RED DAWN

TIMELINE 10/27/62
BOOK FOUR



JAMES PHILIP

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TIMELINE 10/27/62 – BOOK FOUR

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Red Dawn

[Timeline 10/27/62 – Book Four]

Chapter 1

Tuesday 14th January 1964
Steps of the Capitol Building, Washington DC

It was a brutally cold, raw winter's day in the savagely mauled but unbroken capital city of the United States of America. It had snowed again overnight but the morning had brought crystal clear azure skies pocked with fast scudding high clouds, and a bright, dazzling sunshine that seemed to mock the frozen ground and the foggy frost that every breath expelled. The great crowd had been gathering along Pennsylvania Avenue all morning, its ranks swelling from every side as the people of the great city came together to mourn the slaughter and the destruction of the insurrection, and to celebrate their survival.

Looking down Pennsylvania Avenue from the steps of the Capitol Building where he had been sworn in as the thirty-fifth President of the Republic six days short of three years before, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a little surprised by how perversely *normal* the city seemed beneath its wintery coat of freshly fallen snow. If he tried very hard he could almost forget the fire-blackened and blasted building behind him, the desecration of the Smithsonian, the depressingly long list of great public buildings wrecked by truck bombs and left to burn down as for three awful days the fighting had raged, washing up and down the wide boulevards of the city like rip tides of death.

The tanks and armoured personnel carriers which had rumbled down those streets a month ago were parked in and around the city; a comforting presence for the survivors. F-4 Phantoms orbited the capital constantly, their thunderous jets never so distant as to be beyond the edge of human hearing. No civilian aircraft was permitted to overfly Washington or approach within fifty miles of it, no vehicle could enter it without first being exhaustively searched at one of a dozen nominated entry points. Navy gunboats patrolled the Anacostia and the Potomac Rivers, their captains granted absolute powers of seizure and operating under rules of engagement which allowed them to shoot first and ask questions later. The 101st Airborne Division and elements

of the 3rd Marine Division had invested every corner of DC, and each member of the cruelly depleted Washington DC Police Department now had as many as half-a-dozen heavily armed paratroopers or Marine Corps grunts at his back when he, or she, ventured out onto the streets. Regardless of the fact that large parts of the US Government had already decamped to Philadelphia, including the entire House of Representatives under the leadership of the Vice President, the rule of law *would* be enforced in the nation's capital, and its hard-pressed citizens *would* henceforth live in safety.

Or rather, in relative safety.

After the events of the previous month nobody in the Administration was under any illusion that anybody anywhere was *safe* in the messed up brave new post-October War World. There were still those who claimed – perhaps, they even believed it – that the war had been some kind of catastrophically disguised blessing in disguise. The argument went something like: *if the war had happened in say, ten years' time, both sides would have accumulated such huge thermonuclear arsenals that the whole World would have been consumed by the atomic fires*. From which others concluded: *at least this way the greater proportion of humanity had lived through the holocaust*.

Jack Kennedy did not subscribe to that school of thought. He had done what he had thought was right that evening in late October fourteen months ago. He would live with the guilt and pain of it for the rest of his life and surely be damned to eternal perdition in the afterlife, if such a thing really existed. Among other things his belief in a loving, merciful God had died that night in October 1962 when the ICBMs flew and Curtis LeMay's B-52s had burnt and blasted their way across the Soviet hinterlands. But that was then and this was now; and against all rational expectations the World was a no less frightening place. A month ago, there had almost been another war. Yes, another war that the USA would have surely won; but at what price? What was victory worth if afterwards one was utterly friendless?

Not that Jack Kennedy was going to fall into the trap of thinking that Margaret Hilda Thatcher, the Premier of the newly formed Unity Administration of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was *ever* going to be his best friend, let alone soul mate in the crusade to build a new World out of the ashes of the old that was the fond dream of so many Americans.

The President of the United States of America nodded respectfully to the

attractive thirty-eight-year-old widowed mother of twins, whom most of her own people proudly called the ‘Angry Widow’, as he cautiously got to his feet and approached the lectern on the raised dais facing directly down the length of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The last three days had been sorely trying.

The Angry Widow was the hardest-nosed negotiator he had ever sat across a table from; persuading Edgar J Hoover – whom he detested, the feeling was mutual – to compel his agents to wear tuxedos and top hats would have been easier than attempting to make the new British Prime Minister see sense. Every reasonable, closely argued proposition would be greeted with a blue-eyed, steely stare and then she would inform her interlocutor, often stridently, and invariably at great length, exactly why it was a really bad idea and she was not going to have anything to do with it any time soon. Then, just when Jack Kennedy, or his younger brother Bobby, or Bob McNamara, or James William Fulbright, the new Secretary of State was on the verge of bursting a blood vessel the woman would smile a dazzlingly seraphic smile, her chilly azure eyes would twinkle, and she would default to a position which was broadly consistent with: ‘*now, shall we discuss how we can bridge our differences rather than continue at cross purposes?*’

Surrounding the VIPs on the exposed steps of the battle-scarred Capitol Building, British and American Marines fingered the trigger guards of their automatic weapons. Everywhere that Margaret Thatcher and her entourage went hard-faced members of the Special Boat Squadron the elite Special Forces cadre of the Royal Marines went ahead, securing the ground. Royal Marines stood sentinel outside conference room doors and had formed an impenetrable cordon around the British compound at Andrews Air Force Base. The Angry Widow’s personal Royal Marine bodyguard, some eighty strong were uniformly indifferent to the offence they caused to the Secret Service or to members of the specially selected Presidential Guard drawn from the ranks of the 3rd Marine Division. After the assassination of Prime Minister Edward Heath in the Oval Office in December, the British would never again trust anybody else to watch over the safety of *their* leaders.

Jack Kennedy stepped to the dais. He tried to ignore the bitter wind plucking at his coat. The cold was trying to burrow into the marrow of his bones and this was one of those occasions when the President of the United

States of America simply could not allow himself to show the slightest sign of weakness, either of physique or of spirit.

His younger brother Bobby, the Attorney General, said that there were over half-a-million people on Pennsylvania Avenue.

They had strung speakers all the way down to the 7th Street intersection just so everybody who had come out in the winter weather could actually hear what he said. Sometimes words really mattered; and this was the first day of a new age. The World's two remaining nuclear superpowers had become disconnected, strangers one to the other and as a result they had almost stepped over the edge. They had been within hours of falling into a bottomless black abyss. Today, while there was much to rue, there was a great deal more to celebrate. For today at least Red Dawn and the clear and present danger it might still present to the two remaining bastions of global democracy could be set to one side. Today was a day for hope.

"My fellow Americans," Jack Kennedy began, his voice trembling a little. He looked – with a theatrical flourish for the benefit of the TV cameras which were broadcasting the ceremony live across the whole North American continent - over his shoulder towards the British delegation, "our newfound friends," a solemn hesitation, "our rediscovered friends, and to all those in the World who might seek to do us ill," he went on, his tone filling with authority, "today we begin in earnest the long journey towards building a World fit for our children to inherit."

Margaret Thatcher had found it hard to be as *angry* after she had met President Kennedy as she had been with him before that first, face to face encounter. It was not just the man's charm – which could be of the overwhelming kind – or the way he had a knack of looking one in the eye and inclining his head that convinced one that *you* and only *you* were in that moment the absolute centre of his universe. No, it was subtler than that. Before that first meeting it had never occurred to her that fourteen months after the cataclysm, John Fitzgerald Kennedy still agonised with his conscience over the decisions he had made that October day in 1962. She had discovered that day that the one person in the World who would never forgive him for the decisions he had taken in October 1962, was John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He had done what he thought was right; but that was no consolation. Moreover, meeting General Curtis LeMay, whom she had previously held every bit as culpable for the disaster as his President, had

subtly undermined the raft of other assumptions underpinning her *anger*. In the same way the President had not been quite the man she had believed him to be the legendary Air Force General had turned out to be, self-evidently, a much more complicated beast.

The Angry Widow sat unmoving as the President launched into his rallying cry for the two peoples, the cold pinching her face. Her closest associates had been against her travelling to America; after all, the original agreement had been that the President would come to England. She had coyly reminded them of Harold MacMillan's famous remark when asked the question: 'what were the biggest problems in politics?' He had answered, 'events, dear boy, events!' America needed its President in Washington right now and despite her emotional disinclination to offer the man who was still the leader of the Free World undue succour, a weak and divided America possibly sliding towards civil war, was the last thing any British Prime Minister wanted or needed. Thus, Margaret Thatcher had determined that she would go to America and if it became necessary, do her utmost to inject a little steel into the spine of her 'allies'.

Now that she had met John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Curtis LeMay and most of the senior members of the American Administration she had concluded that there was no shortage of moral fibre and determination in Washington, just a surfeit of potentially crippling self-doubt.

The Administration had sent Special Air Mission 26000 – a modified long-range Boeing 707 variant designated a Type VC-137C Stratoliner – normally reserved for the President's personal carriage, and a second older jet from the Presidential fleet to convey Margaret Thatcher, her entourage and her large bodyguard to Washington. She had been treated like visiting royalty since her arrival four days ago and in between the arduous negotiating sessions her hosts had been keen to ensure that she met as many members of the Administration as possible. There had never been any doubt that this afternoon the new 'pact', a minor rehashing of the 1958 US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement would be signed with as much fanfare as could be organised in the limited time available. What had been in doubt, was whether the 'old allies' would understand each other any better by that time.

"Our two great nations have fought three World Wars this century," Jack Kennedy boasted proudly, his voice ringing melodically as it echoed down the serried loudspeakers positioned along Pennsylvania Avenue. "No two

nations on Earth can claim such a noble history of standing up to and facing down tyranny. No two peoples have demonstrated, time and again, such an unrivalled devotion to the cause of freedom and peace in the World!"

Margaret Thatcher envied her counterpart the ease with which he connected with *his* people. Put the man in front of a microphone and within minutes he had his audience in the palm of his hand. The vast crowd clapped and cheered, bayed for more. A sea of raised arms waved like a great ocean in motion.

"And perhaps, no two peoples have gone through such travails and survived with their systems of government intact, their belief in the sanctity of the rule of law untrammelled and their faith in the future undimmed. We have fought together for the right to build a great new society and we owe it to our children and our grandchildren to do the right thing now!"

The Angry Widow had been lost so deeply in her thoughts that she remembered, with a shock, that she ought to have been applauding with the rest of the stage party. She put her hands together and, by her lights, quirked a self-deprecatory grimace in the direction of the President's younger brother.

Robert Francis 'Bobby' Kennedy returned the half-smile. He had been wounded in the left calf when Captain Walter Brenckmann, who had subsequently been appointed as the new United States Ambassador to the Court of Balmoral, had wrestled Edward Heath's assassin to the ground. If the courageous naval officer had not reacted so quickly there was little doubt that other members of the British 'peace mission' would have been killed or seriously injured. Ted Heath's murderess had emptied the magazine of her ex-husband's point four-five calibre M1911 pistol randomly around the packed Oval Office after she had been forced to the ground. Secret servicemen had carried her out of the room screaming and writhing like somebody in the throes of an epileptic seizure. Within hours of the shooting the woman had been locked away in an asylum for her own protection.

The Attorney General had offered to give his 'British friends' daily updates on the condition of the woman, forty-nine-year-old Edna Maria Zabriski, a White House secretary. The Prime Minister had politely declined the offer.

'Justice should take its course according to your laws and the judicial processes of the United States of America without any suggestion of intervention, or influence from outside,' she had assured him.

It was Bobby Kennedy who had come to her privately and asked her to rethink her decision *not* to speak at this ceremony. The President, it seemed, was concerned that an audience outside the United States would not understand her silence at such a 'signal event in the history of our two countries'.

'The President is a charismatic and accomplished public speaker and I am not,' she had explained. 'The steps of the Capitol Building are his natural stage. Mine will be a room in Blair House later in the evening. We both have our own constituencies and I know how best to communicate with mine.'

After the 'Battle of Washington' the Administration had relocated many of its great departments of state to Philadelphia and New York. The damage to public buildings, the loss of archives and the death toll among key personnel was so high that in many cases, organs of Government were going to have to be rebuilt again virtually from the ground up. For example, although the US military machine remained formidable, and its command and control infrastructure superficially more or less intact, its planning, personnel, technological development, policy, training and resupply organisations were in a state of unmitigated chaos. The ships at sea, the aircraft parked at their bases and the army units in their camps and forts were like the branches of some great Redwood tree that had been unexpectedly felled. While the individual branches had survived, the trunk that delivered life-giving sap to those branches and their countless leaves had been split and severed at its base. Just paying military salaries was going to present an almost insurmountable administrative problem in the coming weeks, and every major procurement program was going to have to be reconstructed like giant, unbelievably complicated jigsaw puzzles. The same process was going to have to be repeated across virtually every stratum of governmental activity.

Margaret Thatcher knew from personal experience how difficult that was going to be. In Britain the United Kingdom Interim Emergency Administration – officially superseded by her own Unity Administration on 1st of January – had had to re-invent a totally new form of government utilising the *Emergency District System* automatically enacted in the aftermath of the October War. She had been the first 'Supply Minister' in the UKIEA, and basically, had made up the rules drawing on the lessons learned in the 1945, as she went along. Despite her *anger* the Angry Widow could

not help herself feeling a little bit sorry for her hosts. Not least because it was not until their own people had risen in insurrection, that the Administration had truly comprehended some small part of what things had been like for their ‘allies’ ever since the cataclysm.

“America has looked inward upon itself for long enough,” the President declared. “We in this continent are not an island cast adrift or in some way separated from the World. No man or woman in these United States of America is apart from the rest of Mankind. It is not our destiny to withdraw into our heartlands, or to cower behind the ramparts of our military might. It is not *our* destiny to be isolated from our fellow men. I thank God that we live in a nation that speaks the language of William Shakespeare. I thank God that we live under a system of law and governance mandated by the sons of the European enlightenment. And I thank God that we have been and will continue to be the grain store of the World and the arsenal of democracy. While I live I am proud; proud my fellow Americans, to dedicate myself to the great work of renewal and freedom that lies before us all!”

Chapter 2

Tuesday 14th January 1964
Lisbon, Portugal

HMS Hermes looked like a very old ship from where Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher viewed her from across the harbour. The aircraft carrier had about her that rusting, grubby, greasy sheen that the onset of dusk could not entirely hide from the most disinterested or distant observers, and he was neither. Hermes was hardly four years old and yet she had been worked hard – almost worked to death – in the last year. Not that her down at heel appearance did not mean she could not still, at a pinch, fight her weight.

Her magazines had been partially restocked with newly flown in American air-to-air missiles, her ready lockers were stuffed with clips of forty-millimetre reloads for her Bofors guns, her bunkers had been topped off with aviation and all the other oils and lubricants she needed to keep on steaming and flying her dwindling air group. However, her peacetime air complement of a dozen De Havilland Sea Vixens interceptors, seven Blackburn Buccaneer low-level strike aircraft, five Fairey Gannet anti-submarine aircraft, and six Westland Wessex helicopters was currently reduced to seven Sea Vixens, three Buccaneers, two Gannets and four Wessex's; and most of the surviving aircraft were over-stressed, flying literally on a wing and prayer.

"Commander Christopher," the elegantly dressed blond said, smiling. She had poured herself into the chair opposite him at the table in the waterfront taverna. He had found this place a week ago and come here the last few evenings to collect his thoughts and make his peace with the changed reality of his life. He missed his old ship, HMS Talavera. He missed the gadgets and gizmos that as the old destroyer's Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO) had been his to experiment with and to play with to his heart's content. He badly missed his friends from Talavera's wardroom; those both dead and alive. Worst of all he felt disconnected from things. Ever since Rear Admiral Grenville had brought his staff ashore from his flagship, the Hermes, he had been a spare part, a square peg in a world of round holes.

Hermes sailed for Malta in the morning for a three-month refit; and here he was ashore twiddling his thumbs. If God had a sense of humour it was a bloody perverse one! Peter Christopher gave the woman an impatient frown.

"Don't look so worried," the newcomer laughed. "I'm not about to proposition you, or anything."

The woman's voice was plumy, straight out of the Home Counties.

"We've not met," she went on. "I'm Clara Pullman." She waved to the bar. "Might I have a coffee, please?" She asked in Portuguese. "I came here a lot before the war," she explained, smiling again.

Peter Christopher guessed his companion to be in her mid-thirties. She wore a lightweight fawn coat over a plain cotton dress that was obviously tailored to her contours. She had no rings on her fingers; and had placed a small, grey leather handbag on the table.

Several of the tables around them were occupied by men in Royal Navy or Royal Air Force blue. Lisbon had become an outpost of the British military machine shortly before the ceasefire was declared and now it was swiftly turning into a regular staging post and watering hole, much to the delight of the local hotel, taverna and restaurant owners.

"Forgive my manners," the man muttered. "If it is all the same with you I am not feeling terribly sociable this afternoon."

"No offence taken," the woman assured him. She gave the waiter a tight-lipped smile when her coffee was placed before her, and was silent until the man retreated, wiping his hands on a stained apron. "You've had a rough old time of it lately. Still, you'll be on your way to Malta soon."

The man gave her a baleful look.

"You just need to have a little faith, that's all," Clara Pullman said, glancing out of the window as she raised her cup to her lips. She wore very little makeup, much in the style of the local better off, respectable women of the city; that was how the man had known she was not a tart drawn to the waterfront by the influx of foreign sailors, airmen and soldiers. She nodded towards the darkening silhouette of HMS Hermes. "When were you last in England?" She asked suddenly.

Peter Christopher snorted softly.

"Late November." It seemed like a lifetime ago; all those months that HMS Talavera was swinging around her anchors in Fareham Creek, the occasional runs ashore into Portsmouth or Gosport, the greyness of the skies

and the radiation lockdown exercises.

Yes, that was another lifetime...

“What’s it like at home?” The woman probed, trying not to seem overly anxious. “I left London just before the war, you see. I had a lovely little flat in Hampstead. Courtesy of a rich admirer who had fallen in love with *this* city during the war – Hitler’s War, that is – when he was something dangerous and exciting in the Special Operations Executive. Lisbon was the playground of the spies of all the warring parties in those days.” She laughed a sad little laugh. “The more things change the more they remain the same, I suppose.”

“Home is not like it once was,” the man said gently. “There is no London anymore; or much of Kent, or large tracts of the East Coast. There were some hits up in the north-east, I think. Nobody talked much about it and not a lot of people really know what really happened in some places. There was a big airburst over Morecombe Bay, for example. I’ve no idea if Blackpool is still there. We heard bad things about the rationing, shortages of everything, there were rumours of plague; I don’t know. That’s what it is like at home. Pretty grim for most people, I should imagine.”

The woman viewed him thoughtfully.

“They say radiation levels aren’t as bad as everybody said they would be if we ever blew up the World?”

Peter Christopher shrugged.

“Radiation levels dropped quickly after the first few weeks. The best policy is probably not to think about it. We won’t know how bad things are going to be for a while; several years, perhaps, decades.” He found himself thinking about Marija celebrating each defect-free birth at the St Catherine’s Hospital for Women at Mdina; wondered if that was the new future for all of Mankind: counting its blessings for the tiny things; the things that only a truly merciful God could reliably bestow upon his children. “Humanity is fourteen months into a millennium-long experiment when it comes to living with raised background radiation levels. You and I, we just won’t live so long as we would have before the war. It is our children who will pay the real price.”

Clara Pullman grimaced.

“Children have never been on my agenda. I’m not really the maternal type.”

“No, what type are you Miss Pullman?”

“I was once a nurse. From time to time in the last year I have been again. In the meantime, I was,” she smiled, fluttered her eyelids and tried very hard not to giggle, “a kept lady. But that career was slowly winding down even before the war. The kind of men who *keep* women of my ilk like their *trophies* young and lissom and as you see, I have been neither for some time now.”

Peter Christopher raised an eyebrow.

Clara Pullman raised a hand.

“No, don’t start trying to be gallant, Commander,” when she laughed her eyes came alight. “In the last year I have embarked on a new career. Although I didn’t know it until about a month ago I’ve been, shall we say, on Government Service ever since the day of the war; which serendipitously, brings me to why I’m sitting at a table in a waterfront taverna with a handsome young naval officer trying very hard not to flirt.”

Peter Christopher’s ill humour at being jogged out of his brooding had morphed into curiosity by then. If a beautiful woman – and whatever *Miss Pullman* thought of her own looks, she was a beautiful woman – wanted to spend the time of day cheering him up who was he to affect misogyny?

“We’re not flirting, Miss Pullman,” he observed. “I am...” His voice trailed off because he had been about to say ‘engaged’, which strictly speaking, was not true. He and Marija Calleja were, well, affianced but not in a way that he could easily explain to himself, let alone a complete stranger. They had only ever spoken through their letters, one to the other, and they had never discussed, or mentioned what their ‘relationship status’ actually was. He did not even know what her voice sounded like or she his; he simply felt ‘committed’ to her and he tacitly assumed she felt the same way towards him. In either event he did not consider himself free to ‘flirt’ with an attractive older woman whom he had just met in a waterfront taverna.

“Spoken for?” The woman inquired, her eyes smiling. That was when Peter Christopher started getting the feeling that she knew some, if not all of his secrets. It was like having one’s pocked picked. “I know about Marija Calleja,” Clara said, putting down her coffee cup. “In November I was sitting behind her on a bus as close to her as I am to you now.”

The man said nothing.

“And before you ask,” his companion went on, “I and the people I represent mean neither of you any harm.”

Peter Christopher's stare narrowed. The woman was either a criminal about to blackmail him, somebody put up to this by his father to let him know that the new Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean did not want any kind of scandal.

Either way she was almost certainly a 'spook' of some description.

Clara Pullman was not intimidated by the young man's silence. Everything she knew about the tall, handsome son of the famous 'Fighting Admiral' confirmed that he was every inch the prototypical 'new' naval officer, highly intelligent, technically accomplished in his own field of radar and electronics and probably in several other specialisations too, well-respected by his fellow officers and the men under him. Not yet half-formed he had already been singled out within the Navy for future high command. Of course, Peter Christopher did not know this, or even suspect it. He was not overly ambitious, did not crave to emulate his distinguished, somewhat estranged father, and rather like Marija Elizabeth Calleja in faraway Malta, had virtually no idea how he was seen in the eyes of others.

Marija Calleja and Peter Christopher were well matched, remarkable innocents abroad in a World that needed people like her to guard their backs if they were to ever go in search of their destinies.

"When you get back to your hotel this evening," she explained. "Sober, hopefully," a sympathetic half-smile, "you will find new orders waiting for you." Clara began to rise from the table. "We shall meet again one day," she promised, and walked out of the taverna.

What on Earth was all that about?

Peter Christopher thought briefly about running after the woman and demanding to know what was going on. He could not move even though his mind was racing. If the woman had been going to blackmail him she would have come straight out with it. If that was not it, then whatever was going on was far too subtle to be his father's handiwork. Clara Pullman, if that was her real name – which he seriously doubted - had just made *contact*. It was classic. She had identified him, approached him, looked him in the eye, made her assessment and departed. And now he was a part of the Great Game.

Or am I?

Finishing his beer, he paid up and walked, unhurriedly back the mile or so to his hotel, where he and his erstwhile 'steward', Petty Officer Jack

Griffin and a score of officers and senior NCO's from all three services were billeted. The *Armada de Tagus* was a genteel, old-world sort of rest house that usually catered for retired Portuguese civil servants and antique naval officers. It had about it the faded glory of the days when Portugal had been in the first rank of European superpowers, and like Portugal itself, the hotel had seen better times and was quietly falling down, its walls cracked and its paint flaking. He and Jack Griffin had found themselves back at the hotel after Hermes put into Lisbon a fortnight ago to offload several sick bay cases, and to take on new drafts. What had been planned as a forty-eight-hour stopover had stretched, first to a week and now fourteen days and counting, when the Portuguese authorities granted permission for the carrier to undertake 'essential maintenance' in the sheltered waters of the Tagus Estuary. In fact, the Portuguese had fallen over themselves to be of assistance and a stream of dignitaries, including António de Oliveira Salazar, the seventy-four-year-old Prime Minister – Dictator really - of Portugal and several of his ministers, had paid much lauded courtesy visits to the *Happy H* in recent days.

Because he had already met the old man, who was especially eager to be photographed again with the son of the 'famous Fighting Admiral', Peter Christopher had been summoned back onboard to escort the Portuguese dictator around the bridge and the flight deck. Salazar was not at all what one expected a 1930s-style fascist dictator to be like; he seemed mild-mannered, professorial, more like one's favourite elderly uncle than a ruthless contemporary of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco.

Peter Christopher put those recollections aside as he tore open the slim Manila envelope waiting for him at the reception desk of the *Armada de Tagus* Hotel.

He was so astonished by the contents of his orders that he started reading them aloud.

"...seat booked on Flight GIB Zero-Nine...sixteenth instant."

"Report Officer Commanding HMS Talavera on arrival at Gibraltar..."

"There to immediately assume duties of Executive Officer of said ship..."

Chapter 3

Tuesday 14th January 1964
Wolverhampton Civic Hall, Wolverhampton, England

The tall, gaunt man with the horribly scarred face wearing a black patch over his left eye moved painfully to the lectern at the front of the stage. Whereas the English industrial West Midlands – the engine room of the manufacturing economy of the United Kingdom - had escaped the firestorm of late October 1962, the half-broken body of the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West, was a testament to the greater cataclysm that had consumed as many as eight million of his fellow countrymen and women in the first hours, and between four and five million in the subsequent fourteen months.

Cigarette and tobacco smoke clouded the air and as the angular, grim-visaged figure of the local MP settled, his good eye scanning the ranks of the faithful in the packed auditorium as a breathless hush awaited the prophet's words of wisdom.

Airey Neave, the forty-seven-year-old war hero who had escaped from Colditz and had since December filled the post of Minister of Supply, glanced with apparent equanimity at his companion in the front row of the hall. He and Iain Macleod had declined an invitation to sit with the party of local luminaries and worthies at the back of the stage. When one voluntarily walked into a lion's den one was best advised not to place oneself in the middle of the hostile pride.

Iain Norman Macleod, the Minister of Information and nominally, at least, still the Chairman of the Conservative and Unionist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, returned a tight-lipped smile. This was one of those rare occasions when he felt the need of the company of a man of exactly Airey Neave's proven mettle. In addition to escaping from Colditz Castle, Airey Neave was the man who had read the indictments to the leading Nazis at Nuremburg and was, by common consent that rarest of things, a gold-plated, universally acknowledged surviving national treasure.

Before the October War the annual meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Associations would have been a jamboree, a mostly social

event. Tonight's assembly had about it the feel of a bear pit, hence the presence of two of the Party's 'biggest hitters'. Neither Airey Neave nor Iain Macleod anticipated getting out of Wolverhampton Civic Hall unscathed. Tonight's extravaganza was politics in its rawest, most brutal incarnation, red in tooth and claw. All that was missing was the certainty of pre-meditated violence against the opponents of the local champion. This evening, any violence would be entirely spontaneous. Such had always been the Tory way and Airey Neave, Ian Macleod or their new Prime Minister were determined not to surrender ground to the opponents of reason. The Government had no intention of allowing itself to be stabbed in the back by the very people who ought to be its staunchest supporters

Iain Macleod, the fifty-year-old Minister of Information in the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom might, in other circumstances, have assumed – more or less automatically - the premiership on Edward Heath's tragic death in Washington a little over a month ago. A less noble or a less politically astute operator would have seized the opportunity without a second thought. But he had known intuitively that this was not his time, and more importantly, he had not known if his putative premiership commanded the Chiefs of Staff of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, the Army, or Her Majesty, the Queen's, unqualified support. Without the unqualified backing of the three Chiefs of Staff and the Monarch no man, or woman, could rule in this sorely fractured land. In any event, standing aside had been anything but a wholly selfless act; pragmatically, his sponsorship, counsel and public approbation of the new Prime Minister had guaranteed him what he had craved but been denied for much of the last year, a privileged seat within the inner circle of Government. He would settle for this for the time being and loyally fight battles like that ahead of him tonight, with every ounce of true blue gusto and zeal he could muster; no matter how much blood, sweat, tears and electoral collateral had to be spilled in the process.

If tonight went badly wrong the Party in the country might split down sectional, ideological lines because if there was one man in England who had it in his hands to consign them all to political obscurity for a generation, it was the haunting figure peering one-eyed into the dark mass of *his* supporters.

In the next few minutes Airey Neave and Iain Macleod feared that they might glimpse the shape of things to come. The Minister of Information's

recent encounters with John Enoch Powell had been painful personally – to see his old friend so grievously injured and at one point at death's door – and politically, because every inch of shared ground beneath their feet had evaporated since the October War. Partly, this had been because of the compromises every member of the initial United Kingdom Interim Emergency Administration had had to make to one, form the UKIEA in the first place; and two, to stop it falling to pieces every time something went wrong. Enoch Powell and compromise had always been uneasy bedfellows; and likewise, he and Edward Heath had never been natural confederates.

"We stand at a crossroads in the history of these Isles," the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West declared in that oddly captivating, fascinating nasal way that was his and his alone. "Through tragedy and trial, we now emerge into what we all hope will be what our last great leader, Winston Churchill, might have described as the 'sunlit uplands' of a future redolent with possibilities for the betterment of our people."

Iain Macleod's expression was fixed, his sombre smile painted rictus-like across his face; next to him in the front row Airey Neave groaned audibly. The Minister of Information reached for his cigarettes – one of the first boons of the new Anglo-American rapprochement was a flood of Virginia tobacco and US manufactured filter-tipped cigarettes – and lit up, suspecting this was going to seem like an evening without end...

He had chain smoked most of his adult life and the enforced privations of the last year had turned him into a quarrelsome, agitated tartar at times. But then what was a man without his vices? It was a peculiarity of his career that he had first caught the eye of eye of the then Prime Minister, poor dear, departed Winston Churchill, in 1952 when he had given Aneurin Bevan – the darling of the Labour Party - a right royal roasting in a debate on the National Health Service. Later, as Minister of Health, Iain Macleod had – in the face of vehement and angry protestations from the tobacco industry – announced the scientifically proven link between smoking and lung cancer. Nevertheless, he chain smoked because, and he knew it well, men were essentially contrary animals.

In post-World War II British politics there had been few men as contrary as John Enoch Powell, and now that contrariness threatened to run amok at the worst possible time for the new Unity Administration of the United Kingdom.

Airey Neave felt his blood pressure rising by the second. There was something about Enoch Powell that had always brought out the worst in him. The man's somewhat eccentric and misogynistic observations on the elevation of his dear friend, Margaret Thatcher to the premiership, while outrageously beyond the pale were oddly in keeping with both the man, and the conduct of his life and career to date.

Fifty-one-year-old John Enoch Powell was the most brilliantly gifted prima donna, a man to whom everything came easily and as if by natural right. From a middle-class background, he was educated at King's Norton Grammar School and later, King Edward's School in Birmingham. In 1930 he had gone up to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he encountered and had fallen a little under the thrall of the poet A.E. Houseman – then Professor of Latin at Trinity – and the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Not content with attaining a double starred first in Latin *and* Greek, the young tyro learned Urdu at the School of Oriental Studies in London; this latter because one day he intended to one day become Viceroy of India! At the time it was unclear whether this was youthful bravura or a genuine reflection of the man's over-weaning ambition. Many of the stories about the young Enoch Powell were apocryphal of course and deserved to be taken with a large pinch of salt. The problem was that the man never did anything to disentangle fact from myth. Although Powell was fluent in Welsh, Portuguese, and later Russian; he never claimed he wanted to be Prince of Wales or to replace the dictator, Salazar, in Lisbon, less still to be the man to restore the Romanov's to the throne!

"We live in strange and aberrant times, my friends," the great man proclaimed. "We live in times in which the normal standards of political life and democratic accountability are held wilfully in abeyance by an unelected, unaccountable polity that nobody in this room was ever given the chance to vote for, or would, in my humble estimation, have voted for had they been given the opportunity!"

After winning a clutch of prestigious Classics prizes and graduating with a Double First, Powell had stayed on at Cambridge studying ancient manuscripts and to churn out a plethora of academic papers. In 1937 at the age of twenty-five he had travelled to Australia to take up a professorship in Greek at the University of Sydney, publishing in 1938 his signature scholarly contribution to the Classical world, the *Lexicon to Herodotus*.

Like so many stars of post-Second World War British politics Powell had been appalled by the appeasement of Hitler and the Nazis in the later 1930s and the tardiness of British rearmament.

"Not only did the previous incumbent, Edward Heath, arbitrarily dismiss and for a short time imprison, good and true men who had served their country and this Party honourably all their lives," the poison dripped from the twisted corners of the speaker's mouth, "but *he* had the bare-faced gall to maintain that he did what he did for the *national good*!" The one, blazing eye settled on the two ministers, surrounded by their mixed cadre of Royal Marine and Special Branch bodyguards. "Earlier this evening we heard *Missis Thatcher's* co-conspirators and apologists utter their weasel words in a pusillanimous defence of the indefensible!"

This prompted a low growling groundswell of anger. The objects of the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West's ire – both thick-skinned and resilient old political soldiers hardened by the experience of the last year - were comforted by the knowledge that not everybody in the hall was actually out for their blood.

Just ninety percent of them...

Arriving home from Australia in September 1939, Enoch Powell had enlisted as a private soldier in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. In World War Two only two men in the British Army enlisted as a private soldier and were promoted to Brigadier General by its close. The other man was Fitzroy Maclean. Unlike Fitzroy Maclean, a veteran of daring commando raids in the Western Desert who had later fought with Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia, Enoch Powell had never actually seen action. He had spent the war filling mainly intelligence and senior staff posts in England, Egypt and the Far East. Reputedly, he once so infuriated Orde Wingate, the legendary leader of the Chindits in Burma that that Wingate asked a friend to stop him if he ever looked like he was going to '*beat Powell's brains in*'.

Both Airey Neave and Iain Macleod would have gladly testified under oath that Enoch Powell was exactly the sort of comrade in arms who often moved those closest to him to want to 'beat in his brains'.

Iain Macleod visibly flinched. His own long, pre-October War, friendship with the Party's most gifted and most dangerous loose cannon had taught him that the man was an utterly unpredictable mixture of good and bad; he could be the most perspicacious man in England one moment,

dazzled by hubris the next, wedded to a profound universal moral truth one day, and blind to what was staring him in the face half-an-hour later. His career in Government was at once distinguished, brilliant – a word much overused in politics but entirely justified in describing many of Enoch Powell's insights and initiatives – and yet horribly fallible. Just when his ascent to the highest echelons of Government seemed most inevitable he would stumble, unable to connect with, well, *reality*. He had been an able Financial Secretary to the Treasury under Peter Thorneycroft's Chancellorship in the late 1950s, and the Health Minister in the years leading up to the October War. At the Treasury he had become a fervent believer in the new theories of 'monetarism', and an archetypal old school opponent of using public money to prop up ailing businesses or to boost consumer spending, resigning in protest with Peter Thorneycroft when Harold MacMillan had over-ruled the Treasury team.

Later, at the Ministry of Health, Powell had tried to address the inhumanity of the systemic neglect of those unfortunate enough to be committed to Victorian psychiatric institutions – asylums – and made what became known as his 'Water Tower' speech: '*There they stand, isolated, majestic, imperious, brooded over by the gigantic water-tower and chimney combined, rising unmistakable and daunting out of the countryside - the asylums which our forefathers built with such immense solidity to express the notions of their day.*' He had wanted to tear down the whole diabolical system and replace it with something that was genuinely humane. However, set against great moral crusades such as the battle to reform the insane houses of the nation's past; there was always an odd, pedantic callousness, a disregard for the personal, a lack of empathy for the problems of real people. For example, he was profoundly unsympathetic to the victims of the Thalidomide scandal – babies who had been born with deformities to mothers who had, in good faith, taken the drug in pregnancy – and refused point blank to meet any of the children who had been born with birth defects. '*Anyone who took so much as an aspirin put himself at risk,*' he was reported to have said, as if the principle of caveat emptor should, or had ever applied to the products of the pharmaceutical industry. Burying his head in the sand he had refused to authorise a public inquiry, and – incredibly – decided not to issue a warning to prevent the consumption of any leftover Thalidomide pills remaining in people's medicine cabinets, although such a warning had

already been issued *personally* by the President of the United States to the American people.

Iain Macleod mourned the dreadful suffering his old friend had lived through since the night of the October War; he mourned also the stellar career and remarkable life that was fast imploding before his eyes. Worse, in the next few minutes he was very much afraid that Enoch Powell was going to light the touch paper of a British insurrection of the kind that had just rocked Washington DC. The poor, deluded man honestly and truly, knew not what he was doing...

"I say to you all here in this hall that," Enoch Powell's voice quivered with rage, "*that* woman has usurped the constitution in a way no usurper has usurped the rightful governance of these Islands since Henry Tudor ousted Richard at Bosworth Field. Except," he added with an excoriating flourish, "at least Henry Tudor had the courage to take his prize by battle. He had no skirts to hide behind!"

"I think I've heard enough of this balderdash," Airey Neave said loudly in the moment before the demigod's true believers began to bay for blood.

Iain Macleod nodded and as he staggered to his feet – his two-decade old war wound, from which he had never fully recovered, had stiffened while he sat listening to the other speakers – the ministers' bodyguards quickly stepped close.

"See!" The man on the stage cried in triumph. "See how they run now that their little game has been exposed! Like rats falling over each other in their haste to get off a sinking ship."

Airey Neave did not look back.

Elsewhere in the hall other people were standing; some gesticulating, brandishing clenched fists, others simply trying to get out. Something flew through the air. The veteran of Colditz did not blink, did not attempt to duck. Somewhere behind him on the apron of the stage glass shattered.

At the very moment the Prime Minister was fighting to safeguard the life of the nation in Washington, men who had the bare-face gall to dare to call themselves Tories were queuing up to stab her in the back as soon as she got back. If only for once, just once, the Party could find the gumption to march in step with the rest of the country!

Was that really too much to ask?

Chapter 4

Tuesday 14th January 1964
Blair House, 1651 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC

Sir Thomas 'Tom' Harding-Grayson and his wife, Patricia, were waiting in the first-floor lobby with Lord Franks, the recently appointed United Kingdom Ambassador, and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir David Luce, when Margaret Thatcher made her regal appearance.

Blair House still reeked of fresh paint and in places the recently repaired damage to the internal fabric of the building stood out like a sore thumb. However, despite its proximity to the White House and the fact that vicious fighting had washed around it during the Battle of Washington, the building itself – the original early nineteenth century town house and three adjoining properties – had survived more or less intact. Emergency restoration and repairs had been begun within days of the fighting ending while several rings of new defences were prepared. Blair House was now the temporary Washington residence of the President of the United States of America and no expense or effort had been spared in getting it ready to accommodate its new occupant and his guests.

The Foreign Secretary's wife – a slim, elegant, greying woman in her late fifties – stepped forward and examined her unlikely younger friend. She nodded with approval. She had quietly, and very privately mentioned to the Prime Minister that 'Sunday best middle-class housewife really won't do any more' before the mission left for Washington and had been astonished when Margaret Thatcher had asked her if she would 'look into my trousseau for me', because 'honestly, I don't seem to have time for anything these days!'. Thus, the former novelist and wife of the obscure civil servant who had been catapulted unexpectedly into the international limelight six weeks ago, had found herself in the role of the Angry Widow's fashion counsellor.

Secretly, Pat Harding-Grayson suspected that Margaret Thatcher had had an ulterior motive in asking her advice; how else was she to reserve a few minutes each day in her diary when she would be free to talk to another woman about something other than matters of absolute life and death? Pat,

who had never been an overly maternal woman had even found herself spending time with, and enjoying the company of her friend's twins, Carol and Mark.

It was a funny old World.

"They ought to roll out the red carpet, Prime Minister!" The older woman decided. If only the Margaret Thatcher had the confidence in her looks that she ought to have had, she would be on the front page of *Time* every week of the year, not just when there was at a big US-UK summit.

Margaret Thatcher nodded satisfaction. Patricia Harding-Grayson – since her husband's elevation to a life peerage in the New Year's Honours List, now *Lady Patricia* – had ordered half-a-dozen dresses from Bloomingdales in New York ahead of the delegation's arrival at Andrews Air Force Base. The 'trousseau' had been ready and waiting for the Prime Minister.

'I know you took a host of measurements but all these dresses fit me like a glove?" The Angry Widow – in her most gushing, pacific mode – had demanded of her friend.

'I gave Bloomingdales *all* your measurements and they tailored these *exactly* for your figure, Margaret." Pat and her husband were on strictly first name terms in their private dealings with the Prime Minister; and because of it they were meticulous about observing the appropriate *public* protocols.

"A dress fit for a soirée attended by three Presidents, Prime Minister," agreed Lord Franks, a wise, patient man with gentle eyes and the charm of a born diplomat.

Oliver Sherwell Franks had previously been British Ambassador in Washington between 1948 and 1952. A graduate of Queen's College, Oxford, pursuing an academic career between First and Second World Wars; he had been Provost of Worcester College, and then Professor of Moral Philosophy between 1936 and 1946 at the University of Glasgow. During World War II he had joined the Ministry of Supply, ending the war as its Permanent Secretary. He had encapsulated the lessons learned during the war in *Central Planning and Control in War and Peace*, a document which had been at Margaret Thatcher's elbow for much of the last year and was, basically, the source 'bible' for much of the work of the UKIEA Ministry of Supply in the immediate aftermath of the October War. After the 1945 war Franks had been close to Clement Atlee, the Labour Prime Minister and to

Ernest Bevin. It was the latter who had tempted him away from Queen's College to head the British mission to discuss the Marshall Plan; later he was involved in the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and Chairman of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OECD). Returning to London after four years in Washington he had spent the eight years before the October War as Chairman of Lloyds Bank. What with one thing and another Lord Franks had been top of a very, very short list when candidates were mooted to replace Sir James Sykes, who had been assassinated early in the 'Battle of Washington'.

"Thank you, Lord Franks," Margaret Thatcher grimaced, a little uncomfortable to be complimented.

Jack Kennedy was at the head of the somewhat daunting reception committee.

First the United Kingdom delegation was introduced to Dwight Eisenhower, thirty-fourth President of the United States of America.

Margaret Thatcher had to fight to resist the urge to curtsy.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mister President," she smiled.

The flinty-eyed, lean, somewhat more rotund and grizzled version of the great wartime leader she had only previously seen in Pathe movie clips and newspaper and magazine pictures shook her hand and held it just long enough for her to meet his gaze. She met his stare unblinkingly and after a moment the man nodded.

Harry Truman, Eisenhower's predecessor and the only American other than Jack Kennedy to order the 'first use' of nuclear weapons was visibly frail yet clearly delighted to make the Angry Widow's acquaintance.

"It is an honour to meet you, Mister President."

It was all a blur.

Behind her Lord Franks swapped banter with the two former Presidents and at her side Jack Kennedy was talking, exuding a charismatic charm that at once fascinated and vexed her.

Ahead lay a set-piece banquet and her moment in the limelight; her opportunity to state, definitively her own vision of an Anglo-American alliance which no longer relied upon the forever treacherously eddying currents of some mythical 'special relationship'.

"You must miss being with your family?" She asked Jack Kennedy when drinks were being served and the VIPs were mingling in tightly co-

ordinated circles. "You have young children, just as I do."

"Washington isn't safe for Jackie and the kids," the man shrugged. "I've managed to get back to Hyannis Port a couple of times since the *rebellion* but you know how it is. You and I, we don't get to have a normal family life."

"No, I suppose not."

"Forgive me, that wasn't said very well, Prime Minister," Jack Kennedy apologised instantly.

Not for the first time Margaret Thatcher felt the loneliness of her role and recognised how exposed she was on this frighteningly dangerous World-stage. Her life before the October War had been busy and fulfilling, carefully ordered and managed but in retrospect so stultifyingly narrow that nothing in her past had remotely prepared her for this *test*.

"Please don't apologise, Mister President," she said quickly, and changed the subject.

Over a month ago Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher – a man she whom she hardly knew; but whom she had known intensely for several hours and subsequently for snatched pieces of less than a single week before he had flown to the Mediterranean to stop the rot – had proposed marriage to her and she had...stalled. Or rather, she had asked for time to consider his 'kind offer'. The 'Fighting Admiral' had not mentioned the matter again, and she knew he would not unless she broached it. It had been easy to defer a decision, she had faced down one crisis after another in the last four weeks, sleeping barely two to three hours some nights, travelling the length and much of the breadth of the surviving areas of United Kingdom attempting, with uncertain success, to tie the Conservative Party and the nation together once again into some kind of cohesive entity. After Edward Heath's death she had had no real mandate – and nor did she now - to govern. All she had, all she *owned*, was a fleeting opportunity to do the only thing she had ever wanted to do in her whole life; *to make a difference*. Specifically, to make the lives of the people she represented and now led, better and if at all possible, safer. If she was to do that she had to earn the right to do it and that meant winning the trust and the respect of *her* people. Not just the Tory faithful but of many of her natural political gainsayers as well. In her mind there was no more Conservative or Labour, Liberal, Communist, or any other kind of grouping that ideologically mattered; that sort of thing belonged to the old pre-cataclysm World. For better or worse the October War had

changed *everything*. Oh, the old parties would survive but there was no real scope for alternative agendas, the priorities were so patently obvious to anybody who had eyes to see that it was positively unpatriotic to pretend otherwise. The country and those who relied upon it had to be made safe, fed, and offered a real prospect of making a World that was fit for their children, *all* their children, to live in.

"My loss is as nothing compared to that suffered by so many of our fellow countrymen and women."

Jack Kennedy pursed his lips, waited, knowing intuitively that the seemingly unfathomable woman who had come to Washington and acted – against all expectations - with such disconcerting sure-footedness, and with such a profound grasp of the underlying political realities facing *his* Administration, was about to let him glimpse a little of *her* vulnerability.

"Please don't misunderstand me but," the British Prime Minister became hard, unyielding at the very moment she revealed an inner doubt, "but for the grace of God I might have done exactly what that poor woman did in the Oval Office." She forced a smile. "Oh, I'm sure people will say she planned it all and somebody, somewhere put her up to it or encouraged her, but I think it is more likely the truth is that when she learned about her son being listed as missing in action and heard about the gun camera footage of his plane being shot down, well, she finally lost all hope."

The most powerful man in the World digested this unhurriedly, understanding that the woman neither expected, nor wanted him to address any part of what she had just said to him. She had needed to tell him that whatever he had heard about her, and whatever conclusions he had drawn about her from their relatively brief acquaintance; nothing to her was black and white. Things were not always what they seemed to be and she understood as much.

Jack Kennedy quirked a grin.

"This old house was built as long ago as 1824," he said, apparently going off at a tangent; in reality, he was adroitly assuring his guest that she had made her point. "It was built for the Surgeon General of the Army. It wasn't until twelve years later that Francis Preston Blair bought the place. Blair was a publisher and a close friend of President Andrew Jackson. The Government didn't actually buy the place until 1942, since when it has been the official residence for guests of the White House, and incidentally, the

place where former Presidents usually set up camp when they are in DC." He spoke in a friendly, chatty way as if he was not the President of the United States of America and she was not the embattled Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. They might have been simply taking in the sites of the city, two private citizens who would never know the pressure-cooker ferocity of leadership in times of direst strife. "Of course, President Truman spent most of his Presidency here while the White House was being rebuilt. They discovered during the war that parts of the original building were practically falling down. A single well-placed bomb would have brought the whole place down around FDR's head!"

Margaret Thatcher relaxed, enjoyed exchanging polite conversation.

She ate little during the grand dinner. She sat to the President's right, next to James William Fulbright, his new Secretary of State. Fulbright had struck her as being a most impressive man, and she looked forward to getting to know him better when he travelled to England on a 'fact finding mission'. Discourse during the meal was of the inconsequential, throwaway variety; she was too preoccupied with her forthcoming key note speech, and the men flanking her were determined not to inadvertently surrender new hostages to fortune.

"Mister President, Ladies and Gentlemen," Margaret Thatcher began once the microphones had been arrayed before her and the reception hall had fallen silent. "Circumstances are difficult but the warmth and the whole-heartedness of the welcome with which I and my party have been greeted in this great, somewhat battered, city has been second to none. Truly, the last few days have witnessed the renewal of the most 'special' of special relationships between two countries which hold dearest to their very beings the flame of freedom!"

There would be no hecklers in this audience made up of Administration notables and senior hacks, Army, Navy and Air Force officers and virtually the entire forward echelon of senior staffers for the restored United Kingdom Embassy. However, the Prime Minister was not talking to the men and women in Blair House. Her words were being broadcast live across America, and atmospherics and technological gremlins permitting, to the British Isles and the rest of the World.

"This afternoon President Kennedy and I signed a historic treaty reuniting our two countries in a great crusade."

It took an enormous effort of will to contain the urge to hector, to berate her listeners. She did not have to shout to be heard; those days were behind her and not everybody out there was against her. She had friends as well as enemies.

"My detractors call me the 'Angry Widow'," she went on, a trace of irony in her voice. "I am an 'angry widow' and I have every right to be one. People have a perfect right to be angry and frankly, if a lot of people weren't angry about the state of the World it would be a sad thing. I lost my husband in the October War, my children lost their father. Countless others lost so much more. How could it not be natural to be angry when one's whole World is swept away in a single day? But no matter how angry I am, I know that there is no magic wand that I can wave to bring back that old age which is gone forever."

Margaret Thatcher stood away from the microphones, briefly looked to Jack Kennedy before stepping back to address her worldwide audience.

"President Kennedy and I have vowed to work together," she declared, the pitch of her soprano voice rising. "As it was in the dark days of the Second World War the United Kingdom may one day, once again be the New World's gateway to the old in the rebuilding of European civilization."

Chapter 5

Thursday 16th January 1964
French Creek, Grand Harbour, Malta

The big tug in the red and grubby white livery of the Harbourmaster's Department blew its steam horn twice as the hawsers picked up out of the crystal clear blue water. The propellers under the stern of her smaller Royal Navy consort churned up a sudden maelstrom and a few seconds later the hulk of HMS Torquay began to slide slowly – stern first – out into the open waters of the Grand Harbour.

It was six weeks and six days since the two-and-a-half thousand-ton modern anti-submarine frigate had been wrecked in the dry dock. A bomb had exploded in the water between her thin, unarmoured hull and the dock wall and the immensely amplified explosion had opened up her side like a giant can opener with a twenty feet long blade. HMS Torquay had capsized onto her beam ends in seconds and forty-seven men had died. Only the frigate's masts falling across the dockside had prevented her from turning turtle and probably killing twice as many men. It had taken three attempts to right the stricken ship; now, with her masts, her single forward turret, and most of her bridge superstructure removed she presented a sad, cut down, rusting spectacle. The miracle was that the ship had not broken her back when she sank, or subsequently at any point during the salvage operation; now there was vague talk of one day towing her back to England to restore her to her former glory.

Peter Calleja, Superintendent Under-Manager of the Senglea Admiralty Royal Dockyard did not think that was likely. A ship that had been so badly stressed as HMS Torquay was unlikely ever to be sound again unless she was rebuilt from the keel up. What sense did that make? The immediate plan was to tow the hulk around to Marsamxett and moor it beneath the ruins of Fort Manoel in Lazaretto Creek. The ship's fate would be decided another day. Today the priority was to clear the dry dock and to prepare it to receive the big ships he had been warned to expect in the next few weeks.

"I thought Sam would want to be here to see this, Papa," Peter Calleja's

younger son, Joseph said by way of a greeting as he approached his father. Father and son were alike in their features but the son took after his mother in build and in some respects, temperament. Where Peter was taller than average and sparsely built, Joe was stockier and would tend toward roundness in his middle years like his mother's Sicilian brothers. Samuel, his eldest son took after his father in both looks and frame, if not in his introspection and moodiness.

Peter Calleja tried not to scowl.

He had had to drop what he was doing and come down to the dockside to supervise the removal of HMS Torquay because Samuel had failed to report for work that morning. A second supervisor was also absent, although in his case he – or rather, his wife - had phoned in his apologies in advance. The poor fellow had chicken pox.

"Well, as you see," Peter Calleja grunted, "he's not here."

"I thought I was the unreliable one!" Joe chuckled.

His father gave him a withering look.

The son held up his hands.

"Okay, I'll find something useful to do!"

Peter Calleja watched his twenty-three-year-old younger son scamper away and despite himself, smiled; but only for a moment. It was completely out of character for his eldest son to fail to report for work. Especially, on a day like this! He began to pick his way along the dockside, pacing the frigate as it was slowly drawn out into the open waters of the Grand Harbour. The masters of the tugs knew their business; slowly but surely the ship glided out of the dry dock which had become her temporary coffin. As soon as HMS Torquay's bow cleared the dock gates she became somebody else's problem.

With a ship one could always, sooner or later, wash one's hands of all responsibility; not so with one's children. Marija had been more than a little *distracted* since she had learned Peter Christopher was likely to finally set foot on Malta; Joe, having regained his freedom had quickly reverted to his old awkward, cheeky, activist self; and in recent weeks Sam had been, well, a complete stranger not just to his family and his lovely young wife, Rosa, but to practically everybody.

A parent's work was never done!

Today he was worrying about Samuel; a few days ago, he had been worrying about Marija.

Last weekend Marija had asked to speak to him and they had walked down to the Sliema waterfront, sat awhile watching the activity on the salvage barge moored alongside the wreck of HMS Agincourt on the Manoel Island side of the Creek. Mostly, his daughter was unsettled and preoccupied with when, or if, Peter Christopher's ship would ever sail into the Grand Harbour. However, that was not her only *dilemma*. Dom Mintoff, the leader of the Maltese Labour Party and a former Prime Minister of the Archipelago in the 1950s had asked her to stand as a Member of Parliament in the next General Election, which was scheduled to happen as soon as May. Mintoff, whom Marija had regarded as an unwanted and overly confrontational advocate of her work with the Women of Malta movement, had indicated that she would almost certainly be elected because he planned to insure her name was at the top of the Labour Party's Candidate List. Marija, being Marija, was guilty about this because she instinctively hated being treated differently from anybody else. Moreover, she really was not very keen to be any more involved in politics than she already was and besides, how could she possibly make such a big decision without talking to Peter Christopher about it first?

Peter Calleja and Marija's mother did not know what they would do if – horror of horrors - when eventually the star-crossed pen-friends finally met face to face it transpired that they were not actually meant for each other after all...

Joe presented another kind of problem.

Now that peace had broken out he had thrown himself straight back into the Dockyard Workers' Committee and once again become one of its most rebellious and most stridently vocal proponents. With the ending of martial law across the Archipelago normal industrial relations had, problematically, been re-established in the dockyards. HMS Torquay would have been re-floated and moved out of her dry dock over a week ago had it not been for a series of maliciously timed, wildcat strikes and a resumption of the old pre-war malaise of individual workers downing tools and walking off site at the drop of a hat. Likewise, absenteeism rates in the yards had swiftly doubled and trebled in the last month much to the exasperation of the Admiralty Board that now oversaw the dockyards.

Peter Calleja had tried to explain to his younger son that if things went on this way that 'the British will sack you all and bring in their own people from England'. Joe had looked at him as if he was speaking double Dutch. His

son could not seem to understand that if the British decided that they could not afford to operate the docks as a social welfare scheme designed to support the wider Maltese economy, they would have little difficulty – and even less compunction - importing highly qualified men from their own bomb-blasted homeland and presumably, from elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Even Dom Mintoff and the other local politicians understood as much and had cautioned the unions – not just in the docks – against 'irresponsible actions' *everybody* might later regret.

Joe's mother thought her errant – favourite son – would settle down one day. All he needed was a good woman by his side, somebody who would keep his feet on the ground. Unfortunately, Joe was too busy rabble rousing and politicking in the yards to find time to court, let alone woo, a 'good woman'.

But today Peter Calleja was worrying about Samuel.

Sam had failed to report for work for the second successive day. That afternoon he planned to sign out a car from the Dockyard Pool and drive to the company house at Kalkara that Sam shared with his wife, Rosa. It was high time he and his eldest son had a man to man talk. The boy – even though his son was thirty-one he still thought of him as 'a boy' – needed to pull himself together. Ever since the October War Sam's moodiness had worsened, he had become less approachable, angrier. It had got so bad that Rosa's parents had spoken to Peter and asked him to speak to his son; lately, he had wondered if he ought to try to get Sam to talk to a psychiatrist. The 'boy', Sam, was behaving as if he was suffering the delayed effects of shell shock. Perhaps, recent events had reawakened old demons in Sam's head of the nightmare of the siege twenty years ago when Malta was the most heavily bombed place on Earth? Who knew? Who could possibly know?

