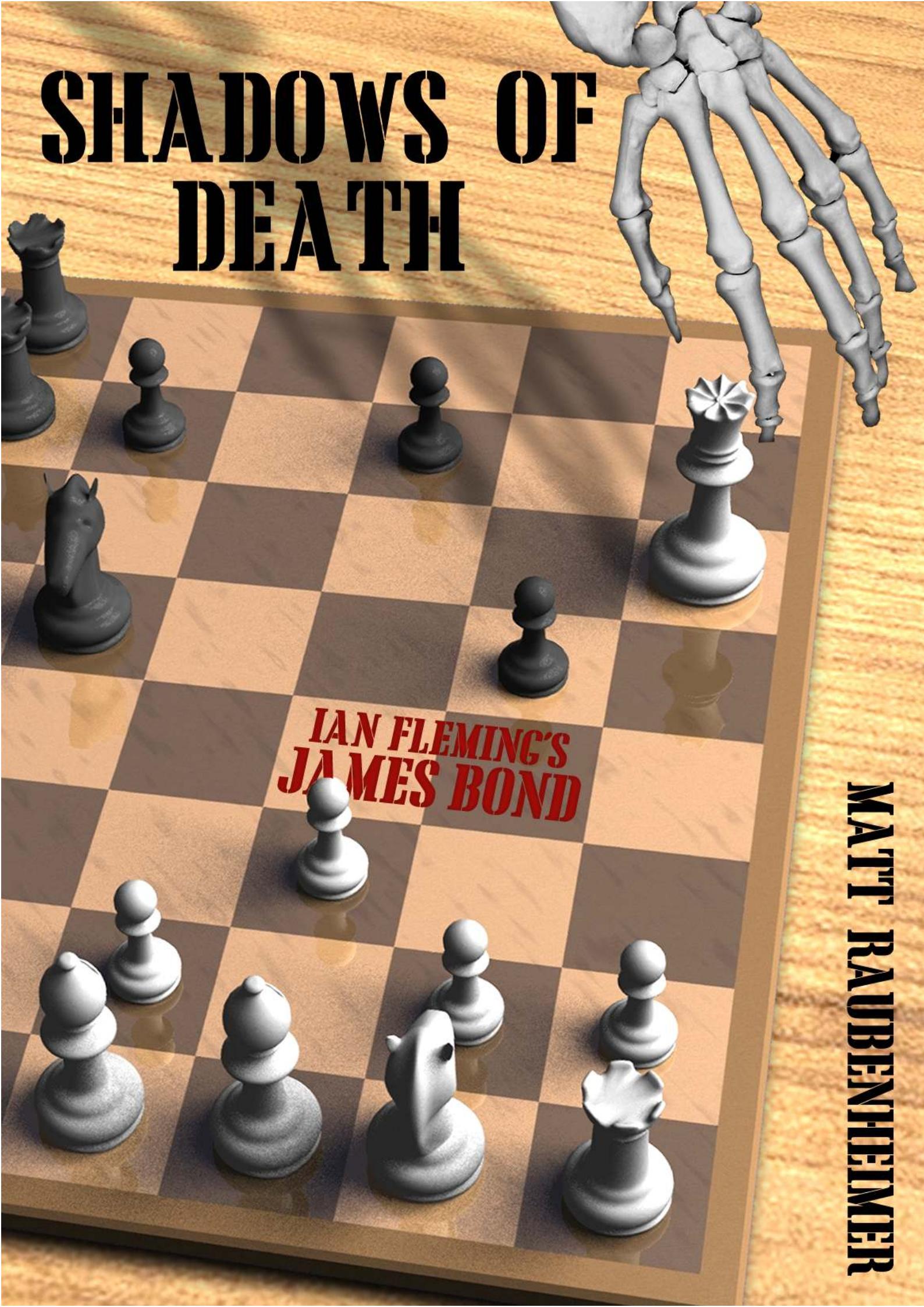


SHADOWS OF DEATH



IAN FLEMING'S
JAMES BOND

MATT RAUBENHEIMER

SHADOWS OF DEATH

A Collection of Short Stories

Ian Fleming's James Bond returns in five short stories by Matt Raubenheimer. From Italy, to Austria, Cuba, France and Croatia James Bond makes his mark.

In *Sidewinder*, Bond is up against a mafioso trading illegal arms with sinister forces who threaten Britain's armed forces.

In *Wienerblut*, Bond is in Vienna when he becomes involved in an outrageous web of crime and treachery.

While on leave in *A Chance to Die*, Bond reflects on the life and death of a secret agent.

Bond travels to Cuba to deal with a rogue British diplomat involved in the occult and selling government secrets. For some this may be a tough assignment, for Bond it is merely *Another Day's Work*.

In *The Queen's Pawn* Bond faces a deadly Irish assassin and a former member of SMERSH bent on the goals of his former employers - Smiert Spionam. Death to spies.

SHADOWS OF DEATH

A collection of short stories
by
MATT RAUBENHEIMER



GOLRUSH PUBLICATIONS

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All short stories originally published on Absolutely James Bond (www.ajb007.co.uk)

Sidewinder – first published July 2005

Wienerblut – first published March 2008

A Chance to Die – first published March 2008

Another Day's Work – first published January 2009

The Queen's Pawn – first published February 2006

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Author's Note

It has been six years since I first published a work of fan-fiction on www.ajb007.co.uk. In that time I have grown, not just as a Bond fan but hopefully also as a writer. When I wrote *Sidewinder*, I had never read an Ian Fleming James Bond novel. All I knew were the films, and when my eyes were opened to Mr Fleming's incredible novels, the passion to add my own chapters to the saga grew. This collection is the result – five tales which offer my own interpretation of Fleming's creation. From the cinematic, explosive style of *Sidewinder*, to the more literary and introspective *A Chance to Die* I feel each tale marks a point on my trajectory as a writer as well as a Bond fan. I look back on *Sidewinder* with a more than a few cringes, but hopefully we learn from our mistakes.

At the time of writing this, the Bond character has been around for 58 years. *Casino Royale* first appeared in 1953, and the world has never been the same since. Hopefully these stories honour the character and the legacy of Ian Fleming. Here's to many more Bond adventures to come, both literary and cinematic.

April 2011

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SIDEWINDER

Trieste Harbour, 21 December 2004, 23:55 Local Time

The moonlight shimmered off the rippled surface of the Adriatic Sea. It cast a light on the shady docks, exposing the many alleyways that looked over the harbour. Smoke from machinery created a shiny veil of mist over the quayside. A man wearing a wetsuit slipped silently into the dark water. He wore a facemask and carried a large oxygen tank on his back. Men walked along the dockside, but the frogman, went unnoticed as he swam towards a luxury yacht.

Silently, he made his way around to the stern of the vessel. The name, *Malachite* was painted on the back in gold and blue text. Some lights were on, on board the yacht. The sweeping shape of the bow gave it the look of a bullet. The water was extremely cold, and he could feel it even through the wetsuit. The water was dark and without a light he could see very little of the ship under the water. He swam around the propellers, and along the side of the craft. A ladder hung over the side of the yacht's bow, and he climbed up it, scrambling quickly over the deck. A wooden walkway led aft from the point where he had boarded. He heard voices from inside one of the cabins. They spoke in a mixture of Italian and bad English. Silently he padded along the deck, to where there were two large glass doors leading into a sumptuously furnished living area. There were brown leather sofas and the walls were covered in complex woodcarvings. There were also several portraits of a German Wehrmacht officer adorning the walls. The man looked towards a passage that led to the cabins. He heard the sound of a door closing

shut, and faint footfalls. A shadow began to grow along the white painted walls. The man produced a silver coloured Walther PPK from inside his wetsuit. He quietly made for the glass doors. Hiding behind the walls, he waited for the man to come into the large living room. Quietly he attached the silencer to his Walther. Two men entered the room; both wearing faded jeans and leather jackets.

“What’s the delay, huh? This town gives me the creeps. Too many cops about.” The one man said. He was clearly Italian judging by his accent.

“Yeah, the boss will know what’s going on.” His companion replied.

“I just hope he doesn’t take too long, man.”

The two men left the room, and the frogman came back in again. He made his way towards the cabin where the two had just come from. He crept, Walther in hand towards the cabin door. He swiftly pushed it open and quickly scanned the room. When he was certain that he was alone in the room, he reached into the inside pocket of his jacket, and produced some explosive. He pulled the button out of the side of his watch and stuck it into the block of explosive. He planted enough explosive to destroy the entire upper section of the yacht, but it wouldn’t sink it. The two men came back towards the room. The frogman dived into the cupboard and shut the door.

Fifteen minutes later, he was becoming impatient. He turned on the backlight on his watch. It was now twenty past midnight local time. The two Italians were on their bunks. They were talking to each other, and he didn’t know how long it would be until they went to sleep, if they did at all. The PPK had its silencer attached, so other people on board the yacht would not hear the shots. He crouched ready to pounce on the two Italians. He held his PPK in his right hand and was ready to push the cupboard door open with his left. The regulation pistol of MI6 was the Walther P99, but for this operation he chose the PPK, because it was smaller, and more

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streamlined than the P99, which was larger, but more powerful. The advantage of the PPK's shape was that it was easier to conceal than its larger cousin.

The two Italians were sipping coffee when the cupboard doors burst open and the man in the wetsuit appeared. He shot both in the head before they even knew what was going on. The man walked across to where the two corpses lay. Each of the Italian men had a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. "That coffee's a bit strong, I'd say." The frogman remarked as he went towards the door.

He checked to make sure that there was no-one else coming and he made his way back to the living room. He heard voices from a nearby room. He could just make out the words, "Is Dino on board?" one man said.

"Si." came the reply. "He's in his cabin."

These words encouraged him; he wanted Dino Ballasini on board when the explosives went off. He quietly made for the glass doors and crept out and over the side of the yacht, down the ladder and into the cold water. He silently propelled himself with his arms and legs back to the shore.

At twenty-five past midnight, he made it back to shore. He unzipped his wetsuit, revealing a dry, Brioni suit underneath. He walked towards a café on the dockside that was still open. He sat down at a table and ordered a cappuccino. He waited a few minutes and then reached for his watch, which was the remote detonator for the explosive. As was standard for MI6 watches, by rotating the bezel ninety degrees, he would set off the blast. He thought for a few moments about the men on board the yacht. "Ruthless thugs, they deserve what they're going to get." He then rotated the bezel, and an explosion rocked the harbour. The yacht was obviously loaded with explosive, because the luxury vessel exploded into a colossal fireball. The explosion lighted up the whole of Trieste harbour. The man sat back in his chair, satisfied with the evening's work.

He got up out of his chair after reflecting for a few moments.

The few people who were still in the café ran to the dockside in a frenzied panic. They flames that consumed the yacht grew high into the air, filling it with the smell of burnt oil and gunpowder. He walked down an alley towards where his car was waiting, a few blocks down. As he walked he felt very uneasy. His instincts told him to beware, but he carried on walking down the dimly lit street.

It took him a few minutes to reach his car, but he could still not shake off the feeling that he was being watched. The walk felt like two hours rather than a couple of minutes. The scene was quite spooky in the dimly lit street. It was the perfect place to be ambushed. Men could pop out of any of the many pitch-black alleyways and put a bullet in him. It felt like eyes in the darkness were watching him. His heartbeat quickened dramatically as he neared his Mercedes Benz saloon. He reached into his pocket for the key, and inserted it into the slot on the door. He heard a sound from inside one of the buildings across the street. There was a muffled thud, like something being knocked over in the dark, and birds exited the building through one of the top windows. He stood on the spot, frozen by his uneasy feeling. He decided that he'd be better off in his car, and began to climb in. Once he was half way into the car, a bullet smashed his skull and he fell to the ground, killed instantly.

2

SIS Headquarters, London, 22 December 2004, 09:55 GMT

When Bill Tanner arrived at his office at MI6 headquarters in London, he found M looking particularly nervous. She hated losing one of her agents, which Tanner could understand, but this was different. She was shaking, and looked particularly angry.

“You look terrible.” Tanner said. “Don’t you want to go home

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for the day?"

"No thank you Mr. Tanner." she said. "I'm quite all right."

"It doesn't look like it, M" Tanner said to her, clearly seeing something was very wrong.

"Did you know that 004 was killed in the early hours of this morning on a mission in Trieste?"

"Yes, I was called by Moneypenny this morning. She told me."

James Bond and Robinson walked into M's office fifteen minutes later. The two greeted M and Tanner, before the Chief of Staff started his brief. "Right, now that we're all here," Tanner glanced at Bond, who was notorious for arriving late. "004 was killed early this morning in Trieste. Bond and Robinson were taken aback by the news. Bond looked especially grim, as he had worked with 004 on several assignments. "He was tracking down an Italian gang boss called Mario Ballasini."

"The Sidewinder?" Bond asked.

"The same." M said.

Tanner continued, "We've suspected him for being involved in some serious arms smuggling. Getting high tech weapons to arm his gang, as well as to sell to various militia and armies."

"Has he made any sales?" Bond asked.

"As yet we haven't heard of any big orders." Tanner said.

M interrupted, "But he has been in negotiation with the Iraqis, and several high ranked Iraqi officers were in Trieste, dealing with Mario's brother Dino."

"Whom 004 put out of action, as well as the crew of his yacht, the *Malachite*." Tanner told Bond.

"When was this?" Bond asked.

"This morning." Tanner answered "A few minutes before 004 was killed." Bond stood in the office, surrounded by silence as all four gathered their thoughts about the events that had just been reported.

"Now, about this Sidewinder. Ballasini has a huge empire

covering the whole of Italy, from Trieste, to Naples to Sicily. He's also been found to be involved in heroin and diamonds." Tanner said.

"I'm sending you to Trieste," M told Bond. "Moneypenny has made the arrangements. You'll have to tread carefully, 007. We haven't got a photograph on file, and we have no idea where he is. His thugs are distributed in every major city in Italy, and you can't trust anyone. He has enough money to tempt even the most honest of people, as I suspect 004 found out." M warned 007.

"One point that may help you, 007. This Mario Ballasini drives a red Ferrari 355." Robinson told Bond.

"I'm sure there aren't too many red Ferraris in Italy, Charles." Bond said sarcastically.

"That is beside the point, 007." Tanner said. "You need to get to the bottom of this arms scheme before the Iraqis can make a deal with Ballasini." Tanner handed Bond a photograph of a young girl. "She was seen with Dino on the night on which 004 killed him. She was not on the yacht. Our contact in Trieste said she was seen going back to a hotel in the city. He'll fill you in when you arrive."

"You can't afford to make any mistakes, 007, or you'll end up shot as well." M warned. "All right, that is all." She said. Robinson and Tanner left the office first, and as Bond was walking out the door she called him back. "I didn't want to say this in front of the other two, but 004 was my nephew."

"What?" 007 asked, shocked.

"She was my sister's only child. She raised him alone, and worked herself to the bone to send him to the finest schools and university. She doesn't know yet, and I don't want to tell her until you've apprehended the man who shot him."

"Why didn't you want Bill and Charles to here this?" Bond asked.

"Because I didn't want word to get out that I am getting you to pursue a personal vendetta on my behalf, 007. It could cost me my

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job!"

* * * *

Q was at work on a pair of sunglasses when James Bond walked into his office. "Ah, 007, there you are!" He said, looking slightly irritated.

"Keeping busy, Q.?" Bond asked.

"Very busy, thanks to you. It is an awful lot of work fixing my shattered creations, which you bring back from your jobs."

"Oh, terribly sorry, Quartermaster." James Bond apologised. His use of the more official term to describe the equipment officer highlighted the insincerity of Bond's apology.

"Now, lets get onto some new gear I've prepared for you." The two walked over to a table where a few items were laid out. "Now, hand me your wristwatch, please." Bond gave Q his Omega Seamaster watch. Q held it up to the light, and examined it closely. "Incredible!" Q remarked. "It's almost in pristine condition!" Q looked impressed, and Bond allowed himself a smile. "However, I'm replacing it with this Omega Speedmaster." Q gave 007 the new watch. It had a bigger face than the previous Omega, but had several stopwatch dials in the face. It had a stainless steel strap and the face was coloured black. "I think you've met your match with this timepiece, 007. It has several rather nifty features."

"And what about all the usual refinements?" Bond interrupted.

"Just listen to me, 007. Note three buttons on the right hand side of the watch. The top button controls a bug detector. If there are any bugs, the seconds hand on your watch points towards them like a compass needle. Now, the hours dial on the stopwatch shows the proximity of the bug. When it is at 0, the bug is within two centimetres. At 2, it is two metres away and so on."

"Very useful Q, gives a man some privacy after hours." Bond

said.

“Really 007, I produce high tech covert equipment for you and all you can think about is your sordid love life. But let’s move on. The bottom button comes out, and is a tracking device. Now, it works on the same principle as the bug detector. The minutes hand on the stopwatch, points in the direction of the person it’s tracking, and I have put a small LED in the bezel. By pressing the middle button you activate it. The frequency of the flashes from the LED shows you the proximity of the tracking device. When you are within about fifty metres of the tracker, it flashes about once every second.”

“Excellent.” Bond said, looking slightly bored of Q’s lecturing.

Q produced a PDA. “Now, 007. This device has a GPS system built into it. It is also compatible with your watch’s tracking device. It shows a readout accurate to about two feet, of where the subject being tracked is.”

“Wonderful, anything else?”

“Oh, only a couple more items, 007. Won’t take more than half an hour.” Bond hoped that Q was joking. “Now, by inserting your pistol into this case, you make it invisible to metal detectors.” Q handed Bond a sheath for his pistol. “It is made of a dense mixture of rubber and carbon fibre, which absorbs the signal from the metal detector rather than reflecting them back.”

“Ingenious.” 007 remarked again.

“Now, your attaché case. I’ve built in a special feature. The handle has a 100 000 volt security system. It is activated by these sunglasses.” Q gave 007 the sunglasses that he was working on when Bond came in. “Twist the strap 90 degrees, and it shocks whoever is carrying it.”

“Thank you Q, now I’ve got a plane to catch, so I can’t hang around.”

“Just make sure you look after this equipment, 007. It cost the British taxpayer an awful lot of money to make.”

“Don’t worry, Q. I’ll bring this stuff back without a scratch,

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guaranteed.” Q shook his head and Bond left the room.

3

Trieste, 22 December 2004, 16:00 Local Time

The architecture in Trieste reflected the city's past. It was a complex mixture of Italian and Austro-Hungarian styles. The streets were lined with cafés and restaurants. The taxi dropped James Bond at the Miramare Castle. Moneypenny had arranged for the Italian contact to meet 007 here. He walked into the castle and in the entrance a man wearing a Brioni suit; similar to the one Bond was wearing. The man walked up to 007. “What is the time?” he asked.

“Time for afternoon tea.” Bond replied. That was the arranged password.

“Welcome to Trieste, Mr. Bond. My name is Sergio Fellini. I will be assisting you on your mission.”

“Well, thank you. Where do we go from here?”

“You have been booked into the Excelsior Hotel. That is where Miss Rosi is.”

“Who?” Bond asked.

“The young lady who was seen with Mr Ballasini. She was followed to the hotel room, and she has not left since Dino was killed.”

The drive from the castle to the hotel was only a few minutes. The hotel was situated right next to the harbour. The sun was setting over the water, creating an immensely beautiful scene. The sails of yachts poked the red sky, and the smell of the sea wafted up through the streets and alleys.

Bond's hotel suite was pretentiously decorated with huge chandeliers, extensive sculptures on the walls, and paintings that depicted events in the history of Trieste. It had a large balcony with a view over the harbour, as well as a huge bedroom. Bond gave the

porter a generous tip and then sat down on one of the large settees.

A few minutes later Fellini joined him. "Okay, Mr. Bond. Miss Rosi is in suite 172. Do you want to meet her?"

"Yes, arrange it for me would you? Meanwhile, how about a drink in the bar?"

"Of course." The two men went down in the elevator, into the lobby, where a restaurant, bar and a small casino was situated. Bond and Fellini occupied a table, and ordered drinks. "Vodka Martini. Shaken please." Bond said.

"I'll have the same, thanks Marco." Fellini said.

"Do you know him?" Bond asked.

"Yes, he is one our agents." Fellini whispered. The drinks arrived and they talked about the job at hand.

"There are several Iraqis in town, I have been monitoring them for a few days now. They met with Dino on the night on which your man destroyed the *Malachite*."

"Where are they now?" Bond asked.

"Staying at another hotel. It's on the other side of town. The *Hotel Greif Maria Theresia*."

"I'll have to do a recce around there tonight. After I've met Miss Rosi, of course." 007 told Fellini. Bond looked towards the stairs coming from the rest of the hotel. An extremely beautiful woman walked down the stairs. She wore a shimmering blue dress, and lots of jewellery. She made her way past the bar, towards one of the gambling tables.

"Now that's something, Sergio!" Bond said to Fellini.

"Oh my god!" the Italian agent replied. "It's Miss Rosi." The woman sat gracefully at a table with several other people playing baccarat. "It's the first time that she's been out of her suite since two nights ago." The two men sat at their table whilst watching the proceedings at the table from a distance. After a few minutes Bond got up and moved slowly towards the table. There was a vacant seat on the lady's left hand side, so Bond sat down.

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“Mind if I join you?” he asked.

“Not at all.” Rosi replied.

The game carried on for about fifteen minutes before Bond asked her, “Been a bit bored all alone in your suite Miss Rosi?” The lady turned to him, looking shocked and worried. “Don’t look so worried.” He said, trying to avoid making a scene at the table. Rosi still said nothing. “Well, it looks as though the excitement of the game is getting to you. Why don’t you join me for a nice quiet drink?” Rosi was hesitant to accept Bond’s invitation. “I promise it won’t do you any harm.” Bond tried again to convince her.

Eventually she agreed, “Okay, if you tell me your name.”

“Bond, James Bond.” He announced as they left the table. “I hear you had a bit of a fright two nights ago.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She said to Bond, although she didn’t convince him.

“Anyway,” Bond continued, “What’ll you have to drink?”

“Tequila,” she said. “And you?”

“Vodka Martini.” Bond answered. “Shaken, not stirred.”

They ordered the drinks and moved over to a table. Miss Rosi was very concerned that this James Bond knew so much about her. She felt very uneasy with him. How did he know she had stayed in her hotel suite for the last two days? Was he spying on her? The two made light conversation about the weather, and the architecture for a few minutes, until Miss Rosi had the courage to ask, “What do you want with me, Mr. Bond?”

“Would you be heartbroken if I said information?” Bond asked, unsure of the response he would get. She looked even uneasier now, and Bond could see a frightened sweat appearing on her forehead.

“Are you a cop?” she asked.

“No.” Bond replied, “But why don’t we go and discuss this matter somewhere a little more private? There is a chilled bottle of Bollinger in my suite. We could talk about things quietly and

peacefully, without being disturbed.

* * * *

Bond and Rosi walked out onto the balcony of 007's suite. "It's beautiful." Rosi said as she looked out over the black waters of the harbour. The gutted hull of the *Malachite* was still there.

"What connection did you have to Dino Ballasini?" Bond asked, not wanting to waste more time. It was already ten o'clock, and he still wanted to pay the Iraqi generals a visit.

"I don't know who you're talking about." She said.

Bond grabbed her arm and squeezed it hard. "You're lying!" he said sternly. He tightened his grip until she eventually pleaded to him to stop.

"I'll tell you everything if you tell me who you're working for." Bond thought about her proposition. He was reluctant to reveal his mission to her. He could not know if she was working for the enemy or not. He detected fear in her, and this led him to believe that she was not in league with 'The Sidewinder', Mario Ballasini. His instinct told him to trust her. Bond had always relied on his instincts throughout his career as an agent of Her Majesty's Secret Service.

Eventually he decided to tell her; "I work for the British Government." It was a standard reply he had used many times before. "The more you tell me, the better I can protect you." Bond thought that this would be the best way to approach her as she was obviously frightened and Bond thought that she would do anything for protection.

The girl gave in to him. "I was Dino's girlfriend, but I hated him. He was a very violent man and he beat me often. There was nothing I could do, because he had so many thugs that if I displeased him they would kill me. That's why I stayed in my suite. I was worried that they might come after me when Dino was killed."

"Then why did you come out tonight?" Bond asked.

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“I was so bored, James. I had dreamed about meeting a man like you, a real man, not like Dino and his impotent henchmen. They walk around like they own the world, but they are cowards. They obey orders only out of fear, and that’s what makes them seem big and tough.”

“Well, I hope that I don’t disappoint you?” Bond said. Antonia leaned towards him and wrapped her arms around him. She gently kissed him, but he was still trying to get information. “Does ‘The Sidewinder’ mean anything to you.” He asked.

Antonia looked disappointed, but answered anyway. “Yes! That is Dino’s elder brother, Mario. Dino always called him ‘Big M.’” Bond was happy that Rosi was starting to tell her story. Bond could tell that she was telling the truth. She was a totally innocent young girl, just mixed up with the wrong people.

“Have you heard anything about Iraqi generals in town?” Bond asked, hoping that she would have further clues about them.

“Yes, I saw three of them on the *Malachite* on the night on which it was destroyed. Dino displayed me like a trophy to them. I felt so helpless, because they looked so cruel and ruthless. Even more so than Dino, who would have killed me if I had done anything against him, especially in front of these men.”

“Do you know where they’re staying?”

“Yes. They are at the *Hotel Greif Maria Theresia* in the old section of town, away from the harbour.” Her story matched Fellini’s, so Bond was satisfied.

Bond smiled at her, and asked “What was it you were trying to tell me earlier?”

The girl smiled back at him, and began to kiss him again. “I don’t know about you but I’ve had a long day.” Bond said as he took the straps of the young girl’s dress off her shoulder and let the dress slip off.

* * * *

The city of Trieste was divided into two fairly distinct sections. The old section of the city is on the lower slopes of San Giusto hill, and the modern section fronts on to the harbour. The old section was dimly lit. The old fashioned housing style created a mysterious and intriguing mood in the streets.

James Bond was driving a Saab 93 belonging to Fellini. The *Hotel Greif Maria Theresia* was a refurbished nineteenth century villa located deep in the old section of Trieste. The streets were pretty much deserted except for the occasional car parked on the side of the road. Bond felt like he seemed out of place driving through the streets at midnight when nobody else was. He didn't want to draw attention to himself. He was armed with a Walther P99 in Q's special sheath. His black attaché case was on the passengers seat beside him. He had left Rosi asleep in his hotel suite. He left via a secret exit that Fellini had shown him earlier that day. A few blocks down the road; Bond saw the old villa on the right hand side of the road. It was surrounded by very well kept gardens, which were full of green plants despite it being winter. He pulled into the hotel's driveway. He got out and picked up his case. Hoping that he would not be seen and questioned, he made his way to a less used side entrance.

