

# **The New Day Chapter**

By

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## Author's Note

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# Chapter 1

It was a wonderful spring morning, he thought, the best time of year to witness the miracles of nature, and where better than in these beautiful fields of Oregon. He studied the majesty of the birds in flight, circling in the sky, sharp-eyed, looking for food, and seeing their chance as they swooped down upon the unsuspecting prey. With a deep breath, he filled his lungs with the crisp clean air, that now funnelled its way down from the snow-topped hills and mountains beyond. There was no sign of any man-made high-tech ugliness here, nor would there ever be. He would make sure of that. For Thaddeus owned this land, indeed, all as far as the eye could see and more. In actual numbers: Twenty square miles of this lush and unspoilt

territory belonged to him. Despite his immense wealth and power, he did not consider himself a selfish man, more an inspirational and caring leader. In fact, Thaddeus prided himself on being the founding father of 'The New Day Chapter.' He welcomed the poor misguided souls, now his people, who came to him seeking enlightenment and sanctuary from the suffocating debacle of modern civilisation. All he asked for in return was their unswerving loyalty, not only to him... but also to the cause.

As Thaddeus ambled down towards one of his favourite spots by the lake, the old man considered the righteous principle of The New Day Chapter. Also remembering, with some anger, those who'd dared try to undermine it. Jess, his former lover for one. She'd taken him for a fool. At first her sweet and innocent charm had smitten him, her apparent solidarity with all that he believed in

made for a perfect union, or so he'd thought. That was until the day he caught her, right here, connected to the internet. Ugh, he hated that word and all the other modern speak of recent times. He shivered slightly as the full recall of that moment filled his thoughts. How he'd seized the digital obscenity from her grasp and pushed her into the water. He didn't know she couldn't swim, but nor did he have any desire to save her either. Instead, feeling betrayed, Thaddeus stood watching as his younger lover flailed her arms around in the cold clear water of Lake Pure, without even offering a hand, because she had let him down so badly. It was all over in a few moments, and he still remembered hearing her last gagging, choking, desperate gasps for air, and then... silence. That was two years past. Even so, sometimes those wide staring dead eyes still haunted him. Thank goodness Annabelle had come along to make everything all right again, he reasoned.

The uncomfortable memory pierced his conscience once more, prompting him to stop at a nearby wooden shack, one of many he had dotted around here, where he went inside. After lighting a small oil lamp, Thaddeus placed it on the floor, whilst removing a long-stemmed bronze pipe from his jacket pocket. Now sitting, he quickly unscrewed the base of the device, dropping in a pea-sized seed, before reattaching it to the body. With practised care, he held the bowl over the flame for several seconds, ahead of putting the mouthpiece to his lips and taking in a deep satisfying draw. After a few more, he felt much... much better. Jess now came into his drug-induced dream, as she always did, and it never changed. She'd start by telling him how sorry she was, forgiving him and insisting he should bear no guilt. He smiled at this notion. Jess knew he was right. His conscience was clear... At least until the opium wore off.

By now, Thaddeus knew that Marco, his right hand-man, was already putting the Master Plan into operation. In the coming weeks that fetid abomination, known as the Worldwide Web, would cease to exist. He took another draw of his pipe, savouring this kindest of natural gifts from Mother Earth. Thaddeus reasoned how all things pure were positive, and should be available to everyone, without fear of persecution or interference from an increasingly intrusive state. They'd used underhand surveillance to point an accusing finger of scorn at his saintly medicinal business empire, and how did they know his output didn't match his raw supply? Computers and the internet, that's how; but not for much longer, he mused. Marco would see to that.



## Chapter 2

Cornelius Wolfe proved a very extraordinary young man, and being the son of a merchant banker, gave him a better start in life than most. However, in his teen years, the young academic had once abused that privilege. Cerebrally head and shoulders above his peers, he applied his superior analytical mind to mainly mathematics and technology, receiving many accolades worldwide for his incredible vision and insight, especially regarding the future of the Information Superhighway.

On the back of this he wanted to showcase his technical talents in a more illustrative manner, utilising the U.S. government's computer systems as his guinea pig. Not in any kind of malicious way, however, such

was his skill, he easily could have. No, Wolfe just wished to boast, by highlighting certain inadequacies within his country's digital infrastructure. This, of course, would prove to be a monumental mistake. When tracked down by the FBI, it took more than his father's influence to convince the authorities, that this was nothing more, than a reckless act by a naïve and stupid youth, who had meant no actual harm. His illegal incursions had simply misdirected supplies inside various government departments, including Fort Knox. In his arrogance, Cornelius had left a detailed message on their secure system, of how by three simple keystrokes, he could have irretrievably donated the Nation's entire gold reserves to charity.

Fortunately for him, sitting in the public gallery at the court hearing was a very interested observer. A man who oversaw the entire U.S. State department's computer network management. When recognising

Cornelius's incredible ability, John Grey had personally intervened. The influential Head offered to sponsor Wolfe's re-education in cyber practices, whilst redirecting his enormous talent into serving the country's digital assets. After some debate, and in consideration of the defendant's age, the Judge agreed, offering to suspend further actions for two years. Meanwhile, after giving a profuse and sincere apology, Cornelius Wolfe went on to work at several government facilities, making a distinct, positive difference, in helping to bolster the whole U.S. cyber defence infrastructure.

That was fifteen years ago, and not a day passed when he didn't appreciate how lucky he had been. Especially so today, as he mourned the passing of his mentor and great ally, John Grey. When offered John's now vacant position, he'd initially refused, as it seemed to him almost mercenary, to accept so soon after his death. This was before

reading the last letter his friend ever wrote, urging the governing body to install his protégé at the helm. So, in honour to him, Cornelius Wolfe eventually accepted the role as Head of U.S. State department's cyber defence network.

He and John had worked hard on a system designed to prevent an acknowledged flaw in the Worldwide Web from being exploited by cyber terrorists. They'd both toured the globe, highlighting how a determined group could exploit this known frailty, and effectively shut down the 'Information Superhighway.' In order to garner the support and co-operation of other Nations, Cornelius had even written freely available academic papers on the subject.

Wolfe checked his watch... it was five to six. Annie had a table booked for seven thirty, best not be late, he thought. A few minutes later he was in his car and heading for the

freeway. When taking a sharp right through a quiet narrow short-cut on the fringes of Washington D.C., he suddenly came to a halt, owing to a broken-down van, blocking his path. Impatient at being unable to pass the obstruction, Cornelius got out of the vehicle and approached the white Ford. From nowhere, a gloved hand, holding a chloroform-soaked cloth, covered his face. He struggled for a second, realising now he was in the clutches of two people and incapable of breaking the hold. In a few moments, Cornelius Wolfe became unconscious.

## Chapter 3

At the offices of ‘Allied Solutions Ltd’ in Santa Monica, there was a great feeling of optimism and achievement, as Blake West welcomed his team into the newly refurbished staff meeting room. There were two reasons for calling them all together. First was to announce the generous funding now granted to them by the Pentagon’s unofficial purse, and the second, to formally introduce a new recruit to the company. Sean Gideon. Although the others already knew Sean, they needed to learn more about him, and this was their chance. Initially, Gideon didn’t realise it, but this was in reality a final interview, to determine if they felt him worthy of joining their elite group of undercover operatives.

Two months had now passed since these people had last convened, albeit in very different circumstances. Sean, a former employee of CODA, an off-grid and highly secretive government redaction office, had made a shocking discovery during the course of his work. A corrupt organisation working right under the noses of the U.S. Defence department, had murdered his father.

Their activities had remained undetected for fifty years until Gideon came along. He'd called upon his best friend and former military colleague, Blake West, to help him seek justice for his father, and shut down this dangerously powerful enterprise. Not only were his and Blake's combined efforts successful, but they had also impressed a Pentagon top dog. Commander Walker requested West's team of specialists become available to the U.S. Defence department, on a contract basis, specifically for covert and deniable operations.

West had formed this elite group of operatives, after recognising there was still a need for people with his unique experience and skills, in the modern world of covert warfare... and because he missed the action. Blake had already proven himself to be very adept at working inside enemy territory, and at the same time a worthy leader. Among his arsenal of abilities, was his incredible marksmanship. In recent times, he'd added many winners' cups to his trophy cabinet. The trained sniper had used his skill with deadly accuracy in the field of war. Sometimes called upon to remove dangerous adversaries from the face of the earth. The last one was nearly two miles off in the distance, hiding in his lair, thinking he was safe there amidst his army of bloodthirsty, merciless killers. West's TAC-50 rifle had proven him wrong. This six-foot two former Colonel in the U.S. Marines now sat quietly



listening, as his friend fielded questions and conversed with the rest of the team.

After a short time, Sean Gideon had received the green light from everyone concerned and accepted a warm welcome aboard. Blake knew this would be the case, but due to the highly dangerous nature of the work these people undertook, how they relied on each other in life or death situations, thought it only right for them to make the final decision. Sean had been used to danger himself, an ex-marine who'd served under West's command and alongside him later, with a little-known unit called 'SpyHawks.' His experience included communications, reconnaissance, and directing covert actions. This usually involved drone and live satellite imagery. In addition to this, Gideon was an expert in subterfuge and unarmed combat. Mandatory skills for operations inside foreign hostile lands. Even in his advancing years he'd kept his six-foot frame in good

condition. However, Blake did not wish to put his friend in the front line, but instead, wanted him to serve with his technical genius Chip Kirk, a former U.S. Navy electronics wizard.

Chip was also an advanced helicopter pilot. His skills had proven to be vital to the success of the last mission. Equally, the team had another accomplished aviator, in the form of a five-foot nine ex-CIA field operative named Virginia Lowe. A formidable lady, who'd seen action in several theatres, including war. An expert in subterfuge and disguise, gaining the confidence of adversaries was one of her many talents, much to their cost. This attractive brunette being a force to be reckoned with and deadly if she had to be.

The final two members of Blake's troop were the youngest and fittest. Both, British ex-Special Air Service SAS commandos,

named Chas Banks and Mick Case, who'd initially served in the Royal Marines. The pair had passed the rigorous selection test for the SAS, and saw action in all parts of the world, which led to them becoming experts in many fields, especially infiltration. The duo also formed part of a unique NATO task force, and this is where they'd first worked alongside the rest of the team. So just over three years ago, when Blake made them an offer to join his new unit, they both signed up without hesitation.

“You passed the final test. Welcome to the team, Sean.” Blake extended his hand which Gideon shook, looking slightly puzzled. They were now alone in West's office.

“Final test?”

“Yes, you just had your make or break interview buddy. I had to let this be their

call.” Gideon grinned, he’d already guessed that, but had played along anyway.

“They’re fine people; I hope I can live up to their expectations of me.”

At that moment, a loud ring of the special encrypted phone on Blake’s desk, signalled trouble was afoot.

## Chapter 4

Marco had just arrived back at his post on the very fringes of Thaddeus's land, when his mobile phone took a message. In the course of his duty, which was to protect his boss and follow his orders to the letter. The leader decreed that his right-hand man could use the tools of modern technology against their creators, seeing it as a fitting sentiment, which often amused him. Only Marco alone owned this privilege. He also had a computer. Neither of these contemporary 'affronts to nature' must ever pass beyond his office, into his leader's domain.

He grinned at the news he'd received. Thaddeus would be pleased to hear this.

"Is it done?"

“Yes. They picked him up an hour ago.” Marco confirmed. He smiled at Annabelle and then kissed her passionately on the lips.

“I’d better get back; the old man will be waiting,” she said, in a tone of pure dread.

“Thanks for a great few days, honey,” her lover replied.

Annabelle handed him her smart-phone then left the office, setting off on her fifteen-minute drive back to her partner’s private domain. How she longed for the time to be rid of this aged ‘Nut Job.’ Already she’d increased the potency of Thaddeus’s opium seeds but needed to let them take effect, before hitting him with the fatal dose. This, she realized, would need a little more time, otherwise awkward questions might be asked by the coroner. Annabelle, like her predecessor, pretended to be the sweet innocent victim of the modern technological

age, knowing this, would soften the soul of the sad, deluded lunatic, who thought she actually loved him. In fact, this lady was a qualified industrial chemist with a grand ambition and a cold heart of stone.

When her lover had set up her interview, she knew the score and the great potential gains. Even though she and Marco were an item, they'd decided it would be worth playing along with Thaddeus, in order to reap the enormous rewards at the end. Already she had tricked the old fool into signing her into his will, and now just needed him to conveniently die.

Marco had at first thought the plan was the craziest thing he'd ever been asked to orchestrate, but if Thaddeus was correct, and they could kill off the internet, then he could also see the advantages that would give him personally. This was because his actual name wasn't Marco. He invented it at his interview.

Sometimes Thaddeus advertised in the Oregon state press, for suitable individuals who wanted to live and experience the natural wonders of nature, by residing and working within his independent bubble of The New Day Chapter. This had appealed to Marco, aka Luigi Pagella, for one sole reason. It gave him a chance to hide from the mafia death squads. In the past, he had committed the cardinal sin of cheating the Godfather, Mario Zaffarella, and had been found out. The young Italian was lucky not to die when they'd finally caught up with him, and only his mastery with the knife had saved him on that occasion. Marco skilfully parried the gun, before driving home the blade deep into the would be assassin's heart and in so doing elevated himself to the top of the mob's most wanted list.

He knew he had to hide well, and so when he saw Thaddeus's advertisement, he saw survival. Marco reasoned his chances of



remaining undetected would increase significantly if the Worldwide Web should die. For one thing, facial recognition technology would disappear overnight, and he knew the mob would now certainly be using that little technological wonder. He considered the recent call. The hired muscle now had Wolfe in their possession, and by now the captive should be more than happy to co-operate, he guessed. That was because they'd also snatched his girlfriend.

\*

Thaddeus had now recovered from his opium induced miasma, and for the rest of the day occupied himself by performing his daily tour of the estate. Of late, visiting his flock became one of his great pleasures. How he loved driving his deep maroon vintage Bentley from place to place and meeting those cheerful waving souls he'd rescued from the ravages of the modern world. In the

town, his people would gather around him in a manner reminiscent of the forced adulation heaped upon unworthy dictators. All smiling, happy beings, each expressing their gratitude and thanks. His Marshalls and other delegated overseers were only too pleased to keep their esteemed leader updated on the production figures and output generated by his numerous processing plants. Here, in all things, it was still 1969, which just happened to be Thaddeus's favourite year. As the evening drew closer, he headed back to his personal space, a one square mile plot where he enjoyed being alone with his new love.... Annabelle. His spirits rose as the lady approached. Although he hated it when she went away, thought it only right she should visit her sick mother from time to time. Marco should also be back soon, he reasoned. He admired this young man who would one day no doubt succeed him. A worthy successor too, he thought.

“Hello, my sweet one, and how is your dear mother today?”

“Oh, much better now, my dearest man. How well you look,” she gushed.

“It must be your outstanding beauty that enhances my appearance, like a fine mirror upon the wall, my beloved.” He leant forward and kissed her lips, not seeing the expression of revulsion in her eyes.

“Shall we take a walk? I have so missed your company these past days.”

“Of course, my gallant knight. Take me where you will,” she said. Now linking her arm inside his, and leading him to one of the many shacks, where she knew the old man would not be able to resist, yet another draw on Mother Nature’s gifts of the earth before bedtime.

After a short while, Thaddeus was semi-conscious, deep into his opium-induced delusions. Annabelle had now left the shack, not just to escape from him, but also to remove herself from the all-encompassing, sickly narcotic fug. The reluctant sweetheart picked up a few magazines from a pile on the floor. Some articles, she saw, circled in red ink, and all of them concerned a man named Cornelius Wolfe.

