

CHAPTER 1

OPERATION MAGMA

Friday, 23rd June, 2017. KGB Headquarters, Lubyanka Square, Moscow. 11.33pm.

I'll ask you one more time. Where is this meeting being held, agent Rowe? Simply tell me the information and the interrogation shall stop," said Doctor Kracinsky as he held a hypodermic needle to the agent's throat.

Agent Rowe looked spitefully at the Russian doctor, with his mind full of hate, his words full of resistance, and his mind straining to stay awake.

"Go to hell, *you* sick bastard."

Gradually, his eyes began to close when he felt the pressure on his neck increasing.

Hold on Jason. Use all that training you've learned in the SARS. They couldn't break me in Syria, so this bastard has no chance.

Agent Rowe was barely alive. His eyes were beginning to roll around in the back of his head, but, somehow, his extensive survival training in the SASR Australian Special Operations Command had kicked-in. Slowly, the pressure started to be exerted on the hypodermic needle as the sodium pentothal began its journey into his veins when the heavy clatter of machinegun fire burst in through the windows. Immediately, they shattered into a thousand pieces. Unfortunately, for Doctor Kracinsky, a bullet lodged into his shoulder blade. He yelped with pain before he slumped to the floor who nursed his injury while agent Rowe was left dangling barely conscious on the end of a tensioned chain.

"Cut him loose and call Medevac – now!" shouted Commander

Appleby. "And for God's sake, find that damned communication."

Despite a rigorous search, nothing could be found, only the fuming remains of a mangled, burnt disc in the wastepaper basket.

Hours later, agent Rowe lay in his hospital bed convalescing, with a heavy bandage plastered over the top of a large cut on his forehead. He was surrounded by two senior FBI agents and an inquiring Commander Appleby when he finally awoke. Never one to refrain from the processes of seeking justice, Commander Appleby pressed forward with his questions when he nudged the semi-conscious agent's shoulder.

"Agent Rowe, agent Rowe, did you find out the location of the next arms exchange?"

Agent Rowe opened his eyes gradually who winced with the discomfort of the bright light beaming overhead when, comforted by the commander's presence, he tilted his head towards the light.

"There wasn't time, Commander, and besides, they were tipped off."

"Tipped off ?! By whom?"

"I don't know, sir, but our Russian contact is a double agent. That's for sure. How else *could* they know?"

"Agent Forbes, contact our office in Kiev. See if they can shed some light on this girl. Well go on, man. Get on with it."

Commander Appleby wasn't one to tolerate fools. His dour mood was nothing more than frustration irritated by the bloating sensation of the peptic ulcer in his stomach. Refocusing his attention back on agent Rowe laid up in his bed, the commander then softened his approach.

"You'll be stuck in here for quite a while, I'm afraid, Rowe. Two weeks I expect. In the meantime, I expect a full, written report."

Despite his frustrations with agent Rowe's notorious womanizing ways, he placed his hand upon his shoulder and wished him a speedy recovery before he turned to leave. Making his way half way to the door, he slowly turned around to have a final word.

"One more thing, Rowe. See if you can leave the nurses alone for five minutes, would you? I don't want the bloody BNA knocking down my door," he said before he smiled a wry smile and departed.

Agent Rowe exhibited a smug smile at the commander's displeasure before he closed his eyes to get some well-earned rest.

Meanwhile, inside the Kremlin, the light, quick footsteps of high heels could be heard echoing down the long passageways; a desperate girl on a desperate mission to find General Kromatov.

"Where's the general? Where is he?"

The two heavily set guards laughed at her distress, but stood rigidly to attention when the general appeared from around the corner. An evil-looking character, with his thin, wiry frame, he looked every bit the villain as his personality revealed. With greying, unkempt hair, a chiselled chin, a narrow face and eyes heavily glazed with alcohol abuse, he smelled and reeked of contempt.

“Yorginsky, come with me, my dear.”

Under heavy escort, the Russian double agent pursed her lips who knew only too well the possible fate that awaited her. Remaining stony-faced, they escorted her to a small chamber of a room heavily fortified with the clunking rigidity of the door’s locks.

General Kromatov moved over towards the wine closet. “Sit down, Miss Yorginsky. Now, tell me. What are the British are up to?”

The double agent’s mind raced to find an acceptable answer, but unwisely, she chose the path of ignorance.

“General Kromatov, I’ve already told the Kremlin everything I know. Agent Rowe didn’t disclose the information.”

The general suddenly became very agitated who spun around with a vodka in his grasp who threw it into her face.

“Liar! You, stupid bitch! We know you’re working for the British. Let’s not play games, Miss Yorginsky, shall we? Now, tell me, what is the codename of the British mission?”

She trembled at the sight of the general’s aggression sensing that, if she made one false move, then she would be liquidated.

Tentatively, she answered him. “I only know that the British call it ‘Operation Magma’, General. I know nothing else.”

“Hmmm – Operation Magma. Yes, very interesting,” he mumbled to himself.

The general’s eyes shifted to his guards when, immediately, they understood the silent order of his body language. Walking over towards her, they grasped the woman’s arm before they marched her off to an unknown destiny as their trailing footsteps echoed in the treacherous depths of the Kremlin’s vast passageways.

“Interrogate her, General,” said the minister. “We must find out more about *this* ‘Operation Magma’, he said in his thick, gravelly, Russian dialect.

“Oh, don’t worry, Minister. If she knows anything, she’ll talk.”

General Kromatov then poured himself another vodka before he offered one to the minister.

“Remember, Comrade General, the president himself has given us top priority clearance. You can use whatever means are necessary.”

A smug smile spread across the general’s face. “I intend to, Minister.”

Having appeased his inflated sense of self-importance, the general drank his shot when the minister asked him a ticklish question.

“And what of *this agent*?”

“Just another one of DCF’s bumbling fools. They have no idea. Our agents in London are tracking him down as we speak, Minister.”

“Make sure he is eliminated, General. I don’t want any loose ends. Is that clear, General Kromatov?”

“Yes, Minister – perfectly.”

Having appeased the corrupt minister’s skewed sense of ethical obligation to the powers that be, the general strutted off defiantly.