The lobby of the hotel was decorated with Crimson coloured carpets. There were numerous paintings on the wall, and luckily nobody at the reception desk. He briskly walked over to the elevator and made for the top floor. According to Fellini's information, the Iraqi generals were staying in Suite 37, one floor from the top. There was no movement whatsoever in the hotel. When he reached the top floor, 007 began preparing his method of reaching the generals in order to plant a sensitive microphone so that he would be able to listen to their conversations.

Inside Bond's attaché case, was a black kernmantel rope. He attached this to a mechanical repelling device, which was hooked to the curtain rail of the window on the top floor's landing. He

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strapped a small harness around himself, and began to climb out of the window. He had used this technique before, although last time he did it was to plant plastic explosive on an armoured glass window. A small control on his wrist regulated the speed at which he went down the wall. His feet made contact with the window ledge, almost without any noise. Bond was very satisfied. He slowly slid the window open, making sure that he made no noise whatsoever. He placed the bug on the inside of the window. Fellini had provided him with some fast working adhesive to stick the bug to the window frame.

007 gently stepped away from the window ledge, and pulled a lever on the controller for the rappelling device. Fellini's brilliant gadget pulled 007 up the wall of the hotel, and back to the window where he had exited the building. He put all of the kit back in his case, and went back down in the elevator. "Brilliant, this Italian Hospitality!" Bond said as he stepped outside.

4

When Antonia Rossi woke up, she found herself alone in James Bond's bed. She heard the shower running, James was obviously in it. She lay there for a few minutes, feeling the soft kiss of the sheets on her bare skin. She was thinking about her encounter with the Englishman. He had asked her lots of questions about her late boyfriend, Dino Ballasini, and his brother, Mario, also known as 'The Sidewinder'.

A few minutes later, Bond walked out of the bathroom, looking very refreshed, and wearing a towel as he walked over to the dressing room. When he came back he was dressed in black trousers and a light blue cotton shirt. "Are you ready for breakfast?" Bond asked.

"I don't want to leave the room. I'm scared, James."

“Fine. But don’t get up to any mischief.” Bond joked.

He met Fellini in a café next to the harbour. They sat at a table, from which the view of the gutted *Malachite* was clearly visible. They ordered light breakfasts and then got talking about Bond’s visit to the Iraqi’s hotel.

“We’ve been listening in on the bug, but it seems the general’s are not awake yet.” Fellini told 007. “After breakfast, you should come down to our office, and see what’s happening for yourself.

“Good.” Bond said. “I think we’re making progress on this case.”

* * * * *

Sergio Fellini’s office was full of filing cabinets. There was a leather topped desk and several bookshelves. Fellini had a radio on his desk, which was listening in on the bug. He turned up the volume for 007 to be able to hear. Two voices were talking, clearly both Iraqi.

“Where are the weapons now?” one of the voices asked. “I want them delivered so that we can go back. That bombing is attracting all kinds of cops to this town.”

“They’re on the *Giulia*. Mario will deliver when the time is right.”

“No, Hassan. We must go to him. This waiting is killing me. For two days we’ve been unable to leave this confounded room.”

Bond was intrigued by this conversation, he was sure this would lead them straight to wherever Ballasini was hiding. “What is the *Giulia*?” Bond asked.

“It is a cargo ship belonging to a large Italian freight company, Vesuvius Shipping. It is based in Naples.”

“Is the *Giulia* in Naples?” Bond asked.

“It could be, but we must check that up for you. Give us a few hours and we will let you know. In the meantime may I suggest

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seeing the sights of Trieste?"

"That would be great, but there's a little something in my hotel suite which is more than capable of keeping me satisfied for a few hours."

Fellini laughed. "My dear Bond, when will you learn to keep focused while you're on a mission?"

* * * *

Antonia was lying on the bed reading a magazine when Bond entered the room. "You bored?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. "You have left me here, alone for nearly two hours, James."

"Dreadfully sorry." James said. "But Fellini's got a useful lead from the bug I planted in the Iraqi generals' hotel suite."

"How did you manage that, James?"

"Oh, just skill." Bond said. "Maybe I should show you sometime!"

Antonia smiled at Bond. She was now much happier, since she had found an ally that was also against the Ballasinis.

"What can you tell me about the *Giulia*?" 007 asked.

"It's Mario's freight ship that he uses to transport cargo in. When Dino met the generals on board the *Malachite* I overheard them talking about it. Dino was going to take them in the yacht to Naples to meet Mario, and hand over some weapons to them."

"Thanks, Antonia, you've been a great help." Bond kissed her and asked, "Are you sure you won't come downstairs for a drink?"

"No thank you, James. Mario's men are there, James, I saw them last night. They were at the baccarat table. That's why I was so willing to co-operate with you, James!" She laughed quietly. "I just wanted to get out of there."

"Oh, well." Bond said. "And I thought it was my overwhelming charm."

* * * *

The restaurant in the Excelsior hotel was full, as was usual for two nights before Christmas. Fellini and Bond sat near one of the walls of the Restaurant. Fellini said to Bond, “See those two men on the other side of the restaurant, they’re Ballasini’s men.”

“Well, Sergio, don’t you think we should move closer and listen to what they’re saying.”

“No need to worry about that, James.” Fellini reassured him “Our agent, Marco, the bartender has all the tables bugged.”

Bond pushed his sleeve up, and looked at his watch’s second and hour hands. The seconds hand was pointing at the saltcellar in the middle of the table, and the hours hand was at zero. “How right you are, Fellini.” Bond said.

For about half an hour Bond and Fellini went through Vodka Martinis. By seven o’clock the two Italian men had left the table. Fellini and Bond went to the back of the bar, where Marco was waiting to play back their conversation. The first fifteen minutes were random conversation, but after about twenty minutes the topic of conversation switched to Antonia Rosi. “She’s obviously scared, she hasn’t come out of her room since she saw us last night.” One of the men said.

“Si, she is being careful, but she has the Englishman protecting him.”

“Do you know who the Englishman is, Vincenzo?”

“No, who?”

“James Bond, British agent 007, with a licence to kill!”

“Really?” he asked, sounding shocked and surprised. “What are we supposed to do now?”

“That is easy, my friend. Do you know what James Bond’s fatal weakness is?”

“No.”

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“A beautiful women.”

“That girl!”

“Si, Vincenzo, that girl. She is the key to Mr. Bond’s undoing. If we get rid of the girl, we will make him very angry, and he will try and find us, so we will let him come, but lay an ambush for him, just like we did for the last one.” Bond took it that they were talking his colleague, 004. The conversation was certainly getting interesting.

“How do you know this?”

“Mario told me.” The man said. “This James Bond is quite well known to him. Although Mario doesn’t know what he looks like. I only found out when I heard him talking to that Rossi girl last night.”

“When do we get her, then?” Vincenzo asked.

“That is easy, my friend. Look across the room.”

“Oh my God, there he is.”

“Right, so he left the girl in his room, so now is the time to strike. We go and get her and then Mr. Bond will an easy target.”

“My God!” Bond said loudly, as he looked at his Omega. It was over twenty minutes since the men left the restaurant. Bond ran out of the restaurant, and towards the elevator. It could not seem to go fast enough for Bond. Although he was pretty certain that the job would have been finished by now, he just hung on to the hope that they were like so many other villains that he had come across in his career, who spent long amounts of time taunting their victims before killing them.

The door was slightly open and Bond felt his heart sink. He pulled out his P99, and pushed it open wide enough to let himself in. As he did this, he noticed some blood on the door handle. The main living room of the suite was a shambles; the men had obviously had to fight to subdue Antonia. Drops of blood on the carpet led to the bathroom. Antonia had obviously dashed to the bathroom and locked herself in, because the lock on the door was shattered, clearly by the two Italian men barging their way in. As he

entered the bathroom, he saw Antonia lying on the floor, with her silk nightdress, ripped to shreds, leaving her half-naked. Her chest had two bullet wounds, which had pierced her lungs. Left on the floor was a Beretta Model 92 pistol, and written on the wall of the bathroom, with Antonia's blood, was the word 'SIDEWINDER'.

"The writing's on the wall." Bond said to himself. He often used light humour to suppress his feelings, because he feared that any remorse or sadness would be detrimental to his work. Fellini caught up with him, and entered the room. He found Bond standing over the body in the bathroom.

"James!" he said. Bond was silent. "I'm very sorry
"We need to get to Naples." Bond said.

5

Naples, 24 December 2004, 08:00 GMT

James Bond arrived in Naples early in the morning. He had driven throughout the night to get there. With him was Italian agent Sergio Fellini. The harbour dominated the view from the Saab, and Mount Vesuvius loomed in the background of the scene. The sky was overcast, and the buildings all had an unwelcoming look about them. Bond had been in Naples in summer, but it looked threatening without the bright blueness from the sky and sea. Instead the scene was grey, which made the old buildings look quite drab. Bond looked out over the harbour. He saw several large cargo vessels.

"You see that large grey coloured ship out there in the sea, Mr Bond?" Fellini asked. "It is the *Giulia*."

007 saw it anchored about two miles out to sea. "Looks like quite a ship." Bond said. The ship was very large, obviously able to

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transport large quantities of arms around the world. “The arms are probably stored well down below, so that when inspected it appears that it is just carrying ordinary cargo.”

“Our agents have inspected it, it appears to be carrying machinery manufactured by Ballasini’s plant here in town.”

“We must check the plant out, Sergio.” Bond said.

“We’ve organised an appointment for you with Ballasini. You’re posing as an employee of a construction company, looking for a machinery supplier.”

“Construction?” Bond asked. “You ought to know that it is not my talent.”

“From what I have heard, most certainly not.”

* * * *

Mario Ballasini’s plant was situated next to the seaport. It looked like any of the other factories in Naples. It was painted blue, and had the large letters, ‘Vesuvius’ painted on the huge front doors. By now it was eleven o’clock. Bond knew that time was short. He had guessed that Ballasini would probably want to ship the weapons out on Christmas when there would be a minimal number of people at the harbour who could delay his operation.

Bond parked the Saab in the main parking area at the plant. He wore a charcoal coloured Brioni suit, a blue shirt and a striped tie. At the door, a security guard approached him. “Can I help you?” he asked, in a deep, menacing voice.

“Yes, I am Boldman. James Boldman, from the Transworld Consortium. I’m here to see Mario Ballasini.” Bond had used this alias several times before.

“Follow me please.” The security guard said. The entrance narrowed into a passage with a flight of stairs at the end. The stairs were bare metal, and the whole place had a chilly feel about it. The main area of the warehouse was a mass of stacked crates and boxes.

Bond assumed that they contained weapons.

After a few minutes of walking, the two reached what looked like a makeshift office consisting of a few pieces of sheet metal bolted together. A sign reading ‘Mario Ballasini – Director’ was nailed to the door. The security man knocked three times on the door. A harsh voice barked, “Come in!”

“Mr James Boldman to see you, boss.” The Italian security guard announced. Mario Ballasini was exactly what 007 had expected. He got up from his chair, and strode across the floor to Bond. He was missing a finger on his left hand, and had a huge scar across his face. He wore an expensive dark blue suit, and a white shirt. He had a distinctly menacing air about him, like many of the villainous men that James Bond had met previously in his career.

“Ah, Mr. Boldman.” He said, with an evil looking grin that accentuated the features of his pockmarked face. “You are interested in machinery?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact I am.” Bond said, while looking about the room. It was not unusual for a man in Ballasini’s position to have camera’s hidden in an office such as this one. There were several points that looked suspicious. Mirrors were a good place, and one hung in the office. It is possible for there to be one-way glass, and a camera mounted behind it. Bond avoided looking towards any potential camera hiding points in case the men who had killed Antonia had sent Mario a photograph allowing him to identify Bond.

“So, you are from England.” Ballasini said. “Why do you come to Naples to look for a machinery supplier?”

“Our present chap has been rather a disappointment. Failed to make dates, and you were recommended by one of our Italian contacts.”

“I see.” Ballasini said. “Your story sounds suspicious to me, Mr. Boldman. Many people have tried to become involved in my affairs. They are all dead.” Mario sat down behind his desk, and typed something into his computer. The keyboard was concealed under the

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desk. Bond realised that his fears were right. Mario did have a hidden camera in his office.

Bond broke the silence in the office by saying, “I don’t quite follow, Mr. Ballasini.”

“Oh, I believe you do, Mr. Bond.”

Bond was surprised that he had been identified so quickly. He played for time by saying, “You mean Boldman.”

“No, 007, I do not mean Boldman. We are not as poorly stocked with information as you might think, Mr. Bond. I believe that you are well acquainted with my friend Sergio Fellini?”

“Fellini?” Bond asked, shocked.

“Yes, my dear Bond, your Italian friend Fellini.”

“So, he’s been working for you all this time.”

“Oh no, Mr. Bond. He’s only recently joined my little organisation.” Ballasini let 007 think about his friend’s betrayal. “It’s amazing what five million will do to a man’s conscience!” Ballasini laughed.

“Okay, Mario.” Bond said. “Go on about your plans.”

“Not before you tell me what MI6 wants with me.” Ballasini said, trying to keep his front as a businessman.

“Come off it, Mario. We both know what I’m talking about.” The room was filled with silence after Bond had spoken. “The illegal arms dealing.”

Ballasini frowned in a way that made him look even more fierce than usual. “It seems that you know too much Mr. Bond, so I will have to exterminate you.”

“Surely not before you show me what you’re up to.” Bond said.

“No, Mr. Bond. This would give you a chance to escape or call for help. But, I’m afraid you are now beyond help. Hand me your attaché case.” Bond gave Mario the case, and the villain looked at it as though he expected it to have some kind of booby trap. His security searched Bond and removed his Walther P99. Ballasini removed Q’s sheath from the pistol. “And what may this be, Mr.

Bond?" he said, as he examined the gun's cover.

"An anti metal-detector sheath." Bond informed the Sidewinder, who looked fascinated at Bond's gadgetry.

"I'm afraid MI6's attempt to halt my operations has resulted in the death of two of its agents." As he said this he picked up the attaché case, and began to walk out of the room. As he did so, Bond produced his sunglasses, and twisted the strap ninety degrees. 100 000 volts of electricity surged through the Sidewinder's body, sending him whimpering to the floor. The security guard raised a Beretta in 007's direction. Quickly 007 kicked the pistol out of the Italian's hand. As he did so the pistol went off sending a bullet through the metal that made up the office's walls. The door was wide open and 007 ran for it. Out on the corridor was a crate of weapons. Bond picked up an Uzi submachine gun with which to fight his way out of the factory. Two men appeared from around a corner, but the fast-firing Uzi peppered them with bullets.

Bond ran down several flights of stairs. He tried to remember the way that he had come up. After about two minutes of running he found himself in a sort of cafeteria. With three tables and six chairs at each table. A man appeared in the doorway into the cafeteria, he didn't appear to be armed, but Bond didn't want to take any chances. Also wanting to conserve ammunition, Bond picked up one of the sharp knives off the table, and threw it at the man. The knife lodged in the muscle between two of the man's ribs, and he collapsed onto the floor.

Bond was certain that he had come the wrong way, so he turned around and made his way back the way he had come. Bond knew that he had not killed Ballasini, so he expected to come face to face with the Sidewinder any moment. He ran for another flight of stairs, which went down into what seemed to be a basement. It was another room full of crates. They all had the markings of 'Vesuvius Shipping, Naples' on them. Bond heard a large group of people running towards the room, so he hid behind one of the crates, Uzi at

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the ready. Bond felt the straps of his holster bite into his shoulders, as he tensed up. Luckily the men ran past. There were about ten, and they would have killed 007 before he was able to shoot all of them.

Bond waited a minute after the men had run past before making his move. There was a large corrugated iron door on the warehouse. He ran towards it and rolled it up. It led to a parking area. There were several large trucks, some loaded with crates, and some empty. There were also several off road vehicles and – Mario Ballasini's Ferrari 355 GTS. He ran to the red sports car and looked at the ignition key slot. Bond could not believe his luck that the key to the Ferrari was in the ignition. He jumped into the driver's seat, and turned it on. The huge V8 of the red beast growled like an untamed lion. Bond put the car into gear, and accelerated off out of the parking area. The tar seemed to go on forever, then Bond saw the exit, it had a boom gate across it and there was a man operating it. Obviously the guard thought that it was Ballasini and began to raise the boom. Bond stopped just before the gate, and looked at the Italian security guard. The man looked shocked. Bond said, "Thanks awfully old chap!" He raised the Uzi and shot the man. Several rounds impacted into the man's chest, and he fell over. The boom began to lower, but Bond put his foot on the accelerator and powered through before it fell. He drove off at high speed saying, "Fascinating building, that."

* * * * *

The house that Fellini had rented for himself and 007 was quite a shabby looking place. The window shutters hung off their hinges and the windows were grimy and smeared. Bond knew that a shiny Ferrari 355 would look very suspicious at a place like that, so he parked a few hundred metres up the road. He knew that he would have to be quick. If Ballasini got hold of Fellini before Bond arrived he would probably run away.

Bond looked through the glove compartment of the Ferrari, and found a Beretta .25 pistol inside. He removed it and put it in the pocket of his jacket and then walked down the road. He arrived outside the run down house in which he and Fellini were staying and pushed the gate open. He walked boldly up the path to the front door, and knocked on it. He heard movement from inside the house, and footsteps were getting nearer to the door.

The brass handle on the door began to slowly open. Bond took the Beretta out of his jacket pocket. When the door was about a foot open, Bond barged it with his shoulder, and knocked Fellini to the ground. He dashed in and found Fellini with his nose bloodied lying on the floor. The door had obviously made heavy contact with his face when Bond had barged it open.

“No, James!” Fellini shouted in desperation. “Don’t shoot me!”

“No? And why shouldn’t I, it’s no less than you deserve, traitor!” Bond said back.

“I give you the money, James. Just don’t kill me.”

“I don’t need your money, Fellini, I just need some answers.” Bond told him.

“I can explain everything, James. But please put that gun away.” Bond lowered the pistol, and pulled Fellini back onto his feet. He handed him a handkerchief to wipe the blood from his nose. “James, I’m so sorry. Three of Ballasini’s men arrived here with AK 47s. They said that they would kill me if I didn’t help them. They said they would give me five million US Dollars if I set you up to meet Ballasini, so he could kill you.”

“And he damn near did, Sergio.” Bond informed him. “Now, tell me what you know about what Ballasini is doing.”

“They told me I must get you to go to the warehouse before Christmas day, because they will be shipping the weapons out on Christmas Day at eleven o’clock at night.” Fellini was providing useful information to Bond. “But please, James. I’m not a villain, please believe me.” Sergio pleaded.

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“I might believe you, if you do me one little favour.” Bond said. “You need to get this message to London.” Bond scribbled a note on a scrap of paper that he found lying on the coffee table that dominated the furnishings of the poorly equipped living room.

“I’ll do it,” Fellini said, clearly eager to regain Bond’s trust. He had thought the Sidewinder had the edge on Bond, but when 007 had escaped from Ballasini’s office, he realised that he had seriously under estimated the British agent.

6

50 miles outside Naples, 24 December 2004, 22:00 GMT

The freezing December night air bit viciously into James Bond’s skin. Only Italian Special Forces DPMs (disruptive pattern material camouflage garments) protected him from the cold. Bond and Fellini were in a small foxhole dug on the edge of the forest. Fellini turned on a homing beacon to guide the British aircraft to the Drop Zone.

Bond’s message to MI6 headquarters in London had read: “*007 to HQ, send SAS immediately. DZ to be confirmed. Somewhere near Naples.*”

A few minutes after turning on the beacon, the sound of four turbo-prop engines were heard. They belonged to a Lockheed C-130 ‘Hercules’. “There they are.” Fellini reported to Bond. The drone of the engines grew louder until Bond could tell they were almost overhead. A light on the starboard wing of the Hercules flashed, indicating that the SAS squad had jumped out. Bond heard the Hercules fly over and power off into the night.

Fellini spotted the first of the SAS parachutes. They were hard to see as the material which the canopy was made out of was a matt black colour, making it almost impossible to see at night. The men

also wore DPMs that made them blend into the darkness even more. The first soldier was about fifty metres above the ground when Bond spotted him. His landing was perfect and he quickly gathered in his billowing chute. The canopies of the chutes were very small, allowing the SAS men to come in and land more quickly than with a conventional sized parachute.

Fellini flashed an infrared strobe. The goggles worn by the SAS showed the flashing strobe, and they moved towards Bond and Fellini's position. Just before they got to the foxhole, Bond jumped out to greet the SAS men. There were eight of them in total. Each wore DPMs and plastic helmets similar to those worn in ice hockey. The men carried a variety of weaponry. Two of the men had foldable sniper rifles strapped to their backs, and several were equipped with explosives. Each man carried a Sigsauer 225 9mm pistol as a sidearm. A small box of extra supplies was also dropped.

"Sergeant McKnight." The squad leader reported to Bond.

"Commander Bond." 007 replied, and the two men shook hands.

McKnight signalled with his right hand for his men to converge on the position. Two men carried the extra supply crate, which contained equipment for Bond and Fellini as well as medical supplies and a radio. The ten men squeezed into two Land Rovers that Sergio had managed to commandeer and they drove towards the run down rented house.

* * * * *

The little house was a squash for the ten men. A few of the SAS men really monopolised the one shower that the house had. They ate the standard-issue Meals Ready to Eat, often called MREs. Some of the men joked, calling them Meals Rejected by Ethiopians. Bond was used to the finest fare, and these meals did not do his taste buds any good.

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At midnight, when everyone had settled down, Bond briefed the men on the operation that they were about to undertake. There was a large blackboard for Bond to brief the men with. He stuck up a large photograph of a ship. “This is the *Giulia*, men. It is Ballasini’s transport ship.” The men looked at the photo for a few seconds and then bond continued, “It is going to be shipping out in a little under twenty four hours. There will be two targets on this raid. They are Ballasini’s warehouse in town, and the *Giulia*. The raid will begin at 2200 local time, just before the ship leaves. We will split into two squads, one of which will handle the ship, and the other the warehouse. The two squads’ attacks must happen at precisely the same time, so that the men on the ship can’t warn those in the warehouse and vice versa.” Bond paused to let the men contemplate the plan.

“Excuse me, Commander Bond.” McKnight said. “What exactly is this Ballasini up to, and what are we looking for?”

Bond was surprised by the question. He had assumed that they had been informed of the background to the situation. “Ballasini’s busy dealing high tech arms with the Iraqis.” Some of the men in the room had done some fighting in Iraq, and looked unhappy at the idea of Iraqi re-armament. “Ballasini is often referred to as The Sidewinder. It is his alias name in the Italian underworld. He is extremely dangerous; I only just managed to escape from his warehouse myself. He is very well protected, and you can expect fierce resistance.”

“Do we have enough men, sir?” McKnight asked.

“Yes. You SAS boys are more skilled than Ballasini’s thugs.” Bond had always had great respect for the SAS. Its men were tough, clever and skilful fighters. He had worked alongside SAS men before, and had great confidence that this operation would succeed. “Now, according to our Italian agent, Fellini, Mario Ballasini will be onboard the *Giulia* when it sets sail. He is the prime target; we need to seize the arms as well.”

“Will they be hidden, sir?”

“Yes, McKnight. Ballasini has a machinery company as a front; all crates containing weapons will be disguised as crates carrying machinery parts.” Bond paused again, before saying, “Right, now try and get a few hours sleep, tomorrow will be a long day.”

* * * *

The excitement of the operation coming to its climax made Bond unable to sleep. This job had consumed him totally. It had been an intense few days, with everything happening almost simultaneously. It was a miracle that he had got to the bottom of Ballasini’s operation so quickly. The Italian police had been on his trail for months and come up with barely anything. In fact, the general consensus of opinion had been that the man was clean. MI6 had, however been convinced that this was just an excuse made by the Italian police to give up looking for him. This had prompted M to send 004.

Bond’s thoughts moved to the innocent victim in this whole mess, Antonia Rossi. The introduction of a woman into the mix stirred up Bond’s anger even more. He had had many girlfriends throughout his career, and so many had been killed. He used to be able to see all their faces when he closed his eyes and thought of them, but the number of dead women was too great for him to picture them all. One face was never far from mind, and that was his beloved Tracy. She was the one woman that Bond could never forget, even if he tried.

The desire to avenge Antonia was a huge force pushing Bond forward to the big operation. He would be attacking the *Giulia*, along with Fellini and three of the SAS operators. By eight o’clock in the morning all were awake, and they greeted each other with ‘Merry Christmas’ wishes. Fellini had managed to wangle a dozen eggs from the local police station’s cafeteria, and treated the men to scrambled

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eggs. This was a relief to all after the MREs that they had eaten the previous night.

By eleven the men were quiet, in anticipation of tonight's operation. Bond unpacked his kit from the crate that was sent with the SAS drop. He unpacked a set of fatigues made out of disruptive pattern material, and a small rucksack to carry his other kit in. This was a medical kit consisting of bandages, morphine and disinfectant. Also he carried some plastic explosive. He put on the fatigues, and a belt on which he would carry ammunition and grenades. A small radio was attached to the collar of the DPMs and there was a pressel-switch on the front. It was a small rubber dome used in case the enemy was too close for Bond to speak. By tapping on the pressel, a burst of static would come through on the radio. One tap meant no, two meant yes. Bond picked up his weapons, a Sig and an MP5. He carried several spare magazines for each in the belt.

* * * *

The team attacking the *Giulia* drove about twenty miles up the coast, to a spot where a large ship was waiting to pick them up. It was a shabby looking fishing trawler. The sides of the vessel were covered in rust and grime. The hull was black, with streaks of white and green across it. A motorised dinghy took the men out to the ship. They sat in it and put their equipment next to them. The ride out to the trawler gave each man a short moment to contemplate what he was about to do.

Bond glanced over at Sergio Fellini. He had insisted that Fellini stay close to him at all times. Sergio had betrayed him once already, and although Bond didn't suspect that he would do it again, he wasn't prepared to take the chance.

The trawler was crewed by a shabbily dressed group of men. They were all Italian agents, and they used the vessel as base of operations and communications. The British had used the same idea

as well. A hairy, dirty looking man led Bond, Fellini and the SAS men down below decks, where a high tech centre of communications was in operation. Millions of Pounds of equipment was kept on the vessel. Men were constantly manning the computers and radios.

