

The 2nd Empty Chair

The Port Arthur Paradox



By Oskar Zimmerman

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Author's Note

This is a work of absolute fiction which incorporates some actual events and facts, however it cannot be complete, and will never correlate with all the facts. Key elements of the events cannot be reconciled with existing facts. Some of the “facts” that we “know” may well turn out to be lies or distortions, once the whole truth is known.

Only the truth can successfully combine all the facts into a single narrative that makes sense, so a reader who is familiar with these events will find discrepancies and artistic licence used to fill in the blanks. Naturally, this delivers an imprecise construction and the narrative cannot fit the known facts perfectly. For this I apologise, but my hands are tied by lack of a formal inquest.

Hopefully the whole truth will come out one day. The key facts that I have based this story around are marked with a footnote. Readers will likely be surprised at how far the zeitgeist has departed from these facts.

Anyone with corrections or extra information is encouraged to contact the author. Your confidentiality is guaranteed.

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A special note of thanks to Paul Moder, who has been an essential source of information and guidance on this project. This book would not exist without his generous assistance and I am most grateful to him.

You can trace the routes described in this novel and see the locations on Google Maps.

Oskar Zimmerman
Sydney, 2018

Context

‘...talking about Kennedy. I was just down in Dallas, Texas.

You know you can go down there and, ah, to Dealey Plaza where Kennedy was assassinated.

And you can actually go to the sixth floor of the School Book Depository.

It’s a museum called ... The Assassination Museum.

I think they named that after the assassination. I can’t be too sure of the chronology here, but ...

Anyway they have the window set up to look exactly like it did on that day.

And it’s really accurate, you know. ’Cause Oswald’s not in it.

Yeah, yeah, so wow, that’s cool. Painstaking accuracy, you know.

It’s true. It’s called the ‘Sniper’s Nest’. It’s glassed in, it’s got the boxes sitting there.

You can’t actually get to the window as such, but the reason they did that, of course, they didn’t want thousands of American tourists getting there each year going [*Mimes looking out of window*] “No fucking way! I can’t even see the road. Shit, they’re lying to us.

Fuck! Where are they? There’s no fucking way!”

- Bill Hicks

* * *

Finch: ‘I want to ask a question, Dominic. I don't care if you answer me or not. I just want to say this aloud... The question I want to ask is about St Mary's and Three Waters. The question that's kept me up for the last 24 hours, the question I have to ask, is:

What if the worst, the most horrifying, biological attack in this country's history was *not* the work of religious extremists?’

Dominic: ‘Well, I don't understand. We know it was. They were caught. They confessed.’

Finch: ‘And they were executed, I know. And maybe that's really what

happened.

But I see this chain of events, these coincidences... and I have to ask:

What if that isn't what happened?

What if someone else unleashed that virus?

What if someone else killed all those people?

Would you really want to know who it was?'

Dominic: 'Sure.'

Finch: '... Even if it was someone working for this government?

That's my question...

If our own government was responsible for what happened at St Mary's and Three Waters...

If our own government was responsible for the deaths of almost a hundred thousand people... Would you really want to know?'

- V for Vendetta

Jan 1982 - West Nicholson, Rhodesia

The Toyota LandCruiser had been purchased new in 1970.

Originally white, twelve years of farm work in the hard Rhodesian sun, dust and rain had soured the paintwork into a sallow tan, almost jaundiced look. Bumping slowly down the dusty main road, the cabin was crammed with boxes, suitcases and the four members of the Dekker family.

Nobody spoke, and a tense atmosphere gripped the inside of the truck as it laboured south.

Packed into the rear of the vehicle, almost squashed by several large suitcases that teetered with every bump in the road, eight year old Benjamin Dekker peered out the back window as their farmhouse faded from view. Crammed into the space next to him, his twin brother Warren peered out the front windscreen.

The boys were classics of Southern African farming society. Blonde, lean and athletic, their blue eyes sparkled with intelligence and mischief, although Warren's face was often more serious than Benjamin's.

A few minutes later, the truck whined up a hill and the boy looked back again, trying to catch one last glimpse of what had been a happy childhood home. The large timber house was marked by a plume of smoke, as if God was reaching down and pointing His finger at young Benjamin's bedroom.

Tiny figures stood round the house, and he knew these were ZANLA. Too young to have learned very much intellectually about the world they lived in, the boys did realise that terrible things began with the letter Z. Most of all, they had picked up the emotions that the adults expressed when the name was mentioned. The little boys knew that all the adults were angry, scared and frustrated whenever they spoke of ZANLA, ZAPU, ZANU or ZIRPA. There were several acronyms but in the boys' world, ZANLA was a bogeyman that had strong, tough adults frightened.

ZANLA was a bad, bad thing.

ZANLA and ZIRPA had been fighting for almost ten years, a protracted civil and cross-border war with many causes, battlegrounds and casualties. In

particular, white farmers were attacked and forced to flee the land they had farmed for generations, leaving a mantle that their attackers had neither the education, experience nor desire to pick up. In less than a decade, the land renamed Zimbabwe went from a wealthy food exporter to a starving wasteland, a living example of endemic corruption, waste and wanton brutality.

The boys' entire living memories had been dominated by impending doom. The Cold War pitted immense empires against each other in far-flung battlegrounds, overwhelming and exploiting local differences in a series of proxy wars. As the Rhodesian Bush War dragged into its final, bloody throes, it was obvious to the Dekker family that they had no choice but to move to South Africa.

Remaining in Zimbabwe could only have one outcome for the white farmers. It was only a matter of time before they would be attacked and killed, so better to move out while they still had the ability to set the agenda, to exert some influence on events.

As their home burned fiercely behind them, the boys listened to their mother weeping softly while the LandCruiser ate up the miles. Their father sat stoically at the wheel, silently brooding as if he could change the past by willpower alone. The tired old truck drove south, merging onto Highway 1 and crossing into South Africa early in the morning. Like clotting blood oozing through a wound, the traffic pulsed steadily but sporadically towards the capital city. Averaging almost fifty miles an hour on the paved road and keeping up with traffic, they crossed swathes of farmland, low mountain ranges and the *Sandriver* before the built-up areas of Polokwane and Pretoria slowed their speed to walking pace.

Benjamin and Warren slept fitfully, and Benjamin was glad when the vehicle squealed to a stop in front of a creamy brick wall, topped with a row of spikes and punctuated by a large security gate. Their father waved to another man who pushed open the gate from the inside, then drove the LandCruiser inside and shut off the engine. Benjamin saw their host pushing the gate closed and locking it, before his father opened the rear doors and let the boys out.

They stretched in the warm morning air, easing the cramps from their muscles as their father embraced the other man.

'So good to see you made it, Katharin, Hans!' said their host, slapping their father on the back and formally kissing their mother on each cheek. Hans

turned the man to introduce the boys:

‘Warren, Benjamin, this is Vellum. Vellum, my sons Warren and Benjamin.’

Benjamin instinctively knew the man’s name was William, and it was only his father’s accent that made it sound like an animal skin parchment. He put out his hand and the older man shook it.

‘Pleased to meet you, Benjamin,’ said the older man. ‘How old are you?’

‘I’m eight, Sir.’

The older man smiled and nodded at the same time, then he shook Warren’s hand as well. ‘Welcome to my home, welcome to South Africa. You’ll be settled in very soon, yes?’

The surging emotions cut little Warren’s heart like a knife. Relief that they were safe, regret and anger about the loss of their home, the shame at running away and the frustration at the unfairness of it all surged and crashed inside him like a stormy ocean upon rocky shores. He was glad that Vellum was helping them, and trusted that the older men could do what was needed to give him and Benjamin a secure future.

The next few weeks passed in a blur, as the Dekker family settled into their new city.

While Hans had lost their farmland, the house and most of their possessions, he had prepared well in advance, selling as much of their equipment and furniture as possible without raising suspicions, and converting the cash into gold coins which were sewn inside his leather belt.

Selling a few gold coins to different dealers in Johannesburg gave the family enough funds to rent a spacious house in a nice neighbourhood, close to a decent school for the boys, and buy the groceries and clothes necessary for a new life.

Katharin set about turning the empty house into a home while Hans secured a job as a supervisor in a factory. The pre-teen boys quickly adapted to their new school and a wide variety of sports - swimming, cricket, rugby and shooting. While never top of their class, the boys competed just as ruthlessly against each other in academics, gleefully comparing test results and school reports at the end of each year.

The 1991 High School Tennis Tournament saw the Dekker brothers competing like never before. Despite strong competition from other students, both boys beat their rivals and faced each other across the net for the Final. The stadium was packed, as teachers and students alike jostled shoulder-to-

shoulder to witness an epic best-of-three showdown from two of the most talented and popular students at the school.

A cacophony of cheers and screams rained onto the court as the boys entered, nodding and waving to supporters and cat-callers alike. Warren noticed Janet de Bouvier sitting in the front row with two of her friends. The three pretty blonde girls blew kisses at both Warren and Benjamin, but Warren held Janet's gaze, and she returned his cheeky smile. Then the umpire's whistle cut the hubbub, and the crowd went silent as Benjamin toed the line to serve. Game on.

The ball rose into the air, and Benjamin's racket smashed it over the net. It was a strong serve, fast and accurately aimed at the corner farthest from his opponent.

But Warren was faster. Catlike, he anticipated the flight of the ball and darted closer, smashing a return that arced over the net, but the spinning ball lost speed rapidly and dropped to the ground. Benjamin raced in, managed to get his racket underneath the ball before it touched the ground twice, and flicked it back, aiming it at the opposite side of the court.

Caught off-balance, Warren dived for the ball but was too late. It bounced inside the line, then continued across the court. Fifteen-Love, and a smattering of applause from the crowd.

Taking position to serve again, Benjamin watched his opponent carefully as he danced on the balls of his feet. Timing the serve when Warren had just begun to rise from the ground, the ball was accelerating before he had time to react. Approaching two hundred kilometres an hour, the ball was almost at the net before Warren's feet were back on the ground, forcing him into an awkward extended backhand return. But the ball spun again as it flew through the air, putting it well out of Benjamin's reach and off the court. Fifteen-All.

Already tired from playing several heats and the semi-final matches, the brothers found each other grimly holding the score level, as sweat poured out of their bodies. Warren found himself glancing at Janet more often, drawing energy and encouragement from her applause and support.

The first game dragged out to deuce, with advantage to Warren. Rocking from side to side, he wiped the sweat from his eyes and studied his opponent. Rather than aiming his serve into the far corner this time, he fired the ball directly at Benjamin's feet. Favouring his forehand, Benjamin danced

backwards and returned the ball in the centre of the court, setting up the next few shots where he would try to out-manoeuvre his opponent. But Warren had charged the net, intercepting the ball with an overhead shot, angling the ball down, right behind the net. The ball bounced twice and then rolled off the court as the crowd cheered Warren's win.

The manual scoreboard was changed to Dekker, B - 0, Dekker, W - 1.

The tension rose and the crowd shushed as the next game began. Warren's serve wasn't as fast as his opponent's, and Benjamin intercepted it easily. He aimed his return into the opposite corner, and it bounced out.

Love-Fifteen.

As the sun moved lazily through the afternoon, the two brothers battled and sweated. Although evenly matched in fitness and stamina, Warren consistently beat Benjamin with superior tactics. Benjamin was slightly stronger and faster in his serve, but if Warren managed to return it, then he had to dash from one side of the court to the other, as his opponent hit the ball accurately next to the line each time.

The first set went to a 6-5, triggering a tie-breaker. Benjamin hit another fast serve, which Warren connected but the ball went out. Benjamin tossed his racket in the air as he won the set, and the crowd cheered again as the opponents took a two-minute break.

Wiping his face on a towel, Warren used the down-time to process what he had learned about his opponent's tactics. Benjamin obviously favoured his powerful serve, hoping to get the ball past Warren before he could connect. Warren's serves were easily intercepted by Benjamin, but in a battle of tactics, Warren would win more frequently. Then the whistle called them back to the court.

The next hour dragged by in a tense series of gridlocks. Alternating between applause and a hushed silence, the crowd watched a struggle of wits and tactics unlike anything they had seen. As the day wore on, the physical strain began to take a toll on the opponent's bodies and reflexes. The second set also ran to a tie-break, but Warren managed to get a serve past Benjamin, winning the set and taking them to 7-5, 5-7: One-All in a best of three match. Shadows were lengthening across the court as Warren fought with all the cunning he could muster. Benjamin's serves were not as fast as they had been, but his own arms and legs were tiring at the same rate, his reflexes degrading as the match wore on.

Moving to the east end of the court, Warren was bouncing the ball on the ground as he prepared to serve when he saw his shadow and realised what it meant. In a millisecond, his brain realised that the sun had moved over his shoulder and he deliberately popped a high, slow serve that would have been an easy return if his opponent had been able to see it. But as the ball rose into the air over the net, the sun dazzled Benjamin, sending sharp stabs of pain into the optic nerves and the ball dropped onto the court and rolled away.

Fifteen-Love.

Wary of using the same trick too often and giving his opponent a chance to adapt, his next serve was a conventional drive down the centre, which Benjamin was able to return. The two opponents stretched and raced back and forth until Benjamin managed to hit the ball into the corner of the court. Fifteen-All and the crowd released a collective sigh, an audible expression that they had been holding their breath in excitement.

Squeezing the racket and the ball as he prepared to serve, Warren realised just how taxing the match had been. The muscles in his hands and forearms were tight, hot and much weaker than when he had started. His heartbeat was pounding in his head, and sweat had soaked his shirt, shorts and underwear. He flexed and relaxed his hands, waving them alternately at the ground in an effort to disperse the lactic acid, then lifted his eyes and tried to plan his next move.

Benjamin seemed unchanged by the ordeal, jumping lightly on the balls of his feet and moving his racket from hand to hand. He moved from side to side but stayed close to the centreline. Warren tried to time his serve in between his opponent's movements, but the fatigue of the day had taken its toll, and his serve went into the net. A collective gasp rose from the crowd, as this was the first major error they had seen.

Wiping more sweat from his eyes, Warren noted that his opponent had stopped bouncing and was calmly waiting for his serve. He knew that despite his act, Benjamin would be as tired as he, and as eager to win the match. Feeding his opponent's hubris, Warren took his time setting up the serve, exaggerating his movements and shaking more imaginary sweat from his eyes and hair. By the time he straightened up and gripped the ball to serve, the crowd had hushed again, eager to see what happened next.

He hit the ball with the top part of the racket, angled downwards to drop the ball just over the net. Benjamin dashed forward and managed to get his racket

under the ball, lobbing it back into the opposite corner. But Warren intercepted it, desperately aiming the ball straight down the side of the court, where it bounced twice. Thirty-Fifteen and another cheer from the crowd.

Warren took his time setting up the next serve. This was the most dangerous time of the game, when he was tired, uncomfortable and likely to make a mistake. In addition, his opponent was down one point, with only a few sets left to win the match. The danger bubbled in the back of his brain as his eyes flicked over the court, desperately trying to get an advantage.

Toeing the service line, he tossed the ball up and served, aiming as far to the opposite side of the court as possible. But the shot was too long, and the umpire called 'Fault.'

Trying to stay calm, Warren drew two deep breaths and served again. This time, the ball went inside the line, but Benjamin returned it. Warren hit it into the opposite corner, but his opponent was faster. Watching the yellow ball flying towards him, Warren stepped back and angled a backhand shot across the court into the corner. Benjamin managed to get his racket under it but Warren was already moving back towards the centre of the court. He got in behind the ball and smashed a powerful forehand right into the opposite corner. Having spent all his momentum in the opposite direction, Benjamin was nowhere near the ball as it bounced twice. Forty-Fifteen and another round of cheering from the crowd.

Excitement and anticipation electrified the crowd as Benjamin won the next two games, making Deuce.

In essence, tennis is a test of endurance and Warren was feeling it. Sweat plastered his hair to his forehead, and his shirt stuck to his back and shoulders. He repeatedly squeezed and shook his hands, trying to ease the muscle cramps from gripping the racket for so long. He wondered if his opponent was feeling the same way. He stole a look at Janet and was rewarded with a wink and a smile.

But if Benjamin was fatigued, it didn't appear to slow his serve. The ball cracked towards Warren who powered it back into the opposite corner, deliberately keeping his opponent at the back of the court. When the ball came at him again however, he lobbed it high and short, hiding the ball in the sun until it was too late for Benjamin to rush in to return it.

Advantage Warren and the applause rose up around the stadium like a storm, then hushed as he set up the final serve.

It went straight into the net. Fault!

Warren took deep breaths as he tried to get himself under control. This was the final point, the final game and Benjamin was obviously stronger than him. *Think! Can't get past him, you'll have to out-play him. Will he fall for the sun trick again? Probably not, so what happens when he hits it? He'll slam it right into the ground just behind the net. I can deal with that.*

Filling his lungs, Warren ignored Janet and the rest of the crowd. Other sounds faded as his world shrank into the narrow corridor of air between him and where he wanted the ball to land. He served, Benjamin returned it and Warren again lobbed the ball up into the sun.

This time, Benjamin had stayed closer to the centre of the court and was able to dash forward. Through slitted eyes, he guessed where the ball would be and smashed a vicious overhand, changing the direction of the falling ball, bouncing it just behind the net and sending it high into the air over the rest of the court.

But Warren wasn't there. Anticipating the move, he had shuffled back to the end of the court, and the force of Benjamin's move had brought the ball into range. As his opponent desperately tried to recover, Warren shot the ball past him and into the far corner.

Applause, cheering and stomping burst out like a wave as the umpire said 'Advantage, Warren.'

Warren felt the exertion taking its toll on his body and his concentration.

He tossed up the ball to serve, and put it straight into the net. Fault!

Dammit! Concentrate!

He tried to focus on his opponent, but he could feel that his reflexes were impaired. Hoping that Benjamin felt the same, he served again, but this one went into the net as well. Double fault.

Warren shook his head and flexed his hands, trying to push the lactic acid along and ease his muscles. At this point in the match, the difference between glory and defeat might be as slight as a milliseconds' miscalculation.

Squinting through the sweat in his eyes, Warren watched the incoming serve. He got in a solid backhand, but his opponent was faster, slashing a spinning forehand shot that bounced across the court in front - tantalisingly out of reach and Warren's knees buckled, leaving him kneeling on the court, with a dark hand-print on the surface where his sweaty hand had steadied his fall. Advantage Benjamin.

The hot concrete glared at Warren, mocking his weakness as his self-discipline dripped onto the court and evaporated. The tension in the air from the crowd pushed him back to his feet, applause, cheering and the occasional catcall helped his brain force his body to continue.

‘Two more points,’ he muttered to himself. Victory was close enough to taste, but the cramping in his muscles increased instead of easing.

Two seconds later, the match was over. Benjamin had served a powerful drive directly at Warren. Unable to get behind it, the ball passed over his racket as Warren’s knees buckled and dumped him unceremoniously on his ass.

Game, Set Match. He had lost.

Dimly aware of the noise from the crowd, Warren stretched out his cramping legs and looked around. Everyone was on their feet, applauding as Benjamin did a little victory dance, tossing his racket up in the air and catching it again. The umpire climbed down from his chair and Warren let out a groan as he got onto his feet. Shame, anger and despair surged inside him as he processed his loss, but he was too physically exhausted to pay them much attention. He shuffled over to the edge of the net and held out his hand for Benjamin to shake.

Benjamin’s grip was almost as weak as his own - the match had been closer than he imagined.

‘Good game,’ said Warren. ‘Congratulations.’

Benjamin looked him in the eye and nodded. ‘Great game, congratulations to you too.’

They turned to shake the umpire’s hand, who grinned like the cat who swallowed a canary.

‘Fantastic game! Awesome! Never seen anything like it,’ he gushed.

They all turned and waved to the cheering crowd, before Benjamin was led to the dais to receive the trophy. Warren packed his things into his sports bag, slung a towel around his neck and headed for the showers. Picking his way through the crowd, he found himself congratulated by friends and strangers alike, all of whom raved about the best contest they had seen.

Leaving the buzz and hubbub of the sports fields behind, he entered the school grounds, wiping the towel over his face to clear the sweat out of his eyes. He was almost at the change rooms when he found Janet de Bouvier blocking his way.

A little overawed by the pretty girl, and feeling self-conscious about his personal hygiene, Warren said nothing. She made a show of looking him over and wrinkled her nose at the smell, but the sparkle in her eyes gave away the mischief. Warren smiled, desperate to shower but not wanting to be rude.

‘Good game,’ she said and Warren noticed her perfect teeth, and the pointy tongue behind them.

He shook his head. ‘Yeah, too bad I lost.’

Her eyes flashed again. ‘Cheer up. Party at my place tonight. Wanna come?’

Warren didn’t need to think for very long. A few drinks and some dancing would help him forget losing the tennis final. And he was already starting to enjoy Janet’s company.

His blue eyes flashed as he smiled. ‘Absolutely!’

He took a shower, went to Janet’s party and their mutual attraction was undeniable. By the end of the night, her friends had happily adopted Warren into their clique and declared them “an item.”

Southern Africa had been evolving rapidly for decades, but the pace of change only increased over the next few years, and South Africa in particular changed in many ways. The Rhodesian Bush War was over, but the Border War gave bloody birth to the new nation of Namibia, and closer to home the ANC had converted decades of violent terrorism and political activism into results. Nelson Mandela had been released from prison, and the ANC were campaigning for election just as the boys were finishing high school.

Warren and Janet became inseparable, easily melding their separate groups of friends with their relaxed, easy-going attitudes.

It was also the end of conscription in South Africa. A decade of campaigning by activists had led to changes in the way the South African military operated, but the Dekker boys’ early experiences in self-defence, oppression and family commitment had blossomed into a fiery desire to serve their new country, protecting their new neighbours from the same threats that had burned their original home. Both Warren and Benjamin were determined to do two years’ service, and to the young, fit & competitive boys, raised on 1980s action movies, the South African military comprised a metaphorical

ladder. At the top of that ladder sat the Paratroopers. An elite force that combined serious adventure with soldiering.

Watching and reading the news, the Dekker brothers knew that South Africa had fought brutal wars against a range of hostile factions for the past years, and nothing was likely to change in the near future. The boys wanted to serve their country, but neither wanted to sit behind a desk or work on vehicles. They wanted action, in an elite unit, where the men next to them would be the best their country could offer. Before they turned 18, Warren and Benjamin obtained their parent's blessing to enlist and since Janet's parent had bought her a car, they arranged for her to drive them into central Johannesburg to start the enlistment process.

The SADF recruiting office was tucked away at the side of a larger complex housing other government departments. Bland concrete walls that were painted light green sometime in the 1960s gave the rooms a gloom that was accentuated by the humidity and lack of air movement. Their footsteps echoed in the hallways as they found the Army recruiter's office. Seated behind a wooden desk, a lean, fit Sergeant with a completely shaved head greeted them with a cheerful smile and a brisk nod.

'Good morning boys,' he said. 'Where you like to serve?'

Feeling overawed by the realisation that this was for real, the twins' excitement cooled. This was for real. Serving meant fighting against a motivated, well-equipped and ruthless enemy who would show no mercy. The boys exchanged a glance with each other and Janet for mutual support, nodded and then Warren said 'Yah, um...we'd like to be paratroopers.'

To their surprise, the older man burst out laughing.

'Sure, sure,' he jeered. 'Everyone wants to be a para. What about you, miss? Special Forces?'

Janet laughed and shook her head.

'Okay boys, you think you can be paras? Gimme twenty press-ups or stop wasting my time.'

The boys dropped to the cool, grey concrete floor and did twenty push-ups. As they jumped to their feet, the Sergeant pointed to Warren, then up at the ceiling.

'Now ten pull-ups. Full length!'

As he looked up, Warren saw a dozen metal pipes snaking across the ceiling. Most of them were small water pipes or electrical conduit, but in the middle

of the ceiling there was a chin-up bar bolted into black metal brackets. He jumped, grabbed the bar and completed ten chin-ups, dropping each time to the full extent of his arms.

Landing on the balls of his feet like a cat, Warren stepped away as Benjamin jumped up, grabbed the wrong piece of pipe and shouted a curse as he burned his hands on the hot water supply.

He crumpled to the ground as the recruiter laughed again, louder this time, wiping a tear from his eye. It was a prank played on every recruit and a regular source of delight in the otherwise drab office routine.

‘Ahhhhh, never gets old,’ he sighed in glee as Benjamin scrambled to his feet, face and hands burning in equal measures. It was an old trick they had borrowed from the British Royal Marines - placing the chin up bar right next to the hot water pipe and using it as a test of the recruit's observation skills. Then he stuck out his chin and eyed Benjamin in a challenge. ‘Well? You got what it takes to finish? Get on up there.’

Benjamin swallowed the pain and leapt up onto the correct bar this time, cranking out ten full pull-ups and then another just to wind up the recruiter. It was an early indicator of the attitude that would get the brothers through recruit and parachute training - suck it up, no matter how much it hurts.

‘Okay,’ said the recruiter as he opened a drawer in the desk and took out two manila envelopes. ‘Application forms, documents list and instructions for your medical tests. Fill these out, post them back and you’ll be sent instructions on where to turn up. Any questions?’

The brothers shook their heads, but Janet asked, ‘How long will they be away?’

The sergeant laughed. ‘Depends if they pass first time. Twenty-two weeks is the standard course, but if you’re stupid or get injured, it’ll take longer’.

Janet squeezed Warren’s hand. ‘That’s almost six months. I can write, but we can’t visit, can we?’

The recruiter laughed again. ‘Oh, don’t worry, Miss. You’ll find someone else soon enough. All the wives and girlfriends do...’

The rest of the year passed in a blur, as their schooling ended and military training began.

Jan 1992 - 3 SAI Recruit Training Camp, Diskobolos

No matter where they plan or hope to end up, all recruits in the South African Army began in 3 South African Infantry Battalion. Transported miles away from their homes - many for the first time, the recruits found themselves crammed into a maze of red-roofed buildings - some painted white, others bare red bricks. The airport next door provided a constant soundtrack of screaming aircraft engine - a stressor supplemented every waking moment by the training staff. Early one morning, the rising sun saw the Dekker boys lined up on the parade ground with twenty eight other recruits, each clutching a rifle and standing at attention.

Their senior drill instructor, Sgt Blazkowicz moved along the lines, inspecting their equipment and posture. Reaching the rear of the formation, he called 'Platoon! Fix, bayonets.'

In one smooth motion, the recruits drew out the steel knives, locked them on the end of the rifle and then stood still, awaiting further orders.

The sergeant started on their bayonet drill. The recruits had all been shown the movements as described, and practised them individually at scheduled times of the day. Now it was time to start bedding the movements into their muscle memory, to start them becoming reflexive. In combat, their ability to strike correctly, either when ordered or not, would be the difference between life and death.

'High Port,' the words cut the air like a trumpet and thirty rifles moved in unison. Like a yoga routine, the movements were linked together into a flowing drill that prepared the men for battle.

'On Guard, Advance, Left Parry, Right Parry, Standing Target Thrust - In, Out, On Guard.'

The lines of men moved like robots, stepping forward and cutting the air with their bayonets, then returning to the starting posture.

'High Port, Bash Slash, Ground Target - In, Out, On Guard, High Port, Advance.'

The rifles moved again, striking the air in front of them with the butt, then the

bayonet. As if their enemy was lying on the ground, they stabbed low, then straightened up and stepped forward again.

The sun moved across the sky, roasting their skin and baking their boots as they drilled for hours. Sergeant Blazkowicz reminded them that their training was all about muscle memory. 'Those with acceptable muscle memory will graduate, those without can join the Navy.'

The training tempo started fast and stayed that way. South Africa's military training was and remains some of the toughest in the world, a standard set by the experiences of a hundred conflicts that often plumbed the depths of human depravity and violence.

The days followed a similar routine. Rostered meal times, rigorous training and taking turns at cleaning, cooking and standing guard. In many ways, the training of recruits hadn't changed in almost a hundred years, and apart from the newer technology, a recruit from the Napoleonic or Great Wars would have been able to fit right in.

The essential requirements for infantry soldiers were simple: carry heavy loads, navigate across country - during the day and at night, and obey orders with set responses. The training staff explained that the reasoning behind the rigid training was to make sure the officers commanding the battle had a set template of commands that they could use, and know exactly what would happen when these orders were combined.

Successful warfare was founded upon predictable responses. Like a computer program, an entire campaign could be drawn up from simple elements that everyone understood, moving men and materiel in pre-arranged directions at set times in order to achieve the desired result.

The commander had to be one hundred percent confident that when he gave orders that said 'At this time, these people will take this equipment and go here and do this,' it would be done at the expected speed and at exactly the expected time. Everything from the length of a soldier's stride and the speed of their pace had to be predictable and consistent.

Initiative might be used when developing a plan, but once the plan was agreed, every element had to be predictable and consistent.

Lives depended on it.

May 1992 - The Long Range Rifle Club, Gauteng

While every military revolves around defeating the enemy using firepower, relatively few military people take a keen interest in shooting. Some in the infantry see their rifle as just another piece of equipment, some of those even consider it less useful than a radio. But in every regiment, there are a few who take pride in long-range shooting, the ability to hit a target which is invisible to the naked eye. Every barracks office contains a few golden or bronze trophies, shaped in the image of prone men lying beside rifles, the museum wall behind the cabinet decorated with photographs of smiling men - most long-dead, grinning beside their rifles and targets.

Shooting matches are held frequently, an opportunity for socialising, networking and showing off, as well as training new marksmen in the finer arts of ballistics and bushcraft. While not necessarily a secret society, the men who could shoot well instinctively formed a separate brotherhood within the military, with many friendships lasting for life, and forming networks to support each other when they left the service.

Shooting tactics were evolving at the same time. Despite ingrained resistance to change in the thinking of the officer corps, the training techniques and irregular warfare concepts developed by the US and UK Special Forces were studied and adapted. Determined to process and learn the hard-won lessons of the Bush and Border wars, the paras trained in a variety of settings and situations but Warren and some of the other Paras took their studies into their leisure time.

One of Warren's favourite activities was attending shooting competitions and gun shows. There was a special energy that radiated from a large group of people who were happily discussing and learning about their favourite interests. South Africa was under an economic embargo, and so they had to manufacture a wide variety of firearms for domestic use. Industry, retail and governments mingled freely at these events, with engineers, soldiers and

strategists comparing notes, gleaning crucial real-world feedback and passing on suggestions and improvements for further development.

In 1992, the largest meet in South Africa was held at the Long Range Club in Gauteng, relatively close to the Dekker family home in Pretoria. The club itself was no larger than a Scout hall, but the spacious grounds had been covered in tables and marquees, displaying everything from muskets to night vision scopes. The space in between the tables was crammed with people from all over the world. Conversation was loud and animated as friends were reunited and introduced, vendors and customers discussed technology and tactics, and underlying all conversation was the steady crackle of gunfire from the range as various long-range competitions tested the skill and equipment of some of the world's finest marksmen.

Warren had been looking at a display of 19th century muzzle-loaders when a hand clapped him on the back and a deep voice called 'Warren Dekker' right in his ear. He spun around and found himself face to face with Vellum Ormonde, his family host from when they had first immigrated into South Africa. His face lit up in genuine delight. 'Mister Ormonde, sir,' he laughed. 'How are you?'

'Fine, Fine,' said the older man. 'Haven't seen you for a year or so - finished school? How're you going? What are you doing here?'

Warren nodded. 'Yes, sir. Going well, Benjamin and I both joined the infantry, to see if we could be paras.' He saw the look on his friend's face and felt a glow of pride. They both knew it was a brave and right thing to do. Then the older man's eyes narrowed.

'I remember you were a great shot at tennis, and not bad with a rifle either, eh?'

Warren nodded. 'I've been looking at some of these new scopes from America and Germany, and the laser rangefinders - I have a feeling that infantry are going to be carrying more and more batteries in the future.'

Vellum laughed. 'Isn't that what the infantry's for - wrecking the knees of young men all over the world?' Then he became serious for a moment. 'Hey, I want to show you something.'

He took Warren's elbow and steered him through the crush of bodies. They moved towards the sound of gunfire, but stopped short of the firing line where a group of spectators were grouped around another table in the shade of a marquee.

As they walked closer, Warren saw a large black gun case on the table, and another one underneath it. The crowd parted as Vellum approached, and several of the men nodded in recognition. Warren's attention was drawn from the tall, dark-haired man beside the table to the contents of the gun case. He whistled in admiration, then looked at the owner for permission to look closer.

Nestled inside the custom leather case was a large firearm, which he had initially thought was an old, fancy shotgun. But on closer inspection he saw that it was a Holland & Holland side-by-side double rifle - a very rare big game rifle. Warren admired the beautiful craftsmanship and the scrolling designs engraved into the wood and metal. Running his eyes over the steel, he saw the numbers stamped into the metal - .600 Nitro. This was a treasure, a functional work of art that weighed almost fifteen pounds - over six kilograms. It fired bullets that were larger than the M2 Browning .50 calibre machine gun.

Warren straightened up and looked at the gun's owner. He was above average height, with a deep tan and dark hair above bright blue eyes. On his head he wore a broad-brimmed hat with a band of leopard skin around the crown. 'That's amazing,' he remarked. 'Big game hunter?'

'Long story, yes,' said the older man with a hint of American accent. 'I was on safari in Kenya when my parents were killed in a car crash - didn't find out about it until two weeks later. So I stayed in Africa and went into business with my host. We've been guiding and hunting almost thirty years but now it's time to go home. But I've made a lot of friends from South Africa over the years and this is the best place to catch up one last time.'

'Sorry for your loss,' said Warren politely. 'Where is "home"?''

'Oh, the States, Colorado.' He motioned with his hand towards Vellum. 'Vellum and I had many adventures, good times. I'm Ray Johnson, how do you know each other?'

'Warren Dekker. We...my family...fled Rhodesia in the 80's... Vellum and my father had worked together, he looked after us until we got back on our feet.' Warren stuck out his hand and Ray shook it.

'And what are you doing now? School?'

Warren warmed to the older man's friendly personality and interest. 'Finished school last year, enlisted. Just finished infantry training...hoping to join the paras...'

The older man nodded. 'Well done, the country needs good young men like you. How well do you shoot?'

Warren shrugged. 'I do okay. Mostly use a shotgun to put meat on the table.'

Vellum joined the conversation. 'Ray, who was that guy you told me about? The American geologist?'

Ray laughed. 'Henry - Henry Bowman. I can't believe you forgot his name!' He pursed his lips and gazed into the distance for a second as he relished a cherished memory. Then he looked at Warren.

'Let me tell you about Henry Bowman. American, like me. He books a safari, turns up with a .375 Ackerley. Bolt action, almost as big as this one, you understand?' Warren nodded.

'So I wasn't sure about this guy, right? I mean...is he a poser? He's carrying this cannon...can he handle it? I need to know. He might be dangerous to have around if he doesn't know what he's doing...'

Other men in the group stopped their conversations and turned towards Ray.

'So the first day, we're just familiarizing the clients with the area, vehicles, checking out each other's equipment, introducing the porters and so on... We go down to the area to sight in, right? There's a seat and a bench to rest the rifles on, and there's some targets at different ranges. So Henry is standing at the side, waiting for others to shoot.'

Having grown up in rural Rhodesia, Warren could picture the scene in his mind. Several of the other listeners nodded as well.

'Soon enough, it's Henry's turn and just as he is about to sit at the bench, these four guinea fowl fly overhead. Henry turns to me and says 'Dinner,' then shoulders this enormous rifle and fires.'

'BOOM...BOOM, very fast, and real smooth,' said Ray. 'It was like he rode the recoil...like riding a bull, letting it help him instead of fighting it.'

Warren was amazed. 'Did he hit anything?'

Ray smiled. 'He brought down two birds with two shots.'

Some of the bystanders muttered to themselves, Warren distinctly heard the words 'great shot,' but Ray just smiled even more.

'So when Banda - the tracker, when he brought the birds back to the camp, that's when we almost fell over. That's when we all knew Henry Bowman was something special.'

Vellum snickered as he knew what was coming, but he shut his mouth to let Ray tell the story.

‘These birds would have been almost fifty yards away, flying at an angle across our line of sight,’ he said. ‘So I was thinking...how much meat is going to be left, once they’ve been hit with a cannonball, right? I mean...may as well hit them with a shotgun slug, yeah?’

He paused a second to let the audience imagine the mess of blood and feathers.

‘But Henry *decapitated* both of them. One shot each.’

Warren was amazed, that kind of shooting was unheard of. Unless the man was teasing him.

‘You’re kidding, right?’ Some of the other listeners muttered their disbelief as well.

But both Ray and Vellum shook their heads. ‘Dead serious, Henry Bowman could do things with a rifle.... An amazing marksman, great mechanical understanding, voracious reader and above all, a real gentleman. Never acted out, or put people down.’ Ray shook his head, ‘Henry Bowman is a great man. The kind of man who takes pleasure in helping other, you know?’ He let out a deep sigh of satisfaction. ‘I can’t wait to catch up with him when I get home...’

Warren ran his eyes over the beautiful firearm again and resolved to take Janet and his brother on a big game safari as soon as possible.

**

One evening after another barracks dinner, Warren discovered that someone had left a pile of books on his bed. Some were training manuals from foreign armies, with arcane names like RIFLE QUICK KILL - US ARMY TT 23-71-1, but most were non-government resources like *Instinct Shooting* by Mike Jennings and *Secrets to Shooting* by Lucky McDaniel and Bill Reece. He recognised other author names like Sykes and Fairbairn, men who had dedicated their lives to teaching others how to stay alive in combat. Leafing through the stack and wondering who had given him these gifts, Warren glanced around the room but only saw the rest of his platoon engaged in cleaning, writing letters home or joking around. He pushed his pillow up against the bedhead, reclined onto it and then opened up the first paperback.

The book described the principles of advanced target shooting without using the sights on a gun. Called “Point Shooting”, the techniques were used to

train the brain, eye and hands so that the shooting became instinctive - bypassing the thinking parts of the brain and literally making the firearm an extension of the eye, so that targets would be hit without having to think.

Warren realised that this was how Ray Johnson had described Henry Bowman's shooting. Looking at the bird's head was enough to aim the rifle accurately.

Again, he instinctively looked around the almost empty room, as if he would see his anonymous benefactor lurking at the window, then laughed at how silly he was being. The shooting community in South Africa wasn't large, and he felt it would be easy for his conversation with Ray to find its way back to someone who wanted to encourage his shooting skills. He reasoned that there was only one conduit for the books to enter the barracks and remain unmolested on his bed, and resolved to find out as soon as it was prudent.

Lucky McDaniel's book described using a spring-powered BB gun to train a student's brain and eyes to consistently hit a row of beer cans, matchboxes and then a small target thrown into the air. Once the student's brain is trained to shoot where the eye is focused, a high level of accuracy could be achieved in a few hours of training. Although the books were old and the language sometimes complex, time flew by and by the time Lights Out sounded in the barracks, Warren's mind was churning with excitement.

But the life of a recruit is regimented through every moment of the day, and so from the moment he opened his eyes in the morning, there was no time for Warren to think about point shooting until their daily exercises and lessons were finished.

At last his platoon were dismissed and he found his way to Sgt Blazkowicz' office. The older man was working through a stack of paperwork on his desk, and glanced up in annoyance as Warren knocked on the door frame.

But when he saw who it was, the frown changed to a smile. He leaned back in his chair with a conspiratorial smirk. 'Dekker. Took you long enough!'

The penny dropped and Warren's suspicions that the books had come from this office were confirmed.

The Sgt's grin widened as he watched Warren process the ideas, then winked. 'Progress assessments can wait. Let's find an open space, yeah?'

Normally terrified of the training staff, Warren found himself relaxing a little. Blazkowicz stood up and grabbed a sports bag from the floor, then a longer cardboard box from behind the office door. Together, they left the building,

crossed the parade ground and spread out their gear on a patch of grass near the firing line of a disused rifle range.

‘Looks like you’ve done this before,’ Warren observed, eyeing the equipment on the ground. It was exactly what he had read about in the books: a spring-powered BB gun, six beer cans filled with cement, some playing cards, matchboxes and a bag of metal washers.

The Sergeant chuckled as he loaded pellets into the toy gun. ‘Not with everyone,’ he muttered. ‘Sure, anyone with two eyes can learn to Point Shoot, but I’m not wasting my time unless it’s for a good cause.’

Warren’s ears burned at the implied compliment but he didn’t say anything.

‘Your shooting is okay, nothing outstanding,’ continued the older man as he gently lined up the empty cans about half a meter apart. ‘But your attitude has impressed some people that I respect, so I agreed to give you a head start.’

Some people that I respect... Another hint about Warren’s career prospects? Warren took the child’s toy and pointed it at the ground, his finger held straight along the top of the trigger guard. Even though it wasn’t a real firearm, the safety lessons that had been beaten into him remained valid.

The Sergeant assumed the position of instructor, standing just behind Warren on his left. When he spoke, Warren realised he was hearing words at normal volume, instead of being screamed at the top of the training staff’s lungs.

‘The effective shooter does not consciously align his barrel when acquiring a target, but it will be in his peripheral vision. The relationship is like the driver of a car who, while looking ahead maintains his position on the road via the hood of the car in his peripheral vision.’

Warren nodded. ‘That’s Lucky McDaniel.’

‘Very good,’ said Blazkowicz. ‘Port Arms.’

Warren turned his palm inwards, so the rifle butt rested on his right bicep, still pointing the barrel down at the ground on his left side. The instructor nodded and said ‘Start by bracketing the cans in order, then knock them down. Okay? Point.’

Warren tucked the butt into his shoulder, placed his left hand under the barrel and aimed the pellet gun in the general direction of the first beer can. He felt the older man move the butt a little higher, so that it rested on his shoulder bone rather than the flexible muscle around it. He knew intellectually what the process was, but he was glad the Sergeant was here to fine tune his posture.

‘Load,’ the words at his ear made him forget everything else and focus purely on the muscle movement required. Keeping his eyes on the beer can, he pulled the gun tighter into his shoulder with his left hand, then racked the lever with his right. The action was smooth and light, popping a ball bearing into place in front of the tensioned spring.

‘Fire.’ Warren reflexively squeezed the trigger, and the toy gun went PING. A puff of dust was kicked up about a meter beyond the second beer can, but not before Warren and seen the shiny pellet streaking away, lit up like a tracer from the sunlight behind him.

‘Adjust left, fire,’ said the voice and Warren racked the lever again, then made a slight adjustment to his stance and fired again. This time, the dust spurted on the left of the first beer can and the Sgt immediately said ‘Load, fire.’

An hour later, Warren was consistently hitting matchboxes and cans in whatever order the Sgt gave him. The stress of concentration had left him, and now he was enjoying himself as the point shooting became natural. Eventually the movement of the sun hinted at the passing of time, and Warren helped pack away the now shredded targets and the toy rifle.

‘Good work today, Dekker.’

‘Thank you, Sergeant. Good times.’

‘Think you can do the same thing with your brother, maybe some others?’

‘Oh, yes. Absolutely, Sergeant.’

‘Good. Borrow the gear any time you like, just let me know.’

‘Yes, Sergeant. Thank you, Sergeant.’

May 1992 - Parliament House, Canberra

The centre of Australian government is not in the two houses where bills are debated, insulted and made into law. While elected representatives and media cameras occupy the House of Representatives and the Senate, real power is actually held by committees, faceless bureaucrats and lobbyists who inhabit the maze of offices and conference rooms that cover the rest of the complex.

One of these windowless rooms looked just like the others, a ring of chairs around the outside wall, with more flanking a central table. On the end wall opposite the door was a whiteboard covered in half-scrubbed scribbles from a previous meeting.

Four of the chairs were occupied, the rest of the room was empty apart from an air of patient waiting. It was obvious that the attendees were waiting for someone else to join them before the meeting would start.

Roland Browne was a thin lawyer who wore a blue suit and glasses. Lounging across the table from him was Philip Alpers, a greying, overweight university dropout with scraggly facial hair and a vacant expression. Sitting beside them were two women, Samantha Lee and Rebecca Peters. Samantha wore shoulder-length blonde hair above her professional suit, while Rebecca's dark hair was cut into a short-back-and-sides, her bulky glasses and casual clothes made many people mistake her for a man at first glance.

The hum of the air conditioning underpinned banal small talk as the four waited.

'How was your flight?'

'Shit. Yours?'

'It was okay. My grant money finally came through, wanna go get a drink later?'

'Sure, I brought some speed as well if you wanna share.'

The talk ended as the door opened and a short, fat man in a dark suit entered the room, carrying a manila folder full of papers. His thinning grey hair and flushed, red face expressed frustration and discomfort.

The four sat up straighter in their chairs, as if in school, all looking at the

newcomer expectantly. He laid the folder on the table and looked at each of them in turn.

‘Is this it?’ He asked, eyeing the empty chairs. ‘Are we waiting for anyone?’ Roland looked uncomfortable, while the two women intently examined a corner of the ceiling. After a moment of silence, Philip shrugged and spread his hands around. ‘Yes, this is the National Coalition for Gun Control.’

‘There’s only four of you? I was expecting a hundred delegates...’ The fat man raised his eyebrows in surprise. ‘No matter, we can begin.’ He sat down and opened the meeting.

‘Good morning. My name is Reginald Stackmore from the Justice Minister’s office. Before we start, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Ngunnawal People.’

Rebecca snorted in contempt. ‘Had guns in their name but it didn’t help them keep their land now, did it?’ Her accent was American and the others stared at her faux pas in horror. Acknowledging the traditional owners of the land was more than just a social convention, it was a statement of solidarity with minorities against imperialism, capitalism and exploitation. “The Acknowledgement” was an essential part of the virtue-signalling that was spreading from the university culture across the whole landscape of government and corporate groupthink. To mock it was mocking the central tenets of everything they stood for.

She simply shrugged and looked expectantly at Stackmore to start the meeting.

‘Right...hemmm,’ he cleared his throat and opened the folder on the table. ‘Following your representations in the National Committee on Violence Against Women last year, a cabinet document has been prepared in order to guide the future of legislation around firearms.’

He tossed some papers in front of the four lobbyists. ‘Here are the minutes from the Special Premier’s Conference last year - Decision 15980.’

The papers were leafed through and greedily devoured. At last the fat bald man - Alpers, spoke up. ‘Holy shit, this is better than I hoped.’

Rebecca nodded. ‘Banning centrefire semi-auto rifles, a uniform approach to state-based gun laws, restricting all firearms with more than 5 round magazines, firepower categorisation...’

‘Huh?’ The male lawyer squinted behind his glasses. ‘Firepower what?’

‘Page 12, Attachment A,’ said Rebecca. ‘It says “certain firearms are

inherently more dangerous than others, the APMC proposes that categories be established...to scrutinise the ‘genuine reason’ for possessing a firearm.”” She snapped her fingers. ‘I’m glad that’s in there. I’m so sick of having people whine “Oh, it’s an inanimate object. Guns can’t shoot on their own, it’s the nut behind the butt,” or “there’s no such thing as a bad weapon, only bad people”...’ she mockingly pitched her voice higher and wagged her head in parody.

The others shuffled through the papers, and Alpers read the next part. ‘About registration...look at this...point 25...’New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania...do not believe that the benefits of registration are established... those bastards!’

Stackmore shrugged. ‘There were comments made...that...criminals don’t register their firearms, most of which are imported illegally from overseas or manufactured illegally in backyard workshops. So the cost of registration outweighs the benefits, because the people who are registering their firearms aren’t the ones committing the crimes.’

‘Fuck them,’ snarled Rebecca. ‘They’re not committing crimes now, but in the future, every politician, banker and lobbyist will be under threat from those legal firearms. How the hell can we make the country safe for politicians unless we remove all the legal guns? Criminal guns aren’t the problem because they’ll never be used against us...it’s the patriots that are the real threat here, and these imbeciles don’t see it!’

Stackmore spread his hands. ‘Registration would cost over a billion dollars a year to maintain, with no demonstrable change in public safety. New Zealand and Canada don’t have a registry for long-arms, so there’s little international precedent to prove the benefits.’

Desperate to change the subject, Roland flipped over another page.

‘Rebecca, because you’re obviously not upset already, check out point 31,’ he commented sarcastically. ‘The government doesn’t think we should restrict firearm sales to licensed dealers...they think people should be able to sell their own private property privately.’

Rebecca’s face went red, and Alpers cast a mocking, angry look at Roland, as if to say “Now, now, don’t stir her up, she’ll have a heart attack.”

Her fist banged the table. ‘Oh my God, she moaned. ‘It’s as if these idiots *want* to be strung up from lamp posts. It’s fundamental, imperative that all legal guns be registered on a police database - how else are we going to know

where to seize them from?’

Roland held up a finger. ‘Item 36 - a public awareness campaign. Isn’t that what you were talking about earlier, Rebecca?’

‘Fucking hell,’ she fired back. ‘Queen Street, Hoddle Street, every mass shooting is a public awareness campaign. I don’t give a shit about public safety, but it’s the implication. Every innocent person shot by a manic could be a politician, a banker or a lobbyist. My father was killed by a patriot with a legal gun, and legal guns remain the greatest threat to unified government. I swear to God, I’m going to avenge him by taking away this clear and present danger to those who govern.’

‘Oh, please. Shut up already,’ muttered Sam Lee under her breath. ‘This is a long-term project and none of us are going to live to see the final outcome.’ She looked at Stackmore and smiled. ‘Thank you, Mr Stackmore. We’ll get to work in our respective jurisdictions.’ She cast a meaningful look at the other three. ‘Start working your media contacts, ramping up the fear and complaining that the government is placing families in danger by ignoring the deadly gun threat...’

Alpers waved his hand dismissively. ‘Yes, yes. We all know how to do our jobs, thank you.’

Stackmore scurried from the room and left the four activists deep in thought, busily planning their next moves.

‘Ten years,’ muttered Sam philosophically. ‘Ten years of working quietly behind the scenes and now we are finally ready.’ She looked at Rebecca and asked, ‘What’s the latest from the UN?’

Rebecca shrugged. ‘Honestly, I’m not plugged in to anything major. Hopefully this will give me a way in, an invitation to sit at the table.’

Sam narrowed her eyes cynically. ‘Make it happen. Whatever it takes, we need to strike soon, get something happening here but we need UN muscle. Understand?’

‘Of course I understand,’ snapped Rebecca. ‘I’m the one doing all the hard work.’

She looked around at the others. ‘Now, who was talking about going to get a drink? Christ, I need one now...’

June 1992 - SAI Recruit Training Camp, Diskobolos

Twenty-two weeks of recruit training in the South African Infantry had turned the Dekker boys into men. They had been tested, trained and coached by some of the most disciplined, caring and patriotic men in the country, themselves highly motivated to make sure that each recruit was trained to the highest level. Their own lives, their families and friends all depended on the effectiveness of the nation's fighting forces. The recruits' youthful energy had been shaped, focussed and disciplined by their exercises and lessons, and the experienced soldiers had done what they could to prepare the younger ones for the horrors of war.

Relentless physical activity, simple foods and consistently high standards had refined and winnowed the fifty recruits down to thirty. Now, they were a known commodity, able to obey orders without question and motivate their fellow soldiers to overcome difficulties. So the next question was, how would South Africa benefit most from their skills and abilities?

Already fit and intelligent, the Dekker brothers stood out to the training staff, who discussed the possibilities available to them - officer training, Special Forces or even military intelligence.

To be honest, neither brother had planned that far in advance, waiting to see how they survived recruit training and paratrooper selection before making any firm decisions.

Now, that time had come. Finishing their passing out parade, the brothers eagerly awaited the next morning when their next assignments would be posted on the board.

Warren was tying his shoelaces when one of the office clerks dashed into the barracks and came up to him. 'Private Dekker, Sargent wants to see you in his office.'

Other heads turned, shoulder shrugged and sympathetic comments made to Warren. 'Sucks to be you bro,' said one. 'What you fucked up now, Dekker?'

Regardless of the dry humour, Warren was right to be concerned. There were only a few reasons why Sgt Blazkowicz would want to speak to him, and none of them were good.

Rushing to the training staff offices, Warren stopped at the door, came to attention, saluted and introduced himself properly.

‘Sergeant Blazkowicz, Private Dekker, 37927, reporting as ordered.’

Reclining in an old wooden chair behind a similarly old wooden desk that was covered in paperwork, Sgt Blazkowicz called ‘At ease,’ and motioned for Warren to sit in another chair to the side of the desk. Warren realised that there were three other men in the room - the junior drill instructors who assisted Blazkowicz, and another uniformed officer he had never seen before. Blazkowicz ignored the other men and looked Warren up and down. ‘Well, Dekker,’ he said pleasantly. ‘Won’t keep you long, just a few questions. How are you finding the Army?’

Warren felt like a fish out of water. He didn’t know who this other chap was, and the Sergeant was addressing him as a person, rather than a nasty smell on the sole of his boot.

‘Sir, its fine, Sir,’ he stammered. ‘Challenging and rewarding, Sir.’

The burly Sergeant nodded. ‘You’re not from South Africa, you’re Rhodesian, aren’t you?’

The blonde private nodded. ‘Sir, my family migrated when I was eight, Sir.’

‘Your great-grandfather was on the Shangani Patrol, wasn’t he?’

‘How did you...?’ blurted Warren, before he could compose himself. ‘Sir, sorry, Sir.’

The Sergeant smiled magnanimously, appreciating the shock that revealing detailed family knowledge would have given the boy.

‘You selected paratroopers as your first choice after recruit training,’ the Sergeant said.

Thinking it was a question, Warren nodded. ‘Sir, yes sir.’

‘Well, the Paras don’t take just anyone, do they? They want to know about people who think they have what it takes.’

Warren couldn’t believe his ears. Did this mean he was being considered for the paras? Was it a test? Testing his reaction, to see if he jumped to conclusions or ask the wrong questions? The Sergeant hadn’t asked him a question, so he kept his mouth shut and waited.

There was a pause in the air as the officers processed his decision to stay quiet, then Sgt Blazkowicz said ‘This man doesn’t exist, and he was never here, but he has some questions for you.’ He waved his hand at the unknown man, standing at the back of the office area, who had not taken his eyes off Warren since he stepped into the room.

‘You’ve been given some introductory light reading, yes?’ The voice was deep and confident, conveying a self-assurance that set Warren at ease.

Warren laughed. ‘Lucky McDaniel and others - yes, Sir.’

‘The reports from your point shooting show promise, and your regular soldiering is fine.’ The older man’s calm brown eyes bored into Warren’s.

‘I’m inviting you to try out for Commando.’

Warren’s heart actually missed a beat.

‘Ahh, yes, sir.’ Warren was stammering as his brain disconnected in excitement. ‘Thank you, Sir.’

The older man smirked. ‘Good. Let’s see how you feel after a few days of pain!’

Warren looked at Sgt Blazkowicz, who was smirking just like the other officers.

‘Sir, but what about the Paras, Sir?’

The Sergeant shrugged. ‘You’ll go to 44 Regiment with your brother and settle in, join the gun club. Then, you’ll get orders to report to supply school or something equally boring. If you fail Commando selection, you’ll just go back to the Paras as if nothing happened.’

Warren nodded. ‘Sir, yes sir. Thank you, sir.’

Plausible deniability right from the start. It was exactly the kind of cloak-and-dagger that appealed to his thirst for adventure.

August 1992 - Bloemfontein, South Africa

44 Parachute Brigade

Warren was delighted to beat Benjamin out for first place in their recruit training, and both had received orders to report to 44 Parachute Brigade for further military work.

After the rigors, screaming and mindless rote learning of boot camp, 44 Para was a dream come true. The boys excelled at sports, teamwork and shooting, while the academic learning was challenging but relevant. They worked well as part of whatever team they were in, either patrolling in pairs or on the major exercises that were held with other infantry, armour and air force units. Benjamin absolutely loved the parachute work, absorbing every possible scrap of information and experience from the other paratroopers. The feeling of weightlessness as he flew through the sky was close enough to heaven, and in his mind, the preparatory tasks of packing chutes, training, exercise and following orders all fed into that free-fall feeling. Those moments of exhilaration made it all worthwhile.

Warren enjoyed the parachuting, but found that his skills and greater interests lay elsewhere. The training staff spotted his refined talent with firearms, increasingly testing him with more and more difficult targets, and expert coaching advice from real combat veterans improved his skills even further. The thrill and expertise that Warren had honed from his point shooting exercises even exceeded Benjamin's love of parachuting, and Warren discovered that he had earned a reputation for his shooting skills that arrived at 44 Para before he did.

One morning, Warren was finishing breakfast in the mess hall when a sergeant sat down next to him. 'Dekker,' he said abruptly. 'Seems like you're some kind of shit-hot shooter. How'd you like to run through the House of Horrors?'

Warren paused, not sure if this was a joke being played on him. Most of the men in the unit had a wicked sense of humour, and practical jokes were very common - an effective way to relieve the extreme stresses that they operated under.

So Warren played it cool. He eyed the name tag on the sergeant's uniform -

METFORD.

‘Sergeant Metford? What’re you talking about?’

‘Sunday. Road trip to a special training facility with some of the others. Interested?’

‘A House of Horrors?’ Warren was sceptical. ‘Sounds like a shitty amusement park.’

The sergeant laughed. ‘Spot on, but the guy who gave you those books will be there.’

Now Warren was interested. This sergeant was obviously part of a group that had been watching him for a while. A group that included Sgt Blazkowicz. Was this his ticket to Special Forces? He nodded.

‘Sure, I’ll be there.’

Metford laughed again, this time in excitement.

‘Shit yeah, this going to be a good trip. Apply for a 12-hour pass, your L-T will approve it. Be at the motor pool at 0630 Sunday, OK?’

Sgt Metford clapped him on the back and left the room. Warren’s mind was spinning as he scraped the last of the food off his plate, but underneath it all glowed a warm burst of satisfaction.

He had something they wanted, and an invitation like this could only be good.

The sun was well up in the sky on Sunday morning when the Para’s truck groaned to a stop inside the sprawling camp that housed 81 Armoured Brigade. Situated in Tempe, a suburb on the outskirts of Bloemfontein, this acreage was home to the School of Armour, tanks & artillery, and also housed an air defence regiment in preparation for joint readiness exercises. But on a Sunday morning, the camp was quiet. Troops and machines were either out in the field, or sleeping in their barracks.

At the far end of a disused runway, inconspicuous amid storage sheds of various sizes, stood the House of Horrors. From the outside, there was nothing remarkable about the warehouse, and Warren looked around eagerly as he climbed out of the troop carrier with nine other paras. There were several other trucks parked nearby, and milling around were a dozen other men from different regiments and branches.

Some of the men had set up a couple of tables and were unpacking SLR service rifles and boxes of loose ammunition while others either stripped and inspected the rifles or loaded ammunition into magazines. Others were standing in small groups, ignoring the work and chatting with each other. It was a familiar scene to Warren, one played out every time troops from any nation went on manoeuvres.

Between two of the trucks, a couple of men were squatting on ammo boxes around a small stove that was heating water for tea and coffee. Warren followed Sgt Metford as they made a beeline for the hot water, with Metford greeting the others like old friends.

‘Ullo chaps, lovely morning. How you all, fighting fit?’

There were smiles, nods and handshakes all round as Warren was introduced. Many of the eyes looked at Warren with curiosity, sizing him up and comparing the young man with the stories told about him. Warren returned the greetings, and was glad when a steaming mug was thrust into his hand. He kept his mouth shut and listened as the conversation rolled around and the group told embellished stories about the adventures they had been on since they last met.