*'So, this is where he'd gotten the idea'.*

Annabelle was not at all enthusiastic. She'd given her solid support when the old man blew up the communication masts the government had insisted on placing across his land. Even acquiring the dynamite, not to mention the cash drops she'd arranged for the crooked telecoms executives. However, this she reasoned may be one-step too far. After all, she liked internet shopping. The

scheming pharmacist gave Thaddeus's dosage levels some more serious thought.

## Chapter 5

The laptop blinked and displayed the familiar face he'd grown to cherish. There could be no doubt, this was his Annie. Her terrified expression made him tug at the ropes that fixed him to the chair upon which he now sat. This was because in the short film playing out before his eyes, the love of his life stood atop a high structure, overlooking the sea. The lady froze in fear of her life, precariously close to the edge of a low handrail, itself attached to a narrow platform. Then the camera swung downwards to reveal the huge waves crashing onto the rugged rocks, far below. Cornelius gritted his teeth at seeing the gloved hand which held his lover's long flowing locks in a tight grip and winced at the pained look on her face.

“A pretty girl, your Annie, isn’t she Mr Wolfe?” Cornelius barely registering this remark; being too concerned for his girlfriend and consumed by a deep, inner rage.

“Why are you doing this? What do you want?” He spat with venom. His tormentor waited a few moments before he spoke again.

“First, I’ll tell you what I don’t want... I don’t want you to give me any reason to kill your pretty lady.”

“What do you want... you bastard.” Wolfe’s mind was in a state of near disbelief.

*‘This can’t really be happening, can it?’*

“That will be revealed soon. This was to make it clear to you we are serious.” With that, Krugle turned and left the room.

The film had ended, but still displayed a frozen view of Annie’s frightened, tear-stained face. Whatever these people wanted,

Wolfe knew he'd have to go along with it, if only for Annie's sake.

\*

Ten miles out across the desolate seascape of Devil's Spike, two masked men dragged their captive back inside the disused lighthouse and placed her in a small, dark, damp room, one floor below. Jensen and Crick were no strangers to this kind of thing. In fact, up until recent times both had been doing it for the government in an official capacity. That was until being disciplined and dismissed from the service for serious misconduct in the line of duty. Jensen thought that was hard, because as far as he and his partner were concerned, they'd just followed orders, but the Secretary of Defence did not see it that way and ordered their immediate removal. These guys were trained assassins who'd found themselves out of work... until now. They asked no questions of



the mysterious Mr X. Half a million bucks made sure of that. No doubt, when the time came, this event would look like an accident, but until then they just had to keep the hostage alive.

\*

Josef Krugle peered through the hidden spyhole, built into a cameo portrait, hanging on the wall of the hospitality suite. This is where he always brought them first. He now observed Wolfe, whilst secretly gauging his temperament, his weaknesses, and body language. These innocuous traits spoke volumes to men like Krugle, a much-practised expert in coercion, manipulation and above all... torture. All kinds of torture, from the methodical surgical removal of living body parts, to the slow, mind shattering turn of the mental screws. Already he could see his subject was buckling, but he didn't want him breaking down just yet, because

Josef needed to keep that sharp academic brain in perfect working order, if he were to achieve his goal, and achieve his goal he would.

Krugle was still held in high regard by those of the Eastern Alliance because few of his victims had died prematurely, and of that, Josef took immense pride. With a wave of his hand, he instructed Wulu, his manservant, to switch off the screen, relieving the captive from his private living hell. Josef had determined that Wolfe was now ready to accept his instructions.

The torturer entered the room. Cornelius heard the slow deliberate footsteps on the varnished wooden flooring as they approached, growing louder... louder... and then stopping directly behind him. Hard as he tried, the cyber expert could not turn his head far enough to see this monster, and he

realised at that moment, that they'd fixed the chair to the floor.

“It would be such a waste of a young life if she fell..? Don't you think, Mr Wolfe..? Of course,... she needn't die at all... It's all up to you, my friend,” he said, in a calm voice, as if reassuring a stubborn child. Cornelius cursed this man to a thousand horrors of hell, but realised he had no choice except to comply with whatever it was he wanted.

“Okay. Shoot.” Was all Wolfe would offer.

“You will use your acclaimed technical ability, to perform a special operation for an esteemed client of mine.” Krugle was enjoying this.

“Cut through the crap and get to the point.” Wolfe was not.

“Very well. You will shut down the Worldwide Web... if you refuse, Annie dies

in front of your eyes.” Josef chuckled at his unintentional rhyme.

“You’re crazy. Do you have any idea of the consequences..? Even if I could do it. Which I can’t.”

“Don’t try to bluff me, Mr Wolfe. I know you can do it. I’ve read your papers.” Krugle sounded definite as he signalled to Wulu to reveal once more the pained face of Annie Baxter on the screen.

“Millions will die! Don’t you understand that?” This, a wasted plea from Wolfe.

“Wulu. Call Annie’s keepers. Tell them to throw her onto the rocks and to send us the proof.”

“No!.. no... all right, you bastard, I’ll do it... Just don’t hurt her.” Cornelius knew he was beaten.

“Good. Now hear me clearly. If you try to fool me, just once, Annie dies a horrible, shocking death, and it will be all your fault. Do you understand?” Krugle’s voice was ice-cold. Wolfe nodded in utter defeat.

## Chapter 6

On the shores of Santa Monica's Sun Harbour district, five people jogged with purpose, sharing the odd joke as they dodged the many tourists and took in the local vista along the way.

“Okay guys, what do you say to a short respite?” This was Virginia; they were close to her favourite bar on the marina.

“Effing ‘A,’ Ginny,” came Chas’s enthusiastic response, as he sported his usual wide grin. Members of his old regiment, the elite SAS, frequently used this term. He’d learnt to tone down the expression a little, knowing this lady hated expletives. Although confident she couldn’t take him in a physical contest, Chas knew full well, and once to his

cost, Virginia could make him look a complete dick, in public.

“I’m all in on this one.” Sean needed a sit down and guessed Virginia had noticed this too. He remembered when he was as fit as Chas and Mick, however that was a few years back now.

“Orange juice only, people.” Chip reminded. This was because they were all on operational standby. Blake West had been summoned to Washington. Something big was coming down. Chip was delighted the new funding from the Pentagon allowed for a second helicopter, because until recently, he’d had to compete with Virginia for use of the cutting-edge Sikorsky. In fact, the team now had an incredible amount of hardware at their disposal. All paid for with that money they helped the State recover from an illegal organisation.

\*

At Reagan Airport, West was met by a uniformed official and driven at speed to the Pentagon. Once through security, he followed his guide to Commander Walker's office. Walker was waiting for him, along with two other men dressed in plain business suits. Derran Gillespie and Chuck Lewis, of the National Security Agency, commonly known as the NSA. After the introductions, they gathered around the desk in the Commander's inner chamber.

“Welcome Blake. I'll get straight to the point as time is of the essence, we think.” He continued, “yesterday evening, one of our country's top cyber experts disappeared along with his fiancée. The evidence points to a snatch, for what purpose we don't know at present. Should his knowledge of our cyber defence infrastructure become shared with



our enemies, it would be devastating for the U.S. and the rest of the free world.”

“I see, you’re sure it was a kidnapping and not a defection?”

“Yes. We have some CCTV footage of the actual seizure of Cornelius Wolfe, picked up on a hidden precinct parking control camera. A little blurred, but our experts should be able to improve the clarity. They’re working on it as we speak,” said Gillespie, as he gave Blake a handful of A4 size stills from a brown envelope. West examined the pictures.

“We might get some leads from this, especially the licence plates,” Lewis said as Blake flipped through the six photographs. Then Walker spoke again.

“Due to the nature of what we’re dealing with here, we want to keep a lid on this for now, which is why you’re here, Blake. Do you

want to take this on?” West thought for a second before answering.

“Once we know the victims’ location, we can do our best to extract them. The problem, as I see it, is the intelligence on this is sparse.”

“We have our people on it too,” Lewis replied. “We can give you live updates throughout.” This was what Blake wanted to hear.

“Okay, Mr Lewis, we’ll take it.”

“Great. Good luck and we’ll stay in touch via the encrypted network. Gillespie will provide you with mobile phones on your way out. Oh, and by the way, this is a Black Operation and will stay as such unless I say different.” Walker rose from his chair, whilst Lewis handed West the photographs and all the documented information they’d had on the abduction of Cornelius Wolfe and Annie Baxter, including their personal profiles.

At the Airport, Blake dialled Virginia Lowe, his second in command, instructing her to ready the team. They would meet this evening at the office.

Aboard his flight back to California, Blake studied the documents Lewis had given him. West had chosen this first-class hub, as it offered the necessary privacy in order to do this. He read up on Cornelius Wolfe, realising in an instant why an enemy would find his talents useful, and snickered when reading of this young man's teenage antics with the keepers of the United States' gold reserves. Next, he perused the copies of the cyber expert's academic papers relating to the internet. West immediately saw a possible motive for his abduction and guessed the NSA had as well. Another possibility was perhaps someone was trying to gain backdoor access to the U.S. cyber networks. Chip Kirk would know about that kind of thing. West wondered what the technical wizard would

make of Wolfe's publications regarding the internet, too. Was it possible to shut down the Worldwide Web? He pondered the ramifications of that, deciding this would be catastrophic because so many things depended on the Information Superhighway these days.

*'No wonder they want to keep this black.'*

The question he asked himself now was, where are they hiding these two?

Blake then read up on Annie Baxter. A librarian and leading authority on antique books with no security links. There was little else of interest. According to the report, she'd gone for a walk and not returned home. The NSA reported the couple were booked to eat out that evening, based on information provided by a colleague of Wolfe's. Now looking at the photographs again, Blake easily identified the van. However, the two

kidnappers wore masks when they grabbed the victim, but it looked like one of them removed the covering after getting into the front seat to drive. He made a note of that and would follow this up with Lewis and Gillespie later.

Although he couldn't rule out a straightforward ransom scenario, the more he thought about this, the more likely he reasoned, shutting down, or damaging the Web could well be the intention. He reasoned, that ordinarily, no one outside the Cyber Security Service would know of Wolfe's exact role within it, he'd been careful to hold back that fact in his publications. This led West's train of thought to conclude that it must be connected to his revelations, highlighting a clear frailty of the internet. This theory had already been widely discussed in the public arena, but Wolfe had now, by means of his papers, confirmed to the world at large that disabling the Worldwide

Web was indeed possible. Tracking him down and watching his routine would be relatively easy these days, despite where he worked. The kidnappers must have known his route home and chosen the perfect spot to grab him.

If this was the reason, then what on earth did anyone expect to gain from it? He did not immediately have an answer for this question. Blake put the documents away, looked out of the window deep in thought.

## Chapter 7

Marco and Thaddeus walked side by side, the latter listening intently as his second in command brought him up to speed on the latest developments. The young Italian suggested using Krugle, as he had learned of the man's reputation through the grapevine of the underworld. Marco had never met him and only knew of him as Mr X, and having heard the stories about the Krugle's brutal practices, preferred not to meet him, anyway. He had contacted him via the Dark-Web and recently wired him the initial instalment of fifty million dollars. Mr X would get the rest in gold bullion on completion of the job. This kind of money was an absolute fortune to Marco, but to his boss, a mere drop in the

ocean, and led Thaddeus's understudy on to the next issue he wished to raise.

“Sir, I suggest we should now lay the plans for expanding the business. With the digital surveillance soon to be eliminated, we can start to think bigger, and the authorities will be blind,” he said, referring to Thaddeus's illegal and profitable narcotics facility, obscured by his legitimate pharmaceutical empire.

Quite recently, Marco deflected an unexpected swoop by the Customs and Environmental Protection Agency, who'd detected a disparity between the raw opium received, and that sold as medicinal drugs, by Thaddeus's company. If it hadn't been for his and Davey's quick thinking, things could have gotten ugly. On that occasion, Davey Doe, the Senior Head of Engineering and Production, known to his subordinates as Mad Dave, because of his short temper and



spiteful tongue, had convinced the officials, a quality issue had forced them to destroy a huge sub-standard stockpile in the furnaces. They'd been lucky that day, having only picked up a warning and a threat of having their import licence revoked, if they didn't improve their accounting procedures.

“Why, what an excellent idea, Marco. How come I didn't think of that...? Please continue.”

“Well, we need to advertise for more workers for one thing, and I can get another two new facilities arranged with the builder.”

“Yes, we must start immediately. Let the contractor use his computer whilst he still can, eh? Ha-ha-ha.”

Thaddeus always managed to bring his hatred of high-tech into the conversation. “One other thing; I heard from Annabelle's mother today... she's taken a turn for the

worse. If you like, I could run your lady over to see her on my way to the contractor's office?"

"Oh, dear... of course, best you take my sweet girl over there now. When do you expect to return?"

"I should be finished in a few days, sir." Was his convincing reply.

"Very well, I shall fetch her."

After they'd gone, Thaddeus's spirits dipped a little, even more so as he neared the lake. Once more, remembering Jess, his mind recalled how Marco had removed her limp fish-eyed body from the water. The Italian had convinced the authorities she'd fallen in the lake, though privately, suspecting Thaddeus had in fact played a part in her unfortunate accident.

Near the shack once more, Thaddeus again withdrew his ornate bronze pipe from his pocket and entered the structure. It was time to relax.

\*

Wolfe had come to terms with his predicament, and after a time, was released from his chair. Wulu led him into an adjoining office accompanied by a thickset minder named Viktor. Cornelius studied the new surroundings, which included some impressive computer hardware, uncannily similar to those systems mentioned in his publications. His heart sank as he now realised how he'd unwittingly engineered his own downfall.

*'If only I'd kept a lower public profile.'*

Unlike the other room, this one had large glass patio-doors, leading out to a balcony, through which there was a vast seascape

stretching far into the slight curve of the horizon. He couldn't be certain, but supposed that he might in fact be on an island. The familiar sound of slow, heavy footsteps approached from the adjoining room. It was Krugle.

“So, Cornelius... quite impressive, don't you think?” He used that tone of voice again, like one friend showing off a new purchase to another.

“It's not enough.” Was Wolfe's unimpressed reply.

“You will have to be more specific than that... and remember Annie: Now what else do you need?” The cold voice once more. This man knew how to play people, Cornelius reasoned.

With great reluctance, Wolfe explained a few fundamentals of how the Worldwide Web functioned, highlighting his intention to

defeat the inbuilt system safeguards, by inputting four simple lines of coded syntax, culminating in a full system meltdown. A single action performed simultaneously from four separate global locations. Although never tried or public knowledge, Wolfe knew it would work. Thinking only of Annie's safety, he listed the mandatory hardware and specified the precise terrestrial locations at which to set these up. The cyber expert would then control all four stations from this room, and when he'd finished writing it, feed the final, seemingly harmless line of code into the cloud. Here it would combine with three others, each uploaded from the other locations, thus becoming the deadliest computer script ever written.

Krugle accepted this wasn't a lie, he could always tell. Privately, he'd been impressed with his gifted young prisoner, and Josef felt it almost a pity he would soon be dead. He was also delighted to learn they were well

placed geographically to carry-out the plan. They would only need three remote locations, but this would need some more time to prepare. He hadn't been expecting that. However, not an insurmountable problem, he reasoned.

“Thank you, Cornelius, we will arrange this with haste.” Josef was his friend again.

