

Daneland's Back

A light hearted, adult thriller

Kindle Edition 2

By Pat Cresswell

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Kindle edition

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~Chapter 1~

1.01

Tuesday, 2nd May

“Yes” “da”

The same simple word, one with so many consequences, was uttered in two places over eight hundred miles apart at the same time. And in conversations that could only lead to head-on conflict.

Goran Riviescu, Russian by birth and the man that owned most of the new commerce in Mandelavria, said ‘yes’ to the revised plan put before him by his right-hand man, Ivan Krusk. Riviescu was seated behind his over-large oak desk, looted from the retreating Ukrainian Commander during the Mandel revolt of 2004. His wood panelled office was on the third floor, on the north bank of river in the centre of Kourkov, the Mandelavrian capital. He was of stocky build, with broad shoulders and an expanding waist line that told of the good life he was now enjoying. He had a noticeably large head, which made him look shorter than he really was. His brown hair was cut short and he had heavy, bushy eyebrows over his most dramatic feature: jet black eyes.

Krusk’s original plan had been fine and so far had created the right misconceptions around his activities. The revisions to the plan were needed to take full advantage of an opportunity Riviescu had identified in some failed business in The Netherlands. He had studied the revisions Krusk had presented him and could see no flaws. On the contrary, he could see a lot of advantages and every chance of success. It would create both the market opportunity and political pressure he sought.

“Yes, go ahead immediately,” he repeated.

“Thank you, Sir,” responded Krusk, with a slight stamp of the right boot heel and a salute. The tall, muscular man with a square head and nothing more than stubble for hair gathered his papers quickly into a folder, tucked

it under his arm and half marched, half strutted out of Riviescu's office. He sensed the impatience in his employer's agreement to his plan and chose not to review the finer details with him. Anyway he had all he wanted from that morning: a full, unconditional order to proceed.

Eight hundred miles away on the South Bank of the Thames in London, the same word hung in the air. This time it was delivered in a more reserved, even hesitant tone. Gloria Hansen, Director General of the UK Security Service, generally known as 'The Service', knew she was in difficulty. That she was in a small office on the fifth floor of a 1930s brick built warehouse rather than her top floor office suite in the Service's Vauxhall office complex only sought to underline her situation. After giving her agreement, she smoothed the skirt of her dark blue, collarless Chanel suit with her palms, as if wiping away any connection.

Sitting behind his desk, Anthony Daneland, felt every bit as elated as Krusk. He too had what he had worked for. The ex-RAF Officer's long experience told him there was no point or need to check on the agreement just drawn from the formidable Ms Hansen. In any case if it went wrong this meeting never happened. He clearly understood her position. Under the last government, undercover or 'off sheet' missions had become a problem when two had gone wrong, somewhat spectacularly, in the space of a month. The UK's clandestine involvement in other countries had made embarrassing headlines on a run up to the election. Daneland fortunately had not been involved with either, but had personal experience of how things can turn nasty. His last mission had lost one of his own men and worse still, an innocent civilian, something that still troubled his sleep on dark nights.

With a new government in power, swept in on policies including transparent government, if an "off sheet" was just discovered to exist the fall-out would end careers, regardless of how much the UK needed the result of the mission. Following the election Hansen had scaled back The Service's 'hidden' arm. Daneland was the only team leader left and his team was mothballed. Other than that the "Off Sheet" capabilities were limited to a few specialists and lone operators. So Daneland was somewhat flattered he had been chosen for this project. Obviously Hansen thought it would build into something more than a one man band could cope with. It looked like a project to get his teeth into, something he had really missed of late.

He politely walked Hansen into the corridor and from there to the rear fire escape. The metal staircase would take her down to the courtyard and then a short walk would reunite her with her driver and escort. As he held the outward opening fire door by the release bar, he fixed her eyes once more. "It is the only way," he said quietly, eyes locking hers. There was no audible response. Hansen's look communicated a thousand words. It said, "Don't screw up, don't get caught, expect no quarter if you don't succeed" and more.

1.02

In March of that year, in Kourkov..

Friday, 24th March

Some months earlier 'yes' had just rung repeatedly in the ears of Professor Edric Losikanic. He walked through the front gate and carefully closed it behind him. The house he had just left was two storeys, set in its own hedged grounds within the Kourkov Institute Park and its architecture was heavily French influenced. And that suited the events that had just occurred.

He drew himself to his full height, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly making a 'foong' noise. He was delighted with himself. As he was just off the Kourkov Institute campus, surrounded by open park land, he did not even scan around to see if there was anybody who would recognise him. If there had been anybody there they would have known full well what he was doing.

Behind him was the house of Georg and Lidinva Randolof, both Doctors working at the Institute and their joint incomes afforded the comfortable, detached villa just off the campus. It was well known to male teaching staff and students alike as Lidinva had an insatiable appetite for physical sex and a promiscuity level bordering on 100 per cent. In fact the only male that seemed unaware of her ways was her adoring husband. He appeared to be in blissful ignorance that his wife was the "Institute bike". Or maybe he liked it that way.

