THE
PROFESSIONAL
CONTRACTOR
OPERATION PENTAGRAM
BENARD OCHIENG'
18+
MATURE
CONTENT

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Kenya.

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Benard Ochieng', Year 2026.

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Benard Ochieng' Omondi is a dedicated enthusiast of creativity, history, politics, international relations and affairs, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations and Diplomacy at Maseno University.

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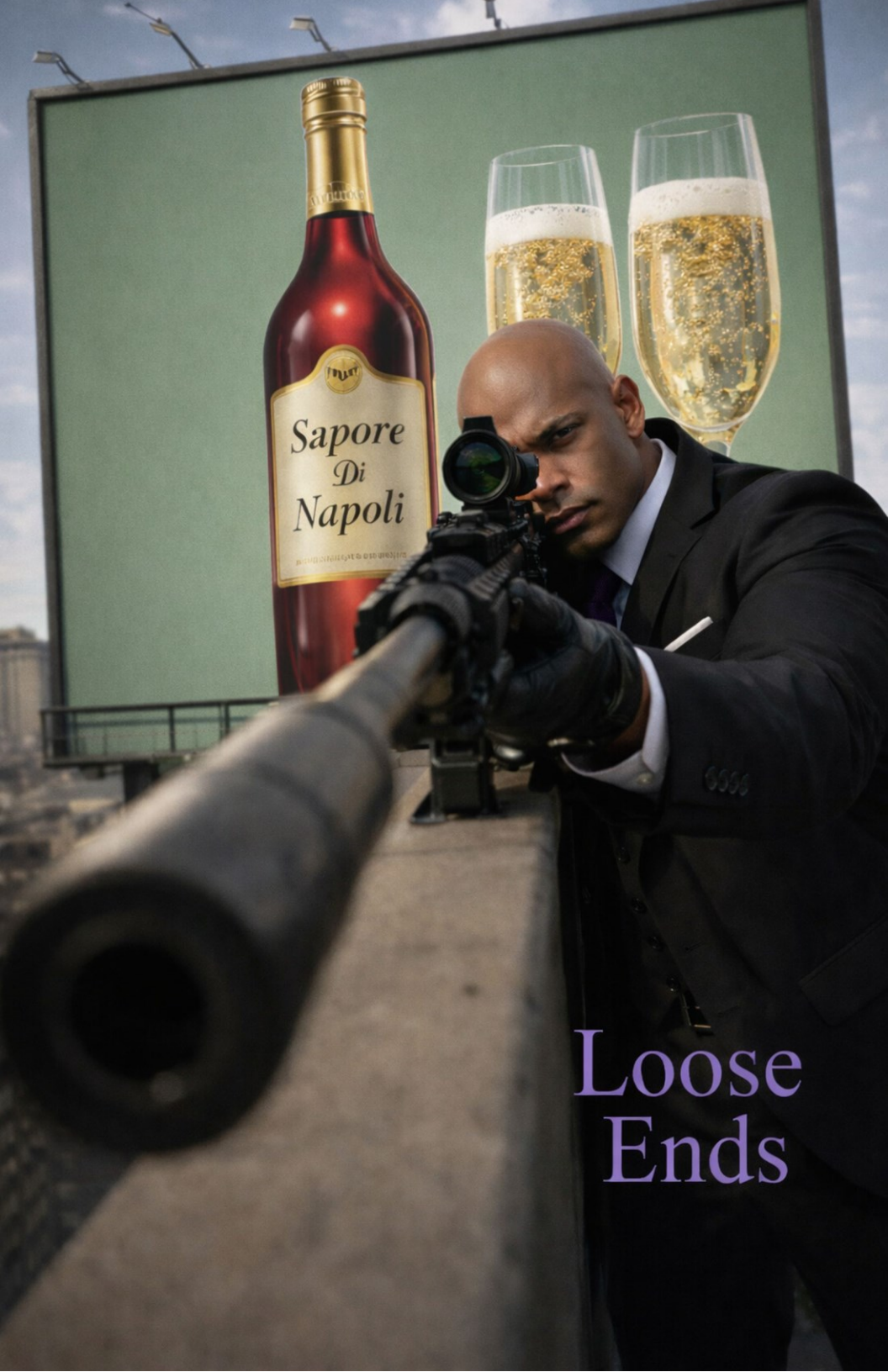
INSPIRATION

This work of fiction draws inspiration from select cinematic and interactive narratives, including ***The Transporter*** film franchise, created by **Luc Besson** and **Robert Mark Kamen** and produced by **EuropaCorp**, as well as the **Hitman/Agent 47** franchise by **Eidos Interactive**. These works influenced the novel's tone, stylistic precision and portrayal of professional operatives.

The thematic exploration of power, authority, and translational influence is also informed by the scholarly contributions of **Susan Strange,** particularly her seminal work ***The Retreat of the State, the diffusion of power in the world economy (1996) Cambridge University Press***, whose analysis of global political economy helped shape the conceptual foundation of this narrative.



Loose Ends

ACT ONE

"LOOSE ENDS"

OPERATION PENTAGRAM

OCTOBER 16,2011

0400 HOURS

(Briefing room MI6 HQs London)

MI6 Intelligence Chief MS Portman Watson briefs agents including Thomas Bridgestone and Oliver Freeman on the Pentagon leaders of the Caligula Italian mafia responsible for cocaine smuggling in London.

SIS BUILDING

MI6 HEADQUARTERS

85 ALBERT EMBANKMENT, VAUXHALL CROSS, SE1 7TP

LONDON,

UNITED KINGDOM

The midnight was heavy with rain-laden clouds that had just wept themselves dry over the Thames River, its dark waters breathing in slow, silent currents with the glow of the London city lights majestically reflecting off its surface.

The Vauxhall Cross, the building that is the headquarters of British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) or MI6, arose from the riverbanks like a modern imperial fortress – geometric, reinforced and impregnable. Its golden lights filled the city indigo night sky and majestically reflected across the waters nearby.

In the building, MI6 Chief Ms. Watson Portman stood at the end of a medium-sized table, behind her, a large transparent office rain-streaked window revealing the beauty of the city lights. Her dark chocolate hair reflected the low light; her expression was carved from discipline and resolve and spoke confidently and gently in her crisp and polished British accent, each word precise and steadfast, every syllable landing with quiet authority.

On the table were seated three of her most trusted agents – Thomas Bridgestone, Wallace Oliver Freeman, and Sally Ratcliffe. Thomas Bridgestone – bald and composed with an athletic body figure, absorbed every word with precision.

Oliver Wallace Freeman, leaned a little forward to the table as he paid attention. He was a man with a moral fire in him, well trained at the filth that the narcotics and their smugglers had spread throughout his homeland from Liverpool, London all the way to Lisbon, Portugal, and was determined to fight it not for glory but to end the infestation.

Sally Ratcliffe sat leaning back on her chair – feeling self-composed, her mind processing Ms. Watson's words with precision. She saw patterns-routes, accounts and encrypted trails when others saw chaos. She processed the information on the Caligula Mafia drug-trafficking ring with judgment that sought annihilation.

Watson tapped a file on the Caligula Mafia on the table. She explained the Caligula's syndicate top leadership briefly, their shipment routes, their financial laundering schemes through shell corporations and private enterprise and how they masked their criminal undertakings behind charity galas.

Chief Watson: Yes gentleman, thanks to Agent Freeman the MI6 now has intel on the next meeting of the Caligula pentagon leaders. Five days from now, they will be meeting at the Nexus Hotel Complex in Naples, Italy to discuss the expansion of their operations beyond Europe. This is the only chance we have apprehend all of them at once, so do not mess this up.

Agent Bridgestone: That sounds great. How do we know they are not leading us to a trap.

Chief Watson: we cannot be sure, but this is the only opportunity we have to end this cocaine smuggling across Europe.

Agent Freeman: This is solid intel I gathered through a guy in the underworld, he knows much of the Caligula. I am pretty sure we are good to go.

Agent Sally: Ok, then I think we should inform Italian authorities for cooperation on this.

Chief Watson: I already did that and chief intelligence agent Antonio Belluci of Italia intelligence will pick you up in Rome for joint operations. The meeting will be at 7pm sunset evening so you will be operating of darkness. Your night vision equipment could come in handy. So, without wasting time, I think that marks the end of this short briefing and we depart for Rome tonight.

(*Watson left the briefing room for her office. Agents Thomas and Freeman and the rest of the agents walked to the armory room to collect their gear).*

Agent Bridgestone; I have a bad feeling about this mission.

Agent Freeman: what makes you say that?

Agent Bridgestone: I feel like we are headed for an ambush.

Agent Freeman: You scared you could lose me again, aren't you? Like in Beirut?

Agent Bridgestone: yes, like Beirut. M16 had to pay a huge ransom to free you from Hezbollah.

Agent Freeman: I remember that shit happens in this job and you know it. In case I don't make it back…… (Bridgestone interrupts)

Agent Bridgestone: You are going to get back home in one piece.

Agent Freeman: …. take care of Sandra and my daughter for me.

Agent Bridgestone: …. whatever you say mate.

(They packed their equipment and weapons and headed to the MI6 vans waiting to take the agents to the airport).

STANSTED AIRPORT
LONDON
UNITED KINGDOM
0045 HOURS

At the parking lot the agents loaded their equipment into the vans and drove to the airport.

At the airport:

Chief Watson: this is it gentleman, we are headed for Rome and let's crack this criminal network once and for all.

Agent Sally: yes mam.

(The MI6 team boarded a private jet waiting nearby, with their gear carried by hand.)

(Gulfstream private aircraft took off)

Agent Sally: Hey Freeman…. Do you mind sharing your source of intel on the pentagon meeting in Naples.

Agent Freeman: A source from the contactors corp.

Agent Sally: Contractors Corp? that shit is real or just conspiracy theory?

Agent Freeman: It's very much real. You do not have much experience in the field. A lot of shit is going on much here, a lot, more than you can imagine.

Chief Watson: The Contactors Corp is a shadow criminal enterprise specializing in high value assassinations and they offer their services to the highest bidder in the underworlds including world governments.

Agent Bridgestone: Is it true that they carried out the assassination of west African leader Thoman Sankara? And on whose behalf? Rumors go that way.

Chief Watson: That is MI6 top secret classified information. I do not have clearance to obtain those files and even if I did, I would not be authorized to share with anyone.

Agent Bridgestone: Sometimes conspiracy just turn out to be true?

Agent Sally: Sometimes, just piece of crap.

Chief Watson: The Contractors Corp are long time enemies of the Caligula mafia. These two never get along and so their intel will come in handy in helping us nail the Caligula to their rightful caskets.

Agent Bridgestone: Why this feud?

Chief Watson: Stiff market competition. Both rely on underground trade networks of illicit drugs and prostitution to fund their operations.

Agent Freeman: ...and animal trafficking and poaching as well.

Agent Sally: Dirty bustards.

Agent Freeman: Yes, this is your first field operation Sally, fasten your seat belts for a rough ride in the dirty world.

Agent Sally: How rough is the ride? *(giggling)*

Agent Freeman: Pretty much rough and dirty.

Chief Watson: I remember my first field operation in1989, fueling anti soviet propaganda in East Berlin…

Agent sally: So, you brought down the iron curtain?

Chief Watson: Yes, we circulated leaflets in the east berlin to stir rebellion and protests against the soviets, that's how we won the cold war. But it was not without dangers when my identity as an M16 agent was exposed, me and my team had to shoot our way out of our apartment taking down 17kgb agents on our trail, we ex-filled east Germany by helicopter flying below the radar, landed in Paris.

Agent Bridgestone: What an adventure. I recall my first mission Iraq 2003 as part of the Special Boat Service, we inserted via the Euphrates River into Baghdad, relayed coordinates and laser designation on targets for American F-117 nighthawk stealth bombers. During our exfil, we were ambushed by a brigade of the Iraq republican guard, Saddam's elite security forces. It was a firefight that left me with two bullets one in my shoulder the other on my leg. I survived after a med-evac being the only casualty of the operation.

Agent Sally: How about you freeman? Any wild stores from your history in the British army.

Agent Freeman: I was a desk officer, never really got to see some good action, even in Iraq. My job was just being an accountant for my brigade. Doing paperwork all day. That's why I resigned and joined the MI6.

Agent Sally: So, you wanted some action *(smiling).*

Agent Freeman: Yes, badly. Theres nothing boring like an office desk.

Agent sally: Do you want to hear mine? Looks like I am the only one left.

Agent Bridgestone: Of course, yeah.

Agent Sally: My time before MI6 was in the Royal Air Force, served as a weapon system officer, flying the GR Tornado over Iraq 2003.

Agent Freeman: Yeah, I saw it on your file.

Agent Sally: I was just 21, imagine, dropping bombs on Saddam's forces in the early hours of the invasion.

Chief Watson: That is a good star for this team knowing each other's background helps form a great bond for teamwork.

Agent Bridgestone: Great mam. My time in special forces taught me that.

OCTOBER 17TH 2011

0600 HOURS

(Gulfstream Aircraft lands in Rome)

Chief Watson: Here we are, Rome. Now let's get to work.

(The team alighted from the private jet with their packed equipment. They are met with officers from Italian intelligence services)

Agent Bellucci: welcome to Rome Ms. Watson, I hope your team is ready for the job.

Bridgestone: Yes, we are.

Agent Bellucci: then come with me to our headquarters for briefing and preparations for this mission.

(At the Italian intelligence HQs, the M16 agents and Italian agents sat in a boardroom for briefing on the pentagon leaders of the Caligula)

Agent Bellucci: once more, I would like to welcome our British friends to Rome for this big mission and I want us to re-examine the profiles of the pentagon, before we lay the plan for operations, some of us have not been briefed on this operation, because we had to keep our plans of the grid, if we are to succeed.

First *(uses remote control to show images of the pentagon leaders)*, we start with pentagon leader number 1: Thoman Baker, citizen of the United States and grandson to American billionaire Thomas Baker Senior. He uses his inheritance to fund operations of the Caligula

Agent Sally: Does his family know of this?

Agent Bellucci: We cannot tell for sure. Maybe they could be part of the filth, but I doubt, the CIA or FBI could be aware if true and apprehended him and inform his family.

Agent Sally: How can't they?

Agent Bellucci: The identities of the Pentagon leaders have always remained a mystery, all the way from its foundations in the 1970s and only made public by the criminal enterprise following the deaths of the leaders. No intelligence agency around the world has ever cracked the identity of the Pentagon until Agent Freeman of British MI6 during his field missions in Czech Republic, met a source, a man who knows the Caligula quite well, a man from the world of conspiracies of the Contractions Corp, whose identity is classified.

Agent Sally: So, we the British are the first to crack this mystery out?

Agent Bellucci: Yes, and thanks to your county, Italy can get rid of this Caligula infestation. Ok, let's move to the

next target *(uses the remote control to toggle next image)* Alejandro Fonseca, Spanish citizen, moonlights as the CEO of "El Paraiso" hotel complex in Madrid and secretly funds the Caligula. And next, Nobutada Mitsuhide, Japanese citizen, also a member of the Yakuza, a high rank triad official. He runs a huge fishing business in Kyushu Island, runs narcotics for Yakuza as well. Number 4 we have, Vladimir Rusev, mother was Russian, father was Bulgarian. He runs a huge weapons supply chain stretching from Moscow through Belarus to the Czech Republic. He was responsible for shipment of arms to separatist forces in Transnistria against the Moldovan government forces in 1992 and also supplied weapons to separatist forces in the 2008 Georgian War in Abkhazia province in support of FSB operations there.

Number 5 our own, Lorenzo Mariottini Cicarelli, big time narcotic trader, runs a prostitution ring in Florence and Rome and moonlights as a fast car salesman with all kinds of classic and modern sports cars from Italy, Europe and around the world. He is the head of the Pentagon and all the other 4 report to him. His lover Allesandra Lisa Giovanni runs the prostitution ring on his behalf and has huge influence on him and conspiracy says she could be behind all operations at the Pentagon and Caligula as the puppet mistress.

Agent Bridgestone: We did not discuss all that in detail in our MI6 briefing that's a good start.

Agent Watson: I preserved it all for our joint briefing with our Italian partners.

Agent Freeman: That's great.

Agent Bellucci: 4 days from now the Pentagon will be holding a meeting at the Nexus Hotel Complex in the conference room 3rd floor to discuss expansion of their operation in Europe and beyond. We shall not notify Naples Police Department to tie up loose ends, the Caligula have corrupted dozens of officers in the town. My tactical team and MI6 agents will surround the building as soon as the meeting begins. Alpha team of Italian intelligence will fast rope via chopper to the roof and rappel to the 3rd floor of the Nexus Hotel conference straight to the conference room.

Bravo team of MI6 agents and Italian intelligence agents will sweep from the ground floor to 2nd floor lock the targets in from leaving the building and once Alpha team secures the high value individuals, Bravo team will go to 3rd floor to exfil Alpha team to the roof for helicopter extraction... Charlie team of Italian agents will guard the ground floor to prevent any reinforcements from compromising Alpha and Bravo team.

Alpha team will remain on the roof for ex-filtration by helicopter, Bravo and Charlie team will extract via ground vehicles.

Chief Watson: That's an excellent plan.

Agent Bellucci: Any question?

Italian Agent Giovanni Trancedi: What part do I play, bravo, Charlie?

Agent Bellucci: You will be second in command to Sally Ratcliffe of MI6 who will head Charlie Team and Agent Ricardo Vicenzo will head Alpha team and as usual Carlos Ferrari, you are the captain of the AISI tactical team so you monitor the entire operation with us.

Agent Bridgestone: I thought I should lead Bravo team.

Agent Freeman: Uh, we are in Italian jurisdiction so I think this is their show and we are the guests.

(giggles in the room)

Agent Vincenzo: Hehe, yes Mr. Bridgestone, this is our show.

Agent Bellucci: Bridgestone will head Bravo team.

Agent Bridgestone: Hehe, fine by me.

Agent Bellucci: I think that marks the end of this briefing and we need to make preparations for D-Day.

Bridgestone: Agent Vincenzo, why don't we head for the tactical shooting range and show me what you got.

Watson: I think all tactical teams need to start by refining their marksmanship skills in the range.

(the MI6 and Italian agents headed for the shooting range to horn their skills and bond in preparations for a big mission).

Bridgestone: Ok, ladies and boys, we are the tactical muscle for this operation and we need to make sure we are ready for this mission. Shooting starts at 50yards and we finish at 10 yards; you will go through the obstacles course as you aim and fire at your targets. And this is your show agent Ricardo, your agents will take the lead, show us what you got.

Agent Vincenzo: Fine by me. Alpha team you're up.

Captain Carlos: Yes, my brother, ladies and boys line up.

(Alpha team was led by Carlos in the shooting practice)

Agent Vincenzo: How long have you been in MI6?

Agent Bridgestone: So, you have not seen my file?

Agent Vincenzo: No.

Agent Bridgestone: 5 years. Before that I was in the British SBS, served I Iraq 2003. How about you?

Agent Vincenzo: I served at Rome City Police, 10 years, forensic department before joining Italian intelligence. Why the career change?

Agent Bridgestone: I served 3 years in Iraq since the 2003 invasion, got tired of fighting a war that had no

ending in sight, a politician's war. I thought I should fight real war against crime in the shadows. I got wounded not so badly on my first deployment in Iraq. I spent one year recovering.

Agent Vincenzo: I lost my partner in a car accident, chasing a bank robber when he was off duty.

Agent Bridgestone: Sorry for your loss.

Agent Vincenzo: Thanks.

Agent Bridgestone: Is that why you left the forensic lab? To chase the bad guys tactically after they lead to your partners death.

Agent Vincenzo: Pretty much yes. I wanted to make them pay first hand.

(Carlos shouted at alpha team)

Captain Carlos: Aim better! My grandmother can do better, come on! *(alpha team members shoot at target as they go through the obstacle course)*

Agent Bridgestone: Alpha team is almost done; we should be ready.

Agent Vincenzo: I am more than ready.

Agent Bridgestone: Good. I keep having this bad feeling we are headed for a trap, but my confidence on the Intel we have tells me to have a little faith.

Agent Vincenzo: Your partner Freeman gave us solid Intel; we have faith my brother in your MI6 team. If we don't do this the Caligula will slip off our fingers in a very long time.

Agent Freeman: Relax my brother. I have your back always.

Agent Sally: How about corruption at Naples Police Department. How do you cope with that?

Agent Vincenzo: We have a spy ring there to inform us of any dirty cops, so far, we have no information on this mission being compromised by corrupt officers from Naples.

LATER THAT DAY

1700 HOURS

Agent Bellucci: That was good training for the day ladies and gentlemen. Operation Pentagram is 5 days out, and we need to move to the next phase. We shall practically simulate the raid at Nexus Hotel at the AISI Advanced Training Complex 7 Kilometers East of Rome. We shall rehearse there from tomorrow morning. Captain Carlos, Agent Vincenzo and MI6 Agent Bridgestone will lead the joint exercise.

Chief Watson Portman: No room for mistakes, we need to get this right and finish this criminal network once and for all. Any questions?

(Silence)

Chief Watson Portman: Ok, then we should begin to pack our gear and move to the AISI Advanced Training Complex.

The joint MI6 team and AISI tactical teams left the AISI HQ's training grounds with their bags, weapons and further equipment straight into 6 black vans waiting by the parking lot.

MEANWHILE IN NAPLES

OCTOBER 17TH 2011

1700 HOURS (ITALIAN TIME)

The Caligula Mafia Pentagon leaders met with Alexei Rostov, Chief Intelligence Officer of the Contractors Corporation at the Il Grande Gioco (The Big Game) Casino. They sat at a round table playing card games as they smoked cigar and drink as they play.

Rostov: The MI6 and Italian Intelligence 4 days from now will intercept you at Nexus Hotel in your grand

meeting. That damn MI6 Agent Oliver Wallace Freeman threatened to expose us all! He threatened to expose everything about our Operation Glass Theatre. He sent me pictures, and camera videos of our last meeting with the Americans, the last deal we had in Casablanca, remember that. He got us on tape. I am sorry I had to give him the intel on the location of your meeting. But I have set a trap for them and my loyal Professional 47 will take him out together with his team. And our secret business with the damn Americans will be back on track as…….

Lorenzo Mariottini Cicarelli (The Head of The Pentagon leadership of the Caligula Mafia) interrupted to speak.

Lorenzo: Wait a minute Mr. Rostov, you gave up the location of our meeting*? (Pulls out his golden pistol firearm on the table).*

Rostov calmly shuffled through the deck of his cards and speaks.

Rostov: Like I said, if I did not, it would compromise our business. I came here to warn you in advance and to tell you I have set a trap for them at Nexus Hotel. A surveillance staff employee is already in my fold. A 10-kilogram C4 explosive is already planted in the 3rd floor Conference room where they will breach expecting to find you. Professional 47 here will maintain touch with the staff employee who will inform him exactly when the conference room is breached and he will detonate

the explosive remotely from a safe distance. *(He finishes and casually sips up a glass of whiskey and commands Professional 47 standing behind him to pour him more into his empty glass).*

Rostov: "Buon Umore Whisky" my favourite always… *(he sips and places the glass slowly on the table with a big sigh).*

Nobutada Mitsuhide, a Pentagon leader of the Caligula Mafia, opens up to speak.

Mitsuhide: I can provide you with intel on the movement of the MI6 and AISI to let you know when they will be coming for us. The Black Lily Protocol I developed with army of cyber experts can do the wonder magic. I will tap into their comms and surveillance systems with the **Black Lily Protocol**; there is nothing like it in the world of cybersecurity (Shuffles through his deck of cards and places his card on the table).

Thomas Baker Jr, a Pentagon leader of the Caligula Mafia, opens up to speak.

Baker: And what if your plan does not go as intended? If the MI6 Agent survives, he will be coming for us all. And God have mercy on your soul, because if I cannot get proof of his death, then I will…. *(Opens up to speak with frustration and is interrupted by Vladimir Rusev.)*

Rusev: Hey! Hey! No threats on this table, we are a family, and like a family we stick together. The MI6 Agent is our problem, all of us, not one man's problem. And we are definitely not holding the meeting at Naples anymore. I propose Prague or Saint Petersburg. I have lots of FSB Agents there under my fold. *(Places his cards on the table after shuffling through them).*

Alejandro Fonseca, a Pentagon leader of the Caligula Mafia, opens up to speak.

Fonseca: Prague is full of FBI and MI6 Agents looking into our mafia, there could be a backlash. I stopped my drugs business after two clients turned out to be MI6 and FBI Agents. They arrested the best men I ever knew pushing the kilos for me. (Draws out his card from his deck and places it on the table).

Lorenzo: We head to Saint Petersburg this evening. Rusev, ensure my private helicopter waiting at Santa Georgia Hospital helipad is well fueled. We then fly to Prague where my private jet is waiting*. (Places his cards finally on the table)*. And that's a win for me…. You all owe me $50,000…to be deposited in my account in 24 hours. That was a good game. *(Picks a new cigar from a box passed on to him by his bodyguard standing behind him, and he places it in his mouth, leaning to his bodyguard to light it up for him).* And you Mr. Rostov, compromised our security, but saved our business with the Americans. I will spare you for that. Money is the bloodline of everything in any business. And I just have

one more task for you to make up for your sins. That is, ensure that MI6 Agent is no more. I do not want loose ends threatening my business. And I need a phone call with the United States Under Secretary of Defense Mr. Graham Hawthorne to let him know we are moving instead to Saint Petersburg to discuss business. He should be there by 6pm. And let DoD Colonel Mark Ellison and CIA Lieutenant Ms. Evelyn Ross be informed of the changes in plan as well.

Rusev: Do not worry boss. I will take care of it all.

Rusev picked up his phone and walked out of the table and called his henchman Dmitri, speaking in Russian.

Rusev: Privet, Dmitry. Nachal'nik khochet, chtoby vertolet byl gotov. Ubedis', chto on polnost'yu zapravlen. Pozvoni Ivanu v Pragu. Skazhi yemu, chtoby on zapravil samolet. My letim v Pragu, a zatem napravlyayemsya v Sankt-Peterburg. MI6 skomprometirovala nashu vstrechu v Neapole.

(Translation: Hey Dmitri. The boss wants the helicopter ready. Ensure it is well fueled. Call Ivan in Prague. Tell him, to fuel the jet. We are coming to Prague and then head to Saint Petersburg. MI6 has compromised our meeting in Naples.)

Dmitry: Da, boss. I, kazhetsya, mne nuzhna pomoshch'. Nikolaya arestovala cheshskaya politsiya v Prage. Oni zaderzhali yego s nashimi narkotikami.

(Translation: Yes boss. And I think I may need some help. Nikolai was arrested by Czech Police in Prague. They intercepted him with our drugs.)

Rusev: Ne volnuytes'. On skoro vyydet. YA lichno zaymus' etim s inspektorom Yakubom. (He hangs up). *(Translation: Do not worry. He will be out soon. I will handle it personally with Inspector Jakub.)*

Rusev walks back to the table.

Rusev: Hey boss. One of our men was busted by Czech Police in Prague. They intercepted him with our drugs. I will call **Inspector Jakub**, he is our man in the inside.

Lorenzo: You will deal with that later. Get me the United States Undersecretary Hawthorne first. And I think we should be leaving. Get the convoy ready.

The orange yellow sunset illuminating the sky and the windshields of their cars as they get in. Lorenzo comfortably sat back in the back seat of his black Audi Car. Rusev got in and sat beside him. He handed over the satellite phone to Lorenzo having dialed the secure phone line to Undersecretary Hawthorne. The phone beeped three times before Hawthorne picked up. He put

it on his ear and spoke with the orange yellow glare of the sunset reflecting off his dark purple sunglasses.

Lorenzo: Undersecretary Hawthorne, how are you?

PENTAGON DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BUILDING

WASHINGTON DC

OCTOBER 17TH, 2011

1100 HOURS (WASHINGTON DC TIME)

Hawthorne: Yes Mr. Lorenzo. I am good*. (He leaves his office for the washroom and the young US Marine Corp guarding him outside his office door follows him.)*

Lorenzo: An MI6 Agent has compromised our secret meeting in Naples; we are meeting in Saint Petersburg on 21st. Kindly make it there. *(Lorenzo is audible on phone on Hawthorne's end.)*

Hawthorne opened the washroom door and briefly removed satellite phone from his ear and told the US Marine Corp guard to stay outside. Hawthorne with his secure satellite phone pinned to his ear by his right shoulders, washed his face by the washroom sink and looked into the mirror and calmly replied.

Hawthorne: Yes. Mr. Rostov informed me of the compromised location. I have sent him enough finances to eliminate the MI6 Agent and get our business back on track. I am confident that Mr. Rostov will get the job done and tie up these lose ends.

Hawthorne removed a face towel from his pocket as the satellite phone remained pinned on his right ear by his right shoulder. Lorenzo replied with audibility from Hawthorne's end.

Lorenzo: That is great. I will get you a good cover story for your trip to Saint Petersburg. I will arrange a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Lavrov as cover for your trip to Russia. You will have talks on nuclear de-escalation and NATO expansion.

Hawthrone replied.

Hawthorne: That is great. I will organize myself right away for a press briefing as soon as Mr. Lavrov is ready.

Hawthorne wiped his face clean with the face towel with Lorenzo audible on his end.

Lorenzo: That is great. I am heading to Prague right now to board my private jet. See you in Saint Petersburg.

Lorenzo hangs up the call.

Hawthorne walked out of the washroom and was escorted back to his Department of Defense Office by the young US Marine Corp Officer guarding him.

Hawthorne spoke to the young officer before opening the door.

Hawthorne: Hey son. Get me CNN's Penny Benjamin. Tell her I need a press briefing. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Lavrov wants a meeting over nuclear de-escalation and NATO expansion. Tell her to come to the Press Briefing Room at the Pentagon. I have a trip to Saint Peterburg. And inform Secretary of State Valerie Clinton, this is precisely her docket more than it is for me.

US Marine Officer: Yes sir. *He salutes Undersecretary Hawthorne.*

Hawthorne opened the door to his office, walked in and comfortably sat back in his chair, placed his secure satellite phone on the table drawing back his drawn black-grey hair with his two hands.

Hawthorne dialed up Colone Mark Elison's secure satellite phone number while seated back on his chair, he got up to takeoff his coat and hanged it on the coat hanger behind his chair. As the satellite phone beeped intermittently, he pressed it against his right ear with his right shoulder as he unbuttoned his shirt sleeves and pulled them up. Finally, the call went through and he relaxed his right shoulder from pressing the satellite phone on his right ear and held it against the ear with his right hand. He turned around to stare at the mid-

morning traffic in the streets below his office glass window and replied…

Hawthorne: Colonel, how are you?

Elison: Greetings Mr. Undersecretary. Something new?

Hawthorne: The meeting is moved up to Saint Petersburg, an MI6 agent compromised our meeting location in Naples and I have given enough funds to the Contractors Corp to take care of loose ends. He knows everything about Operation Glass Theatre.

Elison: Good. That will be good riddance. What do the Brits want in our operations? I think we should send a strong message without leaving our fingerprints all over this, that is a court martial for me and Congressional Subpoena hearing for you and me too.

Hawthorne: No worries son. An anonymous source did the cash transfer for me. Nothing traces back to us. You may contact Evelyn at Langley, tell her of the new updates. We depart together tomorrow with Secretary of State Ms. Valerie Clinton. We shall be meeting Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Lavrov. These two, Clinton and Lavrov do not know what's really on the pipeline, so keep them in the dark about our meeting with the Mafia leadership. They will be our cover and give us good reasons to be in Russia. Operation Glass Theatre will make us rich, and it must not be compromised.

Elison: Good, I'll keep them in the dark and I'll let Evelyn know of the meeting in Saint Petersburg as soon as possible. See you at the airport tomorrow.

Hawthorne: Yes, son. Good day. He hangs up the phone.

Hawthorne still staring at the traffic down below holding the satellite phone on his hands, when his office telephone rang. He rushed to pick it up and replied…

Hawthorne: Hello….

Secretary Clinton: Greetings Mr. Undersecretary. I have received a diplomatic note verbale from the Russian Embassy, saying they wanna meet to talk about nuclear de-escalation, and NATO in Saint Peterburg.

Hawthorne: Yes, my sources in Russia informed me too. I think it would be good in thawing our relations, the past eight years have been hot for us with the Russians, we poked them when we toppled Saddam in 2003, we have been stockpiling new better nukes lately, they are just giving us an opportunity to cool things off. And I think we should take it. Is the President aware?

Clinton replied calmly seated back in her office chair, looking at the wall photo of the president in her office.

Clinton: Yes, President Derick Bowman has been informed. He thinks we need de-escalation. The Russians too have been stockpiling new better nuclear

weapons since the 2008 War in Georgia. I think we need to cap the proliferation to avoid more tensions with the Russians.

Hawthorne walked around calmly in his office and replied...

Hawthorne: That's good. I ordered a private plane to Saint Peterburg, it is well equipped with everything we need for fun along the way, a nice small Putting Green for a mini golf course, and a VIP Executive Lounge and Bar with your favorite drinks, martinis and wine. The plane leaves tomorrow 10 a.m. I think you should board with us.

Clinton: That would be great yes. Ok, see you then.

Hawthorne: Great. *He hangs up the phone and puts it back in its place.*

MEANWHILE AT AISI ADVANCED TRAINING COMPLEX

7KM SOUTH OF ROME

OCTOBER 17TH, 2011

1530 HOURS (ITALIAN TIME)

MI6 and AISI tactical teams prepare to simulate a takedown of five high value individuals (HVIs) in a five-storey training building simulating the Nexus Hotel Complex, in preparation of Operation Pentagram to capture the top 5 leadership of the Caligula Mafia at the hotel complex. A Leonardo AW139 helicopter ferrying Alpha team of AISI for roof insertion hovers around the training building. 6 black vans of Bravo and Charlie teams of AISI and MI6 tactical squads are 300 meters away from the training building waiting for the green light call from the AISI Captain Carlos in charge of coordinating the exercise, as AISI Director Bellucci and MI6 Chief Watson Portman watch live bodycam footages and live helicopter footages of the training on several screens from a van out in the distant near some tents.

Captain Carlos: Yes, director, sir, everything in set? Do I have permission for the greenlight? I think the teams are ready, over. *(Speaks on walky-talky radio from his van watching live video footage of the exercise).*

Director Bellucci: Yes, proceed.

Captain Carlos: *(Speaking on his walky-talky radio)* Ok teams, you know the drill. Alpha team will conduct a roof insertion by helicopter and rappel down along the exterior walls to the 3rd floor glass windows. They will breach the windows with small explosive charges and secure Tier-1 HVIs as they wait for Bravo team to make an entry on the ground floor, sweeping their way to the 3rd floor. Charlie team 1 will guard the entrance to keep clear of any threats pursuing Bravo team from outside. The rest of Charlie teams 2, 3 and 4 will hold their positions around the building to protect all 4 corners from reinforcements if any nearby. Charlie team will initiate the operation by rushing to secure all 4 corners of the building with their vans, and Charlie team 1 will move to secure the building entrance and cover their corner too. Bravo team will escort Alpha team and captured HVIs to the roof for helicopter extraction. Affirmative teams? Over.

Vincenzo: Alpha team acknowledged. *(Says from within the helicopter with rotor noise audible in the background.) (Vincenzo commands Alpha Team.)*

Bridgestone: Bravo team affirmative. *(Bridgestone commands Bravo Team.)*

Ratcliffe: Charlie team affirmative. *(Ratcliffe commands Charlie Team.)*

Captain Carlos: Go! Go! Go! Charlie team move in position. Bravo team follow. Over. (Speaks through his walkie-talkie radio).

The four vans of Charlie team raced to the training building and surrounded it on all four corners. Charlie team tactical squads of MI6 and AISI Agents exited the vans and surrounded the building.

Bravo team vans followed Charlie team at high speed and stopped near the entrance. Bravo team of MI6 and AISI tactical squads exited the van and made an entry into the building.

Bridgestone: Go! Go! Go!

Captain Carlos: Alpha team make the roof insertion. Rappel down to the 3rd floor Conference Room.

Vincenzo: Affirmative Command. Alpha 1-2, fast rope down now! Alpha 1-3 Go! Alpha 1-4 Go! Alpha 1-5 Go! (He commands the team to fast-rope down the helicopter to the roof.)

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1 fast-roping. *(Vincenzo is the last to fast-rope to the roof as the rest of Alpha team hold position to secure the roof.)*

Meanwhile in the ground floor lobby, Bravo team encounters simulated threats – Mock-up Mafia men dressed in black suits played by AISI Agents. They fire at each other with training simunition rifles, The Mafia using mp5 simunition submachine gun with red paint-filled simunition plastic rounds. The AISI-MI6 teams use M4 Simunition rifles firing blue paint-filled simunition rounds. These paint-filled plastic rounds explode on impact marking target with colored paint to indicate a hit on the target.

Bravo 1-3(AISI Agent): Contact, Contact! By the balcony! Engage targets.

The mockup Mafia agents played by AISI agents open fire with their simunition weapons, as Bravo team fires back.

Bridgestone: Cover me! *(He shouts as he exits his cover position and shoots one mockup Mafia agent approaching their position from down the stairs.)* Wallace, cover my left flank, take the left stairs!

Wallace: Copy Bravo1-2 on the move. Bravo 1-3. 1-4 follow me. Bravo 1-5, 1-6, 1-7 cover the right flank with Bravo lead 1-1.

Bravo 1-5: Affirmative

Bravo 1-6: Affirmative 1-2.

Bravo 1-3: Contact! Contact! Engaging targets descending the left flank stairs. (He shoots successfully two targets, splashing blue paint all over them. The third target narrowly escapes and hides behind a huge flower vase by the stairs.

Meanwhile, on the building roof.

Vincenzo: Alpha team, in position to rappel down to the 3rd floor. All teams go.

Alpha teams having harnessed their ropes to the firm building's piping system on the roof, rappeled down the exterior walls of the building down to the 3rd floor windows with the ropes hissing zipping sounds with every descent.

Vincenzo: Deploy explosive charges now.

The Alpha teams stuck small explosive charges of the upper parts of the glass windows and climbed up to safe distance and team leader Vincenzo detonated the explosives and the alpha team made a rapid insertion via the broken window glasses. They shot down easily the 4 mockup Mafia agents guarding the 5 mockup Tier-1 Mafia leaders representing the 5 Pentagon members of the Caligula leadership.

Alpha 1-2: Contact! One target down.

Alpha 1-3: Contact! Two targets down.

Vincenzo: Third target down, take cover behind the pillars.

The Mockup Mafia agents fired their training simunition weapons at the Alpha team.

Alpha 1-5: I am taking heavy fire in my position, someone cover me.

Alpha 1-4: Got you! He fires in the direction of the last remaining mock-up Mafia agent.

Alpha 1-5: Contact! Last of them down*. (He shoots the last targets successfully with blue paint all over the target's black chest bullet proof vest.)*

Alpha

Vincenzo*:* Secure the Tier-1 HVIs until Bravo team arrives.

Alpha 1-2: Copy Alpha 1-1.

Meanwhile in the lobby

Bravo 1-7: Contact! Contact! Engaging 2 targets descending the right flank stairs (He shoots one target splashing blue paint on his black suit and white shirt. The other takes cover behind a pillar near the stairs

Bravo 1-6: Two targets by the upper stairs. Engaging! Cover me! (He breaks out of cover as Bravo 1-7 provides cover fire. Bravo 1-6 shoots down one target, the other shoots him in the chest with plastic simunition round splashing red paint on his tactical vest. Damn! I am hit! (

Bravo 1-7: I got him! (Bravo 1-6 shoots down the target that shot 1-6, splashing blue paint on his chest area.) We have man down! Overlord Command we have a man down!

Captain Carlos: Acknowledged, Charlie 2-, get ready to provide "medical care".

Charlie 2-4: Affirmative.

Bridgestone: Contact by the pillar! Bravo 1-1 Engaging! (He shoots the last remaining target on the right flank.) Target down!

Bravo 1-2: I got the last target on the left flank. He is down. Bravo 1-1, request permission to regroup and extract the wounded.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-1 affirmative 1-2, regroup and assist the wounded.

Bravo 1-2(Wallace Oliver Freeman), 1-3 and 1-4 regroup with Bridgestone's team.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-5, 1-7, carry Bravo 1-6 to Charlie 2-4 in the van outside for "medical evacuation".

Bravo 1-5: Affirmative.

Bravo 1-7: Affirmative.

Bravo 1-5 and 1-7 carry 1-6 to the Charlie 2-4 van for "medicare."

Bridgestone: Alpha 1-1, Bravo team got one casualty, we are headed to your position, sit tight.

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1 copy.

Bridgestone: Bravo team, take the stairs to the elevator on the first floor. We are headed to the 3rd floor to secure Apha team.

Wallace: Bravo 1-2 affirmative

Bravo 1-3: Copy.

Bravo 1-4: Affirmative.

Bravo team moved up the right stairs to the first floor and took the elevator to the third floor. Meanwhile Captain Carlos watches live bodycam footage in his van. Director Bellucci and Chief Portman do the same in their vans.

Bravo team exit the elevator, and enter the third floor.

Bridgestone: Bravo team on the third floor.

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1. We are in room 305, right wing.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-1 copy. Room 3035 right wing, let's go team.

Bravo team stack up near the door to Conference Room 305.

Bridgestone: Alpha 1-1, weapons cold, we are entering 305.

Vincenzo: Affirmative Bravo 1-1. Alpha team weapons cold. Bravo team coming in.

Bravo team breached the door and help secure the HVI targets by zipping them up, assisted by Alpha team members. The zipped HVIs were blind folded by placing a black hood clothing over their heads.

Vincenzo: Command Overlord. This is Alpha 1-1, we have package secure, headed to the roof.

Bravo and Alpha teams marched the mock HVIs to the roof where the helicopter was waiting. The 5 HVIs mock-ups were loaded onto the helicopter on the building roof with the rest of Alpha team and the helicopter took off and landed out 200 meters away in the designated final assembly point in the grass, not far from the tents where Captain Carlos' van, and the other van with Bellucci and Portman inside.

Bridgestone: Charlie team 1 secure out exit at the entrance, we are descending to the ground floor.

Ratcliffe: Copy Bravo 1-1. Your exit is secure. No threats.

Bravo team walked out via the entrance exit door and both Bravo and Charlie teams boarded their vans to the designated final assembly point, 200 meters away.

At the assembly point, the helicopter rotors were still rotating but slowing down. Captain Carlos, Director Bellucci and MI6 Chief Watson Portman stood outside their vans with Alpha team in parade alongside the mockup HVIs with their hood s removed and unzipped, and alongside the AISI agents playing the mockup Mafia men.

Bravo and Charlie team vans arrived and both teams dismount the vans, and walked majestically to the parade to celebrate the half-victory.

Captain Carlos: That was well done. Bravo team took one casualty though. Better be careful next time. The entire operation clocked 8 minutes 51seconds… not bad at all.

Director Bellucci: That was exemplary. We shall have another repeat tomorrow, but this time, it is computer simulation, so hone your keyboard and Play Station skills. This will help you build muscle memory for the entire operation.

Chief Watson Portman: I expected the very best which you have delivered. One casualty means someone was

not watching his back. Work better as a team. You need each other's backs.

Bridgestone: Yes ma'am. We'll do better than that next time.

Director Bellucci: Parade dismissed. You have the entire day off. Tomorrow, we do computer simulation of the exercise.

Captain Carlos: Huuurah!

Alpha, Bravo and Charlie teams: HUUURAH!

Captain Carlos: Dismissed.

The three teams, broke off f and gathered around in the grass to chat and celebrate the success of the exercise.

Sally Ratcliffe: Hey Bridgestone. You did good today. *(She says approaching him with a smile.)*

Bridgestone: Thanks Sally.

Sally Ratcliffe: How about a drink tonight.

Wallace: That will be great. Let's get all the good Italian ladies in the team, and we have some fun tonight.

Bridgestone: Yes, a drink would be great. And we have some fun. *(He says, taking off his helmet.)*

Later that night

The AISI and MI6 teams departed the AISI Advanced Training Complex in British-made Land Rover cars and drove north to Rome for a night party.

The streets of Rome were quiet initially, but Rome always had a way of walking up to life at night. The damp cobblestone roads and paved paths between the buildings reflected strings of amber light from the sodium vapor street lamps in the city. The faint hum of scooters moving in the distance and distant chatter of town dwellers promised the night had just begun.

They alighted from their British-made Land Rover cars at the nightclub, near the Piazza del Popolo. Captain Carlos, the seasoned Italian, took lead of the column of joyful men and women of Task Force 151, with measured confidence. He scanned the festive streets with his sharp eyes, keeping strong vigilance even in times of pleasure and relaxation. Street performers were common at this hour, playing musical instruments and juggling fruits at the amazement and thrill of on-lookers and music lovers paying attention.

Behind him, Agent Vincenzo of Alpha team walked casually, chatting with his teammate Isabella Romano, a clever and confident AISI agent, whose sharp brains coincided with his precision in the field.

AISI agent Giovanni Trancedi walked alongside Oliver Wallace Freeman, holding arms and kept her eyes on Bravo team as she had a knack for reading people.

Wallace usually professional in composure was a little softened by her presence.

At the center of the group was Thomas Bridgestone, walking along the streets, vigilant, eyes scanning the path ahead, but relaxed with Sally held to his right arm, matching his every stride – alert, confident and magnetic. They had playful glances right from the AISI training grounds and tonight, Rome kept a promise more than just camaraderie.

The nightclub "Notte Romana" was a two-storey building with pulsating colorful neon lights, mirrored walls and an open terrace that overlooked the piazza. The bouncer gave them a respectful nod as they approached and allowed them to go in and immediately, they were enveloped in the sounds of bass-heavy Italian house music.

The team claimed a large corner with three empty tables up near the balcony overlooking the main dance floor below. Carlos leaned closer to Elena Bianchi, an experienced AISI field agent with a naughty smile, and engaged in flirty conversations.

Vincenzo sat next to Isabella, and they exchanged inside jokes about the day's exercise. The remaining AISI agents Marco De Luca, Guila Ferraro, Lorenzo Santino, and Francesca Vitale were slightly shy around the female MI6 and AISI agents, but were quickly eased and drawn closer with the evening cocktails.

Bridgestone and Sally sat side by side as the ordered a round of Aperol Spritez. Wallace poured whiskey for Trancedi, and the two shared a private laugh over some inside joke from the day's drills. The night was certainly electric – an energy rare but at its peak in December.

Sally leaned closer to Bridgestone and with a soft voice over the nightclub music in the background said to him…

Sally: I am really glad to have you with me in this moment. Moments like this with someone you love can be hard to find.

