

MILLENNIUM

Countdown to Chaos

An Alan Ridgard Adventure



Chris Deggs

This is a work of fiction apart from the bits that aren't.

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Prologue

It was time, so the clans folk of the henge gathered together inside the circle from around dusk, in anticipation of the events that were to unfold. They had been told by the Shaman that he would come. They waited patiently, their attention drawn by the silvery orb of the full moon, as it rose calmly into the night sky.

As it ascended into the heavens, it bathed Stonehenge in a pale luminous glow, while making the great monolithic stones throw long shadows out across the damp grass. The crisp, chilled night air was wet with dew and mist; those gathered for this special occasion pulled their skin garments about them to keep out the cold. The sacredness of the imminent event was, like the atmosphere, equally laden with expectation.

Suddenly, without warning, a ghostly figure stepped silently from behind one of the massive stones in the central ring, his head portraying the frightening outline of a wolf. Being around fifteen feet tall, he cut an impressive figure, causing the assembled masses on the great banks of the henge to give a muffled collective intake of breath. There was stunned silence as the awesome figure stood before them. Then a drum began a rhythmic beat, and the mystical figure, Tehuti stepped softly from stone to stone in a circular dance, his feet stirring the few wisps of mist that clung to the long damp grass. The crowd too joined the chant, Bah!, Bah!, Bah!... The chant grew in confidence, power and pace, faster and faster, to the accompaniment of reed pipes.

Then, quite abruptly - Tehuti stopped, causing everybody to do the same. An eerie silence descended on the land once more; not a breath of wind stirred the night air. Then, the mighty Tehuti spoke, saying "We have done great works here, which we celebrate this night. The effects of this endeavour will resonate far into the future, beyond the vision of seers. Yet those who reap the benefits of our labour will not recognise its significance until such a time they are forced to do so."

Following a moments silence, as the assembled masses took in his words, the chant started up again. Then a Shaman stepped into the ring. He pulled the heart of a bull out of a bag around his waist. It was fresh, still dripping blood and gushing great clouds of steam into the night air. The Shaman, slowly raising the heart aloft, the blood dripping onto his mask, gave out a long and mournful cry to the heavens. The crowd froze in fear. Far away, in the depths of the still night air, a lone wolf cried in return.

This sacred ceremony commemorated the industrious undertaking of the Dru Ids. Under Tehuti's guidance they constructed the henge of stone that would stand sentiment to the ravages of time. Tehuti, the time-keeper Thoth of the mysterious ancient Khemmetians, had turned up in their midst and instructed the clan to gather and erect the stone monoliths in a certain pattern and order, according to that produced by sonic interference, when two reed pipes continuously play the exact musical note. To them it was a sacred circle but to Tehuti, the machine known as Stonehenge was a gyroscope that was powerful enough to correct the planet's erratic wobble, which was in danger of sending it off its orbital course. Unbeknown to the Dru-Idic people, the wobble had been caused by land and water displacement resulting from the Great Flood. He did inform the elders of the clan that it was their sacred duty to keep the earth on its heavenly course. He also instructed them in various rituals to hide the real reason for the henge. He knew there were dark, destructive forces around whose goal was to use its power for their own ends. Tehuti could not allow this to happen.

Chapter 1

Mediterranean 1998

Ivan Steer felt that nothing could compare to the private cruise around the exotic and historical Greek Islands of the Peloponnesian, the Cycladic and the Dodecanese. As a guest on board the 200 feet 'Fortunato' he was diligently waited upon by members of the 12 strong crew. As he laid back on one of the sun-deck lounges, basking in the rays of the morning sun, he reflected on his good fortune, which was assured now that he had been accepted as one of the inner circle. The years of bowing, and scraping before his masters, as well as showing initiative, had finally paid off. Here he was, a member of the elite, engaged in a secret meeting aboard a luxury yacht, owned by Baron Woodrow Roughschild, as it cruised lazily around the Ionian Islands. Yes, this was the life, Ivan Steer decided as he marvelled at his surroundings, from the fourth deck of the magnificent vessel.

He had been chosen to join the special group, owing to his genius in coming up with an idea that would get people to accept the possibilities of global power cuts and its chaotic fall-out, without apportioning blame to anybody. It had been his idea to create computer chaos at the beginning of the new millennium. Using the media to create anxiety among the masses, all the elite had to do was put the thought in peoples minds that computers could not calculate beyond the new millennium. It was that simple, brilliant and effective manoeuvre that finally got Ivan Steer noticed by those who mattered. They particularly liked the plan because it fitted in with, and masked their much bigger covert agenda.

He was no longer just Ivan Steer, power broker, and go between for the anonymous elite and power politics. He was now part of the illustrious think-tank that was designing the way of the world. Smiling with satisfaction, he reached for the glass of Courvoisier by his side and toasting the salty air with the expensive brandy, he declared, "To the good life and those in control." Then, sensing somebody approaching, he looked up to see a white jacketed servant by his sun lounge.

"They will see you now, in the master stateroom, sir," the crisply attired servant announced.

As he entered the luxurious stateroom, Ivan took in the scene. Seated on blue and white striped leather seats, around an oval shaped mahogany table, six men supped from brandy snifters, while smoking expensive cigars. One of the six men, beckoned Ivan to join them. He had no idea who had made the gesture because they were all masked. he was amazed that they had the need to stay anonymous, even among their closest colleagues. Then, he realised he was the reason for their disguises.

The one who beckoned him to sit down, said, "That computer virus thing is working a treat. They even have a name for it now - the Y2K bug. So now we have to give them a fix. Any ideas on that, Mr Steer?"

"Yes, but they won't be able to do it themselves. They will have to pay systems analysis people to upgrade their computers."

The assembled six took this in. Then one of them, who spoke with a New York accent, responded, "Do you have any idea how many companies use computers?"

"Just about all of them I would think," Ivan answered.

A man with a German accent said, "There must be a huge fortune to be made out of this hoax."

A dapper man with a David Niven type moustache, responded, "Then we must help these gullible businesses part with their money."

They all laughed at this remark.

"It looks as though your Courvoisier needs topping up, Mr Steer," the dapper English gentleman suggested.

With drinks topped up a toast was made to 'the illumined ones'. Then the Englishman asked his colleagues, "Should we bring Mr Steer up to scratch?"

There was assent from the group.

The next man to speak had been silent to that moment. He was almost bald, probably in his 70's and he spoke with an Italian accent. "Signor Steer, in a few months the world will be ready to embrace our leadership. We know this because we are bringing about a situation in which the world, run as it is now, will not be able to exist."

Ivan asked, "What is this situation you are talking about?"

"Signor, the world faces many serious problems for which there are no economical, ecological or ecumenical solutions."

The Englishman intervened. "It is not that the leaders of the world's nations do not have the answers to the mounting problems faced by man. They have the solutions but they do not have the will or the courage to have them implemented. This is the reason for their failure. We, on the other hand, are not afraid to carry out what has to be done and soon we will be in a position to do just that."

"So how do you gentlemen propose to create the 'situation' that gives you the keys to the world?"

The German answered, "We already have the keys. We just have to unlock the doors for chaos to flood in. There are many ways we can implement our plans, but we prefer that the world fails on its own account. We will give the world a helping hand by unbalancing the Earth's energy grid to bring about a global power cut in which all forms of electronic communication break down. In order to achieve this we are embarking on a series of steps around the globe that will culminate on Millennium Eve."

The Englishman added, "Everything must be timed perfectly. Success or failure is dependent on all these elements being synchronised to create the overall effect. In the New World Order, we will be the ones calling the shots. Politicians, scientists, business people and the intelligence community, will all do our bidding."

Ivan smiled, hugely impressed by their belief and confidence. "What part would you like me to play in this takeover, gentlemen?"

The Englishman spoke. "Your target is a British politician called Joseph Minter. You will be sent further instructions as and when required."

"Who will be my contact?"

"Your codename will be 'Cicero'. That is all you need to know at present."

Chapter 2

Giza Plateau 1998

Andrea Burry held her breath. Nobody had seen behind the blocked shaft for around 4,500 years and she was one of the first people to do so. Along with others present, she stared at the computer screen, peering through the optical mechanism of their small robot. It ran on caterpillar tracks, as it penetrated the dark, narrow shaft, which the archaeological team believed opened into the queen's chamber. This latest technology, with its X-ray capabilities, allowed the Chief Egyptologist, Karif Jalani, to see what lay beyond the blocked shaft. As the image showed up on the laptop screen his initial excitement soon gave way to frustration, as the evidence revealed itself.

“Dammit! There is another stone slab blocking the way,” stated one of the archaeologists present.

Jalani putting a positive spin on it, turned to his people. “This is just a minor setback. What we have seen tonight is totally unique within the world of Egyptology. There is nothing to compare it to, as these passages are not in any other pyramids, with or without doors. In fact, the presence of a second door only deepens the intrigue surrounding the Great Pyramid.”

Dr Burry said, “This find is indeed a great one but how are we going to control a huge influx of scientists, coming here to investigate this chamber?”

The Chief Egyptologist stared at her. “Nobody outside of this team must know of this until we are ready to tell the world. Do you all understand this?”

The team affirmed his directive.

Andrea was not happy about the secretive nature of their work. Jalani always played his cards close to his chest but that was not her way. Still, as the only woman Egyptologist on the team, she did not want to lose her place by making waves. Besides, she had her own agenda for being there, so she had to keep a low profile.

Back in her rented apartment, Andrea went over her notes. She paused, and looked out over the balcony of her roof top terrace. The view was magnificent; the estate agent had done her proud. Her apartment, which only cost her 1,200 Egyptian pounds per month, overlooked the Three great Pyramids & the Sphinx. The only thing not in its favour was its position being, as it was, close to the popular tourist area, which was thriving, noisy and alive 24/7. Returning to her research, she read what she had just typed:

The Great Pyramid shaft has been blocked for thousands of years, by a chunk of limestone that has copper handles and may well have been wedged into the tiny shaft (approximately eight inches square) by pyramid builders after it had been used as a polishing tool. Today we managed to penetrate this limestone slab only to find another one behind it. We did not have time to set up the robot to carry out this task. The presence of a second door blocking the way could suggest that whatever lies beyond it had to be kept well hidden. Could it be the very thing I am looking for?

Her work was interrupted by a phone call. It was Abdul Hafiz, a dig worker. She listened intently, and then said, “Let us meet at the Hog's Breath, by the Sphinx.” That agreed to, Andrea went back to her notes. Although, she could not concentrate on her work. David kept coming into her thoughts. She knew in her heart he had not left her by committing suicide. She sighed deeply. It was

no good torturing herself with such thoughts. She needed to focus on the work and not just for her own sake.

She realised this the day she went to the Cairo University to see Dr Karif Jalani. As she approached his office, she heard a conversation taking place inside. The door had been left ajar, allowing her to pick up snippets of what was being said. Even these snatches of conversation going on, between the Egyptian Minister of Culture and an American, told her something untoward was going on. She found the discussion difficult to follow but the American's comment sent a chill up her spine. He mentioned something about Illuminates and the eye in the pyramid being fulfilled. His next comment had her rooted to the spot. She heard him say, "Make sure that everybody is made aware of it. It is absolutely crucial that everything goes to plan on Millennium Eve. Nothing must be left to chance."

Millennium Eve! What was going to happen then? she wondered. Andrea became even more concerned when she heard something about placing a golden cap on the Great Pyramid. Was that what they were referring to? she wondered.

Settling back in her chair, she added to her notes:

In the northern shaft in the past few days, we discovered another blocking stone. The "door" appears to be identical to the one in the southern shaft that was already known. The doors are equidistant (65 meters/208 feet) from the queen's chamber. It is the third such block discovered within the shafts of the pyramid. This was confirmed by our team leader Karif Jalani, secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. We used a specially developed combination of robotics, camera, and lighting technology developed by iRobot of Boston, yielded the new information. Until this discovery, no one knew that the northern shaft extended to the north as far as the southern shaft goes to the south.

Andrea, intrigued by the phone call, closed her laptop and got up to change, in readiness for her meeting with the young Egyptian. As she walked through her spacious, recently refurbished lounge, she caught a glance of the photograph, on the cabinet. It had been taken on their honeymoon, twenty years before. Her eyes clouded over. "I will find out the truth, my love," she quietly proclaimed, as a reminder of her personal mission.

Alan Ridgard hadn't been to Egypt before and it was quite a culture shock for him. The taxi driver, who picked him up at Cairo Airport, just after sunrise, drove his forty year old Fiat like it was some kind of sports-car. Despite the thrill ride it was some time before they came the outskirts of Cairo. And, as tedious as it was for Alan, worse was soon to come. The whole ring-road experience of traffic crawling along, smelly exhaust fumes, no marked lanes and every vehicle blaring their horns every few seconds, was a nightmare that Hassan, his driver, just took in his stride.

Never, in his life had Alan been on a 'motorway' where he saw saw donkeys pulling carts, people pushing wheelchairs along and apparently suicidal adults and children trying to sell you anything from an inflatable spider-man, Basalt statuettes of Egyptian gods, to boxes of tissues, through your car windows, at every traffic jam, of which there were many. "How the hell do you handle this without going mad?" Alan asked.

Hassan grinned, showing his gold tooth. "It is the way it is."

And the way it was, Alan soon discovered, saying 'no' was not an option. as they followed the cars along knocking on the windows again and again, clearly assuming that if they pestered you long enough you would succumb and buy something from them, simply to get rid of them. "How long before we get to Giza?"

"Allah willing, twenty minutes."

There was nothing special about the Hard Rock Cafe in Giza. To Andrea it was just like any other hard rock venue in any country. But from the outside, its crumbling façade made it less than inviting. If it were not for the iconic 'Hard Rock Cafe' sign, the premises could have passed for any Cairo slum. She entered and scanned around for any sign of Abdul. Then she saw him, His western style clothes, levi's and blue surfing t-shirt, sporting a logo on the back, blended in with the tourist crowd. He sat nursing a can of cola. She pushed through the bustling crowd of tourists to arrive at his table. Andrea sat down on the bench seat opposite him. "So, Abdul, what is so urgent that you have to see me today?"

Abdul Hafiz, gave a cheesy grin. "I always enjoy to see you, professor."

"Dr. Burry said, "I haven't got time for small talk!"

"I did not know that talk came in different sizes."

The cheeky but raffishly handsome man was good at English. Andrea thought he was winding her up. "Really. Well never mind. Tell me why you have got me here."

Abdul finished his drink and squashed the can. "This is what they want to do with us, but we are strong and growing in numbers."

Andrea, becoming annoyed, asked, "What do you need to see me about?"

"As you know, we have to stop my government going ahead with their plans on Millennium Eve."

"What plans?" Andrea asked, fishing.

"Surely you have heard they plan to place golden capstone on top of the Great Pyramid on the eve of the new millennium."

"I have read about such things but aren't they just rumours?"

"No, they are not, Professor. It is a Zionist plot, its symbolism being the Jewish skull cap."

Andrea thought his reasoning was a bit far-fetched, but, as they both had the same goal, for different reasons, she let his remarks ride. "So, how are we going to get it stopped?"

"Have you heard of 'Al Haab'?"

"Only vaguely. Aren't they some kind of political activist movement?"

Abdul flashed one of his smiles. "I have joined them and we are working on a plan to stop this outrage."

Andrea, a peacenik from the 70's, became concerned. "I hope your group does not advocate violent methods, Abdul."

"Hosni is determined to copy the French example."

"What French example?"

"Don't you follow the news, professor?" It was only last month that the golden capstone was ceremoniously placed on top of the Egyptian obelisk which stands at the Place de la Concorde. Hosni is determined that a similar ceremony will take place at the Great Pyramid of Giza at midnight on the 31st December 1999. We may have to use some persuasive methods to stop him."

Abdul, I cannot condone violence."

"I also do not want violence, doctor, but we have to do what is necessary."

Alan Ridgard, who was sitting two tables away, knew very little about Al Haab but those who employed him, did. He waited until Abdul Hafiz left the cafe, then he got up and followed him. As he tailed the activist, making sure he was not seen, Alan followed him along streets wracked by decades of abuse. Leprous-looking ruins of once lavish apartment buildings lined down-town streets. Trash was piled everywhere and desert sand collected in every nook and cranny.

Amid the thousands of unfinished but occupied housing blocks that lined the road to the pyramids, his target entered a building in Sobhy, a suburb in Giza. It had gaping, windowless balconies, painted cheerful colours, in a futile attempt to enliven its dreary surroundings. He checked the briefing notes he had made on his phone. It was listed. But was it an Al Haab stronghold or merely a place the young Egyptian was frequenting.

Alan went up to the open door and walked inside. The light was not good. There was staleness in air. Raised voices from one of the apartments got his attention. Then Alan heard somebody descending some steps. He hid beside the stairwell. Two figures passed by and headed outside. He noticed the surfing company logo on the back of the tee-shirt and knew one of them was his quarry.

Alan, being fair in complexion, with pale blue eyes, had to keep a low profile, while keeping his quarry in view. They walked into one of the rare verdant parks in Giza. The man with Abdul unlocked an old Mercedes. They both got in and drove off.

"Shit!" Alan said, as they disappeared from view. All he could do was go back to the Sobhy apartment and look for clues. Then he changed his mind and dialled a number his employer had given him instead. "Hello, my name is Ridgard. I was told you would help me with my project."

Mahmoud was waiting at the entrance of the Cairo Museum, as arranged. Alan recognised him by his red fez, unusual but acceptable attire these days. Taking Alan through the gates, he said, "You must leave any cameras or camcorders with the staff of the museum. You can collect your belongings on your way out."

Alan became suspicious. Why had this Arab organised to meet him where he could not make notes? Reluctantly he did as he was told. The man on the desk smiled broadly as he put Alan's mobile phone and small digital camera in a plastic basket, but scowled at him upon receiving no tip.

Seeing the worried look on the Englishman's face, Mahmoud assured, "Don't worry Mr Ridgard

they will not sell your things.”

Perhaps he was being a touch paranoid but there were things recorded on his phone he would rather nobody saw. “Is there somewhere we can talk in private?”

As most tourists gravitated around the King Tut area, Mahmoud took Alan to an obscure dusty corner with small exhibits of bone and shard fragments.

Alan showed him a photo of Abdul Hafiz, “What do you know about him?”

The contact looked at the photo. “His name is Abdul Hafiz. He is a member of Al Haab.”

“That much I know. Has he been involved in any violent activism?”

“He's been with Al Haab for ten years, so I guess he has. It is believed that he took part in the Luxor Massacre.”

“What happened?”

“It was all over the news. Surely...”

“...But what weren't we told?”

“The news gave a sanitised version. Most of the 62 victims visiting the Hatshepsut temple, were not shot by the terrorists. Most were beheaded or disembowelled.” Mahmoud then spat, “The Al Haab are animals.”

Alan paled, visualising the hellish scene. “I thought all the terrorists were killed while trying to hijack a bus.”

“That is the official story. But there were at least two who escaped. They coordinated the attack from behind the lines. One of those was your man” he said, indicating the photo.

“Who's their leader?”

“Locally, Azhar Fami.”

“Locally?”

“Yes. Our intelligence suggests he takes his orders from someone higher up.”

“Any idea who?”

Mahmoud shook his head. “We wish we did. All we know is that he is a foreigner – a very influential man.”

“So why would he be backing a local terrorist group.”

The contact shrugged. “I think he is playing them for his own agenda. But I don't know what his angle is.”

Chapter 3

London 1999

Alan Ridgard admired the multi-faceted exterior, with its red Suffolk brick and Caen stone dressings. He didn't often stop to admire architectural magnificence but he had agreed to meet his contact at Leighton House at 12 noon. It was now close to 12. 30 pm. Where could Albert Murray have gotten to? Often Alan did not know whom he was meeting. Arrangements were usually made by his employer, behind the scenes. Oh well he would just have to put Mr Murray down as a no-show. He turned to walk away when he espied a man heading toward him. The picture on his phone showed it wasn't his contact.

“Mr Ridgard,” the puffed man stated, in such a way it could have either been interpreted as a question or a statement.

“Who are you?” Alan asked, his suspicions aroused.

The middle aged man smiled “Just in case you are wondering Mr Murray couldn't make this meeting. I'm here in his stead.”

This isn't right, Alan's mind screamed. “You haven't answered my question.”

“Sorry. Frank Sator. Mr Murray briefed me on this. I...”

“...Why wasn't I informed before now?”

“I wasn't asked to do this until an hour ago.”

Alan grabbed his phone. “I'm going to have to make a call.” He keyed in a contact, waited for a response. “Why wasn't I informed about a change of plan?”

“What the hell are you talking about, Alan?”

“Why am I talking to a Frank Sator, instead of the arranged contact?”

“I know nothing about it.”

“So what am I supposed to do?”

“Sound him out – I guess.”

Alan turned to Sator, “Nobody seems to know what the fuck is going on.”

“Why don't we chat inside?” Sator suggested calmly.

Standing inside the building, Alan's senses were overwhelmed by the decorative riches.

Sator said, “This interior style reached its zenith in the golden dome, indoor fountain and medieval Turkish and Syrian ceramics of the Arab Hall, which were built in 1877.”

“You seem to know a lot about this place. But what do you know about Mr Murray's meeting?”

“Let's just say he is privy to information about somebody in London who is behind a terrorist group in Egypt.”

“Do you mean Al Haab?”

“I am not prepared to say more at present. I sense you do not entirely trust me and I don't know how much I can trust you.”

It was a nuisance but Alan appreciated where Sator was coming from. “So what are you suggesting?”

“We can meet again when we each have something to put on the table.”

“When and where?”

“I will contact you and let you know. You will be dealing with me from now on.”

“What's happened to Albert Murray?”

Sator looked straight at Alan. “I was asked to take over. That's all I know”

Alan, dissatisfied, pressed, “Who told you to take over?”

“I will contact you.”

“This was a waste of time.”

Sator smiled, Take some time out to enjoy this wonderful ambience, Mr Ridgard.”

Alan stood and watched as the mysterious Frank Sator left the building.

Alan always found the Thames Embankment to be an attractive place at night but many of the distinctive globe-shaped lights were in poor repair or not working at all, leaving areas in darkness. He was there to meet Karl Haas, the proprietor of Intel-Inc, the private intelligence gathering company he worked for. Bored and cold, he looked out for Karl along the Thames Embankment on the south side, but it seemed deserted. Across the Dark murky river was the Mill bank Tower and the silhouette of the Houses of Parliament. Why couldn't his contacts turn up? he wondered. Then, from the other direction, he saw two figures approaching him. He tensed up. This was not the plan.

They stopped a few feet from him. One said, “We are to take you to Mr Haas.”

“Where is he. Why isn't he here?”

“We are just following his instructions,” the larger of the two darkly dressed men said.

His accent was foreign, probably Middle Eastern, Alan thought.

“This is not the arrangement. I was supposed to meet him here.”

The shorter man quickly whisked out a Smith and Wesson .45 chief. “Come with us Mr Ridgard. Do not give me a reason to shoot you.”

“I never argue with a man holding a gun.”

“Let's go,” the large man ordered.

Alan went ahead. He felt the barrel prodding in his back, as they climbed some steps. He knew it had to be now or never. Reaching the next step he leaned back slightly, feeling where the gun was. As the barrel prodded his middle back, he gauged his move. If he was wrong he would be killed. Turning quickly to his right side he jerked his elbow back, sharply, deflecting the gun. Taken by complete surprise the gunman stumbled back into the path of the larger man. Alan took his shot, spun and punched the smaller guy in the stomach.

He fired by reflex. The shot went wild. He lost his footing and stumbled backward into the bigger guy, knocking him down the steps.

Alan hared up the remaining steps, creating as much distance as he could, before they recovered. Out in the street he raced to his car. The words “I WILL KILL YOU!” rang in his ears. He turned, saw the glint of metal, threw himself to the ground as two rounds reported nearby, kicking up chunks of asphalt. The gunman seemed wild and erratic. Alan's Glock G22 was locked in the Mini Cooper. He decided to sit tight. Silence was his best weapon. His SAS training stood him in good stead. He stayed absolutely still and silent for over twenty minutes.

He couldn't see him but he sensed the gunman coming closer, as the cordite smell used weapon reached his nostrils. He tensed, a tiger ready to spring. He only had one chance and his timing had to be perfect. Holding a razor-sharp Commando dagger in his right fist, he waited, tense, ready for the moment he would have to show his hand.

The moment arrived. He rolled swiftly to the left and came up in a crouch. In the dark the gunman's shot was unmeasured and hurried. Two more shots went wide. Alan, detecting the close presence of his assailant, shot up out of his crouch and thrust his blade to the hilt in the gunman's abdomen. For a moment the would-be killer was suspended on the knife blade. Then with a surprised look, he folded to the ground. Alan withdrew his dagger and wiped it clean with a handkerchief. The gunman was still alive. Gut wounds can take a while to kill. Alan fumbled in the groaning man's pockets until he found a mobile phone. He keyed in 999 and asked for an ambulance. After hastily giving the location, he retrieved the fallen Smith and Wesson with gloved hands, and placed it near to the gunman. He then got into his car, hastily leaving the scene before anyone arrived.

Chapter 4

London 1999

Alan Ridgard went over the events in his mind. It all seemed surreal to him, once he was back home. Perhaps his assailant had survived but he doubted it. He would most likely have bled out before any ambulance arrived at the scene. With his severe military training it was easy to kill someone in self-defence but living with it afterwards was not so easy, even if they were trying to kill him. Even if nobody else knew about it, it was a huge weight to carry for any caring person, and Alan was no exception. Yet he could not tell anyone – ever. He went over it in his mind from a philosophical, legal, and human rights perspective. He reasoned that self-defence was held to be contentious. It permitted him to preserve his life at the expense of another.

Having been forced to go to mass, as a child, he was indoctrinated with old Father Gold's philosophy that all life was of equal value. Therefore, justifying his actions that night, as being permissible, posed something of a challenge to his conscience. However, his aggressor was an adult

and could be said to have been of sound mind - if not sound judgement. He wasn't the first man to die at Alan's hand. During his military experience in Iraq, killing was sometimes necessary. But it was the first time he had to extinguish someone's life, since entering civvy street.

More pressing for him was to find out why he had been captured at gun point. He rang Karl's private number and left a message. "Why was I assailed by two thugs while I was waiting for you. Contact urgent."

Alan received the call around midnight. He fumbled for the phone. Hello, who's speaking?"

"Alan, I got your message. What the hell happened?"

"That's what I want to know. Why didn't you meet me as arranged?"

"I never arranged to meet you."

Alan did a double take. "What! Do you mean?..."

"...It must have been a set-up. But why?"

"And who set it up?"

"Are you OK?"

"Yes but we might have a problem. I can't tell you over the phone. We have to meet."

"Yes. OK, the usual place. Let's say around Ten."

The problem was in the shape of Sharrif Motell, who was sitting in an interview room at the Kennington Police Station. Because of the stabbing, officers from the Kennington nick attended and cordoned off the crime scene. Searching the immediate area they came across another man who was bruised and had a broken leg. After being treated in St Thomas's accident and emergency department, he was splinted up and taken to the police station for questioning. He made out he didn't understand English. He was waiting for an Arabic interpreter to arrive. He didn't know his colleague had died on the operating table.

Alan took, what he called – a walk on the wild side of Fleet Street. Why Karl chose such a pretentious place as the Ivy restaurant, where the rich and famous rubbed shoulders - and it was rumoured, other parts of the anatomy - with the even more rich and infamous, to get a leg up to 'A' list status. He couldn't figure why his boss would prefer such a place. The stained glass windows gave the upper class eatery something of a righteous feeling. What a bunch of pretentious pricks, he thought, upon seeing the city bankers and financial whizzes. The word 'banker' does not begin with 'w' but somehow Alan saw it to be fitting.

Karl Haas, according to taste, was seen to be either boundlessly energetic or a control freak. Alan had experienced both sides on more than one occasion. Karl, already tucking into seared tiger prawns on a bed of rice. He was not a man to wait on ceremony. Alan took a seat.

"Choose something to eat, on me," Karl winked.

Alan was still feeling nauseous from the previous night's adventure. He chose Cauliflower soup with cob nuts and crumbled Roquefort. Even that was a bit rich for his churning stomach.

“So, tell me what happened?” Karl asked between mouth fulls.

“I was waiting for you. Then I was approached by two men. They knew who I was and they knew I was waiting for you.”

Karl whistled through his teeth. “As I said, I made no such arrangement.”

“Then they must have set it up.”

“When have we ever met on a dark embankment?”

“Yes, in retrospect it was a bit strange.”

“So, what happened?”

“They said they were taking me to see you. I became suspicious. Then they marched me away at gunpoint.”

“So, how did you get away from them?”

“I seized a micro window of opportunity and managed to break away. The gunman pursued me and before I could get away he started shooting in my direction. Luckily he was not a very good shot. But the closer he came the more chance he had of hitting me. I took cover and waited until he was close enough. Then I acted.”

“What do you mean?” Karl queried, his brow furrowed.

Alan wondered how much to tell him. He leaned forward, “I had to stab one of them. Then I called emergency services.”

Karl paled. “Oh.”

“The problem is I don't know what happened to the other one. He didn't come after me, so I assume he was hurt when he fell down the steps. But he knows who I am and...”

“... The police would have been alerted. If he was immobilised the police may have found him.”

“And if he'd talked.”

“You would have been arrested by now.” After another bite, Karl said, “So why would he not rat on you?”

Alan pushed the remainder of his soup aside. “Then there's this Frank Sator business. Who the hell is he and what happened to Albert Murray?”

“Meet with this Sator again. Find out what he has for us.”

After lunch with Karl, as Alan made his way to the car park, his phone rang. “Alan here.”

“Frank Sator. Do you know the Earl of Lonsdale beer garden?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll be there at 1pm tomorrow. I will wait for ten minutes.”

“I’ll be there. But it had better be worth my while.”

“It will be, as long as I am paid.”

There it was, slap bang in the middle of fashionable Portabello. The Earl of Lonsdale, a fine Victorian pub, that somehow managed to avoid being turned into yet another trendy bar. Frank Sator was already there, nursing a pint of beer and reading the paper. Alan ordered his beer and joined his contact. The garden still boasted late summer blooms but many were beginning to wilt on their stems. Still the beer garden was something of a haven in the densely developed city.

“So what have you got for me?” Alan asked, as he sat opposite Sator.

Looking around to see if anyone was within ear shot, the accountant began, “I work for the House of Berwick, as an accountant - well glorified book keeper really. Anyway, I suppose this is really about a feud.”

“A feud?”

“Yes that’s right. To give you a bit of history, in 1985, My boss, Habib Arain and Timothy Austerberry, CEO of Longlands, argued about the Arab's take over of the House of Berwick, including its flagship, Herrods.”

“Arain won that debate, did he not?”

“He hired a major league lobbying firm - Ivan Steer Associates - to help win the battle against Austerberry.”

Alan Ridgard switch on his note taker. “You mentioned corruption.”

“The first I got to know about it was fudged figures in the accounts book. There was this Tory - MP Thomas Smithson is his name. Anyway, he begins taking cash in brown envelopes from Arain in return for looking after his interests in the House of Commons.”

“Have you seen him handing over this money to Smithson?”

“Of course, otherwise I would not be here.” Sator leaned forward, speaking quietly, “There were discrepancies in the accounts. Entries were written in as development projects, but the details were sketchy. Then one day, when I walked into Arain’s office, Thomas Smithson, looking like a rabbit startled by bright headlights, was quickly stuffing a brown paper bag in his pocket.”

“Did you report it?”

The man shook his head. “We are talking about Mohammed Arain and an MP. Do you think I want to wake up dead.”

Ignoring the obvious contradiction, Alan Ridgard asked, “What did Arain get out of it?”

“You have to know how the power brokers work. A woman with a natural flair for developing and running major projects, called Sheila Brock, was targeted. She introduced a company in Smiths constituency, National Nuclear Inc., it is called. She then received a commission fee from ISA of £4,000. She is encouraged not to declare it.”

“It is just minor corruption.”

Leaning forwards, the man said, “Yes Mr Ridgard, but don't you see. They have her.”

“Who are they?”

“You’ve heard about the Millennium Dome?”

“Of course, it's been all over the media. What has that got to do with it?”

“The word is that Sheila Brock got the contract. If she doesn't do what she's told they spill the beans on her and she's finished professionally.”

“She seems astute. Why would she risk everything on such a small sum?”

The accountant shrugged, “Who knows. Then I noticed Brock joined the Arain payroll.”

“Why is she useful to Arain?”

“She is a powerful ruthless business women. It is better to have her on side. Besides, I’m pretty sure there were carnal benefits.”

Alan Ridgard ordered drinks for him and the accountant. He then said, “To be straight with you, the story does not grab me. I don't know what this has to do with Intel-Inc.”

“You people have been trying to get a handle on who is running Al Haab.”

Alan looked at Sator, dubiously. “Are you suggesting there is some kind of link here?”

“Of course there is. But I want my due before I spill the beans.”

Alan passed Sator an envelope but kept his hand firmly on it. “Give.”

“Habib Arain is your man.”

Alan did a double-take. “Why the hell would a mega rich Arab with a chain of top deck stores get involved with a fucking terrorist group. It doesn't make any sense.”

“On the face of it, no. But let's take a step back. In 1987 came the June 11 General election. A venture capital expert, Ivan Steer, contributed to the election fighting funds of 21 Tory and several Labour and Lib Dem MPs. Amounts ranged from £500 to £5,000. None of the MPs were encouraged to declare the contributions, and none did so.”

“Who is this Ivan Steer then?”

“Bit of a mystery there, I’m afraid. It's rumoured that his company was bankrolled by Loeb and

Cohen, which means the Roughchilds. However, things were becoming very cosy between Sheila and Arain.”

“What do you mean?”

“He paid for her to stay at the Ritz in Paris and footed the bill for a couple of paintings she picked up in Cornwall.”

“So that is why you assume they are they having an affair?”

To be truthful, I don’t really know, but she is rumoured to put it around a bit. A leg over for a leg up – you might say. Anyway over the next few years he buys her all sorts of things.”

Alan Ridgard could not see a problem. “Well, its his money. And I don't see what it has to do with Al Haab.”

“I am coming to that. Arain uses people and he was buttering her up for something, and she fell for it”

“What?”

“Ivan gets Arain to get her her to befriend Joseph Minter, a run-of-the-mill backbench MP. Shortly afterward Minter is elevated in the ranks when he takes Timothy Smithson's place on the front bench, where he becomes Minister for Arts and Heritage”

“Quite a jump from obscurity. So, why did Smithson stand aside?”

“He had to. Brock lets it be known that Smithson took undeclared commissions from Arain. The PM invites him to become minister in the Northern Ireland office, and of course he agrees.”

“Why is it important for Minter to be MP for the arts?”

Because Minter had received a few favours from both Arain and Brock and, as Minister of art and culture, he is instrumental in deciding who gets the contract for the Millennium Dome.”

Alan Ridgard nodded, So that is how Brock got the Millennium Dome gig.”

“Do you now see how corrupt the whole thing is?”

“Why was it important that she got the contract?”

“Because she could be manipulated by Minter. Understand, a lot was going on that she was not privy to.”

“I’m guessing that Minter is merely a pawn in a bigger game.”

“Of course. I know a little bit about the next level, but there the trail ends.”

“So who is Minter being used by?”

“Not sure really, but the obvious choice would be Ivan Steer.”

“Why him?”

“Because he was behind Minter’s meteoric rise to political fame.”

“favours beget favours.”

“Oh yes.”

After a moments silence, the accountant asked, “So, how about my reward,” reaching out for the envelope.

“When you give me something useful on the Arain – Al Haab connection.”

“Major events are going to happen in Cairo, on Millennium Eve. It is in Arain's interest that disruptions will take place. Al Haab are his instrument for bringing about a chaotic situation.”

“Why does he want the celebrations to be disrupted?”

“All I know is that there has been correspondence between Arain and Azhar Fami.”

“I will need a copy. Can you arrange that?”

“I will see what I can do.”

as Sator rose to leave, Alan asked, “So what happened to the challenge between Arain and Tim Austerberry?”

“What do you think? Earlier this year the Arain trial jury found in his favour.”

“No real surprises there.”

“Austerberry wouldn't have been well pleased.”

“It turns out that Austerberry has a brother, Jerry, who's a spook or something.”

“A spook!” Alan responded, excitedly.

“With MI6 I think. So he gets his brother to do bit of background stuff on Arain”

“And?”

“I don't know for certain but I think they found the link between Fami and Al Haab.”

“Surely he would have used the info to discredit Arain.”

Sator shrugged. I'll contact you soon.”

Chapter 5

London 1999

Alan Ridgard was startled by a voice out of the blue. He was taking a leisurely stroll through the North West end of Regents Park, when he heard, “Well if it aint Captain Ridgard.” He turned

abruptly and there was Bernie Walcott, late of the SAS.

Catching up, Bernie said, "Fancy bumping into you."

"Yes, fancy," Alan responded.

"Yer not still bearing a grudge, are you?"

"What happened over there stays over there, as far as I am concerned."

"Yeah, it was a bloody shambles. We were in the fucking desert freezing our balls off because the brass hadn't done their homework about how bloody cold it got at night."

Alan remembered it only too well. The climate was extremely harsh. He, who had been Norway, had never experienced such bone numbing cold. Yet, due to poor intelligence, they were not provided with the necessary equipment to keep themselves warm. "It was the first time a patrol was sent out there into that hell to get info on enemy troop numbers. We were able to alert our guys to a 30,000 strong Iraqi force heading their way."

Bernie beamed, "Hey, how about coming for a jar down over at the Duke of York, me local boozer?"

Alan looked at his watch. "OK, I've got half hour." Bernie Walcott was a bit of a loose end that Alan had to deal with.

"So, what are you up to these days, Al?" Bernie said, as they settled down with a couple of beers.

"You wouldn't want to know." Brushing it off, he said, "The reason I agreed to have this drink with you is to clear this shit up."

Bernie fixed Alan in his gaze. "What's there to clear up? You had me driving that fucking Iraqi shit heap with two dead, smelly camel jockeys in the back."

"Come on Bernie, you know how it was. What choice did I have?"

"We should have buried the bastards."

"I thought the chopper was going to take them back, along with our prisoner."

"Yeah, well they didn't."

"I know that. But we could only dig shallow graves. They would soon have been discovered."

"Yeah, and I drew the short straw." He sneered, "But then you had it in for me, didn't you, Captain."

Alan stared at him. "If you can't accept things for what they are that's your problem." he stood up. "Enjoy your beer and your life, Bernie." He could feel Bernie's eyes burning into him, as he left the pub. Shit, he had to make difficult decisions out there. He did not want to go through anything like it again.

Bernie Walcott watched Alan leave, then took out his phone. He punched some numbers and listened. Once connected, he said, "I have just been having a beer with Alan Ridgard. There was a

short pause. "What I want to know is why his is still breathing."

Back in his St. Johns Wood basement flat, Alan began his research. He typed,

In 1958, Timothy Austerberry, a young self-made millionaire, moved to Rhodesia where he bought a tobacco farm at Eiffel Flats in Mashonaland West province. From 1962 to 1973 he lived with Irene Smallworth, the wife of a business partner.

The phone interrupted his flow.

Sator said, I have something for you. It's proof of what we talked about."

"The connection between Arain and Azhar Fami?"

"Yes, and I want double my fee."

"That's outrageous," Alan responded, angrily.

"I'm sure Timothy Austerberry would be more gracious."

"That's blackmail."

"Alan, I am putting my life at risk for this, and, at the very least, I will have to leave my job and move abroad. So when do I get my fee?"

"I will have to run it by my employer."

"Then you will have to wait for what I have to tell you."

Alan Ridgard, frustrated by Sator's smugness, contacted Karl Haas. "Sator claims have proof of the connection. He wants double, up front."

"We have to see what he's got, first."

"I agree but he won't give me the document without first being paid."

"Is it worth the trouble?"

"I think so, yes."

After a short pause, Karl said, "I will run it by our client but we have to go by her instructions."

"Yes, I understand. Look, I may be able to get him to accept fifty percent up front."

Karl sighed. He hated complications. "OK, give it a go."

Alan thought about Karl's situation. Some decisions, especially those involving the clients money, had to be sanctioned by the pay master. But it was all wasting time. He sighed heavily and returned to his research.

Timothy Austerberry was recruited to the London and Rhodesian Mining and Land Company, later Longland, as chief executive in 1982. Under his leadership, the firm expanded out of its origins in

mining and became a conglomerate, dealing in newspapers, hotels, distribution, and textiles, along with many other lines of business. Then, during 1985, Austerberry's position was the subject of a High Court case, in which eight Longland directors sought Austerberry's dismissal, due to both his temperament and to claims he had concealed financial information from the board. Austerberry failed in his legal attempt to block the move, but was subsequently backed by shareholders and retained his position. Minter, referring to the case, criticised the company in the House of Commons and described events there as 'the unpleasant and unacceptable face of capitalism'."

Alan was contacted by Sator and they met again in the Earl of Lonsdale. It was raining, so they met in the bar. Designed in the classic style, it boasted polished joinery and a waxed timber floor. The pair settled, with their drinks, next to one of the many cut glass decorative panels. Alan sipped his lager and asked, "Have you got me the proof of the Arain/ Al Haab connection?"

Sator, wearing a broad brimmed floppy hat, putting Alan in mind of a sartorial scarecrow, explained. "In 1983, Austerberry took over The Observation newspaper and became its chairman. He also campaigned to gain control of Herrods department store in Knightsbridge, but was defeated by the Egyptian-born tycoon Mohamed Al-Arain, which led to a well-publicised feud between the two men."

"Yes, I already know this. I want the proof you promised."

"Arain was born in eastern Alexandria, Egypt, as the eldest son of a primary school teacher, Arain tried a number of jobs, from selling soft drinks on the streets of his home city as a child to working as a sewing machine salesman and teacher."

Alan Ridgard drained his glass, and ordered another round. "That's hardly ground-breaking news."

"What's more significant is he was married for two years to Samira Khoshoori (1964 - 1966), the sister of the international businessman and arms dealer Adnan Khoshoori."

Alan eyebrows raised. "Now, that is interesting."

"Adnan employed him in his import business in Saudi Arabia. After establishing wide circles of influence in the UAE, Haiti and London, Arain founded his own shipping company in Egypt before becoming a financial adviser to one of the world's richest men, the then Sultan of Brunei Omar Ali Saifuddal II, in 1976."

"OK, so where's the terrorist connection?"

"Yes, well the significant aspect here is that, after arriving in Britain in 1974 and adding the Al- to his name, earning the Private Eye nickname 'the Phoney Pharaoh', he briefly joined the board of the mining conglomerate Longland in 1975 but left after a disagreement."

"Was the disagreement with Timothy Austerberry by any chance?"

"With them both being hard-headed businessmen, out only for themselves, it would seem logical."

"So you don't know!"

"We can only speculate."

"Was their dislike of each other personal or purely professional?"

“All I know is, in 1985, he and his brother Ali bought the ‘House of Berwick’, a group that included the famous London store Herrods, for £615m. The Herrods deal was made under the nose of Timothy Austerberry, the head of Longland.”

“Why would Austerberry be upset?”

“Because he had been seeking to buy Herrods and he took the Arain brothers to a Department of Trade inquiry. The inquiry, involving one of the most bitter feuds in British business history, issued a 1990 report stating that the Arain brothers had lied about their background and wealth.”

“I thought lying about their wealth went with rich man territory”

“Nevertheless the bickering with Austerberry continued when he accused them of stealing millions in jewels from his Herrods safety deposit box. Austerberry died in 1998, and, without accepting responsibility, Arain settled the dispute with a payment to his widow.

“That does not surprise me in the least, but I want to know what caused the rivalry in the first place.”

The accountant shrugged. “I have no idea about that.”

Alan rose to go. Then he asked, “How long have you known about this Arain terrorist connection?”

“A couple of years.”

“How come Austerberry didn't use that intel to bring Arain down?”

“Maybe he didn't know.”

Alan leaned over the table staring at Sator's face, “And maybe you've been fucking stringing me along.”

“N, no. I w, wouldn't do that.”

“Then provide me with the proof or your life is going to become very uncomfortable.”

Sator, realising he no longer held the ace card, said, “There's no need for that. I have the document but once I give it to you, I have to disappear.”

“And if you don't you' will wish you had fucking disappeared.”

Sator shrunk back in his seat. He knew he had to deliver the goods.

Chapter 6

London 1996

Dr David Burry took a nip of whiskey to settle his frayed nerves. As the liquid left a pleasant burning sensation in his throat his mind took a quick trip back in time. He recalled his roll during the early stages of the Vietnam war. As a military weapons expert working for the British government, he was on secondment to the USA, to find out about Agent orange, a new type of

'herbicide weapon'. In that roll he became privy to research that horrified him. Under the Official Secrets Act he was forbidden to say anything. But he could no longer stay silent, despite the fear of being charged with treason.

David Burry knew his liberty was on the line. Yet he sat in the chair, pampered by make-up artists, waiting to be called. David knew Carly Flowers reputation for pulling no punches. The host of the "Inside Story" talk show, left many of her interviewees like quivering jellies. However, David had already decided to follow through with all his punches.

Carly, the beautiful red-headed television interviewer, Looking straight into the camera, began her interrogation. "It has been called the war that will not end. It is the war that continues to stalk and claim its victims decades after the last shots were fired. It is the war of rainbow herbicides, Agents Orange, Blue, White, Purple, Green and Pink. here with me today is Dr. David Burry who is going to give us the inside goss on these terrible weapons." Then, turning to David, she asked, "How do you feel about being one of the researchers who brought this diabolical poison into the world?"

David was not on TV to make the host look good. He had a mission to fulfil and very little time to carry it out. "This never-ending legacy of the war in Vietnam has created among many veterans and their families deep feelings of mistrust of the US government for its lack of honesty in studying the effects of the rainbow herbicides, particularly Agent Orange."

Carly responded, "Weren't you involved with a team of scientists who consciously covered up information and rigged test results, to mislead veteran organisations?"

"We were directed to manufacture our own results. You have no idea the pressure we were under."

"David, is it not true that on August 2, 1990, two veteran's groups filed suit in US District Court in Washington, DC, charging you federal scientists with cancelling an Agent Orange study mandated by Congress in 1979 because of pressure from the White House."

"The four year, \$43 million study was cancelled, according to the centres for Disease Control in Atlanta, because it could not accurately determine which veterans were exposed to the herbicide used to destroy vegetation in Vietnam."

"By saying 'according to' are you inferring a cover up?"

"Not a cover up as such. It was more likely a tactic to hold up the legal process."

"David, I don't think the American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America and other veteran's groups would agree with you. They are charging you scientists with a massive government cover-up on the issue of herbicide exposure because of the hundreds of millions of dollars in health care and disability claims that would have to be paid."

"Carly, that is why I am here - to put the record straight. The results of the scientific studies were rigged, because we were instructed to rig them."

"Who told you to rig the results?"

Ultimately, the White House, to exonerate the government which conducted the spraying and the chemical companies, such as Monstero, which produced the herbicides. Until there is a true study of the effects of Agent Orange- a study devoid of government interference and political considerations - the war of the rainbow herbicides will go on."

Carly decided it was time to get personal. “David, is this confession just your opinion, to solve your conscience?”

Keeping his cool, Dr. Burry replied, “Charges of a White House cover-up have been substantiated by a report from the House Government Operations Committee. That report, released August 9, 1990, charges that officials in the Reagan administration purposely 'controlled and obstructed' a federal Agent Orange study in 1987 because it did not want to admit government liability in cases involving the toxic herbicides.”

“Well, David, we know that government and industry cover-ups on Agent Orange are nothing new. They have been going on since before the herbicide was introduced in the jungles of Vietnam in the early 1960s. Now, in simple terms, as a scientist involved in the development of these herbicides, how does Agent Orange work?”

“Basically we give the plants cancer. We discovered that broad-leaf vegetation could be killed by causing the plants to experience sudden, uncontrolled growth. It was similar to giving the plants cancer by introducing specific chemicals. In some instances, deterioration of the vegetation was noticed within 24-48 hours of the introduction of the chemicals.”

Carly’s eyes widened in mock surprise. “That soon! Well I can see why it is an effective defoliant. Now tell me how did this herbicide become a weapon of war?”

“In the late 1940's, a Dr Kraus, found that heavy doses of the chemical acid 2,4-D could induce these growth spurts. Thinking this discovery might be of some use in the war effort, Kraus contacted the War Department. Army scientists tested the plant hormones but found no use for them before the end of the war.”

“Didn’t the army carry out experiments with these deadly defoliants?”

“Yes, and they continued to experiment with 2,4-D during the 1950s and late in the decade found a potent combination of chemicals which quickly found its way into the Army's chemical arsenal. Army scientists found that by mixing 2,4-D and another acid, 2,4,5-T and spraying it on plants, there would be an almost immediate negative effect on the foliage. What they didn't realise, or chose to ignore, was that 2,4,5-T contained dioxin, a useless by-product of herbicide production.”

“Dioxin is a dangerous toxin, is it not?”

“Yes, but it wasn't known at the time. In fact it took another 20 years for concern to be raised about dioxin, a chemical the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) called 'one of the most perplexing and potentially dangerous known to man'.”

“Dr. Burry, how does dioxin work?”

“Its toxic properties are enhanced by the fact that it can pass into the body through all major routes of entry, including the skin (by direct contact), the lungs (by inhaling dust, fumes or vapours), or through the mouth. Entry through any of these routes contributes to the total body burden. Contained in cell membranes are protein molecules, called receptors, that normally function to move substances into the cell. Dioxin avidly binds to these receptors and, as a result, is rapidly transported into the cytoplasm and nucleus of the cell, where it causes negative changes in the DNA.”

“How was this weapon used during the Vietnam war?”

“After minimal experimentation in 1961, a variety of chemical agents were shipped to Vietnam to aid in anti-guerrilla efforts. The chemicals were to be used to destroy food sources and eliminate foliage that concealed enemy troop movements.”

“Were you present in Vietnam when this weapon was used?”

“Yes, I was an observer on January 13, 1962, when three US Air Force C-123s left Tan Son Nhut airfield to begin Operation Hades. Their mission was to defoliate huge portions of South Vietnam's heavily forested countryside, in which Viet Cong guerrillas could easily hide. By September, 1962, the spraying program had intensified, despite an early lack of success, as US officials targeted the Ca Mau Peninsula, a scene of heavy communist activity. Hades aircraft sprayed more than 9,000 acres of mangrove forests there, defoliating approximately 95 percent of the targeted area. That mission was deemed a success and full approval was given for continuation of Operation Hades as the US stepped up its involvement in Vietnam.”

“You must have been pleased with the success.”

“Carly, I was horrified but I could not say anything.”

“Why were you horrified, David?”

“Because of the overkill. Over the next nine years, an estimated 12 million gallons of Agent Orange was sprayed throughout Vietnam. The US military command in Vietnam insisted publicly the defoliation program was militarily successful and had little adverse impact on the economy of the villagers who came into contact with it.”

“That was not true, was it?”

“No it was not. Military sprayed herbicides in Vietnam 6 to 25 times the rate recommended by Monstero the manufacturer. In 1962, 15,000 gallons of herbicide were sprayed throughout Vietnam. The following year that amount nearly quadrupled, as 59,000 gallons of chemicals were poured into the forests and streams. The amounts increased significantly after that: 175,000 gallons in 1964, 621,000 gallons in 1965 and 2.28 million gallons in 1966.”

“What effect did this spraying have on the pilots flying the missions.”

“I can't really answer that. All I know is that the pilots I talked to about this were proud of their proficiency in finding their target areas and dumping their loads. Some of the pilots were sickened when they saw the effects of their handiwork. Others adopted a grim fatalism about the job. Over the door of the ready room for Hades pilots at Tan Son Nhut Airport near Saigon hung a sign, saying:

'Only You Can Prevent Forests.'

“David, was Monstero made aware of the dangers of dioxins in humans?”

“Yes, and privately they were very concerned. Publicly they maintained dioxin occurred naturally in the environment and were not harmful to humans.”

“David, do you think the dioxins in Agent Orange are harmful to humans?”

“Of course I do, and so does Monstero.”

“But they claim it is not harmful to humans. Surely Monstero is not lying to us!” Carly responded, cynically.

“I saw a February 22, 1965 Monstero Chemical Corporation internal memorandum, which provided a summary of a meeting in which 13 executives discussed the potential hazards of dioxin in 2,4,5-T. Following that meeting, Monstero officials decided to meet with other makers of the chemical and formulate a stance on Agent Orange and dioxin.”

“What were their findings?”

“Three months later, a memo from Monstero was sent to Russ Mulholland, a manager with Monstero in Canada, informing him that dioxin was exceptionally toxic; it had a tremendous potential for producing chloracne (a skin disorder similar to acne) and systemic injury. There was a postscript to the letter that 'Under no circumstances may this letter be reproduced, shown or sent to anyone outside of Monstero'.”

Carly was ready for the kill. “David, as a scientist involved with this program, when did you become aware of the danger of Agent Orange to humans?”

“When we initiated the herbicide program in the 1960s, we were aware of the potential for damage due to dioxin contamination in the herbicide. We were even aware that the `military' formulation had a higher dioxin concentration than the `civilian' version, due to the lower cost and speed of manufacture. However, because the material was to be used on the `enemy,' none of us were overly concerned. We never considered a scenario in which our own personnel would become contaminated with the herbicide. And, if we had, we would have expected our own government to give assistance to veterans so contaminated.”

“Thank you David for your courageous honesty in this shameful matter”

“I had to do it,” David muttered, mostly to himself.

Carly, turned to the camera. “There you have it, straight from the scientists mouth. Perhaps Monstero Chemicals would like to come on “Inside Story” and explain why they covered up the results of the Dioxin research.”

Sir Frasier Chudley, Director of Operations with MI6, was in a bind. He knew that Dioxin was a worldwide problem, not just in Vietnam. But Russ Mulholland was right in his assertion that Dr David Burry had contravened the Official Secrets Act. Now the cat was out of the proverbial bag what was he to do about it? Monstero was a powerful company with allegiances high up in the White House, and good relations with the CIA was crucial to MI6's intelligence gathering. Of course Dr Burry had to be dealt with - but how? In the end he asked to be patched through to Commander Seally of Special Branch.

Dr. Andrea Burry, Professor of Egyptology at The University of Oxford, sat in the library preparing

her upcoming lecture. Now in her mid fifties, Andrea had a secure tenure at Oxon, the oldest university in the English-speaking world. She felt proud to be part of one of the world's leading academic institutions. She was aware that many Cambridge academics questioned Oxon's legitimacy, in its claim to be the the first English speaking university. But she had seen documents showing that its roots go back to at least 1167, although the exact date of foundation remains unclear. There was also substantial evidence of teaching going on there as far back as the 10th century. It was recorded that, following a dispute between students and townsfolk in 1209, some of the academics at Oxford fled north-east to the town of Cambridge, where the University of Cambridge was founded. The two universities (collectively known as 'Oxbridge') have since had a long history of competition with each other, as shown in their annual boat race on the Thames.

Deep in study, Andrea did not notice the young assistant librarian at first. Then, looking up, she said, "Oh, Julie, I was miles away."

"Julie, who was in awe of Professor Burry, holder of the Lady Wallis Budge Junior Research Fellowship, said, "Sorry to trouble you, Professor Burry but the Dean wants you to go to his office."

Andrea, wondering what it was about, placed her research notes in her old leather satchel (a special gift from her husband that she carried everywhere she went, even on her digs) and made her way to Dean Philips' office.

Upon entering the plush office, Andrea was surprised to see two police officers talking to the Dean. "You asked to see me," she said, with butterflies fluttering in her tummy.

Dean Philips said, "Andrea, please take a seat.," indicating one of the leather chairs on the deep pile carpet.

"What's this about?" she asked, a puzzled frown on her face, as she eyed the police sergeant.

"Mrs Burry, I have some bad news for you." the sergeant stated.

The words were chilling. "Bad news! What sort of bad news?" Andrea asked, nervously.

I'm afraid your husband is dead."

She stared at him as though he were an alien, no words forthcoming. 'Dead! He can't be!' her brain silently screamed.

"We will need you to identify the body," the sergeant pointed out.

His offsideer stayed silent. She was the stern efficient type.

Andrea's mind was a fog.

"Mrs. Burry, are you okay?" the sergeant asked.

'Okay! Of course I'm not okay' her mind replied. "Oh - yes. What was it you said?" she queried, her sense of reality being jerked back into the present.

"We will need you to come with us, to identify your husband's body."

Staring at the police officer, she nodded robot-like, "Yes, of course."

Dean Philips put a tentative hand on her shoulder. "I am deeply sorry for your loss, Andrea. Take as much time off as you need to deal with the arrangements."

"How did he die?" Andrea asked, looking at the face of her husband, as he laid on the table, in the morgue.

"We are not certain yet but the evidence points to him taking his own life." The sergeant answered.

"No, I don't believe it. he had too much to live for!" Andrea argued.

It was a normal reaction to the death of a loved one. Nobody wanted to believe their spouse killed themselves. There were too many unanswered questions, too much doubt, too much guilt. "All I can say is that's what the evidence suggests."

Turning on the police officer, Andrea demanded, "What evidence, sergeant?"

"Sorry Mrs Burry but that information cannot be divulged at present."

As soon as Sir Frasier Chudley received the news, he called in Gail Peters, a British Government spokesperson. handing her the notes on Dr Burry's alleged suicide, he said, "This needs to be dealt with expeditiously, with no comeback on the government."

Gail, one of the best spin doctors, in the business, asked, "So how do we play it?"

"Oh, I would think something like the tragic death of a much respected but misguided, military scientist."

At the news conference she went on the offensive saying, "Dr. Burry took his life because he was so-troubled over his treachery in divulging questionable information under the Official Secrets Act. She stated, "His involvement with 'Inside Story' on BBC TV had thrust the publicity-shy scientist into a media storm. Just weeks later, the 59-year-old father of two was found slumped under a tree five miles from his home in Abingdon, Oxfordshire."

"Is there any truth in the rumour that his death is related to the interview he gave on 'Inside Story,' a journalist asked.

"I cannot comment on that. The Government is deeply shocked to lose this brilliant scientist and is setting up an inquiry to look at the events leading to his death."

Another reporter asked, "Is it true that Monstero Chemicals, the US military and the White House all conspired to stop the truth about Agent Orange coming to light?"

Gail smiled sweetly. "Dr. Burry was a well-meaning but deeply disturbed scientist, who, when the pressure became too great, confused fantasy with reality. He will be sorely missed."

"That bitch knows nothing about him!" Andrea spat out, as she watched the news item concerning David's death.

Colin Burry put his arm around his mother. “She is just a stooge working for the government. She is paid to tell lies to put them in a good light.”

“He would not commit suicide,” she said, tearfully.

“Let’s wait and see what the inquiry reveals,’ her son said, trying to calm her.

“have you heard from Richard yet?”

“Yes, mother, He e-mailed me saying his plane will arrive 6 am tomorrow. then he said,

“Dad was very brave to do what he did.”

“Yes,” she sniffled, “He gave his life for his integrity and I will not rest until I find out who had him killed.”

Looking his mother in the eye, Colin said, “Mother, what he divulged during the interview may have proved too much for him to live with. I never realised the pain and guilt he was carrying, did you?”

“He never spoke about it to me. It would have been a terrible burden for him to carry but I still think he had much too much to live for. He would not have taken his life.”

