

Trading In Paradise
“The Batenes Cell”
A Laundrymen Novel

By
Gregory Harrison

Copyright © Gregory Harrison 2009

First published in New Zealand by RH Books and vybesoft Limited

www.vybesoft.co.nz

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publishers prior consent in any form either physical or electronic.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the authors imagination or are used fictitiously, and any reference to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales, is entirely coincidental.

To my wonderful wife Ange without whose support this novel
would not have been possible.

Also in loving memory of Walter Harrison, a kind and gentle
man who I am proud to have called dad. A real good kiwi bloke.

Table of Contents

Prologue	5
Chapter 1	22
Chapter 2	35
Chapter 3	48
Chapter 4	60
Chapter 5	73
Chapter 6	89
Chapter 7	102
Chapter 8	116
Chapter 9	130
Chapter 10	143
Chapter 11	159
Chapter 12	175
Chapter 13	190
Chapter 14	206
Chapter 15	229
Chapter 16	250
Chapter 17	278
Chapter 18	298
Chapter 19	316
Chapter 20	327
Chapter 21	345
Chapter 22	355
Epilogue	366

Prologue

The plane flew low over the sparkling waters of the Philippines Sea, weaving between the myriad of islands that make up the Batenes group in the very north of the country.

At the controls was Lt.Col Jim (Jimmy) Collins USMC (Rtd). After 20 years service as a pilot, latterly in the 32nd transport squadron stationed at the large USN base at Subic Bay. When the base closed in 1991, Jim took early retirement and used the many contacts he had made during his years there to start a small charter airline servicing the many outer islands in the north of the country which were becoming popular amongst young backpackers looking for ever more remote regions of the planet to explore.

Jim was sure that the identities of the passengers he was carrying today were fake and his suspicion was ever more piqued when the destination he was asked to fly these passengers to was extremely remote and his instructions had included a map showing a circuitous route and to never fly above 1000 ft and to ensure his transponder was switched off after leaving the airfields radar envelope. The passengers too, were also extremely unusual in that they were 2 gentlemen that looked to be in their early thirties, 1 of eastern European ethnicity, as far as Jim could tell from his accent during the brief and very perfunctory introductions. The other, undoubtedly, American. They were also immaculately dressed as if going for a job interview at some large faceless corporation, and their only luggage was their brief cases. Not the loud short and tea shirt wearing youths that made up his usual clientele that were forever asking questions about the islands on their route. These gentlemen refused to enter into any conversation.

The day was a stunning one for flying, however with unlimited visibility and not a cloud in the sky and only a light north easterly breeze, so Jim gave up trying to make conversation and contented himself with taking in the fantastic views of golden sand beaches and crystal clear waters.

After about 90 minutes flying time, the GPS navigation system alerted Jim that he was approaching the designated coordinates. It appeared to be a small heavily forested and hilly island. Dipping the starboard wing, Jim circled the island. The only visible building was a small house with a rusted corrugated iron roof set amongst the trees on the islands southern shore.

Going into a shallow dive, the aircraft approached the island from the south after completing its circuit of the island, landing gently on the water and coming to rest on the beach.

The instructions were to disembark the two gentlemen and their baggage and to immediately take off again. This done, he took off again to the south with the intention of going straight to his favourite bar to settle in for the afternoon, this being his only charter for the day, and a well paid one at that.

Standing on the beach, the two gentlemen watched the float plane disappear to the south. The first of the two men was Steven Jerkovich, a 32 year old derivatives and markets specialist from the Altenheim bank of Switzerland, and currently based in Budapest. Steven had an MBA from a top European university and had gone straight into banking after graduation and had made a name for himself as a quick study and ingenious trader, but had not quite made it to the levels he thought his record deserved. He

put this down to what he thought was the ‘old boys’ network who were stiff collared and ‘proper’ and belonged to up market clubs to which he had never been invited, given his middle class background. In actual fact it was Steven’s clubbing and drinking binges after long hours at the trading desk that had caught the eyes of the banks security people and been reported to the higher levels of management.

So, after another day in which he had made significant profits for the bank and its customers but still feeling quite unappreciated, all he wanted to do was go to his regular bar and enter into another drinking binge with his new friend of late Mikhael.

Mikhael, he felt, shared similar professional problems as himself, having been sent from by his company to what was considered a back water branch, and had come to enjoy each others company. So when Mikhael mentioned one evening he knew of some friends in a large international finance company which did consulting work for the US treasury who wanted someone for a years work, after which he would be set for life, he was intrigued. Unfortunately the role had to be taken up immediately and would involve some travel. Emboldened by the whisky shooters and lager which was his favourite, he agreed and said he would meet with Mikhaels friends the next day.

Once Steven had left, Mikhael telephoned the number he had memorized long ago to report in. The deep and powerful voice of his contact from ‘The Firm’, whom he had never met answered immediately

‘Yes’ said the voice, which always unnerved Mikhael with the power and authority it could convey in even single words.

‘Subject Alpha is agreeable and ready for contact’ said Mikhael.

‘Very good, the funds as agreed will be wired after the subject has been uplifted. Details of your next assignment will be forthcoming,’ said the voice.

‘Thank you sir, I will return back to inactive status until further instructions are received.’ Mikhael said mentally calculating how much he should now have in his numbered Swiss account.

‘Very good’, said the voice terminating the call.

The following day, Steven was met by two distinguished looking men who outlined an offer Steven could not refuse and by the next day he had resigned his position. Bank policy being to escort people in his position off the premises immediately upon termination, Steven was on a flight the next day.

The other man standing on the beach was Ian Thomas. Ian was 27, but still 17 at heart. He had two passions in life, skateboarding down the boulevards of Venice beach where he lived and hacking computers. Ian had made enough money after graduating with a PhD in computer science from Berkley where he had developed automated Telco software during his thesis on voice recognition via lexical access. Now he could spread his time evenly between skate boarding, partying with friends, and developing ever more clever ways of hacking into the computer systems of government departments without leaving a trace.

Unbeknownst to Ian however, one of his attacks had been noticed by a department of Energy computer technician, purely by chance

and pure fluke during a server replication which threw up some unexpected results. Whilst the technician was unsure what he was dealing with, the department of homeland security consultant who reviewed all such reports was.

This consultant who just happened to work for a consulting practice whose partner he reported to belonged to 'The Firm'. The partner instructed his unknowing employee to start a project file looking into all similar attacks. Over a period of 9 months, the technician compiled a report detailing a number of attacks with similar signatures.

The partner then quietly moved the technician on to a new assignment and destroyed all evidence of the project after passing it on to 'the voice', whom used 'The Firm's' considerable resources which included NSA moles to locate Ian. This took some doing, and was only possible using the NSA's super computers to break the complex encryption Ian used to hide his real IP address.

So, one sunny day as Ian was out skate boarding, he simply disappeared into a black panel van which pulled up around a corner and snatched him quickly, quietly and expertly right of his skateboard as he was about to jump off the curb of that very corner.

Ian was then conveyed to a secluded warehouse where he was confronted with evidence of his attacks and given the choice of prison time or to work on what was presented to him as a government project.

Accepting the later, Ian was dropped back at his apartment which overlooked the beach, and given three days to make arrangements and to inform his family and friends that he was going overseas on a special project for a year.

Two days later, Ian found himself standing on the beach of this island standing next to another man, similarly dressed in a business suit watching the float plane disappear into the distance.

Ian and Steven then turned to consider each other for the first time.

‘Do you have any idea why we are here?’ said Ian.

‘None whatsoever’ said Steve, unsure if this was some sort of test, and therefore not proffering any information.

‘Well I’m here on government business’ said Ian, not being so concerned and sure that he would not have been conveyed to such a remote place by his government only to be placed next to a stranger.

‘Government business?’ said Steven now unsure what was going on. ‘Strange place for government business’ he said looking around at the deserted island and seeing only what looked like some old mission house. ‘What government?’

‘Uncle SAM’ Ian said looking quiskly at Steve trying to place his ethnicity.

‘Are you a rusky?’

‘Certainly not, I’m Hungarian, you must be an American’ said Steven said rhetorically having already guessed this by the mans accent.

‘Well, whatever you say, they have certainly picked a nice work environment,’ Ian said.

‘It may be paradise, but you know what they say about roses, watch out for the thorns’

‘What do you mean, this place is beautiful?’ Ian said, unsure what Steve was getting at.

‘It may be beautiful, but can you see any way off this paradise?’

Both then looked around at the house, startled by the clang of a screen door shutting after becoming adjusted to the sheer quietness of the island after the noise of the float plane.

Coming down the beach towards them was a middle-aged European male in a white straw sun hat, dressed in what would be considered ‘smart casual’ in most western cultures, being a white open neck shirt, sports coat and slacks, with the exception of the footwear which was sandals.

Following behind were two of the most incredibly beautiful women either man had ever seen, to say they were sex on wheels was an understatement. Both women appeared to be in their mid to late 20’s and looked physically fit, what gym addicts would call ‘cut’. Both were wearing mid thigh length shorts, and bikini tops.

One was blond with lovely high cheek bones and a perfect tan and of European extraction and C cup breasts. The other was more oriental looking with smaller breasts, but equally as alluring in her own way.

The gentlemen smiled as he approached Steve and Ian, the girls having exactly the expect as was anticipated.

‘Good afternoon Gentlemen. My name is Martin and I am your host here on the island during your stay with us.’

Martin had been intimately involved with the project from its inception, having been selected by ‘the voice’ after making a reputation for himself at the firm by being an excellent subject manager, subjects being what the firm referred to its temporary employees as.

When Steve and Ian had been selected, he had spent a lot of time going over the reports from the field operatives assigned to observe both gentlemen, their habits, behaviours and choice in lovers, everything down to what brand of toothpaste each preferred.

He was therefore able to select two of the firm’s female operatives who best matched each mans taste. Steve showed a taste for women of asian extraction, so Danni, from the Singapore office was chosen, having the perfect blend of cultures from mixed parentage. Her father was a Chinese businessman, whilst her mother was from England.

Danni had been educated to masters level in a well respected mid ranked university in the United States, doing a mixed languages

and politics arts degree. She could speak 4 languages, French, Japanese, English and Cantonese. She also was a champion rower which accounted for her finely muscled body. Danni had come to the firm's attention whilst working as an intern in the public relations department of one of its many 'subsidiaries'. Whilst the firm officially did not exist, it held interests in a multitude of businesses around the world, through the firm's partners, who each controlled several of the businesses.

Ian however loved the beach babes that were plentiful in his home town. Kelly was therefore an easy choice from the firm's LA office. Whilst Kelly was not university educated, she had an IQ of 142 and had flown through here police exams, and had made the SWAT team in record time. She was a Judo black belt and loved triathlons. She had come to the firm's attention whilst one of the firm's scouts had been attending a SWAT team demonstration as a supposed representative of one of the large companies in the area that the LAPD was always trying to impress at the mayors behest.

She had been carefully approached by the firm and offered a large sum of money to come and work for a private security agency which was one of the firm's subsidiaries. Kelly had been approached at precisely the right time by the scout as she had become very disillusioned with macho culture of the SWAT team she was a member of. She also had continuing problems with her lieutenant after she had rebuffed his many advances. The offer of money and world travel and an upmarket apartment as her base and being able to pick and choose out of the many assignments offered to her was too much too refuse.

Both girls had had extensive further training from the firm in handling such clients as Ian and Steve. Each girl was considered easily able to handle the two gentlemen and had been given the extensive dossiers compiled to read and memorise.

‘Steve, Ian, these two ladies will be your assistants for the duration of your stay on the island. They will provide you with anything you require to make your stay as easy as possible.’

Both girls smiled seductively to the two men before them, not being overly disappointed in their less than perfect physique. Whilst both men were not athletes, they were not overweight and were far from the worst men each had had to deal with during their time with the firm.

‘Come with me gentlemen, it’s time to uncover some of the mystery behind what you have both agreed to come here for.’

Each girl then took one of the men by the hand and gestured them to follow Martin up to the house, introducing themselves as they went, but only giving vague details about themselves.

The house had a well weathered look from the outside, but once one stepped through the screen door on the far side of the covered porch, which ran the length of the house and offered a well shaded and comfortable place to sit and watch the beach, the interior was stunningly modern and even luxurious.

It was air-conditioned and had obviously been redesigned with a modern open plan layout, with large living areas, a well equipped kitchen and dining area.

A hallway led off from the lounge towards the bedrooms, each of which had their own ensuite.

‘You have each not been required to bring anything with you as everything has been provided for you. You will find a range of clothes in the walk-in closets in your respective bedrooms which will be a perfect fit, I assure you.’

This pre-empted many questions, both Steve and Ian had running around in their heads.

‘There will only be the five of us staying here until the completion of the project and there will be plenty of time to explore the house, none of which is off limits except our own bedrooms of course, but first we have a scheduled conference call with the project sponsor in the work area.’

Martin then led them all to a large study at the rear of the house which would also be considered a well appointed library in many stately homes. Approaching a bookshelf at on a side wall, Martin took out a book, opened it and pressed a button inside the book where the insides of the pages had been cut out to make room for it.

A whole section of the bookcase then swung open to reveal a windowless but well lighted concrete stairway leading down beneath the house.

At the bottom of the stairway was a stainless steel door, with a key pad next to it. Martin punched in a number and the door swung open to reveal what both Ian and Steve thought was a control room with desks and flat screen monitor workstations and

large LCD screens all around the walls. All were active, except one, showing readouts from financial markets all around the world.

‘This will be where you will spend the bulk of your time during the projects run time. The girls and I will now leave the room, whilst you have your conference. There are no other exits from this area except back through the steel door we entered’

‘You must enter the code I showed you in order to come and go.’ Martin said as he and the girls left the room.

As the door clicked closed, the screen which had up until now been blank displayed a picture of a darkened room with a silhouetted man sitting behind a desk. There was nothing easily visible in the room which gave any indication of where in the world it could be.

The man started to speak.

‘Welcome Steve, Ian, to the island. This will be where you will remain until the project, which I will detail to you both shortly, ends. Whilst you have all the communications and computer equipment you will require before you, all communications will be monitored for legal reasons, so please keep your communications to your friends and family brief and use the brief in the folders on your respective desks. No details must be given to anyone of what you are actually doing or be told where in the world you really are. Remember, there is no privacy on the island and everything will be monitored and recorded.’

This was ok they both thought, as they only had the vaguest notion of where they were anyway, or how to leave even if they wanted to. Neither felt any real concern though, as after all they thought they were working for the government, in the case of Ian, or a government linked firm, in the case of Steve and there was no sign of any threat or coercion and only one older gentleman and two young women to see to their needs.

‘OK, firstly you will be wondering why we have brought you to such a place. That’s easy, we need to know if such an operation as will be outlined, can be run from a remote place with a small group of people successfully.’ The voice continued.

‘Ian, you are a well reputed computer expert and we wish to see if you can crack a number of various banks and financial institutions and access their clearance and transaction processing systems. Steve you are a markets specialist. Once Ian has gained access to these systems, we want you to run a series of complex transactions which will make it very difficult for anyone to trace the flow of money through the various markets.’

‘This sounds somewhat illegal’ interrupted Steve.

‘Remember, you are working for the government, the voice said, you both have been shown the credentials of the agents who ‘recruited’ you. We need to know just how secure these financial institutions are. Each has been warned of impending attacks, but not when. Also, the FBI, ATF and treasury all have agents that will attempt to trace your transactions and location.’

‘So, study the documents in your briefs carefully, and Martin will instruct you when you are to begin. Until then, relax and enjoy

the many comforts we have provided for you.’ The communication was then terminated and the screen went blank.

La Paz, Bolivia, shortly after, 3pm local time.

David’s sat phone sounded, alerting him to the call he was expecting as he walked through the hill top park of the highest capital city in the world.

David Curruthers was the FBI liaison in La Paz, which was considered to be a real back water office. He was tired of the rarefied air at this altitude and the conditions of the city, which, whilst not third world, were old and decrepit.

He had been passed over too many times for promotion, which was why he had agreed to work for the firm when he was approached two years ago. At least he would retire comfortably which was his consolation.

‘Yes’ David said.

‘The project is to commence. Make your contacts ready’ Said the voice, which always made David feel uncomfortable.

‘Very well’ David said, ending the call.

Heading back through the park, he used counter surveillance to ensure he was not followed. He reached his 4WD and started the long drive out of the city and east towards the lush farmlands and jungles that were home to the contacts he had cultivated in the Katari cartel.’

Bolivia had become more of a favourite for the firm than Columbia and Uruguay, as it was less well staffed by the agencies of western governments, being seen as a land locked backwater, and whilst the government was more stable than those other countries, the various government officials required for operations, were easily bribed and it was easier to move funds into the banking system through the various government agencies in Bolivia the firm had corrupted.

London, England. The next day

‘James, good to see you’, Roger said as he stood up from the table in the restaurant greeting his old friend and colleague from British home office. ‘What will it be’ he said signalling the waiter to bring the wine list.

‘Surprise me’ James said knowing Roger had an exquisite pallet for wines.

Sitting down, James passed over a folder containing several grainy photos taken off some low quality surveillance cameras of two gentlemen boarding a private jet at Luton airport.

‘So what am I looking at’ Roger said, closing the folder as the waiter approached. After placing an order for a bottle of Pinot Gris, and the waiter departing, he reopened the folder to study the photos more closely.

‘The jet belongs to company called Porter International, which is a shipping firm specialising in the shipment of wood chip and products from South America to factories here in England.’

‘The gentlemen on the left is a senior executive of the company, whom we picked up during a week long surveillance of a money trader MI5 suspected of moving money for the Russian mafia. We just thought it strange and could not imagine what link there would be with Porter international for which we have no active files on and is not suspected of anything. The other gentleman is an American, going by his passport for whom we have no information on whatsoever.’ James said ‘We thought it may be of some interest to you’.

‘Let me take it back and put it into the system and see what pops up. Do you know where the Jet was going per chance?’ Roger said placing the folder into his brief case.

‘According to the flight plan filed at the airport, it was headed for Jamaica, then on to Washington DC’ James Stated. ‘Apart from the unusual connection with the trader, we do not have enough to justify MI6 resources, which as you know are stretched.’ Roger continued.

‘I think we need to keep this one off the books at this stage’ said Ian. ‘We will make use of the firm Heighton & Hilliker for this. They are a Chartered Accounting Firm based out of Auckland, New Zealand. That is only the front however, they have a forensic division and counter surveillance team of ex SAS types. They specialise in busting money laundering operations which is what I suspect this to be.’

‘Accountants?’ said James thinking Roger Tunnicliffe had finally gone mad.

‘Very few officials know of the firm outside of the special group of people in the Treasury department. Their success comes from the fact that all anyone believes is that they are a firm of accountants the treasury department uses for independent auditing of consulates and businesses.’ Roger said knowing James was one of the people in the British government who he trusted absolutely and who had the power as a senior civil servant in the home office, who also was a link to MI5 and MI6 as well a special branch, making him the ideal cog to get things done.

‘All right, I’ll defer to your judgement on this. Let them know to contact me should they require any assistance.’ James said.

It was then their waiter arrived with the wine and menus. The main purpose of the meeting having now been concluded, they settled into enjoy their lunch and moved on to other superficial matters.

Chapter 1

It had been a long day at the office and Arthur was tired. Arthur Hilliker was the senior managing partner at Heighton & Hilliker Chartered Accountants, and always worked long hours, a result of his military background which had carried over to his civilian life.

Arthur had risen to the rank of Major in the New Zealand army, before leaving the army at age 28, exceptionally young for the rank of major, to start his own professional firm of chartered accountants. His specialisation in the army had been in the logistics regiment. Although slated for higher station in the army and offered his choice of assignments, Arthur had always had the ambition to start his own business.

The amount of contacts he had made both with military suppliers, government officials, not only in the New Zealand government but with many countries he had had contact with became a valuable asset for obtaining his initial client list.

His partner, Don Heighton, he had met through the army when Don did a stint in the Territorial Army. They had struck up a great friendship, and it had been Don who had one day, during an army exercise in a damp wet foxhole in the back blocks of the Waiouru military training grounds in the central North Island, suggested they start their own firm.

Arthur had recently completed his masters in business through the Army's education program run in conjunction with Massey University. Don had been in corporate accountancy up until now and had made a name for himself in the profession having been

Vice President of the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants. Together he felt they could build an impressive client list, and together they did.

Don was more than happy to concentrate on building the firm's Business Advice and Insolvency divisions, whilst Arthur had concentrated on Audit and Forensic accounting.

During one of his many government audit contracts, requiring the firm's specialist forensic accountants, they had uncovered a money laundering operation being run through the Ministry of foreign affairs and trade (MFAT) by a corrupt official who was working in conjunction with a multinational firm involved in importing and exporting. To really get the information they required to bust the operation wide open, Arthur had contacted some of his mates in the SAS who had recently retired from the Army and were looking for interesting work.

The evidence they were able to retrieve was used to arrange covert surveillance of certain individuals and shipments and, working in conjunction with the authorities, they had been able to obtain the necessary warrants and taps which yielded the official indictable evidence required to convict all parties involved.

It was here that, together with Don's agreement, the firm extended its forensic division, secretly and with the sanction of the New Zealand Secret Intelligence Service to include such people as his SAS mates.

This soon got the attention of several western governments who had been impressed with the firm's abilities in what became known as the MFAT Laundry case. The firm had then continued

to work secretly for these governments on such projects under the guise of special audit projects.

Offices of the firm had therefore sprung up in several countries, and by the time Arthur was approaching 40, he had built a sizeable multinational accountancy practice in conjunction with Don, and who along with only the senior partner in each branch knew of the forensic divisions extended abilities.

The reason Arthur was tired this day, was due to the fact that one of the firm's large clients, for whom they provided audit reports, had been discovered to be falsifying loan documents and treating the loans as income.

Earlier in the day, an audit manager approached Arthur.

'John Brown from Audit is here to see you' said Arthur's PA and recent lover.

'Send him in thanks Angela' said Arthur.

Angela was a medium height woman of 32 who had been Arthur's PA now for some 9 years. She was overqualified for the role having a degree in business, specialising in personnel, but had accepted the position after Arthur decided to expand the PA role to also manage the firm's internal communications and administration policy.

Arthur had noticed her work in the firm's personnel division early on the firm's existence. She had developed a business plan to market the firm's personnel and billing management system in

the form of a new Professional Administrative System that she had been developing in conjunction with the firm's IT division.

This program brought the firm significant additional revenue and turned what used to be purely a cost centre into a significant profit centre in its own right.

To be fair, Arthur had also, always found her to be attractive as well as intellectually stimulating. Their passion had grown from a simple secret infatuation each had developed for the other. When they worked together there was always a heavy sense of chemistry between the two, but each had not wanted to be first to break the professional relationship barrier for fear of the possible consequences.

Little did they know however, that their infatuation with each other had been noticed around the office. Whilst the firm did not have an official policy on staff relationships, being the kiwi way of not being restrictive on people's personal lives, there was always the typical kiwi male reservedness that always made such first encounters difficult.

It was not until one night when Don and Arthur were having a drink together that Arthur saw the possibility of romance in a new light.

'I'm worried how it may come across, or that any such advance by me may ruin the great relationship we have,' said Arthur.

'Come on Arthur, it's not as if you two don't command considerable respect in your own rights.' Said Don said lifting a

glass of his favourite single malt whisky on the rocks for another savouring swill.

‘The connection between you both is obvious, and left any longer as it is, it will only end up frustrating you both and potentially ruining it.’

Arthur twilled a bottle of his favourite lager, being his preferred and typically kiwi male, beverage, in his right hand.

‘Perhaps you’re right, I will have to find exactly the right moment though.

‘I know I’m right’ Don said sucking one of his favourite cigars and blowing his trademark circles over the balcony attached to Arthur’s office where they had many a discussion and solved many of the firm’s problems.

So a week later, Arthur had arranged a late night dinner and meeting with Angela at one of the cities well known winery/restaurants on Waiheke Island. Arthur had chosen the restaurant for its stunning view back across the harbour to the distant city and for the incredible sunsets it was also renowned for during the summer month of January.

The helicopter collected them from helipad atop the companies building in downtown Auckland and flew them on a circuitous route around Rangitoto in order to take in the marvellous sights that the Hauraki gulf had to offer.

After a delicious meal of roast lamb for which the restaurant was famous and lovely desert of blackberry cobbler and several

bottles of delicious pinot noir which is recommended with lamb dishes as each brings out the deep luxuriant flavours in the other, Arthur suggested a walk along the ridge overlooking the winery and vineyards.

The evening air was warm, with a refreshing light breeze which kept the heat of the summer at bay. The sun was just disappearing behind the distant Waitakere ranges and the lights of the city were getting brighter and more beautiful to offset the magnificent colours of the last rays of the day's sunlight.

'There's been something I've been meaning to discuss with you' Arthur said looking into Angela's bright blue eyes, which always gave him butterflies in his stomach whenever he had their attention.

His voice was not his usual strong tone which always commanded respect, and set soldiers at attention when they were before him, or other professionals when they entered his office, but was somewhat hesitant and unsure of itself.

'I have to admit that I've had strong feelings for you for some time now, and that they have gone far beyond the incredible respect I have had for you as a professional' he continued falteringly 'but I would hate to upset what we currently have by being inappropriate or..or placing too much expecta...'

Arthur was cut off by the most amazing kiss he had ever felt. It had an electric effect on him which left him speechless.

Angela then pulled away with a look that turned into amused mischief as she studied the effect her kiss had had on him.

‘I’ve been waiting far too long to do that’ she said with a slight school girlish giggle.

Arthur was still speechless and struggling to find the right words, and for once in his life, was not in command of the situation.

She then took him by the hand and led him to one of the wineries guest rooms which she had booked unbeknown to Arthur.

‘But, how did you know where we were going tonight?’ Arthur said confused but with all the wonderment of a boy on Christmas morning.

‘Don’t be silly, I know everyone you do, including the pilots that fly for the firm, and I’ve been looking after your arrangements and expenses forever now.’ She said gesturing him into the room.

The remainder of the night was the most amazing of Arthur’s life and it did not even occur to him to dismiss the pilots, which Angela had already taken care of, however, having anticipated the course of the evening.

So when they arrived back at the office together the next day, there was a lot of ‘way to go’ and mock punches in the arm by colleagues who had guessed what had happened.

Jolted from his moment of reverie of 6 months earlier back to the present by the closing of his office door, Arthur stood up and greeted the audit manager,

‘John how are you? I believe your wife has just had new boy’ said Arthur, who always took an interest in the people who worked for him. Although the firm now had 800 employees in 7 countries, he always encouraged his senior staff to be cognisant and considerate of the employees private lives. Angela also was at the very root of the company’s grapevine and took note of all such happenings and gave Arthur a daily briefing of such things.

‘I’m very well thank you Arthur and so are Janet and little Joseph , but I’m afraid I have some concerning one of our larger corporate clients, Feltron Limited, which must be brought to your attention, due to the possible legal and financial consequences for the firm.’ John said concerned.

‘That’s the company that Sir Christopher Jacobsen is chairman of isn’t it? I couldn’t imagine what he would be involved in that would cause an audit risk to us?’ Arthur said remembering the day Sir Chris had pinned a service medal on his chest for his and his battalion’s exemplary work during the New Zealand army’s involvement in East Timor. Sir Christopher being the honorary colonel in chief of the Royal New Zealand Army logistics regiment.

‘Yes, it is Sir Christopher’s company, but I do not believe he is aware of what some of his fellow directors have been up to. It appears that several of the directors on the board and management at all levels had been involved in fraud which netted them millions during the companies recent capital raising programme’. Ian paused for the next bit,

‘One of our audit seniors, who has a friend with whom he went through uni with and is now working for the HSVB bank in

Singapore was alerted to the existence of some loans when that friend called him from Singapore one day asking about Feltron Limited, just wanting to know if he knew anything about the company as his bank had recently made some large loans to. His friend did not know at the time that they were one of our audit clients and Jason, our audit senior said he could not comment due to that fact. So we are OK at least on the ethical front. However, this peaked his interest as he had not seen any such loans reflected on the balance sheet, or disclosed anywhere in the accounts for that matter.'

'When he quizzed one of the senior financial accountants in Feltron, they confessed no knowledge of any such loans. Upon further substantive testing and tracing of the transactions from the bank, it appears that some of the directors set up a subsidiary in Fiji, where the loans were funnelled through, but brought to account as exports in the New Zealand Accounts. There were a number of falsified sales invoices and shipping documents making the loans appear as sales. This had the effect of making sales look significantly higher, with higher yields and margins, and in effect higher share price, which these directors took advantage of in selling off a large portion of their shares.'

'The implication to us of course is that any party badly affected by this fraud could potentially pursue a course of action against us as auditors having given assent to the half yearly accounts.' John finished looking to Arthur for guidance.

'Very well, arrange a meeting with legal and Sir Christopher so that we can find a way around this.' Arthur said sighing, trying to contain his outrage at those directors that would dare to do such a thing to a man of the stature of Sir Chris.

This is what lead to Arthur's tiredness at the end of that day, after a long meeting with legal, and Sir Christopher, in which they developed a plan to out these directors and save the company, honour the loans and any losses suffered by shareholders who purchased the shares at the artificially high price.

So when Angela said she had Roger Tunncliffe on the line, he felt a lot of the tiredness just vanish. Michael Smith was one of the contacts in US treasury department which sent cases to him that always got his interest. In essence Arthur loved these money laundering investigations more than any other business the firm did. So he eagerly said 'yes, put him through'.

'Hello Roger, how are you. It's been a while between drinks'. Arthur said enthusiastically.

'Too long said Roger. Look, I have an interesting case for you, referred to us by the Brits. We wish to keep this one off the books for now, you know the usual, I do not want too many people in the department knowing about this lead. Although I hate to say it, too many coincidences have been happening lately in which leads we had have just up and vanished, leading me to the conclusion that there is a leak in the department.'

'I am sending you the file which contains all I have to you by diplomatic courier today. I take it you are still in the business of helping us out on such matters?' said Roger.

'Certainly Roger, I will assemble a team as soon as I have reviewed the file and report back to you'. Arthur said.

‘Very good, also, any cooperation you may need from the British end, please contact James Reginald at the British home office, his number is in the file. He has promised any cooperation you may need at that end. He is plugged into all the right agencies and is just the man you will need over there.’

‘Well, I’ll leave you to it for now, have a good day’ said Roger, hanging up.

Arthur, felt a new sense of exhilaration and asked Angela to join him in the office.

‘We have another one do we’ said Angela, as she closed the door to the office and came over to sit on Arthur’s lap and embrace him, knowing what a difficult day he had had, also pleased that one of these cases had come through and knowing how much Arthur loved them. He always had a new lease of life when Arthur worked one of these cases, which also had a positive effect on their personal life.

‘Can you arrange for a meeting with Gary in conference room 12 for first thing tomorrow,’ said Arthur enjoying the embrace and the feel of Angela’s breasts through her blouse.

‘Certainly dear’ then you are taking me out for a nice dinner and afters’ she said hopping up with a broad seductive smile.

Bolivia, The following Day

David brought his 4WD to a stop in front of the largest of the corrugated iron huts which were scattered among small clearings in the jungle. The trip had been long and the roads difficult, if they could be called roads. In fact, what he had been on for the last hour of the journey could be better described as a goat track, through which his vehicle, new as it was and supposedly designed for such terrain, struggled.

Outside the door leading into the hut were two poorly nourished looking Latin men dressed in army DPM's, singlets and boots, each brandishing an AK47 in such a way that suggested they had had no formal training. A gun was a gun though, and these were big guns that were deadly, even in poorly trained hands, perhaps more dangerous.

'I'm here to see Conswego De la Hago' David said approaching the men. The two men stood there eyeing him contemptuously for a few seconds. David was just about to repeat his request when one of the men suddenly turned and walked into the hut, whilst the other man patted him down.

The man quickly returned and gestured David to enter the hut, with a menacing looking smile on his face.

If David was unnerved, which he was, he did not show it. Keeping ones cool even in the face of the atrocities these men sometimes committed was essential if you were to keep their respect, which was of the utmost importance, as people who had lost their respect had a habit of disappearing.

The interior of the hut was stiflingly hot and the 4 men in it all glistened with sweat and grime. The man he had come to see was

sitting behind an old desk with his feet upon it. The other three men all standing around looking at David with barely disguised contempt.

The man at the desk made no effort to stand up, but gestured for David to take the seat in front of his desk.

Sitting, Dave said 'I do hope your organisation is ready as the ship will be arriving at port in the next week and we have a chartered plane ready'.

'Do not worry about us, you are the one who had better be ready, as we would hate for your 'firm' to let us down' Conswego said taking out a knife and pretending to shave with it.

'You have the various officials in La Paz ready and waiting to process our delivery as well as the product ready for shipment?' Dave said wanting to get absolute clarity.

'What did I just say' Conswego said looking menacingly at David and sitting up, taking his feet off the desk and yanking open a draw.

All of David's instincts told him to flee, but he kept his nerve.

Conswego then smiled and thumped a bottle of tequila onto the table along with two glasses with his face turning into a smile.

'Come let us seal our new arrangement in the traditional way, as I do not trust a man who does not drink'. Conswego said pouring the first glasses of what would be many before Dave could leave and go to his 'accommodations' for the night.

It was here he would now be staying until the first plane arrived with the money for the drugs and the other packages which Dave would take back to La Paz.

This was the first of many such trips David would be having to make into this godforsaken part of the world, and which he was not relishing.

Chapter 2

Auckland, New Zealand

‘Gary, my old friend, how are you?’ Arthur said as Gary entered the conference room. This particular conference room being different from the others in that it was windowless and soundproofed and swept regularly for bugs.

Gary Taylor was one of Arthur's oldest friends. They had gone through officer training school together. Where Arthur had gone into the logistics regiment, Gary had gone into the infantry, then into the SAS.

He had retired from the SAS some years earlier, but still looked incredibly fit and tough, and had taken up Arthur's offer to head up the firm's covert surveillance and intelligence unit. He was 6'2" and solid with clear and penetrating eyes that could wring a confession out of any subject he interviewed.

Gary was not married but enjoyed the social life and loved travelling. The day to day work handled by Gary's department mostly involved internal security at the firm or investigating and gathering covert surveillance of employees of the firm's clients who were suspected of fraud.

Whenever one of these cases came along however, Gary took charge of assembling the team along with Arthur.

'You know, I still find it hard to get used to offices like this' Gary said looking around at the wood panelled walls, the high back plush leather board room chairs and the highly polished mahogany board table.

Although Gary worked for the firm, he preferred to be out and about, and spent as little time at the office as possible. He had talked Arthur into letting him have an administrator to look after the day to day details of his department, whilst he concentrated on field work.

It had taken some convincing and a strongly worded conversation between the two to get this to happen, as Arthur wanted as few people as possible to know about the surveillance department and in particular its personnel and detailed workings. But as Gary hated administration and not really being cognisant of the fact that Arthur was his boss, being a strong willed and highly independent individual, he continued to rebel until Arthur saw the sense in his demands.

In fact, even though Arthur had outranked Gary in the Army, because Gary was SAS and he still considered himself to be on a par with Arthur, as the SAS had their own command structure and worked quite independently from the regular army.

Gary remembered back about 12 years when he had had a chance to get to know Arthur again. Although they had graduated officer cadet school together, their respective paths in the Army had not allowed for a lot of contact.

The period Gary was remembering was an instance when Arthur had been sent to the secretive SAS base for special training before being sent to East Timor. There, Gary had been assigned as his training officer.

The training program he had laid out was physically exhausting and very challenging and he had did not have to respect Arthur's higher rank whilst out in the training ground.

He remembered the one incident in which Arthur had really proven himself worthy to Gary, and had really earned his respect.

It was a particularly hot summers day, and the plan for the day had Gary a captain at the time , Arthur being a Major, and two SAS sergeant instructors taking Arthur and 3 other officers from his battalion out on a three day endurance exercise in the extremely hilly and rugged Fiordland national park, which were filled with a maze of high ridges and deep ravines. The going in this area was recommended in all tourist guides as being safe for only the fittest and most experienced trampers due to the many hidden bluffs and steep walled valleys in this heavily forested part of the country. The reward for these hardy types though was some of the most amazing scenery and wild life the country had to offer.

The only access to the part of the park they would be exercising in was by helicopter. This would not be any normal helicopter borner insertion, however, they would be flown to a remote area and repelling down through the trees. The pick up point was a high alpine field three days hard tramping away.

The packs they were carrying weighed only half as much as regular SAS soldiers were required to carry, but even so they were backbreaking.

Once loaded into the helicopter, clearance was given to depart. This would be the only part of the exercise that Arthur would enjoy. The flight took about 90 minutes south from the hanger they were based in at the Queenstown international airport.

The scenery was truly stunning, heavily forested ravines descending down into beautiful fiordes. Arthur even caught site of a pod of dolphins trawling up one of the fiords far below the skids of the huey.

Arthur was brought back to the present as the huey started to descend towards the top of one of the ridges. As the chopper came into a hover above a predetermined point, the door gunner released a lever allowing the repelling ropes to drop down through a gap in the trees which was covered in what looked like waist high grass and tussock.

Stepping out onto the skids, the two SAS sergeants descended first, making the descent quickly and expertly. Then it was Arthur's turn, stepping out onto the skid he was hit by the tremendous downwash of the blades. Although he had practiced this manoeuvre before, the force of the downwash always took him by surprise.

Grabbing the rope he clipped his harness to it and wrapped his legs around the rope around it as he had been shown. The descent, although not perfect was good enough not to earn him a bollocking from one of the sergeants.

Once they were all on the ground, the gunner released the ropes which dropped down and after retrieving them and placing one each in their packs, the team spread out laid down in a outward facing circle formation which covered all angles of approach whilst they waited for the sound of the chopper to recede and they became accustomed to the environment.

The sheer quietness of the place was incredible, broken only by the sound of trees rustling in the light breeze and the occasional chirp of a bird.

After a while, Gary signalled them to stand and using hand signals, the team was placed in a tactical column formation with Arthur taking first turn as point.

The terrain was tough going and it was not long before he was breathing hard. They were all wearing full DPM's which were heavy and soon soaked through with sweat.

After about 90 minutes solid walking, all the time practicing ambush manoeuvres using quiet hand signals where an imagined enemy formation might be, Gary changed out Arthur as point for one of the other officers. This continued on throughout the day.

They drank only sparingly from their flasks, as that was their only water supply until they came across a stream.

They set up camp for the night which was only a hammock and mosquito net which they had to hang between two trees. They had to take turns on watch at two hour intervals. The bush was truly pitch black at night with visibility down to a few feet as only a small bit of moonlight made it down through the trees.

The bush really did come alive at night, however with insects and possums making an absolute racket in the background. Arthur was jolted awake several times during the night by scurrying sounds which must have been the wild boar or deer that were plentiful in the area, and what this part of New Zealand was renowned for among hunting circles the world over.

The language of the SAS soldiers was intimidating and was just the sort you would expect from drill sergeants. Arthur and his

officers were pushed and bollocked the whole time, ‘What’s the fucking hold up 2nd lieutenant Foster, move your bloody ass.’

Arthur was sure that Gary and his sergeants enjoyed this. ‘Come on Major, you bloody girls blouse, you were not told to stop, now fucking move it’ Gary blared at one point when Arthur had stopped and was trying to catch his breath after ascending a steep slope.

The incident that gained Arthur Gary’s respect happened about mid morning of day two. They were moving across a heavily tussocked and rocky alpine field when there was sudden cry and crash sound from somewhere up ahead.

Moving up when instructed Gary could see that the group had come to the edge of a bluff which was dropped away almost vertically to a heavily forested plateau some 150 ft below.

One of the sergeants who had been trailing lieutenant Foster said that one second he had been in sight and giving a hand signal back to him when he suddenly disappeared from view.

They had no luck contacting the lieutenant by calling his name, neither had the lieutenant signalled in any way that he was ok.

‘Shit’ Gary swore. ‘We’re going to have to call in the chopper for an extraction, as we don’t have the equipment for this.

‘Yes, but even if we call the chopper in, the bluff is too steep for it descend to within range of that small plateau. At any rate its 90 minutes flight time away and we need to assess his condition now.’ Arthur said.

‘The radios probably don’t work here, so I suggest that two people go to higher ground whilst one of us descends using the repelling ropes from the chopper in our packs’ Arthur continued.

‘I should descend as I have the most medical training and we will need the strength of the remaining 4 of you to help haul us back up.’

‘Good plan’ Gary agreed.

So they set about making a makeshift stretcher out of some nearby tress, a hammock, and attaching the repelling ropes to either end of the makeshift stretcher. The plan being, the four remaining men would hall from the top, whilst Arthur would use the rope at the other end of the stretcher to stabilise it as ascended.

Gary being the strongest member of the group became the anchor, whilst one of the SAS instructors took the job of being the rope guide at the front.

Arthur started his descent down the rope cautiously. The cliff face was very unstable and littered with loose rocks. Gary leaned out with his front facing the cliff face and feet firmly planted on the edge abseil style. On his very first step, some loose rocks tumbled out from under his feet causing him to slip and slam against the cliff edge whilst the remaining members of the group took the strain holding his weight. Arthur gripped the rope tightly and summoning his reserves of strength reset his position and took another step concentrating on the cliff face, not daring to look down. It was very difficult to find good foot placings without dislodging more rocks. His eyes began to sting as sweat ran in to

them and his vision blurred, but he could not spare a hand to wipe his brow as his arm muscles were already burning from the long careful descent and he did not want to risk his gloves losing any of their grip from his sweat.

Finally, Arthur disappeared below the foliage of the trees at the bottom of the cliff and could finally see the 2nd lieutenant lying unconscious below him in the tall grass which had hopefully partially cushioned his landing.

Getting to him, Arthur assessed him and found that apart from being knocked unconscious, he could only detect a broken leg. Finally the lieutenant moaned and came too, thankfully after Arthur had splinted his leg.

Confirming that the lieutenant could feel no other significant areas of pain except what he described as a 'bloody sore leg' Arthur was sure that the lieutenant could be moved by stretcher safely.

It took another 90 minutes to guide the stretcher back up the bluff, by which time the chopper could be heard approaching the alpine field .

'Bloody good work' Gary said to Arthur, 'we might make good soldiers out of you bloody logistics wallas yet.'

The weather was closing in at this point, so it was decided that the helicopter would return the next day for the rest of the party, whilst the lieutenant was flown direct to hospital then.

Coming back to the present

‘So what’s the brief?’ Gary said.

Arthur picked up the remote control for the projector and pressed the on button. The first power point slide jumped to life on the screen showing the grainy image of the two gentlemen boarding the private jet.

‘What we have here is an image captured by a Luton Airport surveillance camera. The man on the left is Mr Barry Summers, the CFO for Porter international, a shipping Line that freights wood products from Brazil to the UK and Europe. He came to interest during a routine MI5 surveillance of money market trader suspected to have links to the Russian Mafia.’ Arthur started.

‘The other man has been identifies by the American State Department through his passport, as a Mr Andrew Mathews, a vice president of an American company, called ‘Rathbone Chemicals LLC’ who specialises in industrial chemicals.’ Arthur said looking at the screen trying to imagine what possible link there could be between the two.

‘Very unusual. Do you think the shipping company could be arranging shipping for Rathbone somehow, to supply new age chemicals that could be used for bombs to the mafia?’. Gary postulated.

‘No, its not what Michael believes. He had his people look into customs records for both Rathbone and Porter International. Rathbone does not export at all. All of their products are consumed by US based manufacturing companies, none of which

appear to have any link to Rathbone in terms of common shareholding, And Porters ships only travel between South America and Britain and eastern Europe.’ Gary detailed.

‘So what do they want us to do?’ Gary asked.

‘They want us look into Porter International and this Mr Barry Summers and Porter International and to discern what we can, and to see what possible links there are between the three parties, i.e the money trader, Porter International and Rathbone.’ Arthur stated.

‘Right, so as you know, there are three stages to a money laundering operation. Placement, Layering and Integration.’

‘Placement being the movement of large sums of cash into the financial system, Layering being a series of complex transactions designed to lead investigators on a seemingly endless trail of paperwork, and finally Integration where the money is returned to the launderers as if from a legitimate source.’ Arthur started.

‘The theory I have developed is that Rathbone, or someone working in Rathbone without their knowledge is supplying chemicals for cash, the chemicals and their use unknown, probably for drug processing or bomb making, and that Porter is somehow arranging shipment to the Mafia and that this money trader is somehow facilitating the financial transactions.’ Arthur continued to speculate.

‘So the basic plan is then that we will assemble a team and develop a plan to try and infiltrate this ring.’ Arthur said standing

up to answer the buzzer that sounded indicating that someone was at the door.

Opening the door, Arthur saw one of Angela's subordinates standing just outside with a tray of refreshments. 'Angela thought you would appreciate some coffee and biscuits' she said gesturing with her head in askance to place the tray on the table.

'Yes, thank you' said Arthur, 'Just place the tray on the table over there, also ask Angela if she could kindly arrange for dinner reservations for three at the Angus Steak House'

'I take it your still a fiend for a good steak?' Arthur said turning his head to enquire of Gary.

'You know it, so long as its on you'. Gary sais grinning.

'Ok then, lets kick off' Arthur said return to the table with the aroma of freshly ground coffee filling the room, also noticing his favourite ANZAC biscuits were on the tray.

Taking one from the tray he said to Gary 'How big do you think the team needs to be?' before taking a bite.

'Lets see, we need a good entry specialist who's up to date on the latest in alarm & monitoring technology. Then we need, say two good surveillance people who also have good covert entry and search skills which leave the target looking as if it has not been disturbed'. Gary said, pouring himself a coffee from the expensive looking upmarket jug.

‘Then we will need a good forensic accountant to review all the information that they gather. Finally we need a top notch hacker to crack into the systems to get said information.’ Gary continued. ‘there’s you and me as team leader and project manager respectively’.

‘Right, lets start going through the people we have available and put this team together’ Arthur said bring the first of the personnel profiles on to the screen.

The rest of the day was spent going through these profiles to determine the composition of the team.

Chapter 3

The Island

‘Are you sure what we are doing is legal?’ Steven said to Ian, as they laboured away.

‘Look, it’s a government backed operation mate, just relax.’ Ian said trying to concentrate on his work.

Ian was constructing a new https web service to act as a conduit for the vast amounts of data Steven would be utilising when conducting his trading.

‘But why all the cloak and dagger stuff, and why is that guy always silhouetted when he contacts us. I like to see the face of the people who employ me, something just feels screwy to me’.

Steven had been working on developing a complex trading program which was designed to move the funds through a multitude of banks and financial institutions using options, CFD’s, shares, foreign currency trades and numbered accounts.

This alone was not enough, however and the timing of each series of the transactions was crucial. Add to this the fact that he was not supposed to lose any of the money during these trades and Steven had a real challenge on his hands.

This would mean some seriously long sessions, as he would be utilising multiple markets over several time zones.