Bridgestone: Thank you dear. I am glad too*. (Bridgestone replied, smiling back).*

Sally tilted her glass of the drink towards him and so did Bridgestone, they toasted and took sips of the drink till the glasses were empty.

Sally: That is a wonderful taste of Italian drink. *(She commented, smiling, brushing off a strand of her blonde hair from her face).*

Their hands made slight contact as she passed him a cocktail, and they held in for a moment too long. Their eyes met, and for a heartbeat, the chaos of the nightclub faded into oblivion, and it was the two of them left in the bliss of moment of that December night.

At a nearby table, Carlos gently whispered something in Elena's ear. She reacted with a naughty smile on her face,

nudged and tickled him. Next to them, Vincenzo too whispered something into Isabella's ear and she responded with a laughter that softened and watered down his usual emotionless expressions.

The nightclub DJ shifted to a slower rhythm, and the teams surrendered themselves to the charm of the music. They got up from the tables to dance, each with a partner.

Wallace: Let's make this dance worth the moment.

Vincenzo: Yes, let's do it ladies.

Bridgestone was a little hesitant but was quickly drawn to Sally who had to pull him out of his seat for the dance. She caught his glance and extended a hand, with no words but just a gesture. Bridgestone took her hand, and soon enough they swayed in the dance, in sync with the slow rhythm of the music, with the space between them electrified with unuttered attraction.

Not far from them was the couple – Wallace and Trancedi. They moved together with playful precision, with their steps in perfect mirror-like symmetry.

Carlos held Isabella by one arm and twirled her on the dance floor before holding her tight in his arms, with Trancedi raising her left thigh and leg, wrapping it around him with great affection. She smiled and laughed, as Carlos blissfully kissed her on the neck.

Vincenzo and Isabella, held each other close and danced slowly to the rhythm of the music before sharing a slight kiss. When the dance was over, Sally and Bridgestone stood outside the in the upper balcony overlooking the piazza.

Sally: Rome is the perfect place for us, isn't it?

Bridgestone: Yes, it is.

The winter wind teased Sally's hair, the city lights reflecting in their eyes. Not far, Wallace and Trancedi laughed at a shared memory. Carlos whispered something into Elena's ear and Vincenzo stood behind Isabella, holding her tight from behind as they gazed down at the town square.

The blissful night gave them a stirk reminder that there was more to life than tactical missions, more than killing for the good of country, more than drills and more than the dangers they face in the field.

For Sally and Bridgestone, it was the first thread of something deeper, delicate but undeniable, a tension that was woven in their shared smiles, brief touches and the warm December night of Rome.

Sally tilted her head; her lips curved in a playful half-smile. Bridgestone was moved, leaned in, and the energy between them, electrifying and tight. Their eyes met and held for a moment too long, and then Bridgestone

brushed his lips against hers. The kiss was brief, delicate and soft, lingering in their minds longer than in action.

Sally brushed her hand against his chest, and Bridgestone was moved by it to respond with brushing his hand gently down her back. They pulled apart but their foreheads remained rested together as they held hands. Sally looked up at him and said:

Sally: Seems Rome brings out the reckless side of you *(whispering in a husky voice).*

Bridgestone: I could say the same for you.

Nearby, on the same balcony, Wallace and Trancedi, Carlos and Elena, Vincenzo and Isabella along with other AISI agents had been watching the two with amazement. They cheered up, playfully teasing them but with warmth. They all laughed, and the moment was filled with the night. They walked back into the nightclub, and drinks poured, the air filled with laughter and for the next hour, they danced one last time, toasted and shared stories, and their camaraderie was strengthened by the adrenaline rush of the celebrations.

Eventually, the party took a toll on them and they were worn out and made a decision to drive back to the AISI Advanced Training Complex. They walked out of the night club majestically and filled with joy and laughter to the nearby parking lot where they left their British-made Land Rover cars parked. They alighted, ignited their engines and drove off in a tight column.

The British-made Land Rover cars with bright-white LED headlights illuminated the highway ahead of them, with the Rome City lights behind them. Ahead in the column was Bridgestone in the driver's seat, and Sally seated beside him in the front passenger's seat, with Wallace and Trancedi seated in the back seats behind them. The second car in the column consisted of Carlos in the driver's seat and Elena seated beside him in the front passenger seat with Vincenzo and Isabella seated behind them in the back seats. In the last two cars in the column were the rest of the AISI agents.

The night sky was clearing of the clouds that initially caused the drizzle in the early hours of the night, exposing the moon that lit the December night sky with great luminosity.

Wallace leaned back in his seat, folded his arms and interrupted the long silence.

Wallace: Rome seems to have this magic that touches people in a way. Even the quiet ones *(He smiled).*

Sally: Yeah, I thought I was alone in taking note of that. I am glad you noticed it too *(She looks back at Wallace in the back seat with a smile)*.

Wallace: For the first time in my career at MI6, Bridgestone finally got to fall for someone.

Bridgestone, smiled, looked in the rear-view mirror at Wallace, and moved his eyes back to position to focus on the road ahead.

Bridgestone: I used to love someone, until she decided to marry someone else after high school.

Trancedi: Why?

Bridgestone: We were fresh out of high school and she wanted to live it up. I moved on and joined the military, pursued my dreams and buried the past behind me.

Trancedi: She never deserved you.

Bridgestone: The last time I saw her, she was divorced, two years ago. Living all alone with two kids. The husband got into heavy alcoholism and slept around with other women.

Wallace: If she was only faithful to love, she could have spent her life with the better man.

Trancedi: Yeah, the money was too good but it never bought her everything.

The column of British-made Land Rover cars arrived at the security checkpoint at the gate entrance of the AISI Advanced Training Complex. The cars stopped and Bridgestone lowered his car side door window and showed his MI6 ID to the security guard.

Bridgestone: It is us, Task Force 151.

Guard: Ok, you may come in. *(He signals the female guard in the security booth to remotely open the gate).*

The gate opens after the female guard in the booth clicked a button on her computer, and the Land Rover cars drove in in a column, all the way to the parking lot near the female sleeping quarters and the team dismounts from their cars after the engines cut out and headlights switched off. The cold air of the late night rushed into their faces as they walked out of their cars. The men majestically escorted the ladies to the entrance of their sleeping quarters, and stopped at the doorway.

Sally: Tomorrow we are professionals again.

Bridgestone: We never stop being professionals.

Sally stepped closer to him and held his hands before kissing him one last time.

Sally: Good answer *(She smiled)*. Love you and see you tomorrow.

Bridgestone hugged her before letting her go into her quarters.

Bridgestone: Good night, Sally.

Sally: Good night, Tom.

Bridgestone watched her walk along the hallway to the third door on the left where she unlocked the door,

turned towards him and twinkled her left eye before walking in and closing the door behind her.

Carlos and Vincenzo gave their last hugs of the day to their ladies, Elena and Isabella respectively, and so did Wallace to Trancedi. The men then began to walk in the cold night headed to the men's sleeping quarters, under the bright moonlight and the yellow glow of the sodium vapor streetlights if the training compound. Their boots crunched with every step on the dump gravel as a conversation picked up.

Wallace: Today was wonderful. Not bad for a training exercise aftermath.

Carlos: Morale is a good weapon to keep the fighting team up on their toes.

Vincenzo: And so is wine, apparently.

Bridgestone: Yes. You notice it gets quiet after nights like that *(He said with his hands in his jacket's pockets).*

Wallace: Because, tomorrow reality resumes.

Carlos: And because moments like tonight do not last.

The yellow sodium vapor lamps hum overhead.

Vincenzo: But still worth it.

Bridgestone: Always.

Wallace: So, when does Bravo team gets officially distracted by Charlie team?

Bridgestone: Careful, Freeman.

Carlos: Let the men enjoy Rome, Bridgestone.

They all laugh softly, voices low as they walked on the crunching gravel under their boots, as the men's sleeping quarters appeared meters ahead in their view. Not long after, every man was under his blanket and desk lamps went off till early morning.

OCTOBER 18TH 2011

WASHINGTON DC,

WHITE HOUSE

0800 HOURS

President Bowman sits in the White Oval Office with Secretary of State Vallery Clinton, Defense Secretary Leonard D'Angelo Preston, Defense Undersecretary Hawthorne, US Marine Colonel Mark Elison, CIA Director Jane Foster with her Finance and Logistics Officer Evelyn Ross.

He briefs them on the foreign policy he intends to apply to Russia during the expected nuclear disarmament

negotiations, and on NATO expansion, in Saint Petersburg.

President Bowman was a young African-American in his late 40s, with war medals from Iraq and Kosovo. Behind him were his photos from Kuwait, Iraq and Kosovo including the presidential portrait photo. He sat back in his chair as he addressed his officials to represent his policy to Moscow officials in the expected negotiation meetings.

Bowman: In a few days, the talks begin and I want you to make the Russians understand that peace is at the core of our foreign policy. We are ready to cut down our nuclear stockpiles if they agree to do the same with yearly inspections. And on NATO, we shall shelve the induction of Ukraine and Georgia into the Alliance, until a compromise or agreement is reached with the Russians. Make them understand that we are always ready for negotiations over Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO. To provoke them is the last thing we want to do right now, and these talks will give us a window to cool global tensions that have filled the airwaves for the past eight years. Do you have any questions? Any further suggestions?

(Silence).

Bowman: Good. I want you to go to Russia, and do your country some good work, and buy the world the peace it deserves.

Hawthorne: Thank you, Mr. President. It was an honor serving with you. The plane leaves in two hours, 10 a.m. I think we're all good to go and make this country proud. I personally made the arrangements, as this meeting means a lot to me. Peace with the Russians is all I believe is best for this country.

Bowman: That is great of you Undersecretary Hawthorne. I appreciate the initiative you take into this.

Hawthrone: Thank you Mr. President.

3 DAYS LATER

OCTOBER 21ST 2011

NAPLES, ITALY

1000 HOURS

Task 151 of AISI and MI6 Agents drove to Naples outskirts from Rome. They stopped at an AISI safehouse just one mile from the city where a helicopter was waiting. AISI Director Bellucci and MI6 Chief Watson gave one final address to the team before commencing the operation.

Watson: Today, is the day ladies and gentlemen, we catch these criminals today and shut down their operations. Watch your backs and stick together as a team. The operation is codenamed "Operation Pentagram."

Bellucci: This should be over in less than an hour. Do the best and come home safe. Alpha team, proceed to the helicopter, hover around the city until Bravo and Charlie teams are in position.

Captain Carlos: Huuurah! Team Alpha let's go.

Alpha team boars the helicopter nearby which takes off, blowing dust into the air.

Bellucci: We shall monitor the operation from the safehouse. Bravo and Charlie you may depart immediately.

Bravo and Charlie teams board the black vans, which speed off into the main highway leading to the town.

Bellucci and Watson guarded by AISI security agents take a seat in the operations monitoring room in the safehouse with headphones over their heads watching the live bodycam video footages and helicopter footage of the events of the operation.

Watson: All teams, the operation is codenamed "Pentagram" and commences in a few minutes. Mission codeword is SOLTICE, you hear that word again , then you're good to go. Your target: Nexus Hotel Complex, third floor Room 305.

Carlos speaking seated beside the pilot with Alpha team in the passenger bay replied:

Captain Carlos: We're good to go, the target building is in sight, 300 meters away.

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1 acknowledged *(He said over the radio)*. Alpha team get ready.

Bellucci: Wait for Bravo and Charlie teams to get into position (*speaking from the safehouse).*

Bridgestone speaking on the radio seated in front beside the driver with Bravo team at the back of their black van said:

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-1, we are entering the city. Two hundred meters away from the target building.

Sally: Charlie 1-1 acknowledged.

Watson: Overlord Command acknowledged.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-1 to Chalie team, drive up ahead, take positions around the building.

Sally: Charlie 1-1 affirmative.

Charlie team van sped up and overtook Bravo team van, taking the lead. Bellucci and Watson observe the operation from the helicopter video footage and from the agents' live body cam footages.

Sally: Charlie 1-1. All Charlie teams move up to your positions.

Trancedi: Charlie 2-1, affirmative.

Isabella: Charlie 3-1 Affirmative

Elena: Charlie 4-1 Affirmative.

Charlie team vans slow down and take up positions on the four corners of the building.

Sally: All Charlie teams in position.

Captain Carlos: Overlord Command 1-2, all Charlie teams in position. SOLTICE, SOLTICE, SOLTICE! Alpha teams drop on the roof. Bravo teams move in and secure the lobby.

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1, affirmative.

The helicopter pilot flew to directly over the Nexus Hotel Complex building.

Vincenzo: Alpha team, fast-rope down now! Go! Go! Go!

Alpha team dropped ropes from the helicopter and began fast-roping down the building rooftop.

Charlie team 1 secured the hotel entrance and called up Bravo team to take up positions.

Sally: Charlie 1-1, we've secured the hotel entrance, Bravo team move up.

Bridgestone: We are exiting the van to take up positions in the lobby. Overlord Command 1-2, acknowledge.

Captain Carlos: Overlord Command 1-2 acknowledged. Move with caution.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-1 affirmative.

Professional 47 stood at the top of a building a few hundreds of meters away, aiming down at Bravo Team as they moved steadily to the Hotel Building. He took an aim at Oliver Wallace Freeman, part of the Bravo team. He pulled the trigger hitting Freeman in the thigh area. Wallace fell to the ground moaning and Bravo team formed position around him.

Bridgestone: Man down! Man down! Sniper in the area! Move him back to the van. Secure Bravo 1-2 for medical evacuation!

Bravo team took refuge behind the van and placed Wallace inside.

Watson: Bravo 1-1 acknowledged, secure Bravo 1-2 for medical evacuation. You must proceed with the operation. They were expecting us.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-1 affirmative. Put more pressure on that wound Bravo 1-5.

Captain Carlos: Charlie 2-4 move upto Bravo team and provide medical attention. Bravo team 1-8, drive the wounded back to base.

Charlie 2-4 (female AISI squad medic): Yes sir.

Charlie 2-4 runs up to the Bravo team van and gets in to provide medical attention.

Bridgestone: Bravo 1-5 go with the medic.

Bravo 1-5: Affirmative.

Bridgestone: Driver, go! Take him back to base (He said as he shut the van door).

The van took off with speed and the rest of Bravo team rushed to the hotel entrance.

Bridgestone: Overlord Command 1-2, find that sniper it looks like possible 200 meters away north of my position. Search the area and take him out. *(He said as he entered the lobby with Charlie team 1 at the entrance).*

Hotel receptionists began to scream at the front desks in fear.

Bridgestone: Calm down this is a police operation. We have terrorists holding a meeting on the third floor. Bravo team up the stairs. Go!

Bravo team ascended the stairs and four heavily armed mafia men in black suits and white shirts show up at the elevator entrance.

Wallace: Bravo 1-3 Contact! Contact! Engaging!

Bravo team shot down the four heavily armed mafia men.

Bridgestone: We nailed four contacts down! Alpha team where are you?

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1 to Bravo 1-1, we are rappelling down to the third floor Room 305. Hold your position at first floor elevator.

Bridgestone: Alpha 1-1 affirmative.

Alpha team rappelled along the exterior walls to just above the windows of the third floor Room 305. They placed their explosive charges a top the windows and blow them up at safe distance. They breach into the room, and Professional 47 watching from a distance with the binoculars, presses his detonation button, but the bomb failed to explode.

Alpha team encountered enemy fire as they breached but managed to shoot down all targets but realized they were duped as the Caligula Pentagon Mafia leaders were absent from the expected meeting.

Vincenzo: Alpha 1-1, we have encountered enemy fire but the HVIs are missing.

Alpha 1-3: We have a beeping sound under the table. Taking a look. (*He took a knee bending to check and saw a C4 charge explosive).*

Alpha 1-3: Bomb! Clear the room! They really were expecting us!

Vincenzo: Clear the room now!

Meanwhile Professional 47 hidden at the roof top 100 meters away observed the events of the operation as he struggled to detonate the bomb.

Professional 47: Boss, the bomb failed. But I took down the MI6 agent. I need extraction! (*He said over his phone).*

Rostov: The van is waiting on the exit backdoor (He said over the radio).

Meanwhile Carlos observed the city north of the target building with his binoculars from the helicopter and spotted Professional 47 in black balaclava and black suit, packing up his sniper rifle.

Carlos: Eyes on the sniper 100m north of my position. Pilot get me to that building with the large billboard on the rooftop.

Bellucci: Alpha team abort mission and team up with Bravo team on the first floor. Come back to base. All of you. I am calling up Naples Police to send a bomb squad to the target building.

Vincenzo: Affirmative.

Bridgestone: Affirmative Overlord Command.

Carlos in the front co-pilot seat observed the sniper with his binoculars as the helicopter closed in on his position in the roof.

Carlos: He's got a detonator, and looks like it failed.

Watson: I want that sniper in custody.

Meanwhile Bravo team van with injured Wallace arrived at the safehouse with medical expert of Charlie team 2 working on his wound.

Watson got up from her seat and rushed to meet them.

Watson: Give him proper medical attention.

Wallace: Uhhhh! He cried in pain.

Watson: It will be alright Wallace, hang in there.

Bellucci: Get me that sniper.

Carlos: He's descending the fire escape. I have him in my sights. Engaging!

Carlos fired two rounds from his sniper rifle but missed. The sniper jumped down and got into a black getaway van that sped off with the helicopter in pursuit.

Bridgestone: Overlord Command! All teams returning to the safehouse. How is Bravo 1-2 holding up?

Bellucci: He needs better medical attention. A second helicopter is on the way, one mile out to transport him to the AISI Medical Complex.

Bridgestone: Ok, on my way.

Carlos: We are in pursuit of the black getaway van with the sniper. It is headed for the highway.

Bellucci: Overlord Command 2-1, do not lose that van.

Carlose: Overlord Command 2-1 affirmative.

The second helicopter arrived and Wallace was carried on a stretcher to it. Watson and the medical team that arrived with the helicopter and that from team Charlie boarded the helicopter as well.

Watson: He is my responsibility, run the op until I get back *(She shouted at Bellucci standing by the helicopter door with the rotor noise loud, and the roughed-up air from the rotor's rapid rotation waving up his and her hair).*

Bellucci: That's fine! *(He yelled back with the rotor noise loud and shut the door before taking steps back to allow the helicopter to fly away blowing dust into the air).*

Meanwhile the Chalie team vans arrive with Bravo team as well, at the compound safehouse.

Bridgestone: Command Overlord, we are all at the safehouse. Take care of Wallace for me!

Watson: Bravo 1-1 we have him. I am in the medical helicopter. I'll keep you updated on his status, he is still conscious and medics are working on him.

Bridgestone: Affirmative, Overlord Command!

Bravo and Charlie teams departed their vans and entered the safehouse with Director Bellucci joining them.

Director Bellucci: They were expecting us!

Bridgestone: I had a bad feeling about this.

Bravo 1-3: Could there be a leak on intel?

Bellucci: I do not think so. But will look into it.

Bridgestone: Freeman gave us this intel. His source – The Contractors Corporation, someone in the shadow organization knew about this and sold him out.

Bellucci: And why him targeted in particular?

Sally: Did he know something at the Corp? Like some big dirty secrets that get people killed.

Bravo 1-3: Maybe, that could be it.

Bridgestone: A conspiracy at the Corp? Worth looking into it.

Sally: Wallace is a tough guy. I know he will punch through.

Trancedi: Yes, my love will push through*! (Tears rolling down from her eyes).*

Sally: Hey it's alright *(she hugs Trancedi and comforts her).*

Bellucci collapses down to his chair with a big sigh and drawing back his hair and gripping it with frustration.

Bellucci: Conspiracy! Conspiracy! This could be the only logical explanation.

Bravo 1-3: It has to be.

Bellucci: The Contractors Corporation is a highly secretive organization, just who would want to get him killed.

Captain Carlos: Overlord command! We lost the van under the tunnels; it never came out on the other side. Highway 312. I am going down to investigate. *(He signaled to the pilot to descend to the highway, disrupting traffic flow. He dismounted from the helicopter with his pistol fire arm, and ran into the tunnel seeing the van halted).*

Bravo 1-3: Any signs of the sniper?

Carlos: I am approaching the van. I see no driver. *(He opened the side-door only to find the van totally empty).* Overlord Command. The van's empty. They switched cars under the tunnels. We have cameras in the tunnels; we can find the plate numbers of the second getaway car.

Bellucci: Overlord Command acknowledged. Come home.

Carlos: Overlord Command 1-2 affirmative.

Carlos walked back into the helicopter, which took off spraying dust onto the windshields of the cars stopped nearby, and the flow of traffic resumed afterwards.

Bridgestone: That son of a bitch got away. An assassin from the Contractors Corporation.

Meanwhile in the getaway car

Professional 47: Boss. We successfully switched cars. I hope my private jet is ready (He said speaking on the phone).

Rostov: Come home son. Did you confirm the kill?

Professional 47: Could not confirm. Target got carried away into a van, alive probably.

Rostov: Damn it! You are supposed to be the best! And that damn detonator of yours couldn't work! This is going to crumble down on us! Do not come home yet son. Go to the nearest hospital, uh Santa Maria in town, ask for any gunshot victims, find him and finish him off. Don't board that private jet without a confirmation on the kill.

Professional 47: Yes sir. *(He hung up the phone)*. Driver, Santa Maria Hospital.

Driver: Yes sir *(He steps on the accelerator).*

Bridgestone sat alone under a tree in the safehouse compound depressed, Sally saw him and left Trancedi alone with Director Bellucci to comfort her. She walked to him and sat near him, putting her arms around him and leaned on him.

Sally: It's hard for us all. You're not alone.

Bridgestone: He told me to take care of his family incase things went bad. Like he knew it was coming (he said with sadness visible on his face).

Sally: Maybe he did, may be not… but he is a tough guy. He will pull it through.

THAT EVENING

2000 HOURS ITALIAN TIME

MI6 Chief Watson sat at the hospital bench with the doctor's report at the AISI's Medical Complex in Rome. She called MI6 main office in London, specifically the Personnel and Establishment Directorate (PED).

Watson: Yes. Director Margaret Ashcroft. This is Chief Watson calling.

Ashcroft: Yes, ma'am.

Watson: I sadly inform you that our operation went haywire. We have one KIA, Senior Field Operations

Officer Oliver Wallace Freeman. He got hit by a sniper. They were expecting us.

Ashcroft: Oh my God! Freeman!

Watson: Sadly, yes. I don't know what to tell the team. Just update his profile, share the sad news with his family -his estranged wife and children, and parents as well. Let the MI6 family too know he is no longer with us.

Ashcroft: Yes ma'am (she said with a trembling voice).

Watson hang up the phone call and dialled Bellucci's number and the phone number beeped for a moment before Bellucci picked up.

Watson: Hey Anthon. Kindly bring the team to see Wallace.

Bellucci: Is everything fine?

Watson: Just bring them. Yes.

Bellucci: Alright.

Watson hanged up the phone and walked to the room with Wallace's body covered and had a short conversation with the doctored.

Watson: Let everything go as we discussed. They should view the body for a moment before we take it away. We shall present the ashes to the team later on and

give it to his family. And this should go well according to plan, alright?

Doctor Patricia: Yes ma'am.

THAT EVENING

2030 HOURS

ROME

AISI MEDICAL COMPLEX

The MI6 and AISI team arrive at the Medical Complex and are greeted by Dr. Patricia and Watson Portman in the hallway.

Trancedi in tears, and Bridgestone depressed and Sally put her arms around Trancedi to comfort her.

Dr. Patricia: Greetings to you, I am Dr. Patricia and I know you are expecting news on your friend Mr. Oliver.

Trancedi: Is he fine? Ms. Watson you look so sad.Your eyes…

Tears rolled down Trancedi eyes and the weight of the loss sinks down the whole team. Ms. Watson sat on the bench with her head down, tears falling to the floor.

Dr. Patricia: I'm sorry but Freeman didn't make it (she said with a sadness and a heavy heart).

Bellucci: Time of death? (He asked with a heavy heart).

Dr. Patricia: 1630 hours (hands over the medical report).

Bridgestone: Can we see him?

Dr. Patricia: Yes. Please come with me.

The whole team walked to the patient's room with Dr. Patricia. Trancedi in tears hugged him as tears rolled down her cheeks. Sally gently pulled her away and hugged her in comfort as she cried.

Dr. Patricia: I'm sorry for your loss but he fought hard.

Bridgestone: Thank you ma'm. He was a brave soldier (he said as tears rolled down his cheeks). Bridgestone walked closer to Freeman lying on the table. He held his hands and felt them cold and let go after a while.

Sally in tears also walked to Freeman and kissed him on the forehead.

Watson: His last wishes was to be cremated in less than 24 hours, and for Bridgestone and Trancedi to personally deliver his ashes to his *mother (she said with a deep broken heart).*

Dr. Patrcia: That's correct. Excuse me. I have another patient in waiting, and we have little time to move him to the crematorium.

Bridgestone: It is alright.

Dr. Patricia calmly walked out of the room as Bellucci walked to Freeman on the bed and held his hands and said:

Bellucci: I'll get deeper to this conspiracy and bring you justice my brave warrior. Go in peace.

A medical team arrived with a wheeled stretcher, led by Dr. Patricia.

Watson: We have no much time to mourn Freeman. He was a brave soldier. But we need to move him.

Trancedi in great emotional pain and tears was comforted by Sally. The medical team gently moved Freeman to the wheeled stretcher and escorted him to an ambulance in the parking lot with the MI6-AISI team following behind. They placed Freeman into the van and the doctors got in with Chief Watson.

Watson: Stay here. I will bring in the ashes. Stay strong Trancedi. I will be back in an hour.

The doctors shut the ambulance door and the driver switched on the sirens and the van departed with the team looking on with great sadness. Trancedi, suffering the biggest blow besides Bridgestone who appeared manly and strong though.

Meanwhile at Santa Maria Hospital Branch in Naples. Professional 47 talks to the male receptionist.

Professional 47: Hello, I am Mr. Sinclair. I need to know if there's a young British-African-American man, probably early 30s, is an officer, brought in with gunshot wounds.

Receptionist: What time?

Professional 47: This afternoon.

Receptionist goes through the computer database and answers:

Receptionist: No, we have no police officer brought in today. Just a young man of Spanish citizenship, brought in by parents, got shot in a robbery attempt at the parents. Actually, only gunshot victim of today. But he is fine.

Professional 47: Ok, thank you.

Professional 47 walked back to the car disappointed, he opened the door and told the driver to drive to the airport. He called his boss Alexei Rostov Chief Intelligence of the Contractors Corporation.

Professional 47: Boss, I have checked all Santa Maria hospital branches. No signs of the target. We drove the whole afternoon in town, hospital branch by hospital branch. We have nothing.

Rostov: What?! They moved him somewhere. Just come home! Now what do we tell the Caligula Mafia and the Americans?! Today you screwed up son. That's on you, not me! I paid you to do a job and you could not confirm the kill!

Professional 47: Fine boss, that's on me. I will do better next time.

Rostov: There's no next time. He is gone into the shadows! Most probably alive! Who knows if and when he will come after us! Come home! *(He hung up the phone call).*

Rostov leaned back on his office chair disappointed. He poured a glass of whiskey and drank it with frustration. He picked up his secure satellite phone and called Undersecretary Hawthorne. The phone beeped for a while before Hawthorne picked up in the washrooms at Hotel Volkovsky in Saint Petersburg.

Hawthorne: Yes, Mr. Rostov. Did you tie up the loose ends for me?

Rostov: Yes, but we still have a major problem.

Hawthorne: Don't tell me!

Rostov: My hitman nailed the shot but could not confirm the kill. He got him but I am not sure if he is finished. We have swept all hospitals in Naples. No records of his admission or death.

Hawthorne: I paid you to get the job done, not to give me excuses Mr. Rostov. Find him and finish him, or we are all screwed up! This conspiracy will come down on all of us if you can't do your fuckin' job! Tell me why I shouldn't tie up any loose ends myself!

Rostov: This is all in our heads. And don't try me Mr. Undersecretary, the Contractors Corp is not something you want to mess with. I have intel on your dirty jobs at the Pentagon son. Your dirty fingernails are very much vulnerable with one whisper to the federal authorities of the United States. So do not test my patience son. We are all in this shit together or things get messy for all of us.

Hawthorne: Alright. I am in the meeting with Lorenzo and the rest of the Caligula leadership. We're all fucked tonight, Rostov! We're all fucked!

Rostov: Tell them something.

Hawthorne: Definitely not tonight. Lorenzo will slaughter us all. He looks tense and serious tonight.

Rostov: Just tell him the threat is no more, that's what he needs to hear. See you another day *(He hung up the phone call).*

At the Hotel Volkovsky washroom, Hawthorne washed his face in the sink with frustration, staring at the mirror. He wiped his face with a face towel and walked out of the washroom escorted by the US Marine guarding him back

to the table with the Caligula leaders, where he took a seat with frustration outrightly visible on his face, no matter how much he tried to hide it. The guard stood ten meters away together with the security of team of Lorenzo.

Lorenzo: Undersecretary Hawthorne, you look tense than before. Is everything alright?

Hawthorne: Yes, just some frustration back in Washington, we lost good men in Afghanistan today, Taliban ambush.

Lorenzo: Let's get back to business then….

MEANWHILE IN ITALY

2 HOURS LATER

2200 HOURS

AISI HQS

ROME

Watson and Bellucci address Task Force 151

Watson: Today we lost a good man. Our Op went wrong. We were set up by the Mafia and they took one of us so take the fight to them. We bring justice for Freeman and his family. I present you the last remains of our friend Freeman, his ashes. Ms. Trancedi and Bridgestone, kindly step forward and take this. You shall present it to his family on the funeral day.

Bridgestone stood up to receive the ashes and gave the jar to Ms. Trancedi who received them in tears.

Bellucci: This is the beginning of a new war. And in the end, we shall emerge victorious. I give you this opportunity to mourn. Tomorrow morning. We begin the hunt.

Watson: Director Bellucci, can I speak to you in private?

Bellucci: Ofcourse...

Watson and Bellucci move to a secure sound proof room and shut the door behind them, but they remain visible through the sound proof glass window of the room.

Watson: I have top secret information for you and I want it below the radar until we get justice for Freeman, understood?

Bellucci: Yes, ma'am.

Watson: Before Freeman passed away. He passed on some intel to me on who wanted him dead and why. It is a big conspiracy involving the CIA, US Department of Defense and the Caligula Mafia. He mentioned something like "Operation Glass Theatre." He discovered this covert operation involving CIA and DoD officials making millions selling US weapons to the Mafia via the Contractors Corp, allegedly to wipe out ISIS cells in Europe, but I think this anti-ISIS Op is just cover up for personal enrichment. The Americans are our allies, why put trust on the criminal mafia over our European intelligence agencies in wiping out ISIS in Europe.

Bellucci: Good question. And I knew this was a conspiracy, and the Contractors Corporation had something to do with it.

Watson: And Undersecretary Hawthorne is at the center of it all, in cahoots with US Marines Colonel Mark Ellison, CIA Logistics Officer Evelyn Ross. They killed Freeman when he threatened Rostov Chief of the Corp,

who is an accomplice as well, if he did not give up the location of the next meeting of the Caligula in Naples. So, Rostov set him up. The bomb under the table, the sniper it was him. And with probable funding from the Americans.

Bellucci: Hawthorne? Ellison? I personally know these two. Call the FBI.

Watson: Not yet! We need to proceed with caution, and we need evidence for Congressional subpoena hearing for the treasonous Americans and to lock them away in a long time.

Bellucci: Ok, where do we start? We need access to DoD files and CIA files.

Watson: That's it but it's going to take a lot of espionage on our own allies, diplomatic rifts and maybe the entire operations is off the books. Maybe if we spy on the Caligula Mafia and catch them in the act of receiving these weapons, the photographs of American weapons in the exchange would come in handy at the Congressional subpoena hearings. That would be a good start.

Bellucci: How about the Contractors Corp? They are onto this as well. We need to get a man inside and investigate. Bridgestone is grieving. He is the perfect candidate. He will need some revenge.

Watson: I know someone in the Board at the Contractors Corp. We need to keep both Bridgestone and the Board of Directors at the Corp in the dark to avoid miscalculations and possible all-out shadow wars with the Corp with no evidence on Rostov to convince the Board that he has been profiting from weapons sales to the Caligula Mafia behind the Board and that he killed Freeman.

Bellucci: Good reasoning. Let Bridgestone absorb the shock. Give him leave for a few weeks before we send him to the Contractors Corp.

Watson: I will call Undersecretary Hawthorne myself. Tell him we lost an agent today and request his cooperation with MI6 and AISI in battling the Caligula. This will bring us close to him for deeper investigations.

Bellucci: Alright.

Watson: I need sometime alone. Tell Task Force 151 we depart for London tomorrow morning to present ashes to Freeman's family. And we need a military funeral; he was ex-British Army.

Bellucci walked out of the sound-proof room and spoke to Taks Force 151, as Watson visible through the glass window made a phone call.

Bellucci: It was a sad day. Tomorrow, we leave for London with the ashes, for his family ofcourse.

Bridgestone: Affirmative (He said holding Trancedi close, who was still in grief and slow sobs, with Sally sitting next to him.)

Bellucci walked into his office, visible through the window, sat on his chair with a sigh and poured some whiskey to drink in grief and emotional pain.

Meanwhile in the sound-proof room:

Watson: Yes, Mr. Hawthorne, we lost a man today. Security cooperation with the United States is in the best interest of the United Kingdom, to help catch the people behind this and bring them to justice.

Hawthorne feeling guilty suspecting she knew the truth, with a feigned cough replied:

Hawthorne: Ofcourse, the US and the UK have common threats, and in times like this we fight together.

Watson: I will speak to CIA Director Ms. Jane Foster about this as well. A shadow war has just begun, and we need all the allies on the table against the common enemy.

Hawthorne: Yes ma'am.

Watson: I hope to see you at the funeral in London.

Hawthorne: Yes ma'am.

Watson hung up the phone call.

Hawthorne, Evelyn and Ellison sat in the back of the limo driving back to Hotel Nevsky, Saint Petersburg , to link up with the rest of the American delegation in the cold, snowy winter night, with yellow glowing sodium streetlights along the highway lighting up the body of the car with yellow glowing reflections moving from over the bonnet to the windshield, the roof, the rear windshield and trunk with every pass of the streetlights. He put back his phone in his coat jacket and breathed with a deep sigh. The US Marine Corp driver switched on the car's music player at the request of Hawthorne.

AT HOTEL NEVSKY

SAINT PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

2300 HOURS

Secretary of State Clinton sat near the fire chimney in her heavy winter coat, alongside Defense Secretary Leonard and CIA Director Foster as they chat over the meetings

with the Russians early in the day. Ellison, Evelyn and Hawthorne finally walked in.

Clinton: What a surprise, your back. How was your business meeting?

Hawthorne: Uh, it was great.

Suddenly, Director Foster's cell phone rung and she answered.

Foster: Hello Ms. Watson.

Hawthorne sat down on the sofa with guilt visible on his face upon learning it was Ms. Watson on the phone.

Watson: Yes, tonight I call with great grief. Our Op in Naples went bad. We missed the targets and lost a man, and I believe I need your help to find out who tipped the Mafia off and why they specifically my agent Freeman.

Foster: Oh my! That's sad news. Ok We meet up in London tomorrow. I am in Saint Petersburg for negotiations with the Russians, more meetings expected but next meeting in Washington next week.

Watson: Ok thanks Jane (She hung up the phone call).

Foster: Uhh! MI6 lost a man in Italy today (she said with a deep sigh).

Hawthorne: Apparently, she called me on the limo on our way back and told me the same. I was about to share the sad news when your phone rang.

Clinton: Ok

Leonard: Bad news for today.

Foster: She requested for our cooperation.

Leonard: They need us for sure. We're all allies, someone f*cks with one of us, the f*ck with all of us.

Clinton: On point.

Ellison: Can I have a word Mr. Hawthorne.

Hawthorne: Yes, Colonel.

Hawthorne and Ellison walked into the kitchen and murmured in low voices.

Ellison: Do you think she knows it was us?

Hawthorne: I think she knows. Or maybe not.

Ellison: Why would she call you before calling CIA Director Foster?

Hawthorne: Yes. I have a bad feeling she knows. And Mr. Rostov f*cked up. That agent could still be alive. The sniper could not confirm the kill or find the body in any hospitals in Naples *(He said holding his head with frustration visible on his face).*

Ellison: Oh sh*t! We're f*cked! Now MI6 on our tails!

Hawthorne: Or maybe, we're getting ahead of ourselves. She said she would see me at the funeral if I come to mourn.

Ellison: Testing us. If we don't come, then we got something to hide. We should go attend that funeral and save our faces. Maybe we're being too suspicious of ourselves.

Hawthorne: What if we finish her off.

Ellison: No, we have enough blood on our hands. Our fingerprints will be all over it when the truth eventually comes out, leading all back to us.

Suddenly, CIA Director Foster shows up in the kitchen, looking for Russian vodka to cope up with the sad news.

Foster: You boys still discussing business?

Ellison: Yes ma'am.

Foster: I need some vodka from the fridge, kindly move over.

Hawthorne: Ofcourse *(He moved aside).*

Foster: We lost a great man today. I knew that kid's father, he was an aerospace engineer at Lockheed

Martin before moving to British Aerospace Engineering... and I need a drink.

Ellison: Sure.

Foster opened the fridge and picked a bottle of Vodka and an empty glass and walked back to the living room.

THE FOLLOWING DAY

22ND OCTOBER 2011

LONDON

0600 HOURS

A private jet ferrying Task Force 151 landed at Stansted Airport. MI6 Land Rover Cars with blue flashing sirens awaited near the tarmac.

Watson: Ladies and gentlemen, we're finally here. We move straight to Freeman's home to meet his parents, wife and child.

Bellucci: And deliver the ashes.

Watson: Tomorrow, we have a short funeral ceremony with the UK Army, and we begin the hunt for the culprits behind this.

The MI6-AISI Task Force 151 alighted from the private jet with their luggage and operations equipment handled by MI6 agents waiting on the tarmac after they alighted. They got into the MI6 Land Rover cars with blue flashing

sirens, which drove off in a column of four cars. The column of four Land Rover vans arrived at Freeman's home half an hour later.

Chief Watson alighted from the first Land Rover from the front passenger seat. She was followed by the rest and was met by Freeman's mother Christine F. Jackson Freeman and father Joe Oliver Freeman.

Watson: I'm sorry for your loss Mr. and Mrs. Freeman.

Bellucci: Your son was a brave soldier; he asked us to present his ashes to you. Bridgestone and Trancedi, please.

Bridgestone and Trancedi stood up and handed over Wallace's ashes in a jar to his mother who received them with tears rolling down her face as Wallace's father hugged and comforted her.

Bridgestone: He was loyal and faithful to his duty to the end. He fought bravely. Sorry for your loss Mr. and Mrs. Freeman.

Joe Oliver Freeman: I am Joe Oliver Freeman, Wallace's father and I cannot feel any more proud for my son. He was a warrior ever since he was a boy. Please come in everyone.

Mrs. Christine Freeman walked into the kitchen to prepare tea for everyone as the guests sat in the living room. Trancedi opened up to Wallace's estranged wife Bianca Thompson Freeman.

Trancedi: Hello, I am Giovanni Trancedi, friend to Wallace, he told me a lot about you. I know it's hard for us all, but we shall pull it through.

Bianca: That's great… *(she smiled)*. It is sad he had to go this soon.

Elena: We never saw it coming.

Bianca: That is how God intended it to be.

Bianchi: Somethings are always beyond our control.

Carlos: And this does not go without payback. I will avenge him for you Ms. Bianca Freeman. I am Captain Carlos Ferrari, Italian Intelligence.

Bianca: Thank you, Mr. Ferrari.

Shortly, there was a knock on the door and Mr. Joe Freeman, opened the door. He was greeted by the UK Secretary of State Edward Hammond (older man in blue neck-tie and the UK Foreign Secretary Wesley Hague (younger man in maroon neck-tie), escorted by two UK Army Officers in combat uniform armed with automatic British rifles.

Joe: Secretary Hammond, Secretary Hague, what a surprise! *(He shook their hands with joy)*.

Hammond: Mr. Freeman, greetings. My condolences.

Hague: Greetings sir, condolences, your son is a true hero and patriot.

Joe: Thank you, come in.

The two government secretaries and their UK Army guards walked into the house and took seats in the living room. Bridgestone got up to greet them.

Bridgestone: Secretary Hammond, Secretary Hague, thank you for joining us.

Hammond: Welcome, son. Your friend did this country great.

Wesley: I am honored. Times like these require us to stand together in honor of our fallen heroes.

Joe: Thank you once more for joining us.

Sally, Trancedi and Bianchi join Mrs. Christine Freeman in the kitchen on her request. In a few minutes, the tea was ready. Mrs. Christine Freeman carried the kettle of tea and cups on a tray to the living room as the other ladies carried the cereals on a tray for the morning breakfast. The family and the guests enjoyed a conversation over the morning breakfast.

Trancedi: And not to forget, uh… I have not seen Wallace's son, Kevin… he told me a lot about him too *(she said and sipped some hot tea, and placed the cup on the table).*

Bianca: Oh…Kevin was picked up ealry his uncle, my brother Ricky, for a morning trip to the doctor for regular check-up, and his father's death hit him hard, he needed some anti-depression medication. Wallace must have shared a lot with you then…

Trancedi: Uuh...yes. We were close friends on joint missions.

Bianca: Uhh…. things were difficult between us and we got separated for the past four years. I don't think I mind if you two were close…not to mean I didn't love Wallace but I confess I had to see someone else…

Trancedi: Oooh… Wallace was a sweet guy...

Bianca: Before he passed away... we were settling on a divorce but on good terms.

Joe: He didn't tell me that...

Christine: Me neither… I know you two tried but if it wasn't really that much possible, then I understand my daughter.

Joe: I do not know what went wrong my daughter but I would really love to know.

Bianca: Uhh... *(she sipped some tea and placed the cup of the table).* Wallace never wished for a second child, and I really wanted one more child, things grew cold and he got more committed to his job at MI6, and we grew apart the past four years.

Joe: So that's it … I understand my daughter… Wallace was born a warrior ... and always wanted to die a warrior… he loved his job to the core, maybe that is why he wasn't able to fulfill your desires to the fullest.

Christine: I find no wrong on your part Ms. Bianca. I would do the same… but I want you to know that you will always be welcome here as my step-daughter.

Hammond: Things got difficult with my ex-wife too, and on similar issues, we had to part ways, so I pretty much understand your situation Ms. Bianca.

Wesley: Apparently, my wife and I are living happy, we just look for ways of finding compromise in our marriage. We had these differences earlier on but eventually we had our third child last year, a bouncing baby girl, Trishia Wesley.

Bianca: That's wonderful Secretary Wesley. Wishing you all the best.

Wesley: Thank you.

Hammond: Tomorrow, we hold the official funeral ceremony. We shall have soldiers from his former

division – the 15th Mechanized Brigade attending. They will arrive mid-morning today before afternoon to decorate the house in our British national colors in preparation for tomorrow's ceremony. And we shall have a twenty-one-gun salute for Wallace at the end of the ceremony.

Joe: Thank you, Secretary Hammond, for your support.

Hammond: Welcome always Mr. Freeman.

23RD OCTOBER 2011

HANLEY-ON-THAMES

0645 HOURS

The morning mist arose in slow motion from the Thames River nearby the Freeman's home. The funeral ceremony was to be held on the gentle slope behind the family's countryside home. Black cars moved steadily along the wet gravel drive that ealry morning, tyres crunching with non-stop tyre-wheel pressings on the gravel. Military vehicles, diplomatic convoys of sedans, and civilian cars ferrying neighbours and old friends. Men and women of the military community came out in ceremonial medals, and civilians in typical dark funeral attire- men in black suits while the women in black dresses and suits.

Bridgestone, stepped outside into the dump green grass to meet the visitors, gloved hands folded behind his back. Standing beside him was Sally, composed, self-possessed with her posture calm but resolute.

Watson joined them moments later, with her chocolate-brown hair blown by the cold morning wind, and her face barely readable. The Italian AISI delegation came together: Giovanni-Trancedi first, shoulders squared but eyes heavy. Bellucci stood beside her in a dignified restraint, Carlos Ferrari was calm and commanding, Vincenzo de Luca restless in stillness; Isabella stood relaxed but the emotional toll was partially visible on her face and Elena Bianchi had eyes locked on every passing visitor, scanning the growing crowd with remarkable keenness. Bianca Thompson Freeman stood near the front in a straight posture, with hands held on her front with her son, Kevin beside her, putting his one arm around her son, Kevin beside her, putting his one arm around her left arm. Kevin's eyes scanned the crowd, gazing over uniforms, and medals of the military personnel in ceremonial attire chatting a short distance away, looking for something he could not name.

Freeman Joe Oliver and his wife Christine Freeman, dressed in their black ceremonial funeral attire were chatting with the Secretary of Defense Hammond and Foreign Secretary Hague. Christine leaned on her polished wooden cane, looking strong unbent by her grief but refined. Finally, when the MI6 and AISI teams had met and ushered all the welcomed visitors who took their

seats in the open field behind the house near the river, the Army military Chaplain, Reverend Dr. Alistair James Whitcombe of the Forces 3rd Class (CF3) Royal Army Medical Corps stood up on the pulpit in a tent in front of the visitors seated under the white tents, and requested everyone unseated to take up their seats.

The Secretaries, Mr. and Mrs. Joe and Christine Freeman, Bianca and Kevin were escorted by army guards in combat uniform to the front seats, and the Task Force 151 members took the empty seats behind them, except Watson and Bellucci in the VIP front seats. Reverend Whitcombe separated the microphone from its holder and stepped forward holding up the Bible firmly in his hands.

Rev. Whitcombe: We gather here this day not only to mourn Wallace Oliver Freeman (his voice carrying across the open field) but also to give rightful honor to a man who lived his life in courage, with actions in conviction and endured heavy burdens only a few us gathered here will ever fully understand. There cannot be a love greater than to give up one's life for one's friends. Today, we commend Wallace to God's mercy and to the loving memory of those who bear his name *(He kept it short as soldiers took a moment to appreciate the chaplain's brevity with brief hand claps)*. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. May his memory endure in honor and in peace.

A ripple of deeply-felt emotion moved through the crowd of visitors. They sat in silence and the military personnel

guarding the ceremony remained still but vigilant. Christine's hands trembled slightly as she rested them on the jar of ashes she carried. She turned her head and fixed her eyes on the Thames River nearby, and swallowed hard, pressing her lips hard together with her tears collecting in her eyes but barely flowing. She grieved greatly but in silence and resolve. Joe sat with a stiff posture, with his chest rising and falling unevenly with deep emotion. His jaw tightened as the chaplain continued to speak. He lifted one hand slightly, an attempt to steady himself and spoke farewell words only his heart could voice and hear: "Son, we'll carry you in all that we do.''