Two significant things happened for Andrea Burry the same day. Page three in the newspaper informed readers that following a two month probe into the death of Dr. David Burry, Lord Hatten concluded that the scientist had taken his own life. His Lordship stated that Dr. Burry was under great pressure and, according to a message left on his computer, he regretted his actions in taking part in the television interview. Andrea screwed the paper up in disgust. They had taken a hero and turned him into a weak unbalanced coward, a man to be pitied, and she would not have it. The second significant event that day presented her with a platform to air her views. A woman from ‘Inside Story’ invited her on the program.

Carly Flowers was ready for what promised to be her highest rating show to date. Everybody would be glued to their seats to watch the interview off the century, she reckoned. She began by saying, “On an earlier program I had the great pleasure to talk to a scientist who came forward to talk to us about government cover ups, concerning the defoliant Agent Orange. Sadly he cannot be here tonight because he died. However, his widow is with us tonight to tell us her story. Please give a big hand for Mrs. Andrea Burry.”

After the tumultuous applause of the studio audience died down, Carly asked, “Mrs Burry, or may I call you Andrea?”

“Its professor Burry actually, but you can call me Andrea.”

“Very well Andrea, what was your reaction when you first heard about your husband’s suicide?”

“That is was not suicide.”

“Oh, I thought the police report stated that he had cut his wrists and bled to death.”

Andrea responded, “His wrists were cut, but there is no evidence he did it himself.”

“Are you suggesting somebody else cut his wrists.”

“If he didn’t do it himself then, yes, that would be the logical answer.”

“So, Andrea, you don’t believe in Lord Hatten’s conclusions concerning your husband’s death.”

“No I do not. If what David said to was true, he contravened the oath of the Official Secrets Act, which, as a military scientist, he had to sign. the powers that be do not take kindly to people who divulge official secrets.”

“Are you suggesting that the British Government was behind your husband’s death?”

Andrea knew she had to tread carefully. “Carly, what I am saying is I know my husband did not commit suicide.”

“How can you know that?”

“He had too much to live for. For a start one our our son’s is getting married soon and he would not have wanted to miss that for the world.”

Carly didn't want to go there. She want to have her viewers getting schmaltzy over the family's loss. She had to get her interview back on track. “Andrea, as David’s wife you probably knew him as well as anybody.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“So how did you feel about the internal turmoil he must have been going through?” Andrea was floored. She could not say he hadn’t told her and that she was too tied up in her work to pick up on his subtle distress signals. Yet, she did not want to lie.

“Carly, it happened so long ago we don’t discuss it much these days.”

“Yet, what he had been part of, still troubled him so deeply that he had to purge his soul.”

“Yes, that would seem to be so.”

“Did he not tell you about the interview?”

“No, as far as I know he told nobody.”

“Why would your husband not discuss such an important thing with you?”

Andrea sighed, “I guess we will never know the answer to that one.”

Carly smiled sweetly, “Now that David has been put to rest what will you do?”

“In what respect, Carly?”

“Will you pursue an enquiry?”

“I won't rest until I am satisfied about the cause of his death.”

Chapter 7

Oxon University 1997

Andrea Burry lost all enthusiasm for her research and, since her husband's untimely death, generally found life difficult to cope with. But it was 6 months since David's funeral and time for her to return to the hallowed halls of academia.

Andrea stood, looking at the Shelley memorial, something she always did when returning to Oxon. It was a kind of private ritual. Erected at University College in 1892-3, it laid in the west front quad of the college, under a dome painted with stars. Although it was close to The High Street, it seemed to be in another world. It wasn't that Andrea considered the Percy Bysshe Shelley sculpture to be a magnificent work of art, it was the irony of the memorial that attracted her. The domed memorial was intended for the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. Oddly enough, though, Shelley's memorial is placed in the college from which he was sent down from in 1811 for publishing a "scandalous" document "The Necessity of Atheism", which he wrote with his friend Jefferson Hogg. she looked at her watch. It was time for her to get back in harness.

While walking to the faculty of Archaeology, Andrea was intercepted by the prim Mrs Smeech, the Dean's secretary. Without any hellos or how are you? she announced curtly, "Dean Philips wants to see you."

Memories of the last time she was summoned to his office brought tears to her eyes. She brushed them away. He probably just wants to welcome me back, she reasoned, as she approached his domain. She walked in, "Mrs Smeech said you wanted to see me, Dean." She then noticed the other person in the room.

"Hello Andrea. It's wonderful to see you back among us." Then, indicating his guest, he announced, "this is Joseph Minter MP."

"Acknowledging the tall thin man in the navy pinstripe suit," she said, "Hello."

Dean Philips beamed, saying, "Joseph has some good news for you."

"You've found my husband's killer?"

Minter paled. "No, it's about your grant submission."

"Grant submission!" she said, surprised. "Which one, I have applied for many."

"The Giza Plateau one. The board has decided to grant it to you."

Andrea could not believe it. Three years ago she had put the application in, and here it was, approved. "I don't know what to say," she said, catching her breath.

"There is a proviso, Andrea," Dean Philips mentioned.

"There always are conditions."

Joseph Minter explained, “You are not to make any more public pronouncements, concerning your husband's death.”

Andrea's elation turned sour. “So this is a keep quiet grant,” Andrea retorted, angrily.

Minter looked uncomfortable.

Dean Philips came to his rescue. “Andrea, it is nothing of the sort. Besides you have been pushing to get back to Egypt, so I think you ought to be a bit more gracious about it.”

She saw red. “Do you now? Well let me tell you what I think...”

The Dean interjected, “... Andrea, can I talk to you in private?”

Taken aback, she answered, “well, yes, I suppose so.”

Turning to the politician Dean Philips said, “Excuse us for a few minutes.”

The chill factor in the air calmed the pair down, as they perambulated around the quadrangle. Dean Philips said, “Please don't take this the wrong way, Andrea. I know you have been going through a lot of emotional stress but biting the hand that is feeding you is not going to help. For whatever reason you are being offered the opportunity to fulfil your dream. If your keeping silent about your theories to do with David's death is part of the deal, then so be it. You could even see it as part of David's legacy to you.”

Andrea smiled thinly, “Dean, you've always been fair to me and your council has more often than not turned out to be wise. I don't want to blow my one and only chance of fulfilling my dream, as you put it, but he got my back up because of the callous way he thinks he can use my husband's death as a bargaining chip.”

“Dean Philips placed a friendly arm around her shoulder. “Take my advice and go to Egypt.”

“I haven't given up, my love,” Andrea spoke to the photograph they had taken on her honeymoon. “I'm sure you will understand I cannot afford to miss this opportunity. At long last I am able to pursue my goal and look for evidence of the fabled 'Hall Of Records'. She needed the information to back up her radical theory that the Great Pyramid was actually built as a huge power station discharging energy from the natural grid.

Chapter 8

1975 -1990 Vietnam War

Lieutenant Philip Ridgard was among the veterans returning from Vietnam in 1975. Although they had done their duty for their country there were no tick-a-tape parades to welcome them home. Instead, they were returned to the UK, during the hours of darkness, under a cloud of silence and secrecy. Even his wife and young son were not aware of his arrival.

Being back in England seemed quite bizarre and surreal to him. Only a few hours before he was in Saigon, waiting to be shipped out, the echo of machine-gun fire still in his ears. As the CV-2 Caribou landed at Mildenhall US air base, Philip wondered why the only reception committee was a few air force types and military police. Certainly, it had been a dirty war and although he did not return a victor, he was angry that even the USAF treated them like pariahs.

Then, after his demobbing, Philip, like other Viet Vets, was faced with ostracising and condemnation of peace-niks, as well as other ignorant sectors of civilian population. Despite being drafted to fight he was blamed for the part he played in the conflict. Now England seemed to be the alien land, with a different enemy, one he could not get used to. An enemy he saw each time he looked in the mirror. He realised that all returned servicemen carry remnants of the war back with them, locked away inside their psyches. Somewhere in this strange sense of reality was the longing to be reunited with his wife Joan and his little son, Alan. He longed to see their beautiful faces. Yet, ironically, it was when he looked into their eyes that the terrifying images of the war came flooding back. It had something to do with contrasting lifestyles. Philip Ridgard needed them to maintain his sanity, yet their very peaceful presence, by contrast, reminded him of the horrors he thought he had left behind.

They embraced and tears flowed down their faces, so pleased were they to be reunited. Philip then picked up Alan hugging him tight. "I will never abandon you again," he pledged. Looking about him at familiar surroundings, he sighed, "Man, it's great to be back home."

For Philip, it was good to be back home, at first. Then the nightmares began to creep in. He had always been a light sleeper, but, upon his return and he tended to get nervous when alone at night, which often occurred, when Joan was on night-shift at the hospital, where she worked as a theatre nurse. Apart from the increasing night terrors, he found feelings of anger and betrayal creeping up on him. As a serving NCO in bomber command, he did not question his role in holding back the Communist hordes. That was until he found out Americans were not being told the true story. Philip realised the real reason for the Vietnam War was to take another piece of real estate in the Cold War game of Monopoly with the Soviet Union. Even worse, the Vietnam fiasco was, to a very large extent, about drug trafficking, with the CIA, importing cocaine and heroin into America.

Under the Commanding officer of Tan Son Nhut airfield, from where the C-123s left to kill the jungles and crops, in 'Operation Hades' (later called Operation Ranch Hand) Lieutenant Ridgard became exposed to Agent Orange. This resulted in patches of dermatitis on his skin, adding to his psychological and emotional discomfort. He didn't know it at the time, but many of his health problems, including repetitive nightmares, later became bunched together as post-traumatic stress disorder. One of the worst aspects of coping with everyday life was lack of support from the government. Sure, there was a military pension to tide him over but Joan was the major bread winner of the family, yet another thing to goad him.

Philip tried to spend quality time with his young son but his hatred for the system that cast him into the war machine, filled most of his thoughts. As much as he desperately needed to communicate, on an emotional level, with his family, his days were filled with suicidal thoughts and suppressed anger. He desperately yearned for anything to stop the gnawing pain he couldn't even share with his family. His anger and frustration at being a helpless soul in a soulless system that had destroyed his life but left him alive, led to anger and rows with Joan, the last person he wanted to hit out at. His mood swings kept Alan at a distance, yet he did not want to abandon his son again. Eventually, in his confused state, it seemed to Philip that his presence at home was destroying his family, yet he needed them more than anything in the world.

Following a frustrating day of searching for work, Philip could not stand going home. He couldn't handle Joan's sadness and the look of resentment in his son's eyes. He was not a good father and he was a terrible husband, yet he could not do anything about it. It was as though he were controlled by some sort of demon that was hell bent on destroying him and everything he loved. In the end the only way he could block out his anxieties was to fight the demon within with the demon drink. He met a couple of Viet Vets, members of a bikie gang called the 'Marauders', in his local pub. They invited him to their halfway house, where 6 of them lived. Their motto was 'Fuck you Uncle Sam,

we'll look after ourselves'. Philip liked their attitude.

For Joan, it was the last straw. The arguments, the mood swings, and even the drinking, she could tolerate, but having to put up with his beer guzzling, bikie buddies, in her home, proved too much. She did not want Alan to be exposed to such bad behaviour. Sure her husband was suffering some kind of post war trauma. As a nurse she understood that, but he just had to pull himself together before he split the family apart. She loved her husband and would do anything to support him, but he had given up on himself. Now he had a motorbike and he spent more time with other Viet Vets than he did with his family. Joan did not know what to do for the best. In the end she gave him an ultimatum. It was either her and Alan, or the bikies; he could not have both. It was a risk she had to take. She looked at the once proud Air Force Corporal, as he made his decision. Joan cried that night, not so much for her but for the way Alan had been abandoned by his father all over again.

Young Alan was silent and unmoved when his mother told him his dad had left them, this time not for a noble cause. At first it did not seem to make much difference. It had been a long time since his father had spent meaningful and happy times with him. He was not the father he used to know.

Later, when Alan Ridgard was in his teens, he became interested in journalism and he researched and wrote an article on 'Viet Vet Fathers gone AWOL', in which he pointed out that the failure of the Government to give fathers proper medical treatment and support programs, was a major contributing factor in them deserting their children. Alan, like most young people, grew up without any real interest in politics. That was grown-ups boring stuff - nothing to do with kids. For some irrational reason there was the assumption that the government had his interests at heart. As Alan matured he realised it was not the case. In fact sometimes it seemed to be just the opposite, as shown by the cavalier way in which his father, and other Viet vets, were virtually abandoned for not winning a dishonourable, unwinnable war. Yet, despite that, he was still drawn to the army.

Having completed the first phase of selection, known as the endurance, fitness and navigation, or 'the hills' stage, Private Alan Ridgard was accepted into the British SAS. But that was just the start. During this period of training Alan not only had his physical fitness tested to the limit, but also his mental stamina, determination and self-reliance.

The hills stage lasted three weeks, during which time the candidate's marched across the Brecon Beacons and Black Hills of South Wales, while carrying ever-increasingly-heavy backpacks over a series of long timed hikes, navigated between checkpoints.

Having passed stage 1, which was no mean feat as most candidates fall at the first hurdle. Out of the intake of 250 candidates who enrolled with him, the gruelling selection process weeded out all but 20. Next, he was introduced to jungle training, which took place in Belize, in the heart of deep jungles. He had to learn the basics of surviving and patrolling in the harsh conditions. He, and three other recruits, had to live for weeks behind enemy lines, living on rations. Alan soon discovered that Jungle training weeded out those who couldn't handle the self-discipline required to keep themselves and their kit in good condition whilst on long range patrol in difficult conditions. Special Forces teams need men who can work under relentless pressure, in horrendous environments for weeks on end, without a lifeline back to home base.

The small number of candidates who were left now entered the final phase of selection. The likelihood of a special operation going wrong behind enemy lines is quite high, given the risks involved. The SAS wanted soldiers who have the wherewithal and spirit required to escape and evade capture and resist interrogation.

For the escape and evasion portion of the course, Alan and the remaining candidates were given

brief instructions on appropriate techniques. This included talks from former POWs or special forces soldiers who have been in E&E situations in the real world.

Next, Alan, as group leader, and the few with him, including a Private Walcott, were let loose in the countryside, wearing World War 2 vintage coats, with instructions to make their way to a series of way-points without being captured by the hunter force of other soldiers. This portion lasted for 3 days after which, captured or not, all candidates report for debriefing. Unbeknown to Alan, Private Walcott was jealous of his team leader role, a jealousy that simmered away in the background.

Chapter 9

London 1997

Jerry Austerberry entered the portals of the famous Sheridan Club. Once he was inside the establishment, he could not tell the Sheridan club from any other. All such buildings were furnished like grand private houses, with thick carpets, marble fireplaces, rich upholstery, beautiful looking glassware and extremely comfortable chairs. Jerry, who was not a member, only frequented such establishments as a guest of his older, more famous brother, Tim. He found his sibling lounging in a comfortable leather recliner, a brandy in one hand and a cigar in the other

“Take a seat Jerry and be pampered for a while. What would you like to drink?”

“A single malt would be good,” Jerry answered, sitting opposite his brother.

“How’s it going down at the ‘Commons?’”

“In what respect?”

“The dome, old man, what else?”

“I didn’t know you had an involvement.”

“Only a minor one - as a favour really.”

“Minter seems to be on top of it. He’s taken to the arts portfolio like a duck to water.”

“Of course he has. That’s why we chose him?”

“What do you mean, you chose him?”

Tim brushed it off. “Just a joke old man.”

Jerry’s drink arrived on a silver tray. “I have a favour to ask, Tim.”

“What sort of favour?” the elder brother asked, suspiciously.

“Remember my friend and colleague, Dr Burry?”

“Vaguely. Wasn’t he the one to spilled the beans on Monstero and the White House over that Agent Orange stuff?”

“He was also the one who’s death was covered up by the Home Office.”

“That’s quite an accusation. Can you back it up?”

“Only with circumstantial evidence at present.”

Tim Austerberry winced, at a sharp pain in his gut. “So where do I come in this saga?”

“Are you Okay?”

“Of course I am not okay. I’ve got bloody colon cancer, but I’ll survive for now. So what is this favour?”

“I need a copy of the original police report.”

“Why?”

Jerry lightly tapped the side of his nose.

Tim whistled through his teeth. “And just how am I supposed to obtain that?”

“You rub shoulders with Lord Hatten. He would have to have a copy.”

Tim steepled his fingers and pondered his brother’s request. “Get in with Minter. Keep me up to date with all Millennium Dome developments and I will procure your report for you.”

“It’s a deal.”

Having achieved what he met his brother for, Jerry just had to suffer a a blown out lunch and a number of snifters, before escaping back to the House of Commons. He wasn’t really listening to his brother drone on about the gong, Nelson Mandela had presented him with for business excellence in South Africa. He was secretly visualising having the police report in his hands.

Jerry checked his messages. There were no messages from his brother. He knew Tim did not liked to be rushed, but time was of the essence. He checked to see if any contacts from his MI6 consulting days knew anything about the report. Jerry had Joined MI6 after leaving the Cold stream Guards. He had assured a top executive position in Longland's but he needed a greater challenge than the private sector offered him. He later became a recruiting officer, which was when he first met David Burry. Jerry’s job was to screen people for their potential as would-be spies. He was very proficient in helping applicants develop their strengths, whether in operations, intelligence analysis, management, data handling or security. David, coming from a scientific background, was best suited to analysis.

Much to Jerry's dismay his political career had overshadowed his time at 6. He had been out of the loop too long. There was no one from 6 he could call on. He dialled his brother’s mobile phone. There was no answer. He left another message.

Jerry Austerberry read the article while waiting to to get a flu injection. He had never looked at 'High Light' magazine before, but it seemed the most interesting of a mundane magazine pile. After reading 'The Real Vietnam War' by Alan Ridgard, a short two page article, he decided to contact the author. But the Magazine was quite old and the writer could be anywhere. A quick call to High Light did not help, as the magazine had no record of him since the article. He phoned 6 again but this time the records department. They kept tabs on anyone who wrote articles about such things as wars. Yes, there was a file on him. He was ex SAS and now worked in the private sector for a firm called Intel-Inc. The proprietor was a Karl Haas.

Life is full of ironies, he mused to himself. If he hadn’t gone to the doctor for the jab, and if the magazine had not been in the pile; and if he had not chosen the magazine, etc. He contacted Intel-Inc and asked for Alan Ridgard. He was told Mr Ridgard was not available. He left a message for him saying he had important information to tell him, concerning David Burry. He could understand

why the receptionist was reticent about giving out personal information. Yes, he would send his details so they could be passed on to Alan Ridgard.

Alan Ridgard chose the Fresco Coffee bar, a great little cafe for light refreshments and meetings, and not too busy, except at lunch times. It is conveniently situated next to the Canary Wharf DLR station concourse. Being open plan it was easy to see who was listening nearby. The message intrigued him. How did the messenger know he was interested in what happened to David Burry? He watched the middle aged man with the copy of High Light under his arm walk by. Alan Ridgard called out, Hi Mr Austerberry, I'm over here at the bar."

Jerry turned around and, seeing the guy who looked a bit like a young Paul Newman beckoning him, took a bar stool next to him, cradling a leather briefcase in his lap, he said, "Mr Ridgard, I was very impressed with your Vietnam article."

For Alan that was ancient history, a kind of absent father self therapy. "You said you had something to help me with my case. What case would that be?"

6 had recorded Alan's interest in David Burry's death. "Dr David Burry."

Alan wondered how the hell this guy knew that and what his angle was. "So how do you think you can help?"

"I think we ought to go somewhere a bit more private," Jerry said, sliding off the stool.

Once they were seated in a corner of the cafe, Alan sipped his latte and listened as Jerry Austerberry regaled the background to David Burry's death. The story was more interesting than Alan had anticipated. Afterwards he asked, "What makes you think he didn't commit suicide?"

"For a start he would have been the only person that year to have successfully killed themselves with a blunt gardening knife."

"If somebody wanted to make it look like suicide why would they leave a blunt knife at the scene?"

"I've asked myself that question, Alan. The only thing I can suggest is that it was the only knife to hand at the time.

"Didn't you say his body found in the woods?"

"Yes, why?"

"Why would he have had a blunt knife with him?"

"Maybe he didn't," Jerry shrugged.

"Somebody did, which brings me back to my original question..."

Jerry interjected, "... His friend and family all attested to the fact that David was not the suicidal type, especially after he bared his soul on that TV program."

"That's an emotional response, not a logical one. Nobody can know if a another person is suicidal."

"True, I guess, but Emails and minutes of meetings showed him to be acting normally."

“Look Jerry, I’m no psychologist but suicidal people tend to be very good at covering up their intention to take their lives.”

“He was looking forward to his son’s up-coming wedding. He just had so much to live for, so why would he?...”

“...I’m sorry Jerry but nothing you have said convinces me that David Burry did not kill himself.”

Jerry, exasperated, asked, “What about the painkillers he is said to have taken? Even the coroners report said the levels found in his stomach were incompatible with his supposed consumption. Also the police investigation said they found a bottle of water beside his body, yet the people who found him had no recollection of it.”

Alan Ridgard’s eyes widened. “Are you suggesting the police planted that piece of evidence to make it look as though he killed himself?”

“Somebody did, Alan. Somebody was trying to cover up a serious crime.”

Alan ordered more coffee, then turning to Jerry, he said, “I’m sorry, but this is too tenuous for me. My client needs something solid. Besides, once he said what he said the damage, if any, was done. For, whoever, to have him killed would only have added credibility to his accusations.”

Jerry leaned closer to the investigator. “I’m not talking about the TV interview. I am referring to that business with Peter Manderson.”

Alan Ridgard became interested. “What did David have to do with that?”

“David was consistently a thorn in the Government's side. He was the mystery whistle-blower who revealed former minister, Peter Manderson's links to the Hindujala brothers, who were granted British passports shortly after investing money in the Millennium Dome.”

Alan Ridgard’s ears pricked up. The Millennium Dome was to be the Government’s masterpiece for the up-coming Millennium celebrations. “How would he have been privy to such back door deals?” he asked.

“I don’t know the answer to that. All I know is that any sane and reasonable person looking at the evidence would, at the very least, agree that further investigation is warranted.”

“If it wasn't suicide, then clearly Dr Burry was murdered. So who do you think had him killed?”

“My aim is to find out exactly what happened. Frankly, there is more than enough cause to reopen the inquest.”

“This is all very fascinating but it doesn’t get us any closer to the truth.”

Jerry leaned forward. “Look Alan, three senior doctors claimed the official cause of death - a severed ulnar artery in the wrist - was extremely unlikely to be fatal. Arteries in the wrist are of matchstick thickness and severing them does not lead to life-threatening blood loss.”

“Did they give this evidence at the inquest?”

“Yes, but Lord Hatten glossed over it. All three doctors concurred that said that if David had

intended suicide he would have cut a larger artery, ensuring a swift death.”

Alan countered, “Nevertheless, Dr Burry was facing intense pressure over his exposure as the BBC source. Therefore depression, could well have been a major contributing factor that could have driven him to suicide.”

“Alan, I have known the man for a long time. Why, just two days before his death, he made jokes at a Government committee meeting. Also, on the day he disappeared, he spoke of returning to Vietnam in the future.”

“Were you at this meeting?”

“No, but a close colleague of mine was there and...”

“...Who is this colleague?”

“He doesn’t want his name divulged.”

The investigator leaned back, “That’s not much use then, is it?”

“There’s one other clincher. He was a member of the Baha’i faith, which forbids suicide, and one of his sons was about to marry into the faith.”

Alan Ridgard looked straight at Jerry. “This is all very interesting but there is not enough factual information.”

Jerry grabbed his briefcase and stood up. “I will find someone who will take me seriously. I doubt we will meet again.”

Chapter 10

London 1997

Detective Inspector John Schuman tossed the report on his cluttered desk. “Get me Commander Walsh,” he barked into his intercom. Jonathon Latham QC was a very tough and cunning advocate, and Special Branch was going to have a tough time extricating himself from the mess it had found itself in.

His phone rang. He picked up the receiver.

“MI5, Commander Walsh on line for you sir,” the desk officer announced.

“Hello Bernard, good of you to call back.”

“What is it John?”

“Why wasn’t I kept in the loop about his Tamil thing?”

“What do you mean old man? The meetings took place in your neck of the woods.”

“The ‘Yard’ is a bloody big building. I don’t know everything that goes on here. Now, you are going to have to bring me up to scratch before the news-hounds start knocking down my door.”

“Don’t worry old boy. Well put the fear of god up them with phrases like ‘national security’, ‘need to know only’ and the Official Secrets Act. etc.”

The Superintendent responded, “They have been buying and supplying bomb-making equipment for Tamil Ealam’s mob. They may well have been conducting their illegal affairs from these offices, and you tell me not to worry!”

“We will find our where the leak came from.”

“I am reminded of bolting horses and unlocked stable doors.”

“We still need to find the bastard.” Having dealt with that, John finds he has another call waiting. “Yes, what do you want?” he asked, uninterested.

“DI Schuman, I have fresh information about the death of Dr David Burry.”

“How did you get my name, Mr?”

“Ridgard - Alan Ridgard. Now, I believe you were the officer heading up the investigation.”

John became annoyed. “The verdict has been made and I have nothing further to say on the subject.”

“Not even about the questionable evidence that has come to light?”

“What questionable evidence?”

“A water bottle allegedly found at the scene of the crime, sorry, suicide.”

“Who are you? Are you a journalist?”

“No, I work for a private client who has an interest in the cover-up.”

“There was no cover-up.”

“Then, how do you explain that two independent witnesses, who reported the incident, claim there was no such bottle?”

“Mr Ridgard, you would be surprised the number of witnesses with almost non existent powers of observation. We, on the other hand, are trained to be good observers.”

“So the witnesses were liars?”

“The witnesses had just discovered a dead body in the woods. They would have been in shock. A water bottle would be the least of their concerns.”

Alan was not getting anywhere. “So, you are certain the water bottle was by the body when you arrived at the scene.”

“Of course.” With that he slammed down the phone. It was not a good day.

The phone went dead in Alan's hand. So, had he pressed some buttons or was the Senior police

officer speaking the truth? As far as he was concerned the story was dead in the water. Just then his ears pricked up as he heard a news caster speaking on the radio. He could not believe what he was hearing. The voice said, "Jerry Austerberry, Liberal Democrat and ex MI6 officer, was discovered dead at his home today. Alongside Mr Austerberry's body was the .22 calibre rifle that had fired the fatal bullets. Despite the killing being set up to look like suicide, the position of the wounds indicated it would have been physically impossible for them to have been self-inflicted. Police and other Authorities, who initially ruled Austerberry's death a suicide, are revising their position in the light of this new evidence."

Alan went ice cold. Perhaps Jerry Austerberry had been correct after all. However, although his death still did not prove that David was murdered it certainly lent credence to the story. Having only listened to part of the story, Alan Mentally kicked himself. It was too late now, as the source was dead.

Chapter 11

1999 Cairo

Karl Haas' first impression of Cairo was from the air. Home to some 12 million people, the sprawling city had the appearance of a barren, sand coloured metropolis, Most of the vast city's building seemed to display same hues and tones as the endless surrounding desert that seemed to be encroaching on it, like some slow, Incoming tide.

Dissected by the the serpentine River Nile, the life source of and life giver to Egypt for thousands of years, Cairo abounded with history and mystery. Ancient Egypt was back in vogue with the major TV networks, as speculation of more hidden passages and ancient treasures became known to the wider world. Karl had long wanted to see the pyramids and and the Valley of the Kings, but he was not there to play the tourist. He was primarily there to gather intelligence about a disruptive and recently murderous terrorist cell. Normally he would send one of his employees to carry out the mission but his people were all busy on other cases. Besides, he was to link up with Alan Ridgard, who had already prepared the groundwork for the case prior to his arrival

Now he was actually in the mystical land of the ancient and long-gone Pharaohs, he became excited. He knew very little about the assignment his client had given him. Ironically, he was to link up with a Professor Andrea Burry, an Egyptologist, a former client herself. This time she played a different role in his investigations. Funny how things can work out sometimes, he thought, as his plane hit the tarmac.

There was the normal hold-up at the four lane custom check as queues of tired travellers, in a dazed state, trudged slowly forward, clutching documents ready to be stamped. Karl eventually reached one of the four booths where a white uniformed officials checked his passport and visas, before ushering him through to arrivals.

The arrivals lounge, was bustling with excitement as passengers matched up with their waiting entourage's. He scanned the crowds for his contact among the many tour guides and chauffeurs waiting to greet their charges. Amid the array of hand-held signs he spotted one sporting the word 'Intel-Inc'. The skinny young man holding the crude cardboard sign grinned cheesely as Karl approached him.

With his luggage bundled into the boot of an aging Mercedes. Karl put his life in Allah's hands as his driver, Dr Burry's assistant, negotiated the lanes of chaotic traffic. The young driver's constant emergency braking, owing to vehicles ahead pushing into the hazardous traffic flow, had him on the edge of his seat. White uniformed traffic police, unable to do anything about the motoring chaos,

kept themselves looking useful by directing the mass of vehicles in the direction the flow was already travelling. To Karl it looked much like a mass resurrection from the wreckers yard, as un-roadworthy vehicles pushed and shoved their way to the next chaotic intersection. Old, full dilapidated buses stopped to squeeze in yet more passengers, while ancient black and white Fiat taxi's zipped in and out of the many lanes in their haste to grab their next fare.

Eventually Karl's driver left the main highway and drove through much narrower suburban streets, past irrigation canals that were mostly stagnant water filled with all kinds of rubbish and other human and animal detritus. Artistically decorated shops advertised their wares as children played outside in the afternoon heat. "Not far now sir", the young driver, Ali, said, breaking the silence of the journey, as they drive through an older part of the city.

The Egyptologist, Karl discovered, leased a classy apartment, over-looking Giza Plateau. From her balcony he saw them for the very first time in his life - the Pyramids and the Sphinx. He was awestruck by their towering splendour, their enduring mystery and geometrical simplicity. As he looked out at the sprawl of Giza, he espied crows resting in the branches of Sycamores while majestic Kites soared about eucalyptus trees. Clouds of pigeons flew above cupolas, domes and minarets as the recordings of muezzins called the faithful to prayer. In the far distance Karl could just make out the distant lateen sails of feluccas as they sailed up and down the great river Nile.

Professor Burry fussed over the harried, bearded man, who put her in the mind of a bearded Liam Neeson, offering him cold hibiscus tea and getting him comfortable. "How was your flight?" she asked as he ate his second slice of fig cake.

Although she had been his client, Karl had never actually met her. All dealings had been carried out through her solicitor. So she wasn't the dowdy academic type he expected. She was bright and attractive, for a hard-working woman in her fifties. Her chirpiness made him feel at ease. "Smooth and reasonably comfortable," he replied, adding, "But I can't say the same for the horrendous drive here.

"Have you been to Egypt before, Mr Haas?"

"Please call me Karl, and no, I haven't been here before. I wish I had time to visit the wonderful architectural antiquities but pressure of work precludes from doing so."

She looked at him quizzically. "And what is your work here?"

"I need intelligence on a group of activists operating here, they are called Al Haab."

She laughed lightly. "Why on earth would you be interested in them?"

"I'm not but my client is."

"How am I supposed to help?"

He showed her a photo of a handsome young man. "Do you know him, Professor?"

"Yes, he has assisted me on digs, why?"

"Because he is known to have links with Al Haab."

She huffed, "Well I know nothing about that."

Sensing she was being protective of him, like some mother hen over her chicks, he softened, “We believe a prominent English person is running this group but we don't know why. I just want to question Mr Hafiz to find out.”

“You know who it is, then.”

“We have a very good idea of his identity but we cannot figure out what he would have to gain by bank-rolling a terrorist group.”

She looked out of her window, at the pyramids in the dusty distance. Then she turned to face the intelligence man. “Even if Abdul is involved with this group it would be at a very basic level. I seriously doubt he would have any useful information about the internal running of the operation.”

Karl smiled “You are probably right but we have to cover all bases. You of all people would understand that.”

She jotted down some details on a piece of paper. “This is where we will be working tomorrow.”

Karl pocketed the address. “Thank you Professor,” he enthused. You have been a great help.”

Alan met up with Karl at the southern tip of Roda Island, between the Manasterly Palace and the Um Kalthoum Museum. “This well was used to measure the height of the Nile through the course of its annual fluctuations,” Alan mentioned, as they walked around the Nilometer grounds.

“I had a meeting with Andrea Burry. I'm going to her dig tomorrow, to see Abdul Hafiz.”

Alan felt the cool breeze blowing off the water. “Why him? He's just small fry.”

“I have intelligence that he is the ambitious type. So, have you found out what they are up to?”

“Al Haab – no, not yet. But after Luxor it's going to be serious.”

“Can you make an educated guess?”

“Something to do with Giza. That's where the crowds will be gathering on Millennium Eve.”

“There'll be plenty of rich bums on seats that night – an anarchist's dream.”

The taxi driver dropped Karl off near the Step Pyramid in Saqqara. A warm wind was blowing and by the time he had traversed the open space to where some activity was taking place, he became dehydrated. He took a pull on his water flask and looked around for Professor Burry. Then he saw her, the only woman among a handful of Arabs. “Good morning Professor,” he greeted, gaining her attention.

She turned, “Oh! Mr Haas.” She took him aside, “Before I take you to Abdul there are certain rules.”

“Rules Professor?”

“Yes. This is my domain here and if you want my help you need to respect that.”

“OK. Now which one is he?”

“First, you will only speak with Abdul – none of the others and you will not disrupt the work.”

“OK, I agree, now where is he?”

“Finally, you will not treat Abdul as a suspect. I don't want your enquiry to spoil his work.”

Karl waited while Andrea spoke privately with Abdul, who looked over in his direction. Words were exchanged, then she beckoned him over. He approached the pair, wishing he had a sun hat, there being no shade to speak of. Abdul was suitably turbaned.

“The Professor says you want to ask questions. About what?”

“Azhar Fami. Where can I find him?”

Abdul stared at the well-dressed, bearded stranger. He became defensive. “I know no one of that name.”

Karl smiled. “Let me explain. I am here from London to speak with Mr Fami on behalf of the man who is funding your organisation. And he will not be pleased if you do not help me. So where can I find him?”

Abdul felt trapped. He had been told never to divulge personal information about anybody in Al Haab, especially the leaders. Yet this man claimed to know the man who gave Mr Fami his orders. What to do? If in doubt stay silent, was his motto.

Haas, sensing the young Arab's inner turmoil, said, “This is not good, Abdul. You are new with Al Haab. Are you going to fail at the first hurdle?”

It was decision time. “An apartment in 41 Ibrahim Mahmoud. That's all I know.”

“That will do for now. But I may need to speak with you again.”

As the pushy English dog left him to his work, Abdul agonised over his decision.

“That was quick,” Andrea commented, as Karl approached her. “Was he co-operative and helpful?”

“Yes thanks.” Her eyes looked at her. Despite being attired in dusty dungarees and boots, with smudges of dirt on her face, her attractiveness still shone through. “You must find it quite exciting, digging up all this ancient stuff.”

She smiled wistfully, brushing a fly away. “Most of the time it is tedious and extremely boring. But those all too rare moments of unearthing some treasure makes it all worth while.”

“Have you had any such finds lately?”

Seeing what passed for genuine interest, she said, “Yes, with a team led by Karif Harwarbi. For the first time in thousands of years we were able to see beyond a stone door in a secret passage

under the Great Pyramid.”

“Wow! What was beyond it?”

“Another door – unfortunately.”

“So you didn't get to open that one.”

“We didn't get to open either. We had a robot that showed us what was on the other side.”

They were interrupted by one of the Arabs who held a shard in his hand. A cheesy grin spread across his face as he handed it to her. She scrutinised it. It looked Grecian, not what she was searching for. She handed it back. “Take it to Ahmed and tell him to catalogue it.” Turning back to Karl, she sighed, “See what I mean about tedium and boredom.”

He nodded. “So what did you think you would find on the other side of that door?”

“Have you any idea of how difficult it was for me to be part of that dig?”

He shrugged “No, not really.”

“I applied three times over two years before I was awarded the grant. And do you know why I was given it, Mr Haas?”

“Persistence, expertise, knowledge. I don't know.”

She looked him straight in the eye. “The Ministry of Arts did a deal with me. I could fulfil my dream if I stopped suggesting that David didn't commit suicide. This was an opportunity to work with the great Karif Harwarbi, the head of Egyptian antiquities.”

“So that's why you came to us. To see what we could dig up.”

She sighed heavily. “I hated selling out but it was the only way...”

He put a comforting hand on her shoulder. “...Don't beat yourself up over it. But you haven't told me what you thought might be behind that door.”

“It's just a theory. Until I have proof I'm not telling anybody.”

“Fair enough.”

“But there is something else that disturbed me. Perhaps I shouldn't be telling you this but maybe you can find out what it is about.”

“I'm intrigued, but the heat is getting to me. Can we talk in the shade.”

“Oh, sorry. You poor man.”

In the inadequate shade of a fig palm Andrea explained, “This may sound like paranoia but there seems to be some sort of secret agenda going on.”

Karl's eyes widened. "What sort of secret agenda?" he asked, suspiciously.

"This latest dig has taken place in secret under the cover of darkness. I have never experienced such security. I suspect something else is going on with the archaeological work being used as a cover."

"Cover for what?" Karl pressed, uncomfortable about where the conversation was headed.

"I don't know but I think it has something to do with the millennium celebrations in Giza."

"Why do you think that?"

"I overheard a conversation between Karif Harwarbi an anonymous man, he could have been English but I'm not sure. But he had a Middle Eastern accent.

"What exactly did you overhear?" Karl asked, his impatience beginning to show.

"They were talking about a plan to put a golden cap on top of the Great Pyramid."

"What's the problem with that?"

"It wasn't just that. What he said next sent a shiver up my spine. The man talking to Hawass said, 'Timing us crucial. Unless all three elements are synchronised the world will not be ready to embrace it's new masters'."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know. But unless we find out what the other two elements are we could all be in big trouble."

"They could be anything. Where would we start looking?"

"well we know they have some kind of connection with the capping of the pyramid. You could start there."

"Is this an official assignment?"

"I feel this is important – so yes."

"What do you make of it?" Alan asked, when Karl informed him of the new job.

"Andrea is a very intelligent woman. I don't see her being subjected to flights of fancy. But we don't have much to go on. I suspect she knows more than she is letting on. Go and see her and find out what her theory is."

"What about the Al Haab assignment?"

"I will keep an eye on that situation. As soon as we are ready to act, I will let you know."

Chapter 12

Cairo 1999

Alan Ridgard tentatively mounted the camel. They were not his favourite mode of transport, but Andrea had insisted. She had wanted to be well away from any prying ears so she chose Giza Plateau for their meeting. Having left Ali and Mohammed with their camels, Andrea sat down and watched the rising sun. Alan joined her. He sat captivated as the magnificent live giving orb went from pink to liquid gold, going through buttercup yellow on the way. "Now I can see how the sun held the ancient Egyptians in such awe."

She eyed the tanned, fair blue-eyed Englishman. "Yes, I come up here whenever I can. It makes me feel alive and purposeful."

"Karl told me you had a theory about the pyramid dig."

She became guarded. "I am not ready to share it. I told him that."

"It might help shed some light on what's going on."

"Only if I'm right."

"At least it's something to work with."

She paused, then said, "OK, for what its worth, I believe secret experiments are taking place in the Great Pyramid and beneath the Sphinx."

"What sort of experiments?"

"They are being disguised as Archaeological digs, but Karif Harwarbi and the others know what the pyramids were really about."

"What do you mean?" Alan asked, as Ali approached them.

"You ready to go back down now?"

It came over more as a statement than a question. Annoyed at the interruption, Alan rebuked, "Wait over there Ali. We will let you know when we are ready."

Andrea said, "I asked Harwarbi about it."

"And?"

"He denied it. It's not surprising though because the authorities behind science education and the media relentlessly endeavour to convince us that there are not secret investigations going on inside the Great Pyramid."

"And you don't agree?"

"I have witnessed things going on in there. Yet they still deny it."

"What sort of things?"

“Despite their intransigence there is growing evidence that the pyramid is often being closed to the public for, quote, regular maintenance.”

“And you don’t think it is maintenance?”

“I know it’s not. We are carrying out experiments in there.”

“What experiments?”

“We have this robot that gets into spaces we cannot go. We are using sophisticated electronics in there, with cables and wires connected to the main grid.”

“Perhaps it has to do with lighting.”

Andrea shook her head. “Alan, on it’s own it may not seem to be suspicious, but when added to other incidents a pattern begins to emerge.”

“Pattern, what pattern?”

Professor Burry delved into her shoulder bag and extracted a dog-eared book covered in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Opening the volume up she stated, “Have you ever heard of the 'Emerald Tablets of Thoth'?”

“No. I can’t say that I have. What is it?”

“The history of these tablets is indeed strange and beyond the belief of modern science. Their antiquity is quite amazing, dating back around 36,000 years BC.”

Alan Ridgard’s eyes widened in disbelief. “That far back, but I thought...”

Andrea cut him off. “...The author, Thoth, who was also known as Tehuti, was an Atlantean priest-king, who founded a colony in ancient Khemmet following the destruction of his mother country, which we know as Mesopotamia.”

“Khemmet, where’s that?”

Andrea smiled, “Right here, Alan. It’s the correct name for ancient Egypt.”

“Really? I didn’t know that.”

“Not many people do. Once the Greeks took over they changed many of the names to suit themselves. Khemmet became Aegyptos, from which the name Egypt was derived.”

“I see. So, are these tablets well known or are they kept secret?”

“Oh no Alan, they are well known. It’s not difficult to obtain a copy if you want one.”

“Then, why is this so important to you?”

“It has to do with something called ‘The Hall of Memories’, which is not well known.”

“The Hall of Memories! What’s that?”

“It is my reason for being here. The Hall of Memories has never been discovered and both Harwarbi and I are looking for it, but for different reasons.”

“Why are you looking for it?”

Andrea stood up. Ali and Mohammed were getting fidgety. “We’d better be going. Come back to my place and I will show you something.”

Walcott watched as the pair mounted their camels for the downhill trek from the plateau. Just what the hell was Alan Ridgard up to? He wondered. He opened up his phone but there was no signal – not unusual for Cairo. Now he had to find a public phone that worked.

Chapter 13

Cairo1999

Andrea Burry and Alan sat in her apartment discussing the strange happenings taking place in the pyramids. At one point in their conversation, she went over to her wedding photograph. Turning to face Alan, she explained, “For many years I pressed for a government grant to search for the Hall of Memories. Each time I was knocked back because the grant’s board did not consider it to be furthering the study of Egyptology. Then, after my husband died tragically, I was given the grant, to shut me up about his death.”

“Yes, I worked on the case. So he was your husband.”

Andrea showed surprise. “You didn't know!”

Karl never told me who the client was. In my investigation I met a colleague of David's - Jerry Austerberry, around two years ago.”

“You knew Jerry?”

“Only professionally. We met a couple of times to discuss a story he wanted to tell. Tragically, he died before he could complete it.”

Andrea held Alan Ridgard’s gaze. “And this story was about David’s death?”

“Yes. He claimed there was some kind of cover-up.”

“What did he say?”

“There was a delay whilst he haggled over money. He was going to provide me with evidence, but his alleged suicide put paid to it.”

“Poor Jerry, he and my husband were close friends, you know.”

“So Jerry said.” Wanting to get back on track with the current story, Alan asked, “So, if you discover this 'Hall of Memories' what do you expect to learn from it?”

“About a natural global energy grid, for one thing, but more importantly how dark and very

powerful forces mean to use them for their own ends.”

“Who are these dark, powerful forces?” Alan asked, cynically.

Sensing his distrust, she said, “I am not given to wild conjecture or going along with Internet conspiracy theories. So when I say this I choose my words very carefully. “From evidence I have gathered there appears to be a shadow government that pulls the strings. They are the power behind the central banking system and the driving force behind the world’s energy supplies.”

“So, why are they interested in the pyramids?”

Andrea again rose to her feet. “Come and look at this, Alan Ridgard,” she suggested.

The intelligence man followed her to her balcony.

She turned to him. “Have you ever seen such a spectacular view?”

“It certainly is impressive,” Alan Ridgard agreed, looking out onto Giza Plateau, the pyramids and the Sphinx.

Andrea said, “I have studied these edifices for over thirty years and I now know there is much more to them than the public is allowed to know.”

“Such as?” Alan asked, puzzled.

“It’s a long, boring saga. Suffice it to say that my interpretation of ancient Kemet doesn’t fall in line with traditional and accepted thinking on the subject. For example, the tablets translated in the book I showed you, are ten of the twelve volumes, which were left in the Great Pyramid in the custodianship of certain temple priests. The remaining two have never been found.”

“Smiling, Alan responded, “And I suppose it is these two that you are interested in, Andrea.”

“Yes, I have long been obsessed with idea of finding them and now, even more so because I believe they are part of the Hall of Memories.” She paused, then she added, “For nearly thirty years I have sought to discover the content of those missing tablets and at last I think I know what it is.”

“You do?”

“Yes Alan, it has to be the secret of Thoth’s grid work.”

“Thoth’s grid work?”

Andrea became animated. She was in her element with a captive audience. “Yes, the tablets tell us that Thoth ruled the ancient Egyptians from 50,000 BC to 36,000 BC. At the time the barbarous peoples he settled had be elevated to a high degree of civilisation.”

“24,000 years. Now that’s some reign,” Alan Ridgard responded, sarcastically.

“Thoth was a Kemetian deity. The same rules that applied to mere mortals did not apply to him.”

“So, he was immortal?”

In a sense, yes. That is he conquered death, passing on to the spirit realm only when he willed it, and even then not through death as we understand it. His vast wisdom made him ruler over many Atlantean colonies, including those in South and Central America. He was also instrumental in the construction of Stonehenge.”

“Stonehenge! That’s interesting because I was involved in that, recently. I had to put it on the back burner when Karl told me to come here. But I thought Thoth was the time measurer of the Egyptian pantheon,” Alan commented, becoming interested.

“Yes he was and when the time came for him to leave Khemmet he erected the great Pyramid over the entrance to the Great halls of Amenti. In this pyramid he placed his records, the secrets of which were guarded by the highest of his people”

Alan reacted, “Now wait a minute professor. Are you suggesting that Thoth actually built the Great Pyramid?”

“Yes. It’s much older than most Egyptologists believe. And it certainly wasn’t built in the way that modern science tells us.”

“How was it built then?”

Andrea paused. “You would not believe me.”

“Try me,” Alan Ridgard grinned.

“All right. Now, I know this is not going to make sense, but according to the tablets, he constructed it in three days, from the top down.”

The journalist sat silently wide-eyed.

“I told you,” she smiled.

“The top down,” he muttered, trying to visualise such a feat.

Andrea continued, “In later times these guards became the Pyramid priests, who deified Thoth as the God of Wisdom, the cosmic recorder and the universal measurer. In the Age of Darkness, which followed his chosen passing, their were those, called Dru Ids in the island of Angel Land, who did his bidding and guarded his secret.”

Alan put his hand up. “Whoa Andrea, back up a bit. Who are these Dru Ids and what was this secret?”

“We know of them today as Druids. Thoth, as Tehuti, conferred upon the Elders the secret of keeping the grid balanced. He implored them to be vigilant, for the dark forces would use any opportunity to seize control.”

“And these are the dark forces you are referring to now?”

Andrea gripped Alan Ridgard’s arm. “If they gain control of the grid, with the technology they have at their fingertips today, the ramifications are too horrendous to contemplate.”

Alan went silent. He had no real comprehension of what she was referring to but the look of dread

on her face told him it was serious. He asked, "Are the Druids who carry out Solstice rituals still protecting Tehuti's secret?"

"No Alan. Tehuti got the Dru Ids to build Stonehenge by explaining it's lesser function - that of being an astronomical calendar. That's what the sunrise druids ritualise."

"Okay, so are there any descendants of the ancient trustees still dealing with the higher purpose of the stones?"

"That is a good question. I believe there a few wise ones scattered around the globe, but I know very little about them."

"Do they have a name?"

"Before I tell you their name, it is necessary for me to provide with some background. For several centuries before and after Christ's birth, Iona, a small island of Scotland, was the centre for a select gathering of priestesses who had been established there by Tehuti, whom some say was a pre-Merlin Mage. He had received revelations upon which were based the tenets and purpose of this priestess stronghold. They called themselves 'the Priestesses of Ankh', or 'sacred well of life.'"

"Is that the name of Tehuti's Druids?"

"Not these days, Alan. "However, Tehuti (who's soul was one of the five layered souls that composed the identity of Merlin) states that the Ionian priestesses were the basis for the Celtic legends concerning sanctuaries of 'Lady of the Lake' type women who regenerated the male psyche and often his physical form as well."

"So what is their name?" Alan Ridgard asked, impatiently.

"Guardians of the Round table, but why do you want to know?"

"To find out about this grid you refer to."

Andrea showed bemusement. "Alan, you cannot find them. If they wish to, they will make themselves known to us."

"So what do these guardians actually do?"

Before Andrea had time to respond a ruckus erupted in the next room Then, suddenly they were rudely interrupted, as a Western attired Arab, pushed past a protesting Ali, and burst in upon Alan and the professor. Without introduction, he thundered, "I have waited long enough Dr Burry. Now I want an answer!"

Excusing Herself, but giving no explanation for the drama taking place, she ushered the stranger through the doorway and into another room, upon which she closed the door. Alan wondered what the interruption was about, so he asked Ali. But the young Arab just grinned. He was not going to become involved. Alan, fed up with waiting for Andrea to return, decided to go back to his hotel and contact her later. Just as he was about to leave, however, the book of the Emerald tablets caught his eye. Pondering the hieroglyphics of the opened pages, he wondered what secrets and ancient wisdoms they held. He tentatively picked up the volume and flicked through the pages. However, the neatly scripted lines of repeated hieroglyphs meant nothing at all to him. Then he came across some of Andrea's scribbled notes. He read;

Stargates are portals that elevate consciousness. Many stargates were created in a period just after the destruction of Atlantis. The Guardians, who was headed by Tehuti, worked with extraterrestrials to create a grid around the planet.

During the time just after the destruction of Atlantis the Earth was cracked by man's inability to control his ego and anger (emotions). The same conditions still persist today. Is this the reason why the weather is out of control? (The orbit of the Earth is being changed by these same emotions.) Back then, the Guardians came to humanity's help and offered to rebuild the damaged planet. To do this it was necessary to re-establish the polarity that had been destroyed. So Tehuti had the Great Pyramid of Giza built, as an antenna system to stabilize the orbit of the planet and balance its polarity. (It is important to understand that the pyramid is an antenna system, and that Stonehenge is the control panel for this antenna system.)

The next part caught Alan Ridgard's attention. Andrea wrote:

In 1968, the Harvey family was contacted by the Gardians (GRT) and was asked to build a new antennae system to help balance the grid at the present time. In 1975 the Harvey Family constructed a copy of the Giza pyramid and created the Temple of New Saqqara. The model of the Giza pyramid is tuned to the Heart chakra. The reason for creating New Saqqara was to reintroduce heart energy into the grid. The amazing thing that happened right away was that this pyramid ended the abnormalities in the Bermuda Triangle. The crack in the Earth had created the Atlantic ocean. That is why the addition of heart energy into this area ended the abnormalities.

Alan was confused. How could a Professor from Oxford University believe such seemingly irrational things. She probably didn't want anyone to see her private notes. But it gave him a window into how she really thought about these things. The question was, was he going to carry out an investigation for her, based on such bizarre information?

Andrea came back into the room, flushed but strong-willed. Seeing Alan going through her notes, she asked, "Do you find my ramblings interesting?"

Taken aback, he responded, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry. However, once I started looking I became intrigued."

She snatched the book off him. "They're my private thoughts and they are not for public consumption. Now I think you should leave."

"I am only trying to work out where you are coming from."

"That stuff is my madness and has nothing to do with you or this business with the pyramids."

"But..."

"...It is no concern of yours. Your job is to find out what Jalani and his team are looking for."

"The missing tablets, perhaps."

"Or working with ancient technologies!" Andrea answered. She said, "I think it is time for you to leave. After I have calmed down I will decide if you are the right person for this mission. Ali will drive you to your hotel."

“Andrea, I apologise for prying but...”

“...Interjecting, she said, “When I have decided if you can be trusted or not, I will contact you, Leave your contact details with Ali.”

Chapter 14

Cairo 1999

Trevor Harvey was concerned they did not have enough time to carry out the necessary adjustments. The Temple of the New Saqqara followed the tenets of the ancient mystery school where special people were trained to move the huge blocks of stone by using sonics. Trevor believed it was through this method that the great pyramid of Giza came to be built. The school was called Saqqara, the ruins of which comprise Saqqara, and the impressive Step Pyramid, a popular tourist attraction, located about 25 kilometres from the Great Pyramid at Giza.

The New Temple of Saqqara is not to be found on any tourist map. In fact only Trevor Harvey and a handful of chosen guardians, knew of its existence, because it was not made of granite and sandstone and did not exist as a physical entity.

Upon its completion, Trevor Harvey announced, to the chosen few, “Now we have created the Temple of New Saqqara so that people can be trained to reintroduce heart energy back into the grid, it is now time to remember Tehuti’s training and to use this wisdom to help humanity advance into higher planes of consciousness. To activate the grid, one must create a vortex and contact higher dimensional beings who are grid masters that work with the grid at the present time. They are extraterrestrials, Knights Templar, whales and dolphins, fairies and devas, and a host of other entities coming from different dimensions. The method of creating a vortex is found in the remaining two tablets.”

Following another harrowing drive, in which the horn seemed to be a substitute for brakes, Ali drove the aged Mercedes up to the front entrance of Le Méridien Pyramids resort hotel, where Alan was staying. It was within walking distance of the historic treasures of Egypt, including the Giza Pyramids, the Sphinx and other monumental sights. However, that would have to wait, as a cool shower and rest was in order. Much to his relief the reception desk was not busy and he was soon processed and handed his room key. Once he was in his fifth floor suite, which overlooked the the huge swimming pool and surrounding al fresco eating area, he collapsed onto his double bed and fell asleep.

He woke up to find it was already becoming dark. he wondered if Andrea would call, or if she already had. He would have to check with the desk. He wanted to find out who the Harveys were. Then there was the initials GRT. In the light of what he had been told, the initials, logically, stood for Guardians of the Round Table. If so, she knew more than she was letting on about. Then he noticed a hotel brochure pointing out, among other things, the excitement of Cairo night life, which, it appeared, was only fifteen minutes by cab. He decided to give that a miss and stay to try out one of the hotel restaurants instead.

Alan Ridgard made his selection from the sumptuous and extensive smorgasbord buffet, then he went outside and ate his meal in peace, by the swimming pool, which was bathed in moonlight. It was very peaceful sitting outside in the cool night breeze. Alan was enjoying the solitude, when his phone rang. It was Andrea. She had decided to give him another chance. Ali would pick him up at 9 am.

“Traditionally it is called ‘The Giza Necropolis’ but it was more more than that,” Andrea explained,

as she and Alan took in the awesome sight of the pyramids, close up. Pointing to the largest one, she said, "That's the Great Pyramid. It's also known as Khufu's pyramid, although it was, I believe, constructed much earlier than his reign. The Greeks referred to him as Cheops, and they called the land Aegyptos, from whence we get the word Egypt."

Alan Ridgard hardly heard her words. Here he was looking straight up at the Great Pyramid and it totally captivated him. Although he did hear Andrea say the Great Pyramid was the tallest building in the world for over 3,800 years. Noting the uneven surface of the different size stones, Alan commented, "It's amazing but I guess I was expecting to see perfectly hewn stone slabs butted up tightly to each other, like in the movies."

Andrea smiled at his naivety, "Originally the Great Pyramid was covered by casing stones that formed a smooth outer surface, and what is seen today is the underlying core structure. If you look carefully, some of the casing stones that once covered the structure can still be seen around the base and up higher."

Alan Ridgard scratched his head, perplexed. "And you say this Thoth/Tehuti character built all this in just three days!"

"That's what the Emerald tablets tell us, but it's not necessarily my belief."

"What's your spin on it then?"

"There have been varying scientific and alternative theories regarding the Great Pyramid's construction techniques. Most accepted construction theories are based on the idea that it was built by moving huge stones from a quarry and dragging and lifting them into place. This seems logical based on our idea of what it would have been like back then. Personally, I believe the methodology used was much simpler, yet more astounding than that."

"In what way?"

"The tablets tell us that when the Great Pyramid was built, after the destruction of Atlantis, an illusionary grid was set up by a treaty. Mankind was given freewill, but because humanity was only a child, an illusionary grid to control humanity was set up."

Alan Ridgard was sceptical but intrigued. He asked, "Who set up this grid?"

Andrea shrugged, "Who knows? Perhaps by the Syrians or other Brotherhood members. The important thing is that its purpose was to help humanity to overcome the third dimension and yet, at the same time, allow humans to maintain their immature emotions."

"Whatever is the point of us being kept emotionally immature?"

"So that we can learn not to be emotionally immature. The point is that this very ancient treaty is to end on December 21, 1999."

"On who's say so?"

"It's the end of a cycle. That is why the Illuminates, the people who wish to bring you the New World Order, are aiming to recap the Great Pyramid."

"The Illuminates! I thought they were just a fiction."

“That's what they want us to believe. But no Alan, they are very real. They are the ones Tehuti warned the Dru-Ids to beware of.”

“Surely they don't go back that far in history.”

“The modern Illuminates are just carrying on a very ancient tradition.”

Alan frowned, “This is all a bit weird for me. But, supposing you are right, how is capping the pyramid going to help these modern Illuminates to carry out their devious and dominant plan?”

“So that the illusionary grid can be re-established,” Andrea stated, noting the puzzlement on the investigator's face. “Look Alan, this was the real reason that Y2K was announced and publicised. If they can recap the pyramid, they will be able to send a surge of energy through the Earth, which will have the effect of destroying all the electrical systems on the planet.”

“But only if they can synchronise it with the two other elements.”

“True, and I wouldn't mind betting that one of these mystery elements the Egyptian spoken of is Stonehenge.”

“Why Stonehenge?”

“It's obvious really. Tehuti is the link to both the Great Pyramid and Stonehenge.”

It made some sort of sense and it gave him something to go on. But he was not at all convinced about the Illuminates connection. “Isn't this whole Illuminates thing just a little bit fanciful?”

Baulking at his remark, she said, “Don't you see, this is their perfect weapon to unleash on an unsuspecting public. And the beauty of it is that they can blame any fallout on the fictitious Y2K bug.”

“How do you know that?”

Andrea sighed, “David made me promise never to talk about this but I need you to be convinced that what I am telling you is true.”

“What does David have to do with this?”

She took a deep breath. “David was involved with an American military project called HAARP. Have you heard of it?”

“Vaguely. It's something to do with geological sonar, isn't it?”

“It stands for ‘High Altitude Aurora Resonance Project’. It's very hush, hush, but David told me they can beam energy off satellites, and ELF (Extremely Low Frequency), where they control the grid by pulsing it. In essence, once they perfect this technology, they have control of the planet's weather.”

“They, being America?”

“Alan, America is the tool being utilised. But it is the Neo Illuminates, known more commonly as the ‘New World Order’ who are calling the shots.”

“What has this got to do with capping this amazing pyramid?” Alan Ridgard asked, indicating the huge Stone edifice, nearby.

“David told me the Illuminates, or ‘Secret Government’, plans to place 144,000 HAARP devices on all major acupuncture points of the planet. They call this system the ‘Star Wars Program’, which George Bush supported when he took office.”