Warren had almost finished his tea when another sergeant gave two short blasts on a whistle and gathered the men around him in a semicircle. The nametag on his uniform said CLAY. He wore the maroon beret of a serving paratrooper, carried a clipboard in one hand and a cheeky grin on his face.

‘All right gents, we all know why we’re here,’ he called loudly. Checking the paper on his clipboard, he chuckled. ‘But it seems we have a cherry, where’s...Dekker?’ He made an exaggerated show of peering around the faces as Warren stepped forward, flushing scarlet at the unexpected attention. He saw Metford and a few others grinning at his discomfort, no doubt having experienced the same thing in their own time.

‘Dekker, fresh meat,’ called Sgt Clay. ‘You’re going first, so here are the rules:

‘One. This is a timed event. The lower your time, the better.’

‘Two. You get two shots per target, take them at the same time.’

‘Three. Shoot the blue circles, don’t shoot the red squares.’

‘That’s it. Any questions?’

Warren’s brain was swirling with questions, but he simply said ‘No questions.’ His pride forced him to figure it out as he went along, and he had

already assumed this was some kind of target practice. But more than that, it was also an initiation into some kind of secret gun club. A club of skilled men, in a business where shooting skills were prized and respected. There was a murmur of excitement in the group as Metford led Warren over to the table with the firearms.

‘Grab a rifle and three mags, then follow me.’

Grasping the hardware and fitting ear plugs into his ears, Warren was led a few paces over to the side of the warehouse. As far as he could see in the distance, the rolling hills of the airfield and tank training area contained no movement at all. He nodded and asked ‘Rifle range?’

Metford nodded. ‘It’s two miles of nothing, you ready to sight in?’

Warren nodded and loaded the rifle. He pointed it downrange and held it at port arms, cradled near his shoulder as relaxed his muscles and his mind. Metford took out a handful of metal washers and tossed one up in the air, about two yards in front of Warren’s nose. Warren’s brain translated the pellet gun lessons into the same principles, mechanically lifting the rifle and blasting a shot towards the spinning silver disc.

It fell to the ground with a THUD. Warren’s shot had been too far to the left.

‘Left,’ called Metford as he tossed another in the same arc. This time, Warren bracketed the disc, sending the bullet slightly too far to the right - on purpose. He was confident that on the third shot, his aim would be zeroed onto the target.

‘Right’ said Metford, tossing up a third. This time the metal disc went PING and spun even higher up into the sunshine. Warren’s aim was perfect and Metford nodded in appreciation.

‘Ready for some fun?’

Warren nodded. He set the rifle to SAFE and walked beside Metford as they went back the front of the warehouse. Inside the doors, Warren saw that the interior was made into two sections. There was a mezzanine level above, accessed by a stairwell to the left, which formed a viewing gallery over the interior. Warren couldn’t see much of the interior, because there was a partition in front of the warehouse entrance, leaving only a narrow space to the right. God only knew what was in the rest of the warehouse, but Warren was about to find out.

‘You ready?’ Metford asked with a grin, clapping Warren on the back. Warren swallowed the apprehension in his throat and nodded. Metford

laughed aloud, 'Blue only, yeah? Good luck, wait for the horn.'

Then he pointed at the entrance to the warehouse and dashed up the stairs.

Warren checked that the rifle was loaded, wiggled his shoulder around and held the butt in a comfortable shooting stance. Then he took a deep breath and stepped up to the black entrance.

As his booted foot hit the ground at the opening, there was a sharp *TOOT* from an air horn above, which he guessed meant that the clock was running. He loaded a fresh magazine into the rifle, flicked the selector from *SAFE* to *FIRE*, then made a sharp left turn and struggled to process what was on the other side.

A narrow pathway stretched out in front of his boots. On his left, the front wall of the warehouse was covered in sheets of plywood, with the underside of the mezzanine just visible above his head. On the right, the direction of the rear of the warehouse there was an open area, maybe three meters deep, piled with obsolete spare parts, tyres, 44-gallon drums and dumped timber. He barely had enough time to look around when there was a hiss of compressed air, and a pop-up target snapped from behind a stack of tyres. One half of the panel was a red square, with a blue circle on the left hand side. Warren didn't even blink, one second the target was there, and the next he had put a bullet into the blue circle, another into the air beside it. One hit, one miss.

Clarity of purpose lit up his conscious mind as his subconscious did the work. This was some kind of maze, and random targets would pop up, no doubt controlled by an operator on the mezzanine. As the thought ended, another target swung out from cover, and he instinctively fired where his eye was looking. He didn't hit the red square with his first shot, but the bullet didn't hit the blue circle either. It impacted between them, throwing a puff of splintered sawdust into the air. The second one hit the side of the blue circle, and Warren felt he was bracketing the blue circles. His next shots should be on the money.

Now over half-way down the short corridor, he took another step while scanning the whole area, keeping both eyes open. He was close enough to the target area that he had to turn his head, he couldn't see the whole thing in his field of vision.

As he took one more step, almost at the end of the lane, two more targets popped out on either end of the junkyard. The heavy rifle was still tucked into Warren's shoulder, and he fired four shots, landing the first two inside the

first blue circle and one into the last.

This is a lot harder than hitting the discs with a pellet gun.

Reaching the end of the junk piles, the corridor made a sharp right angle, then another. Warren realised that the House of Horrors wasn't really a maze, just a zig-zag series of shooting lanes, like the carnival games where you tried to hit moving ducks or metal targets. The second lane was set up behind the one he had just finished, with more in series down the length of the warehouse. He guessed there were steel plates bolted to the wall frames to prevent any rounds from penetrating further down the warehouse.

Painfully aware that the clock was ticking, Warren trotted around the corner to see what his next challenge was.

In the second lane, a white bed sheet was suspended from strings above, hiding the targets behind it. Around the sheet, bright lights facing out made him squint, just as the sheet dropped away, revealing a row of ten targets at staggered intervals. Some were red squares, and he ran his eye over the blue circles, instinctively squeezing the trigger as he looked at them. Out of twenty shots, only four missed, and he moved around the corner into the next section. He pushed through a heavy rubber curtain into what seemed like a long steel shipping container.

It was pitch black. A tunnel.

His eyes were attempting to adjust to the darkness when a burst of flame lit up the whole area, then plunged it back into utter darkness. Dazzled, he realised that a target had popped up at the same time, but the flame and heat was so unexpected that his shots went wide.

A second later, another burst from the flamethrower lit up the metal box, and Warren scored two hits on the blue circle. So far, the blue circles had always been on the left, and when the third target lit up, the flame so close that he felt his hair singe, he noticed that the bastards had put the blue circle on the right hand side this time!

The rifle bucked twice, burning two holes in the blue circle. *Tricky bastards!*

Warren dropped the almost-empty magazine out of the rifle and pushed a fresh one into place, feeling the snick as the metal catch locked the metal tube in place. He dropped the used mag into his pocket, then stepped to the end of the lane.

Pushing through another heavy rubber curtain at the end of the shooting lane, Warren encountered a set of wooden steps that led upwards. Warren

ascended with his right foot first, keeping his back to the wall and the rifle pointed out over the void. This lane was set up like a barn, with piles of hay and ropes across the floor, and farming equipment hanging from the ceiling. As his foot hit the top step, three targets popped down from the ceiling, but only two of them had a blue circle - one of them had two red squares! *Sneaky bastards!* As the thought crossed his conscious mind, Warren's eye and muscles bypassed his brain in a simple process: scan from left to right - blue circle, shoot, shoot, scan, blue circle, shoot, shoot, and scan. Taking two more steps through the lane, Warren saw two more targets pop up from the floor area. This was unusual because the earlier targets had all been at waist height or higher. He desperately twisted his footing, swinging the rifle barrel down but missed all four shots. *Shit!* Mindful of his ammunition, Warren popped out the magazine and slotted in a fresh one, then stepped into the U-turn that led to the next obstacle.

The end of the barn lane was still high off the ground, and Warren turned the corner to discover that what went up, must come down. But this time, there were no stairs, just a timber ramp covered in slimy moss. This time, Warren was moving to his left, keeping the rifle trained towards the back of the warehouse where the targets would be. Instantly, sprinklers concealed in the ceiling sprayed freezing water towards him, soaking his hair, clothes and rifle and making him gasp with the physical shock. Desperately trying to keep his balance on the sloping ramp, Warren hit three more targets, but found it increasingly difficult to spot the blue circles with cold water washing through his eyes.

Moving to shoot at the last target, Warren slipped on the wet timber and fell awkwardly on his side. The fall, the missed targets and the incessant water drumming on his body fired up his anger, and he swore aloud.

Vocalising his emotions vented them, and he willed himself to pull it together. Using the butt of the rifle, he levered himself upright and stepped out of the lane. The water stopped as quickly as it had started, but Warren had forgotten about it, focussing intently on the next challenge.

As Warren turned right, a baby began to cry. Obviously recorded and amplified so he would hear it through the earplugs he wore, the sound of a distressed infant grated on his already strained nerves. Then another child joined in, a girl, screaming in terror and agony. The elevator in his stomach dropped, and he braced himself for what was to come.

Warren stepped into the lane and immediately flinched. Plastic dolls lined the opposite wall, all in various stages of dismemberment. Some were missing arms or legs, most of them were missing heads. Red paint had been liberally splashed around and the whole scene was lit sporadically by a strobe light that flickered rapidly, dazzling and disorienting him. In the bizarre flashing light, the bodies looked real. The screaming ate away at his soul. It was a scene of absolute hell, lifted right from the nightmares of Dante or the Devil himself. The kind of visual viscera that his brutal and confronting training had tried to prepare him for, while accepting all along that nothing could truly prepare men for combat.

The first two targets sprang out from beside dismembered babies, and four bullets hit the blue circles. But as two more targets appeared, Warren was ambushed by another horror. A life-size black mannequin flipped up from the floor, brandishing a silver machete. Warren's heart actually skipped a beat as flashes of his own trauma burst out of his memory and he instinctively fired - two in the chest and one in the head. Then he shot out the blue circles and dashed for the exit, feeling the vomit welling up in his throat.

Making another right turn at the end of the lane, Warren saw daylight at the end of his final challenge. A door stood ajar at the far end, and the shooting lane contained several wooden school desks with mannequins seated at them. As he moved into the lane, Warren glanced at the ground and noticed that train tracks ran towards the door, one on each side of the pathway. Behind the entrance to this lane, the tracks rose steeply and Warren sucked in his breath. Straddling the elevated tracks, a metal 44-gallon drum was attached to a pair of train wheels. Warren recognised it as the same type of barrel bomb that the Irgun had used to blow up the King David Hotel in 1946 - part of a guerrilla conflict he had studied at school. If it was released, the heavy drum would race down the tracks, obliterating anything - and anyone - in the shooting lane.

All this took less than a second to process, as Warren immediately dashed towards the exit. Four more targets appeared as there was a CLANG and the barrel started moving down the ramp towards him. *No time, no time!*

Distracted by the impending crush and his desperate footwork, Warren's reflexes again bypassed his brain and he fired again. Five shots hit their targets, but on the fifth, the bolt slid forward on an empty chamber. *FUCK! Out of ammo already???? That makes no sense!*

Always one more crisis than we can handle...and no time to think about it.

The heavy barrel was picking up speed, hungrily rolling towards his knees. If it hit him, no doubt the resulting injury would end his career as a paratrooper. He took wide steps sideways to increase the distance.

Still moving towards the exit, Warren smoothly removed the empty magazine, locked in a fresh one and racked the bolt to draw a fresh round into the breech.

No time! Desperate, he crabbed sideways, aiming the rifle forward, shot the final two blue circles and dived through the opening just in front of the barrel. Too wide to follow him, the assembly hit the doorway with a clang and bounced back inside. *WHEW!*

Covered in sweat, dust and grass from sliding across the ground, Warren took a second to fill his lungs, shake his head and try to process what he had just endured. Tension and relief flooded his body with hot and cold waves, his heart was pounding and the screaming baby noises still haunted his ears. Nothing in his experience or training could have prepared him for what he had just endured. The House of Horrors wasn't just a test of marksmanship, it was part obstacle course, part physiological screening and a simple way to cram half a dozen scenarios into a single, contained environment. A test of nerve, skill and mental focus - exactly the kind of stresses he would face as a Commando or SF operator.

Whoever created that was one sick son of a bitch.

Lying on his front, Warren lifted his head to see a pair of black boots standing right in front of him. He switched the rifle to SAFE, rolled to his feet and recognised Metford's grinning face.

'How was that, eh? Feckin intense, yeah?' Metford clapped Warren on the shoulder, sending a small puff of dust and grass into the morning air. Warren nodded as a similar grin spread across his face as the anxiety wore off and only the endorphins remained.

'Come on, then,' said Metford as he trotted back towards the front of the warehouse. 'We all do a walk-through as you swap in fresh targets, then you can watch the next lot go through, ok?'

Warren unloaded the rifle as they reached the entry door, where the observers had gathered again. Sgt Clay greeted Warren with a grin, which Warren hoped was good news. He kept his face neutral however, just in case he was being set up with another practical joke.

‘Nice job, Dekker! What you think of that, hey?’

Warren swallowed. ‘Pretty intense, Sergeant. Good times.’

‘You like the sandbagged magazine trick?’

Everyone laughed, including Warren. The half-filled magazine had caught him unawares, but he felt he had prevailed by reloading smoothly. ‘Sneaky bastards,’ he muttered again, producing another burst of laughter. He guessed that everyone present had been through the same trial, and felt a strong sense of brotherhood at the shared experience. Common trials are what fuse men into teams, a shared suffering and triumph of the team when individuals would have quit.

The small crowd chuckled and pressed into the warehouse, forcing him to walk beside the burly sergeant. The older man handed him a stack of papers with blue circles on them, and showed Warren how to remove the ones he had shot and replace them with a fresh target.

Moving slowly through the maze, much slower than he had originally moved, Warren was able to appreciate the hits and misses - most of which were on the left hand side of the target. A corporal who tagged along behind the sergeant was making notes of the hits and misses on a clipboard, so Warren asked about the strange consistency in his missed shots.

‘You’re used to point shooting with a BB-gun,’ the sergeant replied. ‘The SLR has much harder recoil, and you’re anticipating that by squeezing harder.’ He held out his hand, loosely shaped into a C, as if he was grasping an imaginary rifle grip. ‘As you squeeze, your muscles pull your hand around into a tighter arc, and that’s just enough to pull the barrel to the left. Less than a millimetre, but that’s all it takes.’ The grizzled hand flexed into a smaller C shape, rotating inwards as the muscles worked.

‘A millimetre change in your grip is amplified a hundred times by the length of the barrel, so by the time the bullet is airborne, you’re off target.’

Warren was impressed. ‘Is that like, kinesiology?’

‘Yeah, exactly.’ Clay waved his hand around at the warehouse. ‘This whole thing...very scientific. Everything from mind games to kinesiology. Plus, we can move the targets and playsets around so it’s never the same setup twice.’

Playsets, as if it’s a kid’s game...

By now, Warren had replaced all the shot paper targets, and helped three other men roll the barrel bomb back up the ramp where it was secured with a simple hinged hook. Warren saw a wire leading from the hook, and guessed

that it led back to the control board, where the sprinklers, audio and other moving parts were managed.

As they moved back out into the sunlight and walked towards the starting point, the sergeant took the clipboard and scanned the marks on the paper briefly, then handed it back to the corporal. 'Overall, not bad. We won't have an official score until the end of the day, but you're not the worst. Not the best either, but not the worst we've had.'

Warren took that as high praise, keeping his face serious. 'What happens now?'

The sergeant pointed at the tables where the rifles and ammunition were. 'Clean your rifle and reload the mags, then wait for the next event to finish. We'll cycle everyone through, have some spick & span, and then do it again. Yeah?'

The mention of food made Warren realise he was hungry. The physical obstacle course wasn't very difficult, the soldiers normally completed a far more arduous assault course before breakfast, but the emotional stress had taken an extra toll. As staccato gunshots echoed from inside the House of Horrors, he quickly stripped and scrubbed the rifle with cotton soaked in solvent, ran a series of cleaning patches through the barrel and then reassembled the rifle.

Looking in one of the ammo cans on the table, he saw it was full of ammunition in stripper clips. These C-shaped strips of metal held ten rounds of ammo, and Warren used them to feed the bullets into the magazines he had emptied. The stripper clips locked onto the top of the magazine, and all he had to do was press down on the bullets and they slid straight into the magazine, leaving the clip empty. At the bottom of the magazine, a spring loaded tray provided the pressure necessary to load the bullets into the rifle as they were needed.

He laid the weapon and magazines on the table and then jogged upstairs to the observation mezzanine for the rest of the show.

After a lunch of sandwiches, apples and tepid water, the soldiers ran through the course again. With the benefit of experience, Warren was far more confident about the obstacles, but the actual targets had been moved around or had their sequences changed, so the technical point-shooting was being tested anew each time.

After everyone had been through the course, Sgt Clay tallied up the results

and winners were announced. Warren wasn't expecting to place anywhere near the top, and he clapped and cheered along with the others to congratulate the winners.

The men pitched in together to pack up their equipment, and Sgt Clay came over to Warren as he was loading a table into one of the trucks. 'Dekker?'

'S...yes Sergeant?' Warren managed to bite off the formal military salutation, since they were all technically on leave for the day.

'I wanted to ask...you talked about Kinesiology. Do you know much about it?'

Warren shrugged. 'Just what I read about - Lucky McDaniel. He said when he was training people with a BB gun and silver coins, many of the coins were hit in the same place. He could tell by the small dents made in the metal.'

Clay nodded but didn't say anything so Warren continued.

'So he was thinking, and I agree - that the eye-muscle link is very, very strong. Bypassing the brain function removes a lot of resistance, and basically allows the eye to point the rifle wherever it wants, and the eye is able to perceive a lot clearer than we think it can. It's our brain that slows it down.' He saw a look of amusement and confusion on the Sergeant's face. 'Does that make any sense?'

Clay nodded. 'Science and medicine have been measuring eye function using the brain because it's the only way they know how. Eye - brain - test. It's the only tools they have. But you're right. By training the brain out of the way, we're regularly surprised by how efficient and sharp our eyes really are.'

He paused for a moment, then added another idea. 'I reckon it's like magic, you know? Illusionists? They create a pattern that your eye tells your brain to follow, but then they shift something and your brain stays with the old pattern. That break is where the magic trick happens.'

Warren shrugged. 'I don't know anything about magic,' he said.

'I saw a magician called James Karp,' said Sgt Clay. 'Brilliant show, but he had this saying..."Magic is what happens when your mind stops working; and for a moment, all you do it feel"...I reckon that's the same thing as what's happening here. We're training our brains by feel.'

The equipment had been loaded and most of the men were back in the trucks and leaving. Metford was waiting patiently, careful not to interrupt or disturb Sgt Clay but the implication was clear. The day's event was over and

everyone was keen to get home.

Clay stuck out his hand for Warren to shake. 'Once you finish McDaniel, start on kinesiology. Read all you can about it, Dekker. I think you'll like what you find.'

Warren nodded. 'Thanks, Sarge. I'll look into magic as well. See you next time?'

The older man smiled. 'I look forward to it.'

June 1994 - 3 SANDF Recruit Training Camp

Diskobolos

Warren and Benjamin's infantry training was coming to an end. Instead of screaming at them, the training staff told the platoon what to do, and they did it. Procedures and movements had become second nature, and their tasks were designed to get the recruits used to putting them together in different ways, in order to achieve the desired outcome.

The recruits also had a little more leisure time, which Warren split between writing letters to Janet and giving lessons in point shooting to any other recruits who were interested.

Observing the lessons from a discreet distance, Sgt Blazkowicz was impressed with the young man's natural teaching ability. Warren possessed patience, enthusiasm and a naturally easy-going manner that put his students at ease. This relaxation made the lessons easier for them to learn and they progressed quickly, hitting ever-smaller targets and laughing in amazement at what their eyes were able to do.

Warren used the same technique to help his students understand what was possible. He passed around a metal disc about the size of the size of the "O" when his fingers made the "OK" sign. The metal was smooth on both sides, except for a speckled area where a dozen indents were clustered in a group. He watched in silence as the other recruits passed it around, running their fingers over the dents in the soft metal.

Once they had all had a look, he flipped the disc up into the air, shouldered the pellet gun and fired. The disc went PING and changed direction in mid-air, then fell to the ground in front of him. One of the recruits picked it up and offered it to Warren, but he shook his head.

'Pass it around again,' he said. 'Look closely - you heard the ping, but take notice of where I hit it...' The disc had the same pattern of dents, all grouped in the same area.

'I can't prove this,' he continued. 'Maybe one day, we can film it with slow-motion cameras, but Lucky McDaniel says the eye is targeting the same spot

on the disc.'

There were gasps and mutterings from the group. Sceptical.

Warren smiled. 'Take a look again,' he said. 'You heard me hit it, you saw the impact. You've got the same eyes as me, you can do the same thing. Your eye is able to target far more carefully than we give it credit for - we just need to stop our brains from interfering. That's what these lessons are all about.'

He handed the pellet gun to the first student and described the steps, touching the pellet gun occasionally to adjust it correctly.

'Fire one shot, and watch where the pellet flies.'

PING. The gun spat the shiny ball bearing into the sky where it glowed like a tracer as the sunlight reflected off the shiny surface. The student nodded.

'Ready?' Warren asked, holding the metal disk loosely in his hand. The younger man nodded.

Warren tossed up the disk, aiming about a meter in front and above the pellet gun.

There were two PINGS, one as the gun fired and a second as the disk spun higher in the air.

A few gasps from the crowd, which Warren ignored.

'Good,' he said as he took another disc from his pocket. 'Again.'

The shooter cocked the pellet gun and nodded, then Warren tossed the second disc.

PING, PING.

A smattering of applause came from the observers, as the shooter demonstrated that this first hit wasn't a lucky shot.

After an hour of training, Warren discovered a feeling even more enjoyable than point shooting - sharing the exhilaration with others, and watching their success blossom from his efforts. He felt honest pride in leaving a legacy in these young men, passing along skills that would put food on their tables and might just save their lives in combat. It wasn't too much to hope that these skills would help make their country safe from the communists, keep families together and create a bond with their own children that could be passed along to future generations.

August 1994 - 44 Parachute Brigade

Bloemfontein, South Africa

Socially, economically and legally, it was a tumultuous time for South Africa. Imprisoned for organising a decade of bombings and executions that killed thousands of his own people, Mandela had been released from prison in 1990. Apartheid was officially ending, and investment and opportunity were flowing into the country. Suppressed by decades of sanctions, the economy had started to boom and optimism was high, however many White South Africans tempered their hopes with caution and cynicism.

Benjamin and Warren had settled into 44 Para quickly, completing two training exercises and a combat mission against Marxist insurgents who were moving across the border from Namibia. The infantry moved slowly and methodically as they cleared village after village, commencing operations after the Paras were air-dropped across the end of the valley to seal it off. After five days of running skirmishes with the Marxists and dozens of killed & wounded on both sides, the valley was declared safe and 44 Para returned to their barracks to debrief, clean their equipment and rest.

First your weapon, then your kit, then your body. The procedure followed the relative importance of each item. Still filthy and stained with mud, sweat and blood, the paratroopers stripped their rifles and machine guns into their component pieces and scrubbed the metal with solvent. They worked to remove carbon, lead and copper deposits that would accumulate and jam it the next time it was fired. Once the clean weapons were returned to the armoury, the rest of their equipment had to be cleaned and organised. Finally, they could wash the grime off their bodies and put on fresh clothes.

Benjamin came up to Warren as he was stashing the last of his gear in his footlocker.

‘Orders will be up, let’s check it out.’

Warren nodded, locked the container and they walked to the noticeboard at the end of the hallway, outside the office. Pinned to the cork was a yellow sheet, displaying the rostered duties for the next few days. The brothers high-fived as they saw their names in the group labelled “24-hours R&R” - a weekend off base to spend with their families. They raced each other to the

payphone, each eager to be first to organise some fun with their friends and family.

Benjamin made one phone call, learned of a party that night and arranged to catch up with local friends. Warren also made a phone call, to the De Bouvier house, and made a date to spend time with Janet. They went shopping, visited tourist sites and he caught up on the news from his hometown. The hours passed in a blur as the young soldiers enjoyed their freedom away from the barracks.

Overjoyed to welcome the boy's home safely, their mother Katharin prepared a lavish meal for Saturday evening and Hans brought home a bottle of celebratory Scotch whisky. Janet brought over a dessert, effortlessly charming both Hans and Katharin who accepted her as a daughter they never had.

Over dinner, the parents listened with pride as their sons spoke about their training, new friends and travel opportunities. Living in the barracks and eating army food had help the boys save money, and they happily discussed cars and travel they intended to purchase in the near future.

Then Hans took a deep breath and changed the topic.

'So, what are we up against out there? Anything we should be worried about? Where you going to slot floppies next?'

Katharin cast a worried glance at Janet. 'Hans, no!' She protested. 'Not a polite subject for company...'

But Janet smiled. 'That's okay, I follow the news. And I've got an uncle in the artillery.' She grimaced, 'we all know what combat is like.' She gripped Warren's hand tightly. 'And I know that family is worth risking everything for.'

Benjamin and Warren shared a meaningful glance. *How could the intensity of their experiences be put into words?* Warren swallowed and shrugged.

'It's like a different planet,' he began. 'There's no social rules, nothing is what you might expect it to be. They don't think like we do...but they're clever. Bloody clever. Experts at setting traps, something you won't expect, a crying baby with a grenade underneath, or a landmine in the latrine hole...'

Janet frowned. 'Huh?'

Benjamin grimaced. 'They know our tactics and procedures. We probe with bayonets, to see if they are hiding ammo or equipment... so your *Boer* is probing, and his bayonet trips the mine and it blows him up and covers

everyone in shit...which you can't wash off because you're on patrol...'

Everyone recoiled and expressed disgust. Janet wrinkled her nose but wasn't overly shocked as the news didn't surprise her.

Katharin changed the subject. 'Are they feeding you enough?'

The two boys laughed. 'Never!' Then Warren shrugged. 'The field rations are basically supermarket foods. Tinned meat and veg, biscuits. There's chlorine tablets to put in the water if we need it...'

'Nothing like this, mum!' Benjamin voiced his congratulations on the meal. Warren, Janet and Hans all agreed.

Hans looked at Warren with a serious expression. 'I hear the training is pretty brutal. Are you coping okay?'

Warren shrugged. 'The training is hard, but I don't think that's the main thing,' he said thoughtfully. 'What might be shocking to foreigners or civilians is just the high tolerance for casualties. I think that's the main thing that observers or journalists don't understand.'

Hans frowned in concern for his children. 'Casualties?'

'Well, acceptable losses in training - or in combat - are very high. We lost three or four recruits out at Lohatla - sleeping in holes, the vehicles just drove over them in the night...bam, dead. Plus, we're training with live ammo, so people get hit pretty often. In other militaries, the exercise would be called off, there would be an investigation, but not here. The department just sends a letter and a chaplain to the family and we carry on.' He paused to think, then went on.

'I wouldn't call it physically brutal, it's not like we're been beaten or tortured. It's just that the staff are making sure we are ready for what we'll face on operations. Combat is brutal, and the training is realistic.'

As Warren paused to take another mouthful, Benjamin spoke.

'It's a hard life for everyone,' he said. 'But that's just Africa. We went up near Botswana once, guarding a supply convoy. You can't drive back at night, so we have to stay overnight. So the ones who aren't busy get some beers, we go and sit on the hill that overlooks the *Krokodilrivier*, before it becomes the Limpopo.'

The others nodded. Even if they hadn't seen it, they knew it was the border between South Africa and Botswana, indelibly carved into the psyche of every southern African by the horrors of the Border War.

'So we're sitting on the hill, and down on the other side of the river, we can

see the people washing their clothes on the river bank. They're wearing bright colours - red, green, yellow.'

The others nodded again, it was a familiar scene, played out in every village on the continent.

'Now it's a steep drop down to the river, and because we are high up, we can see the shadow of the crocodile, swimming in towards the group.'

Tension rose around the table as everyone could guess what was going to happen next. But Benjamin surprised them even further.

'So we're taking bets, right...on which colour will be the one taken...by the croc...'

Janet gasped and clapped her hand to her mouth. Warren took the other one and squeezed it gently.

Benjamin looked at her. 'Sure, I know it's horrific. But to these guys, out there on the frontier...that's their life. That's how they value it. Gallows humour...it's the only way to cope with what they are dealing with...every day.'

Janet nodded. 'Otherwise, you'd go insane. It's just life...'

'Or suicidal,' muttered Warren. 'Every platoon of recruits loses a few - maybe more - in the first month. They just can't handle it. But if you can get through that...then black humour is the next natural step. A mental survival mechanism.'

Warren caught a concerned look from his father, and paused, implicitly giving the older man permission to ask what was on his mind. Hans chose his words carefully.

'I'm glad you're both okay...and I appreciate you glossing over the dangers - we all appreciate the danger, even if we don't know the details. But can you explain to me, to us...what are you fighting for?'

Warren chewed slowly as he weighed how to reply. It was a legitimate question, and deserved more than a flippant reply.

'Well, I can't speak to Benjamin, but I'm fighting to preserve a way of life...to maintain a home, to live in this country...under what I consider to be an acceptable system...Christian and capitalist, a set of laws that are respected...if Zimbabwe, and the rest of Africa is an example of the alternatives...'

He shook his head, and noted that the others were nodding in agreement. 'This country took us in, gave us opportunity when Rhodesia was

destroyed...we've built a whole new life from nothing.'

Benjamin looked at his father with respect. 'Agree, a hundred percent. I know you fought hard, but Rhodesia was overwhelmed, betrayed and undermined from outside. In the end, there was no alternative and coming here was the right thing to do. But the difference for our generation...is that there's nowhere else to go.' He waved a hand at Warren and Janet, who were holding hands under the table. 'For us, there's no Plan B - we're in Plan B now...if South Africa falls to the communists or the floppies...we have nowhere to go.'

Hans nodded. 'Every time, I did what I thought was right for our family and the country. It's a difficult balance to maintain, but we're glad you see it that way.'

Katharin wiped a tear from her eye and took a deep breath. The actions broke an awkward silence that had fallen over the table, as the Rhodesians relived the destruction of their country, which took all their plans, hopes and dreams. Warren squeezed Janet's hand. 'There's a bright side. We'd never had met if we didn't leave Rhodesia.' She smiled, and Katharin did as well. 'Yes, look on the bright side,' she murmured.

Hans changed the subject. 'You'll have some leave coming up, then? What're you going to do?'

'Warren looked at Janet, who nodded.

'Two weeks, at least. We're thinking of a road trip: Durban, Drakensberg, down the coast to Cape Town, then back here via Upington.'

Both parents leaned back in their chairs as they digested the information and mentally mapped the route. Hans raised his eyebrows in surprise.

'Big drive. Two and a half thousand miles. That's some wild country, too.'

Warren looked at Benjamin. 'You wanna come along?'

Benjamin laughed. 'I thought you'd never ask. Can I bring a friend?'

Janet laughed as well. 'Sure, there's plenty of room. But we have to take turns picking what music to play. Deal?'

Everybody laughed at that, and Warren topped up their glasses as dessert was served.

The evening formally ended when Hans went to the sideboard and served out five shots of scotch into small glasses for toasting, then placed one in front of each place at the table.

'Everything good about Rhodesia is gone, except the people,' he said

formally. 'We alone carry the ideals and values that we fight to preserve. Please, rise and sing with me.'

The rest of the family set aside their cutlery, stood and lifted a glass.

Instead of the typical 'God save the Queen,' Hans quietly began singing the Rhodesian National Anthem - the tune was the well-known "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's ninth symphony.

Rise, O voices of Rhodesia,

He sang, and the others joined in after the first line.

God may we Thy bounty share.

Give us strength to face all danger,

And where challenge is, to dare.

Guide us, Lord, to wise decision,

Ever of Thy grace aware,

Let our hearts beat bravely always

For this land within Thy care.

Misty eyed, Hans made eye contact with everyone around the table and then drained his glass. 'God bless you all,' he said firmly. The others copied his salute, and the brothers embraced their father. 'It will be okay, dad,' Warren murmured and he slapped the thin shirt covering his father's broad shoulders. 'One day, we'll get our land back.'

The older man swallowed the emotions in his throat. 'Ever hopeful,' he said, before leading Katharin upstairs to bed, leaving the brothers and Janet to finish the bottle of scotch. Just before midnight, the lights in the house went dark and the family slept.

The house itself was a simple design. Living areas downstairs were connected to upstairs bedrooms by a flight of stairs that ended outside Benjamin's room, on the far left of the house. Warren's room was in the middle, and their parents occupied the larger room at the end of the hall.

Warren and Janet were quietly making love when the bedroom door cracked open and Benjamin ducked in. Janet gave little yelp at the intrusion and dived under the sheets, as Warren glared at his brother. 'What the fuck bro? Get the fuck out!'

But his outrage transformed as he saw the look on Benjamin's face. His eyes were wide and a vein was throbbing in his neck. Something was wrong.

‘Shhh,’ hissed Benjamin. ‘There’s someone in the house.’

‘What the fuck?’ Warren’s voice dropped to a whisper.

‘Yeah, I was about to take a piss... heard a window break downstairs. So I looked quickly, there’s at least three. I don’t think they saw me.’ He pointed to Warren’s electric alarm clock beside the bed. The normally bright red numbers were black as the night outside.

‘They cut the power to the house. Get ready, I’ll wake up mum and dad, we gotta slot these fuckers. Where’s your gun?’

All modesty forgotten, Warren and Janet dressed as quietly as possible. Warren gingerly eased open the bedside drawer and lifted out the heavy 1911 pistol. Chambered in .45ACP, the battle-tested pistol was simple, clean and hard-hitting. Benjamin beckoned with his finger until their heads were close together. His voice was barely audible as he suggested a course of action.

‘Janet, stay here and lock the door after us. Get into the corner and line up on the door until we call “all clear,” okay? We’ll get mum and dad, call the police with his mobile phone and then clear the house, yeah?’ Janet’s short blonde hair bobbed as she nodded and drew her own Taurus revolver in .38 Super from her handbag. An imperfect plan now was better than a perfect plan tomorrow, when it might well be too late. The pistol butt was black but the silver barrel and chambers winked in the pale light from the window.

Dark sweat pooling under the armpits on her shirt, Janet wiggled backwards into the corner of the room, where she had a clear view of the door, and gently thumbed back the hammer with a soft click. The lightest pressure on the trigger would fire the cocked pistol, so she rested her trigger finger alongside the frame above it. Safe, but instantly able to be fired as needed.

Benjamin pushed on the door and gently twisted the handle, desperately trying to minimise any noise and giving away the element of surprise. With the door lock retracted, Benjamin took the pressure off and began to open it. Sweat dripped off his face from the tension in the room. With no idea about the kind of threat they faced, Warren aimed his pistol at the growing gap between the door and the frame. When it was wide enough to fit his body, he stepped quickly through and twisted to the left, aiming it away from his parent’s bedroom and towards the top of the stairwell.

Too slow.

He saw the gleaming blade of a machete slice through the air towards his arm, reflexively moved sideways and squeezed the trigger at the same time.

The gun fired, blinding and deafening him but the first attacker was already upon him, slashing open his arm and toppling him onto his back. Warren's head cracked the floor and his world spun around into black silence. Without thinking, he tried to get up but felt a great weight pinning him to the floor as more gunshots flared in the air above him. Warmth spread over his chest and arms and his feet scrambled unsuccessfully for traction on the wooden floor. Moments passed, it could have been three seconds, or three minutes but eventually Warren's vision cleared and his hearing returned. Fire flowed up his right arm where the machete had cut it open and he hugged it to his body to slow the loss of blood. Lifting his knees, he discovered the weight pinning him down was actually a man's body, punctured with two bullet holes. The world spun again as Warren pushed off the body and sat up against the wall, then Janet and Katharin were beside him, crying and screaming and asking if he was all right.

Warren shook his head to straighten his thoughts and squinted to see more clearly. The wooden balustrade beside the stairwell had a section missing, and the hallway was covered in spent brass, chunks of wood and dead bodies. Agony drove Warren's limbs as he crawled through the bloody mess on the floor to peer through the broken railing. Splattered across the wall and stairs were gruesome blood stains and two broken bodies - twisted almost beyond recognition. One of them was dressed in bloody Julies and a black t-shirt but the other was wearing Benjamin's pyjamas.

Oh shit. Oh God, no. NO. What happened?

He didn't realise that he had spoken aloud, but Janet answered.

'When you opened the door, they were waiting. I got the one who cut you, but the second one was too fast. He grabbed Benjamin...maybe as a shield, I dunno.' Janet's voice broke as her body processed the shock. 'They struggled, and Benjamin just looked at me...Oh god, I'll never forget the look...and he just jumped backwards out of the way...he pulled that floppy right over the edge.'

Warren wiped tears from her eyes. She swallowed and took a deep breath.

'There was a third, he looked over the railing and I shot him twice but he didn't fall, he turned to me and that's when Hans fired from their room.'

Katharin had been crying the whole time, stroking his hair and face. 'You were lucky to be lying on the ground, out of the crossfire' she stammered.

'With Janet inside the room, your father had a clear shot down the hallway.'

Warren looked around. 'Where is dad, is he okay?'

The women smiled. 'Yes, he's fine, he's on the phone to the police.' Warren's mother kept touching him, stroking his hair and face, reassuring herself that he was alive.

Ten minutes later, the police arrived with two ambulances and a van from the coroner. Warren gave a statement and was relieved to be taken to hospital to have his arm treated.

The wound was cleaned and sterilized, stitched and bandaged. He was happy when the surgeon told him he was very lucky, that no major damage had been done to the nerves or muscles. But on the third day, the doctor entered his room with a grave face.

'Mister Dekker, how're you feeling?'

'Feeling good, thanks doc.' Warren quipped, and it was true. The painkillers were working, and he was pleased with the healing. Warren wiggled up in the bed and looked at the doctor expectantly.

'Warren, we're pleased with your recovery and hope you can go home tomorrow, but there is something...something you need to know...'

Warren felt sick. If the doctor was having trouble telling him... The doctor took a deep breath.

'I'm sorry, sorry to tell you this...but your blood tests have come back positive for hepatitis...and AIDS.'

There was a silence in the room as Warren's heart and brain stopped working for a moment.

'You...what?' He had a thousand questions but his mouth refused to say them.

'You were cut several times, in your arm and shoulder,' the doctor explained.

'When your attacker was shot, his heart pumped live blood all over you for a few seconds until it stopped. He definitely had AIDS and either he or the machete that cut you had Hepatitis.'

Warren sat in shock. There were no thoughts he could put into words. He felt like he was falling, and grabbed the railing on the side of the bed for support.

'Janet,' he said at last. 'Can you bring Janet in and tell her? How long have I got? And my parents, they need to know, too...'

Once his body remembered how to talk, the questions poured out like water.

A few minutes later, the whole family was in shock. Losing Benjamin had been a terrible blow to them all, but this news was almost worse. AIDS was

barely understood in Africa, often misdiagnosed as pneumonia or liver failure. No treatments were available, but they had all seen media articles and reports on what happened to the people who contracted AIDS. Hans managed to keep his feelings under control but the women wept bitterly. Janet stumbled into the bathroom cubicle and vomited into the toilet. Katharin hugged her son tightly, knowing the disease would take him away from her too soon, no matter how much time he had left.

Warren stroked his mother's hair and held his father's hand tightly. When Janet returned to the room, he looked the doctor in the eye. 'Tell me honestly, how long do I have left?'

The doctor shrugged. 'Very difficult to say. You could live many years, but your body loses the ability to fight off infections. You might be lucky and not catch anything, they might find a cure tomorrow...but there are many risks. Pneumonia, liver disease, tuberculosis, meningitis...if you caught any of these then you might be okay for six months...maybe less, then...' His voice trailed off as Warren nodded.

'A slow decline into a painful death, depending on what ends up killing me,' he muttered, immediately regretting it as the women burst into a fresh round of sobbing. He looked at his father.

'The army won't have me...what am I going to do?'

Hans shook his head, as a tear welled up in his eyes. 'I don't know, son. But we take it one day at a time, okay? Let's get you home first, then go in and talk to the regimental medic, yeah?'

Warren nodded. *Start where you can, with what you know.*

He looked at the doctor. 'When's the soonest I can go home?'

December 1994 - Hawaii

United Airlines Flight 714 from Honolulu to New York via LA was departing into a beautiful tropical morning. At full throttle, the Pratt & Whitney engines hauled the passenger jet off the roasting black runway, over the green vegetation, a strip of creamy white sand and hurled it screaming into the cobalt eastern sky.

Two thirds of the way down the economy class cabin, Rebecca Peters already felt like a trapped animal in a zoo. No, it was worse. Like something out of a black-and-white horror film, an unwilling patient strapped into an evil dentist's chair as he began to operate on his victim.

Her two week summer holiday had been pleasant enough, but the five hour flight to L.A. was rapidly becoming a nightmare.

She had arrived in Hawaii a week ago, with no itinerary but relaxing with two books to get through - both from the New York Times bestseller list. "Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China" by Han Suyin and "Goebbels" by Ralf Georg Reuth. The first she had devoured while lying on Waikiki beach, desperately trying to attract a man – any man's - attention and the second she had saved for the five-plus hour flight back to the USA.

Rebecca had boarded the flight feeling irritated and horny. Despite spending many hours in bars and clubs in the notorious tourist holes and pick up spots, she had fallen into her hotel bed each night alone, lonely and increasingly despondent. It wasn't that she was outright ugly, but her features were more mannish than feminine, her voice pitched low and monotonous and her sense of humour was intellectual & bookish rather than outgoing and vapid.

Her angular, unstylish glasses and mousy hair, cut into a short-back-and sides like a man's, also smothered her social and sex appeal.

Sick of the tourists and eager to get back to the Big Apple, Rebecca had arrived at the departure gate early. She passed the additional hours by immersing herself in the lives, politics and propaganda of the Communists and Nazis, both of whom she admired a great deal. She made notes in the margins of the books, underlining important phrases or expressions that resonated with her and the time passed quickly.

When her flight was called, she boarded early, settling into her window seat

and reflexively checking underneath it to confirm there was a life jacket there. Better safe than sorry. Reading about the rise of Hitler's propaganda genius, she barely noticed the rest of the plane filling up, but the seat beside her remained empty. Looking up from her book, and glancing out the window, she saw that the ground crew had finished loading the luggage and closed the cargo bay doors, and the cabin crew were moving down the aisle, closing the overhead lockers. For a moment, Rebecca allowed herself to feel some glee at the thought of having nobody next to her, but then her emotions went on a roller coaster.

A young man dashed down the aisle and flung himself into the seat beside Rebecca, breathing hard. His curly blonde hair bobbed around madly as he settled into the seat and hunted around for the seat belt buckles.

Trying not to be obvious, Rebecca couldn't help checking him out. Late twenties - if that - and his surfer haircut, lightly-tanned white cheeks, pointed nose and high cheekbones gave the man an impish, mischievous appearance. He radiated an aura of fun, excitement and wonder at the world he was exploring.

It was immediately attractive to an urban, professional woman like Rebecca. Her wrinkled heart muscle began to beat faster.

His first sentence almost made her believe in love at first sight. In that relaxed, almost lazy drawl that hints at Australians' ability to meet any challenge with a minimum of fuss, he grinned at her and said 'Phew – luckee. Almost didn't make it.'

Looking into his bright blue eyes, Rebecca felt a strong attraction, unlike anything she had felt before. Men usually made her feel nauseous, irritating her with their general ignorance, laziness and power which demanded that she work twice as hard for less reward. This young man was different - relaxed, smiling and sparkling with an innocent energy.

She swallowed the lump of desire that rose in her throat and desperately tried to act nonchalant.

'First time flying?'

Those wonderful blonde curls shook again as he fumbled with the seat belt.

'Nahh, I been all over. Asia, Japan, Europe, New Zealand, Hawaii. Now I'm going to L.A.'

Rebecca was impressed that he was so well travelled, despite his youth, since air travel in the 1990s was still relatively expensive. The seat belt clicked shut

at his crotch as the airliner jolted backwards away from the gate and the Captain asked everyone to pay attention to the safety briefing. Rebecca ignored them all, focussing on her neighbour's hair, eyes, teeth and dimple. She stroked some hair off her forehead and desperately tried to think of something to say, to pique his interest and keep the conversation flowing.

'Lots of travel,' she remarked. 'Is it hard, being away from your family?'

'Nahh, it's just mum and she stays on the farm all the time. Me dad's dead.' The way he snickered gave Rebecca's feelings a punch in the gut. Like a balloon being popped, a red flag went up inside her brain. 'Oh, I'm sorry for your loss,' she said carefully.

The young man turned his head and looked at her from below half-lowered eyelids. It was a sly look, like a fox might make when looking at a newborn lamb. 'His loss, not really mine,' he said softly. 'They found him in a dam - drowned. Suicide.'

Something about the way he was talking raised the hackles on Rebecca's neck. There was part of his statement that she didn't believe, something in his body language or the tone of his voice just didn't sound genuine. She decided to change the subject.

'So you've travelled a lot, is that for business?'

He shook his head again.

'Nahh, I just like to fly around. My friend, Helen, she left me money when she died. I like to travel, talk to other people.'

Another death, and yet he spoke about it as if he was talking about the weather. Rebecca leaned back in her seat and breathed out slowly.

'Helen...did she...umm...how did she pass away?'

'Oh...umm...she was...we were in a car accident,' he said. 'She hit a truck and was killed instantly. I was in hospital for a coupla months.'

The icy hand clenching Rebecca's gut relaxed a little. At least it wasn't another suicide. This poor guy sounded unlucky, but two suicides with him as the common denominator...that would be creepy.

'So what about you?' He turned and looked right at her, well inside her personal space. If she wasn't attracted to him, it would have been uncomfortable. But she was, and so she leaned in and lowered her voice. To give herself an air of mystery, she was deliberately cautious and vague. 'Oh, I work in New York, at the UN Building,' was all she said.

Martin nodded. 'Oh yeah, I seen that. On the river. It looks like a domino,' he

remarked. 'When one falls, they all fall over. Very symbolic,' he cackled again.

Rebecca smiled, a thin, humourless smile, immediately thinking that it was a joke he had heard from someone else, rather than thinking it up himself.

The seatbelt sign went off, and Rebecca put her seat back. Partly for comfort, partly to piss off whoever was sitting behind her, but also as a subtle hint that she didn't want to talk any more. But he didn't stop talking. Couldn't he take a hint?

'Not much room on this flight,' he muttered. 'Lots of families, travelling with kids. So lucky. I never got to go anywhere with my parents.'

Rebecca didn't want to get drawn into a conversation with a total stranger. Sure, he was cute, but he was staring. 'Mmmm. It's sad that everyone doesn't have the same opportunities as others.'

'Nahh, some people are just mean,' he said petulantly. 'My dad...we were driving past Risdon prison, and he said to me, he said, "Stay out of trouble. If you end up in there, I won't come visit you."'

'Oh, whoa, hold on a minute,' responded Rebecca. 'Family relationships and conflicts aren't simple, there's many causes, consequences...'

He shook his head and those gorgeous blonde curls tugged at her heart again. 'Even when I was in school, nobody liked me, nobody played with me.' He poured out a long, disjointed tale of woe that Rebecca had trouble following. At last, she couldn't stand it any longer. 'Sorry, err, mate - I gotta use the ladies.'

She wiggled her way out into the aisle, trying to ignore the perverted ogling as her ass moved past his face. Blinded by tears of impotent rage, she stumbled into the toilet and banged the door shut.

She sat on the pan, shuddering in revulsion as she involuntarily re-played his vile, incoherent rantings in her head. It was worse than just redneck country talk, this guy was obviously mentally ill. And to think she had been attracted to him!

If he had kept his mouth shut, she would have willingly joined the Mile High Club with him, right there in the aircraft. The contrast between what was and what could have been was cutting her heart like a hacksaw.

Rebecca swallowed the bile that rose in her throat. The idea of giving herself to his beautiful smile, his gorgeous blonde curls, only to have his vile personality and rantings poison her girlish fantasy - it made her feel

physically ill.

Forced out of the tiny cubicle by the persistent tapping of other passengers on the door, she moved over to a stewardess and asked if she could move to an empty seat.

Stunning, blonde & tanned, the young woman eyed Rebecca's dowdy and mannish frame with barely concealed scorn and disdain. A former cheerleader and beauty pageant contestant, the contrast between her professional appearance and the passenger complaining to her couldn't be starker. Rebecca watched the stewardess' eyes rise from her sensible, flat shoes, past her narrow hips and unfashionable sweater to her angular chin, steel-rimmed glasses and butch haircut.

Even though she wasn't a lesbian, Rebecca could tell the stewardess had jumped to that conclusion, and not in a good way. The "welcome aboard" smile stayed on her lips, but the blonde's cheeks and eyes went hard and cold as she said 'I'm sorry, ma'am. All passengers must stay in their assigned seats.' The gorgeous stewardess even cocked her head to the side as she spoke, as if she was talking to a child. *Bitch.*

'But he's driving me crazy.' Rebecca protested through clenched teeth, trying to avoid making a scene while showing the stewardess how important her concerns were. 'He's not all there, he's a vile, shallow, hateful....pig,' she spluttered.

The stewardess was unmoved, and the trained smile stayed fixed.

'I'm sorry, ma'am. All passengers must stay in their assigned seats.'

'Is that all you can say?' Rebecca thought to herself. 'Just parrot the script like a trained monkey...you're just like a fucking record stuck in the same groove...'

Rebecca wormed her way back into her seat and tried to look out the window, but the aircraft had climbed above the clouds, and there was nothing to see.

And as if he had been waiting for her to return, her tormentor went on as if nothing had happened.

'I'll tell ya, your own people too - they'll take any chance to fuck you over...'

An hour later, Rebecca hit rock bottom. She had tried ignoring him, debating with him, pretending to sleep, even getting out her book and trying to read but nothing stopped the blonde man's angry vitriol. She was his prisoner, trapped in his world for as long as the plane was in the air, unable to escape.

He was talking about some evil people that he knew, the Martins. It was

some long, involved story about how he had wanted to buy farmland. A family he knew from childhood, they had a farm and the land next door came up for sale. He was really excited about this because he really liked the farmer's wife and wanted to live next door to her. Apparently he hadn't been able to organise himself quickly enough, and the Martins had made the deal and bought the farmland first.

To Rebecca, it sounded cut and dried. He saw an opportunity but missed out because of capitalism. He snoozed, and he lost. That's just the way it was, not some grand conspiracy to screw him over. Survival of the fittest - the most flexible, the most adaptable to change. Those who can react to opportunity thrive, and those who can't...wither.

But this guy really seemed to take it personally. He ranted and raved, called them names, accused them of stealing from him, stealing what was rightfully his. The venom and bile in his words was stunning, revolting.

Rebecca decided to put her book away and just sit with her fingers pressed into her ears, but as she reached into her bag, her hand brushed a sheaf of papers that she had forgotten about while on holiday. Before leaving the office in New York, she had printed off her calendar for the coming weeks and stapled it to the agenda and meeting documents for various forums and delegation meetings that she planned to attend.

In addition to the General Assembly of the UN, there were hundreds of Side Events running each year, meetings that brought together delegates, lobbyists and bureaucrats to develop policy and share ideas. Desperate to escape her present torture, she unfolded the papers and began to scan for something interesting.

There wasn't much.

Rebecca wasn't on the inside for any of the committees or forums that made policy. To get "in", required a bank of currency - power, influence or favours that people owed you. Finding the right people, finding out what they needed and then providing that was a proven method for advancement in the labyrinthine bureaucracy of the UN. Rebecca's father had used his connections to get her in the door, but that was where his influence ended. She was on her own, battling against thousands of other minions for position, money and recognition. Like a worker drone in any large organisation, she realised that she had to do the jobs that nobody else wanted to do, in order to curry favour with those she was helping.

Only one item caught her eye: The Belgians were sponsoring a Side Event titled “IANSA Policy Review & Strategy Forum”. This was something she felt deeply about - gun violence. Rebecca’s father had been a CIA agent, travelling the world to help topple regimes that were hostile to American interests, or helping support regimes - no matter how despotic or corrupt, that supported American interests. He worked alongside men from Rand Corporation, Chas T Main (which had recently been bought out by the conglomerate Parsons) and other private think-tanks who executed the orders of the US Government without any direct links to Washington. Their overall mission was to take a planet torn apart by internal and international strife, colonialism, nationalism & distrust and shape it into a group of compliant economic subsidiaries of the USA. Various strategies were developed, tested and refined over the years, with successful coups, bombings and plane crashes in Africa and South America serving to align many of those countries with US foreign policy.

The new governments were strongly encouraged to take out large development loans from the IMF and the World Bank, creating a funnel which sucked money from the taxpayers of those nations and siphoned it upwards, into the hands of the elites who controlled the central banks and the private trusts that underwrote them.

Rebecca wasn’t sure where her father was when he disappeared in 1991. It could have been Haiti or Russia, as both countries experienced a coup with substantial CIA involvement in that year. Either way, she was certain that he had been working to make the world a safer place for people like her, and had been killed by forces opposed to decency, capitalism and freedom.

Leafing through the briefing notes in front of her, Rebecca learned that IANSA stood for International Action Network on Small Arms - a group of activists all over the world who were attempting to stop the flow of weapons around the world. They lobbied inside the UN and sovereign governments under the banner “The Global Movement Against Gun Violence.”

Rebecca chuckled a little at the phrase. It wasn’t entirely correct - IANSA wasn’t against *ALL* gun violence, just violence that didn’t come from the State. They were very happy for soldiers, police and spies to have guns and use them against unarmed civilians, but their aim was to remove the guns from civilian hands, so the people couldn't shoot back. The key to peace was superior firepower, and everybody knew that there would never be peace

until governments had a monopoly on violence.

This is what drew Rebecca's attention. If guns were removed from society, then the criminals who killed her father would be deprived of their ability to resist, and a new society could be created by those who knew better. The world would become a better place, once global laws could be enforced globally. Wealth and knowledge could be shared, minorities protected and governments kept secure from revolution.

But only once the guns were taken off the people, and secured in official armouries.

Rebecca let out a sigh. It was a massive job, akin to a religious missionary heading overseas with a mission to convert the masses. Where to start? She looked at the discussion points for the Side Event and saw phrases like:

Shaping public perceptions to gun violence: The Overton Window
Educating stakeholders on the benefits of disarmament
Promoting women as key drivers of community change
Capitalising on tragedy to drive public opinion

Reading between the lines, Rebecca realised the key to unlocking resistance was murder. Mass murder. Political violence. She knew that nobody gave a shit about wars and murders in developing nations and if she was honest with herself, Rebecca knew that those countries were never going to be the target of disarmament. Take away their AK47s, and those savages would just go to machetes or rocks, same as they had been doing since they invented fire. Besides, she knew of several governments who made good profits, selling arms to both sides of the conflicts in Africa.

No, the real target was the developed world. Europe, and especially America. Rich, powerful nations which had grown fat and lazy on the backs of the third world. Change was coming, analysts at think-tanks like RAND Corporation and Parsons had been filing reports for decades, and people in power had been reading those reports. Energy Return on Energy Investment was starting to peak, and the end of the Cold War had simply sparked a thousand smaller wars for territory, resources and opportunities that the UN exploited quite effectively.

Declining global energy returns required a low-energy future. Renewables like wind and solar simply didn't have the embedded energy, transportability

and end uses that crude oil had. Plastics, chemicals, medicines, fertiliser – the ten thousand produces derived from crude oil. The entire global economy was created upon and utterly dependent on cheap oil supplies. Which were about to peak within ten years.

That didn't mean that the world would run out of oil, it simply explained that there was a mathematical limit, a peak volume of production, after which the oil produced would not increase. Mathematical modelling predicted this peak to occur in 2005.

It wasn't a doomsday scenario, it imply meant that an economic system predicated upon increasing debt and increasing consumption was obsolete, and a new economic model would have to be implemented. All the products that were produced from oil - hundreds of outputs from nylon and plastic to chemicals and medicine would all have to be re-engineered to come from other yet-to-be-discovered sources.

The alternative was to go without.

Which no nation would do willingly.

Nobody was going to volunteer to have less food available, less luxury, less fresh water, more taxes and less wages. The global economy would have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into a sustainable future.

Some of the people who saw this coming were in a position to exploit the opportunity and turn the crisis to their advantage. They were not interested in a soft landing, helping the masses to achieve a level of comfort in their future.

No, the real objective was a world of docile, willing slaves. Slaves who were happy with their low-paying jobs, eating easily manufactured foods, dulling their minds with easily manufactured entertainment. Compliant, allowing the government to tax them like cows in a stall. The ideal planet was a tax farm for the elites who would reap the benefits denied the masses. But first the human traits of resilience, self-reliance and self-determination had to be removed, along with the tools of self-defence. Human domestication.

The biggest threat to politicians wasn't criminals. Criminals were smart enough not to shit where they ate. Detailed analysis of the soviet Gulag had been No, the big threat to politicians was honest, patriotic citizens who had become fed up with the corruption and decided to do something about it.

As long as there were self-motivated people with the capacity to defend their lives, UN control would never be complete.

As these ingredients dropped into Rebecca's mind and began to ferment, a plan began to take shape. She remembered Stackmore's discussion about the Australian states that had rejected parts of her gun control proposals - New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland. In her mind, she dreamed of a gruesome attack, using a white male with a semi-automatic rifle, something that would traumatise the entire nation, make them look at guns with fear, distrust and revulsion.

Something devastating, but not too disruptive. A mass shooting, with a semi-auto rifle, somewhere civilised, but nowhere that would create a serious disruption of economic activity. Competing interests would have to be weighed and balanced. A seed began to sprout in Rebecca's mind, and she turned to the blonde man sitting next to her.

'You said your mum lived on a farm. Is that in Australia?'

He turned and smiled at her, that beautiful, charming smile that belied the filth that came out of it. 'Yeah, Tasmania.'

'Tasmania,' Rebecca repeated, surprised that he pronounced it like "Tasmania" rather than Tanzania. She was expecting it to sound like "Tasmaneer" but when she said 'Tas-mania,' it rolled off her tongue nicely. Her mind was already fitting the pieces of her evil plan together, and Tasmania was a good place to start. She would shove a public awareness campaign about mass shootings right up their smug arses.

'I've never been to Tas-mania,' she said smoothly. 'But I'd like to visit one day. Whereabouts do you live?'

That gorgeous mouth smiled, and leaned closer. He seemed genuinely excited that someone was taking an interest in his life. 'I live in Hobart, it's the capital city...well, it's more like a big town,' he said with a chuckle.

'It's nice through. There's mountains on one side, the river on the other. Sun comes up over the Organ Pipes - that's what the mountain's called, coz it's all pillars of rock stuck together. People go rock climbing on it, but I never been.'

'I'd love to hear more about it,' said Rebecca huskily. 'By the way, my name's Rebecca...who are you?'

She held out her right hand, and he shook it with his. It was an awkward gesture in the confines of their airplane, but his hand was warm & soft. Her own leathery skin felt like it was melting on contact, and she felt another stab of jealousy at his undeserved perfection.

‘Oooh, my name’s Martin.

‘Okay, Martin,’ she said, leaning in attentively. ‘Tell me all about yourself. What's your last name?’

‘Bryant,’ he said, smiling at her with that gorgeous, deceptive smile. ‘Martin Bryant.’

January 1995 - The UN Building, New York

Rebecca arranged to eat lunch with Rupert in the cafeteria closest to his office. An aide to the Belgian Special Representative to the Secretary General, Rupert was both a gatekeeper and a channel. He guarded access to some of the most powerful committees on the planet, and directed resources, money and power to projects that were seen as useful to his employers and sponsors.

