

EMBANKMENT

Security Novels Series - Episode VII



John M Upton

The Episodes of the Security Novels Series:

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Embankment

"Just as I thought, there is definitely something wrong here" Edward Jefferies muttered to himself as he looked through a file of cuttings and typed sheets of paper, many of which were laid haphazardly across his desk.

Having finally retired from the National Security Service a few weeks earlier after a forty three year career in law enforcement throughout the United Kingdom, Jefferies was sat in his study at the little country cottage he shared with his wife of forty years, situated in the countryside a few miles to the north west of the city of Haychester.

"Once a Security Officer, always a Security Officer" his wife Carole commented as she looked around the door post of the study with a wry smile causing Jefferies to look up with a grin of admittance at this undisputable fact.

"I guess it's just as the Commander has always said" Jefferies admitted as he put down the papers he had been reading and greeted his wife as she approached him at the desk "No one ever really leaves the service, well maybe except in a wooden box that is."

"You have been retired what three weeks now?" she asked.

"Four weeks, two days, three hours, forty seven minutes" Jefferies cut in.

"And you are still looking through old case files as if you had never retired" Carole commented as she closed the file on the desk in front of him. "Come and get some tea you old workaholic."

"Sounds like a good idea" he agreed as he rose from his chair and followed his wife out of the study, along the hallway and into the traditional style country kitchen, where no sooner had he sat down at the old oak dining table than his wife was pouring him a large mug of tea from the huge pot she had ready, warming on the range.

"Here you go dear" Carole put the cup of tea in front of her husband "Get that down you."

"Thanks love" Jefferies responded with a smile as he helped himself to milk and one sugar from the jug and bowl on the table.

"So what's wrong with the world? I thought between you and the Commander, you had put it all to rights" Carole remarked as she sat down opposite her husband.

"I have been going through all my old paperwork, old case files and so forth" he explained "I have always had doubts about a couple of cases over the years and now I have the time I thought I would look into them."

"What brought all this on then?" Carole enquired.

"Oh something I read in the paper this morning" Jefferies replied "It may be nothing, old nonsense from an old man."

"Oh that reminds me" Carole remarked "Courier came while you were sifting through your past glories" she picked up the parcel that had been delivered from the seat alongside her and placed it on the table.

"Ah lovely" Jefferies excitedly responded as he picked up the parcel, got up from the table and disappeared back in the direction of his study.

Back in the study, he placed the parcel on the desk and quickly unwrapped it before opening the box contained within and viewing its contents.

He took a few moments to look over the contents with an expression of longing admiration before lifting up the inner tray and inserting something beneath it.

Jefferies then closed the lid of the box and carried the package through into an adjacent bedroom where he placed it inside an old packing trunk before closing the lid and returning to his study.

For the next hour, he diligently worked at his desk, pausing only briefly now and then to retrieve something from his filing cabinet nearby or take another mouthful of tea.

His chain of thought was constant for the entire hour until he read a tatty scribbled note tucked into the back of one particular file. Something had always seemed not right and this was the note that appeared to prove that his thoughts may just have a little supporting evidence to them.

Jefferies quickly scribbled a note on the back of the piece of paper before putting it back in the file and closing it. Taking a moment for quiet contemplation, he sat back and looked around the study at the photographs on the walls, images from his time in the Police force and the Security Service that would later replace it.

One photograph in particular caught his eye, a group photograph of a number of Security Service officers in full uniform posing together outside New Scotland Yard with the famous three sided rotating sign immediately behind them.

The picture was in black and white and in the middle of the group was Jefferies himself when he was younger along with a number of junior officers and his then Acting Deputy to his right, a very youthful looking officer who would later go on to become one of the most respected Commander's in the service.

After a few moments though, Jefferies opened the desk drawer and removed from it his old Security Service issue six shot revolver and then got up and put on his jacket before heading out of the study.

"I'm just popping out for a little while" Jefferies announced to his wife as he grabbed his overcoat from the coat rack in the front hallway and put it on "I won't be long."

Before his wife could even respond, the front door had closed and Jefferies was heading down the path, through the end gate and out into the little country lane that ran past his isolated cottage.

As he proceeded down the lane in the direction of the nearby village, a dark coloured saloon car parked in a lay-by some distance behind him, started up and pulled out, slowly following him at a discrete distance.

Three days later.....

The snow was already starting to fall quite heavily as the lengthy Eurostar express train emerged at high speed from the British end of the Channel Tunnel out into the limited daylight of a wintry late December afternoon.

In the first class section amongst the train's various passengers were two Security Service officers, the Divisional Commanding Officer of the Metropolitan Division known to all simply as The Commander, and seated alongside him his wife of nearly three years, Tracy Caverner, the Divisional Commanding Officer of the Transport Division of the Security Service within Greater London.

They were returning from a rare two weeks off taken at the Administrator General's insistence and time they had wisely used for the long put off honeymoon which they spent together in Paris.

"We must do this again sometime" Tracy commented as the train slowed for its intermediate stop at Ashford International.

"As much as holidays and I are usually regarded as somewhat strange bedfellows" the Commander remarked "I have to admit that was probably the best ten days of my life, even if I still cannot speak a word of French."

"Ahh you old romantic you" Tracy responded as she leaned across and kissed him on the cheek.

"Ladies and gentlemen" the steward announced over the tannoy in a broad French accent "We are now arriving at Ashford International. If you are alighting here, please ensure that you take all your luggage with you and have your passport ready for inspection."

As the train passed the old Ashford Railway Works, the steward continued to repeat the previous announcement in French as the Commander looked up and tried in vain to recognise any of the words.

"I don't want to be the bearer of bad news" Tracy remarked as she looked out of the carriage window just as the train glided to a halt at Ashford International Station "But I think we are about to receive a welcoming committee."

"Well there goes the remaining few days of our holiday" the Commander remarked as they saw waiting on the platform the familiar form of Tracy's identical twin sister Jennifer and her fiancé Simon Fuller, the Deputy Commanding Officer of the Transport Division of the service, both in full uniform which could only mean they were here on business.

As the train stopped, they duly observed Jennifer point them out and then head for the nearest carriage door. Within moments they were on board and had duly arrived at their seats.

"Morning guys" Jennifer called "Had an interesting holiday have we?" she asked as they took the two seats directly opposite the Commander and Tracy.

"Oh just a few days out" the Commander remarked casually.

"Major Parisian Art Robbery Foiled" Fuller placed the previous day's copy of the Evening Standard on the table between them "Armed robbers in Paris were earlier today foiled by two off duty UK Security Service Officers" he quoted from the story.

"Just lending a hand" Tracy smiled meekly as the Commander looked around casually in an attempt to look innocent.

With both females in Security Service uniform and seated nearest the window, it was like looking at a mirror image which duly confused the train steward when he went past causing him to do a double take to confirm whether he was imagining that one of the passengers under his care had mysteriously doubled in the blink of an eye.

"Working on the theory that no one ever gets on a Eurostar at Ashford International just to hop up to Waterloo" the Commander responded "I assume this is not just a social call to see our holiday snaps then?"

"I'm afraid not Sir" Fuller confirmed.

"But I would like to see the snaps anyway" Jennifer cut in.

"The Administrator General asked me to pass this on to you as soon as possible" Fuller explained as he passed across a sealed envelope marked for his attention.

"Take a trip to Marylebone Station. If you pass go, collect two hundred pounds?" Tracy asked as the Commander opened the sealed envelope and removed the letter contained therein which he proceeded to read intently.

"I'm afraid not" the Commander responded as he continued to read through the hand written text that the message had been composed in "A message from an old friend."

"Oh there was one other thing" Fuller continued "Have you ever heard of a..." he tailed off as he consulted his notebook for a name "Carole Jefferies?"

"If she is a little grey haired old lady with the ability to make the best sponge cake in south east England then yes" the Commander confirmed.

"She wants you to contact her urgently" Fuller explained "Apparently something to do with her husband?"

"Isn't that Edward Jefferies wife?" Jennifer asked as the train continued to speed at an impressive rate through Kent by way of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link line.

"The very same" the Commander confirmed "which ties in rather neatly with the contents of this letter" he added as he folded the letter, tucked it back into the envelope and placed in his inside uniform tunic pocket.

"Something I should know?" Tracy enquired.

"Let's just say life got interesting" the Commander commented clearly deep in thought.

With the whirring of its motors echoing around the large glass train shed of Waterloo International Station, the Eurostar arrival from Paris glided to a halt at platform 23.

In unison, all the doors down the platform side of the train opened serenely and the train began to disgorge its passengers.

On the platform, Fuller and Jennifer bid their farewells and headed off back to their duties leaving Tracy and the Commander to proceed down the escalator and through the customs area arm in arm at a much more sedate pace.

Being Security Service officers in full uniform, they were allowed straight through the customs area where the tall black uniformed figure of the Administrator General was stood waiting for them on the far side of the ticket barriers.

"Good holiday?" he enquired as the two officers approached.

"Definitely" Tracy responded with a big smile.

"I got your message" the Commander tapped his tunic where the letter he had received was sitting inside "Do you mind if I take a look into it?"

"I was hoping you would say that" the Administrator General admitted as he accompanied the two officers up the escalators that led from the International part of Waterloo Station up onto the main concourse above.

"You are still on leave for the next few days" the Administrator General added as they crossed the concourse "Your Departments will be ok without you so I don't foresee any problems."

"Ah but the night is young" Tracy remarked with a knowing grin.

"You know I do believe you are becoming almost as cynical as me" the Commander chuckled in response.

"Freedom!" David Jarvis declared as he stepped out of the front gate of Portland Prison where he took a moment to stand in front of the main gates and look up into the sky to see the sunshine and take a deep breath of the outside air.

There was no one to meet him at the end of his fifteen year sentence, the road outside was cold and deserted. As the great Victorian gates slammed shut behind him, he hoped for the final time, Jarvis slung his Prison Service issue plastic bag containing his few and only possessions over his shoulder and proceeded to walk up the road towards the nearby bus stop.

Luck would appear to have been on his side that day, maybe for the first time in his life as despite the icy conditions that were playing havoc with timetables, a bus pulled up to the stop almost as soon as he arrived.

Quickly he boarded the Wilts & Dorset service and paid his fare, slightly taken aback by the difference in bus fares that had occurred during his fifteen year incarceration but not offering any protest, instead he duly took the ticket that was produced from the side of the machine, thanked the driver and proceeded into the lower saloon, taking a seat at the back from where he could look out on a world that he had not seen properly and freely for so long.

Twenty minutes later, he was stood on a railway station platform waiting for a train up to London. Here again there had been many changes in the intervening years. The old slam door trains had long since been retired, replaced by sleek shiny new white and red ones with automatic doors and endless announcements.

The price of a cup of tea from the buffet had changed as well he discovered although he had to admit the large paper cup that his drink came in was significantly larger than the old china cups that used to be served here.

It wasn't long before a South West Trains Class 159 diesel multiple unit train pulled into the platform, running a little late due to encountering heavy snow on its diverted journey from the west country.

As the automatic double leaf doors opened, Jarvis paused to allow a couple of passengers to alight before boarding and proceeding into the standard class saloon where he took a seat in a quiet corner.

With the train now departing with a sudden burst of growling from its diesel engines, Jarvis took a couple of pieces of paper from his pocket, unfolded the battered and dog eared document and scanned what was written upon it for a few moments before returning it to its former resting place.

Looking out of the window at the passing scenery, Jarvis' mind was full of thoughts of the future, the present and most importantly the past.

Carole Jefferies almost dropped the baking bowl she had in her hands when she heard the knock at the door and ran through into the hall.

"Oh thank God" she responded as she saw Tracy and the Commander on the doorstep, although it was a mixture of relief and disappointment that was etched on her face when she opened the door.

"I got your message" the Commander replied as Carole let them into the warmth and closed the front door on the cold wintry evening that was now descending outside with some rapidity.

"I was told you two were out of the country" Carole remarked as they went into the warm, cosy and welcoming front room and at her insistence sat down together on the sumptuous sofa, pausing only to move the dozing ginger cat that was already sitting on it to a more convenient location, much to its displeasure.

"Honeymoon in Paris" Tracy explained as Carole went through into the kitchen to fetch the tea.

"Very nice" Carole responded as she returned with the tray of tea and cake which she placed onto the small coffee table in front of her guests.

"So where is the old rascal then?" the Commander enquired as he leaned forward to pour the tea from the large blue and white striped teapot as well as secure the largest slice of home made cake available on the plate.

"He disappeared three days ago" Carole admitted with a worried look.

"What happened?" the Commander asked, a new level of concern being obviously expressed upon hearing this news.

"Well you know him better than almost anyone" Carole responded "Since he retired a few weeks back he has been in that old study of his going through his files and old cases."

"Anything in particular?" the Commander asked.

"I think there was some old case or other that he suddenly took a major interest in after reading something in the paper a couple of days ago" she continued "Then the other evening he is sitting there drinking his tea and then suddenly announces he is popping out for a while and that was the last I saw of him."

"Would you mind if I took a look around his study?" the Commander asked.

"Be my guest" Carole replied "You should know the way by now."

"Gerry!" the captain of the Security Service Thames River Division patrol vessel Ruth called to his colleague who was standing on the dockside having a quick cigarette break "We've got a job on" he announced.

Duly if slightly regretfully stubbing his cigarette out, Gerry clambered back aboard the small patrol vessel, untying the mooring ropes that were holding it to the dock as he passed before joining the captain on the bridge.

"Where are we off too then Sir?" he asked as he took the helm and started up the two powerful engines that were capable of propelling the craft at some speed when required.

"Embankment Pier" the Captain informed him "Reports of something floating in the water."

"As long as it's not another whale" Gerry commented as he accelerated the engines to full speed and set off up river.

A few minutes later the patrol vessel slowed for the approach to Embankment Pier, just short of Westminster where on the north bank, Gerry and the Captain could see the blue flashing lights of a Security Service patrol car parked adjacent to the embankment wall and a couple of uniformed officers from the Metropolitan Division casting torches over the surface of the water clearly in search of something.

"Somebody gave us a call?" the Captain called from the Bridge, having to raise his voice above the roar of the engines.

"I think its over towards the middle mate" the officer on the embankment called, waving his torch in the general direction he was indicating.

"Gerry, do the honours will you" the Captain called whereupon a powerful searchlight mounted on the vessel was switched on and trained on the area where it was thought the mysterious object may be.

"Bring her around to the right" Gerry called to the Captain as he continued to pan around with the searchlight. Just as the captain applied a little power to the engines to bring the boat around a bit, Gerry caught sight of something in the searchlight which caused him to double back to it.

"Boss, I think I've spotted something" Gerry called keeping the spotlight firmly trained on the object he had sighted.

"Right then" the Captain responded as he manoeuvred the boat in closer to the object and brought it to a stop alongside.

Gerry reached across to get a boat hook which he then lowered into the water to grab the object and draw it into the side of the vessel. Once secured to the side, the Captain joined him and helped haul the object aboard, where it landed on the deck with a dull thud.

"What do you reckon, stiff or an old rug?" the Captain asked as he and Gerry looked over the object, approximately six feet in length and carefully wrapped in what appeared to be some form of black plastic wrapping.

"I reckon we got a stiff Sir" Gerry concluded as he knelt down and looked over the object but without touching it.

"Let's get it ashore" the Captain announced as he returned to the bridge and fired up the engines again.

Under the watchful gaze of a gathered throng of curious passers by looking on from the river bank, the Captain brought the vessel back across the river and pulled it in alongside Embankment Pier where a small gathering of officers were waiting to take it off the boat.

Once it was safely unloaded onto the pier side deck, one officer from the Forensics Division, already prepared in latex gloves, carefully opened the packaging just a little to confirm what had already been suspected, the presence of a dead body.

"I can confirm we have a body" she announced as she carefully returned the packaging to its previous state to preserve possible evidence before getting up and signalling to two darkly dressed men waiting near a black coroner's van that they could now take delivery of their grisly cargo.

Amongst the people watching on the river bank as operations here came to an initial conclusion, a tall distinguished looking gentleman, hair slightly greying but still respectable in appearance, coughed a little before pulling his long overcoat tighter around his body and turning smartly on his heels whereupon he walked away along the embankment into the darkness of the late evening.

"It's late" Carole called as she looked around the study door frame to where the Commander was seated at Jefferies old oak desk with Tracy standing alongside him "You should stay here tonight."

"We wouldn't want to impose" the Commander began to reply.

"Nonsense son" Carole waved away any concern they may have had quite easily "To tell the truth I would be glad of the company."

"Thanks" the Commander responded.

"I'll just go and make your old room up now" Carole announced and set off enthusiastically to see about her task.

"Your old room?" Tracy asked somewhat surprised.

"Edward Jefferies and his wife adopted me when I and the rest of the clan were split up by the witness protection guys in the 1970's" the Commander explained as he continued to look through the files on the desk.

"You really are a complicated chap aren't you?" Tracy asked.

"You could say that" the Commander had to admit.

"Edward Jefferies was one of the senior investigating officers on the Lewisham Diamond Heist investigation" the Commander went on to explain "He was responsible for ensuring that I and my siblings were put into witness protection in exchange for my Father's testimony."

"Oh I see" Tracy responded as she looked up at one of the pictures on the wall in front of her of a younger Jefferies, his wife and a young lad who she just realised was indeed a somewhat younger incarnation of her husband.

"Well anyway, we were all adopted out separately" the Commander continued "Edward and Carole had been considering adoption as they were unable to have kids of their own so they took me on."

"Nothing to do with Carole's expertise at making great cakes then?" Tracy chuckled.

"Well that did have some influence I think" the Commander had to admit "Anyway, I went through school and got next to no qualifications of any real merit so Edward suggested I join the then fledgling Security Service which I did."

"Bedroom is all made up my dears" Carole called through the study door as she went past.

"Eventually I became his Deputy C.O. at Haychester and the rest as they say, is history" the Commander finished.

"Found anything yet?" Tracy asked.

"Possibly" the Commander admitted as he concentrated on looking through one file in particular "Trouble is there are so many case files here and I was involved in a fair few that I keep stopping to relive the memories of a few here and there."

"Nothing like a bit of nostalgia" Tracy remarked.

"There is no way of telling which one of these, if any was bothering him" the Commander reluctantly conceded as he put the file he had been reading through back on top of the not insignificant pile on the desk.

"You do know its gone eleven don't you?" Tracy asked as she observed her husband yawn uncontrollably.

"I need a lie down" the Commander agreed "I do my best thinking when I am lying down."

"Come on then love" Tracy helped the Commander to his feet and together, arm in arm they left the study whereupon the Commander led her down the hall to the guest bedroom.

"This used to be mine your know" the Commander explained as they entered the room, bits of railwayana on the walls being a bit of a giveaway as to the identity of its former occupant now returned.

"Never would have guessed" Tracy smiled with wry amusement as she sat down on the edge of the bed whilst the Commander opened an old trunk by its side.

"Now this brings back a few memories" the Commander remarked as he lifted out of the trunk a number of boxes containing old model railway locomotives and rolling stock.

"I had a motorbike made out of Meccano" Tracy commented as she saw the Commander reacquainting himself with his old models.

"Original Triang Class 08 shunter" the Commander held up the small green shunting locomotive model after having carefully removed it from its original box before returning it again.

"What's that one" Tracy asked as she leaned forward and joined her husband in looking into the trunk.

"Blue Pullman" the Commander explained as he lifted off the lid of the set Tracy had indicated to reveal the two sleek power cars and two intermediate coaches in their blue and white livery.

"Ought to give these a run when I get the chance" the Commander added as he returned the boxes back to the trunk and with a little regret closed the lid "See if they still work."

"Boys and their toys" Tracy remarked with an amused sigh.

"The Met Office tonight is advising people in the south and south east of England not to travel overnight and into tomorrow morning unless their journey is absolutely necessary" the radio presenter announced, an announcement that echoed from the kitchen through the country cottage, down the corridor to the bedroom where Tracy and the Commander were asleep snuggled up in each other arms.

Outside, the reason for the Met Office weather warning was obvious. The earlier hinted flakes of snow had now developed into a full blown blizzard and in the space of a few hours had now coated much of the south of England including London in an impenetrable thick white blanket.

In the bedroom, the old clock on the bedside table registered three o'clock just as an owl in the woodland that surrounded the back of the house, sent out a haunting call that echoed all around the nearby countryside.

Whether it was this or the thoughts going through his mind in his sleep that suddenly woke him was not clear. One thing for certain was that the Commander woke up with quite a start.

"What is it?" Tracy asked blearily, having been awoken by her husband's sudden movement.

"Tracy" the Commander got up and switched on the bedside lamp before turning to look at her with a quizzical expression "I never had a Blue Pullman!"

"This is not exactly the sort of time to be discussing model railways" Tracy remarked "Not that I am that surprised knowing you as I do mind."

"The only diesel powered locos I had were the 08 shunter and a Co-Bo" the Commander explained "I would never have had a Blue Pullman when I was young."

"Yep" Tracy confirmed "I can confirm you have now completely lost me on this one."

The Commander reached over the side of the bed and into the trunk once again and removed the Blue Pullman set box from it which he placed on the bed in front of them.

Carefully he opened it and proceeded to look more carefully at the contents before lifting up the yellow plastic lining tray with the rolling stock in it. Underneath was revealed a brown manila folder with a message attached to the front of it by a paperclip.

"Bingo!" the Commander announced.

"The last place anyone except you would look" Tracy remarked with admiration.

"Oh no" the Commander remarked as he read the attached note from Jefferies and then the opening page in the file "The Embankment Murders."

"You were involved with the Embankment Murders?" Tracy remarked.

"Yep" the Commander grimly confirmed "About fifteen years back or more now."

"I remember the coverage" Tracy recalled "Quite a media circus if I remember."

"Well the press blew it out of all proportion" the Commander explained "It all circulated around a series of seemingly random murders. Nothing connected the victims in any way except they were all killed and then disposed off by almost exactly the same method and in an area of the River Thames that when someone plotted it on a map, centred on the mooring pier outside Embankment Underground Station."

"So what was your involvement?" Tracy asked which caused the Commander to get up out of bed and proceed to remove a framed photograph from the wall, a black and white image of several Security Service officers posed in front of the New Scotland Yard three sided revolving sign.

"Jefferies and I were called in to form a special investigation team after the third murder was identified" the Commander passed her the photograph.

"Nice haircut" Tracy remarked with a chuckle as she recognised the Commander in the photograph with fairly long hair.

"Jefferies was the head of the investigation. His own Deputy, Dave Mullins was taken seriously ill the night before we were due to start so he appointed me as his acting Deputy C.O. on the job" the Commander explained.

"I thought someone was jailed for it though?" Tracy recalled distant events in her mind.

"In theory yes" the Commander looked a little regretful "We finally arrested an employee who worked at Embankment Station by the name of David Jarvis except we were only able to connect him with one murder out of the eight and even that link was tenuous."

"But they found him guilty on all eight if I remember" Tracy remarked.

"In those days" the Commander continued "Juries tended to go on guilt by association. If he more than likely did one, then as far as they and the press were concerned, he did the others as well."

"You weren't convinced were you?" Tracy asked.

"Nope" the Commander confirmed "and neither was Jefferies. Both of us were convinced there was someone else in the frame but we could never prove it."

"All of this begs the question" Tracy asked "Why now and where is Jefferies?"

"Now because yesterday David Jarvis was released on parole" the Commander explained "An event that has attracted the attention of one or two investigative journalists."

"And Jefferies?" Tracy asked.

"My guess would be he has worked out who did the other murders and the real murderer is probably getting more than a little nervous right now" the Commander concluded "especially if there is the possibility of the press getting involved as well."

"Where are you going?" Tracy asked as the Commander got up and grabbed his shirt which he proceeded to put on.

"I think I know where he might be" the Commander explained "You stay here, I have to go out for a while."

"Can't it wait until morning?" Tracy looked out of the window with clear concern seeing the weather conditions outside "You'll freeze to death out there."

"I'm sorry Tracy love" the Commander explained as he put his uniform back on "I have no doubt he is in severe trouble and there are certain old loyalties I have to observe. He saved my life once and I must do the same for him if he is in trouble."

"He could just be down the pub" Tracy remarked.

"In which case" the Commander confirmed with a smile "It's his round first."

"Be careful" Tracy remarked as she got up out of bed and hugged the Commander before kissing him quite passionately."

"I'll be fine" the Commander confirmed "A little chilled admittedly but there is nothing to worry about."

"I thought I heard voices" Carole remarked as she saw the Commander appear in the hallway where he paused to take one last look at Tracy before coming into the kitchen.

"I take it you couldn't sleep either then?" the Commander asked.

"Not under current circumstances no" Carole confirmed "You think you know where he is?" she asked.

"Pretty certain" the Commander confirmed. "Is the old Land Rover still in the shed?"

"Keys under the passenger seat as always" Carole confirmed.

"Look after Tracy for me will you" the Commander requested as he donned a thick overcoat and gloves "She is all I have got."

"Are you sure about this?" Carole enquired.

"Well I have to admit the thought of Tracy in nothing but a silk nightie is enough to make me want to be concreted to the spot by her side but this is something I have to do" the Commander remarked as he smiled at this admittance before opening the back door whereupon a howling draft of cold air and snow flakes invaded the warm kitchen.

"Good luck and be careful" Carole warned.

"Thanks" the Commander confirmed and shut the door behind him.

Outside, anyone would be forgiven for mistaking this rural part of the county of Sussex for some remote frozen Siberian wasteland. The cold temperature with its heavy blizzard of snow was made all the more intolerable by the high wind that was sharp enough seemingly to cut through steel.

The Commander wrapped a scarf around his face to try and keep out the worst of the bitter cold as he trudged through the deep snow around to the side of the cottage and

the old ramshackle garage that leant at a slightly precarious angle against the end of the house.

It took a couple of minutes for him to clear the heavy snow from around the door so that he could get inside where being out of the wind came as a huge relief.

Turning on the light, the old slightly discoloured sixty watt bulb illuminated a typical scene repeated in garages throughout the land with the Land Rover parked in amidst shelves and cupboards of slightly rusting tools, old jam jars full of nails and bits of timber off cut that were always stored just in case they came in useful one day.

The Land Rover itself was an old dark green series one model with the straight sides and canvas roof over the back section, parts of which had clearly seen better days.

Clambering into the driver's seat, the Commander closed the door with its characteristic empty metallic bang before reaching beneath the passenger seat to find the spare keys.

Having located the keys, he put them in the ignition and was about to start the engine when the passenger side door opened unexpectedly and to his surprise, Tracy got in and sat down.

"I'm coming with you" she announced with clear determination.

"Are you sure?" the Commander asked although he knew more than well enough that once Tracy had made a decision, there was simply no point in trying to change her mind.

"Two flasks of hot coffee, some food and a few essentials" Tracy explained as she placed a large bag into the foot well in front of her.

"You know I never would have thought of that" the Commander was forced to admit as he attempted to start the Land Rover without any initial success.

"I forgotten how stubborn this thing can be" the Commander remarked as he tried again, the engine turning over successfully but still not quite managing to fire up.

"Are you sure this antique works?" Tracy asked, clearly rather unsure about the elderly vehicle they were about to all but entrust their lives to.

"She just needs a little coaxing" the Commander explained "I learnt to drive on this you know."

"It's amazing it ever made it as far as the test centre" Tracy remarked "Tax is out mind" she pointed to the out of date tax disc in the window.

"Ah that's got the old girl" the Commander announced as the engine started on the third attempt and he switched on the headlamps, sending a shaft of illumination out into the darkened gloom, with snow flurrying across their path ahead.

With a little slippage from the four wheel drive vehicle as soon as it met the slippery snow packed conditions outside, they set off along the drive and out into the country lane where in the darkness, no lights could be seen for miles in each direction.

"Looks like the power just went off" the Commander remarked "There should be a distant glow from Haychester in that direction" he indicated in the distance which was as dark and unlit as anywhere else around them except the cottage they had just left which had the light from a newly lit oil lamp at the kitchen window.

"Where exactly are we going?" Tracy asked as they headed along the lane as quickly as the conditions would allow which in reality was little more than walking pace.

"There is a place that Jefferies always used to retreat to when he needed some thinking time alone" the Commander explained "It's not far from here and if he was being followed or pursued by anyone when he left the house the other day, that is where I reckon he is most likely to have gone to."

"I suppose the one advantage with this weather is that no one can possibly be following us" Tracy remarked.

"It does have that advantage, yes" the Commander confirmed as he turned off the lane onto a barely visible farm track, only the top row of the barbed wire fences poking out of the snow on either side giving any indication that there was a track there at all.

"Does this thing have any seatbelts?" Tracy asked as she looked around whilst the Land Rover and its occupants were being bumped around by the rough nature of the track combined with the heavy snowdrifts they were encountering on top.

"Its pre-seatbelts love" the Commander explained "In fact its pretty much pre-everything including me" he added "Just hold on tight, it gets rougher from here."

"Rougher?" Tracy exclaimed as one jolt sent her and the Commander bouncing off their seats so high they nearly hit their heads on the cab ceiling before crashing back down onto the seats again.

The lights from the Land Rover were like a beacon shining across the dark snow covered down land as they made their way very slowly up the hill. It took some thirty minutes to reach a point about two thirds of the way up the hill where three farm tracks met, a point marked by a complex of gates, the upper parts of which were just visible poking up through the snow.

"Gate number one, gate number two or gate number three?" Tracy asked as the Commander brought the Land Rover to a stop. He allowed it to slip slightly to a halt before opening the door and getting out.

"Slide across" the Commander instructed Tracy "When I get the gate open, drive through and then I will get back in again.

"Be careful" Tracy responded as she slid across to the drivers side and kissed her husband for good luck before he shut the door and headed out into the snow and wind,

barely visible in the lights of the Land Rover as the snow continued to swirl all around.

Tracy watched anxiously as the figure of her husband struggled through the snow outside and after a bit of shovelling, managed to free the gate sufficiently enough to open it and allow them to pass through.

Tentatively given her usual driving skills, Tracy advanced slowly, having to constantly correct the steering as it slipped and skidded in the conditions until she passed the vehicle through the gate and out onto the track on the other side.

"Very nicely done" the Commander commented as he rejoined her inside, this time taking the passenger seat and allowing Tracy to carry on driving.

"Where to now?" she asked apprehensively.

"Keep going up this track as far as you can until you reach an old windmill and a barn" the Commander instructed "If we can see it that is."

Tracy struggled to control the Land Rover as she drove very slowly up the hill, the wind now even stronger and blowing snow harder and faster than ever across her line of vision.

The snow storm was so intense that the headlights were becoming obscured and the rather paltry windscreen wipers with which the vehicle was fitted were struggling badly.

"Are you absolutely sure about this?" Tracy asked as she narrowly avoided sliding sideways into a gate post that suddenly appeared out of the darkness.

"Well now you come to mention it" the Commander wryly responded "No, not really."

"Is that it?" Tracy asked as she pointed ahead where just visible against the skyline was the outline of a barn and behind it the distinctive sails of a windmill.

"This is the place" the Commander confirmed, much to Tracy's relief as she brought the Land Rover to a halt a short distance away from the darkened buildings.

"Actually when the sun is shining, this is rather a nice spot" the Commander informed her as they prepared to exit out of the vehicle.

"I'll take your word for it" Tracy mused.

"Head straight for that end wall of the barn, directly ahead" the Commander instructed, not that it was all that easy to see with the snow blowing about in amidst the darkness.

Once outside the vehicle, the force of the cold wind and snow was like having the side of your face being etched off with a large cold knife. As a result, they made for the

barn as quickly as possible where thankfully some shelter was afforded by the gable end which was out of the worst of the wind.

The Commander drew his gun as a precaution whilst Tracy held a large torch before they entered through the old wooden door into the interior of the barn.

"Hello?" the Commander called inside as they entered, closing the door behind them.

Initially there was no response but there were signs of recent activity. An old oil lamp provided a warm glow of illumination alongside a small gas stove on which was a gently simmering saucepan, the warm steam and smell of fresh food that was arising from it, making a welcome contrast to the bitter conditions outside.

"You got my message then lad" Jefferies suddenly announced as he appeared from the shadows behind the two officers which made Tracy nearly jump out of her skin.

"Well, we were in the area" the Commander commented wryly as he re-holstered his weapon "It was a nice pleasant evening so I thought we would drop in and say hello!"

"So how many times did it take you to get that old Land Rover of mine started?" Jefferies asked as all three sat down on hay bales around the camping stove.

"Three goes" the Commander remarked "But she got us here which is the main thing."

"You're looking well" Jefferies commented "Bit windswept mind."

"So what is this little adventure of yours about then?" the Commander asked.

"I think you know that already" Jefferies responded.

"A file and a message hidden in the one place no one except me would even think of looking" the Commander remarked "Very clever."

"Five days ago, an investigative journalist by the name of Dixon called me" Jefferies explained "He said he had come up with some evidence on the Embankment murders which if proved correct, would prove Jarvis was all but an innocent bystander in at least seven of the eight murders."

"You and I both suspected that since the day he was nicked" the Commander replied.

"Yeah well" Jefferies continued "I agreed to meet him three days ago at a pub not far from here where we could have a quiet chat. He passed me a photocopy of some of what he had found which I have placed in a safe place, the thing is though, that very same reporter was killed in an accident on the motorway up to London that very evening."

"Could be coincidence" the Commander pondered.

"You don't believe in coincidences" Tracy reminded him.

"Exactly lass" Jefferies agreed "A trait your husband learned from me I reckon."

"Do we know the circumstances of this Dixon's untimely demise?" Tracy asked.

"Apparently he was caught up in a high speed pursuit" Jefferies explained the version of events he had managed to ascertain thus far "A couple of nutters in a stolen car were being chased up the M23 by a Surrey Traffic Division officer when he supposedly skidded on ice and knocked Dixon off the road and down into a ditch. Killed instantly."

"And you don't buy that for a minute?" the Commander asked.

"I still have plenty of contacts around the service even though I have retired and the word is there was something shonky about it" Jefferies confirmed.

"So what led you to this charming retreat in the country?" Tracy remarked as she looked around the darkened old barn.

"I did some digging around, checked the details that Dixon had passed to me against my files and asked a few discrete questions here and there" Jefferies went on "Then I got a tip off from an anonymous source in the service which said I was in danger so I made a copy of my files, shoved the original in the model train box and then left the house, intending to post it to you."

"Some unwelcome visitors?" the Commander asked.

"I was being followed as I went down the lane towards the main road" Jefferies explained "Whoever he or she was, they were pretty good but I have been a Police and Security Officer for way too long not to spot that old trick."

"So you gave them the slip, hid up here and waited for us to show up?" Tracy asked.

"It was only a matter of time before Carole called you" Jefferies responded "It was then only a matter of time before you came straight down to the house, found the files and note I left you and then came up here."

"Of course old Jarvis was released yesterday" the Commander remarked as he sat back with a tired yawn.

"If I were you" Jefferies suggested "I'd have him pulled in for his own protection" he advised.

"You think it is that serious?" Tracy asked, clearly concerned.

"Well so far a reporter is dead, I have been followed and the Commander and I both know that there was something just plain wrong about the evidence that led to his conviction" Jefferies responded.

"With a bit of luck he will be all right until the morning" the Commander added "But there is no way we are going to get back down that hill tonight in this weather."

"You are welcome to stay here" Jefferies mockingly remarked "It may not look much but its got warm hay and a lovely view."

"Not too sure about the catering mind" Tracy remarked as she looked with some concern into the saucepan on the stove. "Good think Carole sent me out with some supplies" she lifted up the bag she had carried in with her when they arrived.

"Now that's more like it" the Commander responded as he happily helped himself to a slice of finest Victoria sponge cake.

"You know" Tracy remarked as the Commander tucked in, sending the now seemingly obligatory crumbs down the front of his uniform tunic "You are the only person I know who eats cake at four in the morning."

"First rule of business" the Commander mumbled through a mouthful of cake
"Survival!"

The wind had died down and the snowfall was reduced to a few descending flakes as the sun came up a few hours later. Inside the barn, the Commander stirred into life, opening his eyes and looking across at Tracy who was still asleep huddled next to him on the rather impromptu bed of hay bales they managed to put together by the light of an oil lamp a few hours earlier.

As the Commander rolled back and lifted himself up onto his feet, he looked down with a little distain at the bits of straw that were now attached to his uniform tunic.

Nearby, Jefferies was also still largely asleep, sitting up with his back against a post. The only other creature awake was a small field mouse which was observing them from nearby while he was helping himself to some much welcome discarded cake crumbs.

The light of the oil lamp was by now barely a thin glow but it was enough to add a little illumination to the dark corner where the morning daylight from the outside failed to reach and where the Commander was now sitting up, looking around.

Something however suddenly attracted his attention as he stood up, for where the light shone from behind through the letter he had been handed the previous day by the Administrator General where it was protruding from his tunic pocket, something was now visible within it.

"Morning love" Tracy called with a slight bleariness as she awoke alongside him only to see the Commander lean forward and careful remove the letter and hold it up closer to the light for a more detailed inspection.

"Something wrong?" Tracy asked seeing as unusually she had been unsuccessful in obtaining a reply from her husband.

"What the hell is that?" the Commander asked as he looked more carefully at the letter, still contained within its envelope, trying to make out something that appeared to be sealed within the paper of the envelope itself.

"Watermark?" Tracy asked as she got up and looked over the Commander's shoulder, now seeing the same mark in the paper that he had just noticed.

At that point the Commander opened the letter, removed its contents which he casually stuffed into his pocket and ripped apart the envelope, revealing that carefully sealed to the inside was what appeared to be a small thin metal disk with a couple of looped wires coming out of it.

"Uh oh!" Tracy remarked as she realised what the strange looking item may be.

"Is that what I think it is?" the Commander asked. He would be the first to admit that he would be the last person who anyone would ask anything technical but even he recognised that what they were looking at spelt potential bad news.

"A tracking device of some kind I would say" Tracy confirmed with a stunned expression, equally mirrored by her husband.

"Did I miss something?" Jefferies enquired as he joined them.

"I think we have a problem" the Commander announced as he passed across the item that they were all firmly agreed now was definitely a tracker of some kind.

"Class three tracking device" Jefferies confirmed the other two's suspicions "I think it may be time for a discreet exit."

"Grab your stuff ladies and gents" the Commander announced as he went over to the door of the barn and opened it a small amount to look outside at the snowy landscape outside.

"Does trouble follow you two around or something?" Jefferies asked as he helped Tracy gather their stuff together.

"I tend to find it follows my husband around a lot" Tracy admitted "I just seem to be followed around by trouble by association."

"Ok old friend" Jefferies announced as he and Tracy joined the Commander at the doorway "You're driving."

"Come on" the Commander encouraged as he led the little party out of the barn, making a trail of fresh foot prints in the otherwise undisturbed snow outside, towards the parked Land Rover that was covered in a layer of snow but still otherwise driveable.

It was a distance of about thirty yards from the barn to their vehicle that had to be covered and as they approached the half way mark, the Commander was the first to become aware that they may not be alone.

"Down!" the Commander called as he noticed a movement in a hedge nearby, a suspicion swiftly confirmed as a gunshot rang out, echoing around the otherwise deserted hills all around.

"Don't you just hate it when that happens?" Jefferies remarked casually as they got up from the ground where they had flung themselves instinctively and ran for cover behind the Land Rover.

A second shot rang out and ricocheted off the rear of the vehicle as the Commander opened the passenger side door and piled inside, swiftly followed by Tracy and Jefferies.

"Looks like we have two unfriendlies in a four by four on the other side of the hedge" Tracy announced as she surveyed the scene over her shoulder through the rear window.

The Commander tried to start the engine as Tracy pulled her gun out of its waist mounted holster and leaned out of the passenger window, taking aim and firing at their attempted assailants.

"Come on old girl" the Commander called as he once again attempted to start the engine without success.

"Ah there she is!" Jefferies announced with triumph as, after much rummaging around in the glove box, he finally managed to locate and retrieve his old Security Service issue revolver.

"You do know you were supposed to hand that in when you retired don't you?" the Commander asked out of curiosity as he attempted to start the engine for a third time, this time with success.

"Was I?" Jefferies asked innocently with a knowing grin just as the engine of the old Land Rover finally fired up with a hearty roar.

"May I suggest we get the hell out of here?" Tracy suggested as she leaned out of the passenger side window and fired off two shots in the approximate direction from where she estimated they had been fired upon.

"Hold on to your hats" the Commander called as he put the Land Rover into gear and moved off "This is likely to get a bit rough!"

As the Land Rover headed off, bouncing and rocking over the uneven and snow covered ground, the two unidentified assailants returned to their own smart four wheel drive vehicle parked nearby and began to pursue.

"Their tailing" Tracy announced as she looked out of the passenger window at the distantly following vehicle behind them.

"It never rains but it pours" the Commander commented ruefully as he attempted to control the vehicle over the rough ground, having now left the track and attempting to evade their pursuers unsuccessfully by going across the snow covered fields instead.

"Head for that tree line" Jefferies indicated ahead "I have an idea that may shake these jokers off."

The Commander duly adjusted their course and steered as best he could towards a large row of trees which lined the bottom edge of the field.

"They are still back there" Tracy confirmed the status of their pursuers, still some distance behind but keeping pace and easily following them from the wheel tracks they were leaving behind in the snow.

"Let me guess" the Commander enquired as they reached the trees "Jam the accelerator peddle down and jump out?"

"Got it in one" Jefferies confirmed.

"Here" Tracy passed across an old crowbar that she retrieved from the foot well beneath her feet "Try this."

"Once we are past the tree line" the Commander instructed "Everyone out and hide behind the trees."

"Here we go" Tracy announced as the Commander slowed down and she got out with Jefferies following closely behind.

No sooner were they out of the vehicle than they quickly made for a nearby large oak tree where, after jamming the accelerator down with the crow bar and getting out himself, they were joined by the Commander.

Quietly and with some trepidation, the trio waited for the pursuers vehicle to catch up, ducking down as they passed through the tree line and continued onwards in pursuit of the distant driverless Land Rover as it continued to make its way progressively down the slope and away.

"That should keep going for at least a couple of miles" Jefferies remarked with a satisfied grin.

"Lets go" the Commander wisely suggested "Before they realise they have been had."

"Next item" Simon Fuller announced from the front of the briefing room in the Holborn headquarters of the Transport Division of the Service "A particularly nasty bag snatcher appears to be on the loose and seems to be particularly fond of the Victoria Line between Pimlico and Tottenham Hale."

Being Acting Commanding Officer in Tracy Caverner's absence, he was enjoying himself immensely, a fact that was obvious to the various officers in the briefing that morning.

"Unfortunately we haven't been able to identify him, her or them on CCTV but if a report comes through of a bag snatcher active in this target area" he indicated the large projected screen behind him with the section of the Victoria Line he had mentioned highlighted "It would be nice to nail them before anyone else gets hurt."

"All right" Fuller brought the meeting to a close "If that is all then you all have a good day."

With that closing statement, Fuller quickly dashed off the podium at the front of the room in order to exit and reach his office before the tide of officers following jammed the corridor up.

"You're enjoying this aren't you?" Jennifer Caverner remarked as she joined him outside his office door.

"Well it does have some advantages I have to admit" Fuller responded as he opened his office door to be confronted by the site of numerous computer and laptop parts strewn everywhere, a sign of his main duty as the resident IT expert.

"I have been thinking" Jennifer began as she sat on the edge of the desk alongside Fuller as he took his seat and picked up an old computer hard drive that was sitting in front of him and tossed it casually into his in tray which then promptly collapsed under the weight of the impact into the tray below it.

"So have I" Fuller responded turning to face his fiancé and taking her hand in his "April the 23rd."

"April the 23rd?" Jennifer asked, slightly taken aback.

"I was thinking of going to a wedding" Fuller explained cryptically "I thought you might like to come along."

"Dress uniform or shall I splash out on a proper wedding dress?" Jennifer asked, surprised that at last Fuller was finally admitting that it was time to get on with the wedding that they had somehow managed to be put off for some time now.

"Church, white dress, Underground train with ribbons on the front of it, the whole nine yards" Fuller responded.

"You are on" Jennifer enthusiastically agreed as she leaned forward and they kissed.

"Great!" Fuller responded "Let's celebrate with breakfast shall we?"

"Do you know when my sister and her beloved husband are likely to reappear then?" Jennifer asked Fuller as they sat down at one of the tables in the Departmental Staff Canteen on the third floor.

"Well they are not officially due back from holiday until the day after tomorrow" Fuller explained between mouthfuls of cereal "So we are safe from chaos until the weekend."

"Looks like the Administrator General will just have to wait then" Jennifer remarked.

"Wait for what?" Fuller enquired out of idle curiosity.

"I was escorting the Chief Home Office Pathologist back to his place last night" Jennifer explained "Apparently he was called out to do an examination on a body that the boys from River Division pulled out of the Thames last night."

"Bit of a high brow visitor for a river body isn't it?" Fuller remarked as he scraped the last of the cereal out of his bowl and consumed it.

"The stiff was some guy named Jervis or something similar apparently" Jennifer continued "Nothing is being released to the papers though and no post mortem is to be undertaken until the Administrator General has seen the Commander though."

"Sounds a bit cloak and dagger to me" Fuller remarked as he and Jennifer rose from their seats.

"That's what I thought" Jennifer replied as they left the canteen "Anyway, I must go, I have an urgent appointment with the Defence Minister as I have to take him to a high level pow wow that just happens to be at his favourite golf club."

"Nice work if you can get it!" Fuller remarked as they kissed and Jennifer waved goodbye.

"See you later love" she called as she disappeared from view.

Fuller contemplated her for a few moments with a happy smile before heading back upstairs to the Control Room where he was greeted by one of the despatch officers furiously trying to attract his attention by a wave of arms and the proffering a telephone.

"It's the Administrator General for you" the dispatcher informed Fuller as he sat down at the main console in the Control Room "Urgent call."

"Name me a time when the Administrator General doesn't make an urgent call" Fuller reluctantly responded as he picked up the call on the telephone extension to the desk he was sat at.

"Good morning Sir" Fuller responded in as cheerful manner as he could manage "What can I do for you?"

"Have you heard from either Commander Caverner or the Commander since yesterday?" the Administrator General enquired from the surroundings of his office on the top floor of New Scotland Yard.

"Last I saw of them was at Waterloo International yesterday" Fuller responded "Since then though, not a dickie bird."

"That's what I was afraid of" the Administrator General grimly confirmed.

"Don't worry Sir" Fuller responded "I am sure wherever they are, they are perfectly safe."

"This is getting bloody dangerous" the Commander commented as he slipped on a patch of frozen snow, nearly sending him head first into a snow drift where it not for Tracy's quick reaction in grabbing his arm as he had begun to slip.

"I hate to add to our problems" Jefferies commented as he surveyed the distant horizon through his opera glasses "But I think our friends have cottoned on to our little side step."

"Lets up the pace shall we?" Tracy remarked as they resumed their journey on foot, being as brisk as the varying levels of snow on the ground would allow as they proceeded across the fields with the distant speck of two pursuing figures just behind them on the brow of the hill they had just come down.

"Where the hell is it?" the Commander looked around the predominantly white countryside as if searching for something in particular.

"What exactly are we looking for may I ask?" Tracy enquired.

"Some transport" the Commander explained as he continued to look around until something caught his attention.

"Head that way" he instructed, pointing ahead towards a line of small trees a few hundred yards to their right whereupon the party changed course and proceeded in the direction he had indicated.