It was oppressively dark. The minister’s head remained hidden in the shadows of the dimly lit room when he picked up the telephone and called the Prime Minister’s office to personally inform him of the progress. Powerful forces were at play. Russian cooperation with the FBI, CIA and DCF had slowly disintegrated since the disappearance of a joint team of Anglo-Russian-Israeli scientists in the Atacama desert in Chile. They had been stationed there to monitor the astrological alignment of the solar system’s planets, notably, to ascertain the planetary positions of the Leo and Virgo constellations. Partly driven to a reluctant cooperation through a forced diplomacy and partly driven by a protective, conservative national interest, a government initiative was implemented by the United States to strengthen ties in a fracturing Middle-East. This international delegation of scientists and religious zealots were stationed there primarily to report on any astrological anomalies in the orientation of the planets orbits, correctly assimilate the recorded data, record the coordinates of orbital frequency and duration, and in a final directive, to compare the physical data with the recorded, historical religious data of centuries past especially the Christian doctrine – Revelation 12. It appeared that the international cooperation was proceeding well until they all vanished without a trace. The Russians blamed the Americans, the Israelis blamed the British contingent while the British intelligence blamed all of them who thought rather naively that it was a staged performance. A performance which had the might of

the Israeli shekel buying up huge volumes of American armaments in preparation for a war – the ultimate war, perhaps even an Armageddon. Religious protagonists vented their fury from all sides when anti-Russian feelings prevailed, particularly in the U.S.; feelings that were politically and historically buried, but resurfaced again with renewed vigour after the confrontations during the cold war.

The minister calmly put down the telephone, having listened to the rantings of an irate president hellbent on protecting Russian interests especially in North Korea who were violently objecting to a leaked report of imminent Israeli nuclear arming.

“Send in special agent Stefanosky, Minister Vlahov. You have my full authority to execute operation ‘Expire’,” he said gruffly before he hung up.

“Da, Prime Minister,” the minister answered succinctly.

Pondering this most serious development, the minister brought his hands together into a conjoined triangle, with the tips of his fingers touching his chin. He thought briefly about the diplomatic connotations that the Prime Minister’s decision would have on international relationships with Russia, but it wasn’t *his* personal decision. He had to follow orders such was the antiquated, corrupted chain of command within the government system. The Prime Minister had restrained from choosing this option, even under intense diplomatic pressure from the west, but his options were fast running out. Afghanistan was a war of defeatist attrition when, despite the implementation of enormous infantry resources, they had failed. And despite the new freedoms that the new democratic Russia offered, the old feelings of communist, national fervour were resurfacing, making the Prime Minister’s position almost untenable. What the Russian government needed was a victory of national proportion and importance when a strike against the west, especially against the tyrannical corruptors of society – the United States, may provide that impetus. With no more time to spare for contemplative thought, Minister Vlahov picked up the telephone and gave his order.

“Yerchenko, send Stefanosky to Washington immediately and advise me when the DCF agent has been eliminated,” he said.

“Da, Minister Vlahov,” said the KBG operative.

All, it seemed, had been set in motion. Yet things rarely go to plan.

Saturday, 8th July 2017. DCF Headquarters, London. 9.26am.

“Take a seat, agent Rowe. I’m sure you’ve met the minister before. Well, he certainly knows all about *you*, I’m afraid,” said Commander Appleby.

Justin Rowe nodded his head apprehensively in cordial acknowledgement at the minister’s presence before he proceeded to sit down.

“Minister,” he said politely.

“Now, we’ve just had word from our agents in Moscow that the Russians are a tad upset at their losses in Chile. I’ve taken the liberty to speak to Senator Johnstone. Well, it’s not surprising the Americans completely deny any involvement in their disappearance. It’s gone all the way to the Whitehouse, I’m afraid. What do you know of ‘Operation Magma’, Rowe?” asked the commander.

“It’s a priority one directive initiated in the United States, I believe, sir.”

“Yes. Yes, that’s right, Rowe. Our intelligence sources tell us that the Americans are up to something. What the hell that is, well, we’re not quite sure. And that’s why you’re leaving on a flight tonight to Washington.”

“Washington, sir?!”

“Yes, Washington, agent Rowe. You’ll be met at the DCA by a Miss Lavinia Lapelle. Yes, she’s *French*, Rowe. She’ll give you a deeper briefing when you meet her. Try to keep your *bloody* hands off her, if you can manage it just this once,” pleaded the commander.

Agent Rowe was smug with his reply “I’ll give her my undivided attention, sir.”

“Yes. Yes, I’m sure you will, Rowe.”

“Oh! One more thing. See Doctor Randall in the science lab before you go. We have a little going away present for you,” said the commander before he smiled a knowing smile. “Well, that will be all.”

Justin Rowe left the commander’s office to walk the distinctly sterile hallways of DCF’s long corridors before he arrived at the government’s secretive, new technology wing. To gain access, using proper DCF protocol, he placed his hand under the laser scanning beam before he punched in his personal verification code. After a one second delay, the computer announced DCF status level nine clearance. Here, monumental advances in the weapons used in espionage were trialed,

designed and manufactured. However, agent Rowe had been kitted out before his last assignment who naturally wondered why he had been seconded for another visit.

“Ah! There you are, Rowe. Now, just come and sit down here and we’ll fit you out with a new microchip,” said Doctor Randall.

“Microchip! I’m not a *bloody* rescue dog, Jeremy.”

“Well, I’m afraid some members of DCF would oppose that opinion, agent Rowe. Now, hold tight,” said Doctor Randall while he thrust an electronic device into agent Rowe’s forearm before he hypodermically injected a minute tracking device.

“I suppose Italy is out of the question?”

“For Queen and country, I’m afraid, Rowe. Now, just be a good boy and you’ll have nothing to worry about. Oh, by the way. You’ll need these,” said the doctor as he tossed him a small jewellery box.

Agent Rowe opened the box. He was comforted by the fact that the tie pin and cufflinks would match his newly fitted tailored suit.

“Cartier?”

“Nothing as prized as that, agent Rowe. Look, I’ll show you how it works. Just pull the pin here and toss – that’s it. Oh! You had better duck down,” said the doctor.

Two seconds later the cufflink exploded into a puff of dust with a loud bang. Unfortunately, it deflated one of the blow-up target practise dummies which sent the air fizzing out in a large expulsion.

Doctor Randall scratched his head. “Haven’t *quite* got that right yet, I’m afraid.”

Agent Rowe looked a little perturbed, but curiosity being one of his fundamental qualities, he asked the doctor what the tie pin was for.

“Well, that’s so you look your best when you meet the president, agent Rowe.”

“The president?!”

“Best be on your way, Rowe. Your plane leaves in exactly two hours.”

“See you on my return, Jeremy.”