They collected sandwiches and cold drinks from the servery area, then selected a table against the wall, to minimise the chance of being overheard. On the surface, the UN personnel respected privacy, and had all signed non-disclosure agreements, but secrets were power and the reality of the UN bureaucracy more closely resembled a tank full of piranha than a body of volunteers working to solve the world's problems.

'First of all, thanks for agreeing to hear my proposal' said Rebecca politely, eyeing Rupert's silk tie and five thousand dollar suit. Pitching a solution to a problem she wasn't supposed to know about carried inherent risks, but Rebecca had sensibly minimised her profile in the whole thing, and most importantly, built plausible deniability into it for him. If she succeeded, he would look good. If she failed, then she would be dead but there would be no recourse onto Rupert. That factor would be fundamental to any operation being approved.

Rupert said nothing. He simply took a bite of his sandwich and looked at the ten thousand dollar watch on his wrist. Rebecca took the hint and pressed on.

'Dad got me in the door, but I don't have a formal designation, a desk, a role. That's why I've been floating around from project to project, building relationships and solving problems. Lately, I've been doing a lot of work with IANSA, liaising with Interpol and NATO to help build profiles of arms traffickers, and that's where I met Viktor.'

Rupert looked bored. 'Viktor has a big mouth and no credibility.'

But Rebecca refused to be fobbed off. 'Look, they don't call him the Merchant of Death for nothing. He has contacts and protection at high levels, that much is undeniable.'

'I know Viktor is only in it for the money, but he says that the whole point of

the UN is civilian disarmament. If we can get the guns out of society, then the risk of violent political activity reduces, civil wars and exploitations stop, and it protects the peacekeepers and politicians alike. The UN is about peace between governments, security of governments. Chasing down arms dealers' isn't our mandate, controlling regime change is.'

'Look, I know America is a long-term project. The Second Amendment... Still, you need a broader strategy. We need to pick the low-hanging fruit first, test what works and what doesn't. Analyse results and effects, get the media to fall in line, test and adapt the psyops for the American public.'

Rupert took another bite of his sandwich. He didn't appear interested, but he wasn't leaving, either.

'We all know America's going to be a tough nut to crack, so we need to start elsewhere, work our way up. Like the Pacific theatre in World War Two - island hop to victory.'

Rupert wasn't impressed. 'None of this is news, Rebecca. We already have some traction in foreign embassies.'

'What about Australia, specifically?'

He shrugged. 'You know I can't say anything until you have clearance.'

'Rhetorical question,' she shot back. 'Rupert, I've got a plan to kick it all off, something major, completely deniable. Sure, it won't disarm the Americans, but it will disarm the Australians. Your lot can analyse the execution and the effect of the media bombardment, in a controlled environment. Fine tune it for action here as soon as there's a spree killing.'

Rupert shrugged. 'You're talking about some kind of bite-and-hold?'

Rebecca leaned forwards. 'Incremental steps. Get Australia disarmed, then every time there's a shooting in America or Europe, the media can just do what they do - go crazy, call for reform, promote senators who call for the second to be repealed, just saturation coverage. They can point to Australia and say "reasonable gun control works." And Rupert, I've already got a guy in mind to do it.'

That got his attention. 'Really?'

'His name is Martin, and he's a fucking asshole. I sat next to him on my flight back from Hawaii. It was torture, he's a racist, mean, bigoted little man who's travelled the world and hates it all. No appreciation for art or culture, he's a snivelling bag of insecure greed who doesn't deserve the good fortune he's had. I hate everything he represents and I'd love to fuck him over.'

Rebecca gave Rupert a condensed version of what she had experienced on the flight.

‘He hates the Millers, because they got in first and then refused his offer to buy their farm, but most of all he hates himself, his shortcomings. He inherited wealth, so he hates others who inherited wealth - WASPs. White Anglo Saxon Protestants - just like him. It’s classic psychological projection.’ Rupert appeared unmoved. ‘You got all this from a flight? Seems to me like you’re projecting our own...hatred...onto this chap.’

‘It was five hours, Rupert,’ she fired back. ‘He tortured me for five fucking hours, ranting about Asia, whining about Europe. He’s a psychopath, a redneck with the mind of a child. I’m telling you, he’s fucking perfect. He fits the profile and the media will eat it up.’

Warren swallowed the last of his sandwich and reached for the cup of tea.

‘I’m not convinced, Rebecca,’ he said pompously and Rebecca’s heart sank like a stone.

‘But...I *am* interested in the potential. Bring a proposal to my office at six next Friday and I’ll see if there’s a next step.’

Rebecca’s emotions flipped from despair to delight but she was careful to keep her face and expression neutral. Any sign of emotional reaction would be perceived as weakness. The whole game of diplomacy was to make the other parties think that their reaction had been anticipated all along.

At six o’clock on Friday afternoon, Rebecca was shown into the offices of the Belgian Special Representative of the Secretary General. She was dressed in her best blue suit, wearing black-rimmed glasses and carrying a slim manila file with a few documents inside. The SRSR himself wasn’t there - he never was, but Rupert led Rebecca into a conference room where another man sat at the head of the table. Blue business suit, thinning grey hair and a big nose. She pegged him as Rupert’s Australian government counterpart and smiled at him in polite greeting. ‘Hello,’ she said.

He nodded, but didn’t say anything. Rupert waved his hand at an empty seat and then sat down next to her. The air conditioning hummed in the background, but otherwise the building was silent. There was a credenza along one wall, containing communication equipment and a paper shredder -

a setup duplicated a hundred times in the other offices in the building. She set the folder on the table and waited politely for her host to start.

Rupert looked at Rebecca and the grey man. 'This unofficial conversation is not happening. No notes will be taken, and the two of us,' he motioned to the other man, 'are eating dinner with two witnesses who will testify to our presence in their hotel room. Understood?'

Rebecca nodded and took a deep breath, pushing her glasses back up onto the bridge of her nose. This was how the big boys played, and one day she would be in their seats, with the power to approve or squash the plans that her minions brought to her. Rupert sat back in his chair and waved a hand at her to begin.

'In the overall plan to pacify America, Australia is a key player,' she began. If the First World population is ever to be secured, several key requisites have to be met. Education, registration, restriction and reclassification. Confiscation won't happen until the end of that process. We are making progress on many of these in legislation, but education remains our steepest hurdle. This is where the power of the media needs to be augmented by powerful statements. Telling Americans "you don't need guns" simply isn't working, there's just too much cultural resistance, and the myth of the frontier is strong. So we need visceral, horrifying statements, evidence, about how guns are bad and no civilised country needs them. The media can pump the message out 24/7, especially as this new internet thing expands into everyone's home, but right now the message is impotent. Pushing it won't achieve much. We need a better message to saturate the public consciousness with, long-term. Something they can trot out time and time again. Something lawmakers can point to every time they make further restrictions, saying 'We cannot allow something like that to happen again, which is why we need common sense gun control.'

She paused to take a breath and review her notes, and snuck a look at her audience. Neither man had moved a muscle.

'Events in Australia make it a prime target - pardon the expression - for such a statement.

'There's a new opposition leader, John Howard - a little man, in every way. Keen to offset his insecurity by making his mark on the world, leave a legacy. He's likely to win the next election in early 1996 - every opinion poll says the same thing. In my plan, he won't know much, but he'll go along

with the program because he's a natural toady. I'm told he personally hates guns, although I suspect it's more that his wife hates them and he does what he's told...'

For the first time, the grey man nodded. 'Yes, he is likely to win and yes, he does what he is told.' The words were barely accented, and Rebecca couldn't tell if he was Australian, American or European. Grateful for the validation, she simply nodded and plunged on.

'The problem is one of proximity,' she continued. 'A massacre in a large city has the advantage of high population, but risks an unknown number of people who might return fire. If there's a criminal or an armed citizen nearby and the shooter is put out of action, that's the worst possible outcome and we need to avoid that at all costs.'

'On the other hand, a country town just doesn't have the visceral impact. City folks just don't give a shit about redneck bumpkins, and will probably think they deserve what they get.'

'So, the perfect event will combine city people, families, and children, in an isolated area with no criminal element.'

Rupert had been studying the texture of the tabletop while Rebecca was speaking, but as she ended her presentation he made eye contact with the grey man. The man's face was expressionless, his lips pursed in concentration as his brain absorbed what Rebecca was saying and comparing it with the things she didn't know.

There were no objections voiced, so Rebecca proceeded with her plan. She opened her folder and pushed out an A4 sheet onto the table between them. It was a printed map of Tasmania, an island at the south-eastern tip of Australia. Both men in the room nodded, as they recognised the island, despite being foreigners living in America.

'Tasmania has been on the radar for several years now,' murmured Rupert. 'Sorry Rebecca, but you don't get any points for trying to surprise us with that one.'

'Twelve years, to be precise.' Rebecca felt sure enough of her plan to push back against his sarcasm. 'I also know the plan could have been implemented much earlier, if NSW Premier Unsworth hadn't let the cat out of the bag in 1987^[1]'

'Arsewipe,' muttered Rupert. 'Thank Christ they got rid of him the next year. Ruined almost a decade of planning. At least he's had the good sense to stay

quiet ever since, a surprising show of intellect...I'd happily throttle him myself.'

Rebeca cleared her throat, regaining control of the conversation.

'So, disarmament was shelved in the 1980s but there's now opportunity to bring it back into the public arena. In this decade, Australia has already had four mass shootings - twenty three dead and seven injured. Surrey Hills in 1990, Strathfield in 1991, Terrigal in 1992 and Cangai just a few days ago. The media are regularly calling for uniform gun control legislation, but the states have been resisting. The farmers still have a pretty decent lobby group, and they're arguing that they shouldn't be treated like criminals.'

Rupert pursed his lips. 'None of this is news, Rebecca. We've been watching the situation closely.'

Rebecca nodded. 'Right, so I propose that the earlier plans be revised. Hobart itself is too crowded, but I have two suggestions that would complement much of the original plan.'

She pushed a second sheet out onto the table, another map that covered the first one.

'The Isle of the Dead is an old convict cemetery, lying offshore of the Port Arthur Penal Settlement. The whole thing is abandoned, but is now operating as a tourist attraction. The Tasmanian state government has invested some funds into modernisation, refurbishment of the facilities, but it's a quiet backwater that attracts wealthy, educated city people as well as foreign tourists - exactly the type of target we are looking at.'

'There's a ferry that takes a hundred and twenty eight passengers at a time - all tourists, no criminal element. It's a sanitised, safe environment with wealthy, international tourists.'

Rebecca paused for effect and looked at the others. Neither was looking at her, they were both eyeing the map on the table, deep in thought.

Without moving, Rupert said 'Interesting. Go on.'

Picture it,' said Rebecca breathily. She was getting excited as her plan seemed to be getting their approval, and there was an element of perverse sexual arousal in there as well. 'Two hundred and fifty people trapped on an island just meters from safety, hunted by an evil gunman with high powered, semi-automatic weapons - exactly the guns we are trying to remove from society.' A warm spot grew between her thighs as she imagined the slaughter of innocent tourists, women and children; the screams and shots in her head

made her salivate a little.

‘Once his gruesome harvest is done, the gunman commits suicide, leaving dozens of traumatised victims - women, children, widows and orphans.’

All the talking, combined with her twisted excitement was making her short of breath, so she paused again and made eye contact with Rupert. He was looking at her with a strange mixture of admiration and disgust. She clamped her thighs together and looked at her notes.

‘Although it’s remote, there are good roads and water access from Hobart, so TV cameras can be brought in close to film the bodies, the gore, the screaming and hysterical victims. They can interview the rescue workers, get hours of tape and edit into the narrative we want.’

‘And best of all, the families will be denied closure, because the dead gunman can never answer the basic question - why... We can use their grief for years, re-traumatising them every anniversary, or every time there’s another shooting.’

Rebecca found it increasingly difficult to concentrate, as the warm spot where she was sitting grew hotter and larger as they talked about the proposed massacre. The pulse beating in her forehead was echoed in her pelvis and she felt her mouth-watering as imagined the terror and grief she was planning to inflict on other, lesser humans. There was a coppery taste in her mouth as she relished the power she was about to wield over life and death. She imagined this was what gods and emperors had felt like, literally making the decision over whether some peon lives or dies. She was eagerly awaiting her moment to slip away to the nearest ladies restroom and relish in the ecstasy of her sadism.

‘Now, I’ve made initial contact with the Premier of Tasmania. He knows the score, and he’s going to be stepping down to manage the Attorney General and Tourism portfolios. That’s important, because we need influence in both of them at the same time, to make sure the message is controlled consistently. Tasmanian society is pretty incestuous, like the Deep South here in the States, everyone is somehow related to everyone else. And the politics is even worse - plus there’s powerful family feuds that can be exploited to keep everyone else in line. I plan to collect dirt on everyone likely to be in the know, so we can control what they say.’

Rupert interrupted. ‘Again, I’m not overly enthusiastic, but I’m interested and I have no objections at this time. You mentioned a second idea...’

‘Ahh...yes. I have a suggestion for the patsy.’

The two men exchanged meaningful glances. This was one of the most critical and dangerous areas of any operation - personnel could be unreliable, selfish, corrupted - any number of factors could combine to wreck an otherwise smooth plan. The right person had to match all the criteria, which included dying in the manner required by the plan. Oswald, for instance, was supposed to resist arrest and be killed by the police, so a backup plan had to be rushed into place when he went rogue. Rebecca pushed a third sheet of paper onto the table.

‘This man represents exactly what we are looking for: white male, inherited wealth, a known eccentric who is not well liked by his community. I propose we use a classic honey trap to get into his head, put him in the right place at the wrong time - a hat tip to Oswald.’

Wiggling slightly in her seat, Rebecca paused to check if there were any questions, then nodded and moved to the next point.

‘Twenty-seven years old, he grew up in semi-rural Tasmania but now lives in full-on suburbia. Father deceased by suicide, mother lives alone on their family farm. The target was in a non-sexual relationship with an older widow, and inherited her estate when she was killed in a motor vehicle collision.’

Rebecca looked at the two men in the room. ‘Personally, you may both come from substantial means, but this insignificant little shit probably killed her by accident in a prank gone wrong - grabbed the steering wheel while she was driving. He inherited a substantial estate by being a psychopath and a murderer. Personally, I’d like to see him suffer for that.’

The grey man looked at Rupert for a moment, then at Rebecca.

‘Does the target have a name?’

Rebecca adjusted her glasses again. ‘Yes, it’s Bryant. Martin Bryant.’

The grey man nodded, pushed back from the table and stood up. ‘Interim planning approval is granted. No funding yet but a budget will be approved within seven days, probably mid six-figures. If there are any questions or tactical suggestions, you’ll be summoned for an interview as a research assistant in our legal department. Find a shooter, urgently.’

Rebecca nodded, flushing with excitement and pleasure that her plan was being accepted. And a half-a-million dollar budget! This was a serious career development!

The warm spot between her thighs began to buzz and she felt the need for some privacy.

The grey man shook her hand, then Rupert's.

'Nice to have dinner with you, Rupert,' he said sarcastically. 'Racquetball on Sunday?'

'Absolutely,' said Rupert. 'Give our love to Ivy and the kids.'

The grey man left the room and the air conditioning was the only sound in the conference room.

As the door hissed closed, Rupert fixed Rebecca with a glint of mischief in his eye. She squirmed in her seat, increasingly desperate to find a quiet place and rub herself into oblivion, but Rupert sensed this and took his own pleasure in denying her the escape she wanted.

He plucked the papers off the table and fed them into the paper shredder. Then he swivelled back to face her, leaning forward with his hips close to the table.

'Congratulations,' he said cheerfully. 'Several steps towards success and your own portfolio. So much murder and mayhem...delicious.' He looked at her flush lips and chest, rising and falling with her deep breathing. She knew there was a ladies' toilet just down the hallway outside. She bit her lower lip and he grinned again. The torment visible in her features was amusing and entertaining as he watched her wrestle with her composure.

Surely she knew what was coming next? His eye glinted like the metal on the edge of a knife.

'We're almost finished here, but there's one final assessment...You're invited to demonstrate just how badly you want this to happen, and how enthusiastically you'll support any future projects that I need your...assistance with.'

Having made this Faustian bargain many times, Rupert had discovered that his favourite moment wasn't the climax at the end. Sure, that was good and all but Rupert's main pleasure came from the expressions that crossed the faces of his assistants as they discovered what it took to get what they wanted. Oh, they all had suspicions, but it was a joy to watch the horror, disgust and resignation cross fresh, young faces as their worst fears were confirmed. The mental gymnastics they endured as they were forced to decide just what value they placed on their dignity, compared to the value of their pet project and their future careers - to a sadist like Rupert this was art

most satisfying.

Quivering in frustration but accepting what was required, Rebecca dropped her glasses onto the table, pushed her chair back and fell forwards onto her hands and knees. The elevator in her stomach dropped and froze as she coldly made the decision to focus on her career. The carpet under the conference table had a harsh, chemical smell and was covered in marks and stains. *God, who knows how many generations of people in my position have crawled under this desk in...supplication?*

Utterly terrified and panting from a horrible combination of exertion, sexual frustration and trepidation, Rebecca crawled forward and discovered that Rupert hadn't moved his hips away from the table. There wasn't much room at all, and as she reached forward and fumbled with his zipper, she banged her head on the underside of the table. A short, sharp cry escaped her lips, voicing her shame, disgust and pain but she bit her lip, knowing that this was nothing compared to what was about to happen to her.

July 1995 - Belgian SRSG to the UN

New York

Rebecca had a foul taste in her mouth as she approached Rupert's plush offices again. She wondered if it was a premonition, as well as a shameful reminder of what was required to get ahead in the UN. While confident that her project was making progress, she was somewhat concerned, as the message to meet Rupert had come as a surprise - she wasn't due for a briefing for another week.

Rupert gave Rebecca a look of contempt but said nothing as he showed her into the now-infamous conference room. Sitting at the head of the table was the grey man, who looked at Rupert and nodded. To Rebecca's surprise, instead of sitting down, Rupert left the room and closed the door behind him. Now she was worried.

The grey man was exactly that - completely unknown to her. The only thing she knew about him was that Rupert treated him like a superior officer or a case handler. She took a deep breath but said nothing, hoping to show respect by waiting for him to speak.

Her anxiety doubled when he said nothing for a few seconds, studying her how she imagined a snake or shark watched their prey before striking. She mentally checked herself in the mirror, hoping that her dowdy pantsuit, bland, short haircut and oversized glasses weren't prejudicing him against her. If she had known she was meeting Rupert's unofficial boss, she would have dressed much differently.

Finally, he spoke. 'Are you a lesbian?'

The question was so personal, so off-topic and so unexpected that it threw Rebecca completely off guard. 'Umm...no...I don't think so,' she gasped. 'But what does that...'

Ignoring her, the grey man interrupted, 'You're a freak, a monster, that's what I think. Deviant. That's why I called this meeting, to check you out for myself.'

Rebecca was so stunned that she said nothing, trying to collect her thoughts

and deliver some kind of suitable reply. Nothing came, but the grey man spoke again.

‘I know everything about Rupert. I probably know him better than his wife does - certainly better than he knows himself. All his mind games...playing Faust...’

Rebecca swallowed the bile that rose in her throat with the memories in her mind. The grey man saw it and nodded, but his eyes remained slits that revealed nothing.

Then he shocked her further. ‘I asked if you were a lesbian. You sure look like one, but what I wanted to see was your reaction. Have you ever enjoyed sex?’

The question hit Rebecca like a thunderbolt, on top of his earlier one. In a moment of clarity, she decided that there was only one option available to her: complete honesty.

The thought immediately calmed her. The truth was simple, and wouldn’t require her to construct and remember an elaborate web of lies that would only come back to haunt her. She swallowed again and looked him in the eye. She decided to be honest but curt, sticking to the barest facts. No doubt this man had done his research on her, just like he had with Rupert and God knew how many others in his network.

‘No,’ she said evenly but confidently. As she said it, she realised there wasn’t really anything to be ashamed of, and wondered why he was asking.

‘The context of these questions will become clear shortly. Let me reassure you that the only reason you are sitting here is because I’m confident in my assessment of your personality type.’

Rebecca wanted to storm out of the room and never see this man again, but her self-discipline and desire to carry out the project won, and she merely cocked an eyebrow and waited for him to continue. She made sure her breathing was deep and even, maintaining a veneer of composure over the turmoil within.

‘You’re not attracted to women and I’m certain you aren’t attracted to men either. Yes or no?’ Rebecca nodded, it was the only response she was capable of.

‘But you do get turned on. You’re not frigid, you get aroused by operations like this.’

Rebecca nodded again, horrified at his insight into her most private and

intimate thoughts.

‘I saw you in our first meeting. Smelled it too, just like Rupert did...’

Rebecca flushed a deep crimson and gasped involuntarily. She had experienced a lot of shameful events in her life, most recently of Rupert’s conniving, but this was a whole other level. She stiffened in her chair and tried to focus on her breathing as a way to calm herself.

‘Relax,’ muttered the grey man in amusement. ‘I’m not going to violate you or make you do anything you don’t want to do.’ Then he chuckled and added, ‘In fact, I believe you’ll find this briefing quite enjoyable and...ultimately...fulfilling...’

Now Rebecca’s interest was piqued. She wondered if this man was like her, a secret sadist. *If that was true, then she had an ally, a compatriot, at a level higher than Rupert. This could be a very, very good thing. Stay sharp!*

The grey man spread his hands. ‘There are no maps, no notes for this briefing. You will consider your original plan as approved in principle but designated Plan A. To all parties except the shooter and honeypot, Plan A is the one that will be executed.’ Rebecca nodded but kept quiet. He hadn’t asked for her opinion.

‘Your contribution to this plan is solid,’ he began. ‘If you succeed, you will give others a template to use in every massacre, both on home soil in America or overseas. Long term gains, exactly the kind we are looking for.’

Rebecca nodded, satisfied with the praise and understanding the wider scope of the operation.

‘Any time there is a shooting, we can use your success in Australia as a foot in the door - to get started on concessions. Once we can start bargaining away the Second Amendment, we can just keep steadily whittling away. It’s the first big step that’s the important one.’

‘Like I said, your plan is solid. But there are...special considerations which require certain changes to Plan A.’ The language was carefully chosen, stilted and unmistakably legalese.

‘I’m now briefing you on Plan B - this is designated TOP SECRET, understand? Full opsec principles and consequences apply for any disclosure or breach - intentional or not.’

Rebecca nodded, kept eye contact and enunciated clearly. ‘I understand that TOP SECRET opsec principles apply to Plan B.’ With her fate now sealed, she shut up and listened.

‘Your original ideas are quite good. Your research is sound, and the proposals gel nicely with high level interests...however...’

The grey man steepled his fingers and pursed his lips as he chose his words carefully.

‘Certain...interests...have decided that there are risks that must be mitigated before we proceed any further. You understand the consequences of exposure, but there are fears that some of those involved...non-military types...will require extra motivation.’

Rebecca tried to imagine what he was referring to, but drew a blank. ‘Non-military involved?’

The grey man smiled evilly. ‘Yes, your research only went so far. This project has involved several departments of State and Federal governments, ASIO, police...we’ve already covered the Unsworth debacle...’

‘It has been decided that the event must contain sufficient elements to ensure compliance. Everyone involved in the project must be utterly horrified at what happens to their comrades, in order to embed indelibly into their nightmares what will happen if they pull an Unsworth after the event,’

Rebecca’s heart lurched at the unexpected twist. Even for her, this was evil - including unsuspecting Federal agents in the target list, to send a message to the rest... She felt a familiar glow blossom in her pants and she leaned towards the grey man conspiratorially.

‘H-Hour is one thirty, right? Lunchtime...so the cafe at the ferry terminal will be the natural place for them all to eat and watch the show, right?’

He nodded.

‘So the observers will have a hearty lunch, then stroll down to the jetty to watch your man shoot up the island. Safe on the mainland, they’ll be able to hear all the screams and shots...most of them will bring binoculars and telephoto cameras.’

‘They will be first on the scene, able to document the mortally wounded, smelling the blood and the shit and the vomit...taking photos and enjoying the agony of the victims.’

Rebecca’s tongue popped out and wiped a trickle of drool from her lips. The imagined smells of gunpowder and coppery blood made her feel hungry.

The grey man looked at her for a moment, assessing how she was processing this new information. He gave a sly wink at her response.

‘Rupert has his uses and is excellent at what he does,’ he said. ‘But you must

appreciate that Plan B brings you alongside him, and your compartmentalisation must be absolute.'

Rebecca nodded. 'I need to develop Plan A completely and brief him on progress as if it's the only operation, while completing Plan B on my own.'

'In absolute secrecy,' he affirmed. 'Plan B must come as an absolute shock, a thunderbolt, right from the blue. If you screw up, I will personally make sure you take twelve months to die, screaming in agony every single day. Understood?'

Rebecca looked him in the eye and nodded. "I would do the same, in your situation.'

He ignored her. 'Your budget has been approved,' he droned, as if discussing the budget for office stationery. 'Flights, rental car, and accommodation - that's all standard. However...' he looked at her coldly. 'The largest item, by far - five hundred thousand dollars, is simply listed as "personnel" - what is that about?'

Rebecca took a deep breath. 'There are two essential people in this operation,' she began calmly. 'The shooter has to be paid, that's fundamental, and I'm budgeting fifty kay for that. The patsy doesn't get anything except a cremation, but we need eyes on him - well before and during the operation. That's been a key ingredient in all the fuck-ups in other false flag jobs - the patsy does or says something stupid. I believe that we need someone on the inside, someone close to Martin, able to monitor him on a daily basis and control him in the areas we need him trained...'

The grey man lifted his eyebrows. 'A honeypot?'

'Exactly,' said Rebecca. 'A girlfriend.'

Impressed, the grey man nodded. 'Who?'

'A contact I met at college in Australia. I was doing Law, she was doing horticulture and we met at a party. She's talented enough, but while she had the academic ability, she had other...problems... She's happy to get into Martin's life, be his live-in girlfriend, then change her name and disappear afterwards. That's what the money's for - to give her something to live on when it's all over.'

'Any risk there, anything?' The grey man frowned in concern, but Rebecca shook her head.

'We know each other better any anyone else, any married couple,' she said firmly. 'She agrees with the plan, the overall objectives and she knows what

will happen if she opens her mouth afterwards. She'll stay quiet.'

'Does she have a name, our honeypot?'

Rebecca nodded. 'Wilmot. Petra Wilmot.'

The grey man stood up and held out his hand. Rebecca stood and shook it.

'Found your shooter yet?' He asked quietly.

Rebecca smiled. 'I have some solid leads.'

He scowled. 'Don't leave it too long. And make sure you use a foreigner that nobody will know. No good running the risk of a local recognising some detail we've overlooked.'

Late 1995 - Downtown Johannesburg

After being released from hospital, Warren drifted aimlessly in a mental fog. The army gave him a medical discharge, but while he waited for the paperwork to be finalised, his life turned another corner.

Janet's vomiting hadn't gone away, and a routine trip to the doctor had resulted in the news that she was pregnant. This again turned the family life upside down. Her own parents were not happy about their unmarried daughter getting pregnant, and were further horrified at the news of Warren's condition. Although disappointed at their lack of support, Warren could understand their feelings, wanting a far better life for their daughter than the mess Janet had obviously landed in.

To his relief, Hans and Katharin overlooked the social awkwardness and welcomed the news of a new baby in the family. After losing Benjamin, Janet's news gave both of them something to plan for, hold onto and care for. A ray of light in their gloom. Hans painted Benjamin's old bedroom and invited Warren and Janet to move in there, a gesture of symbolism which they appreciated. Life from death, new beginnings from tragedy.

The news also gave Warren the motivation to provide for his new family, but reality slapped him hard. He reached out to army contacts and the shooting community, looking for mercenary contract work, body guarding, security work, but there was nothing. No matter how good his shooting skills were, combat was combat, and nobody wanted to risk bleeding around an AIDS carrier. Destitution loomed like the grim reaper above every waking moment, and tortured his dreams when he slept.

Janet gave birth to a healthy baby girl, who they named Hope. Warren got busy with housework, changing nappies and hunting for the cheapest possible groceries.

To keep himself occupied and bring some routine to his life, Warren joined a charity for wounded and disabled veterans. This mostly involved driving and unloading supply trucks, shifting boxes of food and delivering blankets to the homeless.

For eighteen months, he grew his hair long, started drinking more and waited to die.

There were bright moments among the gloom that smothered his life. Baby Hope learned to walk, and Warren was overjoyed as she began to mimic his baby talk. Hans and Katharin did the best they could to support the young family, but all Janet could do was watch helplessly as her boyfriend slowly died. She guessed that he was already dead, inside and waiting for his body to catch up.

One particular day in spring, the air was dry - even for Africa. The mainly glass-and-concrete buildings of the city, especially the Marble Towers that dominated the skyline, reflected the heat back into the city streets, so even the lightest breeze felt like the people were inside a fan-forced oven. By mid-afternoon, his labouring work was done and Warren found himself in need of a cold beer. His last delivery had been in Hillbrow, one of the suburbs most notorious for crime and desperation, but Warren drove to the nearest selection of bars, hotels and restaurants and parked outside the first one he saw. The hotel was made of timber, quite old and seedy but Warren was unafraid. This was a familiar area, and in this bar, he was almost a regular.

As a white guy in a predominantly black neighbourhood, he had been targeted earlier by a small group of thugs who tried to rob him in the doorway. But after word got around the patrons about what had happened to the attackers - and how long they had spent in hospital, people left him alone. It was anonymous and a relatively quiet place to drink away the last few months and years of his life.

Warren nodded a greeting to the old, grey bartender and took his usual seat at a table in the corner. Back to the wall, he had a clear view of the room and the bar, with a window that gave him a wide view of the street outside. The drab waitress brought him a Black Label, and he dropped a banknote onto the tray, then turned to watch the world go by through the window.

He had only taken a few sips from the glass when the door opened and a woman entered the bar. A white woman, well dressed, in this part of town - the contrast was almost comical, a scene lifted out of a dozen Western movies. Every head in the room turned to look at the business suit, strange glasses and short-back-and-sides haircut. It was Africa in the mid-1990s, and most women tried to accentuate their femininity, not butcher and hide it away behind men's fashion.

She took one step into the room and let the door swing closed behind her, then stood still and just moved her head, scanning the room slowly.

Warren didn't move, but he watched her check out the people in the room. It was as if her eyes compared each face to a memory, then decided that was not the person she was looking for, and moved to the next. Five people, five comparisons, five rejections. Then she looked at him and her eyes widened a little. Recognition. Warren sat motionless as she moved across the room to his table and placed a hand on an empty chair.

'Warren Dekker, right? May I sit?' she asked quietly and he nodded slowly. He noticed her accent was American, not Afrikaans or English. The wooden legs of the chair squeaked across the floor as she pulled it away from the table, then sat.

Her gaze lifted from the half-empty glass on the table, evaluated his unwashed shirt, three-day stubble and bloodshot eyes. She caught the bartender's eye, pointed at Warren's glass and raised two fingers. Crystal clear sign language, no matter what country she was in.

He took another mouthful from his glass and swallowed it slowly. Rebecca didn't say anything either, she just waited for the other people in the bar to get bored and go back to their drinks. The waitress came over with two more glasses of Black Label, placed them on the table and left.

At last, the curiosity in him won over his pride and he asked 'So, who are you?'

Rebecca shook her head. 'We're not here to talk about me. I'm here to talk about you.'

Warren shrugged. 'What about me? I'm nothing. Nobody'

'Right,' she said softly. 'Nothing but a dead man walking.' That grabbed his attention. She had done her homework all right, what else did she know about him?

He finished his first beer and started the one she had bought. She took a sip of her own, gagged a little, and then spoke.

'I have an offer. A job. High risk, high reward. You haven't got long to live, but how would you like it if you could leave your family fifty thousand US dollars, in gold?'

The alcohol in Warren's brain slowed it a little, but he knew the current price was around four hundred US dollars an ounce.

'That's four kilos of gold,' Warren murmured. 'What's the job?'

Rebecca looked Warren in the eye. 'Warren, I need to be very clear, and I need to make sure you understand this offer, before I go on. Okay?'

She took a breath.

‘You understand military OPSEC, right? Well, the same thing applies here, but with...different...consequences, understand? If you breathe a word of what I’m about to say, you’ll be the last of your family to die, understand?’

She took another gulp of the beer and raised her eyebrows.

Warren nodded.

‘You need to say it,’ pleaded Rebecca, quietly but earnestly. ‘Say to me that you’ll watch your family butchered alive by ZANLA, and they will be kept alive, in agony, for at least two days, if anyone finds out about this.’

Warren was sobering up rapidly as his body dumped hormones and adrenaline into his bloodstream. He knew all about ZANLA torture methods, and he had dedicated the past two years of his life to slotting those floppies. He held Rebecca’s gaze and muttered through clenched teeth.

‘If I say anything, my family will be tortured to death over two days by ZANLA. What the fuck is this about?’

‘I said at least two days,’ murmured Rebecca. ‘They might last weeks. Of course, once your family finally die, it will be your turn...’

‘At least two days, I get it,’ muttered Warren. *Damn, this was a hard-ass bitch.*

Rebecca cast a withering glance around the room. ‘Let’s go somewhere we can talk, okay? I assume they rent rooms upstairs by the hour?’

Warren laughed as he swallowed the last of his beer. ‘Too generous, lady. Try fifteen minutes...’ He lifted his chin to the bartender and pointed up at the ceiling, wiggled his finger in the air and then exchanged a few Rand for a room key as he passed the bar. By then, Rebecca was already at the old wooden staircase that led up to stuffy, dirty rooms, mostly used by itinerant workers and prostitutes.

He looked at her ass as she climbed the stairs in front of him, but wasn’t excited by what he saw, so he fiddled with the key in his hand instead.

The wooden floorboards creaked as they reached the landing and he opened the room. They both wrinkled their noses at the sight and smell that greeted them, but went in and shut the door. There was an ancient metal-frame bed that Warren recognised as military surplus, a battered chest of drawers with a mirror on top, and a bedside table. Warren opened the window to let in some fresh air, then sat on a rickety chair beside the mirror.

Rebecca sat on the bed, grimacing as she sank into the mattress.

Warren broke the awkward silence. 'So...you mentioned a job...who the fuck are you?'

The silence fell again as she evaluated him, the same look as when she first entered the bar. Calculating, comparing, assessing against a mental database of ideas and expectations.

Warren held her gaze. It was her turn to speak, and she had come looking for him. What kind of game was she playing?

'Okay,' she said at last. 'You're already in, and you know the consequences for breaching opsec. So I'll just give it to you straight, then you can ask questions later.'

'My name is Rebecca Peters. I represent...certain...interests who are pushing subtle regime changes in friendly countries. Nothing major, just a few tweaks to their advantage. Economic consolidation, social engineering, that kind of thing. However, certain projects have stalled in the face of resistance, and so a show of force has been planned. A crisis, something that the media can capitalise on to galvanise action and overwhelm opposition.'

'What's proposed is a spree killing, a massacre, something really gruesome. Many dead - women and children too, but just as many wounded and given mental scars.'

Warren nodded. 'This is some play for disarmament? Getting civilians to give up their guns?'

Rebecca shook her head. 'That's part of it, but only a small part. The overall objective is much more long-term.'

'We propose to shock and offend the public in such a way that they shy away from firearms - for good, the whole concept of self-determination, personal independence, self-defence. The target country is extremely peaceful at the moment, but over the next fifty years or so, it will become much more like this one, South Africa.'

'When that happens, we want the population to be docile, cowed and unwilling to fight back as their rights and freedoms are eliminated.'

Warren squinted. 'Like domesticated animals?'

'Precisely,' said Rebecca smoothly. 'The nation is extremely wealthy, but not for long. It is effectively being looted at all levels, and the natural wealth will soon be gone. The population, grown fat and lazy on the proceeds, will not like a reduction in living standards, will they?'

Warren shrugged. 'Look around.'

‘No, Warren. It’s not the same.’ Rebecca sounded as if she was teaching a kindergarten class. ‘The target country is rich and peaceful. Do you think those people will willingly welcome their country being turned into what’s outside? No, they’ll turn on the people who caused the collapse - politicians, bankers, lobbyists.’

Warren straightened up. ‘Shit, if I knew who was responsible for ZANLA, ZANU, what happened in Rhodesia, I’d slot those fuckers too.’

Rebecca put her hands together as if she was praying. ‘I understand, but that’s not going to happen. Instead, you’re going to participate in an operation to make sure that doesn’t happen in the target country. Long term consequences, understand?’

Warren nodded. ‘Psy-op on a large scale. It all makes sense to me, and for that kind of money, I’m happy to pull the trigger on a bunch of people I don’t know. Fuck them, shit happens, just like Benjamin and all the rest...’

Rebecca smiled. ‘Amazing how the approach of death can change a man’s point of view. Any questions for now?’

‘What country are we talking about?’

Rebecca eyes were shining and she smiled, a wide, ugly smile. ‘Australia.’

Warren frowned. ‘Fuck them,’ he snarled. ‘They’ve stood by and done nothing to help us while floppies have torn my country apart. Nothing but a UN lapdog, they supported British wars and UN sanctions against us, safe in their ivory castles...’

‘Ivory towers...’ corrected Rebecca, but smiled to soften the blow. ‘But yes, I certainly understand how you feel, losing loved ones is a wound that never goes away.’

‘Collateral damage,’ said Warren. ‘These people you want me to shoot - their families will be traumatised, but look around. Hundreds of whites, just like them are killed every month in Rhodesia, here, Namibia...’ He shook his head. ‘As far as I’m concerned, I’m just firing the first shots in a new front of the same war. Bringing the war they avoided, right into their living room.’

Rebecca smiled. ‘That’s fine. Don’t say anything to anyone yet. Let me prepare some notes for you, how to sell it to your family, I’ll meet you back here, same time next week. Okay?’

‘Fifty thousand, US?’ He wanted to hear it again, and she nodded.

‘Yes, fifty thousand US dollars, in gold.’

Warren stood up. ‘I’ll see you next week.’

‘One last thing,’ she said. ‘Let your hair grow as long as possible, okay?’
He shrugged. ‘I wasn’t planning on getting it cut, but okay. Any reason?’
‘Oh, nothing in particular,’ she said lightly. ‘Just let you blend in more, all part of the plan...’
The door clicked shut behind her, and by the time Warren got back downstairs to the bar, she had disappeared.

Early January 1996 - 30 Clare Street New Town

Tap, tap, tap.

The early summer heat was oppressive and the insect noise deafening as Martin answered a knock at the front door. He squinted in the bright sunlight as the door swung open, then smiled as his eyes fell on the slim, attractive young woman standing there.

Straight brown hair cut just above her shoulders, with jeans and a t-shirt that showed off her figure without calling unwanted attention. Sensible, normal clothes. Average.

‘Hullo’ she said brightly. ‘Are you the owner?’

Martin smiled awkwardly. He wasn’t used to the attention.

‘Umm, yeah,’ he said slowly. ‘Well, it’s Helen’s house, but it’s just me now.’

‘I’m Petra, and I love the house,’ she gushed. ‘And I especially love the gardens. What’s your name?’

She took a step back and to the side, opening the view from the front door, so Martin could see the overgrown jungle between the house and the road.

‘Martin,’ he said. ‘You really like the gardens?’

‘It needs some work, though,’ she said carefully. ‘Do you have a gardener?’

Martin shook his head. ‘Nahh, I usually do it myself, but I’ve been overseas. It kinda got away from me.’

‘Looks like it was a long trip,’ she said. ‘Was it good?’

His face lit up. ‘Yeah....I been to London, Singapore, America, and Sweden...’

Petra smiled, and when she looked into his eyes, he flushed.

‘Sounds good,’ she said. ‘Would you like me to help with the gardening?’

‘Ummm, sure,’ he mumbled. ‘But...umm...how much do I pay you?’

She laughed; a bright, golden peal of genuine humour. ‘I’m a hard worker and good value. How about, you pay me fifty dollars a day for a week or two, then we can work it out from there. See if I’m worth more?’

Martin nodded. ‘Yeah, that sounds good,’ he said. ‘When you going to start?’

She looked around the yard. ‘I’m guessing you have a garden shed with some

tools? Why don't we check it out, I'll see what I need to bring, and then I can start tomorrow morning?'

'Yeah, the shed is around the back,' replied Martin. 'Come through the house, its cooler.'

They stepped onto the carpet and Martin pulled the door shut. Padding through the house, he led Petra down a hallway to the kitchen. They passed two sets of stairs, one going up to the top floor and a matching set going down to a basement. Martin went through the kitchen and then out the back door, with Petra following.

There was a patch of grass about two car-lengths square, bordered by a concrete driveway on the left, a carport at the back and a large shed that ran the entire length of the yard on the right. It wasn't an extension of the house, but it was close.

Under the carport was a yellow Volvo 244, with a couple of surfboards propped against the fence beside it. A full length wetsuit swung from a coat hanger, giving the appearance of a dead body.

Martin led Petra over to the shed and threw open the door.

'It's all in there,' he said, stepping back so he could look at her ass as she entered the shed. 'Use whatever you need, let me know if you want to buy anything, okay?'

Petra realised that he wasn't very interested in garden work. She smiled and nodded as she looked around the tools.

'All this is fine,' she said. 'I'll start with the lawn mower, then do something about the shrubs.'

She walked back out into the heat and Martin shut the door. He didn't lock it. Petra held out her hand and Martin shook it. 'We have a deal,' she said firmly. 'I'll come around about seven, before it gets too hot, okay?'

Martin smiled and nodded. 'Sounds good,' he said. 'Nice to meet you.'

The next morning, he was awake early. Like a kid at Christmas, he waited for a knock on the door and was startled when he heard the lawn mower roar into life in the backyard. He dashed outside to see Petra pushing the lawnmower around the grass, wearing sensible shoes, a pair of old Julies and a long sleeve shirt. A sun hat covered her hair and face, but Martin saw her smile as she noticed him.

Instead of trying to shout over the noise, she waved and kept working.

Martin didn't know what to do, he wanted to talk to her but knew she wanted

to work. He went back inside and tried to watch TV, but the noise of the mower distracted him.

No, it wasn't the mower. It was the woman. A woman who had treated him nicely, instead of laughing at him like everyone else seemed to. A young, pretty woman who was nice...ticked a lot of boxes in Martin's solitary life.

He wanted to talk to her, befriend her, have her be his friend. Take her out to dinner.

But he had no idea where to start. What to say. How to keep her attention.

Embarrassed, he waited until she started mowing the front grass, then grabbed his car keys, went out to the Volvo and drove down the street.

He parked in the next block, caught between his fear of the unknown with Petra and his fear of being caught driving without a licence. Fuming at his own impotence, he flicked on the radio and reclined the seat. He closed his eyes and listened to the music, whiling away the time until the object of his desire had gone home.

Once he was confident that Petra had left work for the day, he went back home and watched TV for the rest of the day.

Several days passed in a similar fashion. Petra cleaned up the trees and shrubs as Martin lurked around the periphery of her existence. The yard was transformed from an overgrown wreck into a stylish surround that suited the tall, white house perfectly.

Just before lunch on Saturday, Petra knocked on the back door and then pushed it open.

'Martin? You home?'

'Yeah, yeah,' he said as he came downstairs. 'I need to pay you, yeah?' He began rifling through a leather wallet for the right money.

She smiled and nodded. 'Oh, yes please! But something else, can I ask a favour?'

He stopped moving and looked at her. She was close, and took a step closer.

The smell of her sweat and perfume was strong. Her hair was matted and stuck to her face, but the way she smiled seemed to play with his heart rate. He swallowed.

'Umm...sure,' he said. 'Anything.' The smell of her sweat didn't upset him...the opposite.

She smiled, a coy, devious little smile. 'Can I take a shower?' She spoke softly, pretending to be embarrassed. 'I might go out later and I don't want to

go home first...'

His eyes went wide and his mouth dropped open as he imagined what she would look like in the shower.

'Sure,' he said. 'Down there.'

He pointed past the main lounge room and pointed at a tiled bathroom at the end of another hallway. 'There's a fresh towel on the rail, I keep mine in my room...' His voice trailed off as she stepped past him, casually brushing against him and sending electric shocks into his body.

'Oh, sorry,' she giggled an apology and he flushed again. He wished he knew something to say, some snappy line like the hero in a film, where he would look good in her eyes, and she would laugh, and then invite him to shower with her. The music would swell, and the film would cut to the next morning, when they woke up together...

But the words stuck in his throat and the flush in his face changed from lust to shame.

She went into the bathroom and shut the door. He heard the water running, and went back into the kitchen to make a sandwich. Washing the plate, he put it in the rack to dry as the water noise from the shower stopped.

He shivered involuntarily at the thrill of a real, naked, dripping wet woman.

'Martin?' Her voice carried down the hallway and he almost tripped over himself in his eager response. Confused and boiling inside, he hovered outside the door.

'Umm...yeah? Help? How can I help?' His brain felt as if it was doing cartwheels and his tongue had disconnected.

Petra's voice echoed from inside the bathroom. 'Oh nothing really, I just wanted to ask you a question...'

She opened the door and Martin turned to stone. Freshly showered, Petra had dried her body and towelled her hair, then used her fingers to comb it away from her face. Martin's eyes rose from her feet, up her freshly shaved legs, past her waist and then alternated between her face and the large, perfectly sized breasts that swung from her chest.

Magnetic.

Hypnotic.

Breathtaking.

Smirking at having caught his full attention, she posed, sticking out her hip and cocking her head to the side like a model.

‘I wanted to know.’ she said softly, grinning at the struggle he had to lift his eyes to hers. ‘Have you ever been with a woman?’

All his breath came out in a rush.

‘Ahhh...yessss....yes....I’ve had sex with Julinda...but.....’ His voice trailed off as his brain realised it wasn’t a good idea to talk about another woman.

Petra shook her head and took a step closer, then another. Palms on his shoulders and her breasts touching his shirt, she pressed him backwards against the wall.

‘No, Martin,’ she said softly. Her breath was warm and fresh as he hyperventilated. The shampoo smell from her hair distracted him. He desperately wanted to run his hands all over that creamy fresh skin, but his hands refused to cooperate. ‘I’m not talking about sex,’ she said quietly, her hot, red mouth close to his ear as she gently pressed a knee between his legs. ‘Sex is an event. A one-off, quick squirm that’s over way too soon and totally unsatisfying.’

He put his hands on her hips and she didn’t object.

‘I’m talking about an entire day of total pleasure. Weeks. We’ll make love for hours. You and me, all afternoon in bed, then eating dinner, massage each other...maybe shower together?’

She cradled his face in her palms, forcing him to look her in the eye.

‘I don’t think you’ve ever done that, *been* with a woman. Have you?’

He shivered and shook his head at the same time.

‘Nah ahh.’ He swallowed hard.

She smiled, and moved her hands down to the belt that tied his pants.

‘Would you like to?’

‘Yea...ahh.’

She stopped moving halfway through the motion of loosening his pants. The bulge inside was caught, trapped and quite painful. Her face moved upwards until she looked him in the eye again, hands cupping his most sensitive area.

There was no question that she was in charge.

‘The first rule is...’ she began, and he nodded involuntarily. Pinned against the wall by the object of his desire, he was physically incapable of arguing or resisting.

‘Each time we have sex, it has to be in a different room in the house, until we’ve done them all. Do you understand?’

‘Err, yes,’ he groaned, then smiled wickedly. ‘Wanna start here?’

She shook her head. It was her game, and he didn't get to make any of the decisions. She grabbed him by the belt and began walking backwards, watching his eyes feast upon her body as it moved in front of him. She angled her hips as she towed him, exaggerating the sway of her breasts and laughing at the expression on his face.

'It's not up to you, Martin,' she cooed. 'You're going to lose your mind with pleasure, but you'll do it how *I* want. My rules. Me first. Understand?'

While speaking, she had pulled him into the living room and now she sat on the sofa. With a jerk of her arm, she pulled him to his knees on the floor, then leaned forward and kissed him deeply.

After she came up for air, Martin began to loosen his belt but Petra gently took his hands and moved them to her breasts. 'Not yet,' she breathed into his ear. 'You've got work to do first. I'm going to show you the best way to kiss me all over...'

She put her hands behind his head, stroking the long, blonde hair. Then she leaned back, reclined into the sofa and pushed his head down between her legs at the same time.

January 1996 - Guns N Ammo

Hobart

Petra pushed open the door of Terry Hill's gun shop and led Martin inside by the hand. His eyes were closed, and she had led him down the street from their parked car like a child on his way to a surprise birthday party.

Wadded up in his pocket was five thousand dollars in cash. Most of it was money he had received when selling an inflatable zodiac boat, the rest from saving small withdrawals that were deemed acceptable by the Public Trustee that managed his finances.

Three months earlier, he had taken his first girlfriend, Jeanetta Moani on a boating trip to Hen Island. Riding in an 11 foot inflatable zodiac, they sailed forty kilometres west from Recherche Bay, around the southernmost part of Tasmania^[2]. When the main fuel tank was empty, he had connected the spare tank to the fuel line but failed to notice the fuel hose had become disconnected from the engine itself.

Unable to start the motor, and unable to diagnose the simple problem, they drifted as night fell. Just 2,500 km from Antarctica, the temperature plummeted; wind chill combined with sea spray to bring on hypothermia and their chances of survival dropped toward zero. Both were shuddering uncontrollably when Martin decided it was dark enough to try a flare. The brilliant orange light had attracted a fishing boat and the fisherman had towed them back to safety.

Relieved to be alive, Jeanetta ended the relationship and Martin sold the boat shortly afterwards. His appetite for boating had died that night on the open ocean. He sold the boat and motor for the first offer - just over four thousand dollars.

The money had been lying around, and Petra seized the opportunity.

'I want to buy us a present, because we've been dating for over a week...' While he didn't understand the meaning of the anniversary, Martin was eager to see what kind of present his new girlfriend had in mind.

'Careful, there's a step at the door,' she said cheerfully, catching the shop

assistant's eye and grinning. As the door swung closed behind him, Martin opened his eyes and looked around in wonder.

'Ahhh....wow,' he said, giving her a big smile. They were the only customers in the shop.

She did a little pirouette, waving her hands in an exaggerated show of service. 'Have a look around, see what five grand will buy you.'

The blonde man's jaw dropped as he looked over the wall of firearms on display. There were hunting rifles, pistols, sporting rifles and military rifles with designs that spanned a century. He liked the retro look of the SMLE rifles the ANZACs carried, but then his eyes stopped moving when they fell upon a particular black sporting rifle near the counter.

Martin stepped closer, and the shop assistant went into the back room. He made a few noises and the owner of the shop, Terry Hill came out.

'G'day,' he said cheerfully. 'Whatcha lookin at?'

Petra giggled. 'It's our two week relationship anniversary,' she tittered. 'So it's time to celebrate with another rifle.'

Terry nodded seriously, as if that was the most normal statement in the world.

'Indeed it is,' he said. 'What else have you got?'

Martin's gaze had never left the display wall. 'I got an AR10,' he said absently. 'Had it for years, but it's a .308, I'm a bit scared of the....the kick, ya know?'

Smelling a sale, Terry unlocked the black AR15, checked the chamber was empty and handed it to Martin. Eyes wide, Martin's face lit up as if he was the star of his own action film.

While Martin was engrossed in the AR15, Terry moved over to Petra.

'Lovely idea, miss,' he said quietly. 'I hate to ask, but he needs a licence to buy that now.'

Petra flashed him an innocent look. 'Oh, it's really for me...but we're both licenced.'

She fished in her handbag and then showed Terry two of the new laminated firearms licences. He nodded, happy that they were complying with the law, then went back to Martin.

'It's a Colt AR15 in .223,' he said. 'I got it from Melbourne. Four thousand five hundred dollars for the gun, but if you want a strap, gun bag and the special scope, call it five thousand. I'll even throw in a box of ammo - eighty to a hundred rounds.'

Martin looked at Petra, who smiled a brilliant smile and nodded.

‘I love it, Martin,’ she gushed. ‘It’s a good deal, give him the money.’

Martin handed over the cash, and Terry put the rifle, scope and ammo in a gun bag.

‘Congratulations,’ he said cheerfully. ‘Happy shooting.’

Martin slung the gun bag over his shoulder. He kissed Petra then turned to Terry.

‘Hasta la vista, baby,’ he said, then laughed with the others as his ridiculous impersonation turned to comedy.

He grabbed Petra by the hand and dragged her out of the shop.

February 1996 - Perth, Australia

Bruce Anderson^[3] entered the street cafe and ordered a coke and a muffin. He paid, then carried the food outside to one of the tables in the shade. The weather was hot, and as he sat down, he smiled politely to a young man sitting alone at a table nearby. The youth was obviously waiting for someone who was inside getting food, and Bruce couldn't believe that he was wearing a full white suit, complete with suit jacket - in the heat of summer.

'G'day,' said Bruce blandly. 'A bit hot, ain't it?'

The younger man turned his head away from the sun and faced Bruce. 'Yeah,' he said. 'But I'm okay.' His long, blonde hair shone in the sun, and his pale complexion was tinted with a light sunburn already.

Bruce tried to continue the conversation, after all, it would not be polite to start eating while in the middle of a conversation with someone waiting for their food.

'I'm Bruce,' he said. 'What's your name?'

Pushing his shoulder-length blonde hair away from his face, the other man smiled. 'Martin,' was all he said.

'Pleased to meet you,' said Bruce. 'Haven't seen you around. Where you from?'

Martin didn't seem to be warming to the conversation. 'Oh no,' he said softly. 'I'm not from here, I'm from Tasmania. But I like travelling around.'

'Ahh, never been there, but I hear it's a lovely place,' said Bruce, hoping that Martin's partner would arrive soon and join the conversation. It was getting a little weird.

'Yeah, it's nice,' said Martin. 'I've travelled around, you know...Europe, Asia, America. I seen a lot of people. I like Europe, went SCUBA diving in Sweden, that was good. Yeah.'

Bruce was about to ask about the European trips, but was interrupted when a young woman with dark hair approached the table with sandwiches and drinks on a tray. She sat down next to Martin and as he looked at her, she gave him a stern look, one eyebrow cocked, then she relaxed her face and

focussed on the food. But Bruce had seen both her look and Martin's response, the blonde man looked like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

Bruce sensed quite clearly that the woman wore the pants in the relationship. Martin's body language told him that their conversation was over, so he turned back to his own meal, deep in thought.

The young man was obviously suffering from some kind of social adaptation problem. Not enough to stop him travelling, but there was some developmental delay there. The woman, in contrast, she had no difficulties with ordering the food and seemed to hold some authority over Martin. Strange relationship - even though it wasn't 1950 anymore, Bruce wondered what she was getting out of the relationship - money? A father figure to salve her daddy issues?

He ate his muffin, finished the coke and left. The strange couple were completely forgotten - for now.

Late February 1996 - Johannesburg, South Africa

Warren had accepted Rebecca's advice to choose a suitable time to tell his family about the overseas job, rather than just rushing home and blurting out the news. A weekend family dinner had concluded, and they were still seated at the table when he decided to announce his plans.

'I've been offered contract security work - a two month job in the goldfields of Western Australia. Apparently they've been having trouble with the natives, and I'll be planning and executing their perimeter defences, based on the SOPs we use here.' Seated around the table, his family members nodded. It was a believable lie, the kind Rebecca was so good at.

Janet was smiling for the first time in years. It was exhilarating to see Warren living with some hope and purpose in his life again.

'The subcontractor, who will be employing me, is off the books, totally deniable. Payment will be made in gold, to be collected from Rebecca's legal firm at night.'

'Why at night?'

'I'll be finishing the last patrol at dawn, local time. That's when I get paid. It will be the middle of the night over here, but I'd rather not hang around a second longer than I have to. There's no way I want to get paid locally or use banks...they'll be releasing four kilos of gold to my nominated beneficiary, here.'

Hans nodded, his expression serious as he weighed the options and risks in his mind. 'The city is dangerous, best not to travel at night. You should see if you can hole up in our lawyer's offices next door. But you should definitely take extra security. Make a few calls, see if your old friends can help.'

Warren called Sgt Blazkowicz and gave him a very brief summary of the situation.

'I've got a contracting job in Australia, I need Janet to collect the payment. It will be midnight, in the city. Would you be able to escort her?'

There was no pause, Warren's old friend immediately agreed.

'The city is no place for a woman at night, I'll definitely help you. I'll bring

an MP I know too...a heavy-hitter, name's Reinhardt Ferreira.'

Warren had never heard of him, but Blazkowicz reassured him.

'Reinhardt's a solid guy, dependable and ferocious. A good shot too, my only criticism is he carries a Glock 17, not a 1911, you know? To each their own, ya know; but I won't trust my life to anything John Moses Browning didn't invent...'

Two days later, Hans, Warren and Janet met with Sgt Blazkowicz and Reinhardt in a restaurant. Warren ran through the notes that Rebecca had given him.

'These big law firms are running 24/7. They lock the front doors and have security, but there's always people there, either working late or doing international conference calls with Europe or the States. We meet this lawyer, Randall Staines and he will release the payment to you - four kilos of gold.'

The two soldiers simply nodded. They were quite used to the concept of working for gold, and agreed that Janet should take possession as soon as Warren's job was finished.

Ferreira spread his hands out, palm down. 'The key factor here is to keep it quiet. Concealed carry, but enough firepower to get clear if anyone tries anything.'

Blazkowicz nodded. 'The risk isn't inside the building. These legal guys will keep everything "need to know" and they're used to doing shady deals at night - its how shit gets done in this world. The lawyer might try to steal some of the gold, but we can cut the ingots before we take possession. But that's unlikely. No, the main risk is outside, anyone tries anything, it will be outside as we move it.'

'You think the lawyer will tip someone off, set us up for once we leave?' Janet asked.

Ferreira shrugged. 'Could be anyone, that's not important. We just need to be ready for anything, stack the odds in our favour. Firepower - we got that covered. Plate carriers, pistols and spare mags for moving in public, then some rifles inside the vehicles.'

'Vehicles? As in plural?'

'Yes,' replied Blazkowicz, 'What I'm suggesting is that we leapfrog security around Hans and Janet - you're going to be the ones collecting the payment. So I'll go in first, check the lobby and then stay there. Hans, Janet and Reinhardt will then go up and collect the gold, test the ingots and then come

back down. You'll stay in the lobby while I check outside, then repeat the process to get into your lawyer's offices. Step one, okay?'

Warren nodded. 'How do you get home safely?'

'Just before dawn, traffic will be light but getting busy. Reinhardt and I will go down and get the cars, bring them around to the front, then come and get you. Each of us will be carrying a small backpack and we move fast - straight out the doors, Janet in the front passenger seat of the car in front, Hans the same in the second car. Step two.'

'We come straight home, have Katharin ready to open and close the gate for us. Step three - simple is good.'

Hans nodded. 'What about communications?'

'Radios, same as we use on the farm. We start on Channel 8 and then switch up two channels for each step of the plan. Katharin is on Channel 14 the whole time, we leave the city at 6.00am, should be within radio range by 6.15. Okay?'

Everyone nodded.

Three days later, Warren received a package in the mail. It contained a hundred dollars in American Express traveller's cheques and an economy-class airfare ticket from Johannesburg to Sydney, via Singapore. There was no return address on the envelope, but the postmark was from their local post office - a subtle reminder to Warren that Rebecca knew where his family lived.