Bianca sat with her grip on a second jar of ashes firm. Her eyes glistened from tears held back too long. She swallowed hard, clenched her jaw, nodding once to the chaplain -absorbing the honor the chaplain proclaimed for her beloved yet feeling his irreversible absence. She leaned on her mother-in-law, seated beside her for emotional support.

Kevin kept his eyes wide open; he gazed at the Thames River believing the calm flows of the waters would ease the emotional toll on him. He does not understand fully the recent developments. He squeezed his small palms into his mother's, sitting still. Chief Watson seated in the front row composed and perfect in form. She sat still with her hands placed together on her laps. She alternated her gaze between the chaplain as he gave a sermon, and the

faces of Hawthorne, Ellison and Ross to study them and enjoy the guilt they displayed with her stare.

Bridgestone sat with his arms crossed over his chest. His jaws tightened, eyes dry as if he was no longer moved by emotion, he was a soldier and he had to stay strong and brave. He had poured out all the emotions days prior and was only looking to giving his last honour to a fallen friend. Sally sat firmly, focused, her legs crossed at the knee and arms crossed over her chest. She alternated her gaze between the Chaplain and the waters of the calm Thames River nearby where his friend will finish his journey. She was calm and unmoved by emotions around and like Bridgestone, she was a soldier who had to stray strong.

Trancedi sat next to Bianca in the front row, eyes watery from unshed tears she constantly wiped with her handkerchief and her legs crossed while she carried a third jar of ashes as she carefully listened to the morning sermon. She swallowed softly as her mind raced through the memories of the shared training exercise and missions in Naples. The chaplain after an hour of giving a strong sermon, opened his closing statement.

Dr. Whitcombe: As we lay Oliver Freeman to rest, we remember a life well-lived with valour, integrity and devotion. He carried burdens quietly, acted with honour, and inspired loyalty to those around him. Let us all hold fast to the memory of his deeds, the love he gave us all, and the principles he upheld. May we emulate his

steadfastness in our own lives, and may his example be our guide in moments when we feel challenged and uncertain. Let us commend his soul to God, putting our trust in Him that He the Almighty will enfold our fallen hero with His mercy and grace. And for us who still stand alive and breathing on earth, may we carry forward the legacy of his service, loyalty, and courage that he embodied. And lest we forget the words if Saint Paul in the book 2nd Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Glory be to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I now want to take this moment to invite the family and close friends of our fallen hero to give their farewell speeches.

Seated on the front row as VIPs were Hawthorne, Ellison and Ross with faces that glared with solemnity yet each carried a weight, hiding a burden of guilt that they knew. Hawthorne tightened his jaws ad turned his eyes towards the waters of the Thames, perhaps to help him cool off the burning heat of the guilt he bore inside. Ellison pressed his lips together, breathing slowly to steady himself and calm the burning flames of guilt inside, he crossed his legs to make himself feel better, but better was not the word that could change the situation inside.

Rose held her gaze steady, her lips firm but her slightly quick breathing, furrowing of her brows and the quick blinking she could not suppress hinted at the burning unease she carried inside. For comfort and resolve, she hung onto the fact that nobody knew their dirty secret, well maybe Chief Watson already knew, but they would deal with her like all the other threats in the past, she convinced herself. On the outward, especially in the eyes of the innocent and unaware visitors, family and friends of the fallen, they seemed composed and respectful but inwardly, with every gesture, every held breath and with every scratch of the nose, they knew the guilt they worked so hard to conceal. They knew this is exactly why Watson wanted them here – to test them, read their faces which she did gladfully and expose the brute guilt in the eyes they tried so hard to conceal, and they hated her for it, and if anything, could not wait to fly back home to the United States but they had to take it slow to save their faces.

Wallace's mother stood up, supported by Director Bellucci on her wooden cane to the podium, and at the same time Watson thought sarcastically to herself, inaudible, as she studied the faces of Hawthorne, Elisson and Ross with deliberate precision. She took note of the subtle tightening of the jaws, every blink of the eyes, every restless shift of hands and fingers, which explained more than words could.

She found it impressive how hard they tried to hide it all and laughable how easily she read them all, knowing

exactly how pathetic and predictable they were in her eyes.

The Chaplain handed over the microphone to Mrs. Christine Freeman and stood next to her with the Bible in his hands held together in front of him. She took a breath and uttered:

Christine: My son was born fearless (speaking softly she said). He was stubborn, and stubborn men sometimes grow into brave men. A ripple of faint yet grieving laughter passed through the gathering of visitors. He was the type that chose the hard road but never chose them lightly (She said and made a step back with dignity).

Bianca stepped up to the pulpit and Christine gave her the microphone and composed herself before speaking, her voice trembling once as soon as she uttered her first words.

Bianca: Wallace believed in service. Sometimes too much. Sometimes more than we could *understand (she paused glancing at Kevin standing beside her)*, but he loved his son Kevin. Even when he never said it enough *(Kevin swallowed hard)*.

The young eight-year-old boy stepped forward, unexpectedly but because Bianca intended to be brief in her speech, she passed on the microphone to her son. He clutched a folded piece of paper; he opened it and read the script.

Kevin: My dad said the rivers never stop moving, even when they look still. He said, good men should be like that (He folded the piece of paper back neatly and gave her mom back the microphone, who passed it on to Ms. Trancedi who stepped up from her seat to speak, carrying the jar of ashes with her). She cleared her throat before finally speaking.

Trancedi: He was my friend, my close friend (she said with simplicity), not because of his perfection, but because he was brave enough to ask questions most men would fear to ask.

Bellucci moved up the pulpit to speak.

Bellucci: On behalf of the rest of the team of agents from Italy who were his close friends, and AISI, Italy's Internal Intelligence, we honour Wallace Oliver Freeman – not only as a colleague but a man of courage and conviction. His dedication, his loyalty and the sacrifices he made in the line of duty inspired us all who served alongside him. As we mourn his passing today, we also celebrate a life he lived well with integrity and unyielding commitment to righteousness. May his memory guide us and may we carry the great values he fought and stood for in every mission, every challenge and every act of service. Rest in peace, brother Wallace.

Bellucci passed on the microphone to Bridgestone who got up from his seat to speak final words to his long-time friend.

Bridgestone: Wallace Freeman was more than a colleague – he was a great friend. We served in Iraq together and joined MI6 together. I had the honour to know him in the field of operations and with pride, I stand here to say that his focus and his heart are by far unmatched. Today, we mourn but also cherish a life of service and devotion that only a few could ever truly emulate. Go in peace my brother – you will not be forgotten.

Sally stood up, walked up to the podium and Bridgestone handed over the microphone to her. She composed herself and uttered:

Sally: Wallace Freeman was a man of unwavering courage and quiet strength. In the line of duty, he stood firm, not recognition, but because of the righteous path. I am honored to have called him a friend. His memory will remain firm within us to guide our actions and inspiring our resolve. Rest in peace my friend Wallace.

Watson got up from her front row seat, taking a brief glance at Hawthorne as she stood up and saw the guilty face afraid of more sarcastic scorn about to spear him in the heart. She received the microphone from Sally at the podium, who then moved back to Stand with those who have spoken. She cleared her voice and uttered:

Watson: Wallace Oliver Freeman served with courage, precision, and an integrity that set a standard and benchmark for all of us in intelligence – something some

of us could only desire to emulate. His dedication went beyond duty – he brought inspiration in the lives of those around him, quietly showing how loyalty and honour are carried on to the field. Loyalty and honour to country *(she said as her voice raised slightly, with a purpose unbeknownst to the crowd with the exception of herself and of the three she was deliberately targeting)*, ofcourse are not sacrifices all are willing to make; Wallace made them with no hesitation, proving himself selfless and brave – qualities so rare amongst us than we might comfortably admit. Today we honour more than just his service, but the man he truly was: steadfast, fearless, selfless, brave and resolute, better than most of us. He will be remembered, and his legacy will endure in the work we continue in his name.

As her words settled over the gathering, Hawthorne tightened his jaws almost imperceptibly and his breathing faintly heightened. Ellison pressed his lips thin, lowering his eyes for a fraction of a second too long before lifting them again in a rehearsed composure. Ross was a little uncomfortable in her seat, wrestling inward to control her composure and expression, with the corners of her mouth dipping regardless of her efforts to steady them. In the eyes of the gathering, they were innocent, not worth any judgment or suspicion, and if anything, they appeared solemn, but deep inside, they knew it all, their dirty hands were all over the grief they brought upon everyone. And there, Watson stood firm and resolute, and took note of their restrained frowns

and the naked guilt that showed up on their faces, like a fish drawn to the surface to a hook baited with food, unable to resist the lure. Hawthorne, especially began to regret why he had to come in the first place. The mission was to save their faces, and they had failed at it so miserably, but at least they "won" in the eyes of the rest of the gathering, apparently whom they fooled with their grim and solemn looks unbeknownst to them. The three- Hawthorne, Ross and Ellison, confided in this victory yet they knew deep inside, it was much short-lived not long enough until someday the spotlight inevitably shines on them.

Watson thanked the gathering for attending and listening, and invited the grand speaker- Wallace's father Joe Oliver Freeman to give his final farewell speech. Joe escorted by the army guards to the pulpit received the microphone from Watson, and cleared his voice before uttering his last words to his son:

Joe: Good morning y countrymen.

The gathering: Morning…

Joe: Before I speak, I need Foreign Secretary and Defense Secretary Mr. Wesley and Defense Secretary Mr. Hammond to pray their last respects to my son.

The two secretaries escorted by army guards to the pulpit stood firm and calm, and Joe handed over the mic to Wesley.

Wesley: On behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, by the Grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and of her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth, and the Government, I offer our deepest condolences to the Freeman family in these times of turbulence. Wallace's courage in the field of operations, dedication and unwavering commitment to service will not be erased from our memories. May the memory of who he honestly was, give us inspiration to uphold the values he held dear. Thank you.

Mr. Wesley passed on the microphone to Secretary Hammond who cleared his voice before speaking.

Hammond: On behalf of Her Majesty Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, and the Government of the United Kingdom, I offer my deepest condolences to the Freeman family. Our fallen hero Army Captain Oliver Wallace Freeman began his service at Welbeck Defense Sixth Form College and was commissioned into the British Army at a young age. Within just two years, he was entrusted with great responsibilities as a desk officer and brigade accountant for the United Kingdom Army's 15th Mechanized Brigade, and by the age of twenty, he was deployed to Iraq, where he demonstrated courage and professionalism beyond his years.

Secretary Hammond passed on the microphone to Joe Oliver Freeman who breathed deeply before he spoke. He stood firm despite his age.

Joe: My son, *(he began)* was not easy (*A faint ripple moved through the gathering)*. He argued. He questioned. He disobeyed when he lost trust in obedience. (He paused and gazed at the gathering for a while). I did not raise to follow men, but to follow conscience. *(The blowing wind shifted).* If he apparently died for anything. I pray to God it was for truth *(Watson noted the guilt in the faces of Hawthorne, Ellison and Ross, and deep inside she thrilled, and gave a small faint smile standing on the pulpit with the Chaplain and the special guests who had spoken their farewell speech, and Ross smiled back as if there was no sense of guilt in her).* Because if it was for politics *(his jaws tightened) and tears rolled on his cheeks just once),* then that would be a greater tragedy than death. *(There was no applause but dead silence from the gathering, as no one dared. Watson for the last time turned her eyes on Hawthorne, who was already getting accustomed to the constant volleys of arrows piercing his heart for the day).* That is all I have to say for my son Wallace. Thank you all for sparing time to mourn with us. God bless you.

Hawthorne and his friends, Ellison and Ross, were finally relieved as the Chaplain received the microphone from Joe to commence the main stage of the ceremony – the sprinkling of ashes in the Thames River, a stone's throw away. The Chaplain asked the three women – Christine, Bianca and Trancedi to ready the three jars of ashes. The three intercrossed their arms, locking them at the elbow at the Chaplain's request to begin the march to the river,

as the Chaplain led the way with his Bible firm in his hands. Kevin leaned on his mother all along the way. The Joe and the rest of the VIPs followed, followed by the Task Force 151 members, then the 15th Mechanized Brigade followed in ceremonial uniforms with drums, trumpets and musical instruments filling the air with slow, steady somber musical notes of the "The Last Post", the iconic bugle call that has marked countless British military funerals. Each note played conveyed grief and reverence, echoing across the river banks, and blending with the gentle lapping of the waters of the Thames River, creating an impression of the air pausing in honour of Wallace Oliver Freeman.

Sally, Bridgestone and Watson with the VIPs quiet in formation followed the women with the jar of ashes and the chaplain and after a slow march, they arrived at the riverbanks with the entire gathering behind them. The chaplain made a step forward to the riverbank, the three small jars of Wallace's ashes resting on the arms of the women carrying them.

Chaplain: We gather here in God's presence to honour Wallace Oliver Freeman. May these ashes, the remnant of a life lived well in courage, devotion, and sacrifice, be entrusted to the waters, returning him to the earth and to eternity. Let the river carry his memory his courage and the love he has left behind. Amen.

The Chaplain took the first dip in Christine's jar amd scattered a light trail of ash into the flowing Thames

River, with the morning eight o'clock sunlight reflecting off the flakes of ashes in the air as they fell into the river, with the light ones gently carried upstream by the morning cold breeze. One by one, those closest to Oliver Wallace Freeman carried the jars and sprinkled their share of ashes. Joe was the first in line. He dipped a hand into Christine's jar and released his ashes with trembling hands into the river, as his eyes remained fixed on the calm flowing waters. His words audible:

Joe: Go in peace, son.

Christine, Wallace's mother, stood steady and measured, carrying her own jar from where she dipped a hand to collect a handful of ashes and gently sprinkled them into the river, whispering softly and barely audible:

***Christine**: Rest well in peace my son.*

Bianca Thompson was next in line as she carried her own jar with great care. She dipped a hand into her own jar for a handful of ashes and gently sprinkled them into the river and whispered:

Bianca: Go in peace my love.

Her son Kevin too dipped his hand into her mother's jar and picked his ashes, and sprinkled them into the river.

Giovanni Trancedi, emotional with tears collecting in her eyes, picked a handful of ashes from her own jar, and sprinkled into the river. She finished and gave out a final

cry out and loud, and was comforted by Sally as always. The MI6 and AISI associates followed. Ms. Watson sprinkled from Christine's jar alongside Bridgestone and Sally. Bellucci, Carlos, Vincenzo and Bianchi sprinkled from Trancedi's jar. Bridgestone said his last words audibly:

Bridgestone: Farewell to thee, old friend.

They were followed by the last VIP dignitaries, beginning with Hammond and Westley; with Hammond sprinkling from Christine's jar with murmurs of a brief prayer and Wesley from Bianca's jar, his face filled with solemnity and control. Finally, last on line were the hidden villains, careful to maintain distance from the family. Hawthorne, Ellison and Ross collected from Trancedi's jar and sprinkled into the river, and taking steps back finally with no words.

Secretary Clinton and Leonard; and CIA Director Foster, who went almost unnoticed in deep silence at the ceremony collected their ashes from the jars at random and sprinkled in the river, giving their last and condolences to the family to make up for the deep silence.

Finally, the chaplain stepped up to give the final blessings to the ashes in the three jars and the family.

Chaplain: May God receive him. May peace be upon Wallace Oliver Freeman. May we all carry and cherish his

memory with faithfulness in everything that we do. Amen.

The ashes were secured by the military personnel and placed under guard in the living room of the Freeman's home, as the gathering proceeded to a special dining tent for ealry breakfast. Morning gave way to afternoon as guests shared memories, reflections and quiet thankfulness as they mourned the man Freeman Oliver Wallace, giving honour to his valour and celebrating the life he lived well.

By afternoon, the estate transformed into a controlled reception. More invited guests who could not make it to the official ceremony arrived. More dining tables and tents were erected. Roast meat, bread, wine, tea and all the good food became available as dignitaries and all manner of visitors dined with the family. Watson kept a keen eye on Ellison, Hawthorne and Ross, seeing their plastic smiles and laughter in the moments of joy on the dining tables, taking the moment to wash away and conceal the little of guilt left in their hearts, a desperate attempt to make up for the failure to save their faces during the sermon in Watson's eyes, briefly sharing smiles with Watson who smiled back but with sarcasm in her heart. As dusk neared at five o'clock in the evening, the guests began offering their final remarks in the house. Hawthorne, Elisson and Evelyn Ross stood slightly away from the rest of the guests, conveniently to speak in low tones, with glasses of red French wine in their hands. Unexpectedly, Watson approached them,

standing up from the seats with the VIP guests where she left them giving final remarks.

Watson: Undersecretary Hawthorne, what a sad day it was. I trust the Thames was accommodating.

Hawthorne: Today, it was a tragic loss for all of us (he nodded with stiffness).

Watson: Yes *(she replied gently, picking up a new glass of apple wine from a waiter passing by and putting the empty glass on the tray carried by a waiter passing by).* Strange how some operations appear transparent... until the light shines through the glass. I hope your support helps us catch the culprits *(Ellison's jaw tightened almost unnoticed).*

Ross: Glass? *(She almost choked on the wine and almost pouring out the wine from her glass).*

Watson: Oh…. sorry, careful not to choke on and spill the wine on yourself *(she said and sipped some wine)* … I only meant merely a simple metaphor. The theatre has always kept me fascinated, especially when the audience fail to notice that they are part of the performance *(She said taking note of the slight frown on Hawthorne's face).*

Hawthorne: The intelligence community is filled with dramatics, I don't mean to be rude, but you sound a little poetic in a touching way this evening *(he smiled but with inward sarcasm).*

Watson smiled back and uttered:

Watson: Sometimes *(she said gently whirling up her glass of French wine)*, the actors forget who writes the final act *(she sipped some wine and walked away before Evelyn Ross could respond with a question for clarification).*

The expression on their faces suggested irritation but not comprehension of her words, especially for Evelyn, or perhaps they pretended not to. They assumed she already knew about Operation Glass Theatre as they murmured in a low voice but Ross was not fully on board to accept the developing situation that they are becoming a key target of interest of MI6.

Ross: I think we are way ahead of our heads. Perhaps, we are just overthinking *(she murmured).*

Hawthorne: Perhaps what?! *(he murmured angrily though hiding the facial expression).*

Ellison: Evelyn, unless you have not noticed, she invited us here to test and read our faces; and reactions to her words. To let us know she's coming for us *(he murmured in a low voice).*

Ross: Then we must begin tying up loose ends in Washington and Langley. She will be investigating around at the DoD and spying on the CIA looking for answers. Let's get rid of all files pertaining to Glass

Theatre and eliminate or silence everyone who had clearance to the files *(she murmured back).*

Hawthorne: Good idea but this cannot come out (he murmured out).

Ellison: I have enough blood on my hands, but I can do my best to cover up our assess. I will burn all my files pertaining to this…. You burn yours.

Hawthorne: No worries, Evelyn and I can work out the dirty parts of the job. You deserve that big promotion and silver star in the Marine Corp, and can't ruin that for you onwards.

Ellison: Thanks.

Hawthorne: I think we should get out of here, I have enough arrows in my heart. Let's go give our final farewells, save our faces before the old man and lady, and kiss our asses goodbye.

Ellison: Good.

Ross: Fine…let's go.

Hawthorne and his two friends, walked from their isolated corner putting back their glasses of wine on the tray of a passing by waiter. They walked to the gathering of dignitaries and visitors by the table and sofas and interrupted Secretary Clinton politely and said they were in a hurry, and requested to give their farewell messages and final condolences, which they did and then shook

hands with Joe, Christine and Bianca as they smiled with words of encouragement to save their faces. They said their goodbyes and were escorted by the two US Marines officers who had been guarding them and waiting by the door back to the black limousine waiting in the grass with the yellow sunset visible in the western skies.

Watson followed them gently, still holding her glass of wine and gently called Hawthorne from behind.

Watson: Undersecretary Hawthorne…

Hawthorne turned back before entering the opened rear door with the Marine officer holding the door handle just waiting for him to get in.

Hawthorne: Yes, ma'am.

Watson: Thank you for coming today. I look forward to future cooperation in finding justice for Freeman. Safe journey back home.

Hawthorne: Yes, thank you and I assure you full cooperation of the United States.

Watson: Bye… *(she said smiling at him and walked back confidently to the house).*

Hawthorne, Ellison and Ross got into the rear passenger seats through the opened rear door that was closed shut by the Marine Officer who walked to the front passenger door, opened it, sat on his seat placing his M16 automatic rifle between his legs and finally shut his door. The limo

engines ignited, the bright headlights and red glowing tail lights were switched on simultaneously with the engine ignition and the car drove off the estate alongside other civilian cars.

By late evening, the last convoys departed and quietness returned to the estate once more with only the family surrounded by Task Force 151 members and the UK Army soldiers in combat gear and uniform guarding the home for the night. They built a small campfire burning in the backyard with the calm rush of the river well audible in the distance.

Trancedi stared into the dancing flames of the campfire. Carlos leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. Vincenzo sat with his hands on his knees, breaking a long twig into sections piece-by-piece. Isabella leaned on him for comfort. Bellucci and Watson still enjoying their French wine with their bottles beside their sitting stools, as they sat with calmness and steadiness. Elena leaned on Carlos sitting on the grass as she gazed at the tree line with lights from nearby homes visible in the distance across the river. Bridgestone sat with Sally leaning on one side and lonely Trancedi leaning on the other, and a conversation erupted as Mr. Joe Freeman and Mrs. Christine Freeman rested in the house with Kevin. Bianca joined the campfire with a bottle of wine and a glass, and she joined the growing conversation, that died shortly as she sat down in the grass with a sigh. It was Carlos who broke the silence.

Carlos: Wallace would have hated this *day (he said with a few showing a faint smile).*

Vincenzo: Maybe the too much ceremony, he was a simple guy not looking for recognition.

Watson: On point.

A small ripple of agreement (some with verbal acknowledgement while some nodding their heads) moved through them as the blaze of the fire heightened with the night breeze blowing gently with hot red glowing firewood throwing lighter yellow sparks and heavier yellow-hot wooden flakes into the air, with the latter falling to the ground near the fire. Bianca looked into the flames and said:

Bianca: He once told me something. He said grief is not a weight you carry forever. It is a season. And seasons always change regardless of our readiness for them.

Trancedi: It doesn't feel like a season to me.

Isabella: It feels like a winter, cold and lonely.

Sally lifted her gaze and uttered:

Sally: Winter is not the final season but that which prepares the ground for spring.

Bridgestone nodded slightly saying:

Bridgestone: Loss gives us a new shape. It does not destroy us – unless we give it a chance.

Vincenzo snapped his final piece of the twig and tossed the twig into the fire.

Vincenzo: He once told me about his time in Iraq. How his brigade could return to base with casualties and they nursed their wounds around campfires like this one we have here. No speeches. They had no ranks, no orders, just fire and silence. And the next morning they moved on. He said moving on was necessary and standing still only brought more pain.

Trancedi: I don't know what I am going to be without him (*she said without looking up for a while and stared at the flames blown by the gentle breeze).*

Watson briefly studied her for a while before answering:

Watson: You just will be the same woman, strong with a great resolve. Right now, is a time to bear the pain of grief.

Elena broke her silence by saying:

Elena: We don't move on from someone, we move forward with them.

Vincenzo: Definitely.

Bianca raised her glass slightly and said:

Bianca: To carrying forward.

Watson and Bellucci, the only ones still drinking raised their glasses. The rest responded verbally with an "Amen to that."

Carloss leaned back and looked at Trancedi and said –

Carlos: You know what Wallace would say now? *(Trancedi lifted her glance at Carlos as he continued).* He'd tell us to stop staring at the campfire like monks and philosophers, and start planning something reckless.

A big laughter erupted with Watson almost spilling over her wine on the grass as she was moved leaning back from the laughter, laughing out loud to the sky. Bellucci was caught up in her infectious laughter that made him collapse from his stool, pouring out the red wine on his white shirt that caused additional hysterical laughter. Not even the emotionally laden Trancedi was immune from the infectious hysterical laughter. She laughed off the pain in her heart as Bellucci got up with his empty wine glass and Sally laughing as she helped him wipe off the red wine on his white shirt, leaving a pink stain on it. When the laughter died down, Watson helped Bellucci pour the last of his wine into his glass. She lifted her half-filled glass and spoke:

Watson: To unfinished business and justice for Wallace and his family.

Bellucci raised his glass together with Bianca.

Bianca: Amen to that. To living well enough to make him proud *(she said, her glass still raised high).*

Watson and Bellucci raised their glasses too and they drank empty the last of their glasses, with a few swallows. The fire popped sharply with the gentle blow of the cold breeze, sending yellow bright sparks into the air. The sad heavy night as it began initially, was now picking a lighter and merrier tone. They were not healed, not whole but steadier. The rest *who had not been drinking grew a thirst for the red French wine and Captain Carlos offered to go get more bottles and clean empty glasses for everyone, accompanied by Isabella who wrapped her arms around his waist.*

For the first time of the day, the grief felt no more like drowning but something worth learning values from, seated together and carrying hopes and lessons from the departed.

Carlos and Elena returned with a bottle and an empty clean glass for everyone in trays, and they handed them out like rations. Elena poured the red French wine to all steady-handed.

Vincenzo: Do you see? Logistics is what keeps civilization moving?

Isabella: I think it's rather your humor doing so *(she smiled and he smiled back).*

Vincenzo: My humor is now a national treasure. (*He giggled).*

His humor erupted another outburst of laughter and the fire cracked even louder with raging flames blown by the cold gentle breeze as someone moved a log deeper into the fire. Hot yellow sparks were thrown into the air and higher into the night sky as Trancedi watched them go up into dark sky, for the first time distracting herself from staring at the flames that evoked her emotional thoughts.

Trancedi: I noticed he never liked long speeches *(she said quietly).*

Carlos: I heard he once told a commanding officer, a Lieutenant Colonel to wrap it up during a commendation in Iraq.

Bellucci: Nah, I don't think so.

Watson: Actually, he did. And he had to wash the infantry fighting vehicles of the brigade all afternoon *(Watson smiled faintly*), its all in his MI6 profile papers.

A soft laughter erupted from a surprised Trancedi in learning of this.

Trancedi: That's new *(she laughed softly)*, what an afternoon it was. *(She sipped the red French wine from her glass. She then looked at the rising sparks once more – the sparks brief, bright and gone into the dark night sky*

– but formed part of something perpetous and larger. She coughed out a confession and said) I was angry today.

Isabella: At what?

Trancedi: At him?

Bridgestone: At him? *(Breaking his unnoticed silence in the night).*

Trancedi: For leaving. For not fighting harder. For failing to choose me over the mission. I learned I was selfish in contrast to his selfless sacrifice…. and I realize he was ashamed looking down on me from the heavens.

Bridgestone: Don't be so hard on yourself in times of grief like this. It's perfectly normal.

Watson: Love does not cancel out anger. You loved him, being angry in times like these is pretty much ok, but learning and refraining from your selfish wishes is a big milestone you just made.

Trancedi: Thank you Tom and Ms. Watson.

Bridgestone: Welcome always my dear.

Watson: It's alright, welcome too.

Elena touched Trancedi's hand gently and told her:

Elena: He was well aware of the risks in this line of work. And so did you.

Trancedi: Yes *(She said closing her eyes, lifting her head up to the sky, with a deep sigh)* And he would be angry if I was shrank and broken because of him.

Vincenzo: That's correct *(he said raising and pointing his glass of wine towards her)* and she did the same, a real smile appearing on her face.

Trancedi noticed a left-over unburnt firewood that was not fully in the fire and pushed it with her left foot, and noticed another, getting up to hold it by hand, and pushed it into the fire. Sally noticed what Trancedi may have inadvertently tried to gesture but kept silence. Bridgestone noticed it too. She meant "we do not let go but we continue." Sally said in her thoughts. Trancedi sat back in the grass and uttered:

Trancedi: Wallace shall not be my cold winters, but my foundation.

The Task Force nodded in agreement and Watson replied:

Watson: That's a good opening statement for a new beginning *(she drank the last of her wine in the grass and continued).* That's enough wine for the day and night for me *(she said as she belched with politeness and manners, raising her empty glass as she stood up tired and exhausted)*. Someone carry me to bed or I might just stumble all the way myself *(she jokingly said).*

Bellucci took an opportunity to express hidden feelings and didn't hesitate. He effortlessly lifted her by the

thighs. Watson wrapped her arms around his shoulders, leaning close. She pressed a quick teasing kiss to his lips as he walked steadily carrying her to the house.

Watson: You'll have to keep up *(she murmured, in a low flirtatious voice)* I expect nothing less than a perfect service *(a glint of mischief, which she expressed with a twinkle of her left eye in a low soft voice).*

The group around the fire looked surprised and reacted with silence. Bellucci carrying Watson, met the five UK Army guards on patrol near the house and he explained:

Bellucci: She's drunk, find me a bedroom where she can have a nap.

The alcohol had softened her grief, loosening her restraint and she spoke with drunkenness of flirtatious words.

Army Soldier 1: Yes sir *(he responded)*. Private Rooney, patrol down to the stables, let me escort these two.

Private Rooney: Yes sir.

The soldier escorted them into the house through the living room's open door, with Mr. Joe and Mrs. Christine Freeman were seated in the couch chatting over events of the day, and were surprised to see her drunk as the soldier led the way to the guests' bedroom, where Bellucci placed her on the bed after taking off her official

shoes and coat, and covered her warm with a blanket and she got up to kiss him one last time and said:

Watson: Love you Anthon. Night to you (she leaned back on her pillow smiling flirtishly and Bellucci smiled back).

Soldier: Ok, let's wrap it *up (He switched off the lights, gently closing the bedroom door after Bellucci walked out).*

Watson lay alone in the dark room with the blanket snug around her shoulders. With her eyes closed, she began to count the imaginary sheep leaping over a fence in her mind.

Watson:
One…tttt...twooo…thhhree…fo...fooour…fi...ive…fiiiive
(she murmured as her words grew thick and slurred with every count from the drunkenness. Gradually, the numbers blurred, and her slurry speech also faded into silence as she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep as the soft warmth of the wine and exhaustion eased the weight of the day).

Bellucci walked back to the campfire. The Task Force members met him with a brief frozen heart and silence, and then erupted into astonished laughter, as he still grinned from the private moment, he had with Watson. Vincenzo raised his glass of red wine, as he twinkled his left eye with mischief.

Vincenzo: Ah… the magic of this red French wine! *(he exclaimed)* it comes with surprises! *(he said as he comically looked at the label of his bottle of French wine with one eye-brow raised in a comic fashion typical of Jim Carrey)*.

The campfire erupted further into laughter. Carlos shook his head with chuckles; Elena covered her mouth to avoid loud laughter and Trancedi touched by laughter smiled big but struggled to avoid the laughter with chuckles. Bianca smiled too with the joy of laughter struggling to find expression as she held it all back, and so did Sally. Vincenzo leaned back satisfied with the perfect timing of the joke that kept some hysterically laughing.

Bellucci was not surprised or moved by the jokes from his juniors by responded with his own joke saying:

Bellucci: You know what, you're all grounded. You wash my car as penalty from tomorrow.

This threw the group further into hysterical laughter that somehow took the spot light from Vincenzo's comedy, who could not find a new joke to restore the spotlight. The laughter died and they had the last of their conversations as they got up and made their way into the house nearby, leaving the fire blazing from the night's gentle breeze with sparks still flying into the air.

The ladies found a common empty room and the men went into another directly opposite theirs. Within no

time, conversations died out, the exhausted ladies and gentlemen gradually fell asleep one-by-one till morning.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING

24TH OCTOBER 2011

HANLEY-ON-THAMES

0645 HOURS

The morning sunlight streamed through the trees as the Task Force woke up from their beds as the memories of grief from the previous day were softened by laughter and wine. After the warm morning showers, the Freemans, with the assistance of the ladies made a wonderful breakfast, brewing coffee, toasting bread and frying eggs and later on everyone sat at the tables for the breakfast.

Soon, the MI6 black Land Rover cars were lined up outside, engines running and their blue sirens flashing in the morning sun. The Freeman's were grateful, giving hugs, handshakes, and farewells to the Task Force and the last of the UK Army unit that had stationed over the night for security of the home.

Christine: Take care of yourselves. Thank you for standing with us in these hard times.

Watson: You're welcome Mrs. Freeman. I will be seeing you occasionally.

Joe: My doors will always be open.

Watson: Thank you, Mr. Freeman. We have a long way to get justice for you son and family. We will bring the culprits to justice.

Joe: You'd better get going.

Watson: Sure. God be with you*. (She shook their hands as the other Task Force members were waiting for her in their cars).*

Watson got into the first Land Rover car in the column. Kevin waved from the driveway with his mother as the vehicles departed, and Bridgestone waved at him from the passenger seat of the first car in the column.

It was mid-afternoon and the Task Force had settled in Ms. Watson's modern London home – a sleek, minimalist mansion of clean lines, square angles, and with transparent glass windows that let in sunlight and offered a clear view of the garden and pool below. The Task Force felt relieved and had quiet chatter for much of the day with the gentle hum of the air-conditioning over polished floors. As evening drew to a close, the group made contrasting decisions on how to spend the evening depending on their moods. Bellucci and Watson decided to spend sometime in the bedroom to melt away the tensions of the past days in intimacy and whispers of

laughter, and the rest of the team enjoyed the pool, the water sparkling under the soft sunlight as they swam in the pool with the sense of carefree comfort washing away the weight of the pain from the loss of a friend.

Bridgestone and Sally, shared the water together as their laughter echoed across the open courtyard, and they invited Trancedi to join them as they saw she was bereaved and needed company and warmth. In one corner of the pool, Biachi and Carlos swam side by side as Vincenzo and Isabella playfully challenged each other to races across the pool as the evening air waves filled with splashes, teasing remarks and silent satisfaction. The evening was a time for full release, a gentle pause between missions replacing grief, duty and danger with simple pleasures of laughter and the freedom to be themselves as they prepared to avenge a fallen friend and bring the culprits to justice.

Blood
Contract

ACT TWO

“BLOOD CONTRACT”

OPERATION PENTAGRAM

January 6th 2012

The Wesley's Bar and Restaurant

Richmond Upon Thames London

1800 HRS

The evening drizzle was accompanied by a gentle blow of the wind. Thomas Bridgestone sat down alone at a corner of Wesley's Bar and Restaurant in suburban London area of Richmond upon Thames off Kew Road, a place loved by locals, business men and people looking for solitude. The interior was lit in warm golden yellow that was reflected in broken gold streaks on the pavements adjacent to the main road.

He looked to the outside of the bar and restaurant through the rain-streaked glass window, each rain droplet merging into another and sliding downward in slow motion following random paths. The sub-urban traffic was rather slow and controlled in motion despite no congestion.

He gazed at a yellow taxi car moving down the road, headlights fully bright casting cones of bright light through the evening gentle mist. The taxi car's reflections stretched across the smooth and wet asphalt road and then abruptly shattered as a silver-white Audi car rushed past the taxi in the opposite direction as its tyres sliced through pooled rainwater and sending splashes of water onto the cab.

WESLEY'S
BAR & RESTAURANT
WESLEY'S
BAR & RESTAURANT
Richmond
on Kew Road
WESLEY'S
Blended
Scotch Whisky
RESERVED
BRIDGESTONE

The red traffic lights slowed the taxi car to a halt as pedestrians under umbrellas crossed the road, the headlights of the car illuminating their attires with great intensity. The red light shone upon the taxi car's roof creating a warm orange reflection that was reflected along the car roof and the car tail lights were reflected on the wet asphalt road in broken streaks.

Inside Wesley's, the air was filled with low tone voices of customers blended with soft piano jazz music playing from a juke box, the chiming sounds of cutlery against porcelain cups and plates, the scent of grilling meat and oak-aged whisky.

Bridgestone held in hand a half-filled glass of Scotch, whirling it on his right hand as the sad memories of Oliver Wallace Freeman's passing filled his mind, each memory echoing Freeman's name with the passing of every car.

He took a sip and looked through the window beside him once more. He saw a cyclist in light chrome-green reflective vest riding fast on the main road in the drizzle, his bicycle rear light blinking in red, casting broken streaks of red-light reflections on the wet asphalt road. Behind him was a white and blue country bus slowing down as the traffic lights ahead lit from green to red in a sudden. At the T-junction a black Land Rover car with blue flashing siren lights passed in front of the halted bus, illuminating the Land Rover's interior casting shadow-silhouettes of its occupants through the side

windows and front windshield. The Land Rover drove slowly into the Wesley's pavement and parking lot just near Bridgestone's window. The pulses of blue flashing light were scattered violently across the wet road and through the Wesley's rain-streaked windows, and illuminating Bridgestone's face in quick pulses and then faded as the car engines were shut down, and the same for bright head lamps.

The driver's door was first to open, and he saw a familiar face he expected — his close friend and lover and MI6 partner — Sally Ratcliffe. Sally dressed in a black rain coat over a navy-blue nylon jacket over a white T-shirt, and blue hipster jeans and grey-black tactical feminine fashion boots. She was carrying a black umbrella on her right hand and opened it in one clean motion, scattering away rain drops from its edges in silver beads.

And then the front passenger door opened and Ms. Watson Portman in official feminine black attire walked out, opening her umbrella and shutting the door behind her, the expression on her face completely unreadable.

The rear door was opened and an elderly man stepped out slowly. He was unknown to Bridgestone — a white mustache, a black hat angled against the rain. He wore a dark overall coat over a dark official suit, white official shirt and a purple tie. A male MI6 agent, who Bridgestone recognized as John McBride, cyber division, came out from the opposite rear door, black leather

WESLEY'S
BAR & RESTAURANT
WESLEY'S
Blended Scotch Whisky
RESERVED
BRIDGESTONE

jacket, maroon shirt, blue jeans and white-red sneakers. John opened his umbrella and escorted the elderly man into Wesley's with Sally and Portman behind them. They tilted and closed their umbrellas as they entered Wesley's through the doors.

The elderly man removed his hat exposing his grey hair, shaking off a few droplets from his hat once inside. Bridgestone stood and waved from his corner, and Sally was quick to take note of him. She walked towards his table with Ms. Watson, John and the elderly man behind her. She kissed him on the cheeks and hugged him before opening up with a greeting:

Sally: Evening my love.

Bridgestone: Evening...my love.

John: Evening Tom, hope you are good (*he said as he sat down calmly)*.

Bridgestone: I am good.

Ms. Watson reached out for a warm handshake with a smile as she greeted him.

Watson: Evening Thomas... it's been a while since your leave began last year November.

Bridgestone: Yes... it's been a while.

The elderly man studied Bridgestone as if to evaluate him like an instrument about to be purchased from a store, and eventually extended his hand saying:

Elderly Man: Evening sir, I am Fredrick Wayne Johnson, Board of Directors at Neptune Corporation.

Bridgestone shook his hand and said:

Bridgestone: I am Thomas Bridgestone, Field Agent - British Intelligence.

Johnson: Ms. Watson made me aware already.

Bridgestone: Come on everyone take a seat please.

They all comfortably sat down on the table at the corner as a female African waiter approached carefully, sensing the high status of her guests at the table. She opened up, hands held together in front saying politely:

Waiter: Hello... good evening. What may I bring you?

Watson: Uh... I need a glass of whiskey. Neat.

Sally: Same for me.

Johnson: Get me some scotch, please *(He said after gently placing his hat on the table).*

Waiter: Mr. Thomas... can I get you more Scotch?

Bridgestone: No ma'am. I've had enough for the evening.

John McBride: I need no drink; I am totally fine.

Johnson: Oh... I love that jazz music... Take Five — the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

Watson turned her eyes on Johnson unable to hide traces of amusement expressed on her face and said:

Watson: Oh yes... I should have anticipated that. *(She said tilting her head)*. I remember your taste for clever rhythms and a bit of mischief.

Johnson responded with a faint smile, almost unnoticed and replied:

Johnson: Yes... a masterpiece of the art of old... very much enduring, precise and quietly formidable across the echoes of time.

A minute later, the female African waiter returned with a tray of two whiskey bottles and another scotch bottle, and 3 empty glasses and a glass bowl of ice-cubes with a spoon in it. She gently put the tray on the table and opened the bottles for her guests.

Watson: Thank you, ma'am. What's your name again?

Waiter: Ms. Aisha Wesley, my father Ronald "Ron" Wesley runs this place, he's out today but my grandfather is in his office doing the paperwork for him.

Watson: That's great.

WESLEYS
WESLEYS

Waiter Aisha: Welcome, excuse me I have to attend to other customers.

Watson: That's fine.

Aisha quietly walks away to attend to other customers.

Watson and Sally poured their drinks, added a few ice-cubes to their drinks and so did Johnson.

Bridgestone: So, what brings you here if I may ask?

Watson: Yes... we need your help... we have a plan for avenging Freeman... and we just think you are the best candidate for the job*. (She said and took a sip of her drink and swilled her glass with a tiny ice-cube knock).*

Bridgestone: What's the plan?

Johnson: We suspect there's a mole in the Contractors Corporation — apparently, I also serve as a board member in the Corporation, which operates under the office buildings of Neptune Corporation. Someone in my corporation wanted your friend Freeman dead, and we believe Freeman uncovered a conspiracy in the corporation...

Watson: Freeman tried to whisper something in my ear...

Before he died. He whispered "Contractors Corp, conspiracy... Avenge me" and "tell Bianca, Giovanni and

Kevin, mom and dad I love them." Those were his last words.

Johnson: I do not know how far this conspiracy goes but everyone in the Corp is guilty until proven innocent...

Bridgestone: Any list of suspects?

Johnson: For a conspiracy, it is difficult to pinpoint... may be a few board members or may be the Intelligence Chief Mr. Rostov... or may be individual Professional assassins acted on their own or as a group embroiled in the conspiracy... "shit is on our hands, let's tie loose ends" ...kind of motive.

Bridgestone: A needle in a hay-stack.

Sally: That's why we want you to go in, as an undercover agent for MI6 hired as a professional Contractor for the Corp and then we begin the investigation.

Watson: At the time of Freeman's death, we were against the Caligula Mafia, and then a Contractor from the Corp visually confirmed by AISI's Agent Captain Carlos aboard his helicopter... he saw the sniper that killed Freeman, black suit, white shirt purple tie through his scope.

Johnson: Purple tie is official attire for our professional contractors...

Bridgestone: His face?

Watson: No, he wore a balaclava over his head.

Bridgestone: Ok, I'm in... when is the initiation?

Johnson: Tomorrow, we fly to Zurich together, I have already commended you to the Board of Directors and they looked at your records in the British Army and MI6 and they think you are fit for the job.

Watson: We shall start by spying on the board, we shall deploy a highly sophisticated spyware program in the Corp through your office computer, where it shall spread to other Contractors Corp computers in the Local Area Network. We shall spy on the top leadership to get to the moles in the Corp and find out why they killed Freeman. Take this flash drive with you, it carries the Project Convallaria Codes — the spyware program.

Sally: Boss, how exactly does it work?

Watson: Project Convallaria once inserted into Bridgestone's office computer at the Corp, it infects their system — the code has 3 main sections — the root code, stem code and bloom code. The root code infiltrates the system in the first infection. The stem code enables the spyware to spread in stealth mode quietly across internal networks, servers and connected devices. The bloom code enables deep system monitoring and intelligence collection — emails, financial records, executive communications, board documents.

And we have extra codes — the nectar code, shade code and frost code.

The nectar code — enables data extraction, transmitting hijacked data back to MI6 servers.

The shade code enables the spyware to clean its tracks to avoid detection by cyber-defensive programs and IT experts.

The frost code enables emergency shut down — once MI6 pulls the plug from London, the spyware destroys itself in the infiltrated system, this is something we can do if you get compromised or your mission is accomplished*. (She finished her glass empty, putting it down with the tiny ice-cubes knocking the walls of a glass with a tink sound).*

Sally: Sounds like cool sci-fi... *(She said giggling and smiling)*

Bridgestone: Alright boss... I am fully in...

Johnson: That's a great plan... exposing the moles in my corporation is in my best interest. I apologize for any inconvenience my corporation may have caused you Mr. Bridgestone, but together we can bring justice for your fallen friend — Mr. Freeman.

Bridgestone: Thank you*. (He said as he played around with his empty glass and continued)*. You know, Oliver

really never wasted words... if those were his last words Ms. Watson... then he chose them very carefully.

Watson nodded in acknowledgment.

Watson: That is why we shall take his words very seriously.

The jazz music from the Dave Brubeck Quartet continued to fill the air in the bar, as raindrops traced lines down the window beside Bridgestone, who opened up to speak again:

Bridgestone: Oliver once told me that corporations can hide some things governments have failed to.

Johnson raised his eyebrow and asked with curiosity:

Johnson: He did?

Bridgestone: Yes... he said it in a metaphoric analogy — the larger the machine, the easier it is to hide a tiny secret in it.

Johnson finished up the last sip of his Scotch and spoke.

Johnson: Yes, and you're about to take the first step inside that machine.

Watson: And spill out the secrets hidden in it... *(Watson added).*

Bridgestone looked outside through the rain-streaked glass window beside him, at the rain-soaked parking lot,

as the rain began to wind down. Outside, the asphalt was glistening under the bright street lamp.

Bridgestone: The rain is fading...

Watson: Ten minutes and it will be done...

Bridgestone: I came here in a taxi... left my car home... I hope you guy folks can give me a ride.

Sally: Sure... we can.

Bridgestone: You mentioned a guy... Chief Intelligence Alexei Rostov... Mr. Johnson... how does an illegal op gets carried out using the Corp's assets and he's all in the blind?

Sally: Good question.

Watson: I have known Rostov in a long time... he has been very efficient in the Corp, weeding out corrupt enemies from within... he has served well for the past...Even though not personally... but MI6 has a file on him... rigorous and disciplined in his undertakings... he has backgrounds in Spetsnaz special forces back in the old days.

Johnson: I agree, I believe Rostov is clean on this... his background and reputation cancels out any doubts... unless of course fate proves us wrong.

Watson: We shall spy on everyone... right from Rostov to the field agents, Contractor agents... until we find

justice for Oliver Freeman. The Project Convallaria will do the magic...

Bridgestone: Alright... I hope you don't mind if I use the washrooms in a minute.

Watson: Sure, no problem.

Bridgestone gently got up and walked to the washrooms and came out a minute later.

Johnson: The rain stopped... I think we'd better leave before another shower of rain.

