

5 Silence!

Friday 25th February 2050

The members of parliament sat on their privileged green leather seats were still unaware of the events outside. Even as Colonel Snow, at the head of his unit, marched briskly through the austere corridors that once served as the heart of a sovereign and great nation toward them, many were privately and smugly scoffing at the thought of *being the ones* who would go down in history as the first republicans of Britain.

Seen live on some channels being fed by parliamentary cameras, a young corporal and two other men appeared silently in the public gallery and began to usher away civilians. Below them the MP's wore subtle but buzzing smiles of satisfaction. The proud and determined Freedom Socialists Party leader, Prime Minister Noaitch Aeiou was outlining his plans for Britain's place in a new European order.

A few eyebrows were raised as Colonel Snow entered the floor. Nobody said anything. No-one could be sure why he was there. He just appeared. At first when he walked straight up to the prime minister and began to speak, the majority of the occupants probably thought he was on official business, perhaps there was some kind of security threat. It wasn't until he drew his pistol that a unanimous gasp emanated around the ancient place.

Slowly, Snow lifted his pistol none-threateningly above his head and paced in a deliberate fashion toward the chair. He could hear the gasps and whispers as he moved. To him it sounded as though he was inside a deflating tyre or perhaps more fittingly, the belly of a snake. He knew he would be in trouble for what he was about to do. He could already see in his mind Brigadier Howard bollocking him at a desk. But this was really happening – this wasn't a once yearly event or even a rare event. It was history in the making. Nothing like this had happened for four hundred years. It was real, and these people had pissed him off, well and truly pissed him off. In fact they had been pissing him and half the country off for far too long.

Snow pointed his pistol at the speaker on his chair and with the most serious, bitter and twisted looking face he had ever contorted in his life, he ordered him to vacate it. The speaker was sixty-seven years old and hadn't moved as fast since his wife came through the front door while he was in bed with another woman over thirty years ago. This time in fact, he moved so fast that nobody noticed to where he moved to. He just went. One MP, the shadow minister for culture, sport and media, actually fainted, convinced that the experience was just a dream. Another tried to dial 999 on his mobile phone, certain that the speaker was about to be shot by a crazed maniac.

Colonel Snow did it. He fired his pistol at the empty chair in the firm knowledge that the hole would probably forever remain as a feature of English history – for as long as there was still an England of course. Suddenly he was in the belly of a venomous snake no more. For five seconds he was in outer space. The reverb of the gunshot ended and if earlier you could hear a flower open, in those seconds *you could have heard a fly shit* - as he would put it to listeners years later.

‘THIS HOUSE IS NOW CLOSED!’

He didn't need to shout. He could have whispered and they would still have got the message. More silence followed. Not a gasp. Not a breath. Just stares from worried eyes. Then one brave individual, who remained seated, answered back in a squeaky female voice.

‘By what authority is this house closed?’

It was a voice Snow recognised straight away, a voice which he hated. It was his own personal opinion that he had seen good men die because of this voice. He recalled her famous ‘No,No,No!’ speech where she point blankly refused to supply 2 Para with enough land vehicles during the fall of Kenya. She had insisted that they should make use of the helicopters which they had requested for a different operation in South Africa. The area had been infested with surface to air missiles and he had watched

from mid flight as three new Cheetah Choppers plunged to the ground killing all on board. As far as he was concerned, she was not only unqualified and incapable, she was a disgrace.

The woman who had asked the question was the Minister for Defence - Freedom Socialist MP Ajabita Winipeg. Snow did not answer immediately. He had wanted to make the initial entrance alone, now his men had begun to file into the chamber taking positions on the steps and on the floor.

'By the authority of His Majesty King James VIII, King of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Mrs Winipeg.'

'You have no such authority colonel. As Minister for Defence I order you by the authority of the elected government to remove yourself from this house. You along with all officers and ranks are stood down, I am standing you down. You have NO authority or legal right to bear arms!'

She was of course playing house, playing the game of authority, the leverage game – so naive in the cocoon of her own satisfying position that she failed to see what was real. Snow had no time for her. The bitch.

'WELL CALL THE POLICE THEN!'

'I beg your pardon? Call who? I, am the Minister of Defence. I, do not need to call the police.'

