

Retribution


Fine Line Solutions, #1

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Published: 2011
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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.



A small survivor of a brutal massacre becomes the leader of a terrorist splinter group intent on attacking soft targets in the west. The novel develops into a detective story to find the brains behind the attacks and into a clandestine operation to exact retribution for the evil done, but the terrorist agenda is not complete, a much larger plot with grave effects for the western nations begins.

Retribution: Deserved punishment for evil done.
—Collins Pocket English Dictionary.

Dedication

I dedicate this book with grateful thanks to my son Mark for his help and support in editing and formatting this manuscript and also to my wife Joy for her unfailing love and support at all times. Without their belief and encouragement this book would never have reached publication.

Nicholas Gill.

*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is
that good men should do nothing.*
Attributed to: Edmund Burke (1729-1797).

Prologue

**Palestinian Refugee Camp, Shatila, Lebanon,
September 16th. 1982.**

The bitter tastes of gun oil and cordite filled the boy's mouth. The barrel of the gun between his teeth and the foresight digging into the roof of his mouth prevented him from swallowing. His eyes, wide with fear, stared at the hand holding the gun anticipating the movement of the finger on the trigger.

'Where are your daughters?'

The question was snarled at the boy's parents kneeling on the floor, their hands on their heads, the slightest movement of their bodies covered by Phalangist Maronite Christian weapons.

The boy's mother shook her head in disbelief at what was happening. Distraught she moved her hands to cover her face in an attempt to blot out the scene. The gunshot in the confined space was deafening. The boy's mother pitched forward at his feet, a finger shot off; a blackened hole in her forehead and the back of her head blown away. The boy's father reached out to his wife's twitching body and was shot through the right ear. He fell on top of his wife. Blood, cerebral fluid, brain tissue and bone fragments sprayed onto the TV screen distorting the picture of the game show host; canned laughter brayed into the room.

The boy's control turned to water. A warm dark stain spread through the front of his clothing and the smell of urine mingled with the cordite fumes.

'Ha, he pissed his pants.' The gun barrel was jerked up digging the foresight blade further into the boy's palate and then yanked out brutally tearing a triangular flap of flesh from the roof of his mouth. The gun barrel, swung through a short vicious arc, smashed the boy sideways to the floor spraying blood from his ripped mouth. A poorly aimed shot went through his shoulder; his bowels loosened and the smell of faeces added to the horror of the room. Shame and fear, two prime generators of hatred, began to fester in his mind. He blacked out before the Phalangist Christian militiamen hacked off his mother's hands to get her gold bracelets and rings.

Mercifully he remained unconscious as his beautiful sisters, twelve and fourteen years old, were dragged screaming from their hiding place under the floor, raped, mutilated and left with him to die. When he came round, covered in his own blood and the blood of his family, the horrific brutality perpetrated on his family hit him again. A vicious black hatred began to grow in this small survivor of the massacre at Shatila Palestinian refugee camp.

Chapter 1

**Heathrow, Terminal 3 Departures, 6am.
16th September 2002.**

The last check-in time for American Airlines flight AA115 from Heathrow to New York was seven in the morning.

The killers arrived at six.

The early morning sun glinted off the dark tinted windows of an expensive Mercedes saloon car as it drew up outside the airport concourse. With its' engine running quietly, the driver waited for a parking slot then glided into the curb. The doors opened, and four men wearing dark colored track suits stepped out into the throng of departing travelers. The grey 'U' shaped building enclosed a jostling queue of cabs and cars fighting for a place to set down passengers. The passengers, grabbing trolleys and loading them with luggage, eager to check in, streamed into the departure area, at first milling around then finding and joining the queues for their flights. The driver of the Mercedes saloon got out opened the car trunk and unloaded four long sports bags onto the pavement. He closed the trunk and the car doors, got back into the driving seat and began to study a road atlas. He waved and nodded in reply to the traffic controller on duty who waved him on. He seemed to be working out his route to the next destination so the traffic controller left him, and moved on down the line of vehicles.

Each of the four men picked up a sports bag. Three of them looked expectantly at the fourth man as if waiting for a signal. The fourth man appeared to be weighing the odds. The first anniversary of 9/11 had passed five days ago, security would now have relaxed somewhat.

He seemed to reach a point of no return. His tongue probed a triangular ridged scar in the roof of his mouth; his mind went back twenty years to the day in Shatila camp, the tastes of cordite and gun oil came flooding back. He took a deep breath and gave a short nod. In a well-rehearsed drill the men split into pairs and entered the crowded departure hall through different doorways ten yards apart. Inside the pairs turned left to zone 'B', the American Airlines check-in zone, and split again. Each man moved to a prearranged position, put down his grip and unzipped the top.



Little Sophie Wilson was bursting with excitement. Her baby blue eyes, as big as saucers, looked around the departure hall. She was about to go in an airplane for the very first time with mummy and daddy; all the way to New York to visit her grandparents, and then they were going to take her to Florida, to Disneyland! Her eyes sparkled, she beamed; she would meet all the Disney characters, go on all the rides and have ice-cream and dippy nuggets and chocolate milk shakes. At that age where waiting for birthday treats was almost unbearable she hopped from one foot to the other holding her mummy's hand whilst her daddy checked in their bags for the flight.



Chrisoula Kapopoulos had backache and her feet hurt. This for her was the worst part of being pregnant. She didn't mind the loss of her figure, that was only temporary and as a pregnant mum she positively glowed with that inner radiance which maternity gives to some women, but the discomfort was something else. This trip to the States and the family should have been made weeks earlier when she was not so big, but she couldn't bear to be apart from the handsome husband her parents had found for her. Her arranged marriage to Nicholas Kapopoulos was happier and more joyous than she could possibly have imagined.

He stood besides her holding her hand, smiling down proudly at his, lovely heavily pregnant wife. 'A son, it would be a son,' he thought; as the only son amongst six daughters he wanted more than anything else to continue the family name for his parent's sake. The old traditional ways were still strong amongst Greek Americans.



Alan Evans sat in his wheelchair lost in thought, a feeling of suppressed excitement deep inside himself. There was feeling in his legs; he had made his toes move. All the effort and all the agony of the last months at the special spinal injuries unit had been worthwhile. The therapists had given him a gleam of hope and now he had to persevere, work, work, work and work some more.

'Now it's up to you,' they'd told him.

He'd taken a deep breath and made the decision; he would do it – he would walk again – and run, and jump, and shout for joy! As he sat in his wheelchair waiting to check in he thought that above all he would never take anything for granted again, he determined to live life to the full from now on, every moment of it in all its diversity.



A tall and very shapely blonde girl, standing apart from the check-in queue, was turning heads, and every man who passed her took a good look.

Dawn Saint Pierre was quite used to this kind of attention and appeared not to notice. She was wearing tight brown leather trousers with a wolf fur jacket draped casually over her shoulders, and a tightly clinging grey long sleeved cotton sweater that left little to the imagination. To those who looked, it was obvious that she wore nothing underneath. The leather trousers were over matching ankle length stiletto heeled boots one of which she was tapping impatiently. She was waiting for her manager who was late. Her beautiful, if slightly sulky, looks were framed by long shining blonde hair silky enough to appear in shampoo adverts – as indeed it had – for Dawn Saint Pierre was a professional model. Some of the passers-by vaguely thought that they recognized her, and had she been wearing nothing at all they may well have done, as Dawn, then known as Doreen Peters, had made her start in the modeling business as a page three girl. Calendars had been a natural follow on and more recently she had appeared as the centerfold pin-up in a leading men's magazine. Now she was on her way to stardom with a part in a film, a very sexy film – almost soft porn – but never the less a film for all that. And there was talk of a record contract, for Dawn had a very good singing voice and wasn't afraid to shake it all about. Dawn's future was looking good. As she waited she wondered if, among the fellow passengers, any were film executives who could enhance her career and her casual gaze fell on a smartly dressed, good looking young man in the queue for her flight. 'It would be nice if it were him,' she mused, in fact he would be nice anytime. The young man turned in her direction. Dawn caught his eye; she gave him a very sexy smile.



For David Mason flying was a part of everyday living. As an engineer working for an American oil company he had to travel all over the world on the company's business. It was exciting at first but it didn't take long for the novelty to wear off. Knowing no one, staying in hotels where the rooms were all the same design and similar décor; seeing only the inside of meeting rooms, airport lounges and living out of a suitcase wasn't much fun in his book. In his experience the best way to make the time pass quickly was to work hard.

As he stood in the check-in queue he began to organize his projected workload. He had a lot to think about. Paperwork that he could deal with on the flight included the checking of calculations on load-bearing members and load-bearing points; there were progress reports to be reviewed and a list of critical components for random audit should be compiled. If he could deal with this on the flight, the list of design change requests from the main contractor and its impact on the critical path planning analysis could be dealt with in a day at the New York office. Then he could fly on to do the site visit. Maybe even take a couple of days off, hire some gear and get out into the Alaskan wilderness, clear his brain and recharge his batteries for a while.

His mental plan made, he glanced to his left and saw a stunning blonde girl looking directly at him. She gave him the sexiest smile he had ever seen. David Mason was astonished; this sort of thing never happened to him. He smiled back.

All thoughts of the Alaskan wilderness went completely out of his mind.

06.10am Terminal 3 Departures.

Jim Savage was bored; bored and envious of the people he was protecting. Airport protection had to be one of the least exciting jobs he had ever done in the police force. Hitching his Heckler and Koch MP5 to a more comfortable position he stood by a grey painted pillar in zone 'B' and surveyed the organized chaos that was the busy departure hall. Queues wound snake like between the tape barriers zigzagging up to the check-in desks beneath the illuminated red and blue double 'A' symbol of American Airlines. People of all shapes, sizes, colors and nationalities pushing trolleys loaded with bags, cases, boxes and bundles, all anxious to check in and get the best possible seats, an endless flow of people on the move every day; some tired, some on business, some excited, some going on holiday on a long awaited trip.

Jim wished he was jetting off to some exciting destination himself and as the thought crossed his mind he noticed a shapely blonde girl standing apart from the winding American Airlines check-in queue. Expensively dressed, she was wearing tight brown leather trousers over high-heeled ankle boots, and a beautifully filled close-fitting pale grey cotton sweater; and obviously no bra. A jacket in long wolf fur was draped casually over her shoulders. Long blonde hair swept down to the middle of her back. 'Wow, especially if I was with her,' Jim muttered under his breath, and began to daydream.



There was a thunderclap of sound.

The blast and subsequent shock wave struck like a double hammer blow. Then a stunned silence, all senses shocked, all action paralyzed.

Close to the explosion there was carnage. People began to scream. As hearing returned to those furthest from the explosion the sound of automatic gunfire assaulted their already ringing ears. One of the four men with sports bags had thrown a fragmentation grenade into the check-in queue for the American Airlines flight to New York. The metallic clunk and skitter on the hard floor caused heads in the queue to turn towards it as it went off. The four attackers, ducking behind pillars to avoid the blast, pulled out Kalashnikov assault rifles with folding stocks and, flicking the change levers to automatic, opened fire on the defenseless passengers. The copper-jacketed high velocity 7.62mm rounds were capable at short range of going through flesh and bone, through one body after another, and in the crowded conditions of the departure hall this is exactly what happened.

Little Sophie Wilson died instantly, hit in the chest by a jagged fragment from the grenade that went off only feet away from where she was standing. The force of the explosion hurled her poor mangled body to the ground together with the dreadfully wounded bodies of her parents. Sophie's father was mortally wounded and would die on the way to hospital. Her mother would live, blind and horribly disfigured for the rest of her life.

Alan Evans, trapped in his wheelchair, his head at waist height, was hit in the first burst of automatic rifle fire. A round passed through his neck, severing the carotid artery and cutting off the blood supply to his brain. His brain starved of life-giving oxygen he slowly lost his grip on life as the bright red arterial blood pumped in spurts from his throat. It took him several minutes to die.

The same bullet that killed her unborn son killed Chrisoula Kapopoulos. Hurling backwards by the blast from the grenade, she landed on her back over some luggage on the floor behind her. Already injured and pinned by the weight inside her, she was struggling to get up. The bullet entered her lower abdomen, went through her baby, up through her diaphragm and ruptured her heart. She fell back, both her and her baby dead.

Her husband Nicholas lay nearby. He had been hit in the head by a grenade fragment. He would be in a coma for several months, unaware of the tragedy that had so cruelly deprived him of his wife and unborn child.

David Mason had heard and felt high explosive detonations before, but not at such close range. Hammered to the ground by the initial blast, David was shocked and disoriented but his brain knew exactly what had happened. Shaking his head to try to clear it he struggled to his knees. His arms and legs were working. He could hear a rapid hammering noise as his hearing returned. He looked to his left and saw a few paces away a man in a black tracksuit firing an automatic rifle into the defenseless crowd. David was seized by an uncontrollable rage. Shaken though he was he leapt at the man with the weapon. Grabbing it by the barrel, he tried to wrench it from him. It was a very brave but very foolish thing to do. The man holding the gun moved in concert with David's pull on the weapon, centering the muzzle on David's chest and squeezing the trigger, to fire a burst into him at point blank range. David Mason died instantly, a blackened and smoldering hole in the front of his shirt, a horrific gaping hole in his back where the high velocity large-

caliber rounds exited. The press would make him a posthumous hero, but his parents would be broken and inconsolable.

Dawn Saint Pierre was only slightly injured in the initial blast. Slammed to the floor by an invisible force, she was winded but not wounded. By chance, no grenade fragments had hit her. Her nose was bleeding and she had hit her forehead on the hard polished surface of the floor, but she was otherwise unhurt. Dazed and confused, she struggled to her hands and knees. Looking up, she was in time to see a man grappling with a man with a gun. She saw him grab the gun and pull. She saw his back swing towards her and its centre blow apart as the burst of fire ripped through him. She did not see the bullet that hit her. Slowed and distorted from passing through David Mason, the bullet was deflected downwards and in her direction. As she was struggling to her feet to try to run, it hit her on the left hip at the corner of that triangular white area made by the bottom half of her bikini. Much of the force of the bullet was spent, but it still struck her like a kick from a horse. The bullet hit the inside edge of the pelvic girdle and was deflected inwards, severing a vein from the leg as it went, and spinning Dawn sideways and down to the floor. She was doubled up by the impact and hit the floor on the damaged hip. The pain was excruciating but short. She blacked out.

Archie Day, her manager, was not so lucky. He was hurrying through the crowd to join Dawn. He was late, and he was an impatient man who did not suffer lateness in others. This time his impatience cost him dear. A delay of a few moments and he would have missed his appointment with death. He walked directly into a bullet. It penetrated the left eye socket, went through into his brain and killed him outright.

06.11am Terminal 3 Check-in.

Jim Savage, snapped out of his daydream by the initial explosion, was far enough away from it to be unaffected by the blast and the flying metal splinters, but for a brief moment his mind was paralyzed. Shocked at what he saw, and unable to believe what was happening he heard the unmistakable sound of automatic weapons fire. Quickly gathering his scattered wits he took cover behind a concrete pillar and adopted a kneeling fire position, making himself a small target but with a firm aim. His Heckler and Koch emitted a sinister glimmer of reflected light as he flicked the safety catch to single shots and chambered a round.

Scanning the departure hall for the perpetrators, he caught a glimpse of two of the attackers firing automatic weapons into the crowd, but could not get a clear aim. People were running screaming across his line of fire; others were flat on the floor crying out in agony. His training prevented him from trying a shot whilst there was a risk of hitting any of them.

The firing stopped. He saw the two attackers nearest to him turn away, nod to each other and begin to make their escape. They were heading his way. Jim took careful aim, body centre of the leading figure, and squeezed the trigger. A single shot rang out and the man fell. 'One down,' Jim thought, 'how many to go?' The second attacker stopped, unsure of where the shot had come from. Jim moved the

safety catch of his weapon to auto and aimed the stubby black barrel off to the side of the second terrorist. Following his movements he took up the slack on the trigger. His field of fire was clear. The terrorist jumped sideways zigzagging towards the exit, and ran into Jim's short sharp burst of fire. He collapsed and lay still. Jim's eyes flicked back to the first man. He was moving painfully, trying to crawl towards the doors, his weapon abandoned. It would take him a long time to get away at that rate. Jim searched the departure hall for more attackers. He saw two more men carrying Kalashnikovs dash through the exit doors further down the departure hall. Jim sprinted for the exit, forcing his way past terrified passengers. He emerged outside just in time to see a large saloon car pulling away from the curb. An arriving vehicle unaware of the incident in the departure hall blocked his view of the number plate. 'Shit,' Jim swore angrily, he was powerless. His Heckler and Koch was a short-range weapon, deliberately loaded with specialist ammunition that would not penetrate beyond its target in a crowded place. The departing car was out of effective range. The whole incident had taken approximately 40 seconds from start to finish.

Jim pressed the transmit button on his personal radio and spoke into the mike. 'Three-five to control, red alert, repeat, red alert in departure hall, over.'

A voice came back: 'Control, alarm raised, all units activated, sitrep your location, over.'

Jim spoke clearly and concisely into his mike. 'Terrorist attacks in departure hall at check-in number fourteen. Four attackers seen; two down, two plus driver, attempting getaway in large dark Mercedes saloon car. Grenade thrown, automatic rifles used. Many injured, some badly, probable fatalities, over.'

There was a pause then, 'Control, message understood, standby, out.'

Jim waited.

'Control, emergency services activated, ambulances on their way. ETA your location two minutes. Change to channel three and liaise with other officers on duty, over.'

'Roger, three-five, out.' Jim applied his safety catch, switched his radio to channel three, and went back in to the departure hall to check on the two men he had stopped. The place was chaotic but people were calmer. Some were doing what they could for the injured; others were weeping or standing around in a state of shock. Jim gingerly approached the second man he had shot, his weapon aimed and ready. The man was alive but badly wounded. How badly Jim didn't know, but he was unconscious. Leaving him, Jim went warily over to check the first man to be downed. He was wounded, exhausted and no longer able to move. Lying clutching his stomach and obviously in considerable pain, he gave Jim a look filled with furious rage.

Jim looked round, and saw two police colleagues approaching at a run. He began to shake - reaction was setting in. He made an effort, took several deep breaths and spoke to his fellow police officers. 'Right, these two are terrorists,' he pointed out the two men. 'Put the 'cuffs on them. I'll cover you, so do them one at a time. When the 'cuffs are on search them, then one of you stay with each of them until they're under guard in a secure hospital ward.'

As soon as the handcuffs were in place Jim set off to look for the arriving ambulances to direct them in. He felt shaken and sick; and he knew that he had

hours of work in front of him - debriefings, report writing and so on. 'Jesus,' he muttered to himself, 'maybe being bored wasn't so bad after all,' but then he realized that the excitement was quite like old times.

As he made his way through the carnage of the check-in area he heard a voice, a girl's voice, low and rough with pain. It came from a figure doubled up on the floor; a pool of blood was spreading out from underneath her.

'Help me, please help me.' The voice was barely a whisper.

Checking his stride, Jim stopped and knelt by the brown leather-clad form. It was the blonde girl he had been leching over as the attack began.

06.15am Terminal 3 Set-down area.

The two fleeing terrorists leapt into the waiting Mercedes and slammed the doors. The driver floored the accelerator and the powerful car surged away from the curb. People stared in shocked surprise. The leader spoke harshly to the driver in guttural consonantal Arabic.

'Two are martyred. Go! Go! Not so fast, merge with the traffic, blend in don't make us stand out.' He and his companion shoved their folded weapons into black plastic bags. They removed the training shoes from their feet, and stripped off the baggy track-suits they had been wearing. Everything went into the black plastic bags with the guns.

Underneath the track-suits they were wearing dark suit trousers, white shirts and neat ties. They slipped their feet into polished leather slip-on shoes, did up their collars, tightened the knots in their ties, brushed down their trousers and sat back.

The driver eased the car through the traffic, round the one way system, and into terminal two short-stay car-park. The men got out, opened the trunk and threw in the black plastic bags. They took out and donned jackets and topcoats, picked up briefcases and, still wearing their gloves, closed the trunk. Then they walked into terminal two. Merging with other passengers, the three terrorists, now indistinguishable from any of the other traveling businessmen, made their way to separate check-in desks. They presented their tickets, obtained boarding cards for flights to three different European destinations, and immediately passed through security and passport control. Each man went directly to a separate departure lounge. Unremarked, their faces composed, they sat quietly, confident that no security checks could link them to the outrage perpetrated in terminal three only a few hundred yards away. They began to read newspapers taken from their briefcases. Within thirty minutes all of them were onboard different flights. Within an hour all their flights were clear of British airspace. In three hours each man was in a different European country. It would take the police a week to find the car.

06.20am Terminal 3 Check-in.

As she forced her way out of the mists of unconsciousness Dawn saw a figure walking towards her. She tried to speak. 'Help me, please help me.' The words

came out as a whisper. To her intense relief the figure stopped and knelt by her side.

'Where are you hurt?' Jim Savage asked.

Dawn struggled again to speak through a dry mouth, 'Mm m my h hip, hip and stomach.'

'Okay, let me have a look.'

Jim carefully pulled her hands away from her hip. They were bloody. He looked at the hip as best he could without moving her. He could see the spreading stain of blood from the wound. It was dark seeping venous blood, no arterial blood as far as he could tell, but there could be internal bleeding. He took a clean handkerchief from his pocket and placed it over the entry wound. Stripping away his body armor he took his shirt off and rolled it into a pad, which he gently pressed on top of the handkerchief.

'Hold this in place,' he told her, guiding her hands to the rolled up pad. 'Press it as tight as you can.' He placed the fur jacket lying next to her over her shoulders and upper body to keep her warm and to help ward off shock. 'Now I'll find an ambulance and a doctor. I'll be back soon.'

'Don't leave me, please stay with me,' Dawn's frightened whisper came through dry lips. Gone was the sexy look. The face, pale beneath the careful make up, was the face of a badly scared young girl.

'Don't worry, you're going to be okay,' Jim reassured her, squeezing her hand gently. 'The ambulances are outside, I'll only be gone a few seconds, I'll come straight back.'

06.30am London.

Within ten minutes of the end of the attack phones rang in the news rooms of the main UK. T.V. channels. A tape recorder clicked and a voice spoke in heavily accented but accurate English.

'The Blood of Shatila has struck its first blow.'

'Your soldiers are on Holy Islamic soil; you kill our brothers the Taliban, our friends in al Qaeda. This is our response and these are our demands:

'The world must open its ears to the voices of the People of Islam.'

'The world must open its eyes to the plight of the people of Palestine.'

'We are forced from our homes.'

'We are dispossessed of our lands.'

'We have no redress.'

'All Israeli settlers must be removed from the West Bank.'

'The Dome of the Rock and the other Holy places of Jerusalem must be returned to Islam.'

'An independent Palestinian state must be created.'

'The killing of our brothers in Southern Lebanon, in Gaza, in the West Bank must stop immediately.'

'As the world has ignored our plight so we make war on the world.'

At this point reports of the attack at the airport were already coming in. The timing was impeccable. The newsrooms started to collate the information as the major item for the next news program. Seventeen people were dead. Thirty-five were seriously injured. Sixty-two suffered minor wounds. All those present during the attack suffered shock and fear. The channel whose reporting team had been waiting for a celebrity scored a notable first. The other channels dispatched camera crews immediately and began to speculate. All gave priceless airtime to the phoned-in tape recorded message.

06.30am Heathrow, Terminal 3 Departures.

Jim Savage directed the emergency services to the scene then stayed with Dawn until the medics arrived. He held her hand as she was wheeled out to where the line of ambulances was waiting. She gripped his hand with the desperation of someone who has no one else. 'Please don't leave me.'

'I have to go,' Jim said gently, 'there are things I have to do. I'll come and visit later if you like, as soon as I'm finished here. Look, I'm sorry but I don't know your name?'

'Dawn, Dawn Saint-Pierre.'

Recognition dawned in Jim's eyes and with it an uncertainty not usual to him. Dawn Saint Pierre was a famous model.

'Well, I can come if you really want me to,' he offered hesitantly.

Dawn managed a ghost of a smile. 'Yes, really I do.'

September 17th. Mayfair.

A man stepped through the back door of the American Embassy into Blackburn's Mews and looked carefully around. There was a stillness about him that evoked an air of competence. Mike Edge, for that was his name, saw nothing to alarm him. It was a beautiful sunny day, the sky clear, one of those days that occasionally transform London. As he had plenty of time to get to the Home Office he decided to walk. He set off down South Audley Street past busy cafes and exclusive shops through the residential streets of Mayfair, heading towards Shepherds Market and Piccadilly. A pleasant stroll through Green Park in the bright sunshine, across the Mall into St James's Park and across the lake by the footbridge, took him to the Home Office in Petty France by way of Queen Anne's Gate. The walk gave him time to marshal his thoughts and form a framework of questions to ask.

Major Caltrop of MI5 looked out across the Guards Chapel towards Saint James's Park from the office of an Under Secretary of the Home Office.

'Who is this Mike Edge, what do we know about him?'

The man he was speaking to, a Captain on secondment from the Intelligence Corps opened a file on the desk before him. A series of photographs were set in clear plastic sleeves immediately inside the cover. The photographs were of a tall man with strong, regular, features, dark hair graying slightly at the temples, and wearing steel framed spectacles. The spectacles, a beige corduroy jacket and a

blue denim shirt, created a scholarly look and gave him the appearance of a college professor. It was a carefully constructed appearance and a deceptive one.

The Captain glanced through the photographs, and then began to read from the file contents. 'He's a former Commander in American Naval Intelligence, currently working for the Defense Intelligence Agency out of Fort Bolling, Washington DC. I presume he retains his naval rank but it doesn't say that here.'

Major Caltrop grunted. The rank of the man he was about to meet was the most important item of information as far as he was concerned. 'Hmm, I suppose we must assume so,' he said, grudgingly realizing that this American probably held rank senior to his own. 'Give me a thumb nail sketch.'

'Right. He was born in San Francisco. His father was an engineer and worked for Standard Oil of California, his mother was an economist. He graduated from the University of California with a first class honors degree in Politics Philosophy and Economics then went on to do a Masters degree. His thesis was on the economics of Middle Eastern Oil and he got a distinction. Did naval cadet training at university and volunteered for navy pilot training but his eyesight wasn't quite up to it. Accepted entry to the US Navy, went through officer training, and was drafted to Naval Intelligence. Must have been a natural, his promotion was rapid, rapid enough to warrant staying in the Navy, he could've been expected to reach the top levels.'

'Hmm, could be a political move, maybe he's merely on loan to DIA?'

The Captain nodded in agreement. 'Quite possibly, and he's extended his range, he's highly regarded as an Arabist. He spent several years in the Persian Gulf States, speaks fluent Arabic, studied the history of the region and recently has been working in Tel Aviv as an analyst of Middle Eastern affairs.'

'Who's his boss?'

'John Henderson.'

'Ha, that's why he's on this job, must be genned up on Israeli-Palestinian issues.'

The door to the office opened and the Captain stood up. The Under Secretary came into the room and took his place behind his desk. 'Right gentlemen, our American visitor is on his way up,' he announced.

Major Caltrop picked up the file and returned to the window to study the photographs. He was not at all pleased at the prospect of the Americans getting involved. He turned as Mike Edge entered, looking up belligerently from a photo to the reality. 'Ah, Mister Edge, or is it Commander?'

Mike Edge read his man immediately; he had met the military mindset before. He stood his ground, perfectly still, just inside the door, his eyes measuring the three men there. 'Commander Edge will do very well.'

Annoyed at being ignored by Major Caltrop in his own office, and in order to defuse a developing atmosphere, the Under Secretary stood up and walked round his desk. 'Good Morning Commander,' I'm John Fallows, Under Secretary with responsibility for internal security matters, this is Major Caltrop of "Five", and Captain Jennings from Intelligence.' He gestured towards a meeting table to one side of his office. 'Shall we sit down gentlemen?'

The four men took a seat each.

Aware of his breach of protocol Major Caltrop said nothing, just cleared his throat.

Captain Jennings, being the junior rank present, remained silent.

So did Mike Edge.

'Well, Commander where would you like to start?' John Fallows asked.

'I've flown in from Tel Aviv; all I've seen so far are TV news reports. Suppose we start with the information you have,' Mike Edge suggested.

'We know nothing about them, except that they are calling themselves the "Blood of Shatila" movement. We're expecting some information from your end,' Major Caltrop stated bluntly.

John Fallows looked at Mike hopefully.

Mike shook his head; as yet this group was unknown to him. 'Well, Shatila was one of the Palestinian camps in South Beirut where massacres took place, twenty years ago today,' he offered.

'That's stating the obvious.' Major Caltrop's comment came out as a sneer. Mike Edge's eyes hardened.

'Well, you'd better listen to the tape.' John Fallows took a tape cassette from his desk drawer and put it into a cassette player. The voice claiming responsibility for the attack at Heathrow airport filled the room.

Mike listened carefully to the accent. 'Hmmm, they're Palestinians, Eastern Arabic usage, no doubt about that. They're pushing the Palestinian cause and they want the shelling of Hezbollah stopped. Possibly Hezbollah are funding them. So, they're a splinter group, but are they from Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, or some other group? It's hard to know which faction; it would help to know who the leader is?'

'We don't know,' Major Caltrop grudgingly admitted, 'but whoever they are they have no damned business attacking unarmed civilians, it's a bloody disgrace.'

Mike looked at him. 'They wouldn't agree with you.'

Major Caltrop raised an eyebrow, about to reply, but Mike forestalled him. 'Know your enemy Major. Seventy eight percent of their country has been taken from them by the Israelis, and not content with that, the Israelis are now busy colonizing the twenty two percent they have left,' Mike said, his eyes locked with the major's eyes.

'But killing innocent civilians, there's no...'

'Obviously you know about Shatila and perhaps Sabra too?'

The major's gaze wavered and fell. 'You sound as if you are on their side,' he said, curling his lip.

'No. I'm an American. I'm here because people of my country are being attacked. My job is to protect them; to do that I have to understand the issues; on both sides.'

'So why are they attacking Americans?'

'Because America has largely funded the growth and power of the Israeli state; and because the Jewish vote in America, can make or break Presidents. No American politician dares to alienate them.'

Major Caltrop snorted. 'Huh, American foreign policy, dictated by political ambition as usual.'

‘So what’s new? The same has been true in both our countries for centuries. I don’t have the time to argue over such issues and it’s not what I’m here for. I’m here to find out what I can and to give you any help I can.’

Major Caltrop’s eyes wavered.

‘So, what else can you give me?’

‘You can have a copy of this tape. You can view two of the weapons used. There are statements from witnesses; in particular the statement from PC Savage, the senior armed officer on duty. And you can interview the two we have in custody, not that you’ll get much out of them, oh, and the forensic and ballistics reports, if you need them.’

‘Okay,’ Mike agreed, ‘that’s a start. Can you arrange for me to interview the guy who was on duty during the attack? Savage was it? Tomorrow if that’s okay, the prisoners too? I’ll take the tapes and the copies of the reports with me now to work on back at my office.’

Major Caltrop nodded. ‘Very well,’ he said grudgingly, becoming more and more annoyed at his inability to prevent this American from getting involved.

Mike stuffed the tape and reports into his briefcase and got up to leave. At the door he turned. ‘Caltrop? That’s a spiky iron ball that was used to hinder cavalry troops isn’t it?’

The Major looked at him blankly, wrong footed. His mouth opened, but he found nothing to say.

Mike Edge, smiling wickedly, left the room. He walked back through St James’s Park, the sun hot on his back. There was laughter; people were setting out food and wine on the grass, taking the opportunity for a picnic lunch. Pretty girls in summer dresses and in swimsuits were topping up holiday tans. Wishing he too had so few cares Mike began to go over the scant information he had received and to add bits and pieces to it from memory. Several political organizations capable of funding such a terrorist group came to mind. Palestinian Hamas, dissident Saudi-backed al Qaeda, Egyptian based Islamic Jihad, or Iranian funded Hezbollah, the “Party of God”, based in southern Lebanon. There were many possibilities and permutations. ‘Follow the money,’ he muttered under his breath, ‘follow the money.’

September 18th. Paddington Green Police Station.

There would be a trial. The two wounded terrorists had been given medical attention and would live to face a judge and jury. They had been taken to a secure ward in a nearby hospital under heavy police guard. As soon as they were conscious they had been charged under the provisions of the Terrorism Act on the evidence given by PC Savage and by other witnesses present during the attack. Then, as soon as they could be moved, they were taken to Paddington Green, the police station with the most secure cells in the country.

The terrorists were very well trained. They knew the dangers of talking and maintained a determined silence. There was no doubt about their guilt, but they were not going to give away information which would help the security services of the West to discover their origins or to get onto the trail of their organization.

Whilst awaiting trial they sat in their respective cells. They determined the direction of Mecca from the position of the sun. For the proscribed number of times every day they prayed devoutly to Allah, kneeling, bowing, kneeling and prostrating, lips moving silently they went through the proscribed rituals. What they had done had been done in the name of Allah. He was with them; he would look after them and deliver them from the hands of the Infidel, the Unbelievers. Their own people had strayed from the Path, had become lost, their expulsion from their homeland was the result, the punishment. The only way back was to re-embrace the old ways, the true ways, the teachings of the Koran. Back to the fundamentals of Islam - Islamic Fundamentalism - that holy export of the Mullahs of Iran.

The only quicker, surer, path was Martyrdom.

Chapter 2

September 18th. Athens.

As the last rays of the afternoon sun were gilding the Parthenon, Andreas Kokalis turned left off Liosion, along Filadelfias and towards Stathmos Larisis, the main Athens railway station. The streets were darkening rapidly and Andreas began to hurry. His handsome young face and thin moustache could not conceal a secret smile. He was in a jubilant mood, the bundle of used Drachmae in his inside jacket pocket represented more than six months earnings from his regular employment, and that was only half the promised sum. Andreas, in his mind, was already spending the money in his pocket. He smiled again as he pictured himself wearing the expensive new clothes and the gold Rolex watch that he had recently been admiring.

The big opportunity had come about via his work. The man who had presented him with the opportunity was a regular visitor to the Five Star Hotel where Andreas worked as a concierge. A quiet man in his mid to late forties, George Liani had stayed at the hotel regularly over a period of several months and Andreas had come to know him well. Andreas supposed him to be a wealthy businessman. Wealthy because he always left a generous tip, and as most of the regular visitors to the exclusive Hotel Grande Bretagne were business people, Andreas had assumed that George Liani was a businessman too - which was exactly what the man calling himself George Liani wanted people to think. Well dressed, with plenty of money, and staying in the oldest and finest hotel in Athens, George Liani acquired an automatic air of respectability. But he was not what he seemed, and his fluent Greek had an accent that Andreas couldn't quite place. Whilst checking on the availability of theatre tickets one evening George Liani casually asked, 'I don't suppose you know anyone who wants to make a little easy money?'

Andreas looked at him. He could always use a few extra Drachmae himself. 'Doing what sir?'

‘Well, it’s a little delicate; an accommodation for some business friends of mine, nothing illegal of course, but a fair amount of discretion is needed - that’s why it pays so well.’

That the job was likely to pay well immediately sharpened Andreas’s interest, as it was meant to do.

‘What’s involved?’

‘My friends are in shipping.’

Andreas nodded, that was respectable enough; many wealthy Greek families were in that line of business.

George Liani continued, ‘They live outside Greece as tax exiles, but they urgently need to spend time inside the country, over and above the permitted amount allowed by the tax authorities. They are being threatened with a hostile take-over and need time to prepare the defense of their interests.’

Andreas nodded again. He was no corporate law expert, the explanation sounded okay, but what could he do to help out with that sort of situation?

George Liani answered his unspoken question. ‘They need a villa and some transport rented on their behalf. I’m too close to be involved myself; it has to be someone unconnected with them. Because of the discretion needed, a large fee is available, plus a regular monthly retainer for making any additional arrangements. Do you know anyone who would be interested?’

‘How much are they paying?’

George Liani named a fee and a retainer to be available if the initial job went without a hitch.

As Andreas gulped the bait, George Liani struck home the hook by taking a large wad of high denomination bank notes from an inside pocket and peeling off one as a tip. ‘Half the money will be paid when a suitable villa is rented, the rest when the cars are hired. The cash to pay for the villa rental and the car hire you’d get up front.’

Andreas had taken the job on. After all renting a villa and a couple of cars was not illegal, and if anyone asked he could have a story ready which was near enough to the truth to stand up to examination.

Andreas Kokalis had duly handed over the address of a large secluded villa together with two sets of keys. The villa was rented for a month, in his name, with cash paid in advance. In return he had received from George Liani a bundle of used Drachmae as promised, the same Drachmae that were now burning a hole in his pocket. A day later, there were two cars parked in the drive in front of the villa, also paid for cash in advance, and all that Andreas had to do now was to meet George Liani, hand over the keys to the cars, and collect the balance of his promised drachmae.

Andreas reached the concourse of Athens railway station and waited as arranged, at the set down area, where cars dropped off and picked up passengers continuously. No one would take any notice of him getting into a car there. He stood apart from the taxi queue and lit a cigarette feeling as though what he was doing was clandestine and exciting. It was certainly a hell of a lot better than being at the beck and call of all and sundry, working as a concierge. Maybe this was only the beginning, maybe George Liani needed a local mister fix-it, and maybe this was only a test.

Andreas began to daydream. The new clothes and the new Rolex fitted into the dream very well.

A large BMW saloon with dark tinted windows drew up alongside him, the window slid down and George Liani leaned across the front seat smiling and beckoning to him to get into the back. Andreas opened the door and got in. There was someone sitting on the far side of the back seat, a young man whom Andreas had not seen before, a man with olive complexion, dark eyes and a moustache. He smiled and nodded. Andreas smiled and nodded back, wondering who he was. One of the tax exiles, perhaps?

George Liani pulled away from the curb saying, 'We'll conclude our business away from prying eyes.'

'Okay,' Andreas agreed, and sat back wondering where they were going.

George Liani headed for Peiraios, followed it a short way then turned on to Vaseleiou Tou Megalou, going out through Tavros towards the industrial area on the western side of the city. A seed of doubt began to germinate in Andreas's mind. George Liani had not gone to these lengths to pay him the cash the first time.

'Why do we need to come this far out?' he asked.

There was no answer. Andreas looked to his left and directly into a large black silencer screwed on to the end of an automatic pistol. His mouth went dry and he began to sweat. The car pulled into a factory gateway and stopped. George Liani got out, closed his door, and unlocked the gate. The sign on the gate advertised a firm manufacturing poultry and livestock foods.

George Liani drove the car in and then relocked the gate. He opened a side door in the factory building with a key, and put on the lights. He then opened the car door on Andreas's side. Now he too had a gun with a silencer on it. 'Out, Greek,' he said, motioning with the gun and stepping back to cover Andreas's movements.

Andreas got out, sick with fear; he could place the accent now. George Liani's hate betrayed any disguise. George Liani was a Turkish Cypriot and they had no love for Greeks. Andreas thought about making a dash for it.

'Stand still.'

Andreas froze; his mind refusing to believe what was happening to him. The second man jumped out of the car and also covered Andreas with his gun.

'In there.' George Liani pointed to the open door.

George Liani's accomplice jammed the silencer of his automatic hard into Andreas's spine pre-empting Andreas's last chance of flight. Slowly Andreas walked inside. There was a dreadful smell. The concrete floor was dank and wet from hosing-down and scrubbing with brooms, but no amount of scrubbing and hosing could remove the smell of death. This part of the factory processed the offal, bones and flesh of dead animals into meat and bone meal, an ingredient of livestock feeds.

Andreas didn't hear the shot that killed him. The bullet, an unjacketed soft lead 9mm round from a silenced Walther P4, smashed through the back of his skull and out through the front, blasting away part of his face. Only the two men inside the building heard the 'phut' of the shot, no one else heard anything at all. The force of the impact flung the dead Andreas face down onto the dank concrete.

George Liani and his helper wasted no time. They removed the Drachmae Andreas had been so pleased to earn, together with the car keys, then, using a

sharp knife, they cut away his shoes and clothing, and put it all into a black plastic bag. Taking an arm and a leg each, they heaved Andreas's naked remains into the feed hopper of the process machinery. George Liani pressed a green button on the side of the machine. With a sickening crunching grinding sound Andreas disappeared from view.

The second man hosed the pool of blood and urine into the drain.

George Liani pressed the red stop button and the machinery stopped. 'One less Greek to breed,' he said, reverting to his native Turkish, and spat into the machine.

The two men switched off the lights and left quietly the way they had come, taking the black plastic bag with them and pitching it into the trunk of their car.

When the factory started processing next morning the corpse of Andreas Kokalis would vanish leaving no trace.

September 18th. St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington.

Jim Savage had endured hours of questioning and report writing. When it was over he remembered his promise to Dawn Saint Pierre. Should he go or not, he wondered? He would like to have a girl like that but would a girl like that want him? 'What the hell,' he muttered, 'she did ask me.' He rang the hospital and was told that Miss Saint Pierre was recovering well and could receive visitors. He hurried home and showered. On an impulse, at a stall inside the busy hospital foyer, Jim bought a bunch of flowers. Armed with these he went to reception and asked for Miss Saint Pierre. The lady on the desk told him the ward. Jim found his way there and, suddenly feeling unsure of himself, went in.

Dawn saw him the moment he entered. She had been hoping he would come. Her face lit up and she gave him a shy smile. Jim's hesitancy vanished; he grinned at her and strode over to her bed. 'Hi, how are you feeling? I brought you these,' he said, thrusting the flowers forward, 'thought they might cheer you up.'

'Oh, they're lovely,' Dawn exclaimed. She sniffed the bouquet. 'Mmmm, the freesias smell gorgeous...' she paused. It's a bit difficult.... I've just realized, I don't know your name.'

'It's Jim, Jim Savage, my friends call me Jumper.'

'Well, I'll use your real name. Hello Jim, I'm Dawn, Dawn Saint-Pierre.' She smiled at him.

'You're looking a lot better,' he said to cover his awkwardness, and indeed she was. Some color was back in her cheeks, she had brushed her hair, and she had applied a little make-up.

'Yes, they gave me lots of blood and the surgeon told me that he's done a really neat job on my hip. There'll only be a small scar and that will fade in time. Anyway, it's in a place where it won't be seen, so it could have been worse. Look, I've got the bullet they removed,' she took the flattened 7.62mm round off the bedside locker and showed it to Jim.

Jim shuddered; he knew what these things could do. 'Any pain?' he asked.

'No, they've given me painkillers, so I can't feel a thing.'

'You've been very lucky.'

‘I know,’ Dawn replied. She was silent for a few moments. ‘I could easily have been killed. I’ve been thinking a lot since I’ve been in here, it really shakes up your ideas, you know, about how you live, what’s important and all that.’

‘Yes, I know the feeling,’ Jim agreed, ‘makes you want to live life to the full and not waste it.’

‘Yes,’ Dawn agreed quietly, ‘have you got any kids?’

‘No, I’ve never been married.’

There was another short silence.

‘Can I get you anything? Anything you want done; messages to your family or anyone?’ Without intending to Jim gave the “anyone” an emphasis he hadn’t meant it to have.

Dawn picked up on it immediately. ‘There isn’t an “anyone” around at the moment,’ she said.

Jim was still digesting this statement when the ward sister interrupted their private thoughts.

‘Excuse me,’ she said with an apologetic smile, ‘but the doctor and physiotherapist are coming to see Miss Saint-Pierre in about five minutes, could you be ready to leave by then?’

‘Oh, yes, okay.’ Jim was disappointed but had to agree.

Hesitantly Dawn asked, ‘Could you do me a favor. Would you get me a few things?’

‘Sure, anything you want.’

Dawn opened her locker and took out her shoulder bag. She rummaged in it and pulled out some keys. ‘These are my house keys,’ she told him and, taking a bill from an envelope, she gave him the envelope carrying the address. ‘Could you go round to my place and bring me some clean underwear, a dressing gown and some pajamas? Oh, and some toilet things, and makeup?’

‘Well, hang on, what about your family, won’t they mind?’

‘No sisters or brothers, only me; and my parents are up North. Dad doesn’t drive any more, they’re going to come down by train but they don’t know London at all, it would be a bit of a struggle for them...’

‘Oh, I’m sorry. Well, if you’re sure, yes, of course I’ll do that for you.’

Dawn held her hand out. ‘Quick, give me that envelope back; I’ll make you a list.’ She scribbled furiously for a couple of minutes. ‘There you are, a list, and notes of where everything is.’

The ward sister came in with the doctor and the physiotherapist.

‘Right, I’d better be off then. See you soon.’ Jim left the ward, his thoughts chaotic. Could this stunning girl really be interested in him? In Jim’s experience this kind of thing didn’t happen in real life.

Dawn’s gaze followed him out; she had a speculative look on her face.

September 19th. Mayfair.

It was pouring with rain as Mike Edge stepped out from the American Embassy into Blackburn’s Mews for the second time. The London weather had changed totally with a cold, wet, leaden sky. ‘I could be in another damn country,’ Mike thought, he walked behind the big modern building into Upper Grosvenor Street

and waved down the first cab he saw. 'Vauxhall Cross,' he told the cabbie, 'the intelligence building.'

'Okay, the Iceberg is it?'

'Iceberg?'

'Yeah, well that's what the punters working there call it,' the cabbie explained, 'they say there's more underground than above - an' it's painted white innit?'

When Mike arrived at the Iceberg Major Caltrop was conspicuously absent, but Captain Jennings was waiting for him with the police officer from the armed airport detail. He took them through the security checks to an interview room where the weapons from the airport attack and various other items had been laid out.

Mike's first impression of Jim Savage was of a no nonsense character, standing four square, stomach in, chest out, and chin up. He didn't get that confident bearing from Police training, not even from an armed security unit, Mike thought as he noted the hard, slightly battered face.

'Ex-Army are you, PC Savage?' he asked.

'No, Royal Marines,' Jim Savage replied, looking offended.

'Oh Really?' Mike had come across Royal Marines Commandos during his US Navy days and had been impressed with their professional qualities. 'What did you do in the Royal Marines, Constable Savage?'

'The Real Marines,' Jim Savage replied, a gleam in his eye, 'I was a senior N.C.O., a sergeant instructor.'

'Which branch?'

'SC.'

Mike's eyebrows rose a fraction higher. SC stood for Swimmer Canoeist, the specialist branch whose highly trained and skilled members made up the little known and very secretive S.B.S. units. Their boast was, 'Whatever the S.A.S. can do we can do it with flippers on.'

Mike Edge was impressed and Jim Savage knew it. The S.B.S. had inspired the US Navy SEALs, they were the best. 'I worked with some of your guys once or twice.'

It was Jim Savage's turn to raise his eyebrows inquiringly.

'Naval Intelligence attached to Special Forces,' Mike explained.

The two men looked at each other with mutual understanding. A barrier came down.

'Okay, let's forget the bullshit,' Mike said, 'you know why I'm here, tell it how it happened.'

Jim nodded. 'Okay,' He took a deep breath. 'I was on duty in the departure hall and I was bored stiff,' he began then paused, realizing an explanation was needed for this statement. 'Well this type of work is the worst I have ever done, but a job is a job and I couldn't find anything else when I came out of the Corps...'

Mike interrupted him. 'But guys with your talents and abilities are in great demand now.'

'Wish I knew where.'

'Seriously?' Mike looked at him. He needed all the goodwill and co-operation he could get. It wouldn't hurt for Jim Savage to owe him one. He wrote rapidly on his pad and tore off the page, folded it and passed it over. It carried the name Fine

Line Solutions, a specialist Private Military Company based in Knightsbridge, together with a telephone number.

'Give this firm a ring and ask for a guy named Cunningham, you can mention my name, I'm sure he could find you something with better pay and much more interesting work.'

'Well thanks very much,' Jim said, surprised, 'much appreciated, I'm sure,' and he slipped the folded paper into his inside pocket. 'If I can ever do you a favor, you only have to ask, okay?' They were to be portentous words.

'You never know,' Mike said with a wry smile. 'Anyway let's get on.'

'Yeah well,' Jim continued, 'there I was, bored bloody stiff, leeching over a gorgeous blonde, when all hell broke loose.' He gave Mike the details, giving him a very clear and concise picture of what had happened.

In the process Mike found that he liked Jim Savage and was glad that he had offered to help him with a reference.

September 19th. Marylebone Magistrates' Court.

Both of the captured terrorists were brought before magistrates and were remanded in custody pending trial. When the trial began the charges ranged from armed affray to murder. Neither man would speak to the barrister appointed to defend his case. The barristers did what they could for them by quoting the hardships of the Palestinian people and making justifications to the jury, but that did not affect the trial results. The jury took the view that, however just the Palestinian cause, it could not and did not justify an armed attack on innocent people in a third country.

But both the terrorists wanted to be found guilty. They wished to be martyrs to their cause and to obtain the maximum publicity possible. On being sentenced the two men spoke for the first time. With clenched raised fists they shouted in unison, '**For "The Blood of Shatila".**' '**For "The Blood of Shatila".**' The press loved it.

September 19th. Bayswater.

Jim Savage looked at his watch, he had promised to go round to Dawn Saint-Pierre's place and pick up her things. He would have to hurry to get there and back to the hospital for the start of visiting hours. He set off for Bayswater, the area of London where Dawn lived. Her address was a mews cottage in that part of London just north of Kensington Gardens, which forms the western border of the City of Westminster.

Jim entered the mews and started checking the numbers. He found Dawn's double fronted mews cottage half way down on the right hand side. Smart, with fresh white paintwork and brightly colored flowers in hanging baskets, it was obviously an expensive property. There was a garage on one side, a door in the centre and a Georgian bow window on the other side.

The Georgian window frames hid discreet security grills. The front door carried Banham security locks, and both doors and windows were protected by an alarm system. Using Dawn's keys, Jim opened the front door and deactivated the alarms.

He found himself in a small square entrance hall at the foot of a flight of stairs. There were doors to his right and to his left. Opening the right-hand door he stepped through into a garage. A new dark red Mini Cooper with cream leather interior stood there. The garage door worked on an up-and-over mechanism operated by a remote signal unit in the car. Very neat, Jim thought, Dawn could drive up, open her garage without getting out of her car, drive in, close the door behind her and then get out of the car in perfect safety.

Jim left the garage and went through into the room to the left of the hall. It was an office-cum-workroom.

A desk carried a PC, keyboard and screen. A printer stood on a side table. In and out trays for mail and a leather desk diary were on the desk together with a large blotter. It was neat, orderly and professional. Suddenly Jim noticed the pictures on the walls. They were enlargements of studio portraits, pictures of Dawn professionally posed, photographs for magazines and tabloid newspapers.

They were stunning. Her slightly sulky face pouted provocatively, and her long blonde hair swept down, artfully arranged to conceal very little. Jim swallowed hard. Could this incredibly beautiful woman really be interested in him? It was hard to believe, and it was becoming harder. He tore his eyes away from the photographs and left the room, taking the desk diary with him; it was on Dawn's list.

He went up the stairs and entered the living area. At the rear was a small kitchen, cleverly fitted to contain everything necessary, all new and sparkling. Next to the kitchen was a big comfortable bathroom. Set in the corner was a large oval Jacuzzi bath with a shower above it. A curtain on a curved rail would close off the bath into a spacious shower unit. The whole bathroom was beautifully tiled in mosaics, walls, floor, fittings, everything in rich warm colors.

Jim went into the large living room. It was tastefully furnished, an original still life of fruit, glowed above a Victorian tiled fireplace. The sofa and chairs were in the finest Italian leather, the thick shag-pile carpet soft and deep. Over by the window an antique dining table was surrounded by matching period dining chairs. It was obvious to Jim that money had not been a problem when furnishing this place. He went into the bedroom.

A King size double bed was the first thing he saw. A pang of jealousy stabbed through him. 'Who does she share that with?' he wondered. A mirrored fitted wardrobe filled one wall. Annoyed with himself and his thoughts, Jim went over and opened two of the doors to search for a grip Dawn's notes said would be in there. As the doors opened Jim saw that the whole of the hanging area was filled with clothes. Designer clothes. Below the hanging area were racks of shoes. Expensive shoes. All exclusive names.

Above the hanging area were shelves. Jim took down the grip. It was Gucci. He opened two more wardrobe doors, revealing an area half hanging space and half drawers. The hanging space contained winter coats, leather, fur and cashmere, different lengths and colors.

Jim began to feel ratty. His own flat was respectable but very ordinary, nothing like this. How could he ever take her back there? His dreams began to fade. 'Bloody fool,' he muttered to himself, 'she can't be interested in you.'

He began to pack the items Dawn had listed, and took some of the flimsy silk underwear from a drawer; it was faintly perfumed and very sexy. 'Not bloody fair,' he muttered, and then, as he finished collecting the bits and pieces Dawn needed, a thought occurred to him. If he could earn more maybe he could meet Dawn on more equal terms.

September 19th. Southwest Beirut.

The Blood of Shatila splinter group had set up its headquarters in the ravaged, war-torn city of Beirut, that once beautiful city known as the pearl of the eastern Mediterranean. Their chosen location was an underground car park and service complex deep beneath a damaged apartment building in the southern part of the Western Muslim sector. In a converted storeroom a pressure lamp, hanging from a hook in the ceiling, hissed as it lit the centre of the room where a meeting was being held. In the shadowy corners the grey concrete graded to black.

The man commanding the attention of the assembled company was the man who had led the attack at Heathrow. Styling himself "Abu Asifah", or "Father of Storms", his eyes were blazing with fanaticism and triumph. 'We have struck a mighty blow,' he shouted, 'the world of the unbelievers has been shaken, our cause proclaimed.' He paused for the words to sink in. 'The Israeli dogs wish to crush the Palestine Liberation Organization as they crushed houses at Jenine. They kept Chairman Arafat penned in his headquarters and weakened him in the eyes of the world. The suicide martyrs of Islamic Jihad are putting pressure on the Israelis but it is not enough. The American Jews with their money and their votes are destroying our nation. It is up to us now, we must carry the torch of freedom for our people, we must maintain the momentum, keep applying pressure, more and more pressure until the infidels are forced to meet our demands.'

There was a murmur of approval at his words.

'The shelling of our people in the villages of Lebanon must stop. We will remove the Israeli settlers from the West Bank to create a truly independent Palestinian state. The Holy City of Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock and the El Aqsa compound shall be returned to the people of Islam.' Shouts of approval rang out.

'Our brothers in arms languish in the unclean jails of the infidels, kept from the holy places, unable to make pilgrimage.' He paused again for effect. 'It shall not be! We will twist the limbs of the misbegotten unbelievers, our brothers shall be released!'

His audience stood and applauded him.

In the shadows away from the lamp a short, very fat man frowned and pursed his petulant lips. His vital contribution to the great success had not been mentioned.

September 19th. Bayswater.

As he was packing the last items on Dawn's list Jim remembered the guy from the US Embassy giving him the name and number of a security organization. What was the guy's name? Edge, Mike Edge? That was it. Mike Edge had said that they paid well. How well was that? And could he get a job with them? He eyed the

telephone by the side of Dawn's bed. She wouldn't mind. He'd tell her he'd used it and offer to pay for the call. Jim took out the folded sheet of paper and opened it. The name to ask for was Cunningham. He rang the number.

'Fine Line Solutions,' a clear female voice, 'how can I help you?'

"Fine Line"? "Solutions"? Enigmatic! In Jim's mind the name conjured up all sorts of implications. 'Er, yes, I'd like to speak to Mister Cunningham, please.'

'Yes sir, and your name is?'

'Savage. Jim Savage.'

'Thank you Mister Savage, of what company?'

'It's a private call; I was referred to him by Mike Edge.'

'One moment please, I'll see if Mister Cunningham is available.'

It would be hard to get past her Jim realized, that's why she had the job.

The girl came back to him. 'I have Mister Cunningham for you Mister Savage.'

'Yes Mister Savage, what can I do for you?' The voice was sharp, decisive.

'Hello Mister Cunningham, we haven't met, but I was given your name and phone number by, Mike Edge.'

'Go on,' the voice replied noncommittally.

'Well, he suggested that I ring you and ask you for a job,' Jim said bluntly.

'Did he, now? He must have thought you suitably qualified?'

'Yes, he did.'

'Hmmm, could you give me a thumb-nail sketch, Mister Savage, a very brief résumé please?'

'Ex Royal Marines, specialist qualification SC1; marksman in all weapons; parachute wings and HALO experience...'

'That's enough, Jumper,' the voice cut in, 'we've met before remember?'

A puzzled look crossed Jim's face. 'Captain Cunningham? Cap'n Andy?'

'The same.'

'Well, well... It's a small world. I didn't know you were out of the Corps.'

'Yeah, well, they wanted me to leave Special Forces, go for staff rank, promotion, all that stuff.'

'Oh, I see, so you set up in private practice?'

'Yes, private security is big business, and I had to eat... well that's another story. Anyway Jim, I do have vacancies for guys with your expertise, but, if you choose to attend an interview here, it will include very exhaustive probing into your background.'

'I don't mind that. You know that I passed SBS selection, and I have nothing to hide.'

'Very well, can you come tomorrow at 10.00 am? Got the address?'

'No, hang on while I find a pen and paper... Okay, go ahead.'

Andrew Cunningham gave him the address and Jim wrote it down.

'Mike Edge led me to understand that you pay well, can you give me some idea of your pay scales?'

'No, not yet, and not over the telephone; suffice it to say your talents are in demand and valuable to us. You won't be disappointed if you join us, I assure you.'

'Okay Captain Cunningham, I'll see you at ten sharp tomorrow. Goodbye.'

'Bye Jim; and the name's still Andy.' The line went dead.

Jim grabbed Dawn's leather grip and set off for the hospital. He had a lot to think about on the way.

Chapter 3

September 20th.

The man calling himself George Liani was an enigma; he had no close friends. Born in Cyprus of Turkish Muslim parents his real name was Tulga Sas, but no one knew him by that name now. His had been a happy childhood. Unaware that there was any difference between Greek children and Turkish children he had played happily with both, becoming naturally bi-lingual, and under British rule, life was reasonably peaceful despite the efforts of EOKA, the union with Greece movement. Then when he was fourteen everything changed.

On the twentieth of July 1974 the Greek Cypriot administration affected a coup. Civil war erupted. Twelve thousand Turkish Cypriots were besieged in the old Venetian Citadel in Famagusta. Greek artillery and mortar fire killed twenty-nine civilians. Tulga Sas's father was one of them. In response to this action the Turkish army invaded the island.

In the eyes of the Turkish community justice was about to be done, the hated Greeks would be slaughtered and driven from the land they had usurped, Cyprus would belong to Turkey, as it's geographical location dictated. The Turks were jubilant; then disgusted. Their Government, under ferocious international pressure, gave in. A cease-fire was implemented, a line drawn on the map and only part of Cyprus liberated from the hated Greeks.

Tulga Sas's family, his ageing mother, his sister and his younger brother were caught on the wrong side of the new dividing line. Greeks, who had suffered and escaped the onslaught of the Turkish Army, killed them in a wave of reprisal killings. The bitterness and hatred between Greeks and Turks was renewed. Traditional enemies already, both sides were possessed by a loathing that has lasted until the present day.

The young Tulga Sas left Cyprus in disgust, determined to find a way to dedicate his life against the killers of his family.

Spreading through the Muslim world, from its origins in Egypt, was the doctrine of Islamism, a desire to spread the Islamic faith across the world and to renew the values of the Muslim faith where it already existed.

The young Tulga Sas embraced the new doctrine avidly. If this reform could be introduced into modern Turkey, the old establishment could be swept away and the way would be clear to renew the onslaught; the decline of religious influence, started by Kemal Ataturk, could be reversed.

Within the Islamist movement there were plenty of fanatics and young Tulga Sas became one of the most fanatical. His studies of the Koran had given him a good knowledge of Arabic. Then in December nineteen seventy-nine the Russians invaded Afghanistan. Outraged, as were so many in the Islamic world by this invasion of holy Muslim soil, Tulga Sas made his way to Pakistan. In a camp on

the Pakistan border, a camp funded by a rich Saudi construction millionaire and run by the Inter Services Agency, the Pakistan secret service, he was trained by American and British Special Forces to go and fight against the Russian invader. For ten years he fought with the mujahedeen against the Russians, and made many important contacts amongst his comrades-in-arms in the process.

By the time the Soviets went home in nineteen eighty-nine, his fine record of service had secured him a place in Fifty Five Brigade, the elite expatriate Arab unit some five thousand strong funded and controlled by the Al-Qaeda organization, and used in support of the Taliban. Helping the Taliban to power in Afghanistan subsequently led him to the Jihad Wal and Khalden terrorist training camps in Afghanistan where he could translate his military skills into the covert skills of the urban guerrilla. He was an exceptional student and attracted attention because of his ability, his devotion to his faith, and his Turkish domicile. His tutors and their paymasters considered the idea of having this man placed as one of their own inside Turkey and found it good. He graduated from training fluent in Arabic, and, on returning to Turkey, was provided with funds, contacts and a new identity.

September 20th. Politia, Athens.

Working from the secluded villa rented by the late Andreas Kokalis, and using the two cars hired by him, Tulga Sas now using the alias George Liani, spent hours carrying out a discreet study of catering companies supplying pre-packed meals to aircraft using Athens airport. The man he needed had to work regularly on the delivery of meals to aircraft, had to have a wife and children, had to live in a quiet and remote location, and had to be a devoted father.

Working at the same time from the villa was Suliman Yavas, George Liani's helper. He was meeting incoming passengers at Hellenikon airport. He used different combinations of car, clothes, and chauffeurs hats so as not to be too conspicuous at the arrival point.

The passengers he was picking up all flew in from different European countries, all were traveling on false passports as employees of front companies, but their journeys had begun in Pakistan, Sudan, and Yemen.

They were well dressed and they were all young, all male, with black hair, dark eyes and were of eastern Mediterranean or Middle Eastern appearance. They were all traveling light, with little or no luggage and were supposedly visiting Athens on business. All of them had met their driver before and recognized him on sight, few words were spoken, and they left the airport immediately. They were driven to the rented villa in the Athens suburb of Politia, but they never went by the same route and never by the direct route. Clear of the airport and speaking only Arabic the passengers spent the journey looking out of the rear window checking for following vehicles. At the villa they went inside and did not come out; eventually there were seven of them installed there. Abu Asifah was the last man to arrive. That evening he assembled them in the large dining room and addressed them in Arabic.

'We have followed the great blow struck by the Holy One of Afghanistan with a blow for our cause, now it is time to strike again – the iron is still hot. You have trained hard for many months; now at last I can tell you why you are here and what your purpose is. I shall explain our objective and the plan of action.' He

turned to a set of diagrams and plans hung on an old blackboard and easel set in a corner of the room.

‘We will go over these again and again until each and every one of you has memorized the whole concept and knows every detail off by heart. We will not have the benefit of a practice run; therefore we must rely on previous training and accurate knowledge. As the anniversary of the great blow against America has passed, so the peak of security awareness has passed. With care and precision we shall succeed.’ He began the first of many in-depth briefings covering all aspects of the enterprise; planning, execution, logistics, communications, code-words, weapons, routes in, routes out, timings and contingencies.

After alternating lecture sessions and questions each man knew his precise role in the scheme of things. By studying a scale model of the Athens Airport building all the men knew thoroughly the geography of the place. By studying a scale model of an A300 Airbus with a cut-away top every man knew his position and his responsibilities.

Abu Asifah was pleased. ‘My brothers, you have done well. Later this evening we will be collecting the weapons and explosives, which friends have brought in for our use. Tomorrow our Turkish brother will be here. He is an explosives expert and he will instruct you in the making of explosive charges. I will instruct you in the placement of them in the aircraft. I will make the final connections, but all of you in the aircraft team will need to know how it is done in case of any unforeseen accidents.’

‘Get plenty of rest my brothers; our time of action is nearly upon us. Allah Akhbar.’

As he left the room, a buzz of excited conversation followed. Soon, very soon, they would be striking a blow for their unhappy people.

September 21st. Koropi district, Near Athens.

Sitting in his chair by the stove, in the kitchen of his small whitewashed farmhouse, Dimitris Kosovos was nodding with that irresistible sleepiness which follows a heavy meal on top of a hard day’s work. He had been up at four that morning, and had tended to his animals before going off to his job at the airport. This week he was on the early shift, six till two, the shift he preferred, as it gave him time to catch up on work at home in the afternoons.

On his return to the little farm he had eaten a quick meal of bread, olives and cheese, and then had spent the remaining hours of daylight pruning and retying his vines ready for next year’s growth. He was a simple working man, devoted to his young wife and family and determined to do the best he could for them and their future. Returning from his vineyard he had tended to his animals and then had washed at the pump outside. Going indoors, he’d enjoyed a substantial meal of his wife’s excellent moussaka, and washed it down with a few glasses of his own wine. Sitting in his chair by the stove it was hardly surprising that he couldn’t keep awake. From the edge of sleep he vaguely registered the sound of a vehicle pulling up outside and struggled back to consciousness as the dogs began to bark.

There was an urgent banging at the door. ‘Who the hell can this be? No one calls at this hour,’ Dimitris grumbled, hitching his trousers up and padding to the

door in his bare feet. While he dozed darkness had fallen and Roula, his wife, was putting the two children to bed.

Dimitris rubbed the sleep from his eyes with a large work worn hand and peered from the light of the kitchen out into the dark of the yard. From the noise the dogs were kicking up it must be strangers. He couldn't see anyone. He stepped outside.

'Who's there?' he asked. Receiving no reply he stepped forward a couple of paces, peering into the darkness.

A shadowy form at the side of the doorway quietly stepped forward and hit Dimitris behind the ear with a sock filled with sand. It was expertly done. Dimitris collapsed to the ground. Another dark figure emerged from the shadows on the other side of the doorway. George Liani spoke to him in Turkish, 'Silence those dogs.'

Suliman, the second man, walked over to where the farm dogs were chained up. The dogs went frantic. He drew a silenced pistol from inside his brown windcheater. There were two almost inaudible phuts of sound. The dogs fell silent, each one shot through the head. Unmoved, Suliman walked back towards the lighted doorway. George Liani was kneeling beside Dimitris. He had quickly trussed him up using tough nylon cable-ties. He stuffed a wad of rag into Dimitris's mouth, whipped a cable-tie round the back of his head, shoved the free end through the locking device and yanked it tight.

They picked up Dimitris's unconscious form, heaved him unceremoniously into a patch of shadow, and returned to their original positions in the deeper shadows beside the door.

Roula, settling the children down for the night, heard the car draw up outside, she heard the dogs barking, heard her husband call out, 'Who's there?' She heard the dogs' frantic barking stop, but she did not hear the silenced shots, and presumed that Dimitris had gone over to shut the dogs up.

On coming through from the children's room she found the kitchen empty. She went to the door to look for Dimitris; he was nowhere to be seen. Wondering what was happening she stepped outside to see what was going on.

George Liani stepped silently forward and hit her exactly as he had hit Dimitris. In moments she was bound and gagged like her husband; then both she and Dimitris were carried into the house and lashed to hard upright chairs with more nylon cable-ties.

Moving silently, the interlopers entered the children's room. One at a time, the children were grabbed from their beds, gagged and bound, and carried terrified into the room where their parents sat. They were fastened securely to chairs in the same manner as their parents. The children's chairs were placed either side of Roula's chair in a short arc. Dimitris was positioned opposite his family.

September 21st. Knightsbridge.

Jim Savage turned up at the address in Knightsbridge in plenty of time. He was expected, and was shown to a comfortable leather settee in the reception area and given a cup of coffee.

At precisely 10.00am a tall man of athletic build entered reception. He came over and stuck out his hand.

'Hi Jumper, been a while,' he said smiling.

'Cap'n Andy,' Jim replied smiling back.

'Come with me, we'll get the practical matters out of the way first.' He led Jim to the lifts and entered a vacant one. He pressed the down button. 'It's a bit of a maze so I'll lead the way.' He led Jim through several doors, and eventually they emerged into a well-appointed gymnasium.

'Fitness first, Jim. In here to change.' They went in to the changing room and Jim was given a set of gear. They both changed and went outside, where a stocky muscular man in a physical training instructor's singlet and shorts was standing. He had a clipboard and a stopwatch.

Jim looked at him in surprise. 'Hello, Chalky,' he said.

'Hi, Jumper, wondered if it might be you,' Chalky White said with a wry smile.

Andrew Cunningham was smiling too. 'I've often wondered; how did you get the nickname Jumper?'

'Oh that's a long story,' Jim said sheepishly.

'Yeah, a funny one too,' Chalky said. 'When we were young sprogs we were stationed at Bickleigh Camp on Dartmoor. Jim here cut a table tennis ball in two, made a hole in each bit and drew bloodshot veins on each half with a red felt tip. Then he pulled the sleeves of his Navy Burbury inside out and buttoned it round his neck like a cloak. He screwed the two bits of ball into his eye sockets and lurked round the corner of the canteen in the mist so as to jump out on guys coming back from supper. You've never seen so many sarnies and mugs of tea thrown in the air. Oh my word, you should have seen it, rough tough Commandos jumping out of their skins, and the rest of us rolling round on the grass peeing ourselves laughing. He's been known as Jumper Savage ever since.'

'So that's it!' Andrew laughed. Jim looked sheepish thinking this was not quite the sort of recommendation he needed. Andrew assumed a straight face.

'Okay, let's get started.'

Jim looked at Chalky, 'Canadian Air Force fitness test?'

'Yep, you might have done it once or twice before,' Chalky said sarcastically. He knew that Jim knew what was coming. It was a scientifically devised punishing test of fitness, stamina and recovery rates.

'Not for a while,' Jim replied with a grimace.

Chalky proceeded to put Jim through his paces, stopwatch in hand, impartially making notes of his performance on each set of tests.

Twenty minutes later, the test completed, Jim was lathered in sweat, his chest heaving and his legs wobbly.

'Right, through here, please, on the double,' Andrew Cunningham snapped.

Jim went through the door indicated into a small-arms firing range. Lined up on a table at the rear was a selection of revolvers, automatic pistols, sub machine guns and a modern rifle. Ammunition for each weapon was in a box next to it. The armorer handed round sets of ear defenders.

'The rifle is mandatory, the pistols, revolvers and sub-machine guns are at your choice; one of each,' the armorer told him.

Jim nodded; he chose a Heckler and Koch, a weapon he was used to and a 9mm Browning Hi-power automatic as he was used to them too. The choice of revolver was more difficult. He decided on a .375 Colt Python, one of the most accurate

revolvers ever made. There would be less recoil and therefore more control than with the heavier magnums. The rifle was the British 4.5mm Individual Weapon. Compact, and fitted with the 4X magnification Sight Unit Infantry Trilux, it had been developed from the experimental "280EM2". Jim knew it was the most accurate weapon there, if not the most reliable. He checked each weapon for safety as Andrew Cunningham watched and nodded his approval. Then he loaded each weapon quickly and professionally leaving the chamber empty and the safety catch on. It was obvious that he was familiar with weapons and proficient in their safe use.

'Okay, twenty sit-ups, twenty press-ups and five rounds from the revolver; fifteen sit-ups, fifteen press-ups and five rounds from the 9mm pistol; ten sit-ups, ten press-ups and two short bursts from the H&K; five sit-ups, five press-ups and five rounds from the rifle. Chalky will count and hold your feet for the exercises. It's non-stop. Go, go, go, from the start. For every round that misses the target, a minute will be added to your time. You know the reasoning behind this?'

'Yes,' Jim nodded. He knew that the ability to shoot well when fresh was not much use in combat situations. You had to be able to shoot straight when your arms and legs were knackered, when your chest was heaving with exertion and your eyes were full of sweat. He calmed his mind, centered himself.

'Go!' Chalky barked the command. 'One, two, three...' Jim pulled away at the sit-ups, 'Nineteen, twenty, change. One, two, three...' Jim pumped away at the press-ups, 'Nineteen, twenty. Up, revolver, five rounds, target number one, fire!' Jim adopted the double-handed wide foot stance of the target pistol expert. Blam. Blam. Blam. Blam. He raised the revolver up the centre of the target, firing the instant the fore and back sights lined up with the bottom edge of the black centre mark.

'Unload, clear gun, down, sit-ups, One, two, three...' Jim's stomach muscles were protesting, 'Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen change. Press-ups, one, two, three...' Jim's arms were aching...' fourteen, fifteen, up, 9 mm pistol, five rounds, target number two, fire. Blam. Blam. Blam. Blam. Blam. 'Unload, clear gun, down, sit-ups, one, two three...' the punishing test went on and on. Jim used the H&K in two short bursts. C-c-crack, c-crack, five rounds in two short bursts each time into number three target, more sit-ups, more press-ups, then the short modern design rifle. 'Five rounds into number four target.' Blam. Blam. Blam. Blam. Blam. The heavier detonations of the rifle cartridges slammed the eardrums even through the ear defenders. The recoil kicked straight back in to Jim's shoulder.

'Unload, clear gun.'

'Into the dojo.'

September 21st. Koropi, Athens.