“If you return,” the doctor quietly said to himself.

Everything had been prepared. The false passports and identities, the dozen or so different cash currencies, a mini computerized lap top with an inbuilt GPS, and agent Rowe’s favourite weapons – his razor-sharp kunai, and his Glock 17 pistol. Feeling fully satisfied with the contents of his attaché case, he flipped the lid shut and locked it securely. With

unassuming nonchalance, he wandered over to his apartment window when he signalled the accompanying DCF agent that he would only be a minute or so while he grabbed his personal belongings. Suddenly, a huge, muscular man of Middle-Eastern origin burst through the wall who swung an axe brazenly in agent Rowe's direction. Gritting his teeth, the man seemed thoroughly intent on killing him. Agent Rowe glanced out the window when he witnessed agent Forbes being shot by an advancing accomplice before his training as a former SARS officer immediately sprang into action. The blade of the axe swished through the air just missing him by inches. Whoosh, swish, whoosh flashed the axe. Agent Rowe desperately looked for anything to use as a weapon when he grasped a letter opener on the desk. With increasing ferocity, the man violently swung the axe again when, without thinking, agent Rowe rotated sideways. Smash! The axe flashed beside his face and plunged into the wall. In remembering his ninjutsu training, he thrust hard into the man's advancing solar plexus which, fortunately, momentarily winded him. The intruder groaned as he released his grip on the axe. With the axe now embedded into the wall, the man extracted two knives from his back pockets before he flashed them around in a posturing exhibition of his martial arts skill. For a moment, they just stood still as the two agents eye-balled one another. Full of confidence, the man thrust forward again in a deadly strike. However, agent Rowe was an efficient, highly trained killer who countered by slashing the man's arm with his letter opener. The intruder winced with pain before he thrust again when agent Rowe kicked his knee hard. The force of the blow buckled the intruder's knee into a collapsing submission. Now, with a vicious strike of the letter opener, he thrust it into the intruder's neck. The intruder gasped for air as his eyes expanded to a knowing death before he collapsed to the ground. In an instant, the fight was over. Hearing the advancing strides of an accomplice, agent Rowe grasped the dying man's knife, spun on a one hundred and eighty degree axis, and threw it at the door immediately as it opened. The knife sailed through the air in a direct trajectory before it plunged into the chest of the surprised and gasping Israeli federal agent. He fell to the floor as the life from his eyes gradually faded away. Agent Rowe gasped for breath before he rushed over to the window to confirm the death of agent Forbes whose body lay lifeless in the front seat of the government issued continental Bentley GT silver sedan. No time for communication – just initiation and reaction. The plane was due to leave at precisely 7.45 pm from Heathrow. Explanations would be provided later. Besides, he felt vulnerable. Once safely aboard the Airbus Boeing jet, he would send a message to DCF then.

Flying high over the Atlantic, agent Rowe relaxed back into his business class seat as he scrutinized the buttons of his Rolex wristwatch before he texted a message to DCF headquarters.

Agent Forbes down. Two foreign agents terminated. ETA. Bucharest zero seven hundred hours, Flight Q984. Agent Rowe out.

Having studied the itinerant flight schedules into Bucharest, he offered an alternative time for his arrival who hoped that his transmission, if accessed by a foreign authority, would throw them off the scent. There was more to this trip to Washington than met the eye when his counter surveillance instincts kicked-in. Justin Rowe was no soft touch. Before he became a DCF agent, he had been a decorated soldier graduating from the SARS officer Corps in the highly decorated Australian Command Forces specializing in counter surveillance and anti-terrorism measures. He was an explosives expert, covert reconnaissance genius and an expert in ninjutsu, reaching the lorded rank of Shihan. All in all, a veritable human man of war – the most deadly man on the planet.

Agent Rowe perused the timetable for arrivals. Something didn't add up. It didn't perturb him. He just relaxed back into the gratuitous comfort of his business class seat and swilled his gin and tonic. He had found trouble in Rome before when he was on the trail of some Serbian agents sent by the KGB to offer an alternative plan of action to the Israelis. That was a terrible conflict. Three dead British spies, one American, and four dead Serbian agents, all hushed up under the guise of a tragic car accident, theatrically and subtly disguised by the DCF on a westbound rail line in Rome. Dental records provided the details of the dead, wreaths of flowers were laid on polished coffin lids, and diplomatic expressions of sympathy were broadcast on national television. But agent Rowe had seen and heard it all before. However, this time was different. On three separate occasions now, he had been attacked by foreign agents who knew exactly where he was and when. Realizing this fact, he looked down at his forearm who saw the slight swelling where the microchip had been installed just below his cutaneous skin layer. Now, it all made sense. But, did it? He had known Doctor Randall since his inception at the academy, and everyone, regardless of their position within the organization, were scrutinized mentally, financially, psychoanalytically, physically and emotionally to the nth degree. If he was a traitor, he had succeeded where everyone else had failed such was the rigidity and severity of their internal surveillance. No. His gut feeling was telling him

that it wasn't him. It was a higher authority – someone with a higher clearance and access to sensitive information. Agent Rowe made up his mind right then and there to weed out the informer and deliver *his* justice. Too many people had died righteously for their country, and there was most definitely a price to be paid.

The sms message came back with a vibrating beep.

Agent Owens will meet you in Bucharest. Have a pleasant flight. DCF.

Now, it was confirmed. His transmissions, despite the top secret frequencies he used, were being monitored. Agent Rowe texted back his response.

See you on the ground – out.

The plane screeched its wheels as rubber burnt on a dry tarmac when it landed safely at Washington Dulles International Airport. Agent Rowe felt relatively safe, having used the scalpel from his attaché case to extract the microchip from his forearm. The next destination for the plane was Reykjavik, Iceland. Smiling concietedly to himself, agent Rowe thought that it would be a nice, little diversion.

Sunday, 9th July, 2017. 6.41 am.

A gusting tailwind helped the plane ahead of its schedule which pleased agent Rowe to no end. He didn't mind the unexpected variation. In fact, sticking to schedules was a definite non activity in the espionage business. Agent Rowe had learned that in the field, with his years of experience alerting him to avoid schedules, precise times and dates, appointments and meetings. This was a profession where your survival depended upon your ability to make lightning fast decisions. Street smarts were everything whilst intuition, his most discerning quality, had become the foundation for his survival.