A couple of minutes later, they reached a gate in the fence line, marked by a metal sign of some kind, its markings and message obscured by snow on its face which the Commander swept off with his hand to reveal a familiar message.

"Southern Railway - Beware of Trains" Tracy read from the old style cast iron sign mounted on its slightly rusty post which had been fashioned from an old length of rail.

As they passed through the gate, the Commander looked down at the two sets of running lines, one was almost completely snow covered, the other however showed some clearance which was a sign that despite the terrible wintry conditions, something had managed to pass fairly recently.

"Look!" Jefferies pointed down the line where in the distance, a large cloud of thrown up snow appeared to be approaching them slowly, with the faintly obscured beam of a high intensity light just peeking through.

Just as it looked like a possible rescue was approaching, their pursuers managed to get within range of them, a fact announced all too clearly when two shots rang out, shaking loose snow from the trees above the Commander.

The approach of the snow clearing train, the source of the cloud of thrown up snow in the distance, seemed to be taking ages as the pursuers drew ever closer, necessitating Tracy and Jefferies to try and buy some time and hold them off by firing warning shots.

As Tracy began to run out of ammunition, the Commander was standing in the middle of the line waving his arms to attract the attention of the train's driver who as he approached and slowed, was understandably surprised at being flagged down in the middle of nowhere by one of the most powerful Security Service officers in the country.

"Morning" the driver called from the side cab window, raising his voice over the sound of the diesel engine and squealing brakes as he slowed to a halt "Need a lift?"

"I was hoping you would say that" the Commander responded gratefully as he climbed up the cab access steps and into the doorway before turning to Tracy and Jefferies.

"Come on you two!" the Commander called, an invitation that did not require a second call as they quickly followed and joined him in the front cab of the predominantly blue and orange coloured class 73 diesel and electric locomotive with its front end coated in impacted snow which had been thrown up by the snow ploughs mounted beneath it.

"Right" the Commander announced "Floor it."

"Can't promise anything" the driver responded "but here we go."

As the driver proceeded to move off, the traction wheels began to slip on the icy rails, not helped by the resistance of the snow lying in front of them which was initially reluctant to move under the pressure of the locomotive's miniature snow ploughs.

"What the hell was that?" the driver asked when he and the others instinctively ducked as a gunshot struck the side cab window, shattering it but fortunately not injuring anyone.

"Right" the Commander grimly announced as he retrieved his gun and his reading glasses from inside his uniform tunic "That's it."

He proceeded to the side cab door, ducking momentarily as another shot rang out, striking the side of the gradually accelerating locomotive. With his reading glasses

on, the Commander took aim at the tree from where the shots were coming and opened fire, firing every round he had to make their assailants retreat sufficiently enough to get away.

"Bet that gave them a headache" Jefferies commented as he looked over the Commander's shoulder as the locomotive started gaining some decent speed at last, the cloud of snow being thrown up increasing in direct relation to their rate of forward momentum.

"What I want to know is what the hell is going on around here" the Commander demanded.

"You can say that again" the driver added ruefully.

"When is the next station?" Tracy asked.

"Billingshurst in about two miles" the driver confirmed "Should take about ten minutes at this speed."

"Right" the Commander responded "I think its time we called in some cavalry."

"He did what on the Northern Line?" Fuller asked the caller who had just been put through to the Control Room "With a fishing hook?" he enquired "Nasty...."

"Sir!" one of the despatch officers seated in front of him, called with a firm wave of the arms "It's the Commander on line five."

"If you will excuse me madam" Fuller responded to the caller "I am going to pass you over to my colleague, thank you."

A couple of presses of buttons saw to it that the two calls were swapped over and Fuller managed to make contact with the Commander.

"Afternoon Sir" Fuller responded "Our beloved Administrator General is looking for you."

"Well he will just have to get stuffed for a minute" the Commander confirmed "I don't suppose you know where that fiancé of yours is do you?"

"She's busy at the moment" Fuller confirmed "Will I suffice?"

"I am at Billingshurst station" the Commander confirmed as he looked around the snow covered station platforms, all but deserted except for the snow clearing locomotives, Tracy and Jefferies "Can you have a couple of the VIP Protection lads meet us with a motor at Horsham station in about twenty minutes?"

"Will do" Fuller responded as he jotted the information down on a piece of paper "Anything I should know about?"

"We have a bit of a problem with some unfriendly gentlemen of the gun carrying variety" the Commander grimly confirmed.

"There go my hopes for a peaceful weekend" Fuller remarked with a sigh "I'll see what I can rustle up. Is it you that is to be protected?"

"No" the Commander confirmed "Retired Divisional Commander Jefferies" he responded "I think he knows something that someone else doesn't want him talking about."

"Anything else Sir?" Fuller enquired.

"That will do for now" the Commander confirmed "I may need a few other things if Tracy and I ever make it back to the City."

"I'll let the Administrator General know you are on your way" Fuller responded.

"Got to go" the Commander confirmed as the driver sounded the locomotive's horn to signal to his unusual passengers that he was ready to move off.

"All aboard!" Tracy called from the cab doorway whereupon the Commander clambered back aboard, closing the door behind him.

With a throaty roar, the locomotive moved off, leaving only the empty platform and the dying echoes of its diesel engine in its snow covered wake.

The heavy cold weather had meant that the number of passengers filtering through many of the London Underground's stations was significantly less and the District, Circle, Northern and Bakerloo line station at Embankment was by no means an exception.

Amongst the few passengers passing through the ticket barriers in the main ticket hall was the tall black figure of the Administrator General, a heavy warm overcoat covering his gold braided uniform as he walked out of the south entrance of the station and came to a stop, standing on the pavement on the north side of the Victoria Embankment road that runs along the length of the River Thames at that point.

He cast a cursory glance up towards his right where he could see the large railway bridge which lead to nearby Charing Cross and just visible above that, the top of the enormous London Eye Ferris wheel on the opposite side of the river.

Smartly turning on his heels, the Administrator General proceeded to his left along the pavement the hundred or so yards distance to the Embankment Cafe, directly opposite Cleopatra's Needle.

A warm welcoming atmosphere could be found inside where its customers all seemed to be enjoying a warm and welcoming cup of tea or coffee to try and stave off the worst of the cold air outside.

"Good morning Sir" the cheery assistant behind the counter greeted the Administrator General as he entered, carefully closing the door behind him "What can I get you?"

"Black coffee please" the Administrator General announced grateful as he tendered a quantity of change onto the counter "and whatever is the best cake on offer today please love."

"Take a seat" the assistant gestured towards the seating area "I'll bring it to you."

"Thanks" a grateful Administrator General responded before turning and looking around the seating with its small tables. One table in particular caught his attention, or to be more precise the presence of the man seated at the table, another tall distinguished figure enjoying a large mug of tea and a slice of chocolate cake.

"Afternoon Dickie" the Administrator General greeted Sir Richard Crowthorne, the Director General of the intelligence agency better known as MI5 "I must say I approve of your choice of meeting place" he added as he sat down and thanked the waitress who delivered his drink and cake at that moment.

"Well it is a damn sight warmer than an ice cream in Victoria Embankment Gardens" Sir Richard commented ruefully. "No Commander?" he added with a look around that was as worried as it was brief.

"He and Tracy went down to see Eddie Jefferies last night" the Administrator General explained "Lets just say they ran into a spot of bother."

"He's not the only one" Sir Richard responded as he indicated silently to the waitress as she passed for another mug of tea "I have just had a very uncomfortable meeting with the acting head of the National Security Committee" he added.

"Ah..." the Administrator General responded "I take it our beloved Minister friend, Mr Thornton was on his usual good form?"

"I tell you he was on the telephone to my house before the ink was even dry on the bulletin he received on that body they dragged out last night" Sir Richard remarked as the second mug of tea for him was delivered and he thanked the waitress.

"The Commander still doesn't know about the stiff though" the Administrator General added "He left for Jefferies place before it was dragged out of the river."

"You do know the first thing he will do when he finds out is reopen the investigation don't you?" Sir Richard responded.

"Now that will annoy a few of our political friends" the Administrator General commented "Especially our old pal Mr Thornton" he added with a wry chuckle.

At that moment, the Administrator General's mobile telephone vibrated in his inside tunic pocket making him slightly reluctantly put down his cup of coffee and answer it.

"Hello?" he answered quietly so as not to disturb the other patrons of the cafe.

"Right thanks" he responded before pressing the button to hang up and returning the telephone back to his pocket.

"Please tell me that was good news" Sir Richard asked.

"Tracy and the Commander have just reappeared on the radar" the Administrator General explained "Someone took a pot shot at them and Jefferies but they are headed back to London as fast as the snow on the rails will allow."

"I think it would be a good idea if you met him when he arrives" Sir Richard suggested as the two men rose from their seats and headed for the exit "I think its about time we got the Commander started on the task of throwing multitudes of spanners into various peoples works."

"This seems a bit over the top" Jefferies commented as he got in the back of the powerful unmarked VIP Protection Division car outside the 1930's frontage of Horsham Railway Station.

He was joined in the back by one of the protection officers whilst another silently got in the front.

"Someone wants you breathing your last" the Commander was insistent "And that is not going to happen on my watch."

"But...." Jefferies began to protest.

"What was rule number two of the Haychester Division when you were the Commander in Charge?" the Commander asked.

"My Deputy is always right?" Jefferies responded.

"Correct" the Commander confirmed "And who was your Deputy?"

"You were" Jefferies admitted.

"Point proved" the Commander nodded in victory as he shut the door "Now get going, I'll call you when we find out anything."

Tracy and the Commander watched from the station entrance as the car pulled away, slipping a bit on the icy road surface but soon disappearing from view and away before they turned and headed back into the station.

"Afternoon" the Commander enquired at the ticket counter "Any danger of a train service today?"

"Not much" the ticket clerk behind his glass screen was forced to admit "The weather pretty much shot the schedule to hell as all the new rolling stock froze up."

"Well that's technology for you I suppose" Tracy remarked.

"There is a departure in about twenty minutes for London" the clerk informed them as he looked at his information screen "All sheds to East Croydon and then fast to London Bridge."

"That will do nicely" the Commander remarked "Now, lunch" he declared as, arm in arm with Tracy, they headed back to the ticket barriers, passing through them before heading by way of the over bridge to platform's one and two where the sight of the buffet, open and awaiting business was a welcome sight after the day they had had so far.

"Two teas, one bacon bap, large I may add and whatever the good lady wife is having please" the Commander requested of the chap behind the counter.

"Coming right up" the proprietor responded enthusiastically, delighted to have some custom at last after a quiet snow bound day with just the occasional passing member of railway staff to cater for.

"So where do we go from here?" Tracy enquired as they took a seat in the buffet area.

"I think we should pull the Embankment murders case files and go through it with a fine tooth comb" the Commander began as the buffet proprietor brought their teas to the table.

"Thanks" Tracy responded "Perhaps Fuller or I should do that?" she suggested "I sometimes find a fresh pair of eyes which are unfamiliar with the material can provide a better analysis."

"Good thinking" the Commander agreed as he duly put in and stirred his customary four sugars into his tea "I am going to see if I can track down David Jarvis, a word with him on an unofficial basis I think is now called for."

The Administrator General finished reading the front page story on the London Evening Standard about the snow and ice that had crippled the south east of the country over the last forty eight hours whilst warning that there was still more to come.

"The train now arriving on platform seven is the Southern service from Horsham" the tannoy announced across the sparsely populated concourse of Charing Cross station.

Upon hearing this announcement, the Administrator General folded up his newspaper and stuck it under his arm before rising slowly from the bench seat and proceeding in a business like manner in the direction of the ticket barriers.

There he could see at platform seven an eight car train of snow covered Electrostar type stock gliding in at the end of a long and much delayed journey.

It was with the manner of a man with a purpose that the Commander alighted with Tracy from the train, two of but a sparse few passengers who had been either able or needed to get to the capital that afternoon.

"Afternoon Sir" Tracy greeted the Administrator General as they met at the ticket barriers.

"You two look like you have been through hell" the Administrator General commented with concern as they proceeded across the station concourse in the direction of the steps down to the Underground station.

"It's a long story" the Commander admitted "However we have more pressing matters than the state of our uniforms."

"I had a feeling you were going to say something like that" the Administrator General responded.

"I want to find David Jarvis as soon as possible" the Commander announced as they proceeded down the steps into the bowels of Charing Cross Underground Station, a complex series of tunnels located beneath the busy area of the main line station itself and the nearby Trafalgar Square.

"Well the good news is that he is very easy to locate at the moment" the Administrator General responded slightly reluctantly "The bad news is he won't be all that communicative."

"Care to place a small wager on that?" the Commander asked with a clear note of determination in his voice as they entered the ticket hall and headed straight for the barriers that guarded the way to the escalators that led down to the platforms.

"Not with those odds, no" the Administrator General admitted somewhat cryptically.

"David Stewart Jarvis" the forensic mortician announced as she pulled the blanket covering the body back in the Security Service Forensic Laboratory.

"Bugger...." the Commander responded with a grumpy expression as he instantly recognised Jarvis' face, albeit a little older in appearance from the last time he saw him some fifteen years earlier.

"Looks like the chief was right then" Tracy remarked "You are going to have difficulty getting anything out of him now."

"Even the dead can talk" the mortician responded knowledgeably "You just have to know how to listen, and listen carefully."

"So where did he turn up?" the Commander enquired, trying not to look too closely at the body as he was always a little squeamish around the dead.

"River Division dragged him out of the Thames last night" the mortician responded as he reached for a folder containing evidence photographs and passed it to the Commander "And he sure as hell did not die of suicide or natural causes."

"Wrapped up in black plastic and heavy duty wrapping tape?" the Commander asked as soon as he saw the photographs.

"Exactly" the mortician responded "And before he was parcelled up, he was strangled and shot in the back of the neck up into the head."

"Ouch!" Tracy remarked as she stooped down to take a closer look at the bullet wound where the mortician was indicating. The Commander however was over by the window looking out at the rapidly darkening early evening sky outside, clearly deep in worried thought.

"Bullet?" Tracy asked.

"With the ballistics guys" the mortician responded "They should have something by the morning."

"Where was he dragged from exactly?" Tracy asked as she replaced the sheet back over the body.

"Victoria Embankment" the Commander responded in unison with the mortician's identical response.

"How the hell did you know that Sir?" the mortician asked, as surprised by the Commander's seemingly advanced knowledge as Tracy was.

"Bitter experience" the Commander grimly confirmed "Thanks" he added before turning and leaving, almost stooped with a worried look.

"I think it is time you filled me on the details" Tracy commented as she caught up to her clearly worried husband and took his arm in hers, a much needed expression of support for him.

"Tomorrow morning" the Commander began as he stopped in front of a large window in the corridor that looked out across the City and towards the River Thames, snaking off into the distance "I am going to have to initiate a potentially problematic murder enquiry."

"Since when has problematic ever stood in your way?" Tracy asked with a wry chuckle that succeeded in cheering the Commander up just a little.

"Well this is definitely going to be a major problem" the Commander continued "You see fifteen years ago, a jury found the late Mr Jarvis back there guilty of eight murders, all of which were virtually identical in how the victims were killed and the manner in which their bodies were disposed of."

"Let me guess" Tracy responded "They were all strangled, shot and then wrapped up in black plastic and industrial packing tape before being dumped in the Thames?"

"And now the supposed perpetrator of the aforesaid crimes has been killed in exactly the same manner and dumped in more or less the same location" the Commander grimly added.

"Which means we jailed the wrong bloke" Tracy concluded "The acting chief Minister of the National Security Committee is going to go ape when he finds out" she added "Especially if he hears you are reopening the investigation."

"Yep" the Commander agreed with a wry grin "Let's go and tell him in the morning."

"Home, now!" Jennifer insisted as she all but lifted Fuller out of his seat and thrust his uniform tunic onto his shoulders.

"And there, admittedly somewhat abruptly ended my tenure as Acting Divisional Commander of the Transport Division" Fuller announced with a resigned sigh as he rose from his seat, turned and embraced his fiancé before kissing her.

"My sister is coming back tomorrow then?" Jennifer asked as they headed out of the door into the main corridor and on in the direction of the lifts.

"That she is" Fuller confirmed "The Commander won't be back on duty for a couple of days mind, he is apparently going to head up some investigation team or something."

"Oh really?" Jennifer responded as they entered the lift where Fuller pressed the button for the ground floor.

"He was just on the telephone before you came in" Fuller continued to explain "He wants me to go through CCTV and so forth to track where this chap Jarvis went between when he left prison in Dorset and when the boys from the River Division fished him out last night."

"Getting shot and bagged up in the process" Jennifer added as the lift doors opened with a characteristic ping on the ground floor.

"Of course the best bit" Fuller continued as they headed outside into the near deserted roads around the Transport Division office in High Holborn "The Commander gets to go to Westminster tomorrow and tell that Acting Director fellow that he is reopening a flagship investigation from fifteen years ago."

"Should see some colourful language" Jennifer mused as they entered Holborn Underground Station, however no sooner had they entered the ticket hall and were approaching the barriers than Jennifer's radio suddenly called.

"Victor Papa X-Ray Zero One from Control" the call rang out from the radio all around the ticket hall as she had knocked the volume control earlier.

"Go ahead" Jennifer responded as she and Fuller pulled off to one side so as to avoid holding up the through flow of pedestrian traffic.

"The chairman of the National Security Committee has asked for an official car and escort for tomorrow morning" the Control Room officer informed her "Eight o'clock pickup from Downing Street direct to New Scotland Yard."

"Oh, I wonder what that could be about?" Fuller mused wryly, a sentiment Jennifer clearly agreed with judging by her similar facial reaction.

"Save's the Commander a trip to Whitehall I guess" Fuller commented.

"Tell him I'll be there myself" Jennifer responded "I just hope he isn't sick in the car this time!"

"So what is the plan?" Tracy asked as she poured the kettle into the two mugs of hot chocolate in the kitchen of the apartment that she and the Commander called home when they could get away from work.

"I am going to round up all the officers who were on the original investigation team and interview them" the Commander responded as he sat back on the sofa, relieved to be off his feet at last as well as off duty "After all this time, its possible something may have occurred to them that they did not pick up on at the time."

"That could be tricky" Tracy remarked as she re-entered the living room carrying the two welcome steaming hot mugs of hot chocolate before joining the Commander on the sofa and cuddling up to him for mutual comfort.

"You can say that again" the Commander agreed as he put his arm around her "Two are overseas, three retired and I am pretty sure one or two are dead."

"What about going through the original witness statements?" Tracy suggested.

"Their weren't that many witnesses to begin with, at least not any of any actual use" the Commander mused as he rested his head on Tracy's shoulder "In addition I would be pleasantly surprised if any of the evidence is still kicking around either."

"You are going to borrow Simon again aren't you?" Tracy asked.

"Yes" the Commander confirmed her suspicions "Sorry about that" he added by means of an apology at borrowing one of her best investigative officers yet again.

"We'll wind up having to pay him two sets of wages from two different divisions at this rate" Tracy mused.

"Oh dear" the Commander looked down at the empty mug from which he had managed to drink the entire contents almost without realising.

"I'll get you another" Tracy responded as she stood up and took the Commander's mug from him "Then its straight to bed love" she insisted "I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a long day for you."

The two uniformed Security Service patrol officers guarding the large wrought iron gates that blocked the entrance to Downing Street duly acknowledged Jennifer as she pulled up in her unmarked high speed ministerial escort car before opening the gates and allowing her through.

This was a journey she had done many times before escorting Prime Ministers, heads of state and cabinet ministers to and from the seat of power that were numbers ten and eleven Downing Street.

As she pulled up outside the most famous front door in the country, the chimes of the distant Big Ben began to ring out its familiar tune before the eight bells announcing the time as eight o'clock in the morning.

Exactly on time, the big heavy black door of number ten opened and the small diminutive and obviously worried looking figure of the Minister in charge of the Government National Security Oversight Committee appeared, a hastily folded newspaper and a couple of files under his arm and a large red despatch box in his hand.

"Good morning Sir" Jennifer cheerily announced as she opened the rear passenger door of the car for him.

"Morning" he grumpily responded as he got in the back of the car where he was quickly joined by his young assistant, a somewhat nervous looking young political researcher who looked like he was preparing himself for a very bad morning.

"Right" Jennifer remarked as she shut the car door and returned to the driver's seat. It was clear that the minister was in no mood for idle chit chat or banter so she decided just to get on with the job of ensuring his safe arrival at his destination.

"New Scotland Yard Sir?" she asked as she started the engine.

"Immediately!" the Minister responded gruffly, barely looking up from the files he was leafing through.

With due diligence, Jennifer turned the car around and headed back out of Downing Street where the officers on duty duly let her back out onto Whitehall and then right, into the heart of Westminster.

Even with the heavy morning rush hour traffic in Whitehall and the snowy and icy conditions, it only took five minutes to manoeuvre through Parliament Square, into Victoria Street and then right, into Broadway where Jennifer duly pulled up outside the familiar edifice of New Scotland Yard.

A familiar face was also there outside the building, her fiancé Simon Fuller was busy helping a couple of engineers try and free up the normally rotating three sided sign that had frozen solid in the cold weather.

Jennifer duly gave a cheery little wave to him which he returned before he began to set about the rotation mechanism with a rubber mallet while she opened the rear car door to allow the minister to exit out onto the pavement.

As per her duty, Jennifer duly accompanied the minister and his assistant into the main foyer of the building and as far as the lift where she stood by the lift doors until they closed and the two men were ascending up to the top floor.

Lima Mike Zero One from Victor Pappa X-Ray Zero One" Jennifer called into her radio "You have incoming heading up your way now."

"Is he in?" the minister grumpily enquired of the Commander's Personal Assistant who was sat behind her desk in the outer office.

"Yes Sir" she responded as cheerily as was possible even though she was clearly unimpressed by the gentleman's dour demeanour. "I'll just call him" she reached for the intercom.

"Don't bother" the minister responded as he went straight for the inner office door and opened it.

"Come in why don't you?" the Commander wryly responded from behind his desk where he sat almost professor like with his small square framed reading glasses perched on the end of his nose, over which he observed the grumpy man and his now rather embarrassed looking assistant enter the office.

"Commander" the minister greeted him in a vague nod to politeness that would prove to be short lived.

"What can I do for you?" the Commander put the file he was reading down carefully, put his hands together casually and leaned forwards.

"Are you really serious about reopening the Embankment murders enquiry?" the minister demanded to know.

"Absolutely" the Commander confirmed with a determined grin, he was relishing in his favourite pastime, making politicians squirm, something he had plenty of experience at.

"You do realise how bad this is going to make the Government look" the minister asked "They backed that original investigation up to the hilt, even used it as justification for various crime fighting policies. Reputations are at stake here Commander!"

"Well I'll tell that to Mr Jarvis shall I?" the Commander calmly responded "Only unless he managed to strangle himself to the point of unconsciousness, shoot himself in the back of the head, then wrap himself up in black plastic and industrial strength tape before finally chucking himself, unaided I might add into the River Thames in exactly the same way as the murders he supposedly committed occurred then I would say we have no other choice."

"For God's sake keep the press out of it" the minister insisted as he began to show some signs of calming down a bit but not by much "This is damage limitation as far as I am concerned."

"Oh I'll be very discreet" the Commander responded with a smile that anyone who knew him well meant if there was anyone with a political agenda involved in this matter, he would ensure they were as publicly disgraced as possible.

"I want regular reports please" the Minister responded before turning round and storming out of his office, his shoulders now appearing to be even more hunched with worry.

"How do you put up with him?" the Commander asked the minister's assistant once the small man was out of the door.

"A steady supply of finest whisky and plenty of gin and tonics" the assistant responded with a wry grin which the Commander could not avoid happily agreeing with "For both of us!"

"Do me a favour lad" the Commander added as the assistant reached the office door, only pausing when the Commander called after him "Keep him sufficiently drunk and distracted so he stays out of my hair" he asked.

"I'll try my best sir" the assistant agreed as he left.

Barely had the door been closed than it opened again and the Commander's Personal Assistant entered and preceded in a hurried if business like manner to the front of the Commander's desk and handed over a newly delivered file for his inspection.

"Ballistics sent this through whilst you were giving the Minister a piece of your mind" she explained "Commander Hughes says you are not going to like it."

"He's right" the Commander opened the file and read the note attached to the first page of the report "I don't like it."

"Commander Fuller is downstairs with a couple of officers awaiting your briefing" the Personal Assistant added.

"Right then" the Commander announced as he got up from behind his desk "Time to get this little circus on the road then."

"Morning everyone" the Commander announced as he arrived in the briefing room and proceeded directly to the seat at the head of the table.

Along with the familiar face of Simon Fuller were three other officers, Divisional Commander Steven Feltham, the Divisional Commander of the Thames River Division, Commander Georgina Hughes of the Ballistics and Special Sciences Division and two investigation officers from the Murder Squad.

"Commander Hughes" the Commander began "Please tell me you were not paying attention late last night and that the information I have in this file" he held up the file he had received only minutes earlier "Is some sort of bizarre typo?"

"I'm afraid not" Commander Hughes confirmed "The gun used to kill Jarvis was the same weapon used in the Embankment murders fifteen years ago."

"Delivery" Jennifer Caverner announced as she appeared at the door and showed Jefferies in before winking at fiancé Fuller and then leaving.

"Take a seat old friend" the Commander instructed "We were just discussing the interesting revelation that ballistics came up with."

"Do enlighten me" Jefferies requested.

"The bullet that killed Jarvis came from the same gun that was used in the other Embankment murders" the Commander explained.

"That gun was locked away in the evidence vault up at Euston" Jefferies exclaimed "How the hell did it wind up back in circulation?"

"Assuming of course we got the right gun in the first place" Hughes cut in "You haven't read the best bit yet."

"Am I going to like it?" the Commander reached for the report folder again.

"It depends upon your point of view and your sense of humour" Hughes responded "Page seven" she confirmed.

"The prints on the exterior of the packaging materials used to wrap the body match those found at the crime scenes in the previous murders exhibiting these characteristics" the Commander read from the page.

"The prints found at the scenes of each murder were from Jarvis" Jefferies commented "How the hell did he wrap himself up then?" he demanded to know.

"I smelt something was wrong" Hughes agreed "so I double checked our stiff against his old record and the prints on his record did not match."

"You were right" Jefferies had to admit to the Commander "You called it correctly fifteen years ago, he didn't do it."

"Commander Feltham" the Commander turned to the River Division Chief "Can you increase your patrols up and down the river especially in the area around the Victoria Embankment?"

"Not a problem boss" Feltham responded enthusiastically "You think whoever is responsible is taking up their old hobbies again?"

"I hope not but let's not take any chances" the Commander responded "If anything turns up, have your guys call me direct."

"I'll get right on it" Feltham confirmed as he rose from his seat.

"I might need to borrow one of your boats later" the Commander added with some reluctance.

"Give me a call and I'll send one of the lads down to get you" Feltham confirmed before leaving.

"Right then you two" the Commander turned to the two Murder Squad officers "This is a list of the original investigating officers on the original investigation and a group photograph of us all" he passed across a small folder he had brought with him to them "Find them and get them here by tonight, use the company helicopter if necessary" the Commander insisted.

"Yes Sir" the two officers responded and headed off to set about their task.

"What are we going to do?" Jefferies enquired as he and the Commander got up from the table and headed towards the exit.

"Dig up some old files" the Commander responded "I hope you are not allergic to dust."

As was customary for an ordinary early morning in the Transport Division, Tracy was sat at her desk in her office with a large mug of coffee in one hand and a pile of case files spread liberally in front of her as she processed and authorised a series of impending prosecutions for everything from fare evasion through to armed robbery.

One case file in particular caught her attention, a report about a passenger stopped at Euston Underground Station by a couple of patrol officers as he was trying to force a large parcel through the ticket barriers and as a result causing an obstruction.

There was no offence either noted or committed in this case, it was merely an advisory report that had got mixed up in the pending prosecution files so after briefly reading through it, Tracy put it to one side.

She was about to open the next file in the pile when the telephone rang which caused her to stare at it for a few moments in a vain attempt to get it to stop ringing. After failing, she decided she might as well answer instead.

"Transport Division" she responded in her standard polite telephone manner "Chief of Division Caverner speaking."

"Morning love" the Commander called from his mobile telephone as he headed up the escalators at Euston Station "I've got an offer you cannot refuse."

"I'm all ears" Tracy responded, intrigued by the Commander's words as well as the tone of voice in which it was delivered.

"There is a catch mind" the Commander added as he and Jefferies reached the top of the escalator and exited out onto the busy concourse of the main line part of Euston station itself.

"Oh here it comes" Tracy remarked.

"Can you meet Jefferies and I at the evidence archive in Euston in about an hour?" the Commander enquired.

"As long as you are paying for lunch" Tracy responded with a wry smile "I'll see you later."

No sooner had Tracy hung up and returned to her folders than the telephone rang again.

"I might get some work done in a minute" Tracy commented to herself as once more she reached back across the desk to the telephone, deciding this time to answer it on speakerphone.

"Hello, yes?" Tracy answered as she reacquainted herself with her mug of coffee.

"Sir Richard Crowthorne on line three for you" the receptionist downstairs announced.

"Oh put him through" Tracy responded "Hello?"

"Morning my dear" the calming tones of Sir Richard came through "I was wondering if I could arrange a discreet meeting between I, yourself, your legendary husband and Mr Jefferies?"

"Today my friend is your lucky day" Tracy responded "Where are you now?"

"In my office" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Be at Euston Station in one hour" Tracy responded "I'll meet you there."

"If I'd known, I would have brought a pit pony" the Commander commented as he and Jefferies descended the dusty wooden stairs into the basement section of the Security Service Evidence Storage Facility near Euston.

"Can you see a light switch anywhere?" the Commander asked as he looked around the bottom of the stairs in near darkness.

"Hang on a minute" Jefferies felt around the wall behind him until he found the switch which he then flicked three or four times on and off to no effect.

"Ah..." the Commander commented and fumbled around in his pocket from which after some delay, he produced a small torch which he used to illuminate their surroundings.

"Good grief" Jefferies commented as he and the Commander looked at the long lines of dust encrusted document and item shelves which stretched off far into the distance amidst the sparse light offered by the torch.

"Where did the chap say we were meant to look?" the Commander asked as they advanced into the confined interior, the gap between the shelves barely wide enough with the stuff on them overflowing to allow them to pass through.

"Section B, shelf fourteen" Jefferies responded as the Commander cast the torch up to a sign on the end of one section of shelving, having to brush a fine layer of dust from it to read it.

"Section B" the Commander confirmed as they stood at a junction of shelves "Shelf nine. Let's try down here" he motioned the torch down one dark corridor.

"Blimey, you remember this one?" Jefferies indicated one large box on the shelf as they passed it, the case to which it related clearly marked on the outside of the tatty box.

"Oh yes" the Commander looked "Now there was a crook with a bit of class."

"What happened to him?" Jefferies asked as they carried on down.

"Got ten years if I remember" the Commander confirmed "Bit harsh I always felt."

"Is this it?" Jefferies pointed to one shelf which was packed with boxes and document files a short distance ahead whereupon the Commander concentrated the torch light where he was indicating.

"Bingo!" the Commander called as he pulled one of the files off the shelf, blew a large deposit of dust and detritus off it and read the details on the front cover.

"These should be the physical evidence boxes" Jefferies lifted one box from the shelf and put it down on the ground, where he knelt down and removed the lid.

"Seems all here" Jefferies confirmed as he looked through the plastic bag wrapped items within including a revolver, lengths of rope, some samples of black wrapping plastic and a number of other items.

"Of course the question is" the Commander responded as he too knelt down and joined Jefferies on the floor "If the gun is in this box locked away down here for the last fifteen years, how on earth did it manage to kill Jarvis not forty eight hours ago?"

"Do you want another question?" Jefferies added ruefully as he looked around their dark surroundings "How the hell do we find our way out of here?"

"Well if we ever do get out of here" the Commander responded "First thing we do is get the lights fixed, then get a couple of our guys with a van to cart this little lot back to the Yard."

"What was that?" Jefferies suddenly looked up as a door slammed somewhere over the far side of the storage facility and in the darkness, footsteps could be heard approaching.

"Either this place is haunted or we have guests" the Commander whispered as he pulled his gun from its holster and held it in front of him.

The footsteps echoed around the dusty dark cellar and were definitely getting closer until they suddenly stopped seemingly a short distance away from where the two men were standing.

"Boo!" Tracy called from behind them with an amused giggle which nearly made the two men jump out of their skin.

"We really must stop meeting like this" the Commander remarked as he kissed Tracy.

"Just the sort of place I would expect to find two dusty old relics such as yourselves" she commented with a wry smile "Did you find what you were looking for?" she asked as she looked at the old files and boxes which they had been looking through.

"Three hundred old witness statements, one revolver, several samples of material and a partridge in a pear tree" the Commander announced indicating one of the several boxes on the floor by his feet "It'll take ages to sort through this lot."

"Well" Tracy remarked "I think we had better head upstairs before I get the creeps, you know how I hate dark confined spaces."

"Good idea" Jefferies agreed, the place was starting to give him uncomfortable feelings as well.

By the light of Tracy and the Commander's torches, they managed to find their way back to the door and the stairs that led back up to ground level where the stores officer was talking to the familiar figure of Sir Richard Crowthorne.

"You three look like you enjoyed yourself down there" he remarked seeing Jefferies and the two officers emerge from the depths covered in dust and cobwebs.

"Would have been nice if we could have actually seen what we were doing down there" the Commander commented looking straight at the Stores Officer "Haven't you guys heard about the invention of the electric light bulb yet."

"Oh, we've got bulbs sir" the Stores Officer responded philosophically "It's the electricity supply to them that's the problem. Most of the wiring in this place predates the war, the first one!"

"Does the telephone work?" the Commander asked "Or are we still using carrier pigeons?"

"Been a long time old friend" Jefferies greeted Sir Richard with a warm hand shake.

"You are looking well" Sir Richard commented "Retirement must be suiting you."

"If you can call digging up old cases, getting shot at, wading around in dusty evidence stores and being escorted around by these two legends retirement" Jefferies commented with a wry grin "Then I guess the answer is yes."

"Simon" the Commander called as soon as he was connected through to Fuller in his office at Holborn "Send a van and a couple of the lads over to the evidence store at Euston will you" he instructed "Then get a team together in a spare incident room at the Yard, I want a full briefing at four o'clock."

"I think we can safely say" Tracy remarked to the others "Any chance of a quiet evening just went out of the window."

"Lovely" the Commander concluded the call "Cheers mate, I owe you another one" he added before he hung up and turned back to the others where he duly took Tracy's arm in his.

"Shall we go?" he suggested.

Commander Trevor Jenkins of the Traffic Section was definitely starting to feel his age in his opinion as he climbed back into the marked high speed patrol car on the

south end of Waterloo Bridge where he had just finished dealing with a motorist he had pulled over with a faulty brake light.

As he pulled out into the flow of traffic that was pouring over the bridge despite the resumption of heavy snowfall, a call came over the radio set in the car.

"Lima Mike Whisky Eight One from Control" the dispatcher at the Central London Control Centre at Victoria called.

"Receiving, over" Jenkins responded expecting this to be a call to yet another road traffic accident which was pretty much all he had to deal with today with the slippery conditions.

"There is a Commander Fuller from the Transport Division looking for you" the Control Room dispatcher informed him "Apparently the Divisional Chief needs you to attend a meeting at the yard at exactly four o'clock."

"Did they say what it was about?" Jenkins asked as he reached the north end of Waterloo Bridge and turned left into the Strand heading towards Charing Cross.

"Some old case or other you were involved with apparently" the dispatcher responded.

"Tell them I'll be there" Jenkins confirmed, now intrigued by this unusual and slightly mysterious invitation "Lima Mike Whisky Eight One out."

He continued to drive along following his assigned patrol route and headed down to the north side of the Thames at Victoria Embankment. It was just as he reached Cleopatra's Needle, just short of Embankment Underground Station that a green saloon car came speeding by in the fast lane at well over eighty miles an hour.

"And just where do you think you are going laddie?" Jenkins commented to himself as he pulled out of the slow lane traffic and with his sirens and blue lights in full cry, set off in pursuit.

The traffic on the road quickly got out of the way when they heard and saw Jenkins high speed pursuit car coming up behind them but the car he was pursuing was still some distance ahead and almost to Westminster now.

Suddenly as if by some deliberate act, the driver of the green car slammed on the brakes and then reversed straight towards Jenkins at some speed causing him to put his foot on the brakes with some force as he attempted to execute an emergency stop.

However to Jenkins horror, the brakes failed to respond and he hurtled head on straight into the back of the green car, the driver of which was now running away from the vehicle leaving behind him a trail of carnage as the collision sent both vehicles involved hurtling across the road.

The green car disintegrated sending pieces of it in all directions whilst Jenkins patrol car rolled over and over on its side until its forward momentum was suddenly stopped when it impacted and nearly demolished a lamp post.

Nearby, the driver of the green car paused momentarily and looked back at the scene of carnage which was being added to by other vehicles encountering the debris before calmly walking away and melting into the crowds.

"Tracy love" the Commander enquired quizzically as he stood in front of the chocolate vending machine on the southbound Northern Line Charing Cross Branch platform at Euston "Have you been doing something to the choccy machines or something only it would seem every single one of them is out of service?"

"Nothing to do with me" Tracy admitted although she had to admit to herself that if she had conjured up the mass failure of the machines to cut down her husband's chocolate consumption it would have been an impressive feat "Some technical fault with them all apparently."

"Humph..." the Commander stepped back grumpily from the machine and returned his unused change to his tunic pocket.

"The Commander without chocolate is like a politician without an alibi" Jefferies commented to Sir Richard who responded with a wry smile.

The distant echoing rumble and the accompanying turbulent breeze building up in the platform from the direction of the running tunnel portal heralded the approach of the next southbound service and like a well oiled machine, everyone on the platform stepped forward towards the front of the platform and looked down towards the north end in anticipation of the train's arrival.

As the turbulence of air being forced ahead grew stronger, so did the sound of the train rumbling through the tunnel until suddenly with its headlights piercing the gloom, the six car train of 1995 type tube stock burst from the tunnel portal and screamed into the platform, seemingly only slowing to a carefully judged and accurate stop shortly before the lead carriage reached the opposite end of the platform.

"All aboard" the Commander guided the rest of his party onto the last door of the rear most carriage after alighting passengers had passed. Inside they gathered in the standee space near the doors, Tracy and the Commander leaning against one side of the carriage, Sir Edward and Jefferies on the other side.

"Who are the two goons who joined the next carriage up?" Jefferies enquired as, with the accompanying warning beep, the doors closed and the train moved off.

"Nigel and Terri" the Commander explained "A couple of colleagues from the Undercover Surveillance Section who are keeping an eye on you in particular just in case."

"Well that's a comfort" Jefferies commented slightly quizzically as all four looked down the carriage and waved at the two now slightly bemused looking plain clothes officers who were visible standing at the nearest end of the next car observing them.

It was a fifteen minute trip that was as routine as it was uneventful with the train making its standard journey down the Charing Cross branch of the Northern Line bound for Kennington. It was when the train arrived at the curved Northern Line platform at Embankment that the party of four with their two minders in discrete tow, alighted.

"Now that's more like it" the Commander responded as soon as he saw the kiosk on the station platform from which he did not hesitate in purchasing the largest bar of his favourite brand of milk chocolate that they had available.

"Happy now?" Tracy asked with a wry smile.

"As long as I have you and chocolate" the Commander confirmed already by now on his second chunk "then I will always be happy."

After proceeding up through the station's escalators and passageways, the Commander and his party passed through the ticket barriers in the spacious booking hall with its two main exits, the one to the left being the north exit to Embankment Place and Charing Cross Station, the one to the right leading south to Victoria Embankment and the River Thames itself.

Now that the Commander was reacquainted with chocolate he practically skipped down the short flight of steps from the south entrance with Tracy arm in arm with him and Sir Edward with Jefferies following closely behind.

"Here we are" the Commander announced "Victoria Embankment."

"I'm so happy to be here" Tracy remarked unenthusiastically as she looked around in the mist, blowing snow and cold dark grey sky at the London Skyline and the south bank of the River Thames opposite, as above and to their right, the large railway bridge rumbled with the passing of a local service train that had just departed from nearby Charing Cross.

"Is that what I think it is?" Sir Richard enquired as he pointed ahead to Embankment Pier where a Security Service Thames River Division patrol boat was just pulling in.

"Our transport onwards" the Commander explained although his lack of enthusiasm for boats and being on the water was coming through fairly obviously in his voice.

After crossing Victoria Embankment road and passing down the link walkway to the pier side, they boarded the patrol vessel SDV Ruth which was waiting for them.

"Afternoon Captain" the Commander greeted the commanding officer of the vessel as he arrived on the bridge "Shall we begin the tour?"

"Right you are Sir" the Captain responded as he took the wheel of the vessel "Cast off" he called to the officer up near the bow of the ship who leaned over the side and pulled the mooring ropes in so that they could pull back from the pier and away.

"Here we are then" the Commander announced as he consulted a map of the river which was marked with nine red self adhesive stars at different points along the river bank "Lets head towards Temple Pier please."

"I love a nice ride down the river" Tracy commented to Jefferies as they and Sir Richard stood on the deck at the back of the patrol boat and observed the river barges and other waterborne traffic passing them.

"Pity its so ruddy cold though" Sir Richard remarked as he pulled his overcoat in tighter to try and keep out the worst of the cold bitter wind.

"Fifteen years ago" the Commander announced as he joined them slightly unsteadily on the deck "eight seemingly random unconnected people were abducted, murdered, parceled up and then dumped in the river."

"These the points at which the bodies were found?" Tracy asked as she pointed to the chart of the river the Commander was consulting in his hands.

"Have a gold star love" the Commander confirmed.

"Of course when it comes to bodies and rivers" Jefferies added "life or death depending upon your point of view, gets a little complicated."

"That's true" Sir Richard agreed "They rarely start out from where they were found. The tide, currents from boats and other factors soon see to it that they drift up and down."

"Now, the furthest east body was discovered around here" the Commander pointed towards the nearby Temple Pier from where a river ferry was just departing "The furthest west was down that way" he pointed behind them "near Lambeth Bridge."

"Therefore would it not make sense to surmise that the location that the bodies were most likely dumped from" Sir Richard asked "would be the half way point between the two extremities I would have thought."

"Assuming they were all dumped from the same place" Tracy cut in "and not from a boat or something."

"Serial murderers may be one of the lowest forms of life on the planet" the Commander responded "But they do have one distinct advantage, they are very dedicated and precise. He or she will have used the same deposit point every time."

"Back to Embankment?" Tracy asked.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed "I need a cup of tea."

As the patrol boat made a wide arc to turn around in the middle of the river, Sir Richard joined the Commander at the stern of the ship for a private conversation.

"I just had a very interesting report pass across my desk" Sir Richard commented "It transpires that a certain Minister of our mutual acquaintance is meeting and greeting anyone involved with either the original or the new investigation into the Embankment murders and he is not the only person sniffing around either."

"I had the pleasure of the Minister's company in my office first thing this morning" the Commander confirmed "If I was a betting man, I'd wager he is seriously worried about saving face."

"Question is whether it is for himself, the Government or someone he knows" Sir Richard added "And then there is the Administrator General."

"He does appear a little nervous about something" the Commander agreed "And for once I don't think he is worried about his golf handicap."

"Wasn't he involved in the original investigation in some way?" Sir Richard asked.

"Not that I remember" the Commander looked out across the river as he searched his distant memory, "Might be worth looking up though."

"Hello" Tracy remarked as she looked ahead beyond Embankment Pier towards Westminster where there appeared to be some sort of commotion occurring on the north bank of the river.

"Looks like something is occurring" the Commander commented as he joined Tracy at the front of the vessel before turning back and calling back to the bridge "Take us up there please!"

At his instruction, the Captain diverted from his intended course towards Embankment Pier and accelerated away, passing beneath the bridge and on towards Westminster.

As the vessel approached the scene of the commotion, marked by the presence of numerous emergency service vehicles, crowds of interested spectators and blue flashing lights, the Commander spotted a familiar face watching them approach the embankment.

"Simon!" the Commander called up to Fuller as the boat drew in alongside the stone embankment and slowed to a halt "What brings you down here?"

"Nasty accident" Fuller nodded back behind him "One of Traffic Division's patrol cars got spun off the road."

"Anyone hurt?" the Commander asked concerned.

"Patrol officer is still being cut out of his car now but expected to be a DOA" Fuller grimly confirmed "Several passers by got injured by flying debris, it's a mess up here."

"Meet us at the pier" the Commander instructed, indicating up river the couple of hundred yards to Westminster Pier in the shadow of Big Ben.

Fuller grabbed the mooring line as it was thrown to him on the pier and with some difficulty, knots not being his strong point, he duly helped moor the craft in place as the Commander disembarked, clearly quite relieved at being back on dry land once more.

"Right then" the Commander announced after helping Tracy and the others off before returning to the matter in hand "Lets see what happened here then."

"I'll take these two back to the Yard and I'll see you later" Tracy announced as she and the Commander kissed each other good bye.

"Put the kettle on" the Commander responded.

"Will do" Tracy replied with a cheery wave before heading away with Sir Richard and Jefferies through the cordon line and disappearing into the crowd.

By the time they had ascended the steps from the pier side back up to the Embankment road immediately outside Portcullis House, the emergency services on the scene were standing down having just despatched the last casualty away in an ambulance that was screaming its way across Westminster Bridge at full speed.

"Afternoon Eddie" the Commander called over to a worried looking Security Service officer who was looking over the wreckage of the patrol car which was wedged up and over a couple of parked cars.

"Oh, afternoon Sir" the clearly concerned officer, Commander Eddie Garley of the accident investigation branch responded as he looked up from his examination of the debris.

"What the heck happened here?" the Commander asked as he and Fuller joined Garley in surveying the wreckage.

"From what I can fathom out Sir" Garley looked around still slightly bemused "The officer slammed into the car he was pursuing at the best part of a hundred miles an hour."

"An experienced patrol car driver would never allow that to happen surely?" Fuller asked.

"Who was the driver?" the Commander enquired.

"Trevor Jenkins" Garley replied as he passed across the blood stained and battered warrant card he had recovered from the scene.

"Oh hell" the Commander responded.

"Seconded" Fuller agreed as they both realised that the officer involved was one of the original investigation team into the Embankment Murders case.

"I know that I am not as great an expert as you in accident investigation" the Commander commented to Garley "But there appears to be a distinct lack of skid marks here."

"Well done sir" Garley responded "I cannot find any evidence that he braked or slowed down in anyway. The only thing that stopped him was the lamp post."

"Get the two main vehicles involved back to your little shed and go over them with a fine tooth comb" the Commander requested "Something stinks here."

"I'll have a preliminary report on your desk by the morning" Garley confirmed.

"Thanks" the Commander responded before with Fuller, he departed the scene, making his way out through the throngs of sightseers that were crowded up against the tape line despite the cold weather.

"I've managed to collar the main incident room at the Yard" Fuller informed the Commander as they walked briskly down towards the main entrance to Westminster Underground Station, the side entrance having been closed because of the accident around the corner.

"I bet the Administrator General was overjoyed about that one" the Commander remarked as they entered the ticket hall of the station and passed through the ticket barriers.