Dimitris came round first. Groggy and disorientated he tried to move his hands to touch his throbbing head. He tried to speak, but his mouth was full of cloth, he made muffled grunting noises as he tried to pull free of the unseen restraints to his limbs. He opened his eyes, wincing and squinting against the light. Gradually he regained his vision, and with it a realization of the dreadful circumstances he was in. The first things to come into focus were his terrified children and his

unconscious wife. Rage flooded through him and, in spite of the pain in his head, he began to wrench at his bonds, struggling violently to escape. His wrists and hands bled with the force of his efforts, but he could make no impression on his bonds, none at all. He made no impression on the hearts of his captors either. Unmoved, they watched his pathetic struggles with stony faces.

Eventually exhausted, Dimitris gave up and slumped against the chair. His mind was in turmoil, what was happening to him and to his family? He was not rich, they had nothing worth stealing, and he could not afford a ransom for his children's release. What in heaven's name was all this about? It must be some dreadful mistake.

George Liani and his helper stepped into the lamplight.

Relief and hope flooded through Dimitris; these two men were total strangers, as soon as he could explain it would all be over. He would swear not to notify the police, not to breathe a word and all would return to normality. These men had no business with him; they would recognize their blunder and go away.

Roula began to come round; she too was dazed and disoriented.

Dimitris watched helpless as consciousness returned and terror replaced the sequence of anxious, puzzled and pained expressions, which flitted across her face. Roula's eyes focused on him. Bound and gagged, she tried to speak, but her mouth too was filled with cloth. She turned her head and saw the children on either side of her. Their faces were white, their eyes wide. They were in the first stages of shock. Roula's face turned back to Dimitris, her eyes pleading desperately for help he could not give.

George Liani spoke slowly and distinctly in carefully enunciated Greek into the strained silence. He spoke directly to Dimitris. 'Your family will die unless you do exactly as I tell you.'

He waited for the words to sink in. He held out an old single barreled, 12-bore shotgun. It was Dimitris's own gun, used to control vermin on the family land and to provide the occasional addition to the family larder.

In his other hand George Liani held a box of 12 bore cartridges. He spoke again. 'Unless you do exactly as I say I will shoot each of your children at close range with this gun, and I will shoot your wife the same way.' He paused for the enormity of the statement to sink in and then continued, 'I will then put the muzzle under your chin and blow your head apart. I will remove all the bonds and any traces of our visit; your finger and handprints are all over your gun. I will vanish and the world will think you have wiped out your whole family in a fit of madness, and then turned your gun upon yourself.'

Dimitris was pale with shock beneath his sunburned skin. His limbs felt like jelly. He shook his head violently trying to dislodge the horror that he was hearing.

George Liani spoke again, his cold eyes boring into Dimitris's eyes. 'I am a Turk; I have no love for Greeks.' Then he spat into Dimitris's face.

Dimitris flinched, his eyes closed and then opened wide with fear as the man's words registered. His stomach churned with fear. He knew beyond any doubt that this man would carry out his threats. He knew that he had no choice but to do what this man told him to do.

'Are you on the work-rota for the servicing of flight Number OA 269 tomorrow?' George Liani demanded.

Dimitris nodded. He was.

George Liani turned to his helper, 'Keep a sharp lookout here, I have things to arrange at the other end.' He strode out to the car to use his mobile telephone. He rang the villa in Politia. 'I'm coming back to help with the preparations, its OA 269 tomorrow,' he said, 'cancel the bookings on all the other flights.'

September 21st. Politia, Athens.

In the villa Abu Asifah and George Liani stood at a pair of trestle tables at the end of the large dining room. On the tables were two large canvas grips, two wooden boxes and a cardboard box. Abu Asifah clapped his hands for attention and spoke in Arabic. 'Each of you will be issued with a pistol and two magazines, you will clean the protective grease from them and then lightly oil and prepare them for use. Then you will clean and load two magazines for each pistol with ammunition. You will load them two rounds less than maximum capacity. You all know what to do and the need to do it well. I will inspect everything before you pack it into the containers. When that has been done to my satisfaction, our friend here will show you how to make up the explosive packages. Each of you will make two packages under his guidance.' He turned to George Liani and nodded.

George Liani began to hand out automatic pistols still in their factory protective wrappings. They were part of a consignment of weapons, which had found its way, via dubious transactions and international arms dealers, to a Syrian, a prime exporter of terrorist funds and materials.

Abu Asifah handed out rags, gun oil and flannelette. An hour later all the pistols were clean and functioning perfectly. Ammunition was issued from the first of the wooden boxes. Soon each pistol had a loaded, but not overloaded, magazine in the butt, plus a spare. Each of the team was given several aluminum foil dishes of the sort that aircraft meals are served in, together with lids. Wrapping each pistol and the spare magazine in a separate piece of clean cloth, each man put his weapon into a foil container, and packed it tight with spare rag. The pistol containers were fitted with blue lids. They were packed into an empty cardboard box.

George Liani stepped forward. He took from the second wooden box a sheet of what looked like marzipan. He held it up. In the Arabic he had perfected in the hidden training camps in Afghanistan he addressed the assembled men. 'This is Semtex, cut it, fold it, shape it, and do what you like with it, it's perfectly stable. You need a primer to set it off.' He held up a small white object with a hole in the middle like a slightly tapered cotton reel. 'This is a primer. To set off the primer you need a detonator.' He held up a small thin metal tube the size of a small cigarette, with two wires coming out of the end. 'This is the dangerous bit,' he said, 'whatever you do you must keep these safe, away from heat, shocks or contact with each other and keep them well away from the primers and the explosives.' He put the detonators into a box of cotton wool and, following his own advice, put it well away to one side.

The Semtex he kept on the table in front of him. 'Now watch carefully.' He took a sheet of Semtex and began to cut up and shape with scissors several pieces to layer into one of the foil airline meal dishes. He cut a hole in the centre of each piece to take the gun cotton primer. He then pushed the primer into place through

the multiple layers of high explosive, and put on a green foil lid. He located the hole in the centre of the guncotton primer with his finger and using a biro poked a hole through the foil. 'Okay,' he said 'now we have a nice neat explosive charge which looks like a chicken dinner. The detonator goes in last. You don't put the detonator in place until you are ready to use it. The detonators will be in this meal tray.' He held up a tray and a red lid.

'I'll pack this up, while you make two explosive charges each. I will supervise you.'

The six men set to work, and between supervising them George Liani began to pack up the detonators in cotton wool, laying them in the foil tray. That task carefully completed, he began to pack up some additional foil meal containers. Two with several hundred feet of fine shot wire, the electrical wire used to detonate explosive charges, another with electrical tape, a third with gaffer tape. Batteries went into a fourth and into the rest went electrical cable ties, the tough nylon lock-tight straps that are used to lash heavy electrical cables into place on cable tray.

In all there were thirty meal trays packed up when they had finished; six blue lids - six pistols and ammunition; twelve green lids - twelve explosive charges; one red lid - detonators; eleven silver lids - the bits and pieces, all packed into a strong cardboard box.

George Liani picked up the box and turned to Abu Asifah. 'Now I go to motivate our Greek friend.'

Abu Asifah nodded his approval.

September 21st. Knightsbridge.

Andrew Cunningham stepped onto the tatami matting and bowed towards Jim Savage. Jim stepped on to the matting and bowed back. As he straightened Andy came at him like lightning. Instinctively Jim moved in a circular movement creating space; he countered the attack, but found his counter already anticipated and countered against him. He went with the line of movement trying to set up a combination throw.

Andy resisted. Deadlock.

The two men went into a series of exploratory moves each testing the others balance and reactions. Suddenly Andy found an advantage. He had moved Jim's centre of gravity over his right foot. He went into a fast body drop, turning into Jim and tripping him over his outstretched right leg. Jim rolled into a combination pulling his opponent over him and sliding into a single wing choke lock. Andy gave the rapid taps of submission quickly before he blacked out.

The two men stood up and faced each other again. Andy waved to Chalky White who handed him a 'Fairbairn Sykes' knife. The razor sharp edges of the black, parkerised blade glinted evilly in the light from the overhead florescent strips. Andy held the knife expertly, blade flat, his thumb on top, the whole knife pointing upwards, perfectly angled to slide up between his opponent's ribs. His left arm he held in a half circle out around the knifepoint, shielding the weapon from attack. Jim allowed his subconscious mind to take over. The next attack when it came could not be handled by quick thinking. They circled each other.

Like a striking snake Andy made his move. Jim's subconscious awareness saw the move at its very beginnings, he stepped forward and to the side, his hand blocked the strike at the elbow joint then took his opponent's wrist with the dexterity of a slip fielder. He pulled and turned and twisted, carrying out a Kota Gaesh. Andy was forced to curve over in a fast arc before his wrist broke, and he slammed into the tatami matting executing a perfect break-fall. Jim hung onto his wrist with one hand, stepped across him, pulling lightly in the direction of Andy's motion, turning him onto his stomach. With his other hand he forced the back of Andy's hand against the wrist joint. The deadly knife dropped harmlessly to the mat. Jim executed a slow motion kick towards Andy's exposed throat.

'Good, you haven't lost it,' Andy Cunningham said from his prone position. 'Let's go and see how you did on the other tests.'

Both men stood, bowed to each other and left the mat.

The armorer had checked the targets and added up the scores. 'Marksman's score on all four weapons, Sir,' he reported, 'and inside the allowed time.'

Andrew Cunningham nodded his approval. 'Chalky?'

Not as fit as he used to be, but not bad, not bad at all, I could soon get him up to scratch,' Chalky said with a malicious grin at Jim.

Jim snorted in disgust, 'owe you one Chalky'.

'Okay,' Andrew Cunningham said, 'coming from you Chalky that is praise indeed.'

Turning to Jim he said, 'Right, you've passed the physical tests. We'll get showered, dress, and go up to my office to continue the interview. At a later date we will require you to attend a medical examination at the company doctor's premises in Harley Street.'

The interview in Andrew Cunningham's office lasted for an hour and covered all the specialist skills that Jim had taught as an instructor; his SC1 qualification stood for Swimmer Canoeist One, the instructor rating for the S.B.S. He was an expert in all sorts of arcane subjects, from reconnaissance to sabotage, from underwater attacks to parachuting into the sea. Andrew Cunningham covered the lot in great detail then asked about languages.

'Did the Arabic course at Beaconsfield,' Jim told him. Andrew knew all about that, he had attended the Royal Army Education Corps School of Languages at Beaconsfield himself – had done the same Arabic course but at a different time.

'Did you use it later?'

'Yeah, with the BATT teams in Oman.'

Andrew knew that to have taught Omani troops in their native tongue, as a British Army Training Team instructor on loan to the Sultan of Oman's forces, would have honed Jim's Arabic to a high level of fluency, and it was likely that Jim spoke, or understood, several dialects. 'Hmm, given the number of Middle Eastern clients we have on our books that would definitely be an asset.'

Eventually it was over. 'Thanks for coming in Jim, here is the address of our medical man in Harley Street.' He pushed a card across the desk and then held up a form. 'If your medical turns out okay, and I expect that it will, we will offer you a position. The positions are very sensitive and we would like to do a security screening check on your background. This document is an authorization for us to delve into your private life. Are you willing to allow us to do this?'

'Yes,' Jim said readily, 'where do I sign?'

'Between the penciled crosses; and date it please.'

Jim did as required. He stood up and looked at Andrew Cunningham.

'When can you let me know?'

'Well, we use a parachute club for free-fall practice, here's the address. If you'd like to come and do a couple of drops at the weekend I'll give you an answer then.'

'Thank you, Mister Cunningham; I'll see you on Saturday,'

'The name's still Andy. See you at the airfield.'

Andrew Cunningham showed Jim out and made a mental note to thank Mike Edge. Jim Savage was a good find, one of a rare breed.

September 21st. Koropi.

The bonds were released from Dimitris's wrists with a pair of electrician's snips. The gag was removed from his mouth by snipping the cable tie round the back of his head and ripping the bunched-up rag from his mouth. It was not done gently.

Dimitris tried to moisten his mouth but couldn't; he croaked to his captors asking for water but was given nothing. He began to rub his wrists where the tough nylon ties had cut into them. Feeling began to return to his fingers as the circulation restarted, it was agonizing. Then the bonds around his ankles were snipped through. His feet were not to be left completely free, however. A cable tie was fastened around each ankle separately, not too tightly, but sufficiently tight so that it couldn't be slipped off over the foot. Then the two anklets of nylon were joined with a cable tie to form a short hobble. Dimitris could now shuffle along but could not run. His captors were not totally sure of him yet. George Liani jerked Dimitris to his feet by the front of his shirt and then grabbed the scruff of his neck and shoved him none too gently through to the next room. Dimitris had to hobble fast to prevent himself from falling forwards. The nylon bonds cut into his ankles. He was pushed roughly into a chair.

George Liani, his silenced Walther P4 pistol in his hand, the same one that had killed the unfortunate Andreas, pulled up another chair and sat opposite him. His eyes bored into Dimitris. He produced an object from inside his jacket and held it up for Dimitris to see. 'Mobile 'phone,' he said, and pulled up a number from the memory.

Dimitris heard the muted ringing in the next room and then a voice came over the air. 'Number two.'

'Number one, how do you read me?'

'Two, loud and clear.'

'One, you're loud and clear also.'

He looked up at Dimitris. 'I am going to follow you and watch you from a distance, through binoculars where necessary. I shall see every move you make. My helper next door, whom you heard on the mobile link, will remain with your family. At the slightest sign of a wrong move on your part I shall call through to him an instruction to kill your wife and children. Do you understand?'

Dimitris could only nod.

George Liani slapped him hard across the face. 'Speak to me!' he shouted.

'I understand,' Dimitris whispered.

‘Louder!’

Dimitris swallowed hard and spoke, ‘I understand,’ he said.

‘Now swear that you will do as I tell you. Swear on the lives of your wife and children.’

‘I swear on the lives of my wife and children that I will do as you tell me,’ Dimitris said, his voice breaking with emotion.

George Liani slapped him hard on the other side of his face, snapping Dimitris’s head back the other way. ‘Be sure you do. My helper and I are Turkish Moslems from Cyprus. Greeks there killed both our families. We would love an excuse to even the score.’

September 21st. Politia.

Abu Asifah was pleased, the weapons were prepared, the explosive charges made. It had been a very useful session. He addressed the assembled men in Arabic. ‘Well done, every hour brings us nearer to achieving our aims. Now, listen and watch carefully. If anything happens to me any one of you could be required to place the explosive charges, to connect them up, and to set them off.’

He turned and pointed to a set of diagrams pinned on the blackboard in the corner of the room. ‘This is the layout of the A300 Airbus, the aircraft used on the flight we are targeting. I have marked the points in red on the diagram where the charges are to be laid. Memorize them. Each of you will have to mark up an identical drawing with the correct positions. I will check your mark-ups against my original, so, no mistakes. Now, the charges, every charge detonated goes off in the “direction of initiation”. That is in line sequence - detonator, primer, charge, and target. There is no point in placing charges where there is nothing of any consequence to damage. Each charge when placed according to the positions on the drawing will detonate into a vital part of the aircraft so as to cause maximum damage. The charges will be fixed in place using this adhesive tape, like so.’ He took a dummy charge in a foil container and using the special adhesive tape stuck it onto the blackboard below the drawing. ‘Next you will run the detonating wires to the control point on the aircraft, taping them to the cabin roof as you go. At that point all the wire ends of the same color will be bared and will be twisted together. Like this.’ He passed round several different colored lengths of shot wire all taped together in a bunch, with an inch of insulation removed, and the same ends twisted together as an example. He held up a pair of single pin connectors. ‘The twisted ends of the cables go into the open ends of these spring loaded connections.’ He pushed the ends into the holes and released the spring-loaded grips one at a time. ‘Next we place the detonators.’ He held up a dummy detonator made from a shortened piece of pencil with two wires taped to it at one end. ‘It is inserted into the hole in the primer.’ He pushed the dummy detonator through the green foil lid of the dummy charge into the hole in the primer, and taped it in place. He connected the two wires to the shot wire and taped the joints. Then he held up a transistor radio alarm. ‘This will be with me on the flight. It is adapted for use as the detonating mechanism. On the side of the radio are two electrical jacks, one for a microphone, and one for an earphone. The alarm is set just as a normal radio alarm is set. Now plug the pins into the jacks on the radio, depress

this switch to activate the alarm and when the alarm goes off the circuit is completed. The only difference is in the sound it makes.’ Abu Asifah smiled a cold smile at his little joke.

‘Tamaam, Insh Allah, nihhna rahh bukra.’ ‘Good, God willing, we go tomorrow.’

Chapter 4

September 22nd. Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv was very different from the cold and wet of London. As Mike Edge sat soaking up the hot Mediterranean sunshine, heat shimmer distorted distant buildings and a dust devil sent sand and leaves whirling. The same breeze coming from the sea stirred the purple bougainvillea and scarlet hibiscus climbing the white walls of the apartment. Mike thoughtfully sipped a glass of iced tea as he looked out to sea. He was intrigued, on returning to his office he had found an abrupt message waiting: ‘Lunch, Sabra, today at one, Ben.’

For Ben Levy to make direct contact was unusual. US-Israeli relations were under considerable strain due to difficulties in the peace process, so Mike reasoned that something important could be in the offing. Ben Levy held the rank of Major General. He was head of “A’man”, or Israeli Military Intelligence, itself an integral part of “Tzahal”, the Hebrew acronym for Tzava Haganah L’Israel, or the Israeli Defense Force, otherwise known as the I.D.F.

By its nature, as a national service organization woven into the fabric of Israeli life, the I.D.F. gave Ben Levy contacts throughout the country at every level. His position as head of Military Intelligence gave him strong links with Mossad, the Israeli external, or overseas, intelligence gathering organization, and with Shin Bet, the organization responsible for internal security and intelligence gathering within the borders of Israel.

Mike knew that, as a senior officer in the Israeli intelligence community, Ben operated at the highest levels and the secrets he dealt in were global in their consequences. All these facts were going through Mike’s mind as he left his apartment; he was keen to learn what Ben Levy had to say. He headed for Hayarkon Street and entered the long modern rectangular building that was the Hotel Dan Tel Aviv. He was familiar with the hotel and went directly to the Sabra restaurant with its view out over the white sand beach and the blue Mediterranean. As anticipated, his old friend was sitting at the rear, back to the wall and with a clear view of the entrance across the busy tables. Mike walked through the buzz of the lunch time crowd to Ben’s table, but Ben did not stand up to greet him. Mike felt a chill run through him. The warm twinkle normally in Ben’s eyes was missing. He looked grim and tired.

‘Hi Ben, how’s business?’ Mike asked as they shook hands.

‘Shalom Mike, busy, as always in this part of the world.’

Mike sat down, merging with the rest of the customers in the crowded restaurant. They exchanged pleasantries and inconsequential chat as they each

separately scanned the room, two careful men well used to operating under conditions of risk.

Then Ben said quietly, 'Mike, events are under way that will require us to work more closely together – not just you and me but all the resources of our respective services.'

Mike looked at him, eyebrows raised, his attention sharply focused.

The waiter came with mineral water and took their order. Ben pulled out a packet of king size filter cigarettes and a lighter, extracted a cigarette and lit it, absently putting the cigarettes and lighter in the centre of the table.

'That's odd,' Mike thought, 'Ben doesn't smoke, never has.' Their eyes met.

'Smoke?' Ben knew very well that Mike didn't smoke either.

Ben's eyes went down to the pack of cigarettes and back up to meet Mike's. Mike understood. He reached for the cigarettes, took one out, lit it and puffed out the smoke.

Ben cleared his throat and leaned across the table. He spoke quietly, his English perfect. 'You know that since we destroyed the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osiraq, your people, in their wisdom, have limited the satellite information that they give to us?'

Mike nodded, his eyes narrowed, but he made no comment. It was a sore point. The satellite information the US government released to the Israelis covered only the area within thirty miles of their border.

'Then you will not be surprised that we have had to resort to other more traditional methods?'

'No. So?'

Ben looked at the cigarettes in Mike's hand.

Mike slipped the cigarettes and lighter casually into his own pocket.

Ben nodded his satisfaction.

The first course of their meal arrived and they both stubbed out their cigarettes with relief. They enjoyed their meal, chatting away like old friends, sharing a bottle of good wine and good food in pleasant surroundings. Only Mike could see the edge of worry in Ben's eyes. Only Ben could see the concern building in Mike.

'I think I'll call a cab,' Mike said as they were enjoying the last of the wine, 'better to get home safely than to regret it tomorrow.'

'Yes, good idea,' Ben agreed, 'I'll get the check while you order one.'

Mike went to the pay phone at the back of the restaurant. The number he dialed was not listed anywhere, and the man who answered was not a cab driver although he sometimes drove a cab. The cab he drove was kept in a lock-up garage close to the American Embassy.

'Yeah hello,' Mike said, 'I need a cab, the name is Niemann and I am at the Sabra restaurant, in the Dan Tel Aviv.'

'Okay, a cab will pick you up in 15 minutes.'

Mike hung up and went back to the table. Niemann was a code name, it meant that Mike needed a secure cab with unobtrusive armed escorts and armed driver to get him back to the Embassy safely.

Mike and Ben chatted over their coffee until the cab arrived. When Mike saw the driver enter the restaurant he stood up. Ben stood up too. As they shook hands, Ben looked straight at Mike, 'be careful, my friend, serious trouble is brewing.'

'Sure thing, Ben.' Mike left with the taxi driver, a stocky, powerfully built individual in a black leather jacket and jeans. Now an employee of the US Embassy he had been an instructor in the US Navy SEALs. He was competent and deadly, which was why Mike had asked for his secondment to Tel Aviv. Underneath the loose black leather jacket was a Smith & Wesson model 29, a .44" magnum revolver in a quick release shoulder holster. It had a 270mm barrel and an adjustable foresight. Stopping power plus accuracy. Mike's taxi driver was deadly with that too. As they got into the taxi Mike checked the street. In front of them a motor cycle courier was talking into his radio and his voice came over on the taxi radio wavelength. 'Delivery picked up, returning to base, out.' The vanguard.

Further down the street was another motorcycle courier from a different company. He started up his bike and pulled out after the cab; the rear guard was in place. The motor cycle couriers were also colleagues of Mike's. Under their motor cycle jackets they too carried .44 magnum revolvers. Additionally in their couriers bags they carried sawn-off single barrel 5 shot repeating shotguns. Loaded with heavy number 6 cartridges they created havoc as short-range weapons.

Mike smiled grimly to himself. It would need a small army to stop this team, he was quite proud of the set-up he had devised. Taxis and couriers all carried radios and so communications were easy without being obvious. Motor cycles were fast, could zip through the most congested traffic in the event of an incident or to facilitate an escape in an emergency. They could go down alleys, steps and pavements where cars could not follow and, best of all, both were unobtrusive, a part of the every-day scene in any major city.

The small cavalcade made good progress through the busy streets, the motorcycle outriders keeping in radio contact with the taxi all the way and watching for following vehicles. The taxi did some double back maneuvers went twice round a couple of roundabouts giving the motorcycle couriers every chance to spot followers. None were in evidence, and the taxi pulled up at the entrance to the American Embassy. Mike paid the driver off from inside the cab, and whilst wiping his face with a large handkerchief strode quickly into the building. As the cab drove off its escorts melted into the city traffic.

September 22nd. Cairo.

In the large cool Cairo conference room, under revolving fans set high in the ceiling, Rashid Malik was bringing the meeting to a close, and the translated words were music to Alan Edge's ears. 'It is with great pleasure that I am able to confirm our requirement for the assistance which Mister Edge's company can provide to us. As you all know the provision of a social services system for the people of Egypt has been a cause dear to my heart for many years. The main problems have been the complexity of setting up such a system for the size and diversity of our population, and the administrative difficulty of running it. With their presentation Mister Edge and his partner Miss Sutherland have shown us how it may be done. I therefore have instructed our legal department to draw up contracts for the provision of consultants, for the design of software packages, and

for the supply of computer hardware for a pilot scheme to be carried out over a two year period. This will enable us to put the basic mechanisms in place. There will be an option clause in the contract giving us the right to speed up the program if it is successful. Mister Edge and Miss Sutherland of Technology Today Incorporated, I thank you for your help.' Rashid Malik sat down.

Everyone else around the huge polished conference table stood up and clapped.

Alan Edge was grinning from ear to ear, he looked at his co-director Anna Sutherland; she too was delighted; the effort they had put in had been enormous.

Alan remained standing as the others sat down, his translator at his side. 'Thank you, Mister Malik,' he said, 'I give you my personal assurance that your decision to use the experience and expertise of Technology Today will give you no cause for regret. My contracts department will liaise with your legal department on the form and content of the contracts over the next few weeks with a view to signing contracts as soon as possible. In the meantime I will allocate some of our top systems analysts to the project immediately so that preliminary studies may be produced.' He sat down to a murmur of approval.

The meeting broke up and the representatives of both sides moved through the large double doors into an adjoining room. A sumptuous cold buffet was laid out on long tables down one side of the ornate room and smart waiters in immaculate white jackets and white gloves moved forward with trays of drinks.

Alan Edge took two large frosted glasses of carbonated fruit juice with ice and slices of orange floating on top, and moved over to join the tall, elegant woman who was his business partner. He handed her one of the drinks. 'Great, just great, what do you think?'

'Brilliant,' Anna Sutherland replied, 'I guess we've pulled off a major coup, but we'd better keep the lid screwed down tight until the contracts are signed.'

'Damn right,' Alan agreed, 'which is why I've agreed to start early, we can catch any plays the competition may try to make from the inside.'

'Sneaky!'

'Yeah, well you gotta be. As soon as we get back to the hotel cancel our seats on the planned flight home and reschedule the tickets for a stop-over in London.'

'Well, okay, but why?'

'I want to go talk to an old pal of mine,' Alan told her, 'best darn systems analyst I ever met. Name of Mark Farzai, he speaks the language, would have made a politician of Machiavellian standards and his family is from Cairo. He'd be great to head up our team for this project, to run it from the inside.'

'I know the name,' Anna said thoughtfully, 'If it's who I think, the guy's one of the best in the business. How come you know him? How are you going to get him to work for us?'

'Yeah, it's him right enough. I've known him for years, we were at college together, same fraternity, all that stuff,' Alan replied. 'He's a freelance consultant working in the City of London, which he hates, because he has to wear a collar and tie, and we're going to make him an offer he can't refuse. And before you choke on the cost,' Alan went on, hurriedly forestalling Anna's reaction, 'this first contract is worth millions, if we can give them what they need we'll gain millions more.'

'Hmm, I guess only the best will do.'

At that moment Rashid Malik came over to talk to Alan, and Anna took the opportunity to circulate and to gain some feeling for the mood of the Egyptian feasibility study team. There was much still to be done, and a few clues and tips gleaned now might be invaluable later on.

Anna Sutherland was a very shrewd member of Alan's Board of Directors. A computer studies graduate of the University of California, Stanford Faculty, she had joined Alan's company in its first year, choosing to start work with a promising and exciting young company rather than fight her way up the pecking order of an already established older one. The gamble had paid off. She had played a major part in the development and growth of the young company and Alan, recognizing her contribution, had offered her a directorship and a block of shares. This direct stake in Technology Today Incorporated added to her natural industry and intelligence had had the effect Alan expected. Anna was as dedicated to the company's future and success as Alan was himself.

After an hour or so of informal discussions between the two sides, the reception began to break up. Being careful not to be amongst the first to leave, Anna and Alan departed as soon as was acceptable and went back to their hotel, the luxurious Mena House Oberoi, at Giza.

As soon as she got to her room Anna rang the ticket desk at Cairo airport. The direct Cairo to London flight that evening was booked solid and there were already half a dozen standby passengers waiting for cancellations. The best she could do was an Egyptian Airlines flight to Athens leaving half an hour earlier, but making a connection with an Olympic Airlines flight from Athens to London Heathrow. Using her company American Express Gold card, she booked two seats.

Although she could not know it, it was a fatal booking, which would lead to tragedy in the days ahead.

September 22nd. Tel Aviv.

Safely inside the US Embassy Mike Edge went directly to his office. He emptied the packet of cigarettes Ben Levy had passed him onto his blotter. Taking a slim bladed penknife from his pocket he carefully opened the folds of the packet. There were some strips of microfilm carefully taped to the inside of the folds of the lid. Leaving the debris on his desk he went quickly to the communications room. The communications officer on duty greeted him, as the guard checked Mike's ID. 'Hi Mike, what's up?'

'I've just received these strips of microfilm from a reliable source,' Mike told him, 'I need to know what's on them as fast as possible.'

'Okay, you got it, give them here, I'll take them through to the photo lab.'

A few minutes later the tiny microdot images on the microfilm were enlarged and displayed on the screen of a reader-printer. Mike studied each frame carefully. The frames were of different sizes. The larger ones were of two types; maps, covered with symbols and annotated in Arabic script, and drawings; engineering design drawings.

Suddenly Mike realized what was in front of him. 'Hot damn!' he exclaimed under his breath. He moved to one of the smaller frames. It was a list, again in Arabic script. He moved on with increasing excitement. 'My God,' he muttered.

‘What,’ the communications officer asked, ‘what’n hell’re yuh gettin’ all fired up about?’

September 22nd. Hellenikon Airport, Athens.

Dimitris Kosovos looked awful. Driving to his work in the half-light before dawn, he was dreadfully afraid. He had had no sleep, the blow to his head had left him with a sickening headache and his eyes were sunken into their sockets with worry. Dimitris was under no illusions, his wife and his adored children were at the mercy of Turkish fanatics and he knew they were perfectly capable of carrying out their promises. He was out of his depth; nothing in his life had prepared him for the circumstances he now found himself in. Only one thing filled his mind, he must do exactly as he had been told, in order to get rid of this terrible threat to Roula and the children. He drove on, knuckles white on the steering wheel of his old van. He shook his head to clear it and blinked rapidly to clear his eyes, soon he would be at the car park used by airport employees. Behind him, as he reached a deserted stretch of road, a dark saloon car flashed its lights. Dimitris pulled off the road into a lay-by and stopped.

The dark car pulled in behind him and extinguished its lights. George Liani got out of the dark saloon, opened the trunk, lifted out a heavy cardboard box, and carried it to the rear of Dimitris’s old van. Dimitris opened the vans rear doors and helped shove the box inside.

In the box were the thirty pre-packed meal containers. Dimitris had explicit instructions what to do with them. He didn’t know what was in the containers - he didn’t want to know - he tried not to think about it.

‘Okay, you know what you have to do?’ George Liani’s eyes were hypnotic in their intensity. Dimitris could not meet those eyes. He nodded sullenly. George Liani grabbed a handful of Dimitris’s hair forcing him to look at him. ‘Remember your precious family. Remember my Turkish brother who is with them.’ He slapped Dimitris hard on the side of his head. ‘Tell me what you have to do.’ Dimitris recited carefully by rote his instructions yet again.

‘Remember I’ll be following you and watching your every move.’

Whey-faced Dimitris climbed back behind the wheel of his old van and gripped the steering wheel fiercely to stop his hands from shaking.

Reaching the employee’s car park at the airport, He parked his van in full view of the guard at the airside security gate, but some distance from it. He left his sidelights on, got out of the van, locked it and walked over to the gate, fishing his pass from his shirt pocket as he went.

‘Hey, you’ve left your lights on,’ the guard yelled as Dimitris approached.

Dimitris looked round. ‘Oh shit,’ he said, ‘I’ve left my lunch in the van too.’

‘Not a good start to the day,’ said the guard, and then, noticing Dimitris’s grey and drawn face, he said with concern ‘Hey, my friend, you okay?’

‘No,’ Dimitris said, ‘my brother-in-law came round last night to sample the new wine and we drank until four this morning. My head is killing me.’

‘Serves you right, you’re old enough to know better.’

‘Yeah,’ Dimitris agreed sheepishly, ‘I’m just going to pick up my truck. I’ll switch my lights out and pick up my lunch on the way out.’

‘Okay, but don’t forget or you’ll have a flat battery by the end of the shift.’

Dimitris held up his hands in surrender and walked in to work to collect his service truck. A few minutes later he drove out, the guard raised the barrier and Dimitris drove through. Turning immediately off into the employees’ car park he drove over and stopped his truck in front of his old van blocking it from the view of the guard on the gate. Clambering laboriously out, he walked round, unlocked his van and switched off the lights. It was the work of a moment to take the cardboard box and his lunch bag and put them into the passenger side of his truck. He locked his old van up again and, driving out of the car park past the security gate gave the guard a thumb up sign. The guard waved back, and smiled, pleased to have done Dimitris a good turn in saving him the nuisance of a flat battery.

George Liani, watching from the dark saloon car parked up the road, nodded to himself in grim approval.

Dimitris felt some relief, the first problem was over, and the containers were in the service truck. He drove to the food-processing factory where the airline meals were prepared. He presented the signed requisition for the meals for the next flight he had to service, and the ready filled trolleys of in-flight meals were loaded onto the truck.

Dimitris drove back towards the airport, the anonymous dark saloon car still following him. Dimitris knew the route well; he stopped at a popular roadside taverna used regularly by transport drivers. Parking his service truck between two large articulated trucks he quickly took the cardboard box into the back of his service truck. George Liani watched from the other side of the car park.

Opening the meal trolley furthest from the door, the one that would be loaded last onto the aircraft, he quickly began to remove the foil topped meal trays. Carefully he replaced the genuine airline meals with the color coded ones containing weapons and explosives from the cardboard box. Finally he marked two opposite corners of the trolley with small scraps of red adhesive tape. Stage two was now completed. Gaining a little in confidence, and carrying the box now full of real meals back to the cab of the truck, he drove to the Airport security gate he had come through earlier.

The same guard was still on duty and leaned out of the window of the security cabin as he saw the truck approach. ‘Feeling any better?’ he asked, as Dimitris pulled up. Dimitris pulled a face, and the guard, laughing, raised the airside barrier and waved him in.

George Liani watched him drive through from the roof level of the airport car park. Using his binoculars he watched as Dimitris drove out onto the concrete apron and over to the plane he was to supply.

As Dimitris reversed up to the open door he elevated the truck body on its hydraulic rams. Then he entered the plane by the flight of steps at the other door. He helped to load the trolleys of meals and to stow them in the storage bays. He made sure that the marked trolley went in last and was immediately accessible; and that it was not plugged into the power supply.

With relief he lowered his truck body and secured it, then jumping into the cab he drove to the employees’ rest room. He ran into the toilets and retched like a dog. His hands were shaking and his face grey and sweaty. He decided to go home and then, when this was all over, ‘phone in sick.

George Liani put his binoculars away with a satisfied grunt. Stage three was now complete, the guns, ammunition and explosives were on the target aircraft. Flight OA 269, Athens to London Heathrow.

September 22nd. US Embassy, Tel Aviv.

‘Get John Henderson down here at the double, this stuff is red hot!’ Mike ignored the communications officer’s question in his urgency.

Joe grabbed an internal phone and punched out a number. ‘Here, you talk to him, the number’s ringing.’

Mike took the ‘phone. ‘Henderson,’ a gruff voice said at the other end.

‘John its Mike. There’s something you should see immediately. Come down to the ‘photo lab, right now?’

John Henderson picked up the urgency in Mike’s voice. ‘On my way.’

John Henderson was the Defense Intelligence Agency head of station in Tel Aviv; he was a hub around which U.S. military intelligence gathering in the Middle East revolved. ‘Where’s the fire?’ he asked as he entered the room.

‘Not bust out yet, but it’s smoldering away, look at this.’

John looked at the screen; he moved a few frames across and studied each one. ‘Holy Christ!’ he said. He looked at Mike in disbelief. ‘If this is what I think it is, the President will need to see it.’

Mike nodded grimly. ‘Lists of invoices for chemicals used to produce germ warfare and chemical nerve agents. My guess on a first look is a form of anthrax virus, an unstable form, and VX or a new derivative as the nerve agent. The drawings are modifications to production plants that ostensibly exist to produce pharmaceuticals. The maps give locations. It’s on a huge scale. These other documents are the lists of chemicals already destroyed by the UN inspectorate. If this information is correct they have only located and destroyed a fraction of the materials purchased.’

‘Question is who has the rest of it?’

‘Iran probably, and some has been dispersed to Syria by the look of it. There’s enough to wipe out the entire Kuwaiti population, over run the Kuwaiti oil fields and then do the same to northern Saudi-Arabia and occupy the oil fields there; there’s also enough to damage Israel.’

There was a short silence. John broke it, ‘and we’re pretty sure there is dirty nuclear material to go with it. This has to go direct to the State Department and the Department of Defense, we’ll do a belt and braces job on it.’ He turned to the communications officer, ‘Joe, can we transmit this electronically to Defense? It must be on a secure system?’

Joe shook his head. ‘Email and Fax are out, the drawings and maps are too big, we can’t scan that size. The smaller frames we can do okay though.’

It was John’s turn to shake his head, ‘No, it won’t make any sense to them at the other end if we send it in bits. Make two duplicate copies of these microfilms; I want a copy in today’s diplomatic bag and I want one here for my use, all hell will break loose here soon.’

‘The diplomatic bag’s gone, sir,’ Joe said, ‘it’s sealed and on its way by now.’

'Damn,' John swore, 'Okay, three copies, put a copy in tomorrow's bag. Mike you're going to Washington tonight, you can hand-carry the originals to Bolling HQ. I want you to brief them when you get there. This is too important to leave to normal channels. Some duty officer might put it through the system, or worse still, not recognize its proper significance and sit on it. I'll ring Mary and get her to organize the quickest route to Washington for you. Have you any gear here for a short trip?'

Mike nodded; sudden trips were not new to him. He always kept an overnight bag packed in his office. 'I'll need some cash for contingencies.'

'No problem, you can have a thousand dollars from the emergency fund. Come up to my office, I'll give you the cash now. We need to talk anyway. Joe, ring me as soon as you have the duplicates made, they are not to leave the photo lab until I say so, understood?'

'Okay sir, you got it.'

Mike and John went up to John's office. 'Sit down,' he said, waving towards a couple of comfortable leather chairs, 'let me get you some coffee.' He went over to a filter coffee maker on a table in the corner. 'Not long made,' he said, 'I'd just put the water in when you rang.' He brought over the jug of coffee and two cups. 'It's Jamaican Blue Mountain,' he said with a hint of pride. He sat down in the other chair and looked at Mike. 'Well, what do you think?' He wasn't asking about the coffee.

Mike marshaled his thoughts. 'Kuwait was a creation of the British when they controlled the region,' he began, 'in Iraqi eyes an artificial creation. Iran claims that it was Iranian territory before it was Iraq. They also want it back.'

'Christ, what a prospect and what if they do deals with their neighbors. They could avoid the no-fly zones.'

'It's possible, and recent high level Iranian diplomatic missions have visited Syria.'

'Yeah,' John stroked his chin thoughtfully, 'and the Israelis have as Prime Minister perhaps the single most hated figure in the Arab world, a person who could unite the Arab world against them.'

Mike nodded his agreement. 'That's right, Iran only has to adopt an Islamist standpoint and declare a "Jihad". There is every bit as much hatred between Sunni and Shiite Muslims as there is between Catholic and Protestant Christians, but if a "Jihad" is declared, all the factions could unite against the new Israeli leadership. Worse still the old rivalries could be conveniently forgotten in a flood of religious fervor. Arab could unite with Arab; they would call each other brother and join forces against the western world.'

'Dear God, the whole damn Middle East would go up like a powder keg. Just think what that would do to the price of oil and the world economy!'

There was a knock at the door and Mary, John's secretary, came in. She smiled at Mike. 'Hi,' she said, 'what trouble have you been stirring up now?'

Mike grinned and put his hands up. 'Not guilty, trouble just follows me around.'

Mary laughed. 'Right, I forgot.' Then turning to John, 'I've got Mike booked on the early Concorde flight from Heathrow to Washington. The only problem is that I can't get a seat on a direct flight from here to London, they're booked solid. However I have booked him on to an El Al flight to Athens where he has to change

to an Olympic Airlines flight to Heathrow. It's a bit of a bind having to change at Athens but he'll be in London in plenty of time to catch the Concord flight in the morning. It's the quickest route available at short notice.'

September 22nd. Giza, Egypt.

With the flights to Athens booked, Anna looked out of the window of her room with some regret. The view was magnificent. Forty acres of lush gardens surrounded the hotel and looming massively in the background were the huge bulks of the Great Pyramids, wonders of the ancient world. She hadn't seen any of it.

'Oh well,' she said to the fabulous view, 'business before pleasure,' and turned away to pack.

When she reached the foyer Alan was at the reception desk settling the bill. The Mena House Oberoi was very expensive, but it had been an inspired choice. Originally built at the foot of the Great Pyramids as a royal hunting lodge it had been converted to a hotel in 1869. The luxury of the air-conditioned rooms combined with the original arabesque Islamic architecture had ensured their comfort. The modern executive centre with its state of the art office systems had kept them in touch with their head office in California. The hotel's gourmet restaurant, Al Rubayyat, had provided some memorable meals, and the large swimming pool had kept them in trim with twenty lengths before breakfast each morning. All these factors had contributed to the success of their trip.

'Cheap at twice the price,' Alan remarked as Anna joined him, 'in the circumstances that is.'

'Well, a couple of extra days would have been nice,' Anna replied. 'We both could do with a rest and a chance to do some quiet thinking on this new contract.'

'Yes,' Alan agreed, 'you're right. Once we've hired Mark Farzai perhaps we should take a few days off, go somewhere peaceful and do as you suggest.'

'Sold to the lady in the silk suit,' Anna replied laughing, 'but I want some time to visit Harrods first.'

Alan raised his arms in mock horror. 'Is there no limit to this woman's demands?' Laughing together they went out to the hired car to be driven to the airport. Their tickets were waiting for them on arrival. They checked in, picked up their boarding cards, went through security and passport control and wandered round the duty free shops to use up some spare time. When their flight number was called they boarded the Egyptian Airlines plane for an uneventful flight to Athens. The plane landed on time and Anna and Alan went through the transit system directly to the passenger lounge for their onward flight.

Flight OA 269, Athens to London Heathrow.

September 22nd. Tel Aviv.

Mike Edge settled into the back seat of the taxi as it pulled away from the Embassy entrance. One of the motor cycle courier escorts accelerated out into the traffic ahead. He checked through the rear window, the second courier was in place behind them. He relaxed as the driver moved the car expertly through the

traffic, heading southeast out of the city for the main Tel Aviv to Jerusalem highway, the quickest route for Ben Gurion airport.

Mike opened his briefcase and began to make notes. He would have to do a presentation immediately on his arrival in Washington. He could use the material on the microfilm to cover the plan, the method of attack and the bases from which the Iranians and Syrians could operate. That was okay. What was not okay, and what he was likely to be asked to provide, was an opinion on the ability of Iran to implement the plan. A breakdown of the implications of such a series of attacks for the whole gulf region would be required, and ideas on what could be done to limit the damage and to forewarn neutral parties. Before he knew it he was outside the departure hall at Ben Gurion Airport.

The taxi driver got out and took Mike's overnight bag out of the trunk, unobtrusively scanning the drop off point as he did so. Mike paid him exactly as he would any other taxi driver. The set-up was too good to be blown. The two motor cycle couriers had pulled up not far away. Mike was aware of their presence, but he barely glanced at them as he walked across the concourse. Going immediately to the check-in desk he presented his ticket, checked in his bag and collected his boarding card. That done he went straight through departures, security check and passport control, and headed for the gate for the Athens flight.

The flight took off ten minutes late but, courtesy of a tail wind, the pilot made up the time en route and they landed on schedule. Mike went through the doors marked transit passengers and found his way to the departure lounge for his flight.

Flight OA 269, Athens to London Heathrow.

September 22nd. Politia, Athens.

At the secluded villa in Politia, Abu Asifah assembled all the members of his team together. They were going out to fight on God's behalf; it was fitting that they should pray and be of pure heart. Facing towards Mecca he led the assembled men in their ritual prayers, bowing, kneeling and prostrating themselves before their God. Their prayers complete, they lined up for a final check. Pockets were turned out onto the tables and the contents scrutinized carefully to ensure that no masses of metal were being carried which would set off the security screening devices. Briefcases and flight bags were checked. Nothing was missed; nothing permitted which could cause problems. Their documentation was scrutinized. Passports were checked, visas for their destinations double-checked, tickets checked yet again. Each man's outfit was examined in minute detail; their clothing and their appearances had been varied as much as possible. Some had moustaches, some had not, and two had beards. They looked diverse, not like a team; dispersed amongst a few hundred other passengers they would be unremarkable. One feature however had it been noticed would have drawn a great deal of attention to these men. Many modern shoes have in-between the heel and the sole, a thin strong steel reinforcing shank. Airport metal detectors are tuned to allow for such a small mass of metal; they don't go off every time someone with steel shanks in their shoes passes through. The steel shank in each terrorist's right shoe was longer and thinner than the shank in the left shoe. Masked with

kitchen foil, it was razor sharp, pointed, and had a tape handle at the blunt end. The blade thus formed was three inches long and, expertly used, was capable of penetrating to the heart or cutting a throat, but it would not set off a metal detector, particularly as the men carrying them had no other metal about their persons. At different times four of the men were dropped off at 96 Syngrou Avenue, where they picked up the airport bus for the twenty-minute journey out to Hellenikon airport. Two were dropped off in the centre of Athens at points where they could find taxis. One at a time they arrived at Hellenikon and checked in. One at a time they went through the security checks and through passport control. The two detailed for airport surveillance watched each one go through, ready to extricate them if there was a serious problem, but there was no hitch.

One by one the terrorists joined the other passengers in the departure lounge waiting for their flight. Flight number OA 269, Athens to London Heathrow.

Chapter 5

September 22nd. Hellenikon Airport.

'Hello gorgeous, fancy a bit of company on the flight? Who knows what might happen when we get to London?' A suggestive look and a confident smile accompanied the words.

'Got your brains in your scrotum?' Anna snapped, 'Get lost you slime ball!' She stopped the man dead; his mouth open, his line of chat cut off. Heads turned. Unable to meet Anna's steady gaze the young man went red and turned away.

'He might have got away with it with someone else,' Anna thought to herself, he was good-looking, but far too flash for her taste. She had taken in his finery in her first cool glance; a shimmering, grey silk suit, with carefully matched grey leather shoes and a black silk shirt. Several chunky gold rings and a thick gold chain bracelet were on display. 'There will be a gold medallion, and a gold Rolex in there somewhere,' Anna thought. She was right; the gold Rolex was flashed on the pretext of checking the time, and the chain and medallion showed at the open neck of the black silk shirt.

Elegant, beautiful and with the poise and confidence of a model, Anna had had to put up with unwanted chat-up routines far too often to be polite about it anymore. 'Got me figured for arm candy; serves him right,' Anna thought, then she caught the amused smile of a man sitting opposite her. He had obviously been watching the chat-up attempt and was trying not to laugh. His eyes were twinkling behind a pair of steel-framed spectacles, which gave him a slightly scholarly appearance. Anna thought she saw him wink.

She gave him a wicked grin. He was wearing a well-cut lightweight navy blue suit, white cotton shirt and neat tie. He was well dressed in a way the other man would never achieve.

Anna, her eyes involuntarily sparkling back at his, began to speculate. There was something familiar about his face. If this man made an approach her response would be quite different.



Mike Edge was still thinking about the report he would have to make when he arrived at the State Department in Washington. Looking across at the row of seats facing him, he saw a strikingly beautiful girl sitting opposite him. As he looked a young man sitting next to her turned and spoke to her in an obvious chat-up attempt.

The girl's voice cracked like a whip. 'Got your brains in your scrotum? Get lost you slime ball!'

The guy shrank visibly before her level stare, turned away and began to color bright red.

Mike had difficulty in not laughing out loud. The girl had turned the whole incident from an unwelcome embarrassment into high farce in seconds. Still highly amused, Mike was quite unprepared as the girl's eyes locked with his. Her eyes were twinkling with barely suppressed laughter too. Without intending to, he winked. To his surprise she gave him a wicked grin, followed by an interested lift of the eyebrows. Mike's stomach flipped, his pulse began to race, he started to get up then he froze. Another man had crossed his line of vision and, sitting down in an empty seat on the other side of the girl, began to speak to her. The man was his brother.

September 22nd. Athens.

Dimitris left the airport as the morning began to heat up. He did not notice the rising temperature, but he was acutely aware of the car following him home. He had felt a momentary relief when he had successfully completed the instructions he had been given, but now with time to think, he was desperately worried. Roula and the children were still hostages, the terrorists might keep their promise to leave them unharmed or they might not. He shuddered; the second option didn't bear thinking about. The leader of the two men was constantly behind him, and he could see no way out of his predicament. The problem was that these men were playing for different stakes. Dimitris was shrewd enough to know that he had served his purpose. Even if he had money to offer them they would not be interested; and what if they did go away as promised, leaving him and his family unharmed? The items he had placed on the plane would be traced back to him, his name was on the loading documents, his name was on the work rota, and his fingerprints were all over the substituted meal containers.

Dimitris racked his brains. He had to do something to try to protect his family whatever happened. An idea began to form in his mind. He remembered having an unused brown envelope somewhere in the cab of his van. As he was stopped in the traffic, he rummaged quickly through the accumulated stuff in the shelf on the passenger side. Yes, there it was. He took a ball point pen from his overall pocket and wrote the address of the main Athens Police station on the envelope as the traffic crawled along.

Taking a dog-eared notebook from his overall pocket he quickly wrote his address on the centre pages, then; *'My name is Dimitris Kosovos. I work for Olympic Catering. Two men using this Mercedes car took my family hostage.'* He

wrote down the number of the car following him. *'They forced me to put substitute meal trays onto flight OA 269 today. They are Turks. They are armed and dangerous, please help us!'*

The traffic was starting to move again. Dimitris moved on, he didn't want to arouse the suspicions of the man following him by having horns blown at him for not moving with the traffic flow. At the next halt he quickly tore the centre page from his notebook, put it into the envelope and sealed it, and waited for an opportunity. To his relief one soon came. A large van pulled over, cutting in between Dimitris and the car following him. Dimitris eased over towards the centre line of the road and stopped in the traffic queue, his open window opposite the open window of a car going the other way. Checking in his wing mirror to ensure that the man following could not observe him, Dimitris flicked the envelope through the open window into the lap of a young lady. She looked at him startled.

'Please help me!' Dimitris begged, 'please, this is life or death matter, please deliver this for me!'

The traffic moved off and the young lady, too startled to reply, was gone. Dimitris was forced to move on as well. 'Please God,' he prayed, 'please make her do as I asked. Please.' He prayed the rest of the way home.

The young lady in the car was nonplussed. 'How strange, that poor man, he looked as if he was on the edge of a breakdown.' She looked at the hastily scrawled address on the envelope. The main Athens Police Headquarters. 'Oh well,' she thought, 'it isn't a million miles out of my way, but it'll have to wait until after my interview.'

September 22nd. Departure lounge, Hellenikon Airport.

'Damn,' Mike swore under his breath, 'what on earth is Alan doing here?' Mike was traveling on an Irish E.U. passport under the name of Mike Kelly and didn't want his cover blown. After a few moments Mike began to think that maybe his brother would not notice him. He was deep in conversation with the girl opposite, maybe she would keep his attention and Mike could avoid recognition. Wishing he had bought a newspaper to hide behind, Mike decided to move quietly to the other side of the departure lounge where he could sit with his back towards Alan. Choosing his moment as carefully as possible, he stood up. Several pairs of eyes, including those of his brother, flicked towards him attracted by the movement. Mike saw recognition dawn on his brother's face, saw him say excuse me to his lovely companion and stand up. He walked over.

'Mike,' he said quietly, 'what a pleasant surprise, what brings you here?'

Mike gave him a blank look. 'There must be some mistake,' he said, in a low voice. 'I'm afraid I don't know you,' and before his brother could say anything more he strode off to the far side of the departure lounge, choosing a seat where he could sit with his back to most of the passengers.

Anna's curiosity was aroused; it sharpened her interest to an acute degree. 'Who is that man,' she thought, 'what's happening here?'

Alan was puzzled; he knew his brother worked in the intelligence community, although he didn't know the exact nature of his work. He sat back next to Anna

his brow furrowed in thought. If Mike was denying his identity he must have a good reason.

‘Who was that?’ Anna asked as he sat down.

‘Oh, I thought I knew him but I must have made a mistake,’ Alan said lamely.

‘That’s not like you; you have a good memory for faces.’

Alan didn’t meet her eyes.

Anna sensed a mystery, something she should get to the bottom of. ‘Come off it,’ she said, ‘I know you better than that, who did you think it was?’

Alan, determined to get off the hook, and a little more composed by now, looked her in the eye. ‘No-one you know,’ he said, telling the literal truth, for Anna had never met his brother although she knew of him. Anna opened her mouth to speak. Alan pre-empted her. ‘I don’t want to discuss the matter any further, just forget it,’ he said firmly. He had a stubborn set to his jaw that Anna recognized from previous experience. She knew that nothing would drag information out of him now or in the future if she pressed the matter. She backed off.

‘Okay,’ she said, ‘sorry I asked.’ Even more intrigued, she looked speculatively at the mystery man now sitting at the far end of the room. Taking a pencil and a small pad of plain white paper from her purse, she began idly to sketch his profile.

The public address system gave its warning tone and the flight boarding announcement was made. As always there was a stampede for the boarding gate and to get away from his brother’s scrutiny Mike made sure that he was at the head of the queue.

Anna casually watched the cabin crew making their final checks and taking up their positions for the statutory safety demonstration. The aircraft began its taxi out to the runway; the cabin staff made a final check on seat belts and took their places for take-off.

Anna worked on her sketch.

Mike worked on his notes.

Alan was deep in thought about the new contract.

September 22nd. Athens.

George Liani missed the passing of the envelope. He had been using the mobile ‘phone to talk to his compatriot at Dimitris’s home and had allowed a gap to develop between himself and Dimitris’s vehicle. It was this gap that the van driver had slipped into, blocking off his view. He cursed the van driver in Turkish.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked his number two, in the same language, from the Kosovos living room.

‘A van has cut me off from the target, deal with the woman and kids as discussed; we have no time to waste. I need to get past this van, just do it.’

Moments later he overtook the offending van and with relief saw Dimitris’s old vehicle chugging along just in front. He wouldn’t lose sight of him again.

September 22nd. Departure Lounge, Hellenikon Airport.

Abu Asifah and part of his team were amongst the press of people who stood up and headed for the exit gate as soon as the boarding announcement was made.

The instructions were to merge with the crowd, and the team carried them out religiously. They had carefully chosen their seats when checking in for the flight. Each man had chosen an aisle seat. Two were at the rear, two in the centre and two at the front. Abu Asifah was one of the pair at the front. Each pair sat quietly, aware of the location of their colleagues, each carefully ignoring the existence of the others, each with their own thoughts and anxieties as they waited for the moment of action to arrive. They were attentive as the cabin staff went through the safety instructions but they were attentive for different reasons. They noted the senior stewardess, and which stewardesses were responsible for which sections of the aircraft.

As the safety instructions were completed the aircraft began its taxi to the end of the runway. A few minutes later the pilots built up the engine thrust against the brakes and then the aircraft surged forward with impressive power down the runway. A few moments of acceleration and vibration followed and then the nose lifted, the vibrations stopped and the aircraft powered up into the sky.

Flight OA 269, with all its conflicting interests was on its way.

September 22nd. Koropi.

The man at the farm put down his cell phone. He stepped quickly across the living room, picking up the electrician's snips as he passed the table. He cut the nylon ties holding the children to their chairs one at a time and carried each of them through to their bedroom. They were exhausted and terrified. He put each of them into their beds, hands and feet still bound and mouths still gagged, and covered them with a blanket each.

Roula's face was a mask of terror as he returned. He ignored her, taking Dimitris's old single barreled shotgun and some cartridges he went through to the children's room. Exhausted, they were asleep. Quickly he shot the first child through the chest with one cartridge where he lay. The first child knew nothing about it. The second heard the bang and awoke with a start, confused and afraid. Before he was aware what was happening he too was shot. Roula's eyes were starting from her head as the man came back into the room, the muscles and tendons of her face and neck were straining to breaking point as she tried to scream through the choking gag. He shot her at point blank range in the neck. The shot almost severed her head from her body. Unmoved, the man walked outside to the two dead dogs. Quickly he blasted a cartridge into each dog's head obliterating his earlier pistol shots. Walking back to the house he reloaded the shotgun and stood it by the door. Then, taking his snips, he cut away the nylon ties, leaving Roula slumped dead in the chair. In the same way he removed the ties from the children, rearranging the still warm and flexible limbs into a more natural position under the bloody and shredded blankets. Carefully he pocketed the five empty cartridge cases and put the snipped nylon ties into a plastic supermarket bag ready for removal. Dimitris's old single barrel shotgun had no ejection mechanism; empty cartridge cases had to be removed from the breech by hand. In his hurry to get the job finished and away George Liani's helper overlooked the cartridge now in the shotgun breech. It carried a perfect finger and thumb print.

September 22nd. Central Police Station, Athens.

The young lady into whose car Dimitris had flicked his envelope was on her way to a job interview. Already running late because of the heavy traffic she hadn't had the time or inclination to act immediately on Dimitris's strange request. Now, the interview over, she was in two minds as to what she should do. Standing on the pavement outside the office block where her interview had taken place she held the grubby brown envelope in her hand. She wanted to throw it in the litter bin and forget all about it, she wanted to go shopping in the big stores but something stopped her doing this; deep inside her there was a nagging doubt. The man's face was clear in her mind's eye, she remembered how haggard he had looked, the desperation in his eyes and voice. She shrugged and set off on foot to the police headquarters; it was close by.

She entered the building with some apprehension; in her short experience officialdom was not always helpful to its public. She approached the sergeant at the desk. He gave her an appreciative glance, she was attractive and looking her best from the interview. 'Excuse me,' she said, 'this may sound a little strange, but a man thrust this envelope into my car this morning and asked me to bring it here.'

She handed the envelope over to the sergeant. He took it and examined it.

'Well, miss, let's have a look and see what's inside.' The sergeant opened the envelope and, taking out the page from Dimitris's notebook scanned it briefly. His brow furrowed into a frown. 'Would you tell me exactly how you came by this,' he asked.

The young lady explained the unusual circumstance.

'Hmmm,' the sergeant made a non-committal noise. He thought for a few moments. 'I'm afraid you'll have to wait a short while,' he said, 'I'm going to pass this to a senior officer.'

'Oh great,' the girl said, 'just what I need.' She flounced over to a bench seat and sat down.

The sergeant, totally unaffected, picked up the 'phone and rang through to the investigation department to speak to the police lieutenant on duty.

'I've got an unusual one down here at the desk,' he said, 'it may be something, it may be nothing, but I think you should look at it.'

'Can't you deal with it? I'm up to my ears in paperwork.'

This was a lie and the sergeant knew it; he wanted to pass this on to the investigation branch and then, duty done, he was in the clear. He knew what would get the young lieutenant moving. 'There's a young girl down here, she's bright and very attractive. I think you should hear what she has to say.'

The lieutenant's disinterest vanished, as the sergeant knew it would. 'Okay,' he said, 'show her to an interview room; get one of your men to provide some coffee. I'll come down as soon as I can.' He hung up.

The sergeant looked cynically at the 'phone in his hand. Mention a good looking woman or money and those lazy sods in investigation would be crawling all over it in minutes he thought. He yelled for a constable to come to the desk. 'Show that young lady into interview room number two,' he said, 'give this back to her,'

handing over the note, 'and get some coffee organized.' The constable nodded and went off to do the sergeant's bidding. The young lady went into the interview room and was soon joined by the lieutenant. The sergeant, duty done, recorded the incident together with the lieutenant's name and number and went in search of some coffee for himself.

The lieutenant, whose name was Georgiou, made the girl tell the story again. When she had finished he looked thoughtful.

'What time was it when this note was passed to you?'

'Mid-morning, I was on my way to a job interview at eleven.'

The lieutenant thought hard. This might be nothing at all, but on the other hand if there was anything in it and he did nothing it could cost him promotion. For the sake of a phone call it would be silly to risk his chances of advancement. He went to the phone and picked up the receiver. He spoke to the girl on the switchboard. 'Get me the number of Olympic Catering out at the airport,' he said. When they came on the line he asked for the personnel department. He was put through. He gave his rank and name and asked for the personnel director. The director came on the line. 'Yes, lieutenant, what can I do for you?'

Lieutenant Georgiou asked if one Dimitris Kosovos worked for them and if he had been responsible for servicing flight number OA 269 with meals that day.

The personnel director was cagey. 'We don't normally disclose personnel information like that, especially over the phone. Can you tell me what it's all about?'

'We're checking on information received. It's urgent, I don't have time to come out and flash my badge at you. My inquiry may be of vital concern to your company, please check the information I've asked for and ring back to Police Headquarters. Ask for me by name.'

'Very well,' the personnel director agreed, and rang off.

The lieutenant came back over to the girl. 'Right, we'll soon have a better idea of whether this is a genuine emergency or not. In the meantime I'd better take down your name, address and phone number then you can go.' The girl gave him the information.

'Okay,' he said, 'thanks very much, we'll let you know if there are any developments.'

The young girl looked at her watch. Mid-day. She still had time to do some shops before everything closed for the afternoon break. Lieutenant Georgiou went back to his office and sat at his desk. As he sat down the 'phone rang. It was the personnel director of Olympic Catering.

'Your information seems to be accurate,' he said, 'we do have a Dimitris Kosovos in our employ, and he did service flight number OA 269 with meals this morning. What is this all about?'

The young Lieutenant ignored the question. 'I need to confirm his address immediately, have you got it there?'

'Yes, he lives out in the country at a small place near Koropi.' He gave the address, and then asked again, 'look, can you please tell me what this is all about?'

'We'll be in touch later, oh, one other thing, is this Dimitris still at work?'

'No, he went home at around ten, he was on the early shift, but it seems he was sick.'

'Okay, thanks.' The lieutenant rang off. He thought hard. He didn't want to go off half cocked. Not with the promotion board sitting next week. But the information did fit with what the girl had said. This Dimitris character would have been on his way home, on that road, and at about the time the girl said she had received the note. Should he pass this to a superior, or to the anti terrorist branch? Not yet he reasoned, for if it were true they would take the credit, and if not true he would look stupid. With his eye on his own promotion, Lieutenant Georgiou decided to go out to the Kosovos home and ask a few questions.

September 22nd. Koropi.

Dimitris drove into the sunny yard of his little farm closely followed by George Liani in his Mercedes saloon. He got out of his van. There was an unnatural silence about the place. Half stumbling, half running, desperate with anxiety, he made for the door of the house, only to be stopped in his tracks by George Liani's helper who appeared in the doorway, pointing Dimitris's own single barrel shotgun at his chest.

'Get back,' the man commanded.

'My family, are they all right?' Dimitris blurted out the question. He was desperate.

The man nodded. 'Yes,' he said, 'they're okay, now step back.' Dimitris took a pace backwards.

George Liani stood behind him and his silenced pistol pointed at the small of Dimitris's back. He pointed with his left hand. 'Over there.'

'Why, what's happening?' Dimitris demanded his fear for his family forcing the words out.

'You've done as we asked. Now we are going to tie you all up in that outbuilding in case anyone comes to the house,' George Liani explained. 'We need time to get clear. Now move; we'll tie you first and then bring your family.'

Relief flooded through Dimitris; it would be all right. Soon the nightmare would be over, someone would find them or perhaps they might escape. One way or another, the worst was over. He went into the whitewashed outbuilding.

'Sit down over there,' George Liani, pointed to a box in the corner.

Dimitris sat down.

Swiftly George Liani's helper stepped forward and jammed the muzzle of the shotgun under Dimitris's chin. Ducking his head away he pulled the trigger. The back of Dimitris's head exploded outwards in a spray of pink. He fell back into the corner of the room. The man with the shotgun stepped back. Using a rag from his pocket, he wiped the gun clean of fingerprints. Taking Dimitris's dead hands, one at a time, he closed the fingers around the cartridge cases used on the Kosovos family and dropped them into Dimitris' jacket pocket. Then he put the gun itself into Dimitris's hands, smothering it with the dead man's prints.

While he was doing this, George Liani went outside and cut a branch from a nearby bush. He trimmed it down leaving a three-inch piece of side branch sticking out at the one end. Going back inside he went over to where his helper

had dropped the shotgun next to Dimitris's body. He pushed the branch end through the trigger guard and against the trigger and let it fall alongside the gun. He stepped back and carefully surveyed their handiwork. He nodded with satisfaction and went to check the house.

'A good job done,' he said to his accomplice.

They left the farm, leaving the doors wide open.

Chapter 6

Flight OA-269, September 22nd.

Casually, and without any acknowledgement of each other, as soon as the "fasten seat belts" sign went off the terrorists visited the aircraft toilets. Whilst inside, each removed the slim razor-sharp blade from within his shoe and transferred it to a leather sheath sewn inside his jacket. Then one at a time they resumed their seats.

The cabin staff began to serve drinks to the passengers, pushing the serving trolleys down the length of the aircraft. Abu Asifah chose the moment well. Once the drinks trolleys were far enough down the aisle to be past the two members of the team sitting in the centre of the aircraft, he gave a nod. His partner went forward and entered the toilet at the front of the aircraft. Abu Asifah stood outside as if waiting for the toilet to become free. Casually he surveyed the cabin, and then quickly he gave a sharp double rap on the door, stepped forward and drew the curtain across to screen off the galley and storage area.

The stewardess working there started to turn round to explain that passengers were not permitted in that part of the aircraft. Before she could complete the turn or speak she was grabbed from behind, Abu Asifah's left hand was clamped firmly over her mouth, her head held against his chest and neck. She felt the cold edge of a steel blade pressed against her throat. 'No scream,' Abu Asifah hissed into her ear.

The girl was too shocked to make any attempt at resistance. Helpless, she watched as another man came out of the forward toilet and went swiftly to the units where the meals for the flight were stored. He opened the first storage unit and pulled out a trolley. It had bits of red insulation tape stuck across its corners. The man pulled out the top tray of meals - foil containers with blue lids. Ripping the lid off the container, he pulled out an automatic pistol. Checking that the magazine was fully inserted he pulled back the action and, looking in through the ejector opening, made sure that there were rounds in the magazine. He released the action with a snap, feeding a round into the breech and, leaving the weapon fully cocked, handed it to Abu Asifah who held it to the stewardess's head. The terrorist opened another blue food container, taking out, checking and cocking a weapon for his own use. Seconds later two spare magazines were unwrapped. The man pushed one into Abu Asifah's pocket and one into his own pocket. He then opened more packs with blue lids and took out four more pistols and spare magazines.

With perfect timing, just as he had finished, two more members of the team stepped through the curtains. Each was handed a loaded pistol and a spare magazine. One of the men pushed the pistol into the waistband of his trousers at the small of his back and covered it with his jacket. The spare magazine went into his pocket, and he took a floral patterned zip top wash bag from under his coat. The two remaining loaded pistols and magazines went into this. He stepped through the curtain and, making his way down the aisle, politely passed the cabin staff serving drinks and went to the rear of the aircraft as though going for a wash and shave. The remaining two of the six-man team were surreptitiously armed with the weapons and magazines from the wash bag.

The three men now at the rear of the plane watched the curtain screening the front of the aircraft. Behind the curtain more activity was taking place. Another of the prepared dummy food containers had been opened and some of the disposable nylon cable ties were taken out.

Abu Asifah covered the stewardess with his automatic whilst the other secured her hands and feet. None too gently she was pushed to the floor and bundled out of the way into a corner. Abu Asifah turned to cover the door through to the flight deck with his automatic. He looked at his watch; they were on schedule, all his men were armed and in position, three at the rear of the cabin, himself and the other two at the front, and ready to take control.

Paddington, September 22nd.

Dawn St. Pierre's healthy young body healed quickly with no infection and almost no scar, but she found the days in the hospital bed long and tedious. The high point of her day was visiting time. She was beginning to think of the police officer who had come to her aid as more than just a friend, and she began making a special effort for him. Brushing her long blonde hair until it gleamed she put on a touch of make-up and arranged her silk kimono just so.

Jim appreciated the end result, and it made him feel good, but he had never been involved with such a glamorous woman before and found he had somewhat mixed feelings about it. At first he could not believe his luck, then he felt financially inadequate, then he couldn't keep away.

At the end of a week Dawn was told that she could go home. She broke the good news to Jim, expecting him to be as thrilled as she was, but to her surprise he received the news coolly and with obviously mixed feelings.

Dawn, as a girl in hospital, was, to Jim, a different proposition to Dawn in her own setting. Jim couldn't come to terms with the difference between her financial position and his own.

'What's the matter? You don't seem very pleased at the news,' Dawn pouted at him.

'Yes I am, honestly. It's great news,' Jim protested.

'Come off it, your face dropped a mile when I told you.' A thought struck her. 'Oh, there's someone else isn't there?'

'No! No, there's no one else. I'd tell you if there were. It's just, oh, I don't know, I can't explain it.'

'You're ashamed to be seen out with me, is that it, because I've posed nude?'

'No, don't think like that. It's nothing like that at all.'

'Oh, so you do know what it is then. So why not tell me?'

Jim was trapped, and said nothing. A silence grew between them. Jim looked at his feet. Dawn looked unhappily at Jim. Jim eventually looked up. He saw a tear trickle unheeded down Dawn's cheek. He felt guilty and then ashamed. He took her hand.

'Don't cry, please don't cry. It's only me being stupid,' he said lamely.

Dawn shook her head mutely; she didn't trust herself to speak.

Koropi, September 22nd.

The afternoon sun was throwing long shadows and the scene was quiet and peaceful as Detective Lieutenant Georgiou and Detective Sergeant Joanidies drove into the yard of the Kosovos farm. An old van was parked near the neat whitewashed house. The house door was open, but no one came out. No dogs barked.

The two police officers got out of their car and walked over to the open door. They knocked but there was no response. They called out loudly but there was no reply. The lieutenant went in first. After the glare of the mid-afternoon sunlight outside he could see nothing, but he could hear a continuous buzzing noise. The sergeant, following him in, heard it too. Their eyes not yet adjusted to the light, they took off their sunglasses in order to be able to see. Together, they saw what once had been Roula. Then they realized what the noise was; flies, thousands of them.

The lieutenant, the younger and less experienced of the two men, felt his stomach begin to churn. The sergeant went through to the rooms beyond. Moments passed during which the young lieutenant couldn't take his eyes off the horror before him.

'In here, sir,' the sergeant called.

Reluctantly, the lieutenant went through. The pathetic blasted remains of the two children covered in more flies were too much for him. He ran out retching, and threw up into the yard.

The sergeant, older and more experienced, came outside. 'Better not touch anything, we're going to need forensic,' he said pragmatically. 'I'll radio for help.' He stepped over to the car and made the call. That job done he came back to the lieutenant. 'You okay?'

'Yeah, sorry about this, I'm not very good with this sort of thing. What a mess!'

'Looks like shotgun wounds to me,' the sergeant answered, 'maybe we have a maniac on the loose, the husband, the guy called Dimitris, we'd better look around some more.'

The lieutenant took out his pistol and checked it. 'Cover me when I move,' he said, 'I'll do the same for you.'

The sergeant nodded and took up a fire position behind the car, his forearms resting on the roof.

The lieutenant ran forward to start searching the buildings. Dimitris, when they found him, was past harming anyone. The sergeant looked carefully at the dreadful scene, the slumped body and the shredded head. He looked at the fallen

shotgun and the forked stick. 'Out of his mind,' he said. 'Killed his family and then shot himself. Couldn't face what he'd done.' He spat on the floor with disgust. Flies buzzed.

Lieutenant Georgiou walked outside looking pale but thoughtful. He was remembering the contents of the note delivered by the girl. 'Maybe,' he said, 'maybe not.' He hurried over to the car, and called control.

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

Mike Edge felt uneasy. He didn't know why he felt uneasy but he trusted his instincts, they'd served him well in the past. He looked around trying to pin down the reason for his disquiet. There were several men moving about the aircraft, using the toilets and waiting outside the doors. Could that be the reason? No, Mike dismissed the idea. People always looked slightly awkward when waiting outside the toilets. Still, it nagged at the back of his mind. Some of them had been away from their seats for rather a long time.

The stewardesses were serving drinks. Mike asked for fresh orange juice when the drinks trolley reached his row, but the stewardess had run out. She pressed the service button above Mike's head to call the girl in the galley area for more, and served the people across the aisle. Mike waited. The call light was still on, it had been on now for nearly a minute and no one had appeared. More passengers were asking for orange juice and the stewardess serving drinks was getting impatient. Mike looked up to speak to the stewardess. She was going forward to fetch the orange juice herself, and from the look on her face she was going to have words with her colleague in the galley area, who still hadn't responded to the call from the service bell. She pulled back the curtain, and stepped through to the galley. The curtain was quickly pulled back across. In that brief instant Mike saw a man with a gun.

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

Abu Asifah looked at his watch. In a few moments flight OA 269 would be leaving the ground station controlling air traffic in the Athens area and moving into the next control area. It was time to make his next move. He opened the door to the flight deck and stepped through, pistol cocked, a round in the chamber ready, the safety catch off. He tapped the captain on the shoulder and stepped back. The captain, a steady, grey-haired, experienced pilot turned expecting coffee, and found himself looking into the muzzle of a gun. His first reaction was anger; the possibility of a hijack was one that pilots lived with but in common with all pilots, he had thought that it would never happen to him. His training took over; his first duty was to his passengers. Resignedly but with irritation he realized that he was in for a period of considerable pressure and discomfort. He moved his headphones to hear what the man with the gun had to say.