Can't they see what's real? Snow thought to himself. If this were Africa or South East Asia she'd already be dead.

She was still going on with herself.

'I am the right honourable member ...'

It's people like me that should be honoured – for not shooting her. Not her. The silly cow! Snow thought. His blood was boiling now. She was trying his patience. He knew the whole issue was make or break, do or die. Either he, or she, would be in prison at the end of it. 'I do not care whether you are a right honourable member or a right honourable stench! Just get your butt right off that seat and try to sound less like an actor at an audition.' Snow's men should have deactivated the cameras by now but he couldn't be certain so he added 'bitch' quietly underneath his breath. Then he turned to Dr Reims, independent MP for Tatton. An eccentric old lawyer and a man he respected.

'Dr Reims could you please inform this house in regard to the details of the laws of treason whilst myself and my men remove the illegal government from its place ... thank you.'

The doctor was too shocked and didn't know where to begin so he just began to mumble to those sat next to him. They didn't listen anyway.

The next stage of the plan was going to be tricky. B Company 1 Para had no idea whether they would be able to carry it out. It was supposed to work one of two ways. Either the cabinet would be ushered calmly to a room to await transport to a military base where they would be put under arrest or it would be carried out literally by carrying them out. That wouldn't be hard and some of his men would quite enjoy it. However, if half the House of Commons decided to get brave he would be a little more than worried. He walked over to the positions of the cabinet where twenty or so British Paratroopers were stood waiting.

'Mr Aeiou, the present government, your government, is no longer recognised by its monarch. You and your cabinet are stood down and obliged by the most high earthly authority in this realm to accompany me under the charge of treason. If you resist arrest you will be moved by force.'

Instantly the whole house burst into hoots and howls of derision.

Colonel Snow was the epitome of evil. He was the devil in royal uniform. His orders had been primarily to close the House of Commons and secondary, to arrest the prime minister and cabinet ministers if possible.

Operation Gate Crash had been devised by Brigadier Howard and Charles Severn some weeks earlier as a precautionary option. Nobody else had known about it until Thursday when it had become clear to MI5 that today's parliamentary agenda was a reality. In fact Charles Severn was not convinced it would be needed himself until he got wind that the government were arranging things with the help of French intelligence and keeping things from British intelligence. That had been enough for Severn.

He knew then that if ever there were a case for the use of treason laws this was it. Nobody wanted to appear heavy handed and so Snow had been sent in a little light on numbers.

75. Come To Daddy

Sunday 13th into Monday 14th March 2050

Since his phone conversation with the mysterious French woman the Hound, Macca had stumbled on through the darkness. Going was extremely difficult. Every step forward seemed to be ten steps backward. He was either slipping and sliding on frozen snow or almost swimming up to his waste in fresh drifts of the stuff.

It hadn't been long and he hadn't gone far before he realised that his clothing was wet and knew that hypothermia was becoming a real danger. The wetness hadn't reached his inner clothing yet but it would only be a matter of time. He took off a glove and looked at his hand using the light from Don's phone. Was it purple? He thought about stuffing his hands under his clothing into his arm pits to warm them up but chose not to.

As long as he could hold onto his walking pole his hands would have to wait. He wasn't shivering anymore, while he was on the move at least, and it was not worth opening up his body heat to the elements to stick his hand in there. How on earth would he find any place in the dark, like this? What sort of place was he looking for? He didn't know.

Macca was just hoping that he would find something or somewhere that would transmit an idea, an idea to help him get Jade from their clutches when the time came. Failing that he prayed to stumble upon the British Army, a Snowdonia Mountain Rescue Team, the Boy Scouts or a travelling leprechaun, prayed to the heavens for the RAF to see him.

As if his situation wasn't worrisome enough he found himself thinking ridiculous thoughts about snakes. Remembering that the British viper was said to have lived in these parts under rocks in the heather, he would, every ten minutes or so, terrify his own step with the possibility he might disturb one from hibernation and be bitten.

After an hour or so the wind had started to pick up in short gusts. Each blast like a slap in the face from a fridge freezer door. Each slap in the face carrying shards of ice which stung his cheeks. We'll keep a welcome in the hillsides. Yeah bloody yeah, where is it then?