"Something along the lines of 'What's wrong with that brand new facility at Cardinal Place?' I believe" Fuller confirmed.

"You did tell him half the place is over running as the builders went bust?" the Commander asked as they headed down the first set of escalators as far as the westbound District and Circle Line platforms.

"By that point he was mumbling to himself incoherently" Fuller explained "I gave up any further attempts at communication after that."

The curved platform was relatively quiet when the two officers arrived on it and the Commander casually noted that the chocolate vending machine was marked as out of use. The distant whirring of electrical motors and rumbling from the far tunnel portal proceeded the arrival of a six car train of recently refurbished 'D' type sub-surface stock, drawing to a halt in the full length of the platform before with a heavy sounding hiss, the single leaf doors in each carriage opened with a whirr.

"Did you manage to find everyone?" the Commander asked as the two men boarded the front most carriage and took a seat each in the centre of the passenger saloon.

"I think so" Fuller confirmed "Had a bit of trouble with a Commander MacDonald as he is stationed out in the Shetland Islands so had to get the guys at Glasgow to send a helicopter to pick him up."

"Chief of the Forensic Service?" the Commander enquired.

"Should be there" Fuller confirmed as he consulted a list he had just pulled out from his uniform tunic pocket

"Great" the Commander confirmed "Make sure he doesn't leave without that van load of evidence material."

"That'll cheer him up" Fuller remarked as the train began to slow for its stop at St James' Park.

"This station is St James' Park" the automated announcement on the train called out "Alight here for New Scotland Yard."

Fuller and the Commander were the only two passengers on the lightly loaded late afternoon service to alight into the rather gloomy platform area of the station. No sooner had they set foot on the cold hard platform surface than the doors of the train were closed and it accelerated away into the running tunnel.

"I have a bad feeling about this case Sir" Fuller commented as they proceeded up the stairs to the Broadway exit ticket hall set in the lower part of the former London Transport art deco design headquarters building of 55 Broadway.

Outside, the Commander purchased a copy of the West End Final edition of the Evening Standard newspaper before together the two officers crossed the road and walked the short distance to the New Scotland Yard building where the famous three sided rotating sign was now turning once more having been frozen solid that morning.

"Good afternoon sir" the receptionist called from the desk in the main foyer.

"How do" the Commander responded as he approached the desk, Fuller having gone on ahead to sort out the incident room upstairs "Any messages for me?"

"The Administrator General is looking for you" the receptionist responded as she consulted her notepad which was covered with seemingly untranslatable scribbles that only she understood "And that Minister guy called three times demanding updates on your case."

"In that case" the Commander responded wryly "It's a good thing you haven't seen me isn't it?"

"Seen who?" the receptionist responded with an equally wry smile.

The Commander was exhausted so decided to take the lift for once even though he was never a fan of them. Numerous thoughts ran through his mind as the lift ascended seemingly very slowly up to the seventh floor where it heralded its arrival

with a ping and a cheery announcement that contrasted markedly with its sole occupant's mood.

As soon as the doors opened however, the Commander stepped out into what seemed to be for him the Security Service equivalent of a school reunion where in addition to the various divisional officers that were attending the briefing, they was gathered together nearly all the original investigation team from the first Embankment Murders case, some seemingly exactly the same as they appeared in that fifteen year old group photograph, other looking considerable older.

"Hello" one of the most senior looking officers present, standing alongside Jefferies called as he observed the Commander arrive and join the scene "If it isn't the little fella."

"Little fella?" Tracy asked.

"Not only was the beloved Commander here the smallest officer we ever did work with" retired Commander Frank Frobisher explained "he was also the youngest on the team."

"You mean to say that antique of a husband of mine was actually young once?" Tracy asked mockingly with a characteristic giggle.

"Oh thank you!" the Commander responded "Lets get on with it shall we?" he showed everyone the way ahead to the incident room that Fuller had managed to liberate for the task as per his instructions.

"Everybody find themselves a seat" the Commander called as they all filed in while he took up the position at the front of the room.

"Right then" the Commander announced "As you may or may not be aware, yesterday the boys from the Thames River Division dragged out of the water the newly released David Jarvis, the man convicted fifteen years ago for a serious of murders otherwise known as the Embankment Murders case."

As the Commander continued the meeting, the various officers seated before him read through copies of Jarvis' file and the other accompanying documentation.

"Now I know that you are aware that many of us were uncertain of his guilt at the time but the Prosecution Service and the jury thought otherwise and found him guilty and as far as everyone was concerned that was case closed" the Commander continued.

"That was until last night" he waved the pathologists report in the air with a grim look "Jarvis' body was disposed of in exactly the same manner as his alleged victims and to boot, the fingerprints on the exterior of the packing material were an exact match."

"Hang on" one of the officers pondered "Didn't the finger prints found on the original bodies belong to Jarvis?"

"At the time that is what the forensic reports said" the Commander responded "It would appear there was a mistake in the identification, either accidental or deliberate."

"So where do we go from here?" Jefferies asked.

"I knew you were going to say that" the Commander responded "Three teams" he continued "Team one under Commander Fuller will look into our current body, his movements, known associates, the lot. I want to know who he associated with in prison, did he talk to anyone, what he had for breakfast, the works."

"I'll have CCTV from stations between the prison and his final resting place by the morning" Fuller confirmed.

"Good" the Commander responded "Team two made up of the former officers of the original enquiry and the guys from the Murder Squad will go over everything from that investigation."

At that point, the familiar figure of the Administrator General slipped into the room and took a seat near the back as the Commander continued.

"The third team will be headed by Doctor Grantham of the Scientific and Forensic Section" the Commander indicated the officer seated nearby "Jerry, I want you to go over all the original scientific and forensic evidence and the stuff from our newest stiff, use all those modern ticks and gizmos you are so proud of."

"First thing in the morning Sir" Grantham confirmed "I'll have the finest of fine tooth combs armed and ready."

"Somewhere along the way" the Commander continued "We either missed something or were deliberately diverted away from the real murderer so hopefully if we bang our collective heads together, we should be able to work out where we went wrong."

"You were going to mention Commander Jenkins?" Fuller quietly prompted the Commander.

"Oh yes" the Commander regretfully continued "I have to announce that one of the former alumni of this cheery little band, Trevor Jenkins was killed earlier this afternoon when his patrol car crashed and overturned at high speed."

There were mixed looks in the audience of either shock or sorrow depending on how each individual was connected with the deceased officer, be they a former colleague or just a member of the same close knit community that the Security Service was.

"That reminds me" Fuller interjected after allowing a brief moment of appropriate silence to pass "The Garage Chief called and asked if you could drop in and see him at some point when you are passing, he has something on his mind I think."

"He's not the only one" the Commander admitted "Anyway" he continued "I want you all to have a really good think about this case over night and then we will reconvene here tomorrow at nine thirty and take it from there."

"I think this must be where Transit van's go to die" Tracy commented aside to the Commander as they entered the yard outside the main Security Service vehicle workshops, a grass and concrete area seemingly littered with numerous marked, unmarked and in a couple of cases burnt out Security Service and other vehicles in various states of disrepair.

"Shop!" the Commander called as he and Tracy entered the main workshop where the smell of oil and petrol was as strong as the response to his enquiry was silent.

"Must be on a tea break again" Tracy mused as she looked around the spacious but poorly lit garage workshop area where various vehicles appeared to be in the middle of repairs and inspections, some of which were suspended in mid air.

"Hello?" Tracy called out, her voice echoing around the workshop.

"Can I help you?" came a voice from behind them as a typically attired mechanic in full greasy overalls and carrying a large wrench, appeared in the main door way behind them, surprised that not only did the workshops have a visitor at that rather late hour of the afternoon but also the seniority of them.

"Had a call that someone wanted to see me?" the Commander responded.

"Errr..." the mechanic responded before suddenly remembering "Oh yes, the crashed patrol car."

"That would be the one" the Commander confirmed.

"You want accident investigation next door" the mechanic responded "I'll take you around."

Tracy was momentarily distracted by a couple of Security Service motor bikes in one part of the workshop before realising that her husband and the mechanic has almost disappeared out of sight and had to jog to catch up.

"Here's the boss now" the mechanic pointed ahead into the accident investigation workshop, a clinically cleaner area that contrasted with the oily rag depository next door.

"Evening Eddie" the Commander greeted Garley as he appeared, emerging from beneath the badly wrecked remains of the Security Service patrol car that had crashed at Victoria Embankment, now suspended on heavy jacks as a minute examination was performed.

"I though you should see this" Garley explained as he guided Tracy and the Commander over to the wrecked vehicle "Mind your head" he advised as they ducked underneath where a clip on lamp was attached to the chassis, illuminating the underside.

"I think we were all agreed that Jenkins was much too an experienced a driver to let his car career into another at over eighty miles per hour?" Jenkins asked.

"Beyond doubt I would have thought" the Commander agreed.

"Well take a look at this" Garley moved the lamp to illuminate part of the chassis.

"Being a founder member of the flat earth society when it comes to technical things" the Commander responded "You are going to have to enlighten me. What am I looking at?"

"Mmm nasty" Tracy commented as she leaned forward and instantly recognised what Garley was indicating.

"Well?" the Commander asked "The tension is killing me."

"He had his brakes cut" Tracy indicated the clearly severed brake line.

"Exactly" Garley confirmed "Then someone led him into a high speed chase until his brake fluid ran out and then it was goodnight Vienna."

"I would say that these have been cut in an area where it would be very hard to spot sabotage" Tracy commented.

"Which makes it doubly scary" the Commander responded.

"Do you want me to put this in the public report or sit on it for a while?" Garley asked.

"Given current circumstances" the Commander replied "I would be grateful if this information stayed between us three for the time being until this case blows over."

"You may consider it well and truly buried" Garley confirmed.

"Thanks" the Commander responded "If you find anything else, give me a bell."

"Will do."

"You know when we get married" Jennifer Caverner mentioned to Fuller as he was attentively running through endless hours of CCTV footage at his desk in Holborn "The lady of the household will be expecting certain people to finish work on time."

"Sorry, what did you say?" Fuller suddenly looked up.

"Oh nothing" Jennifer grinned. "If you told me exactly what or who you were looking for I could help, you know two pairs of eyes are better than one and all that."

"This fellow" Fuller passed the file photograph of Jarvis to Jennifer "The two definite things I know about him was he left prison in Dorset in the morning and by late evening he was a corpse that was being pulled out of the Thames."

"So how far have you got love?" Jennifer enquired.

"Well, I've got him on a bus from the prison to Dorchester station" Fuller pointed to one image on the screen, a rather grainy frozen frame from an on board CCTV camera showing an older looking Jarvis than that who appeared in the photograph boarding a bus and paying his fare.

"Then" Fuller changed the image on the screen "I have him boarding a South West Trains service to London Waterloo via Salisbury" he showed Jennifer two pictures of Jarvis, one waiting on the platform at Dorchester and a second showing him amongst a crowd of people alighting from a train at Waterloo Station.

"It's where he went after that which is the mystery" Fuller added with a rueful smile.

"Well he must have either walked to wherever it was he was going or he either got a tube, bus or cab" Jennifer concluded.

"No sign of him at the taxi ranks" Fuller responded "I just finished checking those and it looks like" he continued to fast forward through a further sequence of footage "he didn't get on a bus either."

"Isn't that him?" Jennifer asked pointing to one screen as a number of people walked past the camera's viewpoint.

"Sorry, missed it" Fuller responded.

"Underground station main ticket hall about two minutes previously" Jennifer confirmed.

"Hang on a sec" Fuller rewound the digital footage from the camera that Jennifer had indicated with both of them watching the screen intently.

"Stop!" Jennifer called out, "Back just a tad."

"What exactly is a tad?" Fuller asked just out of idle curiosity.

"Isn't that him?" Jennifer asked, pointing out one man who was seemingly frozen in time in mid step at the bottom of the escalators that led from the main Waterloo Station concourse down to the Underground ticket hall.

"Well spotted love" Fuller replied "Now let's follow him around" he added as he pressed the controls to play all of the camera views in multi screen mode at normal speed.

The complex and comprehensive network of cameras picked up the late Mr Jarvis as he went across to the ticket machine and purchased a ticket before walking back

across the low wide booking hall area to the barriers on the far side where he inserted his ticket in order to be allowed to pass through.

The cameras followed his progress as he navigated his way through the station complex, seemingly a little uncertain as to exactly where he was heading as he often paused and looked at direction signs to find the way to the service he required.

Soon his journey had taken him to the long twin moving walkways that led from the older Waterloo & City, Bakerloo and Northern Line part of the station to the newer part constructed to house the Jubilee Line Extension built some years earlier but long after Jarvis had gone into prison, a fact that probably added to his slightly confused state as to where he was going.

Three separate cameras along the length of the walkway recorded him standing still on the moving walkway as it carried him methodically at little more than a walking pace whilst others passed by who had chosen to walk along its length.

Stepping off at the other end, Jarvis proceeded ahead and then around to his right to proceed with some hesitancy down the escalators that led to the Jubilee Line platforms, still clearly showing some signs of not being entirely certain where he was going.

"What do you reckon?" Fuller asked Jennifer "Westbound or eastbound?"

"I'd reckon eastbound" Jennifer remarked "for London Bridge, Canary Wharf and the east end would be my bet."

"And there he goes" Fuller announced as he followed the recorded progress on the screen "straight to the westbound platform."

"So much for being right all the time" Jennifer mused with a wry smile.

"Nobody's perfect" Fuller remarked.

"Watch it....." Jennifer responded suggestively.

"Moving swiftly on" Fuller wisely returned to the business in hand before he wound up sticking his foot in it with his fiancé.

"There he goes" Jennifer pointed to the figure of Jarvis on the screen as he was recorded arriving on the westbound platform and within moments the camera image observed him step forward towards the platform edge doors as a newly lengthened seven car train of 1996 type tube stock arrived.

It was clear from Jarvis' body language that he was not familiar with the comparatively new concept of the platform edge doors as he looked a little confused before both the train and edge doors opened in almost symmetrical unison allowing the small number of passengers to alight and board.

Jarvis was the last to board, disappearing from view inside the train just as the doors closed and the train moved off.

"Right" Fuller called "That was the 13:21 departure from Waterloo, so where did he alight?"

"He has plenty of choices of destination" Jennifer commented as she looked at a pocket Tube map "Plenty of changing opportunities as well."

"It usually takes approximately two and a half minutes to Westminster" Fuller added as he wound forward the view from the westbound platform at Westminster to the point where the train could be seen arriving in the platform "So if we take the view from the camera at the same point on the platform there, we will see if he got off."

"Can't see him" Jennifer commented as they both scanned the screen where various passengers joined and alighted the service.

"All right then" Fuller responded as he stopped the footage just at the point where the train doors were closed and it had just departed "Green Park next stop."

Green Park's Jubilee Line platforms were of a different design to those on the extension as this was one of the stations on the original section of line opened in the late 1970's and the camera view that Fuller called up clearly showed the decorative style of that period and the lack of platform edge doors that were only to be found on the extension section stations.

"Hang on" Jennifer commented as she spotted something before the view had even got as far as the arrival of the train "Can you zoom in on that bench there?" she indicated on part of the screen with a tap of her finger.

"Should be able to" Fuller responded as he froze the view in mid frame "Hang on a minute" he added as he selected the area of the screen Jennifer had indicated and then zoomed in on it.

"Can you clear that up a bit?" Jennifer asked as she looked carefully at the blown up section, a little fuzzy in resolution as a result of being a zoomed in image.

"Not with this equipment" Fuller admitted "But it can be done if you want, why?"

"It may just be me going senile with old age" Jennifer explained "Its just that there is a figure sitting on that bench who rings a bell an I can't think where from."

"I'll have a look at it later" Fuller responded as he made a written note of the time stamp which Jennifer had pointed out "Here comes our train."

They two officers watched the screen intently as it showed the arrival of the train and once again the familiar procedure of passengers boarding and alighting. Yet again, there appeared to be no sign of Jarvis alighting but Jennifer did notice something else.

"Our mystery man just boarded the second car from the back" she commented.

"Your eyesight must be better than mine" Fuller replied "I completely missed it."

"Well there it goes" Jennifer mused as the train was shown to close its doors and depart as rapidly as it had arrived "Bond Street next."

Fuller quickly changed the view on the main screen to a different recorded feed and much like before, it recorded the arrival and departure of the train at the platform, a scene remarkably similar in appearance to that which had occurred at Green Park.

"This could take all night" Jennifer mused as she looked at her watch that was now reporting the time as passing eight o'clock in the evening.

"Maybe not" Fuller responded as he pointed to an area on the screen where he had just started playing the footage from Baker Street "I do believe that is our man."

"Who is that behind him?" Jennifer asked as she skewed her head slightly, trying to work out the identity of the mysterious figure who had alighted from the next carriage up from Jarvis and appeared to hang back before deliberately following Jarvis at a distance until both men were out of view of the camera.

"I think that was the same guy you pointed out at Green Park" Fuller responded "Trouble is, where are they going now?" he asked as he flicked through camera views at an almost break neck pace while he scanned from screen to screen trying to find them again.

"There" Jennifer pointed to one view as Fuller flicked past it, causing him to stop and go back again "That looks like Jarvis heading up the escalators I think."

"Well spotted" Fuller agreed "Can't see his shadow though."

"Maybe it was just co-incidence" Jennifer remarked as they followed Jarvis' journey up through Baker Street Station to the sub-surface platforms of the Metropolitan Line. From there he then proceeded down platforms three and four through a gateway to platform five which serves eastbound Circle, District and Hammersmith & City Line services.

"The early pioneers of the Underground network may have been excellent engineers" Fuller commented as he fiddled with the controls in front of him "But they forgot to cater for decent lighting conditions more suited to the invention of CCTV" he added wryly as he tried to adjust the images from the cameras which were gloomy as a result of the darker conditions of the original nineteenth century arched roof platform area that was one of the oldest sections of underground railway in the world.

A six car train of 'C' stock on a Circle Line service was seen to arrive in the platform and draw to a halt within the impressive if slightly gloomy platform interior, its twin headlights the only thing really making any effort to pierce the gloom.

Fuller and Jennifer continued to watch intently as Jarvis remained stationary on the platform, merely casually observing a few passengers alight and then proceed off the

platform out of sight. When the doors of the train closed and it pulled away, Jarvis appeared to be alone on the westbound platform where he casually strolled around, gradually making his way towards the furthest end where the CCTV camera's were especially poor.

"Where did he go?" Jennifer suddenly asked as Jarvis apparently disappeared from view, just the empty platform remaining.

At that moment on the recording another train of 'C' type stock arrived and came to halt where as soon as the doors opened, a significant group of people alighted, flooding onto the platform.

"Great" Fuller responded "How the hell are we going to find him in this lot?"

"Here" Jennifer snuggled up to her fiancé "Have a nice hug, I have a feeling we are going to be here all night."

"Your cat is giving me the evil eye" Jefferies commented to Tracy as he sat on the sofa and tried his best to outstare the aged old tabby cat that was observing him with a stern look.

"Probably because you are sat on her sofa" Tracy explained as she came into the front room with two mugs of tea, one of which she passed to Jefferies who took it with a nod of grateful thanks.

"Oh right" Jefferies responded as he looked back at the cat that was continuing to eyeball him sternly.

"I inherited this old cat when I married the Commander" Tracy explained "Although it should be pointed out that my husband and I are owned by the cat, not the other way around."

Tracy sat down on the lounge chair opposite Jefferies as the cat, now safe in the knowledge that her superiority was still unchallenged, walked off with a smug expression readily apparent.

"How long did you work with that mad husband of mine for?" Tracy asked.

"Eleven years" Jefferies reminisced "Right from when he was a cadet through being my Deputy until I moved on and he became Commander in his own right."

"Has he changed much?" she asked out of curiosity.

"Well I never reckoned he would have got married eventually" Jefferies had to admit "But apart from that he is still just the same as he always was."

"Old before his time and gets through uniforms like there is no tomorrow you mean?" Tracy asked.

"He's still wrecking uniforms?" Jefferies responded.

"The Quartermaster's Uniform Office is threatening to black list him he has got through that many tunics this year" Tracy explained with a chuckle.

"Good grief its cold out there" the Commander commented as he arrived in the apartment whereupon he casually tossed his uniform overcoat on the side table in the hall from where it promptly fell to the floor with a loud clunk.

"Point proven I think" Tracy commented with a knowing smile.

"What?" the Commander asked as he entered the room where he and Tracy hugged and kissed each other.

"Now there *is* something I thought I would never see" Jefferies added.

"I do believe there is implication in the air" the Commander announced as he sat down along side Tracy.

"It's just that in all those years under my command" Jefferies explained "You always seemed to be married to the service, well until this little lassie came along."

"I haven't changed that much" the Commander responded "I still have a diet dominated by the four important key food groups, chips, chocolate, cakes and caffeine."

"I am surprised that the Government Food Standards Agency doesn't quote you in one of their endless statistical campaigns about what we should eat" Jefferies remarked.

"Speaking of which" Tracy responded "Tea or hot chocolate love?" she asked as she rose from her seat and headed for the adjacent kitchen.

"Hot chocolate please love" the Commander called after her before turning back to Jefferies "Did you speak to your missus?" he asked.

"Just called her half an hour ago" Jefferies confirmed "She's fine as always, having fun baking cakes for the two officers the local section have keeping an eye on the place."

"Sounds about right" the Commander agreed "I had a word with Al Longton over at Haychester, he ran a company helicopter over the area but there was no sign of the two unpleasant gentlemen with guns."

"Probably back in the capital by now" Jefferies concluded "We need to be very careful, someone wants something covered up and I reckon by now they are getting desperate."

"The Garage Chief at Hendon said that the brakes were cut on Jenkins's patrol car" the Commander added "Whatever is happening has definitely started by the looks of things."

"Here you go" Tracy passed the Commander his mug of steaming hot chocolate before sitting down alongside him.

"Had any thoughts?" Jefferies asked.

"One or two" the Commander responded as Tracy rested her head against him and began to nod off "If I remember correctly we had three suspects before the press got hold of Jarvis and practically found him guilty by default."

"Yes, I did a little digging around on that front" Jefferies confirmed "The other two suspects are both dead, one got killed when his car picked a argument with a lamp post several years ago and the other had a heart attack in prison way back."

"I want to see the evidence that was used to convict Jarvis again" the Commander commented "I am sure we missed something somewhere."

"Could I suggest we get some sleep?" Tracy suggested as she bleary opened one eye and looked up briefly.

"Best idea I have heard today" the Commander agreed.

"Looks like I get the sofa then" Jefferies commented.

"Mind the cat" the Commander warned.

"The Met Office is today warning of continued heavy snow falls across London and the south east" the overly cheery news presenter on BBC News 24 announced on the television in the Holborn office Staff Canteen.

"Dear God" Tracy remarked as she arrived to find Jennifer and Fuller asleep in the corner of the canteen which had caused her to do a double take as she was heading for the coffee machine "Have you two been here all night?"

"What time is it?" Jennifer blearily asked as she came too and looked around.

"It's daytime" Tracy announced, clear, aware and wide awake unlike her twin sister.

"Wake up" Jennifer dug Fuller in the ribs "It's time we went home."

"You two have been here all night haven't you?" Tracy asked.

"Last thing I remember was sometime well past midnight and it was snowing heavily outside" Jennifer confirmed as she slightly unsteadily rose to her feet and brushed down her crumpled uniform tunic.

"Dare I ask what you two were up to?" Tracy enquired as she duly produced three cups of coffee from the machine, two of them strong and black for Jennifer and Fuller.

"I was helping my darling fiancé here with the task of going through the CCTV footage" Jennifer explained "Unfortunately we rather lost track of time."

"Here" Jennifer passed the two black coffees to Jennifer "See what you can do with him, he is due to be presenting part of the briefing at the Yard in just over an hour."

"Right" Jennifer responded before turning to Fuller "Wakey, wakey!" she called loudly in his ear which saw him suddenly wake with a start.

"Welcome back" Tracy announced.

"Did I leave?" Fuller asked blearily as he sat up and looked around with a definite state of dazed confusion.

"Well technically" Jennifer mused "No you didn't. Actually neither did I now I come to think of it!"

"Come on you two love birds" Tracy called "Lets get you sorted out."

A few miles away across central London, Jefferies and the Commander were arriving at St James Park station on an eastbound District Line service.

"It's a bit like old times isn't it?" Jefferies remarked "You and me back on the front line again!"

"Last time you and I were fronting a case at the Yard, I recall we wound up having to fish half of the investigation team out of the Thames" the Commander responded as the train drew to a halt and the single leaf doors opened allowing the two men to step out onto the platform.

"Serves me right for commandeering a boat without checking for leaks first" Jefferies chuckled as he recalled one of those typical incidents that he and the Commander had shared when they had worked together in the Service over the years "Although I recall I was the one in the drink, you were on the shore laughing."

"Well you know me and boats" the Commander reminded Jefferies as they made their way up the platform towards the Broadway exit and then through the lower levels of the 55 Broadway building.

"Good grief" the Commander commented as he saw the heavy snow falling outside, covering the roads and pavements in a white slush through which much traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular were trying to make their way with little success.

"Haven't seen snowfall like this in the city since the 1960s" Jefferies remarked as they trudged through the snow lying on the ground towards Scotland Yard where the

Commander looked on incredulously to the sight of the receptionist and two officers trying to free up the famous normally revolving three sided New Scotland Yard sign that had frozen solid again in the cold.

"This is definitely going to be one of those days" the Commander remarked with a wry smile before he and Jefferies headed indoors into the much needed warmth and shelter.

The investigation office on the fifth floor was already a busy and bustling place with the cacophony of ringing telephones, earnest conversations and intense concentration on the job in hand much in evidence as the Commander walked in.

"Morning everyone" he announced which caused many of the officers to look up briefly from what they were doing, acknowledge the presence of their senior commanding officer and then resume what they were doing.

"Do you remember them being this enthusiastic fifteen years ago?" the Commander asked aside to Jefferies as they stood in the doorway surveying the scene.

"Only when the weather was bad" Jefferies confirmed "The theory worked that if you looked busy in the office, you did not have time to be sent out into the cold or the wet."

"Nice theory" the Commander had to admit before walking over to the head of the Scientific and Forensic Section who was sitting at a desk barely visible underneath the contents of several old dusty evidence file boxes which she had spent most of the time since early that morning sifting through.

"You having fun with this lot?" the Commander asked her.

"Well some of it is making sense" she remarked "Had one bit of luck, one of the guys back at the lab did some ringing around on the industrial tape used to wrap Jarvis body."

"Tell me more" the Commander prompted.

"Well apparently its not used anywhere near as much nowadays as it was back at the time of the original investigation" she confirmed as she passed across an evidence bag with a sample of the tape clearly visible inside "Not only that but we have managed to track down a manufacturer, batch number and possible list of suppliers within the Greater London area."

"I like it" the Commander responded "Anything else turn up?"

"Possible blood stains on the victim's clothing that came from a third party" she responded "Need to do some more tests but they didn't finish until about one in the morning so I sent the lab guys home for some rest for a few hours. It'll probably be this afternoon before we get anything more."

"Keep me informed" the Commander thanked her before heading over to the adjacent briefing room which to his surprise was completely empty.

"Anyone seen Commander Fuller?" the Commander turned back to the office and called out, a question that was greeted with a generally negative response. However the subject of his enquiry was soon located as Fuller appeared at the office doorway carrying a pile of papers and tapes whilst looking somewhat flustered.

"Morning Sir" Fuller remarked as he busily shuffled past the Commander and on into the briefing room where he promptly proceeded to drop the material he was carrying onto the table in a huge heap.

"You look a little the worse for wear" the Commander commented as observed Fuller "Bit of an all nighter was it."

"You'll thank me for it Sir" Fuller responded as enthusiastically as he could manage.

"Right everyone" the Commander called across the office "Look lively, everyone into the briefing room, lets see what you've got."

The Commander and Jefferies took their positions at the large table that dominated the briefing room, one at each end as befitted their seniority and experience with the case in question whilst the other officers filed in carrying various files, cups of tea and coffee and notebooks.

"Right" the Commander called as he stood up "Now that we are all here Mr Fuller, let's see what you have got."

"Oh right" Fuller responded as he rose to his feet and having inserted a DVD disk into the computer terminal in front of him, used a remote control to lower the lights in the room and start up the digital data projector that cast a bright beam of pure white light onto the screen.

"Our deceased friend Jarvis is recorded as having boarded the mid morning South West Trains service to Waterloo" Fuller announced as he cued up the footage to the point where a CCTV camera captured a mixed eight car formation of Class 159 and 170 stock pull into platform seven at Waterloo Station.

"We have him on camera alighting from the last but one coach of the train" Fuller commented as he continued to show the progress of Jarvis through the Waterloo Station complex as seen through a succession of fixed CCTV cameras.

"He went through down into the Underground section, and after what appears to be a little bit of confusion" Fuller continued "he boarded a westbound Jubilee Line service.

"Where did he go?" the Commander enquired.

"He alighted at Baker Street" Fuller confirmed as he changed the view on the screen to the image of the Jubilee Line service arriving at the northbound platform before the doors opened and various passengers alighted or boarded.

Clearly visible amongst them was Jarvis and the officers in the room observed the screen as the camera views followed him back up towards the surface.

"Now this as they say" Fuller announced with a flourish "is where the plot thickens. He makes his way up to the outer eastbound platform 5 which serves the Circle and Hammersmith & City lines, however once there he lets two trains go by before walking down towards the far end of the platform whereupon he vanishes into thin air."

"He doesn't turn up anywhere?" the Commander asked.

"Jennifer and I went through miles of footage until about midnight from all over the station complex and I even checked the traffic cameras in Marylebone Road outside but nothing" Fuller responded "He simply disappeared."

"Ah..." the Commander responded "I think I had better head up there and take a look later. Now what about ballistics?"

".38 calibre handgun with a silencer, the same gun as used in the original murders" the Forensic Division officer confirmed.

"I think that you will find there is one slight problem with that" Jefferies interrupted "The gun from the original murders is safely tucked away in an evidence bag" he tossed the weapon sealed in its bag onto the table for all to see.

"Which in turn has been in a dusty box in a cellar for the last fifteen years" the Commander added "So working on the all fire arm rifling is unique theory, something is amiss isn't it?"

"That could have something to do with the fact that that there gun had nothing whatsoever to do with the original murders" the Forensic Officer explained.

"That means yet another piece of the original prosecution evidence was duff" Jefferies added.

"Which means it was either tampered with, nicked or never here in the first place and the original forensic report was deliberately adjusted to hide the deception" the forensic officer confirmed.

"Nuts...." the Commander grunted.

"This case is falling apart faster than an Austin Allegro" one of the other officers commented.

"That's showing your age" the Commander remarked "Speaking of which, is anyone looking into this journalist?"

"What journalist?" another officer asked.

"The dead one that had that accident after meeting with Jefferies here last week" the Commander explained.

"Was there a file on it?" the Forensic Officer asked "As we never got anything."

"Never mind" the Commander responded "I'll chase it up. Anything else?"

"Al Longton called" another officer responded "He has had some of his guys up over the hills looking for any evidence of those two shooters who you had in tow. Trouble is the snow is thick and drifting up that way so they haven't found much."

"That reminds me" the Forensic Officer called from the far side of the room "The Garage Chief called, said he wanted to speak to you again."

"Looks like I am in for quite a merry go round today" the Commander remarked "I reckon I had best get on with it then."

"Services on the Piccadilly Line are currently experiencing severe disruption due to earlier frozen points at Arnos Grove" the announcement echoed around Holborn Station "There are also delays to all other lines except the Waterloo & City due to the inclement weather conditions."

"Lovely morning for it" Tracy remarked to the Station Supervisor as she arrived in the main entrance ticket hall which was not only somewhat crowded with stranded passengers but also awash with trodden in wet slush from the snowy conditions outside.

"The snow melted partially yesterday evening but then froze over again last night" the Supervisor explained "Everything's ruddy frozen solid and the locals are getting restless."

"Any chance of getting to Marble Arch amongst this mess?" Tracy enquired although she knew the prognosis was not promising.

"You'd be better off on a bus if I were to be honest dear" the Station Supervisor was forced to admit as he went over to extract another errant tourist who had managed to get jammed in the ticket barriers.

"If things get out of hand" Tracy urged "Send someone over to the office and I'll have some reinforcements sent over" she informed him.

"We may need them, thanks!"

Tracy exited the chaotic atmosphere of the station ticket hall and pulled her scarf up over her neck to protect herself from the biting cold snow laden wind that was whistling down Kingsway with the sharpness of a knife.

Fortunately very little traffic was to be found on the roads as even heavier snowfall outside the City had kept a lot of the usual work traffic firmly at home so crossing Kingsway and making her way into High Holborn as far as the westbound bus stop was a simple task.

However when she reached the stop, she quickly discovered that trying to find a bus going in the right direction was going to be more of a challenge.

The first one along, splashing its way through the slush and snow was an articulated bendy bus on the 38, useless for Tracy as it turned left at Tottenham Court Road and headed off towards Piccadilly, similarly the double decker bus on the 8 right behind it would veer from Tracy's intended course at New Bond Street.

"This is not looking good" she mused until a dark saloon car pulled up at the pavement edge in front of her, whereupon the heavily tinted side passenger window lowered electronically and the face of Sir Richard Crowthorne appeared.

"Need a lift my dear?" he asked.

"Heading towards Marble Arch by any chance?" Tracy asked.

"Pass right by the door" Sir Richard confirmed as he opened the door for her "Come inside."

"So what beams you into my neck of the woods?" Tracy enquired as Sir Richard's official car pulled away and headed up towards New Oxford Street in the direction of Tottenham Court Road.

"Meeting of the joint Governmental cross party National Security Committee or whatever they call it this week" Sir Richard explained, clearly not looking forward to spending his morning stuck in an overheated room full of political no necks with agendas to air and axes to grind.

"Don't tell me they are actually going to green light this restructuring proposal?" Tracy remarked.

"Looks like it" Sir Richard confirmed "Old man Hainault has been working on this little pet project of his for months, that is when he is not lost somewhere on a golf course."

"Has anyone told my husband about this yet?" Tracy asked "Only I don't think he is exactly going to be over enthusiastic about it."

"I doubt it" Sir Richard confirmed as the official car bumped over the crossroad junction at Tottenham Court Road and headed into Oxford Street beneath the Christmas decoration lights that were managing to provide more illumination than the cloud obscured winter sunlight.

"That reminds me" Sir Richard added "When you see your beloved, tell him that there are a couple of goons from the Political Support Unit sniffing around the Embankment Murders investigation."

"Interesting" Tracy remarked.

"It doesn't appear to be anything official but someone somewhere with connections and a well filled filodex appears to be getting nervous about something" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Watch your back time again?" Tracy remarked.

"Isn't it always these days?" Sir Richard responded regretfully.

"Marble Arch coming up" the driver called back, the progress having been swift as the centre of London was relatively quiet.

"Thanks for the ride" Tracy responded as the car slowed to a halt directly opposite the main rather tatty entrance to Marble Arch Underground Station where there appeared to be a bit of a fracas brewing.

Sir Richard watched from the car window with amusement as Tracy launched across the road and intercepted the two heavily built men in the main entrance who were having a very loud and prominent argument with a couple of uniformed station staff.

"All right you two" Tracy announced "Either shut up or you are both very much nicked all right?"

The Victorian arched brick roof over platforms five and six of Baker Street Station echoed to the rumbling sound of the arrival of a six car train of 'C' type stock on a westbound Hammersmith & City line working.

As the train paused briefly at the platform to allow passengers to board and alight, the Commander walked onto the eastbound platform from the direction of the Metropolitan Line part of the station by way of the ornate gateway that led into this, the oldest section of Underground Railway in the world.

Looking around the near deserted platform just as the train departed from the opposite side, he looked confused for a moment before walking a short distance up its length towards the far end where within the twin track tunnel portal, the red tail lamps of the departing service were the only things visible in the darkness, receding rapidly into the distance accompanied by the occasional flash from the power supply rail.

Pausing approximately half way along the length of platform five, the Commander momentarily pondered the chocolate machine to his right but then remembered that most of them were empty anyway before reaching inside his tunic pocket and retrieving his battered yet little used mobile telephone.

Having put on his small square framed reading glasses, the Commander proceeded to stare intently at the telephone for a minute or two trying to remember how it worked, modern technology not being his strongest area.

In the end he gave up, returned the telephone back to the depths of his pocket and went over to the payphone on the platform tunnel wall.

"Investigation Office" Fuller responded when he reached over the desk to the ringing telephone.

"Amazing, I actually got the right number" the Commander congratulated himself, prematurely as it turned out.

"Actually no Sir" Fuller responded, "I am leaning over my desk to the one next door to answer the telephone."

"Oh" the Commander reacted "Anyway, fire up that box of tricks of yours and tell me exactly where at Baker Street our man Jarvis disappeared."

"All right then" Fuller responded as he pulled the telephone up and over onto his own desk and began to work on the computer console with the receiver wedged awkwardly on his shoulder.

"Eastbound platform" Fuller confirmed as he wound back the footage he had captured earlier of the events leading to Jarvis' disappearance "Which I see you are already on."

The Commander looked up at the CCTV camera above and to his right through which Fuller was observing him and waved "I know Jarvis came onto this platform but remind me where he went from there?"

"After letting two trains go by" Fuller confirmed "He walked up towards the far end and then turned right and disappeared somewhere down there."

"Right, thanks" the Commander responded "I'll go and have a look."

"Oh whilst I have you Sir" Fuller added "The Garage Chief is getting more desperate to see you by the hour if the endless messages that are pouring in are anything to go by."

"Just another on my endless list of destinations today" the Commander confirmed with a little sigh of resignation "At least it gets me out of that Committee Meeting later mind."

"Oh that reminds me" Fuller added "What are you doing on the last weekend in April?" he asked.

"On current form" the Commander wryly responded "Probably being shot at!"

"Only I need a best man" Fuller explained slightly hesitantly.

"About bloody time" the Commander responded "Just one question, why me?"

"Well I don't have any relatives whatsoever that I can call on so that just leaves you I am afraid Sir" Fuller had to admit.

"It would be an honour" the Commander confirmed "I'll catch up with you later, call me if anything turns up."

"Will do Sir" Fuller confirmed before hanging up.

As another Hammersmith & City Line service departed, the Commander wandered discretely down the length of the eastbound platform, the hard soles of his shoes tapping on the surface which echoed around the near deserted chamber.

It was as he reached the far end of the platform that the Commander came across a possible solution to the mystery he was there to investigate where set into the wall was an exit leading to an old set of steps that rose up.

With a little caution, the Commander entered the stairwell and progressed up the steps to the top where the corridor bent around to the left to cross the running lines before descending by way of another staircase to the opposite platform.

It was obvious that Jarvis must have disappeared somewhere within this little used access way and as far as the Commander could see, the only way out bar exiting onto the opposite platform, a route that was known not to have been taken, was what appeared to be some sort of machine room door set into the end wall.

The Commander looked the dusty dark green painted double doors up and down before trying the handle where to his surprise, he found it unlocked. With caution the Commander opened the door wide and looked inside where a bank of electrical equipment was located alongside a seemingly long forgotten corridor that tailed off into the distance in the darkness.

Rummaging around in his tunic pocket, the Commander managed to locate a torch which after shaking it a bit to get it to work, he used to illuminate the way ahead. Apart from a sea of dust and cobwebs, there was little to tell anyone had been here recently although the dust on the floor was a little disturbed and a discarded crisp packet fluttered through in the flowing turbulence from trains passing through the station complex.

Moving further on into the dark interior of the corridor or electrical room, the Commander looked back suddenly as the door he had passed through slammed shut behind him, sending up a cloud of disturbed dust that billowed into the beam from his torch.

With the door closed, the only sound now was the Commander's breathing and the gentle hum of electrical equipment, the only light that which shone from his torch and a few indicator lights.

He continued ahead, sweeping the torch around but finding little of interest until he reached the far end some one hundred of so yards away, the way ahead blocked by a further door around the edge of which a hint of daylight was just shining through.

The Commander was about to try the door when something caught his eye, glinting in a pile of dust from the light shone by his torch. Bending down to examine the object more closely, he managed to identify a distinctive brass button with the remains of the thread that until recently secured it to its owners clothing, still attached.

In the classical manner, the Commander picked up the button with the assistance of a handkerchief and dropped it into a small plastic bag he produced from his pocket, whereupon he placed it carefully inside his tunic for safekeeping.

Trying the doors ahead, the Commander discovered to his annoyance that they appeared to be secured on the outside by a padlock or something similar. Looking through the crack between the two doors, the Commander identified what appeared to be a chain which was securing the door, a problem soon rectified as he drew his gun from its belt holster, carefully aimed through the crack in the door and fired one shot that broke the chain and allowed the Commander to open the door.

He exited out into the bottom of a rusty metal exterior stairwell that was sunk a short depth into the ground. Ascending the short flight of steps quickly brought him to the surface, a very non descript row of buildings in a side street and the point where clearly this trail was going cold.

Amidst the gathering litter, the Commander quickly spotted another apparently recently discarded button in the gutter which was different to the first one he had found a few minutes earlier and like that one, he proceeded to carefully retrieve it and place it into another plastic evidence bag for safekeeping.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" the Commander called over his radio as he looked around the seemingly deserted side street, a depressing sight in bright sunshine let alone the wintry murky gloom he was currently viewing it in.

"Control, go ahead Sir" the dispatch officer responded, his voice broadcast from the radio echoing around the high building rears of the side street.

"Can I have a scenes of crime team down to Baker Street Station please" the Commander requested "I want them to go over the connecting walkway and stairs between platforms five and six plus the engineering access at the same location that leads to this rather dismal side street."

"Traffic is a bit snarled up in the slushy mess" the dispatch officer responded "but I'll have a team there as soon as possible Sir."

"Thanks" the Commander replied "Have them report directly to me if they find anything, I'm off to the sunny delights of Hendon."

"That's two idiots safely despatched to the grey bar hotel" Tracy called over the radio to the Transport Division Control Room back at Holborn as behind her a Security Service van pulled away from outside Marble Arch Underground Station at some speed with sirens and blue lights in full cry.

"Anything occurring that needs looking at?" she enquired as she headed back into the station, pausing in the ticket hall through which passengers were now passing once more following the disruption of earlier incidents.

"Some civil servant in a right huff just enquired as to where the Commander has got to" the dispatch officer responded "He is supposed to be in that committee meeting but last we heard was a note from Commander Fuller to say he was lurking over at Baker Street."

"What did you tell this unpleasant little Sir Humphrey then?" Tracy asked out of curiosity.

"I told them he had been called away on urgent operational matters" the dispatch officer confirmed "I don't think he believed me though."

"If that chap calls again" Tracy responded "Remember that you should treat him with the same standard of respect we show all senior members of the Government and their associates."

"You mean give them plenty of old flannel and threaten them with arrest for obstruction of justice?" the dispatcher responded wryly.

"Precisely, and if that fails, just threaten to send my husband around to shoot them" Tracy replied with a wry smile "That usual sends them either on a last minute gardening break to the Falkland Islands or alternatively they resign to spend more time with their family."

"For the record Maam" the dispatcher added "the Commander is currently headed in the direction of Kings Cross on his way up to Hendon."

"Thanks" Tracy responded as she put her warrant card on the round yellow card reader on the ticket barrier before passing through it and on to the escalators down to the platform level "I'll intercept him on route."

As the Circle Line train pulled away from Great Portland Street, the Commander took out the two small plastic evidence bags from his tunic pocket and held them up to the light to examine them closely.

Whilst the one he had found outside in the street was about as ordinary as it was for a button to be, the brass one he had found in the electrical room was by far, much more distinctive.

"We are now approaching Euston Square" the driver of the train announced over the intercom throughout the six carriages of 'C' stock that made up the service "Alight here for a short walk to Euston Station especially if you wish to change to the Northern Line as Kings Cross St Pancras is currently suffering short notice station closures due to overcrowding."

This forced a slight change to the Commander's travel plans and with this announcement, he quickly returned the two bagged buttons back to his tunic pocket before rising from his seat just as the utilitarian 1960's grey tiling of the platforms of Euston Square station appeared.

Exiting out onto the airy but dull platform, the Commander was already on his way up the stairs when the train closed its doors and pulled away behind him.

A matter of moments later, after exiting through the ticket barriers the Commander was surprised and delighted to be greeted by the much welcome sight of Tracy waiting for him at the top of the stairs that led from the ticket hall to the surface on the north side pavement of Euston Road.

"Fancy meeting you here love" the Commander greeted her with a hug and a kiss "You must be some kind of detective!"

"I've been known to dabble" Tracy smiled "However I do bring news from the land of the loony."

"Westminster" the Commander instantly responded with a knowing smile "What have the powers that be done now?" he asked as the two officers walked together hand in hand up Euston Road in the direction of Euston Station.

"It's more what you haven't done that has raised their attention" Tracy had to admit.

"No, sorry love" the Commander responded "You've lost me."

"Cross Party Joint National Security Committee meeting ring any bells perchance?" Tracy prompted.

"Ahh....." the Commander suddenly realised "Well I doubt I missed anything interesting."

"Sir Richard mentioned something about the proposed restructuring of Security Service divisions being given the green light" Tracy added.

"It'll never happen" the Commander concluded as they reached the periphery of Euston Station, crossing the road and entering the white snow covered Euston Gardens "They would never approve something that they can't make any money out of in at least consultancy fee's."

"You are just worried in case you wind up being promoted again" Tracy replied, a conclusion the Commander was forced to agree with in the form of a wry but strained smile.

"I've been acting Administrator General once thank you very much" the Commander responded as they ascended the steps up behind Euston Bus Station and came onto the dreary 1960's concrete covered open area in front of the main railway station itself "I prefer to be on the front line actually doing something rather than chairing endless meetings all day."

"Oh come on" Tracy urged "I know you better than that dear, you loved every minute of it".

"Well it did have some fun bits I have to admit" the Commander replied as they walked through the automatic doors and into the lofty but still dull concourse area of Euston Station itself.

"Where are you going just out of interest?" Tracy asked "Assuming that the probability of you going to that committee meeting is about as high as me winning the lottery?"

"Back to Hendon" the Commander explained "Garage Chief wants a quiet word on the QT. I am hoping he will shed some light on how an experienced veteran patrol officer managed to not notice his brakes had been cut, crash his car and kill himself without any rational explanation."

"Well this is where we part company then" Tracy announced as they reached the top of the escalators that led down into the depths of the Underground part of Euston Station "If you get the chance, let's have lunch together" she suggested.

"My dear" the Commander responded with enthusiasm "That is a date."

"Well that was fun" Sir Richard Crowthorne responded sarcastically to the Administrator General as they exited the committee room in the Houses of Parliament.

"I think I've been to more interesting autopsies" the Administrator General was forced to admit but it was clear from his body language that something else was bothering him, a point that Sir Richard quickly picked up upon.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"A little domestic issue" the Administrator General explained in a rather evasive manner "Pay it no mind" he added before disappearing off down the corridor and vanishing into the crowd of civil servants and Members of Parliament who were milling around.

"He's in a bit of a huff today" the Secretary of State for National Security commented as he joined Sir Richard having observed the Administrator General's flustered exit.

"There is definitely something troubling him that is for sure" Sir Richard agreed "and it has nothing to do with what was said back there that much is for certain."