The five men who would attack Mario Ballasini's cargo ship gathered around a small table. Laid out on the tabletop was a rough plan made by Italian intelligence from information gathered during the regular inspections carried out while the ship was in port.

Bond was the first to start talking. "Ballasini is probably somewhere deep in the bowels of the ship. We'll have to fight our way through the ship until we get there." Bond looked at the first of the SAS men. He was a ragged looking man in his thirties. One side of his face had awful burn marks. His same was Macfarlane. "Okay sergeant." Bond started. "Your role is to blast your way through the thugs." Macfarlane carried an L85 carbine, a smaller version of the SA80 assault rifle.

The second man in the squad was Sergeant Davis, who carried a G3 sniper rifle, as well as an MP-5. He was to cover the other members of the squad while in the open above decks, which was very likely to occur at some point in the raid. While not playing this role the MP-5 would allow him to join the assault below decks.

The third SAS sergeant, named Philips was the demolition expert. Should it come to that, he was ready to blow the ship up. He carried Plastic Explosive in a rucksack, and an MP-5 with which to defend himself, and if necessary, join in the charge through the ship.

For a few minutes all the men sat silent. Bond broke the silence by talking in the microphone that was clipped onto the collar of his black fatigues. "White King to Black King. Are you in position?"

"Affirm, White King. Black squad is ready." It was McKnight, who was leading the squad that was to attack the Vesuvius warehouse. They were Black squad.

White squad was Bond's squad. Each man was assigned the name of a chess piece. Bond was King, Macfarlane was Rook, Davis

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was Bishop, Philips was Knight, and Fellini was Pawn.

* * * *

It was an hour before the trawler was in position. The *Giulia* dwarfed the fishing boat. Bond looked out of a porthole, and saw the black steel of the cargo ship in front of him like a huge wall. He glanced down at the water line. No part of the red bottom of the hull was showing, which meant that she was fully loaded. Bond glanced at his Omega, which read five minutes before midnight.

“Black King.” Bond said into his radio. “Prepare to attack in five minutes.”

“Affirm.” McKnight replied. Synchronisation of the two strikes was crucial.

All the men in white squad wore black spandex wetsuits, and rebreathing kits. Each man also carried two magnets. These were used to attach themselves to the *Giulia*’s hull, and they would attach their rebreathing kits to these magnets so that, if the attack went wrong while they were aboard they could jump off and recover their sets from their temporary storage spots. The five men dived into the harbour. The water was extremely dark at midnight, and they needed lights under water. The first to attach himself to the hull was Macfarlane, who was the most experienced diver in the team. The ship’s generators were humming as she prepared to make way. He attached his breathing kit to the magnets and tapped his pressel switch four times. The four bursts of static that came through on the other team members ear- pieces indicated to them that they were at the point of entry. Bond and Fellini carried the lightest weaponry, so they had to carry their means of entry to the ship. Strapped to Bond’s rebreathing kit was a telescopic pole that was assembled in seconds by the experienced SAS team. They had carried out assaults like these many times before in training as well as on actual

operations. Bond glanced at his Omega again. One minute until midnight. They needed to get a move on. Fellini was carrying a thirty-foot Kevlar ladder, which was unrolled by Philips. Davis, secured to two of the others by short ropes, then swam out a few metres and hoisted the pole, hooking the ladder over the ships rails. The five men scrambled up in seconds. As soon as they were all safely aboard, they found a quiet corner and removed the wetsuits. Underneath the suits, were their DPMs. Each man took out his weapons, and checked them over quickly. They had been soaked in Silverspeed and oiled so that the immersion in water would not affect them at all.

Bond held his MP-5 firmly in his hands. It was a masterpiece of weapons engineering. Its firing system was developed in World War II on the German MG42 machine gun. Bond carried the SD version, which was specially configured for special-forces operations. It was silenced, which reduced the muzzle velocity and range, but that was unlikely to be an issue on such a close-quarters operation like this. The five men began to move out of the room. Bond led the way. He swiftly opened the door, and quickly checked that all was clear. He gave the others a thumbs-up signal and they all moved out of the room. They tried to move without creating heavy footfalls, which was quite difficult on a metal deck with heavy-duty combat boots on.

* * * *

The strike on the Vesuvius warehouse got off to a good start. McKnight heard the four bursts of static from Macfarlane's pressel, indicating that the strike was getting under way. On hearing the signal, McKnight made a hand sign to his men and they burst out of their cover. McKnight dispatched the two men guarding the back entrance of the warehouse with his MP5SD. The five men dashed

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across the open area to the door. The squad set up was more or less the same as the white squad. There was one sniper, two utility men, but no demolition man. Instead there were two men armed with L85 carbines to plough their way through Ballasini's employees. McKnight pushed the steel door open, and the men rushed through it. The room that they now found themselves in was completely deserted. It was a large warehouse, without a single crate that had been there the previous day when Bond had visited.

Faint sounds of activity could be heard in the next room. The five men ran across the bare floor of the warehouse and grouped around the steel door that divided stood between them and Ballasini's men. McKnight smashed the door opened, while the two SAS men who were armed with L85s sprayed lead across the room. Several Vesuvius employees were hit, and fell to the ground either dead or badly wounded. A few men armed with fast-firing sub-machine guns appeared from behind walls and fired towards McKnight's men. None of their bullets hit any of the SAS men because they were really just sticking their guns around the wall and firing. The two L85s barked back at the men, which persuaded them to throw their weapons to the ground and surrender to Black squad. Two of McKnight's men handcuffed the Italians with the flex-cuffs that they had brought in their rucksacks. Meanwhile McKnight and the two L85 men went to search for more people in the warehouse. As had been expected, the warehouse was more or less deserted. Several men were found in the upper levels of the warehouse. James Bond had given McKnight a rough idea of where all the major features of the warehouse could be found. He had mostly just seen it while he was making his hurried escape the previous day.

After a few minutes, the entire warehouse had been searched. All surviving employees had been arrested, and the squad was extracted. Ballasini's office was searched, and all the documents detailing the arms deals were seized. McKnight glanced briefly

through them. "Brilliant." He said to himself. "This will certainly lead to several arrests."

McKnight looked at his watch. All the men's watches were synchronised down to the last second. It was twelve minutes past twelve. He spoke into his radio, "Black squad complete." This indicated that to Bond that the warehouse was secure. Two quick bursts of static returned over the radio, signalling Bond's affirmative response. It also indicated that Bond was in a situation where he was unable to speak. McKnight waited anxiously for more information on White squad's progress.

* * * *

Bond looked down at his Omega once again. It read four minutes past twelve. The team were stealthily making their way through the many passages of the vessel. There was no decoration whatsoever. The walls were painted a cream-colour. Bond breathed in the smell. It was the distinctive smell of fresh paint. The whole situation puzzled Bond. The Sidewinder had surely done many arms deals before this one. In which case he would have needed a vessel to transport the weapons. This vessel had clearly never done any long distance sailing. From his naval experience Bond knew very well the wear and tear that a ship experienced on a long distance voyage. Either Ballasini had only just got into the arms business, which was unlikely because his set-up was very advanced. The other possibility was that Ballasini had previously been supplying arms to a local militia, which didn't require long distance transport.

The five men continued to quietly make their way through the Giulia. The cabins walkways were almost entirely empty. After two minutes of walking they made a contact. A man was leisurely walking through the ship, whistling. Fortunately there were several

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small recesses in which they could wait to ambush the man. The whistling warned the five men, and gave them sufficient time to hide completely. The man walked past without noticing their presence. As soon as he was a few feet past them, Bond emerged from his hiding place, swiftly moved up into position behind the man. He smashed the man's skull with the butt of his Sig. The sailor fell to floor, limp and unconscious.

Having hidden the knocked out sailor in a cupboard the squad continued through the ship. They started to hear the sound of talking. They began to move slowly as they approached the double door. It was now nearly ten past twelve. Bond was anxious to hear from McKnight in Black squad. Now, however, his main concern was the next room. He put his ear against the door, and could vaguely hear talking. There were obviously lots of people in the room, because several conversations were taking place at once, which meant that Bond could not hear any of them clearly. He turned his head and looked at the other men. The SAS men looked calm and collected, as if this was nothing out of the ordinary for them. Fellini, on the other was sweating profusely and shaking with fear.

Bond knocked both doors open and the five-man squad surged through the doors. As soon as they were in the room, they fired warning shots up towards the roof. All of the men jumped to the floor. Bond could not be sure how many of them were armed, so he shouted, "Everyone, get up with your hands in the air. And throw any weapons that you may be carrying onto the floor."

The men stood up with their hands in the air. Bond glanced over the group. There were roughly twenty-five men in the room, which appeared to be a cafeteria. There were rows of tables, which had salt and pepper cellars on them. There was a coffee machine in the middle of the room, which most of the men had been gathered around when the White squad stormed the room. One man got up with a pistol in his hand. As he was lifting it, a bullet from Davis's

G3 rifle pounded into his chest, throwing him backwards, and onto the floor. The incident discouraged any further attempts to shoot one of the squad members.

The group then split up. Bond, Macfarlane and Fellini went for a look around, while Davis and Philips stayed with the prisoners in the cafeteria. The three men were walking down yet another corridor when a voice came through on Bond's radio, "Black squad complete." The voice belonged to McKnight. Bond was unsure whether there were any of Ballasini's men around, so he tapped his pressel switch twice, indicating an affirmative.

The men continued for a minute, before a door opened behind them. Three men appeared, armed with pistols. "Drop your weapons." The first man growled at Bond, and his squad members. The three men dropped their weapons. Bond stared angrily at Ballasini's men. The third of the Italian men raised his pistol toward Bond. He felt really helpless, as there was nothing he could do. The Italian squeezed the trigger, and Bond shut his eyes, expecting a bullet to slam into his body. The gun made a soft sound, and 007 felt a tranquilliser dart pierce his neck. His head felt faint, and a dizzy feeling enveloped his body. He stood for a few moments, unconscious before he fell to the steel floor with bone crunching force.

When Bond came to, a bust of a German Wehrmacht officer was staring him at. His vision was very blurry due to the head blow that he had sustained. He found himself in an office, laid out and

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furnished very similarly to Mario Ballasini's office in his warehouse.

"This is my father, Mister Bond." Ballasini appeared from behind a curtain, motioning towards the bust with his hand. "He was in the Regia Aeronautica, before he lost his wings after being expelled. He had shot two of his superior officers in an argument, and was imprisoned. After a few months, he and several others escaped the prison, and joined the Germans, who were unaware of their bad record in Italy. He failed to get into the Luftwaffe but they allowed him to join the infantry.

"Really?" Bond asked, pretending to sound interested.

"Yes, Mr Bond. Really. He had astounding success. He killed many of your countrymen, and also many Americans."

"So you expect to be impressed by his record?"

"No, not at all, Mr Bond." Ballasini said, in his menacing tone. "I would not expect a British to understand the honour which an Italian has for his father."

Bond felt his temples pounding at this insult. His hands were bound by very coarse ropes, which had made his skin raw from the rubbing they had sustained when Bond's fists tightened in anger. He glanced at his left wrist. His Omega was gone. Ballasini had obviously done his homework, and new all about Q's various standard issue watches. He sat there in his fatigues, bound with no way of defending himself. He just hoped that the Sidewinder would give him the long speech describing his views and plans as most of the other villains he had dealt with had given him. This would give him time to formulate a plan to get out of this mess.

"Well, to continue Mr Bond, my father joined the Mafia after the war. He became involved in Heroin smuggling into America, and became one of the best smugglers in the Mafia. After a disagreement with several of his fellow Mafia brothers, he left and changed his identity. You do not just leave the Mafia, Mr Bond. There will always be those who come after you. At the end of the sixties, he set up his

own smuggling operation, here in Naples. Over the next few years he became one of the most feared men in all Italy. He is famous for the assassination of many Mafia leaders. I was only ten when he was killed in a motor accident. I think it was fitting that he should die this way. No man could kill my father. Only he controlled his life, and death. He had a passion for speed, and women. He and my mother both perished that day. I feel sorry for my mother. She was a very naïve, innocent girl. She was not even aware of father's activities. Is that not something Mr Bond? Even your secret service could never live up to that level of secrecy."

"I suppose not. But we have no evil to hide, Mario."

"Evil, Mr Bond? And who said that he was evil? Who are you to judge?"

Mario expected no reply, and Bond didn't give one.

"Look at this gun, Mr Bond." Ballasini produced a pistol from a holster on his belt.

"Walther P38." Bond said, instantly recognising the weapon. "9mm. Standard Wehrmacht issue."

"Very good." Ballasini said, with an evil smile creeping along the right hand side of his face. "This is one of the finest pistols ever made. This gun shaped my father's empire. It has lain to rest many powerful men. Housed within this gun is my destiny. As long as it survives the spirit of my father survives."

"That's very nice, Ballasini. Now would you please come to the point? I'm getting tired of this stinking room." Bond said.

"Do not try and aggravate me Mr Bond. You'll find that if you do, your death will be a particularly slow and painful one. If you behave, I may make it more comfortable. After all, Miss Rossi is waiting for you. You wouldn't want to make her wait longer than she needs to?"

Bond's face went red and hot with rage.

"Now, if you would stop disrupting me, maybe I could get to the point." Ballasini said calmly. "Did you think that you could stop

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me? My father before me has already laid down my destiny. MI6 cannot stop this. It is like trying to stop a freight train with your bare hands. Things are now in motion, that cannot be undone Mr Bond. My empire has been growing every day. It covers almost the entire globe. Soon I will be able to destroy your country. The world will be thrust into a third great war, and a new superpower will come into being.”

“Please, Mario. I have heard this speech so many times, from countless people who are now dead, and have been forgotten!”

“You are very sure of yourself, Mr Bond. But given your current situation, this would seem to be foolishness.” Mario glanced around the room. There were two men with powerful SPAS 15 shotguns trained on Bond, as well as Mario with his P38.

“But do you think that if I die, we will give up and leave you alone?”

“Yes, Mr Bond. I do. What can your M do? She would have lost two agents to me already. Do you think that she would risk a third?”

“And what about the others?”

“Oh you mean your fellow raiders. Yes, I have caught all three of them! They are currently being locked away in the hold of my ship.”

“Only three caught?” Bond thought to himself. There was still hope. One was still free.

“And how do the Iraqis fit into this scheme?”

“Well, they are my allies. They hate your country, and the Americans. Any enemy of yours is a friend of theirs.”

“So they’ll fight alongside you?”

“Absolutely. They are entirely at my command. They don’t know of my future plans. For now, all they need to know is that I am rearming them to kick your people out of their land. But when your troops are removed, I will reveal my plans and the Western world will be destroyed.”

Bond sat and nodded, as he contemplated the enormity of

Ballasini's evil scheme. He was truly a huge danger to Britain and her allies. He had to stop this madman. After a few moments of very uncomfortable silence Mario Ballasini spoke once more, "Well, Mr Bond. I have really enjoyed our conversation, but now it is time to kill you." He raised his pistol pointing it at Bond's forehead.

Playing for time, Bond said, "You wouldn't kill a bound man would you?"

Ballasini thought for a few moments. "You're right Mister Bond. That would not be right. After all, I'm soon to become the most powerful man on the planet. Why should I be scared of a helpless, unarmed man?"

Bond tried to hide a smile. Ballasini was a typical vain criminal. One of the men came over to Bond and untied the ropes that bound his hands. All the while, both Ballasini and the second man kept their guns trained on Bond. After the ropes were untied the man stepped back and took up his shotgun again.

Bond reflected that his being unbound had not helped him, so he needed to play for some more time, to allow the last free team member to arrive and save him. "How about a last drink, Mario?" Bond asked.

Once again Mario took a few moments to think, and then he said, "Well, why not Mister Bond. You are unarmed, there are three guns aiming at your head. Your fellow raiders have been rounded up, so there is no risk for me." He said this proudly as if he was an invincible God. "What will it be?" Mario asked.

"A vodka martini." Bond said. "Shaken, not stirred."

Ballasini pushed a button on his desk, and a man walked into the room, and bowed before Mario, who said, "A vodka martini for our guest." The man nodded. "Shaken, not stirred." Mario added as the man walked out.

The man returned with the drink in a few moments. Bond began sipping the drink slowly. He wanted to give the last member of the SAS team time to locate him. After a few minutes he could go

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no slower and finished the drink.

“Now, Mister Bond, at least you can die happy. You have been a fine audience, and I appreciate it that you have listened so nicely to my plans. Now, however, your time has come. I will come to power, Mr Bond. Nothing and no one will stop me.” He allowed the words to sink in before saying, “Goodbye, James Bond!” He lifted the Walther P38, and aimed it once more at 007.

The next few seconds felt like an entire lifetime. The world slowed down, as Bond stared up the barrel of a pistol in the hands of a madman. Sweat beaded on his forehead, and steadily accelerated down his cheeks. Sweat built up between his fingers until it felt like they were stuck together. Bond’s heart rate sped up at an alarming rate. He started to feel dizzy because of the tension. A smile began to build on the face of the ‘Sidewinder’. Bond found himself thinking, “Why doesn’t he hurry up and pull the bloody trigger?”

Slowly Mario’s finger began applying pressure on the trigger. He was making his moment of victory over James Bond last as long as possible. His whole face was covered in a sadistic smile that spread deep lines across his blemished face. His guards stood impatiently, sensing blood and waiting for Ballasini to strike the killing blow.

Suddenly a red dot began darting around on Mario’s chest. It was the laser from Davis’s G3 sniper rifle. A glimmer of hope shone for Bond once more. He just hoped that no one noticed. The dot stopped at Mario’s heart. He heard some scurried movement behind him, and realized that one of the guards had noticed the laser-targeting beam.

“Boss!” The man shouted as he dashed across to Mario. The face of Ballasini looked angrily at the man who was moving towards him. His mouth opened to speak. The guard jumped in front of Mario as the window of the room shattered. The guard took the bullet from the G3 in the chest. As the Sidewinder fell he fired, hoping that he would hit Bond. Instead, the bullet shattered the bust of his father.

At the same time that the bullet hit the guard, 007 had jumped forward onto his stomach and in a single movement rolled across the floor and kicking the shotgun from the second guard's grasp.

Mario's pistol had slid across the floor, and under a cabinet when his hand had hit the ground. 007 saw his Sig on the table next to where he was lying. The guard who had been shot lay whimpering on the floor, but the second of Ballasini's men was getting up with a Beretta Model 92 in his hand. Before the man could fire Bond kicked him with his left boot. The steel-toed boot shattered the Italian thug's jaw, and he collapsed to the ground unconscious. Bond reached for his pistol, and spun around pointing at Mario, who lay on the ground clutching a broken wrist.

Mario Ballasini had given Bond time to get out of his sticky spot, but 007 was not going to extend Mario the same courtesy. He squeezed the trigger, and the bullet sliced through Mario's chest and pierced his heart. "Nothing and no one?" Bond asked the lifeless corpse.

* * * * *

Bond was lying on his bed, with a glass of Bollinger when his mobile phone started ringing. "Bond here" he answered.

"Thank you, James." Said the voice on the other end of the line. It was the voice of Barbara Mawdsley, M. It was most unusual for M to call her agents who were out in the field. Also she had referred to him as James, which was a true indication of real gratitude towards her best agent.

"No problem, Ma'am." He said, unable to avoid feeling a little proud of himself.

"How about a little leave, 007?" she asked in her friendliest voice, sounding more like a sales-woman than the head of MI6.

"Maybe just a little, Ma'am." Bond said graciously.

"Very well, Bond. And thank you again." M said.

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Bond pushed the end call button on his phone, and lay back on the bed with a great feeling of victory and joy.

“Who was that?” the hotel room service girl on Bond’s bed asked.

“Oh. Just the office.” Bond answered.

“And? What did they say?” She asked excitedly.

“We’ve got two weeks of rest and recreation dear.” Bond said, with a big smile on his face.

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“Bloody hell, this stuff is disgusting!”, James Bond commented. He held a glass of bright red liquid, which he stared at with a disapproving gaze.

“Vienna Blood. You get used to the stuff.”, his companion replied. “It is rather good mixed with orange juice.”

“I think I'll just have a vodka Martini if I may.” Bond smiled.

“Of course, James. In fact, I never really thought that you would like it. You always were a little stubborn. You know what you like and you stick with it. I respect that of course, but I thought you might be at least slightly flexible!”

“And you know, Lance, your problem is that you'll try just about anything. You remember that spot of trouble you got yourself into in Poland?”

“Ah, how could I forget!”

Bond got up out of the armchair he was sitting in, and walked over to the window. Heavy rain was streaming across the window. In the house directly opposite, Bond noticed the silhouetted figure of a woman in the top floor window. She appeared to be simply sitting there doing nothing.

“Who's that night owl across the street there?” Bond asked.

“Oh – she's just moved in there yesterday. I've only spoken to her briefly, but she didn't seem to have much to say.”

Bond sighed as he stared at the rain and commented, “Terrible weather to have on your leave.”

He had just completed an assignment in Italy, and now found himself in Vienna on a week's leave. It was early September, and Bond had hardly expected to find himself in cold temperatures and

torrential rain. He had specifically wanted to come to Vienna to visit his old friend, Lance Hamilton. Hamilton was just over five years older than Bond, and had been a double-oh agent himself. Having retired after a serious injury which had resulted in him losing his left arm below the elbow, he had become the head of Station V in Vienna. Bond knew that ultimately Hamilton's ambition was to become the head of the service, or at the very least M's chief of staff when Bill Tanner finally retired.

"Well, you can't have everything, James." Hamilton said, "When you have only one arm, you learn that very quickly. At least be thankful for a week off!"

Bond allowed himself a slight, if somewhat forced smile as he turned and walked back towards the chair. Hamilton's house was furnished in a simple, but elegant style, with several brown velvet armchairs arranged around a mahogany coffee table, and facing a bronze trimmed fireplace which held a superb fire.

As Bond sat down, Hamilton handed him a freshly shaken vodka Martini. "Made to your very exacting specifications," he said. Hamilton poured himself another glass of the bright red 'Wienerblut'. He knew the man who made it – an old, but lively and immensely likeable man named Fischer, who liked to refer to the drink as 'rocket fuel'.

Bond took a large sip of his Martini and stared into the fire. The sound of the rain slamming against the window and the repetitive flickering of the orange flames started to lull him into a state of semi-sleep. Memories of his previous assignment started playing on his mind. He had been in Florence to track down a former Ministry of Defence man who had been selling secrets to the highest bidder. It so happened that the highest bidder was an Italian known as Maldini, who was in actuality the disowned son of an Arab sheikh. After the fall out with his father, the son had fled to his mother's native Italy. It appeared that the leaked information was being passed on to an extremis group in Iran. Bond had confronted Maldini one-

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on-one and gave him the option of coming quietly or doing it the hard way – he chose the latter, and the result had been very messy. However, the job had been done and the leak had been plugged. Bond had killed Maldini but had come out of it with a dislocated shoulder. It was not too serious, although he found himself in a fairly substantial amount of pain from time to time.

Bond's eyes began to shut as they still gazed into the flames. Less than a minute later, Hamilton's mobile phone rang – the tune was Anton Karas' zither theme from *The Third Man*.

Hamilton answered the call with a curt “Hello.”, and the person on the other end of the line began to speak. Bond noticed his friend's brow become furrowed and his eyes wider. “I don't believe it.” Hamilton said in a low monotone voice. “I'll get over there A.S.A.P”. Bond noticed a slight tremble in his voice.

“Bit of trouble, is it?” Bond asked.

“I'm sorry James, I'm going to have to get down to the station HQ immediately.”

“Is it something serious?” Bond asked, although he already knew the answer. There was a clear look of distress in Hamilton's eyes. In fact Bond could not remember seeing him with such a look of shock in his eyes during all his years as a double-oh.

“Yes, I'm afraid it's very serious.” Hamilton paused for a few seconds, as if gathering his strength, before continuing. “My second in command has been killed. It's just awful, apparently he was buried alive. They dug him up less than an hour ago. It seems that he was drugged and then they shut him in a coffin. By the time he came to he was six feet under.”

“What a terrible way to go.” Bond muttered.

“Oh, I can't even bear thinking about it. Unable to move, pitch dark, completely shut in and no idea where you are. And I know he was a bit claustrophobic as well.” The trembling in his voice was becoming a little more pronounced.

“Can I help at all?” Bond asked.

“No, James.” Hamilton shook his head, as he stared at the floor. “Thanks for the offer, but I doubt there's anything you could really do. You just go ahead and enjoy your leave.”

Bond was reluctant to back off, but he decided that it was probably best to just let Hamilton deal with it in his own way. Bond put on his overcoat and Hamilton showed him out into the wet street where Bond's beloved Aston Martin DB5 sat being pummelled by the rain. He made a fast dash over to the car and scrambled into the driver's seat, out of the rain. The old car was very cold inside and it lacked modern amenities such as an effective heater. Bond's eye was caught by the sight of the new neighbour as she still sat by the window, almost motionless. Bond left his coat on as he started the engine and pulled off. Hamilton stood in his doorway, his face still pale at the shock of the bad news, and he walked back inside and feebly shut the door as Bond drove out of sight. Bond hated to see his old friend in such a terrible state, and he worried about it as he sped through the wet streets on his way back to his hotel.

* * * *

Bond's eyes snapped open just after six am. He sat up in bed, almost surprised that he had managed to have a decent night's sleep. He was not inclined to worry a lot, but he couldn't help it on this occasion. Hamilton had been in the business of death for most of his life, just as Bond had. So Bond found it very surprising that this latest incident of death had affected Hamilton so deeply. Bond could only guess that he must have been very close to his number two – and perhaps the man had a wife, a family. He could only ponder the possibilities. Bond thought back to the time when his own newly-wed bride was snatched from him in a hail of gunfire. He had never felt that distraught before, or since. Hamilton was obviously going through a similar experience. However, he tried to take his mind off the matter as he climbed under the shower.

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By the time Bond emerged from the bathroom the strong black coffee that he ordered had been delivered by room service. His mind turned again to Hamilton. In quite a few ways, the two of them were opposites. Hamilton took his coffee with milk and sugar, and while Bond was a self-styled connoisseur of wines and food, Hamilton would eat and drink anything you could put down in front of him. He wasn't bothered whether a bottle of champagne was vintage Dom Perignon or a cheap bottle from the corner shop.

After he had eaten breakfast, Bond felt that he should call his friend and check how things were going. However, his phone call was diverted straight to Hamilton's answering service. This only multiplied Bond's concern as it was very unlike his friend to leave his phone off. Bond tried again fifteen minutes later, but once again got the recorded message.