Aware that his mind was wandering aimlessly as much as his legs were, Macca stopped and rested. At one time he had been a lot fitter but he didn't blame himself. He couldn't imagine even Edmund Hilary getting much further in these conditions. How far had he gone? It was difficult to be sure. Maybe a mile, maybe more, probably less.

Sitting in a new snow hole for ten minutes he examined the pistol to see if he could still hold it with stiffened fingers. In the movies things come together brilliantly – the hero always has a plan, he thought. But then the scriptwriters weren't freezing their bollocks off on a Welsh mountain at night when they typed out the plot were they. He put the gun away. There was only one plan – keep moving, keep hoping, keep slipping and sliding.

Macca was in fact upon the ridge parallel to the long pass which ran southeastward from the village of Aber. He was between the summits of Foel Ganol and Pen Bryn Du. He did not know that with certainty but the two snipers shadowing him did. In constant communication with the Hound Dominique Tana, who had remained at the farm, they were being guided toward his location.

Dirty D related to them MacIntyre's GPS position and they used their own GPS mapping devices to move in on him. The two snipers had split up. One was three kilometres to Macca's southeast negotiating the slope up to the summit of a mountain by the name of Drum. Drum was the most immediate peak, the first crenellation in the great wall of ice which Macca had seen and was aiming to rise above.

The other sniper was only a kilometre to Macca's northeast following the course of the old Roman road westward, with the intention of getting behind him. The pair of soldiers were equipped with crampons and ice axe, their hi-tech combat ghost cloaks were thick, waterproof and windproof. Still

neither of them could perform any better than Macca in the darkness. Their night vision goggles helped a great deal but underneath drifts of snow a gorse bush looks pretty much like a rock and visa versa. Their distinct advantage was of course their knowledge of Macca's position and their heat sensitive rifle scopes but he was not yet in their line of sight.

The ESIISE team at the farm house observed that MacIntyre was still headed in a southeasterly direction. They expected him to travel a further kilometre then break east toward the homesteads. The first sniper on Drum would be one kilometre to the south and in a prime position to both observe and fire upon the target if necessary. He could also follow the target keeping him in view, visibility permitting.

Once MacIntyre broke east, Davina, Leon and two of the other three ESIISE soldiers would come out to meet him and the first and second, already out there, would close the net at the rear. Tana, with the remaining soldier, would remain at the barn and keep her eye on Jade Moss.

Macca was on the move again. The wind was now an icy gale and the impenetrable paleness of the night sky had been replaced by gruesome darkness of different shades. Sleet began to fall. Just what I need, thought Macca sarcastically – anything to help me man-up. He became too cold to look at the time, too cold to do anything.

Macca estimated that it was about 10 p.m. He was now on a relatively wide and relatively flat ridge, almost a plateau. When resting there was no need to dig snow holes here, his wading had created one three hundred yards long and he could fall down and bury himself in an instant. Yet the more he moved on, the crispier and more frozen the snow became. Perhaps it was simply freezing as he walked in it? It was difficult to tell what the wet weather was doing to it.

Realisation of his location came suddenly. Macca was quite surprised with his progress. He could just about identify the first peak in the great wall at the end of the pass. It now seemed very close and did not look anything near as intimidating as it had done from the start of the trek. The wide ledge he was on was in fact already over half way up what had appeared as a great icy wall all those hours ago. Below him, to his right, he could make out the lake at the end of the pass which he could identify on the postcard map as Llyn Anafon. It was a large pale white flat mass clearly defined by the darker rising slopes around it. Macca felt like giving himself a pat on the back. Instead he got down, snuggled up and pulled out the flask of tea.

'Bingo!', said the first sniper quietly over his headset.

'Number One do you have a visual?' asked Dominique.

'Well the target is either sat on a volcano eruption or drinking coffee. The scope is white hot right on his position.'

'Well done Number One! ... Number Two?'

The second sniper came on the line quietly but clearly out of breath.

'No visual. Over.'

'Number One, do you have a clear shot? Can you see him physically?'

'Negative on second question. The target is under the snow. One out.'

'Yes. But can you shoot him?'

'1,678 metres on a good day in the desert is 68% loss of kinetic, 6.2 metre margin of accuracy and 4.67 seconds of T-time - in the desert I'd say Borderline! Do you want me to take a shot?'