Although she had a rather plain face, her figure was fantastic for those who liked a full bosom and rounded arse and, on some occasions, that

was exactly what Losikanic liked. And he certainly had that day. Rumours of her exploits were rife on the campus. The Wednesday afternoon sessions with five, six or more of her students had ceased to even be talked about. 'Lidinva takes 2 at time' graffiti was old hat and the only recent thing to draw attention to her activities was pictures of one of her bukkake parties that appeared briefly on an Institute blog. She had had the temerity to invite Losikanic to one of these recently. When he had protested that a Professor does not mix with the lower kind, especially with his trousers round his ankles, she had quipped, "Just thought it would suit you, you could cum first as usual." It was that quip that had spiked Losikanic.

And so today he had shown her what a real man could do. He had started with her reclining, naked, as always, on the sofa, with him kneeling between her legs. As he penetrated her she locked her legs around his back and bade him to roger away. Her voice always sounded sensual, but when she really talked dirty it was more than many men could resist. After a little while he could see her starting to build and build. Her orgasm seemed to surprise her, but not stop her encouragement. Then he felt a twang; the condom had split. He pulled out, feverishly found and fitted another one. Lidinva had moved onto all fours and he delighted in rejoining her, and soon she was in raptures again. She had then pulled away from him, all but threw him into a sitting position on the sofa, tore the condom off and ravenously devoured his erection. Completion had never been so sweet and visual for him.

Yes, he had rebuffed her quips and left her astounded. She had begged him to arrange another session in a few days' time. It had been a great success. The formula he had manufactured in the French built Research Laboratory at PharMandel and injected into a normal condom foil packet had certainly passed the acid test; that of exciting Lidinva. Just a shame he must have nicked the sheath inside on one of them. He knew he could look forward to much more fun in the future. If it had that effect on a woman of Lidinva's experience, it would work on anybody. He looked at the world over a broad smile as he marched back towards the Science Faculty building.

~Chapter 2~

2.01

Monday, 10th April

For Daneland the go-ahead from Hansen was the culmination of a month of intensive work. Early in April Hansen had first requested a lunch meeting with Daneland. The conversation covered nothing more than a health check. “Did he still have all his contacts?” “Could a team be put together quickly?” “Were secure overseas operations possible?” It was the type of meeting Daneland expected every six months or so. After all the ‘The Service’ paid a not inconsiderable retainer to him to run the legitimate side of Pegasus Logistics, his Import / Export business, and in addition often gave him Service related business. The only thing that was strange was that Hansen did the check herself. Normally it was some operations staffer.

At the end of the meeting he dared to ask, “Am I being dusted down to be pulled off gardening leave?” Hansen had answered with just a slight smile. So when a second meeting request came around a week later, somehow Daneland was not surprised. This time it was in his office on the top and fifth floor of the 1930s warehouse that was the offices of Pegasus Logistics. Once seated, Hansen thanked Grace Bennett, Daneland’s long standing assistant and key member of his team, for her lemon tea. She took a very small sip while Grace left the room and then cut to business.

“Anthony,” she started in a high tone to attract his attention. She always called him by his full first name. “Anthony, we have a problem that you need to help with.”

Daneland merely raised his bushy eyebrows. They both knew that under the new PM, “off sheet” operations were taboo. ‘Open and fair government in the UK and in the way we deal with the rest of the world’ - the PM’s campaign catch phrase briefly ran across Daneland’s mind.

“I’m sure you will have heard of a breakaway Eastern Europe state called Mandelavria? Been in the news a bit recently as they’re seeking EU

recognition and then membership.” Daneland nodded. “The PM doesn’t seem to be too keen on them. He sees it as condoning breakaway movements and expanding the EU in a reckless way. The French are right in their corner however, giving them all sorts of aid, so it has become a bone of contention in the EU.” She paused and sipped her tea.

“Well given that situation it will be no surprise that we have no FO links with Mandelavria, which up until a few weeks ago hasn’t been an issue. Do you remember the news coverage of a fire in some pharmaceutical manufacturer’s repository? Lost a lot of research material?”

“Er yes, I do. Found a body if I remember. Arson wasn’t it?”

“Right on both counts. A petrol accelerant was used, three seats of the fire, ignited using mobile phones,” confirmed Hansen. She continued, “But it’s the body that’s caused the stir. Met Police did their job and traced him back to a rented flat nearby. Pieter Zhadohy, a Mandel, studying in London. At the flat they found a lot of pro Mandel Royalist literature and a PC full of the stuff. He was a member of the Mandel Royalist Organisation, MRO, and it seems they will use violence to further their aims.”

“So the arson may have been a terrorist act? To help restore the monarchy in Mandelavria? Seems a bit distant to me,” responded Daneland.

“And to me, but not to Number 10 however. The PM thinks it is about pressuring him to be pro recognition, to stabilise Mandelavria as a precursor to a Royalist return. Just that it went wrong. With no official channels, and don’t even think of going via the French; we are having difficulty finding out how real this threat is.”

“But you have lots of able men and women that could operate there,” Daneland stated.

“Open and fair government in the UK and in the way we deal with the rest of the world. We can’t risk a UK connection coming out so soon after the election. So having weighed the risks, I’d prefer an ‘off sheet’ to a UK operator being caught in the streets of Kourkov.”

