

MILLENNIUM

Countdown to Chaos

An Alan Ridgard Adventure



Chris Deggs

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

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Prologue

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

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

Suddenly, without warning, a ghostly figure stepped silently from behind one of the massive stones in the central ring, his head portraying the frightening outline of a wolf. Being around fifteen feet tall, he cut an impressive figure, causing the assembled masses on the great banks of the henge to

give a muffled collective intake of breath. There was stunned silence as the awesome figure stood before them. Then a drum began a rhythmic beat, and the mystical figure, Tehuti stepped softly from stone to stone in a circular dance, his feet stirring the few wisps of mist that clung to the long damp grass. The crowd too joined the chant, Bah!, Bah!, Bah!... The chant grew in confidence, power and pace, faster and faster, to the accompaniment of reed pipes.

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

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

This sacred ceremony commemorated the industrious undertaking of the Dru Ids. Under Tehuti's guidance they constructed the henge of stone that would stand sentiment to the ravages of time. Tehuti, the time-keeper Thoth of the mysterious ancient Khemmetians, had turned up in their midst and instructed the clan to gather and erect the stone monoliths in a certain pattern and order, according to that produced by sonic interference, when two reed pipes continuously play the exact musical note. To them it was a sacred circle but to Tehuti, the machine known as Stonehenge was a gyroscope that was powerful enough to correct the planet's erratic wobble, which was in danger of sending it off its orbital course. Unbeknown to the Dru-Idic people, the wobble had been caused by land and water displacement resulting from the Great Flood. He did inform the elders of the clan that it was their sacred duty to keep the earth on its heavenly course. He also instructed them in various rituals to hide the real reason for the henge. He knew there were dark, destructive forces around whose goal was to use its power for their own devious ends. It would be a terrible thing for humanity if such a thing were to happen.

Chapter 1

Mediterranean 1998

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

He had been chosen to join the special group, owing to his genius in coming up with an idea that would get people to accept the possibilities of global power cuts and its chaotic fall-out, without apportioning blame to anybody. It had been his idea to create computer chaos at the beginning of

the new millennium. Using the media to create anxiety among the masses, all the elite had to do was put the thought in peoples minds that computers could not calculate beyond the new millennium. It was that simple, brilliant and effective manoeuvre that finally got Ivan Steer noticed by those who mattered. They particularly liked the plan because it fitted in with, and masked their much bigger covert agenda.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They all laughed at this remark.

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

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

There was assent from the group.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Who will be my contact?"

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

Chapter 2

Giza Plateau 1998

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

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

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

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

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

The team affirmed his directive.

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

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

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

Her work was interrupted by a phone call. It was Abdul Hafiz, a dig worker. She listened intently, and then said, "Let us meet at the Hog's Breath, by the Sphinx." That agreed to, Andrea went back to her notes. Although, she could not concentrate on her work. David kept coming into her thoughts. She knew in her heart he had not left her by committing suicide. She sighed deeply. It was no good torturing herself with such thoughts. She needed to focus on the work and not just for her own sake.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

before we get to Giza?”

“Allah willing, twenty minutes.”

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

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

“Dr. Burry said, “I haven’t got time for small talk!”

“I did not know that talk came in different sizes.”

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

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

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

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

“What plans?” Andrea asked, fishing.

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

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

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

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

“Have you heard of ‘Al Haab’?”

“Only vaguely. Aren’t they some kind of political activist movement?”

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

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

“Hosni is determined to copy the French example.”

“What French example?”

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

Abdul, I cannot condone violence.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seeing the worried look on the Englishman's face, Mahmoud assured, “Don't worry Mr Ridgard they will not sell your things.”

Perhaps he was being a touch paranoid but there were things recorded on his phone he would rather

nobody saw. "Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

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

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

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

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

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

"What happened?"

"It was all over the news. Surely..."

"...But what weren't we told?"

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

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

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

"Who's their leader?"

"Locally, Azhar Fami."

"Locally?"

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

"Any idea who?"

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

"So why would he be backing a local terrorist group?"

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

Chapter 3

London 1999

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

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

"Who are you?" Alan asked, his suspicions aroused.

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

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

"Sorry. Frank Sator. Mr Murray briefed me on this. I..."