## Chapter 8

In Santa Monica, five people listened intently, as their leader ran through the key facts surrounding the disappearance of the two American citizens. Blake West wanted to brief the team as soon as possible on his return from Washington. In about ten minutes, Chuck Lewis would join them by telephone with further updates from the NSA.

“Ok, there it is people. What do you think?” West asked the question.

“I’d say they’re going to hit the internet. By now all the back doors to the State cyber nets will be under scrutiny or closed off.” Chip sounded definite.

“That’s my feeling too, although we can’t rule out anything, even a ransom situation,” said Blake.

“Is this all the information we have?” added Sean.

“For now, yes, although the NSA will call soon with an update. It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack at the moment: Chip, can you do anything with these stills?”

“I can try. I might be able to enhance the plates and the windscreen area a little.”

“Good. We’ll look at what the spooks come back to us with first.”

“Did anyone see who took the girl?”

“Not that we know of, Ginny, we can ask Chuck Lewis when he calls. For now, we need to be at full readiness, so I’d like you all to stay here in the dorm block.” They all understood and agreed.



“By the way, this is a Black Op, usual protocol. We are known to the Pentagon as Unit Covert. Call sign is Swift.”

West explained the team's role was primarily the extraction of the captives once their location had been determined, but any assistance they could offer to the NSA in the meantime would be appreciated. A few moments later, Blake's encrypted mobile buzzed. He placed it in a special speaker cradle and took the call. After a brief introduction to the team, Lewis gave them some hopeful news.

“We got a fix on the plates, needless to say they're cloned, but we have a face in the van, although not known to us. Right now, our people are liaising with our overseas allies. We may get lucky on this one. Tech is analysing all traffic CCTV footage, and we'll have more on this soon. We know they headed north. Also, we received a video of

two guys hanging around Annie Baxter's home the day before she was grabbed, but no positive I.D. as yet. I'll send you over the clip via secure email. No witnesses to her actual abduction, so sit tight, we'll be in touch." At this point there were no questions, so with that, Lewis hung up. The team digested the information, still aware that all they could do at the moment... was wait.

West put the video clip up onto the large wall mounted screen as they all watched with keen eyes. Although slightly blurred, Chip soon sharpened the image with an application he'd written himself for such a purpose. The scene depicted a station wagon pulling up outside a property on the far side of the street. A man exited the vehicle and ambled past the front garden of Annie and Cornelius's home, stopping briefly to glance at the house, and then walked on. The car crept forward, and the subject got back in. Then it was gone.

“Can you zoom up the image where the guy gets back into the car?” said Chas.

A few keystrokes later and there before their eyes was a chilling and familiar face.

\*

Annabelle and Marco were on their way to the pair's secret hideaway, a beach house near Vancouver Lake. At least they'd managed to get some more time away from the old man, although the lady was not happy.

“Marco, we can't seriously let him bring down the internet.” Annabelle did not know about her lover's past links to the mob, and his true motives for going along with Thaddeus's plan.

“It's out of our hands, especially now they have the expert. I expect it will soon be back online, and by then we'll be long gone.” He

knew that was bullshit but needed to placate her.

“That’s not what Wolfe says in his publications, so how can you be so sure?”

“Look, we’ve got a few days together, let’s not spoil it, huh?”

They continued their journey in silence, with the Italian now feeling a little edgy, not knowing exactly what was going on inside Annabelle’s troubled head.

The next day, Marco headed off to the building contractor’s office on the outskirts of Portland’s southern boundary, driving the red Ford pickup he kept here for his private use. Annabelle took the Chevrolet for a trip into the nearby city of Portland. This is how the young woman reconnected with reality, by spending her money as a kind of retail therapy, hoping the old fool she left behind yesterday, never found out her mother was

long dead. She stopped at a coffee shop to rest her tired feet and considered what must be done to stop an impending catastrophe. Killing Thaddeus wouldn't necessarily prevent this disaster, she realised, and if she informed the authorities, Marco would undoubtedly be implicated too. It was a terrible mess. The question she asked herself now was...

*'Do I love him enough to care?'*

Annabelle decided she would speak with her lover this evening and get him to talk some sense to the old man. After all, she knew how to manipulate him and get her way... didn't she?

Half an hour later saw Annabelle at the Tribune newspaper office where she placed an advertisement in the 'Situations Vacant' section, worded in a similar vein, to the one she'd answered herself when seeking escape

from the straitjacket of corporate America. Marco had contacted her first, they'd clicked instantly. Later, she was shortlisted and interviewed by Thaddeus himself. On Marco's prompting, she'd gotten close to the old man. Close enough to influence the level of his daily opium intake, and that was when they hatched their plan to take control of the entire operation, sell it and disappear. In truth, she felt more trapped now than she did before joining the New Day Chapter.

## Chapter 9

By now, Krugle's contacts had begun procuring the equipment as directed by his captive genius. Each top of the range super-fast computer was being assembled in the U.K., China, and Australia, with the fourth conveniently placed right here in the U.S., on this very island off the coast of California. These, as he understood it, were to feed a central area known as a cloud with a deadly code, via four autonomous routers, which although designed to intercept malicious encoded syntax, would not ordinarily recognise a separate line. However, once these single lines amalgamate within the cloud, they would become a different beast altogether. When re-broadcast as a single entity, this coded verse of doom would

unleash a savage and unstoppable force of destruction, which would kill the Worldwide Web. Every communication satellite becoming a dark, orbiting, useless hulk, and each land-based server-bank, reduced to processing a mishmash of indecipherable gobbledegook, until finally; the power outage shuts them down for good. After that,... total chaos!

“In a week or so we should be ready, Cornelius.” Krugle was friendly again. Wolfe decided it would be best to keep him this way, if only for Annie’s sake.

“I understand. Would it be possible for me to get some fresh air?”

His captor thought on that for a moment, reasoning there was nowhere for this man to run and guessing he wouldn’t know this Island’s location. Apart from a few smaller uninhabited rocks, there was nothing for the



eye to behold, except the wide-open sea. The remote spot was perfect for hiding and was why Krugle had bought this place three years earlier. One day, he even hoped to retire here.

“As you wish, Cornelius. However, there are conditions. Viktor stays with you at all times and don’t forget the consequences if you try to do anything stupid. I can tell you Annie is well, so let us keep her that way.”

Josef nodded to his hired muscle, who signalled Wolfe to stand up. The prisoner rose to his feet. Viktor, a scarred, cropped haired, bent nosed giant of few words, pushed his charge toward the door.

They emerged into a warm, breezy day. Cornelius noted the position of the sun as he took in a deep breath. His watch said four o’clock, yet here it felt nearer midday. Viktor nudged him to move on, along a pathway leading away from the main dwelling. This

led to a wide gravelled area, which stopped just short of a steep slope that swept down into the ocean. The captive turned full circle, studying his surroundings, realising with dread that he was far from any civilisation, or hope of escape. The hulking thug grinned, as if reading this young man's thoughts, whilst indicating for him to keep moving. It seemed he might even be allowed to do a complete circuit of this small, remote hideaway. Now following a narrow footpath which appeared to lead around the edge of this island, Wolfe looked back at the house, a double-tiered flat roofed structure possibly built in the 1930s. On the uppermost balcony stood two figures keeping watch on him, Krugle, and Wulu. Apart from himself, Wolfe assumed they and his unwanted companion were the only people here. He'd already learned the oriental-looking servant, answered to the name of Wulu. The cyber expert resolved to find out exactly where he was, because

Cornelius had decided he would attempt to summon help at his earliest opportunity.

\*

Marco had finished dealing with the contractor and was now driving back towards Portland, aware that a black Mercedes saloon had tailed him for the last three miles. Although the Italian slowed down twice, still his pursuer did not overtake. It could be a new driver, he reasoned, but somehow this did not feel right at all, and then, when the road was devoid of other traffic, the Mercedes made its move to pass. Marco dabbed the brake as the car drew level, when just at that moment a hail of bullets peppered his side window and windscreen.

On instinct he swung the pickup in towards the verge and straightened up again in an instant. Then, spotting a sharp turn directly ahead, the Italian swung the steering wheel

hard to the right, burning rubber as the pickup shot down a side road at speed. His attacker did not expect the sudden change and continued straight on. Without looking back, Marco floored the gas pedal, taking a series of turns as and when they appeared and when sure he'd lost the tail, punched an alternative route into the Sat-Nav system. Sweating heavily now, because he knew the mob had caught up with him again.

After taking a wide circuitous road back to Vancouver Lake, he was satisfied he wasn't being followed and wondered how the hell they'd located him this time. He'd gambled these outlying roads would be mainly free of traffic, which to his relief had proven to be right. The last thing he needed was for the law to enquire as to how those bullet holes got there. Back at the house, he hid the pickup in the large barn which sometimes served as a garage. Annabelle seldom came in here, so there should be no awkward questions, and as

an extra precaution, he covered the cab with an old rug. Marco had been lucky today and hoped his pursuer did not know of this place. Either way, he decided not to return here again, realising he'd be safer staying with The New Day Chapter, at least until the death of all digital surveillance systems.

Now unfurling the blueprints for the new facilities, Marco carefully studied each sheet, just to be sure nothing had been missed, and to take his mind off his earlier brush with death. The contractor had questioned why the extra backup gasoline power generators were needed, and noted the absence of high-tech systems, usually fitted as standard in contemporary quick build modular constructions. He brushed their concerns aside, advising he could always place the order elsewhere if they didn't want it. This did the trick, as the Italian knew it would. Work would begin in the next couple of days

with a promise of a hefty bonus if they could complete in less than two weeks.

By the time Annabelle had arrived back, it was nearing five in the evening. She'd brought with her some of Marco's favourite Italian food and fine wines. For tonight, the lady would woo her lover and hopefully get him to halt Thaddeus's crazy plan. When satisfied that it was not the mob who'd come calling, Marco emerged from the house and greeted her with a kiss, noting with some delight the gastronomic treats before him.

“We shall dine in style, I see.”

He helped lighten her load by carrying in the bottles of Chianti Classico Reserva.

“Yes, my man, we must not forget the important things in life.” Annabelle smiled, hoping the Fiorentina steak would help her get what she wanted.

Franco Corsa removed his sunglasses and wiped his eyes. *'Just the two of them by the look of it,'* he thought. He put his shades back on. Upon returning to his car, parked near the entrance road, Corsa, one of the Godfather's best henchmen, decided he'd wait until nightfall before executing the hit.

## Chapter 10

It was getting late, but West's team had a lead and Blake wasted no time passing on the information to Lewis, who was now calling them back on the encrypted phone. They'd work on into the night if need be.

“Hello again, people, thanks for the intel regarding the face at Annie Baxter's residence. We can confirm the subject is a former Homeland Security Officer named Craig Jensen. I hate to add he was one of our own. We also believe the occupant of the car to be Jason Crick, his old partner in the service. Commander Walker tells me you may have already met these two?” Lewis asked.



“Yes, that is correct, Chuck. We put them out of action during our last mission. That’s all I’m allowed to say on the matter, although you can ask Walker if you want to know more.” Was West’s guarded reply. He, like the others, could not reveal any details at all regarding the closing down of ‘Area 10.’

“No, that won’t be necessary. Anyway, we checked out each one’s last known address. It seems they have both moved on, whereabouts unknown. We’ll keep looking.”

“Sooner we find them the better, Miss Baxter is not in good hands. These guys are professional killers who don’t ask questions. This is why they got booted out,” West said.

“Yes, I know, they were rotten apples in our barrel. Moving on, I received some more information regarding the occupant of the vehicle used to grab Wolfe. Our friends at MI6 identified him as an oriental, named

Zeng Ho Wulu, to an accuracy of eighty-five percent. He is believed to be an associate of a man known only to them as Mr X, a sadistic Eastern bloc torturer. Lots of grizzly notes on how he deals with western spies, but I'll spare you the details for now. Our people are currently trying to establish the whereabouts of all the subjects I have mentioned. One last thing. We think they flew the captives out of the area, from a small private airfield North of Washington. The flight plans proved fictitious, and the aircraft's transponder was switched off soon into the trip. We have impounded a van and car found abandoned close by, these are undergoing examinations in our forensic facility."

"Can you determine their destination?" Blake asked, not expecting much at this stage.

"Initial reports show they headed west. I'm awaiting more information from various internal air traffic departments. I will pass

this and all the other intelligence over to you.” This was Lewis’s final word.

The team stood, then gathered around West’s wall mounted map of North America, believing it likely the captives were still in the country, because the kidnappers’ plane headed west. It would make their job easier, if true.

“The fact they’ve hired Jensen and Crick, leads me to guess that perhaps they might be in our area. Weren’t those guys based in California?” asked Sean.

“A fair point, I’ll ask Lewis. Also, if the plane continued west from D.C. they would more than likely cross California. The question is: Did they land here?”

“Maybe the NSA can give out Jensen and Crick’s mug-shots to all our local airports?” said Chip.

“That could put the hostages at risk, if the perpetrators find out they’ve been made. I’ll ask Lewis how they are approaching this too.” With that, the meeting ended. They’d reconvene tomorrow.

\*

With the second bottle of Chianti now drained, the pair headed to the bedroom. Annabelle had raised Marco’s mood, and later, as they lay side by side, he spoke freely.

“That was exquisite, my love.” Annabelle answered, not sure if he’d meant the food or what followed.

“I like to keep my man happy,” she purred.

“Ah, Annabelle, I would give you the world if I could,” he declared.

“Well, perhaps my needs are not quite so unattainable, my honey,”

“Oh, really, so tell me, what do you want from me instead?” He immediately regretted saying that, now realising what she was driving at.

Franco unpicked the lock on the front door, a piece of cake to a man with his skills. It was a moonlit night, and this had helped. Now making his way through the downstairs of the house, his foot struck an empty wine bottle which lay abandoned on the floor... It hit the wall with a thud. The assassin stood rock still, listening... Satisfied all was okay, he crept up the stairs in silence.

As they lay in bed, Annabelle came straight to the point. This she knew would be her best chance.

“I want you to stop those people from executing Thaddeus’s plan.” Before she could say anymore, her lover had leapt out of

the covers and was listening at the bedroom door.

“Marco. What is it?”

“Shsh,” he said in a whisper, placing his outstretched index finger across his lips in the age-old gesture.

“I heard something downstairs.”

In the semi-darkness he put on his jeans and removed a long-bladed weapon from his jacket. Annabelle looked on in horror. She didn't know he carried a knife. The young Italian stood aside the door as the handle turned ever so slowly. It opened... moving inwards a few inches from the jamb... A gloved hand holding a silenced pistol emerged through the small opening.

Marco swung the dagger downwards, slicing into the wrist of the gunman. Tendons severed, the weapon fell to the floor as the

assassin yelled in pain, with blood spurting out from his wound. Marco took no chances. He readjusted his position, pulling the blade back as he faced his opponent, and then in one swift action, plunged the cold shiny steel deep into the man's heart. The intruder collapsed in a heap on the bedroom floor... dead.

Annabelle, flicked on the bedside lamp, then screamed in total shock and disbelief. She'd never witnessed violence like this before... ever. Marco tried to soothe her, but she pushed him aside and ran from the room in tears, being careful not to step on the body on her way out.

Still in her nightgown, the lady glided down the stairs with her lover in quick pursuit. She had to get out of there. He grabbed her by the shoulders and spun her around, then holding her tightly to him, ordered her to calm down.

“It’s ok... it’s over.” He tried to reassure her. She looked at him, struggling to regain control of her emotions.