This was not new to him however as in his old job, he had had to keep very strange hours to ensure he was present when various markets opened and closed in their respective time zones.

He could not trade in his own name of course, and would need several trading aliases in the different markets. This would serve to further confuse anyone trying trace the various transactions and who would therefore start by looking for trades made by the same trader.

So, knowing the financial systems in such an in-depth way as he did, he had carefully constructed several fictitious traders. Some would obviously be serious traders, whereas some would appear to be amateurs and be making trades that were clearly amateurish, and the money lost by these fictitious traders, would be more than compensated for by the professional ‘traders’. Any investigator should therefore be unlikely to consider these amateur traders and not make the link between the aliases.

This plan should make it incredibly difficult and extremely time consuming for any investigator as they would need warrants in multiple countries and to spend time tracing digging through thousands of pages of daily transaction reports.

Being that the money was to start from a supposedly legitimate source, being a Bolivian government bank account, should therefore make the whole plan untraceable, or at least by the time anyone did, the project would be long over.

Ian had been able to hack into several banks and create legitimate accounts for these fictitious traders and Steven had begun developing a history of trades for these fictitious traders using money that had been in the Bolivian account.

In fact he had been able to make an 11% net return on those funds to date.

‘Look said Ian’ releasing a sigh, ‘Do you really think that any of this would really be possible without government sanction or help, I mean come on, just look at this place for a start. Also, if it wasn’t the government and some mob or cartel, there would be wise guys with guns everywhere.’

‘Perhaps you’re right’ Steven said getting up, still unconvinced in his own mind. ‘I’m taking a break and going to get a beer, maybe have a swim’

‘Go ahead’ Ian said, ‘I would like to see any cartel hideout where you could just get a beer or go for a swim and have a couple of bimbos waiting on you hand and foot’ he said shaking his head at Steven.

Martin, who was always observing the progress of these two gentlemen in a secret room attached to his bedroom, looked away from the monitor which gave a high definition video and sound feed from a hidden camera in the work room to pick up a two way radio.

‘Danni, your up, Steven needs some ‘reassurance’ that everythings as he was told, so make sure he feels better please’.

‘No problem’ Danni said, feeling supremely confident that a man such as Steven would be putty in her hands, which she could mould into anything she wanted.

Steven was therefore somewhat tired after a long day in the 'dungeon' as he and Ian had come to call it and after collecting a beer from the fridge he walked out onto the veranda, found a comfortable lounge chair to sit on and sat back and closed his eyes for a moment.

Feeling the tension starting to drain from him he opened his eyes to find Danni standing in front of him. He had not even heard her come onto the veranda and looked slightly startled. He flicked the cap of his bottle to try and cover this and took a quick swig from the bottle.

Danni was wet, having obviously just taken a swim and wearing only a brief bikini which Steven struggled to tear his eyes away from not wanting to appear rude by openly staring.

'Nice day for it' he said gesturing for her to take a seat next to him.

Sitting down, Danni stretched out luxuriating in the sun and turning her body in a way to afford Steven an easy view.

'So tell me about yourself' Danni said in sultry voice trying to get Steven to open up to her and develop a 'relationship'.

'No, first you tell me about you' Steven said looking at Danni who looked just gorgeous with the water forming a glistening sheen on her perfectly tanned skin and giving a hint of her nipples through the damp fabric of her bikini top.

‘I mean, what’s a girl like you doing here on a deserted island? Wouldn’t you rather be back in the city in the pubs and clubs?’ he said bringing his eyes back up to meet hers.

‘Oh no’ she said ‘I have had more than enough of that scene. I was working as a waitress in one of those clubs you talk about. Believe me, it just gets tiresome after a while putting up with the same rowdy men who are always trying to feel you up and the cleaning up the mess, ooh..’ she said lying and looking down as if remembering such times ‘So when Martin offered me a job here looking after businessmen such as yourself, the decision was easy’ she finished looking back at him.

‘You seem like an intelligent girl, why didn’t you go to college?’ Steven went on.

‘You’re joking’, Danni said with a short laugh, ‘I could never afford it, and my parents certainly couldn’t. No one in my family has ever been to a place like this, but with the money I make after a few years here, who knows’. She said standing up.

‘You look too tense for place as beautiful as this’ she said leaning over and grabbing his hands. Pulling him up she said ‘Its time for a relaxing massage, come, lets go to your room’.

At first Steven was surprised by the hidden strength she possessed as he was pulled easily out of the lounge chair he was lying on, but was soon enjoying the most incredible and sensual massage he had ever had as Danni’s hands moved over his body with a strength and expertise that soon had him gasping in ecstasy, and forgetting all of his concerns.

Auckland, New Zealand

The following day, Gary set about contacting the people that he and Arthur had chosen the previous day. Each had worked with either himself or Arthur in various capacities previously, and each possessed the skills and experience that made them well respected in their particular field of expertise.

First on the list was Ralph Williams. Ralph was a computer super guru that worked in the firm's IT department. His particular expertise was in computer security and encryption/decryption. He also loved computer games and was revered on the gaming circuit as a god and many a professional gaming team had sought to get him on to their team.

Most of the work that Ralph did was for the firm's large corporate clients in reviewing their systems and astonishing them with how easily he could hack into their supposedly secure servers.

Unlike most nerds, as Ralph was not unashamed to count himself as, he also liked rock climbing. As a modern day nerd, he was conscious of his fitness and lived by the motto, hone the body to sharpen the mind, even though Ralph's was already like a steel trap.

This made him perfect for the time as he would be able to work with the other members of the team when entering a building

covertly, as it was sometimes necessary to have physical access to a server.

Ralph was therefore easy to find in his lab which was always littered with computer bits and cables that Gary thought looked like something out of a Sci Fi movie. Being an old school friend of Arthur's he was also entrusted with knowledge of the firm's 'special' operations section that Gary headed.

Ralph said it would not take long for him to put aside what he was currently working on and delegate various aspects of his current assignments to other minions in the IT department, and be ready for the first team meeting which was scheduled for the day after tomorrow.

The second person on the list was Peter Anderson. Peter had been previously offered a position at the firm but preferred the freedom of being self employed and hated all the rules and regulations and the volume of paperwork that came with being employed with such firm's anyway.

Peter was a security consultant who contracted to the firm. So after finishing Ralph, Gary dialled Peters office number. A voice answered 'Anderson Consulting, how may I help you.' It was obviously one of the people that manned the phones of the virtual office service Peter used. 'Yes, is Peter available please?' Gary enquired. 'He is on site at the moment and uncontactable, may I take a message?' the answering service stated. 'This is Gary Taylor, can you tell me where he is?'

'Certainly, he is at 302 Great South Road, Greenlane, the new Vico Advantage building' the answering service said having been

instructed only to give his location details to Gary and just take messages from everyone else. Peter hated being interrupted on the job so he only gave his cell number out to close friends and the answering service.

Heading to the basement, Gary hoped in his brand new top of the range Toyota Land Cruiser which had all the options as well as leather seats. He preferred large powerful 4WD's as they gave great all round visibility and the ability to almost anywhere as well as the power to keep up with most sedans on the open road.

Fifteen minutes later Gary arrived at the Vico building. Entering spacious and airy foyer of the new building, he enquired of the security guard where he might find Peter, telling the guard he was a work colleague. Calling on the two way radio all principle contractors were required to use whilst on site the guard confirmed this and relayed the instructions of how to find Peter.

Finding the construction elevator as instructed by the guard, having picked up a hard hat from the site office Gary punched the button for the very top. Although the building was largely finished, the final two levels still required use of this elevator.

Stepping out on to what would be the roof of the building, Gary saw Peter coming towards him.

‘So what brings an office walla like you out here’. Peter said smiling and shaking Gary’s hand.

‘Me, an office walla, you’ve got to be kidding’ Gary said in mock offence.

Peter had been in the SAS with Gary and there was no building known to which he could not gain access.

‘We’ve got a job on and your just man I need’ Gary said.

‘Fantastic’ Peter said, ‘I’m just about finished here and was planning a small holiday before my next job. Where we going?’ he asked.

‘London first’ Gary said, ‘Then wherever the job leads us.

‘London, great’ Peter said ‘Better be business class, though’.

Gary gave Peter the details of the first meeting, and after a sharing some of Peters lunch whilst sitting on the top of the new building taking in the view, left Peter to finish the job and went off in search of the last two people on his list.

The last two people on Gary’s list were also ex SAS colleagues who now ran a company called Target Services. Target services offered a range of services from private investigation to installing large advertising banners on the sides of tall buildings which required specialised repelling skills.

Alan Davis, and Brett Miller were their names, and had become fast friends in the SAS, and each trusted the other implicitly with their life, and had had to on several occasions.

They were currently on a stakeout for client who had suspected one of his employees of theft.

Gary approached the vehicle they were in, which was a non-descript mid range Holden Commodore, and got in the back, having been given instructions by Alan over the phone on where to find them. Gary had parked around the corner so as not to draw attention in his big shiny 4WD.

Closing the door he said ‘Got the bugger yet?’

‘Just about to collar him’ Brett said whilst looking down the street through a pair of binoculars at a residential building site where the target was currently installing some stolen airconditioning units which Alan and covertly tagged with microdots at the employees premises the previous night.

‘You guys interested in some real work?’ Gary said.

‘Yeah, maybe, what you offering?’ Alan said looking around.

‘Travel, illegal breaking and entering, theft, possible kidnapping and interrogation, that sort of thing. Nothing too bad’ Gary said.

‘All right’, they both said in unison.

‘Let’s collar this guy then go get a beer and talk about it’ Alan said, whilst Brett dialled the detective sergeant who was awaiting their call to catch the perpetrator.

Whilst Gary had been out making these contacts, Arthur had been back at the office finalising travel details for the team with Angela in anticipation of a positive result from Gary that all would be willing and ready.

This being done Arthur called the office of the person who would be the final member of the team.

They needed a first rate forensic accountant who lived to track down fraud and illegal money laundering, and who had the incredible eye for details that was the hall mark of someone in this profession.

‘Hello, Sarah speaking’ the voice on the extension Arthur called said.

‘Hi Sarah, its Arthur, could you come up to my office?’

‘On my way’ she said placing the phone back down and wondering what was afoot.

Sarah was in her late twenties and had moved up quickly through the firm’s ranks and was now a senior associate. She was slim and athletic , going to the gym everyday and was a health food nut.

She had been instrumental detecting many frauds for the firm’s clients and had the skill, tenacity, and incredible memory required to make connections where there seemed to be none.

Sarah was also a sort after expert witness that had been the bane of many a barrister who had tried unsuccessfully to outwit her. She had an ability to present evidence in such a matter of fact way that it was irrefutable.

She was also aware of the firm’s ‘special’ operations section and anticipated that a new operation was about to kick off of which she would be part.

After Sarah had enthusiastically agreed to become a member of the team, she left Arthur's office to make arrangements and close out any current files she had been working on.

Arthur sat back in his comfortable leather chair to contemplate the team he now had, Gary, Sarah, Ralph, Peter, Alan and Brett. Quite a formidable team he thought. The one thing they all shared in common was that that they were all single and had the ability to drop their personal lives at a moments notice.

They were all also highly intelligent, dedicated and were of strong character. Each did have there own quirks, but overall Arthur knew that if any team could take on the challenges on offer, this team could.

Chapter 4

Bolivia

The sheer humidity of the jungle was oppressive and being somewhat unaccustomed to it after the thin high altitude air of La Paz, David was sweating like a pig. This attracted a multitude of insects which were slowly driving him crazy.

This all combined to make David's mood a very dark one. He was sorely tempted to call the whole deal off, except he was being watched too closely by the members of the cartel who were ever present. This was another problem that was causing David much chagrin, there was little or no intelligent conversation to be had as either the men, who were sweaty and dirty did not speak English, or the one who did and were prepared to talk to him were crude in the extreme.

David had been in the jungle base of the cartel for a week now waiting for the plane, which was now a day overdue. He had tried to leave camp once to venture into the village of the people who processed the cocaine leaves into pure cocaine, but he was stopped before he got 50 ft down the track.

He was not surprised however, as the people looked beaten and harassed and dared not talk to him for obvious fear of being beaten by the cartels guards who supervised everything the did. There was very little doubt in his mind as to how brutal the law dished out by the cartel was. There was no sign of any other form of law and order provided by the state either. There had been an uneasy truce between the cartel and the Bolivian authorities for some time now, kept only by the flow of money in the dugs trade.

David was therefore desperately awaiting the arrival of the plane. He was sitting in the bush surrounded by guards and labourers from the village who had hauled the well packaged containers of cocaine to the edge of the air strip. The strip was little more than a long grassy clearing about a mile from the camp.

The first sign that the plane was coming was when one of the mangy dogs kept by guards pricked its ears up. About a minute later David could make out the unmistakable sound of a 4 bladed twin engine Cessna 441 conquest. This was a favourite of pilots on this part of the world for its range, capacity and relative short runway requirements.

One of the guards walked out into the middle of the field and let off a purple smoke grenade which quickly filled the air at the end of the runway with a haze of purple smoke.

One of the guards then got on a portable short range radio

‘Aircon 441, this is ground, do you copy, over’

‘Ground, this is Aircon 441, read you loud and clear, over’.

‘Aircon 441, this is ground, we have released a purple, repeat, purple smoke marker. Do you see it?, over’.

‘Ground, this is 441, I see your goofy grape, I will make a circuit and land shortly, over’

The pilot must be an old Vietnam vet, as they used that term to identify the colour purple. David knew this from his old Vietnam

days as an MP listening to the radio chatter of the chopper pilots on missions where he was based.

‘Roger 441, ground out.’ The guard operating the radio said placing the radio away, ensuring it was switched off, as although there was an uneasy truce, there were still those authorities not a party to the deal the cartel had with most that could not resist seizing an aircraft, and long radio conversations, or even static splash from a short range set whose button was inadvertently been pressed could be used to triangulate a position.

Finally the plane could be made out in the far distance, firstly as a dot, then growing in size and shape until both props could clearly be seen. The pilot did a circuit of the field, before selecting a straight in approach from the east.

The plane touched down and after the pilot had turned the aircraft around, lining it up ready for takeoff, he shut down the engines.

Whilst David may not have had a lot of respect for these people, they were very efficient and fast when it came to unloading and reloading the aircraft. There were two large shrink wrapped packages and a large securely locked brief case that were offloaded from the aircraft.

David looked around as the sound of a small lawn mower like engine started up. Some of the village men who had humped the drugs to the airstrip, uncovered a large cart with drums of fuel on it. The sound came from a small generator which powered a pump. So whilst some of the men were doing the unloading and reloading of the aircraft, others were refuelling the aircrafts tanks.

David went out and took the brief case from the pilot, whom David had not previously met. The pilot was a lean lanky man in his late fifties with short gray hair who definitely looked the part.

He then walked over to Conswego unbuttoning his shirt pocket as he went, taking out a key which had been mailed to him some time ago. He then opened the brief case for Conswego's inspection. Inside was rows of neatly packed bundles of US currency which caused Conswego to smile.

Taking a bundle out and thumbing through it in section, he turned to his men who let out a roar of approval in their native tongue.

Placing the bundle of cash back with the others, he took the key off David and closed and locked it.

'Come my friend, we must now celebrate the beginning of this new relationship'. With a wave of his hand, the guards started berated the villages into concealing the fuel cart as well as gesturing the pilot that he may depart.

After a quick pre-flight, the pilot showed obvious signs of relief to be restarting his engines and getting the hell out of dodge.

The engines started smoothly and were soon revved to full power for a short take off which the pilot managed with obvious skill.

As the noise of the aircraft receded, David turned to follow the band of men back to camp. Although it was only a mile, the humidity made any such walks in this jungle a real effort.

Once back at camp David made sure the packages were securely loaded into his 4WD and was ready for the long drive back to La Paz. Unfortunately, Conswego was not going to let him go without a night of drunken revelry, which was the very last thing David wanted, just wanting to get away from them back to his apartment.

The following day, David set off back to La Paz after confirming the date for the next rendezvous with Conswego, being 3 weeks from today.

The drive back was thankfully uneventful, with the roads getting better and better, the closer he got back to La Paz. Finally back on the motorway back into La Paz, David's mood lifted.

He followed his instructions to the letter and drove straight to the Banco Mercantil M.A in the modern centre of La Paz. On the way he dialled his contact at the bank, Miguel, who instructed him to drive to the side street entrance to the high rise, where he would meet David and open the automated gate.

Miguel was the bank's security manager, and as such had access to the central vault. Before David got to the bank drove through a park he had previously scouted for its secluded nature and the fact that it was seldom used by the populace.

Pretending to be on the phone, he waited for the only person he could see to amble past, being an old lady out walking her poodle, then went into the public ablution block and changed into a guard's uniform for the bank which he had previously been given.

After, a quick tidy of his appearance, David got back into the 4WD and drove straight to the bank.

Miguel was exactly where he said he would be. Seeing David approach he walked over to a key pad in the wall by the gate and pressed in a code. When the gate had rolled up far enough to allow the vehicle in David drove through and stopped to allow Miguel to hop in.

Miguel instructed him to drive to the lowest level of the underground car park where David could see a large steel door adjacent to where he parked. Getting out and unlocking the large rear door to the 4WD, Miguel wheeled up a hand cart that he had placed there previously. Going over to the steel door, Miguel punched in another code and together they entered the bowels of the bank building which housed a large vault into which they wheeled the hand cart.

All around the interior of the vault there were cages, behind which David could see piles of cash in a range of currencies as well as stacks of gold bullion.

They lifted the two large packages onto a large table in the centre of the vault which had a number of money counting machines on top. They proceeded to unwrap the two packages which each contained 4 large brief cases.

Once unlocked with another key that had been mailed to David, they proceeded to empty the cash from each case and onto an empty shelf in one of the cages that Miguel had opened. Each bundle of cash was \$10,000 in US hundred dollar notes. Each case

contained over 6 million dollars in currency, for a total of fifty million dollars.

David had no idea, that this much money was going to be funnelled through this operation, and this was only the first of 10 such shipments over the next year before this operation would be shut down and David could take retirement.

Each of these shipments would boost David's retirement by one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He had already picked out a small beach front house on a nice part of Florida which was nothing ostentatious and would not draw attention from the IRS or anyone else for that matter.

Once the cage was locked, he gave Miguel an envelope containing ten thousand US dollars and having ensured his cooperation for the next shipments, David drove back to his apartment.

After a long shower and feeling somewhat refreshed, he dialled the number for 'the voice' and reported that all had gone according to plan. He then grabbed a beer and walked out onto the balcony already formulating a fictitious report for his trip into the Bolivian back waters.

Houston, Texas

Andrew Mathews was in a board meeting on the top floor of the large edifice like building that was home to the head quarters of

the Rathbone chemical company, of which he was Chairman and CEO.

It was another bland meeting going over the quarterly earnings results. There had been considerable argument between the various divisional managers over the formula use to allocate corporate overheads to each division.

‘This is just bull crap said’ said one divisional manager to another who was building up quite a head of steam. ‘You are simply using absorption costing to build in god knows what levels of non direct costs before charging my division and lowering my GP percentage.’ He bellowed. ‘That’s pure bullshit, my accountants assure me that we are simply using corporate policy when calculating and setting internal recharge costs, its your people up there in Kentucky who are full of it.’

This sent the first manager off on tirade of abuse. IT was at this point that the door to the board room opened and Andrews secretary slipped in and whispered into his ear that he had a call from Washington, before slipping virtually unnoticed out again, whilst the various divisional managers allowed the meeting to descend into a series of recriminations.

David thumped his hand down on the table which brought the room to silence and brought all eyes around to him.

‘I’m not interested in this internal bickering. I will have Robert review all such internal costings. Meanwhile I want a plan from each of your divisions before to arrest the decline in sales in the western states, as a group.’ He said in his quiet but authoritative voice.

‘I will therefore adjourn the meeting for today. Robert, have your people look at this costing issue.’ He said standing up. Robert being the companies CFO.

Going back to his office he made sure to tell his secretary that he was not to be disturbed whilst he was on this call. Picking up the phone, the voice on the other end immediately answered.

‘The first delivery has been made successfully’

‘Good, there was no indication then that anything was compromised along the route by the coastguard, DEA or FBI?’ Andrew asked.

‘None’ said the voice.

‘I really hate that we have to operate this way’ Andrew said

‘The financial system is just too well monitored in this country, and in the ones we would usually use, so we have no choice when moving about the large amounts of cash our new customers in the old Russian republics have to pay us in’ the voice continued, ‘its also your turn Andrew and you are doing well. I will make sure the other members of the firm are aware of your work’.

‘It’s the drugs angle I despise most of all’ Andrew said

‘Never mind that, I have made arrangements for some small seizures, just enough to keep the DEA and FBI happy and to not give the cartel any reason to think they are being double crossed.

Anyway, once this project is complete I will ensure that the cartel is put out of business.’ The voice assured Andrew.

‘very well then said Andrew

‘How’s it going on the island?’ Andrew enquired changing tack.

‘Very well, they are almost ready’ said the voice.

‘I will make a trip to Jamaica then to ensure that end is in order then.’ Andrew said.

‘Very good’ the voice said hanging up.

London, England

Later that week.

Arthur and his team arrived in Heathrow aboard a commercial flight via Singapore, where they had stopped off briefly so Arthur could make a brief tour of the firm’s Singapore office.

They all went through customs separately and took cabs to the apartment that the London office of the firm had arranged for them to use as a base whilst they were there.

The apartment was in Waterloo and very handy to the underground that the team would make use of. It took up most of the fifth floor in the building in which it was located and was nicely furnished. It was rented by the firm on a long term lease

and used for the many international guests that firm had accommodated whilst they were in London on business.

There were several bathrooms, a large lounge and a good sized study that was perfect for meetings.

It was agreed that Sarah could have a the only room with its own ensuite for herself being the only female member of the team, and that the guys would all 'rough it' by doubling up in the other bedrooms.

It was 3pm by the time that the team had settled in and the guys had turned the kitchen into a battle zone fixing sandwiches for themselves from the apartments well stocked pantry when the door bell buzzed announced that someone was there to see them.

'Hello' Arthur said into the intercom.

'It's James Reginald' the voice announced.

'Excellent, please come up' Arthur said pressing the button allowing James to enter the building.

A few minutes later there was a knock at the door to the apartment.

'A pleasure to meet you' Arthur said opening the door and shaking James's hand.

'This is Detective Inspector Jarvis from special branch' James said indicating the gentlemen standing next to him who was of average height and dressed in a very nice Cambridge suit.

The gentleman nodded his head in greeting.

‘Come through into the study and I will introduce you to the team’ Arthur said leading them through to the study.

‘Allow me to introduce you to my team’ Arthur said pointing out each member in turn and their particular expertise.

‘Very good, I’m sure Arthur has told you who I am’ James said, and everyone nodded.

‘This is DI Jarvis who will be your contact with the met while you are here. Now I’m sure you have all been made aware that you have no official authority whilst you are in London, and that anything you require of an official nature will go through DI Jarvis who will now give you an update on our friend Mr Summers’.

‘OK, we have officially ended the police surveillance of Mr Summers having not officially found anything of note and the surveillance team has been assigned a new suspected villain to keep them busy.’ The DI started.

‘The surveillance ended yesterday evening. Apart from his meeting with the gentleman from Porter International there have been no other unexpected visitors to his office, which he runs from his house Mayfair, just the usual low level fences that we allow to make use of him so we can keep a tap on any information that would be useful to the robbery squad. Phone taps have shown nothing unusual except for a call traced to a restaurant in Budapest three weeks ago’. Jarvis continued.

‘There was nothing said that could identify the subject on the other end of the phone and the only thing said amounted to an enquiry on someone or something called subject alpha and that this subject alpha had been uplifted. This caught our attention as it did not sound anything like any regular business Mr Summers conducts either legitimately or for any of the villains he deals with.’ Jarvis finished.

‘OK then, we will leave you to it now as I’m sure you have a lot to organise’ James said whilst both he and Jarvis left a business card on the coffee table.

Returning to the study after showing the gentlemen out, Arthur started to outline the plan for the next day.

‘Gary, you can start by organising all the equipment and underground passes etc that we will need. Peter, Alan and Brett, you can take an initial walk by the house of Barry Summers and arrange a good spot to set up observation from.’

‘Sarah, you can set up at one of the offices at the firm’s office and commandeer anything or anyone you may need. I have spoken to Neville Upham, the senior partner there and he has organised a cover story for you that he will fill you in on tomorrow.’

‘Ralph, you and I can set up communications and control from here.’

‘Up until then, lets get some rest and relaxation as it may be our last chance for a while.’

Chapter 5

London, England

The next morning the team set about their various tasks. First to leave was Gary. He left the apartment and hailed a taxi as he walked down the street. Being late Autumn, the day was overcast and cold so he had elected wear a heavy overcoat over his sports coat, business shirt and regimental tie. Along with his suit pants and highly polished shoes, he looked much like the many other high powered businessman that went about their business in central London.

In the file that James Reginald had left with the team was details of a contact that independent operatives MI5 used to obtain the equipment they required in order that they did not have to go to the official offices of MI5 and be potentially spotted and followed by agents of other nations.

Gary got in the cab and gave directions to the driver for a shopping precinct in the centre of Fulham. The central London traffic lived up to its reputation and it took 45 minutes to travel the approx. ten kilometres to the destination. The underground would have been significantly faster, however Gary would require the taxi to ferry the equipment on the return journey, and rather than try to find a taxi later, he considered it more efficient to grab the first one he saw. He liked London cabs for their spacious rear passenger compartment, built specially for tourists and their large suit cases.

The shop has been well chosen by the people at MI5 as it was towards the end of one of the streets leading off the central plaza

of the shopping precinct and had a parking bay for taxis and commercial vehicles adjacent.

Gary told the driver to keep the metre running and to get himself a cup of tea and a sarni on him whilst he waited as he could be some time. Thinking it was his lucky day, the driver agreed as he would much rather enjoy a meal paid for by a fare than negotiate the streets of London looking for customers.

Walking up to the store front, Gary could see that the business masqueraded as a home handy man store and that it would not be unusual for people to be seen leaving with large packages.

The shop door was fitted with an old fashioned bell that rang when Gary pushed the door open to enter. The shop attendant behind the counter glanced up as the bell rang but seemed to pay little attention to him and soon returned his attention to the crossword or puzzle he was working on in the daily paper.

Closing the door, Gary glanced around the store and noted that the layout was what one would expect in such a store, basically isles of tools and supplies grouped into various categories, power tools, garden equipment etc. He also noted two CCTV cameras, one mounted on the far wall facing the front door, and one behind the counter, both being perfectly placed to capture an image of anyone entering the store.

There were no other customers in the store at this time, Gary noted.

Approaching the store clerk, Gary took out a special card that had been included in the file given to the team. Flashing the card

under the clerks nose, Gary said, ‘I believe you can help me with some special equipment requirements’.

The clerk looked up and briefly studied Gary before reaching under the counter and pressing a hidden button. A door sized section of wall containing a selection of power tools mounted on displays swung open to reveal a room.

Walking in to the room Gary could see some stairs leading down to a basement. As Gary started to descend the stairs the section of wall swung closed behind him.

At the bottom of the stairs Gary stepped through some strips of opaque plastic hanging from the door frame and entered a large room whose walls were lined with all the tools of the espionage trade, covert cameras, listening devices, bugs, cameras, lock picks and guns of all types.

In the centre of the room was a large table with all the packaging consumables that would conceal anything taken from this room nicely. Stepping further into the room, Gary cleared his throat to announce to anyone that could hear that he was present as the room was presently unattended.

The only other exit from the room was a door leading to another room, through which a man stepped as Gary was about to call out. The man was of medium height and build appeared to be in his mid 40's , but it was his face that got Gary's attention. It was the sort of look men got who had seen action and plenty of it. His eyes had that hard penetrating stare of someone who was expert at sizing people up, but at the same time had that far away look of someone who had many demons with which to contend.

‘Can I see your card please’ he said approaching looking Gary up and down, his eyes lingering briefly on Gary’s regimental tie.

Gary handed over his card and the man moved to a computer terminal and entered a code that was printed on the card. Apparently being satisfied at whatever came up on the screen, the man handed the card back and said ‘We do not need to know each others names, and of course you know to keep the existence of this place secret.’

Gary nodded and the man continued ‘You are authorised to take whatever you require in terms of surveillance equipment, but only small calibre side arms and silencers from the weapons racks.’

Gary selected a range of bugs, listening devices and camera equipment with night vision capabilities and high quality zoom lenses from the racks of surveillance equipment.

Gary could not believe the range of arms there were to choose from, even in the small calibre hand gun range he was limited to. There were Heckler & Kochs’, Buerettas, Smith & Westons, Glocks, Armalites, Sig Sauers, Derringers, you name it.

In the end he chose 9mm Glocks for their reliability, lightness and smooth firing action. One for each member of the team, along with a number of spare magazines, preloaded.

The man carefully packaged everything for Gary and placed everything in shopping bags with the stores logo so as to give anyone giving him a casual glance that he had simply been to the hardware store.

Returning to the Taxi, Gary found the driver already waiting and gave him instructions back to the apartment.

Sarah left the apartment about half an hour after Gary and made her way on foot to the firm's offices, which were easy walking distance. She had dressed in a smart business skirt and open neck blouse that was just tight enough to show off her sexy well trimmed figure. She found this had the effect of making men more agreeable to her demands.

The firm's offices were bright and airy and followed the same open plan layout with bookable project and meeting rooms as the firm's other offices around the world.

The senior partner had booked a large meeting room for Sarah for along as she would require it and had assembled a team of juniors and intermediate interns to be at her disposal, although they had not been informed as to the nature of the project.

'Good morning everyone, My name is Sarah Falconer. I am a senior associate in the Audit division in the Auckland office.' She started.

'The project you are assembled here to work on is classified and being conducted in conjunction with various governments as part of our public sector contract with them.'

'No one is to discuss anything regarding this project with anyone outside this room, even you line manager or partner and as this is a priority project you may be required to work overtime.'

‘That being said, I’m sure we will all get along and that you will give me your best efforts of which I will report back to your managers on at the completion if the project’. Sarah said in the no nonsense tone she reserved for barristers and the like in order to gain their attention and respect.

‘Ok, so why are we here you are all wondering. We are here to try and establish a link between a company called Porter International, based here in London, a Mr Barry Summers, a securities trader also based here in London and a company called Rathbone Chemicals of Houston Texas.’.

‘We will be looking for any transactions that have occurred over the past two years that could link any of these entities to each other, and in particular any transactions in their accounts that have been coded in such a way to suggest they do match a regular business transaction pattern.’

‘What we have here’ Sarah said pointing to a large stack of boxes ‘are CD’s containing audit logs for the three entities as filed with the respective tax offices in their jurisdictions covering that period’.

‘As there are nine of you, I will break you into two teams of 4 for each of the company entities, and 1 of you to go through Mr Summers records.’

‘The computers in this room are not connected to any LAN in the company, and are not connected to the network. They are connected via a small LAN for this room only and to that printer in the corner. NO data is to leave the room on any way.’

Sarah had arranged with the various offices in the firm's governmental liaison officer in each relevant jurisdictions on the flight over to have the computerised records available for today.

‘We have a mountain of data to crunch so lets get under way’.

Sarah knew that they would be looking for the proverbial needle in a hay stack, but if there were any transactions that suggested a link between each of the parties, they must be here, however cleverly disguised. It was these transactions that would be integral in allowing the team to focus its efforts in determining what path of enquiry should be followed next.

Sarah would be the last to leave the office each day, locking the door behind her and informing the cleaners that this room was not to be cleaned until further notice. She would also be the one to unlock it the next morning.

Back at the apartment Arthur concentrated on creating a story board which would be used to try and link all the information the team gathered, whilst Ralph was developing the specialised tools that Peter, Alan and Brett would use when covertly obtaining access to Barry's office and flat. These included special devices that would be wired into the computer(s) found on site that would scan and transmit all data on the hard drives and intercept any data being received or transmitted as well as a key logger.

All this data would be wirelessly transmitted to a unit in the observation post that the guys would set up in range of the units, then transmitted directly back to the apartment.

The units would also allow Ralph free access to the computers, but it was getting these units in place that would be the hard part.

This was the plan for the day for Peter, Alan and Brett.

Leaving the flat at about the same time as Sarah, they made their way to the nearest tube station where they would make their way to Mayfair. Their objective for the day was to do a walk by of the target house noting the best possible points of access, and to find a good hide from which to observe the house and place the short range receiver that Ralph was constructing.

They had all chosen to dress smart casual in dress jeans, brand name sneakers, swade jackets and business shirts. This combination would allow them freedom of movement and to blend in to the crowd.

Getting off at Oxford Street station they went to one of the many newsstands and purchased a map of the area. They pinpointed the targets address and could see that it was towards the end of a street which formed a T intersection with another road and there was an alley way going down between the two rows of houses that the targets house backed on to.

They decided to split up and each walk past the house from a different direction. They would stay in communication with each other using ear pieces attached to their mobile phones which were connected to each other via a conference call.

Peters route got him to the street the house was on first. It was a typical London street with rows of terraced housing on each side.

He noted that there was a public house called the Oxford Arms that must be the 'local' watering hole.

It was definitely an upmarket street with all the houses having front gardens which were walled off from the street and gated. This presented both opportunities and problems. Walking further along the street, Peter could see that all homes had security systems and a clear view of the street from their second floor front rooms.

Approaching the end of the street, Peter saw that the target's house was second from the end therefore allowing access from only the front or back. The front windows were double glazed and glancing through the gate as he passed he could see the front ground level windows were barred.

About this time Brett was approaching the alley way that ran down between the rear of two rows of houses, one being having the target house on it. He turned into the alley way with all the confidence of someone who either lived in one of the houses or who used the alley way as a short cut.

The rear yard of all the houses were walled off with a wooden gate allowing access to each yard. Glancing at the second story of each house as he passed, he could see that each had windows which were covered by drapes and were dark. It did not appear if anyone was home or paying attention to him as he walked down the alley.

He noted however that there did not appear to be any CCTV coverage of the alley or any of the rear yards.

Alan at this stage was approaching on the far side of the T junction with the suspects road and saw Brett approaching from the other direction in the other side of the road and then walk purposely into the alley way.

Ahead of him he could see an old lady struggling with a walking stick and pulling a two wheeled hand trolley which was obviously filled with the weeks groceries. She stopped in front of a house that directly fronted the street with only a small front garden and a low wrought iron fence. Resting her hand cart against the fence, she searched through her hand bag and pulled out a set of keys.

Alan noted that her house afforded a clear line of sight to the suspects house and the entrance to the alley way.

The old lady took a step towards her front door after opening the gate and stumbled to the ground crying out in pain as she did so.

Going up to her Alan extended his hand saying 'may I help you, that looked like a particularly nasty fall'.

'It's this blasted hip of mine' she said accepting his help 'the blasted NHS waiting lists just go on forever and my hip replacement operation has been put off three times now. I'm sure there just putting me off continually believing I will kick the bucket first'.

Laughing, Alan said 'I think you will show them. You look like a tough old bird to me.'

'That accent of yours' the lady said steadying herself and taking Alan in 'You're a New Zealander aren't you?'

‘Yes ma’am, I’m just over here on business. May I help you with your bags?’

Alan saw Peter rounding the street and head towards the alley way, not showing any sign of recognition.

Through the mike attached to his collar Peter said ‘Brett, you and I will meet in the oxford arms. Alan you try and get in the ladies good books and see if we can make use of her house. Meet us in the oxford arms at the top of the suspects street when you are finished.’

‘That would be lovely dear’ she said unlocking her front door.

‘Where can I put these’ Alan said indicating the shopping.

‘Just pop it through to the kitchen down the hall whilst sit down for a minute’ she said entering the front sitting rom.

‘Can I make you a cup of tea’ Alan called from the kitchen putting the frozen away in the freezer and leaving the rest for the lady to deal with later.

‘That would be lovely dear’ she called from the kitchen.

A few minutes later Alan brought a steaming pot of tea into the sitting room along with a jug of milk and some sugar on a tray he found in the kitchen along with two mugs.

‘You’re a lifesaver dear’ she said pouring a cup, ‘then you New Zealanders are generally a lovely bunch. You know my late Billy

flew bombers in the war for bomber command with one of your lovely lads' she said.

'We're good and bad just like every one else' Alan said smiling.

They continued to talk for a while, the old lady obviously loving the company. At some stage a long haired tabby called Lottie wandered in to the sitting room and curled up on her lap.

'You know we don't get many visitors now days, do we Lottie.' She said stroking the cat which was now purring loudly.

Alan saw his opportunity and took the plunge.

'You know, I have not introduced myself properly. I am a private investigator working with special branch and I notice that your house provides a great view of the house of a suspect we are investigating. I can't say what for of course, but we do need somewhere to use as an observation post and I was wondering if one of your upstairs rooms would be available for a week, two at the most'. Alan said offering to pour her another cuppa.

'I can get Detective Inspector Jarvis to vouch for us if you like, and I assure you we will be very quiet and unobtrusive.'

'that would be wonderful' the lady said eagerly looking like a new lease of life had come over her.

'It would be terribly exciting. You know I love Miss Marple and the guest bedroom directly above us is never used now and has a great view of the street.' She said hopping spritely up, all memory of her earlier fall and bad hip all but forgotten.

‘Wonderful. Can we come back tomorrow with our equipment then?’ Alan said hopping up.

‘No problem at all’ she said taking his hand in hers ‘Gosh this will be fun, we haven’t had so much excitement in ages’ she said looking at the cat who had now curled up in front of the radiator after being forced to leap from the ladies lap when she hopped up.

‘Until tomorrow then’ Alan said leaving.

Shutting the front door and walking up the street towards the public house Alan talked into his lapel mike ‘Did you guys get all that then?’

‘Sure did you smooth talker’ Peter said nursing his beer.

‘Who knew you had such a way with the old ladies then?’ Brett said laughing

‘Leave it out you silly buggers, shes a lovely old hoot, now I expect a beer waiting when I get there’ Alan said terminating the conference call to a laughter.

Calling Arthur, Alan outlined the days progress.

‘Can you get Sarah to obtain the plans for the terraces that the old ladies house is a part of, as if I am right, the attic space of all those houses is not completely blocked off from one another, meaning we could secretly make our way along to the attic space of a house that has a view of the alley way and the back yard of the suspects

house and install a camera, giving us a perfect view of all comings and goings' Alan speculated.

'Well done Alan' Arthur said, 'You are definitely earning that bonus. I'll get Sarah on to it right away.'

After Alan met the guys and downed a quick beer to yet further jibes about his smooth talking, the guys left and made their way back via the underground to the apartment.

Gary had arrived back and was unpacking and testing the equipment he had acquired that morning.

The guys were clearly impressed and started going over all the equipment that was there.

'I also got a personal side arm each' Gary said unpacking the gloves and spare magazines.

'Hopefully we will not need these, but who knows where this investigation is going to take us'.

'Very nice' Brett said taking one of the guns and testing the balance and the action.

'Oh, I got a couple of silencers too' Gary said taking them out of the bag. 'If we have to use these, they could come in handy' he said passing them out.

'They can be effective in interrogations' Peter said 'nothing can scare the shit out of you more than someone screwing one of these on to a gun'

‘Decorum please gentlemen’ Sarah said causing the guys to look around as they had not heard her enter the room.

‘Do I get one of those?’ Sarah said pointing at the guns.

‘I don’t know, you ever fired one before?’ Peter said

‘As a matter of fact I have. One of my old boyfriends was a cop and he took me to his gun club on a date once’ she said

‘Some date’ Brett remarked.

‘OK then, show me how this works’ Peter said hand her one of the pistols.

Sarah expertly checked the action, ensured the chamber was clear, clicked the action back into place and turned the safety off and took a firing stance.

‘I learn quickly and I was a good student’ she said offering the gun back.

‘No, keep it its yours then’ Gary said passing her a single magazine.

Sarah then said she was going for a shower whilst Peter offered to cook dinner which was a Thai inspired stir fry.

After Dinner they all gathered in the study to share the days events.

‘Have you found anything yet?’ Arthur enquired of Sarah.

‘Not yet, I think we’re in for a long haul on that front, but I did get those plans for you’ she said handing some blue prints to Alan.

Unrolling them Alan looked pleased and pointed out the common attic space the block of terraced house shared.

‘OK, we have our basic plan mapped out then. Sarah, you continue at the office whilst the rest of us take shifts at the house. It will probably take us a week to establish Barries routines and ensure no one else is in the house and determine the best time to make our entry. As there are 6 of us left, I suggest three 8 hour shifts each day’ Arthur said. ‘Gary and Ralph, Peter and Me and Alan and Brett. We can draw straws as to who gets what shift once we’re established.

They then decided to call it a night and headed off to bed early as depending on what was to eventuate it may be a while before regular sleeping patterns could be re-established.

Chapter 6

London, England

Five days had now passed since the team had set up in the old lady's spare bedroom. Early on the first day, Peter had stealthily made his way along the common attic space of the block that the lady's house to where he had calculated he should install the hidden camera. By drilling a small hole in one of the roof slates with a silenced drill he installed a camera which had a clear view of the rear of the targets house.

The team had decided to watch the house for a period of a week to establish the routines of Mr Summers.

The surveillance started in the early hours of a Monday morning, and from what the team had observed, Mr Summers routine consisted of rising around 7:30, being when the first light came on, retrieving the letter from the fence letter box shortly after.

His clients arrived steadily throughout the morning and around midday he left for a strole to a nearby café for lunch. This had been established by a different member of the team following him each day.

He then returned to his house after about 45 minutes and was observed to let a cleaner into the house around 1 pm and who left again around 2pm. The cleaner appeared to be the same person each day unfortunately and who the suspect had obviously developed a rapport with.

During this time, the cleaner was observed to leave the house through the rear door to take out the rubbish, each time using a

key to let themselves back in. The door must have a lock that sets itself each time the door closes, Brett remarked at one stage.

After the cleaner had left there appeared to be no further activity until around 3pm when further clients were seen coming at regular intervals up until around 5:30pm.

‘Does this guy ever go out of an evening?’ Brett said at one point.

Around 8pm on two different evenings, two different women were seen entering the house, both tall and very attractive.

‘Ah, he obviously has his entertainment delivered’ Alan remarked.

Each night there appeared to be little activity in the house with the last light going off at around 11:00pm.

The teams first break came on Saturday evening when a taxi appeared outside the house at around 7pm and Mr Summers was seen leaving the house and getting into the taxi.

The team had a hire car and left it parked around a side street for just such an opportunity and was always manned by a team member. At that time it was Gary in the car.

‘You’re up Brett Gary’ Brett said into the two way radio each team member carried. ‘The suspect is in a Taxi and will be heading past your street about now’.

‘Got it’ Gary said pulling out to follow it.

‘Wake up’ Alan said to Peter, giving him a friendly shove. Peter had agreed to sleep his off shift at the house in case just such an opportunity arose.

‘Whats happening?’ Peter said instantly awake, the habits of his SAS days still deeply ingrained into him.

‘Suspects left in a taxi, we may have a chance to get into the house.’ Brett filled him in.

‘Wheres the suspect heading?’ Alan said keying the radio to get an update from Gary.

‘The taxi has just turned off the A501 and onto the A4201 heading north up towards Kentish Town. Looks like you may have time. Let Arthur know whats happening’ Gary replied.

‘Will do’ Alan replied keying the speed dial on his mobile.

‘Something up?’ Arthur answered immediately.

‘Suspects left in a taxi with Gary tailing. Whereabouts are you?’ Alan queried.

‘Ralph, Sarah and I are about 2 minutes out, but don’t wait for us’ Arthur said ending the call.

‘Peter, you and Brett make the entry, whilst I watch from here. The rest of the team is 2 minutes out.’ Alan said.

Peter placed his locksmiths multi entry tool into his pocket along with his alarm kit, whilst Brett grabbed the USB device Ralph had

prepared, some computer techs tools that Ralph had also trained the team with and a fibre optic camera kit.

Leaving the house by the back entrance, Peter and Brett made their way along the alley to the side street, which led up to the T junction street about 50 metres past and opposite to the alley way that ran behind the suspects house.

The night was dark and overcast which helped considerably with concealment. The main street was lit only poorly with lamps about every 30 feet which cast only a small pool of illumination. In the alley ways there was no lighting apart from the occasional rear light in a back yard.

Making their way nonchalantly in there well practiced and experienced way, Bret and Alan looked just like two lads making their way quickly to the pub on a cold and wet evening.

The Alley way which the suspects house backed on to was in deep shadow. In fact the only light that could be seen was coming from the outside light of the suspects house which had been left on deliberately to give a view of the approach to the back door fro a CCTV camera mounted on the rear of the house.

Entering the alley way and keeping to the dark shadows, Brett and Alan stopped outside the gate to the house still out of view to the camera.

‘Have you got the air pistol?’ Peter said to Brett.

‘Right here’ Bret said poking the barrel through a small gap in the gate and taking aim at the outside light.

There was a small pfft sound and the outside light bulb disintegrated and went dark plunging the rear yard and alley way into now near total darkness. Brett, having been a top rated marksmen needed only the one shot.

Looking around and listening carefully, Brett and Peter waited to see if anyone had noticed the light going out and the small tinkle of broken glass. Not having seen any curtains twitching or any dogs barking they were satisfied they had not been observed and quickly entered the yard through the gate.

They had already determined that the type of CCTV camera mounted on the house did not have infared night vision capability.

Brett's and Peters earpieces crackled into life.

'Gary reports the suspects taxi has stopped outside some sort of DVD store and has entered. He estimates that if the suspect returns straight home it would be a half hour trip based upon the traffic conditions. Arthur says proceed'.

Moving up to the back door, Peter collected the broken glass from the bulb and placed it along with the remains of the bulb he unscrewed from its housing into a plastic bag which he put into his pocket. He then screwed in a new light bulb he had along especially, careful just to screw it in enough to hold it but not illuminate it.

Mean while, Brett had taken the fibre optic camera and cable out and slip the camera end of the cable under a small gap under the back door.

An image appeared on the small 2 inch low light LCD screen showing a hallway leading away from the backdoor. Twisting the cable around they could see a small alarm pad mounted on the wall just inside the door.

‘Do you think you can deal with that?’ Brett said to Alan.

‘No problem, I know the model very well and can bypass it’.

‘We’re going in now’ Alan said into his lapel mounted microphone.

‘Acknowledged, will keep you informed on suspects movements’ Alan replied.

Peter examined the lock and after determining that it was a relatively simple model had it open swiftly. They both then entered the house quickly and quietly, closing the back door behind them.

Peter had the alarm pad dismounted quickly and expertly as the warning alarm sounded on the alarm indicating that there was a certain time frame within which to enter a code before the alarm was sounded.

It did not take Peter long to disable the system with some alligator tooth wire connections which attached the alarm system to a small console Peter operated with practiced skill.

Looking around they could not see any internal CCTV cameras. They then moved down the hall which had a door on one side leading into a kitchen, a door leading down to a cellar on the other

and then lead off into a foyer with stairs leading back up the way they had come. There was a lounge off one side of the foyer and a room that had been converted into a study of the other side.