'What do you mean? Do you have a shot or not?'

'Err this is Number Two. Our gauges are going crazy. The wind is all over the place. I think what Number One is saying is No! - Two out.'

'One on. It's the wind. I can try a pot luck on the average reading but you're looking at a wide margin of error. One out.'

Dominique was frustrated. 'How large is the killing zone? Distance of a mobile target before leaving your field of vision?'

'One on. On the heat scope, as long as he keeps drinking coffee there is nowhere he can go. After that it depends where he goes. If he makes the break east I can track him from this position on the

heat scope for about 800 metres unless he crawls through the snow. In that case without a steaming mug in his hand it might be difficult. If he does make in that direction then the shooting distance also increases.'

'Other directions?'

'There's a large black area below his position. In the scope it's like a long black mass ... could be a rock formation? If he goes behind that or in it, whatever it is, then I lose him till he comes out. If he uses it to get down into the pass then we have to start all over again. Please advise? One out.'

Dominique had never used or been involved in the use of SSx4 rounds before. She understood how they worked but not how well they worked. The rifle gauges would transmit live mitigating data to the satellite which in turn would transmit useable data back to the bullet after processing the physical properties of the location.

'What about the banana bullets?' she asked.

'Two on. Same problem. Even with a live data connection to the satellite any live compensations made for the wind by the bullet as it travels could turn it into a dart with the dropping power of a wobbling peanut. We are talking about the distance. 500 metres closer and we are in business. Two out.'

Dominique was frustrated but being a normally patient lady she remained rational enough to remember that the odds were stacked against MacIntyre. The snipers would just have to get closer.

'Can you make up that distance Number One?'

'One on. Will do. Just thought I'd mention that actual visibility is worsening by the minute. Cloud cover getting lower. One out.'

Macca finished his tea and screwed the lid back onto the flask. He had taken a risk he knew that, but he had felt safe enough and he needed to avoid freezing to death. He wondered whether they would be waiting for him up ahead, or whether they would be behind him. The woman with the French accent was new on the scene. She sounded confident and very professional. She was probably way above Alice's level. Macca contemplated who she might be and what her role was. He would have to be more careful as daylight approached. They would gather his general direction and be tightening a net around him.

Then, amid the strengthening gusts of wind, Macca heard a noise, or at least thought that he did. Raising his head above the safety of his hole he noticed that the dark cloud had receded again but a pallid thick white smog of cloud had descended rapidly. The sleet had stopped but the wind was not abating. The mist was swirling and bubbling around him now and the snow and ice on the surface was being lifted up into a mad frenzy. The weather was dancing with his life. It could protect him but it could also kill him. The noise he had heard was probably the music of this mad orchestra, an orchestra being directed by the spirit of the mountains. The peaks on Macca's route were no longer visible. Guessing his exact position, he used the compass and set off again toward the southeast. He had no idea that he was heading straight for the first sniper on the summit of Drum.

Number One had just packed away his rifle and slung it onto his back ready to move out when the Hound came back onto the line. She was surprised that the target wasn't cutting east toward the homesteads.

'Number One wait out! Target is approaching your position.'

A couple of minutes later and Number One was prone again looking through his scope at a slight white glow in the distance.

'One on. This is more like it. Two what is your position? Over.'

The second sniper was now a kilometre behind MacIntyre and roughly following the path their target had taken.

'Two on. Still no visual. I thought I'd found his trail but it was a fucking goat track or something.'

'I have a CD.'

'Good to hear.'

‘Yeah huh huh ...’

Dominique Tana was concerned that the snipers were babbling and joking about music tracks and CDs. ‘Keep on the job please. No joking about CDs okay?’

‘Two on. One is referring to a ‘come to daddy’. Technical jargon.’

‘I have a ‘come to daddy’! 1,543 yards and closing. One out!’

Dirty D smiled. ‘MacIntyre you are one dead bastard!’ she said to herself quietly.

‘Two on. Remember the target is probably armed. Bide your time. Do not miss.’

‘Number One. There are two mountain streams between you and the target. We think the darkness in your scope you referred to is this area. Hound out.’