“Marco, what is going on..? Who was that man..? And why did you have to kill him?”

“There’s no time to explain. Get dressed.”

He retrieved their clothes from the bedroom, barely glancing at the corpse as he did so.

Later, Annabelle sat in the house as Marco dragged the body out through the side door and into the barn where he wrapped it in the rug which had covered the cab. With a struggle, he lifted the dead awkward weight up and over into the back of the truck. He started the engine and drove the vehicle out into the open. Annabelle now watched from the doorway as the pickup passed by and headed up the track. In the moonlit light she could just make out the many bullet holes in the glass and bodywork.



*'Do I really know this man, Marco?'*

Annabelle grew confused and scared.

Her lover now headed for a place where he could dump both the vehicle and the body. He knew of such a location close by. On his way past, Marco had spotted the assassin's Mercedes tucked into some bushes, and decided he'd ditch that one next. In less than a minute, he'd found the spot he wanted. A little way off the track, on a bend, was a flat ridge, offering a sheer drop into the lake. The Italian, sweating heavily, lined up the pickup and got out of the cab. Now reaching into the back, he unfurled the rug until able to remove a bunch of keys from the corpse's jacket pocket. He wrapped it up again, put the drive in neutral, released the handbrake and pushed the truck over the edge, watching as it plunged nose first into the water some forty feet below. Next, he sprinted back to the Mercedes, got in and started it up. On

returning to the site a short time later, the Italian repeated the process. This was such a remote area that he doubted they would be found anytime soon. After a while, he'd arrived back at the house on foot where in haste, he and Annabelle packed up the car and hit the road.

“That man was trying to kill us, wasn't he? I saw the bullet holes in the pickup. Now, what's going on?” Annabelle demanded, although Marco was in no mood for questions.

“Look honey, I've made some enemies in the past. That's all I'm saying. Best you don't know any more than that.” He tried to sound sincere as he switched on some music. Annabelle turned it off again.

“You just killed someone! Don't you think I deserve some kind of explanation?”

“So, you think that’s any different to what you’re doing to the old man?” Was his sharp reply.

“YES. He’ll kill himself anyway, sooner or later.” A lame excuse, she knew. Murder was murder, no matter how executed. Annabelle decided this was all starting to get ugly.

In less than fifteen minutes, the pair of them were on the highway heading back to Thaddeus. Just outside of Portland, they pulled into a service area to fill up the tank. When Marco returned from the kiosk, Annabelle had gone... He called her name, but there came no reply. She’d vanished. He tried her phone... no answer and cursing to himself, the Italian got back in the car and continued with his journey. His mind raced, trying to piece together a plan, because he couldn’t risk her talking, but what could he do to stop her? Two hours later, Marco had

returned to the sanctuary of The New Day  
Chapter.

## Chapter 11

Jensen was rather more than annoyed when learning of the delay from Krugle, as he thought this operation would be over in a few days. In frustration, the cold killer threw his phone onto the small desk at which he now sat, and winced, because in doing so he'd aggravated an old injury.

On his final mission with the Homeland Security Service, he was slow to react to a surprise attack, launched by two masked men, and received a hefty kick to the ribcage below his right armpit. The cracked bones hurt like hell for months and still pinched with sudden movement. The memory stirred up strong feelings of anger and Craig swore if he ever discovered the identity of the bastard who did it, he'd kill him... slowly.

Crick led Annie outside onto the steel platform which encircled this now decommissioned lighthouse. When in service, the structure warned all shipping away from the hazardous rocks below. The terrace was at the same level as the now disused beacon lamps and gave external access for maintenance. It would have also been used for all round visual observation during daylight. The restless wind rustled her flowing blond locks, as the frightened librarian walked on with caution, gripping the low handrail tight, for fear of falling. Annie was being allowed some exercise. Any hope of escape seemed impossible from this remote and windswept nowhere. All that could be heard was the crashing of the sea hitting the rocks, intermixed with the endless squawking of seagulls. This conjoined with the unrelenting and intermittent rushing of the salty air, as it whipped past her ears.

Annie looked down and spied a boat heading towards them, as Crick alerted his partner to the arrival of the extra supplies. With that, Jensen descended the spiral staircase to meet the vessel when it moored up alongside the small jetty. Krugle owned this place too, purchased under a fake identity, as with the island some thirteen miles farther down the coast.

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Sometime later, Wulu made his second delivery of the day. After having restocked the lighthouse with supplies, he was now bringing ashore the computing hardware collected from the mainland, and Viktor was on hand to assist him with unloading the cruiser.

“Well, Cornelius, it seems the equipment has arrived, my friend, we shall erect the dish on the roof first, I think.” Wolfe shuddered

inside, because he did not want to be remembered as the man who'd engineered the biggest global catastrophe in modern times. Despite his personal angst, he continued to keep this madman's mood even, always mindful of his beloved Annie.

"The rest should be okay here, next to this desk," he answered, casually.

"How long will this take, once all the equipment is in place and ready?" Krugle was growing impatient. He wanted this over as soon as possible so as he could disappear back to the east.

"I will need to do a network circuit test first, to establish full connectivity, and to confirm the configuration of all the transmitted data."

Wolfe's reply seemed to confuse Josef, who looked puzzled.



“Explain that more clearly to me,” he said, in a demanding tone.

“Okay. Firstly, for this to work, the network needs an unbroken connection, rather like an electrical circuit. Any line breaks along the input routers, would prevent all the code from joining up in the cloud, rendering it harmless. Secondly, the powerful inbuilt security software can pick up the malicious code on just two lines and thwart the attack. So, I need to establish the four separate channels work, then input dummy codes from each location, and check that they link up in the correct formation. Basically, I need to conduct a test run, and if successful, I will be able to upload the actual code in the same way. This can only work if it is a rapid onetime, faultless operation, otherwise, it will be detected and fail.”

His captor thought for a moment and conceded this made sense.

“Alright, I see that. Now, how long will the test take?”

“If the connections are good, it will take about twenty-four hours for the test to be checked and validated. As for the actual execution, that would be instant.”

Krugle nodded his understanding, but as a reminder, he spoke of his captive’s girlfriend.

“Very well: By the way, Cornelius, Wulu says Annie is well today, a little windblown, however, otherwise alright, at the moment.”

The last part uttered as a threat. If Krugle wasn’t holding that gun at a safe distance, Wolfe would have hit him... hard. He studied his captor. A short squat figure with a bald head and cold grey menacing eyes, which looked out from behind thick round lenses, mounted in a gold wire frame. His voice was always precise... definite, with an eastern accented tone, and on his forehead, a distinct

birthmark that resembled a five-pointed star. Wolfe would now know this man's face anywhere, which worried him, because Cornelius doubted Krugle would let him live after this, and could only hope he wouldn't kill Annie too.

\*

Marco had slept in late, yawning now as he slipped out of his bed and into the kitchen area, seeking a much-needed coffee. He looked at his phone and noticed there was a message from Annabelle:

*'Sorry, but I'm out of this. A.'*

The Italian ran his hand through his thick black hair and over his aching head, cursing her again as his mind tried to assemble a plan. He'd catch up with the old man this morning.

*'What do I tell him?'* He thought long and hard.

When Thaddeus had finished his morning rounds, he purposefully headed for another of his many wooden shacks. This one was in the woods near the river. The leader of the New Day Chapter looked up as a familiar car approached along the narrow track, and smiled, until noticing that Annabelle was not with Marco. Once out of the vehicle, his protégé walked towards him wearing a serious look.

*‘Whatever could be the matter?’*

“Why, Marco. What is wrong...? Where’s my Annabelle...? Is the poor girl still with her ailing mother?” Thaddeus looked concerned. The Italian took a deep breath, choosing his words carefully, before replying.

“Sir, I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but she will not be coming back.” He waited for the statement to sink in, noting the old man’s look of disbelief, before adding...

“Sir, I have discovered Annabelle is not loyal to the Chapter after all, and her mother is really long dead. It transpires, her frequent visits were actually to a lady friend of hers, who was only pretending to be her mother. In fact, it’s worse than that. Sir... They’re lovers too.”

Thaddeus’s jaw dropped. He was not expecting to hear this. The young man kept his expression serious, quietly amazed that he could make something like this up so quickly.

“You... you’re sure of this, Marco?” said the old man, reeling now, his eyes like fire, and his face, a distinct shade of red.

“Yes-sir, as sure as my name is Marco Mussolini, and what is more, she has owned a mobile smart-phone the entire while she has been living here with us.” That last remark being all too much for Thaddeus, he dismissed his understudy with the wave of a

hand. Now reaching for his pipe as he skulked off into the nearby shack. Marco almost pitied this sad, pathetic figure, deciding he would have to find his boss a replacement love interest... and the sooner the better.

Twenty minutes later the Italian manipulator appeared at one of the illegal opium processing plants, where in the workshop he found 'Mad' Davey Doe admonishing one of his workers for being too slow.

"Don't cherry pick the tasks. Just take the first one on the pile and if I catch you doing that again, you're in big trouble, do you understand?" Davey took pride at overseeing the running of this sweatshop, and wielded his power, in a not dissimilar manner to that of a deranged dictator. Marco noticed how disgruntled and bullying this man was. However, he got results, and that was the

main thing. The worker's logical argument for selecting the tasks that best suited his machine's current set-up lay wasted on this ranting, borderline lunatic. Through his 'red mist' Davey spied his boss. In an instant his demeanour changed to that of a calm, smiling, in-control individual that he most certainly was not.

"Good morning master Marco, and how are you today?" 'Mad Dave,' offered his grovelling welcome.

"I'm well Davey, are you having personnel problems?" Marco asked as he watched the recalcitrant worker walk back to his machine.

"Oh, it happens. You can't get the staff these days. Would you believe he wasted a full three minutes stood there? Anyway sir, to what do I owe the pleasure of your company today?" The Italian couldn't be sure if this man was sincere or not, but decided he was

just plum crazy, and so ignored the comment altogether.

“We will build two new facilities, starting soon. I want you to manufacture the internal installations.”

“No problem at all, sir.” Davey was always keen to please. He would do anything for The New Day Chapter, since his recent promotion for saving Thaddeus’s processing plants from being shut down by the authorities.

Only the poppy seed processing took place here on Thaddeus’s land, with fifty percent of the refined product being then diverted to several illegal drug barons. They shipped the rest to his legitimate high-tech pharmaceutical facilities scattered throughout the world. However, there had been much criticism surrounding opioid based medicinal products in recent times, which had led him to reconsider his long-



term business plans, not least the ever-growing list of pending lawsuits filed against some of his biggest concerns. Addiction to these types of prescription drug was now rife, and the State wanted recompense for the victims. To offset this, Thaddeus was discreetly unloading his company liabilities by selling off his risky assets. Therefore, the demise of the internet would soon not concern him at all. After all, the illegitimate side of his operations had always generated the lion's share of his vast wealth, and he kept these details offline. The old man never involved himself personally in any corporate affairs; being a multi-billionaire, he didn't need to. Instead, he preferred to spend his days here with his loyal brethren of The New Day Chapter.

## Chapter 12

The following day, shortly after an update from Mr. X's people, Thaddeus's second in command became distracted from his false accounting by an unexpected knock upon his office door. This was unusual, he thought. Nobody ever came over here, only Thaddeus, and he normally barged straight in. Marco got to his feet and walked over to answer it. Much to his surprise, there before him appeared an attractive lady, dressed in a colourful full-length floral dress. A bright orange cloche hat adorned her head, on which she sported a large artificial daisy. Her silky auburn hair flowed down to her slender waist and in her left hand she clutched a newspaper. Across her right shoulder hung a large macramé bag.

On the far side of the road was a multicoloured Volkswagen campervan, beside which stood a man who, to Marco's eye, looked much like an ex-hippy.

"Oh, hi there, I hope I'm in the right place. Is this where I can find The New Day Chapter?" She asked almost apologetically.

"Yes, that's right. Who are you and how can I help?" Marco seemed a little puzzled.

"Well, My name's Sally Moses and that's my brother Axel, we saw this advertisement in the Tribune and well... I hope you don't mind us applying in person?" She fluttered her eyelashes. The Italian studied her carefully before answering.

"No, but how did you know where to find us?"

"We spotted your sign last week when we drove by and figured this the right place to

come?" she explained; put more like a question. Marco liked the look of this lady. As for the man, well, maybe he could be useful to Davey, he mused.

"Okay, come in and we'll talk." Marco stood to one side as Sally beckoned her brother to follow. They sat down on the two chairs offered by their host. The Italian cleared his throat.

"Well, let me begin by explaining the rules of living here and becoming a follower of the Chapter. Number one, we do not allow our citizens to use any modern technology here, especially computers and mobile phones." Not that it would matter soon anyway, he knew, but didn't say.

"Oh, my goodness, did you hear that? Gee, that suits us real fine, doesn't it, Axel?" There was a slow nod from her brother, who sat there, totally at ease with his arms folded

across his chest. Axel had hair down to his waist, handlebar moustache and a gold band around his head. His gold and black striped trousers combined with a sleeveless Afghan coat, worn over a red t-shirt, made him look like a 1960s pop star, but Marco couldn't determine which one. Sally continued...

“You know, I can't understand those dang phones, and as for pewters... We don't have a clue on those either, do we, Axel..? Don't you just hate em?” said as a general, but convincing statement. Already, Marco reasoned, the old man would go for a lady like this. In fact, he quite fancied her for himself.

Half an hour later, having received a broad run-down on life within the New Day Chapter, Marco offered these prospective citizens the chance to meet the founding father. Knowing full well, Thaddeus always

made the final decision on who could join and who could not.

“Wouldn’t that be wonderful, Axel..? Yes-please... we’d love to meet the great man.”

“Then I will take you now. Follow me.”

They all rose, and Marco led them to his car. Sally and Axel looked around in wonderment at this unspoilt, sprawling landscape. When they passed buildings or vehicles, nothing looked newer than the 1960s era.

After ten minutes, they arrived at an area of outstanding beauty, established by a natural hedgerow border, broken only by a lone cream painted entry gate. Through it ran the single-track road on which they now travelled. Once inside, their eyes settled on a vast lake over to the left where behind rose some majestic snow peaked hills, stretching far into the distance. The scenery changed, as the road cut through woodland, before

emerging into a large open space, revealing an impressive wooden colonial period house. On the veranda stood an imposing figure, with the dress sense of a Mississippi gambler. His well-worn clothes comprised black breeches, together with knee-length tan boots, a white shirt, and patterned waistcoat, under a three-quarter length grey jacket. On his head sat a dark Stetson hat. The black ribbon tie on his collar completed the look. The man stroked his long goatee beard, in a slow practised manner, as he watched the car pull up to the steps.

Marco made the introductions, as Thaddeus eyed the newcomers with interest, especially Sally, before speaking.

“Welcome to The New Day Chapter. Do you like what you see?”

He raised his arm in a gesture, like a monarch showing off his kingdom.

“Oh, my goodness, it’s so beautiful here sir, don’t you think so, Axel?” Her brother nodded in agreement, a man of few words Marco determined, before saying...

“What do you say I take Axel over to meet Davey, after all that’s where he will be working?” Thaddeus bowed his assent, knowing this would give him some time alone with this charming and pretty lady. Axel looked at his sister as if seeking permission.

“Why, yes, go on, Axel, I’ll be just fine here.” She smiled and fluttered her eyelashes at Thaddeus. As they set off, she turned to her host.

“Pay no attention, sir, he’s always been overprotective of me, that’s what all brothers are like, I guess?”