Abu Asifah spoke in accented but clear English. 'You will obey my orders; I am in control of this aircraft in the name of Allah and the People of Palestine. There are armed men at each end of the aircraft and we have explosive charges on board.' He told the literal truth and omitted to mention the fact that the explosive

charges were not yet wired up for detonation. 'Any attempt to circumvent my absolute control and I will have one of your cabin crew shot,' he continued, 'put the aircraft on to Auto-pilot and listen carefully to my instructions.'

The captain turned to the co-pilot. 'Do as he says, no heroics, we have a planeload of people back there.' The co-pilot switched to autopilot and sat back.

Abu Asifah spoke again, 'When you leave Athens ground control you will not immediately contact the next ground station. You will sign off with Athens and then change altitude and course. This is the new course and altitude you will use.'

The captain started to object.

Abu Asifah cut him short. 'There is no risk of collision,' he said, 'we have done our homework carefully. You will turn out to sea and drop down low enough to confuse the radar screens. When you are out of their range I will give you further instructions. Now give me a set of earphones so that I can monitor your words. I can monitor your actions from the instruments.'

The captain shrugged and, taking a spare set of earphones plugged them into an unused jack on the radio console. He handed them carefully to Abu Asifah who put them on and heard the air traffic controller on the ground inform the captain of OA 269 that he was leaving his control, giving him the next frequency to switch to. He heard the captain's response and dug the muzzle of his gun into the back of the captain's neck. The captain switched the radio off.

'Now,' Abu Asifah told him, 'make a cabin announcement.' He thrust a piece of paper at the captain. 'Use these words.'

The captain read the piece of paper. He switched the radio on and turned to the intercom setting. 'This is the captain speaking, ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'we are experiencing a technical problem, we appear to be losing a small amount of cabin pressure. I am cleared to descend to a lower altitude and we may have to return to Athens to have the problem fixed. I hope this will not inconvenience you too much. I will keep you informed. There is no cause for alarm. Thank you for your attention.'

Abu Asifah removed his pistol barrel from the captain's neck. 'Good, you keep doing exactly as I tell you and no one will get hurt. Now start reducing height and turn onto the bearing I gave you.'

The captain, with the safety of his passengers his paramount consideration, resignedly made the necessary adjustments and the plane began to drop down towards the Mediterranean, turning out over the sea away from Greek airspace.

Koropi, September 22nd.

Thoughtfully, the police lieutenant walked back to the door of the house where his sergeant was sitting on a bench. He sat down beside him. 'There's more to this than you know,' he said, 'you'd better read this.' He gave him the note Dimitris had written.

The sergeant read it and looked at the lieutenant. 'The family was taken hostage?'

'Looks like it,' the lieutenant replied, He jerked a thumb in the direction of Dimitris's remains. 'He was forced to put some substitute meal containers on to an Olympic Airways passenger jet. I've just told control to notify the company so they

can check the aircraft, and I've asked for a full homicide team to come out here and go over this place with a fine-tooth comb. I'll stay here and keep an eye on things. You take the car down to the village and look out for them. Show them the way here.'

'Okay, looks like this is going to be some case.' The sergeant walked over to the car. The radio came to life as he reached it. He listened and then acknowledged the call. He walked back over to the lieutenant. 'We're too late,' he said, 'the airline has just had a call from air traffic control, an Olympic flight, number OA 269, has gone off the radar screens and off the air.'

'Shit!' the lieutenant swore, 'well let's hope it's a hijack and not a bomb.'

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

As Mike's mind retained the image his brain went into overdrive. 'A hijacking? It must be.' Suddenly everything that had gone on before fell into place. The plane had been taken over and was being diverted. His next thought was for the microfilm he carried. He must keep it safe. Opening his briefcase he quickly took out the small brown envelope containing the microfilm. Then, undoing the belt and the top of his trousers, he pushed it into a small zipped pocket sewn into the inside of the waistband of his trousers. Doing up his trousers and belt he looked up into the quizzical gaze of the girl he had seen accompanying his brother.

Anna Sutherland, on her way forward to the toilet, had slowed as she approached the seat of the intriguing stranger, the man about whom Alan had denied all knowledge. He was stuffing a small brown envelope into the waistband of his trousers. Involuntarily she stopped, and raised an inquiring pair of eyebrows over a pair of beautiful green eyes.

Mike looked away and saw two men, guns in hand, step through the curtain from the forward galley and enter the cabin. There would be more, he knew. He swung round and looked to the rear of the aircraft. Three more men stood up. All three held leveled pistols. He grabbed the standing girl by the wrist and pulled her down into the empty aisle seat next to his own.

'What on earth...?'

'Be quiet! And sit very, very still,' Mike hissed in her ear.

As the other passengers saw the menacing guns a rising level of hysteria filled the cabin, screams, cries and a stampede towards the rear of the aircraft began, then as the hijackers at the rear were spotted the aisle jammed, the rush stopped, and a frightened silence descended. There was nowhere to go.

Koropi, September 22nd.

A police vehicle pulled into the yard of the Kosovos farmstead in the late afternoon. No sign of the horrors recently perpetrated there were evident. The forensic team had arrived, guided in by the sergeant. The forensic officer in charge was a very experienced man. He listened carefully to what the lieutenant and the sergeant had to say then he deployed his men with specific instructions. There were terrorist connotations and there would, by the nature of things, be political aspects to this case.

Leaving the forensic officer in charge, the lieutenant and the sergeant walked over to their car. 'Did anything come through on that car registration number?' the lieutenant wanted to know.

'Yeah,' the sergeant pulled out his notebook, 'it came over the radio whilst I was waiting for forensics down in the village.' He turned some pages. 'Here it is, it's owned by Eurocar, the big rental agency, it was rented in Athens.'

'Right, let's get going,' the lieutenant said briskly, 'by the time we get there they'll be opening up after the afternoon break. They may just have some information on the current users of the vehicle.' The sergeant climbed into the driving seat and they set off back to Athens. The two detectives flashed their I.D. at the Eurocar office. The girl on the desk called the manager from the back office to deal with the matter. The lieutenant gave them the car number and the girl called up the details on the computer.

'This car was leased to a Mister Andreas Kokalis,' she said, 'he rented it for a month and paid cash in advance.'

'Give me his address, please,' the lieutenant requested.

'I'll run all the transaction information off onto the printer, if that's okay?' She looked questioningly at the manager.

The manager nodded assent. 'Yes, that will be okay,' he said, and turned to the two detectives. 'Can you tell us what this is about; has the car been involved in an accident?'

'No, no accident, but I'm afraid I can't tell you any more at this stage,' the lieutenant replied. 'I presume it's still out on hire?'

'Just a minute, I'll check.' The girl tapped some keys and went to another screen of the computer program. 'No,' she said, 'it was returned over two hours ago.' She thought for a moment. 'I remember now, just before we closed for lunch a man came in. I was dealing with another customer. He waved the keys and documents at me and left them on the counter; then he rushed off.'

'Where are the keys now?' the sergeant asked.

'I put them in an envelope marked with the car number, ready for the next user.'

'And the car,' the sergeant asked, 'where is it?'

The girl looked at her watch. 'It's probably being cleaned ready for the next customer.'

'Do the cleaners use the keys you have here?'

'No, they have their own keys to all the cars,' the girl explained, 'them and the workshop; it saves them coming in here all the time to fetch them.'

'Right,' said the lieutenant, 'give me the envelope with the car keys in it – don't take the keys out.' He turned to the manager. 'I'm sorry, sir,' he said, 'but we are going to have to impound that car for a short period to enable our forensic people to examine it.' The manager shrugged in resignation. 'Come on,' the lieutenant said, 'let's see how far the cleaners have got.' The car had been cleaned, and very thoroughly. The inside had been vacuumed; the windows and dash polished, and the car had been put through an automatic car wash.

'We make a special effort on this class of car, our customers expect it,' the manager said apologetically.

‘Oh well, there may be some information we can glean from it,’ the lieutenant replied. ‘Sergeant, go and radio for a forensic team to go over this vehicle.’ The sergeant went off, made the call and came back. ‘A team is on its way. What next?’

‘We pay Mr. Kokalis a visit, and for that we need a search warrant and some help.’

Chapter 7

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

The hijacked aircraft dropped down low over the Ionian Sea on its new course, heading for the open Mediterranean. In the passenger cabin the hysteria had subsided and a shocked silence prevailed as everyone wondered what the future held. All the passengers had been moved forward, filling up the previously unoccupied seats around the aircraft so as to leave a block of a couple of dozen empty seats at the rear of the aircraft. Now, under the guns of two of the hijackers, each passenger was being brought back and searched. Once searched, they were moved to the rear of the aircraft and re-seated. The hijackers were looking for weapons.

Gradually they worked their way down the aircraft. Suddenly one of the terrorists hit a passenger on the head with his gun barrel. Stunned, and bleeding profusely from a split in his scalp, the man was dragged from his seat and thrown to the floor in the aisle. He was quickly trussed up using nylon cable ties from one of the dummy meal containers. The terrorist held up a handgun. The man was a sky-marshal. He was bundled forward and strapped into one of the cleared seats directly under the eyes of the hijackers. Some passengers prayed, some muttered to themselves, others sat in terrified silence wondering what was going to happen to them. In the cockpit Abu Asifah was supervising the navigation. The course alterations he gave the captain were taking the aircraft in a great arc first to the southwest, then South, past the western edge of Crete, and on southeast, into the airspace between Crete and North Africa. Finally they turned East following the line of 34-degree latitude past Cyprus towards the coast of Lebanon. South of Cyprus a small correction southwards would take them to Beirut. The military radars had been alerted and it was not long before the plane was spotted. The Greek air force picked up a low flying blip passing the western end of Crete where none should be. They scrambled two jet fighters to have a look and vectored them in, intercepting the unknown aircraft’s course.

The people on flight OA 269 got a big lift to their morale from seeing the Greek air force come alongside, but there was nothing practical the pilots of the fighters could do.

Abu Asifah knew this. ‘Fly your course,’ he told the captain, ‘do not deviate an inch in direction or height. If you do one of your cabin staff will be killed.’

Grimly, the captain did as he was told. He had a good idea where they were headed, and he didn’t expect to get much assistance when they got there. ‘Look, they know where we are now,’ he said. ‘I’ve got a good idea where we’re going and

so must they have by now. They can't do anything to stop you, so let me gain some altitude; flying at this height is dangerous.'

Abu Asifah was not stupid; he knew the risks. 'Yes,' he said, 'you have my permission.'

Athens, September 22nd.

Andreas Kokalis's address was in a seedy part of Athens. Paint was flaking off the poorly maintained buildings, rubbish was piled in the street, and a mangy dog lay in a patch of shade by the dirty steps. Outside in considerable force, the police had the front and back of the building covered with a fully armed detail. Entering the building quietly, Lieutenant Georgiou and the sergeant made their way, guns drawn and ready, to the door of the apartment.

Ringling the bell produced no result. Waving forward a police officer with a sledgehammer, they smashed open the door and burst in guns first.

There was no one home. It was a one-room apartment with basic cooking facilities. The bathroom was down the hall and was shared.

The noise from the smashing of the lock brought the landlord, running and out of breath, from his room on the ground floor, to see who the hell was damaging his property.

He was dismayed to find it was the police. Having no love for them and a few things he would prefer them not to know about, he was totally unhelpful.

'No, he had not seen Mister Kokalis for some time. The rent was overdue, and he was thinking of re-letting the flat, Kokalis owed him money.'

He cursed and spat on the grimy linoleum.

'No, he didn't know where Kokalis worked, didn't know if he had any friends. He didn't spy on his tenants; he kept himself to himself.'

He failed to mention that he was holding Kokalis's mail downstairs in his own room, reasoning that there might be a check, or something else Kokalis needed amongst the mail, something he could bargain with for the outstanding rent. He would clean out Kokalis's things too, as soon as the police left. He knew where he could sell them.

Concerned solely with his own interests, he gave the police nothing of any use.

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

After the search for weapons was complete Anna was moved back and seated next to the quiet stranger. He looked calm, sitting back with his legs crossed and his eyes closed. No, not closed, Anna realized, his eyes were narrowed. He was watching the hijackers every move. She risked a whispered question. 'Are they going to fly us into a building?'

'No, I don't think so, we're flying south and east, away from land; there are no buildings.'

Anna digested this. 'What about Israel? That's to the East.'

'The Israelis would intercept first.'

'And shoot us down? Oh great!'

‘Only if the plane is deliberately aimed at an Israeli target, and I don’t think that’s what these guys have in mind.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, they don’t have much to gain by allowing them-selves to be shot down by the Israeli Air Force, any more than by the Greek pilots alongside us now. My guess is that this is an old-fashioned hijacking, I think they’re going to land somewhere and make demands.’

‘Jesus, I hope you’re right. But why are they doing this to innocent people?’

‘They don’t figure us as innocent.’

‘But we’ve done nothing to them.’

‘We’ve done very little for them either.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘By any reckoning the Palestinians have had a raw deal. The problem is that two different peoples want to occupy the same land. The Israelis have taken over, first by stealth, then by force, the country that was Palestine. Several attempts by the Arab world to remove the Israelis have failed. Now the Arabs are divided. The Palestinians get some support from Arab sources but not much. The Israelis on the other hand get massive support from America. Our supporting of the Palestinian’s enemies makes them regard us as their enemy too.’

‘Well, okay, but that doesn’t give them the right to threaten innocent travelers like this.’

‘In the Middle East the gun beats the olive branch every time. It’s not rational, but it’s how it is.’

‘You’re on their side!’

‘No, I’m not, but you have to know your enemy.’

‘Whose side are you on?’

Mike answered obliquely. ‘The fighting in and around Israel is bad enough, taking the fight to unarmed civilian people in other countries is beyond the pale. Terrorism is designed to terrorize. That’s what it does. They have to be stopped.’

‘What’s going to happen?’

‘We’re flying due East near as I can tell, so I guess we’re heading for Beirut. The guys with the guns are Palestinians, so my guess is that this hijack will be to demand the release of prisoners somewhere.’

‘Will we be okay? I’m scared.’

‘We’ll be okay if we keep quiet and do nothing to draw their attention to us. But we’re in for an uncomfortable few days. Just remember it won’t be forever and you’ll survive.’

Anna looked doubtful.

The quiet stranger smiled at her and gently squeezed her hand in his strong brown one. ‘Believe me. The worst problem is going to be boredom.’

His smile and the friendly squeeze of the hand gave Anna the courage to smile back. ‘Right, then I guess we’re in this together.’

Tel Aviv, September 22nd.

News of the hijack soon leaked out. By microwave link to orbiting satellite and back to earth receiving dish, the information flashed around the world. The

miracle of modern communications ensured that most of the developed world knew about it within an hour. The media went into top gear, TV crews were mobilized, reporters dispatched, and again the marvels of western technology were turned against the western nations. The demands of the Blood of Shatila movement hit every TV screen and every newspaper front page.

***“The West Bank must be free of Jewish settlers to be made a completely independent Palestinian State.
The Holy Places of Jerusalem must be returned to Islam.”***

John Henderson heard the news long before it reached the media networks. He checked with Mary to find out which flight it was that Mike Edge was booked on. She confirmed his worst fears.

‘Oh shit,’ he said, ‘Murphy’s Law is working overtime.’

‘I hope he’ll be okay,’ Mary said anxiously.

‘Him? He’ll be alright; it’s the information I’m worried about.’ John replied.

Mary’s temper flared, ‘You’re not human sometimes, I don’t know why I work for you,’ she yelled, stalking out of John’s office and slamming the door behind her.

‘Oh hell, I’ve put my foot in it again,’ John said ruefully to himself. He waited for a few minutes, allowing time for Mary’s anger to subside, then went and opened the connecting door and stuck his head round the doorframe.

‘Peace,’ he pleaded, putting both his hands up in a gesture of surrender.

Mary gave him a look of exasperation. She couldn’t be angry with him for long; he was too nice a guy.

‘Okay, so I said it all wrong,’ John went on, ‘what I meant was that Mike would be able to look after himself okay in that situation. If anyone can cope with it, he can. Really, he’ll be fine. But the information he’s carrying is vital. We need to get another courier en-route, preferably someone with an appreciation of the implications. Who can we spare?’

‘You,’ Mary retorted in a flash.

John grinned. ‘Okay, okay, I know I’m generally regarded as the least useful member of staff round here. But we have a hijack in progress, a possible war waiting to start, all the creeds of the Middle East going at each other hammer and tongs, South Lebanon in uproar as usual, and who knows what else about to happen. Don’t you think you might need a little help with that?’

Mary smiled, her Boston Irish temper cooled as fast as it flared, ‘Maybe some help would be useful, but I could manage.’

‘Sure you could,’ John agreed, ‘but it would look bad if the boss went on a vacation right now.’

Mary looked at him askance. ‘That never stopped you before.’

John winced.

‘We could send Bill Anderson,’ Mary continued, ‘but you’ll have to brief him first.’

‘Okay, get him in. Meanwhile I’ll see what I can find out,’ John said, and, peace restored, went back into his office.

The first call John made was to the Greek airline, to the managing director who, horrified to learn of the hijacking, was now moving heaven and earth to find out

what had happened and how. He had already received calls from Olympic Catering and the police. He gave John brief details of the events leading up to the hijack as far as he could and the names of the police officers on the case. John made some rapid notes. Then he contacted the American military attaché at the embassy in Athens. 'The aircraft has left its scheduled flight path,' the attaché told him. 'First it turned southwest, then South; then southeast and now it's running due east along the line of 34 degrees latitude. That puts it on track for Beirut.'

'That fits,' John replied, 'the Blood of Shatila movement is claiming responsibility and we suspect them to be a Beirut based Palestinian splinter group. Any contact with the aircraft?'

'Greek military radar picked them up southwest of Crete, then two Air Force fighters went up, they were vectored in and made visual contact. They were still there last I heard, but the airliner is keeping radio silence.'

'Hmmm, sounds like a very professional team of hijackers,' John remarked and then, thanking the military attaché for his help, he rang off.

Next using a secure line he rang Ben Levy. John knew Ben well. As high ranking officers in their respective intelligence services they had known each other for many years. He told Ben that Mike was aboard the hijacked Olympic Airways flight.

Ben, knowing what he had given to Mike, didn't take long to work out why Mike was flying via London and what he might be carrying. 'That's awkward,' he commented, 'what can I do to help?'

'We need whatever information you have on this new splinter group, the Blood of Shatila, and we need someone on the ground in Beirut.'

'Right, leave it with me.'

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

The Greek air force jets could not get any response from the A300 Airbus, nor could they make it deviate from its course. They buzzed it repeatedly, flew across its front, flew parallel and made signs to the captain, flew directly at it on a collision course, breaking off only at the last possible moment, all to no avail. The airliner continued doggedly on its course. Finally, in desperation, they fired cannon shells with tracer across its nose. The airline captain kept his nerve, he knew, and Abu Asifah knew that the Greek air force would not deliberately shoot down a fully laden passenger aircraft unless it posed a serious threat. Eventually, when the aircraft reached Lebanese airspace, the fighters turned back.

Abu Asifah smiled grimly as he saw them go, then he scowled as two Israeli fighters took their place.

The captain's feelings were mixed; his reasoning was the same as Mike Edge's, he knew the Israeli pilots would not hesitate to shoot him down if his aircraft posed a threat to an Israeli target. Everything now depended on the course he flew.

After a while Abu Asifah spoke again. 'When we reach the coast, turn and make an approach for Beirut airport, then switch on the radio and contact their control tower. I will speak to them.'

The captain heaved a sigh of relief. 'Can I have your permission to tell the passengers? It will help to keep them calm.'

Abu Asifah thought quickly. It made sense. 'You have my permission.'

The captain made the announcement and a great sigh went through the aircraft. Anna looked at the man next to her. 'You were right.'

He merely nodded; his mind was concentrated on what might happen next.

When the plane's Captain spoke to the tower they were expecting the call. They told him he could not land. Abu Asifah took over the radio, he spoke in Arabic, the words harsh and consonantal, 'We are coming in to land; nothing you can do will stop us unless you shoot us down. We are ready for martyrdom; the hostages are not. Get everything out of our approach path and make sure the runway is clear. Any accidents will be your responsibility.' He switched the radio off.

'Go in and land,' he said to the pilots, 'when you are down I will tell you where to go.' The pilots went into the familiar routine of preparation for landing. The cabin crew were strapped in to the spare dozen seats at the front of the plane and the terrorists, guns ready, sat in crew seats where they could keep control of events. Realizing that the hijackers meant every word of what they said, and having made a token show of resistance, air traffic control at Beirut cleared the way in, and the plane landed safely.

Immediately it came to a stop the hijackers sprang into action. The ready made-up explosive charges were taken from the food trolley and were positioned throughout the aircraft. The charges were strapped into place using strong, very adhesive, gaffer tape. The shot wire was uncoiled along the centre aisle and then stuck into position on the cabin roof using lengths of the same tape. The food container with the red lid was opened. The detonators were taken out, carefully inserted into the primers and were stuck into place with more black tape. The detonator wires were connected to the shot wires and the shot wires were connected finally to the clock radio carried on board by Abu Asifah. Only when this work was finished did Abu Asifah give the pilots taxi instructions.

'Go to the far side of the airport.' He pointed out of the cockpit window. 'Over there. Stay on the hard standing all the time and park the aircraft.' He switched the radio on and spoke in Arabic again to the control tower. 'If anyone, on foot or in a vehicle, comes within 500 meters of this aircraft without my permission, the aircraft and all its passengers will be blown up.' His voice was harsh and uncompromising. Those listening in the control tower did not doubt his words. The aircraft came to a standstill on the concrete apron at the far side of the airport. The placing and connecting of the explosive charges created an atmosphere of fear and dread within the aircraft. The passengers went very quiet and remained very still.

When everything had been checked to his satisfaction Abu Asifah used the radio again.

'I have a message; it must be recorded and broadcast to the world.'

The senior air traffic controller replied, 'Your message will be recorded. Go ahead.'

'This action is being carried out by the Blood of Shatila movement, on behalf of the People of Palestine and in the name of Islam. Insh Allah.'

'These are our demands:'

'One, we demand the release of our two brothers wounded during the glorious action against the infidel in England and held in jail there.'

'Two, we demand the release of Palestinian prisoners held by the Jewish State.'

'Three we demand that all the Israeli settlements in the West Bank be removed.'

'Four, we demand that the Holy places of Jerusalem be returned to Islam.'

'Finally we demand free passage to our destination. You have twelve hours from now to agree to our demands and to give us an answer.'

'If we have no satisfactory answer by that time one of the passengers will be shot.'

'If any attempt to storm the plane is made I and my companions will blow it up.'

'Such martyrdom would be a joy to us all. Allah Akhbar!'

Flight OA 269, September 22nd.

On board the hijacked aircraft the temperature was beginning to rise. The air temperature on the ground in Beirut was considerably hotter than the temperature in flight over the Mediterranean. Perspiring heavily a team of three men worked their way down the cabin methodically checking the passengers yet again. Each passenger was required to produce a passport, and the passports were carefully scrutinized. Most of the passengers were Europeans of various nationalities, but there were some Americans and a number of Israelis. The bulk of the European nationals were left where they were sitting. A few were moved further to the rear to fill empty seats left vacant by the male American nationals, including Alan Edge, the injured security guard, and the Israeli nationals who had been moved forward to seats directly under the watchful eyes of the terrorists. Once re-seated, each passenger was strapped by the ankle with a cable tie to the leg of the seat in front.

Alan Edge was a very wealthy and successful man from a country where wealth and success are accorded respect. He was not used to being manhandled and tied like an animal and he began to object. The terrorist moving Alan slapped him across the face. Alan began to shout. There was a sickening crack. He slumped in his seat stunned by a blow to his head from the pistol of the terrorist standing behind him. He lost consciousness, fell sideways, and blood from the gash in his scalp ran down his neck staining his shirt collar bright red.

Anna Sutherland cried out in protest as Alan was hit and tried to get to her feet.

Mike Edge hauled her back down with an iron hand. 'Don't,' he hissed, 'anything you say or do will make matters worse.'

Anna turned on him, tears of anger in her eyes. 'Do something!' Her voice began to rise, 'somebody, anybody, do something, please!'

'No! These guys are hyped to fever pitch, they won't respond to reason. In a while, when they think that everything's okay, they'll relax a little. Then maybe someone will be allowed to fix him up.'

'That's a coward's argument,' Anna snapped back at him.

Mike looked her straight in the eye. 'I'm a better judge of this situation than you are,' he said flatly. 'Now, sit back and shut up, or they will give you the same treatment they gave to Alan. Anyone who upsets them now will get more of the same. Alan shouldn't have acted as he did, it was stupid.'

He was right, Anna realized, and then a thought triggered in Anna's mind. 'He does know Alan,' she thought, 'he knows his name, what on earth is going on?' She sat back, puzzled and unhappy but resigned to the fact that for the moment there was nothing she could do. As her tears dried she realized the man sitting next to her was right, the terrorists had total control, and to oppose fanatical armed men at a time when they were tense and nervous would be to invite disaster.

Gradually the terrorists got the passengers secured to their satisfaction. Then they opened the aircraft doors. A blast of hot air entered; the outside temperature was in the high nineties. Inside the plane it would soar to over one hundred and twenty degrees during the afternoon. With the heat of the outside air in came the first of the flies. In their constant search for moisture they would drive the passengers half mad in the hours ahead.

The aircraft was positioned with its tail to the perimeter fence, the cockpit pointing towards the control tower. Units of the Lebanese army had taken up casual positions around a 500-metre radius and were watching the plane in a sullen fashion. They resented being deployed out in the open in the heat.

The hijackers kept well back from the doors but ensured that they had a good clear view of the surrounding area. Reluctantly everyone on board settled down to wait.

A limited number of Greek officials representing Olympic Airways were allowed into Beirut. They were given no facilities and very little assistance. They had contact with the aircraft via the aircraft radio and a telephone link with their government. The Greek government was in contact with the governments of other nationals and was coming under intense international pressure, but their intention to do anything positive was heavily influenced by another factor. The ruling party's financial dependence on funds from Libya meant that very little would be done to oppose the terrorists. They decided to play for time and instructed the Olympic people on the ground in Beirut to act accordingly.

As the first deadline approached the Olympic representatives began to invent reasons for not being able to meet the hijackers' demands. Abu Asifah was expecting this; to play for time was the classic first tactic in counter-hijack techniques. Confident that no action would be directed at him in this location, and fully prepared to blow up the plane if it was, he refused to accept any compromise. He stuck to his original demands and waited for the deadline to arrive. As the deadline struck he issued an order to two of his men. They grabbed the injured sky marshal and dragged him forward to the front door of the aircraft. The man

was terrified; he knew what was about to happen. He begged and pleaded for his life. He was shot in the back of the head. His body fell from the aircraft, the head hitting the hard concrete with a crack. An awful silence followed.

Beirut Airport, September 22nd.

The control tower radio crackled and Abu Asifah's voice came over the air. 'The deadline is extended by six hours,' he said. The radio went silent. The news was flashed around the world. Everyone felt the suspense.

Offers of assistance came in to the Greek authorities, offers to supply skilled specialists to storm the plane; offers from Britain, Israel and from America; but the Greek authorities would not take any action, and in any case the Lebanese authorities would not have let the offered assistance into the country.

Conditions on the aircraft continued to deteriorate. From time to time people were released to use the toilets. The toilets began to smell. The temperature rose inexorably, people were hot, cramped and very afraid.

Mike watched and waited for a chance to speak to one of the terrorists. When the opportunity came he spoke to him in English and asked permission for Anna and one of the stewardesses to go forward and attend to Alan's injuries.

Permission was granted. 'We are not savages,' the terrorist said, 'in war people get hurt, but we allow humane treatment for the injured.'

'Good of you,' Mike thought sardonically, but he kept the thought to himself. 'Thank you, I appreciate that,' he said.

Anna was released and allowed to go forward. She gave Mike a relieved look, and then joined the senior stewardess who had been released to fetch the first aid box. Between them they cleaned up Alan's wound and made him more comfortable. Then they were taken back to their seats and re-tied.

Chapter 8

Beirut Airport, September 23rd.

Intense diplomatic activity went on behind the scenes. All nations concerned were pushing for military or police action to resolve the problem without giving in to the terrorist's demands. Britain refused to consider the release of the two terrorists responsible for the airport massacre, and offered the use of a specialized SAS unit to storm the plane. Israel could not get agreement on the release of the terrorists in her jails and offered the use of a special Israeli Commando unit to do the same job. America and all the European nations were exerting pressure to save their nationals, but the elected Greek government, dominated by the P.A.S.O.K. party, would take no action against the friends of its prime fund donor, the pro-Palestinian Libyan dictator. And poor battered and divided Lebanon needed all the support it could get from the Arab world.

Stalemate.

The hours on the aircraft dragged past in great discomfort. With the terrorist leaders consent, iced water had been sent out to the aircraft to relieve the passenger's thirst. It gave most of them diarrhea. No one had been allowed on board to clean the toilets. The smell and the heat and the flies got worse. Time dragged by. No progress was made.

Abu Asifah allowed another three hours to pass then he spoke to the control tower on the radio again. 'Half the allotted time has gone; if you do not meet our demands by the deadline another passenger will be shot; an Israeli or an American. You have been warned; on your heads be it.'

The media representatives, who were given unrestricted access to the country's communications, picked up his warning. They broadcast it to the world.

Abu Asifah switched the radio off. 'Let them stew a little longer,' he thought.

Israel was the first to grasp the nettle. The Israeli Government announced that they would release five hundred Palestinian prisoners from its jails. The terrorists were jubilant and from one of them word leaked out to the passengers, who were greatly relieved.

Abu Asifah was unmoved, all his demands must be met, not just some of them. The passenger's new found hopes were dashed.

The second deadline arrived.

Again Abu Asifah's tongue traced the scar in the roof of his mouth. The taste of cordite and gun oil came back. He barked a command. Two of his men grabbed one of the American passengers and cut him free. They dragged him to his feet. It was Alan Edge.

Mike Edge's sharp intake of breath caused Anna Sutherland to look up.

'Dear God, no,' she whispered, appalled at what she saw.

Mike's hands gripped the armrests of his seat, his knuckles white, his body shaking with stress.

Alan, his face pale, was dragged forwards. He was silent. He was manhandled into the forward doorway.

Without a moment's hesitation Abu Asifah shot him in the back of the head.

As the shot rang out Anna cried out in protest. 'No! No! Oh please God Noooo...!'

Mike, his jaw clenched the veins and tendons in his neck standing out like cords, made a thin keening sound.

The sound of Alan's body hitting the concrete with a sickening smack reached them. Anna began to sob. Mike's eyes were closed. Tears squeezed between the tightly clenched lids and ran down his suddenly haggard face.

Flight OA 269, September 23rd.

Mike Edge sat white faced and silent in the first stage of shock. A cold anger was building inside him, a rage all the more fierce because of his inability to retaliate. 'I'll get the bastards, Alan, all of them, if I have to follow them to the ends of the earth,' he promised quietly. 'How can they assume the right to take such action, however just they consider their cause to be? How can they believe that they are doing it in the name of God? All the skill, all the resources I can muster I will use.' He breathed the words as if to his dead brother's spirit.

Gradually, Mike became aware of Anna's racking sobs. He reached out to her and putting his arm around her shoulders he pulled her close, as much for his own need as for hers, both needed the comfort of another human being.

For a long time, her head on his shoulder, he stroked the long shining hair away from her temple comforting her, and gaining comfort from her too. Pulling a clean white linen handkerchief from his top pocket, he pushed it into her hand. In taking it Anna moved her arm, her sketchpad slipped from her lap and fell open on the floor at her feet. From the page Mike's own likeness stared back up at him. An idea struck him. He began to talk to Anna in a low and urgent voice, still stroking her hair.

'Listen to me, stop crying. I need your help to nail these butchers. You can help me, you must help me, do you understand?'

Gradually his words penetrated Anna's grief. The idea of making these evil people pay for their vicious actions penetrated her mind. Anna shook herself as though she could physically shake off what had just happened. If there were something positive she could do she would do it. Anna Sutherland was tough.

'Anything, you name it, I'll do it.'

'Good, now listen, that sketch you've done of me, can you do some more, of the hijackers?'

'Well... I suppose, but won't it be risky?'

keep watch and warn you if any of them come near. If we're careful, they'll never cotton on.'

'So we'll have mug shots to take with us when this is all over?' Anna gave her nose another blow, 'But you better keep a damn good lookout.'

'You bet,' Mike agreed, 'I'm going to start compiling dossiers on each of them; all the bits and pieces of information I can see or remember.' The look on his face was grim.

'I'm glad I'm on his side,' Anna thought, as, warily, she began to sketch.

Mike began to make notes. He jotted down everything he saw. Habits, distinguishing marks, mannerisms, everything his trained eye spotted. As the light failed and night fell, dossiers on the six men began to grow.

OA 269, September 23rd.

There is a phenomenon associated with hijackings, and the similar business of hostage taking, called the Stockholm syndrome, in which the persons taken hostage begin to identify with their captors. This began to manifest itself in the hijacked aircraft. People, without realizing it, began to empathize with their abductors. Mike had attended lectures on this subject during his training and recognized it as soon as it began to happen. He described what was happening to Anna and she saw immediately what he was talking about. Her reaction was typically direct. 'How can they crawl to them,' she asked scathingly.

'I'm going to join them.'

Anna looked at him in disbelief.

'We need information on these individuals, and I don't care how we get it.'

'Ah.' Anna understood.

Mike fished about in his wallet. He pulled out a photo of a young woman and two small children. He waited for an opportunity to speak to one of the hijackers. When it came he asked about their aims, their friends whom they were trying to release from jail, and, getting something of their point of view, he worked the conversation round from friends to families. He gave the terrorist the photograph of the pretty young woman and the two little children. 'My wife and children,' he said. The hijacker took the photograph and looked at it briefly without interest, then he handed it back. 'You have no son,' he said, and moved on, not wishing to get involved with a hostage for too long.

Anna, her sketching hidden, had listened. The statement, "My wife and children," caused a pang, that, to her surprise, she recognized as jealousy. She had seen that he wasn't wearing a wedding ring and had assumed that he was single. Mike was holding the photograph carefully by one corner. He reached forward and took an airsickness bag from the seat pocket in front of him. He carefully put the photo into it. 'There's a pair of finger and thumb prints on this,' Mike whispered, 'we can add it to the dossier on him, good job I'm a godfather.'

Anna looked startled. 'I beg your pardon?'

'I've got his finger and thumb print for the dossier,' Mike explained again.

'No, I don't mean that, you said something else,' Anna persisted.

Mike thought. 'I said it's a good job I'm a godfather.'

Anna looked blankly at him.

'My god-daughters,' he said, tapping the bag with his finger, 'my boss's wife and two children.'

'But, you said it was your wife.'

'Yeah, but only to get his interest.'

An unreasonable feeling of relief rose in Anna. She leaned across and squeezed his hand.

Mike was surprised, was it simply the circumstances they found themselves in? Was it merely the need to feel close to someone, anyone who could help in this extremely stressful situation? 'Don't be a fool, this is no time for romance,' he told himself.

One of the terrorists was vain. He kept a comb in his back pocket and from time to time he would pull it out and run it through his hair. Mike had a similar comb in his jacket. He took it out and held it ready. The next time the vain young terrorist passed Mike plucked the man's comb from his hip pocket and at the same time he dropped his own comb on the floor of the aisle. The terrorist, feeling the tug on his pocket, stopped and turned.

Mike pointed at the comb on the floor. 'You've dropped your comb,' he said, and leaning forward he picked it up and handed it to him. The terrorist thanked him, and without looking closely at it, thrust it into his hip pocket and carried on towards the front of the aircraft. Mike grimaced at Anna who looked petrified. The stolen comb went into another airsickness bag. It was covered in fingerprints and had plenty of bits on it that would provide material for DNA analysis.

Water was being distributed, and in the heat everyone was thirsty. Two of the terrorists worked as a team. One handed out plastic tumblers and the other filled them. 'Mike nudged Anna and whispered to her, 'Take the tumbler by the base and the rim as I do. Watch carefully. When his turn came Mike took the plastic

tumbler as he had described, thumb on the rim and fingers on the base. He didn't change his grip but drank the water straight away. Anna watched and copied his actions. After the two terrorists dispensing the drinks had passed Mike put his beaker into another airsickness bag. Anna did the same. 'That's four sets of prints,' Mike whispered, 'we need to tie all the information together, but we don't have any names yet. You number the sketches and I'll put the relevant numbers on the bags so that we know which prints belong to which faces. I have heard a couple of names used in conversations between the hijackers but I haven't been able to put the faces to the names yet.'

'You understand Arabic?'

'Yeah, but keep it quiet, they might let something slip without realizing, especially if they get tired or excited.'

Gradually Mike gathered in bits and pieces of information and evidence. Taken as single items each bit meant nothing, added together and appended to a good likeness, the information would become an incriminating document.

The International Scene, September 24th.

As the plane sat in the baking heat events concerning the aircraft were progressing rapidly. Under extreme pressure from the USA, the Israeli decision to release detainees set the pace. Also under great pressure from the US, Britain agreed to the release of the two terrorists detained for the airport massacre. The safe conduct of the hijack team was agreed.

The terrorists had achieved some of their aims. The sticking points were the removal of the West Bank settlers, and the control of Jerusalem's Holy Places, which included the wall of Solomon's Temple, the "Wailing Wall". This, the Israelis could not or would not countenance. Nothing would budge them. They threatened to parachute in a Commando assault team from the Sayeret Mat'kal, the unit which had carried out the famous raid at Entebbe, to storm the aircraft, and to hell with the risk. No amount of international pressure would change their minds.

Abu Asifah considered his position. He had gained much, certainly enough to make him a hero in the eyes of his paymasters. On the other hand, if he stuck out for the last items and the Israelis did send in an assault team, he could lose all that he had gained so far. "He who fights, and runs away, lives to fight another day." A western saying, but one with merit; Abu Asifah decided to run.

Beirut Airport, September 24th.

On instructions from Abu Asifah the hijack team bound the pilot, the co-pilot and all the cabin crew with the tough nylon cable ties. Then they tied the wrists of the passengers. When the job was complete they waited, watching the airport perimeter fence. After a short while a small convoy of battered vehicles drove up in a cloud of dust. All the men in the vehicles were armed with Kalashnikovs. Two of them walked over and cut a large hole in the chain link perimeter fence.

Abu Asifah sent one of his men to meet them. As he got to the hole in the wire the men from the convoy embraced him. They confirmed that the Israelis had released many detainees. They all did a dance of triumph waving their rifles in the

air. As they did so, a transport aircraft carrying the roundels of the British Royal Air Force landed on the main runway. In it were the two terrorists from the Heathrow massacre. Now sufficiently recovered from the gunshot wounds inflicted by Jim Savage, they were in the custody of two police officers and guarded by a detachment of Royal Marines Commandos. A tough looking bunch, the Commandos were armed to the teeth. A second airport bus met them and brought them close to the official's bus. The Marines de-bussed and went to ground, weapons aimed and cocked, their camouflage rendering them almost invisible. Few military units, if any, could take them on and come off best. Certainly not armed rabbles like the one now facing them. The police escort stood confidently with their charges, securely guarded by the Marine Commandos.

Abu Asifah's man went back to the plane and reported to him.

'Our friends in Hezbollah say many detainees have been released, and our two brothers in the Jihad are here.'

'Allah Akhbar!' Abu Asifah exclaimed, 'God is great! Now, our brothers must be released and the soldiers of the West must withdraw; then we will leave.'

The two British police officers moved forward towards the perimeter fence with their prisoners and stopped. They released the handcuffs and let them go. The men walked through the hole in the chain link fence to a hero's welcome.

The two policemen went back to the airport bus and, covered by the unwavering guns of the Marine Commandos, they went back to the airport buildings. When they were sure that the people in the airport bus were safe the Marines conducted a textbook tactical withdrawal.

Abu Asifah watched from the aircraft cockpit. Such professionalism made him feel uneasy, he shrugged; he was not stupid enough to take on men like these. He preferred soft targets. Preying on the weak and helpless gave him the advantage.

Picking up the pilot's headset he made one last call to the control tower. 'In order to protect our departure and to ensure our safe conduct we have placed booby traps on the aircraft, there are timing devices which will deactivate in one hour from our departure. Then, and only then, can the aircraft be approached in safety, remember the people on board.'

The authorities in the Beirut control tower did not know if this was the truth or not. They decided that there was no harm in waiting a little longer just in case.

It was time to go. Abu Asifah took the radio alarm which had been adapted as a timer and detonating device and placed it carefully on top of a drinks trolley. He pushed it up to the curtain screening off the aircraft cabin and left it well out of reach of any of the passengers, who were in any case securely lashed by their ankles to the seats. He carefully positioned the trolley so that the digital clock face pointed down the aisle of the cabin. He wanted the passengers to be able to see it clearly. His tongue traced the "v" shaped scar on his palate. The taste of cordite and gun oil was in his mouth again. Abu Asifah remembered his mother, his father and his sisters. He pressed a button on the top of the radio and pulled back the curtain. He looked down the cabin. The clock radio was exposed to full view. He remembered the Maronite Christian militia and gave a cold smile. '*Allah Akhbar*,' he shouted, and followed his men from the aircraft.

'We will celebrate later,' Abu Asifah told the celebrating terrorists curtly, 'but first we must get clear.' The small convoy of battered vehicles sped off in a cloud of

dust, the heavily armed but poorly trained young men firing magazine-long bursts of gunfire into the air as they went.

The Marine Commandos watched cynically from a distance as the young men destroyed the rifling and thus the accuracy of the weapons they were firing.

'Trained by Hollywood,' a tough looking grey-haired Marine Commando sergeant commented acidly, and spat in the sand emphasizing his disgust.

Flight OA 269, September 24th.

Conditions on the aircraft were appalling. Sickness and diarrhea were rampant and, tied as they were the passengers were unable to reach the toilets. No one had been permitted to wash for the duration of the hijack; everyone stank. The heat was stifling, the flies were a persistent torment, and over all of this lay the fear. The explosive charges placed by the terrorists were in full view.

As Abu Asifah pulled back the curtain separating the galley from the cabin Mike's eyes went immediately to the radio alarm. He looked up, saw Abu Asifah's wolfish smile and heard him shout, '**Allah Akhbar.**'

There was a false ring to it. Mike's eyes dropped back to the radio alarm. As Abu Asifah left the plane Mike's tired brain made the connections. The bastards had got what they wanted, they were leaving unscathed, and they were leaving the plane wired to blow.

Fear sent adrenaline flooding into Mike's blood stream. Suddenly his mind was crystal clear. He had to get to that radio alarm, and he had to get to it fast. Mike knew that cable ties could not be snapped, or even cut very easily with a knife. Electrician's snips were the best and easiest way to remove them. His brain was racing. There must be something he could use? He turned to Anna. 'Give me your nail clippers.' he demanded urgently.

'They're in my purse,' she replied, 'but why...'

'Get them out; for God's sake be quick.'

The urgency in Mike's voice spurred her into action; she lifted her bag from the floor beside her feet and began to struggle with it. The cable tie handicapped her round her wrists but she managed to open her bag quickly and started to rummage in its depths.

'Tip it out onto your lap.'

'But my things will...'

Mike cut her off abruptly. 'The plane is wired to blow up, I must get to that clock radio, now tip your bag out!'

Anna looked at him wide eyed for an instant then grabbed her bag and tipped it into her lap. The nail clippers were on the heap in a leather case. Mike grabbed them and took them out. They were a sturdy pair with strong jaws and a folding swiveled handle that doubled as a nail file. Mike nodded, with luck they would do. Leaning forward he began to work on the cable tie round his ankle. The ties round his wrists would have to wait.

'Ask if anyone can see the clock,' Mike instructed Anna, 'find out what the figures are on the digital readout.'

Anna shouted up the plane, 'Can any of you read the time on that clock?'

Heads turned.

Anna shouted again. 'Please, we need to know what the reading is on that clock.'

A young man sitting at the front, one of the segregated Americans realized what was happening. 'It's not showing the time,' he yelled back, 'just figures.'

'What figures?' Mike yelled from between the seats.

'One decimal, one two, but it's going down all the time. It's gone to sixty seconds, one minute,' the young man's voice rising high and thin with fear.

'Christ,' Mike swore, less than a minute. He redoubled his efforts with the nail clippers, his fingers sore and his wrists bruised with the effort.

'The guy at the front,' he rapped out; 'get him to count down the timing.' Anna yelled to the man at the front, passing on Mike's order.

The man began to count loudly in reverse, 'Forty-eight, forty-seven, forty-six...'

The rest of the people on the plane had heard the shouted conversation. They began to realize what was happening. Some began to scream, others began to cry, a few began to pray, all tugged at their bonds without effect. The sweat was pouring off Mike, doubled forward as he was the sweat was making his hands slippery. He had seen paper towels in the pile of stuff from Anna's bag.

'Give me a Kleenex.' The words cracked out. Anna handed one to him immediately. Mike took it and got a better grip.

The countdown continued remorselessly. 'Thirty-three, thirty-two, thirty-one...'

Mike was making progress now, using the very corners of the clippers he was gradually snipping his way through the tough nylon tie. He began to work on the other side. 'Twenty, nineteen, eighteen, seventeen...'

God, they were only seconds away from eternity! He dropped the clippers and grabbed the plastic tie wrap. He gave a mighty heave and it snapped at the partly cut point. Mike leapt to his feet, stumbled and nearly fell. His foot was numb; the circulation cut off for too long.

'Eleven, ten, nine...' the young American at the front told off the numbers, his voice getting ever higher and more shrill.

Mike stumbled forward, his bound hands not much use to his unsteady legs, and eyes fixed on the digital radio alarm. 'Six, five, four...'

He was there. He grabbed one of the hanks of shot wire and pulled it free of the microphone jack. 'Three, two, one!' Mike yanked free the other ends of the circuits from the earphone jack for good measure.

Silence...

The silence went on and on.

Tel Aviv, September 24th.

From the information flowing across his desk John Henderson knew the hijack was about to end and that gave him a new problem. He wanted Mike Edge out of Beirut and on to Washington as originally planned. He knew that the Israelis were going to release five hundred detainees. He also knew that the British were going to release the two terrorists that they had in detention.

It followed that the hand-over would take place on the ground in Beirut and that pre-supposed a British presence and a British aircraft. His coffee forgotten for once, John reached for the phone. In minutes he was speaking to his counterpart

in the British intelligence set-up in Tel Aviv. He explained that he had a man on board the hijacked aircraft; that he needed to get him out of there and on his way as fast as possible. When the hand-over had taken place in Beirut could the British fly his man out, he asked? John spoke as if he knew all the details of the hand-over; and had his educated guess confirmed when his contact did not deny the premise.

'Hmm, there might be a problem with the Lebanese authorities,' the British Intelligence man objected, 'they're unlikely to allow contact between the hijacked passengers and our group carrying out the hand-over.'

'A bunch of US dollars will sort that problem out,' John retorted, 'you can leave that part of it to me.'

'Well, it's highly irregular, you know, I don't know what would happen if word got out,' the man from British Intelligence objected, 'no, I really don't think we could take the risk of anything going wrong. Sensitive business you know.'

John played his ace. 'I don't want something for nothing. The Iranians are planning a chemical and biological strike against Kuwait and Israel. They're going to have a go at bolstering the Iranian economy by attacking and annexing all the oil-rich countries on the southern side of the Persian Gulf. And I have all the details.'

There was a long silence, the British guy's face was comical, and then he went pale. If something like that happened on his patch without him knowing about it his career would be finished. There was a stammer in his voice as he agreed to give John all the help he needed in exchange for a set of microfilms.

Mary looked up at him as he came out. 'You look pleased with yourself,' she observed, and then added acidly, 'who's in the doo-doo?'

John grinned at her, 'You, if you keep up the sarcasm, get Ben Levy on a secure line, before I fire you!'

Mary stuck her tongue out at him and got Ben Levy on the line before John got back to his desk. Behind all the banter they were a very efficient team.

'I need a favor, Ben,' John said bluntly.

'If I can, John, if I can. What is it that you want?'

'I need to get Mike out of Beirut in a hurry. Do you have anyone on the ground there who could act as a link between the hijack passengers and the British detachment making the hostage-terrorist exchange? The Brits have agreed to take him to Cyprus. From there I'll try to get him on to an USAF flight to the States. The damn airlines ain't safe anymore.'

'No problem,' Ben replied, 'I've a good man on the ground in Beirut who can bridge the gap. He'll need some bung money though.'

'Whatever it takes; bill me later for the money, and then I owe you for two favors. Thanks, Ben.' He put his phone down and moments later a fax came through. John read it rapidly and, grinning with relief went through to Mary. 'The hijack is over,' he said. 'Mike is going to be okay. I've arranged for him to be given a seat on a RAF Transport Command plane to Cyprus. I need to go and debrief him before he goes on to Washington. Can you find out if we have any military aircraft in the region, which are going back home? I need a lift to Cyprus and I want Mike to go on to the States after I've debriefed him.'

Mary, with her usual efficiency, was already dialing the Air Attaché's number. Moments later she got through to repeat John's needs. Taking a pen she made rapid notes; then read them back to John. 'You're in luck,' she said, 'the Air Force can't help out, but the Navy can. There's a carrier off the coast. The Naval Attaché is going to get a chopper to pick you up and take you out to it and, then a Navy jet will fly you over to Cyprus. It will wait and bring you back to the carrier and the chopper will drop you here. Door-to-door service and all courtesy of Uncle Sam!'

'That's great,' John replied, 'but what about getting Mike to Washington?'

'There's an Air Force C5-A Galaxy on the ground in Cyprus delivering aircraft spares. He's booked on that. It will wait until he's ready to go.'

'You're wonderful,' John said, 'I don't know how you do it.'

'Easy, I'm going out with the Air Attaché,' Mary replied, straight-faced.

John looked at her askance. 'Huh, and this is supposed to be an intelligence gathering organization,' he grumbled, 'so how come I'm always last to hear the juicy gossip? Well, make sure you don't pay too much for my fare.'

Mary grinned at him. 'It's already paid for, and the helicopter gets here in thirty minutes. Amazing the service you get when you pay in advance.'

Beirut Airport, September 24th.

Mike was the last to leave the aircraft, carefully putting the dossiers that he and Anna had compiled into his briefcase. The information they contained was of vital importance to him. That task completed, he joined Anna outside on the baking concrete of the airfield, and in spite of the heat, the fresh air and the warm breeze were bliss. So was the feeling of freedom. 'Are you okay?' he asked her.

'Yeah, thanks to you.'

'You did well.' Mike was embarrassed. Changing the subject he pointed over Anna's shoulder. 'Look, here come the buses to take us out of here.'

Anna turned to see the articulated buses drive up. Formal immigration procedures were waived as many of the passengers had had their passports taken by the hijackers, but immigration personnel were in attendance in order to grant temporary entry into Lebanon so that they could go to a hotel nearby.

One of them had a fax in his hand and was scrutinizing all the male passengers. Spotting Mike, he came over and spoke to him.

'Excuse me, sir, are you Mister Michael Kelly?'

'Er, yes,' Mike replied, remembering the name and papers he was using.

'Would you come with me please, Mister Kelly,' the man asked.

'Why, what for?'

'We have a message for you, I think you should see it,' smiling apologetically at Anna he added, 'I'm afraid it's confidential.'

Mike thought quickly, only John Henderson knew the identity he was using. John must have sent a message. Turning to Anna he said, 'I have to go and check this out. It won't take long; I'll see you at the hotel later, okay?'

Reluctantly, Anna agreed, and as Mike strode off with the immigration official she felt a sudden sense of loss. As she watched him walk away, she suddenly realized that all she was left with was a name... Michael Kelly.

Chapter 9

Shatila, September 24th.

The returning hijackers were welcomed as heroes when they entered the underground car park and service area that was their Beirut headquarters. A celebratory feast had been prepared. A goat had been purchased, slaughtered in the proper ritual manner, and roasted. Rice and vegetables had been cooked; sweet cakes had been made from flour, honey and almonds. Tea and coffee were provided in abundance.

The operation was a success, the mood jubilant, but one man was not happy. The man organizing the feast stood apart from the hijack team and reflected. Much talking had been done, many fine laudatory speeches had been made and still no mention had been made of him, Najib Shawa, the man who had made it all possible.

Najib was worried. His part in these great events was not getting the recognition due to him. After all, it was he who had engineered the whole business. It was his contacts with Hezbollah that had attracted the necessary funds. It was his encouragement and support that had finally made possible the split from the parent faction. He had been the true architect of the Blood of Shatila, and now this upstart was getting all the credit.

His courage fuelled by righteous indignation, Najib Shawa came to a decision. He would bring this matter to the attention of the organization at the meeting called for this evening. Older and wiser heads would see the truth of the matter and curb the influence of this young hothead. They would give him, Najib Shawa, the credit and the proper status that was his due.

Beirut, September 24th.

The immigration official led Mike down a corridor, through an external door and out to an airport Land Rover. 'Jump in,' he said, and climbing into the driver's seat, he drove away from the airport buildings.

'Where are we going,' Mike asked.

The man pointed to the Royal Air Force Transport Command aircraft parked well away from the rest of the planes on the concrete apron.

'Oh no,' Mike groaned, 'I need a shower and some sleep.'

The immigration man shrugged his shoulders. 'Speak to the man on the plane,' he said as he pulled up at the foot of the access stairway.

A Royal Marines Commando Captain in combat dress came down the steps. He was the officer in charge of the detachment who had covered the release of the two terrorist prisoners.

Mike got wearily out of the Land Rover.

'Mister Kelly?' the young Captain asked.

'Yes,' Mike answered abruptly.

‘I’m sorry to spring this on you, sir,’ the Captain said, ‘but we have received orders from our superiors to take you to Cyprus with us. It is at the request of a Mister Henderson, whom I believe you know. I am instructed to tell you that he will be in Cyprus to meet you. He is sorry for the inconvenience, but you are not to be exposed to the press or media here in Beirut, and you are under orders to go to Washington as soon as possible.’

Mike was dismayed. He wanted to stay in Beirut long enough to make arrangements for his brother’s body to be shipped home. He wanted to get to know the girl his brother had been accompanying, and with whom he had endured the hijack, but there was no way out. John Henderson had pre-empted all his options. Mike knew that he had to avoid exposure to the media and he knew that his mission to Washington was one of both national and international importance.

Unexpectedly, the Lebanese immigration official came to his aid. ‘I am friend of a friend of yours, Mister Kelly,’ he said. ‘I am under orders to give you all possible assistance with matters here in Beirut.’

Mike looked askance at the man.

He stood his ground and matched Mike’s doubtful look with one of quiet competence. He took Mike’s arm and led him away a few paces. ‘I work for Major-General Levy.’

Mike looked at him in surprise.

‘Whatever you want done I can get done,’ the man said evenly, ‘I have adequate funds and contacts I assure you.’

Mike couldn’t refuse the offer, it was the logical solution, and as the man worked for Ben Levy he could be relied on.

‘Okay.’ Mike agreed with reluctance and asked the man about Alan’s body; told him he wanted it shipped home to the States; and to look after Alan’s friend Anna.

‘Everything necessary will be done Mister Kelly, you may rely on me,’ Ben’s man replied.

Shatila, September 24th.

The bleak, concrete walled, underground room was filled with men. Again Abu Asifah was the centre of attention. He addressed the assembled members of the movement. ‘Allah is with us. He has shown us the true path. Now that we have found it and traveled the first few steps He is giving us His victory!’

A roar of approval and agreement followed his words. Abu Asifah waited for the applause to die down.

A figure stirred in the shadows and stood up. In his high pitched voice Najib Shawa spoke.

‘Brothers, we have all made a contribution to these triumphs, my own efforts in the provision of funds are not inconsiderable...’

Abu Asifah eyed him sardonically.

‘...I made possible every...’

Abu Asifah cut him short.

‘Do you claim the credit for our success?’

‘Well, in my area of influence, I feel that I have...’

Abu Asifah cut him short again.

'The credit which belongs to Allah, the Almighty, the all powerful, without whose strength we are as nothing?'

'Well, no, of course not. Not that credit. But behind the scenes my organizational skills, my political efforts have...'

'It is Allah's gift, not politics or weasel words that has given us our success. It is action in Allah's name, which will give us victory!' Abu Asifah's clenched fist smashed down on the table. The pressure lamp spluttered and hissed. The mood of the meeting was with him. He gave the credit not to himself but to Allah, to whom it rightly belonged. With consummate ease he made Najib Shawa seem self-seeking and self-centered.

Najib's bid for recognition was brutally squashed.

But Abu Asifah had made a bad enemy.

Beirut Airport, September 24th.

Mike Edge, grim, tired and longing for a shower, climbed reluctantly up the steps of the RAF Transport Command aircraft. Entering the cabin he scrutinized his fellow passengers. They were a tough-looking bunch, dressed in desert camouflaged combat fatigues, and wearing the hard-earned Green Beret with its dull bronze badge. They returned Mike's scrutiny with interest. There wasn't a shifty eye amongst them; none of them needed to prove anything.

These guys Mike realized were men of the same caliber as Jim Savage, formed in the same mould. Mike felt safer than he had for a long time. A hard looking grey-haired sergeant sitting to Mike's left stuck his hand out. 'Dinger Bell,' he announced, 'who're you?'

'Mike Kelly,' Mike replied. His hand felt like it was in a vice.

'On the hijacked aircraft, were you Mike?'

'Yeah; not very pleasant.'

'Brave bastards, aren't they?' the sergeant said scathingly, 'waving guns at unarmed civilians, making war on women and kids. I wish we could have a go at 'em, we'd go through 'em like a dose of salts, eh lads?'

'Damn right Sarge,' one of the marines agreed, 'take the buggers on any day!'

'Bloody politicians won't let us though will they,' the sergeant went on acidly, 'too damned scared of what the press and the loony left would have to say. It was the same in Northern Ireland. We could've cleaned that rat's nest out overnight if we'd had a free hand.'

'Yeah, the Israelis would do it,' another marine agreed. Heads nodded in agreement.

Mike remained silent, the Commando sergeant had given him food for thought, and his mind was racing. These guys were British military personnel, an extension of government, and as such, their expertise was not available for civilian or commercial use. But there must be plenty of ex-military personnel of the same caliber out there in the wider world.

The "fasten seat belts" sign came on and the RAF Air Quartermaster went through the standard pre-flight instructions. The aircraft taxied out to the runway and lined up for take-off. Moments later they were in the air and en-route for Cyprus. Mike smiled quietly to himself, 'God help anyone who tries to hijack this

flight,' he thought and then another thought struck him; the girl on the hijacked plane, he didn't know anything about her. Well, it was too late now. Tired, angry and longing for a shower, he hunched down into his seat and went to sleep.

Shatila, September 24th.

In the dark smoke-filled room, Abu Asifah continued to control the meeting. 'We must not make the error of resting on our success. We must keep up the pressure, keep up the momentum, we must strike again.'

His audience howled their agreement.

'Our next victory,' Abu Asifah paused for effect, 'will be to blow one of the Infidel aircraft and all its unbelieving passengers out of the skies.' There was a hiss of in-drawn breath from the assembled terrorists. Abu Asifah permitted himself a grim smile. This would open the eyes of his followers some more. Was there no limit to Abu Asifah's commitment to the Cause? 'And how is this to be achieved, Abu Asifah?' Najib Shawa asked with a sneer in the silence that followed. Perhaps Abu Asifah was going out on a limb with this idea. Perhaps he could be discredited.

'We shall have a bomb put on an aircraft in a suitcase,' Abu Asifah declared.

'But unaccompanied suitcases are not allowed on board by any of the airlines.'

'That is true, but the bomb may be in the suitcase of a traveling passenger.'

'Do you mean carried by one seeking Martyrdom?'

'Yes, perhaps, or by one of the stupid Infidels themselves,' Abu Asifah replied.

'But no Infidel could be found who would be willing to do this.'

'Only if they knew what they were carrying.'

'So who will arrange this matter?' Najib asked.

'I will arrange it. Most of our men are a little over-exposed at the moment, but the momentum must not be lost.' Abu Asifah paused and thought for a few moments. 'Has the second part of the payment to our Turkish brother been made?'

Najib Shawa, his private thoughts a seething mix of wounded pride thwarted ambition and jealous hatred, almost missed the question directed at him. A nudge from the man next to him brought him back to the present.

'Yes, yes, several days ago,' he said cautiously.

'Hmm. No doubt he could do with more funds?'

'Oh yes, I'm sure he could,' Najib Shawa admitted quietly, whilst in his heart black hatred raged. Without his access to secret terrorist funding this upstart would be able to achieve nothing. But how could he refuse the funds in front of the people he himself aspired to lead?

'Can more funds be arranged? The same amount as before, payable in two parts?'

'Yes, yes,' Najib Shawa wound his hands together in his frustration, 'but as you all know, only I can arrange that.'

'Very well, we will use our Turkish brother for this operation; he has proved most efficient and reliable in his efforts on our behalf. I will contact him. Make the funds available.'

'In the name of Allah, it shall be done,' Najib Shawa said smoothly. 'Yes, just like that,' he thought viciously. 'Two million US Dollars just like that, via my contacts, for your glorification. Well, we'll see who wins in the end. The pen is said

to be mightier than the sword. Politicians control armies. I will use you and I will destroy you. I shall be the one whom the world knows as the true champion of our people.'

He would need help, outside help, but he knew where he could get it. All that was missing was a plan.

British Sovereign Base Area, Akrotiri, Cyprus, September 25th.

'The bastards shot my brother!' The words came out hard, flat, and loud enough to make John Henderson flinch. 'I'm going after them John, I don't care what it takes, I'm going to take them out. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", the only kind of language they really understand. Don't forget I had to sit and watch as they murdered my brother. There has been too much pussyfooting around with these damned terrorist groups. Our great, free, democratic country is being made to look ridiculous; we're becoming a laughing stock around the world.'

'Sure Mike, sure,' John Henderson tried to be as soothing as he could. 'They'll get their just desserts in the end, their kind always do.'

'You don't understand, John. I want to kill them personally. It's the only thing that will give me peace.'

'I do understand Mike, really I do, but we can't go around being judge, jury and executioner, not in our business. You know that. We gather information these days, not scalps.'

'I don't want scalps - I want heads.'

John knew Mike's background and realized that he had deadly intent. He decided to play for time. Maybe in a few days Mike's anger would have gone off the boil, and if he had other things to occupy his mind maybe his fury would abate.

'Listen Mike, I need you to complete the mission to Washington, Bill Anderson has gone out there in your place with a second set of microfilms but he hasn't got your in-depth knowledge. Defense are demanding information. The President and the Defense Secretary want info to present to the UN. Will you do it?'

'I have to go back home for my brother's funeral,' Mike said slowly, 'I might as well go via Washington. How long do you think it will take?'

'A day at the most, probably less.'

'Okay, I'll give you a day there,' Mike agreed. 'Then I want some leave to go over to the West Coast to attend to Alan's funeral. I guess a few days, maybe a week after that to get myself back to normal would be a good idea too.'

'Sure, take all the time you need once the Washington end is sewn up.'

John thought his tactic of time easing the anger was working. He was soon disillusioned.

Mike held up the dossiers made during the hijack. 'Okay, but when I get back I'm going after these assholes,' and he threw the dossiers in John Henderson's lap.

Athens, September 24th.

Lieutenant Georgiou sat at his desk and began to review the information he had gleaned. He started with the note. The checks against some handwriting samples found in the Kosovos farmhouse indicated that Dimitris Kosovos was the

originator. A chain of connections led to his employment and to the hijacked flight; from there the connections came back via the content of the note to the murder of Dimitris and his family. It didn't take a genius to work out that the Kosovos family had been the lever and Dimitris Kosovos the means used by the terrorists to get their equipment on to flight OA 269.

'Well, so far so good, now the big question, who were the terrorists?' the lieutenant asked himself. He decided to write a preliminary report of his investigations and submit it to his boss. It would give his boss the means to keep the higher authorities off his back and leave him free to get on with his job. He swiveled his chair round, pulled the computer keyboard towards him, and began to type.

He was halfway through when the sergeant came in shaking his head, 'Nothing doing, the prints on the car keys and the prints on the shotgun cartridge are from two different men, but well, see for your-self. These are the nearest matches, and even I can see that they're different.' He dropped two sets of photographic fingerprint enlargements onto the desk.

The lieutenant studied them with a magnifying glass. 'Mmm, yeah, there are very definite differences. Okay, so we have two men, neither has a criminal record in Greece, they are possibly Turkish and have links with Palestine. Could this Andreas Kokalis guy be one of them?'

'I'll get a forensic team round to his flat right away, I'll go down there too, maybe we've missed something obvious,' the sergeant said.

The lieutenant nodded. 'Organize a thorough search on his background while you're at it,' he told him. He took the enlargements of the fingerprints and put them in his file; then went back to his report.

The sergeant went to the outer office and gave instructions to a couple of detective constables. One he sent to do a search of the criminal records and one to do a search of the civil records for a Mister Andreas Kokalis.

He himself went to forensics and made arrangements to have Andreas Kokalis's place turned inside out.

Istanbul, September 25th.

George Liani was pleased. The second payment, for the successful completion of his operation inside Greece, had been transmitted by key-tested telex from a bank in Switzerland to his account in Istanbul. A small part of the funds from that transaction had been used to rent a new apartment at the top of an anonymous modern block in the district known as Sishane. He walked over to the window and looked out over the Golden Horn towards the great dome of the Sulimanyie Mosque. Also clearly visible was the Topkapi Palace, for so many years the centre of power of the Ottoman Empire. He thought of how the centre of power had moved back and forth over the centuries between Palace and Mosque, as the influences of religion and state waxed and waned. Soon the power of religion would be pre-eminent again. And he would be the author of the change.

The phone rang, bringing him out of his reverie. He answered it abruptly. A voice said in Arabic, 'Your brother has been taken ill; he will be operated on in two days time, in the evening.'

‘Very well, I’ll come at once,’ he replied in the same language, and hung up looking thoughtful. The call was a prearranged code message, a message he had not expected. He had more work to do.

Chapter 10

British Sovereign Base Area, Akrotiri, Cyprus, September 25th.

‘What are these?’ John Henderson asked in surprise.

‘Dossiers on the team responsible for the hijack,’ Mike told him. ‘The girl sitting next to me was a pretty good artist; she had the knack of capturing a face, even an expression. She sketched them when they weren’t looking; it was too hot to wear masks. Each one is a good likeness. I made the notes and collected the objects. The objects carry fingerprints and in some cases hair and tissue traces. While I’m in the States I want you to dig up every bit of information you can on these chicken-shit heroes calling themselves the Blood of Shatila’

John looked at the accumulated information. The sketches looked good, the bits and pieces of information were scrappy, but to John’s experienced eye had potential. If he could refine what Mike and the girl had produced there would be a useful body of information.

‘You went to London to interview the two Blood of Shatila terrorists when they were in ‘That’s right, and I made some educated guesses at the time and fired some of the guesses into them and touched a few exposed nerves – got reactions. Although they didn’t talk, their expressions spoke volumes.’

‘And you put in a report when you got back.’

‘Of course, it’s on file.’

‘Okay, I’ll drag it out and add it to what we’ve got here. Ben Levy may have some information on this group and we owe him for the Iranian and Syrian stuff. We could copy him on this information, would you mind?’

‘No, but I want all the information he may have added to what we have here.’

John nodded his agreement, ‘Okay.’ He switched on a tape recorder and opened the first dossier, ‘talk me through it as it happened.’

Istanbul, September 25th.

Abu Asifah put down the payphone with satisfaction. The message had been understood. He would now go to finalize the deal. He would go the long way round for safety. He flew first to Tunis, stayed overnight, changed names and documents and flew to Rome, where he stayed again. Using a third set of documents he flew from Rome to Istanbul. A taxi took him to the railway station. He walked through the concourse and booked a modest room in the station hotel. After dinner he took another taxi to the Balkirkoy State Hospital and stopped to rest at a bench outside the main entrance. The bench had one other occupant – George Liani. Abu Asifah sat at the opposite end of the bench. The two men did not look at each other.

In low tones Abu Asifah outlined his requirements.

'How much?' George Liani went straight to the point.

'The same as before, the same deal, half in advance, half on completion.'

'What is the time-scale?'

'As soon as possible.'

'These things cannot be arranged overnight. I need time for planning and preparation.'

'That is why the payments are so generous. The pressure must be maintained, we have the infidels on the run; soon they will be forced to exert pressure on Israel.'

'What about materials, equipment, timing devices?'

'We will supply your requirements.'

'Inside Turkey?'

'Yes, we will arrange for the materials to be brought in, in the usual way.'

George Liani made a mental note to ask for more than he needed. He could find a few other uses for that sort of stuff and the extra funds would be a great boost to his cause, doubling what he had already received.

'It's possible, it could be done, but it won't be easy. You understand that I'll keep the first part of the moneys if, through no fault of my own, I am unable to complete the job within the time you require?'

'Agreed.' Abu Asifah didn't have to find the money. It wasn't his job. The two men parted without a handshake.

Washington D.C. September 26th.

The huge USAF Lockheed C5-A Galaxy was descending towards the Potomac River; inbound to land across the river from Bolling Air-force Base where Mike Edge's destination, the Defense Intelligence Agency Analysis Centre was situated on Brookly Avenue.

Mike tidied his notes and put them away. He had done just about all that he could do in preparation. He had a logical presentation ready to deliver. Questions he would deal with off the cuff. Mike looked out of the aircraft as it circled in to land. The whole of the District of Columbia lay spread out before him in the early morning light.

Nestling in the great fork formed by the Potomac and Anacostia rivers was the very heart of American democratic government. He picked out the Capitol Building, the Washington Monument and the White House. This indeed was the centre of things.

The aircraft landed and Mike said goodbye to the crew, who had looked after him well during the journey. An official car was waiting for him at the foot of the steps and took him across the river and on to the DIA building where he confirmed the arrangement to speak in two hours time. That done, the driver told him he was booked into the Sheraton Grand on Capitol Hill, and dropped him outside the main entrance on New Jersey Avenue with the promise to pick him up in an hour.

Mike went inside and registered. The bellboy carried his overnight bag up to his room and got his tip. Mike gave him the chance to earn more. He asked the boy to go down and buy him some boxer shorts a clean shirt and a pair of chinos. He gave the boy the sizes and some cash. The unexpected delay had used up the

limited change of clothes in his hand baggage. He stripped off his travel-stained clothes and got in the shower. The hot stinging jets of water washed away the weariness and brought him fully awake.

There was a knock at the door and the bellboy came in with the items Mike had asked for. 'You better keep the change,' Mike told him, 'I don't have any pockets in this towel.' The boy went off grinning. Mike quickly donned his new shirt and trousers; he took a tie from his overnight bag and slipped on his navy lightweight blazer. A quick shoeshine, using the kit provided in the room, and he was ready. Grabbing his briefcase he headed for the elevator. He walked through the foyer and out of the main entrance just as the official car drew up.

The driver moved expertly through the traffic and in a short while drew up at the entrance to the DIA building. Mike went in and reported to the reception desk.

'Ah, yes, Commander Edge, Mister Shultz is expecting you,' the girl said. She dialed an internal number and announced Mike's arrival. 'He will be down to collect you in a moment, please take a seat over there.' She pointed to some low modern leather covered sofas.

Mike didn't have long to wait. After a few moments a short powerfully built man, with a grey crew cut and horn-rimmed glasses; came hurrying over. He stuck his hand out.

'Howard Shultz,' he announced, 'pleased to meet you. The President wants everyone concerned to see the evidence you've gotten hold of. Come with me.' Hardly waiting to acknowledge Mike's reply, he hurtled off.

Howard Shultz was not deliberately rude; he did everything at 100 miles per hour and had the knack of getting everyone else moving too. By the time they reached the big lecture hall it was half full. As it filled up Howard Shultz showed Mike the equipment.

'We have had the microfilms blown up and some transparencies made from the copies sent over via the diplomatic bag.' He indicated a stack by the side of an overhead projector. 'They arrived rather earlier than you did Commander Edge. We've also had some transparencies made of our own maps and charts of the area.' He indicated a pile by another overhead projector. 'Here are the controls to the projectors.' He handed Mike a control unit and pointed to a bank of switches. 'The rest of the switches control the lights. You'll need this,' he handed Mike a light pointer to use, 'and your presentation will be recorded.' He turned to the now full room. It was 09.00am precisely. 'Ladies and gentlemen, Commander Mike Edge, a specialist on Middle Eastern affairs,' he announced and went quickly to an empty seat; Mike was on his own.

Tel Aviv, September 26th.

During his return from Cyprus John considered the information he had received from Mike. This new Palestinian splinter group was a real nasty outfit that was for sure. He phoned Ben the moment he reached his office; both men needed to meet. It was easier for Ben to come in to see John; Ben had not been away from his desk and was on top of his workload. John was not; he was still plowing through a mountainous in-tray when Ben arrived. John offered Ben his usual form of

hospitality, fresh Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee, and the two men sat down in the comfortable leather armchairs.