He smiled. Once he was paid for the job, his family wouldn't be hanging around for very long. He would disappear, but so would they; beginning a new life in another part of the country.

Martin and Petra had been back from Perth a week or two when she suggested another trip to the gun shop.

'It's a nice collection you're getting, Martin,' she said. 'A big AR10 and a smaller AR15. Something for every situation, but you really need a shotgun as well. Wouldn't be a complete collection without a shotgun.'

Martin nodded. 'Yeah, yeah. A shotgun would be cool. If someone tried to break in, they'd shit 'emself when they heard that "click-clack" eh?'

Petra kissed him deeply and let him feel her breasts through her shirt. 'I love

it when you think about protecting me,' she said. 'You're my hero.'

Blasting the radio, they drove back to Terry Hill and replayed the same routine from a month earlier. Petra let Martin think it was him buying the guns, while Terry was made to believe it was Petra buying them for herself. This time, they paid three thousand dollars for a Daewoo USAS-12 semi-automatic shotgun^[4].

'A real good deal,' said Terry, shaking his head. 'They're banned for sale in America, so they're being exported to countries that aren't insane about gun laws.'

Martin wasn't paying attention, but Petra tried to be polite. 'Oh really? I thought guns were pretty common in America.'

Mistaking her comment for interest, Terry explained.

'A Gun Control group convinced President Clinton to get the Secretary of the Treasury to declare it a 'destructive device' under an obscure portion of the Federal Code. They also requested that the pump action Mossberg 500 also be banned - simply because it looked scary - but the government exercised some common sense and refused.'

He shrugged. 'The hilarious irony is...the full auto versions are still available to Title II approved owners and dealers with no additional paperwork. But this semi-auto version requires a 'Destructive Device' permit from the ATF.'

He sighed in frustration. 'This is a big part of what we are up against. Gun Control people who don't understand anything about firearms, who want to ban things just because they look scary, and they don't know the existing laws or how they operate. And the politicians are worse, because they agree without doing any research.'

Petra raised her eyebrows. 'I thought anybody in America could buy a gun, isn't that the constitution? You know, all men are created equal and shall be equally infringed?'

Terry took a deep breath. The last thing he wanted to do was upset a customer, but this young lady seemed interested and he felt he could shut himself up as soon as he sensed she was losing interest.

'Well, no; the "All men are created equal" part isn't the constitution, that's the Declaration of Independence. But the Second Amendment to the constitution *does* say that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.' He paused for effect. 'The problem is, both the Federal and State governments have passed thousands of laws, creating a minefield of

overlapping and sometimes conflicting laws and regulations. They might not be constitutional, but as long as the police and courts enforce them, then there's a whole range of people who cannot legally own firearms - convicted felons, for instance. You've also got a whole lot of paperwork and taxes to deal with, depending on what state you're in.'

He shrugged. 'The guys who wrote the constitution didn't imagine the situation we have today, but one thing is sure: high crime grows where the gun laws are most strict.'

Petra took in a short breath of surprise. 'Really? That makes no sense. Less guns, less crime?'

Terry shook his head. 'You're making a common misunderstanding,' he said slowly.

'There's no correlation between LEGAL guns and crime, but ILLEGAL guns are a completely different story. Criminals will always be able to get guns, drugs, alcohol - anything they want. And by banning something, the laws of supply and demand come into effect - illegal profits increase and that attracts organised crime. You can see the same pattern with prohibition of alcohol, drugs, you name it. Once the law gets involved, crime infects the loopholes; and there are always loopholes.'

'Oh? Why?' Petra was enjoying her crash course in American gun culture.

'Two main reasons,' Terry sighed. 'The main one is, the lawyers don't understand the subject matter, so they include concepts, words and phrases that don't reflect reality. The second one is that they want to give an advantage to one group or another, so they might build in a level of ambiguity. That forces the government bodies to take an issue to court, or the public interest to fund a legal challenge. All that does is pay more lawyers to fight it out in court. So one lot of lawyers are setting up a lucrative system for their buddies down the track.'

Petra nodded, then laughed. 'Sounds complicated,' she said gaily. 'Glad I'm just a gardener.'

She turned to where Martin was leafing through a rack of hunting and gun magazines.

'Anything else you want, love?' She wiggled her hips to stretch the fabric of her thin shirt against her breasts, so the hard nipples stuck out.

He took the hint, paid Terry for the shotgun and drove Petra back home as fast as he could.

1 March 1996

Hobart, Tasmania

It had rained overnight, and the motel carpark was shiny as the morning sun warmed the moist air. Glistening with the droplets, a yellow Volvo 244 sat silent in the calm at the start of the day. The motel itself was drab. Tasmania in the late 20th Century was not a modern place, and private accommodation was decidedly rustic. Inside room 14, Rebecca Peters was standing at the front of the shabby motel room.

In a semi-circle around the room sat four other people. Petra Wilmot occupied a chair next to the bathroom door. Next to her, Warren sat on the edge of the double bed, with another couple sitting on the other side of it. Rebecca introduced them as Anthony Nightingale, “our government liaison” but she pronounced it strangely: lee - ASIO - on and when everyone laughed, Warren didn’t get the joke but chuckled along with the rest. Rebecca said the dark-haired woman’s name was Virginia, then stepped beside the board and introduced the mission.

‘This has been in the planning for years.’ She held up her right hand with the fingers splayed and proceeded to tick off items as she spoke:

‘Legislation is drafted and key ministers are in the loop,’ tick one.

‘Tasmania A-G and key police are briefed on the real story and cover story, as necessary,’ tick two.

‘A conference has been arranged for print media from all over the world,’ tick three.

‘Key trauma surgeons are attending a conference in Hobart,’ tick four.

‘And we’ve got our shooter, a patsy and a target...’ tick five.

‘Even though Warren’s the key component, you’re actually a minor one - no offense. Lots of other contingencies had to be catered to, this is shaping up to be quite an operation, and our little cell is just one part of it...’

The pale, gangly woman stepped to over to a whiteboard which had a large scale-map of south-east Tasmania stuck to it. Hobart was highlighted in green, and the road south-east to Port Arthur was marked in orange. She stepped closer and taped another sheet of paper to the board, another map that held a curved coastline, buildings, ferry wharf and off the coast, a solitary

island.

She pointed to it.

‘Isle of the Dead,’ she said. ‘A single ferry takes a hundred and twenty eight passengers out there from the Port Arthur Historic Site several times a day. The ferry ride is less than twenty minutes, after which a guide does a tour of the notable graves and crypts.’

Warren looked at the photos. The island looked about fifty meters by one hundred, half of which was covered in gravestones and crypts. At the western end was a jetty where the ferry obviously docked. He nodded.

‘Easy enough,’ he said. ‘Stay cool until the ferry arrives on the island and leave it last. Shoot the operator, immobilise the engine and then hunt down the passengers. Five mags of ammo, should be an exciting game of hide and seek!’

His hope that the others would laugh at his off joke were dashed. Nobody said a thing. *Creepy.*

Rebecca shook her head. ‘You’ve forgotten the other passengers,’ she said. ‘The ferry will have dropped off the passengers, but there will be an earlier tour waiting to be collected. When the ferry docks on the Isle of the Dead, there’ll be almost two hundred and fifty people there.’

‘You’ll have to be smart about it,’ said Rebecca. ‘Prepare for some heroes who might attack you in self-defence, take enough ammo for three shots per person.’

Warren nodded. ‘Yeah, I know the drill. Situational awareness, muzzle discipline, stay in motion.’ He looked at the others, making sure he made eye contact. ‘I’ve drilled for contacts like this. Multiple head shots, movement, anticipating the target’s reactions, make sure nobody can get behind me. I got it.’

Rebecca nodded. ‘That’s the main objective. The second objective is the media and government response - remember, this is all about the visceral reaction in the public. The whole point is to make this as gruesome as possible, so we can get laws passed that outlaw all guns. I know a few people have to die, but if Australia can become gun-free, then thousands more people will live, understand? This is all about the greater good.’

The greater good. Warren had heard similar speeches from ZAPU and ZANLA, all justifying their atrocities in the name of some nebulous “greater good” that only seemed the benefit the elites, never the worker who was

struggling to feed his family. But this was not the time to be a smartass, to offer real-world rebuttals to naive ideology. His family was due fifty thousand US dollars, and keeping his mouth shut was the only way to make that happen.

‘Media,’ said Rebecca, moving on to another point.

‘Journalists are pre-positioned for the weekend, and we have coaches arranged to bring them to the site as soon as it’s safe. Think about it - what an impact! CNN will devote a two day broadcast of this classic ‘sound bite’: a ferry load of North American tourists shot dead and burnt, and their lifeless bodies floating on Mason Cove, with the Port Arthur ruins as a backdrop. It’ll be a very effective tool for future programming - every time there’s a mass shooting in America, the networks can cut to the file footage to re-traumatise everyone all over again.’

Warren looked at Rebecca closely. There was a shiny trail of drool on her lip and her chest was heaving under her dull sweater. *Damn, this bitch is getting turned on by killing.*

Rebecca poured a glass of water from the kitchenette tap and downed it in one gulp.

‘Now, I believe we’ve found the perfect fall-guy - Martin Bryant. Twenty-nine years old, he has lived in the area all his life and is well-known in the general public as being anti-social and eccentric. Petra has been building a close relationship with him for almost three months now. He owns a Daewoo semi auto shotgun and an AR15 assault rifle.’

Warren chuckled, and Rebecca lost her train of thought at the interruption.

‘What?’

‘Oh, nothing,’ he said, waving his hand in apology. ‘An AR15 isn’t an assault rifle, that’s all.’

She frowned. ‘Yes it is. That’s why we’re trying to ban it.’

Warren chose the tone of his voice carefully. He wanted to educate her, not come across as patronising.

‘An assault rifle is a specific thing,’ he said. ‘Everything in the military is designed so that there is no confusion or ambiguity, and orders can be put together like Lego, right? Terms have specific meanings, which everyone agrees on. Words like defend, reconnaissance, assault, ambush - everyone knows what’s involved and what they need to do to complete the mission. That’s how we train, to make all those steps and sequences instinctive.’

He looked around the room and didn't detect any animosity, so he went on.

'Assault is a specific tactical manoeuvre. Let's say a Lieutenant is out on patrol with his platoon, and they come across an enemy bunker. They report in by radio and the Captain's orders are to assault the bunker, right?'

Heads nodded around the room.

'So when the Captain uses the word "assault", the Lieutenant knows what to do, and his squad leaders, everyone has trained for this. They split the platoon in half. First squad gets on the hill and provides covering fire, while second squad move around the side and use grenades on the flank. That's an assault on a fixed position.'

Rebecca looked confused. 'So what's an assault rifle?'

'It needs two elements,' he replied. 'First squad need to put down overwhelming fire, to keep the enemy's head down and stop them spotting second squad, right? So their rifles need to be capable of full auto fire. Some rifles, like the M16, were full auto; others were limited to 3-round burst to improve accuracy, but that doesn't really matter. An assault rifle needs to be able to put down a high volume of suppressing fire, then switch back to single shot for accuracy when necessary. They are different to a battle rifle or a sniper rifle, which have other uses. But you definitely wouldn't use an AR15 in an assault because they don't have the burst or auto option. You would use an M16, BAR, AK or HK, maybe a G3 or SA-80.'

Rebecca nodded. 'Yes, those full auto rifles are the ones we want to ban.'

'That's my point,' said Warren. 'They are military rifles, they aren't sold to the public. There's no point banning them because civilians can't own them anyway. The only people who have automatic rifles are criminals, terrorists and floppies...People that aren't exactly going to be obeying your gun laws, are they?'

Rebecca flushed, and she looked at her notes. 'Centrefire, semi-automatic rifles,' she said slowly. 'Does that make sense? How does that fit in?'

Warren nodded. 'Sure, that's an AR15, SLR, pretty much any sporting rifle. But they aren't assault rifles.' He smiled at the look on her face and tried to break the tension. 'To avoid confusion, just don't use the phrase "assault rifle" and we should be good.'

Rebecca nodded.

'Okay,' she said slowly. 'Martin has a shotgun and an AR15...that he bought from Guns & Ammo, a local dealer named Terry Hill. Terry doesn't know

anything is out of the ordinary because he bought them in another name, using a valid gun licence.'

Warren started. 'Huh? A valid licence? Won't that lead the cops back to her...to him...to us?'

Rebecca shook her head. 'No, no. I have a contact who is manufacturing the new laminated licences. All he needs is a passport photo, the computer software and the hardware to do authentic cutting and laminating...we even made Martin a licence for full auto guns...made out to a Martin RYAN.' She laughed, but nobody else did.

'Now, I'm not confident that I can micro-manage the police investigation in any way,' said Rebecca. 'I do have access to certain bureaucrats who can pass on messages, but the frontline police and investigators will be operating as per normal. They're likely to be suspicious, but we simply cannot let them in on any details, so we have to be careful. Sure, we're setting up Martin as the patsy, but can you think of any way the police might be guided to suspect it wasn't him? What's the weakest link? Where's our risk?'

Warren imagined the investigation in his mind, running through the options like a simulation. 'The rifles. I can use his AR15 easily enough, but it's not enough firepower. I'll bring his shotgun as well - that's good for short range shots and the AR15 will do fine on people at medium range, but I'll need more penetration if I'm to disable the ferry.'

'What do you mean?' Rebecca frowned.

'Well, the AR15 is chambered in .223. That's a fantastic round for hunting, but if I'm to disable the ferry at the jetty, I'll have to put some shots into the engine bay without actually seeing it. It'll be guesswork, and the .223 is a small size bullet - all that metal around the engine will stop them. I need something larger, something designed for the job.'

Rebecca looked pained. 'What did you have in mind? Martin doesn't have anything else...'

Warren knew exactly what he needed. 'An R1 in 7.62 - it's a battle rifle, designed for long range stopping power and thin-skin penetration.'

'Thin skin?' Rebecca asked the question but a couple of other heads in the room nodded in understanding.

'Non-armoured vehicles. Jeeps, trucks, basically everything we were dealing with in South Africa. Two or three shots into the engine and you'll destroy something vital.'

Rebecca looked over at Anthony Nightingale. He shrugged.

‘No way can I get an R1, that’ll raise too many questions. How about an AR10 in 308? Plenty of them in-country already...shit, doesn’t Martin already have one?’

Warren nodded. ‘Yeah, that would be perfect. A .308 to disable the ferry, AR15 and the shotgun for everyone close by, I can always switch to the 308 for longer range, or to punch through headstones people might be hiding behind.’

Rebecca looked confused. ‘So what’s the difference between .223 and .308?’

‘Bullet size and power. A .308 is essentially shorthand. It means the bullet is point three oh eight of an inch in diameter. In Africa, the FAL rifles we used are chambered in 7.62, right? Seven point six two millimetres - that’s the military version of .308 Winchester. The rounds are very similar - almost identical - but the military version has much higher pressure. So they’re not really interchangeable.’

‘Just to make things confusing, there’s also bullets like the .308 Marlin Express.’ Warren paused, seeing the confusion on several faces. ‘It’s like cars, okay. You can have a 6 cylinder or an eight cylinder engine in the same type of car, right? But then you can have a 6 cylinder petrol or a 6 cylinder diesel.’

Rebecca nodded. ‘It’s more complicated than I thought. What’s the difference with the...marlin... express, was it?’

‘The 308 Winchester and the 308 Marlin Express are entirely two different rounds. The Express is for the Lever guns, and as far as I know, that is the only thing it is chambered for, not bolt guns. But just to make it interesting, you can have several different "300's", the 300 Winchester Magnum, 300 Weatherby Magnum, 300 H&H Magnum, 300 Whisper, 300 Winchester Short Magnum.....and not one of these is meant to work in the rifle it is not chambered for. Some of them will fit though in the other gun chamber, but you don’t put petrol in a diesel engine, do you?’

‘Okay, I get it.’ Rebecca held up both hands to signal a shift in the discussion. ‘Sorry to repeat myself, but I need to make sure you all understand the intent of the mission. It is not, repeat, not to kill everyone on the island.’

‘The whole plan is to traumatise the entire nation. Change their view of guns from positive-neutral to neutral-negative, understand? To do that we need

traumatised victims. Mothers, widows, children. Heart rending horror stories that the media can work their magic on, understand?’

‘There’s a long term plan to change the global economy in the 21st Century, right? Massive exploitation of Africa and the Middle East is going to trigger waves of refugees, and there’s going to be media support for humanitarian intakes, getting thousands of third-world combat veterans with PTSD and violent extremism into the cities and suburbs, creating havoc.’

‘The whole intent is to greatly reduce living standards of developed nations, in order to take pressure off natural resources. Oil and energy consumption is massively over-represented in the developed nations. If everyone on the planet had the lifestyle of an American or Australian, we would need seven planets to sustain us all. Living standards have to shrink, Western economies are completely unsustainable. But we all know that nobody is going to do that willingly. They have to be dragged into compliance, kicking and screaming into a lower-energy future...’

‘Before that happens, we need the population to have a change of heart. It’s already happening - domestication through urbanisation, but there’s still way too many people who would use guns to defend their lives and families. That has to change. Through fear and guilt and shame, we need to get those guns out of circulation, and reprogram the population so that even when their lives are threatened and property stolen, they turn to the government instead of a gun for self-protection.’

Warren shrugged. He pictured his home in South Africa, and he didn’t think this plan would work. But he held his tongue, he wasn’t being paid for his opinions.

‘The media is right behind this, Murdoch desperately wants into the New World Order, and he has key editors and producers buying in. He’s got them believing they are agents of change or something, shaping public opinion like an orchestra conductor.’

‘Right now, in 1996, if waves of refugees started looting and carjacking around Melbourne and Sydney, the locals would just shoot them and go on with their lives. They’re too self-reliant, too wild. They need to be tamed so they won’t fight back when the time comes.’

‘This is the essence of the UN disarmament program. And the key objective of our mission.’

‘Okay,’ said Rebecca. ‘Let’s recap. We have a shotgun, and two semi-auto

rifles, these are exactly what we are trying to get banned. Who are they made by?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Warren.

‘Daewoo sounds Asian, who makes the AR15? Americans?’

Warren nodded. ‘Yes, Armalite and Colt.’

‘What about Europeans?’

Warren frowned, and he noticed that Nightingale was also confused.

Rebecca raised her hands. ‘Look at it from the media’s point of view. We want to attack all sources of firearms, turn the public against them. So we need to give them evidence...grist...smoking guns...literally. So what’s a European semi auto rifle that we can include?’

Warren said ‘FAL’ at exactly the same time that Anthony said ‘SLR.’

They looked at each other and laughed. Then they laughed again at the confusion written all over Rebecca and Petra.

Warren explained.

‘The FN FAL is made in Belgium. FAL is literally the initials for “Light Automatic Rifle” in Belgian. It’s a fantastic piece of machinery, and the Brits recognised it as such. They licenced their own version, called it the Self Loading Rifle - SLR. It’s what we use in Africa...used...’ His voice trailed off and he swallowed the memories back down his throat.

Rebecca ignored his obvious emotional pain. ‘Right, we’ll get one of them too. Anthony?’

‘Sure,’ said the ASIO man. ‘Lithgow made almost a quarter-million SLRs, right up until 1986. We exported ‘em to NZ, Singapore, New Guinea, but there’s still thousands of ‘em lying around in armouries and storage.’

Rebecca looked very excited. ‘Really?’

Anthony smirked. ‘Watch me. Anglesea Barracks is literally ten minutes’ drive from here. I could be back here in thirty minutes with a case of greasy SLRs, that includes the time stopping off at the bottle shop to buy a case of scotch to swap it for...’

‘Do it,’ snapped Rebecca. ‘But just one...we don’t need to attract attention. Can you do it now?’

Anthony looked at his watch. ‘No better time. It’s a reserve unit, so the brass will be at lunch and only the clerks will be there...’ He nodded to Rebecca and left the room.

Warren stretched his legs out in the chair. He wasn’t used to sitting around in

a stuffy motel room for hours. Rebecca said 'Petra, do you have the bag?' 'Mmmm.' Petra rummaged around on the floor next to the bed she was sitting on. She handed Rebecca a blue gym bag. Warren saw the logo - Prince - and assumed it was some kind of fitness brand they didn't get in South Africa. He looked at the bag and imagined trying to fit the rifles - each of different size and shape - into it.

Warren shook his head. 'Sorry, but that's too small. The SLR won't fit - it's over a meter long. You need a bigger bag.'

'Can't do that,' said Rebecca. 'Petra has already linked Martin to this bag. It has to be this one.'

'Can we cut some of the barrel off?' Petra was trying to be helpful.

Rebecca frowned. 'No, I'm not keen on modifications. We tried that with Frank Vitkovic and nearly ruined the whole operation.'

Warren snapped his fingers. 'I remember that,' he quipped. 'The famous Queen Street massacre. Didn't he complain they gave him the wrong gun or something?'

Rebecca nodded. 'Yes,' she said gravely. 'Sawing off the barrel caused the gun to malfunction. When interviewed by police, he said "How do they expect me to kill people with this gun?" - Almost gave the game away. Thank Christ he had the sense to throw himself out a high window soon afterwards...'

'Back to the SLR,' said Warren. 'Just bring it to Seascap. I'll figure it out on the day, okay? If necessary, I'll put the blue bag inside a larger carry-bag. With Martin dead, the cops will just assume he bought it illegally. He sure as hell won't be able to tell them anything...'

There was a silence in the room, and Warren realised he had said too much.

Petra looked at Warren as if she had scraped him off her shoe. 'So, we get these guns. Okay, after he shoots two hundred people...then what?'

Rebecca looked at Warren.

'I'm going to shoot myself in the head.' He said it deadpan, because he had made peace with the fact, way back in Africa. It seemed so long ago.

There was a moment of stunned silence in the room until Petra gagged a little and asked 'What?'

Warren locked onto her eyes. 'I'm dying, of AIDS,' he said, slowly and clearly. 'Home invasion, in South Africa. We killed them all, but in the process, I got cut up, and I caught AIDS. So this is a one-way trip for me. I'm

going to shoot up the Island, then put myself out of my misery. Payment goes to my family.'

Petra cast her eyes down. 'I'm so sorry. I didn't know.' Warren felt a pang that she felt sorry for him and his family, but not the people he was about to massacre, or the young man she was setting up for murder. He mentally shut out those thoughts and concentrated on the task at hand.

Rebecca looked at Petra. 'What's the latest on Martin?'

Petra wrinkled her nose. 'He's a mess, but that's no change to two months ago.'

She sighed aloud. 'As far as he is aware, we are a happy couple. He eats healthy, watches TV a bit, doesn't read anything at all. Swims in the ocean a lot, like to think of himself as a fitness freak. I've been talking to him about guns and he's shown me his rifle and shotgun. I asked him to take me shooting them but he wasn't keen - he seems to like the idea of owning them, but not shooting them...'

Rebecca nodded. 'Classic domesticated masculinity, probably wants to be an action movie star. What about sex?'

Petra shrugged. 'It never lasts long, if that's what you mean.' The others in the room chuckled as she joked about her misfortune. 'He's a randy bastard, but basically a three pump chump. No stamina...'

'Randy?'

Petra sighed again. 'It's embarrassing. I'm not sure he ever had sex before, but he sure likes it.'

Rebecca nodded. 'That's a good thing, surely?'

Petra winced. 'Not when he's running around pestering other girls.' She sighed again. 'It's embarrassing. He's got this idea in his head that because he can do it with me any time he wants, that every other girl also wants it...and him.'

Rebecca smirked. 'How so?'

'This is serious, Rebecca,' said Petra earnestly. 'He's drawing attention to himself. Got himself thrown off a bus because he was annoying some teenage girls. Just talking shit, anti-social, sexual remarks...I don't know how to get through to him.'

Rebecca frowned. 'The last thing we need is unwanted attention. Give him a good scare and tell him exactly how you want him to behave in public, yeah? Hurt him a bit if you need too. A strong grip and a good squeeze on his nuts

and he'll dance to whatever tune you name.'

Petra nodded. 'I'll keep him under control. Leave it with me.'

Rebecca smiled. 'Good. Now, let's run through the overall plan once more.' She turned back to the maps on the board and pointed at Hobart.

'D-Day is Sunday, 28th April. On Saturday the 27th, Warren will drive down to the old convict mine at Saltwater Creek and stash a glass jar of soap powder there. He will come back and spend the night with Martin and Petra, who will give him some of Martin's clothes to wear.' She looked at Warren and Petra. 'You will invite Martin to have lunch with you at Seascap at half-past one. Petra will make sure he agrees.'

'At the same time, Saturday night, our Seascap guests will be occupying the site, to make sure we control the environment. One couple are largely ignorant of the real mission, they're just having a lazy weekend on the peninsula – guests who have booked a room to make sure all the beds are full. The other two are Julie and Virginia, who will stay on Sunday morning to secure the house and make sure nobody else arrives until we do.'

'Petra, Warren and I will leave in separate cars on Sunday morning. I'll be in my rental Ford, Warren will have the other Volvo - identical to Martin's. Petra will tell Martin that she is going to see her parents, and leave the house early. We will all meet at Seascap before 11am and secure it. Once secure, I'll drop Virginia and Julie at the ferry terminal for the Island of the Dead tour.'

Her fingers moved south on the map as she traced the route.

'From Seascap, Warren will phone the Police and tell them the glass jar is full of heroin. There's only two cops in the area, and SOP requires both of them to attend a drug bust. They will be at Saltwater Creek, miles away on a dirt road when the shooting happens.'

Warren nodded, and noticed the others had no objections.

'Warren will leave Seascap about 12.30 in the second Volvo - he has to be off the road well before Martin arrives for his 1.30 lunch. Drive to the ferry terminal and park as close as possible to the dock. When Martin arrives, we will drug him and then kill him with a knife, along with the owners of Seascap. We don't want any unexpected bullets showing up in their bodies - that would raise questions we just don't need.'

Rebecca moved to the other map, which showed the layout of the Historical Site.

‘Take the blue Prince bag with the guns, get a ticket for the ferry and have something to eat in the cafe. Virginia and Julie will get off the returning ferry about 1.30pm and move your Volvo out of sight, south behind the high ground here. I will leave Seascap at 1.30pm in Martin’s real Volvo, park it in the carpark and then walk back to Seascap.’

Julie spoke up. ‘I know it’s likely to be a busy day, but are you concerned they might notice two similar yellow cars coming through the toll booth in less than an hour?’

Rebecca beamed at her own cleverness, but turned her face into a hideous mask as the proportions of her mouth and eyes were all askew.

‘Good point, but I’ve thought of that. The toll-booth staff take a lunch break at half-past one, I’ve even snaffled a copy of the roster for the day.’ She unfolded a piece of paper from her folder.

‘Aileen Kingston will be on duty until lunch at one thirty. The procedure is to count the takings, compare it with the ticket sales and verify with her supervisor at the Visitor’s Centre.’

Rebecca took a deep breath to relish her own cleverness.

‘So the attendant at the booth will be the lunch shift when I come through in Martin’s real Volvo. I’ve bought a blonde wig, just to be safe, and with my short hair, there will be enough of a resemblance to maintain the illusion. It’s only a five-minute drive from Seascap to the toll booth, so Aileen will be long gone by the time I get there.’

‘Julie and Virginia will get off the ferry, take Warren’s Volvo and drive south, into Tramway Street. It’s completely hidden from view, and you’ll be safe there while the island is attacked.’

Virginia nodded. ‘Okay, makes sense.’

‘I will drive in a few minutes later and put Martin’s real Volvo into the same place. With a hundred tourists wandering around, nobody is going to notice the switch.’

‘Once the ferry is empty, Warren will join the queue and ride over to the Island of the Dead with a hundred others, meeting the other hundred-plus who are waiting for their return ride. Choose your moment, disable the ferry and then create as much mayhem as possible. Shooting, hunting, bleeding, screaming...’ She took a deep breath. ‘I wish I could be there to see it...’

Rebecca’s breathing was ragged again, as the sexual arousal burned through her body. She composed herself and looked the others in turn, silently

inviting questions. There were none, so she continued with the briefing.

‘Anthony, you and the other monitors will have a ring-side seat. Spooks from America, Asia and Europe will be observing the whole circus and assessing our response. Enjoy your lunch in the cafe, then when the circus begins, make your notes about response times, efficiencies, chain-of-command, anything you like. I think it will impress the foreigners - after all, we’ve been doing rehearsal drills regularly over the past five years, and we’ve set up a conference for surgeons in Hobart to make sure there’s enough doctors to treat the wounded.’

‘Once enough people have been shot and - most importantly - left alive but traumatised, Warren will use the shotgun to blow his own head off. Blonde hair, dressed in Martin’s clothes...even the inbred morons at Tasmania Police won’t be overly taxed to put it all together...’

‘While everyone is distracted on the island and the Historic Site, Petra and I will set fire to Seascape. With all the carnage at the island, nobody is going to be concerned about three people dying in an unrelated house fire. The fire will make the bodies unrecognisable, and with no bullets in them, no questions will be asked.’

‘Once it’s fully dark, about 7.00pm, I will drive Petra in my car to rendezvous with Julie and Virginia, still hidden on a back street in the Historic Site. We will dispose of Warren’s Volvo by dumping it down a dirt road near Cape Raoul and burning it. It’s one of the most remote places in Australia, nobody is going to find it for a long time.’

Warren looked at Rebecca and nodded in approval.

‘Simple is best. Nice and clean,’ he said.

Rebecca nodded, her chest still heaving a little in lust at the idea of bloodshed and terror. ‘Any questions?’

Virginia spoke up. ‘So we get off the ferry, take Warren’s Volvo out of sight while the shooting happens. What if we’re spotted?’

Rebecca pointed to the map of the Historic Site. ‘Look at all this area to the south. There are abandoned buildings and criss-crossing roads everywhere. Keep moving if you need to, but stay in that south quadrant until dark. Petra and I will find you and then we will exit via Bond Street and the south gate onto Safety Cove Road.’

Virginia nodded. ‘I suppose everyone will be overwhelmed with the chaos, they’re not going to remember things in the right order. I’ll tell Julie to bring

a thermos of coffee and some muffins to share while we wait...’

Rebecca frowned. ‘This is serious. Make sure you’re familiar with the area. Do a reconnaissance trip on Saturday.’

Virginia smiled. ‘Already booked. We’re also doing the ghost tour at night, to double check.’

Anthony frowned. ‘Sorry, can we go back a bit...why do we need two identical cars?’

Rebecca took a moment to collect her thoughts. ‘Public perception, mostly. The gunman needs to be seen getting out of Martin’s car, but we can’t get Martin’s car while he’s still in it. We have to pre-position the shooter on-site, then bring Martin’s car in later, stuffed full of evidence linking him to the shooting.’

‘Warren will drive the decoy Volvo and park down near the water, right near the ferry so Julie and Virginia can move it. Once Martin is secured at Seascape, I’ll load his real one up with ammo, targets, fuel cans, and firelighters and bring it down. By the time the shooting is over, nobody will notice the switch.’

Anthony nodded. ‘And with Warren’s Volvo out of sight until dark, nobody will realise there were two...okay.’

‘That reminds me,’ said Rebecca, fishing in her pocket. ‘Car keys. We all need a set of each other’s Volvo keys.’

‘Yes,’ said Petra. ‘I’ve had some copies of Martin’s key made, tested them - all work.’

Rebecca’s bony fingers worked quickly to thread the different keys onto keyrings and she handed one to Warren, another to Virginia.

‘Redundancy,’ she said. ‘Just in case there’s an emergency, any one of us can get Martin’s car into position, and/or Warren’s out of the area. Good?’

Everyone nodded, there were no questions. Rebecca glanced at her notes.

‘Now, this is one of the most important things.’ She looked at Warren and Petra, to make sure she had their attention. ‘The psychological effect is the main objective of this operation, so we need to tie everything in as closely as possible, package it for the media, okay?’

Warren squinted, ‘You mean, like propaganda?’

Rebecca nodded. ‘Exactly. You need to speak and behave like everything the public hates, so we can link that with semi auto guns, in the mind of the people watching.’ She waved her hands around as she searched for the right

expressions. ‘Wogs, nips, wasps, and seppos...all the derogatory names for foreigners...you need to make some kind of statement about foreigners, right before the shooting.’

‘But not kill the people who hear me, right?’ Warren chuckled, and Rebecca pointed a gnarled, bony finger at him in approval.

‘Right. Have a think about a quick statement, using a selection of offensive words that urban voters will find disgusting, repulsive. Do not, repeat not, use slang from Africa - it has to be Australian. Try to get into Martin’s head, use his accent, okay?’

Warren nodded thoughtfully. ‘So...these racist comments will be repeated to the media by the survivors of a massacre with semi auto rifles...linking the guns - which the audience don’t use or understand, to racism - which they hate...’

He opened his eyes wide in an expression of appreciation at the understanding of psychology that Rebecca wielded.

‘Wow...that’s...umm...yeah, okay. I can do that.’

‘Good,’ said Rebecca sternly. ‘That’s the fundamentals, the whole point of the operation. Effecting changes we want, via social engineering. Managing not only the tragedy but sowing the seeds for decades of subconscious exploitation to come.’

Petra and Martin were lying sideways on the couch, watching TV. Petra had snuggled half-way into his lap, then leaned back so she could look up at him and he could cuddle her.

When the show went to an ad break, she took a deep breath. ‘Martin?’

He looked at her with his eyebrows raised. ‘Mmmm?’

‘We need to have a talk. About how we should act in public. Behaviour, yeah?’

Martin screwed his eyes half-closed, his body tensed with anxiety. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Look, we have lots of sex, right? And that’s good. But that doesn’t mean everyone else does.’

He frowned, so she pressed on.

‘You can’t treat other women and girls the same way you treat me. You and me, we’re special, we have this close relationship, you understand? But on the bus, out in public, you’ve got to keep your hands to yourself, okay?’

Martin nodded. ‘I thought you...they...it would be nice to have sex with everyone. I like it, you like it, everyone will like it.’

Petra shook her head. ‘No, that’s not okay in society, okay? It’s just for you and me.’ She stroked his cheek to soften the emotional sting.

‘But...they’re so pretty, like you... I like doing it with you, why can’t I do it with them too?’

She frowned. ‘There are rules in society, Martin. You might think its okay, but other people don’t. Remember the bus driver? He could have gotten you in trouble with the police. You don’t want that, do you?’

Martin moped. ‘I suppose you’re right. I’ve always been lonely. Everyone made fun of me when I was a kid, never had any friends.’

Petra stroked his face. ‘It’s okay now, love. I’m your friend, aren’t I? I’ve met some people, they can be your friends too if you want. We can help you do something that everyone will remember you for. You’ll be famous.’ Her hand ran down his chest, past his belt and cupped him gently.

His face lit up. ‘Like a movie star?’

‘Shhh, yes love. Like a movie star. But you have to play your part, okay? You need to remember some things, and keep some other things secret, okay?’ Her hand squeezed around him and his whole body tensed up.

He swallowed, and nodded vigorously.

‘You’re going to do exactly what I tell you to do. Yes?’

He nodded again and she squeezed again.

‘Say it.’

‘Yes, yes...I’ll do....everything....everything you say.’

‘And you’ll show me how your guns work? Take me shooting?’

He tensed again. ‘Ahhh....yesssss... Yes, okay.’

She kissed him deeply, then took his hand and shoved it inside her shirt. Threat and reward, this was as simple as training a puppy. Squeeze his nuts as a warning, then reward the desired response with pleasure. With his blonde, shaggy hair, Martin reminded her of a Labrador puppy - energetic, always happy but uncoordinated and unpredictable. Seducing him had been as easy as it was unpleasant, but Petra looked at it a just part of the job - a puppy that needed training in order to do what its master commanded.

Master, or mistress? Mistress, definitely. She lay back on the couch as he mounted her, distracting herself from the task by thinking about the irony in the situation.

She didn't need to think about it for very long.

27 March 1996

Guns and Ammo in Hobart was quiet, as was normal for a Wednesday morning. The owner, Terry Hill was stacking boxes of shotgun ammunition in a glass display case when the front door opened and a young man shuffled in. Standing up, Terry watched the customer approach, weaving a little as he moved between racks of clothing and accessories. Above average height, he had curly blonde hair that fell to touch his shoulders, and he carried a wool blanket, cradled in both arms.

As the young man approached the counter, Terry put on a smile, made eye contact and nodded in greeting.

‘Morning,’ he said. ‘How can I help you?’

The man twitched open the blanket and Terry recognised the barrel and receiver of an AR10 semi-automatic rifle. It was notable because the top of the receiver had a flat carry-handle, like the M16, with a curved hook inside the handle, just behind the front post. This hook was connected to the bolt, moving forwards and backwards as the rifle was fired. Later models changed this by creating a T-shaped hook below the rear sight, which would be pulled back with two fingers to load a round into the breech, then slide forward under pressure from the spring.

‘Something’s wrong with it,’ he muttered. ‘It’s not shooting.’

Terry nodded. The probable cause was a broken firing pin, which could be easily fixed.

‘Okay, let’s have a quick look at it, and I’ll quote for repairs. Can I see your licence?’

Awkwardly cradling the rifle and fishing in his pocket, the customer pulled out his wallet and extracted a laminated piece of paper, the size of a driver’s licence. In 1991, the Tasmanian government had updated the licence system from ordinary paper licences to laminated photo identification, but there were still thousands of Tasmanians who still held the older style, which would only be updated to the laminated version when renewed. This one had been issued recently.

Terry looked at the pink-tinged card, noting the red stripe across the top with white lettering that read GUN LICENCE, TASMANIA. Rows of red lions -

the symbol of Tasmania's government – were spaced across the background as a watermark. The rest of the card had a passport photograph of a blonde man, a date of birth and a name, Martin Ryan.

Satisfied, Terry indicated that he could take the rifle and was horrified when Martin handed it over with the barrel pointed at his chest - a grave breach of every safety rule. If the gun had fired accidentally, he would have been killed - no question about it. The .308 calibre bullet was designed for large game like deer, lions and bears, and the safety rules existed for good reason. No firearm should ever be pointed at anything the operator was not willing to destroy, and Martin had just breached this cardinal rule as if he didn't even know it existed.

Breathing hard from the shock, Terry turned the rifle away from his body and pointed it at the floor. He pressed the magazine release and stressed even more when he saw the gleam of brass inside it.

'Holy shit', he thought. This kid just walked around in public, with a loaded firearm. He looked up at Martin, but the kid was looking around at the other guns on the racks, not paying attention to his own rifle.

Now Terry was becoming angry. Attitudes like this about safety were reckless and a danger to everyone. He completed the safety check by putting a finger inside the carry handle and pulling back the charging hook. To his horror, there was a PING and another shiny .308 cartridge flew out of the rifle and clattered off the counter and onto the floor.

The shock almost stopped his heart.

'You.....you....' It took Terry a moment to process the shock of just how close he had become to being killed. 'You pointed a loaded gun at me,' he finally managed to say.

His words brought Martin's attention back to the rifle. 'Yeah, it's not shooting,' he said again, ignoring the words and accusatory tone of the gun dealer. 'Can you look at it?'

Terry resolved to keep the firearm safely in his possession for as long as possible. This guy obviously knew nothing about firearm safety, and Terry felt it was his duty to society to keep firearms away from irresponsible people.

Satisfied that the unloaded rifle was now simply a club, Terry looked into the open breech. He couldn't see anything obviously wrong, so he unscrewed the pin and the rifle barrel swung forward, where it was hinged at the receiver.

He looked into the barrel, expecting to see a spot of daylight through the tube, but it was black.

‘Huh,’ he grunted in satisfaction. ‘Obstructed barrel.’

Martin looked at him, wide eyed. ‘So you think you can fix it?’

Terry rummaged through a box of tools and equipment on the floor and came up with a hammer and a thin metal rod, about a meter long. Holding the rifle upright by the barrel, he pushed the rod into the opening until it came to rest, then rapped it lightly with the hammer.

A chunk of lead fell out of the barrel onto the counter with a dull thud and Martin’s eyes widened in shock. ‘Oh,’ he said slowly. ‘It was blocked?’

Terry picked up the blob of metal and looked at it closely.

Then he picked up the single cartridge that had been ejected from the chamber. The flat base was stamped .308W. He nodded slowly as he decided what to say.

‘Okay, Martin. Here’s the problem, well, a couple of problems.’ He pulled the rod out of the rifle and put it and the hammer back in the box.

‘There’s different bullets, different types, you understand?’

Martin nodded. ‘Oh yeah. Calibres. 223, 308...’

Terry nodded slowly. ‘That part of it, but there’s more to it. This rifle is chambered in .308 so technically, these .308 bullets might fit. But these bullets you’ve got, they’re just ordinary lead. It’s softer, which is fine for bolt action hunting rifles. Your rifle here needs copper jackets – hard bullets, like they use in the military. Full Metal Jacket^[5].’

Martin nodded slowly but Terry wasn’t certain that he understood.

‘I like that movie,’ was all he said.

Terry showed him the crumpled bullet. ‘When you fired this rifle, the bullet got stuck, just inside. Which is lucky for you, if it had gone any further, the second round would have fed, and then the gun would have blown up when you tried to shoot it a second time...’

‘Looks like the second round jammed on the stuck bullet, just enough so it didn’t lock the bolt, and snapped the firing pin so it couldn’t fire.’ He looked at Martin and became deadly serious. ‘You are the luckiest bloke I have ever met, mate. Jesus, less than a millimetre in the wrong direction, you coulda lost a hand, or an eye...’

Martin nodded slowly, then laughed. ‘Wow, guess I really got lucky then. Can I get some of the right bullets?’

Terry thought swiftly. He did not want to give the rifle back to someone with such appalling safety skills, but the bullets were effectively useless without a rifle to fire them. He vaguely remembered that Martin had another rifle, an AR15, but that was chambered in .223 and the .308 bullets wouldn't even fit. Besides, the kid had money and business was business.

'I do have the right bullets, Martin. But it's a bulk lot I got on special some time ago – three thousand rounds. Not much demand for them.'

Martin nodded, 'I'll take 'em... how much?'

Terry leafed through a large notebook on the bench, then took a deep breath. He wasn't sure the kid would fall for this one, but it wouldn't hurt to try. 'Nine hundred and thirty dollars.'

Martin grinned. 'Easy...but I don't have the money today. I'll have to go to the bank.'

'Martin, that's fine,' said Terry, overjoyed at being able to offload unwanted stock at retail prices. 'But when you come back, park right outside the shop, okay? Three thousand .308 rounds is seventy kilos, you understand? It's a hundred and fifty boxes, so you'll need to make several trips out to your car, okay?'

Martin nodded slowly, on second thought, that was a lot of ammo and he didn't really shoot all that often. It was owning the guns that made him feel like the star of an action movie, actually shooting them – he didn't really enjoy that... 'Let me think about it,' he said. 'I'll get back to you on Monday, okay?'

Terry nodded. 'That's fine, mate.' He opened his hands, palms out over the opened rifle on the bench. 'It's going to take some time to get this fixed, you understand? Your bolt assembly's probably damaged, the firing pin is broken...goodness knows what else we'll find once we take it apart.'

As Martin left the shop, Terry scooped the parts of the rifle into a cardboard box and carried it into the storage area at the back of the shop. Mentally re-living the final warehouse scene from Raiders of the Ark, he set it down on a table cluttered with other boxes, paper, tools and firearms parts, then went back into the shop to serve other customers.

23 April, 1996

All of Petra's talk about guns had stoked Martin's interest in buying another one. He went back to Stuart Woods' gun shop and handled another AR15, but as Petra had his licence, Stuart refused to make the sale. He went into Terry Hill's shop again, asking if his AR10 was working, but Terry told him it was still being looked at.

'Ahh, that's too bad. I bought all those bullets, almost a grand's worth. Now they're wasted if I can't use the rifle.'

Terry nodded in sympathy. 'I know how you feel, mate. But it's in pieces at the moment, and I'm waiting for parts to arrive...'

Martin looked at the other rifles on the wall. 'I want a room like this at home, you know?' He waved his hands at Terry. 'Like in the movies, a couple of rows of guns on the wall, so I can choose whichever one I want to use that day.'

He looked at the classic timber-and-steel form of an AK47, running his hands over the cool metal and remembering all the good scenes from the movies he had seen.

'Can I have this one? I'll give you four thousand?'^[6]

Terry was about to speak, but paused as he saw the look of regret and shame that crossed Martin's face.

'What's wrong, mate?'

'Ahh, shit...sorry....I just remembered...I can't access the money...the Trustee cut off my money...'

Terry was relieved. Given Martin's obvious ignorance about guns in general, he was glad that the young man couldn't buy more, and relieved Martin wouldn't blame him for refusing the sale. He wagged his head in sympathy.

'Sorry to hear that, mate. You're welcome to look around, any time, okay?'

Martin shrugged. 'Okay, thanks. Can you call me when the AR10 is ready?'

'Sure I will, mate,' said Terry. 'But it's probably going to be a while, gotta wait for them to be shipped from the mainland.'

Disappointed and angry, Martin left the shop and got back in the Volvo, slamming the door in frustration. Petra wanted him to let her shoot the AR10 and now he would have to explain that he didn't have it.

It was a conversation he dreaded having.

Wednesday 24 April, 1996

5.30pm

Anthony Nightingale was sitting in his own motel room, drinking an ice-cold beer in preparation for an evening out in the clubs when there was a rapid knocking on the door. He opened it and Rebecca, obviously distraught, pushed past him into the room and banged the door shut.

'Come in, why don't you,' he asked sarcastically. But Rebecca was in no mood for sarcasm.

'We're in the shit, Anthony,' she said tersely. 'Martin's AR10? The one Warren needs for the ferry? It's gone.'

Anthony's eyes opened wide in surprise. 'How? Why?'

'Petra just rang me. She said Martin went out for a shoot with it the other day - without her knowing, managed to break it or something. He dropped it into a gun shop for repairs, but the owner won't give it back.'

'Fuck.' Anthony swallowed the last of his beer and tossed the can onto the sink. 'Sounds like she needs to keep him on a tighter leash.'

'We are GO on Sunday.' Rebecca began pulling at her hair. 'We need that rifle. The SLR is too long for the bag that Petra bought, but we can't use another bag because she was with Martin when she bought it. We need the bag because we need to link him to it.' She snapped her fingers.

'Warren can probably fix it. Can you break into the shop and get it?'

Anthony looked at her with surprise. 'Are you that stupid? That would make things worse.'

He took a breath and said, 'No, leave it there. It doesn't matter. Here's what we do: I'll get another AR10 - same place I got the SLR, okay? Warren can use Martin's AR15 and shotgun, nobody will be looking too closely at the guns, anyway.'

Rebecca's eyes narrowed as she ran through contingencies. 'Okay, fine. Can you get an AR10 in three days?'

Anthony nodded. 'Sure, ammo too. Magazines might be an issue though, your boy might have to reload from loose ammo in boxes, but I'm sure he can handle that.'

'Okay, good,' Rebecca took a deep breath and let it out. Now that she seemed

to have a solution for the crisis, she was much calmer.

‘Thank you,’ she said formally, looking him sincerely in the eye to show Anthony that she appreciated his help and that she understood what was involved. She looked at his crotch and cocked her head to the side. ‘Want a little something else? Show you how grateful I am?’ She smiled what she hoped was a seductive, vampish invitation but he took a step back and shook his head.

‘Thanks for the offer, but you’re not my type. I’ll drop the AR10 and the ammo into your room after lunch tomorrow, okay?’

Rebecca bit back her frustration and nodded. ‘Much appreciated. I’ve gotta go - I’m due for a conference call with one of the Police union brass hats.’

‘Oh yeah?’ Anthony was interested. ‘What about?’

Rebecca blew out a deep breath of stress and frustration. ‘All this legislation. We need to secure key support from so many different stakeholders and they all have different ideas about how they want it to look. It’s a massive shitfight, lots of resistance from some areas. I’m doing deals, bribes and shakedowns left, right and centre. And Howard needs a lot more spine if he’s going to ram it through parliament in time.’

Anthony nodded. ‘Before people have a chance to use evidence-based analysis on it?’

‘Exactly. We need to strike while emotion is hot, before the facts get in the way of the legislation. I’ll readily accept that none of the laws will stop something like this happening again, gun violence in Australia is on a steady decline anyway. But that’s not the point.’

Anthony rubbed his chin. ‘Are you even sure you can get it through parliament? I mean...you’re going against the written constitution of the country.’

‘I know that,’ Rebecca snapped. ‘The constitution specifically limits all aspects of gun laws to the states - the Federal Government has no jurisdiction at all. That’s why I’m so busy, I need to get buy-in from all the states and some of them are just obstinate.’

‘Well, can’t say I blame them,’ chuckled the older man. ‘An American agent, trying to do an end-run around the Constitution, take away the means of the country to defend itself...’ He cocked an eyebrow. ‘It doesn’t look good.’

‘I’m up to the task,’ she fired back. ‘And I’ve gotta go. Thanks for the AR10.’

Then she left as quickly as she had arrived.

Thursday 25 April, 1996

ANZAC Day

Petra had gone with Martin to Richmond for the ANZAC Day ceremony.

Warren was sitting on the bed in Rebecca's motel room as she paced the floor just in front of him. Seated on separate chairs were two of the other women in the plot - Julie and Virginia. Daylight was streaming into the room through the curtains, and there was the occasional traffic sound from outside as the world went about its business.

'You've been briefed on Plan A,' Rebecca said. Her dull voice and lack of inflection gave Warren the feeling that she was teaching a maths or geography class, rather than plotting the murder of dozens, hundreds of people. Just business, nothing out of the ordinary, just a normal day at the office.

'Now I'm briefing you on Plan B. This is Top Secret, not to leave this room, understood? Petra is the only other person in the world who knows about Plan B.'

Warren nodded, he was used to plans being modified like this. 'Yeah, understood,' he said clearly. Julie and Virginia nodded as well.

Rebecca paused and struck a pose like a school teacher. 'What's the first rule of assassinations?'

Warren knew the answer to this one, it had been part of the history courses that all paras were taught. 'Kill the assassins once they finish the job,' he grinned ironically. 'No need to worry about me,' he added. 'I'm outta here, soon as we're done. No way do I want a slow, agonising death from AIDS.'

Rebecca pointed a finger at him like a teacher complimenting a good student. 'Correct, good. Still, there are others - Anthony Nightingale & Andrew Mills for instance. They both work for ASIO, our version of the CIA. They know enough about this plan and the people involved to blow it apart, you understand? If they ever went to the press, or found themselves blackmailed, or in debt...'

Warren nodded. 'There's any number of ways they could let the cat out of the

bag.'

Rebecca gave him a nod. 'So you also understand that they need to be silenced. They are going to be in the cafe, watching the action as it unfolds and making notes about how our emergency crews respond. This information is supposed to be propagated to other agencies to help them create response plans, save lives in future, you know? If something like this happens again...'

Warren nodded. 'Debriefings,' he said tonelessly. He firmly believed that Rebecca would be creating similar mass shootings around the world in the future, to drive her agenda in other countries.

'Correct,' Rebecca continued. 'Sadly, the agencies will need to do without this information, so that they may heed a warning...' She paused, as a vision of Martin on the plane came to her, of him laughing and saying '*don't fuck with the Chuck!*'

Shaking her head to clear the flashback, she finished the sentence...'that you don't fuck with the UN!'

'So we are changing the target. Plan B is a secret change to the mission scope. Warren, you will now be shooting early, inside the cafe. Most of the spooks - the observers must, **MUST** be killed or seriously wounded, understand? We have to send the loudest message possible that we know who they are, and what will happen.'

Warren shrugged. 'No problem here, I'll be able to ID them as I enter the cafe, I'll make sure they are tagged in the middle of the sweep, blend em all in with the others. That way, anyone who knows who they are will get the message, but the general population won't see anything different about any particular group of victims.'

Rebecca nodded. 'Good. Have a think about ways we can get the same message out to the general public. Nobody wants to think their government is evil, but we should try to capitalise on that. See if we can get them worried about the idea that hey, if the government can snatch a retarded guy and frame him for mass murder, which man or woman in the street is safe from the same fate?'

Warren nodded. 'That's a very uncomfortable thought,' he said. 'Martin is a completely below-average, non-threatening bloke. He's not a political activist or agitator, so if someone like him can get fingered, then that idea really destroys the cotton wool that people want to live in, yeah?'

Rebecca smiled, a thin, fish-like smile that gave Warren the creeps. 'That's

exactly what we're going for.'

Warren was eager to move the conversation forward. 'Okay, what next?'

Rebecca nodded. 'The plan is to burn down Seascap, with everything inside. Nice and neat. All they will find is the burned bodies and guns, assume Martin did it all before he died and go from there.'

But let's think worst case scenario. Let's say the Seascap fire doesn't burn them properly, or it rains and puts out the fire. How hard will the police try to prove the guns belonged to Martin?'

Warren shrugged. 'Best thing they'll try is ballistic matching.'

Rebecca gestured to him to continue, so he elaborated.

'The barrel of a gun contains grooves - rifling,' he said. 'When a bullet is fired, the brass casing compresses into the breech, and the bullet is scored by the rifling as it moves down the barrel. Theoretically, if you found an intact casing, and less likely, a bullet that hadn't fragmented, you could use a microscope to compare the surface area with the insides of the rifle to see if they match.'

He shrugged. 'It's a very imprecise science, but that's where they'll start.'

Rebecca stroked her chin. 'Are you saying we should destroy the rifles?'

Warren nodded. 'What you could do is create a squib load - a round with the wrong type of powder - fast burning, or a few grams of C4, in behind the bullet. At the end of the mission, load that round and fire it, and the overpressure will blow up the chamber. Then you can burn the house down around them, and it will look like the ammunition exploded in the fire.'

'Rebecca did a double-take. 'Doesn't that happen, anyway?'

Warren shook his head. 'It takes a lot of heat to set off ammo, and the magazine would go first, because it's only thin metal, doesn't take as long to heat up. Those bullets would explode, but the round in the actual chamber has a lot of metal around it.'

Rebecca looked blank. 'I don't know anything about guns,' she admitted. 'It's just my job to get them banned.'

Warren shrugged. 'A gun is just a pressure vessel. It has to be sealed, so when the bullet is fired, it goes out the right way, instead of back at the user. So the bolt mechanism is a big, solid lump of metal that seals the cartridge in the breech, to contain all that heat & pressure and channel it out in front. There's no guarantee a fire would get hot enough to cook off a round actually in the chamber. It would have to be done deliberately.'

Rebecca nodded. 'Can you do it?'

Warren shrugged. 'Unless you have some C4 lying around, I'll hafta use the powder method.'

Rebecca fished around in a folder and pulled out a small piece of plastic, similar in size to a business card. 'Here, go to a gun shop and buy whatever you need.'

Warren looked at the card. It was a laminated firearms licence, made out to Martin RYAN, and stated the owner was licensed to use semi and fully automatic weapons. The photo was close enough to his own, and he raised his eyebrows in surprise.

'Wow. Where'd you get this?'

Rebecca shrugged. 'A contact of mine does a good business in licences and home-made guns. Martin has already used that licence at Terry Hill's so go to a different shop, okay? And don't lose it - give it back to Petra once you've got what you need, in case we need to get Martin to buy some emergency supplies at short notice.'

Warren stuffed the licence into his pocket as Rebecca turned over a page in her notes.

'Petra will set you up with access to Martin and some of his clothes. Your cover story is that you are filming an action movie, which is why you are going to be talking about guns. Invite him to a lunch at Seascape on Sunday. It doesn't matter what else you talk about - just get his ass to Seascape at one thirty, okay?'

Warren nodded. 'Squib loads in .223 and .308, one thirty lunch at Seascape. I'll get the hand loading gear and make them up tonight.' He frowned. 'I have a question.'

Rebecca raised her thin eyebrows and waited for him to speak.

'Can we go through the transport plan? What cars are we taking and where are we parking?'

'Sure,' Rebecca said, turning back to the map. She pointed at Hobart.

'Plan B, from the top. You will spend the night at Martin's house to get his clothes, guns and ammo. You will make sure Martin is coming to lunch at Seascape.'

'In the morning, you and Petra will leave the house early. You will take your Volvo, Petra will take Martin's Honda Civic. That will force him to drive his Volvo. Virginia and Julie will be at Seascape overnight, and will head for the

ferry about nine thirty in the morning. Petra and I will drive down together and hide our cars in the caravan park just south of the Fox and Hounds pub. It's a convenient location between Seascapes and Port Arthur, with heaps of strange vehicles coming and going - nobody will pay us any attention. We will walk up to Seascapes, meet you there about ten thirty and secure it.'

Warren nodded. 'Okay, leave Hobart about nine, it's about a ninety minute drive, yeah?'

'Yes,' Rebecca continued. 'Martin will be planning to meet you at one thirty for lunch, driving his yellow Volvo. So it's important that you be inside the Historic Site well before then.'

'You will park near the jetty, so Virginia and Julie can easily shift your Volvo into Tramway Street and hide it behind the ruins. Once Martin is secure, Petra will stay with him while I drive his Volvo down into the carpark. You'll be able to see me coming down the driveway, that's your signal to attack.'

'I will leave Martin's Volvo unlocked, but I'll take the keys out and walk back up the coast, through the bush. Once the shooting is over, you will use your keys, start it and drive back to Seascapes. It's about a thirty minute walk, so we should arrive back at Seascapes about the same time.' Her fingers moved over the map as she traced the respective movements.

'Leading the cops there, start of a siege.' Warren understood that part.

'Exactly,' said Rebecca. 'There will be hundreds of traumatised victims but the medics cannot enter a crime scene until it is secured by police - that's the law. So we need to drag the siege out as long as we can, to delay them allowing medics in for as long as possible.'

Warren nodded. 'Yeah, you've made that clear. Quick question, what's going to keep Martin secure inside the building?'

Rebecca smiled. 'A combination of GHB and Scopolamine,' she said. 'Date rape drug. It will knock him out, scramble his memories but it will be out of his system by the time the siege ends. After dark, Petra and I will exit on foot the way we arrived, following the coastline down to the caravan park to get my car.'

'Warren, you will hold off the cops for as long as possible. Hopefully until dawn. Then, set the house on fire, use the blaze to distract the cops and exit north.' She pointed at the empty farmland and state forest that surrounded Seascapes. 'Cross the Arthur highway without being seen, and make your way

west to Grooms Hill Road and Nubeena Back Road - here.'

She pointed to a location north of Nubeena, where the uninhabitable high ground descended to more arable plains.

'It's less than seven kilometres. You can't miss the intersection, I will pick you up there at ten in the morning - not a minute later. We will drive to a phone booth here, in Taranna and make the phone calls to release payment to your family.'

Warren nodded. That was the whole reason he was here.

'After that, it's up to you.' She looked at him with lust in her eyes. 'Have you thought about how you want to go?'

He shrugged. 'You don't want to risk anyone finding a body, do you? So I was thinking...what about the ocean?'

She nodded. 'Top of the cliffs, quick and clean.'

She licked her lips again, plainly excited by thoughts of his death. 'Any other questions?'

There were none.

'Okay then. You two ladies can relax for a few days. Warren and I need to go shopping.'

Leaving the motel room and squinting in the bright sunlight, Virginia and Julie started down the street to get some food, while Rebecca led Warren over to her rental car.

He pulled open the passenger door and got in.

'Nice day for shopping,' he quipped, as he buckled the seat belt.

'Cut the small talk and focus on the mission,' she said. 'What do we need?'

A sense of humour, he thought, but decided to keep his mouth shut.

'Roof racks and a surfboard for my Volvo, something to tie it down with, a glass jar, soap powder...I need fresh socks and shreddies, too.'