“Of course, my dear, and I can see why.”



“Why thank you, sir, what a lovely thing to say.”

“Come, walk with me. Marco will return your brother in a little while.” He assured the captivating lady.

The Italian quizzed his companion about his work experience, not expecting anything sensational to emerge from this creature’s lips. To his surprise, Axel indicated that he once used a lathe. This guy might be useful to Davey after all, thought Marco, whose primary intention was to see if Thaddeus and Sally would hit it off. He reasoned they would, knowing how the old man was such a soft touch for a pretty face. He really wished Annabelle hadn’t absconded, but knew she’d be long gone by now, and Sally seemed the perfect replacement.

When they’d arrived at the workshop, Marco led them in via the back entrance.

Once within the building, they came face-to-face with the noise and smells of busy industrial manufacturing. There at the end of a walkway, in between the machines, was a vast window mounted into the wall. Behind the glass stood a bespectacled man wearing an expression of pure displeasure. Just then, this sour-faced figure appeared to spot something, which prompted him to rush out of his observation post, and over to a nearby worker who himself looked unhappy. Davey Doe arrived at the side of the machinist, his demeanour now becoming ugly. After some debate, he launched into a tirade of bellowing insults, rather like a pantomime performer.

“You mean you put a hole in the wrong place? You... useless dipshit?”

He was beside himself with rage, his face turning redder and redder as he continued his verbal onslaught. Marco realised this was not a good display for a prospective employee to

witness, and shouted a greeting across to Doe, whilst waving his arm to try to divert his attention. Axel just looked on in disbelief...  
*'The guy's barking mad.'*

\*

Now standing by the lake, Thaddeus was discreetly assessing his latest applicant's suitability for a life within The New Day Chapter.

"Observe the natural splendour of nature, the clear waters, bordered by the magical woodland and the glory of the untainted hills beyond. So far, all free from mankind's destructive vandalism."

"Oh, yes... I see it, sir. These so-called captains of industry really know how to trash our world, don't they? I've read they're even trashing space now. Can you believe that?"

This last comment was music to the old man's ears.

“Indeed, they are, and I'll tell you why... because of technology, that's why. It's all out of control. The undereducated, gullible masses, in their craving for digital gadgets, are now at the mercy of those black-hearted miscreants who rule us. Ignorant of the fact they are all being continually watched, scrutinized and conditioned by means of their new high-tech toys.”

“You know, that's exactly what Axel and I think. I hate those darned mobile phones, and as for those pewters, ugh! How on earth did we get to this point in our evolution?”

“By being stupid, that's how. I promise you, Sally. Soon, it will all change.” He smiled, but his wild, red-rimmed eyes were burning pure hatred, Sally saw, as she now stood there facing him.

\*

Mad Dave had now calmed down a little as Marco introduced a wary-looking Axel. The manager made it obvious he didn't approve of this newcomer and eyed him as he would someone with an infectious disease, whilst the candidate gave him a brief account of his engineering experience. In his usual blunt style, Doe asked him a question.

“So, you worked for a military contractor once, you say?”

“Um, yeah man... that's right.” Axel was equally laid back in his manner of speaking as he was in his appearance.

“Did they give you a big enough hammer, boy?” Davey laughed, if only to himself.

“Huh..? Oh yeah man... cool... joke right?”

Davy remained unimpressed. He glanced at Marco as if asking... *‘What the hell have you*

*brought me here?*’ before adding... “Well, if you work here, boy, you’ll need to be like Wyatt Earp. That means... Fast and accurate.” Again, Davey was having a little private joke. Axel’s enquiring eyes glanced around at all the downbeat faces in this dank and dreary sweatshop, before asking... “Erm... Which one is he?... Man.”

## Chapter 13

On Krugle's isle, the computer hardware was at last in place and the other three stations would be ready by the end of tomorrow, his people assured him. Cornelius had personally overseen the stack assembly and aligned the satellite antenna for optimum performance. With every second he'd spent outdoors, the prisoner tried to get a fix on his exact position. He knew this island lay off the American west coast, because Krugle had virtually given that away by putting the dish here. Besides this, the time difference between where they'd seized him, and his estimated location tallied with his watch. He remembered coming round in the aircraft, and seeing Annie for a few moments, before

they put him out again. His next recollection was waking up here. Wolfe had now determined a major airport must be located to the east, by the frequency of the flights passing overhead in the distance. At a guess, he reckoned this spot to be off the shores of California but could not be sure. The cyber specialist resolved to determine his precise location when he adjusted all the dishes for the dummy run. Once again, thinking about the consequences of his actions sent an uncomfortable shiver up his spine.

\*

When the lady moved her macramé bag onto the other shoulder, it was a signal to Chip Kirk that the coast was clear. He'd already seen the real-time video feed, provided by the tiny hidden camera concealed in the daisy on Virginia's hat. Mick covered the technical maestro as he deftly picked the lock and entered Marco's



lair. Sure enough, there was a laptop computer stowed in the top drawer of the desk, given away by the telltale power cable still attached to it. He removed the unit, unscrewed the back and fixed a microchip inside. Once reassembled, Kirk bypassed the login and inserted a flash-drive into the side of the appliance, and in less than thirty seconds, he'd downloaded its entire contents. Besides this, he wiretapped the landline telephone, put a listening device under the desk and fitted a small camera high up in a narrow corner crevice. On completion, the two men returned to their car, parked farther down the deserted link-road, where Kirk plugged the data-stick into his own computer and transferred all the stolen files. He then linked his machine to Marco's and scrutinized all recent activities, including live incoming messages.

After Lewis alerted West to a received tip-off, the pair debated how best to react. The

anonymous female informant had been thin with the details in her brief call and although doubting it was a hoax, they'd infiltrated covertly to establish the facts. She mentioned The New Day Chapter, stating that someone called Thaddeus was to blame for the kidnapping of a tech expert in an effort to destroy the internet. They had not made the kidnappings public knowledge, so this claim sounded legitimate, but they needed to be sure. A check on the cult revealed amongst other things an advertisement in the local press for new citizens. West instructed Chas and Virginia to go in undercover, backed up by Chip and Mick, whilst Sean and Blake remained with Lewis's team in a mobile command unit nearby, monitoring the entire operation. By now the NSA had identified both victims' fingerprints within each of the impounded vehicles. However, they were still waiting for further information regarding a Gulfstream jet used for the escape. Kirk

called Blake on the secure phone, having discovered that Marco was communicating with the kidnappers via the ‘Dark Web.’

“Excellent work, Chip, can you establish their location from this?” West asked with a sense of urgency.

“That’s a negative. We can only get that if the perpetrators go online for long enough, and even then we’d need a full team of analysts monitoring the entire network. The chances are slim, and that’s why these people use this method.”

“Okay, Copy that. Standby for further instructions—Out.” West conferred with Lewis. They needed to decide whether to pull-in Marco now and possibly alert the kidnappers, or watch him in the hope he’d contact them. Even that might not help, as Marco may not even know their location himself, and as Chip had already said, the

chances of pinpointing them this way were minimal.

“It doesn’t look good. We need to decide now because the clock is ticking,” said West.

“Maybe we can contact them directly ourselves, via Marco’s computer?” Lewis put the question.

“We could, certainly, but they may have a code word, or similar I.D. protocol. It’s risky.”

One of Lewis’s agents then handed him a piece of paper. Chuck’s face lit up as he read the message.

“It’s from the FBI. They’ve got a make on Jensen and Crick, placing them at a remote airfield south of L.A. on the day of the kidnapping.”

This was the breakthrough they’d needed. Lewis’s assistant, Gillespie, had been liaising

with the bureau who'd placed one of their best operatives on the case. Special Agent Anne Gideon, who just happened to be Sean Gideon's ex-wife. West smiled as he read the note for himself and handed it to Sean, *'Thanks again, Anne,'* he mused.

Throughout their last operation, Anne Gideon's help had been invaluable, when they exposed a major conspiracy within a secret Defence establishment, known only as 'Area 10.'

"What a lady, she did it again for us, buddy. Okay, let's get 'Sonny and Cher' out of there."

On West's instructions, Sean Gideon sent the message to Chas and Virginia's hidden earpieces. They would now leave this part of the operation to Lewis's team, who had decided not to pull-in Thaddeus and Co, just yet. Chip passed all the data over to Lewis,

including his laptop. They would closely monitor everything Marco did from now on.

\*

The Italian had his doubts about Axel's suitability for a machinist's role within Davey's workshop. This was because the man had nearly taken Doe's head off, by leaving a tightening-key in position prior to starting a lathe with a fast-spinning chuck, a kind of clamping device for round work pieces. Davey had insisted upon a short machining test to assess Axel's skills. On start-up, the key shot away from the machine like a bullet, missing the surprised bully by only a couple of inches. Marco wondered if Axel did it on purpose?

Now back at Thaddeus's house, it was clear the old man liked Sally, as he did not seem to want her to leave.

“Promise me you will return, dear lady, I have so much more to show you.” The old man was smitten.

“Oh, I can’t wait. When Axel and me have sorted things over in Utah, you can bet on that, sir.” They said their farewells before getting into Marco’s car for the short drive back to the site office.

\*

Within the hour Unit Covert were in the sky and heading for California aboard their super-fast Sikorsky Raider helicopter. They had received more information from the FBI, and Special Agent Gideon would be waiting for them. Their first stop would be Santa Monica to collect the other helicopter, and then off to an airfield south of L.A. At last, things were happening. During the flight the team discussed the situation at length, because by now they’d established

Thaddeus's true motive for killing the internet, and Lewis's people had now identified Marco as a wanted fugitive.

"What we have here is a classic case of too much money being in the wrong hands—a fatal combination." Sean remarked.

"I wonder what will happen to the Chapter's citizens." Virginia asked of no-one in particular.

"We can only guess at that, but I think they should at least consider locking up that crazy guy who runs the workshop," said Chas. They all laughed after West said he'd ask Wyatt Earp to bring in Mad Davey Doe... dead or alive.

Anne Gideon met the team at Southside Aero-Park, a privately run airfield, often used by the rich and famous who liked to travel incognito. She'd already commandeered the hangar used to house the Gulfstream jet. A



maintenance worker attested positive identification of the former government hit men, as they emerged to close the large hangar doors, after a helicopter followed by a black van with tinted windows had exited the shelter. The FBI was now treating this spot as a crime scene, and forensic experts were checking out the interior of the plane for clues. The site owners verified regular use of the helicopter, although the customer's details had proven to be false. Anne's team was interrogating traffic camera footage in an effort to determine where the vehicle went from here. She smiled at seeing who'd turned up to meet her, whilst at the same time, felt pleasantly surprised.

“Well, I never would have guessed it.” She offered greetings as the six familiar faces entered the hangar and was even more surprised to see her ex-husband was among them.

“Hi Anne, lovely to see you.” Sean was first to speak, but he did not kiss her as this was official business.

“So, what is it this time?” she asked, raising an eyebrow. Sean smiled, coming back with the vague answer.

“Missing persons. All we can say for now. You know how it is.”

Anne had already guessed she wouldn't get a straight answer. The Special Agent also knew it must be important and so got straight to the point.

“Okay, we are close to establishing the route they took out of here. We have video footage of them heading towards the coast, but the destination is uncertain. We're guessing it is the Long Beach marina area. I have two units down there now, breaking down doors. We're sending the NSA fingerprints from the plane as we find them. They're crosschecking

these as I speak. If we can be of any further help, you need only ask.”

“Thanks for the update, Anne. I’ll let you know if we need anything else.” West led his team over to a quiet corner so as they could speak in private. Chas gave Anne a sly wink before heading off with the rest. After the successful operation at Area 10, Blake had hosted a small celebration party at his home, inviting Anne along too. It was here that she and Chas had become friends.

“If they were definitely here, it looks increasingly likely the kidnappers may be holding them near the coast, or maybe even at sea.” West offered this theory as he unfolded a map he’d removed from his fatigue jacket, and placed atop a nearby portable tool-chest. They all gathered around Blake, carefully studying the chart he’d folded open for them, showing the area of interest.

“Maybe they’re on a ship, and if so, one that facilitates the missing helicopter?” Sean said.

“Yes, that’s another possibility. However, I note there are several Islands off the coast here. They could be on any of these also,” said Blake.

“There should be details of the helicopter kept in the office here.” Sean set off to find Anne, to ask the question, returning to the group a few minutes later.

“According to the site owners, it’s a MD 900 four seat craft, black tail and body except the cockpit area which is white.”

“Should be easy enough to spot from the air if it’s not covered,” said Virginia.

“Yes, but the area is vast, and the ‘MD’ is a very popular model, so we need more to go on,” said Chip. At that moment Anne

approached the team with an update from the NSA.

“Sorry to butt in, but this is important. We can now confirm the two missing persons were definitely aboard the Gulfstream, and... We have located the van.”

This was a major breakthrough. A field unit had discovered the vehicle in a dedicated parking lot near Queensway Bay, used exclusively by those private boat owners who moored their vessels in the nearby marina. Anne continued.

“The harbour master informed us the parking permit shown on the van was issued to Mr Joe Klimst, the owner of Eastern Promise, a luxury motor cruiser. Mr Klimst’s registered U.S. address is Rock Island, California.” The team consulted the map, and pinpointed the exact location, as being fifteen miles off the coast of Los Angeles.

“That’s excellent work, so please pass on our thanks to your people.” West wasted no more time. They would now take a discreet look for themselves. The team boarded one of their helicopters, and Virginia set a course for Rock Island, as West updated Lewis. Meanwhile, the FBI and the NSA turned their collective attention towards the mysterious Mr Klimst.

## Chapter 14

The equipment now stood ready and in place at the other three locations. Krugle stood behind Cornelius, adopting a menacing pose, always looking over the expert's shoulder, and reminded him not to try anything stupid. Wolfe sat at a desk upon which two large monitors faced him. The one on the left showed a basic graphical display, featuring four white satellite dish icons on a red background, positioned one in each corner of the screen. Their antennas pointed toward the centre. In the middle of the display sat a white square, with four white lines emanating from each corner and connecting to each antenna. Placed in a central position between the lower two dishes was another white square, from which two white lines

emerged from the top left corner and connected one each to the two left-hand dishes. This was repeated for the right-hand side. Shown at the midpoint of each line was a small circle that represented a piece of internet hardware known as a router. The whole simple display represented the entire connectivity of the Worldwide Web.

The other screen displayed an array of graphs and box diagrams, each depicting varying and ever-changing digital data. This meant nothing to Krugle... but offered hidden opportunities to Wolfe. Unknown to his captor, the lower right readout was secretly scanning for any nearby short-wave radio signals. Wolfe considered broadcasting on the net to be risky, because he guessed Josef's overseas technicians would be monitoring events. So instead, the cyber tech had drawn on his expertise by covertly installing a simple Morse code Software



Defined Radio SDR. Sending out a pre-set message every thirty seconds...

‘WOLFE – SOS – CALL – FBI – ANNIE – HELD –  
ON – REMOTE – LTHOUSE –RED –RAILS –  
SAVE – HER – FIRST – I – AM – ON – ROCK –  
ISLAND’

Cornelius had now determined his exact location. The expert convinced his jailers of the necessity for him to know this, in order to adjust the orientation of all the satellite dishes. In so doing, he'd pulled up the world map on the screen and pinpointed the Island. He guessed Annie could not be too far away, because in her captors menacing videos, the background and weather always looked the same as here. Krugle saw no harm in Cornelius discovering his whereabouts, knowing full well his captives were both going to die anyway, as was his plan from the start.