"...Why wasn't I informed before now?"

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

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

"What the hell are you talking about, Alan?"

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

"I know nothing about it."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"Sound him out – I guess."

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Do you mean Al Haab?”

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

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

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

“When and where?”

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

“What's happened to Albert Murray?”

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

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

“I will contact you.”

“This was a waste of time.”

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

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

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

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

“Where is he. Why isn't he here?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Let's go,” the large man ordered.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4

London 1999

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

Having been forced to go to mass, as a child, he was indoctrinated with old Father Gold's philosophy that all life was of equal value. Therefore, justifying his actions that night, as being permissible, posed something of a challenge to his conscience. However, his aggressor was an adult and could be said to have been of sound mind - if not sound judgement. He wasn't the first man to die at Alan's hand. During his military experience in Iraq, killing was sometimes necessary. But it was the first time he had to extinguish someone's life, since entering civvy street.

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

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

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

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

"I never arranged to meet you."

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

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

"And who set it up?"

"Are you OK?"

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

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

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

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

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

“Choose something to eat, on me,” Karl winked.

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

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

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

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

“Then they must have set it up.”

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

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

“So, what happened?”

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

“So, how did you get away from them?”

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

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

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

Karl paled. “Oh.”

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

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

“And if he'd talked.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes.”

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

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

“It will be, as long as I am paid.”

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

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

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

“A feud?”

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

“Arain won that debate, did he not?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Did you report it?”

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

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

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

“It is just minor corruption.”

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

“Who are they?”

“You’ve heard about the Millennium Dome?”

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

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

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

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

“Why is she useful to Arain?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Habib Arain is your man.”

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

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

“Who is this Ivan Steer then?”

“Bit of a mystery there, I'm afraid. It's rumoured that his company was bankrolled by Loeb and Cohen, which means the Roughchilds. However, things were becoming very cosy between Sheila and Arain.”

“What do you mean?”

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

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

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

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

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

“What?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“So who is Minter being used by?”

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

“Why him?”

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

“favours beget favours.”

“Oh yes.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I will see what I can do.”

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

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

“No real surprises there.”

“Austerberry wouldn't have been well pleased.”

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

“A spook!” Alan responded, excitedly.

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

“And?”

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

“Surely he would have used the info to discredit Arain.”
Sator shrugged. I'll contact you soon.”

Chapter 5

London 1999

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

Catching up, Bernie said, “Fancy bumping into you.”

“Yes, fancy,” Alan responded.

“Yer not still bearing a grudge, are you?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We should have buried the bastards.”

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

“Yeah, well they didn't.”

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

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

Alan stared at him. “If you can't accept things for what they are that's your problem.” he stood up.

“Enjoy your beer and your life, Bernie.” He could feel Bernie's eyes burning into him, as he left the pub. Shit, he had to make difficult decisions out there. He did not want to go through anything like it again.

Bernie Walcott watched Alan leave, then took out his phone. He punched some numbers and listened. Once connected, he said, “I have just been having a beer with Alan Ridgard. There was a short pause. “What I want to know is why his is still breathing.”

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

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

The phone interrupted his flow.

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

“The connection between Arain and Azhar Fami?”

“Yes, and I want double my fee.”

“That's outrageous,” Alan responded, angrily.

“I'm sure Timothy Austerberry would be more gracious.”

“That's blackmail.”

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

“I will have to run it by my employer.”

“Then you will have to wait for what I have to tell you.”

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

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

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

“Is it worth the trouble?”

“I think so, yes.”

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

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

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

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

Timothy Austerberry was recruited to the London and Rhodesian Mining and Land Company, later Longland, as chief executive in 1982. Under his leadership, the firm expanded out of its origins in mining and became a conglomerate, dealing in newspapers, hotels, distribution, and textiles, along with many other lines of business. Then , during 1985, Austerberry's position was the subject of a High Court case, in which eight Longland directors sought Austerberry's dismissal, due to both his temperament and to claims he had concealed financial information from the board. Austerberry failed in his legal attempt to block the move, but was subsequently backed by shareholders and retained his position. Minter, referring to the case, criticised the company in the House of Commons and described events there as 'the unpleasant and unacceptable face of capitalism'."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“So you don’t know!”