Sally: Sure...

Jonh McBride: I am sure my wife Sarah must be waiting…and don't worry about me, I will catch a taxi by the petrol station over there.

The group got up from the table and Johnson walked to the cashier to foot the bills for everyone before they walked to the black Land Rover waiting by the parking lot. Sally got into the driver's seat, Watson on the front passenger seat and...

Bridgestone and Johnson in the rear passenger seats. They fastened their seat belts and Sally ignited the engines with the front LED headlights lit up the white walls and glass windows of the Wesley's. The red tail lights illuminated the wet asphalt below in a strong red glow. Sally shifted to reverse gear, moving the car in reverse before shifting to 1st gear and slowly turning

FIPS

right and drove off the Wesley's premises into the main road, driving through the green traffic lights at the junction.

The early night sky at 1900 Hours was clearing of the clouds, with the waxing gibbous moon illuminating the clearing skies from the eastern sky and suburban business and residential and countryside landscapes.

As Sally drove across the Richmond Bridge over the Richmond River — the waters were full reflection of the bridge lights, building lights, and the shining moon in the eastern night sky. The river flowed gently beneath the arch bridge.

The car was filled with silence as the quiet hum of the engine blended with the faint whisper of car tyres rolling through the wet asphalt of the bridge.

Bridgestone turned his head, gazing at the passing river and broke the silence.

Bridgestone: Oliver loved this part of town.

Watson took a glance at him on the rear-view mirror and responded.

Watson: Yes... I remember that.

Bridgestone: He always spoke of the river quite often, believing it made the city look older and calmer than it appears.

Sally remained eyes-focused on the road as they exited the bridge.

Sally: Tranquility was one of the things he valued. Peace and quiet away from the noise of this world.

Johnson moved a bit on his seat to recalibrate his composure and said:

Johnson: The Thames has watered this city for over two thousand years, endowing the city with life and calmness that certainly comes with peace to a troubled mind. Oliver surely must have loved this place, no doubt in my mind.

Watson: Tomorrow, you join the Contractors Corp and once you are in, things will never be the same.

Sally briefly took a glance at Bridgestone in the rear-view mirror and asked:

Sally: Any second thoughts Tom?

Bridgestone: No... but a lot of people will have to pay the price for what they did to my friend. I am meditating over that... as a soldier... I fight and kill for my country... bring its enemies to justice... but that takes a toll on the soldier as well... and I'm readying my conscience for the terrible things I am about to do.

Watson: I understand son. Keep your breath steady, your conscience clear and your resolve greater than ever.

Johnson: I would take that advice with all of my heart... for innocent souls like Wallace Oliver.

Bridgestone gently rested his right arm against the rear passenger door and leaned his head on his right shoulder and said:

Bridgestone: Freeman said something else about the river.

Watson turned slightly and asked:

Watson: What might that be?

Bridgestone: Rivers cannot hide the things beneath for an eternity. Eventually, the waters run low in dry times... exposing everything initially hidden beneath the surface.

Johnson: Yes... and that shall hold true when we find the moles in my corporation... I cannot wait to strangle them up a tree myself.

The Land Rover sped into the darker road leading to Richmond Hill with the bright LED front headlights illuminating the wet asphalt road with great intensity.

Sally maintained her firm grip on the steering wheel; her eyes focused on the dark Richmond countryside road ahead with traffic driving on both sides of the road; and her posture composed, apparently with some growing tension beneath it. Bridgestone at the back seat with Johnson and both maintained silence as they carried the

quiet weight of professionals who had a clear comprehension

of the exact events that transpired in Naples and the repercussions that those events had brought forth.

After minutes of driving from Richmond Town, Sally arrived at a junction leading up a small hill in counters via lit avenue-drive. She slowed down, toggled the left-turn indicator and turned left into the contour avenue-drive lit on both sides with small yellow sodium lamps.

In the front passenger seat Ms. Watson finally broke the silence as the car approached the guarded entrance of her Richmond minimalist mansion's compound.

The car then turned left and right along the long tree-lined avenue drive with short yellow sodium lamps on both sides that lead to a minimalist estate in a contoured path of three bends. The estate was on the hillside overlooking the Thames River. Sally brought the car to a full-stop at the gate entrance of the estate, and was greeted with guards from MI6 in black tactical uniform wielding SA-80 British automatic rifles, hanging by slings that went over their shoulders. One white male guard was in the security toll booth and waved at her and the other African-British chocolate-skinned young lady was just outside the booth.

Watson: We move separately here onwards. Tom, keep yourself focused on the mission and let's bring justice to the Freemans. *(She said with her tone calm and controlled).*

Bridgestone: Yes ma'am.

Watson opened her front passenger door after unbuckling her safety belt and stepped out gently, and then gently shut the car door. She spoke one final time.

Watson: You've crossed a line now, and there's no walking back.

Bridgestone: Perfectly understood ma'am.

Watson replied with a small, almost imperceptible nod—hinting her acknowledgement.

Watson: Good night, everyone… safe trip Tom and Johnson.

Johnson: Good night, Ms. Watson.

Female Guard 1 Welcome home ma'am.

Watson walked around the car from behind to greet the female guard waiting on the other side of the car. The second guard in the security booth pressed a button on his computer and the gate slid open, allowing Ms. Watson to pass through and was escorted by the female guard, straight into her minimalist mansion, who then walked back to the security booth to read her evening newspaper over a cup of coffee and donuts.

By the time she arrived Sally had driven into the compound and made a U-turn back to the contoured avenue-drive that led to the main road. She briefly saw the black *Land Rover made the last U-turn on the contoured road into the main road as the red taillights flickered on the Land Rover like stars in the night sky as the car passed the trees that lined the avenue-drive.*

Sally then toggled her left indicator lights as she stopped at the junction leading to the main road. She looked right and then left to check for incoming car traffic but there was none. She then gently span the steering wheel on the left and gently pressed her foot on the accelerator and drove to the main road and set her GPS co-ordinates on the car's GPS map to Bridgestone's home in Greenwich, before switching off the indicator lights. The drive to Greenwich was longer and felt more personal, especially for Sally and Bridgestone, considering the chemistry between them. With the road full of left and right turns—the city seemed to shift around them as tight urban streets gave way to quieter sub-urban roads.

Sally finally spoke after a long silence:

Sally: Sweetie… I hope you're alright.

Bridgestone took a brief glance at her and said:

Bridgestone: I have been worse… I can't stop thinking of that day in Naples… Oliver bleeding in my arms.

Sally: Ok, let's just get home… and I will make you.....feel better.

Bridgestone replied with silence because he did not need to answer and Sally understood why.

Finally, they arrived at Bridgestone's home—a brick orange-brown British-styled bungalow that stood out from nearby homes with unremarkable design that endowed a feeling of safety and the sense of being safe at home on first sight. Sally drove to the driveway and parked just outside Bridgestone's car garage. She switched off the engines and both head and tail lights. Johnson was the first to alight from the car, stretching his back from the long journey for an old man before speaking to Bridgestone.

Johnson: We have 24 hours, and the world will never be the same, for us.

Bridgestone: I know *(he said as he alighted from the car and shut the car door gently).*

Sally unbuckled her safety belt, pulled out the car keys and quickly opened the car door, stepped out in a hurry and shut the door gently and remotely shut all doors via the car's remote control tethered to the key.

Sally: I will prepare dinner for us… I am getting hungry. Are you guys?

Johnson: Yes Ms. Ratcliffe… seriously getting hungry.

Sally opened Bridgestone's front door with her spare keys and headed straight for the kitchen, as Bridgestone and Johnson sat comfortably on the couch. Bridgestone reached for the television's remote control and switched on the television—and the BBC UK news was on—the Prime Minister - Dennis Cameron- addressing the nation from Downing Street, standing beside him on the left was Foreign Secretary Mr. Wesley Hague and Prince William of Wales, and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex.

The headlines read "Prime Minister addresses nation on UK-Iran Bilateral Nuclear Agreement" and the Prime Minister was announcing a proposed deal about to reach its conclusion brokered through UK diplomats led by Hague and Prince Andrew on behalf of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Prime Minister addresses nation on
UK–Iran bilateral nuclear agreement

Prime Minister (Dennis Cameron): A delegation of diplomats from the United Kingdom led by Foreign Secretary Sir Wesley Hague and his royalty Prince William of Wales and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex on behalf of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth Alexandra Mary and the government of the United Kingdom began talks with counterparts from Iran two weeks ago to reach a compromise on Iran's enrichment of nuclear material that could potentially be used to develop nuclear weapons that we the UK feel are a threat to our national security and to NATO at large. The Iranians have accepted regular IAEA and UK inspections of their nuclear facilities in exchange for a reduction in economic sanctions. And we feel that is what we can do for now to safeguard our national security. Tomorrow, delegates from Iran will be here at Downing Street to finalize the agreement, God bless you. God bless the United Kingdom. God bless Her Majesty.

Suddenly photographers took photos, camera shutters rattling in quick successions, flashes of camera light flickering on surfaces in rapid pulses and journalists broke silence, asking several questions, stretching out their microphones for answers. A female BBC journalist asked:

BBC journalist (Barbara Plett): Mr. Prime Minister, what guarantee do we have that Tehran will uphold this agreement? Can we trust Tehran?

A France 24 male journalist asked:

France 24 Journalist (Douglas Herbert): Hello Mr. Prime Minister, I am Douglas Herbert, France 24. Do you mind clarifying the duration for this deal? How long does it last?

A female Chinese journalist from CCTV news asked:

Chinese journalist (Li Tongtong): Mr. Prime Minister! Mr. Prime Minister! What does the U.S and NATO have to say on the UK-Iran bilateral agreement? Do they think this is a breakaway from the P5 PLUS One nations in talks with Iran? Are they satisfied with inspection measures or do they push for a complete shutdown of nuclear enrichment programs? Do they have military options on the table?

Prime Minister: Order Please! Order Please! My Press Secretary Ms. Nicole Coleman will answer all your questions. Ms. Nicole kindly…kindly come forward for a press briefing (*he said turning to Ms. Nicole Coleman standing behind him).*

Ms. Coleman gently walked forward, as the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Prince Andrew and the UK diplomats walked into Room 10 Downing Street, with the bombardment of photography flashes behind them.

And Johnson, watching from the couch suddenly broke silence.

Johnson: Good questions from the journalists. I doubt if the Iranians will keep their promises. How many

underground nuclear enrichment facilities haven't they publicly declared? Reducing the economic sanctions means funding them to enrich nuclear material and develop nuclear weapons against us.

Bridgestone: On point, but what option is really there? The Israelis have been bombing their nuclear facilities, did not stop them. The US tried Stuxnet virus to compromise their nuclear enrichment computerized control systems—a bunch of centrifuges were destroyed but that never stopped Iran from continuing their nuclear enrichment programs.

Johnson: Stuxnet only slowed them down… I agree but I see a war in the region by 2026—US and the Israeli vs Iran!

Bridgestone: And let's pray China and Russia or North Korea never step in… that would be a much bigger war.

Johnson: Yes, it would be.

Sally spoke loudly from the kitchen:

Sally: Did we just give Iran a deal loosening sanctions?

Bridgestone: Yes… we did dear.

Sally: Bad news! Bad news! *(She said as she prepared dinner).*

Bridgestone: What's cooking tonight?

Sally: Roast chicken, with rosemary, thyme garlic, herb butter roast potatoes, and many more delicacies that you love always.

Johnson: My favourite that's wonderful.

45 minutes later, Sally brought the evening meal to the dining table and invited the gentlemen for dinner. The three sat down for the evening meal as they discussed the UK-Iran Nuclear Deal. When they finished, Sally took the dishes to the kitchen and washed them clean as Bridgestone showed Mr. Johnson the shower room and his bedroom.

Johnson: I forgot my briefcase in the boot of the car. I may need it. It carries my pyjamas and tomorrow's attires.

Bridgestone: I will get them for you, no worries.

Bridgestone walked to the outside to the car on the drive-way after picking the car keys from Sally and opened the car boot to retrieve Mr. Johnson's briefcase and closed it before locking it via the car's remote-control. He returned and placed Mr. Johnson's briefcase on his bed and walked to Sally standing by the living room window, put his arms around her by her waist and kissed her on her neck, and she turned and passionately kissed him on his lips for a while, before speaking:

Sally: I know things are hard, not just for you, but for both of us. Oliver meant everything to us. I miss him as you do. His passing hurts me too… but tomorrow we avenge him. I wish I could come with you… but it would potentially expose MI6 especially if the moles at the Corp realize we are investigating Freeman's death.

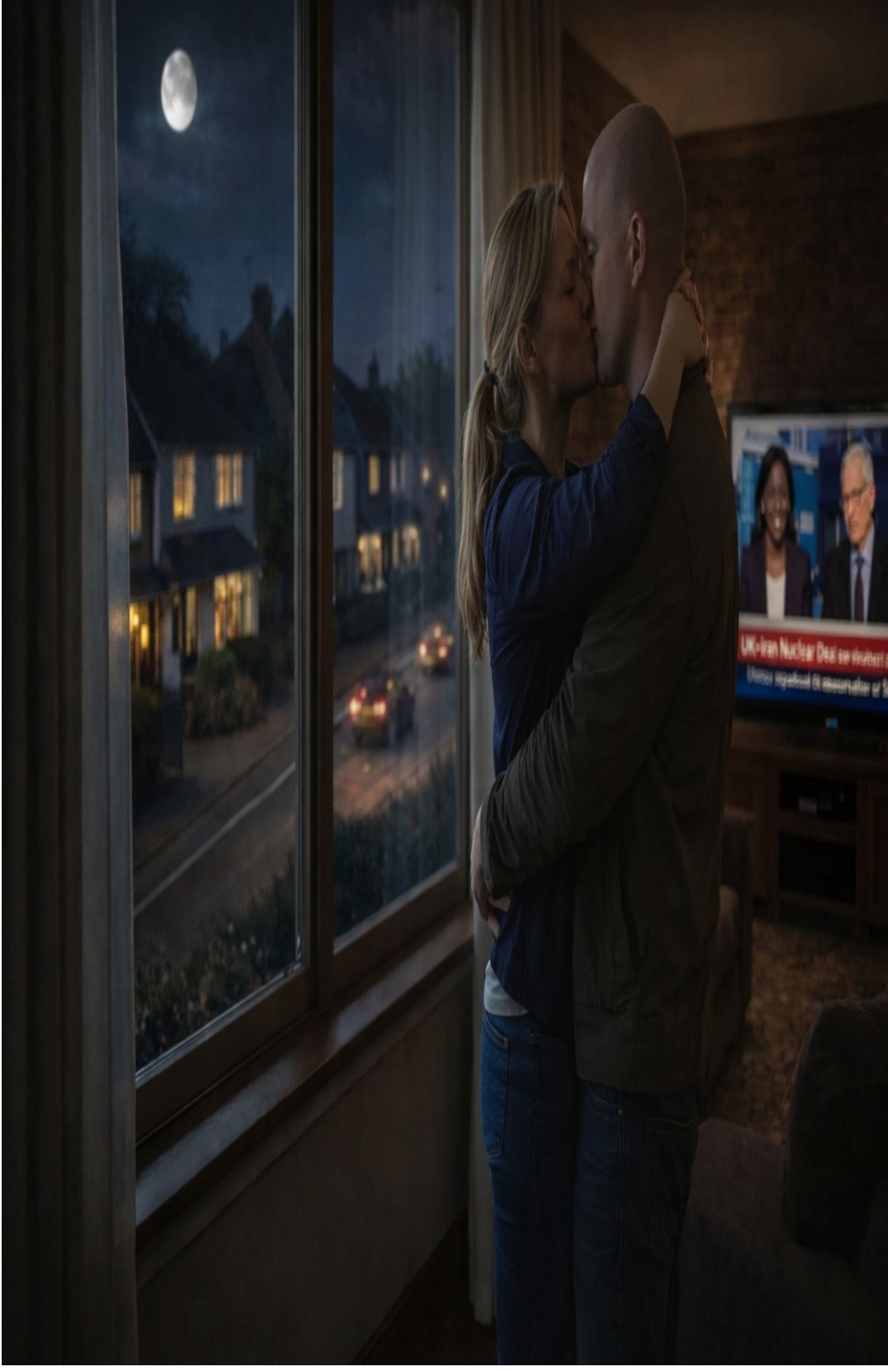
Bridgestone: I am just glad that I have you Sally. Don't leave me too.

Sally: I won't.

Bridgestone: I want you off field missions for a while... until this Freeman's mystery case is solved... ask Watson if she could put you with the intel analysis office instead.

Sally: Ms. Watson would agree definitely, if it means your emotional well-being in handling the Freeman case. I will talk to her tomorrow.

UK-Iran Nuclear Deal


UK-Iran Nuclear Deal

Bridgestone: Can we take a shower together, like we always do since high school?

Sally: Hehe... (She chuckled) ... yes, my love... like high school days... and as always... (She kissed him in the lips once more).

Bridgestone: Johnson is in the shower...

Sally: I know, once he is done, we move in.

Bridgestone and sally moved away from the window curtains, kissing passionately as they walked blindly falling on the couch and laughed briefly before they kissed again, as Bridgestone lied on his back and Sally on top of him.

Sally: I love you Tom... and I can't wait for the day that we do.

Bridgestone: I promise once we avenge Oliver... We shall walk the aisle.

Sally: And the honeymoon? Mombasa? Johannesburg? or Bali?

Bridgestone: I'm caught in between Mombasa and Bali. Which is better?

Sally: I'm thinking we start with Mombasa and then fly to Bali... I love both of them too.

(She said with a smile and kissed him briefly).

UK-Iran Nuclear Deal:
Game-Changer or Strategic Risk?

Bridgestone: That's a good compromise.

Sally: Yes, it is....

Mr. Johnson unexpectedly came out of the shower room covered in his personal blue towel, and said:

Johnson: I see you two love birds are having a good time. I suggest you take a shower together, because I am through.

Bridgestone and Sally quickly got up and Sally pulled back the strand of hair on her face and said smiling:

Sally: Yes Mr. Johnson, that's what we're gonna do... we have been since high school.

Johnson: Hehe... that's quite a romantic connection and history you have there.

Johnson then walked in his bathroom sandals to his room and shut the door.

Bridgestone and Sally went to their bedroom, changed and took off their clothing, wrapped themselves in their shower room towels and headed straight to the shower room, where they took a warm shower together sharing passionate kisses over a brief conversation about Oliver.

When they were through, they wrapped themselves in their towels and headed back to the bedroom, wiping themselves dry before changing into their pyjamas. Bridgestone held her by her waist and kissed her as they

fell onto the bed, they covered themselves under the blanket as they kissed passionately. Bridgestone briefly reached for the lamp and switched it off. What followed was not just an hour of intimacy—but also of release—from violence, from duty, from the pain of Oliver's passing and from the weight of what was to come—a dangerous mission to avenge Oliver.

For one night, Bridgestone and Sally were no longer soldiers fighting for their country but just a man and a woman, deeply in love, sharing a moment of joy and pleasure ahead of dangerous and demanding times.

Sally: That is love I have not had in a long time, we've never done it this way, and with this much intensity.

(She said lying on top of Bridgestone, dragging her finger over his lips like charming dirty witch).

Bridgestone: I know I have been cold sweetie... Oliver's death took a toll on me, and we have been mourning, but I think it is time to let go... and we need to move on, past this pain and grief... rekindle our love like it used to be.

Sally: That's right my love. It's time we moved on. Oliver meant a lot to us, the best we can do is honour his legacy and avenge him.

Bridgestone: Yes, my love.

Sally: And I think we need to fall asleep—tomorrow you have a morning flight to catch. It's 10 p.m. A good night sleep is all you need now.

Bridgestone: Ok.

Sally kissed him one more time before resting her head on his shaven chest, feeling the warmth of his chest with her right palm.

Shortly after half an hour, they fell asleep with the waxing gibbous moonlight in the clear sky illuminating the room through the closed curtains.

7th JANUARY 2012

Greenwich, London

0730 HOURS

The morning sunlight filtered softly through the curtains in Bridgestone's room in his modest bungalow home in Greenwich, illuminating the room faintly. Bridgestone woke up at the sound of the alarm, he turned his head towards the desk beside his bed and reached for the digital alarm and saw it read 7.30 a.m. He switched it off and placed it back on the desk. Sally who had slept with her head rested on his chest woke up to his

7:30

movements and sounds of the alarm. Outside the air was cool, at 3–9°C humid with slight mist but not foggy.

Sally: Morning sweetie...

Bridgestone: Morning my love.

She kissed him briefly before getting up, covering her chests with the blankets.

Sally: I can't see my pyjamas.

Bridgestone: Neither can I find mine... maybe they fell under the bed as we enjoyed our steamy night... I am glad you loved it.

Sally: Hehe... *(she chuckled)* I loved it honey. Grab me that towel near your foot.

Bridgestone grabbed the towel and handed it to her and she wrapped herself in it.

Sally: I gotta go and prepare your morning breakfast…and take a shower afterwards.

Bridgestone: Thanks honey *(he said as he sat upright)* Oh... I found our pyjamas... right there on the foot of the bed near the closet... Get me mine.

Sally went for both pyjamas, handing over Bridgestone's and then took off her towel to dress in it.

Sally: This is better than walking around in my towel.

Bridgestone: I don't think so.

Sally: You men are such dogs.

Bridgestone: I'd love the view... hehe *(he chuckled).*

Sally walked out of the room to prepare breakfast in the kitchen. Bridgestone followed her out but went straight for the shower room only to find Mr. Johnson walking in before he did.

Bridgestone: It's alright sir, you go in first.

Johnson: That's fine son.

Suddenly, the door bell rang and Bridgestone went to check it out. He took a brief glance through the peephole and saw it was the newspaper vendor - Max Fowler, and opened.

Max Fowler: Morning Tom, here's your morning paper.

Bridgestone: Morning Fowler, thanks... I am leaving London for Zurich today, and I won't be around, probably for 6 to 7 months... real serious business.

Max Fowler: That's fine... so your subscription needs a refund?

Bridgestone: No Max... keep the change.

Max Fowler: Thanks...and ... oh… I have to move next door and I wish you safe journey.

Bridgestone: Fine... thank you.

Max turned away carrying his backpack of newspaper before turning back and saying:

Max Fowler: The Royal Prince brothers featured on the front page today but I reckon the real story is captured on Page 3. They call it a 'Sticking Plaster Peace'. My old man said something funny... 'we just sold the farm to Tehran'." *He chuckled.*

Bridgestone: Yea right... I guess this deal is only a short-term solution to long-term problems... I bet it wont last 6 months.

Max: Yea... anyway... wish you well.

Bridgestone: Thanks Max... *(he said and shut the door gently).*

Sally raised her voice from the kitchen.

Sally: Tom, was that Max?

Bridgestone: Yes honey...

Sally: I thought he was still in college?

Bridgestone: Actually, his final year.

Sally: What did he study again?

Bridgestone: A Bachelor's in Political Science—Oxford.

Sally: Bright kid... like his dad Professor Timothy Fowler... maybe a place in the agency could be fit for him.

Bridgestone: Political analysis of global events always fascinated him... maybe someday MI6 will reserve him a nice analyst office. What's cooking?

Sally: I'm frying your eggs; the bread is toasted already.

Bridgestone: Is that the scent of fried tomatoes? I love it. *(he said as he sat on the couch, opening the newspaper to read).*

Sally: Yes, it is honey.

Bridgestone read the front page and it read:

January 7, 2012

CROWN & OUT! (Main headline in massive, bold black block letters)

Princes William and Harry join PM Cameron in 11th-hour Iran Nuclear Peace Gamble. Is it a Deal or a Dud?

The front page featured a visual that entailed a grainy, high-contrast photo of Prince William and Prince Harry walking into the black door of Number 10, with sombre

looks on their faces, with PM Dennis Cameron just a step ahead of them.

The "sidebar" Tease read:

"Exclusive: Inside the secret Downing Street 'Tea Party' that halted a war."

He then took the remote control to turn on the TV and the BBC UK Morning News was on. Iranian diplomats led by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Razmarian Tehrani arrived in a convoy of 3 black Audi cars at 10 Downing Street. They were met by PM Dennis Cameron, Foreign Secretary Wesley Hague and the royals—Prince William and Prince Harry. In addition, was the frantic press pack of journalists and photographers that behaved with the aggressive energy of paparazzi, from behind the steel barricades—a wall of shouting mouths, hurling questions like projectiles in different languages in the cold morning desperate for a headline.

Camera shutters rattled like small arms fire sending flashes of light in quick successions that reflected off the polished bonnet of the black diplomatic Audi cars and the black glass doors and windows of 10 Downing Street.

The pack of foreign officials were escorted towards Door Number 10 of Downing Street, led by PM Cameron who leaned in close to FM Tehrani, his voice barely audible in murmurs beneath the shouting of the press pack. Behind them, Prince William and Prince Harry walked along with practiced royal grace flanking the six Iranian diplomats as they spoke in low tones gesturing "soft diplomacy".

The Custodian—a duty officer who sat on a small chair in the hallway of Door Number 10 Downing Street opened the black door from inside to allow the delegates in, as the Metropolitan Police Guard unit officers from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command stood out near the door vigilant on the crowd behind the barricades in their dark navy blue and silver-topped custodian helmets. The Cordon or the Security Perimeter Officers stood by the barricades wielding HK MP5 submachine guns dressed in their official dark navy-blue uniforms over large yellow-green reflective jackets.

Once all of the delegates were in, the Custodian gently shut the door of Number 10 Downing Street as photographers bombarded the scene with quick flashes of light and journalists continued their yelling.

Johnson finally came out of the shower room 15 minutes later, and his first glance was the news reel on TV and the newspaper Bridgestone was reading.

Johnson: I guess that is the morning paper. And I see the Iranian delegation is here in London.

Bridgestone: Yes... they're here.

Johnson walked gently to his room wrapped in his towel and gently shut the door behind him.

Sally came out of the kitchen with breakfast, ferrying trays of fried eggs, toast bread, fried tomatoes and boxes of milk. She went back to get a kettle of tea and coffee.

Sally: Honey... breakfast is here... a shower first or breakfast on the table before a shower?

Bridgestone got up and answered:

Bridgestone: A shower first...

Sally: Let's go change in the room.

In the bedroom, they took off their pyjamas and wrapped themselves in their towels and headed for the shower room, where they took a warm shower exchanging kisses and laughter, as they knew—the mission to come would keep them months apart.

Johnson was fully dressed up when he came out to the living room carrying his briefcase. He picked the morning paper from the couch/sofa where Bridgestone left it and placed it front page up on the dining table where he sat and served himself tea and more

delicacies. He comfortably read the newspaper, enjoying his breakfast as he also listened to the BBC commentary on the UK-Iran negotiations at Downing Street.

When Sally and Bridgestone were through in the shower room, they headed straight for the bedroom for a quick change. Sally wiped herself dry, applied her lotions and manicure, dried her hair as Bridgestone dressed up in his official black suit, white shirt and blue tie, and black socks and leather shoes.

He packed his laptop and other attire onto one suitcase and dragged it outside to the Land Rover car parked by the driveway, and put it in the boot.

Sally finished up and arrived at the dining table in her blue hipster jeans, white plain shirt under a black leather jacket, her blonde hair tied back into a pony-tail, she wore khaki light-brown feminine hiking boots with

THE SUN

January 7, 2012

CROWNS OUT!

Princes William and Harry join PM Cameron in in 11th-hour Iran Nuclear Peace Gamble.

Exclusive: Inside the secret Downing Street 'Tea Party' that halted a war

GENEVA BREAKTHROUGH: ROYALS SEAL NUCLEAR PACT

GENEVA – Foreign Secretary Wesley Hague and Iranian FM Ali Akbar Razmarian Tehrani haive reached a landmark deal after weeks of secret talks.

Princes William and Harry played a key role, using "soft diplomacy" to bridge the London–Tehran divide.

IAEA access has been traded for sanctions relief; final talks today aim to avert a regional war.

orange-black laces. She sat on the opposite end to Johnson and broke the silence.

Sally: Morning sir, I hope you love my cooking.

Johnson: Sure, you're a wonderful cook. *(He said with a smile as before sipping some coffee).*

Bridgestone joined them, placing the car keys and remote on the table next to Sally, who poured him his favourite tea, served him his delicious escort—toast bread, fried eggs and fried tomatoes.

Bridgestone: Thanks sweetie... this will be wonderful.

Sally: Welcome dearest... *(She said kissing him on the head before sitting back beside him).*

15 minutes later, they finished their morning breakfast and Sally began to clear the table and Bridgestone gave her a hand.

Sally: I think we're done here... I'll be back to do the dishes honey.

Bridgestone: Much appreciated my love (He said and kissed her on the lips briefly).

Sally: Ok, let's drive to Stansted Airport.

Bridgestone: Sure.

They walked to the living room where Johnson was still glued to the morning paper.

Bridgestone: I'll let you keep that paper, you may read it all through on the road to Stansted and flight to Zurich.

Johnson: Sure...

Sally switched off the television and picked the house keys and car keys on the table.

Sally: To save time and rush before the 9 a.m. traffic jam, we need to move now.

Johnson: Sure Ms. Ratcliffe *(He said as he picked up his briefcase on his right side on the floor rested on the chair, getting up with the morning paper clenched beneath his arm pit).*

Johnson and Bridgestone walked to the car as Sally switched off the living room and kitchen lights she forgot to before. She walked out of the house and locked the door with the house keys.

Suddenly, the neighbours took notice they're headed out on a journey—it was Mr. And Mrs. Patel—owners of the Patel chains of supermarkets in Downtown London. They were elderly, but not quite in their mid 50's.

Mr. Patel: Morning Tom, I see you're headed somewhere *(He said standing beside his wife on the short wooden white fence).*

Bridgestone: I'm going out on a long business trip to Paris, will be back soon.

Mrs. Patel: Oh, wonderful son, best wishes to you.

Sally: Morning Mr. And Mrs. Patel, you good this morning?

Mrs. Patel and Mr. Patel: Yes, we are...

Mr. Patel: I hope you're good too.

Sally: I am... I'll be back by afternoon to watch over Tom's house while he's away.

Mr. Patel: Sure.

Sally: Ok... see you later *(She said as she remotely unlocked the car doors from the car's remote control tethered to the car-key).*

Mr. And Mrs. Patel: See ya.

Sally, Bridgestone and Johnson got into the black Land Rover car—Sally on the driver's seat, Bridgestone on the right-side back passenger seat while Johnson comfortably sat in the left-side back with his hat on and briefcase beside him. They buckled up their safety belts before Sally ignited the car engines. Mrs. Patel's young beautiful teen grand-daughter walked into view from the backyard, holding a green hose pipe and waved at Sally and Bridgestone—her name was Disha Patel Farhani.

Disha: Bye Mr. Thomas, Bye Ms. Ratcliffe! Grandma, Grandpa, I finished watering the flowers as you asked.

Mrs. Patel: That is nice of you, my daughter. Now I want you to feed Thapki her morning breakfast—she is in the small kennel next to my bed.

Disha: Yes grandma.

Sally was on reverse gear just entering the main road when she hit the brakes. She looked right and then left, and right again; and shifted to reverse gear with her foot on the clutch and spun the wheel right and hit the accelerator pedal with her foot. The car reversed right and turned into the main road (A102 Southbound) and then she pressed her foot on the clutch- shifting to second gear, pressed her foot on the accelerator and sped up the road.

She checked her digital wrist smart watch, it was 8:30 a.m. As she drove along the A102 road, she was surprised the traffic was lighter than expected. She kept her grip firm on the black thick leather steering wheel of the MI6 Land Rover Discovery 4, keeping the speedometer needle at a disciplined 60km/h. She saw two London Metropolitan police cars in the distance, blue sirens flashing on their roofs, two police officers in navy-blue uniform under yellow-green reflector jackets, standing by the cars redirecting traffic away from A102 Northbound by hand-held orange LED traffic wands (light sticks/traffic batons) as the air was misty and cool, but not foggy. The officers and their cars were at the Sun-in-the-Sands Roundabout.

The BMW Metropolitan Police cars were packed nose-to-nose in a chevron (V-shape) fend-off position at the entrance of the roundabout. As she approached the police road block, she reached for the center console on the car dashboard and pressed a button; and immediately the blue siren lights flashed in synchrony on the car roof. The blue LED siren lights on the car's grille and side mirrors flashed brightly in blue flashes in synchrony with rapid and urgent chirping sound of the acoustic electronic siren.

A female metropolitan officer rushed from the entrance of the A102 Northbound to the end mouth of the A102 Southbound at the roundabout where their police cars were parked, leaving her male companion to do the job and signaled with her orange-glowing LED traffic wands for Sally to slow down and to pull into the filter lane. Sally complied, slowing down into the filter lane stopping next to the female officer.

The officer signaled to Sally to lower her dark tinted side-door window. Suddenly her dashboard radio pre-tuned to Metropolitan Police frequency crackled with the voice of the male metropolitan officer (Gordon) ahead of them who had been assisting the officer, as he continued to re-direct traffic from Rochester Way to Shooters Hill Road—A2.

Officer Gordon (Radio): Officer Gordon here. Clearing the A102 Northbound for outbound flow. All inbound traffic from A2/Rochester Way is now being diverted

onto Shooters Hill Road-A2 to find their own way into the city. The corridor is getting tight. Please stand by—I have a service-coded Land Rover Discovery 4 with blues and audible approaching the filter... over.

Sally lowered the left passenger tinted side-door window as the Land Rover's blue flashing siren LED lights on the side-mirror and roof reflected off the yellow-green reflector jacket of the female metropolitan officer. The female officer introduced herself.

Female officer: Officer Grace Miller—London Metro, may I see your credentials?

Sally: Field Agent, SIS—I'm on an urgent journey to Stansted Airport, it's critical to an ongoing MI6 investigation*. (She said pulling out her MI6 badge from her black leather jacket, as Miller's orange-glowing wand illuminated the badge's golden service crest in a sharp orange glow.)*

Officer Grace Miller: Yes ma'am. Sorry, I see. *(She turned to the male office on radio and continued*). Hey, Officer Gordon! Let her through to A207 Shooters Hill Road! Over…. Safe journey ma'am.

Sally: Thank you and welcome Officer Miller.

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Officer Miller: That's great. *(She reached for her radio and continued as Gordon removed the orange white cones and police road-barricade with red and white diagonal stripes.)* All units on the A205 and Woolwich Pier, this is Miller at the Sands Roundabout. I have a black Land Rover Discovery 4 of SIS, Driver—is a female MI6 Field Agent, moving on priority one. She's transitioning to the A207 toward Academy Road. Clear her path through the Woolwich Ferry to Albert Road and onto A1020. She's headed for Stansted via the A13/A406 interchange onto M11.

A voice of another female officer crackled through Officer Grace Radio; identifying herself as Officer Chelsea Bristow.

Officer Chelsea Bristow (Radio): Officer Bristow here... Affirmative... clearing route for SIS Land Rover... over.

Officer Grace replied:

Officer Grace: Much appreciated Officer Bristow... over. *(She put her radio back in place and turned to Sally and continued)* You may turn onto the A207.

Sally: Fine.

Sally pressed her foot on the accelerator, went around the Sun-in-the Sands Roundabout, turned left into the A207 Shooter's Hill Road after she toggled the left indicator light on and then toggled it off once she was on the A207 Road, accelerating into junction leading to

Academy Road , slowing down to a halt at the junction for red traffic light for half a minute, then the amber light was on for 15 seconds and ultimately turned green, allowing the red city bus ahead of them to move and clear the way. She span the steering wheel to the left and gently pressed the accelerator with her foot and was greeted by officers in navy-blue uniform under large yellow-green reflector jackets, who were using traffic wands to direct the traffic away from Academy Road. The officers then opened the road-block for her by removing the road barricades allowing her to drive through from where she accelerated to Woolwich for the ferry waiting for them signaled by Officer Bristow to help them cross the Thames River.

The rapid chirping of the electronic siren echoed off the brick walls of the Royal Artillery Barracks on the left of the Grand Deport Road, overlooking Saint George's Garrison Church, Woolwich, as civilian cars on the road swerved away to clear road for the Land Rover car.

The John Benn Ferry sat at the pier with its ramp lowered in waiting as the Land Rover car got in first with Metropolitan officers turning back cars to avoid congesting the roads near London City Airport across the river to facilitate the movement of Iranian diplomats after the conclusion of their bilateral talks with the host British diplomats. Johnson broke the silence and said;

Johnson: Looks like we're the only ones getting into the John Benn... or is it, Johnny Benn?

Bridgestone: Yes... they're clearing the Albert Road and other roads leading to the airport across the river—the Iranian diplomats will need haste movements to the airport from Downing Street—so no traffic congestion in Central London and at the airport.

Johnson: I see... fact.

Sally gently pressed her foot on the accelerator as the Land Rover got into the John Benn and the ramp closed before the ferry gently began to sail across the river.

23 minutes later the ferry stopped at North Woolwich and lowered its ramp. Sally revived the Land Rover onto the tarmac and made a U-turn to the right, before driving into Albert Road where she toggled the blue flashing LED sirens and electronic acoustic sirens as she approached the opened road block with metropolitan officers in navy-blue uniforms and large yellow-green reflector jackets and police cars by the roadside. One of the officers—Officer Bristow saluted the car as it crossed the opened road block, and radioed back to Officer Grace once the car drove into the Royal Docks Road (A1020).

Officer Bristow: Officer Bristow to Grace, SIS Land Rover is clear of A1020 heading into the A13/A406 interchange and M11 North. Over.

Officer Grace (on radio chatter): Affirmative Officer Bristow... out.

Sally accelerated into M11 road and drove further to Junction 8 and then took the right turn toward Stansted Airport. She checked her digital smart wrist watch for the time—it was 9:28 a.m. she reached for the dashboard with her left hand, steering with her right hand, pressing a button on the center console to switch off the blue LED siren lights.

The roads leading into Stansted Airport were rather quiet with the exception for aircraft taking off and landing at the airport.

Sally drove carefully, her hands firm on the wheels as the airport's perimeter fence came into view. She slowed down the Land Rover as they drew closer to a restricted access road that led to a quieter section of the airport designated as a private aircraft sector. A security entrance gate lay ahead as the guards stepped out of their booths to inspect the oncoming Land Rover car.

Sally hit the brake pedal bringing the car to a full stop at the security checkpoint and lowered her tinted window. She quickly pulled out her MI6 badge.

Sally: This is a government vehicle — SIS.

The guard keenly took a look at the badge and signalled to the other to lift the barrier arm remotely via a switch in the security booth.

Guard: Oh... so you are the one. SIS Chief is waiting by the Gulfstream private jet.

Sally: What a surprise... thank you.

Guard: Kindly drive in.

Sally pressed her foot on the accelerator pedal and drove gently to the airside tarmac and halted the car next to another MI6 Black Land Rover Discovery 4, and she knew it was Watson waiting unannounced; guarded by two MI6 officers in black tactical uniform, vests, balaclava and helmets, equipped with M4 carbine automatic rifles.

She opened her door after switching off the engines and unbuckling her safety belt and set her feet outside alighting gently from the car, and so did Bridgestone and Johnson.

Bridgestone went to the car boot to retrieve his suitcase.

Johnson: Ms. Watson... we meet again, it's a surprise you never called to say you were coming.

Watson: Morning Mr. Johnson... as the Intelligence Chief, I move always like a ghost *(she said with a smile reaching out for a handshake, that was well received).*

Sally: Morning Chief *(she said as she reached out for a hug that was well received by Ms. Watson).*

Johnson raised his voice lightly to the flight attendant standing by the Gulfstream private jet's airstair door.

Johnson: Ms. Susan McKnight, kindly assist Mr. Bridgestone carry his suitcase into the aircraft.

McKnight: Yes sir. *(she said and gently received the suitcase from Bridgestone and carried it into the aircraft's aft baggage compartment and came outside again and asked)* How about your suitcase sir? Briefcase sir...my apologies

Johnson: Of course, and this newspaper too, put it on my desk.

McKnight: Yes sir. (She received both the briefcase and newspaper and placed them on Johnson's desk in the aircraft.)

Watson: As I was saying, this mission will be very much critical. I came over to hand over this flash-drive — a copy of the Project Convallaria Codes, just in case the first is compromised.

Bridgestone: Thank you, ma'am*. (He said as he received the second flash-drive from Ms. Watson).*

Watson: Tom, this is our path now... to clear the sorrows our foes have brought upon us and avenge Oliver Freeman.

Bridgestone: I understand.

Watson: Take care Tom, and come back in one piece... *(She said and reached out for a hug — like a mother hugging her son goodbye, and then kissed his forehead*

— and Sally was a little startled but maintained composure. Watson continued) Tom you are like a son to me, one of my greatest field agents in my career as SIS Chief and I know you will fulfil this mission flawlessly, like you always do.

Bridgestone: Yes ma'am, I will.

Watson: You'd better get going.

Bridgestone turned to Sally and held her by her waist and gave her a deep kiss, as Ms. Watson gave a faint smile. Both Sally and Bridgestone shed slight tears followed by a short smile and laughter of joy mixed with feelings of sadness due to the months of separation this mission would impose on them.

Sally: I love you Tom and just in case you never—

Bridgestone: Ssshh.. don't say it... I'll be back in your arms — its just a few months away. I love you too... I'll be back I promise.

Sally: Ok... *(she said as she sobbed slightly)* kiss me one more time.

Bridgestone kissed her for a moment and let go, resting his forehead on hers with a big hug. Finally, the two detached as Sally wiped her tears dry.

Johnson: I think we'd better get going.

Bridgestone: Ok. Love you, Sally.

Sally: Love you, Tom *(she said and looked down briefly).*

Johnson and Bridgestone headed straight into the private jet as Bridgestone turned back at the entrance and waved one last time to Sally and Ms. Watson, who waved back, and then he sat next to the window on the chair adjacent to the left wing from where he saw Sally and smiled as Sally smiled back and waved one last time as he waved back, and Watson waved too.

Ms. Watson: It's ok Sally... he will be back.

Sally: I know Chief, we'd better get going to HQ's… a lot of duties await us.

Watson: Sure... hey Sergent Kevin... back to HQ's (*she signalled to her lead security officer to get back into the car with the other two).*

Sally: I will drive behind you.

Watson: Sure.

Sally opened her driver's door, sat on her driver's seat, buckled her safety belt, ignited the engines and placed her hands on the steering wheels firmly as she watched the MI6 tactical security officers lead Ms. Watson to her Land Rover Discovery 4 ahead. She turned her head left one more time towards Bridgestone and texted him on her phone.

Text message

7th JANUARY 2012 9:48 a.m.

"Love you Tom — do it for me, do it for Oliver, do it for MI6. See you when you come home! Take Care."

Bridgestone texted back.

Text message 7th January 2012 9:48 m

"Love you, Sally. I won't disappoint you — will be home before Christmas, in your arms as always. Take care."

She waved at him, and he waved back. Suddenly Ms. Watson's Land Rover Discovery 4 had its siren lights and electronic acoustic sirens switched on, and Sally knew it was time to go. Ms. Watson's car drove off and she followed, shifting her gaze from Bridgestone to the Land Rover ahead, before pressing her foot on the accelerator driving behind Ms. Watson's car to the gate where the beam barrier was already lifted high, letting them through to the silent airport road leading to the J8 junction and M11 road.

In the Gulfstream private jet, Bridgestone was left seated with his legs crossed, and head leaning against the passenger window, and suddenly Johnson broke the silence:

Johnson: I see you and Sally have a strong chemistry *(He said as he read page 5 of the newspaper).*

Bridgestone breathed out with a huge sigh and answered.

Bridgestone: Yes... I will miss her a lot...

Johnson: Keep your head clear, let no emotions cloud your judgement in the field.

Suddenly, a voice crackled through the speakers overhead from the cockpit asking all passengers to take a seat and fasten their seat-belts as the aircraft engines began to hum.

LATER THAT AFTERNOON
ZURICH, SWITZERLAND
1500 HOURS
Neptune Corporation/Contractors Corporation
HQs, Board Room.

The 12 board members were seated in the round table in the Board Room. Mr. Johnson, the Chairman of the Board of Directors stood up to address his fellow board members.

Johnson: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. As we gather here this afternoon, we prepare to inaugurate a new member – a professional contractor for the Corporation to help us make the world a better place and help us secure power in every corner of the globe. I believe, you were all issued files on him and know his background well. I want to thank you for approving this young fine man for a role as a contractor with our corporation. I introduce to you, Mr. Thomas Bridgestone. Mr.

Bridgestone kindly come in.

Bridgestone arose from the bench outside, gently opened the door into the board room and was greeted with applause from the Board of Directors.

Johnson: Thank you for the applause. Mr. Bridgestone kindly come closer.
(Bridgestone walked towards Johnson with confidence and took a stand next to him).
As customary practice, every new Professional is granted a ceremonial and service pistol—the silver M24 X3 Pistol, manufactured here in Switzerland by our own Neptune Corporation—Fire Arms Division.
Ms. Iryna Natasha, Missions Director of the Contractors Corporation, I grant you the honour of awarding Mr. Bridgestone the iconic silver M24 X3 pistol as a welcome gesture into the Corp.

Ms. Iryna Natasha, well-dressed in her formal feminine attire got up from her chair, holding a wrapped purple box and gently walked towards Bridgestone. She unwrapped the blue ribbons, opened the box to expose the silver M24 X3 pistol lying side-by-side next to a silver pistol cartridge filled with 9mm pistol rounds on a purple presentation cushion.

Natasha: This is a wonderful gift to our new member—Mr. Thomas Bridgestone! Welcome to the Contractors Corporation. Kindly have this. (she said as she presented the gift to Bridgestone) You are now codenamed: Professional 66 of the Corporation.

Bridgestone: Thank you everyone, it is quite an honour to receive this wonderful gift from you as a welcome gesture. I look forward to helping you fight insecurity and make the world a better place. *(He said smiling, after receiving the box).*

Natasha helped him close the box and wrapped it again hurriedly.

Johnson: Kindly, Natasha and Bridgestone have a seat.

Bridgestone and Natasha sat together on the round table amongst the 11 directors seated.