‘I’ll take the upstairs, you take the study’ Peter said to Brett.

Moving upstairs carefully in the dark, as no lights had been left on in the house, Peter did a room by room search of the upstairs. There was a bathroom which had obviously been renovated with modern fittings including a spa bath recently. There were three other rooms, one obviously being a guest room and had the look and smell of being unused in some time. The second room had been converted into some kind of work room with books and files spread everywhere.

The third room was obviously the suspects bedroom and gave a great insight into his personality. There was a mirrored ceiling above the bed and in the closet, apart from suits and shirts there was a range of costumes and chains and whips which Peter did not want think of what the potential uses were. After a quick look through the room to determine there were no hidden safes, Peter went back to the work room.

Looking through the files, most of which appeared to relate to client dealings and accounts Peter found a hidden wall safe behind a framed diploma stating the suspects expertise in finance.

‘Suspect now leaving and getting back into the taxi which is now turning and heading back in your direction.’ Alan said through the earpiece.

‘Shit’ Peter said under his breath whilst he quickly used a stethoscope to open the safe.

Inside was a passport, cash in various denominations, bearer bonds and a series of manila folders.

Looking quickly through them, most appeared to contain information on bank accounts under various names, with the exception of one file which had a series of maps with what appeared to be shipping routes, and a bio on a man called subject alpha. Peter quickly imaged these pages with a digital camera before carefully replacing them in the correct order and closing the safe. He then headed back downstairs to see how Brett had been doing.

Brett had meanwhile determined that nothing of importance in the way of papers were in the study, which was nicely appointed with a drinks cabinet, a modern desk and nice paintings along with comfortable visitors chairs.

When Peter appeared, he had the computers CPU box cover unscrewed and half off.

‘I’m going to need a bit more time’ he said to Alan, ‘I have to install the USB device.’

‘We have a problem’ Peter said into his hidden lapel microphone.

‘OK, leave it with us, just complete the job’ Alan replied.

‘We need a diversion’ Alan said to the rest of the team.

‘We could get Gary to cause an accident’ Ralph suggested.

‘No, too risky’ Said Arthur, ‘It would mean police involvement and even though we have special branches cooperation, we do not need to cause them any unnecessary aggravation. Also we do not need to let the local bill know that special branch was involved in sorting out a traffic accident on their patch. We don’t want any attention from local coppas’.

‘I will take care of it’ Sarah said speaking up. ‘No gentlemen can resist a proposition for a drink from an attractive lady looking for a man.’

‘Even if you do say so yourself’ said Ralph mockingly with a smile on his face.

‘Just you watch’ Sarah said punching Ralph in the arm.

‘You sure you can handle this?’ Arthur said concerned.

‘No problem’ Sarah replied confidently.

‘OK, the timing will have to be perfect to avoid suspicion’ Alan said.

‘Where are you now Gary?’ Alan said into the radio.

‘About seven minutes out’ Gary replied.

‘OK go’ Alan said to Sarah, fitting her with a hidden microphone
‘We will monitor you every step of the way’.

Leaving the house by the back door and following the same route Brett and Peter had taken, Sarah hurried to the T junction street to be in time to appear to be walking around the corner on the same side of the street as the suspects house, and heading up towards the pub at the far end of the street.

‘Come on Brett’ Peter said

‘This is trickier that Ralph indicated’ Brett said trying not to fumble the wire crimper as he attached the wires from the USB device to the internals of the suspects computer.

‘2 minutes out’ Gary said.

‘Got that’ Sarah said into her cell phone starting the walk towards the corner.

‘Move it Brett’ Peter said.

‘Shit, somethings wrong, the comm. Light is not flashing like it should. Ralph are you getting anything ?’ Brett said into his microphone.

‘No, nothings coming through indicating a pairing of the Bluetooth devices’ Ralph replied. ‘Check you have wired the device to the power module in the computer correctly’

Brett started retracing the various wires he had attached, with his flashlight, making comparisons to the diagram Ralph had provided.

‘Coming into the street and i’m breaking off’ Gary said.

The team could see the taxi pull up outside the suspects house and the passenger door opened.

At that point Sarah was approaching along the street making an imagined telephone call to a girlfriend when she made a good job of appearing to trip and fall over in front of the suspect.

‘oh..’ Sarah cried as she landed on the pavement and looked up at the suspect. ‘Could you help me?’ she said holding out her hand.

‘Certainly’ he said helping her up.

‘Thank you very much’. Sarah said getting up.

‘No problem, you All right?’ he said

‘I’ll be ok, look I just found out I’ve been stood up by someone I was meeting at the pub up the road here. Would you let me buy you a drink.’ Sarah said

‘No, but thank you anyway’ The suspect replied

The light was still not flashing on the USB device causing Brett to start sweating.

‘Surely you won’t stand me up too? It’s not good to a girls ego to be refused twice in one night’. She said touching his arm.

Light still not flashing

‘Come on, just a quick drink to say thanks’ Sarah said with a look that got most men interested.

‘Look, I’m very sorry, you are very attractive, but have other plans for the evening’ he said turning to open his gate.

The light started to flash.

‘Bingo’ said Ralph. ‘Now get out of there.

Brett started reassembling the computer and replacing it carefully into position.

The suspect moved up to the front door and fumbled with his keys. Finding the right one, he inserted it into the lock.

Brett and Peter then moved quickly to the back door where peter reset the alarm panel ensuring the alarm was activated.

They just managed to close the rear door as the front door opened.

Unsetting the alarm which had started beeping its warning tone, the suspect walked towards the lounge but stopped, something was not right.

It was a moment before he realised what it was. The outside light was off. It normally shone down the hallway through the opaque pane of glass in the top of back door.

Moving down the hallway, he unlocked the back door and saw the light bulb out. Twisting it slightly it came on. Must have been loose the suspect said to himself.

Brett and Peter were waited silently holding their breath on the other side of the fence in the alleyway until they were sure the suspect had gone back inside and was not coming out to make investigations.

They then returned to the house where the team was waiting.

Sarah also returned that way joining up with Brett and Peter as they went.

Chapter 7

London England

It had been two days since the break in and the team was satisfied that the suspect had not discovered any evidence of it. There had been no sudden change in the suspects routine or any telephone calls or emails suggesting such.

The team was gathered in the guest bedroom of the old ladies house to discuss what they had discovered to date.

They had not needed to placate her as yet as they made very little disruption and gave her very brief ‘conspiratorial’ updates on their progress.

‘What have you discovered to date with regards to the tax records of Rathbone and Porter, Sarah’ Arthur said.

‘So far we have uncovered that there has been a series of regular payments made between the two companies. Overtly they appear to be for ‘consulting’ services, however the details on the invoices are vague and we cannot fathom what consulting a shipping company that specialises in wood freighting could give to a commercial chemical manufacturer.’ Sarah explained.

‘The payments are regular monthly payments, not so large as to be considered unusual, but have spiked on several occasions over the past 6 months, for which we have not yet been able to determine a reason for.’

‘Ralph, what have you been able to uncover from the suspects computer?’ Arthur asked.

‘I had started with a general look through the hard drive to get a feel for the file structure. Most of the files are unencrypted and appear to pertain to investments he makes on behalf of his clients as well as on his own behalf. This guy is a real dodgy dealer, if his clients knew what he was up to with their money he would last about five minutes as he takes some real risks.’ Ralph started.

‘OK, is there any connection with Rathbone or Porter that you could find?’ Gary asked.

‘Yes, there was. It appears that he does do some apparently legitimate work for Porter International with regards to handling some of their foreign exchange dealings, although his commission for this is considerably above what you would expect to pay through any regular merchant bank. Also, over the last six months this commission has increased by fifteen thousand pounds a month, the strange thing is, however that this additional money was gone straight back out again to an account with a bank in Budapest. On each of these days that the money was transferred, an email was sent to a hotmail account with the subject ‘Progress payment – subject alpha’ but there was no actual message body, just the subject line.’

‘Wait a minute’ Sarah said whilst rifling through her files and doing a quick calculation.

‘The stream of payments of fifteen thousand coincide perfectly with the stream of payments from Rathbone, and are exactly a match to the spike in consulting fees being paid over that period’.

‘That tallies with what we found in the safe’ Peter said. ‘The file contained some shipping maps and a brief bio of two men. The

first man had no name and is just referred to in the file as subject alpha. He appears to have worked as some sort of market trader for Altenheim Bank. The second man is a Mr Mikhael Simmons, occupation listed as a personnel consultant based here in London.' Peter continued.

'Theres a bank account number listed in his bio, does it match with the outgoing payment streams?' Peter asked

'Let me see' Sarah said taking the bio to compare to her file. 'Yes it does' she confirmed.

'Ok, then, it appears that Rathbone or Porter or Both have been using the suspect to recruit this subject alpha.

'What about these shipping maps?' Gary asked.

'The map is a medium scale map of the English channel going as far east as Kaliningrad. It shows an apparent shipping route from Kaliningrad through the English Channel and out into the Atlantic. There is a cross on the shipping route due south of Plymouth.' Peter said reviewing the map.

'The map is stamped as belonging to Porter International but there are no dates or ship names.' Peter concluded.

'The cross could represent some sort of rendezvous' Brett said

'Very possibly, but we are going to need a lot more information' Arthur said.

‘Is there anything else on the suspects computer relevant?’ Arthur asked Ralph

‘Not in relation to the maps or any shipping information, however, according to the electronic diary, the suspect has made a number of trips to Budapest recently.’ Ralph detailed.

‘Ok, then, we have three leads to follow up on. One we are going to have to continue to follow the suspect, two we need to know what the shipping map represents, which will mean covertly breaking in to Porters head office, and three, we need to follow up on this Mikhael Simmons and this subject alpha.’

‘We have movement at the suspects house’ Alan spoke up suddenly.

The team gathered around the monitor.

A car had pulled up and parked outside the suspects house. The man hopping out of the door did not match the usual clientele. He was obviously muscular and well built and had an awareness about him that suggested he had had professional training in counter surveillance.

‘He’s carrying’ said Brett, ‘See that bulge under his arm, it shows, even through his overcoat’.

‘Whats the time?’ Alan asked

‘6pm’ Peter said looking at his watch, ‘Not a time we’ve ever seen any visit before’

‘I’ve got a gut feeling about this one’ Arthur said.

‘Sarah, you and Ralph continue to monitor from here, Peter you place a tracking device on that vehicle then come back here. Brett, Gary, Myself and Alan will wait in the car. Ralph, patch the mike feed from the USB device through to our portable radio, we may need to move at a moments notice’.

The man strode up to the gate to the suspects house. He was 6ft 4” and looked very confident and had steely gray eyes.

He pressed the intercom buzzed and awaited a reply.

‘Yes, who is it?’ Barry said, annoyed at being disturbed at this time.

‘Its Michael from the firm’ the man said back into the intercom.

There was a moments hesitation and a somewhat meeker Barry said ‘come up to the front door’ and he pressed the button opening the gate.

Walking up to the front door he saw Barry Summers, an overweight balding man that matched the description he had been given.

Michael stepped into the house as if he owned it and gestured for Barry to follow him into his study. This unnerved Barry as he was used to taking charge of situations, especially in his own home. This man was from the firm however and did not look like someone that should be messed with.

‘What’s the meaning of this visit?’ Barry said clearing his throat and trying to take control of the situation but failing to have any effect on the man.

‘Nothing to worry about, routine security check.’ He said looking hard at Barry. Michael had been recruited to the firm for his ability to handle the firm’s associated such as Barry. His presence usually had the effect of putting people off their guard and making it easy to get the information he wanted from them, especially when he put a touch of menace into his demeanour.

‘We just need to make sure from time to time that those people contracted to us, such as yourself, are taking all appropriate precautions.’ Michael said.

‘I assure you I take security very seriously indeed’ Barry protested.

‘Lets see then’ Michael said taking a wand like device out from his overcoat with which he started to sweep the room.

‘Have you had any unusual occurances or visitors lately’

‘None’ Barry said.

‘I have had no new clients in the last month, as the work from the firm and my existing clients keeps me more than busy’

Michael moved over to the book case by the wall and moved the wand over the books.

‘Does anyone else come to the house?’ Michael asked

‘Just my cleaning lady, but I’m here the whole time she is and she has cleaned for me for the past 9 years, I can vouch for her, apart from that no one’ Barry said deliberately leaving out the fact that he had various ladies visit him from an escort service several evenings a week.

Moving to the desk the wand started making a slight beeping noise. The beeping got louder the closer the wand got to the computer hard drive.

Michael looked turned and looked directly at Barry. ‘Show me any and all materials you have relating to the project right now.’ Michael said.

‘There up stairs in my wall safe, quite secure I assure you’.

‘Show me’ Michael said taking a pistol from his shoulder holster and twisting a silencer on to it, then motioning Barry to take him to the safe.

‘Theres no need for this’ Barry continued to protest all the way upstairs to his work room.

After opening the safe and retrieving the file, Michael motioned Barry back down stairs to the study.

‘Sit there please’ Michael said pointing to the chair behind the desk.

Moving to the drinks cabinet he took a whisky tumbler and poured a double scotch into it. He then took out a capsule from

his pocket and emptied the contents into the drink and stirred it in.

Barry was becoming very alarmed by this stage and was drenched with sweat and terror. Barry was not one for confrontations unless he was the one doing the bullying. This had carried over from his school years where he had never had many friends and was often picked on by the older boys at the public school he attended.

So whilst Michaels back was turned, Barry reached for the gun taped under his desk and hid it and one hand under his jacket. Walking back to the desk, Michael placed the drink in front of Barry and simply said 'Drink'.

'No chance' Barry said whipping the gun out from under his jacket.

Unfortunately he was far too slow for the navy seal standing in front of him. Before Barry had the gun half out from its concealment Michael had put a bullet neatly between Barry's eyes, leaving him sitting in his chair with a look of fear and astonishment in his face with a small trickle of blood making its way down his face.

Michael was disappointed and looked disgustedly at the body in the chair. The firm needs to be more selective with the people it hires he thought to himself. It certainly shouldn't be dealing with snivelling people like the poor excuse for an operative in front of him. He could not understand why people always thought they could get the better of him with a gun, he should just have drunk the scotch and gone quietly. Michael hated to leave a mess.

Michael then pulled the hard drive out from its position under the desk and started to take it apart. It did not take long to locate the USB device that Brett had wired into the computer and he quickly pulled out the device out and crushed it under his shoe.

‘Shit, something’s gone down, I’m sure that was a silenced shot’ Gary said.

‘Did you get the tracking device in place?’ Arthur said over the radio.

‘Its magnetised up under the front left wheel arch’ Peter said sitting down haven just gotten back to the room.

‘The guys leaving’ Peter said watching the man on the monitor shut the front door and walk to the car.

‘We need to follow this guy and find out what he knows and what this ‘Firm’ is he said he worked for.

‘What direction is he heading?’ Arthur said

‘He’s pulling out and turning right into the street in front of our observation room’. Peter said. ‘He should be passing you now’

‘We’ve got him’ Gary said ‘ Well hang back and follow you directions.

Gary pulled out and turned to follow the car some distance back.

They continued to follow the target vehicle relying on Peters instructions when the vehicle turned out of site.

‘Where do you think he’s heading?’ Arthur said

‘He’s pulled onto Prince Reagent Lane’ Peter relayed.

‘That leads to London Central Airport’ Sarah said.

‘Were going to have to get closer so we don’t lose him at the airport’ Alan said.

‘Sarah, get on to inspector Jarvis and let him know what’s happening and to get someone down to Barry’s house to see what’s become of him.’ Arthur said.

Michael was sure he was being followed, he had seen the same white Ford Mondeo several times now so he quickly formulated a plan in his head to determine if he was in fact being followed, and if he was how well trained the people were.

The area of London leading up to the London Central Airport was now largely derelict and marked for demolition to make way for new stadiums for the 2012 summer Olympics. This meant there was ample opportunity to make his way through these sites on foot to the airport, which backed up onto these building sites.

Being an embassy car he was driving, he could leave it anywhere for one of the low ranked minions at the embassy to collect later. The plan had originally been to leave the car at the airport and take a helicopter to the USAF base at Alconbury which was part of the NATO transport command infrastructure.

This was, it would make it virtually impossible for anyone to track him as he would not be taking a commercial flight and would disappear into the thousands of personnel at the base. Being a Navy seal it would also not be seen as unusual to arrive at the base in this manner, especially since someone high up in the firm with considerable authority had enabled this operation.

Michael being a seal instructor often travelled throughout the world training soldiers in a number of countries, but had not been adverse to being recruited by the firm, especially since his career prospects had topped out at Lieutenant Commander due to an incident where some soldier in a third world country he was training had died in a training exercise, due to his own incompetence in Michaels mind. Unfortunately this soldier had been the son of the foreign minister of that country. Whilst the board of enquiry had cleared him of direct culpability, a career ending letter of reprimand was placed in his file. It was not long after this, that he was approached by someone from the firm, who laid out his options for the future.

Swerving the car to a stop, Michael got out and made his way with a deliberate air of authority into a boarded up warehouse block. If he was right, the warehouse complex should back directly on to the airport. Getting his mobile phone out, he called the pilot directly and told him to have the chopper waiting for immediate departure at the helipad closest to the disused warehouses at the far end of the field.

The old warehouse was cavernous and deserted and any sound echoed easily throughout the complex, which was not all bad as it made it difficult to locate where the sound came from.

Running to the far end of the warehouse he located a fire exit and forced it open. On the other side was a large expanse of ground leading up to the airport perimeter fence. Seeing there was enough ground for the helicopter to land, he instructed the pilot where to land.

Whilst he waited for the helicopter, he went back through the fire escape and hid behind a stack of old pallets.

‘Theres the car’ Brett remarked. ‘It looks like he may have ducked into that old warehouse, the boarding has been torn open’.

Getting out of the car, the four of them approached the warehouse carefully.

‘Check your weapons’ Gary instructed.

‘I’ll go in first’ Gary said after checking everyone was ready, ‘Arthur, you’re last in’

Entering the warehouse, it was immediately clear that there was very little cover, just an alcove behind an old portacom office would give any cover, so that was where he headed whilst giving the warehouse a good look over.

Michael watched the first man enter. It was obvious by the way he moved that he had military training. Michael did not fire straight away, he wanted to give the chopper a chance to land before firing warning shots.

Next through the door were two more men who took cover in the portacom building.

Gary could hear a helicopter approaching and it sounded like it was landing behind the warehouse. He went to take a step forward when a bullet ricochet off the ground in front of him.

He dived back behind the portacom, waving at Arthur not to enter as he did so.

‘That came from those pallets at the far end of the warehouse’ Brett shouted.

The chopper had now landed and was waiting for Michael.

Michael then fired of several shots at the portacom and ran through the fire escape and straight to the chopper, yelling at the pilot to lift off immediately.

Hearing the receding footsteps Gary yelled at Brett and Alan to lay down covering fire whilst he ran towards the fire escape.

As Gary made it through the fire escape he could see the chopper lifting off, but not before he got a good look at the passenger. As their eyes met Gary could see the steely determination in them that only one combat experienced soldier would recognise in another.

All Gary could do was watch the chopper disappear into the distance as the others caught up to him.

Arthur’s phone started ringing.

After a brief conversation he said to the others ‘That was Sarah. The police have been to the house and confirmed that the suspect is dead.’

‘That was a professional hit, not some hired thug’ Gary said. ‘It seems we have stumbled upon someone that someone, or some people went to great lengths to ensure was silenced’.

Chapter 8

Jamaica

The Rathbone corporate jet touched down at Kingston International airport ten minutes ahead of schedule thanks to some favourable tail winds. On board were Andrew Mathews, Doug Carruthers and James Kendall.

Doug was a senior chemist in the research division of Rathbone and James was a mining operations specialist. Ostensibly this trip had been made to review the companies subsidiary, the Orion Bauxite & Chemical Company of Jamaica.

Rathbone made use of a number of the by products made by the Bauxite mine and made healthy profits selling the primary product Bauxite. Jamaica being the worlds number two producer of the element, behind Australia.

The primary purpose of this trip however was to finalise arrangements for the final stage of the firm's latest scheme so that as the funds arrived in Jamaica from their roundabout trip from Bolivia, thanks to the efforts of Martins team on "the island", it could be filtered back to the firm's members.

All of the firm's members indirectly held shares in a Rathbone subsidiary in Brazil through complex holding company and trust structures. The money would be filtered back to the members through that subsidiary.

Loans would be made by the Bank of Jamaica to Orion which of course would never be repaid. The bank would steadily defease

these debts without a concern as it would hold a lien against the funds arriving from Bolivia.

Jamaica being a foreign sovereign nation with strict secrecy laws regarding its companies and financial institutions, the US and other foreign authorities would be none the wiser.

However, this plan would require the cooperation of a senior bank official, and it was just such a person that Andrew had been cultivating on several recent trips to Jamaica.

Mr Damerae Lawrence was the senior vice president of Investments at the Bank of Jamaica and was also extremely well connected politically. His cousin was the minister of Justice and his brother was a colonel in the Jamaican defence Force. Mr Lawrence himself was a tall well built man of African descent whose family line could be traced back to the first slave ships. His family gained significant prestige as being amongst the leaders of the rebellions which brought an end to slavery in Jamaica in the early eighteen hundreds.

Outwardly, Damerae was well spoken and during business hours was always sharply dressed in a business suit and the very picture of respectability and power, however, in the evenings, he very much liked getting back to his Rastafarian roots and could often be found in his night club enjoying the music of Bob Marley and games of poker with his closest friends. He regularly made sure he lost just enough to ensure their loyalty as well as providing them with some of the best entertainment the small island nation had to offer.

This was the way things were done in Jamaica, quietly, friendly and in the smoke filled Reggae environments of clubs. This did not mean however that when one of the group was threatened, their enemies were dealt with in the old ways of the slave trade Days. This is the primary reason no other criminal group from the Italian mafia to the Russian mob had ever gained any sort of foothold on the criminal underworld in Jamaica.

Andrew was to take Damerae on a site tour of the companies largest mine in the area of Jamaica known as 'the cockpit' which was a one our helicopter flight away.

The flight was simply stunning as the pilot kept to the coast before turning inland for the last 20 minutes of the flight. As the chopper landed, Doug and James went off to undertake their various engagements whilst Andrew requisitioned one of the nicer airconditioned jeeps on site used for getting around the mine.

Andrew drove out to one of the safe vantage points far above the bottom of the large opencast mine to observe the dynamiting of a new section of the mine.

Andrew was keeping to small talk and legitimate for the moment and awaiting the invitation that he hoped would be coming from the Jamaican. Andrew had been to Jamaica enough times to know that such business as he needed to conduct would only be discussed in the more seedy environments of Jamiacas night life.

Most people were impressed by such impressive displays as the large scale upheaval of earth caused by such dynamiting as in the mines. Surely enough the display was truly awesome, and the sound deafening. It absolutely engulfed all the senses as the

tremors rumbled through the earth with the force near to an earthquake and the sound drowned out all other noise and the earth flung high into the air during a series of timed explosions.

This spectacle thankfully had the desired effect on Demerae who insisted that Andrew join him at his club that evening for night of culture.

Andrew had received information from a reliable colleague from his old fraternity who was now involved in tax planning that Demerae had been very helpful in providing ‘efficient’ investment vehicles for their clients in return for a small fee.

Accepting the invitation, Andrew drove them both back to the helipad for the return flight to Kingston.

Later that evening Andrew left his hotel dressed very casually in an open neck shirt and slacks, but with gold cuff links for a touch of class, and made his way on foot through the evening crowds to the address Demerae had provided.

The music and laughter that flowed freely from the many clubs, bars and restaurants Andrew passed along the way lifted his spirits somewhat and helped lighten the tension he was feeling on how to close the deal with Demerae.

Entering the club on Knutsford Boulevard, an infamous street in Kingston, known for its many street side entertainers and as a good spot to get marijuana, Andrew searched through the haze of smoke and dim lighting for his quarry. Being unsuccessful he finally made his way to the bar and asked the bar man where he might find Demerae.

The bar man gave him a long and hard stare and finally motioned with his hand at two large Jamaican men at the end of the bar, and after a brief exchange in their dialect the asked Andrew to follow him.

They made their way through the crowded dance floor to the rear of the club and through a door which opened into a corridor. There were some steps leading up immediately to the right and two doors on each side of the corridor which ended in a fire exit. One of the bouncers as Andrew thought them to be motioned for Andrew to go up the stairs.

Once the door was closed, the sound difference was marked and he could finally hear himself think. There was just the heavy beat of the base to indicate there was a night club on the other side of the wall.

At the top of the stairs there was a door. One of the men knocked on the door and opened it for Andrew to step through.

Stepping into the office, Andrew thought that he had stepped through the looking glass, literally. This was not the office Andrew expected of a Bank vice president. The walls were adorned with the icons and art of the darker side of the Jamaican culture.

‘Please sit down Mr Mathews’ said Demerae.

As he did, the other two men took seats in easy chairs situated at the far end of the office, which blocked the only escape route, and

proceeded to light up joints. The room quickly filled with the acrid smell of marijuana and Andrew started to feel light headed.

‘Would you like a drink?’ he offered.

‘Bourbon please, on the rocks’. Andrew said.

Lifting up the phone, Demarae gave some orders in his own dialect.

‘Welcome to my club, It is where I like to come to relax after a day in the world of international banking, truth be told I would far prefer to be here all the time were it not for the interesting contacts to be made in that world, such as yourself for instance my man.’

There was a knock at the door and a staff member brought in a tray containing a bottle of Bourbon, two glasses and a small bucket of ice. The man placed the tray on the coffee table between where he and Demerae were sitting and left.

Demerae, placed ice in the two glasses and poured to double measures. Passing a glass to Andrew he said

‘You for instance I’m sure are not who you seem Mr Mathews’

‘Call me Andrew, please’ Andrew said taking a sip.

‘No, I prefer to keep my friends on a first name basis and my business contacts as just that’ he said winking at one of his men, who both gave short laughs and blew out plumes of smoke, making the office even more hazy.

Although there was no sense of menace or any threatening gestures of any kind, Andrew had the distinct feeling that these people could make him disappear should they so choose.

‘I’m sure you didn’t drag me out to that mine for a nice pyrotechnic display just so I could see your mining company. You were sizing me up know man for some other business, perhaps not quite ‘kosher as you people say?’

‘OK’ Andrew started, ‘I do have some business that you and your bank could help me with.’ He then went on to explain the plan he had in mind.

‘...in return for this you would be paid 0.5% of the value of the loans’ Andrew finished.

Sitting back he studied the effect his words had on the man.

‘That is a lot of money Mr Mathews, a lot to hide’

‘Yes, but the level of trade between Orion and Rathbone that already exists would be enough not to raise any eyebrows it would just show as an increase in the value of trade between the companies, and we have some very creative accountants.’

‘I believe that I can arrange what you require, and as you know, our secrecy laws and my connections will guarantee this deal will remain a matter between us. I take it I can trust the same on your side?’ Demerae said looking straight at Andrew, then at his men, ensuring Andrew got the message that he had the capability of dealing with Andrew should anything go wrong.

‘Believe me, I have some serious connections too, and the people I know would be very disappointed should anything go wrong also’ Andrew said straight back.

The two men held each others gaze for a moment, then Demerae leant back in his chair laughing ‘We have an understanding then. When would you want this arrangement to start’

‘We have the first batch of funds already in transit, lets say two weeks from today?’

‘No problem man’

‘Ok, well I have a flight to catch, send the papers for signing to this address and I will have them sent straight back’ Andrew said getting up and handing over a business card.

Andrew gulped down great lung fulls of fresh air once he left the club and it took the whole of the walk back to his hotel to clear his head.

At the hotel he informed the night clerk that he would not be staying and that he required a cab immediately to the airport.

Within the hour he was airborne in the companies private jet and on his way back to Houston. Placing the call on the satellite phone all members of the firm carried, the voice answered immediately.

‘We are all set, the shipments from our clients in Kaliningrad, being the placement stage have commenced via Porter International, and as you know, the first one made it successfully

to Bolivia. The final integration stage has now been successfully negotiated. All that remains now is for your people on the island to ensure the layering stage is successful and the funds make it to the new account in Jamaica, of which I will send you the details in the next few days.' Andrew said.

'All is well on that end, I look forward to the receipt of those details. Well done. Of course we will have to deal with Mr Lawrence once this is all over, but leave that to me.' The voice said ending the call in his usual abrupt manner.

The Island

A few weeks had now passed at the island and Steven and Ian had been making significant progress in their work. To all appearances, both Ian and Steven were quite happy on the island and had especially enjoyed the attentions of Danni and Kelly.

However, Steven had been becoming increasingly concerned at the isolation on the island and missed the night life. He was also growing increasingly concerned at the legitimacy of what they were doing.

It had gotten to the stage now that he felt he had to say something. He had decided to test the water of dinner that evening.

'How would you like to go sailing tomorrow on the skiff' Danni said to Steve sensing his tension. 'You have been doing some crazy hours down there lately.'

‘Yes, very good idea’ Martin said ‘I have received reports from the treasury officials that your work is progressing well, and I think a days break is well in order.’ He said smiling at Steven.

‘Everything still ok at your end Ian?’ Kelly said reaching for the salad bowl.

‘Going like the best Allie Oop you’ve ever seen’ Ian said using his skateboarding terminology.

‘Look, I would like to call a mate of mine just to hear a familiar voice’ Steven decided to venture.

‘You know the story, no outside communication until the project is complete’ Martin said with just a slight edge to his voice to get the point across.

‘OK, I’m just feeling a bit more cut off than I thought I would’ Steven said

‘Let me take care of that for you after dinner’ Danni said trying to sooth him.

‘Ok, sounds lovely’ Steven said putting on a front of nonchalance.

The rest of the dinner went well with the usual friendly banter they had developed and Steven made no more attempt to get permission.

That night, after Danni had left his room, Steven laid in his bed awake still feeling uneasy and starting to formulate a plan to get some time off the island.

Later that evening Danni and Martin had a brief meeting in his secret office.

‘We need to get the message across to Steven that he has to accept the fact that he’s here and to make no more such requests as at dinner tonight. Give him a little scare tomorrow’ Martin instructed.

Being an expert sailor, Danni knew just how.

The next day was another day in paradise. It rained only occasionally, and when it did it was a down pour. The monsoon season was still a few months off and Steven had no intention of being stuck here for that long.

He had noted that supplies were delivered to the island weekly by the same pilot who had flown them here, some two months ago now. He had wanted to get to speak to the pilot but each time Danni distracted him.

When Steven walked down the beach, Danni already had the sails up and was holding the small catamaran in place.

‘Hop on’ she said.

‘What about the life jackets?’ Steven enquired.

‘Oh, we don’t need those, were only going in the shallows around the island, don’t worry, I’m an excellent sailor’.

‘Ok’ Steve said jumping on to the trampoline like surface that was strung between the two hulls.

No sooner had he gotten on board and they were underway. The light skiff caught the breeze under Danni’s expert manipulation of the ropes and tiller, and was soon skimming across the water.

Danni first took the skiff directly out from the beach before making a turn and started to track around the islands coast. It was a small island and Danni mentioned it should only take about twenty minutes to do a full circuit.

At first Steven could see the bottom of the sea through the crystal clear waters, but as they got further out, the water changed to a deeper blue and the bottom disappeared. This made Steven uneasy as he had rarely ever been on any sort of boat, and on this one there was a distinct lack of anything to really hold on to.

The scenery as they circled the island was absolutely beautiful and the sea stretched away from the island in all directions with not another speck of land in sight.

‘Don’t you feel a bit cut off here?’ Steven chanced his arm with Danni

‘Look, were here to do a job and we need to rely on each other’ Danni said straight back.

‘Its important work and we just need to get on with it, and you are being paid very well’.

‘Yes, but all the same, surely you and I could steel away for just a night back in Subic Bay, you must be feeling it too, and I’ve seen you talk with the pilot’ Steven thought he had developed a relationship with Danni and that she would surely come around to his way of thinking.

At that point Danni gave a sudden pull on the rope she was holding and at the speed they were going the skiff made a violent change in direction almost tipping over.

Before Stevens brain could determine what had happened he found himself floundering in the water and trying desperately to stay afloat. Steven did know how to swim, and his lack of physical condition was making him tire quickly.

Mean while Danni had righted the skiff and was now circling around him just out of reach.

Steven started panicking and screaming for help as he felt himself losing the battle to stay afloat.

Danni timed her rescue perfectly, bring the skiff alongside just as Steven was about to go under for the last time.

She helped him back on board and Steven laid there gasping for breath for what seemed like an age, shielding his eyes from the blinding sun.

A shape loomed over him blotting out the sun. When he could finally focus his eyes he could see Danni smiling down at him.

‘Now lets have no more silly talk. As I said we ARE stuck here together for the duration of this project and we must work together nicely ok?’ she said

‘Now lets go back to the house and get you dried off and rubbed down.’ She said cupping his face gently with one hand in an ‘affectionate’ manner, but her eyes were anything but.

Steven had clearly got the message but his disquiet had only grown.

Chapter 9

London, England

After the incident at the warehouse the team had decided that there was no more need for surveillance at the house of the now deceased Barry Summers. A thorough investigation by the metropolitan police and team had failed to turn up any further relevant information except to note that the file in the safe that Peter had imaged was missing.

The team packed up their operation at the old ladies house, who was turned out to be very disappointed that they would no longer be there as she had not had so much fun in many a year, and thanked her for her cooperation by providing her with a prepaid holiday package to Majorca for her and a couple of her closest friends. Not to forget Lottie, they also provided a voucher to a cat hotel for the duration of the holiday.

The team then gathered back at the central London flat to discuss the next move.

‘Were the police able to determine who was on board the helicopter, or who chartered it?’ Arthur asked.

‘No, they ran in to a brick wall from the US air force. The charter was a cash job, and apart from a very vague description, the pilot knew nothing. The helicopter was cleared for landing at the airbase, but the controllers on duty had no idea for the reason behind the flight and had no idea who was on board, just that there was high level clearance from the Pentagon’.

‘Do you think the US government is involved in this?’ Peter speculated

‘No, I think though that whoever is behind this laundering operation has some very good connections’ Arthur said. ‘I spoke to Roger Tunnicliffe, and he said that the enquiries he made had simply got the response that independent contractors are often used now days to ferry personnel about and that independent paramilitary firm’s had permission to use their bases. They had simply not been able to turn up any paper work on who had authorised the landing except that it had been made in conjunction with one of those para military firm’s. When questioned, that firm simply denied they had requested any such flight’. Arthur said

‘They are continuing enquiries though and will let us know if anything turns up.’

‘I would say it was clear then, that they were using Mr Summers purely as a recruitment consultant and that he did not really know much more and that whoever is behind this was just clearing up a loose end.’ Peter surmised.

‘We have got three good leads, however. Firstly, the Porter International Map, secondly, this Mr Mikhael Simmons and his subject alpha, and thirdly the Andrew Mathews of the Rathbone Chemical company.’ Sarah summarised.

‘So the next courses of action to follow up then are to organise a break in to Porter International to see what this map means, to make a trip to Budapest to track down this Mikhael Simmons, and finally a trip to the US to investigate this Mr Mathews.’ Alan stated.

‘I think the Mathew connection in the US will require all of us working together in the US once we have more information from Porter and Simmons. So that should be left to last.’ Arthur stated.

‘Gary, how do you think we should handle the other two leads?’ Arthur asked.

‘Well, I think Ralph, Sarah and Peter should handle the Porter lead as that will require specialist entry skills, computer skills and analysis skills’.

‘You, myself, Brett and Alan should track down this Mr Simmons in Budapest and find out what subject Alpha is all about.’ Gary finished.

After landing at the airbase, Michael made his way directly to the special forces hanger at the far end of the airfield. It was normal for special forces to have their accommodations and operations separate and distinct from the regular forces.

The hanger was non descript and there was nothing that communicated that it was the home of the US special forces based in England. The base existing as both a staging post for the middles east ‘central’ and ‘African’ commands and as a joint training and coordination centre with the British SAS.

Michael made his way into one of the special communications rooms where he could guarantee some privacy and placed a call.

The call was answered immediately and the ‘voice’ said ‘Was the job completed successfully?’

‘Yes, but we have a problem’ Michael said.

‘The subject refused to cooperate and tried to draw down on me, so I had no choice but to shoot him’.

‘Also it appears that someone may have been on to him. There was a customised device wired into his computer, something I’ve not seen before, and definitely not a regular device used by us the British or anyone else I’ve known.’ Michael said.

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line before the voice said ‘OK, that does not necessarily mean that they are on to us, they may have been investigating him for something else, it may even be a non governmental private agency. Were you observed at all?’

‘Yes, I got out of there as soon as I had retrieved the file.’

‘However, I was tailed, so in order to get an idea of who it may have been I improvised.’

Michael went on to describe the encounter at the warehouse.

‘It is my conclusion that they definitely had some form of military training’ he concluded.

‘Very well. I think the next step must be to tie up our loose end in Budapest. I will make travel arrangements for you over the next few days. Mikhael must be eliminated as we cannot take the risk

that these people were actually on to Barry's involvement in the plan and had learned about Mikhael'

'I will ensure that your next official scheduled is delayed until your trip to Budapest is completed.'

'Very well, I will await your orders' Michael said.

Bolivia

David Curruthers got up from his desk and made his way to the water cooler. He had been becoming increasingly nervous that his excuses for his frequent absences from the office of late had been viewed with some scepticism.

There were two FBI staff in the Bolivian office which was located in the US embassy and whilst David did not have an official boss in the embassy, being the senior of the two FBI agents, he did have to submit regular reports on his activities.

Most of Davids work consisted of vetting people who regularly travelled to the US and neighbouring countries and were suspected of involvement in criminal cartels and drugs. Much of this work of late David had delegated to the junior agent which had kept him out of the office and his hair. Their communications were mainly by telephone with only the regular office catch-up, of which today was one.

The other agent was Bob Jenkins who also happened to be at the water cooler.

‘How long do you think Aarons going to be here for?’ Bob queried

Aaron Hodge was a SAC (Special Agent in Charge) based at the Langely headquarters of the FBI and was in charge of foreign based agents in South America. He made regular trips to visit his agents and check that everything was in order.

‘He is scheduled in next week and should only be here for two days as he is making a sweep of the offices in the region. David said

‘I don’t expect he would want to stay longer as his wife recently had a new baby and I can’t imagine she would be happy with his absence long’ he continued.

‘Great, I never feel good with the brass getting in the way too much particularly brass like Aaron’.

Aaron was well known for being an absolute stickler for procedure and for knowing the book inside out. Most of the agents in the region had to be inventive in their ‘following’ of procedures given the nature of the people they had to deal with. Things were done very differently by the South Americans. So Aarons strict and unforgiving nature for breaches of the book were not taken well and his visits were universally hated.

‘I’m going to send him out with you most of the time he is here as I have a large lead I am working on with the Bolivian Police organised crime unit.’

‘You’re a real Pal mate’ Bob said sarcastically.

‘Just arrange for him to meet with some of the local mid level Bolivian police you’re working with and make sure the files are up to date.’

Bob still looked unimpressed

‘Look, he’s probably going to want to spend a fair bit of time with the ambassador and senior officials any way, you know, networking and such like to help with his next promotion. You know he’s up for section head soon, one step below a deputy director ship, and you need real connections and networks for that.’ David said slapping Bob on the shoulder and heading back to his office.

The real reason David was palming Aaron off on Bob was that he was having problems with the Conswego and could not guarantee that he would be in the office as he needed to get the problem sorted pronto as the next shipment was due in just over a week.

The corrupt officials that Conswego said he had in his pocket and that made the use of the bank possible were apparently complaining at their level of remuneration now that they had seen the level of funds involved.

As David had not been able to obtain the identities of these officials from Conswego, or arrange a meeting in La Paz as

Conswego refused to leave his power base in the jungle, David had no choice but to head back out to the drug lords base and deal with the situation.

He had strict instructions from the person he only knew as the voice that very little else was on the table and that life could now get very difficult for these people should they get too big for their boots.

It was this that David was dreading putting across, as Conswego and his people did not respond well to intimidation of any sort. David now really believed that he was earning the money he was being paid.

The next day David set off on his trip to Conswego's base in the jungle with a deep sense of foreboding. The only thing that he had really to protect him was the assurance of severe consequences of the firm on which he was gambling his safety.

Whilst David did feel the firm, of which he actually knew little, could no doubt carry out these threats, it was still an extremely difficult situation in which he found himself.

The drive was once again pleasant to begin with, but he knew the trip would once again turn difficult and tedious in its final stages.

David commenced his counter surveillance techniques as soon as hit the main highway east, taking off ramps, winding through some B roads before once again re-entering the highway, but he could not shake the sense that something was not right on this trip.

He dug into his pocket and took out a pack of cigarettes. Flipping the top he pulled one out and stuck it in his mouth whilst keeping one hand on the wheel. Tucking the pack back into his shirt pocket he dug the lighter out of his other pocket and flicked open the lid to start the small flame.

Lighting the cigarette, he took a long drag, once again giving up on his latest attempt to quit. He immediately felt better once the effect of the tobacco hit his blood stream.

Rounding the next turn in the road however, he discovered his relief was short lived. About half a mile in the distance he could see a police road block made up of a van and two chase cars. There were road cones narrowing the traffic down to one lane. The strange thing that struck David was that this was a rather unusual place to for a road block, as well as an unusual time , being about one thirty in the afternoon. Also there was very little traffic on the road.

As David approached the road block, there were only two other cars ahead of him, both of which were waved through by an officer. As David's turn came to drive through, however, the officer indicated for him to pull over to the side of the highway.

'Bugger.....Bugger,Bugger' David muttered to himself as he stubbed out the cigarette in the vehicles ash tray.

The officer approached his window and tapped. Opening the window all David saw was stars and felt a sudden blinding pain as the officer struck him full in the face with his baton.

Before David could react, his car door was flung open and he felt himself being dragged from the vehicle. He landed face down on the hot tarmac with two more officers leaning down on him and securing his hands in handcuffs.

David started to protest that he was from the US embassy but all this brought him was another punch to the stomach which left him winded and gasping for breath. Although David had now been in country for two years and spoke passable Spanish, he did not recognise the dialect the officers were speaking. One of the placed a bag over his head and said in heavily accented English ‘shut up, stop asking questions.’.

He was then dragged to the back of the police van and thrown face down on the floor.

He sensed two other officers hop in and sit down with their feet resting upon him. There must have been seats running lengthways down each side of the rear of the van.

He heard the rear doors being slammed shut and the sound of two officers walking to the front of the van and climbing in, starting the engine.

The van roared off with sirens blaring, but these were soon turned off. The van must have travelled for what David guessed was fifteen minutes before turning off the highway . The side road was full of pot holes and in poor repair and David winced each time the van lurched over one, causing his swollen head to hit the floor. This brought a series of laughter and banter from the officers sitting over him.

It must have been about another twenty minutes travelling time before the van came to halt. The rear doors were forced open and David was dragged from the van and man handled up some steps and into a building. The coolness and echo from the floor suggested that it was a stone building of some type.

David was walked down a corridor and into a room that must be in the rear of the building and placed in a chair.

He heard a door closing and for a while there was silence.

Finally a heavily accented voice spoke and said ‘so you think you can use our banking system for a mere pittance for your money laundering schemes Mr Curruthers’

‘Who are you, and do you know what my government will do to you?’ David said trying to muster authority in his voice.

The man simply laughed at this and said

‘Who I am is unimportant, and I do not think you want your government involved in this any more than you do!’

‘Now I say again, do you really think we will let you get away with using our financial system so cheaply. I think a renegotiation is in order?’

‘I negotiate with Conswego only’ David protested.

‘Conswego needs to know no more of this, and if you want to live you will keep this negotiation to yourself. Now we want another 10 million dollars US for our part in this’ the voice went on.

Feeling a bit more confident that his life was not immediate danger, David said

‘You may not fear my government, but the people I work for do not suffer from the same, shall we say, legal or moral boundaries when it comes to dealing with people like you. We have already made a deal through Conswego and that will stand unless you want my firm to deal with you.’

There must have still been one of the guards in the room as David suddenly found himself crashing to the floor after a powerful punch to the side of his head which all but knocked him out cold. The pain was incredible and he soon found himself tasting blood which was streaming down his face.

‘You do not even know who you are dealing with. Now I am going to give you a bank account number and arrange for your return to your vehicle. Should the funds not be transferred in the next week, your little scheme will come to end, as will you.’

‘OK, I’ve been authorised to go to 3 million US, ten million and I will be taken out by my own people’.

There was a period of silence, then the heavily accented voice said,

‘Very well 5 million US’, there was a foot forced down on his throat at this point and David managed to gasp out ‘OK 5 million’.

‘Now I will arrange for your safe return to your vehicle, and remember this was just between us.’

Chapter 10

Budapest

Arthur, Gary, Alan and Brett arrived in Budapest on a direct flight from London at 11am. Having pre-cleared customs in London via the diplomatic channel, they were able to bypass the regular customs channels at the airport and head directly to the rental car office.

Having pre-cleared customs, the team had not had to declare their small arms and special surveillance equipment.

Gary had made the arrangements for this trip and being a love of nice cars he had organised for a new model Audi A8. This had the passenger space, functionality and power that made it the ultimate choice.

Being the winter months, the temperature was a balmy minus 1 degrees centigrade and each of the team had made sure they had warm clothing and thick overcoats. By the time they made it to the car they all had a light dusting of snow on their shoulder.

They quickly stowed their luggage in the boot and got into the car. Gary fired up the powerful V8 engine, enjoying the noise it made and turned the heater on full blast. Given the power capacity of the engine it did not take long for the temperature inside the vehicle to become quite comfortable.

Gary punched the name of the hotel into the GPS and pulled out of the car park, following the automated instructions.

The hotel they had chosen was a four star hotel in the centre of the city on the left bank of the Danube river which cut the city in two.

Alan marvelled at the architecture along the route. He had originally wanted to be an architect and appreciated the mixture of old roman and later Ottoman influences, but had ended up in the army after accepting a dare from his mates to come along to a recruiting weekend. He had quickly proved himself to the recruiters who had gone all out to get him to sign up.

After getting to the hotel and each had checked in and placed their luggage in their rooms and freshened up, they agreed to meet at the hotels bar. Gary was the first to arrive and ordered himself a beer from the lone bar tender on duty at that time. He then found a cosy set of four chairs around a coffee table in the corner. The bar décor was modern and what one would expect from a modern four star hotel. There were touches of the cities rich history still remaining however with the high vaulted ceilings and the many frescoes depicting that history.

The others arrived one by one and settled into the chairs with their drinks.

‘So what’s the plan’ Brett was first to ask.

‘Well according to the file Peter retrieved from Barry’s house, this Mikhael Simmons was some sort of recruitment consultant. Whether that means he worked for himself or a firm of consultants is unclear. So I suggest that we each take a set of names from this list and start finding all the Mikhael Simmons we can and compare them to the file photo.’ Arthur said.