"Any idea what it is?" the Minister asked out of curiosity.

"No" Sir Richard had to admit "But I certainly intend to find out as soon as I can find my way out of here."

"Keep me informed" the Minister responded "I meanwhile have to go and see our beloved Commander."

"I thought the Prime Minister was in Norway for the week isn't he?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Good God man, I mean the Commander" the Minister responded "Someone with far more power and a damn sight more popular with the public."

"Well last I heard he was digging around on that Embankment case" Sir Richard confirmed.

"At least someone is looking into it" the Minister admitted "For some reason the Administrator General keeps sniffing around but yet when you ask him about the case he feigns disinterest."

"Oh you had noticed that too?" Sir Richard remarked.

"I may be a Minister of Her Majesty's Government and the Commander may have the heads of numerous predecessors mounted trophy like on his wall but I am not as green as I am cabbage looking as my old granny used to say."

"Indeed" Sir Richard agreed "If you will excuse me, I have a hunch to follow."

"I have a hunch to follow" the Minister added "Until later then."

Sir Richard doffed his hat to the Minister before heading for the nearest exit, in the same direction as the Administrator General had departed only to run into a familiar face at the exit in the form of Jennifer Caverner.

"Afternoon Sir" Jennifer called "Nice weather for it."

"If you are a polar bear my dear" Sir Richard responded with a wry smile "You haven't seen the Administrator General by any chance?" he asked.

"I think he just headed out towards Westminster Station" Jennifer responded "Odd though" she remarked "He passed us by without so much as a bye or leave."

"You escorting our beloved Minister by any chance?" Sir Richard asked as he put on his overcoat to protect himself from the wintry weather that was worsening outside.

"Lunch at his club and then I believe we are off to see a certain brother in law of mine" Jennifer responded "At least with this Minister he sees to it his escort officers get a drink at the club."

"Keep an eye on him for me will you?" Sir Richard asked "There is something going on around here and for some reason I haven't been invited to the party."

"I'll see what I can do" Jennifer responded before heading into the interior of the Palace of Westminster whilst Sir Richard exited out into the light snowfall that was once again bringing the centre of London into another bout of cold wintry conditions.

With the few people about all wrapped up heavily against the cold, Sir Richard easily blended into the background as he made his way out of the Palace of Westminster court yard just as the Minister's armoured car swept past him out into Parliament Square and away.

Sir Richard crossed the road and walked briskly towards the main entrance of Westminster Underground station, ascending the steps down into the main ticket hall where he loosened his overcoat, shaking the snow flakes from it before looking around.

To his right in the distance was the long passageway that led to the Victoria Embankment exits and it was with a double take that Sir Richard observed a figure walking away in the distance, his outline silhouetted by the light coming in from the outside.

With a brisk but cautious stride, Sir Richard headed down this passageway from which the figure he had identified had now disappeared having turned right, out of the far exit.

Reaching this far exit brought him to the embankment of the River Thames right in front of Westminster Pier which nestles in the shadow of the bridge and the dominant towering edifice of St Stephens Tower, better known as Big Ben.

Looking around, all Sir Richard could see apart from the haze of snow across the wide expanse of the river, were a few souls walking around, even the usual plethora of tourists had all but stayed away, evidently preferring the warm interior of their hotels to the bleak wintry weather conditions outside.

As he stood on the embankment footpath and leaned on the river side parapet overlooking Westminster Pier, Sir Richard caught sight once again of the Administrator General down on the pier just boarding a river boat as it was preparing to leave.

There was no time to lose, Sir Richard quickly made his way to the entrance to the pier and jogged as best as his health would allow along the link span gang plank down to the mooring pier itself only to see the river ferry pull away almost as he got there and begin its journey down river towards Embankment and Docklands, the Administrator General just visible through the saloon window taking a seat for his journey.

"Now where are you going?" Sir Richard asked himself as he observed the boat head away into the distance before reaching inside his overcoat for his mobile telephone.

"Oh hello...." Fuller remarked to himself as he compared the contents of an old dusty file with what he had just discovered buried deep in a seemingly long forgotten computer file by holding the open folder up against the screen for comparison.

It was with a sneer at the telephone that he greeted its ringing interruption but instead of putting the file down, he merely used the screwdriver he had in his mouth to press the speakerphone button to answer the call.

"Hello?" he called out after spitting the screwdriver out onto the desk, sending it skidding across the surface and onto the floor.

"Afternoon darling" Jennifer called over her hands free communications set from the driver's seat of the Ministerial Escort car which she was driving around Hyde Park Corner before turning left into Park Lane.

"Oh hello love" Fuller's mood brightened significantly at hearing the welcoming voice of his fiancé "What can I do for you?"

"Just thought you would like to meet up for dinner tonight" Jennifer suggested "The Minister is having the evening off and that leaves me with nothing to do."

"Best idea I have heard this week" Fuller agreed "Especially as it's your turn to pay."

"I'll drop by later" Jennifer confirmed "By the way, the Minister is looking for the Commander, I don't suppose you know where he is by any chance?"

"Last reported heading up the Northern Line bound for Hendon" Fuller confirmed "Garage Chief seems to want to speak to him somewhat urgently judging by the number of times he had called" he added as he looked over at the pile of message slips on the far end of the desk as if to emphasise the point.

"I'll see you later" Jennifer confirmed "Love you."

"Love you too!" Fuller responded trying not to look too embarrassed as he realised this conversation had been broadcast over the entire investigation office and everyone was now looking at him with amused grins.

"Could be worse" Jefferies commented as he patted Fuller on the shoulder "At least you didn't accidentally broadcast your proposal of marriage over the entire police radio network!"

"Blimey!" Fuller remarked but was interrupted once again by the telephone which once again he answered on the speakerphone system.

"Hello my love" Fuller answered assuming it was Jennifer again.

"Why Simon, I didn't know you cared" Sir Richard remarked with a chuckle.

"Whoops, sorry!" Fuller responded "I was just talking to the soon to be missus" he explained.

"Don't worry about it" Sir Richard responded "I know of one officer of the law once who proposed to his wife whilst leaving his police radio on system wide broadcast."

"Bye!" Jefferies commented as he decided to make a hasty embarrassed exit.

"Could you put this one on private?" Sir Richard asked when he realised he was being broadcast across the office. Although he trusted all those present, what he was about to ask was more than a little risqué."

"Ok, shoot" Fuller called after he had picked up the receiver.

"I need you to use your specialist skills and do a little digging for me" Sir Richard asked.

"And I take it you want this strictly on the quiet like?" Fuller responded.

"Got in one lad" Sir Richard confirmed as he turned his back on the river to protect himself against the wind which was whipping up a squall of snow into and underneath the pier shelter where he was standing.

"Anyone I know?" Fuller enquired as he grabbed a pen.

"Gerald Forshe" Sir Richard responded fairly quietly after having taken a moment to look around to ensure he was still alone.

"Ger...." Fuller began to respond before a stunned look overcame him and he lowered his head below the top of the computer monitors on his desk "Administrator General Gerald Forshe?" he asked in a voice barely more than a whisper.

"The very same" Sir Richard confirmed "He's been nosing around in this investigation of yours yet publicly makes out he doesn't know anything about it, plus he seems extremely distracted of late."

"I'll see what I can find although I doubt there will be much beyond the official personnel record" Fuller responded as he turned to one of his three computer terminals and began to access various files and other systems.

"Trust me" Sir Richard responded "His name will turn up somewhere, I have a feeling about this."

"Last time you had a feeling about something as I recall, the Commander wound up having to arrest half of the Civil Service" Fuller remarked.

"Hopefully it won't come to that sort of extreme" Sir Richard commented "But I would advise some mutual back watching just in case."

"I'll see what I can find" Fuller announced "Speak to you later Sir" he added before hanging up and setting about his new task with some enthusiasm.

"Next station is Hendon Central" the driver announced over the public address to the scant number of passengers on his six car formation of 1995 tube stock, the cold conditions having killed off the automatic system which meant this was a time for manual announcements.

"We apologise for the delays caused by the inclement weather conditions" the driver added as the train lurched forward jerkily caused by interruptions to the power supply from the ice and snow obstructed electrical conductor rail "This train is a Northern Line service to Edgware.... I hope."

The Commander looked out of the carriage window as the train proceeded onwards along the open air section of the Northern Line, the surrounding area almost bright white with snowfall which contrasted with the skies overhead which were grey and murky.

"Somehow we have made it to Hendon Central" the driver announced with a distinct tone of surprise as he slowed the train on its final approach to the station.

The Commander rose from his seat and stepped over to the doors as the platforms of the station appeared in the saloon windows before the train came to a halt.

"This is Hendon Central" the driver announced to the mere handful of passengers as the Commander reduced the number by one by alighting "Calling at Colindale, Burnt Oak and Edgware with any luck."

Outside on the station platform, the Commander was forced to pull his uniform overcoat in tight around him as protection against the bitter cold wind that was whipping about not only the falling snow but that which was also drifting around.

"Good grief" the only member of station staff on duty in the ticket hall commented as he observed the Commander arrive at the ticket barriers "A genuine bona fide passenger."

"I take it it's been a bit quiet then?" the Commander asked as he passed his warrant card over the reader to pass through the ticket barriers.

"You could say that" the station staff man responded with a wry grin.

"Well don't get too excited as I will be back shortly to double the passenger numbers" the Commander replied with a wry smile.

"I'll keep the lights on then" the station supervisor confirmed gleefully as the Commander left exiting out into the cold snowy conditions once more.

"Have you tried a sledgehammer?" Garley, the Garage Chief asked over the telephone as the Commander entered the side office and knocked quietly on the door.

"If its hooked up that badly, you'll have to knock the front wing off before it will release" Garley informed whoever it was he was having his clearly frustrating conversation with "Well if Jim was the idiot who trashed the motor then he can be the one to go out in the snow and shift it can't he?"

The Commander casually looked around the garage office as Garley continued on the telephone.

It was an office typical of many a car mechanics garage in the land, the Commander thought as he observed the slightly grubby nature of the place complete with oily finger mark stained maintenance manuals, old posters, a dilapidated year planner, a calendar from a car part manufacturer illustrating their wares through the services of a model with no clothes on and four hour old half drunk cups of coffee in chipped and cracked mugs.

"If you see your boss" Garley added "Tell him not to send any more motors out, we've got enough problems scraping what ones are out there off the road as it is, right, bye!"

"Busy day?" the Commander enquired.

"In a manner of speaking Sir" Garley agreed "It's this damm weather, its causing our patrol cars to slide off the road all over the place."

"Glad I took the train then" the Commander remarked "You wanted a word?"

"Oh yes" Garley remembered "Come with me, something you need to see."

The Commander duly followed as Garley led him from the office, across the vast enclosed area of the main workshop where various Security Service vehicles in numerous different states of repair were propped up on jacks and hydraulic lifts, outside and across the main courtyard to a smaller workshop building.

Closing the door behind them, the Commander was unable to see anything in the dark until Garley had switched on the lights, illuminating a scene of a number of damaged and burnt out vehicles in inspection bays, some covered by protective tarpaulins, others fully visible.

"This is the patrol car that got totalled on Victoria Embankment" Garley announced as they walked towards the badly mangled but still recognisable vehicle positioned in one of the inspection bays.

"Now when we went over this last night, nothing really obvious was found to explain how the brakes failed so catastrophically after they were cut" he continued to explain.

"Then we went through the debris which was swept off the road at that location and found this little beauty" he handed the Commander a small clear plastic evidence bag containing what appeared to be a simple small plastic box, barely the size of a small box of matches.

"Well that is impressive" the Commander wryly commented with no idea whatsoever what he was looking at "Err what is it?"

"A work of art Sir" Garley responded almost with admiration "A work of art" he took the object back and held it aloft.

"All right then" the Commander prompted "Acquaint me with this here aforementioned work of art."

"This little beauty" Garley went on to explain "is a radio controlled cutter device which is placed discreetly on the underside of a vehicle in such a way that when activated, slices cleanly through a brake pipe, steering cable or whatever."

"Oh very nice" the Commander mockingly responded.

"Its radio controlled from some form of simple device, probably nothing more than a tiny button mounted in a little box with a low power transmitter" Garley continued "Once pressed, a simple non conductive plastic blade slices across and then the electromagnet is released and it drops away."

"Then I suppose the vehicle travels on for a short distance before its goodnight Vienna" the Commander added thoughtfully.

"Precisely" Garley confirmed.

"These must be pretty rare" the Commander responded as he took the device back to give it a further look.

"A ten year old with a basic knowledge of electronics and a loyalty card at your local model shop could knock something like this up in twenty minutes" Garley responded "Pretty scary when you think about it but they really are quite simple but yet they are also very rare."

"Like how rare?" the Commander asked.

"Up until last night" Garley continued "The only one of these I had ever seen was the best part of fifteen years ago."

"Really?" the Commander remarked.

"Then last night I find this one which led me to a thought over my mug of cocoa" he went on "I remembered you mentioning that there was some journalist who was killed last week or so when he skidded on ice and ploughed his car into a ditch."

"Oh yes" the Commander responded "I had forgotten about him."

"Anyway" Garley continued "When I got in this morning, I gave my opposite number at Surrey Division Accident Investigation a bell and asked if he could send over anything found at that crash site and....." he reached underneath the workbench and produced another evidence bag and held it aloft.

"Now there is a coincidence, or at least there would be if I believed in them" the Commander responded as he recognised a near identical device to the first one in the bag being held up.

"Small world isn't it?" Garley remarked.

"It is indeed" the Commander agreed, "So where did you find the first one?" he asked.

"Well I didn't find it, my old boss did" Garley explained "I was just a junior lad back then you see."

"It was on Metropolitan Division turf then?" the Commander enquired.

"Yep" Garley confirmed "Do you remember a Government junior minister by the name of Dominic Carlson-Browne?"

"Vaguely" the Commander tried to recall events of many years ago "I remember he got mentioned in the papers quite a bit but then sort of disappeared from the political scene."

"Well he was a high flyer in the Ministry of Defence" Garley went on, "You know the sort, young ambitious MP gets first job in a cabinet post and the entire Government thinks the light shines out of his arse."

"Usually they just talk out of them" the Commander added with a chuckle.

"Well anyway" Garley continued "All was fine and dandy for the lad, many even talked about him being a future Prime Minister, however it all came crashing down to earth for him when one of the tabloids discovered that his girlfriend, who happened also to be his personal assistant was the half sister of a big Irish Republican chap that was wanted for terrorism."

"Ouch" the Commander remarked "A classic case of not doing your homework there I reckon."

"Needless to say, with her family ties, especially at that time with the troubles and all that, there was no way he was going to be allowed to stay in the Ministry of Defence" Garley continued "So they basically sent him discretely to the back benches."

"What happened to the girl friend?" the Commander asked.

"No idea" Garley responded "It all went a bit quiet after that until one day his ministerial car blew up with him in it."

"And one of these things was found at the scene?" the Commander asked.

"Got it in one" Garley confirmed "Could be a coincidence though."

"Maybe" the Commander agreed "Still doesn't make me believe in them anymore though."

"Lima Tango Zero One to Control" Tracy called over her radio as she stood just inside the entrance of Covent Garden station "Anyone back there know what this weather is likely to do?" she asked as she looked up at the miserable dark grey sky that was beginning to produce progressively heavier snow falls.

"If the man from the BBC is correct" the Dispatch Officer back at Holborn reported "There is a significant possibility of blizzard like conditions moving in from the south coast into this evening.

"Brilliant" Tracy mockingly responded "Better hope Metronet gets their new snow ploughs out of their wrapping then."

Having given the darkening skies above one last look, Tracy headed inside the station entrance and through the ticket barriers, following the few passengers still around as they waited patiently for one of the three lifts to return to the surface.

After a few moments during which Tracy gauged that the number of people waiting around her would equal a full lift car, she decided to head off to the side and use the spiral staircase, descending the infamous Covent Garden 196 steps to the lower level where she managed to emerge out onto the platform just ahead of the people she had been waiting with for the lift above.

No sooner had Tracy looked up and down the platform to see if any problems were present than a six car train of 1973 type tube stock arrived at the platform with a Piccadilly Line service bound for Arnos Grove.

Above her the electronic next train indicator flashed up a scrolling message advising of delays and cancellations across the Underground network due to the increasingly inclement wintry weather conditions as she stepped forward and boarded the front most carriage and took a standing space near the doors.

With a characteristic bleep, the doors closed and within moments the train was moving off, heading into the dark running tunnel bound for the next stop and Tracy's intended destination of Holborn.

Tracy let her mind wander onto thoughts outside of her work as the train weaved its way around some of the fairly sharp curves but as the train emerged into the curved northbound platform at Holborn, she was brought back to the world by a very sudden jolt as the driver performed an emergency stop, sending passengers including Tracy flying forwards.

"Well that was fun..." Tracy commented to herself as she lay sprawled on the carriage floor before she was helped to her feet by a couple of fellow passengers.

"Thanks" she responded before she checked around to ensure everyone else was all right. Seeing that all of her fellow passengers were fine, Tracy moved to the front of the carriage and used her coach key to open the door to the driver's compartment.

"Afternoon driver" Tracy announced as she joined him in the front cab "Did I miss something?"

"Think this may be one for you" the driver grimly announced as he stood up to allow Tracy to exit from the cab door onto the platform where a crowd was beginning to gather around the front of the train to see what was going on.

"Jimmy!" Tracy called over to the station supervisor who emerged onto the platform somewhat out of breath having just run down two flights of escalators from the ticket hall to see why there was a train stuck half way along the platform "Get some of my lads from over the road down here and keep the crowds back."

"I'll call Line Control as well" the Supervisor responded "This will make their afternoon!"

"Ok ladies and gentlemen" Tracy announced, her uniformed presence aiding in sorting out the crowds as she made her way through them "What do we have here?"

"Looks like a one under to me" one observer commented and it was then as Tracy reached the front of the train she noticed the dent in the cab end bodywork and what appeared to be a booted foot protruding from below in the depths of the track suicide pit.

"Afternoon Maam" a young Transport Division officer announced as he joined her by the platform edge having run all the way across from the Holborn office "Jimmy is closing off the access to the Piccadilly Line platforms as we speak and a Paramedic unit is on the way.

"Lovely" Tracy responded before looking back up at the driver still seated in his cab "Is the power off?" she asked.

"Not yet" the driver confirmed.

"All right, I'll just have to be careful then" Tracy responded with some apprehension as she carefully lowered herself down off the platform and into the suicide pit where she took a moment to look beneath the front of the train before she turned back to the officer above her on the platform.

"Chuck us a torch lad will you?" she requested whereupon the young officer passed down a flash light "And sort this lot out" Tracy indicated the crowds on the platform, "If they saw anything get some details off them, if they didn't get them out of here and onto a bus."

"Yes Maam!" the young officer responded and now joined by three other uniformed colleagues, proceeded to sort out the growing melee of people on the platform.

"Oh hell...." Tracy commented as she switched on the torch and shone it around the front underside of the leading carriage. With a little trepidation, she leaned forward and reached towards the main part of the badly mangled body to see if there was a pulse, expecting not to find one.

"End of the line" she commented with a little sadness as her expectation was duly confirmed and she clambered back up onto the platform where most of the public were now departing under the supervision of a number of uniformed officers.

"I assume he is no longer with us then Maam?" one of the officers asked as he returned to his Commanding Officer by the front of the train.

"I'm afraid so" Tracy grimly confirmed.

"What the?" the Commander commented as the southbound Northern Line Charing Cross branch train pulled to a halt at an extremely crowded Euston Station platform, more so when you consider that there were considerably less people in the City that day than there would normally have been.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control" the Commander called into his radio set as he went up to the carriage doors in the rear car he was travelling in and as they opened, looked down the length of the platform at the massed crowd who, like a tidal wave surged forward to board the service.

"Lima Tango Control receiving go ahead" the dispatcher in the Holborn Control Room responded.

"Anyone got any idea why the entire world and his wife are trying to cram onto the southbound Northern Line at Euston?" the Commander enquired.

"Electrical failure has closed the City branch of the Northern and the Piccadilly is suspended between Kings Cross and Green Park due to a one under at Holborn" the Dispatch Officer confirmed.

"Who's dealing with the one under just out of curiosity?" the Commander asked as he alighted from the train, the space in the doorway that he vacated being immediately filled by several boarders at the same time.

"I believe your good lady wife was on board the train when the incident occurred" the despatch officer confirmed "She just reported the victim as deceased but no identification yet as the London Fire Brigade are still trying to extract the remains out from underneath the train."

"I think I will take the bus" the Commander commented as he looked around the platform as the train, packed to full and standing with passengers perched precariously

on the door opening ledges finally closed its doors on the third attempt before pulling away.

"Guess who?" Jennifer suddenly announced as she crept up behind Fuller and put her hands over his eyes.

"Whoa!" Fuller suddenly jumped, he had been concentrating so intently on what he was doing he had no idea whatsoever she was there.

"Having fun dear?" Jennifer enquired as she looked over his shoulder, pausing for a moment to kiss him on the cheek which cheered him up no end.

"Oh just the usual" Fuller commented as he browsed through file lists on the computer "It would appear that various parties want me to access various information about other parties but not let anyone else know that I am doing it."

"Sounds intriguing" Jennifer commented as she pulled up a chair and sat down alongside him.

"Whilst finding the files isn't all that difficult if you know the way certain people file these things, and believe me I do" Fuller responded "Accessing them without anyone else finding out you are nosing around in places where they would rather you didn't isn't quite so easy."

"Well that doesn't look promising at all" Jennifer commented as a large red message appeared on the screen.

"Blast" Fuller remarked as he too saw the message appear although his expertise meant he did not need to actually read it to know what it said. "I need my equipment in Holborn for this job, I don't suppose you know anyone with a fast car and the means to drive it by any chance?"

"Travelling fast is my speciality" Jennifer remarked "Let me take you for a ride."

"I bet you say that to all your clients" Fuller responded with a smirk as he gathered up his various papers and together they left the office.

"Thanks for the lift guys" the Commander responded as he alighted from the London Underground Emergency Response Unit vehicle as it parked up outside the now taped off main entrance to Holborn Underground Station with the snowfall now noticeably increasing.

"Afternoon fellas" the Commander commented as he passed through the ticket hall "Nice weather for it" he added as he headed on through the open ticket barriers and down the escalators, quickly followed by the Emergency Response Unit personnel in their overalls and with their toolkits in hand.

The Commander duly made his way to the right at the bottom of the main flight of escalators and then down the shorter Piccadilly line escalators to the north bound platform which was a bustling area of emergency service and London Underground personnel milling around the front of the train which was now illuminated with the assistance of large portable halogen lamps.

"You are a sight for sore eyes love" Tracy remarked as she greeted the Commander with a warm embrace "This one is a right nasty mess."

"Any identification?" the Commander asked looking on at the front of the train at a distance. Being squeamish at the sight of blood and gore meant he was going to keep his distance from the scene.

"Well I can tell you his boot size is an eleven" Tracy responded as they both looked back at the scene where the Underground Response Unit personnel were preparing to jack up the front of the train "Apart from that, we will have to wait until they pull him out of there."

"Yuck" the Commander remarked "Come on, lets get out of here."

The two officers, arm in arm turned to leave and were just about to exit from the platform when the Fire Brigade Chief called them back.

"Commander!" he called from his position on the track in front of the train that was now starting to raise itself from the rails with the assistance of the portable jacks.

"Yes?" both Tracy and the Commander turned around and responded in unison.

"Got a name for you on this one" the Fire Brigade Chief replied, proffering a blood stained wallet in his hand.

"Enlighten us please" the Commander gestured.

"Here you go" the Fire Officer responded as he accurately threw the wallet towards them whereupon Tracy easily caught it.

"How do you do that?" the Commander asked Tracy as she smirked in triumph.

"Not only was I the under sixteen girls county motor cross champion three years running, I was also pretty damm good at cricket as well" she explained before her look of triumph changed to one of near shock when she opened the wallet and looked at the identification available inside.

"What is it?" the Commander asked, quickly seeing her change of mood whereupon she passed the wallet to him.

"I think you mean who" Tracy remarked "You are not going to like the answer though."

"Oh hell" the Commander responded as he too saw the identification "Old man Jefferies" he confirmed although Tracy was surprised by the Commander's lack of emotional outburst at the news.

"I'm so sorry" Tracy comforted the Commander "I don't know what to say."

"We will start with how come he appears to have wound up picking an argument with a Piccadilly Line train and lost, and then go from there" the Commander grimly confirmed as he and Tracy turned to leave "Can I borrow your office?" he asked "I need to make a couple of urgent telephone calls."

"Well I was born in Eastbourne" Fuller stated "So why don't we have the wedding down there."

"I suppose it depends on how much family you have" Jennifer responded as she drove through the centre of London around Trafalgar Square, the lights illuminating the National Gallery on the north side of the square also shining through the heavy snow fall which was depositing a thick layer on the roads and surrounding ground despite the best efforts of the area Highways Department to try and keep it clear.

"Slight problem there" Fuller responded "I don't actually have any family, now I come to think of it, there are not exactly a huge amount of friends either."

"Could be interesting in the Church then" Jennifer mused as they entered the near deserted Strand heading towards the Aldwych "Packed on one side and near deserted on the other."

"I'll think of something" Fuller replied "I may well have a best man sorted though."

"Who?" Jennifer asked.

"The Commander" Fuller replied "About the only choice I had really."

"Should be interesting" Jennifer remarked just as they were overtaken around the Aldwych by another Security Service vehicle travelling at quite some speed.

"Is it shift change time?" Fuller asked as they observed the van with its lights and sirens in full cry, proceed apace up Kingsway towards Holborn where in the distance, a number of emergency service vehicle flashing lights could be seen at top end where High Holborn crosses outside the station.

"Looks like something is up" Jennifer agreed as she accelerated to try and catch up to the scene.

"What the hell's going on here?" Fuller asked as they parked up on the periphery of the gathered vehicles outside the station which had become a hive of intense activity.

"Well the forensics guys are here" Jennifer commented as they got out of the car and surveyed the scene "and so are our two favourite Commanding Officers" she indicated Tracy and the Commander as they emerged arm in arm out into the twilight.

"You look like you have had a hell of a day" Jennifer commented as the two couples met on the pavement immediately outside the main station entrance.

"Let's just say things have taken a bit of a turn" Tracy remarked grimly.

"Jennifer" the Commander addressed her firmly "The two officers you had as an escort for Jefferies, have them found and brought to Tracy's office now please."

"I'm missing something here aren't I?" Jennifer remarked as the Commander walked off towards the Holborn Transport Division offices on the opposite side of the road, his back hunched and his hands behind his back, a sure sign he was not at all happy about something.

"Jefferies is the body currently redecorating the underside of the train back there" Tracy explained.

"Victor Pappa X-Ray Zero One to Control" Jennifer immediately all but shouted into her radio, clearly furious that something had gone badly wrong with something that fell under her jurisdiction.

"Go ahead boss" the officer on duty in the VIP Protection Division office responded, evidently unaware of the storm approaching.

"Patch me through to Brian and Alex pronto" Jennifer demanded as she marched on in pursuit of the Commander with Tracy and Fuller in a fairly quick pursuit.

"Victor Pappa X-Ray One One Zero" one of the officers Jennifer was seeking responded, the call echoing around the reception area of the Transport Division offices as she passed through like a battle ship in full sail with Tracy and Fuller struggling to keep up just behind her.

"Is that moron number two?" Jennifer demanded to know "Well put moron number one on the radio!" she called as she entered the lift where the Commander was holding the doors open, unusually for him not taking the stairs that day.

"Err yes Maam?" the second officer responded, his worried tone of voice clearly echoing around the lift car which was now ascending to the fifth floor.

"You two brains of Britain better get your backsides to the Command Office at the Transport Division offices right now unless you want to spend the rest of your careers directing traffic on the island of Sark" Jennifer demanded.

"We are on our way Maam" the officer confirmed over the radio as the lift doors opened and Jennifer marched on ahead straight to her sister Tracy's office where she sat down on the couch on one side of the office, her facial expression one clearly of steaming fury.

"Coffee" Tracy whispered aside to Fuller "Lots of it" she advised nodding at her fuming sister.

"Right" Fuller agreed as he smiled meekly at his fiancé.

"I'll come with you" the Commander agreed "There may well be an explosion in here in a minute."

"I'll just be outside" Tracy added as she too decided on a discrete retreat out of the potential blast range "Don't worry, I'll still be within earshot."

"That would be anywhere within a ten mile radius then" the Commander remarked with a bit of a smile, the best he could manage as the three regrouped outside with Tracy carefully closing the office door behind her.

"I think I may have found your missing connection between the Embankment murder victims" Fuller announced as the three officers headed down the corridor towards the staff canteen at the other end.

"Interesting" the Commander remarked as they entered the canteen, quite busy with numerous officers on rest breaks, the numbers had been swelled however with extra ones who had finished their shifts but had decided not to venture home in the inclement weather that was building incessantly outside.

"Line them up Doris" Tracy called to the canteen assistant at the beverages counter whereupon three steaming mugs of tea were duly produced and the Commander helped himself to his customary four sugars.

"Mind if I join you?" the friendly voice of Sir Richard Crowthorne enquired as he joined them whereupon Doris the canteen assistant duly produced a coffee for him as if on automatic.

"Join the party" Tracy motioned towards a vacant table over by the window.

"Heard the news?" the Commander asked Sir Richard as they all sat down around the table.

"Had a flash notification on my pager about fifteen minutes ago" Sir Richard indicated the little electronic paging device on the inside of his jacket pocket "I was due to come over here anyway as I wanted a word with young Mr Fuller here."

"You want an invite to the wedding?" Fuller asked.

"You've set a date?" Sir Richard raised a surprised eyebrow "I'm stunned."

"Gather around ladies and gentlemen" Fuller announced as he placed a newly printed file on the desk "For here in lies the answer to the immortal question of life, the universe and everything or to be more precise, the connection between the various victims of the Embankment murders."

"Oh do tell" the Commander responded.

"When the original investigation took place, there was nothing like the computerisation of records that we have today" Fuller explained "Couple that with the fact that the one piece of paper that mentions everyone in the same place had enough 'D' notices slapped on it to sink a small army and you can understand why the answer was more than a tad elusive."

"And..." Tracy prompted.

"All of the original victims appear on this list" Fuller held up a rather aged yellow piece of poorly type written paper for their inspection "This is a list of witnesses interviewed following an apparent road traffic accident that occurred one night between Cleopatra's Needle and Embankment Underground Station."

"I don't suppose you could make my day and tell me that this was that strange accident involving some high flying MP about sixteen years ago perchance?" the Commander asked, recalling what Garley had told him a couple of hours earlier.

"How did you know that?" Fuller all but demanded to know.

"A little bird with a large spanner" the Commander explained cryptically.

"Anyway" Fuller continued "The case file was sealed with a hefty 'D' notice twenty four hours after the incident and the whole record of the investigation was locked away in a vault where it remained until about lunchtime when I dragged it back into the daylight."

"Well done" the Commander agreed before turning to Sir Richard "Anything to add me old china, this sounds like your sort of specialty."

"I vaguely remember it" Sir Richard recalled "I was heading up Northern Ireland intelligence at the time and it was the talk of the office that some minister in the Ministry of Defence had been screwing his secretary, all fairly legit and above board as they were both single though."

"Unusual for politicians not to be having an affair these days" Tracy remarked sarcastically.

"It all got blown out of the water" Sir Richard continued "when one of the red top tabloids was about to reveal that this MP's bird was the sister in law or something of a high ranking chap in the Irish Republican movement which made for a major security breach."

"Didn't the story get pulled before the first editions had barely hit the street?" Tracy recalled.

"Prime Minister went nuts when she heard about it" Sir Richard remarked "I remember the heated telephone conversation to my boss was loud and very direct. As

soon as he had managed to get his breath back, an armada of 'D' notices were launched, the MP in question was given extended gardening leave and the young Irish lady was never seen again."

"Get in here!" Jennifer's voice echoed loud and clear from down the corridor, clearly announcing to anyone within earshot that the two officers in trouble had arrived.

"Showtime" the Commander announced as he rose from his seat "If you hear the sound of blood curdling screams, come running."

"Officers Daventry and Moore" Jennifer announced to the Commander as he slightly tentatively entered the office where he found her staring intently and angrily at the two young officers who had been summoned thereto and were understandably looking somewhat nervous.

"Have you explained the reason for their presence?" the Commander casually yet firmly enquired.

"I thought I'd let you have that pleasure" Jennifer announced "I'll just sit here and fume a little."

"Gentlemen" the Commander announced firmly as he stood behind Tracy's desk and looked them square in the eyes "You two have some very fast explaining to do."

"Sir?" one of the officers enquired, still not entirely sure what was happening here.

"Stop me if I get anything wrong" the Commander continued "You two were assigned the close protection duty of escorting retired Divisional Commander Edward Jefferies, correct?"

"Yes Sir" the two officers quickly confirmed.

"So could you two gentlemen please explain to me how come the aforementioned gentleman is apparently now to be found in a deceased state and will be spending the evening in Northfields Depot having various bits of him jet washed off the underside of a tube train?" the Commander enquired intently.

The two officers looked at each other in a clear sense of bewilderment and shock before one of them prepared to explain himself.

"There is a logical explanation" one of the officers began.

"I'm all ears" the Commander prompted.

"We were assigned as you correctly stated Sir to the close protection of Mr Jefferies whenever he was outside of a Security Service building or premises" the officer explained "We stuck to him like glue until we were relieved by two colleagues at four o'clock."

"Hang on a minute" Jennifer interrupted, now slightly calmer although it was obvious that deep down she was still angry "What relief?"

"The two guys from the Met that showed up outside this place" the officer explained "They showed us authorisation too."

"I don't suppose they gave you a copy by any chance?" the Commander asked.

"Err no" the other officer responded "But it was signed and looked legitimate."

"Signed by whom?" Jennifer enquired.

"Yourself boss" the officer responded, understandably confused by the whole turn of events "and the Administrator General."

"Simon!!" the Commander yelled down the corridor having walked up to the office door, opened it and poked his head out into it.

"You yelled Sir?" Fuller responded as he poked his head into the corridor from his office doorway.

"Take your fiancé away for some very strong coffee" the Commander called "Then get your box of ticks working, we have work to do!"

"Holy...." the Administrator General began to comment to himself as he read through the incident report sheet in the main Control Room at New Scotland Yard where he had just read about the demise of Jefferies.

"I'm err heading out for a while" he informed the Control Room Supervisor as he pulled on his uniform overcoat and made a discrete yet hasty exit before the Supervisor could even respond.

In the corridor outside, the Administrator General hurried along to the lift before entering the lift car and pressing the button for the ground floor lobby whereupon the doors serenely closed.

It was only a matter of a minute or two before the Administrator General was making his way outside into the street in front of the main New Scotland Yard building. He barely noticed the heavy snowfall, the comparatively empty street or the fact that the famous rotating sign had now frozen to a complete halt yet again as he crossed the road and made directly for the entrance to St James Park Underground Station nearby.

The station itself was as quiet as the street outside as the service available on the sub-surface District and Circle Lines was at best patchy because of the wintry weather.

Therefore when the Administrator General arrived on the westbound platform, he found himself alone and having to wait in the draughty and dingy atmosphere which

meant he was reduced to casually pacing up and down the hard surface, his expensive black uniform shoes making a prominent tapping sound as he walked about.

After a few minutes, the faint echoes of an approaching train began to become audible from the tunnel portal to his right accompanied by an increase in the draft flowing through the station as a result of the air being pushed forwards in front of the imminently due service.

"This train is all stations to Earls Court" the unseen station assistant announced over the tannoy from the refuge of his warm control room on the ground level above "Change at Earls Court for services to Edgware Road and Wimbledon but please note that there is a very limited service westwards to Hammersmith and Acton Town with services to Kensington Olympia currently suspended."

"Oh joy...." the Administrator General remarked to himself as he examined the chocolate vending machine on the platform wall only to find it was out of order, most likely frozen solid by the cold weather.

As the six car train of newly refurbished 'D' type sub-surface stock arrived in the platform, the noise of its arrival disguised the additional arrival of two men onto the platform at the end furthest from the Administrator General.

No passengers alighted from the train when the doors were opened but the Administrator General quickly boarded the third car from the front whilst the other two gentlemen boarded near the drivers cab.

It was a matter of moments before the doors hissed with air as they closed and the train moved off, heading westwards towards the next stop at Victoria.

"Snowbound" read the headline across the front page of the discarded copy of that day's Evening Standard newspaper that the Administrator General picked up. "Travel routes jammed, Londoners advised not to travel unless absolutely essential" the sub headlines announced.

"Nice weather for Polar Bears isn't it?" one of the two men announced as they appeared in the car by way of the connecting doorway and in a calm but business like manner, each took a seat either side of the Administrator General.

"This meeting is ill advised I would have thought?" the Administrator General suggested.

"It's not like they are packing them in is it?" the second man remarked as he looked around the near deserted carriage.

"You have a point" the Administrator General was forced to admit as he folded the newspaper and placed it on his lap.

"Our sponsors our expressing certain concerns about the way things are progressing" the first man announced "One aspect of this problem has now been taken care of however."

"I just heard" the Administrator General responded, a hint of discomfort prevalent in his voice "Your handy work by any chance?"

"Chalk that one up to a couple of my associates" the first man admitted "Pretty impressive mind but unfortunately it does not entirely eliminate the problem."

"In what way exactly?" the Administrator General asked, barely able to disguise his nervousness.

"We need the Commander's investigation to come to a halt and for the whole matter, any witnesses and any paperwork to disappear and remain that way for ever more" the man explained "We buried it fifteen years ago but apparently not deep enough."

"Most of the key evidence is buried so deep in 'D' notices it will never see the light of day again this side of doomsday" the Administrator General remarked.

"Don't be so sure" the man responded "Need I remind you that much of that information has your name and that of a couple of my associates all over it. Are you willing to take the risk?"

"Of course not" the Administrator General reluctantly admitted as the train slowed for its arrival at Victoria Station.

"Very well then" the man continued after a brief pause to ensure that they were not joined by any additional passengers at Victoria who could have overheard this clandestine conversation "You find out exactly how the investigation is going and then you will meet with my superior at the usual address at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning, and please do be on time otherwise it is likely to be something a damn sight more painful than a snowball that will be slung at you."

"I am not sure I can really get hold of that kind of information" the Administrator General protested as the train continued on its journey, the next station being Sloane Square "The Commander and his team tend to keep these things very close knit and this may be a party to which I am not invited, hell I reckon he is probably getting suspicious of how many times I am turning up already."

"Irrespective of that my friend" the man continued with an insistent tone "If you want to ensure that your name does not appear all over the press in not the prettiest of lights, you need to ensure that you find out what is going on and get that information to us as agreed."

There was an awkward silence as the Administrator General looked down at the floor of the carriage whilst he considered his position in this difficult matter. Meanwhile the two men continued to remain seated casually either side of him, always looking forwards with no eye contact being made between any of them throughout the entire conversation.

“I’ll find out what I can” the Administrator General finally agreed reluctantly as the train pulled into Sloane Square and the two men either side of him got up from their seats.

“Excellent” the first man agreed “Until tomorrow then, have a pleasant evening” he signed off before they both left, alighting onto the platform where the doors of the train quickly closed behind them and departed as quickly as it had arrived in an attempt to maintain the timetable in the current difficult weather conditions.

“Do you really think he will come up with the goods?” the second man asked the first as they stood on the platform and watched the red tail lamps of the train disappear into the far distance of the dark running tunnel.

“What choice does he have mate?” the first man responded “If he wants to stay alive, I can’t see how he can do anything else.”

A whistling could be heard echoing from above as the two men stood on the platform which proved to be from a blue uniformed Underground station worker who appeared down the escalator from the surface at that point on a routine check of the platform.

“Come on, lets get out of here” the first man called to his associate and together they casually departed up the exit steps.

Unnoticed by them as they departed, the Underground worker stopped at the bottom of the escalator and looked back behind him at the two men as they disappeared from view at the top into the ticket hall above.

“Eagle Six One to Control” the Underground employee called into a discreetly hidden radio set within his uniform coat “Targets three and four just left the westbound at Sloane Square, Alpha One is still on the train.”

“Heavy snowfalls continue to cause major disruption to transport links and roads throughout London and the South East of England” the news presenter on BBC News 24 announced over the television in Tracy’s office where the Commander was on the couch fast asleep with Tracy in his arms alongside him.

Tracy herself was barely awake, just managing to keep an eye on the news broadcast as it continued to relate the current weather and travel situation, backed up by pictures of snow clogged roads, trains and buses stuck in depots and the standard warning to all travellers not to go out unless absolutely essential.

They too were stuck as a result of this weather, the roads around Holborn were virtually impassable, the buses were off the road and the Underground system bar a few stretches here and there had virtually given up for the night meaning they were going to have to spend the night in Tracy’s office.

“The time is just coming up to five to midnight” the news presenter continued “We will have the latest news headlines on the hour but first the weather with Helen Willets.”

“Let me guess” the Commander remarked sleepily having woken up a bit “snow, snow and if you are really unlucky, snow.”

“Welcome back” Tracy remarked as the couple kissed each other before she got up to allow her husband to wearily get to his feet with some assistance from her.

“Did I miss much?” the Commander asked as he stretched before going over to the window and looking down on the Christmas card like picture of the deserted streets of central London covered in snow as far as the eye could see.

“It’s snowing” Tracy admitted “But then again that was probably stating the obvious, oh and someone tried to break into Harrods earlier.”

“You would have thought on a night like this that the great and good of the City’s criminal fraternity would think twice and slink off to the comfort of nice warm boozers wouldn’t you?” the Commander remarked as Tracy joined him at the window and put her arms around him.

“I think most of them have” she remarked “Apart from a bit of a barney down on the Euston Road, its been one of the quietest nights in the Control Room for years.”

“Is there any cocoa in this place?” the Commander asked as he looked around in hopeful anticipation.

“Let’s try the canteen” Tracy suggested and together they headed out of the office, however they had only made it down the corridor as far as Fuller’s office when they stopped and peered inside at the strange glow that was coming from the computers illuminating an otherwise dark room.

“Has he been at it all night?” the Commander asked as he and Tracy saw Fuller had fallen asleep on his keyboard whilst the computer merrily carried on with the lengthy task he had set for it unabated.

“I think so” Tracy confirmed “And all day as well.”

“I’ll give him his due” the Commander admitted “He’s dedicated all right.”

“Come on” Tracy urged “I believe you mentioned something about cocoa.”

“Where’s Jennifer and Sir Richard?” the Commander asked as they turned into the darkened canteen and Tracy proceeded to fiddle about in an attempt to find the light switch.

“Jennifer has taken the bungle brothers back to her head office for a full and no doubt painful debrief” Tracy explained from a dark corner as amidst a crash of tin trays

hitting the floor she finally found the light switch “Ah here it is!” she announced as she managed to switch on the lights.

“Let there be light” the Commander remarked.

“Sir Richard meanwhile is probably struggling through the snow back to his office I think” Tracy added as she went over to the beverages counter and ascertained as to whether the urn was either switched on or indeed even had any water in it.

“I got the impression that between him and Fuller” the Commander commented as he watched Tracy attempting to locate a couple of mugs for the planned cocoa “They seem to have a couple of hunches that may be on opposite ends of the same stick.”

“Well we will find out in the morning” Tracy responded “Fuller wants a meeting with the entire investigation team first thing.”

“Are you having problems love?” the Commander enquired as he saw Tracy struggling with the urn trying to get any hot water out of it.

“Weird” Tracy remarked as with a hastily administered slap to the side of the machine, she finally managed to make it work “Usually it is you who has trouble with anything vaguely resembling modern technology.”

“You can say that again” the Commander was forced to admit.

“And it looks like we are out of cocoa” Tracy was forced to admit “Hot chocolate for that matter as well. Will tea suffice dear?”

“That will do nicely” the Commander confirmed.

“Find yourself a table and if you are very lucky I might even find some biscuits” Tracy announced as she duly launched two teabags into two mugs.

The Commander gave Tracy a wink before heading across the canteen dining area to the window that looked out on the quiet dark and snow covered city scape outside, only the lights from a few street lamps and buildings providing any illumination as there were no vehicles on the streets that night.

Removing the chairs from his chosen table and placing them on the floor, he was soon joined by Tracy who brought over the two steaming mugs of tea, the tags from the teabags still hanging over the side.

“Could be a potential crisis here” the Commander announced as he looked at the empty pot beside him “No sugar!”

“I’ll be right back love” Tracy responded with a sense of urgency as she headed back to the serving area.

The Commander contemplated recent events as he looked out of the window at the snow still falling outside when Tracy returned and duly placed the only sugar she

could find, a huge ten pound catering pack of the stuff onto the table, landing with a hell of a thud.

“This enough for you?” she asked with a cheery laugh.

“Only about two days supply there I would have thought” the Commander remarked, self mocking his well known appetite for at least four sugars in every cup of tea and often more than that.

“Anyway” the Commander continued as he lifted the tag from the mug “Since when did we start using teabags in the Service Canteens?”

“Standard issue these days” Tracy mused as she sat down opposite him.

“Teabags” the Commander mockingly mused as he removed and squeezed the offending device from his cup “It’s the end of civilisation as we know it, you mark my words.”

“You still haven’t talked about Jefferies” Tracy changed the subject. She could see though that the Commander had been hiding his feelings about the death of his old friend and confidant behind the bluster.

“I know” the Commander reluctantly responded after his first gulp of tea “It’s just when it comes to things like death I tend to try and ignore them, hope they will go away, besides there is a bit more to this than meets the eye.”

“But this time it’s you adopted father, your old boss and someone you have known since you were what twelve years old?” Tracy responded “If I was in your position right now, I would be tearing this town apart looking for those responsible.”

“That comes in the morning love” the Commander calmly responded with a knowing smile “As soon as we have got all the facts in one place, I am confident that whoever is behind all of this will soon show themselves.”

“You sound like you know the answer to this little puzzle already” Tracy remarked.

“I don’t have all the pieces just yet” the Commander had to admit “But when I do, someone will be getting a very unpleasant visit” he grinned almost with welcome anticipation.

Some miles away across the city, a visibly nervous Administrator General had returned to his office in New Scotland Yard. His attempts to return home eventually were thwarted just beyond Earls Court when the Underground network had to surrender to the onslaught of the weather conditions and all but gave up for the night.

It was now approaching one o’clock in the morning, a fact confirmed when the desk lamp he switched on illuminated the old gold engraved carriage clock on the side board as the Administrator General sat down.

He swivelled his chair around to the window and raised the Venetian blind so that he could look out from the top floor of New Scotland Yard across towards Big Ben and the familiar skyline of Westminster and beyond that the south embankment of the River Thames with the prominent circular feature of the London Eye Ferris wheel.

A stiff drink seemed to be a good idea to him at that point as he reached across to the side table and poured himself an extra large whisky from the crystal glass decanter and managed to down the entire glass full in almost one gulp.

He certainly had the appearance of a man for whom an old can of worms had suddenly returned to haunt him. Up until a few days ago he was fine, in control and responsible for the overseeing of the entire Security Service across the region but now none of that seem to matter anymore as he realised that events were now controlling him, not the other way around.

How soon would it be before someone found out what he was involved with all those years ago? This was the thought that crossed his mind predominantly but in the back of his thoughts was a possibility that maybe, just maybe he could at least cover some of the worst aspects of it.