Johnson: As we all know, the Corp has a long-term enemy—we seek to vanquish once and for all—the Italian Caligula Mafia. Governments have tried to take this Mafia down but many ended up being clients and patrons of the same criminal network they have sought to vanquish. Where governments fail, the private sector particularly, the Contractors Corp, will succeed. As the Political Science Scholar Susan Strange in her book "The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy—1996" says, "Where states were once the masters of markets, now it is the markets which, on many crucial issues, are the masters over governments of states."
We have collected intelligence on the Caligula

Mafia leadership and networks on scales greater than the reach of most governments around the world, and they depend on us for this extra intel, always, which is why they can't take us down, regardless of our nature as a shadow or phantom Corporation if you could call it, operating without licences or cross-border authorization in many occasions.
Last year we traced down the 5 leaders of the Mafia, calling themselves "The Pentagon". This year – 2012, we begin the hunt for these five and cripple it from within with our own implanted candidates in the mafia annual election.
We start with American billionaire Thomas Baker Jnr. Our intel places him in New York in a Brooklyn high-rise apartment – a place he believes lets him blend in with the crowd.
That is where your mission begins Thomas, tomorrow you fly to New York to hunt and eliminate Baker.
He is protected by the Chinese Triad—The Red Jackets Mafia, with main branch in Shanghai, owned by another Pentagon leader—Nobutada Mitsuhide.

Your mission director Natasha Iryna will feed your more intel later on.
Right now, I just want to thank the Board for accepting a new soldier into the family.
Any remarks I may ask?

A board member rose and spoke; his name was Theodore Crenshaw.

Crenshaw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you for such a wonderful candidate to help us in our daily operation. I am more concerned about Baker's involvement with the Russians through the Iron Disciple gang of New York. Our intel on this is a bit primitive... and I will appreciate it if Mr. Thomas or Professional 66, took his time in New York to shed more light on this connection, this will help us clear the rumors that the Russians have been supplying Baker with weapons against us, and help us formulate a policy against Moscow.
Thank you. *(He finished and took a seat).*

Johnson: That is noted Mr. Crenshaw. I will

personally ensure we get more intel on that connection. Anyone else?

(The room was filled with silence)

Johnson continued:

Johnson: Good, then we adjourn this meeting and shift focus to the operations of Neptune Corporation, we have business to do—with clients around the world. And I want an end of the year report on our cars and arms sales, data analysis from the 6 continents, each separately.
Natasha, kindly drive Mr. Thomas to his newly opened apartment in our apartment high rise downtown.

Natasha: Yes sr.

The board members got up and left the room, leaving Bridgestone, Natasha and Johnson in the room.

Johnson: This is your first mission son, before you go to your apartment, Ms. Natasha and I will escort you to your new office downstairs.

Bridgestone: Thank you, sir.

Johnson: You will pick your mission tablet and laptop from your office and head straight to your apartment in the Neptune Towers in Zürich-West, District 5.
Room Number 34. Your suitcase was transported there in advance.

Bridgestone: Ok sir.

Johnson: Let's take the stairs down to your office.

Johnson, Natasha and Bridgestone head straight for the stairwell, and headed straight into Bridgestone's new office from where Natasha packed his new laptop and mission

tablet into a brown leather suitcase. They then took an elevator to the underground parking as Mr. Johnson took another elevator to his office on the top floor of the 11-storey building of the Neptune Corporation.

Natasha and Bridgestone headed straight for a black car, the Neptune XR 95, with a silver Neptune logo on the grille and a red continuous taillight.

Bridgestone: I love this car design.

Natasha: It's the best from Neptune Corporation.

Natasha pulled out her car-keys and remote from her pocket and unlocked the doors by pressing a button on the car remote tethered to the car keys.

She opened the driver's door as Bridgestone walked around the car from behind to open the front passenger door. They both got into the

car, buckled their safety belts and Natasha ignited the car engines, pressed her foot on the clutch pedal and shifted from neutral gear to first gear before pressing her foot on the accelerator pedal, and turning right around a pillar to climb a ramp that led to the parking lot exit with a security booth and a drop arm barrier (crash beam) and rising/retractable bollards.

Natasha stopped by the lowered crash beam, and showed the security guard her Neptune Corp ID and so did Bridgestone, only then did the female guard signal to the male security guard in the booth to push a button to raise the crash beam and lower the retractable bollards to allow the car to exit the parking lot.

Natasha accelerated slowly towards the main road and hit the brakes, checked left, right and left side of the road again before toggling the left-turn indicator and swerving left into the main road for a drive to Zurich West District 5 through the city's traffic.

Half-an hour later she drove into the Neptune Tower Apartment's parking lot after going through the security checkpoint. She parked the

car on a VIP spot and they unbuckled their safety belts, before Natasha killed the engines. They opened the car doors, alighted and shut the doors gently. Natasha locked the car doors remotely via the car's remote control, and then Bridgestone followed her into the apartment carrying his briefcase.

Bridgestone: Finally, we're here.

Natasha: Yes, third floor, we take the elevator. Good afternoon, Ms. Brunner. I have a new guest, room 34*. (She said to Ms. Elodie Brunner, the receptionist on the ground floor of Neptune Towers.*

Ms. Brunner: Afternoon Natasha... I see our new guest... and you are?

Bridgestone: Thomas... Thomas Bridgestone.

Ms. Brunner: What a fine young man...

welcome to Neptune Towers.

Bridgestone: Thank you.

Ms. Brunner: Here... your room keys... to Room 34.

Bridgestone: Thank you, Ma'am. *(He said as he reached out for the keys from Ms. Brunner).*

Ms. Brunner: Take elevator to third floor, enjoy your stay Mr. Bridgestone.

Bridgestone: Much appreciated...

Natasha: Let's take the empty elevator over there before someone else calls it.

They both walk into the elevator and Natasha presses the button for third floor. The elevator doors automatically shut and the elevator began the upward movement to the third floor

as Bridgestone looked up at the floor position indicator as it counted in red display from GF (Ground Floor) 1, 2 and finally 3 when there was a "ding" bell-like sound and the elevator doors opened. Natasha led Bridgestone to Room 34, and asked him for the keys.

Natasha: Kindly... the keys

Bridgestone: Oh... here...

She took them and opened the door, leading Bridgestone inside.

Natasha: This will forever be your place in Zurich for as long as you work with us. Let me take you to your room.

Bridgestone: Cool.

Natasha: Uuuh... *(She said with a sigh as she sat down on the bed and sprung back and*

forth, as she released the strain from the day's work.)

So, Thomas, tell me more about yourself... I'll be your mission director, and I'd like to know you better.

Bridgestone: Oh. *(He said as he sat down gently beside her)* I thought you read my file... I am ex-UK Army, ex-MI6...

Natasha: Yeah... I saw it in your file... but I meant like... do you have someone... kids maybe? If I may ask... It is important for your psychological evaluation on mission readiness... you know.

Bridgestone: Yea... I love someone... she's still MI6 and we plan on walking the isle later this year someday. We have no kids yet but I hope to get one soon.

Natasha: Oh... that's nice.

Bridgestone: How about you?

Natasha: It's a long story. I have been much alone since my college final year... I just needed some space to be alone... live my life. I will be directing your mission from my office here in Zurich tomorrow after you land in New York, the rest from my usual base in Sweden east coast off the Baltic Sea.
I'm getting thirsty, let me get some cold water from the fridge... you need some?

Bridgestone: Yes... get me some please.
Natasha got up and walked to the kitchen to fetch some cold water from the fridge, and came with two glasses full. Suddenly, Bridgestone's phone rang.

Natasha: Who's that?

Bridgestone: My fiancé... just put the water on the lamp desk... I may need some privacy in the

kitchen.

Natasha: Sure.

Bridgestone: Hey sweetie….

Sally (on phone): Hey my love... I appreciate you calling in the morning when you landed in Zürich. I hope you got a warm welcome to your new job.

Bridgestone: Yes, my love...

Sally: So, where are you now?

Bridgestone: My apartment... and I miss you... tomorrow I begin the hunt for Freeman's killers.

Sally: Great... justice will prevail.

Bridgestone: It will my love...

Sally: Uuuh! *(she breathed with a sigh)* ... I can't stop thinking of our last night...

Bridgestone: Me too... it was the best we ever had.

Sally: And I look forward to the day that we do. I want you to be the father to my kids. I'm thinking it would be a baby boy if we get one this year.

Bridgestone: Hehe... my love... yes, a baby boy would be great for me... I'm gonna call him Thomas Junior.

Sally: Thomas Bridgestone Junior, to be precise... I'm glad I could hear your voice again... I just walked out of a meeting with Watson in the situation room just to hear from you... the afternoon session has been boring without you.

Bridgestone: I understand my love... and... that

temporary transfer to the intel analysis wing... don't forget to ask Watson... I want you off the field until I get back.

Sally: I'll talk to her about it after the session ends...

Bridgestone: Cool...

Sally: I gotta go now... I'll call you before bed time. Many kisses to you, my love.

Bridgestone: Love you... kisses to you.

Sally hung up the call, and Bridgestone walked back to the bedroom where she found Natasha already finished her water. He sat down and finished his water, and placed the glass back on the lamp desk.

Natasha: I think... I have to go now Thomas... I look forward to our first mission.

Bridgestone: Ok... see you tomorrow at work.

Natasha collected all the drinking glasses and washed them on the sink, wiped them dry with the kitchen towel and placed them back in the kitchen cabinet. She returned to the bedroom and said:

Natasha: And... oh... I almost made away with your house keys... here...

Bridgestone: Ok... thank you... *(he said, taking the keys)*

Natasha: Bye... and oh... the car keys too... the XR 95 is all yours boy. I'll take a taxi to my apartment (*She placed them beside him and left).*

Bridgestone: Bye... Oh.

Natasha walked to the living room and to the door, opening it to walk out into the hallway and then shut it gently.

Bridgestone lay back on his bed gazing at the ceiling and spoke in his thoughts:

"Oh, my fallen friend Freeman... tomorrow I get to avenge you and find answers to your mysterious death." And... uh this is the moment I have been waiting for. To get into the den of schemers and begin searching – and oh... the Convallaria Codes... I'd better keep it installed covertly on the office laptop now... and it will begin the infiltration tomorrow in the office."

He got up and reached for his suitcase and pulled out the initial flash-drive Watson gave him, from a brown laptop briefcase. He opened the office laptop and inserted the flash-drive and the spyware disguised as part of a facial recognition software installed itself into the computer.

He safely plugged it out and kept both drives in the briefcase.
He undressed and headed straight for the shower room, when he finished... he wiped himself dry, applied his favourite body lotion - Nivea Men's and changed to his casuals.
He got himself a glass of milk and cereals from the kitchen, placed them on the table, locked the door, and sat in the couch in the living room where he found the remote control and switched on the TV.
It was the Swiss entertainment channel-Plus 8, and a family reality show was on, he then switched to BBC World News channel and the bilateral UK-Iran News on Nuclear Deal was dominating the headlines.
News footage of UK and Iranian chief diplomats – Wesley Hague and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Razmarian Tehrani exchanging instruments of ratification outside 10 Downing Street in front of journalists and photographers behind barricades guarded by UK Metro Police in navy-blue uniforms and large yellow-green

reflector jackets. The scene was marked by rattling of camera shutters, rapid photography flashes and yelling of journalists asking questions – all with the energy of paparazzi. BBC journalist Barbra Plett came into view in front of the camera, behind her a motorcade of UK and Iranian diplomatic 2 black BMW 530ds and 3 black Audi sedan cars respectively, and UK metro police standing between the cars and the barricades.
She stood out and a bit far from other journalists yelling from behind the barricades, on the cobblestone road of 10 Downing Street, a red BBC microphone in her hand she spoke:

Barbra Plett *:* Thank you. I stand here in London Downing Street, where the diplomatic officials from the United Kingdom and Iran exchanged instruments of ratification that has brought into effect a bilateral nuclear agreement that what some analysts describe as a significant breakthrough in UK-Iran diplomatic relations.
This agreement was reached today afternoon after weeks of closed-door negotiations and it

includes expanded inspection measures in exchange for a phased easing of economic sanctions on Iran.
This signals a step towards de-escalation in UK-Iran relations but critics raise questions over long-term compliance from Iran, an empowered Iran due to eased sanctions and the broader geo-political impact this comes with on the Western NATO-EU Alliances and definitely on regional powers and Western partners in the Middle East.
That's it for now, I will be availing more information as the events unfold.
I'm Barbra Plett, BBC World News at 10 Downing Street, London, United Kingdom.

Page 52
8th JANUARY 2012
0730 HOURS Neptune Towers Apartments

Bridgestone picked up his light brown suitcase, fully dressed in the official attire of the Contractors Coop. — black suit, white official shirt, and black leather shoes, and a purple tie. He picked the car remote, keys and house keys and walked out of his apartment, locking the door behind him and took the elevator to the ground floor, and left the house keys with Ms. Brunner and walked to the parking lot, for his XR 95 car.

He remotely unlocked the doors using the car remote, opened the driver's door, sat in the seat, fastened his safety belt, shut the door and ignited the car engines driving straight to the Neptune's Corp underground parking lot after going through security checkpoint.
After taking an elevator to the 4th floor to his office, he took a seat and placed the briefcase on his desk, pulled out his office laptop, leaving inside his personal laptop. He switched on the laptop and connected it to the building's Local Area Network, and the MI6 Convorallia

spyware began to covertly spread across all computers in the building.
Suddenly the 4th floor secretary received a phone call from Johnson from his 11th floor top floor office, asking if Bridgestone had reported to work, she replied to him affirming his presence in his office and Johnson asked her to reach Bridgestone and ask him to report to 11th floor to see him.

Johnson: Morning Ms. Lindsey. Is Mr. Bridgestone in the building?

Lindsey: Yes sir, he got in a minute ago.

Johnson: Let him come upstairs to my office.

Lindsey: Yes sir.

Ms. Lindsey walked up to Bridgestone's office and knocked on the glass door. Bridgestone got up and opened the door.

Lindsey: Morning Sir, Mr. Johnson would like to see you, 11th floor.

Bridgestone: Thanks Ms. Lindsey.

He put back his laptop in his briefcase and took an elevator to the top 11th floor, and went straight for Johnson's office. He knocked politely and was allowed in. There was another strange middle-aged man — he assumed it was the Rostov he heard about, and indeed he was right.

Johnson: Welcome Mr. Bridgestone. Meet Chief Intelligence Rostov, he reports directly to me and the Board of Directors.

Rostov: Welcome Mr. Thomas... Mr. Johnson has told me a lot about you. Your MI6 files and UK Army Files are impressive... I must admit.

Bridgestone: Thank you, sir.

Rostov: Call me Chief Intelligence Alexei Rostov.

Bridgestone: Ok sir.

Rostov: Ms. Natasha is on her way to escort you to the airport for your first mission, you will be brief on-flight more about it, and I bet you already know some details from yesterday's Board meeting.

I was away in Russia, Saint Petersburg to strengthen intel sharing with FSB on the Caligula networks, I just flew back in last night.

Bridgestone: Yes sir.

Johnson: You may return to your office... Natasha will be arriving soon.

Bridgestone: Thank you, sir...

Bridgestone left the office and took the elevator down to the fourth floor, and back into his office.

Rostov: I need to sit in my office too Johnson. Will be in touch.

Rostov got up and left Johnson to his office on the 10th floor below, where he sat and began to wonder in his thoughts.

"Just a few months ago I got rid of that MI6 threat Mr. Freeman, and now an ex-MI6 agent is now part of this Corporation, in quite a short time — a coincidence or on purpose. It cannot be a coincidence. I'd better call Sinclair to bug his apartment with secret listening devices while he is away."

Rostov reached out for his office phone call and asked the 6th floor secretary Ms. Phoebe Yen to call Mr. Sinclair (Professional 47) to his office. A minute later Mr. Sinclair arrived at Rostov's office.

Rostov: Yes Mr. Sinclair, come in, have a seat.

Sinclair: Thank you, boss... You look worried and serious.

Rostov: Let's go to the sound proof room please.

In the sound proof room, Rostov said:

Rostov: We may have a problem... Remember the MI6 agent you neutralized in Naples? A few months ago.

Sinclair: Yes... what about him?

Rostov: A few months ago... we neutralize an MI6 Agent and now an ex-MI6 agent just got hired as Professional 66, Mr. Thomas Bridgestone... here's his photo — he has an office on the 4th floor.

Sinclair: Wait... I recognise this man, he was on the ground team, I saw him before I took a shot on the MI6 Agent.

Rostov: His partner...

Sinclair: Probably — most probably... so that's why he's here?

Rostov: I strongly suspect...

Sinclair: MI6 is here to investigate... it won't be long until this mess spills on us. How did they know it was someone in the Corp?

Rostov: The MI6 Agent Mr. Freeman you neutralized... he threatened to expose us if he did not get the location of the Caligula Pentagon Mafia leaders' grand meeting. I had to give him the location and warn the Mafia, so I set a trap for him and you nailed him. Looks like... there are two possible scenarios here... he spilled the beans, gave up our names to MI6 before he died or he is still alive and has spilled the beans on us, and his funeral was entirely faked.

Sinclair: What if he's still alive? He is going to get us unexpectedly in the shadows... and we won't see it coming.

Rostov: Don't despair... we have top notch security around us... but if he's still alive MI6 boss Watson Portman might be playing a big game in our heads.

Sinclair: What do I do now?

Rostov: Reach out to Norton James... go to the agent's apartment together with James and have it bugged...and his office too — I want surveillance on him 24/7.

Sinclair: Good sir...I will leave with him as soon as possible.

Rostov: Good. I have lots of paperwork to do... let's go back into the office now.

They left the sound proof room, and Rostov went back to his office computer and Sinclair walked out of the office and took an elevator back to fourth floor to meet up with Norton.

Sinclair: Hey Norton. Rostov has some work for us to do.

Norton: What is it?

Sinclair: Neptune Towers Apartment... let's drive I will brief you on the way.

Meanwhile Ms. Natasha Iryna just walked into the building and took an elevator to 4th floor to see Bridgestone. She arrived at Bridgestone's office and found him going through the New York Mission briefing files on his office laptop.

Natasha: Morning Tom...

Bridgestone: Morning Director Natasha. Is everything ready?

Natasha: Yes sir...

Bridgestone: Without wasting time let's leave *(he said flapping his laptop and putting it in his briefcase).*

They left for the parking lot having taken the elevator to the underground parking lot and they met Norton and Sinclair talking near their XR 95 car. Natasha interrupted them politely:

Natasha: What's up boys?

Sinclair: Director Natasha... you're here? And oh... Mr. Thomas Bridgestone... the boss Mr. Rostov told me about you, welcome to the Corp... this my friend here is Mr. James Norton... I am number 47, he's 48... (*he said reaching out for a handshake).*

Bridgestone: And I am 66, nice to meet you. I'm just going out for my 1st hunt. The Caligula will be sorry *(he said shaking their hands).*

Norton: Surely, they will.

Bridgestone: So, you boys headed somewhere?

Norton: Yes, Rostov just sent us to meet a guy in town — a Russian... he said he will be useful in my joint mission with number 47 here.

Natasha: Alright, wishing you boys the best.

Sinclair: Thank you...

Bridgestone: We'd better get going...

Sinclair: Fine...

Natasha used the car remote she borrowed from Bridgestone to unlock the car doors and they got into the car with Bridgestone and fastened their seat belts.

Natasha: Where's your car Sinclair?

Sinclair: That one over there, near Rostov's sedan.

Natasha: Cool... you boys better get going... time is of essence in every mission.

Norton: Noted...

Natasha ignited the car engines and drove off the underground parking lot having gone through the regular security checks. She drove into the main road and headed straight for the Zurich International Airport. Meanwhile Sinclair and Norton got into their XR 95 car and continued their conversation.

Norton: The man has seen us already and we can't grab his house keys from Ms. Brunner without her snitching?

Sinclair: We need an exterminator or the regular maintenance crew...

Norton: Oh... Stevens... I know the guy from the regular technical maintenance crew... pay him a few bucks and he will do the dirty job for us.

Sinclair: Let's call him, let him meet us in town.

45 minutes later
08 45 HOURS

Natasha arrived at Zurich International Airport's Private Aircraft Sector. A navy-blue Contractors Corporation's Gulfstream private jet was waiting on the taxiway airside meet area.

She stopped the car a distance from the aircraft and broke the silence:

Natasha: Your equipment, personal accessories including clothing are all packed in a briefcase and suitcase in private jet's luggage storage area.
I'll brief you more on the flight to New York. You will be picked by your mission handlers, Julia Simmons — Professional 1506 and Dwayne McDonald — Professional 1507. They'll escort you to their safehouse in Queens from where they will assist coordinate your mission.

Bridgestone: OK Director Natasha...

Natasha: I'd prefer if you formalized it less and just call me Natasha... (She smiled at him, staring into his eyes)

Bridgestone smiled back and unbuckled his safety belt. He walked out of the car after opening his car door and pulled down together the lapels of his black coat, as he watched Natasha walking out of the car too. They both shut the car doors and Natasha stared at him from across the car roof, folding her arms

casually on the car roof, tapping on it with her right-hand finger. He stared back with a smile.

Natasha: Get this Caligula son of a b*tch for me please. Neutralize him and send back photos to confirm termination.

Bridgestone: Alright... Natasha.

Natasha: I was already starting to enjoy your company... I will miss you in a long time... I will be posted back to my station in Sweden by the time you return.

She walked around the car and gave him a small hug.

Natasha: Good luck Tom...

Bridgestone: Thank you, Natasha...

Natasha: The plane is waiting... I'll miss you... you'd better get going.

Bridgestone walked to the private jet carrying his briefcase and climbed up the airstairs into the aircraft. The airhostess Ms. Susan McKnight gave him a warm welcome as he took a seat on the VIP Executive Lounge.

McKnight walked to the cockpit to inform Captain Kevin Dunn that he should warm up the engines as the passenger was already seated.

McKnight: Mr. Bridgestone is in... warm up the engines, retract and lock the airstair.

Captain Dunn: Yes ma'am.

McKnight walked back to the passenger Executive Lounge and asked Mr. Thomas if he would love anything.

McKnight: What can I bring you sir?

Bridgestone: Just a glass of water for now.

McKnight: Fine...

She went to the galley and got a bottle of cold water and an empty clean glass on a cabinet. She put both on a tray and brought them to the Executive Lounge for Bridgestone.

McKnight: Here sir... *(she said as she placed them on the table).*

Bridgestone: Thank you, ma’am.

McKnight: Welcome.

Suddenly the engines began to hum as a voice in the speakers above from the cockpit signalled all passengers to prepare for the long-flight. Minutes later the Gulfstream jet was in the skies, climbing to the initial 41,000 feet.

9 HOURS LATER (8th JANUARY 2012)
1200 HOURS NEW YORK TIME
1800 HOURS ZURICH TIME

*The private jet touched down on the runways of John F. Kennedy International Airport – **New York**, and taxied to the airside meet area of the Private jet sector. Bridgestone was fully asleep when the aircraft stopped. Suddenly McKnight woke him up.*

McKnight: Sir, we just touched down... wake up.

Bridgestone woke up with a fatigue he had not felt in a long-time. His eyes red and Sally was the first thought that came to his mind. He looked at his watch to see it was noon, and looked through the window expecting a dark night sky, until he remembered basic

geography – flying West means chasing the sun, so it never sets until you land at your destination.

Bridgestone: Oh my god, we're here... finally. Get my luggage to the handlers please.

McKnight: Sure (*she said as she went to the baggage compartment).*

Bridgestone walked to the airside meet tarmac and quickly spot a Neptune XR 95 car waiting by. Two people were inside- a woman with blonde shoulder length hair dressed in a black jacket, purple shirt, blue hipster jeans and purple high-heel fashion shoes stepped out of the driver's seat with the car door open as she wore her purple-tinted sunglasses. From the open front passenger door, an African-American man in a khaki green nylon jacket, white T-shirt and blue jeans and white sneakers stepped out. Bridgestone waved at them as they walked towards the aircraft.

Bridgestone: Afternoon... Ms. Simmons, Mr. McDonald.

Julia: Mr. Thomas... your first mission with us, welcome to New York *(she said stretching out her hand for a handshake).*

Bridgestone: Thank you, ma'am. *(he greeted her warmly before shaking Mr. Dwayne's hands).*

Dwayne: Mr. Bridgestone, welcome to New York. Is that your luggage?

Bridgestone turned back and replied:

Bridgestone: Yes sir... Ms. McKnight kindly put them in the trunk of the XR 95.

McKnight: Yes sir.

Bridgestone: Thank you.

Julia: Let me help you... (*she said as she unlocked the car's trunk from the car's remote control in her hands, and took the briefcase from Susan's hand, leaving her with the suitcase).*

Julia opened the trunk and placed the briefcase on to the sides of the trunk and helped Susan

place the suitcase into the trunk and then shut it and locked it again via the remote control.

Julia: I think we'd better get going guys... time is of essence. Thank you, Suzie.

McKnight: Thank you, Julia... see you next time.

Julia: Next time *(she waved at her and Susan waved back as she walked back to the plane).*

Dwayne and Bridgestone walked towards Julia and the car. Julia opened her driver's door on the left side of the car and took a seat before gently shutting the door. Bridgestone opened the rear right-side door as Dwayne opened the front passenger right-side door and they sat before buckling up their safety belts. Julia ignited the car engines, shifted from neutral gear to first gear and drove off the airside tarmac to the airport exit checkpoint where she was let through much easily.

The drive to Queens was about 20 minutes with moderate traffic on the Van Wyck Expressway (I-678). Julia drove with the composure of a metronome – precise, not in a hurry and inevitable. Her driving was not reactive but

rather pre-emptive; she anticipated traffic rather than responding to it. Cars on the expressway moved in deliberate clusters – gathering then easing apart – just like a tide in the ocean that never fully settles. She drove with the flow of traffic rather than against it, driving the XR 95 into the gaps between cars as they emerged.
The wide-open lanes of the expressway began to narrow as traffic became thinner as cars began to run closer and distances tightened as they approached Queens. Storefronts came into view taking place of service roads, and fences gave way to sidewalks.

Ahead, Julia sees a pedestrian waiting at a crossing and slows down to let her pass with her baby in her arms. A cyclist passes past her and swerves to the road on the left side. Beyond the pedestrian crossing was an idle ice-cream van – the vendor seated outside on a bench nearby. Julia absorbed all this in her view subconsciously as her hands remained steady on the steering wheel. After the mother crossed the road, she stepped on the accelerator and continued down the road as she entered Queens.

Julia: Our apartment is just two blocks away.

Bridgestone: I remember my first MI6 assignment. Pursuing a Russian sleeper cell here in Queens, 2008.

Dwayne: What a coincidence... and New York is your first mission in the Corp.

Julia: It's kind of funny.

Bridgestone: Yes, it is...

Julia: Now we go right, that's it...10 meters over there *(she said as she turned right and parked the car in front of a garage driveway of the agents' residential house).*

The XR 95 rested quietly on the driveway, as its engines ticked down in silence. The house was a two-storey structure typical of Queens and the exterior was visibly displayed the red-brown bricks that composed its wall structure. The bricks looked tightly covered in green mould and could not hide their old-looks, proving the house structure had weathered the testament of time. The garage door was wooden and white painted and panelled. It was lightly worn out along the side edges as proof of long-term use.

A balcony with metal railings also painted in black stood above the main door to the house, which was wooden and painted in white, with a bronze door handle and a semi-circular multi-coloured stained-glass window on its upper half with seven wooden ribs radiating from the centre of the arch like an open fan. These radial ribs divided the glass into 6 large ranges that illuminated the interior with the afternoon sunlight in colours of red, yellow, green, blue, purple and pink.

The houses in Queens sat close together, most of them built from bricks, or vinyl sidings or both – painted in various colour schemes from red to yellow, purple, blue light grey and green. Some houses had ground porches with coloured metal railings, others had upper-level balconies, with each house having a unique or slightly differing architectural design. The neighbourhood was teeming with life.

Playful children's laughter filled the sidewalks and grass lawns. Teens played basketball in a nearby fenced basketball court, others gathered in corners talking, singing, break-dancing and others skating on the sidewalks. Adults drove in and out of homes in their

middle-class cars – sedans and hatchbacks – others ferrying groceries into their homes from their cars. Old men sat by the benches and plastic seats in their home porches lined with metal railings as they talked and others smoked, drank and read news-papers.

Bridgestone, Julia and Dwayne ferried their belongings to the house and left the XR 95 car by the drive-way in front of the garage. Julia put down the briefcase she carried and reached for her keys in her jacket and unlocked the door, pushing it open. She and Bridgestone carried the goods upstairs as Dwayne shut the door and locked it, placing the house keys on the table.

Julia: This will be your room.

Bridgestone: Thanks...

Bridgestone: And it is so nice... thanks.

Julia: Dwayne and I share the other room.

Bridgestone: Like a couple *(he said smiling).*

Julia: Yes... like a couple... no standard protocols prohibit *that (she giggled and smiled back)*. Are you married?

Bridgestone: No... engaged... her name is Sally.

Julia: Sally? I bet she must be a cute one.

Bridgestone: Very much cute.

Julia: Oh... let me set up the surveillance equipment... we just got replacements this morning... we had malfunctions yesterday.

Bridgestone: Need a hand?

Julia: Yes... all hands. Dwayne! *(she shouted)* I need an extra hand installing the new surveillance equipment!

Dwayne: I'm making some coffee honey! Giving me a minute! *(he shouted from the kitchen downstairs).*

Julia: Let's just do it ourselves. Let's open the brand-new boxes over there.

Bridgestone: Do we install them here in your room?

Julia: Not all of them... Just a TV screen for each bedroom connected to the CCTV cameras around the house... so all of us can monitor who's approaching the house. The rest of the equipment are in the garage where we monitor all operations.

Bridgestone: Great... let's get started.

Julia: Sure...

Julia and Bridgestone worked together installing the surveillance equipment in each bedroom as they exchanged stories from past experiences. When they finished, they went downstairs and found Dwayne placing the coffee jug on the table with 3 empty cups.

Julia: I think we need a coffee stop, before we continue.

Bridgestone: Sure...

The three sat down on the dining table and had coffee over a conversation, and Bridgestone reached out for his phone as a quick memory to call Sally bumped into his head. He dialled her

number and excused himself. The phone buzzed for a while before Sally finally picked up.

Bridgestone: Hey honey.

Sally: Hey sweetie... it's time you called. I missed you. Are you in New York now?

Bridgestone: Yes... no longer in the plane... I slept mid-flight much of the journey.

Sally: I know... reminds me of long flights from Saudi to Iraqi airspace in '03.

Bridgestone: I'm preparing for my first hunt tonight. Justice begins tonight.

Sally: I'm glad to hear that. And not to forget... Watson just put me off the field as you requested. She did not hesitate to... because she knows how much you mean to me... and that it was good for your peace.

Bridgestone: I'm glad to hear that... Love you, Sally.

Sally: Love you Tom... I will call you... mealtime at midnight before I retire to bed... I will miss you and many kisses to you.

Bridgestone: Much appreciated my love. I will miss you too.

Sally: Ok... duty calls... bye.

Bridgestone: Bye...

Sally hung up the phone and he returned to finish his coffee.

Julia: I will prepare lunch before we install the garage mission surveillance equipment.

Dwayne: That's fine.

THAT NIGHT
2030 Hours

Bridgestone's eyes remained focused on the road driving through the New York night traffic with his hands firm on the steering wheel. Suddenly from the Queens safehouse, Julia's voice crackled in his earpiece radio communications device, disturbing the silence in a calm and controlled voice.

Julia (on radio): North Shore University Hospital is just around the corner, I guess you see it on your GPS.

Bridgestone: Affirmative 1506, I see it.

Bridgestone drove through the green light and turned right and the North Shore University Hospital came into view. Dwayne watched the live body cam footage broadcasting from a hidden camera in Bridgestone's coat and spoke:

Dwayne: Our intel says Baker's in his high-rise apartment. The front and back entrances are guarded. There's no way you're going through with a weapon. Time is short, you'd better hurry. The helicopter will drop you on the roof of the target buildings. You will scale down the building with a rope and harness equipment already in the helicopter to the 10th floor of the 18-storey apartment complex.

Bridgestone: I hear that 1507... entering university hospital parking lot... I see Professional 1707 waving up ahead.

Julia: Good, give him the car keys, he will escort you to the helipad and drive the car back to the safehouse.

Bridgestone hit the brake pedal and switched off the car engines and lights. He unbuckled his safety belts, and stepped out of the car. He gently shut the car door and locked them with the car's remote control.

Professional 1707: 1707 here... I'll take you up to the helipad and drive the car back to the safehouse.

Bridgestone: 66 here... much *appreciated (he said as he handed over the car keys to 1707).*

The two walked through the parking lot and into the hospital from the front entrance. They were immediately hit by the usual hospital characteristic sharp smell of alcohol disinfectant. The interior was lit in pale-white

by the fluorescent lighting. The people passing the hallway ignored them largely—the nurses, doctors, patients, and visitors, as they walked towards the elevator. Professional 1707 hit the elevator "Go Up" button and in not more than 15 seconds, the elevator doors opened with a "ding" sound before they both entered and the doors closed. They rode up in silence, with Bridgestone's hands casually in his pockets. Not soon enough, the elevator upon reaching the top floor opened with another "ding" sound, and as they walked out, a doctor and a nurse in blue official medical attire walked into the elevator in silence, the doctor with a stethoscope around his neck, surgery face mask on and a notepad and a pen on his hand, and the nurse was busy texting someone on her Nokia Lumia 710 cyan smartphone. The doors shut with another "ding" sound behind them.

The top floor buzzed with the hum of medical equipment, ECG equipment, footsteps of doctors and nurses walking up and down from every room with the sounds of hospital room doors shutting gently. Patient visitors sat on their benches – others in silence, others on phone and others leading newspapers or chatting. And as always, the air was typically

laced with the characteristic smell of alcohol disinfectant.

Professional 1707: Let's take the stairwell up to the roof top.

Bridgestone: Sure.

In a moment, the helicopter – a blue and white Bell 206 Jet Ranger came into view, engines and rotors idle on the red and white helipad. Bridgestone and his handler walked towards the helicopter and stopped by the helicopter's cabin door as the pilot asked:

Pilot: I am Captain Raul Reyes. Welcome aboard, no time, let's move... your safety harness is on the seat.

1707: Good luck brother... I have to go now.

Bridgestone: See you later in the house... *(he said as he got into the helicopter).*

Suddenly the helicopter engines began to hum after Captain Reyes pushed a few buttons and switches in the cockpit, which was followed by a chime sound of the cockpit electronics. Aircraft systems one-by-one arose to life as

instrument panels and digital display screens teemed with life and mechanical gauges moved and lit up with a cold blue, green and white glows. The rotor blades cut through the cold night's air slowly and then faster and faster until they reached a set pre-set climax.

Reyes rested his right hand on the cyclic control stick, not grabbing too tight but lightly and steadily, as his left hand gripped the center-place collective stick. He slowly pulled up the collective stick and the helicopter slowly and majestically lifted from the helipad and hovered it just a few metres above the helipad. The green perimeter marker lights of the helipad glowed brightly, reflecting off the blue belly of the helicopter and its white and blue sides as well. He switched on the helicopter's radio communication systems and then his voice came through – calm, measured and professional.

Captain Reyes: New York Airspace Control, helicopter Romeo-Delta Seven-Five-Niner on the radio. Requesting clearance for departure to Floyd Bennett Field Hospital Landing zone pad. Over. *(He finished and radio static followed).*

As the rotors pushed air downwards on the helipad with a great power-rush, Captain Reyes held onto the cyclic control stick, making micro-adjustments of tiny inputs on the control stick to keep the helicopter hovering and locked in place to avoid drifting away. The Airspace control responded shortly:

NY Airspace Control: Maintain your position. Ready for take-off upon clearance.

Reyes gently pushed on the helicopter foot pedals to keep the aircraft nose aligned to avoid spinning from torque, as the tail rotors blades changed pitch angles and thrusted with greater intensity to counter the torque generated by the main overhead rotor-blade spinning. Then the voice on NY Airspace control returned with a static preceding a crackling voice over the radio:

NY Airspace Control: Romeo-Delta Seven-Five-Niner, New York Airspace. You are cleared for take-off. Proceed to Floyd Bennett Field Hospital Helipad. Maintain current altitude till departure vector is clear. Advise when airborne. Over*. (Static followed).*

Reyes: Affirmative New York Airspace. Romeo-Delta Seven-Five-Niner will maintain current altitude till departure vector is clear and advise when getting airborne. Over (static followed). Sir, we're getting cleared for take-off. Buckle up.

Bridgestone: Yes sir *(he buckled his safety belt).*

NY Airspace Control: Romeo-Delta Seven-Five-Niner your flight vector is clear and you're free to take-off.

Reyes: Copy that NY Air control. I am going airborne. Over *(static).*

Reyes pulled up the center-place collective and the overhead rotor-blades increased their pitch, biting more into the air above as the rotor noise thickened and loudened as the aircraft lifted into the air.
He pushed forward the cyclic control stick gently, dipping the nose of the aircraft enough to transition from hover-mode into forward flight and made micro-adjustments inputs on the cyclic control to keep the aircraft flying on intended flight vector while also shifting his feet gently on the pedals to adjust aircraft nose and yaw the aircraft sufficiently to focus on the

flight path vectors countering the torque generated by the spinning rotors overhead.

As they flew over Long Island in the night, the city far below was colourfully lit, resembling a continuum of light that gradually thickened the more it stretched westwards in the direction of Brooklyn. Initially, it appeared like scattered constellation of stars with isolated pockets of warm yellow dots of light filling the landscape of sub-urban homes, silent streets and commercial streets. The lights appeared spaced out and density gradually began to build.

Roads came into view as bright car headlights flowed in one direction and red car taillights in the opposite direction. Parking lots had cars moving in, others out and others stationary under the yellow glow of overhead sodium street lamps, which along the road street lights stood out in evenly spaced positions illuminating the roads below.

As the helicopter approached Brooklyn and the main city, buildings became taller as the yellow sub-urban lights were gradually replaced by cooler white lights with sharper contrasts of corporate buildings, apartment towers, and shopping malls as lit square and rectangular

windows riddled partially or entirely building structures with light forming irregular patterns with the unlit windows.

Reyes: We're in Brooklyn now, do you have your harness ready?

Bridgestone: Strapped on...

Reyes: I see Jolly's High-Rise Apartments, some 50 metres ahead by approximation.

Bridgestone: I'm ready.

The city no longer appeared scattered but continuous with the city lights growing in density forming a lit field that stretched out to the horizon. The Brooklyn Bridge in the distance appeared as elegant lines of light that linked the bright clustered lights of the Brooklyn across the dark waters of the East River to the bright towers of Lower Manhattan's Financial District.

Finally, the helicopter hovered lightly above Jolly's high-rise apartments and Bridgestone jumped to the rooftop.

Reyes: Good. I'm outta here *(he yelled).*

The helicopter lifted into the air, gushing down large streams of air that threw the dust on the rooftop up and Bridgestone's black coat whipped against the air violently from the helicopter rotor wash, with the coat lapels snapping and folding back on themselves. His white shirt clung tightly to his neck, chest and arms before loosening again in split seconds repeatedly. His purple tie whipped sharply from side to side and also cacked against his shoulder and collar. His trousers pulled tight along his thighs as his legs fluttered and twisted around the calves as he briefly struggled against the weight or force of the rotor wash.

After the helicopter was far off into the distance, Bridgestone tied his harness gear onto an orange roofing rope that was tied around and locked onto a strong, firm large steam-pipe. He then walked to the edge of the building and radioed Julia.

Bridgestone: 66 to 1506, I'm on the roof of the target building ready to scale down to the 10th floor.

Julia: 1506 to 66, great. The target is still in the building, waste no time.

Bridgestone immediately began the quick descent as the rope uncoiled on the rooftop, spilling and snaking it out over the edge as his weight stretched it out eventually straightening.

His leather shoes tapped against the light-green glass windows of the apartment high rise building. Eventually he reached just above the 10th floor and paused. The cold wind of the night gently blew his coat and purple tie.

Bridgestone: I'm just above the 10th floor, which window do I break*? (He asked Julia over the radio quietly).*

Julia: Just beneath you... I see the target on my drone feed, right beneath you. Use your explosive charges, climb up or sideways to safe-distance before you detonate.

Bridgestone: Affirmative.

Bridgestone set up the explosive charge at the foot of the window pane and climbed up to a safe-distance and detonated it remotely,

resulting in an explosion that sent shards of glasses into the room, causing panic.

Thomas Baker: What was that?! *(He said lying on the floor)* Guards, look up the window and check what it was!

A body-guard armed with a Glock 19 pistol walked up to the broken window carefully and tried to check what was going on the outside, he suddenly looked up and was met by Bridgestone's kick on the face as he *swung into the room with gunfire from his silenced M24 X3 pistol. The guards quickly escorted Baker out of the room to the stairwell through the door as two guards exchanged fire with Bridgestone before being hit and falling unconscious to the ground. Bridgestone removed his harness gear as other tenants in the apartment buildings were alarmed and screaming. Bridgestone rushed out of the room for the stairwell, and looked down – seeing Baker and his men escaping.*

Bridgestone: 66 to 1506, target is getting away. I am in pursuit down the stairs.

Julia: 1506 to 66, got it. Get him. I am picking up a 911 call in the area, the cops will be swarming in anytime. Get out of there.

Bridgestone: Affirmative.

Baker: Let's take that empty elevator to the ground floor!

Baker and his men rushed into an open elevator on the seventh floor, and the door shut as Bridgestone rained fire from his silenced pistol on the closing elevator door with no successful hits, leaving bullet marks on the closed elevator doors. He stood near a second elevator door that was down on the third floor. He pushed a button and soon it arrived as the doors opened up with a "ding" sound. He got in and pressed another button shutting the doors. When he got to the ground floor, Baker's security detail at the entrance door was waiting for him, as he saw Baker get into his SUV and speed away. After a brief fire-fight he neutralized Baker's security, rushed to the open road.

The traffic lights were suspended above the Brooklyn roads glowing in red, amber and green interchangeably, as cars halted and moved through intersections. Car headlights

shone brightly on the road, curving paths of white light through the night as red tail lights glowing sparkled reflections on the asphalt road beneath. The city timed with life as pedestrians, young and old, male and female walked along the streets, minding their own businesses as some were distracted by police cars and their loud and flashing sirens coming down the road from a far.

Bridgestone saw Baker's SUV getting further into the distance and hijacked a yellow taxi cab driven by a middle-aged Jamaican man – dressed in Jamaican colours and hairstyles, forcing the man into the front passenger seat.

Bridgestone: I'm going to need this car. So, move in!

He got into the car and accelerated up the road in pursuit of Baker's SUV that was still in his view. As he drew behind him visible on his left-side mirror he saw blue and red flashing sirens on police cars approaching Jolly's Apartment complex.

As he drew closer to Baker's SUV, gun muzzle flashes erupted – Baker's security detail in the car were firing from side-windows and the sun-

roof. Bullet tracers glowing mid-flight, tore through the air, cracking with loud bangs and pops upon impact on the taxi's bonnet and cracking the front windshield as the Jamaican man ducked for cover as Bridgestone swerved left and right to avoid gunfire and oncoming traffic.

The Jamaican man screamed, still ducking low, his hands over his head as glass shards and dust fell around him. Bridgestone unflinched, remained focus on the road ahead as he stepped on the accelerator. The streets blurred around him, headlights streaked past his view, throwing the city in motion.

An NYPD patrol car at an intersection noticed the violent car chase and so loud sirens arose, blue and red flashing lights overhead on the roof lit up in quick succession. A female officer on the front passenger seat reached for her radio as his male counterpart on the driver's seat hit the accelerator pedal, speeding up, and swerving left into the main road giving chase.

Female officer: Central this Unit-6 Adam 27, we've got an active pursuit – possible shots fired. A yellow cab heading westbound on Atlantic Avenue approaching Flatbush Avenue.

Taxi cab in pursuit of a black SUV, multiple occupants, firing from vehicle. Over. *(Static followed).*

The NYPD car gave chase sirens wailing with repeating flashes of blue and red on the car roof and grille. The security detail targeted the police car as well, which began to swerve left and right behind the taxi cab.

Baker: Damn you! … don't fire on the police!

Lead security detail: Yes sir! *(He shouted in acknowledgment from the sunroof).*

Female officer: Central! Unit-6 Adam-27 is taking fire. Repeat – shots fired! Shots fired! Requesting immediate back up. Over! *(Static followed).*

Central Command (on Radio): Copy that Unit-6 Adam-27, maintain eyes on target, engage if necessary. Backup units – 4 minutes out. Over *(Static followed).*

The chase moved into a darker stretched alley between buildings, and a visible building under construction on the left – rising taller in the night sky as temporary work lights hung from

cables. Its concrete frame stood out with the floors stacked up in rigid geometry, with open levels lacking any glass and walls. At the top were red and white steel reinforcement bars projecting upwards and held into the concrete with great firmness.

A bright orange metal scaffolding with workers in reflector helmets and jackets moving up and down the floors through it to different floors, went up the building along its sides. It was wrapped in sections with green safety netting whose loose edges glowed faintly under the night construction work lights.

Suddenly a cement truck ferrying cement across the road rushed in to Bridgestone's view from an alley on the right and the alarmed truck driver suddenly hit the brakes and so did Bridgestone. Baker looked over his shoulders and thanked God for the cement truck as his SUV sped off down the dark alley.

Bridgestone: Damn it*! (He said as he opened the driver's door and ran around the cement truck where he opened fire on the SUV in the near distance, shattering its rear tinted window).*

The police car halted behind the taxi cab. The two officers rushed out of their vehicle with Glock-19 pistols drawn out and headed straight for the Jamaican man, who still ducked in his passenger seat, covered in glass dust and pieces of glass from the windshield.

Female Officer: Hands over your head! I am Officer Samantha NYPD. Where's your gun, and your driver?

Jamaican: I got no gun man! I am the driver – a bald man hijacked me! He went by the cement truck.

Officer Samantha: Hey John, stay with him.

Samantha went behind the truck from the front and found Bridgestone, who quickly shut his earpiece communications systems and body cam.

Officer Samantha: Stay where you are! Put your gun down and kneel on the ground!

Bridgestone: This is a mistake… I am MI6 undercover in pursuit of a dangerous Mafia cell here in New York.

Samantha: I'm not buying that… hands up on your head!

Suddenly a white van rushed past Samantha, scaring the hell out of her. Headlights fully bright and stood near Bridgestone, the side-door opened – it was the Contractors Corp agents on back-up role that was in pursuit behind the police car but took a different route passing in front of the construction site. A black male agent in black tactical gear shouted:

Agent: Professional 1807 here, 66 get in!

Bridgestone rushed in as Samantha was still partially disoriented. The side-door shut and the white van sped-off as Samantha opened fire but the rear window was bullet proof. She reached for her shoulder-radio and said:

Officer Samantha: Central, Unit 6-Adam 27 – white van fleeing southbound, I have visuals on southbound through service lane off Atlantic Avenue, just east of Flatbush Avenue. Vehicle is headed onto State Street.