“How close are we to conducting the test, Cornelius?” Josef became impatient again. Wolfe glanced at the data screen and then answered.

“Asia is still experiencing sporadic outages. I need it to stabilise, but it shouldn’t take them too long to fix. I am preparing the dummy code now.” Krugle determined the prisoner wasn’t lying.

“Alright, but I want you to initiate as soon as you can, and remember this. One false act and Annie dies. Now look at the screen upon the wall.”

Cornelius lifted his head. There before his eyes was another video of Annie, only this time she stood alone, looking even more terrified and pale. Next she strolled towards the camera, and then it went blank. This was the fourth disturbing broadcast so far and Wolfe tried hard to bury his emotions,

knowing he must not screw up now. Krugle left the room, after instructing Viktor to keep a close watch on the prisoner.

\*

Lewis, now alerted to the fact that Marco had just received a message over the Dark Web, immediately contacted West, who was airborne and heading out over the sea.

“Blake. We have intercepted a communication from the kidnappers. They will sabotage the internet within the coming hours. You need to act fast.”

“Copy. We’re on it: Looks likely they’re holding them on Rock Island, off the coast of Long Beach. Conducting recon now.”

“Understood, if you require backup, just ask, the Navy can help us if need be.”

“Okay: Ask them to standby; we may need a boat... Out.”

West cut the call short because Chip Kirk had picked up a Morse signal on the shortwave frequency. Mick Case deciphered the words as they emerged. Helicopter pilot, Virginia Lowe, was careful to set a straight course, far enough away from the Island so as not to arouse any suspicion. Chas Banks and Sean Gideon were studying the rock with high-powered binoculars, looking for possible points of entry. Chas spied something else.

“There’s an outcrop about two miles off, I should be able to get a better view from there, if you can put me down without them noticing.”

A slight sea mist reduced the visibility to around five miles. Ordinarily it would have been about twelve from the top of the Island. They had already identified the cruiser, moored at its berth, and there atop of the Island sat the distinctive MD 900 chopper.

Mick captured the message and read it aloud to the rest of the team.

Chip zoomed up the console map and identified two lighthouses within eighteen miles of the Island. A recent satellite image showed the nearest to be thirteen miles north. West considered the options, deciding it would take too long to go back for the other helicopter. Instead, he had another idea.

“Ginny, do a wide sweep and bring us in low to about three miles on the far side of the outcrop. Sean and I will take the dinghy from there over to the rocks. Then recon the lighthouse and update me.”

The lady did as she was asked. Thankfully, the sea was calm and so the Sikorsky could virtually skim the surface as they approached the outcrop, whilst just managing to keep out of site from the Island. West and Gideon jumped three feet down into the now

deployed black Combat Rubber Raiding Craft CRRC, a specialist dinghy used for sea operations. One of two craft brought on this mission. Each attached to the bottom of the helicopter. The pair took with them some field equipment, including Blake's TAC-50 rifle and a multi-mode radio transmitter. In seconds they were heading towards the rocky atoll, at over forty knots, still being careful to keep the kidnappers' Island out of their line of sight.

After deploying the CRRC, Virginia got the all clear from Sean via the comms. The former CIA operative turned the helicopter away in a smooth, deft action, keeping low for five miles, before climbing up to ten thousand feet. The sleek black aircraft then headed north at over two hundred miles per hour.

\*

Wolfe was now ready to perform the test. Wulu, who had returned from his more domestic duties, now joined Viktor. Cornelius's eye was drawn to his right-hand screen, where there was a slight flickering in the bottom corner of the shortwave scanner box. It was Morse code. The tech expert had set up this device to receive incoming messages as intermittent illuminations within a tiny circle. He decoded the signal:

‘WOLFE – MESSAGE – RECEIVED – STANDBY.’

Cornelius felt his spirits surge, as he sent his response via the hash key, which he'd especially designated as his transmission tap-pad, always mindful not to make his actions look obvious to his captors.

‘W – STANDING – BY.’

He hoped the senders would not try to rescue him first, as this would mean certain

death for Annie, but he was sure he'd made that clear. Another message followed.

‘W – HOW – MANY – PERPS.’

He tapped out a response.

‘THREE – HERE – TWO – WITH – A – MAYBE – W.’

At that point Krugle returned to the room. He berated his men for not watching their captive close enough and placed himself behind Cornelius's right hand shoulder. The torturer spoke in an impatient tone.

“What are you doing now?”

Wolfe diverted his tormentor's attention towards the left-hand screen, by explaining the meaning of the diagram. The white lines were turning yellow; one by one, working away from the central square. At the same time, he tried to keep his eye on the



shortwave scanner and hoped Krugle would notice nothing amiss.

“I have uploaded the dummy code. When the white lines all turn yellow, it means we have saturated the entire web with this text, proving the theory works. When I upload the virus code, the yellow lines will turn black... to signify the Internet is dead. It will take decades to bring it back to its present level of operation. This is what you want, isn't it?”

Cornelius could barely disguise the bitterness in his tone. Krugle secretly marvelled at this man's talent and ingenuity, realising that even if he let Wolfe live, the expert might need a new occupation, because computing, as the world knew it, would soon cease to exist.

\*

West and Gideon had now established themselves on the outcrop where Sean

studied the house on the island through his powerful binoculars, whilst Blake communicated with the hostage by Morse code. He'd now learned there were only three people holding Wolfe. Gideon eyed the satellite dish atop of the house and speculated as to its intended use in the cyber-attack. The two men reassessed the situation, whilst awaiting an update from the others. West had earlier discussed the possibility of closing sections of the internet with Lewis, to protect the local infrastructure. However, this would have placed Wolfe and Annie in even more immediate danger, and whilst there was still a chance, they resolved to stop the sabotage and free the captives.

Virginia arrived at the vicinity of the nearest lighthouse in minutes, keeping the helicopter high and straight so as not to attract attention from any possible occupants. With steady hands and looking through his high-magnification field glasses, Mick confirmed

this structure had red rails, as described in Wolfe's message. They saw no sign of anyone on the platform, and the team instantly realised it would be difficult to get in close to this remote pillar without being observed. The sun broke through, casting a shadow of the lighthouse across the water towards the shore some ten miles beyond. They decided to investigate the other beacon some five miles further on, hoping it did not have red handrails. As they rounded a headland and drew nearer, it was apparent this watchtower's railing was white. Virginia then turned the helicopter inland in a wide arc and initiated a descent. She put the machine down in a field close to the shoreline where the team then employed an advanced electronic camera, which Chip now centred on the distant tower. The tech wizard would have preferred to use a special onboard radar scanner, which could detect if people were

inside buildings, but they would have needed to get in closer and that was too risky.

After about five minutes, Chip signalled to the others to look at the screen, mounted in the display dashboard. Here they observed an image of a female, gripping the handrail tightly, as she followed the circle of the platform around the lighthouse. Close behind her followed a man. Chip increased the magnification. It was more than a fair guess to say they'd located Annie Baxter. Her hair colour and clothing matched the description given to them by Lewis's men, although which kidnapper accompanied her could not be determined at this range. Virginia sent a confirmation message to Blake who told them to standby. It was now late evening and soon the light would start to fade. Then something unexpected happened... The cruiser cast off from the Island and headed north.

The small circle on the right-hand screen flashed another message:

‘W - ARE – YOU – STILL – RECEIVING’

Cornelius did not look at it directly... but Krugle did!

\*

West did not like the look of this. Something was afoot. He called Chip.

“The cruiser just left the Island, I’m guessing it’s headed your way, so we need to get the girl now.” Blake had no doubt this trip was to collect Jensen and Crick. Things did not look good for Annie. At the same moment, there was a reply from the island.

‘STAY – BACK – OR – WOLFE – DIES.’

## Chapter 15

Chip acknowledged the command. Annie and her shadow had now moved around to the far side of the lighthouse near the entrance door. Virginia started the rotors as Chas and Mick put on their helmets and parachutes. There was no other option.

They were going in.

The helicopter rose and headed inland first, before sweeping back at speed towards the target. The team hoped the hired thugs would stay on the blind side of the brick blocked, remote pillar.

Krugle had spotted the ruse, because he understood Morse code perfectly. Six years undercover in the U.K. had made it an absolute necessity. He'd now given Jensen the order to set-up the girl and waste her on his signal, and as promised, Cornelius would watch her die. Josef sent Viktor off in the cruiser to collect the assassins, and ferry them ashore, once they'd finished. Soon Wulu would fly him off the Island too, but first there was some business to take care of. Wolfe, who still sat monitoring the screens, now had a gun at his head.

“Very stupid Wolfe. Who are they?” He jabbed the end of the barrel hard into Cornelius's skull.

“I don't know. They just answered my message.” Krugle considered this and reasoned that maybe it was not the authorities after all. Wolfe again was telling the truth, he could tell.

“Well, you just sealed Annie’s fate... Unless?” Josef let those words hang in the air.

“Unless what?” came his captive’s desperate reply.

“Unless you invoke the destruct command. NOW!”

The wall screen again flickered to life. Annie, now held in a firm grip by Jensen, faced out towards the sea, rigid with fear, her lower body pressed tight against the rail. Crick as usual was filming the whole thing, sending a live feed to Krugle this time, being careful to keep his partner’s face hidden. Wolfe began typing the script, realising nothing could save him now because his rescuers were too damned late.

The helicopter levelled out at two thousand feet. After Chip had checked their parachutes and given them the go signal, Chas and Mick exited the cockpit. One from each side, they



climbed down onto each of the two landing skids, mounted symmetrically below the craft. These were not standard on the Sikorsky, but Chip had them fitted as a detachable, optional extra for situations such as this.

The pair then lowered themselves even further, gripping the extremities of the lower tubular steel rungs, until they faced each other on opposite sides of the craft. Both now suspended in the air by their outstretched arms.

\*

Meanwhile, over on the rocky outcrop, West made some fine adjustments to the TAC-50 sniper's gunsight as Sean assessed the wind speed and direction, indicated by a limp flag atop a pole, at one end of the small island. From this range, hitting the target would need the keenest of sharp eyes, but

nobody's eye was sharper than Blake's. He zeroed in the crosshairs on the white cap positioned at the end of the antenna, which Krugle had recently installed upon the roof of the house. Sean had verified that hitting this 'Feed Horn,' would render the dish inoperable, knowing it to be an essential part of the data transmission. West held his aim steady whilst controlling his breathing, and despite the urgency, blocked all other thoughts from his mind. *'Steady now... relax... and shoot.'*

\*

On Chas's signal, both raiders released their grip and plunged away from the helicopter. Virginia had slowed the machine down to an almost silent hover, keeping back from the target as she watched the two figures free-falling, manoeuvring, aiming their bodies one each side of the lighthouse. At the right moment both men pulled their respective

ripcords, releasing pilot chutes which in turn dragged their main square steerable canopies free. On the far side of the stone pillar, Jensen still held Annie against the rail at arm's length, as the rugged hard rocks below beckoned a careless slip or cynical push. Like hunting birds, two black clad hawks swooped down toward the structure, with Chas coming in first from the left slightly ahead of Mick and veering in on the blindside of those stood on the platform. Both men knew they only had one chance to get this right.

\*

Through the field glasses, Sean saw the feed horn explode into a thousand dust-like pieces, as the entire dish spun around as if on its own accord. West had rendered the equipment defunct, and although he couldn't be sure it would thwart the cyber-attack, it was a fair bet it might. The two men returned to the dinghy in haste, where Gideon restarted the

outboard motor. The craft emerged from behind the rocky hideout at speed and headed towards the island.

They were going to rescue Wolfe.

\*

Krugle sensed something wasn't right, but was not sure what. His prisoner hesitated there for a second, as if he'd noticed something untoward. He ordered Wulu to check on the outside.

“What is it, Wolfe? What happened just then?”

His voice like pure ice. Cornelius knew exactly what had happened. His main data transmitter had stopped working, but he wasn't going to tell Krugle that. In despair, he glanced again at the screen upon the wall where poor Annie still looked statue like, as if frozen with fear.

“I’m ready to send the code,” he lied, pretending now to enter the data, although he knew it would not take long for Krugle’s lackeys to discover the truth.

\*

Jensen held Annie by the back of her coat collar, his arm outstretched, propping the door open and keeping his face out of Crick’s camera lens, by standing just inside the entrance to the lighthouse. To his left, a shadow swooped. He looked across to see what it was, but the door blocked his view. Chas detached the canopy from the harness, using the special quick release clips attached to the para-cords. The former SAS commando hit the narrow platform on his feet, as the momentum sent him barrelling into the open door which in turn, swung closed, trapping Jensen’s right arm so as the brute had to release the hold on the hostage’s collar... Chas followed through, hitting

Crick, and knocking him clean off the walkway... sending him down to his death on the ragged rocks below. The raider just managed to stop himself going down too, by grabbing the rail with both hands, and even then, his body now hung precariously over the side.

The force of the impact had thrown Annie onto her back, as she'd spun away from the rail. Jensen re-emerged with his gun drawn, shrugging off the pain in his arm, to take aim at the dark figure attempting to climb back onto the platform. There was a moment of recognition showing in his eyes, for he knew this man's gait, he was sure, and then... it dawned on him.

*'The bastard who cracked my ribs.'*

He aimed the gun... too late. Two distinct tap-tap sounds from an M16 carbine, dropped him where he stood as Mick swooped down

from the right, and whilst still attached to his parachute, shot Jensen dead. A difficult, but well-practised manoeuvre. He continued his descent down into the water. Chas had by now climbed back up to safety and then helped a very much shaken Annie to her feet. Together they stepped over Jensen's corpse and inside the lighthouse. Virginia was there in seconds to retrieve Mick from the water, whilst Chip instructed Chas to take Annie to the end of the jetty and prepare for the airlift. Virginia sent a quick message to Blake; *'Swift – Hostage secure - Perps eliminated - No other casualties—Out.'*

\*

Krugle wondered what was taking Wulu so long as he looked out of the patio door which led onto the balcony, whilst still pointing the gun in Wolfe's direction. This distracted him from seeing what Wolfe had just witnessed, upon the screen which now turned blank.

Cornelius saw his chance. The door into the other room stood ajar, and so he raced for it and disappeared before Krugle could react. Josef cursed, opened the patio door and called for his manservant, who suddenly appeared from the adjoining balcony, breathless and motioning towards the sea. The two men looked down to observe a dinghy approaching at speed.

“Let’s get out of here!” Krugle said.

The pair raced for the heliport.

Wolfe hid in some bushes at the rear of the house, shaken up and concerned for Annie.

*‘Had they managed to save her?’*

All he could make out on the video was a shadow sending the camera spinning over the side of the rail of the lighthouse. It all happened so fast. A few moments later, he heard the unmistakable chopping sound of



helicopter rotors turning, then the hedge rustled wildly as the black and white machine passed over his head and out over the waters. He stayed still for several minutes, listening, unsure if all his captors had gone. Wolfe guessed the helicopter was Krugle's, as he'd already noted it during his exercise walks, and then came the buzz of an outboard motor. With caution, he emerged from his hiding place, walked over to the precipice on the far side of the island, and looked down. He waved his arms in the air. A figure in the dinghy signalled him to stay put and keep his head down. West knew it may not yet be safe.