Arthur then produces a list containing the names of all the recruitment agencies in the city, and the addresses of all the people with the name M Simmons in the city. There were 62 recruitment agencies listed and 27 people by the name of M Simmons.

So each member of the team had about 23 possibles to follow up on.

The lists of people and agencies were spread right throughout the city and the list was split up accordingly so each team member could concentrate on one part of town. At this point they split up and decided to meet back up for a late dinner around 9pm, This would give each member of the team a chance to try and catch the individuals on the list at home in the early evening.

Being a Tuesday, the city was in full swing with people out and about, so each decided to start with the list of recruitment agencies as their quarry would likely be at work at this point in the day, being early afternoon.

Although the city retained much of its old buildings, the city had undertaken a significant modernisation of its infrastructure and most of the buildings facades had been renovated since the country had joined the European Union. In fact the city has since flourished and was well on its way to reclaiming its reputation and importance as one of the central hubs of Europe. Its main form of public transport was the old tram system which had undergone an upgrade in recent years and now made it easy to get around the many parts of the city.

The team had been able to divide the city roughly into quadrants, given the dispersal of the leads they had.

Alan had the right bank of the Danube extending south of the Széchenyi Chain bridge, Bret had the north quadrant also on that side of the river, Gary had the north quadrant on the left bank, leaving Arthur with the south quadrant of the left bank.

They had chosen to leave the car at the hotel and travel about on public transport in the hopes of catching sight of their quarry in that way, given much of the cities populace go about that way.

Alan had decided to commence the search in his quadrant by starting in the city centre and fanning out to his leads from there. It was still very chilly out and there was also a lot of ice about so although one wanted to get to their destination quickly, it paid to take care unless one wanted to land on the hard cobbles.

The people of the city were generally friendly and helpful but because of the cold really just wanted to get back indoors, so Alan found that the many street news vendors snuggled up in their tin shelters amongst their many magazines and newspapers to be the most helpful, although this did mean buying a lot of unnecessary papers and packs of sweets, the later of which he pocketed and the former being dumped in the nearest out of site trash can.

All of the leads in this part of the city were recruitment agencies, the first of which was located not to far from the start of his quadrant. It was a large modern building of approximately 8 stories. The address he had indicated the firm was located on the fifth floor. The lift worked thankfully and he ascended to the fifth floor emerging in to a reception area where a woman sat behind

a large reception desk with the firm's name in large letters on the wall behind her.

Approaching he introduced himself, but unfortunately the woman did not appear to speak English. He made his best efforts to communicate his question, producing the photo but was making no headway when a lady dressed in a crisp business suit walked into reception and asked in accented English what the problem was.

Showing the photo he asked if Mr Mikhael Simmons worked for the firm, or if she knew of him. She shrugged her shoulders and said no but wished him well in his search.

This was the routine for the rest of the first day, and by the time it was time that most of the cities inhabitants would be making their way home for the night he decided to try some of the private addresses on his list and boarded a tram with what seemed like a hundred other people stuffing the interior to capacity.

Alan thought that he was going to miss his stop being jammed in where he was, and in fact he did, having to wait until the next one until there was room enough for him to manoeuvre his way through the bodies packing the interior of the tram.

Making his way back to the street his first house was located on he found it to be filled with old style pre soviet era terraced houses. This must have been one of the few streets left in tact this way after the allied and then soviet bombardments that nearly reduced the city to total ruin in world war two whilst it was occupied by the Germans.

The team had concocted a story that should they come face to face with their quarry they would say they had been referred by Barry Summers as a specialist recruiter. They were not to give any further details but were to arrange a meet at time that would suit, then fall back and observe and if necessary follow the target.

Knocking on the door, Alan's ears were assaulted by loud music of some description that was more yelling and banging of drums than any regular beat of any music that he had ever heard. The house was obviously occupied by students given the appearance of the young man in front of him and the state of mess in the hall behind him. After a brief exchange in broken English establishing the fact the target did not live there the young man shut the door and could be hear yelling something at his flatmates in his own language as he receded back down the hall.

It was getting dark now, and Alan thought he would try one more address before heading back to the hotel.

The address was two streets over from the current one he was on and he decided to cut down an alley between the streets.

The alley was poorly lit and in deep shadow and he was about halfway down before he spotted some youths ahead of him. It was more the way they looked at him than anything about their stance that set alarm bells of in his head, so he decided to reverses his tracks and head back out of the alleyway rather than risk a possible confrontation with the three young men in front of him.

Giving the alleyway around him a quick scan he could see that the youths must use it for shooting up as there were a lot of used

syringes lying about amongst the piles of garbage cans and discarded cardboard boxes they had fashioned into a crude shelter.

It was this crude construction hidden in the shadows of the alley way that had shielded the youths from him until he was almost upon them.

He had not gotten very far back down the alley when the three young men surrounded him and started jostling him and making obvious demands in their language.

They had picked Alan for an easy mark, mistaking him for some middle aged businessman who they could easily overpower and rob. They did not however count on Alan being an ex special forces soldier.

The different thing about special forces training is that you are trained to fight dirty. One of the rituals that must be endured in the SAS is old fashioned street fighting with fists and knives or whatever else that may be at hand and could be used as a weapon. The object of this training was survival as one did not survive one of these fights in the real world without having the guts to go all the way and maim or kill ones opponent.

Whilst such training was carefully planned and supervised, injuries often did occur requiring hospital treatment, however no one ever complained and as a result the soldiers that made it through to be badged as SAS could handle themselves in unarmed combat with confidence.

Alan at first let himself be jostled whilst taking the measure of the young thugs around him and awaiting the opening he needed to

frighten but not harm too much these thugs. Alan, although having left the SAS was still quite fit and had forgotten none of his training.

His opening came when one of the youths produced a knife and made a lunge for him. With his still fast reflexes Alan grabbed the arm, spun the youth around applying enough pressure to cause the young man to cry out in pain and drop the knife, which he quickly kicked well out of the way up the alley way.

He then forced the youth into one of the others forcing them to collapse in a heap on the ground. The third youth took the chance to deliver a punch to Alan's mid section, followed by one to his head.

The punch to his mid section inflicted no real damage, but the one to the head did draw a little blood. Alan then turned round to confront this youth and delivered him a resounded punch which knocked him out cold.

Whilst the other youths were still untangling themselves and picking themselves up, Alan retreated up the Alley way and retrieved the knife which gleamed in the low light of the alleyway. He then manipulated the blade in such a way as to make the other youths think twice about taking him on, even with their drug induced bravado. They quickly decided to retreat in the opposite direction leaving their mate where he was on the ground.

Not wanting to wait around for the possibility of the youths returning with reinforcements, Alan discarded the knife in a nearby trash can and made his way to the tram stop, wiping the blood of the side of his head as he did so.

After showering and changing at the hotel, Alan made his way down to the restaurant where they had all agreed to meet. Alan found Brett already there.

‘God, whatever happened to you?’ Brett said concerned looking at the nice bruise on Alan’s face.’

‘Taught a few street thugs a lesson’ Alan said.

Gary and Arthur turned up at that point, both shocked at Alan’s appearance.

They enjoyed a very nice steak dinner with conversation turning to everyone’s attempts at tracking down the target. All had had no luck at turning up any leads on the location of their quarry, so decided to have an early night and continue their quest the next day.

The next day they all rose early and after a brief breakfast at the hotel’s restaurant, they departed to carry on with their lists.

Arthur’s enquiries started with the remainder of the recruitment firm’s on his list and was having the same luck as yesterday until a women at a recruitment firm specialising in the finance sector indicated that yes she did recognise the photo while not happy to provide an address, was happy to pass on his telephone number. It turned out the recruitment agency used Mikhael as a specialist head hunter to poach staff from other companies.

Alan then called inspector Jarvis at New Scotland yard to see if he could get an address for the telephone number. At that point

he decided to call the others in from their searches and await the call from the inspector.

During the wait then team played Texas Hold'em poker with one dollar stakes in Arthur's suite. Alan being an expert card sharp since his high school days soon had the others in his debt as he cleaned up hand after hand, until everyone else gave in and threw their cards down and just sat back enjoying a drink.

Their banter was interrupted by the shrill ring of the old style telephone in the room which Arthur answered on the second ring. There was a brief exchange during which Arthur took down some details using the hotel stationery.

Arthur replaced the receiver tearing off the slip of paper from the jotter pad. 'We have an address he announced.

'Lets do a drive by' Gary said jingling the rental car keys in his pocket.

They, then all descended to the basement car park in the hotel lift and went to the vehicle, ensuring their cell phones all had plenty of charge in case they had to follow the target separately on foot at some point.

The address was in the 16th district of Budapest known as Kerulet and turned out to be a middle class suburb containing detached housing and tree lined avenues.

The targets address was modest two story house situated with a front garden and amongst trees.

It was decided that there was no other alternative but to question the man directly using intimidation tactics to find out about subject alpha. So they parked the car and Arthur, Gary and Brett got out, leaving Alan with surveillance. They did not want to give the target any alarm seeing Alan with a bruise.

They approached the house and rang the door bell. After a short while, they could hear footsteps from inside. The door opened to reveal a man in his thirties of medium build and dressed well.

‘Yes, can I help you gentlemen?’ he said.

‘You are Mikhael Simmons?’ Arthur asked

‘Yes’ the man replied

‘I was given your name by a friend at this agency’, Arthur said passing over a compliments card he had taken from the reception of agency that gave him the lead yesterday.

‘I believe you are a very good at head hunting?’ Arthur continued ‘forgive us for not calling in advance, but we prefer to deal directly and face to face in such matters’

‘Right’ the man said unsure but his concerns were overcome by the production of the referral from the agency and he invited the men in.

They went through to a home office that was very impressively appointed with all the modern equipment.

The office was spacious and had a nice view of the garden and street.

Sitting behind his desk, he said ‘Who is it you are after?’

‘You actually’ Gary said taking over the conversation.

‘What?’ Mikhael said confused and growing slightly concerned as he looked at the bright penetrating eyes of the man.

‘Who is subject alpha and who wanted him for what purpose?’ Gary said directly.

‘I have no idea what you are talking about and who are you anyway?’ Mikhael said growing quite fearful. How did these men know about the project.

‘Just get out, this meeting is over, I want you out of my house now!’ Mikhael said mustering all the authority he could.

‘Now, we can do this the easy way or the hard way’ Gary said taking a syringe out of his pocket which just contained water.

‘This is a very strong truth serum, and it will make you talk, unfortunately it will leave you with some brain damage’ Gary said getting up and moving towards Mikhael.

At the same time Brett drew his gun and aimed it at Mikhael ‘Don’t think of doing anything silly’ Brett said.

‘Look, you don’t know who you’re dealing with. These people who I only know as ‘The Firm’ hired me through a contact in London...’ Mikhael was cut off by Gary saying

‘Yes we know Mr Summers’

‘Then you must know these people are not to be messed with, please?’ Mikhael said in a near panic as Gary loomed over him with a needle.

‘Who did you hire for them?’ Gary pressed

‘Ok, a man by the name of Steven Jerkovich, he was a specialist market trader working for the Altenheim bank’

‘Continue’ Said Gary

‘He was renowned for the complex deals he could put together and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the international trading systems. I befriended him and talked him in to working for the firm. He agreed, and they arranged for his travel. That’s all I know, I swear’. Mikhael protested.

‘Do you have a file on this man?’

‘Put it on this’ Gary said passing him a memory stick.

Mikhael plugged it into his computer, clicked a few time with his mouse causing the small LED on the memory stock to flash indicating a file was being copied. He then unplugged the memory stick and handed it back, which Gary placed in his pocket.

At this point, back in the car, Alan noticed a BMW with dark tinted windows driving slowly up the street. It was the only vehicle that Alan had seen move along the street during the time he had been there.

The vehicle moved past him and stopped in the middle of the road. After a moment Alan was alarmed to see the barrel of a gun being poked out of the drivers window.

Before Alan could get his own window down and aim his gun, there was a single shot from the gun.

Then a series of shots as the person switched to full automatic.

By this time Alan had his gun out and took several shots at the vehicle which then roared of into the distance.

Just prior to this, back in the house,

‘How do you contact this ‘Firm’ Gary asked.

‘I have a number memorised of a contact that I call from public pay phones when I have news to report’

Suddenly Gary noticed a red dot appear on the mans chest.

Knowing full well what it was, he dived for the floor yelling at the others to do so just as there was a small tinkle of glass, and Mikhael has flung backwards out of his chair.

A series of shots then rang out from what Gary recognised a silenced HK MP5 SD.

Everything on the desk exploded upwards as the rounds impacted on everything they hit.

Then there was the unmistakeable sound of rounds coming from a Glock.

Alan was giving covering fire.

A screech of tyres was then heard as the others made their way down the hall and burst out the front door, guns drawn.

They rushed to the car and piled in and losing no time waiting for everyone to buckle up, Alan hit the accelerator and roared off in pursuit.

The BMW had disappeared around the corner at the end of the street, but was soon back in view again as they rounded the corner.

The Audi A8 was a match for the 7 series BMW so it would come down to a test of driving skills.

The BMW turned on to the M3 main road heading out of the city and accelerated, weaving in and out of the traffic on the highway.

It was not long before they left the city behind and were racing into the rural country side to the east of Budapest. The BMW being lighter by 3 bodies started to pull away around the winding hill roads out of the city.

As they roared over the crest of a big hill they had been climbing they could see the BMW about kilometre ahead of them now further down the hill.

At the same time they saw a helicopter descending towards an open field about 2 kilometres into the country side from the bottom of the hill.

They saw the BMW skid to a halt, and a man leap from the vehicle and run into the field waving frantically at the chopper.

It was now a race to see how close the team could get before the chopper landed.

Just as the chopper touched down, the Audi skidded to halt and the team leaped out of the vehicle.

The chopper started to lift off and Gary again saw the face of the same man who fled in the chopper in London.

‘Damn’ Gary swore, I will not let that prick get away again like that, ‘I swear it’ Gary said fuming.

‘You better get on to inspector Jarvis, Arthur’ Alan said ‘as we have a fair amount of explaining to do to the local authorities’

‘You’re right’ Arthur said digging into his pocket for his mobile phone and dialling the number.

Chapter 11

London, England

Sarah, Ralph and Peter gathered back at the flat after seeing the others off at the airport, to decide how best to follow up on the Porter International lead.

‘We are going to need to get access to their server, so we are going to need to see how easy it is to get access to their building.’ Peter said.

‘How about the laptop of Anthony Roberts?’ Sarah said.

‘So long as he plugs his laptop into their head office LAN, which I suspect he does, being the chief operating officer, I can access it using the hack we place into their server.’ Ralph said.

Inspector Jarvis had provided them with information, that the senior executive in the photo with Andrew Currthers of Rathbone boarding the corporate jet’ was in fact the COO of Porter, a Mr Anthony Roberts.

‘Where is their head office located?’ Ralph asked

‘In Southwark, not far from Waterloo station, they have there own building on Great Suffolk Street’. Sarah replied.

‘Ok, this is going to have to be an inside job’ Peter said. ‘Someone is going to have to get in there and arrange for the devices to be planted.’

‘We don’t have time to find a disgruntled employee at a senior enough level, so we are going to have to concoct a way of doing it ourselves’. Peter surmised.

‘I had been having the same thought’ Sarah said ‘and have been looking at their situations vacant. They are currently looking for a contractor to work as an independent eye in their internal audit team’ Sarah said looking up from her laptop screen which was displaying this advertised position.

‘Why that’s perfect’ Peter said, ‘We will need to arrange a good cover story for you’.

‘That will not be a problem, I have spoken with Roger, the senior partner at our London office, and he has arranged some outstanding references from our office.’ Sarah said.

‘Roger has agreed to contact the senior manager on my behalf. The cover story being that the firm likes it senior associates to be seconded to industry on such assignments to broaden their networks and gain fresh perspectives. Of course I will be using an alias.’ Sarah continued. ‘I think the best course of action is for me to get in there and one evening arrange for your two to gain entry on some pretext.’

‘Sounds like the beginnings of a good plan’ Peter said, ‘but how will you get out of the engagement without raising suspicion after only being in the job such a short while’ Peter asked

‘There will be a ‘family emergency’ of some serious nature and Roger will arrange for a replacement from the firm.’ Sarah explained.

They continued to talk small details for another half hour before turning in for the night.

The next morning Sarah outlined her request to Roger, who was more than happy to make the arrangements. He rang back shortly afterwards saying that given the firm's considerable government connections and reputations in the audit profession, they would be more than happy to see you this afternoon at one o'clock. In fact, the interview would merely be a formality.

So at 1pm sharp, Sarah arrived on the ninth floor reception of the Internal Audit division of Porter International Shipping. She was dressed very sharply in an expensive woman's business suit, with the skirt hem at a length, not too short to be inappropriate or unprofessional, but at a length to show off her shapely legs and accentuate her figure.

This had an immediate impact on the man who was to interview her. Sarah recognised the look of attraction in a man's eyes and was well used to turning heads, which of course she did as she followed him through the open plan office to a meeting room which had a fantastic view of Waterloo station and, in the middle distance, a glimpse of the Thames river.

'We consider ourselves very lucky to be offered someone of your calibre, Miss Jones' the man said.

'Not at all, my firm values considerably the opportunities for its staff to gain valuable industry experience in reputable firm's such as Porter International, so I thank you Mr Paulson' Sarah said showing just the right mixture of respect and seduction.

‘Please, call me Rae’ the man said, Sarah clearly having a big impact on him.

They continued to chat for a while, and Rae was considerably impressed by Sarahs knowledge of auditing and internal control systems in the modern Sarbanes Oxley era of corporate governance.

‘Well, that covers everything, do you have any questions Sarah?’ Rae asked.

‘Where will I be located, and obviously I will require some measure of privacy given the nature of the work, and I will need a tour of the building’ Sarah said.

‘Of course, as you saw on the way in, most of the staff work in a functional open plan environment, but given the nature of your assignment, I have arranged a spare office for you on the far end of the floor. You will be able to interview the people you need to in privacy there’.

Ostensibly, the role Sarah had been ‘seconded’ for was to analyse the level of knowledge of the companies managers to the companies internal control system, and report on what gaps there may be in the companies internal control and audit systems.

Concluding the interview, Sarah was taken on a tour of the building, starting with the companies personnel division where a security pass was made up for her. This pass just happened to also include limited access to the IT department on the twelfth floor, but not to the secure server rooms.

Sarah was introduced to many of the companies senior managers, and was even shown to the executive suites on the top floor where the CEO, CFO and COO all had their offices.

All the time Sarah was making a good mental note of the layout of the building to report back to Peter, so that he may formulate the plan once she had gotten entry for him and Ralph.

It was around 4:30pm by the time the tour was completed and they arrived back at Sarah's new office.

'I hope you will be quite comfy in here whilst you are with us' Rae said. 'If there is anything I can help you with, please don't hesitate to ask me'

Rae was clearly lingering hoping for some invitation for a drink, towards which he had been angling all afternoon during the tour, commenting how lovely and professional Sarah was.

Sarah left him hanging for just long enough to ensure she had this man in her hands, 'why, sure I would love to. There are some things I would like to talk about before I start officially tomorrow, however I would like to get home first and change. Tell you what, lets make it a night on the town and you can show this Kiwi girl what London night life is really like'.

'Fantastic' Rae said not believing his luck, 'shall I meet you at the local at 7pm for a drink and we will take it from there.

He gave Sarah instructions on where the local pub was and she flashed him one of her smiles that promised a possible great night

in store and Rae headed off towards his office on such a high he could have been on drugs.

Sarah left shortly after and headed straight back to the apartment, where Peter and Ralph were waiting.

Sarah then outlined the afternoon's events and a plan for the evening that required Ralph and Peter to lift Rae's wallet while she kept him busy. They could then copy the security strip on his pass card, which included access to the server room, whereas Sarah's did not. They would then return the wallet before Rae even knew it had gone missing.

'Well done Sarah' Peter said, you certainly achieved a lot for an afternoons work.

They outlined their plan where Ralph and Peter would follow Sarah until an opportunity presented itself to obtain the wallet. If one did not eventuate early enough in the evening, they would manufacture one.

Sarah chose a very sexy little black dress, perfect for dancing along with some tasteful but not too flashy jewellery and a war coat with a clutch bag for the evening.

Arriving at the bar a fashionably ten minutes late, she found Rae, waiting at a table, with a beer for pint for himself, already half gone, and a cocktail for Sarah.

'You look fantastic' Rae said unable to take his eyes off Sarah as she removed her jacket and sat opposite him.

‘I wasn’t sure what you would like, so I got you a Cyan Sunset. Its very popular with the ladies here.’ Rae said in a loud voice trying to make himself heard above the volume of background conversation.

The pub was packed with patrons enjoying a beverage before heading out for the evening. This allowed Ralph and Peter to slip in unnoticed a just another pair of office workers looking for a drink after a long day.

‘You know a lot about what women want then Rae?’ Sarah said

‘No, no.. no more than another man’ he said realising she was baiting him.

‘How about we finish these and go to a nice restaurant I know not far from here, then I know a great club we could do some dancing’. Rae offered.

‘Sounds wonderful’ Sarah said.

As they got up and made there way out, Sarah left he coat hanging on her chair, which Peter soon retrieved before one of the staff realised, and pretended to follow her out to give it back, except he and Ralph left by another exit and positioned themselves to follow.

As Sarah and Rae got outside and, Sarah shivered and sis ‘Oh, I seen to have forgotten my coat, I’ll just nip back in and get it’.

About a minute later she re-emerged looking sad and remorseful, 'it seems someone has stolen it' she said hugging herself in her thin party dress.

'You can't leave anything for a moment anymore' Rae said taking his overcoat off and placing it around Sarah, who smiled back saying 'You're a real gentlemen.'

'As you're a local, you couldn't duck back in there and have a quick word with the manager and leave a contact number, just in case someone does hand it in?' Sarah asked bright eyed.

'Sure, just a moment' Rae said.

Sarah wasted no time checking the pockets looking for Raes security pass, which she found in one of the inside pockets. She took it out and made the prearranged signal of flicking her hair back with her left hand.

Peter seeing this, made his way past and Sarah palmed it off to him in one fluid motion. Unless someone was watching closely, all they would have seen was a man brushing past a lady on the street.

Peter then met back up with Ralph across the street where Ralph was smoking a cigarette in a buildings alcove.

'Ok Ralph, you're up. Get back to the apartment and copy this as quick as you can'.

Peter said handing the pass to Ralph. 'I'll keep an eye on these two and let you know where to meet me.'

Ralph then went and hailed one of the many taxis circling the area and gave instructions promising an extra forty pound tip for a quick trip.

Peter then waited until he saw Rae re-emerge and then followed them down the street and around a corner to a restaurant.

It was a cold night and Peter cursed his luck at being stuck outdoors whilst observing Sarah enjoying a nice dinner through the restaurant's window, and he wondered how the others were getting on in Budapest, hoping they also had some cold weather to contend with.

The taxi made good time and Ralph bolted up the stairs of the apartment building knowing it would be quicker than the lift and unlocked the apartment.

He was soon behind his powerful laptop working at cracking the encryption on the card strip.

The encryption was very good, but it was only of industrial grade and it only took Ralph half an hour to break it.

He then copied the strip onto a blank card using a card strip reader he had made himself out of parts he purchased from a local electronics store.

He called Peter to get directions back to where he now whilst he locked the apartment and made his way quickly back down the stairs to hail another taxi.

Sarah and Rae were just hoping up to leave when Ralph arrived back, the whole operation having taken just over an hour and a quarter.

Peter having retrieved the card from Ralph, made his way further down the street, crossed over and made his way back up towards the restaurant, just in time to run into Sarah and Rae leaving.

‘Excuse me, you couldn’t tell me the way to Waterloo station’ Peter enquired of Rae, whilst palming the card back to Sarah, who returned it to its correct pocket whilst Rae was giving instructions to Peter.

Peter then made his way as if following the directions, with Ralph soon catching him up, whilst Sarah and Rae, made their way to whatever night club they were going to.

Peter and Ralph waited up until 1 in the morning until Sarah finally made it back to the apartment.

‘Well done Sarah’ Peter said

‘Well done yourselves’ She replied. ‘All we have to do know is get you into the server room.’

‘I think I will arrange to work late tomorrow night, and clear you with security after hours’ Sarah said. ‘Meanwhile I will use my time there tomorrow to see what I can find out about the shipping routes from Kaliningrad and see if I can’t come up with a ship name and customer container listing’.

The next day, whilst Sarah was at the office, doing her research in between starting her 'official' work Ralph worked on a program to plant on the companies servers allowing him remote access.

The following evening, around 7pm, once the staff had all left, Sarah checked around the office to see if anyone was still there. She was disappointed to still see a light on in Rae's office. This was going to make it difficult as she had hoped to be left alone at this point. She had to come up with an excuse to fast to leave the floor but still be on 'official business' in the building.

'How's it going Rae? Thankyou again for a wonderful evening last night.' Sarah said standing in the doorway to her office.

Not giving him a chance to answer, she said 'I'm just going down to the archives to follow up on some work. We'll have a chat when I get back up'

'Ok', Rae said, 'good to see you putting the hours in.'

Sarah made her way down to the reception lobby where she found Peter and Ralph talking to a security guard at the desk.

Putting on an air of authority, Sarah vouched for the two men. The guard seeing Sarah's staff badge and security pass did not argue and she signed the register admitting the two men from 'Heighton & Hilliker' as associates.

Once in the lift, Sarah said, 'Ralph, first I will let you in to the server room, there may be some techs there but I'm sure you can talk to them in their language and do what you need to do. Peter

I need you to come with me to the archives, there's a locked off section I can't get to. It's a special section for the executives only.'

Entering the companies computer suite, Sarah used her security pass to enter with Ralph, whilst Peter waited holding the lift.

There were only two techs on duty that evening conducting backups and Sarah introduced Ralph as working on a special project for the internal audit department. They were a bit unsure at first, but Ralph soon had them eating out of his hand with his huge knowledge of systems and in fact soon had manoeuvred the conversation to the latest massively multiplayer online games and their server requirements.

This seemed to satisfy the techs, especially as he came from the internal audit department who nobody really wanted to be under the eye of, having a reputation as the companies Gestapo. Sarah also had an air of authority about her and a look that said don't mess with me as I can mess with you more.

She saw Ralph use the card they had copied to enter the server room whilst she pretended to look at a computer report, and the two techs on duty paid no real attention to him doing so, now arguing about who the better player was in one of the games Ralph had mentioned.

Sensing things were going ok, she left Ralph and returned to the lift, where Peter was waiting and they punched the button for the sub basement.

The doors opened to near total darkness, as all the staff that operated the archives had gone for the evening.

Good, Sarah thought, we may just pull this off yet.

They made their way to the bank of light switches and lit the place up. The lift door closed returning to its default level.

The archives level was huge and seemed to stretch on for whole city block and it took them a while to find the executive records section which was located behind a locked door in a separate walled off room.

Sarah tried her security card but to no avail.

‘Let me look at this’ Peter said opening up a tool pouch he had pulled out of his overcoat pocket.

He proceeded to unscrew the mountings of the card reader and soon had a series of wires attached from a hand held device which he punched some buttons on.

The door then buzzed open.

‘Open sesamy’ he said smiling

‘So what are we looking for?’ Peter asked.

‘I found references to a ship that travels a route from Kaliningrad to Sao Paulo that matched the route on the map we retrieved from Barry Summer’s house. The interesting this however is that some of the container numbers were replaced with a code indicating that only a senior executive could access those numbers. That’s now what I’m looking for.’

About this time, Rae's imagination got the better of him. Did Sarah mean for him to follow here down to the archives at some point? He finally could not resist himself and made his way to the elevators.

Being this hour, one arrived quickly and he punched the button for the subbasement archive level.

'Here we go' Sarah said. This file contains copies of bills of lading with the container numbers and customer names for those coded shipments.

'It appears there's about one a month going to a wood chip manufacturing company, with its contents listed as 'Office Furniture'.

Peter took out his high quality digital camera and images the bills of lading.

'Sarah, where are you?' came a faint call.

'Shit, its Rae, we've got to get out of here. He can't see you either in case he recognises you from last night. Look I'll distract him to the far corner whilst you get out of the building. Then call Ralph and tell him it's time to get out'. Sarah whispered.

She then quickly made her way carefully between the rows of boxed records, grabbing one at random, before yelling out 'Over here'

Peter slipped along the far wall in the opposite direction after quietly closing the door to the executive records office after replacing the file.

‘Ah, there you are’ Rae said. ‘I just thought I would come and see how you’re getting on and if you need any help’. He said gazing into Sarah’s eyes his amorous intentions very clear.

Realising Peter could not use the lift without raising suspicion that there was someone else here, she said ‘Lets go back to your office for a drink. I’m finished here.’

‘You must have nice bottle of something tucked away in a filing cabinet’ Sarah said returning his gaze.

‘I certainly do’ he said, ‘follow me’

They then returned to the lift and made their way to Rae’s office.

Peter breathed a sigh of relief and pulled out his cell phone and dialled Ralph.

‘You ready mate’ he said as soon as Ralph answered

‘All finished here, I’ll meet you at the pub’ Ralph said so that the techs could hear.

‘Sorry Gents. I would love to continue thrashing you, but a better offer awaits.’ Ralph said to the two techs with which whom he had engaged in a game of enemy recon, whilst quietly checking that the program he had installed on the production server was now running correctly.

He then made his way out of the building and met Peter outside the bar where they decided to return to the apartment, giving Sarah the escape call they had planned should Sarah be forced to 'distract' Rae.

Sarah's phone rang as they were starting their second glass of bourbon and Rae was edging ever closer to Sarah on the couch they were sitting on in his office.

'Oh no' Sarah exclaimed, 'I'll leave at once' she said hanging up.

'I've got to leave, my father's just had a heart attack.

With that she was up off the couch and running for the lift, not to return, leaving Rae on the couch wondering what could have been and in need of a cold shower.

Getting back to the flat, she threw her business satchel down and said 'Now I really need a drink'.

Peter was only too happy to pour her her favourite gin which she threw back in one gulp. 'That was getting just too close, you could have called sooner' Sarah protested

'Why, and interrupt a cosy office romance?' Peter said laughing

'I'm only glad I do not have to go back to that place, I pity the poor person who replaces me there, in fact I must make a note to tell Roger to send a man in my place, I would not want to put another woman in that situation.' Sarah said holding her glass out for a top up.

Peter obliged whilst asking Ralph how things were.

‘The program appears to be working fine. I have access to all there servers, in fact there whole local area network in the building. As soon as Anthony logs on with his laptop tomorrow I will have access to that as well.’ Ralph said.

‘Will he know if anyone has accessed his laptop?’ Peter asked

‘Not unless he’s particularly skilled, which being a shipping exec I doubt he is’

‘We need to know about that ships movements, scheduled stops, and anything about those containers’ Sarah said ‘especially anything about the spot on the map in the English channel.’

‘I wonder how the others are getting on’ Sarah asked.

Chapter 12

England

Once back at the secure communications centre, Michael placed a call through to ‘the voice’.

‘Yes’ the voice answered on only the first ring.

‘It appears we do have a problem. The same people who tracked me to the warehouse in London were already at Mikhael’s house when I arrived, and they do have training.’

‘Were you able to take care of Mikhael?’

‘Yes, he is dead, but I have no idea what information they were able to get from him.’

‘OK, I will arrange special leave for you from your current assignments until you have tracked down these people. When you have take no immediate action, just observe and contact me with details.’

‘Yes, got that’. Michael said hanging up with tension growing inside of him. He did not like the idea of people such as this knowing anything about him, he must find out what they know and if necessary eliminate them.

The only lead he really had at this stage was the registration number of the vehicle the men who chased him were driving, and begrudgingly he had to admit to himself, they handled themselves very well.

Leaving the secure comms room, Michael returned to his quarters at the base took a shower and changed into some new clothes. Feeling somewhat refreshed he placed a call to a contact in the US embassy in London who could find the information he needed. This contact was another of the firm’s assets that he had been made aware of and had access to a vast array of information systems. Michael only new him by his first name as the firm

operated in a very compartmentalised fashion with its operatives being largely unknown to each other.

After passing on the information, he arranged to meet the contact, who he knew only as Bill, at a quiet café in a side street off Pall Mall at 11am, after which he could enjoy the chance to see the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, which he rarely got to see. The precision and training of the men involved stirred pride within him as only people trained to a high level in the military could display this.

The rest of the night he spent studying the map he had been sent for the next rendezvous with one of his counterparts from the Russian Spetznaz where a set of codes to whatever was in the container would be handed to him and he would pass on the a similar set of codes to the a set of containers on another ship that was scheduled to pass by that same evening. He was also contracted to arrange transport between the ships for the men with that ship taking them back to their home port of Kaliningrad. He was then to make his way back to a small seaside village on the south coast of England and make his way back to base to transmit the coded securely to 'the voice'.

This next rendezvous was scheduled for next week. Having made one such trip successfully already, most of his plans were already in place. He just had to choose a new launching point so as to not arose suspicion from the locals that an unknown person was launching a sea going rigid hull inflatable on a regular basis at strange hours.

The plan basically was to pull up alongside the vessel, in this case the PCS Malin and the PCS Mara of the Porter International

shipping company. They were both scheduled to pass through the English channel on the same night next week, the Malin headed for Sao Paulo, with the Mara headed for Kaliningrad.

The Russian would then descend to the inflatable and be transported to the Mara with packages being exchanged during the trip between ships.

Getting out the large scale map of the south west coast of England he selected one of the small towns that he had previously determined to have a decent enough slipway from which to launch the rigid hull inflatable, which was currently stored in one of those rent-a-space storage yards that dot the side of most highways by most major towns and cities.

This type of operation appealed to Michael as he loved the sea also almost as much as he loved guns, which is why he had joined the navy. He had spent a lot of time at sea with his father how was skipper of a fishing boat during his school holidays and had loved every moment of it. His father had also enjoyed hunting and Michael as soon as he was old enough tagged along every chance he could. By the time his father was tragically killed in a fishing accident when he was sixteen, he was already adept at both boat handling, navigation and shooting.

Michaels fathers death had effected him greatly and he had begun acting up and after stealing his third car and rebelling against his mother who wanted her son to study harder at school, which Michael hated as it was filled with a what Michael thought were a lot of soft pretentious bastards who had no idea what the real world was like, was given a choice by the judge of going into the Navy or to gaol.

Michael chose the former and discovered a new way of life in which he found challenge and a which also utilised his hard won skills in seamanship and weapons handling.

Michael remembered fondly the first person whom he had come to respect since his father, chief petty officer Tom (steelfist) Stevens, who had earned his nickname by winning most of the boxing matches for the units in the navy in which he served.

As a young seaman, Michael had been a bit arrogant at first feeling his skills were not appreciated enough by the Navy and that he was better than all his fellow new recruits. So one day after an exercise in basic boat handling skills using small P class yachts where Michael had been showing up his class mates lack of skill and answering back to Toms instructions with smart remarks to show off his knowledge, Tom asked Michael to follow him for some specialist instruction. So wondering what this specialist instruction was, he followed Tom around the side of the boat shed, whilst the other recruits were storing the boats away, straight into Tom's "steel fist". All Michael remembered seeing was stars before landing heavily on his backside on the ground. Before he could regain control of himself, Tom leaned over Michael, grabbed the front of his tunic in his large meaty fist and pulled Michaels face to within an inch of his own. The look in those eyes got his attention straight away. It was not until now that Michael had really noticed just how lined and sun darkened Toms skin was which was something Michael recognised from older experienced men of the sea he had known. He could also feel the tensile steel strength in Michaels arms and thought better than to try and fight his way out of this one or say something smart.

‘Listen to me Michael’ he started, ‘Its clear you have considerable natural ability, far above any of the other recruits here and if you have patience and the right attitude you will go far in the Navy, you’ve even been seen as a potential candidate for OCS, but if you continue on in the same arrogant know it all fashion we will have many more of these special training sessions and we will see just how long you will last then.’

He then straightened up pulling Michael easily of the ground and telling him to go and help the others with storing the boats.

That day had a profound impact on Michael and he knuckled down and pulled his head in, and as Tom predicted his star rose quickly in the Navy, first being recommended ant accepted to OCS and then into the seals after a short tour aboard destroyers as a navigator, he still however thought he was better than those around him and eventually his arrogance did start to show through earning him several letters of caution before the incident that landed him in the training roles that now largely filled his time and off the list for consideration for involvement in active operations.

The next day Michael took a bus from the base into town where he caught the train into London.

Although not expecting that anyone was aware of his meeting, never the less Michael took precautions to ensure no one was watching the meeting. There was a news agents across the road and up the street a bit from the café. He bought a paper and sat on a bench observing the café whilst pretending to read to the paper.

There were no obvious signs that anyone was lingering in the street watching him. He saw his contact round the corner into the street and make his way to the café and seat himself in one of the outdoor tables.

Waiting five minutes to be sure the contact had not been followed, he got up and walked over to the table and sat down opposite.

A waitress came out and took their order, the contact ordering a steak pie and a coffee, whereas Michael merely ordered a cup of tea, not wanting to stay long. After the waitress left to get their order, Michael got straight down to business ‘So what were you able to find out about the rental car?’

‘It was rented by a firm of chartered accountants who have a branch office here in London. The named driver on the lease was a Mr Arthur Hilliker. He is the managing partner of the firm, whose head office is in Auckland, New Zealand’

‘This does not make a lot of sense. The guys who were on my tail were definitely no accountants I’ve ever come across’ Michael said taken by surprise

‘Apparently this firm does a lot of forensic and audit work for many governments. I tried to make some discreet enquiries as to what they may be working

On here in England but was given some cock’n’bull story by someone in the British home office whom I can usually get good information from, which is unusual in and of itself’.

The waitress arrived with their order and Michaels contact got stuck into his steak pie with gusto. In between mouthfuls, he said

‘The address of their office in London is on this piece of paper.’ Which he pushed across the table to Michael. ‘Some interesting useful news I got off the internet is that Arthur just got engaged, the printout is also on that paper along with their pictures.’

‘Thankyou’ Michael said getting up having hardly touched his tea. If he hurried he would be in time to see the changing of the guard. He needed some time to think about too about what he had just been told.

Three days after the incident in Budapest, Arthur, Gary, Brett and Alan arrived back at the flat in London. It had taken that long for the police in Budapest to satisfy themselves that they had had nothing to do with the murder of Mikhael and for Inspector Jarvis to contact his relevant counterpart and vouch for them.

During this time, Ralph had been able to access the Anthony’s laptop and had been able to match the container number Sarah had contained to several files on the hard drive.

‘It appears that there are a number of scheduled shipments over the next year between Sao Paulo and Kaliningrad. According to the dates, there has been one shipment already last month, one scheduled for next week, and then they are scheduled monthly after that over the next nine months.’ Ralph said.

‘What about the coordinates on the map we obtained from the money traders house?’ Gary asked.

‘Yes, there are two ships owned by Porter international that make scheduled trips between Sao Paulo and Kaliningrad. I was able to obtain their shipping routes and once a month they pass each other at those coordinates, however I could find no information except for that coincidence’. Ralph said shrugging his shoulders.

‘That’s too much of a coincidence’ Arthur said. ‘Something must happen there, but I cannot fathom what’.

‘Do you think the ships stop or come alongside?’ Brett speculated

‘No, that would break maritime rules and in a busy shipping lane like that such a manoeuvre would be unusual and would not go unnoticed’ Alan said.

‘Was there anything else on the hard drive’ Gary asked

‘Just some emails to a storage rental facility down near Plymouth where a large storage unit has been rented shortly before the time of the first shipment, also the email confirming the rental of the storage space was forwarded on to the CEO of the Rathbone Chemical company along with the access details’ Ralph responded.

‘OK, now that’s definitely too much of a coincidence. Something definitely happens involving one or both of those ships. We need to know what’s in that storage space.’ Gary said.

‘I think we have uncovered the first stage of this money laundering operation as well as confirmation of the link between the two companies.’ Arthur speculated.

‘I can see that this investigation is going to take us to the US and Brazil soon. But firstly we need to know what is in that storage facility and what is going into those containers at the Kaliningrad end’ Gary said.

‘OK, we also need to know who is behind the companies at each end.’ Arthur said.

‘Sarah, your next task is to go back to the office and find out anything you can about the companies that are importing/exporting those containers. Gary, you take Peter, Bret and Alan and see what’s in that storage container and I will stay here and work with Ralph to see what else we can find in Porters system as well as make travel arrangements to Kaliningrad, as we are going what gets loaded into those containers’. Arthur said summing up.

‘I will also see what I can find out about this Steven Jerkovich that the late Mikhael recruited’ Arthur said.

‘I think we all need a drink’ Brett said getting up and heading to the drinks cabinet. ‘This is becoming quite the tangled web. Each lead we chase down seems to run into several more.’

It’s also getting dangerous too, if anyone wants to pull out I would understand’ Arthur said 184unconsciously thinking of Sarah.

‘If you’re referring to me’ Sarah said ‘you can forget it. I knew accountancy was not glamorous when I went into it, which is why I turned to forensic accounting and investigation. A girl needs a little danger now and again just like you boys.’

‘I really appreciate that’ Arthur said, ‘I could see that about you when I hired you, and I could see that you had the ability and your hobbies suggested you would have the character for this kind of work.

Sarah thought back to the first interview she had had with Arthur, fresh out of University and with a inner drive and intelligence that had lead her get the first class honours degree and masters that she had and had gotten her the interview with Arthur.

‘Your hobbies are very interesting, I would say dangerous even’ Arthur said

‘Accountancy is all about good discipline and an eye for detail, which have always been my strengths, and I guess that I have been involved in those hobbies to develop the social side of my character and introduce some excitement into life’.

‘These hobbies will certainly do that, lets see, sky diving, scuba diving, in particular wreck diving and flying.’ Arthur listed from her CV. ‘Will you live long enough to become useful to us?’ Arthur said jokingly.

‘I think the skills I have developed from those activities have only increased my level of self discipline and you can see by the awards I have won I am very god at what I do and would make me a colourful member of staff.’ Sarah replied.

It was then that Arthur decided that Sarah if she worked out well that she could become a very useful part of the firm’s special unit that he had in mind and Arthur had since told her as much.

The clinking of a glass on the coffee table in front of her brought her back to the present.

The glass contained a gin and tonic, her favourite refresher and she took a sip happy to be in the company of these people whose pride in their work matched her own.

The Island

Steven looked up from his terminal after having just completed a series of complex trades through a few of the aliases he and Ian had created and rubbed his tired eyes. So far he had completed transferring half of the money into the Jamaican bank account he had been given the details for.

He had been working on Ian for days now trying to get him to agree to request a trip to the mainland to spend a night at the casino. If he could get everyone to agree to a one night trip, that may provide a possibility for him to slip away unseen.

To this end he had talked the others into a regular poker evening where they gambled with five dollar limits and had concocted a story how he loved casino's as they helped him with his quick thinking skills.

Ian had taken to it like a duck to water given his mathematical background and in his spare time had been trying to develop a system for reading cards. Steven had helped him with this by teaching him 21 and getting him hooked on the game. It was the

thrill of beating the odds, not the money that Steven had discovered thrilled Ian.

‘Look, I’m sure we can convince them to have a one night break at the casino back on the mainland. I don’t know about you, but I’m getting a touch of cabin fever.’ Steven said.

‘You’re right’ Ian finally agreed, ‘I will bring it up tonight during the poker game’.

Ian went back to work with a refreshed sense of vigour having talked Ian into it. It was imperative that Ian be the one to bring it up.

Later that evening after a wonderful beach BBQ dinner that left them all a bit befuddled and after a few hands into their poker game Ian said

‘I would love to try to take on the house at a casino, I think I have developed a system to determine when a tables hot and when to bet big ‘

‘Listen to you’ Kelly said ‘Since when did you become a card sharp?’

‘I am a maths wiz, scratch that, maths god. Cards is simple statistics. Let me prove it to you all.’ Ian said

He then over the next few hands proceeded to predict how each game went and soon had the others all convinced.

‘Look, we are all getting a bit of cabin fever, surely one night on the mainland at a casino would not be breaking the rules’ Ian said

Steven was very and concentrated on shuffling the deck. He dared not look into anyones face for fear they would realise it was he who had put Ian up to this.

The table was very quiet and Steven began to sweat as he was aware now how dangerous these people were. He had told Ian about the catamaran incident, but Ian had refused to believe him, that is why he had had to find another tack to get Ian to work with him to get off the island.

‘Look, I can make us all a lot of money, and it will just be one night spent entirely in the casino. With the work we have been doing we definitely need a small change of scenery to get our perspective back and refresh ourselves for the volume of work coming up. We are ahead of schedule, so one night surely won’t put us behind.’ Ian said.

Steven was sure they could see him sweating and was sure all eyes were on him, he just wanted to get up and be anywhere in the house but there at this point, but he knew he could not draw any attention to himself. So he just started dealing out the cards for the next hand in a cool and calm manner which belied how he much he was trembling on the inside.

‘All right, enough’ Martin said finally

Steven almost erupted out of his chair in fright and it took his last reserves of energy for the night to keep dealing. Martins tone was as unreadable as they could get Steven had learned and those two

words could mean anything, that he had seen through his plan and had had enough of his attempts or it could mean he was simply tired of Ians argument.

He finished dealing and picked up his cards, sweat becoming clearly visible on his brow now. His hands were so wet now he could hardly manage his cards.

‘I’m sure one night in the casino would not be out if the question. There will be some strict rules you have to follow to maintain the integrity of this operation, but I’m sure the girls can help with that’. He said

Steven all but collapsed with relief, he had felt sure his plans had been seen through and that he had been undone.

‘I will make arrangements with the Pilot on his next trip, leave it with me. Now Ian convince me some more if I’m to invest in this scheme of yours at the casino’ Martin said.

They then continued to play late into the evening, by which time Ian had proven his system to the others.

Chapter 13

Plymouth

Michael had rented a top of the range but fairly common Range Rover with heated leather seats and satellite navigation for his trip down to Plymouth. This larger size vehicle would be needed for towing the boat to and from its storage facility and for launching it from the slipway. He had come to like the nicer things in life of late, given the hard life he had had up until now. This did not mean, however that he was any the less ruthless or had become soft in any way, he was still more than capable of spending many nights in a hide observing a target in cramped uncomfortable conditions. In his line of work, you were only useful, or kept alive by your ability to endure these hardships.

It would normally take four and half to five hours over a distance of about two hundred and forty miles using the M4 and M5 motorway systems, however, now that Michael was aware that there was a group of people potentially on to him he was taking precautions, so his route took him through the English countryside and small towns getting on and off these main routes at various random points. This would make it difficult for anyone following him not to make themselves obvious.

This did however add several hours to his overall travel time and by the time he was approaching the storage facility on the outskirts of Plymouth it was nearing four o'clock, he was certain however that he had not been followed.