Bond gave up trying to phone, and dressed himself in a charcoal grey suit with a light blue shirt and dark red tie. Once he was fully prepared, he pulled on his overcoat and drove off from the hotel in his Aston Martin. The streets of Vienna were still soaked, and the rain continued to fall, although it was now much lighter than it had been the previous evening. Bond's tires created two large plumes of spray as he accelerated through the gears.

Station V was hidden behind the front of a successful car-hire firm. The building was located a little way outside the centre of Vienna. As Bond crossed the Danube and headed out towards Saunders Car Hire, he passed the perpetually rotating Riesenrad Ferris wheel and the Prater amusement park. He had been there before, although he tried to keep his mind off that for the time being. It was just another five minutes drive when he saw the sign for the rental company. Bond pulled into the parking lot which was mostly populated by inexpensive, boring four-door sedans made by various far-eastern manufacturers.

Bond parked as near the front door as he could, and went at a fast walk to be out of the rain and into shelter in just a few seconds.

As Bond entered the foyer, he saw the reception desk which was manned by a very slightly built, but attractive looking young blonde with small black rimmed spectacles.

“Good morning, sir.” she said, speaking English with only a slight accent. “How may I help you.”

“Yes, good morning. My name is Bond. James Bond, Universal Exports. I wish to set up a regular car-rental contract. Could I please speak with the manager?”

“I'm terribly sorry, sir. The manager hasn't yet come into the office this morning. Would you perhaps like to speak to Mr Wallis, who is one of our supervisors?”

“That would be fine.” Bond replied.

He followed the girl through a door behind the counter, which led to a stairwell and a basement. She entered a code into a keypad which was on the wall next to a heavy looking steel door.

“Have you any idea why the manager has not come in this morning?” Bond asked.

“No, sir. I haven't heard anything, but I'm sure Mr Wallis will know.” Bond could tell from her voice and her nervous look that she was lying. She knew more information, he was sure of it.

When the door opened, she showed him into a large open office, which contained four desks, each with a member of staff stationed behind a computer screen. There was also a large plasma screen on the wall, although nothing was showing on it.

The young receptionist walked over to the position of a coloured man who sat at a large desk in the centre of the room.

“Excuse me Mr Wallis, this is Mr Bond.”

“It isn't *James* Bond, is it?” Wallis asked with curiosity, as he stood up to greet his visitor.

“Yes it is.” Bond said, and he extended his hand, which Wallis shook enthusiastically.

“It's a real pleasure to meet you, sir.” Wallis grinned as though he had just met a celebrity. The man stood about six-foot-four, with a

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neat goatee and almost pencil thin sideburns. “Mr Hamilton has told me many stories of your exploits.”

“I'm sure that Mr Hamilton exaggerated!” Bond said, trying to calm Wallis down.

Wallis chuckled, and then, as if coming down to Earth after the euphoria of meeting 007, his smile receded into a look of worry.

“Tell me Mr Wallis – where is my old friend, Lance?”

Wallis hesitated for a couple of seconds before saying, “I'm afraid he's missing, sir?”

“How do you mean, missing?”

“He was kidnapped late last night.”

“Kidnapped!” Bond said, almost shouting. “By whom?”

“I'm afraid we don't know.” Wallis paused and took a deep breath, before continuing. “It's terrible, first Mr Hardcastle and then Mr Hamilton. I was only a junior member of staff yesterday, now I'm the most senior person here.”

“It seems that Vienna's a good place for promotion.” Bond said with a cynical laugh – Hamilton, however didn't even manage the faintest smile.

“Do we know where it happened?” Bond asked.

“Yes – it happened just outside Mr Hamilton's house. We have the whole incident on CCTV.”

Bond raised an eyebrow. “Any chance I could take a look?”

“Er, yes. If you like.” Wallis looked as though he didn't want to see the CCTV footage again. He had probably had to watch it a great many times that morning already. “Hang on a moment and I'll put it one the big screen.”

It took Wallis a few minutes to set it up, and the footage when it finally appeared was grainy and dark and the pouring rain created a sort of haze which obscured the vision somewhat. Bond saw Hamilton step out of his door and cross the street to where his car was parked. Parked next to Hamilton's green Lotus Elise was a black Lexus saloon. In fact, from the dark black and white film, it could

have actually been dark blue, but Bond couldn't tell – however, that was unimportant. Bond saw two men get out of the car. Both wore heavy looking coats and from Bond's point of view they both looked the same – heavily built and with short, dark hair. Their facial features couldn't be made out from the film though. One of the men walked out to Hamilton and spoke, then extended his hand for Hamilton to shake, which he did. Just as he was doing so, the other man came up behind him and hit him with what looked like an iron bar. He was knocked out cold and fell onto the wet road with a small splash. The limp body was bundled into the boot of the Lexus, which sped off a few seconds later.

"I didn't spot the number plate on that Lexus." Bond said.

"No. The number plate was in shadow the whole time on that film. We checked with other nearby CCTV cameras and it seems that the number plates had been removed. They must have known that they would probably be spotted by CCTV."

"Didn't any of the neighbours see anything?"

"No, the Viennese police questioned them. None of them were even aware of the kidnapping. The only one that hasn't been questioned is the woman who lived directly opposite Mr Hamilton."

"Do you mean the woman who has just moved in?"

"Yes, that's right. She hasn't been seen at all since yesterday. We guess that she must be away from home."

"No." Bond exclaimed. "She was there last night, I saw her sitting by her window when I left. I think that old girl might know something that we don't." Bond collected his thoughts for a moment and then heading for the door he said, "I'm going over there now."

"Sir, don't you think we should rather get the Viennese police to go. They wouldn't search the house before, but now with what you've just told me they would surely issue a search warrant."

Bond shook his head, "F__k the Viennese police. Hamilton was my friend. I'm not going to leave this in the hands of some snotty nosed rookie policeman." Bond said angrily as he walked out of the

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office.

* * * *

Bond pulled up just outside Hamilton's house. He looked across the street at the house opposite. There was no sign of anybody at home

Bond walked up to the door and knocked three times. There was no answer, but Bond knocked again. After about a minute of waiting outside the door, Bond was getting tired of standing in the rain. He glanced over both shoulders and made sure that no-one was watching him before he set to picking the lock.

He had barely started when his mobile phone rang. He cursed as he took the phone out of his pocket and looked at the phone's display. The caller ID read: 'Managing Director'.

"Bond here." he answered, curtly and sounding distinctly annoyed.

"007" M said in a stern voice. "Don't get mixed up in this kidnapping business." She made it sound like an order. "This is Station V's mess, and they can clear it up."

"They're going to need help – their most senior man is a kid who doesn't know which way to turn."

"Then I'll send help, but it doesn't need to be a double-oh."

"I'm on leave until next Wednesday, so I'm free to do what I like. I'll leave it to Station V after that." Bond said matter-of-factly.

"Don't be insubordinate to me, 007." M said, now sounding angry.

Bond terminated the call and switched his phone off. He could not have known it, but back in her office in London, M gently put the phone down on her desk and whispered to herself, "Good luck, James."

Bond got back to the business of picking the lock, and he had the front door open before long. As he pushed it open and stepped

inside, it was like walking into a tomb. The temperature in the house felt even colder than the air outside and it was totally dark. The thick curtains cut out almost all of the air from the outside.

Bond felt around for a light switch and when he found it he turned on the lights and saw that he was in a compact entrance hall which led through to a small kitchen, and there was a steep staircase to Bond's left. Bond had a quick look in the kitchen and found that it was almost spotlessly clean. However, as he examined the toaster, Bond found that there were some crumbs around the base of it which looked as though they had been left there since the last cleaning had taken place. There was also the faintest smell of toasted bread. Bond guessed that his suspicions were correct and that somebody was at home.

He drew his gun from the inside pocket of his coat and quietly walked out of the kitchen, screwing a silencer onto the end of his Walther P99 as he opened the door to the front room. There was nobody there. The room was furnished with a pair of leather sofas and there was a small piano in the corner of the room. The sofas looked as though they had never been sat in, and there was certainly no sign anywhere in the room that it was ever used.

Bond started to climb the staircase which was fairly noisy under foot. As he reached the landing, he found himself confronted with four doors. Two were open and two were shut. The door on the far left was a bathroom, which was empty. The door on the far right led into a small study which contained a desk with a very outdated PC, and chair and bookshelf. This was the room in which Bond had seen the woman the previous evening.

Bond tried to decide which of the other two doors to open first. His mind was made up for him when he heard the floor creak in the room on the right. He walked up to the door and swiftly kicked it, and it flew open.

As Bond appeared in the doorway he heard the gasp of a woman's voice. He couldn't see anybody in the room, which was a

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bedroom containing two single beds. He then saw a hand sticking out from under one of the beds. "Come out from under there." Bond said sternly. The hand retreated further under the bed and he warned, "Come out or I will shoot you."

A thin, pale-skinned woman emerged from under the bed. She looked as though she had not seen sun for a while and the faint purple rings under her eyes suggested that he had not slept much either. Bond guessed that she was in her early thirties, although in her current state it was difficult to judge.

"Is there anybody else in this house?" Bond asked, and the woman shook her head. She looked quite pathetic as she knelt on the floor with rolling down to her pale cheeks. As she rose to her feet her facial expression changed to one of anger, the corners of her mouth bent downwards and she stared into Bond's eyes. The tears also stopped coming, Bond didn't know what to make of her, she looked weak, but there was something that suggested she had greater strength than her looks gave her credit for.

"Who are you?" She asked, and before Bond could answer she continued, "What are you doing in my house. Do you want me to call the police?"

"No I don't want you to phone the police. That's for my sake, not yours." Bond started to walk around the room, but with his gun still trained on the woman. "You see, if you were to call the police they would have a lot of questions for you, and I dare say you wouldn't be able to give them sufficient answers and they would hold you in custody, and I don't want that because I need some information."

The woman looked frightened again, but Bond tried to relax her a little bit. "Tell me your name. Who are you?"

"My name is Marlene Kurtz." She didn't tell Bond any more and just stared at the floor.

"I'll put the gun away if it will make it a little easier for you to talk to me." Bond said as he replaced the pistol in his coat pocket

once again. "Now please, go on. Tell me a little about yourself."

"Why do you want to know about me? And you still haven't told me why you have broken into my house."

"Forgive me. I know that was a little rude. I broke into your house because a good friend of mine was kidnapped just outside your front door last night and I want to find out who did it, and where they have taken him. Now I found out that the police came round here this morning but they said that there was nobody at home."

"I've been away on holiday," she replied. "I only got back about an hour before you arrived."

"I'm afraid you're lying. I saw you sitting by the study window last night. Plus, I know that you only move in a couple of days ago. Now, I left Mr Hamilton's house not long before he was kidnapped. In fact I think it is quite possible, maybe even likely that you were still seated by the window when the kidnapping took place." Bond looked at her with a cold, quizzical stare. She didn't flinch, she just returned the same harsh stare.

In a split second motion Bond drew the pistol from his pocket and had it pointing between Marlene's eyes. She recoiled, but Bond kept the gun pointed at her. "Don't move, Marlene. Now just answer this question. Did you see the kidnapping?"

She remained silent and Bond repeated the question. "Did you see it happen, Marlene? If you don't answer I'll shoot." Bond warned.

"No, you won't. Then you will just have a dead body and will have got nothing useful out of me."

"Okay, if you like I can aim somewhere which would cause tremendous pain but keep you alive and able to tell me what I need to know."

She started breathing more heavily and quickly answered, "No, I went to bed as soon as you left last night."

Bond fired a single shot which crashed into the wall behind

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Marlene's head. "Liar!" Bond shouted. "If you had simply gone to bed you wouldn't have been so hesitant about answering my question just now. Tell me what you saw, Marlene – or I'll shoot again, and this time I won't miss."

Her answer burst out almost faster than she was capable of saying it. "I saw two men come and take your friend away." She was out of breath by the time she finished the sentence.

"What did they look like? Did you see their faces?"

"No, all I remember is that they were both wearing big coats and they had short hair. It was very black hair."

"And what about their car? Was there anything distinctive about it?"

She shook her head, but didn't speak for about ten seconds as if thinking about what she should do or say next. "I saw their licence plate number, though."

"What?" Bond said. "Their number plate?"

"Yes. I wrote it down." she said, as she looked at a little diary which she had on a small bedside table. She opened the diary at the page marked by the ribbon and read out, "D57-087AU"

"May I see that book?"

"No. It's private." she replied.

"Show me right now." Bond said in a sterner voice. She shook her head and Bond lunged forward and grabbed the diary out of her hands. On the page which she had read from, nothing was written at all. Bond was now more than a little perplexed. Marlene had read out an imaginary licence plate number for a car which Bond knew had been carrying no licence plate at the time of the kidnapping. It was extremely suspicious.

"Saunders Car Hire. How may I help you."

"Could I please speak to Mr Wallis. This is Mr Bond of Universal Exports."

"Certainly sir. Please hold the line."

There was a few seconds silence as the secretary at Station V

transferred Bond to the secure line to Wallis' desk.

"Hello, Mr Bond" Wallis came on the line, still with an air of hero worship in his voice.

"Wallis – I'm at the house opposite Lance's place. I'm holding a woman here, claims to be one Marlene Kurtz. Could you get someone to pick her up?"

"Dear me, this is going to be awkward. You acted without permission from the police. This is going to take a lot of smoothing over."

"I don't give a damn what it takes, Wallis, but get this thing cleared up. Also – I need you to trace a licence plate number for me. D57-087AU."

"What licence plate is that?"

"Never mind for now – just tell me who it is registered to, please."

"Yes, Mr Bond. I'll get back to you."

It was five minutes later that Wallis called back. "Mr Bond. That licence number is registered to a Mr Ralf Henkell. His house is not too far from where you are now."

"Where exactly."

"20 Kaizerstraße. But Mr Bond, please don't do anything else without Police permission." he pleaded with Bond.

"Thanks for the information, Wallis. I do appreciate it" Bond hung up.

Ten minutes later a Police car accompanied by a representative from Station V arrived to take Marlene away. Bond got into his car and headed in the direction of Kaizerstraße. However, he still couldn't understand why Marlene had given him a licence plate number which he new wasn't actually on the car when the kidnapping took place. It was likely that she was an accomplice of the kidnappers, and that she had moved into the house in order to be able to keep an eye on Hamilton's movements to and from his

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house. It therefore occurred to him that the licence plate number and address were probably a trap. Bond took his Walther, complete with spare magazine and silencer to defend himself against whatever threats 20 Kaizerstraße held.

Bond pulled up outside the house. Like Hamilton's home, it was in a row of almost identical houses. Bond couldn't find a parking space directly in front of the house, so he had to park several houses down. As he stepped out of the door of the car, he put his foot in a particularly deep puddle and got some cold water in his shoe. He swore as he walked over to the door which had the brass numbers reading '20'. Bond made three loud knocks on the brass knocker and a few moments later the door opened and Bond found himself face to face with a man who stood about the same height as himself, with large muscular arms. His face was quite aggressive looking with a very pronounced and square jaw line. His jet black hair was cut very short which added to the intimidating look of the man. There was nothing particularly ugly about his looks, but he certainly couldn't be described as handsome. Bond felt certain that this was one of the men from the CCTV footage.

"Excuse me. Are you Mr Henkell?" Bond asked.

"Yes, but there are two Mr Henkells at this address. Which one are you looking for?"

"Ralf."

"That is my brother. My name is Oliver. Who are you?"

"Mr Bond. I am a friend of Marlene's."

"I see. Okay, come in."

Bond followed the man through the door. While Oliver's back was turned, Bond took the silenced pistol out and pressed the business end into his back.

"Okay, Mr Henkell." Bond snarled. "Where's my friend Lance?"

"What the f__k?" Henkell said disbelievingly.

"One chance only, or I'll kill you! Is he here?"

"Ja. Ja. He's here."

“Take me to him.”

Henkell began to walk towards the back of the house. After about five paces, he quickly spun around and attempted to knock the gun out of Bond's hands. As he turned around he shouted, “Ralf!”

Oliver hit Bond's wrist with a chop from his right hand. As Bond's arm recoiled in pain he pulled the trigger. The gun fired and by an outstanding lucky break the bullet hit Oliver just below his left temple and travelled up through his brain, eventually being stopped by the inside of the big man's skull. Oliver dropped to the floor, killed instantly.

Meanwhile Ralf made his way down the house's main staircase. “What's going on?” he called to his dead brother. When Ralf reached the bottom of the stairs he found himself looking down the barrel of Bond's gun. Ralf was identical in appearance to his twin brother in almost every way. The only difference that Bond could make out was that Ralf carried the remains of a two inch scar just above his left eye.

“Who are you, and what have you done with my brother?” the concerned Ralf Henkell asked.

“He's on the floor over there. He made a rash move, I'm afraid.”

“You killed him?” Henkell's eyes widened and his face began to turn red with anger. “You damn bastard!” he shouted as he surged forward towards Bond.

“Now now.” Bond said. “Take it easy. That's just how your brother bought it. I've just had a word with Marlene Kurtz, and she said that I might find another of my friends here.” There was no response from Henkell. “A Mr Lance Hamilton. Do you know him?”

Henkell just nodded in reply, and Bond asked, “Will you show me where he is?”

He nodded his head again, this time frowning deeply. Bond frisked him and satisfied himself that Henkell was unarmed. Ralf started to walk towards the back door, just as his brother had done. As he stepped over the corpse, Ralf swore quietly. Bond left about a

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two yard gap between himself and Ralf, so that he wouldn't fall for the same trick as he had done with Oliver. Ralf opened the back door and headed into the small garden. In one corner stood a shed. It looked like a sturdy, substantial structure, and the door had a very large padlock on it. The shed was clearly used to keep more than just gardening tools.

"Okay, Ralf. I'm watching you. Slowly open the padlock, keeping your hands where I can see them."

Henkell followed Bond's instructions and the padlock clicked open as the key was turned. He then pulled the cast iron door open and Bond walked inside. Sitting on the floor, looking rather bruised and battered was Lance Hamilton. The room was empty, apart from the haggard man who sat with his feet chained to a metal loop which protruded from the wall.

"Lance!" Bond called out. "Are you okay?"

"Top drawer, James." Hamilton said in a croaky voice, and his eyes squinted as they adjusted to the light from outside. "God, I need water."

"Ralf – be a good host would you and get your guest a glass of water."

Bond followed Henkell once again with his gun at the ready as the Austrian poured a tall glass of tap water for Hamilton. They walked through the rain once again to the shed outside. Bond knelt down beside his friend and gave him the glass of water, which he gratefully accepted with his one hand. "Thanks." Hamilton said as he took a big sip. Then Bond saw his friend's eyes widen and he blurted out with a mouth still half-full of water. "James! Watch out!"

Before Bond could turn around to face Henkell he felt the force of a big hand crashing down on the base of his neck. He was knocked to the floor and almost went unconscious. Strange shapes danced around Bond's vision as he tried to stand up straight. The Walther was still in his hand as he staggered towards the door of the shed in pursuit of Henkell. Bond saw his quarry rushing through the

back door and through towards the front of the house. He fired a shot which hit the wall and only harmed the living room wallpaper. Bond started to run, although he still felt dizzy from the blow he had received. He made it to the front door just in time to see Henkell pulling off in the black Lexus. Bond fired another shot, which went through the window and hit Henkell in the left arm. Bond heard a scream of pain as the vehicle accelerated away. Bond ran out onto the street and took aim at the car's tires. He fired again, and the front left tire seemed almost to explode and the Lexus' expensive rims scraped along the street with a spray of sparks. The car lurched to the left and slammed into a light pole on the pavement. Henkell was thrown forward in his seat, but the car's airbags deployed and stopped his face from slamming into the dashboard. The driver's door opened and Henkell tumbled out and slowly got to his feet. All the while, Bond walked down to the road with his gun aimed at the wounded figure of Henkell.

“Stay there and I won't shoot again!” Bond said, but Henkell took off and tried to run down the street. Bond fired another silenced shot and the bullet struck its target in the middle of the back. It shattered Henkell's spine and continued through the man's body, eventually puncturing the heart. The big body, now simply a corpse collapsed onto the wet street, dead.

As Bond made his way back to number 20, he called Wallis once again, “Wallis – I'm at 20 Kaiserstraße. I've got two corpses here. I'm going to need some help disposing of them.”

“Okay, Mr Bond. I'll get onto it.” There was a momentary silence before Wallis asked, “Did you find Mr Hamilton?”

“Yes, don't you worry about him. He'll be fine.”

“I'm glad to hear it. I don't feel quite ready to take on his responsibilities yet.”

“Well, don't get too relaxed. He's going to need a few weeks to recuperate, so there'll plenty of chance for you to get to grips with being in charge.”

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Wallis sent an ambulance to pick Hamilton up and take him to hospital. Bond followed it in his Aston Martin and when his friend had been examined and treated for his injuries, Bond went to the hospital ward and sat down next to the bed.

“I won't have to be here very long.” Hamilton said. “I'll be back at home tomorrow so we may even be able to go out for a meal before you have to go.”

“I look forward to it, but tell me: Who were those Henkell brothers and what did they want with you?”

“It's a bit confusing, and ridiculously petty to be honest with you. They told me that they were trying to start a small scale drug-dealing operation, and they arranged to meet someone to make a deal to sell several thousand Euros worth of heroine. Unfortunately for them, they made a bit of a mix-up and tried to flog the stuff to Hardcastle, my second in command. He played along with it and then the actual buyer turned up. Desperate to cover their tracks, they tracked Hardcastle down and murdered him. And they would have got away with it, had they not tried to take me out as well. After they took me to their place, they questioned me. Kept asking what Hardcastle had told me. When I said that I knew nothing about it, they wouldn't believe me and just kept on hitting me. They told me that they were going to kill me tonight if I didn't tell them what I knew.”

“How ridiculous!” Bond said. “All this has just been over a couple of amateur drug dealers who simply lack the intelligence and subtlety to do their job properly, and it's cost three lives.”

“Bloody hell, life's strange sometimes, James.”

“Yes, but it's more than that. It's a total cock-up. Those guys shouldn't have died, I mean all they were doing was trying to flog a modest amount of heroine, while there's people who get off scot-

free and they're selling millions of Pounds worth of that stuff. What a waste of life, your man Hardcastle and those two brothers."

"James, you've been in this business a long time. You know as well as I do that you can't let feelings into the equation."

"That's exactly why I'm feeling they way I am now. It was because of feeling's that this whole thing happened. I'll bet those brothers' actions were out of concern for each other, and my actions were out of concern for you. Friends, family and loved-ones make you incredibly vulnerable. I should know that by now."

"What do you suggest, having no friends at all?"

"Yes, either that or quit the business."

"Oh, don't talk like that, James. I've heard it all before. You'll forget that sentiment in a week or two. You can't live without your work. What would you do? Retire to the countryside and spend all day tinkering with that car of yours."

"I suppose so." Bond said as he stood up from the hospital chair and starting moving towards the door. "Right now, I've got someone that I need to visit. You stay here and heal up and I'll take you up on your offer of dinner tomorrow night."

"Okay, James. I'll see you then."

* * * *

Marlene Kurtz was being held at the central Police Station for questioning. Bond sat opposite her at a plain wooden table, under the watchful eye of a guard.

"Why did you give me that licence plate number?" Bond asked.

"I don't really know." She said, blushing. When the colour returned to her cheeks, Bond felt that she looked rather attractive. "I suppose I was never comfortable with the drug business that they were getting into. I wanted someone to stop them."

"How are you connected to those brothers?" Bond asked.

"Ralf is my fiancee." she replied.

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“I'm sorry.” Bond said.

“What do you mean? Where is he?”

“Didn't you hear? I'm afraid they were both killed.”

Tears started to well up in Marlene's eyes. “You killed them?”

“Yes, I did. I'm terribly sorry – it should never have come to that. The whole thing is a bit silly really.”

The tears began to stream down her face. Bond gave her a moment to cry and then compose herself. She said, “When I gave you the licence number, I hoped that you would alert the police and they would find them but I didn't think they would end up dying, I mean they were only selling small amounts of drugs.”

“They also killed a man.” Bond said. “Did you know that?”

She shook her head, looking even more shocked than before.

“He was an agent of the British Secret Service. It was all a bit of a mix-up.”

“They didn't tell me about that. They only told me that they needed to kidnap Mr Hamilton, they didn't tell me why they needed to do it, nor did they tell me who he was. Was he Secret Service as well?”

“Yes, we both are. He and I used to work together a lot.”

“I still can't believe that they killed someone over their small-scale drug business. They weren't bad guys really. They were a little simple-minded but they could be very sweet. They watched too many gangster films and thought that selling drugs would be a simple way to make a bit of money. But I think they quickly got way out of their depth.” The tears continue to slowly flow as she spoke. In between the sobs the faintest smile appeared on her face.

“What is it?” Bond asked.

“I was just thinking. When Ralf decided that they need to get Mr Hamilton, he found out that the flat opposite was vacant. He told me that it was a sign that fortune was on their side.”

Bond felt sorry for the girl. She had got out of her depth as well with those two. She wasn't prepared for the life that they were letting

themselves in for. At the end of the day, however, he felt that she was better without them in her life, although he didn't want to say that to her now.

Bond stood up and apologised once again. "I'm so sorry that it ended like this. I hope you can forgive me."

Marlene didn't respond at all.

Bond decided that there was nothing left that he could do and walked out of the room.

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"Thanks for paying for the dinner, James." Hamilton said as he and Bond walked through the door of his house. "Can I get you a drink?" he asked.

"That would be good. I suppose you need a bit of a stiff drink to take the pain of all those bruises away."

"You've got that right. How about a drop of 'Wienerblut'?"

"Forget it! Enough Viennese blood has been spilled lately." Bond quipped.

"All right then, what about a bit of champagne?"

"Yes, that sounds right. What have you got?"

"It's just a local sparkling wine. Made by the same fella who makes that 'Wienerblut'. He calls this wine 'Rene Pogel'."

Hamilton poured a glass for Bond who took a sip and said, "Quite frankly, you have no taste!" he teased.

"It may not be Dom Perignon or Bollinger, but believe me, this wine does have its uses when you're in the right company."

"What do you mean it has its uses?" Bond asked.

"Come on, James – just read the name backwards!"

A CHANCE TO DIE

The car's horn screamed as it approached the figure in the expensive looking suit. It was a four-by-four, although in the split second during which James Bond saw the vehicle, he did not have a chance to identify what type it was. Bond leapt backwards, to get back onto the pavement, but he tripped over the kerb. As the car rushed by, luckily his legs were missed by the big tires. Bond cursed as he got up off the pavement – his hands were slightly grazed and he was annoyed by all the attention that his little mishap had created amongst the passers-by.