“But surely if the PM is against recognising Mandelavria, a terrorist act in the UK is ideal ammo – proves his point, they don’t deserve to be in the EU?” commented Daneland.

“Ah Anthony! Did you not see Prime Minister’s Question Time! He majored on the success this Government is having at containing the terrorist threat – ‘Five’ have broken six cells in the last two months. To have to say there is a new source of threat, one that has already done damage, including a death will just blow that apart. Until we’ve tried everything else we are not going to even consider going public.” She took a long pause. “Take a week, two at the most and see what you can come up with.”

Following the meeting Daneland had started up the project. He called Grace, his assistant of over 15 years’ standing, into his office. “Grace,” he said in a rather upbeat voice, “we need to set up an Operations Room! Use the office up here. I’m going to go and recruit some help.” She smiled broadly in reply. After a near two year layoff it felt good to be back at what they both felt was their real job.

2.02

Tuesday, 11th April

He recognised the voice from the first words. John Calder had just parked his second-hand Vauxhall Omega minicab in a space two doors from his Raynes Park terraced house. It was a dank, wet evening and the red brick, terraced buildings did little to brighten the scene. He was walking past the car that was parked in his normal space by his front gate when the driver’s window whirred down.

“Hello John, how are things?”

He turned and bent down to look into the car. The signature sports jacket confirmed his identification. Daneland looked little changed since the last time they had seen each other. The round face may have been a little fuller and the brown hair had a few more flecks of grey, but he still looked well. His stocky build more than filled the front seat of the Jaguar.

“Well, what is ‘The Boss’ doing here? Just fancied a drive into the suburbs?” asked Calder with a hint of harshness. Daneland raised his left hand, fingers outstretched, to parry the inflection.

“Come on John. I know you’re a reasonable chap. Just listen to what I have to say and if you’re not interested then I’ll drive back out of your life.” Daneland paused, and then added, “Just a few minutes? Do get in.” Calder thought about just walking away, but it was a damp April night, he’d had only a few fares and maybe, just maybe, Daneland had something more interesting than the take away he was carrying and can or three of Tesco’s lager. He rounded the car and got into the passenger seat.

“Thank you, John,” Daneland said as he extended his hand to Calder. Daneland was “old school”, Eton or was it Rugby, Calder was never sure. It was certainly Oxford after that, a distinguished career in the RAF and probably by now a London club or two. But there was another side to him. He was worldly; genuinely caring for those he knew and worked for him. That was a rare trait in the world of intrigue in which he worked. It was that real care that Calder always remembered and really the reason why he was sitting in the passenger seat right now and not inside his house.

“No problem, Anthony,” Calder replied, taking the outstretched hand.

“Oh please, remember it’s always Tony in our team,” said Daneland with a broad smile.

Calder noted the ‘in our team’ phrase and knew what it implied. It had been two years since he last worked for Daneland. It should have been just another mission, involving the newly acceptable Eastern European states. He’d done more missions than he could clearly remember, but this last one in Slovenia had gone horribly wrong. The team had been disbanded instantly. All he got was a text from a long crushed pay as you go phone, but it contained the disband code word and confirmation code. Since then he had tried a few jobs, ending up minicabbing around south west London. Never yet had any one said “follow that cab!” It was just dull. OAPs to the shops and hospital, the middle class to and from restaurants he couldn’t afford, and puking piss heads back from the pubs and clubs. He was ready for a change, but had not expected to ever see Daneland again.

“Yes of course, Tony,” he replied and waited. Daneland took his time, seemingly ensuring he got his speech right.

“You know of Mandelavria, don’t you John?” Daneland began. Calder did as he liked to keep in touch with world affairs even while being a mini cab driver. In the old days it was one of the pockets of discontent in the Soviet bloc that the West fed and encouraged. He was also aware that it had broken away from both Moldova and the Ukraine around 2004, and most recently made the headlines by requesting membership of the EU even though few European governments recognized it as a legitimate country. Many voices were raised against the request. To the West it was a dictatorship, too much to the left, some even used the communist word and others still felt it was a terrorist state torn out of its neighbours by force. Calder nodded.

“Well if you’ve been keeping up you’ll know our new PM is not for recognizing it. Unlike the French, of course. So ‘we’ are involved whether we like it or not.”

He continued, “Mandelavria is a hot topic. There’s even talk of their President Dolovski making a ‘private’ visit to London in a few weeks time.”

“Doesn’t sound like your sort of line,” commented Calder.

“Even MI5 should be able to snoop on him to make sure he doesn’t rock the boat.”

“Ah, not so simple, but then whatever is. There’s a body you see, recovered from a burned out repository not far from here around two months ago. The place belonged to Keller-Fische or K-F, the pharmaceutical giant. You may remember the fire, closed the line into Victoria Station in the morning rush hour. Caused absolute havoc.” Daneland paused.

“Vaguely recall something like it, but I don’t remember a big issue with a body though,” responded Calder.