The previous morning, two days after his meeting with the embassy official, he had determined that the faces in the photo of the magazine article he had been given were of a Mr Arthur

Hilliker and Angela Baird. The article was from one of those societal gossip rags that every country seemed to have, this one being from New Zealand and reporting that Arthur had finally gotten together with his PA and chief of staff Angela, the pair having been recently reported to have spent a night together at a upmarket wine resort on Waiheke Island in Aucklands Hauraki gulf.

Further research had not turned up very much at all about the other members of the team, with the exception of a Mr Gary Christie who was head of the Forensic Accounting Investigation division of Heighton & Hilliker Chartered Accountants.

After another call to ‘the voice’ it had been decided that Michael would travel to New Zealand and start observing Angela’s routines and arrange for her to be abducted and used as leverage should the situation arise where Arthur and his team were getting too close to the firm’s operation.

Firstly, however, Michael had to travel to Plymouth to meet with and train the new team that would take over the transfer of their Russian customers contacts from ship to ship along with the trading of papers and codes for the containers, a task that was normally entrusted to Michael.

Pulling up to the secure gate, Michael powered down his window and entered the code he had been sent to him by the firm into the keypad that was mounted on a pole that was set into the ground one car length back from the gate. This allowed customers with rented spaces to come and go without the need for human interaction, which suited his purposes down to the ground.

Driving in to the secure complex with its all encompassing perimeter security fence he drove to the rear of the complex of garage type storage units to where the larger units were located. Parking his vehicle in front of the unit next to his in such a way to block the CCTV camera view of him opening his unit, he exited the vehicle and walked around it to kneel down in front of his unit and unlocked the roller door. Raising the door slightly about half a foot off the ground, he walked to the left hand side of the roller door and knelt down and reached under the door. Feeling for a switch he had mounted against the wall of the unit, he turned it to the off position. The switch operated an infra red beam had installed that started a hidden camera recording should someone enter the unit without first turning the switch off.

Standing up and lifting the roller door up he walked into the unit to inspect the trailer mounted boat and its equipment, shutting the roller door behind him and turning on the units interior light.

All still appeared to be in order. Checking the fuel tanks were still full after he had topped them off from his last trip and that all the safety gear was still there and in working order should he be stopped by the coast guard for a safety inspection, he then moved on to the secret compartments. These contained a short range signal encrypted radio with the captains of the two Porter International ships each having a similar unit with the codes to enter and decrypt the radio chatter. Anyone else who happened listening on the frequency and in range would simply hear a squawk of electronic noise. He checked the battery was still charged and that the code he had still worked.

Also in the compartment was Michaels preferred HK MP5 SD silenced sub machine gun with five spare clips of ammunition.

Being satisfied that all was in order, Michael, turned the light off and shut the roller door, remembering to turn the switch back on before fully closing it and locking it.

Looking at his wrist watch, it was now 4:45pm, this would give Michael three and a quarter hours to check into his motel, rest and then arrive early to his 8pm meeting with the two operatives who would be taking over from him here. Arriving early would allow him time to observe them arriving and to see if anyone was following them.

The motel Michael had chosen was almost half way between the secluded recreational slipway amateur boaties used to launch their craft and the centre of Plymouth where the pub he had chosen for the meeting was located.

Checking in with the desk clerk, he got his key, paid upfront for three nights in cash and made his way to the room where he threw his overnight bag down and laid back on the bed and closed his eyes to ease some of the tension from the day.

The long drive down from London, although quite nice in terms of scenery once the built up home counties had been left behind, was tiring due to the constant awareness one required to ensure good counter surveillance technique.

Michael had booked three nights, the first for tonight's meeting, the second for a training run with the boat so he could assess how competent his replacements were and the third for a bit of pleasure. This night he was looking forward to. Michelle was a local girl he had met on the first of his trips down here who

worked at a local restaurant as a waitress. She was just the type that appealed to Michael, average height, but slim with perky breasts and an athletic figure. They had hit it off that first night as they both had a love for seafood and tramping in the outdoors. On his last trip, Michael and Michelle had spent a lovely few days tramping in the Exmoor national park.

Michelle was 28 and dreaming of an adventurous lifestyle and had picked Michael straight away as not being from these parts, even before speaking to him and hearing his American accent and discovering their mutual interests at a local pub after her shift had ended. He was very fit looking and very handsome and was dressed in brand name clothing and had a look about him that said 'I'm dangerous' that appealed to her, unlike the usual soft looking guys that she was used to in these parts.

Yes, Michael was definitely looking forward to that evening as Michelle was a devil in bed and had pleased him in ways no other women had before, and Michael thought he had experienced all there was to in lovemaking.

With a sigh, Michael put these thoughts aside to concentrate on the plan for next day. He had received a communiqué from the firm stating Porter international had a ship passing by tomorrow evening and that the captain had been provided with a secure portable radio and that he was to allow him and the new operatives to practice pulling alongside a container ship and disembarking and reboarding at sea whilst underway.

When Michael next opened his eyes, the room was dark and it was approaching six thirty in the evening. After refreshing

himself with a few splashes of water to the face, Michael left the motel and started the Land Rover.

It took twenty minutes to drive into the town centre, once again not driving a direct route. The pub that the meeting was at was chosen by Michael for its ease of observation having only one entrance and being located in the middle of a side street.

He parked his vehicle at the top of the side street which afforded him a clear view of both sides of the street from end to end. The two contacts he was to meet were told to wear leather jackets, jeans and trainers and to have a copy of the Plymouth times with them and to pick a table in the corner.

The time was now seven pm, so Michael had a long wait, and it was unlikely the pair had arrived yet so Michael relaxed into his seat.

It was obviously a slow night for the pub with few people out and about and the people that did go into the pub were obviously locals judging by the snippets of conversation that reached him through his window that he had cracked open slightly.

Certainly no one appeared to be hanging around observing the inn covertly. It was approaching seven fifty pm when two men dressed as briefed approached the tavern and after a quick scan of the street entered the tavern, one having a folded news paper under his right arm.

Waiting the full ten minutes until eight pm, Michael was satisfied that the pair had not been followed. He got out of the land rover, hit the button on the key fob to lock it and approached the tavern.

Entering, the atmosphere was as he expected, noisy back ground chatter and sounds of glasses rattling as a maid went by carrying a tray full of empties. He scanned the interior and noted that no one was paying particular attention to him, with the exception of two gentlemen in a booth in the corner.

Once they saw he had noticed them, one of the men picked up a newspaper, a copy of the Plymouth Times and appeared to be reading it.

Michael went to the bar, paid for a pint of beer and went and took a seat in the booth opposite the two men, who greeted him as if as if he was a co-worker joining them for a beer after work.

‘Good day on the site James?’ Michael said.

‘Very good, we got the new framing in today and were actually ahead of schedule’ James replied using the code phrase that had been given to Michael yesterday.

‘Lets finish these then and head off, I’ve got something to show you guys’. Michael said.

Ten minutes later after all had finished their drinks, they left and went to Michaels Land Rover, fifteen minutes later approaching the storage unit facility.

Along the way Michael had a chance to make an initial assessment of the two men. The one who answered as James was early thirties, lean and clear eyed and very fit looking, clearly as a result of a military diet and training. He was a chief petty officer

in the Navy specialising in small craft operating procedures, currently attached to the British marines for liaison and training.

The other man introduced himself as Bill and was a first sergeant in the army rangers, also currently on assignment in Britain. He was everything you would expect of a 'top' the nickname for first sergeants. He was older, probably early forties, but still very fit looking and was clearly the brains of the two man team. The lines and creases of his face and the sun burnt and dry complexion of his skin told of a hard life out doors and he had the far away look in his eyes of a man who had seen much in his active duty career.

They were all on a first name basis only as part of the firm's standard operating procedure and they all only shared the minimum details with each other.

They approached the key pad in front of the gate and Michael asked each man to memorise the code. The gate slid open and Michael drove around to the unit where he explained the entry procedure to each man and showed them where the hidden camera was which still showed no recordings, indicating that no one had tripped the beam.

'So this is her' Michael said indicating the craft in front of them.

'Are you familiar with this type of craft James?' Michael enquired.

'Perfectly, its exactly the same model we use in training for transporting personnel between vessels at sea' he replied

‘So you would be comfortable pulling up along side a cargo ship whilst she’s under way, retrieving a passenger and transferring him to another cargo ship’ Michael explained.

‘Is that what we’re here to do?’ Bill asked?

‘Exactly that, and only that. There should be no need for weapons, if there is then something has gone wrong.’ Michael replied.

‘Whats the story if something does go wrong?’ Bill asked

‘Place the package you exchanged with the passenger in the container I will show you in a minute, activate the beacon and toss it over the side. Your cover story is that you are hired by Porter International to transport a crew man whose father has fallen gravely ill to another ship for transport back home.’ Michael explained.

Michael then proceeded to show them the hidden compartment and how to operate the marine radio with its special code.

‘Ok its time to go. Get some rest tomorrow, as tomorrow night we have a practice rendezvous at twenty three hundred. I will get some fishing gear tomorrow as a cover.’ Michael said.

They then went through the procedure for exiting the unit with Michael explaining that if they had discovered a recording that they were to leave the area and return to their units and that they would still receive payment provided they retrieved the recording and sent through the same channels as if they had received the package from the passenger.

Michael dropped the pair off at their motel saying that he would pick them up at seven pm tomorrow evening.

It was approaching ten thirty when Michael got back to his motel and he still had some work ahead of him on the internet, researching the hiring of 'yachts' in Auckland, New Zealand on the net as the firm did not have a presence in New Zealand yet according to the information he had been given so it was up to him to make all necessary arrangements.

The next day was patchy weatherwise with occasional squalls moving in off the atlantic, however sea conditions whilst choppy were calm enough for amateur fisherman to launch their boats.

Michael spent the morning purchasing fishing rods, tackle and bait and talking to the shop owner about fishing conditions in the area. Should someone question him for some reason such as a fisheries officer, Michael thought it prudent to be knowledgeable about the local bylaws and conditions.

The afternoon he spent further researching and making enquiries by email about hiring a yacht. By the time six o'clock rolled around he had received an email response back from a yacht hire firm in Auckland indicating the type of yacht he was after was available, but it would be pricey. Someone must be putting in an all nighter in New Zealand Michael thought as he calculated the time difference.

By this stage there were papers all over the other bed next to his laptop with notes and charts regarding the nights operation. Michael thoroughly believed in the motto he had come to live by

that proper planning and preparation prevents piss poor performance, and he planned every detail of each operation.

There was a knock at the door.

Michael grabbed his pistol from under the pile of papers and placed it behind his back.

He got up, went to the door and with his other hand opened cracked the door open careful to keep the hand with which he gripped the gun out of sight. He was not expecting anyone and was therefore ready for anything.

Looking out the door he saw a motel maid with what appeared to be a linen cart.

‘Yes’ he said.

‘Would you like an extra blanket sir, there is a cold front expected this evening.’

She said.

There was a sudden gust of wind with a chill to it at that point, emphasising the maids point. It gusted in and began rustling the papers on the rooms spare bed. One of the papers was dislodged and blew under the adjacent bed that Michael used for sleeping.

‘No, I’m fine thanks, but thank you for asking’ Michael said shutting the door.

Going back to the spare bed, Michael put the safety switch back to safety and turned his attention back to the email.

Confirming the email and requesting bank details Michael then shut his laptop down and tidied up all the papers, not noticing one had blown under the bed. He then changed into what passed as fishing clothes in this area.

Then making his way to pick up his companions he passed through a McDonalds for a quick cheeseburger meal before arriving at their motel.

It took them another hour to retrieve the boat and make their way to the secluded slipway used by amateur anglers in the area. Luckily there was no one else contemplating going fishing at this time and they were able to launch the vessel unnoticed by anyone.

They all made sure they put their life jackets on over their windbreakers as although each was a competent swimmer, in this light and in conducting the manoeuvres they had planned for the evening, no one wanted to take any chances.

As they got underway, Michael activated the dash mounted GPS unit and plugged in the coordinates he had been given for the containers ship PCS Monova that would be passing by this evening.

Once they were clear of the bay and entering the channel proper, James doused all the lights on the boat and the darkness closed in around them. The only light source left was the low light lcd display of the GPS unit.

It was a cold evening and the wind had picked up a bit making the white caps larger and the going somewhat bumpier. However Chief Petty Officer James was handling the vessel skilfully.

Michael had made this first trip by himself, but as James and Bill were as yet untested by the firm having only recently been recruited, they were not fully trusted and therefore the firm's SOP in this case was to have two operatives, both briefed to watch the other for signs that their loyalty lay elsewhere other than to the firm.

The GPS unit beeped indicating that they had reached their coordinates and James slowed the vessel and began circling to maintain their position. All of them began searching the horizon. There were few ships in the channel this evening, in fact the only lights they could see came from distant ships in the shipping lanes.

Michael checked his watch with night glow dial and saw there was still twenty minutes until rendezvous time. Michael scanned the horizon with the binoculars and spotted two ships on the horizon, one headed out into the atlantic and the other on the opposite tack, both on either side of their vessel. The vessel heading out into the atlantic would pass two miles starboard of them. The other vessel heading into the channel looked like it would pass within half a mile to port. That must be the vessel. It was still too far away however for visual confirmation, still being a clump of lights in the binoculars.

About five minutes later the vessels superstructure could now be made out and Michale retrieved the marine radio and punched in the code to descramble the signal.

‘PCS Monover, PCS Monova, this is seacraft over’ Michale spoke into the radio.

‘Seacraft, Seacraft, this is PCS Monova receiving over’

‘PCS Monova, PCS Monova, I say bravo bravo 372, over’ Michael said giving their agreed code signal.

‘Seacraft, Seacraft, alpha, foxtrot 77’ came the expected reply. The codes were necessary in case the operation had been compromised in some way. Any other code would have meant the operation was cancelled. Given the short range of the radios and the lack of other vessels in the area, indicated that it was unlikely the operation had been compromised in any way.

‘PCS Monova, maintain course and speed and have the buoy ready.’ Michael said.

‘Seacraft, roger’ came the reply.

The object of the exercise was to pull alongside the vessel and retrieve a small buoy dangled from a rope over the side of the vessel. Successful retrieval would mean that the operatives were competent and could take over this aspect of the operation from Michael.

The containership soon loomed ahead of them and Michael sat back on one of the seats indicating that he would give no help and would be observing.

The containership was massive and dwarfed the little rigid hulled inflatable. James let the vessel pass them before revving the twin

500hp engines on the vessel to come in astern and slightly to starboard of the giant ship.

The trick was judge precisely the wakes given thrown out by the massive vessel and to crest them with the right approach and speed so as to not flip the small craft.

The wakes this close were huge and rose higher than the small craft and it was only the massive horse power of the twin engines that made the operation possible.

Closing in on the ship, they could soon here the loud rumbling of the ships engines and the churning of the water thrown out by the massive blades. Michael could now see crew members gathered on the rear deck watching their approach.

James approached a huge wake that was rushing towards them. This would scare any but the most experienced small vessel operators. James let the on rushing wave come at them before gunning the engines and angling at the wave at just the right angle. The small vessel broached the top of the wave and crashed down the other side and racing up the trough between the wakes before repeating the exercise.

James had clearly done this before and finally was able to bring the small sea craft in alongside the huge ship. A sailor leant over the railings far above them and tossed a rope over the side with a small red buoy attached to the end.

Bill grabbed a boat hook from a recess in the side of the craft, steadied himself and reached up and after several attempts

successfully retrieved the buoy and cut it away from the rope with a large K bar knife he produced from a sheath attached to his belt.

James waved to the crewman indicating that they had completed the operation and gunned the engines of the craft and angled away from the huge vessel.

They waited until the huge ship was well passed before they angled back in to the coast to begin their return journey.

‘Well done James, Bill. I will contact the firm and let them know you are ready. The next shipment is scheduled for three nights from now, then monthly after that. The firm will give you details well in advance however. You will be paid the agreed amount of ten thousand each per shipment into the accounts you each nominated. This will be the last time you will see me unless things go wrong’ Michael said.

‘What happens if something does go wrong’ James said.

‘Lets just hope that does not happen’ Michael said smiling and patting James on the back, but with his eyes conveying a very different message.

The rest of the journey was made in silence. When they had berthed the vessel and mounted it back onto the trailer and driven back to the storage unit and secured it, James dropped the guys back to their motel and headed back to his own with thoughts of Michelle and the next evening on his mind’.

Chapter 14

Plymouth, The following day.

Gary, Alan, Brett and Peter rolled into town around one pm after taking the direct route from London and drove directly to their hotel. The Duckworth where they had reserved four rooms.

The Duckworth was well known as a good mid price range hotel that catered mainly for commercial travellers and even had a small conference centre. It was an old looking building that had clearly been affected by the harsh weather driven in from the Atlantic, with large patches of its exterior paint work speckled by the weather and the moulded name of the hotel being worn down.

The inside, however had recently been renovated and presented the traveller with modern décor that was still warm and cosy.

Having placed their bags in their rooms, and refreshed themselves they all met back at the car half an hour later, where Gary had a map of the town spread out on the hood of the car.

‘Ok, we’re here’ he said indicating a point on the map with his finger ‘and the unit is here’ he said indicating a second point on the edge of the town on the main road in.

‘I think we need to familiarise ourselves with the town before we plan our approach to the storage unit in case we run into trouble’ he said.

The others agreed and they set out for a drive taking in the main roads into and out of the town centre.

Their route was circuitous and radiated out from the town centre. The town had a rich maritime history and this was reflected in the many monuments and old warehouse buildings that had now been protected, but now with their interiors converted to modern apartments and offices.

They had a fairly good knowledge of the layout of the town by the time they reached the storage unit facility on the outskirts.

‘It looks typical of all such facilities’ Brett said. ‘It’s on a turnoff from the main road and there is a perimeter fence around the whole complex with security cameras mounted on the corner of each row.’

‘There appears to be scrub land behind with some other industrial units on either side’ Alan said.

‘All right, take some photos Peter and we’ll head back and plan our entry’ Gary said.

Peter rolled down his window and started taking photos as Gary drove around the industrial complexes on either side.

It was about six pm and they were headed back into the town centre to their hotel when Gary suddenly pulled into retail shop car park and parked facing the road.

‘What have we stopped for?’ Peter exclaimed.

‘Look over at that motel, at the unit with the Land Rover parked in front of it’ he said.

They all looked over and could see a man placing a bag into the rear of the vehicle and then open the drivers door.

‘That’s the guy that got away from us in London, and Budapest, I’m sure of it.’ Gary said.

The others all looked but were unsure.

The Range Rover pulled on to the main road and headed into town.

Gary pulled out and started to tail, ensuring always to stay a few cars back. The drive did not take long and the Range Rover soon pulled into a restaurant car park on a street filled with eateries and bars.

Gary pulled to the side of the road opposite.

The man got out and went and greeted a lady who was waiting outside for him. He gave her a kiss and after a few words they entered the restaurant.

‘OK, this is a break.’ Gary said. ‘I want to search that motel room.’

‘Look, theres’ a bar on this side of the road. Alan, Brett, you guys go and get a window seat and keep an eye on the restaurant whilst Peter and I head back and search that motel room. If he looks like he’s leaving and heading back. Give us a heads up on our cells.’ Gary said.

With that, Alan and Brett got out and entered the bar. Once they were seated with drinks and a clear view of the restaurant they called Gary and said they were ready.

Gary swung the car around and headed back to the motel. The trip took them around ten minutes.

‘You’re not rusty with your lock picking skills are you mate’ Gary said to Peter.

‘Please, I’ll have that lock open in a jiffy’ Peter said.

Gary parked the car in the retail car park opposite and they both exited the vehicle. The retail car park was fairly full with people coming and going constantly. They were therefore sure that their car would be safe and noticed as they made their way across the road to the motel.

They walked straight up to the room as if they should be there and no one appeared to be paying them any attention. Peter pulled a small leather wallet from his jacket pocket, undid the Velcro flap and took a small pick like tool from inside.

Whilst Gary stood in such a way as to shield Peters activities from the street, Peter slid the tool into the lock and within seconds a click sounded and Peter turned the handle opening the door.

They both quickly entered and shut the door behind them. The curtains were closed, but the door through to the bathroom was open and there was sufficient light streaming through the opaque bathroom window from a lighted sign on the building next door to light the room enough for a search.

Gary started opening drawers whilst Peter moved to the wardrobe.

‘There’s nothing here’ Gary exclaimed

‘There’s no clothes or bags in the wardrobe either’ Peter said

‘What about the bathroom’ Gary said.

Peter went into the bathroom and looked around.

‘Everything is as neat as a pin. Apart from a used tube of toothpaste in the bathroom tidy, there’s nothing here’ Peter said.

‘This guys definitely military and probably active duty. No one else leaves a motel room this tidy’ Gary said.

‘Check under the bed’ Peter suggested.

Gary looked under each bed and pulled out a piece of paper.

‘Shit’ he exclaimed, ‘we can be sure he was definitely our guy now’ Gary said handing the piece of paper to Peter who immediately looked at Gary with a look of real concern on his face.

Gary’s cell phone rang.

‘What’s happening?’ Gary said into the phone.

‘OK, we’re headed your way now. We just found a piece of paper with Arthur and Angela’s photo on it. It looks like a copy of a magazine article, but we can take from this that our guy definitely knows about us. See you in ten.’ Gary said flipping his cell phone closed.

Gary and Peter made sure they left the room exactly as they had found it and raced back to the car.

Ten minutes later they arrived outside the bar to find Alan and Brett already waiting.

‘Which way did they go?’ Gary asked

‘They headed up the street and turned right, heading away from the town centre about five minutes ago’ Brett said

‘Damn, we’ll never find them.’ Gary said.

‘Lets go back to the hotel and phone this in’ Peter suggested.

‘Was there anything else at the motel?’ Brett asked whilst they were driving

‘Not a thing, looks like he checked out and we’ve missed him. Our best bet now is to check that storage facility.’ Gary said.

It did not take them long to get back to their hotel and gathered in Garys room. Gary immediately phoned Arthur to report on the evenings events whilst Peter set to downloading the pictures to the laptop so they could plan their best way in.

Gary finished his call and said ‘Arthur was of course very concerned and is arranging additional security for Angela just in case. He is going to get here to also activate the GPS tracker in here watch for the duration of this exercise. It is very unlikely she would be in any danger back in NZ, but it’s better to take

precautions. He agrees that we should continue with the storage facility operation however.'

'OK, what have we got Peter?' Gary asked

'I have downloaded the photos and created a rough map of the complex and have narrowed down what I think will be the best way in.' Peter started

'Going in the front is out for obvious reasons. The rear of the complex backs onto a lot of scrub land that would be great for a hide, however the cameras, here and here would show our approach' he said indicating on his map where the security cameras were mounted.

'Going by the numbering system, the unit we are after is one of these large units at the side of the complex near the rear here. The camera covering this area is mounted here at the front of the row and rotates to cover the entire length of this side of the complex. If we could use the time it takes to rotate through its arc we could have enough time for someone to get over the fence and disable it without being seen.' Peter said

'Could we not just take the light out covering this row of units?' Alan asked.

'The camera might be night vision capable, but we will take the light out too.' Peter said.

'How long would it take then for the guard to walk around and check why it was down?' Brett asked

‘If someone was watching, instead of just recording, I would say about six minutes’ Peter said.

‘That should be enough time to get into the storage facility. But I doubt anyone is constantly watching the cameras in one of these facilities.’ He continued.

‘If there was someone, we would need a distraction plan ready.’ Gary said.

‘No problem, I think a couple of louts doing burnouts and tossing a few bottles in front of the complex would be sufficient’ Brett suggested.

‘All right, lets do it tonight. The date on that chart we recovered is two nights from tonight. So if what we think is stored in their, it would give us tomorrow to lay in an obo.’ Gary said.

With that they all headed down stairs to the car.

Twenty minutes later they were approaching the facility and Gary pulled the car into the far side of the industrial unit next to the facility which had a driveway that appeared to run around the entire industrial unit complex. It was dark with only the occasional small light mounted along the roof of the complex.

Pulling the car to a halt, Peter and Gary got out and Brett took over the driving duties and after Gary and Peter retrieved some equipment from the boot, drove the car back to the street and parked on the side of the road that gave a good view of the office complex at the front of storage complex. There was a light on inside, but no way of telling is anyone was actually in there.

Peter and Gary approached the side of the industrial complex which was about five metres from the perimeter fence of the storage complex. The fence, being of wire mesh, with a couple of strands of barbed wire running along the top. The row of units which included the one they were interested in were another five metres back from the fence on the other side.

Gary pulled out a air pistol and took aim at the light, which covered that section of the complex. After steadying himself and getting his breathing under control he squeezed the trigger.

The light exploded in a shower of glass and went dark plunging the row of units into deep shadow with only ambient lighting from lights further along the complex. Gary and Peter then watched the movement of the camera to get the timing of how long it took to cover its arc.

After two watching it for two complete turns, they calculated they had forty five seconds to get over the fence and get under it.

They waited for it to begin its turn and ran for the fence. Gary scaled it first and threw a blanket over the barbed wire and threw himself over it landing on the other side and ran to the spot under the camera. Peter was right behind and landed right behind him following to the same point.

Gary then boosted Peter up onto his shoulders so that he could reach the camera. Peter examined the back of the camera quickly whilst balancing on Gary's shoulders which were rock solid under him, which said a lot about the mans strength.

The camera was mounted on an arm which extended out from the building with a wire coming out of the back which ran into the wall of the complex. It appeared the wire was a coaxial cable which was attached to the back of the camera by means of a twist on connector to a plug in the rear of the camera.

Peter twisted this loose, and then twisted it slightly back on, enough for it to be connected, but not enough for it to reconnect the feed.

Jumping down, Gary took out the dialled Alan's phone to see if there was any movement from the office whilst Peter moved along to the unit.

'No movement' Alan reported

'Ok, well keep this line open.' Gary said, clipping the phone into his belt and the earpiece into his ear.

'The lock is fairly simple, but there must be some tamper device to alert them if someone has accessed the unit.' Peter said

'I will unlock the door and raise it only slightly.' Peter said.

He got his lock picking set out and extracted a different type of tool to the one used on the motel lock. Slotting it into the lock he manipulated it until he felt the lock give. He then manipulated the handle and raised the door slightly.

He then got a torch out and laid down and shone the light under the bottom of the roller door from end to end.

‘Ah’ he exclaimed finally.

‘There’s a simple beam like shop keepers use to alert them to customers entering. My bet is that it is attached to a hidden camera that is activated when the beam is tripped.’ Peter surmised.

‘Can you disable it?’ Gary asked.

‘Sure, just reach under the door at your end and you should find a switch mounted against the wall.’ Peter instructed.

‘Done’ said Gary after reaching under and finding the switch.

After that they raised the door and entered, being careful to shut the door behind them.

Peter shone the torch until they saw the internal light switch.

Turning the light on revealed the trailer mounted inflatable boat.

‘Guards coming’ Alan said ‘Time to get out of there.’

‘Can we lock the unit from the inside?’ Gary asked

‘No’ replied Peter ‘The guard will surely test the doors of these units too’.

‘Do you want us to create a diversion?’ Alan asked.

‘Only if you have to, we’re moving now.’ said Gary

They both rushed out of the unit, lowered the door remembering to reactivate the beam before completely closing the door.

‘Can you lock it quickly?’ Gary asked?

‘We’re goin to find out’ Peter said

‘Quickly now guys, you’ve got about three minutes’ Alan said.

‘Go for it’ Peter said ‘I won’t be far behind you.’ He said jamming the tool into the lock.

Gary rushed to the fence and scaled it quickly leaving the blanket in place.

Peter then ran for the fence, scaled it and grabbed the blanket pulling it down with him as landed heavily on the other side tripping over, just as the guard rounded the corner of the row of units.

Gary had already made it to the cover of the industrial unit.

Peter simply laid still hoping the darkness would conceal him.

He looked across at Gary who signalled with his hand for him to stay still.

The guard walked up to the camera and shone his torch up at it. Then along the length of the units. He obviously could not see anything wrong so continued to test each units door.

Apparently satisfied that all was ok he began shining his torch up the fence line.

Shit Gary and Peter thought both at the same time.

The light was almost upon Peters spot. There was a sudden noise coming from the waste ground behind the units and the guard swung his torch in that direction. This was all the time Peter needed to quickly and quietly move over to where Gary was hiding.

The noise turned out to be a couple of wild cats fighting and the guard turned around and started walking back to the office.

Gary and Peter breathed a sigh of relief and few minutes later Brett drove the car around the corner at the rear of the industrial unit.

After he and Peter had gotten in the car, Gary said ‘As we thought, there’s a boat similar to what the special forces and Navy use to board ships at sea, but we had no time to search it.’

‘We are going to need to follow this boat somehow and see what they are up to’ Alan said.

‘I’ll get Arthur to arrange something tomorrow’ Gary said. ‘We’re going to have to keep an around the clock vigil on this place though, as although we have the date and time of their next rendezvous, they could easily change it.’

‘We’ll also need a second vehicle then’ Brett said

‘You arrange that tomorrow then’ Gary said.

After that they drove back to the motel for the night. The next day whilst Gary contacted Arthur, Brett and Alan arranged a rental vehicle from the local Avis agency.

By midday they had gathered back in the hotels bar for a quick lunch and planning meeting.

‘Arthur got on to Inspector Jarvis and we have the cooperation of the local police water unit. I am going down there with Peter this afternoon to brief them.’ Gary said.

‘Alan and I will take the first watch this afternoon.’ Brett volunteered, ‘you can take over at midnight.’

‘Whoever is not on observation when it goes down will go with the Police launch.’ Gary said.

The team then quickly finished their lunch and moved out. Brett and Alan parked the car in a highway rest area just up the road from the storage facility which offered an unrestricted view of the front gate with the advantage of being hidden from passing traffic.

Gary and Peter made his way down to the docks where the local police launch was moored and entered the ground floor of the harbour masters building where the police had their own offices.

‘Sergeant Rogers please, I’m Gary Christie, he’s expecting me’ Gary said to the constable at the reception desk.

‘Yes, follow me’ said the constable and she lead them down to an impressive looking fifty foot launch with inboard engines.

Walking up along side the constable gestured for them to climb aboard and they made their way up into the cabin which was the vessels bridge.

The sergeant shook their hands and proceeded to show them around the vessel starting with the bridge which had radar, forward looking infrared and night vision and an array of communications gear.

The tour finished with the engine compartment which had a 750 hp engine. The sergeant was clearly proud of his boat.

During the tour they had discussed the operation and had decided that they would follow the target boat by radar and use the night vision capabilities to observe what was taking place.

After agreeing the procedure communications procedures and the probable time and date of the operation Gary and Peter left to get some rest before their shift that evening.

The following day was uneventful and it was nearing the end of Brett and Alans shift when Alan said ‘Heads up, I think we may have something’

Coming fully awake from a brief snooze, Brett was in time to see a Range Rover pull up to the gate and drive in after entering a code into the gate access console. It was a little after ten pm.

‘Was that our man?’ Brett asked

‘Don’t think so, and there were two of them.’ Alan said.

About ten minutes later, the Range rover remerged towing the inflatable. Brett immediately got on the cell whilst Alan pulled out to follow at a discreet distance.

‘We’re under way, following two men towing the boat.’ Brett said to Gary

‘We were already underway to relieve you.’ Gary said. ‘We’ll spin around and head to the police launch, whilst you follow them and radio in where they berth the boat, the stay hidden for their return as we will need apprehend them when they return.’

‘Got that’ Brett said

Gary then called ahead to the police launch which was ready and idling by the pier when Gary and Peter screeched to a halt outside the maritime building.

They climbed aboard the launch and a constable cast of the last line and the sergeant gunned the engine and the launch headed out into the bay.

Garys phone rang and Brett relayed the GPS coordinates of the slipway the men were using to launch the inflatable.

Gary relayed these to the sergeant who plotted them on a maritime map of the area. ‘Here they are’, he pointed, ‘about ten nautical miles to port.’ He said

We will move in that direction and come to within 2 nautical miles of them, then use the forward looking night vision to track them with all lights doused.’ He said

The conditions were rough going with a brisk wind blowing in from the Atlantic.

It took thirty minutes to make up the journey to where they thought they would come within night vision range of the target boat. There was absolutely no ambient light given the overcast weather conditions and there was only the distant lights of the town that gave any point of reference, otherwise the night was as black as the ace of spades and all people aboard were scanning the horizon for any dangers.

The sergeant ordered one of two constables to adjust the radar to a broader band opening its range up to five nautical miles. A blip appeared on the radar and was moving quite fast.

‘That must be them, about three miles south west of our current position.’ The sergeant said.

They opened up the boats throttles and the launch leapt forward and all aboard braced themselves against the violent and sudden jolts as the craft crashed through the choppy sea.

The sergeant finally ordered the craft to slow as the blip on the radar slowed and began to circle.

‘We’re now about two nautical miles astern of them.’ The sergeant said as he pressed a button on the launches command console and began turning a knob next to it. A screen on the

console that had up until now been blank started to give off a low light glow and showed indistinct shapes and a lot of blackness. After about a minutes a distinct shape jumped into focus which was clearly their target inflatable and two distinct human shapes could be seen.

Another much larger blip appeared on the radar screen.

‘That must be a container ship given its size, course and speed’ the sergeant said.

One of the men on the inflatable could be seen to raise an object and appeared to be speaking into it. Soon the inflatable could be seen moving towards the on coming container ship which could now be seen as a distinct but distant cluster of lights through the launches forward windows.

‘Can we record all of this?’ Gary asked the sergeant

‘Sure’ the sergeant replied and pressed a button activating the digital recording system on the launch.

The inflatable was pulling up alongside the container ship matching speed and course.

‘That’s pretty good seamanship, especially in these conditions’ one of the constables said.

Shortly after on the infra red screen a man could be seen climbing over the side of the container vessel on a cargo net that had been thrown over the side.

‘That’s pretty gutsy’ the sergeant said.

When the man was safely aboard the inflatable it pulled away from the container ship and once again resumed circling and the containership continued on its course out into the Atlantic.

The name of the vessel the PCS Malin was clearly visible in large letters across its stern. Another blip then appeared on the radar, also clearly another container ship, this one headed into the English channel.

Looking at the infra red screen the third person appeared to take something from under his jacket and hand it to one of the two men piloting the inflatable, who in return handed a similar size package back. The other man then once again lifted what must be a portable radio to his mouth and spoke into it.

Shortly after the same exercise was repeated with the third man this time climbing aboard the containership. Once the ship had passed the inflatable started to head back towards shore.

‘Did we get the name of that last ship?’ Alan asked

‘Yes, the PCS Mara’ the sergeant said.

‘We’ve got to intercept that inflatable and see what is in that package they received’ Gary said

‘From the heading it appears that they are heading back towards the same slipway’ the sergeant said. ‘We’ll follow them in and collar them at the wharf.’

The sergeant then radioed base and requested a tactical response unit to be ready and waiting but was told that due to another incident the unit would not be available for another forty five minutes.

‘How long back to the slipway?’ Gary asked the sergeant

‘About thirty, thirty five minutes’ the sergeant replied

‘That’s cutting it close. It depends how long it takes them to remount the boat on the trailer’ Peter said.

‘We need them to be delayed. I know, we’ll get Brett and Alan to disable their vehicle, a couple of flat tyres should do the trick.’ Gary said getting his cell phone out.

After a brief conversation he said ‘Brett’s going to flatten the tyres on the trailer and one on the range rover.’ Gary relayed.

Thirty minutes later they were approaching the slipway

Bill looked ahead to the shore and could see the range rover was still where he had parked it and that no other vehicles were around, but something did not appear right. The small hairs on the back of his neck were standing up and he had learned to trust his instincts. He unlocked the secret compartment and pulled out the sub machine gun.

‘What do you need that for?’ James asked as he piloted the boat up to the jetty ready for Bill to jump out and manoeuvre the range rover and trailer down the slip way so that he could drive the boat up onto the partially submerged trailer.

‘Somethings not right, I can feel it’ he said. Then it suddenly hit him, the trailer was lower than it should be. Looking hard into the partially lighted car park he saw that the trailers wheels were flat. One could be expected, but as both were clearly flat that could only mean one thing.

‘Get us out of here’ he yelled at James

‘What?!?’ came James’s startled response

Then suddenly they were covered in light and a voice on a loud hailer was speaking at them.

Looking round he could see blue flashing lights on what was obviously a police launch pulling into the slipway behind them.

‘There’s no way to get past them’ James yelled back

Bill steadied himself brought the machine gun up and sprayed the approaching launch before leaping up onto the jetty and running for the range rover.

James simply stared back at the launch like a startled possum in headlights and raised his hands.

Back on the launch everyone dived for cover as bullets started exploding around them shattering glass and ricocheting off the walls of the cabin.

There was a sudden exclamation of pain from someone in the cabin and a small fire erupted out of the console.

Looking around the heap of bodies, Gary saw one of the constables slumped against the wall of the cabin bleeding profusely from a bullet wound to his side. Everyone else appeared to be OK.

The other constable grabbed the first aid kit and radioed for help whilst the sergeant grabbed the fire extinguisher and started attacking the fire.

Gary and Peter raced out of the cabin to the aft end deck and leapt up onto the jetty rolling into a crouched covering firing position with his glock drawn whilst Peter started the chase.

Brett and Alan having seen the commotion unfold from the concealed position where they had parked the car behind some trees in a small reserve on the far side of the car park leapt from the car with their glocks drawn and took cover behind some bushes not wanting to risk the open expanse of the carpark where no cover was to be found.

Alan saw a man running up the jetty towards the range rover and fired a warning shot at his feet and yelled at him to drop his weapon.

This simply invited a fusillade of return fire causing Alan and Brett to duck down.

Bill got to the range rover and saw the rear tire was flat and started to cast around for a alternate escape route. He then heard the sound of fast approaching sirens that clearly blocked the only road from the slipway carpark.

Realising his situation was hopeless he threw down his weapon and kneeled down where he was with his hands behind his head.

Peter was first too him and pushed him flat on the ground with a boot to the back and gun to his head. Gary was not far behind and started searching the man, quickly finding the package just as the tactical response vehicles burst over the rise into the slipway carpark.

Chapter 15

The Island

Steven was standing on the beach in front of the house with his eyes closed and letting the sun stream down on his face, enjoying it for the first time in weeks. It was yet another gorgeous day in what had turned out to be a paradise prison and perfect for flying. Although he was apprehensive and nervous he felt a calmness he had not felt in ages. He felt sure that his plan had a good chance of success.

Next to him were Danni, Ian and Kelly. Martin had announced that he would not be travelling with them to the mainland and this had served to heighten Stevens spirits even further. All had just a small overnight case as they would be only staying on the mainland for two nights and would be spending the whole time at the casino hotel.

It was approaching one o'clock in the afternoon, being the time Martin had arranged for the flight which would be made on the same float plane that had dropped them off at the island, and the same one that always brought in the supplies.

Steven glanced at his watch again for about the tenth time in the last five minutes.

‘Are you nervous Steven?’ Danni said

‘No, no not at all, I’m just keen to get to the casino, quite excited actually.’ He replied cursing himself for letting his nervousness show.

Danni studied him carefully but turned her face skyward as sound of the planes engine could be heard in the distance.

The pilot executed another perfect landing cutting the engine as the plane ran up onto the beach and skidded gently to a halt. The pilot climbed out as they all made their way towards the aircraft.

‘Afternoon ladies and gentlemen, is that all the baggage?’ the pilot said paying particular attention to Kelly.

‘That’s all, its just a short stay’ Kelly replied

‘OK climb aboard, Gentlemen in the back two seats, and lets crank her up’ he said cheerily

Steven actually felt a wistful sense of jealousy as he wished he contemplated having a job that kept him that happy and cheerful all the time. It may not be as high powered a world as finance, but the sense of freedom must be wonderful he thought.

After a quick pre flight and gently pushing the plane back into the water and turning the nose back seaward, the pilot jumped up onto the float and climbed in and started the engine.

In no time they were in the air and the further they got from the island the lighter Stevens mood became. The waters of the Phillipines sea were turquoise blue and incredibly beautiful and the million glints of the sun as it was reflected off the waters surface made the sea look like a jewelled blanket.

Looking around he saw Danni studying him and he smiled back to hide his surprise and turned his head back to the window.

Sometime later the plane started its descent into Subic bay and after landing made a short taxi to a pier. As they all climbed out onto the pier Steven could see a mini van parked at the end with its side door open revealing several rows of seats. There was a large dark skinned man in sun shades standing next to the van who looked to be of Latin American descent.

Danni walked up to him and handed him an envelope filled with cash which the man quickly thumbed through. Apparently being satisfied the man gestured for them all to climb in.

The heat inside the van was incredible and they all began to perspire. The man closed the side door making the interior worse and walked to the front and climbed in the drivers seat.

Once the engine was started, the air conditioning engaged but that only served to make the interior bearable, but definitely not comfortable.

The ride into the centre of the city was a welcome change of scenery from the secluded island. There were people everywhere. The once home of the American seventh fleet had now been transformed into a modern metropolis with new buildings and roads everywhere. It appeared the old town had rebranded itself as a new tourism hub in south east asia. As they drove they passed numerous hotel accommodation from backpacker facilities to five star resorts and there were new shopping centres and theme parks all over the place.

They finally pulled up in front of a fairly new looking building which had clearly borrowed its architecture from Las Vegas. The

Camyan Lighthouse Hotel and Casino was large brightly lit ten story structure with a replica lighthouse right out front speckled with thousands of shimmering lights.

In place of the single large lamp at the top of all regular lighthouses was a large LCD display which wrapped around the circumference of the lamp house advertising the casinos many attractions.

One of the hotels many porters dressed smartly in a crisp short sleeve white shirt which glowed under the hotels many lights and well ironed slacks and a gold name badge came forward and opened the minivans sliding doors and gestured the four occupants to enter the hotel with a broad smile.

As the hoped out, the man clicked his fingers and several other porters rushed forward to collect their overnight bags.

‘Welcome to the Camyan Lighthouse Hotel. It is our pleasure to have you as guests, please follow me to guest registration’ he said and the all trooped of behind him marvelling at the many fountains and pool bars that could be glimpsed through the well landscaped garden that lined the path up to the hotels main entrance.

Danni took care of the registration and returned with a room key to a suite. They made their way to the main elevator bank and pressed a button for the top floor penthouse suites.

‘If we are staying, we are staying in style’ Danni said as they entered the empty elevator.

The doors closed and the elevator began its ascent.

‘We are staying in a two bedroom penthouse suite.’ Danni said

‘How much does that cost?’ Ian enquired

‘You will see when we deduct the cost from your winnings which you have assured us we will make’ Kelly replied smiling.

The elevator chimed as it reached the penthouse level and they walked across the hallway to a door directly opposite the elevator. Danni slotted the room key into the doors card reader and the door clicked open.

Danni opened the door which revealed a luxuriously appointed suite complete with bar, balcony and two guest rooms each with its own ensuite bathroom. The room would not be out of place as one of the rooms reserved for high rollers in Las Vegas.

Danni and Steven had one room, whilst Ian and Kelly had the other. Their bags had already been delivered to the correct bedrooms.

‘I’m having a drink. Anyone want one?’ Steven said moving behind the bar to find it well provisioned with a range of wines, spirits and local beers. As no one else had replied he fixed himself a brandy and walked out on to the terrace which afforded an incredible view of the grounds on this side of the hotel. There were people swimming in the pools in the late afternoon setting sun and people walking the many winding pathways through the gardens. Looking to the horizon he could see the hotel was set

about two blocks back from the beach and on a wide boulevard that ran into the city centre about five blocks distant.

Looking back down, he could see there was clearly no escape from this high up as only spiderman could get down from up here.

He then felt a sudden presence beside him and knew it was Danni without having to look from the scented perfume she always wore. The perfume had originally had an intoxicating effect on him, but this had changed since the incident on the catameran and now it only served to send a chill down his spine.

‘Long way down, isn’t it?’ Danni said placing her hand on his back and exerting a little pressure.

‘I think it’s time we went in and went over Ian’s plan. After all we don’t have a lot of time here.’ Steven said turning to go back inside only to find his way blocked by Danni and once again being surprised by her strength.

‘Remember you are under our protection here and I would hate to have to cut this visit short’ she said looking at him then over the side of the balcony.

She held him there just long enough so that she was satisfied that he had gotten the implied message before turning and leading him into the lounge where Kelly and Ian were already sitting and chatting with drinks in their hands.

Steven and Danni took seats on the sofa opposite Ian and Kelly and Kelly took the cue to start speaking

‘Before you get started going over your plan Ian, we just need to lay down the ground rules here. Steven, you and Ian must be accompanied by either Danni or myself at all times. We will not need to leave the hotel for any reason whilst we are here and you are to make no phone calls. We have instructed hotel management to disable out going calls and to disable the in room internet access. Danni and I will also have the only two room keys. So, as long as you follow these simple ground rules all will be fine and we should have some fun.’ Kelly said smiling

‘Ian, how about you go over your plan again for us before we head down to the gaming floor’ Danni said.

‘The plan is quite simple really’ Ian started ‘I will sit at a table until I feel its coming hot’ whilst you all sit at tables around and when I make one of three gestures assigned to each of you, I will leave the table and you will take over.’

‘It can’t be that simple’ Kelly said

‘Of course its not, it requires a keen mathematical brain and memory, which not many people possess, luckily I do.’ Ian said ‘But this phase of the plan will come into effect tomorrow evening, this evening we will appear to just loose a little bit, but hopefully come out even’

With that having been said they all got up to head down to one of the hotels restaurants before hitting the gaming floor.

Three hours later they had been steadily winning and losing at the tables for about two hours when Steven got up from the tables and

started heading towards the exit. It did not take long for Danni to catch up with him.

‘Where do you think you’re going?’ she said

‘I did not know I had to ask permission to visit the gents’ Steven said

‘You know the ground rules on this trip. This is your only and last warning’ Danni said grabbing hold of Steven’s arm and pulling him into her. She planted a kiss into his ear and said ‘Don’t try it again, and by the way the gents are over there’ she said smiling and letting go and glancing in the direction of the slot machines.

Steven walked calmly into the gents cursing under his breath to himself whilst Danni went and sat at one of the slot machines which gave a good view of the entrance to the gents.

In the men’s room there was a group of young men who looked like college grads on holiday and who were all clearly drunk and passing around some illegal substance to each other.

Steven went up to these guys and made them a proposition.

‘Hey guys. I’ve got a hundred bucks for any of you who can chat up a girl whose been hangin on my coat tails all night, don’t worry she’s a real looker, just not my type, go and buy her a drink or something. Steven said

“Hey man, a hundreds not gonna do it’ one of the bolder guys in the group said.

‘All right, here’s three hundred’ Steven said counting out wad of notes, and while your at it sell me some of that stuff, what is it smack, P, coke?’ Steven said

‘coke’ one of them said exchanging a packet for another hundred dollar bill.