After ten minutes or so the level ground Macca was on began to peter out. At a point where he had to decide whether to go up or down he stumbled into a narrow ditch and then felt ice. His boots lost their grip and he fell with a sickening slap onto a small stream which had frozen in mid flow. Managing to arrest his slide he clung to the long firm grass which protruded from the walls of the ditch. Snow cover was thin here, the stream must have only recently frozen.

The baying hounds were momentarily confused;

‘One on. I have lost visual! Over.’

The satellite phone tracker did not lie. Dominique was quick to reply.

‘It is the stream. Target is at the first stream!’

Macca yelped when he moved. His elbow was smarting and he lay on his side just wanting to cry. This was no good. Too cold, too lost, too fucking bad. For some reason he found himself thinking about Alice. Would she be the last ever woman he would have sex with? Probably fucking likely. At that moment he wanted to kill her. Next time they met he would do. Without asking questions he would just slot her there and then. What a fucking bitch.

Despite being uncomfortable and in pain Macca felt oddly at one with the ice. It was like being humiliated by nature. Strangely it didn’t matter that he was lying there humiliated because no other human could see. Remaining motionless in his contorted position he felt somehow peaceful. If he moved the pain would come back. He could tell it wasn’t a serious injury. He had just given his elbow a good old crack and now some adrenaline was giving him a buzz.

‘Hound to Number One. Target is stationary at the stream. Wait out.’

Almost as if the mountain itself had grown tired of its game Macca no longer felt the need to remain statuesque for its mocking benefit. He dragged himself up and over the far edge of the ditch. Lying on his back in the deep snow again he checked his equipment as best he could. Nothing seemed to be broken or lost.

‘One on. I think I have a slight glow in scope but I can not acquire a target. Over.’

‘Number One. Wait out. Let the target come. Over.’

The second sniper was hungry for part of the action. Even if it meant only observing. He scanned the direction of the target with his rifle scope hoping to find a heat report. ‘Two on. Still no visual over.’

Was the mountain warning Macca or was he just stupid for trying in the first place? It didn’t matter, the question now was whether to go up into darkness or down into darkness? It was probably a longer slog down than it was up. The time he estimated was probably around ten-thirty or eleven. He still had about eight hours left but would have to turn back after three. No! He would have to turn back after two – in case they were behind him following his tracks – he would need an extra hour to find another route back. He decided it was time to move onward and upward.

Soon Macca was having real trouble. The slope was too steep and he was making little leeway. He was not slipping but every step necessitated a careful footing. Where the snow was deep it was not so bad, it created safe and natural foot holes for him to step into. Where it was not so deep the surface below was like butter and he would have to walk sideways for some distance before negotiating another route.

At one point Macca misinterpreted the depth of snow and slipped back down about ten metres, sending a cascade of it down the hillside. Luckily a small frozen tributary stemmed his rapidly increasing speed of descent and, thrusting his walking pole into the snow, he stopped his fall.

Finally, after tackling the slope at an angle rather than attempting to go straight up, Macca came to another narrow ditch which he presumed to be another frozen stream. This time he had seen the darkness of its presence before he had fallen into it. It had taken him about twenty minutes to go the three hundred metres since the first stream.

'Two on. Yes! I now have a scope reading. I have aura only from the dark crevice one K to my southeast and I have a full recognition on Number One about one hundred and fifty metres in altitude higher and about five degrees left of target. Number One can you confirm. Two out.'

Number One lifted up his rifle slightly and could see his colleague through the heat scope. 'One on. Affirmative. I am the full visual at 750 metres altitude. I have your visual. Still have only a glow from the stream area. No target acquired.'

Dominique cut in. 'Hound on. I confirm your calculations. Number Two, to the target you are 989 metres northwest. Number One, to the target you are 804 metres southeast. Hound out.'

Macca found some stability by using his right foot in the shallow ditch and his left foot on the bank. Using the boulders in the frozen stream to anchor his right boot he could drag his left through the snow to another footing. Each time he would stab the walking pole into the ground between them.

Making some progress Macca relaxed a little now. He knew he must surely be nearing the topside ridge of the first peak. Wait! That noise again!

Above the now howling wind was a distinct sound. It was like wind but more mechanical. Then it stopped. He shook his head and continued, the wind was toying with his imagination.