“Not surprising. They initially thought it was the night watchman. But a few things didn’t add up. Although badly burned, he had broken his leg before he died. Possibly caused by a fall of ten to fifteen feet. So that was a bit odd. As was the fact that the night watchman, a contractor, was skiving off that night, nicely tucked up with a lady that was not his wife.” Daneland gave a little smirk before continuing. “Then the old Bill found no evidence of a break in the perimeter wire fence so started to get suspicious. They managed to find an ID card that survived in the poor corpse’s wallet, a Mandelavrian ID card and a Student Union card.” He paused.

“That led them to a small rented apartment where they found a lot of stuff connecting him to the Mandelavrian Royalist Organisation, the MRO, plus details of how to make a bomb. Now just why would they want a bomb and to burn down a document store belonging to a UK leading pharmaceutical company?”

Calder gave it little thought and replied, “I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”
“Alas not, old chap, but I’m rather hoping that you’ll help me to find out.”
Calder was interested, but could not quite see why a Daneland style operation was needed. “Why an off sheet? Why not just the normal channels?”

“Well, as soon as the terrorist possibility was found Number 10 ordered a block on all public activity, something that the PM does not do lightly. With the PM going round crowing about his success at defeating the terrorist threat, the last thing he wanted was a new and active source of terror. Far too sensitive and ‘Five’ think the whole thing was too pat, too obvious. They even suspect a little French Connection and as soon as we said anything about it, they’d miraculously come up with the truth. So with Dolovski, the Mandelavrian President, probably coming to London, the pressure is on to find some facts. Is there really a terrorist threat from the MRO in the UK?”

After a short pause Daneland continued, “The Foreign Office tried to talk with the Mandelavrians but they were less than helpful, which could, of course, be a ploy to push along the official recognition. But there you have it. We’ve no official presence in the country, no open channels to the Mandelavrian Government that could withstand some plain talking and, it seems, possible Mandelavrian based terrorist activity coming our way. So we need some intelligence and answers fast. We could just send The Service boys in, but then remember the election pledges about ‘transparent government at home and abroad’. They were meant for British consumption of course, but we can hardly risk having one of our boys found in the streets of Kourkov right now can we. Could make for a very frosty chat when Dolovski gets here. Not needed while Britain is chairing the EU and the French are trying all they can to be seen as the most progressive EU state. They are already showering Mandelavria with goodies. No, this one is down to the likes of us. The Service needs to know what’s going on, so fancy a little challenge?”

The car went silent, save the patter of a passing rain shower on the roof. Calder stared through the windscreen at the sodden, grey street.

“Oh just a little extra. The bomb making details on the cremated Mandel’s computer were for a chemical device and apparently something that was viable....” Daneland let his sentence hang. Calder weighed the options. Minicabing or saving the UK from chemical warfare? Take-away, lager and the late night news, or being behind the headlines? Boredom or...? He needed to think no more. Despite being dumped and left to fend for himself without so much as a tenner of redundancy payment, he wanted in.

“I’m in, when do I start?”

“Good man, John! Knew I could count on you,” said Daneland, a broad and open smile all across his face. He reached into the back seat and with difficulty retrieved a heavy portfolio. “You can start tonight with a little light reading. This is all we have on Mandelavria, Dolovski and the MRO. See you at Pegasus tomorrow.”

2.03

Friday, 14th April

Calder and Grace joined Daneland in his top floor office in the Pegasus offices. Daneland’s office shared the floor with the Boardroom, Grace’s office and general office area which was normally left unoccupied. The furnishings and decor had a stout but slightly tired look about them. It was the first team meeting since Hansen reactivated Daneland and he was keen to get things moving, but as it was nearly two years since he had run a project, he was feeling rusty and was very aware of it. He had done enough thinking about the situation, now was time for action. He went straight into the proceedings.

“Grace, tell us what your research has uncovered, please.” He looked over at Grace, his assistant. She was trustworthy and able. A slightly built lady, born in Barbados, came to the UK to train as a nurse, had a career in the army medical core then was ‘introduced’ to Daneland as he was setting up his off sheet team.

“Well Tony, I’ve compiled a briefing on Mandelavria, including maps, main political figures, industry and all the history I can find.” She handed them both a slim ring binder. They both picked up the folders and opened them. She was, as always immaculately dressed, today in a blue suit and white blouse, with a small red bow tied at her neck. “It is a bit of a strange situation,” Grace continued, “with President Dolovski declaring Mandelavria independent from Moldova and the Ukraine. Key thing is not all, well few countries, recognise them. We don’t, though the French would if they could, but the EU is pressuring them to hold off. The Americans are sitting on the fence, mainly because, as you know, they are having a bit of a rub with the Russians at present, and the Russians seem to like Mandelavria at the moment. But that may be merely because the Ukrainians have a big issue with the Mandel separation.”

Calder and Daneland were leafing through the folder.

“What about the Mandel Royalist Organisation, the MRO, Grace?”

“Well there are a lot websites out there. Everything from ‘I love the Contessa’, and I’ll come on to her in a moment, to ‘Let’s blow up Dolovski’, but I’m afraid that a lot of the sites are in the Mandel language and even I can’t get much from those.” Grace was fluent in French, German, Cantonese and could get by in at least five others, including Russian, but as Mandel was related to Hungarian and Finnish she had little base to work from. Grace gathered herself; she was recognised for her concise and valuable briefings.