HMS Torquay glided past with men on the deck standing by to start up her pumps or to handle new lines. Peter Calleja stared at the great, crudely welded patch over the catastrophic rent in the frigate's starboard flank which had transformed her from a finely tuned fighting machine, into to a wreck in a split second. The bomb had torn the ship open from the keel to her amidships main deck rail instantly flooding her engineering spaces.

He sighed a heartfelt sigh of relieve as the frigate's bows cleared the dock gates. He checked his watch. It was a little after noon - which meant that give or take a few minutes - the operation was on schedule.

A green flag waved at the seaward end of the dock.

Peter Calleja waited a few seconds and raising his right arm made a circling gesture to the man across the dock from him standing on the cab of an old Bedford lorry. More flags waved and as HMS Torquay was dragged out into the Grand Harbour the dock gates began to swing shut.

A good job well done!

In the end, leastways.

HMS Torquay was safely on her way to her temporary anchorage on the other side of Valletta in Marsamxett Harbour; and he could return to his office and get on with his paperwork. He looked around for the dock foremen who, in his son's absence, had done most of the work ensuring that this morning's work had gone so well. He was a man who made a point of letting his men know that he appreciated their efforts and always remembered men who had done him and the dockyards good service.

He turned away from dock at the exact moment the first dull explosion rolled down the glassy waters of French Creek. It sounded like the discharge of one of the ceremonial saluting guns on the bastions opposite the ruins of Fort St Angelo.

Except this explosion was muffled.

Instinctively Peter Calleja swung around.

It was probably some kind of trick of the eye – the mind trying to make sense of the impossible – but as he saw the expanding blast circles rippling away and the broken towing hawser whipping back over the stern of the small Royal Navy tug, there was a second eruption of dirty white water from beneath the area covered by the salvage weld over HMS Torquay's engine room. Water seemed to bloom outwards from the side of the ship for perhaps, thirty feet in a ball which collapsed as a smaller column of water rose and fell across the deck.

Peter Calleja later had no recollection of hearing the second detonation.

HMS Torquay lurched as if she had been punched amidships by a giant fist. It was impossible but she seemed to lift herself up in the water and then sag back down, except by then she was no longer a whole ship. Her back was broken, her bow digging down into the deep waters of the grand Harbour; her stern twisting away at an ever more impossible angle from the rest of the hull.

A single terrible gout of grey smoke blasted from her funnel and from

ventilation grills behind the bridge. The bow section stabilised in the water; the stern parted and began to fill, rudder and twin propellers rising slowly, gracefully above the surface as the wreck drifted into the middle of the Grand Harbour. Black smoke billowed from the stack of the big red and white decked Harbourmaster's Department tug as she took up the slack and began to drag the sinking stern section of the frigate into shallow water. But Peter Calleja knew it was too late.

He watched in horror as men threw themselves off the two wallowing, foundering halves of the doomed frigate.

Two explosions deep in the amidships spaces.

Sabotage...

Chapter 6

Thursday 16th January 1964
Royal Naval Dockyard, Gibraltar

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher was pleasantly surprised to encounter HMS Talavera's Master at Arms, Chief Petty Officer Neville 'Spider' McCann at the head of the gangway when he reported back onboard his old ship.

He had been even more surprised – no, astonished – to discover the large number of ships tied up alongside in the inner harbour and anchored out in Algeciras Bay. Talavera was one of perhaps a dozen destroyers and frigates, there were Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, tankers, ammunition and stores ships, a Tiger Class cruiser, and swinging on their anchors beyond the breakwater three aircraft carriers; the Hermes, the fleet carrier Victorious and the commando carrier Ocean. In the Reception Hall at the airfield – a much patched up building which had been targeted by Spanish Army mortars in the recent contretemps – he had encountered Canadians and Australians, several of whom were fliers, but mostly air force ground crew, fitters, riggers and engineers, all of whom were in transit to either Malta or Cyprus.

The diminutive veteran Chief Petty Officer with a broken nose and a ruddy, scarred complexion saluted grim-faced. Legend had it that CPO 'Spider' McCann had once been the Mediterranean Fleet's featherweight – or even its bantamweight - boxing champion.

"Permission to come aboard, Mister McCann," the younger man requested in the flat, formulaic way that became ingrained in every naval officer trying all the while to not smile like a Cheshire cat.

"Permission granted, sir!" Snapped the Master at Arms, his stern expression suddenly softening: "If I may say so, sir," he added, "it's bloody good to have you back onboard, sir!"

"Thank you, Mister McCann," HMS Talavera's new Executive Officer chuckled, reaching out to shake the older man's hand. This was a departure from the normal etiquette of these occasions but given what the two men had gone through a little over a month ago, such minor breaches of ancient

customary practice were occasionally permissible. "It is bloody good to be back!"

Spider McCann, the destroyer's senior non-commissioned officer – although technically junior to the greenest sub-lieutenant straight out of Dartmouth – had served with the Captain, David Penberthy, many years before this current posting, earning his unqualified respect and trust. When Peter had first reported to the ship in that now long ago age of reason before the World went mad, the ship's executive officer – Hugo Montgommery, sadly killed at the Battle of Finisterre - had warned him, only a little tongue-in-cheek, that 'there were only four people who have the *right* to give *the Master* a direct order; CPO McCann's wife, God, the Captain and on a very, very good day, *me*.' Hugo Montgommery had also told Peter that Spider McCann was pretty much the first man in Christendom he would want by his shoulder in a tight corner. Hugo Montgommery had been one of those executive officers who could be a perfect tartar when he needed to be but had been a good and firm friend of the ship's gizmo and gadget obsessed young EWO from day one. Peter missed his old friend, choked for a moment remembering the fine times he had had in the dead man's company.

"Peter!"

Miles Weiss, the destroyer's gunnery officer materialised out of thin air and began pumping his friend's hand before he remembered himself.

"Sorry. Welcome aboard, sir!"

"Good to be back, Guns," Peter Christopher laughed.

Lieutenant Miles Weiss was a dapper, lean man a year or so younger than his new Executive Officer. He was a bundle of restless energy who lived and breathed his work. Like Peter he was descended from a long line of naval officers and the two men had always shared a boyish, - childish, really – love of the marvellous, immensely expensive toys the Royal Navy had given them to 'play' with. Until the night of the October War neither of them had seriously anticipated having to fire a single shot in anger in their entire careers.

"We've done our best to tidy up the old girl but really, she needs six months in dockyard hands to get back to her old self," Talavera's Gunnery Officer, and in the absence of a more senior watch keeping officer, until that moment her stand in Executive Officer explained at a rush while the Master at Arms rolled his eyes. "The Captain is ashore at the moment," he went on,

“at some kind of big pow-wow at HQ.”

Peter Christopher had noted the thin grey plume of smoke rising from Talavera’s single funnel as he approached, walking past big grey warships old and new moored stem to stern along the quayside. Everywhere there was activity. Everywhere there were palettes stacked with ordinance, general stores, power and fuel lines snaking. Now he relished the almost imperceptible vibration under his feet and listened to the low thrum of the blowers.

“What have you done with that rascal Griffin?” Miles Weiss inquired, once again forgetting formalities in his delight to be reunited with his friend.

“CPO Griffin asked leave to look up a couple of ‘old muckers’ in Main Street.”

Spider McCann tried hard not to give his new Executive Officer a look which shouted: “Was that wise, sir?”

And failed.

“I told him if he wasn’t onboard in a couple of hours I’d have him on a charge,” Peter reassured the Master at Arms, the levity draining from his face. “I gather the ship has air search and range-finding radars up and working but no other EWO capabilities?” He asked, getting straight down to business.

“That’s the size of it, sir,” the Master at Arms confirmed.

“The main battery is fully operational,” Miles Weiss reported, before appending a crucial caveat to his initial, somewhat bald statement. “Unfortunately, until we get the director position sorted we’ve only got ‘local’ fire control. The good news is that engineering has its house in order. The Chief says he’s got everything in his department back up and running but obviously, we haven’t tried a high-speed run yet.”

Peter Christopher absorbed this news.

“Have we received replacements yet, Mister McCann?”

“We’re forty-three men light of war compliment, sir. We’ve still got half-a-dozens of Plymouth’s people on our roster but most of the other replacements don’t know port from starboard.”

“We inherited a few defaulters, too,” Miles Weiss snorted disgustedly.

HMS Talavera’s Executive Officer had taken a good, long look at the ship from a distance before coming down onto the dockside. The destroyer’s amidships deck houses were gone, her main mast – previously festooned with

sensors and aerials – had been replaced with a spindly, old-fashioned radio pole with a cross yard to string flags off. The stern deck house looked odd without the quadruple GWS 21 Sea Cat launcher, and the stern seemed positively naked without the Squid anti-submarine mortar. From afar one could not see the hastily welded patches over the countless ragged holes in the hull and the surviving superstructure, which was freshly covered with several coats of Navy grey paint. However, recollecting that the destroyer had been a barely floating wreck the last time he had seen her seven weeks ago – all things considered - she had brushed up nicely, he decided.

"How long was she in dry dock after she got here?" He asked.

"Eight days, sir," Miles Weiss told him. He had sobered somewhat, the initial excitement of the reunion passing. "We didn't have that many underwater holes but we had a couple of moderately deformed bottom plates just aft of the bridge; do you remember when we thought we'd grounded on that equinoctial spring tide in Fareham Creek?"

They had put divers in the water to check for damage but visibility in the Portsmouth anchorage was so bad that the Captain had called off the inspection after an hour or so. There had been no internal leaks, no significant seawater ingress into the engine room bilge, so it had not seemed worth risking lives any longer than necessary.

"The dockyard stripped out the port reduction gear," Miles Weiss said in a rush. "The Chief says they machined whatever they couldn't replace out of stores. We've turned the port shaft a few times at low revs while we've been moored but obviously, we won't know how good the repairs have been until we stretch our legs out at sea."

Peter Christopher nodded.

Right! I'm the ship's Executive Officer!

Stop messing around and get on with it!

Miles Weiss, who clearly was not reading his friend's mind, remembered another thing he had meant to tell the newcomer.

"Once we'd got that bloody bomb off the ship," he grinned. "That was a good job done, I can tell you! We got ourselves organised and recovered most of your gear from your cabin. It was a bit wet, obviously but we dried everything out. It is all stowed ship shape and Bristol fashion in your new cabin, sir."

Peter had come aboard with a change of uniform, his shaving kit and a

few miscellaneous toiletries, and a few papers – presently slung over his shoulder in a battered rucksack Jack griffin had found for him in Lisbon - and very little else to his name. He had not given a thought to his lost kit and personal effects for several weeks.

Other than the one recent portrait of Marija he thought he had lost the letter and photographs he had carried around with him ever since he had joined the Navy...

Today got better every minute!

"You can tell me all about how you got that five hundred-pounder over the side over a drink tonight, Guns," he declared, taking charge. "Mister McCann," he turned to the Master at Arms. "If you'd detail somebody to put my gear in my cabin, we'll inspect the ship now."

HMS Talavera's new Executive Officer spent most of the next two hours exhaustively 'inspecting' his old ship. The dockyard had made a good fist of papering over the cracks but technologically, the destroyer was a shadow of her former glory. Practically every trace of modernity had been ripped out of the aft half of the ship, ruined equipment had been ruthlessly removed, and where previously the ship had been a cramped warren of passageways she now seemed roomy, almost airy. Everywhere stank of paint and detergent, and even seven weeks later the occasional taint of burning assailed the nostrils; burning and the reek of bunker oil the deeper one descended into the bowels of the vessel.

Standing on the open bridge Peter looked down on the two twin 4.5-inch turrets of the main battery. The deck had been re-plated where the five-hundred-pound bomb had penetrated the fo'c's'le before lodging unexploded against the magazine bulkhead. He looked up as two Westland Wessex helicopters thrummed overhead to land on HMS Ocean, anchored out in Algeciras Bay. Closer inshore, tenders and tugs were clustering around HMS Hermes, which apparently had arrived around dawn that morning from Lisbon. Out in the Straits of Gibraltar the sleek grey silhouettes of the carrier's escorts stood out to sea. He wondered how the Spanish in the surrounding hills and across the other side of the Bay must feel about the concentration of so much naval power. Perhaps, they were belatedly asking themselves why they had been unwise stupid as to confront it; certainly, they would still be counting the high cost of their folly. Two Sea Vixens circled high over the fleet before swinging out over the sea.

“That’s the Lion, sir,” Spider McCann told the younger man, guessing where his eyes had focused. “The Blake sailed to join Tiger at Malta about a week ago.”

Peter studied the elegant lines of the modern cruiser. Like Talavera and her reconstructed sisters Tiger, Lion and Blake were new ships built on World War II vintage hulls, young ships notwithstanding they had been laid down in the middle of another war. Out in Algeciras Bay the three carriers were each as old. Hermes had been fifteen years in the building, HMS Victorious had still been young when antiquated Swordfish torpedo bombers had flown off her flight deck to attack the Bismarck in 1941, and even the Ocean, now converted to the role of a commando carrier operating only helicopters, was a Second World War build. Nevertheless, the fleet still presented an impressive spectacle.

Peace might have broken out but it did not feel like peace.

Returning aboard around dusk Captain David Penberthy was cheerfully preoccupied as he greeted his new Executive Officer. Over pink gins before dinner the two men fell straight back into the friendly, mutually respectful relationship cemented forever in those dreadful storms off Cape Finisterre when they had fought to save Talavera.

“The dockyard’s done us proud, Peter,” David Penberthy conceded. “But there’s only so much they can do for us. Basically, the kit we need to restore the old girl to her former fettle simply doesn’t exist. Apart that is, from in one place. Malta.”

Peter Christopher had held his breath.

“Right now, in Sliema Creek the salvage people are recovering everything that might conceivably be re-usable from the wreck of the Agincourt. Which is why, when the carriers sail we’ll be following them all the way to Valletta!”

HMS Victorious and HMS Ocean were to be the flagships of two battle groups, each with half-a-dozen screening destroyers and frigates and a fleet train of oilers, ammunition and stores ships. The Cunard liner Sylvannia would also accompany the fleet to Malta and remain in theatre as a troop transport and at need, a hospital ship after an initial spell moored in the Grand Harbour as an accommodation ship. The Sylvania was carrying eight hundred troops and several hundred skilled workers and their families, the latter to be relocated on the Maltese Archipelago.

David Penberthy wasted no time bringing his Executive Officer up to speed on the conference he had attended that afternoon.

“Once we’d all discovered most of us were off to Malta in the next few days, to be perfectly honest,” the Captain of HMS Talavera confessed, “the interesting part of the briefing was the lowdown on what else is going on in the World.”

“Oh, how so, sir?”

“The old country is now definitely being run by a blond bombshell who goes by the name of Margaret Thatcher,” David Penberthy sipped his gin. “Apparently, she was the Member of Parliament for Finchley before the war. Obviously, she isn’t any more because that part of Greater London doesn’t exist these days. Anyway, no sooner had the old Prime Minister been murdered in Washington by that mad woman...”

“Edna Zabriski,” Peter Christopher said helpfully.

“Quite. No sooner had the gun smoke in the Oval Office cleared than the Tories packed the aforementioned bomb bombshell off to see the Queen and her Majesty, in her wisdom, let her form a new government. We no longer serve the United Kingdom Interim Emergency Administration, as of the first day of this year of our Lord nineteen sixty-four we serve the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom. Oh, when she’s not around they call our new leader the ‘Angry Widow’.”

Peter Christopher chuckled, throwing his Commanding Officer a quizzical look.

“Because she says she’s got ‘a right to be angry about what’s happened’!”

“She’s got a point, sir.”

“Oh, absolutely. Anyway, you’ll have heard all that when you were on the Hermes, or out and about in flesh pots of Lisbon,” David Penberthy teased the younger man. “The thing that you won’t have heard is that the Angry Widow and her new Government have adopted what the top brass are calling the ‘Christopher Doctrine’.”

“The what?”

“While he was masterminding Operation Manna and confounding our cousins in the lost colonies,” David Penberthy grinned broadly, “your father, he whom we must all obey, and all that, the C-in-C of all forces in the Med, prepared a paper for the First Sea Lord on the subject of how the Home

Country and the Commonwealth ought to proceed in the changed circumstances of the post-October War World. Broadly speaking, he was advocating closer ties with any former colony that would entertain the same, and an unapologetically aggressive forward defence policy in *all* areas of vital national interest and above all, the maintaining of the sanctity of what we used to call, in the good old days, the trade routes of the Empire. Basically, what we have we hold and we befriend who we may. Back in Blighty the aforementioned blond bombshell it seems, has fully embraced the 'Christopher Doctrine'. Before she went off to Washington to put the Yanks right on one or two things she was travelling up and down the country preaching hope and promising a return to a land flowing with wine and honey if everybody rolled up their sleeves. Among her numerous 'policy initiatives' is a large-scale Government sponsored emigration scheme to send families out to sunnier climes. The civilian contingent coming out to Malta on the Sylvania is the first beneficiary of the scheme."

"Margaret Thatcher?" Peter Christopher mused aloud. "I think she was at Balmoral Castle with my father when those bastards tried to murder the Royal Family."

Try as he might the name *Margaret Thatcher* meant little to him. *Blond bombshell?* No, that could not be right. Even in this thoroughly messed up, topsy-turvey post-cataclysm universe surely the Queen of England would never, in a million years invite a 'blond bombshell' to form a Government!

Chapter 7

Friday 17th January 1964
Birkhall, Balmoral Estate, Scotland

"I hesitate to show you this, Margaret," Iain Macleod apologised, struggling to keep a straight face. Their car was driving through stands of tall conifers on a cold, misty Deeside morning. Every now and then they glimpsed fields, and grey hills through gaps in the forest. Ahead and behind the Prime Ministerial convoy Ferret armoured cars and trucks filled with heavily armed men of the Coldstream Guards rumbled through the idyllic Scottish landscape.

Margaret Thatcher glanced at the front page of the *Daily Mail*.

'*Boadicea Rides Again*!" She murmured in disgust.

In this particular incarnation a cartoon character clearly and unambiguously representing *her* was standing in a chariot. *She* held the reins in one hand while with her free arm she was wielding a large handbag, smiting the nation's foes. The bodies of *smitten* Roman legionnaires were flying in all directions.

"I do wish you'd have a strong word with some of these editors, Iain!" She complained.

The bespectacled man sitting in the front passenger seat of the aging Bentley twisted around and attempted to meet her eye.

"While the editors are generally on our side I'd be inclined to, er, take it on the chin, Prime Minister."

Margaret Thatcher viewed the forty-three-year-old newly appointed Home Secretary with measured exasperation. Roy Harris Jenkins might be the son of a Welsh coal miner but of all of James Callaghan's Labour Party nominations for high office in the Unity Administration, he was undoubtedly the most urbane and perspicacious. He might look like a country bank manager or solicitor but he had a mind which instantly grasped complexity and was not, like so many of the men who aspired to be members of her Administration, reluctant to confront the real dilemmas facing the nation. However, she could already appreciate why Roy Jenkins was not universally

admired or liked within his own Party. There was something overly earnest and academic about him that did not fit well with the necessities of political life. His thoughtfulness and introspection could too easily be interpreted for indecision, or for not knowing his own mind. His was a temperament perhaps better suited to academia.

Jenkins had been invited to join the UKIEA last spring; ill-health and a subsequent brush with the cholera epidemic which had swept through the English Midlands last summer had kept him on the side-lines until now. The sitting Member of Parliament for Birmingham Stechford, he had been one of the few politicians with the guts to debate, face to face, with Enoch Powell the immediate post-war constitutional settlement and the legal underpinnings of UKIEA and latterly, the new Unity Administration. This had already recommended Roy Jenkins to her newly formed inner circle of advisors; and when Jim Callaghan, the leader of his Party and the Deputy Prime Minister, had put his name forward for the Home Office, a department within the gift of her coalition partners, the Angry Widow had readily acceded.

The major posts in the Unity Administration had been split between the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Parties approximately in proportion to their respective shares of the popular vote at the last General Election in 1959; or would have been had the leader of the Liberal Party – which had received just under six percent of the vote – accepted the offer of the post of Secretary of State for Scotland.

“I really don’t care to be portrayed as some latter-day warrior queen, Mr Jenkins,” Margaret Thatcher retorted mildly.

Roy Jenkins had welcomed the Prime Minister and her party home at Prestwick on her return from the United States the previous evening, ahead of attending today’s ‘audience’ with the Queen.

“Well, so long as Mr Macleod is obsessed with creating a cult of personality around you, Prime Minister,” the Home Secretary said, threatening to smile before he turned his head away, “I suspect the denizens of Manchester’s Fleet Street will continue in this vein.”

Edward Heath’s regime had facilitated the re-incarnation of the major daily newspapers in Manchester; the faltering first steps in a half-hearted ‘normalisation of everyday life’ campaign. The *campaign* to restore a vibrant national press had been beginning to bear fruits by the time the first Operation Manna convoys reached home waters but shortages of newsprint

and ongoing problems with the nation's surviving transportation infrastructure had hamstrung everybody's best intentions.

One of Iain Macleod's priorities was the *full* restoration not only of a free press but a comprehensive nationwide restoration of radio and television services. This latter was going to require the removal of the existing Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation; a worthy, liberal-minded man - whose good intentions were invariably vocally and loquaciously expressed - who frankly, clearly lacked the ability to organise a beer tasting session in a brewery.

"Almost there!" He murmured as the convoy swing through the gates to the Royal residence.

For reasons of security the Queen greeted her visitors inside the reception hall of Birkhall, the early eighteenth house built by the Farquharson family and acquired by Prince Albert in 1849 as part of the Balmoral estate, ostensibly for the use of his eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales.

The first time she had been introduced to Queen Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas Queen, and Defender of the Faith, Margaret Thatcher had been a little surprised by how small she was; she had since learned that her Monarch's apparent lack of physical stature was more than compensated for by her steely resolve and her unquenchable sense of duty.

Neither the post-cataclysm United Kingdom Interim Emergency Administration, nor its more inclusive successor the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom, could have been brought into being or made to function in any meaningful way without bending the *unwritten* British constitution in hitherto untested ways; or without the kind permission of the Queen.

The UKIEA had been presented to her as a fait accompli; the UAUK – which Margaret Thatcher viewed as an abomination of an acronym but there was nothing she could do about that at the moment – had come into being with explicit Royal Ascent. Her Majesty had, however, suggested two modifications to existing practices. One, given that in the current circumstances no Prime Minister could claim an incontrovertible democratic mandate; that audiences with herself should be between the Prime Minister and senior representatives of *both* the main parties to the UAUK. Two, in the event that there was a failure to reach *a clear consensus* on a *major matter of policy* no decision should be taken *without the parties first consulting her*.

The Prime Minister and the rest of the UAUK served at 'Her Majesty's pleasure' and *Her Majesty*, in her capacity as the one remaining inalienable symbol of national identity and unity, while aloof from the rough and tumble of party politics, had no intention of being a purely symbolic hands off Head of State in a time of ongoing crisis unimagined by, and unimaginable to, the generations of constitutional lawyers who had slowly, surely over the march of centuries constructed the intricate fabric of the British constitution.

"You'll be looking forward to discovering what mischief the twins have been up to when you get back to Cheltenham?" The Queen put to her Prime Minister as soon as she had ushered her guests into the cluttered neo-Edwardian drawing room of the old house.

"Yes, your Majesty," the Angry Widow agreed. She had only met her Monarch face to face half-a-dozen times but already she felt a real emotional bond with and for the other woman. It helped immeasurably that they were of an age – she was thirty-eight and the Queen only a few months younger – and that they had been brought together by unthinkable disasters. "I gather Prince Philip's recovery continues apace?"

"Oh, indeed," her host said, forcing a brave smile. "His doctors tell me it will be at least another fortnight before we can bring him home. I'm having one of the ground floor rooms – the billiard room – somewhat knocked about to accommodate him. He won't be walking again for some weeks or months, I fear."

After the attack on Balmoral the Queen's husband, Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh had almost died on the operating table. Later, doctors had warned that they might need to amputate his right leg above the knee. Now at last the patient was on the long road to recovery. Prince Andrew, the Queen's three-year-old youngest son had been killed in the attack on Balmoral less than two months ago; but the Monarch's grief was her own, private affair.

"Charles and Anne visit their father every few days," the Queen continued, brightening a little as she spoke the names of her surviving children, "I think that cheers him up as much as anything. Oh, and Sir Julian's missives from the Mediterranean never fail to perk him up somewhat, too." The small woman with the direct, unfussy gaze met her Prime Minister's eye. "As I am sure Sir Julian's dispatches cheer us all in these testing times."

Margaret Thatcher momentarily lowered her eyes.

“Yes, indeed, Ma’am.”

The Queen and her three guests seated themselves. The politicians waited for a sign to formally begin the audience.

“I have read with interest the papers you kindly forwarded to me last evening,” the small, calm woman who was probably the only reason the nation had not completely fractured in the last year prefaced. “I concur entirely with your views, Prime Minister, and look forward the welcoming the new United States Ambassador. I will be happy to entertain Ambassador Brenckmann, his wife and Secretary of State Fulbright when they arrive in the United Kingdom. Like you, I think the prompt re-establishment of ‘business as usual’ with our American allies is an essential first step to restoring some kind of coherent World order. After I have spoken with Ambassador Brenckmann and Mr Fulbright perhaps we should compare notes?”

This last remark was said with a ghost of a smile playing on the Queen’s lips. She had privately confided to her new Prime Minister that she had no intention of ‘dragging the monarchy back to the age of Victoria and Albert’ when Prime Ministers danced around Royal Prerogatives, never quite convinced they were not completely wasting their time. Her role in the governance of *her* Realm had been temporarily modified of necessity; but there would be no question of her *ever* dabbling in politics.

The Queen fixed her latest Home Secretary in her sights.

“I hear that your speech at the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow was well received last night, Mr Jenkins?”

“Thank you, Ma’am.” Strangely, the son of a Welsh coal miner was much more relaxed in his sovereign’s presence that either of his colleagues, both of whom were more accustomed to the setting that he found himself in on that cold January morning. “It was an interesting experience being the ‘warm-up’ act for my Right Honourable colleague.”

“You went down very well,” Margaret Thatcher interjected. While she was enormously bolstered by the near rapturous reception she received every time she spoke in public it was also a little unnerving. She was not doing anything special and as yet, she had achieved nothing concrete in her short premiership except succeeding in splitting her own Party down the middle. She felt a fraud; everywhere she went she was being feted to the rafters and

she did not begin to understand why.

"It is good of you to say so, Prime Minister."

The Queen switched her attention back to Margaret Thatcher.

"Am I right in thinking the Dreadnought incident is still an issue of contention with the Americans?"

"Yes, Ma'am. The vessel is in Gibraltar at this time. The Flag Officer Submarines is satisfied with Commander Collingwood's After-Action Report and the outcomes of the subsequent interviews carried out in Gibraltar with the submarine's senior officers. The First Sea Lord has indicated to me that he sees no need for a formal Board of Inquiry. The United States House of Representatives plans, of course, to appoint a 'Commission' to investigate the loss of the USS Scorpion. I have made it clear to President Kennedy that there are no circumstances under which I will allow Commander Collingwood, or any of his officers to testify to the this – most likely quasi political-judicial - 'Commission' on the soil of the United States."

The Queen nodded her satisfaction.

She changed the subject.

"I believe a preliminary digest of the reports of the survey teams sent into the areas which suffered the greatest damage in the war is now available?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Roy Jenkins confirmed. "I have prepared several papers for your perusal in this respect but if I may, I will jump straight to the, er, 'headlines'."

"By all means, Home Secretary."

Roy Jenkins collected his thoughts for a moment, brushing a hand over his balding pate and adjusting his horn-rimmed glasses. He had brought notes with him, more as a prop than an aide-memoire. He was a man well used to ordering his ideas and meticulously planning their concise, unambiguous expression.

"Radioactive contamination remains at potentially dangerously high levels only in the immediate vicinity of the sites of ground blast strikes. Two of these sites are in East Anglia, the others are in the approximate areas where the towns of Chatham and Gravesend used to be. Elsewhere, it was possible for survey teams to complete provisional expeditions across and within the most badly damaged areas. There were several incidents where survey team members were accosted by people living in or bordering the survey areas. Most of these incidents involved people mistaking team

members for ‘bandits’ on ‘sorties’ out of damaged areas stealing food or attempting to enlarge their ‘territories’. Shots were fired on only two occasions but nobody was injured. However, it has been a generally successful exercise and the results are not by any means uniformly discouraging. It is our conclusion that although our initial casualty estimates were broadly correct, it is clear that a significant number of people initially survived in out-lying bombed areas and have subsequently moved back into the partially devastated areas.”

Nobody said anything.

Margaret Thatcher and Iain Macleod had devoured the reports from the Royal Engineer survey parties, and last night they had discussed the implications in detail until the small hours of the morning.

“Moreover,” the Home Secretary continued, the River Thames is navigable by sea going vessels to Tower Bridge, and beyond by smaller craft all the way up to the first weirs at Teddington. All the major bridges over the River Thames are intact and although there are merchantmen, barges and lighters derelict and sunk or grounded at the quays of many of the major London docks the greatest damage is to the buildings surrounding and adjacent to them, and of course to the transportation and communications infrastructure. In this latter regard, the indications are that many, perhaps most of the capital below ground – that is sewers, cableways, passages and many basements and vaults, not to mention much of the tube railways system, although now flooded in Central London – survived the bombing more or less intact. This is important because it means theoretically that, for example, if we put our minds to it the London docks could be restored to full use within a matter of months.”

“What of the rest of the capital?” The Queen asked flatly.

“The survey teams estimate the epicentres of the four major strikes – which they now provisionally assess as being in the range of three hundred thousand kilotons to somewhere slightly in excess of one megaton, as being Dagenham, Bexley, Barnet and Harrow. The south-eastern quarter of the Greater London Area therefore suffered the least catastrophic damage, and a large number of major buildings are still standing in the centre of the capital including the shell of the Houses of Parliament, albeit severely knocked about...”

Chapter 8

Saturday 18th January 1964
17 Bay Street West, Kalkara, Malta

Lieutenant Jim Siddall, formerly a staff sergeant in the Royal Military Police but for last seven weeks a brevetted officer on the personal staff of Vice Admiral Sir Julian Wemyss Christopher, the Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean, parked his Land Rover across the road from the neat, sandstone Admiralty Dockyard company house. The former Redcap did not think he would ever get used to the Maltese winter – balmy January days with a warm sun overhead between the showers – but every time he remembered winter in England he inwardly chuckled with smug complacency. Yes, this was the life. Whoever would have thought that one day Mr and Mrs Siddall's tearaway good for nothing son would be a Political Intelligence Officer on the staff of the most powerful and famous British field commander since Montgomery of Alamein?

It was a funny old World...

He had been in a good mood ever since Marija Calleja's had knocked unannounced on the door of his pokey office beneath the ramparts of the old citadel walls of Mdina, after walking the short distance from St Catherine's Hospital for Women, situated on the other side of the Cathedral around which so much of the inner fortress was built.

'I am sorry to trouble you, Jim,' she had apologised but the soldier had not been in the least incommoded. It was her first visit to his bolt hole and he had been boyishly pleased to see her. 'My mother is in a state,' she had explained, a little embarrassed. 'My sister-in-law, Rosa, my brother Samuel's wife, called on her in Sliema last night and well,' Marija had shrugged, 'she is very *worried*.'

The pale blue of her auxiliary nurse's uniform suited the young woman's slender figure and almond, questing eyes. Her long nutmeg brown hair had been clipped back, and her delicate hands were restless.

'Nobody has seen Sam since Wednesday afternoon. What with what happened to HMS Torquay, Rosa is beside herself...'

Jim Siddall had persuaded his visitor to sit down and offered her a cup of tea.

'No thank you...'

The soldier had not had to think very hard about what to do next.

'How can I help?' He had asked.

As he had escorted her out of his office Marija had pecked his cheek and he had felt like he was nine feet tall. He still felt at least eight feet tall as he stepped out of the Land Rover and straightened his uniform. The C-in-C ran a tight ship, he liked his HQ to run like clockwork and he was a stickler when it came to uniforms.

Jim Siddall had always taken pride in his appearance and the crispness of his uniform; he still painstakingly bulled his own shoes each morning before he reported for duty. He had fitted like a well-oiled cog into the HQ machine and already made a number of new friends in the Officers' Mess. The C-in-C expected his staff to work 'as a team' and made it crystal clear that 'everybody had to get on with each other' or he would 'know the reason why'.

And now Marija Calleja had come to him asked him for help.

Life was good.

Rosa Calleja had been crying. She was a pretty girl of about Marija's age, a little shorter by an inch or two and fuller-figured with auburn hair and grey-green eyes filled with trouble. She was dressed in a long frock drawn in tightly at her waist, the hem of which danced around her tanned calves. She wore a silver chain with a crucifix pendent. She fingered her wedding ring as she eyed the big man on her doorstep.

"Lieutenant Siddall," the man introduced himself, at pains not to sound like the military policeman he had been for most of his decade-and-a-half in the British Army.

"Ah, Marija's friend," the woman on the doorstep sniffed, on the verge of a flood of new tears.

The tall former Redcap heard himself being referred to as 'Marija's friend' and was so distracted that he hardly registered anything else for several seconds.

"Er, I am on the C-in-C's staff," he explained lamely. "Marija asked if I could make discreet inquiries. Er, to ascertain your husband's whereabouts without causing a stir..."

“He goes off some nights,” the worried wife blurted. “I don’t know where he goes. But he’s never been gone this long without saying something...”

“Perhaps, if we talked inside?” Jim Siddall suggested, knowing how most neighbours usually had their gossip antennae specifically attuned to exactly this kind of conversation between a tearful spouse and a representative of the authorities.

Inside the small, cool simply furnished company house it was very quiet. Maltese houses tended to have thick walls, were rarely more than two storeys high and had wooden shutters on south-facing windows to keep out the heat by day. The Calleja’s residence was one of the better company houses, relatively new – post 1945 – with internal bathroom facilities, a small reception room and kitchen on the ground floor, and presumably at least two bedrooms upstairs. Marija had once mentioned that her father was entitled to a similar house – possibly a little grander – but that her mother was fond of the apartment in Sliema, so, as in most things, her father had deferred to his wife’s wishes. Maltese civil society was doggedly Catholic; right up until the moment one scratched beneath the surface crust and discovered that in just as many ways it was positively matriarchal.

Jim Siddall had chortled to himself when he had first heard that back home the old country had acquired its first female Prime Minister. A blond bombshell side by side with the Queen running the show! The new woman – whose name eluded him for the moment – and her Majesty could hardly make a worst fist of things than the old men who had gone before them. From the pictures he had glimpsed on the cover of the *Times of Malta* the new woman, Margaret something or other, was certainly a *looker*. Everybody in the Mess at Mdina was agreed on that if not a lot else about the new regime in England. Like military men anywhere and at any time in history, they were more interested in the facts on the ground than talk of a new World in the morning. If the ‘blond bombshell’ meant to give them the tools to do whatever she ordered them to do, then all well and good. Otherwise, what had really changed?

“I am forgetting my manners,” Rosa Calleja apologised. “I should offer you a cup of tea. It is very kind of you to come all the way around the island to visit me.”

Presently, the frightened wife and the soldier sat across from each other

at the small kitchen table.

"Sam, your husband, doesn't usually absent himself in this way?"

"No. Never like this or for so long. He goes off all the time. He hates to be around the house. Either he locks himself in his workshop or he goes off in his car but he always tells me when he expects to be back and he's usually not more than an hour or two late."

"A workshop?" Jim Siddall asked gently, knowing better than to badger the woman. His judgement was that she was so worried that she would tell him absolutely everything she knew in her own time whatever he said or asked.

"There are three old Nissen huts at the end of the road behind the houses. I think they were Messes for the crews of the anti-aircraft batteries guarding the approaches to Fort Rinella and the Grand Harbour during the Second War. Sam rents the one nearest the house. He likes playing with old motor bikes. He had an old Triumph when we first met. He always wanted to take me places on it but he rode like a madman and I was too scared..."

"Has he friends he stays with?"

"Sam has no friends," the wife complained. "No, that's not true. He was friendly with a couple of guys who were killed when that ship was bombed in the dock. He was very bitter about that but I thought he had got over it."

"What about you?" The former Redcap asked innocently.

"My friends are in Valletta and Rabat. They don't like to come all the way to Kalkara when Sam is at home."

"Husband's with demanding jobs often like to be quiet when they are at home," the man countered, testing the young woman's mood.

Rosa Calleja huffed irritably.

The man followed up: "Are you and Sam happy together?"

The young woman blushed deeply and looked away.

"Yes! Who says we are not?"

"I used to be a policeman," Jim Siddall confessed, guessing this would not be news to Rosa Calleja who had struck him as being an intelligent, probably very well-informed young woman. "If I am to help you find Sam then I need to know about your life together. I need to know if there is any reason he might suddenly do a disappearing act?"

The woman folded her arms across her breasts as if she was cold.

"Our marriage was a sham. After the night of the war my husband found

me physically repugnant to him. We hardly talked, and then we didn't talk at all. I still love him, but..."

Jim Siddall was suddenly getting a very bad feeling; and it immediately began to gnaw at his gut.

Wrongness shouted at him.

"Have you looked in at his workshop in the last day or so?"

"No." The woman shook her head vehemently. "He hates me going anywhere near it."

"You mentioned a car?"

"He sometimes comes home with a company car; some dreadful noisy dirty thing from the car pool at the Dockyard Head office at Senglea."

"Has anybody from Dockyard Security visited you yet?"

Rosa Calleja shook her head.

"No, my friends," she shrugged, realised she was not making any sense and explained, "the other wives in the houses in the street, they say the police are interviewing everybody in the docks first. Nobody has been out here yet."

"I was told that Sam wasn't interested in politics?"

"I think that was why he fell out with his brother. Joseph is very active in the docks." Rosa did not entirely approve of that. "He was very angry when Marija got involved with the Women of Malta." She really, really did not approve of her sister-in-law's notoriety. "People from the Internal Security Department interviewed him several times about that. I think they sent him to talk to her once, maybe twice. Of course, the Heroine of Birgu – Vittoriosa as you English say - wouldn't listen to a word he said. Marija and her precious *principles*!"

Jim Siddall paused to collect his thoughts.

Nobody had told him that goons from the notorious, now disbanded ISD had tried to apply pressure to Sam Calleja in a back-door attempt to undermine the Women of Malta movement.

"Who else visited Sam last year?" He inquired, not really expecting to learn anything new.

"A British naval officer with a scarred head visited me one day last November." She squeezed her eyes shut trying to remember his name. "A Commander McNeill. He was a very charming man. Very well-spoken. I was a little surprised when Sam arrived home just afterwards. It was all very

strange. They went off for a walk together and I never saw the Commander again. He and Sam shook hands out in the road when they came back from wherever they had been and Commander McNeill drove away. His driver was a blond lady. Funny, I'd forgotten all about that until you asked me that question..."

"That is often the way. One's memory is a funny thing."

"You were a policeman?"

Jim Siddall nodded.

"Not all policemen have loud voices and a big stick, Mrs Calleja." He came to a decision. Before he tried to encapsulate his 'bad feeling' about the situation in a report to the Dockyard Security people, he would have a little nose around. Just to see if there was anything obvious to be found. He would leave the house to the experts; spare Rosa Calleja that shame a little longer. "Do you mind if I have a little look around Sam's workshop. You never know, there might be a clue to where he is in there amongst his motor bike stuff. In my experience, there's often a completely innocent explanation for most apparently mysterious disappearances."

In this case he did not think that was remotely likely but it was not his job to put the fear of god into a young woman who was already worried very nearly out of her mind.

It transpired that Sam Calleja carried the only key to the padlocked workshop with him at all times. Jim Siddall returned to his Land Rover and retrieved a tyre iron.

The three old Nissen huts were slowly bleaching in the Mediterranean sun.

The company houses were at the top of the settlement of Kalkara. Narrow streets and picturesque old houses filled the ground sloping down towards the blue waters of the Kalkara Creek. Beyond the Nissen huts the Mediterranean was hazy as distant rain clouds drifted south.

Sam Calleja's 'workshop' was the only one which was padlocked. The adjoining huts looked empty and unused, on the farthest the door hung off broken hinges.

"The local kids play around here all the time," Rosa said, walking away to peer into the dark inside of the hut with the open door.

"I should think this whole island is a paradise for kids," the big former Redcap chuckled as he carefully jammed the crowbar into the door jam. The

padlock looked new and formidable so he had determined to have the door off its fragile, rusty hinges rather than try to break the lock.

Satisfied he had worked the lever far enough into the space beneath the upper of hinge, Jim Siddall took a deep breath, and applied pressure. At first there was a groaning of dry wood, then a splintering.

And a soft metallic click.

And then the Nissen hut exploded.

Chapter 9

Saturday 18th January 1964
Camp David, Thurmont, Maryland

James William Fulbright, the fifty-eight-year-old Missouri-born Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations had been appointed as the late Dean Rusk's replacement as Secretary of State on Christmas Eve 1963. He was an impressive man physically, intellectually and politically, a man of conviction and surprisingly, contrary views. Many people believed that if President Kennedy had had the nerve to install him at the State Department in the spring of 1961; things would have turned out differently when the Soviets tried to base ICBMs on Cuba. However, that was hindsight and Fulbright was not a man who lived in the past. Which was the main reason he had summoned Walter Brenckmann back to America – delaying his taking up his new role in Oxford by another few days - and cordially requested the new British Ambassador, Lord Franks, to an 'at home' weekend with him at Naval Support Facility Thurmond, more popularly known to the man in the street as 'Camp David'.

Camp David had been the official country bolthole of Presidents of the United States of America since 1942. Situated some sixty miles north west of Washington DC in the Catoctin Mountains, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had called it the USS Shangri-La – allegedly because the base was run by the Navy and it put him in mind of the mythical Himalayan paradise described by British author James Hilton in his 1933 novel 'Lost Horizon' – but it was Dwight Eisenhower who had set the name 'Camp David' in stone during his Presidency in the 1950s. Protected with missionary zeal by the Marine Corps, Camp David was the one place in America where the new Secretary of State knew for a fact that he had an even chance of conducting a *private conversation* with the two men whom he believed might – at this moment – have the fate of the World in their hands.

Fulbright understood why Jack Kennedy had not nominated him as Secretary of State back in the fall of 1960 in the heady days after his photo-finish election race with Richard Nixon. Nixon had actually carried three

more states than Kennedy; and only lost the popular vote by a little over one hundred thousand of the sixty-eight million cast. The race had been far too close for comfort and the new Administration had wanted to avoid courting controversy.

Fulbright was a Southern Democrat and proud of it, and his unshakable commitment to multilateralism – no matter that it accorded with the President's own personal internationalism – would have sat much more comfortably with the expressed foreign policy agenda of a Nixon Administration. Notwithstanding, Fulbright was not a man inclined to waste time chewing over past slights, setbacks or mistakes. Now was his moment and he intended to seize it.

The new Secretary of State had been the junior United States Senator for Arkansas since January 1945, a member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from 1949, and its Chairman for the last four years. He was also a convinced segregationist – in retrospect probably the clinching argument that had handed Dean Rusk his seat at the top table in 1961 – who was also, famously, the only member of the Senate to have voted *against* a 1954 appropriation for Joseph McCarthy's *Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, under the purview of which McCarthy's unholy inquisition against alleged *Un-American Activities* was pursued. A former Rhodes scholar and attorney who had been admitted to the bar in Washington DC in 1934, he had gone into politics while he was lecturing in law at the University of Arkansas, first being elected to Congress in 1942. He was exactly the sort of independently minded and motivated political animal that was incomprehensible to many non-Americans. To an outsider his liberal multilateralism and opposition to right-wing anti-libertarian dogma, or any trammelling of existing civil liberties by the government sat diametrically opposed to – and was apparently irreconcilable with - his trenchantly avowed segregationist position, and the gusto with which he had helped filibuster, for example, the 1957 Civil Rights Act. Only in America could a man have made his mark sponsoring a program - the Fulbright Program in 1946 - providing for educational grants in overseas countries to promote understanding between the United States and those countries; yet a few years later vehemently object to the Supreme Court's decision in the 1954 Brown v Board of Education case, whereby Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren had ruled that Kansas's State-sanctioned segregation of public schools amounted

to a violation of the 14th amendment and was therefore unconstitutional.

Only in a country as big and as diverse as America could a man like William Fulbright have prospered, and eventually, albeit by default, become the safe pair of hands into which his President had belatedly entrusted the Unites States' self-evidently bankrupt foreign policy.

Outside several inches of fresh overnight snow carpeted the wooded slopes of the Catoctin Mountains as the 'conference' began. The Secretary of State was still trying to get a handle on Walter Brenckmann, the obscure US Navy captain who had tried to sound the alarm bell before the recent near-catastrophic breach in Anglo-American relations, whom Bobby Kennedy had – pretty much single-handedly - persuaded the President to appoint as the new Ambassador to the Court of Balmoral. Fulbright was not one of those men who resented or saw the President's younger brother as some kind of impediment to good governance. The Attorney General had emerged wiser from the recent farrago; and for the first time he could envisage the younger sibling as a genuine Presidential contender in say, ten years' time. But that was for the future and the pressing problem was the here and the now.

Walter Brenckmann did not immediately stand out in a crowd. He was of average height, a year or two shy of Fulbright's age and greying. His voice was confident, and he gave a man a long, contemplative stare, unblinking while he was in conversation. His wife was a little older, very grey, and slim without being wiry. Clearly, she was one of those calm, pragmatic women who were behind most happy families and most successful men. Walter Brenckmann had stipulated that if the President wanted him to go abroad again in the service of his country then it would be 'as a team with my wife'. Basically, before the October War the Brenckmann's had been planning to retire to Florida and if they could not do that, they would at least be together for what remained of their declining years.

Walter Brenckmann was not *just* the guy who had warned the State Department that the 'special relationship' had fallen into disrepair and become a ticking time bomb; if he had not tackled that mad woman in the Oval Office the President and half his Administration might have been killed. One way and another, the former Naval Attaché had a lot of credit in the bank. If he wanted his wife in on this 'conference', that was okay.

Oliver, as Lord Franks, the fifty-eight-year-old new British Ambassador insisted on being called had instantly established a rapport with the

Massachusetts home-maker as they sat next to each other in comfortable chairs around the fire in the Main Lodge. For her part, Joanne Brenckmann was clearly charmed by the suave, scholarly Englishman.

"I should start by thanking you," Fulbright declared, bringing the informal session to order as he fixed Oliver Franks in his sights, "for the dossier of information regarding the state of former US Bases in the United Kingdom and the detailed inventory regarding the disposition of munitions and recoverable war stores."

The British Ambassador smiled. He had been as surprised as his American hosts to receive abstracts of the same survey reports and damage assessments recently compiled for the Unity Administration at home only days, in some cases, hours, after they had been submitted to his sponsors in England.

"When Mrs Thatcher makes a promise she keeps it, Bill," he re-joined, pursing his lips for a moment. "I confess," he smiled, "the lady is something of a revelation to us all."

Joanne Brenckmann cleared her throat.

"Is it really true that she's cheered everywhere she goes, Oliver?"

"Oh, yes. I think she's struck a chord with our people in the United Kingdom. She's like a real breath of fresh air."

"Is she really a blond?"

Lord Franks chuckled.

"No, dear lady," he shook his head. "Although, in a certain light..."

Walter Brenckmann entered the fray.

"Actually, she's very new to all this which means she's got none of the pre-war baggage, and hardly any of the guilt of many of her closest senior advisers. She was just a Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Pensions, a relatively very junior member of the Government before the war. Albeit I believe she was the youngest woman ever to be appointed to such a post, and the first Member of Parliament among those elected in the 1959 election to be so promoted. This 'Angry Widow' thing plays incredibly well with the people in England because it chimes with the common experience of, well, *everybody* over there in a way that even now, I don't think a lot of Americans understand."

He looked to Lord Franks.

The Englishman nodded sagely.

“I think you’re right, Walter. Although, obviously, you’d be a better judge of the mood of the American people than I.”

The Secretary of State listened thoughtfully to the brief interchange.

“Our two countries have signed up to a lot of good intentions,” he said to the British Ambassador. “In good faith; between ourselves we can agree on that much, I hope.” Nobody demurred. “Moreover, the President has issued Executive Orders, realistically, to the limit of his powers to make good on several of his promises.”

Grain ships and tankers had already set sail from Gulf and east Coast ports bound for the United Kingdom. Badly needed pharmaceuticals including stockpiled antibiotics had been flown across the North Atlantic but it was only a start and they all knew it.

Fulbright went on.

“We’ve got problems of our own that we need to address before we can talk about re-integrating our militaries, for example.” This was an understatement of monumental proportions. As they spoke a root and branch *purge* – there was no other word for it than ‘purge’ – was being jointly conducted by the FBI, the National Security Council, and the Secret Service of the senior command of the US Atlantic Fleet, what remained of the Air Force Department, and of at least eight State National Guard Divisions.

The Department of Defence was not, and would not be for some time, in any position to categorically declare that the nation’s military was wholly under the command and control of the President of the United States of America. The new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Curtis LeMay – the man who was more than any other responsible for putting down the insurgency and winning the Battle of Washington – was roaring around the North American continent ruthlessly restoring a particularly rough and ready form of absolute ‘command and control’. Without LeMay nobody knew what would have become of the country in recent weeks. The man was a genuine all-American hero.

“Which means,” Fulbright apologised to the British Ambassador, “in the event of a crisis in the United Kingdom’s sphere of influence,” essentially Western Europe and the Mediterranean, “at this time I cannot foresee the United States being in any position to offer more than symbolic military assistance in the foreseeable future.”

“I think that is understood in England,” Oliver Franks said sombrely. “I

think most of the uncertainties in this area revolve around the, er, elephant in the room."

"Which elephant would that be?" Joanne Brenckmann queried, raising her coffee cup to her lips.

"Red Dawn," he husband murmured.

"I understood this Red Dawn thing had shot its bolt?" The wife queried.

"In America, for the moment, perhaps," Walter Brenckmann reassured her.

"There are many areas of the World which remain complete blind spots to both the CIA and to British Intelligence," the Secretary of State explained. A part of him was questioning why he was about to divulge his country's most secret intelligence to a housewife from Cambridge, Massachusetts who had never even held a Government job; the other part of him reflected that in this new World so brutally burned out of the old, such oddities constituted the 'new normal' of 'business as usual'. "There are indications that Red Dawn may have subverted what before the October War was Turkey and areas of neighbouring countries. It is unclear whether Red Dawn will target the Balkans and perhaps, Italy, or strike south into the Middle East. Frankly, we have no idea what real military clout Red Dawn may have accumulated, how many people have been persuaded to side with it or even if the populations of the areas in which it may – and I emphasise the clause 'the areas in which it *may*' – be operating have already been assimilated into its foul movement. Our British 'allies' have informed us that they are doing what they can to reinforce their existing forces in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean. Currently, a relatively small combined air, sea and land force has re-secured control of the island of Cyprus. This will be crucial if Red Dawn strikes into the Levant, Lebanon, Syria, or Iraq because a base in Cyprus will allow us to fly in supplies and to operate aircraft in support of Israel and Jordan, the only two inherently sympathetic coherent military powers in that region." Realising he was extemporising more than he had intended the Secretary of State paused to draw breath and to collect his thoughts.

"Oh," Joanne Brenckmann murmured. "You really think a war in the Mediterranean or the Middle East is inevitable?"

Her husband sighed; as always, his wife had cut through the hyperbole to the nub of the matter and voiced the nightmare of both the American and British governments.

“Not inevitable,” the Secretary of State parried. “But possible. Light munitions and other military stores are being sent on every aircraft and ship bound for the United Kingdom. Normally, there would be an Airborne Division of a Marine Expeditionary Force ready for mobilisation and transportation abroad at two to four weeks’ notice; presently, those forces are deployed on policing duties at home. Most of Strategic Air Command is locked down. The Atlantic Fleet is either mothballed or effectively unemployable. Basically, the Federal Government can’t risk a new general mobilization of forces until the internal security situation has been resolved. We don’t know if there will be another war. If it doesn’t happen for six months or a year we might be in a good place to fight it. If it happens before then,” he shrugged, quirking an apologetic grimace in Oliver Franks’s direction, “I’m afraid our British friends may be on their own.”

Chapter 10

Monday 20th January 1964
Government Buildings, Cheltenham, England

The Prime Minister had been at her desk since six o'clock that morning and now, nearly five hours later, she showed no signs of flagging. Sir Henry Tomlinson, the head of the Home Civil Service and Secretary to the Cabinet knocked lightly at his mistress's open door.

Margaret Thatcher looked up for a moment.

"Come in, Sir Henry," she said in that friendly soprano she seemed capable of finding no matter what the time of day, or how tired she was feeling. She finished reading the paper on her desk, initialled the bottom of the page and looked up, again.

"The Cabinet awaits, Prime Minister," the eminence grise of the Unity Administration reminded her with a half-smile. "Forgive me, but as we've discussed, you really do need a private secretary."

The Angry Widow viewed him with the briefest flicker of exasperation.

Peter Thorneycroft, her recently re-appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer had told her the same thing about an hour ago. *Chancellor of the Exchequer*, that almost made it sound like her Government had something like a pre-war Treasury rather than stacks of hurriedly printed, virtually valueless paper currency and a mile-high pile of 'I owe yous' that it was never going to repay in a million years. The post of Chancellor might still be a non-sequitur but one day, hopefully soon, it might mean something again. Sometimes that was the real beauty of giving a thing a proper name.

"You'll be glad to hear that Lady Patricia has laid on tea and light refreshments," the Cabinet Secretary declared.

Lady Patricia, the wife of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Thomas 'Tom' Harding-Grayson, had accompanied the 'peace mission' to Washington DC and had made herself indispensable to Margaret Thatcher as a non-political feminine confidante, dresser, and general pressure release valve. She had also proved diplomatically adroit at keeping all the people the Prime Minister did not need to see at arm's length.

“That’s most considerate of her,” the Prime Minister declared, picking up her handbag and following her Cabinet Secretary out into the long cold first floor corridor of the draughty old mansion that accommodated what passed for the seat of Government of their sorely abused land.

Before the war the Cabinet had comprised twenty-one ministers. Edward Heath had attempted to mimic this in his UKIEA; Margaret Thatcher had resolved that a Cabinet of no more than twelve members including the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, currently the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir David Luce, was sufficient in the present circumstances. Of the eleven other members of her Cabinet, the Foreign Secretary was a political appointment with no Party affiliation, and of the other ten members six were drawn from the Conservative and Unionist Party of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, and four from the Labour and Co-operative Party.

The Prime Minister headed the Conservatives who included in their number the Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir Basil Brooke, who had elected not to attend this Cabinet conclave due to the fluidity of events in Ulster. In this case ‘fluidity’ was a thinly-veiled euphemism describing the near civil war that was tying down over twenty thousand British troops badly needed in the Mediterranean. However, Northern Ireland was a canker that was going to have to wait for another time; likewise, the disgraceful behaviour of the Government of the Republic in Dublin in at best tacitly, and at worst, deliberately inflaming the sectarian tensions at play in the north.

The other Conservative Party ministers around the oval table were: William Whitelaw, the forty-five year old Member of Parliament for Penrith and the Border, at Defence; Peter Thorneycroft reinstated in the post he had held for several years in the 1950s at the Treasury; Airey Neave at Supply, which now also oversaw Transportation; Iain Macleod at the Ministry of Information; and holding down the Scottish Office, the one largely intact pre-war ministry, John Scott Maclay, the fifty-eight year old MP for Renfrewshire.

The labour ‘faction’ was led by James Callaghan, the leader of the Labour and Co-operative Party, who was Margaret Thatcher’s deputy. Unlike in Edward Heath’s Administration, if anything happened to her he would automatically become the next Prime Minister and would remain so as long as he retained sufficient support in the country and Her Majesty’s

confidence. Callaghan also held the portfolio of Secretary of State for Wales. To balance the 'unity' of the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom, the posts of the Home, Labour and Health departments had been assigned to Labour Party nominees; respectively Roy Jenkins, Anthony Crosland and Christopher Mayhew.