'Ahhh! That's more like it. Come to Daddy is acquired. I have full torso in scope visual. Target moving left to right at 795 metres. One out.'

Dominique was happy. It was all but over now surely.

'Hound to One. When can you do it?'

'Two on. Remember to check my position. I do not want your delivery in my face.'

'Safe shot. One out.'

Dominique became spirited. 'This is Hound. Safe shot? Can you go now?'

'One to Hound. I think it would be a good idea to wait and see how close he will come. If I have more to aim at I can guarantee. Over.'

'Can you see him without heat yet?'

'I don't have an actual. Visibility too poor.'

'What is the actual visibility up there?'

'Right now I'd say about thirty metres at the most but it keeps changing. One out.'

There it was again out there somewhere in the swirling darkness. The same grating noise. Was it thunder? Macca stopped in his tracks.

'One on. Static Target. Permission to take down?'

Now Dirty D was excited. 'Granted! Take down the target! Take down the target! Hound out.'

The second sniper's job was now to think for the first.

'Wind direction.'

'Check.'

'Wind velocity.'
'Check.'
'Altitude.'
'Check.'
'Elevation.'
'Check.'
'Ambient temperature.'
'Check.'
'BDC.'
'Dialling in ... Downhill travel vectoring set ... Suppression set ... Taking shot!'

Click.

At that very instant and convinced he had only been hearing things Macca had decided to move on. As he dragged his left boot through the deep snow his right boot dislodged the rock he was using for stability and he slipped. He fell from the view of the sniper's scope. Macca did not hear the sniper bullet thud into the ground eighty metres behind him.

'Target down!
To Dominique this was far better than sex.
'Down? Did you say he is down? Is he dead?'
'The target is down. Repeat, the target is down!'
'Two on. Wait out Number One.'

Macca rose to his feet again.

'Wait ... wait! Negative! Target is not down! Repeat ... target is not down! No kill! Ready for second shot. One out.'

Davina and Leon, who had just returned to the Hound's team at the farm from a little mission of their own, were eager to know what was happening. Davina bit her bottom lip in excitement as she listened to the sniper's conversation. If he killed Macca she would be off the hook. Having allowed him to escape would not matter. The sniper was about to make atonement for her mistakes as Alice.

They listened as Number One slowly inhaled a deep breath and everybody waited in anticipation. All of a sudden an unexpected and garbled wall of noise omitted from the communication set. It sounded as though the first sniper was screaming and panicking in a thunderous meteor storm. The voices of the two ESIISE snipers on the hillside became merged and it was impossible to tell who was who.

'... right above ... my fucking head! ... Can't hear ... Head! ... Head! ... What? ... What? ... What the F...? Above me! ... Low ... position ... shit! ... Compromised ... aaah!'

Dominique Tana recoiled in surprise. 'What is it? What is going on?' she shouted into her headset. 'What's that noise?' Davina asked the room.

Dirty D shook her head. She had no idea. This was like something out of a budget horror movie.

RAF Group Captain Danny Cairns had been given a new toy to play with – a Royal Navy Sky Dragon with vertical take off and landing capabilities from the HMS King Charles. Unable to sleep he had gone out to test its manoeuvrability and was doing some crag hopping. To the sniper who had lined up Ark MacIntyre in his sights, Cairns was a demon from hell.

Number One had just about begun to pull the trigger for a second time when the RAF pilot had thundered in from the south and come to an abrupt halt directly above his position. Cairns had decided to hover above the summit of Drum and use his instruments to scan the distance by swivelling on the

spot. Almost thirty feet immediately below him the ESIISE hit-man was rolling as fast as he could away from the scorching down-blast.

Macca had been equally as startled by the arrival of the sky dragon. The thick and deadly numbness of the night had been broken by a potential saviour. 'It has to be the RAF', thought Macca aloud. 'It has to be.' He fumbled and hurried upward toward the noise. No longer trudge ... trudge ... trudge. Macca was now trudge, trudge, trudge, trudge up the hillside. He should have listened to that inner voice – 'More haste less speed.'

Having gone no further than ten metres, Macca slipped straight into the ditch and this time he didn't stop. What excitement the mountain was having today. A jet blasted sniper rolling about and screaming on the top and a cold and wet fugitive experiencing his first solo toboggan run away from that pain - in defeated silence and self preserving concentration.