“The only real Mandel royal is a contessa living in Paris. By all accounts a very forward lady and not a stranger to salacious headlines. There are Mandel exile communities in many European countries and in the US. The Royalist element seems to be in all of them, it is a roll over from the independence movement of Communist days, but the main centre is Paris, where the Contessa lives. Since the independence of Mandelavria the royalist support has grown in Mandelavria as well.”

“Thanks Grace, thorough as usual,” commented Daneland. “John, what have you uncovered from the fire in the repository?”

Calder eased back in his chair and looked down at his notes. He was just short of six feet tall and though approaching forty, had retained his athletic build. He had a thin face and the thinness was exaggerated by his pointed beak-like nose. He always looked uncomfortable sitting down

and was much more at home getting on with the job rather than talking about it. Using forged MI5 credentials he had gained easy access to the Metropolitan Police team that worked on the repository fire.

“Well it was definitely arson, no question according to the DI that investigated. There were three seats to the fire and an accelerant, probably petrol, was used. Two areas were inside the storage racking and the third around our poor Mandel, Pieter Zhadohy. And they found that a doctored mobile phone was used to start each one. The autopsy report showed our Mandel, Zhadohy was alive when the fire started, well breathing at least; he had smoke in his lungs. And he had a severely broken femur. The DI presumed it was from a fall trying to get back out of the window he came in through.”

Daneland interrupted. “Were mobile phone parts found by our Mandel?”

“Yes, traces of two, strangely,” responded Calder. “Despite the fire some of the contents of his wallet survived. That’s how they identified him. As you know it included a photo id for London University and that’s how they traced him to a rented flat not too far away. There they found a whole host of MRO stuff, including material he authored, so he was definitely involved with the MRO. And a computer with instructions to make the chemical bomb. When that was all reported back they got the ‘hands off’ order from Number 10.”

“Any sign that the hush up was to do with the content of the repository?” asked Grace.

“Good thought,” added Daneland, looking at Grace.

“Not as far as the DI was concerned. It was all to do with the Mandel connection. With the PM and French playing pat ball with the Mandel issue, anything connected with Mandelavria gets the same treatment. Not that the DI minded, he had plenty of other cases to work on.”

Daneland considered the information for a while. A lot did not add up. Why would a Mandel royalist burn down the K-F repository? Where was the gain or even the publicity? And becoming a martyr in the effort did not seem like anything else the MRO did. Of course the PM’s stance against recognising Mandelavria and certainly against them entering the EU could be a reason.

“You know John, Grace, this just doesn’t add up. Hansen has us digging into this because her people can’t be seen in Mandelavria. Well I can see that would be a problem. ‘You don’t recognise us, but you spy on us,’ they’d say. Or worse still the French would accuse us of that. And the lack of any official or unofficial channels to Mandelavria makes any terrorist like activity a real unknown. But why attack a pharmaceutical company repository? I guess he could have stolen some research material and set the fire to cover his tracks, but then it went wrong. He fell on the way out, realised he was done for and brought forward his end by torching himself?” Daneland left his own questions hanging.

It took a few moments for Calder to offer an opinion. “But he need not ignite the fires using the mobiles until he was safely outside. He would have to have been really dedicated to set them off after his fall, knowing he would be burned to death. Maybe he was that dedicated and set himself alight to hasten the end?”

Daneland had already thought that far. “Yes John, but would you have taken an extra mobile phone igniter and petrol with you? Sounds a bit cautious for this type of situation.” Calder and Grace nodded in agreement.

“I can’t help thinking that there is a K-F connection here. Something they have or have done. John, be a good fellow and go stay near K-F’s offices, they’re just outside Leatherhead I think, and just ‘beat the bushes’ a bit.”

2.04

Tuesday, 18th April

The K-F offices were in a business park to the north west of Leatherhead. Over the weekend Calder had found a comfortable B&B in a 1930’s semi. The full English breakfast and endless tea were just to his liking. From that base he set about finding places that K-F employees frequented. It wasn’t hard. The George was a Victorian, brick built pub near the station

and was the first drinking establishment you came to coming into town from the offices.

Around 12.30 there was an influx of smartly dressed business folk and a few others in blue overalls. While they stayed in their own circles, all seemed to know each other and the blue overalls bore the K-F logo. Calder noticed that the blue overalls joined a person who had been there since before he arrived. Apparently deep in his Daily Mail he tried to pick up on the conversations. Children, holiday plans, office gossip and one couple seemed deep in business chat about a contract. Around 1.20 they started to thin. With a little more space around him, Calder could now tune into the blue overalls. The group was breaking up too.

“Well we’d better get back. Leave this gentleman of leisure!” said a short and rather overweight man with combed back receding hair. There were murmurs of agreement and chairs scraped back. “See you Larry,” a few said and the group trailed out the door, leaving a middle aged man with short, well cut hair sitting with a half full pint glass. He wore jeans and denim shirt. He rose and took his glass to the bar.

“A swift half in there please, Jackie,” he said to barmaid. Calder finished his glass and stood next to him waiting to be served.

“Bit quieter now,” Calder remarked casually.

“Sure is. Same every day as soon as the K-F mob are back at their desks,” replied Larry. He seemed happy to talk. The barmaid returned with Larry’s topped up glass. He slipped a few coins into her hand.