‘Whose the girl then?’ the guy said who sold him the coke.

‘Shes wearing a blue dress and diamond necklace and is asian looking. She’s sitting by the slot machines right across from the door.’ Steven said

‘We’ll show ya how its done dude, wont we guys’ he said slurring his words and laughing which caused all the others to start laughing with all the bravado that alcohol brings.

Steven followed them to the door and stopped the door from fully closing, leaving it open by the narrowest of cracks so he could see what went down.

The guys all approached Danni and surrounded her, each taking a turn trying to chat her up. Soon Danni’s attention was distracted from the door whilst fending off an advance from one of the young men. Steven took his chance and ducked out and behind a row of slot machines sure Danni had not noticed.

He made his way quickly towards the exit of the gaming floor and looking around decided to head down a side corridor and through a door with a stairway leading up stairs to the next level of the complex which contained several restaurants and bars.

Emerging on that level he looked around seeing several restaurants and bars all connected by a terrace walkway overlooking the level below. He rushed along the walkway and entered a bar that contained a bank of pay phones on the far wall and selected one which took credit cards.

Being glad that the girls had not thought to take their wallets from them, he dug it out of his inside jacket pocket, retrieved his visa platinum card and shoved it into the slot.

After a few seconds that seemed like an age the small LCD display stated that the transaction had been accepted and a call could now be placed. He lifted the receiver and dialled a number he had memorised of a friend back in Budapest.

The phone seemed to ring for an age before someone answered.

‘Hello’ a voice said before the line suddenly went dead.

Danni recognised the hand that had reached over his shoulder and clicked the receiver hook ending the call as Danni’s.

Glancing around he saw Danni looking at him with stone faced expression that conveyed barely concealed anger. She leaned over him as if to kiss him placing one arm around his neck.

Steven felt a sudden prick in his neck and pulled away giving Danni a startled look. He started to feel a strange warming sensation spread throughout his whole body and his vision started to blur. He went to take a step forward but his legs would not respond as they normally would.

He then felt a string arm grab him under his arms and looked groggily around to see Danni supporting his weight. At that point he found he did just did not have the will to resist and let Danni walk him back to the elevators as if he was seriously drunk.

When they made it back to the room, Danni laid Steven out on the bed in their room. Steven was still unable to mount any sort of resistance and could only lie there and watch the room slowly spin. After a minute he saw Danni loom over him a hypodermic needle in one hand filled with some sort of liquid which she jabbed into his neck. Shortly after everything went dark and Steven was sound asleep in a drug induced coma.

Danni then turned down the bed, removed his jacket and shoes and handcuffed one of his hands to the bed post. She shut the bedroom door and made her way back down to the rejoin the others.

‘Where’s Steven Ian asked as he noticed Danni had returned without him.

‘He’s taken ill, so he’s gone to bed for the night, but don’t worry, its nothing serious’ Danni said. She then gestured with her head for Kelly to join her over by an unused table but out of earshot of Ian who continued gambling, where she explained what had happened.

About an hour later they all agreed they had had enough for the night and headed back to the penthouse suite.

The next morning after a long lie in Ian finally arose around ten am. He went out into the lounge to find Danni and Kelly chatting over cups of coffee.

‘Morning sleepy head’ Kelly said.

‘How’s Steven?’ Ian asked

‘He’s still unwell and won’t be joining us today. He’s taken some pills for a migraine and will be sleeping it off, so we will be down to three for your plan this evening’ Kelly said.

‘Help yourself to some breakfast, sit on the balcony, it’s a lovely day’ Danni said gesturing towards the breakfast bar where room service had already left a range of cereals, fruit, juices, croissants and spreads.

‘What’s the plan for the day?’ Ian enquired whilst filling his plate.

‘Thought we would spend it by the pool’ Kelly said

‘Sounds good to me’ Ian said smiling and taking his plate out onto the balcony and sitting at one of the patio tables.

After breakfast they all changed into their swimming gear and headed down to the pool. Danni placed the do not disturb sign over the door handle to let room service know not to enter.

Ian never tired of seeing Kelly in a bikini, she simply looked gorgeous and turned many a head on their way out to find a couple of lounge chairs.

After several swims and many drinks Ian said 'I'm heading back up to the room. You want to come too?' he said winking at Kelly

'Sure' Kelly said feeling fairly sure what Ian wanted. She was not too perturbed as their lovemaking had actually been enjoyable much to Kelly's surprise. Ian had been quite adept at satisfying her unlike the other such gentlemen she had had to 'look after' for the firm.

Sometime later after a very satisfying time with Kelly, who now appeared to be asleep, Steven rose and crept out into the lounge. He wanted to check on Steven. He had not heard Danni come back in so crept over to his bedroom door which was closed.

He opened it quietly and looked in. What he saw shocked him to the core. Steven was lying still in his clothes from last night with one of his hands hand cuffed to the bed. He appeared to be still out cold.

He walked over to the bed and tried to shake Steven awake and saw the used syringe on the bedside cabinet.

Now very concerned he started to shake Steven. Having no luck rousing him he went into the ensuite and filled a glass of water and went and threw it on Stevens face hoping that would bring him around.

Steven started to mumble and he finally opened his eyes and it took him a while to bring his eyes into focus. When he finally saw that it was Ian, he grabbed him with his free hand.

‘You see’ he said very groggily still heavily under the influence of whatever drug they had given him. ‘They are not going to let us free, they are not from the government, you must get away. My jacket pocket’ he said letting go and waving in the direction of his jacket which was hung over the back of a chair in the room, before lapsing back into unconsciousness.

Startled, and unable to reawaken Steven he went over to the chair and searched through Stevens jacket, finally finding the packet of white powder. Carefully unwrapping the small packet and dabbing his finger into it and tasting it, Ian had been to enough parties to know the taste of cocaine. There appeared to be enough for about two fixes.

He then heard the sound of Kelly stirring and quickly left Stevens room closing the door. He then went to the bar and made two drinks. He poured the contents of the packet into Kelly’s drink and went into the bedroom.

‘I just went to fix us some drinks’ he said handing a glass to Kelly who took it and put it on the bedside cabinet, much to Ian’s alarm.

He hoped back into bed and took a sip of his drink

‘Aern’t you thirsty?’ Ian said

‘In a minute’ Kelly said propping herself up on the bed.

Ian felt himself start to sweat, she must consume the drink before Danni arrived back. All those stories Steven had been trying to convince him of must be true. How could he have not seen all this?

‘You All right, you look miles away’ Kelly said studying him

‘I’m fine’ he said ‘I’m just thinking about tonight’

‘It will all be fine’ Kelly said picking up the glass and raising it to her lips but not taking a sip.

Pulling the glass away from her lips she said ‘have you got some worries?’ she said looking at him. ‘Will it still work with only three of us?’

‘Sure it will, I was just recalculating the best way to make the most money with there people’ he said smiling and finishing his drink.

Kelly raised the glass to her mouth and swallowed the whole drink at once.

Ian got up and said ‘I might take a shower’ he said watching for the effects of the cocaine.

‘Sure darling’ Kelly said.

‘I’ll just refresh my drink first’ Ian said heading to the bar hoping the drugs would take effect.

Putting his glass down on the counter he heard a sudden commotion coming from their bedroom. Kelly suddenly burst into the lounge and levelled a gun at him.

‘What have you given me’ she yelled at him.

He could see the gun swaying in her hand and that she was trying to fight the effects of the drug. But he stood there unable to move transfixed by the sight of the revolver pointed at him.

Finally Kelly succumbed to the effects of the cocaine and collapsed onto the floor. Ian went over and nudged her to see if she was still conscious at all. Kelly remained absolutely still.

Taking his chance he rushed into the bedroom threw on some jeans, trainers, a t-shirt and jacket and grabbed his wallet. He rushed out of the suite and raced to the stairwell. He did not want to take the chance of running into Danni in the elevator.

He looked over the stair railings and could not see or hear anyone in the stairwell. He then bounded down the stairs two at a time. Reaching the bottom he regained his breath and calmed himself down so as not to attract anyone's attention and opened the door and peered out.

Not seeing Danni or anyone official he opened the door and proceeded out through the hotel lobby which was shielded from the pool by the landscaping and plantings.

As Ian was doing this Danni stepped out of the elevator and opened the door to her suite. Seeing Kelly unconscious on the floor, she grabbed the pistol out of her purse and rushed through the suite clearing the rooms. Noting that Steven was still unconscious and handcuffed to the bed.

She then rushed to Kelly who was out cold on the floor. Unable to awaken her she rushed back into the bedroom and threw on some clothes and shoved the pistol in a jacket pocket.

She checked the stairwell in time to hear a door closing at the very bottom.

Ian made it to the boardwalk and turned left heading into the centre of the city. A few blocks ahead he could see what looked like a brightly lit collection of outdoor eateries where traders prepared quick and cheap meals whilst people waited.

As he got closer he could see that it was more a whole maze of shops much like a bazaar with narrow alleyways crisscrossing everywhere. Entering the Bazaar Ian found himself harassed by shop owners trying to sell him everything from spices to counterfeit watches. Finally he came across a vendor selling prepaid cell phones, perfect he thought.

Not taking time to bargain he simply paid whatever the man asked which when converted would turn out to be a very expensive phone. Quickly tearing off the wrapping and discarding it as he walked he dialled a friend's number in LA hoping there was enough credit on the phone to last the call.

The phone rang on the other end. After a few rings a voice answered 'Hello'

'Graeme it's Ian'

'Hey buddy, where the hell are you, you disappeared man, we all thought you had been abducted by Aliens.' Graeme said.

'Look, just shut up and listen. I've been kidnapped and need help, I'm somewhere near the old Subic Bay naval base in the Philippines?' Ian spoke hurriedly into the phone.

‘What the fuck?, you’re kidding right, another one of your pranks’ Graeme said back in voice that said he thought Ian was pulling another one of his jokes.

‘No, this true goddamit, I need you to go to the police, the State department, someone, I dunno, just help me’ Ian yelled down the phone

‘hey man, you’re not joking are you?’ Graheme said

Ian looked around and saw Danni moving through the market, it didn’t look like she had seen him yet.

Ian suddenly crashed to the ground having walked straight into a man walking in the other direction. The man dropped the box of jars containing sweets he had been carrying. One of them broke and the sweets rolled everywhere and caused a commotion. Ian grabbed for the cell phone he had dropped only to find it smashed and unusable.

Looking around his eyes met Danni’s whose attention had been drawn by the sudden commotion. Ian got up and ran leaving the man yelling after him. He ducked in and out and between stalls and alleyways not taking any note of where he was going until he finally ran into a dead end alley way between two buildings. Looking around he could see no way of climbing up and no other exit.

Seconds later Danni crashed into the alley way behind him drawing her pistol and levelling it at him.

‘I was hoping it would not come to this. Kelly really liked you and will be very disappointed when she comes around from whatever you slipped her.’ Danni said as took a syringe from her jacket pocket.

‘Look, there no need for that, I’ll do whatever you want.’ Ian said raising his hands in surrender.

‘You had better’ Danni said.

Danni walked behind him and put her arm around him under Ians Jacket and jabbed the needle into his side, but being sure to keep it concealed under Ian’s Jacket. She tucked the gun back into her jacket pocket with her other hand.

‘Now we are going to walk back to the hotel nicely and calmly not attracting any attention, that way I will not inject you, understand?’ Danni said menacingly.

‘Yes, I understand’ Ian said , and they began their walk back to the hotel.

As they got out of the elevator and opened the door to their room, she pressed the plunger home.

‘You said you wouldn’t’ Ian exclaimed before collapsing on the floor of the suite as if heavily drunk.

Kelly was awake but clearly effected by the drug now. Danni went over to her to see how she was.

‘Are you ok?’ Danni said slapping Kelly sharply across the face.

‘he gave me cocaine, but I think I can handle it now’ Kelly said finally being able to focus.

‘I’m going to call for the van, lets clear out of here’ Danni said getting out her mobile phone. She then called Jim and instructed him to have the plane ready for immediate departure.

Danni and Kelly then proceeded to make sure that nothing was left behind. They uncuffed Steven who was by now more lucid and able to walk.

‘We’re heading back to the plane now, the trips over. If you try anything on the way back to the plane, you’re a dead man, understand?’ Danni said

‘Yes’ Steven simply said not wanting another dose of whatever that drug was. He had a raging headache anyway and felt like he was going to throw up.

A few minutes later Danni’s phone went saying that the van was outside and ready.

Kelly already had Ian back on his feet and was supporting him, with both their bags over her other shoulder.

They made their way slowly to the elevator, then out to the van. They drew a few curious glances from people and Kelly simply rolled her eyes at them as if to say, yes he’s drunk again. The people who glanced simply nodded in understanding.

The made it to the van and Steven sat heavily down on one of the seats, whilst Ian was more or less poured onto the floor. Kelly and Danni got in after them and closed the door with Danni ordering the driver to go.

The hotel management was not concerned as Danni had said they may need to leave suddenly and had prepaid for the room and left a blank signed credit card slip for any additional charges.

When they made it to the jetty, Jim already had the float planes engine going and no one noticed the guys being marched and dragged as quickly as possible to the aircraft.

‘Back to the island I presume?’ Jim said as he pushed the throttles forward for takeoff.

‘Correct’ Danni said with relief descending on her as the water fell away beneath them.

Chapter 16

Kaliningrad

Four days after the capture of James and Bill at the slipway in Plymouth Arthur, Gary, Peter, Alan and Brett flew into Kaliningrad. During those two days they had questioned James and Bill in conjunction with the Plymouth police but had been unable to obtain much useful information other than name, rank and serial number.

As they were both active US servicemen involved in clandestine operations on British soil which involved the shooting of a British police officer all hell had broken loose in diplomatic circles. The US military wanted their serviceman back for interrogation, but as a police officer had been shot, the British home office were refusing to hand them over.

Luckily, the officer had not died but was still in hospital in intensive care, but was expected to live. The newspapers had not yet learned the details of the shooting and that US servicemen had been involved much to the relief of both governments who thanks to Arthur had found a way through a potential political standoff.

Arthur had spent much time on the phone to Roger, his contact at the US state department and James his counterpart in the British home office. As Arthur and his firm were well known to and independent of both governments and the situation involved an ongoing investigation they had each agreed for his firm to conduct, it had been agreed that the servicemen would be held in custody at a joint British and US special forces base in Britain and that Arthur be given another month to complete his investigation before it was taken over by each respective government.

Whilst this was seen as significant kudos for the firm, it came with a lot of pressure as should they fail, the firm would lose a significant amount of the prestige it had gained in the eyes of both governments over the past few years, which would result in the loss of a significant amount of business. Also, there were a number of people in various agencies in each government that were affronted by this decision and were applying a lot of internal pressure to have the investigation placed back in their hands, in particular the US military.

‘You had better get this one right Arthur. This case has the potential to cause significant embarrassment to our government’ Roger said over the video conference from behind his state department desk in Washington DC. ‘The secretary of state has taken a personal interest in this case and I have really stuck my neck out here’

‘I very much understand’ Arthur replied ‘My firm has handled many delicate investigations for you before and this will be no different. We have a number of promising leads and we will be working around the clock to get this case closed confidentially as soon as possible.’

‘Very well, I do not need to explain the consequences for us both if this goes pear shaped then. In the mean time I have again tried to find out from this end how these two US servicemen came be involved, but I am getting stone walled by the Pentagon. Someone in there knows something for sure. What about the package?’ Roger said.

‘We examined the package, it contained some shipping documents and codes. We are not sure what the codes are for, we suspect its some sort of combination, probably to whatever is in the container. We resealed the package and sent it on using the instructions the police were able to obtain from the serviceman, the only details they would give other than their name, rank and serial number. We really don’t think they knew anything of any significance and were just pawns. The police monitored the drop off to see who would pick up the package, but whoever it was were very good. The managed to cause what must have been a diversion by detonating a small charge hidden in a car parked near the entrance an armoured car used to enter a bank that was right across the street from where the package was to be picked up. By the time the officers recovered from the explosion which shattered all the windows and damaged some of their surveillance equipment, the package was gone.’ Arthur said.

‘What about the other package that they were seen exchanging at sea?’ Roger asked

‘We suspect it contained similar papers and codes to a shipment going to Kaliningrad. We also suspect that this is the where the money laundering operation begins. Someone is paying a lot of money for whatever is in that shipment. The container going to Sao Paulo must contain the money and that will be where the placement stage of the money laundering operation begins. Our next stage of the investigation will be to go to Kaliningrad and determine exactly what is in the shipment and who is paying. Sarah, my top forensic accountant is currently doing document searches and analysis to obtain evidence of who is behind both shipments along with Ralph, my top computer expert, whilst the rest of my team will get the physical evidence. We intend to go

to Kaliningrad first as that ship arrives first, then over to the US to follow up some leads there before going to Sao Paulo to observe who collects the container and where the money goes.’ Arthur detailed

‘Why not just grab the money now?’ Roger asked

‘We think this is just the first of many shipments and if we let them know we are on to their methods they will change their operation and we could lose our window of opportunity to get into the rest of their network. We need to know how they place the money into the financial system, how they layer it and who performs the layering and finally how the money is integrated back into the system as legitimate money and who benefits from this.’ Arthur said in summation

‘Very well, but keep me posted on every step. Be careful in Kaliningrad, do not trust the police or anyone there, Since the collapse of the soviet union corruption has been rife.’ Roger said ending the video call.

As they left the warm interior of the airport terminal after collecting their car keys from the Avis desk, they all hugged their heavy winter coats as they were hit by the still winter wind and sleet in this small part of Russia that was an exclave being cut off from the rest of Russia after the collapse of the soviet union and now surrounded by the independant states of Lithuania and Poland.

‘Kaliningrad is a very important part of Russia with significant manufacturing infrastructure, BMW and Hummer both having plants there and one in three television set sold in Russia being

manufactured there. It is also home to the only Russian Baltic sea port that is ice free all year round and plays an important part in the maintenance of the Russian Baltic fleet.' Peter said

'Well aren't you the walking encyclopedia' Brett said

'No, I just read it in the in flight magazine' Peter replied chuckling

They had hired two five series BMW's with Arthur and Gary in one and Peter, Alan and Brett taking the other. Their first destination was the Triumph Plaza Hotel which was located near to the ports of Kaliningrad and had the advantage of underground car parking.

After registering at the desk they all gathered in Arthur's room to sort out the details of the plan.

'The ship arrives this nineteen hundred this evening and according to Sarah will dock at the Lesnaya Gavan dock number three. To the west over here' Gary said pointing to a spot on the map 'is a series of old disused naval warehouses that provide a perfect view of the ship as it unloads. Using binoculars we should be able to see the container numbers as they are off loaded onto trucks. After that it is just a matter of following the truck to wherever the container is delivered. We really cannot plan beyond that.'

'All right let's move' Arthur said looking at his watch and seeing it was near to four thirty in the afternoon already.

Twenty minutes later they arrived at the disused warehouse complex to find it shut off behind barbed wire fences.

‘There appears to be only one guard on duty’ Peter said over the portable radio to Arthur and Gary who were in the car behind them.

‘Leave that to me’ Gary said getting out of their car.

Gary sauntered over to the gates whilst the others all looked on from a distance. One of the guards came up to Gary and engaged him in conversation. After a minute, the guard waved for the other guard to join them where they could be seen talking some more. Gary eventually pulled out a wad of cash and handed it over. He then waved for the others to drive up as the guards unlocked and opened the gates.

As Arthur pulled up Gary hopped back in and instructed Arthur to drive and instructed Brett to follow in the other car.

Finally they found the warehouse that gave the best view of the dock that the ship would berth at and they parked the cars inside out of view.

‘What did you tell the guards?’ Brett said quizzikly as the all gathered in front of the cars.

‘I said we were movie producers from Hollywood scouting for potential movie sites, that and a little cash to grease their palms. So long as we are out of here by the end of their shift at midnight we will be fine.’ Gary said.

This brought a series of chuckles from all.

‘All right, wheres the best spot for surveillance’ Arthur asked

‘Up there on the mezzanine where theres some broken windows’ Peter said pointing up at an old unsafe looking walkway which ran the length of the inside of the large empty warehouse.

‘Doesn’t look like anyones been here in years’ Alan said.

‘Not since the fall of the Berlin wall and the drastic reductions and cost savings imposed on the Russian Navy’ Arthur said.

‘Its bloody cold in here’ Brett said.

‘Yes, I suggest we take turns up there observing whilst the rest of us wait in the cars’ Gary said.

‘The ship could arrive any time so we need to be ready to travel anyway.’ Peter said.

With that being said they started taking twenty minute watches up in the gantry with the binoculars and the sheet of paper with the container number written on it and a still of the face of the man who exchanged papers on the inflatable taken from the police launch. Although the still was grainy and black and white there were enough features visible to allow for recognition.

Two hours later it was approaching seven pm and the ship finally arrived and was pushed against the dock by two harbour master tug boats. It took until seven thirty before the ship was tied off

and the gangway lowered. Some officials climbed aboard the vessel with clip boards and documents.

By this time there were several trucks lined up waiting for containers to be offloaded onto their flat beds.

‘heads up, here comes our man from the photo’ Peter said into the radio, it being his turn on watch. ‘He’s coming down the gangway stairs. He’s now headed for one of the trucks with that package in his hands. He’s opening it now and pulling out some documents.’

The man examined the documents and apparently being satisfied went and climbed up into one of the trucks waiting for container offload to begin.

Peter relayed this to the others.

The truck was the third in the queue. Twenty minutes later after two containers had been offloaded by the giant port cranes, the target truck pulled under the crane awaiting its load. The giant crane manoeuvred its huge grapple over a container on the ship, locked on to it and lifted it effortlessly of the ship and on to the truck. On the way down Peter read the number off the container and compared it to the one on the list.

‘That’s it’ Peter said into the radio and moving down to his car. Both vehicles then peeled out of the warehouse heading back to the main gate which the guards opened for them, then they headed directly up the road where the gate to the docks the truck would be using would be was located. They pulled over to the side of the road, turning off their lights but leaving the engines idling ready to follow the truck.

Five minutes later the truck pulled out of the docks and turned left headed up the street away from them. They followed the truck keeping as far back as possible for about twenty minutes before it finally pulled into a broad driveway leading down between two rows of warehouses. There was a large sign in Cyrillic at the entrance to the driveway.

Gary who could speak and read Russian having completed a BA degree in languages before joining the army translated the sign to the others 'Volaniya Chemical Company'.

As they pulled up across the street, they were in time to see the truck drive into a warehouse situated behind an administration building and see a roller door close behind it.

'All right, lets park up over there Gary said taking operational command whilst in the field.

Both cars pulled up into a car park behind some simple landscaping in front of a similar complex which appeared deserted for the evening. Arthur remained behind the wheel of their car whilst Gary spoke over the radio for Alan to remain behind the wheel of the other car and for Peter and Brett to follow him up to the warehouse.

The three of them then made their way over to the administration building which backed on to the warehouse the truck had pulled into.

‘Ok, it looks like all the admin staff have left for the evening. If this complex is like most others, this admin building should connect to the warehouse.’ Gary said

Peter peered into through the glass door that showed a showroom with a range of packaged containers. There was an alarm panel with a blinking light just inside the door.

Retrieving his lock picking tool pouch, Peter soon had the front door open and went in going immediately to the alarm panel which had started beeping a warning tone. He took some more tools and wires out of the pouch and soon had the panels cover off and was attaching some wires with alligator teeth to wires in the alarm panel which soon stopped beeping.

‘OK, I’ve disabled the alarm’ Peter said.

The others then entered shutting the door behind them. They then moved over to the door at the rear of the showroom. Opening it, the corridor beyond was empty. There was a stairwell leading up to the second story immediately behind the door and the corridor continued down and turned right. There were two doors on either side of the corridor before it turned. From the signs on each door Gary translated as toilet block and staff room.

‘Lets head upstairs, there may be an office in the rear with a window into the warehouse’ Gary said.

They made their way up the stairs with guns drawn ready for trouble. Listening at the door Peter made a hand signal indicating he could not hear anything on the other side. Opening the door they stepped into an office area. They slowly cleared each office

moving quietly to the rear of the admin building noting a server room as they went.

‘I’ll insert the virus Ralph gave us’ Gary whispered as he was the only one who could probably read the screen. Moving to the server console Gary moved the mouse and the screen came to life casting a glow through the room. He had been right, although anyone would recognise a Microsoft windows screen when they saw one, everything was in Cyrillic.

Gary removed a small USB device from his jacket pocket and plugged it into the server. A new window popped up and Gary selected the file explore option and then clicked on the file Ralph had installed on the USB device. Another window appeared and a progress bar appeared showing the progress of the installation of Ralph’s program on to the server. When that was completed Gary shut down both windows and removed the USB stick and left the room leaving the computer time saver to blank the screen again.

He then made his way down the corridor and found Peter and Brett crouched down in an office which had a view of the warehouse. They were watching the truck lower the container on to the warehouse floor. When this was completed they saw the man from the ship hand over the package containing the documents to a third man who tucked them into his jacket. He then opened the roller door whilst the driver and the man hopped back into the truck and drove away. He then lowered the roller door and walked back to the front of the container and manipulated the combination locks on the container and opened it. Inside the container were stacks of barrels on pallets. After retrieving a pallet from the container with a forklift truck the man

opened the small lid on one of the barrels and placed a pipette into the barrel and withdrew a sample of chemical and poured the contents into a plastic pouch he took out from his jacket which looked similar to field test kit customs officers use. After waiting for a chemical reaction the man seemed satisfied and took out a mobile phone and made a phone call. After this he placed the pallet back into the container after sealing the barrel and shut the container resetting the locks.

He then left through a door in the side of the roller door turning off the warehouse lights as he left.

‘We’ve got to get a sample of what’s in that container’ Gary said. They all then moved back through the administration office and back down to the first level and followed the corridor which led to a door which gave access to the warehouse.

Taking their flashlights out, Brett went to the forklift whilst Gary and Peter opened the container using the codes they had intercepted in Plymouth.

Brett removed the pallet whilst Gary retrieved the pipette from the bench where they had seen the man with the field test kit leave it. Peter looked on some the shelving in the pallet racks on the opposite side of the warehouse and found a series of empty plastic containers of various sizes that this factory must use to package its bulk chemicals for sale.

Gary used the pipette to extract some of the contents and poured it into the small plastic bottle Peter had retrieved.

At that point Gary's radio made a garbled noise which none of them could comprehend.

'Say again?' Gary said into the radio

The same garbled response came back.

'They must be trying to warn us of something but theres some interference on the channel' Peter said.

Just then they could hear some cars pulling up outside.

'Shit, lets leg it' Gary said and they all ran for the door leading to the corridor. They got to the corridor just as they heard the small metal door mounted into the roller door open.

They then heard a series of shouted exclamations in Russian as they retreated down the corridor and ran for the front door. They burst out the front door just as Arthur and Alan skidded the BMW's to a halt on the street in front of the building.

The glass door behind Gary shattered as a series of bullets slammed through it barely missing the three of them as they sprinted for the cars and dived in. Peter had barely slammed the car door closed as Alan sunned the accelerator hard to the floor throwing him back into his seat. Arthur did the same following right behind.

As they made it to the end of the street two cars burst out of the warehouse driveway in hot pursuit.

Alan turned left heading for a main road he had seen on their way in.

‘I wish we had had time to study the layout of this town first’ Alan said as he swung the car in and out of traffic racing down the two lane street. He looked in the rear view mirror and saw Arthur sticking right on his tail. Looking further back he saw one of the cars turn into the street and follow him whilst the second pursuit car raced straight ahead and disappeared down another street.

‘Where the hell’s he going’ Alan said as he swung the car out onto a three lane highway and headed spinning the steering wheel to stop the back end sliding out. Arthur screeched around right behind him also struggling to stop his car spinning out of control.

They raced up the highway which was thankfully light in terms of traffic. Suddenly there was a huge impact behind them and Alan stamped on the breaks staring into the rear view mirror to see that a car had rushed out of a side street and smashed into the side of Arthur’s car causing both vehicles to skid out of control glass and metal and plastic fragments flying everywhere.

Several cars that had been following swerved wildly to avoid the smash and smashed into parked cars on either side of the highway until the road was completely blocked.

Arthur stumbled out of the twisted wreckage and started to run for Alan’s car whilst Gary stumbled out of the other side and attempted to jump across the crumpled hood of their car as the vehicle that had been giving chase screeched to a halt.

Two men got out and started firing towards Gary who cried out in pain as a bullet hit his leg as he jumped off the hood landing heavily on the pavement. Arthur turned to help him but Gary yelled at him to run as he could see one of the men in the car that had rammed them struggle out of the wreckage with a gun. The other man who had been driving was not moving and was crumpled over the steering wheel.

Arthur made it to the car and dived in and Alan stamped on the accelerator and the BMW leapt away. The men from the other chase car started firing as they could not give chase due to the carnage blocking the road.

Arthur looked back in time to see a man level a gun at Gary as one of the others climbed over the wreckage and grabbed Gary yanking him to his feet.

Alan threw the car round a corner and raced away down a side street desperately looking for somewhere to hide their car. Finally he came across a shopping complex with a multi story parking building and dived in going up several levels before selecting a parking space.

They all sat there trying to catch their breath and calm down after the huge adrenaline surge they had all just experienced.

‘What are we going to do now’ Alan said finally getting himself under control first.

‘We’ve got to get this stuff back for analysis’ Brett said

‘Not before we get Gary back, there no telling what they will do to him’ Arthur said

‘Lets boot up the laptop and see if the GPS locator in his watch is working’ Peter said pulling the laptop out of its case.

Meanwhile Gary was trussed up on the backseat of a car being driven at high speed. His leg wound had turned out to be a bad graze only which the men who had man handled him into the car had bandaged quickly enroute with a handkerchief and tie.

No one spoke to him during the trip which had now lasted ten minutes. Finally the driver slowed and pulled into the basement car park of what looked like a high rise apartment building.

Gary was then ordered out of the car and he and the three other men in the car walked to the elevator and rode it to the tenth floor. Exiting the elevator they walked down a hallway to room 1034. Gary was taking note of everything he could in case an opportunity to communicate presented itself. There was a man standing guard outside. He looked like a real mobster from a TV show dressed in a cheap suit with greasy hair swept back into a small pony tail.

He opened the door for them to enter. Inside the apartment were two other men, one a tall well dressed man in his early thirties and very fit looking, clearly a high ranking enforcer type Gary thought. The other man was shorter, and overweight, maybe in his fifties, with gray hair that still retained a few streaks of its original black coloring. He had a beard which was in similar condition.

Two of the men who had brought Gary here went into the kitchen to get a drink whilst the third stuffed Gary roughly into a chair and went outside to join the man on the door, closing it behind him.

The old man studied Gary for a while before saying in English.

‘Are you MI5, CIA. Now tell me, don’t be afraid, my men here won’t hurt you if you cooperate’

This drew a few laughs from his men, but there was nothing humorous about their laugh, however this did mean they all spoke English.

Guessing that these men were not going to accept any kind of story that did not ring of the truth Gary thought fast to concoct a cover story that may buy some time for Arthur and the others to locate him and formulate some sort of rescue plan. He would have to string it out however to get this time and Gary knew what that meant from his SAS training. Simply being the grey man here would not work.

‘Look, could I have a drink of water?’ Gary said starting out slow

‘You may have a drink of water when you tell me what you were doing at my warehouse?’ The man said

‘Look I’ve been shot and lost blood, I need some water’ he repeated.

The old man looked at the man Gary thought was his chief enforcer, who moved in and gave Gary a solid punch to the side

of the head. Gary's head stung like hell and he saw stars but he could tell he was holding back though and that told him that he was experienced at this sort of interrogation and was conserving strength.

‘All right, I’m just a thief, I clearly chose the wrong warehouse tonight.’

‘I don’t recognise your accent, where are you from?’ the old man said

‘Australia’ Gary lied

‘Is that where your friends are from too?’ he asked

‘yes’

‘Who hired you and why my warehouse?’ the old man asked again

‘no one, we’re just travelling through Europe robbing from companies to pay for our travels’ Gary said.

‘Well to show you we are not barbarians in this part of the world, you can have your glass of water’ the old man said gesturing for one of his men to bring him a glass of water. Gary took a long sip in case it would be his last drink for a while. As soon as Gary took the glass away from his lips he saw stars again as he received another blow which caused him to drop the glass. The punch was followed swiftly by another to the stomach which caused Gary to gasp for air and slump forward onto the floor.

The old man loomed over him and said ‘now lets dispense with the fairytales shall we and tell me where you are really from. You see, the locks on that container are very sophisticated and unless you have the codes, there is no way some common thieves from, what do you call it down there, yes the outback, could have opened that container.’

‘What can I tell you, we were lucky’ Gary said

This brought Gary a swift kick to the stomach.

Just then one of the henchman said in Russian ‘The video call is coming through on the computer’

The old man moved over to the desktop computer that had a large twenty two inch LCD display and pressed a button on the keyboard. The screen went blank and then an image appeared of a silhouetted man sitting behind a desk.

‘What has happened’ the silhouetted man said

‘I’ll tell you what has happened, we caught one of the men breaking into the warehouse and they had the container open, now how could that have happened, were you planning to double cross us and destroy the shipment?’ the old man replied.

‘The firm does not do such things and further more you have my permission to interrogate and kill the intruder, but please be so kind as to let me know what he has to say, as we need to know if our operation is compromised. We need this operation to continue to its conclusion as do you. Now may I suggest you use doctor

Dzerzsky on this subject as if this man is a professional, the usual techniques may prove ineffective, and time is of the essence here.'

The screen then went blank before returning to the normal windows desktop.

Gary noted the silhouetted man clearly had an American accent and he was sure there were epaulettes on his shoulders.

The old man nodded at his chief enforcer and who dug a cell phone out of his pocket and dialled a number. He spoke in Russian and Gary heard him speak to a man and give the address of the apartment as the old man loomed over him and said

'Your story is going to come out now, but alas you will experience a great deal of pain.'

Back in the car park Peter had narrowed down the address of building where Gary's GPS locator was giving out its signal. It was within the ten nautical mile radius of the watch's range.

'I'm going to call James Reginald first at the British home office and let him know what's happening before we make another move.' Arthur said pulling his cell phone out of its clip on his belt.

The others watched the laptop screen whilst Arthur dialled the number, looking for any signs that Gary may be on the move.

The phone conversation was short and to the point and the others looked at Arthur expectantly when he ended the call.

‘Ok, James was very adamant that we are not to seek the assistance of any local law enforcement as there is no telling whether they have been corrupted or not.’ Arthur said

‘You mean they don’t want another diplomatic scandal on their hands’ Peter said

‘You’re probably right but we need to trust his judgement. He is going to see if MI5 has an asset in the area that can assist us. They definitely want that sample bottle however so that will be some motivation for them to help.’ Arthur said

‘Is that all?’ Brett said slightly exasperated

‘No, the HMS Gloucestershire is making a visit to Lithuania to renew old ties the Royal Navy had before the Russian revolution. He advised us not to use Trains or Airlines but to get ourselves to Klaipeda where she is berthed. We will be recognised as Royal Navy Auxilliaries and allowed aboard.’ Arthur said.

‘Where the hells that?’ Alan asked.

‘Its about 120 kilometres north of here, like driving from Auckland to Hamilton, also I have given James our GPS frequency for MI5 to use should they be able to help.’

‘But, we are on our own still’ Alan said

‘In the mean time, yes, so any ideas on our next move then?’ Arthur asked looking from face to face.

‘We have no choice except a smash and grab. We just need to hope they do not have too many heavies around’ Peter said.

With that Arthur started the car and headed out of the carpark taking directions from Peter who had programmed a route from their current position to the position given out by Gary’s GPS locator.

Fifteen minutes later they were driving down a street filled with apartment towers when Peter said to pull over and stop.

‘He’s in that building over there’ Peter said

‘Can you tell what floor?’ Brett asked

‘No, we would have to use the portable tracking unit and go floor by floor’ Peter said.

‘Arthur, you stay here in the car with the engine running, we do not need to take the risk of someone recognising you. The rest of us could pass as locals at first glance.’ Peter said.

Peter, Brett and Alan then all checked their glocks before tucking them into their belts and concealing them under their jackets. Getting out of the car, Peter activated the tracking device which looked like a PDA and attached a earpiece connected by a wire to the device which he shoved in a jacket pocket. To anyone looking it would look like he was listening to an MP3 player. In actual fact the earpiece was emitting a low intermittent tone that would increase the frequency of beeps as they got closer to Gary’s watch.

They sauntered into the building looking every bit as if they lived there. They noted there was a man loitering about the entrance and looked like he may be some sort of lookout. They walked right by him to the elevator bank laughing as if to a good joke one of them had told. The man glanced at them but appeared to pay them no real attention. They got in the elevator and pressed the button for the twenty first and top floor. As the elevator ascended the beeping in Peter's ear got quicker in frequency and then as they went past the tenth floor it started to decrease in frequency.

'He's on the tenth floor' Peter said pressing a button to stop the elevator at the next floor. They then made their way to the stairwell and descended to the tenth floor.

'Right, there may or may not be guards on the door. If there is, be ready to follow my lead and take them down quickly and quietly' Peter said.

They then entered the common corridor and made their way along past the elevator and round a corner where ahead they saw two men guarding a door. The beeping in Peter's ear got quicker and quicker in intensity until it was indistinguishable as they were passing the door to room 1034 that the two guards were in front of.

With lightening reflexes that had barely diminished since his time in the army, Peter changed direction and lunged at the second guard after passing the first as if just trying to walk by whilst jiving to some music.

The guard was stunned at first taken by complete surprise but recovered quickly and started to struggle, but Peter had him in a choker hold and was squeezing the mans throat shut causing his eyes to bulge and flail about with his arms trying to loosen Peters grip. They stumbled to the floor, the man falling on top of Peter, but Peter's grip was merciless and vice like and the guard finally lost consciousness.

Getting up, he saw that Brett and Alan had disposed of the first guard who was now also lying unconscious on the floor. Drawing their weapons and communicating with hand signals, they all drew the weapons and prepared to rush the apartment. On Peters signal, Alan being the most solid of them all kicked the apartment door with all the strength he could muster. The apartment door was not match and door flew open with parts of the frame splintering around the lock.

They rushed into the room with one of them covering a different angle. They found Gary slumped in a chair with a tall well dressed gentleman standing over him, an older man standing in front of him and two other men behind the bar who had dropped their mugs and were reaching for their weapons, but seeing guns already trained on them raised their hands.

The well dressed man was in the process of securing Gary to the chair he was in with a role of duct tape. Peter gestured with his gun for him to step away and herded him and the older man behind the breakfast bar to join their colleagues so that they could cover then better.

‘You will not get away with this. With the people I have on my payroll I will have every cop in the city looking for you, you have no chance of escape’ the older man said in a threatening tone.

‘Well, we’ll take our chances’ Peter said as he freed Gary from the chair.

Peter and Gary then dragged the two unconscious guards into the room and bound them with the duct tape whilst Brett and Alan kept the others covered. Gary then tossed the well dressed man the tape and instructed him to bind his cohorts similarly. Finally when he was satisfied that all were secured, he gave the well dressed man a solid punch to the stomach which toppled him over, followed by another to the back of the head which brought all the way to the floor.

‘You won’t get far’ he spat ‘and I will have fun dealing with you. There will be nothing left to identify you when I’m finished’ he continued to spit until Gary silenced him with a couple of twists of tape around the head.

‘So these devices of Ralph’s really do work’ Gary said grinning at his mates.

‘We definitely owe him one when we get back’ Peter said.

They all then moved out of the apartment and took the stairs to the ground level and sauntered out the building not wanting to draw attention from a group of late night revellers returning to the building. As soon as they were out the street, however they raced to the car and Arthur peeled away whilst Peter programmed a route to Klaipeda into the GPS unit.

Twenty minutes later they were on the E28 motorway headed for Znamensk where they would find the E77 which would take them to the Lituianian border, from there they would find the A13 which would take them direct to Klaipeda and the HMS Gloucestershire.

They had plenty of fuel and had elected to ditch their bags they had left at the hotel which only contained some clothing, in order to make the quickest possible time to the border which was still some fifty kilometres distant. They all had kept their passports on them for just such a contingency.

The night was pitch black and it was now around two am in the morning. There were few cars on the road and they were making good time. Arthur had called ahead and left a message on James's night secretary detailing their proposed route.

The miles flew by under the cars tyres as Arthur went as fast as the wintery conditions would allow. They made Znamensk by three am and turned north onto the E77. It was shortly after this that Arthur noticed headlights some distance back. After another few minutes Arthur was sure this was no ordinary driver by the way they were closing the gap and taking crazy risks on the slick road and blind corners.

Another few minutes and the car behind them was only a few hundred metres back. Soon bullets were ricocheting off the road on either side of car. Looking in the rear view mirror Arthur could see two men in the car behind them. The passenger was leaning out the window and taking shots which were wild due to the fact the cars were now throwing themselves around corners and almost becoming airborne over crests in the road.

Brett twisted around on the rear seat and shot out the back window and started to return fire. Suddenly his gun came flying back into the front of the car narrowly missing Gary's head as the car behind rammed their car causing Brett to crash backwards and lose grip on the gun.

A bullet shot through the back window, just missing Alan who was seated in the middle of the rear seat and leaning down as far as possible to create a low profile, and smashed into the stereo sending small shards of plastic everywhere.

Arthur started swerving the car from side to side to make aiming as difficult as possible as they raced into a tunnel. As they raced out of tunnel and emerged into a large flat valley, which was now only five kilometres from the border, they saw a helicopter closing in on their position from the left hand side of the car. Someone was leaning out of the chopper and started firing.

'Shit, we may be in trouble here guys' as Arthur quit weaving and just gunned the car for all it was worth. Tracers started streaming out from the chopper but to all their amazement slammed into the car behind them causing it to lose control crash off the road roll and burst into flames. The chopper then came level with the car and Arthur could see the guy leaning out gesturing for him to stop the car. Arthur then screeched the car to a halt as the chopper landed in the field next to them. They all piled out of the car and ran to the chopper.

As they all piled into the chopper, the man in the co-pilots seat gestured for Arthur to put one of the headphone sets on, of which there were three in the rear. There was just room for the five of

them to squeeze in the back and the pilot pulled in the power and chopper slowly rose into the air.

‘James arranged for this service. I cannot tell you who we are of course and this service is being offered on the understanding that you deny it ever happened given that we have violated Russian airspace.’ The man spoke as soon as Arthur had put the head set on.

‘You will have no such problem from any of us’ Arthur said in response.

‘I believe you have a small container of liquid for us?’ the man said.

Arthur gestured for Peter to give him the container and then handed it over to the man who took it and put it in a case he had with him.

They all sat back then recovering from the nights ordeal and watched the lights of farm house and roads go by under them as the pilot hugged the terrain making his way to the coast, then following it until they could see the lights of a city twinkling in the distance. The pilot then brought the chopper down in a field where there was a man with waving a torch like an aircraft controller.

When the chopper had settled, the man opened the door to the chopper and gestured for the five of them to follow him to two cars that were parked at the edge of the field.

As they reached the cars the chopper took off and the man turned the torch off and opened the passenger doors on each vehicle. Inside they found the drivers were wearing royal navy uniform.

‘Welcome to Lithuania gentlemen’ the man said in a Russian accent smiling, ‘These drivers will take you to your ship. You are royal navy auxiliaries returning from a night on the town’

They were all certainly drunk enough on adrenaline to pass as if they had been out on a night on the town and settled back for the short drive to the ship.

Chapter 17

Houston, Texas

Three days after their harrowing escape in Kalinigrad, and a short stay aboard the HMS Glostecshire and another helicopter transfer

to an RAF transport flight to Heathrow then a transit flight from London where they had picked up Ralph and Sarah the team and had a quick debrief with James Reginald before arriving in Houston.

During the debrief James said that the chemical was being analysed and that from initial tests it was nasty stuff and definitely a classified substance that should not be being sold.

Sarah said that through her research that she had discovered that most of the people behind the company in Kaliningrad were ex high ranking military officers that had taken advantage of their positions during the turbulent times after Glasnost and had gained control over several privatised former state companies and were clearly the source of the funds that were being laundered.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the company listed on the shipping documents was controlled by several Powerful Brazilian businessmen and local government officials. As yet I have not been able to tie these men to Rathbone or Porter, with the exception that Porter has several small freighters that make runs between Jamaica and Sao Paulo carrying bulk bauxite.

They had then discussed that the next step was to follow up the Rathbone connection in Texas before heading to Sao Paulo, Brazil to intercept and monitor the container being delivered by the PCS Malin and observe what was happening with that particular container. The Malin was not due in port at Sao Paulo for another ten days.

The weather in Houston was in sharp contrast what they had been enduring in Europe. The temperature was in the thirties and they

all discovered that they required some new clothes now that they were in hotter climes.

That evening they gathered in the hotel bar to plan their next move.

‘Try not to plan anything too adventurous for me over the next few days’ Gary said still winching from some of the injuries he had received at the hands of the Russian mobsters.

‘I think this one is going to be down to Sarah and Ralph, at least at first’ Arthur said. ‘They really proved themselves on the Porter Shipping leg of the investigation’

‘Why thank you’ said Sarah raising her glass acknowledging the compliment

‘I think we are going to need a slightly different approach on this one though. We are going to need to get close to Andrew. From what our DC office has told me by talking to their friends and colleagues who work here in Houston, is that Andrew Mathews is a fairly private individual and conducts a lot of his work from his Ranch in Navasota, north of Houston.’

‘So what will be my brief’ Sarah enquired.

‘One of the managers in our DC office has a friend in a CPA firm here in Houston who has stated that there is some internal strife between the various divisions in the Rathbone Chemical company regarding intra-company costings. They have been hired as independent auditors to review the companies inter departmental recosting system. Calling in a favour, they have agreed that Sarah,

given her expertise in this area may be part of the team. This will allow her to get close to Andrew.’ Arthur explained.

‘So what is the next step’ Sarah asked

‘You will meet the team at their offices tomorrow as a consultant for the project briefing before you all head to Rathbone. Andrew will be part of the Rathbone executive team who will be briefing once you arrive at their offices.’ Arthur said.

‘What will the rest of us be doing in the mean time’ Gary asked

‘Resting, I believe that we are going to need to be back up to par once we hit Sao Paulo in nine days time.’ Arthur said.

‘Well then, I’m going to find the pool’ Brett said getting up.

‘I’m going to find a masseur to iron out some the kinks and bumps from the last week. I wonder if this place has a spa suite’ Gary said also hoping up.

The following day after meeting the team at the CPA firm’s offices, which consisted of ten accountants with specialist skills in corporate cost allocation modelling, Sarah found herself sitting in a large conference room in one of the top floors of the Rathbone Chemical Company. The CFO had just completed the project briefing and introduced Andrew Mathews, CEO of Rathbone.