Ark Jagameister MacIntyre the Snowdonia winter sports champion was about to be served up ice cold. But to where? Despite forgetting the lake was frozen; Not the lake ... Please not the lake, was all he could think. Then the answer came with a soft and pleasant relief.

'Eyeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.' The small flock of sheep sheltering in the crevice of the muted stream shot off in all directions. The impact with them had slowed Macca down enough for him to grapple with the protruding grass and cling on. Just as he did so he caught sight of the jet's afterburners as it roared off down the pass to the north.

Hauling himself out of the crevice, Macca lay there panting for five minutes until his senses returned. His whole body was aching and he was beginning to shiver violently.

Macca knew he had to get warm somehow. He was now completely soaked and couldn't go on. How far he had travelled he didn't know but it was time to give up. He moved slightly. The pain was bad but manageable. Swinging his leg over to the side he felt it make contact with something. The rattle of his walking pole echoed back as it skipped off ice and rocks down the slope. Macca cursed. Somehow he'd kept hold of it as he descended but he'd not used the retaining bracelet to secure it to his wrist. Now it was gone.

After pulling himself together the first sniper called in. He had been hit by the Sky Dragon's blast but was unharmed. The second sniper had already informed the Hound Dominique of the situation. They had lost MacIntyre in the panic. He had completely vanished. The tracking data from Don's phone had also stopped and the rest of Tana's team in the farmhouse were disturbed.

'Maybe he was taken off by the jet?'

'Impossible ... the jet was above me.'

'Maybe you hit him the first time?'

'I don't think I did.'

Paranoia took hold. Why had the jet appeared at that location? Were the royal British on to them? Why was the tracker not picking up Don's phone anymore? Leon suggested it might be best for the team to pull out, but Dirty D wasn't ready to release her claws. She had convinced herself that MacIntyre must have been wounded by the first shot. Perhaps he had succumbed to the cold as a result. She ordered the two snipers to search his last known position. The decision would waste forty minutes of their time and give her target the freedom to descend back down into the pass.

80. Still Got It Coming

Monday 14th March 2050

Joel and the other fifteen men of Charlie Two had heard the alarm at the farm from their position half a mile down river as they crept along the bank southward. It was an interesting development but the focus of their mission had now become the destruction of the PPR communications jamming vehicle. The reverberating siren was a mere distraction but also a welcome one as it meant they could pick up the pace without the fear of being heard.

There was no shortage of cover and as the marines crunched the snow in the direction that the PPR vehicles had gone, they startled a creature of some kind, most likely a badger, which sloped off into the undergrowth. It made Joel think back to the day before the royals were evacuated.

He had been talking to the king and queen about the subject of British wildlife and the conversation had developed into one about the suffering of animals, something very close to Queen Sonja's heart. She had expressed her disappointment at the general lack of interest on the matter. Joel had tried to explain to her that there was a time late in the last century when western civilisation had established laws and regulations protecting both wild and domestic animals, that slaughter houses were monitored regularly, that the fur trade was banned, and even policed, and that national television gave greater exposure to the topic. She knew that already of course and what Joel had really tried to tell her was *why* it was no more. He was always conscious of the repetitiveness of his rants on the political and economic issues which concerned him greatly and was aware that they were perhaps bored of his views, so on that occasion he had changed the subject.

He thought about the welfare of animals now as the badger scurried off and he blamed it on the diminished values which had taken over his country and the rest of Europe. Nothing mattered to people anymore, nothing but themselves. He could see the connection between Sonja's cares and his own – there were no nations anymore – just geographical spaces occupied by cultural, racial, ideological, and religious tribes who didn't want anything in common, let alone *have* anything in common. People, loyal only to the shine of money, striving to compete too much for too little, under the banners and symbols of lies and religions, striving to secure a place for themselves and their own kind, among a mish mash of others in a world going down the drain. Apart from a cumulative loss of values and therefore direction, what had taken over was the will of the individual to conquer and make space for himself whatever the cost to those around him. It was a bit like the wild-west except there was nowhere available to settle without disturbing the existing residents. The loss of a nation with clear and distinct pillars with which to adhere to and improve had brought nothing but a loss of respect and responsibility – even the politicians had become self serving professional thieves.