“elp you?” she said to Calder.

“Pint please, luv,” he replied, handing her the glass. Larry did not return to his table, so Calder took the opportunity.

“You work there?”

“Worked,” Larry emphasised. “Took the early retirement package a month ago. Best thing I ever did.” Larry took a packet of cigarettes out of his breast pocket and offered Calder one. Calder declined and Larry took one and lit it. He took a heavy draw and blew the smoke upwards and away from Calder.

“Not by the bar, Larry!” chided the barmaid.

“We’d better sit down,” suggested Calder, leading the way to a table. Larry followed with pint and cigarette.

"I know a lot of people that say they don't know how they ever fitted work in when they retired," said Calder after they were both comfortably installed at a round wooden table. "You're right there."

"What did you do?"

"Post room courier," replied Larry, in a very formal tone. "Van driver between the sites really. But it was OK. Got around, met a lot of folks. Could never do a 'nine to five' at a desk. Bore me to tears." "Got many sites around here?" "Three around London. Used to be four, but one burned down."

"I think I remember reading that," responded Calder.

"Yea, it was the repository, where they kept all their research records, drug trials and that sort of stuff. Pretty well burned to the ground. What do you do?"

Calder had been expecting the question and took a sip of his pint before answering. "My name's John," said Calder, holding out his hand. Larry shook it and confirmed his name. "I'm a freelance reporter. Do articles for the local rags and freebie papers. I should be working on one about how international companies impact small towns. Just can't get started yet." He grinned. "Got any stories about K-F to get me going?"

Larry had. And over another two pints talked about how they did not care for the people that really kept the place going, just the star scientists and great visiting professors. Calder picked up on the latter to keep the flow going. A few moments later he realised he'd found pay dirt.

"A few months back, had this Russkie; well apparently he wasn't Russian but something like Mandolvian. Bit like Star Trek if you ask me. He'd been before, late last year. Mr Lossie, Losikan I think it was. Anyways, I was told he could have anything he wanted. I did trip after trip for him to and from that repository. This box, that box, take these back, and never a please or thank you. And he could speak English alright. Especially to young Alice, pretty girl, they'd given to assist him. Dirty old sod, always leerin' down her blouse. Mind you she could have buttoned it up a bit more." Larry nudged Calder's arm.

"Any idea what he was doing?"

"Apparently he was looking for stuff K-F gave up on to see if they could continue the research back at his place. I got his last boxes back the day before the fire. And some of it was dodgy stuff." Larry tapped the side of his nose. "Dodgy?"

“They used to do some government stuff here. Chemicals. He had all that work out. Dr Fran’s stuff. Remember her well. When they were closing down that project I helped her shred the unwanted stuff and pack the rest for the repository. Nice lady, not snooty, like most of them. Fran Ward she was. Still up there.”

“Any other stuff you got for him you remember in particular?” Calder knew he was sounding too pushy, but Larry was mellowed from his liquid lunch.

“Only Hadden’s stuff. You see I knew them all. That’s the value of keeping the likes of me. Dr Hadden. He took the package at the same time as me.” “What was he doing?” “Oh this wasn’t recent stuff of his. It was well back. They called it ‘Recreational Research’! It was still written on the outside of the boxes. Imagine needing to research into relaxing!” Larry raised his pint.

Yes imagine that, thought Calder, but the chemical elements had lodged strongly in his mind.

2.05

Wednesday, 19th April

Calder reported back to Daneland. Grace took some notes as he recounted his drinking session with Larry.

“A quick result John, well spotted,” said Daneland when Calder had finished.

“So we have this Professor character from what we can assume to be Mandelavria looking through research records at K-F, some of which could be connected to HM Government work. Then a day after he finishes, all the records go up in smoke.”

Daneland consider the information for a moment. He turned to Calder.

“Did the police have a layout of what was where in the repository John?”

“Yes they did, got a filing plan from K-F.”

“Could you check what was filed near to the two places the fire started for me, thanks?” Calder nodded.

“Grace, track down this Dr Ward at K-F please and make an appointment for us to see her. Use the HM Audit Office cover. Oh and I guess we should try and find Dr Hadden as well, though as he’s left K-F that could prove difficult. And see if you can find anything on this Mandel scientist. Loikan was it John?”

“Losikan Larry said,” corrected Calder. The meeting ended and Grace set to work while Calder left to go and see the police team.

Around an hour later Calder phoned Daneland. “I’ve checked the locations where the Forensics said the fires started and looked at what was filed there. And guess what?” reported Calder.

“Tell me,” responded Daneland.

“Dr Ward’s work is near one and Dr Hadden’s is near the other.”

“One could be a coincidence, but two...” replied Daneland.

“My thoughts exactly,” said Calder.

2.06

Thursday, 20th April

Surprisingly Dr Hadden proved rather easy to find. He was still living not far from K-F’s offices and while intrigued by a request for a meeting from the HM Audit Office, Grace had placated him by saying it was just routine administrative stuff. A meeting was set for the next day.