'Shreddies?'

'You know...underpants.'

'Oh, okay. Let's start with Kmart. They will have the jar, powder and clothes. They might even have the roof racks.'

Two hours later, they arrived back at Warren's motel room. He sat behind Rebecca in the car, because the front passenger seat had to be laid back to fit the surfboard in.

Rebecca helped him carry the shopping into the room, then shut the door behind her.

‘Okay, just to recap,’ she said. ‘On Saturday afternoon, I’ll drive you down to Saltwater Creek. Virginia and Julie will already be at Seascape, and they will take the ghost tour to familiarise themselves with the area in the dark. We will return here just on dusk, you’ll take the surfboard and roof racks and put them on your Volvo. You’ll drive it to Clare Street and sleep the night, collecting some of Martin’s clothes from Petra.’

‘In the morning, we will drive down separately and meet at Seascape about ten thirty. We will secure it and the Martins, then you will drive down to the ferry. Martin will arrive soon after, then Plan B is in effect.’

Warren nodded. ‘Simple is good.’

Friday 26th April

Petra invited Warren to meet her and Martin for lunch at KFC. He had met Petra at the briefing sessions in Rebecca's motel room, but this was his first time speaking to Martin. The crowded public location was perfect - nobody would look twice at two blonde men eating at the same table. They would assume they were related.

He spotted the young woman with the straight, dark hair sitting across the crowded restaurant. All he could see of her partner was his back, and a shock of golden blonde hair cascading to his shoulders. He walked over as Petra looked up and smiled at him.

'Martin, this is Warren. He's one of the new friends I told you about.'

Mouth full of chicken, Martin nodded as Warren sat down. 'You making the movie?'

'Action movie, yeah...like Under Siege, is this mine?' He nodded at a cardboard box of chicken and chips on a tray, with a can of lemonade.

Petra nodded. 'I got you some, save you waiting in the queue.'

'Thanks.'

Warren stuffed some chicken into his mouth and carefully eyed Martin as he ate. Petra's boyfriend was older than him, by about ten years, but at a glance they could pass for brothers. Martin's hair was longer than Warren's, and his complexion was clear and smooth, but the similarities were strong. The main difference was their nose. Warren's was sharply curved, like a ski-jump but Martin's was long and straight.

The can hissed as he cracked it open and the fizzy lemonade tickled his nose as he drank. 'You ever done any acting, mate?'

Martin shook his head. 'Nahh, but I like action movies, I like guns. You talk funny.'

Warren smiled, deliberately not taking offense at the blunt comment. 'Ahaa, my accent. Yeah, I'm not from around here, I'm from South Africa.'

Martin's eyes opened wide. 'Africa? Wow. That's somewhere I never been. What's it like?'

'What's Africa like?' Warren struggled to find the words. 'It's a big place, a wild place...but very beautiful. There's mountains, jungles, beaches, all

different kinds of people.'

'What about SCUBA diving?' Martin had a funny habit of maintaining eye contact for long periods. Staring. Warren found it upsetting.

'I've never done any,' he said mildly. 'But yeah, people go diving, fishing...'

'What's the movie about?'

Warren was startled at how quickly Martin changed the subject.

'Oh...it's an action movie. Good guy witnesses a bank robbery, bad guys try to hunt him down. But he's not innocent, so he's trying to get away from the cops and the bad guys at the same time.'

Martin looked impressed, and Warren felt impressed at himself, making up such a good storyline.

'We all need to catch up,' said Petra. 'Have a few drinks, that would be fun, wouldn't it?'

'Yeah, sure,' said Warren with a smile. 'Tomorrow? What time?'

Petra looked at Martin. 'Well, we're having dinner with Martin's mum tomorrow. Might go to the movies...'

'Yeah, look, I'm busy in the early evening, so that's fine. I'll come over after dinner, talk about the movie...'

Warren wiped his hands on the little refresher towel and stood up to put the rubbish into a bin. 'Okay, sounds good. I'll see you tomorrow night. Ten thirty?'

Martin was still eating, but nodded and waved. Crumbs fell from onto the table as he said 'Tomorrow night' with his mouth full.

Warren smiled at Petra, who gave him a smile filled with pain and regret. Warren detected a hint of relief that the operation would soon be over, but maybe that was just his imagination.

'I need a duffel bag, something to carry my equipment in - a...tripod...that's over a meter long. Any idea where I can buy one around here?'

Petra pointed to her left. 'About three blocks that way, there's a department store. You'll get something in there.'

Warren nodded and smiled. 'Thanks much. See you tomorrow night.'

Saturday 27 April - Seascape Guest House

1.45pm

David & Sally Martin had bought Seascape as a way to supplement their retirement, both financially and socially. The complex had three structures but only two were residences - the "Pink Palace" was the main house where the Martin's lived and meals were served, and a two-story outbuilding where guests could stay. There was another large shed that was under renovation, which would be another guest cottage when it was finished. The three buildings were laid out in a triangle around a grassy area, with a gravel driveway that branched on two sides of the main house.

The couple were pleased with the business, which had steady bookings from tourists visiting the area. The recent good weather had ensure the rooms were full, and the Martins had declined further booking requests as both guest houses were taken for the weekend.

David was sweeping leaves off the front porch when he heard tyres crunching on the gravel driveway. Stephanie and Donald Gunn had booked ahead, and David welcomed them to Seascape. The couple checked in, carried their bags over to their cottage and then saw the sights around Port Arthur^[7].

The porch swept, David read the newspaper and did some gardening while waiting for their second lot of guests. The other guest rooms were booked by two women, who arrived about 4.30pm. By late afternoon, everyone was settled in and the visitor's book for the weekend was completed with neat script:

*S & D Gunn - Hobart. Lovely spot, thanks for having us!
Julie & Virginia from Sydney.*

As the sun set, the Gunn's went out to eat at Kelley's - a restaurant nearby, while Julie & Virginia ate dinner with the Martins and then left to take the Port Arthur Ghost Tour. The Gunn's returned to the main house about nine o'clock, chatting with the Martins until the two other women returned about

an hour later^[8].

By ten pm, the three bedrooms were dark and quiet, awaiting the onslaught that tomorrow would bring.

Saturday, 27 April 1996

Hobart motel

Dusk

Warren's butt was sore from sitting in Rebecca's car for over two hours.

The trip itself had been uneventful. A long drive on a single-lane road, through rolling green country and across a cute rotating bridge with ocean on both sides. Eventually, the tarmac ended and the dirt road to Saltwater Creek created a dust cloud behind them.

Handling the glass jar with gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints, Warren added a few decent shakes of soap powder and then popped the lid on tight. He walked through the ruins of the convict mining operation and set the jar in place where it was hidden from the road.

That small walk was the only exercise he got. After that it was back in the car and driving north towards Hobart. Rebecca had barely spoken on the way down, and now that the sun was setting, Warren was happy to be alone with his thoughts and let her concentrate on driving.

He wondered what Janet and Hope were doing. Their faces, voices and laughter. He shut his eyes and went back in time, revisiting the good memories. Feeding the light, even though it was a small glow in the overall darkness of his life.

At last, the winding country roads gave way to suburbia, and they passed the airport, the prison and the shopping centre that told Warren they were close to the motel. Rebecca eased the rental Ford to a quiet stop next to the yellow Volvo, then turned to look at him.

'Everything okay? Any final questions?'

Warren ran through the plan in his mind, then shook his head.

'None. Simple is good. I'll see you at Seascapes about ten thirty.'

They got out of the car and closed the doors quietly. Warren pulled out his keyring and fingered the key for his Volvo. 'I'll put the roof racks on, could you get the board and straps?'

Rebecca opened her motel room and retrieved the surfboard, carrying it awkwardly out to where Warren had screwed the metal roof-racks onto the boxy yellow sedan. 'Put it on the passenger side,' she said.

She made another trip to the motel room, carrying the SLR and AR10 that Anthony Nightingale had obtained.

As he strapped the surfboard on top, Rebecca looked into the back seat. 'What's that bag for?' she asked, pointing at a black duffel bag in the back of the car.

'It's to carry the SLR in,' he grunted quietly. 'It won't fit in Petra's blue Prince bag, but I need to get it into the cafe. So I'll put the smaller guns in the blue bag, keep it open but put it and the SLR inside this one and carry the whole thing inside. That way I can leave your smoking gun-bag at the scene, but still have the long rifle on me.'

Rebecca rubbed her chin. 'Okay, that's fine. Oh, I almost forgot. There's only a quarter tank of petrol in there.' She pulled out a wad of cash and held it out. 'There's a bunch of different notes there - I know its strange money but I'm sure you'll manage. Put some extra fuel in, but keep at least a hundred in hand - you'll fifty in need cash to get into the site and you'll want to get some food in the cafe.'

Warren nodded and pocketed the cash. He gently laid the two rifles inside the duffel bag, then straightened up. To reassure Rebecca that he was on point, he looked her in the eye and said 'Maintain Plan A until Plan B kicks off.'

Rebecca smiled. 'That's it then,' she said awkwardly. Hands in her pockets, she shifted her weight from foot to foot, like a teenager hoping for a first kiss but unable to speak the words.

Warren jingled his keys. In the moonlight, her face looked like a turtle.

'Goodnight, see you tomorrow.'

'Goodnight,' she said. 'Good luck.'

He unlocked his Volvo, started the engine and drove off into the night.

30 Clare Street, New Town

Saturday 27 April

9.30pm

Martin and Petra had dinner at Martin's mother's house^[9]. It was a quiet evening and they had a few drinks, then they went to the Cadillac Club looking for Petra's cousin. Unable to find anyone they knew, the couple moved on to Hadley's. After a drink at the hotel, the pair went home as Petra was now confident they had been seen by several witnesses. She had established some truth to sandwich the lies of her cover story.

As they pulled Martin's Honda Civic into the driveway, Warren approached on the footpath. He saw Martin's yellow Volvo in the headlights, a surreal image as he had just parked his identical vehicle around the corner. He was glad it was out of sight as he walked up the pathway, meeting Martin and Petra at the door. The blue Prince sports bag was balled up in his coat pocket.

'Hi Warren,' said Petra. 'How was your afternoon?'

'Good, good,' he said, stepping through the open door as Martin flicked on the lights. 'Some crazy landscape in this country. I like it a lot.'

'You want a drink?' Martin was moving over to the liquor cabinet. 'Got some port, Sambuca...or do you prefer scotch?'

'Ahh, just put the kettle on for me, please,' said Warren. 'Cuppa tea if you got one.'

Martin let out a grunt of surprise and gave Warren a strange look, as if it was impossible to anyone to refuse a drink. 'Yeah, okay. I think we have some tea - that cupboard above the sink.'

Petra ran water into the kettle as Warren looked around the living room. Neat and tidy, there were no piles of rubbish or rotting food anywhere. A bookshelf near the TV held two rows of videotapes, mostly popular action and thriller films. There were no dirty dishes in the sink, so whatever Martin's social problems, he was obviously careful to clean up after himself.

Petra handed Warren a steaming mug of tea then looked at Martin. 'I'm going to have a shower, then I'm going to bed. You boys can stay up as long as you want, okay?'

Martin nodded and Petra looked at Warren. 'I've put a blanket on the sofa,

and some spare clothes, okay?’

Warren nodded. ‘Thanks very much, appreciate the help.’

After Petra left, Martin moved into a smaller room off to the side. A floor lamp against the wall, two chairs sat next to a wooden table, where Warren placed the steaming mug. Leaning up against the corner, Martin’s black firearms grabbed Warren’s attention. He identified an AR15 made by Colt and a semi-auto shotgun that he didn’t recognise.

‘Nice guns. You like to shoot?’

Martin shrugged. ‘Not really. They kick hard, and I’m always afraid the noise will make the neighbours call the cops. I don’t have a licence, so...I really just like looking at them, owning them, yeah...’

Warren felt the word ‘pussy’ rise up in his mouth, but clamped his teeth shut and turned his head back towards the guns.

‘Can I have a look? I could help you load some magazines.’

Martin passed over the shotgun, then the AR15. ‘I got another one, an AR10, but it’s not working, took it in for repairs. It looks like this one, similar, yeah.’

Warren held up the black painted steel and turned it over in the light. ‘Very nice, mate,’ he said. ‘Where’s your ammo? How many mags you have?’

‘What, like clips?’ Martin asked. He went into another room and came back with some cardboard boxes and three metal magazines for the AR15. Warren opened the wrappers and spilled out the loose ammo onto the table. He took one of the metal mags and fed bullets into it, pressing down the spring with each extra round. ‘Twenty seven, twenty eight, twenty nine.’ he counted, then set it down on the table.

‘You missed one,’ said Martin. ‘It’s a thirty-round clip - mag.’ He caught the error and used the correct terminology.

‘Yeah, mag,’ said Warren. ‘Clips are different. But yeah, I only put twenty nine rounds in, because it stops the spring from being overloaded and causing feed issues. With one in the rifle, you still have thirty rounds, but if the spring won’t push ammo up then all you have is a club, you know?’

Martin nodded, eyes wide. ‘Wow, you really know your stuff.’

Warren winked. ‘I used to be in the army, so yeah, we got good training.’ His fingers worked instinctively to fill another magazine, and he laid it on top of the first one.

‘Oh, magazines, that reminds me,’ said Martin as he bounded out of the room

again. He came back and tossed some paper magazines - the reading kind - onto the table. 'I get these from the newsagent,' he said as he opened one to an article about night vision. 'I been reading about army night vision stuff...see in the dark...so cool. You ever have that in the army?'

Warren sipped the tea. 'Yeah,' he said. 'But mostly the pilots and chopper crews. On the ground we just used our own eyes.'

'So you're staying here tonight,' said Martin. 'That's cool, what you doing tomorrow?'

'I'm going to be scouting locations, down near Port Arthur.'

'Oh cool. What's the movie about?'

Warren put on a serious look. 'Why? You want a part?'

Martin laughed, incredulous. 'Serious? Can I?'

Warren pretended to think hard. 'Well, there's one scene. You know the Fortescue Bay turnoff?'

Martin nodded. 'Yeah, it comes off the Arthur Highway just south of Taranna. Fortescue Bay is out, further east than Port Arthur. Right hand turn as you're heading towards Port Arthur.'

Warren continued spinning a story for the older man.

'Okay, so you're a minor character, a good guy. You're a friend of the main character, who is kinda good and kinda bad, right?'

Martin nodded and leaned forward in his chair, hanging on every word. Warren sipped from his steaming mug as the rest of the story crystallised in his mind.

'So you're driving north up the Arthur Highway, in your own car, the Volvo. You've helped the hero get away from the bad guys, but now you're worried they will come after you. You get to the turnoff, but you know that's a dead end - there's no escape from Fortescue Bay.'

Martin closed his eyes and nodded, creating the scene in his mind.

'So there's a car there, you pull over in front of it, force it to stop. You've got your AR15, because you were shooting at the bad guys earlier, yeah? Self-defence...'

Eyes still closed, Martin nodded again. 'Mmmm Mmmm.'

'So you need a hostage, for protection, yeah? So you get out of your car and wave the gun around. Yelling, "Get in the car," that kind of thing. You're on the passenger side, there's a woman there, and you're trying to get her out.'

Martin could imagine it, just like his favourite action movies. 'Cool,' he

murmured.

‘But then you see, there’s a child in the back seat, the camera will zoom in, so the audience gets a shock. The driver will get out, he’s a man, let’s call him Rick. He says something like “No, No, leave her alone,” so there’s this moment of crisis, right? Where your character is trying to decide what to do, who to take.’

‘So you say to the guy ‘I like the look of your car, mate. I’m gonna take your car.’

Martin nodded. ‘I got the keys from the Volvo, so they can’t go anywhere.’

Warren was impressed that Martin was getting involved in the fantasy. He guessed that nobody had read any books with Martin when he was little, so this kind of imaginary journey would have appealed to him strongly.

‘Sure,’ Warren continued. ‘So you get this guy Rick, you don’t want him to see where you are going, because the bad guys might be able to make him talk. The woman can’t drive the Volvo to the cops, tell them what direction you went... So you put him in the boot of his car and you drive off...leaving the wife and kid on the side of the road.’

Martin laughed. ‘Awesome,’ he said. It was just like an action movie.

‘So you drive full speed, whoooooosh, the motor is roaring, but it’s hugging the turns like a race car. You’re looking for a safe place, yeah? Round the bend, outrunning the bad guys, you pull into Seascape - but there’s nobody home...you get out of the car, you’re banging on the door, looking in the windows...’

Martin nodded, entranced by his own imagination. This was better than TV, because he was starring in his own mind.

‘Now remember,’ Warren reminded the older man. ‘You have to be acting scared, you know? You’re desperate, knocking on the door, the windows...imagine what it’s going to look like on the screen - the dramatic music, the panic in your eyes...’

Martin grinned again. He identified with Segal and Stallone, and in his simple mind, the story came to life.

‘It’s a simple scene - a kidnapping with your AR15, put the man in the boot, drive to Seascape, nobody home... that’s it - the cameras stop running. We can do it after lunch. One thirty, sound okay?’

Martin opened his eyes. ‘Lunch? Tomorrow?’

‘Yeah,’ said Warren seriously. ‘Down near Port Arthur.’

‘Oh yeah, I been down there, swimming. Wanna come for a swim?’

‘No thanks, I can’t swim, plus I got heaps of work to do. But let me buy you lunch?’

Martin grinned - a free lunch sounded fine to him. ‘Sure. Where?’

‘Like I said, how about Seascape? Maybe I could talk to the owners, see if they would sell it to you?’

Bryant shook his head. ‘Dunno if they’ll sell. Spoke to those bastards a while ago, they cheated me dad out of that deal. Then they refused to sell me the farm next to Marian’s. I really wanted to be near...’ his voice trailed off as Petra came to the door of the room, wearing a bathrobe tied tightly around her body.

‘I think it’s worth a try, Martin,’ she said. ‘At least have lunch and talk it over...’

Warren picked up the shotgun from the table and fed a shell into the tube magazine under the barrel. ‘Maybe we can persuade them, like in the movies, eh? I’m sure the trustee would allow you the funds to buy real estate - after all, that’s a sensible investment...’ The suggestion was obvious, and Bryant liked the idea of forcing the Martin’s to give up what should have been his.

‘I do want that farm. That would be awesome.’

Martin grinned at the thought and then Warren became serious. ‘But you can’t mention me, ever. You breathe anything, ANYTHING about me, and I’ll gut you - and Petra too. Understand?’

Martin’s face went white, and Warren pressed him for a verbal response.

‘Say it! I’m a ghost. Say you know what will happen if anyone knows about me.’

Lip quivering, Martin stammered ‘If...if...if I tell anyone about you, you’ll get me, kill me slowly, and Petra too...’ He looked at Petra who was staring at him, wide-eyed. ‘No matter what, Love,’ she said softly. ‘Forget Warren ever existed, okay?’

Warren leaned forward. ‘I know where you live, you don’t have the money to disappear, do you? No, I’ll find you and I’ll bleed you...slowly.’

Tears streaming from his eyes, Martin nodded. ‘You never existed, I’ll forget you. Anything, just please don’t hurt me.’ He paused, then said quickly, ‘Or Petra.’

Petra winked at Warren when Martin wasn’t looking. Good job.

Warren smiled and patted the older man’s cheek. ‘Chin up old man. It’s just

like a movie. You do your part, I'll do mine and then I'll disappear like a ghost.'

Petra stood up and tugged at Martin's sleeve. 'Come to bed, love,' she said huskily. 'I'll make you feel all better, okay? Just make sure you're at Seascape by one thirty tomorrow.'

Martin's attitude brightened immediately at the idea of having more sex with Petra, but the look that she gave to Warren was one of disgust and resignation to an unpleasant task. As they left the kitchen, Warren idly compared their respective roles. Sure, he was about to commit mass murder for money, but it was money that was going to help his family. But Petra? Although she was basically a honey trap, there was nothing simple about her job. She was playing a long con, getting into Martin's life months ago, getting into his bed, getting into his head. She had to learn all about what was going on inside his head - and fast. She had to understand his triggers, how he could be incentivised, threatened and consoled. What would make him angry and things he would ignore or find funny - even if they were offensive to other people. Sure, Rebecca would have gotten access to his psychiatrists' files, but even Dr Eric Dax^[10] wasn't looking into Martin's head for the things this operation needed. Dax was simply assessing Martin for mental illness - schizophrenia. Petra had to do it all on her own.

With the room to himself, Warren finished loading the last of the ammunition and then pulled out the blue sports bag. He stashed the guns and ammo inside it, then took it out to the living room and set the bag beside the sofa.

Going back to the side room, he took his mug and cast one last glance around, to make sure he hadn't left anything incriminating behind. He left the chairs where they were and washed his mug in the sink. He had no idea that the next people to see the room would be journalist Judy Tierney, as she followed the police when they broke open the door.

28 April 1996

30 Clare Street, New Town

6.00 am

Warren was awake before dawn, just like the morning of every patrol and mission in Africa. Martin's sofa was far more comfortable than any place he had slept since leaving his childhood bed when he volunteered for the Paras. He pulled on the clothes - Martin's clothes, that Petra had laid out for him - blue jeans, a yellow long-sleeve t-shirt and a green overcoat, laced up his boots and stepped into the bathroom to wash his face. He wrinkled his nose a little, the shirt had obviously been in storage for a while - it smelled musty and dank but the plan required Martin's clothes so it would have to do.

He liked the overcoat. It was three-quarter length, so it wouldn't tangle his footwork, and it had four deep pockets - two on each side and another two on the breast inside. The pockets were deep enough so nothing would fall out, even if he had to move quickly.

Rubbing the cold water through his fingers and hair, he parted the long blonde mop in the middle, patting it into some semblance of Martin's. It wasn't nearly as long as his host's, and their noses were different, but the resemblance was there. Rebecca had done her job well, finding a shooter and a patsy who looked close enough to be brothers.

The only thing he really noticed was his complexion. At barely twenty years old, Warren still had a rash of teenage acne on his cheeks and chin, and he couldn't help but notice that Martin's features - a decade older, were pale and creamy smooth. 'Lucky bastard,' he thought to himself.

Nothing could be done about it, he thought to himself. Hopefully nobody will be looking too closely once the shooting starts.

But what about the double-cross?

Warren turned the problem around inside his brain like one of those cube games with the different colour sides, turning the angles and seeing how they fit together.

Plan B made sense in a sick kind of way. He was a soldier, not a spy, but even he could see the sense in silencing as many as possible of the people involved. There was also the added benefit of terrorising the survivors - they

would know beyond any doubt what they were dealing with, and would be highly incentivised to keep quiet.

But Warren also felt sorry for Martin. Sure, he was rude and obnoxious at times, but he was like a little kid, innocent and socially clumsy, like he had never learned how to be an adult. Rebecca seemed to hate him for no apparent reason, but that was her problem. Martin was probably going to die in the next 24 hours, but on the off-chance that he lived, Warren decided to do what he could to help Martin. But how?

The best way would be to put doubt in people's minds that Martin was acting alone. He needed to make sure people would remember a different man, just for today. He would need to draw attention to himself, not in a big, flashy way, just a mental marker so people would say "Oh yeah, that wasn't Martin, it was someone else did this or that, I remember where he was".

As he walked out of the bathroom, his eye landed on the bookcase across the room. On a shelf sat a squat black bag of fake leather, which obviously contained a video camcorder. Warren smiled. Martin wouldn't miss it, and even if he did, in about ten hours he would be thanking Warren for taking it.

Lifting the bag, Warren listened for any movement in the house. Silence. Martin and Petra were still asleep. Good, be quick but quiet.

He slipped into the small room with the magazines on the table and took out the camera, setting it on the table and thumbing the power button. He put his eye to the viewfinder and lined up the focus on the other empty chair, then pressed the "record" button. A red light glowed on the front of the camera and he moved into the field of view and sat down.

What to say? Best to be brief, no knowing when Martin would be waking up. Where to start? The camera was patiently whirring, recording his indecision. He switched on his most broad South African accent and told it straight.

'My name is Warren Dekker. I have my own reasons for what I'm being paid to do, and it's nothing personal. I am making no political statement, I have no anger towards the victims, and I'm just a mercenary on assignment. All you need to know is, Martin didn't do it. I'm sorry it has to be this way, I'm sorry for your families, but I'm being paid well and I need the money.'

'I know this has been planned in detail, at high levels, but I only know a few key minions - "need to know" and I don't. Sorry I can't blow it wide open, you're going to have to do that yourselves, but don't pin it on Martin - he looks like me but he didn't do a thing.'

He stood up and shut off the camera, putting it back in the bag. Then he grabbed the sports bag with the guns, slung them both over his shoulder and left the house without a backwards glance. He passed Martin's yellow Volvo with the surfboard on the top, parked silently in the driveway. 'Roll the dice', he muttered - there was no going back now.

A short walk in the early morning sunlight took him around the corner to where he had parked the other Volvo the night before. The number plates and surfboard didn't match Martin's exactly, but it was close enough. Warren tugged on the surfboard, testing the straps that held it to the roof racks, making sure it was secure. He opened the back door of the car, and wiggled the blue sports bag into the larger one, then put the camera bag into the foot well where it wouldn't fall. He quietly closed the door and got into the driver's seat, then paused for a moment, mentally rehearsing the plan in his mind.

Step 1. Get down to the peninsula before Martin, secure Seascape for the others.

Step 2. Call the cops and send them out to Saltwater River.

Step 3. Get to the ferry terminal before 1.20 pm and wait for Rebecca to arrive in Martin's real Volvo.

Step 4. Execute Plan B

Plan B? No...Plan C. He was going to do what he could to leave evidence exonerating Martin. He had seen and heard enough of Rebecca's vile plan to set his mind to helping Martin once he had been paid.

He fired up the second Volvo and headed east, retracing the route he had taken to drop off the decoy soap powder at Saltwater River. Early traffic was light as he crossed a couple of bridges and passed the airport. Coming into the suburb of Midway Point, he saw a newsagent and pulled over. He entered the shop and nodded to the owner, scanning the shelves and racks because he wasn't sure what to buy. It had to be something small, something Martin wouldn't usually have bought - as his eyes fell on a box of cigarette lighters on the counter. He took out one and fished in his pocket for coins - there were none. 'Hang on, I gotta get money,' he said to the owner, before dashing back to the car. Inside the ashtray was a mess of gold, silver and brass coins, so he tipped the whole thing into his palm and went back to the shop.

The money was unfamiliar to Warren, but he made sure to drop more than enough on the counter, then grabbed the lighter and left in a hurry. The

owner, Angelo Kessarios^[11] was looking at him strangely - hopefully the incongruous purchase would stick in the owner's mind and help him remember that it wasn't Martin in the yellow Volvo.

Crossing another bridge and a few minutes further down the road, Warren spotted a Shell service station, with a small market attached. He pulled in and again wondered what small thing he should buy, hoping to make it more significant in Martin's future defence. Entering the shop, he saw a shelf of tomato sauce bottles, grabbed one and paid for it, again using many small coins in an effort to seem unusual without looking crazy. But Spiros Diamantis, the man behind the counter, barely glanced at his face as Warren made his purchases.

Back in the Volvo, Warren pressed on, mindful that the clock was ticking on the operation. He drove east and then south as the suburbs thinned into farmland interspersed with public land and wild national parks. He crossed the Eaglehawk Neck, a narrow spit with water on both sides of the road, passed through Taranna and saw the signpost to Fortescue Bay.

It was a desolate, isolated piece of land. The side road cut away to the left, skirting a narrow inlet with thick trees on the other side of the stagnant, reedy water. A tin shed for a bus shelter and a signpost were the only man-made things in sight.

The road followed the shoreline for a few hundred meters, then veered back into the trees. Warren crested a hill, shadows flickering on the car as the sun came up higher, and then he was braking hard, in order to make the left hand turn in front of a black-and-white sign affixed to the driveway fence.

SEASCAPE

30 Clare St, New Town

8.00am

Martin woke up with Petra lying spread out under the covers. He watched her breasts rise and fall as she slept and wondered what she was dreaming about. The sex last night had been exceptional, and Martin had slept deeply afterwards. Still naked, he slipped out of bed and put the kettle on. He padded barefoot round the kitchen while he made breakfast, then slipped on some clothes and woke Petra, sitting across from her at the kitchen table while they ate.

‘Sunday. Going to your parents again?’ he asked. She nodded with a mouth full of toast.

‘Yeah. Be good to see them,’ she mumbled. ‘You?’

Martin squinted. ‘Might go for a swim at Roaring Beach, then I’ll meet Warren for lunch.’

‘Sounds good,’ she said. ‘Meet you back here for dinner?’

Martin swallowed the last of his food. ‘Yeah,

They showered together, dressed and Petra left the house at 8am^[12]. Martin watched a little TV but became bored with it and left the house shortly afterwards. The surfboard was already on top of his yellow Volvo - he rarely took it off except to bodysurf on it, so all he had to do was turn the key and it started. He pushed a tape into the console unit - Best of Aussie Rock, and turned the volume up loud as the drum solo and guitar riff started.

He didn’t know that he was following Warren’s route, catching up because of Warren’s frequent stops. He stopped for a cappuccino in Sorrell^[13] and was spotted by an unnamed witness about half an hour later as he drive through Eaglehawk Neck, bouncing around in his seat to the music^[14].

Martin’s fuel gauge didn’t work properly^[15], and he was worried at how much fuel he had left, so he pulled into the petrol station at the Convict Shop and Bakery in Taranna. The little clock on the dashboard read 10.40am. There was a man in the forecourt serving fuel, and Martin asked for fifteen dollars - that was all the paper money that he had on him. Chris Hammond^[16]

put the fuel in, thinking it was a little strange that the customer pulled the paper money from his pants pocket, not a wallet.

Confident that he now had enough fuel for the trip, Martin continued west, along the top of the triangular peninsula, heading for Roaring Beach on the west coast.

Seascape

9.30am

The six people at Seascape ate breakfast in the Pink Palace, then Julie and Virginia left for their ferry ride to the Isle of the Dead. Donald and Stephanie were strolling outside, admiring the garden when David Martin approached. ‘Good morning,’ he said brightly. ‘Would you like a tour of the grounds? I can show you where the native birds are...’

‘Love to,’ said Donald, and the three proceeded to walk around the extensive gardens, stocked with colourful flowers, and a row of tall green poplar trees that separate the guest lodge from a third building that was under renovation. They spotted many native birds, and Stephanie commented on how raucously they sang and fluttered around the branches.

‘Yes,’ said David. ‘They’re pretty restless, might be a cat around.’

‘Oh, domestic or feral?’

‘Feral cats. Horrible problem down here, they kill a lot of natives, and not because they’re hungry - it’s just their instinct. I shoot them any time I see them.’

Donald and Stephanie nodded in agreement at the conservation actions, and David led them to the worksite to have a look at the work-in-progress. As they passed the pump room, Donald opened the door to look inside and was surprised to see a rifle leaning against the wall^[17]. Then he guessed it was the one that David used to shoot feral cats, shrugged and hastened to catch up with his host.

‘So, where are you heading from here? The older man asked the question as they strolled back towards the living quarters.

Donald and Stephanie smiled to each other. ‘Oh, no rush. Drive around the coast, maybe play tennis at the courts in Nubeena.’

Stephanie nodded. ‘Just a nice weekend in the country.’

David Martin nodded politely. ‘Sounds lovely, I hope the weather holds for you. I’ll let you get on with it.’

‘Okay, great. Thanks for your hospitality,’ said Donald, shaking the host’s

offered hand.

‘Have a good day,’ said David as he went back inside the main house.

The Gunns packed their belongings into the car and turned left out of the driveway, heading south.

As they disappeared around the bend in the road, Warren approached from the north, turning left into the driveway. He slowly approached the Pink Palace, wheels crunching on the gravel drive. He bobbed his head from side to side, continuously assessed the situation, scanning for threats and mapping ingress and exit routes. He was seeing the location for the first time, but was quite familiar with the layout from Rebecca’s briefing notes. He drove past the “Seascape” sign, over the small bridge that spanned a drainage culvert across the front of the property, then past the guest residence on his right. Veering left, the driveway terminated in a large grassy area between the main house on the left and the guest house.

About a hundred meters from the house, the grass ended in a body of water, and inlet called Long Bay.

He saw two figures approaching the house from the east, where a jetty stuck out into the inlet. Running north-south, the strip of ocean ran past the Fox and Hounds, Port Arthur and then opened up into the Southern Ocean. He got out of the car as the distant figures became Rebecca and Petra, having stashed their vehicles in the holiday park and walked up the coastline.

‘Morning,’ he greeted them softly. ‘All okay?’

Petra smiled and Rebecca nodded. Rebecca carried a grey camera bag on a strap over her shoulder, which Warren guessed contained the extra ammo she would leave for him in Martin’s car.

‘Reverse your car up to the front door of the house,’ Rebecca said. ‘I want to check over the guns, and make sure there’s nothing incriminating left in there, just in case Julie and Virginia fuck up.’ Warren nodded and then did a double-take as she drew a black pistol from her pocket. He recognised it as a Smith & Wesson revolver - the type used by NSW Police, and many other law enforcement officers all over the globe.

The conversation was overheard by David Martin, who strode around the side of the house and then gaped at the sight of the strangers.

‘Oh hello,’ he said, then spotted the pistol. ‘Who...what are...who are you and what do you want?’ He managed to stutter.

Rebecca waved the pistol at him. ‘GET INSIDE, GET INSIDE NOW,’ she

screamed in his face.

He put his hands up. 'Okay, okay,' he stammered again. 'Take whatever you like, we don't have much.'

'Shut up and get inside,' snarled Rebecca again. 'Where's your wife? Is there anyone else here?'

'Sally's inside,' croaked the old man. 'Please don't hurt us, we'll do whatever you want.'

Rebecca slapped him with her palm open and fingers stiff. The force of the blow sent the old man to his knees, as she screamed in his ear 'I ASKED YOU A QUESTION. IS THERE ANYONE ELSE HERE?'

'No, no,' sobbed David, desperately trying to grasp the situation, but it was impossible to comprehend. This experience was unprecedented - unimaginable - and he crawled a few steps before staggering to his feet. A vicious kick to his backside from Rebecca drove him forward, and a few steps later he pushed open the front door of the Pink Palace and shuffled inside. Rebecca stayed just one step behind, aiming the pistol at the back of his skull. Petra followed, with Warren last, eyeballing the driveway and garden areas to check for witnesses. There were none.

'Stay still,' snarled Rebecca to David Martin, waving the gun dangerously in his face. The sound of the door opening and the raised voices had alerted Sally, and the elderly woman came from a back room to see what the fuss was about.

The sight of his wife, and the overwhelming feeling of danger overrode any common sense in David's mind, and he reflexively stepped toward her. Whatever his motivation - reactive protection or proactive warning, none of it mattered because Rebecca raised the pistol and fired two shots into the ceiling before Warren could close the door.

The sound of the shots cracked the veneer of civilisation in the room. Everyone except Rebecca fell to the floor as flakes of paint and debris drifted downwards. Warren was taken completely by surprise, given that his attention was still focussed outside the front door. Partly deafened, he jerked around at the unexpected explosions, just in time to see Rebecca scream 'SEE WHAT HAPPENS? See what happens when you disobey? Do what I say!'

Eight hundred yards to the north at a property called Benbullen, Andrew Simmons^[18] had plenty on his mind. He and his wife Virginia were employed as managers at Port Arthur Historic Site, and were due to attend a seminar on change management to be held at Meredith House, Swansea. The venue was over two hours' drive north, and the couple had arranged for another employee to drive them to the conference centre at ten thirty, but their driver was running ten minutes late. Andrew had just checked his watch for the twentieth time that morning (since every thirty seconds felt like a full five minutes) when he heard two clear gunshots from Seascapes at 10.40am. Of itself, this was nothing unusual. He knew that David Martin often shot feral cats, foxes and rabbits and very soon afterwards, the driver arrived to take him and Virginia to their seminar.

The two gunshots were forgotten until much later that afternoon.

Inside the Pink Palace, Rebecca pushed the Martins together. She waved the smoking pistol barrel at a plain black sofa against the wall.

'Sit there and don't move a muscle,' she said.

Physically shaking with fear, the elderly couple crawled up onto the sofa and sat down. Backs straight and knees together, the tension in their bodies showed in their posture. Rebecca shook her head, and the pistol at the same time. 'Apart,' she snarled. 'One at each end.'

David wasn't moving fast enough, so Rebecca gripped him by the throat and shoved him sideways. She shoved the pistol under his chin. 'Keep pissing me off, and I'll end you, right here,' she hissed. As she backed away, the elderly man was hyperventilating with fear.

'Bend forward, hands behind your back,' she said, fishing in her coat pocket and drawing out a pair of steel handcuffs. She locked both of the Martins' hands behind their backs, then straightened up and looked at Warren and Petra triumphantly.

'Secure,' she said, imitating a TV police officer or soldier tasked with a military objective.

Warren looked at Petra, anything to look away from the crazed look of lust on Rebecca's face. 'What now, hurry up and wait?'

Petra nodded. 'Martin said he was going to swim at Roaring Beach, so he'll

be awhile. We don't have to do anything until about one o'clock.'

Rebecca chuckled gleefully. 'Time to kill,' as she strutted over to the kitchen area and rummaged around in the drawers. She let out a grunt of satisfaction as she stood upright, a glittering knife blade in her hand.

The prisoners looked at it and began to pant in terror, the shock of their ordeal triggering the fight-or-flight response, but Rebecca laughed.

'No, no, it's not for you...I just need some gags. Can't have you screaming too loud and attracting attention, can we?'

She used the knife to slice a dish towel into several strips. Rolling one into a ball, she stuffed it into Sally's mouth and tied a second one around the old woman's mouth and head, to prevent her spitting out the suffocating rag.

David was next, and as she straightened up from tying his gag, Rebecca put on a tone of mock apology.

'Now, I must confess,' she minced, 'I did tell a little white lie just now.' The old couple's nostrils flared as they tried to get enough oxygen, and their eyes bugged in anger at their treatment. Rebecca ignored it, and continued her charade.

'I did say this knife wasn't for you...it was to make the gags, and that's true...well, it *was* true,' she said in a girlish, singsong voice. 'But that was then, this is now...'

She turned to face her victims, her eyes bright, feverish. She twirled the knife in her fingers as she took first one, then another slow step towards the hostages. 'We've got plenty of time to settle in before me and Warren have to leave...time to kill...plenty of time....to kill.'

Pinned to the sofa by the weight and weakness of their own bodies, the Martin's were unable to move. Rebecca slithered over and mounted the elderly man, rubbing her chest against his and settling her thighs over one of his legs. He groaned and tried to move his face away, but Rebecca drew the point of the knife slowly down his cheek.

'Shhh,' she whispered. 'There's plenty of time for screaming later.' Her breath was coming in quick, short gasps and her heart was pounding in her flat chest. She paused for a moment, wiggling her ass to get comfortable as she rode her victim like a horse.

Then she pushed the knife into the top few layers of skin, twisting and working it as the muscles in his body tensed in agony. A strangled groan escaped the gag and David's eyes bugged out in pain, but Rebecca rocked her

hips backwards and forwards, working her pelvis around until she found the best angle for her pleasure spot.

Petrified in horror at the sight, Sally appeared fixated on the knife and the trickle of blood running down her husband's skin. Salty tears poured from her eyes as her comfortable security bubble - intact for over seventy years, was violated in the most sadistic way possible.

Rebecca whet her lips, then stabbed the knife into the skin of David's chest, relishing the vibration that his muffled screams of pain sent into her pelvis. She twisted the knife, then stabbed again, causing immense pain but nothing fatal.

Warren looked on in disgust.

'What the fuck is this? Irma Grese?' He muttered, as much to himself as to Petra.

Glad of the interruption, she asked 'What? Who?'

Warren used the opportunity to turn his back, away from the sight and sounds from the sofa. 'Irma Grese was a guard in a Nazi death camp,' he explained. 'She got sexually aroused by watching operations in the prison hospital. She would slash prisoners with a metal whip to give them wounds, which would get infected and require surgery, so she had a constant supply of stimulation. She would sit in the surgery rooms, orgasming and drooling as the prisoners were operated on - no anaesthetic...' his voice trailed off as he saw the look on her face. She was ashen, but Warren shrugged.

'Seen it before, torture in Africa' he muttered. 'But not this bad. Normally, what we saw was the end product, the mutilated bodies.'

'People are bad,' said Petra softly. 'And people are good. I think we're all capable of...that...but most of us make different choices.'

Warren shook his head. 'Na-ahh,' he muttered darkly. 'I'd never go there, and nobody I know, either. Some people are just fucked in the head and she's one of them. I mean, look at her - imagine if something like that gets hold of real political power?'

Blood was beginning to pool under the sofa as the torture continued.

Rocking backwards and forwards with David's thigh pinned between her legs, Rebecca thrust the knife into his leg and sternum - carefully avoiding arteries or areas that would allow a quick death. Her mouth dropped open as the rising ecstasy disabled her fine motor skills.

The knife dropped from her senseless fingers as Rebecca climaxed hard,

rubbing herself between the legs and relishing the agony, pain and humiliation of her victims. Even muffled by the gags, their screams of agony, terror and injustice hardened her nipples as she drooled from the side of her slack mouth. Her eyes rolled in her head and her back arched, steadying herself with a bloody hand on the side of the sofa as a second orgasm crashed through her.

Then a third.

It took several long seconds before Rebecca could draw breath, and when she did so, it was the only sound in the room. She took several deep breaths, closed her mouth and focussed on David's face. It was slack, his head lolling forward and Rebecca slapped him.

'Hey, HEY!' she barked. 'That was great. You were great. Did you enjoy it?'
No response.

Rebecca swallowed, then drew the pistol and jammed it under his chin.

He was dead.

'Well fuck me,' she cackled, letting his head drop again. 'Musta given him a heart attack.'

She looked over at Sally. 'I bet he never had sex that good, broke his heart, didn't I?'

Sally had stopped crying.

She had passed from grief into acceptance that she was going to die, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Rebecca swung her leg off David's corpse and stood on shaky knees. As she turned towards Sally, the older woman got her revenge in the only way possible. Unable to make much of a sound through her gag, the old woman's eyes blazed with anger and indignation, and a nasty kick with the pointy end of her shoe connected right where Rebecca's pelvis was most sensitive. Rebecca doubled over, losing all her breath in one explosion of pain. She tried to sit back onto the couch but missed, sliding to the floor in a heap.

Her entire world consisted of pain and nothing else.

There was a sound like a moose call as she desperately tried to suck air into her lungs.

Eventually, she caught her breath and shot Sally a look of pure venom. The older woman returned the glare, unafraid now that she had accepted her death, and had struck a blow on the way.

Still breathing heavily, Rebecca stood over the sofa. 'Fucking bitch,' she

snarled, pointing the pistol at Sally's left eye. Sally lifted her chin, calmly staring down her psychotic captor as her finger tightened on the trigger. A vein throbbed in her temple as she waited defiantly for her life to end.

Then Rebecca released the trigger, and pointed the gun away.

'Shooting's too good for you, bitch. Gonna have to go another way. Get up.'

She grabbed a handful of Sally's shirt and hauled her upright, then pushed her through the doorway into the master bedroom and face down onto the bed. Above her backside, her cuffed hands waved pathetically in the air as she struggled to breathe.

'Don't move. I'll only be a second.'

Rebecca needed both hands to unlock the handcuffs on David Martin's body, so she stuffed the pistol back into her coat pocket. The metal rasped as she unlocked the cuffs, then again as she used them to hogtie Sally's hands near her ankles.

'Bring him in here,' she ordered Warren. 'Lay him next to her.'

Petra shot Warren a look of disgust but Warren eyed the bloody knife on the floor and shrugged. *What choice did they have?*

Warren grabbed David's corpse under the arms while Petra lifted the feet and together they carried him over to the bedroom and laid his body on the double bed next to his wife. Sally was curled in the foetal position due to the handcuffs, and began moaning quietly through her gag as she looked at the dead man's face.

Warren took a moment to pay his respects to the dead. 'That was fucked up. Neither of you deserved that, so rest in peace,' he said softly.

Rebecca was downing a glass of water as he and Petra came back into the main kitchen area. Warren noticed she had picked up the knife and was holding it in her right hand. 'I need some fresh air,' he announced. 'I'm going to sweep the perimeter, just to be safe.'

'Good idea,' said Rebecca. 'Check your fields of fire and dead ground for later.'

'I'll come with you,' said Petra suddenly, stepping outside as fast as she could.

They walked in silence past the second Volvo, which was reversed in close to the front door, approaching the bridge where the driveway entered the property. Then they circled around to the left, passing the two-story guest house towards the line of poplar trees.

‘That’s pretty fucked,’ said Petra quietly. ‘I don’t think I’ll ever recover from that.’

Warren said nothing, and his silence drew a sharp glance from the younger woman.

‘What do you think?’ She was insistent.

Warren shrugged. ‘Things I’ve seen, floppies... yeah, she is pretty fucked in the head but...I guess...I dunno. I’ve been trained for things like this, you haven’t. So I guess it’s different for me. I don’t know anything about Rebecca, but now that she’s in a completely lawless situation, where she will never be prosecuted for her actions, she is living out her deepest fantasies.’

Petra sighed. ‘I knew she was a bit...kinky...but torture and murder...?’ She shook her head.

‘Oh, it’s more common than you might think,’ said Warren as they walked along the shoreline and passed the jetty. ‘Milgram, Stanford Prison, there’s plenty of examples of the depravity humans will go to under the right conditions. Take away the fear of punishment, add in an element of authority and BAM...most people will go absolutely feral.’

Petra blanched. ‘That’s scary to think about.’

Warren nodded. ‘Yeah, nobody wants to. That’s how the Milgram experiment was invented.’

‘Really, why?’

‘After World War Two, all the Nazi’s said “Oh, I was just following orders” and nobody in America believed them. They all said “No, no rational person would go along with orders to torture another human being.”’

Petra nodded. ‘It’s unthinkable.’ But Warren shook his head.

‘So Stanley Milgram did this experiment to test normal people, to see if they would administer painful or fatal electric shocks to a person. The same test was done all over the world, and the results were pretty consistent - over sixty percent of participants inflicted a fatal voltage to the subject.’

‘They killed people?’

‘No, no.’ said Warren, smirking a little at her expression of concern. ‘The subject was an actor behind a screen, screaming in pain but not receiving any shocks. In some of the tests, over ninety percent of normal people were willing to give a fatal shock on the instructions of an authority figure in a white coat.’

Petra was quiet for a while as she digested what Warren had said and

compared it with the sadism she had witnessed. At last she spoke, just as they were approaching the house.

‘I guess one difference is, you’re doing this for your family. For money. But she’s just doing it for her own pleasure.’

Warren lowered his voice and slowed his pace, to make sure he wasn’t overheard. ‘Nahh, this isn’t her idea,’ he murmured. ‘She’s just a pawn, obeying orders and getting what she wants on the side. There’s big money and power behind this...has to be.’

Petra nodded. ‘I just want to get paid and get this over with.’

He turned back to the house. ‘Yeah, let’s do it.’

He pushed open the door and let Petra in first. They went into the bedroom and saw Rebecca giving Sally the same treatment David had received. As she caught sight of them watching her, Rebecca wiped the knife on the bedclothes, then raised her pistol and smashed it down into the old woman’s skull. Twice.

There was a sound like eggshells breaking, and the body began to spasm.

Which triggered another orgasm in Rebecca’s pelvis.

Warren and Rebecca watched in horror, waiting for the distasteful moments to be over.

At last, both women stopped moving and Rebecca climbed off the bed as Warren stepped forward.

‘Okay,’ he said to Rebecca. ‘You’ve had a great time. What’s the next step in the plan?’

Still breathing heavily after her emotional rush, Rebecca checked her watch. ‘It’s after eleven thirty,’ she said. ‘The Plan B shoot is timed for one thirty - when the cafe will be full of spooks and tourists. You need at least thirty minutes to get into position and let Julie and Virginia hide your Volvo, and we need the cops to be as far away as possible.’

‘You think I should call them now?’

Rebecca nodded, wiping her face with the remains of the towel she had used to gag her now-dead prisoners. ‘Give me a minute to catch my breath, I’ll be right with you.’

Warren picked up the cordless phone handset and took a piece of paper that Rebecca passed him. The phone was simple to understand, with a green button above the normal keypad numbers. He pressed the green button and was rewarded with a dial tone, so he pressed in the numbers and waited for it

to ring at Nubeena.

Click. 'Police, Nubeena.' A woman's voice. Warren was careful to put on his best Australian accent, to cover the South African intonation.

'Yeah, umm hi...There's a...a... stash of drugs, heroin, at the convict mine up at Saltwater Creek,' he stammered. 'They sailed in last night, stashed it in the ruins, ready for collection later today. Better send someone out there. Heroin, the old convict mine, Saltwater River, yeah?'

He hung up before the operator could ask any questions.

'You think they bought it?' Asked Rebecca. He shrugged.

'It doesn't matter,' he said. 'Protocol requires they investigate anything like that. The government doesn't like competition from private operators.'

She nodded. 'Yeah, and there's only two cops on the entire peninsula. With a drug bust, they'll both have to go. To make it look like they are checking each other. If it was just one copper, there's a chance he or she could just steal it and say it wasn't there.'

Roaring Beach, Tasmania

12.00pm

Martin had made good time, crossing Eaglehawk Neck then passing through Taranna on his way to Nubeena. In less than twenty minutes, he was turning right onto Roaring Beach Road. The asphalt immediately became gravel, and the road twisted west as it followed the contours of the ancient, hostile landscape. Another twenty minutes on the dirt and he took a left fork to Roaring Beach Conservation Area, screeched to a dusty halt in the small gravel car park and switched the engine off.

He sat for a moment, looking around the deserted area, then got out and opened the boot. He realized he had forgotten his towel, so he closed the boot, took the surfboard off the roof and then walked for about five minutes along the track between the dunes. The spot wasn't popular, which is why he liked it, and there was no chance anyone would be coming along so he didn't bother locking the car.

The track cut between the high, grass covered dunes and then dropped down towards the water. The dunes were covered in vegetation, then ended in a long strip of rocks about ten meters wide that divided the dunes from the main sandy beach area. The rocks acted as a breakwater, to reduce the effect of tidal erosion on the dunes.

Martin stopped just near the rocks, took off his shoes and then slipped out of the rest of his clothes.

There were other beaches in Tasmania that he could have swum at, but Martin liked to swim naked. It wasn't a sexual thing, well - not much. It was mostly about feeling close to nature, becoming one with the fish and creatures that he had scuba dived with as a younger man. He had enjoyed those days with his father and friends immensely, but watching the fish had sparked a connection in his subconscious that never disappeared when he was on dry land. Martin swam nude because it was as close to the fish as he could get. Close to nature. One with nature. Close to God.

The water was cold, but refreshingly so. The day was calm, a few waves broke over his head but mostly the water was perfect for swimming. He couldn't stand up, so he bodysurfed on the board. It was slippery because he

hadn't waxed it^[19], so he gave up after being dumped a few times. He dived under the water, looking for fellow fish in the clean, clear ocean, then burst back to the surface like a whale, blowing the air out of his lungs and then diving back under water again.

Floating weightless under the dazzling sun was heaven.

To catch his breath, Martin floated on his back, feeling the midday sun on his entire body and enjoying the sensation. He sucked in deep breaths, relishing the salty water on his face, lips and eyes. Then he rolled over and stroked for a few breaths, swimming parallel to the shoreline.

After almost twenty minutes, Martin was getting cold and he knew it was time to get out.

Splashing through the knee deep froth, he looked up and down the beach, trying to see where he had left his clothes. Wiping the water from his face and using his fingers as a comb, he brushed the shoulder-length hair away from his face, back from his forehead.

Then he stopped and giggled a little in embarrassment.

He wasn't alone.

Not good. Not good at all.

His clothes were quite near, but further down the beach, there were two other people also coming out of the water. Martin danced around a little, swiping his hands over his body to sluice off as much water as possible, dried himself hurriedly and dressed, embarrassed at his nudity but also concerned because it wasn't a legal nudist beach. He would be in trouble if caught by the police or dobbed in by a member of the public. Then, the police would be asking how he got to the beach, since he didn't have a driver's licence.

His clothes were a bit wet, but his main thought was to get outta here, fast.

Rubbing his hair, pulling on the grey top and blue tracksuit pants and slipping on his shoes, Martin noticed the other people dressing as well. Because of the heightened danger of exposure, they stuck in his mind.^[20]

Leaving the beach, he had to walk towards the others and noticed that it was two men, wearing short "spring suit" type wetsuits. That also was surprising, he would normally have expected a man and a woman, and given the cold water, steamer wetsuits. Martin's anxious emotional state at being exposed in the nude made him seize upon these details, and the emotion attached to the memories made them more vivid.

The second shoe had his keys in it, which went into his tracksuit pants pocket

and Martin headed back up to the car. He had to do a three-point-turn to get around the other car parked there, but he didn't pay it any attention. His stomach was rumbling and he wanted food and a coffee.

Retracing his path on the dirt road, Martin popped back onto the asphalt in Nubeena, and made another right hand turn onto Nubeena Road. From the turn, it was less than a kilometre - just on half a mile to another T-intersection and here Martin turned right again, onto Main Street in the centre of Nubeena township. Just after the turn, he crossed over the road and parked in the gravel parking lot of Nubeena Bakery and Cafe.

He shut off the engine and checked his hair in the mirror. Good enough. It was just after 12.30pm.

He went into the shop and ordered a coffee and a toasted sandwich^[21], then went outside and sat in the sun to wait. The sun was warm on his body, taking away the chill from the swim but not enough to make him worry about getting sunburnt.

The coffee and toasted sandwich arrived at the same time, and neither lasted long as Martin was starving. Blissfully unaware of the time he was wasting, Martin got back in the Volvo and continued south on Nubeena Road, crossing the southern part of the peninsula and heading for Port Arthur.

After ten minutes driving, he looked at his watch and saw it was right on 1.00pm. He still had half an hour before meeting Warren at Seascapes, so he decided to see if he could catch up with Marian Lerner. She lived with her husband, Roger on a cattle farm to the south of Port Arthur, and Martin had known her about 15 years ago. He liked Marian, she had been nice to him. If she was interested in being his girlfriend, he would definitely break up with Petra. Petra wasn't much fun to be with any more, and he hoped Marian would be his girlfriend, because it would let him move away from Hobart, and hide from Petra where she would never look for him.

But his stomach churned as he pulled up at the gate to the Lerner's farm. Roger was right there! *Shit!* Martin thought quickly, how to explain what he was doing there?

'G'day,' said the farmer amiably as Martin's car stopped. It was a generic greeting one would make to a stranger, but then he did a double-take.

'Martin? Martin Bryant?'

'Hi Roger, how are you?' He put on a big smile.

'Good mate, good. Haven't seen you for years. You look good.'

Martin smiled. 'Yeah, pretty good.'

Roger frowned. 'What brings you all the way out here? Long way from Hobart.'

Martin's brain clicked into an alternate reality, as if he was an actor in the film Warren had talked about. 'Well, I bought some land, and I was thinking about putting some cattle on it, breed 'em up. Yeah, so I'm looking for cattle to buy.'

Roger nodded. The story was plausible enough - Martin certainly had enough money.

'I may have some for sale. What are you after?'

'Ooh, nothing major. Say...five cows and a bull? Lucky bull.' Then he snickered again, laughing at his own joke but in a way that was more creepy than funny.

The older farmer nodded. 'Sounds reasonable. I can certainly...' his voice trailed off as it was obvious that Martin wasn't listening. Instead, he was looking over Roger's shoulder at the farmhouse.

'Is Marian home?'

Roger felt a flutter in his stomach, that sixth sense that there was more to the question than appeared on the surface. In the past, Roger had felt concerned about the attention Martin had paid his wife, and now the danger signs flared up again. *Why the hell is this guy so interested in my wife? He's good looking and has money, surely he can pull a girlfriend of his own...?*

'She is...' He said it slowly and cautiously.

'Ooh,' breathed Martin, visibly excited. His pink tongue whet his lips instinctively in a reflex that Roger associated with a snake eyeing a mouse.

'Can I see her?'

Roger weighed up the balance of probabilities in his mind. If Marian could tell him to piss off, they would be rid of this pest once and for all. But no way would Roger leave his wife alone with this kid, not even for a second.

'Sure,' he said warily. 'I'm going back to the house, I'll come with you.'

Martin looked at his watch. It was 1.15pm and he was still a few minutes' drive from Seascap. He thought about the consequences from Warren if he was late. No...He would have to come back and see Marian another time.

'That's okay,' he said. 'I gotta go meet some people, maybe next time.'

Roger Lerner breathed a sigh of relief. 'Okay, no worries mate. Next time.'

Martin got back in the Volvo and did a U-turn, heading back north.

Roger shook his head and went back to working on his farm. It would be almost half an hour before he stopped for lunch, and he was telling Marian about the strange incident when he heard the gunshots in the distance.

Seascape

About 12.30pm

Rebecca checked her watch and looked at Warren, lust glinting in her eyes. 'It's time to go. Martin will be here any minute. You know what to do?' Her flat chest was heaving in anticipation of the massacre, a supplicant worshipping the angel of death.

Warren nodded and tapped a finger to his temple. 'I'll see you back here before dark.'

'You got the spare key for Martin's Volvo?'

He jiggled the key ring up in the air and nodded. 'All good.'

Rebecca nodded and looked at Petra, who nodded as well. An awkward moment, as the plotters sent their agent off to do their dirty work.

'Okay, well, good luck then,' said Rebecca at last.

Warren walked to the door and was aghast to hear gravel crunching under car tyres.

Oh Shit! What the fuck? Don't tell me Martin is here early?

He ducked his head quickly around the side of the house, then pulled it back in. He turned to the others, 'Not Martin,' he hissed. 'Expecting anyone else?' Wide eyed, they shook their heads. This was bad. Any witnesses could blow the whole thing wide open. 'Get rid of them,' snarled Rebecca, drawing a finger across her throat. 'Any means necessary.'

Warren didn't want to risk attacking innocent tourists before the plan called for it - that was a recipe for disaster. He decided to use violence as a last resort, and quickly stepped out of the house to confront the unexpected visitors.

The couple had climbed out of their car and were closer than he expected, almost bumping into them as he came around the corner of the house. Warren flicked his hands at them, trying to shoo them away as if they were a cat.

The woman looked startled, but the man kept his cool. 'Oh, hello,' he said smoothly. 'We're John and Maureen Mason^[22], from Victoria. We drove past earlier, we're just on our way back to the airport, but could we have a look around, for when we come back, next time?'

The sentences tumbled out in a jumbled manner. John's tongue ran away for

several reasons - firstly it was the shock of having a stranger jump out of nowhere, but also a desire to try to regain control of the situation by dominating the conversation. Besides, he hadn't really wanted to stop, but had only done so to humour his wife.

Warren shook his head and hunched his shoulders, repeating the hand movements to get them to go away. He didn't want to speak and betray his South African accent if at all possible. But apparently John misunderstood, and pressed again. 'I wonder if we could have a look at one of the apartments.'

Shit! Can't these idiot take a hint? Warren channelled his impersonation of Martin and hoped the accent wasn't too noticeable.

'No,' he drawled. 'My mother and father are out for ten minutes. I can't show you around because...I've got my girlfriend inside.' The intensity of the situation and the risk involved made Warren move from one foot to the other, and his head bobbed about on his neck as he tried to see any other witnesses around. This was the most critical part of the operation, he was all keyed up with adrenaline, and panicking at the possibility of being compromised by some random tourist.