"I'm okay, thanks." Bond said politely to the tourist who tried to help him up. Bond felt embarrassed and stupid – he dodged death for a living, and here his life had almost been snatched from him while he tried to cross a street to meet a beautiful woman who was waiting for him in a flashy restaurant on the Champs-Elysée. What had happened?, he asked himself. How had he made such a stupid error of judgement? He couldn't answer that question. However, he resolved to make sure he didn't make the same mistake twice - He looked a second time before crossing the cobbled street. As he made contact with the pavement again, he felt slightly sick. He had come within a few inches of death. That car had been travelling at a considerable speed, and a vehicle that big and heavy would surely have killed him. As Bond walked through the door of the restaurant he thought that the car might have been a Porsche Cayenne.

"Bonsoir, monsieur." The waiter greeted Bond.

"The name's Bond, I'm meeting Miss Danielle Lacroix."

"Oui, monsieur, she is waiting for you. Please follow me."

The restaurant was clearly catering for a generation below Bond.

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He was only five years older than Danielle but even that slight generation gap tended to show in their difference of taste. But then – Bond admitted that he was a bit old fashioned. He would prefer a quiet meal in the elegant surroundings at Blades than at this glossy palace with its elaborate lighting and modern stainless steel and glass interior. The waiter was dressed in black trousers and white shirt. He looked perfectly respectable from behind, although when Bond was facing him, he was disgusted to see that the waiter wore a shiny silver bow-tie. Bond was shown to the table where Danielle was sitting. She wore a very tight fitting dress of silver material, clearly she knew exactly the type of restaurant this was, although to her credit it wasn't shiny like the waiter's tie. Instead, it actually looked very elegant and wouldn't really have looked out of place in a much classier restaurant. Her hair was a light brown with very discreet highlights and cut just below shoulder length. Her facial features were not particularly distinctive but her face was very pretty. She had a small, slightly pointed nose, and deep, blue eyes, which were framed by black eyeliner, although she had clearly taken care to ensure that she didn't overdo it.

"Ah James, you made it!" Danielle said as she stood up to greet Bond.

"Just about – I had a slight accident on the way in."

"You would like to order something to drink, monsieur?" the waiter interrupted.

"Do you have Dom Perignon?" Bond asked.

"But of course, monsieur." The restaurant wasn't so bad after all.

"Okay, bring us a bottle and some foie gras, please."

The waiter scurried off with the order, and Bond sat down at the table, slightly annoyed that he could see his reflection in the table, although once he sat down, and was viewing the table from a shallower angle, Danielle's reflection became visible, and he could live with that.

“What made you choose this place?”

“This place is fantastic, James. The décor, the atmosphere the music, even the people are fantastic.” Then, almost as an afterthought, “The food is terrific as well.”

“I'm not sure I would call the décor and the music terrific.” The music was light electronic music which was partly relaxing in style, and party design to get you dancing, especially when the drums and the bass kicked in.

“Oh, you always have to act like such an old man!”

“I thought I was an old man.”

“Nonsense, James. You are only slightly older than I am. You just behave like you're old. I mean, if I had wanted an old man I would have gone out and got a rich one! You may dress and eat like a wealthy man, but that is all courtesy of SIS, as soon as you're surplus to their requirements that will be the end of your days as a bon vivant. Even your beloved car wasn't bought by yourself, although looking at how old it is now I don't think that Q would really want it back!”

Bond's Aston Martin DB5 was his pride and joy, the one thing in his life which he regarded as a hobby, even though a lot of the upkeep and maintenance was done by someone else, as Bond seldom had the time.

“I suppose you're right, Danielle. My pension will barely cover a Ford Fiesta.

“So tell me about your accident, James.”

“Oh, it was nothing actually – I almost got run over by a car.”

Danielle started laughing, and once she had regained composure she said, “James, how many times have evil men tried to kill you, and you almost get killed by a car! That would have been ironic!”

“Just to point out – some evil women have tried to kill me as well. But yes, it would have been ironic, and bloody inconvenient as well – I've been looking forward to this Dom Perignon all afternoon.”

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As they waited for the champagne, Bond couldn't help thinking back to the incident on the road. He still had a slightly queasy feeling in his stomach, it was a feeling that he wasn't familiar with, even though he had faced death many times before. Perhaps it the manner of death – when at the mercy of a maniac you feel as though are surely going to die, and when you survive it is an against-the-odds thing. But when you are crossing the street for a pleasant evening with a lady, the last thing you expect is that the breath you took as you stepped off the kerb would be your last. As the incident replayed in Bond's mind he physically winced as he saw the big car almost hit him.

"Are you okay, James?" Danielle asked, her deep eyes reflecting concern.

"Yes, I'm just a little tired that's all!"

"Still recovering from your experience the other evening?"

"Yes, I guess that must be it."

Danielle was with the DGSE, the French equivalent of the SIS. They had worked together tracking down a deranged individual who was trying to sabotage the Eurofighter program. It had been an exhausting chase which had culminated in a nasty shootout with three henchmen. Thankfully they were bad shots, and between Bond and Danielle, all of them were either eliminated or arrested.

"You're not much of a conversationalist this evening." Danielle complained to Bond, who sat with a vacant expression on his face as he contemplated the evening's events so far. "You really look like you've been spooked."

"I'm sorry, it's not as bad as it looks. I'm just feeling slightly shaken."

Before Danielle could respond, the waiter arrived with the bottle of champagne, and the foie gras. Bond thanked the waiter, and he took a sip of the Dom Perignon, which never failed to improve his mood.

"Please tell me what's on your mind, James. I can see that you're deep in thought. It isn't just that you're tired."

A CHANCE TO DIE

“Well, no. I suppose it isn't.” Bond took another sip from his champagne flute. “It's just that, I was convinced for a second earlier that my time had come. I felt it in my soul – it was almost like a moment of peace realising that I reached the end, I had arrived at a defining moment of my life – that is, the end of it. Then, somehow being let off the hook leaves a bit of an empty feeling. I had seen my end but then it didn't come, maybe that's somebody trying to say something to me.”

“You don't believe that surely. You aren't saying that it was some sort of divine intervention? I mean, people get hit by cars all the time, it probably happens something like every two seconds somewhere in the world. It isn't like it's a freak occurrence.”

“No?” Bond asked, sounding almost a little disappointed. “I thought maybe I was being offered one last chance to live a normal life. Maybe if I were to tender my resignation right now, I would be on the road to living in peace.”

“That's rubbish and you know it, James. You can't leave this life and think that it won't come back to haunt you. I know an agent who got tired of being a cold blooded assassin, and applied for a transfer, and he eventually became a section chief. But he was always haunted by his memories of killing in cold blood, till one day it got so bad that he killed himself. If you must take some kind of divine message from today's little incident, maybe it is that you have been spared so that you can prevent some crazed bastard from killing thousands of people, that you have been spared to achieve something worthwhile. Don't forget why we're in this business – to protect the citizens of our respective countries. Just think what would have happened if some of the schemes that you had foiled had actually succeeded - the world would be in even more chaos than it is already. You now have another chance to stop that from happening.”

“Bloody hell, Danielle. How did such an optimist like you get into such a rotten business?”

SHADOWS OF DEATH

"I suppose at the beginning it was a desire to do good – now I don't really think about it much. Most of what I've just told you is bullshit anyway. You can't think too much about this job, and you know that as well as I do, so just switch your mind off and stop worrying about it, because if you don't – it'll kill you."

Bond had occasionally wondered how he would eventually be killed. Would he be slowly and agonisingly tortured until eventually his body just gave up? Or perhaps his death would come quickly in the form of a bullet from a fellow assassin. Whatever happened, Bond was convinced that his death would be an unpleasant one – it was the business he was in. He had seen it many times before, he had even dealt out unpleasant deaths himself, and had been threatened with a horrific end by more than a few villains over the years. He wasn't really afraid of death, but it was the inevitable suffering that sometimes disturbed Bond. For a few seconds he actually felt regret that the car hadn't run him over – perhaps he had been given a chance to die a clean death, a death without the anger and violence that he dreaded. Maybe he had missed his opportunity. However, the more he thought about it, the more that sentiment vanished. It would simply be too bloody embarrassing to die by getting run over. What kind of an idiot lets a car hit him? What would they say at his funeral? James Bond died in the service of his country? Bond could imagine the tiny crowd – Moneypenny, Q, one or two former double-oh agents who had gone on to higher things, possibly M, standing over the grave of an agent who simply forgot to look as he crossing the street. No, that wouldn't do at all. He would just make sure that the incident stayed between him and Danielle, and he would just get on with his job. Death would have to wait before it could claim him. Bond needed something to take his mind off the subject of death. As he looked across the table he saw the answer – he was in the company of a beautiful woman, and he had a bottle of excellent champagne, not to mention the foie gras which was top class. It would be a piece of cake.

ANOTHER DAY'S WORK

SHADOWS OF DEATH

The sticky July heat made James Bond sweat from the moment he left the air-conditioned terminal building at Miami International airport. As he walked out into the bright sunlight, he put on a pair of sunglasses and looked for a taxi to take him to his hotel. He reached into his jacket pocket and retrieved his gunmetal cigarette case, took one of his Morlands cigarettes and placed it between his lips. He then searched his pockets for his Ronson lighter. Before he could find it, a voice came from behind him.

“Excuse me, mister. Are you lookin’ for a lighter?”

Bond turned around. That Texan voice was unmistakable. “Felix, you sly old devil! How did you manage to creep up on me like that?”

Felix Leiter’s face broke into a crinkled smile as he shook Bond’s hand. “You must be looking for a ride. Come with me – you’ll like my new toy.” The new toy turned out to be an immaculately restored 1968 Shelby Mustang. The car was not elegant, but it no doubt had plenty of muscle – a typically American sports car. The car’s condition was immaculate, despite it being four decades old.

Once Bond’s baggage was put in the boot, they got into the car. Leiter’s face showed a look of pride as he sat behind the steering wheel. The big V8 engine roared into life and made a deep growl as Leiter pulled off. He may have been missing a hand, but over the years he had developed a great level of skill at using the hook on his right hand, so that he was able to drive with all the dexterity of a racing driver. Also, Leiter’s steel hook had been replaced with a far lighter, yet stronger titanium-alloy hand which allowed far more control than his simple old hook.

“They haven’t assigned us to work together again, have they?” Bond asked.

ANOTHER DAY'S WORK

"You bet they have! They knew that you needed the help of somebody with skill and daring. And you don't have to worry about my missing parts. I don't even notice it anymore. Otherwise the CIA wouldn't have taken me back, and I'd still be stuck investigating horse-racing scams and such like."

"Well, old friend, I think we're both getting to the stage when we'll be over the top of the proverbial hill."

"Speak for yourself, James." Leiter said with a mischievous smile.

"You know what I think, Felix." Bond paused for a few moments. "I think they just thought that this would be a simple job for a couple of old-timers like us. Nothing requiring the fitness and energy of one of those twenty-something year old agents."

Leiter sighed deeply, almost in harmony with the deep sound of the engine. "The thing that scares me, is that you might just be right."

Bond felt the need to change the topic of conversation. "So what is the plan then?"

"Well, tomorrow morning we'll take a fast boat to Cuba. I borrowed it from a pal of mine. I'll drop you on the north coast near the town, and then I'll carry on cruising around, trying not to look suspicious. I might even do a bit of fishing. Obviously I'll be in constant contact with you, so you can shout if anything goes wrong."

Bond recalled the details of the operation from his briefing with M the previous day. It was a strange case, but fairly straight forward. Harold Richardson, a government official in the Caribbean, who occasionally passed choice pieces of information to M, had gone renegade in Cuba. He had always been a bit of a revolutionary thinker – too revolutionary for the government's liking, and he was not renowned as the most reliable character, which was probably why he had been sent off to some stinking hot corner of Cuba – out of the way. Now, he had completely gone beyond the control of the

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government, and had become part of some religious cult. The foreign secretary had decided that he was destroying the good name of the British government and should be removed from the equation. “Try and get him to come quietly.” M had instructed Bond, but failing that she had said that force could be applied if necessary. The way Bond understood that was that he should be eliminated if he wouldn’t cooperate. As he thought about the task at hand, Bond hoped that it would not come to that. Even though it was his job, cold-blooded killing always left a bad taste.

The sun was just beginning to set by the time that Bond and Leiter reached the hotel where they would be staying. It was fairly ordinary, but comfortable, which was all that Bond needed. After checking in to their rooms, they went to the bar and ordered double bourbons. As they sat with their drinks, they both sat quiet contemplation as they considered the task before them.

“Don’t you think a death sentence is a little harsh for a fella who has got himself mixed up in some cockamamie religion?” Leiter asked, breaking the silence.

“I was thinking the same thing” Bond answered. “I have the impression that this isn’t just a simple case of dressing up and prancing around in colourful ceremonies. I’ve encountered some of these cults before, and they’re not just song and dance. But the way I see it, it’s just another day’s work, just another kill. I’m not going to stay up at night thinking about it. I stopped doing that a long time ago.”

After finishing their drinks, they proceeded into the hotel restaurant and had a simple meal of medium rare steak with chips and vegetables. Even though Bond enjoyed gourmet cooking, he still appreciated the basics. The steak was perfectly done, tender and juicy. After dinner, they each had another double bourbon and then retired to their rooms to get an early night.

* * * * *

At just after three A.M, Bond was woken by Leiter knocking on his door. He showered, then dressed in beige trousers and a pale blue, short sleeved, Sea-Island cotton shirt. Felix waited for Bond in the hotel lobby, and they left the hotel together. It was a fifteen minute drive in the Mustang to the dock where their boat was moored. The sun was rising by the time they reached the boat, which was sleek, long nosed, with a raised control deck and an enclosed cabin below. It was powered by two large diesel engines with gave it a top speed of almost fifty knots. The large rear deck was ideal for fishing from, and there were several rods laid down on the side of the deck. As they climbed aboard, Leiter proceeded into the enclosed cabin and Bond followed. Leiter handed him a Walther P99 with a silencer and two spare magazines. With the more stringent safety regulations it had become impractical for an agent to carry a weapon through airports, so where possible the foreign services and stations arranged the weapons of choice for travelling agents. Leiter then went to the upper deck and took the controls. Within a couple of minutes they were under way, and Bond went up to join his CIA partner.

"Should be there in about four hours." Leiter said. "Just relax for a bit."

The breeze and sea air invigorated Bond and reminded him of his time in the Navy. He sat in one of the two chairs, and stared out to the horizon as the boat accelerated and began to skip over the top of the swells. By the time they were well clear of Miami, the sun had begun to shine with intensity, and Bond put on his pair of Persol sunglasses.

When the Cuban coast was in sight, Bond went below to change clothes. He put on a black wetsuit and put all of his equipment in a waterproof backpack. It contained his Walther, with extra magazines and a silencer, as well as a set of clothing which he would put on once he was ashore. The boat slowed down a few

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hundred yards from the shore. It was a bit of a risk landing in daylight, but the area looked secluded, so Bond felt that he was safe enough. The need to land by day was that it was Friday, and every Friday night, the cult had their weekly ritual ceremony. Bond's aim was to reach the town where the ceremony was to take place by late afternoon. Leiter gave Bond a GPS which showed their current location and showed the destination. The colour display on the device showed that their current location was on the eastern end of the Bay of Matanzas. It was roughly sixteen miles as the crow flies, but the hilly terrain would no doubt necessitate a roundabout route to the main road. From there, Bond would walk along the road, and try to hitch a lift to the town. Bond's Omega Seamaster watch also contained a GPS transmitter which showed his position on Leiter's portable GPS.

Before Bond went over the side of the boat, Leiter shook his hand, "Best of luck, old friend. And keep in contact."

"You just see to it that you don't get up to mischief." Bond winked at his friend, as he entered the water.

Leiter laughed as Bond swam away from the boat towards the shore. It was a swim of some two hundred yards, and it was made easy by the flippers, as well as the waves which carried Bond to shore. When he reached land, he removed his flippers and walked up the short area of beach, which ended at a steep, but short cliff. As he looked around, he could see an easy path up through the rocks. He turned around and looked out to sea. Leiter's boat was speeding away over the horizon. Bond then stripped off the wetsuit and changed into the clothes which he took from his backpack. These were a pair of cream-coloured jeans and a thin blue cotton shirt with a white vest underneath. He then put on a pair of brown suede shoes. He hid the wetsuit and flippers amongst the rocks, and then scrambled up through a crack in the cliff, reaching the top in less than a minute. According to the GPS, he needed to walk about three miles west along the coast in order to find the road.

ANOTHER DAY'S WORK

As he walked along the top of the cliffs which ran along the shore, he glanced at his watch and noted that it was now nearly eleven o'clock. He wanted to get to the town as early as he could. He continued to walk briskly and within an hour he found the road which ran from Matanzas, east towards the town called Santa Ana. The temperature was thirty-three degrees, and the sweat beads ran from Bond's forehead as he walked in the heat of the midday sun. Few cars past Bond, but after several attempts, somebody finally pulled over and offered Bond a lift.

"*Buenos días. Santa Ana?*" he asked the driver, who nodded his head. "*Gracias.*" Bond said as he climbed into the car, which was a mid-80s Chevrolet Impala Coupe. The bodywork was a little rough around the edges with several areas of bad rust, and there was no air-conditioning to relieve Bond of the heat, but nonetheless he was grateful for the lift.

As the driver, a middle aged man with greying black hair and a large bald patch, pulled off, Bond asked him "*¿Hablas inglés?*" meaning "Do you speak English?"

The driver replied "*No.*" As a result, the conversation on the way to Santa Ana was almost non-existent. Twenty minutes later, they arrived on the town's main street. The winding road was lined with assorted shops and cafés – the architecture being a mix of quaint little colonial era buildings, which were looking rather worse for wear, and art-deco style buildings which Bond guessed dated from about the 1940s. Leading off the main avenue were various roads, mostly very narrow, which led through an eclectic mixture of houses of varying styles and designs.

The driver of the car pulled over and Bond climbed out, thanking the driver for the lift. He offered the driver some money for his troubles, which he gratefully accepted. Bond walked down the pavement which ran along the main street, keeping an eye out for any sign of his target. Before leaving London, he had studied

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photographs of Richardson, and knew that he should be able to recognise him easily if he saw him. As the main street seemed to be the only major road in the town, apart from the small back-streets, he decided that if he were to sit in one of the cafés which lined the street, he would be able to keep a look out for Richardson.

Bond entered a café, and ordered himself a double-bourbon, and also found himself unable to resist the temptation of a Cuban cigar. He bought a Montecristo cigar, and took it with his drink to one of the tables next to the pavement. After lighting the cigar with his trusty Ronson, Bond drew the smoke into his mouth, savouring the spicy, chocolate filled flavour of the Montecristo. There was something unmistakable about the taste and aroma of Cuban cigars that Bond felt could not be equalled. He sat, smoking and drinking for over half an hour without seeing any sign of Richardson, or indeed any European-looking person. As Bond took another sip of his third double bourbon, a grey Pontiac Grand-Am drove down the street. As it neared Bond, he spotted a silhouette which could only be Richardson. He had a plump face, and thinning hair on top of his head. As the car passed the café where Bond was seated, Richardson turned his head toward Bond, showing his facial features. As he saw Bond, his forehead became furrowed and his smile became a frown. Bond looked away, in order to avoid looking like he was watching Richardson, but as the car went around the corner, Bond downed the remains of his drink, got up from the table and proceeded to walk down the street in the direction in which the car had gone.

“Excuse me, signor. That man is a friend of yours?” one of the locals asked Bond.

Bond turned to look at the man, who was seated at a small table outside another of the local cafés. He looked roughly thirty years old, with short black hair and a well built body. He looked like a ex-soldier to Bond. “Well actually, he looks a lot like a friend of mine from school days. Harold Richardson.”

“Si, signor. That is Mister Richardson.”

ANOTHER DAY'S WORK

"Do you know where he lives?" Bond said, with a sense of unease about the man.

"Yes. Take the second road on your left, and his house is number eleven."

"Many thanks." Bond said as he continued down the street. After walking for about thirty seconds, Bond glanced over his shoulder to where the man had been seated, and saw that the table had been vacated. His sense of unease deepened as he took the left hand turn into the road that the man had instructed him to take. As he walked down the narrow road, he counted the numbers of the houses as he passed them. "17 . . . 15 . . . 13 . . ." Just then, Bond heard light footsteps behind him, but before he could turn around, he felt a muscular arm clamp around his neck. Bond let out a gasp and the cigar dropped from his mouth as the arm put enormous pressure on his neck, forcing the trachea shut. As Bond struggled for breath, he tried to pull the arm away from his neck but to no avail. His assailant, who Bond assumed was the man that he had just spoken to, was extremely strong. Bond used his right foot to stamp on the man's foot, but this had little effect. He then used his right elbow, and jabbed at his opponent's solar plexus. This time the blow had a little more effect, and the grip on Bond's neck loosened slightly, and he was able to turn around slightly and give his assailant a right handed blow to the jaw. It was not particularly effective, because Bond was unable to get much of a wind up to the punch. However, he had surprised his assailant with his fighting ability and he sensed that with a few more moves he could take the initiative in the fight.

The two opponents wrestled each other to the ground. Bond wished that he could get his hands on his Walther P99, but it was in his backpack, which by now had been ripped off in the fight. He managed to roll to his right, ending up on top of the other man. Bond tried to grab the man's head, but his strong hands prevented Bond from doing so. With their hands locked together, as if arm-

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wrestling, Bond lunged forward with his head, and headbutted his opponent on the forehead, near his right temple. He groaned, and his grip on Bond's hand weakened, allowing Bond to reach for his throat. Instead of trying to strangle him, Bond bashed his head on the road several times, which left him dazed and on the verge of unconsciousness. Bond ran over to his backpack, and in a few seconds, retrieved the Walther. As he walked to the man who lay sprawled on the road, he screwed the silencer onto the pistol. The man slowly came to his senses, then suddenly leapt to his feet once he realised his situation.

"Now just keep calm." Bond warned in a stern voice. The man's dizzy eyes looked towards Bond, and he nursed his aching head with his right hand. "This sort of thing shouldn't be done in public. Why don't we go back to your place for a bit of privacy?"

The man walked, somewhat out of balance, to number 11, and after a little effort he unlocked the door and walked inside. Bond kept his pistol aimed at the man's head as he glanced up and down the street to make sure that there were no people watching. Satisfied that there was nobody, Bond followed the man into the sitting room of the house. "Cosy looking place." Bond said. "Let's have a chat."

The man collapsed onto an old sofa, and Bond sat opposite him. The furniture and decoration of the house was in a state of disrepair. Bond noticed a bottle of Vodka on the sideboard and went to pour himself a shot. "I hope you don't mind." He said to his unwilling host, who shook his head feebly. Bond downed the Vodka, and then pointed his gun once again at the man. "What is your name?" he asked.

At that moment, the man began to cough and choke, and rolled off the sofa, writhing around on the wooden floorboards.

Bond was certain that it was just a ruse, and he walked over and kicked the man in the ribs. He groaned and coughed one more time. "I'm afraid that old chestnut won't work on me" Bond said sternly.

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“Now I asked for your name. I expect an answer.”

“Bolivar.” He said angrily.

“What Bolivar?”

“Hector. Hector Bolivar.”

“And who do you work for? Mister Richardson?”

“Occasionally, he gives me work to do.”

“Such as?”

“I have underground contacts who are useful to him.” Bond kept the gun aimed at his head, and the look in his eyes was determined and cold-blooded, which convinced Bolivar to talk. Also, he was still in great pain from the kick to his ribs – he felt as though one of them was broken. His breathing was laboured and he wheezed between each sentence. “He also employs me as a bodyguard.” He continued.

“Why would he need underground contacts?” Bond asked.

Bolivar remained silent, which prompted Bond to kick his sore rib once again. Bolivar collapsed to the floor groaning in agony. Bond took two steps back so that he was out of reach, should he attempt to lash out at him. “The question still stands.” Bond said as Bolivar got up to his knees once again.

“He’s involved in many things. I have no idea what they all are, though.”

“And what’s this religious cult that he’s involved with?”

“He says that he has become fascinated by the occult and Caribbean religions during his time here. He began attending ceremonies, and is to be officially inducted into the cult this evening.” Bolivar then opened his mouth slightly as if to continue, but appeared to change his mind and then he remained silent.

“You were about to continue?” Bond asked, but Bolivar shook his head. “What does this initiation involve?”

Bolivar bit his bottom lip and shook his head. Bond then aimed the Walther between Bolivar’s kneeling legs and squeezed off a shot, which went through the wooden floorboards. Bolivar gasped and

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jumped to his feet. “Don’t go anywhere.” Bond warned him. “If you don’t tell me everything, then the next shot will be more painfully aimed – not to kill, just to cause pain. Now, I’m sure that you don’t want this to be any more painful than it needs to be. You made a good start, please continue.”

Bolivar knelt once again and said, “In order to be inducted, he has to kill an unbeliever.”

“Who?”

“Just a nobody. They usually kidnap orphans or street-children to be executed.”

Bond’s face broke into a frown of disgust. His mind was made up – Richardson deserved a death sentence. He wasn’t sure if M knew about this, but it seemed to justify her harsh orders. M had said to take time quietly if possible, however Bond now felt tempted to simply kill him. In addition there were the others affairs that he was involved in. Bolivar had claimed not to know much about them, and Bond sensed that he was being honest when he said that.

“Right, you’re going to take me there this evening. If you make one false move I’ll kill you, so don’t try anything silly.” Bond warned. He then found some rope in the house and tied Bolivar’s hands and feet, then passed the time by talking some more with him, and helping himself to the contents of the drink cabinet. Bolivar had informed Bond that the ceremony would take place at sunset, which would be between about seven-thirty and eight o’clock. Just before seven o’clock they left the house. Bond walked several paces behind Bolivar, with his hand in his pocket, ready to pull his Walther out at any moment. He had changed into clothes found in the house – a pair of black trousers and a black polo neck sweater. As they reached the outer sections of the residential area, they came across a forest. As they made their way through the Tropical Pine trees, the sound of bongo drums became audible. They crept through the undergrowth to the fringes of the cleared area which included a small cabin. Bond could see the gentle flickering of candlelight

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through the window, and on the front step a man appeared to be practicing with his drum. This was very useful, as the sound of the drums overpowered the sound that Bond and Bolivar made walking through the undergrowth.