With this latter thought in mind, he turned back to his desk where he unlocked and opened the bottom right hand drawer from where he extracted a small notebook and an old dusty manila coloured folder which he placed together on the desk.

Quickly he thumbed through the notebook clearly looking for something specific in amongst its hand written pages, many of them creased and faded with age until he stopped and ran his finger down one page where he found what he was looking for.

“One Get out of Jail Free card!” the Administrator General declared to himself with a little triumph, allowing himself a bit of a smile for the first time in three or four days.

Quickly he pushed the notebook into his inside tunic pocket before taking the manila folder under his arm and rising from his seat.

Switching off the desk lamp once again brought the office back into total darkness save for the shaft of light from the doorway as he discreetly left, closing the door behind him quietly so as not to attract the attention of the few officers around the building to his unusual late night presence.

The records office on the floor below was his next destination with the manila folder still snugly tucked under his arm. He decided it was prudent to take the fire stairs down the one level and checked carefully before exiting from the stair well into the corridor that he was still alone.

As with much of the rest of the building, the records office was deserted with the Security Service night shift working on a skeleton crew as many officers had been trapped in the terrible weather conditions and had been unable to make it in.

Once inside and with the door carefully closed behind him, the Administrator General went over to the paper shredding machine and had got as far as putting the leading edge of the file into the machine when suddenly the power went out, stopping the machine and plunging the entire building into darkness until the emergency lights came on a few moments later.

In the deadly silence, the only sound audible to the Administrator General was his own pounding heartbeat and heavy breathing. Realising his predicament, he attempted to remove the file from the shredder but the leading edge was already firmly stuck in the blades and it refused to move.

Suddenly, voices could be heard in the corridor outside and the Administrator General quickly realised he needed to make a quick exit as the one thing he most certainly did not want was to be caught in the presence of this file.

As the voices outside in the corridor faded away into the distance, he took his chance to quietly leave the room and disappear unseen down the corridor to the fire exit where upon he took the stairs down to the back exit from the building in Victoria Street and quickly left, completely failing to notice that behind him, it was obvious that only the floor he had just been on appeared to be without power.

Back in the records office, Sir Richard Crowthorne stepped out from the shadows of a row of document shelves and went over to the shredding machine which he switched off at the wall plug before producing from his inside pocket his mobile telephone.

"Terry" he called over the telephone after having speed dialled a number and being answered "As soon as he is clear, you can put the power back on."

"Right boss" Sir Richard's associate responded as he pulled the trip switches in the power room downstairs back into the on position.

As soon as the light and power were restored, Sir Richard put the controls on the shredder into reverse before switching on the plug again, allowing him to easily extract the file from the jaws of the shredding blades without further damage.

"Who's been a naughty boy then?" Sir Richard remarked to himself as he flicked through the slightly damaged but still clearly readable pages of the file before leaving the room.

The Control Room at Holborn seemed fairly busy when the Commander poked his head around the door at just before six o'clock in the morning where he found Tracy standing in for an unavailable early morning duty shift supervisor at the main control console.

"So when can we expect to hear from the work crews at Amersham?" Tracy asked over the telephone "Well we need to know what the situation is going to be like on the Metropolitan Line before the morning rush is scheduled to start in case I have to get my guys to placate any cheesed off commuters."

The Commander discreetly sidled up to the side of Tracy and took the seat alongside her as she continued to ascertain just how badly snarled up with overnight snow the lines north of Finchley Road were.

"Thank you" Tracy responded before hanging up, whereupon she leaned over the console and tapped one of the dispatch officers in front of her on the shoulder.

"Yes Maam?" the dispatch officer responded.

"Looks like there will be very little west of Wembley Central moving before seven at the very earliest" Tracy informed him "Ask the Harrow office to get as many bodies as they can to the stations along that section, especially Uxbridge as its likely to get lively."

"Looks like it is going to be a fun morning" the Commander commented as he gave Tracy a quick hug.

"Half the Piccadilly is frozen solid, the Northern Line is a mess, the District and Hammersmith & City are sporadic at best, the East London is shut" Tracy recounted the tale of woe "Half of the city's bus drivers are stuck in the snow but at least the Victoria Line is working until it gets shut down because of overcrowding."

"I know you will handle it in your usual tactful and diplomatic manner" the Commander reassured her.

"I'll try not to shoot anyone then" Tracy responded with a wry smile.

"Well it would help, we are spending a fortune on ammunition across the service" the Commander responded before leaning across and kissing her "I'll see you later love."

"You still owe me lunch by the way!" Tracy called after her husband as he left the control room, prompting him to double back and pop his head back around the door post.

"Lunch, right, I'll sort something out" the Commander responded with some enthusiasm "See you later."

"What do you reckon?" Jennifer asked her colleague as she drove the ministerial car through the leafy suburbs of Kensington & Chelsea where despite the best efforts of the highways department to keep the worst of the snow clear overnight, she still had to call upon all her advanced driving skills to keep the car straight on the slush and snow covered road surface.

"Grumpy or extremely grumpy?" Jennifer added.

"Given that we are about to turn up unannounced at his door with a demand for his appearance from higher authorities" her colleague mused "I am willing to bet we will be looking at the extreme end of extremely grumpy."

"You can knock on the door then" Jennifer announced as she pulled the car up to the front door of a Georgian style town house, one of a number of similar expensive apartment like houses in this exclusive part of the city.

"Yes Maam" the officer confirmed with a little reluctance as he got out of the car, adjusted his uniform and proceeded purposefully towards the front door.

The old style pull down handle for the bell elicited a distant ringing sound of a bell somewhere deep inside the property and after a few moments, a butler of traditional appearance opened the door.

"Yes?" the butler enquired in a polite but low key manner.

"The Director General of the Security Service Sir Richard Crowthorne requests the urgent presence of the right honourable Secretary of State for National Security at New Scotland Yard at the earliest opportunity" the officer announced.

"Oh he's gong to love that" the Butler responded "A few moments please" he added as he closed the door again.

"Now what?" the officer asked as he turned back to Jennifer who was now out of the car and standing by the front, polishing the front chrome work with her handkerchief.

"We wait" Jennifer confirmed "Give it ten minutes" she added.

"Thirty minutes" the Butler confirmed once he had reopened the door but before either of the two officers could offer a response the door was firmly if politely closed again.

"Terrific" Jennifer responded with some hint of irritation in her voice before she reached inside the driver's side window and retrieved her radio set.

"Victor Pappa X-Ray Zero One to Control" Jennifer called over the radio "Charlie? Are you there?"

"Control receiving, go ahead" came the response.

"Put that mug of coffee down and get on the telephone to Sir Richard" Jennifer requested "Let him know we are going to be at least half an hour late as the Minister is having his breakfast."

"I'll pass on the message Maam" the officer back at the Control Room responded.

"What do you suppose the chances of a cup of tea are?" the officer with Jennifer wondered.

"About as remote a chance as any of us finishing at a sensible hour tonight I should reckon" Jennifer mused.

"Come in" the Commander called from his desk as he heard the polite knock on the door. He looked up when the office door opened to see Sir Richard Crowthorne make a discrete entrance.

"Good morning Commander" Sir Richard announced his presence as he arrived in the office, making a careful point of closing the door behind him.

"Take a seat" the Commander gestured to the seat in front of the desk, "Help your self to some of the Administrator General's whisky, I liberate a bottle from his collection whenever I am in his office."

"Oh" Sir Richard looked at the bottle before pouring himself a glass "This is the good stuff."

"Enjoy" the Commander prompted.

"To absent friends" Sir Richard raised his glass as he sat down.

"Indeed" the Commander agreed as he raised his already half drunk mug of tea "I take it you didn't just sidle into Scotland Yard at this early hour just to snaffle a free drink?"

"Correct" Sir Richard confirmed as he lifted up and placed on the desk his briefcase which he proceeded to open. From inside it he produced the file he had rescued from the shredder in the early hours of that morning, now contained inside a protective plastic evidence bag, and placed it on the desk in front of the Commander.

"That looks like its seen a fair bit of mileage" the Commander commented as he put down the paperwork he had been working on, moved the small square gold framed reading glasses to the end of his nose and peered over them quizzically at the file.

"Actually I should think that in the last few hours that file has probably clocked up more mileage than it has ever done before" Sir Richard explained "I suspect that until a certain senior officer of our mutual acquaintance tried to dispose of this in the early hours of this morning, it had been nestling safe, secure and no doubt as far as he was concerned, hopefully long forgotten in the bottom drawer of his desk."

"May I?" the Commander indicated the file.

"Help yourself" Sir Richard replied "You may need one of these afterwards though" he indicated his whisky glass, the contents of which he then proceeded to finish off with a flourish.

"What happened to this then?" the Commander asked as he carefully removed the file from the protective bag and noted the ragged leading edge.

"It had a close encounter with a shredder" Sir Richard explained slightly elusively "The encounter in question being interrupted at the crucial moment by one of those very localised power cuts that I seem to be very experienced at arranging."

"Message received and understood" the Commander responded before reading the faded front cover of the file "Operation Cleopatra?" he asked.

"A little black operation from the early 1980's" Sir Richard explained.

"One from your Department?" the Commander asked "Or are we into the territory of supervising Civil Servants and associated pond life?"

"Definitely not one of mine" Sir Richard reassured "This unpleasant bunch specialised in ensuring that there were no security leaks within Government Departments, especially the MOD, Home Office, etc."

"Anything where security sensitive information was usually left lying around on the tables of the staff canteen then" the Commander remarked with a smirk "Would I be right to assume that at some point along this line of enquiry the name of a now deceased Member of Parliament assigned to the Ministry of Defence with an unfortunately connected Irish lady personal assistant will enter the conversation?"

"Hence 'Cleopatra' got her name" Sir Richard explained "That was where that guy's car mysteriously crashed, right in front of Cleopatra's Needle."

"And a stones throw away from Embankment Tube Station" the Commander added.

"For a man who doesn't believe in coincidences" Sir Richard remarked "You must be seriously intrigued by now."

"You can say that again" the Commander when he was interrupted by the intercom from his Personal Assistant's office outside.

"Yes?" the Commander answered.

"Is Sir Richard with you?" the voice of Jennifer Caverner asked from just the other side of the office door.

"Sitting right in front of me" the Commander confirmed.

"I have the Minister here as he requested" Jennifer announced.

"Send him in" the Commander responded with a slightly quizzical tone before turning to Sir Richard "Something I should know about?" he asked.

"Oh I have quite a few little surprises lined up for this morning you will find" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Good morning Minister" the Commander called as the Secretary of State for National Security arrived in the office, looking surprisingly rather quizzical rather than grumpy and annoyed as had been expected.

"Commander, Sir Richard" the Minister responded, "To what do I owe the potentially dubious pleasure?"

"Have a glass of this slightly stolen whisky" Sir Richard passed the decanter and a fresh glass to the Minister as he took a seat "You may find you will need it."

"Ah, the good stuff" the Minister cheered up "Ta very much" he responded as he poured himself a drink.

"Do you want the good news or the bad news?" the Commander announced as he leaned forward and smiled knowingly.

"Well my press officer says I should try and think more positively so I will go for the good news first" the Minister responded but taking a moment to recharge his glass just in case.

"The original Embankment Murders will not reflect badly on the Government as things currently stand" the Commander announced "Or to put it another way, you won't be the victim of a sudden ad-hoc cabinet reshuffle."

"Oh lovely" the Minister responded before bracing himself with a further gulp of whisky "And the bad news?"

"Here you go" the Commander passed across the file "Operation Cleopatra."

"Ah..." the Minister responded hesitantly as he took the file "An old lurking chestnut that I had hoped was long since gone."

"It would appear that there is some connection between the Embankment murders, an incident involving a Member of Parliament about sixteen years ago and the Administrator General himself" the Commander explained "As to what though we shall have to wait and see."

"Just as I was getting interested" the Minister responded "Which reminds me, you missed the Committee Meeting yesterday."

"Tragedy" the Commander mocked "My heart bleeds with the pain."

"After evaluating current and future needs for policing and other security issues in the country" the Minister went on "It has been decided to restructure the divisional make up and command structure."

"Fascinating" the Commander responded with mock fake interest "Which bright spark thought of this little gem?"

"Well technically" Sir Richard cut in "It is based upon the report you submitted late last year."

"Oh bugger" the Commander responded "I've just run into a huge elephant trap haven't I?"

"Sorry" the Minister responded "Anyway, the effect of this is that it is proposed to merge certain divisions of the service with effect of August 1st."

"Let me guess that Transport Division becomes a sub division of the Metropolitan section?" the Commander enquired.

"Something like that" the Minister continued to explain "A Greater London and South East Division with sub-divisions for Central London, Transport, VIP Protection, etc all under one metaphorical roof and commanded by a new Regional Administrator General reporting directly to the National Security Committee."

"And guess who was unanimously voted to be the new Regional Administrator General?" Sir Richard added pointing towards the Commander with a knowing grin.

"I bet there were a few civil servants in that meeting who started looking horrified when you announced that one" the Commander responded.

"It's a bit short notice though" the Minister admitted "Eight months to basically reorganise the entire Security Service."

"No doubt carefully worked out so that the Prime Minister can have a nice flashy photo opportunity and unveil some expensively designed new logo just in time for the next general election" the Commander responded with a distinct hint of sarcasm which came from experience.

"That's what I like about you" the Minister responded "You never let cynicism stand in the way of formality."

"Oh you are too kind" the Commander responded.

"Well it will all be formally confirmed in a press release later this week" the Minister confirmed "I thought you had better know in advance so you don't look surprised when you get accosted by the press later."

"Tracy is likely to laugh her pretty little head off when she hears about this" the Commander remarked as he looked across at her picture in the antique silver photograph frame on his desk.

A polite knock at the door interrupted the Commander's train of thought at that point "Come in!" he called.

"Morning Sir" Fuller responded as he popped his head around the door "We will be ready for you downstairs in about ten minutes" he confirmed.

“This should be interesting” Sir Richard remarked “Make sure you’ve put the kettle on lad.”

“You got it” Fuller responded before disappearing as swiftly as he had appeared.

“Will the Administrator General be joining this little party?” the Minister enquired.

“Somehow I doubt it” Sir Richard confirmed with a knowing grin “He is shall we say stuck in traffic.”

“You have got to be kidding me” the Administrator General called to his driver as he leaned forward and looked over the front passenger seat at the large traffic jam that was now grinding to a complete halt in front of his official car.

“Radio mentioned something about an overturned snowplough near Hyde Park Corner Sir” the driver confirmed.

“Right then” the Administrator General confirmed “Looks like I’m walking” he announced as he got out of the car and put on a long overcoat over his formal uniform before closing the car door and heading off down the pavement, soon disappearing from view in the gentle snowfall.

As he departed, two men got out of a black cab in the traffic a short distance behind his official car and began to follow along discreetly, pausing only at the drivers side window for a few moments to confirm something with the driver.

Once the two men had departed in the same direction as the Administrator General, the driver reached for the in car telephone and dialled a number.

“Can you patch me through to Sir Richard Crowthorne please” the driver requested.

“He’s on foot then?” the Sir Richard confirmed over his mobile telephone as he walked alongside the Commander in the direction of the briefing room “Let’s hope he takes the scenic route then, cheers.”

“Has anyone told you, you are a very sneaky chap?” the Commander asked as they reached the lift where the Commander duly pressed the button to summon it.

“Oh indeed, goes with the job” Sir Richard replied with a wry grin as the lift doors opened whereupon the two men followed the Minister into the lift car “I used to run a very lucrative horse betting business when I was at school.”

“I know” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile “I won a hundred and fifty quid on the Grand National” he added “Hell of a lot of money for your average seven year old.”

“Perhaps I should take up Security” the Minister remarked as the lift slowed to a stop at the next floor down “It sounds a far more interesting occupation.”

“Pay’s lousy” Sir Richard remarked.

“The hours can be pretty lousy as well” the Commander added as the lift doors opened “I did meet the wife through the Service though so it does have some serious compensation.”

“Good luck gentlemen” the Minister who remained in the lift called after them “Keep me informed” he added as the lift doors closed.

“You know I am starting to like that guy?” the Commander commented to Sir Richard “It’s a pleasure that for once I am encountering politicians that aren’t trying to stab everyone in the back for a profit.”

“When was the last time you arrested a Home Secretary then?” Sir Richard enquired.

“About three weeks ago” the Commander added with a satisfactory smile as they proceeded up the corridor “Pulled him over for drunk and disorderly so that is at least four that I have had grace my arrest copybook over the years.”

“After you” Sir Richard held the door of the briefing room open when they arrived.

“Thanks you” the Commander responded as he entered whereupon his eyes went straight to the plate of chocolate biscuits in the centre of the table.

“Right then Mr Fuller” the Commander called as he effortlessly scooped up several biscuits in one swift move as he made his way to the head of the briefing room table and proceeded to sit down “I am all ears and this had better be good.”

“All right” Fuller began slightly hesitantly “As you know, the original investigation into the Embankment Murders could not find any connection between the victims except how they died and the fact they all wound up dumped in the river.”

“All right so far” the Commander agreed.

“Well I and a couple of my colleagues here who worked on the original investigation did some digging around and Commander Holworth here came up with the first clue” Fuller indicated the officer sat to his left.

“Good morning Commander” Holworth called “We did a reappraisal of the effects of the various victims, however we discovered that a large chunk of the records were withheld from the investigation last time around which after a lot of digging around we found.”

Holworth reached inside his briefcase and tossed onto the table a plastic evidence bag, faded and battered but still recognisable.

“Old style travel cards?” the Commander asked as he recognised the contents.

“Indeed” Holworth confirmed, “I believe Mr Fuller here actually worked out the connection.”

“I went back through ticket sales records dating back to 1981 and discovered something rather interesting” Fuller continued “All of the victims had season tickets for the London Underground and every single one of them was for a journey that either started, terminated or involved a change of trains at Embankment.”

“So they could have all been in the same place at the same time” Holworth added “Except for some reason somebody did not want us realising this and removed the evidence at an early stage before we got to it.”

“Eau de Rat anyone?” the Commander asked “You said there was another connection?”

“Sir Richard here asked me on the QT to look into the life history of the Administrator General” Fuller continued.

“Go on then old friend” the Commander turned to Sir Richard “Let’s hear it then.”

“As you probably suspected” Sir Richard explained “In thirty five years of service to this country’s security, I soon learnt that it was a very good idea to know exactly who you were working with as their was always likely to be a day when my life depended upon them.”

“That reminds me, I really must update my records” the Commander mused.

“Anyway, when I pulled the file on the Administrator General when he took over some months back, there seemed to be very little in it bar the official biography and what there was seemed to have a very specially prepared sheen to it if you know what I mean” Sir Richard explained.

“It looked way too good to be true” the Commander responded as he munched on his third biscuit of the morning.

“Exactly” Sir Richard confirmed “And when he started popping up amongst this enquiry all over the place, coupled with a few whispers on the political grape vine, I asked you genius Fuller here to dig deep.”

“It took some doing as well” Fuller added “However I did manage to find him mentioned as the operating Commander of a specialist operation which dealt with political corruption and anything involving the compromising of state papers and secrets also known as Operation...”

“Cleopatra” the Commander finished the sentence.

“Very good” Sir Richard responded, himself now also on his third biscuit.

“All of the names of the original victims of the Embankment Murders plus Jarvis all appear on a list of witnesses” Fuller continued “They all gave witness statements over an incident that occurred on the Victoria Embankment between the south entrance of Embankment Underground Station and Cleopatra’s Needle some three weeks before they started turning up dead in the River Thames.”

“Let me guess” the Commander enquired as he waved around his fifth biscuit of the morning like a baton “They all witnessed the circumstances around a car crash in which a prominent Member of Parliament was killed.”

“Give the man a gold star” Sir Richard confirmed with a wry smile.

“I’d rather have another biscuit” the Commander responded as he looked down at the empty plate in the centre of the table and contemplated the few crumbs remaining.

“I think this is where my Department comes in” the Garage Chief, Commander Garley cut in as he produced the evidence bag he had shown to the Commander the previous day and passed it around the room “This was recovered from the road debris after the patrol car crash the other day” he explained “It is a discreet remote controlled device that at a press of a button cuts either a brake or fuel line and then drops off the vehicle shortly before it fails and crashes, making it look like an ordinary accident.”

“Nasty” Fuller remarked as he took his turn to look over the device “Are these common?”

“Here’s another one” Garley duly produced a second example for the room to see “This one came from my opposite number in Surrey who recovered it from the wreckage of a car that skidded off a country road a few weeks back killing a journalist.”

“Small world” the Commander remarked “This journalist was on his way back from a meeting with the late retired Commander Jefferies.”

“Even smaller” Sir Richard added “If I am not mistaken this journalist was also the same guy who was about to expose that Member of Parliament who was killed in the Embankment crash before the ‘D’ notices went in.”

“And then there is the third one” the Garage Commander continued “I don’t have it but my old boss says he found an exact same device in the strewn debris surrounding the crash site of that Embankment crash.”

“We are missing something here” the Commander remarked “Some connection that I am not seeing.”

“You have to admit it is intriguing” Sir Richard remarked.

“You said you were going to bring something to this party” the Commander turned back to Sir Richard “Assuming its not a fresh supply of biscuits, the floor is yours.”

“Firstly” Sir Richard rose to his feet and went over to Fuller “Please call up your footage of the Piccadilly Line escalators at Holborn Station at four o’clock yesterday afternoon.”

“All right” Fuller responded as he moved aside to a computer terminal and called up the required CCTV footage, fast forwarding through the constant image of the upper part of the three escalators that led from the mid level of Holborn Station down to the Piccadilly Line platforms.

“Here we go” Fuller announced as he reached the required time index and slowed the footage to normal viewing speed “What are we looking for?”

“Two men, dark jackets travelling together with Jefferies just ahead of them” Sir Richard explained as he and Fuller continued to look carefully at the screen.

“That them?” Fuller asked as he paused the screen momentarily.

“No” Sir Richard confirmed “Keep going” he added as Fuller restarted the footage again “Hang on, slow it down a bit here.”

“There is Jefferies going past” Fuller pointed out “And there are the two guys you are looking for” he added as he stopped the footage.

“Right then” Sir Richard continued “Will you do me the favour of summoning up the camera footage from the second car of the westbound District Line service that departed St. James Park station at eleven fourteen last night?”

“This could take a little while” Fuller explained as he started working on his laptop computer “Services were all over the place last night because of the weather, hang on a minute though.”

“Who are you calling?” the Commander enquired as Fuller picked up his mobile telephone and quickly dialled a number.

“Line controller at Hammersmith” Fuller explained as he waited to be answered.

“Don’t ask me” the Commander looked at Sir Richard “I just work here!”

“Terry?” Fuller asked as his call was answered “Yes it’s Simon Fuller.”

“Oh hello mate” the Line Controller responded from his desk in his office situated above Hammersmith Station “How’s Jennifer, haven’t seen her around lately.”

“Oh she’s great” Fuller replied “We just set a date for the wedding at last.”

“Nice one mate” the Line Controller responded “What can I do for you?”

“What state is the District Line in?” Fuller enquired.

“Pretty much 100% snafued I’m afraid” the Line Controller confirmed as he cast an eye over the status screens in front of him which were showing the same depressing information they had done since the attempted start of service a few hours earlier.

“What about last night?” Fuller enquired “Specifically I am after the tape off a train that left St. James Park last night heading westbound at some time after eleven last night.”

“Oh that’s an easy one” the Line Controller responded “The only westbound services along that bit were the ones from Mansion House what with the Circle off and nothing being able to get in or out east of Whitechapel.”

“You think you could trace which unit was on the service?” Fuller asked.

“Hang on a minute” the Line Controller went back over to his computer console and consulted some information on the screen “Last westbound of the night that was” he confirmed from his display “Unit 7104, ‘D’ stock, terminated at Earl’s Court and then shunted into the sidings before all the points finally froze up.”

“I don’t suppose the CCTV footage from it has been downloaded into the system by any chance?” Fuller enquired.

“I would have thought so” the Line Controller confirmed “Should be in the main system by now.”

“Cheers mate” Fuller responded “I owe you one.”

“Well?” the Commander asked as Fuller hung up and began to work again on his laptop.

“Lead car of the service in question was number 7104” Fuller announced which means by process of Underground mathematics, the second car from the front was number 17104.”

“I’ll take your word for it lad” Sir Richard commented not being an expert in London Underground minutiae and numbering.

“Now if we fast forward to the time stated” Fuller commented as the footage moved quickly on the screen “This is the train arriving at St James Park.”

“That looks like the Administrator General” the Commander commented as he joined most of the officers in the room who were now crowded around looking over Fuller's shoulders.

“Very good” Sir Richard commented “Keep going” he encouraged Fuller to resume the playback.

“Sit's down” Fuller commented on the displayed events “Picks up discarded paper, doors close, train moves off.”

"Hello" the Commander looked ahead to the far end of the car where two men appeared through the connecting doors from the front carriage "Who are these two?"

"Whoever they are" Fuller commented "It looks as though their presence makes the Administrator General feel somewhat uncomfortable."

"Freeze it there" Sir Richard requested "And zoom in on those two gents please."

"Sure" Fuller responded "Hang on a minute."

"Now then" Sir Richard remarked "Do these two ring any bells with anybody?" he asked.

"Well if I were a betting man" the Commander remarked "They look pretty similar to the two guys who escorted Eddie to his untimely appointment with the underside of a Piccadilly Line train and I would not be at all surprised if the two goons who chased the good lady wife and I across the South Downs were in some way connected as well."

"Sadly we don't know what this little chat was about" Sir Richard continued "However what we do know and you will see if you continue the footage is that after some considerable chatting, the two gentlemen alighted at Sloane Square where I had a couple of my lads follow them."

"Any idea which way they headed?" the Commander enquired.

"Clambered into a waiting taxi and disappeared off into the night unfortunately" Sir Richard confirmed "The Administrator General however continued on his merry way as far as Earl's Court which was as far as he could get without the aid of a shovel."

"And where did our illustrious leader go after that?" Fuller asked.

"He doubled back to St. James Park and his office which is where I caught him trying to shred this little proverbial can of worms" Sir Richard produced the file once more and placed it on the table.

"Did someone give this to the dog division for their lunch?" Fuller remarked as he looked at the tattered file.

"Not exactly" the Commander responded "It was rescued in its final death throes from the company shredder."

"Operation Cleopatra" Fuller read from it "At least they had decent op names back in those days."

"I reckon that someone is black mailing the Administrator General" the Commander concluded "Who however is open to question."

"Over what?" Fuller asked.

"When he was a simple common or garden supervisory officer" the Commander explained "He was the co-ordinator of this little operation" he indicated the file "A little Government problem solving hit squad that at some point suffered the problem of a number of its heavies getting a bit over enthusiastic and overstepping the mark."

"One dead Member of Parliament for example?" Fuller asked.

"Precisely" the Commander responded.

"The thing is" Sir Richard continued "This operation was officially cancelled fifteen years ago, however it would appear that someone decided to farm it out to a freelance contract."

"Now all we need to know is who is signing the cheques and running this little domestic disaster" the Commander added "and I think the first port of call is the Administrator General's office."

"Mind if I tag along?" Sir Richard asked as he followed the Commander out of the room.

"Join the party."

"I don't believe it" the Administrator General grunted in general disdain as he checked his watch which confirmed his suspicion that there was no way he was going to make it to New Scotland Yard in time to pop into the briefing, it was almost certainly going to be all over by now.

With a bit of a sigh, he looked up at the grey sky, brushed some loose snowflakes from his uniform overcoat and proceeded on foot up Park Lane to where it met the end of Oxford Street in the shadow of Marble Arch.

The traffic was unusually light as he crossed the road briskly and then proceeded directly to the entrance to Marble Arch Underground Station, pausing briefly to purchase a copy of the Standard before heading down the steps into the booking hall below street level.

The Administrator General took a few moments to look around the busy ticket hall and his years of experience soon identified a possible confirmation to his suspicion that his movements were being monitored by someone in some way.

Proceeding to the ticket barriers, the Administrator General gave no hint that he suspected he was being followed as he swept his warrant card over the magnetic reader before passing through the barriers and heading briskly on to the escalators that led down to the platform level.

As he disappeared from sight down the escalator's, one of the station supervisors, the same one who had been on the platform at Sloane Square the night before, left the ticket hall and followed.

Down on the eastbound platform, a Central Line service formed of eight cars of 1992 type tube stock was just arriving with a service that the next train indicator above the Administrator General was advertising as being destined for Hainault via Newbury Park.

As he joined the crowds attempting to board the train, the Administrator General looked around carefully seeing if he could spot anyone joining the service that would be following him as, by his working out there were at least two parties wishing to keep a close eye on his whereabouts now.

The inner end of the lead car of the train was about the only place where he could find a suitable standing space, taking advantage of the perch bench seat in the end window bay which also afforded a reasonable view of both the entire length of the car he was in but also through the end car windows, the interior of the adjacent car as well.

"This service is for all stations to Hainault via Newbury Park" the driver announced over the train tannoy system as the last few boarding passengers crammed into the already jam packed doorways "Please stand clear of the doors!"

Taking a further look around as the train doors were closed and the train pulled away bound for its next stop at Bond Street, the Administrator General was reasonably satisfied that with the exception of the always present CCTV cameras on board the train, he was now travelling largely unobserved.

On the platform of Marble Arch with the tail lights of the train just visible disappearing off into the distance of the dark running tunnel, the station supervisor spoke discretely into a radio within his uniform jacket before returning back to the upper level.

Two stops further on, the Administrator General duly alighted at Oxford Circus where once on the platform, he waited for the crowds to clear before making his way through the station's lower levels where ongoing renovation work had seen the tiled surfaces removed leaving corridors with bare concrete throughout making for a very formidable and utilitarian appearance.

The Administrator General momentarily paused at the entrance onto the northbound Victoria Line platform when he recognised the two men from the previous evenings encounter waiting for him there.

"Good morning" the taller and more dominant of the two men announced as they came together towards the far end of the platform "My employer had the strangest feeling you might go and do something silly so sent us along to make sure you turned up."

"How considerate" the Administrator General responded mockingly as the distant thunder of an approaching train began to filter from the running tunnel.

"One small problem" the tall man responded "You still appear to have a following."

"Not from the Security Service" the Administrator General responded "I would have spotted them."

"Different league I think" the man commented "Looks more like MI5 to me, black leather jacket and spectacles by the chocolate machine" he added without even looking in the direction.

"Looks like he has a friend as well" the other man remarked "Female, short, dark suit, bit tasty looking."

"Who wants the honour?" the tall man asked his colleague casually.

"Now hang on a minute..." the Administrator General responded when he realised what was about to transpire.

"Shut up" the tall man cut back sharply "You are involved in events which you no longer control or understand the seriousness of."

"You two go on ahead" the shorter man responded casually "I'll take care of this little problem."

"What if the Transport Division's finest show up?" the Administrator General asked as the train began to run into the platform.

"Don't worry" the shorter man reassured them as the train slowed to a stop "I can take care of myself, besides I have friends in this town."

"Come on" the tall man announced as he guided the Administrator General aboard the train as soon as the doors opened whilst his colleague left them, making a brisk walk up the platform with clear intent and purpose.

"Stand clear of the doors" the driver announced over the train tannoy whereupon the doors slid closed with a metallic clank. No sooner were the doors closed than a hiss of released air heralded the departure of the train.

As the train began its departure into the running tunnel at the north end of the platform, the shorter man calmly walked up to a point a short distance from the two people they had identified a few moments earlier, pulled a silenced gun from inside his jacket and shot them both with cold and deadly intent.

"Try hitting it again" Tracy suggested as the young officer in front of her in the queue in the canteen struggled with the uncooperative coffee machine "It usually works for my husband."

"You hit him or he hits coffee machines?" the young officer enquired aside as she duly applied a firm slap to the side of the machine as had been suggested.

"Anything mechanical that dares to oppose him as a rule" Tracy remarked as she duly joined in the hitting of the coffee machine herself, carefully judging where to strike on the side of the casing as if there was some carefully applied scientific principle.

"Oh well done Maam" the young officer announced as suddenly the machine surrendered to the ongoing onslaught and duly produced a plastic cup into which it poured the requested beverage.

"Right then" Tracy stepped forward to obtain her cup of tea from the machine but just as she was about to reach down for the cup as it appeared, her radio set began to summon her.

"Lima Tango Zero One from Control" the dispatcher one floor up called.

"Great" Tracy remarked with a sigh of resignation before reaching for her radio "Lima Tango Zero One receiving. Tell me, is there some physical connection between my desire for urgent refreshment and the world that I was not previously aware of?"

"Err sorry Maam" the dispatcher reluctantly responded "Its just we have had a report of a possible double shooting at Oxford Circus Station."

"I'm on my way" Tracy responded as she gulped down the cup of tea in one gulp "Have the usual circus meet me there."

No sooner had Tracy gulped down the remainder of the tea and effortlessly thrown the plastic cup into the nearby bin than she was heading out of the building by way of the fire escape staircase down to the basement car park.

A few moments later, she emerged from the basement vehicle exit ramp on her Security Service issue motorbike and with sirens and blue lights in full cry she was soon making rapid progress along New Oxford Street towards Tottenham Court Road.

Running across the lights at Tottenham Court Road, Tracy's motorbike was joined by a high speed patrol car which was also responding to the call and had come up from Piccadilly by way of Charing Cross Road and together, the echo of the sirens off the sides of the buildings lining either side of Oxford Street saw to it that the traffic and pedestrians quickly moved out of the way.

Oxford Circus itself was in complete chaos when Tracy arrived, with Underground staff having closed all four entrances and two exits to the station which had resulted in a lot of people milling about as they sought information as well as alternative transport.

As Tracy arrived on the scene, she carefully drove her motorbike onto the pavement and parked it alongside the north west entrance to the station set into the pavement where she was quickly joined by a number of officers of both Transport and Metropolitan Divisions who had responded to the call from various directions and whose vehicles were now causing further disruption by blocking access for the now overburdened bus services.

"This is a zoo" Tracy commented before looking around and quickly assessing the situation "You two" she indicated two officers nearby "Organise the cavalry and get the whole area cleared and taped off."

"Yes Maam" the two officers responded and promptly began to sort out the crowds who were milling around apparently unaware of the potential danger of the situation.

"Right" Tracy called "You three come with me" she indicated three armed response unit officers before heading down the steps into the station where the chaotic scenes of outside were similarly mirrored by the clutch of confused passengers who had been trapped inside the station complex when the exits had been sealed.

"Get names and addresses" Tracy instructed "Search anyone who looks suspicious and if they were witnesses, get them a cuppa and some TLC until reinforcements arrive."

"Glad to see you" the Station Manager greeted Tracy and her colleagues as they arrived at the ticket barriers in the main booking hall located directly beneath Oxford Circus. "Northbound Victoria Line" he added as he led the way through the barriers to the down escalators.

"Paramedics?" Tracy enquired.

"Two off duty ones were in the station when the shootings happened" the Station Manager confirmed "They are down there now and there is a full crew on the way."

"The shooter?" Tracy asked as they reached the bottom of the escalator and proceeded through the lower levels in the direction of the Victoria Line platforms.

"Melted into the crowd and disappeared before we even realised what had happened" the Station Manager confirmed.

"You two scout around and check everywhere" Tracy instructed her two colleagues who were walking with them as they reached the Victoria Line Platforms, now devoid of the crowds, only a couple of station staff and two paramedics on the northbound platform present as they arrived on the scene.

"What's the situation with the trains?" Tracy asked as she knelt down to examine the bodies.

"Victoria is shut between Kings Cross and Brixton, all other lines are non-stopping" the Station Manager confirmed.

"I am sure I've met at least one of these before" Tracy mused as she looked more closely at the face of the female victim, still alive under the attentions of the paramedics but struggling "I just cannot place where."

"Lima Tango Zero One" Tracy's radio echoed around the near deserted confines of the platform tunnel.

"Go ahead" Tracy responded as she rose back to her feet and stepped back from the bodies.

"Most of the station appears clear" one of the armed support officers reported
"However there may be someone lurking on the Central Line platforms and we could do with some backup before we go in and check."

"I'm on the way" Tracy responded as she drew her gun and checked it before proceeding at a rapid pace back up the platform to the exit which led to the Central Line platforms.

"Good grief" the Commander commented as he alighted from a number 159 bus as it ground to a halt towards the upper end of Regent Street, not far from Oxford Circus, where he surveyed the chaotic scene with some concern.

"Control" he called over the radio "This is your boss, did someone declare a sale or something in Regent Street and not tell me only it would appear the entire world and his wife appears to be here?"

"Reports of a shooting incident at Oxford Circus Station" the Metropolitan Division central control room dispatcher confirmed "Transport Division Commander in attendance."

"I think I'll drop by and lend a hand" the Commander confirmed as he proceeded up Regent Street towards Oxford Circus where the area around the station entrances had now been cleared of unnecessary people.

"Staff" the Commander joked with the officer guarding the tape barrier who lifted it up and let him through with an acknowledging salute.

"Mind if I tag along?" Sir Richard Crowthorne enquired as he jogged up to the Commander.

"Join the party" the Commander responded as they descended into the station entrance
"What brings you to this little part of the world?" he asked.

"I'll tell you when we get down there" Sir Richard confirmed with some grimness evident in his voice.

"Where's that good lady wife of mine?" the Commander asked as he arrived in the ticket hall which was now crowded with officers and representative from various emergency service agencies as well as the boiler suited members of London Underground's Emergency Response Unit.

"Down at platform level Sir" the officer charged with the job of co-ordinating operations in the hall confirmed.

"Right, thanks lad" the Commander responded by which time he was already heading down the escalators with Sir Richard struggling to keep up with him.

"Control from Lima Tango One" Tracy called into her radio as she arrived at the west end of the westbound Central Line platform where two armed support officers were waiting, their guns trained ahead at where they believed someone was lurking.

"Get Central Line control to stop anything passing through Oxford Circus will you?" she asked as a train passed slowly through the station without stopping, its passengers all looking through the side windows of the cars whilst some were visible stood at the doorways poised to alight despite being told they were not stopping there.

"Maam" one of the officers called back without taking his eyes off the far end of the platform "Something moving down there."

"Right" Tracy rechecked her gun "Move out."

"What ever happened to ladies first?" the other officer remarked wryly to his colleague as they proceeded cautiously down the length of the platform.

"Damm" Sir Richard remarked as he and the Commander arrived at the scene of the earlier shooting on the Victoria Line platform and examined the victims which were still be attended to by the paramedic crews.

"Friends of yours?" the Commander enquired as he cast a momentary glance although his well known reluctance at the sight of blood and gore meant he quickly looked away.

"These were the two agents I had trailing the Administrator General" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Oh hell..." the Commander remarked "He couldn't have done this" he commented.

"I agree" Sir Richard responded as he stood back whilst the paramedic crew working on the female agent prepared to lift her out of the station to a waiting ambulance outside "They must have been identified and taken out by a professional, someone in the trade."

"Our two nutters perchance?" the Commander wondered as he went over to the chocolate vending machine and inserted fifty pence.

"That would be my reckoning" Sir Richard agreed.

"Someone is very insistent that we quietly drop this case by the looks of it" the Commander concluded as he retrieved his chocolate once it appeared and proceeded to unwrap it before joining Sir Richard in following the paramedics carrying their critically injured patient towards the escalators which led back up to the surface.

"Is she going to make it?" Sir Richard asked as he helped the paramedics carrying the stretcher up the escalator.

"Touch and go I reckon" the nearest paramedic commented "We'll know once we get her into intensive care."

"What the hell was that?" the Commander asked as he suddenly spun around to look back in the direction of what sounded like gunshots from somewhere deep inside the station complex.

"The ancient mating call of the lesser spotted nutter?" Sir Richard responded as he and the paramedics reached the top of the escalator and the ticket hall.

"I'll be back" the Commander responded as he double backed to the opposite escalator and headed back down into the bowels of the station complex with his gun drawn.

"Don't you just hate old clichés?" Sir Richard remarked as the Commander disappeared from view.

"Drop your weapon and come out with your hands up!" Tracy demanded of the unseen shooter who had with deadly accuracy managed to send one of the armed officers spiralling to the ground where he was lying on the platform clutching his badly bleeding leg.

"We've got to get him out of here" the other officer remarked as he bandaged the wound of his colleague as best he could whilst Tracy covered them from behind a chocolate vending machine.

"Go" Tracy called back "I'll cover you."

As the injured officer was helped to his feet by his colleague, Tracy ducked out and fired two shots down the length of the platform which provided the necessary moments for them to leave quickly. At the far end of the platform, the officer with his injured colleague met the Commander coming the other way.

"What's occurring?" the Commander enquired.

"The boss is back down there Sir" the officer reported "She is the one being shot at."

"Right" the Commander responded "Get him out of here and then summon the cavalry down here."

Using the shadow of the platform wall for its limited cover, the Commander quickly made his way up the platform to where Tracy was sheltering behind the chocolate vending machine which suddenly took the brunt of two shots fired from the very accurate but still unseen assailant.

"Morning love" the Commander responded "Fancy meeting you here."

"It has not been a nice morning" Tracy admitted as she momentarily ducked out and fired a further shot back down the platform.

"I see what you mean" the Commander remarked as he and Tracy ducked together instinctively as a further shot was fired back at them in response.

"Right!" Tracy rose to her feet and reloaded her gun with a fresh clip of ammunition "Now I am angry."

"Uh oh..." the Commander murmured "Now he is in trouble."

"This is your last chance" Tracy called down the platform towards her unseen opponent "Either drop your weapon and come out with your hands up or I am going to lose my temper."

"Well I guess he must be thinking about it" the Commander remarked as Tracy's demand was followed by almost thirty seconds of silence.

"I'll take my chances thank you!" the shooter then responded in a calm measured tone.

"I got an idea" the Commander checked his gun again "Keep chummy talking as long as possible."

"What the hell do you want me to talk about?" Tracy asked out of bemused curiosity.

"I don't know" the Commander responded "The weather, how Chelsea are doing in the Premiership, what a noisy place Kakrafoon has suddenly become, use your imagination love."

"This is costing you dinner you know" Tracy replied "Good luck" she leaned back and kissed him before the Commander departed back up the platform to the far entrance.

"Tell me Mr Gunman Sir" Tracy called back down the platform "How do you propose to get out of this little predicament you find yourself in?"

Tracy's words echoed around the platform as the Commander reached the far entrance where he was met by a team of armed officers, led by the officer the Commander had sent back up with the injured colleague some minutes earlier.

"Ah, the cavalry" the Commander was obviously glad to see the six heavily armed men who unlike himself, were fully suited up in protective gear including obligatory bullet proof vests "You three guard every exit off this platform at this end and make sure no one gets past you."

"Yes Sir" the three indicated responded and moved out.

"The rest of you follow me" the Commander led the way across to the opposite eastbound Central Line platform.

"You seemed to be a determined and sensible kind of fella" Tracy called down the platform.

"That's very nice of you to say" the gunman responded seemingly slightly bemused.

"So why don't you chuck that old gun away and we'll go and have a nice chat" Tracy continued "Cup of tea? I'll throw in some biscuits!"

"We had better hurry up" the Commander called to his colleagues as they jogged down the eastbound platform "I think the good lady wife is running out of things to say" he added as they reached the far end.

"I'll be wanting a very good lawyer" the gunman responded, a response that was audible to the Commander as well as Tracy.

"That can be arranged" Tracy confirmed "Anytime now love will be fine" she murmured under her breath as she was indeed running out of things to say.

"I can assure you that even if you managed to arrest me, which is unlikely I may add" the gunman continued "You will discover that I have powerful friends who will ensure that any incarceration will not be for very long."

"Would you care to place a wee small wager on that?" the Commander enquired as he pressed the barrel of his gun against the side of the gunman's head.

"Ahh..." the gunman found himself forced to admit defeat and reluctantly raised his hands in surrender.

"Gentlemen" the Commander tossed the gunman's weapon to the armed support officer immediately behind him "Search this chap from head to toe and then escort him to a cup of team and a comfortable room down at the Yard."

"Yes Sir" the lead officer responded whereupon the Commander looked back down at the gunman "We are going to enjoy a nice long chat you and I" he confirmed with a wry smile "Well, I'm going to enjoy it that is for certain!"

"Hello?" Tracy called down the platform, still unsure as to what was happening.

"Yes love?" the Commander responded as he looked around the corner of the cross passageway back down the westbound platform.

"Did you get him?" she called back.

"Yes dear" the Commander confirmed as he headed down the platform whereupon Tracy stood up and joined him in the middle where they welcomed each other with a warm hug.

"Great" Tracy responded "Lets get some lunch."

"You two look like you had fun down there" Sir Richard commented as Tracy and the Commander arrived at the top of the escalator in the ticket hall.

"It's the anticipation of seeing my darling husband actually pay for lunch" Tracy responded looking her husband squarely in the face and smiling broadly.

"You got him them" Sir Richard nodded in the direction of the restrained gunman as he was escorted up from the adjacent escalator by six officers and calmly marched towards the nearest exit.

"I am willing to bet something happens to him between here and the Yard though" the Commander admitted as he, Tracy and Sir Richard proceeded together up the steps to street level.

Outside in the area of Oxford Circus itself the two officers and Sir Richard watched from the stairway as the gunman was shown into the back of a waiting Security Service marked prisoner van and the back doors firmly closed behind him.

"Morning Sir" the tall presence of Commander Cassini, the recently appointed head of the Undercover Surveillance Unit announced as he and a small team of plain clothes officers joined them "You called for my services?"

"Good to see you" the Commander responded with a handshake "You are a difficult man to track down."

"Well it is what I do best" Cassini admitted "Being invisible is my business."

"In that case" the Commander responded "Melt into the crowd and watch the occupant of the rear of that there van like a hawk."

"You got it" Cassini replied as he made silent hand gestures to his three colleagues alongside him who immediately disappeared into the surrounding crowd as if they were never there.

"Report directly to this infernal thing" the Commander indicated his mobile telephone "Don't use the regular communication channels."

"Yes Sir" Cassini responded.

"As soon as anything happens, you let me know where, when and who, all right?" the Commander insisted "Be aware that there are uninvited guests at this little party and they know what they are doing so be careful."

"Aren't I always Sir?" Cassini responded with a smile and a tug of the forelock before he too disappeared into the crowd.

"How does he do that?" Tracy remarked as she looked around, unable to find either him or his team even though she knew full well they were there.

"No idea my love" the Commander commented "but he's never let me down yet. Now what about lunch?"

"Shouldn't you be getting back to the Yard to interview chummy?" Sir Richard enquired.

"No point" the Commander responded calmly "He's never going to get there, hence Cassini and his cavalry being called in."

"Why do I get the feeling you know something that no one else does?" Sir Richard asked.

"Just playing a well educated hunch" the Commander added "Now did someone mention something about lunch?"

"After you" the man escorting the Administrator General insisted as he held open the door for him, allowing him to enter the well appointed office study that was on the other side.

It was a sumptuous room typical of a retired senior Civil Servant and indeed this accurately reflected its regular occupant, a relatively elderly man with distinguished silver grey hair and antique framed reading glasses perched on the end of his nose.

"Good afternoon" the man seated behind the desk greeted the Administrator General's arrival with courtesy "Take a seat."

"Thank you" the Administrator General responded slightly hesitantly.

"That will be all" the man called to his associate standing in the doorway "I will call for you shortly."