John opened the discussion. 'As you know, Mike Edge was caught up in the recent hijack, what you may not have realized is that Mike's brother was on the same aircraft. He was shot dead, we assume because he was an American passport holder. Mike had to sit and watch it happen.'

'Alan Edge, the passenger who was killed, I did wonder when I heard the name.' Ben had gone very still, his features set like a bronze mask. 'Go on.'

John pointed to a folder on the coffee table between them. 'Mike is a professional. There was nothing else he could do at the time so he gathered information with which to nail the bastards at a later date. There was a girl sitting next to him on the plane, seems she had a natural talent for drawing, some people are gifted that way.'

Ben nodded. His features had not softened at all.

John continued. 'This girl took considerable risks; she did sketches of each of the hijackers when no one was looking. It seems that the heat in the plane was too much, even for them, and they didn't bother with hoods or masks. Mike reckons they are very good likenesses.'

Ben nodded again. His organization had a rogue's gallery second to none in the Middle East. It should be possible to match some of them to the sketches. John was continuing. 'Mike made notes to go with the sketches, and he collected various items which carry fingerprints and DNA material.'

Ben broke his silence. 'He seems to have been very efficient considering the stress he must have been under.'

'Bloody-minded would be a better term to use. Now he wants to go after them.'

'That's understandable, but is it a good idea to have your department involved in an operation like that?' Ben asked.

'No, and not my department, he wants to go after them personally.' John shook his head. 'Said he'd resign and go it alone if necessary; meant it, too.'

'Hmm,' Ben's brain was racing behind his hard expression. 'Have you got anything else on this group?'

'Yes, we know that the same group was responsible for the attack on Heathrow a while ago. In fact I sent Mike over to London to find out what he could about the incident and those responsible for it. He interviewed the two captured terrorists; and to complete the connection they were the two released in Beirut the other day.'

'Is Mike's report in there?' Ben asked, pointing to the file on the table.

'Yes, it's all there, and I've been in contact with the Greek authorities. They say their investigations are continuing. There seems to be a connection at that end too, an airline catering company employee and his family were blown to bits with a 12 bore shotgun. The man serviced flight OA 269 with meals prior to take-off; that has to be more than a coincidence.'

'Lovely people the Blood of Shatila; the more I see of their handiwork the more I agree with Mike's point of view.'

'Well, yes, privately I might agree, but officially I can't, and neither can you,' John pointed out.

‘Maybe it would be a good idea to set Mike onto the trail in Greece,’ Ben suggested slowly, ‘divert him a little from the desire for personal revenge. He would be doing something relevant and God knows we need as much information as we can get on this bunch of thugs.’

John looked at him sharply. ‘Yeah, that could be the way to go. We would need to find a pressing reason with which to persuade him, but that could just be the way to take some of the wind out of his sails.’

Washington D.C. September 26th.

‘Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.’ Mike turned to face his audience.

In the centre of the front row sat the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Behind them their respective assistant chiefs, together with the sober suits of Defense Department officials. A selection of specialist intelligence personnel both civilian and military sat behind them. A sea of medal ribbons went back as far as Mike could see. At the sides and at the rear were representatives of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the National Security Council, the Department of Homeland Security, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency among others. Howard Shultz had been busy. Quite a few other meetings must have been cancelled at short notice.

Mike took a deep breath and, taking a transparency from the top of the pile, placed it on the overhead projector, switched it on and dimmed the lights. Displayed on the large screen, on the wall of the room, was a map of the Persian Gulf and the surrounding countries. He put the red dot of the light pointer on the map of the Persian Gulf.

‘This is the richest oil bearing area on our planet,’ he said, and looked directly at his audience, ‘and it’s not Texas. Thirty seven percent of the world’s crude oil is produced in this region. Most of the countries of the region are stable, but to understand the current situation we have to go back and review the events leading up to the present time.

For centuries the territory we know as Iraq was part of the Persian Empire, what we now know as Iran. With the vast oil reserves in the area the Iranians covet it and would love to have it back.

More recently Iraq itself was divided. Prior to 1913, Kuwait was part of the Vilyat or administrative district of Basra, a part of Iraq. As a result of an agreement signed in 1913 between the British and the then rulers of Iraq, the Ottoman Turks, Kuwait became an autonomous district. During the war of 1914–1918, with the Turks allied to the Germans and building the Hejaz Railway, it was expedient for the British to block access to the head of the Persian Gulf. In order to do so, they recognized the Emirate and its’ 10,000 square mile land area as a completely independent nation. This division, which gave the British a valuable ally against the Turks and the Germans, was ratified by the Sykes–Picot agreement of 1916, which divided the former Ottoman Empire between Britain and France. This division was regarded as totally artificial by the Iraqis and has never been accepted by them. It caused great frustration by denying them a land area that had previously never had an independent existence and more importantly it

deprived them of access to the waters of the Persian Gulf via the Shatt-al-Arab waterway.

For thousands of years before that, the territory was disputed between Iraq and Iran. The whole of Iraq, or Mesopotamia, was part of Iran, part of the ancient Persian Empire, and the Iranian claim to this territory has never been settled to the satisfaction of either country. Eighteen separate treaties have attempted to settle the issue without success.

Then came the discovery of oil. Particularly contentious is the giant Rumallah oilfield, which straddles Iraq's border with Kuwait.'

Mike paused to take a sip of water.

'Now for the sake of brevity we jump a few decades. In nineteen eighty, the Iran-Iraq war began; an eight year war fought over this ancient territorial dispute. At that time Iraq held reserves of 30 billion dollars. In nineteen eighty eight, after the war, they had debts of 100 billion dollars, 30 billion of which was owed to Kuwait. The Iraqi position regarding that war was that they and they alone, stood between the Islamic Fundamentalism of Iran and the rest of the Arab world. For holding that position they claimed that the rest of the Arab world owed them. Saddam Hussein demanded repeatedly that their debts, particularly the debt to Kuwait should be written off, and that the Arab world should help exhausted Iraq back on to its' feet. Instead of helping them the other Arab States stabbed them in the back. They broke OPEC agreements on production quotas, over produced, brought down the price of oil and reduced Iraq's limited income to levels where they could not even pay off the interest on their loans.'

'The Kuwaitis were particularly blind and greedy. They held reserves of over 120 billion dollars overseas, which gave them an investment income of approximately 13 billion dollars a year, a sum that exceeded their oil revenue income, and that was for a population of eight hundred thousand nationals. And all this time no one, but no one, gave any thought as to why the Iranians had fought so long and so hard for eight years, no one gave any consideration as to why Iran had squandered so many lives, had exhausted itself over this hot and sandy wasteland.'

Mike took another sip of water.

'So, all of Iraq's grievances over territory, borders, oil rights, the Rumallah oil-field production, sea access, who owed what to whom for the Iran-Iraq war and so on, were brought before the Gulf Co-operation Council. No one mentioned Iran. Iranian claims were ignored. Diplomatic missions, meetings between King Hussein of Jordan, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, Yasser Arafat of the PLO, meetings in Jeddah; meetings in Baghdad, all came to nothing. Their situation desperate, the Iraqis issued repeated warnings, moved troops, made threats, all of which the Kuwaitis' and the Saudis' shrugged off as blackmail and bluff, and which the rest of the world ignored. The result was the invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War. Kuwait was laid waste. So was Iraq; but Kuwait is being aided and rebuilt by the West, Iraq is not.

Meanwhile Iran kept quietly producing oil and rebuilding its strength.' Mike looked at his audience. 'Don't misunderstand me; I had no sympathy with the Iraqi regime. It was a brutal dictatorship and violence was its principal tool. The leader of that regime personally ordered the execution of twenty-one members of

his first cabinet. He drew his pistol, in a cabinet meeting, and shot one of his officers in the head, killing him for daring to disagree with him. He forced the members of his cabinet to act as a firing squad executing political prisoners. This dangerous brutality ran in the family. His son beat one of his father's bodyguards to death in front of guests. His cousin gassed seventy thousand Kurdish civilians. Yes, that regime was brutal. But the regime did have a grievance. They saw themselves and their country as seriously wronged, and that made them more dangerous, even more of a threat. The Iranian regime may not be as brutal but it is certainly as ruthless.'

There was silence in the audience.

Mike continued, 'Iraq, as you know is in a terrible state, largely due to the after effects of the gulf war and the sectarian infighting between Sunni and Shia factions. As a consequence the people of Iraq have to endure terrible privations. Many are starving and there is a deliberate policy of interference from neighboring countries like Syria and Iran. Every day, ordinary people have to watch their children die because of shortages. According to World Health Organization figures five hundred thousand Iraqi children have died for want of basic medicines and adequate food. The numbers for Iran are not available but are thought to be not much better. Think about that for a moment. How would you feel?'

Mike paused to put more slides into the order he required, then continued.

'The rulers of Iran now see their ancient enemy in a seriously weakened state. They see the oil rich lands that for so many thousands of years were their lands as being poorly defended; a situation that may not occur again in the foreseeable future. They see a possible opportunity to regain lands that historically were theirs.'

Mike took another sip of water.

'How can Iran exploit this situation? They have to strike in a way that cannot be stopped. They have to reach a position of dominance that cannot be challenged. They have to do it before the West can react. They have to use a method of attack that is unstoppable. They have to make an unexpected pre-emptive strike. Achieve a fait accompli.'

Mike put a new slide on the projector.

'Of the nine United Nations Security Council resolutions enacted against Iraq, none were complied with in their entirety. United Nations Security Council Resolution 687 in particular demanded that Iraq provide declarations on all aspects of its Weapons of Mass Destruction program fifteen days after the Security Council enacted the resolution in nineteen ninety one. Eleven years later gaps and inconsistencies remain in all of Iraq's declarations. Only when incontrovertible direct evidence came to light did Iraq modify its declarations.'

'This is a list of thousands of tonnes of chemicals and materials supplied to Iraq prior to the Gulf War. Western scientists have evaluated these chemicals and materials. Some are the materials needed for the production of the nerve gas VX. Others are for the culture of biological agents based on a form of smallpox enhanced from thirty-five percent mortality rate to one hundred percent mortality rate, and of botulism and anthrax derivatives.' 'These chemicals were not purchased in research quantities but in industrial quantities, and indicate gas and virus production on a commercial scale. Less than forty percent of this

material was accounted for by the UN weapons inspectorate, so given the remaining sixty percent we are looking at potential gas production in tens of metric tonnes, and germ production on the scale of units of metric tonnes. Where did this materiel go? The Iraqi Air force planes went to Iran. Did the means of production for Biological Weapons end up in the same place? The germ warfare material is easily stored; it is freeze-dried using the same process as for instant coffee.'

Mike selected a slide from the other heap and placed it on the second overhead projector. It was another map, one of those on the microfilm he had received from Ben Levy. The quality was not quite so good but the symbols stood out clearly.

Mike continued, pointing at the symbols on the map,

'There have been high level meetings recently between Iran and Syria. These symbols represent desert airfields. You will remember that before operation Desert Storm began, the Iraqi leadership ordered the dispersal of their best aircraft and the withdrawal of their best troops to places of relative safety. They even flew their crack squadrons of aircraft to the territory of their old enemies Iran. Why?' Did the production materials for weapons of mass destruction go to their old enemies too?

'Was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait viewed by Iran as an experiment, albeit an experiment on a grand scale? A reconnaissance on a scale we could not countenance and therefore did not see it the same way as the Iranians? Remember, approximately sixty percent of the Iraqi front line troops were Shiites, all were badly led and poorly trained; in fact their disposable divisions. The Republican Guards, their best equipped and best trained troops never fought. In fact were kept well away from the fighting. Why?'

'Was the gassing of 70,000 Kurdish civilians an experiment for future attacks on neighboring countries? Could this be an experiment which Iran might copy or benefit from?'

'Iraq had, prior to the Gulf War, some three hundred aircraft, mainly Russian MIG 29 Fulcrums and MIG 31 Foxhounds. All were armed with 30mm cannon, four AA10 Alamo A/C semi-active radar-guided missiles, two Alamo B Infra-Red homing medium range missiles and two AA11 Archer close combat Anti aircraft missiles. Alternatively, and most importantly, they could carry a large selection of ground attack weapons pods on six wing stations. These are the aircraft that were dispersed to neutral countries like Iran and maybe Syria prior to hostilities commencing. Operation Desert Fox did not target these aircraft. Iran we know still has them. Also in recent weeks you will have seen evidence of Iranian progress in their missile program. Even a small force of operational modest range missiles armed with chemical, biological or dirty nuclear warheads would pose a serious threat to neighboring countries and to US forces in the region.'

Mike paused for another sip of water.

'Here is another question. Why do countries, with enormous and developed reserves of oil and natural gas, well within the worlds' top ten producers, want or need nuclear powered reactors? Iran has the Bushehr 1 reactor and another at Darkhovin, together with three known uranium enrichment plants. Other, worrying issues are the IAEA reports of research experiments geared to the development of a nuclear weapons capability. Does the Iranian nuclear research

centre have hidden buildings and rooms forbidden to the nuclear inspectorate as they were in Iraq?’

Mike’s audience shifted uneasily.

‘We are aware, from intelligence sources, of leakage of Russian rocket and nuclear technology to Iran; given recent conditions within the Russian federation, with tens of thousands of scientists and technicians redundant and unpaid, that was bound to happen. Gentlemen, make no mistake, these regimes have the means to deliver chemical, biological and nuclear weapons outside their own borders. From the dispositions shown here they could invade Kuwait, Northern Saudi Arabia and attack Israel. With the possible involvement of Syria the threat to Israel is even greater. This alliance knows from the Gulf War exactly how long it takes the West to react. These documents are the plans for a sneak attack. The combined use of VX nerve gas, enhanced smallpox and an unstable anthrax derivative would decimate and kill whole populations; men, women and children. The advantage from an alliance’s point of view is that the attacked countries and their infrastructures remain intact. There would be minor damage from road accidents, plant breakdown from lack of supervision and control, but nowhere near the damage that would result from a shooting war. In two to three weeks the viruses would break down and become harmless; the VX nerve gas would disperse to safe levels, and the attacked countries would be wide open for the aggressors to walk in.’

Mike paused again, took a sip of water, and put another slide on the projector.

‘This map shows the forming up areas, the start line and the dispositions of all the regiments that are to take part in the clean up. They do not begin to move until two days after the main attack, that is the air attack, has succeeded.’

He paused for a few moments to allow his audience to absorb the information on the Iranian map.

‘Kuwait has no defense against the forces which could be unleashed against it, and Saudi-Arabia hasn’t either. Israel would struggle to survive.’

Mike changed the map on the overhead projector for one showing the South coast of the Persian Gulf. He ran the red dot of his pointer along the coast.

‘First Kuwait, second, Saudi-Arabia, then Qatar. A causeway joins the stretch of water between the mainland and the island of Bahrain. It too would fall, and the United Arab Emirates would be next.’ Again Mike paused to allow time for his words to be digested.

‘A domino effect, gentlemen, such as was feared in Southeast Asia, but in a region of the world with far greater consequences for the nations of the West. Another war in this region would force oil prices through the roof and do untold damage to the world economy, particularly to the manufacturing based economies and to those countries that are dependent on oil imports.

Afterwards, if this invasion is allowed to happen, a very large proportion of the world’s oil will be under the control of the Ayatollahs, men who would not hesitate to use such control to dictate terms to the Western world. That then is the general situation, are there any questions so far?’

An air force general in the second row stood and said, ‘We have the no fly zones implemented, and actively patrol them. How could they launch an air attack from the South?’

Mike nodded. 'Iraq would not be the immediate target. Our no fly zones cover only the national territories of Iraq and Kuwait. Iran sits across the Persian Gulf from Northern Saudi Arabia. The first strike would come from across the sea, across the Gulf in effect. Very quickly they would gain control of the whole of the Persian Gulf up to and possibly including the vital shipping lanes of the Gulf of Hormuz. The annexation of Iraq comes later. Strikes from Syria could go west, fly down the Mediterranean and come at Israel from the sea.'

The air-force general nodded and sat down.

'Consider also this fact,' Mike continued, 'Israel elected as Prime Minister a man so hated in the Arab world that the entire Arab world could unite against Israel in protest. Remember that the unresolved Palestinian problem is in the forefront of the minds of all Arabs. Give any Muslim nation a common cause and the danger is that they will forget their national disputes and unite against the Infidel.'

Mike put another slide on the overhead projector. 'It is not only the world's largest oil reserves Iran is after. There is further justification for an invasion. This document is a propaganda statement in which the Iranian fundamentalist regime claims that the custody of the most Holy Shrines in the Muslim world, namely those in Mecca and Medina, and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, are defiled by corrupt and unworthy rulers. They intend to proclaim a "Jihad", a "Holy War", to liberate these shrines for the true believers, and, in so doing, gain control of them for themselves. This is a very real issue to devout Muslims. It would cause all sorts of changes of alliance. It would mean that this action would receive approval from countries in the Arab world that would condemn an act of aggression for mere greed - which of course is the true reason for planning such an attack. It is very cunning. By this plan they could be seen as the protector of the true faith, gain control of the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf region, and give their people a big increase in their living standards in order to stay in power. You realize of course, that if Iran's plans are to be stopped, it is the West who will have to do it. Effectively that means us. America.'

There was a long silence.

Howard Shultz broke it.

'Do you have any solutions to suggest, Commander Edge?'

Mike picked up his notes. 'These are my considered recommendations,' he said. He began to explain his thoughts and opinions. He lectured on for over an hour. When he had finished talking he turned the lights up. He asked for questions, and another hour was spent in lively debate.

When there were no more questions Howard Shultz got up from his seat and joined him.

'Thank you, Commander Edge, you have been most lucid in your briefing, we all now have a much better understanding of the problems which lie ahead. Your difficult trip has been most worthwhile. We, for our part, must now busy ourselves with contingencies to cope with this situation. I hope you will not think us rude and inhospitable, but we have much to do and will have to leave you to your own devices.'

'That's quite all right,' Mike replied, 'A little time to myself after the last few days will be very welcome.'

'Yes, I'm sure it will; come, I'll show you out and get a car to take you back to your hotel.'

Tel Aviv, September 26th.

Standing up, John picked up the file and carried it over to a small conference table in the corner of the office. Ben followed, and taking a chair each they sat down to go through the contents together. John opened the file and shoved it in front of Ben. Abu Asifah's likeness stared up at him. Ben nodded his head, 'I think we have a file on this one.' One by one they went through them. There were eight in all; Ben was negative about five of them, the other two he was pretty sure about. 'These ring alarm bells, but that's not to say we have anything on them, I'll have to get my records people on to it. He looked disgruntled.

John went over to fetch two more coffees, it was a calculated move; he wanted Ben to complete his thought processes. Placing the two coffees on the table he sat down again. He looked directly at Ben. 'Got anything to add?' he asked bluntly.

Ben hesitated before replying. 'I'm pretty sure about three of these individuals in Mike's dossiers, but I may also have a contact in this splinter group.'

John looked sharply at him. 'In The Blood of Shatila?'

'Yes; this contact is corrupt,' Ben said slowly, 'corrupt and greedy, both for money and for power.'

'Sounds like he could be turned?'

'Possibly, but he's treacherous; he would have to be handled very carefully.'

'What does he want?'

He wants to have clout, recognition, notoriety, call it what you will, he wants to be number one, the guy who gets on TV. He wants to be the recognized leader, the guy who hobnobs with politicians in front of the world's press; that's what he wants; that and enough money to make him rich.'

'What's stopping him getting the top job for himself?'

Ben tapped the top file, Abu Asifah's file; 'This guy - and half a dozen thugs.'

John looked thoughtful; 'Seems to me your contact could use a little help.'

'Ben looked at him. 'It wouldn't be easy, we would have to get the lot in one go. We think their base is pretty formidable. Well guarded, too.'

'Tell me about it.'

'Well, we're pretty sure they're in Muslim West Beirut as you would expect, but in the southern part where the Hezbollah influence is strongest.'

John nodded, 'That would make sense.'

Ben went on. 'There is an underground car park and service complex below one of the damaged apartment buildings. It's very heavily guarded and there seems to have been a lot of coming and going which roughly coincided with the recent attacks.'

'Number of guards?'

'Don't know, but we think it's a major headquarters.'

'Well we need to get more information; we need to be able to tie the individuals in these dossiers to the group in Beirut. Their last area of activity was in Athens, I'll see if I can get Mike to go there.'

‘Okay,’ Ben agreed, ‘and I’ll do some thinking about how to crack the Beirut nut. One thing’s for sure, sledge hammers seem to be out.’

Over Southern England, September 26th.

‘Running in!’ The pilot’s warning sounded in the helmet earphones.

‘Okay.’ Jim Savage got a firm grip, stepped out into the 80-mph slipstream, and took up the rear floater position trailing one leg. Twelve thousand feet below him between his feet was the patchwork quilt of the English countryside, a long, long way down.

Another member of the drop team quickly took up the forward floater position and Andrew Cunningham took the centre position. All three were standing on the step and hanging on to the outside of the plane. The rest of the team crowded into the doorway of the nine-seat Islander aircraft.

‘**READY!**’ Andy rapped out the commands. ‘**SET!**’ Everyone took a deep breath.

‘**GO!**’ All nine members of the drop team shouted the action word together and, as one, leapt clear of the aircraft.

There was a rush of wind, noise, a change of temperature and the pressure of air roaring over Jim’s body. No sense of falling at all.

As one of the base formation Jim had already got a firm grip on the two either side of him. The rest of the team, feeling the wind and changing their body attitude by moving their arms and legs as wings and rudders, began to cruise in to join the formation. Then the whole formation was swooping through the sky at an exhilarating 140 miles per hour, adrenaline pumping round their systems, senses and awareness heightened to the absolute maximum, huge grins of delight on every face. The formation completed, Andy gave a nod, and the formation broke, each individual exerting total concentration to keep close and maneuver to the second formation; that achieved they broke again. The third formation was harder; it took more time for everyone to link up. Jim checked his altimeter and looked up. Andy had done the same, 4,500 feet. Not enough altitude for another formation; moments later Jim’s Paralert altimeter began beeping in his ear as he passed through the 3,500 foot setting.

Andy gave a hand signal. All the team members turned through 180 degrees pushed out their legs pulled their arms back and tracked away into clear space.

Jim checked around and made certain he was well clear. He signaled his intent to open his main canopy and released the small pilot ’chute. There was a small jerk as it deployed then, a much larger jerk as he was pulled up by the deployment of the main ’chute. The roar of the wind stopped, all was calm and still. The multi-colored rectangle of Jim’s Ram Air sports parachute hung in the air above him. He began to fly his ’chute and moved carefully closer to Andrew Cunningham for a canopy hook-up. He grabbed hold and moved down the lines until he could hook his feet in Andy’s harness. More of the team moved in, each one joining the stack as they spiraled down to the marker on the airfield they had taken off from thirty minutes before. Then the stack pilot, the top-most member of the stack, broke away, and one by one each of the team broke off also, and spiraled in to touch down. Jim hit the marker dead centre, landing gently on tiptoe and collapsing his

'chute from a standing position. They all grinned at each other, wanting nothing in the world so much as to go back up and do it all over again.

Andy walked over to Jim. 'The view's better during daylight,' he said, grinning, 'you enjoyed it, I can tell.'

'Yeah,' Jim grinned back, 'and it's safer landing on the ground than in the sea.'

Washington D.C. September 26th.

Mike Edge felt drained. He sat back in the comfort of the official car on the way back to his hotel. Unbidden, his thoughts began to go back over the events of the past few days and the tasks he now had to do. He needed to sort out the arrangements for his brother's funeral and get that ordeal behind him. Only then could he give his full attention to tracking down those responsible for Alan's murder. The car dropped him back at the Sheraton Grand. Thanking the driver Mike went in, picked up his key, went directly to his room and rang John Henderson in Tel Aviv. The phone was answered immediately by John Henderson's secretary Mary.

'Mike, how are you?'

'I'm okay.'

'I've been worried sick about you; that ogre we work for should have given you some time off after your dreadful experience on that aircraft.'

'He couldn't,' Mike said quickly, 'it sure would've been welcome, but John was right, I had to complete the job at this end. It was too important, you know it was.'

'Hmmm, I'm not convinced, he's a slave driver.'

'Yeah well you're some slave,' Mike laughed, 'is he in?'

'Yeah, but only just, hold on, I'll put you through before he escapes.'

John Henderson came straight to the point. 'Hi, Mike, how did the briefing go?'

'Very well John, no questions I couldn't answer. The people here have gone off to work out their strategy.'

'Great, good job, you've gotten them off my back.'

'Well, I'm sure glad about that,' Mike replied, 'guess you have other things to deal with.'

'You bet,' John said, with feeling.

'What arrangements have been made regarding my brother?'

'Yeah, right, our friends in Beirut are shipping Alan home. They have notified his company in the first instance, as you, his next of kin, were not available. The company gave the consular people the name of a law practice in San Francisco. I have it here for you.' He gave Mike the name; Bloom & Co.

The name was familiar to Mike; Alan had stayed with the same law practice that the family had used for their private business. John continued, 'Contact the law firm as soon as you can, they need to talk to you as the next of kin.'

'Okay, anything else?'

'Yeah, I spoke to a mutual friend; he thinks we ought to meet when you get back. The hijacking was organized in Athens; all sorts of clues are beginning to surface.'

'Good, I'll see you in a week or so, 'bye.' Mike rang off, a grim smile of satisfaction on his face. Ben and John should have a lot of information available by then.

Chapter 11

Galata District, Istanbul, September 27th.

Walking slowly through the crowded streets lit by the hissing pressure lamps of stallholders, George Liani made his way back towards the Galata Bridge; his mind was occupied with a new set of problems. The new job would be difficult to arrange, but the extra funds and some extra explosives would make the effort worthwhile. Who could he use? On an impulse he changed direction and headed for the apartment of Suleiman Yavas, his helper on his last job. It was in a block of apartments, less luxurious than his but respectable. He had his own key to the outer door; it made coming and going less conspicuous. He walked quietly up the stairs, ignoring the lift to avoid noise, making his visit less obvious to hidden ears.

Reaching the door, he was about to knock when he heard a woman's shrill voice from within. He put his ear to the door and listened. A row was under way. Some minutes later looking very thoughtful, he left as quietly as he had come. He 'phoned his helper the next morning ordering him to come to his address, and, as soon as he arrived, he confronted him.

'What was that row going on at your place last night?'

Suleiman was caught off guard, he tried to feign ignorance, but George Liani was not to be put off. Eventually the truth came out. Against Liani's rules his helper had taken a girlfriend, and they had fallen out.

'What was the row about?'

'She's pregnant, and she wants me to marry her.'

'How much does she know about you?'

'Next to nothing; and most of that is lies.'

'Does she know where your parents live?'

'No.'

'Know anything about your family at all?'

'No.'

'Good, good; do you want rid of her?'

'Yes, for sure, the silly bitch has become an embarrassment.'

To Suleiman's surprise, George Liani began to smile; this was the answer to a prayer.

'This is what you do. Take this money and buy her a ring. Take her for a meal. Tell her you want to marry her and take her to the United States with you. Tell her all your family is in America, and that you are nearly through with your studies here.' George Liani explained the details of the new job he had to complete. As he spoke his helper began to see the way out of his difficulties.

Manston Airfield Kent, September 27th.

‘Okay, consider yourself hired, welcome to the firm.’ Andy clapped Jim on the shoulder and shook his hand. Everything checked out, and we are delighted to have you on board. Next time Mike Edge is down here I’ll buy him a drink.’

‘He uses this airfield does he?’

‘Yes, when he was stationed over here he used to come down every weekend; we must have made a hundred drops together.’

Jim nodded, he was anxious to know what rates of pay applied in this new job. The lovely Dawn Saint-Pierre was never far from Jim’s thoughts these days.

Andy read his mind. ‘Come on, let’s find a quiet corner in the bar and I’ll tell you about the firm, what we do, what kind of work you are likely to be doing and what you can expect to earn.’

An hour later when Jim left to go back to London he was elated. Andy had told him how much he could expect to earn per day, what his expenses would be, how much he could expect to get in bonus payments from grateful clients, and that the company policy was to keep paying top rates for top quality.

‘That way we keep our best people,’ he said, ‘very often clients make the guys offers to go and work for them full-time. Obviously we don’t want that to happen so we pay well and expect our guys to stay loyal.’

That made sense to Jim. Feeling better than he had for a long time, he hurried back to Bayswater, eager now to see Dawn who, more and more, was occupying his thoughts.

Athens, September 27th.

Lieutenant Georgiou stood and stretched in his cramped office. His shoulders ached from hunching over the keyboard, but his report was finished. He printed a copy for his boss and then copied the file to a disc.

Taking the printed copy with him he walked to his boss’s office to talk him through it, he wanted a second opinion on his own reasoning.

To his surprise and annoyance his boss threw the report casually in the tray on his desk marked filing, without even looking at it.

‘I’d like to go through the report with you, sir.’

‘That won’t be necessary.’

‘What? Why not? It’s a major...’

The captain put a finger to his lips, and getting up quietly closed the door. He pointed to a chair. ‘Sit down.’ He looked at Lieutenant Georgiou and made a decision; he had known the lieutenant for a long time. ‘I’ve been a police officer for twenty years; I’ve always done my duty as best I could. I’ve always tried to be fair and maintain the rule of law, regardless of which government was in power. Under this government things are different. Now I’m given orders from above, orders I have to implement; orders which stick in my throat.’ He paused for a moment, a sour look on his face, and then went on bitterly, ‘I have to order you to drop the case.’

He had difficulty meeting lieutenant Georgiou’s astonished gaze.

‘Why? We’re making real progress; it’s a big case. It’s attracting international press interest because of the hijack connection; we’ve got some good leads, I...’

'Drop the case, on the explicit instruction of the second in command of the Ministry of Public Order,' the captain cut in harshly.

The lieutenant got the message; he sat, silent and bitter like the captain. It was common knowledge in Greece that the second in command of the Ministry of Public Order, the ministry that controlled the Greek National Police Force was a P.A.S.O.K. party member who had been nominated by the Greek President himself. It was common knowledge that this second in command of the Ministry of Public Order had been arrested in 1976 and sentenced to seven months imprisonment for smuggling forty Kalashnikov AK47 assault rifles into Greece. It was also common knowledge that in spite of the court ruling he had never served a day of his sentence and that the following year he was made a member of the Greek Parliament.

'Democracy,' the Captain spat the word out, 'we Greeks invented it. We gave it to the world. How have we allowed men such as these to take it from us?'

The lieutenant had no answer.

'I'll tell you how it happened, a certain Arab leader gave P.A.S.O.K. four million US Dollars to finance their election campaign, that's how, and rumor has it that he has pumped in another sixteen million to date. Twenty million US dollars in all, not much really, it must be the cheapest real estate deal in history.'

The lieutenant nodded his understanding. 'Yeah, he bought Greece.'

San Francisco, September 27th.

Washington held no attraction for Mike, he did not know the city, he had no friends there, and he had painful personal things to deal with. He rang the reservations desk at the airport, and booked himself on the evening flight to San Francisco. Then he went down to reception. The girl there made him a reservation in the Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf, a sister hotel; that done, he went back to his room and packed.

Next morning, after an all too brief nap snatched on the night flight to the West Coast, Mike checked in at Fisherman's Wharf. From his room he rang the office of the family law practice and made an appointment for that afternoon to see Mister Aaron Bloom the senior partner. His short notice trip to Washington was expanding beyond the original plan and his overnight bag couldn't cope, even with the recent additions.

He would need a suit for the funeral, a black tie, some shirts and various other items. His hotel was only a few blocks away from the shops and tailoring workshops in the side streets off Grant Avenue. He set off on foot to buy the things he had listed, and didn't take long to make his purchases. He was back at his hotel in time to enjoy a club sandwich for lunch. Then he set off at a leisurely pace to keep his appointment with Mister Bloom. The address had not changed, the practice was still in the heart of San Francisco's business district, but it had obviously grown. From the board in the foyer of the modern office building Mike noted that the practice now occupied five floors.

He arrived at reception five minutes before his appointment time, but was not asked to wait. He was escorted directly to Aaron Bloom's spacious office with wide views out over the city to the Pacific Ocean beyond the Golden Gate Bridge. Aaron

Bloom came out from behind his desk to greet him. He shook Mike's hand vigorously. 'Mike it's been too long.' Aaron Bloom was a stout jovial man, bald but with masses of grey curly hair above his ears. Gold rimmed half-moon reading glasses sat on a prominent nose. Two shrewd black eyes twinkled away above them. 'Come over here and sit down. You know Mike, your parents were among my very first clients and became good friends to my wife and I. Alan became one of my biggest clients, and a valued friend. I'm most distressed about his death: so unnecessary.'

'Thank you for your sympathy Mister Bloom,' Mike said simply, 'you are very kind.'

'Not at all, a terrible business; terrible; and please, call me Aaron, the rest of your family always have. Well now, let's not brood over it, I expect you need some information.'

'Yes, I thought you would be the best person to come to.'

'Indeed, indeed,' Aaron Bloom said heavily. 'Alan's firm contacted us as soon as they received the bad news. We got in touch with the proper authorities and made the arrangements for his body to be brought to San Francisco.' He took a business card from a drawer in his desk. 'This is the firm of morticians we use for these unhappy events. Unfortunately some clients die each year, and with families scattered the way they are these days we often have to step in and make the immediate arrangements.'

Mike nodded his understanding. 'What arrangements have you made for the funeral?'

'All the official business is over and done with, post-mortems and such. We have official permission for the burial to take place, and I have made arrangements for Alan to be placed in the family plot next to your parents.'

'Thank you, that's what he would have wanted.'

'When will the funeral be held?'

'Tomorrow at three; at Grace Cathedral.'

'I expect there will be a number of people attending from Alan's company. Have they been catered for?'

'Yes, indeed,' Aaron Bloom assured him, 'and I have taken the liberty of setting up a meeting with Alan's business partner.'

'What for?'

Mr. Bloom looked at him over his glasses. 'You are both major beneficiaries of Alan's estate; the will has to be read.'

Mike sat feeling stupid; that thought hadn't occurred to him.

Technology Today Incorporated, Silicon Valley, September 28th.

Anna phoned Aaron Bloom an hour after Mike had left his office. Aaron was relieved. 'Anna, at last, where have you been? I've been trying to contact you for days.'

'I've been traveling. I made an important stop in London and then flew here. I came here to the office directly from the airport.'

'Well thank goodness you're back; there are a number of things which need your attention. Some papers to sign and some decisions which you need to make. You

will be going to Alan's funeral, and later there is the reading of his will to be attended. Together with his brother you are one of the main beneficiaries.'

'I hadn't got that far in my thinking, I called you to find out about the funeral arrangements.'

'The funeral is tomorrow afternoon at three, at Grace Cathedral. I shall attend as an old friend of the family.'

'Thanks, so I'll see you there. Until we can settle matters legally, can I assume executive responsibility for all Technology Today decisions?'

'Yes, but it should be formally recorded,' Aaron Bloom replied, 'one of the matters requiring your immediate attention is the signing of the necessary papers. They are on your desk. They will need to be properly witnessed.'

'All right, I'll get that done, and I'll clear up the outstanding decisions. I'll have someone hand-carry the signed papers over to your office as soon as possible.'

She put down the phone, and walked over to the large picture window which formed one complete wall of her office. She had not yet considered her position within the company. Aaron Bloom's words, "Together with his brother you are one of the main beneficiaries," effectively meant that someone she knew next to nothing about was going to gain a large share-holding in Technology Today in the immediate future.

What if she didn't like him? What if she couldn't work with him? What if...? What if...?

Impatient with herself for indulging in useless speculation, Anna turned away from the window. 'Think positive,' she said out loud to herself. The first thing to do was to get the papers signed, which gave her executive control. Then she could run the business during the interim period. After the funeral she would meet this brother of Alan's and could assess him. Shortly afterwards Alan's Will would be read and she would be present. She would know the worst then.

Bayswater, September 28th.

Jim lay back in Dawn's big double bed, yawned and thought back over the last couple of days. Dawn had met his changed mood with unrestrained joy. Jim's apology for his earlier attitude, over a candle lit dinner, had led to a better mutual understanding. Promises had been made, and short term plans for the immediate future. Jim had never felt happier. Reluctantly he left the warm hollow made by Dawn's body, got up and checked his bag, carefully packed for a trip of about eight days, then went into the bathroom. A naked and wet Dawn was just stepping out of the shower. Jim wrapped her in a large fluffy bath towel, hot from the heated rail, and handed her a smaller towel to go round her hair. Dawn put it on turban style and gave him a wet kiss of thanks.

Jim showered and shaved whilst Dawn dried and brushed her hair, and then they both dressed. They had managed to book flights within two hours of each other. Dawn drove him to the Kensington office, waited whilst he got his briefing and tickets, and then drove them both out to Heathrow. The traffic out of West London wasn't too bad, and they arrived in good time to park and get to the check-in. As they entered the concourse Dawn's step faltered. Jim looked at her in concern. She had gone quite pale.

'It's all right,' he said, placing a reassuring arm around her shoulders, 'the odds against the same thing happening twice are millions to one.'

'I know, it's silly, but I got cold shivers up my spine when I saw the building.'

'Come on, I'll check you in first, and then me. We'll go through to departures and I can see you off at the very last minute. I'll stay with you until they call your flight.'

Jim loaded the bags on to a convenient trolley. As they walked towards Dawn's check-in desk Jim saw one of the armed police standing looking at them. Jim didn't know him. The guard had an envious look on his face. With a start of surprise Jim realized that his own casual wish of a few weeks ago had come true.

Zurich, September 28th.

Najib Shawa had a corner room in the Hotel Zurich, on the East bank of the Limmat, with views out over the city. He looked down on the fast flowing waters of the Limmat as they left the Zurichsee, waters that would soon join the Rhine and journey to the North Sea. His room had a connecting door to an adjoining room, and he was about to invite a guest. He picked up the phone and dialed for an outside line, then dialed 00 - the Swiss international code; 972 - the Israel National code; 2 - Tel Aviv area code, and an ex-directory number. The ex-directory number belonged to Israeli intelligence and was allocated to Ben Levy's office. The number was answered immediately.

'Bat Yom Import-Export, can I help you?'

'Yes, I'd like to speak to Mister Benjamin please,' Najib Shawa said in his high thin voice.

'Who's calling please?'

'Mister Omar.'

'One moment sir, I'll see if he's in.'

Ben Levy was in and working hard. 'I'm sorry to disturb you,' Rachel said, 'but I've got "Omar" on the line.'

'I'll take the call, put him on.'

'Putting you through now, sir.'

There was a click and Najib Shawa's oily, high-pitched tones came on the line. 'Good morning, my dear friend,' - Ben pulled a face - 'I have some goods for you to look at, excellent quality, I'm sure you will be most happy to purchase them, the price is very cheap.'

'That depends, I may be interested, go on,' Ben growled.

'I've put the details in the post to you, but I expect you'll want to inspect the goods before purchase as usual?'

'Yes, I'll get an inspector to call in.'

'Oh no, these are rather special items, you should see them for yourself.'

'When?'

'The day after tomorrow, if that's convenient?'

'Where?'

'The warehouse details are in the post. I look forward to your visit, my friend, Goodbye.' The phone went dead.

Ben raised his eyebrows. 'Well, well, I wonder what Najib Shawa has for sale?'

San Francisco, September 29th.

Standing in the deep shade outside Grace Cathedral, Anna Sutherland was wearing a smart black designer suit with a white silk blouse and a black silk scarf at the throat. A large black bow held her hair severely back from her face, and a black hat with a shoulder-length veil covered her face. She was there early. As a director of Technology Today she felt it incumbent on her to be there to greet the many employees attending the service. She had declared a day off with pay as a mark of respect, a day of mourning.

As if in a surreal dream Anna went through the greetings and condolences until it was time to go inside and take her place on the front pew. She walked down the centre aisle. At the end of the front pew a man sitting in the first seat stood to let her pass. Anna stopped in shock. Her face, already pale in grief went a shade paler.

It was the man from the plane. He put his hand out to her.

‘Hello I’m Michael Edge, Alan’s brother.’

The organist struck a chord and the service started.

Chapter 12

New York, September 30th.

The OPEC meeting was drawing to a close, much to the relief of the security professionals whose job it had been to keep a watchful eye on the delegates.

Jim Savage was on his way with his delegate to Kennedy International Airport, his last trip on duty. Once on board the private jet the Sheikh would no longer be Jim’s responsibility, but Jim’s competence had not gone unnoticed.

‘Thank you for your efforts on my behalf, Mister Savage,’ the Sheikh said in his Eton English, as he stepped out of the limousine, ‘my secretary will write to thank your company for providing me with such competent staff.’ Smiling he turned and mounted the steps to his private jet as his secretary handed over a thick manila envelope.

With a word of thanks, Jim slipped it into his inside jacket pocket and left the airport in the chauffeur-driven limousine. On the way back he stopped off to hand back his Smith and Wesson, together with its ammunition, to the arms supplier that Andrew Cunningham’s firm used. Riding into the big city, he took the manila envelope from his pocket and slit the top with his thumb. Inside was a wad of hundred-dollar bills. He counted them. One hundred bills - ten thousand dollars. Jim had never had that much money in his hand at one time before, and this was the bonus; he was due wages too. He lay back on the luxurious cushions and began to chuckle, then to laugh. He could cope with Dawn’s wealth now.

Tel Aviv, September 30th.

Ben Levy was not amused when the mail from Mister Omar landed in his tray informing him that the meeting was to be in Zurich. He didn't want to leave Israel at this time, but decided that he must go. He had a hunch that 'Omar' was about to make him an offer he couldn't refuse.

The following day he made a pleasant flight between Ben Gurion and Kloten airports and took a taxi down the N1 autobahn into the centre of Zurich. The taxi dropped him off at the narrow set-down point in front of the Hotel Zurich, and he went into the large square foyer. At the reception desk he presented his reservation slip and was given a registration card to fill in. He made it out to comply with the details on his reservation slip and false passport; it wasn't policy to use his real name on a trip like this. The receptionist retained his passport telling him he could pick it up later, and gave him the plastic card key to his room. He took the lift to the floor indicated on the card-key and stepped out onto the landing. Modern wood paneling in a bright orange-red color covered all the walls. He followed the number signs, found his room and went in. The door had hardly closed behind him when, with a slight click, the connecting door to the next room swung open and Najib Shawa, alias Omar, came through. He held out a limp hand.

'Welcome my dear friend; I'm so glad you could come. I have coffee in my room, please join me.'

Ben ignored the limp hand. 'Give me a few moments to wash and freshen up Najib, and I'll come through.'

Minutes later Ben went through to Najib Shawa's room. It was much larger than his room and had a corner position with views over the Zurichsee stretching away into the distance. Najib offered him a comfortable modern chair, some coffee, and began a long circuitous preamble in the Arab manner, gradually working his way towards the purpose of the meeting. Eventually he came to the point.

'As I'm sure you are aware, I am a person of influence in our movement. It was I who saw the need for a higher profile for our organization. It was I who sought out the contacts with other movements and countries. It is I, who through my contacts am able to provide the all important funds. These facts should be recognized, but...' He paused to mop his face, and then continued, 'that recognition is being given to another.' A look of poisonous spite crossed his features as the floodgates of his envy and his malice opened.

Ben sat quietly, his face impassive but his mind racing. Here was a man whose hatred was blind, a man who could be used.

'Are you claiming the credit for the airport massacre in London and for the recent hijacking, both carried out by the Blood of Shatila?'

A hint of alarm flitted across Najib Shawa's sweating face. 'No, no, of course not, that was the work of the hothead element I oppose.'

'Oh, silly of me, of course you deplore the media coverage and notoriety those brutal actions have given you?'

Najib evaded Ben's acid question. 'I supply the funds, but the funds are being used, against my advice, for purposes which I never intended.'

'No, of course not, you imported terrorist funds from Iran and Libya for the building of hospitals and kindergartens, and some nasty man bought guns and explosives with it while you weren't looking.'

Najib hurried on ignoring Ben's heavy sarcasm. 'It must be stopped, this hothead and his band of thugs must be removed so that I can exert my proper authority - in the political field, you understand.'

'How do you propose to remove them?'

Najib Shawa's face was a study in malevolence. 'All at once; and I want you to provide me with the means.'

San Francisco, September 30th.

Somehow Anna got through the service. The full impact of her loss had finally struck her. Alan was gone. Gone! Forever gone! She would never again see the kind and generous man who had given her the chance to show what she could do. Tears rolled unchecked down Anna's cheeks. But even in her misery she was acutely aware of the man at her side, and surreptitiously looked to her right. His face was set and drawn and he was crying silently. He became aware of Anna's glance and, reaching out, he took her hand. Clinging to this small comfort, they mourned the man they had both loved as a brother.

Eventually the service reached the point of departure to the grave and the mourners stood and followed the coffin outside. In the bright sunlight the flowers glowed and the brass fittings gleamed and the mourners looked drab and sad. The solemn procession reached the Edge family vault and, with due ceremony, Alan Edge was laid to rest with his parents. The service ended and one by one the mourners drifted away.

Mike stayed where he was and Anna stayed with him. Both were saying their final goodbyes, but Mike was also renewing his promises. He vowed he would exact retribution for Alan's death, for all those so brutally butchered in the name of the Blood of Shatila.

After a long painful silence, Anna and Mike turned away from the vault and walked together towards the gates. Mike spoke first. 'We need to talk; I have some explaining to do.'

'Yes,' Anna agreed, 'there are a few questions to which I would like answers.'

'Will you come for a walk with me? I feel the need to walk in the sunshine; we can talk as we go.'

'Yes, today has been a black enough day; some sunshine and fresh air would be welcome.'

Anna took off her hat and veil, and removed the black silk scarf at her throat. They took Anna's car and after a while were at the eastern end of Golden Gate Park. They began to walk west towards the ocean.

Mike reached out and Anna took his hand. It seemed the natural thing to do.

'I'll give you some explanations first,' Mike said, 'and then if you have any questions I'll try to answer them too, okay?'

'Okay.'

Mike took a deep breath. 'First some details about me. I work for the Government, I am a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs, and I am involved in the gathering and analysis of information. I spend a lot of time overseas in and around our embassies and consulates throughout the Arab world.'

Anna nodded her understanding.

'A few days ago, it seems a lifetime ago now, a batch of information was given to me by a colleague from another country. The material originated in a third country, one in which both he and I have a particular interest. The information was of such enormous consequence to us and to all the other western nations that I was asked by my boss to hand-carry it to Washington and to personally give an analysis of its content. I was on my way there when Alan spotted me at the airport.'

'You were not very pleased to see him, as I recall.'

'No, I was using a false passport, traveling as a national of another country.'

'Why?'

'Well, US citizens are not particularly well liked by some of the Muslim nations at the moment, and, as it turned out it was a wise precaution.'

'Yes I do see that,' Anna said, 'is that why you couldn't do anything for Alan?'

'Partly, but no-one could have done anything under those circumstances.'

'I guess you're right,' Anna agreed slowly, remembering the swiftness with which it had happened. They walked a while in silence, each busy with their own thoughts. Anna was first to speak. 'The official at Beirut airport, he was too helpful, who was he?'

'I don't know him personally, but he works for a friend of mine, he was ordered to help you out of there as an inducement to get me to leave immediately.'

'I thought he was too eager to help. You were ordered to continue to Washington there and then?'

'Yes, taken there in fact by military transport.'

Anna was silent for a few moments. 'Well, it must have been important.'

'Yes, it was,' Mike said, and left it at that.

Galata District, Istanbul, October 1st.

Suleiman Yavas, George Liani's helper on the Greek operation, looked at himself in the full-length mirror. Tight white trousers, black silk shirt, white slip-on shoes of the finest calfskin, his gold plated bracelet, watch and medallion gleamed against his tanned skin. He nodded at his reflection, satisfied with his efforts. One smile and the stupid bitch who had allowed herself to become pregnant would be all over him, all over him and ready to believe anything. He picked up his white jacket from the back of the chair and draped it over his shoulders.

Whistling tunelessly he set off to pick the girl up. Fingering the small ring box in his pocket, he strolled through the bustling throng in the Istichal Caddesi towards the northern entrance to the tunnel, one of the oldest subways in the world. The ring in the box looked superb, a diamond of quite respectable size set in gold. The gold was nine carat gold plating and the diamond was cubic zirconium, perfect in every way except for its origins. She would never know.

Taking the subway southbound he emerged in the old port district of Galata, near to the North end of the Galata Koprusu, the bridge across the Golden Horn linking ancient and modern Istanbul. From there it was only a short walk to the girl's home. Setting his features into a smile, he rang the bell, knowing that she would be anxiously waiting for him. His contrite phone call the previous evening had soothed her anger. His glib explanation of his rage, as shocked surprise at her

announcement that she was pregnant, had allayed her fears. His veiled hint that he might accept his responsibilities had raised her hopes. His handsome appearance and smart turnout would do the rest, as it always had in the past. Soon she would be eating out of his hand.

She was waiting for the doorbell to ring. Opening it at once, she flung her arms round his neck and hugged him fiercely, desperate to make up.

He kissed her quickly on the cheek and led her out into the street looking at his watch. 'We must hurry; I've booked a table at the Galata Tower Restaurant for eight.'

The girl's eyes widened in surprise, he had never taken her to such a place before.

On entering the restaurant, they were shown to a table with a superb view. To the West and South were the waters of Haliç, the Golden Horn of antiquity, to the East the Bosphorous, and across its waters, Üsküdar on the shores of Asia.

The setting sun slowly changed the appearance of everything, as the ancient buildings were stained first pink and then mauve by the evening light. As the light faded and the city lights began to twinkle in the darkness, the mystery and the history of this meeting place of East and West pervaded the atmosphere. A more romantic setting than this would be hard to imagine.

Tel Aviv, October 1st.

Ben Levy returned from Zurich in the crisp cool of the morning before the day began to heat up. His car met the plane at Ben Gurion airport and he was whisked away with an escort of his own men. They drove him directly to his office. Before they left the airport perimeter Ben was on the car phone to contact John Henderson.

Mary put him through immediately.

'Hello, John, I've looked at the merchandise our friend has for sale. I think we can do a deal with him. Would you like to come over, and I'll tell you what's on offer.'

'Sure, I'll be as quick as I can.' John finished what he was doing and, with an instruction to Mary to hold the fort, he went to Ben's office. Ben's personal assistant, Rachel, a rather plain girl, a sergeant in the Intelligence branch of the Israeli Army, met him and showed him into Ben's office. It was a large, airy room with a cool marble floor; comfortable bamboo framed furniture, original oil paintings of scenes from Israel on the white walls, and dominated by a huge leather topped desk.

Ben came out from behind it, a serious look on his face. 'Sit down John, sit down, make yourself at home,' he said, waving in the general direction of a large armchair. Rachel, would you organize some coffee for us please, and bring it in yourself.'

Rachel understood. Something very sensitive must be about to be discussed. Closing the door firmly behind her, she went off to make the coffee, leaving the two men to their discussions.

John uncoiled himself into a big comfortable cane armchair, put his feet up on a matching stool and lay back. 'Give me a kick if I nod off,' he said, his sharp inquisitive gaze giving the lie to his words, 'what did you get from your friend?'

'Quite a lot! He wouldn't give names but, he is so consumed with hatred and jealousy for this guy he sees as a usurper of his own position that he will entertain anything to get rid of him and his supporters – even asked me for help in doing it.'

John's eyebrows rose. 'Well, well, prepared to do some dirty work for us, is he?'

Ben nodded, 'Yes, but it would be foolish to rely on him alone, we would need to ensure the success of any such attempt ourselves. They are using the underground car park of that damaged apartment building in Southwest Beirut. Our intelligence was quite accurate on that point. Apparently the place is well guarded and easy to defend, and we couldn't get across that part of the town without a tremendous fight. Pretty near the whole of the male population is armed with Kalashnikovs and anti tank rockets. Any attempt at a direct attack and our targets would be warned off immediately. They'd be away into the warren of Beirut's ruins before we would get anywhere near.' There was a short silence as John digested the information.

Then Ben spoke again. 'Did you get anything from the Athens end?'

'Yeah, I got the name of a police lieutenant who investigated a particularly nasty multiple murder. Seems it was associated with the hijacking. I want to put Mike on the ground in Athens to pick up the trail.'

San Francisco, October 1st.

It was obvious to Aaron Bloom, when Mike and Anna entered his office, that they were already friends; he decided that he approved. 'May keep it all in the family, and that wouldn't be a bad thing,' he thought. He welcomed them both and then sat them immediately opposite himself at the conference table.

'Let me explain how I have arranged matters,' he began, 'you two are the main beneficiaries. There are several small cash bequests and certain gifts to be dealt with, and I propose to deal with those items first. A plain statement that the balance of the estate falls to you two will follow, but without specific details. I shall then ask the other beneficiaries, none of whom are family, if they object to the rest of the will being read in private.'

'Fine by me,' Mike said, and looked at Anna.

'Fine by me too,' she agreed.

'Right, let's get the others in.' He pressed a button on his intercom and spoke to his secretary. A few moments later the door opened and a number of people were ushered in to take their places around the polished rosewood table.

The first bequest was to a local charity for handicapped children and was for one hundred thousand dollars. Mike blinked; Aaron Bloom had said small bequests; this was a large sum of money in Mike's view. He began to wonder what Aaron Bloom considered a large sum.

Alan's housekeeper received another one hundred thousand-dollar bequest, together with life tenure of her apartment in the old Edge family home. There were several smaller bequests, of between fifty thousand and ten thousand-dollars, to employees and to small local charities. Then Mister Bloom made his planned

announcement. There were no objections, and the smaller beneficiaries filed out looking pleased.

Aaron Bloom looked at Mike and Anna over the top of his half-moon spectacles. 'Right, he said, with evident relish, 'now for the meat of the matter. Anna, you have a fair idea as to the company's worth?' Anna inclined her head in assent. 'Mike, you must know that your brother built up a very successful business, but I don't suppose you have any detailed knowledge of his affairs, am I correct?'

'That's correct.'

'Okay, I've had the company's accountant's draw up a balance sheet of the company's assets, together with the figures for the last three years, and from that an estimate of the company's worth as of today's date.' He slid a sheet of paper across the table to each of them. 'For now just look at the bottom line.'

Mike looked. His jaw dropped. The figure was over three hundred and three million dollars.

Anna was quite calmly nodding her head in agreement with the estimate. 'Yes, that's about right,' she said.

Mr. Bloom nodded and went on, 'All of the shares are in private ownership, you, Anna, have ten percent of the share holding. Alan retained ninety percent in his own name. The terms of his will with regard to this share holding are as follows: he has left to you, Anna, thirty-nine percent of the shares in Technology Today Incorporated.'

Anna gasped; as of now she owned forty-nine percent of Technology Today equity, worth over one hundred and forty-eight million dollars.

'To you Mike, as his only blood relation, your brother has left fifty-one percent of the shares in Technology Today Incorporated.'

Mike shook his head in total disbelief. He was now worth over one hundred and fifty four million dollars.

There was absolute silence around the table as the implications sank in. Mike and Anna were shareholders in the company, but Mike had a controlling interest.

'Now, there are some personal bequests, the family house in San Francisco is left to you, Mike, with the proviso that, as previously stated, your brother's housekeeper, retains the use of her apartment in the house for life. You may wish to continue to retain her services?'

Mike nodded silently. He was stunned.

'As for other private property, your brother had an apartment in New York, a house in Aspen, and a cabin in Vermont. These are also left to you, Mike.'

'Now we come to investments.' Mr. Bloom smiled. 'I pride myself that I had some influence here. First, blue chip shares.' He slid another piece of paper across the desk to Mike. He and Anna looked at the list.

'I have put the current values against the numbers of shares owned and then the value of each holding in the right hand column; the total value of the portfolio is in the bottom right hand corner.'

Mike looked. Fifteen million, seven hundred and fifty six thousand, two hundred and one dollars.

'And of course, there is income from the shares too in the form of dividends. The estimated income across the whole portfolio for this year is in the region of 4%,

and then there is growth in the portfolio value of around 10%. Those figures are at the bottom left.'

Mike looked at them; income of over a half million dollars, and growth of the portfolio's value of over one and a half million dollars a year.

'Of course, the income is before tax.' Mr. Bloom pulled a face. 'Next, there is the high risk portfolio.' Another sheet of paper joined the small pile in front of Mike. It was a list of carefully researched and selected new small companies with high potential. Companies in biotechnology, computers, software, TV film production, marketing and so on.

Mike already knew where to look for the figures: just over five million dollars worth of shares in companies growing at about 20% per year and producing an income of 16% per annum.

He was shaking his head in disbelief when Mr. Bloom said, 'Also there is this,' and passed a large strong brown manila envelope across the table.

In his late brother's handwriting, across the front of the envelope, was the instruction: "To be handed personally to my brother, Cdr. Michael Edge, in the event of my death. Open in private."

Tel Aviv, October 1st.

There was a knock at Ben's office door and Rachel came in with the coffee. 'Mmmm, that smells good.' John sniffed appreciatively at the aroma from the cafetière.

Rachel smiled at him. 'Like to hazard a guess as to what it is?'

'No need to guess, that's Jamaica Blue Mountain, my favorite, I'd know it anywhere.'

Rachel shook her head in mock amazement.

Ben laughed. 'His nose is the best sense organ he's got, he can sniff out trouble, information, rats, all sorts of things, isn't that right, John?'

'Sure is, but especially good coffee.'

Rachel left, a smile on her plain face, she had a soft spot for big bluff John Henderson. The two men sipped their coffee. Eventually John spoke. 'We need to do a reconnaissance job on this Blood of Shatila headquarters.'

Ben nodded in agreement, 'Who would do it?'

'Joint effort?' The suggestion hung in the air for a few moments.

Ben shifted uncomfortably in his chair. 'Our involvement in Lebanese affairs over recent years has proved to be an embarrassment. At the moment government policy is to keep out of it.'

'Yeah, I have the same problem,' John admitted. 'State likes matters to be resolved, but without them getting their hands dirty.'

'Terrified of the international press,' Ben said with feeling.

Yeah that leaves the problem back in our laps as usual. I wish Mike was here, I'd like his input on this.'

'Well, he would certainly have the motivation,' Ben remarked.

'To do a recce? No, I want him to start in Athens.'

'Well, to organize it then.'

'Yeah, well, after all the crap he went through on the hijack, and losing his brother and all, I've given him a stretch of leave. He did a good job briefing State in spite of the stress of his brother's murder. He's at home in California at the moment.'

'Well, we need him back. We need to collate what we have with what my contact has given us, and form a working basis for an in-depth reconnaissance to be done in the near future. We could ask Mike to organize the recce. If the recce confirmed what our friend Najib has told us, we could go ahead with a scheme to help Najib become the undisputed leader of the Blood of Shatila movement.'

John nodded slowly, he put his hand up and wiggled his fingers, 'Yeah, it would be great to have our hands up the back of his jacket.'

The image, of Najib Shawa acting like a ventriloquist's dummy, made Ben smile.

Istanbul, October 1st.

A good chilled white Villa Doluca wine was brought to the table and served. A dish of crudities, celery, cauliflower, spring onions and sliced carrots was placed before them, together with marinated olives and pickled sweet peppers. They nibbled at the starters for a few minutes, their differences behind them; the atmosphere becoming more relaxed.

'Now,' Suleiman thought, 'do it now.' He took the boxed ring from his pocket and held it ready. 'Will you marry me?'

'What! What did you say?'

With a theatrical flourish, the young man slid the box across the table.

'I asked if you would marry me.'

'Oh yes, yes, I've wanted that more than anything in the world.'

The pretty, dark-eyed girl looked at him speechless. This was the best moment of her young life. She opened the box and gave a sharp intake of breath. The stone in the ring flashed in the light of the candle on the table. She held out the box and the ring with her right hand, and she held out her left hand, fingers extended.

The young man took the ring from the box, looked into her eyes and slipped the ring onto the third finger of her left hand. In best Hollywood fashion he asked her again, 'Will you marry me?'

'Oh yes, oh yes, I will, I will,' the girl's happiness was complete. For several minutes her attention alternated between her husband to be, and the handsome ring he had given her, but then she suddenly frowned.

'First we must get our parents' permission.'

'Yes, we'll go and see your parents after we have finished our meal.'

'Oh, I think they'll be pleased, they like you, my father is most impressed that you are studying at the Teknik Üniversite, and that your family is established in America.'

'Good, that should make things easier, do we need to tell them about the baby yet?'

'No, not yet, let's get married first and tell them later. There will be much less fuss.'

'Okay, then the sooner the better.'

‘What about your family? They’ve never met me. We can’t get married without them having met me.’

The young man appeared to think hard for a few moments. ‘You could go over and visit them, if you like,’ he suggested.

‘Oh yes, we could,’ the girl said excitedly, ‘it would be a lovely trip, oh yes, let’s do it. Can we, please?’

‘No, no, I can’t - not yet. My finals are in three months. I’ve got masses of work to do. I daren’t take time off and miss lectures now. I’d fail my exams and I wouldn’t get my degree. We could go in three months time when the exams are over, though.’

‘Oh no, I’ll be getting big by then, I couldn’t bear to meet your parents like that.’

‘No one would know; how could they?’

‘Oh yes they would. They would; women look for the signs, especially when the wedding is in a hurry. Your mother and sisters would know immediately.’

‘Well, if you don’t want to go on with it, we’ll call it off. Just live together, if you like.’

‘Oh no, no that’s not what I want. I want to marry you, truly I do.’ There was anguish in her voice.

There was silence for a few moments as the meze was served. Suleiman allowed the silence to grow.

‘Would they make me welcome if I went on my own?’

Suleiman breathed a silent sigh of relief. ‘Yes, of course. They will be delighted to meet you after all that I have told them about you in my letters.’

‘What? I didn’t know you had told them about me, you didn’t say anything to me about writing home about me; you haven’t told them about the baby have you?’ The girl’s words came tumbling out anxiously.

‘No, silly, of course not, I’ve simply told them how lovely you are and how much I care for you. My mother and sisters are dying to meet you. You know how mothers and sisters are about these things.’ The girl nodded, but didn’t look completely convinced.

‘I’ll tell you what we’ll do, we’ll ring my father, before we leave here if you like, then you can say hello to him over the phone, break the ice a little, as it were.’

‘When would I go?’

‘I’ll have to ask my father, but I’m sure he won’t mind if you go right away. He has a big house, there’s always plenty of room.’

They came to the end of the meze. ‘Let’s go and call him now,’ the young man suggested, ‘before the main course arrives, he’ll just be getting ready to go to his office.’

Filled with apprehension and an uneasy excitement, the girl allowed herself to be persuaded. They went to the phones and Suleiman made the call. With a feeling of profound relief, the girl thought his father sounded really nice. He had been surprised and delighted at their news. He had offered to meet her at the airport. He had said she could stay as long as she liked. He and the family would make her most welcome; said she must call him George. Happy and relieved, the young girl chattered away all through the main course, making plans for her trip. ‘I’ll need some new clothes, and a decent suitcase, my old one is a bit decrepit.’

'You can borrow mine, it's a big new one with a trolley handle and wheels; it'll be easier for you to manage in your condition.'

Chapter 13

San Francisco, October 2nd.

Mike Edge looked blankly at Aaron Bloom.

'I don't know what's in the envelope,' Aaron Bloom explained, 'and it's a requirement that I'm not present when you open it. As I have to visit a partner on another matter, please feel free to use this office.'

Mike barely managed to thank Aaron Bloom as he got up to leave; Mike was in a state of shock. He took Anna's hand. 'I had no idea, no idea at all how successful Alan had been.'

'He was a clever man, he was a workaholic and he had a lot of luck early on in his business career,' Anna told him. 'After that the timing was right, and the business just grew and grew.'

'Yeah, then his luck ran out,' Mike said bitterly.

Anna looked at the papers that told the story of Alan's wealth. 'I feel that all this is still his.'

Mike nodded without speaking. For someone to have achieved so much, and then to have been so casually killed, for what was, in effect, a publicity stunt, was a bitter thing to contemplate. 'We can't give it back to him, but I'd spend all of it to get those responsible for his death.'

Anna turned to him, a new look in her eyes. 'That would be fitting. With that amount of money, your contacts, my business connections, anything is possible. And we do owe him.'

Mike sat staring at the manila envelope for several moments, and then taking a paper knife from the desk he opened it. Inside was a single sheet of paper and a small brown envelope. The sheet of paper was a letter of introduction, written in Alan's own hand and on his personal headed paper, to a Swiss bank. It introduced Mike as Alan's brother and heir, and stated that on production of this letter, together with a death certificate, the bank should give into his possession assets currently held by them on Alan's behalf. On the bottom of the page, below Alan's signature, were two signatures over official stamped marks of the bank. One signature was against the title Directeur, and the other against the title Sous Directeur. The stamp was the stamp of Piat et Cie, Geneva.

Mike handed the letter to Anna and opened the second envelope. It contained a single unusual looking key.

Anna read the letter with a puzzled frown. 'Well, Mr. Bloom doesn't want to know about it, you can't really ask anyone else about it, the only thing to do is to go and find out for yourself.'

'For ourselves, we're going to Switzerland.'

New York, October 2nd.

The chauffeur dropped Jim at the hotel to collect his bags and, in a hurry to investigate the contents of his own brown envelope, drove off. Before he did anything else Jim went up to his room, dialed the number, and got through to Dawn's hotel. He gave the room number and asked to speak to Miss Saint Pierre.

Dawn's voice came on the line, 'Jim, oh, at last. I've been waiting and waiting for you to ring. I couldn't get hold of you. I've tried several times, where are you?' Dawn's voice was a mixture of happiness and relief.

'I'm in New York; just finished my first assignment, it was a doddle. Got a pat on the back, brownie points and a thumping great bonus to boot; ain't life grand?'

'Not at this end it's not,' Dawn told him. 'The studio has given my part to some unknown starlet - probably for sleeping with the producer - and my agent over here has managed to screw up the record contract too.'

'Oh sweetheart, that is bad news, can't anything be done to put things right?'

'I don't think so, there may be an outside chance on the record deal in a couple of week's time, but the movie's definitely blown. I'm thoroughly pissed off. I should stay on over here for a while just in case the record thing can be salvaged, although I'm damned if I want to.'

'Sounds to me as though you need a break, how about if I come over to California and join you? We could have a weekend together at least?'

'Oh Jim, yes please, could you? Could you really? That would be marvelous. We could have a week's break here, it's a gorgeous part of the world, we could have a lovely time, and the work can go to hell.'

'I'll be on the first available flight; when I've checked in at Kennedy I'll call and let you know my arrival time.'

'Wonderful, oh you gorgeous man, I'll meet you at the airport,' Dawn's voice became low and husky, 'and I'll be ready for you.'

Dawn could turn Jim on at several thousand miles distance.

Geneva, October 2nd.

Mike and Anna took a taxi from Cointrin Airport and came into Geneva via the Route de Mayrin. The cabby took them down the Rue de la Servette, then along Boulevard James Fazy and crossed the Rhone on its exit from Lac Lemman by the Pont Coulouvreniere. A short run through some side streets brought them to the Rue du Rhone and the doors of Piat et Cie in the old part of the town. It was a deceptively modest building, a building that did not match its long established reputation.

Mike and Anna were directed by a navy blue uniformed security guard through to the entrance foyer where they gave their appointment details to the receptionist. She was expecting them, and opened the armored sliding glass doors to an inner part of the foyer where there was a waiting area. Two more security guards in navy blue uniforms were at a second desk discreetly placed in an alcove. They didn't intrude, nor did they miss much.

After a few moments a man, with an unmistakable air of authority; immaculately dressed in a well-cut grey pinstriped suit, came down two steps from an inner corridor to meet them. He introduced himself as Eric Schiller, Sous

Directeur. His English was faultless, his manners impeccable. He shook their hands and with great courtesy invited them to follow him to a meeting room saying that Director Berques would join them there shortly. They waited, chatting politely about their journey and first impressions of Geneva. In that time Eric Schiller took four calls on the 'phone at the end of the room. He spoke successively in French, German, Italian and Spanish. He was fluent and able to think fast in each language. It was obvious that he was a very busy man.

Then the door opened, and a tall spare man with a hooked Gallic nose and bright black eyes came into the room. He too was wearing a well-cut, pinstripe business suit, but in navy blue. Eric Schiller introduced him as Jean Berques, Directeur, and then invited them to move to the beautifully polished burr walnut conference table, where they sat in comfortable leather chairs. There was a firm knock at the door and a tray with coffee and decanters of water was brought in by one of the staff and placed on the centre of the table.

When she had left, Monsieur Berques said simply, 'Your brother was a very good client of our bank, Mr. Edge. We very much regret his untimely death.'

'Thank you,' Mike replied, 'as you will have realized, it is my brother's death which has brought me here.'

'Indeed, that is why both M'sieur Schiller and I have made ourselves available for this meeting.'

Mike produced the manila envelope, which Mr. Bloom had given him. He took from it the letter and a copy of Alan's death certificate and passed them across the table to Monsieur Berques.

Istanbul, October 2nd.

Now that Suleiman had asked her to marry him, Fatima Kemal was radiantly happy. She had spoken on the telephone to his father in New York, and had been invited over to meet the family, but regrettably Suleiman could not go with her. His finals at the Technikal Institute were the problem, but Suleiman's father had sounded really nice, she mused, and he had said, 'You must call me George. We are so excited at the news.' He had seemed pleased to talk to her, and had promised her a warm welcome on her arrival.

She held Suleiman's hand tightly as they walked into the terminal. He was pulling her suitcase, the one he had promised to loan her. He stayed with her in the check-in queue and lifted her case onto the scales for weighing.

'You mustn't lift this in your condition' he told her for the umpteenth time, 'you must get a porter at the other end,' then pecking her lightly on the cheek, 'can you manage for a moment? I need to pay an urgent visit to the lavatory.'

She smiled and nodded. She had her ticket ready and passed it to the girl on the check-in desk who was asking if she preferred a smoking or non-smoking seat.

'Non-smoking please,' she said, and a moment later was given her boarding card.

Fatima nodded and thanked her, and went in search of her beloved Suleiman. He wasn't anywhere to be seen. Fatima moved over to a seat where she would have a good view of the check-in area and sat down to wait for him. He was gone a very long time. She tried to read her magazine, but was fearful of missing him. Where

could he be? Was he all right? She began to worry seriously. For the hundredth time she looked at her watch, her flight would be called in a few more minutes. Just as she was thinking of having him paged she saw him come out of one of the toilets. He looked pale and strained. She rushed over to him, full of concern. Suleiman, oh my darling, are you all right?’

‘Oh, yes, well... er - not quite,’ he muttered.

‘Whatever’s the matter?’

‘Well, I’ve got dreadful diarrhea; it must be something I ate.’

‘Oh, dear! I can’t leave you like this!’

‘Don’t be stupid,’ he snapped tensely; and then more softly, ‘I’ll be okay. I’ll call at the University Medical Centre on my way back.’

Fatima was about to protest when the chimes sounded and her flight was announced. She hadn’t even got to the departure gate yet; she felt panic start to rise inside.

‘Come on, no time to waste. Have you got your passport ready?’

‘Yes, here with my boarding card.’

‘Good girl, quickly, give me a kiss. I’ll ring you this evening when you’re with my family.’ A last lingering kiss, and before she knew what was happening she was going through passport control. She was cleared through by the official checking passports, and turned to wave to Suleiman. He wasn’t there.

Los Angeles, October 2nd.

At the airport Dawn came hurtling through the slow moving passengers, causing heads to turn and clung to Jim with a hunger that was apparent to everyone. Jim shouldered his suit carrier and flight bag and, arm in arm; they left for Dawn’s hotel suite.

‘Boy oh boy, am I ready for you?’ Dawn whispered as they left the arrivals hall.

Jim laughed. ‘You come right to the point, don’t you?’

Dawn gave him a wicked smile in return. ‘Save your breath for when we get to the hotel.’

‘Yeah, well, there’s something I have to do when we get there.’

‘What, something more important than me?’ Dawn put on her famous sulky look.

‘Sweetheart, I have to ’phone the office and tell them where they can contact me.’

‘What! But you’re on leave, tell them to get stuffed.’

‘I can’t, it’s a condition of my employment with this firm. The work is not nine to five. I have to be available at any time.’

‘Rubbish, you don’t have to work for anybody on those terms, I earn enough...’

‘Dawn, I won’t be kept by you. If we are going to be together I am going to pay my way.’

‘But...’

‘No buts. I intend to keep this job. It’s the best job I’ve ever had. I’m not going to blow it in the first few weeks, not even for you.’

Jim had a truculent look. Dawn realized that if she continued she would cause a row. She gave way gracefully.

‘Well, I suppose they won’t call you unless it’s an emergency, so let’s not fight about it. My panties are in my handbag.’

Geneva, October 2nd.

Monsieur Berques took the proffered papers and scrutinized the letter very carefully. Without comment he passed it to Eric Schiller. He too looked very closely at it while Jean Berques read the death certificate. When he had finished he looked at Eric Schiller with an enquiring look. Eric Schiller nodded and Jean Berques nodded his assent too. Eric Schiller reached for the phone and spoke rapidly in French, the language of Vaud cantonment.