The cabin cast a large shadow over most of the clearing, so the drummer started a fire which illuminated the area very well. Bond crouched down lower as he feared being seen in the glow of the fire. A few minutes later, five figures emerged from the cabin, and the drumbeat began again. One of them was Richardson, and four elders of the cult formed around him. As he knelt on the floor, the elders raised their hands in the air and chanted a prayer of some kind. The fire sprayed sparks into the air, which were caught by the gentle breeze and made vivid patterns across the shadowy forest. After two minutes of chanting the elders returned into the cabin, leaving Richardson alone in prayer.

At this moment Bond felt that Bolivar was now a liability, and he knocked him unconscious with a well placed blow to the base of the neck. Bond then moved swiftly into the middle of the clearing and came up behind Richardson, clamping his hand over Richardson's mouth. "Come quickly." He said sternly. "Make a sound and you're dead."

Bond then dragged Richardson into the forest, and went about one-hundred yards into the trees, before he threw him to the ground. He aimed the Walther at Richardson's head, and was about to squeeze the trigger when Richardson said "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm from the Secret Service, with orders to kill you." Bond deliberately omitted the fact that his orders were to take him alive if possible.

Richardson coughed as if choking on something; and his face was one of utter disbelief. Bond continued, "You're a disgrace to your country, Richardson. You were going to kill a child in that ceremony. Why?"

Richardson's face then became one of anger, "Because," he

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said, emphasising the word, “frankly I’m sick and tired of the attitude that we, as the so-called civilised, are somehow superior to these people. Frankly, this religion has far more going for it than the supposedly superior religion of Western Christendom.”

“And that justifies murder?”

“Religion has been used to justify murder for millennia. It was used by the Christians during the crusades, or have you forgotten that little historical item?”

“None of this makes murdering an innocent orphan justifiable. Also, your friend, Mr Bolivar told me that you are involved in many shady dealings. I don’t know any details but I suspect that the head of SIS does, otherwise she wouldn’t have sent me. You’ve disgraced your country, betrayed your government. Don’t you feel any shame?”

Bond clearly touched a nerve with Richardson – his shoulders sank and he had a look of misery. His mouth curled downwards, and he appeared as if he was about to break down into tears as he realised that it was over.

Shouting voices began to sound from the clearing, and Bond saw the yellow beams of flashlights coming through the trees. They seemed to be shouting Richardson’s name angrily, as if they saw his vanishing as an insult to the cult. Bond suspected that they were now after Richardson’s blood. When Bond looked back at him, he saw that he had indeed broken down to tears, but he was now holding a pistol in his right hand. It must have been concealed in the waistband of his trousers. Bond raised his pistol to fire at him, but before he could do so Richardson put his pistol to his head and said to Bond, “Please. Allow me.” He pulled the trigger and his temple appeared to explode in a flash of blood, smoke and fragments of skull. The lifeless figure slumped into the undergrowth, and was momentarily illuminated by the flashlights of the elders. Bond turned and ran out of the forest towards the town, hoping that this black clothing would keep him from being seen.

ANOTHER DAY'S WORK

* * * *

It was four hours later when Bond swam out to meet Felix Leiter on the boat at the same place where he had been dropped off. He had signalled to Felix to pick him up, and had then run the entire distance from Santa Ana to the edge of the bay and their rendezvous. By the time he had swam to the boat and hauled himself aboard, his energy was utterly spent.

“Tough day?” Leiter asked.

“Just another day’s work.” Bond replied.

“So he’s dead?”

“Yes. But he took care of it himself – saved me the dirty work.”

“You look like you could do with some refreshment, James. All I’ve got aboard is beer. I hope that is okay?”

“It sounds great. Give me anything cold and wet, as long as it isn’t seawater.”

An hour later, as they were heading back to Miami at fifty knots, Bond called M. It was now early morning in London. “It’s done.” He said simply. “He did the job for me, though.”

“I’m glad that he saved you an unpleasant task, 007. I suppose you were wondering why we gave you permission to kill him.”

“Well, I saw the ceremony. He was going to kill an orphan as part of his initiation, but is there more to it than that?”

“I’m afraid that might have turned out to be one of many such offences. He began a child-slavery racket a year ago. Apparently he was just doing it for pocket-money. He was also involved in drugs, tobacco smuggling, anything which offered a bit of quick cash. In addition he was mentally unstable. He had rehabilitation, and we thought he was over it. It was decided that Cuba was a quiet, out of the way sort of place where he wouldn’t be able to cause any mischief. I guess we were wrong. It was our mistake, I’m sorry that it became your problem.”

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“No apologies. It’s my job.”

“But Bond, do take a few days leave before coming back.”

“With pleasure.” Bond said, before hanging up the phone.

He then sat back on one of the chairs on the deck of the boat, and lit himself another Montecristo cigar. “Just another day’s work.” He whispered to himself.

THE QUEEN'S PAWN

1

The cool touch of a Martini glass kissed the lips of a black-haired, British man. The man, who none of the locals recognised, sat at a large marble table. Opposite him was a local man, one of the clubs regulars. His hair was a dark brown, and his skin was very pale. His accent was a strange one. It was predominantly a Croatian accent, with a strange touch of Irish in it.

The British man looked slightly older than his opponent. His manner was very polite and he was everyone's idea of the ultimate gentleman. This was noticeable even though no one in the room had known him longer than an hour. His clothing was immaculate, a Saville Row tuxedo and dress shirt with a large black bow tie.

The centre of the room's attention was the chessboard that the two men stared at. Both players were more or less level. Both men had lost their bishops and their Queens. The Croatian man had two more pawns than his British opponent, and he had the only knight left on the board. The Englishman, however, had taken one of his opponent's rooks.

The game had begun about forty-five minutes earlier. The Croatian had been looking for an opponent for his daily chess match. He was well known locally as a great chess player. He had competed in many international tournaments and had won many of them. His daily chess match was one of the club's main events. There were always people eager to take on the man, who was known only as Vladimir. The game always started promptly at nine. On this particular evening, however, by five past nine no one had stepped forward to take the man on. He was clearly getting irritated, and called for someone to accept his challenge. When it appeared that no

one was going to take him on, the Englishman had appeared out of the small crowd that had gathered around the table.

"I'd be delighted to join you, Mr.."

"Vladimir." The Croatian had replied curtly.

"And my name is Bond." The Englishman had said. "James Bond."

* * * * *

Twelve hours earlier, Bond had been sitting in a leather chair, facing M in her office. Behind her was a large wall screen. To Bond's left had hung a portrait of Admiral Sir Miles Messervy, the previous head of the SIS. She had had that look on her face that showed she was very troubled. Bond had briefly seen a newspaper headline on his way to the SIS headquarters at Vauxhall Cross, which had read: "Two suicide bombings in Manchester." Bond had suspected that this news had something to do with M's mood.

"I take it that this is about the bombings." Bond had said.

"Yes, Bond." M had replied. "We've got to put a stop to it. The police are trying to control the situation, but they'll need help."

"Do we have any leads?" Bond had asked.

"Only one." A familiar voice had reported. Bond turned around. It was M's Chief of Staff, Bill Tanner. "We got a tip off from one of our men in Zagreb about an ex-IRA assassin, who now works for a Croatian businessman, Yuri Zivkovic. Manufacturer of textiles, leather goods and chemicals. This Irish man is Gary Connolly, well known for many extremely gruesome murders. He is particularly well known for a gruesome method known in the Irish underworld as the 'tongue tie'. They slit the victim's throat and leave him with his tongue hanging out through the slit."

Bond thought about Tanners words. "Where is Connolly now? In Zagreb?"

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“Yes, 007.” M had said. “You’re leaving on the next available flight.”

“How is this Gary Connolly linked to the bombings, though?”

“That is for you to find out.” M had said sternly.

The tension in the room was immense. Everyone in the Secret Intelligence Service had been shocked by the bombings. Suicide attacks were often reported in the news, taking place in the Middle East. For it to happen on their home soil was something else. While sitting in the chair, Bond reflected on a previous case, in the days of Sir Miles, when he had seen a film of a suicide bomber assassinating a British politician, Lord Mills. Since that day suicide bombers had disgusted Bond.

“Where can I meet Connolly?” Bond had asked.

“Well, according to our man in Croatia, Connolly plays chess every night at the Meštrović Club. You could meet him there.” Tanner had informed 007.

“Fine.” Bond had said. “Thanks, Bill.”

M had handed Bond a photograph of a shorthaired man, with a very light skin, and thick eyebrows. “This is the only photograph that we have of him. It was taken when he was caught during an SAS raid a few years back. He was imprisoned, but he and several other IRA assassins escaped in a very embarrassing moment for the police.”

“Exactly what was the lead that we got on Connolly?” Bond had asked.

“It’s not much, but the Police intercepted a phone call from his house in Zagreb to a number in Manchester. They spoke mainly in what we expect is code-talk, but they were discussing two places in Manchester.” M had paused. “The two places where the bombs were detonated.”

“And what about his boss, Zivkovic?” Bond had asked.

"Well, we don't have anything on him." Tanner had said. "He has no criminal record and our contacts in Croatia seem to know little about his background. He first came to public attention during the collapse of communism in Russia. Soon after Croatia gained her independence in 1991, he emerged as one of the country's leading industrialists. I checked with registry and our information on him goes back only as far as 1987, before then he is nowhere to be seen."

"Sounds like he was living a secret life before then." Bond had said.

"Yes, it seems a little suspicious. I think that he might have a somewhat shady past." M had said. "Perhaps you could try and cast some light on it for us, 007."

"With pleasure!" Bond had said.

"It's probably only a matter of time before another attack. You need to move quickly, 007." Tanner warned. "If this is an IRA operation you can bet that they won't stop until they have achieved their goal, whatever it may be. There'll probably soon be attacks all over the country, including here."

"It could just be to spread terror throughout England. And we can't let that happen. Seventy five funerals are going to take place in the next few days, so we have to do something about it, Bond." M said. "Go find the men responsible for this, and stop it."

* * * *

The British man named Bond reached into the pocket of his tuxedo, and withdrew a gunmetal cigarette case. He pulled out one of his Morlands cigarettes, and placed it between his lips. Bond then produced his battered Ronson lighter. Once the cigarette was ignited, Bond moved his bishop once space, diagonal upward and to the left.

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This threatened Vladimir's knight, and with an unhappy grunt he retreated. Bond advanced a pawn a single square, and then settled back in his chair, taking a satisfying draw from his cigarette. Vladimir's king was in a corner of the board, and he moved it one square horizontally, which put it next to his remaining rook.

The concentration, as well as the fireplaces and the body heat in the room started to get to Bond. He retrieved the white linen handkerchief from his pocket and wiped some of the sweat from his forehead. He sat for a while, thinking about his next move. Vladimir was starting to look more and more agitated. He was obviously not in a good mood. Bond's rooks were both on the back row, closest to him, virtually unmoved in the entire game. Lacking a queen, Bond realised that they would be the tools with which to defeat the man who sat opposite him, sweating profusely. He advanced one of the rooks all the way across the board to one row away from Vladimir's back line, where the Croatian's rook and king resided.

From its current position, Vladimir's rook could do nothing to challenge Bond's one. His mood deteriorated further, and the beads of sweat on his forehead grew. He moved his rook one square forward, so that it was directly next to Bond's one. If Bond took the rook, Vladimir's king would be able to capture his. However, if Bond left his rook where it was, Vladimir's could capture it. In order to stop this from happening, Bond used his second rook to cover the first. He kept it on the back row, but lined it up so that it was guarding the other.

Vladimir's response to Bond's move was to move his king another square across the back row, so that it was threatening Bond's rook. Although both players were well aware that the king would be unable to take the rook, because it would be moving into check by Bond's second rook, it meant that if Vladimir took Bond's first rook, and the second retaliated, the king would be able to capture the last remaining rook on the board, making both players more or less

equally placed.

Bond's rook retreated one space. Bond was not fond of retreats, as they wasted moves. Of course, he hated to run away from an enemy, but he also had the wisdom to know when it was necessary. He liked to think that this applied in his actual life as much as it did in his chess.

The white rook now threatened Vladimir's black knight, so he moved his own rook two blocks horizontally to protect it. He knew very well that if he lost both his rook and his knight, his game was well and truly over.

When he saw the move, a faint smile crept across Bond's face. He didn't make it obvious that he was delighted with the way the game was going, but if one of the spectators looked carefully at Bond's face, it would be visible. He moved his rook across, placing the black king in check. Vladimir's face turned almost purple as Bond calmly said, "Check."

The Croatian's bottom lip started to shake as he saw that all was now lost. His king could only retreat into a corner of the board, which would let Bond close in for a clean kill. He knocked his own king over, signalling his surrender. Bond extended his hand to shake Vladimir's. Bond's angry opponent didn't respond. Instead he sat in his chair, the veins in his neck bulging out in anger. He picked up one of the ceramic chess pieces in his hand, and tightened his grip on it. His hand went red as he crushed the piece, a bishop, in his fist. Bond heard the delicately crafted piece cracking in Vladimir's hand. The hand slammed down on the table, depositing a pile of dust on the marble. His bloodshot eyes stared angrily at Bond's. The tension was visible to all around. Eventually, Vladimir stood up and briskly left the club, swearing in Serbo-Croat.

As soon as James Bond walked out of the door of the Meštrović Club, the cold January air tore into his skin like knifes. The artificial warmth created inside the club was in sharp contrast to the reality of the environment outside. The club was situated on a narrow road lined with old-fashioned buildings. The road itself was a cobblestone affair that eventually became a market square.

About thirty yards down the road, Bond saw the infuriated Vladimir climb into a white Rolls Royce, and begin to accelerate down the road. Bond walked briskly to his own car, his favourite silver birch Aston Martin DB5. He quickly climbed into the driver's seat and got the engine running. It was a little sluggish due to the sub-zero temperature, but he was moving before Vladimir's car made its first turn off the cobblestone road.

Bond took a quick glance at his Omega Speedmaster supplied by Q branch. It was now past eleven o'clock. The chess match had gone on for just over two hours, and Bond was quite tired from the concentration involved. Bond followed the Rolls off the cobblestone and onto an even narrower tar road through a dimly lit row of houses. Bond was worried that he would lose track of Vladimir in the gloom of this dark neighbourhood, but his lights reflected off the rear window of the Rolls as it made another right turn. Bond once again followed suit, maintaining quite a considerable following distance in order to avoid looking suspicious to the driver of the car. Bond thought of Vladimir and his childish show of temper in the club. He laughed a little at the man who he knew to be ex-IRA assassin Gary Connolly.

As the Aston Martin hit a hump in the road, and he felt the pistol in his shoulder holster against the side of his body. Concealed

under the tuxedo was a Berns-Martin Triple Draw holster, containing Bond's standard issue Walther P99 handgun. He had now become very used to the P99, and had grown very fond of it, as he had with the Walther PPK and the Beretta .25 pistols that he had used before.

The road continued on for several miles, until they reached the outskirts of Zagreb. Bond now found himself in a grimy looking suburb. Rubbish bins lay on their sides, and everything had a dark sooty feel to it, especially on this dull winter night. In the distance, the red braking lights of the Rolls were visible. Bond estimated that they were about a hundred and fifty yards down the road. They were completely still, which suggested that the car had stopped. Bond slowed down, to avoid getting too near to Vladimir. A few seconds later, the braking lights went out, and the taillights vibrated, as the car had started moving again. Bond slowly edged forward in the Aston Martin, crawling along the road at less than a walking pace. Suddenly the red lights disappeared, which Bond assumed meant that the car's engine had been turned off. He allowed about a minute for everyone to disembark from the car, and go inside wherever they had stopped. In the darkness, with his lights dimmed, Bond couldn't see whether they had stopped outside a house or not.

After having waited impatiently for a few minutes, Bond drove down the road to where the car would be. As he drove, he became increasingly aware of a hedge that began to appear across the road in front of him. He looked around for Vladimir's Rolls Royce, but saw no sign of it. He parked the Aston Martin a little distance away from where he had thought the Rolls had been, and got out. He drew the Walther from his shoulder holster, and slowly walked across to the hedge. The verge between the road and the hedge had tyre marks in the grass. Bond knelt on the ground, and felt the muddy tracks, which were wet. This meant only one thing, which was that the Rolls had driven off the road and through the hedge.

The section of the hedge that now stood in front of Bond

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didn't look at all suspicious. The tyre tracks however had given everything away. Bond looked in the hedge for any sign of disturbance. Some of the leaves had clearly been pulled out of the way, and some of the branches of the plants in the hedge had been snapped, and the leaves were bent. Bond stuck his hand inside the disturbed area and felt the cool touch of metal. Bond ran his hand over the metal shape. It felt like some sort of handle, judging by the way it was curved to fit comfortably in Bond's hand. He turned the handle, which made a squeaking noise as the badly lubricated handle moved. He slowed down the turning, and when the handle could not turn any more, he pushed on it. More rusty metal squeaked as the hedge began to open. The hedge was obviously hiding a gate, which Bond was now pushing open. Even going very slowly didn't stop the gate from making a noise. Bond opened it inch by inch until it was open just wide enough for him to squeeze through.

As soon as he was through the hedge gate, Bond stood with his Walther at the ready. Quickly he glanced over the small lawn. The garden was very poorly kept, showing that someone who cared very little about it lived here. Judging from his encounter at the club, Bond felt that Vladimir fell squarely into this category. He could not imagine someone who was as brutal and impatient as Vladimir to be interested in a pastime such as gardening.

Bond slowly made his way towards the house. It was a shabby looking building. Some windows were cracked, and streaks of grime lead from the roof, down the walls all the way to the ground. Frost had formed on the ground and he could hear it crunching under his shiny black shoes.

Around the back of the house, several lights were on, and there were faint voices coming from one of them. Slowly Bond crept nearer, with his Walther held up in front of his face, ready to shoot anyone who came around the corner. The pistol was equipped with an extremely long and heavy silencer. This eliminated almost all the

noise made by the pistol, but made it much more difficult to carry, especially if it was holstered. Despite it being slightly awkward, it was a worthy compromise because if Bond was forced to shoot someone, he was unwilling to take the risk of someone hearing the shot. He had no idea who was in the house, and how many people there were.

There was a great deal of noise coming from the room in which all the lights were on. Bond recognised the voice as Vladimir's. He clearly had not got over his defeat, but he was speaking in Serbo-Croat, so Bond was unable to understand. He was, however able to discern the word 'Bond' in Vladimir's hurried and angry speech. Another, deeper and far more calm voice spoke back to Vladimir. Bond sat listening for a few minutes. Vladimir began to calm down, and even started to sound excited. Bond heard a sadistic laugh, and a thud that sounding like a fist hitting a table. Bond was unable to curb his curiosity and he edged towards the window to try and get a brief glimpse of the man who Vladimir was speaking with. A large windowsill stuck out below the window, which Bond used to hold onto and lift himself up. As soon as he began to hang on it, he realised that it was loose. It was too late, however, and Bond fell backwards onto the lawn.

Even as Bond fell, his eyes tracked the windowsill slab as it fell to the ground. When it fell, it hit the concrete pavement and broke into several pieces. The contact with the ground made an enormous crashing sound, and as soon as it hit, the talking inside the house stopped. "Stupid fool!" Bond said to himself, as he began to back away from the window.

The sound of a growl made Bond feel as if his heart had stopped beating. The growl was followed by a series of loud barks. There was certainly more than one dog, probably five or six. Bond began to run. As he did so he looked behind him. A head peered out of the window that Bond had tried to look through. It was not

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Vladimir, so there was a chance that he wouldn't be recognised. Less than a second later, Bond saw a Pit Bull come bounding around the corner the house, spraying saliva as it ran. Bond quickly aimed and fired the P99. It made very little sound, but the dog was knocked right off its feet by the bullet. Bond ran even faster now towards the hedge gate. The distance had not seemed very far when he had come in, but now the gate could not come quickly enough. Bond looked up at the house as he ran, lights were turning on in just about every room. Bond swore under his breath, as there were obviously many people inside the building. Bond looked back towards the gate, but as he did so he felt his foot make contact with a hard object.

Bond fell face first into the frosty grass. Dirt covered his face, and the tumultuous sound of hungry dogs grew from behind him. He turned over onto his back, slightly dazed. Bond saw another pit bull running towards him. He reached for his P99, which he had dropped as he fell. His eyes were fixed on the drooling, bounding dog as it close in on him. After what had seemed like ages of fumbling for the pistol, he felt the handgrip in the palm of his hand. As he began to pick up the Walther, the dog jumped on him and bared its teeth. Slobbering in delight it opened its mouth wide to take a chunk out of Bond. In a lightning fast reaction, Bond put the pistol up by his chest, up against the flesh of the dog. Due to the size of the silencer, he couldn't get the gun to the place where he wanted it. The dog's teeth struck and Bond quickly rolled over. The dog was surprised by Bond's sudden movement and only managed to rip a great hole in Bond's tuxedo. Before he could bite again, Bond had the tip of the silenced Walther up against the dog's skin. He squeezed the trigger, and the force of the shot threw the dog off him. Bond jumped up and ran the last few yards to the hedge and leaped over. As he came down he broke his fall using a judo technique that he had been taught in his martial arts training.

He rolled over and went towards the Aston Martin. A shot

came from the house, but Bond heard the bullet whistle past him and smack into the road a few feet behind him. He jumped into the bulletproof car, and started the engine. It took an irritatingly long time to get started. As soon as the engine was running, Bond put the car in reverse, and roared backwards down the road. He performed a handbrake turn to spin the car around and then sped off back towards central Zagreb and his hotel.

He was certain that some of Vladimir's men had seen the number plate on the Aston Martin. Luckily the DB5 was still equipped with the revolving number plates that Major Boothroyd had fitted many years back. He switched the number plate, but he knew that it was not enough. He doubted that there was another DB5 in Zagreb, let alone a silver birch one.

Bond drove back to the hotel very irritated at his mess up. He had likely jeopardised the mission, and that never went down well with M.

3

When Bond got back into his hotel suite, his pulse was still going in overdrive, and the adrenaline had not yet drained from his body. He looked at his expensive tuxedo in the bathroom mirror. The left shoulder of the jacket was shredded, and the trousers had been torn when Bond had leapt over the hedge onto the pavement.

Bond took off the jacket, and then took the chamois leather straps of the holster off his shoulders. He sat down in the suite's most comfortable armchair, and poured himself a large measure of vodka. The cold liquid felt like an anaesthetic rushing over his body.

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After several glasses of vodka and a cigarette, Bond headed for the bath. The hot water soothed his sore muscles, and calmed him down. The vicious attack by the dogs had taken him completely by surprise, but even if he had been expecting it, he wondered if he would have been prepared. Vladimir obviously meant business by keeping that pack of dogs in his yard. He was definitely protecting something that he wanted to remain hidden.

By half past twelve Bond got to sleep. It had been a really packed day. The morning briefing at Vauxhall Cross, the rush to Heathrow airport, finding his way around Zagreb, meeting with an agent of the Croatian National Security Office, then the chess match, followed by the encounter at Vladimir's house. Almost as soon as Bond had put his Walther under the pillow, and laid his head down he had dropped off.

Forty minutes later Bond woke up with a start, instinctively placing his right hand around the butt of the Walther hidden under his pillow. He listened carefully for any noise, while at the same time looking at the hotel's bedside alarm clock. It was twenty past one, and Bond cursed whatever had made him get up. He was very tired, and he didn't need to be continually waking up. He placed the P99 back under the pillow, this time keeping his hand wrapped around the handgrip.

Bond had been asleep for only a few minutes when he woke up again. This time he saw a shadow coming from the bathroom into the suites bedroom. He couldn't hear any footsteps thanks to the thick carpets in the room. He lay in the bed completely still, waiting to let the man get close. His eyes were half shut, and he could just see the dark shadowlike body creeping towards him. All his muscles tensed up as he began to be able to hear the intruder's breathing.

A small silver beam of moonlight was coming through a gap in the curtains. It now illuminated the intruder's face, and the stainless steel blade that was being brought closer to him. He lay absolutely

still, and stopped breathing. The intruder was obviously taking pleasure in this deed. For Bond, it was agony, and he hadn't even been stabbed yet.

The man moved at an extraordinarily slow speed. Bond needed him to get closer before he acted. He was still holding his breath, and in his mind he was urging the man to hurry up.

Once he was close enough, the intruder raised his knife high in the air, as if he was performing a ritual sacrifice. The man had lifted the knife as high as he could when 007 threw his legs into the air, kicking the knife out of the man's hands. The man, who was shocked and surprised offered little resistance to Bond who kicked him in the chest, and then in the solar plexus. The blow from Bond's bare foot winded the intruder, but it was not enough. The man jumped down on Bond, who punched him with his left fist. The punch did little to deter the intruder, who began to strangle Bond.

Bond delivered another left punch to the man's head, but it did nothing. His enormous hands were still wrapped around Bond's neck like a vice. Bond still had the Walther P99 in his hand, so he removed it from under the pillow, and quickly cracked the man's skull with the butt. The vice-like grip on Bond's neck vanished, and he let out a big breath. He jumped out of bed, and stood above the intruder, who lay unconscious on the hotel suite's floor. Bond's entire body was covered in a cold sweat, and his hands were shaking slightly as he reached for his mobile phone, constantly keeping an eye on his fallen assailant.

He quickly dialled a number on his phone, and was answered by a rather grumpy reply, "*Da!*" The voice on the other side of the phone shouted.

"Hello, Vladek!" Bond said. "Sorry to wake you, but I've got something in my hotel suite that you should see!"

"What?" the tired man replied.

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“Wait and see!” Bond laughed. “I’ll expect you in ten minutes.”

As he waited, Bond lit a cigarette, and continued to watch the unconscious man. Exactly ten minutes later, a loud knock on the door echoed through the suite.

“Come in!” Bond said.

When the door opened a very irritated looking Vladek Tesla, a descendant of the famous Croatian-born American electrical engineer stood silhouetted in the frame. Bond turned the light on and the UNS agent’s features could be seen. He had black hair and a thick moustache. His skin was very pale and he looked very skinny and frail, but he held a Star 30M pistol in his right hand. When he saw Bond he said angrily, “What the hell is it, 007?”

“That.” Bond said, pointing with his pistol towards the limp, unconscious body that lay on the floor.

Vladek ran across to the body, and looked at the man’s face. “Good god, James! You nailed Dmitri!”

“What, is he a friend of yours?”

“No, he is one of the most wanted criminals in Zagreb. He is a freelance assassin, a favourite of our friend Vladimir.”

“Good grief, I never realised he was such a bad loser!” Bond chuckled.

“What do you mean?” Vladek asked.

“I beat him at chess, now he sends this gorilla to punish me as he can’t do it for himself!”