Daneland and Calder arrived outside the tile hung detached house in a leafy street in Bookham. Hadden was in his gardening clothes and mowing the front lawn when they arrived. He introduced himself as George, barely glanced at the false identification they presented him with and bade them to follow him round the side of the house into the kitchen. He was mid to late fifties, well receding with a ‘comb over’ hairstyle. An offer of tea was declined and Daneland started to explain their interest. He told Hadden that as some Government related work had been destroyed in the K-F fire they had to follow up on it. Purely administrative he had assured the Doctor. He then told him that some of his work had been stored near to where one of the fires started, so they just needed to check what was in the files. Calder added the ‘Recreational Research’ comment he had gained from Larry.

“Ah that stuff. I’d all but forgotten about that. Yes, K-F had a programme looking into the recreational use of drugs rather than the normal ‘cure people’ stuff. All the pharma majors do this from time to time, usually kicked off by a belief that some government will legalise cannabis or the like.” Hadden sounded very matter of fact about it.

“Usually comes to nothing however. Some things escape though. That’s where the date rape drug, Rohypnol came from. We looked at a few things, mostly cannabis or opiate based, aimed at relaxing people in much the same way as a few drinks.” Hadden paused, obviously thinking back through the years. “Ah yes, I remember the best one,” said Hadden, leaning closer to them in a conspiratorial way. “Liquid orgasm we called it. It was synthetic Oxytocin.” Calder and Daneland looked blank.

“Oxytocin is the hormone in the brain that sparks off an orgasm. It causes the release of opiates and endorphins that people experience as the mental part of an orgasm. We developed a synthetic version, well close to it. It had an effect on men, but about ten times the effect on women.” He paused with a large smile on his face. “It could be absorbed through any moist surface and provided the lady was already, shall we say getting excited then wham! You were the best lover she ever had. We did some limited trials, official and unofficial, if you take my drift.” Hadden winked at them both.

“You still had to get to first base mind you, but after that you couldn’t beat them off! Can’t remember the name of the girl who led the trials ...” “What happened to it?” asked Daneland
Hadden was trying hard to remember something. “Jane! That’s it, Jane Little. Jane ran the trials. No idea where she is now. She was a bit full on, if you know what I mean.”

“But what did happen to the work?” Daneland repeated.
“Ah. Bit sad really. Something in the make-up was different to natural Oxytocin. We never found out what, but it made it chemically addictive. After a few dozen doses you just couldn’t do without it. Made you sex mad you could say. Then as it built up basically it poisoned you, brown marks on the breasts were the first sign. Still it was fun while it lasted!”

Daneland began to think they were wasting their time, so he skillfully brought the interview to an end, while leaving George with a feeling that he had given them all they needed and there would be no further questions.

As soon as they were both in Daneland’s car, he asked Calder what he thought of what they had heard.
“Seems straight forward to me, nothing much there.”

"I agree. I was getting a bit bored of hearing about Georgie boy's party tricks. Mind you, would you have thought that solid middle class, middle aged man was such a love god?"

"Must have faded a bit over the years," said Calder with a grin. They drove back to Pegasus.

2.07

Monday, 24th April

It was the following Monday when Daneland and Calder were shown into Dr Fran Ward's office at K-F. Her secretary furnished a coffee for Calder and a tea for Daneland.

Dr Ward was well into middle age, with light brown hair cut just off her chin line. She was prone to putting on weight it seemed and her face was beginning to look jowly. Her thick glasses were perched on the end of her nose so she could look over them at her visitors. Her manner was short, but Daneland put that down to her being busy. She had however, taken a careful look at their identification. Not that it mattered, as it was produced on the same printing presses and paper as real identifications, just not in the normal hours of operation of the secure printers.

"Thank you for seeing us at such short notice, Dr Ward," Daneland said in opening. "It's really a routine matter. We understand some papers related to Government work were destroyed in the K-F repository fire and that some of those were related to your work."

Dr Ward looked sceptical. Calder joined in. "According to the records these were the boxes of files belonging to you." He placed on her desk the printout from the K-F repository log that he simply forgotten to return to the police files. The sight of the print out on K-F printer paper seemed to break down her hostility to them. She adjusted her glasses to read the lines that Calder pointed to.

"Umm. That was the DIY chemical weapons project we worked on until it was taken back into the Government labs."

"Was there any classified material in it?" asked Daneland without looking up from the pad held on his knee.

"No there wouldn't have been. All that stuff was parcelled up and sent to the Government labs. It was only the lab notebooks."

"What type of research was it?" asked Daneland.

"It didn't really get very far. It was all about creating a small volume essence that could be used with common stuff, like bleach, paraffin and the like that are easy to find in an urban environment. The idea was that troops could safely carry the essence and then produce the chemical agent as needed by mixing in things they could get locally."

"Any success?" asked Calder.

"Some, but as I say it was taken away from us before we got anywhere near the finished options, let alone an actual product."

"Just note books you say, could anybody work out what you found from them?"

"Guess they could if they had the time and patience to read them all. It would need to be an expert in the field in any case. But that's not an issue is it. You said they were burned with the rest of the stuff?"

Daneland realised they may be going too far. "Quite. There is just a chance of course they were removed before the fire was set, so we just have to ask."

"As I say it would need to be an expert and they would have to read through the whole story to see what failed and what showed promise."