Why shouldn't a backwards tumbling into a quagmire of dissected tribal loyalties and pathetic pseudo hierarchies be allowed to sustain its own international nation with its own currency of crack cocaine, cannabis, and cultural propaganda? It has to be like that for the sake of the economy. That thing the economy wouldn't be the same without competition, strife, and aggressive marketing tactics. No wonder the abattoirs were not monitored and the animal rights laws not policed anymore. It was surprising that anyone had even seen an animal unless it was chopped up and packed up for consumption to make money for someone, or appearing on some kid's virtual reality visor in his bedroom. Perhaps it was a crocodile or a python or even a pit bull terrier that had just crawled off into the Welsh night? Finally set free by a drug induced gangster who could no longer afford to feed it value priced mass produced sausages because the price of Ketamin had gone up? Joel felt himself wishing he had said all that when he had the chance but now the queen was dead and he was about to, or hopefully about to, dispense justice.

The marine's form of justice embodied the art of killing of course. Killing defenceless animals – fellow earthlings – no! But killing humans – dirt bags, humanoid rats who make life difficult for all on earth, Joel could do it easily enough, he would have no qualms about it. For him, killing wasn't hard,

in fact it really was easier than standing on a spider. It was hearing and watching humans die that was the worst part. Pulling the trigger was simply mechanical. He didn't like it but he'd seen enough to understand that in a world resonating with human hatred, murderous greed and rhetorical bullshit and terror, it was necessary.

In total Joel had spent a year in Africa. For his first six months he had been deployed to the Sudan where as part of the Red Sea Group he had been based at Lake Nuba on river patrol. Despite seeing thousands of miles of the River Nile on that tour he had not been in any contact with the enemy worth talking about. Then, after opting for an extended tour, his unit had been redeployed to the swamps of the Congo. It was here that he received his baptism of fire.

The AFI, aided by the NIA (Nigerian Islamic Army), had initiated a revolt in southern Central African Republic and took the city of Bangui. They had then moved in and fortified and converted the city. Using the river systems they had next moved into northern Zaire as far as the River Zaire, from southern Sudan and Uganda. As a result, Africa was cut in half. With Cameroon fighting on all fronts apart from the Gabon and Congo borders in the south it was only a matter of time before the enemy tried to take Congo out of the equation. When they did, Joel and the 3rd European Commando Brigade had found themselves on the front line almost every single day for the last four months of his stint.

It hadn't been long before he and his comrades had realised that fighting the enemy would be fruitless. How do you stop men who have nothing to lose, who think that they've already spent their lives? People who see death as insignificant because in life they can achieve no more? People who don't even believe in life? When a villager who lives in the dust of the desert is told that he will be fed and clothed to join a gang of men who will be his comrades, part of a common struggle, alongside millions across a continent, that together they can take for free what the world wouldn't give them, they will not often refuse.

The enemy, previously individuals with no real comprehension of nationhood, now felt united, felt a part of something for the first time in their lives, something which would give them purpose and nourishment beyond scraping the barren desert day after day for scraps. Why should they work hard now that their wives and sex slaves had given them children to rake their part of the desert? They could never afford to purchase a netvision screen but now, by Jihad, they could take them with force. They could also, justifiably, in the name of Allah, omit the white man's world from the land they had brought it to.

These men didn't care about their own lives. Why would they care about Joel's? That had been Joel's final thought when he had lain on his back in a jungle field hospital eight years ago waiting for the anaesthetic to set in. Multiple shrapnel wounds to his legs and two automatic rifle rounds in his chest had taken the surgeons three hours to remove but it was the bayonet wound to the back of his skull which he felt now as his thoughts came back to the present.

Joel's number two was tapping him on the helmet and indicating that one of the men up ahead was pointing across the river. Joel stopped and crouched, the rest of his section had done so already. Fifty metres away on the far bank of the river and perched above it on a steep slope was the road into the pass. There, where the road made a sharp bend, was Aejeret Regan's little convoy, stopped still, with headlights still glaring. The crashing sound of the icy river disguised the noise of Joel calling in to Major Rose as his men readied Sexy Charlie for a second time.