Andrew took the stand and gave a brief history of the company and backed up his CFO’s expectations of the team. Sarah had worn a provocative yet still professional suit and had unbottened

her blouse just enough to give a glimpse of the cleavage between her C cup breasts.

After the speeches, there was a meet and greet session where the executive mingled with the team from the CPA firm to get to know them as the project was expected to last some months and require a great deal of communication and cooperation.

Sarah was beginning to despair of getting the opportunity to meet Andrew as the session was almost over and it would be time soon to start the real work, and was therefore considering a direct approach when Andrew suddenly appeared in front of her.

Sarah could see why he was the CEO of a fortune 500 company. He was immaculately presented and had a real x factor about him. When he was talking to you he commanded your whole attention with his clear blue eyes and disarming smile.

Sarah had been around such people before, however and did not allow herself to be overcome as some of the other members of the team had clearly been.

There was a little small talk at first and Sarah was careful to engineer the conversation over several topics to impress him with her business acumen before asking about what such a man does for recreation and detailing some of her own exploits, all the time flirting with him in such a way as to not appear too unprofessional.

‘I like you very much, you seem very much more alive than your colleagues, how did you ever end up as a CPA?’ Andrew asked.

‘A girl has to do something and I found that I had an affinity for numbers and business at a young age, so I chose accountancy and finance as my major. I guess that’s why I also haven’t lost my wild side from being a country girl’ Sarah said

‘Did you grow up on a farm then?’ Andrew enquired

‘Yes, my parents ran beef cattle on a thousand acre farm in the King Country, that’s in the North Island of New Zealand’ Sarah replied

‘Ah, so that’s the accent I’ve been trying to place. Did you have horses on the farm?’ Andrew asked

‘Couldn’t have managed the farm without them, the terrain is very hilly and unsuitable for quad bikes or farm bikes and during muster you could spend days tracking down strays and camping out. Horses were the only real option’ Sarah said.

Andrew was very impressed with this sexy young but very intelligent woman as she was different from most of the gold digging socialites who were constantly trying to make a catch of him.

‘Would you like to visit my ranch this weekend, we are just about to start a muster of our own at my ranch, I’m sure your colleagues here could spare you for a few days. Andrew said with a look in his eyes that told Sarah she had clearly made an impact on the man.

She did not want to sound too eager however and ruin the spell she was casting.

‘I don’t know, I have a very tough boss to impress and I am trying to make partner in the next year’ Sarah said.

‘Come on, say yes, I will clear it with your boss, you leave him to me’ he said

‘Well ok, it sounds great, I haven’t had the chance to ride in ages’ Sarah said.

‘Great, we have drinks scheduled with your team here again tomorrow night which just happens to be Friday. Bring a bag with you for say three days. I take it you have jeans and boots.’ Andrew said

‘I certainly do’ Sarah lied, she would have to rush out tomorrow and purchase everything she would need.

‘Have you ever actually ridden a horse?’ Brett laughed when Sarah had explained what had occurred after getting back to the hotel

‘Of course I have. My parents may not have been farmers, but my uncle did own a cattle farm and I spent many summers there as a kid growing up.

‘Well that was fantastic work for one day Sarah’ Arthur said

‘Well you are going to need some teaching in picking locks as his office will almost certainly be locked.’ Peter said and he and Sarah spent several hours practicing opening locked doors until Sarah could almost do it blind folded.

‘Now, look after these, its my favourite set’ Peter said giving her his lock picking set.

After a long and mind numbing day spent reviewing certain aspects of Rathbones interdepartmental recosting model Sarah was actually looking forward to the next few days. The only bright spot of the day had been during her lunch break which she had spent purchasing all the new clothing she would need. This had brought back child hood memories she had forgotten.

Arthur and Gary had met her for a quick bite of lunch to inform her that they had located the ranch and would be staying at a small motel in the town which serviced the farms and ranches in the area. They also gave her a USB stick from Ralph to use to install some spy software on Andrew’s computer. All she had to do was boot the computer and stick the USB in one of the slots during the boot up sequence. The software would install itself.

That evening after the networking and drinks session Sarah retrieved her overnight travel case from under the desk she had been assigned and took the elevator to the basement car park where Andrew had his car waiting.

The drive to the ranch took about two hours, a lot of it stuck in the Friday night exodus of traffic from the city. Once they were on the 290 however, it was fairly smooth sailing.

When they finally pulled into the ranch homestead it was nearing ten pm. The Ranch complex was very impressive. The driveway itself wound between impressive landscaping including artificial ponds and creeks that were very cleverly integrated into their

surroundings. Andrew pointed out the features of the ranch as they went, indicating where the accommodations for the ranch hands were located, hidden amongst a grove of trees, where the stables were and a helipad and shed for the choppers the ranch manager used to assist with the mustering of strays.

Finally the main homestead itself came into view and it was an impressive site with four massive columns supporting a portico and a balcony over the front door and shuttered windows all across the front of the mansion reminiscent of the old southern state cotton farmers.

As they pulled up in front of the steps leading to the large front doors a two men descended the stairs and opening the car doors and greeting them.

‘Take Miss Falconers bags to the Newbury suite after parking the car please Aaron’ Andrew said to one of the men.

‘Yes Sir’ The man said getting in the car and driving it around the side of the mansion.

‘Mrs Simms has prepared a supper for you and Miss Falconer’ the other man said taking Andrews jacket as they entered the main foyer of the house.

Andrew nodded and taking Sarah by the hand said ‘would you like a brief tour before supper?’

‘That would be wonderful. Your mansion is truly impressive’ Sarah said taking in the broad sweeping stairs that lead up to a

mezzanine which lead off in either direction at the top to wings on either side.

Their tour finished at Andrews large library and study on the second level.

‘This is where I do most of my work from. I only go into Houston when there is a board meeting or some important fixture.’ He said closing and locking the doors to the study.

They then descended to a dining room where a member of the household staff was just laying out two steaming hot bowls of soup.

‘Well I am truly impressed’ Sarah said after they had both been seated and the staff member had left the room.

‘Thank you very much, but wait until you see the rest of the property. We will be riding out at dawn with a posy of men to begin the muster. I try to be involved as much as time permits as there is nothing like camping out under the stars after a day in the saddle’ Andrew said before testing the temperature of his soup and taking a spoonful after finding it to his satisfaction.

‘The soups wonderful’ Sarah said

‘Mrs Simms secret recipe. She has been with the family for as long as I can remember. She was very good to me after my parents died when I was ten’ Andrew said remembering a painful memory.

‘Oh, I’m very sorry’ Sarah said

‘No, No, it was a long time ago. I have put you in the Newbury suite in the guest wing, it has a wonderful view of the gardens. Another project of Mrs Simms’ Andrew said.

After finishing their soup talking about the ride tomorrow they retired to their rooms. Andrew had mentioned that they would be spending two nights camping before returning to the mansion for one final night.

After a shower in the ensuite attached to her room, Sarah put on some pyjama shorts, top and a robe and slippers. She put the USB stick and lock pick in one of her robes deep pockets and went to the door of her room which was ornate and gold trimmed with gold handles. Cracking it open slightly and hoping it did not squeek, she peered out. The corridor was dimly lit and she could not see or hear anyone.

She stepped out of the room, closing the door and crept along the corridor. When on wall of the corridor gave way to the mezzanine she stopped and glanced down to the main foyer which was now mostly in darkness. She was hesitant of staying here too long in case someone came out of a door in the wing across the mezzanine in the other wing of the mansion.

There was a sudden movement in the deep shadows downstairs and a flashlight beam started making its way around the walls. Sarah ducked back just as it was about to reach the spot she was peeking out from. After continuing around the walls, it disappeared and darkness returned to the cavernous foyer. She then heard steps receding and eventually a door opened and closed, echoing off the walls of the largely empty mansion.

Moving quickly and making no sound in her slippers, she crossed the mezzanine to the next wing and stopped listening. She could not hear any sounds. Sarah then moved to the double doors which gave entrance to the library and ducked inside quickly, closing the door she had used with care not make the slightest noise which could echo and alert a member of staff who may come and investigate.

The library was eerily quiet and dark, lit only by the ambient light of the moon streaming in through the large windows. She moved quickly to the doors to the study. Listening she could hear no noise on the other side and there was no light no light shining from under the door.

Taking out the lock pick set she set to and after a few false starts, finally had the door open. She crept in and shut the door behind her which appeared to lock automatically as a small click could be heard from the lock. She tested the handle and found it opened from inside without need for a key.

She moved to the large desk and began searching for the computers CPU, finally discovering that it must be contained in a locked cupboard in the desk. It took her a while this time but she finally managed to defeat the desks lock which was more sophisticated than the doors.

Placing the USB stick in a slot she powered up the computer. The screen on the desk sprang to life and after a few moments the BIOS screen disappeared and the boot sequence started. The light on the USB stick also started flashing indicting it was transferring data. Eventually the login screen appeared and she removed the

USB and powered down the computer. She was about to begin locking the cupboard door when she heard the door to the library open and close and soft footsteps approach the doors to the study.

Sarah held her breath hoping that it was just someone checking the doors. Her heart sank when she heard a key being inserted into the lock. She cast about desperately for a place to hide settling on a spot behind a couch which was concealed from most of the rest of the study.

The door opened just as she crouched down out of view. Footsteps could be heard moving to the desk. Then the sound of someone sitting, it must be Andrew she thought hardly daring to breathe.

She heard the sound of key jingling, a brief pause then the sound of the computer booting up. Several minutes passed and then there was the sound of keys being punched and a mouse being clicked. After about half an hour she heard the computer power down and the sound of keys jingling before footsteps and the sound of the study door closing. She waited for another few minutes even though her leg muscles were beginning to cramp.

Finally sure she was safe she slipped out of the study and moved towards the door of the library. Her heart was pounding in her chest and she could hardly hear if anyone was outside for the sound of it. If she was going to be caught, it would be now.

Finding the courage, she placed her hand on the ornate gold handle and pressed down as carefully as possible and pulled the door open. Stepping out she almost screamed in surprise as the shape of a man was looking at her from across the corridor.

She managed to calm herself down as she realised it was just a statue she had not noticed on her way in as it was partially hidden by a large potted palm.

No one appeared to be in the corridor and she made her way quickly back to her room, collapsing on the large soft bed and taking some time to bring her nerves under control. Arthur had promised her excitement working for him, she just never thought it be quite so exciting, they were a Chartered Accounting firm after all.

Sarah was awoken at seven the next morning by a knock at her door. Throwing on her robe she opened the door to see one of the house staff.

‘Breakfast will be served in half an hour mam’ the man said.

Having a quick shower, not believing she had slept through her alarm. Sarah was normally an early riser, taking a five mile run most mornings. The events of last night must have gotten to her.

Feeling refreshed after a quick shower, she threw on some jeans and a blouse and descended the broad marble staircase and made her way to the dining room. Andrew was already there munching on a piece of toast whilst reading a newspaper.

‘Ah, good morning, I trust you slept well.’ He said looking up

‘Very well thank you, the room was very comfortable’ Sarah replied smiling.

‘Good, good. After breakfast we will be mounting up and riding out. Are you still looking forward to it?’ Andrew said

‘Very much.’ Sarah said pouring herself an orange juice and filling a bowl with fresh fruit and cereal.

After breakfast they walked out to the stables where the ranch hands were preparing all the horses and equipment.

‘Here we go, meet Sunstar’ Andrew said handing her the reins to a beautiful pure white Mare.

‘She’s very lovely’ Sarah said letting the horse muzzle her and get used to her scent.

‘She’s all saddled up and ready to go’ Andrew said swinging up on to the saddle of his horse, a magnificent jet black stallion. With that, all the other musters mounted their horses, ten men in all, Sarah bringing the number to eleven. There were also several pack horses with their reins attached to the back of the saddles of a musters horse.

Andrew looked like a real cowboy with spurred boots, cowboy shirt and a nickel plated six shooter with pearl handle in a holster all topped off by a ten gallon hat right out of a western. He also had the biggest grin on his face and it was easy to tell this was something he really enjoyed.

Andrew spurred his horse and they all galloped out and headed onto a trail leading away from the mansion, passing the empty stock pens which would be filled with cattle after the muster and

onto a trail leading out on a broad expanse of open land that was broken by the occasional hill and creek.

They were headed for the back of the property some fifteen hundred acres distant where most of the cattle were located and from there they would slowly drive them all forward back to the pens.

Although the day was hot and dusty, by late afternoon, Sarah could not remember the last time she had had so much fun. They had selected a sheltered ravine to camp for the night which at one end opened out onto a cliff face which dropped away to large expanse of land which formed the rear of Andrews ranch. There was steep trail at one side of the cliff that they would use the following day to drop down into the table land.

Sarah insisted on helping set up camp wanting to get as much out of the experience as possible even though the ranch hands had tried to insist otherwise.

It was not long before a large camp fire was roaring and they were all sitting around singing. One of the ranch hands had brought a guitar along and was strumming out one old trail song after another.

After the sun had gone down and the sky had darkened, there was the most amazing blanket of stars the Sarah had ever seen on display.

‘Come for a walk with me so we can get a better view’ Andrew said and they walked for a while so that the light from the camp fire no longer interfered.

The night was quite cool once away from the fire and Sarah gripped her jacket tightly.

‘Beautiful isn’t it’ Andrew said matter of factly as they reached the edge of the cliff and looked out over the moonlit expanse of land that ran to the horizon with not an artificial light to be seen anywhere.

‘Makes one feel small and insignificant’ Sarah said

‘Not me’ Andrew said ‘Makes me feel positive. See, I am a glass half full type of person and I see this and think of that is still left to conquer’

‘You’ve already conquered a great deal, there must be a point when you are contented’ Sarah said

‘No, I will not rest until I have built one of the largest and most powerful companies in the world. You can never think too small’ Andrew said putting his arm around Sarah.

‘That’s very ambitious’ Sarah said ‘You must have to risk a lot’

‘I never risk anything, that’s what lawyers and accountants are for, to shift the risk. I am a planner you see, I keep track of every little detail’ Andrew said staring at Sarah.

Sarah could not determine what it was that she was seeing in Andrew’s eyes, but whatever it was it was not the look of a man trying to woo a woman into bed. It was something more simple,

more basic, not lust but hunger. Andrew had an insatiable hunger in him to conquer all.

‘Speaking of details, why were you in my study last night?’

A shiver ran down her spine and she looked around quickly, too quickly really.

‘Don’t try to deny it. The cupboard in my desk was unlocked, and I am the only one with a key. I never leave it unlocked. You are the only person in the house who would have tried to get in to it. So I had your room searched today and they found the lock picking set’ Andrew said in a tone that was calm but deliberate and filled with menace.

Sarah tried to pull away but Andrews grip was too strong.

‘I’m very disappointed Sarah, I really thought you were different, not like the usual gold diggers. But all you’ve turned out to be is smarter and devious. I’m going to get you talking one way or another tomorrow back at the ranch.’

Andrew applied a slight pressure to Sarahs back and one of her feet lost its footing and Sarah had no choice but to grip on to Andrew for dear life.

‘Now that’s a gentle warning. Do not try and escape, this place can be treacherous in the dark.’ Andrew said pulling Sarah back away from the cliff and leading her back to camp.

‘This is your bedroll, now try and have a good nights sleep, tomorrow is a long day. You will see that there are several men

on watch throughout the whole night.’ Andrew said moving to a near by bedroll.

Sarah climbed in and wrapped herself up trying to remain calm. All she could do is activate the GPS panic button on her watch and hope the signal got through to the team.

She did not get any sleep that night and was very tired but pumped full of adrenaline when she was told to move the next morning. After the camp had been broken down, Sarah, Andrew and two of the men headed back towards the homestead, whilst the remaining men continued with the muster.

It was one one pm before they stopped for a break and they were half way back towards the homestead. Sarah was allowed down to sit under a tree and was given a wrapped ham sandwich and some bottled water.

There was a slight breeze and only the sound of the water in the creek bed they had just crossed to break the silence. A piece of dirt suddenly kicked up by one of the mens feet causing him to jump up and look around. Two more pieces of dirt kicked up around the men as they were about to run to the horses to retrieve the horses keeping them in place.

Soon the sound of a trail bike could be heard and it rounded the base of a hill and raced towards the group. As it got closer Sarah almost yelled for joy as she saw it was Gary. He skidded to hold in front of the men and stood up ordering the men to sit down and pulling a gun from his jacket pocket.

‘There is a world class sniper on that hill as I’m no doubt you’re aware of by now. If you try anything stupid before we are gone, your all dead men. Now sit down against that tree. Sarah get that rope from the horses’ Gary said gesturing towards the saddles.

One by one Gary bound the mens feet and hands double checking the bindings as he went.

‘Do you know who I am?’ Andrew yelled

‘I do’ Gary said calmly and matter of factly

‘Then you will know what I can do to you’ Andrew spat

‘Not if you can’t find us. But listen mate, you’re not the only one with powerful friends, you would do well to remember that’ Gary said looking directly at Andrew

‘Lets go Sarah’ Gary said as he shooed the horses away hoping this would slow them down even further when they eventually got free.

He then got on the bike and motioned for Sarah to climb on behind him and they roared off with Sarah gripping Gary tightly.

Chapter 18

Sao Paulo, Brazil

In the days after the rescue of Sarah from Andrew's Ranch, there had been significant developments in the investigation and after spending another three days holed up in their hotel in Texas, they had flown to Sao Paulo now certain that the beginning of the money laundering operation known as the placement stage commenced in Sao Paulo.

Sarah and Ralph had worked around the clock analysing all the information they had received to date including what they had been able to retrieve from Andrews computer before it had mysteriously disappeared.

'Someone has disconnected the computer from the internet, permanently, I can no longer even ping its IP address' Ralph said.

'Andrew must have discovered the virus I planted, or at least suspected I had tampered with it' Sarah replied.

'Still, we at least were able to gather a great deal of information' Arthur said.

Arthur had explained the circumstances around Sarah's rescue. He explained that sometime on the morning of the day Sarah had joined the posy, her signal had moved out of range and that had meant that if she had activated the panic button, they would not have known of it. They had known that she had been successful in planting the virus the night before as Ralph had been able to access Andrew's computer.

So that afternoon, Arthur had made arrangements to charter a small aircraft and overfly the ranch with Peter taking the laptop along to pick up your signal and plot it on a map.

Meanwhile, Gary, Brett and Alan had hired some trail bikes and purchased some high powered hunting rifles and scopes. They had then found a spur road that ran part way along the boundary of the Ranch.

When Arthur and Peter had finally picked up your signal, and had realised she was in trouble, Peter had been able to guide Gary, Brett and Alan to her position by having them activate their watches so he could see the relative position of Sarah to the others.

It had then just been a matter of finding the best opportunity to set an ambush. It had been decided that Brett and Alan, having both been through sniper training in the past would keep Andrew and his men covered whilst Gary rode one of the trail bikes in to collect you.

Whilst Sarah had been shaken at first by the experience, she had shown remarkable resilience and once back in Houston at the hotel with the team, she had thrown herself into the task of analysing all the information the team had gathered to date and had compiled a scenario to explain how the money laundering operation was working.

‘OK, to start with we now know that Andrew is using the Rathbone Chemical company to sell specialised and restricted chemicals to a Russian company using the Porter International Shipping Company. Who also transports the cash back to Sao

Paulo with documents and codes for each container being transferred in the English Channel as the ships pass each other.’ Sarah started.

‘We now believe that these chemicals are being manufactured in Brazil by a company that appears to be owned by a group of powerful local businessmen who are in fact just front men to disguise the real ownership of the company, the Jamaican Bauxite Company, which is itself a subsidiary of Rathbone. Whether or not these Brazilian businessmen are members of this mysterious “Firm” we have heard of or are just local front men, we as yet do not know.’ Sarah continued speculating

‘The Porter Shipping Company is again used to transport the raw material used in the manufacturing of the illegal chemicals, between Jamaica and Sao Paulo. When the container carrying what we suspect to be the cash arrives in Sao Paulo the cash is somehow placed into the financial system, how yet we do not know. What we do know now is that it eventually turns up in a bank in Jamaica. From there a loan is made for the same amount to the Orion Bauxite Company which is never actually repaid. It is just defaulted on and defeased. The Jamaican Bank does not care as it has the original money in another account that it controls. Over the next year there is a significant up turn in profitability for the Jamaican Bauxite Company as its output appears to rise significantly, they even have brought in additional freighter from Porter International to freight the supposed increase in production. In actual fact, the output remains the same, but the additional ‘profits’ or now ‘legitimate’ looking money equal in amount to the loan are channelled through the subsidiary in Brazil and out to the real shareholders. This being the third and final stage, known in

the business as the integration stage of the money laundering cycle' Sarah completed.

'So what about these extra freighters, do they just run back and forwards from Kingston to Sao Paulo empty?' Gary asked

'That's what we suspect to make this phantom increase in production appear legitimate, with the exception that they are probably running drugs for someone.' Sarah again speculated

'What we don't know is who is doing the second or 'layering' stage of the operation, i.e disguising the transactions from where the money enters the cycle to where it finally arrives in Jamaica. Without this we could never actually prove the laundering operation and tie it anyone in particular, especially Andrew and Rathbone, as all we have is circumstantial without that actual documented trail' Sarah said.

'I may be able to help with the who, but not the how' Arthur said.

'I phoned Roger, he is a very senior department head at the US State department and the man responsible for hiring us on the American side, to update him on our progress to date. He said that the LAPD had forwarded them a missing persons file regarding a one Ian Thomas. He is a computer super wiz with a doctorate in computer science and has been known to hack very sophisticated systems. It appears that one of his friends received what amounted to a panicked phone call from him, saying he was in the Phillipines. The call originated from a cell tower in the Subic Bay area.'

‘That tallies with what we found on Andrews computer. He had arranged for a subject beta living in the LA area to be recruited, but there was no details as to who this actually was’ Sarah said

‘It seems to me, that of you were going to run a successful layering operation, a computer hacker, this Ian Thomas, and a financial markets specialist, this Steven Jerkovich from Budapest known to us as subject alpha, would be the very two people you would need to run it successfully. What I don’t understand is why they are in the Phillipines?’ Gary said.

‘Maybe for its remoteness?’ Peter speculated

‘I agree, if you were going to want to keep a lid on these two individuals, you would have to take them somewhere remote where you could keep them under control’ Alan said.

‘Well, after we have followed the money from the container arriving in two days, we will have to follow up this lead in Subic Bay if we are gather all the evidence Roger will need to prosecute this.’ Arthur said.

‘What about this ‘Silhouetted figure’ Gary saw whilst he was captive in that apartment in Russia?’ Brett asked

‘I believe he is the ultimate big guy behind this ‘Firm’, not Andrew’ Sarah said

‘This Andrew is just one of the people in this ‘Firm’ then?’ Ralph asked

‘Absolutely, I would speculate that he is the ‘project manager’ for this particular money laundering operation, and that the firm is made up of a number of similar powerful business people. There’s no knowing who they are.’ Sarah said.

‘Why don’t they just have the Russians transfer the money into a Swiss bank account and have done without the need for all this subterfuge?’ Brett asked

‘Because the trail would be too easy to follow to tie everyone together. Although the Swiss and a few other countries have secrecy laws regarding their banks, now days post nine eleven, they are not nearly so secret. The American government through the SEC has seen to it that any foreign banks that deal with America must give up their right to secrecy. Also these Russian business men these days have a lot of American dollars they need to get rid of without raising too much attention.’ Sarah explained.

‘What about that other name you got off Andrew’s computer, this David Curruthers’ Brett asked.

‘I passed that on to Roger at the State Department. He said he would get back to me. Right then, lets move, we have a plane to catch’ Arthur said and they proceeded to pack away their equipment and prepare for the trip to Sao Paulo.

‘Make sure you image and back up everything and send it all to Angela back in Auckland. She will collate everything for the investigation file’ Arthur said.

A day later they arrived in Sao Paulo on a direct flight from Houston. Their trip in to the city was slow with people and cars

and trucks everywhere. Sao Paulo, being the largest city in the southern hemisphere and known as the financial capital of South America as well as the most populous was certainly living up to its reputation. They were accosted on many occasions by kids and adults alike tapping on their car windows trying to sell them everything from souvenirs to fake brand name watches whilst they tried to navigate the often congested streets.

They finally made it to the hotel and took advantage of the hotels pool to refresh themselves before gathering in Arthur's suite to plan their surveillance of the container as it was off loaded.

'The PCS Malin is due to dock in the ports at Santos here , tomorrow at around four in the afternoon according to the shipping schedule' Gary said indicating a spot on the map.

'Sarah, you Ralph and Peter will remain here, whilst the rest of us will conduct the surveillance.'

'In the mean time, Gary, Sarah, we will take a trip to the local police head quarters where Roger has arranged for us to meet an inspector who may be able to give us some help should the situation arise. Also they are apparently big down here on courtesy and cooperation and do predisposed to help investigators such as us unless they have been previously made aware of their activities. Gary, you speak Portugese so can translate for us and Sarah, we may need you to explain some of the details. The rest of you, relax as I feel things are likely to get quite lively seeing large amounts of money are involved.' Arthur said.

The meeting with the local police inspector was cordial if somewhat perfunctory and they were warned not to attempt any

kind of interference with the suspects if they saw a crime going down, but to contact the him and he would arrange for the necessary apprehension and subsequent investigation. He did not want foreigners gallivanting around his city.

After assuring him that they would do nothing of the sort they returned to the hotel for the evening where Arthur found a message waiting for him to call Roger.

After making the call, Arthur gathered everyone in his suite and filled them in on the details of his call to Roger.

‘Roger came back to me with some brief details on that name you unearthed. It appears that Roger Curruthers is an FBI agent assigned to the American embassy in Bolivia. He had no more details than that other than to say that his supervisor an Aaron Hodge would be making a visit to Bolivia in the next few days.’ Arthur explained.

‘Bolivia?’ Alan exclaimed

‘Could make sense’ Sarah said thoughtfully. ‘Bolivia is one of the more corrupt countries on South America, known for its fairly loose financial system. An FBI agent may be in a fairly unique position to be aware of and make contact with the necessary corrupt officials. La Paz is certainly a lot smaller than Sao Paulo, and it would be a lot less officials to have to bribe’

‘So how would they transport the money to Bolivia, certainly not by road?’ Brett said

‘Probably by light aircraft with extended range fuel tanks’ Sarah

‘Ok, slight change of plan. Whilst we conduct the surveillance tomorrow. See if you and Peter can make arrangements to hire a suitable aircraft in case your assumption is correct.’ Arthur said.

That night they all went out to experience and enjoy the local nightlife and cuisine, not knowing when they would next have a chance to, given the unexpected twists and turns this investigation had already taken.

The next day, Sarah and Peter turned after a bit of research turned up at a private commercial airfield use by many charter airlines and local airfreight companies. Being commercial in nature as well as catering to private pilots and flight schools, many of the staff spoke English as they catered to a wide variety of customers as well as the fact that English was the international language of the sky.

There were several charter companies at the field and Sarah, being a licensed multiengine pilot chose one that had a variety of multiengine aircraft in and around the hanger it occupied.

Knowing that a hefty bond would be required to be left with the Aircraft, Arthur had given Sarah his American Express black card which had more than a sufficient limit to cover this cost.

‘Which ever government is funding this investigation by us is going to be in for a shocker of a bill.’ Sarah said.

Peter laughed as they headed into the hanger office, to negotiate the charter of a Beechcraft King Air C90A she had looked over outside the hanger which already had extended range fuel tanks

installed. Most of the aircraft on the field did due to the remote nature of many of the towns and cities the region had.

She requested that aircraft be made ready and fuelled to go any time from tomorrow morning onwards. She purchased a range of charts that covered all the territory from Sao Paulo to La Paz Bolivia. After spending some hours familiarising herself with the regions weather conditions and terrain, she filed a flight plan from Sao Paulo to La Paz. She had no idea if her flight plan would correspond with that of the route the other pilot would take, that is if there was surmising about another aircraft was correct.

Sarah and Peter arrived back at the hotel around four and knew they would be in for a long wait whilst Arthur, Gary, Alan and Brett tracked the container.

In fact they had found a great spot from which to observe the unloading of the container. Right across the quay side street from the wharf the vessel was due to berth at was a seafarers centre, complete with cheap accommodation, mess hall like restaurant and an upstairs bar with a balcony that provided a magnificent view of the harbour.

The four of them had chosen a table right by the balcony railings and had been enjoying drinks and a bar meal as they observed the PCS Malin slowly making her way into port. All except Brett that was who had drawn the short straw and was the designated driver. He had had to content himself with soft drinks and orange juice whilst the others grinned and sampled a range of local and imported beers.

Like Kaliningrad there was already a row of container trucks lined up ready to receive the containers as they were off loaded. Unlike Kaliningrad however, they did not have a face to look out for, so had no idea what truck in the queue would be their quarry.

They therefore took turns watching each container as it was offloaded. It was not for another hour that they finally saw the container being unloaded and noted the registration number of the truck it was loaded on to. That done they raced downstairs and up the street to where they had left the rental car. They had paid some street youths a hundred US dollars who were in the area to keep an eye on the vehicle with the promise of another two hundred if the car was untouched when they returned.

Where the car was parked had a good view of the entrance to the docks and they waited for the truck they had spotted to emerge. This took another ten minutes, and when it finally did emerge they swung in behind it.

‘This is not like Kaliningrad, we need to tag this truck in case lose it all this traffic and or get way laid by the mass of people in the streets.’ Alan said.

‘Also we cant stay too close behind in case we get pinged’ Brett said

So at the next set of lights. Arthur got out of the passenger side, as Brett was driving and attached a key chain like device under the truck. With all the thousands of people who moved in between the vehicle when they were stopped at lights, no one paid any real attention.

Once back in the car, Arthur saw Gary already had the laptop out and saw a red blip blinking on a map of Sao Paulo. When the lights changed the truck went straight ahead and Brett turned right. They were going to try and follow the truck one block over on a parallel street as much as possible.

The blip continued to move away from the coast towards the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo. Half way between the metropolitan area and the coast they entered a major manufacturing and industrial area which made the going easier as there were not so many people on the streets disrupting traffic.

‘Take the next left’ Gary instructed

Arthur swung the car around the corner in time for them to see the target truck pull into a factory complex and park in a container unloading area. Gary pulled the car to the side of the road and parallel parked between to other vehicles. From this point they still had a clear view of the container yard.

The driver got out of the truck and using the cranes mounted on the trailer unit, lowered the container onto the ground.

About a half dozen men in suit trousers and cashmere jackets came into view following a well dressed man who approached the driver. Whilst the men surrounded the container trying to look like ordinary workers, the well dressed man approached a second man who had just emerged from the cab of the truck. After a perfunctory greeting and shaking of hands, this second man produced a package from under his jacket.

The driver of the truck, finished resetting the trailers cranes and departed in the now empty truck headed back towards the ports.

‘There’s no way we are going to get close to that container, look at all those men guarding it trying to look like ordinary factory workers.’ Brett said.

‘You can tell by the bulges in their jackets under their arms that they are all armed’ Gary said.

At this point they saw the well dressed man approach the container tearing open the package he had received. After reading something of the papers inside the package, he manipulated the locks on the container and swung the doors open.

The container stacked full of cardboard boxes mounted on pallets. The man gestured at someone out of their line of sight and a forklift appeared and started unloading pallets. After about four trips the man and the second man from the truck entered the container, re-emerging a minute later. They shut the container and reset the locks and then walked out of site into the warehouse next to the container yard. The six guards remained.

‘We could be in for a bit of a wait’ Alan said.

‘Theres never a donut shop around when you need one’ Alan said

Two hours later after several false alarms where they all thought something was going down as late model cars came and went with powerful looking businessmen entering and re-emerging from the warehouse, another car pulled into the complex as it was night was rapidly descending.

Two gangster type men emerged from the front of the vehicle and opening the rear door hauled a man out of the back. The man was wearing an aviators jacket and a cap.

‘Hand me the binoculars’ Gary said.

Gary then focussed in on the mans cap, in particular the logo.

‘The Logo on that mans cap says Lock Airfreight’ Gary said to the others.

The well dressed man was then seen to put his hand on the shoulder of the man in the aviators jacket and lean into him say something before slapping his face gently.

‘That guy in the aviators jacket looks shit scared to me’ Gary said.

The container was then opened by the well dressed man and he again disappeared into the container, this time re-emerging carrying three large brief cases which he put into the trunk of the car.

The two heavies then put the aviator back into the car and the climbed in and started the cars engine. The well dressed man resealed the container and he and all his men walked back into the warehouse as the car pulled back out onto the road.

Gary pulled out to follow as Arthur got onto the phone.

‘Sarah, can you find out what you can about Lock Airfreight and call me back right away’ Arthur said before closing his phone.

A few minutes later Arthur's phone rang and after a brief conversation ending with Arthur saying, 'stand by, I will update you soon'.

'Sarah says that Lock Airfreight is a small niche air freight firm specialising in remote and difficult air strips. They are based out of the same commercial airfield Sarah hired the Beechcraft from today.' Arthur said.

'Sounds perfect for clandestine drop offs and drug running' Gary said.

'That pilot did not look to happy though. It looked to me like he was under duress, probably being threatened.' Alan said.

'They do not appear to be headed for the airfield however.' Gary said, having located the airfield on a map on the laptop.

'The airfield is to the east and we are headed west' Gary continued.

'Probably going to some sort of safe house where they can keep this guy under watch for the night' Brett proffered.

They continued to follow the car another ten minutes to the outskirts of the city proper when they saw the car pull over to the side of the road and park in front of a residential tower block. One of hundreds that dominated the cities skyline.

The two heavies then exited the vehicle, one collecting the cases from the trunk whilst the other opened a rear passenger door and

motioned for the pilot to get out. Then locking the car they all trooped into the apartment tower.

‘Looks like they are going to button him down for the night’. Alan said.

‘Well, we’ve got no choice but to keep an obo going here. I’ll take first shift’ Gary said.

‘I suppose its hard routine then’ Brett said looking around out of the cars windows for some sort of late night food place.

Arthur dialled Sarah to let them know the score and to be ready to depart at first light.

It was a long hot night, and they all took turns keeping a watch out for any signs of the men re-emerging whilst the others dozed with the windows down to try and get some movement of air going.

At about six thirty the next morning Arthur bumped the others awake.

‘Here they come.’ He said indicating the two heavies and the pilot exiting the tower block, one placing the brief cases into the trunk before they set off, this time in the direction of the airfield.

Arthur immediately got on the phone to Sarah to discover they were already nearing the airfield, Sarah having guessed at an early morning start given the favourable weather conditions that morning as a storm was due in late that afternoon.

It took thirty minutes to make it across town to the airfield. The car they were tailing entered the airfield and drove directly to a hanger with Lock Airfreight emblazoned on the side, where they could be seen exiting the vehicle and walking directly to an aircraft. Whilst one of the heavies placed the brief cases in the aircraft, the pilot could be seen walking around the aircraft doing a pre flight inspection.

As the pilot climbed in, the two heavies retreated to their vehicle, but remained to observe the pilot start the engines and begin to taxi forward.

‘Lets go’ Gary said and they themselves entered the airport and drove to the hanger that Sarah had given them the name of to find Sarah, Ralph and Ian already in the aircraft waiting.

Brett skidded the car to a halt and they all ran for the aircraft to find Sarah at the controls. There aircraft was originally designed for a pilot, co-pilot and ten passengers, but with the extended range fuel tanks installed, the rear two passenger seats had been removed. This left one seat free after Arthur Gary, Brett and Alan had climbed in and buckled up.

Sarah indicated for everyone to put their headsets on, having ensured that there were sufficient headsets for all when chartering the aircraft.

She then started the port engine and after scanning the gauges started the starboard engine. When she was satisfied that all the gauges were reading nominal they others heard her contacting the tower requesting clearance for immediate departure.

As they taxied towards the assigned runway after receiving clearance, they saw the other aircraft they would be following go to full throttle and roar off down the runway.

As there was very little activity at the airfield this early, Sarah was given clearance as the next aircraft. She taxied the aircraft onto the runway, lined up and set the brakes. She then pushed the throttles all the way forward and the engines roared and the aircraft began to vibrate and strain against the brakes. After a final scan of the instrumentation Sarah released the brakes and they roared off down the runway in pursuit.

Chapter 19

Auckland , New Zealand

After clearing customs at Auckland International Airport, Michael went straight to the Avis car rental desk and signed for the keys to a top of the range Toyota Prado. He had requested such a vehicle as he required a vehicle to fit the persona he needed for this leg of the trip.

It had been a week since he had left Bill and James with the task of making the rendezvous with the freighters. He had spent the following two days going on a short camping trip with Michelle to the Dartmoor National Park where they had spent a wonderful few nights together.

Michael had then left direct for Heathrow, promising to return soon and take Michelle on a trip abroad.

Michael had made arrangements for the hire of a fifteen metre Najad design that had fully automated rigging, GPS, autopilot, VHS and a complete galley, head and shower unit. This was a perfect Yacht for the trip from Auckland to Nuemea.

Being Mid summer in the southern hemisphere, the cruising conditions were expected to be idealic.

Having become a skilled boat handler and navigator in the navy Michael felt more than confident to skipper the yacht, even in unfamiliar waters of the south pacific.

His first stop would be the Westhaven marina which took half an from the airport following the instructions from the GPS unit. He

was to meet a Brendon Chalmers who owned a boat sale and hire company based at the marina. Michael caught his first glimpse of the Hauraki Gulf as he drove over the Newmarket viaduct. The sea was sparkling and perfectly calm with the weather conditions expected to remain perfect for sailing all through the next week.

Reaching the marina, it took another five minutes to locate the business of Mr Chalmers among the many other boat chandelery and marine associated businesses. Parking the big Prado he walked up to the office and found a middle aged chubby man sitting behind a desk inside. There were several other desks, all empty. The walls were covered in photos of yachts and launches for sale and hire.

‘Mr Chalmers?’ Michael enquired

‘Yes, that’s me’ the man said looking up from his paperwork smiling.

‘I’m Kevin Brown, I spoke to you on the phone from London last week regarding the hire of the Najad.’ Michael said using one of his many aliases.

‘Yes. I believe you plan a sailing trip for yourself and some mates around our lovely waters’ Brendon said.

‘That’s correct. I will be needing the yacht for about a fortnight.’ Michael said.

‘Do you have your yacht masters certificate and in shore captains licence with you?’ Brendon said.

‘Here we go’ Michael said producing a sheaf of papers in the name of Mr Brown provided to him by the person he only knew as ‘the voice’. Included in the papers were a yacht masters certificate, inshore and offshore captains certificate as well as master mariners certificate for large vessels.

‘You’ve obviously spent a fair bit of time at sea to obtain these Mr Brown’ Brendon said looking impressed.

‘So, lets take you down and show you the yacht’ Brendon then said.

They then proceeded to walk down to the marina and along several pontoons before arriving at the yacht in question. Brendon quizzed Michael about seamanship and boat handling as they went to guage the mans real knowledge as he was not about to rent the yacht to just anyone. Michale however was more than able to answer all the questions thrown at him and soon had Brendon more than satisfied that he knew what he was doing on the water.

After completing the paperwork and paying for the yacht and taking receipt of the keys, Michales next task was to provision the vessel and purchase a large two hundred litre wheelable plastic container. This all took Michael the rest of the day and it was six pm before he sat down at the table in the yachts main cabin to enjoy a beer. He intended to stay on the yacht until the completion of the operation here in New Zealand.

The next morning he set off very early to obtain a car park with a good view of the vehicle entrance to the building occupied by Heighton and Hilliker. He had his SLR camera with zoom lens

ready and at around six thirty am the first vehicle arrived. Zooming in on the driver, it was not the woman in the picture he had been given. He had had to obtain a replacement through the web as the original document he had been given was no longer with all the other papers in his attaché case. This bothered him as he could not remember where he had misplaced it.

Several vehicles rolled up to the entrance and punched in a code to open the roller door, before he finally recognised Angela. She was driving a BMW X5 painted metallic blue. He noted the registration and settled in for what could be a long day.

It was six pm that evening before he saw the same BMW exit the parking garage of the building followed immediately by a late model white ford falcon with two gentlemen in the front.

Michael pulled out to follow. They moved through the inner city streets then on to Quay street which ran along behind the main wharves before running into Tamaki drive, according to the GPS. It was a beautiful waterfront drive which round around all the inner bays of the cities inner suburbs. On any other day Michael would have enjoyed the scenery, but he was concentrating on not being pinged by the men in the Falcon who were obviously some sort of protection as they followed Angela all the way to her home, which was a beautiful two story structure in the suburb of Mission Bay which overlooked the gulf.

Angela pulled up to the gate at the front of the house and entered a code into the key pad. After the gate had swung open, She drove in followed by the white Ford Falcon. Michael parked further up the street and saw lights come on in the house, although he had lost sight of the two men.

Michael had not expected to have to deal with protection, but was still confident in his skills and just thought of it as a simple annoyance. He did not have time to wait and plan however, as he had clear orders to abduct Angela this evening.

He studied the house to gauge the best mode of entry. The house was the last in a dead end street and had a ten foot fence running the entire perimeter of the house. On one side of the house was another mansion with a clear space on the other side behind the wall leading up to the cliff edge, probably a tennis court or swimming pool. Behind the house there did not appear to be anything.

Michael got out of the car and walked along the footpath the length of the wall until it dead ended in a fence. On the other side was a sheer drop to the rocks below. Michael jumped up onto the fence, which allowed him to grab the top of the wall and swing himself over.

Landing quietly behind some bushes on the other side his suspicions were confirmed. There was a large in ground pool in the clear space leading up to the cliff edge. The pool was connected to the house by a beautifully landscaped garden and cobbled steps leading up to a large veranda with broad French style doors which could be opened into the living area beyond.

There were garden lights at the edge of the cobbled walkway up to the veranda and the pool itself was also lighted from below the surface casting a pale blue hue over the house. The living area was lighted and Michael observed Angela walk into the kitchen

followed by one of the men. He was about to move when he heard a scrunch of gravel.

He froze and waited. He eventually heard another scrunch of gravel as if someone was shifting weight. The sound seemed to come from about ten feet further up the garden towards the house. Michael slowly lowered himself to the ground and took out a large knife from a sheath he had in his inside jacket pocket. He had purchased it earlier that day. Crawling stealthily along the garden army style, he moved in on the position he had heard the sound. There it was again, just over a bush in front of him.

He very quietly got up into a crouching position and steadied himself, then lunged forward like a cobra striking only to discover the sound had been made by a hedgehog making its way through the garden. Michaels sudden movement had started some birds in a tree however and they launched themselves into the air squawking and flew away.

Remaining very still, Michael peered at the house from the deep shadow of the bush he was now behind. The sound of the birds had not appeared to have alerted anyone in the house as the man and the women were still talking over drinks at a table. The second man Michael had seen in the Ford, however stepped out of some shadows about fifteen feet away and looked around. Michael had not seen him up until this point. He then turned and started to walk along the base of the garden under the veranda towards the side of the house, eventually disappearing around the corner of the house.

Michael took the opportunity and crouch walked over the path where there was a natural defilade preventing the people in the

house in the living area from seeing him. He then made his way quickly and quietly to the corner of the house where he froze. Listening he could hear nothing, only the sound of crickets, then suddenly the sound of music. Someone had started a stereo in the house. Michael recognised the sound of ABBA. Someone had tastes dating back to the seventies.

Risking exposure, Michael took a quick peek around the corner of the house. The second man was now about halfway along the perimeter of the house. He was facing away from Michael and had a cell phone to his ear.

Michael stepped quietly around the corner of the house and crept slowly up behind the man, his trainers not making a noise on the carpet of grass. He had his knife ready and was nearly upon the man when the man took the phone away from his ear and clipped back into his belt having finished his call.

A glint of moonlight off the blade of Michaels knife must have alerted the man to his presence as he suddenly spun around and threw a punch at Michaels head. The blow grazed the side of Michaels head as he leant the side just in time. The power behind the punch was impressive and the mans reflexes fast. Had the blow connected it would certainly have stunned him.

Michaels reflexes were slightly faster however and the man had now exposed himself to counter attack and Michael, stepped into the man ramming his knife into the mans throat, silencing him. Michael stepped back to avoid the blood spatter as the man stumbled back clutching his throat not being able to make a sound, finally collapsing to the ground and losing consciousness.

Michael now quickly moved back around to the back of the house and heard the sound of a patio door opening. Michael hid in the deep shadows of the garden bordering the walkway up to the steps that led up to the veranda.

It was the first man as he called out the name of his companion. Not getting a response he walked down the steps and along the pathway, stopping on the other side of the bushes to Michael to once again call his companions name.

Michael lunged through the bushes putting one hand over the mans mouth and the other bring the blade up to the mans throat and run the blade over the mans carotid arteries opening them up. By the time Michael had pulled the man back through the bushes into the shadows, he was dead.

Michael had considered taking the men down in such a way as to leave no casualties, but that would have required an approach taking more time than he had. In the end however, Michael had no conscience about taking their lives as it was a necessary part of the business, and that was all it was to Michael, just business.

Michael walked up to the house and after seeing that no one was now in the living area. He stepped through the patio door to the sound of waterloo playing on the stereo. He then started clearing each room on the lower level. Not finding anyone he walked up the internal staircase to the upper level. He could hear the muffled sound of a shower running behind one of the doors. Moving along the corridor he found the door with the sound of the shower coming from behind it. He opened the door and entered a large bedroom with ranch sliders at one end opening out onto a balcony with a magnificent view of the gulf.

The sound of the shower was coming from an ensuite. Moving to the door of the ensuite which was open, Michael saw the figure of a women showering behind the steamed glass of a shower cubical. Rather than cause a commotion, Michael decided to wait and stood behind the door waiting for the women to finish.

Yes, this was a typical women Michael thought, as the shower seemed to go on and on and on. He was about to take the direct approach after all when the shower finally stopped. The ensuite was now filled with steam and it was drifting in to the bedroom.

Finally the women emerged from the ensuite dressed in a bathrobe and drying her hair.

Michael burst out from behind the door and before Angela could react he rammed the butt of his knife down on her head knocking her unconscious. He then took some cable ties he had purchased from his jacket pocket and secured her ankles and wrists and tied a gag around her mouth before picking her up and carrying her downstairs.

After placing her gently on a sofa he went outside and finding the button to open the gate he pressed it. He then cast about for a heavy rock whilst the gate opened. Being a landscaped garden he easily found a heavy rock and placed it in front of the gate to prevent it closing.

Walking back up to his hire truck he thought about the trip to come and how he wished Michelle was hear under different circumstances to share the beauty of the place with him. That was the biggest problem with this job, having someone to share it with

that could be understanding, strangely enough to his mind he had not found such a woman yet, he wondered if Michelle would understand.

Starting the vehicle, he drove it in to the courtyard and backed it up to the steps leading up to the front door, which was conveniently hidden from view from any other house. He opened the large rear door to the Toyota Prado and retrieved the large wheelie container from inside and dragged it into the house. Once inside he loaded Angela into the two hundred litre container and closed the lid. There would be plenty of air in there for the trip to the yacht.