Daneland looked at Calder. "I think we have all we need, anything more from you John?"

"Not really."

"Well thank you Dr Ward. I think that has cleared things up. If we have any further questions, can we phone you?"

"No problem at all." She seemed happy the meeting was closing. Just as they were moving to the door, Daneland tried once more.

"Just between us, did you find anything that was promising?"

Dr Ward looked pensive. "We are a world leader in chemical processes. I think we handed over some great opportunities to your Government boffins," she replied with a wry smile.

"Thank you very much," said Daneland.

2.08

Friday, 28th April

Daneland was waiting for Grace and Calder to join him in his top floor office. He was turning the pages on that morning's Financial Times. On the European pages an article leapt out at him. 'Mandelavria' was the word that caught his attention. He read the article in full. It was about a Russian corporate raider, Goran Riviescu, who was trying to buy into a Dutch conglomerate. The Mandelavria connection was that he was now domiciled there. The article noted he had decided to keep his base there despite the uncertainty on Mandelavria status.

The deal had gone sour when Riviescu announced that his due diligence had revealed a massive accounting error in the company's books. Billions of euros were missing. The CFO had now resigned claiming the CEO had stopped him from putting in the systems needed and was not able to know what the actual situation of the company was. An external audit team had been brought in and they had recommended that the whole thing be put in the hands of the administrators. It was a big scandal, with implications through the commercial sector and the government in The Netherlands. To lighten the grim story, a side bar pointed out that one subsidiary was the largest condom manufacturer in The Netherlands and had already closed. The headline ran 'No more caps for the Dutch.'

Calder and Grace arrived. Grace noticed the article Daneland was reading. "Well that's one item I won't need to brief you on thank goodness!" she exclaimed.

"Know anything about this Riviescu?" Daneland asked.

"Richest man in Mandelavria, by far. Russian born, but actually fought for the Mandels during their war of independence and is widely credited with paying to arm the Mandel forces that keep the Ukrainians from just walking back in. He owns shares of the oil, telecom and now the pharmaceutical businesses there, as well as significant international holdings."

"Sounds quite a character," commented Calder.

"Must say I don't see what he's gaining by going public on the finances of a company he was trying to buy," remarked Daneland, as he slid the newspaper across the desk for Grace and Calder to read. Calder was immediately drawn to the side bar headline.

"Bit of shame for the Dutch," he said tapping the article with his finger. Grace, never one to enjoy anything vaguely 'rude', resolutely ignored him. "Yes," grinned Daneland, "bet the road rage statistics go through the roof."

“Not to mention a few problems in the red light districts!” responded Calder.

“Please!” exclaimed Grace, slapping her palm on the desk.

“Sorry Mother Hen, boys will be boys,” said Calder.

“Let’s get down to work.” said Daneland. “I’ve picked up on some early plans of the visit to the UK by Dolovski. Doubt if it will run to an official visit but a few specially arranged meetings can’t be ruled out. Just may put a little more meaning behind any Mandel activities here in the UK. John, please go over our visits for Grace,” he added looking towards Calder.

Calder recapped on the visits with Dr Hadden and Dr Ward. The Hadden visit he thought was a waste of time, except for the tales of escapades at parties. After checking his notes he remembered Jane Little’s name and made sure Grace made a record of it. He then moved on to the meeting with Dr Ward.

“Much more interesting. She confirmed they were working on some form of low tech chemical weapon, something that could be made out of readily available products in an urban setting, such as bleach.”

“And her last comment to me suggested that they were successful,” added Daneland.

“But,” continued Calder, “the repository only had the lab notes, so she reckoned it would take a qualified scientist to sort the wheat from the chaff.”

“Someone like our Mandel professor maybe,” suggested Daneland. “Find anything there Grace?”

Grace smiled and pulled out a single sheet she had prepared. It had a portrait picture in the top right corner.

“This is who I think it was. Professor Edric Losikanic. Aged 45, installed as head of the Science and Technology Faculty of the Kourkov Institute by Dolovski. Claims a distinguished career in many fields, but some specialisation in chemical reactions and pharmaceuticals. His good connections do not stop there either. The same Riviescu as in the FT article appointed him head of research for the new joint venture pharmaceutical plant that opened last year, PharMandel I believe it’s called. There are other stories about him however in some of the less official publications.”

Daneland knew that reference could mean anything from underground publications to weblogs to pornographic sites. Although Grace was repelled by salacious talk, nothing stood in her way of conducting the most thorough research.

She continued, "It seems the good professor has an eye for the ladies. More than one or two comments about affairs with students and at least one woman scientist from the United States making accusations of non professional approaches during a conference." Daneland and Calder studied the sheet provided by Grace. After a few minutes Daneland gave his verdict.

"It seems to me that this man has the skills and the character to be involved in something that isn't quite above board. He had access to Dr Ward's work and the abilities to understand it. And it is too much of a coincidence that it is destroyed by a specially set fire just days after he leaves. And everything points to Mandelavrian based activity. I think we need to dig deeper, get a full team on board. What do you think?" Both grace and Calder agreed with him.

"I'll go and see Hansen soonest. There is no time to lose with Dolovski visiting London."

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