Sean and Blake soon determined only they and Wolfe remained on the Island. The cyber expert voiced his delight, when learning his beloved Annie was safe and being looked after by the FBI. He expressed his thanks to all concerned as the three waited for Virginia to come and collect them. West updated Lewis, who in turn put out an All-Points

Bulletin, or APB on the helicopter and Cruiser. Strangely, no-one knew what had happened to the boat. Blake felt disappointed the perpetrators had got away from him, particularly because the ringleader remained unknown to them. No doubt Wolfe would give Lewis a full description, and this may reveal his true identity. At least the Worldwide Web was safe... for now, he reasoned.

Viktor had seen the raid on the lighthouse unfold before his eyes. He instinctively turned the craft around and headed back towards the island. It was then that his leader called and ordered him to take the luxury vessel out to sea to a set-location where he would wait for the helicopter to arrive.

Josef Krugle was getting away.

## Chapter 16

Over in Oregon, Thaddeus's plans for running his drugs empire within an internet free world turned out to be fruitless. It took the combined effort of the security agencies and FBI to close down his operations. Under Chuck Lewis's direction, they rounded up Marco, Thaddeus, and some of his flock, including mad Davey Doe (in a straitjacket), preceding the official closure of The New Day Chapter.

In Washington, D.C., State officials arranged an emergency summit in haste with the purpose of speeding up plans to improve the protection of the cyber industry. Cornelius Wolfe would soon become the newly appointed head of an International initiative, dedicated to shielding the

Worldwide Web, and its entire satellite infrastructure from terrorist threats.

Two weeks had passed since the rescue of the cyber expert and his girlfriend by Unit Covert, and now West's team were back in Santa Monica, following a Pentagon debriefing. No mention of their recent exploits would ever be made public for a lifetime. Sean Gideon knew that all too well. Certain that somebody, somewhere, sat compiling the redacted documents, just like he did himself in his last official role for the State.

The team were now discussing with Blake the possibility of expanding their numbers. This latest operation stretched their capabilities to the limit, and West believed the perpetrators would not have escaped if he'd placed more people on the ground. This was something they would have to put on the back burner, because Lewis came on the line

again. The NSA had at last identified the man who masterminded Wolfe's abduction, and he wanted Unit Covert to bring him in. The infamous Josef Krugle had evaded the U.S. authorities and made his way back to his native home in Belarus.

They listened in on the conference call, where Lewis gave them a short intelligence brief, as to the exact whereabouts of their fugitive and his accomplices. Plans were already in motion to transport the team and their helicopters to Europe. Here they would set up a temporary H.Q. at a combined U.S. services base, close to the Belarusian border. The team would fly out from Travis airbase in a C-5M Super Galaxy in twenty-four hours, bound for Lask in Poland.

"You'll be pleased to know it was our friends at SpyHawks who made the breakthrough." Lewis said this because both West and

Gideon had served in this unit during their military careers. He continued...

“Wolfe’s excellent description finally enabled us to put a name to the face. Mr Joe Klimst is in fact, Mr Josef Krugle, aka Mr X. Wanted by the west for crimes against humanity. This is what makes the extraction operation such a big deal.”

“Yes, we see that,” said Blake.

They already knew about the merciless tactics used by this eastern torturer, when conducting his illegal interrogations of western agents. Until now, they had known the sadist only as Mr X, because none of his victims lived long enough to give any clue as to his actual identity. For years, Krugle had travelled the world in the guise of a diplomatic advisor. However, his true purpose was to spy on foreign intelligence services, and help his leaders identify western

infiltrators in the east. Krugle was a clinical and methodical operator, who'd tail western spies for months, scrutinising their every move, whilst taking careful note of their contacts. Then, when the time was right... his henchmen would pounce. The unsuspecting agents dragged away in the dead of night to a chilling and dark place, where Josef Krugle would slowly and permanently... damage them.

To date, he'd been quite successful, because no-one ever associated Mr X with Josef Krugle, the diplomatic advisor. That was until a sharp-eyed undercover operative, working for SpyHawks, spotted Zeng Ho with Krugle when they'd returned to Belarus. The similarity of Wulu's companion to Wolfe's description of his captor was unmistakable, in particular, the red star-shaped birthmark on his forehead. Before this breakthrough, Zeng Ho Wulu had only appeared on the west's radar via a vague tip-

off, obtained years before by MI6, which is why they'd watched and photographed him for a time. Then one day, their informer disappeared, so too did Wulu, and Josef's faithful manservant never led them back to his master. In recent times, Zeng must have entered the United States illegally with Krugle from Rock Island, because there was no record of either ever being there. He and Viktor abducted the tech genius, and may have gotten clean away with it, had the oriental not removed his mask too early.

### ***Belarus***

Although he'd amassed an enormous amount of money, it still dissatisfied Josef that he'd failed in his mission, and he blamed his lackeys for not watching the expert closely enough. He reasoned that by now, Wolfe would have given a detailed description of his captors, and so it was only a matter of time before they discovered his



identity. He selected a bottle of finest vodka from his drinks cabinet and took his second glass of the evening. It satisfied him to think he'd be safe here in his beloved country, knowing it would be unwise to travel to the west again. That didn't bother him now. Josef had just banked fifty million dollars and so could now retire here on his extensive farmland, midway between Adelesk and Kozly. Mature Pine, Birch and Oak trees surrounded his beautiful white stone house, set here in lush woodland. Beyond that lay fertile fields where his farmhands grew barley, rye and sugar beet. He'd still use his skills here from time to time, even more so now a new cold-war was rearing its head. At least it would keep him occupied, he reasoned.

## Chapter 17

It was eleven p.m., when the giant cargo aircraft thundered down the main runway at Travis airport in California, for this mammoth, hulking beast weighed in at over eight hundred thousand pounds. Amongst the payload were Unit Covert and their mission equipment, and in less than twelve hours, they'd be in Poland. Within the passenger section of the aircraft, each member sat strapped into their seat, in a similar fashion to that of a standard commercial airline traveller. Immersed in their own individual thoughts and preparing themselves for what was to come. Chas, still peeved at how he'd let Virginia dupe him, by allowing her to select their undercover personas, especially

the clothes, for their infiltration of The New Day Chapter, had revenge in mind. The fighter had no time to object, noticing later how the lady had thought it amusing to have pulled one over on him. This he guessed was in retaliation for his persistent swearing in her presence, although secretly, he admired her, and would protect her to the hilt. Right now, though, he planned a little surprise for the lady when they returned to Santa Monica.

After the pilot had levelled the aircraft at cruising height, Blake West unclipped his seatbelt, stood up in the aisle, and faced his team.

“Okay, listen up, people. Before we left, I received some more intel from Lewis.”

He handed out copies of a detailed aerial photograph, depicting a substantial house, set deep in a woodland area inside Belarus. They each now studied their copy of the print.

Besides showing the dwelling, the camera had also captured two smaller outbuildings, one of which they identified as a garage, the other, they supposed, was an aircraft hangar, because of its proximity to a short runway.

“This is where SpyHawks say Krugle lives. The surrounding farm belongs to him and acts as a front for his real occupation.” West explained the details, and then Mick said...

“The woodland offers perfect cover on the ground.”

They all agreed. An air infiltration looked to be the best way from a practical viewpoint, but this border was one of the most heavily defended in the world, meaning there would be a formidable military presence in the area. The team getting caught on the ground was always a major risk, especially for a helicopter crew. However, SpyHawks knew the pattern of the Belarusian border guards’

routine patrols and would monitor them during the extraction.

“After unloading at Lask, we will fly the helicopters over to a reconnaissance base near Sokolka, close to the border. This operation will be conducted from there. Needless to say, it is a ‘Black Op.’ I suggest you all now get some sleep. We’ll work through the plan later.”

\*

It was early afternoon on this hot July day, when the phone rang. Wulu answered, and, on the instructions of the harsh voice at the other end of the line, immediately transferred the call to his master.

“This is Krugle, who is calling?”

“Valkyrie.” Josef recognised the codeword which meant the ‘State Security Committee’

required his services. He answered in keeping with protocol.

“We can accommodate a late order.”

“Good, comrade. Our people will arrive tomorrow morning.” The caller hung-up. Krugle then summoned Wulu and ordered him to prepare the basement facility. This ‘Client’ did not pay a great deal of money, but Josef would at least get the satisfaction of breaking one more western spy. He wondered what information his customer required. Each case was unique and as he did with all the others, Josef would first assess his subject.

## ***Russia***

Flanked by two armed plainclothes officers, the prisoner walked through the long, dark corridor to the office of Dimitry Smirnov, the Station Head of Military Security. The door already stood ajar. With a

guiding nudge from one of his escorts, the captive entered the room first.

“Sit Down.”

The stern-voiced instruction was issued as an order from behind the large wooden desk. Anatoly Lebedev did as he was told and faced his inquisitor for the second time that day.

“This is your last chance to tell us your true identity, who you are working for, and why you were spying on our weapons test facilities.”

After protesting his innocence, Lebedev fell silent. Smirnov waited a few moments before speaking again.

“Unless you tell us the truth, we cannot help you.” No further sound left the prisoner’s lips.

“Very well, have it your way. You are being sent to another location where you will stay

until you decide to tell us the truth.” Dimitry nodded to one of his men, who then ordered the prisoner to stand. The door opened, and the three filed back out.

Anatoly returned to his cell, located in the building's basement. His actual name was Alex Kaminski, a naturalised British citizen and undercover operative for MI6. When attempting to leave the country, officials had caught Alex with sensitive information relating to a secret hypersonic weapons programme. He'd been living and working in Russia for five years, posing as Anatoly Lebedev, a history academic from Saint Petersburg. Alex operated as a go-between and courier, gathering classified information he collected from the different field agents scattered around the state.

His downfall came when one of his contacts had aroused the suspicion of the authorities, warranting a surveillance operation by the



Russian Intelligence Service. This led them to the dead-drop point, where they'd waited, and watched. They had followed Alex from the bookshop. When detained and questioned, the spy denied any knowledge of the small data-stick concealed within the spine of his recent purchase. He knew his cover was sound, and as long as he stuck to his story, hoped this would force them to release him. Smirnov, on the other hand, was not convinced this was an unfortunate mix-up involving an innocent scholar. The tough Russian had been in this business too long to be fooled that easily. However, his contact across the border in Belarus would determine this for sure... one way or the other.

\*

It was ten o'clock local time when the two Sikorsky Raider helicopters landed in Sokolka, a small Polish town close to the eastern border with Belarus. Used during the

Second World War, by the occupying Nazi forces as a staging post for Jews destined for the death camps, and infamously known as the Sokolka Ghetto. Once all their equipment was sorted out, West wasted no time in assembling the team in a makeshift operations room, loaned to them by Major Rickard the base commander. It was small and spartan, comprising two tables, some chairs and a wall mounted whiteboard. A hundred yards away from this building stood the drone reconnaissance H.Q., manned by SpyHawks personnel, a covert intelligence unit known only to a few trusted souls inside the U.S. Military. West and Gideon would utilize their facilities whilst the others were in the field.

“We go in at twenty-three hundred hours tomorrow. The subject, Josef Krugle, will, I am told, be tucked up in his bed.”

Blake had already attached an enlarged aerial photograph of the house to the whiteboard, along with a picture of the torturer.

He continued, “there will be two accomplices inside the building. We have identified these as Zeng Ho Wulu, his personal assistant, and Viktor Kutznesov, a former member of the GRU, Russian Military Intelligence Service.”

He pinned up their mugshots and gave a breakdown on the layout of the dwelling, using some diagrams Lewis’s people supplied. SpyHawks pinpointed Krugle’s bedroom, which had a balcony. This would provide a perfect point of entry for the team. Kutznesov slept in an adjacent room, whilst Wulu’s quarters were on the ground floor near a kitchen. By the time of the planned extraction, all three should be asleep.

## Chapter 18

Just after six in the morning, the Kamov Ka-60 helicopter touched down near the small private airfield, on the outskirts of Minsk. The prisoner was then transferred to a waiting car for the three-hour plus drive to Krugle's house. Daylight now, he noticed. Alex grew concerned at learning he was no longer in Russia.

*'What's going to happen to me?'*

His travelling companions were the same two plainclothes officers assigned to guard him in Moscow, and neither had said a word to him for the entire flight.

This theme continued for the duration of the onward journey. They arrived at their destination at a quarter to ten. The British spy could not fail to notice how isolated this place was. A good spot to hide a body, he thought, as his blood began to chill. The black Mercedes pulled up at the side of the property. Nikolay Ivanov got out of the front passenger seat and opened the back door, signalling for the handcuffed prisoner to get out, whilst covering him with his PSM standard issue pistol. His partner, Leonid Turgenev, exited the car and led the way to a side door entrance. Once inside, Wulu greeted them and guided them down some stairs to the basement.

It felt cold down here. They followed Wulu along a dark, narrow passageway to a door at the end. It was a cell. To the left stood another room, the double doors left wide open revealing a large chair at its centre, rather like the type a dentist would use. The walls

displayed an array of white shelves, cupboard units and worktops, as found in any medical facility. A large circular light mounted above the chair completed the look. Alex Kaminski now knew what to expect. They would torture him for information, and he guessed, letting him see this, was just the start of the process.

Wulu opened the cell door as Ivanov pushed Alex inside and closed it behind him. They would now leave him there alone, to consider his position. Alex recognised this common tactic, used in order to soften up a prisoner mentally. He would not talk, the stakes were too high, and his many Russian informants would suffer if he did. Kaminski was himself originally from Warsaw. He settled in Britain ten years earlier and studied at Oxford University, where a lecturer had introduced him to the British Intelligence service. His academic brain and fluency in Russian had made him a perfect choice for

MI6. His code name on this operation was *Countryman*.

Whilst Viktor shared vodka with the recent arrivals, Josef had a more pressing engagement. Here on the opposite side of the small two-way mirror, upon the wall of the prisoner's cell, he now studied and evaluated his subject's every move. The spy was checking his appearance. Josef noted how long this man stood there observing himself... a full minute? A ladies' man, by the look of him, he reckoned, echoed in the fashionable style of his clothes. Not as scruffily dressed as most academic types he'd met, and his hair looked too tidy, he mused.

Krugle had seen enough to determine this man's weakness, and that was... his vanity. The observation assisted the torturer in deciding the method he would adopt to get his captive to talk. However, Josef did not consider himself an unreasonable man,

therefore the subject would be given a fair chance to deliver the information willingly. Tonight, the process would begin. Just after Alex had fallen asleep, they would awaken him, and drag the panic-stricken prisoner to the chair. This was a tried and tested method of interrogation, and it seldom failed. Josef smiled at the thought.

\*

They finalised the plan, satisfied that if performed correctly, they would have little trouble lifting Krugle out of Belarus and transporting him back to the U.S. After a short morning work-out and yet another run over the details, they rested up. For tonight, Unit Covert would be busy. Gideon, with a drone at his disposal, would perform an initial aerial sweep before the operation began and maintain live surveillance throughout.



Sean summoned Blake to the drone command centre. He'd spotted an unknown vehicle at the target's house.

"It could belong to Krugle,"

"It could, but it's not recognised by SpyHawks," said Gideon, adding...

"If it's not his, then there may be others present." A fair point, but West knew the weather was about to turn for the worse in the next twenty-four hours, so any delay might hamper the operation.

"Okay, keep an eye on it, Sean, but for now the mission has to stay on schedule." West left Gideon to his work and went back to the billet, deciding he'd need to modify the plan just in case Sean was right about the car.