"Mr Renquist" the Administrator General began once he had seen that the office door had been firmly but politely closed "May I enquire as to the reason for this little meeting."

"I thought it was time you and I had a little chat, you know, face to face" Renquist calmly informed him "Drink?" he proffered the crystal glass decanter of finest brandy "You will probably need it."

"Thanks" the Administrator General poured himself a drink from the decanter and sat back in the antique leather armchair where he attempted to appear relaxed but inside that was far from the case.

"You and I have a mutual problem" Renquist continued as he reached into his desk drawer and produced a couple of files "One of our old operations has come home to roost and if we are not careful, this could become very public very quickly."

"I am on it" the Administrator General responded.

"Interesting interpretation of your situation" Renquist responded "From what I can see, you have singularly failed to ascertain the status of the investigation and to add insult to injury, you have MI5 officers following your every move."

"Which means there is a pretty good chance that the Commander knows something of what is contained in that charming little document" the Administrator General indicated the folder on the desk "or at least has some suspicions."

"He may be an excellent officer and a gentleman" Renquist commented "However it is clear that he is perhaps too good, we may need to consider some form of diversion to distract him."

"That little performance that one of your goons put on back at Oxford Circus may divert him for a while" the Administrator General remarked.

"An unfortunate but necessary occurrence" Renquist agreed "It may however serve other purposes."

A knock at the door interrupted the tense atmosphere in the room which caused Renquist to look up and call for the person knocking to enter.

"All right" the Administrator General admitted as he recognised the second man who had left him at Oxford Circus in order to eliminate the two agents who had been following them "I'm impressed, how did you do it?"

"Friends in low places who are receptive to the old fashioned ways of no strings attached cash" Renquist smiled "Where you followed?" he asked the man.

"No Sir" the man confirmed with a wry smile.

"Remain here" Renquist insisted "The Administrator General here was just leaving."

"I guess that's my cue" the Administrator General admitted as he rose from the seat "However I get the strangest feeling we will be talking again."

As he left, the first man returned and the two of them stood in front of Renquist's desk as if awaiting their instructions.

"I regret to inform that our mutual friend may be about to become a liability" Renquist calmly announced as he reached inside his desk drawer and produced an official looking document which he proceeded to fill in and sign using a traditional gold fountain pen before handing it across.

"This is getting serious" the lead man commented as he looked at the paper.

"That there document gives you official authorisation to remove whoever you feel necessary if you see any sign, any sign I point out, that the Administrator General is compromised" Renquist informed them.

"Consider it done Sir" the two men confirmed in unison before turning smartly on their heels and departing.

"There is no doubt about it" the Commander remarked as he and Tracy sat on the ledge in front of Cleopatra's Needle "If they were all here at the same time, they would have been witnesses to the accident."

"Well" Tracy remarked as she selected a chip from the paper wrapped fish and chip supper they were sharing "What we need to establish is who was the on scene supervising officer who took down the names and addresses of the witnesses."

"Hang on a minute" the Commander downed a further chip before reaching for his radio "Lima Mike Zero One to Control" he called.

"Control, go ahead" came the rapid response.

"Do me a favour and press the magic button on that desk in front of you that patches me directly through to Commander Fuller please" the Commander requested.

"One moment please Sir" the response came before a brief pause of silence.

"You rang Sir" Fuller's voice called over the radio a few moments later.

"Where are you?" the Commander enquired assuming that he was probably still in his office wading through endless files in the search for elusive clues that had remained hidden for years.

"About twenty yards away from your present location actually" Fuller responded which caused Tracy and the Commander to look around them with some surprise.

"Could you be a little more specific perchance?" the Commander asked.

"Embankment Cafe" Fuller confirmed as he and Jennifer waved out of the window across the street in the Commander's direction "Jennifer decided I should be buying lunch."

"I know the feeling" the Commander agreed as he looked across at Tracy by his side and smiled knowingly "We will be right over."

Disposing of the empty chip wrapping as they passed a rubbish bin, the couple proceeded across the Victoria Embankment road and up the steps before entering the small cafe building set in the south edge of Victoria Embankment Gardens.

"Two teas please" the Commander called as he came in before he and Tracy joined Jennifer and Fuller at their table by the front window.

"I take it you had the same hunch as I did then Sir" Fuller remarked as he swivelled around his laptop to show the Commander the screen "All of the Embankment murder

victims were indeed interviewed by one officer as witnesses of the now alleged accident."

"Let me hazard a wild guess" the Commander remarked as the waitress brought the teas over to the table whereupon he gave a nod of thanks before proceeding to pour four sugars into it "The officer on site on the night in question is nowadays better known as our very own Administrator General."

"A very good wild guess" Fuller confirmed as he tapped the screen where the scene officer's name was clearly shown.

"Well it's been one of those days when they just seem to keep on coming" the Commander remarked between enthusiastic gulps of tea.

"The Minister was mumbling something earlier about all this" Jennifer remarked "Mind you mumbling is nothing that unusual from him."

"He's probably wondering how much this is going to damage the Government's image if any of this gets out in the open" Tracy confirmed what everyone else was suspecting.

"There is one other thing" Fuller added "According to these files, there were two Scenes of Crime officers attending that night who as of yet I have been unable to trace."

"Tried the guys at Personnel?" the Commander asked "They seem to know everyone in the service right down to the tea lady at Harrow."

"As far as I can tell" Fuller explained his predicament "there is no record of these two officers having ever existed."

"Curiouser and curiouser" Tracy remarked.

"Oh and your chummy from Oxford Circus?" Fuller added "He never arrived at the Yard."

"I believe that's a tenner you owe me" the Commander commented aside to Tracy who gave a surrendering shrug and passed across a ten pound note "If you will excuse me for a few moments."

"Where are you going?" Tracy enquired as the Commander rose from his seat and turned to leave.

"Telephone call" the Commander explained "I am just going to see if my run of hunches is still running its accumulator."

"Does he always speak in riddles?" Jennifer asked out of curiosity as the Commander left the cafe and went out onto the veranda outside where he took his mobile telephone and managed to successfully dial a number having now mastered this particular piece of modern technology after a lot of patience.

"Cassini" the Commander asked as he was answered at the other end "How are things?"

"Our friend with the gun fixation was duly released at the top end of Regent Street" Cassini confirmed "He proceeded discretely to Great Portland Street station where he took a Circle Line service and is currently at Kings Cross waiting around on the Circle and Metropolitan Line platforms."

"You have him in sight?" the Commander asked.

"Two of my lads are circulating in that area and I have two each at the stations either side just in case he decides to move but at the moment, its looking unlikely" Cassini confirmed.

"Where are you?" the Commander asked as he pulled his uniform overcoat in tighter against the cold biting wind that was whistling around.

"Admiring the new western ticket hall over the Metropolitan Line platforms" Cassini responded as he looked around the newly opened section of Kings Cross Underground Station with its modern glass finishes and spacious interior slightly offset by the presence of builders materials and hoardings as there was still much work being undertaken.

"Stay there" the Commander responded "I am heading up to you" he confirmed before hanging up and returning inside the cafe.

"Everything all right love?" Tracy asked as the Commander sat back down and finished off his cup of tea.

"That accumulator is still going strong" the Commander confirmed "Should have had a tenner on it."

"Any Lima Tango unit available to assist" Tracy's radio called out quietly as she had turned the volume down but she turned it back up when she heard the call commence "Disturbance at Westminster Underground Station, officer requires assistance."

"Duty calls" Tracy remarked wryly before kissing her husband and rising from the table "See you later."

"Have fun dear" the Commander called after her as she left.

"Lima Tango One to Control" Tracy called into her radio as she left "I'm three minutes away, show me as on the way."

"I meanwhile have another appointment" the Commander announced "Jennifer, tell the minister if you see him that I will call him when I am available" he announced "And Fuller, let me know if you find anything about our two mystery guests."

"Will do Sir" Fuller confirmed as the Commander too rose from his seat, placed some money on the table and then also departed.

"If I wanted to find someone who did not exist" Jennifer remarked "I would start off with where the fake names also appear elsewhere."

"Good point" Fuller agreed "Let's see what I can find."

The Commander pulled his uniform overcoat tighter around him against the cold wind as he walked down the steps from the cafe to the pavement before turning right and proceeding the hundred yards or so to the south entrance of Embankment Station.

The ticket hall was relatively quiet as the Commander entered and passed through the ticket barriers before going straight down the escalators and through the station complex to the Northern Line platforms where a six car train of 1995 type tube stock was just arriving on a Northern Line service which according to the next train indicator was bound for Edgware via Charing Cross.

"This is Embankment" the automated announcement broadcast over the platform tannoy as the Commander went over to the platform edge and waited by the rear carriage for passengers to alight first "Change here for the Circle and District Lines. The next station is Charing Cross."

Once the last passengers had alighted, the Commander boarded the train at the inner carriage end and perched himself in the space adjacent to the connecting door through to the next carriage.

"Please stand clear of the closing doors" the platform announcement called out by which time the doors of the train were already closed and it was beginning to leave the platform.

A few stops further on and the Commander alighted at Warren Street before walking briskly through the station to the Victoria Line platforms where he soon became aware that one person who had boarded the Northern Line train at the same time as he had back at Embankment was also on the platform waiting for the next northbound Victoria Line service.

The Commander decided to ignore what was possibly a coincidence even though it was unusual for him to believe in such things but as a precaution as soon as the train arrived and he had boarded, it was notable that he was on his radio calling someone.

Kings Cross St Pancras station was only two stops further up the line and quickly reached on the comparatively quiet early afternoon service where the Commander alighted. There he waited for the crowd of disembarked passengers to leave the platform before he too followed up through the station by way of the escalator to the tube lines ticket hall, currently in the middle of a major rebuild and resembling more of a building site than a major transport interchange.

"Afternoon Sir" the ticket barrier supervisor acknowledged the Commander as he let him through.

"Thank you" the Commander responded before looking around at the partially rebuilt station with its strange mix of new and old surfaces as well as temporary hoardings and half finished fittings "Which way to the Metropolitan Line these days?" he asked.

"Current route is away to the left and then try and follow the signs" the ticket barrier supervisor admitted "It's a bit of a mess at the moment but if you find the nice shiny new bit then you are there."

"Right, thanks" the Commander acknowledged before he departed but not before noticing out of the corner of his eye, the man he had first seen at Embankment Station approaching the ticket barriers on the other side of the hall.

It was an unaccustomed route from the tube to the Western Ticket Hall section of the station, the latter part now extensively rebuilt and a far more spacious and modern open space than the rather pokey staircase it had only very recently replaced.

"Welcome to London Underground" a random recorded announcement boomed out from the tannoy system in that part of the station as the Commander passed the new ticket barriers and paused to look around the new section.

Over in the far corner, looking very inconspicuous and blending well in with the background was Commander Cassini who knew exactly where the Commander was and indeed had known about his entire journey up to that point.

"Afternoon Sir" Cassini greeted the Commander as they met over by the far wall "Glad to see you made it."

"Are the two guys following me part of your herd by any chance?" the Commander asked casually.

"Ah" Cassini reluctantly admitted "You noticed them then?"

"Only just" the Commander replied "A lesser person than I would have had trouble spotting them."

"A little insurance policy in light of recent circumstances" Cassini explained "Courtesy of the Minister and at the insistence of a certain Divisional Commander of the Transport Division of our mutual acquaintance."

"Ah" the Commander realised "Now what about chummy?" he enquired.

"Follow me" Cassini led the way across the new concourse area, through the ticket barriers and down to the sub-surface platforms where they were met at the entrance to the eastbound platform by two more of Cassini's undercover team.

"Where is our friend?" Cassini asked.

"Far end" one of the officers confirmed "He has let a Met and a Circle Line train pass so I reckon he is waiting for a Hammersmith & City Line service."

"Echo One from Echo Seven" Cassini's radio discreetly announced.

"Go ahead Jackie" he responded.

"Target one has just stepped forward to the platform edge" the call came over the radio.

"Next service from this platform is a Hammersmith & City service calling at all stations to Barking" the platform supervisor announced over the tannoy.

"Target one is intending to board this next train" the next call came "He is being joined by a second individual who has appeared from the opposite platform."

"Describe this fellow" the Commander requested as the noise of the train's approach began to filter through.

"Five foot two, slim build, broad shoulders, same jacket and trouser combo as his mate" the observing officer confirmed.

"Sounds like our other loony" the Commander confirmed as the six car train of 'C' type sub-surface stock arrived in the platform and came to a halt.

"Assign target one's friend the tag target two and follow" Cassini requested over the radio as the train doors opened.

"They are boarding the last car" the observing officer confirmed.

"I think we'll join the party" Cassini confirmed with the Commander who nodded in agreement before they entered the platform and boarded the third car from the front just moments before the doors closed and the train moved off.

"One of my guys in my section reckons he has seen the chap we have called target one somewhere before" Cassini mentioned as the train lurched its way eastwards.

"Figures" the Commander agreed "I am beginning to think these goons are in some way linked to the service in some form or other."

"Looks like we may be alighting at the next stop" the observing officer confirmed over the radio.

"Farringdon" the Commander looked up at one of the line diagrams mounted above the doors "I wonder if they are changing onto a Thameslink."

"Ouch" Cassini remarked "That means one of two completely opposite directions with numerous different possible destinations."

"Well north would take us back to Kings Cross and on to the delights of Kentish Town" the Commander worked out so I reckon southbound would be the most likely choice."

"Team three from Zero One" Cassini called over the radio "Distribute yourselves along the route of the Thameslink services south of Farringdon" he instructed "Team four hold at Kings Cross and Euston in case our friends double back."

"Here we go" the Commander remarked as the train slowed once more as it approached Farringdon, the platform flashing past the windows before the train came to a halt and the doors opened.

"Careful Sir" Cassini advised as they stood in the doorway and looked out down the length of the train towards the rear "We are in plain clothes but if they see your uniform then they will know they have been rumbled."

"You have a point" the Commander agreed as he looked down at his uniform "After you" he gestured ahead whereupon he followed Cassini off the train and remained behind him on the platform.

"Targets one and two now proceeding from the platform" the observing officer confirmed over the radio.

"Whoa" the Commander looked across the platforms as the train departed "The plot thickens."

"Well I'll be damned" Cassini remarked as he too saw what the Commander had just observed, standing at the gateway between the westbound Metropolitan Line platform and the southbound Thameslink services was the Administrator General.

"Come on" the Commander accompanied Cassini off the eastbound platform and headed by way of the over bridge to the westbound, stopping at the bottom of the steps and observing ahead.

At the gateway, the reluctance and resignation of the Administrator General was obvious as he was joined by the two men who then accompanied him to the southbound Thameslink platform with amongst the crowd of passengers milling about, two of Cassini's undercover team keeping a nicely inconspicuous watch on the three men.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control" the Commander called over his radio as he continued to observe discreetly from a distance.

"Control, go ahead Sir" came the reply from Fuller back at Holborn.

"Southbound Thameslink services from Farringdon" the Commander enquired "What's the state of play?"

"Snowfall brought down the overhead at Luton this morning and the conductor rails are freezing over south of the Thames" Fuller confirmed "Severe delays in both

directions, the next southbound Thameslink from Farringdon is a fast to Brighton in six minutes."

"Thanks" the Commander responded before returning back to Cassini "Let's go shall we?"

It was a nervous few minutes waiting for the delayed southbound service, only the arrival and departure of a northbound service which raised its pantograph as it was stationary for the change over of electrical supply that occurs for all trains here providing any form of distraction for any of the seemingly various parties present.

"Where do you think they are going?" Cassini remarked as he and the Commander stood by the platform gateway, just out of sight of the Administrator General and his accompaniment that were stood further up the platform trying to look as inconspicuous as possible.

"London Bridge perhaps" the Commander pondered, calling upon his vast knowledge of the railway network of the City, "Blackfriars is another possibility but it could be as far south as Gatwick or even Brighton."

"I had better get some reinforcements put on standby" Cassini replied "If you will excuse me" he added as he withdrew to one side to speak on his radio whilst the Commander looked down the platform towards the north end from where in the distance, the approach of a train could now be heard.

"Looks like we are in business" the Commander remarked as an eight car train of Class 319 stock appeared from the far tunnel and arrived in the platform whereupon he turned around to see the two men and the Administrator General step forward.

"They are boarding the second car from the front" the report came over the radio from one of the observing undercover officers.

"Board the third and first cars from the front" Cassini urged "We are going on the back" he added as he looked across at the Commander who without any further hesitation, quickly jogged across the width of the platform and boarded the train.

"The good thing" the Commander commented as the two men boarded the train and looked around the interior of the carriage "If our three friends up front decide to go for a wander through the train, they won't reach us."

"How did you fathom that one out then Sir?" Cassini asked as the doors closed and they each took a seat.

"Eight car train" the Commander explained "Thameslink services are formed of two four car units and there is no corridor connection between them."

"Ah" Cassini realised, not being an expert in Southern Region train minutiae "Let's hope they don't get any ideas about climbing around the outside then."

"The way my day has been going" the Commander remarked wryly "Nothing would surprise me."

"Right, that's it" Tracy gave up being nice to the group of protestors who had gathered in the mid level of Westminster Underground Station and had been causing disruption for the last hour and a half now "Leave the station now or you are all nicked."

"This is a denial of legitimate protest!" a screaming protestor announced which was the rallying cry for the rest to start shouting as if in some competition to out shout each other.

"Oh stuff this" Tracy remarked as she threw up her hands and as if in defeat and turned to the wall of officers stood behind her who were separating the protestors from the rest of the station.

"Right" Tracy called, having to raise her voice above the din so she could be heard "Let's get them out of here."

Members of the public passing through the station were swiftly moved out of the way as in amidst a cacophony of shouting and resisting arrest, numerous officers dragged the recalcitrant protestors back up towards the ticket barriers in an effort to remove them as quickly as possible.

Squeezing them through the ticket barriers proved to be a little problematical though simply due to the thronged numbers that made up the group trying to get through the barrier gaps that were only ever designed for single file one person at a time traffic.

"Come on will you" Tracy called as she dragged the still doggedly determined leader of the protest through the ticket barriers.

"Government oppression!!" the protest leader called out to anyone who could be bothered to listen which was not many by the looks of indifference the few passers by granted this outburst.

"Shut up!" Tracy demanded as the protestors were unceremoniously dragged out of the station entrance where rows of waiting Security Service vehicles were waiting to receive their uncooperative passengers.

"Lima Tango Zero One from Control" Fuller called as Tracy threw the last protestor in the back of the van and shut the door firmly.

"Go ahead" Tracy responded as she moved back and then looked down at her slightly dishevelled uniform.

"Be advised" Fuller continued slightly cryptically "numerous parties are heading south on the Thameslink."

"Understood" Tracy responded "Any idea of likely destination?"

"Cassini's team report they are likely to alight at Mos Eisley" Fuller responded.

"Oh right" Tracy replied after a momentary pause whilst she worked out the coded reference "Keep me advised."

"Will do" Fuller confirmed "Control out."

"Oh for goodness sakes" Tracy remarked as she looked up to see another small crowd of protestors appear around the corner from Parliament Street and head across the road causing traffic to swerve to avoid them.

"Control from Lima Tango Zero One" Tracy called "Send me some more cavalry, we have some lurkers."

"East Croydon" the Commander announced as he and Cassini alighted at the north end of platform three "You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy."

"We must be cautious" Cassini agreed with an amused smirk as from some distance away, they could just observe the three men walk away towards the exit ramp up from platforms three and four.

"Team three" Cassini called over his radio as he and the Commander began to proceed up the platform just as the train began to pull away "They are all yours."

"We got them" the lead officer of the fresh undercover observation team confirmed as he observed the three men pass through the ticket barriers and head directly for the main exit whereupon the three undercover officers dispersed from their waiting positions and followed within the crowd.

"Fiver says they take a tram towards Beckenham Junction" the Commander remarked as he and Cassini reached the bottom of the ramp and began to proceed up to the main station building at street level.

"Targets are boarding an eastbound tram outside the station" the confirmation came over the radio which made the Commander smile.

"Remind me never to play poker with you Sir" Cassini commented "Team four, follow in a company van and be discreet" he instructed over the radio.

"Right" the Commander announced as they arrived in the main ticket hall area and passed through the barriers, "Time for a cup of tea I think."

"You know where they are going already don't you Sir" Cassini concluded.

"Lets just say" the Commander responded with a tone of mystery "I can easily make an educated guess."

The tram continued to head east on its journey that would eventually terminate at Beckenham Junction, the Administrator General was sat towards the front end of the lead car whilst the two men accompanying him remained stood in the large floor area of the doorway, thus ensuring there was no way he could alight without them knowing.

Some minutes later as the tram slowed for Blackhorse Lane, the leader of the two men signalled silently to the Administrator General that this was where they would be alighting and with a resigned look, he rose to his feet and made his way to the door.

With the tram now at a halt and the doors opened, the Administrator General and his two minders alighted, the only three people to step out onto the small platform that made up the tram stop.

"Team three leader to Cassini" one of the observing officers who remained on the tram called "Targets have alighted at Blackhorse Lane and it looks like they are being met by a large black or dark grey Mercedes car with blacked out windows."

"Confirm dark coloured Mercedes" Cassini enquired as he and the Commander stood outside the west entrance of East Croydon station, the latter observing the trains passing beneath as they drank their cups of tea.

"Confirmed" the officer on the tram responded as it pulled away from the stop and his involvement in the affair came to an end.

"Team four" Cassini called over the radio to the two officers he had following discreetly in a van "You are up next, Team one, find a set of wheels and be prepared to take over observation as soon as you can."

"All goes well?" the Commander asked as he looked back from observing the passing trains.

"We still have them in sight" Cassini confirmed as he finished off his cup of tea

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" the Commander called into his own radio.

"Control, go ahead" the response quickly came.

"Have Commander Fuller pull any relevant connections between the Administrator General and anything that exists, occurred in or even vaguely sniffed in the direction of the Croydon and Beckenham district."

"Yes Sir" the despatch officer confirmed.

"Well you seem to have this all well and in hand" the Commander responded to Cassini "I'll see you at London Bridge."

"Sorry Sir?" Cassini responded, understandably confused.

"Call it informed instinct" the Commander explained which left Cassini no more the wiser "Until later" he added as he downed the last gulp of tea and headed back into the station.

"Weird" Cassini commented to himself as he watched the Commander disappear out of sight before turning to his radio "Team Three" he called "Current location please."

"Mr Administrator General" the distinguished presence of Renquist began as he sat back in the rear seat of the car, the Administrator General sat uncomfortably alongside him and one of the two accompanying goons observing them over the back of the front passenger seat "So glad you could make it."

"Did I have a choice?" the Administrator General enquired.

"Unless you want your past involvement with certain Government projects thrust out into the open by way of the popular press" Renquist responded "then quite frankly, choice never came into the equation."

"And why here?" the Administrator General asked.

"Just travelling back from another appointment with a mutual colleague in the area" Renquist explained as much as he was going to.

"Well" the Administrator General gestured generally "Here I am, so what is it you want?"

"The Embankment Murders investigation naturally" Renquist confirmed "Further to our earlier conversation, my contacts are indicating that the Commander and his team are being far more efficient in their investigations than any of us had anticipated."

"If I interfere any more with the Commander's investigation then he will almost certainly begin to ask probing questions, the answers to which would be damaging not only for myself but also quite possible for the Government and your good self as well" the Administrator General advised sternly.

"None the less my friend" Renquist responded calmly "This is attracting the wrong sort of attention."

"Try keeping your goons on a leash may help" the Administrator General nodded towards the goon sitting in the front passenger seat.

"With all due respect Sir" the goon responded menacingly "Do you want a slap?"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen" Renquist raised his hands to calm the situation "Please calm down."

"The only way I can get this investigation grounded will be either through 'new' evidence which diverts the investigation team elsewhere or alternatively issuing a cease investigation order but that would need to be signed by a member of the Security Committee" the Administrator General responded.

"That can be easily arranged" Renquist remarked "Admittedly it would not be a genuine signature but it would be made available in a format that is easily mistaken for the real thing."

"Then I suggest you set the wheels in motion in some form or other because I am running out of options" the Administrator General admitted.

"If you will excuse me" Renquist apologised as he picked up the car phone and speed dialled a number where upon he waited patiently for a few moments to be connected.

"Good afternoon" Renquist called as soon as he was answered "That matter we discussed over lunch yesterday, see to it will you?" he requested. "Thank you" he then acknowledged before hanging up."

"Who the hell was that?" the Administrator General asked out of curiosity.

"A business associate with the same interest in seeing justice as ourselves" Renquist explained before turning his head to face the Administrator General for the first time in the entire conversation "Can I give you a lift somewhere seeing as I am heading your way?"

"Tell that to your lawyer" the Commander announced as he unceremoniously bundled a handcuffed passenger off the train from East Croydon at London Bridge where on the platform, two officers from the Transport Division were waiting to take possession.

"Allow us Sir" the lead officer announced as they took over "What happened?"

"Chummy here decided to get all angry and confrontational when he was asked for his ticket" the Commander explained "a non-existent ticket I might add."

"Up yours!" the arrested passenger retorted defiantly.

"Shut it" the officer checking his handcuffs responded, giving him a bit of a jolt to back up his response.

"Nicely put" the Commander agreed "Anyway I happened to be in the next carriage when I heard the commotion brew up so I waded in and nicked him."

"Come on matey" the other officer responded as he proceeded to take the arrested man back along the platforms towards the main passenger concourse where a familiar face was waiting for them at the ticket barriers.

"Do you go looking for trouble or does it just follow you around love?" Tracy enquired with an amused shake of the head.

"It seems that most of the time trouble can find me pretty easily I tend to find" the Commander admitted as he passed through the ticket barrier and greeted Tracy with a hug "What brings you to this charming little corner of the city?"

"I was in the area when I heard an officer was having trouble with a fare evader on an incoming train" Tracy explained "When I heard the phraseology used, I had this sneaking suspicion you had something to do with it."

"Come again?" the Commander asked as he and Tracy walked across the South Central side concourse towards the front entrance that led out to the bus station area immediately outside.

"Do the words 'Officer reports a right moron with an attitude problem and no ticket' ring any bells dear?" Tracy asked inquisitively.

"Now I come to think of it" the Commander was forced to admit "they do have a familiar ring to them."

"Where are we going anyway?" Tracy asked as they walked across the bus station area.

"Waiting for a friend" the Commander explained "and there he is" he pointed ahead to a slightly grubby unmarked Ford Transit van that pulled into the side of the road just ahead of them whereupon Tracy recognised the face of Commander Cassini in the front passenger seat.

"Nice timing Sir" Cassini announced once he had wound down the side window "Our friends are right behind us in a black Mercedes."

"Mind if we hitch a lift?" the Commander asked.

"Hop in the back" Cassini gestured whereupon the Commander opened the side door of the van before helping Tracy inside and then closing the door behind them.

"Team Five to Controller" Cassini's radio called "Target vehicle is approaching your location from the south east, contact in forty five seconds."

"Roger that" Cassini confirmed as Tracy and the Commander looked over the front seats of the van to see what was going on "We will take over the tail as soon as they pass."

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" the Commander called over his radio "Patch me through to Commander Fuller please."

"Fuller" the response came after a short delay.

"Where are you?" the Commander enquired.

"Back at Holborn" Fuller confirmed as he looked around the busy Control Room
"Something I can do for you Sir?"

"Black Merc approaching London Bridge Station" the Commander informed Fuller
"Follow it with the cameras and wash its number through the system will you?"

"Consider it done already" Fuller announced as he got to work on the computer console.

"Here he comes boss" the driver of the van informed Cassini, not for one moment taking his eyes off the wing mirror in which the image of the target vehicle was growing progressively larger as it got closer.

"Pull out a couple of vehicles behind him" Cassini instructed his driver "but watch out for these traffic lights."

"Damm" the Commander commented as he looked out of the back door window of the van "Blacked out windows, have crooks these days got no consideration for the complications of law enforcement?" he commented wryly.

Cassini and his driver watched casually as the black Mercedes car passed them within the slow moving confines of the heavy traffic that was still trying to cope with the aftermath of the recent wintry weather conditions.

"Away you go" Cassini instructed, causing his driver to proceed carefully, nudging out into the traffic flow a couple of vehicles behind the target car.

"Lets see where this little merry go round takes us" Cassini commented.

"As long as we are not in pursuit of the proverbial untamed poultry" the Commander added.

"Huh?" Tracy asked, a sentiment obviously shared by Cassini and his driver as well.

"Wild goose chase?" the Commander explained.

"Oh right" Cassini responded before returning to the matter in hand "Looks like we are heading across the centre of the city" he added as he consulted his large A to Z map on his lap.

"Fiver says we wind up back towards the Euston Road" the Commander commented.

"No chance Sir" Cassini responded "Speaking of which, how on earth did you know we would pass London Bridge?"

"Just something I picked up on in the old case files" the Commander explained "Not everything is answered through computers these days you know."

"I just hope these guys are passing via Holborn" Tracy commented "I have an office full of files to review."

"And I just bet you are looking forward to that my dear" the Commander remarked wryly.

"You can tell can't you" Tracy responded with an amused grin as the van passed over London Bridge itself and reached the north bank of the River Thames.

"Coming up on Monument" the driver commented as he continued to follow the car as it came off London Bridge along King William Street and slowed for the approach to the traffic light controlled junction at the complicated intersection of several roads outside the entrances to Monument Underground Station.

"That gives us several different options of destination" Cassini confirmed as he consulted his map whilst they waited for the traffic lights to change and the intended direction of travel of the car they were tracking to be revealed.

"Here we go" the driver announced as the lights changed and the traffic began to move off "It's left, left, left into Cannon Street."

"This is what you are going to do Mr Administrator General" Renquist announced as they continued on their journey "We are going to go to my office where I will hand to you two sets of files."

"What is contained in these files?" the Administrator General enquired, becoming increasingly more uncomfortable with his situation.

"One set is my records of the original operations with which you were involved" Renquist explained calmly "The other is a specially created evidence record that I have had put together for just such an occasion."

"Do these documents have some prominent names all over them by chance?" the Administrator General asked.

"Some names are prominently mentioned, others are merely implied but will be obvious to the right people reading the files" Renquist confirmed "You will take them to our political friend the Minister and explain to him the facts of life."

"Or rather your elaborated version of them you mean" the Administrator General added with a knowing tone.

"I think you know a bit too well for your own good" Renquist remarked with a merest hint of menace.

"High Holborn" Cassini called "Alight here for the Transport Division office."

"See you later gentlemen" Tracy announced as she discreetly slipped out of the rear door of the van, "I think you still owe me lunch by the way love" she added with a knowing smile before quickly closing the door before the Commander could offer any response by way of mitigation.

"That woman will be the financial death of me" the Commander remarked "Still love her mind" he quickly added.

"Here we go" the driver of the van announced as the traffic lights turned green and the car moved off ahead northwards into Southampton Row and onwards towards Russell Square.

"This is turning into a right merry go round" the Commander remarked as he looked over the front seats of the van at the traffic ahead within which they continued to gradually travel.

"I expect Mr Fuller is probably running a pool by now on where we are going to wind up" Cassini remarked.

"I'll ask him" the Commander remarked as he reached for his radio "Commander Fuller, respond please" he called.

"You rang Sir" Fuller responded, now seated at his computer terminal in his office where he was joined by Tracy who had just arrived.

"Have you got the cameras following this here Mercedes?" the Commander enquired.

"It's currently going around Russell Square" Fuller confirmed as he consulted one of the monitors perched somewhat precariously on the desk "And I managed to get a name attached to it as well."

"Oh do tell" the Commander responded as the van driver swerved gently around Russell Square maintaining the same short distance from their target.

"Registered to a leasing company that does a lot of business with the Civil Service, Government work, that kind of thing" Fuller explained "May just be coincidence but then again you don't believe in them."

"Get on to them" the Commander instructed "Find out who is paying the bill for this motor in particular but keep it strictly on the QT. Remember, walls have ears."

"I always thought they had sausages" Tracy remarked with a smirk.

"Oh very good" the Commander responded whilst Fuller just started giggling uncontrollably.

"Deary me..." Cassini remarked "The jokes don't seem to get any better around here do they?"

"As soon as I have anything" Fuller responded "I'll give you a call."

"That may not be possible" the Commander responded "I seem to be travelling incognito at the moment."

"I'll send the company bloodhound" Fuller remarked as he looked across at Tracy.

"With Tracy on my tail, there is no escape" the Commander admitted "Which is not as bad as it sounds mind."

"Was your bet by any chance somewhere in the region of Euston per chance Sir?" the van driver called back to the Commander.

"Oddly enough yes" the Commander confirmed.

"Then I suggest its time you collected your winnings" the driver confirmed "Because we are definitely slowing for somewhere around here by the looks of things."

"Hang on" the Commander commented as he saw the car ahead slow near the junction with Euston Road and directly opposite Euston Station itself "Let me off here."

"What are your intentions Sir?" Cassini asked.

"I'll stick to the Administrator General" the Commander instructed as he opened the side door "You hound whoever is in that car with him if they split up, I want to know exactly who or what we are dealing with here."

Standing on the pavement, the Commander waited until the van pulled away and across Euston Road, where it stopped a short distance up from the Fire Station before the Commander calmly walked around the corner into the south side of Euston Road.

From there he was able to observe the black Mercedes car parked a short distance away and whilst discreetly hiding from view in a recessed doorway, he observed the Administrator General, Renquist and one of the heavies alight from the vehicle and assemble on the pavement before the car drove off.

For a moment the Commander feared he may be about to be seen when the three men turned towards the doorway where he was hiding but fortunately their destination turned out to be another property a couple of places further up from where he was.

"Now where are you going my friend" the Commander pondered as he watched the three men disappear inside behind the heavy black Georgian style door which closed serenely with a firm clunk.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control" the Commander called over his radio set discreetly "Commander Fuller please."

"Fuller here Sir" Came the response "Having fun hiding in doorways are we Sir?"

"All right" the Commander admitted "How did you know that."

"Up on your right Sir" Fuller explained causing the Commander to look up to his right to see one of the traffic cameras that watched the Euston Road pointing in his direction.

"Hi there" the Commander offered a small wave in the camera's direction "Who owns the gaff two doors up then oh great knowledgeable one?"

"Just a moment Sir" Fuller responded as he consulted his computer to call up the appropriate records before he quickly found the answer "Here we go, registered to some charity or other according to the Council Tax records."

"See what you can find out about them" the Commander requested "Principal bodies involved, benefactors, who pays the bills."

"I'll see what I can find" Fuller responded "I'll send the usual suspect with anything I find."

"Nice safe" the Administrator General commented as he saw the large old fashioned cast metal safe with its huge brass maker's plate which was located in a discreet side room off of Renquist's study.

"She may be old" Renquist admitted as he opened the huge metal door "However it does provide plenty of security for some of the most sensitive documents in the country" he explained as he retrieved two files from amongst a large pile of similar material before carefully closing the door, rotating the wheel and removing his key.

"Here you go" Renquist passed across the two files to the Administrator General who looked at them with a worried expression "These should convince our ministerial friend when he sees them."

"How genuine are these here documents" the Administrator General asked, a clear look of scepticism on his face.

"They are as genuine as we want them to be" Renquist assured calmly.

"Just how many other skeletons do you have in your little collection in there?" the Administrator General asked out of curiosity.

"The instruments of Armageddon, and plenty of them" Renquist reassured him "Enough probably to bring down the Government of several countries if I choose to."

"Nice little retirement plan" the Administrator General remarked wryly "And now if you will excuse me, I have to see a man about a problem."

"By all means" Renquist gestured as the Administrator General turned smartly on his heels and headed for the door.

"Just remember where your loyalties must lie" Renquist added with some foreboding which made the Administrator General pause halfway through the door for a moment with a feeling of trepidation "Sudden changes of circumstance are very easily arranged."

"Afternoon my dear" Sir Richard Crowthorne announced as he knocked on Tracy's office door.

"Come in please" Tracy gestured as she chucked another of the many files she had spent the last hour wading through onto the done pile which promptly overbalanced it and sent the whole heap cascading to the floor.

"Busy morning?" Sir Richard asked as he generously stooped down alongside Tracy's desk and helped to pick up the fallen files.

"You could say that" Tracy remarked wryly "I could have sworn someone said we were heading towards a paperless office society."

"Probably the same chap who then rushed out and bought shares in a bulk paper company I expect" Sir Richard remarked with a smirk as he took a seat in front of Tracy's desk.

"What beams you into my neighbourhood then?" Tracy asked.

"I have been hearing a bizarre rumour about the Administrator General going on a mystery tour of some of the less salubrious parts of South London" Sir Richard remarked "Then there is the tale of two senior Divisional Commander's of the Security Service observed by my duty Anti-Terrorist guy clambering into the back of a van at London Bridge Station."

"Fascinating" Tracy commented as she proffered a biscuit which Sir Richard gladly accepted.

"So I have to ask myself a question" Sir Richard continued "Either the Security Service cannot afford the bus fare from London Bridge to Euston, via Holborn which given the latest budget predictions would not be all that surprising, or your legendary husband is doing his sneaking around act where he will most likely plonk his size nines into someone else's pool and get his toes bitten off by a proverbial piranha."

"Ouch" Tracy remarked "I'd rather he stayed in one piece, I've only just trained him how to use a tea towel" she admitted "That's taken me the best part of three years!"

"Ah yes" Sir Richard responded "He mentioned something about that the other day. Any way, I thought that you and if he decided to joins you, your husband may be interested in something my lads turned up at Oxford Circus" he explained as he produced a couple of very neatly folded pieces of paper from the inside of his jacket pocket and passed them over to Tracy who took them and unfolded them, reading what was written there on.

"Confirms at least partially what I think my husband was suspecting" Tracy agreed after she had taken a few moments to read the contents of the document before she reached across to the intercom on her desk "Commander Fuller, may I borrow you in my office for a few moments."

"I was just about to come and see you as it happened" Fuller responded.

"He's been digging around as deep as possible into some of the darker recesses of the filing system to see if we can put a name to the goons that seem to be involved in this mess" Tracy explained "I hope he has found something."

"Afternoon Maam, Sir Richard" Fuller announced as he arrived in the office with a flourish.

"What do you make of this" Tracy asked as she passed the paper back across the desk to Sir Richard who passed it on to Fuller.

"Well" Fuller commented as he read the document carefully "This would appear to confirm a working theory I have regarding our unfriendly acquaintances."

"You have an idea who they might be?" Tracy asked.

"We all agreed I believe that these guys are probably either former Security Service officers or attached in some way to the original Embankment Murders investigation" Fuller explained "The problem is that as of yet we have been unable to put a name to anyone outside of the murder investigation team except the current Administrator General and four unidentified officers who apparently took witness statements at the scene of the car crash that killed the MP at Cleopatra's Needle."

"So what is this working theory then?" Tracy asked.

"I had a thought in bed last night" Fuller continued "Jennifer was snoring and keeping me awake, it occurred to me that there is one vital element that we may have overlooked in all this."

"The river..." Sir Richard suddenly looked up with a sense of realisation.

"Give the gentleman with the poker fixation a gold star" Fuller announced "The one common factor that was staring us in the mush the whole time is the river and its north embankment and the one Division of this service that has no computerised personnel records for the period in question is the Thames River Division."

"Time for a bit of old fashioned detective work then" Tracy remarked.

"I'm on my way down to Wapping in about ten minutes" Fuller confirmed.

"Ah the joys of the East London Line" Tracy remarked wryly "I suppose I had better go into bloodhound mode and track down that husband of mine to give him the news."

"He was last seen lurking in a door way in Euston Road" Fuller confirmed
"Commander Cassini has a couple of his guys watching his back just in case."

"Mind if I tag along?" Sir Richard asked as Tracy rose from her seat and grabbed her uniform tunic.

"Join the party" she responded.

"Hurry up" the Commander commented to himself as he sheltered within the scant shelter of the doorway "It's getting cold out here."

Sure enough, even though it was still early afternoon, the short mid winter days ensured that the temperature rarely got to anything really bearable and when it did, it was usually only for a very short time in the middle of the day and with the onset of the late afternoon, the cold was beginning to return with a vengeance.

A quick look around by the Commander established that there were few people about, only a couple of Cassini's observers were casually strolling in opposite directions on the other side of the road and even the road traffic was unusually light.

Indeed the Commander was looking around pondering the quiet surroundings to the point where he nearly did not realise the door of the place into which the Administrator General and the others had gone over an hour earlier had just opened and the gentleman in question emerged, the closing of the door firmly behind him indicating he was travelling alone.

"Now where are you going my friend" the Commander pondered as he observed the Administrator General, clearly with a lot on his mind pause on the door step and look ahead, obviously worried about something before he moved off, crossing the road with ease and heading towards Euston Station.

"Cassini" the Commander called over his radio "Keep watch on the lot inside this place, I'll follow our glorious leader."

"Be careful he does not see you Sir" Cassini responded.

"Don't worry" the Commander reassured him "The distracted state he is in, I could walk right past in front of him leading a brass band of purple wombats and he would not notice."

The Commander waited until the Administrator General was safely across the road before he too set off, following him at a safe distance so that he was not spotted although he quickly judged by the Administrator General's expression that he could indeed be standing right behind him and still not be noticed.

Indeed the mental picture of the purple wombats playing brass instruments momentarily clouded the Commander's mind for a short time but he quickly regained his senses with a disbelieving sharp shake of the head and continued to follow.

Ahead, the Administrator General reached the dismal 1970's concrete excuse for a bus station area that served Euston Station and passed through it to the equally dismal open area in front of the main station itself.

The Commander paused in the shadow of the National Rail headquarters building to observe the Administrator General enter the main line station by way of the sliding door which gave access to the main concourse, another nasty 1960's concrete effort that was about as warm and welcoming as the cold wintry weather outside.

Inside, there were a fair few passengers milling about waiting for their trains to the Midlands and the North West which meant that the Administrator General was able to slip unnoticed across the concourse to the escalators that lead down to the Underground Station part of Euston.

The Commander only just caught sight of his head as he ascended down into the booking hall level of the Underground Station and realising there was a danger he could lose his quarry in amongst the complicated lower levels and any one of the services from the six platforms down there, he quickened his step.

With the Administrator General still looking troubled as he passed through the ticket hall and the barriers, the Commander lost sight of him as by then he had only just managed to get past some slow moving tourists with some inordinately oversized luggage and reach the bottom of the escalators from the main line station above.

"Blast" he commented to himself as he quickly scanned the busy ticket hall and along the lines of barriers to no avail before he decided on a slight alteration of plan.

"Afternoon gents" the Commander announced as he knocked on the door of the station control room and put his head around the door post "I don't suppose you have seen a tall black Security Service officer by any chance?"

"If you mean the guy with the look of doom on his face" the Station Duty Supervisor responded "He is heading for the Northern Line Charing Cross Branch by the looks of things" he pointed to the monitors showing the passageways in that part of the station.

"Ah, there you are my old friend" the Commander remarked as he looked over and studied the screen before turning back to the Station Duty Supervisor "When is the next Charing Cross Branch southbound due?" he asked.

"Four minutes" the Supervisor confirmed looking at another screen to confirm his belief "Runs all the way to Morden."

"Don't let that train leave until I am on it" the Commander requested as he departed at a rapid rate out of the door and across the ticket hall in pursuit.

"Derek, this is Control" the understandably slightly stunned Station Supervisor called over the radio "Are you still on the Northern South."

"Yes Chief" the Platform Supervisor confirmed as he looked up and down the platform just as the Administrator General appeared from the entrance portal.

"The next service is not to leave until both the uniformed gentleman you see to your right" the Duty Supervisor confirmed from looking at another CCTV view, this time of the platform itself "and another gentlemen similarly attired but somewhat shorter in stature are on board, however keep it quiet."

"Got it boss" the Platform Supervisor confirmed even though he had not a clue as to what it was actually all about.

At that moment it became apparent to him as the Administrator General and a number of passengers waited patiently on the platform that the train was on approach, the characteristic disturbance of air and a distant rumbling noise gradually getting louder from the far tunnel portal signalling its imminent arrival.

"The next train is all stops to Morden via Charing Cross" the Platform Supervisor duly announced as the turbulence and rumbling grew louder before the six car formation of 1995 Tube Stock emerged from the tunnel, its high intensity headlights piercing the gloom before it came to a halt, neatly framed with both cabs of the train at either end of the platform.

As the doors were opened, there duly followed the usual collision of alighting and boarding passengers all trying to pass in opposing directions at the same time. Meanwhile the Administrator General discreetly boarded a little further down where the passenger numbers were less.

Observing the tall uniformed officer boarding, the Platform Supervisor jogged down to the front end of the train and alerted the attentions of the driver.

"How do mate" the driver remarked as he looked out of the side window when he saw the Platform Supervisor approach "Something wrong?"

"Waiting for a very important passenger" the Platform Supervisor explained as he looked back down the platform slightly nervously for there still appeared to be no sign of the Commander yet.

"Would that be the chap?" the driver asked as he saw the Commander appear, noticeably somewhat out of breath on the platform and come up to the front of the train.

"I reckon so" the Platform Supervisor remarked.

"Someone must be in trouble then" the Driver remarked "That there is the Commander, the gold standard of arse kickers."

"He seems awfully short for such a powerful guy" the Supervisor remarked.

"Appearances can be deceptive" the Commander responded wryly as he joined them "Is he aboard?" he asked.

"Third car up" the Platform Supervisor confirmed nodding up the platform.

"Mind if I ride up front?" the Commander asked as he boarded by way of the cab door.

"Welcome aboard Sir" the driver confirmed as the Commander took the vacant second man's seat and closed the door.

"Mind the doors!" the Platform Supervisor called down the length of the platform as the driver closed them.

"All right" the driver announced as he checked on his indicator panel that all the doors were successfully closed "Here we go."

"This is where the fun begins" the Commander remarked as the train moved off on its journey via the dark running tunnel bound for its next stop at Warren Street.

"Lima Tango Zero One to Control" Tracy called over her radio as she stood on the pavement outside Goodge Street Station in Tottenham Court Road "Can you get a couple of our heaviest officers and a nutter van around to Goodge Street as soon as, we have a couple of drunk and disorderly's who need removing."

Just inside the booking hall of the station, a patrol officer who happened to be in the area when the call came through plus Sir Richard were busy holding down the two miscreants on the cold hard floor to prevent them doing any more damage to either their surroundings, passers by or more likely themselves.

"This takes me back" Sir Richard remarked as Tracy returned to the ticket hall and passed him her handcuffs "I have missed dealing with good old fashioned street violence."

"There is always a position open for you if you ever consider defecting to our side" Tracy remarked as she helped Sir Richard and the other officer bring the two now handcuffed miscreants to their feet and march them out of the building.

"Blimey that was quick" Sir Richard remarked as a marked Security Service van pulled up outside and the two officers travelling on board got out of the vehicle to meet them on the pavement.

"Get these two charming gentlemen to a cell" Tracy instructed as she helped hand them over "Fill them with black coffee and then charge them."

"Yes Maam" the two officers responded as they took the two miscreants and hauled them around to the back doors of the van where they were unceremoniously loaded in.

"Right" Tracy responded as she brushed down her uniform, slightly crumpled following recent events "Where was I going?"

"Northern Line if I recall" Sir Richard escorted her through the ticket barriers as in the background, the Security Service van sped away with sirens blaring at full cry "Shall we?"