Maureen Martin was sharper than her husband, or maybe not disoriented by the same stressors, and she took a step backwards. The look on her face showed plainly that she thought Warren was being rude, and strange. But she knew her husband would press on, in order to carry out her wishes. That idea had to be stopped.

She put her hand on John's arm and said 'Come on, let's get out of here.'

That was enough for him. As long as Maureen was happy to leave, that was fine with him. They both scurried back to their car and left. Maureen's last furtive look back at the guesthouses showed her that the young man had stopped moving, and was staring back at her as they made the right-hand turn back onto the Arthur Highway and drove north towards Hobart.

Arthur Highway

Near The Fox and Hounds pub
Just after 12.35pm

Warren turned left out of the Seascapeway driveway and headed south. Literally around the corner, just a few hundred meters from Seascapeway, he spotted a touring van pulled over onto the side of the road with the bonnet open - a worldwide distress signal.

He slowed down to check it out.

Even better, two young women were looking at the engine bay in helpless confusion.

Here was another opportunity to absolve Martin, so Warren immediately slowed to a stop.

He got out of the Volvo and walked up to the two females who were now sitting in the front seats, fiddling with the ignition.

‘Need some help?’

Gaye Lynd and her friend Vicki had been trying to restart the motor but there was no sound, no motion, nothing.

‘It just won’t start’ said Gaye. I think the battery’s dead.’

Warren smiled at the two tourists and ran his eye over the engine bay, mentally running through a checklist to diagnose the possible problem.

A vehicle engine needs three things: fuel, air and electricity.

Warren looked at the starter motor, tracing the wires back to the battery. The terminals were a mess of coloured wires, some of which had been cut short as equipment had been added and removed from the van over the years. He touched the terminal clamps and was rewarded with movement. *Ahah! There’s your problem. Loose battery connection.*

Warren wiggled the terminal clamp back down as far as it would go, then hammered on it with his fist to lodge it tighter. He went around to the driver’s door and stuck his head in the open window, letting the two girls get a good look at him. ‘Try it now!’

Gaye turned the key and squealed in delight as the motor stuttered and then

roared into life.

She turned to thank the surfer guy but recoiled a little from the musty smell emanating from his clothes. Before she could speak, Warren sniffed the air inside the van and asked ‘You got any weed for sale?’

The girls looked at each other and Gaye shrugged. ‘Sure,’ she said. ‘But we’ve only got one joint left.’ She licked her lips in anticipation and stuck her chin out defiantly. ‘Fifty bucks,’ she demanded^[23].

Warren felt like laughing out loud at the ludicrous rip-off it represented, no way was a single joint worth fifty dollars. But he was feeling cheerful, surely these girls would be miles away from the shooting when it went down, and would be able to tell their story to the media and police alike. ‘Deal,’ he said with a quick smile, pulling out his wad of cash and searching through the bills for the number fifty. He handed over the note, and Gaye passed him a small plastic bag of green buds.

‘Thanks,’ he smiled at her, telepathically trying to embed his face into her mind. ‘You girls travelling around?’

They giggled. He was kinda cute, and they liked the attention. Clever with his hands too, apparently...

‘Yeah, we’re just on holidays, doing some swimming. What about you?’

Warren laughed. ‘I’m on my way to the Isle of the Dead, to kill some WASPs.’^[24]

The girls just laughed. ‘You a pest controller or something?’

‘Oh yeah, something like that,’ he said with a grin, trying to turn it all into a joke. ‘Stay away from the area, okay?’

He went back to the front of the van where the battery was well and truly charging from the motor. He shut the hood and then stepped back and waved as the two girls drove back onto the highway. They disappeared south as Warren got back into the Volvo and put it in gear. He also drove south, toward The Fox and Hounds guesthouse and his destiny that lay just beyond it.

Passing the guesthouse on his left, he saw a young man walking up the opposite side of the Arthur highway. But having just spent precious minutes with the two girls, he couldn’t risk any more time on the exposed road.

Martin would be coming north to Seascap at any minute, and Warren had to be well inside Port Arthur when that happened.

Arthur Highway

Near The Fox and Hounds pub

About 12.40pm

Jai Nichols was feeling mature and free as he walked north up the Arthur Highway.

Barely into his teens, the young man had arranged to go into Hobart for a friend's birthday party, an effort supported by his grandfather Joe.

'Be good for him,' the older man had said to his reluctant mother. 'Get him used to moving around in the world, meet some new people. I'll drive him if it makes you feel better.'

But at the last minute, something came up and Grandad couldn't spare the time for a two-hour round trip to drop him at the party. 'Best I can do is drop you at the General Store at lunchtime,' he said.

'That's okay, Grandad,' said Jai. 'I can hitchhike easily enough, plenty of tourists will be going back to Hobart. I'll give you a call on the home phone to come and get me.'

Dropped off at the Port Arthur General Store a few minutes after midday, Jai^[25] made good time on foot but nobody stopped to pick him up. He had walked for about half an hour when he saw a yellow Volvo driving south. Jai wasn't interested in the car, because it was headed in the wrong direction, but as it went past he saw the driver was a young male, just a bit older than Jai himself. The teen had never seen the man before, but noticed the shaggy blonde hair and the surfboard on the roof. The image resonated with the boy who was stepping out into the world on his own. It represented a freedom that he was eagerly awaiting, the independence to do his own thing, go his own way. A dream that was almost within his reach.

The sun was hot and traffic was slow as Jai slogged uphill. The only car he had seen in twenty minutes was the yellow Volvo heading the wrong way. The black road snaked around to the right, and he saw the sign for Seascape in the distance. He bought a soft drink at The Fox & Hounds restaurant, then walked back to the highway and headed north again.

The growl of an engine and tyre noise from behind gave him hope of a lift, and he turned around, then dropped his mouth open in surprise. A yellow

Volvo, just like the one that had passed him earlier, sped towards him. He stuck out his thumb, begging for a ride, but the Volvo was doing the speed limit and passed him. He was about to swear when the brake lights flared red and the car slowed, making him think that the driver had changed his mind. Breaking into a sprint, Jai trotted up the road but was doubly disappointed as, instead of pulling over on the left, the car crossed the road and went into the Seascape.

SHIT! An emotional rollercoaster of hope, rejection, more hope and then dashed hope as it was obvious that the yellow Volvo wasn't going any further north.

For the next hour and a half, Jai walked north and thought about the guy in the Volvo. He wanted to be able to do the same thing, just drive around as he pleased. It was strange, though. Why had the car driven south, then turned around and come back up to Seascape? Why not just pull in as he drove south? After all, the Volvo was driving on the left side of the road, and Seascape was on the same side. It would have been easier than overshooting, doing a U-turn and then coming back a few minutes later.

Jay couldn't figure out the puzzle, but finally forgot about it as he arrived in Taranna, where an ambulance driver gave him a lift to Warrane. By the time the party ended, the yellow Volvo was all over the media, along with the news of the massacre.

Arthur Highway

Near The Fox and Hounds pub

1.10pm

His mind in a whirl from the stolen thrill of seeing Marian, Martin drove north up the Arthur Highway. He pushed the Volvo hard, nervously aware of the ticking clock and his lunch deadline with Warren. He took his foot off the throttle as he approached the Port Arthur Historic Site, thinking about going inside. He had been down there as a younger man, hanging out with other kids and just being cool, annoying the tourists and minor shoplifting from the gift shop.

But his mood darkened as he remembered the new toll booth. There was a fee to get in now. With his inheritance funds frozen by the Public Trustee, he had spent the last paper money he had putting fuel into the car. Even the coins in the glovebox were getting low, since he had bought two coffees and a toasted sandwich earlier in the day.

No, that wasn't really the cause of his resentment. It was a convenient, top-of-mind reason, but if pressed, he would admit that the entry fee represented something much more sinister to Martin.

The owners of the Broad Arrow Cafe had recently sold it to the state government, and the installation of toll booths was a gesture of control from the State. It was an intrusion of authority into a place where there had been freedom. In earlier years, his innocence had been untouched by the fingers of government. He could come and go as he pleased.

Now, that innocence had been stifled, smothered, greedily and callously fingered by forces beyond his control. Bureaucrats in Hobart had taken something good from his childhood, and moved it out of his reach.

He was still thinking about the toll booth when he drove past a hitchhiker, which distracted him. He almost missed the turn, and had to jam on the brakes in order to get into the Seascape driveway. For the second time that day, he unknowingly copied Warren by parking the Volvo out the front of the Pink Palace.

Shutting the door, he shivered for a second, unaware of the cause. There was no sound apart from the birds and the insects.

The autumn sun was hot overhead

He knocked on the front door, but there was no answer. He rattled the handle, locked.

Doesn't make sense, Warren was supposed to meet me here. But where's his car? Where are the Martins?

He walked around the building, looking in the windows, testing the back door but there was no sign of the owners and everything was locked. It was just like the movie scene he had imagined the night before.

Now he was worried. *Where were the Martins?*

Rounding the far corner of the Pink Palace, he was surprised to see Petra and Rebecca sitting on a seat under the veranda. Their backs to the wall, they sat on a cast iron and timber bench that faced out over the water. Shaded from the sun and secluded from the wind, it was a lovely spot and completely invisible from the road or the driveway.

A wine bottle sat on the wooden veranda floor next to the seat. As Martin watched, both Petra and Rebecca were drinking from glasses as they chatted quietly.

'Oh, surprise,' said Petra as she saw him, and waved him over. The two women stood up as he approached, and Petra jogged over to meet him.

Martin was perplexed. 'I thought you were going to see your parents?'

She giggled. 'Surprise!' she replied. 'As if I was going to miss your big movie part. You're going to be famous.'

He laughed with her, but it was forced, confused. 'Oh yeah, I forgot you knew about that. Where's Warren?'

Petra took his hand, then used the other to stroke his brow. 'Warren doesn't exist,' she said softly. 'It's just you, for the rest of the movie.'

She led him by the hand, up onto the veranda and towards the seat where Rebecca had been watching the exchange.

'Who's this?' he asked.

Petra smiled, holding out her hand to help Rebecca stand up, hoping the physical gestures will set him at ease. 'Martin, this is Rebecca. My boss.'

'Oh wow,' he said, shaking her hand awkwardly. 'Nice to meet you.'

Then he looked closer. 'Do I know you? Have we flown somewhere together?'

Shit. How is it possible that he remembers?

The two women exchanged worried glances but Rebecca shrugged. *He won't*

remember anything soon...

‘I don’t think so,’ replied Rebecca smoothly. ‘Would you like a drink? Come inside.’

She pushed open a side door and went inside, into the main living area. Petra and Rebecca led Martin to the kitchen bench where bottles sat - sparkling white wine and vodka. He looked around. ‘Nice place they got here, hey? Where’s David and Sally?’

Rebecca was busy in the freezer, popping ice cubes into a glass. From her pocket, she took dropper bottle and squeezed three drops on top of the ice.

In response to the question, Rebecca said ‘Oh, they’re not here...the film company has rented the whole place for the day...’

‘What’s that?’ hissed Petra, nodding at the dropper bottle.

‘Rohypnol and scopolamine,’ returned Rebecca softly. ‘It will wipe his memory and make him docile at the same time. You won’t have any trouble out of him.’

‘Is it going to be enough?’ Petra asked quietly.

‘It better be, we can’t have any traces of it in his system when they do the autopsy.’ Rebecca stole a glance at Martin. He was above average height and size, a strong man in the prime of his life. She added another drop and then put two shots of vodka in on top.

‘Why don’t you have a seat,’ she said to Martin, swirling around the vodka in the glass to make sure the chemicals were mixed. ‘We’ll have lunch ready in just a minute, okay?’

Martin sat at the main kitchen table, took a sip of the cold drink, then a larger gulp. Rebecca smiled and sipped at her wine, giving him subconscious encouragement to drink up.

‘So...have you done any acting before?’ Rebecca knew the answer, but was determined to maintain the illusion that this was a film shoot. She also needed to make sure he drank the whole glass before she left the building.

Martin shook his head. ‘Nahh, but I reckon I’ll be good. I like movies, know a lot about them. I like acting...’

The two women chatted with Martin for another ten minutes, but his speech was becoming increasingly slurred.

‘I don’t feel so good,’ he said, pushing his chair back from the table and lurching to his feet. ‘When’s lunch going to...urgh’ He wobbled on his feet, about to fall.

Rebecca and Petra took him under the arms and led him into a side room. They let him sink into a recliner, as his body relaxed into sleep. Rebecca poked him viciously in the cheek with a bony finger, but there was no change to his deep, rhythmic breathing.

‘He’s out, good,’ said Rebecca briskly. ‘No time to lose.’

Fishing in his pockets, she took his car keys and walked swiftly to the door. She reversed his Volvo up to the side of the building, leaving the driver’s side door open and opened the boot. She made several trips, loading it with ammunition and a packet of fire starters. Then she took all the key tags off the board behind the service counter, stuffing them into the now empty camera bag and tossed it in as well.

Satisfied, she slammed the lid shut, noticing that Martin had left two jerry cans of petrol in the rear passenger foot wells. *Good enough.*

Petra handed over Martin’s passport, which Rebecca stashed in the glove compartment.

‘I think we’re ready,’ she exclaimed brightly, turning to Petra, who was hugging herself and jigging a little on the spot as the nervous energy found physical expression.

Ice cold, Rebecca asked ‘You nervous?’

Petra laughs once. ‘Yeah, just a little. Now or never, hey?’

Rebecca gave her a hug. ‘It’s nothing,’ she says. ‘Just babysit Martin, turn away any nosey people...I’ll be back in an hour, and Warren soon after that, ok?’

Petra nodded. ‘If anyone comes, I’ll tell them we’ve all got the flu and to come back tomorrow. That should be enough.’

Rebecca stroked Petra’s cheek and looked her in the eye. ‘We’re doing the right thing. Saving lives. Stay positive, okay?’

Petra sniffed, then gave a faint, brief smile. ‘Yes, I know. The greater good. Good luck.’

Rebecca got into Martin’s Volvo and started the engine. After a three-point turn, she eased it down the driveway and over a little bridge that crossed the stream near the road. The car crunched on the gravel driveway, then turned left onto the asphalt.

Jai Nichols was well past the Seascapes driveway by now, heading north. He wasn’t able to see the mysterious yellow car driving away from him, south to the tollgates.

Port Arthur Historic Site

12.40pm

Warren hadn't seen any more opportunities between the petrol station at Taranna and Port Arthur to make people remember him but when he pulled up outside the toll booth that channelled traffic into the parking areas, he had another idea.

When it was his turn to pay, he reversed instead of moving up to the cashier. The road was narrow, and it took several turns reversing and then turning before he could drive to the back of the queue. There were a dozen vehicles in the line, all being held up by this yellow Volvo, and Warren hoped that this would be enough to make people question the chain of strange coincidences.

Pulling up to the tollbooth a second time, he heard the attendant tell him the admission price and he instinctively tried to convert it into Rand. Then he shook his head, paid the entry fee with a \$50.00 note^[26] and received the entry ticket and a map of the area. He recognised the buildings from Rebecca's briefings, and drove down towards the water, but took a wrong turn. He merged left too early and ended up in the main car park, too far away from the ferry terminal for Virginia and Julie to find the car.

Muttering in frustration but reminding himself there was enough time, he did a loop of the carpark and then got back onto Church Street. Heading due south, he stayed left and ended up outside the main visitors' centre. Again, the road veered left onto Tarleton and he saw the Broad Arrow Cafe signposted just beyond it.

On the right was a row of trees, and he could see the ferry terminal a hundred yards down the road. Following the trees to the right, he entered a small parking area designed to accommodate the turning area for busses - it was right beside the water. This is where Virginia and Julie would get off the morning ferry and use their spare keys to move his empty car around behind the Visiting Magistrate's House.

Ian Kingston was a senior manager at the State Emergency service, but for reasons known only to him, had taken a job as a parking attendant at Port

Arthur (where his wife Aileen worked) just a few weeks ago. He was on duty when he saw the yellow Volvo parked where it would obstruct the turning busses, so he walked over before the driver could get out. First thing to check was a valid ticket - okay, it was there on the passenger seat. He ducked his head to speak to the driver.

‘You can't park here,’ he said. ‘You’re too close to the water, the busses...the busses need to be able to turn around, and they need a lot of room. You need to reverse, do a U-turn and head back up Jetty Road and park in front of other vehicles - those ones nose in, facing north.

Shit. This was exactly the attention Warren didn’t need. He spoke politely.

‘I’d like to park down on the water’s edge.’

‘I’m sorry, but it’s preferable for you to park up there - it’s normally kept reserved for campervans, okay?’

Fuck it, cooperate then adapt.

Warren nodded, started the Volvo again and drove up a short ramp, back onto Tarleton Street. He pulled into a smaller car park next to some historic houses, waiting for the attendant to leave. As soon as the coast was clear, he reversed out, turned the car around and went back to the spot near the water. The busses wouldn’t be leaving for a long, long time.

He parked the Volvo at the end of a row in the car park, within sight of the Broad Arrow Cafe and right near the ferry terminal. An ominous smudge on the horizon, the Isle of the Dead reached out for his attention, but he swallowed his emotions and focused on the mission.

Slung over his shoulder, he carried Martin’s video camera and the black duffel bag, awkward and heavy with the guns and ammunition, into the information centre and purchased a ticket for the afternoon ferry. Even though Plan B was activated, he still had to pay attention to detail in order to avoid suspicion at all costs. The ASIO and foreign spooks were naturally observant people, and further trained to a high level. They might get suspicious if he didn’t buy a ticket to the ferry he was supposed to be going on.

Then he went back outside, crossed the grass to the Broad Arrow Cafe and got in the queue to order some food. He nonchalantly looked around the crowded tables, recognising several faces from the planning meetings but displaying no emotion, nothing that would indicate recognition to an observer.

He checked his watch, it was 1.20pm.

Inside, he was having trouble breathing, so turbulent were his emotions. Already committed, he had set aside the revulsion he felt about killing innocent people. After all, killing for his country is what he had volunteered, trained, sweated and bled for. It was only a small extra step to killing to secure his family's future. Just like any army mission, his emotions were locked in a box and put into the basement of his mind, packed away so his full attention would be on the movements required.

Just another mission, he told himself.

But no, it wasn't normal. This was something else. There was Anthony Nightingale and the Asian man - Warren didn't know his name but he had seen him hanging around with Anthony - obviously they were intelligence agents. Over at another table he spotted Andrew Mills. These vultures, these perverts, were hanging around the scene of a murder they had helped plan and coordinate, without getting dirty. He knew they were excited, like kids going to see the circus, and that made it even worse. It was sick. Like setting a house on fire and sticking around to watch and hear the people burn.

To them, he was just a trained monkey about to do some tricks that would advance their political agenda. He was a mercenary and a murderer, sure. He could live with that - for a few more hours, anyway. But he was doing it for money and that was as good a reason as any. But these parasites had no good reason to be here, they were just here to watch innocent people bleed and scream and die. Voyeurs. Ghouls. Like the people who watch a car wreck without helping, but worse, this was a murder spree that they had set in motion, now they were calmly eating a meal as if they were about to see a theatre show.

Warren's stomach turned in revulsion that these primates called themselves human. How could they be human?

As the line shuffled closer, he remembered a passage from *The Gulag Archipelago*. After witnessing indescribable human brutality, kindness and survival, the writer had come to a simple yet profound conclusion:

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them.

But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

Warren's life experiences in Africa, and the people he had met in the past month had certainly proved to him that humans have infinite capacity for both charity and evil. Perhaps accepting that fact was the way to inner peace, realizing that the world was both good and evil, and being able to respond to both equally.

Perhaps the problem with the world was that not enough people were willing to face evil directly, abdicating that role to police or governments, with the natural result that evil grew to fill the vacuum?

The queue moved again, interrupting his philosophy and shunting him inexorably into the attention of the server behind the counter. The pre-mission stress had prevented him from eating breakfast, he had only drunk the coffee in Forcett but he knew he would need energy for the rest of the day. Who knows when he would be able to eat again? Anxious to avoid talking too much and bringing attention to his accent, he pointed at the bay-Marie selections and sandwiches he wanted, then reflexively rubbed his eyes to clear his pensive, moody thoughts. *Focus on the mission, one two three*, he thought to himself. The server put his food on a tray and asked, 'You want anything to drink?'

Warren's mouth was dry, same as every time they went into combat, and he nodded, pointing at the fresh orange juice. 'And a Solo, pleese', he said, doing his best casual Australian accent. Harried, the lady didn't even blink, but grabbed a can from the fridge, putting it on the tray with a clear Schweppes cup and tapping at the cash register.

She woman muttered some numbers at Warren, but he was prepared for the strange currency and prices. He pulled out a roll of small and medium bills and handed over an amount that was larger than the number she had said. With practised ease, the server put it in the cash register, handed over some coins and then turned her attention to the next customer in the queue, dropping Warren from her attention and memory.

The heavy bag slung over his shoulder caused Warren to exercise care with the tray, which was loaded with food and two drinks. He knew there was still a few minutes before Rebecca would be signalling him, but he needed a clear line of sight to the entrance toll booth. That meant sitting on the deck outside.

As Warren approached the door, it opened and a group of people came into

the cafe. Carol Pearce and Carmel Edwards were last, and he asked them to hold the door for him, the tray and the bag. He smiled in thanks as he moved past, and Carmel said something about the size of his meal.

‘Yeah, bin surfing all morning,’ he lied^[27], and then they were past and the door closed behind them.

Virginia and Julie had spent an idyllic morning looking at the horrific evidence of torture, murder and sadism encapsulated on the Isle of the Dead. The tour guide was relaxed and knowledgeable, describing the harsh discipline and brutal conditions suffered by those imprisoned and entombed in the area. They both felt a sexual thrill and the thought of beatings, rapes and torture; imagining themselves to be the ones inflicting pain on helpless victims.

Both women were breathing heavily when the ferry docked back on the mainland. After strolling around hundreds of graves, silent witness to the agony and brutality their occupants had witnessed, the two psychopaths were now keyed up for real life bloodshed. They crossed the gangplank and Julie let out another little moan and squeezed her partner’s hand as they spotted the yellow car.

‘There’s the Volvo,’ she murmured. *Just as planned, that was good.*

There was nobody around who might see them opening the car and recall that it had been parked by a blonde man, not two women. Ian Kingston had walked away behind some busses, and the main ferry crowd were heading straight for the Cafe to get something to eat. Julie opened Virginia’s door for her, then walked around the front of the car and got in. Neither of them put on a seatbelt, since they were only going to be driving around the uninhabited historical site, to get the car out of sight.

They turned left onto Tarleton Street, then left again as Tarleton forked, cruising south, past the government gardens - directly away from the cafe. The road ended in a four-way junction, and they veered south-west onto Tramway Street. Crossing Bond Street, they drove another fifty meters or so, then pulled over just south of “Clougha” - the visiting magistrate’s house. The car was hidden from the cafe by a thick stand of trees on the hill, but to the north-east, the land gradually dropped away, before rising to the Broad

Arrow cafe, clearly visible against the trees and rocky cliff behind.

Confident that their spot offered safety from the gunfire but an excellent view of the massacre about to unfold, the two women got out stood together on the crest of the hill, the killing grounds laid out before them like a panorama. Behind them, less than ten meters away but invisible to the victims, Warren's yellow car ticked quietly in the silence as the exhaust cooled.

Barely able to contain their excitement, the two savages had a perfect vantage point, and Julie produced a Thermos of coffee to share as they watched the show.

Saltwater River

35 minutes' drive north-east of Port Arthur.

Constable Paul Hyland's watch read 13:05 as he and Constable Garry Whittle stalked around the ruins of the convict coal mining operation, looking for the heroin stash^[28]. A drug bust of this size was rare in Tasmania, so they were both eager to seize not only the illegal drugs, but the career advancement that would accompany it. Given that the most common drug consumed in Tasmania at the time was Marijuana - grown and mostly smoked on site by small farmers, it was unusual that Heroin - an expensive and normally urban drug - was being imported.

But since the convict settlement was only meters from the shoreline, in a protected and sparsely-populated section of Tasmania and accessible from the open ocean, the coppers saw no reason to doubt that smugglers might have sailed in, stashed the cargo so that their local contacts could come and retrieve it at leisure.

The morning had been still and clear, and now the early afternoon sun beat down on the two uniformed police as they walked around the piles of sandstone that had once been buildings. The area was deserted, only the relentless ringing of cicadas and the lapping of the shoreline disturbed the atmosphere at the abandoned site. Some of the walls were still erect, especially at the corners, creating dozens of shady hiding places that had to be checked. Constable Hyland's stomach growled and he realised with dismay that even if he found the stash right away, it would be more than half an hour before they would be anywhere near a place that served lunch.

There are five ruined buildings at Saltwater River. The two closest to the dirt access road are nothing more than a single wall, but closer to the water, there are three buildings in the shape of an H pattern. Starting their search near the parked car, the two officers found nothing in the four ruins they examined, and hurriedly moved on to the last one before the water.

'Mate, we've been set up,' puffed Constable Hyland, sweating under the hot sun. 'Someone's having a good laugh at us, sent on a wild goose chase.'

Constable Whittle scowled, not wanting to believe they had been tricked, but glanced around the surrounding bushland, trying to see if the jokers were watching them. But beyond the cleared ground, the bush rapidly became impenetrable, and Whittle knew that a dozen men could be concealed from view, just meters from where the cleared sections ended.

‘Fuck this,’ he said. ‘Let’s get out of here. As if anyone’s gonna store expensive heroin here, where any hikers or tourists could find it? Seriously, there’s no situational control. Who’s to say the courier delivered it here, and didn’t just say they did - and just sell it later, in Melbourne?’

While speaking his mind, the pair rounded the end of the last wall, just meters from the lapping shoreline. They turned to look inside the crumbling sandstone cubes and there, tucked against the corner was a glass jar, half full of white powder. The two cops froze, not quite believing that the anonymous phone tip had been accurate.

Hyland let out a low whistle of disbelief.

Pulling on a pair of latex gloves, Whittle stepped forward and picked up the jar. He turned to Hyland, holding it up to the light and shaking it slightly. Then he frowned.

‘You ever tried any of this? Heroin?’

Hyland scowled. ‘No, never. What you getting at?’

Whittle shook his head. ‘Nothing, I mean... Heroin is a powder, right? You’ve seen the training materials, samples and photos... But look at the top layer.’

They put their heads together as Whittle held the jar up to the light and shook it again.

‘See how big the flakes are? More like soap powder than anything in the drug photos.’

Hyland’s face went from angry to furious and then to curious.

‘Only one way to find out. Open it.’

‘What? Here? With no lab, no witnesses? What if they find out?’ Whittle blanched.

‘Nahh, look - it’s not even sealed,’ crowed Hyland as he twisted off the lid and shook the contents again. He put his nose close and sniffed, then offered it to Whittle.

Whittle hesitated, then leaned over and breathed in.

He looked at Hyland, testing his reaction.

‘Soap powder. Smells just like my missus’ soap powder.’

Whittle turned to look around at the scrub, more certain than ever that this was a joke. ‘Very funny,’ he called out sarcastically. ‘Ha Ha Ha. Good laugh, wasting Police time.’

But the only sounds were the relentless ringing of the insects.

‘Fuck this,’ said Hyland. ‘Let’s get some lunch.’

Moving uphill, away from the water, the two police officers arrived at their patrol car at 1.23pm.

Constable Whittle started the car as Hyland thumbed the radio. ‘VKT, VKT, it’s Whittle, up at Saltwater River. We found a glass jar, but all it had was soap powder. Over.’

‘Okay Whittle,’ replied the police operator. ‘Noted. See you back here after lunch.’

Dust and gravel spewed from the wheels as the police car cut a U-Turn and sped south towards civilisation.

Broad Arrow Cafe

1.25pm

In contrast to the inside of the cafe - crowded with both tourists and spooks, there were several empty tables on the balcony, so Warren selected one that gave him a clear view of the carpark and the toll booth. The ferry had just pulled into the wharf and disgorged passengers, who he watched enter the cafe as he ate. A woman wearing the uniform and a name badge - Wendy - rushed up from the ferry, past his table and seemed to recognise him, she smiled and nodded her head as she passed - which was strange. Maybe she thought he was Martin and the resemblance was better than he had feared.

It was a beautiful day, and Warren looked around at the nature scenes as he ate. The ferry wasn't due to leave until 2.00pm so he knew there was plenty of time to eat what he could, while keeping an eye on the driveway for Martin's yellow Volvo with the surfboard on the roof.

Wendy's few words of greeting to Warren seemed to spark social interaction in the other people at the tables, and they nodded politely to each other, and to him. Warren felt this was probably the last opportunity to get people to notice that he wasn't Martin, but the rising tension in his chest made coherent thought difficult. He noted the irony, Martin seemed to have no problem talking to random people on the street and in restaurants, to the point where he butted in where he sometimes wasn't wanted. *How to channel that?*

The food was average, but Warren wasn't tasting it. This far into the mission he was almost robotic, simply shovelling calories into his body in order to provide fuel for the exertions of the next few hours. Some other people came out onto the balcony and Warren nodded politely to them, and they made some generic comments about the weather.

'Parking not an issue, though,' he said blandly. 'Told me to move, but I parked back near the water anyway, just over there.'

The row of trees hid the Volvo from sight, and he had to rely on hope that the car had been moved correctly.

Channelling his inner Bryant, Warren tried to incorporate the phrases Rebeca wanted the witnesses to remember. 'Lots of tourists here,' he said in an effort to sound like a racist, inbred local. 'Lots of WASPs, not many Nips or

Wogs.'

The other families either politely ignored him, or just smiled and continued eating. Warren was saved from any further theatrics as he caught a flash of yellow in his peripheral vision. Up at the toll booth, the other yellow sedan stopped as the driver paid the entry fee, then moved down the hill towards him...Rebecca was driving Martin's real Volvo, which meant that the patsy was unconscious and secure at Seascapes. Warren took a deep breath, then another.

Showtime!

His watch said 1:32pm.

Swinging the duffel bag over his shoulder, he put the video camera on the tray, took another deep breath and maneuvered his way back inside. He put the tray onto the closest empty table and took a step to the side of the door. That was basic opsec, making sure that nobody could take him from behind. He scanned the room for threats, making eye contact with Michael Sargent, who was sitting opposite his girlfriend, Kate Scott. Michael noticed the blonde man had a flat nose like a boxer^[29], but what drew his attention were the eyes. Michael said the man looked hyped, amped up as if he was about to challenge him for a fight. He met the challenge, refusing to drop his gaze from the other man.

Then eye contact was broken and Warren finished his scan.

While his eyes had been drinking in the layout of the cafe, his brain had been transforming that data into a 3D mental map. The room was shaped in an L, and he was standing in the corner between the two parts of the room. Back to the wall, the smaller part of the L was to his left, with the main room opening to his right hand side. The military part of his brain worked out a quick shooting plan.

First, kill the people in the smaller area to his left. That would eliminate any danger from that direction. He would keep the table between himself and the rest of the room, as a barrier to help stop anyone who tried to be a hero.

Then he would work his way clockwise around the room.

Simple is good.

He took another deep breath, calming his nerves and flushing his bloodstream with fresh oxygen, as he unzipped the blue bag and laid it on the table next to the tray. He took care to spread open the two sides of the bag, so the firearms were exposed and easily accessible.

Even fully loaded, the AR15 was light, his right hand naturally slipped around the grip and he lifted it clear, taking care that none of it snagged on any of the material or the strap of the bag. He had no idea that Martin was left handed.

Warren locked his elbow to secure the rifle between his hip and his shoulder. While it wasn't the SLR he knew intimately, the months of strict Paratrooper training had made the metal and plastic shape an extension of his own arm and eyes. The weight and shape put it about halfway between the pellet gun and the SLR. The telescopic sight on top was a nuisance, utterly useless at this short range, so he ignored it. Just like Point Shooting in the House of Horrors, he instinctively knew where the shots would land, and in close quarters like this, he didn't need to range or stopping power of the 7.62 rifle, this smaller one would do nicely.

As his thumb moved the selector from SAFE to FIRE, and his right finger depressed the trigger, he started to count off the rounds using a basic mnemonic.

It was a children's counting rhyme he had learned as a child.

*One, two, three, four, five,
Once I caught a fish a-live,
Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
Then I let him go a-gain,
One, two, three, four, five.*

The syllables in rhyme were simple and clear, easy to remember in the chaos of combat and there were twenty nine of them. Finger pressure on the trigger lifted the sear, and the spring snapped the firing pin out into the breech, where it struck the primer of the first round. Warren's mental state could be described as meditative or hypnotic, his muscles operating mostly on reflex and training. He focussed his eye on the first target's nose, and that's where the first round hit. Then the next, and the next.

Almost every round fired found flesh.

First was an Asian couple sitting right near the door, then a white couple with a young child.

One - two - three - four - five

The first gunshot deafened him, but Warren was prepared for the ringing in his ears. His eye was tracking across the cafe in front of the gun barrel, lining up targets for his hands and hips to follow instinctively. He kept his mouth

open, allowing the impact of the gunshots to escape his chest cavity and minimise the movement of the gun. To the people watching, it looked as if he was laughing in a robotic manner, but there were sound scientific reasons for letting the air move freely – a millimetre either way would be magnified into a miss by the distances travelled by the bullets, especially at longer ranges.

He kept his back to the wall so nobody could get in behind him, then shot Neville Quinn and another four people, among them the Asian spy he had seen speaking to Anthony Nightingale. To Warren, his body movement was akin to a ballet, a finely tuned dance around and through the targets and risks. Constantly shifting his weight from one foot to the other, Warren ensured he was always in balance and couldn't be caught 'flat-footed.' Neville Quinn survived the shooting, telling the police that '...he appeared to be the best trained army guy I've ever seen, his stance was unbelievable.'^[30]

The relentless target training that Sgt Blazkowicz had helped him through made the shooting second nature. All Warren had to do was look at where he wanted the bullets to hit and his trigger finger squeezed at the right time, reflexively. Blue targets in the House of Horrors, train hard, fight easy. *Once - I - caught - a - fish - a - live*, seven more shots.

Less than thirty seconds had passed. The rifle had moved clockwise from 9 to 1 on an imaginary clock face, arcing from left to right as he pivoted on his heel. A third of the way through the magazine, he shifted his hips and took aim at the next section of the cafe.

There were several spooks sitting in this section - Tony Kistan and Andrew Mills were killed with head shots. Rebecca had said that Mills was likely an ASIO agent, while Warren recognised Kistan - a member of the ANC, the communist party of South Africa and a major political activist.

Interspersed among the generic diners were other government agents who were shot but survived. So he would know who to target, Warren had been shown photos by Rebecca, with names written underneath - Rob & Karen Atkins, Justin Noble and Hans Overbeeke. Even though they were expecting a mass shooting, the speed of Warren's execution caught them all by surprise, unable to react in time and those who did survive were saved only by the sacred geometry of chance.

Most of the other diners died where they sat or stood. The pressure waves from the gunfire, contained inside the enclosed space, acted like a flashbang. The overwhelming stimulation causes temporary loss of hearing, and also

disturbs the fluid in the ear, causing loss of balance. This caused most people to remain still, easy targets as Warren fired rapidly.

Anthony Nightingale had just finished his meal when Warren brought the tray back inside. 'Good boy,' he thought. 'Getting ready to get on the ferry, mix up your rubbish with everyone else's so the forensics people can't get any DNA. Cover your tracks.' He barely noticed the bag moving as Warren drew out the AR15, and he froze in shock for a second as his brain refused to believe that the plan had changed. Shots rang out, creeping clockwise around the room towards him and he leaped to his feet. 'No, NO! *Not here,*' he screamed^[31], as if his life depended on it - which it did. His panic overwhelmed his opsec training, and with his life in danger, he didn't care who might hear him.

Warren was prepared for the reverberation inside the enclosed structure. He knew that his eyes and ears would be affected by the supersonic crack as the bullets were fired, the burning cordite and the echoes as the walls and ceiling bounced the sound back at him. After the first shots, his ears were ringing and he didn't hear Anthony's words, but he understood what the spook was trying to say. The look on his face, shock and disbelief changing to horror as he realised the betrayal, amused Warren and he shot Anthony in the neck, right in the voice box. Warren took pride in his shot placement, as if to make a statement: 'Shut up, asshole.'

Six, Nightingale - seven - eight - nine - ten.^[32] In some ways, these shots were easier than the House of Horrors because everyone was frozen in shock at their tables, or lying motionless on the floor. *Then - I - let - him - go - a - gain.* After training with the BB gun and sessions in the House of Horrors, these executions were easy.

Contrary to popular belief and the hysterical media reporting, the supersonic bullets fired by the AR15 were **not** designed to kill people. The US Army had researched gunshot lethality extensively after World War 2, where they fielded an excellent battle rifle - the M1 Garand. Firing a large .30-06 bullet, the M1 was designed to quickly kill enemy soldiers, and it did an excellent job in the fields of Europe and the islands of the Pacific.

But in the 1950s, the dimensions of warfare were revised. Planning for a long-running, multi-theatre war against the economic might of the Soviet Union, the doctrine of war changed. American war planners realised that it only took 2 enemy soldiers to dig a hole and bury a dead one, but it took

many surgeons, nurses, resources and therapy to care for a wounded comrade. And if he survived, a wounded veteran would depress civilian morale wherever he went, further burdening the society which now had to feed and house him. It was a greater economic and psychological blow to inflict wounds on enemy troops, which in turn would do more overall damage to the Soviet Union's economy than if the soldier was killed outright and buried.

Smaller bullets, travelling faster, would allow US and allied soldiers to carry more ammunition, and if they only wounded the enemy, well...that was the point, after all.

So when Eugene Stoner demonstrated the AR10 to the Pentagon in 1956, it met most of their criteria immediately. They made some minor changes, and the new rifle was named the M16. With a curved magazine holding 30 rounds, the plastic-framed rifle was a physical manifestation of the changes in the US fighting doctrine. While the M16 had full-auto capability as a military rifle, it was widely recognised as an excellent sporting and hunting rifle, so Armalite released a civilian version that was restricted to semi-auto fire in order to comply with US gun control laws. The patent was filed under the name Armalite Rifle, model 15, which was quickly contracted by the marketing department to simply AR15.

At the time, the AR15 was possibly the only firearm based on a design intended to wound rather than kill outright, but in the hands of a trained hunter or sporting shooter it was a flexible, stable and capable platform, supporting a wide variety of customisable components for game hunting, recreational or competition shooting. In almost constant service for half a century, the only other design with that kind of career in the US Army was the Brown Bess musket.

There were six more shots in the rifle, and Warren decided to show off a little. He made two sequential head-shots, then shot two people with one bullet, then made two more headshots.

One - Two - Three - Four - Five.

By the time he had counted the twenty-nine words in the rhyme, he knew there was only one round left in the rifle. The detachable magazine was empty. Warren had trained relentlessly for this critical time in a gunfight. Both hands were busy, removing the empty magazine and inserting a fresh one. With a bullet still in the chamber, the new magazine would lock into

place and the rifle was ready to fire again, immediately. It was four simple movements: press the mag release with his right thumb and drop out the empty magazine. It fell to the floor next to the gift shop counter^[33]. He reached into his pocket, grasped the new magazine in his left hand and slid it into place, feeling the click as it locked into place and then moved his left hand back onto the barrel shroud. In less than two seconds, he was ready to shoot again.

If Warren had fired the last round, the feed tray in the magazine would pop up and lock the bolt assembly backwards on the empty chamber. He would then have to complete all the earlier steps but the chamber would still be empty. He would then have to slap the bolt release catch so a fresh cartridge would be loaded, bang the forward assist to make sure the new cartridge was seated properly, then aim and fire the rifle. This process required both hands, consumed relatively vast amounts of time, fine motor skills and concentration - all of which were the most precious commodity of all in a gunfight that could be over in seconds.

While Warren had trained for hours at a time, to make both options instinctive, whenever possible he would preference the first one. There was a risk that an alert enemy could try to rush and overpower him while preoccupied with changing magazines. Keeping a round “up the spout” not only simplified and sped up the reloading process a great deal, it also gave him a defensive round to shoot an attacker while reloading.

But above all else, he had the supreme advantage all shooters desire - disarmed victims. Not one of the people in the cafe had any kind of defensive weapon, even the off-duty police officer was not legally allowed to carry his service pistol - or a personal firearm - in self-defence. Trained to shoot and move while Communists - hardened combat veterans - were shooting back at him, Warren had all the time in the world to stroll around the carnage and assess any residual threats. The air in the cafe was full of smoke, but there were no threats.

He moved around to the right, past the servery and into the gift shop area, shooting several more people as they cowered on the ground. At the back of the gift shop, there was an emergency exit door set into the wall, which opened onto the deck outside.

Or should have opened out onto the deck. As Warren came down the short passage between the racks of trinkets, he saw a huddle of people at the door,

desperately pushing and pulling on the handle. As an emergency fire exit, the door should have opened easily from the inside, but the terrified women screamed and moaned in terror because the door remained immovable. The woman closest to the door had both hands on the metal handle, wrenching it up and down in a frenzy. Her breath came in sharp gasps of terror as she saw death approach, but the door remained immutable.

With a fresh magazine in the rifle, Warren started the rhyme again. *One, Two, Three, Four, Five. Once I caught a fish alive. Six, Seven, Eight.*

After these shots, the magazine was half empty and all movement inside the cafe ceased.

Peter Nash was shot in the head, protecting his wife Carolyn from the shooter. She silently wept and cradled her husband's body, praying that the gunman wouldn't hear and come back.

Warren moved to the front of the cafe, but didn't open the door.

He waited inside, near the door, for several reasons.

Firstly, he needed to know if there were any survivors. He would tell them by the instinctive moans of pain - they wouldn't be able to help themselves, just like those bastard Communist floppies in those villages. And to do that, he needed his hearing to recover from the beating it had just taken.

Secondly, his brain and lungs were fizzing with adrenaline. This was giving him the shakes as his fine motor skills were compromised. Taking the time for some deep breathing would help calm his aim for the next part of the hunt.

Thirdly, it was a matter of target acquisition. It was human nature to run away from loud noises and scenes of killing, but it was also human nature to be inquisitive. A few minutes rest would allow his hearing to recover a little, to inspect the bodies for signs of life, and it would also tempt those who had fled to come in closer for a look. That was a key part of Rebecca's plan.

Then, he would shoot again.

But not with the AR15. The barrel was hot, and needed a rest to cool down before it could be safely fired again. Warren walked back to the table where the blue Prince sports bag was lying and swapped it for the AR10 (chambered in the more powerful .308W calibre) and the shotgun. Different tools for different jobs, he laid them on the table and noticed movement at the other end of the cafe. Picking up the AR10^[34], he moved over and shot Graeme Collier and Robert Elliot^[35], then went back to the table to finish laying out

the damning evidence that Rebecca wanted him to leave for the investigators.

Ashley Law^[36] was on the phone in the information building when he was interrupted by the noise from nearby. It sounded like someone was hammering two metal sheets together, and it was supremely annoying. It went on for a minute, then another one. There was a pause, then banging started up again. Hanging up the landline, he went outside into the carpark to try to find out what was irritating him. He stood next to Anne Hillman and asked ‘Who’s banging that bloody iron?’

Broad Arrow Cafe

1.28pm

Lying on the floor of the cafe alongside piles of bodies, Mary Lee Olson and her husband Dennis pretended to be dead. With the initial explosions, Mary had thought a pressure cooker may have exploded in the kitchen, but rapidly realised that people were being shot all around her. Lying among the carnage, Mary felt as if the shooting would never stop, but eventually the room went quiet. The shots had stopped for a moment, a moment that turned into several minutes but Mary was physically unable to move, literally frozen with fear. With adrenaline flooding their veins, every second seemed to last a lifetime and after lying immobile for what seemed like an hour, another survivor nearby whispered 'He's gone.^[37]'

Mary didn't dare move her head, but Dennis weighed the options and took a look around. He couldn't see Warren standing just around the corner, so he got to his feet, darted beside a Coke vending machine and scanned to see if the coast was clear.

It wasn't.

Warren saw the movement and his training bypassed rational thought to move his muscles directly. The target was over 3 meters away, and likely to move quickly, therefore the best weapon was the shotgun. He lifted, aimed and fired in one fluid motion but Dennis was faster, sprinting into the kitchen and out the back door into the loading dock. It was only after he had rushed to safety that he realised that some pellets had hit him, without doing significant damage. Examining Dennis a few minutes later, medic Wendy Scurr described the wounds as "small, round, raised and dark, with minimal bleeding...shotgun pellets...about the same as farmers use.^[38]'

Satisfied that anyone left alive in the cafe would be utterly traumatised, Warren left the blue Prince bag on the table and packed the shotgun, SLR and AR15 into the black duffel bag. Swinging the bag over his shoulder, he took the AR10 at port arms, stepped to the door and pulled it open. Sure enough,

there were people around, some were even walking towards the sound of gunfire.

Insane as it may sound, they imagined it to be a historical re-enactment of a battle.

At least one of the staff had escaped from the cafe and was herding people away from the area. Warren saw him immediately and opened fire, but the AR10 didn't have a scope, the shots were wide and hit some trees. Warren moved out into the carpark, which was crowded with busses and cars, turning the open area into a maze of death. The barrel of the AR10 was heating up slowly again as he moved between cars, but in the cooler outside air he wasn't worried about heat any longer. He began to move in a rhythm, humming and trying to imitate Martin's manner.

'Good times, having a good time,' he sang off-key, keeping an eye on his surroundings to make sure nobody got in behind him. He fell into a rhythm again, moving two or three steps, letting his bodyweight fall onto his front foot as he fired at targets, then shifting back to pivot on his rear heel to cover his six o'clock.

He shot one of the bus drivers - Royce Thompson, who dropped to the ground and rolled out of sight. '*No time to linger, gotta keep the tempo up,*' thought Warren as he searched for more targets. A man and a woman were standing near one of the buses about ten meters away, and he lined up the sights as they started to run away.

Brigid Cook was hit in the thigh, with fragments of her bone hitting Ian McElwee and covering them both in blood. They disappeared behind one of the coaches parked in rows. He didn't see Brigid use her apron as a tourniquet, sensibly tying the strings into a bow so they could be easily untied if she passed out. That way, rescuers wouldn't waste any time in saving her life, if they arrived in time^[39].

He spotted movement in a bus window, and dashed up the steps. A man crouched between two seats, the back of his head an easy target. Warren fired robotically and then went back to the car park.

He observed that people were moving in ripples, as if he was a stone tossed into a quiet pond, and wherever he moved, there was movement as they tried to get away. 'No rush,' he thought to himself. 'The nearest cops are half an hour away, at least.'

He walked down towards the water, firing in bursts of single and double taps

as people screamed, ran and bled. He saw the ferry in the distance for the first time and was surprised at how big it was. 'Rebecca's original plan would have been quite impressive,' he thought. 'Trapping two hundred people on that remote island to be hunted down...leave a few traumatised survivors...'

By now, there was nobody down near the water, so he looped around and walked back up towards the carpark and the visitor centre. Head on a swivel, he kept checking every angle for movement, to see if anybody was coming back into range.

He walked past the spot where he had parked, noting that the space was empty. He felt no emotion, but mentally ticked off one of the mission elements. Julie and Virginia had done their part, and were hiding it in the trees to the south.

He spotted more movement in the bushes behind the cafe, and fired another dozen random rounds towards it, but couldn't see if he hit anyone. He wasn't upset by this, since the main objective was to terrify people. He hoped that by now, most of the killing was over.

Tramway Street

South of Clougha, the visiting magistrate's house
1.36pm

Paul Cooper^[40] had been herding people away from the shooting. Using the church as physical cover, he had run south, past the church and approached Tramway Street when he saw a flash of yellow. A yellow car. A yellow Volvo.

His heart stopped for a full second.

The dark yellow, almost mustard colour flashed a warning in his brain, because he had seen a blonde man getting out of that car, and it was a blonde man who was shooting people. Paul wasn't aware how his brain made the connection, but he immediately felt terrified. Had the gunman gotten back in his car and come around in front of him?

Like an ambush? That would mean that people like Paul had actually been moving survivors into a trap. The shock of the idea hit him like a physical blow.

Then another flurry of shots from down near the cafe resolved that question. The gunman was still down there, so Paul was safe for the moment, but how the hell did the gunman's car end up over here?

There was a low hill in front of the car and standing on the grass at the top, two women were watching the scene at the cafe. They had a perfect view of the massacre, but the car was invisible to the screaming people across the park.

'Hey,' he huffed as he trotted up. 'That's the type of car the gunman has - have you seen anyone come past here?' Startled by the unexpected intrusion, Virginia and Julie made noncommittal noises but started to get back in the car. Paul stopped them.

'Seriously. Is this your car? Who's the driver?'

'I am,' said Virginia as she swung her body into the driver's seat. 'What's going on?'

Paul decided they were innocent bystanders who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the heat of the moment, he didn't notice the incongruity of two middle-aged women driving a car with a surfboard lashed

to the roof.

‘You’re not supposed to have a vehicle here, it’s pedestrian only.’ His words were terse and they came out strongly.

‘There’s been a shooting, the gunman is still on the loose. If you attract attention, you’re liable to get shot.’ He took a deep breath. ‘Get out of here, please. Drive straight on, go out past the motel and go home.’

This posed a serious problem to the two women. On one hand, they had to keep a low profile and refusing to leave the scene of a massacre would raise suspicions. But they were under specific orders from Rebecca to stay in the area so she knew where to find them - and the red hot Volvo. Under no circumstances could they allow it to be discovered by the police or the media. Julie and Virginia exchanged a glance and nodded politely to Paul. ‘Yes, of course,’ said Julie. ‘We’ll drive out past the motel - good luck to you.’

Satisfied that the two strangers were on their way out of the danger zone, Paul retraced his steps, moving closer to the gunfire as he worked his way towards the nearest telephone in the administration offices.

Starting the car as Paul walked away, the two women waited until he was out of sight and then got the car moving. But instead of driving west to safety, they turned north and drove past “Clougha”, then slowed to a crawl. Virginia took a right, then a left into Church Street. This street passed a few ancient houses before forking around the giant sandstone ruins of the original church building. On the right was a more modern church hall, built of timber with a red corrugated iron roof.

‘Should be safe here,’ she muttered to herself as much as her passenger. ‘If we see anyone else, I’ll just circle the block until Rebecca arrives.’

The ruined church lay between the Volvo and the cafe, completely protecting them from any stray bullets that may fly in their direction. They eased the Volvo to a stop in the shade of the church and settled in to enjoy the rest of the show.

Arthur Highway

Just north of Port Arthur Historic Site
1.55pm

Rebecca had parked Martin's Volvo when he was alerted by all the people running and screaming. *Good*, she thought. *Right on time*. She removed the key from the ignition to make sure none of the panicked tourists stole it in an attempt to get away, but left the car unlocked to speed Warren's exit when he was finished.

Keeping a low profile, she quickly walked back up to the road, heading north to rendezvous at Seascapes once Warren had expended all his ammunition. Nobody was paying her any attention, because there were all hurrying in the same direction.

As she passed the General Store on the Arthur Highway, she drew back her right arm and tossed the key into the scrub, never to be recovered.

In a staccato rhythm with her own footsteps, the gunshots rang out crisp and clear in the still afternoon air. Her lungs were full of fresh air, and the success of her plan made her feel giddy with excitement. She had tasted a whiff of blood and terror as she parked the car, and as she walked north, she could hear noises in the scrubs all around her as the terrified survivors scrambled away. The frenzied sobbing, moaning and grunting sounds delighted her and she felt her nipples harden in arousal.

It was a beautiful day for mass murder and terrorism. She felt the warm glow of the autumn sunshine as a direct blessing, a physical manifestation of the mission going to plan and the rewards she would be receiving. The thrill of success smoothed the jagged emotions she had endured to get here, the shame and fear, the stress of managing the operation.

But the best part of it all was getting away with murder.

Volley after volley rippled across the ridge as she trotted north. Ordinarily it was a thirty-minute walk, but Rebecca was moving faster than average and she made it back to the guest house just before 2.30pm. Sweaty and thirsty, she pushed open the door, nodded breathlessly to Petra and went straight to

the sink where she drained three glasses of water, one after the other. Petra looked at her with a critical eye. There were dark sweat stains under her arms, and the shirt stuck to Rebecca's back in the middle. Petra wrinkled her nose. 'You need a shower, dear.'

'No time now,' said Rebecca. 'Warren will be here any moment.'

She paused as another three shots cracked in the distance, then smiled at Petra. 'Sounds like everything's going to plan, I'm so pleased.'

Both women laughed in delight and high-fived in celebration.

Near the Church

Between the Cafe and “Clougha”

1.59pm

Virginia and Julie had sat silently in Warren’s Volvo for almost half an hour as small groups of people ran past in the distance. A group of staff from the PAHS came to the church to use the telephone, and saw them sitting in the car. In this group, Ashley Law assumed the two women didn’t know what was happening, and felt concerned for their welfare.

That’s dangerous. If the cops see that car, they’re likely to shoot first and ask questions later.

He called out to Vicky McLaughlin^[41], who was helping shepherd survivors into the church.

‘Vicky! Stop that car!’ His voice rasped with exertion and stress.

‘Tell them to get out of the car,’ he gasped, and Vicky dashed closer and waved frantically in the driver’s window. ‘

‘You’re sitting ducks, there’s a gunman on the loose.’

Virginia looked at her in surprise, but didn’t open the window.

‘Get out, get out! Come into the church.’

Julie grabbed Virginia’s arm. ‘No, let’s drive.’

Virginia jabbed her right thumb over her right shoulder as a signal to the group that she was reversing the car. Deciding that the walking wounded were a higher priority, Vicky nodded and ran back into the church.

The Volvo’s brakes squeaked as Virginia reversed across the road, then did a three-point turn back towards Clougha. But instead of turning right, she continued straight on, then made a right turn into Tramway Street. They were right back where Paul Cooper had spoken to them, behind cover and concealment, but Paul was long gone. Virginia shared out the last of the coffee in the thermos and they relaxed back in the seats, passing the time until Rebecca arrived.

Main car park

Port Arthur Historic Site

2.15pm

Warren was aware of the mental clock ticking away in the back of his mind. He was running low on ammo, and anyone with half a brain and run away from the area by now. He moved back from the water's edge towards the car park, angling towards the yellow Volvo as it came into view. Rebecca said she would leave more ammo in the trunk, and Warren decided to take a moment to reload, scan the area and re-assess before heading back to Seascape.

Warren noticed his hand shaking with adrenaline as he took the spare key out of his pocket and opened the trunk, emptying the duffel bag inside. He noticed that Rebecca had also put in some sheets of cardboard, crudely made into hand-drawn targets. *Jesus! She's laying it on thick.* She had also left some boxes of ammunition for him, both calibres. *Good girl!*

Warren dropped an empty magazine from his pocket next to the shotgun, then took the one out of the rifle itself^[42]. He reloaded the AR10 and the AR15 from boxes of ammo, then slammed the lid shut. But as he did so, he noticed a dark stain on the ground underneath the car. It just so happened that as his eye focused on the puddle, a drip from under the car caught the sunlight as it fell. *A leak?* He dropped to one knee and dipped a finger, then brought it to his nose - petrol!

What the fuck?

He stuck his head down near the ground and saw the problem immediately. **FUCK!**

One of his shots had hit the ground and spun off, and by pure dumb luck it had punched a hole in the fuel tank.

No time to lose, he HAD to get the Volvo out of there NOW. It was the only thread tying Martin to the massacre and without it leading the cops to Seascape, he wasn't getting paid. The rifles clinked together as he wrenched open the driver's door and stowed them in the passenger foot well. Twisting

the key in the ignition, the engine was still warm and it caught immediately, jerking forward as he spun the wheel to navigate the narrow lanes of the car park. He goosed the throttle, urging the old car up the hill towards the toll booth.

Targets in the bush. He spotted colour and movement, pulled on the handbrake and threw the shifter into N. He grabbed the AR10 this time, sliding out of the Volvo with the rifle muzzle and his feet first, a movement practised a hundred times by infantry dismounting from vehicles into a contact.

Petrified with fear but galvanised into action by her self-preservation instinct, Nannette Mikac was shepherding her two little girls - Madeline and Alannah, away from the road when Warren called for them to stop. With the Volvo disabled, he would need another car and the best way to dominate such an interaction would be to use a hostage. This woman would suit that purpose.

‘Get down,’ he called. ‘Get down on your knees.’

Both children were crying and the woman was babbling in terror. ‘Don’t hurt my babies,’ she said, repeating it over and over like a mantra.

No, this wouldn’t work. Warren decided that he needed a single person, the two kids would be impossible to control. Time was running out, and he could hear other people moving through the trees nearby.

Fuck, this isn’t going to work. They’re uncontrollable. Try again with someone else.

Warren gave them three quick shots, as accurately as possible so they wouldn’t feel any pain. The adrenaline was beginning to subside now, and the shock of the child murders turned a worm inside him.

‘Fuck you, Rebecca. If that’s not enough kids for you to exploit, then bad luck. I’m not shooting any more kids.’ He muttered the words under his breath, but he felt it was important to vocalise his resolve. Somehow it seemed more permanent if he said it aloud. It put his message out there into the universe.

He tossed the rifle back into the Volvo and gunned it back up the hill towards the toll booth.

The thrill of combat had soured inside his brain, especially with the two little girl’s deaths, and his emotional state had turned from fluffy cotton candy to cold steel. There was a physical weight to the murders that fogged up his brain, tugging at his soul and his eyelids. A wave of fatigue rolled over

Warren as his body processed the adrenaline and lactic acid, so he slapped himself in the face and forced himself to take stock of the situation.

The AR10 was muzzle down in the passenger foot well, and Warren realised he had lost track of how many rounds he had fired. He put driver's window down and motored onwards, uphill towards the toll booth. The building was built alongside the ENTRY lane, on the far right side of the clearing. His side, the left hand side, had no obstructions and allowed free exit from the site.

He almost made it.

The yellow car sputtered and stopped in the EXIT lane, right next to the toll booth building on the opposite side of the roadway. Heavy bushland hemmed in the cars on both sides of the road, and Warren's training screamed a warning about the lack of manoeuvre room, cover for enemies and narrow exit options.

It was probably the worst tactical position he had ever been in.

The ENTRY lane was also blocked by a Gold BMW that was facing the wrong way - uphill.

A man and a woman were standing next to the BMW, while the male driver and a female passenger sat in the front. Warren took a closer look at the first man as he stepped closer, waving his hand up and down as if telling Warren to lower the side window so they could speak. The window was already down and Warren had no desire to be trapped inside a vehicle, so he grabbed the AR10 and stepped out onto the roadway. Hyperaware, he thought it was strange that the man showed no fear, a striking contrast to the screaming, terrified victims that were milling around just a hundred meters away.

Then the man smiled. It was a big, white smile in a dark, narrow face.

'Perfect timing,' he said. 'You're Warren, right?'

Warren felt as if he had been punched in the gut. *How the hell?*

The man smiled again at the confusion on his face.

'Relax,' he said. 'I'm Robert Salzmann.' He waved his hand at the other woman. 'My wife Helene. In the BMW are Jim Pollard, Rosie Nixon. Rebecca asked us to block off the entry, make sure nobody came through while you were on the Island. What the fuck happened?'

Warren's brain assembled the information and analysed it. These four must have been a rear-guard sentry, arranged by Rebecca to make sure no cops or other threat entered the site while Plan A was being executed.

Which meant that they didn't know about Plan B.

Which meant that they were a threat to him.

'We need to talk,' he said. 'Get in the car.'