“I still don’t understand what this has got to do with the Great Pyramid being capped.”

Andrea grabbed the Journalist’s arm. “You have to realise that the Earth is an engine and that by tapping into its electromagnetic field they can control consciousness by controlling the frequency of the planet. Capping the pyramid, coupled with the mysterious stuff going on inside there, can change the Earth’s magnetism and throw everything out of kilter, causing, among other things, a global blackout, the likes of which we have never before experienced.”

“That’s heavy stuff!” Alan responded, surprised.

“I remember David telling me that Nicola Tesla knew that this global grid energy could be used as inexpensive or even free energy. He wanted the world to know this and that was his undoing. J P Morgan made sure that Tesla would be ruined and discredited.”

“Yes, I can see how such an idea would not be embraced. But what a shame. Think how advanced we could be now if Tesla had been encouraged.”

“Well, of course it could not be allowed to happen. While the petrochemical industry has us, quite literally, over a barrel, we have no power. But Tesla’s technology, had it been allowed to develop, would have given us the opportunity to free ourselves of illegal governments and the oil barons.”

“This, of course, could not be allowed.”

Looking Alan in the eye, she added, “David was not killed because of exposing those monsters behind Agent Orange. He was silenced from talking about HAARP.”

Chapter 15

England 1999

Kes Crane had lived in the Alderbury Caravan and Camping park for over five years, since taking early retirement from her teaching job. She lived a simple existence, just her and Rameses, her Egyptian cat. The main reason she chose the Alderbury park was because it was not far from her main passion - Stonehenge. She checked her calendar. There was only three months to go. She then thumbed through her telex and dialled a number. “Obi, is that you?” she asked, upon hearing a muffled voice on the line.

“Who else would it be dear heart?”

She cringed at the way he addressed her, but she let him get away with it. “We need to meet - and soon.”

“Do you have anything new?”

“I’m certainly not going to discuss any details over the phone. I’m sure mine is tapped.”

“The mystery intrigues me, old love. When and Where?”

“How about the site, tomorrow if you can make it?”

“On one condition old love.”

“And what would that be, Obi?”

“Make sure you bring some of your delish scones and hot chocolate with you.”

“They got the date wrong by some 3,000 years,” Kes stated as she and Obi Wan Dawkins stood outside the perimeter fence, looking at the huge enigmatic megalithic circles within.

“What are you on about, old girl?” Obi asked, wrapping his muffler around his neck to help keep out the morning chill.”

Kes, more often than not, was the one to come up with some fresh fact about the stones. Whoever did so had their lunch paid for. Kes, Grinning hugely, reached into her shoulder bag and, with a grand gesture, withdrew a laminated document, “Dah, dah.”

“What’s that, dear girl?” Obi asked, tentatively, concerned that she had gone and done it again, and lunch would be on him.

“It is believed to be the oldest detailed drawing of Stonehenge, apparently based on first hand observation.”

Obi extended his hand. “let me see that.”

“Looks like lunch is on you today,” Kes laughed, handing over the print.

Obi put on his glasses and peered at Kes’ find.

“I am impressed old girl. But how do you know it’s kosher.”

“Look at the stones,” Kes suggested, pointing in their direction.

Obi got her drift. “Yes, I see what you mean. The drawing clearly shows four trilithons; now only three are left standing. So how old do you reckon this drawing is?”

“Oh, that’s easy, the drawing was found in Douai, northern France, suggesting that in the 15th century four of the original five trilithons survived.”

“That’s marv’ old girl, but next round will be mine.”

Kes smiled. They played this private game as an incentive to keep digging up new information on the enigmatic stone circle. Not that they needed any incentive as it was their joint obsession with the ancient monument that drew them together in the first place.

Now it was time for the real work of the day. As a standing member of the British Society of Dowsers, Kes, had her rods with her. They were ‘L’ shaped, 150mm long and 80mm deep. She unpacked her brass rods, which had sleeves on the handles, allowing them to swing freely, without them being affected by the muscles of the hand. Kes knew that the most potent ancient monuments around the world had one thing in common - the presence of Earth energies. Underground water,

ley lines, and ley-line power centres. She believed these had the power to alter and uplift human consciousness. She took up dowsing because it was the intuitive practice or technique for locating these Earth energies.

Obi stood by and watched her in action. He was not himself a dowser, but he appreciated the validity of what she did. He followed her, as her rod antennas detected ley line energy in their customary way - by crossing over. He realised that everything on Earth is in transformation and change, flowing, growing, blowing, falling and rising. He used such observable examples as rivers, wind, weather and tides in his lectures. This was fine but when he tried explaining the invisible transformations, such as vibrations and radiations, beyond the students limited range of perception, he fell foul of the Dean. Somebody had doxed him in and he had a fair idea who it was. It was a warmish day for October, so Kes and Obi enjoyed their luncheon in the riverside gardens. They both agreed it was worth making the trip to Salisbury. The 16th century Old Mill Hotel was Obi's idea. One of the rules of their game being, whoever buys lunch chooses the venue. Kes, who had never been there before, was entranced by the mill race that cascaded through the restaurant. From where they sat, waiting for their orders to be served - honey glazed breast of chicken with Port and Redcurrant Reduction for Obi and oven roasted salmon Fillet with a herb crust and home-made Hollandaise for Kes - they caught glimpses of water voles, little egrets and damsel flies. In the distance they could even see Salisbury Cathedral.

As they ate, Obi said, "You haven't told me how the readings went."

"Not much change really. The influence of the dome has not yet kicked in." Following a bite of salmon, she changed the subject. "In the Scala Mundi, the Chronicle of the World, Merlin is given credit for building Stonehenge between 480 and 486 AD. The Latin text says, he, 'not by force, but by art, brought and erected the giant's ring from Ireland.'"

"Yet Marcus insists that the stones went up from 2,500 BC, with the blue stone outer circle somehow transported from West Wales. I don't know how he thinks the ancients were able to drag double decker bus-size sarsen stones 30 miles across Salisbury plain."

"Seeing as you brought the subject up, have you confronted him yet over dobbing you in?" Kes asked, referring to his contemporary and academic nemesis, Professor Marcus Cullen.

Marcus' very name was enough to put Obi off his chicken. He deftly changed the subject. "The drawing, you have, when did it come to light?"

"I'm not sure of its whole pedigree, but it was recently identified by the art historian Christian Haak. It has never been on public display, but according to a journalist friend, who works with 'Fine Arts Magazine', it will be seen next year in an exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. Apparently, next year they will be celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Society of Antiquarians."

Finishing his lunch, Obi queried, "Didn't you say it is the oldest known drawing of Stonehenge?"

"Well, there are two earlier images of Stonehenge, one in the British Museum Library and one in the Parker Library in Cambridge, but the Douai drawing is unique in attempting to show how the monument was built. I mean it actually shows tenon joints piercing the lintel, a timber construction technique."

"Yes old girl, but the real Stonehenge tenons only go partly into the top stone."

“Why do you think that is?”

He shrugged, “No idea old girl. Now come on and eat your lunch. We have to get back to work, old dear.”

“Refer to me as 'old' one more time and you will be wearing it,” she warned, half jokingly.

Chapter 16

London 1999

Neil Hitler put the finishing touches to his latest creation, a home made bomb, crude but effective. He had an intense hatred of regulation in any shape or form. Many people would call him an anarchist but he saw himself as the 'catalyst' – the bringer of change. He was the extreme drop-out, except when it came to his gyro cheque and national health benefits. His family name was Hitchcock. Hitler, which was his chosen name, was considered an odd choice by most people with whom he associated. To many people he resembled the actor Sean Penn but he was taller and skinnier. Being anti-social, he had few friends but that did not concern him at all. Most people, as far as he was concerned, had a herd mentality and it made him sick at how easily they allowed themselves to be manipulated by the 'System'.

That was not the life for him. Misunderstood by most people he came into contact with, he kept mostly to himself, in his simple garret. Some, who found him intriguing soon became put-off by his extremely non-conformist attitude and gave him a wide berth. Just his name was enough to keep most people at bay. The pen pusher who handled his deed poll name-change, balked at his choice and tried to deny him the right to use it. But, as unsavoury as it may have seemed, there was no rule in the book to preclude him from using Hitler as his surname.

Neil reckoned that most people needed waking up to what was actually going on around them and he went out of his way to use shock tactics to jar the 'sheeple' as he called them, out of their apathy. One of the lesser confronting things he did was wear a RAF greatcoat, with Disney character patches sewn in where the flight sergeant's stripes once were. Even this had an irritating effect on people he came across, especially if they were or had been in the armed forces. An anarchist and conspiracy theorist since his student days, Neil had no illusions about the cruel world he saw about him. The way he added things up was echoed by the maxim on his self-printed t-shirt – Politics: Same Shit, Different Ass holes.

Neil had no real heroes he looked up to, except perhaps, William Godwin, whom Peter Kropotkin, said, was the first to formulate the political and economical conceptions of anarchism. His main motivation to be an anarchist stemmed from his distrust of authority figures. There were too many corrupt politicians, bent cops and perverted priests for him to have any faith in the system. Everyday he saw the wage slaves rushing to and from work, what he saw to be their places of bondage. Having distanced himself from the civilised state he considered his depth of perception to be far greater than that of most people around him.

Of late, Neil Hitler had become obsessed with the Millennium Dome project. On the one hand it was a form of temporary employment for him, but the more he learned about the reasons for its existence the more he came to hate it and what it stood for. For Neil, it was not a harmless entertainment centre to keep the sheeple distracted for a short while, it was something much more sinister. Sitting at his laptop computer, in his squat in Wandsworth, he scanned the Internet and came across a site called 'Your Rights', which covered a variety of topics pertaining to common law. He linked to a page called 'Taking Action' and scrolled down to a section on bomb making.

There was a bit of blurb about some countries being more interested in home-made bombs than others. Neil reckoned the news organisations were hot on the trail of any amateur bomb makers because they like to sensationalise the dangers of free information on the net. No doubt this was linked to the fact that the Internet was a threat to traditional news and information distribution channels. Neil could see that the Fascists seemed to be preoccupied with suppression of free speech in the name of 'law and order'. For Neil Hitler any hint of suppression by the fascist law makers was like waving a red rag at the proverbial bull. It was time for affirmative action. He found a web page indexed for 'bomb making instructions' and began taking notes.

Back in Kes' caravan, she and Obi enjoyed a cup of coffee. They were sitting outside, under her striped awning, so that her smoking did not affect him. "How do you cope, living in such a small space?" he asked.

"Oh, you get used to it. The important thing is tidiness, otherwise it soon becomes chaotic."

"Yes, I expect so. How are you coping generally?"

Kes knew what Obi was alluding to. She sighed, "It's been three years since Brian's death. I still can't stop thinking I could have done more."

Gently covering her hand with his, he said, "We all wonder what more we could have done when our loved ones die. Although, blaming yourself for not saving his life helps no one, least of all you."

"Yes I know all that," she responded angrily, "but if I had been there for him, instead of looking after the needs of other kids, I may have seen the signs."

Obi, realising he was crossing an emotional minefield, decided to say no more on the subject.

Then, their privacy was interrupted by kids playing football near her van. The shouting was bad enough but when the ball came very close to hitting the pot plants near the steps to her van, enough was enough. She jumped up, yelling, "I'VE TOLD YOU LOT ABOUT PLAYING NEAR HERE. GO AND PLAY AROUND YOU OWN VANS. IF I CATCH YOU HERE AGAIN I WILL REPORT YOU TO THE CAMP MANAGER!"

The Kids, after a bit of cheek, grabbed their ball and scurried away.

Obi, putting a steadying arm around Kes' shoulders, said, "It's Okay Kes. They're just kids doing what kids do."

"Yes," she smiled wanly, lighting up another cigarette. I don't know why, but just lately I've been feeling very down."

"You've been under a lot of pressure. What with Brian's death and now the threat to the grid, you've had a lot to cope with."

She smiled, more warmly this time, "I sometimes think that the work we do together is the only thing that keeps me sane. Which reminds me, I've been following the progress on this computer crash thing and it leads me to believe that it is all part of their plan."

Obi was puzzled. “What makes you think it has anything to do the energy disruptions?”

“I’m not really sure, but they have created an atmosphere of fear by bringing us Y2K at the dawning of the new millennium, and creating the Gulf War, which is an unnecessary war.”
“It all depends on your perspective. For the Illuminates it is a necessary war,” Obi said, with undisguised cynicism.

“Yes, and now they are building that large dome in London's harbour.”

“The Millennium Dome, yes. It’s cleverly disguised as an amusement park for kids and entertainment for adults. But, according to Neil, it houses a system of computers to control the grid via the Great Pyramid.”

At the mention of Neil Hitler’s name, Kes balked. “He’s too much of a loose cannon, Obi. Besides, how can you trust his word. You know he lives in paranoia land.”

Obi responded, defensively, “I trust his technical judgement. After all he has been involved in setting up the computer network in the dome.”

“So, how does he know the computers are programmed to disrupt the grid?”

“He told me he had broken a code that showed telluric energy line data pinpointing the triangulated connection between the Great Pyramid, Stonehenge and the Millennium Dome.”

“Have you actually seen this data?”

“Not yet, no.”

“Then tread very carefully, where Neil is concerned.”

“Look, old girl, we need all the help we can get.”

“Yes, especially if he is right and the Millennium Dome is actually designed to replace the control of the old system that was built in Stonehenge. But knowing what he is like I cannot just trust his warped logic on the matter”

Chapter 17

Oxford 1998

Marcus Cullen looked up at the Gothic design of the university towers, which were bathed in a golden hue, as the setting sun surrendered to the moon’s domain. This was his favourite time of the day. With the daily departure of his students he took a few moments to breathe in this phenomenal natural beauty – one of the few aesthetic pleasures left in his life. He took out his trusty Bible, an accessory he always had with him. It was bookmarked at Matthew 24 which clearly told him that one of the major signs of the last days was 'earthquakes in divers places.' He believed this was prophesy and that so many quakes in such a short time should tell us something. He took out his electronic note taker and recorded, 'It is only the beginning of many sorrows if people do not forsake their evil and take heed of the warnings in the Bible'.

Back in the security of his tenured cottage Marcus pondered his dichotomy. As a historian, of some note, and professor of Ancient English history in particular, his faith in Biblical prophesy wrangled

somewhat with his historical rationalism. However, Marcus a complex person, had the ability to compartmentalise his life in such a way that being both a scientist and a fundamentalist Christian posed no major problem for him. Although the same could not be said for his family, who saw very little of him, as he had to find time to accommodate both realities. Even when he was home, they sensed his detachment from them. Marcus was well aware of his children's sense of emotional abandonment, But he was looking at the big picture in which he would save them from being victims of the Lord's avenging angel. He could not explain this mission that drove him, but he believed it was better to put up with his families resentment today to ensure their survival tomorrow.

The historian in him always had him looking for anecdotes, concerning the University of Oxford, to regale to the undergraduates he taught. With his last tutorial of the week over, in which the four undergrads had discussed their essays on the Ancient Britons, with him, he succumbed to a glass of Madeira sherry, his only admitted to vice.

Just then his phone rang. It was Obi Wan Dawkins. Marcus inwardly groaned. Of late his ex-friend and colleague, Obi, had been getting on his nerves. He asked, "What do you want?"

Obi was taken aback. "Just because we have academic issues surely we can still be courteous to each other."

"Look, it's been a long day so say what is on your mind so that I can return to some peace and tranquillity, before eating."

"The university press has reservations about publishing my latest paper. Do you know anything about this?"

"No. Why should I know anything about it?"

"So my work was not discussed when you last had lunch with the editor."

"Not specifically, no."

"What do you mean, not specifically?"

"We were discussing how some wild theories of academics, if published, in house, can create confusion among the student body."

"Good God man, we are teaching educated adults with degrees, not kindergarten children."

"That may well be so but they still look to us as being their mentors. As such we have a responsibility to keep to mainstream views."

"That's old hat thinking. I believe our students should be encouraged to explore beyond the boundaries of accepted theories. What is your problem with this? Are you concerned that your conservative historical view will come under fire?"

"No, but I must say I'm concerned that papers like, 'An evaluation of Stonehenge as a gyroscopic machine', will tarnish our professional status."

"Well it's a damn sight more creative than regurgitating outmoded theories on the subject and presented them in yet another boring book about equinox alignments!" Obi retorted. Then he heard nothing, as the line went dead.

In his paper 'An evaluation of Stonehenge as a gyroscopic machine' Dr. Dawkins wrote:

According to the translations of Sumerian texts, the ancient edifice was built to regulate the orbit of the planet after the 'Great Flood'. It monitors the orbits of the sun and the moon so that the Brotherhood (Guardians of the Stone Temple) can keep track of the orbit of the planet. Is this the reason why so many crop circles appear around Stonehenge? Perhaps their function is to activate the grid to rebalance the planet. Many historians marvel at the accuracy of recording the activity of the sun and the moon that is built into this circle of stones. However, if by design, this is a record keeper to keep the planet in orbit and to monitor the tip and tilt of the Earth, this system would have to have these statistics built into it. Also, if, Stonehenge is the control panel for the Great Pyramid's antenna system that was designed to keep the planet in a balanced orbit, this theory would go some way to explain why so many crop circles appear in this area.

What he did not put in his paper was his belief that Y2K had been created so that the Illuminates could control this system. Concerning this point he was in accord with both, Neil and Kes. Neil thought he knew what the bad guys were doing, but he had no idea why. Obi had worked out the 'Why' part of the equation, so now they both had a clearer picture.

They were certainly the 'odd couple' Neil and Obi. Obi Wan Dawkins felt uneasy about the anarchist's, what he saw to be his, irresponsible behaviour. Although Obi was by no means a conventional academic, he still had a sense of the natural order of things. So, even he found it difficult to go along with Neil's total rejection of society. On the other hand, Neil was offended by Obi's sense of self importance. Obi Wan Dawkins, appeared to Neil, to have a huge chip on his shoulder, like he was the only one marching in step and everybody else was out of line. Strangely, the traits Obi displayed (an effeminate persona with bullying tendencies) that made most of his friends and acquaintances feel uneasy in his presence, did not worry Neil one little bit. In fact he welcomed the weirdness in people and, in a strange way, felt more comfortable in their company. For this reason, if for no other, he felt Obi to be a kindred spirit of sorts. However, if it were not for their common interest in the Millennium Dome, they may not have given each other the time of day.

Neil sat huddled in his trademark great coat, outside the Calthorpe Arms, the evening chill had set in causing him to pull his Mickey mouse beanie over his ears. then he saw Obi approaching, dressed all in black, with a cherry red beret.

"Where the hell have you been? I've been freezing my arse off out here!" Neil complained.

"A charming greeting, I'm sure," Obi fired back. "Shall we enter, my dear?" He said, taking Neil's arm.

Neil didn't mind. It would raise a few eyebrows when they entered the pub.

Sure enough there were a few spluttering sounds and mental daggers launched in their direction, as they walked slowly to the door sporting the sign 'RED AND BLACK CLUB'.

"Why here?" Obi asked, as they entered a largish room with around thirty individuals engaged in discussions, in small groups.

"Because you are now in the headquarters of the British Anarchist Network, BAN for short," Neil grinned.

“You wretched bastard. You tricked me!”

Neil chuckled. He knew Obi would not be seen dead in such a place on his own accord.

Obi felt uncomfortable. he could almost see the chips sitting on members shoulders. He felt like a very small fish in a huge ocean. “Is it safe for us to discuss things here?”

“The safest place ever.”

“What do you mean?”

“Where’s the best place to hide a tree?” Neil asked.

“In a forest of course.” Then he saw what Neil meant.

“Do you think there might be spies here?”

“Fucking Big brother is everywhere these days,” Neil answered, louder than was necessary.

“Have you been a member long?”

“A while yes. Hey, you ought to join.”

“I don’t think so. I’m not into this obsession with conspiracy theories.”

“No, you’re just obsessed with your own wacky theories.”

“Why don’t we order drinks and sit down.”

The pair found a vacant table in one of the corners of the room. They sat down with their drinks and Neil began, “I’ve left my job at the MD and now I’m thinking of blowing the fucker up.”

Obi responded, “You don’t have to play the shock-jock games with me.”

“No, I fucking well mean it. It’s such a con and I’m well and truly over it.”

“I really don't think it would help. My dear.”

“Help! I don't do things to help. Look, it has to be destroyed.” To emphasise his point, he added, “Look, we know the Millennium Dome is being constructed by the Illuminates, to divert grid energy from Stonehenge to their dome in London's Harbour. Now, I reckon, they created the story of computer shut-downs so they would have an excuse for the global failure of all the electrical systems on the planet.”

“So you think the MD is like a huge aerial, or several linked in antennas.”

“Well, it certainly looks like it, with those fucking towers sticking out of it at odd angles.”

Obi said, “That aside, a colleague of mine in Egypt reckons the celebrations they have planned for Millennium Eve, over there are all part of destabilising the grid.”

“Really!” Neil stated, surprised. So how are they going to do that?

“Apparently, if they succeed in recapping the Great Pyramid, which is what they are intending, and transferring the control of the grid from Stonehenge, to the Millennium Dome, it will send a massive surge of energy through the grid and the world would experience a massive blackout, with no electrical power.”

“Fuck Me!” was all Neil could manage.

Chapter 18

Cairo 1999

Alan Ridgard got his driver to follow Andrea’s directions. He alighted from the ancient Fiat taxi, in view of the famous Step Pyramid. She had engendered a sense of urgency, without giving any explanation. Alan pulled his wide brimmed hat down to shield his eyes from the desert sun. Although it was late summer the sun’s heat was still fierce. He checked his watch. Andrea was running late. He scanned the area, looking out for her, but she was no where to be seen. His attention was drawn to a tour bus that had just arrived. He watched as the passengers were taken to the massive stone structure, known as the Step Pyramid. Then he saw Andrea’s Mercedes arrive. She alighted and headed towards him. Now, hopefully, he would find out what this impromptu meeting was all about.

With no apology for her tardiness, Andrea announced, “This is Saqqara, an important section of the Great Memphis Necropolis.”

Alan looked up at the huge stone edifice. “Yes, I have gathered that much. So what is this urgent message you have for me?”

Indicating the area, she said, “This was the Old Kingdom capital and the kings of the First and Second Dynasty are mostly buried in this section of Memphis' ancient necropolis.”

Alan just nodded, wondering where this was headed. Karl had told him to take in what she said. They could pick the bones out of it later.

Andrea added, “Mysteries surrounding this place have been of constant interest to us Egyptologists.”

“Andrea, as fascinating as all this is, why do you want to see me?”

“Please bear with me. Now, three major discoveries have recently been made here at Saqqara, including a prime minister’s tomb, and a queen’s pyramid. I was lucky enough to be involved in the discovery of the tomb of the son of a dynasty-founding king.”

“How is this relevant to this millennium stuff?”

“Well, Saqqara is best known for this, the Step Pyramid,” she answered, indicating the massive structure they walked towards. Traditionally, it’s the oldest known of Egypt’s 97 pyramids. It was built for King Djoser of the 2nd Dynasty by the architect and genius Imhotep. However, it is what Saqqara is not so famous for that interests us.”

“What do you mean?”

Much to Alan's disdain, Andrea left the question unanswered. Instead she took him away from other tourists, who were gathering nearby.

Once they were alone, she said, "You can't be too careful."

"Careful about what?"

"I want you to meet someone - a colleague of mine."

"Oh, and who is that?"

She fixed him in her gaze. "You wanted to meet one of the 'Guardians of the Grid', didn't you?"

"You said it was impossible!"

"I've thought about it long and hard and I think you can be trusted."

Alan, stunned, replied, "When can I meet this person?"

"Soon, but first I need to explain what we are up against and why the guardians must remain anonymous."

Alan just nodded.

"Before you are to meet this person I need to apprise you of certain things regarding this arrangement. Understand that the Illuminates rearranged the calendar so that they could create the illusion of fear at the changing of the coming millennium. Furthermore, the old treaty that was originally made at the construction of the Great Pyramid, is almost null and void. If this were not so, humanity would have free will and the ability to use the grid to advance into higher planes of consciousness, through the star-gates. For the Illuminates to keep our minds in an addled state, they have to be able to re-establish this global energy grid."

"Are you saying that humanity is better off without this treaty?" Alan asked, puzzled.

"The treaty was made to keep the planet aligned. Now, the planet no longer needs that treaty. But the dark forces need to re-establish it, to be able to control humanity their own way."

Alan nodded, "Yes Andrea, now I think I understand what you mean."

"We know the Gregorian calendar was manipulated in such a way as to bring about anxiety and fear. Because, as long as we remain in fear, it is easy for them to have control over us. So they will be able to re-establish the illusionary grid and control humanity, which will not be able to raise its consciousness to a higher frequency." Andrea paused, then said, "Now we meet the guardian."

Alan followed Professor Burry to a tomb that was accessed through the remains of a chapel. Near the entrance, they passed through a doorway that lead into the crypt, which was solidly built, comprising heavy and compact masonry. Once inside, he encountered the guardian, who stood with his back to the pair.

Andrea said, "I have brought him."

The mystery man turned to face them. He wore the traditional jellabah and turban, with part of it

covering his lower face. The small area of his face that was exposed, showed him to have blue eyes and pale skin, suggesting he was Caucasian. "Professor Burry tells me you are investigating this planetary grid Millennium business," the man said, his accent cultured.

"You are well informed. I am actually working for Dr Burry."

"The people who are trying to manipulate the grid are very powerful and very dangerous."

"Yes, I understand that."

"Then you should be quaking in your boots."

The weight of the man's words hit him like a pale of icy water.

"If you truly understand what is being said, you would not treat it so casually. These people topple popes and presidents, if they get in their way. To them you are nothing but an irritating insect."

"I apologise if I appear to be treating this knowledge lightly but what you are telling me seems highly improbable." Alan responded.

"I assure you it is very real indeed. Now, I would like to tell you something of great importance about that which I speak."

"Okay."

"The Knights Templar knew of this treaty and strove to rebalance the grid by building cathedrals, so that humanity could resonate at a higher than animal frequency. These cathedrals were built on sacred power points. The Knights knew that the Essene community had the knowledge with the Ark of the Covenant, which they used to make a grid of love on the planet."

Alan, enthralled, responded, "I understand the Knights Templar were not just the protectors of Christian pilgrims. I understand they found a great treasure in the Holy Land, but now I am confused. So what really was their real purpose?"

"Their real purpose was to deal with Alchemy. Not the point of changing water to wine, or lead to gold, but to change gross man into a 'Christed' Being, so that the experiment on Earth could be fulfilled. Mankind is a combination of 22 different genetically encoded star systems."

Alan Ridgard's eyes widened. "Whatever do you mean by us being a combination of 22 different genetically encoded star systems?"

"We were created on Earth to bring peace and harmony into the consciousness of the Pleiadian galaxy. We are an experiment. When we become one with our encoding, humanity can bring peace and love through Freewill to this planet. Then the whole of the Pleiadian galaxy will be able to experience the same."

"Look, coming back to terra firma, what was the real reason for the Crusades in the first place?" Alan Ridgard asked.

The stranger answered, "Late in the Eleventh century, a group of men known as the Clandestine monks created the Crusades to win back Jerusalem, so that they could re-establish the Essene

knowledge on the planet. Jerusalem means 'New Salem' or 'city of peace'. Salem was the birth place of the Order of Melchizidek, known here as the Brotherhood. It is here that the wisdom of the Essenes came from. This is why the Crusades were created.”

“So, how were the Templars created?”

“In 1099, Jerusalem was recaptured. Godfrey was made the king of Jerusalem and allowed nine men to dig in the ruins of King Solomon's temple to find the secrets of the Essenes. The Essene material was buried with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. In 1118, the Order of the Knights Templar was founded to protect this discovery of the Ark of the Covenant and records of Essene wisdom.”

“Why were they so interested in a Jewish artefact?”

“The Ark was much more than that. The Templars used the Ark of the Covenant to advance in time so that they could bring back the architecture of the great cathedrals to re-establish the grid, so that humanity could advance in consciousness, and the great Pleiadian experiment could be accomplished.”

“How did they re-establish the grid?”

“They connected all the great cathedrals to a twelfth dimensional star-gate in southern France. This was the home of the Cathars, a branch of Essenes that moved to southern France after the destruction of Jerusalem. So by entering any of the cathedrals, one could immediately be elevated to the twelfth dimensional star-gate.”

Alan Ridgard, stunned, stood open mouthed.

The stranger continued, “That is why each cathedral contained a labyrinth, which generates a vortex and connects you to the twelfth dimensional star-gate. To walk a labyrinth creates a pathway to Jerusalem, or a twelfth dimensional star-gate. Remember, Jerusalem means New Salem, where the ancient order of Melchizidek priests or the sacred Brotherhood, resides.”

“So what has all this got to do with what we are engaged in now?”

“It is now time that humanity understands this history and protects this wisdom. We are a planet of Freewill and, as we are a creation of love, fear and deception will destroy us. Whereas the love vibration and an understanding of who we are will bring peace, tranquillity and balancing harmony to the entire galaxy.”

“That’s extraordinary,” Alan gasped.

“You are very privileged to know these things. It is only because Professor Burry said it was necessary for you to hear these things to strengthen your resolve, that I agreed to take this risk. Now you both must leave.”

“I never realised that people like him existed,” Alan stated, as he and Andrea stood outside the chapel.

“Their presence has to be the biggest secret on this planet. Understand, that at this time, the Illuminates has created a system of HAARP and ELF to control the weather and to use mind control against us. The Temple of New Saqqara is an antenna system to counteract this. Once a person is trained through this system and contacts the Guardians of the Round Table, they can tap into the

grid anywhere on the planet and use their mind to create a balance of love within the grid. It is only through this love that the planet can be balanced. This knowledge is the Guardians wonderful gift to the whole of humanity.”

Alan Ridgard fixed Andrea in his gaze. “If they have it under control why are you so concerned about what could happen?”

“Because they can only carry out their mission in secret. We have to be their functionaries in the world. We have to do what we can to stop the devious dark forces from taking control of the grid.”

“Presuming what you say is true, what practical steps can we take to stop them?”

Andrea ignored his question. Instead she said, “I do not feel this is all in the right order.”

“What order are you talking about?”

“What the guardian said. Don’t get me wrong. I think the idea is great.”

Alan became irritated, “What idea?”

“The idea that cathedrals are gateways, when I sense none of them are.”

Alan, was confused, so he just listened.

She looked straight at him. “I have a friend who worked with Sainte-Germaine in Ireland last march. She told me she found the Illuminati had used all Christian churches for control, through blood ritual and murders, therefore keeping them in a dark state.”

“I have often wondered what all the macabre and brutal church iconography was about. Somehow it does not seem to fit with Christ's message of peace.”

“No it doesn't. Understand that the Illuminates use everything to their own ends and they are masters at the game - religion included. They use Church rituals to make us feel more helpless, but glad to be inside something sacred to 'save' us. All the the ritual sounds, smells and words entrance people and the blood rituals practised, which are often placed within each church, gives a sense of the 'devil' presence, so the congregation is more loyal than ever to the Holy Church, in order that they are saved.”

“But surely those who embarked on the Crusades were genuine in their motivations!”

“Alan, it’s all a con. The Crusades were an extension of evil, sending troops out to genocide full villages if they did not embrace Christianity. They murdered around 80,000 of their own people.”

“Where’s the written evidence to attest to this?....”

Andrea interrupted, “.....I know, because I was a crusader, and those were some of the most awful times to live in. The Crusaders thought they were being lead by God through the churches minions, so they were full of themselves, very self righteous and thought they were actually saving souls through murder. But it was just more blood ritual for the Illuminate controllers.”

Alan removed his hat and scratched his head. “What I don’t get is how the Illuminates could have used the Church to control the grid.”

“It’s simple, Alan. Understand that churches were built upon sacred earth energy portals, vortexes and other special points. This way the dark side could 'play' the wolf in sheep's clothing and also control the energy grid of the earth at the same time. The grid is now dissolving and new grids are replacing that one, which is why our light work, our prayers, our positive intentions are so wonderful, for it is this that creates the new grids and activates certain junctures in the grid to open up these pressure points.”

“Do these new grid points exist in the same locations as the old ones?”

“Some of the points moved away from the old places, especially where blood ritual was performed.”

“Does that mean the churches are no longer influencing the Earth?”

Andrea answered. “The Church has done its job and the Illuminates does not need it in the same way because now it can manipulate the grid directly without the help of the Church.”

Alan rounded on her. “Just what the hell am I supposed to do with all this stuff?”

“Find the evildoers and expose them for whom they are.”

Yes, Alan thought, but with credibility. “Andrea, I need to speak to other people about this.”

“There is no time. We have to act now.”

“So, I'm George and I have to slay the evil dragon?”

She sighed, That's about the size of it, I'm afraid.”

“Do you know anyone in England who could help me?”

“It’s not the sort of thing I can be open about.”

“Surely you’ve spoken about this to somebody,” he pressed, convinced she was definitely holding something back.

“Only Marcus Cullen, but I don’t...”

“...Who’s Marcus Cullen?” Alan interjected.

“A history professor at my old uni.” Then Andrea became silent.

“What's the matter?”

“No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“What isn’t?”

Grabbing his arm she implored, “Please don’t contact him.”

“Why not?”

“It would be a bad idea. I should never have mentioned him in the first place,” Andrea said, admonishing herself.

“But, if he is the only lead you can give me!”

“Alan, this very important. Promise me you will not try to contact him.”

Alan sighed, “How the hell am I supposed to carry out this assignment without sources?”

Andrea hesitated, then she suggested, “You could try one Obi Wan Dawkins. He is also an Oxford University historian.”

“He sounds like a refugee from Star Wars.”

“He'll be much more open than Marcus,”

Although intrigued by the name, Alan needed more basic information. “Do you have a contact number for him?”

“I'm afraid not. I have lost contact with him/ Mind you, you could probably track him down through the University of Oxford.”

It all started innocently enough. The taxi arrived at Saqqara, after Andrea had been chauffeured away. The taxi driver was friendly enough, answering Alan's questions about Cairo. He was feeling hot but reasonably relaxed in the back of the old taxi, when it suddenly veered off the road, and travelled up up a dusty, stony track. “Hey, where are you going?”

“A short cut,” the driver laughed, secretly retrieving a sharp knife from under his seat.

Then, Alan noticed the other vehicle, a 4WD stopped across the lane way, with two young Arab men leaning against it.

Alan's antenna was on full alert.

The taxi slowed to a halt.

Alan saw the two men approaching the taxi. They were brandishing wicked looking machetes. This was not good.

The driver turned to his passenger, pointing the knife blade at him.

Alan's mind raced. The bastards were going to mug him. He looked at the wicked blade “There's no need for violence. Look, here's my wallet”

“We don't want your fucking money, infidel.”

“What do you want?”

The two men were just about to yank his door open.

He had to take the initiative. Taking them by surprise, he opened his door and thrust it hard into them, causing his assailants to stumble backward.

Diving out of the car Alan performed a Judo roll. Coming up on his feet he already had his dagger unsheathed and ready. But the odds were not in his favour. Taking on three armed Arabs was futile. So he ran away.

But, quickly recovering from his shock manoeuvre, they were hot on his heels, yelling out loud, "Death to the infidel".

He slowed his pace, allowing the faster of the three to catch up.

The machete arced toward him.

he ducked, made his move, thrust upwards with his dagger, finding soft flesh.

The Arab grimaced in pain, clutching at his stomach, as the blade found its target.

Instinct took over as the second machete wielding Arab lunged toward him.

The weapon described a deadly arc in the air set to split open his head.

Split second reflexes kicked in. Blocking the blow with his left forearm he jabbed, with straight fingers into the man's throat, smashing his windpipe.

As the second Arab writhed around gasping for breath, the driver, not wishing to meet the same fate, hared back to his cab.

Alan leaned forward, hands on knees breathing heavily. What the fuck was that all about, he wondered? Why was somebody trying to kill him? Was it tied in with Andrea Burry's discoveries? Too many questions with no answers.

Chapter 19

London 1999

Alan Ridgard had to exit Egypt fast. Karl annoyed, but understanding, had organised his air ticket and helped him leave the country that very day, before the Cairo police were on to him. An Egyptian gaol would not have been a pleasant experience. Once his plane was in the air he gave a huge sigh of relief and knocked back a couple of in-flight whiskeys. Leaving the heady mysticism of Egypt behind, he was looking forward to arriving back in England. Wracking his brains to try and figure out who wanted him dead was useless. Besides, the two incidents, one in London and one in Cairo, two years apart, may not have been connected. If they were, he had better be on his guard.

It cheered his soul to see the winding silvery ribbon of the Thames snaking its way through a sprawling, miniaturised metropolis, as his aircraft descended to the tarmac at Heathrow Airport. With nothing to declare - his blood stained dagger left in the garbage in Cairo - he was soon competing with other tired travellers who were competing to retrieve their baggage from one of the carousels. Having achieved that hurdle he caught a black cab that took him to his refuge in St

John's Wood.

After a refreshing coffee he checked his mail and any telephone messages left in his absence. Apart from people wanting his money and others trying to get him to buy something from them, there was only a reminder from his local library listing fines for overdue books, which really placed it in the first category. A phone message from Karl Haas brought him back to his fantastic but highly questionable assignment. He dialled his boss's satellite phone. Upon hearing Karl's voice, he said. "Hi Karl, what's happening?"

"I'm having to work with the delightful but slightly zany Andrea. The local cops are looking for a killer. The one with the gut wound died. And I am stuck out here doing your job."

"Sorry Karl but how I was to know a couple of psychopathic towel heads..."

"...I know. What's done is done." After a short pause, he said, "Andrea gave me a lead for you. An Obi Wan Dawkins, if you can believe such a name."

"Yes she told me. And no, I have had chance yet. But seriously. Is she batty or not?"

"Yes, her story is really out there, with very little solid evidence to back it up. But it ties in with Al Haab. Don't forget that."

"There's not much I can do about that from here,"

"Find out what you can about Arain. He seems to be the key. Oh, and try not to leave any more bodies around for police to find."

Alan woke up in a cold sweat, to rain beating against his basement flat window. It was still dark but at least he wasn't being pursued by a horde of sword wielding Yodas, all after his blood. His watch showed it to be around 5 am. What the hell was he doing with his life, alone in his garret, when at least one gorgeous blond should have been sharing his bed. Then Professor Burry came to mind. Not in a sexual way, although she was still an attractive woman. Now he had to contact a historian with some weird Star Wars fetish. Perhaps that was what the scary dream had been about. He staggered around in his cramped kitchen, searching out ingredients for a caffeine hit. It would have to be black as the milk in the fridge had nearly turned solid. While drinking his coffee, the mysterious but untouchable professor Cullen came to mind. What the hell was that 'mustn't contact him business'? If the world was soon to go to hell in a hand basket – strange saying that – he needed all the help he could get. Damn it! Why hadn't he pressed Andrea for an explanation. But somehow he didn't think it would have been forthcoming.

Since leaving the SAS Alan couldn't picture himself in a pen pushing job, or selling the unnecessary latest thing to people who didn't need them. So when Karl Haas offered him a field agent job in Intel-Inc, he jumped at it. Mostly it was about research, questioning people and collecting useful intelligence. It was 'black ops' type work, that the average Joe would see to be underhand and dirty but Alan saw a sense of honour in it. The importance of honour had been instilled into him by his dad, before his father went off the rocks. As a young, impressionable boy Alan saw Corporal Ridgard as a man to be proud of. That was before the Vietnam War turned him into a basket case. Yes, young Alan was proud of his dad, who taught him that honour was the greatest of virtues, especially in a wartime scenario, where it is so easy to let standards drop.

It was this sense of honour that made him keep his word to Andrea. So he kept Marcus Cullen off

limits despite his growing curiosity, where the untouchable academic was concerned. As an intelligence operative Alan tried to maximise success while minimising risk, both personally and to others who are involved. The two attempts on his life showed the kind of dangers he faced. Yet he had a feeling they were personal, not professional. But who had he pissed off so much that they had tried to have him killed? Nobody sprung to mind. He decided to make a list of possible candidates.

There was Jamie Fringe back in 3rd grade. But surely he wasn't still holding a grudge. In any case pushing someone's head down a school toilet bowl was hardly going to result in a contract on his life. Then there was Malcolm Towder, or Talcum Powder – a name he hated - and the incident with Jenny Frome, his date for the school prom. Sure Towder had a date with her first but it wasn't his fault if old Talcum couldn't make it because he had the shits – literally. Admittedly the laxative powder in his coca cola would have impeded his amorous advances. But surely he would not, after all those years, still be having the shits with Alan, enough to want him dead.

After searching through his past the only other candidate was Bernie Walcott, who he had a drink with a year or so before. But he was just a fucking whiner. Besides what happened in Iraq stayed in Iraq, well at least as far as Alan was concerned.

Yes, the consequences of venturing into the proverbial lions den could mean becoming the lions lunch. He accepted the fact his work put him in harm's way. But it was unacceptable to him that sometimes, his source, and possibly others involved in the case, could also suffer as a result of his actions. Such was the situation with Professor Burry. She had inadvertently mentioned Marcus Cullen as a possible source. The fact she had implored him not to contact the man made finding him all the more tantalising. Her telling him to forget the name and never to seek him out or approach him in order to corroborate her story, was almost too much for him to bear. Any unscrupulous investigator would see this as waving a red rag at a bull. Alan, however, was not one of them, so heeding Dr Burry's wishes, he sought out his only other lead, the historian who named himself after a Star Wars character.

Alan had no success in locating Obi Wan Dawkins. The contact number he had been given was incorrect. There were quite a few universities in Oxford and he gave up after getting negative responses from the first three. Exasperated, it dawned on him that Professor Burry may be having a nervous breakdown; that the historian existed only in her imagination; and that he was out chasing wild geese. Oddly enough this line of thinking spurred him on to investigate further. If there was a real person called Obi Wan Dawkins, then there might be some truth to the rest of her bizarre story.

Having no joy in tracking down, what he now believed was Andrea's fantasy academic, Alan threw his hands up. Angry and frustrated, he decided to ditch the assignment, head down to the King's Head and drown his sorrows in a couple of bevies. The second beer cleared his head. Any-more would have had the opposite effect. As he recollected, Andrea said This Obi character could be contacted at the University of Oxford, not at an Oxford University. That was the name and it had been staring him in face all the time. He phoned The Oxon reception but was informed that no staff members were named as such.

His lead seem utterly useless. Then he recalled that Andrea said Marcus Cullen lectured at her old university, which was the Oxon. As she knew both Professor Cullen and the ethereal Obi perhaps Cullen would know about the Star Wars fan. As much as it went against his sense of honour, phoning the forbidden contact seemed the only avenue he had left to pursue.

However, as fate would have it, he received a call just as he reached for his mobile. He listened as the caller spoke. "Yes, this is he. Who wants him?"

“We need to talk.”

“About what?”

“The Millennium Dome.”

“Who am I speaking to?” Alan asked, suspiciously.

“I can’t tell you over the phone. Why don’t we meet, say tomorrow, at the dome.”

“Who are you?”

“A friend of Obi Wan Dawkins.”

Alan couldn't believe his luck. “I’ve been trying to contact him all day. Where is he?”

“We can talk about that tomorrow. Say, the main entrance of the site - around tennis.”

Alan Ridgard considered the proposal. He needed a contact to help him with the assignment and the mysterious caller may well be what he was looking for. It could also be a trap to end his life. Brushing his growing paranoia aside, he agreed, “Okay, but how do I recognise you?”

“I’ll be wearing my Air Force Great Coat. And bring some cash because it's going to cost you.”

Chapter 20

Cairo 1989

Abdul Hafiz lay huddled up on a crude bed in the dark cell, wracked with pain. Now that the numbing effect and shock of being brutalised had worn off he was feeling the full extent of the cuts and bruises. He remembered being blindfolded and taken to a police station where they stripped him naked and beat him intermittently for 12 hours. The police, having realised they had the wrong man, denied the incident had ever taken place. Abdul was released before dawn on May 8, but with the warning that he would be beaten more severely the next time he was detained. He later found out it was a case of mistaken identity, Another young man, Ahmed Mafir had used the Internet to call for a nationwide day of protest on May 4 against price hikes and curbs on freedoms across Egypt, and Abdul had been blamed.

Having been released from gaol, Abdul Hafiz gleaned two main things from that experience. To never trust the police and to fight the unjust policies of President Hashish Barraba. To this end he met up with Amelia Pori, an activist with a grass roots group called Al Haab. Since campaigning with Al Haab, Abdul had bolted from trouble a number of times, including dashing from security forces closing in on a demonstration in the port city of Alexandria. However, his less mercurial moments had landed him in police cells. But upon each release he returned to his computer, opened his blog and conspired in cyberspace to end President Mubarab's 27-year rule of Egypt.

Abdul’s passion soon had him rising through the Al Haab ranks. He became their spokesperson and on one occasion, when he was interviewed by Mohammed Ahmed, a left wing journalist, he said, “No one knows when the trigger of revolution will be pulled. The state is oppressive, but ordinary Egyptians from all over sympathise with us. The generation born since 1981 came into the world during the worst period of Egyptian history.” He paused, then added, “We can see how dynamic the

rest of the world is, but we feel alienated, as if we are living outside of time. We've spent years in schools and learned nothing. We have school diplomas and other certificates that are completely useless.”

Born in Cairo in 1969, Abdul Hafiz missed the vicarious persecution that culminated in the widespread and uniform expulsion of Jews from Egypt in 1967, at the time of the Six Day War. But his father told him the stories and he became anti-Zionist. He learned that in 1945, there were approximately 900,000 Jews living in Arab countries. After the Six Day War only a small number remained. Abdul’s father took pains to explain the difference between the ‘true Jews’ as he called them, and the Zionists. He explained there had always been a harmonious historical relationship between Jews and Muslims but that was destroyed only by modern Zionist intervention.

Abdul grew up believing the Jewish exodus was mainly voluntary. However, he later learned the Jews were manipulated and persuaded to leave by a combination of Zionist and colonialist conspiracies. Anti-Jewish feeling played little or no part in the so-called expulsion. He realised the political purpose of this perspective was to contest the legitimacy of the State of Israel which is based at least in part on its self-defined role as a refuge for all Jewish victims of persecution, whether from Europe or the Middle East. In actual fact it was really set up as a spy base to gain intelligence to be used against the Islamic countries of the Persian Gulf.

Chapter 21

Cairo 1999

Abdul Hafiz, enjoyed working with Andrea Burry, on the dig. Besides, being an assistant to a famous Egyptologist looked good in his CV and kept the police off his back. Behind this veneer of respectability, his darker side continued to operate. It vexed him that he had to keep that part of his life from the professor, but it seemed that Allah willed it to be so.

Amongst Abdul's many conspiracy theories he claimed that the 'eye in the pyramid' blatantly evoked the well-known Masonic symbol on the US one-dollar bill. From the Internet he learned that Freemasons also harboured ancient Hebrew Rituals related to Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, which also fired accusations of 'Zionist' infiltration in the Arab newspapers. That these accusations were hotly denied by culture minister Farouk Hosni, meant nothing to Al Haab.

In line with Hosni's view, Dr Jalani stated, on the television news, that. “The suggestion was groundless.” Dr. Jalani, the official in charge of the Pyramids, claimed, “The upcoming Millennium celebrations have nothing to do with Masonic beliefs. The design on the US dollar is a faulty imitation of the Pyramids of the Middle Kingdom.”

Abdul was not sucked in by Hosni’s or Jalani’s rhetoric. They had their own beliefs on the subject and nothing was going to stop them exposing the blasphemy and corruption surrounding the Millennium celebrations. Funded by Mohammed Fazi, to destabilise the moderate Egyptian Government, Al Haab was primed for action.

The Arab activist was looking forward to meeting with Professor Burry. He was infatuated by her. So he took advantage of any opportunity to spend time with her. He recalled the day he got a glimpse into the real Andrea Burry – not the archaeological professor. During one excavation he found a small part of an artefact that excited her. It was the look of excitement in her eyes, that gave him a glimpse of Andrea with her guard down. For a moment – one that remained with him – Abdul saw her innocence, her vulnerability her essence. He fell in love with that but never ever voiced his innermost feelings.

Andrea sat nursing her coffee, the second one she had ordered from Cafe Beano's, a trendy café, close to the more affluent Marriott restaurant. Abdul was late, and she needed to talk with him urgently. As the cafe became filled with noisy customers, she wondered if she had chosen a suitable meeting place. Still, the sweet crepes had been to her liking and the coffee had a rich aroma, but where was the young Arab she was supposed to meet? She was about to give up, and leave when, through the large windows, she saw him approaching.

"Where on earth have you been?" She admonished, as the young man sat down.

"My humble apologies professor but I have been busy."

"As am I and I have wasted nearly an hour waiting for you."

He flashed a disarming smile. "I am here now. What was so urgent professor?"

"When we're not working you can call me Andrea," she said, softening a little to him.

He ordered a coke and ice. Then he said, "Remember that artefact I found for you."

"Part of one – yes."

"You told me it was a clue to something called the 'Hall of Memories'. What is that?"

Hardening, she responded, "I did not ask you here to talk about that."

"I know that," he grinned, "but I am interesting in finding out..."

"...Never mind about that," she interrupted. Staring at him, she tossed a copy of the Al Ahram Weekly on the table. "Tell me your Al Haab group was not behind this horror."

Abdul, looked at the article but said nothing.

Pointing at a picture showing the aftermath of an explosion, Andrea stated, "It says here that a bomb exploded in a souk, killing traders and two tourists. The police say that Al Haab was behind this. Is that true or not?"

Abdul eventually found his voice. "Professor, you must understand what we are up against. Unless we show Hosni and Zawarbi that we are serious, they will not stop their Zionist trickery."

"So, Killing innocent people is okay with you!" Andrea responded angrily.

"Professor, we have demanded that they stop the ceremony from taking place. They just ignore us. It is on their heads that more incidents will follow."

Abdul, I told you once before that I will not be party to terrorist violence. I should have you arrested."

"Perhaps if I ask Hosni nicely to not cap the pyramid he will not do it," Abdul answered, sarcastically.

Andrea cooled down. "Of course that would not work, but there must be other, more peaceful ways, of getting your point across."

“Professor, the only effective way to make the government take notice is to damage the tourist trade. If that means people get hurt then we are sorry, but this is war as far as we are concerned.”

“And that makes it acceptable , I suppose.”

“We do what we have to to achieve our collective goal.” Then, Abdul looked at her quizzically.

“Professor, what are you doing to stop this terrible act from taking place?”

Andrea thought about it. She was talking to Karl to have him investigate her claims. But that was just intelligence gathering. Whereas Abdul, although misguided, was putting his life on the line for what he believed in. She sighed deeply, “I can never advocate violence as the answer but I cannot fault your dedication and bravery, Abdul. I never thought I would be saying this but maybe sometimes the means do justify the ends.”

The Arab gave a cheesy grin. “Thank you professor, now perhaps we can talk of more pleasant things like The Hall of Memories.”

“I guess you've earned it, she sighed. OK, Abdul, what do you want to know?”

“How are you going with your search for it?”

“I think this calls for more coffee,” She said snapping her fingers to get the attention of a nearby waiter.

As she settled into her third Beano’s coffee, Andrea began, “The American Psychic Edgar Cayce, known as the 'Sleeping Prophet', foretold the placing of a gilded capstone on the Great Pyramid which, according to him, would act as a 'symbol' for the rediscovery of the legendary 'Hall of Records of Atlantis'. This, he claimed was to be located under the paws of the Great Sphinx. He said also hidden there would be a record of the events of the second coming of Christ”

“By Allah, how did he know such things?” Abdul asked.

“He was a great seer who was somehow able to see events in the future. According to him, the crown or apex (or capstone) was made of metal that was to be indestructible, being of copper, brass, gold with other alloys.”

“This Case, (that was how the name sounded to him) did he know about what we are doing?”

“Oddly, Cayce also associated the event with the establishment of a sort of New World Order based on Masonic principles”.

“That he knew of such things back then is truly amazing.”

“Yes Abdul, it is quite marvellous. He detailed it as follows:”

“...For with those changes that will be wrought, Americanism with the universal thought that is expressed and manifest in the Brotherhood of man into group thought as expressed in the Masonic Order, will be the eventual rule in the settlement of affairs in the world. Not that the world is to become a Masonic Order, but the principles that are embraced in the same will be the basis upon which the new order of peace is to be established...”

“Al Haab is dedicated to stop their plan.”

She covered his hand with hers, “Be careful Abdul.” She had taken quite a liking to the young man.

The Cultural minister tried not to let his growing concern show. He had to keep a cool head. He had just left the political council of the Majilis al haab? (not to be confused with the terrorist group) where the main topic had been the souk bombing. Many questions were asked about the Al Haab connection and their demands. Farouk Hosni felt out of his depth. He needed those answers himself. He had to speak with Karif Jalani.

Karif Jalani, one of Egypt’s most eminent archaeologists was busy in the field when he received Farouk’s call. Annoyed at being disturbed while studying the gigantic 'Colossi of Memnon', which was perhaps the most imposing monument on the West Bank, in Luxor, he reluctantly listened to what the caller had to say. He replied, “I cannot leave this site at present. You will have to come here and see me.”

“That could be difficult at present my friend. I am needed here to keep the police and media informed about Al Haab.”

“And I have discovered some new evidence concerning Amenhotep III's mortuary temple, so I cannot come to you.”

Farouk sighed, “Very well, I will catch a plane and see you at the site.”

Secretly, Minister Hosni was happy to get away from parliament for a while. The two hour flight to Luxor, gave Farouk chance to go over the questions posed by members of the Majilis al Halib.

As the aircraft descended he could make out villages on the western Nile bank of Luxor, as well as the magnificent graves and mortuary temples of the Pharaohs of the new kingdom. A police car awaited the minister’s arrival, to take him to the monuments of Thebes West. The armed police protected the Cultural Minister, as he approached Amenhotep III's mortuary temple, which now stood virtually alone in a field at the side of the road to the valley of the kings.

“Greetings my friend, May Allah smile upon your journey,” Karif Jalani smiled bowing to the politician. “Let me show you my find”.

Farouk followed his friend. It was good to be in the open air, the rays of the sun warming his body and spirit.

The Egyptologist stopped in front of the huge statue. Turning to his friend, he said, “One of the most troubling problems for biblical archaeologists was the lack of archaeological evidence for Moses and the Israelites in Egypt. Prior to the Exodus, there were hundreds of thousands of Israelites in Egypt, yet little or no evidence of their existence has been found, even though the sojourn is recorded as lasting for centuries, in the Scriptures!”

“Oh!” was all Farouk could think to say.

“Yes, Aaron, the older brother of Moses, a Levite, was the first high priest. The Islamic sources have very scant details of Aaron, but from the Bible, we know that Aaron was the eldest son of Amram and Jochebed, a daughter of Levi, as mentioned in Exodus 6:20. Aaron is three years older than Moses but younger

than Miriam as quoted in Exodus 2:1,4; 7:7.

Farouk laughed. "Since when have you been studying the infidel's bible?"

Karif remained serious. "I have come to believe that much of the Bible's content also reflects part of Egyptian history."

"So, what is your big discovery?"

"The biblical chronology dates the birth of Moses to around 1527 BC. In the new chronology of Egypt, the Pharaoh on the throne of Egypt was Neferhotep I of the 13th Dynasty."

"Is this what you got me down here for?" the politician said, disappointed.

"Oh no. There's more than that my friend. Artapanus wrote that a Pharaoh named Palmanothes was persecuting the Israelites. His daughter Merris adopted a Hebrew child who grew up to be called prince Mousos. Merris married Pharaoh Khenephres."

"So this Prince Mousos is the biblical Moses."

"Yes! And he grew up to administer the land on behalf of this Pharaoh. He led a military campaign against the Ethiopians who were invading Egypt at the time. However, upon his return, Khenephres grew jealous of Mousos' popularity, who then fled to Arabia. After the death of Khenephres, Mousos returned and lead the Israelites to freedom."

"Is it a true account, my friend?"

"Alas, it may be only a Mosaic story with similarities to the biblical account. Yet the only Pharaoh with the name Khenephres was Sobekhotep IV, who took the name Khaneferre at his coronation. He reigned soon after Neferhotep I of the 13th Dynasty, and, as I mentioned, was the Pharaoh in power at Moses' birth"

"It does sound very compelling. However I need your assistance concerning Al Haab."

Distracted from his theory, Karif Jalani brushed off Hosni's comments. "They are just a bunch of crazies. Pyramidiots I call them." he laughed at his own joke.

Farouk was not amused. "They claim responsibility for the souk bombing. They may be crazies but they are powerful crazies, and that makes them very dangerous."

"So, what has this got to do with me?"

Farouk looked Karif in the eye. "They are demanding that the capping of the pyramid be stopped."

The Egyptologist laughed derisively, "They are just millennium conspiracy theorists, claiming the Egyptian authorities is allowing a secret society bent on world domination to hold rituals inside the Great Pyramid, as 2000 dawns. There are many of these idiots gathering here, from all over the world, but mainly from America."

"With respect my friend, Al Haab are different. They claim the capping of the Great Pyramid is a Zionist plot to..."

Karif saw red. "... As custodian of the Giza pyramids, I will not let the pyramidiots tell me what to do."

"They seem to be well organised..."

Karif interrupted. "...They are just a bunch of drugged up crazies. They have even said, on the Internet, there is a tunnel from my bathroom to the Great Pyramid and that I am hiding evidence of a lost civilisation of aliens, who they claim, built the pyramids. And you think I would give these people any credence!"

"All the same, Al Haab are threatening to attack another tourist location if we do not open up dialogue with them on this issue."

"Then, it is the job of the security forces to stop them. My responsibility lies with with the Giza pyramids, and no fringe group is going to spoil a spectacular millennium party. An opera has already been composed by Jean Michel Jarre, and at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 31, a gold-plated, light-emitting capstone 10 meters high will be lowered by helicopter on to the missing peak of the Great Pyramid of Cheops."

Farouk had hoped for more cooperation from his friend. He asked, "Why is the capping ceremony so important?"

"Don't worry my friend, the crowds will be kept about a kilometre away from the three Giza pyramids and the Sphinx. There will be an increased police presence for the party, which is intended to boost tourism. The measures are mainly to ensure the pyramids will not be damaged by crowds and to guard against any threat from Islamic militants and the 'pyramidiots.'

Farouk felt he was not getting through to his friend. "The damage is already being done, and more terrorist acts could yet take place. Tourists may become panicked and decide attending your show is not worth them risking their lives."

Feeling threatened, Karif said, "Then you had better get the security forces onto this before it blows up in both our faces."

Chapter 22

Oxford 1999

Alan Ridgard met Marcus Cullen but did not know it. Although 'met' is probably too stronger word to describe the brief physical interaction that took place. Coincidentally, it was Professor Cullen who gave Alan, directions to the faculty of History. Then both continued on their separate ways without knowing who the other was. Following Cullen's directions, Alan walked through the building until he came to the huge library. It was there that he had arranged to catch up again with Professor Burry. He found her sitting alone at a table where she was poring over some open books.

She looked up as he approached. "Alan, it's good to see you again. You left Cairo in quite a hurry."

"Yes, and with good reason. Let us just say it became a bit too dangerous for me to stay there. So, what are you doing back here in England?"

“Alan, time is against us and I have information that will prove useful.”

“What are you talking about?”

She stood up. “It's too public here. Come with me.”

“Where are we going?” he asked, following her lead.

They sat on a seat in the main quad, which was near a statue of The English civil war Roundhead leader, the statesman, Oliver Cromwell.