A few moments later the same member of staff who had brought the coffee knocked and entered again, this time carrying another manila envelope. Jean Berques handed it to Mike. ‘Please open this now in our presence,’ he said.

Mike did so. He extracted a substantial sheaf of documents. The first documents on the pile were tied with ribbon. Mike looked at Jean Berques, who came to his assistance.

‘It may be easier if I talk you through the contents; the first document is your brother’s offshore will, and it gives you clear title to all his assets outside the United States, all of which are controlled by this Bank. I recommend that you make an offshore will immediately yourself to protect your assets for posterity. Should anything happen to you without an offshore will in existence, your offshore assets would remain inaccessible in perpetuity - not a suitable state of affairs, as I’m sure you would agree?’

Mike nodded his agreement.

‘The second document is a Power of Attorney giving us the power to act on your late brother’s behalf. It will be necessary for you to sign a new one, before a public notary, if you wish us to act for you as we have acted in the past for your brother. The third document gives details of your brother’s numbered account with us. It will be known only to you and to senior executives of this bank. The law on discretion is very strict in Switzerland. The fourth document is a registration of deposit box numbers. The fifth document lists investments and assets. Everything is up-to-date as of yesterday’s date, and all taxes due have been paid.’

Mike put the offshore will and the Power of Attorney to one side. He looked at the statement of account. There were deposits held in US dollars, Swiss francs and English pounds. More than two million dollars, over two million Swiss Francs, and just over one million pounds Sterling.

Mike passed it to Anna. He looked at the list of assets. It was mostly a list of holdings in offshore managed funds. All the funds were with big, well known international financial institutions, which had a very wide range of investments. The portfolio value stood at over one hundred million Swiss Francs.

Eric Schiller spoke into the silence. ‘The management of these investments is my responsibility, I switch holdings within the investment companies “in house” funds according to the performance of their respective sectors. That way no units are sold and no bid-offer-spread percentages have to be paid. The investments have maximum flexibility and only a switching discount is payable.’

All Eric Schiller had to do was monitor the performance of each sector, USA, Far East, Japan, UK equities, commodity and energy, property, bonds and so on. He would issue a switching instruction to a given fund manager in a given sector if that sector started to slow down. The units in that fund would be switched to a more buoyant sector that was picking up. The swings by sector were much less violent than swings in individual share-holdings, and therefore posed less risk.

‘What happens if the world’s stock markets go into a nose dive?’ Mike asked.

‘All the investment companies we use have a gold fund. If shares start to drop in a world recession, or even in a national recession, we switch into the in-house gold funds. Gold usually increases in value when equities go down.’

Mike was impressed. ‘This arrangement is a credit to you, M’sieur Schiller, and the facility a credit to your bank.’

‘Thank you.’

Jean Berques spoke again. ‘We have provision for an offshore will to be drawn up ready for your signature if you so wish it. Also a Power of Attorney is ready at the Notary’s office nearby. Both of these documents are independent legal documents and you may allocate them as you wish. We of course hope that you will keep your business with us, and give your Power of Attorney to us, as your brother did.’

‘I have no reason to change these excellent arrangements, and I am more than satisfied with your professional services,’ Mike said.

Jean Berques inclined his head in thanks. ‘Very well, it only remains for you to inspect the deposit boxes. Would you care to do so now?’

‘Yes, now would be very convenient.’

Iceland, October 2nd.

The Turkish Airlines 747 took off on its great circle flight northwards over Europe, curving out northwest and gaining altitude, to cross high over Iceland towards southern Greenland. In the hold the lead-acid time pencil detonator hidden in Fatima’s bag of cosmetic pencils went off. The detonator flashed into the primer hidden in a make-up pot, and that detonated the sheets of Semtex taped to the inside of the suitcase under the lining. A massive explosion ripped through the aircraft severing some of the controls to the tail-plane, and blowing a gaping hole through the fuselage.

Part of the blast went upwards, ripping through the cabin floor and killing three passengers outright. Massive de-compression occurred; four passengers were sucked out into empty space. Oxygen masks dropped down in front of the passengers, who were gasping for breath. The pilot fought to control his stricken aircraft using every trick his years at the job had taught him. But the damage was too great. He succeeded in wrestling the wounded plane down into denser air. Using the massive engines, he managed to maintain airspeed and some degree of directional control but, with the damage to the control lines and the drag of the gaping hole in the fuselage, the aircraft was too sluggish. The co-pilot was sending out a Mayday to the aircraft ground control at Reykjavik. Ground control at Reykjavik went to emergency status immediately and cleared the airport of all traffic. Then they tried to talk the stricken aircraft in.

Turning to make an emergency approach, the pilot was over unfamiliar territory. He saw the looming hillside in what would normally have been plenty of time. The mortally wounded aircraft would not respond. At over two hundred miles per hour the massive aircraft slammed into a sheer wall of rock. Both pilots had their eyes open all the way in.

A massive explosion occurred as oxygen tanks and fuel tanks ruptured and ignited. The fireball fell to the base of the rock wall, burning the few survivors of the impact to charred remains, including Fatima Kemal and her newly conceived child.

Geneva, October 2nd.

Jean Berques nodded. 'Please follow me.' They went further into the interior of the bank and stopped at an elevator. Eric Schiller used a plastic card key and a keypad combination number to open it. They entered and were taken down to the vaults. Security guards checked them through two sets of doors. Eric Schiller opened a steel vault door into a room lined with deposit boxes. He took a key on a long chain from his pocket and inserted it in one of the locks, then looked at Mike. Mike used the key from the small envelope and together they opened the locks. Eric Schiller pointed to a table in a cubicle at the end of the room.

'You may wish to use that facility. M'sieur Berques and I will wait until you're finished.'

Mike opened the hinged door and drew out the lower of the four drawers. It was surprisingly heavy. He staggered slightly as the unexpected weight caught him unawares. He carried the steel drawer over to the alcove. Stacked inside the drawer were numbered deposit boxes. Mike selected one at random and opened it. A folded square of black velvet lay on the top. Mike lifted it out and put it on the table. Underneath were four black velvet bags. Mike picked up one, released the bow and opened the neck. He looked inside and let out a gasp.

'What is it?' Anna asked her eyes bright with curiosity. Mike didn't reply; he tipped its contents onto the square of velvet. A glittering cascade of cut diamonds lay flashing white fire under the light of the overhead lamp. All were of gem quality.

Anna gasped. 'Good God, those are worth a fortune. What's in the other bags?'

They looked. Flawless emeralds in one, the finest blue Ceylon sapphires in another, perfect Burmese rubies in the third. Mike took a sapphire from the bag and examined it. It was trap cut, of a fine blue color and about three carats.

'Let's see what else there is in there.'

The individual box contents were astounding. One was full of Krugerrands, another of gold sovereigns, a third full of small white gold ingots, all three boxes full, and all the contents 22-carat gold. A fourth was full of platinum ingots.

Mike shook his head in disbelief. 'No wonder the drawer was so heavy.'

'Well, none of this is ornamental in the sense that it's made into jewelry,' Anna observed, 'it must be purely for investment purposes.'

'Yes.' The point hadn't occurred to Mike, but Anna was obviously right. 'But however did he manage to squirrel all this away?'

‘Well, he manufactured and sold computer components abroad. Some contracts must have been through offshore companies, and the proceeds would have come into this bank,’ Anna mused. ‘An insurance against any future problems I suppose. If Technology Today were ever squeezed out of a very competitive market he would still be fabulously rich in an international sense. He could retire here and live like a king. He loved this country as much as home.’

‘Mmmm, I guess you’re right, and if Alan set it up it would be done properly. Well, I suppose we should check the other three drawers.’

The top drawer was full with bundles of one hundred dollar bills.

The second drawer was full of Swiss francs.

The third drawer contained bundles of high denomination bearer bonds.

There was a long silence as Mike and Anna digested the implications of all this wealth. Eventually Mike broke the silence. ‘Well I guess we shouldn’t keep those two gentlemen waiting, we’d better pack this lot away and lock it up again.’

Anna helped to stow the gems and precious metals back into the deposit boxes and Mike hefted the drawers back into place.

Jean Berques and Eric Schiller were waiting patiently outside. When Anna came out Eric went in to Mike to lock the deposit box door with their keys.

After they had done so Jean Berques looked at his watch and said, ‘I imagine that as you have been traveling you are hungry. If your schedule allows and if you will permit, we would like to offer you the opportunity to use our facilities to freshen up, and then take you for lunch in our favorite restaurant. It’s only a few steps from here, and the notary’s office is on the way. M’sieur Schiller could take you in and the papers could be completed, signed and properly witnessed in a few moments if you are agreeable.’

‘I am agreeable,’ Mike said immediately. Such an arrangement would keep the whole of this fabulous offshore fortune in the secure and competent hands of Banque Piat et Cie, in his name, and safe for the future. ‘And thanks for the chance to freshen up and the offer of some food, we sure need it.’

Jean Berques took Anna on to the restaurant whilst Eric Schiller took Mike to the Notary’s office. Twenty minutes later they joined Anna and Jean Berques at the restaurant. It was an excellent meal, fresh grilled lake trout, served with a delicate white wine sauce, together with fresh vegetables, and that Swiss specialty rosti potato. The food, the local wine and the service fully justified Jean Berques recommendation.

As they ate Mike absorbed the fact that he now had an offshore fortune to go with his onshore one. But the offshore fortune was untraceable.

Chapter 14

Montreux, October 3rd.

The view from Mike and Anna’s adjoining suites in the Hyatt Continental in Montreux was staggering. Across the stillness of the lake and commanding instant attention rose the Savoy Alps. Their roots in the water’s edge they went up and up,

towering into the sky, massive and silent. Capped in glittering white, and incredibly beautiful, this massif contained the highest mountain in Europe and provided one of Europe's most magnificent views.

Anna stretched luxuriously in the king-size double bed, and then sat up at a discreet tap at the connecting door. Mike stuck his head round the door. 'Room service is here with breakfast.'

Anna groaned, 'Whose bright idea was it to breakfast on the balcony?'

'Yours, you booked it last night as soon as you saw the view.' Mike threw her a bathrobe and went to the door. 'On the balcony please,' he told the waiter. The young man nodded and pushed the large drop-leafed room-service trolley through to the balcony. He lifted the drop leaves into place making a round table. Laid with a thick white linen tablecloth, the table was loaded with covered silver dishes.

Anna lifted covers to see what was there; crisp streaky bacon, scrambled eggs and tiny plump sausages in one dish. Hot toast, hot rolls and croissants wrapped in linen napkins in another, with butter in a dish of ice and a selection of marmalades and conserves in tiny pots together with a selection of Swiss cheese, ham and salami, and a magnificent bowl of fruit. Freshly squeezed orange juice, freshly made tea and a cafetière of coffee completed the breakfast offering.

Anna sat with Mike on the balcony as the waiter left and they breakfasted in the morning silence, enjoying the warmth of the sun.

Anna curled up in her chair in a thick toweling bathrobe. 'Oh, this is heavenly,' she said with feeling, looking out over the tranquil lake.

Mike nodded his agreement. 'The company is good too.'

Anna smiled, 'D'accord – as we're in Vaud. What shall we do today?'

'I'd like to go for a leisurely stroll along the lake shore and think about being a multi-millionaire.'

'Okay... I know, let's walk to Chillon Castle; it was made famous by Lord Byron in his poem "The Prisoner of Chillon". Apparently it's perfectly preserved. The roof is intact, lots of the original furniture and weapons are still there and there is a locks museum.'

They finished their leisurely breakfast, and then Mike went back through to his suite, showered, shaved and dressed while Anna got ready.

As he waited for her to finish, Mike fiddled with the TV control. The voice of the TV announcer was part way through a news bulletin. '...group known as the Blood of Shatila has claimed responsibility for the disaster.'

'The Blood of Shatila'. The words seared inside Mike's skull, the group that killed Alan. Then came images of the wreckage, the fire-blackened bodies, the bits and pieces of people and their pathetic belongings strewn over the harsh Icelandic landscape. The terrible scenes etched into Mike's brain, his heart was pounding, his breathing rapid. 'An eye for an eye!' That was all they understood! It was time to go back!

Anna saw it begin in the setting of the muscles of his face. Watching his expression from across the room, she knew that Mike would have no real peace of mind until he had avenged his brother's death. She arrived at a decision. Mike would need help to come through what lay ahead. And if he didn't come through Anna didn't want to come through either.

Mike reached for the phone and began to dial John Henderson's office in Tel Aviv.

Mary answered the call. 'Mike, are you recovered after your ordeal?'
'I need to speak to John, it's urgent.'

The terseness of Mike's reply cut Mary short. 'I'll put you through.'

John Henderson came on the line. 'Mike, where are you?'

'I'm in Montreux; I've been in Geneva on business concerned with my brother's estate. I want to get back to work.' There was a slight pause. 'I've just been watching the news.'

'Ah, yes, Iceland; the Blood of Shatila again. Well, I want you to pick up their trail, but first you need to come here to meet with Ben and me.'

'Right, I'm on my way.' Mike hung up as John's goodbye came over the line. 'I have to go back to work,' he said, expecting protest.

'Yes, I know.' Anna surprised him. 'But I'm coming too.'

Mike opened his mouth to object.

Anna beat him to it. 'I won't get in the way.'

'It will be dangerous.'

'I know.'

'I don't want you involved.'

'I am involved; Alan was my partner and my friend.'

'I couldn't bear to see you harmed.'

'I'd go crazy with worry.'

They looked at each other. Anna was not prepared to give way and Mike did not want to.

Deadlock.

'You can help me best by looking after Technology Today. I have responsibilities there that I can't honor at present and you know what needs to be done there much better than I do. If you handle that, for us both, it'll take a lot of weight off my mind; make it easier for me to do what I have to do.'

Anna could not fault his argument. She wavered.

'When will I see you again?'

'Soon, just as soon as I can make it.'

'You'll keep in touch?'

'As many times a day as you want.'

Anna began to think about Technology To-day, she had an even bigger stake in it now, there were things to attend to and these thoughts tipped the balance. 'Well, let's start packing.'

Istanbul, October 3rd.

In the Galata district of Istanbul two men sat in front of a television set sipping cola and watching the news program. Suddenly there it was, the item they had been waiting for, a Turkish Airlines jumbo jet with a full load of passengers had crashed into an Icelandic mountainside. There were no survivors. An estimated two hundred and eighty people were dead.

George Liani clapped Suleiman, his helper, on the shoulder, 'Well done. A perfect result, now let's walk across to my place and I'll give you the money. We can stop for something to eat at the other end of the Galata Bridge.'

Suleiman, happy in the belief that his action had wiped out his lapse of security in getting involved with that stupid cow of a girl, eagerly agreed.

Halfway across the Galata Bridge George Liani broke his stride, and stepped behind Suleiman. He slid a needle sharp stiletto from a sheath sewn inside his jacket, clamped an iron hand over Suleiman's mouth and rammed the blade up through the slatted ribs of the young man's back and into his heart. Suleiman made only a short muffled grunt of surprise.

Jamming the mortally wounded young man against one of the bridge pillars, George Liani rapidly searched his pockets for anything that might identify him. He had taken his wallet, keys and a pocket diary when a car, headlights on, drove onto the far end of the bridge. Quickly patting the remaining pockets and not feeling anything, he tipped the dying man over the rail. Suleiman was dead before he hit the inky black waters of the Golden Horn.

George Liani took a Kleenex from his pocket and, turning his back to the approaching car, wiped the stiletto blade carefully and threw the tissue over the rail after his former colleague.

He smiled; any connections between him, the plane, the girl, the bomb and Suleiman were now severed.

Beirut, October 3rd.

In the concrete basement room in Southwest Beirut, a group of men were gathered around a portable radio tuned to the BBC Foreign Service. They too heard the news of the air disaster, and hailed it as a great victory. Abu Asifah telephoned Reuters. The Blood of Shatila movement claimed the responsibility. It was theirs to claim - they had ordered and paid for it.

There was however a dissenting voice. 'Nothing has changed, our cause is no further forward, and we have spent fortunes all to no avail.' The challenge came from Najib Shawa, and the words were hissed out into an icy silence where they hung uncomfortably in the air. There was a growl of disagreement from those assembled, they had been riding high on the wave of their publicity; to have their lack of forward planning pointed out to them was not a comfortable thing.

The accusation was leveled at Abu Asifah, who seemed to be casting his mind around seeking a reply. Before he could utter a response his accuser went into the attack again.

'Nothing has been done to prepare our next strike. The momentum is being lost, soon we will no longer be news, and the attention of the media and of the world will be distracted by other events. Are we to be men of yesterday?'

Feet shuffled, a throat nervously cleared. All eyes turned towards Abu Asifah. Standing up, he surveyed the assembly with his customary arrogance.

'Another blow is being prepared, the Blood of Shatila will strike again,' he shouted at Najib Shawa, but he was bluffing. He had nothing under development, no attack, no plan, but could not afford to admit it.

‘Really? And where will you strike this time? The Israelis are not moved by attacks on gentiles,’ Najib sneered.

‘We shall strike in the very heart of Israel.’ Abu Asifah said it for effect, and knew immediately that he had captured the initiative back from Najib Shawa. ‘We shall carry the war, into the very centre of the nation that has usurped our lands,’ he continued stridently, his voice rising as he warmed to his new idea. This was what the assembly wanted to hear, and a roar of approval, a roar such as he was used to, came from the throats of the terrorists gathered there.

‘I am preparing a press conference, the world shall be warned, and the nations of the West shall be made aware of the consequences of their inaction. We shall escalate the attacks upon the unbeliever nations until they are forced to accede to our demands. Our strike at the heart of Israel shall fill them with fear and trembling!’

Najib Shawa sat back into the shadows, a sly smile playing around his lips. Abu Asifah was now committed to a very dangerous path. It was inevitable that such momentous news, news of a strike at the heart of Israel, should leak out.

And Najib Shawa had his own agenda.

Tel Aviv, October 4th.

Mike phoned ahead for his special taxi to meet him at Ben Gurion airport and take him to the DIA office, arriving just after Ben Levy. The three men wasted no time and started the meeting immediately. John took the chair. ‘Ben and I have discussed these matters at length. Let me tell it how we see it. Okay?’

Mike nodded his assent.

‘Right, what we have is a Palestinian splinter group. We think it’s close to Hezbollah and has links with Islamic Jihad. An extremist group similar to the Baghdad based group set up by Abu Nidal in the seventies. They’ve claimed responsibility for three major attacks on soft targets, the attack on the airport in London, the Olympic Airlines hijack and the more recent blowing up of the 747 over Iceland. We have no reason to suppose this will be their last operation, and the consensus is that they will continue.’

Mike interrupted. ‘I want the hijackers, are you guys certain they are the same people?’

‘Yes and the brains behind the attacks are the same that’s for sure. We think confirmation of that can be found in Athens, okay?’

Mike nodded.

‘Ben?’

‘Right so far.’

‘Okay, the group has a leader who styles himself “Abu Asifah”, which translates as “Father of Storms”, an emotive name and one which commands a following, especially amongst the younger elements. He however did not form the splinter group. That doubtful honor belongs to one Najib Shawa, a man with whom Ben has contact. There is a very great deal of animosity between these two men, particularly on Shawa’s side. So, we have a split within the group, a potential weakness that may be exploited. Abu Asifah can’t take over total control of the

group because Najib Shawa is the one with the connections to Hezbollah and the terrorist funding. Without funds Abu Asifah would not last long.

Najib Shawa sees Abu Asifah as the usurper of his position as leader within the organization and wants to eliminate him but doesn't have the means. He wants to be rid of Abu Asifah and his bully boys. He's told Ben that he wants help to achieve this, and may even be prepared to get his hands dirty. I don't have much faith in him - neither does Ben. Our inclination is to have the right people in place in order to force him to go through with what he wants to achieve.'

'Maybe even do it for him,' Ben commented.

'Perhaps. To get those sort of people in place will not be easy, but Najib Shawa has given Ben some information about the group's headquarters, which makes us think that there, may be a way in. Before we commit ourselves, it would be prudent to do a reconnaissance to verify what friend Shawa has told us.'

John paused for a moment to give Mike and Ben time to comment.

Ben cleared his throat a couple of times. 'There's something else. The problem for both our Governments, yours and mine, is that the issue of direct involvement in the affairs of Palestinians on Lebanese soil is very sensitive. No one in authority would give permission for such an operation to take place at this time.'

A long silence followed Ben's statement.

John and Ben watched Mike as he considered all that he had been told.

'What you are telling me is that we have an opportunity to knock out this gang of thugs but we won't be allowed to do it?'

'Yes.'

'Right. I'll resign and pick a team to take these assholes out. I owe it to my brother.'

John shook his head. 'First we have to make sure that they are the same assholes. Ben and I both want a reconnaissance of the headquarters we're told they're using. Once that is under way we want you to pick up the trail in Athens where the hijacking was set up. Find out if these are the same guys. Then when we are sure of our ground we hit them.'

Ben nodded, his face grim, 'Hard,' was all he said.

Istanbul, October 4th.

The first rays of dawn were striking the tips of the highest minarets, and across the fast flowing dark waters of the Bosphorus the Muezzin's call to prayer drifted faintly on the still morning air. In the half-light, a small group of fishing boats headed back towards the entrance of this unique waterway from their fishing grounds in the Sea of Marmara. Each boat trailed commercial lines in the hope of hooking a few fish. Their catch had not been good on this trip. The fish restaurants of Tarabya would have restricted menus this evening if nothing took the bait on their way home.

Suddenly one of the fishermen gave a yell. A jerk and a powerful drag on his line indicated a big fish. The man at the helm cut the throttle in response to his call, and the man on the line made ready to play the fish. Perhaps, he thought, it was a swordfish or a blue fish; a big one of either would make a difference to their night's earnings. He felt the line, waiting for the fish to make the next move. Nothing

happened, the line had gone dead, and it was snagged into something. Cursing his luck, the fisherman pulled in his line to salvage his gear. He saw no point in losing tackle, especially when they'd caught no fish. It was a heavy weight on his line, something big dragging in the three knot current. With much swearing and the help of another of the fishermen, the line was hauled in.

Face down in the water, arms and legs splayed out, the body of the young man who had been George Liani's helper bumped into the side of the boat. There was consternation at first, and then an argument developed. Some of the crew wanted to cut the corpse free and pretend they hadn't seen it, but two more boats came over to see what the fuss was about, and that tipped the balance. Now that there were witnesses there would be talk in the cafes and there could be repercussions. The skipper had a responsibility to take it in and notify the authorities.

The body of the young man was unceremoniously hauled from the water and dumped on the deck. During the remainder of the trip back to harbor the gold plated chain, bracelet and watch, which had meant so much to the young man in life, disappeared. There was no wallet or money, nothing else of value to be taken only a lapsed membership card to Galatasaray football club. They didn't find that as it was in a small inside pocket of the jacket. The card carried a photograph and a membership number. The heat sealed plastic covering was intact, and no water had got in. The body had been in the water only a few hours. Tumbling through the air in its fall from the Galata Bridge the body, relaxed in death, had struck the water flat. Air had been trapped in the clothing, giving initial buoyancy, keeping it on the surface.

The waters of the Golden Horn had carried it out to join the fast flowing waters of the Bosphorus. The waters of the Bosphorus flow with such force in the centre that back eddy currents form along the banks. Aided by a stiff wind from the southeast, the young man's body had got caught up in a series of back eddies, and had made only slow progress through the hours of darkness. By morning it had just cleared the entrance to the waterway, and was at a point where smaller vessels would converge in order to leave the centre of the waterway clear for bigger ships.

If the wind had been from a different direction the mighty Bosphorus current would have carried the corpse out into the open waters of the Sea of Marmara. If the fishermen had had a good catch, no lines would have been out and the body would not have snagged in them. A series of unforeseeable circumstances had conspired to frustrate George Liani's disposal plan.

The body was handed over to the police at the quayside. Statements were made and signed and photographs were taken before the body was removed to the morgue for a post-mortem and forensic work. In due course quite a considerable amount of information was obtained. As the body had not been long in the water it was possible to gently dry the skin of the hands, using a hair dryer, and to photograph the fingerprints taken when the skin had dried out. The dental record was noted, and the Galatasaray football club visited in order to check the name and address listed against the membership card number.

The post-mortem showed the cause of death to be an expertly delivered stab wound, from an unusual three point star shaped blade, up through the rear ribs and into the heart. Very little water was present in the lungs, and death was

stated to have occurred before the body entered the water. Nothing of any value was found on the body, and so robbery was inferred as the motive, the fingerprints were put on file and the case joined the pile of other criminal investigations awaiting attention.

Beirut, October 4th.

Abu Asifah sat down amid his chanting supporters, an aloof expression on his face. Behind it his brain was racing, how could he deliver? The course of action, to which he had just committed himself and his followers, would be very difficult to achieve. Security within Israel was very tight. The population was used to a state of continuous conflict, everyone was alert and the whole nation did their stint at military training. A significant strike against a worthwhile target inside Israel was a very different prospect to the relatively soft targets that had previously been attacked. Sudden realization and relief flooded through him. He had said that he would hold a press conference. This would give him high exposure, his face would be known. So well known, in fact, that he couldn't possibly go on the mission himself. That would prejudice it completely. He had found an unanswerable argument. Someone else would have to do the dirty work. He would merely have to find a way to take the credit for himself.

Immediately the Turkish dissident, the fanatical Muslim fundamentalist came to mind. He was clever, he was resourceful and he was available provided the price was right. Abu Asifah smiled, more a baring of the teeth, he would spend some more of Najib Shawa's funds, use them to throw the lie back into his fat oily face. He would give the Turkish brother definitive instructions. The blow would be massive, it would be spectacular, and would change everything.

Tel Aviv, October 4th.

During the drive back to his apartment Mike wrestled with the problem of doing a reconnaissance of the Blood of Shatila HQ. It wasn't going to be an easy task, he would need expert help, and he wasn't going to get Israeli or American personnel, John and Ben had made that quite clear. At the back of his mind was a name, he had met someone recently, who the hell was it? Where had he met him? It was someone connected to recent events concerning this terrorist group, someone with a perfect background in reconnaissance. There was a name on the tip of his tongue. He looked out of the taxi window. Suddenly he had it, the guy he had interviewed in London, Jim something? Jim, Jim Savage that was the guys' name, ex SBS. How could he get in contact with him? Mike thought hard. He had given the guy Andrew Cunningham's 'phone number and told him to ring him about a job. Maybe the guy had taken his suggestion seriously; maybe, maybe not. It was a long shot, but worth a try. He used his mobile 'phone. Moments later the satellite link was made and Andy Cunningham was on the line.

'Mike, how are you? Are you in London?'

'No, Tel Aviv.'

'That's a pity. I owe you a drink; the guy you sent along for an interview, Jim Savage, turned out to be an old acquaintance.'

'Ah ha, so he made contact, did he?'

'He sure did, and came through with colors flying.'

'I didn't realize you knew him.'

'No, neither did he until he rang me. But then Special Forces is a small world.'

'Well he's why I'm ringing. I'm interested in hiring his services for a tricky job. Could that be arranged?'

'No problem, might even be able to give you a discount as you introduced him to us,' Andrew said with a chuckle.

'Okay; I won't go into details over the phone. I'd prefer to talk to him before we make any firm commitment; the job is dangerous.'

'Well, he's in California at the moment; he's just finished his first job for us. Did very well too, I've had a letter of thanks for his services. He's taken a few days off to spend with his girlfriend in L.A. but I can contact him. Do you want him to come to Israel?'

Mike thought quickly. 'No, I have to go back to San Francisco; perhaps he could come up there. If he can make it ask him to go to the offices of Technology Today, in Santa Clara, and ask for me. Make it for the day after tomorrow, around midday, and I'll be expecting him.'

'Okay, I'll ring him and arrange it; talk to you soon, 'bye.'

Mike cleared the phone with a satisfied smile and speed dialed Anna's number. Things were beginning to fall into place.

Beirut, October 5th.

Drawing himself up to his full height, Abu Asifah faced the battery of flashguns and cameras aimed at him by the carefully selected representatives of the world's press. It had been difficult to secretly organize, but it had been worth the effort. Through these eyes and ears he could speak to the world, the attention he found so enjoyable was being focused upon him directly. In loud ringing tones he began his carefully prepared harangue.

'The nations of the West have failed to take seriously the demands of the people of Palestine and the Blood of Shatila movement.'

'For more than fifty years we have been dispossessed of our lands, and evicted from our homes without redress.'

'Lands and homes we had occupied for centuries have been taken from us and the West has ignored our plight.'

'You ignore us at your peril! We repeat, for the benefit of the world, our demands.'

He paused for effect, and then continued,

'We demand that Israel return the West Bank and Jerusalem to the Palestinian Nation.'

'We demand the creation of a Palestinian state.'

'Israel must recognize the Palestinian Nation, its people, its territory and its right to exist as a separate state.'

'If these demands are not met we shall strike again, this time our aim shall be more direct.'

A clamor of questions came from the assembled reporters. Abu Asifah ignored them all, raising a clenched fist he shouted the war cry of Muslims down the centuries, '**Allah Akbar**,' then strode from the room.

It was dramatic and it made good press.

It caused Ben Levy some disquiet; he decided to watch Najib Shawa even more closely.

Pictures of Abu Asifah's stern features, fist raised, made many of the world's TV news programs, and, much to his satisfaction, the world's newspapers, as he looked at them a day later.

'I shall need more funds,' he told Najib Shawa in a private meeting called for that purpose. 'I can't lead this operation myself; the exposure to the Press has made my face too well known. I cannot risk the success of a mission inside Israel and compromise it at the outset by insisting on going myself.'

Najib Shawa nodded his understanding, and his understanding was greater than Abu Asifah realized.

Najib Shawa knew he had been out-maneuvered and he saw clearly how it had been done. He gave nothing away, but played the part of a controller of funds to a tee. 'What are the funds to be used for? How much will you require? Will they be used to good effect?' he asked anxiously.

Abu Asifah looked at him patronizingly. This groveling little man, how could he be a threat to a warrior such as himself? 'I shall employ a trusted brother to carry out the strike, he is competent and has served us well before. We will make the front-page headlines of the world's newspapers. I shall need three million US Dollars.'

Najib Shawa gasped, as he knew that would be expected, meanwhile his avaricious brain was working overtime. He would ask for four millions and then a million could go to his Swiss account. He shook his head dubiously.

'I don't know if I can raise three million dollars,' he said, 'it's a large sum of money.'

After Najib Shawa had gone, Abu Asifah rubbed his hands together. He thought he had managed Najib Shawa well. Now he must contact the Turkish Brother.

Chapter 15

Silicon Valley, California, October 6th.

Jim Savage arrived at the impressive modern glass clad Technology Today building, and was taken up to a large suite of executive offices. A very attractive secretary ushered him into a spacious and luxurious modern office. To his surprise he knew the man who came from behind the desk to shake his hand. He had met him before.

'Hello again, Mister Savage.'

Jim recovered quickly from his surprise, but, realizing that it had shown on his face, he used it to ask a question. 'What are you doing here? I thought you were based in London.'

'Well, that's quite a story, come and sit down and I'll tell you what I need, and then if you're interested I'll explain my involvement.'

'Okay, but first, thanks for putting me in touch with Andy Cunningham, you did me a real favor.'

Mike grinned. 'When I phoned him, he thanked me for doing him the favor. Maybe you should ask for a raise.'

Jim grinned back. 'Maybe I will in a few months, as it is I'm doing nicely thank you.'

There was a silence for a moment as Mike gathered his thoughts. 'I'll come to the point right away. I'm after a terrorist group calling itself the Blood of Shatila. The same group responsible for the Heathrow attack as you will remember. I have access to some very good intelligence, but I want to verify the intelligence before I make a positive move. The only way to do the verification is by a covert reconnaissance. I remembered my conversation with you and that your background was SBS. I contacted Andy in the hope that you had gone to see him and found that you were on his payroll and possibly available for this job. Before I offer it to you I want you to know that it's going to be dangerous.'

The glint in Jim Savage eyes betrayed his interest. 'Where will this operation take place?'

'Beirut.'

Jim's smile became a grin. 'Could prove interesting, what's the time scale?'

'I want you in at the beginning. It will be a two-man operation, to go in and do the reconnaissance and gather the information needed to plan the main operation. The next stage will be to insert a strong strike team; possibly to HALO them in to a suitable drop zone. We'll have a little help from friends with the insertions and the recovery. I need your expertise to help me both to plan the operation and execute it. Are you interested?'

'Well, I'd be happy with the recce job, that's my trade, and I'd be happy to become a part of the strike team. But to train and lead a strike team as well you'll need more than just me.'

'Hmm, I suppose it is a bit much for one man to cover both requirements,' Mike said thoughtfully. 'Is there anyone you can recommend?'

'Well, I'm not touting for business, but why don't you talk to Andy Cunningham? When I went for my interview, there were a couple of useful hands around that I recognized. He must have the right types on his books.'

'Yeah, now that you mention it, it's obvious. I'll talk to Andy. Anyway for now, if you're agreeable, you're on the payroll and there will be a good bonus in cash if we're successful.'

'There is one thing. I have a problem with the immediate start; I'm on holiday with my girl friend Dawn, she's here in California, and I don't want to suddenly leave her on her own.'

Mike thought for a moment. 'I might be able to provide a solution to that problem.'

‘Great, if you can arrange something I’m in the game. I presume I’ll be working through Andrew Cunningham?’

‘Yes, he has quoted an initial day rate for your services and I’ve agreed it with him.’

‘It’s a deal.’ Jim stuck out his hand.

Istanbul, October 6th.

The money George Liani had obtained from his previous activities had not gone very far. Setting up an underground press had cost him more than he had anticipated, and his smear campaign against the existing regime in Turkey was costing him a fortune.

He badly needed more funds, and the phone call from Abu Asifah came at a very opportune moment. Having established that an advance was possible, he agreed to a meeting in Damascus in order to discuss terms, and to learn what was required.

Booking himself on a flight to Damascus, he traveled using the documents he held in the name of George Liani. As far as he was aware no one had made any connections to that name and he didn’t have funds to spare with which to purchase a new identity. The identity of George Liani would have to do.

California, October 6th.

Anna sat at her desk acutely aware that Mike was ensconced in his brother’s former office with a tough looking character apparently specializing in security. If Mike was going into anything with this guy Anna wanted to get his measure. She was wondering how to get herself introduced when the phone rang. It was Mike. He solved her problem for her by inviting her to come into his office to meet his visitor.

Jim Savage stood up politely to shake hands, his hand was dry, his handshake firm. He had a smile that started from within. Anna found that she instinctively liked him. He was quiet and had an air of competence.

After the introductions, Mike explained that Jim would be working with him on the terrorist problem, that Jim was interrupting a short holiday with his girl friend Dawn in order to help him out and that they would be going somewhere quiet to develop their ideas. It would mean that Dawn would be left high and dry. Could Anna help out?

Anna thought quickly. She reasoned that the more help she gave Mike the more indispensable she would become, and the closer she got to the work he was engaged in, the more difficult it would be for him to keep her at a distance.

‘So what are you planning?’

‘We have to plan a recce from the sea.’

Anna made a quick decision. ‘Well, I have a place on the Big Sur coast, would that make a good base?’

Mike considered her offer. ‘What is the place like? Do you think it would be suitable?’

‘Well, why don’t we all go down and have a look?’ Then, turning to Jim she said, ‘There’s plenty of room Mister Savage. You and Dawn could come and stay. I could spend time with her, and show her around. Would that be acceptable?’

‘I think so, but I’d rather she decided.’

‘Okay, where is she now?’

‘Sightseeing in Carmel, I’ve arranged to meet her there later.’

‘That’s great; we can collect her on our way down this afternoon.’

Lebanon - Syria, October 6th.

Abu Asifah was delighted with George Liani’s prompt agreement to attend the meeting. Wondering if the Turk was hungry for cash, he too made his preparations to go to Damascus. He could be there by the next day, even traveling by road across country. Abu Asifah had lost his taste for air travel after seeing the Icelandic air crash on television.

The car he was in, escorted out of Beirut by two Land Rovers full of armed men, climbed the winding road from Baabda up to the pass between Jabal el Knisse and Jabal el Barouk. Up past stands of the now rare Cedars of Lebanon, past the pylons and cables of the deserted ski lifts, the small convoy ground its way up to the summit of the pass. The temperature in the morning at this altitude was decidedly cool.

On the other side of the pass, they descended the steep road into the vast Beqaa valley. As they wound their way down the day warmed up, the sun got higher and hotter, and the still air of the valley bottom replaced the cool breeze of the mountains. The car had no air conditioning and Abu Asifah, his escorts and the drivers, began to sweat.

The two escorting Land Rovers turned back, to await his return at Majdel Aanjar, just before the climb up to the Sahel plateau and the border with Syria. An armed incursion into the sovereign territory of the Syrians would do his cause no good at all. Abu Asifah and his driver passed through the military checkpoints as the road left Lebanon, entered Syria, crossed back into Lebanon again and followed the border southwest towards Jabal el Manzar. Then the road crossed again into Syria for the last time and began its descent into the valley of the Nahr Barada, past orchards, gardens and vineyards irrigated with snow-melt from the surrounding mountains, the northern approach to Damascus, one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world.

The car edged its way through the teeming streets to the famous Omayad Mosque, where Abu Asifah got out. The mosque was filling up with the faithful attending evening prayers. Abu Asifah slipped his shoes off, washed and went in to pray. He prayed for a long time, until the Mosque was almost empty and then, when his watch showed the right hour, he looked around for the man he was here to meet.

Carmel, California, October 6th.

Dawn sat at an open-air table at the sea front restaurant where she and Jim had arranged to meet. She had finished an iced tea, and was debating whether or

not to order a second one when she saw Jim coming towards her table. She leapt to her feet and was about to run to greet him when she realized that he had company.

Jim only got a decorous peck on the cheek before making the introductions. 'Anna, Mike, this is Dawn Saint Pierre. Dawn, I want you to meet Anna Sutherland and Mike Edge.'

'Well, let me order a bottle of wine while you put Dawn in the picture,' Mike suggested.

Over the wine, a delicious Californian Lytton Ridge Zinvandel, Jim explained that Mike needed his help with a special project and that he wanted to take on the job.

Dawn looked a little crestfallen, and Mike quickly jumped in to explain that, if she were agreeable, all four of them would go down to Anna's place on the Big Sur coast. He and Jim would spend a little of the time there making their plans, and Jim and Dawn would be able to spend even more time together than on the five day holiday they had planned.

Dawn smiled her relief. More time with Jim was fine by her, and she had been enchanted by the coastal scenery on their drive North from Los Angeles. She would love the chance to stay and explore it.

The wine finished, they made their way to Anna's big Chevy Blazer, and headed south out of Carmel towards Big Sur. After returning Jim and Dawn's hire car and collecting their bags, they made one more stop at a supermarket that Anna used regularly, to buy fresh provisions.

'What's the name of this place of yours?' Mike asked as they cleared the edge of town and picked up speed.

'If I told you the name you would be no wiser, and I'm not going to try to describe it to you. I want you to make your own acquaintance with the place.'

'It must be quite special to you,' Mike remarked, but Anna would be drawn no further on the subject, and they all fell silent looking at the scenery. To Mike, as a native San Franciscan, it was familiar ground, but to Jim and Dawn it was still fresh and new.

Some miles before Big Sur Anna turned off the main highway. Mike's interest sharpened, this was new territory for him. With the ease of one long familiar with the route, Anna swung the big 4x4 off the blacktop onto a forest road, and then after a mile or so, on to a narrow track which soon began to descend sharply through pine forest. Down and down they went, the headlights carving through the growing dusk, until eventually they reached a grassy meadow above a sheltered beach. Set back at the edge of the meadow against the trees was an old wooden house.

Anna switched off the engine and the lights. They sat in silence for a few moments, their eyes adjusting to the darkness. Gradually the clouds parted and bright moonlight silvered the scene. Mike opened his door and got out. The others followed. Anna went and stood next to Mike and took his hand. Mike took a deep breath of clean sea air, silently absorbing the surroundings. The dark forest with the old wooden house nestling under it, the level grassy meadow, the beach, the surf, and the sea-carved rock formations, black against the silver sea.

Anna waited, watching his reactions. It was the scenery that held his attention first.

The two couples walked down to the water's edge. They looked out at the big pacific breakers crashing onto the rocks, the flung spray flashing silver in the moonlight. The curve of the beach in the valley mouth, the cliffs on both sides, and the old house, a grey blur against the black of the forest. Mike was the first to speak. 'What a beautiful place. However did you find it?'

'I didn't have to,' Anna replied, 'my grandfather left it to me. He bought the valley years ago, timber, stream, beach, all of it. It's about a thousand acres altogether. He was going to log it, but he fell in love with the place and built himself a house here with his own hands. Come on; let me show it to you.'

As the two couples walked across the grass towards the house its features became more distinct, a big single story house with a porch running the full width of the front, a deck at the side and additions made from time to time as necessity required at the rear.

Anna unlocked the side door and switched on the lights. She walked over, stooped, struck a match, and lit the kindling in the kitchen range.

'Mostly I use oil lamps for lighting, and the range for cooking, but there is a small hydro-electric system, driven by the stream, which enables me to enjoy the benefits of modern living; 'fridge, hi-fi and so on. Come on through and let me show you round.'

She led them into the living room. It was a large room with a pine beamed ceiling. A big stone fireplace with a hearth made of old flag stones filled most of one wall. There were bookshelves everywhere, crammed with books; classics, biographies, poetry, plays, textbooks, modern novels, books of all kinds. Sure evidence of an active mind. The furnishings were genuine antiques, carefully chosen colonial American pieces, and suited the room perfectly; certainly evidence of inherent good taste.

Two large double doors, half-paned in glass opened on to the porch and on either side of them two large picture windows looked out to the sea.

'Through here is my study.' Anna walked in to an adjoining room. It was furnished with a large antique desk but had a high backed modern swivel chair, upholstered in soft leather. On a side table were an up-to-the minute PC with its own high-resolution screen, keyboard and a color printer. The PC was linked to a satellite dish connection. On a set of shelves was a comprehensive set of software textbooks.

'I can work from here just as well as from the office. In some ways it's better. I don't get so many interruptions.' She looked at the others, 'well, what do you think.'

Dawn was enchanted by the location. 'It's beautiful, a lovely retreat, perfect for getting away from it all.'

Jim assessed it from a practical viewpoint. 'We could train a small army here and no one would know.'

'Yeah,' Mike agreed. 'And yet you're in contact with the rest of the world if you choose?'

'Yes,' Anna patted the PC. 'I can generate work here and download it to the office network. I have internet, I can access files on the office system, upload them,

and work on them here; copy colleagues via E-mail, anything. But best of all, I can go for walks, do my creative thinking.'

'Peace and quiet; that's what appeals most,' Dawn said, 'and walks, just what I need to help me convalesce.'

'Why, have you been ill?' Anna asked.

'She's not long out of hospital,' Jim answered for her. 'She was injured in the attack at Heathrow, that's how we met.'

'The Blood of Shatila,' Mike said, surprised, 'you were a victim of them too?'

Dawn nodded. 'It makes me so angry, the senselessness of it. Not so much what happened to me, but the other poor people, especially that little girl; I still see her huddled little body in my dreams.'

'We have good reason to remember those butchers too,' Anna told her, 'Mike and I were on the Olympic Airlines flight they hi-jacked. We had to sit there while they murdered Mike's brother Alan. He was my friend and my business partner.'

'Oh how awful for you.' Dawn looked at Mike and then at Anna, 'It seems we all owe them.'

'Yes,' Mike said, his face was grim, 'that's why we're here. A better location for preparing a clandestine operation would be hard to imagine; and even harder to find.'

Damascus, Syria, October 7th.

George Liani detached himself from the shadows at the side of the mosque and walked across to greet Abu Asifah like a brother. He led him into a small side room off the main arched dome of the Mosque where people could meditate quietly after prayers. The room was empty as the two men addressed their business.

Sitting on the richly woven silk carpet, Abu Asifah took a map of Israel from beneath his robe and put it down in front of George Liani.

Tapping the map he said, 'I need a blow struck within Israel, a mighty blow, a blow to send shock waves around the world.'

George Liani concealed his surprise well. To make any strike inside Israel would be no easy task. Israel was a nation which lived under constant threat, its population all served in the military from necessity and all could be armed in case of emergency. Still he needed funds badly.

'How much?'

'Two million US Dollars,' Abu Asifah told him, 'half in advance, and half on completion.'

George Liani's face remained impassive. A million dollars in advance would solve his immediate problems and get things moving again. But the risks far outweighed the returns. Money wouldn't save his cause if he were dead or in jail. 'It's not enough,' he said, 'not for a target inside Israel.'

Abu Asifah looked affronted. 'How much are you looking for?'

'You can't put a price on it.'

'Well what about the cause?'

George Liani shrugged, 'It's your cause not mine.'

'Let's look at the maps again.'

‘No, there is no point,’ and before Abu Asifah could argue, George Liani rose to his feet, left the mosque, and disappeared among the crowd.

Big Sur Coast, California, October 7th.

The morning was fine, clear and sunny. A cool breeze came in off the sea as Anna and her guests ate breakfast on the deck at the side of the old wooden house. In the fresh morning sunlight the situation was magnificent; the view out over the grass towards the beach and the rock formations of the Big Sur coast provided a perfect setting in which to start the day.

The two girls had prepared the meal, chatting and getting to know each other better, and making plans for the day ahead. Mike and Jim had been banished to the wood shed at the rear of the house to split logs and build up the supply for the stove. ‘Go on make yourselves useful,’ Anna had instructed, ‘we’ll cook, you stoke.’

‘Well, we need to get fit, I suppose this will make a good start,’ Jim said laughing, as he and Mike went out stripping their shirts off as they left the kitchen.

After breakfast Anna took Dawn on a walk down the coast to look for sea otters, leaving Mike and Jim free to discuss their plans for the reconnaissance of the Blood of Shatila headquarters. They went back to the wood shed and carried on chopping wood as they talked.

They soon identified their first problem. Ben Levy could probably handle the supply of equipment for the actual reconnaissance and strike; but now they needed equipment with which to practice. They started by listing their requirements.

‘Why don’t we ask Andy Cunningham to supply it all?’ Jim suggested, remembering the weapon supplied for his last job. ‘He’s got contacts over here, and it wouldn’t look so odd if it was his company gathering up the kit.’

Mike thought briefly. ‘Yeah, I need to talk to him about some useful guys for a strike unit. He may as well supply the kit too.’

‘I don’t see why not, he has contacts over here and he has ex-special forces guys on his books. But I guess he’d charge you plenty for that kind of service, it could cost a lot of money.’

‘Don’t worry, money’s not a problem,’ Mike told him, and went to the phone. Five minutes later he was talking to Andrew Cunningham in London.

‘Hello Mike, how’s it going?’

‘It’s going well, but I need to know if you can give me a little more help.’

‘What kind of help?’

‘Bodies and equipment.’

‘Not over the phone. I’ll come over on the next available flight. I’ve got your phone number and I’ll give you my flight details as soon as they’re confirmed, so that you can meet me at the airport.’ Andy hung up.

‘He’s coming over to visit with us to discuss our requirements,’ Mike said to Jim, ‘very professional, and very discreet.’

Mike and Jim enlarged on their plans. They would require Andy to put suitable candidates through the same rigorous tests to which Jim had been subjected. Once passed fit they would come over to California. Mike and Jim would set up a

temporary training camp for their use at Big Sur. Two weeks training together would weld the selected individuals together as a team. In the meantime, Mike would ask Ben Levy to get his people to look for an underground car park that resembled the one in Beirut. Whilst the recce was under way in Beirut the strike team would start to practice for the real thing, somewhere in Israel, under near-identical conditions.

Syria—Lebanon, October 8th.

Abu Asifah spent the night in a Damascus hotel room raging at George Liani's lack of co-operation. Because of it, he was committed to a course of action that he could no longer achieve without risk to himself. Or on his return he would have to admit failure, and to Najib Shawa of all people. And he wished he could spend longer in Damascus. Any time spent away from the tensions of Beirut was a profound relief, and he needed time to think. But his escorts were waiting. He set off to return to Beirut, retracing his route along the banks of the river Barada, up through the orchards and gardens made fertile and productive by the waters running down from the high ridge of mountains to the northwest. After his ascent from the great valley of Beqaa, his escort of two Land Rovers picked him up at Majdel Aanjar, and escorted him back over the mountains and down into Lebanon. He ate his liver all the way.

On arrival at the Blood of Shatila headquarters, Najib Shawa was waiting for him. The meeting got off to a bad start. Omitting all the usual courtesies, Abu Asifah launched the meeting with an imperious demand. 'I need more funds. You are to provide them.'

'Really, O great one, for what reason?' Najib Shawa's heavily sarcastic response did nothing to improve the tone of the meeting.

'I don't have to give you a reason; you already know that it is for an operation. That is reason enough.'

'Not so. Maybe you are milking the finances I provide for your own benefit.' Najib Shawa's pointed remark touched a nerve. Abu Asifah's imperious gaze flickered slightly, just enough to confirm Najib Shawa's guess.

In an attempt to regain the face he knew he had just lost, Abu Asifah tried to frighten Najib. 'How dare you suggest that I, I Abu Asifah, I who have done so much for the cause, could be tempted by money?' He rose to go to the door. 'For that I will have you shot!'

'Not if you expect more funds! I have made arrangements for my own protection, be assured! If anything happens to me, certain documents will be sent which will ensure no moneys are ever provided to you again. How will you fare then? Your star is already becoming dim.'

Abu Asifah stopped, his hand on the latch, a murderous expression on his face. He needed the money to maintain his position, and only he knew he was siphoning funds off for his private use. How could Najib Shawa know? Did he know or was he guessing? There was no way of finding out; he would have to play for time.

'Come, sit down, and tell me, is our mutual friend going to act for us again?' Najib Shawa's high-pitched voice was at its oiliest.

Abu Asifah hesitated; he was not expecting the direct question, his own fault for omitting the niceties of normal Middle East preamble. He swallowed hard.

Najib saw his hesitation and his discomfort. He pressed his advantage.

'No? Too risky even for him is it?' This was news indeed. His enemy had failed; his mission to Damascus had not been successful. Najib sensed a weakness.

Abu Asifah tasted bile. His revenge, when it came, would be very sweet. He composed his features and returned to his place opposite Najib Shawa. 'I am setting up a strike deep into the very heart of Israel,' he said pompously, needing to save face, 'unfortunately I cannot lead this strike myself as I am too well known. I am using a trusted ally, one who has served me well in the past, to set the plan up.'

'Who?' Najib enquired mildly.

'You don't need to know,' Abu Asifah replied curtly.

'The Turk has refused,' Najib thought.

'How much do you need for the contract?' Again Najib's question was mild.

Abu Asifah paused slightly, calculating. George Liani had refused two million; he might settle for three, almost certainly he would do the job for four million – twice what he had been offered. He should have at least a million for himself. 'Five million dollars,' he said without blinking; if George Liani would do it for three he could take two millions for himself.

'I suppose you can't tell me what the target is either?' Najib said acidly. 'You come to me and you demand five million dollars, for someone unnamed to attack something undisclosed, and you expect me to cough up that sort of money without question. What sort of fool do you think I am? What kinds of fools do you think my backers are? How can I be expected to raise such a sum on such a weak argument? It's impossible; I won't even attempt to do it.' It was his turn to pretend to get up to leave.

Abu Asifah had no options left open to him; he knew no sources for funds of that magnitude, he would have to impress Najib, to get the funds.

Reluctantly, he told Najib Shawa his choice of target.

Najib Shawa turned to look at him, shocked into silence. 'It's not possible,' he breathed.

'I believe that with the help of Allah, a way can be found.' Abu Asifah felt he had regained face.

Najib was not convinced. 'Who gave you such an assurance?'

Abu Asifah paused. 'The brother in the cause from Turkey.'

'So, I guessed the right man,' Najib thought, 'but can I believe that he would be so reckless? And believe it on the word of such as Abu Asifah?'

'I know that one's work.' Najib Shawa's brain was racing, all his cunning at full stretch. Such a coup would give enormous prestige to the movement; and to Abu Asifah in particular. Abu Asifah's position could become impregnable if the scheme succeeded. Najib couldn't allow that to happen, but he couldn't deny funds for so prestigious an operation either. That would undermine his personal credibility. The pedigree of the mysterious and careful Turkish brother was impeccable, no grounds for withholding funds there. Could he circumvent Abu Asifah, sideline him? Maybe even use the situation to help get rid of this hated

usurper of his position in the Blood of Shatila movement. Perhaps claim the credit for the coming operation for himself? On balance he decided he probably could.

'I shall have to go to Zurich to arrange matters,' he said, after what appeared to be weighty consideration, 'but I think the necessary funds could be made available for such a bold operation. You are to be commended for your intrepid plan.' Najib felt he was back in command; he stuck the knife a little further into Abu Asifah's wounded pride. 'Arrange for your Turkish brother to meet me in Zurich,' he said, 'perhaps I can persuade him where you have failed.'

Abu Asifah nodded curtly. He had little choice, but vowed silently to himself that he would have his revenge.

The meeting broke up and the two men went their separate ways, their mutual hatred greater than ever. But Najib was excited. He was sure his backers would go for such a strike. They would pay almost any sum to achieve such a blow against Israel, and there would be plenty of scope for Najib to make a profit.

For such a target he could demand ten million dollars.

Chapter 16

San Francisco, October 10th.

Andrew Cunningham arrived on flight VS020, landing at 10.30am pacific coast time. Mike and Jim were there to meet him. In the terminal they confined the conversation to greetings, waiting until they were on the road in Anna's Chevy blazer before discussing business.

Andy broached the subject as Jim drove south.

'Now, Mike, what is it that you want?'

'More than you may be prepared to countenance.'

'That depends, do I smell some excitement?' Andy Cunningham's grin was predatory.

Mike nodded. 'You do. I guess the best thing is to tell you everything and then see if you are prepared to help.' He told Andy about his connection with the Blood of Shatila's activities, the airport massacre, the hijacking and the killing of his brother Alan, the recent bombing of a passenger flight and his conviction that more atrocities would follow if this organization were not stopped.

'We have a secure training base here, and we have reliable intelligence on where their headquarters is. The first phase will be Jim and I going in to do a recce. Then, second phase, we will act as pathfinders to bring in a strike team. Third phase we stamp them out. The fourth phase will be a tactical withdrawal.'

'So, what exactly do you want from me?' There was business here as well as friendship.

'I'll need somewhere between a dozen and two dozen good men, together with the necessary equipment and someone to plan and execute the strike. I don't need cowboys.'

'You need one less, I'd like to volunteer.'

Mike shook his head, 'No, I can't accept, you are a friend; I wouldn't feel right involving you at the sharp end.'

'No involvement, no help.'

Jim said nothing; this was between his boss and the client.

'Look Mike, I'm not going to send men in on an operation like this without being present myself,' Andy stated flatly, 'I've never done that before and I'm not going to do it now. You wouldn't either.'

Mike stared hard at Andy. Gradually his face relaxed. Andy was right, and he would be an excellent man to have on such a mission. 'Okay, you win.' Mike stuck his hand out and Andy shook it warmly.

'So how do we get the rest?' Mike asked, 'we can't just place an advert in the press, we'd attract unwanted attention.'

'Yes, and you'd get all the psychos and fringe riff-raff. The only way to do this is on the grapevine; spread the word quietly amongst a few of our old pals. The word will soon get round, and we'll start to get calls from guys whose track record we already know. In fact, there are a few guys already on my books who are suitable and who could start to spread the word. What did you have in mind as a suitable fee?'

Mike shrugged, 'I don't know what the going rates are. Funding this is not a problem, you tell me; I can make the money available.'

'Well, the money should be payable in three parts, an up-front payment, a day rate or daily fee, and an end of contract bonus. Provision should be made for payment to be made to next of kin if necessary. I can handle all of that for you. For now we just have to set the rate at a good enough level to make it attractive to the right guys.'

'Right,' Mike thought for a moment. 'How does this sound? Ten thousand dollars up front, a thousand a day for thirty days and ten thousand end of contract bonus; payable in any preferred currency, and in cash or bankers draft.'

Andy looked at Mike in disbelief. 'But that's fifty thousand a man. It will come to a huge sum.' It was the first time Mike had ever seen Andy's composure slip.

'It's a big job,' Mike countered.

'Yes, but for fifteen guys at fifty thousand each, that's seven hundred and fifty thousand total, and then there will be my company's commission, air travel and other costs in addition. You're looking at a total expenditure of a million dollars US.'

'Well then, as these guys are going to put their lives on the line, double it. A million dollars is not worthy hire for the guys who are going to avenge my brother. Piat et Cie, Geneva will make two million dollars available, tomorrow.'

Andy still could not take it in. 'But you can't spend money like that... can you?'

'I can, and not even miss it, give me your company's account number. I'll have the money, plus a fifty percent margin for contingencies, transferred to your account by key tested telex by tomorrow midday. Anything else you need, just bill me. I've known you long enough, I trust you to do what is necessary. Jim, I want you to go back to London with Andy after your break, help him with the vetting.'

Andy looked helplessly at Jim.

Jim shrugged. 'Don't argue with him, seems he's got more money than sense, and as far as I can see he isn't short of sense.'

'Right then, let's put the word out to the streets.' Andy dug out his laptop and his mobile 'phone and emailed his secretary to get in contact with the ex SBS members of his staff. Between them they would know where to find some useful bodies.

'Equipment,' Jim reminded Mike.

'Oh yes, and we need training equipment stateside.'

Andy nodded and opened his private phone index. Ten minutes later he had an email response giving him three names with three fax numbers and three 'phone numbers. One could supply weapons, silencers, ammunition and night sights, another could supply Klepper canoes, oxygen re-breathing apparatus, dry diving suits, flippers, masks, waterproof diving watches and compasses. The third could supply surveillance equipment and burst transmission radios. All of it was to be ordered by fax to the order of Andy's company. Andy would arrange collection and delivery to a place where they could transfer it to their own vehicles. There would be a ten per cent handling charge on top of rental.

'Great. That leaves me free to organize the training base here. And don't forget to bill me for any extras.'

'Fear not, I'll invoice for everything we get as we get it.'

The three men, good friends already and becoming better, turned off the blacktop their business completed in outline before they had reached Anna's house. 'Come on, there's cold beer inside,' Mike said as they pulled up on the grass outside the old house. He didn't have to say it twice.

Zurich, October 10th.

Najib Shawa gnawed his fingernails all the way on the rail link from Kloten airport into the centre of the city and walked out of the Bahnhof, the main railway station, into the Bahnhofplatz where he found a taxi to take him to the Hotel Zurich. Wanting his meeting with George Liani to be discreet, he had adopted the same strategy as for his previous meeting with Ben Levy and had booked the same interconnecting rooms.

The head concierge, recognizing him from his previous visit as a liberal tipper, was very obliging, and had his bags delivered quickly to his room. Najib handed over his passport as required by Swiss law and filled in his registration card. Within five minutes of registration photocopies of Najib's passport were faxed to Bat Yom Import and Export. The head concierge, like head concierges everywhere, had a nose for money. This one was Jewish and was now receiving payments from Ben Levy.

George Liani, ever careful to avoid being compromised, checked in to another hotel altogether. He made his way to the Hotel Zurich, went straight through the foyer to the telephones and rang the room Najib Shawa had booked for him.

'Mister Shawa?'

'Yes.'

'Wait there.'

George Liani went up in the lift two levels above Najib's floor and walked down the fire stairs to Najib's adjoining room. The oily smile, and the limp, handshake provoked the same reaction in George Liani as in everyone else, dislike and

mistrust; but George Liani was desperate for funds – he would not be here otherwise. Swallowing his dislike he sat down at Najib’s invitation to see what he might be able to gain.

Faced with George Liani’s stony stare, it took Najib some time to get to the point. Eventually, aware that George Liani was becoming restless, he approached the subject. ‘I... er, I understand that the meeting in Damascus did not bear fruit.’

‘No.’

‘Mmmm, I see... er, well, what was the problem?’

‘The target was impossible and the price unrealistic.’

‘I see, how much were you offered?’

George Liani told him. Najib had difficulty containing his delight; here was confirmation that Abu Asifah was creaming off money for himself.

‘Well, it’s not the money that counts, it’s the cause.’ Najib gave the same excuse as Abu Asifah and got the same reply.

‘It’s your cause not mine.’

‘Oh no my brother, our cause, the Islamic cause; I begin to think you have not been given the full picture?’

George Liani’s eyes narrowed. He said nothing, but Najib knew that he had his full attention.

‘Your action would be the signal.’

‘Signal? For what?’

‘The signal that will start the Jihad.’

George Liani’s body stiffened. ‘I know of no Jihad.’

Najib knew that he had him. ‘That was a bad mistake on Abu Asifah’s part. He should have trusted you of all people. If he can’t trust you who can he trust?’ Najib saw no harm in giving Abu Asifah another stab in the back.

George Liani grunted and scowled. ‘Jihad? What Jihad? Why haven’t I heard of it?’

‘It has not been announced yet; as a key figure you should have been consulted.’

‘Consult me now.’

‘Yes, that is why we are here.’ Najib’s mind was racing. He had George Liani on the hook. He needed to strike it home, to get his agreement. His crafty mind went into overdrive. George Liani was a fanatic, ‘So tell him what he wants to hear,’ he thought.

‘We have lost our faith,’ he began.

‘Yes.’ George Liani nodded his agreement; his eyes showing fervor.

‘Our problems are of our own making, we have strayed from the path.’

‘Yes!’ The word was uttered with force. His eyes flashed. ‘Our ways are not the ways of Allah. All of Islam is lost and at fault. We must return to the teachings of the Koran, we must get back to the fundamentals of Islam!’

Najib nodded vigorous agreement. ‘We must destroy Israel, in a Jihad that will unite the Muslim nations; the people will see the truth. Islam will expand and conquer the world as it did after the True Prophet’s teachings became known.’

George Liani’s eyes blazed with fanaticism but his face remained stern. ‘Yes! It shall be! It shall be done in the name of Allah! Allah Akbar! God is Great!’

‘But I shall need funds.’

Kensington, London, October 11th.

Andrew Cunningham stayed a day at Anna's house, planning finer detail of the operation with Mike and Jim, then he, Jim and Dawn returned to London. Together with Jim and his existing staff, he began the job of vetting applicants the morning after his return from California. Five potential candidates had picked up the word on the grapevine already, and had made themselves available.

Big John "Digger" Trench was an SC1, the same as Jim Savage, and had spent time as one of the specialist instructors whose job it was to put Royal Marines candidates through the SBS selection course at Poole in Dorset. He was the first one in. Six foot six in his socks, everything about him was long; long muscular arms, long muscular legs, a long muscular body and long years of practice at extremes of endurance. Digger's job in Poole had been to drive men beyond their physical and mental limits and de-select those without the right temperament. He pushed them through feats of endurance they could not have imagined. A tough, resilient and determined man, one trained to go forward no matter what the odds or what the setbacks.

Jim knew him, and so did Chalky White, the ex-Royal Marines physical training instructor, and as they knew him well it was fitting that they should give him a hard time.

'What-ho, Digger, didn't ever expect to see you with a spare tire,' Chalky said for openers. He received a glare for his trouble that would have frightened lesser men to death. It left Chalky totally unmoved.

'Never mind, Digger old son, if you don't do too well I'll fiddle the figures for you, seeing as I know you,' he continued quite unabashed, 'an' Jim here will turn a blind eye, won't you Jim?'

Jim made as though looking through Nelson's telescope, blind eye closed. 'I see no ships.'

Digger picked Chalky up, and sat him on a vaulting horse. 'You'll get a better view from up there,' he said with a mean grin, 'mind you don't fall off and hurt yourself.'

Chalky grinned happily back. Years ago he and Digger had earned their wings on the same parachute training course at Abingdon. Chalky put all his weight on his hands on the end of the box did a handstand then back flipped onto the mat.

Digger sniffed and looked at Jim. 'Huh. Always was a show-off,' he said scathingly.

Jim smiled and savored the insults. 'Okay, Chalky, let's see if the old feller has still got what it takes,' he said, and Chalky started Digger off on the Canadian Air Force fitness test. He went from that to the firing range and did the press-ups, sit-ups, and five rounds into the target routine. As a marksman he put every round within the inner circle in close knit groups of less than one inch. Even the cynical Chalky was silenced.

Digger looked at him. 'Saved you the trouble of fiddling the report, Chalky old son,' he said with a wink.

'Yeah well, it ain't over yet, Handy Andy is about to knock the stuffing out of you,' Chalky replied, and led the way into the dojo area.

Andrew Cunningham did his best to do as Chalky hoped, but as Andy remarked to Chalky afterwards, it was like trying to fight a tree.

The next applicant was totally different. Small, wiry, and formerly from the Glasgow district of Blackhill, the area where Glasgow council put its problem tenants, Wee Willy Anderson had grown up in a world of hard knocks, no hope, and football. Nothing the world could throw at him could disillusion him; he had no illusions. He was inured to it all. Mentally tough, but not physically big, he had been picked on during his first days in a barrack room and had been given a split lip and a black eye. In the middle of the night Willy had got up, had taken the big iron bucket of coal from next to the stove and, swinging it round and round to gain momentum, brought it crashing down into the face of the man who had picked on him.

The damage done was considerable. A broken nose, broken cheekbone, three teeth knocked out and a fractured jaw.

'Ifn ony've yez wants tae hiv a crack ut me, ye'd best be ready tae gae wi'out sleep,' Willy had remarked laconically. No one bothered Willy Anderson again. The bully recovered in Haslar Royal Naval Hospital and applied for immediate service discharge. Willy Andersen earned his Green Beret, did his time in a commando unit, volunteered for training as a swimmer canoeist, passed the selection course and qualified as a SC3 rating. Jim Savage had been his instructor. In addition Wee Willy had spent a long time working with Andrew Cunningham in the Fourteenth Intelligence Detachment, or "the Det." in Northern Ireland. He was well used to clandestine operations. Willy too passed all the tests, and like Digger was accepted as part of the team. He was another hard man, but of a different sort.

The third candidate came from a similar background. He was ex SAS, and like the other two candidates before him, Dave Prendergast had been in action for a large part of his life. He had served in Muscat and Oman. Seconded first as an instructor by the British Government, he had gone on to take a well-paid job as an officer-mercenary in the Sultan's forces. With the subjugation of the warring tribes in the western district of Dhofar his job had become boring; mere garrison and patrol duties in a hot and uncomfortable place. He had resigned his commission, paid his last cheque into his offshore account, and had rung Andrew Cunningham to find out if anything interesting was afoot.

'Well, it just so happens that there is a job in the planning and preparation stage, come in and talk to me about it,' Andrew told him, and made a note against his name: Jumpmaster for the HALO drop.

He was the next one to go through the testing procedures. Not known to Chalky and Jim, and not ex-marines, he was spared the insults, but was subjected to closer scrutiny. As a former SAS trooper, his performance was ultra-critically assessed. But even though they would have dearly loved to find an SAS man wanting, neither Jim nor the acid Chalky could fault his performance.

'Welcome to the team,' Jim said, grinning and shaking the hard dry brown hand offered to him.

'Thanks, glad to be on board,' Dave smiled, and gave a mock naval salute.

The fourth, Alan Fields, better known as "Seedy", was an explosives expert. Trained initially as an "AE" or Assault Engineer, demolition, cutting charges, booby-traps and mines were among his specialties. His best mate, Patrick Murphy

inevitably known as “Spud” and also originally an AE, had sussed that Seedy was up to something and wangled himself an interview too, becoming the fifth candidate. And so a steady trickle of men came through the doors of Andrew Cunningham’s premises. All were known by name and by reputation to Andrew, Jim or the unimpressible Chalky White. If they had not been known, if they had had no track record, they would not have been invited to come forward for the selection tests. Of all the men attending only two failed the tests, and they failed because they were unfit.

One of these was just back from a round the world sailing-trip, and had not been for a run for months. The second was keeping three girlfriends happy, and had done all his recent training in bed; ‘Doing horizontal jogging,’ as Chalky put it. He was exhausted more than unfit. Both would have been liabilities and were honest enough to admit it.

The rest all passed with flying colors. All had been entitled to wear parachutist’s wings, and had High Altitude Low Opening jumping experience. A one-day trip out to the free fall club used by Andrew was sufficient for him and Jim to see that none of the selected men had forgotten their expertise. The following day Jim assembled them for their initial briefing, and Andrew produced different club class tickets to San Francisco.

The men were ordered to fly out by separate routes.

Zurich, October 12th.

George Liani left the Hotel Zurich the way he came. No one had seen him arrive and no one noticed him leave.

An hour or so after obtaining George Liani’s agreement Najib phoned down to the concierge. ‘Would you order me a cab please?’

‘Certainly sir when for and where to?’

‘At reception in ten minutes, going to the Baur au Lac.’ Najib gave his destination without thinking. He could not know that Ben Levy’s office would know his destination before he got there. In the cab his mind replayed his conversation with the Turkish fundamentalist. He was pleased with his handling of the situation. He thought it masterly, Abu Asifah would be furious. Najib pondered on his enemy. Abu Asifah was still a threat, but the Jew Levy would help get rid of him, whilst he Najib, with the help of the Turkish fanatic could get rid of some prominent Jews. He thought of Abu Asifah bragging about his target and wondered if it was possible. And claiming the start of a Jihad? Maybe that was over doing it, but, feasible or not it was the stuff of dreams for the people he was going to see. They would pay, and pay well for such a scheme. If it was possible well and good, if not he should be able to siphon off enough funds for it not to matter.

He traveled the full length of the Bahnhofstrasse to the Burkliplatz, where the driver dropped him at the world famous Baur au Lac hotel. He paid the taxi off and went into reception. The people he needed to see about the funds stayed only in the best places. Najib Shawa had a good room at the Hotel Zurich; his contacts had the best suites at the Baur au Lac. There was no comparison.

All the suites on two floors had been taken in the interests of security. Large men in suits guarded the access points at stairs and lifts, and Najib had to endure the indignity of a thorough search before being allowed to pass. As a mere petitioner for funds he was kept waiting for two hours, which gave him more time to think about his pitch.

The meeting was held in one of the suites, the controllers of the funds, five in total, were seated in an arc at a large table. Najib was obliged to stand to present his petition. He had decided to go for broke, to grab their attention at the beginning. After the expected formalities had been exchanged he dropped his bombshell. There was silence. The silence went on and on. Najib allowed it to continue, giving his audience plenty of time to digest his words.

Eventually the centre figure at the table leaned forward. 'It is not possible, it is the heart of Israel, it's too well guarded.' His tone was almost one of wistful regret, and told Najib what he needed to know.

'I believe it can be done, my organization has succeeded in every mission it has undertaken. I can find a way; Allah will show me a path.' Najib was carried away with the grandeur of the idea and he had heard plenty of Abu Asifah's ranting. He had not given too much thought to its achievement. That was the job of others.

A member of the panel sitting next to the chairman leaned forward. 'Suppose a way could be found, what would you see as the result?'

'The whole of the western world would be shaken to its foundations. The world's press would have a field day. The world would have to take notice of the plight of my people.'

There was a murmur of agreement around the table. The chairman of the funding committee beckoned the members either side of him to move closer. They leaned over as he spoke in hushed tones. 'The state of Israel would be paralyzed for days, on its knees and at the mercy of its enemies. Such a blow from within could enable attack from without to succeed where it has previously failed. A Jihad, announced on the success of such a blow, would ignite the Muslim nations and rid us of this thorn in our side for good.'

Four heads nodded in agreement.

The first man spoke again. 'What would you require from us?'

'Merely the funds.' Najib was shrewd enough to know that the members of this funding committee might be more willing to risk the money if failure could be laid at the door of others. He went on with his pitch, which was not very modest. It was apparent from his submission that the idea for the strike was his own idea, Abu Asifah was not mentioned in connection with it, and it was inferred that the efficient Turkish believer was a close colleague of Najib's. His enthusiasm for the plan, together with the high profile of the chosen target, made a big impression on his audience, but he did not get an answer. He was told to wait outside. An hour later he was told to come back in a day's time.

Big Sur Coast, California, October 13th.

Mike and Anna had been busy. Mike made a trip to a local sawmill and placed an order for sawn and planed lumber. He went into Carmel and purchased tools, nails, screws and paint from a hardware store.

While he was away Anna removed a load of junk from the two sizeable store rooms at the back of the house and, sweeping clean all the dust and cobwebs, made preparations for the construction of two temporary ranch style bunk houses. The main house would accommodate the first arrivals until the bunkhouses were finished, and the kitchen and dining room would serve as cookhouse and mess-room.

Anna volunteered her services as cook and steward. She wanted to be close to her man until the business was finished. This was a way to achieve that aim and it would have the practical value of leaving the men free to concentrate on their training.

Both Mike and Anna went up to San Francisco to meet the first members of the team, and had no trouble at all in spotting them as they came into the arrivals area. There was an air of competence and a controlled presence about each man that proclaimed that he was different.

'That's them, the bunch together,' Anna said, 'I'll bet you.'

Mike nodded, 'I won't bet you different.' He walked over to them.

Several pairs of eyes locked onto his approach.