“We can only speculate.”

“Was their dislike of each other personal or purely professional.”

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

“Why would Austerberry be upset?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“A couple of years.”

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

“Maybe he didn't know.”

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

“N, no. I w, wouldn't do that.”

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

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

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

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

Chapter 6

London 1996

Dr David Burry took a nip of whiskey to settle his frayed nerves. As the liquid left a pleasant burning sensation in his throat his mind took a quick trip back in time. He recalled his roll during the early stages of the Vietnam war. As a military weapons expert working for the British government, he was on secondment to the USA, to find out about Agent orange, a new type of 'herbicide weapon'. In that roll he became privy to research that horrified him. Under the Official Secrets Act he was forbidden to say anything. But he could no longer stay silent, despite the fear of being charged with treason.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who told you to rig the results?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Dr. Burry, how does dioxin work?”

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

"How was this weapon used during the Vietnam war?"

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

"Were you present in Vietnam when this weapon was used?"

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

"You must have been pleased with the success."

"Carly, I was horrified but I could not say anything."

"Why were you horrified, David?"

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

"That was not true, was it?"

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

"What effect did this spraying have on the pilots flying the missions?"

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

'Only You Can Prevent Forests.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What were their findings?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sir Frasier Chudley, Director of Operations with MI6, was in a bind. He knew that Dioxin was a worldwide problem, not just in Vietnam. But Russ Mulholland was right in his assertion that Dr

David Burry had contravened the Official Secrets Act. Now the cat was out of the proverbial bag what was he to do about it? Monstero was a powerful company with allegiances high up in the White House, and good relations with the CIA was crucial to MI6's intelligence gathering. Of course Dr Burry had to be dealt with - but how? In the end he asked to be patched through to Commander Seally of Special Branch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm afraid your husband is dead."

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

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

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

Andrea's mind was a fog.

“Mrs. Burry, are you okay?” the sergeant asked.

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

“We will need you to come with us, to identify your husband’s body.”

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

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

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

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

“No, I don’t believe it. he had too much to live for!” Andrea argued.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"He would not commit suicide," she said, tearfully.

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

"have you heard from Richard yet?"

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

"Dad was very brave to do what he did."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Very well Andrea, what was your reaction when you first heard about your husband's suicide?"

"That is was not suicide."

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

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

"Are you suggesting somebody else cut his wrists."

"If he didn't do it himself then, yes, that would be the logical answer."

"So, Andrea, you don't believe in Lord Hatten's conclusions concerning your husband's death."

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

"Are you suggesting that the British Government was behind your husband's death?"

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

"How can you know that?"

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

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

"Yes, that's right."

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

"Carly, it happened so long ago we don't discuss it much these days."

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

"Yes, that would seem to be so."

"Did he not tell you about the interview?"

"No, as far as I know he told nobody."

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

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

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

"In what respect, Carly?"

"Will you pursue an enquiry?"

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

Chapter 7

Oxon University 1997

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There always are conditions."

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

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

Minter looked uncomfortable.

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

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

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

Taken aback, she answered, "well, yes, I suppose so."

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 8

1975 -1990 Vietnam War

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

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

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

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

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

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

Philip tried to spend quality time with his young son but his hatred for the system that cast him into

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the escape and evasion portion of the course, Alan and the remaining candidates were given brief instructions on appropriate techniques. This included talks from former POWs or special forces soldiers who have been in E&E situations in the real world.

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

Chapter 9

London

1997

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

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

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

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

“In what respect?”

“The dome, old man, what else?”

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

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

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

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

“What do you mean, you chose him?”

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

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

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

“Remember my friend and colleague, Dr Burry?”

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

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

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

“Only with circumstantial evidence at present.”

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

“Are you Okay?”

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

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

“Why?”

Jerry lightly tapped the side of his nose.

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

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

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

“It’s a deal.”

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

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

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

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

Life is full of ironies, he mused to himself. If he hadn’t gone to the doctor for the jab, and if the magazine had not been in the pile; and if he had not chosen the magazine, etc. He contacted Intel-Inc and asked for Alan Ridgard. He was told Mr Ridgard was not available. He left a message for him saying he had important information to tell him, concerning David Burry. He could understand why the receptionist was reticent about giving out personal information. Yes, he would send his details so they could be passed on to Alan Ridgard.