The plane taxied to gate twenty four. He alighted with his leather attaché case clasped in his hand before he walked the short distance to customs where he presented his falsely issued government passport to the customs official. Sensing nothing out of the ordinary, the customs official stamped his passport before agent Rowe proceeded through. No problems encountered there, just the surveillant stares of foreign eyes through the long-range lenses of an Olympus camera. However, standing out in the crowd in a gaudy, Hawaiian shirt, was the rather awkward figure of agent Leonard Dawltry, a rather forlorn-looking British agent

who bore a placard with the name of agent Rowe's pseudonym written in large, black lettering. Agent Rowe had dealt with him before who passed him off as a simple, but patriotic servant to the queen when agent Dawltry approached him.

"Ah, Mister Collier – Mister Richard Collier, I presume."

Agent Rowe rolled his eyes. "Yes, I'm Richard Collier."

"Please follow me, Mister Collier. Your transport awaits you, sir."

Agent Rowe walked briskly and discreetly as he followed agent Dawltry out of the terminal to a waiting, black Mercedes Benz.

"Let me help you with your bag, Mister Collier."

"Thank you, Leonard," said agent Rowe as he smiled and boarded the car.

The chauffeur closed the door, the engine rumbled and the car moved forward.

"You really must refrain from using my first name, agent Rowe. I've told you this a thousand times before."

"I'll try to remember that – *Leonard*."

"Aaw, you're hopeless. Commander Appleby shall hear of this."

"Hmmm. I believe I haven't had the pleasure," said agent Rowe.

Sitting in the back seat was a vivacious-looking woman. She was thin, intensely attractive, with jet black hair, ruby lipstick painted immaculately on thin, pursing lips and deep blue eyes to match. She extended her hand while agent Rowe finished his cursory, visual inspection before she introduced herself.

"Agent Lavinia Lapelle, and you must be Monsieur Rowe," she said in her sensual, Parisian accent.

"Yes, delighted, Miss Lapelle."

Hmmm. This trip may not be a waste of time after all. I'll give her thirty six hours, and then she's all mine.

Agent Rowe gently grasped her hand in a sensual handshake. Her eyes retracted before they glowed with the exchange.

"Monsieur Rowe, Commander Appleby has warned me about you, and I must tell you that I am here *strictly* on business."

There was a glint in agent Rowe's eye. "Yes, of course, Miss Lapelle. Perhaps later you can brief me personally in the hotel bar. I assume you have your orders."

Feeling susceptible to his overly masculine machismo, agent Lapelle tightened her resolve and her legs before she delivered her briefing.

"What do you know of 'Operation Magma'?"

Agent Rowe stared out the window before he refocused his dark, green eyes on her beautiful face.

“It’s an American operation, I believe, in association with the British and Israeli governments. I know that an international delegation of scientists is missing, and a huge arms deal has been conducted between the Americans and the Israelis.”

“Yes, that’s right, Monsieur Rowe. And DCF blame the Russians completely. In fact, we have intelligence that links their disappearance to a certain General Kromatov.

“Kromatov! I’ve heard that name before. KGB operative, isn’t he?”

“Yes – a nasty piece of work. He killed off a sector of Belorussian insurgents during the cold war. Even the Russians don’t like him,” said agent Lapelle. “Anyway, I have been given the highest clearance from Commander Appleby to brief you.”

Agent Rowe nodded questioningly at her, suggesting if this sensitive information should be disclosed in front of the chauffeur and accompanying agent.

“Oh! Don’t worry, Monsieur Rowe. Agents Dawltry and Brewer have been given level seven status clearance. We’re free to talk.”

There was a momentary pause when agent Lapelle tried her level best to avert agent Rowe’s gaze while she thought of how best to inform him. However, his debonair attraction was slightly unnerving for her female sensibilities.

“Operation Magma is a U.S. initiative. You’re right about *that*, Monsieur Rowe. It was formed in association with the Israeli government in 1953 in fact. Some Israeli scientists discovered a deviation in the orbit of Jupiter. That paranormal observation attracted the interest of U.S. astronomers who subsequently studied the alignment of each of the planets, primarily the Virgo and Leo constellations in particular. It was concluded scientifically that there would be a perfect alignment in the future, late September 2017 –a perfect match for Revelation 12,” she explained.

“Revelation 12?! That’s the last verse of the new testament as I understand it.”

“Yes, precisely, Monsieur Rowe. Please, let me explain. The results of the data were stolen. Most probably sold into Israeli hands. Unfortunately, they were released to Israeli government officials who, with religious and political impunity, directed the Sayeret Matkal, that country’s elite forces, to substantially increase their armaments. Our greatest fear is that with religious fanaticism in the Middle East reaching escalating proportions, nuclear war remains a distinct possibility. Many Jews and Catholics are convinced of the prophecy of Revelation 12, and it is DCF’s confident analysis that radical, religious fundamentalists in

cooperation with the Russian military are responsible for the missing delegation in Chile,” she said.

“So, what you are telling me, Miss Lapelle, in summary is that Israel is arming itself in preparation for a possible nuclear war based on an ancient prophecy yet to be proven in the future.”

“Precisely, Monsieur Rowe. The end of days – the Apocalypse.”

There was silence while agent Rowe tried to absorb the enormity of the information, but still, he couldn’t fully comprehend the magnitude of it.

“Why haven’t agents in the U.S. alerted the rest of the world to the Israelis’ affairs, and what can *I* do about it?”

“Well, the Americans saw the writing on the wall. They paid enormous amounts of hush money to the Israeli government, even allowing their nuclear armament program to expand beyond protocol 57 agreed to by President Faulkner himself,” she explained.

“First Russia then North Korea now Israel. There are always going to be superpowers threatening nuclear war somewhere.”

“Monsieur Rowe, it is not only the threat of nuclear war our governments are worried about. There is a fundamental concern for the recent shifts of the tectonic plates on the earth’s surface, the eruptions in Indonesia, and the tsunamis occurring regularly all over the planet. Religious fanaticism, world climate change and the availability of Uranium are a potent mix, possibly even fatal for mankind, and the Russians know it.”

Agent Rowe put two and two together.

“So you want me to infiltrate the Russian defences and find the missing delegation, don’t you?”