The white van swerved left on the main road and the occupants including Bridgestone

rushed onto a parked red Toyota Camry with a driver inside.

Van driver: We have to ditch this van. The police have visuals on it.

Bridgestone: Good.

Sedan driver: Get in!

Bridgestone and his counterparts got into the red Toyota Camry sedan with tinted windows and the car gently swerved into the main road to avoid attention and suspicion as police sirens, red and blue flashes appeared on the rear-view mirror some one hundred metres away.

As they drove into the distance, Bridgestone looked back over his shoulders from the rear passenger seat and saw NYPD cars swarming on the van. Officer Samantha and her partner John signalled to the cement truck driver to drive through the alley to the construction site.

Samantha: Tell the taxi driver he needs to come with us to write a statement at Central. And kindly drive his cab to Central. I'll drive to

meet up with back-up units ... I hear them halted down the alley.

John: Sure Sam, see you downtown*. (He said as he walked to the taxi cab).*

Samantha took their unit car and drove up to the end of the alley intersecting with State Street. She found back-up units inspecting the abandoned white van. She got out of the car, gently shutting her door and approached her fellow officers.

Samantha: Evening officers, Samantha here... Unit 6 Adam 27. Suspect was bald, black suit, white top, purple tie – looked British, he said he was MI6 undercover after a Mafia-terror cell in New York.

Officer Bradley: MI6… that's a diplomatic friction we got here… call Chief Benson, tell him we have friendly intelligence operatives on US soil without our acknowledgement.

Samantha: Yes sir. *(She reached out for her Nokia 710 smartphone and walked not far away and made a call to her station chief).*

Chief Benson received a call in his office and saw it was Officer Samantha.

Samantha: Evening Chief, what is it… suspect on the high-speed chase is MI6 undercover, at least that's what he said. I think I got him on body cam; I can upload his image from the laptop in my car.

Benson: OK, meanwhile let me patch through to MI6 and confirm if they have operations on our soil.

Samantha: Yes sir. *(Benson hang up the call)* Boys… I got the suspect on body cam. Chief Benson needs the footage so let me upload it right away.

Officer Bradley: Sure, Sam. Let me take a look too.

Samantha reached for her laptop in the backseat and shut the rear passenger door, placing it on the boot of the car and took an SD card off her body cam and loaded it onto the laptop. She opened the recent files sections and the video came to life.

Officer Bradley: Hey… I think I know this guy… from Iraq… he was SBS when I was in US Army, he was Thomas somebody.

Samantha: You know him?

Bradley: Yeah… joint operations in Iraq, 2003, 2004. Upload it to Central. Suddenly Samantha's phone rang and she picked it again.

Samantha: Hello Chief…

Benson: MI6 says that's their guy… he's undercover on a mission and the Feds have been informed about it… so rest the case...and get rid of that video please.

Samantha: Yes sir. *(Benson hang the phone).* It's federal level shit – FBI, MI6 kind of stuff. Benson says we rest the case.

Bradley: Sure… who's he after?

Samantha: Above our clearance… let's go back to Central.

She shut the laptop, put it back in the backseat and got into her unit car.

Samantha: See you guys in the morning. *(She said as she ignited the engine and swerved gently onto the main road and drove away to Central).*

Back in the safehouse in Queens, there was disappointment.

Julia: I can't believe that SOB got away. We have to begin another search, long days of surveillance again…

Bridgestone: Uhh*! (He took a deep sigh as he sat on the couch).* We'll find him again.

3 DAYS LATER
11th JANUARY 2012
2300 HRS
(CHINATOWN, NEW YORK)

The night in Chinatown, Lower Manhattan was colourfully lit and teeming with life. Red and golden bright lanterns were suspended above the narrow streets. Neon lights on restaurants, shops, car garages and more buildings flickered in layered Chinese characters in bright colours of green, blue, red, white and pink.

The architecture told a historical tale of China, with curved rooftops arching upwards at the corners, crowned with flying eaves – the fēiyán – that lifted into the night sky like wings. The roofs were covered in ceramic tiles, red in colour. Along the edges of the roofs were small stone statues of dragons, and ancient guardians and stylized beasts, which watched over the streets below.

The streets were filled with onlookers- others walking around and amazed by the colourful traditional music and dance of the "dragon dance" performers – dressed in red and yellow national attires – swinging and dancing, lifting long red and yellow Chinese dragon puppet with poles, the dancers moved in synchrony with the thunderous pulse of the drum beats, the sharp clash of cymbals, and the deep resonance of the gong which were accompanied by the flowing, melodic plucking of a "guzheng" stringed instrument weaving through the air like soft silk.

Under the glowing red and golden lanterns, the dancers lifted and lowered the dragon smoothly in quick flowing successions, with each pole rising, dipping, and rising again, seamlessly like a wave. The long dragon

puppet, whose body was painted in alternating spiral bonds of crimson (red), and golden yellow, with crimson and gold scales twinkling under the lanterns' glow, followed their rhythm as it bent in smooth arcs that rippled from head to tail, reminiscent of a serpent gliding on the waters.

The lead dancer at the front lifted the puppet dragon's head up and down, left and right, majestically making the dragon's eyes to blink with every turn, in rhythm of the music. Bridgestone from his driver's seat in the XR 95 car, watched patiently, as he waited for the Red Jackets Triad henchmen and their boss Yu Lin to walk out of the Red Dragon Casino. Julia's voice suddenly crackled in his earpiece.

Julia: I just intercepted a call to Yu Lin's phone. He is to meet with the Iron Fist Biker Gang leader at the East River harbour. He is walking out of the Casino in a moment. Wait for him.

Bridgestone: Ok, waiting.

In a moment Yu Lin and his henchmen in red jackets with yellow dragon logos embroidery at the back walked out of the Casino. His bald head sparkled under the crimson and golden

lanterns that lined the entrance of the casino. He holstered his golden eagle pistol fire-arm in his trouser, held in place by his trouser's belt in the back area, the gun pressing on his trouser with a cold touch. His men armed with MP5 SMGs escorted him to his car and 3 got into his red Toyota Highlander SUV while the other 4 got into another similar SUV in the back, all parked at the front of the casino.

They drove off, disrupting the music and dance in front of the Casino. They drove past Bridgestone's XR 95 car that was parked lights out, engines off just at a road junction overlooking the casino entrance, turning left as they headed for the harbour. Bridgestone brought his engine and car lights to life. He watched them take the next bend to the right from his rear-view mirror, and tuned his car around to follow.

He followed them patiently from a distance without raising suspicion, all the way to the harbour, where he switched off his car engines and lights, at a distance. Bridgestone unbuckled his safety belt, opened the door and walked out with his high-definition spy camera, before shutting the door again. He sneaked to a good vantage point, in between blue and red

shipping containers in a dark area of the harbour. A drone sent by Julia to follow him was right above him, hundreds of feet in the air, watching the deal that was about to go off.

The Iron Fist Biker Gang leader stepped forward to greet Yu Lin and Bridgestone took photos with his spy camera. He introduced himself by mentioning his name:

Gang leader: Evening Mr. Lin. I am Christopher Rowland, leader of the Iron Fist Biker Gang. Your weapons shipment is ready... hey, Willies, Kerry... bring in the weapons crates.

His henchmen Kerry and Willies carried a crate from a stockpile of crates and placed it between Christopher and Yu.

Christopher: I bought these from the Russian Mafia in Moscow. AK-47s, for this crate—good firepower you need. Other crates—have bazookas, AK-74s and Makarov PM pistols, also Yarygin PYa pistols. The deal was 2.5 million.

Yu Lin: That's great... let my men inspect the other crates... and it's a done deal.

Christopher: Fine by me.

Yu Lin: Chénqiáng jiǎnchále qítā xiāngzǐ(陈强检查了其他箱子。). *(English translation: Chen, Qiang inspect the other crates). (he said in Chinese).*

The two men complied and patiently inspected the other 5 crates of weapons and confirmed the items on offer.

Qiang: Lǎobǎn, wǒmen qiān de hétóng dōu zài zhèlǐle. (**老板**，**我**们签的合同都在这里了。*). (English translation: Everything we signed up for is here boss). (he said in Chinese).*

Yu Lin: Hǎo……zhàoleǐ……kāishǐ zhuǎnzhàng 250 wàn měiyuán (**好**……赵磊……**开始**转账 250**万美元**）*(English translation: Good... Zhao Lei... begin the transfers 2.5 million dollars). (he said in Chinese).*

Zhao: Shì de, lǎobǎn (**是的**，**老板**。）(English translation: Yes boss). *(he said in Chinese).*

Zhao Lei, in charge of the triad finances, picked up his tablet computer and began the digital wire transfers of the money as Christopher's finances manager confirmed the transfer from his tablet computer.

Zhao: Wánchéngle. (完成了。）*(English translation: It is finished). (he said in Chinese).*

McCartney: Boss... the money's in 2.5 million in your account.

Christopher: Let me see *(he said grabbing the tablet computer from McCartney).* Good... Mr. Yu Lin... the crates are all yours... the deal is done and I appreciate working with you.

Yu Lin: You're welcome.

The biker gang got into their Harley-Davidson Softail motorbikes and drove off as the triad members carried the weapons crates to the back of the two SUVs. Dwayne's voice crackled in Bridgestone's earpiece.

Dwayne: We have it all... I hope you took enough photos too *(on radio).*

Bridgestone: I did.

Julia: Now, get out of there... head back to your car *(on radio).*

Bridgestone sneaked in the dark and got into his car and waited for the triad to finish loading their SUVs. He watched them from the dark through his front windshield drive out of the harbour.
He ignited his car engines and lights and followed them safely at a distance, all the way to Chinatown. He watched them unload the crates from the back of Yu Lin's SUV, taking their photos with his spy camera, as they carried them into the casino. He uploaded all the images to his mission tablet computer and sent the photos to Julia.

Julia: I have received the photos... keep spying on them for more activities.

Bridgestone: Good.

A few minutes later, Yu Lin and his men got back into their SUVs and drove off, this time taking a different route out of Chinatown. He followed them from a distance to the quiet outskirts of the city in Westchester County. The trees stood dense on both sides of the road,

their barks visible in brown, and their green leaves too with the illumination of the headlights of cars on the highway. Tree branches intertwined overhead, giving rise to canopies that absorbed the car lights and fractured the moonlight into narrow silver streaks across the asphalt road.

Bridgestone's grip on the steering wheel remained firm as cars and lumber trucks drove past him in quick successions, lighting up his face and car interior with every pass. As the road descended, tree cover on both sides of the road were replaced by a wooden ranch fence and a large green ranch field, and a lit log cabin on the left side of the road in the distance appeared near a junction with trees lining up the roadsides on the right turn. The log cabin stood near a large concrete bungalow painted in white with maroon edges and ceramic tiles. He watched the two SUVs drive off the road into the private ranch estate. He passed them, and took a turn right at the junction, driving some fifty metres before stopping by the road-side.

Bridgestone: Julia, I followed the triad to the outskirts of the city, Westchester County. They drove to a wooden cabin outside a nearby large

concrete bungalow painted in white with maroon edges and ceramic tiles. Let the drone pick up activity.

Julia: I got it... I see them in the cabin on infrared. Others carrying the weapons crates to the barn, with a red farm tractor packed in front.... audio signals picking up... just casual talks... wait... I hear a phone ringing... intercepting the call...

Bridgestone: Tune me in. I see the red tractor near the barn, yes those look like the same weapons crates they bought at the harbour.

Julia: Got it.

Thomas Baker Jnr's voice became audible on Bridgestone's earpiece as Julia relayed the intercepted phone call.

Baker (on phone call): Yes Mr. Yu Lin, do you have my weapons?

Yu Lin: Yes boss... the deal at the harbour went well.

Baker (on phone call): Kindly ensure security is in place at the Casino and the ranch estate as

well. I will send someone the day after to pick up the crates. I want top-level security for a high-profile meeting tonight at the Statue of Liberty, on Liberty Island tonight. I am meeting Victor Chavez, the legendary arms dealer from Venezuela.

Yu Lin: Boss... no worries... I will handle that. What time?

Baker: Midnight... don't be late.

Yu Lin: I'm leaving right away... my men will drop by the casino to collect more ammunition. I will not disappoint sir.

Baker: Good. See you then. *(he hung up the call).*

Dwayne's voice crackled in Bridgestone's earpiece.

Dwayne: 66, that's a new window we have. Finish him tonight.

Julia: We're leaving the safehouse immediately for Skyport Marina Pier. We have a man there with a fishing boat and an underwater propelling vehicle to bypass the Coast Guard.

Bridgestone: Looks like Baker has the Coast Guard in his payroll... no way he's going to be there without Coast Guard authorization.

Julia: Noted, we'll look deeper into that later after you finish the job.

Bridgestone: Good. See you at the pier... 66 out.

Julia: Affirmative.

LATER THAT NIGHT
2330 HOURS
Sky Port Marina Pier

The air at Sky Port Marina Pier smelled of a mix of salt and fuel. The pier was well lit in the night, with the pier lights illuminating the dock waters of the East River, with the ripples fracturing the boat lights into dazzling movements of light on the surface. Along the docks, boats rested moored, with hulls painted in contrasting colours of red, blue, grey and white.

On the dockside road, a car approached the pier with its headlights bright. It was Bridgestone in his XR-95 car. The headlights briefly swept across the pier illuminating the cars parked nearby and the boats moored at the docks, before it stopped near a white van with Julia and Dwayne waving nearby under the glare of the bright headlights. He switched off the engines and car lights, unbuckled his safety belt and walked out before shutting the door gently.

Julia: Finally, you are here... it's 30 minutes to midnight, we'd better hurry.

Dwayne: Your diver's equipment and the under-water propulsion vehicle is on the boat.

Bridgestone: OK... (*he said as he locked the car doors with the car's remote control).*

The three walked to the pier to a white boat with a middle-aged bearded man in a typical fishermen's casual attire- a checkered blue and red shirt, a khaki-green sleeveless body warmer vest, blue jeans trouser, black hand gloves, and rubber fishing boots.

Julia: 66, this is 3331, Josh Rolins. Rolins, this is our new recruit -66- Thomas Bridgestone.

Josh Rolins: Nice to meet you 66, get in.

Bridgestone: Nice to meet you 3331, or should I call you Josh.

Josh: Your diver's gear and equipment is in the cabin. Your propelling vehicle too. You might want to help me carry it when we get to the mission's insertion point.

Bridgestone: Cool.

Bridgestone, Julia and Dwayne got into the boat as Rolins unmoored the boats by untying the ropes that held it in place at the docks. Bridgestone walked into the cabin to change into his diving gear and equipment. Josh went to the wheelhouse after putting the ropes on the deck and ignited the engines and boat lights. He guided the boat off the decks gently and sped along the East River towards Liberty Island.

One hundreds meters off the Governor's Island, the boat stopped, it was midnight already and time was ticking for the narrow opportunity.

Josh: Coast guard patrol up ahead near the Liberty Island.

Bridgestone: They must be providing security for Baker under disguise of routine patrol.

Julia: You need to leave now.

Josh: Julia, Dwayne help me cast the nets.

Bridgestone: I see one coast guard boat approaching.

Julia and Dwayne cast the nets into the river as Josh and Bridgestone plunge the underwater propelling vehicle into the sea, where it floated after a splash.

Josh: Deflate the floaters to sink in. Take this harness... tie it around you and lock the tethered hook it onto the vehicle. Push a yellow button on the controls to deflate the floaters, the blue one to inflate them, the green one to switch on the propulsion system, red one to switch them off. I have preset the GPS glide path into the vehicle's computer. It will guide you straight to the docks of the Island and back to the boat on your return trip.

Bridgestone: Good... it's time. *(He said and dived into the water. He tied his harness around locked onto the underwater vehicle, deflated the floaters* and it sank into the waters with him, where he pushed the green button to bring into life the propellers.

He hung onto it from the sides clenching the side handle bars as its rear propellers cut into the water, gliding him away from under the stationary boat, towards Liberty Island with the propellers humming as the Coast guard approached from the island. Josh, Julia and Dwayne lowered their fishing lines into the deep, reflector jackets on.

Half-way to Liberty Island, Bridgestone saw from within the waters the Coast Guard boat pass over him tens of feet above, its engines roaring underwater and cutting through with streams of huge to medium sized to small bubbles from the white foamy wake of waters from the underwater propellers of the Coast Guard boat.

Bridgestone gazed at the digital display on the side of the yellow underwater vehicle near the buttons as it displayed the the GPS coordinates

of target location and time to target countdown: 1 minute 30 seconds. The bright white lights of the propulsion vehicle cut through the dark waters of the East River in narrow cones. He looked above up ahead; he could see the lights of Liberty Island coming into view but dim and fractured.

He looked down—it was an endless depth, where colour shifted from murky green to a deep, absorbing navy-blue and then darkness beyond into the deep. Small fish (minnows) drifted past him in quick successions in silvery dazzles against the bright cones of the machine's headlights. Others swam in groups, others as lone swimmers. A minute later, the machine drew closer to the surface, its light dimmed as Bridgestone adjusted brightness from the controls pad, as the Liberty Island dock lights came into view tens of metres away.

He finally arrived at the Liberty Island's southern tip jetty. He stood floating in the water under the wooden jetty—his harness tethered to the floating underwater propulsion vehicle. Overhead, docking lights at the jetty gave soft amber glows that passed through the narrow spaces of the wooden jetty and cast narrow lines of reflections, on his face and his

black diving gear and swimwear, and the yellow propulsion vehicle as well. The lines of light danced in dazzles on the rippling water surface.

He untethered his harness from the propulsion vehicle that was floating under the decks. He pulled out a hooked tether rope from a section of the vehicle where it was coiled into and climbed on the railing at the docks, hooking the tether in place on the lowest metal railing and slowly went back into the water when he saw a triad guard walking towards his direction, with slow paced steps—unaware of his presence yet. The guard in a red triad jacket was armed with an Mp5 SMG that was hanging under his left arm on a sling attached to the back of the gun, going around his left shoulder.

Bridgestone looked above through the tiny spaces between the wooden planks of the jetty as the guards walked closer to the edge. Dust and salt on the surface of the wood fell through the gaps, almost falling into his eyes as the wooden planks creaked faintly underfoot. Much of the beams of light passing through the gaps between the planks of wood were for a moment disrupted by the guard's body, only a few gaps were left unblocked forming fewer

lines of reflections of amber light on everything beneath.

Bridgestone saw him take out a cigarette from his jacket and put it in his mouth, and then a lighter from his back pocket. He lit the cigarette, and puffed smoke into the cold blowing winds.

Bridgestone slowly swam out of under the wooden jetty, took out his silenced **M24 X3** pistol, and reached for the jetty's lowest metal railing, aimed his gun at his chin, as the guard looked into the deep seas puffing smoke into the gentle winds.

Bridgestone pulled the trigger twice and the guard fell over the railing, almost into the water but caught him and covered his mouth as his feet gushed into the water. He pulled him to under the jetty and dragged him into the water and finished him off quietly with his combat knife.

Bridgestone climbed on the jetty—lined with empty wooden crates. He saw the Statue standing tall in the distance beautifully illuminated against the Newark City backdrop. He saw 6 more guards patrolling by the statue.

He moved crate-to-crate and got close enough. He heard them speak in Chinese.

Guard 1 (Ming): Wáng, liú, wǒ méi kàn dào chén. (王，刘，我没看到陈。) *(English translation: Wang, Liu, I do not see Chen).*

Liu: Bié dānxīn, míng……tā zǒu dào xiàmiàn de mǎtóu qùle. (别担心，明……他走到下面的码头去了。). *(English translation: No worries, Ming... he walked to the jetty down there).*

Ming: Hǎo de. Wáng, zhōu hé wèi zài dǎo de lìng yīduān xúnluó……yě jiùshì dōngběi bù. Sōuchá líndì gōngyuán, kàn kàn yǒu méiyǒu rùqīn zhě. Hái yào jiǎnchá běibian de mǎtóu……ānquán bìxū yánmì. Wǒ hé liú rào dào diāoxiàng de lìng yībiān qù. *(English translation: OK. Wang, Zhou and Wei patrol on the other end of the island... the north-eastern part. Sweep the forested park for any intruders. Check the northern jetty too... security must remain tight. Liu and I will walk around to the other side of the statue).*

Wang: Yes boss. Zhou, Wei let's go.

The three men left to patrol as instructed. Ming and Liu walked to the other side of the statue. Their red jackets glared under the lamps on the island as they walked around armed with their ***MP5 SMGs****. Bridgestone took off his fins and oxygen tank and placed them by the crates. He walked speedily, gun aimed forward as he headed for the statue*.

Ming: I cannot find Chen on radio... can anybody find Chen on radio...

Zhou (on radio): Boss, Chen loves his cigar more than anything. When he smokes, no body bothers him. I bet he switched his radio off just to puff some smoke.

Ming: Shì a……dàn wǒ dé qīnzì qù kàn kàn tā. *(English translation: Yeah... but I will have to check on him myself).*

Zhou (on radio): We're sweeping the forested parks... no signs of intrusions here.

Ming: Good.

Bridgestone rushed over the cobblestone pathways and jumped over the railing barricade onto the green grass near the statue

complex, the well-lit statue standing majestic on the complex. He walked towards the complex, and found a back-side door partially open and walked in stealthily.

Bridgestone: I'm in Julia...

Julia: Good, we'll disable the surveillance systems to cover your movements and identity. We already disabled all exterior security cameras. No trace of your involvement.

Julia: My drone has a live feed of Victor Chavez and Baker striking an arms sale deal on the pedestal observation deck.

Bridgestone: Observation deck, got it. I will take the Accessibility-Only Elevator.

Julia: Okay... hurry.

Bridgestone made his way to the pedestal observation area level and walked outside to the edges.

Julia: I have you on my drone feed. Walk to the opposite side of the deck.

Bridgestone found Baker and Chavez on the other side of the pedestal observation deck smoking cigars over an arms sales deal.

Bridgestone: Hold it right there! I got you now*! (He said pointing his silenced pistol at Baker).*

Baker: Son of a bitch... it is you again! *(He said as the gentle winds swung his hair back and forth).*

Chavez: Who the f*ck are you boy? *(He said standing in between Baker and Bridgestone, his hair dancing in the wind).*

Bridgestone: None of your business... my business is with him.

Chavez: Leave or I kill you! *(He demanded).*

Baker: Where are my guards?

Bridgestone: Useless dogs!

Baker: Who are you? What do you want from me?

Bridgestone: A group of powerful men want you dead... and I am just here to finish that job.

Chavez pulled out his Colt .45 revolver pistol from his holster and Bridgestone finished him off with a pull of the trigger of his silenced M24 X3 Pistol.
Bridgestone: Now, it's you and me. Walk in... *(He pulled him into the building and switched off his radio and body cam).*

Julia: Dwayne, 66 just lost signal to us... running diagnostics.

Bridgestone: This is for my MI6 Partner Wallace Freeman... you the Caligula killed him in Naples, with help of someone in the Contractors Corp. I want to know who it is?

Baker: I get it... I get it... this is personal... you are not getting a thing from me!

Bridgestone shot him in the foot and he yelled out crying as he fell onto on the floor.

Baker: Stop! Please! *(he cried begging mercy on the floor).*

Bridgestone: Tell me... Why did the Pentagon ring of the Caligula kill my friend Wallace? *(He asked and shot him on the other foot).*

Baker yelled out louder, and cried out for mercy.

Baker: Aaaaaaaaah! I'm sorry... we killed him... because—because... he uncovered a dirty secret... a conspiracy... If I tell you... I am dead... my entire family will be *dead (he sobbed and cried as he confessed to his sins).*

Bridgestone: What conspiracy?! *(Bridgestone demanded an answer shouting).*

Baker: Weapons flow... government black sales involving us and... and a bunch of powerful people who we work with... they asked us to kill him!

Bridgestone: What powerful people?!

Baker: US government... Contractors Corp!

Bridgestone: Names! I want names!

Baker: I can't tell you! Or my family is dead.

Bridgestone: Thanks for the update... I bet I will get more answers from the other 4

Pentagon ring leaders. Goodbye! *(He pulled the trigger twice, killing Baker instantly).*

Bridgestone walked around picking his ammunition shell casings including on the exterior observation deck of the Pedestal near Chavez's body, and placed them in his pocket. He took out a "dirty pistol" from his side holster and implanted it onto the scene; after wiping it clean of any traces of human fingerprints and DNA with special chemical agents, and implanted false shell casings a short distance from Baker's body.

Shortly after, he took out his spy camera and took photos of Baker's body, and left the building back to the jetty. He timed the guards outside on patrol and took advantage when they decided to go to their other side of the island to continue patrol, and rushed back to the jetty. He took back his fins and oxygen tank and rushed to the edge. He wore his fins and oxygen tank and placed the oxygen hose's mouthpiece into his mouth and jumped into the water.

He untethered the propulsion vehicle from the railing and tethered his body harness to the propulsion vehicle. He pushed it into the

distance and deflated the floaters partially by pushing the yellow button. After he ignited the engines and propellers with the green button, he clenched the side bar handles and the machine propelled him as it sank, moving towards the fishing boat near Governor's Island.

When he arrived, he untethered his body harness from the floating underwater vehicle. Dwayne and Julia pulled him off the water into the boat. He then helped Josh with the vehicle's tether that was hooked to the boat. Josh then sped off the boat back to Sky Port Marina Pier with the propulsion vehicle towed behind, floating on the surface.
The deck of the boat had a net full of fish, slapping their tails onto one another, gasping for air.

Bridgestone: What catch you got tonight? (*He said as they approached the pier).*

Julia: Yes... a nice catch tonight...you caught a big fish too.

Bridgestone: Here take the SD card off the camera for the confirmation kill*. (He said giving*

the camera to Julia). I think I need to take off this swimwear and change into my clothes.

Julia: Dwayne, upload the photos to Director Natasha. Tell her Baker is finished.

Dwayne: Cool.

Josh steered the boat safely to the docks and docked the boat gently before mooring it on the wooden jetty. He then pulled the heavy propulsion vehicle with the aid of a rotary winch, welded on the back of the boat, that allowed him and Dwayne to place it on the deck of the boat near the net. Shortly, Bridgestone returned from the cabin, fully dressed in his official black suit, white shirt, purple tie and leather shoes.

Bridgestone: I think we're done here... you came in handy Mr. Rolins.

Rolins: Welcome son... any time... always find me here by the docks.

Julia: We're grateful too... see you again soon.

Rolins: No problems sister!

Julia, Dwayne and Bridgestone got off the boat back to the parking lot of the Sky Port Marina.

Julia: Let's drive back to Queens, stay behind me Tom.

Bridgestone: Got it.

They quickly got into their vehicles and drove off into the main road under the FDR Drive elevated highway into the E 23rd St. Road, taking the first turn right into 1st Avenue and then joining the 495 Road from the E 35th St. Road, which led them over the East River to Brooklyn and all the way to Queens, to the safehouse.

12th JANUARY 2012
0200 HOURS
SAFE HOUSE
QUEENS, NEW YORK

Bridgestone, Dwayne and Julia were on secure live communications on video call to Director Natasha, who was quick to congratulate them on the mission's success.

Natasha: Your performance is commendable 66, and to you 1506 and 1507. That wraps up the Blood Contract Operation. Now 66 has to be ready for the next target—Alejandro Fonseca, a senior Caligula leader in the Pentagon ring. Our intel says he fled to his base in Paraguay—a forested area, actually a jungle near the border with Argentina not far from the "Rio Parana" river. He runs narcotics and paramilitary services for the Paraguayan Army in suppressing rebel southern elements of the *Paraguayan People's Army (EPP),* a Marxist-Leninist group that fights for the rural poor by attacking the rich estate owners in the north. The southern wing funds the north through organised urban crime and border smuggling. The EPP has a splinter faction active mostly in the north but partial criminal activities in the south as well—*the EML - Army of Marshall Lopez- the Ejercito de Mariscal Lopez*. Fonseca has another base in the rural north to help the Paraguayan Army and Police fight these militia, but mostly he spends time in the south where our last intel collected by spies on the ground and satellite feed place him.
66, this operation is code-named Verdant Blood Hunt, part of the wider Operation Pentagram. You will partner with Mexican and Argentinian military naval forces to reach his

camp. Fonseca's drug networks have intoxicated societies in Mexico and Argentina heavily, this is why both governments have decided to cooperate with us.
1506 and 1507 will fly you in to Florida to meet your new handlers—2511 and 2512 in Miami. They will fly with you to Tampico, Mexico to meet the Mexican Navy's Special Forces, *the "Fuerzas Especiales de la Armada de Mexico"*. Commander Javier Ortega Salazar will escort you to Argentina from the ASTIMAR I naval shipyard in Tampico, on the Allende class anti-submarine frigate *ARM Francisco J. Mina*, headed for joint military exercise off Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2 weeks time. Until then, you are awarded a short holiday to relax with family and friends, as you prepare for the next kill. 2511 and 2512 will feed you with more intel and brief you more on the mission in Miami, Florida.

Bridgestone: Yes ma'am... or should I say Director Natasha.

Natasha: Regardless, congratulations on your first mission success. Prepare for the next. I am headed to brief the Chief Intelligence and the Board on your success. See you soon. Out.

The flat TV screen at the safehouse garage went blank as Bridgestone breathed a sigh and got up from his chair.

Bridgestone: What a night… I need a shower and some sleep.

Julia: I'll get some milk for us all, and then we go to bed. Mission accomplished, boys.

Dwayne: That milk would be useful…

Julia walked to the kitchen for boxes of milk. Dwayne went to the living room, turned on the TV, and fell onto the couch, covering himself with a blanket. Breaking News filled the screen: Billionaire Thomas Baker Junior was found dead alongside wanted Venezuelan arms dealer Victor Chavez on Liberty Island. A female reporter from WNBC was reporting live:

Reporter: Lynda Baquero reporting live from Liberty Island, where New York Police and Coast Guard officials have confirmed the deaths of American billionaire Thomas Baker Junior and a second individual identified as Victor Chavez—a Venezuelan international arms dealer wanted by the FBI and Interpol. Behind me, city police and Coast Guard officers

are pulling out the bodies. They report that a gun was found at the scene—a Glock 19 pistol—and three shell casings as well. The mystery killer has not yet been identified, as authorities are still gathering forensic evidence. Above me, an NYPD helicopter is searching the island with searchlights, while K9 units sweep the forested park areas for any signs or clues left behind by the killer. The motive for the murders is not known at the moment, but investigations are ongoing. I am Lynda Baquero, reporting for WNBC.

Bridgestone: It's on the news now.

Dwayne: All CCTV cameras on the island were scrambled for the duration of your mission—no trace leads back to you.
Julia: That's right, Tom… have your glass of milk.
(She handed a glass of milk to Bridgestone).
And Dwayne, this is for you*(She handed Dwayne his glass).*

Bridgestone slowly sipped his milk and finished it while watching the breaking news replay. When he was done, he went straight to his room, changed into a towel, and took a long shower before falling asleep.

12th January 2012
Queens Safehouse
0930 Hours

Bridgestone, wearing a navy-blue jacket, white T-shirt, blue jeans, and light brown hiking boots, sat alone on a bench outside the safehouse. He watched the neighbourhood come alive as he reflected on the previous night's mission and Oliver's death. He felt he had finally avenged him—but the mission was not over yet, and nothing could bring him back. He vowed not to stop until he uncovered the full conspiracy behind his death. Julia and Dwayne joined him on the bench.

Cars passed by, children played and sang in front yards. Teenagers skated and played basketball, the elderly read newspapers, while others gathered in small groups, smoking and discussing the previous night's killings on Liberty Island.

Julia: You must be thinking a lot… I know… taking a life can be—

Bridgestone: I am a soldier, Julia *(he interrupted*). I kill for my country. It's what I was trained to do… always. Right now, I miss my fiancée… she's still with MI6.

Dwayne: It's fine—not against protocol if you see her. As long as mission specifics don't reach her.

Bridgestone: I will have to travel to London for a while… I will join you in two weeks before we head for Florida. Or I just fly straight to Florida from London and meet you there.

Julia: Okay, that's fine. I'll let Captain Kevin Dunn know. He's still in town—he was to remain until the flight to Florida, before flying back to Zürich. He will fly you back home and back to Florida.

Bridgestone: Prepare my luggage and items… I fly tonight.

Dwayne: Cool.

Bridgestone: I need to make an important call. Can I get some privacy please.

Dwayne: Fine by me, I have to process intel collected by agents in Brooklyn. See ya later *(he said and walked back to the house).*

Julia: Ok, Tom, you need to take a walk too, to relive the weight in you.

Bridgestone: Yes, that would be great.

Julia: I need to go help Dwayne with the intel analysis. See *ya (she said and walked back to the house).*

Bridgestone got up and walked down the pavements in the neighbourhood, towards a McDonald's restaurant in the area. After walking thirty meters down the pavement and reached the restaurant entrance. He took out his secure phone and called Ms Watson. The phone beeped for a while, as he walked down to a table far off in the corner with no one seated. Finally, Ms Watson picked up the call.

Watson (on phone): Hello Tom, it's been a while... I saw the news...

Bridgestone: One head of the five-headed snake is down, four more to go...and I got some answers from Baker on the conspiracy that

killed Freeman. It was the US government or a group of powerful people in the government, and someone or people in the Contractors Corp, confirming Freeman's last testimony.

Watson: Why the hell do our closest most trusted ally kill one of us... an MI6 agent?

Bridgestone: Freeman uncovered a black weapons sales conspiracy in the US government, with connections in the Contractors Corp. Baker did not tell me who, he was bleeding and dying anyway, so I finished him off. I will find out more in my next mission.

Watson: This is taking a new turn; I will call the Foreign Secretary right away to my office...we need to tread carefully or we lose another agent.

Bridgestone: And I want Sally off this case; I can't lose her.

Watson: That is fine Tom. I will bench her off this case.

Suddenly, a white female McDonald's waiter arrived to make queries, interrupting his call

politely. Her name- Jessica Flinch engraved on a small rectangular golden plaque buttoned on the left breast area of her yellow McDonald's T-shirt.

Waiter (Jessica): Hello sir, what may I bring you.

Bridgestone: Hold on *(he said to Watson on phone),* a plate of French fires and a bottle of Coke.

Waiter (Jessica): Ok sir, getting it for you right away.

Bridgestone: Thank you.

Jessica left for the kitchen to inform the cook to prepare some French fires.

Bridgestone: Yes, continue please.

Watson (on phone): Did he say who in particular in the US government?

Bridgestone: No, he never did. But we need to start digging. Call FBI Agent Melissa Thompson, she is on an assignment in Prague, undercover

against the Caligula. She needs to start digging on who in Washington killed Freeman.

Watson: To avoid any further diplomatic friction already growing in Washington because of our Nuclear Deal with Iran, we need to keep this quiet, and President Bowman, just got re-elected last November for his last term, exposing the conspiracy right now would interfere with the mid-term elections in favour of the GOP Republicans who are already showing discontent in American superior role in NATO-European Security and will find every excuse and advantage to deepen the attacks on the Democrats and Bowman's administration. President Bowman has been very instrumental in NATO and European security through peace and diplomacy against growing threats from Moscow since the 2008 invasion of Georgia. The GOP's approach would leave us funding security a lot more on our own and if anything, their insistence on more missiles in Poland and Romania closer to Russia's borders would only heighten the tensions we have with Russia.

Jessica: Sir, he's your French fires and Coke, enjoy please *(she said placing a plate of French fries and a bottle of Coke on the table).*

Bridgestone: Thank you *(he said holding the phone aside for a brief moment before putting it back on his ear as the waiter walked away).* Yes, you are good on point. So, when should Melissa start digging?

Watson: After we get to the bottom of this conspiracy and after all the Caligula leaders are dead. Finish the mission first, come home and we fix this together, no rushes.

Bridgestone: Ok, I am flying to London tonight, my next mission is two weeks away – Alejandro Fonseca, Paraguay, coordination with Mexican and Argentinian Navy Special Forces on this one. I will send you the files on my flight back to London tonight.

Watson: Good.

Bridgestone: What have you got from Project Convallaria?

Watson: A lot of data is streaming in..... our intel analysts are digging through.

Bridgestone: Ok, ma'am. See you tomorrow morning.

Watson: Ok, bye *(she hung up the phone).*

Bridgestone then called Sally, and waited for her to pick the call as he took the first bite of his French fries. Finally, the call went through.

Bridgestone: Hey honey?

Sally: Hey sweetie...I saw the news, one Caligula down, that's the first step in avenging Wallace.

Bridgestone: There's more to know but I can't speak now, it is a long story on the conspiracy. I asked Watson to bench you off the case, I don't want you digging into dirty shit that might harm you.

Sally: Ok, I get it.

Bridgestone: I am flying home to London tonight. I am coming home for a two week stay before my next mission.

Sally: I am glad to hear that. I missed you a lot.

Bridgestone: Me too. I love you Sally

Sally: I love you too honey. I am bit at work see you tomorrow when you arrive.

Bridgestone: Fine, I love you too.

Sally hung up the phone, and Bridgestone placed his phone back into his jacket. He picked up the fork and ate his French fries as he sipped his bottle of Coke.

Verdant
Blood Hunt

ACT THREE

“VERDANT BLOOD HUNT”

OPERATION PENTAGRAM

VERDANT BLOOD HUNT
ACT III
18th January 2012
0730 HOURS

The outskirts of London was engulfed in a morning mist that partially reduced visibility along the roads. The airport tarmac and asphalt taxi-ways at Stansted were wet from the raining in the previous night. Small pools of water gathered on pot-holes along the roads.

The Gulfstream Private jet ferrying Bridgestone on his return trip from New York landed majestically on the wet tarmac runway of Stansted airport, sending up splashes of water that had collected on the wet tarmac runway. The aircraft cut through the mist as it decelerated along the runway before slowing down, turning away from the runway towards the private airside meet area.
Bridgestone had fallen asleep, when suddenly a female voice woke him up.

McKnight: Sir, we just landed, wake up.

Bridgestone: Oh... Susan... thanks... what time is it? *(He said before glancing at his wrist smart watch).*

Susan McKnight: Sir, it's 7:30 a.m., we just landed at Stansted.

Bridgestone looked outside, and he saw a black Land Rover Discovery 4 with blue flashing sirens.

Sally standing outside the vehicle caught his glance through the passenger window. She waved with a smile and he responded in good kind. Susan went to the airstair door and pulled a lever that hydraulically opened the airstair door, that touched the ground after a slow controlled opening with a mechanical-hydraulic sound. Cold air of the morning rushed into the cabin as Susan went to the baggage compartment at the rear of the aircraft to retrieve Bridgestone's two leather briefcases. She returned and Bridgestone followed her down the airstair, as they walked towards the vehicle.

Bridgestone: Morning my love.

Sally: Morning Tom, six days without you was like 60 years for me...

(Bridgestone hugged her and kissed her passionately before McKnight interrupted).

McKnight: Excuse me ma'am... kindly open the boot for me please.

Sally: Oh... sorry.

(Sally used the car remote to open the boot for Susan. Susan manually opened the boot's rear door by the door handle and picked up the two briefcases and placed

them in the boot before shutting close the boot's rear door).

Sally: Thank you, ma'am... what's your name again.

McKnight: Susan McKnight...

Sally: I'm Sally Ratcliffe.

McKnight: You're most welcome. I need to go now. See you in two weeks time

(She rushed into the aircraft to pick up her belongings before meeting Captain Dunn in the cockpit).

Sally: Let's get going my love *(She said, as she opened the driver's door and Bridgestone walked around the car to open his front passenger door).*

Meanwhile in the aircraft, Susan had picked her red suitcase and umbrella and reached out to Captain Dunn in the cockpit.

McKnight: Hey Dunn, I am leaving for home - Stratford. And I kind of feel much
alone... I could make good use of someone's company for the next two weeks.

Dunn: Why not... let me unbuckle this thing... come on... let's go... *(he said as he picked his black briefcase from the co-pilot's seat).*

McKnight: Thanks...

Susan and Dunn walked out of the aircraft and Dunn reached for a control panel behind a discreet access flap on the airstair door. He pushed the "Close Door" switch and the airstair door began to rise from the wet asphalt slowly in a controlled manner with a mechanical-hydraulic sound.

Dunn: Let's grab a taxi over there.

In the distance, they saw Sally's Land Rover with blue flashing sirens passing through the security gate checkpoint onto the road leading to Thremhall Avenue. In the car Sally broke the silence.

Sally: You look tired my love. *(She said smiling and shifting view from the road up ahead into his eyes).*

Bridgestone: Yes, it was a bit hectic... Wallace was in my mind... when I pulled those shots.

Sally: You said something come up... about the conspiracy... I'm curious... I know you don't want me on this but...

Bridgestone: Alright... Baker confessed something... the US government or someone in the government wanted him dead because he uncovered a black weapons sales conspiracy from the government to the Caligula Mafia — a criminal network.

Sally turned into the A120 from the Thremhall Avenue Road as Bridgestone continued.

Bridgestone: So, the Caligula and corrupt people in the US government hired the Contractors Corp to kill Freeman.

Sally: Alright... I bet the CIA has something to do with this... a black op... it has to be... Watson should dig deep into this...

Bridgestone: She summoned the Foreign Secretary yesterday. She will come over for an afternoon visit to brief us on the details.

The mist on the road followed them for a time and it thinned as they merged into the M11 southbound road.

Sally: Alright... did you call FBI Agent Melissa Thompson... she's a friend... she could help...

Bridgestone: Watson said we should proceed with caution... not until the Caligula leadership is finished.
Sally: It's only a matter of time before we find out who killed Freeman, in the US government.

Bridgestone: Time reveals a lot about things...

The traffic was light but growing as they approached Woodford. Sally looked at her fuel gauge and realised the vehicle was running low on fuel. She drove along the M11 Road onto the N Circular Road around the Waterworks Corner roundabout and onto Maybank Road (A113) and to an Esso Fuel Pump station in the area. Bridgestone noted the Price per Litre costs on display on the price gantry.

Bridgestone: 141 Pence per litre of diesel!... Oh my! The prices are going up... they were a bit down when I left.

Sally: Yes, my love.

A female attendant in a navy-blue Esso uniform, with an Esso logo on the breast area, and under a yellow-green reflector jacket walked towards the vehicle and Sally lowered her window.

Sally: Morning ma'am... fill me the whole tank.

Attendant: Yes ma'am *(She said, and reached for the keypad of the fuel dispenser)* How much in litres?

Sally: 82, full tank.

Attendant: OK... *(She keyed in 82 litres into the fuel dispenser's keypad and inserted the fuel nozzle into the vehicle's filler neck after opening the fuel filler door).*

The attendant went back to the keypad and pushed a button to allow the diesel fuel into the tank as the numbers on the digital screen display on the fuel dispenser counted the total price and total volume of diesel fuel. Eventually the tank was full, and the fuel flow automatically stopped from an inbuilt mechanism in the fuel nozzle. She shut the fuel filler flap of the vehicle and returned the nozzle to its holder.

Attendant: That will be 115.62 pounds.

Sally gave her Barclays debit card and the attendant inserted it into a card machine and gave it to Sally to

input her PIN. After the payment, Sally took back her debit card and drove off the station. After a drive back to N-Circular road, Sally made her way to North Woolwich to catch the ferry to cross the Thames River to Woolwich area from where she drove along the Academy Road and turned right into Shooters Hill Road (A207). She went around the Sun-in-the-Sands Roundabout and took the A102 Blackwall Tunnel Approach to Greenwich area, where she stopped at Bridgestone's brick bungalow on the driveway.
They both unbuckled their safety belts, opened the car doors and gently walked out of the vehicle. The neighbours — Mr. and Mrs. Patel watering the gardens on the front yard across the short wooden fence were quick to greet them.

Mr. Patel: Hey, Mr. Thomas, it's been six days since you left! Back so soon!

Bridgestone: Yes... it was a swift business agenda, but will be away again soon in two weeks.

Mrs. Patel: That's fine... we're glad to see you're back home fine.

Bridgestone: Thank you.

Sally reached for the two leather briefcases in the back and she opened the car boot and retrieved them before shutting the door. She used the remote control to shut lock the car doors and carried the luggage to the front door. She then picked her house keys and unlocked the door and carried the luggage inside as Bridgestone followed.

Just before Bridgestone shut the front door, Max Fowler the morning newspaper vendor called his name out, a few metres behind him.

Max: Hey Tom... you're back so soon.

Bridgestone: I am back yes...

Max: I got you your morning paper. *(He pulled out a newspaper from a backpack he carried over his shoulder).*

Bridgestone unfolded the paper to read the front page, which spelled out:

US RESET POLICY ON RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA EUROPE ON ALERT AS US PRESIDENT SETS NEW NATO COURSE

Bridgestone: This worth reading through... thank you Max.

Max: Ok, see you later.
Max moved to the next house as Bridgestone shut the door close, and sat down on the couch as Sally went to the kitchen to prepare some breakfast.
Bridgestone checked his watch, it was 9:30 a.m. He switched on the television and it was the BBC Sports News with Gabby Logan as host. There was a replay clip on the previous day's match — Liverpool vs Manchester City.
Gabby Logan on the television was speaking from the studio saying:

Gabby Logan: Liverpool just made the first step toward the Carling Cup final with a 1-0 win over Manchester City at Etihad Stadium. The goal was scored by Steven Gerrard in the 13th minute from the penalty spot after a foul on Daniel Agger. Man City had a huge struggle to keep up their usual rhythm without the key players like Vincent Kompany and Yaya Touré. Man City made the effort to dominate possession in the second half, regardless, they failed at breaking down Liverpool's rigid defence. The results of the match gives Liverpool a narrow but key leverage as they head into the second leg at Anfield.

Sally spoke from the kitchen:

Sally: Honey that was a beautiful game... I had to watch it alone, sadly, when you were away. Can we catch the Manchester United vs Bolton Wanderers match tomorrow weekend?

Bridgestone: Yes honey, I will buy the tickets right away online.

Bridgestone took out his phone and bought the tickets online before turning back to focus on the newspaper. Half an hour later, Sally returned with breakfast for the morning — tea and toast bread with marmalade. They sat down at the table and conversed over the New York mission and Freeman’s conspiracy regarding rogue foreign agents in the US government and the Contractors.

Hours passed by and the sun was overhead in the afternoon. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. Sally went for it, and it was her MI6 boss Ms. Watson.

Watson: Afternoon Sally...

Sally: Afternoon boss, kindly come in.

Bridgestone was asleep on the couch after a heavy lunch meal. Sally walked to the couch to wake Bridgestone up from his slumber.

Sally: Honey... hey... wake up.