He sat back in the driver's side and moved the rifles into the back passenger side seat so Helene could sit. Robert got in behind him, and Warren turned half-way around so he could speak to both of them.

'Bullshit, Rebecca sent you,' he said. 'She didn't say anything to me. Fuck, I could have shot you.'

Robert shrugged. 'You were supposed to be on the Island. That's what we can't figure out.'

Helene wasn't looking at Warren, she was staring out the front windscreen.

'There's a car coming,' she said. 'A red Corsair.'

Warren ignored her. 'What were your orders?'

Robert shrugged. 'Pull up here, seal off the area and then blend in and exfil when the police arrive - should be hours. Tell them we heard shots but didn't see anything.'

Warren nodded, 'Are you in charge? Who is senior?'

Robert shook his head. 'Jim is the one with connections, but we're all former spooks. We've all worked together on joint ops after he demobbed as soon as the war ended. He called on me and Helene just in case they needed help. For old times' sake...'

Warren checked his watch. They were wasting time here.

'I need your car,' he said. 'This one's outta fuel and I gotta get to Seascapes as soon as possible.'

Robert shook his head again. 'Can't happen,' he said. 'The four of us need to stay here, those are our orders. You'll have to get another vehicle on your own.' As far as he was concerned, the conversation was over. He opened the door and got out.

The car that Helene had spotted had now pulled up near the BMW. Both Jim and Rosemary Nixon were waving their hands in a "shoo, shoo" motion, telling the driver, Debra Rabe to leave the area. In the passenger seat, Nicholas Cheek saw the whole thing happen^[43].

'Fuck!' cursed Warren. He got out of the Volvo and got in Robert's face. 'There's been enough killing,' he spat. 'Hundreds of survivors are traumatised, it's done, over.'

Robert laughed. 'Not by a long shot,' he sneered. 'Get on with it, grunt.'

A red mist fell over Warren's mind as the little girls flashed over his vision but he kept his face under control. *Don't let your face betray your intentions.* 'Fine,' he said calmly, to put the others off-guard. 'I'll get another car, let me get my guns.'

He walked around the front of the Volvo, past Helene and opened the rear passenger door. He grabbed the AR10 and continued circling the Volvo, coming back to face Robert in the middle of the road.

The red Ford Corsair had stopped and begun to reverse. Nicholas Cheok was still riveted to the scene in front, describing the AR10 as a 'kind of Arnold Schwarzenegger gun' in his witness statement.

'Sorry to tell you,' he said calmly. 'Orders have changed. It's Plan B now.'

In full view of the people in the Corsair, Warren raised the rifle and shot Robert Salzman in the chest. The dead man fell backwards and collapsed into the roadway, feet pointing at the Volvo as Warren stepped around to the passenger door and dragged Helene out by her hair.

She wasn't screaming, the shock had stunned her reflexes in a similar turn of events to Anthony Nightingale earlier. Instead, she made a gurgling noise and fell to her knees beside the car. Warren stepped back a pace, lowered the AR10 and shot her in the head.

Absolutely confused at the sight and sound of "their" man turning on them, the occupants of the BMW were just as easy to kill. Warren took a savage delight in shooting Jim and Rose in the head and neck, since they were obviously connected to the conspiracy at Rebecca's level or higher.

As the red Corsair reversed out of sight, Warren dragged the dead bodies from the BMW and was about to climb in when he remembered the other rifles. He went back to the Volvo and grabbed the SLR and the AR15, then did a quick check to make sure he hadn't missed anything incriminating. He knocked open the hinged door to the glove compartment and fumbled inside. The only thing there was a folded blue notebook, which turned out to be an Australian passport. Flipping open the cover, he laughed aloud as Martin's face stared back at him^[44]. 'Good one, Rebecca,' he snorted and tossed the identification booklet back into the glove compartment. 'Laying it on a bit thick, I hope you know what you're doing.'

Warren had no time to ponder whether the authorities would ask Martin why his passport happened to be conveniently left in the car at the crime scene, or if they would be bright enough to consider the possibility of it being planted

there.

Right now, he needed that BMW to get him to Seascap. He was already late. He turned on the engine and floored the pedal.

In the few moments of relative peace, as he drove away from the scene of the crime, Warren had another thought that hit him like a punch in the kidneys.

They're going to know I'm at Seascap, they think I'm alone. So what's to stop them just busting in and ending it all right now? Rebecca wants to drag it out as long as possible, turn it into a siege, but a siege needs hostages...That's the only way to keep the police at bay...

Hostages...

At that moment, his stolen gold BMW burst out of the trees into a cleared area, where the Arthur Highway intersected with the access road to the Historic Site. There was a cemetery on the right and a sign said KODAK on the left as the BMW hurtled north. Next on the right was a service station, a red and white sign above the shop said PORT ARTHUR GENERAL STORE.

Driving slowly towards him from the exit was a white Toyota Corolla. Inside the car, Warren could see two people and the only thought that flashed into Warren's mind was *hostages!* He stomped on the brake, swung the wheel and the BMW shuddered across the road and smoked to a halt in front of the corolla, blocking the exit.

As he dashed around the back of the BMW, the Corolla's passenger door was closest to Warren. Swinging the AR10 in his right hand, he yanked open the door with his left hand and reached inside to grab the woman in the passenger seat. Saved by her seat belt, Zoe Hall fought back with a flurry of arms and legs, screaming and slapping his hand away from her. Her colleague from work, Glenn Pears got out of the driver's seat to confront their attacker. He came around the front of the car, so Warren mentally switched targets. He let go of Zoe and pointed the rifle at Glenn.

'The trunk, get in the trunk!' he screamed, waving the barrel of the AR10 at the terrified man. Hustling to the rear of the BMW, he popped open the boot and jabbed Glenn in the back as his hostage obeyed, but too slow for Warren's liking. The prisoner swung a leg into the BMW, then bent forward and fell over the lip. Warren slammed the lid and lifted his eyes to check on the woman, horrified to see that she had slipped out of her seatbelt, climbed across into the driver's seat and was trying to drive away.

Sorry, bitch. You fought hard but today's not your lucky day.

With Glenn Pears safely inside the BMW, Warren swung up the AR10 and fired from the hip, stitching three shots into the side of the car and hitting Zoe in the chest. Spinning .308 brass arced in the sunlight and she slumped forward over the wheel as Warren threw the BMW back into gear and burned rubber up the Arthur Highway.

The entire incident had taken less than three minutes.

As the gold car disappeared in a cloud of exhaust and rubber, Jim Laycock stepped out of the Kodak shop opposite the service station. He had seen the whole thing happening, alerted some minutes earlier by his son-in-law, who had served in the Greek army. 'Gunshots, large calibre,' he later told police^[45] that these were the shots fired at the toll booth. Jim's witness statement contains the following statements: "I have known Martin BRYANT from the age of 10 years" and "I did not recognise the male as Martin BRYANT."

Jim had made two phone calls to the police and then ran outside to see if he could render assistance to the victims.

Back in the BMW, Warren was struggling to stay in control.

Breathe. Focus. Breathe. Plan. Almost hysterical from the exertion and unplanned detour, Warren sucked air into his lungs and mentally ticked off Rebecca's plan.

Dropped off the decoy Volvo - tick.

Shot up the Cafe instead of the island - tick.

Fucked up that Armstrong asshole, too. Big tick, if I do say so myself. And the other four spooks at the tollbooth.

Lots of dead victims and traumatised survivors - tick.

Relatively few wounded. Targets either killed outright or subject to survivor guilt - tick.

Leave evidence of Martin strewn around - tick.

Get away unscathed - tick.

Now to draw attention to Seascope for the siege.

Warren rubbed a hand over his face as the BMW ate up the roadway. The BMW was a dream to drive, and he was going so fast that he almost missed

the turn to Seascapes, which was half way up a slight hill on a straight stretch of the bending road. To the north, the road crested a moderate hill as it curved to the left, and several cars were visible in the 200-meter stretch. *No time to lose.* Yanking the car across the roadway, he cut off a Datsun 180B towing a trailer. Stomping the brakes, the BMW skidded to a stop just inside the driveway and Warren grabbed the AR10 again.

Ding Dong, it's not Avon calling.

He fired two quick shots at the trailer as it receded south, but he knew from experience that they missed. No matter, there was a string of cars approaching from the north, and Warren patiently waited for them to come as close as possible. John Rooke was driving the Datsun and he had heard the shots, so he eyed the extended side mirror with horror to see what the gunman was doing.

A blue Holden Frontera and a dark red Ford Falcon passed Warren from right to left and he tucked the butt into his right shoulder to steady his aim. Two shots starred the Frontera windscreen and broke Linda White's left arm as she drove. After a pause to adjust his aim for a combination of the recoil and the reduced distance as the car approached, Warren fired a third shot. But the driver had been sightseeing, and believed the rifle was part of a show. Slowing down even further to watch the spectacle, the Frontera was driving slower than Warren estimated, so the shot hit the bonnet in front of the driver, instead of flesh. By pure chance, the bullet snipped the throttle cable. With the engine idling, the Frontera rolled to a stop, fortunately out of sight around a bend in the road. The stunned driver and her fiancé, Michael Wanders, realized that she needed urgent medical attention, so they switched places so that Michael could drive to get help. But while the motor fired, the throttle was useless and so they bailed out and tried to flag down a lift from the vehicles behind.

Right behind the Frontera, a dark red, burgundy Ford Fairlane was driven by Doug Horne. Sitting behind Doug was his wife Fay and next to her in the passenger seat was Helen Shilkin, who sat behind her own husband, Neville. Neville was showered with broken glass as Warren's next volley wounded Doug, blowing out the windscreen and side window. Through a trick of visual geometry, the Datsun driver John Rooke saw this in his left rear-view mirror as he drove around the sweeping curve below Seascapes. Doug didn't know that the blue Frontera behind him had been disabled, and in the shadow

of the trees he mistook the dark red car for a blue one.

Then the traffic flow was interrupted.

Anne Wardle was driving a silver Mitsubishi Magna with three female passengers when she saw the first gunman shoot at the Datsun with the trailer. Anne braked to a stop and started to reverse back up the hill. The cars behind her hadn't seen the danger, so they overtook and drove right into the kill zone. These were the blue Frontera, the burgundy Fairlane another red Ford, a Falcon Futura driven by Canadian Simon Williams. Simon was an official at the Canadian embassy in Canberra, on holiday with his wife Susan in the passenger seat.

Warren saw the last red car overtake the reversing silver one, and knew that the silver car would stop any further vehicles coming. To make sure the targets were visually aware that the gunman had come to Seascapes, he waited for the last car to approach, then stepped out into the middle of the road, firing a single shot into the centre of the windscreen. There was no need to kill anyone, the only thing necessary was to get a clear message to the police: Seascapes.

Inside the silver Magna, the transmission whined in reverse gear as the car moved slowly- too slowly for comfort - up the hill, away from the gunman. The four women were horrified at what they had seen, and the inexorable but slow motion of the car seemed to increase their fear. Nobody spoke, the driver was riveted on the rear-view mirror, while the other six eyes were watching the rifle recede in the distance.

At the wheel, Anne decided to reduce the danger of a rear-impact by moving over to the other side of the road, using the wing mirror to judge the distance from the white line on the edge of the asphalt. As she did so, a single rifle shot hit the windscreen, right in her field of vision. Then they were around the corner, relatively safe but unable to relax until they had arrived at Taranna, drunk a strong coffee and reported their story to the police at the roadblock there.

Satisfied that he had caused enough mayhem to get the attention of police, Warren got back into the BMW and drove the short distance down the driveway to the Seascapes guest house.

In reality, it was three houses - a large main house with a high, triangular roof made of corrugated iron, painted light pink. The house was surrounded by veranda, and two smaller two-story guest houses were set in a triangle

formation around a central parking area.

Warren pulled the BMW to a stop outside the main house and checked his watch. It was 2.10pm, almost exactly half an hour since the first shot was fired inside the cafe. He took the AR10, opened the boot and dragged out Glenn Pears, who was wide-eyed and gasping for breath after the g-forces and shooting he had experienced. He half-pushed, half-dragged the stumbling hostage into the house, almost knocking Petra over in the process.

‘The fuck is this?’ She screamed the question, bringing the already high tension inside the house to fever pitch.

‘A hostage,’ grunted Warren. ‘Keep the cops from just coming in shooting. Gimme handcuffs.’

Martin’s handler stood still for a moment, processing the logic in Warren’s decision, then went into the other room where David and Sally Martin’s bodies lay on the double bed. She unlocked the handcuffs from Sally’s corpse without a second glance and took them over to Warren.

Glenn Pears glared at the couple defiantly, but wasn’t strong enough to stop his wrists being cuffed together. He was pushed to the floor at the foot of the staircase and Warren used the second pair of cuffs to link his bonds to the balustrade. Petra tore up a pillowcase and used it to gag his mouth.

Warren had barely straightened up from securing the handcuffs when Rebecca came downstairs. ‘I was about to have a shower,’ she declared. ‘But I heard the shooting.’

Warren grinned. ‘I don’t think I hit anyone,’ he said. ‘But the cops definitely know we’re here.’

‘Good. The longer we can keep the road blocked, the longer the survivors will be traumatised,’ she said. ‘Bring your guns inside and go upstairs and check if the police are outside - we can’t have the local plod running in here and being a hero. I’ll move that car away from the buildings, its cover they could use to approach behind.’

Still covered in sweat and grime, Warren followed Rebecca outside. He slammed the boot of the BMW and collected the rifles from the passenger foot well. As he went inside the house, he saw Rebecca driving the car past the house, down beside the row of poplar trees into an open area of green grass where it wouldn’t obscure their view of anyone approaching the house. The weight of the vehicle left deep tyre tracks in the soft earth and grass.

Since time was critical, she drove too fast for safety and had to skid on the

grass to bring the BMW to a stop beside the poplar trees. She cut the engine, stepped out and pulled a flask from her pocket - the hip-flask type used to carry alcohol in. This one was filled with methylated spirit, intended to make sure she could burn Seascap down the next morning. Rebecca splashed about half of the bottle's contents into the fabric interior and then struck a match.

By the time she was back at Seascap, the front half of the car was burning and smoking fiercely.

Upstairs, Warren checked the northern windows for the tactical view they offered. He leaned the AR15 up against the corner of a wall, then moved into the central area at the top of the stairs and left the SLR there. The door to the room at the end of the hall was locked, and when he rattled the knob, it didn't turn.

Warren took a step back, kicked forward with his right foot and the metal latch splintered out of the frame and as the door cracked open, Warren couldn't believe his eyes.

The room was full of hunting gear. Fishing rods were stacked in a corner, and a timber gun rack held a dozen other firearms. Warren recognised the timber stock of an SKS, the slide of a pump-action shotgun but what grabbed his attention was another AR15 rifle with an oversized, boxy scope mounted to the top. He picked up the heavy rifle and his suspicions were confirmed - instead of a normal rifle scope, this was a battery-powered night vision device. *Holy shit! This was expensive kit, had the now-deceased owners used it? They didn't seem the type, more likely to be one of their adult kids.* The small-calibre rifle, equipped with night vision, would be an excellent tool for feral pests like rabbits and foxes.

It would also serve him very well once the sun went down.

He opened the closet door and wasn't surprised to see a set of waders in camouflage pattern, more fishing gear and a stack of metal boxes that he recognised immediately as military ammunition cans. He flipped open the lid of the closest one and examined the flat base of a cartridge - .223 was stamped into the metal, telling him that the AR15 would accept it. He checked another five rounds from the same box and they were all .223 - a

good sign that the owner had taken care to keep them all consistent. A single incorrect calibre could destroy a firearm worth thousands of dollars and seriously injure the operator.

He dived into the other boxes like a kid on Christmas Day. There were 7.62 rounds for the SKS and SLR - although the rifles used ammunition of a different length, so Warren was careful to keep the boxes separated.

There was movement at the door, and he glanced up to see Rebecca standing there, eyes wide at the treasure trove he had discovered.

‘What the fuck is this?’ she whispered.

Warren just laughed. ‘Best Christmas present ever, huh? Here you were, worrying about Martin’s AR10 being unavailable...and there’s a fuckin’ *ARSENAL* here all along.

‘I’ll be using this,’ he said as he showed her the night vision scope. ‘Very handy once the sun goes down, stop them sneaking up on us.’

Then he smelled smoke. Not wood smoke, this was a harsh, chemical smoke, like burning tyres and plastic. He looked at Rebecca in alarm but she shook her head. ‘It’s just the BMW,’ she said. ‘I set it on fire to destroy any DNA you might have left in it.’

Moving from room to room, Warren took down the curtains and opened up all the windows. Each time, he carefully studied the view and estimated the distances to landmarks and features - that information would come in handy in the dark, when the time came to shoot at anyone who was trying to sneak up on them.

Once he had a 360-degree mental map of the surroundings, he went back into the gun room and ferried out different firearms and ammunition, stocking the upstairs rooms with a variety of different rifle calibres and shotguns.

It was going to be a loud night for everyone.

Seascape

3.00pm - 5.30pm

Downstairs in the main living area, Rebecca handed Warren a sheet of paper with lines of typed text.

‘Here’s your assignment for the next twelve hours - keep the police occupied while Petra and I clean up here and then get rid of your Volvo, ok?’

Warren nodded and looked at the paper. It looked like a play, with stage directions and dialogue interspersed on the page. Under a heading ‘Scenario’ it read:

SOG CT FTX OPFOR TEMPLATE

Date:

At the side of the typed text was a handwritten name - HYLAND and a telephone number.

Establish perimeter, create range card if practical

Cover angles of approach

Establish dominance

Minimize phone call duration to negotiators

Schedule phone call times but fail to call

Tell them hostage is okay

Demand a helicopter

Do what I say, the hostage will be okay

At the side of this typed text were more handwritten words - Adelaide or Melbourne

Take 1 hostage on the helicopter

String negotiations out as long as possible

Avoid discussing the situation in detail.

Talk in circles.

Agree on nothing.

Change subject often.

Warren looked at the paper twice, then at Rebecca. He was thoroughly confused.

‘Please explain?’

Rebecca huffed, and gave him a look that a school teacher might give a particularly lazy student. She pointed at the start of the first sentence.

‘This is a template for a Counter Terrorism exercise. Guidelines for the opposing forces - the bad guys. It tells you what the police are likely to say and do, so you can stay one step in front, okay?’

Warren nodded.

‘So, the story behind this exercise is that you - the bad guy - are threatening Hyland, okay? You make threats to a cop, they all come running like a pack of dogs, okay? That establishes the pretext for the police action. In this case, the local cop’s name is Hyland, his wife handles the phones at the Nubeena station.’

Warren nodded again, this was starting to make sense.

‘So, make up a code name for yourself, the character you are playing in this exercise. Who’s this guy, threatening a cop - to his own wife?’

Warren shrugged. ‘A real asshole.’ He thought for a moment. ‘Well...in America, Jodie is the guy who bangs Marine’s wives and girlfriends when they’re away on deployment. But this is Australia, so how about Jamie?’

Rebecca looked pleased. ‘Jamie, done. So just read through the prompts and the dialogue, feel free to adapt it if it feels clunky, okay? Let the police do most of the talking, okay?’

Warren struck a pose and quoted the famous lines from the movie Die Hard. ‘We got the international terrorist playbook, and we’re running it, step by step.’

Rebecca just stared at him with her mouth open and a blank look on her face. It was obvious that she hadn’t seen the movie.

‘Die Hard...You...hmm...never mind.’ Warren turned back to the phone to end the awkward moment.

Still looking at Rebecca, he plucked the cordless phone from its cradle, dialled the number and looked at his watch as he waited for the line to connect. It was 3:08pm, and he noticed it because the numbers were the same as the bullet calibres he had been shooting.

The phone rang in his ear, then clicked as the call went through.

‘Nubeena Police Station, can I help you?’ The voice was female, young. She sounded tired, probably not happy at having to cover the phones on a Sunday afternoon. He wondered if she was aware of the shootings by now.

‘Yeah, am I speaking to the policeman’s wife?’ He couldn’t hear anything at first, there was a dog barking in the background^[46].

‘Is that your dog barking?’ That one wasn’t in the script. Warren caught Rebecca’s expression and decided to follow it closely.

‘Do you know where your husband is?’ No reaction, she might still be trying to quiet the dog.

‘Having fun at Port Arthur, is he?’

‘Who is this?’ That got a reaction. She knew about Port Arthur. Her voice was strained and distraught. Warren smiled, the script was working.

‘Jamie, you can just call me Jamie.’ But she didn’t, she was obviously concerned about her husband.

‘Do you know if he’s okay?’ Merran felt her stomach elevator drop as she imagined her husband had been taken hostage. She could tell by Warren’s tone of voice that this wasn’t a prank call. The chances of this being a prank were very small - microscopic, because Nubeena Police Station had recently been given a new phone number that wasn’t in the public phone books yet. Certainly there was nothing inside Seascap to indicate what the new Nubeena police station number was. Rebecca had gotten the number from Stackmore inside the government, and he had simply accessed the current phone number form the government directory. Neither he nor Rebecca knew how close this minor detail came to blowing their cover story.

Warren chuckled and nodded, even though she couldn’t see him down the phone.

‘I know,’ but then he let the sentence hang in the air. He thought he heard the intake of breath as Merran tried not to cry aloud.

He saw that Rebecca was starting to stress and decided to stir both women up a little.

‘Playing with yourself, are we?’ Warren laughed once, like a lecher, then hung up.

Then he saw the incredulous look on Rebecca’s face, and burst out laughing again. The stress of the situation was almost overpowering, and Warren let out several cackles of hysterical laughter at his own joke.

He was still laughing as the phone - still in his hand - rang. Warren pressed the green button and remained in character as Jamie, laughing aloud.

A woman's voice on the phone, 'Hullo, hullo. Is this the right number for Seascape?'

Warren continued laughing, then calmed enough to say 'Yes.'

'Who am I talking to?' *Shit, this lady was pushy. Couldn't be the negotiator, they wouldn't be that unprofessional.*

Warren laughed again. 'Well, you can call me Jamie.'

'It's the ABC calling^[47]. What's happening?' The tone in her voice really annoyed Warren. She sounded like she needed a good spanking. He looked at the script in his hand, then rejected it because she wasn't the cops. He could afford to have a little fun, take the piss.

'What's happening? What's happening is I'm having lots of fun. But I really need a shower. If you try to call me again, I'll shoot the hostage.'

That shut her up. He could almost imagine her mouth working as she tried to think how to respond.

'If you call again, I'll kill the hostage.' He repeated the threat and then hung up on her.

He looked at Rebecca and shrugged.

'Not a bad effort,' she said. 'You've certainly stirred everyone up and they know we're here now. Cuppa tea?'

'Yeah, sounds good,' he exhaled as he put the phone handset in his pocket. 'I need to relax a little.'

They both laughed and Rebecca filled the kettle and switched it on. Settling the phone in his jacket, Warren's hand touched the sachet of marijuana he had bought from the girls in the van. *God, that seemed like hours ago...* He tore off a strip of paper from the checklist and rolled a fat joint, then lit it from the lighter he had purchased in the morning.

The first deep drag filled his lungs with cool, clear fumes and he held it for two, three, four seconds, then exhaled through his nose.

A second draw, the same duration and the joint was half gone. He offered it to Rebecca and Petra but they both wrinkled their noses at him. 'Prudes,' was all he said, as he sucked down the last bud smoke and then flicked the butt into the sink. He took another deep breath and felt the high kick in - that sexy, crazy, irreverent feeling that made him feel invincible.

The phone rang again. Warren picked it up.

‘This is Terry McCarthy of the Tasmania Police.’ Warren looked at the script.
GAME TIME!

‘Uhuh.’

‘How’s things going in there, mate.’

The buzz made Warren’s eyes blue for a moment. On the page, *HYLAND* became *Hawaii* and Warren’s tired, overstimulated brain used alliteration to link it to a related word that began with “H” - *Holiday*.

‘Fine. Couldn’t be better, just like a Hawaiian holiday.’

McCarthy squinted^[48]. *What the hell was he talking about?*

‘Hawaiian holiday?’

Warren swallowed. ‘Yes, that’s correct Sir.’

‘Oh sorry. I don’t understand what you mean by that.’ McCarthy thought that it sounded as though the man was speaking from a script.

Shit, there wasn't any more in the script. He was supposed to wing it! ‘Uhh,’ warren stammered. ‘I don’t know, myself.’

‘I want a helicopter,’ he said firmly. ‘Get me a helicopter to Hobart airport, then call me back.’

Rebecca took the phone out of his hand as he cut the connection. She gave him a stern look. ‘Pull your shit together, Warren. If you carry on like an idiot, they’ll burst in here and spoil the whole op.’

‘Yeah, sorry. Give me another shot.’

‘Sort your shit out,’ she barked. ‘Get upstairs and keep them away from the house.’

Warren went back upstairs, took the SLR and emptied two or three magazines at the police. He thought he hit one of the police cars, but couldn’t be sure. No matter, the whole point wasn’t to kill police, it was mainly to attract attention.

The first few shots had been aimed at officers setting up roadblocks outside Seascape, causing Constables Allen and Whittle to take cover in a drainage ditch^[49]. After he lost sight of those two, he changed position and fired bursts at any movement he could see. The main objective was to keep the police presence out on the road, and prevent them from encircling the house. Once the sun set, Rebecca had to get back to Port Arthur to link up with Warren’s Volvo, and if she was arrested by the perimeter police the whole operation would be a disaster.

Warren knew he had to be as accurate as possible, and avoid actually

shooting any police officers. Such action would likely drive their tribal mentality blind with rage, and trigger some irrational action that would screw up the whole plan. No, the cops had to be held in place, but not antagonised. It was a delicate balance.

Satisfied that the police had learned not to try and flank him, Warren went back downstairs.

Martin was lying on a bed in one of the bedrooms. Petra was sitting in a chair, looking at him with a thousand-yard-stare, lost in her own thoughts. She startled when Warren knocked on the door, as if she wasn't aware he was standing there.

'Where's Rebecca?' He kept his voice low and polite.

'In the shower.' Petra pointed down the hallway.

With the AR15 still in his grasp, Warren had a flash of inspiration. He darted down the hall, kicked open the door and ripped the shower curtain off the rail. The plastic hooks sprayed across the floor as he shoved the rifle in Rebecca's face and screamed at her.

'THE COPS ARE HERE ALREADY! GET OUT! GET OUT! GO, GO, GO!'

Utterly terrified by the sudden disturbance, Rebecca made an instinctive attempt to cover her scrawny, leathery body but Warren grabbed her by the back of the neck and pushed her out of the bathroom. Water droplets scattered all over the floor as he rushed her towards the outside door, her shrill scream of terror echoing in the confined space. They burst out through the back door into the blinding daylight and Warren followed her onto the grassy yard, hard on her heels. 'Get upstairs,' he screamed in her ear and gave her a shove out onto the grass in the direction of the smaller guest houses. Lying in the drainage ditch outside, Constables Allen and Whittle couldn't believe what they were seeing^[50]. But the sight of a blonde man, carrying a black rifle was enough for the two policemen to draw their pistols. Allen thumbed the radio.

'This is Allen. We have the gunman in sight. Permission to shoot.'

Sergeant Andrew Fogarty - the senior officer in charge at the time - immediately replied over the same open channel. 'Permission denied.'

What the fuck? He thought. *I can end this now. We might not get another chance!*

He saw the "what the fuck?" look on Whittle's face, and grimaced.

Allen thumbed the radio again and spoke clearly, choosing the right words for maximum effect. 'We have the Port Arthur gunman in sight. Permission to shoot' he said slower than the first time, in case the stress of the situation had garbled his earlier words.

Sgt Fogarty sounded irritated that his authority was being questioned, and maybe the extra emotion caused his tongue to slip. 'Permission denied. This must happen,' he said clearly into the radio^[51], instantly regretting the remark. He would lose sleep many nights in the near future, wondering if that comment had given the game away, and put his life and his family at risk of the same execution.

Rebecca was still in shock, screaming and gasping as she sprinted naked across the grass, but as she approached the guest house, she realised that the others were not following. She turned her head to see Warren back near the door of the Pink Palace, laughing hysterically, and he only laughed harder when he saw the look on her face.

Now, her screams of fright changed to anger as she ran back towards him. 'You bastard!' She was absolutely livid, and her red, angry face contrasted with the sagging, leathery skin that wobbled as she moved. 'I'll fucking kill you!'

Warren saw her shoulder move, and quickly pushed his left hand out to block her slap. Dragging her arm down, he used her momentum to trip her inside, where she sprawled on the carpet. Thick, dark clumps of hair were visible under her arms and all around her butt as she struggled to cover herself and face him at the same time.

'Calm down,' he said. 'Okay, it was funny, but it's over now. We have work to do.'

She pushed her nude body up onto her hands and knees and flashed him a look of pure evil.

'Fuck you, asshole,' she muttered. 'I'll be glad to see you die tomorrow.'

She limped back to the shower to get a towel, while Warren went back upstairs to shoot at the police some more. He moved from room to room, using different rifles of different calibres - a .22 rabbit gun, the .223 AR15 and two shotguns. The different types and calibres made different noises, and the police could tell there was a variety of different guns being used^[52].

Out in the living area, the phone rang again. Warren pulled the handset out and pressed the green button.

‘Jamie?’

‘Yes that’s correct.’

‘It, it, it’s Terry, how are you?’

‘How are you Terry? I’m alright.’

‘Just ringing up, I said we’d ring back at about 5 o’clock.’

‘That’s correct, yes.’ Warren followed the script and played it cool, then decided to turn the tables and be the one asking questions for once. Just to see how the cops would respond.

‘Where are you at the present?’

‘Oh I’m actually talking to you from Hobart,’ said Terry.

‘Oh Hobart.’ Warren went back to the script, ‘How’s this helicopter going?’ McCarthy paused. ‘Well we’re working on that at this moment. That’s being passed on to the people that have to know about it. I can’t give any indications as to what’s going to happen in relation to that as yet.’ Warren rolled his eyes at the obfuscation.

‘But I can give you this assurance Jamie, and I want to make you completely understand this, we’re not going to rush in and see anybody get hurt or try to do anything that might see anybody get hurt, okay? And I want you to understand that’s that that is genuine and I guarantee that’s the case.’

Warren shrugged, not believing a word of it. ‘Okay.’

McCarthy went on. ‘Now, we only had a brief conversation before and I just want to clarify that everything that I got down before is right, alright? There are three people in in the cottages with you, is that correct?’

Warren looked at Rebecca and, Petra, then at Glenn, still handcuffed to the bottom of the staircase.

‘That’s correct at the present, yep,’ he said to Terry.

Rebecca looked at her watch, then waved at Warren to get his attention. He pressed the handset to his chest to muffle any sound.

‘Should I go upstairs, make sure there’s nobody sneaking in?’ she asked.

He nodded. ‘Just one squeeze at a time, okay? I’ll come up in between phone calls.’

Rebecca went upstairs as Terry asked ‘What do you mean by that?’

Warren pouted. 'Oh except I should say, myself - aren't you going to class me as a person?' He grinned at the idea of what the policeman's face must look like.

'Well, yeah I'm sorry, I meant three persons other than yourself...and that's Rick, Sally and David Martin who actually own the cottage. Is that correct?' Warren shrugged. The Martins were inside the cottage, what was left of them. 'Yeah that's correct.' He knew the police would be assuming that the Martin's were still alive, because they had no idea that Petra and Rebecca were inside as well.

There was a bit of a pause as the negotiator collected his thoughts, then he said 'Now you were talking just a little bit about Rick having come from Fortescue Bay. Can you just enlighten me as to what happened there?'

'Yeah, yeah, I got him and managed to get him - his wife she, he wanted to participate in the kidnapping instead of his wife, I thought alright quick...'

He instinctively ducked as a rifle shot cracked out above his head.

'...get in get into the car and I've got him as a hostage,' he finished abruptly. 'Okay, okay now you were in your car there, were you?' Terry sounded as if he was writing it all down. 'You're in your car and you what, pulled them up? They were driving along in a car, is that correct?'

Warren though this was a fantastic story, and was glad the police were giving him a story to follow, instead of just asking him to make up what had happened.

'That's correct,' he said, shaking his head in glee.

'Alright and how did you stop them, Jamie?'

Warren shrugged. 'Had to get a rifle,' he said, wondering which one he would have used to stop a car. Probably the SLR - he knew the abilities of that 7.62 round, and the kind of damage it would do a car engine.

The cop kept talking. 'Oh I see, right, so you were standing on the road they drove up and you pointed the rifle at them and they stopped.'

'Yes that's correct.' Warren had no idea what Terry was talking about, but as long as Terry was happy to keep talking, that was more time the Rebecca needed to terrorise the victims.

'Okay, and what did you...you were planning on taking these people hostage? Why, why Jamie? Do you want to tell me why?'

Warren looked at the script and became evasive.

'Oh man, you... that's what you're getting paid for I mean...'

‘Well, I’d like to hear it from you.’ The negotiator was persistent.
‘No, na, na, no,’ said Warren. *Not getting sucked into making any concrete statements.*

‘Is there any reason why you took these particular people?’

Warren looked at the script again and changed the subject.

‘I wonder why ABC phoned me up. How did they get this number? Did someone... must have got well paid for...?’

McCarthy interrupted. ‘I’ve got absolutely no...’ he protested.

Warren decided to flex his position, shut down those probing questions.

‘I don’t want them phoning me up again.’

McCarthy backed down, placating, supplicating.

‘No, no well as I said we’ve isolated the phone so that won’t happen again, okay?’

‘Good,’ said Warren. It felt good to be in control of the situation again.

As the perimeter calmed down, Rebecca came back downstairs. As she entered the kitchen, Warren was horrified to hear another male voice say ‘Petra?’

He whirled around and there stood Martin, sleepily rubbing his eyes and leaning against the door frame. Warren and Petra exchanged glances, then both looked at Rebecca, who seemed equally horrified.

Martin looked at Glenn Pears, gagged and handcuffed to the balustrade.

‘You didn’t give him enough,’ hissed Warren.

Rebecca shrugged, ‘Nothing we can do about it now.’

‘Where are we?’ asked Martin. ‘I can’t remember getting here. Where are we? Who are these people? I’m so sleepy...my face feels like it’s asleep...’

Warren put on a huge grin.

‘We’re still filming, mate. Have a seat here but make sure you stay quiet, okay?’

Martin gingerly eased himself into a chair, rested both elbows on the table and put his face in his hands.

An hour after sunset, Constable Allen had wormed his way into position like a snail. Clambering underneath the driveway bridge outside Seascapes, and moving a few centimetres at a time, he was now able to peer through some

brush at the whole side of the main residence. His field of view included the main windows of the smaller guest lodges. He wiggled his hips to get as comfortable and switched on the night vision scope. About the size of a can a soup, it was bolted to the top of the rifle and amplified the ambient light with a green, speckled filter that lit up the scene far better than moonlight. He scanned from left to right, checking the windows of the Pink Palace, then the guest houses in turn. Nothing.

One of the guest cottages was on his right, then the driveway curved left, past the second cottage to the main residence on the far right. In between the two guest houses was a row of poplar trees running directly away from him, and beside them in the distance was the smouldering wreck of a burnt-out car. He guessed that this was the BMW reported hijacked earlier in the afternoon.

He couldn't see into the ground floor windows of the main residence, but that wasn't his mission. His mission was to cover the upstairs windows only and this position was perfect. Others would be tasked with sneaking in closer, to get eyes on the ground floor of the big house from a different angle.

He thumbed the radio. 'Allen in position, no movement to report, over.'

A moment later, his call was acknowledged. 'Allen, copy all. Out.'

Allen was a trained operator, having taken part in several training exercises just like this over the past two years. He knew how to regulate his breathing and his muscle movement to maintain a state of passive awareness. He was relaxed and observant, but able to kick into high gear at a moment's notice. He completed a range card, estimating the distance to different windows to help him aim the rifle correctly, then settled in for what might be a long night. He synchronised his breathing with regular sweeps of the compound on the night vision.

Main house, nothing. Centre house, nothing. Right house, nothing. Switch it off to save battery and give his eyes a rest. Then repeat a minute later.

On one of the scans across the main house he spotted movement. The window had been smashed hours ago and the curtains removed, so the movement was definitely new. He froze in place and steadied the scope as best he could.

For a moment the silhouette was clear - a single figure holding a long rifle. His own rifle was sighted in at 100 meters, but the distance was much less, about 60 meters at the most. This meant that bullets would impact above the crosshairs, but not by much. He centred the cross on the centre mass.

Reflexively he slipped the rifle from SAFE to SEMI and then he remembered the radio exchange from earlier in the afternoon. The gunman was to be kept alive, contrary to all common sense and police procedures.

Out in the cold darkness, Constable Allen ground his teeth together in frustration as the black figure fired two shots at the trees, then disappeared. He knew they might not get another chance to end the siege and he wondered what the hell Fogarty was thinking.

The kitchen was pitch black as Warren had turned off the lights. He was showing Rebecca how to play games with the cops outside, to keep them on their toes.

He would turn off the lights in the kitchen, then run upstairs and fire two shots from a window. Rebecca would turn the lights back on downstairs as he ran to another room, then fire again in a different direction. She giggled in amusement as she imagined the cops' amazement at the superhuman speed displayed by what they assumed was one shooter, running up and down the stairs.

But Rebecca's personality soon tired of playing games. She wanted blood. The taste of fear and pain - without any consequences, her desire for evil boiled inside her heart.

Glen Pears remained as still as possible. Eyes closed and head downcast, he sat beside the foot of the stairs with his hands cuffed to the balustrade.

Rebecca dragged a kitchen chair over to him and gently nudged him into awareness. She rested the back of the chair against the staircase and motioned for him to rise. Using the balustrade, he leveraged himself upright and sat on the chair. Still cuffed together, he ended up in a position where his arms were raised above his head, elbows bent backwards. With his wrists together above his head, Glen could still flex and move a little, and use the vertical balustrade bars for balance.

She spread her knees wide and sat on his lap. Leaning forward, she rubbed her chest against his and whispered in his ear.

'Don't be afraid. I'm his prisoner too, but I'll help you if you want.'

Still gagged, Glen made a grunting sound, but Rebecca wasn't paying

attention.

‘When the time is right, I’m going to make a run for it. Wanna come?’

He nodded.

She ran her hands up under his shirt, feeling the muscles under his flesh and stroking the patches of hair that she found. She pulled him closer and whispered into his ear again.

‘You help me out, I’ll help you out, deal?’

He nodded again, grunting what he hoped was a positive response. The gag made it difficult to breathe and impossible to make loud noises.

‘Good, good,’ she crooned as if to a lover. She went back to stroking his chest, rocking backwards and forwards as she sat on his legs.

Her right hand ran from his navel, caressing his chest, pressuring his neck and then hooked around into the hair on the back of his head. Gripping a handful, she forced him to look directly into her eyes. Her breath came in deep gasps. He saw fire in her eyes, sparkling with exhilaration and lust.

His eyes widened as her left hand explored lower. Rocking backwards with her hips, she used her pelvic bone to force his knees even wider apart.

Then she maintained eye contact and explored his pants. She saw confusion, excitement, shame and fear expressed, and drank in the experience like a potent liquor.

Slowly, teasingly, she popped open the buttons on his shirt and rubbed her hard nipples against his chest. She kept her own shirt on, shamed by the hair on her own body, but used the warmth and texture of his skin to stimulate her libido.

Her chin jutted out, proud below the taut lips pulled across her teeth. She arched her back and rolled her hips in time with her heartbeat.

Leaning in closer, she saw his lips pucker in reflexive anticipation of a kiss. He was firm now, hot and strong in her left hand as she flexed and pumped slowly.

Releasing his hair, her right hand retraced its path, choking him lightly, then stroking his chest and belly. Glen closed his eyes and she pinched a nipple.

‘Eyes on me, understand? Worship me,’ she hissed. He nodded.

Her right hand now stroked her own body. First the buttons on her shirt, then her own neck to feel the pulse throbbing just below the surface. She slid her hand around to a back pocket and gripped the steak knife by the handle.

In the darkness, he didn’t notice the blade until she waved it in his face.

Moonlight reflected into his eyes, which widened in fear. He squirmed and she laughed.

Still squeezing with her left hand, she held the knife at his crotch.

‘Don’t worry, love,’ she hissed like a snake. ‘Just keep still and you’ll get your reward.’

She felt his legs and torso tense up as she brought the knife closer, drawing it across the fabric of his pants until she found a section that wasn’t right against his skin.

Stabbing the blade gently into the fabric, she worked it up and down, creating a split that ran from his knee to his belt. Like skinning an animal or using a can opener, she dipped the point of the knife into the top few layers of skin, lifted the sharp edge through the material, and then repeated the movements.

After a few minutes, his pants were shredded and his panicked breathing was starting to calm. She had hurt him, but only pinpricks where the knife had touched his skin. Effectively naked from the waist down, he could smell her sex and the ceaseless movement of her left hand on his shaft had kept him hard as a rock.

Still pumping rhythmically, hypnotically, Rebecca leaned in and kissed him deeply.

She felt his lips respond, at the same time as his climax and his member started to swell involuntarily. His eyes closed as he rode the wave towards the crest.

That was when she drove the knife into his side, below the rib cage.

A quick, hard jab that lodged the entire blade inside him. The response was volcanic.

Glen’s body tensed with the unexpected shock and pain.

His eyes flew open, a guttural shriek escaped the gag in his mouth and his legs jerked around in agony.

Drooling with lust, Rebecca used the handle of the knife for balance, riding his agony like a bucking bronco and causing even more pain. The zipper on the front of her jeans was in just the right spot, and she wiggled her hips around in a circle to increase the sensation.

She let out a long, low moan of ecstasy as another orgasm crashed through her.

Glen’s body began to spasm as the shock hit his nervous system. The handcuffs rattled against the balustrade as his limbs thrashed about, making

all efforts to stop the awful pain. His eyes bugged out in his head and his cheeks puffed around the gag as it stifled his sharp cries of pain. Sweat beaded on his forehead and she licked it off.

A deep sigh came up from the depths of hell and moaned out through her chest. All her muscles relaxed as the endorphins worked their magic.

Glen was still in agony. The pain in his side was burning worse than anything he had ever experienced.

Until Rebecca pulled the knife out.

Another burst of painful screaming was dulled by the gag, but Rebecca simply laughed and licked the sweat and tears from his face. She stood up, stepped back and stabbed the knife down into his thigh. By now, his brain was so overloaded with pain signals that it barely registered; he was reduced to a meaty lump of blubbering pain. Nothing else existed.

She was twisting the handle again when Warren rumbled down the stairs carrying the FN FAL. He looked at the scene in amazement and disgust.

‘What the fuck’s going on?’

Rebecca licked her lips as she struggled for composure.

‘Just making sure he can’t run away.’

Warren shook his head. ‘You’re a fucken liar, Rebecca. We both know he’s not going anywhere and we both know you’re a sadistic torturer.’ Barely moving the rifle, he aimed and fired a single shot into Glen’s heart, mercifully ending his misery.

Rebecca rounded on him, spittle flying as she screamed ‘Why the fuck did you do that? What’s it to you what I do? Why do you men have to fuck up everything?’

Warren said nothing. He simply looked at her in contempt, then went back upstairs. As he left, Rebecca ripped the knife out of Glen’s body and began a frenzied, shallow stabbing all over his corpse. She screamed incoherently but soon ran out of energy and collapsed, sobbing, onto the floor.

At last, the red haze on her vision cleared, and she took several deep breaths. ‘Get it together,’ she muttered to herself. Climbing to her feet, she tossed the knife in the sink and washed her hands.

Legs still wobbly, she climbed the stairs and picked up a rifle. As Warren came into the room, she looked at him calmly and said ‘Sorry about that before. Want some help up here?’

Warren looked unsure. ‘Stay up here,’ he said cautiously. ‘I’m going back

downstairs.’

At 8.30pm, Warren was back in the downstairs kitchen with Martin sitting slumped at the table beside him. Terry McCarthy was back on the phone. Warren was surprised to find that the police officer was happy to lead the conversation, asking simple questions so that he could just mumble or say ‘yeah’ as a form of answer.

He stuck to his request for a helicopter.

‘What are you going to do with this helicopter?’ Terry asked.

‘Hobart airport, then to Adelaide.’

Hobart airport, right. Then to Adelaide? Do you realise just how difficult that is to organise?’

Warren knew there would be no helicopter, but he played along because it was on the script.

‘I can hear them flying overhead. Just get me on one of those.’

Next, McCarthy asked him about the guns. Would he take the guns on the helicopter?

Warren knew there was no way they would allow firearms on a civilian chopper.

‘All the guns will be destroyed.’

‘You’ll destroy them?’ Terry sounded incredulous.

‘Yeah, I’ll smash em up, toss them out the window. I’ll take Sally with me on the helicopter, and I’ve got a knife, a really good hunting knife. I’ll hold it to her side to make sure there’s no surprises, okay?’

As he said the words, another thought popped into Warren’s head. That was the plan, after all, to blow up and burn the guns, so that only the shotgun in the Volvo would link Martin to the crimes.

But if Warren left the SLR somewhere.... somewhere outside...away from the fire...

Martin had never owned a SLR, this would be a massive anomaly that would surely get the investigator’s attention. Good plan.

McCarthy asked ‘Uh, why are you going to take Sally?’

‘Oh, she’s a female isn’t she? I mean she’s going to lash out at me or anything.’

McCarthy chuckled, 'Well I don't think anybody's going to lash out at you if you've got all those guns you've got.'

Warren chuckled at the idea. 'Well, they're not all mine. A lot of them I found them upstairs here, so...' He ducked again as Rebecca fired from upstairs - it sounded like a shotgun.

'I've got some explosives...it's actually not nitro-glycerine...um, what's that other one? Round, plastic...gelignite is it? With wicks on it that floats? Chinese writing on the label.'

McCarthy sounded concerned. 'Where did you, can I ask you where you got that from Jamie?'

Warren decided he had nothing to lose by being honest. 'Under the bed upstairs here.'

'Well you didn't actually have it before?' Terry sounded shocked. 'It was there?'

Warren shook his head. 'No. I've only owned a couple of guns, yeah. All these other guns are here and everything.'

'Well, before you go, will you at least give me this undertaking that you're not going to sort of stick any of the guns out the window and start firing off shots? Look, I can assure you that nobody's going to do anything alright?' Terry sounded panicked.

Instead of trying to keep the terrorist on the phone, McCarthy changed the subject and tried to get off the phone as quickly as possible. This was definitely NOT something he wanted on the transcript.

Warren looked over at Martin, who was sitting at the kitchen table with his head in his hands.

He was about to say something when Rebecca called from upstairs.

'Warren,' she hissed. He looked up the staircase at her.

'I was shooting with the scope...the night scope...there's someone creeping in close to the house...' She pointed in the direction of the road and driveway.

SHIT! Terry had lied, saying that nobody was going to do anything stupid. He dropped the phone handset on the table and moved from window to window, trying to stay out of sight from outside. He told Martin to stay where he was.

'Someone out there, northwest. Wait here, don't move. I'm going up on the roof to keep him away, OK?'

Martin nodded and sat up straight as the gunman darted out of the room. Martin was always amazed at how smoothly and swiftly Warren moved, like

a cat or a ninja. Yes, like a ninja, dressed head to toe in black.

Warren scrambled out onto the roof and fired several shots at the police, who held their fire and retreated, still aiming their rifles at the cottage. A military helicopter flew past, black on black and he fired at it too.

Downstairs, the phone handset was lying on the kitchen table. It rang again and this time Martin picked it up. It was Terry McCarthy, and Martin felt a thrill run through him at the opportunity to play his action hero. In his semi-drugged state, Martin believed that there were two groups outside, police and the bad men that Warren was defending him from. He didn't want the Police to shoot Warren by accident or mistaken identity.

McCarthy said 'Jamie?'

Martin took a deep breath, steadying his voice to sound like Warren had. The conversation went like this.

Jamie: 'Yes. Hello. How are you?'

McCarthy: 'I'm very well thanks Jamie. Yourself?'

Martin's heart was pounding and adrenaline flooded his brain. *He was talking to a real police officer! This was beyond exciting, it was just like an action movie. He became flustered and the words just tumbled out of him in a rush. Most of all, he wanted to make sure nobody shot Warren by mistake.*

'Well, I'm well up to now. The past few, 20 seconds. What I've actually found out man, is that one of your boys is right outside, northeast I'd say, with an infrared scope. Would you just ask him to move on?'

McCarthy: 'Right, we'll do that, we'll do that now.'

Jamie: 'Cause he's going to shoot, he's trying to shoot, he's going to shoot your main man.'

McCarthy: 'No, I can guarantee.'

Jamie: 'I'll blow this, umm this, you know, you know what's going to happen.'

McCarthy: 'I don't want to see anyone hurt, alright?'

Jamie: 'You just move him on.'

McCarthy: 'Okay, I'm organising that now. I can also assure you that it's not our intention to hurt you or see anybody else hurt, okay.'

Jamie: 'Really.'

Martin hung up the phone and let out a chuckle, whirling around on the spot in exultation. In his mind, he had just played a part in a real life action movie! *Spoken to real Police officers, just like in Die Hard or Lethal Weapon.*

Awesome!

He stared hard at the phone, striking a pose.

‘S’right,’ he said. ‘You don’t want to see anyone hurt. But you don’t *FUCK* with the *CHUCK!*’

He strutted around the room and did a few imitation karate moves, unaware that his voice had been recorded, and his own uncle would use that twenty-second taped conversation to identify him as the gunman^[53].

Warren moved around the upstairs windows, checking every slice of the pie for shape, shadow, shine and movement. He saw some, but nothing nearby, no threats. He fired two more blind shots to the east, out into the water where they wouldn’t hit anyone. Slipping out the back door, he dashed across the gravel area to the other cottage and rushed up the stairs. He was almost out of ammunition for the SLR, so there was no point keeping it around any longer. He opened an upstairs window and fired a single shot in the general direction of where he had seen the shadows of the police, then moved across the room and did the same thing in another direction.

He didn’t know that Martin was speaking to police at the same time, and that the rifle shots he was making were clearly audible on the tape recordings.

Ten minutes later, Warren was back on the phone, unaware that Martin had hijacked his role.

‘I’m looking forward to my helicopter ride, man. When are you gonna to tee up this helicopter ride?’

McCarthy kept stalling. ‘Well as we talked about before, we’ve still got a way to go before we reach that stage yet.’

Warren decided to hit back. ‘Good, good. Don’t think to yourself in your mind that you can actually talk me into walking out. I wanna actually get into the helicopter for a ride to Hobart airport. I love helicopters, always been interested in helicopters, and I’ve never had a ride in my life.’

McCarthy played along. ‘Yeah, I I’ve actually been interested in helicopters myself I find them fascinating, machines and their abilities...in fact many years ago wanted to be a helicopter pilot.’

Now it was Warren’s turn to string him along. ‘Oh?’

Instead of following procedure and pressing for the release of hostages, even

one as a show of good will, McCarthy kept talking about himself. ‘Never got the opportunity, unfortunately. I’ve only ever flown in them on a couple of occasions so I’m probably a little bit luckier than you.’

Lucky? Fuck you chum, you know nothing about luck. ‘Yeah, yeah,’ was all he said.

McCarthy ignored him, ‘but er, they are a magnificent machine. You can appreciate, there will be some difficulties finding a helicopter suitable to go down there. There are a number of the aircraft that are in the south of the state are only licensed to be used during daylight hours, so we’ve got to find out what the situation is in relation to after dark operation. You appreciate that won’t you?’

Warren bit back a laugh. Terry had said those words at the exact time a helicopter flew past Seascap. The vibration from the rotors rattled the windows. He had seen Squirrel helicopters flying back and forth, ferrying the wounded to hospital

‘Can I sit in the front? Is that alright? The hostage can sit on my lap?’ Warren wrinkled his nose at the idea of hugging a corpse.

McCarthy took him seriously. ‘Well, I don’t know if that’s possible.

‘Oh, we’ll work something out anyway.’

Rebecca’s rifle cracked again from upstairs, registered on the transcript as “cough”.

Warren jerked his head at Petra, telling her to get Martin out of the room. The brunette took his arm and led him back into the bedroom.

‘You’re crying,’ Martin said. ‘Are you hurt?’

Petra shook her head. ‘No, love. I’m okay. I’m just scared, that’s all.’

‘Why are you scared?’ He stroked her face.

‘There are bad men outside, Martin. I’m afraid they’ll hurt us.’

‘Are we in a movie?’

She smiled. ‘Yes, yes - that’s it. The movie we are making.’

‘Here, love,’ she said as she held out a glass of water. ‘Everything will be okay. You trust me?’

He wiped his nose and sniffed at the same time. ‘I feel bad,’ he said before he drained the glass.

He grimaced, then smiled at her.

‘Thanks. Hope I feel better soon.’

She nodded, stroking his brow and gently pushing him back onto the bed.

‘Sleep now, love,’ she purred. ‘Everything will be alright soon.’

Behind the main house stood a two-story shed that the Martins’ were renovating into another guest house. To make sure the police weren’t sneaking up on him from the south, Warren had run over, gone upstairs and repeated the window process. Staying back from the openings and hiding in the shadows, Warren fired the FN FAL blindly into the darkness.

Then he waited for movement. It would take disciplined troops to hold their position under fire, and he doubted the local cops had the nerve. Even in the faint light of the moon, the movement of branches and bushes as they moved would give away their position.

There was none.

Nobody was watching the south side of the block. Or if somebody was there, Warren had a grudging respect for their nerves.

Another two shots in the space of about five minutes, and all the .308 ammo he had was expended. All Warren had left was the squib round, so he dropped out the magazine and reloaded it with that single round, then pushed it back into the rifle. He pulled back on the charging handle, then let the return spring slide it forward, stripping the squib round out of the magazine and into the chamber.

The return spring...

That gave Warren another idea about how to help Martin. With the rifle loaded and the safety on, he moved his attention to the gas plug at the front of the rifle, just above the barrel. The gas plug seals the gas piston, which is the mechanism used to reload in automatic or semi-automatic fire. Expanding gas in the barrel is vented into the gas port, pushing the piston back against the bolt carrier, ejecting the spent cartridge, re-cocking the rifle and loading a fresh round from the magazine.

Surrounding the gas piston was the return spring, and when the rifle was reloaded, the spring pulled the piston back away from the bolt carrier, returning it to the front of the rifle, ready for the next shot. The rifle was useless without a return spring, but now, filled with the explosive round, it was the return spring that was useless. Superfluous.

Warren twisted the gas plug a quarter turn and pulled it out. The small

cylinder of metal came away from the barrel, and the tensioned spring pushed the gas piston out slightly. Warren pulled out the gas piston, removed the return spring, then pushed the piston back in and screwed the plug back into place.

‘Good luck, Martin,’ he whispered. Surely, once the forensic people got hold of the rifle, they would raise holy hell about how on earth it could have been fired without essential parts, or how the child-like Martin would have known how to field strip a rifle he didn’t own. Warren hoped that the defence lawyer would be able to compile the trail of breadcrumbs he had left into reasonable doubt. Then he squinted his eyes, aimed the rifle out the window and tensed his muscles in anticipation of the blast.

CRACK.

Warren felt the rifle buck and his right hand went numb. Inspecting the damage, he was pleased to see that the bolt cover had blown off, the chamber was scarred and the brass cartridge had been pasted over all the interior surfaces like glue. Tiny, red-hot particles of metal would also be coating the rifling inside the barrel, so no forensic information would be gained from ballistic testing any of the rounds he had fired. Warren cynically laughed and said ‘Rebecca, I have carried out all of your instructions.’

He had just added a few of his own, that’s all.

Mindful of the time, and cautious that he not leave Martin alone for too long, Warren flushed the gas piston spring down a toilet, ensuring that it would never be found in the wreckage of the burned house. Then he moved back to the sliding window and leaned out over the narrow awning over the entry door. He carefully slid the rifle down the sloping awning until it came to a stop in the gutter. It was hidden from anyone close to the house, like the police, but media helicopters overhead would definitely capture it on camera before the police could make it disappear.

‘Reasonable doubt,’ he muttered. ‘Good luck, you poor bastard,’ he added as he went back across the gravel to the main cottage.

The main kitchen/lounge area was quiet, since Martin had gone to the bathroom.

‘Look, I’m still shitting myself that he’s awake,’ said Rebecca, nodding at

Petra. 'Are you absolutely sure he won't remember anything?'

Petra held up her palms in an 'I don't know' expression. 'Hard to tell, it all depends on the individual constitution.' She grimaced to express the mental calculations she was attempting, then blew out a deep breath.

'Should we risk it? The fire will burn it all, surely?' Rebecca took a bottle of sleeping tablets from her pocket and weighed it in her hand, a physical manifestation of the decision that had to be made about Martin. She looked at Petra, who shook her head.

'No,' she said. 'It takes a lot of fire to burn a body into ash - which is what we would need. I don't think we can risk having them in his system...yet. Shit!'

She pressed both palms to her temples in an expression of doubt and frustration.

'I just don't know...'

Petra rattled the bottle. 'Half way. I'll put some out, but I won't make him take any yet.'

Rebecca nodded. 'Okay, fine.'

Petra counted out 19 blue sleeping tablets^[54] and put them into a drinking glass. She ran water into a second glass and brought them into the sitting room where Martin lay back in the recliner. She put them on a side table.

'How you feeling?' She asked quietly.

'Ehhhh, not good,' he said thickly. 'Massive headache. Even my eyes hurt.'

She nodded in sympathy.

'Cheer up, you're going to be famous,' she said brightly. 'I have something here to help you sleep. There's nineteen here - take as many as you want, okay?'

It took a moment for his eyes to focus on the pills in the glass, but he nodded. Hands shaking, he tipped three into his palm and then washed them down with water.

Martin's body shuddered as he swallowed, then he lay back again and began snoring softly.

Outside Seascape

After dark

After nightfall, Petra and Rebecca had snuck away to the shoreline, easily escaping the police cordon as Warren provided covering fire from the upstairs windows. Sticking to the scrub at the coastline, they made their way south, through the trees along the side of Stingaree Bay, across the boat ramp at Stewarts Bay and into the Caravan Park. There were very few people about, and nobody paid them any attention. As quietly as possible, they got into Rebecca's rented Ford and drove around the darkened streets.

Rebecca kept the headlights off. She was familiar with the area and drove slowly, confident that there was no danger of seeing another vehicle for some time.

Despite being a crime scene, the majority of the site was deserted. Still busy with the siege at Seascape, the police had abandoned all the survivors, in the dark, surrounded by corpses and the smell of blood and shit. A few helicopters had flown the wounded to Hobart, but as the sun went down there was no reassurance from uniformed police, no grief counsellors.

Just on 6.30pm, they turned into Tramway Street and slowed to a stop behind the yellow Volvo. Virginia and Julie climbed out and danced a little jig as they greeted Rebecca.

'It was amazing,' Julie gushed in admiration. 'The Plan B went off perfectly, it was so exciting to watch.'

Virginia cackled in agreement. 'Sensational. Had the perfect little perch here, we could see the whole thing. Running around like cockroaches, they were... bam bam bam bam bam. Orgasmic.'

Julie nodded enthusiastically. 'Congratulations on all your planning and hard work. Fabulous!'

'So glad to hear it,' said Rebecca as she drew the revolver from her coat pocket. Virginia was closest to the muzzle, and Rebecca fired one shot into her head, then jerked the pistol over and shot Julie twice in the chest. The two women collapsed in the road, right next to the Volvo.