Charles Anthony Raven Crosland, the forty-five-year-old MP for Grimsby, was one of the finest minds in British politics, and would have risen high in his Party and in Government regardless of the intervention of the October War. His Ministry of Labour portfolio included a brief to explore options for re-creating a new national education system. Schools were currently the responsibility of the Emergency District Administrations, while at present the surviving Universities were left to their own devices, other than where their funding was directly related to Government defence research, development or other priority projects.

Forty-eight-year-old Christopher Paget Mayhew, who had been MP for Woolwich East, the seat of his old friend and mentor Ernest Bevin was a pro-Arabist with liberal views that before the October War had sat uneasily within his own Party. Margaret Thatcher had hesitated before rubber-stamping his appointment to the Health Ministry, but James Callaghan had offered no obvious or better qualified candidate, so she had accepted Mayhew, albeit on probation.

"Good morning, gentlemen," the Prime Minister chimed as she entered the room to a squealing of chair legs on the wooden floor. It irritated her that she was the only woman in Cabinet. Women had also suffered the vicissitudes of the recent war and its dreadful aftermath, in fact, by any logically applied standard women and children had suffered the most; and yet they were barely represented in the higher echelons of the UAUK. She would have nominated a woman from her own Party if one had been available with any of the necessary qualifications – *necessary qualifications, that was a nonsense, she was a grocer's daughter from Grantham with degrees in chemistry and law and was learning by trial and error as she went along* – and Jim Callaghan had been oddly reluctant to promote the cases of women in the Labour movement. The name of Barbara Castle – the fifty-three-year-old left-wing Member of Parliament for Blackburn - had been mooted briefly; the woman was not to the Prime Minister's personal taste but she would not have vetoed her promotion had Jim Callaghan nominated her

for the Cabinet. *So many things to do and no time whatsoever to spare.* "Does everybody have a copy of the agenda?"

"Yes, Prime Minister..."

"Good." Margaret Thatcher looked directly across the table to the impassive uniformed figure of Sir David Luce, the First Sea Lord and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff. "Sir, David. Would you please brief us on the latest military and intelligence developments?"

"There is currently no significant threat in our home waters or in our home air space, Prime Minister," the suave, coolly professional Admiral reported. "No United States Navy surface unit is presently within one thousand nautical miles of our shores. Nevertheless, American assets have been made available to C-in-C Mediterranean under the terms of the recently concluded Washington agreement. At the previous Cabinet you asked me to investigate the status of the US spy satellite programme. Satellite over flights of the Adriatic, the Aegean and Asia Minor might have gone a long way to addressing the intelligence deficit in the Eastern Mediterranean. Regrettably, I have been informed that no such reconnaissance facility is operational at this time; nor will it be until next year at the earliest. Notwithstanding, Central Intelligence Agency U-2 spy planes operating out of Aviano in Northern Italy and from RAF Akrotiri have flown missions over the Aegean, the approaches to the Bosphorus and over the Black Sea as far north as Sevastopol. Photographs from those sorties are presently being analysed by CIA analysts in theatre. First reports indicate more traffic in the Bosphorus and along the southern Black Sea coast than we anticipated. A number of vessels, possibly warships are anchored in the vicinity of Istanbul. There are also indications of large fires and troop movements around that city. Since we have no eyes on the ground in that part of the World we are somewhat disadvantaged. C-in-C Mediterranean has requested Special Forces troops – either or both Royal Marine Special Boat Squadron and Special Air Service Regiment parties - be inserted into the region to provide a better feel for what is going on. I have explained that this will not be possible owing to the ongoing internal home security commitments of the SAS and SBS. C-in-C Mediterranean is aware of the increased demands on the available deployable Special Forces units subsequent to the attack on Balmoral. Understandably, Admiral Christopher's primary concern is for the security of our position on Cyprus. Currently, the forces deployed on Cyprus are at the end of a long

supply chain and are too weak to sustain action overlong against determined and more numerous enemies; which brings me to the ongoing redeployment of all available military assets to the Mediterranean."

The mood around the table was subdued as the First Sea Lord began to detail the plans now in motion.

"The fleet carrier HMS Victorious and the commando carrier HMS Ocean departed Gibraltar last night in company with seventeen other vessels, including the Cunard liner Sylvania carrying troops, and a cadre of skilled tradesmen and their families to Malta. HMS Hermes will follow in three days' time with four escorts and a convoy of seven fast merchantmen including the P and O liner Canberra. In total these vessels are transporting the equivalent of two brigades of mechanised infantry, over thirty centurion main battle tanks and over fifty other armoured fighting vehicles. The main bulk of these forces will be based, off-loaded, or cross-decked at Malta for redeployment as circumstances determine once Admiral Christopher's initial entrenchment exercise is completed."

This plan had raised eyebrows at the last Cabinet meeting, ten days ago on the morning the peace mission had set out for Washington DC.

The C-in-C Mediterranean planned to 'tidy up the map' by seizing the islands of Pantelleria, Lampedusa and Linosa which lay across the western approaches to his Mediterranean citadel, Malta. Presently, the islands were in the hands of local tribal juntas, and 'pirates' who had preyed on fishermen and passing small craft, and presumably, reported all shipping and aircraft movements in the area to their clients in Sicily and Italy, and possibly, Libya. Once Cyprus had been secured by a, hopefully, sustainable garrison and the Mediterranean Fleet was reinforced to such a strength as to allow it to keep that garrison supplied indefinitely; Julian Christopher had his eyes on, if not occupying Crete, then neutralising it as a threat to his lines of communication in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Crete operation was unlikely to feasible for some months as many of the troops who were being transported to Malta were fresh recruits. Moreover, if opposed, retaking – or even just occupying Crete – would be a major undertaking requiring a great deal of meticulous planning.

The 'Christopher Plan' was based on the premise that British and Commonwealth interests in the wider Middle East could only be secured from a position of military strength. At the moment the Egyptians, Israelis

and the Lebanese were sitting watchfully on the side-lines. Since the October War the Americans had maintained a tenuous air bridge with Tel Aviv, but in the aftermath of the Battle of Washington and the paralysis of certain sections of the US military this was now temporarily suspended.

Farther south only the presence of what were essentially isolated and beleaguered British garrisons – literally a thin red line of trapped troops and aircraft badly in need of spare parts and maintenance, supported by a handful of former Pacific Fleet destroyers and gunboats – held what was left of the peace East of Suez. The oil-rich Arabian Peninsula lay virtually undefended, its constituent nations, emirates and feudal fiefdoms constantly looking across the waters of the Persian Gulf at an unstable Iraqi state and Iran, the sleeping regional superpower ruled by a man – forty-four-year-old Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi - who increasingly behaved as if he was a reincarnated Persian Emperor rather than the son of a usurper who had seized power in a military coup in the 1920s. Under the 'Christopher Plan' British and Commonwealth forces would eventually reinforce the one existing substantial Commonwealth garrison at Abadan, and other key points in the region to 'deter any adventures' by either the Iraqis or the Iranians. It was recognised that in the present circumstances this was a pipe dream and that the C-in-C Mediterranean's motives for 'flagging the matter' had more to do with broadening the strategic debate about what was, and what was not possible, than mandating urgent military priorities at the fringe of his area of responsibility.

"I gather there has been another sabotage incident on Malta?" Margaret Thatcher checked.

"There were two internal explosions on HMS Torquay while she was being moved out of dry dock. The wreck sank in the Grand Harbour. Fortunately, the two halves of the ship do not present an immediate hazard to navigation. The latest news I have is that an officer from the C-in-C's personal staff was killed by a booby trap while investigating the disappearance of a dockyard employee who might, in some way, be linked to the Torquay incident."

Margaret Thatcher nodded.

"Thank you." She did not need to ask the First Sea Lord to keep her informed of developments. She looked around the table. "Has everybody had a chance to read the digest of the survey reports on the bombed areas of

greater London?"

Airey Neave raised a hand.

"We ought to follow up in strength ASAP, Prime Minister!"

"Forgive me, I completely disagree," Roy Jenkins, the Home Secretary objected politely.

"We need to strike while the iron is hot, man!" The former escapee from Colditz Castle protested.

Margaret Thatcher held up a hand to forestall a general free for all.

"Mr Jenkins," she invited, "while the investigation and re-assimilation of the bombed areas may eventually become a military matter – or at least, a matter requiring significant military resources to be allocated to its accomplishment – at this time the issue falls within your remit. What is *your* view as to how to proceed?"

The Home Secretary blinked at her through his horn-rimmed glasses, possibly a little surprised by the genuineness of the deference in her clear soprano voice.

"It seems to me," he prefaced, deprecatingly, "that if people have been living in the devastated areas beyond the writ of the national government for over a year I strongly suspect they won't take kindly to folk whom they might regard as, shall we say, freebooters suddenly marching in and cherry-picking resources that they feel that *they* rightfully own. It is my view that we should send parties in to negotiate the return of the peoples of these regions to the, er, bosom of the nation, rather than to simply assume that they automatically 'belong to us'. The last thing we need is another guerrilla-style war on our hands like we have in Ulster. Our priorities are to re-open the docks, yes? Everything else can wait but the sooner we get the London docks back into operation and re-open the roads between them and the rest of the country the better, yes?"

Margaret Thatcher nodded curtly. She glanced to her friend Airey Neave. He shrugged, grimaced his impatient acquiescence.

"If you would submit plans for immediate action along the lines you have suggested for next Cabinet please, Mr Jenkins?" She searched the room for dissent. "That's settled then. What is next, Sir Henry?"

The Cabinet Secretary was a little pained when he spoke.

"*The Dreadnought Incident*, Prime Minister."

Chapter 11

Monday 20th January 1964
HQ of the C-in-C Mediterranean, Mdina, Malta

If anybody else had tried to hold back Arkady Pavlovich Rykov in that moment he would have killed them. His rage was so pure, his disgust so unrepentant that he was, almost but not quite, utterly beyond reason.

"Arkady! No!" The woman's terrified scream cut through the shimmering red haze of his lust for murder. The room had disintegrated into madness moments before, filled with cries of disbelief and alarm, and a cacophony of flying furniture and crashing sound. "NO, ARKADY!"

The former KGB Colonel blinked back to sanity.

He was standing over the bloodied form of the man on the ground. No, not the ground; the body on the *floor* of the darkened office beneath the crazily swinging single light bulb.

The man at his feet was groaning.

He had been afraid he had killed him for a moment; killing was so much easier than *hurting* a man.

Arkady Rykov realised he was gripping something heavy in his right hand. He was gripping it so hard the muscles in his forearm were starting to twist with cramp. He opened his hand and the rounded stone, a paperweight of some kind that he had snatched up from the desk, dropped leadenly onto the wooden boards an inch from the man on the floor's bloodied head.

That, he thought, was careless.

If he killed the man at his feet there would be *inquests*, and many questions he did not want to answer.

"What's going on in here?" The demand was uttered in a calm, boyish voice with an authority far beyond the years of its owner.

Lieutenant Alan Hannay stepped into the room, cautiously picking his way across the detritus-strewn floor. Behind him two big men wearing the Red felt trimmed caps of the Royal Military Police stepped into the room.

Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher's flag lieutenant looked around, and then down at the man with the smashed face moaning softly at his feet.

Finally, he studied Arkady Pavlovich Rykov and his badly shaken blond female companion. He frowned at the former KGB-man and smiled a tight-lipped smile at Clara Pullman.

The young man removed his cap and scratched his freshly cropped skull – the rebellious mop of hair which fell over his brow whenever he was hatless had had to go, it was unmilitary - while he contemplated his next decision.

"Ah," he sighed, his youthful features a picture of bafflement. "Well, I think I can safely report to the C-in-C that you've introduced yourself to Major Williams, Colonel Rykov." He looked again at Arkady Rykov, this time a hard, quizzical look that lingered on the man's scarred head and rage-filled eyes. "We were warned that you two had previous history. Can I take it that *we* have finished settling old scores for the moment, Colonel?"

Clara Pullman took hold of her lover's elbow.

"Yes," she hissed.

Alan Hannay was waiting to hear it from the lips of the professional killer standing in front of him.

"Yes," the Russian grunted. He spat on the man on the floor; Major Denzil Williams, the man he had come to Malta to replace as MI6 Head of Station on the Archipelago.

Alan Hannay frowned; spitting on a man when he was down was just as bad as kicking him in his book. *Still, if we had understood the Russian character a little better it would probably have saved an awful lot of unpleasantness fourteen months ago.* He glanced over his shoulder at the two Redcaps.

"One of you fellows cut along and fetch a doctor! Sharply now!"

Admiral Christopher's flag lieutenant would have had a great deal more sympathy for Major Denzil Williams, the acting head of Station of the Secret Intelligence Service on the Maltese Archipelago if the man's pig-headed complacency and incompetence had not recently got one of his friends blown to pieces; and if he had not had to be the one to break the news to Marija Calleja. The Admiral would have done that, but he was on a tour of inspection on Gozo and he had not wanted the poor woman to hear the news from a stranger or by accident. Marija had sobbed uncontrollably for several minutes before Doctor Margo Seiffert had arrived and enveloped her in her arms.

“I’m Alan Hannay, by the way,” he grinned, a little sheepishly, extending his hand to the pretty blond woman he knew had to be Clara Pullman, the defector’s *secretary*.

Arkady Rykov turned to shake his hand also, kicking the prostrate man’s left arm out of the way as he stepped closer to the younger man.

“I didn’t know Lieutenant Siddall very well,” the C-in-C’s flag lieutenant explained, at that moment not really very interested in whether the man on the ground between the two men was alive or dead, “but he and I struck it off from the start, he was a decent sort and he will be sadly missed. Unlike some people I could think of.”

“I lost my temper,” the Russian apologised. “I haven’t lost my temper for many years. Not since my old friend Nikita Sergeyevich put down the rising in Hungary, in fact.” He sighed. “After that I learned that losing one’s temper was never enough.”

“Quite,” agreed the younger man.

“What has been done about the other names on the list?” Arkady Rykov asked brusquely.

“Two of the names were killed when HMS Torquay was bombed the first time. Two of the others are in custody. We’re still looking for other three.”

“Arkady!” Clara pleaded.

She and Alan Hannay both thought the Russian was going to start kicking the unconscious SIS man again. Although neither of them felt overly inclined to stop him if he did, they were both mightily relieved when he refrained.

“The World is full of fucking idiots!” Arkady Rykov growled. “I need a cigarette.”

The only man who had cigarettes was the second Redcap.

“Since when did you smoke?” Clara asked her lover.

“I always smoked. When we met I was busted up in hospital. They wouldn’t let me smoke. Then you said you hated men blowing smoke in your face so,” the man shrugged in an uncharacteristically Gallic way, “so I stopped smoking.”

Alan Hannay felt a little left out as the man and the woman gave each other long, searching looks.

“You gave up smoking for *me*?”

“It is no big deal,” the ex-KGB-man scoffed.

“Every time I think I know you I...”

Again, the Russian responded with a Gallic shrug.

“I was Iosif Vissarionovich’s translator, remember? After Yalta that slime ball Beria tried to have me sent to the Gulag for collaborating with the Yankees even though I was obeying Iosif Vissarionovich’s orders. I served Nikita Sergeyevich loyally for many years and then the old fart paid me back by making me break bread with Red Dawn. Giving up smoking is nothing, my love.”

Alan Hannay’s eyes kept opening wider and wider.

Clara saw this.

“Arkady was Joseph Stalin’s translator at the Yalta Conference in 1945,” she explained, wondering how she could sound so vexed. “The Man of Steel – that’s what the Russians called the old monster – had him mix with the American interpreters and that was how his spying career got started. Arkady was Nikita Sergeyevich’s, I mean Khrushchev’s inside man in the NKVD and later in the KGB. He fell out of love with Khrushchev when he was ordered to infiltrate the leadership of Red Dawn in 1959. When I met him, he had just escaped from...”

“Clara, I love you dearly but if you say another word I will have to break your beautiful neck,” the Russian said glumly, in between taking long, lung-filling drags on his cigarette. He gave Alan Hannay a bleak stare. “I must talk to Rosa Calleja.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. The poor woman is practically catatonic, Colonel.”

Arkady Rykov’s expression indicated that he did not understand why this needed to be an insurmountable problem.

The trio had moved out into the narrow cobbled street behind the Cathedral and had to stand to one side to allow a harassed-looking civilian and two new Redcaps into the wrecked office. The civilian was one of Denzil William’s men who had run to fetch, presumably the two Redcaps he now had in tow, when Rykov had turned up.

The Russian finished his cigarette and crushed out the glowing stub beneath his heel. He flexed his right hand, suddenly aware of the stinging ache across his knuckles.

“I think I’ve broken something,” he remarked.

“Somebody is hurt, they say?” A peeved, American accented woman’s

voice demanded from the darkness behind the three people standing in the street. Margo Seiffert squinted irritably at the man testing his damaged right fist.

"Yes," Alan Hannay called, stepping forward. "He's inside that door," he pointed. "Major Williams. He had a very nasty fall, I'm afraid, Doctor Seiffert."

"A fall," the former United States Navy Surgeon Commander asked, eyeing Arkady Rykov. "Um," she breathed, "and would this fall have anything to do with what happened to that poor man yesterday in Kalkara?"

"Have a look at him for yourself, Dottoressa Seiffert," the Russian suggested sardonically, "judge for yourself."

The woman shook her head and brushed past, moving in swift, bird-like steps. She darted inside.

"We can't stand here all night," Alan Hannay declared.

Planting the couple in the Mess he hurried away, promising to return in a few minutes.

"We've only just got here, Arkady!" Clara whispered angrily.

They had been flown direct from Lisbon to interrogate the surviving members of the Red Dawn cell they had infiltrated on their last visit to Malta; the members of which ought to have been in custody for the last seven days. It was only when they arrived in Mdina that it transpired that the local 'intelligence men' had thought it was a better idea to keep the suspected Red Dawn terrorists 'under surveillance' than to round them up 'prematurely'.

Major Denzil Williams had been somewhat put out to discover that the 'senior officer' the Head of MI6, Sir Richard 'Dick' White, had personally sent to Malta to take over *his* operation was none other than Arkady Pavlovich Rykov. He had indignantly informed the Russian in somewhat unprofessional, intemperate language that the only way he was going to allow him, a 'fucking Soviet traitor', to speak to any of *his* prisoners was over 'my dead body'.

Coincidentally, that was exactly what Arkady Rykov had been hoping he would say. The former KGB Colonel had needed no further encouragement to oblige the man who had had him kicked half-way around the Rock of Gibraltar seven weeks ago.

Chapter 12

Tuesday 21st January 1964
HMS Dreadnought, Algeciras Bay, Gibraltar

The Royal Navy only had one nuclear-power hunter killer submarine and when she had limped into Algeciras Bay before Christmas all the stops had been pulled out. A two-dozen strong team from Vickers Shipbuilding Ltd at Barrow-in-Furness had flown into Gibraltar on an RAF Comet within hours.

The air-dropped Mark 44 thirteen-inch torpedo, one of four dropped by the USS Enterprise's Grumman S-2 Tracker anti-submarine hunter aircraft, ought to have sunk HMS Dreadnought. The warhead had exploded within feet of the stern of the submarine. Shock damage had shattered machinery footings, shorted out most the boat's electrical systems, and comprehensively killed her sonar suite. It had taken Dreadnought six days to limp into Algeciras Bay. Once in harbour and dry-docked Commander Simon Collingwood's initial damage assessment was that his command would not be fit to go to sea again for six months. That was a month ago, now the Royal Navy's first, and for the foreseeable future, solitary nuclear–powered attack submarine was thrusting out into the Straits of Gibraltar on a dark, starless night, provisioned for a six-week war patrol.

The Captain of the Royal Navy's most complex and valuable asset was not under any illusions that his command was in tip top fighting trim; or that in an ideal World she did not still need several months in dockyard hands. However, that did not mean that HMS Dreadnought was not fit for combat.

"Depth of water under the keel please?" He called.

"Eight hundred feet, sir!"

Simon Collingwood glanced across the plot table to his Executive Officer, Lieutenant-Commander Max Forton.

"Diving Stations if you please, Number One!"

"Diving Stations, aye, sir!"

In an 'ideal', perfect World, Simon Collingwood would have preferred to have test dived the boat in dock, or within the inner dockyard basin at Gibraltar but they did not live in a *perfect* World. *God knew they did not!*

So, they would have to get on with it in the open ocean instead. Dreadnought had put to sea with five civilian workers onboard; Flag Officer Submarines had thought this would support the fiction that Dreadnought was departing on a slow, safe run home to Plymouth. That was fine for Flag Officer Submarines, who bless his cotton socks, was not the man who was going to have to explain to five disgruntled civilians sometime in the next few hours that Dreadnought – notwithstanding the boat was a tad worse for wear – was heading not for Blighty, but for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The two men who had been on watch in the cockpit at the top of the sail thirty feet above the control room, slid down the ladder and dogged the hatch shut over their heads.

"The boat is ready to dive, sir!"

"Carry on," Simon Collingwood said to his Executive Officer before casually settling in his command chair.

He heard the air rushing out of the ballast tanks, felt the planes grip the water and the bow of the submarine begin to dip. It was all very quiet and orderly, there were no raised voices, no existential angst other than the normal breathlessness everybody experienced the first time a boat dived after a spell in dockyard hands.

"Seventy feet!"

Dreadnought was submerged.

"Eighty feet!"

"Ninety feet"

"One hundred feet!"

Shortly the submarine's wake would be subsumed by the ocean and her passage through the water would be invisible at the surface.

"NO LEAKS!"

"Level the boat at one-five-zero feet please!"

At one hundred and fifty feet they would check again for leaks. They would check every single inch of the boat, just to be sure.

"Helm. Make our course two-seven-five degrees!"

"Two-seven-five degrees, aye, sir!"

"Come up to six zero revs please!"

Two hours later after dropping down to two-hundred and thirty feet below the surface there were still no leaks, nothing had shorted out and the engineering department reported a 'qualified' clean bill of health.

“This is the Captain,” Simon Collingwood announced over the boat’s public-address system. He would worry about running silent another time. “The boat is dry and nothing important has broken since we left port. This being the case in five minutes time when I turn the boat around HMS Dreadnought will commence her second War Patrol. This time we won’t be playing hide and seek,” he allowed a suggestion of wry levity to tinge his words, “we will be operating in support of allied naval units in the Eastern Mediterranean. We are carrying a full load of torpedoes and we are fully provisioned for a six-week cruise. I offer my sincere apologies to the civilians in our midst but for security reasons it was deemed necessary to make it look as if we were going out for a short proving trip before heading straight home. I suggest you enjoy the trip. That is all.”

Trying not to chuckle too loudly he looked to his Executive Officer.

“Revolutions for twenty knots, Number One!”

“Helm. Make your course zero-eight-five!”

Simon Collingwood went to his claustrophobic cabin – spacious and luxurious compared to any other on the boat he often joked, very much with his tongue in his cheek – shut the door behind him and opened the small safe by his bunk head with the small key he always carried with him.

He recovered the sealed orders which were only to be opened once a vessel had departed port and was out of sight of land; such orders rarely contained good news.

He opened the envelope unhurriedly with an odd lack of interest.

He was astonished to discover two hand-written sheets of note paper bearing the crest of the *Prime Minister’s Office*.

Sunday 19th January, 1964.

Dear Captain Collingwood,

I have written this note by leave of the First Sea Lord and the Flag Officer Submarines, as it would otherwise be highly irregular for a Prime Minister to communicate directly with a serving offer, thereby circumventing the chain of command.

I have pleasure in communicating to you that Her Majesty has seen fit to award you the Distinguished Service Order in recognition of your remarkable achievement in completing, trialling and making

HMS Dreadnought so self-evidently combat ready. Moreover, your professionalism, restraint and tactical acumen under immense personal stress in resisting the temptation to engage hostile enemy vessels last December was instrumental in avoiding a new general war. It is therefore my pleasure to inform you that the Board of Admiralty has seen fit to promote you to the rank of Captain as per the date of this letter.

With regard to your current mission I wish you all success.

A list of awards for gallantry and good service, and promotions for several other members of your excellent crew will follow within forty-eight hours of your departure from Gibraltar.

I thank you and your people again with all my heart.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Thatcher.

PS. Please feel free to share the contents of this note with your crew.

Simon Collingwood stared dumbfounded at the flowing script for a long, long time. '*PS. Please feel free to share the contents of this note with your crew...*'

The commanding officer of the most lethal – conventional – weapon in his nation's armoury had never really been very interested in politics. He had never voted; never really seen the point. One old man in a suit saying pretty much the same thing as another was not that much of a choice was it? Whichever party was in power the World kept on spinning round, the Navy struggled on from knock to knock and rediscovered the Nelson touch whenever there was a new war. Politics had not mattered.

The Prime Minister had written to him.

Personally.

As if she was just another human being like him.

And it was not a typed pro forma sort of letter. She had sat down and taken the time to *write it to him.*

Personally...

Back in Gibraltar all Dreadnought's logs and sonar records had been confiscated; supposedly sent back to England for analysis. Nobody had actually mentioned a Board of Inquiry; but he had assumed that he and Max

Forton, and perhaps several others would inevitably be hauled in front of one. The USS Scorpion and all her people were gone and somebody somewhere was going to have to pay the price for that. He had assumed it would be him; and that when the time came he would defend himself and the service and go down fighting if that was what it came to in the end.

It had never occurred to him that his Government would stand by Dreadnought, let alone reward him, his crew and his command for their fortitude under intolerable pressure.

Suddenly, he was on his feet heading for the control room brandishing Margaret Thatcher's letter as if he was Moses coming down the mountain to proclaim the Almighty's wisdom freshly written on immutable tablets of stone.

The Prime Minister had written to him, personally...

Chapter 13

Tuesday 21st January, 1964
City Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The city fathers of Philadelphia had always thought big and City Hall was the living embodiment of that hubris writ upon the land in granite. With a tower topped by a thirty-seven-foot-tall twenty-seven-ton hollow bronze statue of the City's founder, William Penn, at five hundred and forty-eight feet high Philadelphia City Hall had been the tallest inhabited and habitable building in the World when it was completed it 1901. Other brick and stone structures like the Pyramids, and a small number of medieval cathedrals topped it but nobody had worried overmuch about that at the time or since because nobody actually 'lived' in them.

Lyndon Baines Johnson, the thirty-seventh Vice President of the United States of America was sick to the back teeth with *facts*; especially facts about City Hall, the designated temporary home of Congress. Both Houses were due to sit again in less than a week's time and he was beginning to feel like the man who discovered the rattlesnake in the lucky dip. Of course, a little of his unease was the natural discomfort of a lifelong Southern Democrat in a strange north-eastern city in the middle of winter. In that respect living in the capital city of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was just the icing on the cake. Before he had known it, *he* had started telling visitors the 'facts' that the locals had drilled into his head as if he too, was a native of the city.

"This is some place, Admiral," he said gruffly to the tall handsome man in uniform as he led the new Chief of Naval Operations into his hastily configured conference room. Notwithstanding that there were over seven hundred rooms in City Hall finding official accommodation for his staff and that of senior Congressional leaders had been a nightmare. Once Philadelphians had realised that the Federal circus was coming to town rents had doubled and trebled in the blocks around City Hall. In a month or two Philadelphia would be exploring boomtown territory like a second Atlantic City between the First and Second World Wars. The local real estate 'boom' was being further exacerbated by the Navy Department's decision to relocate

to Camden, New Jersey, on the opposite bank of the Delaware River. "City Hall took thirty years to build and cost the city twenty-four million dollars. That was in 1901 when money was money!"

"My people tell me it is still the tallest masonry building in the World," Admiral David Lamar McDonald, the forty-seven-year-old Georgian who had inherited the 'CINCLANT fiasco' and was now charged with reversing the mothballing of most of the US Navy. In the absence of a functioning Congress there had been no time for, or any practical means of, conducting 'acceptance hearings' for the CNO; instead McDonald had been invited to Blair House by the President, the Secretary of Defence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and grilled for several hours. The President suspected that the Navy had caused one global nuclear war, knew for a certainty that it had almost started a second one last month by clumsily manufacturing an incident in the North Atlantic with the British nuclear submarine HMS Dreadnought, and he was determined that the Navy was not going to screw the pooch again on his watch!

"Yes, they say that too," the Vice President sighed.

"They say the observation room up in the tower is five hundred feet up in the air, Mr Vice President," the CNO re-joined with respectful affability. He was a former naval aviator who had progressed steadily through the ranks with the assurance of one destined for high command; McDonald had been the executive officer of the USS Essex, and later the commanding officer of the USS Coral Sea before graduating to command the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.

"I hear tell you get the best view from the hatch at the top of old Bill Penn's statue," Lyndon Baines Johnson replied, determined to get the last word on the subject of City Hall.

The two men shut out their flunkies and took seats at the head of the long, gleaming rectangular mahogany table which dominated the Vice President's personal conference room.

"Do you have any problems with the command protocols notified to your office forty-eight hours ago, Admiral?" The Vice President asked bluntly.

The confident, strong-featured naval officer grunted ruefully, and nodded.

"The Commander-in-Chief has spoken and General LeMay in his capacity as the lawfully appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has

endorsed the President's actions. These are extraordinary times and I concur one hundred percent with General LeMay that my duty, and the duty of *all* the men under my command is to stand behind the President." The Chief of Naval Operations half-smiled. "So, to answer your question directly, Mister Vice President, in the matters we shall be discussing today, is that I serve at your pleasure."

Lyndon Baines Johnson nodded. The trouble with most *officers and gentlemen* was that they never answered a straight question with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Nevertheless, McDonald came recommended by everybody who had ever had anything to do with him and he had been pencilled in for the CNO job before he got his fourth star. Perhaps, if McDonald had been CNO last year they would have saved themselves a lot of unnecessary grief. *Still, there was no point crying over spilt milk.*

The President and Jackie were off on the stump in the Midwest and Bobby Kennedy was trying to quieten down the situation in Atlanta, Georgia. The two most charismatic members of the Administration would be living on jetliners for the next few days attempting to hold what was left of the Union together; meanwhile LBJ was minding the store in Philadelphia while Robert McNamara, the one-time whizz kid boss of the Ford Motor Company, was methodically unravelling the nightmare reorganisation and relocation of the Pentagon with one hand, and with the other acting as the provisional military governor of the nation's sorely ravaged capital. To say that the situation was a mess was to understate the problem by a factor of scores and hundreds but at least Curtis LeMay had – in the last week - finally managed to lock down *all* of Strategic Air Command's nuclear assets.

"Where are we with the SSBN inventory, Admiral McDonald?" The Vice President asked bluntly.

"All Polaris ballistic missile armed boats are in port, sir," the CNO reported. "Inventory checks are ongoing but all fully generated warheads and launch systems are accounted for and locked down at this time. Further to this, all nuclear-capable surface units have returned to port and are off-loading munitions to secure facilities on land with the exception of the carriers Enterprise, Kitty Hawk and Independence. Enterprise is currently in transit to Norfolk, Kitty Hawk is docked at Kobe, Japan, and the Independence is on a homeward transit via the Cape of Good Hope. I am prepared to *personally* vouch for the loyalty of the commanding officers of

those ships, Mister Vice President."

Each of the big carriers routinely operated with up to forty nuclear warheads stored in their magazines; in retrospect, casually scattering 'nuclear assets' around every theatre of war and every ocean of the World had been madness. That said nobody in Washington had foreseen a situation in which the political leadership could not trust its military with the custody of such dangerous toys; until it was too late.

What might have happened if the insurgents had got their hands on an atomic bomb during the Battle of Washington?

LBJ shuddered at the very thought of it.

"The British think the lid's going to blow in the Mediterranean," the Vice President growled. "We have fragmentary intelligence about fighting in and around Istanbul and there's a lot of new traffic in the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara. The trouble is neither of us has eyes on the ground any more. The CIA is screaming for the spy satellite program to be reactivated but realistically we're not going to have cameras back in orbit for six to twelve months. We made a whole lot of bad decisions last year," he admitted, keen to clear the air with the newly-appointed Chief of Naval Operations. "We know something is happened over there but we don't know what."

"Red Dawn?" Admiral McDonald asked. "My Staff report there is a big increase in radio chatter from formerly 'quiet' areas around the Black Sea. Presumably the CIA is talking to the British about this stuff?"

LBJ scowled. If one was looking for a litmus test of the disarray after the Battle of Washington it was that the CIA was much more likely to be talking to the Brits than it was to the high command of the United States military.

"That whole area was pretty badly chewed up during the October War," the Texan observed sourly. "The Soviets couldn't get at us so they took their revenge on the Turks. It was a miracle Istanbul got away untouched. What with the destruction of most of the major centres of population in Anatolia, Bulgaria and the military coups across what was left of the Balkans we're blind in that part of the World. Romania is the only half-way functioning member of the Warsaw Pact in that part of the World and they've been putting out diplomatic feelers via the Scandinavians. CIA and the State Department don't know what they want, or care. The way things are Bucharest is bound to be awash with refugees from the surrounding countries and I don't see the regime in Romania being any kind of ally in the near

future. The whole area is a mess; that was the rationale behind trying to retain contact with the Italians. We've still got U-2s operating out of Aviano but you can only see so much from sixty or seventy thousand feet..."

The Chief of Naval Operations sucked his teeth.

"The latest CIA papers coming across my desk paint a bad picture."

"Spooks like to scare-monger."

"My planners are working on the basis of a worst-case scenario, Mister Vice President. Judging by their ongoing fleet redeployments the British are also planning for the worst," he ran a hand through his thinning fair hair, "and like us, hoping for the best."

Lyndon Baines Johnson nodded, wishing he felt a little more presidential and a little less, *worried*...

"Tell me about the worst case?"

"The worst case is what the British sources predict," the CNO retorted dryly, "A Red Dawn-inspired or led horde out of the East falls upon either the British possessions in the Mediterranean; or the Balkans and the Italian peninsula or pours into the Levant or down the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers all the way to the Persian Gulf. The last option is the most immediately disastrous for our own World position, but both of the first two options are terrifying. If Red Dawn is capable of mobilising the survivors of the Soviet forces in the Ukraine, the Crimea, the Caucasus, say," the CNO continued grimly, "and amalgamates that force with the remaining resources of the Turkish state we've got nothing short of nuclear strikes capable of stopping it."

"That is *not* an option Admiral."

"No?"

"There's no point saving the World if it ends up being so goddam radioactive we all glow in the goddam dark!"

The Chief of Naval Operations let this unscientific remark go uncontested.

"Okay, worst case scenario," he went on. "Red Dawn might strike west across the Balkans, or down through the Aegean," he recapped. "Taking Crete would isolate the British in Cyprus and potentially threaten the security of the pre-October War atomic weapon storage facility at Akrotiri. Or Red Dawn might strike south towards the Gulf oil fields. The bottom line is if they've got any kind of surface combat capability – barges with guns on them

would be enough – and any kind of air force," the Chief of Naval Operations shrugged, "they'll roll right over whatever is in front of them on Cyprus."

"If Red Dawn strikes into the Middle East they'll have to get past the Israelis?" The Vice President objected.

"Yes, and the Jordanians, the Iraqis, the Iranians, the Egyptians, and the Iranians," Admiral McDonald agreed. "But it isn't very likely the existing national military forces in the region will actually co-ordinate, let alone work together against a common threat like Red Dawn. Likewise, none of the above would contemplate diversionary or spoiling attacks by any elements of their armed forces to support the British." The Chief of Naval Operations reconsidered. "Well, the Jordanians might, I suppose. But I doubt if any of the others would lift a finger to help the British until or unless they feel themselves to be directly threatened by Red Dawn. And then they'd scream for help from us, and probably the Brits!"

"You talked about the vulnerability of the Italian peninsula?"

"Yes, that's just as big a problem, in the long term a much bigger problem, for us than losing the Gulf oil fields. If Italy falls to Red Dawn, or anybody else as inimical to the USA as Red Dawn, we eventually lose access to the Mediterranean and sooner or later the rest of whatever is left of Central and Western Europe probably falls with it. The worst-case scenario is that we – the United States – find ourselves with no friends in the half of the World from whence most of our fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers came from, sir."

Lyndon Baines Johnson felt oddly presidential when he asked the obvious question: "What do the Brits need from us?"

"The old Sixth Fleet would be a good start, Mister Vice President."

"And?"

"If we're talking worst case scenario," the CNO obfuscated for a few precious seconds. "A Marine Expeditionary Corps, a lot of grunts to put boots on any ground we hold. Air, lots of it. Air, every kind you can think of, sir."

"What can we send them now?"

There had been ten fleet carriers in service at the time of the October War including five of the eight huge modern Kitty Hawk and Constellation class ships. In addition, the nuclear-powered USS Enterprise had just finished working up and was about to join the fleet. The arbitrary mothballing of over

two-thirds of the surface fleet had left the Navy with just three operational carrier battle groups. The Kitty Hawk was not likely to be fit for sea again for at least two months; the Independence was currently in the Indian Ocean heading home for a six month refit; and the Enterprise was working up in the North Atlantic - assimilating a new command team subsequent to the summary removal of her previous flag officer and most of his staff, and several key members of the nuclear-powered carrier's operations team – in the aftermath of the 'Dreadnought Incident'.

The reactivation of other major surface assets had not started; nor would it for some weeks and none of the mothballed big carriers could be returned to service before the autumn at the very earliest. The only part of the fleet which had not been completely hamstrung by the 'Peace Dividend' exercise was the Submarine Division. It had got away with mothballing all its conventional, old-fashioned diesel-electric boats, gradually halting the ballistic missile submarine building program, and making superficial adjustments to the scheduled rate at which it was building the next generation of nuclear-powered hunter killers.

"We can send the Enterprise and her escorts to the Mediterranean," the Chief of Naval Operations stated unequivocally. However, he immediately added a caveat. "Enterprise is not fully combat ready. Her new command team has not had time to bed in and most of her original air group was rotated after the events of last month."

"Can she fight?" The Vice President inquired softly.

"Yes, sir. She can fight."

"Okay. What else can we send?"

"Three, maybe four SSNs can be warned for departure or diverted to the Mediterranean in the next forty-eight hours." McDonald was not a man who went in for hand wringing. "As to the surface fleet," he informed the Vice President, "the manner in which so many ships were taken out of service and so many key personnel were *sent ashore* in so short a period has damaged the esprit de corps of the whole service, sir. That's going to make it hard to reverse the cutback programs still in effect no matter how much money we throw at it. Before we can get parts of the Fleet back to sea we first need to stop the ongoing mothballing. Another issue is that a lot of officers have resigned their commissions. Some by way of a protest, I suppose. But others because they are afraid they'll get caught in the FBI's 'chain of command'

dragnet. If you want the Navy back at sea as fast as possible somebody is going to have to call off the witch hunt. Either way, we're eighteen months to two years away from restoring the Fleet to its pre-war fighting strength."

After the CNO had gone Lyndon Baines Johnson went to his desk.

Although the Administration could move the pieces around on the chess board; Congress could kick over the board whenever it wanted. He was still picking up exactly the same sort of isolationist, 'let the Brits pick up their own shit' messages that had bedevilled Anglo-American relations in the last year. In the current emergency the President was ruling by executive orders. That was a short-term, very temporary arrangement. Ultimately, unless the United States of America was under attack, or threatened with imminent attack, only Congress had the power to send American soldiers, sailors and airmen upon 'foreign adventures'. Problematically, there were many in both Houses of Congress who wanted the President impeached for the bombing of Malta and the attack on the two British destroyers off Cape Finisterre; and more who wanted the captain of HMS Dreadnought hung by the neck until dead from a Pennsylvania Avenue lamp post. When the truth about the loss of the Scorpion came out, as it would when the first courts martial commenced at Norfolk sometime next month – hopefully, later if he had anything to do with it – the shit would really hit the fan.

That bastard Edgar J. Hoover was already leaking titbits of information to his lap dogs in the Senate; and the CIA was retaliating by doing the same thing via its clients in the House in a concerted attempt to undermine the old faggot.

At the very moment America needed its Navy the most, the service was about to be embroiled in the greatest conspiracy theory of the age, its reputation dragged through the mire of history. The Air Force was no less culpable in recent disasters; but unlike the Navy, there were no headline culprits and whereas people in the SAC chain of command had clearly questioned their *unlawful* orders; the Navy had been so all fired up mad keen to sink a *British* submarine going about its lawful business in international waters that they had inadvertently torpedoed one of their own!

Chapter 14

Wednesday 22nd January 1964
King's College, Oxford, England

Sir Thomas Harding-Grayson waved nonchalantly to his old friend, the Cabinet Secretary as he entered the Common Room. He was not convinced he liked having to chase around the country to speak to the Prime Minister but then politics was a messy business and although he was not really involved in the nitty-gritty of the political game; the woman he worked for most certainly was!

He did not know when it had happened. It had crept up on him in much the same way it must have for most of the others. However, before he left Washington he had awakened one morning and realised – known for a fact, actually – that he had ceased to be a simple public servant and become Margaret Thatcher's liege man. It was an almost feudal thing. The Angry Widow had picked up the standard they had all known was lying, half-forgotten in the mud and started waving it so violently that the whole World had seen it flying, proudly once again. And he had known that wherever *she* led and that wherever *she* led the country, *he* had to follow.

"There appear to be warships anchored off the Golden Horn!" The Prime Minister scowled as hands were shaken. "And an RAF fighter intercepted and turned back an enemy reconnaissance aircraft north-east of Cyprus yesterday afternoon!"

The Foreign Secretary paused for thought, a little surprised that the RAF had not simply shot down the interloper.

He smiled.

"You look well, Prime Minister."

"Thank you, Tom. It is very kind of you to say so."

"What's the latest news from the lost colonies?" Sir Henry Tomlinson, the Cabinet Secretary inquired urbanely.

"The US Navy is readying the USS Enterprise and her escorting vessels to depart for the Western Mediterranean. Several nuclear submarines are also being warned to sail for the region in the next few days." Tom Harding-

Grayson raised an apologetic hand of caution. “We shouldn’t get our hopes up. Congress may put the kybosh on this at any time. And even if these ships and submarines ever reach the Mediterranean any kind of formal, pre-arranged line of command is extremely unlikely.” He sobered somewhat and carried on his abbreviated summary of the latest international developments. “Spain has formally, as opposed to informally, denied the US Air Force and Navy access to its airfields and ports. The tin pot dictators in Corsica and Sardinia are now making noises about shooting down any ‘foreign pirates’ who ‘desecrate’ their air space which means out flights to and from Malta will have to make wide, fuel-consuming, detours around those islands further lengthening flight times to and from the archipelago. The Italian fascists are getting nervous also. Nobody has any idea how much longer they’ll permit U-2 aircraft or KC-135 tankers to operate out of Aviano. Sicily,” he sighed phlegmatically, “well, the Sicilian authorities seem to have gone quiet. They probably don’t want to do anything to upset the Fighting Admiral.”

At the mere mention of Sir Julian Christopher’s person, the Prime Minister lowered her eyes and felt the heat rise in her cheeks. In a little less than two hours she would be meeting him off his flight at RAF Brize Norton, and she had absolutely no idea how she was going to get through the reunion without making a complete fool of herself.

“Very wise of them,” she murmured. “What is Lord Franks’s considered opinion as to the mood of Congress in Philadelphia, Tom?”

“Inward looking, Margaret,” the Foreign Secretary snorted quietly. In this company - Henry Tomlinson was his oldest friend and already the Angry Widow’s closest advisor - he and the remarkable woman who had been unexpectedly thrust onto the World stage at the height of the recent war fever, were on ‘Tom’ and ‘Margaret’ terms. Not because they had survived the Balmoral atrocity together, but because they had actually formed the foundation for a lifelong mutual respect and friendship. Like Henry Tomlinson, Tom Harding-Grayson regarded himself as a non-political cog in the gears of the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom, whose role was, as unlikely as it sounded, essentially protective of the young woman - she was twenty years their junior as near as dammit - upon whose shoulders the survival of the country largely depended. Nobody had seriously predicted a month ago that Margaret Thatcher’s elevation to the Premiership would suddenly offer the British people a leader about whom they might coalesce;

and more than that, a leader who understood the collective anger of her people, and their ache to be convinced that if they only had a little faith, things would get better. "Our Ambassador fears Congress may be *very* inward looking. By the end of the month we might very easily be right back where were started."

Margaret Thatcher gave him a peevish look.

"A month ago, I hadn't put my signature to a draft treaty guaranteeing non-belligerence in the short-term and whole-hearted international co-operation at an unspecified later date. A month ago, President Kennedy hadn't ordered the urgent despatch of food, oil and badly needed pharmaceutical products to us. A month ago, the First Sea Lord was resigned to sending most of the Royal Navy to the bottom of the North Atlantic in a war we couldn't possibly win." She sniffed. "Despite appearances to the contrary, and apart from the fact I think I'm coming down with a head cold things seem to be looking up, gentlemen."

Sir Henry Tomlinson chuckled.

"Well, that's told us!"

"Quite," Margaret Thatcher agreed, not really getting the joke as she reached for her handkerchief and stifled a genteel sneeze. "Blast," she murmured irritably. "I knew it was a bad idea sitting out there on Capitol Hill in that cold wind!" She shrugged off her angst in a moment. "Anyway, I'm glad I've got you two here together," she announced, one matter ticked off and the next item on her agenda advanced to the top of her list.

There was nothing in her tone warning the two men that she was about to drop a bombshell.

"You are my closest non-Party advisors," she prefaced busily. Then, with no further fanfare she declared: "I propose to recall Parliament as soon as possible. Here in Oxford would be as good a place as any, unless either of you have got a better idea."

The two career civil servants, both Oxford University men and keen students of both what was *constitutional* and what was *possible*, glanced uncomfortably at each other. Their initial response was that although the idea was probably constitutionally sound; it hardly seemed sensible in the circumstances.

"Prime Minister," Sir Henry Tomlinson ventured, "leaving aside the question of whether or not such a project would be, shall we say, wise," he

hunched his shoulders in apology, “there are certain practical difficulties...”

“Parliament has a perfect right to debate and vote upon whether it has confidence in *my* Administration, Henry,” the lady retorted instantly. “Nothing which lies ahead of us will be easy,” she went on. “Likewise, very little of what lies ahead of us will be surmountable without the support of the British people and the unimpeachable legitimacy conferred on *any* Government, by the unambiguously expressed confidence of the House of Commons. Without that legitimacy my right to lead and the authority of the UAUK will be built on sand. Frankly, if I don’t seize the moment within the next few weeks it will be lost forever and perhaps, with it our best chance of leading our people out of this vale of despond.”

“Be that as it may,” Tom Harding-Grayson observed. People got blown away with the power of the Angry Widow’s presence on occasions such as these. “Henry makes a good point. The Government might not survive a vote of confidence. The membership of the House of Commons is somewhat reduced from its pre-war strength and many of the Honourable members who survive will have been twiddling their thumbs in the shires to no good effect in the interim. I daresay a minority of them will fall in behind hotheads like Enoch Powell...”

“No doubt there will be people of a like mind to the Honourable Member for Wolverhampton South West in the Conservative Party, and the Labour Party!” Margaret Thatcher retaliated mildly. “I confidently expect people like Michael Foot and the other peace at all costs,” she was about to say something profoundly ungenerous but thought better of it, “*dreamers* will have undergone any kind of Damascene conversion in recent weeks. However, I have faith in the common sense and patriotism of the representatives of what remains of our great and ancient democracy, gentlemen.”

Sir Henry Tomlinson opened his mouth to speak, shut it.

There was a knock at the door and a youthful subaltern marched into the Common Room. He handed the Cabinet Secretary a note, turned and departed.

“Secretary of State Fulbright and Ambassador Brenckmann have arrived safely at Brize Norton, Prime Minister.”

“Good.” That afternoon RAF Brize Norton was destined to be the meeting place of two Worlds, the symbolic counterpoint to the grand peace

ceremony of that icy day in Washington last week. However, whereas in Washington the talk had been diplomatic, focused in the main on generalities, today's encounter was about the practicalities of the new alliance in a World half-shattered. Things were beginning to look ominous in the Mediterranean, hence the flying visit to England by the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Julian Christopher.

She and the man everybody now called the 'Fighting Admiral' had spoken by telephone eight times since he had proposed marriage; the matter had not been raised again by either of them. The assassination of Edward Heath in the White House and her unexpected assumption of the Premiership had changed everything except her feelings for the tall, handsome much older – by the best part of a quarter-of-a-century – man who had, without having to try, swept her off her feet in the handful of days she had known him before he had been sent to Malta. They had met, survived the Balmoral atrocity during which he had saved her life, by throwing himself on top of her a split second before a five-hundred-pound iron bomb had skipped across lawn in front of the Castle and hurtled through the picture window in front of which they had been standing, flirting one with the other in the previous minutes. The poor man had been fearfully knocked about and badly concussed; she had held his hand that night as he tossed and turned in a feverish sleep, repeatedly calling out the name not of his late wife, but of a woman called 'Aysha'. One day she planned to quiz him about 'Aysha'. In anything like normal circumstances, she would already have quizzed him about the mysterious woman who had so preoccupied his dreams that night after the attack on Balmoral Castle. In *any* other circumstances things would be so different.

Margaret Thatcher realised that she was staring into space.

That would never do!

"Good," she repeated. Turning to her Foreign Secretary as she reached down to pick up her handbag from beside the leg of her chair, she asked, without preamble: "What is Dick White up to, Tom?"

The unthreatening interrogative jolted Tom Harding-Grayson.

"Er," he tried very hard not to betray his misgivings; without great success. The woman had a way of slicing through a man's defences before he knew he was even under attack. Sir Richard 'Dick' White, the Head of the Secret Intelligence Service had flown out to Lisbon within hours of Special Air Mission 26000, the specially modified VC-137 Boeing jetliner normally

only used by the President of the United States, returning the Prime Minister's party to the United Kingdom, landing at Prestwick in Scotland. Loaning the aircraft had been a nice touch by the Americans and Jack Kennedy's generosity had gone down well with the Angry Widow. The Foreign Secretary forced himself to focus on the lady's beguiling question. "Dick felt that the nearer he was to the, er, 'action' the better, Prime Minister."

"The Head of MI6's place is in England advising *me*," Margaret Thatcher declared, "not gallivanting around the World like a character in one of Mr Fleming's scurrilous paperbacks."

"I'll have a word with him."

The first time Margaret Thatcher had been briefed about Red Dawn, the Prime Minister had taken it with a pinch of salt; a very, very large pinch of salt. In the intervening weeks Red Dawn had first been a fortuitous bogeyman whose existence allowed diplomacy the scope to hold back the dogs of war, and then, with a dark inevitability it had become a monster stalking and threatening the fragile peace between the old trans-Atlantic allies.

Was it really possible that the ogre of Red Dawn that loomed over the Balkans, the Aegean and Asia Minor could have risen so soon from the ashes of the Soviet Union?

She had read the summary transcript of KGB Colonel Arkady Pavlovich Rykov's three debriefing sessions several times. The first interrogation had been conducted by Dick White in person, the second and third by 'old Russia hands' sent to Portugal by the Head of the SIS to pick holes in the defector's narrative. According to Dick White, Rykov had scared the living daylights out of the 'old salts' he had sent to Lisbon to discredit if they could, the former KGB man's warnings of a new, imminent and possibly unwinnable war.

Arkady Rykov talked about a 'generation war', of a terrible genie that once let out of its confinement could strike anywhere at any time. Margaret Thatcher did not know what to believe about Red Dawn; for all she knew it was a myth. The American authorities had been interrogating insurgents – or terrorists, traitors, or madmen depending upon one's taste – captured after the Battle of Washington for several weeks now and nobody had mentioned 'Red Dawn' by name. When this was put to Arkady Rykov he was alleged to have

smiled and said: '*Krasnaya Zarya*' is not an organisation, it is a state of mind. I was an officer of the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* and before that the *Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del,* but after Hungary in 1956 in my own mind I was an avenging angel. Judge a thing not by its name but by its deeds.'

Margaret Thatcher had toyed with the idea of bringing the Russian to England. She would have liked to have met him; Dick White had counselled against it and besides, he had urgent work for the man elsewhere.

Krasnaya Zarya.

It sounded almost poetic.

Red Dawn might be a paper tiger, an invention of the mind of an embittered defector. Today she would hear what the man in whom she placed a nameless faith – Julian Christopher - thought about the reality of *Krasnaya Zarya*. If what was happening in the Mediterranean was simply the inevitable long-term post-war disintegration of the old order into violent chaos that was bad enough; but the steps she had already sanctioned, reinforcing the fleet and the local garrisons might yet be sufficient to hold the line long enough for Kennedy Administration to get its house in order. If it was the case that the northern shores of the great inland sea dissolved into anarchy that was bad; but it was not necessarily fatal to the United Kingdom's vital strategic interests in the region. With the weight of American military and industrial muscle at its back the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the British Army might hold the line indefinitely. However, if Red Dawn was the monster described by Arkady Pavlovich Rykov, she honestly questioned whether anything short of another thermonuclear war would hold the wolf from the door.

Presently, it was time to leave for RAF Brize Norton.

Not to be outdone by their North American competitors the Rolls-Royce factory in Derby had modified a pair of Silver Shadows with armoured panels and bullet proof windows for the use of senior UAUK officials. The cars had been waiting for the Prime Minister when she arrived in Oxford that morning.

Margaret Thatcher, the Cabinet Secretary and the Foreign Secretary patted the luxurious, deeply padded seats and looked around the inside of their Silver Shadow like overgrown children inspecting an exciting new toy as the convoy set off for Brize Norton. Ferret armoured cars cleared the way ahead and brought up the rear. A Royal Marine Commando with an

automatic rifle sat in the front passenger seat and overhead, a Westland Wessex helicopter hovered with machine gunners quartering the surrounding countryside pacing the vehicles on the ground.

The last time Margaret Thatcher had laid eyes on Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher he had presented a somewhat sorry sight. His face was heavily bruised, he was stiff and horribly sore with cracked ribs and he had had unhealed burns on his arm. He had had no time to rest or recuperate on Malta, although hopefully, being away from the northern winter would have restored the colour in his cheeks.

Goodness, here I am on the way to perhaps the most important meeting of my life and all I can think about is the twinkle in Julian Christopher's blue-grey eyes!

It was a funny old World sometimes...

Chapter 15

Wednesday 22nd January 1964
Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia

Even though it was not yet ten o'clock in the morning a large crowd thronged Auburn Avenue and only a police presence three ranks deep stopped the ever-growing tide of humanity blocking the intersection with Jackson Street. Outside in the road a cordon of state troopers and Secret Service men guarded the hastily constructed wooden stage next to the front entrance to the Church. ABC and NBC had parked broadcast trucks across the street; technicians were struggling to run cables up to the unwieldy cameras bolted to the roofs of each vehicle. National Guardsmen milled around the back of the building, mostly out of view of the gathering crush of humanity in Auburn Avenue.

Anybody with a line of sight down any of the long, straight highways leading to - more likely, passing through - this small corner of Atlanta would have seen an amazing thing, endless processions of people, white as well as black, converging on the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Robert Francis 'Bobby' Kennedy the younger brother of the President and since 20th January 1961 the Attorney General of the United States of America was under no illusion that the thousands filing down towards Auburn Avenue had come to see him. As his heavily protected cavalcade of bullet proof limousines crawled down Jackson Street to the intersection with Auburn Avenue he had the oddest sense that the future was rushing towards him. America was changing and sooner or later the American people were going to wake up to a different country. Sooner or later that change might have happened anyway but the October War had pressed the 'fast-forward' button, bringing things to a head years before they might otherwise have become *the* over-riding domestic issues confronting not just the present Administration, but whichever came after it.

Here in Atlanta a century after William Tecumseh Sherman's Union Army had besieged the city before embarking on its 'March to the Sea' through Georgia, only a fool or a charlatan or a diehard Klan bigot could still

believe that the hundred-year-old post-Civil War settlement which, even now, actively disenfranchised and disadvantaged men, women and children simply because of the colour of their skin, was anything other than fundamentally wrong.

Here in Atlanta and elsewhere in the South, whites and blacks alike had realised that their futures were inexplicably intertwined, that the old ways which had so recently killed so many of their fellow Americans, were unsustainable in the new age. Bobby Kennedy did not hear many people saying it out loud, not yet, but one day they would shout it in their thousands and millions and when they did, he planned on being there to hear the thunder of righteous voices.