“Yes, that’s one of your directives, but there is more to this than meets the eye.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our intelligence informs us that ‘Operation Magma’ is just a front for the illegal sales of Uranium to the U.S., Russia and Israel. We have traced the source of the sales of huge quantities of Uranium 238 from a U.S. company, Thrax Enterprises, owned by none other than billionaire, Viktor Thrax himself. Oh! He validates the legitimate sales of Uranium using legalised contracts with the U.S. government well enough. The North American Justice Commission issued subpoenas to his company’s lawyers for those documents, and even an independent audit from the ACA has validated its authenticity. But it’s just a front for the billions that are exchanged under the counter, and we know that he has been trading illegally with China. He is a very dangerous man, agent Rowe.

Your assignment is to track him down, report to DCF all of his illegal activities, and bring him to justice. Do I make myself clear?" asked agent Lapelle as she tried so desperately hard to assert her authority.

Immediately, agent Rowe answered her when his intrinsically annoying male, condescending attitude kicked-in.

She's not only beautiful, but intelligent. I like that.

"Perfectly clear, my dear. But why don't we discuss this over dinner? Hmmm?"

The chauffeur checked his rear view mirror when an emerging grin appearing on his stubbled face.

"You're *impossible*, agent Rowe. Agent Brewer, please step on it," said agent Lapelle,.

Feeling slightly uncomfortable at agent Rowe's roving eye, they travelled in silence to the Sofitel Washington hotel in Lafayette Square, a beautifully appointed hotel of decidedly French origins, no doubt organized by agent Lapelle herself. Well dressed bellhops attended to their luggage while agent Rowe signed the hotel registry.

Ever the opportunist, agent Rowe tested the boundaries. "Care for a drink?"

"I'll see *you* in the morning," she said as she flashed her pearly whites.

"Well, I certainly hope so."

With his eyes rigidly fixed to the luscious curves of her body, he watched her swaying hips gyrate into the distance of the hotel's lobby. After failing to seduce her, agent Rowe thanked the concierge for the bellhop's assistance and proceeded to his room – room 159. Impeccably presented, a series of lovely, clean lines delineated the room's interior. Cherry-red walls, chocolate coloured carpet, and neutrally coloured furnishings completed the picture. Agent Rowe scanned the room in a habitual reconnaissance, giving the room the once-over in a speedy visual evaluation. Nothing seemed out of place. *It was almost too perfect, he thought.* Now, convinced of his privacy, he flipped open the manila folder she had given him, picked up the photograph of Viktor Thrax, and studied his face closely.

Looks like an evil bastard. Hmmm, I've dealt with worse. Megalomaniacs – the lot of them.

He then tossed the photograph back into the folder and picked up Thrax's personal file when he read the information with interest.

Former Chairman of Plasdek Industries, Consortium founder of Euroil Petroleum, Founding CEO of Thrax Enterprises, Senior Director of Thrax Minerals Pty Ltd, Senior Consultant of Chemical Engineering NASA.

His rap sheet read more like that of a senior chemical engineer's profile than that of an underworld criminal. Reading further, agent Rowe flipped through the pages as he tried to absorb the complicated web of interactions that implicated Thrax's company in the possible and probable murder of witnesses, FBI and DCF agents. The file contained information concerning the suppression of documented evidence of his company's activities, the billions of unaccounted dollars invested in off-shore accounts, and the police reports of missing persons, notably two of his former accounting employees, a lawyer and an investigating prosecuting district attorney who was fatally shot when a court hearing against the Thrax empire was imminent. Rowe didn't need to read any more. He knew the type of man he was up against, an untouchable kingpin surrounded by a group of thugs administering rough justice. He tossed the file back into the folder, extracted his gold embossed cigarette case from his jacket pocket and lit a cigarette. Feeling relief, he blew the smoke in an extended breath while he relaxed into the camel-coloured sofa. Suddenly, his cell phone rang.

"Justin. It's me – agent Fenton. Get the hell out of there! The Russians, they.....," he said.

Suddenly, the line went dead.

There was a peppering barrage of machine gun fire, the sound of screeching car tyres and a large explosion when the call abruptly ended. A bullet fizzed in through the window of his room which broke the glass and the solitary globe in the suspended light. It shattered it into a thousand pieces. Agent Rowe kept low as his eyes searched for his attaché case which was neatly positioned beside his bed on the bedside table.

Bloody hell! Okay. Stay low and get to the window Justin.

He wriggled low on the carpeted floor and moved into his bedroom, never once flinching. All the while, bullets clattered indiscriminately into the hotel room puncturing the walls in a destructive staccato repetition as plaster, glass and timber shards flew everywhere. After the frenzied attack, agent Rowe heard the screeching of tyres and the rapid acceleration of cars. Sensing their evasion, he scrambled over to the broken window to take a closer look. Two elongated, black transit vans were speeding off into the distance while the wails of Washington's police car sirens approached from the opposite direction. He sat himself upright against the wall. Agent Fenton was dead. He instinctively knew that, but he also knew also that *he* was lucky to be alive.

Thrax – you bastard.

CHAPTER 2

BEAST OF THE MIDDLE EAST

**Tuesday, 11th July, 2017. Tel Aviv. Headquarters of the Mossad.
2.38pm.**

Please have a seat, agent Rowe,” said the high commissioner of the Tel Aviv secret police.

He was a small statured man, impeccably dressed in a svelte, personally tailored Armani suit who sported a slicked crop of greasy, black hair and possessed a million-dollar smile.

“Thank you, Commissioner.”

Agent Rowe had flown directly to Tel Aviv from Washington following an order from DCF headquarters in London. He was accompanied by two CIA agents, agents Tomlinson and Brewer, his French DCF contact, and a representative from NAATU, agent Driscoll, whom the Americans insisted on being present. Unfortunately, agent Rowe’s reputation was preceding him, and the Americans were taking precautionary measures in lieu of the recent troubles in Washington and Chile.

“It seems, agent Rowe, that we have a trail of dead bodies all leading to your doorstep. Now, why is that?” asked Commander Appleby .

He had flown to Tel Aviv to offer an olive branch to the Israeli secret intelligence organization, the Mossad. Unable to resist getting under the commander’s skin, agent Rowe answered with his usual, well-intentioned, but dead pan brand of humour.

“Must be the plague, sir.”

Commander Appleby was in no mood for levity, especially given the fact that four more agents had been killed in Washington, one of them a Mossad special agent.

That peptic ulcer was playing up again. “Don’t be so *damned* insolent, Rowe. Look, I know we’ve given you level nine clearance, but I’d wish you’d keep your bloody gun in your holster if you understand my meaning.”

Agent Rowe grinned, but thought that he should refrain from upsetting the commander any further before he asked a serious question requiring a serious answer.