He then wheeled the container back out to the vehicle and loaded it into the rear. He then returned to Angela's bedroom and finding a travel bag, filled it with some of her clothes and emptied out the contents of the ensuite of all its toiletries. After all, the last thing he needed was to have to pull into a port somewhere to buy women's toiletries.

The drive back to the marina was uneventful and he reached the mooring without any holdups. He parked the Prado in the long term spaces at the marina and retrieved the travel case and after placing the large container holding Angela on to the ground.

Throwing the travel bag over his shoulder, he gripped the handle of the wheeled container and started walking towards the mooring trundling the container behind him.

He was approaching the ramp down to the jetties when he saw two men walking up the ramp carrying fishing poles and a large chilly bin between them.

‘Planning a good catch are you?’ one of the men said nodding at the two hundred litre wheelie container Michael had.

‘Absolutely, theres a bunch of us heading out to the Poor Knights and Great Barrier Islands for a big trip.

‘Good luck then mate’ they said in passing.

As Michael got to the yacht he found a found that there was a wooden ramp that could be attached to the yacht making it easy to wheel supplies aboard. He used this to easily get the large container aboard and into the main cabin, where he picked the still unconscious Angela out and carried her to one of the forward cabins and placed her on the bed.

Then stepping back on deck he tossed the ramp back onto the pontoon and cast off all the mooring ropes. The yachts engines started easily when he placed the key into the ignition on the yachts control console and only a small bubbling noise could be heard coming from the water at the stern as he throttled forward slowly clearing the jetty and keeping to the five knot inner harbour speed limit. He flicked the yacht’s running lights on so as to not raise the suspicion of anyone who may have been watching and entered the inner harbour heading for the Rangitoto channel in the cool and refreshing evening sea air.

Chapter 20

Bolivia

‘There he is’ Gary said into his microphone. ‘About five hundred feet below us and a mile ahead’

They had been following the plane for about four hours now, occasionally losing sight of him in patches of clouds, but using the onboard radar they had been able to keep pretty much on his tail.

‘So long as we keep on above and behind him, we should be in his blind spot’ Sarah said.

‘Won’t he pick us up on radar?’ Gary asked.

‘That model aircraft isn’t equipped’ Sarah replied.

‘How about our fuel status?’ Arthur asked

‘We’re fine, with the extended range fuel tanks we can make it all the way to La Paz’ Sarah said

‘What about his aircraft?’ Brett asked

‘He probably has long range tanks aboard as well and have a similar range to us’ Sarah replied.

‘Where are we now?’ Alan asked

Sarah looked at the GPS and then at a map on a clipboard on her knee and said ‘we’ve just crossed the boarder into Bolivia. Its

about another three hours flying time to La Paz, which is roughly the heading we are on now’

‘Well that confirm’s it. Bolivia is definitely the place. That name we discovered on Andrew’s computer that turned out to be an FBI agent based in Bolivia must be the connection. He must have some official bribed in La Paz to deposit the cash that must be in those brief cases. Once we are back in cell phone range I am going to call this in to Roger.’ Arthur said

They were low enough for cell phone coverage to work at nine thousand feet, but looking below, all any of them could see was mile after mile of jungle and a myriad of river systems, but absolutely no sign of farm land or civilization, certainly not a cell phone tower.

La Paz

‘Bob, how are you?’ Aaron said as he came through the arrivals gate at La Paz international airport.

‘Very good sir, welcome to La Paz’ Bob said shaking Aarons hand.

‘Where’s David, I would have expected him to be here to meet me?’ Aaron said

‘He is on some undercover work with the local police. He asked me to take you to the embassy and bring you up to speed’ Bob said

‘I was not aware from your weekly reports that there was any such investigation going on.

‘I think it is something David has been working on and off on for some time. He does not always fill me in on the details of his movements, but assured me that it was going in the reports. Maybe he hasn’t sent them through to Langley yet, there probably in his office, as it does get crazy down here sometimes’ Bob said hoping not to land his boss in trouble with Aaron.

‘That is still unacceptable. All of your investigations must be approved of and be on the books. There is no excuse for this.’ Aaron said looking quite perturbed.

‘David requested that I take you on a brief tour of the city so you can get your bearings and then to your hotel so you could get some rest. He said he would be back by then and would collect you personally to take you to the embassy for a small reception the ambassador is holding for senior local laws enforcement and city officials for you’ Bob said.

‘No, take me straight to the embassy. I want to start reviewing your paper work immediately’ Aaron said

‘That was not what David requested. He said everything would be available for you first thing tomorrow and would all be in order’ Bob said trying to buy his boss some time as they walked to the

short term parking outside the terminals main doors where Bob had left an embassy car.

‘I’m sure David would prefer that, but that is not acceptable to me. Have you got a cell phone number for David?’ Aaron asked

Bob was very worried by this time and wondering just what trouble his boss had gotten him in too. Looking this unprepared in front of a senior FBI supervisory agent was potentially career ending. Bob had fought hard to get time in a post abroad as it was seen as a significant feather in your cap when promotions came up and being involved in what could be perceived as a branch office that did not follow procedure and kept Langley in the dark was a quick way to get one sent to a dead end office in Alaska or somewhere equally as undesirable even if Bob himself had not been directly involved.

Reluctantly Bob reached into his jacket pocked and pulled out his cell phone and dialled David’s number. It went straight to voicemail. Bob tried again and got the same thing.

‘His phone is going straight to voicemail Sir’ Bob said

‘Well lets go to him, where is he’ Aaron said getting on to the front passenger seat as Bob pressed the button on the key fob.

After putting Aarons bags in the trunk, Bob got behind the wheel and drove off in the direction of the embassy.

‘I don’t know exactly where he is at’ Bob said getting more frantic by the minute and cursing himself for not being more of a stickler for the rules and insisting David follow procedure.

‘Let me get this straight. You do not know where your fellow agent is and he is on an unsanctioned operation’ Aaron said looking hard at Bob.

‘It appears so Sir, yes’ Bob said now sweating

‘Well someone must be able to get a hold of him. Which local police official is in charge of this ‘special investigation’ that David is attached to, surely they could get through to him, even in the field’ Aaron said

‘I don’t know’ Bob said now completely dejected and realising just how silly he was now looking in front of Aaron

‘What?!?’ Aaron exclaimed.

‘Well who is likely to know. There must be someone in the local police that is your main liason officer. Lets try them” Aaron said exasperated.

‘Inspector Gutierrez’ Bob said

‘I take it he’s on your phones contact list?’ Aaron asked

‘Yes sir, he is’ Bob replied with trepidation

They were now entering the main highway connecting the airport to the city which was as Bob expected choked with traffic. There was a quicker way at this time of day taking a network of B roads, but Bob was trying to buy time at this point.

‘Call him now and find out exactly where David is’ Aaron ordered.

Bob once again dug his cell phone out and dialled the number.

After a short conversation Bob flipped his phone closed and looked straight ahead knowing what he would say next would probably cause Aaron to go through the roof.

‘The inspector is unaware of any such investigation Sir, and wanted to know what I was talking about. He said he would be talking to you tonight and wanting to know why an FBI is running an investigation in his city without his knowledge’

If he wasn’t driving, Bob would have closed his eyes as some sought of shield against what he knew was coming.

Aaron with some visible control managed to stop himself exploding into a tirade and after a few moments simply said ‘Take to the embassy now and you had better hope for your sake that you have had nothing to do with this’.

At this very point in time David was once again crouched hidden in the jungle at the edge of the airstrip listening to the man acting as ground controller speak to the pilot of the approaching aircraft which was now twenty minutes overdue. Cursing the pilot under his breath David looked anxiously at his watch knowing that by now Aaron would have arrived. He hoped that Bob was covering for him and would make it up to the young agent.

One of the Conswego's men then threw a smoke grenade into the field and orange smoke started pouring forth.

Soon David could hear the sound of the approaching aircraft and waited impatiently for it to land. Although he trusted Bob, he really needed to get back and smooth things over with Aaron, or the big prick as David really thought of him as.

'Look, over there' Gary pointed and they all looked in the direction he was pointing. In the far distance they could just make out a strip of bare land cut into the surrounding jungle.

'Looks like a makeshift landing strip' Sarah said.

A small plume of orange smoke could now be seen and the aircraft they had been chasing was now descending and heading directly for it.

'What do you want me to do?' Sarah asked.

'Give it a wide berth, we may not know if they are armed down there. The place looks like something a drug baron would use for loading a plane with drugs' Arthur said.

'I'll make a note of the GPS coordinates' Sarah said scribbling some numbers down on her knee board.

Pulling his cell phone out of his pocket Arthur saw one bar now appeared indicating there was partial coverage, but that was ok as that was all he needed.

Sarah banked the aircraft to port and headed towards a road she had spotted in the distance that was going in the general direction of La Paz.

When they got to the embassy Bob took Aaron up to the ambassadors office for a brief introduction before they went to the FBI suite in the embassy. David still had not called and all Bob's delaying tactics had been in vane.

As the entered the suite, the secretary assigned to the FBI office said

'There is an urgent message for you sir from a Roger Tunncliffe of the state department in Washington DC' she said handing Aaron a message.

'This guy wants me to give him a call urgently' Aaron said

'Is there a secure phone I can use?' Aaron asked

'In the conference room; Bob said leading the way. When they got there Aaron motioned for Bob to wait outside.

Aaron entered the conference room, closing the door and sat at the board table and initiated the secure call.

‘Aaron, my name is deputy secretary Roger Tunnicliffe. I am sorry to inform you that one of your agents names has come up in relation to an investigation on of our contractors is running in conjunction with the British home office.’ Roger started.

Roger then went on to bring Aaron up to speed on the progress of the investigation

‘So, the investigative team is arriving at La Paz airport as we speak after trailing the plane from Sao Paulo. They believe that David would have been at the jungle airstrip to collect the cases. They and I are requesting your cooperation in this matter. You will be in operational command and they will share all the information they have with you.’ Roger finished.

Aaron normally did not having to work with other agencies even after the official change of policy post the inception of the department of homeland security, but Aaron was not going to turn down a deputy secretary of the state department. Who knows how useful he could be in the future especially if a favour was owed to him. Besides, what the deputy secretary was saying tallied with what he was thinking at this point.

‘I take it that I can put an entry in favours bank then Mr Deputy Secretary’ Aaron said.

‘You may Supervisory special agent Hodge’ Roger said.

‘Very well, call your people and let them know I will be expecting them and will work with them on the investigation’ Aaron said ending the secure call.

Aaron went to the door and requested that Bob join him at the conference table.

Taking a seat opposite Bob, Aaron said ‘Can you assure me that you know absolutely nothing of David’s off the book activities, and before you answer, think very carefully about what you are about to say’

‘Sir, I can assure you that I know absolutely nothing. I have even had my own suspicions but have had nothing concrete upon which to challenge a senior agent’ Bob swore.

‘Ok, well what I am about to tell you must remain absolutely confidential. Soon a group of people will be arriving who have been conducting an investigation into a money laundering operation under contract to the state department, and Davids name has come up as a suspect .’ Aaron said.

Bob looked somewhat shocked at this and Aaron could tell the shock was genuine having interviewed hundreds of suspects during his career.

‘We have to act fast as they followed a plane from Sao Paulo which has just offloaded some brief cases in a remote jungle air strip, probably working in conjunction with some local drug barons. These are the coordinates. Does any of this make any sort of sense to you?’ Aaron said handing over a scrap of paper with some GPS coordinates on them.

‘May I plot these?’ Bob asked pointing to a map on one of the walls of the conference room.

‘Go ahead’ Aaron indicated.

Bob plotted the coordinates which were in a remote part of the country Bob was familiar with.

‘About six months ago, David was involved in some sort of operation with local enforcement in that region but due to some internal corruption, nothing ever became of it. It was shortly after this that David started these regular disappearances. David was involved as there was some American connection, but David said that he could never confirm this.’ Bob said

‘Can you trust this inspector you contacted earlier and will he cooperate with us and be able to provide local support, including air support?’ Aaron said

‘Absolutely Sir, the inspector goes to the same church as I do and he is well regarded in the community for his efforts in relation to working with street youth in his spare time to stop them becoming gang members. He is one of the non corrupt as we say here in Bolivia. There has even been an attempt on his life.’ Bob explained

‘Very well, we are going to need air support in the form of a chopper to intercept and follow David as we expect he will be heading back into the city. We will need additional officers to make the arrest as he hands over what we suspect to be a large volume of US currency in three black brief cases.’

‘I will call the inspector immediately’ Aaron said reaching for the phone and dialling the Inspector’s direct line.

When the inspector answered, Bob gave the inspector a brief outline of what Aaron had just told him. When Bob replaced the receiver, he looked at Aaron and said

‘He is arranging a special squad of officers as we speak. He is also getting a search warrant for David’s apartment. As he is an embassy official and accredited diplomatic staff, he cannot arrest him but will assist us and hand over all evidence found at his apartment. He is also arranging for a chopper to be available immediately’ Aaron explained.

‘Do you know what vehicle he would be using?’ Aaron asked

‘He always uses his 4WD, I know the registration having had to arrange its regular renewal’ Bob said.

‘OK, you will go on the chopper and try to spot it. How many possible routes back into the city is there?’ Aaron asked realising they could be looking for a needle in a haystack.

‘Only one sir, its not like the states here. There is only one main highway leading towards those coordinates so it should be relatively easy to spot him coming back in to the city.’ Aaron said.

At that point there was a knock at the door. The secretary opened the door, entered and said to Aaron, “Sir the team has arrived”

‘Very good, show them in’ Aaron said.

Arthur and the team then entered the conference room and after some brief introductions they all took seats. Aaron laid out what

he had agreed with Roger and then asked Bob to bring them up to speed on the arrangements they had made with the inspector.

‘Perhaps Peter can accompany Bob on the chopper to act as our comms officer, whilst Gary and Brett and Ian accompany you on the surveillance and capture of David. I would like to accompany the police on the search of Davids apartment along with Sarah and Ralph. Obviously all evidence would be handed over to you for evidentiary purposes with us retaining copies for the investigative file we are preparing’ Arthur said.

‘Agreed, now lets move’ Aaron said getting up from the conference table

Each team member grabbed a walkie talkie from the multicharger and ensured they all were set to the same channel.

Bob and Peter took an embassy car and headed to the police base to meet the chopper whilst Aaron drove his team towards the financial district anticipating that any large amounts of cash would have to be deposited in the vault of one of the banks which all had their head quarters amongst the tall buildings of the financial district.

Arthur, Sarah and Ralph, programmed the address they had been given for Davids flat into the GPS in the embassy vehicle they had been assigned and headed there to join the police squad that would have the search warrant.

Fifteen minutes later, the radios being carried by each team crackled into life.

‘We are airborne’ Bobs voice was coming through loud and clear.

Five minutes later, Arthur pulled up behind a police cruiser that was parked in front of the tower block containing David’s apartment. As the three of them got out of the car, two police officers emerged from the cruiser and one handed Arthur the warrant. One of the officers who spoke English in a heavy Portugese accent said ‘Our orders are to assist you to make entry to the apartment and be here as an official police presence. You are to conduct the search of the apartment however.’

They all then trooped into the apartment tower and took the elevator to the eleventh floor where the apartment was located. The building supervisor they had collected along the way opened the door for them and stood aside. As they entered the two policemen took up post either side of the door and sent the supervisor away.

‘This guy really is a slob, look at this place.’ Sarah said looking at the pizza boxes with half eaten pizzas in them and the dirty plates and glasses lying about. There were articles of clothing strewn all about the apartment as if the whole place were one big disorganised walk in wardrobe.

‘I can’t believe this guy is a senior FBI agent, nothing is organised’ Arthur said looking at several case file lying about that should really have been left in the office.

‘Ah, here we go’ Ralph said finding a laptop buried below a pile of clothes he had been reluctant to touch, even in the latex gloves they had all donned on entry. Aaron had insisted on this and handed them a box on the way out of the embassy.

Ralph booted up the laptop and was soon unearthing the secrets contained on the hard drive whilst Arthur and Sarah continued the search.

‘Look at these FBI files. They all are on various city officials and there are detailed notes on observations he was running on these people. I would bet these files are here because they were not official investigations’ Sarah said.

‘Look at this’ Arthur said bring over a sheaf of papers.

‘This is a sale and purchase agreement for a beach front villa in Florida’ Arthur pointed out.

‘Heres another one for a fifty foot launch’ Arthur said handing Sarah another piece of paper.

‘These are not things someone on an FBI salary could ever afford, even if they did save all their life, which I seriously don’t believe this guy was capable of’ Sarah said looking at the lack of personal discipline the apartment evidenced by its dishevelled state.

‘Bingo’ Ralph said and Arthur and Sarah turned around expectantly

‘Theres a mountain of financial information for you to go over Sarah. Theres also a file here called ‘BatenesCell’. It’s a word document detailing the plan to use two experts on a remote Island in the Batenes Island group in the north of the Phillipines. This all tallies with everything you put together in Houston Sarah. This file was emailed to Andrew for action’ Ralph said.

‘The remoteness of the island and the fact that the subjects would be in a strange country removed from all of their support systems and friends should ensure their cooperation.’ Ralph said reading a paragraph from the file.

‘Well done Ralph, Lets keep searching a while here then take all this back to the embassy’ Arthur said.

Aarons radio crackled and Bobs voice could be heard coming through.

‘We still have the subject vehicle in sight. We are continuing to maintain a high altitude so as to not make him aware of our presence’

Bob had spotted the vehicle about fifteen minutes earlier as they had anticipated and had commenced tracking the vehicle. The pilot had radioed instructions back to the inspector who was arranging a net of police to move in on David when he was seen to make contact and hand the brief cases over.

‘He’s pulling into a park and stopping.’

‘Hes getting out and carrying a small sports bag into a block of toilets’ Bob continued to relay the movements.

David had been glad to be able to slip away from Conswego early this time. Thankfully Conswego seemed preoccupied with some other problems and had not been predisposed to keep him around now that the shipments were becoming routine and David was no longer an unknown quantity to them.

He had deliberately left his cell phone off however as he did not want to get entangled in a call to Aaron and have to try and explain himself and disobey an order to get back to the embassy immediately before he had a chance to safely deliver the cases.

Stepping out of the toilet block in his guards uniform he looked around and being satisfied that no one was watching moved back to his vehicle. He could not shake the feeling seemed different this time however, and the small hairs on the back of his neck were standing up. He briefly considered taking the money and disappearing, but knew that he could not stay hidden from ‘The Firm’ forever and dare not think about what they would do to him when he was found. He put his current nervousness down to his supervisor being in the city and continued with the plan.

Arriving at the bank, his contact was waiting as expected and opened the gate. At that point there was a screech of tyres behind him and David looked in his side mirror and saw Aaron climbing out of the drivers seat. Then there was the sound of a whole precinct of cop cars closing in on his position.

Aaron walked up to David and simply said ‘Why?’

David sneered at him and said ‘Why, because of snivelling little bureaucrats like you’.

He then punched Aaron full in the face knowing it would be his last chance to get one in and just wanting to salvage something from the situation. Aaron did not go down however but took a handkerchief from his pocket to stem the flow of blood from his nose and said 'I hope you enjoyed that, because you are now going to the darkest hole I can find in the federal prison system'

'The people I am working with just won't let that happen' David said before clamming up, leaving Aaron to consider the implications.

Chapter 21

Subic Bay, The Phillipines

They had left David in the hands of Aaron for further interrogation and deporting to the USA for trial. They had all been amazed at the amount of money contained in the brief cases and Aaron had seized it as criminal proceeds and claimed it for Uncle Sam. His promotion to head of department would now be assured after such a find.

Bob had also been transferred state side due to give evidence in the case against David who had steadfastly stuck to his decision to remain silent and refused to say anything to his interrogators knowing it was the only thing that could save him from retribution from the firm.

Arthur had arranged a pilot to return the plane to Sao Paulo and had contacted their hotel to forward the baggage they had left behind to them before they flew out on a flight to Singapore where they had arranged a flight to Subic Bay.

Before they departed, Aaron said he would arrange for the agent attached to the Manilla office to be waiting for them in Subic Bay and to provide any assistance on cracking the last phase of the money laundering operation, the Layering phase, which would crack the whole case wide open and hopefully provide some leads on who was behind this 'Firm'.

Two days later they landed at the Subic Bay International Airport, all except Sarah who had agreed to return to Auckland to start preparing the case file for hand over to Rogers people at the State

Department, and Ralph who would assist on the preparation of the technical IT dimension to the case.

When they came through the arrivals area, they were approached by agent who had recognised them from the descriptions he had received from Aaron.

‘I’m agent Dean Marris. I believe Aaron informed you that I would be here to work with you’ he said shaking their hands.

After the introductions, Dean lead them to a minivan he had hired where he filled them in on the arrangements he had made prior to their arrival.

‘I have arrangements for a helicopter to ferry us out to that Island that was mentioned in the case file. Its ready and waiting on the pad now. I had also made some enquiries about the two men also mentioned in the file. They arrived here about three months ago and it appears they must have gone straight to that Island as no hotel I can find in the area has records of them having stayed even a night. There was on hotel however that did have the men, along with two women who stayed a night there about a week ago. The strange thing however was that they were registered to stay two nights but disappeared without checking out after the first night.’

Martin burst out onto the terrace where both girls were sitting at a table talking.

‘Pack everything up, we are shutting down and moving out. Jim’s already on the way in the plane.’ He said.

‘Whats going on?’ Kelly exclaimed

‘I just had a call from you know who. It appears everythings gone pear shaped at the Bolivian end and we are to get out and return to our home bases and await further instructions.’ Martin said

‘What about the guys?’ Danni said

‘We are to get them on the plane then dump them out on the way back for the sharks’ Martin said

Steven and Ian turned and looked at each other in horror. They had just walked into the kitchen in time to hear martin’s comments.

Steven grabbed Ian’s arm and put a finger to his mouth as if to say keep quiet. He then crept for the back door to the old mission house. They were out of site of the others and had not been noticed by them.

They got to the door and thankfully it was still open to let air in to circulate and they were able to slip out without making a sound. They then dived into the cover of the heavy vegetation at the rear of the house and started running through the jungle that covered the rest of the island.

‘Where are we going?’ Ian asked

‘Anywhere but back there. We need to stay hidden until their gone’ he replied

‘Won’t they try and hunt us down first?’

‘They might, but I suspect they would rather make a clean get away. If we can remain hidden long enough, they may just give up and take off before the authorities arrive’

‘What makes you think anyones coming?’ Ian asked.

‘If everything went pear shaped in Bolivia, theres a good chance they know about this place and they wouldn’t be trying to evacuate this fast if they thought otherwise’.

Back at the house Danni burst into lounge where Kelly and Martin were dumping some bags.

‘There gone’ she yelled

‘Shit, they must have overheard us’ Martin said.

‘We’ll have to split up and search the island’ Danni said pulling her gun out and checking the magazine.

‘We haven’t got much time. The planes due very soon and we can’t delay our departure’ Martin said looking at his watch anxiously.

‘Well lets move it then’ Danni said full of purpose leading the others out through the rear door and in to the jungle where they all separated and took a different direction.

‘Sssh’ Steven whispered stopping suddenly.

‘What?’ Ian whispered back looking around wide eyed.

‘I’m sure I heard something back there, quick follow me’ he said leading Ian into the thick jungle. The vegetation had varied from parts of tropical rain forest to almost impenetrable jungle in place. They had just moved out of a small clearing between trees into a patch of thick jungle.

They crouched down, hardly daring to breathe. About thirty seconds later they could here the sound of someone moving through the clearing they had just vacated.

It was Danni, she was sure she had heard movement from this direction. She had excelled at orienteering in the girl guides and started looking around for signs of people having moved through this area. Then she spotted it. To her left a patch of heavy jungle had definitely been disturbed. There were several broken and damaged leaves as someone had pushed their way into the thick jungle.

She stepped forward and froze. A temple viper raised itself up and started hissing. Its black tongue making a contrast to its green and white cross band markings every time it sprung forward.

‘Move’ Steven said and the crashed out of the other side of the bush and began running through the jungle.

‘Danni raised he gun very slowly and very deliberately and just as the snake sprang forward she fired’.

Kelly stopped in her tracks having heard the gun shot. Just then she heard a noise and Steven and Ian crashed out of the jungle straight into her and they all crashed down in a heap. The gun was knocked out of her hand and went flying into the undergrowth.

Kelly and Steven got to their feet first almost simultaneously. Steven threw a punch which Kelly blocked and then went crashing back to the ground as she kicked his feet out from under him. Ian was partially up at this stage and launched himself into the side of Kelly. Instead of taking her down as he expected he found himself seeing stars and landing in the undergrowth as Kelly had twisted out of his tackle and delivered a punch to his head.

At that point they all heard the noise of the float plane overflying the island. Kelly decided to cut her losses and ran in the direction of the beach.

As she burst onto the beach she saw Danni and Martin appear out of the jungle at different points along the beach.

‘Did you get them?’ Martin yelled Looking from face to face as they came together.

‘No, they got away, and I decided it was better to get out of here than chase them any further’ Kelly said

‘I agree, lets get out of here’ Danni said as they saw the plane come to a stop on the beach.

Whilst Danni and Kelly went into the house to grab the bags, Martin walked down to the plane to talk to the pilot.

As the girls were emerging from the house carrying the bags a helicopter burst over the top of the house after coming from behind one of the islands hills having flown over the islands jungle interior from the other side.

‘bring us down over there out of pistol range’ Gary said pointing to a sandy outcrop of the beach as they saw one of the girls raise a pistol as if to fire on them.

As the pilot brought the chopper down they saw the pilot of the float plane start to taxi around for take off leaving his passengers behind.

‘Once we are off, stop that float plane from taking off’ Gary said to the pilot.

Gary, Arthur, Dean and Brett then jumped from the chopper and ran for the cover of the bush shielding their eyes from all the sand flying about as the pilot pulled in power and took off heading for the float plane which was slowly gathering speed on the water. Alan had drawn the short straw and had to stay behind as the chopper did not have room for all of them.

The helicopter came down over the wings of the float plane just as the pilot was about to take off. Having no where to go now, the float plane pilot had no choice but to cut power before he flew into the breakers crashing over the reef that formed the broad lagoon and calm waters that allowed the float plane to land and take off.

The float plane taxied back to the beach and cut its engine and hopped out of the aircraft as Brett moved in gun drawn.

The chopper had moved off and landed back at the sandy outcrop, shutting down.

Dean and the others had bundled Danni, Kelly and Martin up, who had surrendered and were walking them up to the house.

‘Where are Ian and Steven’ Arthur asked them.

‘Hiding in the jungle’ Kelly replied drawing a quick rebuke from Martin

‘Look, we know that they’re here and what you had them here doing’ Gary said

Arthur sent Brett off to find the men whilst the rest of the party moved into the house and started searching whilst dean handcuffed the girls.

‘Where did they do the trading from?’ Arthur asked Martin.

‘Follow me’ Martin said resigned to the fact that they would eventually discover the room below anyway and leading them into the library where he retrieved the book with the remote button for operating the secret door.

‘Look at this place’ Gary said as they entered the control room.

‘You could run a small war from in here’ Dean said looking at the large LCD displays adorning the walls and the racks of servers in the room.

‘Very impressive. Who is behind all of this?’ Arthur asked turning to face Martin.

‘You had better look at this Arthur’ Gary said staring mesmerized by the largest of the monitors mounted on the wall in front of them.

Arthur gasped and stood transfixed as he stared at the large LCD screen which showing a picture of Angela bound up in a small room.

The picture suddenly changed to that of a man sitting behind a desk who just appeared as a silhouette in the low lighting of the room he was in.

‘You have something of mine and I have something of yours.’ The silhouetted man said in a deep gravelly voice.

‘I propose that if you want Angela back, you must release Martin and my girls now, and let them depart. Once I am satisfied that they are safely away, I will ensure Angela is released to you. Do not bother trying to argue with me, just let my people get on the float plane immediately and depart. Do not try to follow them in your chopper as trust me I will know. I believe they will need about a half hours head start before your chopper departs the island. I have therefore arranged a little fire works display to keep you entertained in the mean time.’

The silhouetted man then reached across his desk and pressed a button. Just before the image changed back to that of Angela however, the lower arm of the man was caught by a pool of light and they all recognised the one broad and three narrow gold stripes and star that signified the rank of a full admiral.

Everything in the room then started to explode and sparks started showering everyone in the room and they all retreated upstairs and ran for the beach as the small charges started going off in the part of the house they had just vacated. As they all made it outside they ran for the far end of the beach.

Martin and the girls ran for the float plane which Jim already had started.

The others all watched the float plane take off and disappear into the distance, just as the house exploded in to a huge fireball.

Brett arrived behind the others with Ian and Steven in tow all mesmerized by the sight of the house which was now sending a huge column of smoke high into the air.

‘Where do you think that float plane went, it was certainly not headed back to Subic Bay’ Brett said.

‘Who knows.’ Arthur said only thinking of Angela at this point.

Chapter 22

Auckland, New Zealand

Two days later, the team arrived back in Auckland after having arranged an additional helicopter to ferry Ian and Steven off the island who were now undergoing extensive questioning at a Phillipines police station by Dean and a group of specialist interrogators who had been flown in from the American embassy in Singapore.

They had chartered a private jet and flown direct from Subic Bay to Auckland and it had been the longest flight of Arthur's life. He had been in constant contact with Sarah back at the office who said that they had not had any communication from Angela and that her watch GPS locator was either not in range of the receiver or not working.

The police had been to Arthur's house where Angela had been staying and had discovered the bodies of the two men hired to keep an eye on Angela. It had been a professional job by the way the men had been taken out. Nothing appeared missing from the house and Angela's watch had not been found.

The idea that it was a professional had been confirmed when security footage from the house had been retrieved showing the face of the man who had abducted Angela. Gary recognised it instantly as the man who had escaped from him twice, once in London, the second time in Budapest.

They were all now gathered around the conference table in the secure conference room at the offices of Heighton & Hilliker. All except Sarah that was who was flying a search pattern along with

three other aircraft Arthur had had Sarah hire and equip with the GPS locators set to the frequency of Angela's watch.

'As Gary said during the flight he is convinced it looked to him like the cabin in a launch or a yacht that Angela was in' Brett said as they were discussing the image they had seen on the LCD screen in the house on the island.

'That would make sense as New Zealand being a remote Island nation, the only way to get out undetected is by sea'. Peter speculated.

'How long has it been since she was abducted?' Brett asked

'Four days. The police confirmed that two fisherman returning from a day trip ran into him at westhaven marina. They remembered him as he had an unusually large wheeled chilly bin he was dragging behind him' Alan said reading a copy of the police report he had obtained from his contact in the police.

'We all know what or should I say who was in that' Alan said solemnly

'The yacht he hired is ocean capable according to the guy he hired it from. The man had all the right papers and his knowledge of boat handling was more than enough to impress this guy who hired the yacht out'.

'When is Sarah next due to phone in?' Arthur asked.

'Shortly. She has been flying this sector here trying to pick up Angelas GPS signal' Peter said pointing to a section of the map

showing the northland coast all the way from Auckland to Cape Reinga.

‘Sarah seems convinced that they would have had to put in to one of the many sheltered bays to ride out the tropical storm that blew in three days ago, a day after they had set sail.

‘Where are we at with the Navy?’ Arthur then asked.

‘Gary spoke to Commodore Greer. The frigate HMNZS Te Kaha was on her way to conduct exercises with the Australians. But he has ordered her to make best speed to the search area. She is expected in the area some time this evening. There was also a detachment of SAS aboard who Gary knows and will lead, they were to take part in the exercises and they are making plans to board the yacht by stealth when it is located. Commodore Greer was more than happy to return a favour arranging this given the circumstances. Gary would have arrived aboard via helicopter by now and will lead the SAS assault as he is still a commissioned officer on the SAS reserve list.’ Peter said.

Arthur thought back to his time in the Army when he had worked with the then Commander Greer on several operations in East Timor. Both had developed a deep respect for the other.

‘Looks like the weathers clearing. We should be able to get underway again this evening’ Michael said.

He and Angela were both sitting in the main cabin sharing a meal. Michael had his large K Bar on the table in easy reach, jammed

into the table top to stop it sliding about in the heavy swells. Angela noticed he always had it on him or near him. It was a menacing looking thing and she was sure he had it on display just as a reminder of what he could do should she try anything again.

On their second night out whilst Michael was on deck navigating the yacht into a sheltered bay Angela had tried to break into the radio console and get a distress signal out. She had activated her watch GPS which she thanked god she had simply put in the gowns pocket that evening, but she knew it only had a ten nautical mile range.

She had just managed to open the cabinet where the radio was housed when Michael had entered the cabin.

‘Silly girl’ was all he had said before slapping her across the face hard enough to draw blood and send her crashing to the floor. He had then bound her up and tossed her in one of the small sleeping cabins again.

He had only let her out again this morning after promising to behave. He had humiliated her by making her use a bucket for her ablutions and apologise to him like a school girl. Also she was never allowed out of his sight now whilst she was not bound up. She had, however overheard him talking to someone on the satellite phone he had. The gist of the conversation was that was keep Angela in his custody and to continue his voyage as the girl may still be of some use.

It was his eyes she hated the most. They were dead pan and had no sympathy in then whatsoever. Every time he looked at her she felt violated as if by a psychopathic monster.

‘Lets go up on deck and get underway’ he said yanking his huge knife out of the desk.

‘But I haven’t finished’ Angela said indicating her half eaten sandwich.

He just looked at her with those eyes and she hopped up meekly and walked up into the cockpit ahead of him and sat down in one of the chairs that were mounted to the deck. The rocking motion seemed more violent up here and the draughts that made it into the cockpit cut right through her wind breaker. The windows were covered in spray and the outside deck looked very slick.

Michael started flipping switches and the sound of automated winches could just be heard over the wind winding in rope, raising the anchor and raising sails. Michael flipped another switch and the boom swung into the wind and the sails caught the wind and the yacht started to gather momentum.

Angela looked at her watch before gripping the railing on the console to steady herself and stop from falling out of the seat. It was seven pm. It would normally still be light at this time of year, but due to the overcast conditions it was dim and gray making it difficult to distinguish between the sea and the sky when one looked towards the horizon.

Sarah was flying a grid pattern off the coast of Northland, concentrating on the area between the Whangarei heads and Cable bay. This was the area most likely that the yacht would

have used to shelter from the storm. The conditions were not the best for flying with low cloud cover and high winds but she was not going to let Angela be lost to them.

She had just been up for an hour as that was the first time the winds had dropped to Marginal. She had been using a network of aeroclub airfields as she had made her way up the coast. She could have flown direct from Auckland or Whangarei but that would have cut down on the range and time aloft searching.

She was going to make one more pass over the cable bay area before being forced to land when the direction finder on the co-pilots seat started making a noise. Her heart leapt into her throat. This was the first time in the past two days of searching that it had made a sound.

She altered course until the signal stabilised and began to grow stronger. Then she spotted a large yacht about five nautical miles north west of the entrance to cable bay. She made a note of the GPS coordinates and radioed them into the air traffic controller who would call Arthur as she was now outside of cell phone coverage.

Commander Chris Mason was on the bridge of the HMNZS Te Kaha. They had been cruising towards a blip on the radar for the past half hour. It was the only blip and was just the right size for yacht or large launch. It was too small for a coastal freighter and too big for a pleasure craft. Only someone skilled or someone intent on making international waters would attempt a voyage on such a boat in these conditions.

‘Bridge, Comms’ The speaker attached to the ships internal communication network sounded.

‘Go ahead Comms’ he said into the microphone after he picked it out of its cradle.

‘We have just been notified of the GPS coordinates of the vessel.’ the Comm’s officer then read out.

‘Navigator’ the commander said

‘That matches the coordinates of the plot on the radar sir. If we adjust course to 030 degrees we should pass out of site of her then be in position to come in behind her.’ The navigation officer responded.

‘Very well, Exec, set condition Bravo and rig the ship for dark. Alert the SAS commander and ready the seacraft for launch’ Commander Mason said to his executive officer.

‘Aye Aye Sir’ the executive officer said.

Moments afterwards sailors were running about the ship to their assigned station when the ship was set to condition Bravo.

Gary and three of the most experienced SAS men took their positions aboard the sea craft along with a sailor who would pilot the seacraft, which was now attached to a crane which would lower it over the side of the frigate when Commander Mason gave the order. They were all dressed in black and had black face paint on. In the quickly fading light, the pilot of the yacht would have to have night vision to see them approaching.

Thirty five minutes later, the order came. After travelling at flank speed for the past half hour to manoeuvre into position, they all felt the ship slow to a safe speed to launch the seacraft.

This was an operation Gary and his SAS team not had much practice at but the launch went smoothly attesting to the professionalism of the men and women aboard the ship.

The sailor, a chief petty officer gunned the engines and raced away from the frigate. About half a nautical mile ahead they could make out the yacht which had its running lights extinguished, but had a single navigation light on atop its mast going.

As they closed in on the vessel, Gary raised his night vision glasses and scanned the vessel. He was able to make out two people in the cockpit through the clear Perspex cover that had been lowered to protect against the worst of the weather.

The yacht had a low stern deck that allowed for divers to climb back aboard the vessel after surfacing. This low deck was about six feet wide and about five feet deep where it deadended in a wall with steps leading to the upper deck which lead along to the entrance to the main cabin or up into the cockpit.

Gary made several hand signals to his men indicating that the sea craft would pull up behind the yacht and the front two men would jump from the prow of the sea craft one at a time onto the diving deck.

In normal conditions, such a manoeuvre would require some skill, but in these conditions it was treacherous.

The petty officer started judging the swells as he closed in on the stern of the yacht. He had to also judge precisely how much power to apply. Too little at the wrong moment and the men jumping would not clear the gap, too much and he risked running the sea craft up onto the back of the yacht, which would be disastrous for all aboard as it would slip off and probably flip over.

The first man climbed up to the prow and prepared to jump. The petty officer applied power just as they were cresting a swell and he jumped. As the craft came down the other side of the swell the next man positioned himself on the prow and they saw that the first man had made it and had grabbed on to a rail on the side of the diving deck.

They started to rise up the next swell and the petty officer again applied more power and just as they were again cresting the swell the next man jumped. But just as he did the yacht shuddered slightly side ways as it was hit by an unexpected wave and the man hit the side of the yacht and slipped into the water.

Suddenly a stream of bullets started impacting the sea craft but went suddenly wild and up into the air.

Gary yelled at the petty officer that after his jump to go back and collect his man then he ran forward and in one massive leap cleared the prow and leapt for the yacht which they were now side on to. He just managed to grab the wire railing on the diving deck and was now hanging on precariously. There was the sound of a women screaming which stopped suddenly.

Then an exchange of gun fire started. Gary hauled with all his strength and still being supremely fit as a throw over from his SAS days he managed to fling himself over the railing and crash on to the diving deck.

He saw his fellow soldier bound up the stairs and fire and dive into the cockpit yelling as he went. The hauled himself up and followed suit, tripping on the slippery rolling deck at the last moment and stumbled into the cockpit where he found his man in a life and death struggle with the man who had fired at them. This man had gained the upper hand and was in top using all his weight to drive his knife into the soldier.

Gary kicked out with his foot and connected with the side of the mans head causing him to lose balance and crash backwards against the base of the console. He was not stunned however and launched himself forward grabbing the knife out of the soldier as he went by. Gary grabbed the pistol that was velcroed to his vest and fired just as the man closed the distance and landed on him.

He rolled the man off him and was about to punch him with all his might when he noticed the man was just staring into space with dead eyes.

Getting up he went to his soldier who was groaning.

‘How bad is it?’ the asked.

‘Pretty bad, but I’ll live, I think you nailed him just in time’ the soldier said letting out another groan.

The grabbed a field dressing out of one of his pocket and handed it to his man.

‘Press on this while I go and check on the women.’ He said.

Then he entered the main cabin descending the stairs from the cockpit. At the bottom he found Angela unconscious and bleeding from a wound from the back of her head.

Epilogue

Ten days after Angela's dramatic high seas rescue the whole team was taking a well earned vacation at the very exclusive Kahikatea Resort in the central north Island. In fact Arthur had made sure they had the entire resort and its staff to themselves for the week.

They had all just enjoyed a three Michelin star quality meal prepared by a world renowned chef and were sitting around a sumptuously appointed lounge room that catered exclusively to the rich and famous, enjoying after dinner brandy's.

They had all just arrived by helicopter that afternoon after Angela had been given the all clear by the countries top neurologist and allowed to leave hospital.

'That was some rescue, thank you very much' Angela said giving Gary a kiss on the cheek as she passed him before sitting down next to Arthur.

'Yes, thank you Gary, we owe you everything' Arthur said raising his glass in Gary's honour.

The others also raised their glasses in his honour.

'Ok, leave it out you lot' Gary said being the typical reserved Kiwi bloke.

'In fact, I couldn't have asked to work with a worse bunch of losers and slackers' Gary said smiling

Of course, coming from Gary, this was a hell of a compliment and they all knew it as being SAS, Gary had always set the highest of standards to live up to.

‘Well, that investigation was a hell of a ride’ Ralph said

‘Yes, when is the next one’ Brett said

‘I can’t imagine going back to regular PI work after that. Although we still have that cheating husband file to follow up on Brett, there should be some excitement there’ Alan said chuckling.

‘What about you Peter, what have you got on your books?’ Arthur asked

‘Absolutely nothing, and that’s just the way I want it for the next while. In fact I might go bush for a while, I hear there’s an oversupply of wild boar in the Kaimanua’s’ Peter said matter of factly.

‘Well, I’m actually looking back to getting back to some nice boring forensic accounting work, now that the investigation file is complete and sent off to James Reginald and Roger Tunnicliffe’ Sarah said

‘There’s nothing boring about you Sarah, especially the way you fly’ Alan said laughing.

‘Speaking of the case. How is that SAS man that got stabbed on the boat?’ Angela asked

‘He survived, he’s on restricted duties for a month, but after the report I gave to command, I wouldn’t be surprised if he gets the Victoria Cross’ Gary said.

‘What did they do with Michaels body.’ Brett asked

‘No ones come forward to claim his body, so he’s going to be buried in a proper grave.

‘Have they arrested Andrew yet?’ Sarah asked taking a personal interest in his outcome.

‘I had a call from Roger earlier today. He was killed by a car bomb two days ago at his ranch in Texas. It has been kept under wraps until now, complete media blackout as it happened just as the FBI were about to move in with a search warrant. They have as yet found absolutely nothing at the ranch or at the Rathbone head office.’ Arthur explained

‘No information on what the ‘firm’ was or is or who that silhouetted man was’ Gary asked.

‘Absolutely nothing’ Arthur said.

‘How about the Orion mining company or its subsidiaries in Sao Paulo’ Ralph asked,

‘They found traces of that chemical we intercepted in Kaliningrad but with the corruption in Brazil, the authorities down there are not cooperating and they have been completely unable to trace who any of the principles of the firm are. The officials and

businessmen they had corrupted down just closed ranks.’ Arthur said

‘What about the Russian angle’ Alan asked

‘Same story’ Arthur said

‘Something they have been able to do something about however is arrest that official from Porter shipping and shut that operation down. Also David has been indicted and is under guard in an undisclosed federal facility. Bob has been cleared and moved back to Langley. Those two US servicemen, not having diplomatic protection are to spend some time in a British jail for shooting that policeman, after which they will be deported and rearrested to stand trial by the JAG core. They both still refuse to speak for fear of their lives, however, someone definitely got to them.’ Arthur said

‘Did they ever locate that float plane or the three people running the operation on the island?’ Brett asked.

‘The Phillipines Navy found wreckage well north of the island and the body of the pilot. The interesting thing was that it was in the middle of a major shipping lane with no islands or land masses for miles around.’ Arthur said

‘How did they rate our performance overall then’ Gary asked

‘Well, thanks to us a major operation was uncovered and a significant amount of cash has been recovered from both Bolivia and Jamaica, which Britain and the US governments are sharing.

I think we can be assured that they will be knocking on our door again soon' Arthur said

'Just not too soon. I still have all the bumps and lumps to iron out from that escapade' Alan said, to which they all laughed.

Character Reference

Good Guys

Arthur Hilliker....Senior Partner & Co Founder of Heighton & Hilliker
Gary.....Ex SAS and head of the 'Special Investigations' Section of H&H
Sarah.....Senior Associate and Specialist Forensic Accountant
Peter.....Ex Army colleague and Security Systems Specialist
Alan.....Ex Army colleague and Private Investigator
Brett.....Ex Army colleague and Private Investigator
Ralph.....Head of IT at Heighton & Hilliker

Bad Guys

Silhouetted Man...Mysterious head of 'The Firm'
David.....FBI officer in Bolivia recruited by 'The Firm'
Michael.....Navy Seal and firm enforcer
Martin.....Project Manager for 'The Firm'
Danni.....Enforcer for 'The Firm'
Kelly.....Enforcer for 'The Firm'
Andrew.....One of 'The Firm's' principals and CEO of Rathbone
James.....Chief Petty Officer and sea craft driver recruited by 'The Firm'
Bill.....Army Rangers Sergeant recruited by 'The Firm'

Major Supporting Characters

Angela.....Arthur's girl friend and chief of staff
Roger Tunnicliffe...Deputy Secretary, US State Department, Arthur's contact in USA
James Reginald.....British Home Office senior official, Arthur's contact in the UK
Inspector Jarvis.....New Scotland Yard, liaison for Arthur's team to law enforcement
Aaron Hodge.....FBI Supervisory Special Agent (David's Boss)
Bob.....FBI junior agent in Bolivia
Mikhael Simmons...Recruitment consultant used by 'The Firm' in Budapest
Jimmy Collins.....Float plane pilot
Steven Jerkovich...Financial Markets specialist recruited by Mikhael for 'The Firm'
Ian Thomas.....Computer Specialist recruited by Andrew for 'The Firm'
Conswego De La Hago..Drug baron, used by David to get access to corrupt officials
Don Heighton.....Arthur's partner and co-founder of Heighton & Hilliker
Barry Summers ... Underworld fence and money trader used by 'The Firm' in the UK

Back Cover

When an airport security camera catches a grainy photo of two international businessmen boarding a corporate jet whose businesses seem quite unrelated and with one of the businessmen just having had a meeting with a known villain, the authorities whose own agencies are stretched to the limit call in the specialist forensic accounting services of Heighton & Hilliker to investigate.

Arthur Hilliker has left the army after a short but stellar career to set up an international chartered accountancy practice along with his best mate Don Heighton. Using the many contacts in governments around the world they developed during their military career, they have established a reputable international business with a specialist forensic accounting division specialising in busting money laundering operations.

Pitting their best team against this case they soon become embroiled in a case that pushes them to the edge and takes them around the world. Will they bust the case and save their reputation or have they stumbled on a mysterious organisation that will stop at nothing to protect their money and operation.

Twists, turns and unexpected events keep the reader gripped as the story unfolds and builds pace to suspense filled ending.