Mike endured the scrutiny. 'I'm Mike Edge; I guess you'll be the guys I'm expecting?'

'Dave Prendergast; pleased to meet you.'

'Digger Trench - heard about you from Jim.'

'Name's Willy, Willy Anderson, guess you're the boss?'

Mike smiled. 'The name is Mike; this is my partner Anna Sutherland. Mike made the introductions. All the men looked quietly at Anna and each politely shook hands. There was no preening, no smart-assed remarks, no attempt to make an impression. That impressed Anna much more than anything else would have done.

Zurich, October 14th.

Najib was summoned early in the morning, a good omen he thought. This time he was not kept waiting, but was ushered straight into the suite. At the meeting he was surprised to find two extra persons present, persons to whom his financial contacts were most deferential. One wore a loose black turban and a long black coat over a collar-less shirt and baggy black trousers. An Afghan Mullah, Najib realized, but what was he doing here? The second man was in loose white robes and his head cloth was in the style of the mountain tribes. He had a long thin face, long thin curly beard, and deep set hooded eyes. These eyes bored into Najib from a solemn humorless face.

Najib felt a sudden stab of fear as recognition dawned. This man, a Saudi, a multi-millionaire, controlled a huge international fortune and a worldwide network of terrorist cells. Najib was offered a chair. He bowed, uttered the ritual courtesies, and sat down arranging his robe comfortably while his brain raced furiously. What necessitated this man's presence here, and why a Mullah? He knew the Sudan panel member, the Iranian and the Yemeni representatives, these men represented governments; but the others? The bearded man leaned over and spoke quietly to

the mullah who looked surprised and then nodded vigorously. Both of them looked at Najib, both with a cruel smile.

Najib knew that he was nearly there.

The Saudi businessman asked questions and covered much of the same detail that Najib had given at the first meeting. 'Yes, he could put into effect this devastating attack. Yes he believed it would be severe enough to paralyze Israel; cut off the head of a snake and the body might thrash around but it was no longer in control. Then the tenor of the meeting began to subtly change as the Mullah asked questions.

'Yes it could be a signal.'

'For a Jihad?'

'Ah, yes. It could be seen as a call to the faithful. I, of course could not make such a call, such a call would have to be made by a proper religious authority. But I should deem it a great honor to give the signal for it to begin.' Najib's brain was racing. Was this going out of his control? Carefully guessing the point of view of each of his questioners, Najib told each what he wanted to hear. He was employing his skill and craftiness to secure funds, but in the process he sensed that these people had another agenda, something undisclosed to him but very important to them.

So he asked for ten million dollars, five more than the actual requirement; and he got it. As he left the suite at the Baur au Lac he had difficulty containing his glee. He should worry! It would take him time to launder his extra millions, and he looked forward to a little luxury in Switzerland whilst he did it. Smiling to himself he returned to the Hotel Zurich.

On collecting his key he was surprised to be given a note. He had a colleague waiting in the foyer, a colleague from Bat Yom Import Export.

Big Sur Coast, California, October 14th.

Mike collected the lumber he had ordered, and all the necessary materials. Thanks to Spud and Seedy's construction expertise the bunks were completed during the morning of the first day and, before sitting down to a pleasant lunch in the shade of the deck, the men went off for a quick swim in the surf. For half an hour they yelled and fooled around, pitting their strength and endurance against the big waves and then, ravenously hungry, they came up to the house to eat the food that Anna had prepared. They tucked in with evident appreciation. Ice cold beers washed down the excellent meal, and then they set to work painting. After supper they made benches and a long table. By the evening of the first day the basic requirements of a temporary training camp were all in place.

The following morning the men took the Chevy Blazer and went into town. Willy, Seedy and Dave went to a furnishing store to purchase mattresses, pillows, a fridge and a freezer.

Mike, Spud and Digger rented another Blazer, went to a camping supplies store for sleeping bags, and to a big supermarket for supplies and more beer. It took them several trips to ferry their purchases down to the house by the beach, but by the evening of the second day all the mattresses and bedding were installed in the

bunkhouse, all the food and beer either in the freezer or the fridge or in the store room.

The advance party had everything ready. They awaited only the phone call that would tell them the rest of the occupants were on their way.

San Francisco, October 14th

Mike and Digger met Jim, Dawn and Andy at San Francisco airport, then worked in relays with the Chevy Blazers taking the new members from the airport to the house by the beach. On arrival the new team members had a quick stroll round to stretch their legs, and Andy, who had been before but only for a meeting, had a good look round to get the measure of the new facilities. He declared them fit for purpose.

Chalky White, with characteristic bluntness, commented, 'Yeah, very scenic but where's the nearest nightlife?'

Mike put a stop to that line of thought immediately. 'The nightlife comes after this operation. From now on it's all work and no play; anyone who doesn't fancy it, leave now.'

No one moved.

Chalky grinned, 'what the hell, I need a rest from drinking and chasing women anyway.'

The general laughter at his obvious lie destroyed the awkward silence, and going into the new bunkhouses, they all picked a bunk, stowed their kit and sat down to the huge piles of food Anna and Dawn had laid out buffet fashion on the big trestle table. It was a cold buffet and the better for that in the Californian heat. After they had eaten, and drunk a couple of cold beers, they opted for an early night, the best cure for jet lag. Tomorrow was going to be a busy day.

It started at 05.30. Pulling on shorts, sweatshirts and trainers, Mike, Andy and Jim joined the ex-special forces men outside on the dew-soaked grass. Andy called for everyone's attention.

Listen up; how many of you speak Arabic?' Several hands went up, including those of Jim and Dave Prendergast.

'That all?' A few more hands went up hesitantly.

'Ah'm a wee bitty rusty 'n ma accent's nae too guid,' Willy Andersen said. Among the laughter a few men nodded in accord.

'Well, the job will require a knowledge of Arabic; some of you are fluent and will take the point when it's needed. The others need to brush up so as not to be caught out. From now on only eastern Arabic will be spoken at this location. Mike Edge here is an Arabist specializing in the Middle East. His Arabic has been used in Palestinian communities and contains local idiom. Copy it as best you can.'

'Salaam Alekhum.'

'Alekhum Salaam,' the response came back.

'Aiwa sedigi,' 'Yes friends,' Andrew continued in Arabic, 'Chalky will be in charge of fitness training.' A groan went up from those who knew him. 'Over to you Chalky.'

Chalky gave them all a wicked grin. 'Shukran, sedigi.' Chalky's Arabic was amongst the rusty group, but he struggled on determinedly, using English where

he couldn't remember the Arabic words or usage, knowing that the more he used Arabic the quicker it would come back to him. The result was a hotchpotch that had the team in fits of laughter.

'Ah shit, mush tamaam, I'll have to give the pep talk in English to start with,' he said, with an apologetic glance at Andrew.

Andrew nodded, trying not to laugh. 'It'll come, Chalky.'

'Okay, warming up exercises first, then we have a training circuit to set up. Today we do one circuit and go for a run along the beach, on the hard sand. Tomorrow we do two circuits and run on the hard sand, the day after that we do three circuits and run on the soft sand. After that it will start to get just a little tougher - we do it in full kit; that means full rucksacks and carrying weapons, ammunition and full water bottles. At the end of each run we will swim for half an hour and then breakfast will be served. This will be the routine every morning. Any questions?'

'Aye, an whut's efter ra breakfast? Dae wuh git tae gae back to ra bunks?' Willy Andersen enquired.

Jim grinned. 'Only if you break a leg, otherwise it's weapon training, unarmed combat practice, free-fall parachuting at Wheelers Field and tactical movement by night as soon as it gets dark.'

'Bloody hell, it'll be like being back at Lympstone,' moaned Seedy, ever the humorist.

'No,' Mike corrected him, 'the pay is better.'

There was laughter and general agreement.

'Right ho, all together in time with me, follow my example.' Chalky began with stretching routines for arms and shoulders, progressed to trunk, and finished with legs. Then he began warming up exercises, again in arm, trunk and leg order. 'Come on you guys, work at it!' Chalky raced round demanding the last ounce of commitment from men who were already working hard, and he got it. Some labored breathing was heard.

'Okay, all stop, deep breathing exercises commence.' They all stood, feet apart, hands on hips, and filled their lungs with the fresh sea air, their rate of recovery giving the better indication of their fitness.

The circuit started with a short jog, and then they stopped to do thirty press-ups. They jogged some more to where Chalky had them lash the steel bars he was carrying between pairs of trees well above head height.

'Chin the bar twenty times,' Chalky ordered. Immediately afterwards they ran a little further to a big log lying on the grass. 'Jam your feet under the curve of the log, knees bent and do thirty sit-ups, on your feet, run this way, stop here and do thirty squat-thrusts.' The panting men all placed their hands on the grass and began to pump their legs back and forth, bringing knees up to their chests, causing already tired abdominal muscles to protest.

'Run some more, stop here, thirty star jumps, commence!' Chalky squatted on the ground and leapt as high in the air as his legs could power him, throwing his arms and legs wide as in a star. The others followed suit. They ran on to a long shelf of rock.

'Now, feet up on the shelf, do twenty press-ups and then deep breathing exercises.' Chalky set the pace. Jim, Andy and the others kept up. Mike was

experiencing some difficulty, but he kept up. After two minutes deep breathing they set off at a fast pace along the hard sand. It was three miles there and three miles back. They all earned their breakfast.

After breakfast Mike called for attention and began a lecture to explain their proposed operation. Jim took one of the Chevy Blazers and drove to a hardware store. There he purchased a roll of fine mesh chicken wire, a bundle of bamboo canes, some black polythene sheeting and some hessian sacking. He also bought some big round pumpkins and squash from a roadside stall. The wire, canes, and polythene sheeting were for the construction of hides, the hessian for camouflage. The pumpkins and squash would be used as targets when the firearms arrived.

In the afternoon Jim gave a refresher course on the construction of hides, SBS style. He did it in Arabic and the guys began to find words coming back to them from old campaigns. 'Look for a dip in the ground,' he said, 'there won't be time to dig holes and hide masses of soil. It needs to be long enough and wide enough to accommodate you and your kit. When you've found a suitable place, remove the surface cover carefully peeling it to one side, like so.' He began to cut away the rough turf and scrub from the dip in the ground. 'It could just as well be rubble and concrete,' he commented, as he worked energetically away. 'Then you put the canes in place, bending them into a convex support structure like this.' He demonstrated. 'On top of the canes place the wire mesh, followed by a layer of polythene and then replace the removed surface cover on top of the lot, like so.'

The men looked on as Jim put the finishing touches to the hide. What had been a concave dip in the ground was now a slightly convex hump. It looked solid and a part of the terrain. Jim lifted the mesh at one end and propped it open with a bit of stick. He lay down and wriggled backwards, feet first into the space he had created, and lowered the end gently down. He had been swallowed up by the landscape. 'Walk round and have a look from various angles,' he suggested from his place of concealment.

Mike was impressed. 'If I didn't know you were there I'd never guess it in a million years.'

Jim emerged grinning, 'An Argentine soldier stopped his armored personnel carrier yards from me in the Falklands, he got out, walked over and pissed a foot from my nose; he'd been drinking wine. Gave me a nasty turn; I thought a section of troops was gonna winkle me out, but it was only the driver splashing his boots.'

There was laughter at the anecdote; they all had stories they could tell.

'Well, it illustrates the point,' Jim said, 'on this type of operation camouflage and concealment is the best form of defense. Better to come and go unseen than to have to fight, which brings us to the hessian. Just before we go in we'll need to get a supply of genuine rubbish as piled up in the Beirut streets, and sew and stick it on to hessian squares. Then if we need to we dive into a dark corner, deploy the rubbish covered squares and look like any other old pile of refuse. A pile of refuse with a sting though, we'll be carrying silenced weapons in case anyone tries to look too closely.'

Mike was surprised at the simplicity and the ingenuity of the technique. As the training continued, he felt his confidence growing. In Andy Cunningham and company he had acquired real valuable assets.

Zurich, October 14th.

Ben tapped Najib on the shoulder as he read his note. Najib started as if he had received an electric shock.

‘My friend, I see you have my note, let’s go up to your room and we can discuss the figures as you requested.’

Ben’s words gave Najib time to regain some of his poise. ‘Y-y-yes, good idea,’ he stammered, trying to suppress a look of pure loathing.

Ben took a grip on his elbow and steered him firmly to the lifts. Two other men from the foyer joined them. As the lift doors closed Najib opened his mouth to protest. One of the two passengers cut him off before he could utter a sound. Grabbing a fistful of Najib’s shirtfront he jammed him into a corner of the lift. Najib looked to the other passenger for help. He looked indifferently back. Both were Mossad and were working for Ben.

Never a physical person, Najib was easily kept on the defensive. He stuttered and stammered trying to reconcile conflicting thoughts. What was the Jew Levy doing here? How did he know that Najib was in Zurich? How much did he know of his business? The Lift doors opened and he was given the bum’s rush along the corridor to his room. ‘The key Najib,’ Ben demanded, keeping the pressure on.

Najib fumbled in his robe and produced the card key he’d picked up at the desk. Ben slammed open the door and the Mossad agents shoved the panicking Najib through it. Ben followed them in like a charging bull.

Najib was backed into the dressing table, his knees buckled and he sat heavily onto his assorted toiletries. He was not comfortable and the Jew Levy was nose to nose with him and snarling like a wolf.

Ben signaled to one of the Mossad agents. The man stepped forward drawing a large black IMI Desert Eagle .44 Magnum automatic from a shoulder holster. Taking a silencer from his leather jacket pocket he screwed it onto the muzzle of the automatic. He pressed the silencer into the centre of Najib’s forehead. Najib went very still.

‘This team will put a soft nosed bullet through your brain and, after dark, dump your carcass into the Limmat. It may be found in a couple of weeks half way down the Rhine or it may reach the North Sea. I don’t care which. Or you can tell me what you know.’ Ben’s eyes bored into Najib.

Najib realized he could be living his last moments and his sly brain made the necessary accommodations.

‘My friend, why the high drama? You know that I am keeping you informed of events, surely? Call your man off.’

‘Talk or die now.’ Ben made no sign to his operative.

‘Yes, well, I’m here on business as you may suppose.’

‘Blood of Shatila business?’

‘I was on my way to fax Bat Yom Import Export when you so rudely hustled me up here.’

‘Really.’ Ben’s voice was heavy with sarcasm.

‘Truly, truly I was.’

The second Mossad agent spoke. ‘You have been to the Baur au Lac. We have made extensive enquiries; the guest list is most interesting.’

Najib swallowed hard, desperately trying not to let his fear give him away.

'Get to the point.' Ben nodded at the agent with the gun. He ground the silencer hard into Najib's forehead forcing him back to the mirror.

Najib winced, but he was gaining time. 'Tell the Jew enough of the truth to be believable, but not enough to prejudice the grand plan,' he thought, 'if I am careful in what I say, I can get myself out of this situation. I can manipulate events to my advantage later.'

'Abu Asifah is planning another operation,' he said, 'I am merely here to arrange the funds.'

Where?'

'Aah...'

The agent with the gun thumbed back the hammer.

'Inside Israel; I was going to advise you, I really was.'

'What is the target?'

'I'm not sure yet, I am trying to find out for you,' Najib lied glibly.

Ben pointed at the bed. 'Bring a pillow.'

It was passed to the Mossad agent with the gun. He put it over Najib's face.

Najib's arms waved frantically and muffled squeals came through the pillow.

Ben Nodded. The pillow was removed.

Najib's face was white and greasy with sweat. He panted to regain his breath. His brain was racing, could he bluff? What would the Jew believe? Would the Jew Levy risk a killing in a Zurich hotel? Would he kill a valuable inside source?

'One more time Najib, What is the target?'

Najib gambled. 'Truly, I don't know, I'm not permitted to know,' Najib said in a shaky whisper, 'I'm only involved in provision of funds.'

Ben's mouth was dry. 'When is the attack to take place?'

'Not yet, I believe it's in the planning stage.'

'Will he lead it himself?'

'He will claim so,' the sneer in Najib's voice was profound, 'but be assured, the job will be set up and carried out by another - as have most of his achievements in the past.'

'Who?'

'Well, I'm not sure, I can't...' Najib's voice tailed off as Ben's eyes bored into his own.

'You don't help me, I don't help you. Abu Asifah becomes a leader of world renown in your place. If you want my help to oust the man who has taken your position in the organization you founded you have to deliver.'

Part of Najib's brain registered the change from the threat of death to threat of non-co-operation. The other part could not bear to think about his relegation; jealous rage consumed him, overriding his fear.

'No one knows this man's real name, not even Abu Asifah. Like most of his kind he uses false identities.' Najib shrugged expressively, 'Who knows what names he may use? I don't need to know his name, so it has been withheld from me, but I think that he is a Turk. He operated in Greece for Abu Asifah; he masterminded the hijack operation. He also organized the blowing up of the aircraft over Iceland. Most of these great victories of Abu Asifah, they would all have been impossible without this man.'

'Where is he now?' Ben rapped the words out.

'I don't know,' Najib opened his arms wide, a picture of innocence. 'The last I heard of him was when he operated for Abu Asifah in Greece,' he added hastily, pretending to gabble now as the Mossad agent raised the pillow, 'he is a Muslim, an Islamist; he wants to spread the Islamist message in Turkey and for that he needs money; Abu Asifah provides it in return for jobs done.'

'What does he look like?'

'I don't know; I've never met him.'

Ben's face expressed disbelief.

'Truly, I've never met him; all contact was through Abu Asifah.'

Sweat beaded Najib's brow, had the Turk been seen visiting him? His eyes pleaded with Ben to believe him.

Ben grunted, 'Keep your eyes and ears open, Najib, I want all the information you can get on this man and this operation. Believe me Najib; if you want my help, you give me unlimited help in return. Any sign of treachery and I'll shop you to your friends.'

Najib fell over himself in his haste to agree, and began to give Ben details of the Blood of Shatila headquarters, its layout and guard routines.

Later after an hour of laying poison for his enemy, Abu Asifah, when the door closed behind Ben and the Mossad agents he spat on it. 'Jew pigs, I'll beat you in the end,' he hissed.

Big Sur, October 23rd.

After days of hard training weapons and equipment, procured by Andrew Cunningham's company, were delivered in a plain panel truck to a quiet lay-by. There they were transferred to the Chevy Blazers and driven down the track to Anna's house and placed in a storeroom.

The teams cleaned and assembled the weapons and began to practice their use. Andrew had chosen Uzi assault pistols as their personal armament. Being semi-automatic, they provided light, extremely portable firepower. Fitted with efficient silencers, they were quiet and deadly in operation, and Andy came up with a way of enhancing both the stealth and the stopping power of the weapons. He had purchased some boxes of 9mm Glaser safety ammunition. The Glaser round is a cartridge, the bullet of which is made up of a thin copper case containing lead shot in liquid Teflon. When the round fires the bullet behaves exactly like a normal copper jacketed bullet until it impacts its target, then it dumps its energy like a small shotgun cartridge fired at close range. If the bullet misses the target, it splashes on the first solid object it hits and there are no give-away ricochets.

Andy loaded his silenced assault pistol with Glaser ammunition and Jim loaded his with standard 9mm rounds. They set up some large squash on rocks near the beach and paced out the distance to the firing point. Jim fired first, aiming at the rocks. The muzzle explosions were inaudible from only a few yards away, but loud whining ricochets whanged off over the sea, a complete give-away. Jim adjusted his sights to correct the weapons aim.

Then Andy fired at the rocks. There was a barely audible phut from the pistol and no give-away ricochets off the rocks as the Glaser bullets splashed and

fragmented. He too adjusted his sights slightly. The rest of the team sat on the sand watching with interest.

Satisfied with the accuracy, they set out to assess the stopping power of the rounds. Again Jim fired first, punching a single 9mm round into a squash. It went through the big vegetable quite cleanly, the exit hole not much bigger than the entry hole.

Andy aimed at a second squash and fired a single Glazer round. The big squash exploded into a spray of fragments.

Andy looked at Jim and patted his magazine full of Glaser rounds. 'We use these,' he said grimly.

As their fitness improved, the men split into two teams and trained for their respective tasks. With the help of Willy Andersen, Jim instructed Mike in the use of oxygen re-breathing apparatus, a closed system where the oxygen breathed is recycled to scrub out exhaled carbon dioxide and pick up oxygen. The big advantage of such a system is that there are no telltale trails of bubbles on the surface. The big disadvantage is that going any deeper than twenty-two feet you die from oxygen poisoning. They used very accurate depth gauges.

Navigation at night ten feet down in inky black water had to be learned by Mike and practiced by the three of them. Even Jim and Willy found this technique difficult despite their previous experience. Together they got back into the knack of it and after a while were able to make accurate landfalls at night. They practiced observational techniques and the coding and entering of information into their burst transmission radios. The information had to get out even if they didn't. The short sharp burst transmissions would ensure no one could get a directional fix on their positions; an unlikely scenario in Lebanon, but Jim and Willy were professionals and didn't intend to take unnecessary risks.

The team trained hard for two weeks, fine tuning their already fit bodies, honing their special skills and polishing their Arabic. Finally they were ready.

'Listen up guys, we ship out to-morrow...' Mike's words were drowned in a great cheer. He handed Jim a bunch of tickets. 'I guess I don't need to tell you all to keep shtum regarding destinations.'

Chapter 17

9.00am. Tel Aviv, 10/24/02.

Twenty four hours after the team left for Israel, Mike reported to John Henderson's office in Tel Aviv to give him a progress report, whilst Jim and the rest of the team went off to a secret destination.

'We're ready to go on the recce John,' Mike told him, 'two of the guys have been getting me up to scratch on technique and fitness and I think we can get the confirmation and the information we need.'

John didn't look as enthusiastic as Mike had expected, but before he could comment to that effect there was a peremptory knock, the door opened and Mary ushered Ben Levy in.

On his return from Zurich a car had taken Ben to his office where his in tray was piled high, his e-mail in box was full of items demanding his attention and his personal mobile was stuffed with text messages. With a heavy sigh he had immediately attacked the backlog. What he found, added to what he had heard from Najib Shawa, added to what he already knew had given him cause for grave concern.

John looked up, his eyebrows raised inquiringly. 'Want to tell me where the fire is Ben?'

'It's just being lit,' Ben replied, 'and it's too close for comfort.'

'The stakes are being raised? Where's this taking us?'

'There is something I should have told you,' Ben said, something I held back.'

John looked him in the eye. 'So tell us now.'

Ben took a deep breath. 'You aren't going to like this; the microfilm I supplied via Mike?'

John nodded. 'What about it?'

'I held some back.'

'Go on.'

'There was a section on dispositions in the Western Desert. A deployment of strike capability by Syria aimed at Israel. Our leaders wouldn't take the risk of it getting out and causing mass panic in our people.'

John and Mike looked at him in surprise.

'Well, Israeli-US relations were not at their best at the time and I gave you what I could. Anyway as far as we're concerned that is not the important issue.'

John held his anger in check, if this was not the important issue what the hell was?

Ben told them the result of his visit to Zurich, and what he had learned from his contact.

Mike looked at him doubtfully; 'A major attack inside Israel?'

John's reaction was the same as Mike's. 'Is it possible?'

'Well we can't afford to take the chance,' Ben told him, 'and anyway there's more. I've spent hours going through reports and checking on the people attending the alleged Islamic conference at the Baur au Lac in Zurich. I'm beginning to feel as though we have only seen the tip of the iceberg. The people my contact visited in Zurich included top representatives of Al-Qaeda, the Iranian regime, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and PFLP activists based in Syria. Members of the Takfir group from Egypt and Sudan, and disaffected Saudis were also present. That's a pretty broad confederation – what, I ask myself, could be their interest in the activities of the Blood of Shatila.'

'You think they are all behind a strike into Israel?'

'Someone is; maybe all, maybe some, we know there has been high level contact between the Iranians, the Syrians and the Al-Qaeda network. To me it begins to look as if someone is co-opting the Blood of Shatila's actions for their own ends. From whispers gathered elsewhere and from the data on the microfilm I think the Blood of Shatila group has one objective, but the others at that meeting may have another objective entirely. I think Abu Asifah and the Blood of Shatila would see a strike inside Israel as an action to heighten their profile. For the Iranians, the Iraqis, the Syrians and the others at national level, it could be calculated to

paralyze the Israeli nation and at the same time act as a signal for a chemical and biological attack on Israel as well as on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.'

John looked grim. 'So, maybe the Blood of Shatila and its next operation is being funded for terrorist acts, but more importantly is being used as a signal for the start of their real intentions? A Jihad, legitimizing in Muslim eyes a series of actions; actions that would gain access to the wealth of Kuwait, the wealth of Saudi Arabia, control of the most holy places in Islam, and the kudos of destroying the Israeli State?'

Ben nodded. 'Either by design or by accident I believe the two things are linked. If I'm right the whole balance of power in the Middle East is about to be altered. We could have a Muslim revival led by fanatics, funded by oil wealth and controlled by brutal despots. That can't be allowed to happen.'

John stood up and began to pace round the office. 'So, we've analyzed the hell out of the situation, question is, what are we going to do about it?'

Mike was the first to speak. 'The whole thing has to be nipped in the bud. We have more reason than ever to eliminate them.'

'By "them" you mean the Blood of Shatila?' Ben asked.

'Who else, they're the guys I'm after?' Mike replied sharply.

'If you take out the Blood of Shatila, do we have any guarantee that this strike at the heart of Israel will not go forward?' John asked.

'No, we don't,' Ben replied, 'and that is my principal concern, this Turkish Islamist is a determined pro. Everything we know about him suggests that once he has been set a task, he forces it through to the end.'

'So the signal would still be given, the Jihad would start, Iran and Syria could launch a chemical and biological attack and the whole of the Middle East would go to hell anyway,' John stated flatly.

Ben nodded; 'Exactly so.'

Mike, as an analyst, needed no elaboration. His brain was cutting the problem into manageable segments. 'Well, we are ready to go on the recce. The follow up strike team is in training to take out the Blood of Shatila HQ. The team leaders know what I want done, and once we have the recce results they'll know how to do it. So, our priority has to be to locate the Turkish Fundamentalist and stop him. The signal for the Jihad has to be prevented.'

'Damn right, once their planes or missiles cross the border we have four minutes before they hit,' Ben said fervently. 'John, you and I need to put this before the United Nations Security Council and get the necessary force sanctioned against Iran, Syria, whoever.'

'The process has been started, Mike put the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the picture several days ago, but it takes a hell of a long time to get the UN moving. We need to alert them to the new data.'

'Right, you guys need to push on that, so who's going to go after the shadowy Turk?' Mike asked.

Ben and John looked at him.

'No, I'm going after the bastards who killed my brother.'

'Half the bastards,' Ben said.

'What?'

'The guy who made the hijack possible was this covert operator; the guy Najib says is a Turk. Without his involvement the guys on the plane could not have killed your brother. He is at least half-responsible for Alan's death. If you don't get him you've only done half the job.'

'But...'

'You said yourself only a few moments ago that the recce and the strike teams are competent and ready to go. Let them take care of that half and you go after the other half, the guys who set Alan up.'

John added his weight to the argument. 'Mike, you still work for me, you are a serving officer under an oath of allegiance. I agree with Ben, your specialist team can take care of the Blood of Shatila thugs. I need you to go after the brains; the guy Najib thinks is a Turk. He has to be stopped. You have a damn good reason to go after him, and, if I have to, I will give you a direct order as a serving officer to do so.'

Mike took a deep breath, held it and let it out slowly. Gradually the balance tipped in his mind. They were right. This Turkish fanatic had to be found, he had to be stopped and he owed it to Alan to stop him. Permanently.

'Okay, where do I start?'

'At the scene of his last major operation: Athens.'

1.00pm. Lod, Israel.

Ben Levy had found a disused building with a similar layout to the terrorist stronghold in Beirut. Conveniently, it was a government building. It had a chain link and razor wire fence around it at a secure distance and IDF regulars were posted to guard it. Ben had commandeered the whole of the building, including the basement service area, and the car park levels. He also had the top floor set up as an accommodation unit. Provision had been made for food to be delivered, and there were wash basins, toilets, and showers for the team to use. They were issued with IDF olive drab fatigues.

The sweat ran off Digger Trench's forehead as he shoveled sand into the sandbag held open by Willy Anderson. He paused to wipe it away from his eyes, and surveyed the progress they were making in building defenses as shown on satellite photos of the suspected Blood of Shatila HQ in Beirut. One sangar on the approach road to the car park was completed with observation slits in place giving a clear view of the road. A timber and corrugated iron roof covered with sandbags to keep out grenades or mortar bombs also served to keep out the worst of the sun. A second sangar was half built. Down the road timber barriers covered in barbed wire were laid out to form a set of "S" bends to slow down approaching traffic. The set up was exactly that which existed in the Shatila district of Beirut.

'C'mon Digger, 'ra bags'll nae fill theirsens.' Willie's voice rasped across Digger's thoughts.

'All right, all right ya wee bugger, I was just checking progress.'

Digger shoveled the last couple of spades-full into the sandbag.

'When ahv a can av ice cold lager in me mit, that'll be progress.'

Willy shook open another sandbag for Digger to fill.

Andy Cunningham and Jim Savage straightened their aching backs.

Digger's next shovel-full went down the back of Willie's shorts.

Chaos ensued. After a few minutes of horse play Andy yelled, 'Break it up! I want this job completed today!'

Willy shook the sand out of his shorts. He grinned at Digger again.

'Ya big bam, whin ye're legless ahm gonnae piss in yer beer.'

Jim grinned at Digger. 'He's not called Wee Willy just 'cos he's little,' he said, and turned to resume shoveling just as Mike pulled up in his hired car. Jim and Andrew walked over to him.

'Get the guys together inside,' Mike told them, 'there's been a change of plan.'

Glad to have a few moments respite from the fierce sun, the team moved inside. Digger handed out cold cans of lager from an antiquated fridge he had scavenged from somewhere.

Mike got straight to the point. 'I have to go off on another aspect of this operation. Jim, can you and Willy handle the recce?'

Jim shrugged. 'Sure, it's our trade,' he said and looked at Willy.

Willy shrugged too. 'Nae problem.'

'Good; so Andy that leaves you one man short, can you still cover the strike?'

'Yes, we have built in contingency in case things get nasty. I could always reduce the holding team securing the rendezvous by one without much risk.'

'Right then; Jim, Willy, get to this address, in your local civvies, tonight.' Mike handed Jim a slip of paper. Aim to arrive at 10pm. Take no ID. The password challenge is Aardvark the response is Zebedee. You'll be taken to an Israeli Naval unit. All the kit you need will be waiting for you to check it out. You go in tomorrow night. Andrew, carry on with the training as planned. When the recce information comes in, you will be contacted and given all the data and all the help you need. Good luck.'

8.00am. Big Sur.

Anna had plenty to occupy her mind. Work kept coming in via her computer link with Technology Today and via email.

Dawn was not so lucky. She had nothing to occupy her mind, nothing to take her thoughts away from what might be happening to her beloved Jim. Without her being aware of it her concern began to become an obsession.

Anna tried to take Dawn's mind away from her worry by giving her things to do, but Dawn's ability to help with the problems of Technology To-day was limited, and doing chores around the house didn't prevent her from thinking. Even long walks didn't help much. On one of their strolls along the beach Anna became aware that Dawn was crying softly.

'I can't help it,' Dawn sniffed miserably, 'I don't know where he is or what he's doing, I just know it's dangerous.' The floodgates of her tears opened and she sobbed, 'Oh Anna, he's all I care about in the world. I've had so many failed relationships, and now the one man I truly care for has to earn his living doing things that are so dangerous. It's not fair.'

'I know, I know,' Anna put her arm around her shoulders and held her close. 'I feel the same way about Mike. These men, there's no way they'll listen, not till they've done what they've set out to do.'

As she gave Dawn a Kleenex from her pocket, Anna began to wonder whether Dawn was fully over the trauma of the attack she had endured at Heathrow.

Dawn gave her nose a good blow. 'If only I could speak to him, find out where he is; find out if he's safe.'

'Well, I have a number we can call in an emergency, Bat Yom Import and Export, whatever that may be...'

'Oh please Anna, just to find out that they're all right, please...'

'Come on, let's go back and do it now.' Emergency or not, Anna decided that Dawn's distressed state warranted a quick 'phone call.

The two women hurried back to the house. Anna rang the number Mike had given her.

'Shalom; Bat Yom Import Export.'

'Ah, yes, do you speak English?'

'Of course Madam, how may I help you?'

'Well, I was given your number by Mike Edge; he said I could contact him there.'

'I see, one moment please...'

'What are they saying?' Dawn's anxious question came over Anna's shoulder.

'Hang on,' Anna switched the 'phone to the speaker. The switchboard girl at Bat Yom came back to them.

'I'm sorry Madam, Mister Edge isn't here at the moment, and I can't reach him directly.'

'What about Mister Savage?' Dawn blurted the question, unable to stop herself.

At the sound of another voice the switchboard girl became more defensive, her voice sharp. 'I'm sorry there's no one of that name here.'

Motioning Dawn to keep quiet, Anna's tone was conciliatory. 'I'm sorry, I'm on the speaker phone, that was my secretary jogging my memory, one moment and I'll switch it off. There, I'm back on the hand set now. Is Mister Cunningham available then?'

'No, I'm sorry, but if you would like to leave a message I'll make sure Mister Edge gets it as soon as he phones in...'

Anna's long experience of corporate practice told her she wasn't going to get any further. 'Okay, can you ask him to contact Anna Sutherland at Technology Today as soon as he can, thank you, 'bye.' She looked at Dawn, slumped and miserable, her hope of news of Jim gone.

'Don't worry, they're probably in a meeting or something and can't be disturbed.'

'If they were in a meeting she'd have said.'

'Not necessarily, she was just being careful, and that's a good thing, helping to keep them safe.'

Dawn turned and buried her head in Anna's shoulder. 'Oh God, I can't stand this, it's driving me mad.'

6.00pm. Athens.

The Hotel Grande Bretagne is the oldest and finest hotel in Athens. Its massive rectangular shape, set in Constitution Square, facing the National Gardens and the Houses of Parliament, gives an impression of solid respectability. The black

and white marble and the elegant décor of the foyer add to that first impression, as does the impeccable service and the cosmopolitan atmosphere.

As Mike checked in the receptionist gave him a fax message from Bat Yom Import Export and confirmed that his reservation was as specified. He had a large suite; bedroom with bathroom en suite, a lounge, dining room and a small kitchen.

'Good, self contained, this will do as an office and as a base to work from,' Mike thought as the door closed behind the porter. He sat at the writing desk, took out his address book and reached for some copy paper. It was the work of a few moments to draft a fax to Anna, then he got busy on the 'phone. Ten minutes later he had contacted the two police officers that had investigated the Greek end of the hijacking. On his way out through the foyer he asked the receptionist to send his fax. An hour later he walked into the Athens Police HQ, and asked to speak to Lieutenant Georgiou or Sergeant Joanidies. He was ushered into an interview room.

'How can we help you, Mister Edge?' the lieutenant asked.

'Well, I got your names from a colleague. He said that you were the officers who carried out the investigation of the hijacking of the Olympic Airlines flight a short while ago.'

The two police officers looked at each other.

'What is your interest in that case, Mister Edge?' the lieutenant asked.

'I'm in the business of preventing hijackings, I wondered if you could give me some material that might help.'

'That case is closed Mister Edge, we are satisfied that nothing untoward happened on Greek soil.'

'Yes, I'm sure that is the case lieutenant, but...'

'No buts, Mister Edge, the case is closed; we can give you no information on this subject. The sergeant will show you out, goodbye.'

The lieutenant, with his ambitious eye still on promotion, was inclined to be very careful in dealing with anyone not in the Greek police force, anyone not Greek, and particularly anyone from another country's officialdom. He stood up as he spoke, and made as if to leave the interview room.

Mike took a very thick wad of drachmae from his inside pocket and peeled off a couple of notes. He shoved them into his trouser pocket then replaced the bundle of notes in his jacket. 'It's very important to me to get some information on this case, are you sure you can't help me?'

Lieutenant Georgiou's eyes met those of his sergeant and held them for a moment. He gave a barely perceptible nod and left the room.

'You heard the lieutenant,' sergeant Joanidies said, 'the case is closed.' As he spoke he opened his notebook and quickly wrote down an address followed by the words "After six tonight". 'Follow me,' he continued, 'I'll show you out.' He thrust the piece of folded paper into Mike's hand.

6.00pm. Istanbul.

George Liani had a developing problem. Word had reached him that the Istanbul Police were getting close to his fundamentalist press operation. Someone had

talked and soon a raid would be made. He had no time to lose, and he had very few options open to him. 'Money, it always comes down to money,' he muttered to himself as he looked out over the bustle of the Golden Horn. The promised advance funds from his Palestinian contacts had not yet come through. His resources were low, and the fact that someone had talked meant that he was unable to rely on his local fundamentalist volunteers.

He briefly contemplated storing the equipment and the materials in his own apartment but he rejected the idea out of hand. He didn't relish the idea of being caught sitting on subversive material. The Turkish authorities regarded this as a very serious offence, and there would be no way to deny his involvement.

Another option occurred to him, he could move everything into the apartment of Suleiman Yavas, his former helper. It wasn't far away, the rent was paid up in advance, and there was no connection to him. He had Suleiman's keys; he could hire a van and he could move the stuff himself.

By the time the rent came due he would have his new funding through, and could find somewhere else to set up the printing operation. He thought it through carefully and could see no reason why he should not use the apartment. In any case a bit of movement in the apartment would stop any curiosity that might be aroused among neighbors by the place being empty. He didn't want his former helper listed as a missing person by some nosy do-gooder, and if the apartment was raided the authorities would be looking for Suleiman and not for him.

Taking the dead Suleiman's credit card from the wallet removed from Suleiman's person when he had killed him, George Liani left his apartment and made his way to the nearest van rental company. Using Suleiman's credit card, he hired an unmarked white delivery van for a twenty-four hour period, and drove off to the district where the underground press was located. He drove casually around, following a pattern that would enable him to case the whole area. He saw nothing to alarm him.

Later, under the cover of darkness he stripped out the computer, the printer, the color photocopier and all the bits and pieces. Then he removed all the files, pamphlets and every scrap of paper. Working through the early hours of the morning he transferred it all quietly to the new location without anyone taking any notice of him. Opening a cupboard to store some pamphlets he found a brief case. Inside were the papers of his former helper; birth certificate, passport, driving license, identity card and medical insurance.

'Could be useful,' he muttered under his breath. He knew where he could get them altered for his own use. Taking the briefcase out to the van he carried on working until everything was stored to his satisfaction. Then, tired, but satisfied with a job well done, he went home in the early dawn light.

9.00am. Big Sur.

Anna rushed out of her study waving a fax. 'Dawn, it's from Mike, he says that all's well and don't worry...'

'Where are they, is Jim okay?' In her haste Dawn dropped the dish she was carrying onto the table with a crash.

‘Well he doesn’t say as much,’ Anna said slowly, ‘but it’s a prompt reply. Technology Today sent it on, that girl did pass on our message, I guess.’

‘Let me see,’ Dawn took the paper from Anna’s hand. ‘There’s a return code on the fax header, do you suppose we can find out where it was sent from?’

‘Shouldn’t be a big problem; give it to me.’ Anna rang the switchboard room at Technology To-day. ‘Suzy, I’ve got a fax here, this is the return code; can you check it out and get me the address please?’ She waited. ‘Okay. Thanks.’ She turned to Dawn. ‘That didn’t take long. It was sent from the Hotel Grand Bretagne, in Athens.’

Dawn looked unhappily back at her. ‘Athens, what the hell are they doing in Athens? Oh God, I can’t stand much more of this.’ She stormed out of the kitchen slamming the door behind her, ran to her room, and flung herself onto her bed.

Anna, watching her fleeing back, pursed her lips and frowned. Dawn’s behavior was, to say the least, erratic. Could this exaggerated concern for Jim be a symptom of some deeper stress? What did they call it? Post something? Post traumatic stress disorder? Was that what was at the root of Dawn’s behavior?

Curled up, unable to contain her misery, Dawn stared sightlessly out of the window, tears running unchecked down her cheeks.

Gradually a plan began to form in her mind.

8.00pm. Lod, Israel.

Once the sangars and the roadblocks were completed the strike team adopted a reversed working routine, rising in the early evening and going to bed in the late morning. As they had just come from a different time zone, their body clocks were more in tune with these times in any case, and as the time for the raid was close, Andy decided to stick to this arrangement. The team would sleep during the heat of the day and get up for breakfast in the evenings from now on.

They were also practicing their Arabic pronunciation, with emphasis on the standard forms of greeting. ‘Salaam Alekhum,’ ‘Peace be unto you.’ And the standard response, ‘Alekhum Salaam,’ ‘Unto you be Peace.’ ‘Kief halek, sedigi?’ ‘How are you, friend?’ No large vocabulary was attempted but, under the expert guidance of Andrew Cunningham and Dave Prendergast, great emphasis was placed on learning the accent, particularly on the words of response. Circumstances could arise where any one of the team may be forced to speak. They would need to understand basic conversational questions and be fluent in a few common responses. Hour after hour they practiced, until they sounded like Palestinians to Andrew’s ear.

Moustaches and beards had been grown, and these were now shaped and dyed to suit. Hair was trimmed into local styles of barbering and dyed. Faces, which were not yet brown enough from the Californian and Israeli sunshine, were dyed to a deeper color. A set of clothes in local style was ready for each man, complete with a stained and well-used Keffiyeh in the distinctive black and white pattern favored by the PLO.

Other intensive training continued. ‘Who cuts the most meat?’ Digger Trench opened his lecture with a question. He was giving a refresher course in the use of the Fairbairn Sykes knife, the wicked-looking, double edged, mat black weapon

that is the emblem of the Third Commando Brigade, the brigade in which most of these men had served.

‘A butcher?’

‘Right, and what does a butcher use to keep his knives sharp?’

‘A butcher’s steel.’

‘Exactly, a finely serrated edge is needed.’ Digger held up his own knife and a big butcher’s steel. ‘Here’s how you do it.’ He began to sweep the edges of the blade diagonally down and across the butcher’s steel. A thin line of bright metal glinted along the edges of the matt black blade.

From behind the trestle table, which he was using as a lectern, Digger lifted up a rack of sheep ribs and hung it on a convenient pipe with a butcher’s hook.

‘Once it’s sharp, this is how you use it.’ He held the knife horizontal, the blade pointing forwards and flat to the ground. He tilted the blade up and in one continuous sweeping movement slid it up between the meaty sheep ribs. The blade went in to the hilt. He turned the ribs on the hook to show the length of blade protruding into the ribcage. ‘Five inches, two more than needed to rupture a heart.’

He turned to a human anatomy diagram. ‘Here is where you place the knife for maximum effect. Remember, live muscle will clench onto the blade in a reflex reaction, you will need to use more effort to get it out than you did to push it in.’ He paused to put away his grisly lecture aids and picked up the next item.

‘Stealth is our watchword for the first two thirds of the operation. You will be carrying assault pistols, but they are for use in extreme circumstances only. Initially all opposition has to be taken out silently. The knife is one tool for the job. The next tool is the Welrod pistol.’ In his hand he held a matt black tube twelve inches long and about one and a quarter inches in diameter. About a quarter of the way along its length was a wooden handle. He held the odd looking weapon up for all the men to see.

‘The Welrod pistol, gentlemen, old but still effective. Overall length 12", weight 32 ounces, barrel length 5", caliber .32", rifling 4 groove right hand, fires single shots. It is magazine fed, but you have to cock it for each shot. The muzzle velocity is 700 feet per second and it is totally silent.’ He tapped the end of the tube. ‘Inside here are a whole series of oiled leather self sealing washers, which close up after the passage of the round. This weapon is a close quarter elimination tool to be used when the enemy is out of reach of your knife. You will each be issued with one of these pistols and with ammunition for it. Don’t try to use it at ranges over 10 yards, the accuracy is limited. Use it close in and aim for the centre of the chest.’

Each man was issued with his odd looking but lethal pistol and they went into the basement to practice close range shots into man sized targets. Nothing could be heard even from a few feet away.

They began to practice infiltration methods. They took it in turns, different pairs of men alternately being the guards and then the infiltrators. Andrew encouraged them to make constructive criticism wherever possible, but in the event there was very little to criticize. These men were professional and, even operating against the expertise of each other, made very few mistakes. A full dress rehearsal was

planned, with Ben in attendance to see how it went. Digger Trench lined them up for inspection and walked round with Andy and Ben Levy.

‘Don’t let the Israeli security services catch sight of this lot,’ Ben warned, ‘or the whole of the local defensive set-up will be ordered to stand by to repel a raid.’

10.00pm. Big Sur.

Dawn had not emerged from her room for supper in spite of Anna’s pleas. Anna tapped on Dawn’s door, a mug of hot chocolate in her hand, hoping to tempt her. There was no answer. Anna turned the latch and went in. The bed had been lain on, there was a dent in the pillows but the covers had not been pulled back. Of Dawn there was no sign. She took in the state of the bed and then saw the note propped on the dressing table.

‘Dear Anna, please don’t be angry. I can’t stand it any longer. I’ve gone to Athens to find Jim.’

Anna felt a stab of fear. She sat on the edge of Dawn’s bed to think. Dawn had run off to do the very thing Mike didn’t want - what if she blundered in and caused Mike’s plans to fail; unwittingly put lives at risk. Anna felt keenly her own responsibility in this. Dawn had been in her care. Perhaps she should have given more of her time to Dawn, helped her more... but she had had so much to do to catch up with her work from Technology Today...

Well, damage limitation was what was needed now. She wasn’t working from the office in any case. She could work from anywhere with a laptop and a mobile. She would follow Dawn; perhaps head her off before she could do any damage. Then Anna realized that the Hotel Grande Bretagne in Athens was the only address Dawn had. Using the resources of Technology Today, and with a little luck, she might be able to get there before her, but there was no time to lose. Her Chevy Blazer was gone, Dawn must have taken it. Reaching for the ‘phone, Anna contacted a private executive airline company that Technology Today used when speed was essential. She ordered a helicopter to pick her up from the stretch of grass above the beach and a private jet to be on standby at San Francisco International Airport.

Chapter 18

9.00am. Athens, 10/25/02.

The address was a taverna in the Plaka district, the oldest part of Athens, on the northern slope of the Acropolis. Mike found the way with difficulty, winding through narrow streets, some so old that they followed the routes of prehistoric footpaths. Finally he went up a steep stepped street which was little more than an alleyway. He was beginning to worry when the steps suddenly opened onto a small but busy square. At the side of the taverna, beneath a wrought iron canopy covered in an ancient twisting vine, tables and chairs were set on ancient flagstones.

He sat in the shade and ordered ouzo. The order came with the inevitable mezedes. Mike sat and nibbled at the snack, and sipped his drink. He had been there for twenty minutes when he saw the sergeant coming towards him. He stood and greeted him in the Greek fashion, insisting that he join him for a glass of ouzo.

The sergeant ordered it 'me pago', that is with ice, and nibbled at the mezedes. Finally he spoke. 'What your game, Mister Edge?'

'As I explained, I'm working on the prevention of hi...'

'Don' give me that, Mister Edge. You are the American CIA, why try bribe my boss?'

'I didn't try to bribe anyone.'

'You show large roll cash.'

Mike looked at him steadily but said nothing.

The sergeant helped him out. 'The boss, me too, hate these hijackers, hate what they do here. The lieutenant, so he young and want high job, but me? I retire soon. What you want Mister Edge, maybe I help you out.'

Mike nodded. 'Okay, I'm trying to pick up the trail of the guy who set up the hijacking here in Athens. He was indirectly responsible for the death of someone close to me. I want his head.'

The sergeant understood. Feuds and family vendettas were not unknown in Greece. 'So I help you. What is copy of police file be worth?'

'Are your investigations complete?'

'So, so.'

'Not finished?'

'Is stopped.'

'Stopped, why?'

'Is not your business, you want file or no?'

Mike had little choice. He named a figure.

The sergeant beamed. 'Each?' he suggested.

Mike nodded his agreement.

The sergeant finished his ouzo and stood up to leave. He smiled. 'Wait 'ere, I back at ten of clock,' he said, and walked off into the crowded square.

9.00am. Sde Dov, Israel.

'This is the aircraft we will use for the drop,' Andy Cunningham pointed over his shoulder at a camouflage painted tactical transport plane inside the hangar. 'We will practice boarding in darkness so that everyone knows where his seat is, who is on either side of him, and who is positioned with whom in the door-ways. This we will practice here on the ground inside the hangar. When we have it perfect we go up and practice a few night drops. I want every one of you to know your position in the free fall configuration, your altitude setting for formation break-up, your individual time count for separation and 'chute deployment, and your o'clock landing position relative to the marker lights.

Understood?'

There was a rumble of assent. They had all done it before but not for a long time. They all knew the perils of a HALO drop in the dark and in total silence.

Collision with a colleague, 'chute entanglement, 'chute collapse, dispersal too soon, missing the close confines of the drop zone. A good period of practice would get every one back into the swing of things, make the whole enterprise safer and more efficient.

'Right, no objections and no questions; once we are okay on the loading drills we will be making three jumps every night until we are perfect. Let's get started.' Under the leadership of Andy and Dave Prendergast they set to with a willingness that was based on a real understanding of the difficulties of the task they faced.

10.00pm. Plaka District, Athens.

At the appointed time the sergeant delivered the goods, but he took Mike to a small room at the rear of the taverna to do so. 'Don worry, this place is family place, no one talk,' he told Mike. 'I tells you what's in the file now. You want more, you ask of me here, not at polis station, okay?'

An hour later Mike sat studying the file in the back room; the sergeant had given him lots to go on. He began to make orderly notes while the sergeant's comments were still fresh in his mind. He could see immediately that there were several lines of enquiry to start on. First, there was the mute testimony of Dimitris's note.

'They are Turks,' Dimitris had written.

Secondly there were the fingerprints found on the keys of the car used by the terrorists and on the case of the cartridge which had killed Dimitris. John and Ben would have the resources to start a search of known terrorist activists and they could have the fingerprints checked.

Meanwhile here in Athens another line of enquiry beckoned. Who was this Andreas Kokalis, the man who had hired the car used by the terrorists? Mike decided to send copies of the file to John and Ben immediately, and then investigate Andreas Kokalis personally. Do a bit of digging around, and see if he could come up with more information. In Mike's experience not everyone co-operated with the police.

He 'phoned John Henderson and found that John had already contacted a colleague in the American Embassy in Athens. This man had been instructed to give Mike any assistance he needed. Under this arrangement photographic enlargements were made of the fingerprints found on the hire car keys and on the case of the shotgun cartridge which had killed Dimitris Kosovos.

A photocopy of Dimitris's note was appended to a written request for a search to be implemented, via the Turkish authorities, of their central fingerprint archives and the special section on terrorists. A copy of the package was sent to Ben Levy in Tel Aviv with a request that it be given the same treatment.

Satisfied that he had done all that he could to further those lines of enquiry, Mike turned his attention to the trail which, starting with the car registration number in Dimitris Kosovos's note, had ended at the address of the hirer of the car: Andreas Kokalis. He decided to make a visit to the address and see what he could learn at first hand. He took a cab to the district the address was in and stopped a few blocks from the street.

Walking the last part of the way he was able to take in the general atmosphere of the area. It was not affluent. 'No one would choose to live here,' Mike thought; 'Andreas Kokalis would have lived here through necessity rather than choice.' Yet all terrorists had ample funds, and Mike could think of few that resisted the opportunity to live well.

He examined the building. The peeling paint, the cracked and loose exterior rendering, and the broken roof tiles combined to give an air of neglect to the place. A dog, crusted in mange, sitting scratching itself in the doorway, added a feeling of raw indifference to the surroundings.

Mike stepped into the open hallway and banged on the chipped and dirty paintwork of the first door. There was a faint sound of movement from inside. A floorboard creaked and a brief glimmer of light came through a peephole in the door, only to be cut off by someone peering through it. The man in the room having established that Mike was alone, a rough voice came through the door.

'What you want?' The words were rasped out in colloquial Greek.

Mike fished a high denomination Drachma note out of his pocket and let it do the talking. Bolts grated back and the door creaked open on neglected hinges. A dirty unshaven face with bloodshot eyes scowled at him and an even dirtier hand reached for the banknote.

Mike held it out of reach. 'Information,' he said, 'Andreas Kokalis.'

A glimmer of understanding replaced the suspicion on the unpleasant face. The door creaked open a few more inches. A brusque jerk of the head indicated that Mike should step inside. He found himself in a room of indescribable squalor, and saw that there was a second man present. He was sitting on a filthy unmade bed, a stub of a cigarette stuck to his bottom lip, his eyes squinting against the smoke drifting upwards from it.

The first man closed the door and bolted it. 'Who you?' he rasped in heavily accented English, 'what you want?'

Mike's eyes narrowed as he saw the bolt shoved home. 'I want information; I can pay.' There was silence whilst the statement was digested.

'What information?'

'Andreas Kokalis, where is he?'

The man shrugged at the question but his eyes were on the banknote. 'He go, no come back. Maybe soon I let his room.'

Mike fished another banknote from his shirt pocket and added it to the first one. He got no reaction. He pulled out a third note. The man licked his lips. Mike was being careful not to let them see how much money he had, but it was obvious that they were speculating on the possibilities. Mike gently waved the three bank notes. 'Information?'

The first man responded by calling out in Greek. A third man stepped out of a shadowy alcove screened off by a beaded curtain. Slowly, arrogantly, he stepped over to stand in front of Mike. He was a big man, tall and powerfully built, used to the fear his size and reputation had given him. The man on the bed spat his cigarette butt on to the floor and stood up. He drew a wicked looking lock-knife from his pocket and flicked it open. It didn't take a genius to work out their intentions.

Mike drew slow deep breaths, letting perception take over from sight. He sensed the first move before it had started. The big man's hand, held at his side, made a grab for Mike's shirt front. He was way too late. Mike slapped the arm away and came in hard. His heel crashed down on the big man's unprotected instep. The bones broke with an audible crack. The shrill scream seemed oddly out of place coming from such a big frame. The big man doubled forwards, his body jack-knifing in agony. There was no room for pity. To be weak would be to die. Mike put both hands on the big man's head and slammed his face into his fast rising knee with all the force he could muster. The bone of the big man's nose split the thin flesh covering it and then broke. His head flew backward exposing his throat. Mike hit him hard across the windpipe with the edge of a rigid hand. The big man fell forwards, a gout of vomit erupting from his mouth. Retching uncontrollably, he fell into his own mess.

The man with the lock-knife was nearly on top of Mike the wicked curved blade arcing up towards his stomach. Mike pivoted to the side, the sharp blade missed him by millimeters, and he stabbed his left-hand forward, fingers spread, driving for the man's eyes with a ki-ai, a loud yell designed to distract. The man's hands flew up to protect his face as Mike slammed his right fist into the solar plexus. All the breath was driven from the man's body; he doubled up, gasping for breath. His lock-knife dropped to the floor, burying its point in the floorboards. Mike's bunched fist crashed behind the man's right ear, dropping him senseless.

The first man was at the door, his hand reaching for the bolt. Mike snatched the dropped lock-knife from the floor and whanged it backhanded into the door, missing the man's wrist by an inch. The man whipped his hand away from the bolt as if it had stung him. Mike picked up the three high denomination bank notes and, his eyes like flint, stepped over the fallen thug collapsed in his own vomit. His eyes transfixed the man cowering by the door.

'Information on Andreas Kokalis, now!'

Ducking his head repeatedly in an obsequious attempt to please, the man moved cautiously over to a cupboard against the wall.

Mike followed him, pulling the lock-knife from the door as he went. He grabbed a handful of the lank hair and jerking the man's head back he pressed the honed blade flat against the dirty throat. 'One bad move, I cut you.'

Dumb with fear, the man reached into the cupboard and pulled out a bundle of envelopes bound by a rubber band. His hands shaking, he handed the bundle over.

Mike threw the three bank notes onto the table. As the man reached out to grab them, he drove the lock-knife through the man's hand, through the bank notes and deep into the table. His face white with shock, the man passed out. Mike left quietly, closing the door behind him.

2.00pm. Hotel Grand Bretagne, Athens.

As he returned to his hotel Mike stopped in surprise as Anna came to meet him. 'What on earth...? I thought...'

'Mike, have you seen Dawn?'

'Dawn? No, why? I thought...'

'She's gone looking for Jim.' Anna took Mike's arm and led him to an alcove. 'She's very upset, I don't think she's fully recovered from the events at Heathrow. She's been behaving very irrationally since you all left; I think she's suffering from PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.'

'Why the hell would she come here?'

'After we received your fax she left a note saying she was going to look for Jim. The only address she had was the one we got from the return code on the fax header. Here, this hotel, I came to warn you, and to try to head her off.'

'Hell, Jim isn't here, he's miles away doing other things.'

'Well, she doesn't know that. I might have beaten her to it. I pulled all the strings I could, to get here fast. Maybe she's not here yet.'

'Okay, thanks for the warning, have you checked in here?'

'No, not yet.'

'Well don't, I have a suite, there's plenty of room, and I'm registered in another name, so if she enquires here she won't easily find either of us.'

'But what about her, she's in a desperate state, she's...'

'Okay, okay, don't worry, you can stay here and look out for her. When she shows up you'll have to take her back home.'

'But... but what if she won't go? She's manic, not at all rational the last time I saw her.'

'Anna, I can't worry about that. I have other things to do that won't wait. Come on let's get you installed in my suite then you can work out what we're going to do about her.'

3.00pm. Hotel Grand Bretagne, Athens.

The bundle of mail Mike had obtained contained one very useful item of information. A letter from the Hotel Grande Bretagne, the hotel Mike was staying in. Photocopied on headed notepaper, it was a written warning to all employees about absenteeism. Any further occurrences would be punishable by instant dismissal. Andreas Kokalis, it seemed, had worked as a Concierge there. 'Coincidence?' Mike wondered, maybe it fitted the events as Andreas had not been seen at his address recently. Leaving Anna to rest he made his way down to the American bar, the main bar of the hotel, for a much-needed drink; reaction to earlier events was setting in. The bar wasn't busy, and Mike chose a strategic place near to the till, the focal point of the barman's activity. Playing it like a tourist, he struck up a casual conversation with the barman and, after a while, asked after the guy who was Concierge the last time he stayed.

'What was his name? Began with "A", An... something?'

'Andreas?' the barman offered.

'Yeah, that was it, Andreas, a real nice guy, always helpful, he still work here?'

'No, sir, he don't work here no more, he leave sudden.'

'Oh, gee, that's a real shame, had a bundle of laughs with that guy over the years, any idea where he's gone?'

The barman shook his head. 'No sir, one day he don' turn up for work, no one see him no more.' He hesitated as if about to say more, and then shrugged and

turned to serve another customer who had chosen that moment to come up to the bar.

Mike bided his time, finished his drink and picked a quiet moment to order another, and then continued his previous conversation as though he had not been interrupted. 'Guess I ought to look him up for old-times sake, ain't there anyone who might know where he's at?' A large denomination Drachma note appeared in his hand.

The barman hesitated for a fraction of a second, and then engulfed the banknote with a practiced hand.

'You talk to Effi at GB corner, she Andrea's girl, maybe still so.' He looked at his watch. 'She here now, you want speak her.'

'Oh great; thanks, pal.'

The barman nodded and pocketed the banknote.

Mike strolled from the bar to the fashionable coffee shop within the Hotel Grande Bretagne, long a popular meeting place for Athenian society. He sat at a vacant table. A petite dark-haired girl, efficient looking and smartly dressed in the hotel uniform, came over to take his order. Mike spotted her name badge and politely asked if her nickname was Effi. She nodded and agreed that it was. 'What can I do, sir?'

'Well, I guess I'd like you to spare me a few moments of your time. Would that be possible?' The girl looked doubtful.

'I'm trying to find Andreas Kokalis.'

Effi gave him a strained smile. 'Ah, we no can sit witha da customers,' she said. But the thought of learning something about the disappeared Andreas was too much for her to resist. 'You sita somewhere else, I check to my boss I think isa okay.'

Mike went through to a lounge area while the young waitress went and spoke with her boss. Within two minutes she was back. 'How I help?' she asked as she sat down.

Mike gave her a reassuring smile. 'Sure hope so, I'm looking for Andreas Kokalis.' He gestured with his thumb. 'Barman told me you may be able to help me on that.'

At the mention of the name the girl's eyes filled with tears. She took a Kleenex from her pocket and buried her face in it, blowing her nose hard. Mike didn't know what to say, so he said nothing.

'I love him, he ran, the bastard, I hope he rot.'

'What happened?'

'So, I don'ta know lot, but Andreas he do business. He doa something for one guests here, one he know. He say he can make much money, yes, his villa it show it.'

'His villa? I thought he rented a room.'

'So, yes did, but before, you see?'

'No, I guess I don't.'

'Well we work here and room with job, you know, but we become... Well, when we going to each other, I wanted somewhere. People in hotel they gossip. It can cost us jobs. Andreas rented a room for be together. Was secret place, not much,

but ours. We hope buy a place one day. We talk about it a lot...' The girl stopped; her thoughts on a previous time.

Mike put a sympathetic hand on the girl's hand. 'Tell me what happened?' he prompted gently.

The girl sighed and then said, 'There was man, see, guest. Andreas tella me 'bout 'im. He want Andrea's acts for 'im, want Andreas name and address for something. I don' like him, I thing might be drugs or something, but Andreas say is okay, the man very res... res...'

'Respectable?'

'Yes, issa word.'

'So, you saw him then?' Mike asked.

'Oh yes, I a see him lot of time. He here many time. I look in register after, after Andreas go. After man stop coming here, customer man.'

'Do you remember his name?' Mike asked urgently.

'Yes, is Liani, Georges Liani, I don' forget.'

Mike wrote the name down. 'And you can't remember what it was that he wanted Andreas to do?'

'No, I no know for sure, but he give Andreas lot of money for it. Andreas going boughta new clothes and watch he seen, and he say to buy me presents. Then he go out on me, run off and have big villa in ver' nice place.' There was a catch in her voice and she blew her nose hard again.

'How do you know about the villa if you never saw him again?'

'Was a letter, comea here to hotel for Andreas. Manager give to me for to give Andreas, but I don' know where he gone. I think the letter to tell me where he go, so I open.' She looked at Mike, hoping he would understand.

'You must have been very worried, what did you find out?' Mike asked.

'Yes, yes was, wanta to find him, talk him, you know?'

'Of course, that's only natural, anyone would have done the same.'

Reassured, the girl continued with her story. 'Was letter from agent asking if he want again lease on big villa in Politia, richa area you know, besta people live there.'

'What did you do?'

'Well, I takea the letter an address an went to see to find him, but was no one. He gone, because never no one in.'

'When was the last time you went there?'

'Two days.'

'And the first time?'

'One week before, after I get letter.'

'Can you show me the letter, please?' Mike asked.

'No, is ina bag,' she glanced nervously towards the GB corner. 'I no can stay.' She hesitated, reluctant to break this tenuous link to Andreas. 'I am finish six on the clock. I meet you 'ere with letter.'

Mike pressed on. 'Did you see anyone else out at this villa, the man called Liani, for instance?'

'No, no one, no one the place empty sure.'

'Would you know this Liani character again if you saw him?'

'Oh yes,' the girl was positive, 'I don't forget him.'

‘Could you give me a description of him?’

The girl nodded. ‘Was a man more old to you, maybe ten year. Tall, 1.6 and 1.8 meters, strong, black hair with grey on sides, black moustache, black eyes, sharp eyes, scary...’ She gave an involuntary shudder, ‘So sorry, I go, I be ’ere on six. She hurried back to work.

Mike sipped his coffee thoughtfully. Could Anna produce a likeness from a description? Mike used the phone at reception to call the suite, and spoke to Anna. ‘I need you downstairs at six. Can you bring some sketching materials and be down here then?’

‘Well, I guess... okay, sure.’

4.00pm. Hellenikon Airport, Athens.

Without the advantages Anna enjoyed via Technology To-day it had taken Dawn longer to get to Athens even given a few hours start. Dawn may have been upset, but she wasn’t stupid, and she had had plenty of time to think on her long journey. She had worried about the reception she would get from Mike. He wouldn’t be pleased to see her that was for sure. What if he was furious? What if he refused to tell her where Jim was? Perhaps she ought to be more devious, keep a low profile, just find Mike and let him lead her to Jim. Dawn also knew that she wasn’t exactly a low profile person. She tended to attract lots of attention, stares even. With these thoughts on her mind she changed planes at Heathrow. Going through the transit lounge she saw a lot of Arab families, the women covered from head to foot in long black chadors, and that gave her an idea. Covered to that degree no one would recognize her, and if spoken to she could pretend not to understand. No one would bother her. On arrival in Athens she asked the Taxi driver to take her to a seamstress.

6.00pm. Hotel Grand Bretagne, Athens.

At six o’clock Dawn, encased from head to foot in black silk material and wearing a veil, sat in an alcove and watched intently as Anna came down to join Mike in Reception. Neither of them noticed the black chador clad figure sitting quietly in the foyer.

Effi joined them minutes later in the lounge, just as Mike finished explaining the situation to Anna. Mike introduced Effi and Anna and asked Effi, ‘Can you describe the man Liani, and watch my friend sketch him as we go along?’

Effi looked doubtful.

He turned to Anna. ‘Do you have everything?’ Anna nodded and opened her bag.

Effi looked at Mike. ‘You find him?’

‘Maybe. Whatever I find, I’ll let you know.’

Effi made up her mind, she smiled sadly, ‘I don’ wanta anything bad to Andreas,’ she said, and handed Mike the letter.

Mike looked at the letter as Anna began questioning Effi about the appearance of the man known to her as George Liani. The text of the letter was in Greek, but Effi had already told him the content. Of more importance to Mike was the address

of the real estate agency, and that was repeated in English on the letter heading. Mike looked out of the window deep in thought as Anna quizzed Effi.

‘Did he have a thin face or a round face?’ Anna began.

‘No thin, no fat.’

Anna tried again, ‘Well was it long, square, oval, pointed, what?’

Then she realized that Effi was struggling with the verbal descriptions. Her English, learned in the bar-cafe where she worked, was not adequate to this task. ‘Look, I’ll draw some shapes, you tell me which one is the nearest and the best.’ She quickly sketched out a range of facial shapes and held them out for the girl to look at.

Without hesitation Effi pointed. ‘Like that.’

‘Great, cheekbones,’ Anna pointed to her own, ‘were they prominent?’ Effi nodded, she made slanting movements with her fingers high up on her own cheeks.

‘Nose?’ Anna queried as she rapidly shaded in the cheekbones, ‘was it big?’

‘Yes, curve, an’ a big moustache.’

Anna sketched furiously for a few minutes. ‘What about the cheeks, were they full or hollow?’

Effi sucked her cheeks in, ‘So.’

‘Jaw?’ Anna pointed. Effi thought about it while Anna worked, then she used her fingers again around her own face to describe a strong jaw with a cleft chin.

Mike looked over Anna’s shoulder. The face was taking shape.

‘The hair, was it black like the moustache?’

‘Yes, but grey here.’ Effi pointed to the areas above her ears.

‘Was it long or short?’

‘Short cut, no square, like army only grow longer.’

Anna drew in what she thought the girl meant. ‘Any beard, stubble, anything like that?’

‘With shave, but strong under skin, you know, you see line here.’ With her finger she drew a line on her cheek.

‘Was he tanned or pale?’

‘Sun tan, fit, not for office man and black eyebrow an’ sharp eye.’

‘Okay,’ Anna put in some more shading around the eyes and on the cheeks, smudging the pencil marks with her finger. ‘Now, have a look.’

Effi peered at Anna’s pad. She drew in a sharp breath. ‘Yes, is him. Hair more bit lower on front, eye more deep, more shiny.’

Anna worked at the likeness putting more on the hairline and deeper shading around the eyes.

Effi looked again. ‘Is him!’

Mike walked over from the window to take a look. A very well drawn likeness stared up at him from the page, a hard direct face, gimlet eyed and uncompromising. ‘A tough looking character,’ he remarked, ‘but then he would be, wouldn’t he?’

Effi wasn’t sure what he meant. ‘That him. You know him when you find.’ She left with a grateful smile and again a request that if they found Andreas they would let her know.

Turning back, Mike saw that Anna was still working hard on her sketchpad. 'Now what?' he asked.

'I'm doing different versions of this face, now that I know what he looks like, I can do some profiles and some half profiles too, the odds are that if we do see this guy it won't be from the front.'

'What would I do without you?' Mike said with feeling.

Anna gave him a wry look. 'I told you I'd come in handy if you'd let me come along,' she chided gently.

Mike grunted a sheepish response and studied his notes. Then he took a street map of Athens from the table. He found the road the villa was in and studied the location. 'Would it still be rented to Andreas Kokalis,' he wondered, 'would it be occupied, and where did the man known as George Liani fit into things?' He decided to pose as a prospective client at the property agency. They had this villa on their books, so if he asked for a large villa to rent in Politia they would probably let him look round it. If it wasn't empty they might tell him he had just missed it, or they had just what he needed but it wouldn't be available for a couple of weeks. If it wasn't available it was likely to be occupied and so would merit a more cautious approach.

'Come and look.' Anna called him over to see the results of her efforts. A set of faces stared up at him with more life. The faces of the man looking up at him now had the air of the fanatic. Mike knew instinctively that this man was extremely dangerous. 'Vicious looking bastard,' he thought. But then, to hide his thoughts from Anna, he said, 'That's excellent, almost as good as photographs; we should stand a much better chance of finding him now.'

11.00pm. Off Ras Beyrouth, Beirut.

The submarine stopped engines and slowed in the water. A small patch of white foam formed on the surface of the dark sea as a small black object broke the surface and rotated through three hundred and sixty degrees. Forty feet below, the commander of the Israeli submarine searched the sea surface out to the horizon in all directions. Satisfied that all was clear he gave the order. 'Surface slowly.' He continued his careful sweep as the range of his vision through the periscope improved with the gain in height. As the forward deck cleared the surface a hatch was opened from below and two black rubber clad figures emerged. They wasted no time. A long indistinct object was hauled through the open hatch assisted by men below, and placed across the deck forward of the conning tower. The canoe, camouflaged black and silver grey, was on deck and ready for launching. The two men checked the seals on their rubber dry suits, then settled themselves into the canoe, and fastened the watertight skirts in place. The forward hatch closed onto its seals with a muffled thud, and the hatch clips were wound home.

As the sub gently submerged, the two men launched themselves down the curve of the hull and slid into the water with a powerful thrust from their paddles. With rapid strokes they powered well away from the hull. The water along the hull of the submarine seethed white as the tanks were blown, and swirled powerfully as the massive hull began to surge forward. The two men steadied the tiny craft as

the mist from the escaping air swirled round them. Then they paddled strongly away from the patch of turbulent aerated water in the direction of Beirut.

Jim and Willy covered three miles in under an hour. Ahead of them loomed the bulk of Ras Beyrouth, the rocky headland that made a huge step in the coast of Lebanon, on which the city of Beirut had grown. The lighthouse on the headland gave them a bearing for their approach.

Half a mile off the headland Jim tapped Willy twice on the shoulder. Willy stopped paddling and steadied the canoe in the water as Jim donned his oxygen re-breathing apparatus and flippers. Jim straddled the canoe and worked his way back till he could slide over the end into the inky water. Clearing the canoe, he checked his bearings, gave Willy a thumbs up and slid under the choppy surface into the claustrophobic total blackness.

From now on he would be swimming blind on compass, watch and depth gauge. Swimming along a bearing calculated from information on the charts and tide tables, making allowance for the currents round the headland, he kept faith with his compass and followed its guiding luminosity through the inky blackness. He checked the luminous depth gauge continuously, maintaining an average depth of ten feet below the surface. Only the creatures of the sea were aware of his passing, no one on land could see his approach. Suddenly a cold slimy mass engulfed his head, obstructing his facemask and dragging him to a halt. Jim instinctively pulled out his diving knife, but it was unnecessary; the mass of seaweed had not entangled him, and he backed out of it. Weed grew on rocks; he must be close in. Gradually he inched his way up. His head broke the surface in amongst the weed and he looked round ready to dive instantly if anyone was about.

Everything seemed okay. He pushed his mask up to get better vision. No lights, no movement. He pulled the tight rubber hood away from his ears, all was quiet, and there were no sounds other than the restless movement of the sea. He needed to get his bearings and work out where he was.

Headlands jutted out of the sea to his left and right. He was at the base of a rock pillar. Another pillar rose from the sea some yards away. Only one place on the coast fulfilled these criteria. He was directly in front of the Grotte aux Pigeons, a little too far north and a little too far inshore from where he wanted to be. Quickly he took bearings and, refitting his facemask, sank back into the blackness. He swam off on his new course, checking his watch for elapsed time in order to estimate distance traveled, and trying to judge when he would clear the long rock ledge to the south of the small cove. People fished from that ledge during the day. He decided to allow extra clearance in case of night- lines. When he thought he was clear he surfaced carefully again and checked. Good, he was past it. All around was dark and quiet. Nothing moved. He took another bearing and sank back again. He checked his depth gauge and swam in until he touched bottom. He carefully followed the bottom in to the point where he hoped to be. When he next broke the surface he was in a small sea-carved cleft with about six feet of water to the bottom. There were plenty of weed covered rocks between which to sink and weight a canoe. He took a good look round. No one could see him from the landward side. He pulled a waterproof torch from his kit and pointed it out to sea. At eight second intervals he pressed the rubber stud and a red glow shone out.