“Are you sure you didn’t aggravate him, Bond?”

“Well, I paid a visit to his house a little earlier, killed two of his dogs.”

“What?” Vladek asked sounding distressed.

“Well, I tried to get a look at what he was up to, and

unfortunately I attracted the attention of his dogs and they attacked me. I had to defend myself.”

“You do realise that this could seriously jeopardise this mission, and that I'll have to report it to M?”

The conversation was interrupted by a few groans from the flattened intruder. There was a thin trail of blood from the spot where Bond had hit him, which ran down his cheeks like red tears. He rolled over, clearly still dazed. “Turn around very slowly,” Bond said, “and put your hands behind your head.”

“Please don't shoot.” The man pleaded. “I am just doing a job!”

“Oh yes, as since I seem to be at the centre of this business proposal I'd like some information before I sign the deal.” The man groaned again, as Vladek put handcuffs on him. Bond kept the silenced pistol aimed at the man's head, should he lash out at Bond's partner. “Now,” Bond began, “Why does he want me dead?”

“Who?” The man known as Dmitri asked, not sounding at all convincing to Bond, who was used to these games that people played when they knew that they had been caught, but still tried to wriggle their way out of it.

“No games, just answers.” Bond said sternly.

“I don't have any damn answers for you, I was merely hired to kill you.”

“By Vladimir?”

“Yes, but I have no idea what for.”

“I'm not convinced.” Bond said angrily, punching the man in the stomach as hard as he could. The assassin coughed and choked, but got up again.

“I'm telling the truth.” He said. “Vladimir said nothing, except that you are very dangerous.”

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“He said nothing about suicide bombings?”

“No, nothing.” Dmitri said, with sweat and blood running down his face.

“Vladek, take this man to the police, and hand him over. Tomorrow we’re going to have another look at Vladimir’s house.”

The Croatian agent kicked Dmitri hard in the side and told him to get up. Once he was up, he pressed the business end of his pistol against the thug’s back and told him to walk out of the door. Bond stood in the hallway and watched the two get into the elevator, before going back into his suite to try and get a bit more shut-eye.

4

The beeping of a mobile phone dug deep into Bond’s sleeping head, waking him up, and bringing him back into the world of the living. He searched amongst the pile of clothes that lay on the floor beside the bed for the phone, which continued its high-pitched whining like a mosquito that is unwilling to go away. Eventually he found the phone, and picked it up. “James Bond here.” He answered in a slightly gruff voice.

“Oh, I didn’t wake you up did I, James?” the soft voice on the other end of the phone asked. Bond recognised the voice immediately.

“Penny! Don’t you know not to bug a man this early?”

“Never mind about that, James. M wants you on secure line 3.”

“Thanks, darling Moneypenny.” Bond said to M’s ever loyal secretary, before pressing the ‘3’ button on his phone, which gave

him a direct line into one of the phones on M's desk in her office.

"Good morning, 007." M said, without a hint of pleasantness in her voice.

"Good morning to you too, Ma'am." Bond said, trying to send the conversation in a slightly friendlier direction. Unfortunately his tactics failed.

"You could very well have destroyed this operation!" M was very nearly shouting. "There has been another bombing, this time outside Buckingham palace. Killed thirteen people, mainly overseas tourists."

"Good God!" Bond mumbled.

"I hope that your intrusion on Connolly last night has not caused this."

Bond suddenly felt his entire body go limp. The thought of his actions causing the deaths of thirteen innocent tourists was too much for him to handle. "There's no way to know that I caused this!" Bond attempted to defend himself, as well as shrug off the sickening feeling of guilt.

"Well, you did cause a huge upset at his house, you killed two of his champion dogs, and then he sent someone to kill you, who is now in jail thanks to you. I'd say he had something to get angry about."

"Now, we haven't even confirmed that Connolly had anything to do with the first two bombings. I think it's a bit soon to connect him with this third one." Bond said.

"Oh, stop trying to defend your position Bond. You fouled up, and you're lucky I'm not pulling you off this case. There is no time to replace you. Any second wasted could mean the death of even more innocent people, and you wouldn't want to have that on your conscience, would you?"

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Bond hated the way that M was talking. It was emotional blackmail, and he wasn't a person to just accept it. He knew, however, that the case was too important to turn his back on. "Fine. What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Keep a close eye on Connolly, who he meets, and where he goes." M said. "Oh, Bond. Please try not to mess it all up again."

* * * * *

Driving the Aston Martin around Zagreb was no longer an option. Bond had been caught red handed, and all of Vladimir/Connolly's men had seen the car. Bond now found himself sitting alongside Vladek Tesla, in the Croatian agent's own Skoda. A car that was as inconspicuous as you could find in Eastern Europe. The car was parked about a hundred and fifty yards down the road from the house. Bond peered though a pair of powerful binoculars, and watched Vladimir pacing around one of the upper rooms. It had been fifteen minutes since they had parked where they were, and Bond felt that it was time to leave. If they continued to sit there, it would soon become noticeable that they were spying on the house.

They drove around the block a few times, with Vladek concentrating on the driving, and Bond concentrating on the house. Eventually, after Bond had lost count of the numbers of times that they had been up and down the same roads, he noticed a girl leave through the front entrance of the house. This entrance was not hidden like the back one was. "Follow that girl, Vladek." Bond said.

They turned off the road that they had been going around, and onto one of the main roads of the town. The girl was walking towards one of the parks on the outskirts of town. Bond and Vladek parked outside a coffee shop that looked over the park. They sat down and ordered two cups of strong, black coffee and watched the girl, who was now sitting on a bench, reading. She wore a big furry

coat, and sleek black leather shoes. Her hair was a dark brown, and her face was a pale colour, and she had obviously not seen the sun for days.

Once the two men had finished their coffee, the girl still sat reading. "I think I'm going to go and introduce myself to our young lady friend." Bond said to his Croatian partner.

"For heaven's sake be discreet, James. She probably knows about you."

Bond put a coat over his regular Brioni suit with a blue Turnbull & Asser shirt. He walked slowly across the grass to where the girl sat. He made his way up to the bench and politely asked, "Mind if I sit down here?"

"Of course not." The girl replied in an extremely friendly tone. She shifted herself across the bench to give Bond room to sit down.

"By the way, I'm Mark Hazard." Bond said, introducing himself by using one of the cover names he had used previously. "I'm from England and I'm here to buy textiles."

"I know a textile manufacturer." She said.

"I know you do," Bond said. "Yuri Zivkovic."

The girl laughed, "There aren't many locals who don't know him, Mr. Hazard."

"Please, call me Mark." Bond said smiling, hoping that this would prompt her to introduce herself.

"I'm Alexandra Jannsen," she said. Bond's tactics had worked. "But I'm usually called Alex by my friends."

"Well, Alex." Bond began. "How do you know Zivkovic?"

She looked worried now, and Bond was angry with himself for making her nervous. "I don't know what you mean, Mark. Like I said, everyone knows Yuri Zivkovic, I didn't mean I know him personally."

"No, of course not. Sorry, I misunderstood what you meant."

"That's okay, Mark. It's really great to have someone to talk to."

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The girl sounded as if she was sick and tired of her present situation. He thought that there might be a chance of convincing her to join him. If Connolly's reputation was anything to go by, he would certainly not be an easy man to have a relationship with. Also, Bond was familiar with his type. They usually got their women through force. This girl could just be the way to get to the heart of Connolly's operation.

"Well, I'm a little busy this morning, but why don't you join me for dinner this evening."

"That might be difficult." Bond raised an eyebrow. "I mean, I have lots to do."

"Oh, do please try and come. Meet me at the restaurant at my hotel. It's the Imperial Hotel."

She shrugged her shoulders and then said, "Okay, Mark. I'll be there at seven o'clock."

"Excellent show, Alex. I'll see you then."

The girl began walking back towards the house, and Bond walked back to the café, where Vladek was waiting. "Well?" he asked.

"I've got an appointment with our young friend." Bond said.

* * * * *

Bond dressed in a new black tuxedo, with his shoulder holster concealed under it. If Alex was in league with Vladimir, then he thought that he might find that he needed to defend himself, so he carried the Walther with him to dinner. When he arrived at the table he had booked, Alex was already sitting there in a strapless red dress. "Good evening." Bond said.

"Evening, Mark!" she said excitedly. Bond sat down at the table, and a waiter appeared.

"Ah, good evening." Bond said. "I'd like a bottle of Bollinger please, and some caviar." The waiter hurried off, and Bond looked into Alex's eyes. She was surely no older than twenty-two. The real

question that was troubling Bond was, is this girl in league with the enemy? Could it be that she is simply an innocent girl who has managed to get clutched in the jaws of a psychotic maniac? Bond could not simply ask her such things directly. If she realised that Bond was an SIS agent, she would surely get a fright and panic, which could completely destroy Bond's chances.

The champagne and caviar arrived, and the waiter poured a glass each for Bond and Alex. Bond raised his glass, and the girl followed suit gently touching the glasses together. "Cheers." Bond said. "Here's to a wonderful evening."

The girl smiled back at Bond and then took a sip of her champagne. Bond noticed a cut across her left cheek, which he was certain hadn't been there that morning in the park. She had clearly tried to hide it with make-up, as the cut had no redness to it, but was entirely flesh coloured. "Scratch yourself?" Bond asked.

She looked shocked at the question, as if she was surprised that Bond had noticed the cut. "Oh, y..yes." she stammered nervously. "I...I scratched myself on a low hanging branch on my way home after meeting you.

It looked suspicious, and she was definitely hiding something. Had the wound been inflicted by Connolly in anger? "Well don't worry," Bond played along, "it is barely visible. You're just as pretty as before."

She smiled nervously. She was still unaware of Bond's true identity. The two then continued to make light conversation for half an hour, most of it initiated by the girl. She was very interested in London, and she wanted to know everything about it. "And what about your business? Why have you come to buy textiles?"

"Well, I'm in import and export. Always looking for a good supplier."

"I see." The girl said. She sounded a little weary of Bond's story. Perhaps Connolly had warned her to be careful.

"So, where can I meet Yuri Zivkovic?" Bond asked. "From

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what I've heard it sounds like he's a good bet for us."

"Well, he lives at..." She stopped suddenly, with a terrified look on her face as she had realised what she had done. Her eyes began to well up with tears, and she started to shiver.

"Go on." Bond said.

"I'm sorry," she cried, "I can't. He'll kill me!"

Bond tried to seem like a sympathetic spectator in the whole affair. This would hopefully make her less scared, as well as maintain his cover. "Why would he do that?" he asked in the least threatening voice he could.

"I have to go!" she said, getting up from the table. Bond grabbed her arm as she tried to get away.

"Hey!" he tried to comfort her. "Surely you won't leave without having a nightcap."

She turned to tear-streaked cheeks towards Bond, and nodded. "Okay, I'll stay for a while." Bond began to walk away from the restaurant and towards the elevator. When they reached the suite, Bond removed his jacket, whilst making sure that the girl never saw his pistol.

"Why don't you go into the bathroom and clean your face up?" Bond asked. When she closed the bathroom door, Bond quickly took off the jacket, and removed the gun and holster, hastily putting them in the drawer of his bedside table. When the girl came out she looked nervously at Bond.

"Who are you, really?" she asked. Her eyes were still red and her face was pale. Bond was hesitant to answer her with the truth.

"He gave you that cut on your face, didn't he?" Bond asked, with a stern face.

The girl stood, unable to tell the truth, yet unwilling to hide it. She wiped another tear as it ran down her face, and answered, "Y...yes." She stammered, as Bond looked her in the eye. She could tell from Bond's eyes and the look on his face that he would not accept any story that she made up. "How does it concern you?" she

asked.

"Look, I can help you." Bond said. "I can see that you have a rotten life at that house. I bet you don't enjoy those ruffian's company."

"Are you a policeman, Mark?" she asked.

"No," Bond said. "I work for the British government. My real name is James Bond. I'm in Zagreb to take care of our friend Vladimir, and his boss, Zivkovic."

"What did they do?" she asked, sounding worried. "Why do the British want them?" Bond was pretty certain that she was entirely in the dark, and he decided that if he told her what they did, she would be disgusted by their atrocity and turn against them.

"We suspect that they organised the detonation of several bombs in Britain. Two in Manchester and one in London." The girl's face had a terrified look on it. "I have to stop this killing."

The girl started bawling, and in between the tears, she shook her head. "No, you must be mistaken."

"Maybe you haven't noticed anything, but they are ruthless killers, Alex." She continued to cry and shake her head, unable to believe Bond. "I don't know what they say to you, but many innocent people have been killed already, as well as twice that they have tried to kill me."

"Are...Are you sure?" She stammered, still crying.

"Yes." Bond replied. "And I need your help to stop it. You need to help me get into that house. Unless you would rather carry on living in that place, and you'll have to deal with your conscience knowing that as long as those two remain free, more people are going to die." He paused for a few seconds. "Can you live with that?"

The girl replied by shaking her head. "There's a secret entrance to the house via a manhole. You climb in and there is tunnel that comes out behind a big cabinet. But there is a man who guards it constantly.

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“Okay, this is what I need you to do.” Bond said, taking out a silver ballpoint pen. “Hidden in this pen is a pressel switch. It’s a small device that sends a radio signal to this earpiece.” Bond showed her the small earphone. The signal comes out as bursts of static.” The girl nodded to show that she understood. “You need to take care of the guard. Once he is out of the way, click the pen’s button three times. That will send three bursts of static to my earpiece.” He handed her the pen, and then said to her, “Once you’ve done that, you need to put the pen in the same room as Zivkovic and Vladimir. It contains a very sensitive microphone. It transmits to the earpiece as well. I want to be able to hear what is going on when I approach. Also, It will let me know that if I have been spotted if I hear them shouted and screaming about me!”

“When are you planning to do this?” Alex asked.

“Midnight tonight.”

The girl glanced at the small gold watch on her wrist. It read half past eight. “What are we going to do until then?” she asked.

“I can think of several things.” Bond smiled at her, and leaned towards her and kissed her gently on the lips. The girl responded by putting her arms around his neck, and the two pairs of lips passionately locked.

* * * * *

At eleven o’clock Bond climbed out of bed, put on his trousers and went to the bathroom. When he came back into the bedroom, the girl lay in the bed, enjoying the soft caress of the sheets on her naked skin. “Time to get going, Alex.” Bond said.

She sighed contentedly before removing herself from the bed and putting her shimmering red dress back on. “I’m ready, James.” She said.

“Good.” Bond smiled at her, realising the risk that she was taking. “I’m sorry that you had to become involved in this, Alex.”

The girl responded with a nervous smile. Bond nodded back to her with a faint smile on his face. He dressed in an all black outfit consisting of black trousers and black steel-toed boots, with a black long sleeved shirt. He rolled the sleeves up and then put his holster on. The black straps were barely visible, thanks to the rest of the outfit being black. He placed his pistol in the holster under his left arm. He put a silencer in his pocket, as well as the earpiece. The earpiece wasn't very obvious when it was on Bond's ear. It looked like a hearing aid. There was a transparent plastic piece in his ear. This was linked to a powerful receiver that was hidden behind the ear. The receiver was a flesh colour to make it even less conspicuous. The girl put the special pen in her small handbag, and asked, "Ready, James?"

"Yes, let's get going." Bond answered. The two left the room and walked along the crimson-carpeted passageway towards the elevator. Bond pushed the down button, and the two stood waited for the lift. The characteristic 'dong' sounded, and the doors slid open. Alex was halfway in when Bond grabbed her arm and stopped her.

"What is it?" she asked looking slightly worried.

"Something just occurred to me." Bond said. "Zivkovic probably had you followed here, in which case they'll be watching the elevator. Bond headed for the steel door at the far end of the passageway. "This door probably leads to an emergency escape." He walked briskly along the passageway, and tried the door's handle. It was locked.

"Damn it!" the girl said. "What will we do?"

Bond answered her question by taking a Swiss army knife out of his pocket. It was a dull-red coloured knife, which superficially looked like any other standard model. However, this particular had been modified by Q-branch, and contained two skeleton keys, which Q claimed were capable of opening more than ninety-five percent of the world's locks. "A great improvement on previous models." Q had

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boasted.

The girl looked on in amazement as Bond inserted one of the skeleton keys into the door and opened the lock without any hassle. They half opened the door and crept out onto the steel landing of the emergency staircase. They were eight floors up and the landing commanded a superb view of Zagreb. For the most part, the lights were out in the residential part of the city. The streetlamps burned, as well as a few bars and nightclubs, although the lighting in the bars was dim. Also, the nightclubs, despite their flashing lights, mostly had no windows or the windows were blackened. This meant that little light escaped onto the street. The whole view had an eerie feeling about it. The streets were covered in shadows, a perfect place to be attacked.

Having taken in the scenery, the two began to descend the stairs as quietly as possible. When they got to the third floor, Alex slipped and fell down several stairs. Bond thought that the noise of the fall had surely given them away, but to his relief no one came to investigate. Less than a minute after this mishap they continued their descent. They eventually reached the bottom of the staircase, which was in a small garden surrounded by hedges. The air bit into Bond, as he walked across the grass. He quickly scanned the car park, and saw no one. He signalled to Alex to come and she hurried across the lawn. They were about to move into the car park when Alex gasped and crouched on the ground behind the hedge.

“What is it?” Bond asked.

“Stefan.” Alex said. “One of Yuri’s henchmen.”

Bond looked up again and saw a man in a long, black leather coat, and a black woollen hat walking across the car park, keeping an eye on the hotel’s entrance. The Skoda was parked in between Stefan and the hedge that they were hiding behind. Bond observed Stefan’s movements and quickly noticed that he went around a corner as he walked his patrol route. They had about thirty seconds before he came back. When he disappeared around the corner, Bond jumped

up and Alex followed suit. They walked briskly over to the car, making sure they didn't run. This would only look suspicious. Bond unlocked the car and Alex jumped in the back and lay across the seat so that she would not be visible. Bond moved quickly over to the driver's side and climbed. He started the car, and quickly revved the engine to warm it up. He then put the car in reverse, and manoeuvred himself out of the parking bay. He then put the car in first gear, and drove off with a slight spin of the wheels on the thin layer of ice that lay on the cobblestone road. They left the hotel's gate as Bond saw Stefan come back around the corner in his rear-view mirror. Stefan glanced quickly at the car, but when he saw only Bond's silhouette he paid no more attention to it. "We got away with it!" Bond said as he made a racing change into second as they accelerated down the road.

5

The site of modern-day Zagreb was first occupied in Roman times, and Slavic tribes settled in the area in the 6th century. They established a settlement that came to be known as the Gradec, or "fortress". A second settlement, known as Kaptol, developed as a religious town in the late 11th century. Gradec and Kaptol expanded and eventually converged to become the sprawl that comprises modern Zagreb.

As the Skoda carrying Bond and Alex drove through the sprawling suburbs, the girl in the passenger's seat sat still and silent. Her whole body was stiffened, and Bond could swear he heard her heart pounding. "Relax, Alex." He said. "Now, just think. Tomorrow morning you'll be rid of those two bastards for good."

She breathed in a deep breath, before saying, "I hope you're right, James." She looked at him, as he drove the car with cool self-

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confidence. “I hate to say it. But I think you’re underestimating those two.”

“Why would you say that, my dear?” he asked.

“Well, they’re very powerful. Even if you kill them, there are still others who will come after you.”

“Don’t worry about that, Alex.” Bond reassured her. “I assure that once we’ve got them we’ll be out the country in a matter of hours. When we’ve arrested them, a friend of mine will come and take them. He’ll organise their extradition back to England, and they’ll be locked in one of the world’s most secure prisons.” Bond was referring to Dartmoor prison in southern Devon. Bond then remembered that Connolly had already escaped Dartmoor once. He thought about it for a few seconds and reassured himself that security would be tighter when he was imprisoned for a second time.

Buildings and alleyways flashed as Bond went at the speed limit through the built up areas of Zagreb. When they were getting near to the area of the house, Bond began to look for a convenient spot to park. From where they were he could just see the roof of the house. It was about one hundred and fifty yards away. Bond pulled over to the side of the road, and stopped the car. As the engine stopped, Bond said, “Here we go.”

The two walked to about fifty yards away, and then Bond stopped. Alex walked closer. She could see the guard now. He stood in a black leather coat, identical to the one worn by the man in the parking lot at the hotel. She inched closer towards him and whistled at him. When he spun round she smiled seductively at him and motioned him to come to her with her finger. He stood still and tried to pay no attention to him, but he could not keep his eyes off the girl’s breasts, which jutted towards him. She began to undo the zip on the back of her dress. The guard began to walk towards Alex, and she continued to remove the top of her dress. The guard came and put his arms around the girl, and began to kiss her. He undid the rest of the zip, and began to pull her dress off. The cold air began to feel

painful on her bare back. She began to slowly move her right hand down towards her thighs. As the dress fell off her body, the man was too busy kissing her body to notice the knife strapped to the inside of her left thigh. Her hand went straight for the knife, and she removed it from the leather pouch strapped to her leg. She pulled it out and quickly thrust it into the man's back. He shouted in agony, and she stabbed him again, this time in the side of his neck. The man began to fall to the ground. He was a huge man, six foot five, and all muscle. The weight of his body falling on Alex knocked her to the ground as well. She pushed his dead body off her, and got up. She felt a little stupid standing on the side of the road, in nothing but a pair of black lace panties with a dead body at her feet. She took the pen Bond had given her and clicked it three times.

When Bond emerged from behind a hedge, he saw Alex putting the red dress back on. The guard was a dead black heap on the pavement. When he reached the spot, he pick up the corpse by the shoulders and dragged it over to the nearest water drain. He removed the grid before dropping the leather-clad body into it.

Once Alex was properly dressed again, they opened the manhole. There was a steel ladder, about five metres high that Bond could see went down into a dimly lit room. Alex climbed down the ladder first, followed by Bond, who replaced the manhole's steel cover as he climbed in. As he reached the bottom, he looked around inside the small room that they now found themselves in. Its concrete walls were streaked with water marks from seepage, and there was a damp smell in the air. "Okay, do you know where to go from here?" Bond asked.

"Yes, this tunnel goes on for about twenty metres, and then there is another ladder. At the top is a small landing, which is directly behind the cabinet. Yuri and Vladimir will probably be in the room with a gold plated door. You can't miss it, 'cos all the other doors are wooden."

"Thanks for your help, Alex." Bond smiled at her gratefully.

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Just put that pen in the room, and then go to your bedroom and wait there. Don't do anything stupid. If they catch me, don't try and rescue me, because then they will know that you are with me."

"No ways. I will help you no matter what." She said sternly to Bond.

"I don't want you to get hurt, that's all. It isn't that I don't want your help."

"Forget it." She said. "If they get you, they'll have to kill me before I let them kill you."

Bond smiled and nodded, before he started walking down the tunnel, and the girl followed. When they reached the ladder, Bond climbed up first, followed by Alex. They both stood on the small landing, and Bond gave the girl a hand signal, and she pushed the cabinet open. Thankfully, the room was empty. It was obviously a small library, with cabinets full of books, and a reading table with a couple of chairs. The girl looked back at Bond and gave him a thumbs up signal. She then closed the cabinet, and moved towards the gold-plated door. She put her ear up against the wall, and heard the two voices of Yuri Zivkovic and Vladimir. They did not sound particularly worried, which was very relieving. She was very scared that her entry with Bond had been noticed. She knocked on the door, and Zivkovic said "Come in." in Serbo-Croat. She opened the door and appeared before the two men. "Evening, my dear!" Zivkovic said to her. "You've been out late."

"I went to the theatre with a friend of mine from university. Afterwards we went for a meal."

"I see." Said Zivkovic, sounding a little suspicious of her story. The girl stood silent for a few moments, trying to decide how she was going to plant the pen in the room without looking suspicious. After a few seconds she came up with an idea.

"I bought this for you, at the shop next door to the restaurant that we ate at." She handed him the gold pen. She thought that the story she had made up was a superb idea. It made her story of being

out in town that evening more convincing, and she has put the pen in the room in a way death was not suspicious.

"Thank you, my dear girl." He said, with a faint smile across his cruel face. He had a very pointed chin and very short light brown hair. His eyes were dark brown, and his mouth had an angry look.

"I'll just go off to bed, then." The girl said. Zivkovic nodded in reply and sat down. She left the room, and walked back over to the cabinet and opened it. "Good luck." She said to Bond, then she kissed him and left the room down a passage. Bond attached the silencer to his Walther, and walked out into the room. Thankfully there were thick carpets, which stopped the heavy boots that he had on from making a noise. He quietly closed the secret doorway behind him and walked over to the gold-plated door. He knocked three times, and Zivkovic answered, "*Da!*"

Bond opened the door quickly, and raised his pistol, aiming it and Zivkovic, and then turning and aiming it at Vladimir. "You!" Vladimir snarled at Bond.

"Yes, good evening to you too, Mr. Connolly." Vladimir frowned at Bond. "Go over and stand by Mr. Zivkovic." Bond ordered. He got up out of his seat and stood next to his boss. "Now, hands up both of you!"

"Who are you?" Zivkovic asked.

"I'm British Secret Service." Bond answered.

Zivkovic now frowned as well. He then shrugged his shoulders, and asked, "What does the British Secret Service want with me?"

"No games, Zivkovic." Bond said sternly. "What were those suicide attacks in aid of? You caused the death of many innocent people, and I presume you don't mean to stop now."

Before Zivkovic or Connolly could answer, Bond heard the door of the office start to open. The window behind Zivkovic was like a mirror, and Bond saw another man in a black leather coat. Bond spun round and shot the man right between the eyes. He spun round and saw Zivkovic and Connolly both drawing guns. Bond shot

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Connolly in the heart, but before he could aim his Walther at Zivkovic, the Croatian gangster had a pistol aimed at Bond's head. He immediately recognised it as a Makarov 59, the standard side-arm of all Soviet forces since the late 1950's. "Now it is your turn to put your hands up!" Zivkovic grinned at Bond. When Yuri saw the Walther fall from Bond's hands onto the floor, he sat down behind his desk once more, keeping the pistol aimed at Bond's heart. "So, Mr. Secret Service. Do you have a name, or am I simply to call you a fool?"

"Piss off!" Bond said angrily.

"Your name, or I shoot you." Vladimir smiled. "Not dead, of course! But somewhere where it will cause a lot of pain."

Bond began to sweat, "The name's Bond." He replied, then wiped the sweat off his forehead. "James Bond."

"I see. I have heard your name before. You have a great reputation." Bond made a somewhat artificial smile, as if he was proud of this. "I am a former agent of SMERSH, Mr. Bond. I was in Otdyel II, the department in charge of operations, including executions."