Rounding the corner to the lifts, they were fortunate that a lift car was waiting and they quickly boarded just as the heavy metal doors closed and the lift began its slightly creaky descent down the shaft to platform level.

"The next station is Goodge Street" the automated announcement duly informed the passengers in the cars of the southbound service as it left Warren Street "This is a Northern Line service calling at all stations to Morden."

"Don't you ever get fed up of that woman constantly announcing things in your ear all day?" the Commander asked the driver as they fairly barrelled along.

"I just pretend its the wife going on about football and block it out of my mind" the driver explained with a smirk "Goodge Street coming up" he added as a circle of light from the distant platform appeared in the distance and got increasingly larger as they approached.

On the platform, a smattering of passengers looked up as the train appeared from the tunnel and came to a halt.

"Fancy meeting you here" the Commander called as he opened the cab door upon seeing Tracy and Sir Richard waiting for them at the south end of the platform.

"Hello love" Tracy greeted her husband "I come with a message."

"Hop aboard the front car" the Commander nodded behind him "I'll join you in a few moments."

Tracy and Sir Richard duly boarded the front car of the train by the nearest set of doors and the driver after checking his panel, closed the doors and released the brakes.

The Commander went back through the connecting doorway to the passenger saloon and joined Tracy on one of the seats with Sir Richard facing directly opposite.

"You are a hard man to track down at the moment" Sir Richard remarked.

"It seems to have been one of those days all things considered" the Commander admitted.

"Fuller has a theory" Tracy informed her husband whose arm she was holding for comfort "He theorised that the one connecting factor in all of this mess we overlooked was staring us in the face."

"I must be getting old" the Commander admitted "What did we overlook exactly?"

"The river" Tracy explained "Fuller is heading down to Wapping as we speak to give the records of the Thames River Division a going over, the ones from fifteen years ago were never computerised."

"If our well trained goons which we have always assumed were former officers were with the River Division, then that would explain why we were unable to find them" the Commander responded.

"It would also explain how the bodies of the various victims managed to find their way into the Thames largely unnoticed" Sir Richard added.

"So what brings you to this little party?" the Commander enquired.

"There would appear to be some worrying whispers in the political circles" Sir Richard explained "Two of my deep cover guys have heard in the last couple of hours that rumours are circulating about some high level civil servant issuing strange restricted orders and that you are about to go on one of your wing clipping expeditions."

"Well I think we can safely say that if I manage to confront the Administrator General without any uninvited guests dropping by" the Commander concluded "There may well be a vacancy on the top floor of the Yard by tonight."

"I believe our friend the Minister feels the same way" Sir Richard confirmed as the train stopped at Tottenham Court Road whereupon Tracy and the Commander rose from their seats to stand in the doorway and observe down the platform to see if the Administrator General was alighting.

"No sign" Tracy confirmed what the Commander already suspected and as the doors closed, they returned to their seats.

"Of course you know what will happen don't you?" Tracy asked her husband.

"The Administrator General goes on extended 'gardening leave' and then the Minister will be in my office insisting I take over the centre seat" the Commander grimly confirmed.

"You've done it before" Tracy comforted him "Very successfully I seem to recall."

"But that was Acting Administrator General" the Commander reminded her "Fixed term, I knew I had three months and then I was moving back to the Met Division. This is a whole different ball game" he added as once again the train slowed, this time for its stop at Leicester Square.

"I am sure you will effortlessly cross that bridge when you come to it" Sir Richard reassured him.

"I have a phobia about bridges" the Commander reminded them "An alternative analogy may therefore be in order."

"Ah..." Tracy remarked as the train once again stopped and the doors opened whereupon they repeated their observation of the platform at the doorway.

"I reckon he is getting off at either Charing Cross or Embankment" the Commander remarked.

"What makes you think that?" Tracy asked out of curiosity as the doors once again closed and they took their seats again as the train moved off.

"Whoever his controller is" the Commander explained "The unknown man behind the Operation Cleopatra jobs, has probably sent the Administrator General with those files he is carrying to the Minister on some sort of mutual skin saving exercise."

"He's heading for Whitehall then" Sir Richard remarked "Makes sense though."

"So what is the plan then my dear?" Tracy asked.

"I have to confront him" the Commander explained "If we can get him to give me a name, testify, something that can help us identify those behind this set up, then I can enjoy my favourite hobby."

"That would be unsubtly kicking in doors and annoying the powers that be" Sir Richard grinned.

"That would be the one" the Commander agreed with a wry grin.

"The services of my department are at your disposal whenever you require them" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Thank you" the Commander responded "I have a feeling I will need them."

"We are now approaching Charing Cross" the automated announcement system informed the train's occupants "On arrival, the last set of doors will not open..."

As the flow of often ignored recorded information continued, the Administrator General rose to his feet and looked around the interior of the car slightly nervously before stepping over to the door just as the lights of the platform at Charing Cross appeared and the train braked to a halt.

"This station is Charing Cross" the announcement continued as the doors opened and a significant number of passengers proceeded to alight "Change here for the Bakerloo Line and Main Line Rail Services."

The Administrator General was already crossing the platform and heading for the sign posted way out when the Commander alighted from the front car, leaving Tracy and Sir Richard on the train to continue onwards one further stop to Embankment.

The train's doors were already closing when the Commander reached the way out from the platform and saw just ahead the Administrator General reaching the escalator that led up to the surface.

As the whine of the trains traction motors died down in the background with its departure, the Commander joined the queue of people at the bottom of the escalator and standing on the right, was able to continue observing his quarry who was now about two thirds of the way up.

Whilst the Commander was following the Administrator General through the lower levels of Charing Cross station, the train with Tracy and Sir Richard on board had made the short journey down the Northern Line to the next stop at Embankment where they were now alighting.

"I think its time you made a few phone calls" Tracy remarked to Sir Richard as they made their way off the platform and up towards the booking hall by way of the escalators.

"And you had better put a couple of van loads of the service's finest on standby" Sir Richard responded.

"Good thinking" Tracy remarked as they reached the ticket barriers in the Embankment booking hall whereupon she reached for her radio "Lima Tango Zero One to Control" she called "Rustle me up some cavalry on an alpha priority standby status in ten minutes."

"Where would you like them Maam?" the despatch officer in the Holborn Control Room enquired.

"Have a couple of van loads head towards Embankment and Charing Cross" Tracy instructed "Another van load need to be on standby near Euston, Cassini is on site with some of his lads so he can tell you where he wants them."

The Commander paused in the ticket hall of Charing Cross Underground Station and watched the worried looking Administrator General reluctantly pass through the ticket barriers before following himself a few moments later at the other end of the row.

"Now where are you going?" the Commander pondered as he continued to follow him at a discrete distance within the crowds up the steps to the main concourse of the main line railway station above, where the early rush hour was just beginning to build up.

Fortunately the possibility of losing the Administrator General in amongst the commuters was avoided when he was seen to turn to his right and exit the station out onto the cobbled forecourt that separated it from the Strand that ran past outside.

The Commander remained in the shadows of the passageway exit when he saw the Administrator General come to a stop near the vehicle gates and reach for a mobile telephone from his tunic pocket.

Although the conversation was inaudible, the Commander was easily able to tell that it was abrupt and for the Administrator General judging from his expression, somewhat uncomfortable.

With the call completed and the telephone returned to his pocket, the Administrator General took a deep breath, reaffirmed his grip on the files held firmly under his arm and moved off towards Trafalgar Square.

"I love the river" Tracy remarked as she and Sir Richard leaned on the north Thames Embankment wall in front of Cleopatra's Needle and observed the pleasure craft and river ferries passing by as the water lapped at the sides of the embankment with a soothing splashing.

"Has the Commander learned to swim yet?" Sir Richard asked as he passed Tracy a cup of tea in a polystyrene cup that he had just acquired for her from the cafe on the other side of the road.

"He won't even go near a boat unless it cannot be avoided" Tracy explained "And yes, he still can't swim."

"Better not put him charge of the River Division then" Sir Richard mused.

"Ah" Tracy remarked as she observed two marked Security Service vans coming along the Embankment "Here comes the cavalry."

"I had better head towards Westminster" Sir Richard remarked "There is likely to be a bit if a political storm brewing any minute and I don't want to miss the fun."

"Afternoon guys" Tracy greeted the two van loads of officers as she met them at the pavement edge "Park yourselves out of sight down the road by the back of the MOD and I will call you when I need you."

The Commander stood on the corner of Trafalgar Square and watched as the Administrator General trudged across the square, past the famous Nelson's Column.

Once he was a reasonable distance away and as soon as the traffic light controlled crossing allowed him, the Commander crossed the road and continued to maintain a discreet distance as he followed the Administrator General as he reached the south edge of the square and crossed over to enter the top end of Northumberland Avenue.

"Lima Tango Zero One from Lima Mike Zero One" the Commander called over his radio set "Have you got the cavalry on standby?" he enquired.

"Two van loads of the company's finest await your instructions" Tracy confirmed.

"Where are you love?" the Commander asked as he crossed the main road and entered the top end of Northumberland Avenue himself.

"Just having a cuppa on the Embankment" Tracy confirmed as she waved off her colleagues in their vans as they drove off to take up position out of sight until called for.

"In that case" the Commander informed her as he picked up his pace to keep up with the Administrator General who had now quickened his progress "Make yourself invisible as the Administrator General is heading straight for your position and I am right behind him."

"Oh hell" Tracy remarked as she looked up and down for somewhere to hide from view "I'll hide behind Cleopatra's Needle."

"Where is Sir Richard?" the Commander asked as Tracy practically ran over the steps and onto the section of the embankment that jutted out in front of Cleopatra's Needle.

"He's headed down to Westminster" Tracy confirmed "There is likely to be some political fireworks about to go off and he wants a front row seat when it kicks off."

"Hope he saves me a seat then" the Commander responded "Duck love, he's just exited from Northumberland Avenue and is heading under the Charing Cross Bridge.

"Be careful love" Tracy urged.

"I will" the Commander confirmed as he too reached the corner where the bottom end of Northumberland Avenue met the Victoria Embankment road alongside the heavy railway bridge that carried the main railway lines into and out Charing Cross.

"This is turning into a mystery tour" the Commander remarked to himself as he stood by the old green cab hut cafe on the corner and observed the Administrator General as he emerged into the daylight on the other side of the railway bridge and look around with a worried expression.

With a heavy heart and a deep breath, the Administrator General turned and ascended the steps alongside the south entrance to Embankment Station that led up to the Golden Jubilee Footbridge, a skeletal white metal structure whose modern appearance and design contrasted sharply with the old Victorian era railway bridge on which it had been mounted.

As a commuter train rattled slowly out of Charing Cross across the railway bridge, the Administrator General walked slowly along the length of the walkway until he was almost half way across the river.

"You and I need to have a little chat Sir" the Commander announced from behind him, causing the Administrator General to turn around.

"Ah, Commander, I had a feeling you would be paying me a visit" the Administrator General admitted.

"So far I reckon I can connect you two at least two unexplained deaths, a couple of shootings and at least three cases of attempting to pervert the course of justice" the

Commander informed him as he approached, slightly unsteadily as his fear of heights coupled with the open nature of the bridge meant he was feeling somewhat nervous.

"As an associate of mine would say" the Administrator General responded mournfully "Everything revolves around evidence my old friend, do you have any?"

"Lets try this for a starter" the Commander extracted the evidence bag containing the buttons he had found at Baker Street station and held it in front of him for the Administrator General to view "Missing something are we Sir?" he asked cryptically.

"A button is a button is a button" the Administrator General remarked casually although deep down he was now more than seriously worried.

"Not this one" the Commander pointed out the shiny metal button in the bag "This one I showed to my friends down at the Uniform Branch, very interesting they said."

"How so?" the Administrator General asked feigning an interest.

"This came from one of our uniforms" the Commander explained "Its one of the old type gold plated ones from a senior officer's uniform. These haven't been issued in the best part of ten years so I got them to do a little checking, you know how many uniforms there are in circulation with this old type button?"

"A lot I would have thought" the Administrator General responded.

"Two" the Commander announced "My ceremonial dress uniform that is currently on display in the Police Museum and yours. I do believe you will find it belongs just there" the Commander pointed to a point on the Administrator General's tunic where a tatty black thread marked where a button was until recently attached.

"Ah" the Administrator General looked down at his uniform, clearly unaware until now he had even lost the button "But it could have fallen off anywhere I would say. Where did you say you found it?"

"In a maintenance access passage at Baker Street Station" the Commander announced "Now either you have taken up a sudden interest in late Victorian Metropolitan Railway architecture or you had some involvement in the disappearance of the late Mr Jarvis."

"I see you are holding many of the cards" the Administrator General was forced to admit defeat "However let me assure you that as regards the death of the unfortunate and yes you are correct innocent Mr Jarvis, I had nothing to do with that beyond being an unwilling eye witness."

"I think I can believe you there" the Commander admitted "That brings me to this little button" he held up the other button he had found at Baker Street "So to whom does this belong?"

"The Civil Servant who was charged with the responsibility of devising, running and directing the original Operation Cleopatra and associated activities back in the 1980's"

the Administrator General confirmed "A very powerful man with a large safe full of unpleasant skeletons that a lot of very influential people would do a lot of remarkable things to keep well and truly buried."

"Does this ghost have a name?" the Commander asked.

"Renquist" the Administrator General "I never did find out anything more about him."

"Lima Mike Zero One to Fuller" the Commander called into his radio as he steadied himself against the bridge parapet.

"Fuller here Sir" he responded having just arrived at the River Division office on the bank of the Thames some miles down stream at Wapping.

"Has the name Renquist come up in your file searching?" the Commander enquired.

"Rings a bell somewhere" Fuller responded "However not being anywhere near a computer at the moment means I can't confirm it."

"When you get the chance" the Commander asked "Find this gentleman, find out where he is and then let me know as I would dearly like to meet him for a little chat."

"Bringing such people down a peg or two very publicly is my specialty" the Commander confirmed "Speaking of which, where are you intending to go with those files you are carrying."

"Renquist wants me to bring these documents to the attention of the Minister" the Administrator General explained "Part of his little collection, he hopes that these will make the Minister order you to stop the investigation."

"When was the last time I listened to a politician telling me what to do?" the Commander asked frankly.

"Good point" the Administrator General admitted as in the background the approaching engine noise of a boat began to fill the air, becoming more audible as below the two men, one of the Security Service Thames River Division patrol boats appeared from beneath the bridge as if on the approach to the adjacent Embankment Pier.

It was then that both of them became aware of four heavily built and identically dressed men approaching, two from each end of the foot bridge and walking towards them sternly and with clear intent.

"I think we are about to have guests" the Commander remarked as he looked around.

"Welcome back" Tracy remarked to Sir Richard as he rejoined her by Cleopatra's Needle "The main event didn't happen then I take it?"

"The Minister is firmly ensconced in his club having lunch" Sir Richard confirmed "That's him out of circulation for at least another two hours by my reckoning."

"Well you haven't missed much here that is for certain" Tracy reported as she looked up and down the river "On second thoughts though..." she remarked as she suddenly noticed the patrol boat a short distance away up stream beneath the bridge.

"Try these" Sir Richard produced a set of opera glasses from his overcoat and passed them to her.

"Oh dear" Tracy remarked, clearly now very worried "It looks like my husband is about to make a mess" she explained as she watched through the glasses the confrontation on the foot bridge and the heavily built gentlemen who looked like they were about to intervene.

"Perhaps we should join the party" Sir Richard remarked "and bring along some friends."

"Are you armed?" Tracy asked as she removed her semi automatic handgun from its belt holster and checked it.

"Never leave home without old faithful" Sir Richard confirmed with a wry smile as he produced his old service revolver and brandished it with pride.

"Come on" Tracy urged and together they headed off towards the bridge.

"I was rather hoping this was your herd Commander" the Administrator General commented as the four men came to a halt, two either side of them and blocking any possible exit.

"I'm afraid not" the Commander responded before turning to one of the men standing right behind him who he recognised as the man he had earlier arrested at Oxford Circus station.

"Hello again" the Commander greeted the man mockingly "Fancy meeting you here."

"With all due respect" the lead man, the one from the Oxford Circus incident announced politely but firmly "You two will have to come with us."

"Lima Tango One to Control" Tracy called into her radio having passed back the opera glasses to Sir Richard who continued to survey the distant scene.

"Control, go ahead Maam" the response came quickly.

"Patch me through to the Thames River Division Patrol Boat err" she tailed off and tapped Sir Richard on the shoulder "What is the name of that boat?"

"Looks like the Patrol Vessel Esther" Sir Richard confirmed through the opera glasses before panning back up to the foot bridge.

"The Patrol Vessel Esther" Tracy called as she returned to her radio.

"I think things are about to turn ugly" Sir Richard confirmed as he observed the heavily built men move in towards the Commander and the Administrator General with a clear sense of determination.

"Embankment units one and two" Tracy called the two vans of officers she had on standby "Roll and deploy to the east Jubilee Footbridge immediately."

"Don't you just hate it when this happens" the Commander remarked casually as two of the men stood either side of him and were about to take hold of him by both arms.

"Change of plan gentlemen" the Commander then announced as he struck out and hit the man to his left in the stomach before punching the one on his right in the face.

The Administrator General reacted in much a similar manner and before anyone knew what was going on, there was a major fight in progress just as a significant number of armed Security Service officers began to flood up the steps at the north end of the bridge and head towards them.

Unfortunately, with the reinforcements still some distance away, the Commander and the Administrator General were still heavily outnumbered and despite their best efforts soon found themselves pinned against the rather flimsy looking bridge parapet.

"Get out of this one" the Commander wryly suggested to the four men as the armed officers reached them but it was to soon transpire that the four men had planned ahead for this.

"I do hope you can swim" the lead man announced before with a sudden heave they lifted the Commander and the Administrator General over the parapet and dropped them into the cold wet water of the River Thames below.

The four men quickly followed them down but with a controlled dive which meant once they hit the water, there were nowhere near as disorientated as the two officers and were able to make quickly for the Patrol Vessel Esther that moved in closer to pick them up.

"Oh you have got to be joking" Tracy remarked as she witnessed the unfolding drama from Embankment Pier having run down the access walkway from the road. It was clear that the Patrol Boat was working for the bad guys and its presence here had been carefully planned.

"Hold your fire!" Tracy called up to the armed officers on the bridge who were aiming down into the river and the chaotic scene below where the Administrator General was clambering aboard the patrol boat whilst the Commander was clearly struggling in the water.

"Try this!" Sir Richard called out as he joined Tracy on the pier side and threw out a life belt towards the Commander.'

Behind him on the patrol boat, the Administrator General was dragged aboard by the four men before he turned and looked back out to the river where he was shocked to see the Commander struggling in the water to reach the life belt.

"You are not just going to leave him there are you?" the Administrator General demanded to know.

"Shut up" the lead man responded tersely as he struck the Administrator General squarely across the back of the head, sending him spiralling to the deck unconscious.

"Right" the leader of the men announced as he entered the bridge of the vessel and called to the helmsman "Floor this cow and let's get the hell out of here."

As the engines of the patrol boat accelerated to full speed, the wash from its rapid departure down river caused the Commander to lose his tentative grip on the life belt and he began to drift away towards a couple of old boats moored in the middle of the Thames.

"Lima Romeo Control from Lima Tango One" Tracy practically screamed into her radio as she watched her husband drifting away helplessly "Patrol Vessel Esther is a hostile vessel, repeat hostile vessel.

"I've got him" Sir Richard announced as he finished removing his coat, jacket and shoes before diving into the Thames and proceeding to swim over to the Commander's position where he managed to grab hold of him and pull him towards the old boats.

"What other vessels have you got between Embankment and Greenwich?" Tracy asked over the radio as the hostile patrol vessel began to disappear into the distance.

"The SPV Ruth is at Blackfriars but she is rather old and slow" the River Division Control Room confirmed "The nearest high speed vessel capable of catching the Esther would be the Jennifer but that is all the way up at Wapping."

"Tell her to head this way" Tracy responded as she looked on relieved at the sight of Sir Richard helping the Commander aboard the old boat in the middle of the river from where they both gave a wave towards her to indicate that both were all right.

"Tracy?" the Commander tried to call over his radio only to get an electric shock from the water logged unit which forced him to drop it onto the rusty deck of the old boat.

"I think for this radio, the war is over" Sir Richard examined it casually before calmly tossing it over his shoulder.

"Well that was fun" the Commander remarked wryly "I don't suppose you have a drink about you do you?" he asked Sir Richard.

"I regret to inform you my old friend that my hip flask with its consignment of the Administrator General's finest whisky is currently over there in my jacket pocket" Sir Richard announced regrettably.

"Ah well" the Commander remarked as he looked across at Tracy standing on Embankment Pier.

"Tracy!" the Commander called over to her "Get after them but try not to shoot the Administrator General."

"But what about you two?" Tracy called back.

"Oh we'll be fine" the Commander replied although he was somewhat unconvinced of this fact given their current situation "Just get going and I will see you later."

"All right!" Tracy called back as she blew a kiss in response before heading back up the access way to the Embankment.

"I am willing to bet if it was my wife standing over there" Sir Richard mused "Instead of a nice loving kiss, all I would get is a complaint about the fact this was a clean shirt this morning."

"Don't worry" the Commander reassured him "If it makes you feel any better, I can safely say that the Uniform Office will not be in the best of moods with me when they see I have ruined another uniform!"

"Lieutenant!" Tracy called to the officer she found at the top of the pier ramp who had just arrived along with other officers from the vicinity in response to the emergency.

"Yes Maam" he responded eagerly.

"I want to borrow your motorbike" Tracy called as her eyes alighted with glee on her favourite form of transport, a powerful fully marked and equipped Security Service patrol bike parked by the side of the road.

"Err yes Maam" the officer responded as he threw her the keys "She tends to over rev a little in the lower gears" he advised as Tracy climbed on to the bike and started the engine.

"I'll try and bring it back in one piece" Tracy called back with a wry grin before she revved the engine and did a full turn to cross the carriageway and proceed east along the Embankment.

"What are we going to do with him?" one of the men asked as he and an associate dragged the unconscious body of the Administrator General into the wheel house and dumped him in the corner.

"That's for the old man to decide" the leader responded "Although I expect it will be the usual drill."

"Looks like we've got company" the helmsman announced from the wheel "Patrol Vessel Ruth is just ahead and turning towards us."

"Where are we?" the leader asked as he looked out of the windows around the front and sides of the wheel house.

"Just passed Blackfriars" the helmsman confirmed as the Ruth could be seen getting ever closer.

"Patrol Vessel Esther" a loud hailer was suddenly heard to call "This is the Security Service Patrol Vessel Ruth, surrender and prepare to be boarded."

"How original" the leader remarked before turning calmly to his three associates behind him "Get out there and deal with them please" he requested sternly.

"This is your last warning" the loud hailer continued to call as the Ruth began to turn and prepare to pull alongside the Esther "Come out on deck, thrown your weapons down and put your hands on your heads."

"We are coming out" the leader called as if signalling their surrender, in reality of course he was merely using this opportunity for a distractive diversion.

The three armed men duly appeared on the rear open deck section of the Esther just as the Ruth approached alongside.

"Now" the leader called from the wheelhouse whereupon all four men produced automatic weapons from behind their backs and proceeded to open fire on the Ruth.

"Bloody hell" the Ruth's commanding officer responded as he and his crew instinctively ducked for whatever cover they could instantly find as gun fire struck the vessel, shattering windows and equipment with deadly efficiency and bringing the vessel to a halt in mid stream as the engines gave out.

"Everyone all right?" the commanding officer called as he lifted himself cautiously back off the deck of the bridge as soon as the gunfire had stopped and the engines of the Esther were heard to pull sharply away.

"I think so" the helmsman confirmed as everyone looked around to see how everyone else was, all appearing to be moving with no sign of major injury.

"Patrol Vessel Ruth to Control" the Captain called over the vessel's radio before he realised that the hand unit had been disconnected from the rest of the equipment by gun fire impacts.

"Ah" the Captain responded as he casually tossed the unit over his shoulder where it crashed onto the debris littered deck and reached for his own portable radio "Patrol Vessel Ruth to Control" he tried again.

"Control" the River Division Control Room responded "Be aware that there have been reports of gunfire near Blackfriars" the dispatcher added.

"No kidding" the Captain responded slightly dejectedly as he looked around the gun fire shattered bridge "Who is the officer co-ordinating this little water borne disaster?"

"Divisional Commander Caverner of the Transport Division" the Control Room dispatcher confirmed.

"Should have guessed really" the Captain added ruefully "Patch me through to her will you?"

"Sirens, blue flashing lights" Tracy gestured in front of her at the stationary traffic "What do you want, a sign that says get out of the way?"

"Lima Tango Zero One from Lima Romeo Control" Tracy's radio called which caused her to pull over to the side of the road alongside the river to reply to it.

"Go ahead" she responded as she took the opportunity to look up and down the river.

"Captain of the Patrol Vessel Ruth wants a word with you Maam" the Dispatcher explained.

"Put him through" Tracy responded "Captain?"

"Yes Maam" the Captain of the Ruth called "I thought you had better know that we just took a lot of gunfire from our stolen vessel."

"Everyone all right?" Tracy enquired concerned.

"A few cuts and bruises but nothing serious fortunately" the Captain confirmed as he looked around the fairly comprehensively wrecked bridge "The old girl may need a few days in dry dock mind."

"Where is the Esther now?" Tracy asked.

"Likely to be approaching Tower Hill by now I would have thought" the Captain responded.

"Ah" Tracy looked down river from her position in front of the Tower of London where in the distance approaching Tower Bridge she could see the Esther approaching, travelling at a steady pace so as not to attract any unwanted attention.

"Are you guys still mobile at all?" she asked.

"We can move" the Captain confirmed "Steering is a bit wonky but she still floats."

"Get yourselves back to Embankment Pier and pick up my husband and Sir Richard from the old boat in mid stream" Tracy instructed as she restarted the engine of the motorbike and prepared to move off again.

"Turn this floating Swiss cheese around lad" the Captain called to the helmsman.

"Yes Sir" the helmsman responded as he cranked the wheel around rather creakily until they were pointing back upstream whereupon he began to accelerate away which produced a choking black cloud of smoke out of the back of the vessel from the damaged engines.

"Make smoke!" the Captain responded jokingly in the manner of those old war films with the British Navy.

"Are there any steam ships left in service?" the Commander pondered as he noticed a large black cloud of smoke approaching them from the east with a boat only just visible in amongst the encroaching smog that seemed to be getting worse by the minute.

"Oh dear" Sir Richard remarked as he turned and also saw the approaching pollution "Methinks they are in a spot of bother."

"I know the feeling" the Commander mused before suddenly sneezing loudly.

"There they are" the lookout on the front deck of the Patrol Vessel Ruth called back to the bridge.

"Would you mind pointing me the right direction" the Captain called from the bridge "We can't see a thing back here!"

"Starboard fifteen degrees" the lookout called "Slowly now."

Sir Richard and the Commander looked on amused as the patrol boat drew in alongside and the captain appeared from amongst the fog to welcome them aboard.

"Someone call for a taxi?" the Captain called as he helped Sir Richard aboard the ailing craft where another member of the crew offered a large towel which he gratefully accepted.

"I'll take the next car" the Commander responded as he looked at the badly damaged boat.

"Come on" Sir Richard replied as he and the Captain jointly hauled the soggy Commander aboard "It's as safe as falling off a boat."

"I'll do the jokes" the Commander responded as he too wrapped himself up in a towel to try and dry himself off as the boat moved off and headed towards the nearby Embankment Pier.

"What's that noise?" Sir Richard asked as the two men followed the Captain onto the shattered bridge.

"It's called running water" the Commander remarked "You find it all around a boat you know."

"Captain!" the cry came up from below decks in the engine room "I think we are sinking."

"Hurry up" the Captain urged the helmsman as he approached the pier side and with poor control available, slammed sideways into it and stopped the engines.

"All hands abandon ship" the Commander suggested "Old cliché I know but it works."

No sooner had Sir Richard, the Commander and the crew piled off the ship onto the pier side than the vessel took on an alarming list before gently lowering itself into the depths of the river.

"Can't wait to hear what my boss says about this" the Captain commented ruefully as they stood and watched the boat sink before them.

"Oh hell" the Commander remarked as he looked around at the approach of stern footsteps "I think we are in trouble now."

"Really?" Sir Richard turned around and saw what the Commander had seen, the rather stern looking Minister approaching down the access ramp with his protection officer Jennifer Caverner having trouble keeping up with his fast pace.

"Minister" the Commander greeted him with fake cheerfulness "Fancy meeting you here."

"What the hell is going on?" the Minister demanded to know.

"How long have you got" the Commander responded as behind him, the sunken boat gave out a final release of trapped air bubbles.

"Watch out!" Tracy called to the officer who emerged from the side entrance of the Thames River Division Headquarters in front of her approaching motorbike.

"Whoa!" Fuller responded as he suddenly reversed and crashed back inside the doorway with the files he was carrying going flying in all directions.

"Are you all right?" Tracy asked as she stopped her bike in front of the doorway to see the sprawled body of Fuller lying on the floor.

"Paper files" Fuller responded as he got up and managed to get himself and the files he had been carrying back into some sort of order "I am amazed anyone bothers with them anymore."

"Find anything?" Tracy enquired.

"Lots" Fuller confirmed "If I may ask Maam, why are you here?"

"Small case of a stolen boat and half a dozen nutters" Tracy explained somewhat cryptically "If you will excuse me" she revved the engine of the motorbike "I need to find some fast transportation of the water borne variety."

"What is going on around here?" Fuller mused as he observed Tracy disappear off into the distance in the direction of the dockside.

"Afternoon" Tracy greeted the understandably confused looking dock master as she arrived at the dock side and drew to a halt "What's the fastest boat you have?"

"We are making good time" the helmsman of the Patrol Vessel Esther reported as they continued to sail up river at a steady pace.

"Excellent" the leader of the group agreed as he went out from the bridge onto the deck and surveyed the scene up and down the river "Looks like the authorities have given up and called it a day."

"Oh my head" the Administrator General groaned as he began to sit up in the corner of the bridge.

"Are you all right?" the Captain of the vessel enquired.

"I had the strangest dream..." he began to respond.

"Better go back to sleep then" the leader of the group responded as he re-entered the bridge and knocked the Administrator General unconscious once more.

"Ouch" the Captain commented.

"Where are we?" the leader enquired.

"Just coming up to the Docklands area" the helmsman confirmed "Isle of Dogs and Canary Wharf" he added as he manoeuvred the vessel around a pair of waste barges that were moored in mid river.

"Jolly boating weather..." the leader began to hum as he strolled back outside and looked around as they passed the waste barges only for his relaxed attitude to be suddenly shattered when he realised that hiding behind the barge was another Security Service Patrol Vessel.

"Floor the bastard!" the leader called as he raced back into the Bridge cabin.

"Problem?" the helmsman asked as he threw forward the throttle levers for the two engines to maximum power causing a sudden acceleration of the boat.

"What is the most powerful and fastest boat in the fleet?" the leader asked.

"The Patrol Vessel Jennifer" the helmsman confirmed "Except it won't be commissioned for another week yet."

"You may wish to revise your estimates" the leader pointed towards the rear of the vessel.

"Oh hell!" the helmsman responded before shouting down the access way to the engine room below deck "Bypass the fuses, do something, I need everything you have got!"

"There they are!" Tracy declared as the Esther appeared into view from in front of the waste barges "Floor it" she called to the Captain of the high powered speedboat.

"You are aware Maam that the paint on this thing is still wet?" he asked as he accelerated away.

"Well drive faster then" Tracy suggested "The paint will dry quicker."

"If you insist" the helmsman responded as he opened up the accelerator on the powerful twin engines of the Patrol Vessel Jennifer to full and they lurched forward, clearly reducing the gap between them and the vessel they were in pursuit of.

"Does this thing have sirens?" Tracy asked as she saw up ahead they were approaching a number of small and some large boats in the river who were about to get tangled up in the encroaching pursuit.

"Yes" the helmsman confirmed "That console to your left."

"Oh this just gets better" the gang leader remarked as the sound of a siren with accompanying blue flashing lights began to be sounded from the Jennifer behind them.

"That there is the most powerful boat in the fleet" the Captain of the Esther confirmed "We won't be able to outrun them for long without overloading the engines."

"In that case" the leader announced "We need to consider alternative plans, start weaving around and see if we can shake them off a bit."

"Hold tight!" the helmsman of the Jennifer announced as he was forced to make a sharp turn to go around a moored vessel that the Esther had just jogged around ahead. Just as the helmsman resumed a straight course after the sharp turn, the men aboard the Esther duly produced their unwelcome surprise.

"Duck!" Tracy called as she saw weapons being brandished in their direction and the crew of the Jennifer threw themselves to the deck as gunfire strafed over the open

bridge section of the vessel, shattering a couple of the wind shield windows but causing no major damage to ship or crew.

"Oh I do love a nice quiet sail down the river" Tracy sarcastically mused as she reached for her gun and checked it "Keep this thing still" she instructed before she popped up, quickly took aim in the direction of the patrol vessel Esther and opened fire with several quickly fired rounds.

"Take that!" Tracy called after them before ducking down behind the control console again as a return volley of gunfire was duly dispatched.

"Mind the paintwork!" the helmsman responded as he saw his brand new boat being shot to pieces around him.

"Hard to starboard!" Tracy called out whereupon the helmsman quickly jumped back to his feet and pulled the wheel to the right.

"I meant the other way" Tracy responded as the boat turned in the opposite direction to that she thought she had requested and braced herself for.

"Port is left, starboard is right" the helmsman explained.

"Oh..." Tracy replied "In which case, just get me up alongside them."

"Here we go" the helmsman responded as he returned the engines back to full throttle and manoeuvred back in the direction of the Esther which was weaving in and out of the moored boats and other river traffic in an attempt to shake off their pursuer.

"This is the Security Service Patrol Vessel Jennifer to the crew of the Esther" Tracy called over a loud hailer as they drew ever closer on the section of open river approaching the Thames Flood Barrier "Surrender your vessel and prepare to be boarded."

The only response to Tracy's demand was an inevitable burst of gunfire aimed back at her vessel causing her and the crew to once again duck behind the instrument console as the already shattered windscreen and bow bodywork took another hammering.

"Sod this" Tracy remarked as she sat up on the deck "We need a diversion of some kind."

"Try this" the helmsman chucked Tracy a flare gun.

"Great" Tracy remarked as she looked it over "Got anything else on this tub?"

"Armoury box is in the floor underneath you" the helmsman nodded downwards.

"Oh lovely" Tracy looked over the box contents and picked out a couple of clips of ammunition for her gun and a stun gas launcher, both of which she tucked into her tunic pockets making them bulge rather awkwardly.

"Ready?" the helmsman asked.

"I think so" Tracy confirmed.

"Right then" the helmsman instructed "When I catch up to them, fire the flare gun over them so it fires on their port side, then when they are all looking out of the left, I sweep in from the starboard side and ram the buggers."

"Sounds like a plan" Tracy responded as she and the rest of the crew returned to their feet and resumed the pursuit "This looks like a good opportunity" she pointed ahead to further traffic in the river ahead in the form of another set of refuse barges being towed slowly along.

Accelerating back up to full speed again, the helmsman of the Jennifer quickly caught up towards the Esther and went the other side of the refuse barge.

"Let's see if we can surprise them" Tracy announced as she aimed above her head and towards the far side of the river on the opposite side of the Jennifer and fired.

"What the hell was that?" the gang leader asked as a whishing noise and a bang was suddenly heard somewhere close to their port side. "Go out there and take a look" he ordered whereupon his men left the bridge and spilled out onto the port side of the vessel and scanned the river side.

The next thing the men knew, there was a sudden large jolt which caused the vessel to lurch, catapulting three of them into the river whilst the fourth only just managed to hang on.

On the other side of the Esther, Tracy clambered aboard at the rear of the vessel and quickly went over to the struggling gang member who was barely able to hang on to the side rail.

"Allow me" Tracy called and before the man could respond, she had calmly struck him across the back of the head and sent him following his colleagues into the cold river.

With the outside deck clear, Tracy drew her gun and proceeded to the bridge of the vessel, pausing alongside the side door to glance around the corner and see inside where she saw the gang leader, the helmsman who was trying to correct their heading following the side swipe impact, and a couple of others.

"Try this" Tracy remarked to herself as she tossed in the stun gas grenade she had requisitioned from the Jennifer which after rolling along the deck, suddenly blew and emitted gas that caused those in the bridge to start coughing and collapsing in the confusion.

"Somebody shoot something!" the leader was heard to call from amidst the smoke cloud which was already starting to dissipate when Tracy entered the bridge to be greeted by the sight of two armed men coming up the stairs from below decks.

"If you insist" Tracy responded as she defended herself by shooting both men causing them to fall back down the stairs before she turned her attention to the unconscious Administrator General lying in the corner.

As Tracy was checking him to see if he was still all right, the leader of the gang appeared from out of the thinning smoke and grabbed her around the neck and pulled her back.

"Get off me!" Tracy demanded before administering a swift back kick which sent her attacker reeling where he fell against the main control console. Just at that moment, the helmsman who was still trying to keep the vessel on course as it approached an area of busy commercial traffic, picked up a gun from the desk and turned on her.

"Die bitch!" he screamed in anger as he aimed straight for Tracy only for all of them to be suddenly thrown to the deck as the boat, now partially out of control, sideswiped another vessel in mid river.

The helmsman was thrown against the bulkhead and bounced back onto the controls unconscious and also ramming the engine throttle out at full power.

"Would you care to rephrase that?" Tracy remarked as she looked on from the deck.

Outside, the helmsman of the Jennifer watched with concern as the Esther began to waver about all over the place.

"Its gone berserk" he commented as he tried to move in towards the wayward boat, being careful not to wind up a collision victim himself.

"What the hell is going on?" the Administrator General asked groggily as he began to resume some form of consciousness only to be confronted by the strange and unexpected scene of Tracy trying unsuccessfully to pull the unconscious helmsman off the controls whilst the vessel wavered and lurched about all over the place.

"Welcome back" Tracy responded "Things are a little difficult to explain."

"No kidding" the Administrator General remarked as he looked around, still clearly confused.

"Commander Caverner!" the captain of the Jennifer called over his loudhailer "Get off that thing quick!"

"What the...?" Tracy pondered before looking up through the bridge windows to see that they were entering a major freight vessel handling area and the river ahead was teeming with large bulky vessels.

"Problem?" the Administrator General asked as Tracy realised the necessity for a speedy exit and helped him to his feet.

"No time to explain" Tracy confirmed "Come on" she took his arm over her shoulders and lifted the large man out of the bridge house and onto the open deck.

"Women and Administrator General's first!" she announced as they reached the edge of the deck whereupon Tracy promptly pushed the Administrator General into the river before jumping in herself, leaving the boat to plough on ahead out of control.

Quickly the captain of the Jennifer has moved over to them and after helping Tracy aboard, they both unceremoniously hauled the Administrator General up over the side and casually dumped him on the deck to recover.

"Oh hell" Tracy remarked as she looked up and saw the Esther running around out of control, each turn bringing it closer and closer to a large freighter that was turning in mid stream.

"Time for a swift exit" the Captain agreed as he headed back to the controls on the front bridge.

"Turn this tub around and burn water" Tracy suggested as they saw the Esther make its closest pass yet at the freighter which with its large and slow progress was struggling in vain to avoid what now seemed inevitable.

"Hold tight" the Captain called as he swiftly turned the wheel before embedding the throttle as far into the revs range as it would go.

Tracy looked behind them as they proceeded to accelerate rapidly away, just in time to see the Esther make its last turn before slamming hard into the side of the freighter, disintegrating on impact and causing a large explosion and debris to be sent up when the impact ruptured and then ignited her fuel lines.

"Achoo!" the Commander suddenly sneezed loudly as he sat on the bench on the quay side at Embankment Pier with an equally cold and wet Sir Richard Crowthorne.

"Bless you": the Minister responded as he paced nervously up and down behind them.

"Thank you" the Commander responded as he blew his nose on a slightly damp handkerchief proffered by Sir Richard.

"This is bloody awkward" the Minister continued "You want me to authorise a raid on an unknown address containing an unknown man who as of yet we have no idea exactly what it is he or she is know to have done."

"That's about the size of it" the Commander agreed.

"And if" the Minister continued "and I stress if I approve the warrant, we could be opening a whole lorry load of canned worms for the Government."

"All part of life's rich tapestry" the Commander responded with a wry grin.

"Very poetic" Sir Richard remarked.

"Tracy is trying to get me more cultured" the Commander explained "My education was not exactly what you call classical."

"Yeah, I remember" Sir Richard recalled.

As the sound of a powerful boat approached from down river, the three men looked up to see the slightly battle scarred Security Service patrol vessel Jennifer approach with Tracy on the bridge.

"Here comes trouble" Sir Richard remarked with an amused grin as they watched the vessel turn around in mid river and come into the pier side.

"Hello love" the Commander called with a wave "Busy afternoon?"

"Let's just say the Thames River Division Chief is not going to be a happy bunny" Tracy responded as she looked around whilst the captain of the Jennifer brought the vessel in to the side of the pier whereupon a clonking noise was heard from beneath.

Tracy leapt down from the vessel onto the deck as soon as she was able and then after looking up the pier walkway towards a group of officers standing nearby, attracted their attention with a shrill whistle.

"Four wet loons on board" she called to them as they came over in response to her call "Take them away, dry them off, feed them coffee and then throw them in a cell for the night."

"Yes Maam" the lead officer responded before they clambered aboard the Jennifer and proceeded to gather up the subdued and handcuffed men who were sat on the rear deck section where they had been put after having been earlier hauled out of the river.

"I see the Ruth made it then" Tracy remarked before looking around "Where is it by the way?"

"You here that knocking noise" the Commander asked as alongside him Sir Richard casually pointed towards the river beneath the Jennifer "That's the Ruth."

"Ah" Tracy looked down at the river "In which case, if anyone sees a mad Divisional Superintendent in a boat, I was never here."

"Did you get the Administrator General?" the Minister asked.

"Oh cripes" Tracy responded "I nearly forgot" she clambered back aboard with the Commander following her to where the Administrator General was sat at the back of the bridge looking like he was suffering a severe hangover.

"Well you look like hell" the Commander remarked as he and Tracy looked at him slumped in the corner.

"All things being considered" the Administrator General responded slightly groggily "It's been a very bad day, but at least it can't get any worse."

"Care to bet on that" the grumpy response came from the Minister as he joined them on board.

"On second thoughts, maybe I was wrong" the Administrator General reluctantly responded.

"Names" the Minister demanded "Who is the man behind the ongoing Operation Cleopatra?"

"If I tell you" the Administrator General responded "I will be dead within an hour."

"I can see to that" the Commander tried to assure him.

"All right" the Administrator General gave in "The man is a Civil Servant by the name of Frederick J Renquist the third."

"Where do I find this gentleman?" the Commander enquired.

"At his offices and apartment in Euston Road" the Administrator General responded "But be aware, he is well protected by a number of heavies."

"These heavies" the Commander asked "Who are they?"

"Mostly former Security Service, Special Ops and the like" the Administrator General confirmed "Very good at what they do so for God's sake be careful."

"Effective immediately" the Minister declared as Tracy and the Commander helped the Administrator General to his feet "You are on extended leave of absence and will be transferred to the care of the Witness Protection Division."

"Gardening leave" the Administrator General remarked with a wry grin as he was helped down the gangplank onto the deck of the pier "And me with my hay fever."

"Has anyone got a radio that actually works?" the Commander asked as he looked around.

"Here" Tracy passed her radio set to him only to suddenly realise that her set had also suffered the effects of being submerged in the river "Ah, on second thoughts."

"Never mind, I'll think of something" the Commander responded wryly as he and Tracy put their arms around each other and headed up the walkway towards the river embankment with the Minister and the Administrator General following close behind.

Up on the Embankment, Fuller had arrived to see what was going on and was joined along the road side by several emergency service vehicles as well as Jennifer and her ministerial car.

"Did I miss anything?" Fuller asked Jennifer as they greeted each other.

"Well so far my wonderful twin sister had been let loose with a boat, wrecked it and indirectly got another one sunk" Jennifer reported "Sir Richard and the Commander wound up in the drink and to add to the fun the Minister just effectively fired the Administrator General."

"Everything normal then" Fuller responded with a smirk as they saw Tracy and the Commander approach from the pier side.

"You two conspiring again?" Tracy asked with a smile.

"Just remarking what a normal day it was" Jennifer replied "By the way, the Chief of the Thames River Division has just been on the radio, I think he is a tad pissed about something."

"Oh, I wonder what that could be" the Commander remarked before turning to the Minister "Mind if we borrow your car?"

"Here you go boss" one of Cassini's officers called as he got back in the front passenger seat of their unmarked van and passed across a fresh cup of coffee.

"Oh, cheers mate" Cassini responded thankfully.

"Did I miss anything?" the officer enquired.

"Here, well no" Cassini admitted "It's been pretty much as you were since we got here."

"Oh" the officer responded with disappointment.

"Although judging by what's been coming over the radio for the last hour" Cassini continued "It sounds like someone has been having fun messing around in boats."

"That would explain the general call from the Chief of the River Division" the officer concluded "I think he is calling anyone he can think of to find out what the hell is going on."

"Well if he spent more time on his boats and less on the golf course then he wouldn't be in the dark would he?" Cassini remarked.

"Commander Cassini from Control" the radio called.

"Hello, sounds like we have contact" Cassini remarked as he picked up the radio to answer the call, "Cassini receiving, go."

"The Commander urgently requests the pleasure of your company in his office in thirty minutes" the message came.

"All right then" Cassini responded slightly surprised "I'm on my way."

"What was that all about?" the officer asked.

"No idea mate" Cassini responded as he got out of the van "I expect it's probably nothing, watch the shop until I get back."

"Will do boss" the officer responded.

"Right" the Commander announced as he arrived in his office at New Scotland Yard followed by the others "Fuller and Sir Richard, I want you to dig up everything we know about this Renquist character and meet me in the briefing room downstairs in half an hour."

"Yes Sir" Fuller responded before he and Sir Richard quickly departed.

"Looks like another uniform ruined" the Commander remarked as he casually tossed the wrecked tunic in the corner and sat down behind his desk.

"Perhaps I had better call the Uniform Office" Tracy suggested "You are not exactly top of their Christmas card list at the moment."

"Good idea love" the Commander agreed whereupon Tracy picked up the telephone on the desk and began to dial.

"Meanwhile" the Commander turned to Jennifer "I would like you and a couple of your most trustworthy officers to escort the Administrator General under plain secure cover to the safe house over in Richmond and put him in with Jefferies."

"Jefferies is alive?" Jennifer responded with understandable shock.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed "Tracy and I arranged a very convincing accident at Holborn for him and he's been safely tucked away ever since, I do owe the Piccadilly Line Controller a large bottle of finest scotch though."

"We will have him snugly tucked up there within the hour" Jennifer confirmed as she turned to leave but paused at the door "You two are not going to do anything stupid are you?" she asked.

"Of course not" the Commander smiled in response "Just pop around to this Renquist's place for a little chat."

"Right....." Jennifer responded "I'll see you two renegades later."

"Meanwhile" the Commander turned to the Minister who was helping himself to a stiff drink from the decanter "I need a very air tight arrest warrant on the QT."

"I think I can arrange that" the Minister agreed reasonably "On two conditions."