Bridgestone: Oh... sweetie... *(he said getting up to rub his eyes)* Oh... Ms. Watson... you are here.
Watson: Yes son... I'm here to discuss the details of my meeting yesterday with the Prime Minister Cameron and Foreign Minister Wesley Hague.

Sally: Yes... boss... kindly give the details.

Watson: I informed the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the conspiracy that killed Freeman and that rogue elements of the US government were involved, including the Contractors Corp. The last thing they want is tension between our two countries... and asked that MI6 proceed to investigate further with caution.

Bridgestone: Did they talk with their counterparts in the US?

Watson: No... we don't know how deep or high this conspiracy goes or who is or is not involved. As of now,

the situation is treated as "compartmented allied risk". We have to be very cautious of US intelligence, the CIA looking into our investigation. The findings of our investigations stay amongst the 3 of us, and not to forget the Foreign and Prime Minister.

Sally: That makes five of us...

Bridgestone: The Caligula is likely to be cautious now... one of them is dead... they know Baker's death is MI6's answer to Freeman's death... we need to alert our agents to be very cautious.

Watson: That's right... expect high level remote meetings of the Caligula leadership... moving up and about to a central location compromises their security. Lorenzo Cicarelli Mariottini the top leader of the Caligula has just disappeared from MI6 radar, our agents, spies can have no trace him... but I bet the Contractors Corp will find him.

Bridgestone: He is one scared rat... I will find him and finish him.

0900 HOURS, Washington DC

Meanwhile in Washington DC, Defense Undersecretary Graham Hawthorne, DoD US Marine Colonel Mark Ellison and CIA Finance and Logistics Officer Evelyn Ross met at the steps of the Jefferson Memorial overlooking the Tidal Basin. It was an emergency meeting following the death of co-conspirator Thomas Baker Jnr.

Hawthorne: Colonel, Evelyn... it's nice to meet you guys. I called you here on an emergency meeting.
Ross: Yes... it is important that we meet.

Ellison: Especially after Baker's death.

Hawthorne: Someone has figured out the names involved in the death of the MI6 Agent Wallace Freeman, the one we got rid of.

Ross: MI6 is closing in... and expect more bodies on the heap... they want revenge.

Ellison: Mr. Undersecretary, tell me you have a GAME-OVER plan.

Hawthorne: I'm drawing up something but I may need your brainstorming... maybe if we could meet same place here again tonight... we work on that. Right now, I just wanted to say we are on our own... Lorenzo and the rest of the Caligula are not picking my calls... I don't want that kind of fragmentation here!... we must continue to play as a team...always.

Ellison: I'm with you Hawthorne.

Ross: Me too... we clean up this mess together.

Hawthorne: Operation Glass Theatre stops tonight. No more trading with the Caligula... the last shipment of weapons to the Mafia leaves port tonight. We're cutting off relations with them now. Rostov is the only one reaching out... we can team with him. I want to thank you for coming, we meet again tonight.

Ross: Good.

Ellison: Yes...

Hawthorne: Let's make our way to the parking lot and back to our offices... Can't risk speaking too long here, who knows what MI6 spies could be following us.

Ross: We'd better leave.

The three conspirators hurriedly walked down the steps of the Jefferson Memorial back to the parking lot to get into their cars.

FOLLOWING DAY
14TH JANUARY 2012
1510 HOURS

Sally and Bridgestone arrived at Old Trafford in the afternoon to watch the Manchester United vs Bolton Wanderers game. The air was sharp and metallic. They gently walked into the stadium alongside other arriving football fans.
The two lovers adorned in Manchester United red T-shirts walked hands together and took seats near the entry stairs in the stadium's seating area. Sally zipped up her navy-blue jacket and so did Bridgestone as the cold began to bite, as the temperatures dropped to a range of 5°C to 6°C.

The match had begun ten minutes earlier and Manchester United was dominating the possessions.

Sally: We missed the opening rhythm.

Bridgestone: But not the closing outcome.

The crowd was teeming with life, cheering, chanting football songs.

Sally: Scholes is quite sharp today. Quite motivated than ever.

Bridgestone grabbed Sally tight, hands over her shoulders and she leaned on him.

Bridgestone: Players like him never lose timing, rather, it is the world around them that slows.

After 45 minutes of the first-half, Sally and Bridgestone were eager waiting for a goal, the players were in a tight game and neither could win. The referee added an extra minute. After a serious ball maneuvering in the middle-field, Paul Scholes had the possession of the ball and not long enough he successfully landed it on the back of the net of the opponents and the stadium roared to life.

Sally: Yes! What a goal! *(She rose to cheer).*

Bridgestone: Goooal! *(He got up and joined the cheer in the stadium).*

The Manchester players were gathered around Scholes and lifted him to the air as the referee blew the end of

first half whistle. The disappointed Bolton players were quick to leave the pitch as the Manchester players celebrated with the cheer of the crowd. They soon sat again for a restart of the second half as the players returned from their respective locker rooms. Bolton returned more energetic and thirsting for an equalizer. Manchester did not panic but managed their opponents skilfully. Every attempt at a goal felt more determined and every pass felt weighted as if already pre-determined by fate.
Sally reached for her thermos and pulled out two insulated cups from her bag.

Sally: Honey... I think we could make good use of some tea.

Bridgestone: Sure...

She poured the tea into both cups gently and closed the thermos, putting it on the floor in front of her. They both drank with swift small sips to warm up as the air was cold. Minutes and minutes passed as both sides made shots on target but unsuccessful as the crowds bit their tongues in anticipation of a goal. Then on the 74th minute, the ball landed on Wayne Rooney's feet, he maneuvered the ball through Bolton's defensive lines and kicked it ahead of Danny Welbeck who gracefully received it and shot it straight onto target like it had been destined to happen. The ball was in the net, and the stadium roared to life full of cheers and chanted songs as the Manchester players gathered around Welbeck to celebrate.

Sally: Another goal! Yes!

Bridgestone: Goooal! Two-nil!

The two lovers celebrated, but careful not to spill their hot tea. Again, on the 83rd minute - the Bolton team was stretched thin in the field, exhausted and wearing out. Manchester team took advantage of this and slipped in through their stretched middle fields and defences. The ball was in Michael Carrick's possession alone with the goalkeeper, he did not hesitate and landed it straight at the back of the net with a powerful kick, throwing the stadium again to a cheerful three-nil victory.

Sally: Goooal! Three-nil.

Bridgestone: Yes... one more time!

They celebrated and kissed as the crowd around them cheered and celebrated.
Not long enough, the game resumed after the Manchester United players finished their celebrations. The Bolton team struggled to push through in the last 6 minutes but to no avail. The time was over, at the 90th minute the
referee blew the whistle. Bridgestone checked his watch it was exactly 4:50 p.m.
The players in the field shook hands, some too disappointed and avoided any interactions with the opponents.
The crowds cheered, the Bolton fans disappointed were quick to leave.
Sally and Bridgestone left too, they walked past security to the gates outside.

Sally: That was a beautiful game.

Bridgestone: Yes, it was.

They kissed by the roadside as a taxi car pulled over near them, and he asked politely.

Taxi driver: Where to sweet angels?

Bridgestone: Euston Station.

Taxi driver: Yes sir, hop in. That's a long drive but I will appreciate your support.

Bridgestone opened the rear door of the taxi car to let Sally in. He walked around to the other side of the car, and opened the rear passenger door and got in before gently shutting it. The taxi car drove into the main road heading to Euston. At the station, the car stopped outside to let Bridgestone and Sally out. Bridgestone got out, and Sally followed carrying her back pack.

Taxi driver: Thank you very much.

Sally: You're welcome Mr. Rogers... nice ride.

Taxi driver (Rogers): Oh... see you next time.

Sally and Bridgestone took the stairs down into the Euston sub-way station.
They joined a small crowd of people waiting to board the next sub-way train to North Greenwich station. The first train that was full, rode away and the announcer

took on the public address system to announce the estimated time of arrival of the next train.

Not long enough, 15 minutes later, the empty train arrived and Bridgestone, Sally alongside other commuters boarded. Bridgestone and Sally took a seat right next to the door for a prompt exit upon arrival. The train filled with people, young, middle aged and old. Then Bridgestone noticed someone who got in to take a seat beside Sally, it was an old comrade from the Special Boat Service unit, and he was quick to reach out:

Bridgestone: Hey, John... McLaren *(he reached out for a handshake).*

John: Hey... oh... Tom... it's you... I see you caught today's match. I was there too apparently.

Bridgestone: Meet my fiancé - Sally.

Sally: Nice to meet you John, I'm former Royal Air Force - Iraq.

John: I'm former SBS, I served with Tom.

Sally: That's great.

John: So where are you now Tom.

Bridgestone: Sally and I are MI6, now.

John: Oh... cool... I'm a private security contractor for the White Wolves Contractors...

Bridgestone: That's great.

John: I heard the sad news... you lost an agent in Naples.

Bridgestone: Yes, we did... and we're digging to find the killers.

John: You'll get them... and f*ck them up.

Sally: We did...

Suddenly, the train was full and the train doors shut, before the driver pulled the lever to accelerate the train along the tracks towards North Greenwich station. Bridgestone and John engaged in a conversation that went over the glorious days of service in Iraq, as the train sped towards North Greenwich station. Sally was focused - chatting on Facebook with friends as the two long lost friends had a friendly chat. It was a long ride, at least that is how it felt like for the three ex-military friends over the nostalgic conversations on a train ride that actually took 30 minutes. The train arrived at North Greenwich station; the doors opened after the train reached a full stop. Commuters began to leave the train and; Bridgestone, Sally and John joined them. They walked to the outside where Bridgestone and Sally stopped to say goodbyes, before exchanging phone numbers. It was already dark and the sun had set in the West.

A white Land Rover drove towards them and curved, showing its sides and stopped - it was a Discovery 4 model, with the blue logo of the White Wolves Contractors company. Two civilian men in civilian attire and body armour with thigh-strapped pistol holsters on light khaki brown trousers and brown hiking boots stepped out. Its nighttime headlights were bright and the tail lights were glowing red.

John: These are my men; I am going out on a mission tonight.

Bridgestone looked at his wrist smart watch, it was 9.30 p.m.

Bridgestone: Are you headed out of the country?

John: Yes... business in Prague.

Bridgestone: Cool... I'll just take a taxi way home. See you next time.

John got into the rear seat of the white Land Rover and the two men got into the front seats. The vehicle reversed, then sped away into the road.

LATER THAT NIGHT
22.20 HOURS
GREENWICH HOME

Sally and Bridgestone just finished their evening dinner, and were quick to clear the tables before they took a shower and immediately retired to bed.

Sally: Last night was great, can we do it again?

Bridgestone: Why not? I will be away in months if not weeks again... *(he said and chuckled).*

Sally and Bridgestone the two lovers shared a passionate kiss before as they chuckled under the blanket and what followed was an hour in the night of powerful intimacy and release from the pressures of work, days of separation from both in the past days and weeks to come. Finally, they fell asleep.

The next two weeks were spent together doing all the wonderful things couples do, - shopping, hiking,

swimming and sight seeing; and not to forget the powerful nights of intimacy.

28th JANUARY 2012
STANSTED AIRPORT
LONDON
0800HOURS

Finally, the time had come for Bridgestone to depart for Florida for his next mission - as usual Sally escorted him to the Stansted Airport and kissed him goodbyes before he left the black Land Rover vehicle and shut the front door and walked into the private Gulfstream jet waiting. After the doors shut, Bridgestone waved goodbye to Sally from the side passenger window, and she waved back smiling before driving away back to MI6 headquarters.

McKnight arrived from the baggage compartment, went into the cockpit for a brief talk with Captain Dunn and asked politely.

McKnight: Can I get you anything sir?

Bridgestone: No... sir... I'll tell you when I need something.

McKnight: Ok.

Bridgestone: So, you and Dunn are seeing each other now?

McKnight: Oh... how did you know?

Bridgestone: You talk a lot more like your close today?

McKnight: Yes... uh *(she smiled).*

Suddenly the aircraft engines began to hum and the captain on the address system told all passengers to fasten their seat belts. Not long enough, the aircraft was on the take-off runway and into the air - destination - Miami Florida.
Bridgestone checked his wrist watch for the time: It was 8.30 a.m., London time.

McKnight: I hope you made good use of your holidays.

Bridgestone: My time with my sweetheart was great. We had memorable times.

McKnight: Dunn is quite a great guy. I think I should spend the rest of my life with him.

Bridgestone: If you think he's the one. Then have him.

McKnight: That's great... thanks.

After 8 hours of flight, the Gulfstream private jet finally touched down. Bridgestone was immediately woken up from his slumber by the hard landing and screeching of the tyres. The aircraft taxied off the runways to the airside-meet area, as the engines hum died down.

McKnight: We're here sir - Miami. 1506 and 1507 will be joining us...

Bridgestone checked his smart watch... it was 1.30 p.m. Miami time. They just gained five more hours of daylight traveling West from London.
He looked at the tarmac outside through the window, he saw 1506 - Julia Simmons and 1507 - Dwayne McDonald standing on the airside meet area alongside his new mission handlers he was yet to be introduced to.

McKnight walked to the airstair door and pulled a lever allowing the door to lower slowly to the ground with a faint humming hydraulic-mechanical sound. When it touched down, Bridgestone left his seat and walked to the outside of the aircraft. He was greeted by his former handlers Julia and Dwayne.

Julia: Nice to meet you 66. We meet again.
(She said and reached out for a handshake).

Bridgestone: Good to see you again Julia.
(He shook her hands warmly).

Dwayne: Sir, it is nice to see you again.
(He shook Bridgestone's hand).

Meet your new handlers, 2511 and 2512 – Kimberly Rodriguez and Vincent McDonnell, respectively.

Rodriguez: Yes... I'm 2511, I believe you are the new recruit - 66. Nice job in New York.

Bridgestone: Thanks.

Vincent: I am 2512, we fly to Tampico and then sail to Buenos Aires. I believe Director Natasha briefed you a lot on the next mission, I will just take you through the rest as we fly to Tampico.

Bridgestone: Cool.

Julia: Time is squeezed, and I guess you guys should be boarding.

The sun overhead was bright and the afternoon breeze was blowing from the oceans in the east. Julia's and Kimberly's hair were blown back and forth by the afternoon winds as they stood on the airside meet tarmac.

Bridgestone: I guess, I'll see you someday again Dwayne and Julia, working with you was great.

Julia: Ok... bye.

Julia and Dwayne turned back, walking towards a helipad in the short distance to fly back to New York. Meanwhile Bridgestone and his new handlers got into the private jet and took their seats. Captain Dunn from his cockpit pushed a button to retract the airstair door. Not long enough after the door closed, engines were humming again. Dunn slowly guided the aircraft to the taxi-way and requested permission to take off.

Captain Dunn: Miami International Air Control this is Gulfstream November Sierra 641, request permission

for take off, destination Tampico, Mexico, departure 145 *(radio static followed).*

Miami Air Control: November Sierra 641, you are cleared to Tampico International via the SUNEX FOUR Departure, then as filed. Maintain level at 410 ten minutes past departure. Departure frequency one two four point five. Squawk code 473.

Captain Dunn: Acknowledged Miami Control. November Sierra 641 is taking off.

Dunn thrusted the engines as the private aircraft accelerated down the runway, and shortly afterwards lifted to the skies. Two hours and twenty minutes later, the aircraft wheels touched down on the tarmac runways of General Francisco Javier Mina International Airport. The aircraft slowed down and was directed by the air traffic control to the airside meet area where Navy officers of the Armada de México - the Mexican Navy led by Comandante Javier Ortega Salazar of the Mexican Navy Special Forces were waiting. The aircraft stopped at the airside meet area, and engines' humming slowly died out. McKnight used the aircraft's airstair door lever to lower the airstair to the tarmac below. She then went for Bridgestone's two briefcases in the baggage compartment and carried them outside as he followed down the airstair, and so did Kimberly and Vincent. The Mexican Navy officers assisted him in carrying the luggage, placing them in their vehicles.

Commander Javier: Welcome to Mexico Amigo *(he saluted him, and shook his hands).*

Bridgestone: Much appreciated Commander.

Commander Javier: Good. No time to waste... the Colonel is waiting.

Bridgestone: These are my handlers - Kimberly Rodriguez code name - 2511, Vincent McDonnell - 2512.

Javier: Nice to meet you. These are my men Sergeant Juan Suarez and Sergeant Roberto Federico. We shall escort you to the ASTIMAR I naval shipyard to the *Allende Class* anti-submarine frigate - the *ARM Francisco J. Mina*. Colonel Leonardo de Castillo is waiting to meet you onboard.

Bridgestone checked his watch, it was - 3.20 p.m. Tampico time. They got into an armoured four by four vehicle that was at the back of a column of two. One navy officer drove them as the other drove Commander Javier. The two vehicles left the airport and straight to the ASTIMAR I Naval shipyard. 30 minutes later they arrived. The breeze from the sea was soothing and relaxing in the hot afternoon. Immediately they departed the vehicles, they walked straight to the pier and boarded the frigate as navy officers and sailors saluted them. The colonel left his quarters to greet them on the deck of the ship as the sailors took Bridgestone's luggage together with those of his handlers to their sleeping quarters.

Colonel Castillo: Welcome aboard my guests. Siéntase como en casa. Nuestro viaje a Argentina comienza en una hora.

(Feel at home. Our journey to Argentina commences in an hour time).

Bridgestone: I'm Professional 66 - or call me Bridgestone. These are my handlers - Kimberly and Vincent.

The colonel shook their hands and escorted them to their sleeping quarters guarded by armed navy sailors.

Colonel Castillo: You will share this room for the journey. Feel at home - it's a 20-day journey we have. I bet you will get along with my navy sailors and officers for the duration.
Vincent: Yes... It will be a pleasure. This operation codenamed Verdant Blood Hunt will be a pleasure working with you.

Commander Javier: Alejandro Fonseca and his drug network will be our focus as
he's our common enemy.

Colonel Castillo: We shall do a joint mission briefing in the conference room, and discuss the mission planning. We appreciate the extensive intelligence the Contractors Corporation has shared with us. Finding Fonseca has been a challenge as he has been shielded for years by elements in the Paraguayan government.

Kimberly: And we shall continue to cooperate on such matters.

Vincent: Can we do that mission briefing now?

Colonel Castillo: Anytime yes... we can. Commander Javier, get your special forces team to the conference room.

Commander Javier: Yes sir.

Ten minutes later - the joint task force sat in the ship's conference room to discuss the mission. Commander Javier led the briefing as his special forces operators sat on the table with the Colonel and alongside Bridgestone and his handlers.

Commander Javier: In about an hour's time we live for Argentina for joint military exercises and a covert infiltration mission across the borders into Paraguay. Our target is this man you see on the screen: Alejandro Fonseca. With the help of the Argentine Navy Riverine Special Forces - the Tactical Divers Group, we shall execute an operation to neutralize the drug lord Alejandro Fonseca whose drug networks has affected our both of our nations.
The contractors Corp - will provide the kill shot offering deniability to the Republics of Mexico and Argentina of any involvement. Once the Contractors Corp agent-66 gets into Paraguay, he is tasked with destruction of meth labs, fuel tanks and any other vital infrastructure that is involved in narcotics production, after neutralizing the primary target. Argentine Riverine naval special forces will extract 66 via an armed river boat on the Rio Parana.
Mexican Special Forces will extract the boat from the river via helicopter and fly below radar back to Argentine airspace.

Upon arrival at Buenos Aires, we shall fly in a Chinook helicopter to the
Argentine military base in Resistencia where we shall base our operations, and that's where the extraction team will land for a mission debrief. Commander Javier pushed a button on a remote control and satellite images of Fonseca's compound appeared on screen, before he continued.

Commander Javier: This is Fonseca's compound about 100 meters by 100 meters in size. This is a narcotics lab, this here is a meth lab, these here are fuel tanks, this here is the armoury, this over here is a garage for motorbikes, quad bikes, jeeps and trucks. This here is a back up generator and next to it a metre box & main power supply. Agent-66 of the Contractors Corp will be tasked with destroying key infrastructure with the C4 explosive charges you will be provided with - the fuel tanks, generator, power box, the trucks.

The rest of the key infrastructure will be destroyed by a stealth aircraft of the Contractors Corp - the **F-67 Ghost** adding another layer of operational deniability to Mexican and Argentine forces. Agent 66 will be supplied with GPS-homing beacons for airstrikes. The Argentine forces are well-briefed for this mission and are only preparing to receive us. Any questions?

The room was silent until the colonel spoke up.

Colonel Castillo: That was wonderful Commander. I hope your team is well prepared. This operation will be

quick and fast before Paraguayan forces can react. We shall maintain deniability of any involvement, thanks to assistance from the Contractors Corp.

Commander Javier: My team is well and ready sir.

Colonel Castillo: Present Agent-66 of the Contractors Corp with his military uniform and equipment that he will need for this operation and I want this ship sailing into the seas right away.

Commander Javier: Yes sir -

Soon enough the Mexican frigate ship left the Tampico Shipyard Pier and set sail into the seas escorted by a refuel tanker ship for a journey that would last 25 days.

18th February 2012
Apostadero Naval Buenos
Aires - ARMADA ARGENTINA
Naval Station
0630 HOURS

The Mexican Navy frigate the Francisco J. Mina arrived at the Buenos Aires Argentine Navy Pier after 25 days of sailing at sea. The morning air at dawn was filled with scent of salt in the seas. The breeze blew gently across the calm surface of the waters. The sailors aboard lowered the ship anchor into the deep once the ship docked at the pier. The loud horn sounds of ships

departing and arriving at the naval station filled the air. Bridgestone and his handlers escorted by Commander Javier and other Navy special forces operators departed the ship with their luggage as Colonel Castillo remained behind to oversee the joint naval exercises with the Argentine Navy. A CH-47 Chinook helicopter of the Argentine Navy was waiting nearby at a landing zone at the naval station. The joint task force boarded the helicopter whose rotors were already in motion, sending plumes of dust into the air.

Soon enough, the utility helicopter took off and departed for the Resistencia military base, a flight that lasted for four hours. The helicopter landed at the base and the task force was greeted by Argentine Navy Riverine Special Forces team led by Commander Esteban Ruiz de Alarcón. The twin rotors of the helicopter tore through the air, sending dust into the air, blowing into their faces as their hair were sent into rapid back and forth motion.

Commander Ruiz: Welcome to Argentina boys.
(He saluted and shook their hands).

Commander Javier: Yes commander. We're ready for this crucial mission. This here is Agent-66 of the Contractors Corp - he is our key asset for this mission. These are his mission handlers to help us coordinate the mission. When do we leave?

Commander Ruiz: Tomorrow 0400 Hours. Come on, I will show you your quarters. Then we spend the rest of the day preparing and planning for this mission. I will need all hands I can get.

Commander Javier: You have us, commander let's get going.

Commander Ruiz and his men led their guests to their quarters and showed them around the base. He introduced them to Colonel Nicolas Ferraro in charge of the military base, who welcomed them warmly before taking lead in mission planning. After a whole day of mission planning and preparation, the men retired to their sleeping quarters at 8 p.m. to rest and prepare for the actual mission.

19th February 2012
Resistencia Military Base
Argentina
0300 HOURS

Commander Javier arose early morning to wake up the ten joint task force members for the mission. Bridgestone got up, and checked his watch - it was 3 a.m. in the morning. He jumped into his sandals, grabbed his towel and headed straight to the bathroom with the rest of the men. They sang songs of war like comrades having each other's backs marching to war. After the showers, the men dressed up in their military uniforms and protective gears and so did Bridgestone who was issued a unique pixilated military camouflage uniform by the Mexican Navy Special Forces.

He was equipped with a Silenced M4 Carbine Assault rifle, 5 magazine rounds, C4 explosive charges, night vision equipment, a combat knife, his personal M24 x3 silenced pistol and GPS homing beacons for airstrikes. Colonel Ferraro walked into their quarters and demanded a line up after all soldiers were fully dressed and equipped.

Colonel Ferraro: Morning ladies and gentlemen. Today is D-Day. We have a mission to fulfil to protect our motherlands from the networks of narcotics that have killed our youth. This morning, we take a step to victory, towards a world free of this narcotics intoxication. Do not disappoint me. Let's move.

Commander Javier: Let's move boys! Go! Go! Go! To the parade outside!

The task force stepped outside of the quarters rushing to the parade outside. The sky was dark but with the glint of stars. The air was cold, but they had enough warm attire to keep them comfortable. They stood in a formation of two rows- the Argentine forces in front, the Mexicans and the Contractors Corp teams on the last row. Commander Javier, Ruiz and Colonel Ferraro stood before them.

Commander Ruiz: Ok, there's a civilian cargo aircraft transporting flowers to Paraguay. This will be a good cover for Agent-66 of the Contractors Corp to conduct a parachute jump 150km from the border, close enough to the target area. Team Argentina will extract the agent via a river boat armed with Vulcan-61 machine guns. Team Mexico will extract the boat from the river with the CH47 Chinook utility helicopter, and fly below the radar back to base. Any questions?

(There was silence).

Commander Javier: Ok, Team Mexico -

Colonel Ferraro: Parade dismissed. It is 3:40 a.m. We cannot lose time.

Commander Javier: Team Mexico follow me to the helicopter.

Commander Ruiz: Team Argentina follow Commander Javier too. You will be inserted into Paraguay on the river from the helicopter, which will fly below radar in Paraguayan airspace. And for Agent 66, you may board the cargo plane immediately, your handlers will coordinate the mission with the rest of mission command.

Bridgestone: Yes sir.

Bridgestone carried his equipment to a civilian repurposed C-53 cargo plane transporting flowers to Paraguay. The propellers were in full motion humming loudly and throwing dust in the air. The crew inside handed him his parachute-jump equipment including a parachute pack. The pilot turned on his radio equipment and communicated with the air traffic control.

Pilot: Torre Resistencia, Cincuenta y Tres Tango Sierra, listos en cabecera. Solicito salida *(Radio static)*

(Resistencia Tower, Tango Sierra 53, holding short, ready for departure. Request clearance).

Tower (on radio): Cincuenta y Tres Tango Sierra, autorizado despegue pista 86. Viento leve del noreste.

(Tango Sierra 53, cleared for take-off runway 86. Light northeast wind).

Pilot: Autorizado 86... allá vamos. (Cleared 86... here we go).

Engines roared as the aircraft rolled onto the runway.

Co-pilot: Carga estable.
(Cargo secure)

Pilot: Copiado
(Copy that).

The C-53 Skytrooper began to speed up down the runway as the crew shut the rear entry side door and locked it mechanically with a lever. The engines roared louder as the propellers cut more into the air directing airflow under the wings. Soon enough, the cargo aircraft majestically lifted into air, fuselage gleaming against the crescent moon-lit dark skies over Resistencia.

Bridgestone looked at the city below, from the oval windows on the sides of the aircraft fuselage. The world below resolved into geometry and light. He admired the ordered-disciplined natural looks of the lit city below. From the high altitudes the city resembled a vast, glowing circuit board that was carefully laid onto the dark earth surface. The city was like amber rectangles of light—with long straight avenues visibly brighter with thin amber lines stretching across the landscape. The roads had bright white lights moving in one direction

and red tail lights flowing in the opposite direction—with the flow of traffic steady and slow.

The *Rio Parana* River in the distance was visible, reflective of the crescent moonlight. Far out into the distance, it was nothing but darkness with faint lines of light of the countrysides around the city.
Inside the cabin of the aircraft, the vibration was constant—deep, mechanical and steady. The hum of the radial engines on the wings filled the cabin in a way dulling the senses hence the outside view felt more distant and almost unreal.

Regardless, the grids of light below was appealing to the eye and if anything, fixating. The perfect lines of light, the right angles at intersections, an order that was imposed into the view.

As the aircraft turned north-east heading towards Paraguayan airspace, the pilot's view was full of awe—as Resistencia's grids of light slid slowly off the left side of the windshield. The pilot tightened his grip on the yoke. He looked at the magnetic compass suspended above the windshield in between two panels of switches and plugs. It trembled quickly and slightly with the rhythm of the engines' vibrations and steadied, as the aircraft nose came round turning from north towards east, gradually reading heading from 000... easing through 010... 020 and then to 045 North East; abbreviated as NE on the magnetic compass, as the pilot held the yoke steady on the turn and then released at 045 NE. He now rested his hands gently on the yoke as the C-53 Skytrooper cargo aircraft continued its

climb, engines humming louder with a deep steady strain.

The altimeter gradually unwound counting 1200 feet to 1,800... 2,400 and higher. The pilot rested his other hand on the throttle quadrant, making small and precise input adjustments as he paid attention to the engines REV counter.
The vertical speed needle remained steady just above zero—indicating a shallow, controlled climb.

He looked outside—seeing the last of Resistencia's scattered lights fade completely out of view, and was replaced by thin faint lines of light and a few clusters of light of the green countryside. The river gleaming against the crescent moonlight was visible ahead below from the co-pilot's view—as it lined the international borders between Paraguay and Argentina.

The altimeter crept higher—2,800... 2,900 and so on until the pilot pushed in the yoke gently, dipping the nose gradually until the aircraft reached 3,000 feet.
He trimmed out—placing his fingers on the trim wheel until the control pressure in his hands vanished and let go of the yoke as the aircraft levelled out at 3,000 feet in a perfect aerodynamic balance. The vibrations died down significantly but not fully as the control surfaces became aligned for stable flight. Airflow over control surfaces became smoother, the pilot needed less micro-corrections and the engines alongside the airframe felt more "settled".

The vertical horizon ball centred as the vertical speed indicator needle fell to zero. The pilot made his last

adjustments on the throttle, syncing the power, and then he let the flying beast fly like a freed spirit—levelled, quiet and controlled.

The *Rio Parana* became larger and larger as the aircraft drew closer towards Paraguayan airspace. Suddenly, a voice from Resistencia Air Tower crackled over the radio with radio static:

Resistencia Air Tower: Tango Sierra Cinco Tres, Resistencia Torre, Salga de frecuencia. Transfiriendo comunicaciones a Control Asunción uno dos cuatro punto ocho. Buen vuelo.

(Tango Sierra 53, Resistencia Tower, leave the frequency. Transferring communications to Asunción Control on 124.8. Have a good flight.)

C-53 pilot quickly changed to recommended radio frequency and contacted Asunción Control:

Pilot: Asunción Control, Tango Sierra 53, C-53 Skytrooper, estable a 3,000 pies aproximándome a la frontera. Solicito autorización para tránsito comercial en espacio aéreo Paraguayo, manteniendo 3,000 pies.

(Asunción Control, Tango Sierra 53 Skytrooper, steady at 3,000 feet approaching the border. Request for clearance for commercial transit into Paraguayan airspace, maintaining 3,000 feet.)

Asunción Control: Tango Sierra Cinco Tres, Asunción Control, transito autorizado. Mantenga nivel tres mil pies, notifique ingreso a FIR Asunción.

(Tango Sierra 53, Asunción Control, transit approved. Maintain 3,000 feet, report entering Asunción FIR).

The CH-47 helicopter with both Mexican and Argentine Special forces operators on board was following behind and approached the river, flying below radar to avoid detection by Paraguayan air traffic control and military radars nearby. They approached the river with a Special Forces' SOC-R (Special Operations Craft – Riverine) boat hanging from a hooked tether attached to tether points on the helicopter.

After crossing into Paraguayan airspace one kilometre from the border, Bridgestone checked his smartwatch—it was 3:39 a.m. Rodriguez's voice crackled in his earpiece radio.

Rodriguez: 66, you're 1km into Paraguayan airspace buckle up.

Bridgestone: Copy that.

Commander Javier's voice crackled in his earpiece radio too.

Commander Javier: I'm in the helicopter with the rest of the special forces joint task force. We're just crossing the border into Paraguay below the radar. 30 minutes to insertion point on the *Rio Parana*.

C-53 Parachute Jumpmaster: 55 minutes to drop zone.

Bridgestone: Copy.

The crescent moonlight lit up the cockpit interior as the pilot and his co-pilot rested their heads back on their seats as the aircraft flew along into Paraguay. Radio chatter in low volumes filled up the airwaves, as the aircraft's airframe vibrated gently mid-flight.

PARAGUAY
0401 HOURS
Rio Parana

The CH-47 Chinook codenamed Iron Dragon hovered tens of feet above the *Rio Parana* like a dark machine suspended between two worlds. The rotor wash blew the surface of the river wildly into chaos causing ripples that travelled across the river, fracturing the crescent moonlight reflections into dazzling movements of light on the surface.

Inside the aircraft, the rotor noise was loud as Mexican Navy Special Forces' Commander Javier and his jumpmaster ordered the ten Argentine Navy special forces operators of the *Tactical Divers Group* to get up and prepare to insert into the boat being lowered onto the river, as the helicopter hovered over the waters. The remaining five military officers were Mexicans including the pilots flying with aid of NVGs (Night Vision Goggles).

The Argentine forces were already rigged in their body harnesses; weapons held against their chests and NVGs glowing artificial greens on their faces.

Commander Javier: No time to waste go! go! go!

One by one, they descended down the rope onto the boat and the last man untethered the boat from the hooked tether hanging from tether points on the helicopter.

Commander Javier: Sail to extraction point on grid Alpha Zulu marked on the map. Go! Go! Go!

The boat sped up north along the *Rio Parana* sending white wake of water up on its rear and the sides. The machine gunner got hold of the M61 Vulcan machine gun mounted on its frontal right side, and another machine gunner mounted on the other M61 Vulcan machine gun on the rear side of the boat.
Another special forces operator sat on guard on the left side of the boat with his belt fed M249 Squad Automatic Weapon for suppressing any potential additional enemy fire.

The helicopter lifted gently into the air maintaining altitude below radar at 150 ft (45.72 metres) above the ground, as it flew to a cleared agricultural plain field masked from the radar by jungles and rolling hills around where it landed, sending plumes of dust into the air and the crops—soybeans, maize and wheat around were blown wildly, tilting to their sides by the thrust of the rotor wash.

The C-53 Skytrooper was already slightly more than 90 kilometres into Paraguayan airspace and the Jumpmaster broke the silence.

Jumpmaster: 24 minutes to drop zone.

Bridgestone: Got it

The gentle vibrations of the fuselage and the steady hum of the engines filled the void of silence, as Bridgestone held tight the cargo handholds tethered to the ceiling of the aircraft's cabin. He checked his smart watch again—it was 4:01 a.m.

Commander Ruiz: Flight patterns over Paraguay look normal, no signs of heavy military aircraft in the target area, may be few hundreds of kilometres south of Asunción – two Tucano light attack aircraft of the Paraguay Air Force on a routine air patrol mission. We have tapped into their communications networks—no signs of military forces put on alert. All teams proceed fast but with caution.

Bridgestone (on radio): Affirmative Over-Lord

Commander Javier: Acknowledged.

LATER AT 0425 HOURS
PARAGUAYAN AIRSPACE

The C-53 Skytrooper was approaching the designated drop point zone. The jumpmaster switched off the amber cabin lights and lit up the red cabin lights to prepare Bridgestone for the parachute jump from 3,000 feet. Another jumpmaster from the crew mechanically opened the rear side door with a lever and air rushed

into the cabin, blowing hard against their faces and bodies.

The lead Jumpmaster inspected his parachuting equipment before lighting up the green cabin lights and switching off the red one. He counted.

Lead Jumpmaster: On the count of
THREE... TWO... ONE... GO! GO!

Bridgestone jumped through the open door, his NVGs (night vision goggles) strapped on. The aircraft flew above past him. He looked at the ground, his vision through the NVGs was in chrome-green. The landscape vast—covered in patches of jungles, and plain agricultural land. The *Rio Parana* curved on the landscape like a snake, its surface gleaming with the reflection of the moonlight. He fell a few tens of feet plummeting towards the jungle, arms and legs apart to slow down the fall, before deploying his purple parachute, 3 seconds after falling through the rear side door.

At 2,800 feet, the parachute's canopy was fully inflated as he descended to the jungle below. He could see the target came 2 kilometres ahead well lit through his night vision goggles. He steered himself towards a narrow treeless patch of the jungles and landed after a controlled descent lasting 4 minutes. He took off the parachute pack and repacked the chute canopy into the backpack and put it back on his back. He aimed his silenced M4 carbine forward, the invisible infrared laser glowing light green through the NVG lenses deep into the jungle. He marched forward, scanning his

environments. He heard the sounds of a variety of animals- from the dry hiss of the Jararaca Pit Viper, the rattling of the bushmaster snake and faint sliding rustle through dry leaves, possibly the South American Coral Snake. The air in the jungle was also filled with the sounds of indigenous birds. The deep croaking "gonk-gonk" calls of the Toco Toucan came from his hand right side in the trees above. Small flocks of Red-and-Green Macaws flew above—emitting loud, harsh screeching squawks. Just ahead of him in the distance was the repeated "wraaaah" calls of the Harpy Eagle, sounding closer to the bark of an animal than a sound from a bird.
In the distance he saw search lights and slowed. Two 1980's era open roof jeeps- head lamps fully bright, were driving slowly along a muddy road 20 metres ahead—a search and patrol party comprising ten armed men with AK-47 rifles equipped with LED torch lights. They were patrolling down the road leading to the camp.

Bridgestone drew closer only 10 metres away from them, hidden behind a tree. Another pair of jeeps came and stopped near the last two men walking behind the other eight. The two men boarded a jeep in the last column and they continued down the muddy road. Bridgestone crossed the muddy road to the other side unseen, hiding into the tree cover. He followed the search party on patrol until the jeeps got stuck in the mud. The first two pairs were got stuck first and the rest followed as the mud from the previous night's rain grew thicker.

The men got off their jeeps to patrol down the road on foot, their boots sinking into the mud ankle-deep. The last two men, got bored and walked slowly behind the rest, smoking cigarettes and puffing smoke into the cold air of the dark morning. They were speaking in Spanish, conversing about the previous day's disappointing Sunderland vs Arsenal match that saw Arsenal eliminated with Sunderland victory of two-nil.

Patrol Militia 1: ¿Te acordás de ese partido?
(Do you remember that match?)

The other militia man put his cigarette into his mouth, and sucked in some air through his mouth, the cigarette's burned, glowing brighter in amber. He then released some smoke from his mouth and nostrils.

Patrol Militia 2: ¿Acá? ¿Ahora?
(Out here? Now?)

Patrol Militia 1: Sí FA Cup Fifth Round. Sunderland A.F.C contra Arsenal F.C

(Yeah... FA Cup Fifth Round. Sunderland against Arsenal)

The second militia man gave a faint smirk as he puffed smoke sideways into the cold dark morning air.

Patrol Militia 2: Dos a cero... me acuerdo. El segundo gol... feo.
(Two-nil... I remember. The second goal... ugly)

The first militia man nodded gently, loosely playing with the half-burnt cigarette in his fingers.

Patrol Militia 1: Contraataque rápido. Un error... y todo se abre.
(Fast counterattack. One mistake and everything opens.)

He looked at the rest of the patrol team up ahead. They were walking ahead much faster, leaving them behind. They reached the first pair of jeeps on lead patrol, stuck in the mud—tail lights glowing red against the wet muddy road and headlights glowing bright-white, illuminating the path ahead and the jungle's exterior edges on both sides of the road. Bridgestone followed from the jungles on the left side of the road carefully, hiding behind the trees on stops.

Patrol Militia 1: El tiro pegó en el palo
(The ball hit the post).

(He said giggling)

Patrol Militia 2: ... y vuelve. Directo a él. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain. Gol en contra.

(... and comes bouncing back. Right onto him. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain scored into his own goal).

(He said laughing out loud)

Militia one joined the loud laughter as the eight man-patrol militia ahead walked into a darker stretch of the road as they illuminated the dark road ahead with their LED torches and alternating between illuminating the

dark muddy road ahead and the jungles on both sides of the road.

A truck full of militia men rolled down the muddy road from a steep bend from their front. Bridgestone watched from a distance, well hidden in the jungle's foliage. The driver stopped; another truck came and stopped behind the first—headlights fully bright. The first truck driver lowered his window and spoke to the lead patrol militia man.

Truck Driver: Recibí tu llamada por radio. Cuatro jeeps atascados en el barrow. Tenemos más hombres y dos malacates en los camiones para sacarlos y llevarlos de vuelta a la base. El camino detrás de mí está menos embarrado, los jeeps podrían pasar por ahí.

(I received your radio call. Four jeeps stuck in the mud. We have more men and winches on the trucks to pull them out and take them back to base. The road behind me is less muddy, the jeeps could get through there).

Lead Militia: Sí... pasá esta curva. Hay cuatro jeeps detrás de nosotros. Podemos volver y ayudar con más manos.

(Yeah... drive past this bend. There are four jeeps behind us. We can go back
and help with extra hands).

Truck Driver: Perfecto, amigo. Vamos entonces. Deciles a tus hombres que suban atrás.

(Perfect, my friend. Let's go then. Tell your men to hop in the back).

Lead Militia: ¡Todos a los camiones! Volvemos a sacar los jeeps del barro profundo y llevarlos a la base.

(Everyone into trucks! We're going back to pull the jeeps out of the deep mud and take them to base).

The men complied and mounted onto the back of the two trucks that drove around the muddy bend of the road to get to the jeeps stuck in the mud ahead. The trucks stop when they met the last two stragglers chatting.

Truck Driver: Necesitamos más manos para remolcar los jeeps del barro y llevarlos de vuelta a la base. ¿No te molesta subir?

(We need extra hands to tow the jeeps out of the mud back to base. Do you mind hoping in?)

Militia Man 1: No. La base está a solo treinta metros más adelante. Ustedes tienen suficientes hombres, mas de treinta. Es suficiente. Nosotros vamos a explorar er el camino hacia la base para despejar cualquier posible amenaza.
(No. the base is just thirty metres ahead. You have enough men, more than thirty. That is enough. We'll scout the road ahead to base to clear any potential threats.)

Lead Militia: Está bien, es razonable. Ustedes avancen y exploren. Nos vemos en la base.

(That's reasonable. You scout ahead. See you back at base).

Militia man 1: Sí, jefe. Nos vemos allá.
(Yes, boss. See you then).

The truck moved up ahead up the muddy road, red tail lights glowing behind them as the occupants in the front and back moved back and forth, up and down as the trucks fought their way through the thickening bumpy muddy road.
Bridgestone realised the muddy road was in his favour... more than 30 men just departed the militia compound to struggle with dragging the jeeps out of the mud, meaning he would encounter fewer enemy threats inside the poorly guarded compound. He trailed the two stragglers from the foliage on the left side of the road. He took one head shot at close range with his M24 X3 silenced pistol and disarmed the other. He grabbed him from behind and choked him, till he lost his breath and finished him off with the silenced pistol.

He dragged their bodies into the jungle foliage and covered up the blood with thick mud, rubbing mud with his boots to mix it with the blood. He saw the base searchlights up ahead 30 metres ahead. He approached from the jungles on the left side of the road and reached a perimeter fence behind the oil storage tanks. He took out a sharp pliers and cut the fence wide open realizing it was not electrified. He slipped through the gap and placed his first C4 explosive charge on one fuel

tank. On his left far in the distance was a searchlight tower with two guards atop, one moving the searchlight to illuminate the compound's premises, the other smoking cigarette.

He timed the movements of the searchlight and rushed to under 3 trucks parked in an open iron-roofed garage whose frame was wooden. He placed another C4 explosive charge under the truck right on its exterior fuel tank and crawled under the remaining two as two guards on patrol left Alejandro's office 15 meters away approaching his direction. Just in front of him 10 metres ahead, was the backup generator building with a mains supply power metre box behind it. He waited for the two guards to come near. They stopped and began talking about the night-2 days ago of their wonderful experience in the town's brothels. They giggled and walked down the compound far away towards the kitchen and meth lab.

Bridgestone crawled out of the under the trucks after timing the search lights. He rushed to the power supply box, cut the lock open with his steel combat knife, and placed a C4 explosive charge and shut its lid close. He then found a rear-side door to the backup generator building partially open. He pushed in gently; the dark room well lit through his NVG lenses. There was no one, he placed another C4 explosive charge under the generator and sneaked out quietly. He held his breath at the corners of the building as he peeked to see if anyone was approaching. Alejandro's wooden office building was just 20 metres away. He could hear his voice over a telephone conversation. Bridgestone tapped into the earpiece comms in his left ear and whispered:

Bridgestone: I made my way into the compound; do you have a live satellite feed on me? Out.

Kimberly: Yes, we see you on live sat feed.

Bridgestone: A telephone is being made from Alejandro's office—tap into it, listen and take notes.

Vincent: Copy that - 66. I'm on it... triangulating call for location to intercept.

Bridgestone: I have rigged the fuel storage, trucks, backup generator and power supply box. Proceeding to the meth lab and narcotics lab to plant GPS homing beacons for airstrikes. Where is Ninja-57?

Kimberly: Ninja-57 is on holding pattern undetected 15 kilometres north of you below the radar. Call in the strike when ready.

Bridgestone: Copy that 2511. Out.

Bridgestone walked back to the other end of the backup generator building; he held his breath as the searchlights narrowly missed him trying to peek around the corner, if anything out of his reach as a concrete wall stood between him and the jungle outside and the searchlight tower was far off down from where the wall met another concrete wall extending into the jungle. He saw the two guards walking back in his direction. He crept back into the backup power generator building and to his left he saw something he failed to see on his first sneak in—a tunnel with ladder on the other end of

the generator. He thought this led straight to Alejandro's building and possibly the meth lab and narcotics lab. He took the ladder down as the voices of the two guards grew louder and louder as they approached. The tunnel was well lit but with rats running around, he saw CCTV cameras in the tunnels and radioed in Kimberly.
Bridgestone: 66 to 2511. We have a situation—CCTV in the tunnels, my only viable way into the meth and narcotics lab and Alejandro's office building.

Kimberly: the cameras? Are they cable or connected on a Wi-Fi network?

Bridgestone: They appear to be wireless... probably feeding the monitoring room don't know where via Wi-Fi. Can you hack into it? Oh, I see a relay connection box behind a crate ahead of me.

Kimberly: Insert the special USB drive into the computer in the box. It has a special virus that will cause video footage replays and cut out live feed.

Bridgestone crept as the camera ahead of him swerved left looking away from his direction. He opened the box on the wall first, cutting the lock open with his combat knife. He inserted the special USB drive into its port and the screens in the monitoring room, flickered imperceptibly the guards unalarmed as it happens frequently, and the footage replay began. He freely navigated through the lit unguarded tunnels, taking off his NVGs to avoid the bright lights. He scanned the path ahead with great acumen pointing his silenced pistol forward as he rushed through the tunnel that had

multiple intersections from the main tunnel; hence he turned side-to-side at each intersection to check out for threats. He reached the end of the tunnel and climbed up a ladder; it led to the meth lab. He reached halfway and heard voices of militia men talking as they were labouring in the production of illicit methamphetamine. He could not climb into the room, so he climbed down and placed the first GPS-homing beacon at the bottom of the ladder but behind a wooden crate and activated it, sending the GPS signals to the Contractors Corp stealth aircraft—Ninja 57, and the pilot broke the radio silence:

Ninja-57 pilot: Ninja-57, received the first GPS beacon broadcast. Maintaining holding pattern over Paraguayan airspace.