“I’ve studied the file on Thrax, sir, and I’m sure there’s a link to the Russians. Commander, when do I go in?”

“Yes, you’re absolutely right, Rowe. We know that from all the off-shore accounts in the Caymans and Switzerland. We just don’t know the size of the operation, and that’s where you come in, Rowe. The commissioner has agreed to avail the resources of the Mossad at your disposal. However, to keep you in check, DCF has assigned to you agent Haddad. You go in immediately, and you will retain your level nine clearance, Rowe. But try not to kill everyone you meet, will you?”

A handsome-looking man, with a thick crop of black hair, a thinly manicured moustache, and a set of pearly white teeth then nodded at agent Rowe in a cursory introduction. Agent Rowe was not impressed with the arrangement.

No way. I’m not nursing anyone. I’ve done my time, and he won’t be able to keep up. I wish those fools in Whitehall would realize that we need the best.

“Commander, I work alone. You know that.”

“Well, not this *bloody* time, Rowe. I’ve been on the phone to Washington for two hours cleaning up your mess, not to mention the special clearance that NAATU have insisted on. You go in at twenty two hundred hours. Agent Lapelle will give you a full security briefing, agent Myers will detail the location and transport logistics, and Lieutenant Tomlinson will assist you with weaponry. You will be briefed fully immediately after this meeting. Any questions?”

An awkward silence prevailed.

“Yes, sir. Could you recommend any decent restaurants in Tel Aviv?”

“What the bloody hell are you on about, Rowe?”

“Well, sir, I have to de-brief agent Lapelle after this is over.”

The commander rolled his eyes, knowing full well the intention of agent Rowe’s double entendre. His eyes then left agent Rowe’s when he spoke directly to the commissioner.

“Good luck, Commissioner. You’re going to need it,” he said before he exited the commissioner’s office as fast as he could.

There was a small interlude of pausal silence before a chuckling commissioner piped up.

“Well, it seems the commander still has faith in you, agent Rowe despite his aggravation.”

“Nothing a stomach calmativie won’t cure, Commissioner.”

Agent Rowe then officially introduced himself to the Mossad special agent. “Agent Rowe – Justin Rowe of Her Majesty’s Secret Service.

“Shizaf Haddad, agent 49X – collections department.”

Extending his hand in a friendly gesture, their palms collided. Despite his initial objections, agent Rowe took a shine to the Israeli agent immediately.

“Well, come on, Shizaf. We’ve got work to do.”

Lieutenant Tomlinson then guided them into an adjoining room usually used to interrogate suspects. In the strictest of protocols, agent Rowe and his Israeli partner were briefed on the transport route they would take, the layout of the Thrax thermonuclear reactor plant, the arsenal of weapons at their disposal, their micro receiver radio frequencies, and the exact ETA and extraction time for the operation. It was second nature for agent Rowe, but the young Israeli officer found the foreign counter reconnaissance tactics challenging if not exhilarating. They were issued the standard cyanide suicide pills, ammunition for their pistols, a small amount of C-4 and a few detonators, all standard DCF equipment. With their electronically modified issue Rolex fx-29 watches, the two agents synchronized the time before they arranged to meet at the Crown Plaza hotel foyer where they were staying.

**Thursday, 13th July. Crown Plaza Hotel, Tel Aviv. 17°Celsius.
7.46pm.**

Agents Rowe and Haddad nodded their heads discreetly before they moved outside. Both agents were dressed in their formal evening wear. Waiting for them across the way in Hashalom Road was their black Mercedes Benz, two accompanying DCF agents, and Lieutenant Tomlinson, all wearing their trademark black sunglasses. They walked over to the car in silence who jumped into the back seat before the car roared off bound for the Thrax thermonuclear facility. Under the protection of a dark Tel Aviv night, they stripped off their clothes in the car revealing their dark, blue cargo pants and matching Israeli army issue

shirts. Agent Rowe's weaponry included his Glock 17 pistol, his traditional Kunai knife, and a smaller DCF issued Beretta M9A3 strapped safely into his holster. He looked across at the young Israeli agent when he noticed that he appeared decidedly nervous. Beads of sweat dripped from the young Mossad agent's forehead.

"Look, I'm not expecting trouble, Shizaf. We're going in to observe, not to blow the place up."

Shizaf breathed a little easier. He wasn't, of course, a newcomer to covert operations, but his time in the Israeli army was mainly spent on the West Bank trying to keep peace with his Palestinian neighbours. In fact, this was his first mission for the Mossad, and he was looking to agent Rowe for guidance. Agent Rowe nonchalantly ran through his checklist with the consummate professionalism of his years of experience in the game. Ammunition – check, radio frequency – check, Kunai – check, extraction point – check, guns – check, suicide pills – check, night vision goggles –check, time – check.

Yeh, everything looks good. I just hope he doesn't trip up.

He then looked at the time before he checked Shizaf's watch for perfect synchronization – check.

Everything accounted for, he smiled a gentle smile as he tried to alleviate any stress in order to give confidence to his partner.

The Mercedes belted along the Ayalon highway as it headed north towards the plant before the chauffeur made a sharp, right-hand turn when the huge illuminated Thrax Enterprises sign appeared over the horizon.

"Pull over, Ross, will you?" asked Lieutenant Tomlinson.

Lieutenant Tomlinson had come along for the ride to go over some last minute details when he flicked on the interior light and extracted his map of the Herzliya precinct. Pointing his finger at the coordinates, he was very direct.

"We're dropping you *here* by the eastern boundary. There's a blind spot between the viewing towers. Thrax's security guards patrol the perimeter every twenty minutes, so you should have ample opportunity to enter the compound. From your drop off point, it's approximately seventy metres to a heavily armed silo. There's no access there, only stores of non-reactive Uranium ore. Don't worry, we've scanned our Geiger counters and you're quite safe. Once you've crossed the compound, look for the workers' office. You can't miss it. It's on the second level, so you have to scale a flight of stairs. Access inside can only be gained through fingerprint technology. Once you're inside, well, I'm afraid, you're on your own. Okay, gentlemen, please tune your

receivers to 287 gigahertz. This will give you an open, undetectable channel to receive us. Here, take these gloves. They're the latest in Doctor Randall's personal identification recognition software range. Quite ingenious really. Impregnated on the silicon skin are the fingerprints of two of Thrax's scientists," explained Lieutenant Tomlinson.

"What's this button for?" asked agent Rowe as he pushed it.