"Yes, I'm aware of the structure of SMERSH, Zivkovic." Bond said, sounding irritated.

"I recall that your *zapiska* was particularly full." Zivkovic was referring to the dossier that SMERSH had kept on him. "You humiliated us many times, Mr. Bond. Even our best executioners were unable to kill you."

"So SMERSH is behind the terrorist attacks?" Bond asked.

"No, no, Mr. Bond." Zivkovic shook his head. "I'm sure you are aware that SMERSH was disbanded some years ago, such a pity." He smiled as he remembered his years as an executioner for the former Soviet government's instrument of revenge. "I have not, however abandoned the ideals of my former employers. I still have a deep hatred for the British. A few years ago I toyed with the idea of starting a new SMERSH, but I eventually decided that I would prefer

a small, invisible organisation.”

“So you went into business for yourself.” Bond said.

“Quite right.” Zivkovic nodded. “But alas, I am growing old. I then began looking for a more youthful man who shared my hatred of the British.” Zivkovic smiled again and said, “Where better to look than the IRA! So I came across our friend, who you correctly identified as Gary Connolly.”

“How long ago was this?” Bond asked curiously.

“Six years ago.” Zivkovic told Bond.

“So he was already in your employ when the SAS caught him and put him in prison?”

“Yes,” said Zivkovic, “that was very inconvenient. I had to devote three months of my valuable time to devising a way to get him back. I was very angry about that whole episode. I said he should abandon his IRA operations and come with me to Zagreb. He disagreed and said, that he wanted to carry on fighting for his beloved IRA for a few more months. This was a foolish decision on his part.” Zivkovic sighed as he continued telling Bond his story. “However, I decided to help get him out. I planted one of my own operatives in Dartmoor. He worked in the prison for over a month, building up a good reputation and waiting for the right moment. One evening when he was on duty alone he let Connolly and a few other IRA men out. I was, of course, quite happy to help the IRA. They shared many of my beliefs, and I admired some of their methods.”

“The tongue-tie?” Bond asked.

“Yes, that is one of my favourites!” Yuri laughed. “Mr. Connolly was particularly gifted at this method of execution.” Zivkovic paused, and then continued with the story. “So we began our operations against the British. Our initial operations were confined to Eastern Europe. We would assassinate a British Agent here, a visiting British politician there. In our first year we eliminated only four people. By this time Mr. Connolly had become Vladimir.

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He received professional voice training in order to sound more like a real Croatian. He began to dispatch all our victims with his trademark, which, as you pointed out, was the tongue-tie.”

“This is a brilliant story, Yuri.” Bond said. “I’m getting a little tired, so do you think you could hurry up?”

Zivkovic glared angrily back at him. “You are bored by my story?” he asked.

“No, it’s a fascinating one.” Bond said, sounding very artificial. “I’m just in a hurry, that’s all.” He said mockingly.

“In a hurry to die?” Zivkovic asked. His pistol was still aimed right at Bond’s heart. “For that is all that is in store for you once I have finished with you.” Bond stood still, thinking about Zivkovic’s words. “Now to continue.” Yuri began again. “About two years ago I decided that it was time to move on to bigger operations, so we began targeting England itself. We started our offensive by eliminating five agents of your sister service, MI5.”

Bond racked his brains, and then remembered hearing of the event. “Oh yes!” he said. “New years eve. You killed them at a nightclub in Liverpool, with a bottle of beer packed with C4 explosive. It just so happens that you took out seven innocent party-goers at the same time.”

“Yes, that was a shame.” Zivkovic mocked Bond, who stared angrily into the Croatian’s brown eyes. “But seven drunk teenagers must not be allowed to stand in the way of my operation.”

“You’re just a butcher, Yuri. Nothing more.”

“And you are just a fool, and you are entitled to your own opinion.” Zivkovic grinned arrogantly at Bond. “I lay low for a while, while MI5 investigated it. We made some more small attacks over the last year. Then of course as you know, two days ago we learned that two of the famed ‘OO’ agents were in Manchester, and we sent two eager young men to detonate themselves, killing the agents.”

"What!" Bond shouted. He had heard nothing about two 'OO' agents being killed in the Manchester bombings.

"Surely you are aware of this?" Zivkovic asked. "Is this not why you were sent out here?"

"Yes." Bond said angrily. "But I knew nothing about the two agents."

"Are you telling me that M never even told about your 'OO' brethrens' demise?" Zivkovic laughed hysterically. "And you are supposedly her best agent?" He continued laughing. "They do not even trust you with information."

Bond thought about the absurdity of the situation. Why had he not been told about the dead agents? Zivkovic was right. M obviously didn't trust him enough to tell him, because surely they knew. Every time that an agent had been killed previously, they had been aware of it. There was only one answer: M had thought that if she told Bond about it, he would turn the mission into a personal vendetta.

Zivkovic was still laughing, "The great James Bond. Left in the dark by his boss!" He was pushing the right buttons, because the anger in Bond was building up, at an extremely fast rate. His breathing was heavier, and his heart was pounding. Every heart beat sent another wave of high pressure blood to the shaking muscles of his body. "You see now why I call you a fool. You come here and try to kill me. I am an extremely powerful man, who can kill anyone he pleases with a single word. You on the other hand are merely a paid assassin, one of Her Majesty the Queen's pawns, whose job is to move her empire forward one square at a time. And you think that you are capable of killing me?" Zivkovic snorted. "Live is just a game of chess, and how many chess games have you seen where a pawn captures a rook?" Yuri waited for a reply but Bond remained silent. "You see, Mr. Bond. Such things don't happen in the real world."

Bond was overflowing with anger. If Zivkovic was not aiming a

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pistol at his heart, he would have dived over the desk and beaten the hell of the arrogant bastard. He looked at the body of Gary Connolly who lay one the floor, with a neat red hole in his chest. “Don’t you think enough people have died yet?” Bond asked. “All those people in Manchester, tourists outside Buckingham palace. Now, even your protégé, Vladimir.”

“Well, Mr. Bond. You may have killed Vladimir, but I still have at least two lives to take.”

“Two?” Bond asked.

“Yes. You, of course.” Zivkovic then paused. “And my so-called lover, Alex.”

Bond’s anger was now at absolute boiling point. “Come on, Yuri. Leave the girl alone. She was scared, that’s all. Any innocent young girl would be frightened if she found out that her lover was a murderer.”

“Perhaps what you say is true.” Zivkovic said. “But anyone who betrays me cannot be left alive. It is a basic matter of principle.”

“What’s that to a man as unprincipled as yourself?”

This touched a nerve in Zivkovic. “Who are you to judge?” he said as he got up out of his chair and walked over to Bond. “You are yourself a killer, and you come here and try to say that I am unprincipled. Your own life is hardly a sweet tale. You have committed many sins, and the time has come for you to pay for them.” He stood in front of Bond and looked into the British agent’s blue eyes. He then pressed the pistol right up against the chest. “Now pay.” He whispered menacingly. Bond shut his eyes, waiting for the hot lead to slam into chest. Instead, he felt the pain of a fist slamming into his face, and then again. His face was now bloody. His nose bled, and there was a gash above his left eye. Bond felt a prick in his arm, and his vision almost immediately went blurry. The image of Zivkovic in front of him began to disappear into a hazy greyness as Bond passed out.

The sun shone straight into Bond's waking eyes. He closed them almost fully so that there were just two narrow slits to see through. His throat felt as dry as sandpaper, and his lips were cracked and sore. Dry blood restricted his breathing through his nose, and sweat mixed with blood had stuck the hairs on his forehead together. One of his eyes was swollen and purple, and he had a pounding headache.

He put aside the pain, well actually he decided that it was more really just discomfort, to take in the scene that he now found himself in. He was in some sort of courtyard, around the back of the house. He was chained to a concrete chair, which overlooked what appeared to be some sort of arena. It was a circular grassed area, surrounding by a big electric fence. In the middle of the circle was a wooden post, which had a chain attached to it. On the end of the chain was a ring, which was obviously used to tie an animal, or a person, to the post. There was a shed, constructed out of concrete blocks, which contained some wild beast. Bond heard growling and pounding coming from inside the small structure. He looked at his left wrist, to see what the time was, but his watch had been removed while he was unconscious.

He looked around, but saw no one. He could hear the pit bulls, which had attacked him on his first visit to the house, barking and yelping on the other side of the building. Bond looked up at the sky. It was a perfect blue, with just a few wisps of cloud toward the horizon. "A perfect day", he thought to himself.

"Good morning Mr. Bond." Yuri Zivkovic's voice disturbed the peace. Bond remained silent. "You slept well?" the Croatian asked.

"Yes." Bond said. "I didn't have any trouble nodding off."

"British humour." Zivkovic chuckled. "It is all but lost on me."

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Bond's sense of humour evaporated when he saw three of Yuri's men dragging Alex out into the courtyard. Her clothes were ripped and were hanging off her body. She didn't look at all dignified. "Welcome to the party, my dear lady." Zivkovic teased her. She had obviously been hit around after Bond had been drugged. Her bottom lip was swollen, and her forehead was cut. Her whole body had bruises on it. "Lovely day for a bit of sport." Yuri said. "Have you ever dabbled in the under-rated sport of bear-baiting, Mr. Bond?"

"I've never been one for blood-sports." Bond answered. The arena, Bond now realised was a bear pit, and that was Zivkovic's reason for keeping the pit bulls.

"Why ever not, Mr. Bond." Zivkovic asked. "It is a most noble sport."

"Unless you happen to be a bear." Bond said, frowning.

"Oh please, Mr. Bond." Zivkovic laughed. "Don't tell me you're a campaigner for animal rights?" Bond didn't answer, but he simply stared angrily into Zivkovic's cold eyes. "It was very popular in your country during the sixteenth century, especially amongst the monarchy. It is a lot simpler than modern sports such as cricket or football. A bear is tethered to a stake in a sunken 'bear pit' and dogs are set on the animal. The fight continues until the bear is killed. Occasionally, some or all of the dogs are killed instead. If this is the case, the bear is kept for another occasion. Sadly it was outlawed in most countries in 1835, however it has continued to take place illegally in many countries, as have other such sports like cockfighting."

"No lecture, please Zivkovic." Bond said curtly. "It is just a massacre, for what? Entertainment?"

"I would have thought that a natural killer such as yourself would know how to take pleasure in the act of taking another's life."

"I only kill on strict orders from the British government. Those whom I kill are ruthless men themselves, and deserve nothing less. I

take absolutely no pleasure in the deed.” Bond said sternly.

“Well, suit yourself, but I know that although you refuse to admit it, you find as much satisfaction in death as me. Of course your own death will provide you with little pleasure, but you owe a great deal of pain for all the people that you have killed, some of whom were very dear friends of mine. It is a strong bond that forms between SMERSH agents. Perhaps it is the awful conditions that we had to endure together in training. The sense of partnership is unusually strong. When your fellow agents’ lives are taken, one is filled with anger of the highest intensity. I have waited too long to avenge my brothers, but at least I shall have to wait no longer. You will now pay what is owed. You shall pay with your life, for those that you have taken.” Zivkovic said all this with a tone of pride, and uncontrollable glee.

“What about the lives that I have saved?” Bond said. “All these times that I have killed another man, it has saved hundreds of others every time. Don’t those count for anything?”

Zivkovic thought for a few seconds, then smiled and said, “Ach. You are just trying to salve your conscience. As a so-called English gentleman you force yourself to think that killing is wrong. Why? If it is wrong, why do you do it? Do you do it because it’s your job? No!” Zivkovic said boldly. “You do it because you want to. Because you like it.”

Bond couldn’t tell if Zivkovic really meant any of the things that he was saying, but it infuriated him. He vainly tried to break free from the chains that held him to the chair. All he achieved was to cut his wrists on the sharp metal of his bonds.

“Do not struggle, Mr. Bond. It is merely a waste of energy. Most unwise, I’d say, because you’re going to need it.” Yuri grinned sadistically. Zivkovic motioned towards the shed with his hands, and one of his men went over to the shed, and unlocked the door. He opened it and then left hastily. Another man came in with a nasty looking whip and began to crack it. A huge brown bear emerged

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from the door of the shed and came lumbering into the bear pit. The man with the whip lashed the bear twice and the huge animal stopped moving. A second man, who also appeared to be an animal handler, picked up the chain and put the ring around the bear's neck. Before the animal could respond, it was securely attached to the stake. "See Mr. Bond, the bear is now in place. It has been angered by the whips, and will require little encouragement to attack anything that comes near it."

"You're not going to force us to watch this brutal show are you?" Bond asked.

"If I were you, I'd pay attention, Mr. Bond. And you too young lady." Zivkovic looked at Alex. "Once this fight is over, both of you will have your turn!"

Bond heart started racing, and he heard the girl start to cry. He knew that there was nothing that he could do to stop a man like Zivkovic from doing what he wanted. The only thing that he could do was to think of a way to stop the dogs from killing them.

At the far end of the bear pit, a passage of electrified wire ran from the back of the other side of the house where Bond presumed the dogs were kept. A gate kept the dogs out of the bear pit, and when they heard one of the handlers open the gate they ran full speed from the back of their enclosure to the bear pit. Five dogs entered the arena. Three of them immediately jumped on the bear, sinking their razor sharp teeth into its huge limbs. The bear groaned in agony and began swinging its arms and legs. One of the dogs was hit by one of the bear's swinging hands, and the huge paw shattered the dog's jaw and it fell to the ground whimpering. The other two dogs still had their teeth firmly in the bear's legs. Blood from the bear covered the dog's faces, and they slashed the bear with their claws. The last two dogs now joined in the fight. They both jumped up and slashed the bear's chest. The huge animal moaned as the four remaining dogs mauled it. One of the dogs bit into the bear's heel and the leg collapsed. The bear fell to the ground, on top of one of

the dogs, whose muffled squeals could be heard from under the bear, as the huge body squashed it. The remaining dogs then went for the bear's neck and started to tear at it with their teeth. The bear began to roll around on the grass as the dogs killed it. After they had mangled the bear's neck, the dogs began to slash the bear's chest. The dogs bathed in the bear's blood as the huge creature breathed its last breath.

With the show over, the handlers chased the dogs down the electrified tunnel, and back to their enclosure. The girl's face was red and streaked with tears. Bond was breathing heavily and shaking in anger. He hated to see an innocent creature killed by savage animals, bred and trained for their purpose by human beings. "Quite a show, eh, Mr. Bond?" Zivkovic said to Bond who swore angrily at the former SMERSH agent. "I hope for your sake that you have a good plan, Mr. Bond, because as you can see, my dog's are particularly nasty." Zivkovic laughed.

One of Zivkovic's men came and released Bond and the girl from their chain. Two more kept sub-machine guns aimed at them constantly. The man pushed the girl towards the enclosure, and she cried as she was forced into the pit. Bond followed with his hands in the air. Meanwhile, The animal handlers lifted the bear's lifeless body out of the pit. The stake in the middle now had two chains attached to it. The ring on the end of each chain was big enough for one human hand. The left hand of both Bond and the girl were put in the rings, which were basically like handcuffs. All the men left the pit, and walked up to where Zivkovic was standing. "I wish you luck, but I would not bet on you as the winner's of this. Goodbye, Alexander. Goodbye to you too, 007. It has been a pleasure to meet you at last, but now our meeting is over. I will leave you in the capable hands, or should I say paws, of my dogs. I do so hate to see people suffer. So I will refrain from watching, however, I will leave one of my men to watch over you in your last seconds."

"Very thoughtful of you, Yuri." Bond said, without the slightest

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hint of happiness on his face.

Zivkovic laughed and turned his back on the pit. He went back inside the house and was followed by all of his men, except for the one who was standing by the gate. He pushed a button on his remote control and the gate slid open. Bond was facing the gate and he saw five pit bulls come bounding down the tunnel. He swore under his breath, as he watched the dogs racing towards them. Alex cried out, "James!"

"It's okay, Alex. I'll get us out of here." Bond replied. He wasn't really sure if he meant it, because he could see very little chance of getting out of there. However, at that time a line from Shakespeare flashed across his mind: *'They have tied me to the stake; I cannot fly, but bear-like I must fight the course.'* Bond smiled as he recalled the quote, and he said, "I'll fight them, Alex!"

The first dog reached Bond and he swung his boot at it. The perfectly timed kick connected with the dog's neck, and the steel-toed boot shattered the dog's neck, and killed it instantly. "One down." Bond remarked. Another two dogs then jumped on Bond. One slashed Bond's right arm, while the other one bit his leg. The thick trousers Bond was wearing stopped the dog from biting a huge chunk out of his leg, but the teeth still sank into Bond's flesh. He screamed in pain, but with the edge of his free hand, he hit the back of the dog's neck. The dog howled and let go of Bond's leg. Bond kicked its chest and broke the dog's ribs. The girl was screaming and Bond looked over his shoulder. Another dog was about to attack Alex. Bond swung around as far as his chain would let him, and punched the dog's mouth. The dog's bared teeth cut Bond's fist, but the dog backed away from Alex. Bond's main aim was now to protect the girl. The blood that flowed from his arm and leg caused the remaining dogs to go into frenzy. All three dogs attacked them at once. One bit Bond in the leg again, and he punched it as it struck. Another got the girl's arm. But with her flailing her arms around, it

didn't manage to bite her properly. She did still have three nasty cuts on her arm. The dog that Bond had punched was lying on the ground for a few seconds, but that was all that he needed. He raised his right foot a few inches in the air, and then brought the heavy boot down on the dog's neck.

Now only two of the vicious dogs remained. The guard still stood watching the fight. Even if they killed all the dogs, Bond suspected that his orders were to shoot them. He felt the last of his hope drain away. The adrenaline seemed to leave his body, and he felt tired, and lost the will to carry on fighting. He thought of the innocent girl, who would soon be ripped to pieces by the dogs. The thought was just too terrible for Bond to consider. He was just about to give up when he remembered the special boots that he was wearing. Concealed in the heel of his left boot was a flat throwing knife. He turned around so that the guard wouldn't see anything. He lifted his leg up and pushed the heel of the shoe back. The knife popped out of the heel. The handle of the knife was just big enough for one hand, so Bond took the blade in his free right hand and got ready to kill the last two dogs. He now had hope once more, and he turned around the face the dogs, while still keeping the knife concealed so that the guard would do anything. One of the dogs leaped onto Bond. The dog landed on his chest, and knocked Bond to the ground. When he fell, the chain pulled on his left shoulder, and he felt it dislocate. He yelled in pain, but he bared the blade of the knife, and stuck it into the dog's ribs. The pit bull squealed and rolled off Bond and died. The guard saw the blood-covered knife in Bond's hand, and he raised his sub-machine gun and aimed it at Bond. The British agent saw the guard and in one fluid motion he sat up and threw the knife at the guard. Before the man could pull the trigger, the knife pierced his neck and cut the trachea. The man dropped the gun and fell over. He lay on the floor, writhing in agony for a few seconds before he died.

Bond got up, and prepared to kill the last dog. The right boot

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had no knife in the heel, so he would have kill the dog with his hand or feet. Before he could decide what to do, the pit bull jumped onto Alex. It bared its teeth and prepared to bite her neck. Bond hands instinctively went for the dog's neck. His dislocated shoulder caused him huge amounts of pain, but that wouldn't stop him from strangling the dog. The pit bull's neck was almost solid muscle, and Bond felt like his grip was hardly affecting the dog at all. The animal tried to snap at Alex's face, but Bond pulled hard on its neck and managed to get it off the girl. He dropped the dog on the floor, but it was up again in less than a second and it went for Bond. He punched it with little effect, but it gave Bond a second to swing his arm properly and punch the dog with terrific force. The blow knocked the dog straight to the ground, where it lay whimpering. Bond put it out of its misery with a sharp blow from his boot to the dog's head, breaking the skull and instantly killing the dog.

Bond let out a groan of pain, as he leant against the pole. The girl was crying, and she asked Bond, "Is it over now, James?"

"No." Bond said.

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"Zivkovic is still alive." Bond said. "My mission isn't over until that bastard is dead."

"But how are we going to free ourselves from this pole?"

Bond thought about how he was going to get them out of their situation. The situation seemed hopeless. The blade of the throwing knife might have unlocked the hand-cuffs, but at present it was stuck in the neck of the dead guard. The other thing that worried Bond was that Zivkovic or one of his men could come back out any second now. He turned to look at the girl. She was in a sorry state. Her skirt and shirt were both shredded, and she was covered in a

mixture of dirt and blood. Through the torn shirt Bond saw that the girl was wearing a black bra. At first, he didn't think of it, but a few seconds later he said, "Of course." He paused and smiled, then continued, "Alex, take your bra off!"

"What?" she laughed. "Now's not the time for that!"

"Don't argue." Bond said. "Just take it off, and give it to me." With her free hand, Alex undid the clasp of the black nylon bra, and gave it to Bond, who quickly began to tear it to shreds.

"James." She said. "What do you think you're doing?" She realised what Bond was up to when, he took the under-wire out of the shredded piece of lingerie. He bent the wire into a rough lock pick, and began to try and free the girl from her cuffs. After two minutes of trying, the locked turned, and the girl was free.

"Go and get that gun." Bond said to her, pointed to the spot where the dead guard lay. "And get the knife as well while you're there." The girl picked up the gun, and covered her mouth as she pulled the bloody knife from the man's severed neck. By the time she returned to the pit, Bond was free. "Okay, Alex. Let's go and kill that son of a bitch!" Bond looked at the girl, who smiled back at him. Both were in pain, but they both understood that they had a score to settle with Zivkovic. The girl looked a real mess, her ripped shirt revealed her pale chest. Bond walked over to the dead guard and took his leather coat. "Here." He said to the girl. "Wear this."

She gratefully put the coat over her torn clothes, and then said to Bond, "Ready, James?"

Bond nodded in reply, and then looked at the sub machine gun he had acquired. It was an Ingram M10. He had never used the weapon himself, but he had heard of it. A small, concealable sub-machine gun with an astonishing rate of fire, over a thousand rounds per minute. He took the magazine out and saw that it was half full. Bond seemed to recall that the magazine had a capacity of thirty-two rounds, which meant that he had about sixteen. It had a bulbous suppressor on it as well, which was obviously needed in a built up

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neighbourhood. It wouldn't help to be firing guns that would arouse the suspicions of the other residents. As they turned towards the house, a man in a black coat came out of the door. Bond squeezed the trigger and shot about seven rounds into the man. Bond was astonished at the effectiveness of the suppressor, which reduced the noise to just the sound of the oscillating bolt. They entered the house through the door that the guard had just come out of. "Alex, why don't you wait here and stay out of trouble?"

"No, James." She said insistently. "This time I'm coming with you."

"Fine, then you had better make yourself useful." He said to her. "Which way to Zivkovic's study?"

"Up the stairs." she said as she pointed at the wooden staircase. As they started up the stairs, the wooden steps creaked under their feet. The sound attracted another guard, whom Bond dispatched with the throwing knife. He wanted to conserve his ammunition. He had no idea how many there were. Once they reached the landing, they found a guard asleep in a chair. Bond tried to silently walk over and knock the man out, but the sound of his heavy boots on the wooden floor gave him away, and the man woke up. Before he knew what was going on, he was peppered with bullets from Bond's M10. His screams attracted another guard whom Bond dispatched in the same manner. He took the magazine out, and saw that he now had five rounds left. He would only get one chance to shoot Zivkovic, as one squeeze of the trigger would fire all those bullets. He crept over to the gold-plated door of the study, and kicked it open. The force of the kick destroyed the door's lock, and he saw the sight of Zivkovic sitting behind his desk. The shock on Zivkovic's face was a sight to behold. The face of the powerful man was now one of fear, as Bond squeezed off the last rounds, the Croatian fell off the side of his chair, and the bullets went harmlessly through the window. Bond swore as he ran out of bullets. He ran across to Zivkovic, who was drawing his Makarov. Bond kicked the pistol from his hand, and

kicked the man in the gut. Despite Zivkovic's age, he was still in the same shape as he had been when he was in SMERSH. His abdomen was solid muscle, and the kick had little effect. He jumped, and punched him again in the solar plexus. Still he seemed unaffected, and he punched Bond in the chest. Bond doubled up, but he stayed on his feet.

"You bastard!" the girl shouted as she lunged towards Zivkovic, but the big man slapped her off her feet, and she lay whimpering on the floor.

Bond punched the Croatian on the jaw, which had more effect, but Bond knuckles ached. Zivkovic punched Bond again, and the punched nearly knocked Bond off his feet. Bond responded with two left punches to the man face, and he drew blood. The red blood streaking down the former SMERSH agent's face only made him look fiercer. He seemed unaffected by the pain. "It hopeless, 007!" he said. "No man on this planet can hurt me!"

The girl picked up a big wooden mallet, which was hanging on the wall, and hit the huge Croatian in the genitals. The man screamed and fell to the ground whimpering. The sweat ran down his face, which was turning a deep purple, and Bond mocked him, "What about a woman?" he asked, before kicking Zivkovic in the mouth. The big man lay on the floor, motionless. Bond walked over and picked up the Makarov pistol. As he pointed it at Zivkovic, he remembered the chess analogy that the Croatian had used to taunt Bond the previous evening. He smiled and said, "Check Mate!" before firing three rounds into Zivkovic's chest. The bullets sliced through the muscular chest and punctured the big man's lungs and heart, which killed him instantly.

* * * *

Bond lay on the bed in his hotel room, after a night of pleasure with Alex. He no longer felt the cuts and bruises, but was under the

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influence of the painkiller that was love. The girl walked into the room in a silk nightie, and asked Bond, “Seen the newspaper this morning?”

“No.” He said. “What’s it say?” The girl handed him the paper and he read the main story.

YURI ZIVKOVIC DIES

Popular Croatian businessman Yuri Zivkovic died last night in Zagreb. Local authorities have refused to comment, but it is believed that the industrial magnate died of lead poisoning.

Bond laughed at the last line. “Good old Moneypenny!” he said, “She always comes up with a good story!”

“Is your mission over now, Commander?” Alex asked.

“Not quite.” Bond said, with a slight mischievous grin on his face. He was still a little disappointed that M had neglected to tell him of the death of the two agents in Manchester. “I still have a small score to settle with my managing-director.”

MATT RAUBENHEIMER is a filmmaker based in Cape Town, South Africa. He has been writing stories from an early age. His first James Bond fan fiction novella, *Sidewinder*, was published on the Absolutely James Bond website in July 2005. Since then he has written another four short works, and also co-authored the full length Bond novel, *Obsidian Masquerade*.

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