Commander Ruiz: Confirmed Ninja 57. Wait for the second beacon.

Colonel Nicolas Ferraro: This is Overlord 1-1. Will give the order to prosecute target when ready.

Ninja-57 pilot: Copy Overlord 1-1.

Bridgestone walked back into the tunnel at the last intersection; he headed right and reached another dead end with a ladder going up. He heard voices up the ladder in the room, and again placed the GPS-homing beacon in an empty opened wooden container and shut it close, placing it near the ladder overlooking the roof of the building, visible up the tunnel. He decided it was time to finish off Alejandro. He walked back to the tunnel intersection and branched right again on the

next intersection. He saw another dead end, with a ladder going up. He reached for it and gently began the climb. He found himself in the CCTV room with two guards partially asleep on their chairs. He thought of finishing them... but worried about Alejandro in the other room 20 metres away. He slowly crept into the room from the upward tunnel and took a head shot on the first guard spilling blood on the monitor screens. The other, he choked from behind till he could not breathe and finished him off with a tranquilizer injection, sending him to deep sleep, as his legs kicked back. Alejandro apparently in closed doors in his office did not hear the commotion as he was focused on the telephone call. Bridgestone crept out of the room whose door was partially open, and sneaked towards Alejandro's office whose voice grew louder with every step Bridgestone stealthily made towards the door.

Bridgestone: Both labs rigged. Approaching Alejandro's office *(he whispered over the comms).*

Kimberly: Copy that 66. Proceed to prosecute target.

Bridgestone cut out his body cam live feed and switched off his comms radio, and quickly opened the door aiming his silenced pistol at a surprised Alejandro who tried going for the alarm button but one shot on the wooden table from the silenced pistol, sent him back frightened.

Bridgestone: ¡Ni se te ocurra! Intentá cualquier cosa estúpida y estás muerto. Decime quién dentro de Contractors Corporation mató al agente de MI6 Wallace Oliver Freeman. O la próxima bala va para vos.

(Don't even think about it! Try anything stupid and you're dead. Tell me who in the Contractors Corporation killed MI6 agent Wallace Oliver Freeman. Or the next bullet goes in you.)

He pointed his silenced pistol directly at Alejandro Fonseca, and continued.

Bridgestone: ¿Quien del gobierno de los Estados Unidos estuvo involucrado? ¡Decímelo!

(Who in the United States government was involved? Tell me!)

Alejandro: No puedo decirte una mierda. Si lo hago, estoy muerto.

(I can't tell you shit! Or I'm dead).
Bridgestone: Estas prácticamente muerto si no hablás.

(You are as good as dead if you don't talk)

I want names (he added).

Alejandro: Ok, no puedo dar nombres, pero investigá a fondo en el Pentágono de EE.UU. y en la CIA sobre la Operación Glass Theatre. Una operación encubierta... lista para usarse. Si te digo más, la gente de la CIA va a puntar contra todos mis seres queridos. Grandes nombres estuvieron involucrados en la conspiración y querían muerto a tu socio del MI6. Él sabía demasiado y era una amenaza para nosotros, los Caligula.

(Ok, I can't give names but dig deep in the US Pentagon and CIA for Operation Glass Theatre. A black ops off the shelf. I tell you more and the people at the CIA will target every loved one I have. Big names involved in the conspiracy wanted your MI6 partners dead. He knew too much and he was a threat to us the Caligula.)

Bridgestone: Quiero los nombres importantes ahora.
(I want the big names now).

Alejandro: You want the big names? huh? ¿Queres nombres importantes? huh? Empezá investigando en la CIA, desde el Director de Inteligencia, y en el Pentágono, el Secretario de Defensa. Bajá por la cadena de mando entre los altos rangos; creeme, vas a encontrar los nombres que buscás.
Ahora salí de mi oficina antes de que entren los guardias. Hay cámaras de CCTV en este edificio y van a venir enseguida.

(You want big names? huh? Start by digging the CIA right from the Director of Intelligence and the Pentagon's Secretary of Defence. Climb down the ladder amongst the senior ranks, believe me you will find the names you are looking for. Now get out of my office before the guard’s swarm in, there are CCTV cameras in this building and the guards will be swarming in very first.)

Bridgestone: Tu sistema de vigilancia está comprometido y tu equipo de vigilancia está neutralizado. Ahora somos solo vos y yo, señor Alejandro Fonseca.

(Your surveillance system is compromised and your surveillance team is neutralized. It's just you and me, Mr. Alejandro Fonseca).

Alejandro: Asi que vos sos el asesino misterioso que mató a mi amigo Baker Junior en New York. ¿Estás borrando a los Caligula? Puede que tengas éxito acá, pero no en tu próxima misión.

(And so, you're the mystery killer who killed my friend Baker Junior in New York. You are wiping out the Caligula out? You may succeed here, but not in your next mission.)

Bridgestone: Sí... él pagó caro, y vos también lo vas a pagar. Murió llorando pidiendo piedad, una piedad que él nunca le mostró a nadie, como a Wallace Freeman.

(Yes... he paid dearly and so will you. He died weeping for mercy, mercy he never showed to anyone like Wallace Freeman.)

And thanks for the update *(he continued giving a smirk on his face)*. Buenos noches, dormí. ¡Esto es por matar a mi socio!

(Goodnight sleep, this is for killing my partner!)

Bridgestone pulled the trigger three times, striking Alejandro in the chest with three rounds, sending him to the floor from his chair bleeding unconscious. He checked his smartwatch on his wrist. It was 5:20 a.m. he looked outside through the closed curtains gently pushing them aside. There was faint sunlight in orange

below a partially dull-blue horizon in the east that crept into the morning skies. Suddenly alarms in the compound went loud. The guard he injected with a tranquilizer woke up and pushed the alarm switch button beneath his desk. The search lights shone at Alejandro's office wooden building as established base protocol demanded. The two patrolling guards in the compound rushed towards the building and Bridgestone heard the boots thump on the muddy soil outside. He rushed to the CCTV surveillance room and finished off the staggering guard with his silenced pistol and slid down the ladder in the tunnel. The guards walked into the room.

Lead Guard: Bajen a los túneles y persigan al intruso. Tráiganlo de vuelta, vivo o muerto.

(Go down the tunnels and pursue the intruder. Bring him back dead or alive.)

The second guard rushed down the tunnels, climbing down the ladder with haste. The lead guard continued:

Lead guard: Voy a ir a ver al jefe en su oficina.

(I will go check the boss in his office). *(He reached for his radio and called the other militia units pulling the jeeps on the muddy road).*

¡Todas las unidades, todas las unidades! ¡Retirada a la base! El jefe, el señor Fonseca, ha sido abatido a tiros en su oficina. El intruso podría estar en los túneles de abajo. (Radio static followed)

(All units! All units! Fall back to base. The boss Mr. Fonseca has been shot dead in his office. The intruder possibly in the tunnels underneath.)

Lead militia: ¡Lo oyeron! ¡Retirada a la base! ¡Dejen los camiones y regresen corriendo a la base! ¡Converjan en el edificio de generación eléctrica y en todas las entradas a los túneles!

(You heard it! Fall back to base! Leave the trucks and fall back to base! Converge on the power generation building and all on the...tunnel entrances!)

The lead militia and his men left the jeeps and trucks stranded in the muddy road and ran back to base, struggling through the ankle-deep muddy road, others falling and rising again.

The second guard followed Bridgestone into the tunnels and they exchange fire. Bridgestone firing from cover at an intersection in the tunnel. His silenced M4 carbine assault rifle spitting out bullet shell casings in rapid succession.

Second guard: Tengo al intruso a la vista en los túneles, ¡contacto visual confirmado y en combate! ¡Estamos bajo fuego!

(I have visuals on the intruder in the tunnels, confirmed visuals engaging! Taking fire!)

Shortly, Bridgestone caught him with one bullet on the chest that sent him flying to the ground. He rushed for the ladder leading to the backup generator room and

climbed out of the tunnels, after retrieving his USB Drive from the CCTV relay circuit box. He crept out of the room and saw a bunch of dirt bikes and quad bikes of varying colours of the spectrum parked behind the trucks in the open-air garage. He timed the search lights and rushed to the garage, picked a yellow dirt bike, lit up the engines and the watch tower guards were alarmed by the sound of the motorbike engines. They shifted their search light to the open-air garage, and opened fire from their AK-47 rifles as Bridgestone sped away towards the gap in the fence he cut with a pliers at the beginning. Bullet fire glowing in amber rushed past him sending mud and dirt into the air upon hitting the ground, and sparking upon hitting the metal surfaces of the trucks and iron-sheet roofings of the garage. The truck's side windows, side mirrors, and front wind shields were cracked or shattered by the heavy bullet fire. He slipped through the gap as the search light followed him into the jungle outside as bullet fire rushed past his dirt bike, knocking down tree twigs and foliage and throwing mud and dirt into the air upon impacting the ground.

They lost sight of him in the jungle's foliage and radioed the units outside just arriving at the gate after a struggle through the thick mud. Bridgestone made his way out of the jungle onto the muddy road behind him, shocking them in a surprise as they heard the roaring engines of the motorbike behind them with red tail lights glowing. They opened fire as the bike flew into the other jungle across the muddy road.

Lead militia: ¡Agarren a ese bastardo! ¡Mató al señor Fonseca! ¡Termínenlo! ¡Suban a los cuatris, a las motos y a los jeeps! ¡Síganlo hacia la selva!

(Get that bastard! He killed Mr. Fonseca! Finish him! Get on the quad bikes! Get the dirt bikes! Get the jeeps! Jeeps! Follow him into the jungles!)

The militia men split, others went for the jeeps, others rushed through the gates into the compound to grab dirt bikes and quad bikes from the garage.
As they rushed out of the garage and on quad bikes and dirt bikes, the timers on the C4 charges planted under the trucks timed out, sending an explosion that threw the trucks out of the garage through the iron-sheet roofs, engulfing the last seven riders in flames and body parts flying into the air alongside their dirt bikes and quad bikes that caused secondary explosions. The C4 on the fuel tanks exploded at the same time sending burning oil spills into the air across the fence to the wet foliage outside and on the muddy grass in the compound. The other seven riders who got out early enough were lucky — 4 on dirt bikes — a rider and a gunner, and 3 quad bikes — a rider and a gunner as well.
They rode fast through the open gates into the jungle. The lead militia got into a jeep and took a narrow less muddy path that led straight to the river. He saw Bridgestone on his yellow dirt bike fifty metres ahead, the bike's red tail light glowing and flickering behind tree barks and foliage as he went round the bends on the path. The headlights of the jeep and the bikes illuminated the dark path and the jungle foliage on both

sides of the path, illuminating the green foliage against the backdrop of grey and light-brown tree barks.

He radioed other militia men to converge on the narrow path leading to the river. His men opened fire from the jeeps, sending glowing bullet fire past Bridgestone on the less muddy path and cutting into pieces green foliage and eating through tree barks of the jungle as the path curved left and right through the jungles.

Bridgestone: 66 to Command. I'm nearing the river with a hot pursuit behind me. Where is Messiah 1? How far from the extraction point?

Commander Ruiz: Overlord 1-2 to Messiah-1-1 how far from the extraction point Echo-Delta?

Messiah-1-1: We're sailing fast up the river... 1 minute to Echo-Delta Extraction Point... Messiah-1-1 out.

Bridgestone: 2 minutes to the river... hurry up Messiah-1-1.

Messiah-1-1: Copy that 66.

Kimberly: Just intercepted a call 66. A call was made to alert the Paraguayan Navy Riverine units 8 kilometres up the stream. All military and police units have been re-directed to the base. Messiah-1-2 are you on the move?

Captain Javier: Messiah 1-2 is taking off from landing zone Alpha-Zulu to intercept and rescue Messiah-1-1 from the river. Messiah 1-2 out.

The Chinook helicopter's engines began to hum as rotors spun slowly faster and faster and faster, sending dirt into the air and blowing wildly the soyabeans, maize and wheat crops, tilting them to the sides with the great thrust of the rotor wash.

The helicopter gently lifted into the air the tethered hook hanging beneath, as the helicopter rotated on its vertical axis, dipping the nose and thrusting forward towards the *Rio Parana* maintaining altitude of 150 feet below the Paraguayan radar. Bridgestone saw the river shores up ahead and from a bend of the river — the humming of a river boat with headlights lighting up the surface of the river around the bend, until it came into full view.
He looked at his smart wrist watch — it was 5.45 a.m., the orange-blue sky in the east was creeping into the black skies lit by the crescent moon in the west and littered with constellation of stars. Daylight was gradually eating into the dark skies.

Bridgestone: Messiah 1-1, I see you. Confirm visuals on yellow dirt bike, bright headlights in the foliage!

Messiah 1-1: 66 we see you. Hurry to the river banks... we see heavy fire behind you.

Bridgestone rode to the river banks as the SOC-R boat intercepted him. The Argentine Special forces pulled him on board after he dumped his bike on the banks and the boat machine gunners rained hell of bullet fire on the jeeps and bikes giving chase. The lead militia jumped out of the lead jeep as his men onboard were

slaughtered by the Vulcan machine guns and the Squad Automatic Weapon (the M249 Minimi). Some of the other bikers were slaughtered riding towards the banks as they opened return fire, falling to the ground as their bikes hit the trees to a dead stop or overturned and tumbled towards the banks. Others turned back deep into the jungles to avoid enemy fire. The second jeep hit a huge tree after the driver and a few men were slaughtered by machine gun fire, sending shards of glass and glass dust from the windshield into the seats and bodies. Those who were alive took refuge in the foliage, behind trees and behind the jeeps whose headlights were damaged from hitting the trees and further by heavy machine gun fire. The jeeps caught fire and they had to retreat, with more men slaughtered attempting return fire as they fell back. Tree twigs and branches fell apart; large leaves were torn into pieces and tree barks eaten through by heavy machine gun fire.

The last two jeeps ferrying more men arrived and were met with heavy machine gun fire. The lead jeep's driver and front seat passenger were slaughtered by the machine guns. The rest in the back seats and those in the second jeep behind joined the retreating forces on foot abandoning the jeeps. Once the boat's machine gunners realised the enemy retreated. The boat turned back making a U-turn on the wide river back to meet the CH 47 helicopter down stream.

Messiah 1-1: Messiah 1-1 has secured the asset, sailing south to meet Messiah 1-2.

Messiah 1-2: 5 minutes out, we have you on GPS.

Messiah 1-1: Copy that Messiah 1-2. Out.

Colonel Nicolas Ferraro: Ninja-57 you are cleared hot on the GPS homing beacons. Level that compound.

Ninja-57 pilot: Ninja-57 copy that.

Ninja 57 — the F-67 Ghost Stealth fighter-bomber aircraft pilot broke holding pattern and flew undetected to the target area in under 2 minutes, dropping JDAM bombs (pre-programmed with the target location GPS on board by the pilot) on their targets — blowing into pieces the meth and narcotics labs on Alejandro's compound, killing several guards on alert in the area.

Ninja 57: Target destroyed. Ninja 57 on bingo fuel. Ninja 57 on heading 180° to Resistencia. ETA 11 minutes out.

Colonel Nicolas Ferraro: Copy that 57. Fuel trucks waiting by to refuel you.

Ninja 57: Copy that Overlord. Out.

Meanwhile on the *Rio Parana*, the boat meets the CH 47 helicopter downstream. The Special forces operator on the boat, signalled to the pilot with red glowing wands to come to lower altitudes so they can reach the hanging tethered hook. The pilot lowered his collective stick in the cockpit gently, pushing the helicopter slightly towards the river surface, sending ripples of water radially from around the boat towards the shores

of the river and sending a thin mist from the river surface into the air from the thrust of the rotor wash. They successfully hooked the boat and signalled to the pilot via radio to lift into the sky.

Messiah 1-2 (Pilot): Messiah 1-2 has extracted Messiah 1-1, flying below radar back to base.

Colonel: Copy that Messiah 1-2. Maintain altitude along the river.

Meanwhile, the "Armada Paraguaya" (the Paraguay Navy) and the Riverine Police — the "Prefectura General Naval" (General Naval Prefecture) arrived in armed river patrol boats — two Croq-15 class Australian-designed riverine patrol boats, 3 locally built Pirá-170 and 3 locally built Pirá 240 light patrol boats, the latter 6 arriving slightly behind with the roar of Yamaha outboard motors.
They were met by the Fonseca's lead militia lieutenant who led the search and
patrol party in the night. His name was Alfonso Benitez Ramón Rojas. The Navy captain was Captain Andrés Giménez, the riverine police captain was Captain Miguel Caballero.

Alfonso: Captain Ramón, Captain Miguel, it is good that you are here. Fueron responsables de la muerte del señor Alejandro Fonseca; se desplazaron en una lancha fluvial hacia el sur, posiblemente de origen argentino; avisen a la Fuerza Aérea para que los localice y haga seguimiento, y coordinen con las autoridades.

(They were responsible for the death of Mr. Alejandro Fonseca; they travelled south in a river boat, possibly from Argentina. Call in the Air Force to locate them and track them, and coordinate with the authorities).

Captain Ramón: ¡Qué desastre! ¡Hay cadáveres por todas partes!

(What a damage here! Bodies everywhere!)

The joint teams assessed the damage by the river banks before proceeding to the main compound. Meanwhile Bridgestone checked his watch on the boat hanging on the flying helicopter. It was 6.00 a.m. The border checkpoint on their map was not far away.

Helicopter Pilot: 13 minutes to Argentina border hang tile boys.

The villagers woken up early to fish in the river and attend to their farms and plantations spotted the low flying helicopter ferrying a boat. It was painted in jungle camouflage patterns with no national markings. They looked with wonder, and most assumed it was Paraguayan military helicopter on morning exercise. Some took out their smartphones and took selfies and photos of the low-flying helicopter.

Helicopter pilot: We're leaving the trail of the river. I'm pretty much sure navy border patrol is on alert waiting to engage. We'll fly home over the less patrolled routes.

Commander Javier: Just cross left straight into Argentina, we shall fly over San Cosme in Argentina and

over Corrientes and then to Resistencia. We don't have to follow the straight pre-determined flight path.

Helicopter pilot: OK commander, swerving left.

The pilot ruddered left by pressing his left foot on the left rudder pedal, he slightly moved the cyclic control to the left and slightly lifted the collective to maintain altitude as the helicopter banked and turned left. They officially crossed the borders and then 20km from the border back into Paraguayan airspace — 2 Embraer EMB 312 Tucano light attack aircraft armed with 2 Sidewinder infra-red guided air-to-air missiles each acquired a missile lock on the helicopter whose pilot and co-pilot were not alarmed by any missile warning systems.

Kimberly: We have two bogeys — Tucanos Paraguay Air Force approaching 22.4m out into Paraguay airspace.

Commander Javier: They can't engage. We are in national airspace.
Tucano Pilot 1: Foxtrot 1-1 a Commando Asunción, tengo bloqueo de misil Sidewinder sobre helicóptero CH-47 Chinook no identificado a 20 km, ya dentro del espacio aéreo argentino. Solicito permiso para perseguir hacia Argentina y abrir fuego.

(Foxtrot 1-1 to Asunción command, I have a Sidewinder missile lock on an unidentified CH 47 Chinook helicopter 20km away, already in Argentine airspace. I request permission to pursue into Argentina and engage).

Asunción Command: Negativo, retírense. No podemos arriesgar un incidente militar internacional.

(Negative, fall back. We cannot risk an international military incident.)

Tucano pilot 1: Foxtrot 1-1 recibido. Regresando. (Foxtrot 1-1 acknowledged. Turning back).

Tucano Pilot 2: Foxtrot 1-2, recibido. Regresando. (Foxtrot 1-2, acknowledged. Turning back).

The two aircraft banked left, and flew back towards Asunción. They had been radioed as they flew an air patrol mission on the south western parts of the Paraguayan airspace near the town of Guazu-Cua to intercept the helicopter before crossing into Argentina.

Kimberly: The two aircraft have been ordered to turn back. You're safe.

Helicopter pilot: Messiah 1-2 over San Cosme. ETA to Resistencia — 30 minutes.

Commander Ruiz: Come home mission accomplished.

Colonel Nicolas Ferraro: Somebody get me a bottle and a glass of champagne. Madam President Ms. Christina Valdés Larraín will give me a big medal for this. Everybody celebrate!

The mission control room was filled with uproar, joy and applause. The infantry men brought in bottles of wine and champagne glasses for the celebration.

30 Minutes Later (0643 Hours)

The helicopter hovered over the landing zone and landed the boat gently as the soldiers on board successfully unhooked the boat on the dirt as fumes of dust spread out from the ground radially into the air. The helicopter then skidded left sideways over the tarmac helipad and landed gently on its wheels, the orange metallic hook tethered to the lower parts of the fuselage touching the tarmac first, then the aircraft wheels. The green helipad lights glowing in the lit morning while the sun was visibly rising in the east—an orange ball of fire floating in the eastern horizon.

The Argentine special forces and Bridgestone got off the boat and dusty helipad walking majestically towards Commander Ruiz out to meet them. Behind them Commander Javier and his Mexican special forces walked out from the helicopter's rear door, night vision goggles raised up on their tactical helmets, and the same for Bridgestone and Argentine special forces.

Kimberly, Vincent and Colonel Ferraro came out to greet them, still holding their champagne glasses.

Colonel Ferraro: Well, done ladies and gentlemen. You did this country proud. The President will grant medals for this.

Kimberly: Good work Tom. You did great. I bet Sally is waiting for you.

Bridgestone: Not until I get the medal first from the President herself.

Colonel Ferraro: Everybody... back in the Missions Control Room. Today we celebrate... wine glasses and bottles for everyone. HUUURAH!

The soldiers: HUUURAH! (they replied).

3 DAYS LATER
22nd FEBRUARY 2012
QUINTA DE OLIVOS PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE
ARGENTINA
2000 HOURS

The night settled swiftly over Buenos Aires. Quinta de Olivos—the Argentine presidential residence—was glowing in warm golden light. The long pool of water at the Guest's Pavillion captured the reflection of the guests who stood by, as well as the residential building, decorated in buntings of Mexico and Argentina and the glowing lanterns around the pool in a majestic display. The two national flags were raised on separate flag poles atop the residence, each flag bowing into the evening winds and illuminated by lights below as required by international diplomatic protocols.

The gardens and the entire estate were live with discreet movements of ceremonial guards, plain clothes security personnel and the distant humming of arriving car engines. The guards at the main entrance at the *Avenida Maipú,* opened the gates with measured precision to let in the arriving guests.

One by one, first-class state vehicles marked with respective national flags on the bonnets entered the estate. The first car arriving was a black official sedan whose front side doors bore the official insignia of the Mexican Navy. A navy officer driving the car gently guided it through to the VIP parking lot. He stepped out of the car in full-service dress: —a dark navy-blue jacket riddled with golden buttons, a peaked cap with gold-trimmed visor and white gloves in his hands. He walked swiftly to the rear left door and opened it for the Navy Colonel Leonardo de Castillo and saluted him as he exited the car. He shut the door gently after him and escorted him to the guest's waiting area by the pool. Dignitaries were standing tall in ceremonial attire both military and civilians.

Butlers walked around with trays of champagnes and martinis and the colonel grabbed a glass for himself politely. Not long enough, a new vehicle—a black state sedan car with the official insignia of the Argentine Air Force on the front doors arrived through the *Avenida Maipú's* open gates, the wheels rumbling on the hard shiny cobblestones lining the compound, that reflected the glow of the red tail lights and bright LED headlights of the car. An airman driving the car steered it gently to the VIP parking lot to a stop. He killed the engines and car lights, stepped out of the car, and shut his door gently. He was fully dressed in ceremonial uniform—a midnight-blue jacket that matched the trousers colours, a white shirt, black tie, white gloves, and a peaked cap that bore the markings of national cockade. He walked swiftly to the rear left side door and opened it.

Colonel Nicolás Ferraro stepped out and the airman saluted him before gently shutting the door behind him. The colonel was fully dressed in ceremonial attire—the Argentine Air Force dark blue ceremonial gala: structured tunic with a standing collar, gold-trimmed cuffs and gold lace insignia on the shoulders. He wore a peaked cap, with distinctive red band and gold embroidery, that sat perfectly aligned on his head. His left hand rested on his left side. The airman walked behind him towards the rests of the guests where they were served a glass of champagne each by a male butler walking round with a tray of champagne glasses.

A minute later, a convoy of four black sedan cars with Mexican flags at the front sides of the bonnet arrived wheels rumbling on the hard and shiny cobblestones lining the estate. The bright LED lights illuminating the estate and red tail lights glowing and sharply reflected on the cobblestones. They drove to a directed parking lot reserved for foreign VIPs. The 3 vehicles halted at the parking lot and the occupants stepped out—Commander Javier and his men from the Mexican Navy Special Forces alongside the invited Mexican Ambassador to Argentina Mrs. Valeria Cortéz. She was driven in the last vehicle in the column.
The Mexican Navy officers were dressed in full ceremonial uniform white jacket, trousers, gloves and high-gloss white shoes. Their white-topped caps had black visors that bore gold embroidery along the brim. Their upper sleeves bore the Mexican Navy Special Forces—the Fuerzas Especiales insignia—a midnight-blue shield bordered in gold with a central silver anchor which anchors the unit's tri-part identity of naval heritage and elite amphibious capability. Around the

anchor were the words Fuerza, Espíritu and Sabiduría stitched in bold. These symbolised physical force, resilient spirit and tactical wisdom essential for high-stakes unconventional warfare. The ambassador wore a green ceremonial dress with a small button atop bearing the Mexican national colours of red, white and green.

The ambassador was received warmly with full diplomatic protocol.
Shortly afterwards, Commander Ruiz and his men from the Argentine Navy Special Forces—the Tactical Divers Group, arrived in a convoy of four black sedan cars, wheels rumbling on the hard shiny cobblestones of the estate. They were directed by security personnel to a specific VIP parking lot where the car stopped and the occupants stepped out in the ceremonial attire—midnight blue (Azul Noche) jackets, straight cut with high closed collars; and lined and secured with seven gold buttons that bore engravings of the national shield. They wore matching trousers, and polished-shiny black shoes. On their heads they wore the brown berets each bearing the Tactical Divers Group emblem on the front. Several of them carried ceremonial sabres that featured gold-finished hilts and were suspended from black belts with bronze buckles.
The last car arriving at the ceremony was a Neptune XR95—bright LED headlights and a glowing continuous red taillight that set it apart from other sedan cars in the ceremony. Bridgestone was driving, Kimberly seated in the front passenger seat and Vincent in the left rear seat. The wheels rumbled on the hard shiny cobblestones as the security personnel directed them to a specific VIP spot. Bridgestone killed the engines and

switched off the car lights. He unbuckled his safety belt and so did Kimberly and Vincent. Bridgestone was the first to step out—fully dressed in his black suit, white official shirt, purple tie and polished leather black shoes. He was followed by Kimberly in her purple ceremonial dress, classy purple high heel shoes, and a purple pearl necklace around her neck. Vincent stepped out last in an attire similar to Bridgestone's in tone.

They walked to join the rest of the guests by the pool. Then the President, Ms. Christina Valdés Larraín flanked by armed military officers and civilian state security stepped out of the Quinta de Olivos, standing by the white cylindrical pillars at the entrance of the residence, that supported a balcony above-decorated with buntings of Mexican and Argentine colours.

President Christina: Señoras y señores, ¿me permiten su atención, por favor? Bienvenidos a esta celebración en honor a nuestros defensores, tras los ejercicios conjuntos entre las armadas de México y Argentina.

(Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please. Welcome to this celebration to honour our defenders, following the joint military exercises between the Mexican and Argentine navies).

She continued.

President Christina: En representación de la República de México Embajadora Valeria Cortéz, su presencia es un honor para nosotros.

(Representing the Republic of Mexico, Ambassador Valeria Cortéz, your presence is an honour for us).

De acuerdo con el protocolo diplomático, ingresarán primero la Embajadora de México, luego los coroneles y comandantes de ambas armadas, seguidos por los demás oficiales y, finalmente, los invitados civiles, para un breve recorrido por la residencia.

(According to diplomatic protocol, the Mexican Ambassador will enter first, followed by the colonels and commanders of both navies, followed by the remaining officers and finally the civilian guests, for a brief tour of the residence).

El personal de seguridad garantizará la protección durante el recorrido y la
ceremonia.

(Security personnel to ensure protection during the tour and ceremony).
She entered the residence after a ceremonial guard opened it from the inside, and was followed by the ambassador, senior military officers, junior military officers and the rest of the guests.

The interior was filled with refined elegance—marked by high ceilings, chandeliers and warm-toned decor which defined the main dining hall which had a long mahogany polished table that dominated the room, the table already lined with food, polished silverware and cutlery, bottles of French and Spanish wine and wine glasses, and surrounded by wooden chairs that were artistically curved with remarkable precision, especially

the President's grand chair- all arrangements done to reflect the diplomatic precision of the evening. The lighting was soft and golden in a way that encourage conversation without breaking formality.

After the tour inside the Quinta de Olivos, they left the interior to the outside through a back door and headed to estate's grounds marching through the garden that had marble figures and statues standing amongst trimmed hedges, and lit subtly from below giving an appealing view. After taking a tour round the estate in low-tone conversations, the procession gently circled back toward the main residence, and onto the guest's pavilion by the shallow pool that reflected on its surface the illuminated presidential residence, the bunting decorations, the two illuminated national flags atop the residential building, the lamps around and the silhouettes of gathered guests.

The president’s earlier words lingered in the air—not just as a welcoming note, but a carefully crafted and staged assertion of unity, military cooperation, and diplomatic respect for both nations—Argentina and Mexico.
Again, following diplomatic protocol, the guests sat one by one on the dinner table with the Argentine President and shared a meal over conversations on international politics of the Latin and South Americas. The table laid out a variety of delicacies that curated an expression of Argentine identity—elevated to meet diplomatic standards.

The "*Empanadas*" released warm, spicy aromas, their flaky crusts giving way to finely cut beef. The "*Provoleta*" glistened under the dusting of oregano. The evening's centre piece delicacy—the "*Asado*" with perfectly seared cuts of beef resting in their own juices, the accompaniments included "*Chimichurri*" a vibrant green herb sauce made from parsley, garlic, oregano, olive oil and vinegar—delivering a bright tangy flavour that made the barbecued meat tasty.
The crisp Malbec wine filled the wine glasses from the wine bottles—The Malbec—a cultural symbol in Argentina gave a discreet diplomatic nod and a welcoming gesture to the Mexican delegation and thus enhanced Argentina's global reputation. Desserts on the table included *Dulce de leche, Alfajores*, and scoop-artisanal ice cream paired with fruit and chocolate.

An hour later, the tables were cleared and the guests sat outside in the guest's pavilion near the long shallow pool for the final and key stage of the ceremony – the award of military medals to the military personnel involved in the covert operation in Paraguay under the guise of awards for great performance in the joint naval exercises.

The ambassador and the colonels took the front seats facing the entrance of the residential building. State decoration in the form of buntings reflecting both Argentine and Mexican national colours were put on display lining the upper edges of the roof of the residential building in alternating patterns and on the balconies as well.

The president gave her brief speech commending the military officers who led
and participated in the joint naval exercises.

President Christina: Distinguidos almirantes, oficiales, marineros de Argentina y México, señora Embajador de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, y distinguidos invitados civiles,

Les expreso mi sincero agradecimiento por su servicio ejemplar durante estas tres días de ejercicios navales conjuntos. Su profesionalismo, disciplina y precisión en el mar han reflejado los más altos estándares de nuestras armadas.

Estos ejercicios han fortalecido no solo nuestra preparación operativa, sino también la confianza y la amistad entre naciones. Han demostrado que la cooperación en la mar es una fuerza de estabilidad y seguridad compartida.

En nombre de la Republica Argentina, felicito a todo el personal involucrado por su dedicación y desempeño sobresaliente. Que este espíritu de colaboración continúe guiando nuestro trabajo en los años venideros.

(Distinguished admirals, officers, sailors of Argentina and Mexico, Madam Ambassador of the United Mexican States, and distinguished civilian guests,
I extend my sincere gratitude for your exemplary service during over the three days of joint naval

exercises. Your professionalism, discipline and precision at sea reflect the highest standards of our navies. These exercises have enhanced not just our operational readiness but also the trust and alliance between our nations. They have demonstrated that cooperation at sea is a force for stability and shared security. On behalf of the Argentine Republic, I commend all personnel involved as a result of their dedication and outstanding performance. May the spirit of collaboration continue to be the guide for our work in the years to come).

Applause followed the brief speech for a moment as she looked into the crowd side-to-side, bombarded with flashes of photography from the photo-journalists in attendance. And then she continued:

President Christina: Este noche, reconocemos un servicio que no solo fue coordinado, sino ejecutado con una precisión que exigió confianza absoluta.

(Tonight, we give recognition to service that was not only coordinated, but executed with a precision that demanded absolute trust).

She paused briefly and continued.

President Christina: En las operaciones marítimas conjuntas en el teatro del Atlántico Sur, nuestros socios demostraron disciplina, contención y excelencia operativa.

(In the joint maritime operations in the South Atlantic theatre, our partners demonstrated discipline, restraint and operational excellence).

She gazed briefly at the military formation of officials eager to receive recognition and awards seated in the front row. She then continued.

President Christina: Por su rol meticuloso en la identificación de objetivos, la coordinación marítima y la integración de fuerzas durante los ejercicios navales conjuntos.

(For his role in target identification,
maritime coordination, and force integration during joint naval exercises).

She paused briefly and continued:

President Christina: El Colonel Leonardo de Castillo de la Armada de México recibirá la Orden de Libertador General San Martín, grado Gran Oficial.

(Colonel Leonardo de Castillo of the Mexican Navy will receive the Order of the Liberator General San Martin, Grand Officer grade).

An Argentine Navy sailor in white sailor's ceremonial uniform stepped forward holding before him a purple presentation pillow with the medal on it. Ambassador Valeria Cortés standing next to the President, received the medal and waited for the colonel to arise from his seat and walk to her, and then gently placed it on the Colonel's breast-area on his ceremonial attire with

formal precision with applause from the crowd. The colonel received it warmly and saluted both the ambassador and President, before making a U-turn march to his seat.

The President continued:

President Christina: Por su liderazgo decisivo en la planificación de operaciones especiales integradas y la ejecución multinacional de fuerzas de élite.

(For his decisive leadership in integrated special operations planning and multinational elite force execution).

She paused briefly before proceeding.

President Christina: El Comandante Javier Ortega Salazar de la Armada de México recibirá la Orden del Libertador General San Martín, grado Comendador.

(Commander Javier Ortega Salazar of the Mexican Navy will receive the Order of the Liberator General San Martín, Commander Grade).

Another Argentine navy sailor in ceremonial attire presented the medal on a purple presentation pillow. The Ambassador Ms. Cortés received it and waiting for the Commander to march from his seat, and then placed it with honor and gentleness on the breast-area of his ceremonial attire with an applause from the crowd. The commander saluted her and the President before making a U-turn to march back to his seat.

The president continued:

President Christina: Para los diez operadores bajo su mando, cuya disciplina y cohesión garantizaron la continuidad operativa en entornos de alto riesgo.

(For the ten operators under his command, whose discipline and cohesion guaranteed operational continuity in high-risk environments).

She continued after a brief pause.

President Christina: Cada uno recibirá la Orden al Mérito Naval, grado Oficial.

(Each will receive the Naval Merit Order, Officer Grade).

The ten Mexican Navy officers got up from their seats towards line up before the ambassador. 10 Argentine Navy sailors brought forth 10 purple presentation pillows each with a replica of the medal. The ambassador was assisted by other five Argentine navy sailors from their seats in the crowd in receiving the medals and pinning them on their ceremonial attires of the Mexican Navy special forces officers as applauses arose from the crowds.

Photo-journalists kept up their bombardment of the senior guests, hosts and everyone else with camera light flashes as they took photos. When the awards were given fully to the ten, they saluted the ambassador and president before marching back to their seats.

The President continued:

President Christina: Por su precisión en la coordinación aérea, la desconflictación del espacio marítimo y la sincronización del apoyo durante los ejercicios navales conjuntos.

(For his precision in aerial coordination, maritime airspace deconfliction, and synchronized support during joint naval exercises).

She paused for a breath and continued:

President Christina: El Coronel Nicolás Ferraro de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina recibirá la Orden al Mérito Aeronáutico, grado Comendador.
(Colonel Nicolás Ferraro of the Argentine Air Force will receive the Order of Aeronautical Merit, Commander grade).

The colonel arose from his seat; his golden ceremonial sabre held in hand as the sabre was held in place by his white belt with a bronze buckle. He marched majestically to the ambassador who placed the medal on the left breast area of his ceremonial attire. An applause followed before the colonel saluted the president and the ambassador, and marched back to his seat.

The president continued.

President Christina: Por su liderazgo en la inserción táctica fluvial, la coordinación de extracción y la integración de fuerzas conjuntas.

(For his leadership in riverine tactical insertion, extraction coordination, and joint force integration).

President Christina held her breath briefly and continued.

President Christina: El Comandante Esteban Ruiz de Alarcón de la Armada Argentina recibirá la Orden al Mérito Naval, grado Comendador.

(Commander Esteban Ruiz de Alarcón of the Argentine Navy will receive the Naval Merit Order, Commander grade).

Commander Ruiz arose from his seat; his golden ceremonial sabre held in place by his black belt with a bronze buckle. His brown beret gave him an authoritative look. He marched majestically to the ambassador who received the medal on a purple presentation pillow from an Argentine navy sailor and placed it on the breast area of his ceremonial attire. The commander saluted him as the gathering gave an applause. He turned back and marched to his seat.

The president took a glass bottle of water on the stand and took a sip before continuing:

President Christina: Y para sus diez buzos tácticos, que ejecutaron contención y apoyo de extracción en condiciones ambientales hostiles con precisión absoluta.

(And for his ten tactical divers who executed containment and extraction support in hostile environmental conditions with absolute precision...)

She paused and continued.

President Christina: Cada uno recibirá la Orden al Mérito Naval, grado Oficial.

(Each will receive the Naval Merit Order, Officer grade).

The ten men arose, dressing code not different from their commander. They marched majestically to line up before the ambassador. The ambassador was assisted by Argentine sailors in pinning the medals on the ceremonial attires of the soldiers as rounds of applauses arose from the gathering. When they were through, the 10 men of the Tactical Divers Group saluted the ambassador and the President before turning back to march to their seats.
The President put the papers she was reading from in good order and pushed back a strand of her long hair that was getting on her face before continuing.

President Christina: Señoras y señores, distinguidos invitados, quiero agradecerles a todos por tomarse el tiempo para asistir a esta ceremonia...

(Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, I want to thank you all for taking your time to attend this ceremony).

Quiero agradecer a la Embajadora de México y a su delegación por acompañarnos para honrar a nuestros valientes combatientes.

(I want to thank the Mexican Ambassador and her delegation for joining us to honor our brave warriors).

La cooperación entre nuestros Estados es esencial para nuestro beneficio mutuo en un mundo donde las amenazas crecen cada día.

(Cooperation between our states is essential for our mutual benefit in a world where threats are steadily increasing).

Agradezco al alto mando militar de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos por acompañarnos en el fortalecimiento de esa cooperación.

(I thank the senior military leadership of the United Mexican States for joining us in deepening that cooperation).

She paused briefly.

Por ahora, considero que hemos llegado a la conclusión de esta ceremonia.

(For now, I believe we have arrived at the conclusion of this ceremony).

Les deseo a todos un viaje seguro de regreso a sus hogares.

(I wish everyone a safe journey back home).

She said holding that line with weight.

Que Dios bendiga a los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, que Dios bendiga a la República Argentina, y que Dios los bendiga a todos.

(God bless the United Mexican States, God bless the Republic of Argentina, and God bless you all).

Muchas Gracias
(Thank you).

The president shook hands with the Mexican ambassador Cortés and they walked into the residence with the rest of the diplomatic delegation, and the military officers from both nations. The journalists bombarded her with questions as photojournalists lit the scene with rapid camera flashes of light.

One journalist asked:

Journalist One: ¡Presidenta! ¿Puede ampliar sobre los ejercicios navales conjuntos en el Atlántico Sur?

(Madam President! Can you tell us more on the joint naval exercises in the South Atlantic?)

Another journalist asked:

Journalist Two: ¡Presidenta! ¿Puede confirmar si hubo operaciones encubiertas en Paraguay?

(Madam President! Can you confirm whether there were covert operations in Paraguay?)

The guests outside in the pavilion left one by one as others remained standing engaged in conversations over the night's events. Cars emptied the parking lots, wheels rumbling gently against the soft-shiny cobblestones that reflected not just the security lamps in the estate but also the car red tail lights and headlamps. The security guards saluted them on their exit as they guided them out of the estate.
Inside the Quinta de Olivos, the atmosphere became quieter than the outside. The lighting became softer, warmer and controlled in golden shades.
The heavy doors sealed the room from the noisy press outside. The procession inside settled in a small conference hall in the residence, each individual taking seats other than the President, the ambassador and the state security detail, not to forget the navy sailors presenting the last four medals on purple presentation pillows. The President stood at the centre of the room, beside her, the Mexican ambassador, hands held together in front. She broke the silence in the room and said:

President Christina: Ahora podemos hablar con claridad.

(Now we can speak clearly).

She gazed into the seated gathering and look down to read on the last four confidential and top-secret award papers.

President Christina: Las operaciones encubiertas en Paraguay exigieron precisión absoluta, coordinación multinacional y negación plausible en cada fase.

(The covert operations in Paraguay demanded absolute precision, multinational coordination, and plausible deniability at every stage).

She paused briefly, hinting at her acknowledgement of reality, and then turned her gaze briefly at Bridgestone, before continuing.

President Christina: Por su incisión encubierta bajo cobertura civil, la neutralización de un objetivo de alto valor en territorio paraguayo y la preservación de la negación plausible operativa...

(For covert insertion under civilian cover, the neutralization of a high-value target in Paraguayan territory, and the preservation of operational plausible deniability...)

Thomas Bridgestone recibirá una condecoración presidencial clasificada equivalente al mérito de la Orden al Mérito Civil, grado Comendador.

(Thomas Bridgestone will receive a classified presidential decoration equivalent to the Civil Merit Order, Commander grade).

An Argentine navy sailor presented the golden medal on a purple presentation pillow and the Mexican ambassador put it around his neck, where it hung on a ribbon with the Argentine colours of light blue and

white. An applause followed and Bridgestone walked back to his seat, after shaking hands with both the president.

The President continued:

President Christina: Por la coordinación operativa multinacional, el enlace crítico entre fuerzas argentinas y mexicanas, y la continuidad de misión en Resistencia bajo presión extrema...

(For multinational operational coordination, critical liaison between Argentine and Mexican forces, and mission continuity in Resistencia under extreme pressure).

Kimberly Rodriguez y Vincent McDonnell recibiran distinciones presidenciales clasificadas de mérito equivalente.

(Kimberly Rodriguez and Vincent McDonnell will receive classified presidential merit distinctions of equivalent standing).

Both Kimberly and Vincent arose from their seats to stand before the ambassador. The navy sailors brought the medals on the purple presentation pillows and the ambassador picked one and hang it around Kimberly's neck with an applause from the gathering. She admired the golden medal and vibrant Argentine colours on the ribbon before shaking the President's and ambassador's hands. She stood aside, as the second medal was placed around Vincent's neck with an applause. Vincent shook

the ambassador's and president's hands. Kimberly and Vincent then walked together back to their seats.

The president put aside the previous paper and held in her hand the last awards paper, and read.

President Christina: Ex piloto de la Fuerza Aérea de los Estados Unidos, operando bajo contrato de apoyo estratégico.

(Former United States Air Force pilot, operating under strategic support contract).

Por penetración de defensa aérea hostil, ejecución de ataque de precisión de alta altitud y apoyo decisivo en la fase final de neutralización operativa...

(For hostile air defense penetration, execution of high-altitude precision strikes, and decisive support in the final phase of operational neutralization...)

Cindy G. Larson recibirá una distinción presidencial clasificada equivalente al mérito de la Orden al Mérito Aeronáutico, grado Comendador.

(Cindy G. Larson will receive a classified Presidential distinction equivalent to the Aeronautical Merit Order, Commander grade).

The last Argentine sailor stepped forward with the purple pillow, and the medal on it. Cindy arose from her seat in her purple dress and walked to the ambassador who placed the golden medal around her neck—the ribbon vibrant in Argentine national colours. The

gathering followed with an applause and she shook both the President's and ambassador's hands before walking back to her seat.

The President organized all the three papers into a bunch and handed them to a navy sailor nearby. She spoke one final time:

President Christina: Quede establecido que lo que se ha logrado esta noche no es obra de una sola nación, sino de una cooperación disciplinada entre servicios, capacidades y voluntades.

(Let it be established that what has been achieved tonight is not the effort of a single nation, but of disciplined cooperation between services, capabilities and wills).

She stepped back with an applause from the gathering. A senior Navy sailor then took the podium and announced the end of the ceremony and that guests could stay for conversations but not beyond midnight when all invited persons and guests should have vacated the premises.

The guests arose, others left the premises immediately, others stay behind for chit-chats. The President, the Ambassador and delegates sat in the guests' lounge for an evening tea over discussions of future cooperation between the two states.

Bridgestone and his team of contractors said their last goodbyes to their military comrades before leaving the premises in their Neptune XR 95 car, and drove straight

to Ministro Pistarini International Airport where a Contractors Corp C-130 cargo aircraft was waiting for them. After driving through airport security checkpoints—they drove to the commercial and cargo aircraft sector of the airport where Contractor agents signalled them to drive straight into the cargo bay of the aircraft before the cargo bay ramp closed behind them. The agents secured the car in place to avoid unwanted movements during take-off and turns in the air.

Bridgestone and his fellow agents in the car stepped outside and took seats on the sides of the fuselage. Moments later the aircraft was taxiing into the runway and not long afterwards, lifted into the air.

Bridgestone: Mission accomplished. Kimberly update the mission logs on the mission tablet please. I need a long rest before my next mission... huuuuh... (he took a deep sigh before looking at his watch, it was 11.30 p.m. He closed his eyes and fell asleep on the flight back to Miami).