The Attorney General's apotheosis had come upon him late. He had grown up in the hothouse of northern Democratic Party politics, suspicious of and forever mindful that Southern Democrats *weren't like him*. Yet it had not been until he and Jack had been on the election trail and of necessity courting exactly that *southern* constituency that the reality of life in the Deep South nearly a hundred years after the abolition of slavery in the Union and the end of the Civil War, had really stuck in his craw. This was his fifth visit to Atlanta since the October War and nothing in politics had given him more pride and satisfaction than his association and developing friendship with the extraordinary man to whom the massive crowd had come to look to for hope.

Something remarkable had happened – and was happening – all across the Deep South. Yes, religious and racial bigotry, segregation and countless injustices remained ingrained, entrenched within the fabric of the South but increasingly, the Civil Rights movement was being embraced by poor whites who shared the privations of the large part of the coloured community, and by middle class whites who just wanted to live in peace with their neighbours. For every diehard red neck bigot there were tens of pragmatic souls who – rocked by the near disaster of the October War which had robbed them of all the certainties of their former lives – had privately seen the light. All men were equal in the sight of God; and all men were the same flesh and bone beneath the skin.

"Now and then," the Attorney General of the Unites States of America said distractedly as he smiled and nodded at the waving, cheerful throng pressing close to the Governor of Georgia's limousine, "I find myself honestly believing that some good might yet come out of the war."

Samuel Ernest Vandiver, the forty-five-year-old seventy-third Governor of Georgia did not reply immediately. But for the war and the dislocation in its aftermath he would have had to run for re-election last fall. Not that the local Democratic hierarchy would have rowed in behind him; he had made too many enemies cleaning up the mess – mostly good old-fashioned graft that had gotten out of hand - he had inherited from his predecessor, Marvin Griffin. He had been Griffin's Lieutenant-Governor and was therefore tarnished by association. This had not made his job any easier and he had made a lot of enemies among Georgia's Democratic Party aristocracy, many of whom regarded themselves as the guardians of the 'proud' tradition of their plantation-owning ancestors. Georgia democrats had never forgotten that it was the Abe Lincoln's *Republican* Union that had *raped* the South; it was the same nineteenth century mindset that still allowed otherwise well-educated, rational men to refer to the Civil War as the 'War of Succession', or the "War for State's Rights'.

Like the President's younger brother Vandiver had trained as a lawyer before entering politics. Elected Mayor of Lavonia in Franklyn County in 1946 soon after he left the United States Army Air Corps he had become the State Adjutant-General in 1948, been elected Lieutenant-Governor in 1954 and successfully run for the Governorship in 1958 when it was still de rigor for a Southern Democrat in Georgia to be a conviction segregationist. Not that Vandiver had ever had a problem with that. Back in 1958 he had pledged to defend segregation in the State education system; his campaign motto had been 'No, not one!' declaring that under his administration *not one* black child would attend a white school. Notwithstanding this solemn promise, Vandiver had meekly complied with a decision in a US District Court ordering the admission of the first two black students to the University of Georgia. Afterwards, he had persuaded the Georgia State Assembly to repeal a law banning the funding of integrated schools and set up a commission to plan for wider school desegregation.

Like many contemporary Southern Democrats his college education, war service and exposure to influences and ideas from outside his immediate Georgia caucus, Vandiver had for many years found himself espousing views and prejudices that he no longer personally regarded – if he ever had - as being articles of faith. He was no latter-day born-again reformist and he had fought tooth and nail to preserve Georgia's County Unit System of voting – a

form of electoral college rather than one man one vote democracy – right up until the moment the United States Supreme Court had ruled it as unconstitutional; but a part of him had secretly welcomed being forced to eventually start doing the *right* thing.

There was no shame in that; Bobby Kennedy had decided that Vandiver, despite his faults, was a man with whom he and the Administration could do business. Vandiver's Governorship had been efficient, relatively 'clean' by Georgia standards and but for the war would have improved the lot of many of the poorest Georgians.

How many other state governors of either Democratic or Republican persuasions could honestly claim that?

"That's a stretch," the Governor of Georgia remarked. "I find it very hard to see any good coming out of what happened back on October sixty-two." Unlike his companion in the back seat of the limousine he was still intensely uncomfortable to be seen paying court to the most famous living Georgian. It was not because he was a racist – because he did not consider himself to be one, other than in the small things imbued in one from birth in the Deep South – but he was much more aware than the President's younger brother that the crowds in the streets around the Ebenezer Baptist Church represented only a section, albeit a significant section, of the natural Democratic constituency that he represented. The Democratic Party, especially in the South, was an unimaginably broad 'church' embracing Northern liberals and Southern white supremacists and every shade of politics in between. First and foremost, Vandiver he was a practical man. If he alienated too many people on the right he honestly did not know if that left him enough votes on the left to one, win the Democratic nomination for the next gubernatorial race; and two, win the actual General Election. He could not remember a time in his adult life when opinions had been more polarised, or when the Democratic Party machine in Georgia had been so fragmented.

"The economy of the great State of Georgia is still in recession," he went on. "I've got military bases shutting down all over the place, nowhere near enough police to keep the streets safe. Hell, it isn't as if I can trust the National Guard to do much more than direct traffic. You'll forgive me if I beg to differ with you, I hope, sir."

"The moment when a nation seems to be at its most divided is the time its leaders must seek to unite it the most," the Attorney General murmured. It

was a mantra that he and his brother were proselytising across the continent while other members of the Administration, and the newly constituted Joint Chiefs of Staff under Curtis LeMay's gung ho chairmanship, were striving to restore a functioning Government machine and to undo the massive self-inflicted structural damage wrought by the 'peace dividend' cuts to the military. The depth of the looming crisis – irrespective of the real or imagined threat posed by Red Dawn which would hopefully turn out to be another in a long line of 'intelligence community' myths – was underlined by the fact that the New York Stock Exchange which had crashed spectacularly during the Battle of Washington, had still to recover fifty percent of its pre-insurrection value. Practically every American bank was as technically bankrupt as the Government, the entire financial system underpinning the still huge and miraculously, relatively intact North American industrial and economic behemoth was currently being funded on a wing and a prayer and millions of unpayable *I Owe Yous*. The social, political, economic, banking and military crisis was so acute that all it would take to bring down the whole stack of cards might be another surprise, another tiny unexpected knock.

In the next few days the House of Representatives would reconvene in Philadelphia. If either Congress or the Senate summarily rejected or reneged on the treaty with the British all bets would be off. If LBJ could not cut an interim deal to stop both Houses moving to vote down the renewal of the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement – and nobody else in the Administration could cut Congressional deals like the wily Texan – what then?

Bobby Kennedy and the Vice President had always disliked and mistrusted each other. It had been a visceral, personal thing. The Attorney General detested the older man and Lyndon Baines Johnson had held the younger sibling of the President in contempt. The only thing that had until recent weeks united them was their mutual detestation. Bobby *had not* wanted LBJ on the Presidential ticket in 1960; and at the time of the October War it was the worst kept secret in town that he was sounding out alternative candidates to join Jack on the 1964 ticket. Tellingly, although his brother had not encouraged him in this neither had he asked him to desist.

Before the October War, Jack had made a point of being punctiliously correct and polite with the Vice President, and he was invariably collegiate and occasionally deferential to him in meetings with other Cabinet members. After the October War Jack had kept a distance between them; the

catastrophic breakdown in relations with the British and the Battle of Washington had changed everything.

To discover that he was no longer the President's only 'special advisor' had come as a perversely welcome shock to the younger brother, a weight unexpectedly lifting off his shoulders. In the last few weeks he had thrown himself into his work with a new lightness of spirit. He had even managed to exchange a few genuinely civil and well-meant words with LBJ, who had contrived to respond in a grudgingly similar vein.

"Somebody took a pot shot at the President when he was in Dallas yesterday," Bobby informed the Governor of Georgia, who started in alarm. "Well several shots, we think," the Attorney General went on, as if an assassination attempt on the life of a President of the United States of America was a routine affair calling for little comment. "Some nut job in an office block housing a book depository with an M-16. The Marines and the Secret Service hosed the whole top floor of the building with automatic fire. They found this weird little guy in Army fatigues bleeding to death on the floor when they stormed place. He died before they got him to hospital so we don't know his story yet. Hoover's people are on to it."

"You wonder what's happened to this country sometimes," Samuel Vandiver grunted.

"Only one bullet actually hit the President's car," Bobby Kennedy confided, still preoccupied with the crowd pressing ever-closer around the Governor's limousine. "It pinged right off the armour. I hate it when stuff like that happens when Jackie is with the President."

Every night the newscasts carried film of the President and his glamorous wife in another city, the President charismatically delivering a beguiling, inspiring, humbly beseeching keynote speech and Jackie, well, Jackie just being Jackie. The nation's perfect first family was trying to connect with, and to be seen with, as many Americans as possible as the Presidential caravan criss-crossed the continent preaching family values, and the inculcation of a renewed sense of national togetherness and manifest destiny. There had been an insurrection, the opening shots of what might have been a second and unimaginably awful Civil War in Washington DC before Christmas, but Jack and Jackie Kennedy were the last people in Christendom to hide away in a bunker when their country needed them. Symbolism is everything in public life. While his brother re-imagined the reality of the

Presidency; Bobby was travelling the land re-building old and exploring new alliances which might yet bolster the Republic against some of the setbacks to come.

The limousine ground to a halt and a phalanx of Marines eased back the pressing crowds between it and the entrance to the Ebenezer Baptist Church. The door opened on the Attorney General's side of the car and he clambered out into the warm sunshine of the Southern morning. He straightened, shot his cuffs, and smiling confidently approached the man who, more than any other embodied to Bobby Kennedy, the future of a new and lasting post-war American domestic settlement. From this point onward, no US Administration could ignore the constituency for which this man spoke and whom he represented with such peerless eloquence and dignity. In his dreams Jack Kennedy's little brother saw the day – perhaps not so many years hence – when *this* man would stride the World stage. He had never believed a black man could be President of the United States of America; but meeting this man and exchanging the first mutual exploratory tendrils of what he hoped would be a lifelong friendship, he had realised the arrant folly of the idiotic racial stereotypes and prejudices drummed into him all his life.

The Reverend Martin Luther King Junior stepped forward into the sunlight and extended his hand in welcome to the younger brother of the President of the United States of America.

Chapter 16

Wednesday 22nd January 1964
RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, England

The flight from Malta had been delayed by ninety minutes at RAF Luqa by stormy weather and thunderstorms. The afternoon was moving towards a premature, overcast dusk by the time the Comet 4 in British Overseas Airways Corporation livery slapped down onto the wet tarmac of Brize Norton's extended main runway. There was another delay while the jetliner had to taxi to its appointed hardstand and the disembarkation steps were positioned. Then there was a further short hold up as the BBC outside film unit, which had been caught on the hop by the rescheduled landing – nobody had told the technicians that the flight was about to land - had to scramble to get into position to record the Fighting Admiral's arrival in England.

Vice Admiral Sir Julian Wemyss Christopher, Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations trotted sure-footedly down to the tarmac followed by his absurdly youthful-looking flag lieutenant, Alan Hannay, who was burdened with a bulging attaché case.

"Welcome home, Sir Julian," Margaret Thatcher said, so loudly she was afraid it might seem to those who would be watching the news footage at home on television – the BBC had started broadcasting scheduled television programs again ten days ago – or in cinemas, that she had blurted the welcome like a star struck schoolgirl meeting a movie star. But then that was what *this* man was; a film star in all but name. He was the man who had masterminded and forced through Operation Manna, and he was the man who had taken command in Malta in the middle of a devastating surprise air raid. The films and photographs of the tall, handsome Admiral surveying the wreckage and mingling personably with his men and Maltese civilians, added to the praetorian assurance in his voice when he addressed crowds, or spoke to reporters had quickly set his reputation in stone. Nobody could have any doubt that this man was the rock upon which the British presence in the Mediterranean was anchored. She had asked herself if she could still be as

infatuated with Julian Christopher as she had been when she had bidden him adieu at RAF Cheltenham in December. When she closed her eyes she still felt his lips half-touching her mouth. Now she knew. She was no less in the man's thrall; if anything, she was even more lost.

The Prime Minister was pleased to note that there were no visible traces of the injuries the sixty-three-year-old Vice Admiral had sustained at Balmoral Castle in the week before his departure for Malta. He stood easily, unpained and his face was tanned. He looked lean and fit; and his eyes were thoughtful as he returned her gaze and shook her hand.

"It is good to be home again, Prime Minister," he returned dutifully. "Albeit only for a flying visit, more is the pity." He half-turned: "May I introduce my flag lieutenant. This is Lieutenant Hannay."

Margaret Thatcher shook the boy's hand.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir David Luce stepped up and took the Fighting Admiral's hand next, patting his old friend on the arm.

"You are looking well, Julian," he declared.

"You know how it is," the returning hero smiled. "There's nothing quite like active service to concentrate a man's mind on the things that really matter."

Margaret Thatcher tried not to blush too deeply when Julian Christopher glanced to her as he spoke.

The welcoming ceremony completed the participants were whisked out of the cold of the darkening afternoon into the warmth of the hastily re-configured barn-like Officers Mess. Margaret Thatcher had not trusted herself to speak to Julian Christopher in the car transporting the welcoming party back to civilization. She looked around the Spartan, whitewashed building in which a long trestle table about which a dozen hard chairs had been arranged and quirked a smile to nobody in particular.

"I wonder what Mr MacMillan would have made of today's meeting in such an," she shrugged, "unconventional locale?"

"It think it would have reminded him of the good old days when he was attached to General Eisenhower's staff in the Mediterranean," Sir Henry Tomlinson suggested.

"Sir Harold and President Eisenhower were a good team," Margaret Thatcher declared, looking to her two American interlocutors.

William Fulbright had left his entourage kicking their heels in an

adjoining Mess Hall. The British Premier had indicated she wanted to keep this thing sweet and simple. Sir Julian Christopher was flying back to Malta tonight and unless anybody had a problem with it, Sir Henry Tomlinson would act as the 'conference secretary'.

"Good to meet you at last, Sir Julian," the Secretary of State said guardedly to the tall British Admiral in whom his countrymen and women – he had not missed the Angry Widow's untypical distraction now that she was in the great man's proximity – placed so much faith. "The Navy people back home spit when they hear your name so you must be doing something right!"

The Fighting Admiral appraised the American for moment.

"That's kind of you to say, sir." He was suddenly very serious. "Back in the Second War, I was proud to fight side by side with the United States Navy. If it comes to it, I will be again."

There was something a little chilling in the steely resolve in the older man's voice that broadcast that with, or without, the US Navy he would be fighting *again* soon.

The new American Ambassador to the Court of Balmoral, Captain Walter Brenckmann, who had crossed the Atlantic with his Secretary of State stepped forward and introduced himself.

"I gather that your son transferred off the USS Scorpion shortly before she sailed on her last voyage, Mr Ambassador?" Julian Christopher asked immediately.

"Thank God!"

The Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean had heard good reports about Brenckmann. It did no harm to exploit their shared recent terrors.

"My son was onboard HMS Talavera when she was attacked off Cape Finisterre," he told the other man. "Fortunately, he avoided serious injury. We both had very lucky escapes, Captain Brenckmann."

"Indeed, we did, sir."

Margaret Thatcher called the conference to order and the participants took their places around the table. Orderlies in RAF grey blue appeared out of nowhere bearing tea and coffee.

Nobody even thought of reaching for their cigarettes, pipes or tobacco pouches for it was already very well known, far and wide, that the Angry Widow detested smoking anywhere in her vicinity.

She fixed the two American guests in her sights.

"Secretary of State Fulbright and Ambassador Brenckmann," she prefaced, time was pressing and the World was doing its level best to go to Hell in handcart in the meantime. "The purpose of this conference is to inform me so that I can properly brief a full meeting of the Cabinet of the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom in Cheltenham tomorrow morning. Admiral Christopher has been summoned to this place to brief me on the most recent intelligence and developments in the Mediterranean. I have invited you to be present to better enable you to inform your own colleagues at home, and," she was momentarily a little whimsical, "hopefully, to better understand us."

The Secretary of State nodded.

Walter Brenckmann said nothing. William Fulbright was not any kind of anglophile it was just that he was an American who understood, instinctively, that the United States was stronger and safer embracing rather than estranging friends old and new. The man was a Southern Democrat to the core, a segregationist who had signed the *Southern Manifesto,* so he was not ever going to be in the camp of the so-called 'bleeding heart' liberals on any issue. However, in everything he had ever said about foreign relations he was a stone-cold realist. There was realpolitik and there was cheap talk; there was nothing in between for a man like Fulbright. He had warned the Kennedy Administration in 1961 that the Bay of Pigs Invasion would be a disaster; supported the President's tough stand over Berlin and against the building of the wall between East and West Germany, he had vigorously promoted the role of the United Nations and NATO since their inception; and vociferously mourned the disintegration of both in the months since the October War. To Fulbright, the renewal of the old alliance with Britain was the first unmistakable sign that sanity was beginning to return to international affairs.

"I would like to think that the Administration that I have recently become a member of," the man who was still the sitting junior Senator for Arkansas and the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs said, "would treat a visiting minister and ambassador from Britain with the same courtesy and trust with which Walter and I have been treated, Prime Minister. If I have anything to do with it in future such courtesies will become the default mode of our mutual dealings."

“Well said, Bill!” Murmured the Foreign Secretary, Sir Thomas ‘Tom’ Harding-Grayson.

Margaret Thatcher looked to the C-in-C Mediterranean.

“Lieutenant Hannay,” the tall man prefaced, suddenly very brisk and business-like, “has brought the latest U-2 photographs with him for you to scrutinise at your leisure, Prime Minister. I have also received partial reports relating to information coming out of the Aegean and the Greek Islands, mainly from refugees fleeing to Cyprus and Malta.”

“Shall I put up the map, sir,” Julian Christopher’s flag lieutenant asked.

“If you’d be so good, Alan.”

Alan Hannay looked around and picked the nearest wall.

A minute later a large coloured physical map of the Eastern Mediterranean from Malta to Haifa was tacked at eye height next to the table. Everybody gathered around it.

Julian Christopher accepted the slim pointer his flag lieutenant handed him. The young man stood back, outside the circle waiting to be summoned at need.

“A couple of general points before I get to the meat of the matter,” the handsome C-in-C in the Mediterranean prefaced. He was looking at the two American guests. “My official title includes what has, up until now been an ‘honorific’ element. I am C-in-C of all British and *Commonwealth* Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations. There have actually been over a hundred Australian and New Zealand officers and men attached to units, mainly in Malta and Cyprus for some months. Such secondments are typical of the way the Army operates. Shortly, these men will be joined by cadres of air force technicians and intelligence analysts from Australasia and Canada, and logistics personnel and other non-combatants, doctors, nurses and signals staffers from several other Commonwealth countries, and South Africa - which of course, formally left the old Commonwealth the year before the war - who will be deployed across the theatre of operations as necessary to back up and support the existing British forces. In due course, I expect at least one submarine, and hopefully, a frigate or destroyer to be taken over and wholly manned by Commonwealth personnel. I also believe that South Africa and Southern Rhodesia will shortly be shipping infantry companies into theatre, initially to train alongside my forces and eventually, to be integrated into existing front-line units, initially at Aden and at Abadan. I say this because

no matter how it might seem from ‘across the other side of the pond’, as it were, the United Kingdom does not stand alone. While it is true that our present weakness on the ground in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East stems from the destruction of a substantial element of our ground forces in Germany in the October War, and the commitments we subsequently made to our Commonwealth friends to guarantee their security, we are not alone and at need, we are confident that our friends *will* stand by us in the trying days to come.”

William Fulbright’s face creased into a wan smile.

Everything he had heard about the ‘Fighting Admiral’ was true. *We might lose a battle or two; but we will never surrender*. America had Curtis LeMay; the Brits had this suave, eloquent Admiral. LeMay and Christopher were utterly different kinds of men; yet in most key respects they were exactly the same kind of men.

“I hear you, Sir Julian,” the Secretary of State chuckled, looking the other man straight in the eye and holding unblinking eye contact for long seconds.

The naval officer nodded and launched into his planned briefing.

“First, nobody really knows what is going on in the Black Sea, Anatolia, Istanbul, Greece or the Balkans. What we do know is that *something* is going on and that whatever it is, it doesn’t look peaceful.”

His pointer dropped into the middle of the Black Sea.

“Intelligence on how many Soviet naval units were destroyed at the various Black Sea Fleet bases was scratchy – well, non-existent for some months after the October war – and remains so. Our assumption was that the majority of surface units had probably been destroyed but that some part of the submarine fleet might have survived. However,” the tip of the pointed fell on Istanbul. “We now know that several major surface units must have survived the destruction of Sevastopol. It would be reasonable to assume that given the rising international tensions in the days before the war elements of the Black Sea Fleet might have been dispersed to navigable inlets around Sevastopol, or perhaps, been sent out to sea. A recent mission by an RAF Canberra based at Akrotiri overflew the Sea of Marmara and made a single pass over Istanbul. Analysis of the film shot during this pass identified at least four large warships in the Golden Horn anchorage. There may have been other units present but one of the ships was making a lot of smoke and

the Canberra's crew detected sophisticated radar emissions north of the city and aborted their mission."

"How sophisticated, Julian?" Sir David Luce asked. The First Sea Lord's question was not for his own benefit; he wanted the others around the table to hear the answer.

"The emissions were consistent with a modern Soviet style fighter command and control system. The sort of system one would only turn on if one already had interceptors in the air. At my personal request a U-2 sortie was subsequently flown over the area from Aviano Air Force Base in Northern Italy. Preliminary analysis of the material arising from that sortie indicates as many as eight destroyer-sized or larger warships in the Golden Horn. Two of the large ships seen on the previous mission were absent. However, over the Sea of Marmara some fifteen miles from the nearest land the U-2 photographed a large vessel in company with at least four small escorts and two medium-sized merchantmen. General cargo ships or small liners, it isn't possible to tell. The big ship was making a lot of smoke and by then it was early evening and visibility was poor."

"And these aren't Turkish ships?" Margaret Thatcher checked, frowning.

"The smaller vessels might be, Prime Minister. Well, some of them. The Turkish Navy comprised a handful of surplus war-construction Royal Navy and USN destroyers and frigates, and ten or so Balao class diesel-electric submarines. Again, late World War Two vintage unmodernized vessels."

"Neither the RAF Canberra or the U-2 were actually attacked?"

"No. The U-2 overflew the region at sixty-eight thousand feet, the Canberra at over fifty thousand." Julian Christopher moved on. "Crete," he announced, tapping the long shape of the island with his pointer. "Our intelligence was that Crete, which had been overlooked in the original Greek military coup d'état had recently been taken over by the Government in Athens. This may not be the case. Refugees talk about an invasion, towns and villages being sacked and massacres having taken place. The whole island seems to be in chaos. All the refugees who have come ashore on Cyprus or been picked up far out at sea talk about soldiers everywhere, atrocities, widespread rape and looting. Aerial reconnaissance from Akrotiri had been inconclusive, other than to tell us that several settlements have been

burned to the ground and most of the harbours along the north coast are deserted. *However*, two days ago a Red Navy Kirov class cruiser and two smaller escorts were identified anchored in Souda Bay. The same over flight brought back pictures of new major construction work in progress on the airfield at Heraklion where it appears that the main runway is being extended. It is now our working assumption that Crete is no longer under the control of the Greek Junta in Athens."

The silence in the room was palpable, uneasy.

"Greece," Julian Christopher continued, "has, as you will know opted for a policy of armed neutrality since the military took over a couple of months after the October War. That neutrality initially took the form of non-interventionism, then turned into a sort of paranoid isolationism in which all foreigners were first encouraged to leave, and later forcibly expelled from the country along with the dissidents and trouble makers the regime did not get around to imprisoning or shooting. There is evidence that life on several of the major Greek Islands went on fairly normally until fairly recently but we now believe that around the time Crete was removed from the control of the regime in Athens – sometime in the last six weeks we now think - the Greek Junta lost contact with many, perhaps all, the major islands in the southern Aegean. It may be that they have declared independence from the mainland or suffered the same fate as Crete. The simplest explanation for this may simply be that local military garrisons have rebelled against Athens. Obviously, the presence of at least one former Soviet cruiser at Souda Bay, may suggest that something more sinister has befallen the region."

The pointer moved onto Asia Minor.

"We knew that Ankara was almost totally destroyed by several airbursts during the October War. We don't know what happened to all the NATO military assets based in Anatolia. Incirlik, for example, was abandoned within a month of the war. Frankly, the Mongol Hordes of Genghis Khan could be at large across the Anatolian plains for all we know. What we do know for sure is that in the last few weeks our listening stations on Cyprus are picking up a lot of radio chatter from the vicinity of Incirlik, the coastal strip directly north of Cyprus, and from around Izmir on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor. People who know about these things categorise this 'chatter' as being typical of a Division or perhaps, an under-strength Corps-sized military organisation. Some of the 'chatter' is in the clear, mainly in Turkish but

we've also got intercepts in various Russian dialects, but most of the traffic is non-voice and coded so we've got no real feel for what's being said to whom or about what."

"Reformed Turkish Army formations?" Walter Brenckmann asked.

"Your guess is as good as mine," Julian Christopher guffawed ruefully.

The pointer returned to Istanbul.

"There has been fighting in and around Istanbul in the last month or so. Or that was what we thought. Three days ago, the destroyer HMS Undaunted, on patrol at a mid-point between Cyprus and Malta acting as an emergency communications relay between RAF Akrotiri on Cyprus and my headquarters in Malta, rescued several fishermen from a badly shot up fishing boat that had run out of fuel. The boat had been fired on by a Turkish warship somewhere off Rhodes. Two men dressed like Soviet naval officers had been put aboard and the crew ordered to sail the boat to Crete. To cut a long story short there was a storm and the crew threw the 'Russians' over the side. Not knowing that Crete was not safe they headed for Souda. When they got there, they were ordered to anchor off shore, refused fuel and provisions and questioned by another 'Russian'. Concluding they weren't among friends the crew decided to make a run for it. Which they did but there was another storm and eventually they ran out of fuel. They claim that before they left Rhodes on their last voyage there were rumours that a pogrom against Westerners and Jews was under way in Istanbul."

"Just gossip?" Margaret Thatcher asked.

"This big ship making a lot of smoke you mentioned earlier, Admiral Christopher?" Tom Harding-Grayson inquired idly. "Modern ships make relatively little smoke unless they mean to deliberately lay a smokescreen?"

"Quite," the First Sea Lord concurred tersely.

"The smoke is a problem," Julian Christopher added. "But we've got enough detail on the pictures we've got of this ship to make a preliminary identification."

Margaret Thatcher was both intrigued, and troubled by the two Admirals reticence to share their little secret.

"Tell me more," she demanded, trying not to flutter her eyelids.

"There's only one big ship in the region that fits the bill," Sir David Luce explained. "Big guns in five twin turrets, one forward, two aft and two offset amidships. A big, coal-burning ship, that's what the smoke must be, coal

smoke."

Tom Harding-Grayson barked a short laugh.

"My God," he whistled, "just when you think the World has stopped going mad, something else comes along!"

"You're going to have to explain it to me," the Angry Widow said, beginning to frown. "Whatever it is you are all laughing about?"

"It has got to be the *Yavuz,"* her Foreign Secretary announced. "I thought the Turks scrapped her years ago!"

Julian Christopher concluded that a little straight talking was in order.

"The battlecruiser *Yavuz* was built as the *Seiner Majestät Schiff* – His Majesty's Ship - *Goeben* by Blohm and Voss in Hamburg before the First World War. She was commissioned into Kaiser Wilhelm II's High Seas Fleet in July 1912 but trapped in the Mediterranean by the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914. Basically, she was chased into the Sea of Marmara by the Royal Navy where she was handed over to the Ottoman Empire as part of the deal that saw the Turks come in on the German side."

"Oh." The Prime Minister did not know what to make of this news.

Sir David Luce, the First Sea Lord decided to clarify matters.

"The Turks struck the Yavuz off their Navy list four years ago. The ship had never been properly modernized. It was and probably remains a museum piece. The thing that worries me is that somebody – somebody who has other big, more modern ships at their disposal – has obviously gone to a great deal of effort to re-activate one of the Kaiser's dreadnoughts. It speaks to me of a disturbing obsession to put every available weapon, regardless of its usability or suitability, to the, er, wheel."

"It is madness to waste time and resources on a ship like this when you have better assets to hand, Prime Minister," Julian Christopher said sombrely. "To me it suggests a military mind that doesn't care about waging war effectively," he concluded, "but a mind whose one guiding purpose is simply to make war."

Chapter 17

Thursday 23rd January 1964
HMS Talavera, Eastern Mediterranean

The Battle class destroyer was loping along at twenty knots with only one of her Admiralty three-drum boilers lit. Her captain, David Penberthy was taking full advantage of his orders requiring him to make an independent passage to Valletta to test the hurried repairs to his ship. If he had been allowed to top off his bunkers in Gibraltar he would have fired up her second boiler and let HMS Talavera off her leash; as it was he planned to wait until he was closer to their destination. Besides, if the forces detailed to seize the three rebel-held islands of Pantelleria, Linosa and Lampedusa on the way to Malta ran into any significant resistance he wanted a healthy operating reserve in his tanks. In the Royal Navy no self-respecting destroyer captain wanted to miss a potential scrap on account of a trifling thing like empty fuel bunkers.

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher was not about to get used to his new berth, the Executive Officer's cabin, any time soon. His old friend Hugo Montgommery's ghost still lingered in the cabin and throughout the ship. His predecessor had been a harsh task master when he had to be; but always a man who was prepared to put a consoling hand on a fellow's shoulder.

Accommodation on a destroyer tended to be at a premium. There was a bunk against the aft bulkhead, a writing table over a slim chest of drawers, a couple of small overhead lockers. There was no port hole because the original scuttle had been welded over during Talavera's eighteen-month long conversion from an old-fashioned gunboat to a Fast Air Detection Escort.

Ironically, the only reason he and so many of the men still onboard the destroyer had survived the October War, was because Talavera had been at sea running radar trials when a megaton-range ground burst had destroyed her home port of Chatham.

At the time Talavera had been one of the most advanced ships in the Royal Navy. Not so today. A couple of months ago off Cape Finisterre an

A-4 Skyhawk's bomb had exploded at the base of her main mast, and another alongside her stern. The first hit had destroyed most of her electronics suite, the second – a near miss – had ignited two unfired GWS 21 Sea Cat surface-to-air missiles and detonated several ant-submarine mortar rounds loaded in her stern-mounted Limbo launcher. Every man caught on deck aft of the amidships deck house had been killed or seriously wounded within seconds. Shortly afterwards, as the ship's doctor - a perpetually sea sick young man who had been deemed fit to practice medicine at the end of his penultimate year at medical school under the War Emergency Act, and sent onboard Talavera just ten days before she left Portsmouth - and every single one of his qualified sick bay orderlies had been transformed into disambiguated parcels of flesh and bone randomly sprayed across burning bulkheads during the Skyhawks' first strafing run. Peter, his position in the Radar Room compartment of the Command Information Centre – CIC – partially shield from the hail of cannon fire raking the main deck by structures farther aft, had been knocked unconscious but otherwise emerged remarkably uninjured, a concussion, a gashed head, a very sore shoulder and several deeply bruised and miscellaneously cracked ribs excepted. Approximately half his shipmates had not been so lucky. Ignoring the walking wounded among whose number he had considered himself, of the 218 officers and men onboard fifty-seven were killed, eight men were listed as missing presumed killed, and forty-one had been so seriously injured as to be unable to return to duty before the ship reached port. Nobody knew how many of the dead might have lived if the ship's surgeon, albeit a not quite qualified doctor in normal times, inexperienced and horrendously out of his depth as he would inevitable have been had he survived the attack.

HMS Devonshire, Talavera's consort that stormy afternoon, had suffered a similar casualty list. Unlike Talavera she was a brand-new ship with a green crew and it was only the fact she was twice Talavera's size, built like a cruiser with a complement over twice the size of the converted Battle class ship that had enabled her to survive. Talavera had survived because her core of experienced old hands had somehow managed to keep her afloat long enough for help in the form of HMS Plymouth, a modern Rothesay class frigate commanded by a veteran captain with a seasoned crew, to come to her aid.

HMS Devonshire had been sent back to England.

Talavera had not; and Peter Christopher was not complaining.

There was a rapping knock at his cabin door.

"Come in!"

Chief Petty Officer 'Spider' McCann stepped in from the corridor. The small, lined, sinewy ex-champion pugilist was a little surprised – pleasantly so – by the effortless aplomb with which the formerly easy going Electronic Warfare Officer had re-joined the ship in an entirely new role. Not that he would ever mention it to anybody. A ship's Executive officer trod an extremely narrow path; he needed to retain the respect and trust of the crew but *he* could never forget that *he* was the man answerable to the Captain for the smooth running and the battle readiness of the ship. It was very hard for any second-in-command to actually be liked or popular and friendships were things many Executive officers eschewed. Yes, Lieutenant-Commander Christopher began from a good place; a lot of the men knew him and he and the Old Man had virtually carried Talavera into Oporto on their backs after the action off Finisterre. But no, that did not count for very much as time went by and the destroyer fell back into normal seagoing routines. Half the crew were new men, many of them on their first ship, lacking the sea legs, the professionalism, the seamanship and the priceless seagoing experience of the men they had replaced. Which made it even more remarkable how sure-footed Talavera's ridiculously young – the kid was only twenty-seven, the Master at Arms continually reminded himself – new Executive Officer had been in the five days he had been back onboard.

"Any new defaulters for the Captain's table overnight, Mister McCann?"

"No, sir."

Peter Christopher checked his watch. It would be dawn in thirty minutes. In Ten minutes time the ship would stand to Air Defence Stations One; a drill that owed its origin to the exigencies of former wars. In the pre-dawn twilight surface ships were marvellously silhouetted against the half light of the new day, periscopes and even small boats, like torpedo boats, were almost invisible to the naked eye down low against the background of the iron grey sea. In the twilight there was no real horizon, no ranging point for the lookouts high in a warship's superstructure, the only sign of a threat was a trail of bubbles in the water or a tell-tale smear of exhaust smoke. The advent of radar in World War II had somewhat eroded the necessity and the utility of the pre-dawn drill, but as a way of waking up the ship and starting

each new day with a metaphorical ‘bang’, closing up at Air Defence Stations One was hard to beat. In any event, who really trusted in radar? HMS Talavera’s slowly rotating four-ton double bedstead Type 965 long-range air defence system atop her great lattice foremast could supposedly see to and slightly beyond the visible horizon; but *seeing* danger hurtling towards one was not the same thing as being capable of fending it off when it actually arrived overhead. This was never truer than in the ship’s current, electronically denuded condition. The wreckage of the GWS 21 Sea Cat surface-to-air quadruple launcher had been removed, likewise the Limbo anti-submarine mortar; bare steel plates covered the decks where they had blown up and burned off Cape Finisterre. The 20-millimetre Oerlikon cannons on the stern deckhouse had gone, too, and while the twin 4.5 turrets of the destroyer’s main battery on the foredeck looked mightily impressive and made a comfortingly loud noise when fired in unison, currently the guns could only be directed, ranged and fired under local control. The gunnery control radar and all its associated electronics had been destroyed off Cape Finisterre and not replaced in the desperate rush to patch Talavera up for the run to Malta.

“Mr Weiss has the watch, sir,” the Master at Arms reported. Both men knew the watch list but the formalities had to be observed. Redundant information was nowhere near as big a problem as risking a failure to communicate a potentially vital piece of information one believed a colleague already knew.

Peter Christopher eased himself to his feet, grabbed his cap.

“Lead on, Mister McCann.”

The two men went first to the bridge.

“Good morning, Mr Weiss,” Peter half-smiled. Miles Weiss had joined the destroyer two months after the October War. Eighteen months his new Executive Officer’s junior in age, the two men were both ‘modern technical officers’ by training and vocation. For Peter the fascination was with radar and electronics, for Miles Weiss it was with guns and ordnance of every imaginable description. “Any surface contacts?”

“We’re painting several fishing boats on the Type 965 repeater, sir.” The dark-haired shorter man reported. “But nothing closer than seven miles. We have a couple of larger contacts farther out. Range thirty miles and slowly falling astern. Might be the Spanish destroyers Gibraltar warned us were

stooging about out here?"

Peter Christopher could feel the easy motion of the ship under his feet as she effortlessly breezed along at a speed no merchantman in the world could match, her blowers hissing, her fabric softly, rhythmically vibrating.

"They probably don't realise we're half-blind with most of our radars down," he chuckled. Before they departed Gibraltar, he had heard that the Spanish had sent a delegation to the border of the colony to deliver a formal 'ceasefire concordat'. It seemed that, just so there could be no further 'unfortunate misunderstandings', Generalissimo Francisco Franco Bahamonde had personally commanded all Spanish land, air and sea forces, and all internal militias to observe an indefinite unconditional unilateral 'armistice' with the 'forces of the British Empire'. "If those contacts are Spanish they're a long way from home?"

"True," the officer of the watch agreed. "Initial contact was on a northerly bearing. As I say, they've slipped back a bit in the last hour or so. Obviously, in our present *situation* there's no way we can interrogate their radar signatures," presently, Talavera's electronic warfare capability was negligible, "so for all we know those fellows might not even be Spanish."

"The French and the Italians had US search and fire control kit before the war," Peter Christopher mused aloud. He did not overly care for the notion that the two shadowing contacts might have better eyes over the horizon than his own ship. In this age having better and more capable electronics systems was the equivalent of having the lee gauge – the advantage of the wind – in former, pre-steam eras. He sighed, focused on more immediate matters. He glanced at the bulkhead clock. "Air Defence Stations in eight minutes," he grinned. The old hands were accustomed to being welcomed into the new dawn by the alarms blaring through the ship; for the green draftees many of whom were still seasick, it was a horrible introduction to another exhausting and bewildering shipboard day. "The Master and I will make our way to the auxiliary damage control station."

"Aye, sir."

The Auxiliary Damage Control station – ADC - was in the gutted after deckhouse. The dockyard had restored direct telephone links to the bridge and the engine room, repaired the emergency steering position, and tested all the linkages to the destroyer's twin rudders. In dire extremis HMS Talavera could, theoretically, be conned from the ADC station although in practice, the

very thought sent a shudder of apprehension through every fibre of the destroyer's Executive Officer's being.

Petty Officer Jack Griffin was waiting for the two men when they reached the stern. He was staring into the darkness where Talavera's propellers churned the water white and faintly iridescent. The deck vibrated much more noticeably nearer the stern.

"Morning, sir. Morning, Master," rasped the stocky, red-bearded man who Spider McCann had commandeered as his Deck Division number two and made responsible for turning the greenest of the latest replacements into 'real seaman'.

"Not like you to be wool-gathering at this time of day, Petty Officer Griffin?" Peter Christopher observed.

"I'm getting soft in my old age, sir!" The other man retorted.

Spider McCann snorted derisively

"Seriously, Master," Jack Griffin protested. "Some of the blokes we took onboard at Gib are just kids who volunteered for this lark to get..." His voice trailed away. "You know, things aren't that good at home, I suppose."

"It'll get a lot worse if we fuck up!" The Master at Arms reminded his most junior Petty Officer.

Peter Christopher had wondered how Jack Griffin would cope with suddenly finding himself at the bottom of the pecking order in the Petty Officers' Mess. He needn't have worried. Spider McCann had set him to work night and day with the youngest, least 'naval' of the new men and from what HMS Talavera's Executive Officer had heard and seen to date, Jack Griffin might have been born to bully and mentor confused, frightened and sometimes angrily belligerent boys towards manhood. Jack Griffin threw a salute and departed ahead of the alarm to his damage control station in the empty deck space behind the funnel where the CIC had been. The compartment had been so comprehensively wrecked that the whole structure had been cut away and dumped on the dockside at Gibraltar. The absence of this element of superstructure, the GWS 21 Sea Cat system, the Limbo anti-submarine mortar and the old main mast meant that Talavera had lost somewhere around seventy tons of top weight, all of it relatively high above her notional centre of gravity; consequently, she was a much stiffer sea boat, and her period of roll shorter. This ought to have made life easier for the new men, reduced the agonies of sea sickness. It ought to have, anyway. In

another way it made Miles Weiss's job as 'Guns' – the gunnery officer – harder because not only did he have to contend with an absence of a working fire control system but the new 'stiffness' of the ship made her a much less stable – 'slow rolling' - gun platform in any kind of cross sea.

"Another few days and we'll be in Malta, sir," the Master at Arms remarked as the two men waited on the stern beneath the flapping White Ensign on the jack staff above their heads.

Everybody who had been on Talavera any length of time, certainly everybody who had been onboard before the action off Cape Finisterre, knew the story about the Fighting Admiral's son and his Maltese sweetheart. There were few if any secrets on a ship the size of the old Battle class destroyer, especially when the ship had been tied up in harbour most of last year awaiting a call to action nobody had seriously believed would ever come.

Well, they had been as wrong about that as they had been wrong about practically everything else!

"Yes," the younger man muttered. "In my spell on Hermes I allowed myself to get carried away with things," he confessed. If he could not trust the Master at Arms with a harmless secret then what hope was there? He had started dreaming of seeing Marija waiting for him on the quayside as the carrier glided into the Grand Harbour. "For the moment I think taking things day by day is the ticket."

The older man sniffed.

"That's very wise, sir!"

Chapter 18

Thursday 23rd January 1964
Cabinet Room, Government Buildings, Cheltenham

"Good morning, gentleman!" Margaret Thatcher called as she swept into the oak beamed room which the previous owner of the mansion – a now deceased Fleet Street press baron – had probably honestly believed resembled a classic Tudor reception room. The dead newspaper magnate had been a man of decidedly flawed and ill-informed tastes and the big house that now accommodated the Cabinet Office and the rooms of several of the most senior members of the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom reflected his foibles. The Devil, as they say, is invariably in the detail and the one thing the magnate had not invested in was the building's plumbing and central heating; neither of which worked. The Cabinet Room was relatively warm thanks to a roaring fire in the great, baronial hearth at its northern end; facilitated by the Prime Minister having given her personal seal of approval to the pooling her Ministers' daily personal coal rations. Today was going to be a long day and she did not want her key associates slowly turning into blocks of ice when there was work to be done.

The Prime Minister was in bullish form, her mood untouched by the troubling news from the Mediterranean and the disturbing intimations from across the Atlantic that the 'America First' camp in the relocated Congress in Philadelphia was stronger and more vociferous than Tom Harding-Grayson, the Foreign Secretary, had anticipated in his worst nightmares. As much as she hated waiting on events, the situation was what it was and there was no point moping about it. One played the game with the hand one was dealt.

Besides, half-an-hour alone with Julian Christopher had made her invincible.

At the end of the 'conference' in the Officers Mess at RAF Brize Norton yesterday evening, the Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations had baldly requested: 'Might I have a few moments alone with you, Prime Minister?'

The room had cleared without her having to say a word.

'Perhaps, if we sat down?" The man had suggested as orderlies had brought fresh cups of tea and retreated to a safe distance out of earshot.

The couple had at sat at the end of a long trestle table, sipping their tea.

'I am very much afraid that this will be a bloody thing, Margaret,' Julian Christopher had said eventually. 'But you must not worry about me.'

'That's impossible!' She had blurted.

'My proposal stands,' he had continued, quirking a wry smile, his eyes locked on her face, 'I will be honoured to be your husband at the drop of a hat. But I know that now is not *our* time.'

Time had been so short there was no scope for beating about the bush.

'I think about you a lot,' she had explained, feeling tongue-tied.

'And I you, Margaret.' He had seemed a little distracted for a moment. 'Right now, *you* belong to *our* people. Even from where I've been sitting in Malta it is abundantly clear to me that you have caught a mood, galvanised in some way the imagination of the man and the woman in the street; in Britain certainly, and perhaps, also throughout the Commonwealth.' He had set his jaw. 'Nothing must distract you from your,' he had shrugged apologetically, '*destiny*, is probably what I am trying to say.'

She had looked at him in astonishment.

'Destiny?'

'Yes, I think so. Things are so mixed up these days that there is room again for that sort of word. The war changed everything. For example; I was appointed C-in-C Far East Fleet just before the October War in recognition that I would never be First Sea Lord. My time had passed, you see, and flying my flag – albeit briefly – at Hong Kong was my, shall we say, *quid pro quo* for acknowledging with such good grace that sometime in 1963 David Luce would succeed the then First Sea Lord, Sir Caspar John. As it happens I can think of no better man than David to be at the helm in these times. But for the war I'd have left the Navy by now. I'd be sailing my yacht, the *Aysha*, in the Solent, and preparing myself to circumnavigate the British Isles single-handedly. That, incidentally, was the one thing I'd promised myself I'd do before I died. Sail single-handed all the way around these, er, *sceptred isles*.'

She had summoned her courage.

'The night after the Balmoral atrocity you were a little delirious. You

mentioned ‘Aysha’ several times. It was my impression that you weren’t talking about a yacht, Julian?’

The man had tossed back his greying, tanned, handsome head and fixed her with twinkling grey blue eyes.

‘No,” he admitted, shaking his head. ‘I was at Singapore before the Second War; attached to the Staff of the C-in-C Far East. There was hardly any ‘staff work’ to be done and I’d spent most of the thirties racing yachts. I dreamed of winning the America’s Cup for Britain and the Empire, but it was not to be. My naval career was in the doldrums, I’d probably have left the Service but for the war. Peter was only a few months old when I was posted to Singapore and my marriage was already a farrago, truth be told. In Singapore I raced yachts, I drank heavily, and I womanized. *Aysha* was the mistress of one of the richer, more obviously crooked rubber planters; one of the ones who dealt contraband and kept a foot or a hand or a finger in every conceivable pot. He was the sort of man without whom no Empire can function. His name was Li Leung-Chung, a Chinaman, probably a gangster although we didn’t ever use words like that in those days. A man like Li Leung-Chung never gave a fig about who was running the show just so long as he got his cut. That was the way of Empire; people like him were the glue that held the whole edifice together. In Singapore nobody asked any questions so long as the rubber kept flowing to the factories of the English Midlands, and nobody – not for a single minute - cared if the underlying fabric of the Imperium was rotten.’

He had realised he was rambling.

‘No, *Aysha* was not a yacht. *Aysha* was my mistress for three months in 1939 and then the war happened. The rest is, as they say, history.’

‘Have you had many mistresses?’ She heard herself asking, not believing she had had the temerity to ask the question so brazenly.

The man had shaken his head.

‘No, not since my wife died.’

Her face must have been a picture because Julian Christopher had smiled ruefully, belatedly recognising that his answer had been less than unambiguous.

‘That wasn’t said very well,” he decided, ruefully. ‘Let’s just say that there has been no one for several years.’

Bidding the man that one day she planned to marry farewell. had not

been easy, and her colleagues must have noticed her distraction on the drive back to Cheltenham last night. Somehow, she had managed to hold back her tears until she was alone, that was the main thing.

Margaret Thatcher took her seat and waited for her male colleagues to settle again. And then she waited a little longer until she had everybody's undivided attention.

"Several amendments to the proposed agenda for this Cabinet have been submitted to the Cabinet Secretary. I do not doubt that any of these amendments deserve discussion at the highest level. However, I do not wish to be diverted from the two matters originally mooted for this Cabinet. Any other matters of substance may be debated *after* we have addressed those key challenges facing the UAUK, *if there is time*. Otherwise it is my general view regarding how we should proceed in these difficult times that inter-departmental issues should be hammered out between the ministries involved, rather than raised at Cabinet. Nobody around this table would have been invited to join Cabinet if they did not enjoy the total, unqualified confidence of both Jim," she nodded to her left where the lugubrious, brooding presence of James Callaghan, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the leader of the Labour and Co-operative Party, sat deep in thought, "and myself."

Several men stirred, none actually voiced an objection until Admiral Sir David Luce, the First Sea Lord who sat in Cabinet representing the Chiefs of Staff Committee raise a hand an inch or so off the gleaming polished surface of the big oval table around which they sat.

"The first item on the agenda is an essentially *political* one, Prime Minister. I would not be in any way discommoded if you asked me to absent myself while it was discussed."

"I appreciate your sense of propriety in this, Sir David," Margaret Thatcher countered, having anticipated the First Sea Lord's unease. "The matter of the relocation of Parliament to Oxford and the reconvening of the House of Commons will inevitably be major headache from the point of view of security. There may well be questions that you will need to take back to the Chiefs of Staff. I would like you to remain in Cabinet."

The First Sea Lord nodded his assent.

The Angry Widow wasted no time jumping into the bear pit.

"I propose that not later than the last day of February the House of

Commons should be recalled to sit in Oxford. Furthermore, I propose that at that time the UAUK immediately seeks a vote of confidence to legitimise its writ for a period of not more than two calendar years. It is my intention that all surviving Parliamentary constituencies currently without a Member of Parliament should organise and conduct a by-election within the next ninety days, and that a General Election be held not later than eighteen months from this day."

Her Cabinet had had little time to digest the topic, openly stated in the agenda which she had had published less than twenty-four hours in advance. There was an ominous silence when the Prime Minister sat back and looked around at the faces of her colleagues.

The second item on today's agenda was 'the situation in the Mediterranean and the likely ongoing response to it by the USA'.

James Callaghan cleared his throat.

"Why wait over a year for a General Election?" He asked. "If *you* stood now you'd wipe out my Party as a political force overnight, Prime Minister," he observed dryly.

"Even if that was true, Jim," she replied, a little surprised that she was not having to fend off a dozen assailants at once. With a shock she realised that she had contemplated her strategy for every contingency except the one she was actually facing. "I don't believe there has ever been one example in the history of the World when democracy was best served by a single, dominant party or faction. Look at what was achieved in both the First and Second Wars by coalitions of the willing and the like-minded. Look what we achieved *together* under Ted Heath's leadership in the darkest days of last year. Besides, I suspect I have at least as many detractors as supporters in the country. Gentlemen," she swung around to make eye contacts up and down the table, "I will never be a dictator. Never, ever! What we might achieve together dwarfs anything *any* of us could conceivably achieve alone. At some stage this spring or summer I will look to stand for a vacant Parliamentary constituency, as I expect those colleagues around the table whose old constituencies no longer exist to seek their own seats. Without democratic legitimacy we can achieve nothing in the long term."

James Callaghan looked to his fellow Labour Party members; Roy Jenkins, Anthony Crossland and Christopher Mayhew. Each man nodded wordlessly.

“The Labour Party endorses the Prime Minister’s proposals for constitutional renewal,” the Deputy Prime Minister declared. With a sigh he added: “Without reservation.”

The Prime Minister tried hard not to give her deputy a suspicious look. She had been brought up to believe that if a thing was too good to be true, it probably was too good to be true.

“Forgive me, Prime Minister,” the Foreign Secretary interjected. “Much as I subscribe to democracy and all that,” he grimaced, “I’m not convinced that running for Parliament is my, er, cup of tea.”

Margaret Thatcher morphed into the Angry Widow for a split second.

She did not have to say a word.

“Obviously,” Tom Harding-Grayson muttered, “if one must, one must.”

“We’ll sort something out for you,” Iain Macleod, the Minister of Information in the UAUK but still the Chairman of the Conservative and Unionist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, assured the man who until a few weeks ago had been the Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Office.

“Oh, I couldn’t possibly stand as a Tory, Iain.”

James Callaghan guffawed at this development.

“Then what will you stand as, Sir Thomas?”

The Foreign Secretary blanched at the Deputy Prime Minister’s sardonic employment of his formal title.

“Actually, I’ve always been a bit of a closet socialist, Jim.”

Margaret Thatcher’s eyes became blue saucers.

Sir Henry Tomlinson coughed.

“Sir Thomas kept very bad company in his student days at King’s College,” he observed helpfully.

The Angry Widow concluded that the ‘boys’ had had their fun.

She glanced to Sir David Luce.

“First Sea Lord, would you brief the Cabinet on the latest intelligence analysis of the situation in the Mediterranean please?”

This had an instantly sobering effect on the meeting.

Chapter 19

Friday 24th January 1964
Royal Naval Hospital Bighi, Kalkara, Malta

Rosa Calleja was in a small airy room at the end of the first floor white-washed ward. Bright afternoon sunshine poured in through high windows. The young woman was propped up in the big bed, looking small and understandably sorry for herself. Her right eye and the top half of her head was swathed in a thick matrix of gauze and muslin bandaging, her right foot and lower leg up to the knee, resting on a pillow was encased in a thick plaster cast and her left arm was in a sling, her hand held high to her throat. There were fresh flowers in a glass vase on a small bedside table on which there was a jug of water and single tea cup. To her visitors' surprise the patient was not wearing a hospital gown but an oversized white shirt. A sheet covered her lower body – apart from her broken lower right leg – ensuring her modesty.

Arkady Pavlovich Rykov had wanted to 'interview' the woman immediately he had discovered what had happened to Lieutenant James Siddall; but he had burned too many bridges half-killing that idiot Denzil Williams and besides, Clara had talked him out of 'turning up at the hospital and making a scene'.

She had not mixed her language: 'They already think you made up the stuff you told them about Red Dawn. We could both end up in prison if we are not very, very careful!'

The former KGB man had conceded that she might have a point and it was not as if the last couple of days had been entirely unfruitful. Retracing his steps from the last time he was on Malta he had confirmed, much to his dissatisfaction that somebody – fairly recently – had clumsily manufactured the disappearance of the original surviving Red Dawn cell that he had contacted in November. *Manufactured* as in some *imbecile* had persuaded them to attempt to go to ground, which they had done with all the aplomb of headless chickens. He hated amateurs. The three missing members of that cell, two men and a woman, might already be dead, and like everybody

assumed Samuel Calleja was dead. Problematically, although that made more sense than their still being active somewhere on the Archipelago, unfortunately he could not count on it.

Samuel Calleja had thought he was running a tight ship but he was a disturbed man whose motives were liable to shift with his moods; another *amateur*; albeit a relatively gifted one with ice water running through his veins...

Clara Pullman insisted on preceding her partner into Rosa Calleja's room.

Clara was a wonder to Arkady Rykov.

A walking, talking living wonder; that their paths had happened to cross in such an unlikely place – Incirlik Air Force Base near Adana in Turkey – within days of the October War had been so serendipitous that sometimes he was tempted to consider the possibility of their being some omnipotent guiding hand, godlike, in the Universe. However, every time he started thinking that way he chided himself for getting sentimental in his old age. Lucifer he could credit, a merciful God, never. In retrospect, he ought to have gone to greater lengths to establish Clara's *credentials* before now – long before now – but it had not seemed to matter until *now*. It was always a mistake to become *personally*, or as weak-minded people called it; *emotionally* involved with somebody who eventually learned too much about one.

Undeniably, Clara had finessed his work on Malta and she was right about the British not trusting him. Worse than not really trusting him, they did not actually like him and that was going to be a problem. The death of Lieutenant Siddall, and Samuel Calleja's disappearance had become inextricably linked to the sabotage of HMS Torquay and the people at the top – specifically, the man at the very top, Admiral Christopher - was looking to him to give him answers. Rykov knew he was in a bad place – he and Clara both – and he did not see an obvious way out of it. If he failed to deliver the surviving members of the 'Red Dawn cell' on a silver platter he did not think Admiral Christopher was the sort of man who would accept the failure gracefully; and if he served up the appropriate number of heads on the aforementioned platter then what use would the famous 'fighting admiral' have for him afterwards? Until things had taken such an unwelcome turn he had seriously been asking himself if he still needed Clara. As things had

turned out it seemed that for the foreseeable future, he needed her quite badly.

It was Clara's idea that they talk themselves into the hospital pretending to be friends of the Calleja family. It helped that she had trained as a nurse in her late teens and had a knack of instantly forming a rapport with practically everybody they encountered. Clara's scheme had worked perfectly right up until the moment they entered Rosa Calleja's room.

Clara had thoroughly 'briefing' him ahead of their visit.

'This will work much better if you pretend to be a doctor engaged by Rosa's parents and maintain the fiction that you are a regular visitor.'

Consistent with this the Russian's head was full of superfluous information about the Royal Naval Hospital Bighi.