“I'm surprised to see that here,” Alan stated, indicating the statue.

“Well, the university was a centre of the Royalist Party during the English Civil War, but the town was largely anti King Charles and favoured the opposing Roundhead cause instead. However, what is interesting is that the Soldier-statesman, Cromwell, was the chancellor of this university from 1650 to 1657.”

“Now, that is interesting.”

“Yes it was he who was instrumental in preventing both Oxford and Cambridge from being closed down by the Puritans, who viewed university education as dangerous to their fundamentalist religious beliefs.”

“Fascinating Andrea, but I'm sure that is not what you got me to come here for.”

“Have you met up with Obi, yet?”

“No, but I received a call from a Neil Hitler.” He added, “Do all your friends have weird names?”

“He is not exactly a friend. Be wary of him. He is a loose and reckless cannon.”

“That may well be but he is the only cannon who has offered to help me so far.”

Andrea put a friendly hand on his knee. “I am involved with a radical group called Al Haab and things are getting a bit out of hand.”

Alan Ridgard, taken aback, asked, “What do you mean?”

“I mean they are about our only chance to succeed in stopping the dangerous capping of the pyramid. It's not common knowledge but I thought you should know.”

“How radical?”

“Carrying out terrorist acts, I'm afraid. They were involved in a bombing that cost four lives.”

Alan Ridgard's eyes widened. “You must distance yourself!”

“One of their leaders is an intelligent young man who has been researching the Gregorian calendar.”

“What does that have to do with...”

“...Please just listen, Alan,” Andrea pleaded, cutting him off.

He switched on his recorder.

“He argues that the Gregorian calendar was created by the ancient Illuminates, a secret society that has held power since early human history, and that Millennium Eve 2000 will coincide with a surge of solar energy, which is to be manipulated by the Illuminates cult through their HAARP technology. Manipulating this energy will, they believe, help Illuminates to control the thoughts and emotions of the masses.”

Alan sneered, “And you think Neil Hitler is a loose cannon.”

“Please listen, and don’t interrupt.” Andrea snapped.

Alan, taken aback, retorted, “I’m not one of your students.”

“OK, that was a little harsh of me, but what I have to say is important.”

Alan mollified, grinned, “Okay, I’m all ears.”

She explained, “ It appears that the Giza site is the ideal venue for what the Illuminates have in mind because it was originally built to centre upon a massive energy vortex of converging force lines. Now I know there are all manner of rumours floating around concerning the Giza Plateau on Millennium Eve. But even some elements of the Egyptian press, together with doomsday Internet sites have been quick to see plots in plans to project giant images of the Pharaonic Eye of Horus on to the sides of the pyramids during Jarre’s show. They have linked the image to what they describe as the 'Masonic symbolism' of the glowing eye at the top of the de-capped pyramid, as clearly shown, on a US \$1 bill.”

“What do the Egyptian authorities have to say about these strange theories?”

“Egyptian archaeologists shrug off claims there is anything sinister in giving the Cheops? pyramid a new top. When, after 30 years of labour, Cheops was allegedly completed 5,000 years ago, it was then crowned with a gold capstone amid celebratory festivities.”

“And you think this terrorist group you have a connection with is going to be able to stop this new Millennium ceremony from ever taking place.”

“I don’t know. However, I have heard from a reliable source that Hosni is getting cold feet and amid accusations of 'Zionist' plots and 'Masonic' skulduggery, the Egyptian government is split on the capping issue. Many of them want to cancel the placing of the golden capstone on top of the Great Pyramid on the eve of the millennium.”

“That’s good news then.”

“Yes, if it is true. However, we need to step up things at this end. So you need to see Kes Crane. She is an expert on all things to do with Stonehenge. I cannot come with you but I have set up a meeting between the two of you for tomorrow morning.”

“I can’t make it I’m afraid.”

“Why?” not?”

“I’m meeting Neil at the Millennium Dome.”

“You need to get together with Kes soon. I will reschedule the meeting, but it has to be soon.”

Chapter 23

London 1999

Neil Hitler believed in getting to know his enemy, which was why he got himself a job at the Millennium Dome. As a electrician he had access to many parts of the dome, off limits to other workers. He needed to know it intimately for what he had in mind. The Millennium Dome, a huge exhibition centre, designed by Richard Rogers, on the Greenwich peninsula in London, England, was to open on December 31, 1999. Publicly part of the Millennium Experience exhibition to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium, Neil was convinced that it hid a darker agenda. He looked around to see if Alan Ridgard had arrived. He pulled his great coat around his thin frame to ward off the the chilly, drizzly rain that added to the greyness of the day. Then he espied the security guy, making his way around the largest dome of its kind in the world. “I didn’t think you were coming,” he said, by way of scolding Alan Ridgard for his tardiness.

“All these cabs and you can never get one one you need it.”

“Take a look at the fuckin’ monstrosity,” Neil prompted, pointing a gloved hand at the dome.”

“Why was it put here?”

“They constructed it here, in Greenwich, because of its proximity to the 0° longitude meridian, from which the precise beginning of the new millennium can be calculated by the historically and geographically important Greenwich Royal Observatory building.”

“I don’t suppose you can get me inside,” Alan Ridgard asked, doubtfully, as he observed the high fence all around the dome;’s perimeter.”

“No mate. I’ve still got my security ID but I’m saving that for a more important occasion.”

“What occasion is that?”

Neil looked daggers at Alan Ridgard. “Fuck off! I’m not telling you that.”

“You not going to do anything stupid, are you?”

Neil starred at the investigator. Listen mate, we’ve got less than three months to nobble this fucker and you ask me a question like that. If we don’t stop it they will have won, and, if they deem it so we will be kept alive to work for them.”

Not wanting to get caught up in any of Neil’s many conspiracy theories, Alan suggested, “Okay, talk me through the dome set up.”

“Well, there’s 14 zones in the exhibition, organised according to: Work, Learning, Money, Body, Play, Journey, Share Ground, Living Island, Home Planet, Talk, Faith, Rest, Mind, and Self Portrait.”

“Why those particular areas?”

Neil shrugged, “How the fuck should I know? Maybe it’s all part of a plot to brainwash the sheeple

who get sucked in by the hype and come here. There's also an arena for live performances to take place."

"It all seems pretty harmless."

"Of course, why wouldn't they spend all those millions on entertaining the masses?" Neil asked, sarcastically.

Alan nodded.

Neil turned to face the investigator "Alan Ridgard, what looks like a perfectly harmless tourist attraction is in fact designed to program visitors to the Dome to pacify them to events to come."

"How?"

"Have you heard of the Y2K thing?"

"It's something to do with computers not working in the new millennium, isn't it?"

"That's what they want us to believe. Listen mate, Y2K was created so that the Illuminates could control this system. They built the Millennium Dome to move the energy from Stonehenge to their dome in London's Harbour. Then they created the story of computer shut-downs so they would have an excuse for all the electrical systems on the planet shutting down."

"Why do they want to do that?"

"To create chaos and take over with their world government, of course."

"How are they going to achieve that?"

"If they succeed in recapping the Great Pyramid and transferring the control to the Millennium Dome, it will send a surge of energy through the grid and Obi told me the Earth would of been in total blackout."

Alan Ridgard slowly shook his head. "This all seems to much to take on board. How am I supposed to use this info to build a case?"

Neil became edgy. He started scratching his chin. "If the fuckin' Illuminates have their way and they decide you are useful to them, you will only be investigating what they dictate. So forget your fucking case and commit yourself to human liberty instead."

Up to this point Alan Ridgard had only considered himself carrying out an assignment for a client. Now, it seemed he was becoming part of the plot, not just another agent doing his job. A chill ran up his spine. Being associated with anarchists and terrorists, filled him with self loathing. He had always felt honourable in his actions, even if the jobs themselves could be considered unsavoury. He looked Neil in the eye. "I have to go."

"Listen mate, running away from this won't make it go away. wake up to yourself. You are up to your arse in this, whether you like it or not."

Neil's parting words played over and over in Alan mind. He was running from the madness, not the so-called evidence he justified, as he finished a beer, in the Cutty Sark tavern, on Riverside Walk.

He was security agent. He gathered intelligence. He did not become part of the problem. Yet, in this case it was difficult for him to distinguish between being the investigator and the investigated. As a employee of Intel-Inc he did not have to believe what his client told him. Yet, here he was, involved with the weirdest and scariest story along with some pretty odd characters. He felt himself being sucked into their madness. Yet some part of him believed their story, a story he was part of. And that scared the hell out of him.

Back home there was a message for him. It was Andrea telling him Kes Crane was free the following morning. She left directions for him and told him to be careful. There was no return number. Alan Ridgard sat down with a coffee and set about transcribing his notes. He felt he should contact Neil and explain why he left the way he did. he found his number and rang his mobile phone.

Neil answered, "Who is it?"

"Alan Ridgard, I just need to explain..."

"...Nothing to explain mate - you just bottled it,"

"Bottled it?"

"Got shit scared."

"I was just wondering what I was becoming entangled in."

"We're already entangled mate."

"What proof do you have that this is an actually conspiracy?"

"Mate, you just have to add the bits together."

"Explain some of the bits to me."

"Not over the phone mate."

The phone went dead.

Alan Ridgard put down the receiver. Then he returned to his laptop and he continued to type up his notes. He wrote; There are many questions that need answers for this to make any sense. He then listed the questions:

- (1) Who rearranged the calendar and why, in reference to bringing about about fear at the changing of the millennium?
- (2) What is the old treaty that was allegedly made at the construction of the Great Pyramid, and why was it now null and void?
- (3) How could mankind have the ability to use the grid to advance into higher planes of consciousness through the star-gates, when freed from the grid?
- (4) How can the Illuminates keep mankind's minds controlled, by re-establishing the grid?
- (5) If all this is true, what can we do to stop it?

Neil's solution is to destroy the dome before it becomes part of the grid.

After listening to Neil, Alan thought the man was mentally unbalanced. Admitting to wanting to

destroy the dome without knowing if he was an undercover cop, showed recklessness. So could he be a reliable source? Apart from Andrea, so far, he was the only source. Alan sighed, and pored over his notes on the Millennium Dome.

From the architectural design standpoint, the Dome, constructed at a cost of US \$1.125 billion, comprises 12 columns that support a white canopy. It seemed an excessive sum of money for what amounted to a roof that creates a space below it. There are 6 entrances to the dome with adjacent globes that provide the points for the 6 pointed star. Neil had suggested its symbolism was that of the flag of occupied Palestine by the CIA narco-terrorist collaborators and macro-criminals. He also stated that the twelve towers also permit a Templar Cross to be drawn with each of the four corners of the Red Cross having three points.

From a project point of view the unopened Millennium Dome project was already controversial, arousing much criticism and opposition on a number of fronts. The huge cost is a major factor, for a temporary building, at a time of huge cuts and attacks on the working class and poor with attacks on unemployed, single mothers, people with disabilities etc. The secrecy surrounding the proposed contents of a 'public' project, the artistic/cultural merits of exhibits, whether there will be a religious theme - yep, Christianity, the desirability or otherwise of commercial and nationalist elements. Some of those against the project, the direct action group, called 'Reclaim The Streets', protesters who occupied the construction site for several hours late last year.

Chapter 24

London 1999

Sheila Brock looked about her at the huge dome under which she was standing. She had come a long way since early 'Corporate Projects' days. CP, the brainchild of her, then, husband and herself started as a small business that organised local events. It grew, under her steerage and motivation, into a huge company that designed and developed large scale expositions. By this time she and her husband had parted company, and not under the best of terms. This acrimony simmered like a grumbling volcano, which then erupted into a legal lava flow, nearly destroying the business.

After a long-fought court battle, he ended up with their mansion and she with the business. For the prior five years Sheila was CP's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, under her husband. Following the court's decision she became Chief Executive Officer in December 1988. She brought to CP's top job, an in-depth understanding and knowledge of both national and Regional level major events industry issues. This was gained from her 18 years of exhibition design experience. Corporate projects got its biggest break when Sheila Brock attained the greatly sought after multi million dollar Millennium Dome project.

Apart from being a hard-headed and a sometimes ruthless business woman she was very hands-on, and not only with the men she fancied. Very successful in business, known as the ball breaker, Sheila, at 45, owned the largest shareholding in 'Corporate Projects'. She hit the big time with a government contract for the 'Millennium Dome'. Although she had rich influential friends in her corner and although Joseph Minter said he would put in a good word for her in Parliament, it still came as a big surprise when she found out that she had secured the very lucrative deal. Now, two years into the project, Sheila began to wonder if she had really been that fortunate after all. With any major project the size of the Millennium dome, with the number of strands that had to be pulled together, there was obviously going to be some glitches, but the MD operation appeared to be having more than its fair share. She looked at the report once more and she still couldn't comprehend how he had got away with it, until he was caught, of course. Had he not been apprehended by the FBI and extradited to Broad moor, she may still not have been aware of the the

financial fraud that ran into millions of pounds. Sheila looked up at the clock. Joseph Minter would be there soon and she had to have some answers.

Joseph Minter, MP for Culture and the Arts was already on his way, but he was caught up in traffic on Creek Road. He tapped on the glass partition between him and his chauffeur. And once his personal driver pressed a button on the dashboard and the glass barrier slid aside, Minter asked, "What does the GPS say?"

"Bit of a grid lock at present, Minister. There's a road accident ahead and most lanes have been cut off."

Minter grunted, "I see." He then punched in some numbers on his phone. A female voice welcomed him to the Millennium Dome Experience. He barked, "Get me Sheila Brock."

"Who shall I say is calling?"

"The Minister for Culture and the Arts. Now get a move on!"

"I am trying to locate her now, sir."

"I take it that you have read the report," the Minister said, once he had Sheila on the phone.

"Yes, but I just can't understand how he did it."

"Well, Simon Bailey was under your radar."

Sheila was not going to wear it. "Now, wait a minute! I can't be expected to know everything that is going on here!"

"Now come now Sheila, you were signing invoices, bills and various other documents for him, for Christ's sake. You cannot deny it. The metropolitan police have the records."

"Have you any idea how many invoices I have to sign for different types of expenses here?"

"Sheila, did you delegate anyone else to sign your name on MD documents?"

"Not that I remember, why?"

"Now think very carefully. Did anyone sign your name for you?"

Sheila got the Minister's drift. "Yes, now I come to think of it. Cheryl, my personal secretary, had my permission to use my signature, but only on run of the mill type documents."

"Is there any way she could have been in a position to sign any invoices using your moniker for any of Simon Bailey's fraudulent expenses?"

"I don't know. I suppose she could have."

"Then, my dear, that is what we are going to tell Mr Plod, when he gets here."

Although Cheryl was not a personal friend, Sheila felt somewhat uncomfortable passing the blame onto her. "What if Cheryl says it was not her."

“Then, my dear, you will have records to the contrary.” After a short pause he added, “You are far more valuable to this project than she is.”

As DS Ionnus wove the wailing police car, in and out of the traffic lanes in Creek road, he turned to his passenger, asking, “Guv, have you been inside the dome yet?”

“Why do you ask?”

“No reason in particular. It’s just that...”

DI Schuman cut his partner off in mid sentence. “...What do you know about this polly who’s going to be with her.? What’s his damn name - Munster or something like it.”

“Minter, guv. Joseph Minter, Minister of Culture and the arts.”

“That’s fucking great, some arty-farty type pulling rank on me!”

“I can see the dome now guv,” Ionnus mentioned, eyeing what looked like a huge parachute that had been spiked by aerials.

“Whoever signed those invoices will be treated like a suspect,” Joseph Minter pointed out, as he and Sheila went over her story.

“But, what if she is innocent,” Sheila asked.

“That’s up to the police and the courts to decide. Your job is to make sure this ‘white elephant’ opens on time.”

“What’s going to happen if they believe her. What will happen to me.”

Putting a comforting arm around her shoulder, the politician said, “Nothing is going to happen to you, Sheila. After all, you are able to access those reports on the invoices she signed, aren’t you?”

Sheila handed the printed sheet to Joseph, worried that the cops would be able to see through her subterfuge.”

After being shown through to Sheila’s office by Cheryl Gaynor, DI Schuman produced his ID and introduced himself and his partner. “And you would be?” he asked the politician, having a pretty good idea to whom he addressed.

“Joseph Minter MP,” the tall, lean man answered.

Looking straight at Sheila, the Inspector said, “As you probably know why I am here let us cut straight to the chase.”

Minter interrupted, “Just so that we are all clear, please explain your purpose, Inspector.”

“Very well Mr Minter,” Schuman responded. Then, addressing Sheila, he explained.

What I want to know is how one of your senior managers, namely Simon Bailey, having taken advantage of the chaos at this troubled project, managed to execute a £4 million fraud to fund a

millionaire lifestyle.”

“We would all dearly like to know that Inspector,” Sheila smiled.

“We have been through his financial records, which lucky for us, he kept. Many of the fraudulent documents including many invoices, have your signature on them. How do you explain that, Ms Brock?”

Joseph jumped in. “Ms Brock is sometimes too busy to...”

Realising she had a minister for the crown in her corner, The senior officer bristled. “... I would like to hear it from Ms Brock, if you don’t mind, Minister.”

“What Mr Minter is saying is that I sometimes allow other trusted employees to sign documents on my behalf.”

DS Ionnis piped up, “Do you mean trusted employees like Simon Bailey?”

Joseph responded, indignantly, “There is no need for such pointed remarks!”

Schuman responded, “Nevertheless, my colleague has a point. Just who are these ‘trusted’ staff members, Ms Brock?”

Sheila smiled coyly. “I may have exaggerated what I meant just a little, Inspector. There is only one person I trust enough to allow her to sign for me.”

“And, who would that be?”

Sheila sighed heavily. “Cheryl Gaynor, my secretary - she showed you in.”

The DI nodded. “I will have to interview her. Do you have an office I can use?”

Sheila objected, “I would rather that you interview her in her own time. We have a lot of catching up to do and I can’t afford to lose her right now.”

Schuman responded, “I am investigating a serious crime, so I will speak to her now, if you don’t mind.”

Minter spoke up, “Inspector, correct me if I am wrong but as far as I understand it, Simon Bailey has already been convicted of the crime you are investigating?”

“We have reason to believe he had accomplices, Mr Minter,” DS Ionnis stated.

“Surely you don’t suspect my secretary of any wrongdoing,” Sheila added.

“We won’t know until we have spoken with her,” DI Schuman pointed out. As he went out into the reception area he turned, saying, “Oh Ms Brock, keep yourself available for any further questioning today.”

Minter asked, “What do you mean, further questioning?”

The Metropolitan Police officers did not answer. They left her, to interview her secretary.

Turning to Joseph, Sheila, asked, “Just what the hell am I going to do without a secretary today?”

Joseph smiled, “You might as well take the day off, Sheila. We could take a walk and get a coffee down by the river. Unless you have something more exotic in mind,” he said suggestively, raising his eyebrows.

Sheila just glared at him. “How can you think of that at a time like this. I want to know what they are talking about,” she said, pointing towards reception.

“How are they going to play this?” Sheila asked, as She and the minister ate their lunch at the Rivington Grill.

He looked up from his meal at her, “This will put the spotlight on your integrity.”

“Jesus Joe, I haven’t done anything.”

Fixing Sheila's gaze, he said, “I know that, but it happened under your watch.”

Sheila sighed, “So what happens now?”

Joseph shrugged, “How would I know? The cops have their man, so maybe they won’t push things too far.”

“How does this affect you, politically, Joe?”

“It’s nice of you to finally ask.”

“There’s no need to be like that!” Sheila retorted.

“Don't forget it was through my recommendation that you got this contract.”

“So, do you think that was a mistake now?”

“I’m not saying that, Sheila, but it was your lighting expert who defrauded us and bought a yacht, helicopter, sports car and even land and properties in the US after awarding his lighting company lucrative contracts at the Greenwich landmark.”

“Yes, well I suppose that is for me to deal with.”

“Sheila, this is not only about you. As the Minister responsible for overseeing the Dome assignment, I have to explain to the Government, which is already under considerable pressure over the costs of the £800 million Dome, that Bailey gave Nu-Design Ltd, a lighting company he secretly set up, £3.9 million of work.”

“I am aware of that.”

“Are you also aware that he stole £1.1 million raised by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), the organisation responsible for the Thames site. Most of that cash had come from the National Lottery and business donations intended to pay for the lighting for the Millennium celebrations.”

Sheila paled. "This is not going to help our current sponsorship drive."

Joseph Minter, got a waiters attention, snapped his fingers and requested the bill. Then, Turning to Sheila, he said,

"It's getting late and I have to go."

"Go! I thought you were coming back to the Dome with me."

"Sorry - no-can-do. There are things I need to follow up. Keep your chin up, and I will see what can be done at my end."

DI Schuman was waiting for Sheila's return. he had some pertinent questions to put to her.

DS Ionnis asked, "Do you think she is hiding something, guv?"

Seeing her enter the Dome, The DI responded, "Here she is. So I guess we will soon find out." Approaching Sheila, he said, I have some more questions. Shall we go to your office?"

"I don't like the way this is shaping up," Joseph spoke into his cell phone.

Ivan Steer, on the other end of the call, asked, "What do you mean?"

"The police are sniffing around the Dome."

"What for, I thought they had their man."

"They are convinced he had an accomplice and Sheila is being targeted."

Ivan paused, then said, "I see. You can vouch for her integrity, I trust."

"Of course! But this is the last thing we need at this crucial time"

"I thoroughly agree, Joseph. we can't afford to lose her at this stage. Look, leave it with me and the Met. will not be a problem."

"That is good to know."

"Joseph, are you up to the task I have set you?"

"Yes, of course I am. Why do you ask?"

"Then make sure you don't contact me to get you out of trouble again. Am I clear on that?"

"Yes Ivan, perfectly clear," Joseph answered, feeling about 10 inches tall.

As Sheila and the two policemen settled in her office, DI Schuman began. “There are a few discrepancies we need to clear up. For example, despite him being unqualified, you appointed Bailey as head of lighting. Why was that, MS Brock?”

“He impressed me with his experience at such a young age, his confidence and his CV”

“Did you carry out a check on him, before putting him on your pay roll?”

Sheila became terse. “I don’t see what that has...”

Ionnus cut her short. “...You put him on pay of £70,000 in July 1998 because he impressed you with his ‘youth, and confidence’. What exactly did you find impressive about our Simon, Ms Brock?”

“He showed me a well thought out lighting plan for cost-cutting in the electronics department. It made a lot of sense and I was suitably impressed.”

“Meanwhile he launders NMEC money paid to him by his company through a complex network of offshore bank accounts. Does that also impress you, Ms Brock?”

Sheila stood up. “Inspector, I have helped you all I can and now I have a backlog of work to catch up with. I’m sure you can find your way out.”

Schuman said, “I’m afraid it doesn’t work like that. You will be dismissed when I think you have satisfied our enquiries and not before.”

Sheila dug her heels in. “I am not answering any more questions without legal representation,” she stated, defiantly.

“Very well, we will go for now,” the DI said, smiling that he had made his point. Then as he left, he turned and said, “You’ll be pleased to know your personal secretary is in the clear.”

Surprised by the change of tact, Sheila said, “Oh, that’s good,”

The DI continued, “She showed us a memo stating the specific circumstances in which she could sign your name. Anything concerning contractual expenses was strictly forbidden. The memo came from you, Ms Brock. Good day and I’m sure we will be talking again very soon.”

Chapter 25

England 1999

Joseph Minter, breathing heavily, rolled over onto his back on the sumptuous king size water bed.

Sheila laughed for the first time that day, “Am I too much for you darling?”

He gazed on her naked form. ‘Not bad shape for someone who's in their mid forties’ he thought to himself. He said. “ It’s this fucking day that has been too much, not you. It was murder in the House this afternoon.”

“I’m sure it was, Joe,” Sheila said abruptly, not wanting to go into his woes.

Joseph reached for a cigarette and offered her one, which she accepted. He lit them and inhaled

deeply.

Looking for an ash tray, Sheila said, “That chief cop was a right bastard. He really has it in for me.”

Joseph gave her a knowing look. “I don’t think the inspector will be troubling you any more.”

Her eyes widened, “Really! How do you know that?”

“Because my sweet, Joey is looking after your back.”

“Only my back,” she giggled, giving him a hug.

He laid back and sighed. Sex was certainly good therapy after the grilling in Parliament. He went over the afternoon question time in his mind. How was he supposed to know if Bailey’s wife, who worked as his deputy, was guilty of any wrongdoing? His opposition number was having a field day with such questions as, “Was the Minister aware that Bailey, who had worked in theatre Illumination, and ran a team of 40 people, hired staff and helped to organise Dome lighting contracts, never told his bosses that Nu-Design, the firm he repeatedly backed for the lighting maintenance contract, had been set up by him? Was the Minister aware that he had made his mother, Ruth Barclay, and best friend, David Gordon, directors?” No, Joseph Minter MP was not aware of these things, because he had left Sheila Brock to her own agenda.

Sheila’s sense of righteousness in the Bailey affair was mostly a shield to cover her embarrassment. She was soon hounded by the media, both at work and at home. Under a barrage by the press, she soon realised that being questioned by the police was not so bad after all. “Get these fucking reporters off my back Joe, “she barked into her phone, or I won’t be responsible for my actions.”

“It goes with the territory I’m afraid.”

“Is that supposed to be a useful comment?”

“I’ll organise someone to come and see you. A clever chap from a prominent PR company. Meanwhile boost your security to keep the hounds at bay.”

“Organise it soon Joe.”

“Right away, Ms Brock.”

Sheila put her phone down and sighed heavily, tears glistening in her eyes. She was the tough businesswoman; she did not cry. She reread the days news articles concerning the ‘Dome’

The Mail read:

A big question mark, concerning ethical and effective management, has to hang over the head of Sheila Brock, the MD’s CEO. Her decision making leaves a lot to be desired. Why, for example, did she leave the young and inexperienced Simon Bailey with the task of deciding which companies should be invited to tender for lighting at the Dome. His ability to influence this decision was important in terms of ensuring Nu-Design (his family company) was successful in its eventual bid. Although none of the NMEC staff responsible for awarding the contract had heard of Nu-Design, it was granted the £1,924,152 deal in February 1999.

The Sun ran with;

The Dome fraud saga goes on unfolding. Nu-Design, represented by Bailey, 44, an Australian, went on to lodge invoices for £3.9 million. A total of £2.8 million was paid before the fraud and money-laundering scheme was uncovered. In August 1999 police began investigating the suspected fraud after NMEC became suspicious of Simon Bailey, its newly appointed manager. It emerged that Bailey set up the firm with fake signatures soon after he took the Dome job. In promotional literature he falsely claimed it had been trading for several years, employed scores of staff and had a “highly respected parent company” called Lumenus.

The Mirror wrote::

Nu-Design’s bid for the Dome contract included fake references from senior staff at MTV, Alton Towers and London theatres. Pro-Design was hiring lighting gear from one company that NMEC had used and then using it at the Dome but charging vastly higher hire rates to NMEC. Bailey had set up offshore accounts in Switzerland, Latvia, Florida, Guernsey and Jersey. Payments to his company allowed him to buy a helicopter and yacht, a £250,000 home in Docklands and a £160,000 house in Florida.

Sheila sat staring at the articles, all of which cast her in a poor light. She screwed the papers up and hurled them into a bin.

DI Schuman called DS Ionnus into his Scotland Yard office. “Get a car from the pool. We are heading off to The Millennium Dome,” he stated, a slight smirk playing at the corner of his mouth.

“Guv, I thought the Commander told us to leave it alone.”

“Yes, but this is whole different case. This is to do with dirty dealings and corruption.”

“What is the investigation actually about?”

“Investigations, Mike. There are four of them. She won’t wriggle out of this one.”

“The Dome seem s to be a gigantic crime scene,” Mike laughed.

Sheila Brock sighed heavily, stirred her cappuccino and leaned back in her office chair. She felt exhausted and it was only 10.20 in the morning. It wasn't just the sex that tired her out. A barrage of negative comments about her management abilities was the main cause of her ennui.

Just then her office door burst open and in walked the cops.

Startled, she demanded, “What the hell are you doing back here?”

Schuman, who figured the 'hands off' order from higher up the food chain, had been instigated by the interfering politician, smirked, “Sorry to trouble you again, Ms Brock.”

“I was told that the investigation had been completed.”

The inspector, loving his sense of power, said, “Yes, but this is a different case we are investigating.”

“A, a different case! What case would that be, inspector?” Sheila queried, dreading the answer.

“We are investigating allegations that contracts at the Millennium Dome were awarded corruptly.”

The CEO. showed puzzlement. You said it had nothing to do with Simon Bailey.”

“That’s right,” DS Ionnis agreed, “We have been apprised of these criminal acts of fraud by the the public sector contracts unit of the Metropolitan Police fraud squad.”

Sheila stared at the police officer. “I don’t understand! What picture?”

“Some of your executives have uncovered several suspicious contracts.”

“Which executives?” What contracts?” Sheila demanded, becoming increasingly concerned.

DI Schuman said, “You haven’t exactly got your finger on the pulse around here. There are at least four known contracts for the Dome's construction phase, which includes its 'fitting out' by electrical, plumbing, building and engineering companies that we believe are fraudulent.”

Sheila did not like what she was hearing. “Which of my executives have been working with the fraud squad?” she inquired.

The DI, ignoring her question, mentioned, “It is understood they include at least one claim of ‘kickbacks’ being paid.”

Sheila, completely nonplussed, threw her arms up in a gesture of defeat and slumped back in her chair.

Later that day Gerald Frome, of Harper Frome Consultants, held a media conference. No, Sheila Brock would not be resigning from her position as CEO of the Millennium Dome project. No she was not aware of any fraudulent contracts, until informed by the police. Yes, there are ongoing investigations. Ms Brock, who likes to run a tight ship, insisted on it. Yes, she has everything under control and on target. yes, there has been a few setbacks, as with any massive and complex project, and it takes a strong dedicated person, like Sheila Brock, to overcome them. Yes, there were fears that an audit would reveal a large 'black hole' in the NMEC's accounts because of unexpected liabilities. However, an audit has been carried out and it shows the extra liabilities are in fact less than £2m. This relieves pressure on finances. Yes, the stakeholders can be assured that the audit has sorted out finances, and that the current fraud inquiries are unlikely to involve primary contracts. Yes, it is understood that no level of fraud is acceptable, but the amounts turned up aren't large in comparison with the scale of the Dome project.

Although pleased with Gerald Frome’s positive PR, Sheila felt ashamed that she had not seen the rot setting in. What with the corruption and fraud, and PC Plod tramping all over the place, disclosure of the latest embarrassment for her operation, responsibility had to be placed squarely at her feet. With the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), subjected to damaging rows over cost over-runs, over-ambitious visitor targets and the mismanagement of budgets, She wondered how the project could survive intact. Not wanting any-more dark secrets to rear their ugly heads, Sheila was forced to admit to the media that total costs for the project had risen to £854m, nearly £100m more than its original budget.

Unbeknown to Sheila Brock other moves were afoot, to rescue the project. as a fall back position

against such a disaster, a secret consortium stepped in to add new energy and new capital to the project. The first she new about it was when a memo from Joseph Minter landed on her desk, informing her that a deal struck with a new MD buyer 'Heritage Holdings' would not affect her position with NMEC. She stared at the memo, and then she asked Cheryl to get her Joseph Minter.

Joseph Minter knew it would take more than a lunch at the Rivington Grill to get Sheila to calm down. He knew she would be angry, but what could he do? He just had to face the flak and grin and bear it.

Sheila threw the printout down in front of him. "Just what the hell is going on," she snarled.

"Just listen and let me explain," Joseph said quietly.

"It had better be a good."

"Something had to be done, and done quickly if the project was not going to fall apart."

"I should have been informed. I should have been part of the takeover process!"

Joseph felt he wasn't getting through to her. "Sheila, the whole box and dice was falling apart. Another week of assassination by media and our Government would have to have pulled the plug. Then where would you be? without your lucrative contract, that's for sure."

"I don't agree, Joseph. Harper Frome was helping me turn things around and..."

Joseph, frustrated, interrupted, "...You haven't had to sit through the abuse and jibes in the fucking House all week. In any case, when I received the call that Heritage Holdings were interested in buying the MD I was very relieved."

"Then, why didn't you contact me immediately?"

"Bloody hell Sheila, I only found out yesterday. That's why I sent you this memo,"

Sheila rounded on him. "Do you seriously think I am dumb enough to believe you only heard about this yesterday?"

"Whether you believe it or not is completely irrelevant."

Sheila became silent, then she said, "But you are the Minister for Culture and the Arts. You would have to be kept in the loop."

"I am flattered that you think I wield such power and influence but it is somewhat exaggerated."

"Who's behind Heritage Holdings, Joe, Sheila asked, slightly appeased.

"Political donor and property tycoon Robert Bolling." Placing a comforting hand on her wrist, Joe said, "Don't worry, he is not going to affect your operation. In fact I don't think you will even get to see him."

"That's all very well but what is his real agenda?"

“Sheila, after what has happened at the Dome over the last six months there is a perception out there that you have failed. This, of course, is of great concern to the stakeholders. If they lose confidence in you, everything you have worked hard for could go down the tubes. So, can’t you see that Heritage Holdings are offering you a lifeline, and you ought to be very grateful for that.”

“Come on Joseph, do you really expect me to believe Robert Bolling is doing this out of the goodness of his heart? Give me a break.”

“He has already given you one, for whatever reason.”

Chapter 26

London 1999

Patrick Cooper sometimes went a whole day without remembering what happened. But for most of the time March 8, 1965 was a date indelibly etched into his mind. He could never forget what unfolded that fateful day. It all began when he and other US Marines waded ashore near Da Nang in South Vietnam, to guard the nearby airfield from attacks by the Viet Cong. He, like most servicemen, assumed the situation would be resolved in a few months. However, the campaign took ten excruciatingly long and bloody years and 58,000 deaths, before the last Americans left the war-torn country. At the time, nineteen-year-old, Connemara-born Patrick Cooper and his mates Sean Kelly, Ed O’Rourke and Dan Donagher arrived in the first major wave. At the time Pat was a bit gung ho about killing the 'Gooks'. That was until the reality of his situation set in, and he and his Irish friends became part of an enemy infiltration group.

He spent two tours of duty with major Mike Grooms, running the blockade into North Vietnam. During that time, Sean was blown up by a land mine; Ed was wounded and picked up by a medivac chopper, only to be killed when the Gooks shot it down; and Dan died in a Viet Cong ambush. Somehow Pat survived in tact, or seemingly so. Following his discharge, he decided to visit his native Ireland for the first time in many years, where he met and fell in love with an Irish girl from Kilkenny. The future looked promising for the Viet Vet. That was until the night terrors kicked in.

Somehow it had all gone wrong. Pat could not remember when it began to fall apart. There had been too many drink induced blanks in his mind for him to work it out. It was as though his synaptic jigsaw had holes where clusters of burnt out brain-cells should have been. He had drifted off again, when the sound of a gavel hitting wood, brought his mind back to the painful present.

“Does the defendant have any thing to say in his defence?” the morose, bored looking magistrate asked with disinterest, showing in his voice.

“I hit him in self defence, your Worship.”

The magistrate launched into his sermon. “Mr Cooper, this is the third time in six months that you have been up on assault charges, while under the influence of alcohol. it’s not a very good record, is it?” he said slowly shaking his head.

Pat responded, “I agree with your Worship, but I won’t be letting it happen again.”

The magistrate, having heard that plea many times before, did not respond. Instead he continued. “Each of these violent assaults occurred in public houses, in which you had been drinking.” He paused to adjust his glasses. “I see here in my notes that the last time you were up before the

magistrate it was suggested that you undertake anger management therapy, but it would appear that you have not done so. You were also told that a third offence would land you with a custodial sentence. You have now committed that third offence, so I have no option but to impose a sentence of six months in prison.”

Pat’s heart dropped. The thought of being incarcerated filled him with dread. “Your Worship, I will do anything you say, but please, Your Honour, don’t send me to prison.”

The magistrate pondered Patrick Cooper's court reports. Looking up he said, “It says that you are suffering depressions owing to a traumatic experience during the Vietnam War. Well, all I can say is, pull yourself together man, the war is over. Now, Mr Cooper, stand up please.”

Patrick stood up.

The magistrate continued. “You are indeed fortunate Mr. Cooper because I am going to give you a choice. You will either serve your time in prison or you can enrol in an anger management course and be sentenced to 100 hours of community work.”

“Thank you your Worship. I will do anything to stay out of prison.”

“Very well, this is your very last chance. Now go straight to the probation office and register.”

Once he was outside the Wandsworth County Court, Pat’s first instinct was to find a pub, to celebrate his freedom. Luckily for him he had the presence of mind to shelve that plan and find the probation offices instead. He offered up a silent prayer. Dear Lord give me the strength to clean up my act so that I can see my boys again. Then the memories flooded in. he hadn’t seen John and Paul for over two years, not since Colleen had called the police to have him removed from the family home. part of him felt like the victim, one of the walking wounded, human refuse left over from the garbage of war. He shuddered. It was too painful to go there in his mind. He regretted so much. Christ, he needed a drink. No! I have to be strong, Pat told himself as he made his way to the probation office.

Sheila soon came to see the wisdom of Joseph’s words. Due to the bad publicity, sponsors were pulling out in droves. If it wasn’t for Heritage Holdings intervention, the Dome would be finished. But she was still curious about the Dome's latest benefactor. Just who were Heritage Holdings? Companies House had no record of such a company, which, to Sheila, seemed very odd. Since the takeover nobody from HH had been to see her, or even contacted her in any way. A call to Joseph had not helped. He just said HH wanted to stay anonymous, and for her not to worry about it. She wasn’t so much worried as she was annoyed. As CEO of NMEC, Sheila felt she had the right to make contact with the new owners, in fact it was odd that nobody had checked up on her. She tried putting the mystery out of her mind. but the not knowing was beginning to affect her work. She new Joseph was holding out on her so she decided to use a different tact.

Without telling Joseph why, She invited him over for dinner. Dial-a-Feast turned out a sumptuous Duck L’Orange followed by delicious Black Forest Cake with Jersey cream. Then they kicked back in sun lounges with brandies, while , overlooking the ocean. Joseph said, “This is the life. I think I could get used to it.”

Sheila broached the subject she had been planning all evening. “I need some information on Heritage Holdings, Joe.”

“Why? what’s the problem?”

“No problem, except for the fact that I do not have any kind of communication with my new employers.”

Joe smiled, “I’m as much in dark as you. I only get told what I need to know, and believe me that’s the best way.”

Sheila fixed his gaze, “Well, I can’t work that way.”

“I’m afraid that’s the way it has to be.”

“Then I’ll resign,” Sheila stated, watching Joe’s expression.

“You can’t resign, Sheila. It’s out of the question at this late stage.”

Sheila rose and went to the balcony overlooking the ocean. She turned to face Joseph. “Then tell me how to contact Heritage Holdings, which, according to Company’s House, does not exist.”

Joseph got up and stood close to Sheila. “I have tried to protect from you what I have to say, but your stubbornness leaves me no choice.”

“What are you talking about?”

“There is more to the Dome project than you think.”

“Joseph, stop talking in riddles and tell me what you mean.”

“Have you heard of ‘United Purpose’?”

“It’s some kind of management training programme, isn’t it?”

“It is, but it is much more than that.” Joseph hesitated, then he continued, “This is in the strictest confidence, OK?”

“Yes, of course. Now, stop keeping me in suspense.”

“Our Government has long been aware that impending climate change has many unknown factors, one of which may very well be massive power cuts. This being the case special UP people are being trained to cope and maintain order among the masses.”

Sheila, feeling a bit let down, responded, “Okay, but I don’t see the need for secrecy.”

“You will when I tell you the Millennium Dome is also a massive dynamo to generate energy from the natural grid in the event of huge power blackouts.”

Sheila’s legs became like jelly and she sat down. “My God, that’s unbelievable!”

“Believe it my dear. That is why we cannot afford to lose you.”

Sheila stayed silent . Then she asked, “Is this Heritage Holdings running United Purpose?”

“Not exactly running it, but they certainly are involved. Which is why you must forget all about

them and get on with your job. I am your go-between. Anything you wish to convey to them comes through me.”

Although Joseph Minter’s explanation seemed plausible enough, Sheila was still not entirely happy. She felt she was being gently manipulated from behind the scenes. The public were being misinformed but even worse was the fact that the sponsors were also being misled. If ever they got wind that they were funding a covert security operation, they would have every right to sue, and she was in the firing line. They would never accept that she did not know about it. If she hadn’t have pushed Joseph she could still be living in blissful ignorance. But now it was too late. She contacted Joseph and they met in her office.

“What’s the problem now?” a harried Joseph Minter asked, as he sat down near her expansive desk.

“What happens if anyone else, say our major sponsors, get wind of the energy stuff?”

Joseph sat up straight. “That is hardly going to happen!”

“Are you saying there is absolutely no chance of any of them finding out?”

“Well, of course not, but in such an event we would deny it as a crazy conspiracy theory.”

Sheila smiled, “Of course you will. However, if we we’re sued over it I want a written affidavit attesting to the fact that I knew nothing about it.”

“My dear girl, you don’t think I would leave you hanging out to dry, do you?”

Sheila lied, “Of course not Joe, but I will feel more secure about it once I have it in writing. Is that a problem?” she asked, quizzically.

“Joseph smiled, “Of course not, I will have it seen to.” He paused, thoughtfully, then added, “The problem is how do we word it when we can’t say why it is being written. I think you are going to have to trust me on this one.”

She had no reason not to trust him. After all, Joseph Minter MP Minister for Culture and the Arts was instrumental in getting her the MD contract. And he had taken her into his confidence, by explaining the real reason for the Millennium Dome and what they hoped to achieve by it. However, she still had some nagging doubts. What if what he told her were only part of the truth to put Heritage Holdings and United Purpose in a positive light. Initially, Sheila was surprised to hear the Millennium Dome had very little to do with entertaining the masses or even making a profit. Then it struck her! The owners were not concerned about fraudulent deals but they were worried about the police and the media finding out the real reason for the Dome. This being the case, she was being used in a fraudulent way herself. Sheila could not go to the police and she could not even seek legal advice. However, she needed someone she could trust, to cover her back. Joseph Minter was not entirely to be trusted, so who could she use?

Pat Cooper tried to concentrate, as the facilitator droned on. It was his first day of the seven week course and already he was bored and angry.

“...Anger is a natural emotion which can sometimes be useful in motivating people to deal with things that are not right in their lives or the lives of those around them,” the facilitator, a middle aged Christian woman, called Gwen, explained. “However, sometimes people can develop patterns of anger that are unhelpful and interfere with their relationships with others or their ability to get on

with people at work, etc. If left unchecked, this sort of anger can become entrenched and serious damage can be done to relationships or even job security or in extreme cases can lead to problems with the law and physical harm to the person or others.”

Pat’s attention was more on the draught coming through the door, than on what was being said. Although, his ears did prick up when she mentioned that problems with anger can be exacerbated by the use of alcohol or other drugs. That was something he could attest to. He hadn’t gotten into any drunken fights for three weeks, so he thought he was cured, and he didn’t need to attend the course he had been forced to sign up for.

“Anger can be caused by a wide range of factors from inherited tendencies, traumatic events, such as a horrific past physical or sexual abuse, through to self inflicted substance abuse,” Gwen stated, looking at the sea of troubled, guilty, hopeless faces.

Pat pulled his jacket around him and, for the first time took in other people in the church hall. His eye caught an attractive middle aged woman, who sat on the other side of the circle, they were all part of. However, it wasn’t so much her sexual allure that drew his attention. It was the fact that she sat forwards in her chair, as though she were actually interested in what was being said.

During a short recess, for beverage and biscuits, Pat approached the woman. “Hi, I’m Pat. You look too happy to be here.”

The woman smiled sweetly, “You’re an observant man. To be truthful I came here to observe, not be part of the group. I have people in my company who tend to be aggressive at times. I figured I might glean some clues about how to handle them.” She grinned, adding, “But don’t tell our God-fearing Gwen that.”

Pat laughed, “Mum’s the word. But tell me, what sort of business do you run?”

“Have you heard of the Millennium Dome?”

“Who hasn’t. It’s always in the news about some fuck-up or another.”

Sheila nearly grimaced, but hid it well. “That’s one way to describe it, Pat. I’m Sheila, by the way.”

Here he was, talking to an attractive business woman, so Pat, desperately needing a job, decided to push his luck. “I don’t suppose you’d have any work for a man like me.”

She eyed him up. He looked tough and fit. “I might have a place in security for you.”

At that point, they were being called back to class.

Sheila quickly pressed a small card into his hand. “It’s got my number. Give me a ring if you are interested.”

As Gwen went on about anger being made worse by ineffective communication, Sheila’s mind was on Pat. Although she had only just met him her gut feeling said he was right for the job. By the end of the day’s session she found out he was a Vietnam Vet and that his marriage broke up and he was trying to get himself together so he could spend time with his sons. She heard from her sources that he had been sacked, for his violent outbursts, from various menial jobs, but he was now determined to make a go of whatever job he was given. Yes, he could be very useful.

Chapter 27

Salisbury 1999

Kes Crane had a secret that she had kept for a very long time. It was a secret that she had inherited, a kind of sacred trust, she was very careful not to break. Even her family did not know about it. That was when she had a family. Her husband was taken from her many years before, but her son died more recently. It was after his passing that she sold the family home and bought a caravan on a permanent site. Her friends said she was mad to give up her home, for a caravan, but she needed a clean break from everything, her friends, her job, and her lifestyle. But not her passion for all things Stonehenge.

She sat down to breakfast, porridge oats with muesli added and she opened the newspaper. The date caught her attention more than anything. "Less than three months to go," she said to herself. Then she remembered that Andrea's colleague was coming round that morning. A look around the caravan told her it needed tidying. She shrugged. Oh well, if she hadn't gotten around to it by the time the investigator turned up so be it. He would just have to take her as she was. A framed photo caught her glance. It was a picture of John, taken when he was fourteen years old. Her eyes misted over, as always when she looked upon her son's face. "I miss you so terribly, my beautiful boy," she said, tearfully. Deep down inside she felt guilty for not reading the signs.

As principle of her school, her career took up nearly all of her time. She was so busy dealing with the problems of her students, that her teenage son's anxieties missed her attention. She assumed her son did not do drugs and did not commit crimes. When the police reported his death from a heroin overdose, she was grief stricken. Although her sense of guilt assuaged over the years, she still felt partly responsible for his death. Kes attended grief counselling sessions, where she met Mahlia, who ran spiritualist gatherings in the local Red Cross hall. She became very interested in spiritual matters and after attending a séance, in which her dead son communicated a message to her, forgiving her, she decided it was time to get her life back on track.

Kes had always been intrigued by 'subtle energies' since she was a child. Her father, a keen dowser, took her on field trips to measure the energy of ancient monuments. It was while on one of the adventures that she saw, and became captivated by, Stonehenge and she had been drawn there ever since. Being a wife and mother and holding down a teaching job at the local primary school, she did not have much spare time to follow her passion. Now, retired from teaching, and with too much time on her hands, Kes was able to follow her passion to her heart's content. But how can a broken heart feel contentment?

The sound of a car engine nearby, shook her from her solace. Kes looked out of the window at the fair-haired man, resembling a young Paul Newman, who emerged from the vehicle. Before opening the door to welcome her visitor, Kes grabbed a cigarette, lit it and inhaled deeply. Feeling less stressed she readied herself to meet him.

"Hello, I'm Kes"

"Hi, I'm Alan Ridgard. Andrea told me you could shed some light on this odd Millennium Dome scenario."

Kes, standing aside to make room, laughed, "It's a bit cramped but there's probably enough room if we both breathe in at the same time."

Looking around the interior of the tasteful, if untidy, caravan, Alan said, "It reminds me of holidays our family had when I was a kid."

"So your mum and dad liked caravan holidays."

“It was only my mum. At the time my dad was in Vietnam, during the war.”

Kes stubbed her cigarette out in a sea shell ashtray. She automatically reached for another one, but resisted the temptation. “So what do you want to know?” she asked.

“I need something solid to go on.”

“Well you won’t get anything more solid than Stonehenge!” she chuckled.

“Okay, tell me about the function of Stonehenge,” Alan said, setting up his small recorder.

Kes had a short coughing fit, She grabbed a glass of water. “Alan, I am very concerned that the MD is changing the energy flow.”

“I been told this before but I don't understand how it works.”

“Well, when the Great Pyramid was built, after the destruction of Atlantis, an illusionary grid was set up by a treaty.”

“Yes, Andrea told me that much but...”

Kes needed to concentrate. “Please listen while I explain.”

Alan grinned, “Sure.”

“Mankind was given Freewill, but because humanity was only a child, spiritually and emotionally, an illusionary grid to control humanity was set up.”

“Who set up this illusionary grid?”

Kes shrugged, “Nobody actually knows. Perhaps it was set up by the Sirians or other Brotherhood members. The important thing is that its purpose was to allow humanity to overcome the third dimension and yet maintain its immature emotions. Anyway the treaty will end on December 21, this year.”

“How do you know that?”

Kes, intent on her explanation, ignored his question. “The important thing is that the Illuminates, the people who wish to bring you the New World Order, know about it. This is why they want to recap the Great Pyramid so that the illusionary grid can be re-established. This is the real reason that Y2K has been announced and publicised so much.”

“So, how does capping the pyramid create this illusionary grid?”

“If they are able to recap the pyramid, they will send a surge of energy through the Earth, which will destroy all of our electrical systems on the planet. They want to do this so that they can control people's minds.”

“How do you know they are capable of doing this?”

“Alan, have you heard of HAARP.”

“Someone mentioned it to me recently. I think it must have been Andrea. There was something about her late husband being involved.”

Kes, saddened at the mention of David’s name. “Such a tragedy,” she sighed, empathising with Andrea’s loss. Then steeling herself, she regained her composure. “Yes, well it’s all hush hush of course, but they have already implemented a system of HAARP (High Altitude Aurora Resonance Project), where they can beam energy off satellites, and ELF (Extremely Low Frequency). By this method they can control the grid, by pulsing it. In essence, they have control of the planet’s weather at this point. That’s how we know they can do it”

“Then why do they need the Pyramid?”

“It’s partly because it’s the Illuminates ceremony and partly because it cannot be traced back to them.”

“What do you mean?”

“They are not ready to reveal HAARP to the world. However, David told me that the New World Order, or the Secret Government, is intending to place 144,000 HAARP devices on all major acupuncture points of the planet.”

“What will that do?”

“The Earth is an energy processor and by tapping into her electromagnetic field they can control the planet’s consciousness. Believe me they can do this by controlling the frequency of the Earth. Scientists like Tesla and others knew that you could use this energy for inexpensive or free fuel. This would mean that vehicles could run on free energy without the use of fossil fuels.” She paused to check on the investigator’s attention. “Just imagine, Alan, this would give humanity the opportunity to be free of illegal government and the oil barons.”

“I seem to remember Andrea saying something about that.”

Just then the Kes’ mobile phone rang.

“I have to answer that, so excuse me,” Kes said, raising the device to her right ear. She listened, then, turning to Alan, she said, “It’s for you,” a puzzled expression playing on her face.

He, equally perplexed, took the phone. “Who is this,” he asked.

“You and Kes Crane should walk away from this Millennium stuff. You have no idea what you are getting involved in. It can only end badly for both of you.”

“Who are you? What are you talking about?” There was no answer. The phone went dead.

“Who was it?” Kes asked.

“I think we have just been threatened.”

“Threatened! By whom?”

“Somebody who wants us to stop looking into this energy stuff.”

She paled. "They know where I live and they have my phone number."

"Were being watched from somewhere close by. It could even be from a caravan on this site."

"What should we do?"

"Get away from here now."

"I'll take you to Stonehenge. Then we can continue our discussion."

"The caller might come nosing around while we're gone."

"He's more likely to follow us to see what we are doing."

He looked at Kes. "You know, there might be something to this mad theory after all. But I think I'll pass on the tour today. I need to check on something back home."

Kes felt disappointed. There was nothing she enjoyed more than explaining her theory of Stonehenge, at the site of the circle. "I hope you will come back. I think you will find it worthwhile."

"Sure. In the meantime keep a low profile."

Chapter 28

London 1999

Alan Ridgard listened to the anonymous recording waiting for him back home in St John's Wood. It seemed to be another veiled threat. Not to be distracted from his task in hand. He jotted down some questions. How did they know he had gone to meet Kes? How did they know he was nosing around the energy theory? What did the theory have to do with them? If they were trying to stop the theory becoming known in all likelihood there was something to it. This made Alan determined to get to the bottom of it. He booted his laptop and set to work. As he started to transcribe Kes' explanation, he was interrupted by the phone. "Yes, who is it?" Alan asked, suspicious of any unsolicited call.

"It's Karl here. What happening Alan. I have had a call threatening me if we don't drop the case."

"Karl, I am convinced it is bigger than I thought. It seems that we are treading on the toes of powerful people."

"Which powerful people?"

"All I know is it has something to do with a group called the Illuminates. It seems that whoever they are they have a lot of clout, enough to pull strings and manipulate government ministers, like the MP behind the Millennium Dome Project."

"The Millennium Dome. What's that got to do with it?"

"It's the third element that links Giza and Stonehenge."

"Alan, do you really believe this stuff?"

"I'm beginning to. Especially after these threats over the phone."

“I thought this case was about finding who is running Al Haab.”

“I think it's all linked. Al Haab is just being used as a tool by Arain.”

“It doesn't make sense. Why would those behind this elaborate plot want to bring attention to their Millennium projects and even threaten them?”

“Who knows how their devious minds work. But I suspect it has something to do with distraction.”

“Alan, if this investigation starts attracting the attention of some powerful bad boys it's best if we back off.”

Karl, this has gone way beyond an investigation. This is life and it affects all of us right now!”

Alan's email in-box was bulging with unread messages. One stood out. It was from Neil. It read:

“The FUCKERS have done my gaff over. They left a message telling me I am next. I am in a bolt hole. I will contact you when the coast is clear. Obi is going to contact you.

Neil

Alan sat back and rubbed his eyes. What was that all about? Who had ransacked Neil's place? Was it the same people that threatened him and his boss? If it was the law, had they found anything incriminating. Even with what little Alan knew of Neil he realised it was quite likely. Did it have anything to do with the warning he had at Kes'. If so, they knew there was a connection between Neil and himself. Alan had to work out his next move very carefully. Whoever had ransacked Neil's place probably knew where he lived as well. It would be best to move out for a while. But where to? Karl wouldn't be able to help. Kes was being watched. He phoned Andrea Burry. “Hi Andrea, Alan here.”

“Hello Alan, How is it going?”

“If you mean the job, I need somewhere to stay.”

“What do you mean?”

Somebody is onto me and I have been warned off. I suspect they know where I live. I can't afford to take chances.”

“Kes told me she had been warned but...”

“... The upshot is I have to go to ground. Do you have anywhere I can hole up for a while?”

“Can you meet me at the Cromwell statue, tomorrow – say around 11ish?”

“Why?”

“There's a new angle I want you to look into.”

Driving along North Parade in Oxford was confusing to drivers, Alan Ridgard being among them. For some strange reason North Parade ran South of South Parade. He wondered if the map was

wrong but Andrea pointed out the reason for the anomaly.

He mentioned the oddity in town planning as they talked under the watchful metallic eye of Oliver Cromwell, she explained that the North Parade represented the Royalist North Front, while South Parade was the Roundhead Southern Front.

“That makes more sense, Andrea. But why have you asked me to meet you?”

“Because of a new angle. Actually it was Marcus who pointed it out.”

“Pointed out what?”

“Have you heard of 'United Purpose'?”

“Only in the terms of, unity, togetherness, oneness etc.”

“This United Purpose is different. The official description is a British charity that runs leadership development programmes throughout the UK. A Julia Middleton started it off in 1989.”

“It doesn't sound at all sinister.”

“No Alan, it's not. It's very sensible and practical. Its aim is to improve the way organisations and society as a whole, respond to crisis situations. All kinds of leaders are developed through United Purpose through a programme of diverse and sometimes difficult challenges.”

“So what has it got to do with this Millennium plot?”

Andrea looked Alan straight in the eye. “Answer me this. Why are there fifty of these UP groups running in the UK to teach people crisis management?”

Alan shrugged.

“Well, logically, whoever is behind it, is expecting chaotic events. Otherwise why would they be training these people.”

“Yes, that makes sense.”

“The next question is why are they expecting a chaotic society. The answer is because they aim to bring it about.”

The car drew quietly to a halt in the suburban street. Two men sat in it, surveying their surroundings. All appeared to be quiet. They synchronised their watches. It was 1.38 am. Without a word the two men, dressed in dark clothes, made their way to the front door of 22 Marlborough Hill. They descended stone steps to the basement flat where a Mr. Ridgard was known to live. One of the men drew a Glock pistol while the other man, deftly removed a pane of glass, almost silently. He then reached in, unlatched the window, and deftly climbed through it, gaining access to Alan's home and all his belongings. Once the front door was opened the men went about their destructive work.

Alan's phone rang. He excused himself and walked away from the Cromwell statue, to where the signal was clearer. “Who's speaking?” he asked.

“Are you Alan Ridgard?”

Not giving anything away, Alan asked, “So ,who are you?”

“I thought you investigators had good memories.”

“What’s that got?...”

Cutting him off, the caller said, “...We spoke back at Kes Crane’s caravan. Surely you remember.”

Realising who he was speaking to, Alan became tongue tied.

“I’m looking after your back Mr Ridgard, getting rid of the obstacles one by one.”

“Who are you and what do you want?”

“It’s best for you if you don’t know who I am. And what I want is to smooth the way so that what must happens will happen with the least fuss.”

“What do you think ‘must happen’?”

“The good shepherd must look after his sheep.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Alan, the only question you ought to be concerned with is which team you want to be on - the shepherd’s or the sheep.”

Alan thought about it. The mysterious caller seemed to be happy to prolong the conversation, so it was time to raise the ante. “How do I get on the shepherd’s team.”

The caller simply said, “UP,” and then he rang off.

Alan felt confused. First, the caller threatens him with the stick, now he was offering the carrot. And what did he mean by getting rid of the obstacles one at a time. Was Neil one of those obstacles? What about Jerry Austerberry and even David Burry? Were they somehow connected with all this millennium madness? No threats had actually been made against him but the inference was there. Someone was watching him, that he was sure about. Also what was 'UP' about? Too many questions and not enough answers.

“You look pale,” Andrea said, “Was it bad news?”

As though jerked back to the here and now, he said, “Oh! Oh, it's nothing important.”

“It seems to have affected you deeply. Why don't we go and brew a pot of tea.”

“Yes, I could do with a cup.”

“You are walking in the footsteps of Gandhi, Bill Clinton, or any of 25 British Prime Ministers who have passed through these corridors,” Andrea mentioned as they approached a door with her name on it.

“This looks like a hotel,” Alan said, as she unlocked the door.”

“It is like that. I can even get room service, or eat in the college hall.”

The unit was small but cosy. Alan looked out of a Gothic window at the college's gardens with students and staff wandering through them.

“So, are you ready to tell me what it was that troubled you after the phone call?”

Alan sighed, “OK, I think it was the same person who rang me at Kes'.”

“What did he say?”

“Something about him getting rid of the obstacles, one-by-one.”

Andrea's eyebrows jumped up. “Did he elucidate on 'obstacles'?”

“No. But he said he had my interests at heart and that I could either be a sheep or a shepherd.”