"Go on" the Commander responded.

"One" the Minister began "I want you to ensure that this Renquist chap and any of his associates are taken out of circulation permanently and as quietly as possible."

"Straight forward enough" the Commander agreed as the two men tried not to be distracted by the rather tense conversation Tracy nearby was having on the telephone "And the other condition?"

"I want you to accept the permanent post of Regional Administrator General for London and the South East with immediate effect" the Minister informed him.

"All right" the Commander reluctantly agreed "If you insist."

"Its not just me who is insisting" the Minister confirmed "It's the combined request of the Prime Minister, Lord Hainault and several other notaries including the Director General of the United Nations National Policing and Security Committee" he produced an envelope from his inner jacket pocket which was sealed with a traditional red wax seal and personally addressed to the Commander by name.

"I've a good mind to frame this" the Commander commented once he had broken the seal, extracted the letter contained inside and read it.

"Uniform Office says you are now officially black listed" Tracy responded as she hung up "So you are down to your dress uniform."

"I'll go and sort out that warrant" the Minister responded as he put the empty glass on the desk "Thanks for the drink."

"Anytime" the Commander called after him as he left.

"Alone at last" Tracy remarked to her husband as she sat down alongside him and they put their arms around each other.

"Give us a kiss" the Commander requested.

"As you asked nicely" Tracy responded and they kissed.

"Can I ask of you a small favour my love?" the Commander asked her as he looked into her eyes with strong affection.

"Anything" Tracy responded "As long as it doesn't involve any more boats."

"Can you help me squeeze into my dress uniform" the Commander responded with a smirk "I swear the damn thing has shrunk."

"All right then" Tracy got up and went over to the cupboard in the corner where the Commander kept his spare uniform parts, a cupboard that upon opening she discovered was rather empty.

"The guy from the Uniform Office wasn't kidding was he?" Tracy remarked as she extracted the dress uniform and laid it down across the desk.

"Here, help me with this thing will you love" the Commander asked as he tried to remove his uniform shirt which had been reduced through the rigours of that days events to the status of a tatty rag.

"Good grief" Tracy responded as she duly took the deceased garment from her husband and at arms length dropped it into the waste basket.

"That should give the cleaning lady a bit of a surprise" the Commander commented as he picked up the fresh clean shirt and put it on.

"You're putting on a bit of weight" Tracy remarked "Too many chips and doughnuts."

"That is almost exactly what the Service Medical Examiner said a couple of weeks back during my annual check up" the Commander was forced to admit.

"I know" Tracy smirked "I got him to say it."

"Remind me never to play poker with you" the Commander responded "You are just too damn sneaky to bluff."

"Here" Tracy proceeded to take the Commander's tie and help him tie it correctly "What would you do without me?"

"I hope I never have to find out" the Commander responded with a little apprehension in his voice.

"You are an old romantic you know that" Tracy remarked as she put her husband's dress uniform tunic around him and then tried to get the buttons to meet the button holes down the front without success.

"Definitely need to cut down on the doughnuts" the Commander admitted as he looked down at Tracy struggling with his tunic.

"I told you" Tracy responded as she gave up trying to button him up and instead passed the Commander his gun and holster "Come on, we have work to do."

"Looks like a lively little party" Cassini commented as he arrived in the briefing room to find hurried and bustling activity, telephones ringing and earnest conversations in

progress. Looking around the busy room, Cassini's eyes alighted on Fuller sitting over to one side with Sir Richard Crowthorne as they busily waded through what appeared to be a veritable mountain of both paper and computer files.

"I was sent for" Cassini announced as he joined them at the desk "I don't suppose you can tell me what this little shin dig is all about?"

"Something to do with this guy apparently" Fuller explained as he pointed to the screen on which was displayed a scan of a very old photograph of Renquist "Problem is he somehow has managed to wrap anything connected to him up in so many knots, black holes and locked files that I am having a fair bit of trouble finding anything about him above his name and the last payments he made for the congestion charge."

"Hang on a minute" Cassini suggested "If you can't follow the man, follow his car and then follow the money."

"Why the hell didn't we think of that?" Sir Richard asked Fuller.

"I have no idea" Fuller responded as he began to furiously tap away at his computer "But I have every intention of rectifying that little oversight."

"I'll go and get some coffee's" Sir Richard suggested "Leave the technical stuff to you young whippersnappers."

Sir Richard promptly made a discrete exit from the busy room and went the short distance up the corridor to the canteen to secure the promised beverages where he found himself joined in the queue at the counter by the Commander.

"Divisional head of Her Majesty's Specialist Security Agency reduced to the lowly job of tea lady" Sir Richard announced with an amused chuckle as he put three mugs of coffee plus a small packet of three digestive biscuits for himself onto a tray.

"I am willing to bet your wife would love to be here right now with a camera" the Commander remarked as he helped himself to a very large mug of tea from the machine.

"Speaking of keeping up appearances" Sir Richard remarked "What's with the dress uniform."

"It's err" the Commander looked down at his uniform "Well a long story."

"I can believe that" Sir Richard responded "Actually after working with you all these years, I can believe just about anything."

The Commander duly chuckled at Sir Richard's comment as he tipped in his customary four sugars into the mug of tea and stirred thoroughly only to then realise that he was being tapped on the shoulder in a most insistent manner and Sir Richard was looking apprehensive at the identity of the person standing right behind the Commander.

"Good afternoon Commander" the calm but firm voice of Divisional Commander Steven Feltham of the Thames River Division announced "You are a hard man to track down lately."

"Steven" the Commander grimaced but adjusted his expression before turning around to greet his colleague with a handshake "What can I do for you?"

"Small matter of three of my patrol boats" Feltham explained.

"Ah..." the Commander realised the reason for Feltham's apparently disgruntled tone "Let's take a seat shall we?"

"After you Sir" Feltham duly followed the Commander and Sir Richard over to a table.

"Let me hazard a guess" the Commander responded "Would this have anything to do with this afternoon's little drama?"

"Correct" Feltham confirmed "In the space of less than an hour, the Esther was stolen and then after various shenanigans rammed unceremoniously into a freighter, the Ruth was last seen heading to the bottom of the Thames by Embankment but not before it put on a display of smoke the Bismarck would have been proud of and then there is the Jennifer."

"The Jennifer?" the Commander tried to pretend he knew nothing just as he saw Tracy enter the canteen, see who the Commander was sitting with and make a very swift exit again.

"The brand spanking new high speed patrol vessel that was requisitioned by one of your senior officers" Feltham continued "In the process of which it suffered some not inconsiderable damage to its bodywork."

"Nice boat though, you have to admit" Sir Richard, already on his third biscuit remarked "Whoops" he added as he realised he had dropped himself in it.

"Care to explain Commander?" Feltham enquired.

"Perfectly simple" the Commander responded "The Esther was hijacked by a gang of very experienced, determined and well armed nutters who would stop at nothing to achieve their aims."

"So who the hell commandeered the Jennifer then?" Feltham asked.

"Can I get back to you on that one?" the Commander asked "I will ensure that you receive new vessels to replace your lost equipment though" he reassured him.

"Blimey Commander" Feltham commented "Did someone make you Administrator General or something?"

"As a matter of fact old friend" the Commander responded as he rose from his seat with Sir Richard following "They just did."

"Terrific" Feltham responded "That means Fuller owes me twenty quid in the sweepstake."

"You couldn't up my overdraft limit while you are in there could you?" Cassini asked as he watched Fuller look through computerised bank records on the screen in front of him.

"That would be unethical, fraudulent, dishonest and low" Fuller responded as he continued to concentrate "But I'll see what I can do."

"You breaking into the Bank of England again?" the Commander asked as he joined Fuller at the table and watched what he was doing.

"As a matter of fact, yes" Fuller calmly responded "I am just following the money."

"I thought we were supposed to be following this Renquist character" the Commander asked.

"Let's just say that circumstances Sir have forced me to take a slightly different approach to the problem" Fuller confirmed as his laptop beeped and a new file appeared on the screen "And there you go" he announced.

"Well go on then" the Commander encouraged him "The suspense is killing me."

"Frederick J Renquist the third" Fuller announced "Born 14th October 1949 in Leytonstone, second son of not surprisingly Frederick J Renquist the second and Lady Victoria Devlin."

"Cosy" the Commander remarked "What does he do?"

"Well according to the records I was able to dig out" Fuller responded "Not a lot."

"He's a Civil Servant, of course he doesn't do anything" Sir Richard commented.

"Yeah well" Fuller explained further "Normally with Civil Servants they like to put their successes on full public display, looks good when they get nominated for the inevitable knighthood in the New Year Honours List but this guy seems to have buried pretty much everything he has done under enough 'D' notices to sink an elephant."

"Speaking of sinking, that reminds me" the Commander added "Commander Feltham says you owe him twenty quid."

"I had better check which sweepstake that was for I suppose" Fuller responded "Anyway, back to this character. He seems to have kept off the usual political radar's

for the most part bar a few mentions in the odd unpublished public enquiry here and there" he passed across a couple of heavy looking folders across, one of which in particular gave the Commander a cause for concern.

"Not another one" the Commander remarked as he looked through one of the public enquiry files with the look of someone who had met an old friend that he had hoped he would never see again.

"Sir?" Fuller asked seeing the Commander's reaction.

"Long story" the Commander responded as he dismissed this line of enquiry "Carry on."

"I eventually traced him through the Congestion Charge system" Fuller explained "Once I had a registered name and a number plate of his car, all I had to do then was follow the money as suggested by Cassini here until I found him."

"And where might I find this gentleman?" the Commander asked.

"Right where you were not three hours ago Sir" Fuller announced with triumph "The same place I might add that Cassini and his boys have had under surveillance all afternoon as well."

"Cassini, would you mind doing the honours?" the Commander asked.

"Team three from Zero One" Cassini called into his radio "Anything occurring?"

"The maid put the cat and the milk bottles out about twenty minutes ago" one of Cassini's colleagues confirmed "Apart from that, nothing is stirring boss."

"Could he have legged it out the back?" the Commander asked over Cassini's radio.

"No Sir" the officer confirmed "We have all exits from that place and the ones either side fully covered. Someone is still at home as the upstairs front room curtains have moved occasionally in the last half hour."

"Hold position and report anything that happens, no matter how significant" Cassini responded "I'll rejoin you fairly shortly."

"I've put the two cars registered in this chap's name on the Congestion Charge camera system to flag up if he tries to leave town" Fuller confirmed "And he won't be going anywhere by bus or tube either, I just cancelled his Oyster Card as well."

"Sneaky and underhand" the Commander commented "I like it."

"One arrest warrant" the Minister announced as he arrived in the briefing room holding aloft as if in triumph the crucial document "Signed I might add by the Prime Minister himself" he added as he duly handed it to the Commander.

"Is this going to be a kick the door in and gas the place job" Tracy enquired as she joined them "Or are we going to do it real quiet like?"

"I think this needs a subtle quiet approach" the Commander responded after taking a moment to ponder "For which I will be requiring one of your many talents love."

"I'm intrigued" Tracy responded "Lead on my dear."

"I spy with my little eye" one of the Undercover Surveillance officers sat in the van's front passenger seat began "Something beginning with B."

"Bus" his colleague seated in the drivers seat responded.

"No" the first officer replied smugly if still somewhat bored "Try again."

"Boss" the second officer responded, this time a little more alert "Over there."

"Oh yes" the first officer confirmed as they both straightened themselves out a bit and sat more upright upon seeing Cassini approach discreetly from the direction of Euston Station.

"Evening gents" Cassini announced as he clambered into the back of the van and proceeded to kneel at the front looking over the back of the front seats "Bored yet are we?"

"You could say that Sir" the first officer responded as he stifled a yawn "I haven't been on an observation this dull and lifeless since my second honeymoon."

"Well stay awake lads and ladies" Cassini announced "Things are about to get interesting."

"This is team two on the back access" the radio announced on the Surveillance Team's own frequency "I have a dark grey Vauxhall saloon registration Lima Tango Five Five Oscar November Golf coming to a halt with three occupants including the driver."

"Take no action" Cassini announced over the radio "They are expected."

"We have guests I take it then Sir?" the first officer asked.

"In a way" Cassini confirmed cryptically "In a way."

"Are you sure this is a good idea love?" Tracy asked as she got out of the drivers seat of the dark grey saloon car that she had borrowed off of her sister Jennifer.

"No" the Commander responded wryly as he got out of the front passenger seat with the Minister alighting from the rear of the car "But like most things in my life, it sounded like a good idea at the time."

"That's what I thought" Tracy remarked "Just in case, I have a couple of van loads of the company's finest parked up around the back of Euston Station."

"Lets just hope we don't need them" the Commander responded as he took out his gun and checked it before returning it to its holster "You stay here until I call" he informed the Minister, "Tracy my love, you are with me."

"I've got a really bad feeling about this" Tracy remarked as she followed close behind her husband as he led the way down a back alley that ran along the rear of the row of properties that fronted onto the south side of Euston Road.

"This is it" the Commander announced as they reached a firmly secured tall wrought iron back gate that silently announced to all and sundry that trespassers were firmly not welcome, a message further enhanced by the presence of elderly rusty but still effective barbed razor wire looped all around the top of it.

"Couldn't we just knock?" Tracy asked out of curiosity.

"What, and spoil the surprise?" the Commander chuckled as he started to clamber up the outside of the gate.

In a few moments of struggling, he managed to reach the top and from his tunic pocket produced a set of wire cutters that after a couple of quiet clicks, soon took care of the razor wire.

"You are full of talents" Tracy remarked as the Commander jumped down on the other side of the gate and she duly followed him up and over to join her husband on the inside.

"Yeah well" the Commander admitted quietly "Its one of the benefits of a slightly dubious childhood in south east London I guess."

"Where now?" Tracy asked as she drew her gun in precaution.

"Keep very close behind me and keep your head down" the Commander suggested before he set off, bent downwards across the well maintained little garden area inside its high Victoria brick walls to the back door of the property.

Tracy followed quickly behind him and they joined up together again, kneeling on the ground either side of the back door whereupon the Commander inspected the lock.

Slowly turning the handle and pushing on the door revealed what he had suspected, the door was locked from the inside.

"Let me take a wild guess" Tracy remarked as she put her gun on the ground and reached inside her uniform tunic pocket "This is where I come in."

"Well I didn't just bring you along for the pleasurable company and the good looks" the Commander remarked as Tracy duly produced her lock picking tools "Plus there are other advantages to having married a locksmith's daughter."

"My father opened some of the most secure safes and doors in London over the years" Tracy responded with pride as she began to work on the door lock.

"And my real dad carted some of those very same safes away in the back of a speeding Transit van if I recall my earliest days correctly" the Commander ruefully added.

"Here we go" Tracy announced as the lock was heard to click open "Now we just have to hope the burglar alarm isn't on."

"On three" the Commander suggested as he drew his gun and held it close to his chest in readiness.

"One, two..." they both whispered in unison "and THREE!" At that moment, the Commander opened the door and they both proceeded quickly inside before closing the door quietly but firmly behind them.

"Well that was easy" Tracy remarked as they both with their guns drawn scanned up and down the kitchen corridor they now found themselves in, seemingly dark and deserted.

"First steps always are, that's the problem" the Commander admitted "Let's try down here" he suggested nodding to his right towards what appeared to be the main part of the building.

"What are you doing?" Tracy asked when the Commander stopped part of the way along the corridor and began to fumble around in his tunic pockets.

"Looking for my reading glasses" he explained as he finally located the small gold square framed glasses and then with the look of a professor, proceeded to balance them on the end of his nose "That's better" he announced "I can see what I am shooting at now."

"Shall we?" Tracy suggested.

"By all means my dear" the Commander agreed as they moved off again to perform a careful and systematic sweep of the ground floor.

"Should we look in the cellar?" Tracy asked as together they peered down the rickety looking steps that led into a dark and damp basement below them.

"Maybe another time" the Commander remarked, a sentiment with which Tracy whole heartedly agreed "Lets go up" he suggested.

With the Commander leading, they took the darkened twisting back stairs up to the first floor and thought as they reached the upper landing that they had made their way up undetected until the last step at the very top suddenly creaked loudly as soon as the Commander stepped on it.

"I don't believe it!" the Commander whispered in irritation.

"I always thought that was a cliché that just happened in old movies" Tracy remarked as they looked around cautiously to see if anyone had detected their approach.

Suddenly a door a short distance away opened and silhouetted in the light coming from the window at the far end of the landing, a figure appeared. Fortunately Tracy and the Commander managed to duck out of sight into a side room before the mysterious figure came into view.

After a few moments of looking around, the figure calmly returned his semi-automatic weapon to the safety of his jacket pocket and returned back into the room from whence he came and closed the door behind him.

"This was definitely not one of my better ideas" the Commander admitted quietly as he and Tracy cautiously opened the door and looked around the door pillars up and down the landing to see if there was anyone else about.

"Clear this way" Tracy whispered.

"Here too" the Commander agreed "Come on, and watch out for any more dodgy floorboards."

"Can I make a suggestion" Tracy commented as they proceeded along the landing "Would it not be a good idea to put the silencer on your gun?"

"Good point" the Commander agreed as he fumbled around in his pockets for the silencer attachment "One loud shot and we will have the whole of this lot on top of us in no time."

"What's that?" Tracy asked as she looked on ahead towards the far end of a passageway that led off the main landing.

"Sound's like a radio I think" the Commander commented "Let's go and see who is at home shall we?"

With understandable caution, they proceeded along the darkened corridor towards the source of the sound but when they were only halfway there and with no nearby cover to duck behind, another door in the corridor opened, the shaft of light from the inside of it being broken by one of the heavy thugs appearing.

"Oi!" he called when he looked to his right and saw the two officers skulking in the shadows. Quickly Tracy reacted and fired a silenced shot that sent the man collapsing to the floor with a loud thud.

"Do you think there is anymore of them?" Tracy asked as they went over to the body lying on the floor illuminated by the light from the doorway when a second man appeared.

"What the..." was all he managed before he too found himself crashing to the floor unconscious after the Commander struck him across the back of the head.

"Quite possibly" the Commander confirmed before he and Tracy entered the room to check all was clear. Inside the small room, the presence of a card table with two poker hands and two glasses on it seemed to indicate that the two unconscious men now lying in the corridor were its only occupants.

"You grab that one" Tracy suggested as she picked up the first man's legs and dragged him inside the room whereupon the Commander duly did the same, following with the second man.

"Full house versus two pairs with an ace kicker" the Commander remarked as he could not resist taking a quick look at the two card hands on the table before they returned to the corridor, very slowly and quietly closing the door behind them.

"Where were we?" Tracy asked as they continued down the corridor until they reached the last door at the very end of the corridor from behind which the sound of a radio broadcasting BBC Radio 4 could be heard.

"I suppose we should knock really" the Commander pondered but instead he tried the ornate gold door handle slowly and carefully until the door opened, whereupon the two officers proceeded inside with caution.

"No one home" Tracy remarked as they both looked around the study they now found themselves in, an ornate antique desk, one of those old style cast iron safes and a selection of antiques and art decorating the room but no sign of an occupant.

"Perhaps we should have phoned ahead and made an appointment" the Commander responded wryly but their attention was suddenly drawn when the sound of a toilet flushing from the direction of an adjacent room was heard.

"You go and get the cavalry to surround this place" the Commander urged Tracy "I'll stay here and have a chat."

"Be careful love" Tracy urged before discreetly leaving the room.

Renquist looked into the mirror briefly as he washed his hands and pondered recent events. As ever despite the one or two setbacks that had occurred throughout the day, he was confident that everything would work out as he planned by some means or other.

He dried his hands with one of the towels that were very neatly laid out on the antique brass towel rail before leaving the bathroom, switching off the light as he left.

As he re-entered his study and took his seat behind the desk, he took a moment to listen to the radio which was continuing to play in the background before picking up that evening's edition of the Evening Standard.

He had already read the news pages and so turned to the back page to commence the sports section but as he turned the paper over, something attracted his attention that caused him to do a double take.

"What the?" he commented calmly to himself as he noticed that the Sudoku puzzle printed on the back page of the paper had been completed by someone.

"Sorry about that" the Commander announced from the shadows of the window as he stepped out into the light, his gun in his hand "Couldn't resist."

"Well, well, well" Renquist looked up surprised "Commander, this is a rather unexpected honour."

"Thought I'd pop in" the Commander responded "You know, have a little chat."

"Have a seat" Renquist continued to play the host "So is this meeting business or pleasure."

"Strictly business" the Commander confirmed as he sat down "Oh and I wouldn't bother doing that" he added as Renquist pressed the button secreted underneath the edge of his desk that sounded an alarm in the room down the corridor.

"Hmm" Renquist pondered his situation for a moment "And why not may I ask?"

"Horace and Boris or whoever their names are have, how shall I put it" the Commander explained "been put on ice so to speak."

"How about a drink then?" Renquist picked up the crystal decanter on the desk and poured himself a drink and one for the Commander as well.

"Thank you" the Commander responded as he took the glass "I must say you are one of the most accommodating crooks I have ever dealt with."

"In whatever line of work someone may be in" Renquist remarked "There is always room for common courtesy and politeness, so what shall we drink to?"

"A prosecuting attorney without a sense of humour?" the Commander responded.

"How about what I believe in" Renquist replied "The preservation of the nation and the status quo."

"Always preferred the Rolling Stones myself" the Commander retorted.

"Touché" Renquist replied as he took a sip of the drink.

"So that's what you claim you do" the Commander commented "Preserve the state of the nation by using dirty tricks. I came across a little organisation with very similar ideas once a while back, they don't work around these parts anymore."

"Oh you mean my competition, the so called Omega Committee Association" Renquist scoffed at the merest mention of them "They were but a bunch of amateurs compared with what I represent."

"Noble words" the Commander commented "But you know what they say, the higher they are the harder they fall."

"Depends on who is cutting the rope up which you are climbing" Renquist replied "Besides the Omega Committee believed in achieving their aims through brute force and a hell of a lot of ignorance, I on the other hand use far more sophisticated weapons."

"Information" the Commander sat back in his seat and took a sip of drink.

"Indeed" Renquist confirmed "Admittedly backed up by a bit of metaphorical arm twisting here and there but at the end of the day knowledge is far more powerful than any gun, bomb or the knife of a silent assassin in the night."

"The power of knowledge is not your exclusive monopoly you know" the Commander retorted "How do you think I found you?"

"Unfortunately in this day of greater information access" Renquist commented with some regret "Even gentlemen such as I cannot stay off the grid forever, something somewhere always gets written down or recorded or taped somewhere."

"Congestion Charge" the Commander explained "Once we had a name, we just followed the money."

"Oh the irony!" Renquist called out "If only my Father could see me now, after all these years of manipulation and deception in the name of my country, I get brought down by something I did honestly and legally."

"You will have plenty of time to ponder that where you are going" the Commander responded.

"Oh, I have already been doing some pondering" Renquist confirmed as he refilled his glass "Done a little bit of reading, some digging around."

"In what way?" the Commander asked out of curiosity.

"When I first came across your good self" Renquist explained "You were a brilliant young Lieutenant in the Security Service assigned to the Embankment Murders investigation. I could see even then you were going places so I looked you up but yet could not find anything bar your official service record and the list of decorations."

"I like keep myself to myself" the Commander remarked.

"Then when all this resumed a few days ago and I heard you were once again on the case" Renquist continued "I took the liberty of looking you up again. You are an interesting man Commander."

"So my wife keeps telling me" the Commander remarked.

"Over the years I have developed more contacts than the intelligence gathering arms of MI5, MI6, the Security Service and a number of other significant organisations put together and yet despite all that, according to everything I could find from even the darkest corner of the furthest flung filing cabinet, your life story continued to elude me."

"Well I am a busy chap" the Commander casually admitted "I never get time to do anything else."

"Is that so?" Renquist responded "Then perhaps you would care to explain to me, just to satisfy my idle curiosity you understand, why according to my records, you seem to have been born at the age of thirteen years old?"

"Typing error?" the Commander asked with a sarcastic grin.

"Everyone has a history" Renquist explained "That is the power of information, from the moment you are born you are recorded with name, place, parents details, weight and then it goes on and on through childhood. Doctors records, inoculations, school enrolments, reports, membership of the Lego Club, you name it, every interest and move recorded in a list, a file, a report somewhere waiting for the day when someone needs to find out who someone really is on the inside."

"I had a school bus pass" the Commander admitted.

"That's just it" Renquist continued "Every person I have ever dealt with I have checked up upon and I have been able to tell everything about them right down to what supplies the hospital canteen were ordering in the day that person was born. Take your good lady wife Tracy Caverner for example."

"What about her?" the Commander became a little more defensive in tone at that point.

"Ah. here we are" Renquist consulted one of the folders on his desk "Eight pounds and nine ounces at 12.42 in delivery room 3 of the Royal Free Hospital in Greenwich."

"And your point?" the Commander asked.

"You are a blank sheet of paper Commander" Renquist explained "For an information specialist, you represent to me that very rare and challenging occurrence, someone with apparently no past whatsoever prior to his thirteenth birthday and even after that, what records do exist have the distinctive metaphorical perfume of the Specialist Security Service trail covering experts emanating from them."

"You know I will be going through that safe don't you?" the Commander looked across briefly at the old style cast iron safe in the corner before returning his gaze firmly back to Renquist.

"Oh please, feel free" Renquist casually responded "All I keep in there are some basic informational tools on certain people and organisations, a mere appetiser compared with the real informational power that I can access."

"I hope you have a lot of reading material available because you are going to have plenty of time to read it where you are going" the Commander informed him.

"Let me assure you Commander" Renquist responded calmly as he rose from his seat "Whatever incarceration you may have planned for me will be short."

"Do you know how many times I have heard that one over the years?" the Commander retorted as he also stood up and with a wave of his gun indicated to Renquist to move towards the door.

"I cannot say for certain under these unusual circumstances but I am sure with a little digging through the files I could tell you eventually" Renquist remarked.

"Lets go" the Commander urged where upon Renquist went ahead and opened the door leading out into the corridor.

Outside of the study, the corridor was now even darker as the evening gloom had intensified and only the light from the street lamps outside shining through the few windows provided anything by way of illumination.

"Are you trying to save on electricity or something?" the Commander remarked as they headed along the corridor towards the main stairs.

"In my business Mr Commander" Renquist coolly responded "Some things are best kept in the dark."

"Well don't blame me if you trip over and break your neck then" the Commander advised but before Renquist could offer a pithy comeback, the Commander was struck over the head and fell to the floor unconscious.

"Don't worry my friend" Renquist reassured the unconscious Commander lying on the floor as he was joined from the darkness of the shadows by one of his minders "I won't."

"Got your message Sir" the minder confirmed.

"Well done" Renquist thanked him "Let's get out of here quietly."

"I have a couple of the lads ready to lay on a little diversion that should attract everyone's attention" the minder confirmed.

"Am I going to like it?" Renquist asked as they headed down the stairs to the front hallway.

"Depends on how fond you are of that car Sir" the minder replied slightly quizzically.

"Oh dear...."

"Are we getting the overtime on this one boss?" one of Cassini's officers asked over the radio.

"Bloody well hope so" Cassini replied "I have a wife, three kids and a mortgage to support."

"It's just that we are freezing out here" the officer stationed around the rear of the premises under surveillance responded.

"If it makes you feel any better" Tracy's voice came over the radio "The architectural ambience of Euston Station isn't exactly warm or enthralling either" she commented as she stood on the concourse of Euston main line station along with a team of officers on standby.

"Don't worry" Cassini tried to reassure everyone "I am sure things will warm up soon."

No sooner had he finished his sentence than the car parked near to the premises under observation suddenly exploded, sending a plume of bright flame, smoke and debris high up into the air.

"That wasn't quite what I had in mind" Cassini commented as he and his colleagues proceeded to rush from their various locations to the front of the property in Euston Road and the scene of the explosion.

"What the hell was that?" Tracy asked over the radio.

"Everybody move!" Cassini ordered as the echoes of the explosion died down.

"Come on!" Tracy called to the officers with her and with a hasty pace, they left the Station and ran as fast as their equipment and uniforms would allow them through the bus station area and out onto Euston Road where they too were confronted by the chaotic scene.

"Right" Tracy took charge of the situation "You two seal off the road at that end, you two seal it off at this end and you check that the Fire Brigade are on their way, they are only just over there."

"Subtle..." Renquist commented wryly as he and his minder left by means of a back door from connecting premises which was not under surveillance.

"Coast is clear Sir" Renquist's minder confirmed "If we are going to leave, its going to have to be now."

"Ok then" Renquist agreed "Let's get out of here."

"On three!" Tracy called to the armed officers gathered at the front door, having to raise her voice as the sirens of the approaching Fire Engines from the nearby Euston Fire Station were almost deafening "Everyone ready?"

The nods from the officers with her confirmed their readiness before Tracy lined up the hand held battering ram to the door lock of the property.

"One, two and THREE!" Tracy called before swinging her arm back and bringing the full force of the battering ram on the door lock which thanks to old fashioned solid craftsmanship, stayed solidly closed.

"Bugger!" Tracy exclaimed and tried again which apart from some surface damage to the paintwork, had equally as little effect as her first attempt.

"Oh sod this" Tracy responded as she threw the battering ram over the iron railings into the adjacent garden and drew her gun, aimed at the lock and fired three shots in rapid succession.

"I think you've got it Maam" one of the officers observed.

"Old ways are always the best" Tracy remarked as she confirmed the lock was all but freed and with a swiftly administered kick, the door gave way allowing the officers to flood into the main hallway.

"In pairs, check every inch of this place from the basement to the attic and everywhere in between" Tracy commanded "Let's go!"

"The guy from the insurance company may have a problem with that one" Renquist mused as he looked around the corner into Euston Road to see the Fire Brigade start to extinguish the shattered remains of his car before, having checked to ensure they continued to be unobserved, he and his minder walked calmly across the road in the direction of the station.

Whilst the Euston Road was now closed off because of the ongoing incident and the arrival of further vehicles from various agencies on the scene, the main line railway station and the complex Underground Station immediately beneath it were still running as normal and it was with relaxed ease that Renquist and his minder were able to casually enter the mainline station.

"Commander Caverner!" one of the officers called down the corridor on the first floor "We've found him!"

"What happened love?" Tracy asked the Commander as she arrived in time to see two officers help him to his feet.

"I think someone mistook my head for a battering ram" the Commander remarked still somewhat groggy "Did I miss anything?"

"Well..." Tracy replied.

"What's that burning smell?" the Commander asked "And why am I covered in broken glass?"

"That was a little pyrotechnic show outside arranged for our benefit and entertainment" Tracy informed her husband as she put her arms around him in support "Come on, let's get you sorted out."

"I'm fine" the Commander weakly protested as if being in Tracy's arms was a cure all for anything.

"This is your wife speaking" Tracy informed the Commander "You are not all right and you are to seek immediate medical attention or no supper."

"Yes dear" the Commander conceded as she helped him along the corridor.

Renquist and his minder used a side entrance to make a discreet entry into Euston Station which was sufficiently bustling with evening peak travellers that no one took any notice of them as they walked across the concourse towards the escalators that led down to the Underground section.

The ticket hall was its usual busy self as Renquist approached the ticket barriers and produced his Oyster card pass which he placed on the round yellow magnetic reader only for him to stop suddenly when the barrier refused to open.

'Seek assistance' a little illuminated notice informed him which was not something all that unusual with this equipment so Renquist tried again on the next barrier to the left only to produce the same result.

"Damm..." Renquist commented quietly to himself as he withdrew from the barriers before he got swamped in the ever pressing onward crowds.

"Something wrong boss?" Renquist's minder asked from the other side of the ticket barriers.

"It would appear that someone has been up to some tricks" Renquist calmly responded as he looked down at his Oyster Card with some concern.

Indeed he was right to be concerned for at the moment of his first attempt at scanning his card, an alarm noise commenced on Fuller's laptop a few miles away back at New Scotland Yard.

"Lima Mike Zero One from Control" the Commander's radio called as he and Tracy were sat on the back door ledge of an Ambulance whilst he had the back of his head checked over.

"Go ahead" the Commander responded.

"Fuller here Sir" he announced "Renquist's Oyster Card just popped up on the grid at Euston Station, ticket barriers 46 and 47."

"Lovely" the Commander responded as he quickly rose to his feet with Tracy helping him as he was still a little unsteady.

"I'll round up the lads" Tracy announced.

"If you like Sir" Cassini added "I can have my lads flood Euston Station discretely, it's a hell of a rabbit warren down there."

"I'd appreciate it" the Commander confirmed "Tracy my love, get every exit blocked off and all trains non-stopping but do not evacuate the station until we are ready."

"Right" Tracy confirmed as she looked around to see what officers and other personnel she had available "Come on you lot, look lively. We've got work to do!"

"One day travel card" Renquist commented to himself as he went through the ticket buying options on the self serve ticket machine "Zone's 1 and 2."

After putting his money in, the machine duly printed the pink coloured ticket which Renquist took from the lower tray along with his change before turning back to the ticket barrier line and this time successfully passing through it.

"Which way boss?" Renquist's minder enquired as they reached the escalators and the choice of Victoria Line, Northern Line City Branch and Northern Line Charing Cross Branch in either direction for each presented themselves.

"Northern City Southbound lad" Renquist confirmed as they proceeded within the busy crowd down the escalator.

"I want every entrance out of the Underground Station covered with as many bodies as we can squeeze in" Tracy informed the officers she was leading into the main concourse area to the surprise of the members of the public who were witnessing this spectacle.

Meanwhile as the barriers were being drawn across the top of the down escalators to prevent anyone entering, Cassini and his team were beginning to filter throughout the complex lower levels of the station.

On the southbound Northern Line City Branch platform, Renquist and his minder were calmly standing towards the edge of the platform at one end, unaware that they were being watched by two of Cassini's officers who were, to all intents and purposes just part of the crowd nearby.

In addition, the CCTV system fitted throughout the station was also watching them carefully and watching the screen up in the Control Room in the ticket hall was the Commander whilst Tracy was finishing the organisation of officers at the top of the escalators that led to and from the platform levels.

"There's the little fella" the Commander confirmed as he tapped the screen, right on Renquist's head.

The Commander and the Station Supervisor looked up when Tracy knocked on the window and gave a thumbs up sign to indicate they were ready

In response, the Commander looked across at the control room staff and silently nodded to indicate that it was time to order the evacuation of the station.

"Will Inspector Sands please report to the Control Room" a pre-recorded announcement called three times throughout the Underground Station section, the sound echoing all throughout the complex network of passageways.

"Ladies and gentlemen" the Station Supervisor announced over the system "Due to an electrical fault, will all customers please leave the station and make their way up to the main concourse. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and hope this will not be too long a delay."

"This is team four on the Northern Line City southbound" the radio on the Commander's belt called "Target one has a large heavily built gentleman travelling with him and they do suddenly appear to be a little concerned."

"Looks like we got them rattled" the Commander announced with a hint of pleasure as he left the Control Room and joined Tracy in the ticket hall where already the steady stream of confused looking passengers were passing through the barriers and leaving the station.

"They don't seem to be in any hurry do they?" Tracy remarked as the passengers continued to pass out past them but at a very leisurely pace, indeed it was to be another five minutes before the last few went through.

"Did we miss him or am I just going mad?" the Commander asked as he and Tracy looked around the now quiet ticket hall.

"He definitely wasn't in that lot" Tracy agreed

"Jim!" the Commander called back to the Station Supervisor "Show me a plan of this place."

"Here you go Sir" the Station Supervisor brought over a large sheet of paper with the plan of the Underground section of the station on it "Every tunnel and platform there is."

"We lost them" Cassini confirmed with regret as he joined them at the ticket barrier line along with his group of officers.

"It's strange" one of the plain clothed officers confirmed "One moment we were following them in the flow of people leaving the station, the next moment they were gone."

"Are you absolutely sure there is no other exit out of this place other than through the ticket hall here" the Commander asked as he and Tracy studied the plans carefully.

"Not that I know of" the Station Supervisor confirmed.

"Damm it!" the Commander muttered before he suddenly looked up as if a thought had just occurred to him.

"Something wrong love?" Tracy asked seeing her husband's expression.

"The plan says 'New Ticket Hall'" the Commander explained cryptically as he tapped the part of the plan he was talking about.

"So where is the old one?" Tracy remarked.

"Exactly" the Commander responded "Flood everywhere below this level with as many bodies as you can find."

"Yes love" Tracy responded enthusiastically as the Commander turned to leave "But where are you going?"

"To test a theory" the Commander confirmed "Jim, come with me" he instructed the Station Supervisor and as Tracy began the task of sending officers down to the platform level, they left the ticket hall and headed back up to the surface.

"Well this is fun" Renquist commented as he and his minder made their way slowly up a dusty muck laden spiral staircase, the years of disuse laying thickly in the dust that covered the tiled walls.

"It was either this or the large contingent of armed officers waiting for us upstairs" the minder explained "and I reckon Sir that the Commander is probably not in the most forgiving of moods at the moment."

"Good point" Renquist agreed "Keep climbing."

"All right" the Commander announced as he and the Station Supervisor reached the west end of the frontage of Euston Station and looked around, up and down Melton Street that runs down the west side of the station.

"There" the Commander pointed up the road as he resumed, walking at a brisk pace with the Station Supervisor trying to keep up until on the corner with Drummond Street, they reached a distinctive red terracotta tiled building of the same style as many Underground station buildings in the City, only this one was clearly disused with its former doorways bricked up and sealed with the exception of one firmly locked maintenance access door.

"Isn't this...?" the Station Supervisor began to ask.

"The old original Euston station entrance" the Commander confirmed "Yes I do believe it is."

"That must mean they could be using the old lift shafts to get out" the Station Supervisor concluded as the Commander examined the lock on the door.

"Give me your standard keys" the Commander asked to which the Station Supervisor duly handed over a large bunch of varied keys.

"Are any of those going to work?" he asked.

"That's the beauty of a large organisation like the Underground" the Commander explained as he tried a couple of keys in the lock, so far with no success "There has to be a standard set otherwise no one would get anywhere."

The fourth key he tried duly elicited the desired result as the door lock opened with a stiff click and the Commander was able to slowly open the door.

"Stay here" he instructed the Station Supervisor "If you hear anything happening, send for the cavalry."

"How much further?" Renquist asked as they continued to climb the steep spiral stairs "I'm getting to old for this sort of thing."

"Nearly there Sir" the minder confirmed as they reached the top and exited into the gloomy former ticket office area which was now little more than a dilapidated storage area for bits of old ventilation equipment.

"Good evening" the Commander announced as he stepped out of the shadows into the beam of one of the small bulkhead lights that barely provided much illumination.

"Don't you turn up in the most unusual of places" Renquist remarked "You" he called to his minder "See the gentleman out."

"With pleasure Sir" the minder responded as he stepped towards the Commander but unlike last time, he was ready for him and through a pre-emptive strike to the midriff,

sent the minder reeling backwards until he fell against a grille guarding the portal to another former lift shaft.

Under the minder's not inconsiderable bulk, the grille gave way through the pressure and its aged fatigued frame, causing the minder to fall backwards down into the depths of the dark disused empty lift shaft until a few moments later there was a crash as he hit the bottom followed by an awkward silence.

"Ouch" Renquist commented "Do you know how difficult it is to find good staff these days?" he asked calmly.

"Come on" the Commander instructed with his gun pointing forwards "The game is over and you are going to jail."

"What the hell was that?" Tracy asked generally as she stood in one of the passageways near the Northern Line Charing Cross Branch.

"I think it came from behind here" one officer called down the passageway and indicated a maintenance door that was unlocked.

With caution, Tracy led the way inside which it turned out led to the old lower lift landing where in one of the three lift shafts could be seen the body of the minder in amongst the large cloud of dust his fall down the shaft and impact with the bottom had thrown up.

"Hello?" Tracy called up the shaft "Is there anyone up there?"

"Is that you dear?" the Commander shouted back down.

"Yes love" Tracy confirmed "Did you get him?"

"Oh yes" the Commander confirmed as he reaffirmed his grip on the grumpy looking and firmly hand cuffed Renquist "I got him."

"Great" Tracy responded "I'll take the escalator back up."

"Ok!" the Commander confirmed.

"Oh by the way love" Tracy called back up, evidently unaware that their conversation was now echoing around the entire station much to the amusement of the officers and staff present "You still owe me lunch!"

"Are you aware of the power, influence and position I have in the City Commander?" Renquist asked as the Commander quietly escorted him unobstructed to a waiting patrol car parked on the forecourt of Euston Station.

"Do you think I really care at this moment in time?" the Commander retorted now being thoroughly tired, fed up and wanting to go home.

"Ah Commander, you got him then" the Minister called as he joined them by the patrol car as the Commander was lowering Renquist's head to help him into the back seat.

"Minister" Renquist called from the back seat in greeting "Fancy meeting you here."

"Forget it pal" the Minister responded "Whatever favours the Government owed you are hereby void and cancelled."

"There are other means of communication and influence you know" Renquist calmly responded "I am sure someone will be able to assist me somewhere in the chain of the Security Service."

"Oh that's a point" the Commander responded "You don't know yet do you?"

"Know what?" Renquist enquired cautiously.

"Meet your new Administrator General" the Minister indicated the Commander who just grinned with satisfaction as he saw Renquist's jaw drop with shock.

"Bugger..." Renquist responded under his breath "Never mind, congratulations Comm... I mean Administrator General" he called "I enjoyed our little conversation earlier, we shall be talking again one day soon, until then."

"Until then" the Commander responded as he shut the back door of the patrol car and tapped the roof to indicate to the driver to move off.

As the patrol car departed with its heavy vehicular escort, Tracy emerged from the main station entrance and joined them where she and the Commander embraced each other in a warm and much needed hug.

"Well you look a mess love" Tracy remarked as she saw the generally grubby state the Commander was in "Come on, let's get you home and cleaned up."

"Good idea" the Commander responded as he kissed Tracy "We can sort out this mess in the morning."

"We are now approaching Horsham" the on board automated announcer duly informed the passengers of the 10.02 departure from London Victoria.

The Commander got up from his seat, now dressed in the full dress uniform of the Regional Administrator General, not so much because he wanted the job but more that it was the only way he could get a new uniform that did not look wrecked without annoying the uniform office.

"I told you I would get you home in time for lunch" the Commander informed Jefferies who got up from the seat opposite him.

"Well if you can't take the word of an Administrator General" Jefferies admitted with a wry chuckle "Then what is the world coming to?"

"Indeed" the Commander agreed as the train snaked beneath the road bridge at the north end of Horsham Station and slowed to a stop in platform three.

"Administrator General" Jefferies remarked as they alighted from the rear car of the train as soon as the doors were released and stepped out onto the far end of the platform.

"Regional Administrator General" the Commander reminded him "Only London and the South East."

"But who would have thought it" Jefferies commented as they walked up the platform towards the exit as the train doors were closed and it moved off into the distance "That rather dour sincere thirteen year old lad I had to interview in a Police Station in darkest Lewisham becomes one of the most influential and powerful people in the country."

"It's not all that exciting" the Commander responded as they turned and began to ascend the steps to the over bridge "Although I fully intend to do something about all those endless meetings and paperwork."

"You always did your best work out there on the street" Jefferies agreed "And speaking of wandering the streets" he added as they reached the bottom of the steps in the ticket hall and passed through the barriers "Is our friend Mr Renquist safely tucked away somewhere?"

"He's currently enjoying the hospitality of one of the Security Service's finest funny farms" the Commander confirmed as they exited the station and stood outside the 1930's built main station building "And a number of key politicians are reported to be busy burning every file they can find just to be on the safe side."

"What of Renquist's little file collection?" Jefferies asked as they saw his old Land Rover approach around the roundabout with Tracy driving.

"I got Fuller to turn his place upside down, he even had Jennifer help him pull the floorboards up last night but the only files we found were in the safe which he should be now safely depositing somewhere where only he, Tracy, Jennifer and I know" the Commander explained "Trouble is that is only a mere selection of the wealth of information I suspect Renquist had access to and not surprisingly he's not saying where the rest of it is."

"Hello love!" Tracy called as she drew to a halt whereupon the Commander and Jefferies climbed inside.

"Give me some good news" the Commander remarked as he kissed Tracy.

"I love you" Tracy responded as a matter of fact.

"Well I knew that bit" the Commander replied admittedly.

"And you will be delighted to know that Carole will have dinner on the table in twenty minutes" Tracy added as she released the hand brake and manoeuvred the Land Rover back out into the traffic.

"Now that's what I wanted to hear" the Commander responded.

"I'll second that" Jefferies agreed.

In central London, Fuller with Jennifer alongside him as armed escort as well as for personal moral support emerged from the King William Street exit of Monument Underground Station.

From there they proceeded with a purposeful step south down the quiet streets of late evening London on Christmas Eve towards Monument Street. As a result there was no one else around to observe them as they entered what appeared to be a maintenance access door set into the foot of the building on the corner.

Inside with the door closed firmly behind them, Fuller proceeded to turn on the power for the old wooden panelled elevator with its lattice gate before they descended into the depths of the former King William Street Underground Station.

"I do like this place" Fuller remarked as they entered part of the former platform area, now converted to offices and a control room "Nice, safe, secure and no one even suspects it is here."

"Do you think anyone will ever need these files?" Jennifer remarked as she took the briefcase she was carrying and placed it on the table before opening it to reveal a large collection of manila folders inside.

"Let's hope not" Fuller replied as he opened the briefcase he had been carrying to reveal similar contents to Jennifer's case "This is merely a selection of what we know exists somewhere and the damage some of this could do if it got into the wrong hands defies imagination."

"Would you mind telling me darling whose are the right hands for this material?" Jennifer asked as she took the files out of her case and passed them to Fuller who put them together with his batch and placed them in a safe secreted in the floor below the carpet where no-one would ever think of looking.

"Good question my dear" Fuller agreed as he secured and locked the safe before returning the carpet to its previous position "Still, for the time being, that little lot can stay very firmly buried."

"Let's hope it stays that way" Jennifer remarked before taking Fuller's arm in hers
"Come on, I've booked a table for Christmas dinner."

"Great idea" Fuller agreed as he kissed Jennifer "Who's paying?"

"The Commander" Jennifer confirmed with a wry smile "He doesn't know that though, Tracy took the cash out of his wallet earlier today at her insistence."

"Your family aren't half sneaky" Fuller remarked as they left "But I like it."

"Do you think we have disturbed a sleeping dragon?" the Commander asked Tracy as they stood together on the front porch of the Jefferies' home and looked out at the snow descending, coating the surrounding South Downs in a carpet of pure white.

"That's very prophetic" Tracy remarked somewhat surprised "Where did that come from."

"I was just thinking back to the conversation with Renquist" the Commander explained "He's a very intelligent man, quite interesting actually" he admitted "I just got the impression he knew a lot more than he was letting on and I think he will use it to his advantage."

"You're imagining things" Tracy responded "Renquist is firmly in jail and there is no way he can access any files, information or contacts he may have in there unless his mother pays him a visit using the old file in the cake trick."

"Don't underestimate him my dear" the Commander cautioned "He's good, even without a file in a cake, speaking of which, I'm hungry."

"Always thinking with your stomach" Tracy remarked "Mind you Carole's cake is excellent."

"Come on" the Commander responded "Let's get inside" he suggested as arm in arm they went back inside "If you are very lucky I might let you play with my Blue Pullman."

To Be Continued.....

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