The hospital's design was apparently attributed an officer of the Royal Engineers, a certain Colonel, later Major-General Sir George Whitmore. The foundation stone had been laid in March 1830 by Vice Admiral Sir Pulteney Malcolm, the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet; and the main works on the original building completed some two-and-a-half years later at a total cost of around twenty thousand pounds, a veritable Prince's ransom in those days. The East and West Wings of the hospital were built in the Doric style – that is, with Doric columns and high ceilings – and the Surgical and Fever Wings, added much later between 1901 and 1903. RNH Bighi had been the Royal Navy's principle hospital facility in the region for over a hundred and thirty years; the reason Malta had become known to generations of servicemen as 'the nurse of the Mediterranean'. Although the hospital had been heavily damaged by bombing in the Second World War, the British had completely rebuilt and restored it to modern standards in the latter 1940s and the early 1950s.

Sometimes Arkady Pavlovich Rykov hated his remarkable capacity to absorb 'facts'.

"Commander McNeil!" Marija Calleja declared, a little vexed, looking up from a dog-eared paperback book – *The Far Country* by Nevil Shute - she had been reading. "If that is really your name?"

She carefully placed a dried flower to mark her page, put down the book and rose stiffly from the chair on the door side of the room to confront the newcomers.

"Which I doubt." Her long dark hair was drawn back in a tightly severe

pigtail, her almond eyes flashing suspicion. "You can't come in here, anyway; whoever you are."

The last time Clara had seen the other woman she had been intimidating – peacefully, politely but very effectively – a nervous young British Officer who had been sent across the road from the gates of the since destroyed, British Military Administration Headquarters on Manoel Island to detach her from her sisters in the Women of Malta Movement. That day Marija Calleja had clearly been a little tired and sore from standing for several hours holding a corner of a large banner which plaintively asked:

IS THIS HOW YOU TREAT YOUR FRIENDS?

Tired and sore or not, she had radiated an aura of calm, pacific dignity that had infuriated, bewildered and embarrassed the young subaltern who had been sent out from the base to speak to her.

"My name is Clara Pullman," she smiled, holding out her hand.

"How do you do, Miss Pullman," the younger Maltese woman responded pleasantly, shaking the proffered hand. Marija was wearing a calf-length pleated brown skirt and wore an unbuttoned thin cardigan over a plain blouse. A crucifix hung on a slender silvery chain over her girlish bust. She wore tired cork sandals, and no make-up. But then she had the sort of natural *prettiness* – yes, prettiness rather than outright beauty – that made foundation and face paint superfluous in practically any situation. As before Clara was struck by the calmness in the younger woman's brown eyes, brown eyes that so desperately wanted to twinkle with mischief and questions.

Clara half-turned to her companion, who was trying hard not to scowl.

"As you guessed, Miss Calleja, *Commander McNeil* is not my friend's real name," she confessed. "However, we very much want to know what happened to your brother."

"I am sure that many people want to know what has happened to Sam," the wartime child heroine of Vittoriosa-Birgu remarked seraphically. She switched her stare to the man standing at the attractive blond woman's shoulder. Since their previous meeting at Fort Manoel his hair had grown to conceal the worst scars on his scalp. He was a dapper, handsome man in his forties, perhaps ten years his partner's senior. "The last time I spoke to *Commander McNeil* he tried to blackmail me, or at least I think he did. He

told me he was worried that I would embarrass Admiral Christopher. He gave me the impression that would be a bad thing for everybody." Again, her almond eyes appraised the man, meeting his hard dark stare fearlessly. "Thank you for stopping the censoring of Peter's letters. Well," she added in qualification, "thank you if you actually had anything to do with it, anyway. I know you probably lied about that too, so why should I believe a single word that you or Miss Pullman say to me?"

Involuntarily, the former KGB man could not help himself mellowing.

"Marija," the woman in the bed whispered in a frightened, little girl lost voice. Instantly, her sister-in-law turned and went to take her right hand between her own hands. "Who are these people?"

Clara stepped closer to the bed.

"We are trying to find out what happened to Samuel, Rosa. We work for Admiral Christopher."

"Shall I make them go away, Rosa?" Marija asked solicitously.

"Yes, no, I don't know..."

"My sister was very close to the explosion," Marija explained to the visitors.

She and Rosa had not even liked each other until Jim Siddall had been blown up, his life extinguished in the blink of an eye. Marija had been helpless for several hours after Lieutenant Hannay had broken the news to her. Margo Seiffert had hugged her and let her cry until she ran out of tears; and then she had travelled to Kalkara to be with Rosa. Whatever had happened to her brother, whoever was responsible for the death of her good friend Jim Siddall, she and Rosa were *sisters* now.

"Her ears still ring a little, I think. If you bully her I will scream very loudly and you will both be arrested."

Clara bit her lip, knowing the younger woman was not bluffing.

Her lover and partner patted her arm and stepped around her to stand before Marija Calleja.

"My name," he said, not bothering to affect gravitas or severity, or to entirely conceal every last trace of his childhood *Moskva* accent, "is Arkady Pavlovich Rykov and until the Cuban Missiles War I was a Colonel in the *Special Political Directorate* of the KGB reporting directly to the Chairman of the Party, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev. I now work for the Head of British Intelligence in England and I, and my..."

“Partner,” Clara said simply.

“Partner,” the man continued, “have been sent back to Malta to provide Admiral Christopher with answers.”

Marija absorbed this and decided not to scream her lungs out quite yet.

“*The* Nikita Khrushchev?” She asked, her face scrunching into a quizzical mask.

“He was one of a kind,” nodded the ex-KGB man.

“Sam was,” Rosa blurted unhappily, “*is* a good man.”

The former KGB Colonel gave the woman in the bed a sad-eyed look.

“Your husband was recruited by the First Main Directorate of the *Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* – the Ministry of State Security of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in April 1950.” He said it so matter of factly, conversationally that what he had said hardly registered with the two young Maltese women in the room for some seconds. ‘Some time in 1951 or 1952 he was approached by and inducted into a subversive movement within the Soviet apparat called *Krasnaya Zarya*. Two months ago, your husband proudly claimed to me that he was one of the gunmen who assassinated the then Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir Douglas Holland-Martin and his wife, shortly after the Cuban Missiles War. He believed me to still be a representative of the Central Mediterranean Directorate of *Krasnaya Zarya*, or as you would say in English, *Red Dawn*. In my experience there is nothing more dangerous than a man who has never believed in anything who suddenly discovers a focus for his rage.”

Rosa Calleja started sobbing.

Marija Calleja opened her mouth to speak but initially, no words passed her lips.

“I do not understand?” She admitted eventually, subconsciously stroking her sister-in-law’s hand. Not waiting for a reply, she turned and very gently, put her arms around her ‘sister’

“Red Dawn terrorist cells like the one led by your brother were responsible for the outrages committed after the October War. Those outrages were calculated to force the British to crack down and imprison so many of your men folk,” Clara explained patiently. “Arkady and I believe that your brother and other members of his cell may have been responsible for the sinking of HMS Torquay; and that other members of Red Dawn on

the island may have taken ‘punitive’ action against them for disobeying orders.”

“Extreme ‘punitive’ action,” the man concurred.

“I don’t see how Rosa or I can help you, Mr Rykov?” Marija Calleja declared quietly after bending her lips down to her ‘sister’s’ ear and murmuring words of comfort.

“It is very simple,” the Russian informed her, “we need to know *everything* about your brother’s life. *Everything*.”

If Arkady Rykov had not already known most of the answers what he had just told Marija would have made perfect sense. Logically, somewhere in Samuel Calleja’s past there would be clues to how and why he had died and who was, allegedly, hunting down – most likely – the other members of his cell. At his behest Denzil William’s people were, albeit sulkily, interrogating the families and friends of the other cell members; that was, of course, a complete waste of time. Stumbling across Marija Calleja at Bighi had been his first piece of real good fortune since he and Clara had arrived on Malta.

There were tears in Marija’s eyes.

“I loved Sam as any sister would love her brother,” she said hesitantly, “but we were not close. I was always closer to my little brother, Joe. Joe is my good friend as well as my brother. He and I, well, we understand each other but Sam,” she shrugged guiltily, “we stopped talking to each other a long time ago. We would argue, fight over anything. With Joe I never fight. I tell him off sometimes, but we never fight. I am the wrong person in my family to talk to. You must talk to my father. I think he knew Sam better than any of us.”

Chapter 20

Saturday 25th January 1964
HMS Talavera, off Pantelleria, Central Mediterranean

They had almost missed the fun, such as it was. Fifty miles south of Sardinia Captain David Penberthy had ordered the old destroyer's second Admiralty 3-drum boiler to be 'lit up' and HMS Talavera had raced to join the coming battle at better that thirty knots. Her two shadows, always hovering out on the edge of her radar horizon, had made no attempt to maintain contact. It was as if they had known the Battle class destroyer was no longer in transit but readying herself for the fight.

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher braced himself against the bridge rail and focused his binoculars on the island emerging out of the haze as the rising sun burned coolly on that January morning forty-five minutes after the dawn. HMS Talavera was idling along at eleven knots, the middle ship in an ad hoc gun line of five destroyers and frigates of varying vintages.

At the head of the line was HMS Whitby, the ten-year-old name ship of her class of anti-submarine frigates. Astern of her and three hundred yards ahead of Talavera was the Defender, a Daring class old-fashioned post-World War II fleet destroyer bristling with guns; astern of Talavera, the new Tribal class destroyer Nubian, and the Puma, a Type 41 anti-aircraft frigate brought up the rear. On joining the gun line David Penberthy, as senior officer present, had taken command. For all that the 'gun line' was a hotchpotch of ships of varying sizes, characteristics and sensor suites, the vessels shared common 4.5-inch calibre main batteries.

Five minutes after dawn the gun line had fired a single 'long' ranging salvo of eighteen rounds. The shells had whistled over the island and crashed harmlessly into the sea between eight hundred and a thousand yards beyond the island. Within minutes a dozen helicopters had lifted off the deck of HMS Ocean and now Royal Marines of 42 Commando were fanning out across the rocky terrain of the former Italian territory in the Central Mediterranean.

If everything had gone to plan similar scenes would be playing out on

Lampedusa and tiny Linosa some miles to the east and south, where the fleet carrier HMS Victorious was flag ship of a much larger all arms battle group.

The gun line was slowly moving inshore, soon the five ships would be clearly visible to the naked eye to anybody brave enough to stand on the sea wall protecting Porto Pantelleria, the main settlement on the most level, and most easterly part of the thirty-two square mile volcanic rock which sat sixty-two miles south of Sicily and thirty-seven miles north east of the nearest outcrop of the Tunisian coast to the west.

“When we invaded Sicily in the Second War,” HMS Talavera’s commanding officer remarked cheerfully, “we had to plaster the whole island for days before we winkled out the garrison. Fingers crossed, it is looking a bit more straightforward this morning.”

His Executive Officer took one hand off his binoculars and held up his right hand with his first two fingers as crossed as he could get them.

“Touch wood, sir,” Peter Christopher agreed.

Westland Wessex’s were relaying troops onto the island, racing to and from HMS Ocean above the gun line at masthead height. If there had been any serious resistance the destroyers and frigates under David Penberthy’s command had been ordered to stand off and shell the island’s single airfield and Porto Pantelleria until the locals saw sense. Everybody was a little relieved that this was not going to be necessary.

“The Flagship says for the gun line to move close inshore, sir!”

“Number One!” David Penberthy chuckled. “Put us at the head of the line if you please. We’ll lay the old girl off the entrance to the port. The rest of the squadron can demonstrate a couple of miles due east of the sea wall.”

“Aye, sir!” Peter Christopher started calling orders.

“Guns fore and aft!”

The line of grey warships followed in Talavera’s broad wake.

Confirmation that the local dictator on Pantelleria had surrendered unconditionally was received as the destroyer came abreast of the entrance to Porto Pantelleria. The harbour and town looked quiet, empty but then it was still very early in the day. Fishing boats bobbed, moored haphazardly in clumps behind the sea wall.

Two small motor launches approached.

“Small arms parties to the port side!”

HMS Talavera’s eight-man Royal Marine detachment quickly took

position, fingering their FN L1A1 rifles and Sterling submachine guns. Two squads of seaman hastily mounted heavy machine guns on the aft deck house rail.

It was a profoundly anti-climactic moment when a rotund, bald, sweating man in an ill-fitting lounge suite and two unarmed youths in creased and grubby Italian Army uniforms struggled up onto the deck and after much bowing and scraping, and with a cringing show of self-abasement, obsequiously requested in halting English, 'the honour to place our humble island in the safe hands of the Royal Navy.'

It transpired that '*the Fascisti'* had taken to the hills and that for the rest of the island's population this was 'liberation day'.

It took a few minutes for this to be reported by radio in the clear to the Flagship. At a little after ten, Captain David Penberthy went ashore to liaise with the Royal Marine contingent in Porto Pantelleria, leaving Peter Christopher in command of HMS Talavera.

By then the Mayor of Pantelleria, Signore Mario Simonelli, had regaled him with the history of his home. The Carthaginians had seized the island in the seventh century before Christ; the Romans had briefly conquered it in 255 BC, lost it the next year and not finally incorporated it into the Empire until 217 BC. Nine hundred years later – give or take a decade or two – the Moors had gained suzerainty and clung onto it for four centuries before a fellow called Roger of Sicily, a Norman freebooter by all accounts, had eventually supplanted Moorish rule. But... No dynasty survived forever. In 1311 an Aragonese fleet under a certain Lluis de Requesens had taken Pantelleria; whereupon the victorious admiral had installed himself as a Prince. *Ah, those were the days...* In the sixteenth century – quite recently in Mediterranean history, just yesterday really - the Turks had sacked Porto Pantelleria. Peter Christopher had been a little disappointed that there had been no mention of Barbary Pirates. Eventually, the Mayor had collapsed in an exhausted, hoarse heap at the Wardroom table and his hosts had had to pour a brace of stiff drinks down his throat to revive him. The poor fellow had been waiting for somebody to invade his little fiefdom for several months and when the evil day finally arrived, he had expected all the women to be ravished and the men massacred. Today's events had been so 'civilised' that he was very nearly swooning with relief.

"Rape? Massacres? No, no, no," Peter Christopher had reassured him,

“we don’t do that sort of thing. It simply isn’t done.”

Spider McCann, HMS Talavera’s Master at Arms had listened to most of the Mayor’s outpourings. Afterwards, he accompanied the Executive Officer onto the main deck. The two men walked unhurriedly to the bridge.

“Sometimes I wonder what’s happened to the World, sir,” the older man admitted wearily. “It has got so everybody is afraid of their own shadow.”

The two men went up onto the open bridge.

The sky was clearing to a perfect azure, the sun was warm on their faces and the nearby island seemed idyllic. The flanks of the eroded ancient volcanoes were covered in vegetation, smoke rose lazily from chimneys beyond the harbour and crowds had come out to stare at the big grey warships moored and slowly parading close inshore. HMS Ocean’s helicopters came and went in an endless relay. Signore Simonelli had mentioned shortages of fuel and medicines, spare parts and the like but not alluded to hunger among his people, which was probably a good sign. Presumably, the survival of Pantelleria’s fishing fleet had keep starvation at bay since the October War.

Try as he might Peter Christopher could not help but think of Malta, less than one hundred and fifty miles a little south of due east from where HMS Talavera rode on the gentle swell in the lee of Pantelleria. One hundred-and-fifty miles away; that was less than five hours steaming at flank speed for the old Battle class destroyer. Not that the old girl had sufficient fuel in her bunkers for a run like that; the Old Man had burned their boats in the overnight rush to join the gun line.

“It would have been a pity to have bombarded this place,” he said distractedly.

“A waste of good ammunition, sir,” Spider McCann agreed.

Peter Christopher shook his head and chortled softly. Every mile Talavera steamed closer to the Maltese Archipelago he felt another tiny weight lifting off his shoulders, a lightening of his spirits, an optimism that he had not known since before the October War. It was as if a new life was calling to him. In retrospect it was bizarre that until a few days ago he had never been to the Mediterranean, other than to spend a few hours ashore when his first ship, HMS Leopard, had touched at Gibraltar to refuel on the way down to South Africa. A couple of months later he had very nearly made a fool of himself with the sporty, blond younger daughter of a Cape

Town lawyer while Leopard had been based at Simon's Town. He had been so shaken up by that experience that he had fallen easy prey to a pretty, very sensible Vicar's daughter called Phoebe Louise Sellars soon after his return to England in late 1961. Luckily, nothing had come of the 'engagement' and he had no idea if Phoebe was dead or alive. Looking back, he could not believe he had been so one-eyed about Marija until it was almost too late, or that she had waited so patiently and for so long for him to come to his senses.

HMS Ocean had moved to within about two miles of the coast. In the morning sunshine she looked like a great white flat-topped whale as the glare reflected back off her box-like high sides.

"Engineering request permission to damp down Number Two Boiler to conserve fuel, sir?"

"Negative," Peter Christopher retorted patiently. "Notify me when the bunkers are below ten percent please."

Everything seemed to be going swimmingly, the invasion of Pantelleria had been a bloodless walkover; but if he had learned anything in the last few weeks it was that a wise man took nothing for granted.

"Are both boilers on line?" Captain David Penberthy asked as he stepped back onboard just before two o'clock that afternoon.

"Yes, sir. I've warned the Flagship our bunkers are running low."

"Very good. We'll put our guests ashore as soon as possible. I don't think we need to be hanging around here much longer."

While the island of Linosa had fallen without a shot being fired, land-based artillery had engaged the gun line off Lampedusa and aircraft from Malta had been called in to support HMS Victorious's weakened and untried air group in the suppression of 'enemy' resistance around the island's airfield.

In mid-afternoon Talavera went alongside the Defender and took onboard fifty tons of heavy bunker oil; then, leaving HMS Nubian as a sentinel outside Porto Pantelleria, the old Battle class destroyer had led the four-ship gun line south-east at twenty-seven knots.

In the night the fires burning on Lampedusa were visible over thirty miles away.

Chapter 21

Monday 27th January 1964
St Catherine's Hospital for Women, Mdina, Malta

Dr Margot Seiffert guided her young friend to the chair by her desk in her cramped but immensely organised, and ridiculously tidy first floor office overlooking the inner courtyard of the three-storey two-hundred-year-old merchant's house at the heart of the hospital.

Over a decade ago she had started out with three ground floor rooms running a clinic on two days a week exclusively for women and children. With the patronage of St Paul's Cathedral, literally a few steps away at the other end of the square outside the front of the building, her little empire had grown, and grown; donations had trickled in and then dripped, eventually becoming a steady stream, and she had purchased the rest of the house. Later the Cathedral had leased her several adjoining properties for a peppercorn rent and arranged for the courtyard residence behind the new hospital to be made available to 'La Dottoressa', as Margo was known in church circles and among the local people in Mdina and the sprawling hill top town of Rabat beyond the Citadel walls.

Marija was one of over sixty Maltese women she had trained – each over a period of at least three years of mainly practical, on the ward, tutelage - as 'nursing auxiliaries' in the last fifteen years. Although Margo's nurses 'qualifications' were not recognised by the Archipelago's hide-bound 'British' medical establishment, none of her women were certified as 'qualified to nurse at the St Catherine's Hospital for Women' until or unless *she* was personally satisfied that, given the opportunity, her auxiliaries would easily pass the final exams and interviews 'mainstream' or 'ordinary' nurses on Malta were required to pass to earn the sobriquet of a *State Registered Nurse (Malta).*

Like most of the young women Margo Seiffert had trained, Marija had been rejected by the medical schools set up by the British and latterly run by local doctors when she was eighteen. Marija had been rejected because of her childhood injuries and the likelihood they might impinge upon her

capacity to perform standard ‘nursing duties’ as she got older. Other of ‘Margo’s auxiliaries’ had been turned down for irrelevant educational considerations or because their family backgrounds, or their personal circumstances did not sit well with the all-male Maltese Medical Establishment. For example, illegitimacy was apparently an irredeemable disqualification, as was being a young mother, as was having at some time in the past refused an offer of a place at a Medical School. None of that mattered at the St Catherine’s Hospital for Women. Marija had fully qualified – by Margo’s exacting lights – aged twenty-two and had been a practicing nurse at the hospital and as a visiting nurse and assistant midwife in Rabat and Mosta for the last four years.

The recent upheavals on the Maltese Archipelago had vindicated everything Margo had been trying to achieve. Her *auxiliaries* had performed, according to the letter signed by the Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean – and therefore, the de facto Military Governor of the Maltese Archipelago – ‘with great professional efficiency and dedication during the recent emergency’. Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher had asked her to make known his personal appreciation for her nurses ‘*invaluable and selfless work* to each and one of her *angels of mercy*’. Furthermore, he sincerely ‘hoped to be able to thank each and every one of them personally in due course.’ In lieu of this he had already ‘included my highest commendation for the work that you and your nurses performed in the days after the attack on these islands in my official report to *Her Majesty*.’

Margo Seiffert had snorted an involuntary laugh at this; but ‘her girls’ had been touched to the quick by the idea that they had been ‘commended’ to the Queen for doing no more than what they had been trained to do.

“How is our little princess this evening?” Margo asked her friend.

Marija gave her a mildly vexed frown.

“I’m okay, I suppose,” she grudged with a sigh. That afternoon she had gone to the company house in Kalkara to pick up clothes and some toiletries for Rosa. Alan Hannay had insisted on providing her with a car and a driver, he was a nice boy but every time she saw him she thought about Jim Siddall, with whom the youthful looking flag lieutenant had struck up a somewhat unlikely friendship. She had detoured to her home in Sliema to spend a little time with her Mama before returning to Mdina to meet her injured sister-in-

law when the ambulance bringing her from Bighi arrived at the Citadel. She need not have worried about her Mama; the Sliema apartment in Tower Street was full of aunts and cousins she hardly ever saw. She had gone for a walk down to the waterfront with her father, who had been forbidden to enter the Admiralty Dockyards while 'investigations continued'. Arkady Rykov, Clara Pullman and several different Redcaps had interrogated him for over twelve hours the previous day and he was in a mild state of shock, unwilling and incapable of believing the 'lies about Sam'. Her younger brother, Joe, was being 'grilled' today.

"Rosa says that the hospital at Bighi is on alert for casualties from a big battle out at sea," she said, guessing that Margo would be a better judge of the veracity of this snippet of gossip than her *sister*.

Margo Seiffert nodded.

"There was a big battle when the British landed on Lampedusa and one of their frigates, HMS Puma was badly damaged. Lieutenant Hannay paid a *house call* while you were out this afternoon. He said he doesn't think our services will be needed 'directly' this time but that we might be asked to take in more women and children to free up beds in other hospitals."

Marija absorbed this.

"I think Rosa will be happier here. Surrounded by other women, I mean."

Margo hesitated before asking what she asked next.

"She really didn't have any idea Sam was..."

"A monster?" Marija suggested quietly.

"No, I didn't mean that!"

"None of us had *any idea*, Margo," Marija scolded her friend and mentor. "None of us! And now everything is ruined..."

"I'm sorry, that was me being famously insensitive," the older woman apologised instantly. If she had not been so anxious about her young friend's state of mind she would never have made such a stupid mistake. "But," she groaned, "everything isn't *ruined*, Marija."

"No?"

The harshly self-accusative cry of pain cut to Margo Seiffert's soul.

"No?" Marija asked again, quietly, inwardly excoriating. "There must have been signs but I saw nothing. Peter Christopher will come to Malta one day soon and I won't be able to look him in the eye. Everything that might

have been between us is," she shrugged helplessly, "is gone..."

"Marija, I..."

"Peter is Admiral Christopher's son," the young woman reminded her friend unnecessarily. "The Admiral's son cannot have anything to do with the sister of the man accused of assassinating one of his predecessors. They think Sam blew up that ship that sank in the Grand Harbour, Margo!"

Margo wanted to throw her arms around her friend.

Suddenly, her thoughts were in a hopeless chaos. She had never wanted children, never really wanted to be married although she had tried it once and paid the price for her blunder. She had had numerous affairs, but only one that gave her lasting emotional and physical comfort and by then she had been far too old to start having babies. Yet although she had had no children of her own; she had watched Marija grow from broken childhood to the full bloom of her womanhood, been with her every step of the way, shared her growing pains in ways only a mother would normally know, and loved the girl as truly as her own mother. Marija was not the daughter she had never had, but in practically every way that mattered, she was her daughter.

"You have nothing to be ashamed of." The bald statement seemed so lame.

"It doesn't matter. Everything is over now. I shall not embarrass the Admiral, or Peter. It is not as if there is any *arrangement* between us." Marija steeled herself, very calm in that moment. "Besides, he deserves a woman who is *whole*, a wife who can be his wife in every way. Not a woman who will be a burden to him always..."

"Marija!"

The younger woman quirked a sadly resigned smile.

"You know what I look like under my dresses, Margo. How can a man take pleasure in a woman with..."

Margo had stopped feeling guilty. Her guilt was rapidly transforming into righteous anger.

"Marija, I won't..."

"I have made my decision," the younger woman said flatly. "I will write to Peter and tell him that it is over. He must forget me. It is for the best."

Margo was about to say something that later she would probably have regretted. She was saved by the bell, specifically the ringing of the telephone on her desk. The ringing was unnaturally harsh in the dreadful silence filling

the air between the two women.

"Yes!" The older woman snapped irritably into the handset.

"My apologies, Dr Seiffert," Alan Hannay replied contritely, "I hope I haven't called at an inopportune time."

"No, no. What can I do for you?" Margo belatedly waved for Marija to stay but her friend was already half-way out of the door.

"I must be with Rosa," she whispered and disappeared, closing the door softly at her back.

"Would you have a few minutes to spare for a meeting with Admiral Christopher?"

"When did your boss have in mind, Lieutenant Hannay?"

"Er, if it is convenient, now, actually."

It was actually over an hour later as the Cathedral bell was chiming eight o'clock that Margo – with the light of battle glistening in her eyes – was ushered into the modestly appointed office of the Commander-in-Chief.

The Fighting Admiral looked up from his papers.

He grimaced and rose to his feet, coming around his desk to greet his visitor.

"Thank you for coming, Margo," he half-smiled, extending his hand.

Hands were shaken. The woman said nothing.

"Would you bring in that bottle I we brought back from England and a couple of glasses please, Alan?" The great man asked his flag lieutenant. In a moment a bottle of twelve-year-old Royal Lochnagar Scotch Whisky was being opened and generous measures poured into two crystal tumblers. Alan Hannay, his duty performed, made himself scarce, leaving his elders in private.

Julian Christopher held out a glass for the woman who had almost but not quite been his mistress a dozen years ago during his last stint in Malta. He had commanded a cruiser squadron in those days; the German Wars seemed over, and the Cold War was a long way away on sunny Malta and he had reverted to type, carefree and womanising. And Margo had – after keeping him on tenterhooks for several weeks - comprehensively rejected him. At the time it had come as a rude shock, a sign that the years were catching up with him. However, he soon got over his rejection, moved on from one cold-hearted affair to the next until his wife had died. Peter had never forgiven him for not being there when she died; for not having been

there for her at all in fact, during her final illness. Atonement was an odd thing, he reflected.

"Peter's ship will be anchoring in Sliema Creek sometime tomorrow afternoon," he announced, raising his glass. "HMS Talavera distinguished herself again the other day. Her commanding officer was incapacitated by a direct hit and Peter took command of Talavera's squadron." Julian Christopher was on the verge of exploding with paternal and professional pride. "When HMS Puma was damaged by two direct hits which left her dead in the water," he went on, "it seems that Peter conned Talavera into shoaling waters between Puma and the guns on land so that a tow line could be passed onboard!"

Margo tried not to think of the horrible conversation she had had with Marija earlier that evening.

"He sounds like he's a real chip off the old block, Julian!"

"I'll say!"

"Will you toast the officers and men of Her Majesty's Ship Talavera with me," the man chuckled.

"Yes, of course I will."

"Talavera!" They both drank deep; and stood looking at each other.

Presently, Margo looked into her glass.

"This is the real thing!"

"Yes, a present from an admirer in England."

Margo's eyes narrowed. He had not said it triumphantly, but fondly and with a self-deprecation that would have been alien to his character in those long-ago days when he was attempting to seduce her.

"My lips are sealed," the man confessed wryly.

"It must be serious then?"

"Oh, yes." He waved to the chairs in front of his desk. They sat down, each stiffly and suddenly worn by the exertions of another very long day. "I was slated for retirement last autumn," Julian Christopher guffawed.

Margo waited for him to get around to the real – or perhaps, in the circumstances the *other* reason - he had asked her to join him at such short notice.

"This is a hateful business with Marija's brother," he said presently, soberly sipping his whiskey.

"Yes," she agreed.

“How is Marija?”

“She thinks this thing has ruined her life but because she is the person she is,” Margo shook her head, “bless her; she has resigned herself to it.”

“Oh, god,” the man groaned. “What does that mean? Is she off to a nunnery or something?”

“Her brother has disgraced his family and in this part of the World that really matters, Julian!”

“Sorry, I didn’t put that very well. I understand that she must be upset about what happened to Lieutenant Siddall, of course.”

“Aren’t you?”

The Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations pursed his lips.

“Yes. But I can’t allow things like this to become personal, Margo.”

“Why not?”

“According to the people we have in custody, Samuel Calleja’s workshop was booby-trapped to destroy the evidence of what had been going on in it and to kill the first person who came looking for him. That’s standard operating procedure, apparently. It now seems likely that he remained on board HMS Torquay when she was re-floated so that he could personally set off two demolition charges positioned in the engine room bilges adjacent to the ship’s keel. Think about what manner of man can do a thing like that! Think about it, Margo! Is it any wonder his own family, his own wife, for goodness sake, didn’t understand that they were living hand in glove with a monster?”

“Marija blames herself.”

“The man’s wife didn’t know he was making bombs and storing stolen demolition charges in that bloody workshop,” the man grunted.

“Demolition charges?”

“The Naval Clearance team who have been examining the site of the explosion and searching every address or shed or hole in the ground that *these people*,” he clearly did not include *these people* as fellow members of the human race, “have lived at, worked in or hidden in, think that the detonation of at least two connected five-pound charges was involved at Kalkara. Other charges were ‘daisy-chained’ to the booby trap but failed to go off. Half the neighbourhood would have gone up in smoke if all the explosives in that hut had gone off!”

“Madness,” Margo breathed angrily, finishing her whiskey. Marija had given her a more or less verbatim account of her meeting with the man and the woman who had visited Rosa in hospital at Bighi. “The Russian and his,” she paused, not knowing how to describe the blond woman Marija had spoken of, “partner, talked to Marija about something called *Krasnaya Zarya*?”

The Fighting Admiral bared his teeth in a predatory smile.

“Mr Rykov and Miss Pullman both work for me,” he confirmed. “The World is in more of a mess than we thought it was. If that’s even possible? We destroyed one enemy,” he went on brusquely, “in the October War and spawned something that might, in the long term, be even more dangerous. At least we could talk to the Soviets. I don’t think it is even worth trying to talk to *Red Dawn*.”

Chapter 22

Wednesday 29th January 1964
United States House of Representatives, City Hall, Philadelphia

Lyndon Baines Johnson no calmer now than he had been nine hours ago; in some ways he was actually angrier now than he had been when he had seen the numbers the tellers had handed him late last night.

A few minutes before midnight the previous evening, the second full day that the House of Representatives had sat since the Battle of Washington, both Houses of Congress had narrowly voted to suspend the 'Emergency War Mobilization Authority' issued by the President on the 2nd January, instructing the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to reactivate reserves, commission ships and order Air Force units to forward bases.

The 'Authority' had green-lighted the orderly restoration, over the course of the next twelve to eighteen months of the military striking power of the armed forces to its pre-peace dividend cuts status; giving immediate priority to the mobilization of units which could be made ready for foreign deployment within ninety to one hundred-and-eighty days.

The much-depleted *House* – eleven Congressmen and six Senators had been killed in Washington, a score hospitalised and several were absent in protest because they objected to the reconstitution of 'the House' in Philadelphia – had stabbed the Administration in the back.

The President was on his way back to Philadelphia.

General Curtis LeMay, the rambunctious Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was on his way back to Philadelphia.

The problem was that every drifter and grafter in the North-East was also on his or her way to Philadelphia to share in the Government largesse which was steadily, surely coming to dominate every aspect of life in the city. It was one thing for the President to signal the end of pork-barrel politics nationally; another entirely to lay so much as a finger on the rights and prerogatives of the good men and true who populated the House of Representatives.

In a second vote late last night, Congress had also thrown out the 'War

Assistance Bill' under which humanitarian and other supplies were currently being sent to the United Kingdom gratis under the auspices of pre-October War 'overseas aid' legislation.

The Vice President of the United States of America waved down his visitors, he did not have the time for the normal civilities.

"Are you guys out of your tiny fucking minds?" He demanded of the assembled Majority and Minority leaders and their deputies of the Democratic and the Republican Parties of both the Senate and the Congress.

"Mister Vice President," the Democrat Majority leader of Congress began. He did not get another chance to speak for some minutes.

LBJ roared: "Who the fuck do you think saved your miserable fucking arses last month?" The tall Texan's anger was in no way theatrical; his rage was white hot and if he had had a gun he would have shot somebody by now. He had expected belly-aching, he had expected to have to buy off some of the harder cases particularly in the Senate; what he had not expected was a gutless restatement of old vested interests as if the Battle of Washington had never happened. "Haven't you arseholes listened to a single fucking word the President and me have been saying to you since the fucking war?"

No, they had not.

"Jesus Christ!" The Vice President fumed, towering over the old has-beens and party place men who passed – in these sad times - for the political leadership of the two once great pillars upon which American democracy ought still to be able to rely. "Less than two months ago parts of our military, aided and abetted by people in practically every goddam organ of Government were plotting to get us into a war with the British. Six weeks ago, there was a full-scale insurrection, a coup d'état in Washington DC! Now you guys are fucking around like turkeys the week before Thanksgiving!"

At midnight tonight, all work reactivating and restoring the United States of America's military might to its pre-October 1962 condition and status was illegal. The Navy Yards across the Delaware in Camden, New Jersey were already shutting down; funding was frozen, everything was being infected by a new and deadly paralysis. Even if the madness could be undone nobody would trust the Administration again until only God alone knew how much scarce treasure had been wasted.

The Vice President had no illusions about the honour or the motivations

of the men before in him the grand, wood-panelled reception room on the first floor of City Hall. Sometimes he thought the House of Representatives was populated entirely with lawyers and small-time mobsters. Yes, there were some notable public servants in both Houses but they were a minority and they did not invariably rise to the top, often they were held down and ignored by the plethora of resentful 'little men' around them. As he glared at the angry, flushed faces of the 'legislators and lawmakers' in the room he felt unmitigated contempt. Southern Democrats and Northern Republican money-lenders; bleeding heart East Coast liberals and West Coast attorneys, Mid-West isolationists and Deep South good old boys! All it wanted was for Wyatt Earp and Sitting Bull to chase each other around a fucking Wild West Circus and the whole half-baked charade of the American dream would be manifested in glorious Technicolor!

"This country is under attack," Johnson growled. "But nothing, I repeat nothing, so endangers the American way of life and the freedoms we all cherish so dearly as the wilful neglect of its duty by the alleged the representatives of the *People*!"

He had briefed this same caucus of 'leaders' at regular intervals in the last three weeks. Once and only once, he had taken the risk of passing on confidential information supplied by the British, and his trust had been promptly betrayed; he had read about it the next morning in the *Philadelphia Herald*, listened to his words playing back over public radio and on Johnny Carson's fucking *Tonight Show* on NBC a day later. And now the bastards had deflated the expanding bubble of the re-mobilization of the American military so effectively that even if they revoked last night's vote in the next few hours – which they weren't going to do because it was beneath their fucking dignity regardless of the consequences for the nation – it would take several weeks, perhaps a month to put everything back on track. Probably, it would take a lot longer. And every one of the bastards knew it!

It seemed that the leadership in both Houses had, with hitherto undemonstrated calculated mendacity, united around a consensus that until such time as the Warren Commission's first formal evidence session was scheduled – ideally the date would be carved into the living rock – that the Administration's 'war plans' should be subjected to 'extraordinary scrutiny'. There was also the small unresolved matter of the loss of the USS Scorpion, which nine out of ten Americans still erroneously believed was the result of a

sneak attack by the British nuclear submarine HMS Dreadnought.

The Senate had moved a motion demanding a Joint Committee of Investigation into the sinking of the USS Scorpion', authorising the same to subpoena the British Ambassador and the commanding officer of HMS Dreadnought to testify 'under oath'. Small considerations such as the sanctity of diplomatic immunity, and the fact that there was no law in the land under which a serving officer of an allied power could be obliged to swear any kind of oath before a Congressional Committee were judged by the 'leaders of the House' to be ephemeral, piffling details to be addressed at another time.

The Warren Commission into the *Causes and Conduct of the Cuban Missiles War* had been the Administration's great initiative to set the record straight. The Battle of Washington had delayed its planned public set piece inauguration but preparatory work was well in hand. A secretariat had been recruited and Chief Justice Earl Warren, its universally respected Chairman, had already discussed with Administration members, and several of the men present that morning in City Hall, exactly how he planned to conduct his work.

As originally envisaged the Commission's mandate might have included an investigation of the 'consequences' of the October War; but this 'term of reference' had been, to all intents, relegated to a footnote. It was too soon after the event and Earl Warren had demanded that the 'whole shebang needs to be rationalised'. Which left just the 'causes' and the 'conduct' of the catastrophe to be chewed over...starting sometime later that year, hopefully: nobody knew when that sometime' was going to be because frankly the Democrat and Republican camps were already so deeply entrenched on the subject of the war that most people tacitly assumed the Commission was unlikely to sit until after the next Presidential race.

The Vice President had allowed himself to be gulled into a false sense of security on the 'Warren Commission Front'; right up until the moment the 'leaders of the House' had stabbed him in the back.

Et tu Brute?

Until last night he had regarded several of the men in the room as personal and *political* friends. Up until last night he had been unwilling to fully sign up to the President's plan to appeal over the heads of Congress directly to the American people even though his – and to a lesser extent,

Bobby Kennedy's separate tour of the Deep South – seemed to be playing much better with the man in the street than he had hoped it would in his wildest, most outrageously optimistic dreams. The pictures of the two Kennedy brothers praying with the Reverend Martin Luther King at that church – what was it called? The Ebenezer something or other, in Atlanta and afterwards leading that march – which they had said had been over a million-strong must have been like Sherman's march to the sea all over again to the Southern Democrats in Congress. That little prick who had shot at the President in Dallas had done the Administration another huge favour, sparking a wave of spontaneous outrage that had further swelled Jack Kennedy's poll ratings. God in heaven, JFK was like some resurrected Pied Piper! When he had breezed into the battered but intact southernmost suburbs of Chicago the networks had covered the visit as if he was the prodigal returning. If only he had got out and about on the stomp in the months after the October War; things might have been so different.

However, LBJ had not got where he had got by crying over spilt milk. They were where they were. There was no Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy was for kids. Treating the 'leaders of the House' with respectful kid gloves had been a bad miscalculation. He should not have listened to the President; he should have done this thing his own way.

"Later today I have schedules meetings with Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover, and with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, John McCone. Those gentlemen have made me aware that the judgement of several of the 'representatives' who voted in last night's 'debate' may have been clouded by personal pecuniary considerations and been unduly influenced by, well, let's just say, the company that some of them have been keeping in recent times. Without wishing to pre-determine the outcome of those meetings, once I have seen Director Hoover's, and Director McCone's evidence, it is likely I will have to decide whether or not to pass that evidence to prosecutors, or to other *interested parties*. Director Hoover has been accumulating evidence for some considerable time about corruption in the body politic. Until this time, I was able to persuade the President that allowing the Federal Bureau of Investigation a free hand in investigating fraud, insider trading, false accounting and the granting and accepting of inappropriate political favours by members of the House, would not assist in the Administration's wider desire for stable government.

Likewise, Direct McCone of the Central Intelligence Agency regards, particularly the most recent cases, where sensitive and confidential information about the defence status of both the United States and its ally, the United Kingdom, has found its way into the hands of unauthorised persons in the media within hours of its confidential disclosure to Members of the House, constitutes not a breach of privilege, but repeated acts of *treachery*. When I next speak to the President I will advise him in the strongest possible terms, that," he paused, wanting to grind his teeth with exasperation, "notwithstanding my previous objections, it is in the national interest that Directors Hoover and McCone, and the other relevant authorities, *fully* investigate and *prosecute* to the last full measure of the law, without fear or favour, *each and every malefactor*."

The room exploded with protestations of innocence.

The sad thing was that the protestations were completely genuine in the minds of many of the loudest and most outraged 'protestors'; these men had been corrupted for so long, that they honestly believed the backhanders, favours and 'considerations' they received were legitimate elements of their monthly salaries. They took it for granted that their children would be awarded bursaries to the best schools and colleges, that they would have the choice of lucrative legal partnerships and boardroom sinecures, that they would collect honorific titles that enabled them to call themselves 'Doctor' of 'Professor' or 'Judge' or 'Colonel' when it suited them, and that newspapermen would allow them their illicit extra-marital romantic peccadilloes and unsavoury friendships because that was what business as usual on Capitol Hill was all about.

Slowly, worry and the first glimmer of real concern began to flicker in the eyes of 'the lawmakers'. They had complacently assumed that the Vice President was one of their own. He had been Senate Majority Leader for six years before he ran for the Democratic Presidential ticket in 1960. If they were dirty, what did that make him?

Lyndon Baines Johnson eyed the men around him like a big cat identifying the weakest member of the herd; his next kill.

"After all this is over – assuming the World hasn't blown itself up again – I'll still be here this time next year. Some of you guys will be behind bars. You all need to be thinking about that and letting me know how you're going to make it up to me."

This said the Vice President turned on his heel and walked out.

Chapter 23

Wednesday 29th January 1964
Fort Rinella, Malta

Arkady Pavlovich Rykov wiped the blood off his hands under the cold tap. The mirror in the washroom was cracked so he took great care unhurriedly checking that there was no blood spatter on his clothes. Beating a murderer within an inch of death was one thing, walking about the streets looking like you had just beaten somebody very nearly to death was another. Besides, he did not want to have to explain to Clara what he had been doing the last twenty-four hours. She was better doing what she was doing; sitting by Rosa Calleja's bedside; his talents, honed by years working for several of the most monstrous men in history, lay in other directions.

He had never actually enjoyed beating another human being to death although he had known many men who did, but he had never lost much sleep over having to do exactly that. In the past he had not worried overmuch about the justice of it because there was no scope for that sort of thinking within the Soviet internal security apparat. Nowadays, well, he was supposed to be working for men with a more complex understanding of the human condition and the World in which they lived, men whose minds were more attuned to subtlety and nuance and less terrified of the consequences of failure.

The woman he had told Denzil Williams's people to look for had fled to Gozo where, foolishly, her family had tried to hide her. They had been under the misapprehension the woman was in hiding because of her past involvement with the Women of Malta Movement – in which she had been an occasional, somewhat anonymous activist - and her whole village had turned out to attempt to stop the police taking her away.

The two men, brothers, had known there was no escape.

Two soldiers were dead after setting off another tripwire booby trap at the back of the rundown apartment block in Mosta where the last two men from Samuel Calleja's compromised Red Dawn cell had gone to ground and barricaded themselves into a miniature Alamo.

Once Arkady Rykov had got over his surprise that the unaccounted for final three terrorists had not been eliminated by the *Krasnaya Zarya* leadership on the Maltese Archipelago, the two prisoners Denzil William's people had taken into custody after the sinking of HMS Torquay, had quickly supplied a list of names, places, and contacts. After that it had been relatively straightforward hunting down the final three.

The Mosta 'Alamo' had had to be stormed. Neither brother had survived.

He had reported to Admiral Christopher that of the seven members of the terrorist cell Samuel Calleja had been the oldest, the others were all in their mid to late twenties. The only woman in the group had been married to one of the two cell members killed when HMS Torquay had capsized during the Yankee bombing on the 5th December.

The former KGB-man had always been a little squeamish about interrogating women; particularly young, petite, attractive women. However, down in the basement – the old dungeons, he guessed – of Fort Rinella there was nobody to hear the woman's screams.

Arkady Rykov was satisfied that he had now established a narrative that went a long way to limiting the damage. Samuel Calleja's group was responsible for the deaths of over a hundred people, the majority innocent Maltese civilians who had happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the chaotic aftermath of the October War they had assassinated British officers, more than once in the presence of their wives or families, randomly gunned down servicemen, targeted leading Maltese civic and political leaders, and left car bombs and other booby traps in busy public buildings and thoroughfares.

Before the bombing of the 5th December and the death of two or their three bomb-makers onboard HMS Torquay, the group had been planning a new terror campaign unsanctioned by its *Krasnaya Zarya* masters on the archipelago.

The woman's name was Lela Catana-Perez.

Her family had come to Malta in the 1930s, refugees from the civil war in Spain. Her father had worked in the Naval Dockyards with Peter Calleja, Samuel's father until his retirement in 1960. The old man had died before the October War. Lela Catana had been active in the Maltese Labour Party before the recent war and become to all appearances an anonymous

housewife in its aftermath.

Lela Catana had not expected him to hit her.

She had honestly believed she could make any accusation she wanted and that there would be no consequences. Even when he had ordered the others out of the interrogation room she had continued to scream at him; presumably thinking somebody would hear her.

'Traitor!'

'You betrayed us!'

'You cowardly bastard...'

She had not believed what was happening to her until he had hit her again and she was lying in a bleeding, sobbing heap on the cold stone floor with her hands cuffed behind her back.

Arkady Rykov had drawn up a chair and patiently watched her shocked brain and shuddering body come to terms with the new reality.

'I work for the British,' he had told her. 'You will tell me everything I want to know," he had declared. "If you lie to me I will hurt you very badly and you will carry the scars the rest of your life. I should tell you that before I worked for the British, I worked for the Soviets and I learned my business in the torture cells of the Lubyanka. Presumably, you've heard of the Lubyanka?'

The woman nodded, spat blood on the floor.

'Down here I can break your bones, slice flesh off your face, pull out your teeth or your finger or toe nails with rusty pliers. I suppose if I wanted I could attach electric contacts to your most private parts and make you twitch and dance until you voided your bowels and bit off your own tongue. I can make your last hours on Earth a living Hell. I could rape you, of course. But you're not really my type and even I have some scruples about these things.' He had thought about this. 'Perhaps, I'll have the boys outside rape you instead...'

The stupid bitch had made him hit her more than he had hoped he would have to but eventually she had talked. When she gave the wrong answers, he hit her again. After a while she got the idea; in the end she could not stop talking.

And pleading, always they pleaded...

Nobody above ground had heard Lela Catana's screams but the Redcaps and MI6 operatives in the adjoining rooms had heard everything. They did

not bother concealing their disgust.

How did these schoolboys ever defeat the might of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics?

"She'll live," he had snorted, meeting the hard eyes with his own unblinking stare. Grabbing his jacket off the chair outside the interrogation cell he snapped: "Tidy her up. I may need to *interview* her again."

He would not have needed to *interview* her or any of her comrades at all if they had done their jobs properly.

Krasnaya Zarya had handed the Calleja cell to the security authorities on a plate. If they had put a full-page advert in the *Times of Malta* they could not have undermined and betrayed Samuel Calleja and his band of bungling zealots more completely, and yet that idiot Denzil Williams had still fucked up! If he had done his job properly Lieutenant James Siddall would not be dead, and HMS Torquay would not be lying wrecked in two pieces on the bottom of the Grand Harbour and he would not have to be wasting his dwindling stock in the eyes of the British cleaning up the mess. When Dick White had turned up in Lisbon last month to debrief him he had known the clock was ticking; if he had not been able to persuade his MI6 handlers to send him back to Malta the preparations formulated and executed with such care and at such a cost over the last year might have come to nothing. And Samuel Calleja and his fucking amateurs would have well and truly *burned* his cover with the British.

"No visitors!"

The day was overcast when he emerged into the daylight.

He blinked, his eyes growing accustomed to the brightness of the light after so many hours in the dimly lit subterranean world of the bowels of Fort Rinella.

"They wouldn't let me in!" Clara Pullman complained as she clambered out of the Land Rover parked just outside the main security gate.

The former KGB man struggled to look his lover in the eye.

He dug around in his jacket pockets as if he had lost something.

"How did you know I'd be here?" He asked.

"Lieutenant Hannay told me this was where you and *the boys* had set up shop."

"Oh. How did you know I would come up for air? You could have been waiting here all day?"

The woman shrugged. She was wearing a fawn cardigan over a thin summer frock. To the Maltese the mild, showery weather was wintery and they went about dressed in several layers of clothing; the English and other foreigners were instantly recognisable in their summery civilian garb and tropical uniforms.

"The view is nice from here." She inclined her head to one side. "I hate it when you shut me out of things, you know that."

"I explained before," he retorted, "there are things I must do alone. Things that you cannot be involved with..."

"I'm not your little woman..."

"No," he agreed sulkily. "I need a drink. Let's go somewhere. I have to report to Admiral Christopher later this afternoon." Belatedly, he realised that was how the woman had actually known where to find him. The Commander-in-Chief had sent her to bring him back to Mdina.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "you should have that drink later."

The road rose and plunged along the rocky heights above the southern creeks of the Grand Harbour and bumped along potholed roads between close-packed limestone houses. Away from the docks and the military camps and depots Malta had about it a tired, dusty feel even at this time of year when the rain often fell in torrential showers and the temperature never scorched. Presently, they drove into the heart of the island.

"Did you persuade the woman to talk?" Clara asked quietly, her voice almost lost in the clanking and revving of the engine and the loud rumbling of the tyres on the poorly maintained road.

"Yes," he confirmed.

Arkady Rykov was glad to bid a brief farewell to his partner outside the Citadel of Mdina.

At the Headquarters of the C-in-C Mediterranean he was swiftly ushered into Admiral Christopher's presence. The Fighting Admiral had none of the dismissive superiority in his manner he had encountered in other senior British officers.

"Do we have a problem, Colonel?" He inquired, looking up from his desk and indicating the newcomer to take a seat.

"I think it is probable that the Calleja cell was operating independently, sir," the Russian replied. A big lie was always better than a small one. "Other than a contact with a woman operative whose name he would not

divulge when I met him last November, Samuel Calleja had had no contact with Red Dawn since the October War. We now have a full list of the 'actions' carried out by this cell. What I don't know, and what I can have no view on, is whether there is another cell *active* on the Archipelago."

"But surely you have an opinion of the subject, Colonel?"

"I believe it is likely that given there was one, apparently well-resourced and highly motivated Red Dawn cell active on the islands, that there may be others."

"What state is the woman," Julian Christopher had authorised the use of 'extraordinary measures' to 'break' the two men captured by Major Denzil Williams's men, and later the woman, "Lela Catana in?"

"Her mother would still recognise her, sir," Arkady Rykov informed him bleakly. That was a lie but he was making appropriate and proportional allowances for British sensibilities.

The Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations frowned.

"Like Major Williams?"

"Not so bad as Major Williams," the Russian assured him. "But I wouldn't put any of them in a public court room for a couple of weeks. Maybe three." He viewed the older man quizzically. "Or do you want me to dispose of the bodies, sir?"

Julian Christopher thought about it.

What use was honour and decency in a World gone mad? Samuel Calleja's associates had murdered and maimed without conscience, another four men had died when the Torquay was sabotaged. Among their victims was the wife of the C-in-C at the time of the October War, thirty-two women and eleven children, the youngest, two years old, consumed in the fireball when car loaded with Jerry cans of petrol had been detonated outside the American School in Valletta.

Besides, there were other considerations than the morality of the new age. There was a 'bigger picture'; and it was his duty to never allow himself to take his eye off that 'big picture'.

Not least there was his own position and by implication, that of the ongoing governance of the Archipelago and its defence. Even a military tribunal convened *in camera* would not remain secret for long. These people – no, not people, *terrorists* - would relish their day in court, tens, scores of *his*

people would inevitably learn the true story, the true depths of Samuel Calleja's treachery. Sooner or later some warped version of *the truth* would escape into the wider World; and Samuel Calleja's family would be pariahs for ever more on Malta. If his son was not so intimately, inextricably linked to Marija Calleja; or if he had never met that remarkable young woman would he have simply left the family to its fate?

Possibly, although he liked to think not.

But Peter *was* linked to Marija Calleja; he had met her and he had no intention of throwing her, her family, his son's possible future happiness, and any part of his own reputation to the wolves just to give a bunch of cold-blooded murdering terrorist scum their day in court.

He looked the former KGB man in the eye.

"Yes, that would be better. But if you can please do it cleanly, quickly." He sighed, knowing in his heart that whatever he told himself, this small additional atrocity would probably be but the first of many he would commit before the coming war was won. "I want no further unnecessary unpleasantness. Just dispose of them."

Chapter 24

Wednesday 29th January 1964
Government House, Cheltenham, England

Captain Walter Brenckmann, the fifty-four-year-old United States Ambassador to the Court of Balmoral was no closer to being able to read Margaret Thatcher's underlying mood today than he had been the first time he met her around eight weeks ago. The woman was an enigma, possibly – but only *possibly* – not quite as steely beneath the surface as she seemed but always likely to spring a surprise.

The Unity Administration's Secretary of State for Defence, William Whitelaw was chatting to the Premier over cups of tea served in Dalton bone china, when Walter Brenckmann and the Foreign Secretary, Sir Thomas Harding-Grayson entered the Prime Minister's rooms.

"Ah, there you are, Tom," the tireless widow and mother of twins waved cheerfully. "Good evening, Ambassador," she welcomed the American. "I gather you two bring more bad news from Philadelphia?"

Walter Brenckmann was fully aware that the question was asked with a polite amiability to disguise the seething exasperation Margaret Thatcher, and her colleagues in the UAUK must be feeling as they watched the House of Representatives kicking the ratification of the new US-UK Military Mutual Assistance Treaty, the delayed confirmation of James William Fulbright in his post as Secretary of State, and the small matter of the President's inalienable right to mobilize the United States military around the two re-located Houses of Congress and the Senate like a slowly deflating football. Viewed from the other side of the Atlantic it reeked of chaotic disunity at the very time the World's last remaining superpower's energies ought to have been focused on consolidating international stability.

"The President has decided to go over the heads of Congressional leaders, Prime Minister," the United States Ambassador to the Court of Balmoral explained. "I am expecting the text of his State of the Union Address tonight to be on my desk shortly. The President called me twenty minutes ago emphasising that he will welcome any comments you might

have on it. I can tell you that his speech will focus mainly on domestic political issues but will unambiguously re-affirm in the strongest terms the Administration's commitment to the undertakings given in the US-UK Military Mutual Assistance Treaty. Regardless of Congressional or Senatorial filibustering the Administration will meet its obligations under that Treaty, Prime Minister."

"As we will *our* obligations, Mister Ambassador."

Everybody sat down and the Angry Widow, in her most housewifely, charming and emollient incarnation, insisted on pouring the newcomers' tea. There was no milk, as usual.

"Willie," she invited the hangdog-faced Secretary of State for Defence to speak.

William Stephen Ian Whitelaw had been a natural choice for his current post. Although he had only entered Parliament in 1955 as MP for Penrith and the Border - after several unsuccessful attempts to win the East Dumbartonshire seat - was well thought of in the Party and was the kind of man who commanded respect and attention simply by dint of his manner and bearing. Educated at Winchester and later Trinity College, Cambridge, where he joined the Officer Training Corps, he had been commissioned into the Scots Guards in 1939. Subsequently, he had fought through Normandy, France, the Low Countries and Germany with the 6th Guards Tank Brigade, emerging in 1945 with the rank of Major and chest full of campaign medals and miscellaneous other well-earned awards for gallantry. Leaving the Army in 1946 to manage the estates he had inherited from his grandfather – his own father having been killed in the Great War – at Gartshore and Woodhall in Lanarkshire, politics had eventually become his calling. In the years immediately before the cataclysm he had entered Harold MacMillan's Administration as a Lord of the Treasury, a grandiose title for a Government whip in Parliament, in 1961. By October 1962 he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour. Edward Heath had offered him a senior post last summer before illness intervened; a large man he still looked grey and a little shrunken in his pre-war suit, and there were bags under his eyes which exaggerated his hangdog looks.