Rebecca believed the area was empty, she had no idea that three employees of the PAHS, Lee-Anne Goodwin, Brian Albion and John Featherstone were

standing quietly on the veranda of Clougha, just a hundred meters north in the dark. They had taken refuge from the massacre there, hoping the thick sandstone walls would protect them from stray bullets. As the gunfire moved away to Seascapes, they had come out of hiding but stayed in the area to wait for the police. The unexpected shots absolutely terrified the three, who believed the gunman had left the area. They ran back inside the building and shut the door^[55].

Grunting softly and sweating in the warm evening air, Petra and Rebecca loaded the bodies into the second Volvo and each drove one vehicle south, down Bond Street to the gate at the end of the restricted area. Rebecca pushed the gate open and drove through, then closed it after Petra had followed her. They turned left onto Safety Cove Road, then right onto a dirt road that led to the lookout - one of the most remote and southernmost places in Tasmania.

Well after sunset, on a Sunday evening, the lookout was deserted; the women worked together carrying the dead bodies of Virginia and Julie down to the edge of the cliff. Rebecca made another two trips to the cars, returning to Petra carrying a 25kg weightlifting disc and a length of rope each time. They checked the bodies for identification, jewellery, anything that could identify them, then Rebecca took a length of rope and they used it to tie a disc to each body. The lookout overhangs a deep, undercut section of the cliffs, and the two women were able to roll the bodies off the edge quite easily.

SPLASH.

SPLASH.

The impact sounds were muffled by the regular surf noise and the added weight sucked the corpses to the bottom. The motion of the waves rubbing the bodies on the rocks would strip the flesh from the bones very quickly, and the hungry fish would do the rest.

Petra looked startled as Rebecca drew the pistol from her coat pocket, then exhaled in relief as she drew back her arm and threw it out into the ocean.

No witnesses, no bodies, no evidence.

Neither woman spoke as they walked back to the cars. Rebecca paused at the carpark, taking a moment to look at the stars and re-centre her mind on the job. The easy part was done, and some parts of her plan had worked perfectly. Other parts would need to be addressed, and she needed to be calm

and logical.

She took several deep breaths and when she looked at Petra, she saw the younger woman looking at her expectantly.

Rebecca's thin lips twisted into a smile. 'Good. Done. I've got a few loose ends to tie up but you're pretty much done. First thing we need is the phone, I gotta get the cops onto the right track, then we can dump the Volvo and you can get back to Hobart, OK?'

Petra nodded. 'There's a phone box in Nubeena. Nobody'll be there, this time of night.'

'Sure,' said Rebecca as she led the way back down the dirt road. The headlights made gruesome patterns on the gnarled trees that guarded the track, hunched and blasted by the harsh weather and the minimal nutrition from the thin soil.

In less than five minutes, they were back on the asphalt.

The road to Nubeena took on a supernatural glow in the twin headlights as Rebecca drove west. Although the action was over, she was nervous, jumpy and eager to finish the job and get out from under the stress. She stayed under the speed limit, slowing the car as the speed limit dropped to walking pace. Easing slowly into the built-up part of the small town, she switched off the headlights and rolled to a stop outside the brightly lit booth. The clock on the dashboard said 21:10 as Rebecca quietly opened the door and stepped out. She kept the car door open, minimising unnecessary noise, and walked over to the booth.

The pay phone in Nubeena was an old green metal one, stuck on a long waiting list to be replaced with a new plastic version. Rebecca lifted the heavy black handset, fed coins into the slot and then dialled a number from her pocket notebook. It rang once, then the line clicked open.

'Homicide,' the male voice sounded stressed, almost drowned by the hubbub of raised voices in the background. Rebecca could imagine the state of panic in the police headquarters, so she spoke loudly and clearly.

'I'm only going to say this once, so write it down. The siege at Seascapes, the man you should look at is called Martin Bryant.' She spelled out the last name phonetically 'Bravo Romeo Yankee, Alpha November Tango.'

'Who is this?' the voice asked suspiciously. 'How did you get this number?'

Rebecca ignored him. 'Write it down. Bryant, Martin. Lives in Hobart, thirty Clare Street in New Town.'

Then she cut the connection and fed more coins into the fat metal box. She dialled another number from the same page in her notebook.

‘News desk!’ The female voice sounded even more stressed than the cop had. There was the same background ruckus, and Rebecca could imagine the feeding frenzy going on at ABC and the other media organisations.

‘Write this down,’ she said loudly and clearly. ‘The gunman is Martin Bryant. Thirty Clare Street New Town. You’ll need to distract the police to get inside and get some photos. Put them on the front page tomorrow.’

After a short pause, the woman repeated, ‘Martin Bryant, thirty Clare Street. Who are you?’

Rebecca just laughed. ‘Your guardian angel,’ she said, before hanging up. She knew the temptation would be irresistible. The journalists would feel no guilt about breaking into Martin’s house and publishing his photograph, and this would go a long way to fixing his identity as the killer in the mind of the general public.

Witness statements confirm this in fact did happen:

‘I have today viewed a folder containing thirty photographs of male persons, and I immediately recognised photo #5 as the person I believe to be the gunman, but I must be honest here with this identification, and say that I have definitely been influenced by media coverage of his photo in relation to an identification.’

– Eyewitness Lindsay Richards (May 29, 1996)

‘I have read an article in Time Magazine, and have viewed a photograph of Martin Bryant within this article ... so if I chose Bryant in a [police] photo board, I would be very influenced by this article.’

– Eyewitness Brigid Cook (May 29, 1996)

The bumpy dirt road became smooth asphalt at Safety Cove Road, and Rebecca turned her rental Ford to the left, then took another onto Nubeena Road. A little over five minutes later, she reduced speed as the road curved to the right, taking a left fork at a sign that said “Stormlea: 9.” Petra followed in the Volvo.

Another few minutes in the darkness and the road became dirt. When the headlights broke through the trees screening the road, they only illuminated

grassy paddocks, empty of livestock. There didn't appear to be a living thing between them and the South Pole.

Rebecca slowed again, looking for landmarks. She took a right fork, driving into the national park - an unpopulated section of land that was useless for farming and never visited by tourists as it was too far away from anything. She found an open space, where the road had been widened to allow vehicles to pass. It was covered in gravel, no risk of the fire spreading when they torched the Volvo.

She did a 3-point turn in the road, passing Petra and parking a dozen meters back the way they had come. By the time she had walked back to the Volvo, Petra had parked it and left the door open. She stood beside it, hugging her arms to her chest in the cold wind that blew straight from Antarctica.

Petra watched as Rebecca used the second half of the spirit in her flask to get the interior burning, then they stepped back as the breeze fanned the flames. There was a shriek as the vapour in the petrol tank ignited, but since the car was almost empty, little liquid fuel spilled onto the ground.

Satisfied that any fingerprints or DNA evidence was burning out of existence, Rebecca turned her back to the light and got into her car. Petra sat next to her, and they drove away without a backward glance. The silence inside the car wasn't comfortable, as the tension was high. Both women were worried about what might be happening at Seascapes

'We're made good time,' she said blandly. Anything to occupy the silence. 'Do you think the main road will be open?'

Looking satanic in the green glow from the instrument panel and the reflected light from the trees outside, Rebecca shook her head.

'Don't risk it,' she said. 'Come back this way, go through Nubeena and then out through Taranna. You'll do it in less than two hours and it removes the risk of being stopped at a roadblock.'

Petra hugged her arms around her body and nodded.

'The greater good,' she said.

Rebecca drove as close as she dared to the Historic Site, then dropped Petra off in the dark.

'Good work,' she said. 'Get home as quickly as you can, speak to Martin's family, okay? Reporters will be all over it soon, you know what to say...'

Petra nodded. 'Will do,' she said. 'See you tomorrow?'

Rebecca nodded. 'I'll deliver your payment in the afternoon. Then I've got to

get to back to Canberra, take advantage of this as much as possible.'

'Good luck,' said Petra as she closed the door, feeling in her pocket to make sure she had her car keys. She jingled them and then set off on foot towards the caravan park where she had left her car that morning - it seemed like an eternity ago.

The rural roads were empty and she drove fast. By eight o'clock, less than two hours since leaving Seascapes, she was facing the TV cameras and telling the world how shocked and upset she was.

'The Martin I knew was gentle, a lovely sweet man. He would never hurt anyone.'

Monday 29th April 1996 – Outside Seascape

Dawn

Andrew Fogarty was checking dew on the grass around the perimeter for footprints when his Commanding Officer appeared around a clump of trees.

‘Fogarty,’ he hissed and the SOG leader trotted over.

‘Morning, boss,’ he said. ‘No sign of exfil, so I’d say they are all still inside.’

‘Good,’ said the older man. ‘We need to end this. Now. The media need to come through but we need this wrapped up.’

Fogarty nodded. ‘Shall we assault the main building?’

‘No, burn them out instead.’

Fogarty was amazed. This ran counter to every training doctrine in existence.

‘Ahh, what about the hostages?’

‘I’m confident they are already dead. We have no confirmation of life, only the word of a maniac.’

‘But Sir, the hostages take priority, you know the SOP. The last time anyone burned out a hostage taker was in 1880...’ His voice trailed off as he waited for CO to understand.

But the older man simply frowned. ‘So what?’

‘It was at the Glenrowan Inn...Ned Kelly... Commissioner Standish was sacked after the Royal Commission. Do we really want that kind of attention?’

But the older man was firm.

‘My orders stand. The hostages are collateral damage and considered deceased already. The media must take priority. Carry out your orders, Sergeant.’

The SOG operative swallowed, saluted and went off to find something flammable.

Inside the building, Warren knew he had held the police off long enough and the end was near. He checked his watch - it read 07:30, the sun had been up for an hour, and Rebecca had plenty of time for the media circus to have been

primed and let loose. He knew the cops would be getting tired and bored, seeking an opportunity to test out their toys before the next shift arrived to steal their glory. Time to go, no time to waste.

Time to finish the plan. He checked on Martin - still lying on the recliner in the side room, snoring.

Warren slipped the second squib round into an empty AR15 magazine. He popped it into the rifle and aimed it upstairs. He braced his body against the blast and squeezed the trigger.

The chamber exploded, sending the dust cover and shrapnel flying all over. Just like the SLR, the AR15 was wrecked, just like Rebecca wanted.

The explosive noise inside the room had covered the softer, hollow POMP sound from outside, but the *CLANK* was unmistakable as a 40mm smoke grenade came through an upstairs window and rolled across the floor. The chemicals mixed, and white smoke began to billow from the windows upstairs.

Oh shit! The cops are coming in. No, not yet. They'll put one into each of the windows upstairs, then another down here. Use the smoke to cover your exit.

Somewhere deep in his soul, Warren felt a stab of pity for Martin, but it couldn't breach the icy layer of mission discipline in his mind. There was no time to give the older man more drugs, and even if he had done so, they would show up in the autopsy.

Warren took one final look around. Glenn Pears' body was still cuffed to the stairwell handrail, Rebecca had cleared out with her possessions and the pistol so there was nothing left to show anyone except Martin had been there. The fire would erase anything they had missed, just as Rebecca had planned. A second smoke grenade came in through the broken glass in the kitchen window and rolled across the floor. Hissing hot smoke, it came to rest against the wall, right near the floor to ceiling curtains.

From the corner of his eye, he saw the bottom of the curtains catch fire from the heat of the smoke round, greedy flames rushing up the wall to feast on the flammable ceiling and timber structure. *SHIT. Time to go. NOW!*

Warren chuckled at the irony of the cops starting the very fire that he needed to cover his tracks. *It was almost as if the authorities were helping!*

Easing himself slowly out the side door, Warren was startled to hear thudding footsteps behind him. Before he could react, a vicious shove from behind threw him out the door where he reflexively dived to the ground before the

police could notice him.

Naked from the waist up, Martin's legs flew past him, shrugging out of a burning jacket and dropping it on the ground. Numbed by shock, Warren saw him kick off his shoes and pants and then hunch over, clasping his hands to his head.

Martin seemed to be moaning in pain, oblivious to his surroundings as he crouched naked beside the outside wall of the house. Hidden from the approaching police by a fold in the ground, Warren could see that Martin's back was red and blistered. His training overwhelmed his natural curiosity, and he wormed his way backwards into the tree line he thought he heard Martin say 'Don't shoot, I'm the hostage!'

Warren was aghast. *Fuck! FUCK!* Somehow Martin had woken up - maybe from the pain of the fire, taken off his burning shirt and made it out of the house. *ALIVE!* It was the worst possible scenario, one that should never have happened. *This was seriously FUCKED UP. Oh shit! I'm never going to get paid now...*

But lying in the dirt, there was nothing Warren could do. He rolled under the bushes and with practised ease, slinking away silently into the garden as the flames from the Seascape growled and crackled through the structure. The blaze was a useful distraction, and none of the police officers around the area noticed his passing, slick and silent as a shadow.

Constable Malcolm Scott was a member of the police Special Operations Group. Along with Constables Hawkins and Ward, he identified the blonde man as Martin Bryant from New Town, then assisted the paramedics to get the patient onto a stretcher and into the ambulance.

Martin's back was badly burned, and the paramedic attending him asked Scott to remove the handcuffs so they could work on his whole back. Scott did so, then opened his notebook as Martin spoke to the medic^[56].

The ambulance officer said, 'What's your name?'

'Martin Bryant,' he mumbled. 'What's the point of all this?'

The ambulance officer said, 'I preserve life, Martin. Have you been drinking alcohol?'

Bryant replied, 'A bit, it hurts. I want to get out of here.'

Constable Scott scribbled it all down in his notebook. Then his movement stopped in amazement and his mouth dropped open in surprise at what Bryant said next.

‘Where is she?’ he demanded.

‘Who?’ Constable Scott was perplexed.

‘Petra, Petra - did she get out of the fire? Petra’s my girlfriend. We always stick together.’

He sounded concerned. More worried about Petra than his own pain.

Scott wrote it down, then said, ‘Was Petra in the fire?’

Bryant said, ‘Yes, she was in the house.’

Scott wrote it all down.

His account ends: BRYANT made further comments but his speech was incoherent. The ambulance officer asked questions in relation to BRYANT’S medical situation.

By the time the blazing roof of Seascape fell in, showering the area with sparks, Warren was five hundred metres north, darting across the Arthur Highway, then slogging due west, uphill through the featureless scrub.

He reached the top of the ridge after another ten minutes, and took a knee to catch his breath and assess his location. The scrubby hillside was part of some kind of forestry plantation, state forest or National Park. Uninhabited, steep and bisected by only a few logging trails and dirt roads, he could hide in the terrain for months without being discovered, but he only needed a couple of hours. Moving quietly and resting often, he stuck to the high ground and slowly moved north-west until he came across Norfolk Bay lookout.

From the lookout, he turned due north, descending a rocky spur and crawling slowly across some bare ground. There was almost no risk of detection, given that there were very few farmhouses around and all the police action would be focussed on Seascape and the Cafe, but his training had repeated the lesson that no soldier could be too careful. Hubris had ruined many missions and killed far too many good men, and these lessons were hammered into the Paras every day. In his mind, Warren was still on duty, and that meant maintaining opsec, light & noise discipline and being careful to leave no

trace.

His stomach had rumbled, as the cafe food was used up and he had nothing to replace it. He was never tempted to try eating local plants, since he had no experience with them and didn't want to risk an accidental poisoning.

Well, on second thought, poison was his escape route, that was sure, but at a time & place of his choosing. Not some farmer's backyard where his body would be discovered and questions asked... Warren deliberately avoided thinking about the AIDS virus ravaging his body, but he was looking forward to meeting Benjamin soon, and together they could go skydiving - forever.

'Stay on it,' he thought, catching his wandering mind and jerking it back to the mission like a dog on a leash. He checked the position of the sun in the eastern sky, made a note of a landmark on the right heading and moved again. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, moving as slowly and silently as the dawn light filtering through the trees.

Not that a few days without food was a problem. Most of their Para training had involved lack of supplies, training the men to be subconsciously prepared for things to go wrong, to adapt and re-work a plan if reinforcements were ambushed, or if their patrols had to stay out in the field longer than planned. The men took pride in being unflappable. Their heroes were men who could stay calm, return fire and move to cover even when bodies were dropping and their friends were screaming in agony around them. Warren had a good idea of just how effective his body would be on each day of a food-free mission, keeping a mental note of his physical and mental decay, double checking decisions to make sure his nutrient-deprived brain wasn't overlooking some vital criteria.

Given that he had been on the mission and without sleep for over 24 hours now, he took extra care with movement and observation. He had plenty of time to gently worm his way over the farmland, towards the trees that lined Nubeena Back Road to his north. The road was on top of a hill, and the slopes approaching it had been cleared for grazing and a few farm buildings dotted the grassy areas near the road. He spotted the hayshed first, gleaming in the sunlight, and put it on his left, moving downhill slightly to meet the intersection of the Back Road and Grooms Hill Road.

At last, he saw the stand of trees at the T-junction. It was a good spot, Rebecca had chosen it well. Two large gum trees stood right beside the gravel road, and there was no way to miss it, even if his navigation was

incorrect as he came down off the ridge. Flat on his belly, Warren eased up the last few meters and slid into the thicket like a snake. Secluded from view, he rolled over onto his back and looked at his watch. It read 09:54 and Warren smiled, allowing a sliver of professional pride dance in his mind. He was almost exactly ten minutes early - right on time, meaning that his mission planning and execution had been perfect. Planned according to his abilities and executed according to plan. *Good job*. Rebecca should be here very soon.

The tops of the tallest trees burst into song as a flock of white parrots danced around in the branches. It was a magical time of day that Warren loved experiencing. In training or patrolling, it was rare for him to sleep through a sunrise, and he was glad that the last one he would ever see was such a spectacular display. The birds and insects screamed and buzzed and Warren basked in the intensity of the morning's beauty.

Lying still in the grass, Warren heard a vehicle approach but stayed motionless. His black outfit had been effective camouflage in the night, but it would be the opposite in daytime, so he lay still and breathed a sigh of relief as the vehicle, which he recognised as Rebecca's white Ford falcon - slowed to a stop. Quick as a cat, he was up, opened the passenger door and slid inside as Rebecca took her foot off the brake and hit the throttle as hard as she could without spinning the wheels. The car shot back up to cruising speed as if nothing had changed.

To an uninterested observer, there was nothing remarkable about the car slowing for the intersection, checking for traffic and then driving off.

Before he could catch his breath, Rebecca was screaming at him.

'For fuck's sake, Warren. He wasn't supposed to live! How could you let him get away? The moment I step away, it falls apart! Fucking Hell! FUCK!' She slammed her palm into the steering wheel.

'You haven't got a fucking clue what's riding on this operation, and if it gets screwed up, I can tell you there are going to be some very powerful people who are going to be very pissed off. You may be on a one-way ticket but if you've fucked up my career, I am personally going to fuck you up.'

Warren looked out the window at the beautiful Australian scrub that was blurring past the window. The early morning light had brought out the animals, and he saw groups of small kangaroos feeding on grass in the cleared areas they passed.

‘Are you even listening to me?’ Rebecca shrieked, taking her eyes off the road and looking directly at him. Flecks of spittle foamed at her mouth and Warren eyed her warily. He hadn’t yet received confirmation that his payment had been received, so he needed to tread lightly.

‘Nothing you can’t handle,’ he said. ‘He won’t remember much from the drugs, and there’s enough influence from the former Premier and the Attorney General to stop any unwanted investigation.’

‘Stupid, stupid ingrate,’ she retorted. ‘He’s going to lawyer up, and that lawyer is going to pick the whole thing apart. Oh my god, we are so fucked.’

Warren realised she didn’t have any military strategy training. Plus, she was emotional and obviously not thinking clearly, so he just came out with it.

He switched on the Command Voice that officers used. A firm, strong and even tone that conveyed natural authority and assumed the co-operation of the listener.

‘So you need to avoid a trial. Get him to plead guilty. Why not bait and switch?’ Warren was careful to avoid any snobbery or condescension in his tone. He needed to keep her onside until Janet and his father had their gold. Rebecca knew nothing about the trail of clues he had left, but hopefully there was enough contradictory evidence there to demand a mistrial at least. By the time that happened, his family would have safely disappeared.

Rebecca was still angry, but she drew a deep breath and appeared to calm down. The dirt road became a strip of dirty asphalt, then ended in a T junction. Rebecca brought the car to a stop, checked both directions and then turned right, towards Taranna.

‘Please explain?’

Warren held his hands out in front of him, palm up. ‘You get your own lawyer ready. Make him familiar with the case, give him as much information as is safe, and you make sure he knows what will happen if he lets the cat out of the bag, yeah? Maybe show him a video of some family being tortured, make sure he knows that it will be his family if he talks...yeah?’

‘Then, you let Martin get his own lawyer, it doesn’t matter who it is. Let him do his job at first, but then you start ramping up the pressure from different sides. Increase the caseload, get reporters looking into his background, digging up dirt. Harass his wife and kids. Late night phone calls to keep him tired, stressed. Start running negative stories in the press, get disgruntled clients to complain about him. Then you send him a note, saying that his life

will be much better off if he resigned from the Bryant case. You know, all your problems will go away, just step away. Leave it to someone else.'

Rebecca nodded, deep in thought. 'That's all achievable.'

'So then the Attorney General has a word with the judge. Tells him to go along with the change of lawyers. The judge will have picked up on the chatter from his mates at the golf club, that there's a lot of political people keen to make this all go away, but you won't have to lean on him directly. He doesn't need to know anything at all, just hints from third parties in the tea room or on the golf course. At the next court appearance, Bryant's lawyer resigns and your man is ready to step in. He volunteers to take over and the judge agrees to it.' Warren placed his left hand, palm up over his right, symbolically replacing one with the other.

'Then your man can take all the time in the world, tell Martin anything he wants, and just get him to plead guilty. Six months in solitary confinement - who cares? That way, it doesn't matter how long it takes, because the media will have moved on. They'll cause a fuss when he does plead guilty, interview the families again, drag out the misery and the exploitation, but at the end of the day, they will go along with it. None of them want to step out of line and put their reputation at risk.'

Rebecca nodded. 'Another opportunity to re-traumatize everyone...all over again. Good.'

Another thought occurred to Warren. 'Martin's not too bright, is he? I mean...socially, intellectually...'

Rebecca snapped another sharp look in his direction. 'No, of course not. That's mostly why we chose him. Why do you ask?'

Warren rubbed his chin. 'You should prep your lawyer. Get him to research a couple of cases - Timothy Evans and Margaret Livesey.'

Rebecca repeated the names aloud so that she would remember. 'What about them?'

'Timothy Evans confessed to killing his wife, and Margaret confessed to murdering her son. It's in a book by Bob Woffinden called Miscarriages of Justice.'

'So what?' Retorted Rebecca. 'Justice miscarries all the time. That's what it does.'

'No, no,' said Warren. 'That's not what I meant. Seriously, check out the book - it's an investigation into how mentally deficient people can be made to

believe they did something, when in fact they didn't. It was in one of the legal studies courses I did at school.'

Rebecca rubbed her chin. 'It that like the Ingram case? That child molester?'

'Warren snapped his fingers. 'Yes, they talked about that in the course as well. The shrink ...Richard...something...was able to prove that Ingram remembered something that had never happened. It can be done. Just get your men prepared for it when the time is right. If he prepares his words right, Martin will believe anything he is told.'

Rebecca pondered his ideas for a moment. 'What about normal people? Activists? Will he get support from the public, do you think pressure can be brought onto the politicians for a more thorough investigation?'

Warren shrugged. 'It's possible, but not likely, and I'll tell you why. Most people don't want to think their government is capable of doing something like this. They live in a nice cosy world of ignorance and trust. They assume politicians are corrupt, but *nicely* corrupt, *acceptably* corrupt. They know politicians feather their own nests and put their own interests first, but that's just par for the course. None of the Australian politicians are throwing people out of helicopters, are they? Disappearing fathers or children...'

'Life is comfortable and the government corruption isn't harming them directly. They don't want to know about people in their government who are willing and able to commit mass murder, then frame a disabled bloke for it.'

Rebecca didn't interrupt him, so he went on.

'So if they realise that there are forces in this world that can collude with their government and do *this* to Martin, they have to accept that the same forces can do similar things to them. Just as easily.' He stabbed a finger towards the dashboard for emphasis.

'And subconsciously, that's a bridge too far. The Western human mind isn't comfortable with that kind of knowledge, that exposure. Boers, maybe - *Keffirs*, definitely but domesticated city people don't want their safety blanket shredded by thinking about the implications.'

Warren decided that he had said enough, and shut his mouth. Rebecca was silent in thought so he looked out the window as they drove east. The road passed farms and open scrub, and Warren glimpsed water in the distance, with high cliffs a smudge on the horizon.

Cresting a hill, they descended out of the scrub and passed lush, irrigated fields on either side, as Rebecca slowed the car and stopped at another T

junction. They were back on the Arthur Highway, having completed a clockwise circuit of the peninsula. Rebecca turned left, heading north into Taranna as Warren chuckled at the irony of them effectively re-tracing Martin's route in reverse.

Rebecca stuck to the speed limit as they entered the township of Taranna proper. There wasn't much - a few houses, a B&B and a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witness. Rebecca pulled the car into the forecourt of a petrol station and parked near a phone booth on the footpath. She shut off the engine and got out, Warren following close behind.

Rebecca opened the booth door and kept it open with her foot, so Warren could crowd in beside her. She opened a small notebook to a page with scribbled numbers, then lifted the handset and fed several coins into the payphone. Checking the number on the notepad, she dialled 0011 to make an international call, then 27 for South Africa and 11 for Johannesburg. The last few numbers connected her to a private line in one of the Big 5 law firms. It answered after just one ring, and Warren heard Rebecca say 'Randall?'

The answer must have been affirmative, because she went on. 'Yes, the package can be released. Authorisation two zero. Are there any complications?'

Warren's heart lurched as he couldn't hear what was said, but Rebecca seemed unperturbed. 'Okay, thank you. Good day,' she said politely and hung up.

The coins rattled inside the phone, but none dropped into the return tray.

Rebecca turned to face Warren, close inside the tiny phone booth.

'Your family don't trust me,' she said in mock indignation. Her breath was foul, up close and personal. 'Showed up with several layers of security...'

Warren smiled. Good. Vellum and Sgt Blazkowicz would have arranged the best possible escort for Janet and Hans.

'So, they have collected your payment. Give them five minutes and then make your confirmation call.'

The sun was fully up now, but the morning was still cool. Warren stretched his muscles in the warm sun, flexing away the last of the lactic acid. Rebecca lit a cigarette, blowing a cloud of smoke in his direction. Warren wrinkled his nose in disgust but didn't say anything - there was no point. Instead, he closed his eyes and imagined his father and girlfriend, flanked by security, walking swiftly down the bustling night-time streets in Johannesburg. The

offices of the big law firms aren't far apart, sprawling over several large skyscrapers in the business district, but progress could be slow because of the masses of people crowding the streets.

He hoped there was safety in anonymity.

A car drove past without slowing down, the driver ignoring the two people standing next to the phone booth. Just another Monday morning in a farming town at the bottom of the world.

After another minute, Warren lifted the receiver and fed coins into the fat metal payphone. He knew the number by heart, and his pulse throbbed in his forehead as he waited for the call to go through. There was a click, a string of six quick beeps in rising pitch, then the line at the other end started to ring. Warren's heart started to pound with anxiety. *Were they okay? Had Rebecca double-crossed him?*

A receptionist answered, and he coughed to get himself under control. 'Ahh, yes. It's Warren Dekker, calling for Mister White.'

'I'm not sure if he's back yet. Hold please.'

Oh shit. Warren started to panic. *They should be back by now. Rebecca hadn't moved, but she was still closer to the car than he was, and she had the keys...how could he have been so stupid? She was going to drive off and leave him with nothing...*

The line clicked and a man's voice said 'That you, Warren?' Warren let out a huge sigh of relief.

'Yes, yes. Are they all right?'

The South African lawyer chuckled. 'Everyone's fine, they're all here; the gold is legit - but get this! It's stamped Deutsche Reichsbank 1944!'

Warren wasn't surprised, he took a sideways glance at Rebecca. 'Nazi gold...that's not surprising at all. Anything else?'

'No, all good. But the other lawyers were looking down their nose at your friends...'

Warren appreciated the lighter moment in such heavy circumstances. 'Fuck them, they're not paying my bills. Can I talk to Janet please?'

The line went quiet for a moment, then the love of his life crackled through the copper wire.

'Hi love, we've missed you so much. How are you? The job went okay? Where are you?'

The questions poured out, a flood of needed communication held back only

by his absence.

Tears flowed out of Warren's heart as he spoke to the woman he loved, for what he knew was the last time. 'I've missed you too. Yes, the job went okay, and we got paid... How are you holding up? How's Hope?'

'You can talk to her if you like, Hope, say hello to daddy.'

The connection was faint, but he distinctly heard the baby cooing and then say 'Dada,'

Warren sank against the wall of the phone booth as guilt and fear and joy and sadness washed over him. He would never see them again, but at least he had set them up for a good life.

'I love you, Hope. Daddy loves you, baby.'

Janet came back on the line. 'How are you feeling?' As she voiced the words, they both knew there was more to the question than his emotional state at the time. He took a deep breath.

'I'm not going to lie, baby. I'm sick. Really sick. And I'm in a lot of pain.'

'Oh, Warren...'

'I can't come home. I'm sorry, but this was a one-way trip. I'm so sorry, but there's nothing I can do.'

'Warren,' Janet's voice broke. 'No, no, no, no, no, no... There has to be a way. Doctors in America, Britain... something. Don't leave me, don't leave us...'

He shook his head through his tears, even though she couldn't see him.

'Sorry love. I'm not going to make it. You'll have to be strong for Hope, but mum and dad and Vellum will look after you, okay?'

But she was crying now. 'I don't want them,' she howled. 'I want you. I need you. Hope needs you.'

'I'm so sorry, but I'll be dead in a few years anyway. And that's no kind of life that I want. We both knew that when I enlisted, didn't we?'

There was a sniffle as she dried her tears and tried to breathe properly.

'I don't care. I want you back.'

'I want you too, love. I need you. But I'm sick, you know that. They killed me that night, just taking a while, yeah?'

'Mmmuhuh.'

'So at least we had an extra year, yeah? All the photos, good memories to hold onto. But I can't come home, love. It's breaking my heart but I just can't. I don't want you to see me dying every day. That's no life, I'd just be a liability to you.'

Janet's pain turned to anger.

'So what am I supposed to tell Hope? Huh? How can I... How dare you dump that shit on me?'

'Hey, hey,' he soothed her. 'She will understand. Show her the photos...Dad was in the army, and died while she was little. Just like Vellum's dad, Sgt Blazkowicz, half the kids at school had lost a dad or uncle...'

She made a garbled choking noise as she struggled through tears and anguish. 'Your dad wants to speak to you...'

There was a pause and then Hans spoke.

'Warren? I'm thinking it's not good news.'

Warren sniffed away the tears. 'Dad, I can't make it home. You'll have to look after Janet and Hope, yeah?'

The older man's voice was tender. 'Son, I knew this was happening, right from the start. I knew you weren't coming back. Its okay, and you know it. Your mother and I, we love Janet and Hope as much as we love Benjamin and you...'

It was hard for Warren to hear the resignation in his father's voice. Putting him and his dead brother in the same breath...it was vocal confirmation that his father was resigned to his fate.

'I love you, Dad. You know that, Mum too.'

'We know, son, we love you too, but be safe, okay? Don't hurt yourself.'

Warren nodded through another batch of tears that washed his face.

'It's okay. Won't be long and I'll have no pain at all.' He took a deep, shuddering breath. 'Good to know you'll look after them. Can I talk to Janet again?'

When Janet spoke again, her voice was calmer. Resolute.

'I love you, Warren Dekker. Always have, always will.'

'I love you too, baby. Look after yourself, and our baby, yeah?'

'I will. I don't wanna go but Sgt Blazkowicz says we need to get home.'

'Okay love. I love you, and I'll see you soon, yeah?'

She sniffled. 'Love you too. Give our love to Benjamin.'

Then the line cut out and the coins clattered inside the machine like thirty pieces of silver on the temple floor.

Rebecca's leathery lips made a sucking noise as she consumed the last of the cigarette, then flicked the butt away. She held the smoke in as Warren rubbed his eyes and nose, shuddering with the pain of saying goodbye to his family.

Then he locked eyes with her, resigned to his fate and she blew out the smoke in one stream.

‘Ready to go?’

Warren nodded. He was ready to leave the phone booth and the planet.

He sat back in the passenger seat and Rebecca drove back on to the road. They drove north, past the water that Warren had seen earlier, then turned east past Eaglehawk bay. At the tiny Neck that joined the peninsula to mainland Tasmania, they turned right onto Blowhole Road towards Waterfall Bay lookout. After ten minutes, Rebecca eased the car to a stop at a lookout atop the cliffs. A metal barrier blocked the road to the left, and rock bollards allowed pedestrian access to the lookout beyond. Warren took a deep breath, his hands and lungs were fluttering as he felt the next few movements would be the last he ever took. It wasn’t that he was afraid of death, his training had seen to that. No, it was just the uncertainty. Not knowing what came next, now that he was on the cusp of finding out, with no way to return to the living.

Then he shook his head. He wasn't living. He was a dead man walking. He didn’t belong here, and it wasn’t fair to Janet or his parents to watch their other son slowly die in front of them.

He took a deep breath and opened the door. Rebecca was already at the lookout, standing next to a blue sports bag. On top of the bag sat another exercise weight disc and a length of rope. Warren was amazed at the vitality of colour and sound that his senses were picking up as he took a short walk to the railing overlooking the water. The spectacular sunrise had moved above the clouds, lighting up the ocean in warm, golden reflections.

Rebecca drew a pill bottle from her pocket, and shook out a single capsule into her palm. ‘You held up your part of the deal, and I’ve delivered the gold. Now it’s time to erase the evidence.’

Warren took it. ‘What’s this?’

‘Saxitoxin,’ she said tonelessly, as if she was describing a loaf of bread. ‘Developed by the CIA after World War 2, it was intended to replace cyanide as a last resort for operatives.’ She looked at him and smiled, but the gesture was eerie and twisted, given what she had just planned and executed - literally, in the past two days.

‘Bite it, don’t swallow it. Less than five seconds, you won’t feel a thing, OK?’

Warren stepped to the railing and climbed over it, then sat on top, dangling his legs in space as if he was sitting in the door of the transport plane on a jump. A few skinny trees eked a living from the rocky soil between the metal safety railing and the sheer drop beyond. The light breeze stirred his long blonde hair, fanning his face like Janet's caress.

He looked at the sunrise, flashing and dancing on the waves far below, it would be good to fly above the waves forever, laughing and whirling with Benjamin as they waited for their family to join them. Rebecca put her forearms on the railing and leaned forward, looking out at the same view but from behind the relative safety of the railing.

He looked at her one last time. 'You're an evil woman,' he said. 'I don't know how you can live with yourself. You should throw yourself in with me.'

Rebecca just laughed. 'Nope. I'm saving the world from people like the ones that killed your brother. The message we will spin, will convince people to surrender their guns. All those weapons...we'll take all the guns out of society and make it safer for everyone. Millions of people will live because of the sacrifices made here.'

Warren looked at her with doubt on his face, but her voice changed pitch, as if she was trying to convert him to her religion. Her chin jutted out as she spoke,

'It's bigger than just gun control, it's about social programming, training a whole generation to rely on the government to protect them, not their own guns. Let the all-powerful State take care of them'

Warren's head jerked back a little as he tried to process the insanity of what she had just said. Rebecca's eyes were shining and her posture leaned forward, like an evangelist at the pulpit.

'Then you're a fucken idiot. The Kaffirs who killed Benjamin didn't use guns, did they? No, all that was needed was machetes. And if you take away the machetes, they will sharpen rocks. Instead of killing people as an excuse to take their guns, how about you look at the root causes of violence? Huh? Poverty? Exploitation.'

'Never going to happen,' she retorted. 'The people who run the show, who funded this op, they make immense profits from poverty, exploitation, debt, war, disease and conflicts. Class warfare is the mechanism they use to enrich themselves. You think they're going to take even a one percent reduction in

profit, just so some faceless savages can have a better life?’ She laughed again, the sound chilling Warren to the core of his soul.

‘Even if it didn’t cost them anything, you think that’s a signal they want to send to their competitors? That they care about their slaves? The peons? These are people who turn over houses and cars and jets every year, just because they can. You think they have any attachment to the people that make them rich? They care less about some family they never met, than about the guy who puts fuel in their private jet.’

‘People like you are just ingredients in one of their factories, to be processed and sold to make a profit.’

‘There’s no grand conspiracy,’ she continued. ‘But there are a handful of families who have amassed wealth, power and influence, greater than you could imagine. Either through being in the right place in the right time, or committing the right crime, they are effectively beyond the constraints of economic or legal structures. Names like Soros, Rothschild, Metternich, Glucksberg...the royal families of Europe, ancient money - these are the people who started world wars, selling weapons and loaning money to both sides. They own governments, because they influence the UN, IMF and World Bank decisions about money flows. No president or prime minister is going to decline a phone call from the Secretary-General or the president of the World Bank, are they? But Boutros-Ghali or Wolfensohn are just figureheads, you understand? Even they have bosses, people who pull their strings.’

‘Bullshit,’ said Warren. ‘People like that ARE the bosses. Secretary-General of the UN? Nobody tells those people what to do.’

‘Oh yes there are,’ Rebecca shot back. Those presidents and ministers, they all sit on boards and have lunches and dinners. They mix with power at the highest level, kings, despots, sycophants, assassins, bankers. All of them jockeying for advantage, dealing with the devil himself. Sometimes they gang up on others, pooling money and resources to start a coup or convince a government to make a certain decision. Arms shipments, construction and infrastructure contracts, inter-government debt and forgiveness, even wars...money is just a symbol of power and these people trade in it every day.’

Rebecca took a step back and lowered her voice to a less confrontational level.

‘Put it this way. Do you know who owns the shares in the US Federal Reserve?’

Warren shook his head.

‘What about the Bank of England?’

‘No,’ he said. She seemed confident, and that made him nervous.

‘The Bank of England was owned by private shareholders from 1694 until 1946. George Washington was a shareholder, and you can bet your ass that the German and Greek Royal families got their hands on a few shares after Albert married Victoria in 1917. But my point is...the Labour government nationalised the Bank of England in 1946, right? So those shareholders had to agree to sell their shares to the government. And what do you think they asked for in return? Trinkets?’

She shook her head, and Warren did too. He had to admit that nobody would go along with a plan to redistribute their wealth willingly.

‘Those shareholders, who had made billions over the previous century, they would have demanded influence over the new corporate structure. They already play golf with ministers, judges and Parliamentarians, the Knights have regular dinners with the Queen, and all their kids go to the same schools. What do you think they talk about over champagne and caviar?’

Warren shook his head. ‘Money and power?’

‘Exactly,’ said Rebecca. ‘And how to get more of both.’

He shook his head again. ‘I don’t care, I got mine and I’m making my choice. My family are the only thing that matters to me. If it’s fucks like you that are running the world, then we’re all fucked and I want no part of it.’ He picked up the weight disc, looped the rope through it and then tied it around his body.

He climbed off the fence and stepped to the drop-off. The rock was cool in the sunshine as he sat on the very edge of the cliff and slipped the poison pill into his mouth. The air was fresh and cool as he breathed and lived for the last few moments.

He bit into the capsule, feeling the heat of the poison flooding into his veins, mixing with the AIDS virus and seeping rapidly upwards into his brain. It tasted like copper in his mouth.

‘Fuck you, Kaffirs; fuck you Rebecca,’ he muttered as he looked out at the horizon, just like he had done a dozen times with his brother, in the good days when they had health, a mission and each other.

‘Hey bro, here I come. You miss me?’

He took a deep breath, filling his lungs with the salty air, the breeze and the sunshine.

Then he leaned forward and jumped out over the crashing waves. Arms and legs spread, he re-lived the weightless ecstasy of free-fall, connecting his soul with the best times in his life.

Then the poison touched his brain, and by the time his body smashed into the water, he didn’t feel a thing.

The ocean sucked and pawed at his empty flesh, already beginning the process of decomposition, absorbing him into itself as efficiently as a living organism. Rebecca stood at the railing, watching in vain for any signs on the surface as the extra weight dragged him down for the sharks to feed upon.

Steps one and two were complete, now for the hardest part - making sure that Martin didn’t say a word until her political objectives were met.

She turned her back to the sun and walked away from the edge.

Warren had already been filed away in her brain, void of importance, practically forgotten.

Like so many others, simply a tool to be used and then discarded.

Addendum

The foundations of our criminal justice system:

Innocent Until Proven Guilty

The basis of our system of criminal justice is that a person is to be considered innocent, if charged with a crime or offence, until proven guilty. The civil law system in Europe makes the opposite presumption. A person is guilty until proven innocent in their criminal justice courts.

Proof ‘Beyond Reasonable Doubt’

The prosecution must satisfy the magistrate or jury, as the case may be, that the accused person is guilty beyond reasonable doubt. If there is any reasonable doubt whether the accused is guilty, they should be ‘acquitted’, that is, found to be not guilty of the offence.

It is not up to the accused to establish their innocence, although sometimes the accused has to show that there is sufficient evidence to raise an issue as a defence. For example, a judge will not instruct a jury as to self-defence without some factual basis for it.

In some cases, the burden of proving a particular defence, such as insanity, may be on the accused person, but only on the balance of probabilities.

- Tasmanian Law Handbook

<http://www.hobartlegal.org.au/book/export/html/8>

A chain of coincidences and questions about the events at Port Arthur that can only be answered by a formal inquiry:

On the Sunday morning, two hours before the murders, ten of the senior managers of Port Arthur Historic Site were taken to safety many miles away up the east coast, for a two day seminar with a vague agenda and no visiting speakers. Was the timing of this trip a mere coincidence?

Just before the shootings, the only two policemen in the region were called away on a wild goose chase. They were sent to the Coal Mine at Saltwater River, to investigate a heroin drug stash which turned out to be soap powder. This was too far for them to get to the Broad Arrow Cafe in time to be of any use. Had a policeman remained at Dunalley he would have closed the swing bridge to prevent the killer(s) from escaping from the peninsula. Did Bryant, with an IQ of 66, organise this decoy and if so, when did he place the soap powder at the mine?

Before the massacre, a specially-built 22 person capacity mortuary truck was built. It attracted some derision at the time, but its effective use at Port Arthur was unquestioned. After the massacre it was advertised, unsuccessfully, for sale via the internet, then converted for another purpose. Without the foresight of Port Arthur, why build it? If it was built for a major vehicle or plane crash, the risk of such an incident has only increased over time, as more and more vehicles and planes are in use. When it had proven its worth, why get rid of it?

Witnesses vary in their identification of Martin Bryant as the gunman. A young woman who ate her lunch near the gunman just before 1.30 said he had a freckled face. Graham Collyer, the wounded ex-soldier, who had the best opportunity to observe the killer, said he had a pock-marked or acne spotted face. Neither description fits Bryant who has a beautifully smooth complexion. Graham Collyer says that it was not Bryant who shot him in the neck.

On 30th April the Hobart Mercury printed an old photo of Martin Bryant on

the front page. This was illegal because at that stage some of the witnesses had not yet been asked to identify the killer, and the photo would have become fixed in the minds of the witnesses. When one witness was asked to describe the clothing worn by the gunman, she described the clothing on the newspaper photo instead of what the gunman had worn. The Mercury newspaper was not prosecuted for breaking the law.

Mrs Wendy Scurr, nurse, tour guide and Ambulance Officer, rang the police at 1.32 pm to report the shooting. She and other medics then cared for the injured and the dead without any police protection for six and a half hours. Who ordered the armed police to stop at Tarana, where they had a barbecue? The police who arrived by boats were a stone's throw away from the main crime scene, the cafe, and they too failed to come in to see what was going on. Was this meant to increase the trauma of the survivors?

Three more shots were fired at Port Arthur at 6.30pm while Bryant was at Seascope. Who fired those shots?

At a Forensics Seminar in Queensland where the Tasmanian Police forensic gun inspector, Gerard Dutton, gave a lecture, the first question came from Mr Ian McNiven. He asked if there was any empirical evidence to link Martin Bryant to the Broad Arrow Cafe. Sargent Dutton immediately closed the 15 minute question time and would not reply. When McNiven managed to say "I have here Graham Collyer's police statement...", Sgt Dutton threatened him with arrest and called for security agents to escort McNiven out of the building.

When Dutton was asked the same question in America by a Doctor at a seminar, he replied truthfully – "There is no empirical evidence to link Bryant to the cafe."

A police videotape exists which proves that the police had an excellent opportunity to get DNA samples and fingerprints of the gunman. The video briefly shows the blue sports bag on a cafe table. The gunman had carried his rifle in this bag and left it right next to his drinking glass, his Solo soft drink can, knife, fork, plate, video camera, etc. Why did the police fail to take DNA

samples and fingerprints?

According to the official story, Bryant first killed David and Sally Martin at Seascope Cottage in the morning, then went on to Port Arthur. Yet two policemen have reported seeing a naked woman with black hair, screaming and running from one building to another at Seascope well into the afternoon. If Sally Martin was dead, who was this woman?

Proof of other gunmen in Seascope Cottage. While Bryant was calmly talking to police by telephone in the cottage during the 'siege' and the conversation was recorded, someone else fired another rifle 20 times. In the transcript the gunfire is recorded as 'coughs' but an electronic analysis of the 'coughs' shows that it was a gunshot.

Two More Very Handy Seminars. On the Sunday morning, some 25 specialist doctors (Royal Australian College of Surgeons) from all over Australia had attended a training course in Hobart, and their last lecture was on Terrorist Attack and Gunshot Wounds. They stayed on to take care of the wounded victims.

Also, more than 700 reporters from 17 nations came to a seminar in Hobart. They were asked to arrive during the weekend as the seminar was due to begin early on Monday morning. The fact that Hobart was chosen over Melbourne or Sydney as a venue may have a rational explanation, yet the organisers were never asked about it.

"There will never be uniform Gun Laws in Australia until we see a massacre somewhere in Tasmania" said Barry Unsworth, NSW Premier, December, 1987 at a conference in Hobart. Was this an ignorant prophecy or did he know something was being planned?

"If we don't get it right this time (gun laws) next time there is a massacre, and there will be, then they'll take all our guns off us", said the deputy prime minister, Tim Fischer in May 1996. Who is the "THEY" who would order the removal of our guns? Did Fischer let slip that gun confiscation has been ordered by someone other than our own leaders?

In February 1993, a Victorian gun collector, Bill Drysdale of Yea, handed in a Colt AR15 rifle to police during an amnesty. He subsequently identified the rifle as the one recovered from the Seascope Cottage that had allegedly been used in the Broad Arrow Café massacre. In an interview with the Melbourne Herald-Sun on June 23, 1996, Drysdale said that he was virtually certain that the AR15 was his, on account of its extreme rarity in Australia at the time, and because of the unique mark a gunsmith had made on the barrel of his rifle, which matched that on the massacre rifle. The serial numbers were almost identical, while ‘my rifle also had a collapsible stock and a Colt sight, just as the massacre weapon has,’ said Drysdale. The Herald-Sun noted, ‘One of Australia's largest firearms importers told the [Herald Sun] that firearms matching the Port Arthur weapon were as scarce as hen's teeth,’ and that the chances of two weapons of the same type, with almost-matching serial numbers, being imported into Australia, were ‘next to nothing.’ Police subsequently told Drysdale that the rifle had been destroyed at Sims Metal furnace on March 9, 1994. However, they later admitted that no records are kept of when individual guns are destroyed and that some guns had been sold to a Bendigo dealer for sale overseas. The history of this rifle, which was obviously retained by someone in Tasmania Police when it should have been destroyed, is the first clue to the existence of what Martin Bryant told his mother had been a ‘police conspiracy.’

In June 1995, the state of Tasmania ordered a special refrigerated mortuary truck with a capacity of 22 bodies, almost exactly the number of persons killed at Port Arthur ten months later. It was used for the first and only time on the evening of the massacre and was placed on sale in September 1999. Who decided in 1995 that a state with an average murder rate of one every two months required a vehicle capable of transporting 22 bodies at once? No other state had any such vehicle.

In November 1995, less than six months before the massacre, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was removed from the Workers Compensation Act in Tasmania, effectively removing any claim by any worker or volunteer for compensation to overcome this problem – a problem of the sort that would

have affected a good many people in the wake of a massacre. Wasn't this development convenient for the Tasmanian government? Too convenient?

Also in November 1995, Roland Browne, spokesman for the Tasmanian branch of the Coalition for Gun Control, warned not only Tasmanians but all Australians, that if Tasmania did not enact tougher firearm laws then there would be a massacre in Tasmania of massive proportions. In March 1996, after the Dunblane massacre, he reiterated the same dire forecast on the national television show A Current Affair with Ray Martin. Since all the gun massacres in Australia had taken place in the two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, the chances of one taking place in quiet, sparsely-populated Tasmania would have been virtually nil. So what did Browne know and when did he know it?

On November 14, 1995, a new Coroner's Act received royal assent, superseding the 1957 Coroner's Act. Oddly, despite receiving royal assent, the legislation was planned to come into effect only towards the end of 1996, that is to say, after the massacre. Why was the legislation expressly designed not to be in force for almost another year after it was effectively made law?

Beginning in 1995, the quiet backwater of the Tasman Peninsula was used as the location for 'several' SAC-PAV (Standing Advisory Committee for Commonwealth/State Cooperation for the Protection Against Violence) emergency training exercises. According to Joe Paul, Executive Officer of the Tasmania State Disaster Committee, the exercises that began in 1995 were 'designed to assess the emergency services response capability to an event on the Tasman Peninsula, which includes Port Arthur.' Why was the Peninsula singled out for such special treatment? Was there really a higher chance of an emergency in the Peninsula than in any other part of Tasmania? What did these exercises consist of exactly? Was their purpose to mask the planning of the PAHS massacre, which would superficially look like planning for just another counter-terrorist exercise?

Beginning in 1995, there were several significant personnel shifts in areas that would prove relevant to the massacre. First, Constable Chris Iles, the sole

policeman at Nubeena Police Station (the nearest police station to the PAHS) was suddenly transferred, after 15 years, to Sorell Police Station, and was replaced by Constable Paul Hyland. Second, Ian Kingston, manager of the Tasman Peninsula State Emergency Service (SES) unit since 1984, took a part-time job as the PAHS security manager and parking attendant. Third, in March 1996, in an unprecedented development, the Premier of Tasmania, Ray Groom, stepped down, not to retire, but rather to take over a bunch of portfolios, including Attorney-General and Minister of Port Arthur, that would prove important in regard to the April massacre. Finally, the SOG got a new leader, Hank Timmermann, only ten days before the massacre. Were personnel 'in the know' being manoeuvred into position? Why did Ian Kingston suddenly need a part-time job? Does the SES pay that badly? Isn't the role of parking attendant a little lowly for an experienced manager? And how many days did Kingston actually work at the PAHS altogether?

In February 1996, Martin Bryant acquired a new girlfriend, Petra Wilmott. Not only is Wilmott the sole source of the police claim that Bryant bought a Prince sports bag in a Hobart store, she was his girlfriend at the time (March 1996) he bought a new rifle, the first he had bought for many years, suggesting a newly awakened interest in guns. Was Wilmott part of a conspiracy to set him up? Was she responsible for Bryant's sudden interest in guns? Did she provide him with the firearms license gun dealer Terry Hill says Bryant showed him? Did she encourage him to pose for photographs that would make him look 'psycho'?

In the month immediately prior to the massacre, the quiet, sparsely-inhabited island of Tasmania was the location for a sudden wave of emergency training exercises and workshops predicated on terrorism/mass fatality scenarios. On the weekend of April 20-21, Emergency Services held a disaster exercise at Hobart Airport. The same weekend, the Police Academy held an aviation seminar. 'The seminar considered Tasmania's resource capability to cope with a domestic aircraft accident and identified the support available from other states.' Joe Paul explains, 'Other exercises were held to test anti-terrorist arrangements. These exercises practised emergency service personnel and other organisations in responding and managing an event with multiple deaths and casualties.' In the week before the massacre, Royal

Hobart Hospital finalized its new Emergency Disaster Plan ('Code Brown'), the final draft of which landed on the desk of Dr Rod Franks, staff specialist in emergency medicine, on April 26, 1996. Other key hospital personnel had already received copies by this time. Then, on the weekend of April 27-28, the Hospital held an Early Management of Severe Trauma (EMST) workshop that was attended by 25 of the country's top specialists from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. The workshop happened to conclude at about 1pm on Sunday, conveniently making the specialist personnel available to assist in the aftermath of the massacre. Also on the same weekend, ambulance headquarters in Hobart held a training seminar for 18 volunteers. How often are staff work development seminars held on weekends, let alone Sundays? Why in April 1996, and specifically by the weekend of April 27-28, was Tasmania so extraordinarily well prepared for emergencies of the sort leading to mass fatalities which had never occurred in the state's history, and which had only ever occurred in Sydney and Melbourne?

On March 27, about a month before the massacre, Martin Bryant took his Colt AR-10 .308 semi-automatic rifle to Hobart gun dealer Terry Hill for repairs. Hill claims that Bryant showed him a valid firearms license in the name of Martin RYAN, which was correctly endorsed for prohibited and fully automatic weapons. Over the following month, Bryant made several visits to Hill's store, purchasing items that Hill says did not require details of Bryant's license to be recorded. These purchases included several gun cases and finally, on April 24, 1996, four days before the massacre, three boxes of Winchester XX 1 1/2 oz. shotgun shells, code number X12XC. However, at no time did Hill sell Bryant any weapons, or ammunition of .223 Remington or .308 Winchester calibres, that were used at Port Arthur. Since Bryant did not buy anything from Hill that was actually used in the massacre, someone appears to have given Bryant a license and encouraged him to buy goods from Hill as a means of setting him up after the massacre as the source of the Port Arthur gunman's weapons and ammunition. Whoever this person was, he (or she) was not only able to provide Bryant with a gun license, he also knew what purchases Bryant would be allowed to make that would not require a dealer to record his license details.

On the very day of the massacre, the top ten people at the PAHS were

summoned to a seminar in Swansea that had only the airiest rationale ('managing change at Port Arthur'), no agenda, and which was timed to start at 1 p.m. Why was the PAHS staff seminar held at Swansea rather than at the PAHS? Why was the seminar held on a Sunday afternoon, of all conceivable times? Was this a pretext to deprive the PAHS of its security chiefs, with the exception of Ian Kingston?

Back cover blurb:

Hobart, Tasmania

28 April 1996

It was 10.30pm, and the police weren't taking any chances as they approached the house on Clare Street. Set back from the road in the lush suburb of New Town, it was an average, two-story house. Built of white bricks and a corrugated iron roof, it was surrounded by lawn and a stone path led to the front door. The small town cops, only used to giving out speeding tickets and sobering up the regular drunks, had just seen 58 people killed or wounded and were treating their task as if it was an army patrol in an active war zone. Like something from an action film, the carnage had affected them at a subconscious level, and they moved as if their lives would be ended at any moment.

Two officers kept watch as the point man approached the front door and gingerly tested the handle.

Already high, tensions rose as he pressed the metal lever and inched the door open, every muscle screwed tight in anticipation of the worst.

He pushed a little harder, trying to see if the door was booby-trapped, despite not knowing what to look for or how to test for triggers.

But the old timber door creaked open without protest, and the terrified police officers stepped inside the house. It was empty.

Although the occupant was currently being described as an evil madman, the interior looked tidy and normal, with no indication of the killer's mindset in the evidence left behind. On this first search, the police found some paper wrappers that had come from ammunition packets, but nothing else that linked the occupant to the massacre.

Following closely behind, journalist Judy Tierney stepped across the threshold, mentally recording the details she was going to present to the public. Already, the media were running an emotional story about the lone gunman, who had callously taken so many precious lives in a despicable act of pure evil. She was looking for any evidence that would answer the crucial question: why did he do it?

The kitchen was tidy, no dishes piled in the sink or rubbish strewn on the floor, but in a smaller room to the side, Judy saw something that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

Unlike the rest of the house, which was crammed with furniture, this room had only a lamp, a small table and two chairs. As Judy leafed idly through the pages of some magazines on the table, she saw pictures of guns and men in camouflage uniforms. It contrasted to the rest of the house, as if two people had sat at the table, talking about guns, maybe drinking a cup of tea and then stood up, pushing back the chairs as they left the room, never to return.

The mass-murderer was obviously one of the occupants, as he lived alone in the house that he had inherited from his friend Helen Harvey, along with almost half a million dollars.

For the past hours, Judy's imagination had been building a picture of the madman, his childhood and possible motives for the massacre, the planning and the purchase of the firearms and equipment, driving down to Port Arthur, killing all those people and setting the Seascope guest house on fire.

The entire media and police juggernaut that was beginning to gain momentum was predicated on the assumption that he had acted alone.

But if that was true, who had been sitting in the second empty chair?

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- [1] Reported in the media in May 1996
 - [2] Risdon prison interview
 - [3] Testimony to Paul Moder
 - [4] Risdon prison interview
 - [5] Risdon prison interview
 - [6] Risdon prison interview
 - [7] Donald Gunn witness statement
 - [8] ibid
 - [9] Risdon prison interview
 - [10] Mullen, P. (1996) Psychiatric Report on Bryant
 - [11] Angelo Kessarios witness statement
 - [12] Petra Wilmott witness statement
 - [13] Risdon prison interview
 - [14] Bugg QC, in court documents
 - [15] Risdon prison interview
 - [16] Chris Hammond witness statement
 - [17] Donald Gunn witness statement

- [18] Andrew Simmons witness statement
- [19] Risdon prison interview
- [20] Prison interview
- [21] ibid
- [22] Court documents page 64, 65, 66
- [23] Gaye Lynd witness statement
- [24] Gaye Lynd witness statement
- [25] Jai Nichols witness statement
- [26] Aileen Kingston witness statement
- [27] Court documents, page 73
- [28] Bugg QC in court documents P174
- [29] Michael Sargent witness statement
- [30] Neville Quinn witness statement
- [31] Bugg QC Statement in court documents
- [32] Wilkinson video recorded 17 shots in 16 seconds
- [33] Witness statements by Major Sandra Vanderpeer and Peter Crosswell
- [34] VICPOL Snr Const. Dennis Gabbedy later examined the .308W casings
- [35] Graeme survived and said it was not Martin Bryant who shot him
- [36] Ashley Law witness statement
- [37] Mary Olsen witness statement
- [38] Wendy Scurr witness statement
- [39] Brigid Cook witness statement
- [40] Paul Cooper witness statement
- [41] Ashley Law witness statement
- [42] Police report stated it contained 17 rounds, the shotgun contained 9 cartridges. Court documents page 158-159.]
- [43] Nicholas Cheok witness statement
- [44] Police forensic report, also witness statement of shown to Aileen Kingston says Detective Peter Hessman
- [45] Jim Laycock witness statement
- [46] Merran Craig witness statement
- [47] Alison Smith witness statement
- [48] Terry McCarthy witness statement.
- [49] Pat Allen witness statement
- [50] Gary Whittle witness statement
- [51] Reported by other emergency workers listening on the unencrypted frequency

[\[52\]](#) Gary Whittle witness statement

[\[53\]](#) Michael Cordwell witness statement

[\[54\]](#) Statement by Blair Saville, custody officer at Risdon Prison, of a conversation he had with Martin Bryant

[\[55\]](#) Lee-Ann Goodwin witness statement

[\[56\]](#) Malcom Scott witness statement