Alan Ridgard chose the Fresco Coffee bar, a great little cafe for light refreshments and meetings, and not too busy, except at lunch times. It is conveniently situated next to the Canary Wharf DLR station concourse. Being open plan it was easy to see who was listening nearby. The message intrigued him. How did the messenger know he was interested in what happened to David Burry?

He watched the middle aged man with the copy of High Light under his arm walk by. Alan Ridgard called out, Hi Mr Austerberry, I'm over here at the bar."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, why?"

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

"Maybe he didn't," Jerry shrugged.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Did they give this evidence at the inquest?”

“Yes, but Lord Hatten glossed over it. All three doctors concurred that said that if David had intended suicide he would have cut a larger artery, ensuring a swift death.”

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

“Alan, I have known the man for a long time. Why, just two days before his death, he made jokes at

a Government committee meeting. Also, on the day he disappeared, he spoke of returning to Vietnam in the future.”

“Were you at this meeting?”

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

“...Who is this colleague?”

“He doesn’t want his name divulged.”

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

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

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

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

Chapter 10

London

1997

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

His phone rang. He picked up the receiver.

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

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

“What is it John?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“How did you get my name, Mr?”

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

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

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

“What questionable evidence?”

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

“Who are you? Are you a journalist?”

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

“There was no cover-up.”

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

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

“So the witnesses were liars?”

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 11

1999

Cairo

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

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

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

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

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

With his luggage bundled into the boot of an aging Mercedes. Karl put his life in Allah's hands as his driver, Dr Burry's assistant, negotiated the lanes of chaotic traffic. The young driver's constant emergency braking, owing to vehicles ahead pushing into the hazardous traffic flow, had him on the edge of his seat. White uniformed traffic police, unable to do anything about the motoring chaos, kept themselves looking useful by directing the mass of vehicles in the direction the flow was already travelling. To Karl it looked much like a mass resurrection from the wreckers yard, as un-roadworthy vehicles pushed and shoved their way to the next chaotic intersection. Old, full dilapidated buses stopped to squeeze in yet more passengers, while ancient black and white Fiat taxi's zipped in and out of the many lanes in their haste to grab their next fare.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm not but my client is."

"How am I supposed to help?"

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

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

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

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

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

"You know who it is, then."

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

She looked out of her window, at the pyramids in the dusty distance. Then she turned to face the intelligence man. "Even if Abdul is involved with this group it would be at a very basic level. I

seriously doubt he would have any useful information about the internal running of the operation.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Can you make an educated guess?”

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

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

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

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

“Rules Professor?”

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

“OK. Now which one is he?”

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

“OK, I agree, now where is he?”

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

Karl waited while Andrea spoke privately with Abdul, who looked over in his direction. Words were

exchanged, then she beckoned him over. He approached the pair, wishing he had a sun hat, there being no shade to speak of. Abdul was suitably turbaned.

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

“Azhar Fami. Where can I find him?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Have you had any such finds lately?”

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

“Wow! What was beyond it?”

“Another door – unfortunately.”

“So you didn't get to open that one.”

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

They were interrupted by one of the Arabs who held a shard in his hand. A cheesy grin spread across his face as he handed it to her. She scrutinised it. It looked Grecian, not what she was

searching for. She handed it back. "Take it to Ahmed and tell him to catalogue it." Turning back to Karl, she sighed, "See what I mean about tedium and boredom."

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

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

He shrugged "No, not really."

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

"Persistence, expertise, knowledge. I don't know."

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

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

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

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

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

"Fair enough."

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

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

"Oh, sorry. You poor man."

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

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

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

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

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

"Why do you think that?"

"I overheard a conversation between Karif Harwarbi an anonymous man, he could have been

English but I'm not sure. But he had a Middle Eastern accent.

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

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

"What's the problem with that?"

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

"What's that supposed to mean?"

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

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

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

"Is this an official assignment?"

"I feel this is important – so yes."

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

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

"What about the Al Haab assignment?"

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