"The island of Lampedusa is now in our hands," he announced sagely. "I am glad to report that casualties were much lighter than first feared although we lost a brace of helicopters and several of our ships were knocked about

somewhat. Admiral Christopher reports naval casualties as twenty-three men dead and sixty-one seriously wounded. All vessels with the exception of HMS Puma, which was hit twice in the engine room, were able to proceed to Malta under their own steam. It now seems that the island was in the hands of a group of fanatics who had expelled, or massacred, we aren't sure which yet, every man, woman and child who had been living on Lampedusa before the late war. It was only after the expenditure of prodigious quantities of naval ordnance that the Royal Marines were able to move in and winkle out the last defenders. A dreadful business; it puts me in mind of some of the fights I was involved in, or came across after the event, in Germany during the Second War. Whole towns levelled and fanatical SS men fighting to the last man. We captured a few badly wounded men, otherwise," he shrugged. "Senseless really."

"Do *we* think Lampedusa was in the hands of Red Dawn?" Walter Brenckmann asked.

"We don't know. At Pantelleria and Linosa our ships fired warning shots and the locals couldn't throw up their hands in surrender quick enough. Obviously, we will interrogate the survivors as soon as possible. One curious thing did come to light; we found a lot of Soviet type automatic weapons and shoulder–held rocket propelled grenade launchers on Lampedusa. It sounds like a peculiar affair all round, actually."

"Go on," Margaret Thatcher encouraged him.

"Well, according to Admiral Christopher, our ships would have been handled much worse if so many of the hits on them had not been by relatively small calibre armour piercing, or solid shot. Many of the hits simply went in one side and out the other, hardly any of our destroyers and frigates having heavy plating, let alone armour."

"One fights with what one has at hand," Tom Harding-Grayson offered.

The conversation moved on.

Walter Brenckmann cleared his throat.

"The President asked me to thank you personally for facilitating the access of our survey teams to former US bases in Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. The RAF's informal assistance to our people over the recovery of dual-key assets is also very much appreciated."

Margaret Thatcher was looking forward to speaking to the American Ambassador's wife. Pat Harding-Grayson, or rather, as she was now, Lady

Patricia, had invited Joanne Brenckmann to afternoon tea yesterday. The Ambassador's wife had brought 'cookies' baked with ingredients she had brought all the way from her home in Boston. Pat had been touched by the gesture and apparently, had had 'a jolly good woman to woman' gossip with her new American neighbour.

"I insist that you and your wife come over for drinks one evening, Captain Brenckmann," she said, flashing her dazzling smile. She had honestly thought her smile was just 'a smile' until people had remarked on how she ought to 'flash' it more often. Or at least that was what Iain Macleod and his people at the Ministry of Information said.

"Joanne would enjoy that, Prime Minister," the greying American replied.

After Walter Brenckmann had departed the Defence Secretary turned to the Foreign Secretary.

"HMS Blake is currently docked at Limassol awaiting delivery of the first nuclear warheads from the Akrotiri stockpile. It is anticipated that it will take up to seventy-two hours to load all thirty-eight weapons. Facilities on Malta are now ready to accommodate the, er, *bombs*."

The Foreign Secretary had had a bad feeling about the nuclear weapons store on Cyprus for as long as he had known the Akrotiri store existed. In the later 1950s the island had been a powder keg of religious and ethnic tensions; and ever since the October War the potentially idyllic island – very much set in a silvery blue sea – had been hanging off the end of perilously long and tenuous lines of communication. Added to this the previous C-in-C Mediterranean had neglected the defences of the bases on Cyprus and done nothing to reassure the neighbouring countries; Lebanon, Israel and the Alawite Syrian communities clinging to the coastal strip between Turkey and Lebanon, that the British presence on Cyprus contributed anything meaningful to the stability of the region.

"HMS Dreadnought will be tasked to patrol the waters south of Cyprus ahead of HMS Blake's departure for Malta. The cruiser will be escorted by three screening escorts. HMS Victorious, having been delayed by the Lampedusa affair, will refuel at Malta ahead of steaming east to provide air cover for the Blake flotilla once it is out of range of land-based aircraft flying from Akrotiri."

"What is HMS Victorious's combat readiness?"

“Her air group remains under strength but all remaining civilian workers will be put ashore at Valletta. Ideally, Hermes would be sent directly to the Eastern Mediterranean but she is experiencing ‘technical’ problems with her boilers which currently limit her speed to only fifteen knots. Admiral Christopher proposes dry docking her at Malta as soon as possible. The other option is to send her back to Gibraltar but then she would be up to a week further away in the event of an unforeseen crisis developing.”

Margaret Thatcher was finding her new Defence Secretary a calming, and a very safe pair of hands. His soothingly phlegmatic attitude to things was not in any way complacent, simply the rational acknowledgement of the old axiom that ‘there is only so much one can control’; and the rest is in God’s hands. He had told her, very gently, that the worst possible thing a politician can do in almost any conceivable war situation, is to contemplate interfering directly in military affairs. ‘Trust the man on the ground,’ was his motto. It was a mantra she would not have *trusted* herself to obey had the ‘man on the ground’ in the Mediterranean not been Julian Christopher.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir David Luce had gone to Portsmouth to confer with the Flag Officer, Channel Fleet, and to personally ascertain the status of the Navy’s two largest aircraft carriers, the Ark Royal and the Eagle, both of which were in dockyard hands. HMS Eagle was nearing the end of a major structural rebuild and modernization; HMS Ark Royal was likely to be lost to the Fleet for many months. Representatives of the De Havilland, Blackburn and Supermarine companies were also due in Portsmouth to explain to the professional head of the Royal Navy why HMS Victorious had had to put to sea with such a ‘scandalously depleted air group’ when so much ‘treasure, and priceless irreplaceable skilled labour, materials, scarce metals and oils and fuels of countless varieties, was being *thrown at them*’?

“That blasted man Staveley-Pope,” the Angry Widow complained suddenly, “he must have been asleep on the job! How in the World could he have left all those warheads out there in Cyprus? It beggars belief!”

“Margaret,” Tom Harding-Grayson objected, diplomatically, “I’m sure if the previous Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean knew what we know now he would have done something about it.”

“Um!”

“I think Tom has a point, Prime Minister,” William Whitelaw added very patiently. “Just as we can only deal with the situation before us; we must be

aware that officers in the field can only form judgements on the basis of what they actually know at the time.”

Chapter 25

Wednesday 29th January 1964
The Waterfront, Sliema Creek, Malta

"I thought I'd find you here," Joe Calleja declared in the subdued tone he had been unable to rise above in the days since the news of Lieutenant Jim Siddall's murder. The man had saved his life once; and had been a good friend to his sister at a time when she had badly needed a friend. And now he was dead and it was likely that their brother had set the bomb that blew him into countless pieces of seared flesh and splintered bone.

Marija glanced nervously to her brother, then looked back at the sleek, mauled grey warship moored fore and aft to the big drum buoys in the middle of the anchorage less than a hundred yards away. Deeper into the Creek the big salvage barge moored alongside the wreck of HMS Agincourt was partially hidden by the stern of the recently anchored warship. From the shrouds below her black, double bedstead radar, an enormous battle flag flapped below the port top cross brace of her great steel lattice foremast.

Marija had dressed in dark clothes, a long dress almost down to her ankles and her hair was hidden, as was much of her face by a black muslin scarf.

"Do you remember the night of the war when everybody came down to the Creek to watch the British destroyers trying to escape out to sea?" Joe asked.

"Yes," his sister replied in a whisper. "That was the night we met Jim for the first time."

"It seems like years ago."

"Perhaps, it was. I think we are all much older now."

"Mama said you planned to go back to Mdina tonight?"

"Lieutenant Hannay promised to send a car later."

"Oh." Joe hated to see his sister brought so low. He thought he had seen all her moods but this was different, there was a dull resignation in her. He had never seen that before, not even when as a five or six-year-old he had visited her in Bighi; in those days when she had been trapped – seemingly

forever – in a hospital bed, often in a cage of steel that was literally holding her together, her eyes had sparkled and she had prattled about what she would do when she was well again. Always, there had been hope, a future filled with possibilities, bright and exciting. "I saw Papa had the *Times of Malta*, did you read the story about HMS Talavera?"

"Yes." Marija sniffed back a tear and forced herself not to raise her hands to her eyes to wipe away the moisture welling, welling, unstoppably like the rising lump in her throat. The British had gone insanely close inshore off Lampedusa to help the assault company of Royal Marines who had gone ashore unopposed only to be pinned down by a hail of machine gun and shoulder launched rocket fire. The 'enemy', or 'pirates' or 'monsters' depending on who one spoke to had opened fire on the destroyers and frigates of the 23rd Escort Flotilla, led by HMS Talavera with anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. HMS Puma had lost all power, been forced to drop anchor to stop running aground. A hit on HMS Talavera's bridge had badly wounded several men including the ship's captain and Peter Christopher had assumed command not only of his own ship, but in the confusion, of the whole flotilla. Ordering the two least damaged vessels, HMS Leopard and the big old-fashioned fleet destroyer HMS Defender to lay down covering fire he had steered the Talavera between the shore and the crippled HMS Puma, secured a tow line and while Talavera's main battery bombarded and ultimately silenced the 'enemy' guns at point blank range firing over open sights, had eventually hauled her wounded consort to safety into deeper water.

Peter was a hero.

And she was even less worthy of him...

She had sat down to write him a letter that morning; stared at the blank sheet for minutes and then an hour, her hand paralysed. Each time she gripped the pen to start to write, no words came. She could say anything to Peter Christopher except that she did not love him; yet unless she denied that love what was the point of writing the letter? In her room at the St Catherine's Hospital for Women in Mdina she would try again to write, to explain, to end this unbearable turmoil...

In the gathering dusk lights were blinking on along the length of the old Battle class destroyer. Two whalers were butting up against the ferry jetty, waiting a little further along the sea wall. Talavera's crew were swinging down a boarding ladder and forming up on the amidships deck.

Marija thought the destroyer looked a little bit odd with the yawning gap behind her funnel where she would normally have expected to see the high, blocky deckhouse which somebody had once told her housed most of the technical marvels of the converted Fast Air Detection *Battles*.

Several cars drew up opposite the ferry jetty.

Marija forced herself to look away.

In the *Times of Malta* they said the British ships had gone so close inshore off Lampedusa that the enemy guns, firing shells designed to penetrate the inclined, super-hardened thick armoured glacis plates of tanks had ripped straight through the thin hulls of the British destroyers 'like hot knives through butter', except where they hit something solid, then they had ricocheted around the insides of the ships like huge unstoppable bullets. She counted half-a-dozen football-sized jagged holes in the bridge superstructure and the hull beneath it. HMS Talavera's stern looked like a colander, riddled with fist-sized dark holes and blackened, here and there by small fires. The paper had said only three of her men had died and only eight had been seriously wounded. Staring at the visible damage she did not know how that was possible, surely more men must have died?

Marija was so preoccupied she did not notice, or feel, Joe's sudden movement by her side.

"Miss Calleja?" Alan Hannay asked anxiously. "Marija, are you all right?"

She swung around, wild-eyed.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you."

"No, no. You didn't, Alan."

"Oh. Good. Look, the Admiral is going aboard HMS Talavera. He would be honoured if you..."

"No!" Marija cried.

The young officer misunderstood.

"I'm sure they've quite tidied up the battle damage," he said lamely.

"No," she hissed. "I cannot, I have no right. Everything is spoiled now. Don't you see?"

"Er, no," the C-in-C's flag lieutenant stammered, deeply troubled by the tears flooding down the woman's face. "Lieutenant-Commander Christopher will be coming ashore with the Admiral. There are lots of photographers and journalists down by the ferry..."

Marija shook her head and broke past him.

Her brother exchanged worried looks with the British officer and ran after his sister. He soon caught up with her. The sea front was crowded and Marija was not as spritely once she met the rising slope of Tower Street.

“The British don’t blame you, sister!” He declared breathlessly. “They don’t blame any of us. They know we didn’t have anything to do with what Sam was involved in!”

Marija kept marching purposefully up hill.

Joe made a grab for her elbow.

She shook off his hand.

“Please!” He pleaded plaintively.

Marija halted and suddenly he was two paces beyond her before he realised she had stopped. He turned.

“Don’t you see?” His sister implored him. “Peter is a hero and I am the sister of a monster?”

Joe threw his arms wide; unable to express his utter incomprehension.

“I was stupid to think he would ever love me!” Marija went on, spiralling into self-immolation in her despair. “Me! What was I thinking, Joe? What kind of a wife could I ever be to a man who is such a hero?”

Joe didn’t know what to say or even if there was anything to be said.

He pulled his sister towards him and wrapped his arms around her, in a moment she was clinging to his neck, sobbing unrequitedly, inconsolably in the failing light of the day.

Down on the waterfront a brass band struck up.

“How does HMS Talavera look, son?” Joe’s father asked, standing aside as his daughter stumbled into her mother’s waiting arms and the two women crabbed, hugging and crying into the kitchen. The son followed the stooped, defeated figure of his father into the living room.

“She looked like she was in a real fight, Papa,” Peter Calleja’s surviving son told him. “I don’t know how they could have let her get into *any* kind of fight. She’s missing her CIC deckhouse, she’s got no gun directors, the mainmast is just a radio aerial, and she’s got no surface-to-air missile launcher or AS mortar. She must have had to fire her main battery in local control the other day. That’s almost like something from a World War One sea battle!”

His father forced a haggard smile.

“Like father like son,” he said with a soft, dreadful bitterness.

“We met Lieutenant Hannay on the sea wall. He invited Marija to go aboard, or to meet Peter Christopher when he came ashore.”

The father’s eyes clouded with remorse.

A few minutes later Joe Calleja left the house. If he stayed in it a minute longer he would want to throw himself under a bus. He was a little guilty he could not share in his mother and father’s, or really, in Marija’s grief. He was sad about Sam, and ashamed, mostly he was spitting mad. How could that miserable, self-centred, selfish bastard have done this to them? He had murdered Joe’s friend, Jim Siddall, and worse; he might have succeeded in doing the impossible; breaking Marija’s spirit. When he had set off those bombs in the bowels of HMS Torquay, Joe hoped his brother had lived long enough to know what he had done, long enough to suffer.

He worked his way to the sea wall, sat on the cool concrete.

He smoked one, then a second cigarette, watching what was happening on HMS Talavera.

Two tall men, officers, were standing on the stern a little apart from a gang of others, talking, perhaps laughing as they examined the ship’s many jagged wounds.

For the first time he wondered exactly what kind of a man Peter Christopher was; any man who had done what he had done off Lampedusa – assuming the stories were true – was certainly a brave man. Marija had said he was a good man.

A brave good man; now there was a rare thing!

After an age the whaler which had transported the Commander-in-Chief across the glassy waters of Sliema Creek to welcome home his conquering hero son, filled with bodies and serenely chugged back towards the ferry jetty.

Joe began to work his way along the waterfront to get a better view.

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher was his father’s height, possible an inch taller, a perfect, carbon copy of the great man as he must have been in his late twenties.

Joe saw the younger man looking around; and knew he was questing for Marija. Joe waved but remained anonymous in a crowd where everybody was waving.

Flash guns popped and dazzled, the Pathe film crew stalked their prey.

Big, round metal microphones were pushed into the younger Christopher's face. He took it in good spirit, smiling a little shyly, self-consciously the way all movie stars wish they could but never, ever quite manage to convincingly pull off.

"On behalf of my crew," he said sheepishly, his father standing back out of the limelight as his son's voice carried, echoing along the seafront and up the narrow streets of Sliema. "I must thank everybody for such a marvellous welcome. I'm told the crowds on Tigne Point and the ramparts of Valletta were a thing to behold. I missed most of it, I'm afraid. I've never been to this part of the World before and I was rather keen not to inadvertently run Talavera aground on her first visit to this lovely island!"

There was laughing, a shuffling clamour for more.

What followed was a quick-fire barrage of shouted questions which the youthful destroyer commander parried with what appeared to be practiced grace but was in fact, simply well-manner charm.

"All I can say is that I've been looking forward to visiting Malta for a long time and now that I am finally here, I intend to enjoy every minute of it. Although obviously, not until my ship is patched up and ready to re-join the fight!"

Chapter 26

Thursday 30th January 1964
HMS Dreadnought, Sea of Crete

In another fifteen minutes Captain Simon Collingwood, the commander of the Royal Navy's most advanced warship, the nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarine HMS Dreadnought, would have dived deep and commenced a high-speed run to his new patrol box one hundred and fifty miles south of Crete. Then the sound room had picked up surface contacts coming his way.

For the previous forty-eight hours Dreadnought had slowly cruised off Souda, and Heraklion and back again. The presence of a few small fishing boats had been noted, but the pre-October War ferry traffic, and the criss-crossing of the Southern Aegean by merchantmen of every shape, size and antiquity was a sad memory. The seas north of Crete were eerily quiet and lonely. The waters under the boat's keel were also astonishingly deep in this part of the Eastern Mediterranean. Here only a few miles off the north-western coast of Crete there was no bottom for nearly two miles down.

The hairs on the nape of Simon Collingwood's neck had tingled, stood up on end when he had received the orders to proceed to *Crete*. Crete was one of those places that had a special resonance to Royal Navy men. It was in the waters around Crete in 1941 that the Mediterranean Fleet had fought some of its most gallant actions of the whole Second World War. Tasked to evacuated the defending troops routed by massed German paratrooper drops, cruisers and destroyers weighed down with rescued soldiers had shot themselves dry as they twisted and turned beneath a rain of bombs. When ships ran out of ammunition men had picked up pistols and rifles, anything to fend off the relentless Stukas and Junkers Ju 88 dive bombers. Three cruisers and six destroyers were sunk, another fifteen warships damaged in rescuing over sixteen thousand of the twenty-two thousand men of the original garrison on Crete.

When questioned about the Royal Navy's appalling losses in the evacuation the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Andrew Cunningham famously replied: '*It takes the Navy three years to*

build a ship. It takes three hundred years to build a tradition. The evacuation will continue.'

Right now, the hairs on the back of Simon Collingwood's neck were starting to stand up again.

In the distance the tall superstructure of the approaching cruiser had reminded him of old photographs of the Bismarck's consort at the Battle of the Denmark Strait, the Prinz Eugen. This was hardly surprising because Soviet naval architects had stolen practically all the best ideas of their German enemies after the Second World War; not to mention one or two of their not so good ideas. Notwithstanding, the fifteen thousand-ton Sverdlov class cruiser bearing down on HMS Dreadnought cut a singularly impressive dash. Nearly seven hundred feet long, armed with a dozen six-inch guns in four turrets, with her superstructure bristling with anti-aircraft guns, equipped with ten 21-inch torpedo tubes, and with her vitals protected by up to four inches of armour plate, the cruiser was approaching at thirteen or fourteen knots.

Even at a range of over a mile Simon Collingwood could clearly see the huge flag flying from her tripod main mast abaft her second stack as it streamed out to port on a stiffening southerly wind.

No battle flag he had ever seen flown by a Royal Navy ship, not even by one of the old King George V class leviathans he had served on as a snotty – a midshipman - at the end of Hitler's war, was half the size of the great rippling blood red standard lashed to the Sverdlov class cruiser's halyards.

He clicked the button to take photographs.

The mechanism of the camera module built into the periscope mounting whirred and advanced the film. He clicked again, and again.

"Down scope!"

The Captain of HMS Dreadnought stood up straight.

"Down planes! Make our depth one-five-zero feet!"

The deck under his feet began to gently cant forward. Soon they would all hear the onrushing cruiser, her screws thrashing at the water, her passing like the distant thunder of a score of express trains in the night.

"She's a later Sverdlov class ship," Simon Collingwood announced conversationally. "More radio and radar clutter on her superstructure than I've seen before. I couldn't see any escorts but the sky behind her was very hazy. The haze might have been funnel smoke, but," he shrugged, grinned at

his red-headed, rusty-bearded Executive office, Max Forton. "Nothing would surprise me, frankly!"

There was a brief low mutter of amusement before everybody got on with their jobs.

"Once she's gone by we'll come up to periscope depth again and see what's coming up behind *our* Sverdlov, Number One.

Waiting until the big cruiser had crossed Dreadnought's track some five hundred yards astern, Simon Collingwood brought the submarine about and slowly came up to periscope depth, around sixty feet, the depth being measured from the boat's keel.

"Target One is turning!"

And so she was! For long seconds the big ship presented her elegant port silhouette to the clicking periscope camera.

"There's a lot of traffic coming down from the north!" Max Forton reported as he watched the tactical plot updating. "At least one heavy! Maybe two!"

"Our Sverdlov has a big pennant number on her side," Simon Collingwood reported. "One-zero-five!"

There was a short delay while files were hurriedly thumbed.

"That's makes her the *Admiral Kutuzov*, sir!"

The next question was what on Earth was she doing this far south?

"What was her home port?"

"Sevastopol."

Okay, but if one of the Soviet's big ships was at sea when Sevastopol was blasted off the face of the planet; how many of her brothers and sisters were sent out to sea to keep her company back in October 1962?

A destroyer or a frigate could limp out of harbour within, say, a couple of hours of flashing up a single boiler? But a big ship like that cruiser out there? If she had had her boilers lit, no time at all; but from a cold start? Hours, many hours. There was nothing modern about the machinery of these Stalin-era cruisers. The Soviets had been given a half-built German heavy cruiser as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, later they had captured other German uncompleted or badly bomb-damaged hulls and buildings full of blueprints. It was tacitly assumed they had adopted the Germans' pre-war overly complex and maintenance-intensive machinery layouts, as well as copied numerous other internal features of the Nazis'

Hipper class cruisers. Hence the striking resemblance of the Admiral Kutuzov with twenty-year-old images of the Prinz Eugen.

Simon Collingwood watched as, some four thousand yards away, increasingly silhouetted against the setting sun, the handsome cruiser came to a virtual dead stop, with her bow pointed almost due north.

"What's our range to the nearest land?" He asked.

"Two point two miles, sir."

The Captain of HMS Dreadnought went on watching.

Nothing happened for about a minute and then, without warning, the cruiser's side lit up like a long, violently iridescent, blinding firework. It was some moments before he realised the Admiral Kutuzov's main battery had fired a broadside.

"The cruiser has just loosed off a broadside," he intoned flatly. "Presumably, at the units coming down from the north."

The Sverdlov class cruiser fired another broadside; this time the guns spat a little raggedly.

"Second broadside. Under local control this time."

It was peculiar watching so much sound and fury and hearing *nothing*.

His hand closed on the camera button as the next broadside erupted from the side of the Admiral Kutuzov.

Moments later the sea between the periscope lens and the cruiser convulsed, huge columns of white water completely obscuring the fifteen-thousand-ton warship.

The darkness was settling now.

He waited for the cruiser's next broadside.

A minute ticked by, and another.

Then far astern of the nearly stationary ship a huge tract of sea dissolved into a forest of shell splashes bigger than anything he had ever seen other than in the movies, or a…

"Give me a range and bearing to the nearest northern contact please!"

He was already swinging the periscope around.

"Zero-two-one degrees!"

"Nine thousand years!"

Nothing. At first there was just the seemingly impenetrable grey dusk and the haze making it impossible to distinguish where the sky ended and the ocean began. Simon Collingwood raised the periscope to its maximum

extension. Ships carrying out a full-bore shoot weren't worrying about detecting the radar ghost of a raised scope.

He was counting the seconds.

Almost two minutes passed.

He trained the lens down the bearing of the approaching contact.

Cranked up the magnification to maximum; imagining he could make out a low, dirty, smoking hull almost directly bow on to the Dreadnought.

Without warning the whole northern horizon seemed to momentarily flare like a bursting supernova as the fifty-three-year-old battlecruiser Yavuz – built as the *SMS Goeben* in 1912 to serve in the Kaiser's High Seas Fleet – unleashed an eight-gun broadside from the eleven-inch guns of her main battery.

"Gentlemen," the Captain of HMS Dreadnought chuckled ruefully, "I think we are witnessing one of the most bizarre gunnery exercises in history. The Kutuzov and a World War One battlecruiser are trading offset broadsides."

The light was gone.

"Down scope! Make our depth two-zero-zero feet!"

Moving to the plot Simon Collingwood eyed the Cretan coast to the south waiting like a long, impenetrable barrier against which he had no intention of being trapped.

"We'll work our way around to the east of these fellows up top," he decided out aloud. "I'll feel happier when we have a little sea room. I propose to delay our run south until we receive word from Malta. We'll send off a flash report on the shenanigans topside and see what Fleet HQ wants us to do about it."

Chapter 27

Thursday 30th January 1964
Cheltenham Town Hall, Gloucestershire, England

"This is a dreadful mistake, Margaret," Iain Macleod hissed as he caught up with his Prime Minister on the steps to the Town Hall, having had to scurry madly around the car to continue their 'debate'. Or rather, their politely 'blazing row'. It was all very well for Airey Neave to assure him, and everybody else who would listen, that 'the lady had made up her mind' and that therefore, 'there was nothing anybody could do about it' but Airey was not the Chairman of the Party, and in any event the poor man had, in retrospect, been in the Angry Widow's thrall for many months.

"It is nothing of the sort, Iain," Margaret Thatcher retorted irritably. "Later this year I will be standing at the by-election in this constituency and I have no intention of taking anything for granted."

"The bloody man wins both ways!" The Minister of Information protested. "By sharing a stage with the bounder, you give him credit he doesn't deserve!"

"I don't like what he's been saying around the country any more than you do," the woman snapped. "But he's got a perfect right to say what he wants; just as I have a perfect right of reply!"

The Chairman of the Conservative and Unionist Party of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland would have argued more but fresh snow had fallen that afternoon and the stone steps were slick with ice. He lost his footing and pitched forward, saving himself only by throwing out his arms.

"Iain! Iain?" Margaret Thatcher demanded plaintively. "Are you all right? Was it your old wound?"

The strong hands of the nearest Royal Marine Commandos of the Prime Minister's personal bodyguard raised the shaken Minister to his feet and started dusting him down, their eyes searching for danger, other men fingering the trigger guards of their Sten Guns. Many of the Royal Marines had been with Margaret Thatcher in America and throughout her ceaseless perambulations around the country, and they had begun to form such a fierce

esprit de corps that already comrades and detractors alike had started calling them the ‘Angry Widow’s Praetorians’. The Prime Minister had been informed that some of the Commandos wore vests beneath their combat fatigues emblazoned with the motto ‘*God Bless the Angry Widow*!’

It smacked of exactly the *cult of personality* which so energized her Right Honourable Friend, the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West. That, and she strongly suspected, the fact that she was a mere woman.

The Royal Marines unceremoniously carried Iain Macleod inside the lobby of the Town Hall, clearing a path through the throng of aimless sightseers, local dignitaries and assorted anonymous MPs who had decided tonight would be a good time to make a belated appearance in the town which had been the United Kingdom’s seat of government for the last year.

“Wait! Wait! Wait!” Margaret Thatcher commanded. “She turned to view her Minister of Information. He looked a little bedraggled and he had mud on his hands. She handed him a handkerchief and placed a sisterly hand on his arm. “Are you sure you are all right, Iain?”

“Yes, yes,” he muttered, wiping his hands and trying to shrug some of the creases out of his jacket.

“Perhaps, you should sit down for a little while?”

“I shall be fine in a moment,” the man insisted. “Besides, if you think I’m going to let you go in there and face that, that,” he spluttered with the indignation of a man who feels himself to have been betrayed by an old friend, “that man *alone*,” he forced out eventually, “you have another thing coming, Margaret. And that’s final!”

Margaret Thatcher thought she was going to cry.

But the instant quickly came and went.

She smiled and Iain Norman Macleod, the man who had once been her fiercest critic in the former United Kingdom Interim Emergency Administration, briefly felt as if all the ills of the World were as nothing.

The youthful Captain in command of the *AWP* detachment went ahead into the body of the Hall where an audience of well over a thousand souls hung over the first-floor balconies and shifted impatiently in the packed seats below the stage. The crowd stilled as the Marines surveyed the ground around them before waving for the Prime Minister to be ushered through the doors at the rear of the chamber.

Most of the audience jumped up and started clapping and cheering but a significant minority stayed seated, their silence like an accusation. A block of about a dozen teenagers dressed in black ostentatiously turned their backs on the Prime Minister's party as it passed. As she and Ian Macleod climbed up the steps onto the stage the cheering reached a spontaneous crescendo and six Commandos moved into position in the narrow gap between the first row of seats and the front of the stage, eyeing the nearest members of the audience with stony stares.

The Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West was sitting patiently, emulating a marble statue in one of the two chairs placed on the right-hand side of the stage. Next to him, perspiring in the television lights, sat his second, the MP for West Flintshire.

Eton educated fifty-seven-year-old Evelyn Nigel Chetwode Birch, had emerged from the Second War with an Order of the British Empire – an OBE – and the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. He had been elected to Parliament in 1945 despite the Labour landslide and progressed effortlessly up the greasy pole of political life until, in league with the man sitting beside him on the stage, he had joined Peter Thorneycroft, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer in resigning in protest from Harold MacMillan's Cabinet in 1958. Before that he had held the posts of Minister of Works, Secretary of State for Air and finally, Economic Secretary to the Treasury but all that had ended once he had fallen out with the Prime Minister and a large part of the Tory Party hierarchy. Like most politicians who feel themselves undervalued and publicly spurned by his leaders, he had scores to settle.

It was unclear whether the understandably nervous invigilator provided by the BBC was cognisant of the bitter undertow of the emotions in play that evening.

The Prime Minister went to him and extended her hand in greeting.

If anybody had told Barry Lankester when he joined the BBC in 1955 as a studio manager that one day he would be refereeing a public fight between two politicians – who in this day and age literally had the power of life and death over everybody in the land – in front of a probably small television audience and a radio one of countless millions, he would have laughed. Hysterically, actually. But then if somebody had told him the World would blow itself to pieces over a few rockets on an island in the Caribbean he

would probably have laughed even louder.

It was a funny old World.

He honestly had not realised that the Prime Minister was so young; only a few years older than him. Meeting the lady in person, face to face, for the first time he was struck by how fresh, *young* – that was the word that kept repeating in his head – vivacious and, this was the really shocking thing, *pretty* she was. It was not the manufactured beauty of a movie star; it was real and unlike a movie star, whom one could only worship from afar, this woman looked one in the eye and you knew, you just knew, she was listening closely to every word you said to her.

Barry Lankester would later realise that he had been bewitched by Margaret Thatcher that night in Cheltenham and that afterwards, nothing had ever been quite the same again.

"I gather that as a child you were in Coventry in 1940 during the terrible blitz," Margaret Thatcher said to him. "Mister Heath once spoke to me about the emotions Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* stirred in him. I believe you were lucky enough to introduce the piece at the Coventry Festival in the summer before the recent war?"

The BBC man was stunned.

How on earth did she know that?

"Now," the Angry Widow counselled the younger man, "you mustn't worry yourself if Mr Powell and I start knocking lumps out of each other. That, after all, is what *normal* politics is all about."

The title of the 'debate' was: '*That the Country has no faith in the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom'*.

There were three lecterns in a line at the front of the stage.

Each was topped with several microphones of various types and vintages.

The 'proposer' of the motion, the Honourable Member for Wolverhampton South West would speak first. Once he had laid the bare bones of his case before the people of Cheltenham and the supporters he had brought south from the Midlands; Margaret Thatcher would 'defend' the UAUK. Thereafter, both parties had agreed – informally – that the debate would proceed by cut and thrust, not overlong or repetitive diatribes.

Iain Macleod was hardly alone in thinking that the thirty-eight-year-old widowed mother of two teenage children had made a potentially catastrophic error of judgement in accepting Enoch Powell's challenge.

Enoch Powell possessed the most brilliant, albeit erratic, not to say febrile, intellect in the Party. He had led a life dedicated to scholarship, and to ascetic and esoteric learning. The man was a multi-lingual, latter-day polymath whose command of the English language was bettered only by the feral acuity of his mental processes.

Margaret Thatcher's only defence against overwhelming odds seemed to be in the unsuspected talismanic charisma she had found from within herself after Edward Heath's tragic assassination in Washington. Somehow, she had tapped into a latent mood in the country and ridden that wave in recent weeks. However, she was not a particularly accomplished public speaker and in a heated discussion she often turned dogmatic and hectoring. Unlike her opponent she had no particular talent for deflecting verbal barbs with irony or with a well-timed aside. All the strengths which worked in her favour out on the stomp in the country were as likely, fault lines in the hot-house atmosphere of the old Town Hall. Worse, if she metaphorically fell on her face in this arena there was nothing her devoted AWP could do to rescue her.

Despite Iain Macleod having expressly advised her not to do it, before hostilities were joined Margaret Thatcher stepped across to her two most vociferous political adversaries.

Enoch Powell, a punctilious man in such things rose painfully from his chair and shook the Prime Minister's hand. As much as he detested the woman manners maketh the man. His right eye blazed and he held himself as erect as his mauled and remade frame allowed.

"I trust your journey here today was not too onerous, Mr Powell?"

"Not at all, madam," the tall, thin, gaunt figure assured her in a parody of the distinctive, piercing, reedy voice which had arrested countless meetings and graced so many sessions of the House of Commons before the October War. "I confess," he added, humourlessly, "I did not think this day would ever come. Or if it did, it would come so soon."

"Why," the Angry Widow re-joined, her blue eyes glinting with the light of battle, "do you not think that a lady is a fool to nobody but herself if she keeps a good man waiting too long?"

Chapter 28

Thursday 30th January 1964
Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Mdina, Malta

The acting editor of the *Times of Malta*, Paul Boffa, felt a little like Daniel must have felt entering the lions' den as he was shown into the presence of the man he referred to as the 'Supreme Commander', or in less sanguine moods, 'Il Supremo'. His first reaction to his surroundings was one of surprise. He looked around the small, Spartan office. He had expected something grander by far; not a small room filled by a big desk with unprepossessing *in* and *out* trays, a big gun metal lockable filing cabinet and hard chairs, one behind the desk, two in front of it. 'Il Supremo' was pulling on his uniform jacket as the twenty-five-year-old former sports and cultural 'stringer' – he had spent much of his time before the October War reporting on football matches, weddings, christenings, funerals and brass band concerts staged by the 'occupying power' – shuffled nervously to a halt two steps into the room.

Paul Boffa had not expected the Fighting Admiral to be as tall as he was in his photographs or as he had seemed in the movies visiting the bomb sites after the American sneak attack in December, or later as he worked the crowds like a seasoned politician. The older man was nearly a head-and-a-half taller than the newspaperman.

Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher smiled as he walked around his desk and took his visitor's hand firmly in his own. His grip was hard and dry and when he spoke he looked Paul Boffa in the eye.

"It was very good of you to come over at such short notice, Mr Boffa," the older man declared. "I must apologise for my tardiness in not making your acquaintance before now but as you know, things have been a little hectic and we've both been a little busy in the last couple of months."

This was no exaggeration.

Paul Boffa's boss and most of the senior staff at the *Times of Malta* had been killed or injured during the 5th December raid. The next day he had found himself head of a small committee – they had laughingly called

themselves the *Times of Malta Soviet* - of survivors struggling to put out a single broadsheet version of the paper in the following days. About ten days after the bombing a representative of the new C-in-C had turned up, unannounced at the paper's makeshift offices in Valletta and much to everybody's astonishment asked: 'Is there anything *we* can do to help the *Times of Malta* to get back on its feet?'

That was the first time he had met the late Lieutenant Jim Siddall. The big former Redcap had become the *Times of Malta's* unofficial conduit into the heart of the British Administration of the Maltese Archipelago. Jim Siddall had never asked him to slant a story or, in fact, ever mentioned the actual content of the paper. The new policy was that the Maltese press should be 'free' and 'independent' and if any official or officer under the C-in-C's command did not understand that, then Jim Siddall wanted to know. The next day the warehouse where sufficient newsprint for twenty days pre-war publication of the *Times of Malta* - the archipelago's entire stockpile – had been released to the paper for 'immediate' use; the stockpile, owned by the British, had been dispensed *gratis* as a 'token of good faith' in 'support of the ongoing recovery operation'.

Admiral Christopher waved for his visitor to take a seat and the two men settled. The journalist was greedily studying his surroundings for insights into his host. There was no ash tray in the room. No pictures on the wall, just the framed prints on his desk. One might be of the son, the 'hero of Lampedusa', he assumed. But what of the other two? He tried hard not to flinch from the great man's stare.

"We think we've got to the bottom of what happened out at Kalkara the other week," Julian Christopher announced, instantly business-like. This was a man to man conversation, there would be no dissembling. Or at least, that was what he hoped the younger man would take away from this interview. Sir Richard 'Dick' White, the Head of the Secret Intelligence Service – MI6 – had assured him that, whatever else they thought about him, Arkady Rykov had a particular talent for making apparently intractable problems 'go away'; in this case his talents had been applied to the business of so comprehensively corrupting and fragmenting the evidence trail, that hopefully, in the coming months nobody would even attempt to make sense of recent events. "I know you were friendly with Lieutenant Siddall and you must be as keen to know exactly what happened as anybody."

If a thing was too good to be true, it probably was too good to be true.

However, knowing this and trusting one's instincts only took a man so far, so Paul Boffa listened, tingling with anticipation and yet intuitively wary. It was as if he was putting his hand into a box which contained a priceless jewel that was his for the taking; the only problem was that there was a scorpion lurking in the darkness right next to the gem.

"We now believe that Samuel Calleja may have been the innocent dupe of a Soviet-style communist cell. After the murder of Jim Siddall, a joint Royal Military Police and Royal Marine Commando operation attempted to apprehend five persons of interest in the inquiry into the explosion at Kalkara and Samuel Calleja's disappearance. Regrettably, these persons of interest, four men and a woman, whose names I cannot at this time release to you for ongoing security reasons, were heavily armed. When *our* people went in they opened fire. Two of my officers were killed and several others injured in a booby trap explosion much like the one that killed Lieutenant Siddall. Realising they were cornered the *terrorists* apparently turned their weapons on each other in some kind of bizarre suicide pact."

Julian Christopher sighed wearily.

"I don't know," he shook his head sadly, confidentially, "I saw some bad things in the Second War and I know some bad things were going on in the last days of the Empire, especially while we were pulling out, but sometimes, I just don't understand what gets into people's heads."

Paul Boffa heard this as if at a distance while the forefront of his mind struggled to digest the message he was being given.

"Samuel Calleja was *not* a terrorist?"

The great grimaced.

"No. We have no evidence to that effect."

"So, he wasn't involved in the sinking of HMS Torquay?"

"We think that's unlikely. That's not to say that he wasn't forced to give the terrorists access to the ship before he was murdered, or that he was left to die onboard her when she sank. Obviously, somebody had to have given *these* people access to the dockyard and to the ship. How else would those responsible for her loss have got onboard to place their demolition charges?" The older man left this rhetorical question to linger in the air a moment. "Perhaps, he was tortured to reveal the best places to position the charges? We just don't know and I rather doubt if we ever will know."

“I understood that Peter Calleja, his father, and Joseph Calleja, Samuel’s younger brother had been arrested and interrogated by the security police...”

Julian Christopher gently corrected the young man’s terminology.

“We don’t have any *security police*, Mr Boffa. The *Internal Security Department* personnel who survived the bombing of their headquarters on Manoel Island in December were reassigned to other units and the Malta ISD formally disbanded at that time. Samuel Calleja’s father and brother were *interviewed* by officers of the Special Investigations Department of the Royal Military Police, and by intelligence officers attached to my Headquarters Staff.”

“Yes, of course,” Paul Boffa agreed, a little chastened. The ease with which the other man could suddenly dominate the room was a rude reminder of the political realities of a Maltese Archipelago under – albeit at the moment relatively benign – military occupation. “As I was saying,” he went on doggedly, “Peter and Joe Calleja were detained and interrogated and then placed under house arrest?”

“Lieutenant Siddall died as a result of an explosion on property rented by Samuel Calleja. It was important that this matter was investigated by the appropriate authorities regardless of the known connections of some of those unwittingly implicated with the, er, person, of the current Commander-in-Chief.”

“Ah, I see. Presumably, Marija Calleja has been interviewed?”

Julian Christopher scowled suddenly.

“No, of course not!” He made no effort to hide his offence at being asked such a crass and ridiculous question.

Paul Boffa flinched. “But you said...”

“Miss Calleja’s father and surviving brother had access to bomb-making equipment and demolition munitions in their work at the Naval Dockyards. They also had the training and the technical knowledge to use the same, had they been so moved. Marija Calleja is a nurse, for goodness sake. And Lieutenant Siddall was her friend, dammit!”

“I’m sorry, I...”

The older man raised a hand.

“No, no, I apologise. One tries very hard to be aloof from things, to keep a cool head and so forth but some things make a man’s blood boil. It was a miracle that Samuel Calleja’s poor wife wasn’t killed as well! Sometimes, I

just don't understand people who can cold-bloodedly booby-trap a door like that. There might have been children killed! Honestly, it beggars belief!"

The Editor of the *Times of Malta* dug deep and found new resolve.

This was the story of the year, certainly the story of his career.

But it was far too good to be true?

"People are bound to say this is all very convenient, Sir Julian?"

"Oh. How so?"

"One minute the Calleja family is disgraced; the next they are exonerated, the innocent victims of a cruel and heartless conspiracy?"

The Fighting Admiral shrugged, holding his peace.

"And then there are the rumours of the involvement of Marija Calleja with your son..."

"I'd no more discuss personal tittle-tattle about a member of my family with a journalist than you would, Mr Boffa." Julian Christopher had not imagined the younger man would swallow the story hook line and sinker. As Dick White had observed, rather pithily, he thought; 'the thing is to get a fellow hooked, then, sooner or later he will reel himself in.' It was for this reason that one never disclosed *everything* even when one actually wanted everybody to know *everything*.

In a situation in which the truth needed to be buried by a veritable bodyguard of lies, the trick was to provide just enough information to allow Paul Boffa, his readers and anybody else who sniffed around later, to give the official account the benefit of the doubt.

Julian Christopher relented.

"Look, it is a matter of record that Miss Calleja and my son have been 'pen friends' for many years. To the best of my knowledge Miss Calleja and my son have *never* actually met each other. Presently, my son is fully engaged making good the battle damage to his ship. I should imagine that Miss Calleja is supporting her family in the way any good daughter would in these sad times. I have no idea if Miss Calleja and my son have met since Talavera moored in Sliema Creek, or if the *young people* have plans to meet each other in person at this time, or in the future."

The Editor of the *Times of Malta* was more than a little out of his depth. He was floundering, drowning. It was because of this that he allowed his focus to shift from the immediate story, to one that was at best ephemeral, and at worst, black propaganda.

“There is a great deal of talk about something called *Red Dawn* on American radio stations and on the news wires coming from Reuters, Sir Julian?” He took a big gulp of air. “Is *Red Dawn* the real reason for the sudden naval build up?”

The Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations viewed the editor thoughtfully with eyes that were instantly flinty, unforgiving.

“You and I don’t know each other very well, Mr Boffa,” he said after what seemed to the younger man, an interminable pause. “In England politicians and senior officers can sometimes rely on gentlemen of the press to unconditionally respect a confidence, usually in advance of some major public announcement or event. Are you familiar with the conventions described in the ‘Chatham House Rules’, or ‘Lobby terms’?”

Paul Boffa nodded, but he checked he understood the proposition correctly.

“Under those ‘terms’ it would be understood that whatever I am told is either unattributable or embargoed until a future date agreed by mutual consent, Sir Julian.”

“Quite.” The great man smiled faintly. “It is a question of trust. On your part you must be confident that I am not using you for nefarious purposes relating to perfidious Imperial policy; on my part I must know that you won’t print something you have been told in confidence at an inopportune time.”

“I am an honourable man, Sir Julian.”

“As were the poor fellows in those B-52s the RAF shot down last month,” the Commander-in-Chief retorted mildly. He hesitated. “Perhaps, you and I should begin our journey with small steps, Mr Boffa?”

“As you wish, Sir Julian.”

“Red Dawn,” the older man murmured, his tone that of a man willing to test the waters. “*Krasnaya Zarya*,” he prefaced ruefully, “we now believe was the Soviet response to the situation they found themselves in after the end of the Second War. The Americans had the atomic bomb and they didn’t. Therefore, the Soviets, specifically, Josef Stalin, believed that the USSR would lose the next war. Seventeen years later they were right; but by then Red Dawn was so deeply embedded in every facet of the Soviet system that it infected everywhere in the World touched by the Soviet State. It was

by then ubiquitous. So, when the war came and blew away the old Soviet Union what was left was Red Dawn. We now suspect that the terrorists who duped," he liked that word too much and therefore forbade its use again in this conversation, "Samuel Calleja, were responsible for the worst atrocities committed on Malta in the weeks after the October War, including the assassination of one of my predecessors, were almost certainly affiliated to the Red Dawn movement."

Paul Boffa's eyes were widening, his pupils dilating in astonishment.

"Moreover," Julian Christopher went on, his tone low and severe, almost schoolmasterly, "it is the considered view of Her Majesty's Government that the attacks on Royal Navy vessels and the bombing of Malta last month was part of a broader Red Dawn inspired conspiracy against British *and* American interests. Furthermore, the belligerence of Spain and the irrational behaviour of the regime in Italy and of other Mediterranean powers towards British interests may also have been fomented by agents of Red Dawn. The recent actions against Pantelleria, Linosa and Lampedusa were therefore necessary 'tidying up' operations to deny safe havens to Red Dawn terrorists, and to secure sea communications with Gibraltar. It is my sincere hope that these actions will persuade the authorities on Sicily and in North Africa, that any attempt to shelter elements of Red Dawn or to interdict our lines of communication will henceforth have the direst consequences for those responsible."

"So Red Dawn really exists?"

"Yes. That is our best analysis of the available intelligence."

Paul Boffa was reeling and yet from somewhere, he knew not whence, he found the gumption to ask the one question that he had to ask.

"Is Malta in danger, Sir Julian?"

The older man nodded.

"Yes," he said again, "if Malta falls to *Krasnaya Zarya* then the whole Mediterranean basin from the Levant to the Straits of Gibraltar will most likely be plunged into a new dark age."

Chapter 29

Thursday 30th January 1964
Cheltenham Town Hall, Gloucestershire, England

"The Lady says to us," the tall, gaunt, scarred man with a patch over his empty left eye socket called, his voice keening to the high vaulted beams fifty feet above his head, 'that we should trust her; that she knows what she is doing and that she is, at heart, a democrat of the old school. Yet she is of that coterie of place men and women that only a few short weeks ago, very nearly carried this great nation to the brink of a new thermonuclear denouement with the United States of America! How could that war have ended other than with our total and utter immolation, our extinction as an island race, and the final obliteration of what remains of our ancient and proud heritage?"

Margaret Thatcher listened with apparent equanimity as she gazed seraphically into the body of the main hall. Although it looked and had the feel of a building fifty years older, Cheltenham Town Hall had been completed as recently as 1903. Back then it had been a part of the redevelopment and expansion of the spa town, built on one side of Imperial Square – in peaceful times a green garden area for the citizenry to enjoy when at leisure – at a princely cost of some forty-five thousand pounds. The main hall was the jewel in the architectural crown of the building, designed to hold a thousand people, its Corinthian columns and balustraded first floor gallery gave it a regal, old World authenticity. On alcoves either side of the stage there were plaster statues of King Edward VII and King George V dressed in their coronation robes. The Town Hall was a marvellous relic from the England that had been swept away by the October War.

"What price the sanctity of our Parliamentary tradition?" Demanded the one-eyed man: "when it can be so effortlessly suborned by the Machiavellian machinations of the Government's propaganda machine? Josef Goebbels reincarnated could not wish for a better tool with which to sculpt the cult of personality surrounding the person of our new leader!"

Iain Macleod was spitting, almost but not quite, under his breath.

"Some of us actually fought the Nazis," he hissed in Margaret Thatcher's

ear, “unlike others who hid behind the staff tabs on their shoulders for the whole bloody war!”

Enoch Powell must have caught at least a part of his old friend’s outburst. He hesitated, half-turned before picking up the threads of his thoughts.

“What profit is there going cap in hand to our American *friends* when clearly those friends have already reneged upon the terms of ‘the treaty’ so recently signed with such fanfare in Washington? And by what right did the Lady’s government sign that treaty in the first place?”

A small section of the crowd was braying: “Hear! Hear!” Each and every time their spokesman paused to draw breath. Other voices, male and female were responding: “Shame! Better peace than war!”

“And that, my friends,” the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West declared, beginning to wind up his ‘brief’ opening remarks, which had already dragged into a twenty-five-minute-long harangue, a monologue underwritten with bitterness and anger, a spear of righteous anger seeking but never actually finding a target in which to embed itself.

“That is the real question. Through cruel mischance we have reached a point in which we no longer have a legitimate Government. The Unity Administration is a skimpy fig leaf for the Lady’s petty tyranny. The Unity Administration is a charade, a constitutional nonsense with which the coven of conspirators locked in smoke-filled rooms in that old house next to the new airport has shamelessly bamboozled the Queen, in her time of grief and trial, into rubber stamping to the eternal ignominy of what was once the mother of Parliaments!”

Margaret Thatcher hoped Enoch Powell would sit down before he fell down; her opponent looked dreadful and he had been dripping with perspiration for several minutes.

The man’s arguments were at once cogent and oddly, banal. It was as if he was not living in the same World that she had been for the last year.

She was only a little surprised by how few people stood to applaud Enoch Powell when eventually he stepped back from his lectern. As she had warned Iain Macleod she would, she got up and politely clapped her adversary back to his chair. Then she walked to her lectern, carefully placed her hand bag on the floor by one side and looked into the blinding lights. Taking a moment to shield her eyes she peered into the throng.

“Oh, dear,” she smiled, “I had no idea that I’d upset Mr Powell so,” she spread her arms, momentarily, “so much.”

The mood in the hall was instantly less tense, oppressive.

“I was reminded on the way to this meeting,” she continued, desperately trying not to laugh at her own jokes, “that Mr Norman Wisdom, during his time in the Signal Corps, once appeared on this stage. I believe it was in 1943 and Rex Harrison was also on the bill. It was after the show that Rex went backstage and tried to persuade Mr Wisdom to turn professional. So, what with one thing and another, Mr Powell and I are treading in illustrious footsteps!”

Enoch Powell and his on-stage supporter, former Treasury Minister Nigel Birch scoffed loudly and tossed their heads back with an ill-considered contempt that ran exactly counter to the mood pervading the thoughts of nine out of ten people in the hall.

“This *Lady*,” the Angry Widow declaimed, “has no pretensions of dictatorship and none of my colleagues is Josef Goebbels’s analogue. I am disappointed that a man of honour would even consider voicing such a slur in such a public and reckless manner.”

Enoch Powell and his second made as if to rise to their feet.

“No!” Margaret Thatcher cried angrily. “We’ve had to listen to your bile and your recriminations, now you can jolly well hear me out!” She focused on the Hall. “People keep telling me about the good old days. I understand as much as anybody why people naturally yearn for a return to ‘normality’. Before the war I was blissfully happy in my marriage and my chosen career, my children had a loving and devoted father, our little family had so much to look forward to. Then one day all that was stolen from me. But, we cannot turn back the clock. I am sorry but we are never going back to the way we once were. The challenge before us is to survive and to build a *better* World for our children and our grandchildren. If it transpires that we are the lost generation whose dreams and hopes had to be sacrificed for the future of our children, is that not a just and proper price to pay for *their* futures?”

She knew she had most of the people in the Hall in the palm of her hand.

“I was a very lowly cog in Harold MacMillan’s pre-war administration. I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Pensions, at the very foot of what some commentators disparagingly call the ‘greasy pole’ of politics. I

had never had more than a glimpse of the higher echelons of the Government; in fact, I can honestly say that I hardly thought at all about what it must be like to hold senior ministerial positions. My detractors to the right," he waved in the direction of Enoch Powell and his comrade, Nigel Birch, "and my friend to my left," Iain Macleod nodded, "held high office in the years before the war as did my predecessor, Ted Heath. But what happened was not their fault. Just as the hard decisions I have had to take in the last few weeks have nothing to do with my being a woman, or any motivation to disparage and undo the traditions of our democracy. We are fighting for our survival and sometimes I think too many of my former colleagues in politics still think they are living in some kind of pre-October 1962 bubble. Let me reassure you; I am living in the real World, ladies and gentlemen. I live in the real World that you all have to live in; and that you have been living in since that night in October 1962. I doubt if very many of my pampered, privileged detractors could survive without their *customary privileges* in that World. In Government House *everybody* lives by the same ration standard enforced in this town. I can look people in the face in *this* town because I'm hungry a lot of the time. I'm cold a lot of the time, too. Yes, I bought some new dresses when I was in America! Would you have your leader, the person who speaks for you abroad, dress like a pauper? How many of you – not the people who came down here from the Midlands, obviously – how many of you who live in Cheltenham could afford, or get hold of the expensive suits Mr Powell and Mr Birch are wearing? My opponents tonight have castigated me for most of the crimes committed under the sun since time immemorial. But neither of them has ever sought to speak to me face to face, or to converse with me like a normal human being. If they had sought such a dialogue, this confrontation would never have happened."

The Angry Widow morphed slowly back to Margaret Thatcher, the mother and housewife who had trained to be an industrial chemist and then a barrister, unknowingly preparing for a radically different destiny. Her tone became almost conversational for all that it boomed and echoed around the old auditorium as the public-address levels fluctuated.

"My Government has two objectives. Only two! First, we must survive." She paused, her gaze roving across anonymous faces. "Our first duty is to survive as a nation and as a people and to carry forward into the future the values we hold dearest. Foremost among those values is our love

of Parliamentary democracy and our loyalty to our Sovereign Monarch, Queen Elizabeth. If we must fight again we will fight. I will fight to my dying breath to ensure that we survive. If I have to turn this country into an armed camp to survive that is what I will do. But we must survive. And to survive we must be ready, willing and prepared to fight. My Government will fight!"

This sobered the hall.

"Second, it is not enough just to survive. My opponents accuse me of cultivating a cult of personality. I don't think I am a second Boadicea, ladies and gentlemen," she protested, quirking a forced smile. "I am a mother, I was a housewife and most days I wish I still was but like so many women I am a widow, and every day I mourn the one I lost, as you must the ones you have lost. I came into politics to make things better. Ladies and gentlemen, I intend to make things better."

She had to wait for quietness for nearly a minute.

"My Government is settled upon recalling Parliament to sit in Oxford not later than the last day of February this year. At that time Mr Powell and his friends can vote *democratically*, on my future and on the future of *our* country. But I tell you one thing; the day when one class or vested interest determines the fate of us all is gone forever!"

This time she had to struggle against the ongoing ovation to continue.

"There will be by elections for all vacant, surviving Parliamentary constituencies during the next year. Parliament will sit every month until the next General Election which will be held before the end of 1965. *I will not have petty self-appointed demagogues pretend that they speak for my people!*"

Fortuitously, Cheltenham Town Hall was stoutly built and in good repair, and the roof did not come off. To her right a small group of Powellites sat, arms crossed in murderous silence staring at the shameless ideological apostates all around them. The Angry Widow fixed them in her sights; deciding that they were a rather well-fed, well-dressed little clique in the pale, shabby mass populating most of the hall.

Did I really just say 'my people'?

"One day we will rebuild the shattered cities. In a decade from now we will have rebuilt the Houses of Parliament and we will have reclaimed our great capital city, making it once again the premier metropolis of the

Commonwealth. Only when we have healed ourselves can we heal Europe and repay our Commonwealth brothers and sisters for the bounty of Operation Manna. Whatever appearances to the contrary, we are bound to our former colonies around the globe more strongly, more profoundly than ever we were in the days of Empire. We must survive and we must rebuild. Every hand must be turned to the reconquest of our broken lands and to the regeneration of hope for generations to come!

The man with the gun did not emerge from the ranks of the ruddy-cheeked, well-fed outraged Powellites.

The ragged, bearded man in his thirties had been sitting in the third row from the stage, one seat in from the central isle on the right-hand side of the auditorium.

He was perhaps fifteen feet away from Margaret Thatcher when he fired the first shot.

Should I duck?

The Prime Minister's Royal Marine Commando bodyguards had strict orders not to open fire in a crowd; their Sten Guns were loaded but were for show only. There had been a heated debate about that; she had held firm. Her life was only one life and she did not want an inadvertent bloodbath on her conscience just because somebody 'sneezed at the wrong time' in her vicinity.

The muzzle flash of the gun, some kind of old-fashioned revolver was very smoky, she observed idly as her assassin fired a second shot. Her senses were at once frozen and impossibly heightened. She watched the circular chamber of the weapon rotate.

Below her the Marines were throwing bemused and terrified bystanders aside in their desperation to come to grips with the gunman.

Four shots.

And another, that's five!