Chapter 19

1.00am. Off Beirut, 10/26/02.

Willy sat patiently in the canoe, making occasional paddle strokes to keep on station. After what seemed like an age a red glow shone out of the blackness. He counted the seconds; eight, and the red light shone again. Time to go in. Silently he paddled in towards the city's glow, and soon found himself entering a cleft under the cliffs. The bow of the canoe was grabbed, and Jim's wet, black, rubber-covered head bobbed up alongside.

Neither man spoke; they went silently into the next phase of the operation. The canoe was unloaded, its buoyancy vented and the cargo-carrying area filled with stones. As it sank it was guided into a cleft in the rocks, and the swaying masses of weed were draped over it. Several marine creatures immediately took up residence. Willy and Jim held a line between them and, towing their waterproof equipment hold-alls, set off to the south parallel to the beach.

A one and a half kilometer swim due south took them past the old Saint-Simon resort area to a point where the beach curved in slightly. They surfaced, checked their bearings yet again, submerged and carefully swam in to the beach. No one was around. Easing off their flippers and masks, they opened the containers and removed their silenced Uzi assault pistols. They were ashore in enemy territory, and like black shadows moved warily and silently across the deserted sands and into the dunes.

2.00am. St. Georges Beach, Beirut.

While Willy kept watch, Jim quickly removed his rubber dry suit, straightened his dark clothing, and added more camouflage cream to the exposed parts of his body. Then he slipped on his kit, conveniently stowed in a multi-pocketed slip-on waistcoat, and put on his waist belt carrying five full water bottles. His sacking cloak with the rubbish carefully stuck and sewn to it he draped over his shoulders. He quickly scraped away a large quantity of dry sand, and then dug down into the base of the dune. Taking a thin cane, he pushed it deep into the sand, marking the position of the hole. His flippers, dry suit, oxygen re-breathing apparatus and facemask were all sealed in the waterproof hold-all. The hold-all went into the hole and was buried in the sand. The dry surface sand went back on top. A short length of bamboo stuck out of the sand next to a clump of tough grass. Anyone would have to look hard to spot it. Jim hoped he wouldn't need the equipment again, but it might provide a way out if things did not go according to plan. Anyway, he could not leave it on the beach like a calling card.

The offshore breeze began to obliterate the marks in the dry sand. Moving up to Willy's position, Jim tapped his shoulder and took over the watch-keeping. Willy quickly followed the same routine; it was second nature after the hours of practice on the beach near Anna's house.

When Willy was ready the two men made a final check of each other's camouflage arrangements, and jumped up and down to make sure nothing about their persons rattled or clinked. Satisfied, they slung their bundles, picked up their weapons, and moved off.

They went cautiously through the newly bulldozed ruins of the shanty towns that had grown up on the former resort area, going towards the Avenue Ramlet el Baida that ran due South parallel to the beach. They waited a few minutes, watching for any movement.

Willy stayed put, weapon at the ready, as Jim sprinted silently across the road. Jim disappeared into the darkness on the far side of the highway and Willy waited a few moments to give him time to take up a suitable position. Then he also silently crossed the deserted road. The two men followed this pattern of movement for the whole of their advance into this hostile territory. As one moved, the other watched. It took longer, but it was prudent. Their object was reconnaissance, to get in unseen, to observe unnoticed and to leave un-remarked. They had one and a half kilometers to cover to their objective, and they had five hours of darkness left. Some of that time had to be allowed for the setting up of hides in suitable observation positions, but even so they were in no hurry.

Their prime concern was to avoid contact with any of the armed groups of West Beirut. Amal Militia, Lebanese Army, PLO terrorist factions, any or all were dangerous and nervous of each other. These people wouldn't ask questions, they would open fire first.

Cautiously they crossed some broken ground between the coast road and the Avenue Camille Chamoun then crossed this road too, exactly as before. Just south of the City Sports Centre and crossing more open ground, they came to the edge of a built-up area. This was going to be the hard part. Who could say what eyes were peering out into the darkness?

They crouched and looked for a long time into the dark corners of the massed buildings. Suddenly in the blackness a match flared.

Cupped in the hands of the smoker, the light was muted to a dim glow, and then the match arched out to the ground, going out half way through the arc of its fall. The end of a cigarette glowed as the smoker drew on it. It moved and glowed a second time and then moved back again. Two men were sharing it.

Jim nudged Willy and pointed to the left. A narrow street opened out onto the waste ground. Some burnt out vehicles lay there. Willy nodded and moved quickly across and into the darker shadow of the nearest vehicle. Jim followed. The two guards, their night vision ruined by the flare of the match, saw nothing.

Crouching beside the burned out vehicles, Willy and Jim each pulled out a black and white Keffiyeh. Quickly wrapping their heads in the Keffiyehs they walked quietly down the narrow alley in the darkness. If anyone saw them they would look as if they belonged.

Moving rapidly, they passed unchallenged through several small streets of damaged buildings and then stopped abruptly.

In front of them was an open area, piles of rubble from shelled buildings littered the ground, and across the open space stood a damaged apartment building. Both men recognized it from Ben Levy's photographs. In the service area below that building should be the Blood of Shatila headquarters.

4.00am. Shatila.

Jim and Willy split up, each heading for a suitable area in which to set up an observation hide. They used every scrap of cover and every patch of shadow that the broken ground provided, crawling on their stomachs, moving only one limb at a time in their careful advance across the open rubble-strewn area in front of the terrorist HQ. Then cloud covered the moon and no moonlight filtered down, enabling them to make expert use of the black darkness.

Jim selected a place in the angle of a ruined wall in which to construct his hide. A pile of rubble formed a vee shaped hollow with the wall. It was well away from any vehicle access or from any well-trodden footpath. A rough straggling shrub growing tenaciously out of the wall would provide some shade from the heat of the next day's sun. Jim rearranged the rubble underneath to make it level and made a hip scrape to make it as comfortable as possible; he would be lying on it for long hours to come. Quickly and expertly, he laid his canes over the hollow and against the wall, and then spread his wire mesh over the top. The plastic sheet went on top of that, then a variety of light rubble pieces, completely covering it from even the closest scrutiny. Next he carefully built a jagged opening at the front through which he could observe the terrorist HQ. Satisfied with his efforts, he wormed his way in through the opening, feet first.

Willy moved to a position on the other side of the open area, chosen so that he could see things that Jim couldn't see. His OP was in a patch of thick weed and scrub. A shallow trench ran through the middle of the weedy plot, and Willy quickly removed the growth from the forward section of it. He too built his cane support frame with great care, covered it with wire mesh and plastic sheet, and re-laid the rough weed clumps on top of it all. He checked to make sure no mesh or cane showed, and put his equipment and weapons in place. 'A place for everything - everything in its place - you won't be able to shine a torch to find what you want. Make sure you put every item in a set place, always put it back where it belongs, be certain that you know exactly where any given item is at all times so that you can put your hand on it immediately in the dark.' His SBS instructors, and more recently Jim, had hammered the point home. The last thing to do here was to shine a light to look for things. Quietly he wriggled into his hide and settled into position. He set up his night vision equipment and began a slow and careful sweep of the area in his field of view.

There was the entrance to the terrorist HQ. The defensive sangars were there just as they had built them at their practice site at Lod; staggered and fifty yards apart, either side of the road leading to the ramp down into the Blood of Shatila HQ. A vague shape was mounted on a tripod in each sangar. They would be machine guns, heavy caliber jobs Willy thought, judging by their size.

A battered Land Rover drove up flaring the night vision scope. Willy protected his eyes. He couldn't see how many men were inside it, but the wash of light from the headlights illuminated distinctive longitudinal flanging on the shapes in the sangars. Russian Goryunov SGM's, 7.72mm caliber, belt fed, with a cyclic rate of fire of 650 rounds per minute. The mounts on them could be quickly altered for anti-aircraft use. Willy made rapid notes. A look through the telephoto lens of his

camera in daylight would confirm his observations. Also visible were a rocket-propelled grenade and its launcher. It looked like a standard Soviet RPG7V anti-tank weapon. Where there was one of those there would probably be many, they were cheap to make and effective. Willy studied the sangars carefully for a long time. There should be just two men in each according to the information supplied by Najib Shawa. The information proved to be correct; there were two men in each sangar. Willy looked down the road away from the damaged apartment building. A double pair of offset rubble and sandbag barriers were built across the road to cause approaching traffic to slow down in order to negotiate the sharp 'S' bends thus formed, and then a timber and barbed wire barrier lay across the road. Two men were slumped on the ground at the barriers; they looked as if they were asleep.

Willy began a slow and systematic visual search of the building above the parking garage. He soon spotted the glow of a cigarette, there should be an additional health warning to sentries on the packet, he thought wryly. This man was on the near side of the block looking out over the approach to the Headquarters entrance.

Jim Savage had spotted a second lookout from his position; again his task had been made easy by the glow of a cigarette. 'Very careless, very slack, very convenient,' he thought, 'and they wouldn't have very good night vision if they kept on lighting smokes. That would make things easier in the coming operation.'

According to Najib Shawa's information there should be at least two more sentries, where were they? Patiently, Jim kept searching. Eventually they gave away their positions and Jim made another note in his log book.

6.00am. Shatila.

In the early morning dark Jim checked with his compass, adjusted his satcom dish and switched on the burst transmission radio. Whilst it warmed up he coded a series of messages and loaded them into the memory. Checking his watch, he waited for the correct time and pressed the transmit button to send the first message. A brief burst of radio waves a fraction of a second long, scrambled and compressed, shot out at the speed of light to be picked up by the relay satellite. Ben and John would know in seconds that they were in position and undetected. Gradually the sky began to lighten and as the dawn broke he folded the dish and pulled it inside the hide. The hot sun began to dispel the cloud, and the heat intensified. Both Jim and Willy took time to eat some of the hard dry mountaineer's emergency rations they were carrying as a food supply and washed it down with precious bottled water. The small rectangular packages were made up on the old North American Indian principal of parched corn ground fine, and each package contained two thousand calories. They were dry and not very tasty, but they were light, easy to carry and would keep them going. Every scrap of the wrappings had to be carefully packed away to be taken back with them. They would leave no telltale traces of their visit.

As the early morning light strengthened, two armed men emerged from the underground car park and ambled over to relieve the men at the road barriers. The men at the road barriers drifted in and took over the two sangars, and the

men in the sangars went up to relieve the men on lookout duty. The men on lookout duty came down into the underground car park. They moved briskly, their stint of duty finished they were going off watch.

Najib Shawa had said that the guards worked a six-hour rota. Two hours on the barriers, two hours in the sangar followed by two hours on the roof on lookout duty. Each two-hour change of duty was to relieve boredom and keep the guards awake. It didn't seem to be having the desired effect. Jim watched carefully to see if this routine was adhered to. So did Willy; separately they confirmed and noted that it was so, and made entries in their logs.

As the first light of dawn broke over the damaged city, Willy used his camera lens as a high powered telescope to look at the machine guns. They were Goryunov SGM's all right, an old design but very effective. 'Where the hell did they get those from?' he wondered. The rocket-propelled grenades were the RPG7V's, as he had thought, simple and fairly accurate. Predictably the guards were all carrying AK47 assault rifles as personal weapons. The sangar defensive positions were well built, well located, and each had an open field of fire. Any attempt at a direct assault would be seen by the lookouts and would prove very costly against such defenses and weapons.

8.00am. Athens.

To help camouflage his enquiries, Mike asked Anna to go with him to visit the property agency that had written to Andreas Kokalis and, as Mike's plan to allay suspicion was to play the wealthy tourist, so Anna dressed to look a little over the top. Mike gave the taxi driver the address from the letter that Effi had shown him. They walked into the property agency's smart modern office, Mike playing the tourist abroad, and asked the young girl at the desk for details of any large villas they might have for rent. The girl was there on her own and, offering them seats, she went to a filing cabinet and took out several files. She placed the details of four properties on the desk in front of them. The villa in Politia was the third one in the pile.

Anna had been well briefed. 'This one looks suitable honey; it's in the right area too.'

The girl was eyeing Anna's jewelry. These were obviously wealthy clients. 'Yes, it ver' nice, and is empty now,' she said. 'Was use for a month recently, so is been aired, but we put cleaner in to give it clean. Is lovely property.'

Mike thought rapidly. The recent let would have been to Andreas Kokalis, he had rented it for a month, and then he had disappeared.

'You like view it?'

Mike gave an exaggerated shrug of his shoulders, palms up. 'Sure would, what the lady wants the lady gets.'

Anna fluttered her eyelids at him, laying it on thick. 'Gee honey, you're so wonnerful, let's go now.'

'Okay babe. We'll take a look at this one right now, young lady.'

'Ahhh, is problem sir, I on my own. I not can leave the office, you come back later maybe?'

Anna pouted at Mike. He looked at her and back at the salesgirl. 'No way, you wanna do a deal, we do it now.'

'Well... well... I no can just go out there with you and leave office, maybe if...'

'Tell you what sweetheart,' Mike interrupted her, 'just give us the keys and we'll mosey on out there on our lonesome and take a lil' ole looksee.'

Anna frowned, she thought Mike was laying on the tourist act a bit too thick, but the girl seemed not to notice. Maybe too polite to react, Anna thought.

'Er... Well, maybe you leave deposit? You get back, when you bring keys. Oh, an' we take passport details too,' the girl said hesitantly.

'No problem, here y'are,' Mike handed the eagle crested document over to her, 'and how much do you want as a deposit?'

The girl told him.

'Hell, I don't got any drachmas; honey do you have any change in your purse?' Anna shook her head. 'Well, hell, it's refundable, ain't it? Here, take this.' Mike thrust a hundred-dollar bill, equal to twice the required amount of drachmae, across the desk at the girl. 'Never mind the change, we'll be back in an hour and you can give us this back.'

The girl was pleased, the office would stay manned, and there was a chance of some commission if the villa was let. Without further ado she handed over the keys and gave him the particulars. She excused herself for a moment, made photocopies of Mike's passport, and gave it back to him.

'Hey, great job.' Mike and Anna left and went in search of a car hire office.

'I don't seem to be making much of a contribution, so I'll act as transport manager,' Anna said as they left the property agency. Her Hertz credit card took care of the car hire and provided a powerful Mercedes saloon to take them out to the suburb of Politia.

They reached the road in which the villa stood and drove slowly past it. There was no sign of life; the place looked closed and empty, as it should. Anna kept on taking left turns until they came again to the road outside the villa. She pulled into the curb and parked. Mike got out.

'Be careful,' Anna told him.

'Don't worry, I will,' Mike said, and set off at a slow stroll. He turned into the villa grounds and walked around the house, looking at it in the way a prospective client would. Eventually he arrived back at the front door. Taking the keys from his pocket he unlocked it and stepped inside. There was no sound, no sign of any life at all. Every surface gleamed and there was a strong smell of polish. The place did look as though it had been thoroughly cleaned recently. Being careful not to touch anything, he did a tour of all the rooms. All the interior doors were open to allow air to circulate. There was nothing untoward to be seen. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and using it to open the latch he went out through the kitchen door and looked at the rear of the building. Over to one side were the garbage bins. A thought struck him. How often was the garbage collected, how often from a property that was only occasionally occupied? Lifting a lid, he looked inside. The rubbish had not been collected. Walking back to the car he told Anna to drive round to the rear of the villa. Following her he pulled the black bin liners out of the bins and quickly tying the necks of the bags, he put them in the trunk.

'Drive round to the front door while I lock up,' he told Anna, and walked back through the villa, locking the rear and front doors as he did so. They drove back into the centre of Athens, and much to the disappointment of the girl in the property agency they declined to rent the villa.

Mike was silent during the drive back; it was possible that there would be a lead to the previous occupants in their rubbish, but to establish that he would need some help, specialist help, maybe from the Greek police sergeant.

It was late morning when they arrived back at their hotel and passed the car over to the head porter on the main door. Mike phoned the taverna from the desk and asked for Sergeant Joanidies.

'Isa no ere.'

'Okay, its Mike Edge, tell him to meet me for lunch, usual place.'

'Yes sir.'

'Thanks.' Mike rang off.

As Mike and Anna crossed the foyer a taxi drew up at the main entrance. A figure, clad in a black chador, walked unobtrusively out to the taxi that had followed them very discreetly to both locations. Money and information changed hands.

12.00am, Plaka District, Athens.

Mike drove his car with the rubbish bags in the trunk through the heat of the morning to the square by the taverna for his meeting with Sergeant Joanidies. Sergeant Joanidies was already there and in the process of ordering a lunch of fetta cheese, fresh tomatoes, olives, crusty bread, and chilled white wine for both of them.

'Scene of crime expertise cost money,' the sergeant said, with a sardonic smile.

'How much?'

Sergeant Joanidies shrugged. 'Depends; what you want done?'

'I have some bags of garbage that I'm pretty sure was from the hijacker's base here in Athens, and I'm willing to bet they didn't wipe their trash.'

Sergeant Joanidies pursed his lips. Maybe this wasn't going to be a complete waste of time after all. 'How many bags?'

Mike told him.

'I'd have to pay out a lot of money to get the forensic officers to do that amount of work.'

Mike's bargaining position was weak, and the sergeant knew it.

Sergeant Joanidies mentally upped the price he had in mind. He named a figure.

'Okay; half now, half when you deliver, but I want the results by the end of the day.'

Mike left the taverna reflecting on how easy things became when you had unlimited money.

11.45pm. Plaka District, Athens.

Later that evening Mike handed over the balance of the cash and picked up the forensic report back at the taverna. One of the bags had contained a man's bloodstained clothing, shoes and a few possessions. The clothing was crudely cut as if removed from an accident victim. Inside the shirt collar and cut in half was a laundry tag. According to the laundry the tag number was for the Hotel Grande Bretagne. Andreas Kokalis came immediately to mind. His thoughts racing Mike read on. The bloodstains on the shirt had also proved to contain fine particles of bone and human brain tissue. It was likely that the owner of the clothes had died from a gunshot to the head. The clothes had been cut up the back and roughly ripped away, actions consistent with the removal of clothing from a body lying face down on the ground. The shoelaces had been cut. Whoever had done it had been in a hurry and had been brutally efficient.

Gradually, a pattern began to form in Mike's mind. The man known as George Liani had hired Andreas. To do what? What had Andreas done? He had rented a large villa and he had hired a couple of cars. He hadn't stayed at the villa but several other men had, and one of them had been responsible for the brutal murder of a family of simple hard working country people. A print from the rubbish matched the print on the cartridge case in Dimitris Kosovos's old shotgun. The man of the murdered family had been forced to put the weapons and explosives on the ill-fated Olympic Airways flight. George Liani must have used Andreas Kokalis as a front man to rent accommodation and transportation; to set up a base for his team, Mike reasoned. He had then killed him, disposed of the body somehow, and had thrown away his clothes expecting the refuse collection service to remove them. The other bags contained ordinary domestic rubbish, including toothbrushes and razors that could give DNA samples, and on some items of the rubbish fingerprints had been found, prints from several different men. It seemed that the man who had followed Dimitris Kosovos and butchered his family had stayed in the villa, together with a group of other men. What if he had seen the prints before, possibly from the dossier he and Anna had compiled during the hijack? Were they the same as the prints taken from the glass, the comb, the photograph and everything else he had collected? If so it would be confirmation that the hijackers or at least some of them had stayed in the villa. And as soon as he had his base set up by the unfortunate Andreas the man known as George Liani must have searched for another suitable person, an airport worker, to put the weapons and explosives on the plane. He'd found Dimitris Kosovos and forced him to co-operate by taking his wife and children hostage. Then they too had been brutally killed. The police file contained photographs of the scenes at the Kosovos farm. Then George Liani had watched the hijacked plane take off, had come back and cleaned out the villa, maybe with some help, and cleaned and returned his car. But he hadn't thought it necessary to clean the rubbish. He had made just one mistake in relying on the refuse collectors to remove the rubbish on a regular basis from a villa that was only occasionally occupied. Even so it was a dead end. All the leads were dead ends. Andreas Kokalis had vanished without trace, probably dead. Dimitris Kosovos was dead, his family dead, and the hi-jacking was history. The perpetrators were long gone and the man known as George Liani, the man who had so carefully set everything up with no connections to himself had vanished without trace. Mike reviewed his

findings grimly. He now knew what had happened, but he was no nearer to the person behind it all. He was up against a professional, an utterly ruthless individual who took few chances, and left no one alive to talk. Using a pay 'phone he rang John Henderson.

'John, I've obtained some information, but I've reached a dead end.'

'It's okay, we have a new lead. Fly to Istanbul, Ben and I will join you there. Check in to the Topkapi Saray Hotel.'

Chapter 20

05.00 Shatila District, Beirut, Lebanon, 10/27/02.

As the first light, just before dawn, touched the tops of the buildings at the start of the second day, Jim saw movement right at the top of the ruined apartment block. A head and shoulders appeared over the parapet surrounding the flat roof. A second head and shoulders joined the first. The second man had something over his shoulder. Jim got his telephoto lens on to it and took a series of snaps. He thought the shouldered object looked familiar. Suddenly, as the man turned, Jim had got a good look. It was a hand held surface to air missile launcher. So the terrorists had an air defense capability too. That would rule out a rapid rope helicopter assault.

Jim and Willy, concealed in their hides, continued to watch as the guard changed every two hours. The guards were regular in their timings but sloppy in their manner, too casual, too confident, nothing had happened to alarm them in their West Beirut heartland for a very long time. Although Willy and Jim suffered as the heat of the day increased they didn't emerge, even to relieve themselves, but answered the needs of nature into the plastic bags they carried for the purpose, knotting them and placing them where they would not be split open. Otherwise the smell and the flies attracted would cause them problems, could even give their positions away. They observed and made notes, trying to verify the suspected Achilles heel of the terrorist HQ. They knew that their lives and the lives of the rest of the team could rest on the accuracy of this recce. Continually Jim coded up and added information to the burst transmission radio message ready for it to be flashed into the atmosphere when they were confident that they knew how to penetrate the target.

7.00am. Athens.

Mike told a disappointed Anna, that he was leaving for Istanbul immediately. 'No Anna,' he said gently, 'it would not be a good idea for you to come with me, nor is there any point in your staying here. Dawn has not shown up here, and even if she does she won't find anyone – certainly not Jim.'

Anna pulled a face. 'I suppose you're right, but I am still worried about her. Perhaps I should stay here for a few days more, just in case.'

'Well, that's entirely up to you, but how are things at Technology Today?'

‘Fine, I’m in regular contact by ’phone and have dealt with any issues via email. I can do the same for a couple more days without any problem.’

‘Okay, are you coming to the airport to see me off?’

Dawn, her identity still concealed under her black chador, watched from her quiet alcove as Mike and apparently Anna, went to check out at the desk. Fully confident now in her anonymity, and under the pretext of picking through some tourist leaflets, she went and stood next to Anna at the desk. She heard Anna say, “I’ve got your mobile number but what’s the number at the Topkapi Saray?”, and watched from the corner of her eye as Mike wrote it on a hotel note pad. Then, the bill paid, she watched as they went out to a waiting taxi.

Taking the next cab in the line she told the driver, ‘Follow the cab in front, I’ve just missed my friends, they’re on their way to the airport and I have to say goodbye.’

Dawn, completely concealed under her silk chador, followed as Mike and Anna went to a check-in desk, she made a note of the flight number, and watched as they walked towards the departure point. Then she went to a monitor screen and checked the destination for that flight. ‘Istanbul’.

Quickly, she went to the arrival hall, to the hotel reservations desk. ‘Excuse me,’ she said, ‘but can you tell me if there are any rooms free at the Topkapi Saray Hotel?’

The lady on the desk looked blankly at her. ‘There’s no hotel of that name in Athens,’ she said, ‘it’s in Istanbul.’

‘Oh, so sorry, I must have made a mistake.’ Dawn hurried off, her mind working overtime. There was no point in staying in Athens, the Athens realtor had not recognized her photo of Jim and she had found the villa at Politia deserted. She had to find Jim, and Mike must lead her to him eventually. Her luggage could be retrieved from her hotel at a later date, and she could buy essentials here at the Airport shops. She saw no point in continuing to wear the long black chador now that Mike and Anna had left Athens. Folding the light silk carefully she put it into her bag, went to the Olympic Airline ticket desk and booked herself on a later flight to Istanbul. That done she started to buy spare clothes, toiletries and other items she would need for her trip.

10.00am. Athens.

Saying goodbye to Mike had left Anna feeling worried and sad. She felt sympathy for Dawn and thought how awful she must feel with all her world centered on Jim, not knowing where he was, terrified that he was in danger, and wondering if she would ever see him again. Giving her nose a good blow, she felt better and decided to stop for a coffee and check her messages. There was a message from Technology To-day regarding some decisions that needed her immediate approval. Anna had her laptop with her so she quickly finished her coffee and went in search of the airport business center.

1.00pm. Istanbul.

Mike flew into Ataturk Hava Limani, the airport serving Istanbul, hired a car and bought a good detailed map of Istanbul and the surrounding area. He drove to the Topkapi Saray, where the doorman had his car parked for him, and checked into the hotel. The girl on reception immediately gave him a note. It simply said "B&J" and gave a room number. Mike went to meet Ben and John before doing anything else.

Ben was agitated. 'This man must be found. He must be located. What have you got so far?'

'As I said, a lot of dead ends,' Mike replied with a concerned look on his face. He described the early part of the trail that the Greek police had followed from the note to the farm and from the car registration number on the note to the hire car firm. That in turn had led them to the hirer, Andreas Kokalis, who had mysteriously vanished. He gave an abbreviated account of his own visit to Andreas Kokalis's flat, and thence to his place of employment via the letter threatening Andreas with dismissal. Enquiries at his place of employment had led to his girlfriend, who had supplied a name, George Liani, and a description. 'And these'; Mike tabled the likenesses sketched by Anna.

Ben picked them up. 'I'll get these checked against our rogues' gallery; anything else?'

'Yes. Effi, the girlfriend, also showed me a letter that had come to Andreas Kokalis's work address at the hotel.' Mike explained about the tracing of the villa and the stroke of luck that the rubbish had not been removed. He told them about the cut and bloodstained clothing. 'The trash was pretty smelly, but we got some good prints out of it, and hair samples and used toothbrushes. I'd like to have the prints and DNA checked against the samples I collected during the hijack, I'm pretty certain some of them will match and confirm that the villa was the base for the hijackers.'

'So, they used this Andreas Kokalis and disposed of him?' John asked.

'Yes, as they did with Dimitris, the guy they forced to put the stuff on the plane, and as they did with his family.' Mike took the police photographs, taken at the Kosovos farm, from the file and put them on the table.

John spoke quietly. 'The clinical efficiency doesn't stop there. I made some enquiries here in Turkey as you requested, used a bit of clout to get results from those prints you sent. I got the Turkish security people to do some checking of the records, just on the off chance, and one of the prints was matched to a body fished out of the Sea of Marmara...' he paused and tapped the photo of the remains of Dimitris Kosovos's family. 'The man who did this was stabbed in the back and dumped in the Bosphorous. His fingerprint matched the one on the shotgun cartridge case at this farm. His prints turned up somewhere else - on a fragment of adhesive tape from the bomb which destroyed the jumbo jet over Iceland.' He took a photographic copy from the file in front of him and handed it round. 'Our experts say it's a ten point match with the print on the cartridge case.' There was a silence.

'You were right Mike, John said, 'dead-ends everywhere, quite literally.'

'So what now,' Mike asked? 'This information seems to point here to Turkey, but we don't have a single concrete lead, nothing definite to go on.'

John cleared his throat. 'I hadn't quite finished. On the body found at the entrance to the Bosphorous was one overlooked item, a lapsed membership card for Galatasaray soccer club. It was in heat sealed plastic, with a photograph of the dead man, and undamaged by immersion. From the club records we've traced this man's address.' He put a photographic enlargement of the card on the pile in the centre of the table for Mike and Ben to look at.

'So, let me recap,' Ben suggested. 'What we have to remember is that, according to information received, another operation is being planned by Abu Asifah. The man doing the setting up, and probably a large part of the execution of the plan, is this individual we now know as George Liani. He has to be found and he has to be stopped.'

'So, what do we have on him?'

'One, we have a name, probably false.'

'Two, we have a likeness.'

'Three, we have a location and address with which he is associated.'

Mike looked up, 'We need eyes on the ground here in Istanbul. The only real lead is the address he's associated with.'

Ben looked gloomy. 'Yeah, it's pretty tenuous, and we don't have many people in Istanbul, there's never been any need. Can we get any local assistance?'

'I'm trying. I've already made contact with the Turkish Security Service,' John said, 'but this address is the only lead we have. Mike, I want you to try to pick up the trail from here.'

'Yeah, well, we don't want this man lifted by the Turks; we want to follow his trail until we know his intentions.'

Ben agreed. 'That's right, he may already have something set up affecting Israel, if so I want to know, and I want to know what. I'm going back to see what I can find out at that end. John, will you introduce Mike to your contact here?'

'Yeah, okay I'll do that on the way to the airport; then I'd better see if I can get some response from the State Department, the National Security Agency or anyone else. As far as I can see they sure don't seem to be treating this as a matter of urgency.'

5.00pm. Hellenikon Airport, Athens.

Absorbed in making her purchases, Dawn mentally listed the things she had in her new carry-on bag. What she had managed to purchase would have to do. She knew she was cutting it a bit fine and hurried through the crowded departure hall towards the departure point. Suddenly, over the announcement system, in amongst a stream of Greek she heard her name.

Anna, having spent time catching upon Technology Today business, was just leaving the business centre. She heard it too. Startled she ran into the departure hall. The announcement came again in English; 'Would Miss Dawn Saint-Pierre, passenger on flight TK850 to Istanbul, please report to gate twelve immediately.'

Anna, desperately pushing her way through the crowd, was just in time to see Dawn go through the passport and ticket check and disappear from view.

'Well, I'll be...' Anna swore under her breath. So Dawn had been in Athens. Or was she traveling through? How did she know to go to Istanbul? All sorts of unanswerable questions ran through Anna's mind.

She pulled out her mobile and rang Mike's mobile number. It was switched off. She tried the Topkapi Saray Hotel. Mike had checked in but was not in his room. Leaving a message for him to call her she headed for the Olympic ticket desk and booked herself on the next available Istanbul flight.

5.00pm. Istanbul.

Mike, leaving the hotel with John, asked the doorman to have his hire car brought up. The doorman called the garage, the car came and John's bags were loaded into the trunk. John gave Mike directions to the Turkish Security Office where the fingerprint from the cartridge case had been matched to the body found in the entrance to the Bosphorus.

John's earlier contact with Turkish security proved valuable, a senior Turkish security officer welcomed them, a square, powerfully built man with a thick black moustache. Mike was introduced to him as the officer John was appointing to the case. They shook hands. John had advised the Turkish authorities they were looking for a man whose purpose was the escalation of Islamic Fundamentalism in Turkey. This was a very serious matter to the Turkish government and the word had gone out. Assist any security service which can help; do it under the guise of mutual anti-terrorist co-operation, but glean every bit of information you can.

The Turkish secret service man had meetings set for the remainder of the afternoon, meetings that he could not cancel, but promised to make time for Mike afterwards. John, having helped them to get acquainted, made his excuses and explained that Mike was driving him to the airport. Having seen John through to departures, Mike returned to the Turkish Secret Service offices. The stocky secret service man ushered Mike into a meeting room and began to explain the current state of play. He had already had a good look inside the flat of the man who had been fished out of the Bosphorus. The man now identified as Suleiman Yavas. He explained in heavily accented English that they had obtained a search warrant and, using a locksmith, had had a quiet look inside.

'They are exactly what you say; fundamentalists.' He produced a number of pamphlets and tracts, printed on different colored paper. 'See, this stuff is against Government; computer and printer there, color copier, ink, paper, everything. Many, many pamphlets like this. But not working, I think. Not connect to power. Not, how you say, not for working?'

'Stored?'

'Yes, is stored. Not working print shop, temporary stored I think.'

'Did you disturb anything? Could they be scared off if they come back and find things moved?'

The stocky Turk shook his head decisively. 'No, very, very careful; take only few examples of pamphlets, many, many there, this few not be missed. Anyway we watch; no one come yet.'

'Can I go see for myself?'

A cautious look crossed the Turkish security Agent's face. 'Mebbe... I have to get permission.'

'Well, can you get permission now, it's urgent?'

'No is possible, mebbe tomorrow.'

'Look, this is vital to my inquiries, can you please get permission today?'

The stocky Turk gave a helpless shrug. 'Boss no 'ere.'

There was nothing Mike could do. Furious and frustrated he went back to his hotel and found Anna's message waiting. As he turned from the reception desk with his key he noticed a figure sitting in a quiet corner of the foyer wearing a black silk chador. For a moment he was back in the hotel in Athens. There had been a woman in a black chador in the foyer of that hotel too; was it a coincidence? Mike didn't believe in them. Was he getting paranoid? Probably, but in his business paranoids tended to live longer. He gave no outward sign that he had noticed her but made a mental note to watch out for her. Back in his room Mike tried to ring Anna, but she had not returned to her room at the hotel and her mobile was not responding. 'Maybe in a bad signal area,' he thought to himself. Well, he would try again later. Taking a shower to freshen up he towed off vigorously, put on one of the hotel's bathrobes and stretched out on the bed to do some thinking. Moments later he was asleep.

11.30pm. Shatila.

Towards midnight, in the last hour of the day, Jim and Willy carefully inched out of their hides, dismantled them, covered the traces of their visit, packed up their gear and headed for the pre-arranged rendezvous. Willy got to the rendezvous first. He crouched in the angle of a damaged wall in deep shadow and covered himself with his rubbish covered hessian cloak. He strained his eyes into the darkness through a fold in the hessian in the direction from which he expected Jim to appear. Suddenly he heard the scrape of boots and a rattle of rubble falling. Moments later a figure vaulted the wall and knelt down into a fire position. The figure was aiming a Kalashnikov, so it wasn't Jim. Willy was so close to the man that he could hear his breathing. Slowly, and with infinite care he leveled his Welrod pistol and eased off the safety catch. He wouldn't fire unless he had to, but if he had to he couldn't miss. Long seconds passed. Then with more noise a second man joined the first, and from the same direction. In low voices a discussion began between them in Arabic. Willy, with some knowledge of the language, strained his ears to pick up words that he knew. It seemed the first man thought he had seen something, although he wasn't exactly sure what - a vague shape, movement, something that should not have been there. They waited.

Willy waited with them, keeping his breathing shallow and quiet. He was terrified that Jim was about to walk into an ambush.

Nothing moved in the stillness of the night. The two Palestinians, who had been out on a roving patrol, began to argue quietly. The second man suggested that it was a dog that his pal had seen. This suggestion was hotly denied. 'Go and look, then, I'll cover you from here, the second man said. His pal was not keen. 'Wait a few more minutes, then we'll both go,' he countered.

'Uh huh, but it's probably nothing.' A few more minutes went by.

‘Come on let’s have a quick look, and then we can go and have a smoke,’ the first man suggested. They moved off cautiously, but not very skillfully, making a considerable amount of noise.

Willy waited a few seconds, and then carefully eased himself into a position from which he could watch the departing pair. A voice whispered in his ear. ‘Well done Willy, I thought for a minute that you were going pot the pair of them.’ Jim had approached silently from an unexpected direction. Willy shook his head in a silent negative, and jerked a thumb in the direction of their route out. Jim grinned, his teeth white in the darkness and gave Willy a thumbs up. He led off whilst Willy covered him, and after a few yards moved into a deep patch of shadow. They both waited a few moments, and then Jim’s arm emerged from the shadows just long enough to give Willy the signal that it was clear. Willy moved out and on past Jim to a point twenty five yards in front of Jim’s position, whilst Jim took his turn at covering Willy’s movements. Leap-frogging each other in this manner, they moved parallel with the Avenue Camille Chamoun through the built up area towards the north.

Willy was moving up towards Jim’s position, when suddenly Jim’s right hand shot up in the stop signal. Willy froze and then eased himself into the shadowy arch of a doorway, thumbing off his safety catch. Nerves taut, he waited and watched.

Chapter 21

3.00am. Shatila, 10/28/02.

Jim sank into his cover and quickly deployed his hessian and rubbish camouflage. He was a little too quick in his movements and there was an audible rustle as he settled into the corner. An armed man, wearing a ragged red and white keffiyeh, his rifle carried at the ready, detached himself from the shadowy gateway where he had been on watch, and moved across the road to investigate. A guard for another terrorist faction, he moved slowly and deliberately towards Jim’s position.

From beneath the hessian Jim watched his approach. He slid his FS knife from the sheath sewn inside his carryall waistcoat his legs bunched underneath him. The man stopped, leaned forwards for a close look, and began to raise the muzzle of his weapon. He had heard something suspicious but didn’t know what. His thumb flicked off the safety catch, his finger curled around the trigger.

The heap of rubbish in front of him suddenly erupted upwards. The muzzle of his old rifle was grabbed, pulled down and to one side. The man’s eyes widened in shock, his mouth opened to shout. They were the last voluntary moves his body made. The wicked matt black blade of Jim Savage’s razor sharp FS knife slashed up under his chin, through his tongue, through his palate, through the thin bone sheet at the bottom of his skull and into his brain. He died without a sound, still on his feet. Jim slowly lowered him and his weapon quietly to the ground, and

jerked his knife free from the contracting flesh. He waited and watched. All was still, nothing moved.

After a few moments Jim put his grouped fingers on top of his head, the signal for Willy to join him. They carried the body over to the gateway where the man had been on guard. The gateway was barred with a heavy wooden double door. The doors were set into a ten-foot high wall of mud brick. Jim put his mouth close to Willy's ear. 'Him or me,' he said grimly, 'he had his finger on the trigger and the safety off. He must have been guarding something; we'll make it look as though our interest was inside there.'

Willy nodded his understanding. 'Lucky he didn't get a shot off,' he whispered back. 'Cover me.' He went to the far side of the street. Slinging his machine pistol across his back, he ran at full tilt at the ten-foot wall. He lifted his left leg as high as he could reach and slammed his foot into the mud brickwork, keeping his leg straight. His momentum carried him up and over, his outstretched leg acting as a pivot. His hands grabbed the top of the wall and, using his arms to continue his body momentum, he hoisted himself up so that his stomach lay across the top of the wall. Throwing up his right leg, he swiveled his position so that he was lying flat, face down along the top of the wall. The whole maneuver took just five seconds. He lay still, looking down into an empty courtyard. Nothing moved. Quietly he dropped down into the courtyard and examined the inside of the doors. A heavy wooden bar was in place across the centre, and iron bolts at top and bottom went into sockets in the top of the gateway and into the paving below. In the right hand side was a small wicket gate. Carefully Willy slid up the locking lever, turned the knob and eased the latch from its socket. The small wicket door opened silently and he stepped through to help Jim with the corpse.

They carried it in and propped it in a dark corner in a sitting position, the rifle cradled in its arms. A thin trickle of blood ran from the corner of the mouth, but apart from that the man could have been asleep. Willy wiped away the blood, using a corner of the man's keffiyeh, to further the appearance of sleep.

Jim went out cautiously into the street, and made sure the way was clear. Willy followed through the wicket door in the main gate and carefully pulled it until the latch softly clicked. He checked his watch. The two encounters had delayed them by forty minutes. They had to move quickly to make up some of the time, but they still moved alternately, giving each other cover. Rapidly they made their way through the deserted streets into more open ground beyond. Without incident they crossed this area in the darkness and reached a wall topped with barbed wire. Jim turned south and they followed the wall to a set of high gates. One hundred meters away a truck turned a corner forcing them both to go to ground under their rubbish covered capes. Shielding their eyes from the headlights to protect their night vision, they waited for it to pass. Then one at a time they rose like shadows, jumped for the top of the gates, pivoted across the top of the gates on their stomach muscles and dropped lightly to the ground. They were inside the Beirut football stadium.

Under the stands of the football stadium many heaps of rubbish had accumulated over the months. Now there were two more. Beneath one of the heaps, shielded by black polythene, working by the light of a Maglite torch, Jim got busy encoding a burst transmission message.

Willy watched warily, his heap strategically placed to guard the entrance to the space below the stands.

Their hiding place was well chosen. Few people ever came under the stands even in daylight, but Jim and Willy were taking no chances. They were in hostile territory, and if they were seen the recce would be wasted and the strike would have to be aborted.

Willy heard a faint rustle behind him. There were plenty of rats, but it was Jim at his side. 'Okay, nearly time to transmit,' Jim whispered. He moved off, and made his way cautiously to the top of the stands while Willy covered him. He set the aerial to the correct orientation and checked his watch. Thirty seconds to go. They dragged by as Jim felt the exposure of his position. He lay flat and kept perfectly still watching the sweep second hand creep towards six. As it passed the prearranged time he pressed the send button down sharply. A burst of radio waves lasting a fraction of a second shot out at the speed of light to the orbiting communications satellite and was picked up and relayed on. Moments later it was received in Tel Aviv. As soon as he had depressed the send button, Jim grabbed the set and dropped back under cover of the stands. As he did so he heard the sound of a two stroke motor starting up. Carefully he peered from his hiding place and saw a groundskeeper steering a motor mower onto the pitch. Behind that another man was preparing a white line marker machine.

Mike beckoned Willy to join him. 'What day d'you make it?' he whispered.

Willy calculated quickly and whispered back, 'Ah mek ut Saturday.'

'Me too; shit! There's gonna be a game!'

'Magic, tha'll help pass ra time.'

'We're not sodding supporters, keep your head down, and no bloody cheering when they score!'

Willy grinned at him. 'Whut, no even ifn they're playin 'n ra green hoops strip?'

07.00am. Istanbul.

Rested, showered and breakfasted Mike felt a new man. The agent from Turkish Security came looking for him in the hotel breakfast room, a huge smile preceding his good news. He had clearance and could take Mike to the stake out now. Draining the last of his breakfast coffee, Mike left the breakfast room with his Turkish colleague. Crossing the foyer, he noticed that the woman in the black chador was there again. Before he could react, he was astonished to see Anna getting out of a taxi at the main entrance. He dashed outside. 'Anna, what the hell...'

'Mike, didn't you get my message?'

'Yeah, I've been trying to ring you.'

'Well I've been on a flight getting here; my mobile's been switched off.'

'Oh. So..?'

'It's Dawn, she's here. I saw her boarding a plane for Istanbul.'

'What? How...? Wait a minute.' Mike's brain made an odd connection. He dashed back into the foyer. The woman in the black chador was not there.

The Turkish agent was looking perplexed. 'What happen?'

Mike patted him on the shoulder. 'It's okay; a colleague has turned up with new information.'

'Ah, colleague.' The Turk looked at Anna appreciatively. He wouldn't mind a colleague like that.

'She can come with me in my car, yeah?'

The Turk looked doubtful. 'She stay in car?'

'Sure. Anna, get in,' Mike indicated the hire car, 'you can fill me in on the way.'

'Where are we going?'

'To try to find Liani.'

The Turkish officer led the way in his unmarked car, Mike followed and Anna explained about the announcement at Athens airport and how she had seen Dawn going through for the Istanbul flight. 'I couldn't contact you, so I decided to come on the next available flight. I don't understand how she could know to come here.'

'Mike, intent on keeping the Turkish officer's car in view, made no comment, but thought some more. The Turkish officer indicated and pulled over to the side of the road. Mike pulled in behind him. They were at the end of a quiet side street just before it joined a busy main road. The Turk got out and came to the window.

'You come, she stay, okay?'

'Okay,' He turned to Anna. 'Just wait here, I won't be long.'

Anna watched as the two men walked over to a large block of apartments.

11.00am. Üsküdar, Turkey.

George Liani's face showed no pleasure, even though the first installment of the moneys for his new contract had been paid into his account. But at least now he could start things moving. First he would relocate the underground press and get new premises; then the work of his cause could continue inside Turkey in his absence; the true faith would continue to be proclaimed.

He set off to look at suitable premises, and by midday he had rented a vacant unit on a large industrial estate. Here his converts would not need to work so covertly but could work like a normal small printing business, the only difference being that they would do no advertising and would encourage no outside interest. Visitors would be discouraged on the grounds that they were doing confidential government work.

He decided that he would move the equipment from the condo during the hours of darkness. He would need a van for the move, and he could also use it to do some preliminary checks of the area. He went to a different van hire company, but hired the same type of anonymous unmarked van as before, using Suleiman's credit card again. He approached the road that the apartment was in, merging with the normal daytime traffic and moving no slower or faster than the vehicles around him. There was nothing suspicious that he could see on first sight, nothing that could have been a stakeout vehicle, only a couple of cars stopped at the intersection, no individuals loitering and trying to look unobtrusive. He flicked his eyes upwards and quickly scanned the windows opposite the apartment he was using as a store. One open window stuck out like a sore thumb, the only one in the whole block. On this busy thoroughfare usually all the windows were closed to keep out the traffic noise and fumes and to allow the air-conditioning to work

efficiently against the stifling heat. He cast his mind back to his previous checks on the area; he didn't ever remember a window being open in that block before. It struck a slightly odd note. His instinct was troubled, was it anything or was it nothing? He had to stop at the traffic lights, and used the few moments of time to peer intently up at the open window. He did not notice the girl in a car in the street to his left. The girl gave an involuntary start of recognition.

01.00pm. Galata District, Istanbul.

Anna almost missed him. The image in her mind's eye, which she had used to sketch the likeness of George Liani, suddenly matched. It was him she instinctively knew it, the man in the white unmarked van. He was staring with intensity at the apartment block opposite the block that Mike had gone into with the Turkish security man. She quickly tried to read the number plate at the rear of the van but the car behind the van pulled out too quickly and blocked her view.

'Shit!' Then the questions flashed through her mind. What the hell should I do? Where is Mike? Should I follow the van? It was too late; the van had gone, swallowed in the choking Istanbul traffic. Anna sat agonizing over what she should do next. For ages there was nothing she could do. Then she saw Mike approaching the car. He reached down to open the door, and Anna opened her mouth, about to tell him what she had seen, when he suddenly straightened and ran across the road behind the car.

Anna turned in time to see him wrench open the rear door of a taxi stopped there. She jumped out of the car and ran to see what on earth he was doing.

In the back of the cab was a woman in a black chador.

The cab driver was out of his cab now and shouting angrily at Mike in broken English. Mike was yelling at the woman in the back of the cab. He saw Anna and opened the cab door wider.

'Get in, that's Dawn in there; get that damn' hood off her!'

Anna looked at him in shocked surprise; reacting quickly she got into the back of the cab and slowly pulled back the hood of the chador; the black clad figure in the cab began to sob. Anna put her arms round a very upset Dawn Saint-Pierre, and Dawn clung to her.

The cab driver stopped shouting and stepped back scratching his head. All this was beyond him.

Anna began to comfort the distraught Dawn, and then remembered her important news. 'I've just seen him,' she blurted to Mike.

'Who? What are you saying?'

'The man you're after, Liani, he just drove past here in a plain white van!'

'Hell's teeth, are you sure it was him?'

'It was him all right, the likeness was exact, and he was staring at the block opposite; the block you were in, like an animal intent on its prey. It was him, I know it was.' Anna put every ounce of conviction she could muster into her statement.

'Where was he staring?'

'Up there, at the side of the building, about half-way up, I should think.' Anna pointed.

Mike looked up at the area she described 'The open window,' he said quietly, 'that's the stakeout, it scared him off.' Mike knew that the best place from which to aim a telescopic sight or a telephoto lens was from well back in an unlit room with a window open. George Liani would know that too.

'Did you manage to get the van number?'

'No, another vehicle blocked the number plate. I didn't have a chance to read it, let alone remember it,' Anna said angrily.

'Don't worry about it; you did well to spot him at all. He won't be sure, the existence of an open window will increase his caution, not scare him off. My guess is he'll be back for a closer look. We need to be able to run a multiple tail on him.' Mike paused and thought for a few moments, involving the Turkish authorities might cause problems. He needed help from John or Ben, but for now he was on his own. He tapped the taxi driver on the shoulder and spoke to him. The driver's English was tourist derived and so a bit limited. A bunch of money was produced and after a little negotiation, the young cab driver reached for his radio microphone and spoke in Turkish.

Mike turned to the girls. 'Dawn you wanted to help, now's your chance, Anna help her get sorted out. I've asked the cabbie to tell a pal that he's got a good "drive as directed" job for him, with a bonus if he gets here quickly. He's going to park up and wait for his mate to arrive. When he does, you take a cab each and I'll flash the two of them some more cash and tell them what to do.' He turned and questioned Dawn's driver, then continued to explain his intentions. 'The cabs are different makes and different colors, which will help us. Dawn have you got a mobile phone?'

Dawn sniffed and nodded, producing her mobile.

'Right, Dawn, get that hood back on. Anna set up a conference call on all our mobiles; I'll get one of Anna's likenesses for each cab.' He sprinted to his hire car and took Anna's sketches from the file in his brief case, then dashed back.

After a few minutes the other taxi arrived. Mike got into each taxi in turn and gave the drivers a wad of cash together with a cover story and a set of instructions. Anna went round the corner in the second cab and parked up, while Dawn's cab remained where it was.

Mike took stock; he had a makeshift shadowing team at the intersection in unobtrusive local vehicles. Not an ideal solution but he had five pairs of eyes looking out for the white van. John would not be back in his office yet. He rang Ben fervently hoping that he would be back in his own office by now.

3.00pm. Galata District, Istanbul.

A mile from the apartment, sitting in his van in a side street, George Liani gnawed at his moustache. Everything else had looked okay, but the open window nagged at him. That was the only discordant note. It was not in his nature to take chances; better by far to be sure. His mind made up he started the van and drove to a shop he knew near the waterfront. It was a pawnshop and could be relied upon to have a good selection of second-hand binoculars for sale. Sailors were always trading-in such items for cash for a last run ashore. He selected a pair of high-powered roof prism binoculars. Small, but very powerful, they would enable

him to look deep into the room with the open window, but would not be too obvious hanging round his neck under his buttoned-up jacket. Driving back across the city, he gradually worked his way to a position in a side street close to the block of apartments with the open window. Locking the van, he made his way on foot to a place where a busy street intersected the main road. It was adjacent to the block where the late Suleiman had lived and where he knew that there were telephone booths. Stepping into a booth, he went through the motions of making a call and then, slipping the binoculars from under his shirt, he turned and peered up through the open front of the booth towards the window that had worried him earlier. He raised the binoculars and focused them. Deep in the room mounted on a tripod, he saw a large camera with a telephoto lens and alongside, also on a tripod mount, a pair of powerful binoculars. A shadowy figure moved behind them. It was a stake out. His instinct had served him well. Quickly he stuffed the binoculars back under his shirt and hurried from the phone booth, his thoughts racing, he half walked, half ran, back to his van.

05.00pm. Galata, Istanbul.

It was his haste that gave him away. Mike caught the rapid movements from the corner of his eye and glanced casually round to see the cause. He drew in his breath sharply, the face was unmistakably that of the man they were after and he was going away from them. 'Damn, I didn't expect him back so soon,' he muttered. His car was facing the wrong way. He grabbed his 'phone and alerted Anna and Dawn. 'Target spotted, moving past me to the rear of my vehicle, still in sight, stand by.' He twisted round in his seat in time to see the man turning into a side street, moments later a white van pulled out and drove past Mike's hire car. He used the 'phone again. 'Target now in the white van, driving past my position, stopped at the intersection, turning right away from the apartments, get moving, over.'

'Okay,' Dawn answered, 'I see him.'

'We're right behind you,' Anna said.

The chase was on.

05.15pm. Galata, Istanbul.

George Liani scanned his rear view mirror looking for following vehicles. He saw traffic behind him, saw a car pull out of a side street several cars back, but did not notice a taxi turn into the road two cars behind that and accelerate to keep him in view. As he passed the next intersection a second taxi pulled out and joined the tail of a queue of vehicles.

His thoughts as he drove turned to other matters. Was the stakeout on account of him and his activities? He had to assume that it was. How had they, whoever 'they' were, got onto him? Had he been careless? No, he was sure he had not. Were they interested in Suleiman? Perhaps a clue from the blown-up aircraft had led them to the apartment. That was possible. Well, they would have to wait a long time for Suleiman to come home. A grim smile played at the corner of his mouth. Now it would be foolish to go and try to remove the equipment he had stored there;

better to forget it, better to change the plan. He had more funds, and there was work to do to secure the other half of the moneys. That would take him out of town while things cooled off a little. Maybe he should do that sooner rather than later.

The decision on a different course of action gave him food for thought, and parking his van outside his own apartment; preoccupied with his thoughts, he went inside.

06.00pm. Sishane, Istanbul.

Mike spoke to Anna and Dawn via the open conference call. They were well away from the apartment block.

‘Well, we know another address now, Mike said, ‘but that’s about all we know.’

‘What now?’ Anna asked.

‘We watch, and while we wait we need to get organized. I’ll bung the taxi drivers some more cash and see if we can get them to split into shifts, one on duty and one on standby. I’ll ’phone John and Ben and see if they can hurry up their reinforcements.’

‘Better be quick,’ Anna said, ‘we don’t want to lose this guy now we’ve found him.’ She watched the entrance to the block of flats from a position in a line of parked cars a hundred yards away.

To keep the conference call open, Mike went to find the nearest phone booth, and made a call to John Henderson, only to find that he was still not back. Next he tried Bat Yom Import and Export. Ben was not much help.

‘I’ve not got many reliable people at that location Mike, the ones I do have are at the airport. Can you contact them there?’

‘No, I don’t have time; we’re too thin on the ground here. I have the person we are interested in located, and under surveillance, but I need some help to keep tabs on him. I’m using amateurs who should not be involved. I need assistance in this location urgently.’ He gave Ben George Liani’s address.

Mike walked casually back to his car speaking into his mobile phone.

‘Any movement?’

‘No, not yet,’ Anna replied, ‘how long do you suppose we’ll have to wait?’

‘No can tell, could be minutes, could be hours. Have you got any Turkish Lira?’

‘Yes, why?’

‘Go and see if you can find some food; kebabs, sandwiches or something and some coffee, in cups with lids. If we have to move we can take it with us. Do it now and hand it out as soon as you get back. If we have a long wait at least we’ll have something to keep us awake.’

‘Okay, the driver will know a place.’

‘Yeah, good, be as quick as you can, and keep your phone to your ear.’

Chapter 22

7.00am. Sishane, Istanbul, 10/29/02.

George Liani had a bad night. Unable to sleep he paced his apartment. All his instincts told him it would be better to move sooner rather than later. He took from a drawer a bundle of documents formerly belonging to Suleiman Yavas, his murdered assistant. He checked them quickly, passport, with visa, driving license, identity card, all expertly altered with photographs of himself in place of those of the late Suleiman, and an open first class return ticket to Tel Aviv. The name on the ticket matched the name on the documents. George Liani had planned ahead.

As he hastily dressed in different clothes he thought about his immediate actions and his natural caution re-emerged. Suleiman's apartment was being watched. So it was possible that he had been followed home and this building was being watched too. He had to assume so, and that all entrances would be covered. Dodging out of the rear entrance with a suitcase would be a complete give-away. Behave normally until an opportunity to slip his followers could be created, that was the way to do it. Go out with no luggage, get into the anonymous white van and drive quietly away. He put the papers and ticket into his inside jacket pocket, together with his banking documents, picked up the van keys and headed for the door.

Mike and his team had had a worse night. Taking turns to keep watch in the cramped confines of the taxis none of them got much sleep. Anna had gone back to the all night transport café for more coffee and Mike was on watch as George Liani emerged. He spoke into the open conference call.

'He's coming out.' It was George Liani, no doubt about it. He walked to the plain white van he was renting and climbed in. 'Follow me Dawn, keep a good distance between us, we don't want to be seen.'

'Okay, we're following.' The driver nodded, started the engine, and eased out into the Istanbul traffic.

'Anna, where are you?'

There was a short silence then to his relief Anna's voice. 'What's up?'

'We have movement.'

'Where are you?'

Mike had the street map in his lap. 'On Selamsiz Caddesi, heading west, I think he's making for the Ataturk Bridge.'

'Got that, driver says we're not too far away.'

'Okay, let me know when you have us in sight, out.'

Mike kept the white van in view, and Dawn followed Mike. They struggled through solid traffic and then Mike's voice came over the 'phone link.

'Dawn, I'm going to drop back a few cars, get your driver to overtake me and stick to his tail for a while. I'm pretty sure now that he's heading for the Ataturk Bridge.'

'Okay.' Dawn told her driver and he nodded that he understood. Mike's car and Dawn's taxi changed places. Suddenly traffic lights ahead began to change. Mike put his foot hard on the accelerator and began to shoot the lights. There was a blare of horns as traffic hurtled across the intersection. Mike stamped on the brakes, swung the wheel, and skidded to a stop broadside on. Cars and trucks swerved and honked narrowly missing him. A police motorcycle, light flashing pulled across the street and stopped in front of the car. Mike's heart sank.

‘Dawn, I’ve hit a problem, can you keep up the tail, over?’

Dawn looked at her driver and shrugged, ‘I guess we have to.’

‘Where are you now?’

‘We’ve crossed the Ataturk Bridge and we’re on Ataturk Bulvari, going West, I know he doesn’t have any luggage but the driver thinks he may be heading for the airport.’

‘Anna, can you catch up with Dawn? I’ll be with you as soon as I can, out.’

Mike got out of the car to deal with the Turkish Traffic Policeman. The Traffic Policeman moved at the pace of a straining snail. Mike fumed with frustration. Minutes went by then suddenly Anna came on the ‘phone.

‘Mike, its Anna, I’m stuck in a traffic queue, its solid; road-works ahead I think.’

‘Oh hell, everything’s going to rat shit.’

‘Mike I’m sorry, there’s nothing I can do!’

‘Okay, okay. Listen, ring Bat Yom Import–Export,’ Mike gave her the number. ‘Speak to Mister Benjamin, use my name; tell him I think our friend may be flying out. Tell him to keep his people there at the airport. Ask him to check the flights, see if anything stands out, he’ll know what to do. Anna, I have to go now, bye.’

The Policeman took his time, finished taking Mike’s details and handed back his papers together with a traffic ticket.

8.00am. Istanbul.

Partly from instinct, partly from training, partly from habit George Liani had a sense of being followed. There was a taxi that had been behind him for some time. Well, taxis went to the airport regularly; even so he felt uneasy. He waited until he reached the outskirts of Istanbul where the traffic was thinner, and then began a series of turns. This particular taxi followed him on every turn. There was no doubt the vehicle was following him, but why so obvious? Why not a series of different vehicles? The police were not short of manpower, what was going on? He drove on, repeatedly checking the rear view mirror for other tailing vehicles, but could not see any. He made a decision. He turned off the main road onto a secondary road that wound towards the coast of the Sea of Marmara, and put his foot down. The van began to pull away from the following taxi.

Dawn tapped the taxi driver on the shoulder. ‘Quick, he’s getting away from us. We don’t want to lose him.’ She leant forward anxiously and spoke into the ‘phone. ‘Mike, he’s been dodging about, he may have spotted me, and he’s speeded up.’

‘Right, I’m clear of traffic now,’ Mike replied, ‘I should be with you in a few minutes.’

‘My driver says he’s taken the coast road. He’s still speeding up, hope it’s not because he’s seen us.’

‘Stay with him, I’ll take over the tail in a few minutes, out.’

Dawn turned to the driver. ‘Don’t let him get away.’

The taxi driver grinned and put his foot hard down on the accelerator.

George Liani took a bend at high speed and checked his rear mirror. The taxi was out of sight. He changed down to third. The road was clear. He wrenched the steering wheel hard over as he yanked the hand brake on. The van slid violently in a hand brake turn through one hundred and eighty degrees. As it slid he slammed

it into second gear, released the hand brake, corrected the slide and accelerated back on the inside lane.

The taxi driver's eyes went wide with shock. The white van was hurtling towards him on the wrong side of the road. Instinctively he swerved to avoid it, hit the verge, bounced and lost control. Dawn screamed at the same instant. The taxi left the road and dropped down the slope towards the sea. The front hit a rock, impaling the taxi driver on his steering column with the impact, and then it spun round and skidded backwards down the slope into an old but solid pine. The fuel tank split on the impact and petrol spilled onto the hot exhaust, vaporizing immediately. A high-tension plug lead, dislodged in the first impact, flashed a blue spark as it earthed onto the engine block. There was the crump of an explosion, and fire raged through the vehicle.

George Liani, a look of grim satisfaction on his face, executed another hand brake turn, and accelerated back round the bend and out of sight.

Mike could get no reply from Dawn on the 'phone. He was still trying when he saw the smoke and flames ahead. It was Dawn's taxi. He screamed to a halt and leapt out. He threw himself down the slope towards the car with no regard for his own safety. Inside, he saw Dawn's blonde hair flare and crumble to ash, then further in the taxi driver's dark hair did the same. As he tried to reach them he saw their skin blister and then appear to melt.

Dawn scabbled frantically at the glass, her mouth open in screams of agony. Her hands shriveled to claws, and then she went limp.

Mike's eyebrows singed off, as did the hair at the front of his head. His face and hands began to blister and the heat seared his lungs. He felt hands tugging him backwards. It was a passing truck driver from the road above. 'Stop, too late, you can do nothing,' the driver yelled in his ear. He dragged Mike away before the vehicle exploded. Mike began to shake with shock.

What the hell was he going to say to Jim?

8.30am. Tel Aviv.

The office was quiet. Ben was using the quiet to do some thinking when the 'phone rang shattering the silence. It was his direct line; few people had the number. At first he didn't recognize the strained, almost hysterical, voice on the line. 'Mike, is that you? What's happened?'

There was a shocked silence as Ben absorbed the information Mike gave him.

'We must let Jim know as soon as possible.' The distress in Mike's voice was increasing.

'No! No, it will do no good to relay this to him now. It would affect him too much; it would put lives at risk.' Ben, although shocked at Mike's news, had not seen the horror of it as Mike had and was thinking more clearly. 'Everything must continue as planned. I know; I know it's horrific, but we have to continue.' Ben cut out Mike's protest before he could utter it. 'Listen, Anna contacted me. This Liani must not give us the slip.'

The mention of the name filled Mike with bitter anger, 'He's gone; I've lost the bastard!'

'No, we're on to him again. You thought he was heading for the airport before the accident. I contacted our friend in Turkish security and asked him for the flight lists from Istanbul. On one list was the name Suleiman Yavas; he's heading for Ben Gurion.'

'The one who murdered the Kosovos family? But he's dead; he was fished out of the Bosphorous.'

'Exactly, dead men don't board planes. I think Liani is using his deceased associate's identity.'

'Well... he was using his apartment to store stuff, so I suppose he could be using his ID.'

'Yeah, we'd better be ready for him when he comes through immigration. I suppose you'll be getting back here as soon as you can?'

'Damn right we will, can you book Anna and I on a private jet and give us the VIP treatment to get us through the entry formalities ahead of him?'

'Leave it to me; you will be met at the door to the plane.' Ben rang off; he had a lot to do.

12.00am. Ben Gurion Airport, Israel.

George Liani was careful to appear normal, his arrival in Israel needed to be unremarked, and so he conversed amicably with his fellow passengers. He had purchased luggage and clothes at the shops in Istanbul airport. He kept his gaze casual as he walked towards Israeli immigration. He experienced some moments of anxiety at the immigration desk as the official there looked closely at his passport, checked the photo, and scrutinized his face; but then the passport was handed back and he was through. As he walked through to baggage reclaim the immigration official looked up and nodded to his supervisor. The supervisor picked up the phone. George Liani waited patiently for his new luggage to come through on the carousel. He loaded it onto a trolley and wheeled it through the green nothing to declare channel. No one stopped him and he walked into the arrivals hall amidst a flow of passengers.

Standing well back in a darkened office above the arrivals hall, Ben took a call from the immigration desk.

'The man you are interested in is coming through now.'

'There, that's him!' Mike pointed.

'So that's our man,' Ben Levy breathed, and then to the photographer, 'Get his picture.'

The photographer nodded as he focused his telephoto lens. Moments later a whole roll of film had been taken by his motorized camera.

Ben spoke into his mobile 'phone, 'He's approaching the exit doors, start to pay off the cab.'

Anna climbed out of the taxi and dumped her bags on the pavement outside the airport concourse. She fished in her purse for her money.

Ben's voice came through Anna's mobile 'phone. 'He's going through the doors now.' She relayed the information to the cab driver.

The cab driver winked and looked up, he saw George Liani wave, and gave him a thumbs up. He took Anna's money, handed back the change and received the tip.

He drove on a short way to pick up his new fare. Anna walked into the departures building.

'Take me to the King David Hotel, Jerusalem.' The taxi driver nodded and George Liani climbed in the back with his bags.

The taxi drove off. '79, Picked up a fare at the Airport, going to the King David Hotel, Jerusalem,' the taxi driver said into his radio mike.

The radio crackled as the controller spoke back to him. 'Okay 79, as soon as you're free, give me a call; I might have a return fare for you by then.'

'79 will do.'

George Liani permitted himself a look behind. No other vehicle was following. As far as he could see, there were no lights of any sort to be seen. George Liani, alias Suleiman Yavas, was inside Israel but not unobserved as he thought. The taxi driver who picked him up at the airport was Mike's colleague from the American Embassy. And Ben Levy was busy deploying a small army of personnel from Shin Bet, the common abbreviation for "Serut Bitahon Kelali", the "General Security Service", the organization tasked with maintaining security inside the borders of Israel. Ben had agents of Shin Bet rushing into position on radioed instructions even as the "taxi" left the airport entrance. The manager of the King David hotel was compelled to accept several new additions to his staff: all Shin Bet operatives. The receptionist who dealt with George Liani on his arrival was one; the chambermaid who searched his room and his belongings whilst he ate a meal was one. The cleaner, who polished outside the lifts, keeping watch as his room was being searched, belonged to Shin Bet, as did the waitress who served him in the restaurant and kept an eye on him as he ate. Whilst he ate his meal the phone in his room was bugged. From now on every move he made would be watched, noted and acted upon.

The people at Ben's disposal were hand-picked; the very best that Shin Bet had. Experienced through the years of trouble which their fledgling nation had endured, all of them were experts, and there were sufficient of them for the same face never to be seen twice by the man they were shadowing.

Initially none of their efforts found any clue to their quarry's plans or intentions. His luggage and his belongings were new and yielded nothing to his watchers. He made no telephone calls from his room, nor did he receive any. That evening he did not go out, but spent the time resting and quietly studying a street map of Jerusalem, fixing the geography into his mind so that he knew the main routes and the principal landmarks. The detail, the visual recognition, he would add later.

12.00 midnight, Beirut.

All through the day and the following night Jim and Willy had taken it in turns to keep watch. Two hours on and two hours off, huddled together now beneath the rubbish covered cloaks, the man on watch ensuring that the man sleeping did not snore or talk. The ground staff had started work again at six, preparing the stadium for the Sunday game. They had gone about their work cheerfully, unaware that a pair of vigilant eyes watched their every move, and that they were covered by a gun each time they approached a certain set of stands. There had

been no alarms through the morning hours, and the ground staff left for the long midday break at twelve, allowing Jim and Willy to relax a little and ease the tension. The staff returned in early afternoon to set out the flags and touch up the white lines. As dusk fell the floodlights were switched on, and the turnstiles manned. The crowds poured in to watch the game, the roars and stamping drowning the faint movements beneath the stand where Jim and Willy were making their preparations.

After the match when the crowd had departed, Jim and Willy waited an hour watching and listening for any sign of movement. None came. The place was deserted. Staying under cover they encoded the signal to start the next phase.

2.00pm. Jerusalem.

Dressed like any tourist and with camera and binoculars hung round his neck, George Liani set out on foot to familiarize himself with the city of Jerusalem. He walked through the streets with his tourist map until he was quite familiar with the main thoroughfares. He occasionally made a random check to see if he was being followed, but it was out of habit not out of alarm, and such was the skill and the sheer number of Ben Levy's security people that they did not lose sight of him for a moment. Without doing anything remotely suspicious George Liani returned to his hotel, used the toilet, and freshened up.

From the King David Hotel it was a mile to the Knesset. After getting his bearings, George Liani started work on his reason for being in Israel. Taking his miniature binoculars and a small transistor radio with him, he left his hotel. He stopped at a coffee shop and, ordering a black coffee, asked where the pay 'phone was. He made one call. A woman's voice answered speaking low and fast. He was given a time and a location. A relatively short walk along Ramban Street took him to the junction with Binyamin Mitudela. Turning to his right, he walked up the incline, climbing the hill on which the Knesset stood he reached the junction with Ben Zvi. Crossing that road he turned to his left and began the climb up Ruppin, skirting the Knesset in its grounds to his right. Soon he reached the junction where Kaplan and Shemuel Wise intersected with Ruppin. Turning left again he made his way past the Shrine of the Book and into the art garden alongside the Israel Museum. Still playing the tourist he strolled around the Israel Museum and grounds until he found a suitable bench where he rested. The bench had a panoramic view across to the Knesset and overlooked all the approach routes to that building set in its own grounds. He studied the Knesset and its approach roads. He needed a way in and was pleased to see that his advance intelligence was correct. He saw exactly what he was looking for. Surveyors were completing their setting out work for the costly and controversial new blast wall to protect the Knesset, and mechanical diggers had begun to excavate the footings.

On the way back from the museum he bought the Arab language newspapers. An article in the newspaper confirmed an event; the date of the event was two days time. The details of his plan were falling into place.

10.00pm. Lod, Israel.

It had been a silent group of men who boarded the coach to the airfield. All these men had been in action before and knew what it would be like. A feeling of grim purpose descended on the team. The coach took them to a small military airstrip. They were expected, and after a brief but thorough security check they were allowed to drive in.

A jeep full of MP's escorted them out onto the airstrip and up to a tactical transport aircraft. In dark broken camouflage paint it was indistinct but loomed above them as they approached. The aircraft carried no markings but was part of the Heyl Havar, the Israeli air force.

Silently and without a word of command, the team de-bussed and climbed aboard the aircraft. Each man went to a pre-defined seat position and, strapping himself in, placed his kit at his feet in front of him. The doors were closed and the lights, already dim, went off. The pilot of the aircraft powered up his engines against the brakes; then with a sudden lurch they were off. The vibration from the runway lasted a few brief moments and, then the big aircraft was up and away, powering out on a steep curving climb, taking them to the west out over the dark Mediterranean.

The fasten seat belts signs went off and the men began to make their preparations for their arrival at the drop zone. Parachutes and reserve chutes were donned and carefully checked, weapons and equipment packs were strapped to each man's leg with quick release webbing, altimeter settings were checked and watches synchronized for the last time. This would be a short flight and they had barely enough time to get themselves ready and into their exit positions. The plane turned and began its high altitude run over the sea three miles West of Beirut. It would make only one pass.

11.45pm. Beirut.

Flitting from shadow to shadow, Willy made his way to the top of the stands. The heat of the day had warmed the air over the land and it was rising, drawing cooler air in off the sea, a strong onshore breeze blowing from West to East. Willy streamed his keffiyeh to gauge the wind strength. About force three on the Beaufort scale, as near as he could guess. He made his way down to where Jim lurked in the shadows giving him cover.

Jim raised his eyebrows inquiringly. Willy put a hand up, three fingers raised, his other arm out giving the wind direction. He melted into the shadows as Jim moved cautiously out on to the pitch. Jim used his knife to make an incision in the turf under the centre spot, and then took a tiny but powerful Maglite torch from his hold-all waistcoat. He stuck the end into the soil and, covering the lens with his hand, he gave the top a couple of anti-clockwise turns. The powerful light came on. He gave it a half turn clockwise and the light went out. Pacing out ten yards from the centre spot in the direction the wind was coming from, he set another Maglite, then returning to the centre he paced out ten yards in the opposite direction and set a third.

In the same manner he laid out fourth, fifth and sixth torches along the axis of the wind direction. The number of torches in the crossbar indicated the wind

strength, and the long leg of the cross gave the direction in which the wind was blowing.

Quickly and silently he rejoined Willy in the shadows of the stand. Jim tapped his wristwatch and raised both hands, all fingers raised; H-hour minus ten minutes.

Willy took his own Maglite from his hold-all waistcoat and held it ready. He switched on the small burst transmission radio and switched to receive, a low hiss of static in the single earplug, the only sound.

They settled down to wait.

Chapter 23

00.05am. Over Beirut, 10/30/02.

Andy Cunningham gave the order, '**Positions!**' The two halves of the team moved down the fuselage to the doors. Moments passed. '**Ready,**' as the red light came on. '**Go!**' Andy shouted the command as the red light flashed to green. '**Go!**' Dave Prendergast shouted the same command at the same instant on the other side of the aircraft. The two groups of men, hanging on either side of the aircraft and packed in the doorways, leapt into the rushing black darkness. Each had a firm grip on a fellow team mate and each wore a marker light on the back of his helmet to facilitate the link-up. Within thirty seconds the pairs were joined into a standard free fall formation. Shortly after that the two teams joined and the combined group of men rushed down through the darkness, their clothing flapping furiously in their slipstream as they accelerated to one hundred and forty miles per hour into the blackness. The helmet lights winked out thirty seconds after the two teams achieved link-up. They swooped in towards the coast, the lights of Beirut giving them their direction, the stiff onshore breeze assisting their free fall flight.