'Zingggg!!' Out popped a five-pronged titanium razor-sharp cat's claw, making the agents jump with surprise.

"That's the gore claw as we agents like to call it, or DCF paramilitary gadget SJX-59 standard issue," said Lieutenant Tomlinson.

"Remind me not to scratch my head," said agent Rowe while he retracted the claw and slipped on the gloves.

They waited there in the car in a shady cul-de-sac by the side of the road while the heavy cloud cover shrouded the faint moonlight. With the final preparations concluded, agents Rowe and Haddad applied military grade face paint to their skin before they pulled their night-time vision goggles over their eyes. Lieutenant Tomlinson waited for the command on the receiver when he nodded affirmatively before the Mercedes moved off to the drop off zone eight hundred metres away. Moving slowly, the car crept up to the outside perimeter fence before the two agents disembarked whilst they kept low and remained out of the range of the sweeping searchlights.

"Psst – Rowe. Extraction time is exactly twenty four hundred hours," whispered Lieutenant Tomlinson as a reminder.

The car then moved silently away.

"Over here," whispered agent Rowe as he wriggled over the ground towards the chainmesh fence.

With his training kicking-in, he extracted his wire cutters from his utility belt and waited for the searchlights to pass before he clipped a neat square in the fence for them to pass through. In the distance, they could hear the barking of the German shepherds and the pounding, echoing sounds of industry from within the compound. A searchlight beam trailed overhead whose light faintly illuminated their frosty breaths. Keeping low and silent, they waited for the light to pass before they moved through. Camouflaged in their Israeli-issued army gear, they were almost undetectable when they scrambled the seventy odd metres before they came to rest at the huge silo. Here, in complete silence, agent Rowe plotted his next move. Using his watch to time the intervals between the search lights, he counted. One, two, three, four, five, six, and then the light flashed again.

“You’ve got six seconds to scale the stairs, Shizaf. On my count.”

Using digital sign language, he counted them in..

“Five, four, three, two, one...go!”

They scrambled up the stairs when they came to rest at the base of the security door. It was fully lit up under the iridescent glow of a fluorescent light bulb. Four seconds had passed. Immediately, agent Rowe thrust his glove into the fingerprint recognition sensor before the door clicked open. Without delay, they rushed inside as the door started to close whilst the searchlights trailed sparingly over the door frame. Now, safely inside, agent Rowe looked each way down the long, sterile, white passageways when he heard the approach of footsteps and the muttering of voices. Sensing the danger, they scrambled down an adjoining passageway where they stayed silent in the shadows. A team of scientists escorted by two guards bearing machine guns walked on by completely oblivious to their presence. It was tense as both agents removed their nighttime vision goggles and reached for their guns. The machinations of industry could be heard a few hundred metres away. A dull, pulsating rhythm with a metallic timbre aroused the interest of the agents who had now caught their breath. Staying silent, agent Rowe signalled to agent Haddad to follow when, with their guns drawn, they crept down the passageway. All the while, the murmuring of voices could be heard from within. Agent Rowe then popped his head out of the shadows while his eyes barely reached over the side window pane. Inside he could see a vast chasm of a room, with scientists in white coats roaming everywhere and an army of uniformed security guards bearing machine guns. There was row after row of computer screens while, at the end of the room, a large, circular floor prevailed. Agent Haddad moved up beside agent Rowe whose eyes remained focused on the unfolding drama.

Suddenly, the huge circular floor’s panel moved mechanically sideways in a jolting, metallic, clunking motion revealing a cavernous underbelly underneath. To their amazement, a huge utopian model of a futuristic city then appeared before them. It moved progressively upwards, with its central feature aptly named Thrax Towers prominently displayed in the centre. On and on, it vertically thrust until the vast model of the city occupied the entirety of the circular floor space which stood eight metres high.

“What the devil is this?” whispered agent Rowe.

“Ssssh! I think it’s a model of some sort,” said Shizaf.

“Yes, Shizaf. I can see that, but what the hell is it?”

At the conclusion of the giant model's reveal, a portly, balding man sporting a neatly manicured beard and a monocle appeared before a delegation of official looking people. Arrogantly, he propelled himself forward in an electric wheelchair. A series of panels then opened up from the ground when a leather-bound armchair and accompanying desk appeared in each space which slowly elevated to the surface in a perfectly executed mechanical thrust. In capital letters on each desk appeared the names of the countries of the selected delegation members.

"Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen," said the explicitly English voice.

Agent Rowe looked at agent Haddad and nodded his head who now recognized the imperial presence of the evil chairman.

"That's Victor Thrax."

In an ominous display, an official military figure bearing a Russian officer's uniform sat down next to Chairman Thrax whilst all the delegation members took their seats. Agent Rowe immediately recognized him. It was none other than General Kromatov.

"Welcome foreign delegates to Thrax Enterprises. Your governments have been duly notified of the auction process. Once your bid is submitted, there is no negotiation. All monetary bids shall be settled immediately in U.S. currency and deposited directly into our treasury account in the Cayman Islands. Proceed," said the robotic voice.

The lights dimmed before a giant screen lowered down mechanically from the ceiling as footage of earthly disasters beamed while the delegates reeled back in horror. Tsunamis, earthquakes, wildfires, volcanic eruptions; all manner of natural disasters were broadcast while an evil voice narrated the apocalyptic realities of the future which ended on a most pessimistic note.

"At the inception of Revelation 12, the earth shall cease to exist. A great darkness will envelop the earth, the seas shall rise, and the land shall be swallowed up."

Having delivered the gruesome message, the screen faded and the lights came back on when all eyes refocused on the evil chairman. A map of the world appeared on the screen which twirled around quickly before it slowed when an enlarged map of Turkey appeared.

"The bidding starts at one hundred billion dollars," said Chairman Thrax.

There were furious, clanging sounds of buzzers, a flurry of flailing arms, and gasps of exasperation whilst the bids were made. This process went on for nearly twenty minutes until the final bid was made at two

hundred and sixty billion dollars at which point Chairman Thrax thanked the representative from Greece.

“Thank you, Foreign Minister Dimitriadis. Please proceed with the finality of your purchase,” said Chairman Thrax.

The minister proceeded to deposit the vast sum into the Thrax organization’s account electronically, with the knowledge that eighty years of accrued foreign debt was deposited with the purchase and centuries old conflicts of his government’s borders with Turkey had effectively been wiped from history.

“What the hell is going on?” asked agent Haddad.