“That could be in reference to being a leader or one of the 'led'.”

“He said something about my joining 'UP', whatever that is.”

Andrea brightened. “It has to be 'United Purpose' the very thing we were talking about outside.”

She fussed around organising the tea. “If you look on the table you will see a flyer about United Purpose.”

Alan picked it up and glossed over it. Then he read it more carefully.

“HAVE YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A LEADER IN A CRISIS?”

United Purpose is a UK charity that is on the lookout for intelligent, clear-minded people with management skills, in all different fields, to become the nation's elite executive. There are 50 different centres in the UK where you can enrol for these courses.

There was a an email link for further information, brochures, timetables etc. Alan put the flyer down.

Andrea handed him his cup of tea. “Somebody wants you to go to one of these courses.”

“Why?”

“Somebody thinks you have leadership potential.”

Alan frowned staring at her. Then his phone rang. It was Karl.

“Alan, I think we have upset somebody. We had VAT people come into our head office and go through our books.”

“Did they say why?”

“They are a law unto themselves. But somebody directed them to audit Intel-Inc. I have also had Company House asking me some questions about my business.”

“That means we must be onto something.”

“Something that is causing this company grief. I am wondering if it is too big for us to handle.”

“You'd better talk to your client. She is right here.” He handed his phone to her. “It's Karl.”

Alan watched her smile morph into a deep frown as her brow furrowed. She listened to what he had to say, then said, “Karl, don't you understand that we only have just over two months to put a spanner in their works. Giving up is not an option.”

“I am not suggesting you give up. But I think you are treading...”

“...We do not have time to brief any other agencies. Besides, you won't have an agency if these dark forces are not thwarted.”

Her words hit him like a freezing shower. He was caught up in something he did not understand, but something from which he could not extricate himself. “Put Alan back on.”

Alan grabbed the phone. “Yes Karl.”

“Come to Intel-Inc head office tomorrow at seven AM and bring everything you have on the Millennium Project with you.”

Chapter 29

UK 1999

Karl Haas set his company up in Greater London House in Mornington Crescent. Intel-Inc sold and fitted security systems, fire alarms and CCTV systems as well as providing intelligence to its clientele. Since Intel-Inc opened its doors to clients in 1995, it had conducted thousands of intelligence projects in areas relating to investment, finance, litigation, retail, telecommunications, health care, defence, manufacturing, and many other categories. Intel-Inc now covered the globe.

The company motto 'Intelligence is Power', was emblazoned on the wall behind the reception desk. Karl was proud of the way his company mitigated the client's risk by focusing on key questions that related to critical decisions. Yet, when it came to making decisions about how to handle the Burry contract, Karl didn't know what to do. A knocking sound got his attention. Alan Ridgard stood in the doorway of his office. “Come in Alan. We've got to decide how we are going to handle this.”

Alan tossed a file on his desk. “To put this in a nutshell it seems that there is a way that the planet's energy grid can be manipulated. Certain parties intend to alter the energy to create massive power cuts world wide. These people are doing this in order to take control of the world. Now, I know this seems to be just crazy – fantasy comic book stuff – but as weird as it sounds evidence, as such, points towards this being a strong possibility.”

“So you believe this stuff?”

“Let me put it this way, Karl. I don't think we can afford to ignore it. If this is real we only have two and a half months to make sense of it and stop it from happening.”

Karl rose from his desk and placed his hands behind his back. “Our job is to help our clients see their particular problems more clearly. It is not our job to solve their problems for them.”

“Yes but this is not just their problem. It's also our problem. Karl, this goes way beyond the job. This is about preserving our way of life and keeping our liberty.”

Karl stared at his investigator. “And if you're wrong we are going to look like a bunch of idiots. We'll lose all our credibility.”

Alan threw his hands up. “It's your call. However, if you do pull out from Andrea's case, I will continue to pursue it on a private basis.”

Karl sighed, “OK, convince me that this threat is real.”

Alan scratched his head. “It all seems to centre around the pyramids. There's the Al Haab group protesting against the Egyptian government placing a capstone on the Great Pyramid; there's the odd work going on in the pyramid under the guise of maintenance; there's the grid link between the Great pyramid and Stonehenge; and then there are the warnings we have both received from some anonymous source.”

Karl sighed, “It's not much to go on, is it?”

“I don't suppose gut feelings count.”

“Okay, we'll go along with it for now but this company reserves the right to pull the plug at any time.”

“Oh, there's one more thing.” Alan tossed the 'United Purpose' flyer on Karl's desk.

“What's this?”

“A workshop I'm going to attend.”

“What's it got to do with...?”

“...The project. Andrea suggested I go along. So did our mystery caller.”

“What do you mean?”

“I had another phone call. This time it was the carrot, join our team sort of thing. Then he said the letters UP. Andrea reckons it stands for United Purpose, a crisis management training programme.”

“So, are you looking for my blessing?”

“No Karl – your money. It's going to cost a 300 pounds.”

Alan found his flat pretty much as he expected - ransacked with his belongings strewn around the place. He could have reported the break-in to the police but, as nothing appeared to have been taken, what would be the point? As he carried out a cursory inventory, his phone began ringing from where ever it was buried. Following the wire from the wall socket he discovered it under a pile of books and research notes. He grabbed the receiver.

It was Neil. “Hi Neil, look this is not a good time.”

“You can say that again. The bastards took my research on bomb making.”

Alan Ridgard’s fears were realised. “Bloody hell Neil, you make bombs and they’ve linked me to you. We have to meet.”

Neil thought about it. “They’ve probably got this line bugged so I’ll send you contact details later.”

Chapter 30

England 1997

Philip Ridgard had made some bad choices in his life. He hoped this wasn't going to be one of them. As he drove across Vauxhall Bridge he could see the new SIS offices ahead. The huge stone edifice, resembling a modern castle, had been the head quarters of the Secret Intelligence Service since 1995, when it was separated from MI5, it’s more adventurous brother, for security reasons. Philip had passed the building many times but he had no idea that it housed the SIS, better known as MI6. At age 52, being seconded to the SIS was the last thing Philip expected, but the salary package and security was too good to refuse. He was head-hunted because of his background in the Army Investigative Service Office during the Vietnam war. He was to report to a Peter Cox of Administration Services, a colleague of the SIS officer who had first approached him that night when he was at one of the many crossroads in his life.

One such crossroad was when he left his family and rode off with the ‘Sons of Satan’ motorcycle club. All members had to have served in the Vietnam War. Dog Man, the gang’s unelected leader, referred to him as ‘Brass Ass’ on account he was the only commissioned officer in the group. Dog Man, standing at 6.2, overweight and balding, but with a long beard to make up for the lack of coverage on his head, like his compatriots, to one degree or another, came back to Briny with memories he would rather forget and ailments he wished were gone. Like many returned servicemen who were emotionally and physically damaged, he suffered from memory loss, balance disturbances, sleep disorders, depression, exhaustion, body pain, chronic diarrhoea and concentration problems. Philip remembered the time when Tunnel Rat and No gas had an argument about the origin of the Hell’s Angels. Tunnel Rat insisted that they were founded by veterans, whereas No Gas maintained the Angels evolved from the “We’ll do what the fuck we want,” attitude of the more radical element of the ‘anything goes’ 60’s. This debate caused no end of amusement among Philip and the other bikers. In the end, in true bikie style, it was to be decided by a bike race between the two contenders.

Tunnel Rat sat astride his throbbing FXWG Wide Glide, with its trade marked flame tank, next to No Gas’ revving 84 FXRT. The Son’s Of Satan found a disused ww2 airstrip for the exercise. There was much excitement when Dog Man thrust down the old Black Sabbath t-shirt on a stick, that passed for the starter's flag. Both bikes reared up like bucking horses as their riders opened the throttles, then they were off, accompanied by the riotous cheers of the rest of the gang. No gas won the event but that was not what the challenge was about. These guys had been living on the edge in ‘Nam and now they only felt really alive when they were testing themselves to and beyond their limits.

Philip had some good times with the Son’s of Satan and it helped him become rehabilitated. He felt he had something to live for, friends to watch out for and, somewhere out there, a family he wished fervently to be reconnected with. He had not seen his son Alan for many years. Now he was constantly on Philip’s mind. Dog man and the others did not want to see old Brass Ass go, but they respected his decision. For Philip Ridgard it was time to re-engage with the wicked world.

This re-engagement took some interesting twists. Philip sold his Harley and rented a bed-sit in Notting Hill, where he found work as a night watchman for a building supplies depot. He found the solitary nature of his work to be to his liking. Despite his brave attempt at what passes for normality in society, Philip still had to combat his constant emotional struggle and resulting severe mental stress. Now known as PTSD 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,' is characterised by symptoms like nightmares; feelings of detachment, irritability, sleeplessness and difficulties in concentrating. On top of this toxins ingested from working with Agent Orange was playing havoc with his lungs. from Much of the time he felt homesick and terribly alone, in an uncaring world. This huge lack of care went right back to the source, the US military itself and a Government that tried to hide its shame by making out the Viet Vets did not exist. Their Insufficient care or concern and the lack of heed towards the soldiers, worsens their mental health. The emotional effects aggravate this, due to lack of proper medical care and support. In his frustration and anger Philip started a campaign to get the Government to take responsibility for it returned servicemen, to take care of its soldiers and the moral responsibility of the inhabitants of the county to realise the value of their service to the nation. he advocated that suitable medical support should be extended to the soldiers to help alleviate their pain.

At first it was just a few letters in the local paper. Then Radio Caroline Overdrive took up the cause and Philip was interviewed on the air, for the very first time. Later, after much lobbying on his part and the work of a documentary film maker, a program went to air on the BBC called 'Forgotten Sons'. His son was not forgotten though and he prayed that one day they would meet up again. Despite all his attempts to track down his ex-wife having failed, he was determined not to give up.

Forgotten Sons got Philip a degree of notoriety and a local MP got behind his push to give the Vets a better deal. Many other Viet Vets began to come forward to strengthen the cause. They organised and held public meetings to garner support and to warn would be-recruits what sort of deal they can expect when they return after tours of active duty, in foreign lands.

It was during one of these gatherings that Philip noticed someone he knew from his 'Nam days. Captain Stuart Mayer, his superior officer. Seeing his old comrade brought back the memories, during the deafening sound of explosions in the middle of the night Philip and Stuart had moved to the rooftop of his rented house, to witness a dazzling display of rockets and flares lighting the Saigon night sky. All around, the sound of battle, during the early hours of 31 January 1968, heralded the arrival of the 1968 Tet Offensive. Armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades, Philip and Stuart waited for a ground assault, which fortunately never came. During the remaining hours of darkness, Philip kept informed of events by listening to military police and other tactical communications on the radio. Since he spent the night on the roof of his house, he was unable to direct operations from his headquarters.

However, despite numerous warnings, the intensity, coordination and timing of the Tet Offensive surprised the allied intelligence community, including naval Intelligence officers such as Philip. In addition to a flawed intelligence collection effort, naval Intelligence and COMNAVFORV misunderstood critical information, resulting in American naval forces being improperly deployed and surprised when Saigon and numerous other targets were attacked on 31 January 1968.

Captain Mayer sought out Philip during the meetings recess. "Lieutenant Ridgard, I do believe," he said, approaching his former second-in-command.

"What's left of him. Stuart, you old son of a gun. How the hell are you?"

"I'm doing good. How about yourself?"

“Oh, you know how it is. You don’t want to hear about my woes. Come on let me buy you a drink.” Philip said, ushering his friend through a group of people, towards a table set up with tea and coffee.

Philip gave Stuart a brief history since his army days.

Stuart said, “Are you happy with your job?”

“It pays the rent. Why?”

“It’s just that I might be in a position to help you out, job wise, if you are interested, of course.”

“What sort of work?”

“What your good at – intelligence.”

Philip, taken aback, responded, “You are kidding of course.”

“No mate, I’m dead serious. I can set you up with an interview, if you like.”

Philip exhaled, “No mate. My intelligence gathering days are long gone.”

“Look, you’ve still got the know how. Besides, you get special training courtesy of HM government.”

“How do you know about this?”

“Because I’ve been working for the old girl for years.”

“Where?”

“SIS mate.”

“Do you mean MI6.”

“That’s right.”

“Fuck!” Philip said, gob smacked.

Philip soon found that ‘6’ as MI6 was affectionately known, had very little resemblance to James Bond movies, which in no way portrayed the full range of the Security Service's activities. Unlike the celluloid hero, Philip did not have a license to kill and he had to obey the law just as any other citizen. When things were slow he had to kill time, but that was the only form of murder his job allowed him to engage in. It also gave him chance to pursue the avenue for which he joined the service, which was to use MI6’s intelligence base to track down his son.

Chapter 31

Oxford 1999

Alan Ridgard marvelled at the array of architectural styles, as he drove through Oxford. it seemed to him that the city exhibited every sort of building design, since the Saxons invaded the area. Known as the 'city of dreaming spires', a term coined by poet Matthew Arnold, in reference to the

harmonious architecture of Oxford's university buildings, the city, as Alan discovered, is also dissected by the rivers Cherwell and Thames. He quickly checked his directions as he drove his Mini Cooper slowly through a maze of streets. Alan's contact, the elusive Obi Wan Dawkins, had decided they should meet, in the Bodleian Library, one of the oldest bibliothèques in Europe. Known to Oxford scholars as "Bodley" or simply "the Bod", it is one of six libraries for works published in the United Kingdom and under Irish Law it is entitled to request a copy of each book published in the Republic of Ireland.

Andrea had provided Alan with a photo of Obi Wan Dawkins, to help the intelligence man recognise the academic. He entered through the library portals to seek out his prey. It did not take long for the journalist to spot him. His salmon pink zipper jacket and luxurious blond hair made him stand out, like the proverbial sore thumb, from the other academicians poring over their books. Spotting his target sitting, hunched over reference books, oblivious to the world around him, Alan approached tentatively. "ER, excuse me, Mr Dawkins."

Obi looked up with a start, "Dr Dawkins, if you don't mind, my dear. Now what can I do for you?" the historian said, with the accent on the ooo. He appraised Alan Ridgard, as though x-raying him. "Alan Ridgard. We have an arrangement."

"Indeed we do my dear boy," Obi said making a lunge toward the investigator.

Alan wasn't sure whether the strange scientist was going to shake his hand or give him a hug. Much to the investigator's relief it turned out to be the former.

Already gestures indicating displeasure were apparent as the pair talked in the audibly forbidden zone.

Obi took Alan's arm, saying, "Let's find somewhere more private, my dear"

Once they were outside the circular edifice, standing on the grass, Alan commented, "Neil said you could help me with some background on this Millennium Dome and Stonehenge."

"Oh, did he now, the naughty boy. Of course you could shell out, and buy my book "Stonehenge, its function as a gyroscope'. Although I suppose you want to pick at my brains like some sort of mental crow."

Alan, while struggling with that mental image, said, "I would certainly like to know more about that."

"Then buy the fucking book," Obi spat, his demeanour spinning 180 degrees.

Alan Ridgard stood stock still.

Obi burst out laughing, an annoying sound that was high-pitched and tinkly. He said, "My theories on Druidic Britain were considered outlandish by this establishment and the bastards kicked me out. Although it was really down to the obnoxious Professor Cullen."

At the mention of that name, Alan Ridgard's ears pricked up. "Do you mean Marcus Cullen?"

"Never mention that name in my presence," Obi ordered.

"Why is it that nobody seems to want to talk about him?"

Obi became firm. "Do you want to hear what I have to say, or not?"

With no idea as to why Obi was so upset, but he decided to let it go. "Please enlighten me," he said.

"The whole of academia needs a bloody good shake up. How dare that mothballed bunch of stuffy historians say my theories are wrong? Just because my radical ideas don't fit in with their narrow myopic view of history does not make me wrong!" Obi ranted on.

Alan, feeling agitated himself, grumbled, "That's all very well Dr Dawkins, but can you tell about these theories of yours?"

Slightly mollified by his outburst, Obi cleared his throat. "Stonehenge was built to regulate the orbit of the planet after the destruction of Atlantis. It monitors the sun and the moon so that the Brotherhood can keep track of the orbit of the planet. I feel that is why so many crop circles appear around Stonehenge."

"By using it as an astronomical observatory?"

"Yes, and by keeping track they knew when adjustments to the Earth's rotation were needed."

"So, how did they make adjustments?"

"By altering the energy flow of the natural grid, of course. You really must pay more attention, my dear," Obi admonished playfully. He continued, "So, the guardians have the knowledge to control the grid. In this way, they can activate the grid so that they can rebalance the planet."

"Dr Dawkins, are you saying that traditional historians ignore this aspect of Stonehenge?"

"My dear, until moi discovered this phenomena nobody had an inkling. Now the stuffed shirts don't believe me and like the proverbial ostrich they hide their collective heads in the sands of out moded intellectual tripe, hoping they won't feel anything when the truth comes to bite them in the arse."

"But there are many studies carried out to understand the marvels of Stonehenge."

Obi sighed, "Look Alan, yes it is true that many historians marvel at the accuracy of recording the activity of the sun and the moon that is built into this circle of stones, but that is as far as it goes. However, if by design, this is a record keeper to keep the planet in orbit and to monitor the tip and tilt of the Earth, this system would have to have these statistics built into it."

"Yes, I suppose that has to be so," Alan agreed.

"Remember, Stonehenge is the control panel for the Great Pyramid's antenna system that was designed to keep the planet in a balanced orbit. This is why so many crop circles appear in this area."

Becoming animated, Alan Ridgard asked, "Are you suggesting that crop circles help to balance the grid?"

"They certainly have something to do with it. However, let us stay on track. What do you know about this Y2K thing?"

“Only what Neil told me, that Y2K was created so that the elite Illuminates could control this system.”

“It was a stroke of genius, a wonderful way to help the shadowy Illuminates gain control of the grid.”

Alan, perplexed. “How does this Y2K bug help them to control the system?”

“It was designed as the perfect cover-up to explain away electrical failures.”

How so?”

Obi sighed heavily, acting as though he were teaching an unwilling child. “When the Dome dynamo is activated energy will be diverted from Stonehenge to it. They created the story of computer shut-downs so they would have an excuse for all the electrical systems on the planet shutting down. If they succeed in recapping the Great Pyramid and transferring the control to the Millennium Dome, it will send a colossal surge of energy through the grid, overloading it, and the Earth will be in total blackout.”

“Wow!” was all Alan could manage.

“Precisely, and that’s not all, my dear. The cunning swine even rearranged the calendar so that they could bring the illusion of fear at the changing of the millennium. The old treaty that was originally made at the construction of the Great Pyramid, is now null and void. If it is left that way, mankind will have the ability to use the grid to advance into higher planes of consciousness through the star-gates.”

“And this Illuminates is trying to prevent this from happening.”

“Of course, my dear. They have to do this to stop our consciousness from advancing. After all you don’t want smart slaves. So, in order to keep mankind’s minds controlled, they had to re-establish this grid.” Many people know that this calendar was manipulated. Understand, that this state was manipulated to create fear. There is nothing to fear but fear itself. Because as long as you remain in fear, they will be able to re-establish the illusionary grid and control humanity, so we cannot advance into a higher frequency.”

Alan, intrigued, said, This all smacks a bit too much like a conspiracy theory. How do you know it’s for real?”

“My dear boy, I was led to understand you were over all that. You sound like a person going down with Titanic trying to decide if it was an iceberg that hit it or not. You really have to make up your mind.”

“I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t think there was something to all this.”

Obi smiled, “Right Mr Alan Ridgard, come with me. There is somebody I want you to meet.”

“Who is it?” Alan asked, suspicious of anyone else’s involvement.

Obi was non-committal. “Oh I think you will be pleasantly surprised.”

“Where are we going?” Alan asked, trying to keep up with Obi’s big strides.

“The Sackler Library,” Obi shouted over his shoulder.

“Another library.”

“Yes, this one specialises in archaeology, art history and the classics.”

As the pair entered the portals of the biblioteque, Alan, scanning the reading room, thought he saw Andrea studying at one of the many tables. “Isn’t that...” he asked, cut off by Obi’s reply.

“...I told you it would be a pleasant surprise,” Obi chortled in high pitch, summoning Andrea’s attention.

She looked up and smiled, “Alan, what on earth are you doing here?”

“I could ask you the same thing. I thought you were back in Egypt.”

“The dear boy needs educating, so I brought him to you,” Obi grinned.

“He must be having a good effect on you, Obi. I haven’t seen you so chirpy in ages.”

“Oh, dear lady, we have been having a riot.”

Turning to the investigator she asked, “Are you primed and ready?”

He grinned, “I think my powder is dry.”

Andrea’s resultant laugh brought forth a librarian who suggested the merry band carry on their mirth outside the library precincts.

Chapter 32

Oxford University

Andrea Burry suggested they went back out in the quad. Obi and Alan listened, while Andrea elucidated on her theories. She began, “Now, where do we start? Ah yes, the Knights Templar knew of the old treaty we have spoken off and strove to rebalance the grid by building circular temples so that humanity could resonate with a higher frequency. These cathedrals were built on sacred power points. The Knights knew that the Essene community had the knowledge with the Ark of the Covenant to create a grid of love on the planet.”

“So their purpose was not to stop Christians being sliced up by Saracen scimitars, while on their pilgrimages.”

“That may have been a motivating factor to start with but their real purpose was to deal with Alchemy.”

“Do you mean turning base metal into gold?”

“No Alan Ridgard, it had nothing to do with changing water to wine, or lead to gold, but rather to change gross man into a Christed Being, so that the experiment on Earth could be fulfilled.”

“What experiment?” Alan asked.

Andrea responded, "Mankind is a combination of 22 different genetically encoded star systems. We were created to bring peace and harmony into the consciousness of the Pleiadian galaxy. We are an experiment. When we can become one with our encoding, humanity can bring peace and love through Freewill to this planet. Then the whole of the Pleiadian galaxy will experience the same."

"Well we haven't done a very good job," Alan Retorted, cynically.

Andrea continued, "Late in the Eleventh century, a group of men known as the Clandestine monks created the Crusades to win back Jerusalem, so that they could re-establish the Essene knowledge on the planet. Jerusalem means "New Salem."

"Is that significant?"

"I should say so. Salem was the birth place of the Order of Melchizidek, known here as the Brotherhood. It was from there the Essenes derived their wisdom. This is why the Crusades were created."

"I thought it was to capture Jerusalem."

"That was part of the plan, yes. Now, in 1099, Jerusalem was recaptured by the Christians. Godfrey was crowned king and he allowed nine men to dig in the ruins of Solomon's temple to find the secrets of the Essenes. The Essene material was buried with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. In 1118, the Order of the Knights Templar was founded to protect this discovery of the Ark of the Covenant and records of Essene wisdom."

"Why did they want the Ark?"

"The Templars used the Ark of the Covenant to advance in time, beyond the Dark Ages to the Enlightenment, so that they could bring back the esoteric knowledge pertaining to the architecture of the great cathedrals, in order to re-establish the grid in their time. They did this selflessly, so that humanity could advance in consciousness, and the great Pleiadian experiment could be accomplished."

"Whoa Andrea, this sounds to much like an Indiana Jones story. And even if it is true what's it got to do with this Millennium caper?"

Obi interrupted, "Dear hearts I have to go." he bowed with a flourish. He eyed Alan. "I leave you to this dear ladies tender mercies. Chow for now."

Andrea picked up her thread. "Time, in this sense, is like a musical scale, with each note vibrating to a different frequency. As an example today's time frequency allows us to have computers, whereas the frequency of even 100 years ago, did not. So what is allowable at any given time is determined by the frequency of that time. The Templars used the Ark to alter the frequency of the grid, but only inasfar as it affected them."

"How could they change the grid in such a way it only affected them?"

"They connected all the great cathedrals to a twelfth dimensional star-gate in southern France. This was the home of the Cathars, a branch of Essenes that moved to southern France after the destruction of Jerusalem. So by entering any of the cathedrals, one could immediately be elevated to the twelfth dimensional star-gate."

“What do you mean by twelfth dimensional star-gate?”

“This is where it becomes somewhat complex. Do you think you are ready for this?” Andrea asked, not sure whether to proceed.

He hesitated, then he said, “You'd better tell me.”

“Okay, let us imagine our space and cosmos as the surface of a hyper sphere. In fact this is a solution - one of the better ones - of Einstein's relativity regarding the form of the universe. Thus we see that it is finite yet boundless.”

“How can it be finite, yet boundless?”

“Expansion, like a the TARDIS effect.”

“I don't understand.”

“Of course you don't. Now are you going to listen or not?”

Feeling admonished, Alan Ridgard uttered, “Yes, of course.”

“Very well but don't keep interrupting me.”

“OK.”

“If one reached far enough in one direction across space one would go all the way around the hyper sphere and come back to the starting point. Think of this sphere having holes through its surface. Similar pathways inside it criss-cross and intersect at the surface at different points. Bear in mind the surface covers great distances across a galaxy. Now imagine countless 'pipelines' inside the sphere intersecting, forming, what we will call, major and minor junction boxes These are coordination points, energy centres, nodes, or time-line intersection points, or white holes as opposed to black holes.”

Checking that Alan was still with her, Andrea asked, “Are you following me so far?”

“Yes but I'm not sure I'm seeing the same thing as you.”

Andrea continued, “Okay, so portals at the surface will lead to these inner-space coordination centres. Just imagine 12 of these major 'junction boxes' or energy centres neatly positioned inside the sphere. We must now further consider that the source of all energy comes from beyond (inside) those centres and that the 12 coordination centres constitute the core holographic template which keeps everything in perpetual creation.”

“Wow Andrea! You are assuming a great deal here. I'm still trying to get my head around the Millennium Dome syphoning energy from Stonehenge.”

“Yes, well this is the mechanics of it. Now, these centres are points where different time lines intersect. As a result of their nature they are also dimensional portals or Star Gates.”

“Andrea, what is the difference between portals and star gates?”

“Star Gates cut across dimensions whereas portals usually refer to doorways within the same dimension.” While Alan was trying to mentally digest that little gem, she said “Okay, now imagine that entry through these Star Gates, which can be accessed from the surface portals in our 3D space, will give instant transit to other portions of the cosmos, that is, inside the sphere and other parts of its surface. This is a very simple model, for example, the energy centres are not the same, they cover a range of dimensions.”

“What are these 'junction boxes' and intersections? How do they relate to our known universe?”

It is generally thought that our universe is made up of cycles within cycles. Actually, it's spirals within spirals. We have planets orbiting stars; star systems orbiting further stars; then these larger systems and constellations are orbiting further celestial centres - then all are rotating around the hub of the galaxy. These are repeating intervals of different times and these motions of bodies manifest frequencies. This structure of space-time intervals within space-time intervals forms a template which manifests from the Divine Blueprint. I

“The macrocosm and the microcosm,” the agent suggested, pleased he was getting a grasp of what was being said.

“Exactly. Now there are probable time lines, extensions of, a desirable actualised past or desirable future. This enables a species to advance where these time lines intersect, such as with the Star Gates. Using this principle we can change the past and alter the potential future, by shunting and bypassing undesirable actualised time lines, such as ours. This is what the Christos Realignment Mission will accomplish).

“And this is the knowledge the Knight Templars discovered?”

“Yes Alan Ridgard. Now can you see why the Church was so afraid of them.”

“I am beginning to - yes.”

“That is why each cathedral contained a labyrinth, which generates a vortex and connects you to the twelfth dimensional star gate. To walk a labyrinth creates a pathway to Jerusalem, or a twelfth dimensional star gate. Remember, Jerusalem means New Salem, where the order of Melchizidek or the Brotherhood, resides. It is now time that humanity understands this history and protects this wisdom. We are a planet of Freewill and we are a creation of love. Fear and deception will destroy us, whereas the love vibration and an understanding of who we are will bring peace and harmony to the entire galaxy.”

It was a lot for Alan Ridgard to take in. “How about we continue over a coffee,” he suggested.

“Okay so what are the bad guys doing to to stop this?” Alan Ridgard asked, as they sipped cappuccinos in the almost empty refectory.

“As you know, at the present time, the Illuminates has created a system of HAARP and ELF to control the weather and to use mind control against us. The Temple of New Saqqara is an antenna system to counteract this.”

“Tell me more about this the New temple of Saqqara?”

“In the period of time just after the destruction of Atlantis the Earth was cracked by Man's inability to control his ego and anger (emotions). The same conditions exist today. That is why the weather is

out of control - the orbit of the Earth is being changed by these same emotions. Back then, the Brotherhood came to humanity's help and offered to rebuild the damaged planet. To do this it was necessary to re-establish the polarity that had been destroyed. The Great Pyramid of Giza was built as an antennae system to stabilise the orbit of the planet and balance its polarity. It is important to understand that the pyramid is an antenna system, and that Stonehenge is the control panel for this antenna system."

"So, the pyramid is like a TV Ariel and Stonehenge is like the remote control," Alan reasoned, trying to get a grasp of what Andrea was saying.

"That's a reasonable analogy, yes. Now, did I mention that in 1968, the Hardy family was contacted by the Brotherhood and asked to build a new antennae system to help balance the grid at the present time?"

"I remember something about it - yes."

"In 1975 the Hardy Family constructed a copy of the Giza pyramid and created the Temple of New Saqqara. The model of the Giza pyramid is tuned to the Heart chakra. The reason for creating New Saqqara was to reintroduce heart energy into the grid. The amazing thing that happened right away was that this pyramid ended the abnormalities in the Bermuda Triangle. The crack in the Earth created the Atlantic ocean. That is why the addition of heart energy into this area ended the abnormalities."

"Okay, but what is so special about Saqqara?"

"The mystery school where humanity was trained to move the large blocks that allowed the pyramid of Giza to be built, was called Saqqara. The physical Saqqara, that we visited, is located about 25 kilometres from the Great Pyramid at Giza. The new Temple of Saqqara, is designed so that humanity can remember the wisdom that was taught there. Many of us have been trained at Saqqara in previous incarnations. Now we have created the Temple of New Saqqara so that people can be trained to reintroduce heart energy back into the grid. It is now time to remember your training and to use this wisdom to help humanity advance into higher planes of consciousness."

"Do the bad guys know about this?"

"Whether they do or not, if their plan works out all this good work will be ruined." Fixing Alan Ridgard's gaze, Andrea asked, "Do you study the Bible?"

"Not since Sunday school - why?"

"Because Revelation reveals to humanity much of this secret knowledge, but most of this information is encoded so that the average human being does not understand the war that is being waged between the light and the people in our government that wish to extinguish this light. The dark forces are trying to control our freewill on this planet so that we become their robots, enslaved into their diabolical plan. This is a planet of free will. Every man, woman and child, has encoded within its being, the power to break this bondage, and in so doing, free the whole galaxy from this situation. Yes, there is a war going on. Thousands of years ago, the sovereign beings of this planet were given free will, - the opportunity to choose and understand the power and existence of love. In so doing, this element will be given to the whole universe. That, in a nutshell, is the secret knowledge that must be dealt with and understood. In understanding this, it is important to understand the total game plan of the dark forces."

“Okay, so give me some details of the bad guys game plan.”

“Their first step is to chip humanity so that they destroy the powerful encoding of love that gives us the power of freewill.”

“Which they do by causing us to fear.”

“Which they can do by creating an antennae system within the planet so that they can activate these chips. Many of us haven’t a clue of this process. There is probably less than 2% of the world’s population that has the ability or the desire to even understand this. Most of us are herded into our everyday life like the sheeple we are. The burdens of everyday life prevent us from comprehending the real secret knowledge of being sovereign, and knowing that we have the opportunity to take the whole galaxy back to a situation of free will and love.”

“And we do that by being free of the original treaty.”

“That’s right and this can only occur at the end of the contract the guardians made with this planet. So to counteract this, the Illuminates plan to cap the Great Pyramid on December 31, in a few weeks time during a spectacular celebration. If the capstone is lowered onto the pyramid, the planet would have experienced a reversal in the power in the grid, and Y2K will become a reality. The reversal in the grid will shut down all computers and electrical systems all over the planet.”

“How do you know all this Andrea? Are you one of the guardians?”

Andrea smiled, “If I was I would not be telling anyone.”

“Alan grinned, “I get it. Need to know basis.”

“The important thing here is that the beings on this planet are a combination of 22 different star systems in the Pleiadian galaxy. Instead of having a brutal, murderous war, it was agreed upon to fight the battle within a small situation on Earth. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to raise the frequency and the vibration of the planet and, of our being, so that the whole galaxy can return to the peace and harmony that it deserves.”

“How can we do that when we are sheeple with wool over our eyes?”

Andrea firmly grabbed Alan's right wrist. “You have to understand that this is a planet of free will. Everyone has to make the decision for themselves, but when 144,000 of us rise above the humdrum of everyday life, and take back the power of being a sovereign being, then the planet will return to light and in so doing, make a powerful statement for the whole galaxy. If the encoding of 22 different star systems can live together in free will by the encoding that is in our RNA/DNA, then the beings within the galaxy will have an understanding of each other’s race, because, when 22 different star systems can function in 144,000 individuals who have free will, then the whole galaxy will have an opportunity to live in peace.”

“It all sounds very wonderful, Andrea, but when I watch the news I see no evidence of this wonderful golden age emerging. In fact it seems the opposite!”

“Don’t you see, if these good works become public knowledge, the dark forces would put a stop to them?”

“I never looked at it like that. But what will happen if the good guys can’t get the numbers?”

“If we do nothing we will all find out very soon.”

“Okay, So what practical steps can we take to be effective as one of the 144,000?”

“Alan Ridgard, once a person is trained through this system and contacts the Brotherhood, they can tap into the grid anywhere on the planet and use their mind to create a balance of love within the grid. It is only through this love that the planet can be balanced. This knowledge is the Brotherhood’s gift to humanity.

“I need to speak to someone who understands and has the ability to connect with the grid.”

Answering his request while seemingly ignoring it, Andrea said, “Kes wants you to go with her to Stonehenge.”

Chapter 33

Stonehenge 1999

Kes Crane, having paid the entrance fees and escaped from the hucksters hawking ice lollies, souvenirs and a poor excuse for hamburgers, led Alan into the stone circle. He's first impression of Stonehenge was that of a seedy tourist trap. However, once they were inside the outer circle he felt like he was in a different dimension.

“It was not always like this,” Kes Crane reminisced sadly, indicating the rope fence that kept visitors within 20 feet of the stone circle. It never used to have these tight controls. What with organised parking, licensed guides, and restricted access it killed the whole atmospheric feel of the place.”

“That’s progress for you,” Alan uttered, uselessly.

Once Kes was inside, mesmerised by the majesty of the huge stones, she forgot her gripes. With a look of awe, she said, “It has stood as silent and nearly as old as the Sphinx. It mocks us with its riddles, defying us with its unfathomable logic, captivating us with its fearful symmetry,” Kes Crane elucidated, caught up in her own wonderment.

Alan took in the scattered ruins in a circular cluster, that drew upwards of 1 million pilgrims annually to a triangle of land wedged between two rural roads on the Salisbury Plain of Wiltshire, England.”

Kes pulled her beanie down over her ears to protect them from the persisting hoary frost. “Most people, even the so-called experts, don’t know why it was built or who built it. However, it does bring people together to wonder in metaphysical awe at the magical mysteries of Nature, God, and Man, it triumphs still.” Kes expressed loudly, throw her arms wide as though embracing the stones.

Indicating the geometric arrangement of stones, Kes pointed out, “The main circle of large stones, which is called the ‘Sarsen Circle’, was supposedly once composed of 30 upright stones that were topped by 30 Lintels that were mortised at each end.”

“The lintel, that’s the bit across the top, isn’t it?” the agent qualified.

Realising she was dealing with a rank beginner, Kes smiled saying, “Yes, that’s right. Now, of the 30 upright stones that were originally claimed to have been there only 24 are left standing in their

original positions and of 30 lintels only 5 remain in place.”

“What about the stones outside the Sarsens?” Alan Ridgard queried.

“They are referred to as the Aubrey Circle, after John Aubrey, who first discovered and analysed the ring of post holes. 56 evenly spaced holes which vary in depth from two to four feet.” Rubbing her mittens together to keep out the morning cold, Kes said, “If you look carefully between the Aubrey holes and the Sarsen Circle you can see two other circular patterns of holes named the Y holes and the Z holes. If you count them you will find 30 holes in the Y series forming a circle roughly 35 feet outside the Sarsen Circle, and supposedly only 29 holes in the Z series of holes which are about 5 to 15 feet outside of the Sarsen Circle.”

Fed up with the detailed statistics, Alan Ridgard changed the subject. “So, Kes, how does this tie in with the MD theory?”

Turning to face him, she replied, “Stonehenge is not the ruin you see before you. It was constructed, under Tehuti’s guidance, to the universal geometric harmonics of Light. Do you know that the radius of the Aubrey Circle is related directly to the ‘speed of light; and the radius of the Sarsen Circle corresponds to the square of the reciprocal of the speed of light.”

Alan's eye widened in surprise. “That is incredible!”

“My research also shows that the larger megaliths seem to have a crystalline structure that emits some form of electromagnetic radiation.”

“How can they do that?”

Fixing him in her gaze, Kes said, “Harmonic relationships discovered here set up opposition to the ‘Light Fields’ at the earth's surface or those Light fields that prevail in space. Space and time could be altered by the manipulation of the outer all enclosing field set up by the crystalline structure.”

“Travel in space and time! This is science fiction stuff! You are joking surely.”

“I've no time for jokes!” Kes retorted angrily.

She fumbled in her pocket for her pack of smokes. She lit one up and inhaled deeply.

Feeling better she continued, “The Sarsen stones and central trilithons can be likened to giant electromagnets that set up interlocking energy fields around the centre of this device. The trilithon section remaining a static field in relation to the Sarsen section, which spins around a resonant rotating field.”

“Okay Kes, so what would result from the interaction of the sarsen resonant rotating field and the trilithon section static field?”

“I would suggest that the interaction of the rotating sarsen field with the electrostatic trilithon field would be to create a spinning motion.”

“It seems so you have it worked out,” Alan Ridgard stated, pulling up his jacket collar to keep out the wind and drizzly rain that had just started.

Patrick Cooper arrived at the car park and looked for the blue Suzuki Swift. He found one in second

row; the registration number matched the one he had been given. He wasn't sure about carrying out the task she had given him. It went way beyond his job description as head of security. But the promise a pay increase and other unspecified perks was too alluring for him to pass up. Pat had seen the way Sheila eyed him up. He was still fit and strong with rugged good looks. Shaking his fantasy from his mind, he attended to the task at hand. A glance around the car park told him nobody was nearby. He looked at the Suzuki and felt in his pocket for the metal cutters. He wanted to get the job over and done with. Apart from anyone seeing him, it was cold and slanting, icy rain began to fall.

Despite Alan's sweater, hat and gloves, exposure to the blustery, wet weather that was now washing over the plateau of Salisbury Plain. was getting to him. Seeing the reporter shivering, Kes said, "Let's find somewhere warm and dry to continue our conversation."

Whilst, walking back to the car-park, Alan turned around to face the stones. From around 40 meters away in the grassy field and the minimised human presence, was enough for him to see the circle in its natural glory. Caught as it was, between England's solid green earth and the drama of its grey, overcast, John Constable sky, Alan Ridgard found the effect Spellbinding.

"That really is amazing," He uttered, mostly to himself.

Kes, hearing him said, "It is a vital machine that needs to be functioning correctly."

"Yes, I get that. I don't get how the Millennium Dome manages to divert the energy flow"

"Turn around and look at it Alan. Look at the geometry. It's an ancient version of the Millennium Dome."

He turned and looked. "You'll have to spell it out for me."

"To start with the outer ring of monolithic stones, I believe, supported a cone-shaped timber roof."

"Roof! I didn't know it had a roof."

"Many people like myself now believe the stones we see were actually a roof support. The wooden beams would have stretched out from the stones to form a 10-point star on the ground, like the supports that jut out from the Dome."

"OK. That sort of makes sense."

"A former army engineer told me the tent-like shape of the Dome was designed to line up exactly with the movements of the sun at key dates throughout the year."

"Are you suggesting the Dome is some kind of astronomical clock?"

"In a way – yes. And it makes perfect sense for this monument to have a roof."

"Why?"

"I can't imagine the people who built Stonehenge standing in the rain, like we are. It doesn't make any sense at all. I had to ask myself: Why was it so big? Why is it in a circle? What are the lintels locked together and why is there a circle of holes around the stones?"

Alan rubbed his stubbly chin. "So the Dome designers knew a thing or two about the natural grid

energy flow.”

“Look Alan, There have been so many budget blow-outs and scandals to do with the Dome it's definitely not worth the effort – financially. But it is necessary to change the energy flow. Why else would they persist with such an expensive white elephant?”

The driver watched from his driving seat as the man and woman got into the Blue Suzuki. He followed them, at a distance, as they drove away from Stonehenge. He had seen the man lurking by the car but he had no idea why. At first he thought the man was going to steal it but why would he do so when there were much better prizes for the taking. He didn't know anything about the woman driver but the man, he believed to be Alan Ridgard.

Kes and Alan chatted, as she rubbed her hand on the inside of the windscreen in an attempt to clear the condensation. With wipers at full pelt the little Swift headed along the A303 to East Knoyle, where Kes was taking Alan for lunch.

Kes was telling him about a particular pub that did the best ploughman's lunches when it happened. They were just rounding a bend, when, up ahead Kes saw a tractor coming out of a field. The farm machine was right in her path. Instinctively she plunged her foot on the brake, but nothing happened.

Alan yelled “SLOW DOWN!”

She desperately pumped the brake.

Alan's heart was in his mouth as he looked on helplessly at the lumbering tractor.

“Oh my God!” Kes mouthed, as she headed straight at the slow moving vehicle. She slammed the stick into third gear. Her little car slid crazily over the wet, muddy road. Desperately, she yanked the wheel to the left. The car lost traction, skidded sideways, but was still heading for the rear of the tractor.

Alan took control. He spun the wheel to the right, gaining some tyre tread purchase. Then hard left. The little Suzuki skidded on two wheels, into the gateway of the field the tractor had just vacated. “BRACE YOURSELF!” he yelled, as the car hit thick mud, glanced off a gate-post, where, for a split second, it balanced precariously, before flipping over and rolling a few times, coming to a halt upside-down in the field. Alan's last conscious feeling was that he was in a tumble dryer. Then blackness.

The driver in the car following skidded to a halt at the scene of the accident. Climbing out of his car he rushed to the damaged vehicle. The farmer was already there, trying to wrench open the the drivers door of the upside down car.

“What happened?” the car driver asked.

“I don't rightly know. But I got out of the field just in toime.”

The driver reached for his cell phone. He stabbed some numbers, then said, “We need an ambulance. There's been a car accident on the A303, about 5 miles from East Knoyle.”

Chapter 34

Oxford 1999

Alan Ridgard awoke to find himself in strange surroundings. His basement flat did not have nursing staff walking around. He felt a throbbing headache and realised his head was bandaged. As he tried to sit up a stabbing pain in his rib area became apparent. He grimaced and laid back down.

The fog in his brain began to clear and memories of the accident came filtering in, the tractor, the brakes not working, hitting the gatepost, rolling over. His smart manoeuvre had probably saved his life. Then it hit him. How was Kes? Had she survived? He had to know. There was a button on the wall beside his bed. He pressed it and a nurse appeared.

“Oh you’re awake. How are you feeling?”

“Never mind about me, what about the driver of the car?”

“She’s been taken to theatre. They’ll be operating now.”

“Operating! How bad is she?”

“You will have to talk with her surgeon about that,” she responded, giving a non committal response

Alan Ridgard, exhausted, slipped back into sleep.

The next time Alan Ridgard woke up, Andrea was sitting by the bed with a bag of grapes.

“What happened to you?” she asked

“The brakes of Kes’ car failed and we crashed.”

“Were the brakes spongy before the accident?”

“Never mind about that, I want to know how Kes is.”

“It’s not looking good. She sustained serious internal injuries from hitting the post and head injuries from the rolling car.”

“My God, that’s terrible. One minute we were chatting away about lunch and the next...”

“... Alan, Andrea interrupted, “Do you think the car could have been sabotaged while you were at Stonehenge?”

“Wide-eyed the investigator responded, “Do you think it was a deliberate act?”

“I don’t know, but it wouldn’t surprise me.”

Alan frowned. It was my fault. I should never have involved her, after that first warning.”

“Alan, Kes was the one that involved you. Do you know if the car has been checked yet?”

“I’ve no idea. I just woke up here. Thank God that farmer was there to phone the ambulance.”

“Yes, you were very lucky. Now, I am going to contact the police.”

Just then a doctor approached Alan's bed. He checked the patient's chart, then checked his chest with his stethoscope. Looking at his patient he said, “You’ll do.”

“Do you mean I can leave here?” Alan Ridgard asked, surprised.

“Your cranial swelling is going down and your ribs were only bruised so yes, you can go home.”

“What about my friend Ms Crane. is there any change?”

“She’s not my patient, but as far as I know she is still in a coma.”

Sheila was enjoying her weekend off, in Eastbourne. She sat back in her sun lounge, smoking a joint, her double glazed penthouse balcony, protecting her from the chilling greyness outside. She called out, “Pat, where’s my coffee got to?”

“It’s on its way, lover,” Patrick answered, approaching with two steaming mugs on a silver tray.

“Don’t call me that?”

“Don’t call you what?”

“I don’t like being referred to as ‘lover’.”

“What would you prefer I called you then?”

Ignoring that remark, Sheila threw a paper on the lounge he sat in. “I see your targets made the news.”

Pat glanced at the article the headline read, ‘Car Possibly Sabotaged - driver in coma’. Seeing the result of his handiwork Pat was horrified. “That poor woman, I never intended that to happen.”

“Stop snivelling Pat,” Sheila snapped. “Are you sure this cannot be tracked back to you?”

“To be sure Sheila. You’ve nothing to worry on that score. But I feel uncomfortable doing this kind of work.”

“You like the perks though, don’t you,” she said suggestively. “she then asked, “So, what are you going to do about them?”

“What do you mean?” Pat asked , surprised.

“To stop them snooping in the MD project.”

Pat did not want to hurt them any more. “Don’t you think we have done enough. I mean, according to this paper, she’s still in a coma. And I don’t think Alan Ridgard will be giving us any more trouble.”

Sheila did not like loose ends. "I hope you're right Patrick, for your sake."

Alan was working on his notes when the police, two plain clothed officers, turned up at his flat. "Have you found out about the brakes yet?" he asked.

DS Travers said, "It would seem that the brake-lines of the Suzuki had been cut. We are no longer treating the incident as an accident. So my question is do you know of anybody who would do such a thing?"

"No, I have only known Kes for a short time and I know very little about her."

"What about if you were the target, not her."

That thought had tortured Alan since he left the hospital. He couldn't bear to think he had caused her condition. Not mentioning the previous attempts on his life, Alan joked, "As far as I know the librarian at the St Johns Wood library is the only person likely to be pissed off at me, but I don't think her job inscription includes killing members for overdue fines."

"Don't be a smart ass. Somebody tried to kill you two, and you want to joke about it? If it was not for that bloke at the scene you two would probably have died from hypothermia."

"Yes, I'd like to thank that tractor driver for helping."

"Helping! He was the pratt that caused the accident. No, it was the other driver who phoned for an ambulance."

Alan Ridgard was amazed. "What other driver?"

"He'd legged it before we arrived on the scene, but according to the tractor driver, he seemed to be very concerned."

"Was he just driving by at the time?"

"We're not sure but we certainly want to talk to him."

Although Marcus Cullen was just one of 100 permanent staff in the History Faculty, holding the esteemed office of Regius Professor, he stood out from the rest. As most of the experience of humanity is contained in the past, Marcus knew, from a very young age, that was where he wanted to delve. The first Regius Professor of Modern History was appointed back in 1724, and undergraduate examinations began in 1850. He worked and lived in one of the forty-five college communities, in a honey-coloured medieval quad. This was where he was waiting for his guests. Oxford, Alan noted, is certainly a lively, thriving and beautiful city. He observed this as Andrea drove him to the university. Passing through a number of college communities he got a sense of the massiveness of the institution. The different architectural styles, ranging from Medieval Gothic to controversial post modernism, added to the splendour of the University. Alan asked, "Who have we come to see?" as Andrea parked, as close as was possible, to a honey coloured, fort-shaped building, complete with ramparts.

“Professor Marcus Cullen.”

“But you said...”

“...I know what I said, and I am pleased you heeded my words. However, now I think it is time to confront Marcus Cullen.”

“Confront him?”

“Marcus is a dear friend but he is very complex and, at times, it is difficult to see where he is coming from.”

“Obi Wan Dawkins doesn't seem to like him.”

“Andrea laughed loudly. “That is one of the understatement of understatement. Then she became serious. “Alan, follow my lead. Even if you don't understand why I am saying something stick with me and for God's sake do not question it, okay?”

Puzzled by her directive, he argued, “But I need to ask him questions.”

Andrea rounded on him. “Listen to me Alan, I know how to handle Marcus, you don't. He is a brilliant man and very convincing. If you take the lead he will lead you on and you will not know it. Now, either you do this my way or we leave right now.”

He acquiesced, nodding, “Okay, if that is how it has to be.”

Marcus invited Andrea and Alan Ridgard into his private study. “Hello Andrea, it's good to see you, and who is this young man? he asked, indicating tall man with piercing blue eyes and short, slightly wavy, fair hair.

“Hello Marcus, this is Alan Ridgard. He is writing an article on sacred geometry. I told him you are the major expert in this area.”

“Well, I don't know about the 'major expert' bit but come in and sit down and warm yourselves by the fire.” Turning to Alan, Marcus asked, “Who do you write for or are you freelance?”

“Freelance at present,” Alan answered, wondering why Andrea had introduced him as such.

Andrea said, “Alan Ridgard is interested in the geometry of Stonehenge. I told him that was your main area of expertise.”

In his deep resonate voice, Marcus began to open up. “First, let me say that all geometry is sacred because geometrical shapes are, what I refer to as, ‘frozen sound forms’, templates, if you will. When the average person looks at Stonehenge they see a circle of stones, but the expert eyes sees other configurations. Within these other geometrical shapes we discover the technology that gives these monoliths their awesome power.”

Andrea spoke up. “Marcus, tell Alan about the Star of David.”

“Ahem, well now there are of course other interesting possibilities for the use of this technology based on the Stonehenge configuration pattern. As I have suggested in my latest book, 'The Geometry of Stonehenge', it is entirely possible that this ancient edifice, or any similar device based on the same template could be used to generate energy fields based on a Star of David geometrical

configuration of crystalline structures.”

Andrea suggested, “Maybe this Star of David configuration pattern, which employed in a crystal grid structure and utilised in a highly specific way, could be used to literally channel an enormous amount of higher-dimensional energy through the fabric of space-time into the centre of the complex to form a pillar of light or some other massive concentration of energy.”

Marcus added, “Or maybe if a huge amount of energy could be generated, possibly amplified and then focused into an extremely small area at the centre of this circle, then a bridge or gate could be created that would allow access to higher dimensional space, possibly allowing for travel into other space-time continuums (universes) or also to act as a hyper-spatial shortcut to far off distant locations in this universe.”

At this juncture Marcus, turning to his guests, said, “How about a rather tasty mulled port with lemon?”

Alan thought the offer rather odd when the academic was into his flow. Although, the pause gave him chance to check his small recorder.

“What a wonderful idea, Marcus,” Andrea agreed. Fortified by the warming sensation of the port, Andrea said, “Tell Alan about the Freemason connection.”

This, being one of Professor Cullen’s favourite topics, it took little prompting. “Yes, well the origins of modern freemasonry are relatively recent. Its roots go back to the stonemasons of the middle ages who worked on our great cathedrals. They formed themselves into guilds to preserve and protect the skills of their trade - some of the Masonic symbols of the apron, the square, the compass etc. are the leftovers from this time.”

Alan asked, “What happened to these guilds?”

“With no further major building projects, the old trade guilds fell apart after the reformation and the guilds were thrown open to non masons. The rituals used today are largely the product of the Freemasons of the late 17th. and 18th. centuries, although many of the actual esoteric secrets go back to ancient Egyptian times or earlier. They have been passed down through the mystery schools of Egypt, Babylon, ancient Greece, and then down through the middle ages by such orders as the Knights Templar, Cathars and Rosicrucian, and from there to modern freemasonry.”

“Why were they kept secret?” Alan queried.

“In the face of mass persecution by the Christian church in the middle ages, these secret sects were vital in helping to preserve esoteric knowledge. Some experts even say that the secrets, among other things, are concerned with the true origins of humanity, which may not be so entirely terrestrial and a product of evolution, as our present science would have us believe. We are moving now into the realms of intelligent life elsewhere in the cosmos and the possibility of contacts with earth in the past. Some say one of the secrets of the 33rd. degree is that they are in touch with intelligent life in the Sirius star system, although others dismiss this as being absurd. Nevertheless, Sirius is the flaming star which appears in Masonic temples.”

Andrea jumped in. “So, Marcus, what knowledge might be being kept from humanity as a whole?”

“The secrets may cover such matters as knowledge of the 'life force' or 'kundalini' which connects

all humans to the earth and to the cosmos. This is often, represented symbolically by the snake, which ironically is incorporated in the symbol of the British Medical Association, even though the medical profession and conventional science deny this life force even exists. So too knowledge of the energy grid of the earth, sometimes known as ley lines, and how these connect with the collective consciousness of humanity. There is nothing wrong with the knowledge itself obviously - indeed it has been very important for it to be preserved especially against the background of dogmatic religions and Christianity which once sought to destroy the ancient knowledge and persecuted and killed anyone who attempted to pass it on.”

“What happened to this knowledge?” Alan asked, noting a dark look from Andrea.

“The Freemason’s knowledge was usurped by satanic forces. This dark light, which some refer to as Illuminates, has taken control of this knowledge to use it for their own reasons. The danger here is people who have the knowledge, deny it to others and abuse it. So, the knowledge borne by the ancient mystery schools has been taken over by those who wanted to use it for their own purposes of power and control. What was originally an honourable craft has been hijacked and perverted for sinister purposes, but only those at the very top of the pyramid of initiation are aware of what is going on and the true agenda. They know that the energy grid of the earth can just as easily be used to project negative and malevolent thoughts as positive and loving ones, and this is where dubious oaths and rituals come in, explaining the 'bad vibes' some people have experienced in Masonic temples.”

Andrea chipped in, “Marcus, aren't Freemasons forbidden to discuss politics?”

“Whilst ordinary masons of the lowest 3 degrees of craft freemasonry are forbidden to discuss politics in their lodges, at its highest levels freemasonry has strong political overtones. Note the Masonic symbol of the pyramid mounted by the all seeing eye, the symbol of the structure of world freemasonry, to be found on the back of the US one dollar bill. Around it the Latin inscription - 'Annuat Coeptis Novus Ordo Seclorum' - announcing the birth of the new ordinance of the ages or, to use contemporary terminology 'New World Order', a phrase much associated with domination by a global elite and rather popular with George Bush.”

“Are you suggesting that Bush is a high degree mason?” Alan Ridgard asked, earning another dark look.

“That is how he became a nominee for the Presidency of the United States. Understand, Bush is one of a number of US presidents thought to have reached the highest levels of Masonic initiation, others include Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford and Bill Clinton. In his book 'In God's Name', in which he investigated the murder of Pope John Paul 1, David Yallop illustrated how the top level Masonic lodge P2, with members in South America and the Vatican as well as Italy, and powerful influences in the USA and elsewhere, was effectively running Italy. Despite the public exposures of the early '80's, P2 still exists today.”

“Where does it exist?” Alan Ridgard queried.

“As the notorious and very elitist Skull and Bones Society. This shadowy politically based Masonic organisation in the USA, said to have some bizarre sexually orientated initiation ceremonies, is based at Yale University where meetings are held in a windowless mausoleum known as 'the Tomb'. Its membership is dominated by well known families of the 'eastern establishment', such as Bush, Rockefeller, Harriman, Whitney, Bundy, Vanderbilt. In fact Bush is one of the best known present day initiates - he was apparently once accused by Pat Buchanan of running a 'Skull and Bones' presidency.

Alan, although greatly impressed at Marcus' vast knowledge of the subject, could not see how it was helping with his case. Facing The historian head-on, he asked, "What does this have to do with the Millennium Dome conspiracy?"

There was silence in the study. Andrea glared at him.

Marcus, steepled his fingers, resting his chin on them. Then, looking Alan in the eye, he said, "Entertainment for the sheeple. It's all sleight of hand - look at this, not over there, mind control." Then, smiling at the pair, he rose to his full height, saying, "It's been good to catch up again Andrea but I must be getting on with marking these assignments," he said, indicating the work on his desk." Once they were outside, Andrea turned on Alan, "Well done! You just blew it big time!"

Alan Ridgard, shocked by her verbal attack, asked, "What am I supposed to have done?"

"What have you done!" She repeated, shaking her head. She turned to walk away, and then she turned to face him. "I will tell what you did. You disobeyed my instructions. You thought you knew better. I was very deliberately avoiding direct and confrontational questions, but no, you have to blunder in about the Millennium Dome."

Alan, also angry, responded, "How long was I supposed to sit all through that intellectual stuff before he got to the point?"

"With Marcus, it takes as long as it takes. Although that is irrelevant now, because he probably won't speak to you again."

Chapter 35

London 1999

Alan Ridgard woke up as Rameses, Kes' Egyptian cat jumped on his bed, "Yeah, I know you're hungry but you're going to have to wait until I'm up."

The cat purred, rubbing his cheek against Alan Ridgard's hand. Kes' cat reminded Alan to phone the hospital for a progress report on Kes. The last time he checked with her surgeon she was still in a deep coma. The police had not made any progress in the case. There were no witnesses and the saboteur had disappeared. Alan still felt the occasional twinge in his side but other than that he felt fine. He got out of bed and grabbed a thick sweater to ward off the creeping winter chill. With Rameses at his heels he put on the kettle for coffee. Than his phone rang. it was Neil.

"Hi Alan, Obi told me about your accident. Are you all-right mate?"

"Yes, thanks for asking. Although, Kes is still in a bad way.'

"Is she the nutty chick in the caravan?"

"Right now she's in hospital in a coma!" Alan retorted angrily.

"Shit, that's a real bummer."

"Yes, and it doesn't look like they will catch the person responsible."

“Then, it wasn’t an accident.”

“No Neil, it wasn’t.”

“Anyway, the reason I rang is that I got a girl I want you to meet.”

“A girl - why?”

Because I fuckin’ ‘ave, that’s why. Now are you interested?”

“Only in the case I’m investigating.”

“Yeah, well she can shed some light on that.”

Alan Ridgard thought about it. He sighed, “Okay, when and where?”

“Under Waterloo Bridge in say, one hour.”

Alan Ridgard saw the pair huddled together swathed in heavy overcoats. They were talking and smoking and didn’t notice him at first. Then Neil detected a presence and, looking up, he said, “Took you Fuckin’ long enough. We’ve been freezing our tits off waiting.”

“So, why did you choose such a draughty place?”

“Because its Fuckin’ private, mate.”

“So what’s it all about?” Alan asked

“Alfieeee,” Neil sang, finishing the line of the popular song.

“Who’s your friend?” Alan asked, pointing at the Goth woman with black lipstick and face jewellery, huddled in an Afghan coat.

“Neil said you was after some info about the dark light,” she said, with no introduction.

“Dark light?”

“She means the Illuminates, mate.”

“What that got to with Millennium Eve?”

“She works for Heritage Holdings,” Neil stated , as though it would explain everything.