All eyes strained towards the ground and then, suddenly, there it was, a single light flashing at one-second intervals in a patch of blackness. As one entity the formation steered towards it. After thirty flashes the light stayed on and more lights joined it in a long cross formation. Three lights in the bar - wind speed three knots - and the long leg giving the wind direction.

As the formation passed through four thousand feet all the altimeters began to bleep, the sound setting quite low but still clearly audible to the wearers. The formation broke up, each man peeling off from the man next to him in a prearranged sequence into clear air space. Each man counted his seconds off, to give himself plenty of lateral separation from his colleagues, and then one by one rip cords were pulled and the rectangular black canopies deployed with a jerk. Now came the hard part, estimating the approach of the ground in the darkness. Equipment and ammunition loads were released so as to hang below each man on their attached lines as each of the men steered into a quadrant demarcated by the arms of the cross of lights. They did not aim to touch down anywhere near the centre, that would have risked collision, entanglement, and the collapse of their

'chutes. Instead, each man aimed for an imaginary point pre-allocated within a given quadrant of the cross of lights and corresponding with the hours on a clock face.

Andrew Cunningham steered for twelve o'clock, Dave Prendergast for six, Digger for three, Spud for nine, others for points between. They steered in, keeping a wary eye out for their mates and when each judged the height to be correct they put a leg against the equipment line. When the equipment touched the ground the line would slacken and impact would follow split seconds later. Like huge black snowflakes each chute and its flier glided silently into position and touched down without a sound. Each man's equipment was packed so as not to give a single clink or rattle. They all landed on their feet, collapsed their 'chutes, and went to ground in a defensive circle, weapons pointing outwards.

One at a time the men around the perimeter of the pitch moved towards the stand; the furthest away moving first. As they crossed the pitch one of them pulled the Maglites out of the ground, switched them off, and stowed them in his kit.

Jim crouched in the stands and checked as all the torches went out. No torches left on, all the team safely down and in place. He raised his arm and gave the signal to advance. Two files of men led off, the point man of each file scanned ahead, the centre of the files looking and pointing their weapons to the flanks, the tail man of each walking backwards covering the rear. All weapons were loaded and cocked; each had a round in the chamber and the safety catch on.

Jim led the well-spaced formation off the pitch and down the tunnel, through the player's dressing rooms and out to the player's entrance. A pair of bolt cutters made short work of the padlock hasps. Men were left in the player's entrance to deal with the stadium staff and secure the route for the withdrawal.

2.00am. Shatila.

Like indistinct shadows, each file moving alternately, the team of men melted away into the darkness, one section covering as the other moved. The terrorist HQ was less than a mile away.

They approached cautiously to within two hundred yards of it and went to ground in a defensive circle exactly as they had done on landing. Two shadowy figures slid away into the night, heading for the road barriers that were the outermost point of the terrorist defences. Jim Savage was one, Wee Willy Andersen the other. They knew the ground best. Slowly and with infinite patience, inches at a time, they worked their way towards their quarry, approaching from the only direction that was slightly obscured. Suddenly a match flared, the two men instinctively closed their eyes and turned their heads away to preserve precious and vital night vision. Such carelessness could only help them, the attackers.

They reached their chosen position and waited.

After ten minutes a voice spoke in Arabic. 'I need to piss, won't be long.'

He was answered by a grunt, and then, 'Piss well away from here, the flies are bad enough already.' A figure muffled against the night chill, head wrapped in a black and white keffiyeh, stepped out of the sangar on the approach road and walked over to the usual bush. He was short in stature. Willy nodded to Jim. The sound of a man urinating came clearly on the night air.

Jim moved swiftly and silently to a patch of shadow on the route the man had taken out to the bush. He crouched, waiting. Willy lay flat watching the sangar. If the man had been taller Willy would have gone.

The terrorist sentry shook off the drips, and doing up his flies walked to his death. As he passed Jim's position, Jim's shadowy figure uncoiled from his hiding place like a steel spring; a hard brown hand was clamped over the man's mouth and nose from over his left shoulder. He was yanked backwards. As he fell back, too surprised even to grunt Jim's razor sharp FS knife slammed up between his ribs below the right shoulder blade. Stabbed to the heart, the man died instantly.

Willy pulled his own keffiyeh around his head, and walked straight into the sangar, his Welrod pistol cocked and held ready down the side of his leg.

'Enjoy your piss?'

Willy raised his ugly tube-like weapon. There was a faint sound, something between a light cough and a quiet snort. The second terrorist fell forwards onto the sandbags, his heart blown apart by the .32 caliber round.

'Two down and no alarms.' Willy breathed as Jim joined him. He took his Maglite torch from his pocket. Carefully shielding it from the view of anyone else, he gave two dim red flashes in the direction of the rest of the team.

As the rest of the team moved towards the sangar, Willy and Jim adjusted their keffiyehs. They looked remarkably like the two men they had just eliminated.

Four of the team quietly removed the two bodies to a nearby storm drain. The rest of the team settled down to wait.

An hour later two sleepy guards emerged from the terrorist headquarters and ambled towards the sandbagged sangar. One of the reliefs stretched and yawned as he emerged; the other was rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Suddenly, silently, they both collapsed to the ground, and then appeared to rise up again in slightly different places. The two figures ambled on towards Willy and Jim's position. Willy and Jim were waiting for the switch.

'Salaam Alekhum.'

'Alekhum Salaam.'

The two substitute reliefs were Andrew Cunningham and Digger Trench. Meanwhile the two dead reliefs were being surreptitiously removed, both shot through the heart with rounds from the silent and deadly Welrod pistols.

Jim spoke a few words of Arabic to the new reliefs; just to make it look like an authentic hand-over of a guard position should anyone be watching. Then he and Willy shouldered the former sentry's Kalashnikovs and wandered over to their next place of duty to relieve the two real guards who were there. This would be the acid test. Could they carry off the impersonation?

Their heads swathed in their keffiyehs against the chill of the night air they wandered into the next defensive position, which was inside the ground floor of the damaged apartment building. It was dark inside, no lighting at all, which suited their purpose admirably.

'Salaam Abdul, cold out there, eh?' one of the guards remarked, addressing Jim in colloquial Arabic.

Jim rubbed his hands together vigorously and answered back in the same dialect, his voice muffled in the black and white keffiyeh. 'Go see for your-self,' he growled.

Seeing only what they expected to see, and hearing what they expected to hear, the two terrorist guards laughed at his irritation and, slinging their weapons over their shoulders, they wandered off to their next point of sentry duty.

At all the subsequent changes of duty, Willy and Jim would relieve the same two men, and the strike team would gradually penetrate deeper and deeper into the terrorist base. Every two hours, on the hour, two new sentries came on watch, roused from their beds by the two going off at the end of their spell of duty. Every two hours two of them were silently removed as they emerged and were replaced by two of the strike team members. Now, four changes later, there were ten members of the team infiltrated into the terrorist headquarters, dressed and masquerading as Blood of Shatila guards. All the points of access to the terrorist headquarters were under the team's control.

Jim used his Maglite torch again and the remaining six shadowy figures rose up from their cover and quickly moved through the darkness and into the entrance to the apartment block basement. All of them had their Welrod pistols cocked and ready for use. The two explosive experts were carrying bulky rucksacks. They found an unused storeroom, placed the rucksacks carefully in a dark corner, and covered them with Jim and Willy's rubbish-covered cloaks.

The others split up. Some went with Jim and some with Digger Trench. Digger's destination was the top floor barrack room for off-duty sentries. Slowly he eased open the door. He and his companions stepped quietly into the room. The last two to be relieved had not yet gone off to sleep; they sat on their bunks in the dim light.

'What..?' One of the men reaching for his AK47 began to shout a question. He and his companion were shot dead at point blank range. The rest began to wake. Some, waking more rapidly than others, reached instinctively for their weapons as they surfaced from sleep. They were shot and fell back. The sinister Welrod pistols re-cocked and ready swung back and forth covering the room. Digger could not afford a mistake. Even one burst from an AK47 would do enormous damage at such short range and, more importantly, would alert the whole of the terrorist headquarters.

Digger took no chances: as each terrorist made his move he was silently eliminated. Finally, the room was quiet. Cordite fumes swirled eerily in the dim light. Digger signaled to his companions, two kept watch as the bodies were removed down to the unused store room, laid in shadow and covered with more rubbish covered cloaks. Digger closed and locked the door. None of the Blood of Shatila terrorists in there would ever kill or maim unarmed civilians again.

Turning the mattresses in the barrack room for off duty sentries they settled down to sleep whilst two of their number remained on watch. The sleeping men were safe enough.

At the same time that Digger entered the barrack room for off duty sentries, Jim Savage stepped into the guard commander's room. 'As-salaam Alekhum...'

The guard commander glanced up from the rota he was working on for the following week. 'Salaam. What is it?' He looked back down trying to resolve a problem. From the corner of his eye he saw an unusual movement. He looked up again and stared into the ugly black end of Jim's Welrod pistol. 'Guards!' He shouted the warning to men who were already dead, and grabbed for his pistol on

the table to the right of his papers. His head snapped forward as the Welrod round smashed splinters of his breastbone through his heart.

'Put him with the others.' The ugly, silent and deadly tube went back under Jim's old and faded jacket. He sat at the table and studied the guard rota.

As daylight came, the routine of guard duty went on exactly as before. Only the persons carrying it out had changed. The study Jim and Willy had made of the sentry routines during the recce made it easier. Vehicles were turned back at the first barrier and were made to park up. Visitors went on foot to the next barrier where they were searched at gunpoint and their papers checked. Only then were they allowed to proceed. 'Halt.' 'Papers.' 'Stand still.' These were the only words used by the guards, who were under orders not to engage in conversation. The guards changed every two hours as normal, each new pair coming on watch and two going off watch to eat and sleep after rotating through the various sentry locations. Andy gave each pair an emphatic warning as they went on and came off guard duty. He knew that the most insidious and dangerous enemy for the coming hours would be boredom.

8.30am. Jerusalem.

In bright morning sunshine George Liani set out to visit his bank manager. Turning down Keren Hayesod to King David Street, he threaded his way across the busy traffic, made his way through the narrow streets of the Yemin Moshe Quarter, and on up to the imposing towers of the Citadel of David. At a bank near to the moat entrance he called in to keep the appointment he had made by phone from his hotel room earlier that morning. The call had been recorded, and the Shin Bet operatives following him were expecting him to go there. Ostensibly, he was going to arrange funds for his day to day needs, but he had other business that he had been careful not to mention. Half an hour later he emerged from the bank, crossed Jaffa road and entered the Old City by the Jaffa gate. He made his way along the Street of David to the descending steps. Here he paused for a few moments to look at the teeming life of the bazaars.

The Shin Bet operatives shadowing him had no difficulty in concealing themselves in the throng. A youth wearing a crash helmet with a dark visor, and riding a cross-country motorcycle, drew up to the intersection and stopped.

Striding forward George Liani threw his leg over the rear of the bike and sat on the pillion seat. The bike roared off and turned down one of the narrow pedestrian bazaars. Dodging shoppers and the boys hurtling down to the tiny shops with their handcarts loaded with supplies, the motorcycle and its passengers were soon lost to view.

The Shin Bet operatives were wrong-footed. They had no suitable means with which to give chase. A series of frantic messages were sent out from several personal radios. Ben Levy was notified and gave immediate instructions for the Old City to be discreetly sealed.

Within a few minutes plain clothes Shin Bet operatives were stationed at all the gates, the Jaffa gate on the West, the Zion gate and the Dung gate to the South, the New gate, the Damascus gate and Herod's gate to the North, and the Lion's gate to the East. But they were too late; George Liani was gone before they could

seal the old city off. The motorcycle and its rider whipped him out via the Dung gate, down Ha-Ofel to the Jericho road and South to Silwan, the Arab town in the lower part of the Kidron valley. The youth thrust a piece of paper into George Liani's hand, pointed to a doorway and then drove off. The motor cycle, stolen that morning, would be hidden in a different part of Jerusalem for later use.

9.30am. Jerusalem.

Ben Levy was furious. 'He can't just have jumped onto a stranger's motor bike,' he said to Mike and John, 'he must have planned it, and done it for a reason.'

John was looking thoughtful. 'As far as we know he has no reason to suppose we're on to him, but, almost as soon as we found him in Turkey we nearly lost him. He's a professional, so maybe he's just covering his tracks as a matter of routine. My guess is that neither he nor his friends are taking any chances.'

Ben looked at them grimly. 'Well, how the hell do we find him again?'

'And what the hell is he up to?' John added.

'I'd give a lot to know the answers to those two questions,' Ben said fervently.

9.30am. Silwan District, Jerusalem.

The doorway led to a small shop selling spices and savory herbs. The people in the small back room were allied to "*Hezbollah*", "the Party of God". This was a safe house in a safe district, one that he could use for as long as he needed it. George Liani was taken to a larger room above the shop and introduced to a group of twenty young men dressed in white robes and white head cloths. They were members of "Islamic Jihad", an organization opposed to Israel, whose members believed in immediate rebirth in Paradise for anyone who died in the service of Islam. All had volunteered to act as suicide bombers. One of them in particular wanted fervently to put his belief into practice, an introverted and intense young man who impressed George Liani. George Liani would make the bomb; the young fanatic would deliver it and make his way to Paradise, a martyr to the cause.

Using the shop telephone, George Liani contacted the first few names on the list given to him by the boy on the motorcycle. They were active members of the Intifada and were cautious but agreed to help. George Liani wanted a collection of fertilizer to be made. He specified granular Ammonium Nitrate, a fertilizer with high nitrogen content and identical to that used by terrorists in Northern Ireland.

The word went quietly out within the disaffected Arab groups and it spread to the small farms and vineyards where such stuff was to be found. Collection points were nominated at a few of the larger holdings where the owners could be relied upon, and where a few fifty-kilo bags of granulated fertilizer would cause no comment. Good money was paid, and the sacks came in by donkey, by bicycle, and by car. Very quickly and without any of the participants knowing or caring what the stuff was to be used for, a series of stockpiles began to grow.

During the course of the morning the total of all these scattered amounts became a very large quantity indeed.

George Liani's next priority was a suitable base for operations. From a pay phone he called his bank manager. Najib Shawa had not yet sent all the additional

funds to his account. But with the knowledge that some money was available he began a search for suitable premises by scouring the local press. The most suitable property on offer was a small agricultural engineering works on the southern edge of Silwan. It was vacant and had a covered workshop with plenty of storage space. He made appointments to view by phone, using the bank as a reference. All the equipment and tools he would need were still in place.

He gained immediate use of the premises by having his bank manager pay two months rent in advance, with the stated intention of purchasing the premises outright as soon as the legal documents could be produced. Again the instruction was given by phone from a public call box.

He made a second call. He didn't want his operational funds to get too low.

9.30am. Shatila, Beirut.

At a meeting in the dimly lit underground room in the terrorist headquarters, Abu Asifah, impatient for progress, was haranguing Najib Shawa. 'All the agreed funds must be provided for this man, you will give him what he needs,' he announced imperiously.

'Really, who is he that I should give him anything?' Najib wanted to know.

'You don't need to know his name. He is on a mission for the cause; he needs money for materials, for accommodation and for food.'

Najib quickly put two and two together; someone on a mission for Abu Asifah?

'Ah, the job in Israel, why didn't you say so, of course money can be provided for that, we have already agreed it,' he said shrewdly.

Abu Asifah glared at him; he could not admit it and if he denied it Najib would continue to quibble over the funds. He did not want anyone to see the defiant stance that Najib Shawa usually took up against him, and he did not want to lose face, so he compromised. 'You don't need to know where the job is,' he snapped, 'it is enough that I tell you what has to be provided.'

Najib Shawa bowed ingratiatingly, 'Anything for the cause, I am its loyal servant, perhaps I can be of help with the provision of documents and tickets?'

'No, the arrangements have been completed. Just supply the funds to this bank.'

Najib Shawa cursed mentally, this spawn of a dog and a hyena was giving away precious little information, but the bank location would be revealing. Perhaps he could also get a date.

'When will the funds be needed? Our account is a little low at present; I need to arrange a transfer.'

'You have until this evening, no later,' Abu Asifah said harshly, his need to dominate Najib Shawa overriding his caution.

'Yes, I can manage that, but I will have to go and do it personally, given the time-scale,' Najib replied; he now had an approximate date to add to the information he had already gleaned. 'And how much will he need?' he asked, looking at Abu Asifah with an unblinking stare of enquiry.

Abu Asifah hesitated momentarily, 'I'll let you know after the meeting.'

Najib saw that Abu Asifah could no longer meet his gaze. Abu Asifah wanted to add his percentage.

'Go and start the arrangements,' Abu Asifah ordered with a gesture of dismissal.

Najib Shawa scowled as he left the room, his hatred seething inside. Obviously something significant was to happen soon. It was time to ask the Jew Levy for the help he needed.

12.00am. Silwan, Jerusalem.

George Liani's next action was the purchase of two different vehicles. He found them at a surplus plant sale advertised in the Arab press. The first vehicle he wanted was a second hand, ready-mixed concrete truck. Six such machines were in the sale. The second vehicle was a battered four-wheel drive pick-up, for sale at the same place. His bank manager provided cash for both purchases, and the young fanatic was given the authority to pick it up. The bidding had been quite competitive for the first five of the trucks, but it was the sixth and last truck that George Liani was interested in. It was almost new and was exactly what he needed. The bidding started high and went up fast. At the very last moment George Liani came in as a new bidder. This ploy drew minimum attention to him and disheartened the other bidders. After a few desultory bids from the original bidders, it was his. To the surprise of the auctioneer's clerk, he paid in cash. He drove the vehicle away personally, and took it directly to the agricultural workshop in Silwan.

George Liani was not in the slightest bit interested in producing ready mixed concrete. He bought paint and various bits and pieces of equipment and, under the cover of the workshop he set to work to adapt the vehicle.

The young fanatic bought the other vehicle and he also paid cash. Battered, unmarked and dusty, it was exactly the sort of vehicle anyone could expect to see coming and going from an agricultural workshop. Using this pick-up and driving around the various farms and small landholdings, the names of which had been supplied by his own organization, the young man began to collect his passport to the next life. A few bags here, a few there from the scattered stockpiles of granular ammonium nitrate fertilizer that had been gathered on George Liani's instructions. It was unloaded from the pick-up inside the covered workshop, and stacked on wooden pallets clear of the floor to keep it dry. Forty bags, each of fifty kilos were stacked to a pallet. As each pallet was filled kilos grew into metric tons, stored under cover, away from prying eyes.

Quickly the excavations of blast wall foundations around the Knesset progressed. Soon the pouring of the concrete would begin.

1.00pm. Shatila.

Self-interest prompted Abu Asifah to issue his orders for the special meeting. To remain the leader of the movement he needed everyone to know that he was the controlling power behind the next mighty blow to be struck for the cause - even though someone else was doing the work. The word was passed out to the faithful and a special emphasis was given to the instructions, which grew rather than diminished as they went from mouth to mouth. The heroes of the previous actions against targets in the West, the hotheads, the fanatics, and especially those who

could be of use to Abu Asifah, all were summoned to the extraordinary meeting; those not asked to attend began to solicit invitations.

1.00pm. Silwan.

George Liani, dressed in old and dirty working overalls, his head swathed in a loose cloth turban, drove his concrete delivery truck into his rented workshop. He closed the big corrugated iron doors and spent thirty minutes checking the road outside through the ill-fitting gap. Satisfied that no untoward notice was being taken of his activities, he rigged up some welding gear and began welding fittings to the huge barrel of the ready mixed concrete truck. Eventually he put down his welding tongs, took off mask and gloves and, wiped the sweat from his face. It was hot in the workshop, and the heat from the welding arc made it worse but he would not work with the doors open. The welding done, he changed his trade. Picking up a spray gun, he turned on an air compressor and began the job of putting on the first coat of paint. Only when the first coat of paint was in place did he stop work and go back to his quarters for some sleep. He could do no more until the paint was dry; a few hours sleep would be welcome. Rising after two hours and stopping only for a quick snack he spent the rest of the daylight carefully painting the huge bulk cement delivery truck in colors identical to those of the company contracted to supply ready mixed concrete to the civil works at the Knesset. As dusk fell he took the truck out for a drive on dirt roads to give the new paintwork a coating of dust and grime. It would not do for it to look new when it made its delivery.

Next he began the job of carefully weighing and loading the ammonium nitrate granules into the rotating drum of the big truck. It took him several hours. He totaled the amounts of fertilizer he'd loaded into the drum and then added the required amount of fuel oil, together with a small quantity of each of two other ingredients. After an hour the ingredients were thoroughly mixed and, weary but well satisfied, he shut off the lorry's engine and went off to catch up on lost sleep. He had done everything he could, but he was missing three vital components that had not yet arrived.

12.00pm. The Negev Desert.

The components that George Liani so desperately needed were being unloaded from three very weary and footsore camels. Amidst much snorting, roaring and attempts to bite, the tired and irritable animals were being encouraged to kneel and then rest. Their loads were removed, and with furtive haste three bales of Egyptian cotton were loaded into the back of the battered pickup driven by the Hezbollah fanatic.

The bales contained three 'beehive' demolition charges. These charges were part of the mass of munitions that had been left behind by the British forces in Suez, after their withdrawal in 1956. Packed, and preserved to Ministry of Defense standards, they would still be in excellent condition. Stolen from a military base near the Suez Canal, these charges had traveled by a winding route through the rugged and empty mountains and deserts of the Sinai Peninsula. They had

crossed the two hundred and twenty-kilometer border with Israel during a black moonless night, and had arrived at the agreed rendezvous on the road between Mizpe Ramon and Sede Boqer, under the shadow of Har Nafha, in the heart of the Negev desert. They were late and, having waited there for hours, the Hezbollah fanatic was not pleased. It would take time to make the drive to the agricultural workshop to the South of Silwan. He drove through the remains of the night, using quiet back roads at first, and then as it began to become light, merging into busy traffic on the main roads when he came close to the major towns. By using this stratagem he successfully negotiated the checkpoints and, his papers being in order, his vehicle was not searched.

George Liani was relieved and pleased to see him when he drove into the big workshop. Quickly, the bales of cotton were pulled apart and the dun khaki boxes exposed. Together they made short work of opening the boxes and bolting the three demolition charges onto the fittings welded to the big cement drum on the truck. Then they painted them to match the surrounding paintwork. One of these devices would have been quite sufficient to set off the massive load of ammonium nitrate fuel oil mixture; George Liani liked to have plenty of back up. The charges were connected to contacts placed at the front of the truck and to a radio controlled detonator. The contact detonators would be armed by a radio signal at the last moment to avoid accidental detonation en route and would detonate the charges on impact. In addition if the young Hezbollah fanatic got cold feet, George Liani could set off the massive bomb with a second radio signal on a different frequency, thus ensuring his rise to paradise for him.

Chapter 24

8.00am. Jerusalem, 10/31/02.

Mike Ben and John were still wrestling with the problem of George Liani's disappearance.

'Well, let's put ourselves in his place and review what has happened to date,' Mike suggested.

They started by reviewing the most recent reports supplied by the Shin Bet operatives. No leads to George Liani's whereabouts had been found.

'Where would he strike?'

'Reports say he spent time on a bench outside the Israel Museum overlooking the Knesset,' Ben stated.

Mike looked up and caught Ben's eye. 'Look at the last part of the report. His room was full of Arab language newspapers and he had a back issue of the Reshumot, the official gazette of the Knesset proceedings. He's making a study of the events inside the Knesset and I'll bet anything you like he's made a list of events that will draw a packed sitting of the one hundred and twenty members.'

'That's when he will strike!'

'At a time when he can do maximum damage!'

John nodded, 'What events are coming up in the next few days?'

‘One stands out above all others,’ Ben said slowly, ‘the Financial Report. The minister responsible for the country’s finances is giving our equivalent of your State of the Union report, or the British Budget Speech. It has to be presented at least sixty days before the end of the financial year, that is, within two days time.

‘That’ll be the target date, I’d bet my life on it,’ Mike said, ‘couldn’t be anything else.’

‘How will he strike?’

‘Most of their attacks have been bombs.’

‘Right, so any attack is likely to be a bomb attack.’

The three of them looked at each other grimly.

‘The work on the new defensive blast wall, it’s under construction now, and he has to make his move before it’s completed,’ Ben said thoughtfully.’

‘What would you do in his place?’ John had a good idea what Mike was going to say.

‘I’d use a vehicle, a car or more likely a lorry, put a bomb in it and bring it in with the contractor’s stuff.’

‘Yes, exactly what I’d do too, it can’t be a coincidence that he sat and watched the work under way,’ Ben agreed.

‘Where would he get that kind of quantity of explosive inside Israel? Your people have things well under control where explosives are concerned.’

Ben’s brow wrinkled in thought. ‘It would have to be ANFO, the bulk of it, there’s no other choice.’

‘That needs a high explosive charge to set it off.’

‘Yes, but a much smaller quantity.’

‘It will have to be imported, or be here already. The ammonium nitrate fertilizer certainly is; there must be thousands of tons of the stuff, and plenty of fuel oil.’

‘It’s all falling into place,’ John said grimly, ‘but how the hell are we going to find him?’

Ben shook his head wearily. ‘There must be a lead somewhere. In the meantime all vehicles approaching the Knesset, particularly the contractor’s vehicles, will have to be subjected to even more rigorous searches.’

‘The high explosive may not be in the country yet,’ John suggested, ‘you’d better increase searches at the border check points.’

‘Can you get the financial report postponed on security grounds?’ Mike asked, ‘to give us more time?’

Ben shook his head, ‘No, it’s too important an event. You know how sensitive financial markets are; a postponement for any reason would send shock waves around the financial world. Billions could be lost; the cabinet wouldn’t countenance it. I’ll have to increase security and step up our efforts to locate Liani.’

Ben reached for the phone and began to issue a rapid stream of questions. Suddenly his face went pale. ‘Are you sure?’ He looked at John and Mike, his face stricken. ‘The Minister of Finance will begin presenting the Financial Report at noon today!’

John looked at him aghast. ‘So little time!’

Mike looked shocked, his face pale, sore and scabbed from his burns. He held up the report he was reading. 'There's something here, an advert was ripped from a newspaper in his room. Did anyone follow it up?'

'Not that I know of, what day, which newspaper?'

Mike told him the date. 'It was page twenty-six top right hand column.'

'I've got that paper here, let's have a look.' Ben turned the pages. 'It's an advert for an auction, construction equipment, bankrupt stock.'

'Let me see.' Ben leapt to his feet, 'Come on, we need to pay them a visit.'

'Yeah, and then his bank manager,' Mike said, tearing the advert from Ben's paper, 'he went to see him just before the sale.'

8.00am. Silwan.

George Liani was mixing concrete. Not in the big ready mixed delivery vehicle, but in a cement mixer. He had carefully covered the top of the ANFO mixture with a thick polythene membrane, and his Hezbollah fanatic was dumping buckets of wet cement on to the top of the polythene sheet. The sheet would prevent the moisture reaching the explosive mixture until the cement set. The fuel oil that he had added earlier would prevent any seepage of moisture around the membrane from contaminating the ammonium nitrate granules. It was necessary from the point of view of authenticity that a ready mixed concrete delivery truck should appear to be filled with concrete; and, more importantly, the concrete plug would seal the explosive inside the big steel drum, giving it the containment characteristics of an enormous steel encased bomb.

8.30am. Jerusalem.

'Do you remember this man?' Mike put photographs of George Liani, taken at the airport, down on the reception counter.

The young girl looked at Mike's face livid and scabbed from the burns he had suffered in Istanbul, and began to stammer.

'What's the problem?' A man in his mid forties came out from an inner office.

'Are you the auctioneer?' Ben asked. He handed the man his ID as he spoke and watched his eyebrows climb as he studied it.

'Yes, but...'

Ben passed him the photos. 'We are looking for this man as a matter of extreme urgency. We think he attended one of your sales.'

'Which sale?' the auctioneer's brow creased in a frown.

'The bankrupt stock sale; construction equipment.'

'Yes, that's it, I remember him - he bought one of the lots and paid in cash. Unusual that. I thought so at the time. The money is still in the safe. Alarm flitted across his face. The money is okay isn't it, not stolen or forged?'

'No, our man's not in that game. Let me see the cash.'

The auctioneer, still looking worried, went to the safe in his office and returned with a linen bag. He tipped it onto the counter. The money was still in bundles, the bands stamped by the bank.

Mike looked closely at them. 'Issued by the bank he visited,' he said.

‘I’m sorry, we need to take a sample of this with us,’ Ben told the auctioneer. ‘Don’t worry you will get it back shortly.’ Taking a card from his wallet he quickly wrote out a receipt. Taking one of the bundles he looked at Mike. ‘Come on, we’re going to pay our friend’s bank manager a visit.’

08.00am. Jerusalem.

John Henderson was less than a mile from George Liani’s workshop. Working from one of Ben Levy’s offices he was on a secure line to Washington, speaking to the Director of Middle Eastern Affairs for the National Security Council in the White House Basement. He was up against inter-departmental politics. This time there were no troops massing on the borders of Kuwait, no supply lines in evidence and no signals traffic indicating greater military activity.

The National Security Agency, bigger than the CIA and better funded, with all its satellite data and computing power had no evidence of the planned chemical and biological onslaught which John, Ben and Mike were sure was about to take place. For that matter the CIA had no information either, and, still resentful of the creation of the DIA as a direct result of its own incompetence, the CIA was doing its best to rubbish John’s claims.

‘Director, please, I am convinced that there is a pre-emptive strike about to take place. The whole point of this form of attack is that it is sudden. By its very nature there is no warning. The order is given. The planes and rockets are armed and head for their targets. The target areas are decimated. Only then does the aggressor mobilize his ground forces. He goes in to clean up, not to fight. Please, you have access, the President wants to have a go at Iran, now’s his chance. Get a significant show of force into the Gulf. Get him to send in carrier task forces to the Med and the Gulf as a precaution. Forces at work in the Middle East have to see that we are ready to go. Major force is the only language that will convince them.’

9.30am. Jerusalem.

Moments after the bank opened for business Ben Levy stormed in. Together with Mike and two Shin Bet colleagues he bypassed the short queue and went straight to the enquiry desk. He showed his ID to the girl on duty there. ‘I want to see the manager immediately. Immediately, understand?’

‘Yes sir, I’ll tell his secretary right away.’

The girl went off, and the manager’s secretary came out, a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl with an air of self-importance. ‘Yes sir, can I help you?’ She was trying hard to intercept the problem. Ben fumed. He showed his ID card again. ‘Take me to the manager, now,’ he said, his voice quiet but sharp, ‘it’s a matter of National emergency!’

The girl paled, ‘I’ll see if...’

‘No “see ifs!” Whoever is in there, get them out!’ Ben indicated his Shin Bet colleagues. ‘We’ll close your bank if we have to;’ acting the bully to get results.

The girl was now tight-lipped and angry. ‘Just one moment, sir,’ she said and disappeared into the manager’s office. Ben followed her in. A portly little man emerged from behind his desk, his secretary hovering behind him.

'What is the meaning of all this...' he began.

Ben deflated him immediately. 'Your bank, specifically this branch, has been engaging in activities contrary to the interest of the State,' he said, putting a real bite into his voice.

It was the manager's turn to go pale.

'I'm investigating matters of national consequence, and you can best help your bank's position by giving me your full co-operation.' As he spoke he thrust his ID card under the manager's nose.

The manager looked at it and swallowed hard. 'You'd better have a seat,' he stammered, all the fight knocked out of him and he pointed shakily to chairs by his desk.

'Thank you,' Ben said with a baleful look at the secretary. She took the hint and disappeared. Ben threw the wad of bank notes on the desk.

'Your bank issued these notes, the bands are date stamped. Which account was debited?'

The manager had already made his mind up to co-operate; any trouble at this level could cost him his job. He tapped some keys on his computer. 'Only two large cash withdrawals were arranged for that day,' he said, 'one much larger than the other.'

'How much was each one?' Ben demanded.

The manager told him.

'The larger sum, which account was it from?'

The manager pointed with his finger and at the same time turned the monitor on his desk. Against the account number was the name, S. Yavas.

Ben let out a sigh of satisfaction; at last things were beginning to come together. 'What else can you tell me about this account?'

'Well, the account was opened with sums of money from abroad, from Switzerland I think.' The manager opened another file and began to check. 'Yes; a series of telex transfer from a Swiss Bank.'

'Najib Shawa,' Ben thought to himself. 'What else can you tell me?'

'Well, we, the bank that is, acted for the account holder in the rental of some commercial property, if I remember correctly, I have the details here somewhere.' The manager reached for a file on a shelf near his desk. 'Yes, here it is, an agricultural workshop to the South of the city, here's the letting agent's brochure.'

To the bank manager's astonishment Ben grabbed the details and the money, and ran from the bank without another word, Mike and his Shin Bet colleagues at his heels. He slammed the car door nearly off its hinges. The driver had the car in gear and moved off the instant it shut.

'Silwan, make it the fastest trip of your life.' Ben grabbed the car phone and punched the memory button for IDF HQ. 'Major-General Levy; put me through to the Commander-in-Chief.' He opened his map as the C-in-C came on the line.

'David, its Ben Levy, the rapid reaction force, get them airborne now, they're to go to an agricultural workshop to the South of Silwan, just off the Kidron Valley road, wait...' Moments later he had the map reference and gave him the co-ordinates. 'And notify the police; get the Kidron Valley road sealed off. Have all forces go from stand-by to full alert; the signal for an airborne chemical and biological attack is imminent.'

9.30am. Silwan.

George Liani believed in moving on as soon as a place had served its purpose. Before the concrete was set he closed down the Silwan workshop. Instructing his Hezbollah driver to put the stolen cross country motor bike in the pick-up and follow him, he drove the cement delivery lorry out onto the road and put his foot down. Ten minutes later and several miles away he eased his foot on the accelerator and began to look for a place to get the concrete delivery truck under cover for a short while.

10.00am. Shatila.

In a quiet part of the underground complex another bomb was under construction. Nowhere near so big, this one was a present for Najib Shawa.

The two men assembling it had been trained as Assault Engineers, the branch of the Royal Marines Commandos that specializes in explosives and explosive devices. Over their years of service these men had seen pretty much every booby trap and bomb that human ingenuity could devise, plus they had a few ideas of their own.

Andy Cunningham came in to check their progress. 'How's it going lads?'

The two figures looked up from their work. 'Real good, I've measured up, done all the calculations and marked the demolition points,' Seedy Fields told him. 'All the charges are made up, checked and ready to put in place as soon as we get the word.'

'The word.'

Spud Murphy grinned, 'We'll place 'em right away skipper!'

Seedy chuckled. 'Then all we have to do is to finish this.' He gestured to a large cube shaped tin, labeled Hills Biscuits, in red white and blue.

Andy went over to have a look. On the table alongside the tin were a large box of steel ball bearings, a box of primers, a timing device, several reels of fine wire sheathed in different colored insulation, assorted tools, insulation tape and a large pile of pale yellow waxy looking cylinders. He picked up one of the cylinders and sniffed at it. There was no smell.

'Semtex?'

'Yeah, the terrorist's own private supply.'

Seedy grinned at Andy. 'We liberated it from their armory, seemed like a good idea to use their own stuff.'

Andy smiled grimly to himself. Semtex, the terrorists' favorite weapon was going to be turned against them; their own Semtex, a real taste of their own medicine. Grinning he set off to tell Jim.

10.00am. Jerusalem.

Ben's car rocketed out of the city, the tires squealing as they tried to obtain purchase on the road surface. The driver put the headlights full on and with his hand on the horn he began to cut and weave his way through the dense traffic,

leaving chaos in his wake. He used both sides of the road indiscriminately, and mounted the pavement to bypass obstructing vehicles. Drivers and pedestrians alike cursed, swore, and shook angry fists as the car passed.

Ben, Mike and the two Shin Bet agents gripped their seats tightly as the driver threw the car from side to side. Very soon they were out of the thick traffic of the city centre and on to the clearer roads of the suburbs. The driver put his foot down even harder. After what seemed an age the agricultural workshop came in sight. On Ben's instructions the driver stopped well short of the entrance to the premises. They waited and watched. Ben fumed, why were they taking so long? He grabbed the car 'phone to get an explanation. Suddenly, with a terrific clatter, two helicopters shot low over the hillside, and hovered over open ground. Two teams of armed men leapt out of each machine and raced for cover. They swiftly surrounded the buildings. The leader of the team covering the front of the building used a bullhorn and speaking in both Arabic and in Hebrew, he ordered the occupants of the building to come out.

Nothing happened.

Ben got out of his car and ran over to where the team leader was crouching behind an earth bank. 'What the hell kept you? Send your men in, you know what to do.'

Working to a practiced routine, the two teams cleared the building, one team staying put and maintaining a cordon around the premises, while the other team made a rapid entry. There was no one there.

Ben walked in and looked around. There were dozens of empty fertilizer bags thrown in a corner of the workshop. He walked over and picked one up. On the front, below a well known brand name, were the words "Ammonium Nitrate Granules". Ben threw it down and picked up several more. They were all the same. Under the empty bags were the British military boxes from the beehive charges.

'This is the place all right, but we're too late.'

10.00am. Silwan.

George Liani wanted as much distance between the two vehicles and the workshop as possible. A mile to his rear police raced into position and began to set up roadblocks.

He turned at the first road junction and made for a different industrial estate in a different part of the city outskirts. There would be more scope for hiding a large vehicle in an industrial area than in either the city or the countryside, but there was still the problem of getting the vehicle under cover.

As he drove he looked for possibilities and suddenly he saw the solution to his problem; a big vehicle workshop specializing in the repair of trucks and other commercial vehicles. A good backhander and an imaginary fault were all that was necessary to get the big vehicle off the road and out of sight.

11.00am. Shatila.

As the heat of the day built up, a trickle of men began to approach the main entrance to the terrorist headquarters. They were expected, but even so they were

stopped at the sangars and were asked to show their hand written invitations in Arabic script. The best Arabic speakers had this duty. Those not so good stood back in the darker shade of the sangars, captured weapons at the ready and their heads swathed in the black and white keffiyehs. They admitted Abu Asifah's associates with a curt nod, acting out the mannerisms and routines of the sentries which Jim had noted whilst watching the headquarters. They made it appear completely authentic; weapons were put into racks in the entrance to the building, each one marked with its owner's now defunct invitation. The invited guests saw nothing to alarm them; they filed in confident that guards were in place keeping them safe from harm.

The irony of the situation was not lost on Andy, Jim or the rest of the men on sentry duty, but not a flicker of a smile betrayed their sardonic amusement.

11.30am. Silwan.

The big concrete delivery truck emerged from the commercial vehicle workshop into brilliant sunshine. Muttering a monotonous prayer over and over to him-self the Hezbollah fanatic drove through the traffic. His eyes were glazed. He was wearing a pair of stolen overalls bearing the logo of the concrete company supplying the Knesset site.

In his religious zeal his mind was closed to everything, everything except his mission for the cause. Soon he would be a hero, feted and praised in paradise, surrounded by beautiful houris, something he had never achieved in this life.

He arrived at his rendezvous, a lay-by screened from the main road by bushes and a group of ancient olive trees. Parked in the entrance to the lay-by was the battered red pick-up, George Liani in the driving seat, his eyes watching the main road. The Hezbollah fanatic drove past him and parked out of sight of any vehicles traveling on the highway.

George Liani climbed out of his pick-up and walked over to the truck. Neither man spoke. Opening a flat tin box, George Liani carefully removed a layer of cotton wool. The small metal tubes of detonators glinted in the sunlight. The Hezbollah fanatic felt an orgasmic twinge. It was the work of only a few moments for George Liani to insert them into the beehive charges and make the final connections. The massive lorry bomb was now armed and ready to blow. George Liani went back to his pick-up and drove off. He needed to get to his observation point at the Israel Museum.

11.30am. Shatila.

In his role as leader, Abu Asifah greeted each of his activists at the door to the underground room. 'Salaam Alekhum,' he gave each a brotherly hug, a kiss on each cheek, and received the traditional response, 'Alekhum Salaam.'

All of these men were terrorists. Each of them had been responsible for innocent deaths, for people maimed, crippled and disfigured. This was their boast, their claim to fame, and the reason they had been invited. Their faces were animated, and alive with anticipation of the next act of savagery in which they had been invited to participate.

Abu Asifah saw their mood, and knew that they were all with him in spirit. This would be the ultimate terrorist event; it would make him a legend in the minds of his people and a legend beyond his own lifetime. He rubbed his hands together in satisfaction as each terrorist took his place in the underground room. When the room was full he nodded to the man nearest to the door.

It was Najib Shawa.

‘Close the door, Najib,’ Abu Asifah commanded peremptorily. He knew that it would lessen Najib’s status in the eyes of those present to be the recipient of such menial instructions.

Najib Shawa merely nodded, closed the door and stood by it, but his heart was filled with black hatred. Where was the help he had been promised? So far he had seen no signs of it. Was this a false promise from the devious Jew Levy?

Abu Asifah’s imperious tones cut into his bitter thoughts. ‘Bring coffee and biscuits for my guests, Najib,’ he demanded, his voice filled with contempt.

Najib Shawa left the room, struggling to keep the lid on his hatred.

11.45am. Silwan.

After half an hour the fanatic stiffened. A big concrete delivery truck, to all intents and purposes identical to the one he was driving, came into view; then a second, and then a third. He took a deep breath, started his engine, and put the truck into gear. The first delivery truck went past the end of the lay-by. The fanatic let out his clutch and moved slowly towards the end of the lay-by, screened by the ancient olive trees. As the second truck passed he began to pick up speed. The third and last truck passed. The Hezbollah fanatic put his foot hard down on to the accelerator and swung out behind it. Now there were four concrete trucks making a delivery to the Knesset.

11.45am. Shatila.

‘Greetings my brothers, fellow warriors of the cause.’ All of Abu Asifah’s terrorist helpers from the great victories of the London airport massacre, and the hijacking of the Olympic airline flight, were now assembled in the underground room. Gazing round in a self-important manner he continued, ‘I am about to strike another mighty blow for our movement.’ A gratifying murmur of anticipation spread round the room. ‘Even as I speak, a massive bomb is starting its lethal run to a target at the very heart of Israel.’

The room buzzed with excitement. He waited for the right moment. The buzz subsided slightly. Abu Asifah pointed to a large digital clock. ‘At noon the bomb will be delivered and detonated.’

A cry went up from every throat, “Allah Akbar”.

Abu Asifah uncovered an easel supporting a large-scale diagram of the Knesset grounds and the surrounding area. ‘I shall talk you through the events as they are happening, and then,’ he pointed to a large television screen in a corner behind him, ‘we will watch the television together, watch the world’s reaction to our strike.’

An even louder roar went up. This sort of drama appealed perfectly to the savage natures of those present. Abu Asifah had stage-managed it well. As the hubbub died down a voice raised the question that all minds were now beginning to ask.

‘What is this target inside Israel?’

A murmur of interested speculation arose in the room. Abu Asifah raised his hands and waited for absolute silence. When it was achieved he spoke again, just two words.

‘The Knesset.’

The silence went on and on as the enormity of his statement sank in.

11.45am. Silwan.

‘There’s no point in hanging around, we missed them.’ Ben’s voice was harsh with disappointment as he spoke to the leaders of the armed police teams. ‘We won’t catch up with them now, they’ll have gone to ground somewhere else and it will take too long to trace them. We know the type of vehicle they are using, so see if there is anything else here which will give us more positive information to go on.’

‘Right, sir, we’ll go through this place with a fine toothed comb.’

It took a matter of minutes to find the paint, and a few moments more to find the masking tape and the stencils that George Liani had used to paint the concrete delivery truck.

‘Okay, we have enough to go on,’ Ben said, ‘but we have to stop them in time.’ He turned to the team leaders.

‘We’ll use your men to reinforce the existing security arrangements, let’s go.’

Mike, Ben and the armed units climbed into the two waiting choppers and, with a clatter of rotor blades and a rush of dust laden air, the two machines took off and headed for the high ground on which the Knesset stands.

Ben tapped the pilot on the shoulder and shouted over the noise of the rotors. ‘Radio ahead and tell them to expect us.’ The pilot nodded his understanding and switched to the security services frequency. He spoke rapidly for a few moments and then listened. He gave Ben a thumbs up signal and switched back to his air traffic control frequency. They were expected.

11.45am. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Gunning the engine of the old red pickup, George Liani raced towards the Israel Museum car park. He parked the pickup, dragged the motorcycle from the back, hid it in some bushes, and ran to a point overlooking the Knesset grounds. There were a few people about, mainly tourists. The seat he had previously used, well screened and shaded by some bushes was empty. He walked quickly over to it, sat down and scanned the approaches to the Knesset. Sitting tensely in the shade, staring at the roads leading up to the Knesset, the tension he felt began to mount inexorably. Suddenly he stiffened. He pulled his binoculars from under his jacket. Two helicopters clattered into view and landed on the grass in front of the Knesset building. Two teams of men got out, and each team was sent to reinforce one of the two temporary roadblocks on the approaches to the main gate.

A stocky grey-haired man was giving instructions. George Liani raised his binoculars and brought Ben Levy into focus. It was the first time he had set eyes on him, but he instinctively knew who he was. George Liani chewed at his bottom lip. The presence of this man could mean only one thing. The Israeli authorities knew that the Knesset was a target. How much more did they know? He looked at his watch, there was not much time left. He began to review his escape arrangements; as he did so he spotted a flicker of movement at the point where the road from the city of Jerusalem came into view. He raised his binoculars again and looked intently through them. A large yellow and black ready mixed concrete delivery truck was grinding up the hill, followed by another, and then another. Soon there were four in a convoy.

Chapter 25

11.45am. Beirut, 10/31/02.

Najib Shawa left seething with rage. Abu Asifah was treating him like a servant, and, because it suited his purpose, he was forced to accept such treatment with a smile on his face. But he did not like it; he did not like it at all. Another matter was nagging away inside his head. What if the promised help failed to materialize? Would he be left out on a limb, his status diminished in the eyes of the movement that he had started and which he aspired to lead single-handed to international acceptance?

His mind preoccupied, he scurried towards the area of the underground headquarters where food was prepared. Out of nowhere a figure, head swathed in a keffiyeh, blocked his path. He found himself looking down the barrel of a long silenced pistol. His mouth opened and closed, but no sound came out.

The silenced weapon moved, motioning him into a small side room where food was stored. Bending over a table, two similarly dressed men, their heads also swathed in keffiyehs were working on a large square tin of biscuits.

'You are Najib Shawa.' It was a statement, not a question. The man, speaking Arabic, was Andy Cunningham, but Najib did not know him. He nodded acknowledging his identity.

'At what time is the attack on the Knesset to take place?'

'M-m-midday,' Najib stammered, finding his voice at last.

The man with the silenced pistol looked at one of the men working at the table. The man nodded and set a small timing device to detonate at 12.00 noon. In the base of the biscuit tin Najib could see a large doughnut-shaped ring of Semtex high explosive. Around the outside of the explosive were many hundreds of steel ball bearings. The timing device was wired to the detonators and set in place in the centre of the ring of explosive. The direction of initiation of the explosion would be outwards from the centre, driving a scything hail of steel ball bearings with enormous force. Several layers of trays of biscuits were stacked on top of the explosive device and the tin lid was carefully put back on and sealed with a strip of clear Sellotape.

‘Check your watch against ours, and be out of the meeting room at least one minute before 12.00 noon. Have a good excuse ready. Make sure that this goes on the table in the centre of the room, and make sure you open it up yourself,’ Andy instructed. He handed the large cube shaped biscuit tin to Najib.

Najib seemed to have gained strength and courage from the device he now held. His eyes glittered with malice. These frightening individuals were on his side; the Jew Levy had come up with the goods after all.

Don’t worry,’ he snarled, ‘I know exactly what to do.’

11.57am. Jerusalem.

Mike Edge saw the first concrete delivery truck the moment it topped the rise in the road leading up to the Knesset. ‘Ben, look!’ He pointed down the road.

Ben sprinted for the temporary roadblock that had been set up five hundred meters from the entrance to the Knesset grounds. ‘Stop that truck!’ he yelled at the armed guards on the barrier. The second truck came over the rise, then the third and the fourth.

‘Stop all of them and search them!’ he yelled again as the first truck slowed and stopped at the barrier. He looked at the other three trucks; the bomb could be in any one of them.

Mike scrutinized the men in the cabs. The drivers were all wearing the company’s overalls and leaning out of their cab windows to see what the hold-up was; all except for the last truck. Was it his imagination or did the driver of the last truck look tense? There was something else about that truck which was wrong, what was it? Suddenly it clicked. The big steel concrete drum was stationary; the drums on the first three delivery trucks were rotating, keeping the cement from setting whilst it was in transit.

‘It’s the last truck!’ Mike shouted and instinctively pointed at the same time.

The young fanatic saw the accusing arm pointing at his vehicle. He slammed the truck into gear and pulled out of the line. Revving his engine hard, he angled across the road, mounted the curb, and roared over the dusty grass, bypassing the temporary wood and barbed wire barriers on the road itself. Still accelerating, the massive truck swerved back on to the road and headed for the entrance into the Knesset grounds. Several of the police and soldiers on guard duty began to shoot at the accelerating vehicle but the vehicle was going away from them and the bullets merely pinged off the big steel drum between them and the driver’s cab. It would take more than bullets to stop such a big vehicle. Frantically Mike looked round for something more effective.

11.55am. Beirut.

Najib Shawa entered the meeting carrying the large tin of biscuits. Soon, very soon, there would be none left alive who had witnessed his humiliation, how sweet it would be to him, how very sweet! Andy and Jim followed him in carrying the coffee, sugar and trays of small coffee glasses. They wore their keffiyehs and their faces were in shadow. Both of them kept their faces and eyes averted. Andy watched to make sure that Najib placed the bomb in the middle of the big table at

the centre of the room. Jim watched for any adverse reaction. No one took any notice. Andy and Jim put down their big brass trays and left the room, leaving the assembled terrorists to help themselves to the coffee. Najib, sweating profusely, took the lid off the biscuit tin and uncovered the first layer of biscuits.

Hands reached out and began to pick out favored varieties. One of the terrorists gave Najib a nasty moment by lifting out the top tray in order to get at a favorite sort in the tray below, but to Najib's relief he did not poke any deeper into the tin.

Najib moved back to his former position near the door and watched the proceedings.

Gradually the room settled down again, all those present sipping the sweet black coffee and nibbling at biscuits. The time was three minutes to noon.

At two minutes to twelve Abu Asifah called for silence and picked up a long cane to use as a pointer. 'The bomb is a concrete delivery truck, a large one packed to the brim with ANFO, 'It was waiting in this lay-by here for the midday delivery to the new Knesset blast wall construction site.'

There was a murmur of appreciation around the room.

'By now it will have joined the queue of vehicles approaching the Knesset grounds.' The tension building up in the room was a tangible thing.

Najib Shawa continued to sweat. He checked his watch, 11.59. He surreptitiously opened the door and slid out of the room into the corridor. As he quietly closed the door behind him he heard Abu Asifah continuing the harangue...'

He jumped as a firm hand clamped onto his shoulder. Andy Cunningham pulled him away from the door and gave him a questioning look. Najib nodded frantically, the bomb was still in place.

'Take him to the storeroom where the guys are waiting,' Andy whispered. Najib was escorted off by Digger.

Inside the underground room Abu Asifah continued, 'As I speak the bomb will be entering the Knesset grounds...' He turned to the television set and changed to an Israeli news channel. A political commentator appeared on the screen, the Knesset building in the background. He was busy trying to predict the content of the finance minister's speech with speculation of the sort with which the media fill up airtime on such occasions.

'He'll have some real reporting to do in a few moments,' Abu Asifah thought savagely to himself.

Outside the room, in the corridor, Andy and Jim cocked their captured Kalashnikovs and flicked the change levers to safe. They lay face down, well away from the doorway, in the angle between wall and floor, closed their eyes, then put their hands over their ears and kept their mouths open to give protection against what they knew was coming. A debt was about to be repaid.

"Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar", the chanting inside the room began slowly, whispered by one man, others joined in and it rose louder and louder until it reached fever pitch.

11.59am. Jerusalem.

Mike Edge saw what he was looking for slung on the shoulder of an Israeli trooper, a LAW Anti-tank missile. He snatched it from the man's shoulder, pulled off the end caps and extended the rear tube. The spring loaded sights popped up. It took one second to arm the weapon, another second to aim it. Ben stopped the trooper's protest. The truck was approaching the gateway into the Knesset grounds, soon it would turn and be more difficult to hit, and it would be at the gateway where there were guards who would be killed.

In the art garden, overlooking the approaches to the Knesset, George Liani clearly saw what was happening, but was powerless to influence the events unfolding before him. All that he could do was to will the fanatical Hezbollah driver onwards with all of his might. He pulled out the aerial on the detonating device contained in the transistor radio. He sent the signal to arm the contact detonators. He put his thumb on the plastic button that would send the detonation signal out at the speed of light to the lorry now bearing down on the gateway to the Knesset.

'Get inside the grounds; hit the building where I showed you! Go on, go on, Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar, God is great, God is great, go on, go on...' He began in a whisper, but his voice rising with the tension of the moment ended in a strident shout.

'Get down, get down, take cover!' Ben shouted the commands as he saw Mike aim at the big truck. The men around him, and those on duty at the Knesset gateway, saw what was about to happen. They all dived for the nearest protection the ground could give.

Mike took a deep breath, steadied his aim, and squeezed the trigger on the LAW. There was a loud wham, a ringing in his ears, and a sheet of flame flashed out of the rear of the launcher, seventy percent of the propellant charge. The remaining thirty percent hurled the projectile out of the front end of the launcher on a curving trajectory, arcing to intercept the moving truck. The recoil was zero, and, holding his breath, Mike watched as the warhead and the vehicle converged. Time seemed to slow down and then the warhead struck. It hit the curve of the big cement drum, and it glanced off...

In the art garden, George Liani saw the same events unfolding. To him everything seemed to be happening far too fast. He saw Mike grab the LAW rocket, saw him kneel, saw him aim, heard Ben's shouted warning, and saw all the guards dive for cover. He felt panic. As the warhead struck, his thumb twitched. In the split second in which the grenade glanced harmlessly off the drum of the truck his thumb hit the button, the signal flashed out, he couldn't stop it.

As Ben watched, there was a huge orange flash, a solid wall of force hurtled outwards, an awesome titanic sound slammed the eardrums stunning and deafening those nearby.

The explosion was dramatic and in the ringing silence that followed at the Museum car park. George Liani stood up shaking; he knew that he had just made a terrible mistake. He had seen, in the last split second, the anti-tank grenade glance off the big cement drum. If his nerve had held, if his hand had been steady, the bomb would now have been at the very heart of the State of Israel. His face contorted with rage, George Liani uttered every curse he knew against the hated Israelis. Then, his rage subsiding, his cold logical brain regained control. It was time to go. Now, while all attention was focused on the scene of the bomb blast. He

slid into the thick bushes at the side of the bench seat with the speed and silence of a disappearing snake.

12.00am. Beirut.

On the television in the underground room, the voice of the presenter changed in volume and in pitch. 'Something is happening here, some kind of emergency,' he said, then, in an instruction to the camera crew, 'get this on film!'

Only Abu Asifah was close enough to hear his words over the sound of the chanting voices. The camera panned sideways away from the presenter and then zoomed in on a big bulk concrete delivery truck which was racing for the gateway to the Knesset grounds.

'There is gunfire.' The presenter's voice was high-pitched with excitement. This would be a scoop. 'Troops and police are firing on that truck!' The microphone picked up the sound of more gunfire.

The chanting in the underground room rose to a shouted crescendo. Abu Asifah leaned forward to turn up the sound on the television; he pointed at the television screen. 'Look, look, on the screen, it is being filmed; the whole world will see our victory!' He stood in triumph, fists raised above his head. 'Allah Akbar, Allah Akb...' the television screen flashed orange from the explosion of the detonating truck.

'Allah Akbar, Allah Akba...' A massive detonation flashed through the room as the biscuit tin exploded. Contained by the thick concrete, the awful blast of force pulped the internal organs of all those present, a hail of steel ball-bearings scythed through bodies as if there was nothing there, and ricocheted around inside the room with the effect of a liquidizer. All the available oxygen was burnt up in the explosion. Even if anyone had been left alive and in one piece, they would have been suffocated.

The door to the underground room flew off and shattered against the opposite wall. A blast of force slammed over Andy and Jim as they lay in the relative safety of the wall and floor angles. Air was sucked from their lungs, for a few moments they could not breathe, and then a backwash of air rushed in to fill the vacuum created by the explosion. A few steel ball bearings rattled harmlessly down the corridor. They stood up. Holding their keffiyehs to their faces and breathing through their noses against the swirling dust, they moved to the wrecked doorway. The room was dark.

Jim pulled a magnesium flare from his belt pouch, pulled off the igniter strip, and threw it into the room.

In the fierce white light of the flare, smoke and dust eddied over a scene of total carnage. Nothing moved. Retribution had been exacted.

Those who had chosen to profit by the bomb had died by the bomb.

Chapter 26

12.01pm. Beirut, 10/31/02.

Najib Shawa was escorted into the storeroom just as the bomb went off. He flinched and ducked as first the blast and then the noise of the detonation struck him. A few seconds passed. With the realization that he was unharmed, came a fierce joy. The hated Abu Asifah was dead; his power base of terrorist thugs gone with him, but the successes of the Blood of Shatila movement remained. He, Najib Shawa, would inherit those successes, his status would increase, and his wealth was safe and would grow.

He turned to go back to the room where his enemies had perished. He wanted to gloat. His head full of his own triumph, he didn't see the sand filled canvas tube swinging in a fast arc behind his head. It struck him behind his right ear, an expertly delivered blow. His triumph exploded in a burst of stars and he slumped to the ground. He was still unconscious when Andy and Jim returned, and would remain so for some time to come.

'What do you want done with this specimen?' Digger Trench enquired mildly, hefting Najib by the waistband like a weekend grip.

'He'll have to take his chances, we'll make his survival look as miraculous as possible, shove him under here.' Andrew pointed to a thick concrete workbench. It was supported on strong concrete plinths, and was in the corner of the storeroom, near to the outside door, where supplies would normally come in. Najib Shawa was unceremoniously stuffed into the cramped space between two plinths, and the heavy wooden table on which the lethal bomb had been assembled, was turned on its side and leant in front of the opening.

'If Najib Shawa wants to be a leader he needs to be a hero,' Andrew said sardonically to Jim and Digger, 'a bit of realism will ensure his credibility!'

Jim, Digger and the two assault engineers all grinned at his remark, they knew what was about to happen, and Najib Shawa was not going to enjoy it one bit.

'Seedy, are all the charges in place?' Andy asked.

'Yeah and the delays are connected. All we have to do is reel out to a safe distance, connect up and blow her in on herself,' Seedy Fields told him.

'Right then, let's get moving, withdraw all the sentry pairs,' Andrew ordered.

Jim and Digger sprinted off to give the order to the pseudo-sentries.

Andrew and the two assault engineers left by the outside storeroom door and, unreeling a drum of electrical detonation cable as they went, they mounted the concrete steps up to ground level at the side of the damaged apartment block. There they waited for the rest of the team to join them.

From the defensive sangars, from the roof of the building, from deep within the terrorist stronghold, pairs of men sprinted for the rendezvous at the top of the concrete steps. Andrew counted the team members in as they arrived. From the time of the explosion only three minutes had elapsed, but the time now was three minutes past twelve, three minutes after noon, a busy time of day in Beirut. People were already looking to see what had happened.

'Form up, double, march.' Jim gave the order quietly in Arabic, and the team of men began to jog away from the terrorist headquarters towards the road leading to the football stadium.

They all wore their black and white keffiyehs, and they looked like armed Palestinians reacting to the recent explosion. A careful eye would have noticed the

twin line of thin black insulated wire which was unwinding from a reel, held on a short length of steel tube between two men in the centre of the compact group.

A crowd of onlookers was beginning to gather on the opposite side of the waste ground. They had heard and felt the explosion, and being local residents they knew the nature of the building and its occupants. They were keeping a discreet distance.

Jim steered his group of "Palestinians" directly towards the onlookers. 'We are under attack, get back, there may be more bombs,' he shouted in Arabic.

The crowd of people that had gathered were not strangers to bombings, living and surviving in Beirut as they did. There was a scramble away from the area, and in a few moments the waste ground was clear.

Andrew, Jim and the team crossed the waste ground in under a minute and reached the entrance to the first street. Spud and Seedy ducked into a convenient doorway. Quickly they cut the cable they were unwinding, parted the two strands, bared the ends of the wires, and connected them to a magneto shot-firing unit. That job done, they looked across the street at Andrew and gave him the thumbs up.

Andrew looked around. There were people in the street, but the two explosive experts were well shielded from view. Andrew gave the thumbs up signal to Jim. Jim checked his area was clear. 'Blow it,' he ordered.

12.30pm. Jerusalem.

Of George Liani there was no trace. Moments after the massive bomb detonated, below the art garden, he removed the stolen cross country motor bike from the bushes and rolled quietly, in neutral, from the car park. His new belongings left at the King David Hotel were abandoned. He did not go near the place again but made his way via back lanes and footpaths to an address in the Wadi el-Guz district. There he shaved off his moustache and donned the black burqa and leather facemask of purdah. His identity papers as Suleiman Yavas were burned and a new identity given to him. He became Fatima Hezzan, wife of Yousuf Hezzan and mother of Abdul, a member of a devout family and part of a group of Syrian pilgrims touring the Islamic Holy sites of Jerusalem.

All border crossings were warned, but without result, he did not go near them. Air and seaports were put on maximum alert. Photographs were faxed and sent to every point of departure out of the country, all to no avail.

The most ruthless and dangerous terrorist associated with the Blood of Shatila organization had vanished.

12.30pm. Beirut.

Seedy Fields gave the handle on top of the shot-firing unit a sharp twist. On the other side of the open ground a ripple of expertly placed and carefully timed explosive charges went off from the centre outwards. Flashes and spurts of smoke and dust shot out sideways from the building. As heads turned to look, the damaged apartment building collapsed in the centre first then folded inwards on itself, almost in slow motion, amid a roiling cloud of dust. Slowly the dust cleared.

A pile of rubble emerged, a mass of concrete and steel, burying deep beneath it the remains of one of the most vicious terrorist organizations of modern times.

Andy Cunningham looked at Jim and saw the mixed emotion on his face. 'Good riddance,' he said, 'a pity we can't get rid of all terrorist groups that way.'

'Let's get the hell out of here before somebody rumbles us, Jim replied. Even as he spoke they heard the familiar crack-thump of rounds fired in their direction, and then the crack-crack-crack, thump-thump-thump, of in-coming automatic weapons fire.

Andy dived to the ground, but three men were already hit. The rest of the team had taken cover as a reflex action in positions from which to return fire. They knew that to get their heads down was not enough, it was necessary to return fire, make the opposition cower down so as to regain the initiative.

Andrew peered round the base of a low wall. Digger Trench, and Spud Murphy, one of the assault engineers, lay out in the open. They were ominously still.

'Where did the shots come from, did anyone see?'

Loud, almost indecipherable swearing came from a hollow in the rubble. 'Ra poxy rag-heed bastards 'r innat hoose o'er ra street. An ahm shot 'n ma arse.' Wee Willy Andersen's aggrieved voice came back at Jim.

'White house, green door, left nine o'clock, row of ground floor windows.' Jim translated Willy's Glaswegian into a classic fire order description, and in seconds all eyes, all weapons were directed at the row of ground floor windows. As they watched, two hands appeared holding a Kalashnikov, which was poked, out of the window. A totally random burst of fire was sprayed about the street. No one else was hit.

12.40pm. Beirut.

Najib Shawa regained consciousness slowly and with increasing pain. His head throbbed, his mouth was full of dust, he couldn't see clearly, and could barely move. He had no memory of what had happened to him, did not remember the blow to the head which had rendered him unconscious.

Horror and panic began to grow inside his head; he began to struggle, tearing at his surroundings with his bare hands and screaming at the top of his voice. He could make no impression on any part of the place he was trapped in. He stopped screaming, tried to remember what had happened, remembered the bomb. Had it been too powerful? Had it brought the building down on top of him? Yes, that must be it, he was buried alive. Claustrophobia had always been one of his terrors. His fear rose to a new pitch, he wet his pants, his bowels loosened and the stench filled the confined space. Najib Shawa, a Statesman - in his own mind a leader of men on the world stage - filled with self-pity, began to sob.

12.40pm. Beirut.

Jim pulled a face at Andy. 'Lucky shots?'

'Yeah, firing like that they couldn't've hit a barn if they were inside the bloody thing,' Andrew replied caustically.

'Must train 'em with hose-pipes,' Jim growled back.

'Section two, get ready to move,' Andrew shouted the order. 'Section one, target, row of windows, short bursts, fire at will.'

Instantly a crash of return fire; well aimed and deadly, smashed through the windows from which the original shots had come. Glass exploded inwards, shards and splinters of wood flew, the protruding Kalashnikov dropped to the ground outside. As the gunfire spat out, Jim Savage and his section leapt to their feet and sprinted out into the open area, picked up their three injured mates and dragged them back into cover.

Andrew yelled another set of orders. 'Medics, over here!' The two men carrying the first aid bags sprinted to get to the casualties. 'Cease rapid fire! Aimed shots only, keep their heads down!' He turned to the medics,

'How bad are they?'

One of the medics looked up. 'Spud's a goner. Digger's concussed; a head wound, lots of blood but it's superficial, he'll be okay to move when he's got a field dressing in place. Willy's got a brain wound; he's hit in his arse. He'll have to limp.'

Andrew peered out into the now deserted street. The citizens, used to such events on the fraught streets of Beirut, had vanished at the sound of the first shots. No more shots came from the row of ground floor windows.

'Okay, we move out and take them with us, share out their kit and weapons and take turns in giving fireman's lifts. It will slow us down but no one or anything gets left behind. Two section, get ready to move, one section, covering fire, now!'

Jim and his men set off down the deserted street as Andrew's section laid down a barrage of small arms fire. The three men carrying the casualties ran with short staggering steps for the first hundred yards, and then eased them down as the section went to ground and took up new fire positions.

Jim gave the same fire order, 'Row of ground floor windows, short bursts, fire at will. More shots crashed out, shots that gave Andrew his cue to move. Andrew and his group disengaged, and in turn sprinted down the street past Jim and the others in his group. In this way the two groups conducted a fierce fighting withdrawal which gave no one any desire to tangle with them. Slowly and carefully using these pepper-pot tactics they made their way through the streets. Andrew used the radio to warn the rearguard that their arrival was imminent. Minutes later they were back at the football stadium, where Dave Prendergast had lookouts posted to cover them as they came in.

02.00pm. Beirut.

Exhausted, Najib Shawa's racking sobs eventually stopped. Realizing that he could still breathe he became calmer. Air was getting into the space in which he was trapped. If air could get in, then sound could get out. He began to call for help. After what seemed an age, rescuers heard his feeble cries. Lumps of shattered concrete were thrown clear from the steps leading down to the storeroom door. The remains of the door were prized open with a length of iron bar, the overturned table smashed and pulled out in bits.

Najib Shawa, covered in dust and grime, was extricated feet first from the safe niche in which he had been placed. His rescuers extracted him as quickly as

possible without looking closely at his rubble covered location. His safekeeping was hailed as an act of God. He was praised as a hero of the cause, an honor he did nothing to refute. His indignation and fury were quite real. He had not expected to have the whole headquarters collapse on top of him; that had not been part of his plan at all. He was suitably enraged.

02.00pm. Beirut.

Exactly on time the strike team entered the football stadium via the player's entrance. As they went through the dressing rooms they passed the stadium staff that had been captured, bound and gagged as they arrived for work that morning. They were not happy with their circumstances, but apart from a few hours of indignity and discomfort, they would be unharmed.

Immediately on arrival Andy spoke to Dave Prendergast. 'Send the signal for the transport.'

'Already done, it's on its way in now,' Dave replied with a grin, 'better get outside now, this is one bus I'd hate to miss!'

With a battering of sound, the UH-60A Black Hawk tactical transport helicopter slammed over the edge of the Beirut stadium. Taking off from a military airstrip near Haifa, it had flown West out over the Mediterranean, North to a point due West of Beirut and then due East at sea level to cross the coast over the beaches South of the headland of Ras Beyrouth. It had no markings. Crossing the coast flat out at its maximum speed of two hundred and ninety six kilometers per hour, and at a height of fifty feet it took forty-eight seconds to reach the football stadium. The pilot sat the machine on its tail and used the main rotors to brake his approach, then, leveling off, dropped within the stadium confines and hovered, wheels barely touching the dusty turf.

The now conscious but still groggy Digger Trench, Willy Andersen, and the unfortunate Spud Murphy were put on board, the last one with his face covered. Jim's section boarded next, then Andrew's section. Dave Prendergast and the rearguard came in last, walking backwards, weapons trained outwards in case of trouble. There were no incidents; the withdrawal was taking place too rapidly for any opposition group to realize what was happening. The last two men leapt into the chopper as it began to move and were grabbed and pulled inside by their colleagues either side of the door.

With a terrific clatter of rotors, a storm of dust and a roar of powerful engines, the big machine tilted forward, gained airspeed, lifted easily over the perimeter of the stadium and powered out towards the open Mediterranean. As it gained speed, at ten-second intervals, the co-pilot fired pairs of magnesium flares in order to decoy any heat-seeking rockets that may have been fired at them as they departed. None were.

They left as suddenly as they had arrived, the element of surprise their armor against attack. Within the hour the helicopter was inside Israeli air space, had heavily armed helicopter gun-ship escorts, and was on its way to the air force base nearest to Jerusalem.

Inside the helicopter the members of the team were quiet and withdrawn. The Blood of Shatila terrorist group had been destroyed; they would shed no more

innocent blood. Even so, Andy and Jim could take no joy from their success. Reaction and anti-climax were setting in.

Andy leaned forward and shouted over the noise, 'Well, that's it, Mike's brother is avenged.'

Jim nodded. The loss of Spud overshadowed their success. They lapsed into silence each man thinking his own thoughts.

03.00pm. Jerusalem.

Stunned by the force of the massive explosion, it took Ben Levy several minutes to recover his wits, but he quickly realized that his objective had been achieved. The Knesset was safe and undamaged, the government of the country functioning and intact. The massive truck bomb had been detonated well away from the building itself, and the first part of the new blast wall had done its job. There was no loss of Israeli life.

Mike too was stunned by the massive detonation, but knew that he had prevented a greater catastrophe. He was not pleased to learn that George Liani was not yet in the net, but with the exception that Liani was still on the loose, the operation had been a success.

John Henderson had the bigger picture ready for them at the air base. The United States had sent stern diplomatic warnings to Iraq, Iran, and Syria backed up by massive force. A US Naval battle group steamed to the head of the Persian Gulf, another to the Eastern Mediterranean, their cruise missiles and aircraft at the final state of readiness. Britain too sent a diplomatic warning, armed its Tornado force in Kuwait, and flew more Tornados to bases in Turkey. The Israeli Defense Force had gone to maximum alert and had scrambled its Air Force and deployed it to its borders.

Iran, Iraq and Syria did nothing. The conflagration in the Middle East had been averted.

Ben had received a signal that the Blood of Shatila HQ was destroyed and that the strike team had been extracted complete, although not unscathed. The Israeli Government would deny all knowledge of these events and would issue absolute denials of any involvement. Ben mulled over these events as he was driven to the air base. The use of a high quality team of professional mercenaries had distinct advantages. Smiling quietly to himself, he began to list other problem areas that could be resolved by such a team.

Epilogue

06.00pm. Tel Aviv, 11/01/02.

Andy Cunningham and Jim Savage entered the air base commander's office. They were dusty and still wore their old clothes, but the weapons and the keffiyehs were gone. Mike, Ben and John stood with their backs to them watching a

television screen. On the screen the dusty, scratched and bruised features of Najib Shawa were twisted in hatred and anger.

‘But the Israelis insist that it was not them who wiped out your movement,’ the television interviewer replied, ‘and the responsibility has been claimed by a counter-terrorist group calling itself “The Anti-terrorist Army”.’

‘I don’t care what they call themselves, the Israelis are behind it, they had no right to attack innocent people, women and children, heroes of the Palestinian Liberation movement, no right to attack us in our adopted city. It is an outrage.’ Najib Shawa sprayed the presenter with spittle in his indignation.

Ben raised his eyebrows and looked at John as he turned from the set. John nodded, and made a hand up the back of the jacket gesture, Najib Shawa was a puppet, singing to their tune, but his attempt at humor didn’t ease the tension in the room.

Mike turned to greet the new arrivals.

Jim Savage let out an involuntary gasp.

‘Christ Mike, what happened to your face?’