“I think their auctioning off countries of the world. At least, it appears that way.”

Agent Rowe then removed his watch who began taking microfilm shots of the gathering. The bids continued when it became clearer that ‘Operation Magma’ was merely an American propaganda stunt hiding a much bigger operation behind it. It also became clear that the countries offered for purchase were those situated on or near the ring of fire, countries that were historically, politically and financially unstable.

“This is madness,” whispered agent Haddad before he brought his Rolex to his lips to convey a communication in the standard avionics format.

“Delta, Charlie, Foxtrot. This is agent 49x. Do you read me?”

Suddenly, lights flashed red when a wailing alarm system went off.

“Intruders! Intruders!” the system blared.

Huge, metallic screens immediately slid down the windows while all the delegation members became trapped inside who immediately shouted their protests at their incarceration. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. Bursts of machine gun fire sounded off in rapid succession just above the agents’ heads.

“What the hell?” gasped agent Rowe. “You changed your frequency, didn’t you?”

“Well, I thought I did.”

“You, bloody idiot. Come on. Let’s get the hell out of here.”

With no other option left to them other than to crash through a door at the end of the passageway, they took off like wounded bulls in a china shop while they left a trails of bullets in their wake. All the while, they fired off shots at will.

“Cover me,” shouted agent Rowe.

The young Israeli agent was sweating profusely as he took pot shots at the incoming fire while agent Rowe extracted his C-4 and slapped it onto the wall.

“Fire in the hole,” he yelled as he depressed the button on his detonator.

Agent Haddad knew exactly what that expression meant when they both flung themselves over a pile of discarded bags full of sample ore extract. Bang! The C-4 exploded leaving a gaping hole in the wall. Seizing their opportunity amongst the fire and smoky haze, they exited the compound. A trail of bullets blazed across the path behind them before the searchlights focused on their escape. At this point, DCF back up agents in the car had realized what was happening when they began firing at the towers’ search lights as the agents came scampering back towards the chainmesh fence. All hell was breaking loose. Alarm bells were ringing, sirens were wailing, and bullets were flying everywhere while the agents squeezed through the fence and ran to the car. Everyone jumped in as the Mercedes’ wheels spun furiously before the car sped off along the road by the compound’s perimeter. Bullets peppered the rear window of the car. Fortunately, they were deflected by the bullet proof shield that agent Driscoll had previously engaged.

“Just watch and observe – not bloody likely! I thought the commander made himself pretty clear, sir,” said Lieutenant Tomlinson.

“He forgot to change his frequency, Kurt.”

Agent Haddad looked away in shame.

The car tore down Habrigada Hayehudit Street as it headed for the freeway whilst two large, black transit vans remained in hot pursuit. Swerving ferociously, agent Driscoll drove like a man possessed when he weaved in and out of the traffic in a vain attempt to escape. Suddenly, the choofing sounds of rotating chopper blades surged overhead before a hail of bullets peppered the car’s panels. Fortunately, the car was the latest edition model Mercedes, fitted out with an anti-terrorism, steel-reinforced chassis, 50mm calibre front and rear machinegun mounts, eight mini ballistic XT missiles, a comprehensive GPS and radar system, rear mounted flame thrower, two inch thick bullet-proof glass and a road spike ejection system – a veritable, mechanical monstrosity of technology and death.

Agent Driscoll watched his mirrors while two perpetrators rattled off their machineguns indiscriminately whose rampant bullets punctured slight holes in the Mercedes’ thick shell. Alarmingly, he spotted a man holding a grenade in his hand who was preparing to pull the pin. They were speeding up directly behind them as the man motioned to his driver to go faster. With both of his hands on the wheel, agent Driscoll shouted at agent Rowe to take affirmative action.

“Engage the flamethrower, Justin – now!” he said.

Agent Rowe understood the machinations of the Mercedes Benz C250, having been indoctrinated with all of its gadgetry and military grade equipment in the final training regimen of his time spent at the academy. He reacted immediately when he lowered the sliding panel, flicked the ignition switch and depressed the button. Whoosh! A thick plume of flame directly engulfed the transit van behind them which veered off the freeway uncontrollably, smashed through the road barrier and plummeted onto the carriageway below. A series of loud explosions could be heard before it burst into flames. Still the bullets kept flying while they swerved in and out of the traffic as the chopper thundered overhead. A tunnel loomed in the distance. Approaching at breakneck speed, agent Rowe searched the control panel before he deployed the mechanical grappling hook device which he fired directly into the undercarriage of the chopper.

Ziiiiing! Clunk! It was a direct hit as the spiked head of the grappling hook became firmly embedded into the chopper's frame. Agent Haddad felt distraught.

"Max it out, John," said agent Rowe.

Agent Driscoll pushed the pedal to the metal sending the wheels spinning around furiously. All the while, they approached the tunnel at maximum velocity. Overhead, the chopper twisted and turned in violent motion as it tried desperately to gain elevation while the Mercedes sped relentlessly towards the façade of the concrete entrance. Bullets flew everywhere in a blaze of crossfire. With the updraught of the helicopter's frenzied flight, the Mercedes swayed violently from side to side as it crashed into a swathe of unsuspecting vehicles. In a final thrust, the car entered the tunnel when agent Rowe simultaneously disengaged the grappling hook before he fired the AZF extron mini ballistic missile at the pursuing van behind. The chopper was now completely out of control when it mercilessly ploughed into the concrete barrier and exploded into a massive fireball. A huge plume of smoke whooshed into the air before the chopper's gyrating rotator blades whizzed through the air like giant shurikens of spinning death. In an accompanying blast, the missile launched from the rear of the Mercedes which tracked directly into the transit van. It exploded with an intense boom, sending it careering ten metres into the air while leaping flames of fire sprang from the mangled wreckage of the car. The Mercedes roared off leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. Looking behind, the agents breathed a sigh of relief.

Agent Rowe systematically went through all of his post engagement routines by clicking the safety latches on his guns, securing his kunai in

his sheath, and checking for any post traumatic injuries. None present – good. What a relief! They were lucky this time, but agent Haddad’s carelessness brought agent Rowe swiftly to anger.

“*You* could have got us all killed! *You have* to be more careful, Shizaf. It’s not the bloody boy scouts, you know.”

Agent Haddad was mystified by the Australian agent’s outburst.

“They were right about you. *You are* a lunatic.”

There was silence, but in the pause between their communication, they both started to laugh. Meanwhile, the Mercedes sped off in a blaze of glory.