“And just who are Heritage Holdings?”

“Alan. mate, they are the new owners of the MD.”

“And that is significant?”

“Of course it is, Alan Ridgard.” Then putting his arm around the woman’s shoulder, he said, “He’s a bit thick at times but he is okay, our Alan. You can tell him, Zenda.”

She looked at him, wondering how much to tell. Then she said, "I am Zenda Bolling."

Then noting the vague look on the blond stranger's face, she added, "Sir Robert Bolling's daughter."

"Is this suppose to impress me or something?" he responded.

Neil added, "Sir Robert is President of Heritage Holdings. Now do you get the fuckin' significance mate?"

"Getting anything out of you two is worse than having teeth pulled. Just tell me what this is about."

Zenda took up the story. "Heritage Holdings have corporate interests and their own private intelligence services. They are also well represented in Masonic secret societies."

Alan, impressed with Zenda's information and her erudition, secretly wondered how Neil was close friends with the daughter of powerful business tycoon. "Is your father involved with these secret and covert groups?"

Zenda laughed loudly. "What do you think?"

"I guess he is,"

"He doesn't know that I know but daddy is a fully paid up member of the Skull and Bones Society. He is very high up in the spooks game as well. He has gatherings of old orders, such as the Knights of Malta and the Priory of Sion in his ancestral home. Now, because they are controlled by MI6, who now guard their ancient secrets, he is well placed as part of the world takeover."

"You could be sitting pretty then." Alan mentioned.

"I turned my back on the whole game years ago. My father and his cronies are the true Goths, with their dark evil energies."

Now, Alan Ridgard could see that Neil would be the perfect slap in the face for her father.

Neil commented, "Alan, do you know that, despite what Christianity would have us believe, Jesus married Mary Magdalene - they had a son and from him there is said to be a royal bloodline from which the Stuart monarchs of Scotland and later England can claim direct descent."

"Fascinating, Neil, but what does it have to do with anything?"

Zenda answered, "This is highly significant when one appreciates that Princess Diana was of Stuart descent and that she too would almost certainly know all this. The present Stuart heir to the British throne is Prince Michael of Albany who resides out of the public eye in Edinburgh, but who is nevertheless the Scottish representative of a little known organisation called the European Council of Princes."

"So she had a right to the throne."

"Yes Alan, Zenda confirmed. More right than the queen, actually."

Alan's eyebrows arched. He remained surprised.

Zenda clarified, "The Windsors are really usurpers, descended from the German house of Hanover, which was put in place in 1714 by powerful vested interests, who caused James II the last reigning Stuart monarch to flee in 1688. This was done for political gain and their non-intervention in British affairs and politics, was said to be the condition underpinning this arrangement - something that continues to this day."

Neil added, "Yeah, and contrasting this, Prince Michael's views on the role of the monarch is that he/she should act as the guardian and protector of the rights of the people against the excesses of governments and those who control them."

"Isn't Prince Michael the Titular head of British Freemasonry?" Alan Ridgard asked.

"Yes," Zenda concurred, "which clouds his integrity. Anyway these events initiated the onset of Masonic government, which included the setting up of privately owned central banks in Europe, and developed in corporate form especially from 1945 onwards with the creation of global mega corporations."

"It is a plutocracy mate, brutal and insidious. The corporate powers have authority over elected parliaments," Neil added.

"Do you know why I am against my father and all those like him?"

"Other than what you have told me, Zenda, no," Alan Ridgard answered.

"It's because high ranking intelligence chiefs and deep cover intelligence operatives are on the boards of big companies in oil, science, technology, armaments, financial institutions, publishing and media. This Masonic structure is well illustrated in Britain today where we have an elected parliament which conducts its affairs in public. At the head of it is the government including the Cabinet, whose so-called democratic deliberations are not generally made public. Above that but less visible, are publicised summits such as the G8 the IMF etc. whose deliberations are strictly secret. Calling the shots are banks, big business and corporate think tanks."

"If they already call the shots why do they want to officially run the world?"

"Good question mate," Neil commented. "I reckon. little or unknown publicity shy private forums such as Bilderberg, the Tri-Lateral Commission and the European Round Table of Industrialists, have been working their plan to a point where everything is under their control and so that nobody can resist them and their master plan."

Zenda added, "We are at the top of the tree, we have a monarchy in which the rituals and pageantry of the Coronation and the state opening of parliament are very much Masonic in nature."

"But surely, Zenda, there are not enough of them. the selected elite bunch to control billions of people."

"They certainly need a huge army of brainwashed minions to do their bidding. So they need prefects to impose their rules on society. That's where things like the United Purpose program comes into the picture"

"I received a flyer from them but I don't know much about them. How do they fit in with this alleged elitist plot?"

Neil, rubbing his gloves together, suggested, “ Let’s carry on this chat over a nice hot drink.”

Underneath the bridge the trio found a café, next to the Museum of the Moving Image, owned by the British Film Institute. A man wearing overalls and day-glo coloured vest followed them in. Alan and his contacts made themselves comfortable while he ordered the coffees. Little did they know that the man who followed them into the café, was Patrick Cooper, Sheila Brock’s eyes and ears. He took a seat two tables away from theirs.

The coffees arrived and Alan asked Zenda for more information about United Purpose.

She explained. “They tried to recruit me. At first I resisted but I decided to go to find out what was going on.”

“So, what was going on?” Alan asked.

“Basically, brainwash training for people who are attracted to powerful positions in this society, including high ranking police officers.”

Neil jumped in, “So mate, if people start getting too close to the truth of United Purpose then the Police become involved, which is why our flats were done over, and probably had something to do with your accident.”

Alan bristled. He wondered if the previous two attempts on his life was also down to them. “Are you suggesting that the cops may not be investigating what happened to Kes?”

“Well, if the top brass piggies order them to turn a blind eye to certain activities, well they're not going to argue, are they?” Neil reasoned.

Zenda stated, “I know they protect UP at any cost. They will use violence against any opposition to UP, under the pretext of 'Anti-Terrorism' 'laws'.”

“This is big time stuff then.”

Zenda elucidated, “Alan, let's be absolutely clear here, 'United Purpose' is the glue that sticks the European Union/New World Order together. Even if anybody tried to, targeting this organisation' will not work because they are part of the NWO/Global Government plans.”

“How can they be stopped then?” Alan asked, exasperated.

“By blowing up their fuckin’ Dome for a start!” Neil stated, all too loudly.

Draining her coffee, Zenda said, “Alan, United Purpose is a hidden menace in our government and schools United Purpose is the glue than enables fraud to be committed across government departments to reward pro European politicians. Corrupt deals are enabled that put property or cash into their pockets by embezzling public assets.”

As Alan and his contacts left the restaurant, Pat Cooper jotted down a few notes on the newspaper, behind which he had been hiding.

Alan Ridgard is still nosing around. A freak called Neil and Dracula's daughter were mouthing off about some conspiracy crap about something called United Purpose.

He made a note to ask Sheila about this.

Chapter 36

Ulster 1919

Lord Ivan Steer always took great pride in the motto on the family shield, 'Tu Ne Cede Me'. Roughly translated this means 'You will surrender to me', an attitude him soundly subscribed to. Under his management the Steer family in Ulster moved away from linen mills and gravitated to industries more in keeping with the needs of the times, armaments, chemicals etc. Ivan left these pursuits to the male members of the clan, while he set up 'Ivan Steer and Associates, as a PR company of the highest standing. It was through his think tank that 'United Purpose' was born.

He turned to Sheila Brock, his weekend house guest, whom he was showing round the ancestral home. He indicated a large painting in a gilt frame. "That is Lord Gladstone Steer, an Anglo-Irish nobleman, of sorts. He took up this estate, courtesy of a successful Cromwellian campaign." Ivan gestured with his arms. "This was the old boy's nest egg, his reward from Cromwell, for fighting with the Roundheads during the English Civil war."

Sheila faked interest in the tour. She needed Ivan's help. If having to suffer his boring family tree to achieve her end, so be it she thought.

He droned on, "Did you know that prior landholders from before the Tudor/Stuart/Cromwellian/Williamite times assimilated Norman gentry. Well, by Tudor times the huge majority of these people were using Irish as their first language. The really got up the nose of English officials, who were horrified that the English gentry in Ireland preferred Irish as their mother tongue." Ivan hooted at this.

Sheila grimaced – but secretly so.

"So, Lord Gladstone's descendants were as Irish as Paddy's pigs and mostly Catholic to boot." Ivan then pointed to another portrait hanging on the wall, "This branch of the family stayed true to Lord Gladstone's roots. They were heavily influenced by the Tudors and Stuarts, and more successfully under Cromwell & William of Orange, and they were almost exclusively Protestant." She had to show interest. "You certainly have interesting ancestors, Ivan."

"Yes well when the Edict of Nantes, which persecuted Protestants, was revoked, in 1695, many of the Huguenots who had to flee France settled in the British Isles. Among them was the subject of this painting," he said, pointing at a smaller framed artwork, one Louis Complant, who was born, and brought up as a weaver of fine linen, in the town of Cambrai. To escape Catholic persecution he fled to Ulster, and eventually settled down in the small town of Lisburn, about ten miles from Belfast. It was there that he met my esteemed ancestor, Lord William Radley Steer, who had inherited this Estate, after his father died. Anyway Complant and he became firm friends and business partners. From Louis, William learnt all he could about the linen industry but then they had a falling out."

"Why was that?" she asked, mildly interested.

"Dear old William set up 'Belfast Linen Products' and declared himself the Managing director. Louis who thought that position was to be his, fell out with William and left the partnership. Although the linen industry was already well and truly established in Ulster, Lord William found scope for improvement in weaving, and his efforts were so successful that he was appointed by the

Government to develop the industry over a much wider range than the small confines of Lisburn and its surroundings. The direct result of his good work was the establishment, under statute, of the Board of Trustees of the Linen Manufacturers of Ireland in the year 1711.”

Gladstone Hall Estate had always provided an excellent environment for driven game shooting. With an abundance of mature woodland and forestry that peaked over open pasture land, produced each gun with an exceptional shooting experience. For this reason Sir Robert Bolling liked to visit there as much as possible, preferably as part of only small shooting parties. On this occasion it was just him Sheila, who was a fair shot, he discovered, and Ivan.

It was the first time Sheila had met the owner of Heritage Holdings. He reminded her vaguely of a shorter version of Robert Mitchum, one of her favourite film actors. He had a commanding air about him. Even Ivan Steer deferred to him. “

“This is Sheila Brock,” Ivan smiled, introducing her.

“So you're the owner of the Millennium Dome. Pleased to meet you Mr Bolling.”

Bolling smiled thinly, saying nothing. He wasn't particularly interested in the woman who had, in his mind, taken on far more than she could chew. He then turned to Ivan. “I didn't come here to talk about business, unless it's the business of bagging some game.”

“Damn shame I had to miss the fun last weekend,” he bewailed.

“Yes old boy, you missed an extraordinary shoot. There was only 8 guns but we bagged 96 birds.” The tycoon broke open the Purdy he was using and loaded more cartridges. Then, far enough away from Sheila for her not to hear, looking at Ivan, he asked, “How sound is the Brock woman?”

Ivan answered, “Minter tells me she is adapting well.”

“Had you ever met her before today?”

“Good Lord no! Why would I want to?”

“She has made too many blunders to be useful to us. I think it best to make her disappear.”

Ivan baulked, “She is high profile so a hit is out of the question. And road accidents are very difficult to stage.”

“We don't want any hiccups at this final stage, Ivan.”

“I hear our friend Hosni is wavering. It seems the this Al Haab mob have put the wind up him.”

“Dammit Robert, why couldn't the pyramids be in a civilised country?”

“It's no joke Ivan. The Group met and we decided to get involved. We've agreed to give Hosni access to our terrorist data base, just on this one occasion.”

“Good idea.’

“And we want you to coordinate with the Typos.”

Ivan felt he had enough to do. "I don't know, Robert. What with keeping an eye on the Dome and now this. What's wrong with Arain?"

"Minter will take responsibility for the Dome."

Sheila approached the men, who abruptly stopped their conversation. She looked at each of them in turn. "Well, are we going to shoot something, or not?"

Ivan said, "We have a job for you, in Edinburgh."

Sheila Brock sat in cab that was taking her to 6 Waterloo Place. She had never been to Edinburgh before and the long slow taxi journey gave her ample time to take in the sights: the castle, the fine Georgian architecture and the university, the latter of which gave rise to the city's nickname, 'Athens of the north'. Earlier, its nickname was 'Laud Reek for Old Smoky', because when buildings were heated by coal and wood fires, chimneys would spew thick columns of smoke into the air. Sheila was not sure why she had pulled out of the Millennium project at such a crucial time to be sent up north to the United Purpose training centre. They had better have a damned good reason, she affirmed with herself, as her cab waited in the long traffic queue.

"What's the hold up for?" she asked her driver.

He turned back toward her. "It's the wee festival, lassie. It always gets busy around this time of the year."

"Can't you take a short cut or something," Sheila asked, annoyed.

"It Canaan be done. Once we pass the next light we should be alright."

Sheila sighed heavily. Then she stabbed some buttons on her cell phone. There was no answer so she left a message. "Arrived in Edinburgh. Make certain the job is completed this time."

The sign read; educational training, IT training courses, online training courses and access training courses. Underneath in smaller lettering 'United Purpose Training Centres' was only meaningful to the discerning eye. She followed directions that took her to a reception area, where she was instructed to take a seat. No sooner than she had picked up a United Purpose manual, Julia Wrightway, UP's chief executive took Sheila into her office, where she was surprised to see Joseph Minter MP waiting there.

"Hello Sheila," he said, rising to his feet in his usual gentlemanly manner.

"What are you doing here?" Sheila queried.

Julia came to the rescue. "The minister is here in his cultural advisory category. The question you ought to be asking is why you are here, Ms Brock."

"Yes, I was wondering why I was summoned here."

"To apprise you of United Purpose and its crucial role in the future. Currently we have some 50,000 trainees in 36 cities, 12,000 'graduate' members. Our mission is to recruit and train 'leaders' to be loyal to the directives of United Purpose and the EU."

"What happens to them after their training?"

“They return to their usual departments, which they then mould according to the directives of UP. When the time comes for changes to be made, in their management positions they will subvert and undermine that department as is deemed necessary. They will do so to destabilise its power based and orderly structure. The deplorable state of the NHS being a very good example of our strategies”

Sheila stared wide eyed. “Are you saying that the inefficiencies of the NHS are not due to incompetence?”

Julia fixed Sheila’s gaze. “Sheila, United Purpose is identifying leaders in all levels of our government to assume power when our nation is replaced by the European Union.”

The MD CEO’s sat bolt upright, as though struck by lightning. “So that's what happened with corruption and fraud at the MD. It was all orchestrated by UP!”

“It was the perfect testing ground to see how effective UP infiltrators can be.”

Sheila took a deep breath, to stop her from leaping across the desk and grabbing Julia by the throat. “So I have been a fucking guinea pig in your little experiment!”

Julia remained calm. “Sheila, I am sure you can see why we could not have alerted you to this. Now please hear me out.”

Sheila, stunned, remained silent.

“Unlike current leaders, UP leaders are taught to rule without democracy, and will bring the EU police state home to every one of us. We have members in the NHS, BBC, the police, and the legal profession. In fact many of Britain's 7,000 quangos, local councils, the Civil Service, government ministries and RDA's (Regional Development Agencies) are controlled by UP. So any moral outrage on your part will be useless. It is better that you become part of and embrace United Purpose, than for you to be left outside.”

Grasping the reality of the situation, Sheila asked, “Who running this private police force?”

Joseph spoke up, “It is not private. It is part of the the public police force but it is known only to the key senior officers who understand the importance of UP in today's world. Currently Jessica Deville is the United Purpose senior police officer. She implemented the 'Shoot to kill' policy without reference to Parliament, the law or the British Constitution. We also trained Josephine Paranoiov, the Law Society's Chief Executive Officer. In fact there are a surprising number of lawyers who are UP members.”

“My God!” Sheila uttered, startled. “This is part of the New World Order, Bush speaks of, isn’t it?”

Julia said, “Sheila, make no mistake, soon the world will

“But from what you say the British legal system has been subverted by a judicial panel the plays to the tune of UP’s drum.”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“Frankly – yes.”

“Sheila, to survive we have to think big. State constitutions are no longer valid in the big picture.

It's no coincidence that justice is more expensive, more flawed and more corrupt. And no surprise the courts refused to uphold the law, when a challenge was made to the signing of the six EU treaties, which illegally abolished Britain's sovereignty."

"So UP is making British law unworkable!"

Julia smiled, "Sheila United Purpose is backed by John Presconn's 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister' with myself, as UP's National Chief Executive."

While Sheila waited for Joseph Minter to return from the toilet, she sat looking at the exhibits of Scottish artists displayed on the Bistros walls. Joseph had suggested dinner at Creelers, which was well known locally for its fine Scottish food, which included seafood and game. The restaurant, which is located just off the High Street on Edinburgh's famous Royal Mile, oddly had the informal atmosphere of a bistro. For the first time that day Sheila began to feel relaxed.

Joseph Minter resumed his seat just as the entrée was being served. After ordering drinks he said, "I haven't seen much of you lately."

"Why, have you missed me?" she said flirting with her eyes.

"We seem to cruise along quite nicely. I miss that."

"So, you're not getting it at home. Well, you've got my number," she responded, off handed.

"Yes but you might be not be the one who answers," he retorted.

"Just what is that supposed to mean?" Sheila enquired, fishing.

"You know very well Sheila, so don't play coy."

"It's about Patrick, isn't it?"

"Your incompetent boyfriend – yes."

"He's not incompetent in all things," Sheila said, suggestively.

Joseph felt himself going red. Going on the offensive, he said, "We are concerned about pillow talk."

Sheila starred straight at him. "Fuck off Joe!" she exploded.
"Damn it Sheila, too much is at stake!"

"Relax Joe, He only gets told what he needs to know for him to function as my gopher."

"Still, intimate involvements at this stage of the game are very risky."

"He is just a bit of rough trade on the side. You are still my true love."

"Then, do we get to share a room tonight."

"You never know what could happen if you play your cards right." She became serious. "But first I

need to pick your brains about UP.”

Alan Ridgard was also finding out about UP:

It started in 1985; in the 1990's, with its members' cross departmental influence, it was involved with what the disastrous New Millennium Dome Company and the squandering of £800 million, £300m of which was diverted into the web of quangos set up by UP. The ensuing fraud case over this, stalled in the courts thanks to UP's influence in the legal profession. Over £100 million of tax payers money was spent on UP courses alone, all of which had been hidden from the public. No published accounts existed, and members names were a guarded secret. It charged substantial figures for its courses. Matrix for example costs £3,950 plus VAT, and courses for the high flying 'leader' can be as much as £9,950 plus VAT. This money is paid by government departments financing senior staff to become agents for UP, instead of loyal to their own jobs. United Purpose International (Ltd by guarantee) is registered as a Charity No 1056573 and describes itself as being involved in Adult education.

“Some charity!” Alan Ridgard stated to his empty office.

He looked up the number of one of the main London UP training centres. He phoned the number and, after getting rid of the robot voice, spoke to one of the office staff. “So how are potential leadership candidates selected?” he asked.

She had the scripted answer to hand, “Potential United Purpose subjects are ‘selected’ for training on the basis of their potential leadership skills.”

Alan, ready for the stock answer, asked, “Is their susceptibility to conversion one of the considerations?”

She couldn't find that answer in her list of ready responses. “I'll have to put you through to my supervisor.”

Alan waited while his ears were bombarded with insipid music. Then a voice said, “Can I help you?”

“Yes, I'm writing an article on adult education. I want to know what UP looks for in a potential leader.”

“Give your details to the receptionist and she will mail the details to you.”

“There is no need to go to that trouble. All I want to know is whether or not susceptibility to conversion is one of the things UP looks for.”

There was silence on the line.

The supervisor answered. “Of course not. I don't know where you reporters get your ideas.”

“What's your name?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“So when I quote you, I have a name to go with it.”

“You can't quote me!”

“Then put me through to some one I can quote.”

More silence on the line.

Another voice asked, “To whom am I speaking.”

“John Rathbourne,” Alan Ridgard responded, quickly thinking of a pseudonym.

“Well Mr. Rathbourne, we do not give unsolicited interviews over the phone. Make an appointment and come to see me in person.”

“I will. I have many questions to ask.”

Chapter 37

Salisbury 1999

Obi Wan Dawkins found the colourful array of displayed art to his taste, as he made his way to Kes’ bedside. It was Salisbury District Hospital’s new objective - hospital enhancement through the appropriate use of the arts in healthcare. When he reached her bedside there was still no change. Head trauma caused by her car accident still held Kes in a deep coma. Her doctor had explained the underlying cause of coma is bilateral damage to the reticular formation of the mid brain, which regulated sleep. Obi was shocked to see an air tube in her throat. “Kes is not getting worse, is she?” he asked a passing nurse.

“Why do you ask?” the nurse queried, wondering who the ash blond, clean shaven guy was.

“Because my dear girl she didn’t have that thing sticking into her two days ago,” Obi answered, flicking his long hair back

“Oh the tube. Well with patients in deep unconsciousness, there is a risk of asphyxiation as the control over the muscles in the face and throat is diminished. Doctor Phillips felt in her case the risk of asphyxiation is high, so, to be on the safe side he prescribed the endotracheal tube.”

“Has she shown any signs of improvement?” Obi asked with faint hope.

“No, she is just the same, no better, no worse.”

Obi nodded. “I will spend some time privately with her now,” he said, dismissing the nurse.

He sat on the plastic chair by her bed and took her hand. “Kes old girl I wish you would wake up. You’ve been here a while now and you don’t want to miss the fireworks, do you? I miss having conversations with you Kes. Do you know you are about the only person I know who is intelligent enough to have a decent conversation with me. People who envy my grasp of reality accuse me of having a chip on my shoulder. It’s nonsense of course. Just because I do not fit in with their societal games I am considered odd. Good God old Girl I was even expelled from the good old “Oxon”. Good job you can’t hear me because this tripe would bore you to tears. Just then he saw a tear-drop run from the corner of her eye. “Kes, can you hear me?” he asked more loudly.

Obi’s loud, high-pitched voice brought a nurse running into Kes’ room. “Can you keep your voice down? Patients are trying to rest.”

Obi huffed, "I thought it would be of some interest that she was crying,"

The nurse, unimpressed, retorted, "It happens from time to time. Don't read too much in it."

"That's a nice caring attitude I must say, dearie."

She retorted, "Right now I am caring for 12 patients and the last thing I need is wild outbursts disturbing those that are at least asleep!"

"Well, I hate to keep you." Obi said gesturing her to go away.

Once the nurse had returned to her duties, Obi sat back with Kes. It was difficult for Obi Wan Dawkins to carry on a one-way conversation and he was at a loss for words. In the end he said, "My theories on Stonehenge, as you know, may be radical but they are sound. I cannot, for the life of me understand why those cretins that pass for academics sent me down. I suppose they could not face the fact that I was right. Imagine finding out you'd been wasting your time for decades on incorrect theories. It would certainly make a big dent in their egos."

He sat and looked at Kes, There was no recognition of him in her eyes. Kes' doctor told him to speak to her as though she were taking part in the conversation. Personally he did not think it was doing any good. He sighed heavily and got up. Smiling, looking at Kes, he said, "Well old thing I have to go now. I'll be back to see you soon."

Once he was outside the hospital, Obi used his mobile phone. He rang a number he had for the agent. On the fifth ring Alan Ridgard answered. Obi said, "I'm at the hospital. Nothing new to report I'm afraid, dear boy."

Alan was surprised to hear from Obi. "I take it you two are very close."

"She's one of the few people around who has enough sense to see where I am coming from."

"So, did you just phone to have a chat or was it for something specific."

"I have an idea that might help you with your investigation. That is, if the accident hasn't put you off."

"It wasn't an accident."

"Yes that's right, but they haven't caught the culprit yet, have they?"

"So, do you want to meet and talk?"

"Sounds like a good idea. I'll meet you near the Dome."

"Okay, how about the Cutty Sark, in the upstairs bar, this evening around 7 o'clock."

"See you then dear boy."

Originally the Union Tavern, the pub was renamed when the world famous tea-clipper was moved to Greenwich in 1954. As Alan Ridgard waited for Obi to show up he supped a stout in the upstairs panelled bar. Alan had arrived early, before the bar became busy, so he was able to get a seat near

the large bow window that gave panoramic views across the Thames to the Millennium Dome. Among the other punters around the bar was a man who was not just there for the drinks and chit-chat. He kept a low profile but at the same time kept an eye on Alan Ridgard.

Obi arrived shortly after 7pm. he swanned across the bar, working his way to where Alan Ridgard sat. He snapped his fingers to summon a waitress, who took his order. Then, sitting down, he turned to Alan Ridgard, "Hows the case going, dear boy?"

"I am breaking the investigator's golden rule, by becoming part of it."

"And that's a problem?"

"It is if I lose my objectivity."

"Yes dear boy, I do see what you mean. So how are you going to deal with that?"

"Well let me see. I am working on a project that is so off the planet I think I am dreaming it half the time. I have very few reference points from which to work. I have had my life threatened and my boss wants to pull the plug on the job."

"Your boss has cold feet!"

"Yes, he's been intimidated by the bad guys."

Obi grinned, "They've probably got a fatwa out on me."

Alan Ridgard took a mouthful of beer, and asked, "So what am I doing here?"

Obi asked, "Do you mean now, or generally?"

"Now, of course," Alan Ridgard responded brusquely.

"You need to look at the power behind the Dome."

Alan retorted, "That's great advice, If I knew who that power was."

"One of them is Joseph Minter, Minister of Culture and the Arts."

"And just how do I get to see him?"

Obi winked, "You just concentrate on the questions you wish to raise and I will deal with the details."

"Oh, you know him, do you?"

Obi just winked again.

Chapter 38

London 1999

Commander Peter Brass, the newly appointed leader of a hand picked task force, stood at the speakers podium as he faced up to the hoard of reporters awaiting his press briefing.

“Have you any idea who the Millennium bomber is, Commander?” a reporter asked.

“We are making good progress and expect to have our man, or woman, very soon.”

“So, at present, you do not know who you are looking for,” a tabloid journalist pressed.

Another member of the media spoke up. “Commander, are extra resources going to be used to apprehend the bomber?”

“We have selected individuals who will complement the special task force that has been put into place.”

“Will you be running this team and, if not, who will you put in charge?”

“Inspector Schuman will be the senior field officer running this case.”

“This alleged bomber has been sending the police messages concerning his activities for many months and he is still at large. So what makes you think this Inspector Schuman will run him to ground?”

“DI Schuman has extensive policing experience ranging from the control of civil disorder during the riots of the 1980s to successfully combating both drug trafficking and violent crime in the Nineties. he is also an expert in data analysis and the forms of Nodal Zone Tracking used extensively by the FBI in the United States and the BND in Germany. His first results are expected to come from re-sifting the existing information on the MDB.”

“Is this task force going to be ongoing?” another reporter asked.

“This special task force has been formed for the singular purpose of bringing the Millennium Dome Bomber to justice. Now, that is all I have to say at the moment.”

As Commander Brass stepped away from the podium a final question was fired at him from the floor. “Is this Millennium bomber just a hoax to to take the media away from the stench of corruption that seems to be rife at the Millennium Dome?”

The World's Biggest Xmas Party, that's what the invitation read. This was how Heritage Holdings described their Christmas Day/Boxing Day extravaganza to be held at the Millennium Dome, before the official opening on New Years Eve. Sheila looked at the invitation with disgust. It was going to be difficult enough getting the place ready for operation in the 31st December without having to bring the date forward. She dialled a line and asked to speak with Joseph Minter. When he came on line, she attacked, “Joseph, what’s all this nonsense about a Christmas party at the Dome.”

The Minister had been ready for her complaint. “What can I say? What Heritage Holdings want, Heritage Holdings get.”

“And that’s all you have to say! We are going to be flat out just getting the damn place to open on time as it is, without throwing a bloody party here. Let them, who have the luxury of having spare time this festive season, have their shindig somewhere else.”

"I know its some what of an imposition but..."

"...Imposition! It's a bloody impossibility. If they have a party here, that's it as far as I am concerned!"

"What do you mean - that's it?"

"I'm resigning from this madness!"

"You know that is not an option at this stage, Sheila."

"Then, you'd better get Mr bloody Bolling to have his shindig somewhere else!"

"And do you think he will listen to me?"

Sheila was silent for a moment. Then she answered, "Okay, he can have his party, but he'd better not expect me to get this place open on time for New Year's Eve!"

Joseph sighed, "Sheila, just do what you can, but the party goes ahead."

Sheila didn't respond. What was the point? Then she changed the subject. "There's something else I need to talk about"

"Oh!"

"I want a guarantee, in writing that I will not be implicated or thrown to the dogs over this latest United Purpose deception"

"What are you talking about?"

"The bloody investigations for fraud and corruption by executive personnel at this accursed Dome."

"Oh that! United Purpose have nothing to do with it."

"That's not what the wonderful Julia told me."

"I don't know why she would say that."

Sheila was taken aback. "Then who is behind it?"

"I wouldn't have a clue."

She put down the phone and pondered over the Minister's words. It seemed as though the whole thing was a farce, some sort of cover for something far more sinister. Anybody could see it was the wrong time for a Christmas party, so how come Heritage Holdings couldn't work that out? Maybe they did not care about the Dome opening on time. Perhaps they were just too busy spending the taxpayer's money on themselves and their cronies to be bothered with the fine detail of making the Dome work. And if it did not work the axe would fall on her. Well, she would not be the fall guy for anybody, least of all Heritage Holdings. Then the realisation hit her. Simon Bailey and all the other corruption nonsense had been orchestrated to make her look bad. Now, the party was to be the final nail in her corporate coffin. It had all been meticulously worked out, with nothing being left to chance and she had fallen for it hook, line and sinker.

Now that she had discovered she has been set up to fail, she made up her mind what to do. “So they want the Dome to be a disaster, do they?” she said to her empty office. Then she spoke into her intercom. “Get me Pat Cooper please.”

“I have a job for you,” Sheila said, as Pat entered her office.

Pat looked at her askance. “I Hope you don’t want any more cars run off the road, Sheila.”

“That's not funny, Patrick!” she admonished.

A cheeky grin spread on his face. “Or would it be a job for me to do in private?”

“Do you know anything about using explosives?”

Pat’s eyes widened. “Jesus Christ woman, what are you asking of me this time?”

“Do you know where to obtain some semtex?”

“My God woman, you’re serious, aren’t you?”

“I can make it worth your while, you naughty man,” Sheila mouthed , batting her eyelids.

Alan Ridgard met Joseph Minter MP at the Thames Embankment, near Westminster Bridge. The politician reminded Alan Ridgard of a gaunt pallbearer. Traditionally attired in pinstripes and bowler hat, Minter said, “I don’t usually deal with snoops in this way.”

Alan let the insult slide. “Then why did you agree to see me?”

“Because people like you, Mr Ridgard, can go off half-cocked by being misinformed, and then become a nuisance. I can well do without that so what is it that you want to know?”

“What United Purpose is about.”

The words hit Joseph like an icy shower. “I assumed you would want to know some facts about the Millennium Dome.”

“I do. What’s the connection?”

“Who said there is one?”

“Are you saying there isn’t any connection?” Alan pressed.

“It all depends on what you mean by connection. First of all United Purpose is an adult training program.”

“For affluent adults, according to the workshop fees.”

“It’s for people who have already shown they have leadership skills.”

“So what kind of qualities do attendees have to show to be accepted in United Purpose classes?”

“Mostly people who are able to keep their heads in a crisis.”

Alan became more interested. He switched on his recorder. “What sort of crisis are we talking about?”

“I don’t know. It could be of a natural disaster nature, or it could be to do with civil unrest.”

“So, is the government expecting something of a chaotic nature to occur soon?”

Joseph rounded on the journalist. “Of course not! Then calming down, he added, “We just have to be ready, that’s all.”

Big Ben, striking distracted the pair. Joseph looked up at the huge clock-face. Smiling, he said, “ I have to get back for the afternoon session. I do hope I have been able to clarify things for you.”

“I’ll walk with you,” Alan responded, keeping up with the politician’s long stride. “Has it got anything to do with Y2K?”

“Do you believe in that nonsense?”

“A hell of a lot of businesses do.”

“Personally, I think it is a huge con. But then I am not an expert in that area.”

“Well, we haven’t got long to wait to find out,” Alan grinned.

“Precisely, Mr Ridgard. And I have not got much time to beat the bell calling me to do my duty.”

Chapter 39

London 1999

Neil Hitler believed society had gone too far to the right to ever achieve true anarchy, at least not in his life time, but he loathed the notion of government. If he really believed in anything it was supporting anarcho-communistic groups of people working together, for each others benefit. Under his “fuck you” exterior simmering compassion waited to break out. Neil felt that the sheeple were inherently good and did care, but the world had become too caught up in consumerism, with everything becoming a commodity. Each day he saw the outward signs of depression and anxiety, weighing people down, as they wearily dragged their feet to hated but existence sustaining jobs. They went through this endless ‘ground hog day’ repetition, seeing no other choice. Neil used to think their was choice in his life, but he soon came to realise he could only make selections in the narrow band of choices presented. He was sick of being told what to strive for, constantly reminded by the images of people who have it all. he was no longer convinced that pushing himself, working 24/7, by buying stuff, he could achieve this, and be the someone his merchant banker father wanted him to be. Neil wanted to be someone in his own right, not just a commodity to be used and discarded by the status quo.

Neil believed in no man-made laws, no one man saying this is this, and you must obey it. He did believe in retribution for crimes, penalties decided by the community, in a true democracy (rule of the people, not the mockery it had become). He sighed as he joined the wires to the timer. His eye

caught the tattered poster stuck to the wall of his rented flat. It boldly proclaimed “We do not need laws”. Although a favourite mantra of his, he still believed we should not steal or commit murders or attacks on others because that would be wrong and harmful to them, not because we are told not to.

As he placed the clock in position Neil smiled at his handiwork. Someone had to wake up the sheeple, he decided, and a bomb in the dome could well do it. He felt that capitalism was the root of all evil... the consumerism, the obsession with possessions, the need to be better, faster, harder, stronger, richer, more than the person next to you, instead of just living alongside them. With such strong convictions he could not possibly follow his father in the bank.

Neil Hitler knew full well his feeble attempt to wake people up by bombing the Dome was not going to bring about anarchy. But, in his mind, he could try and make the sheeple see that they would be better off free. He believed in the in human generosity of spirit and that people are all fundamentally good. Most people do love and care about something or someone. He yearned for a time when humans of all races and religions could co-exist without conflict to the extent that it is happening now.

Normally idealism and anarchy do not go together. But Neil was a complex soul. A dreamer who preferred naive idealism to losing all faith in the human race. But he had no faith in any government. He reckoned every government did as much harm as it could, and as much good as it must. He liked Oscar Wilde's comment that 'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at'.

On the other side of the coin was anarchism. He believed that a society organised without a coercive state, could not be any worse than the mixture of care and scare governing bodies around the globe, the only difference between them being the amount of care and scare used to make it work. Although not entirely convinced, Alan's investigator nose tells him there could well be something behind the conspiracy theory of Neil Hitler. As improbable as it seemed to him, he had a gut feeling telling him to investigate the Millennium Dome affair. Having carried out a background check on Neil, Alan was not surprised that he grew up in a conservative family. Going over his notes, Alan read:

Neil Hitler (real name Hitchcock) An anarchist since his student days. he also wants to destroy the dome, but for another reason. He sees it as a propaganda tool of the quasi religious corporate elite. He liked to shock people, especially by telling them his chosen surname. Long straggly hair, wears military greatcoat with Disney characters where the sergeants stripes once were.

His father is an investment banker. In his teens Neil, who was against the whole fractional banking system, saw his father as the enemy, and he couldn't live in the same house with him. He decided to drop out of the system and, after being kicked out of college, for inciting the students, he became reclusive. But that wasn't enough. He had to shock people into, what he called, 'society's awakening' He could not be bothered with trying to reach people through the accepted channels. Instead he set out to shock people out of the socially engineered apathy by doing such things as changing his surname to Hitler, a person he secretly admired.

Alan Closed the file. Okay, so the man was quite intelligent but he was also a loose cannon. He wondered if the anarchist was really going to bomb the dome. And, if so, whether it would be a bad or good thing.

Chapter 40

Cairo 1999

Dr Andrea Burry knew that by digging into the past she was avoiding delving into her tangled feelings about David and how he died. What she didn't know was that somebody was digging into her past. She was definitely a person of interest to a number of people, but especially to Habib Arain

Karif Jalani was also interested in the woman professor, in connection with another important issue he had to deal with. A book called 'Giza - the true story' had hit the book shops and was causing a stir among Egyptologists. The book's author Dan Lawson was also finding a strong readership among pyramidology buffs. The timing couldn't have been worse for Jalani, who was happy to go along with the classical explanation, concerning the Great pyramid's construction methodology. It was not so much that Lawson had discarded the usual picture of impossible engineering, extreme antiquity, and 'lost' civilisations. Jalani could easily brush such absurd theories aside. What concerned him was a passage in the book alluding to the mythological 'Hall of Records' which, the author maintained, had been the quest of many Egyptologists, including Professor Andrea Burry. She had been working with him and his team, off-and-on, for many years, and he had no idea she subscribed to such irrational views. He had to confront her on the issue.

At first, Andrea, never read anything into it. After all archaeologists have to perform all kinds of functions at digs. But she was disappointed that Dr Jalani seemed to be leaving her in the background – literally. The team, working in one of the so-called ventilation shafts above the King's Chamber used a modified robot to cope with the 45 degree angle. But she had been set to work in the upper northern shaft, away from the real action. During one of their breaks, she took Karif Jalani aside. “Dr Jalani,” she said, “I have an issue I want to bring to your attention.”

“I also have something to ask you.” he countered.

“Oh.”

“Have you read Dan Watson's Book, 'Giza – the true story?’”

She shrugged. “No. Why?”

“Because he mentions you in it. He says that you subscribe to the existence of the Hall of records. Is this true?”

Andrea went cold, despite the late autumn sun beating down on Giza. “Is this why I have been removed from the forward team?”

“You have not answered my question.”

She could lie and say she would sue the author for suggesting such things. Or she could say exactly as she felt. Dan had said he would be writing a book about new findings about the Great Pyramid. She had agreed with aspects of his theory in principle but had no idea he would be quoting her in the story. “I know of Dan Lawson. He was doing his masters on secret chambers in the Great Pyramid. I went through his notes with him and agreed on a number of the points he made...”

“... Points, such as a theory about the alleged 'Hall of Records'?” Jalani interrupted.

“I have never let my personal theories interfere with the beliefs of this team. You know that.”

“Nevertheless you have not been completely honest with me and that puts me in a very difficult situation. I may have to dismiss you from the team.”

Andrea couldn't believe it. The shame of going back to Oxon, her tail between her legs, was incomprehensible to her. “You would really fire me because I do not believe your version of events. Do you really want to go head-to-head on this Dr Jalani?”

He smiled, confident of his position, “You will go back to England in disgrace. Nobody will listen to your ranting.” he paused, then said, “Now, I am busy. I will let you know of my decision shortly.”

In Andrea's view, she had two choices. Wait for the 'Head of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities' to dismiss her or pre-empt him by resigning from the team, giving professional differences as the reason for her decision. But either path would preclude her from getting into the newly discovered chamber to find out what was actually going on. The third choice was much more risky and involved the help of others and one person in particular.

Habib Arain sat back in the air-conditioned comfort of his Mercedes Limo, waiting for his man to show. It had been a while since he had returned to his roots. He looked out of the dark tinted window at the remains of the ancient Roman Amphitheatre, with its tiered stone seats. It had always been his favourite site in Alexandria, where, as a child, he had spent many-a-hour pondering the greatness of the ancient Roman culture.

He saw Abdul Hafiz heading his way. The Egyptian was alone, as arranged. This was the first time Arain had actually laid eyes on the man. He got his chauffeur to open the door. Arain beckoned the Arab who, obediently, slipped into the leather seat opposite the building magnate. Arain said, “So you are my man here.”

“Mr Arain, I am my own person.” Abdul countered.

Ignoring the agitator's rebuttal, Arain said, “Where are we with 'Operation Cheops'?”

Abdul said, “Everything is ready and in place. We are ready to carry out our mission.”

“Good, but there's a change to the plan.”

“Change! What change?”

“The explosion is not to occur until after the capping.”

“But why. Al Haab will get more recognition if it happens before midnight.”

“This is not for you to question. Wiser heads than yours have decided this. Do you understand?”

Abdul, not expected this, became confused and unsure. “As leader of this group I need to know everything we do and why we do it.”

Arain smiled And offered the younger Arab a big cigar and took one for himself. “We are together on this – yes.” He ignited a slim gold lighter and lit up Abdul's cigar. “As leader of the cell you are told what you need to be told. I have told you what you need to know. Your job is to carry out my

instructions.”

Abdul acquiesced. “Yes, of course. It just took me by surprise.”

Professor Burry stepped out of the taxi into the midday heat in the heart of Nazlet El Samman. Dan Lawson was staying in the village, while researching a rock cut tomb at the base of Giza Plateau. After gaining directions from locals concerning his whereabouts, she was taken, by donkey cart, to his dig site. He was surprised to see her. After a brief catch-up chat, he showed her a photograph.

Andrea scrutinised it. “It looks like some sort of tomb. So what makes it so special?”

Dan Lawson said, “You can see by the tomb decoration that statues and stories were definitely used when The Great Pyramid was built.”

Andrea, awestruck, responded. “Have you told Jalani about this?”

Lawson laughed derisively. “He had the gall to suggest that the Pharaohs may have treated their women better than they treated themselves.”

“That's absolute nonsense!”

“Of course, but Jalani still attributes the Great Pyramid to Khufu because of a single stencilled cartouche including his name, which was found in a crawl space above the so-called King's Chamber. It's existence is simply too flimsy to justify his hypotheses.”

“So, is that why you wrote the book.”

“Giza, the true story – yes. Have you read it?”

She rounded on him. “No but Jalani has.” Then checking her anger, she said, “He brought one chapter to my notice.”

“Oh, which one?”

“The one where you mention my belief in the 'Hall of Records'.”

Lawson laughed, “How did the arrogant prick take it?”

“Do you know how difficult it was for me to be accepted on his team?”

Dan was brought up short. “Oh, has it caused problems?”

“You talk about arrogant pricks, Dan. That information was not for your reader's. Consequently, my future with his team is precariously in the balance,”

“I'm sorry Andrea. I didn't realise.”

“Yes, well now I need your help and, if you don't want me to sue you, you had better say yes.”

“What sort of help?” he responded brusquely.

“Harwarbi and his closest dig members are carrying out some kind of secret work above the Central Chamber. I need to get in there to find out what's been going on.”

“Get above the Central Chamber! What with Jalani and his cronies crawling all over the place?”

“After what you have written he is never going to let me near the place.”

“What's so important about it?”

“They are up to something under the pretext of maintenance. It has something to do with the Millennium celebrations but they are keeping it secret.”

Dan Lawson looked at her askance. “I always thought you were a serious scientist.”

“I am Dan. And I'm also serious about suing you for damages to my professional reputation if you don't start taking 'me' seriously.” Then she said, “I happen to know Karif Harwarbi is going to Paris soon. I will let you know when the coast is clear.”

Back in her apartment Andrea determined two things. One, that she was going to be dumped from the dig and two, she needed to get into the pyramid undetected. Archaeology used to be a joy for her. That was before politics and unscrupulous investors got involved. History used to be safe for her. The past was already worked out. Everything that had happened, had happened, despite the many and varied theories on the subject. It was trying to work out what is right and what is wrong in the modern world that created huge moral dilemmas for her. She saw ancient Khemmet (Egypt) as some kind of Golden Age with mysteries abounding. Who built the pyramids and how old is the sphinx are issues of no interest to her. Let the mysteries retain their mystery was her motto. It was the modern secrets that concerned her. She knew some sort of secret work was being carried out in the great pyramid and her moral self said get real and somehow let the world know what is going on. David had died trying to disclose evil works to the world. Could she be prepared to do less. She would have to sacrifice her dream to do it. Discovering the Hall of Records would have to wait for another day. The bad guys couldn't. Andrea knew in her heart that she had worked on her last dig in Egypt, while Karif Jalani was in charge of the antiquities department. She poured a large measure of scotch and took a sip. Sighing heavily she said to the empty room, “Fuck it! In for a penny, in for a pound.”

Chapter 41

UK 1999

Obi Wan Dawkins stood waiting for Alan to show. He didn't know whether to trust the man but he seemed genuinely concerned about Neil, but wouldn't give any details over the phone. He looked around at the other empty tables in the Vault and Garden cafe. It reminded him of the emptiness in his life. Feeling depressed and despondent wasn't a rare thing for him, especially when he suffered any major set backs, such as the one he was currently dealing with. Or, more to the point, not dealing with. To be sent down from Oxford was a big enough blow for even the most stable individual to deal with, and Obi was hardly that. But when he was kicked out of the History Department by the likes of Marcus Cullen, was just about too much for him to bear. Usually, when he had these black moods, Obi had Kel to talk to. But she was still in a coma and family members were thinking about having her life support switched off. Obi couldn't bear it.

He saw the tall fair haired man come towards him. He didn't get up. He just waited for more bad news to be dumped on him.

Alan took a seat. A waiter zoomed over and took his coffee order. "Hi Obi, hows things?"

"Fucking terrible, if you really want to know."

"What's wrong?"

"Apart from everything, you mean?"

"Yes, well that aside, I think Neil is about to do something really stupid."

"So what else is new?"

"Did you know that he makes bombs."

"I've never actually seen one, but I believe so."

Alan leaned really close and spoke in almost a whisper. "He's planning on using one in the MD."

"He's been talking about that for over a year. I don't think..."

"...Man, he is serious, I'm telling you. And he won't listen to me. But you might be able to make him see sense."

Obi stared at Alan. "He's a fucking anarchist, for God's sake. He's a law unto himself. I have no influence over his decisions."

"He has to be stopped. He could fuck up everything."

"What do you mean – everything?"

"The whole Millennium Eve thing."

"So you believe in that now."

"I don't think we can to ignore the possibility. Besides, I have a job to do." Alan paused to sip his coffee. He then looked straight at Obi. "If he goes off half-cocked we could all be implicated. You have to talk to him."

Then his day lifted. After Alan left. He called the hospital. Kes had regained consciousness but was still in a serious condition. It was suggested that he left it a day or two before visiting her. Feeling buoyed he was feeling stronger – perhaps strong enough to face his nemesis, in the shape of Dr Marcus Cullen. It was time defend his reputation as a historian in a letter of complaint to the Dean. But first he had to speak with Neil. Personally he couldn't have cared less about what happened to the dome, but his friend was another story. He dialled the anarchist's number and received his rather brusque recorded message.

"I'm away somewhere, so if you have something useful to say record it after the message. If not, fuck off!"

Obi said "Obi here. Ring me."

As they stood just above 'Traitor's Gate' the famous entrance to the Tower of London, before the tourists began to arrive, Neil said, "I can think of a few people who should be executed here these days."

Obi, not enjoying his enforced trip to London, a city that depressed him even more than Oxford, said, "Rumour has it that you are planning an assault on the dome."

Neil grinned. "What launch an attack at dawn, with my army. Wish I fuckin' had one."

"The point is, dear boy, it would be best to keep a low profile at present."

"Why?"

"Because bigger plans are afoot and we don't want anybody fucking things up before time."

"Who's this fucking we. And what plans?"

Obi wondered how much to let on. Neil could easily go off half-cocked. "Let's just say it has to do with the Great Pyramid, Stonehenge and the MD. It all has to be co-ordinated and perfectly timed."

Neil rounded on Obi. "Is someone else going to do the dome?"

"Not in the way you are thinking. That can be all yours, but not until the new year."

"I'm not part of some fucking team. I work alone – always have."

Obi sighed, "If you were part of a team we would not be having this conversation. Think of it more as you being alerted about an undercover op so that you don't blow it. Okay?"

Neil grinned cheekily. "Do you know why I suggested we meet here?"

"Not really, dear boy."

"It was built by Edward 1st as a water-gate entrance to the Tower. Did you know Ann Boleyn was the last royal resident there. After she was given the royal chop the entrance was no longer used as the Traitor's Gate."

"Fascinating old boy but you are rather teaching a historian to suck eggs."

"The point is I want to go through there, with my head held high – as long as it is still attached. I reckon blowing up their fucking dome should do it for me."

"My dear chap they don't execute prisoners any more. And the MD is all yours after the new year."

Neil sighed. "So what now?"

"I thought I might buy us some breakfast."

"Where?"

This you manor, old boy. Surprise me.”

Neil did. And they ended up sitting on a wall eating hot dogs and drinking weak coffee, while being plagued by pigeons, who could spot a bread crumb at a hundred yards. Neil said, “So what’s happening with your problem?”

Obi flicked back his long hair. “They’re a bunch of wankers at Oxford. I don’t even know if I would want to go back there.”

Neil grinned, “A historian with a huge chip on his shoulder.”

“Marcus Cullen you mean.”

“No. You.”

“Moi,” Obi said with mock surprise.

“Your radical theories about Druidic Britain are considered outlandish by the establishment and you seem surprised.”

Cullen is so stuck in his quasi Christian fundamentalist and Pagan view, he won’t even consider allowing new ideas to march forward.”

Neil chucked the last part of his roll to the swarming pigeons. “Maybe I should have a little word with him.”

Obi gave a high pitch laugh. He wouldn’t let you get within a hundred yards old boy. Beside, what could you do to help?”

“I have hidden talents.”

“Better you didn’t dear boy. In any case I have an idea to shake up the establishment. I intend to make those stuffed shirts in my old history department, eat crow, once I prove my Stonemason theories to be sound.”

Chapter 42

Cairo 1999

Alan Ridgard had a vague idea he was being followed, but he was not certain. That was until he steered his Mini Cooper from the Haymarket into Suffolk Place. There was no mistaking his suspicions then. The dark late model Subaru was definitely following him. He made a mental note of the plate number and pulled into a short-term parking space. As the other car drove slowly past, the passenger extended his hand out of the window and made like it was a gun. Alan read the gesture as direct threat. Whoever it was they didn’t care that he knew their intention. He grabbed his phone and punched in the number for Intel-Inc and asked them to run a check on the Subaru’s index number.

Andrea loved to get caught up in the sights, sounds and smells of the Souks. So visiting Khan Misr Touloun was one of her main pleasures in Cairo. Abounding in carpets, camels, shoes, books and

veils or whatever else took her fancy. In the bazaar all her cares and worries evaporated like mist, at least while she was immersed in a world that had hardly changed in hundreds of years.

Then she saw him, or thought she did. And David's death invaded her transported state. It looked like Karl Haas among the hagglers, who were arguing with gold, silver, copper, perfume, spices, and cloth merchants, to get the lowest price. Curiosity got the better of her and Andrea pushed through the throng of meandering tourists to get closer. He turned briefly. She was sure and yelled out, "Mr HAAS."

He turned quickly, his brain determining the direction the voice came from. Then he saw the woman, frantically waving her arms but didn't recognise her at first. Who was she and what did she want, he wondered. He was supposed to be meeting someone else but this troublesome woman had probably blown his cover. But how did she know his real name?

She caught up with him as he moved into the crowd. "Karl, it's me – Andrea. David's wife." Damn, she still couldn't say widow.

Recognising her, he said, "My God! Fancy meeting you here."

"I couldn't believe it when I saw you." She paused, then asked, "Are you in a hurry or can I offer you a drink?"

"No and yes."

Sitting at a sun-shaded table outside the Mahfouz Coffee Shop, Andrea asked, "So what brings you to Cairo?"

He was there to meet with a plant in the Al Haab group, but he was hardly going to say so. "Oh, I've always fancied visiting the pyramids and I needed a break. How's the dig going?"

She wasn't about to tell him she'd been sidelined. "Pretty slow at present."

"Well, if you have time you could give me a guided tour."

"Bring me up to date about David and I will give you a morning of my time."

"David, goodness me! Nothing new, as far as I know. I thought you had some private agency looking into it."

She sighed, "I have, but they haven't come up with anything. What do you think happened?"

"I don't think it had anything to do with his TV interview about Monstersanto chemicals."

"Yes, I figured that much and in my heart I know it wasn't suicide. So why do you think he was killed, Karl?"

"I don't know," he lied, knowing it had something to do with inside knowledge about the Millennium Dome.

Andrea, sensing he was holding back said, "I know you know something you're not letting on. Well I might be able to help you locate your missing source."

He stared at her, “What missing source?”

“Oh, come on Karl. I know you have contacts in 6. You may be here on vacation but it's much more likely that you're on a mission and that you were in the bazaar to meet someone.”

'Yes, until you spoiled it' he thought. “You have a very vivid imagination.”

Hmm, let me see. Al Haab have been in the news a lot lately. Someone from England is funding them and pulling the strings from behind the scene. The person you seek is going to tell you who he is.”

'Fuck, she must be a mind reader' he thought. “OK, let's say for the sake of argument that hypothetically you are right. Who would know who's running the show?”

“Hypothetically speaking the leader would be my best guess. But I'd go for the second-in-command, for two possible reasons. One, He would be close enough to boss to know what's going on, and two, he'd probably like to have the boss' job.”

“Very good, Andrea. You are full of surprises. Now, are you going to tell me where I can find Abdul Hafiz?”

Andrea felt a cold chill race up her spine. He had been playing her all along. “Karl, what on earth makes you think I know this terrorist?”

He smiled, “Times and places you and he have met. I even spoke with him on one of your digs, remember?”

“So 6 has been spying on me. A bit out of your jurisdiction, isn't it?”

“Not us Dr Burry. We had the information passed onto us.”

“By whom?”

He stared at her. “I don't know what going on between you two, Dr Burry but I think it would be best if you did not communicate with him again.”

Chapter 43

Oxford 1999

Neil Hitler wanted to do something he saw to be a noble, selfless act. And helping his friend fitted in that category. Sure, Obi had told him not to intervene but that was just because he did not want the him to put himself at risk. He'd show that 'up-himself, recalcitrant, bastard. He pulled in the electrician's van, he had stolen two hours earlier, to check his bearings. The University's history department happened to be one of the most long-standing , Neil read, as he checked the brochure for directions to the Faculty of History. He chuckled at a private joke about the word 'history' also meaning 'no more'. Being an electrician and wearing overalls it was easy for Neil to gain access to the building. He thought it odd that nobody questioned the authenticity of strangers as long as they wore work clothes and carried a toolbox. As Neil had both he was able to make his way to his target area undisturbed.

He approached the room where Dr Marcus Cullen was in the middle of a lecture. He entered

without knocking, and walked in on the class.

“Can I help you with something?” Dr Cullen inquired, somewhat taken aback.

“Are you Marcus Cullen?” Neil asked, looking at the surprised expressions on the students faces.

“Yes. What do you mean by interrupting my class?”

Neil stared at the man who had wrecked his friend's career. “Your lesson has ended. In this tool case I have a bomb. In my hand I have a remote control for the bomb.”

Marcus stared hard at the intruder. “If this is some sort of prank I...”

“...It's not a fucking prank, Marcus. Now, I suggest your students leave right now, so you and me can have a little chat.”

“How dare you come in here and...?”

“...Perhaps you don't believe I have a bomb in there,” Neil said, indicating the tool box. “Take a look and see for yourself.”

The students were already moving. Soon it was just Neil and Dr Cullen.

“You do realise that the police will be here any minute. Now I suggest you give up this nonsense before someone gets hurt.”

“Don't be stupid. I only have to press this little button and the department of history, is history. Get my little joke?”

“What the hell is all this about?” Marcus said trembling.

“I want to talk to you about my friend, Dr Obi Wan Dawkins.”

“What do you mean?”

“You had Obi kicked out. I want him reinstated, or I blow us up.”

“I can't just have him reinstated like that. The university board have to make that decision and it cannot happen just like that.”

“Then I press this button.”

“For Christ sake man. It is out of my power. All this is for nothing.”

Neil heard people outside the door. “Tell them to stay away. If they come in here we all go boom.”

“PLEASE, ALL STAY WHERE YOUR ARE. HE HAS A REMOTE CONTROLLED BOMB.”

“So what's the first thing you do to get Obi reinstated?”

“It's all very complex. There's applications to draw up. Then there are different committees involved. I cannot just wave a magic wand and...”

“...I am getting very bored with all this negativity, Dr Cullen,” Neil said, yawning for emphasis.

“I’m sorry. I can start the ball rolling, but not here, not now.”

“Why did you fire him?”

“I didn’t. It was the board’s decision. They didn’t like the huge chip he carried around with him. They didn’t like his unconventional teaching methods. They did not agree with his outlandish theories about...”

“...ENOUGH!” Neil said positioning his thumb over the remote control button.

Somehow instinct kicked in and Marcus Cullen found himself under a film projector table, as the deafening blast ripped apart the lecture hall. It was the last recollection he had of the terrifying experience.

As soon as Obi wan Dawkins heard the words “bomb explosion in history department” on the national news, he froze. He didn’t have to be told who was responsible. Then he heard somebody say “Miraculously Dr Cullen, who was in the lecture room when the bomb went off, escaped with minor injuries. The bomber died in the explosion”. So that bastard Cullen had escaped but his dear friend had taken his own life. It was then that he realised Neil had really loved him. How else could his self-sacrifice be explained?

Marcus awoke, to his great surprise, in a hospital bed, surrounded by medical staff and a couple of uniformed police officers. His wife, Felicity was also present, with two grown children in tow.

A doctor, who said he was in charge, turned to one of the officers, who had note book in hand, “You must all leave now and let the patient have some rest.”

Officer Dewer, with pen poised over blank page, said, “Doctor we just need to ask Mr Cullen a few questions. It won’t take a minute.”

Felicity corrected, “Doctor.”

Turning to her, Dr Prentiss queried, “Yes.”

“No. He’s a doctor.”

“No, he’s the patient.”

Dewer jumped in, “What she means is the patient is Dr Cullen – not Mr.”

“Who are you calling she?” Felicity said, poking at him.

Marcus just wanted to sleep.

He awoke again. Most of the bedside entourage had gone but the two cops were still there.

“Dr Cullen, Have you any idea why the bomber targeted you?”

Marcus groaned as the anaesthetic began to wear off. Feeling every burn and bruise, he winced as he tried to move to a more elevated position. We had to let a colleague go. Apparently the bomber was his friend, which, if you ask me, gives some idea of what kind of person we fired.”

“And who was this person?” Dewer asked.

“Obi wan Dawkins. It's not surprising he had no discipline in his lectures, considering the kind of company he kept. I want him arrested. He must have put that terrorist up to it, as revenge against me.”

“Do you know where this Dawkins character lives?”

An officious staff nurse came marching up to the bed. Seeing Dr Cullen's drowsy state she said, “That's enough questions for now. You have to leave.”

Dewer, seeing Cullen's eyelids drooping, got up. “We'd better be going then.”

Obi was having a very bad night. He couldn't get Neil out of his mind. He had to speak to someone who cared, who knew the real man. Kel was out of the question. That only left Alan Ridgard. But he was just doing a job for Andrea. Andrea would be good to talk to about it but she was somewhere in Cairo. Perhaps he needed to let Alan know any way. He rang the agent's number.