### ***10:45 p.m. Eastern European Time***

Viktor watched Nikolay and Leonid rouse the prisoner from his sleep as Alex's eyes

squirmed against the harsh bright light radiating down from the ceiling. Disorientated and half-conscious, he felt hands pulling him from his bed. Almost involuntarily, he rose to his feet, now being part-marched and part-dragged out of the cell and into the adjoining room. His captors removed the handcuffs before thrusting him into the large chair. Now seated, they restrained him by using special straps on the armrests positioned on opposite sides. These leather bonds being then attached to each of his wrists so as his hands and inner forearms faced upwards. They bound his ankles together and secured them to a steel footrest with another leather strap. The overhead spotlight then came on... bright.

Krugle dismissed the others because he liked to work alone. Alex, still squinting, studied this short, squat figure, with a bald head and cold bespectacled eyes, stood before him. His tormentor, who wore a white

surgical top with a round collar which fastened on the side of his neck, studied this latest specimen for a few seconds before speaking.

“Are you comfortable, Anatoly?” A mocking question to which there was no answer forthcoming.

Krugle’s voice turned cold and precise. “I am going to ask you some questions. If you are wise, you will answer. If you are not, I will make you suffer. Do you understand?” Still no sound left the MI6 agent’s lips.

\*

The Sikorsky Raider was in the air for a short hop over the border into Belarus. It was a dark, still night, perfect for this kind of operation. In view of Sean’s discovery of the mystery car, Blake had made a last-minute change to the plan. He took Virginia’s place. She would now be on standby with the other

helicopter, in readiness for an emergency evacuation, if things went south. Now aboard with him sat Chip Kirk at the controls, Mick and Chas.

Kirk switched the running mode to silent as the craft came in low to avoid being detected on the defenders' radar. In five minutes, he arrived at the drop zone, a small clearing in the woods, three hundred yards or so from the rear of the house. His three black-clad passengers exited the helicopter. Each wore their night vision glasses as they headed off through woodland towards the property. The trio stopped at the treeline facing the building, where they saw a light showing on the ground floor, and another shining up from a cellar. This was not expected. Blake signalled to the others to stay put and made his way over to the basement window.

Inside, Krugle quizzed the prisoner.

“What is your real name?”

“Anatoly Lebedev.” Was the reply. Josef sensed a lie, but continued... “Who are you working for?”

“I own a bookshop. I source rare books for international customers,” Alex said with conviction. Krugle again detected a lie.

“You are lying through your teeth. I always know a liar. Well, we will now have to do this the hard way. Do you understand?”

“I’m telling the truth, and you have no right to do this.” Alex tried in vain to reason with his inquisitor, who had moved away to pick something up off a worktop.

\*

West lay on his front, keeping to one side of the small window and looking down into the room. He instantly recognised Krugle, watching now as the torturer held something

above his victim's bare inner forearm. It was a pipette. A thin glass tube containing a liquid, pointed at its lower end with a rubber bulb at the other. He looked on in concern as Krugle lightly squeezed the bulb, allowing a drip of liquid to splash onto the victim's skin. It was concentrated acid. After a second, Alex felt the sharp burning pain, accompanied by a smell of rotten eggs, and then he stifled a yell. Krugle showed no emotion as he spoke once more...

“That part of your arm will now be scarred permanently. You will have a mark, rather like this one, on my forehead.”

Josef smiled as he pointed out the star-shaped birthmark, but Alex was in no mood to look or care because his flesh was burning, and it hurt like hell.

West beat a hasty retreat, returned to the others and updated them on what he saw below. Their priority had now changed.

“We need to rescue this guy before that bastard disfigures him.” The others nodded their understanding.

With care, they crept towards a side entrance. Blake stayed outside to cover their six, whilst Mick and Chas entered the building in silence. Loud voices drifted across the deserted, darkened hall from beyond a facing door. To their right were some stairs leading down below. They first warned Blake before descending to the basement. Chas led the way, with Mick covering their backs.

Krugle had made his point and explained to his subject what was coming next.

“That was just a sample, Anatoly. Now look above.”

Josef hit a foot pedal, and the chair reclined with a jarring thud, until coming to a stop when the victim's torso lay almost flat. Alex looked up at a large glass bottle containing a clear liquid, directly above his face. At its base, a small tap. Krugle fixed his struggling prisoner's head in a special clamp, designed to restrict any movement.

“Now, Anatoly. I want you to tell me the truth. WHAT IS YOUR REAL NAME?”

After checking the passage was clear, Chas rounded the corner at the bottom of the stairs, pausing for a moment on receiving a click signal from West. Someone was leaving the upstairs room and heading their way. Although Blake remained outside the closed door, he'd heard the solid footsteps as they crossed the timber boards. Mick stayed hidden around the corner at the bottom of the stairwell and heard the approach, determining this was just one person. As



Viktor rounded the corner, Mick laid the surprised giant flat out with a single blow to the head. He signalled Chas to continue whilst he disarmed and tied up the unsuspecting Russian.

Krugle spoke again, only this time his voice was definite and chilling.

“When I turn-on that small tap, concentrated sulphuric acid will slowly drip onto your pretty face, and burn your flesh unrecognisably. Much in the same way as I have demonstrated on your arm. You will also be blinded and suffer extreme pain. So, answer my questions. Tell me exactly who you are!”

Josef raised his hand until his thumb and forefinger gripped the small tap-screw. Alex’s answer stayed the same, and then Krugle’s spat his last words of warning...

“Okay. I can tell you this. You will never look the same again... ever.”

At that moment, a silenced pistol shot shattered Krugle’s wrist, sending him spinning away from the chair. As he turned, his other arm caught the stand on which the acid bottle was mounted, knocking it over as he and the receptacle hit the ground together. A mighty crash of shattering glass released a deadly acid shower which covered Josef’s head, hands and clothing. The spy was saved from further harm by the back of the chair. Mick stood at the doorway whilst Chas released the captive. They’d gotten there in the nick of time for him, but danger still threatened.

For Krugle, on the other hand, it was too late. The sadist lay on the floor writhing in agony, his flesh burning away from him fast, as a fetid smell filled the air. Chas considered putting a bullet in the tormentor’s head to put

him out of his misery, but then recalled some of his former colleagues in the regiment who'd suffered at the hands of men like Krugle. He decided to leave him. Just desserts, he reckoned. His only regret was that they couldn't take this bastard with them now.

Alex thanked the two masked faces and asked who they were.

“Just follow us and do as you're told.” Is the only answer he got, and the spy willingly complied.

On hearing the commotion below, Nikolay and Leonid drew their weapons and headed out of the door, closely followed by the unarmed Wulu. Down the stairwell, they spied Viktor, gagged and bound in the corner at the bottom. Leonid ignored this and raced to check on his charge. He entered the room, now greeted by the grotesque,

unrecognisable, writhing figure of the torturer lying on the floor. Nikolay joined him soon after. There was no sign of the prisoner. Wulu then emerged, having released Viktor. The manservant looked horrified when seeing his master on the floor, barely alive, and the putrid stench of burning flesh was making them all gag. Wulu pointed to a small, concealed door in the far corner which led to an escape tunnel. The prisoner must have found it because Nikolay had already checked the empty cell.

Blake had discovered another entrance to the basement and alerted the team. Mick Case found the hidden door, and they'd managed to get out just in time. West now met them at the entrance and all four men headed for the woodland. Case guided Alex through the darkness. It wasn't long before they could hear the shouting of someone giving instructions in Russian. The moonlight was now illuminating the open spaces, making it

easier to see for the pursuers. Sean Gideon's voice came over the comms.

“Swift: I have you on thermal visual. Three armed men to your rear, now mobile and in pursuit.”

Headlights blazed on the wide track behind Blake and the others, following them through the woods. It wouldn't be long before they were seen. The team headed off the track and into the dense undergrowth, taking Alex with them. As the car drew nearer, two shots from Chas's MI6 carbine took out the headlights. The Mercedes swung to one side, swerved back across the track and stopped midway. The three Russians got out on the far side of the vehicle, and using the car as a shield, Viktor opened fire whilst Leonid and Nikolay retrieved some hardware from the trunk.

West realised they were only two hundred and fifty yards from the evacuation point, at the end of the track. They made a run for it through the undergrowth where it was darkest, hoping those following wouldn't know their intended evacuation point. Blake and Chas provided sporadic cover fire to keep their pursuers far enough back, whilst Mick led Alex through the trees with a sense of urgency. Chip had the helicopter ready as they approached, and Sean kept them updated...

“Two hundred yards and you're there... Wait a minute, they've got RPGs.”

This was the last thing Blake wanted to hear. Rocket-propelled grenades could bring down the chopper, and would also arouse the attention of the Belarusian border troops. They needed to keep the Russians far enough back to allow the helicopter to get out of there safely. Blake made a decision. He ordered

Chip to evacuate as soon as Mick and the prisoner had reached him. Meanwhile, he and Chas would keep the Russians pinned down, until they could both evade capture and make it to the backup evacuation zone nearer the border.

Four minutes later, the Sikorsky was airborne, keeping low above the treetops and heading away from danger. Chip had reluctantly followed his orders. In Sokolka, Virginia readied the other helicopter for the emergency Zone 'B' evacuation. The lady knew that Blake and Chas would now be headed for the backup area, and she would go in, guns blazing if necessary. Later, back at the operation HQ in Poland, Mick had established the identity of their passenger. Alex did not reveal being an MI6 operative, as he now awaited collection by an official from the British Embassy.

Blake and Chas made their way towards the revised evacuation area. They'd twice dodged the Russian agents, and on one occasion could have eliminated them if they chose. However, both men knew, this would have serious implications politically, and neither wished to start a major war. Over their comms came another message from Sean...

“Swift: Helo-1 has returned to base... Helo-2 is on standby... Be aware border troops are mobilising... Proceed at once to Zone ‘B’.”

West cursed, because he knew the border guards were in fact Spetznaz Special Forces, a well-trained unit, similar to American Navy SEALs and the British Special Services. He acknowledged the message, indicating he and Chas would be at the evacuation zone in fifteen minutes. To the north they could hear a helicopter, knowing this meant only one thing. The defenders were airborne.



Nikolay and Leonid had pulled their superior rank with the unit commander and insisted on being aboard the Mi-VN helicopter, as it now swept the border area looking for the armed infiltrators. The GRU men knew their careers would suffer as a result of this western incursion, especially so because they'd lost a major spy. Smirnov would no doubt bust them out of the service... unless they managed to redeem themselves by getting him back. As far as they could tell, he was still here somewhere, and if so, they would find him. On the ground, troops with sniffer-dogs deployed near the house and would soon pick up a trail.

The two infiltrators closed in on Zone 'B.' West alerted Gideon for an update. Ever conscious that the enemy was nearby, he did not want to risk an airborne extraction if the odds were against them succeeding. In seconds, he received his answer...

“Swift: We are green for go. Helo-2 is in the air. Be aware there are troops advancing on your area... stay alert.”

Sean made the call, knowing the risks were high and the border unit's helicopter was closing in fast on Blake's position, as were their men on the ground. Chip had now joined Sean in the command building and took over control of the surveillance drone. He had an idea. Mick accompanied Virginia as she aimed the Sikorsky fast and low towards Zone 'B.' A mere half a mile to the north of that location, the Mi-VN hovered close to the ground, enabling three soldiers to jump clear to check out the surrounding area. Leonid and Nikolay were still on board with their RPGs at the ready.

The Russian pilot then detected two other aircraft, one ahead flying low over the border, and another, much closer, coming in even lower behind him. He swung his helicopter to

face the intruder... a second too late. The unmanned surveillance craft clipped the Mi-VN's rotor blades; just enough to render it impossible to fly. The helicopter plunged to the ground as the drone shattered into many pieces. Chip had already initiated the self-destruct mode for all classified instruments onboard.

Virginia was at the evacuation area, Blake and Chas broke cover and raced towards the hovering Sikorsky. Soldiers emerged from the trees in front of them, and then the shooting started. West went down but managed to get back to his feet and hobble on. Mick opened fire from the side of the helicopter, making the soldiers hit the dirt and allowing Chas to assist Blake into the aircraft. Bullets were now striking the Sikorsky as Virginia raised it up, spun it to face the soldiers and fired off a short burst with the onboard twin cannons. A volley of shells ripped into the ground in front of the

attackers, tearing up the soil and pinning them down. She then skilfully turned the craft away, before accelerating up into the darkness. West had taken a bullet in his lower right leg. Mick was applying first-aid to stem the bleeding, whilst Chas alerted H.Q. to the fact they needed to get him to a hospital fast.

“Swift: Man down... Have an emergency medic at the ready... We’re coming in now - Out.”

## Chapter 19

Now a month since their return and quite a lot had happened. The debriefing took place at the Pentagon, where Unit Covert were formally introduced to Commander Bart Walker, Chuck Lewis and Derran Gillespie. Blake had recovered from his wound, relieved to know there would be no permanent damage. Now even more intent on expanding the team, realising that perhaps he was slowing down a little. He'd taken a hit and put his people at too much risk. Maybe it was time to take a back seat, he reasoned? The rest of the team knew this would never happen, but said nothing.

Once again in the meeting room at Allied Solutions, West gave the team his final summing up of their recent operations.

“I spoke with Lewis earlier today. As you know, the final outcome worked out slightly different to our expectations. I can tell you the Brits were delighted to have their man back safe, as to why he was there is still classified. Lewis believes that Krugle is dead, some may say, a fitting end for a torturer. Finally, The New Day Chapter is no more. The Federal government has seen to that. Mr Thaddeus, real name, Walter Hawks, has had his illegal billions seized and as a result, Bart Walker’s department has an even bigger fund to draw on. In turn, they have given us a larger purse for our operations, which leads me to my next announcement—We have two new prospective candidates and I want you to meet them. They are Wes Scott and Lucas Allen, both ex-U.S. Navy-SEALs.”

Like Chas and Mick, these men were experienced Special Services veterans, used to working together in dangerous, war-torn regions. They had come highly

recommended by one of Blake's former colleagues at SpyHawks. Today's gathering would seem like an informal meeting, but in reality, it was a final interview for the two. The pair would be open to any questions, just like Sean was, before being accepted into Unit Covert. West needed new field combatants with Chip Kirk, because this would balance well with Virginia, Mick and Chas, giving two separate infiltration teams. West and Gideon could then devote their time to directing the missions. As a bonus, Lucas Allen was a top grade marksman, like Blake.

With that, West fetched the two hopefuls from a rest area across the landing. The team stood up as Wes and Lucas entered the meeting room where Blake formally introduced the two men. After this, the newcomers took a chair each and the team then sat down themselves. Virginia had left the room for a minute and upon her return, took the nearest vacant seat. As she did so, an

almighty loud burp of wind emanated from beneath her. She froze for a split second and then glared at Chas with a look of iced malice. The room became a chaos of laughter and for the life of her; she could not stop herself from joining in. The lady pulled the Whoopee cushion out from under her, before throwing it at the culprit and spitting venom...

“You bastard, Banks.” Chas covered his ears in a mocking gesture, as if offended.

“Ginny... Mind your language, my dear... Can’t you see we have guests?”

Scott and Allen regarded each other, grinning, as if to say...

*‘These guys are crazy. We have come to the right place!’*

West left them all to it and returned to his office. It was their decision now.



THE END

Blake West's unit will return in...

The Holder of the Key

THE SWIFT SERIES

PREQUEL - REDACTED

BOOK 1 - THE NEW DAY CHAPTER

BOOK 2 - THE HOLDER OF THE KEY

BOOK 3 - WE PROTECT OR WE DIE

BOOK 4 - THE INVISIBLES

BOOK 5 - STATUS-6

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