Although Alan would never admit it, he had been damaged by his experience of war in Iraq. A person would have to be made of stone not to be affected by the horrors of such conflicts – terrors that often revisited them at night. A shot or two of scotch just before sleep helped him have two or three hours rest before the memories once again escaped from his subconscious. So he was not well please to rudely aroused from his slumber at 1.46 am, by Obi wan Dawkins. “What the fuck are you talking about? Slow down.”

“Neil's dead. He went to Oxford to see Marcus Cullen. A bomb went off. Somehow that bastard Cullen survived but Neil died.”

“And you saw fit to tell me this in the middle of the fucking night. What the hell do you expect me to do about it?”

Obi, realising it was a big mistake, made an even bigger one. “Don't be angry dear boy. I just had to speak with someone. I'm feeling wretched.”

“Well I'm not your bloody agony aunt. Neither an I the Samaritans. So good fucking night.”

“Wait, I need to contact Andrea. What's her contact...” The line was dead.

Two hours later it was Obi's turn to abruptly awakened from his fitful slumbers. Some one was knocking at the door. Draping his pink robe about him he staggered to the door. His befuddled brain thought it heard someone shouting, “OPEN UP. POLICE.”

The words, 'Oh what a tangled web we weave', came to mind, as Karl Haas went over the latest intelligence he had received. Habib Arain had become a person of interest to 6. Habib Arain the mega rich Egyptian who cheated Jerry's brother out of the Herrods deal. His brother had due to buy the famous Herrods store in Knightsbridge when he was pipped at the post by Habib Arain. Jerry referred back to the dossier. He read:

Herrods was bombed in 1983 by a two man communist cell working with the IRA. Their were

Kremlin links to Irish republicans at the time. This was never divulged by British Intelligence and was a fact little known by American/Irish sympathisers, who in the main were very anti-communist. The “Semtex H” explosives used were specially prepared without the customary smell to fool sniffer dogs. This was according to Mossad operatives, only obtained in supplies to Russian and Polish activists. No link was made at the time. Karl wondered why that little titbit had been added.

After having a fortifying brandy, he continued. 6 knew an intelligence body had been used for the hit because they always left characteristic hallmarks called 'tells' and the bombing was definitely not consistent with a Soviet establishment bombing. The Kremlin was ruled out because 5 thought the hit would theoretically have been farmed out to foreign nationals.

Cross-referenced data showed a pattern emerging between the Herrods attack and a number of subsequent bombing incidents, including the deaths of 3 members of the Saudi royal family, the assassination of Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic. In the early sixties private money was offered to finance the killing of Kim Philby in Moscow, by a well known British patriot circus owner.

It is also known that Israel has killed many British citizens in Britain since WWII, as confirmed by Menachem Begin, who even tried to bomb the fifties German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, killing a disposal expert and wounding others.

Was 6 suggesting that Israel was behind it all? He wondered. And, if so what did it have to do with Al Haab? If Arain, his late brother's nemesis, was involved, was he actually a Mossad asset?"

DS Kronick and Constable Dewer carried out the questioning. Kronick took the lead. “You knew the bomber, Mr Dawkins.”

“He's name is Neil Hitler.”

There were raised eyebrows.

“He was not an evil person.”

“He said he was doing it for you. What do you know about that?”

“I had no idea he would do such a thing.”

“Do you think you were unjustly treated by the victim, a Dr Cullen.”

Obi was a mass of messed-up emotions. “Neil was just as much the victim here.”

Dewer asked, “What was your relationship with the Terrorist?”

“Terrorist!” Obi had never thought of him as such.

“What else would you call a person who walks into lecture hall and lets off a bomb?” Dewer asked.”

Obi, confused, answered, “I just never thought of him like that.”

“Were you and he in a gay relationship?” Kronick said, coming straight to the point.

“How dare you suggest that our special friendship – something you lot could never understand – was some sordid little ass fucking affair?”

“I was merely asking a question Mr Dawkins. Which brings me back to my previous one. Do you think the university in general and Dr Cullen in particular treated you unjustly?”

“Yes, of course I was.”

“And you told your 'special friend' about this,” Kronick said, as though he was talking about something distinctly distasteful.

“Yes, but I had no idea.”

“Did you tell him that your radical theories on Druidic Britain were considered outlandish by the establishment? Did you tell him that Dr Marcus Cullen, the head of the history department at the University of Oxford had it in for you?”

“We may have talked about such things.”

“So you tell an anarchist who makes bombs that you, his 'special friend' has been badly treated by Dr Cullen and the university and you want us to believe you had no idea, in his unbalanced mental state, that he was likely to carry out this terrorist attack.”

“You know nothing about him! How dare you suggest he was mentally unbalanced?”

Kronick leaned in close to Obi. “Would a mentally balanced person go into a class room and blow himself up?”

Obi couldn't take any more. Sleep deprived and grief-stricken he jumped up. “Just what the fuck are you lot trying to prove. A good man died because the world is so-fucked up that he couldn't bear to live in it any more. Now are you going to charge me with something. If not I am walking out of here right now.”

Kronick became mollified. “We are just trying to ascertain the facts. We will be looking very closely at you and may need to ask you further questions. You can go for now.”

Chapter 44

Salisbury 1999

Obi Wan Dawkins fussed about Kes, wrapping her woollen shawl around her, as they sat in the Salisbury hospital grounds talking about Neil. A chilly wind was building up and he was concerned she might catch a chill. “Let me know if it becomes too cold, my dear.”

“Nonsense. You fuss too much. Old Kes is made of sterner stuff. How is Mr Ridgard by the way?”

“Him. All he cares about is himself. He couldn't care less about Neil.”

“Oh come on, Obi. He hardly knew the man. And Neil was not exactly famous for creating a good first impression.”

Obi grinned, "You could say that."

"More importantly what's happening with the Millennium project?"

"I confess I've been a bit out of touch. Andrea is in Cairo though. But I don't know what she's up to."

Kes grabbed his arm. "I have something important to tell you."

"What's that?"

"I know why I was targeted."

"What do you mean?"

"I am one of the Guardians."

"Guardians!"

"Yes. I've only known it for about 10 years but I know I have to protect Stonehenge to help maintain an energy balance. I have to carry out some work there so I have to get out of this hospital. Will you help me?"

"Of course. But won't you be more vulnerable back at your caravan? Aren't there other Guardians who can help?"

"If there are they will come but I cannot rely on that."

"Can't you contact them?"

She took Obi's slender hand. "it's not some kind of club with meetings. I don't know any other Guardians. Look, if your worried, why don't you stay with me for a while?"

"Oh dear heart, I am not the physical type. Alan could be useful for that, I suppose. And he does have your cat."

"Oh, dear Rameses. I need him back."

As Alan carried the cat, in its carrier, to the caravan, the wind tossed the dry leaves around, while causing already defoliated trees to shed more. It was the 5th of November and people gathering combustibles piled them up in readiness for a communal fire the coming night. Alan saw Kes at the door, balancing on crutches.

Her eyes brightened as she saw Rameses, who was trying to escape from his confinement. Alan had only just gotten him to settle down, after a tedious trip in the mini.

"Come to mummy, my beautiful boy," Kes cooed, opening her arms.

Rameses had other ideas. As soon as he was released, he was a black blur, heading off into the

trees.

“He'll be back when he gets hungry,” Kes said, inviting Alan into her compact home.

“How are you, Kes?”

“The injuries are healing slowly. How about you? I believe your speedy intervention probably saved both our lives.”

“Yeah, but I wasn't bargaining on clipping the gate post.”

Kes smiled. Then she said, “I have to go to the stones but I need your help.”

“Sure but this time I will be looking for people lurking in the car park.”

“Just imagine what it would have looked like new,” Kes marvelled, as she and Alan entered the circle. She indicated around her “The stones we see today show Stonehenge in ruin. Many of the original stones have fallen or been removed by previous generations for home construction or road repair. She groaned with the effort of walking with crutches.

“Why is it so important for you to be here, when you are obviously in pain?”

She turned to face him, stumbling a little. Alan, do you know anything about the origin of these stones?”

“They're some sort of astronomical calendar?”

“That's one of their functions but it does not explain how they came to be here, in this configuration in the first place.”

Seeing her physical discomfort, he suggested, “Maybe we should sit down somewhere, so you can rest your leg.”

“Stop fussing. I'm here because that is where I am supposed to be. Look, let me explain.”

“Okay, if that's how you want it.”

“You've heard of Atlantis?”

“Who hasn't. It's a myth though, isn't it?”

“No. It was real but not how people imagine it to be. Anyway, there was a huge disaster and the island Atlantis was on, sank. This had huge repercussions for the Earth. It began to wobble slightly out of its orbit. A very wise man called Tehuti directed the Druids of ancient England to construct this stone circle. Only the wisest of the Druids were privy to the gyroscopic nature of the henge. The priests used it as an astronomical temple. Those people who knew were called the 'Guardians' These, the enlightened ones could tell, by the energy vibration of the stones, if the planet's energy grid was balanced or not.” She looked Alan in the eye. “I am one of those Guardians.” Alan looked at her wide-eyed. “No shit!”

“That's why I have to be here at this time. The grid is being manipulated and we have to be on the alert for changes in the flow.”

“But what can you do about it?”

“I cannot divulge that. But I will tell you something about the design.”

“What about it?”

“If you have two flutes playing the same continuous note, they set up a pattern of interference that echoes the layout of Stonehenge”

“Well, I'm no expert but it seems a bit far-fetched.”

“Take it from me that the Druidic builders were inspired by 'auditory intuition' when they planned the layout.”

“So if anyone carried out that musical experiment the geometry created would be like the layout of these stones?”

“Yes, Alan. The layout of the stones correspond to the regular spacing of loud and quiet sounds created by acoustic interference.”

“But what would these ancient Druids have known about sound waves?”

“It's reasonable to think that Tehuti had such knowledge. It so, he may well have taught his inner circle about them. But for most of the Druids, the nature of sound waves – and their ability to reinforce and cancel each other out would have been considered as being magical.”

“Okay. I'll take your word for it. So how long have you got to stay here?”

She smiled. “It's Okay Alan, you can go. I just needed help getting here.”

“So, how are you going to get home?”

“Come back and pick me up in about five hours.”

“What about threats?”

She smiled, “I'm safe here, within the henge.”

Marcus Cullen blamed Obi for the explosion, and told the police as much. But they had found no evidence suggesting his culpability and had let him go, with the usual orders about not leaving the country. Leave the country! Obi thought that funny, especially as he had no intention to leave his flat, let alone the country. But Marcus was not about to let it go at that. Just because they were incompetent or Obi wan Dawkins was too smart for them. He wasn't going to let the historian off the hook that easily. He grabbed his phone and punched in a number.

Chapter 45

England November 1999

Alan Ridgard, as Alan Mason presented his false identity to the young man in the dark suit. The

man from the Chester Grosvenor Hotel, handed him back his motor license, and smiled. Welcome to United Purpose. Now he was in anonymously, courtesy of the fake license, obtained via Obi wan Dawkins, Alan mingled with the crowd, sipping their pre-seminar wine. The was excited anticipation in the air, as none of those present had been to a UP workshop before. Alan said little and listened for any snippets of conversation that may prove to be useful. As everybody was dressed in civilian clothes, Alan had no idea who he might be talking with. He did not want to say anything to an off-duty police officer, or anybody from some government agency. He knew that UP Planted police and the like to question any suspects not considered kosher. So it was best if he kept a low profile.

There was something about off duty police officers that, for the trained eye, gave them away. They couldn't stop asking questions for a start. But that wasn't it. There was something about the way they quizzed people, subtly accusing them, drawing them out. Apart from their antagonistic approach, which many of them cannot help, The way they looked at people, as though trying to search their brains, seemed to fit the police profile. Alan made a mental note of 3 people at the seminar in particular. Two were around middle-age, overweight, with one sporting a Zapata type moustache. The other one had balding ginger hair. The third person, a woman in her mid thirties had an air of authority about her. Woman police officers were even more easy to spot. They oozed control while trying not to lose their allure.

The seminar was run meticulously following a very specific pattern, in which pieces of UP jigsaw were revealed in a particular sequence. The punters, or their companies has paid two thousand pounds apiece for their members attendance. So they weren't about to waste their time. Alan observed that the more people pay to attend a workshop the more they allow them selves to be manipulated. This became quite obvious to Alan when the first speaker belittled attendees at the work shop to rapturous applause by those, pleased that the spotlight was not on them. Actually it was, but with much more subtlety. The speaker knew it didn't matter who volunteered to be stripped mentally and emotionally the rest of the people related to it, by virtue of being part of the proceedings.

During the morning break Alan found himself talking with an accountant, a hospital registrar and a builder. The builder asked, "So what do you do?"

Alan was ready for that one. He called on an old skill, "I'm a free lance journalist – but don't tell anybody."

"So, are you doing a story on this workshop?" the accountant asked.

"No, not at all. Like you, I'm here to learn what UP is about."

"They'll only let you know what they want to," the builder stated.

The registrar, who had been listening quietly, said, "I know somebody who tried to find out more than he was supposed to know. He was hauled off by the police. Their investigations were stringent."

"So, are you suggesting there's more going on than they are letting on about?" Alan asked. "Well, this friend, who shall remain nameless, told me that when people start getting too close to the truth of United Purpose then the Police become involved... and they 'will' use 'violence' under 'Anti-Terrorism' 'laws'."

Builder laughed, "That's just CT bullshit! Why are you here if you believe such crap?"

“The hospital board sent me. “Anyway, I didn't say I believed it. I just said what he told me.”

“Which hospital is that?” Alan asked

“The Countess of Chester – why?”

“Oh, just idle curiosity. No reason.”

Alan made a mental note about the registrar. He wondered how many other attendees were suspicious of UP motives. He need access to a computer. There was one set up on the stage. He broke off from the others, walked into the lecture room. The room seemed deserted so he went up on stage, walked to the computer, and searched for Chester Hospital. The Countess of Chester came up. He then found a list of Registrar. Luckily they had thumb-nail head shots next to their names. There were different ones for differences areas of health. The picture that matched Alan's mental image was James Temple.

The After noon session emphasised the benefits of the UP program. After the people had been told how useless they are in an emergency situation, the afternoon session showed them how they could be very useful in crisis scenarios. Alan realised the morning session was all about singling out the 'resisters'. These are attendees who reacted to having their survival skills belittled. They must have psychologists planted in the audience to assess verbal and non-verbal reactions. Alan made a note to be extra careful. But then they might home in on that.

That evening, after dinner, Alan looked out for the registrar, but he was nowhere to be found. Damn! He was the only person who seemed to have an inside track on UP and he was nowhere to be seen. The other two people he had spoken to were there but neither had seen the Registrar since the afternoon session. It seemed a bit odd so Alan went to reception.

Cathy, the girl on night desk duty, said, “Can I help you sir?”

“Yes, I was in a hurry when I got here and I didn't sign in.”

“What's your name, sir?”

“Alan. Alan Ridgard.”

She scanned the attendance list, “There's nobody of that name listed.”

He wondered what she used for brain-cells. “That's because I forgot to sign in. Why don't I just do it now?” he said grabbing the book.

Quickly scanning the columns, he looked for evidence of the James Temple. Next to his name was number 212. Alan quickly scribbled his name down. He handed the book back. “Thank-you Cathy,” he said, winking.

There was two things about room 212 that made Alan suspicious. First, the door was unlocked. And second, there was nothing in the room to suggest James Temple had ever been there. But someone had, because bed covers were strewn around the room, the bedside table was on its side. It looked to Alan as though a struggle had taken place there.

“What are you doing in here?” a smart young man wearing a maroon blazer with, The Grosvenor,

emblazoned on his pocket. He came into the room and repeated his question.

“I am looking for an acquaintance. He wasn't with the group, so I came up here.”

“Who is he?”

“James Temple.” Alan looked at the porter. He tutted at the state of the room.

Alan suggested, “It's probably nothing. He must have gone out and left his door unlocked.” He brushed past the hotel employee.

“If he turns up how do I contact you?”

Alan turned, “The name's Mason. Leave details at the desk.”

Back in his room Alan pondered the situation. Temple had spoken out during the lunch recess. Temple had disappeared. The builder and the accountant heard what Temple had to say about UP. Did one, or both of them, report him? Had he been removed from the workshop, or did he leave willingly?

There was a knock at his door.

“Who is it?”

“It's about Mr Temple.”

Alan went to the door and opened it.

The night porter, the builder and the accountant walked into the room.

“Hey! I don't remember inviting you in.”

The porter said, “Mr temple changed rooms. I just thought I would let you know.”

“Okay. So what room is he in?” Alan queried, his suspicions growing. Remembering the disarray in room 212, it looked like he would have to knuckle it out. “Why are these two here with you?”

“Because, Mr Mason – or is that Ridgard – your reputation precedes you. Now we don't want any trouble. He pulled out a snub-nosed 38. So if you will just leave with us quietly everything will be all right.”

“Where are we going?”

“To see Mr Temple.”

Temple, tied to a chair, looked as though he had been hit by a bus. One eye socket was turning blue black and his jaw was cut and swollen. The builder closed the door to room 508.

The porter pointed his gun at Alan's chest. “Mr Temple has been trying to help us with our enquiries, but with a little difficulty”

“Perhaps it has something to do with his broken jaw,” Alan ventured.

“So, Mr Ridgard, why are you here? And don't say because you wanted to do the workshop because we know that is not true.”

Any answer, except the true one and he would end up as pulp pie. The porter did not look like a professional killer. The pistol didn't sit comfortably in his hand, which meant he may hesitate before shooting. Could Alan afford to take the risk? The builder and accountant stood just behind the porter. “What's your name?” Alan asked.

The porter steadied the gun. “Why do you want to know?”

“Well, it's like this. I am not going to answer your questions and if you don't stop waving that pea-shooter at me I'll make you eat the fucker. So you might as well let us go.”

The porter tensed, open mouthed.

This was Alan's cue, the moment he needed. Thrusting forwards he blocked the gun arm with his left hand, forcing it out to the side. His right hand chopped into the man's throat, flooring him, leaving him gasping for air.

The Builder, launching himself at Alan, tackling him, causing them to crashed, entangled, on the bed.

The accountant lunging forward, grabbed the fallen weapon.

Alan, shoving the builder to one side, drove his fist into the bridge of the man's nose.

“Stop right there, or I'll shoot Temple.”

The porter, having dragged himself to his feet, gasped, “Give me gun. I'll shoot the fucker.”

“That's not a calculator. It's a deadly weapon. You are out of your league,” Alan said.

“I'm not a fucking accountant so I don't give a shit about what you think.”

So he was a cop, or security, or something even more sinister. Noticing the porter making a move towards him, Alan said, “One more step and I'll break your legs.”

The porter froze

The builder sat up groaning

The accountant press the short barrel against Temple's head temple

“You shoot him and I will break your neck. Your choice.”

He wavered, “I mean it, so back off.”

“Look man, I don't know how you got mixed up in this shit but you can put the gun down, grab your mates and fuck of out of here now, while you have chance, or live for another thirty seconds.”

With the other two reticent to take more of a beating and the ex SAS bloke counting down from

thirty, he said, “Fuck it and fuck you,” while hurling the gun into the corner of the room. Turning to the builder, he said, “Come on, lets go.”

“That was amazing. I could never do that with someone holding a fucking gun on me.”

“Desperate situations call for desperate measure. Now let's get you out of those ropes.” Looking at the bruises Temple had suffered, Alan grabbed the phone. “Please send an ice bucket to 508 as soon as you can.

“So what do we do now?”

Alan grinned, “Well, I think we have overstayed our welcome. I'll grab my things and meet you here in ten minutes. Get a towel and apply the ice to those bruises, or they'll hurt like hell tomorrow.’

“They hurt like hell now,” he grimaced.

As Alan approached room 508, he heard police sirens outside. It might have been nothing to do with him but he couldn't afford to take the chance. “Come on Mr Temple, we have to move.”

“Almost ready. The damned zip is stuck.”

“Leave it! We have to leave here now.”

Temple left the case on wheels behind, grabbing a shoulder bag instead.

Alan travelled light – just casual clothes and a nylon back-pack.

They raced along the corridor to the stairs.

Alan stopped. He heard several people running up the stairs in heavy boots. “Fuck, they're onto us.”

“What are we going..?”

“...We'll take the lift, he answered, pressing the button.

The stomping feet were on the last flight of stairs. In seconds they would be caught dead in the water. Just then the lift doors slid aside. The pair dived in, past a cleaner with bucket and mop. Alan got the doors shut, just as the heavy mob went thundering past the lift.

“Phew- that was close,” Temple gasped.

“I have to get out at floor three, “ the maintenance man said.

Alan pressed the button. The lift came to a halt. “Can you tell us how to get to the car park?”

grabbing his pail and mop, he looked at Alan. “Just go down the stairs to basement and you'll see the sign.”

By the time the pair reached the basement the staircase was reverberating with noise of many boots striking the concrete steps above. Alan pushed against the door below the car park sign and emerged among the two lines of parked vehicles. He led Temple to the Mini Cooper S, when he

was blinded with light.

“What the fuck!”

“Who are you and where are you going this time of night?” a voice challenged.

With no time to lose Alan had to improvise. “Dr Ridgard. I have an emergency call to attend to.”

“And what about you?” he asked, turning his powerful torch beam on the Registrar.

“He's my patient. I have to get him to the hospital, now.”

The guard hesitated. The car park door burst open and an armed tactical response team thundered across the car park

Alan grabbed temple. “Follow me now.”

They raced for his car. The lights blinked, doors unlocked; they were inside.

“Stop that car!” someone yelled.

The Mini spun in reverse out of its parking space.

“Stop or we shoot!”

Alan floored the accelerator. The little car spun its wheels and roared towards the exit. Shots reverberated from behind. His rear-view mirror was filled with blinding light. A larger car was in hot pursuit. The barrier loomed ahead. There was no time to insert his card. “Hold tight.” Alan yelled as, with grim determination he gripped the steering wheel and aimed straight at the barrier praying the impact would not immobilise his car. CRAAACK! Bits of timber were flying in all directions. One head light out but the Mini was still moving. Alan swung a left into Northgate St, which was, thankfully, mostly deserted that time of night. The road was still wet from earlier rain but the Mini's wide tires hugged it well The bigger car was bearing down on them. “Mr Temple, I need you to navigate me to somewhere out of the way so I can lose our tail.”

“Keep going till you hit the roundabout, then straight ahead down Liverpool Road.”

Alan accelerated away just avoiding being bumped by the dark 4WD. Screeching to a halt to avoid a motor cyclist, Alan floored the Mini into the roundabout and took off fast down the road. The Mini's acceleration left their pursuer's further back.

“Turn right into Eversley Park.”

Alan spun the wheel hard. The Cooper S screeched into the suburban road. Then, with James' directions, Alan took his pursuers on a merry dance around a housing estate, careful to avoid any cul-de-sacs or other dead ends. Then, as he turned into Grange Road, a big 4wd blocked the road sideways.

“Fuck, we're trapped, Alan stated, as the Mini slewed to a halt. Their pursuers were only 200 ft behind. Alan had mere seconds to act. Revving his car he quickly turned down a narrow lane between two rows of garages. The Min fitted, just, but it was too narrow for the bad guys chasing him. “Where does this go?” Alan asked

“Bugged if I know. I just hope it goes somewhere.”

To compensate for his broken headlight, Alan put on his full beam and spots. His car hit gravel and slewed across the road.

Temple gripped his seat. “Fuck! We're heading for the railway embankment.”

Alan yanked the wheel and the Mini did a right angle turn, narrowly missing crashing through the railway barrier. He slammed his foot on the brakes, skidding his car through a muddy patch, before it came to rest in some long grass.

“Phew!” Alan uttered.

“I don't know about you, but I'm shagged.”

Alan laughed, releasing pent up tension. “Yeah, that just about sums it up.”

“You're a handy sort of bloke to have around in a crisis,” James Temple said, as he and Alan had breakfast together.”

“UP didn't think so,” Alan grinned. He sipped his coffee. “First time I've slept in nurses quarters and it happen to be with a man,” Alan joked. He'd managed to snatch 4 hours sleep and was bright as a button.

“Well I didn't want to take trouble back to my place.”

“I wonder who the heavy mob were. Does UP have its own tactical response people?”

“It wouldn't bloody surprise me. This UP stuff is big deal. Probably bigger than we can possibly realise, Alan. United Purpose, I believe, is the glue that sticks the EU/New World Order together. Mark my words United Purpose/EU/NWO are all one and the same. We have to get the goods to expose them for what they really are. Trust me, targeting this organisation will not work.”

“How can they be brought to task then?”

“They can't.”

“There has to be some solution to this.”

“If you have to ask what the answer to 'United Purpose' is... then you are on the wrong fucking track mate. United Purpose The Freemason's Unelected Power! (All part of the NWO/Global Government plans)”

Alan grinned, “Well, infiltrating their training sessions wasn't exactly a great success.”

“It's a hidden menace in our government and schools. United Purpose is the glue than enables fraud to be committed across government departments to reward pro European politicians. Corrupt deals are enabled that put property or cash into their pockets by embezzling public assets.”

Alan drank the remains of his coffee. “I don't know how I got caught up in UP. It's not even the case I'm working on.”

“Are you some kind of private detective?”

“No. I work for Intel-Inc. Basically we gather information for clients – the sort of intelligence they don't find on the Internet. This job has to do with the evil side of the Millennium Dome.”

“Evil side! It's just some entertainment centre, right.”

“Actually it seems to be some sort of energy generator, which will cause a huge power cut as soon as we hit the new year.”

“That sounds pretty out there to me. Anyhow, what does United Purpose have to do with this millennium power cut theory?”

“I don't know. Although I guess a big power black-out will call for crisis management.”

“And with something like 80,000 trainees in 36 cities, there's 18,000 potential crisis managers, giving UP enormous power.” James looked straight at his guest. “My friend, the one that told me this stuff, reckoned that UP recruits are indoctrinated to show much more loyalty to UP and its directives than they are to their own departments. Even to the point that, if directed by UP to do so, will undermine and even subvert their own departments. The NHS is a very good example of such undermining by middle management.”

“Are you saying that these recruits are purposely making their own working practices inefficient?”

“Alan, United Purpose is identifying leaders in all levels of our government to assume power when our nation is replaced by the European Union. Unlike current leaders, UP leaders are taught to rule without democracy, and will bring the EU police state home to every one of us.

“So where are all these UP people?”

“It has members in the NHS, BBC, the police, the legal profession, many of Britain's 7,000 quangos, local councils, the Civil Service, government ministries, Parliament, and it controls many RDA's (Regional Development Agencies).”

“My God, it's like some cancer festering in the underbelly of modern society.”

“Yes, and it will destroy anything or anyone who threatens it's position of power.”

Alan felt a shiver race up his spine.

Chapter 46

London Nov 1999

Jessica Dickson moved in the world of powerful men. Men like Ivan Steer and Robert Bolling. She was a power to be reckoned with and even the City's movers and shakers were known to tremble at her coldness, when it came to implementing UP policy. She was aware of the whispers behind her back and secretly smiled at the legend she had become, like some wild-west gunman with many notches on his belt. The whispers said, she was the United Purpose senior police officer who authorised the 'Shoot to kill' policy without making any reference to Parliament, the law or the British Constitution. She had already caught two spies in the group. John de Menezes was one of the innocents who died as a result.

Janet Paraski tested the microphone that was set up in the main hall. She looked out at the Twenty or so legal people sitting around small tables. As the Law Society's Chief Executive Officer she was at the Bolling estate to address UP's latest policies concerning changes to the British judicial system. Having outlined certain parameters she said, "And now it gives me great pleasure to introduce a woman who really needs no introduction at all – Jessica Dickson."

The short haired, five foot tall woman lowered the mike to her height. She stilled the rapturous applause with a hand gesture. "Hello everybody. They call me the 'Wild Bill of Westminster', because I never back down from a fight. They call me this behind my back but I don't miss a trick."

There was laughter in the hall.

She continued, "They called my 'shoot to kill' policy, concerning terrorists, cruel and barbaric but it still stands today. For United Purpose to be successful societies comfort zones have to be challenged and changed. My reference to comfort zones means people living in a way they are used to. Such lifestyles are not at all sustainable and, if the necessary changes are not implemented soon, we will not survive. Therefore somebody has to stand up and make the hard but necessary decisions. UP is the vehicle to do this. And it falls upon you, judges and legal people here today to sum up the courage to put these changes into law. The judicial system must lead the way."

While the meeting continued in the main hall, Robert Bolling, Ivan Steer and Baron Woodrow Roughschild had their own private tete-a-tete. They were laughing at a joke made by Roughschild, when he said that "British justice was the best that money could buy."

Bolling added, "In my experience it is certainly becoming more expensive, more flawed and more corrupt, which is just as well, really."

They raised brandy snifters to that one. Then Bolling asked, "Ivan, how are we going with the EU treaty signing?"

"As you can imagine there was a hue and cry from the Lords, who challenged the treaty because it proposed abolishing Britain's sovereignty."

"Wasn't the challenge unsuccessful?"

"Absolutely, Robert but the people had to see democracy in action, so the judicial system went through the motions. It was a tedious affair but the outcome was inevitable and the six signings went ahead,"

Roughschild said, "I had a meeting with John Pressing the other day and I'm pleased to say, the deputy PM is right behind us. Julia tells me The Head of the Civil Service Commission is a member. And UP is close to controlling Plymouth City Council, where it has subverted the democratic process."

"Excellent news," Steer commented. And as The media Barons are in UP they make sure their local editors refuse to let journalists publish the articles."

Roughschild asked, "Robert, is that damned quango business sorted yet?"

Bolling smiled. "It's a damn good Job I took the the reigns. God knows how that incompetent Brock bitch got the job in the first place. The Millennium Dome Company is an absolute shambles under

her leadership.”

“Robert, Isn't she still the CEO?” Ivan queried.

“Yes, well in name anyway. Once I was on board my money people discovered she had squandered some £80 million, £30 million of which was cleverly diverted into the web of quangos set up by UP. Of course the fraud case that resulted has stalled in the courts, thanks to UP's influence in the legal profession.”

Roughschild chuckled, “She went like a lamb to the slaughter. Is she aware that she was set up for the fall?”

Bolling said, “Who cares? She has nearly served her purpose.”

“Which was?” Ivan asked.

“To set up funding for the UP project, of course,” Roughschild smirked.

Sheila was thundering mad. “How has this happened without me knowing about it?”

The accountant was just as perplexed. “It didn't go through my books.”

“So, you're telling me that £10 million, of our money, has been spend on UP courses alone, and its been hidden from us.”

“That's what appears to have happened but...”

Sheila interrupted his flow by speaking into her intercom. “...Get Me Joseph Minter, immediately.”

“I tried following it up but they have no published accounts, and members names are a guarded secret.”

“Why do they need all that money. After all look at what they charge for their courses. Matrix for example costs £3,950 plus VAT, and courses for the high flying ‘leader’ can be as much as £9,950 plus VAT.”

Her phone beeped. She picked it up. Joseph Minter was on the line. With no pleasantries Sheila launched into her attack. “Why are large amounts of MD funding going to United Purpose?”

“Sheila I can't talk about this over the phone. I'll try to get round to your office later.”

“Bloody hell Joseph, we are talking over £80 million.”

“I can't discuss this now. I'll meet you at the dome around 7pm.”

“Christ, you'd better have a damn good explanation.”

Flustered, she put down the phone. Turning to her accountant, she said, “For Christ's sake keep a lid on this. If the media get hold of it your life won't be worth living.”

“Come on Sheila, I'm on your side here. So there's no need to make threats.”

“Good. I'm glad we are on the same page.”

Joseph Minter was half hour late and that didn't improve Sheila's mood one bit. She had been champing at the bit all day, needing to strike out at someone or something. She had been shuffling bits of paper on her desk and glancing continually at the wall clock, when he eventually turned up.

It had been raining torrents causing the traffic to travel at a snail's pace. “Terrible bloody night out there.” He complained, shaking his umbrella.

Sheila had no sympathy. She thrust a cost analysis file at him. “This money is supposed to be ours, paid by government departments and now I find that over £80 million has been syphoned off to finance senior staff to become agents for UP, instead of loyal to their own jobs here.”

Joseph smiled weakly, flopping into a chair, “Calm down Sheila. Lets discuss this rationally.”

“Rationally! OK, so rationalise why United Purpose International (Ltd by guarantee) is registered as a Charity No 1056583 and which describes itself as being involved in Adult education, has been allocated over £80 million of our money.”

“It's not as simple as that. I have been doing some digging since our phone call. It aspires that United Purpose is listed under Heritage Holdings, which means that Sir Robert Bolling owns both companies, so what you see to be incorrect use of MD funding is actually one instrument of Heritage Holdings using funds for another of its instruments.”

Sheila sat and stared at him. “Well, Joseph, someone has to make up the shortfall for us to meet our financial obligations.”

“I'm sorry but, as the song goes, the levy is dry.”

She glared, “You fucking bastard. You lot have set me up for the fall. I demand to speak with Sir, fucking, Robert Bolling.”

“I'm afraid you have no power to make such demands.”

“Don't you be so sure. I know that United Purpose is no fucking charity. It's more the public side of the Illuminates bloodlines.”

Joseph Paled. “Don't go there Sheila, it's not worth it.”

“Then you get Heritage Holding to pay our bills, or the media might just find out that UP's subjects are ‘selected’ for training according to their susceptibility for conversion. They have to be in the right job, with the right colleagues and friends? They have to have power, influence and the control of money? If the candidate has some, or all of these key attributes, then the local United Purpose Advisory Board decides if they can do the course.”

“I strongly suggest that you say nothing about United Purpose to anybody.”

“And I strongly suggest that you had better get my financial problem sorted, and quickly.”

Joseph stood up and made to put a soothing hand on her shoulder.

She shrugged him off. “Get it sorted Joseph, or the whole house of fucking cards comes tumbling down.”

He looked her in the eye. “For your own sake do not stir up the UP hornet's nest. These people have power and influence like you would not believe. They can make you disappear permanently, erasing you like you'd never lived.”

“Is that some sort of threat?”

“Christ, no. Look, I will see what can be done.”

After Joseph left, Sheila phoned Pat. “You know something about explosives, don't you.”

“Yes, from my military days. Why?”

“I have a special job for you. I will talk about it tomorrow.”

“Well me love, special jobs mean special rewards, which, I might add, I want before I do the job.”

Sheila sighed, “I'm not in any state to offer special rewards tonight.”

“And there's me here with the spa and the champagne bubbling. I reckon it's just what you need.”

She couldn't fault him on his perceptiveness.

As the Minister for the Arts and Heritage sat back in his cab, his mind was plagued by dark thoughts. He secretly agreed that the whole UP thing was becoming a law unto itself. Council Officers were having quasi secret meetings with, for example, property developers who were United Purpose friends. No agendas and no minutes were kept. United Purpose Graduates from the public quango sectors such as the Regional Development Agencies attend, and had the power to award large sums of public money to projects. Joseph knew it was the worst national example of cronyism, closed contract bids, fraud and corruption. And he was powerless to do anything about it.

But there was an even darker side to UP that he had only just discovered. Unseen to the general public, United Purpose undermined traditionally effective and efficient government departments with an overwhelming influx of new language, political correctness and management initiatives. They talked of empowering communities, vision, main streaming (sucking EU money into a project to sustain it), community empowerment, working partnership, regeneration and celebrating diversity etc. Documents appeared about change, and reorganisation. At first Joseph Minter, along with most other Parliamentarians, thought it was a courageous and efficient innovation. But, in reality doublespeak and interdepartmental confusion reigned. Things no longer worked properly, which meant another layer of UP duplicity was served up, making things even worse in an endless cycle of the cure being worse than the disease. Management decisions became stupidly destructive because that was the way UP had determined it. Organisational performance became increasingly sluggish. Undermining the NHS was United Purposes' biggest success so far.

Joseph sighed. He had been caught on the UP hook and he could not extricate himself. Although he felt for Sheila and her plight, he had to cover his arse first. Yes, it had been a difficult day the house and now they night was not becoming any easier. The bombshell that Dicky Cameron, who was pro Europe, used the language of United Purpose in the Commons. There was uproar in the House when he announced that Colin Clarke, the most committed of the pro Europeans, had been put in

charge of his "Democracy Task force". An opposition speaker quipped that it was rather like putting the cat in charge of the safety of mice. Minter just wanted desperately to get home and drink himself stupid and seek oblivion for a few hours.

Chapter 47

Oxford December 1999

Bernie Walcott considered the proposition in the cool light of day. He didn't know Marcus Cullen from Adam and that gave him pause for concern. Normally assignments came through his agent but this one hadn't. Who was this Marcus Cullen who had offered him £100 thousand for the job? Even more curious was how this Cullen had gotten his private contact details. Still, business had been very slow of late so a nice boost to the bank account certainly would not go amiss.

Marcus Cullen still felt the pain in his leg and shoulders. The blast had really taken the wind out of his sails and now he had been told he would need a walking stick for support. He sat back reading the Oxford Gazette, waiting for his guest to arrive. He had chosen 'The Standard' for their get together, for two key reasons. Marcus enjoyed authentic, quality South Asian food. And it being opposite the Phoenix Cinema made it very easy to find. Marcus was eating a Caesar Salad, while imbibing a fine wine, when Obi wan Dawkins turned up.

"Take a seat," Marcus said, indicating an empty one opposite him.

Obi, noticing the scar on Marcus' face said, "That bomb blast was a terrible tragedy, dear boy."

"Yes. Luckily I wasn't hurt too badly."

"Yes, but Neil died."

"That lunatic was your friend, I believe."

"I knew him and probably understood him more than most. But he was hardly what I would call a friend. In fact I don't think he had any."

"Well, let's order lunch." Marcus said, "going for grilled sole. What about you?"

"Well it's uncommonly decent of you, dear boy. I'll have the vegetarian lasagne."

As they sipped an above average red, Obi said, "I assume you haven't invited me here to talk about Neil Hitler. So why am I here?"

"I'm not at all surprised he was friendless, with a name like that."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that. I'm sure there are white supremacists out there who would willingly have befriended him. Nevertheless, you seem to be avoiding the issue."

"I have been talking with members of the faculty and the consensus is that you should return to Oxford with your reputation and position in tact. It was suggested that I tell you. There you are."

"Don't get me wrong. It's great news. But why the change of mind?"

"It was decided that all theories deserve an airing amongst peers and that you should have the

chance to present your paper.”

Obi was speechless. How could those stuffed shirts in the faculty have become so enlightened so quickly?

“Do you accept what I have told you?”

“Abso-bloody-lutely old boy.”

Lunch continued on an amiable note, with neither party being too dogmatic about their beliefs. Obi enjoyed his lasagne immensely and, perhaps, too many wines. But he was still able to stand steadily upright as he left the restaurant. They said their good byes and each went their way. As Obi entered the underground public car park and approached his old Wolesley, a single shot rang out but he didn't hear it, as his lifeless body fell to the concrete.

The young couple giggled and jostled each other playfully as they made their way to his car. Then she thought she saw something glint in the darkness. Soon, their levity turned to horror. The glint in the dark was caused by the reflective metal of a wristwatch, attached to the arm of a dead man, whose blood was mostly on the outside. After the initial shock, she called 999 and reported a murder.

After gathering the initial evidence, Detective Superintendent Mike Mailer reckoned the victim, Obi wan Dawkins had arrived at the car park between 8 and 10 pm, where an assailant shot him in the back of the head. He died immediately. Although there were no witnesses to the murder, a silver BMW was seen speeding out of the car park. There was no proof the two incidents were connected, so that avenue was not to be pursued at the present time.

Mike Mailer had a large segment of the car park cordoned off by police tape. Around fifty cars were left in the car park overnight while he had his officers scour the scene for evidence. 21 people were able to have access to their vehicles and drive them away the next morning. Stunned residents and shoppers looked curiously at the crime scene, expressing shock and dismay.

Chapter 48

London December 1999

Sir Paul Camden left Scotland Yard, a worried man. He had just been informed by Special Branch about a serious threat of a terrorist attack on the Millennium Dome, New Year's Eve. He was worried about the destruction such an attack could do both physically and morally. But his concerns went much deeper than that. Sir Paul faced the biggest and most important decision of his seven years as the Metropolitan police commissioner. He had to decide as to whether the dome could be opened, as planned. He was damned if he did keep it closed and damned if he didn't. If he delayed the planned grand opening on New Year's Eve unnecessarily, his long unblemished career would be on the line.

Two hours before on that Friday afternoon, he had been briefed about a warning that a bomb had been planted in the dome. The caller gave the warning anonymously. The person who took the call said the voice sounded like a disguised Irish one. The IRA had not been active in London for many years. Besides, The provisionals didn't bother to disguise their voices. On the one hand it could easily be a hoax. There had been a few of late. But this one differed from other hoaxes in that a

code word 'turtle' was used in the warning. Turtle was the code used by MI6 to speak about the Millennium Dome. Nobody, outside the intelligence and police services referred to the dome as such. So Special Branch was convinced the threat had to be for real but Sir Paul was not so sure.

This was the worst possible and the most logical time for the Commissioner to have to deal with such a dilemma. It was time to bring other people into the loop. He phoned the assistant commissioner. "Ian, there's a bomb threat alert concerning the turtle. There was a short pause. "Because SB just informed me and they are taking it seriously. Now I want the place thoroughly searched. So organise a team and get on with it." Another pause. "Start anywhere, just get on with it."

Ian Johnson, the Met's assistant commissioner, ran the threat past his key anti-terrorist officers. They queried the use of the code word 'turtle' to prove the threat as being authentic, because, as one of them pointed out, The shape of the dome could easily suggest a turtle carapace. The consensus was that the warning was a bluff. Despite the caller's voice being disguise Irish, there was no intelligence to suggest groups opposed to the Northern Ireland peace process had planted a device.

The assistant commissioner assessed that the celebrations should go ahead; the dome had been searched and security on site was tight. Nevertheless Sir Paul had ordered him to search for an explosive device in the Millennium Dome. Although Ian secretly questioned the commissioner's judgement, plans still had to be put in place for evacuating the dome. He hoped to God that it would not amount to that because it would be logistically difficult and abandoning the show-piece of the nation's celebrations would have been a complete humiliation. Downing Street described reports that Tony Blair and the Queen had insisted 'the show must go on' despite the threats, which they said were 'rubbish'. First though, a thorough search of the huge complex had to be carried out.

Detective Superintendent John Schumann, of the Metropolitan Police flying squad, was prevailed upon to carry out the search. It was just his luck. The planned weekend (his wife's birthday celebrations; the trip to Paris; and the after dinner show) all had to be put in hold. "Fuck." he mouthed as he went about organising his team.

Chapter 49

Millennium Dome Mid December 1999

John Schuman, although annoyed, frustrated and anxious, never let it show. As always, he approached this task with dogged determination. He was scrutinising a floor plan of the dome, with his key people, when a harried Sheila Brock arrived at the dome.

"What's going on here?" she asked, angrily, having had her relaxing evening spoiled by Schuman's urgent phone call."

Schuman took her aside. "Sorry about this but we have reason to believe that a bomb has been planted somewhere within the dome. We need you here because you know the lay out and that will save us precious time."

She stood there, jaw dropping, feigning surprise. "But who? Why?"

"We don't know that. We are working on intelligence received. Now, if you would unlock the place we can get started."

As they entered the huge building, Sheila asked, "Do you think the threat is genuine?"

What he thought was irrelevant. He just wanted to get the job done. Ignoring her dumb question, he handed out copies of floor plans to each of his men. "As you can see I have divided the building into numbered grid sections. Once you have thoroughly checked an area let me know. If anyone does come across a suspicious looking device, do not go near it and contact me immediately. Okay men, let's do it." he turned to Sheila. "Let's have some lights."

Within a few seconds, after the whole dome was bathed in bright light, Sheila said, "I bet this is a total waste of time."

John answered, "We certainly hope so." It was bad enough searching for something that was there but how did he know when to stop searching for something that isn't there but could be. He said, "Now if you will excuse me Ms Brock. I have to join in the search."

He teamed up with Detective Ionus and started checking out the huge edifice. If there was a bomb planted there it could be anywhere. He and Ionus had worked on many cases together.

Ionus hadn't been inside the dome before. It all seemed a bit weird. "What the hell is that?" he asked.

The body (sponsored by Boots chemist) caught Schuman's attention. "It looks like the statue has a glowing groin."

"What the hell is that about?"

"Could it be the bomb?"

Ionus chuckled nervously. "It reminds me of the terrorist instructor who was teaching his suicide bombers. He says, "Pay attention, I'm only going to show you how to do this, once."

Schuman grimaced. "I'm serious. We'll have to dismantle the thing or get behind it."

Sheila stood in the kitchen area, making a mug of coffee. As the water boiled, she wondered if she'd overstepped the mark. But those manipulating bastards had pushed her too far this time. She had been totally undermined and used as some sort of pawn in a much bigger game. Betrayal, she called it. And now to be called out at 10 pm, just when she and Pat were about to jump into the Jacuzzi, this happens. But her biggest worry was how they had found out about the bomb. Then she heard a ruckus outside. Going to the main entrance she saw Joseph Minter arguing with a police officer. "Minister, whatever are you doing here?"

"You know this man then?" the policeman said.

"Well, of course I do. This is Joseph Minter, Minister for the Arts."

"Oh, sorry Sir," the officer apologised. "It's just that with no ID..."

"Understandable," Joseph said, brushing past the policeman. Then, following Sheila into the Dome he said, "What the hell's going on?"

"They're looking for a bomb," she said, retrieving her coffee.

"A bomb!"

“Yes. It seems that this dome is plagued with bad luck.”

“Bloody hell! And we have to be open for business in less than two weeks.”

She turned on him. “How are you going with my funding?”

“Sheila, the funding has dried up. What can I do?” he said spreading his hands in a helpless gesture. “Then get Sir Robert to dip his hand in his pocket.”

“Jesus, Sheila, I can't tell the likes of him what to do.”

“That all depends on how much you want this dome to open on time.”

He turned on her. “Is that some kind of threat?”

“You can take it anyway you like but if Sir Robert does not return the money he took from us we will take industrial action.”

“Fuck, Sheila, you can't do that.”

“Just watch me. Now the ball is in your court.”

Ionus, using levity as a way to defuse the seriousness of the situation, turned to Schuman, saying, “A man has custard in one ear and jelly in the other, and the doctor says, 'what's the problem with your ears' and the man says I'm a trifle deaf.” He then chortled at his own joke, which was more irritating than the joke itself.

Having ascertained that the glowing groin didn't conceal a bomb, they moved on. Schuman looked up. If they didn't find anything inside they would have to search the roof. He was not looking forward to that. One of the lights from the Sky scape (hosted by Sky) saying 'Enjoy', flashed from above. “Chance would be a good thing,” he said, dejectedly.

“Yeah, enjoy because you could be blown up any moment,” Ionus added, cynically.

They stopped at a display called 'Self Portrait - A celebration of our country, our people, our attitudes and tastes chosen by people across the UK'. We'll check this out. There's plenty of places an explosive device could be hidden, Schuman said. Then he said, “Look at that.”

Ionus was bemused by what he saw. The exhibit announced 'True blue Briton. (fairplay, humour, public spirit, language). “They missed out bullshit,” the detective quipped.

“Check that statue,” Schuman ordered, indicating another type of true blue Briton in the form of a statue. X-rays quoted in British Self Portrait below George Michaels: 'X-ray: Still the best invention for over 100 years and British too'.”

Ionus, a crossword buff said, “This is a good example of the BS being spouted here because Rontgen discovered X-rays in Germany, 1895.

“So it was your lot that came up with it, not ours.”

“I Thought you were Irish.”

Now they were searching around a huge globe called 'Home Planet' (sponsored by British Airways and BAA). Schuman's mind was blitzed by the highly irritating child avatar, considered to be an incitement to violence. Yet the message of Home Planet was it is remarkable for the miracle of life.

Ionus nearly puked at the prominent message '6 billion faces, just one heart'. A very touching statement and one that almost had Schuman throwing up as well. He quipped, “The Americans who designed this oblivious to the fact that the last time anyone sighted a smiling coal miner in Britain was before Thatcher broke the unions in the 1980's.”

“Shit, I need a coffee,” Ionus said. Having gone over the exhibit thoroughly.

“I think I saw a kitchen area near the entrance. It's Sergeant Hebditch's area but who gives a monkey's, I'm in charge.”

As they supped coffee, Sheila Brock entered the kitchen. It was around 1 am and she looked worn out. “How much longer is this going to take?” she asked.

Schuman shrugged, “A lot longer if we don't find something soon.”

She was almost tempted to give them some sort of clue. “It's just that we have to be up and running at 8.”

“Can't help you there,” he yawned. “Nobody is allowed in until we get an all clear.”

“Assuming this is a hoax and you don't find anything how do you know when to stop looking?”

“That is the big question. Once we've covered all the ground and the roof, if we don't come up with anything, that's it.”

“You have to search the roof?”

“Well, yes if we don't find anything in here.”

She sighed “It makes you almost wish you are going to find it.”

“There is a certain irony in that,” Ionus agreed.

Only Pat knew where the device was. She went outside and phoned him. There was a bitter chill in the air and it was beginning to sleet. She stamped her boots on the slippery ground, trying to keep her circulation going.

The ringing woke him up. He grabbed his phone, made to switch it off, then he heard Sheila's voice. “Where the fuck are you this time of the morning?” he said.

“Stuck in the bloody dome, while the cops are searching for a bomb.”

“Fuck woman! Have they found anything?”

“Not as yet. If you tell me where it is I will keep steering them away from the area.”

“I couldn't af-ford t' tell you.”

She wondered why he was talking funny, but put it down to his sleepy state. “Pat, you'd better have that Jacuzzi bubbling when I get there.”

“When will that be?”

“A hell of a lot quicker if they knew where the bomb was.” Shivering, she said, “Look, I'm freezing my tits off out here. I have to go.”

As she walked into the comparative protection of the dome she thought about their brief conversation. His speech had been perfectly normal except for the bit 'couldn't af-ford t' tell you'. Af-ford, af-ford? Then he said 't' instead of to. She scratched her head. Had he given her a clue. She said Af-ford 't' over and over, then it hit her like a bucket of cold water - A ford T. It was a clue. She went straight to the location of 'The Journey' exhibit, which was sponsored by Ford. Two detectives were already nosing around the James Bond boat, the exhibit's centrepiece. She approached them. “Excuse me officers, this display was only assembled yesterday. I think somebody would have seen a bomb hanging around.”

He looked at her, “And you are?”

“Sheila Brock, the boss of the dome. So I do know what I'm talking about. Don't get my wrong. I'm not trying to tell you your job. I just thought it might help you save time”

The other officer smiled, “Thank you Ms Brock. This is the kind of intelligence we need.”

Sheila watched as the pair started investigating the next exhibit. She needed to rest as the cumulative effects of the day's stress hit her. She had never seen it before but the exhibits had been designed and set up in such a way that visitors would, subconsciously, be almost ready to swear blood allegiance to the New World Order.

Whilst Schuman awaited the final reports from the two remaining teams, something didn't seem right. He asked Ionus, “Why is our Ms Brock hovering around when she could be back home tucked up in bed?”

The detective shrugged, “Don't know guv. Maybe she's one of those types who need to feel they're in control.”

Just then Schuman received a report that the final two grids had been completed. He checked his watch. It read 4.32 am. “Six hours work and nothing,” he complained. He ordered his team to meet him at the entrance for debriefing.

As the team assembled, one of the detectives suggested, “Maybe it was a hoax after all.”

“We won't know until we've checked the roof,” Schuman stated.

Ionus said, “It'll be brass monkeys up now – and fucking slippery. We're all buggered. I think we need a rest first.”

“Yes you're right,” Schuman agreed. “And well done team. It's been a huge effort.” Then he said, I know were all knackered but could any of you have missed anything?”

“No guv,” came the collective reply.

Then somebody spoke up. “Guv, we didn't actually miss anything. But there was an exhibit with a James Bond boat that had only just been put up yesterday. So there was no way a bomb could have been put there.”

Schuman stared at the man. “And how exactly do you know this, detective?”

“Well Ms Brock told us.”

The detective superintendent turned to the detective. “Take me to the display.”

A search in the boat revealed a suspicious looking device. Schuman said “Okay, contact the bomb squad. I think we may have found our package.”

“Bloody hell guv, and we very nearly missed it,” Ionus said.

“Find Sheila Brock and bring her to me. I'll be in her office.”

Chapter 50

Millennium Dome Mid December 1999

John Schuman was sitting in Sheila Brock's chair, when Ionus escorted her into her office.

“I see you've made yourself at home, superintendent,” she said

Schuman got up and offered her, her seat. “We thought you would like to know we have found what looks like it could be the bomb.”

She froze but hid it. “That is a relief, superintendent. Now we can all go home,” She said, going weak at the knees.”

He smiled weakly, “Would you like to know where we found it?”

“Oh, yes. Of course.”

“It was in the bond boat, under a seat.”

“My goodness.”

“Yes. We were lucky to find it, after you told my men not to bother looking.”

She paled, hoping it didn't show. “I was only trying to help. The exhibit was only constructed yesterday, so I thought...”

“...How many exhibits did you offer advice on, Ms Brock?”

“Only that one. Why?”

“And that happened to the one hiding the device. Curious, wouldn't you say.”

Sheila, feeling cornered, attacked, “Are you accusing me of knowing where the bomb was and not telling you?”

“Oh, I think it is much more serious than that.”

She glared, “How dare you accuse 'me' of such a thing. I am not saying another word until I speak with my solicitors.”

“That is your prerogative, Ms Brock,” Schuman said curtly.

“Now, do you have a mobile phone on you?”

She froze. “A mobile phone.”

“You were observed going outside in the freezing cold. Why was that, Ms Brock?” Ionus asked.

“Shortly afterwards you diverted my officers away from the bomb location. Did that have anything to do with your phone call?”

“You've got it all wrong, superintendent. I did go outside but it was to just wake me up.”

Schuman fixed her in his tired gaze. “We have CCTV footage of you, so please hand over your phone.

She looked at him defiantly. “I refuse,”

He sighed heavily, “Okay, arrest her Inspector Ionus.

The phone rang at 6.05 am, an hour before Joseph Minter usually rose from his slumber. It was Sheila Brock. She had been arrested on charges of terrorism. She needed him to get the best legal representation. She was being held at Scotland Yard. Minter's half conscious mind tried making sense of her message. “Look, I've only just woken up. Who's the arresting officer?”

“An Inspector Ionus, Flying Squad. Get this sorted quickly, Joseph.”

“I'll get onto it right away. But does it have anything to do with the bomb threat?”

“I am not saying anything until my solicitor arrives. But I want you to line up a top QC, right.”

“That goes without saying. This is a terrible, terrible mess. Jesus, I hope the media doesn't get hold of this.”

Patrick Cooper sat in a holding cell awaiting his interview, his agitation rising. His motto was never tell the cops anything. His anger shifted focus, to Sheila. Why the hell had the stupid bitch phoned him with so many cops around? He'd been toying with her and never, in a million years, reckoned she was smart enough to see he had given her a cryptic clue. But if they had her phone he feared the police would soon be linking the bomb to him. Fuck!

Shortly after, he was taken to an interview room where he was questioned by DI Ionus and a DS

Brougham, his arresting officer. Following the usual preamble, Ionus said, "Mr Cooper, you received a phone call from Sheila Brock at 2.32 am this morning. What was that call about?"

Patrick stared at Ionus. "No comment."

Ionus smiled, "Well, Mr Cooper, it doesn't matter because we have a tape of the call." Turning to DS Brougham, he said, "Play it for Mr Cooper, to jog his memory."

The detective clicked the play button. "Where the fuck are you this time of the morning?"

"Stuck in the bloody dome, while the cops are searching for a bomb."

"Fuck woman! Have they found anything?"

"Not as yet. If you tell me where it is I will keep steering them away from the area."

"I couldn't afford t' tell you."

"Pat, you'd better have that Jacuzzi bubbling when I get there."

"When will that be?"

"A hell of a lot quicker if they knew where the bomb was." Shivering, she said, "Look, I'm freezing my tits off out here. I have to go."

Ionus looked at Cooper. "What do you have to say about that, Mr Cooper?"

Christ, it couldn't have been any clearer if he had painted them a fucking picture. He needed to know he would be looked after. "I want my solicitor."

Ionus passed him his mobile. "Make your call."

Conran Hanratty QC sat with Sheila Brock in the interview room. He scrutinised the police evidence and the charge sheet and slowly shook his head. "The police have the bomb, which has been defused and is being checked for DNA, fingerprints etc. They have a taped copy of your phone call to a Mr Patrick Cooper, one of your employees, who was staying in your apartment."

"Yes."

He perused another report, "Mr Cooper has been involved in public affrays on a number of occasions, usually with alcohol involved. That was prior to his employment with your company. "

"Correct."

Hanratty removed his reading glasses. "Ms Brock, why did you employ a violent drunk as your head of security of the Millennium Dome?"

"That's being a bit harsh, isn't it, Mr Hanratty?"

"If this goes to court the prosecution will be much harsher on you."

"Does that mean this may not go to court?"

“Let's concentrate on our defence. Mind you, the evidence against you is the most damning I have seen. I suppose we could go for stress and mental strain of the job.”

“Pleading insanity, you mean!”

“Temporary insanity might work but...”

“...Mr Hanratty I am most definitely not pleading insanity.”

Hanratty got up. “Very well, Ms Brock. I have been given instructions from another party to give you this letter,” he said, handing her the House of Commons envelope.

It was, as she expected, from Joseph Minter MP. It read:

Dear Ms Brock

I have appointed Conran Hanratty QC as your legal representative. It is in all our interests that this matter be dealt with as expediently as possible. Although you are being charged with the most serious of crimes we have to limit the damage. First you have to distance yourself from Patrick Cooper. An announcement will be made that he has been arrested for some sort of corruption. We cant tamper with police evidence but we can spin a story that could make you come out of this smelling of roses.

In return for getting you out of the mire, you have to complete your MD contract and follow my every directive, without question. If you agree to this, Mr Hanratty will inform me and wheels will be put into motion.

Joseph Minter MP.

She looked at her QC. “Tell him I agree. But I am concerned about Patrick Cooper, if he goes to court and gives evidence.”

“As I understand it Ms Brock, that isn't for you to worry about.”

Schuman couldn't believe it. A whole night's work for nothing.

Ian Johnson, said, “We weren't to know that she was working undercover for 6.”

“I just don't believe it. “That phone call was genuine. I'd bet my life on it.”

“Yes, well 6 now has the phone. Apparently the call comes under the official secrets act. So it cannot be used as evidence of any complicity between Ms Brock and the bomber Patrick Cooper.”

Schuman shook his head. “Something stinks here. Someone has been pulling strings.”

“John, a word to the wise. Let it go.”

“What about Cooper?”

“He's a terrorist. It's outside our remit.”

“So we lose him as well!”

“He will be dealt with by 6. It's their territory.”

As a thoroughly demoralised Schuman slumped out of the deputy commissioner's office, Johnson said, “At least we got the bomb. Well done for that.”

Chapter 51

London Mid December 1999

Tim Austerberry sat across from Theresa Mayfield, the Home Secretary. “We should be throwing the damn book at her. She's a traitor, For God's sake.”

Theresa listened to 6's assistant director, then she responded. “Tim, I need your support in this. The media will be told that she worked under cover for 6 to trap the bomber. Your lot gets kudos too.”

“Home Secretary, is the Millennium Dome worth all this aggravation?”

“It's gone way beyond that, I'm afraid. If we pull the plug now we will be the laughing stock of the world. The MD is a symbol. It's the 1851 exhibition, up a notch. It must be a success and we can't change CEOs in midstream.”

“It goes against my better judgement.”

Theresa smiled, “It is for the greater good, Jerry. I assure you.”

Jerry sighed heavily. “So what happens to the bomber?”

“He's yours. Do what you think fit. But he must not go to court.”

The last person Alan Ridgard expected to hear from was his father. In fact he was the last person Alan wanted to have anything to do with. So when he heard Philip Ridgard's voice at the other end of the line his heart missed a beat. “What do you want?”

“Alan, I feel as uncomfortable as you, but we need to meet.”

Alan clenched his fist wishing his father was right in front of him. “You have no fucking idea how I feel.”

“I understand that you are very angry. That's to be expected. But this is bigger than our personal issues.”

“I don't have any personal issues. I got rid of them once you no longer existed in my life. So why the hell should I listen to anything you have to say?”

“it seems we have a mutual friend in Karl Haas. He told me to ring you.”

Alan's mind was a jumble. Why had Karl done that and how did they know each other?

“Alan, this has a bearing on the case you are working on.”

“How the fuck do you know what I'm working on?”

“I shouldn't be telling you this but I'm with 6 and we are both involved in the same end game. We need to meet so I can share some intel with you, before you return to Cairo.”

“How the hell did a fucking shell-shocked, bikie, piss head get involved with MI6?”

“Alan, you can insult me if you want but this is about a Habib Arain and your boss thought you ought to know.”

“OK, but we keep this professional.”

“Of course. This is much bigger than our pathetic relationship.”

“I wasn't aware we were having any kind of relationship.”

“We should get this sorted out soon – say, tonight at Swiss Cottage beer garden, 7:30.”

“This had better be good.”

Built in the style of a Swiss Chalet, on the site of a former toll-gate, Swiss Cottage was a unique and popular London drinking hole. A popular bombing target for the IRA during the 1970s, the pub survived and thrived on its turbulent history. Alan made his way through the main bar, out into the beer garden. It was a chilly evening and he didn't have a warm coat with him. Still, he hadn't planned on staying long.

Then he saw his father. He looked overweight and balding. It had been over 25 years since he had seen him. The shell of a man he was looking at wasn't the rebellious bikie he remembered as a child. But he was still the father who had abandoned him. Alan plumped down opposite. “Okay, I'm here. What have you got for me?”

“What, no pleasantries, Alan. Let me at least get you a drink.”

Alan scowled, “I'm not here to socialise. This is purely business.”

Philip Ridgard looked at the pain in his son's face. “Look Alan, I'm terribly sorry for abandoning...”

“...Oh, give me a fucking break. I'm not interested.”

“But at least give me chance to explain.”

“You don't need to. Now if you don't get to the fucking point in the next minute, I'm walking.”

“Okay, so you're not ready to deal with it. I respect that...”

“...For fuck sake! Don't you get it?” Alan exploded, getting up to go.”

“Okay, we won't go there. Just sit down and I will tell you.”

Alan sat down. “Well?”

“What do you know about Habib Arain?”

“In connection with what?”

“His association with an Egyptian activist group.”

“You mean Al Haab?”

Philip leaned forwards. We have intelligence that there is a connection between Arain and the capping of the pyramid. He is using this group to disrupt the activities in Giza on New Year's Eve.

“I know that – but why? I would have thought he would have supported the celebrations.”

“The capping of the pyramid is not important. It's what's been going on inside the pyramid that is,”

“So what's been going on there?”

“Never mind that. We need Al Haab to change its focus. The capping stuff is just distraction. It means nothing. You have to meet with Dr Burry and get her help to neutralise what's been going on.”

“Ok, so what's in it for Arain? Is he being used as well?”

“Of course. The connection between Arain, Jalani and Robert Bolling is a man called Ivan Steer. The man is a manipulative genius. It is purported that he is behind the Y2K concept.”

“I don't get it. Why me? Surely 6 and 5 have enough intelligence to deal with this.”

“Alan, you're correct, you don't get it. British Intelligence cannot be involved in this. The British government mustn't be seen to sanction it. You have a good relationship with Dr Burry. Plus she is your client. I'm just telling you this so you are forewarned.”

Alan got up. “Thanks for the info. I don't expect we will meet again.” As he left the beer garden Alan didn't see the tears glistening in his father's eyes.

Chapter 52

Cairo late December 1999

Abdul Hafiz looked at Andrea, surprise showing on his face. “What do you mean by suggesting we forget about the cap.”

Andrea made sure they were away from prying ears. So they walked past the Great Pyramid and ubiquitous camel drivers selling rides. Once they were far enough away from the presence of others, she said, “The cap is a distraction from the main event. Dr Harwarbi and his team have managed to move behind the second door in the Great Pyramid. They are doing something in there that is going to be bad for the whole world. Our priority is to stop them before it is too late.”

“I have been told nothing about this,” Abdul spat.

Andrea knew she was taking a big risk being seen out in public with Abdul. Jerry had warned her that the Egyptian security services were on her case. But this was the only way she could reach the leader of Al Haab and speak with him. “Abdul, we need the help of Al Haab in this.”

“Dr Burry, there is a Zionist plot to take over Egypt. The cap is symbolic of the Jewish skull cap. We cannot allow this.”

“Abdul, what you and your people do on Millennium Eve is your concern. But right now I need – the world needs your help in stopping Jalani and his cronies from activating something in the pyramid. We have to get in there and stop them. “I need you and your people to create a diversion at the same time as my team infiltrates the secret chamber.”

“What you are asking me to do would focus attention on Al Haab before Millennium Eve. It could damage our chances of our main mission.”

Andrea sighed heavily. What would it take to get through to Abdul? “Abdul, listen to me. If we do not manage to sabotage what Harwarbi and his crew are doing your symbolic gesture will amount to nothing. They will laugh at you for being so gullible. If you want to spoil the Zionist's New Year's Eve party, then help us wreck their plans. If we get caught going into the pyramid unofficially, all will be lost. Al Haab has to find a target and hit it to detract attention from us, so that we can do what we have to do, undetected.”

“Dr Burry, I respect you a lot and I know you are a good person. But even if we did decide to help you, we have very little time to organise a diversion for you. We have been successful because we plan well and pay attention to every detail. What do you suggest we do at such short notice?”

“Abdul, you are an intelligent man. Whatever you decide, do not let your superior officer know about this.”

“What do you mean? I am the leader.”

Andrea looked at Abdul, smiling, “British Intelligence knows there is somebody funding and driving Al Haab. We have an idea who it is but now proof to back it up. However, this person is not who you think they are. This person is aligned with a very powerful pro-Zionist elite. They want you to put your energy into destroying your Zionist symbol because it will create confusion and allow them to get into the pyramid and activate what they have been doing in there. That's why we must get in there first.”

Abdul slumped. Everything he believed in was becoming unravelled in his brain.

Andrea reached out to take Abdul's hand. “I know this is very difficult for you but, believe me, we need your diversion.”

In the afternoon on New Years Eve Al Haab triggered almost-simultaneous bombings at the Red Sea resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing at least 8 people & injuring an estimated 20 others. Abdul Hafiz hated to lose his compatriots but they volunteered for the mission, from which they would not return. He quickly organised 3 attacks – two suicide car bombs and one planted bag bomb. One bomb killed 7 workers in a coffee shop at the city's Old Market. The other suicide car bomber struck the Ghazala Garden Hotel, by crashing through a security checkpoint & slamming into the hotel's reception area before exploding. The hotel lobby area collapsed, along with its roof. The Old Market area was a vast mess of broken glass & litter. The third bomb was an improvised device left in a bag; it killed a tourist at a beach-front parking lot & shuttle stop about two miles from the hotel. The explosions took place about 10 pm, Egypt time, in synch with Andrea Burry's covert assault on the Great Pyramid.

Oblivious to the human carnage resulting from her plan, Andrea led her small team (Alan Ridgard, Sam Whitehead [a British micro-robotics engineer] and Dr Ali Khufed [a trusted colleague from Jalani's team. As part of the deal made with Tim Austerberry, 6 provided both the engineer and the robot.

The night was bitterly cold as the four made their way, stealth-like, up the narrow pathway to the opening of the huge stone edifice. Dr Khufed addressed Dr Burry, saying, "I remember Jalani saying that the secret gates at the heart of the Great Pyramid had been opened for the first time in 2012, solving a mystery that had puzzled archaeologists since 1872."

Alan kept his keen eyes peeled, ready for any movement indicating a human presence. So far they hadn't encountered any guards or security people. He brought up the rear as the group entered the Pyramid. He heard a sound, someone moving around the rocks. With his Uzi, courtesy of Abdul, he scanned the area the sound had come from. Then he heard it again and brought the small machine gun to bear. It was only a temple dog, scavenging for food.

Alan relaxed and caught up with the rest of the small group, who began their climb up towards the kings chamber. Alan had to bend almost double to fit into the narrow passage way, as he followed the others up the ramp, with only torch light to guide their way.

Andrea halted her crew at a point where an even narrower horizontal passage way led them to the Queen's chamber. She was in awe of Al Manun, who, well aware of the fabulous treasures found in other Egyptian Pyramids, forced his way into the Great Pyramid of Giza. Finding chisels to be of little value against such a large mass of limestone his men used the heat of fires and the thermal shock of pouring vinegar over the rock to fracture the stones. Large battering rams were used to break the fractured stones into removable pieces. She marvelled how his team's gargantuan effort made their mission so much easier.

They moved along the passage until they were in the Queen's Chamber. Andrea pointed out two air vents, each just eight inches wide. They were in a vee shape at right angles to each other. "This is the one," she indicated.

Sam set up his laptop computer Then he set up a small tank-shaped robot with X-ray capabilities. It ran on batteries and relayed what it's lenses saw, to the laptop screen. Sam placed it inside the vent, which had a 45 degree incline, which was why Sam had designed it with small caterpillar tracks. Alan thought he heard a sound. "Shhh," he urged. In the silence he craned his ears. There it was again and it was no temple dog. They never ventured inside the temples but acted as self-proclaimed defenders – servants of Anubis, the jackal god of the underworld. Somebody was headed in their direction. Alan looked down the passage. It seemed to be empty. He got Andrea's attention. "Get on with what you have to do. Be as quick as you can. It seems we have company."

Sam watched his screen as the robot made its way to a small door that blocked its passage. Andrea and Ali watched over his shoulder as she activated the X-ray camera. Now, for the first time, she could see what was beyond that barrier.

Alan crouched in the passageway. It was so cramped he could only just point his gun at what ever might be coming his way. A torch would have attracted unwanted attention. So he sat in the dark, wearing night vision goggles. There were two ghostly looking figures approaching. He snapped the safety off the Uzi. It had a full magazine. The ghostly figures had entered the shaft crouched and carrying guns. He took a deep breathe, then fired a short burst into the passageway. There was a yell, some cursing in Arabic. Whoever they were they had decided to drop back.

Andrea and the others were in awe at what they saw. It looked like a strange mechanism – very

Tesla-like. Sam confirmed it, "it's a sophisticated Tesla coil, What the hell is it doing here?"

"Never mind that, we have to destroy it.' Ignoring Sam's protestation, she said, "Alan we need you now."

"Great. So who's going to guard the passage in case our friends come back."

Sam said, "I finished here for now. I'll take over."

"Have you had firearms training?"

"Does fighting in the Falklands count?"

"Relieved, Alan handed him the weapon." Be sparing with the ammo, it's all we've got." Turning to Andrea, he said, "How the hell did Jalani get that apparatus in there. Jesus, it's like fitting the Titanic in a pill bottle."

"There must be another way in," Andrea said.

The three searched around the chamber with their torches, looking for any that could have been new work. There was nothing that suggested another way in.

Alan got Sam's attention. "Anything happening out there?"

"Nothing I can hear."

Andrea checked her plan. She turned to Ali. "Were you here when they fitted that Tesla stuff?"

"No, none of us knew about this, except Dr Jalani, of course."

"And whoever did the electronics," Alan added.

"Perhaps the entrance is no in this chamber," Ali offered.

"Then where?" Andrea said, as though entreating ancient gods.

"Another chamber, perhaps," Ali said.

"We could try the King's Chamber," Andrea suggested.

Alan said, "If we're backtracking don't forget there's bad guys with guns out there somewhere."

Alan took the Uzi off Sam, who needed to pack his gear. He then edged slowly forward, in a crouch stance, his weapon trained on anyone moving ahead of him. He prayed that they had gone or would at least, listen to reason. He dreaded to think they may have retreated to bring reinforcements. It was always a possibility, one he could not ignore.

Shuffling along, he reached the junction between the two chambers, without incident. He acted as the rearguard, while the others ascended to the King's Chamber.

A cursory check showed no obvious lines, indicating any concealed entrances, in the solid granite walls. Then Andrea focused on the Granite sarcophagus, with a broken corner, on the stone floor of the otherwise bare chamber. She crouched down and shined her torch along the edge. Beckoning Ali,

she said, "Come and look at this."

He looked and saw a narrow band of of the stone floor lighter, in colour, than the rest. "This has been moved recently," he said.

Andrea called to Alan, "Come here. We need to move this."

Alan asked, "Do you think there is some kind of tunnel here?"

"It's been moved. So we have to ask ourselves why?"

They all put their shoulders to the stone coffin and heaved. It gradually began to move very slowly. With each heave it slid aside a bit more, making a horrendous scraping noise, loud enough to wake the dead, Andrea thought.

Then Alan thought he heard another noise, coming from the ramp. Instantly grabbing his Uzi he took up a defensive pose. There appeared to be no movement. Then, when he heard the scraping sound of stone on stone, he caught a momentary glimpse of a torch beam. He donned his night goggles and everything turned an eerie green. He caught the shapes of the two men. It looked as though they had not called for the cavalry. Oh for a marksman's rifle, he bewailed. All he could do was send a quick burst of fire in their general direction. He heard swearing and saw the torch go out, as his pursuers once again took cover.

It only took one more massive shove to reveal a trapdoor. Once the cover was removed, Andrea shone her torch. There was a rope ladder that went down into darkness. She couldn't see anything beyond that.

Alan handed the Uzi back to Sam, "They'll probably keep their heads down. But if they don't, shoot them off."

Sam nodded.

"Can you handle that? Because if you can't they will kill us."

"Don't worry Alan. I've got you covered."

Alan pulled on his back pack and went to the trapdoor.

Andrea pulled him back. "I'm responsible for this. I'd better go first."

"Andrea, there's no need for you to go down there. It'll just complicate things..."

"... But..."

"I'm working alone on this one – no arguments," With that he began descending the rope rungs.

At the bottom of the ladder, he shone his torch around to get his bearings. There was a freshly constructed narrow passage way, causing Alan to crawl down a slope with a 30 degree angle this led him to a grill that gave him access to the Tesla coil. He was sweating profusely in the very warm crawl space. His confinement plus the physical exertion in getting to the vent. Stuck his shirt to his back. With great difficulty and diminished dexterity Alan managed to model the semtex and fit the detonator. Having completed his task, he crawled back up the passageway, to the rope steps.

Then he heard shooting from above. He froze. Hopefully Sam was keeping the enemy at bay but he had no idea what he would find, once he was back in the chamber. He detonated the semtex. The explosion was muffled in such a confined space but the reverberation unsettled and broke off stone fragments and covered him in dust.

The shooting had stopped and, as nobody was climbing down the rope ladder to confront him, Alan figured it was a good sign. Unless they had captured or killed Andrea and the others and were waiting for him to emerge from the hole. However, as they had not pushed the coffin back into place, he still had a chance to survive.

Handhold over handhold, Alan climbed the ladder. He had some plastic left. He could rig a small bomb and throw it into the chamber. But if Andrea and the others were still alive he may very well hit them. He looked up but nobody was looking down.

He was near the top of the ladder when he heard an awful noise. Then he realised what it was. It was the coffin being pushed back into place. He grabbed for the top rung of the ladder, removed his backpack and hurled it into the chamber. Someone was shooting at it. He took advantage of the lull in pushing and came up out of the hole, and executed a body roll. There was a paraffin lamp illuminating the chamber. It was just within range. He launched out with this right foot and caught the lamp, crashing it into the wall. He heard shots. They went wild in the darkness. Through his night goggles, Alan could make out the two human forms. He withdrew his knife and kept low, moving as silently as possible.

When he was near enough to the first man, Alan raised his knife and thrust it down, through the assailant's foot. Blood spurted as he withdrew the blade.

The Arab screamed in agony, grabbing for his foot, dropping his weapon.

Alan, retrieving the fallen Kalashnikov, swung it on the other man, who was going to his friend's aid. Alan pulled the trigger. The Arab was thrown backwards as red splodges appeared over his grey Jellaba.

With all the ruckus it was time for a quick getaway, before the security forces turned up. As he descended the ramp he was torn between self survival and looking for the others. His survival instinct won hands up as his SAS training, kicked in. Once he was outside the pyramid, gulping in the cold night air, he heard a sound. He swung the gun in its direction. Then he heard Andrea's voice, "Thank god you made it."

Chapter 53

Cairo Millennium Eve.

Andrea Burry raised her glass of cold hibiscus tea. "To a job well done team. Especially to Sam for his quick thinking and courage for which we owe him our lives."

Sam reddened a little. "We all did our bit to make the operation successful, especially Alan who made it all worthwhile."

The celebration took place at Andrea's apartment. She asked, "What happened to those people who were after us?"

Alan was reticent. "They tried to bury me alive. I did what I had to do, to survive."

"Who were they?" Ali asked.

"I don't know but I don't think they were from the national security services, otherwise they would have requested back up. No, I think they were working alone."

"Well, I hope Jalani doesn't know what has happened. I'd love to see his face when it doesn't work."

“Does that mean our job is done?” Alan asked.

Andrea smiled, “I guess it does. But we will definitely find out come midnight.”

“And that's only six hours away.”

Andrea switched on her TV. Crowds were already gathering in Giza, in readiness for the night's entertainment. A stage was being set up near the Great Pyramid, in front of the rows of seats some of which were already occupied. The red orb of the sun was setting prompting the lighting people to switch on the bank of floodlights specially erected for the occasion.

Then the scene changed to a news flash. In three different bomb blasts around Egypt the previous day 11 people were killed and 43 injured. Three of those killed were members of the notorious terrorist group 'Al Haab. Al Haab claimed responsibility for the attacks, stating there would be more disruptions if the Egyptian government went ahead with it's plans to cap the Pyramid on Millennium Eve.

Andrea paled and had to sit down.

Ali got her some water.

Alan said, “It's not your fault. You did what you had to do.”

She looked at him, a pained expression showing on her face, “I did it. I am responsible for their deaths.”

“Andrea, look at me. “You did not tell Abdul to kill those people. You had no idea how things would pan out.”

“Alan, do not try to make me feel better. I do not need you or anybody else to protect my feelings. So just back off.”

“Whoa! I'm just trying to get things into perspective.”

“I got Abdul, against his better judgement, to create that diversion. He is not responsible.”

Just then the phone rang. It was Abdul. “Thank god you're alive.”

“Allah the perfect one smiled down upon me. But now, I must see you.”

“What for?”

“Dr Burry, it is important. Meet me at our usual café in thirty minutes.”

She turned to the others. “I have to meet somebody.”

“Is it Abdul Hafiz by any chance?” Alan queried.

“He needs to see me alone.”

“No! It's too dangerous, Andrea. I'll follow but keep in the background.”

“If he sees you he'll never trust me again.”

Alan grinned. “Don't worry. I'm good at blending in with a crowd.”

By the time Andrea arrived at the Hog's Breath Cafe crowds were already congregating in readiness for the dusk-to-dawn music and laser show by Jean-Michel Jarre. Advertised as the '12 Dreams of the Sun, it promised to be quite an extravaganza.

Jalani was on form, giving his version of events. He was holding court with the media. “I came up with the idea of capping the pyramid after being shown a Pharaonic relief at Abu Sir. One of the team had unearthed a scene depicting workers dragging a capstone with the hieroglyphic word for white gold on it”

“Dr Jalani, in the light of the recent attacks by Al Haab and their opposition to this ceremony, aren't you concerned that this event may well be targeted?”

“I can assure you and all the people here, the security forces are well equipped and prepared too deal with those trouble makers.”

“What is the significance of the capstone?”

“My interpretation is that when the king finished building they placed a capstone on top. After that the people danced and rejoiced because the nation's project was completed.”

“Some Egyptologists are calling this a sacrilege, a cheap gimmick to attract tourists.”

Jalani laughed. “I assure you it is not cheap. But what the pyramids' ancient builders would have thought of the modern version of their own, highly religious celebration is impossible to guess. Perhaps they would approve of their god-king's tomb being the centre of world attention more than 5,000 years after it was built.”

Abdul Hafiz looked tired and ragged.

Andrea asked, “Are you all right?”

“I lost three good people and you ask me am I all right.”

“Why did you call, Abdul?”

“To tell you, you are in danger. I must take you to a safe house.”

Andrea sat upright, “What on earth do you mean?”

“There is an hired killer after you.”

“How do you know this?”

He stared at her. “Trust me, I know.”

“So, who is this hired gun?”

Abdul, exasperated, thumped the wooden table with his fist, rattling crockery. “You are not listening. He could be here right now. You could be dead at any time. You must come with me now.”

Andrea, confused, rose to her feet, hoping that Alan would follow.

The Hog's breath cafe was filling up, making it difficult for Alan to see what was happening with Andrea. Then he caught a glimpse of her leaving with the young Arab. He forced his way through the food queue and headed for the door. He looked around but couldn't see her. Then he saw her disappearing into an old Fiat. It was pulling out into the traffic flow. He began to run after her but that was no good. He saw an old bike propped up against a wall. Grabbing it, he rode unsteadily away, after the rusted Fiat. As it turned out, using a bike allowed him to gain on Abdul's vehicle. Weaving in and out of traffic, moving at a snail's pace, Alan saw the Fiat four cars ahead, He slowed down, immediately feeling the heat of the evening.

Alan tried not to look conspicuous once Abdul turned off the main highway into a narrow street flanked by shoddy high rises. He followed them to an enormous housing development. The car stopped and Andrea and the Arab went inside a high-rise housing block. Alan followed, keeping back, disappearing into the shadows wherever possible.

Philip Ridgard was feeling the heat and the strain. He was too old to be a field agent but he felt he had to do something to make amends, if that was at all possible. His official reason for being in Cairo was to apprehend the person behind Al Haab. He had been tailing Abdul Hafiz, so when he saw him leave the Hog's Breath Cafe with Professor Burry. He decided to follow. There was a crazy cyclist all over the road, so he hung back, in the old Mercedes he was driving. He watched the terrorist and the professor enter a high rise building. Then, to his surprise the crazy cyclist was following them.

Andrea couldn't understand it. Apart from Abdul and two other activists, Tim Austerberry was there.

She turned to Abdul. "You lied to get me here."

He looked very sheepish. "Dr Burry, this is more important than that."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Tim intervened. "Andrea, my dear, you have been treading on some very important toes. In fact you are a bit of an annoyance to some very influential people. In one hour the capping ceremony will take place. That will be the trigger to start a series of events that will have important ramifications for this world. Nothing must be allowed to stop this."

She turned to Abdul. "Surely you can't go along with this."

Tim flashed a sickly smile. "Mr Hafiz has seen the error of his ways."

Andrea, becoming concerned, said "Now that you have kidnapped me what next?"

"I think kidnap is too strong a word, Andrea. We are protecting you for your own good."

Alan hovered by the door but did not enter. Picking up snatches of conversation he deduced the Andrea wasn't happy with her situation. There was also a cultured English voice but he didn't recognise it. His attention was broken by approaching footsteps. Turning around, he did a double-take. It was his estranged father. "What the fuck!"

"Yes, it's good to see you too, son. Now let's get the hell out of here."

“What are you on about. A friend of mine, well actually my client, is in there and...”

“...Yes – Andrea Burry. Now lets get away and I will explain.”

“Explain what exactly?”

Just then the front door opened.

Philip pulled Alan to one side. They watched from the shadows, as Tim Austerberry left the apartment and headed for the stairs. Alan pulled away before Philip could stop him. He caught Austerberry on the stairs. “What have you done with Dr Burry?”

Austerberry turned, caught by surprise, “Wh, who the hell are you?”

Alan thrust him up against the stairwell, “Your worst fucking enemy, if I don't get an answer.”

“Unhand me. I work for the British government,” Austerberry said, trying to push Alan away.”

“I don't like beating up old people, but you leave me little choice, he said, raising his right fist.

“There's no need for fisticuffs. And for your interest I am trying to keep Dr Burry safe.”

“Take me to her , right now.”

“It's not a good idea. There are people there who would not appreciate your...”

Alan launched a punch into Austerberry's solar plexus, causing him to double up in pain. “The next punch will rupture your left kidney, so I suggest you do as I say.”

In the day, he could take a blow like that without even wincing. But a combination of age and cancer had Tim writhing in pain. He started walking back up the stairs, prodded on by Alan.

Philip saw his boss in the corridor. His boss! What the hell was he doing there? He snuck back into the shadows.

“How many in there?” Alan asked, prodding Austerberry in the back.

“Three – and Andrea Burry,”

Weighing up the odds, even if they weren't armed, which was highly unlikely, they were not exactly in his favour. He got Austerberry to face him. “You will go in there and say you are arresting Dr Burry on charges of espionage. You will bring her out here and we will disappear.”

“Abdul is not stupid. He will not believe such a ridiculous story.”

“Then, for your sake, you'd better be convincing.”

Abdul came to the door, in response to Austerberry's knock. “What are you doing back here?”

“I have orders to take her in. She is wanted for espionage.”

Abdul, unsure whether to believe the man, was secretly relieved. He genuinely liked the professor – no, admired her. He didn't want to be the one to do her harm. He turned to his compatriots. “Bring the woman here.”

The Arab guarding her said, “Why?”

“She is no longer our responsibility. She has been arrested by Mr Austerberry.”

Andrea, wondering what was going on, said, “I don't want to go back to England. Keep me here with you.”

Abdul smiled at her. “Professor Burry, things are going to become difficult for us here. It's better that you go.”

As the door closed behind them, Alan said, “You have done well. Now walk quietly away and leave Andrea with me.”

“Sorry, can't do that old boy,” Tim said, thrusting a Beretta automatic in his direction.

“What are you going to do – shoot us?” Alan asked, now the tables were turned.

“That is precisely what I must do, Mr Ridgard. Any last words.”

Alan read Austerberry's face. He was not the killing type, especially where cold-blood was concerned. But in a tight corner who knew what he was capable of?”

Then another voice said, “Put down your weapon Mr Austerberry, or I will shoot.”

He couldn't believe it. He was staring down the barrel at Philip Ridgard. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Drop it, Tim.”

“C'mon, we're both on the same firm.”

“I don't know what this is all about, Tim, but when someone pulls a gun on my son I get kind of protective. So for the last time,…”

“...Your son! I didn't know,” he said, reluctantly handing Alan his weapon.

Philip, holstered his weapon. He went over to Tim Austerberry. “Who are we kidding? We're both too old for this shit. Just let them go and we can go and join in the celebrations.”

Jerry looked at Philip. A spasm of pain shot through him. “Yeah. Who are we kidding?”

Chapter 54

Giza Millennium Eve

Andrea Burry was experiencing a cocktail of feelings, including sexual ones. She hadn't felt such stirrings since David's death. Back in her apartment she gave Alan a huge hug. “I don't know how you did it but you rescued me, like some gallant knight.”

He enjoyed the closeness and warmth. It had been quite a while since he had experienced such a connection. She kissed him on the cheek, then on his mouth. "Alan, this is probably a mistake but right now it's what I need."

Alan felt the same, as she manoeuvred him into her bedroom. From her bedroom window she could see the Great Pyramid. Owing to its longevity it always gave her a feeling of stability. As they tumbled onto the bed, she sat up. "My God!"

"What is it?"

"It hasn't changed."

"What hasn't," Alan said, becoming annoyed.

She turned and grabbed him. "Look, Alan, the top of the pyramid."

"He looked. Then he exclaimed, "There's no cap on it!"

Andrea got up and rushed into her lounge. She switched on the TV. It was all over the news. There were some technical difficulties and the capstone would not be dropped onto the Great Pyramid. She looked up at Alan, wide-eyed. "We actually did it. We stopped them." At around 5 pm that evening, Dr Karif Jalani stared hard at the messenger. "What do you mean – it's destroyed."

"The sarcophagus had been pushed aside, revealing the drop to the secret tunnel below. There was also a dead body in the King's Chamber."

Jalani, nearly bursting with outrage, responded, "Who is responsible for this. I will have them executed."

The messenger continued, "The intruder was shot dead. But there was other blood, like somebody else was wounded but got away."

"Who were these people?"

"I do not know. But they were not the one's who did the damage to the equipment."

Jalani glared at the man. "Find them. They cannot get away with this.

"It had to be Al Haab."

Karif became thoughtful. "No, it was not them. It had to be somebody who knew about our work."

But there is only us and the other members of our team.

"It was her. It had to be." he stated vehemently.

The messenger ventured, "Who?"

"Dr Andrea Burry, the vindictive bitch. Send people and find her. Bring her here."

With the messenger gone, the ramifications of the sabotage hit home. He truly loved the majesty of the pyramids. They should be left to people who understood them, not grubby infidel tourists,

leaving their rubbish and wearing away the passageways. He wanted to close them to the general public. Now, his standing was such that, he was close to his goal. He hadn't wanted to put that technical stuff inside the Great Pyramid of Khufu, but he did so because, because they would let him close the great monument afterwards.

But now, with this latest indignity visited upon the ancient structure, he dream became sand, blowing away across the vast desert.

Jalani couldn't stand by and let the loves of his life suffer any more, under his stewardship. He staggered to his telephone and dialled. He said, "This is Dr Jalani. There has been some complications with the giant cap. I need to speak with Farouk Hosni."

Heavily armed Egyptian soldiers and black-clad police officers swept into the compound occupied by Abdul Hafiz and a dozen members of Al Haab. He quickly put out an alert to other cells. Someone handed him a Kalashnikov rifle but he knew it was useless. They were surrounded and a searchlight helicopter was hovering overhead. They made their way to a back exit. Abdul hurled a grenade back into the room they had occupied. It was a feeble attempt but it might just destroy some evidence.

The terrorists rushed out into the dark yelling, "Allah the magnificent we are ready," They were met with a barrage of gunfire. Six of Hafiz's men died where they stood. He knew then it was all over. They were surrounded. He pulled another grenade, his last thoughts being about Dr Burry.

Alan had his father's number. He had vowed never to contact him, let alone ask for his help. Andrea was just about finished packing. He pressed some buttons. "Hello, is that Philip Ridgard?"

"Is that you Alan?"

"Yes. Now listen. We need to leave Egypt tonight. Can you arrange a plane?"

"It's a bit short notice. Why the urgency?"

"Never mind about that. Get it arranged and phone me with details."

Andrea pulled her wheeled case into the room. "Why can't we at least wait until tomorrow and leave like civilised people, Alan."

He held her hands and looked her in the eye. "Andrea, there was no mechanical fault. They found out what we did and they will be after our blood."

"But they don't know it was us."

"Jalani may be a colossal egotist but he's no fool. How many other people could it be?"

His phone rang. It was his father. It was arranged. They would be picked up.

Alan smiled, "We have our lift."

A number of things happened in quick succession. So fast that Alan's head was left in a spin. They were on their way down to the car-park, where their driver awaited. As they walked from the dimly-lit entrance, Alan saw the humvee standing mere yards away. The driver took Andrea's luggage. Alan shielded her as she got in the car. There was a momentary glint of metal. Alan's instinct caused him to duck. The shot rang out. Alan grabbed his gun and fired in the direction of the shooter. Then he froze. Andrea had collapsed, half in the car. He got her inside, slammed the door and yelled "She needs help. Get the fuck out of here, now."

Bernie Walcott was past being helped. One of Alan's bullets hit him in the chest, He was dead as soon as he hit the ground.

Alan cradled Andrea in his arms. The bullet had punctured a lung and narrowly missed her heart. She looked up at Alan, coughing up blood. Using his free hand he pressed his father's contact. "Make sure there are medical staff standing by," he ordered.

Her eyes were fluttering. She was going cold.

"Andrea, stay with me. Grip my hand."

She coughed up more blood, smiled weakly and said, "I was always faithful to David."

Alan knew what she meant. He could see her drifting away. "Stay with me Andrea. We're nearly there."

Her hand went limp. She coughed up a huge wad of blood. "I'll be able to ask David himself," she said, slumping in Alan's arms.

For the first time since his dad deserted him, Alan cried."

Egypt has no foreign military bases on its soil. Well that is the official line. But the US offers military aid annually worth \$1.3 billion. The aid is set up between Egypt's armed forces, The US Defence Department and Dyncorp International. So, a few miles south of Cairo Airport, the CIA operate the old base used by the Allies during World War Two. Philip Ridgard was waiting. He saw Alan alight from the Humvee, covered in blood. "Alan, are you OK?"

"It's Dr Burry. She caught a sniper's bullet, as we left her apartment. She's dead."

"That's terrible. Look the plane is waiting, so you'd better go."

Alan looked across the tarmac at the Trader Grumman that had fired up its twin engines. "What about her?"

Philip said, "I'll make sure she is sent back to England."

"I think she would rather be buried here, somewhere near her beloved pyramids."

As Alan headed off to the waiting plane, he heard his father say, "Take care son."

"Sure dad." The words were drowned out by the aircraft noise, but Alan had never used that word since he was a boy.

THE END

Epilogue

Patrick Collins had failed in his mission. Alan Ridgard must lead a charmed life, he reckoned. The hired gunman had hit the woman but his nemesis had escaped. He's never been responsible for a woman's death and it churned in his gut. He hated what he had become. He should never have been sucked in by Sheila Brock. The bitch shopped him over the fucking bomb – the one she got him to plant. She comes up smelling of fucking roses while he loses his job and is threatened with a prison sentence if he breathes a word about it.

He turned his key in the lock and let himself in. He felt the weight of the Glock in his pocket. This would be the last time, he secretly vowed.

Andrea came to the door, attired in a long satin nightdress. She eyed him. “Where have you been. I needed you at the Dome celebrations,”

He didn't bother to explain. Yes this would be the last time, he affirmed, affixing a silencer as she walked away.

Alan read about Sheila Brock's death in the daily Mail. The official line was that she had committed suicide. Joseph Minter said she was under a lot of pressure with the problems associated with the Millennium Dome. Another article stated that the Y2K bug had proved to be untrue. Computer clocks ticked flawlessly into the new millennium. People went on with their lives oblivious to the fact that they had been hoodwinked. The world at large never got to know how close they came to chaos caused by global power failures and all that would have meant. It had been very costly to combat the invisible, powerful enemy but they had achieved it, largely due to the courageous Andrea Burry. However, this was only a temporary setback for the invisible power brokers. Their plan, though held up, was still firmly in place. So Alan, having been instrumental in covertly dealing with the big picture, decided to focus on the personal one. He picked up the phone and made arrangements to meet with his father.

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Here is a sample from another Joab Rackham adventure called Ziggurat – The Real Agenda in Iraq

1

Joab lay on the bed, suffering from exhaustion. The Grand Ishtar Hotel had an inadequate wall-mounted fan that did little to cool down the hotel room. He wanted to get up but his tired body wouldn't let him. He could hardly raise his head from the pillow. The flight from London he was slowly recovering from hadn't helped either. He looked at his watch. It read 2.30 pm Iraqi time. He

was due to meet his contact in 30 minutes. He looked at the Baghdad map on his phone. Luckily the meeting place was not far away. His contact had promised him the interview would be worth his while but wouldn't say any more than that on the phone. After the arduous flight from Heath Row it had better be worth it!

Between the American military and Iraqi police it was difficult to travel around parts of Baghdad without being questioned about your movements. The "Press Member", badge Joab carried allowed him a bit more leeway than most but even so he didn't want to have to divulge his intentions that day. Sticking to bomb cratered back alleys he followed the rapidly given instructions and found his way to the meeting place address. Dr. Humaz greeted him. "Did you have any problems getting here?" he asked.

Joab didn't know what to expect but he could have been face-to-face with Omar Sharif look alike. No, accept combating jet-lag."

"I am sorry to rush you on this but we have move on this quickly."

"Why the rush? What is this all about?"

The Iraqi smiled, "It's quite a story and all will be revealed in time. I am sorry for rushing you." Taking Joab by the arm he ushered the reporter inside the old house, saying, "Please come and share refreshment with me and I will fill you in with some details."

Agreeing, and impressed with the doctor's almost perfect English, Joab asked, "Have you studied overseas?"

"Yes, at Harvard University."

"That's very impressive Dr. Humaz."

The Iraqi didn't comment. He organised some light refreshment and they sat down. He looked at Joab nervously for a moment, and then asked. "Are you sure you weren't followed here?"

"No I wasn't. Would there be a problem if I was?"

"It's difficult to tell these uncertain days. It was bad enough in Saddam's days with his secret police but now we have both the Iraqi secret forces and the CIA to contend with."

With growing concern Joab ventured, "So are we dealing with something sensitive here?"

"Yes and no. I will explain."

"It's just that I don't represent one of the major tabloids. It's just a monthly mag called "High Light."

"I know. I have still got copies from when I lived in America." Then pausing, Dr. Hamuz said, "The major tabloids would not publish what I am going to tell you, nor would Western news services."

"Why not?"

"Because news is not news any more. It is more like propaganda and what I have to say does not fit in with their Anglo Saxon Christian belief systems." Then, passing food and drink to Joab he continued "Are you cognisant of the works of Zachariah Sitchin?"

"Yes. He was the guy that translated all those Sumerian texts, wasn't he?"

"He was, yes, and much more besides." Pointing to a certificate Dr. Humaz explained, "My doctorate is in the study of Mesopotamian antiquities, a subject that has been in my heart for as long as I can remember. This is something I share in common with Saddam Hussein."

Surprised at this Joab can only manage, “really?”

“Yes but I will enlarge upon this aspect as my story unfolds.” Then he added, “Do you know much about archaeology?”

“Only that archaeologists always end in ruins,” he punned, wishing he hadn’t as he noticed the Iraqi’s blank look.”

“It was a joke,” Joab tried explaining.

“Well what I have to tell you isn’t,” Dr. Humaz responded, tersely. Then he continued, “Archaeology is a very recent science. It was only after Schliemann’s discovery of the ancient city of Troy that we were shown a window into the past that made humans question the invalidity of myths. His discovery set many young amateur archaeological hopefuls seeking fame and fortune by uncovering past civilisations.”

“With respect Dr. Humaz I don’t have time to just listen to your anecdotes. This doesn’t sound like the ground breaking story you promised.”

The academic stopped in his verbal tracks, got up and went to the window. He then turned around facing Joab. No longer Smiling, he said, “This is more significant than you could possibly realise young man. I have to start softly in this way so as to prepare you, and your readers, for the intellectual bombshells I shall drop later. So will you do the courtesy of listening to my preamble?”

Feeling somewhat chided, Joab agreed to be more patient and Dr Humaz continued his story. “So scientific archaeology only happened once a reluctant academia acknowledged the past being dug up in the Middle East digs. By then these archaeologists were running foul of your Roman Church that feared their findings would contradict the history of the Old Testament.”

“And we can’t have that”, Joab added, cynically.

“Well your Church hadn’t had to deal with such a challenge to its authoritative view of religious history before. Even Galileo, in order to have his life spared, had to capitulate his heliocentric view of the solar system when confronted by the dreaded inquisition. Even Giordano Bruno, a catholic monk who held to the Copernican view, having been tricked by his Church’s duplicity, was burnt at the stake in Rome. And that was only 36 years before my old Harvard University was founded.”

Joab, becoming more interested, began recording the session.

Dr. Humaz continued, “By then evidence of the Church’s misrepresentation was clearly being shown for what it was, so Western religion went into damage control.”

“How did they do that?”

“They funded their own archaeologists whose mission was to reinforce the Church’s view of biblical history.”

“But surely their discoveries would belie this.”

“That’s a risk they had to take. In any case if any findings contradicted Church doctrine Rome refused to publish the findings.”

“So it was very selective. But didn’t the archaeologists balk at this?”

“Yes but the Church was their paymaster. One such example of selective truth occurred when Sir Flinders Petrie, the most distinguished archaeologist in his field, discovered a very ancient Anunnaki gold processing plant on Mt Horeb in the Sinai. When he published his findings privately the Church stopped his funding.”

“Now wait a minute. Who are these Anunnaki you just mentioned?”

Getting up, the Iraqi instructed, “Please follow me. I have something to show you.”

Despite the predictable tribulations for the CIA in Iraq and Afghanistan Douglas Cane willingly accepted the post of Station Chief in Baghdad. Baghdad, which was the largest foreign based station ever, still had its problems. Colonel Cane looked up from the report he was reading. “Damn it George what the hell is your team doing?”

George Daniel Mason, Cane’s veteran second in command immediately launched into his defence. “How the hell are we supposed to infiltrate this group when we have very few people who can speak Iraqi?”

"Then use those who can."

"It's not that easy Colonel. Those that can speak the lingo are mostly diplomats untrained in undercover work. Besides the language we can't travel freely because we don't look like Arabs, and you're likely be shot by any one of them."

“Okay so nobody said it was going to be easy. Look I’m getting a lot of flak from Langley over this. They’re wondering what we are doing with our time and their money over here.” For Cane it was really a CYA (cover your arse) exercise. Confronting such problems on critical fronts, had recently seen the removal of his boss the CIA head in Baghdad because of questions about his ability to lead the massive station and Douglas didn’t want to attract the same fate.

He was all too aware that the Company (slang for the CIA) had closed a number of satellite bases in Afghanistan amid concerns about that country's deteriorating security situation.

Joab followed the doctor into another room where, in a glass case, there were various ancient looking artefacts. Opening the door Dr. Humaz carefully lifted out a clay tablet and laid it gently on a table. It depicted three figures and some cuneiform text. He then explained, “Petrie's astounding findings never saw the light of day. The power of the Church saw to it that his work was never published and also made sure that the British Library never catalogued the work - one of the most important discoveries in Archaeology. In fact it wasn’t until the startling findings of Sitchin that the truth began to be revealed to the wider world. In Genesis 6:1-4 it reads, “There were Nephilim in the earth in those days”. Nephilim is often translated as “giants” which, although only partially accurate, is never-the-less, a legitimate and appropriate interpretation.”

“Now I’m getting really confused. What do these Nephilim have to do with the Anunnaki?”

“I do apologise. I know it’s a lot for you to take in. As I was about to add, a better definition may well be “those who came down”, “those who descended”, or “those who were cast down.” The Anunnaki of ancient Sumerian texts is similarly defined as “those who from heaven to earth came. Anu meant heaven and Ki, Earth, as translated by Sitchin. Now virtually all open-minded historical and theological scholars agree the Old Testament’s book of Genesis was extracted from the older Sumerian records, if only because of the similarity in their Comparative Religions.”

“Is that now accepted by the Church?”

“Some of the more liberal clerics recognise that “The Enuma Elish”, the Sumerian Epic of Creation, and Genesis share a number of common elements but in general the conservative Church avoids such rational thought like the plague, despite the Stories of a Great Flood and Deluge, also being common to both Sumerian and Biblical accounts.”

“In the light of such overwhelming evidence how can they confidently maintain their intransigence?”

“Such logic does not mean anything to the Church. However, Sitchin’s findings can only lead us to

the inevitable conclusion that the Anunnaki were as real as Noah, Moses or Abraham.”

The CIA men looked at one another. They both men knew it wasn't their fault they hadn't made any progress infiltrating a cell known simply as Gizatrug. The previously undisclosed moves by the CIA in the Gulf underscored the problems affecting the agency's clandestine service at a time when it was confronting insurgencies and the U.S.-declared war on terrorism. George Mason responded. “It's okay for the goons back in Virginia. They aren't here. We're not the only CIA officers having to deal with a series of stumbles and operational constraints that have hampered our ability to penetrate these insurgents Doug.”

“I know that George, but we have to do better. Now if you're not up to the task...”

“Now wait a minute Doug! Our guys are doing the best they can. How come when our station is the largest in agency history, eclipsing even the size our station in Saigon at the height of the Vietnam War, we can't get a handle on these guys. Handing over a file the Colonel responded, “This might be some help.”

The CIA deputy scanned the document. “This is just some pissant journo from some pissant New Age rag nobody gives a shit about. Are you suggesting he's privy to this cell were tracking down.”

“Have your people got any info on an Iraqi archaeologist called Dr. Hamuz?”

“Yeah, he was one of Saddam's antiquity experts, wasn't he?”

“Yes, well we need to know what he knows before he gives this journo the dirt. So get your team onto it George and come back with good news.

Just then the CIA head's phone rang. George Mason got up to leave. Picking up the dossier on the reporter he determined that he was going to follow up this lead himself.

2

“So who were these Anunnaki and where did they come from?” Joab asked trying to get a grasp on things.

Pointing at the tablet Dr. Humaz answered, “Sir Laurence Gardner, the renowned author of “Realm of the Ring Lords” has written: “Every item of written and pictorial attestation confirms that the ancient Sumerians were absolutely sincere about the existence of the Anunnaki, and those such as Enki, Enlil, Ninkhursag and Inanna fulfilled earthly functions with designated community duties.” He looked up at the journalist. “This tablet depicts Anu in the centre with Enki and Enlil on opposite sides. Anu is the Emperor and the other two are his sons.”

“So where did these Anunnaki come from?”

“A planet called Nibiru.”

“What were they like?”

“Let us just say that they were very advanced beings, the patrons and founders of us Homosapiens. They were teachers and justices; technologists and kingmakers who were jointly venerated as archons and masters. However, they were very real and were certainly not idols of religious worship like the ritualistic gods of subsequent cultures.”

“So how did the worship of these gods come about?”

“It occurred after the Annunaki left the planet. So used to them were our primitive ancestors that they desperately enjoined their return. In fact, the word which was eventually translated to become ‘worship’ was avod, which meant quite simply, ‘work’ and the Homoerectus of the time certainly worked for the creator gods from the sky.”

“This is all very interesting Dr. Humaz but it leaves “star wars” in the shade.”

The doctor frowned deeply. “Joab, because of the way they have all been brainwashed the Anunnaki presence may baffle historians, their language may confuse linguists and their advanced techniques may totally bewilder scientists, but to dismiss them is downright foolish.”

“Okay, assuming all this is correct and these people really existed what’s that got to do with us today?”

“That is the most crucial aspect to all this and will be revealed to you in good time.”

“Doctor, I’m not here to play riddles. If you have a story to tell then tell me because quite honestly this doesn’t seem to be going anywhere.”

Dr Humaz turned on his guest. "I assure you I'm not toying with you. However what I have to impart, if the information got into the wrong hands, would mean a death sentence for me and other colleagues who helped compile these findings. For years we have had to work in secret to gather this information. So do you really think I would impart the crux of this to a stranger such as yourself? If you want this story you are going to show me your commitment in getting it to the right sources.”

Taken aback by this verbal onslaught, Joab gathering his wits, responded, “You’re absolutely serious aren’t you. I never realised this history lesson was so potentially dangerous.”

Mollified, The doctor said, “Let me explain something of the gravity of this. If this information became common knowledge it would totally unbalance your Western status quo. Do you think your fundamentalist Christian governments would take such a threat lying down?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Do you now why I chose your High Light for this task?”

“No, you never mentioned it.”

“It’s because, from some of the articles I have read, you don’t publish sensational conspiracy theories but you do seek to uncover truth. If you lived here in Iraq my friend you would know just how difficult and dangerous it is to expose the lies. The question is will you help me to let the world know what is actually going on here?”

“I, I think so, - yes.”

Smiling, the Iraqi responded, “Even if it puts you in potential danger as well?”

“I haven’t run from a story yet.”

“We are talking about the potential destabilisation of your governments and Western religion. It is not something to be taken lightly.”

“I understand that”, Joab answered, secretly worried about what he was getting himself into.

“Very well, now I suggest you go away and decide if you can dedicate yourself to this assignment. I will contact you tomorrow for your answer.”

As Agent Mason made his way back to his office another agent accosted him. “George, how are we supposed to build teams here, when many of our consignee agents that do take on sensitive overseas assignments are only willing to serve here on 30- to 90-day rotations?”

George Mason didn’t envy Frank Tate’s job. As head of personnel training in Iraq this revolving-door approach Tate referred to had undercut the agency’s ability to cultivate ties to warlords in Afghanistan as well as collecting intelligence on the Iraqi insurgencies in Baghdad.” Well we just have to do the best we can in less than perfect conditions Frank.”

“It’s just not good enough. How the heck am I supposed to train people to work out in that hell hole when there is such a shortage of Arabic speakers and qualified case officers willing to take dangerous assignments?”

“You know what. The boss and I were just discussing that very point.”

“Hell George, we are so short handed here that the agency has been forced to hire dozens - if not hundreds - of CIA retirees, for god’s sake. And we have to lean heavily on translators as well as using soldiers for tasks that our officers normally perform.”

“So what do you expect me to do about it Frank. Have a quick word with my namesake in the White-house?”

Leaving the disgruntled Frank, George made his way to the IT intelligence gathering centre. He was all too aware they were fighting an uphill battle. Even without the personnel challenges, Iraq and Afghanistan were seen as being so dangerous that it is difficult for agency officers to venture outside guarded districts and compounds without security details, making covert meetings with informants extremely difficult.

The call had been from Langley and Douglas Cane was not a happy man. His predecessor had been removed in December, following weeks of increasingly deadly and sophisticated attacks against U.S.-led coalition forces and civilian targets. The official line had been that it was a huge operation and the Company needed a very senior, very experienced person to run it The number of CIA personnel in Iraq exceeded some 500 people. The replacement of the station chief meant that the high-profile post had been held by three senior officers since Bush had declared an end to major combat in Iraq in May. And now the baton had been handed to Colonel Douglas Ulysses Cane, late of the U.S. marines. He quickly came to realise just how demanding the job of Baghdad station chief really was. His onerous task included briefing top U.S. officials in Iraq, providing frequent updates to Washington on the stability of the country, and overseeing all of the operations and analysis done in the nation.

The first of the three recent station chiefs had served at the Baghdad station before the Persian Gulf War in 1991. He went had gone there ostensibly to run operations from across the border before the invasion of the “Coalition of the Willing” was set up. He was fluent in Arabic as well as being 'extraordinarily experienced' in setting up and running large intelligence operations. His replacement had served as station chief in a neighbouring country and was to stay in Baghdad for at least a year. But he had been pushed out in December amid a combination of personnel problems and growing concern in Washington that the agency was failing to get an adequate grip on Iraqi insurgency. It had been speculated that the officer might have angered officials in the Bush administration with a pessimistic report he produced in November saying that a growing number of Iraqis believed the US coalition could be defeated. But the US officially denied that the report, which was quickly leaked to the media that played a major role in his ousting. Douglas’ CV stated that he, the current station chief, was a highly regarded officer 'who rose rather meteorically' during operations in Kosovo, the agency’s last major build-up of assets.

Mostly, Joab found the Ishtar Grand to be an excellent hotel, especially under the difficult circumstances in Baghdad. It was very conveniently located and extremely secure and safe. And sometimes the Internet worked. Joab took advantage of it and carried out research into what the web have to offer about the Anunnaki. And there was a great deal on offer, mostly repetition but sometimes a juicy morsel. Dr Humaz seemed of sound mind but some of the stuff he talked about Joab found hard to swallow. Joab considered himself as open minded as the next person but the whole 'aliens from other worlds visiting Earth thing, was something he'd never been able to get his head around.

Following a comfortable nights sleep Joab hopped into the shower, turned the water on and immediately hopped out again. There was no hot water. After a quick cold shower he went down to breakfast. The omelette station was unattended at breakfast, which meant he had no one to complain to about the cold buffet. The day was warming up so Joab decided to take a stroll to a local cafe and a hot breakfast.

George Mason was on surveillance outside The Grand Ishtar, wating for the reporter to emerge. He had waited in the hot car for over an hour being seeing the English guy leave the hotel. As the reporter was walking George left his car and followed him on foot. His quarry stopped at a small coffee shop for breakfast.

As Joab sat down at one of the empty tables, a waiter was soon at his side taking his order for a lamb kebab and strong coffee.

George Mason, wearing a Press Association badge, approached him. "You look like one of the press guys. Mind if I share your table."

Joab eyed the guy and had him pegged as a Yankee hack. "Sure. It's a free country."

"Only since we kicked Saddam's ass,"

Joab questioned such jingoistic logic but kept quiet.

George then said, "Us press guys have got to be mad working in this hell."

"So which rag do you work for?" Joab asked, just as his breakfast arrived.

George ordered coffee. Then, addressing Joab, he answered, "One of the nationals. So who do you work for?"

"High Light mag. Have you heard of it?"

"Can't say I have. What kind of things do you write about?"

"You'll just have to buy a copy and find out," Joab said, smiling.

"Hey, don't be secretive man. I'll tell you my angle if you spill the beans on yours."

"Okay, it's a deal."

"Well my paper has me on a special assignment to look at what we Yanks are really after here."

"Which is?"

"Have you ever heard of the term Gizatrug?" Mason asked, looking for a glint of recognition in Joab's eyes.

"No. Should I have? So what does it mean?"

Ignoring the question the bogus reporter asked, "So what's your story?"

“Oh! It’s just a kooky new age story about the Sumerian stuff. Pretty light weight really.”

“Yeah, but the Sumerian stuff is interesting. Have you read any of Sitchin’s works on the subject?”

“Not really. No.”

After finishing their coffees, just before they went their separate ways, George handed Joab a fake card with a genuine phone number on it. He said, “I got to go now. If you need any help with your research I’ve got good contacts. So just let me know.”

Douglas Cane reckoned he had more obstacles to overcome than a steeplechaser. The latest one involved under resourced intelligence gathering, which was caused by the fact that many of the CIA's employees had been based at secure compounds at the airport in Baghdad. His intelligence pool had been further whittled down as other operatives were working in the so-called Green Zone, the heavily fortified area in central Baghdad around the headquarters for the Coalition Provisional Authority. There were also smaller offices, known as bases, in Basra, Mosul and other parts of the country. Cane found himself arguing with Langley over the agency's mission and priorities, saying that the CIA had been drawn too much into troop-protection work ordinarily carried out by the military themselves. As a result, he was greatly concerned that the agency hadn't been able to concentrate on recruiting the spies that will be needed as crucial sources of information for years to come, since sovereignty was transferred from US hands. He received the normal platitudes but he had at least had his concerns noted.

Apart from all his other duties Douglas was also in charge of setting up a new Iraqi intelligence service, drawing at least in part on former members of Hussein's Mukhabarat. But although candidates were to be identified and vetted in Iraq, much of their training was to take place outside the country, in Jordan or Egypt. However, the main problem confronting the Baghdad station was security constraints inhibiting the ability of operatives to move about the country. Increasing random violence made it harder for people to do their jobs.

Joab never gave the meeting too much thought. The American was just another lonely journo trying to show off. When he returned to the lobby of the Grand Ishtar a message with a crude map attached awaited him. It was, not surprisingly, from Dr. Hamuz, who, it turned out, had set up a rendezvous to meet Joab. After quickly changing into some fresh clothes Joab took his map and began following the route the Iraqi scientist had provided him with. Out in the scorching day Joab had to run the gauntlet of desperate Iraqi kids trying to sell cigarettes and other merchandise in order to survive. As he walked on trying to ignore them an American armoured vehicle came around the corner and most of the street urchins disappeared. The troops weren't very kind to these kids, either ripping them off or scaring the hell out of them.

On a previous assignment from High Light Joab had done a freelance report on American morale in Baghdad and had discovered a combination of things eating away at the minds of the troops, as they pulled duty in the scalding Iraqi heat. The increased spate of attacks had certainly raised alert levels across the country, but most soldiers in Iraq who had been there for over a year, having played critical front-line roles during the war, now had to cope with the new stress of policing. Joab had also discovered another remarkable thing when he spoke to troops that had been there long-term. They were tired - the kind of psychological tiredness that accompanies taking part, surviving, and conquering in war, and the capture of Baghdad; then watching that euphoria dissipate as their go-home date has been extended time and time again. Many troops were concerned about how they would cope when they returned to the US, and were worried that their victory will be tarnished with the mismanagement of the post-war phase. As an occupation force, they were the only game in town, and as such got blamed for much that went wrong. So although it is unfortunate that they should take out their frustrations on, what they consider to be, fair game Iraqis, their response was not at all surprising.

What had once been a booming tourist industry had died in Iraq with the Gulf war in 1991. Placed out of bounds by UN sanctions, and the risk of being shot at by poverty-stricken looters or by US fighters maintaining the UN's no-fly zone, tourist attractions waned. Now a military zone, policed by the US and Iraq alike. it was no longer a civilised place.

Another assignment had taken Joab on the streets of Baghdad to get the views of everyday people. Of the English speaking interviewees the average Iraqi on the street believed the US would pull out before a lasting form of Democracy or an orderly government was established. The average Iraqi on the street said they remained unsure of US motives in their country. One police officer told Joab about this mismatch of expectations in that most Iraqis believed when the regime collapsed things wouldn't be much better for them. Many naive Iraqis had the vague idea that the Americans would drive up and park with the full American dream: a house, two-car garage, white picket fence and a dog. Instead, there was only one thing that Iraqis - nearly three months after the war could point to as an improvement since the fall of Saddam Hussein: freedom of speech.

Joab pondered these things as he made his way to the bombed out ruins of a mosque. Beyond this landmark he crossed the road and saw Dr Humaz sitting, reading the paper outside a coffee house. He stood up and greeted the reporter. "I'm so glad you were able to make it".

Joab ordered a coffee and, as they were in the shade, removed his hat. "Can we speak freely here?" He asked.

"That depends upon what you classify as freedom of speech," the doctor answered. Then he said, "When you've finished your coffee we are going for a drive."

"Oh really, where to?"

"I want you to meet a friend of mine."

"And who is this friend?"

"Someone very knowledgeable and who can help you with this assignment."

Concerned, Joab responded, "I thought this was just between you and me Dr. Humaz. It complicates things to get other people involved."

The Iraqi smiled, and then he asked, "Have you ever heard the word Gizatrug?"

The word made a connection in the journalist's mind "Yes, it's funny you should mention it. It came up in a conversation I had this morning, when the other reporter asked me the same question."

The Iraqi missed a breath. "What other reporter?"

Joab shrugged, "Just some journo I had coffee with. Why?"

Dr, Humaz quickly took out his mobile phone, dialled a number, said something in Iraqi, then he quickly ushered Joab to where a small car was parked.

"Where are we going?" Joab asked.

"To a safer place. Now, please get in the car."

"I don't understand."

"I will explain as we drive."

As the academic negotiated the busy Baghdad streets, Joab asked." What the hell is all this about?"

"He wasn't a reporter."

“And just how do you know that?”

“Because a reporter wouldn’t know about Gizatrug.”

“What the hell is this Gizatrug anyway?”

“I couldn’t tell you back there but it is a covert enclave of special people who are dedicated to bringing forth the truth.”

“And are you a member of this select group doctor?”

“It is a secret society, so the identity of members is not broadcast. Now we have to find you a safe place because you have been compromised.”

“Compromised - by whom?”

“That bogus reporter was a secret service agent, probably CIA. If I am correct they know where you live and that you have contact with the Gizatrug. Therefore we will set you up somewhere safe while we tell you what is going on.”

“What if you’re overreacting?”

“I hope that I am, but I don’t think so.”

“What about my stuff back at the hotel?”

“Don't worry Joab, I will have your things collected.”