Margaret Thatcher had not heard a thing; not the concussion of the gun firing or the screaming, the chairs scraping, over-turning and the bodies flinging themselves out of the way.

She watched with a kind of academic, disinterred curiosity as two hulking AWPs bowled into the gunman. He went down as if he had been hit by a speeding express train; the Flying Scotsman, perhaps.

"Prime Minister! Prime Minister!"

Margaret Thatcher blinked back to reality. Slowly, her brain began to register real rather than super-slowed time. She struggled to focus for a moment.

Enoch Powell had taken a hold of her elbow.

"Margaret?" He asked worriedly, his single eye clouded with alarm and concern. "Prime Minster, are you all right?"

She half-turned, looking down the length of the rapidly clearing hall.

Two Royal Marines were dragging the unconscious body of the unsuccessful assassin away.

Iain Macleod was slowly picking himself up off the stage where he had dived for cover, eying the unlikely sight of his crippled former friend, Enoch Powell supporting his detested adversary. Given where the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West now stood, it was obvious that he had made a futile, but nonetheless gallant effort to place himself between the Prime Minister and the gunman.

Every day in every way the World becomes stranger.

Chapter 30

Friday 31st January 1964
The Office of the Vice-Present, City Hall, Philadelphia

The President of the United States of America had not felt this good for years. The gruelling non-stop schedule of flights, speeches, meet and greet sessions, and packed and chaotic press conferences wherever SAM 26000 touched ground had reminded him that he was not powerless, and that he could still make a difference. In retrospect his personal renaissance had begun that day in Washington he had met Margaret Thatcher the first time. Her people were in a much worse place than most Americans; she was the one who would have been on the losing end of any war between their nations, and yet she had been the one who had talked about the future and what governments existed to do for *their* peoples. The woman had been both pragmatic and charismatic; and subsequently he had gone straight out on the stump to reconnect with the American people.

He had been shaken up to hear about the assassination attempt in Cheltenham, and appalled when he learned that the Prime Minister's bodyguards had been forbidden to use their automatic weapons.

It was as if the woman had a death wish!

The details were still a little hazy and the British were not saying much until they had had a chance to interrogate the shooter.

"Okay," Jack Kennedy drawled, leaning back in the hard chair, balancing his coffee on his right knee. With the members of the Administration criss-crossing the continent and operating out of temporary offices in DC, Norfolk, San Francisco, New York and here in Philadelphia meetings involving senior members tended to be kitchen cabinets. Again, this suited the President just fine. Things could be discussed properly, people did not get to extemporize on areas they weren't responsible for and there was a lot less in-fighting. "So, I don't get to be impeached this year?"

Lyndon Baines Johnson snorted a laugh.

"I don't know about this year. Maybe not this week," he retorted like a bear with a sore head. "I swear if I had a gun I'd use it on these guys!"

“When we talked yesterday we still didn’t know where we are with the reactivation program?” Jack Kennedy prompted.

“Up a creek without a paddle,” the Vice President groaned. “Bobby’s people at Justice, well, Nick Katzenbach, leastways, says it is legal to make plans but not to actually implement them!”

The President mulled this for a few seconds. Nicholas deBelleville ‘Nick’ Katzenbach, the United States Deputy Attorney General had been the real power behind the throne at the Department of Justice ever since last summer when he had gone down to Alabama to confront Governor George Wallace. If Nick said something was ‘legal’ a man could bank it.

The majority of US Presidents through history had had this sort, or similar problems with the House of Representatives. His problems were, for example, nothing compared to the strife Abe Lincoln had had in his day. While he wanted to prepare his nation for a war he believed was inevitable; Congress was not convinced that war was imminent, did not trust him to make the call in the first place, and lastly, really did not want to pay for it unless or until the myriad of pork-barrel sectional and factional vested interests in the two Houses had been satiated several times over. The normally sclerotic sinews of the Republic were further choked, in this instance, by a pathological disinclination among a sizable minority of representatives and senators to ever again risk getting involved in foreign ‘adventures’.

“And I thought I was the Commander-in-Chief!” Jack Kennedy snorted.

General Curtis LeMay, still the *acting* Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because Congress had not yet scheduled confirmation hearings, shook his head with disgust.

“You *are* the Commander-in-Chief, Mister President.”

William Fulbright allowed himself a guffaw.

“Oh, if only the US constitution was *that* concise, General!”

Curtis LeMay had had several run ins with the new Secretary of State in his previous job. Fulbright remained – again because the House of Representatives could not get its collective arse in gear – Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. For the last two decades the Air Force General had been in the business of planning and making war on ‘foreigners’, not having ‘relations’ with them. That said, Fulbright was an impressive guy, not a glorified office manager like his predecessor, Dean

Rusk.

"You'd know more about that than me, Mister Secretary."

"Congress legislates, the Executive dispenses, the Senate holds the ring between the two and the judges pick up the pieces," Fulbright grimaced. "That's the balance of power designed by the authors of the Constitution."

Curtis LeMay scowled. He was a man who had fervently believed all his life that that one lawyer in a room was way too many.

"The Brits have got a situation developing in the Eastern Mediterranean and we're sitting over here with our thumbs up our arses, Mister Secretary," the man who had won the October War in fourteen hours said testily.

"Just so, General," William Fulbright retorted, never a man who cared to be reminded of the patently obvious. He sought the President's eye. "It seems to me," he decided, "that we have two choices. Either we renege on our undertakings to the United Kingdom, or we embark on a constitutional experiment."

"Specifically, Bill?" Jack Kennedy asked, sipping his coffee. His coffee had not tasted the same since Edna Zabriski - one of his White House secretaries - had assassinated the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath in the Oval Office after the Battle of Washington. Say what you want about her but that woman had made a damned fine cup of coffee!

"General LeMay assures me that the high command of our military has been purged of elements not wholly empathetic to the Administration?"

"Godammed right," the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff grunted.

"We're not under attack, Bill," Jack Kennedy remarked flatly.

"What was the Battle of Washington if it wasn't an attack on the USA?" Fulbright inquired sternly. "Let me remind you that we've just re-initialled a copy of the 1958 US-UK Military Mutual Assistance Treaty which, strictly speaking, never lapsed. That Treaty was ratified by the House back in fifty-eight and nobody disputes that. Under *that* Treaty we didn't just guarantee technical assistance, we reaffirmed our commitment to the defence of the United Kingdom..."

"But not of Malta or Cyprus in an environment where US troops had been expelled from one, and our diplomatic presence at the other terminated," the fifth member of the cabal – Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General - who had flown into in Philadelphia a little less than an hour ago, offered unhappily. Since the Battle of Washington, the President's younger brother

had visibly ceased to be his elder sibling's most 'special adviser' and become instead, the next most high-profile proselytizer of the Administration's radical change of direction. The Administration had not just decided to rebuild its fractured relationship with its oldest overseas ally; it had determined it was going to re-make its contract with the American people. That was *all* the peoples of America; white, black, Hispanic, European, native, Floridian, Midwestern, Southern, Californian, *all* and *every* American regardless of his or her political, religious or ethnological identities. It was only now after several weeks on the road that Bobby Kennedy was beginning to get a feel for the magnitude of the task, and the weight of history bearing down on his and his brother's shoulders. A little of that heavy burden was reflected in his eyes. "We can't ignore that."

"Why are we worrying about it?" The Secretary of State asked bluntly. "We all know that there are significant military assets which we can move into position in the Mediterranean. Why don't we just do it?"

Curtis LeMay was uncomfortable in his chair. He wanted to be roaming the room like a caged tiger looking for corners of carpet to chew.

"Because they're the wrong assets and the logistics are a mess, Mister Secretary."

The President put down his coffee.

"Tell me about the available assets, General."

"The Enterprise and the Long Beach," the US Navy's unbelievably expensive giant trophy nuclear-powered super carrier and her nuclear-powered cruiser consort, "half-a-dozen escorts and several SSNs are exercising in the Eastern Atlantic. We have air assets, maybe fifty aircraft of all types in Spain and Italy. We have no idea how practical it will be to conduct operations from our bases in those countries. Spain basically want us out, we shouldn't even be in Italy. If we didn't have two battalions of Marines holding the perimeter the local mafia would steal everything we've got at Aviano. Other boots on the ground? As for allies in the region we can rely on? Nobody except the Brits."

Jack Kennedy had come to the meeting direct from taking Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara's conference call from Washington. The former Ford Motor Company man was overseeing the salvage and recovery operation in DC and drawing up plans to use the recent disaster as a springboard to radically integrate the disparate arms of the giant American

war machine. That, however, was a long-term project. This morning their discussion had focused on short term ways and means.

"The British have the use of Portuguese ports and air bases," the President pointed out. "They have a long runway on Malta, Pantelleria airport is probably going to be open again soon, and they've got RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. What's the issue re-locating our air assets in the Mediterranean?"

"Congress," Bobby Kennedy said glumly. The President's younger brother had to speak as the Attorney General of the United States of America whether he liked it or not. "I doubt if the legal basis for the initial deployment of those aircraft to Spain and northern Italy was watertight to start with, Jack."

"Fine," the President grinned. "We'll offer them to the British. Tell me about the Enterprise battle group?" He invited the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Curtis LeMay scowled.

"The Enterprise needs to be provisioned for a new deployment. So, do her escorts. Obviously, bunker oil isn't a problem for her and the Long Beach, but food, aviation fuel, bombs, bullets and everything else is."

"Bob McNamara says the Independence Battle Group is in the South Atlantic heading back to Norfolk?"

"The Chief of Naval Operations says her fleet train will be seriously depleted by the time it gets back home. Besides, Independence has got a problem with her catapults."

Jack Kennedy grunted.

"We can start the Enterprise on the way to Gibraltar," the Commander-in-Chief decided. "The Independence can dock at Gibraltar and see if she can get her catapults fixed without having to come back to the East Coast. We can send specialists and parts out by air if necessary. Enterprise can take up position in the Eastern Mediterranean with Independence's fleet train and as many combat ready escorts as possible. In the meantime, General LeMay," he said, straightening in his chair, "find out if the British can accommodate our existing 'in theatre' air assets."

"None of this will happen fast, Mister President," Curtis LeMay cautioned. Because it was Curtis LeMay who said it nobody in the room was about to suggest he was sandbagging. "We're talking fourteen to twenty-one

days for the Enterprise to be on station. Ten days for the first SSNs to deploy. Moving air assets is faster but organising the ground crews and logistics isn't going to be easy even if the Spanish and Italians don't actively obstruct the redeployment."

"Do what you can, General."

Unready ships at sea, a handful of aircraft based in potential combat zones and a few hundred boots on the ground in foreign lands. That was what the Commander-in-Chief had at his personal command. The legislators and overseers of the House of Representatives held the purse strings to everything else.

The President could ride roughshod over his political foes but only at an incalculable cost to the rule of law. Before the cataclysm of the Cuban Missiles War he might have acted with impunity, embarked on any crazy adventure he liked; for example, like the Bay of Pigs fiasco. He would have got a bad press but that was all. Now, whatever he did he risked new and damaging schisms at the very time when American needed to be at its most united. The brutal reality was that even if there was war in the Mediterranean, or elsewhere, unless American blood was shed Congress would probably block any significant attempt to help the British.

Sometimes, Jack Kennedy was convinced that the American political class of 1964 was the most anti-British since 1776.

Chapter 31

Friday 31st January 1964
HMS Talavera, Sliema Creek, Malta

There was a crisp knock at Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher's open door. Bright morning light poured into the cabin through two portholes, illuminating the desk where HMS Talavera's acting commanding officer was attempting to come to terms with the administrative nightmare of commanding a damaged ship in harbour.

Petty Officer Jack Griffin's bearded features were immobile.

"Begging your pardon, sir," the newcomer said, "but there's a civilian on the gangway who claims she's a Surgeon Commander Seiffert of the United States Navy. She says she holds a reserve commission in the Maltese Defence Force, whatever that is," the man sniffed derisively, "but she doesn't have any papers or an ID card so the Master at Arms is, er, entertaining the lady. He ordered me to, er, let you know what was going on, sir."

"Dr Margo Seiffert?" Peter Christopher demanded, rising to his feet and searching for his cap.

"Yes, sir."

"I'll be on deck directly."

Jack Griffin slid away.

Peter Christopher jammed his cap on his head, and assailed by a renewed surfeit of guilt, went to meet his visitor. He had arrived at Malta at the end of probably the worst week in Marija Calleja's life and contemptibly, he had not yet contrived to go ashore to comfort her. He told himself it could not be helped, that there was nothing he could do about it. His dreams of watching for Marija on the quayside as his ship glided into harbour had come to nothing; just getting his damaged ship safely moored fore and aft in the confined waters of a strange anchorage had been a nightmare.

What with one thing and another HMS Talavera's arrival at Malta had not exactly gone to plan. The Lampedusa expedition had not gone to plan either, of course.

He tried not to dwell overlong on the events of that dreadful night in the

shallows off the small, unexpectedly dangerous island. He had had plenty of other things to think about. Although, in all the commotion being reunited with his father for the first time in years had not been anywhere near as traumatic or well, downright unpleasant, as he had anticipated. The reality of the meeting – perhaps, because it was such a public affair – was that both men had behaved with restrained politeness and respect, playing up to the gallery. They had both understood their roles in the other night's drama.

Margo Seiffert was talking animatedly with Chief Petty Officer Spider McCann, Talavera's senior non-commissioned officer. The Master at Arms and the side party snapped to attention the instant they sighted their commanding officer on deck.

Big canvas awnings had been draped across the decks of the destroyer, both to hide her fresh wounds and to keep conditions below deck tolerable. Even at this season the Mediterranean sun beating down on the ship's superstructure soon elevated temperatures below decks to uncomfortable levels.

"I do apologise for this," Peter Christopher began. "If we'd known you planned to visit us..."

The tanned, lined, straw-haired small woman in her early sixties sighed, eying the young man with quick, grey eyes.

"The pictures in the *Times of Malta* add five years to you, Commander," she said eventually.

"Oh, yes. Do they?" Peter remembered his manners. "Forgive me, should I call your Doctor, or Commander?"

"Margo," the woman declared, flashing a harassed smile.

HMS Talavera's acting Captain was painfully aware of the flapping ears in the immediate vicinity.

"Won't you come below to my day cabin, er, Margo," he suggested. "I'm sure we can rustle up some refreshments."

Below deck Margo was impressed by the size of the Captain's day cabin, where much of the business of the ship was normally conducted. This morning the desk normally occupied by the Captain's Secretary was empty, its owner currently residing in the Royal Naval Hospital at Bighi with abdominal shrapnel wounds.

A wardroom steward looked around the door.

"Tea or coffee?" Peter asked his guest.

“Coffee if you’ve got it. Black.”

There was a couch and two easy chairs beneath the aft porthole.

“I know I should have been ashore before now,” the man apologised, feeling dreadful. “But we took a bit of a beating off Lampedusa and...”

“You don’t have to make excuses to me, Commander.”

“Peter, please,” he stammered in return.

“How is Captain Penberthy?” Margo asked, exploring the cabin, not interested in settling for the moment. Marija’s creased studio-posed monochrome portrait was in a battered frame on the cluttered desk.

That was a good sign!

“Not so good. He lost his right foot when the shore battery opened up. Things were a bit of a shambles and he lost a lot of blood before the Surgeon got to him.”

Margo picked up Marija’s framed portrait on the desk. The print had obviously been folded and flattened several times. The photographer had caught the essence of Marija, the serenity and the mischief, and the hope recently half-extinguished.

“That portrait and I have been through a fair bit in the last couple of months,” the handsome young man said self-effacingly.

The steward knocked at the door and entered with a tray.

Presently, the man and woman faced each other, seated in the chairs beneath the open porthole.

“You’ve heard about what happened to Marija’s brother?” Margo asked flatly.

“Only what I read in the *Times of Malta* this morning. Marija must be horribly upset. It must be unbearable knowing your brother has been used and most likely murdered by terrorists...”

Margo Seiffert was looking at him oddly.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she murmured. “It isn’t that cut and dried. Marija’s father and younger brother were questioned by the Redcaps and virtually placed under house arrest for several days. People Sam Calleja was friendly with were among the terrorists who committed suicide when the police closed in on their hideouts. The whole family feels,” she shrugged, “tainted by the whole thing. Quite apart from losing Sam; and it isn’t as if they’ve found his body yet.”

“I read that they think he was probably on HMS Torquay?”

“Yes. That’s what they think.”

“How is Marija?”

“She spends a lot of time with Rosa, Sam’s wife. The two of them couldn’t stand each other until this happened and now they are like ‘sisters’. The reason I came to meet you, Peter,” Margo explained feeling increasingly uncomfortable the longer the interview lasted, “was...”

“I should have tried to get ashore earlier,” the man blurted. “Marija must think I’m an absolute idiot!”

“No, she doesn’t think that. I’m sure she understands that you have responsibilities onboard your ship.”

“Oh, then...”

“What happened to Sam, and the death of Lieutenant Siddall,” Margo smiled tight-lipped, “who had always been sweet on Marija, isn’t quite as simple as the story in the papers. Things aren’t so clear cut, Peter. Marija is, ashamed, I suppose. She’s got this stupid idea that she’s become an embarrassment to you and to you father, whom she’s met several times. I’ve tried talking to her but she can be the most stubborn person I’ve ever known. That’s why I’m here and she’s not.”

“I don’t understand, Margo?”

“Whatever you do don’t wait for Marija to come to you, Peter.”

A few minutes later the acting commanding officer of HMS Talavera escorted his guest to the gangway and sent her ashore in the destroyer’s whaler. He stood watching the small boat glide across the hundred-yard gap to the ferry quay. His thoughts were tangled and troubled and he was sick at heart. The World had betrayed him and for the moment he was at a loss to know what to do about it.

Unseen on the waterfront Marija stood anonymously in the crowds milling around the ferry bus stops. She saw the tall naval officer shaking Margo’s hand, the side party coming to attention as her friend departed the ship. It almost broke her heart seeing Peter Christopher from afar as he stared after the boat taking Margo to the shore. The lies in the *Times of Malta* were worse than the truth; at least in the truth there were answers. In those lies there was only despair. If the British had tricked the paper into lying about Samuel’s crimes, what else had they lied about? What had really happened to the...*terrorists*?

She was torn.

She could hardly look at the long deadly, scarred outline of the destroyer moored in the middle of the Creek without flushing with pride. *Her* Peter commanded that ship. *Her* Peter was a hero; except he was not *her* Peter. If he ever had been he was not now.

All her hopes were in ashes.

Hot wet tears ran down her face as she drew her shawl over her hair and turned her back on the destroyer anchored in Sliema Creek, and the man whom she had never met but had loved for as long as she could remember.

Chapter 32

Saturday 1st February 1964
RAF Luqa, Malta

Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher, Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations and his deputy, Air Vice-Marshal Daniel French waited for the two VIPs to disembark from the RAF Comet 4, and stepped forward to greet the visitors.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir David Luce, exchanged salutes and crisp handshakes before turning to the hangdog-faced man in a baggy suit.

"May I introduce you to the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr William Whitelaw, MP."

"Delighted to finally make your acquaintance, gentlemen," the politician smiled, speaking in a slowly lugubrious voice that broadcast quiet confidence.

The quartet walked towards the slab-sided control room where cars awaited to carry them to Mdina.

"The Prime Minister most particularly asked to be remembered to you, Sir Julian," William Whitelaw declared. "She's dreadfully keen that everybody should know that blighter in Cheltenham Town Hall missed her from point blank range even though she never moved a muscle throughout the whole episode!"

When Julian Christopher had first heard of the assassination attempt he had almost burst a blood vessel. His high anxiety had not materially decreased in the following twenty-four hours. It was only now that his normal equilibrium was partially restored. He was relieved when the First Sea Lord suggested the Defence Secretary and Daniel French take the first car. He dropped beside his old friend in the back seat of the second vehicle.

"How are you, old man?" He inquired solicitously.

"Not so bad, David." Julian Christopher could not stop himself following up with: "How is Margaret?"

This provoked a rueful chuckle.

"The man was less than fifteen feet away from her and he fired five

rounds from a Webley Mark IV revolver," the First Sea Lord explained, "and completely missed her. Mr Powell, the fellow who has been giving her so much stick back home attempted to place himself between the assassin and his bête noire. One round nicked that gentleman's right hip. Otherwise, nobody was inconvenienced. It transpired that the assassin was a fellow with a long history of mental disturbance, somewhat exacerbated by the loss of his entire family in the recent war."

"How the blazes did the blasted man get into the hall with a loaded gun?"

"The AWP are looking into that."

"The what?"

"The *Angry Widow's Praetorians*, that's what some of the Commandos in her protection detail call themselves."

Julian Christopher laughed, the tension drained away.

"Dreadnought is still in contact with the Admiral Kutuzov," he reported to the professional head of the Royal Navy. "Well, she was the last time she reported in about two hours ago. The Kutuzov is in company with two Turkish destroyers; a couple of old M class ships we transferred to them in the late fifties. At Cyprus, the Blake and her escorts may be ready to depart Limassol as early as this evening but Operation Reclaim is on hold, at least until we establish a better picture of the tactical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, or until all our supporting forces are in position."

Sir David Luce ruminated.

"Do you think the Admiral Kutuzov is likely to move into a blocking position south of Crete, Julian?"

"I've got no idea," his friend confessed. "There are obviously several other potentially hostile major surface units operating, or perhaps simply exercising in the Southern Aegean. For all we know the Kutuzov Group may be just one of several task forces patrolling the approaches to south-western Turkey."

"Dreadnought running into the Admiral Kutuzov and the Yavuz trading practice broadsides was quite a stroke of luck. I'm not sure I'd have liked being in the Kutuzov's place, trusting to fifty-year-old German optics for my salvation."

Both men had been brought up in a big gun navy in which gunnery exercises involving shooting at another ship with a deliberate range or bearing error – usually at least six degrees - built into all the firing solutions,

was routine. Among other things it demanded a very steady nerve. Inadvertently feeding the *correct* information into the gun control table – a complicated room-sized mechanical computer on a big ship – could result in disaster.

"Good lord, no! Still, it takes one back a bit, what!"

"Not all the reports of the Lampedusa action have yet come across my desk back home," the First Sea Lord went on, "but your boy is evidently a chip off the old block, Julian. Taking command of the flotilla and going inshore like that to rescue the Puma! It speaks to me of the finest traditions of the service and all that, what!"

In the Citadel of Mdina the two admirals, the airman and the politician went up to the old Officers' Mess terrace on the south-eastern ramparts.

"Quite a view," William Whitelaw exclaimed. "You can see half the island from here!"

"From the northern walls you can see the rest of the island, sir," Air Vice-Marshal Daniel French explained. "In the olden days this place was the great bastion of Malta. Lookouts could see pirates and invaders coming from miles away. The locals would rush inside the fortress and wait until it was safe to go back outside again."

"There's a similar citadel on Gozo, the second largest island in the Maltese Archipelago," Julian Christopher remarked. "At Victoria."

Supervised by the C-in-C's flag lieutenant, Alan Hannay, stewards served tea and biscuits as the senior officers made small talk with their political master. Then it was down to business, big maps of the Eastern Mediterranean were unrolled across the tables and the briefing commenced.

"Can you talk about the air situation first please, Dan," Julian Christopher asked. He and his deputy met once or twice a week, otherwise their duties kept them apart. It had been Air-Vice Marshal Daniel French's Hawker Hunter interceptors which had shot down the four 100th Bomb Group B-52s on that awful Friday in December *before* they had succeeded in totally wrecking the archipelago's defences. The two men had got on well from the outset, more than that, they actually liked each other. The Royal Air Force had swiftly promoted their man once the C-in-C had unilaterally appointed the airman his deputy on Malta with 'full powers' to act in the event of his absence or unavailability. "The First Sea Lord and Mr Whitelaw probably won't have heard the latest news."

“My pleasure, sir,” Air Vice-Marshal Dan French grinned. The former Lancaster pilot and the commander of one of the first V-Bomber squadrons deported himself with a calm, cheerful confidence that imprinted his authority on everybody he met. His wife and daughter had been killed in the October War; his son, a Vulcan bomber pilot, had survived and he had come to terms with his personal grief by throwing himself into his duties on Malta. Notwithstanding that he ran a tight ship and he did not tolerate fools gladly, he was popular and well respected by his men, and had a reputation for going out of his way to get on well with those Maltese citizens with whom he had regular dealings. “The US Air Force isn’t wasting any time extricating itself from Spanish and Italian territory. Three C-130 Hercules transports landed at Ta’Qali shortly before you arrived at Luqa. Another two are expected at Gibraltar around now. The C-130s are chock full of ground crews and all the spares they could cram in and still take off. There will be several more C-130s flights coming down from Aviano tomorrow ahead of the rest of the air group. The fast jet element of the US Air Group is six F-104 Starfighters and eight A-4 Skyhawks. There is also a U-2 based up there and two KC-135 tankers. From tomorrow the C-130s will be shuttling back and forth evacuating the two under strength battalions of Marines who have been defending the base from ‘brigands’ and ‘freeloaders’. If things go according to plan all moveable assets and personnel should have been transferred to Malta within the next seven to nine days. The Spanish situation is murkier. Franco’s people are making waves apparently. It may be that the US Air Force commander on the ground ignores the Spanish and ups and goes with everything that’s airworthy at very short notice. To cover for this eventuality the Prime Minister has made a personal approach to Salazar, the Portuguese dictator, asking him to re-open his air space to US aircraft.” He looked to the Defence Secretary. “I imagine you know more about the political aspects of this, sir.”

William Whitelaw nodded.

“The Prime Minister has been eager for US-Portuguese relations to be ‘normalised’,” he confided. “Given the exigencies of the current situation this might well happen via the back door, as it were.” He hesitated. “What is the strength of the American air presence in the Iberian Peninsula?”

“In total about thirty serviceable aircraft of all types, sir.”

“Can they all be accommodated at Gibraltar at need?”

“Yes, but RAF Gibraltar is extremely vulnerable to Spanish interdiction, sir.”

“Quite. How would you describe your relations with our American cousins, Air Vice-Marshal?”

“Cordially robust, sir. However, there has been no discussion of command and control issues.”

Julian Christopher launched into a concise summation of the general naval situation.

“HMS Blake is still at Limassol. The transferral of nuclear warheads and the tactical uncertainties arising out of the movements of the surface forces Dreadnought has encountered have put Blake’s part in Operation Reclaim on hold. HMS Victorious and her escorts will be in a covering position mid-way between Crete and the North African coast by around dawn tomorrow morning. HMS Dreadnought continues in contact with the former Soviet cruiser Admiral Kutuzov and her two screening destroyers. The Kutuzov group is presently patrolling in an area close to the north-west coast of Crete. My concern is that this ship is approximately a match for HMS Blake in a gunnery duel and at her maximum speed could easily intercept either the Victorious, or the Blake task forces in the open sea. While Dreadnought remains in contact with the Kutuzov we have the whip hand; however, the intelligence picture is dangerously incomplete. We have no idea where the old battlecruiser Yavuz is, or where the other major surface units spotted at Istanbul may have deployed in the last week.”

William Whitelaw stared at the charts on the table. He looked up.

“What action will you take if the Kutuzov attempts to intercept HMS Blake or HMS Victorious, Sir Julian?”

The Fighting Admiral did not hesitate.

“I have ordered Dreadnought to sink her if she approaches within thirty miles of elements of either the Blake’s or the Victorious’s screens. In the event that Dreadnought is out of contact with the Kutuzov at that time or unable to carry out an attack, I have issued similar orders to the Flag Officer, Victorious Battle Group, sir.”

There was really very little to discuss: HMS Victorious was steaming hard to be in position the following morning, the Blake was preparing to leave Limassol for a high-speed run to Malta with her cargo of nuclear warheads, and the Dreadnought was stalking a former Soviet cruiser now

flying the flag – they assumed – of Krasnaya Zarya.

"Before we left Brize Norton," Sir David Luce said, speaking for the first time in some minutes, "I spoke to Admiral McDonald, the new US Chief of Naval Operations. He seems a good, solid fellow. Basically, practically all US Navy's available major surface units are converging on Gibraltar. Logistically, it is a complete dog's breakfast; the Americans are improvising practically everything. The long and the short of it is that two big carriers, the Enterprise and the Independence will be in theatre sometime in the next twenty days. The Enterprise sooner, it seems. One fly in the ointment is that the Independence has catapult troubles; we'll have to see what we can do to help her at Gibraltar. If needs must McDonald is prepared to send Enterprise and her 'goalkeeper' the Long Beach, the two nuclear-powered ships directly into the Med. He's also ordered four SSNs already on exercise or patrol in the Atlantic to proceed to a holding position off Lisbon. Unfortunately, these boats are not provisioned for an extended cruise so again, we'll have to see what we can do about that at Gibraltar. So, it seems the cavalry is on the way. Personally, I hope we don't need to be rescued, but I rather suspect that whatever is brewing in the Eastern Med things are going to start happening fairly soon."

The Secretary of State for Defence mulled matters.

"Sir David mentioned to me on the flight here that HMS Hermes may be forced to return to Gibraltar?"

"Machinery troubles, sir," Julian Christopher bemoaned philosophically. If Hermes could not steam fast enough for long enough to launch and recover fast jets, there was nothing he could do about it. One fought battles with what one had to hand, not with the forces one wished one had. Hermes's woes had not been entirely unexpected and Rear Admiral Nigel Grenville had already shifted his flag to the Victorious before the operations against Pantelleria, Linosa and Lampedusa. "Hermes will dock at Malta pending a decision as to whether to send her back to Gibraltar. A second carrier would be just the ticket right now but we haven't got one so that's that."

"What of HMS Ocean?"

"She's in relatively good fettle. Presently, she can only steam at twenty-three knots but that's not such a huge problem since she's configured solely as a helicopter carrier these days."

"Um. Might it be advisable to indefinitely delay HMS Blake's departure

from Cyprus?"

The Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations did not read into or imply any criticism from the Secretary of State for Defence's question.

"Yes," he admitted immediately. "It might be. However, given how exposed our garrison on Cyprus has become with the fall of Crete to – if not hostile then possibly inimical – unknown forces and certain other worrying intelligence indications, the weapons store at Akrotiri has become a hostage to fortune. Removing it from the strategic 'mix' will greatly clarify the situation in the event of a crisis in that area."

William Whitelaw straightened and met Julian Christopher's gaze.

"You mean that we won't necessarily have to resort to Arc Light, Sir Julian?"

In the months since the October War nobody talked about using nuclear weapons; *Arc Light*, the name of a pre-war exercise simulating the effects of a limited atomic exchange had become the generic header under which a generation of British senior officers and their political masters now debated the unthinkable.

The hangdog, prematurely jowly face of the forty-five-year-old Defence Secretary was suddenly stony.

"The Prime Minister reserves to herself the prerogative to authorise Arc Light strikes at both the tactical and the strategic level. She has asked me to ascertain from the officers 'on the spot' their acknowledgement of, and their undertaking to comply with this stricture."

Air Vice-Marshal Dan French flicked a glance at the First Sea Lord, who replied with a barely perceptible shrug of his shoulders

"What if Red Dawn possesses viable nuclear weapons?" Julian Christopher responded coolly.

"If they do," William Whitelaw said resignedly, "I suspect that sooner or later Red Dawn will employ them regardless of what we do."

Chapter 33

Saturday 1st February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 7 miles SSW of Elasa Island, Crete

It was a dull, windy day with spits of rain in the air. The water in the three-and-a-half-mile channel between the uninhabited, rocky outcrop of the island and the Cretan mainland was choppy, with white-capped waves tripping over each other. The island of Elasa itself was drably faded green and mostly brown, and the sea had turned that particular iron shade of grey that all seasoned mariners know to be the harbinger of stormy weather.

It was over an hour since the Admiral Kutuzov and her two escorting destroyers had changed course to pass through the channel. It was far too risky to follow the surface ships into such narrow waters so Dreadnought had broken away to the east and run at high speed to intercept the big cruiser south of Elasa. The Sverdlov class cruiser ought to have been filling the lens of the attack periscope but the channel was empty.

"Down periscope!"

Captain Simon Collingwood cursed silently.

"Come right. Make our course zero-nine-five!"

He stumped over to the tactical plot.

"The sneaky buggers must have put about as soon as the island was between us and them, sir," Max Forton, the boat's Executive Officer commiserated.

"We'll retrace our course. Hopefully, we'll pick up the Kutuzov again."

There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the theory it was just that this was going to be one of those days when nothing worked out as planned. An hour later when the submarine crept up to periscope depth north of Elasa there were no big ships on the horizon.

"Sound room reports distant cavitation! No constant bearing, sir!"

HMS Dreadnought had sailed from Devonport over three months ago with a full set of Admiralty charts for the area her orders required her to patrol. The boat's chart locker was therefore, cluttered with a plethora of highly detailed and meticulously updated charts of the Western Approaches

to the United Kingdom and the Atlantic coast of Western Europe. At Gibraltar, Dreadnought had *not* taken on board a new set of charts for the Eastern Mediterranean because that would have given the lie to the fiction that she was heading back to England. For the last week the most sophisticated weapon in the Royal Navy's armoury had been navigating with the aid of a school atlas and half-a-dozen out of date large scale sea maps – they hardly deserved the title 'charts' – Max Forton had had picked up in a bookshop on a walk along Main Street just before Dreadnought departed the Rock. In a peacetime scenario in which the boat could use its active sonar to monitor the depth of water beneath the keel and any nearby obstructions – like rocks, wrecks or enemy ships – the lack of adequate charts would not have been a problem. In the current situation where the last thing he wanted to do was to advertise the boat's presence, stumbling around unknown and uncharted coastal waters was akin to Russian roulette.

Crete's north-eastern extremities curved raggedly away from the body of the island into the north. The resultant peninsula was a jagged, wooded sparsely inhabited region of coast deeply pitted with sheer-sided, treacherous anchorages some of which were large enough to hide ships much larger than the Admiral Kutuzov. Close inshore Dreadnought's battery of hydrophones would be baffled with back echoes and deflections; they would have to be almost on top of a contact to be certain of what kind of beast they had by the tail.

"Here!" The Captain of the Royal Navy's only nuclear-powered hunter killer submarine decided, stabbing a point on the tactical plot ten miles due north of the tip of Cape Sideros. "We'll take the boat down to three hundred feet and work our way up to here. Nice and slow. Five knots will do it."

It took nearly three hours to get into position but as Dreadnought eased up to periscope depth everybody on board could hear the onrushing screws of a big ship. The trouble was it was the wrong ship.

"Chapayev class cruiser, there is a big eight-six-two on her side!" Simon Collingwood growled.

He stood up straight.

"Down periscope! Make our depth two-zero-zero feet if you please!"

"Eight-six-two makes her the *Komsomolets*, sir!"

"Thank you." Simon Collingwood smiled like a wolf who has spotted his next meal. "Everybody on their toes please! The *Komsomolets* is in

company with at least three, maybe four escorts. One of them is going to run right over the top of us in the next two minutes. I only got a look at her bow on but she looked like a Krupny class destroyer. I didn't get a good line of sight on the other ships in the screen."

While Dreadnought moved invisibly to the north the destroyer thundered over her stern like a runaway express train as the submarine quietly slid into the depths. No matter how many times a big ship ran over the top of him Simon Collingwood's blood pulsed faster and harder with the exhilaration of the moment.

"I want bearings on all the surface units around us please!"

It soon became apparent that the *Komsomolets*, a slightly – only very slightly – smaller and earlier version of the Sverdlov class ships, carrying a similar main battery of a dozen six-inch guns in four triple turrets, was in company with at least four other warships.

Simon Collingwood started doing the maths: a Great War battlecruiser, two Soviet cruisers, at least half-a-dozen ocean going escorts. For all he knew it was the tip of the iceberg and more worryingly, if so many surface warships had survived the destruction of the Black Sea ports; how many Soviet submarines might also have escaped the holocaust? Put a respectable number of surviving surface units from the Soviet Black Sea Fleet together with the Turkish Navy, which before the October War had boasted at least ten former US diesel-electric submarines on its lists, and suddenly, the Royal Navy's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean started looking awfully threadbare.

"Active pings!" Called a sonar man.

"What bearing?"

"Three-one zero! Very distant, sir!"

The Captain of HMS Dreadnought noted his Executive Officer's raised eyebrow. He shrugged.

The distant thump of underwater explosions became audible.

The faraway detonations were like thunder, half-imagined on a sultry summer afternoon. They went on, and on, and on for minutes, slowly drifting south as minutes turned into a half-hour and then an hour.

Somewhere to the west, perhaps five to ten miles away ships were rolling old fashioned drum depth-charges over their sterns. Other vessels were shooting clusters of small anti-submarine mortars.

It went on for eighty-seven minutes.

"How many big bombs?" Simon Collingwood asked idly when the ocean was quiet again.

"Over two hundred, sir."

"Maybe they stopped because they ran out of depth charges?" Max Forton suggested dryly.

His Captain grimaced. In the last few days he had witnessed the *Yavuz* expending antique eleven-inch rounds as if she had access to an unlimited supply of such arcane – and presumably unobtainable and therefore irreplaceable in modern times - ancient ordnance. No munitions factory on the planet had manufactured shells to that specification since 1945; and when the old ship's magazines were empty that, as they say, was that! Now they had listened, thankfully from afar, to a depth charge attack that would have been considered unforgivably, possibly criminally, profligate in a U-boat hunt in the North Atlantic in 1943.

Those were the facts but what did it mean?

Was it some kind of realistic exercise to shake the cobwebs out of ships and crews which had been sitting in port for most of the last year?

Or a plain simple demonstration of naval muscle?

Or both?

"Contact bearing one-two-zero!"

"Range five miles!"

"Bring us up to periscope depth if you please, Number One!"

"More contacts bearing one-two-five degrees!"

The *Komsomolets* and her escorts had moved off to the south-east. Another group of ships had been responsible for the overlong and recklessly exuberant depth charging somewhere out to the west. Now a third set of contacts was coming towards them from a few points west of south.

Dreadnought rose gently to periscope depth.

The day was turning stormy and waves were breaking over the periscope mast as it dipped up out of the depths. Visibility, which had been several miles earlier in the day had closed in and Simon Collingwood did not get a good look at the nearest contact until it was less than a thousand yards away.

"*Skoryy* class destroyer!" He called, clicking the camera button repeatedly. The colour of the great dark flag streaming out from the approaching destroyer's forward tripod mast was not readily decoded by the

human eye, everything was grey and the shadows were almost black such was the weight of the descending overcast. But the flag would be red; it could only be cardinal blood red. The escort was tearing across Dreadnought's bow with a great bone in her teeth, crescents of white water sheering away from her forepeak as she raced headlong through the choppy seas.

Simon Collingwood swung the periscope to the left.

"Sverdlov class cruiser. Looks like the Admiral Kutuzov but I can't be sure." He kept taking photographs, the camera winding mechanism constantly in motion, whirring lowly above his head. The big ship was throwing up a broad bow wave even thought she was only making fifteen or sixteen knots. "Looks like a second Skoryy class escort behind her and the two M class destroyers that were in company before..."

A shadow had flitted across the lens.

He flipped the 'sky' switch on the right-hand twist grip of the attack periscope, peered into the greyness of the clouds. Circled, circled, straining his eyes.

And then he saw it.

"Down scope!"

He swung around to face Max Forton.

"Take us down to three hundred feet!"

He collected his wits.

"Warn engineering for maximum revs on my command!"

The deck under his feet canted forward.

"There was an old-fashioned float plane right on top of us," the submarine's commanding officer announced flatly. "My assumption is that it spotted our scope." Dreadnought could not outrun the Admiral Kutuzov's escorts but they could not hunt her while they were charging around like that Skoryy class destroyer. Most shipboard sonar was useless in a vessel travelling faster than fifteen knots.

Simon Collingwood briefly considered running silent, playing cat and mouse, but only briefly. The way these fellows had carpet bombed large tracts of ocean with big World War II type one-ton depth charges, he had no intention of keeping close company with them. Besides, so far as he knew he was not actually at war with the men in the ships above him. If he was he would have flooded down his torpedo tubes by now.

No, he would dive deep and run for open water at top speed and then at a safe distance, rise close enough to the surface to transmit a sighting report and await further orders.

Chapter 34

Sunday 2nd February 1964
Manoel Island, Malta

Petty Officer Jack Griffin pulled the tarpaulins off the piles of scrap metal and wiring littering the ground along the shore. Behind him the low hump of the island between Sliema and Lazaretto Creeks rose gently to meet the still intact sixteenth century outer bastion walls. Within the wall a single large thermobaric – fuel-air – bomb had extinguished all human life in a split second; and other than to pick up the body parts, nobody had yet attempted to reclaim any part of the old fort which, as HMS Phoenicia, had previously been the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean.

"Most of this *equipment*," the bearded, mightily peeved Petty Officer complained, "had salt water in it at some stage, was damaged in the bombing, or was *destroyed* by the half-trained monkeys who *salvaged* it. A lot of the kit that ought to be here, the *good stuff*, isn't here at all. Those arseholes," he jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the barge tied alongside the crazily canted stern of HMS Agincourt grounded on the rocks of Sliema Creek a hundred yards away, "have probably half-inched the best stuff!"

A weather-beaten fishing boat was lashed to the stern of the sunken destroyer. It seemed that this vessel was the abode of the 'dockyard approved and appointed salvage master' and several of his male relations.

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher had actually thought it was a stupid idea, not to mention impractical, trying to refit HMS Talavera using materials salvaged from her sunken sister ship. However, in the Royal Navy a man got used to being given – if not stupid, then less than thoroughly thought through – orders, so he had been game. Until, that was, he had taken a look at the scrap beneath the tarpaulins.

HMS Talavera's Master at Arms, Chief Petty Officer Spider McCann sniffed the air as if something smelled bad.

Peter Christopher did not need to spend overlong investigating the scrap heap to know that somebody somewhere not a million miles from where he stood was cheating the Royal Navy.

“Mister McCann,” he said stiffly. “I would be obliged if you would organise a party to board that barge and that fishing boat,” he nodded towards the offending articles, “to detain all those persons you encounter and to search the same for *contraband*.”

It was all the licence that HMS Talavera’s senior non-commissioned officer needed.

“Aye, aye, sir!”

The scowling, teak hard little man who had once been the Mediterranean Fleet’s flyweight – or bantamweight, nobody seemed to know which - boxing champion marched purposefully back down the jetty towards HMS Talavera.

Peter Christopher turned back to Jack Griffin.

“I want you to compile and inventory of all the big items – don’t bother with the small stuff that people always walk off with in their pockets – comparing what has been recovered from the Agincourt with Talavera’s original technical commissioning manifest. The two ships should have had a more or less identical sea-going rig. I want to know what is missing and I want to know it as soon as possible. Any questions?”

For once in his life – reading the dark look in his Captain’s eyes - Jack Griffin did not have any questions, or any personal, pithy or otherwise, comments he cared to share.

Miles Weiss, Talavera’s Gunnery Officer and senior surviving watch keeper after Peter himself, was waiting for Peter Christopher when he returned aboard.

“Those *people*,” Peter Christopher growled, nodding towards the salvage barge, “have been filching equipment from the Agincourt. The ‘salvage’ they’ve piled up on the shore is scrap. Most of the sounder items in the pile have been damaged in the salvage operation.”

“That’s a poor show,” the younger man frowned. “Goodness, that’s like grave robbing!”

“Yes, it is,” his commanding officer agreed sourly. “When Mr McCann returns to the ship he will have several guests. They are to be accommodated in the brig until I decide what to do with them.”

“Whatever you say, sir. But isn’t that going to cause an awful stink?”

Peter Christopher gave his friend a hard look.

Miles Weiss grimaced.

“I’ll make sure they’re thrown in the brig, sir.”

“Good. I’m going ashore. I want to talk to somebody in authority at the dockyards!” It was still early and hardly anybody was about as he walked through the trees on the landward side of the old ramparts and knocked on the frame of the guard house door. HMS Phoenicia might lie abandoned and for the while, forgotten but the rest of Manoel Island had rapidly been re-colonised by the Royal Marines, the Redcaps and the crew of the depot ship HMS Maidstone, moored in Lazaretto Creek. “I want a car for official business,” he demanded brusquely.

“But it is Sunday, sir.”

“I don’t care if it is Christmas Day!”

Ten minutes later a dusty old Humber with dented chrome fenders was forthcoming. It was driven by a boy soldier – he could not possibly have been eighteen – who had yet to acquire a Mediterranean tan.

“What’s your name, Private?”

“Timpkins, sir. Royal Warwickshire Regiment, sir!”

“How long have you been on the island?”

“A week, sir.”

“Do you know your way around?”

“I know the way to Mdina, sir. And Luqa. And I went to the dockyards yesterday!”

“Try and find the dockyards again.”

The boy was a surprisingly accomplished driver. Peter Christopher commented on it and he discovered Private Timpkins had grown up helping out in his father’s garage in Nottingham. No sooner had he joined the Army than he had been posted to the garrison motor pool.

At first it seemed as if the Admiralty Dockyards of Malta were closed.

Well, it was Sunday.

After driving from gate to gate it eventually transpired that the Dockyard Office at Senglea ‘never closed’. Parking up in the shadow of HMS Ocean, whose crew was taking on stores unhindered by the absence of civilian dockyard workers, Peter Christopher walked, unchallenged into the ground floor lobby of the two-storey, ugly concrete post-Second War building. He quickly discovered that although the offices might ‘never close’ that on a Sunday they were open only in a Wild West ghost town sort of way. On the ground floor two ratings from HMS Ocean were minding the front desk.

They snapped to attention when Peter Christopher walked in.

“I’m looking for somebody in charge?” He informed the two seamen.

“Sorry, sir. Don’t know who is in charge, sir. There are a couple of Maltese gentlemen upstairs but we don’t know who they are. They were here when we came on duty, sir.”

There had been soldiers on guard at the main gate otherwise the dockyards seemed wide open; practically anybody could walk in. How hard would it have been to sabotage HMS Torquay?

“What’s upstairs?”

“That’s where the Dockyard Superintendent and the Under Managers have their offices, sir. I think there may be a board room up there, too, sir.”

Peter Christopher strode up the stairs and emerged onto a single corridor with offices off to each side. Most of the doors were locked. He walked down the corridor, reading nameplates.

“Can I be of assistance to you, Commander,” a soft, tired voice inquired from behind his shoulder.

Peter Christopher turned on his heel.

The lean, greying man in shirtsleeves had emerged from a door near the stairs that the younger man had not tested. He viewed the tall Lieutenant-Commander thoughtfully for a moment.

“I certainly hope so!”

The other man nodded.

“I’m the duty Under Manager today,” he explained. “Why don’t we continue this in my office?”

The two men marched to the first open door, half-way down the building. Peter Christopher did not look for the name plate on the door as he followed the older man inside.

“Please take a seat, Commander.”

HMS Talavera’s Captain hesitated and then accepted the hard chair as his host settled behind the cluttered, somewhat battered desk set at an angle across one corner of the musty room. The atmosphere smelled of old paper, tobacco smoke, grease and oil.

“Commander Christopher, isn’t it?”

“Lieutenant-Commander, actually,” the younger man retorted with a vexed ill-grace that was wholly out of character. He relented. “Sorry. I’m not on top of my form at the moment.”

The civilian was in his fifties. He was sparsely built and there was a

weary dignity in his dark eyes. The office around him might be cluttered, but there was order in the clutter.

"HMS Talavera distinguished herself in the action at Lampedusa by all accounts?"

Peter Christopher shrugged, self-conscious and uncomfortable with any kind of praise. It was not as if he had done anything terribly brave or noble at Lampedusa. Captain Penberthy was badly wounded, the ship was getting shot up, HMS Puma was dead in the water and things were fast going to Hell in a handbag. All he had done was stand in for the Captain and done exactly what David Penberthy would have done in the same situation. He had got the flotilla organised, done what he could do to help the Puma. It just so happened the only way to help the crippled frigate was to draw the fire of the shore batteries while a tow was secured. Honestly and truly he did not know what all the fuss was about!

"The ship and her crew acquitted themselves well," he agreed. "Which makes it even more galling that the bunch of pirates allegedly salvaging parts for Talavera's refit from the wreck of the Agincourt have dumped a pile of scrap on the quayside and probably walked away with the few useful pieces of equipment that survived the bombing and the fire!"

The other man's face fell.

"Actually," Peter Christopher explained, feeling a little foolish now that he had had a little time to reflect on his initial reaction to discovering what had been going on, "before I came over here I ordered my people to search the salvage barge for *contraband* and to arrest the salvage master and anybody else who was hanging around on his boat."

"Oh, I see." The man behind the desk half-smiled, before forcing a severe expression to form that belied the amusement in his tired eyes. "That will no doubt lead to a deal of bad feeling."

"Frankly, I don't really care. My ship is a mess and I was counting on Agincourt's spares to start getting her back to her rightful state, Mr," he hesitated, "forgive me, I don't believe I know your name, sir?"

The other man sat back in his chair.

It creaked unnaturally loudly in the quietness of the Sunday dockyard.

The older man fixed the younger man with his gaze.

"My name," he said, sighing, "is Peter Calleja."

The younger man stared at him, his mouth momentarily agape.

The other man’s wry smile broadened.
“I am Marija’s father.”

Chapter 35

Sunday 2nd February 1964
Camp David, Thurmont, Maryland

"My fellow Americans," John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth President of the United States said, instantly finding *the voice* he knew to be the nearest he would ever come to matching the delivery of his Democratic predecessor Franklin Delano Roosevelt's legendary 'fireside chats'. FDR had talked America through the travails of the Great Depression, the fears of the uneasy peace while Europe fell into war, and then through the tumultuous years after Pearl Harbour in a series of thirty of those radio 'fireside chats' between 1933 and 1944. Presidents since FDR had tried to emulate him, becoming increasingly seduced by television in the 1950s. People said that Jack Kennedy was the first President of the 'television age' but tonight he was going back to basics. America had very nearly lost its soul in the months before the Battle of Washington; its soul, its conscience and its sense of manifest destiny. Never had his mighty nation more needed somebody to remind it of what it really meant to call oneself 'an American'. "As I travel our proud land people say one thing. One thing, my friends; they tell me that they want America to be *one* America again."

Coming out to Camp David, hidden away in the Catoctin Mountains where he and Jackie and the kids could actually be safe – Secret Service paranoia about the security of the family compound at Hyannis Port had finally shut it down three days ago – had focused Jack Kennedy's mind and convinced him that, despite his reservations, he had no choice but to circumvent the constitutional conventions which had since the time of George Washington, guided the nation.

Bill Fulbright, the man he ought to have appointed Secretary of State in 1961, the Vice President, and his brother, Bobby, had steeled him to take decisive action when he was in Philadelphia. He had still honestly hoped that a direct appeal to Congress would unblock the political log jam; and had determined to make one last attempt to persuade the jeremiads.

He had spoken to the 'leaders' of the House. He had appealed over their

party and vested interests to their patriotism, to their sense of duty and to their idealism. He might as well have been talking to a pack of hungry wolves around the freshly killed carcass of a buffalo. The bastards had just wanted to know what was in it for them.

He had asked LBJ to keep J. Edgar Hoover on a tight leash a little while longer. In the meantime, he would light another kind of fire under 'the House'. Once he let the FBI go to war with the House there would be no rowing back, the well would be poisoned for a generation. Besides, Hoover would go after the Administration's friends with twice the energy he went after its foes. Trying to have one's political opponents locked up was always bad politics; basically, it was bad enough dealing with the enemies you knew about without having to worry about the ones who might replace them. The Vice President had confronted the House with one kind of justice, now he would confront it with another.

The 'fireside chat' was being recorded for broadcast this evening in a room full of technicians, equipment and Administration flunkies. It was hardly a relaxed affair. Jackie had found herself in a corner with the kids. She tried to smile. She still tried hard to broadcast the regal grace and elegance of that age before the Cuban Missiles War when she had been the queen of the new Camelot. Like them all she was tired, careful to hide her fears from her children. A log fire crackled in a desultory fashion in the background but the room was a little cool because with all the comings and goings most of the warmth of the fire was constantly being sucked out into the wintery morning.

"It is my dream that one day all Americans will live safe in a nation in which *all Americans*, regardless of their colour, their creed or their political affiliations exist together in harmony. I dream of a nation at peace with itself. I dream of a nation that embraces its allegiances to its natural allies and seeks an ongoing dialogue with those who would do us ill. I dream of World in which the pen not the sword is the defining instrument of this nation's foreign policy. But most of all I dream of an America in which the words 'United States' are the bed-rock of our democracy, and in which the good-will of all right-thinking people is the guarantor of the universal freedoms to which this great country has been dedicated since 1776."

Jack Kennedy glanced across to his wife. His daughter, six-year-old Caroline perched on a stool by Jackie's right hand, three-year-old John

Fitzgerald Kennedy, junior, bored and restless squirmed in his mother's arms. The President forced a tight-lipped smile for his small family.

"When the Founding Fathers designed the Constitution of the United States of America," something in him rebelled at such a generic, non-historic usage of the term 'Founding Fathers' but politics was an imprecise business and sometimes, compromises were unavoidable, "they had in mind creating a system of government in which no man would ever be their over-lord again. They had had their fill of Kings and Queens, and like the Roman Senate of old, they wanted no Caesar ruling over them. Thus, the Founding Fathers created a governmental system in which there was a surfeit of checks and balances that broadly speaking; remains inalienable despite numerous amendments to the Constitution in the one hundred and eighty-seven years since the Founding Fathers completed their work." Again, did one count from the Declaration of Independence in 1776, or the Constitutional Convention of 1777, or Independence itself, or the election of the first President, George Washington in 1789, or even, go back to the First Continental Congress in 1774 as one's starting date? *1776 would have to do.* "However, the Founding Fathers, being men of good sense and at heart practical, pragmatic men *never* intended for Congress to ignore existing treaty obligations – as previously ratified by both Congress and the Senate – or to wage a vendetta against the lawfully constituted Administration in a time of the direst national emergency."

Actually, Chief Justice Earl Warren had informed him that the Founding Fathers could not be deemed to have made any such assumption. Most of the Founding Fathers were, after all, slave-owning English Tories who simply did not like paying their fair share of the tax bill. The political and social standpoints of the majority of the men who had signed the Declaration of Independence would have been deeply offensive to most modern-day Americans.

The past, as any historian will confirm, was a different place.

Jack Kennedy focused on the text before him.

"The United States of America faces grave perils, my friends. I have no personal taste for playing the role of a latter day American Caesar. We are not Romans and we do not seek to rule any other nation or people. But when Congress denies the Executive arm of the Government of the United States of America the means and the money to enable it to defend its borders and its

citizens, something is very wrong. Something is sick within the body politic and like a cancer it must quarantined and cut out before it consumes the body itself."

They will never, ever forgive me for what I am about to do!

"In consultation with senior members of my Administration, senior members of the Senate, and with the High Command of our armed forces," he said solemnly, regret leeching from his voice like blood from an open wound, "I have this day written to the Majority and Minority Leaders of Congress and the Senate informing them that if, within twenty-eight days, they are unable to assure me that both Houses are ready to support me in the measures necessary to guarantee the safety and security of our nation, and to respect this nation's foreign undertakings to other nations, as previously sanctioned by the House of representatives," the thirty-fifth President of the United States of America took a deep breath, "I will suspend indefinitely both Houses. At that time, I will form an Administration of National Unity which will initially include all State Governors."

Jack Kennedy counted silently: *one, two three, four...*

He was the man who had ordered a massive, all out strike against the Soviet Union and its allies. Now he was giving Congress twenty-eight days' notice that they were next on his list.

"In the interim, I will act as the Commander-in-Chief of the United States of America and take whatever actions I deem fit as circumstances develop to defend *our* country." He let this sink in for a moment. "It is of paramount importance to our foreign friends and allies that they know they can rely on treaties and agreements made with *your* Government. Without trust there can be no such thing as a real friendship, or a real partnership. For that reason, I will now read to you what *your* Government and *your* Congress signed up to on 4th April 1949 in Washington DC."

FDR had never read to the American people from a dusty old treaty. But he had 'chatted', explaining and contextualising dilemmas and issues which so many other politicians had never had the courage to confront. Jack Kennedy had always believed that a leader's job was not just to lead, but to *explain*. Nothing, absolutely nothing was as crucial to the exercise of power in a democracy as the informed consent of the people. Perhaps, if he had remembered that a little earlier in his Presidency the World might not be in such a mess now.

"Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty stipulates that: *The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.*"

Yes, it was heavy stuff and if you did not listen very carefully you were not going to 'get it'. Well, it was about time somebody gave the American people credit for their innate horse sense, decency and patriotism. He was confident that a large number of Americans would listen to every word and that they would 'get it'.

"*Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security*."

Jack Kennedy looked to his wife for reassurance.

Jackie smiled.

They had been apart too much this last year and that had been a mistake.

"Article Six of the North Atlantic Treaty says: *For the purpose of Article 5, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France, on the territory of or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer; and on the forces, vessels, or aircraft of any of the Parties, when in or over these territories or any other area in Europe in which occupation forces of any of the Parties were stationed on the date when the Treaty entered into force or the Mediterranean Sea or the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer.*"

The President's expression had become grim.

"My Administration takes these Articles to mean that an attack on the United Kingdom, or *any* of its bases in the Mediterranean, is a direct act of war against the United States of America."

Chapter 36

Sunday 2nd February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 78 miles SSW of Rhodes

There was a knock at the open door to Captain Simon Collingwood's cramped cabin. Lieutenant-Commander Max Forton stuck his bearded face around the bulkhead.

"Come in, Number One," invited the commanding officer of the Royal Navy's only nuclear-powered attack submarine. He handed the two message sheets to the newcomer, waving him to sit on the adjacent bunk.

Max Forton grinned.

"Congratulations, Commander," his captain chuckled. The top sheet was a list of promotions and recommendations for decorations for gallantry and good service. The second sheet was about the business of war.

"Thank you, sir." The younger man pulled a face. "You don't think they'll haul me off to somewhere I'd rather not be the first time we touch land, do you?"

"You and me both, I should imagine," Collingwood guffawed. The next time Dreadnought docked she would not be going to sea again until her ever-growing, already very long defect list had been addressed. "The Blake has been ordered to stay in Limassol another forty-eight hours."

Max Forton perused the second sheet he had been handed.

"Hermes making for Malta at best speed," he read out aloud as he skimmed the page. "Second Submarine Squadron boats to adopt forward positions in a picket line across the Libyan Sea. Victorious task force temporarily withdrawing towards Alexandria. That's a turn up, the Egyptians offering re-fuelling facilities... Tiger and Lion are rebalancing their main magazines with eighty percent AP shells. Good god," he concluded, "they've patched up the Sheffield and they're planning to send her out to join the Victorious!"

Simon Collingwood nodded.

Every ship in the Mediterranean Fleet which could raise steam was being sent to the Eastern Mediterranean. While HQ in Malta scrambled to position

units west and south of Crete, HMS Blake and her cargo of three dozen nuclear warheads recently removed from the old combined NATO-CENTO store at RAF Akrotiri had no choice but to remain in port. The Blake might be a match for a Sverdlov or Chapayev class cruiser in normal circumstances, but with such precious and dangerous treasure in her magazines, a gunnery duel with one or more of the former Soviet cruisers was to be avoided at all costs.

The 'Cyprus problem' had come home to roost with a vengeance. Cyprus had been a NATO enclave on the western periphery of the Central Treaty Organisation area of operations. The nuclear weapon store had been under joint US-UK control at the time of the October War and with the pullback of US forces in the Mediterranean the British garrison had effectively usurped the smaller combine US Air Force and Marine Corps presence and taken custody of the stockpile. While the ruling Greek Junta was neutral and showed no signs of ambitions towards Cyprus, the position was tenuous. When Crete ceased to be Greek-controlled, Cyprus should have either been massively reinforced, or abandoned. Unfortunately, Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher's predecessor as Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean had neither had the resources nor the will to reinforce Cyprus and had made preparations – unfortunately very visible preparations – to evacuate the British presence from the island. This had sparked widespread civil unrest not to mention high anxiety; without achieving a single worthwhile tactical or strategic gain for the occupiers at the very moment that the sudden threat of Red Dawn had prompted the worst crisis in the region since the October War. That this was a crisis, not a 'panic', was solely down to the calm, sure guiding hand of the current Commander-in-Chief in Malta.

"Um," Max Forton grunted, "I hope they keep all those A class boats out of our way!"

His captain heartily concurred with this thought.

The 2nd Submarine Squadron's six A, or Amphion class, diesel-electric submarines based at Malta were relics of the immediate post-Second War era; able to stay submerged only for as long as their batteries lasted, relatively slow under water and obliged to transit from base to any potential war station mostly on the surface. The advent of the nuclear age of submarines had made them horribly obsolete overnight. They would also be very difficult to tell apart from any former Soviet or Turkish diesel-electric boat that Dreadnought

encountered.

“It is a bit of a mess, isn’t it?” Simon Collingwood said, wholly rhetorically. It was a thought he would not have dreamed of voicing to any other man aboard Dreadnought.

“Presumably, one of the reasons the Blake is holed up in Limassol is that her main battery magazines are full of HE and proximity fused ant-aircraft rounds,” Max Forton mused. “Her escorts too, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“None of our cruisers could lay a finger on the Yavuz,” Collingwood observed. The old ex-German battlecruiser had eleven-inch thick cemented armour over her vitals, nine-inches protecting her turrets and up to three inches on her decks. Catching himself thinking negatively he instantly recanted. “Still, I’m sure if the old beast turns up the RAF will have her number!”

“You never know, she might sail across our bows sooner or later, sir!”

Late yesterday afternoon the Admiral Kutuzov and her escorting destroyers had rendezvoused with a tanker anchored off the Greek island of Rhodes. There were fires burning on the island, a pall of smoke drifting out to sea. Fire on the land and oil slicks marring the blue Aegean from sunken ships; everywhere that Red Dawn went scorched earth followed. Having topped up their bunkers the Sverdlov class cruiser and her escorts had steamed over Dreadnought, heading south. That was two hours ago.

Max Forton opened his mouth to speak.

The distant explosion had both men on their feet.

By the time the concussion waves of the second and third detonations reached the Dreadnought both men were marching into the control room.

“Contacts along the explosion bearings?” The Executive Officer demanded, studying the tactical plot.

“Negative, sir!”

There was a smaller explosion, and another. Low rumbling outbursts that eddied in the deep water.

“We have the Kutuzov group bearing zero-nine-five degrees. Range five miles. The explosions bear zero-one-five degrees. Range unconfirmed but I’d guess two to three miles, sir!”

Despite the inherent risks there was no substitute for the mark one human eye when it came to unravelling a thorny tactical situation.

“Bring the boat to periscope depth if you please, Number One!

The sporadic detonations continued as the Kutuzov group steadily drew away to the south. Dreadnought's primary task was gathering intelligence, clinging onto the cruiser was secondary now that 'Operation Reclaim', the rather unimaginatively named exercise to empty the nuclear weapons stockpile on Cyprus had been put on hold for forty-eight hours, possibly longer.

Thirty minutes later Simon Collingwood was studying a scene from a bad dream. Over a dozen sailing boats, several small lateen-rigged and three or four larger, two-masted brigs were running west while the Admiral Kutuzov fired speculative long-range salvoes at them from her rear turrets, and one of her escorts, a Krupny class destroyer idled at around three thousand yards sporadically picking off fresh targets. The quality of the gunnery was abysmal but it did not have to be very good to every now and then cause carnage. Smoke rose from two unseen victims as Dreadnought's periscope cruised very slowly through the flotsam and jetsam of wooden ships blown to pieces with high explosive shells. From what Simon Collingwood could make out the sailing boats were packed with bodies.

There were also a lot of bodies floating in the water.

The periscope camera clicked and whirred.

"Down periscope!"

The control room waited patiently.

"The bastards are using a refugee convoy for target practice. There's a Krupny class destroyer on the other side of the convoy firing pretty damn near over open sights. She's holding position letting the wind blow the sailing boats onto her guns."

It was of course, pure cold-blooded murder.

Although Dreadnought's rules of engagement gave him unusually broad discretion, they did not give him unfettered licence to risk advertising his presence in daylight by putting a Mark XX twenty-one-inch homing torpedo with a one hundred and ninety-six-pound warhead, under the keel of the Krupny class destroyer. Simon Collingwood re-considered this. No, he decided, I'd probably put a couple of old-fashioned Mark VIIIs into the bastards. Why waste modern kit on people who behave like eighteenth century pirates?

"We have to assume they don't know we're here," he explained irritably. "Take us down to two-zero-zero feet. Plot a course to put us in front of the

Kutuzov group."

The captain of HMS Dreadnought stalked out of the control room. Summoning a yeoman, he dictated a terse report to be transmitted to Malta. He checked his deck head chronometer. Darkness came suddenly at this time of year, in less than an hour's time.

Coming to a new decision he walked back to the control room.

"Belay my last orders. A change of plan," he announced. "It will be getting dark up top soon. We'll loiter at periscope depth westward of the convoy. Whatever's left of it, that is, until dark and see what our friends on the Krupny do next."

He hoped the destroyer would re-join the rest of the Admiral Kutuzov force.

If so he would surface, take on board the first survivors he found. If one could not see with one own eyes what was going on ashore; the next best thing was talking to somebody who had seen and experienced what was going on!

Simon Collingwood went to his command chair to wait.

Waiting was a thing a man got used to in the submarine service; and a wise man used his 'waiting time' wisely. From what he had seen of Red Dawn at sea – if Red Dawn in action was what he had actually seen in the last few days because nothing really made much sense in comparison to the World he had lived in before the October War – his putative enemy was profligate, arrogant, and brutal. His briefing notes on the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean spoke in vague terms about pirates, the island of Crete ravished by invaders, people fleeing to British territories in small boats with garbled tales of unspeakable horrors in their homelands. At the heart of the darkness *seemed* to be a thing called *Krasnaya Zarya*, but what might seem to be going on and what was really happening might well – in fact they often did – turn out to be completely different things.

He had never met a member of the Red Dawn movement, never heard a named individual labelled a member of that organisation, and unless he had seen that giant blood-red flag flying from the mast of the Admiral Kutuzov with his own eyes he would have been none the wiser. His assumption would have been that the cruiser had survived the war and was in the Aegean because frankly, once your home port had been nuked, practically anywhere else was a huge improvement.

If Dreadnought had been at sea during the October War and the United Kingdom had been totally devastated; he would probably have sailed to Canada or the United States, or if they were as devastated as Europe, then South Africa or Australia, anywhere that did not glow in the dark where he and his crew were welcome. Many Soviet citizens, military and civilian, must have had to make decisions like that. Red Dawn might simply be one of many 'homes' for people, ships, and families who had literally nowhere else to go.

His initial acquaintance with the naval representatives – probably of *Krasnaya Zarya* - told him that murdering helpless refugees just for the sake of it was probably par for the course; which was explicable, in a way because that was what monsters did sometimes. However, what was going on with that Krupny class destroyer and the convoy of sailing boats was so inexplicable as to be almost theatrical. If the name of the game was barbaric slaughter then why not just circle the convoy with the whole firepower of the Kutuzov group and get it over and done with fast. Presumably, the big cruiser had somewhere it needed to be, so why drag things out like this and waste so much main battery ammunition on ships that could be sunk by a couple of short close-range bursts from a twenty-millimetre anti-aircraft cannon?

A nasty, suspicious mind was an invaluable asset for a submarine commander. Without it a man would not advance far in the service; and in the way of things it was only the men with the most highly developed nasty suspicious minds that got to the top of the tree. Suddenly, Captain Simon Collingwood's very nasty, suspicious mind was working overtime.

"Flood down torpedo tubes one, two, three and four if you please, Number One!"

Max Forton acknowledged this and began to issue quietly voiced orders.

Tube One was loaded with a Mark XX homing torpedo, the other three tubes with infinitely more reliable World War II vintage heavyweight Mark VIIIs. Currently, Tubes five and six were empty.

"The boat will come to actions stations!" He added: "Very quietly please!"

Chapter 37

Monday 3rd February 1964
Prime Minister's Rooms, Government Building, Cheltenham

"Willie! Margaret Thatcher scolded her Secretary of State for Defence. "If I'd had any idea you were laid so low I'd never have allowed you to make your 'flying visit' to Malta!"

The man with the hangdog, paternally reassuring looks of a man a decade or more his senior smiled wanly. There was greyness in his face and a bone deep weariness in his limbs that reminded him of the toll illness had taken on him in the last year. Others had greater burdens to bear than he, and the Secretary of Defence was not about to complain about his own minor aches and pains. He had hardly known the Angry Widow before the war and it had not occurred to him that in forming her new Cabinet she would rely so heavily on men friendly with and held in high esteem by her predecessor.

'I know Ted Heath wanted you in Government as soon as you were recovered, Mr Whitelaw,' she had assured him in the moments before she had offered him his current portfolio.

'My closest colleagues and friends tend to call me *Willie*,' he had responded and they had gotten on famously ever since. His calmness and grace under pressure was more of a comfort than he realised to a harassed single mother of two who still, occasionally, felt a little out of her depth.

"You were far too busy to absent yourself for the best part of two days," the man replied emolliently. "Besides, for my sins I was once a soldier and sometimes military men find it easier to be frank with a fellow old soldier." This said he changed the subject. "I missed President Kennedy's fireside chat while I was in the air?"

"The President rowed in behind us. He was a real trooper! I listened to the 'fireside chat' with Jim Callaghan and Tom Harding-Grayson. They were mightily encouraged and somewhat relieved. The only fly in the ointment is that Jack Kennedy is having a frightful time convincing Congress to support his line; Lord Franks was astonished he went so far as he did. He's virtually declared war on his own Party in the House of Representatives. Lord Franks

says he won't carry out his threat to suspend Congress whatever happens but that he probably felt he had to make the threat to convince his enemies that he was in earnest."

Willie Whitelaw had known, or rather known of, Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador to Philadelphia - for the foreseeable future the de facto post Battle of Washington capital of the United States – for many years and regarded him as the best possible man to be representing the United Kingdom's interests in America.

It was two o'clock in the morning and the Prime Minister had been working through her official Red Boxes – the constant stream of reports, papers and submissions which flowed through her private office – when the Secretary of Defence had arrived back at Government House. She had smiled, ordered him to sit down while she arranged for tea to be brewed and served. Presently, they sat across a low coffee table, cradling their cups and saucers next to a guttering coal fire.

"The naval situation is potentially very worrying," Willie Whitelaw explained. "Every available ship is being rushed to the Mediterranean but as you know, some thirty percent of the fleet is still in overseas waters and committed to maintaining our 'presence', in Australian, New Zealand, South African, Hong Kong, Singapore and other waters as part of the compact informally agreed with Commonwealth and other countries to facilitate Operation Manna. That part of the active fleet which is now in Home Waters is mostly in very urgent need of refitting or replenishment, and drafts of experienced men have had to be taken from many of those ships to bring the crews of ships in the Mediterranean up to war strength, or to form new training cadres in the United Kingdom. The case of the Ark Royal illustrates the situation perfectly. The ship and her men are exhausted after a year of continuous operations. The ship needs many months in dock and her men are frankly, somewhat jaded. However, HMS Eagle, our other large aircraft carrier is just out of dockyard hands, and by transplanting several hundred men from the Ark Royal into her complement and transferring Ark Royal's somewhat depleted air group, I am informed that she may be fit for limited operations sometime in the next month or so."

"But the Hermes is available?"

"Yes, but she's another tired ship with a depleted air group. Hermes is currently en route for Malta at her best speed, currently around sixteen knots.

In certain sea condition she can fly off fast jets, but without all her machinery working in tip top form she will struggle to safely land any aircraft she launches. That leaves HMS Victorious as our only available fleet carrier in the theatre. And she is relatively freshly out of dock and is carrying less than half her designated air group. These problems are common, to one degree or another, across the whole Mediterranean Fleet, Margaret. The depth of our problem may be best expressed by the fact that Admiral Christopher is hoping to send HMS Sheffield to join the Victorious battle group. One of HMS Sheffield's three main turrets is wrecked and she cannot steam faster than eighteen knots. He won't even know if the ship is seaworthy until she runs trials off Malta in the coming days."

"But that's..."

"Madness?" Willie Whitelaw suppressed a yawn. "I think not. The First Sea Lord reminded me of something Sir Julian's Second World War predecessor, Admiral Cunningham said during the Battle of Crete in 1941, something along the lines of while it takes two or three years to build a ship, it takes hundreds of years to build a tradition. I know you speak to Sir Julian every few days and you will believe me when I say that he is in no way downcast. The transfer of American aircraft to Gibraltar and Malta increases 'Allied' air power in the theatre and thus far, although Red Dawn – if it is not Red Dawn then it is something equally inimical to our vital strategic interests in the region – obviously has significant naval forces and possibly, armies on land, we have thus far seen little evidence of a modern air striking force. In fact, Red Dawn seems to completely lack an air component. Nevertheless, Operation Reclaim is on hold for forty-eight to seventy-two hours pending developments."

"Developments? Such as?"

"Other than HMS Dreadnought we have virtually no intelligence gathering capability in the vicinity of Crete or in the Aegean. As for Asia Minor we are blind. The CIA mounted a U-2 mission to overfly Istanbul, the central Aegean and the length of Crete yesterday but photographic analysis had not commenced by the time my flight left Malta. All the US Air Force specialists who do that sort of analytical work were in transit from Aviano yesterday. RAF Luqa is like an oriental bazaar at the moment. Honestly, Prime Minister, you wouldn't credit how much equipment our American allies had stashed away at Aviano! Plane after plane is unloading all the

time! Our chaps out there feel like comparative paupers!"

There was a quiet knock at the door.

"Come in!" Margaret Thatcher called.

James Callaghan, the Deputy Prime Minister looked like he had just been awakened from a deep sleep. Sir Thomas Harding-Grayson seemed only a little less discommoded, when the two newcomers entered.

Chairs were drawn up around the still glowing embers in the hearth, and there was a pause in proceedings while the Prime Minister made sure her new guests had cups of tea.

The Foreign Secretary yawned and rubbed his eyes. His tie was a little askew and his threadbare jacket needed pressing; he had probably come over without disturbing his wife, Lady Patricia.

At the Prime Minister's prompting Willie Whitelaw briefed the newcomers, adroitly summarising what he had already reported to her.

"So, we still don't know what Red Dawn intends?" Jim Callaghan groaned. "Just that it appears to have a lot of ships we didn't know about until a week or two ago and the whole Aegean seems to be in its hands?"

Tom Harding-Grayson frowned wearily.

"If a number of major ex-Soviet surface warships survived the October War then it is likely that a number of ex-Soviet submarines survived also. As we learned to our cost fifteen months ago, some of their submarines carry nuclear-tipped torpedoes, Margaret."

"Yes," the Angry Widow acknowledged tersely.

"Sir Julian is not unaware of this possibility," Willie Whitelaw remarked.

"I spoke to the American Ambassador before I came over," Tom Harding-Grayson said to the room in general. "Walter Brenckmann says that when the Enterprise battle group arrives off Gibraltar, the USS Enterprise and the USS Long Beach, the two nuclear-powered ships will proceed directly into the Western Mediterranean and proceed at their best speed to Malta."

The Defence Secretary coughed.

"Several of the Enterprise's escorting vessels will need to oil and provision at the Rock before proceeding into the Med," he explained. "In the event they don't catch up with her in time Sir Julian plans to send vessels pencilled in to join HMS Hermes's squadron to meet the Enterprise."

"When can we expect the Enterprise to reach Gibraltar, Willie?" Jim Callaghan inquired.

“Not until Thursday at the earliest. There’s a huge storm system in the North Atlantic presently. Even pulling out all the stops,” he shrugged, “she probably won’t be in a position to support our forces in the Eastern Mediterranean for a week to ten days.”

The Foreign Secretary shook his head, hoping to clear out some of the cobwebs.

“No matter how worrying things seem, in a month or two we might be looking back on these last few days wondering what all the fuss was about.”

“I hope so, Tom,” Margaret Thatcher declared grimly.

Jim Callaghan ran a hand through his hair.

“What is the latest on the other American battle group?”

“The USS Independence is currently oiling at Cape Town,” William Whitelaw explained. “As you know the Independence is almost as big as the Enterprise and carries nearly the same sized air group. Enterprise and Independence both carry two to three times as many aircraft as our biggest ships, and both are much newer ships than anything in our inventory apart from the Hermes, which, as I mentioned, is a bit worse for wear at present. In any event, the Independence cannot be expected, at the earliest, at Gibraltar until at least a week or so after the Enterprise.”

The Foreign Secretary was caught out by his own exhaustion for a moment: “The worst thing is the knowledge that there may be people out there,” he waved to the rafters, “who might have no other purpose in life than to destroy us and everything we stand for. We cannot argue with them. They will never see reason. They will never rest until everything is reduced to ashes.”

“That’s the thing I can’t really understand,” Jim Callaghan observed glumly. “If these people were coming to us asking for aid or reparations, restitution of some kind I’m not exactly sure what we could do for them presently, but we wouldn’t just ignore them. Honestly and truly, I think all our problems with the Americans in the last year have been because neither of our countries really wants to go on fighting the same kind of undeclared Cold War we had before the,” he looked around at the other tired faces, “cataclysm. Given half a chance we’d all gladly beat our swords into ploughshares and make an immediate start on reconstruction.”

Margaret Thatcher nodded vigorously.

“Well said, Jim.” However, this was the briefest of contemplative

interregnums. “Sadly, things are what they are, and we are where we are. As to the true nature of Red Dawn? There may well be a significant hard core of diehards, Jim,” she conceded. “But I doubt if every foot soldier, sailor or camp follower is a true believer in Red Dawn’s foul cause. Yes, perhaps the leadership – assuming Red Dawn has a formal leadership and a recognisable officer cadre – is imbued with a philosophy of nihilism and revenge. However, many, many others will almost certainly have hitched their wagon to the cause because to have done otherwise would have been to starve, or to face imminent violent death.

There was an insistent rapping at the door.

Iain Macleod, the Minister of Information had pulled his trousers on over his pyjama bottoms and wore an old grey sweater under his jacket. His thinning hair was sticking out at all angles from the sides of his head and he was more than a little agitated.

“Something’s just happened in Greece, well, Athens, anyway. The military junta are broadcasting non-stop about being under attack by Soviet aircraft and tanks, and,” he scowled, “the Turkish hordes.”

Everybody looked at the newcomer, blinking.

The wild-haired Chairman of the Conservative Party and the UAUK’s chief propagandist threw his arms up in the air in despair.

“Athens is being bombarded from the sea and Piraeus is burning!”

Chapter 38

Monday 3rd February 1964
Rabat-Mdina, Malta

Clara Pullman propped herself up in the bed and ran her fingers through the thin mat of dark hair on her lover's scarred chest. He was silent in the gloom but their thoughts were shouting in the night. Arkady Pavlovich Rykov had always been the most patient, gentle and occasionally, the most ardent of all her lovers.

"I am sorry," the man muttered. "Did I hurt you?"

"No," she said, leaning across him to plant a wet kiss on his brow. Their love making had ceased for a while after he was badly injured by Denzil Williams's goons at Gibraltar two months ago. With Arkady's restoration to more or less full fitness – for all the scars and the terrible beating he had taken on the Rock he was virtually indestructible – in the last two to three weeks they had begun again to enjoy each other's bodies, although not with the passion of before. She had believed it was because he was still pained; how could he not be after what those bastards did to him? But tonight, he had been a stranger. He had never taken her before she was ready to receive him, never, other than when she had goaded him, or been so dominant, or so rough with her. He had not 'hurt' her although she suspected she would be bruised in places nobody was going to see and be sore in the morning but he *had* abused her. He had never done that before. "You seemed so *angry*?"

"Not with you," he said lowly. "Never with you. Sometimes I think that you are the only thing that stands between me and the madness."

Clara tingled with terror.

She fought to shrug off the icy hand clutching her heart.

"You are the sanest man I have ever met, Arkady Pavlovich."

The man grunted a snort of humourless laughter.

"I have done many bad things in my life," he confessed as he had done many times in the last year, only this time he was deadly serious. "Before the war they never touched me. In the country where I lived bad things happened every day. That was understood, expected. You are probably the only

woman I have slept with who wasn't secretly, or not so secretly, terrified of me. And now even you are a little afraid of me sometimes."

Clara wanted to claim otherwise.

She was silent.

"Nikita Sergeyevich sent me to infiltrate the higher echelons of Krasnaya Zarya because he knew that deep down I was just like the men he feared. Khrushchev never feared the Americans; he thought all his life that the Americans were too soft and too addicted to *mom's apple pie* to prevail over the Soviet system. He believed that it was only a matter of time before International Socialism overwhelmed the West. He only ever really feared the enemies within, Red Dawn and the other factions within the Politburo, and of course, the KGB, seeking to undermine his drive to modernise and lift the Motherland out of the pit the monster Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, Stalin, had left us all in. Nikita Sergeyevich sent his very own Prince of Darkness into the deepest, most evil black depths of that pit to discover the *character* of his coming nemesis. He knew that few men could see as well as Arkady Pavlovich Rykov in the stygian darkness of the World in which Krasnaya Zarya had been born." He sighed. "And now even the woman I love is terrified of me."

Clara sat up in the bed, suddenly aware that she hurt in places she did not usually hurt and involuntarily wincing.

"I am not terrified of you!" She hissed unhappily.

"No?"

"No! I love you..." *Did he just say he 'loved' me?*

"Then you love a monster."

Clara pulled the sheets about herself as if she was cold.

"Ever since we came to this place you've been strange."

"Yes," the man agreed.

They had been on Malta a fortnight during which they had often been apart; she running errands for MI6 as if she was some kind of secretarial Mata Hari who filled in the time between seducing enemy officers doing the office typing, shopping and driving when nobody could think of anything better to do with her; and occasionally providing female cover for one or other of Arkady's personas in the field. She knew that her lover had been sent to Malta to hunt down Red Dawn; and to tidy up the mess left behind by Denzil Williams's incompetence. Other than that – she knew better than to

go out of her way to make her own independent inquiries - she had only the vaguest of notions as to what Arkady had actually been up to in the last two weeks. In bed he had been uncommunicative, distant.

"Red Dawn is like a disease," he said. The man was lying on his back staring into the darkness. "Iosif Vissarionovich would have been proud of what he created. He understood that if nuclear war consumed the Motherland then the surviving splinters of the military-industrial complex and the security apparat would look for something just like Krasnaya Zarya; that they would be drawn to it like moths to the flame. Red Dawn corrupts and consumes everything it touches. Like gangrene, once it takes hold the limb must be amputated or the body will die a horrible, disgusting, inevitable death. The British and the Americans do not yet understand this. They still hope that they can meet *Krasnaya Zarya* in battle and that if they are victorious later there will be peace talks, and accommodations can be reached. But that is not the nature of the beast. I think the British are closer to understanding the evil they confront. Admiral Christopher is a man who understands that in war things happen which no rational man would normally sanction; that in time of war decency and humanity are suspended. And that sometimes in war one has to do things which will haunt one forever. The greater good is a peculiar thing; an excuse to commit untold atrocities and the Admiral is a man who understands this."

"Atrocities? What are you talking about?"

"There were eight of them. Samuel Calleja, whom you knew about, or rather, you guessed correctly was the probable leader of the cell when we were on this island in November..."

"You were interested in his sister and she obviously wasn't a terrorist," Clara retorted.

The man ignored this.

"Two men in Samuel Calleja's organisation were killed when HMS Torquay was bombed in the December raid," the man continued, ignoring her interjection.

Clara froze; he was going to tell her *everything*.

"Two men were arrested by Major Williams's associates before we returned to Malta, and three others were under what that fool regarded as 'surveillance'," he scoffed derisively. "I had to hunt them down. After the sinking of HMS Torquay, Admiral Christopher gave me *carte blanche* to do

whatever needed to be done to roll up and dispose of the cell. I tortured the terrorists until they had told me *all* their secrets, and *all* the secrets of *everybody* they had ever known."

"Arkady, I..."

The man reached up and placed his fingers on her lips.

"And when I finished torturing them I staged their 'deaths' to make it look as if the Redcaps and the Army had done all the work. I choked the woman and," he moved his fingers gently down to her chin, "and put a bullet in her brain."

The quietness was suddenly crushing.

"I have killed many women before," the man continued flatly. "I have tortured many women. I was never ashamed until now."

Chapter 39

Monday 3rd February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 91 miles SSW of Rhodes

"SUBMERGED CONTACT BEARING ZERO-TWO-SEVEN!"

Captain Simon Collingwood acknowledged the report as if he had been expecting it for some minutes. In fact, he had been expecting it for at the last two hours and was beginning to wonder if he was being a little paranoid. *No, one could not command one's Navy's only nuclear-powered submarine and not have a paranoid streak.*

"Designate submerged contact as Bandit Two."

"Speed six knots, course two-seven-five degrees!" Then immediately, another report. "She's very noisy, sir. She must have been sitting right under one of the bigger sailing boats. She suddenly came out of nowhere. Two screws, she's got a worn bearing on one of them!"

HMS Dreadnought had been idling, barely maintaining steerage way in the middle of the no doubt traumatised, dwindling number of survivors of the sailing convoy which had been sporadically tormented and mauled by the long-range gunfire of the Sverdlov class cruiser Admiral Kutuzov, and used for target practice by a loitering Krupny class destroyer. The Kutuzov and her other escorts were now far below the southern horizon, the Krupny class ship – designated Bandit One on Dreadnought's tactical plot - was slowly circling the sailing boats at a range of about eight thousand yards firing star shells to illuminate the area every ten minutes.

"Range to submerged contact estimated at two thousand yards, sir!"

That was close, too close for comfort but if the contact held her current course she would draw slowly west of north and the range would widen.

"Your hunch was right, sir," Max Forton, the boat's red-bearded Executive Officer grinned as he looked up from the plot.

The enemy had baited a trap for Dreadnought.

They had hoped she would intervene to stop the slaughter of the innocents; sink the Krupny class destroyer wreaking such carnage among the wooden-hulled sailing ships. But only fools rushed in where angels feared to

tread, and Simon Collingwood was neither a fool nor an angel.

He had not taken the bait and there was never any possibility that he would. When you commanded a nuclear submarine, *you* made the rules and everybody else danced to *your* tune. Dreadnought had crept into the huddle of broken sailing ships three hundred feet beneath the surface, slowly eased up to one hundred feet; and waited.

"Do we have a firing solution on the submerged contact?"

"Negative, sir. There's a lot of wreckage in the water and she's too close to one of the surviving sailing ships."

So, the waiting continued a little longer.

After about fifteen minutes: "We have a firing solution for Bandit Two, sir!"

"Okay. We will execute attack plan Alpha," Simon Collingwood decreed. "We will fire the Mark XX homing torpedo in Number One tube at Bandit Two and turn towards Bandit One at twenty knots. We will fire the Mark VIIIs in Number Two, Three and Four at a range of between fifteen hundred and one thousand yards."

HMS Dreadnought's blunt bow slowly swung around to the north.

"Firing solution for the Mark XX fish in Tube One is set, sir."

"Very good."

"The plot is automatically updating, sir!"

"What's Bandit One up to?"

"Holding at seven thousand five hundred yards, sir!"

"Range to Bandit Two?"

"Two thousand three hundred yards, sir!"

"Check firing solution for Bandit Two!"

"Checked. The board is green, sir."

Captain Simon Collingwood did not hesitate.

"Fire One!"

"The fish is running straight!"

The Mark XX had to run for approximately a thousand yards before its passive sonar guidance system kicked in. Ideally, its programmed target would be somewhere in a relatively narrow cone of sea in front of it when that happened. If there was nothing in front of it the torpedo would start searching to acquire a target and it was never a good idea to allow a dumb machine to pick its own target. Given the crowded nature of the waters

nearby the Mark XX was configured to actively ping its target to confirm acquisition before reverting to silent running. Of course, if Bandit Two's sonar men were on their mettle they would already have detected the propeller noise of the missile cruising towards them at twenty knots. Against a fast surface target like a destroyer or a frigate capable of performing violent high speed evasive manoeuvres the relatively slow Mark XX could, theoretically, be evaded, assuming that it was fired from far enough away, detected in the water early, and that the vessel under attack was already steaming fast. The diesel-electric submarine hiding among the shattered sailing flotilla attempting to spring and ambush on Dreadnought was too close and far too slow to run away or to evade a Mark XX once it had acquired target lock.

"Our fish is active!"

"Target lock!"

"Helm! Make your course zero-three-zero!"

"Revolutions for twenty knots!"

Seventy-one seconds later the dull, rumbling detonation touched the pressure hull.

"We are clear of the sailing boats!" Sang out one report.

Another man was calling down the decreasing ranges to Krupny class destroyer.

"Six thousand yards!"

"Bandit One is holding her course. Speed constant at eight knots."

Simon Collingwood and his Executive Officer exchanged raised eyebrows.

A Royal Navy ship would have jumped to life by now; cranked up to fifteen to twenty knots, started pinging frantically in every direction. This fellow seemed to be cruising along as if nothing had happened. Or had the Krupny interpreted the detonation as Dreadnought's demise?

"Five thousand yards!"

"Four thousand yards!"

Still the escort lazily continued to proscribe a leisurely orbital course around the remnants of the sailing fleet.

"Perhaps, they're all drunk?" Max Forton suggested.

There were chuckles and guffaws around the control room.

"Confirm firing solution please!" Simon Collingwood snapped.

“Confirmed!”

“Recommend a narrow spread, sir!”

“Affirmative, make it so!”

This is too easy!

The commanding officer of HMS Dreadnought was still thinking ‘this is too easy’ right up until the moment the first of two Mark VIII torpedoes crashed into the side of the four-thousand-ton Soviet destroyer at over forty knots. The first of the three torpedoes had narrowly missed the ship’s bow, the second smashed through her side below her bridge; the third penetrated her machinery spaces amidships. The seven hundred and twenty-two-pound Torpex warheads exploded within seconds of each other.

The Soviet destroyer ceased to exist. Less than a minute later her splintered bow and stern, floating separately apart, rapidly filled with water and sank.

“Take us down to three hundred feet!” Captain Simon Collingwood ordered tersely.

Chapter 40

Monday 3rd February 1964
Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Mdina, Malta

Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher paused for a moment when his flag lieutenant, Alan Hannay slid the latest signal from HMS Dreadnought in front of him.

"Excuse me a moment, David," he apologised to his old friend, Admiral Sir David Luce, the First Sea Lord as he held the telephone receiver away from his head for a moment, "I'm just receiving the latest from Dreadnought."

His youthful flag lieutenant withdrew from the room.

"Most urgent from Dreadnought," Julian Christopher read aloud. "*Ongoing interrogation of survivors of civilian refugee fleet suggests pogroms and a reign of terror on the mainland opposite north coast of Cyprus and a simultaneous military build-up. Boys and young men are being conscripted into militias, old people sent to the hills to die, women are being horrifically used and abused and military age men who refuse to join Krasnaya Zarya's Shock Militia are being shot.*"

"It sounds like something from the Stalin era," Admiral Sir David Luce, remarked stoically through the buzzing, clicking static on the scrambled long-distance line. "Except much worse, perhaps?"

"I authorised Dreadnought to take up to twenty people, women and children and a few old men onboard. Captain Collingwood had no option but to leave the rest to their fate. As it is the extra bodies will no doubt seriously impinge upon the smooth operation of the boat. Still, Collingwood seems to know what he's about and he's sending through reports as they become available."

"A curious little action south of Rhodes?" The First Sea Lord mused, not actually asking a question.

"Dreadnought was very well handled, David," the Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre stated unequivocally.

“Oh, absolutely. Collingwood is undoubtedly a *very sound man*.”

When two admirals talked about one of their captains as ‘a sound man’ or noted that a man had handled his ship ‘well’ in action, there was no more ringing endorsement of a man’s conduct in the performance of his duty and his obvious suitability for future high command.

Julian Christopher had scanned the rest of the latest report from HMS Dreadnought now. Captain Collingwood’s previous reports had made chilling reading.

“These refugees are reporting the signs of a forthcoming major invasion of Cyprus,” he decided. “Makeshift landing craft and small boats of all descriptions are being seized, likewise gunboats and coastal escort type vessels of every size; and there are reports of villages being strafed by helicopter gunships and MiGs.”

“That’s not good news.”

It seemed that Red Dawn had been obsessed with keeping its build up, and particularly its air force hidden. The implications of this were deeply worrying to both men.

“What does Dan French think about this?”

Air Vice-Marshal Daniel French was Julian Christopher’s deputy on Malta; a most able man who had flown a tour on Avro Lancaster bombers in World War II and had commanded one of the first V-Bomber squadrons in the 1950s.

“He thinks Red Dawn’s main problem won’t have been collecting ‘airframes and engines’ or necessarily ‘pilots’ because they would have been to hand all over the Soviet Union after the October War. The big problem will have been maintenance, securing runways, base facilities and things like how you get the right sorts of aviation fuel to the right places to enable continuous operations. He says that if he was in charge of Red Dawn’s air force he would have taken over Incirlik air base and Ankara airport. The Anatolian part of Turkey wasn’t exactly a first World country before the war. Most of the modern military infrastructure was put in by NATO in the fifties, mainly by the Americans, and the road system is best around Ankara and Adana right next to Incirlik.”

“Presumably, Dan being an RAF man wants to bomb both locales to smithereens?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think?”

“I think the shooting has already started. We are at war and should act accordingly. All things being equal my recommendation is to conduct Arc Light strikes on both air bases and to carry out pre-emptive conventional strikes against the main ports of Southern Turkey opposite Cyprus. I’d want to co-ordinate these actions with strikes on the main pre-war airfield on Crete, at Heraklion. In an ideal World I’d kick off the ‘home run’ phase of Operation Reclaim at the same time.”

The First Sea Lord absorbed this. His old friend and he were thinking along similar lines but it was still good to hear it from the horse’s mouth.

“So that would be your recommendation to the Prime Minister, Julian?”

“Yes, David.”

“What if Arc Light isn’t on the table?”

Julian Christopher sighed, the verbal equivalent of a Gallic shrug down the telephone line.

“If we adopt a self-denying ordinance when it comes to the tactical use of nuclear weapons, realistically, we will have to modify our strategic objectives.”

The First Sea Lord bypassed his old friend’s dryly enunciated sophistry.

“You mean we have to get used to the idea that we’ll probably lose Cyprus and find ourselves driven out of the Eastern Mediterranean?”

“Possibly, yes.”

Admiral Sir David Luce knew his old friend too well to be gulled into any sense of false optimism. When a man like Julian Christopher said ‘possibly’, what he meant was ‘probably’. If the C-in-C Mediterranean had honestly believed that, with the forces he had to hand, he could hold Cyprus and continue to prop up the United Kingdom’s tenuous presence in the Eastern seas he would have said so.

“Very well, I will take that to this morning’s War Cabinet.”

Julian Christopher put down the phone.

“Your son is here, sir,” Alan Hannay reminded him after a judicious thirty-second delay.

“Send him in please. We’ll go out on the ramparts. Be a good chap and organise hot drinks. Peter and I will probably benefit from a calming cup of tea.”

The father looked his son up and down as he marched into his office.

“You look well, Peter.”

“Thank you, sir. Keeping busy stops one’s mind from worrying about things one can do nothing about.”

Father and son shook hands.

“Come outside and have a look at the view,” Julian Christopher said, leading the way through the outer reception rooms onto the long, airy balcony Mess area atop the eastern ramparts of the old Citadel of medieval Mdina. He gestured for his son to take a seat at a table at the sheltered end of the terrace as there was a stiff, south-easterly breeze gusting at the immovable bastion beneath their feet.

Father and son had had no real opportunity to speak privately on the evening HMS Talavera had limped into Sliema Creek. They had both been aware of the countless watching eyes and it had been a breathless, oddly bloodless occasion which in retrospect had pre-empted and taken virtually all the sting out of this personal and private second meeting.

“I met Marija’s father yesterday,” the younger man announced ruefully. “He seems a decent sort. Sad, about his son, obviously.”

“The whole family has had a rough old time of it.”

Peter Christopher felt as if he ought to entertain more animosity towards his father. If this reunion had happened before the war then things would have been different. Perfectly bloody, in fact; but everybody had lost so much it was hard to keep the fires of old hurts and resentments burning hot.

“There are rumours about Samuel Calleja’s part in,” he hesitated, “things?” He asked lamely.

“Unfounded,” his father retorted bluntly. “The whole Calleja family was thoroughly investigated after the explosion in Kalkara. Due process and all that tosh, no stone left unturned and so forth. The security people have gone into everything with a fine toothcomb and established that Samuel was an innocent dupe in the loss of HMS Torquay. He was used shamelessly by the,” a grim half smile, “terrorists. They were clearly attempting to smear the whole Calleja family. I personally briefed the *Times of Malta* in an attempt to put an end to the more fanciful stories that were circulating.”

Peter was at once relieved and assailed by further questions, none of which his father was likely to entertain.

“You’ve been busy, Peter?” The Commander-in-Chief chuckled.

“Ah, I probably overstepped the mark arresting all those local men.”

His father guffawed anew. “Never mind. You let them out as soon as you’d calmed down.”

“Yes, but...”

“I don’t think any lasting harm has been done. Talavera,” the father declared, changing the subject. “What’s her state of readiness?”

“Miles Weiss and I spent most of last night supervising re-patching the cabling to the Type Two-Nine-Three aerial on the foremast. Miles, sorry, Guns, was testing the system when I left to come here. It looks like we’ve got full director control for the main battery again. I never realised how important that was until those shore batteries opened up on us at Lampedusa. Miles, I mean, Lieutenant Weiss has worked a miracle getting the main battery shipshape. Otherwise, we’re planning to weld a couple of single 20-millimetre Oerlikon mounts onto the aft deck house roof. We’ve already welded over most of the shrapnel holes in the ship. Fortunately, below the waterline the old girl seems as good as new.”

Cups of tea arrived, served by a steward.

Peter Christopher gazed out across the island, taking in its mottled faded greens and browns contrasted against the grey of the sky and the dull blue of the ocean.

“I didn’t realise Malta was such a military camp, sir,” he commented.

“Things,” his father said lowly, “are looking a bit sticky. I’m sure we shall pull through but we’re pretty stretched at present.”

“So Red Dawn is real?”

The father nodded. Both men were struck by how ‘adult’ this interview had been and by how little residual animus hung in the air between them.

“Nobody knew if Red Dawn was a terroristic hangover from the October War or something more significant until the last few weeks. Frankly, we’ve been caught on the hop. I don’t think it occurred to anybody until recently that the destruction might not have been as total as we first thought. It is now apparent that the only thing in Eastern Europe that was totally destroyed by the heaviest bombing was pre-war political and military cohesion. What appears to have happened around the Black Sea and in Turkey is that Red Dawn has moved in and filled the vacuum. Latterly, it seems likely that they have also invested Crete. Across the region Red Dawn has collected up all the viable war fighting assets it can lay its hands on and dragooned large numbers of followers into marching beneath its banner. We’re still piecing

together the intelligence but we think we are likely to be opposed by powerful naval forces based in the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean, potentially very large numbers of troops and possibly, a number of former Soviet jets and helicopters."

Peter Christopher did not believe what he was hearing.

"Without Crete what happens to Cyprus?"

The older man raised an eyebrow, impressed with speed with which his son had drilled down to the nub of the matter. Given news coming in all the time from Greece of renewed widespread fighting; Cyprus was already lost, untenable.

"What indeed," the father murmured. It was time to change the subject. "Have you gone to see Marija, yet?"

The son's face flushed hot.

"No!" He said, trying to retreat back into his shell; that well-developed protective mental carapace he had so lovingly, carefully sculpted over the years since his mother's death. "No. She's been so busy and with this thing about HMS Torquay and that poor fellow getting blown up in Kalkara, and all the hoo-ha about her brother I didn't like to be, well, pushy..."

His father viewed him thoughtfully.

"Marija is a most remarkable young woman, Peter."

"Funny, isn't it? You've met her and I haven't?"

Julian Christopher smiled.

"Yes, it is a funny old World, isn't it?"

Chapter 41

Monday 3rd February 1964
St Paul's Cathedral Square, Mdina

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher was in a daze as he wandered out of the Headquarters, literally stumbling onto the narrow cobbled street in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral. It was while he was in that befuddled state, not really looking where he was going that he found himself standing in the piazza outside the Cathedral, staring numbly at the sign over the door of the nearest building.

It was a solid double door – painted freshly Navy blue - much broader than any other in the surrounding houses. The brickwork around it suggested this was a relatively recent modification; somewhat out of keeping with the antiquity of every other entrance onto Cathedral Square.

St Catherine's Hospital for Women.

There was an adjacent brass plaque, brightly polished: *Director – M.A. Seiffert, MD.*

He stared at the sign over the door and the plaque.

This is where Marija works...

He took off his cap and stood in the weak sunshine which now and then, burned small holes in the overcast. In England he would have been shivering, here it was mildly warm and he did not feel remotely over dressed in his recently acquired white tropical rig.

Everything had hit him at once.

He was to remain as captain of HMS Talavera; there were no plans to post a new man to replace him *pro tem*, nor would there be until the current 'emergency' was over. Without most of her former sensor suite, no meaningful anti-aircraft or anti-submarine capability and consequently a crew reduced in number by some forty-four men, Talavera was suffering the indignity – albeit technical – of being designated a 'general purpose escort' rather than a fully-fledged 'fleet destroyer'. Whether she was a fit command for a Lieutenant-Commander or a full three-ringer was moot; but in the current emergency it was entirely reasonable and consistent with 'wartime

practice' to leave the ship in the hands of a two-and-a-half ringer who had already shown 'exceptional command ability in combat'.

'If you weren't up to the job, Peter,' his father had told him brusquely, 'I wouldn't leave Talavera in your hands for a minute.'

It was the first time his father had looked him in the eye and taken him seriously as a fellow naval officer. In fact, it had been the first time they had ever had anything like a man to man conversation about *anything*. It was all very disconcerting.

Talavera was to complete her hurried repairs as soon as possible and he was to report to Captain 'D', 7th Destroyer Squadron onboard HMS Scorpion as to the combat readiness of his command not later than noon tomorrow.

Miles Weiss was to stand-in as his Executive officer, in the interim maintaining his substantive rank of Lieutenant. In action Miles would remain the ship's Gunnery Officer. The allocation of damage control functions in the event of action would be reviewed by the Captain 'D', 7th Destroyer Squadron.

It seemed Peter Christopher's career in the Royal Navy was blossoming, despite his numerous self-confessed shortcomings.

Why didn't anybody else notice those painfully obvious shortcomings?

However, if his career was blossoming, the rest of his life seemed to be a mess, a hopeless muddle of emotions and miscalculations. He had thought his father was his worst enemy; now he could not even remember why. And Marija? He had been at Malta several days without so much as laying an eye on her. It was not clear if she even wanted to see him. This business with her brother might, he had no idea how, have fractured and doomed the one relationship which had carried him through the last fifteen months without losing his mind.

Was Marija in the building in front of him?

Possibly, watching him now...

"Hello, sir," said a friendly voice by his shoulder.

Lieutenant Alan Hannay smiled wanly, flicking a glance towards the upper windows of St Catherine's Hospital for Women. The Commander-in-Chief's flag lieutenant was ridiculously young-looking, boyish until one noted the perspicacity in his green grey eyes. He had come to the Royal Navy late after achieving a double first in medieval history and theology at Balliol, Oxford. The youngest son of a suffragan bishop who had perished in

the October War, he had navigated his way through Charterhouse and Oxford with effortless ease, rather like an eel negotiating its way up a muddy stream. The Royal Navy had not appealed to him overly but eventually, the time came when it was a question of following his father into the Church of England – tricky, he was an atheist – or pursuing a career in teaching. Neither had really appealed to him. Fortuitously, it transpired that his father had long been acquainted with Sir David Luce, at that time C-in-C Far East Fleet. Letters of recommendation had been exchanged and Alan Quartermain Hannay had found himself in the Navy; that was in another age, a few short weeks before the World blew itself up. As always, he had fallen on his feet and found himself appointed a supernumerary on the staff of the man unexpectedly catapulted a year or so earlier than planned into the post of First Sea Lord. Whence, Alan Quartermain Hannay had made himself indispensable first to one great man, and then for the last two months to a second.

Vice Admiral Sir Julian Christopher's son seemed a decent sort, a bit of a chip off the old block with an uncanny knack of being close to the action. Peter Christopher's summons to a cordial 'chat' with his illustrious father had triggered thought processes that had been working in the C-in-C's flag lieutenant's brain these last few weeks. Although he had not surreptitiously engineered this 'chance' encounter; it presented an opportunity that he did not plan to waste.

The tall Lieutenant-Commander blinked distractedly at the newcomer.

"Oh, hello, Hannay. Sorry I was miles away."

Alan Hannay could guess where his mind had been focused; decided that it was not a fruitful area of discussion.

"Forgive my impertinence, sir," he apologised. "I've got an errand to run in Sliema and I understand you've got a car waiting for you outside the Citadel?"

Peter Christopher pulled himself together.

"Er, yes. You're welcome to cadge a lift."

"That's awfully decent of you, sir."

Peter Christopher thought he caught a glimpse of a curtain twitching on the first floor out of the corner of his eye, and the ghost of a silhouette behind it for a moment. He might have been imagining things. He pulled himself together. The thing was to concentrate on getting his ship ready for sea. He

had less than twenty-four hours to get Talavera ship shape before he reported to his new commanding officer. When he presented himself to the Captain 'D' of the 7th Destroyer Squadron, HMS Talavera and her crew would be *ready for sea* in every way.

"Don't mention it." He turned on his heel and the shorter, youthful looking flag lieutenant barely eighteen months his junior fell into step with him. "So, what's it like working for my father, Lieutenant Hannay?"

It was not asked with any edge. From what Alan Hannay had heard about the Admiral's son the man was exactly what he gave every appearance of being, a decent, straight down the line sort of fellow. He had a reputation of being something of a technical wizard, too, except without the bookishness of many of the new 'scientific officers'.

"Very inspiring, sir," he replied diplomatically.

"Can I ask you an odd question?"

"By all means ask, sir."

Peter Christopher hesitated, almost thought better of it, and then asked the question anyway.

"What's the real story about Sam Calleja?"

The directness of it knocked the wind out of the younger man's sails. His step faltered and he had to scramble to catch up with HMS Talavera's commanding officer.

"I'm not with you, sir?"

"No? HMS Torquay is sabotaged after being floated out of a dock where Samuel Calleja worked as a senior yard foreman the day after the man goes missing, a Redcap working for the Admiral gets blown up trying to get into Samuel Calleja's workshop, there's some kind of island-wide manhunt and five terrorists are cornered and killed, or commit suicide, I don't know which. In the meantime I get the oddest visit from Dr Seiffert; and my father goes out of his way to tell me it is all a devilish plot that 'incidentally' implicated the Calleja family in the activities of this bloody Red Dawn movement, whatever that is, and Marija Calleja," he realised he was beginning rant and his voice was getting loud as they marched down the narrow streets back to the gate to the Citadel. "And Marija, whom I'd hoped to be the first person I saw when I finally came ashore in Malta, suddenly seems to be avoiding me like I've got leprosy!"

Alan Hannay understood that there was no *right* way to respond.

“I don’t know the truth of the Samuel Calleja imbroglio, sir,” he admitted. “Other, that is, than I am sure that whatever was going on had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the rest of his family. The man’s wife, Rosa, poor woman, was very nearly killed in the blast that did for Jim Siddall.”

“You knew Lieutenant Siddall?”

“Yes, sir. He was a good man. Salt of the earth. He was very protective of Marija and her family during the tenure of Sir Julian’s predecessor on the archipelago when things weren’t so good for her and her younger brother, Joe. Marija was terribly upset when he was killed.”

“Oh, right. I see. They weren’t...”

“They were just friends, sir. Jim Siddall has a wife back in England,” Alan Hannay added as if to remove all doubt. “As to your earlier questions. Sir Julian may, or may not, have finessed the *Times of Malta*, and other organs of public information to lighten the load being borne by the Calleja family, but the wild rumours that were in circulation were, in my humble opinion, no more than that. Just wild rumours.”

Peter Christopher breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief.

“This must all be hellish for Marija and her sister-in-law?”

“Yes, sir. Rosa Calleja was transferred to the hospital here in the Citadel at Sir Julian’s request to ensure her privacy. I understand that Marija spends every free moment with her.” He seized his opening to close the debate: “Which might go a long way to explaining Miss Calleja’s apparent aloofness since your arrival, sir.”

Alan Hannay was surprised and a little unnerved when the tall son of his all-powerful master threw him a hard, quizzical look that warned him in no uncertain terms not to ‘try to pull the other one’ again. It was a little disconcerting; the C-in-C’s flag lieutenant was entirely unaccustomed to being seen through so effortlessly.

“No, that’s probably not the truth and nothing but the truth, sir,” he said quickly.

A few minutes later Alan Hannay was immensely relieved to discover proof positive that his companion did not hold this minor obfuscation against him. As their ancient staff car rolled and jolted down the hill back towards Valletta Peter Christopher turned to him and asked, without preamble: “Why did you really want to get me alone, Lieutenant Hannay?”

“Er, I don’t...”

“You are the one man on the island who can click his fingers and make any kind of charabanc known to man materialise out of thin air. You don’t need to ask the acting-captain of a beaten up old destroyer for a lift? You certainly don’t have to chase after him outside HQ unless, of course, you don’t want anybody else overhearing what you have to say to me?”

The bearded petty officer behind the wheel of the car chortled like a bear with the choice of three full porridge bowls for breakfast.

“Don’t mind Petty Officer Griffin,” Peter Christopher smiled. “Griffin and the Talavera’s Master at Arms, Mr McCann, don’t like me going anywhere in public on my own in case the streets are full of assassins waiting to nail the C-in-C’s son’s scalp to their totem poles. I managed to escape their ‘protective clutches’ the other day but they haven’t let me get away with it again since.”

“Oh, I see. That’s really quite touching actually,” Alan Hannay granted, unusually perturbed by the other man’s frankness. “Oh, I feel very foolish now, sir.”

Peter Christopher was silent.

“The thing is,” his father’s flag lieutenant blurted in a rush, “I’ve got a little bit pigeon-holed on ‘the staff’ and I was hoping somebody – a captain such as yourself, for example - would take pity on me and request my services in a more ‘active service’ role?”

Chapter 42

Monday 3rd February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 61 Miles ESE of the Koufonisi Islands, Libyan Sea

There was little spare space on a submarine at the best of times. HMS Dreadnought only had berths for seventy of her one hundred and thirteen officers and men, many of whom were expected to 'hot bunk'. The only remotely private quarters on the boat were the officer's 'state rooms'; pokey little compartments not for the claustrophobically inclined. The only way that Simon Collingwood could accommodate the twenty-two refugees he had rescued – he had only been authorised to bring twenty onboard – was to surrender his officers' cabins to the newcomers and turn the Wardroom into a communal officers' hot-berthing space. His cabin was now the temporary home of two young women and the three small children in their care.

"God help us if we have to run silent, sir," Max Forton, his irrepressible Executive officer guffawed as the two men stood over the plot, considering their options.

"Well, at least we've stopped the kids running around the control room," his commanding officer commiserated. No Executive Officer liked having his boat transformed into a crèche any more than any rational captain liked having children or especially, women, on his vessel. Simon Collingwood was a traditionalist and the very idea of women onboard was anathema. "We're going to run short of provisions several days earlier than expected. As for routine medical supplies, they're practically exhausted now."

"We could make Limassol in two days, sir?"

"I don't want to be off station that long." He did not want to be 'off station' at all. Taking on board the refugees had been a gamble; if they could provide significant new information about the situation on land it would be worth it, if not, he would have recklessly impaired the fighting efficiency and endurance of this command to no good purpose.

Simon Collingwood still remembered the faces of the men, women and children he had been ordered to expel from the protective steel cocoon of the Dreadnought's pressure hull on the morning after the October War. There

had been no more strikes like the giant airburst over Morecombe Bay – the closest strike to where Dreadnought had been fitting out in the graving dock at Barrow-in-Furness – but he had not known the war was over at the time. This time around he was not going to let down the two old men, seven women and thirteen children, several no more than babes in arms, he had taken under *his* protection. His conscience simply would not let him do it a second time.

The refugees, including the older children, were still being interviewed. Everything they learned was being carefully distilled into a series of flash communications with Malta.

"I'd guess we are sixty to seventy miles east of the Second Squadron's picket line," Max Forton speculated, prodding the plot with a pencil.

The Amphion class conventional diesel-electric submarines of the 2nd Submarine Squadron based at Malta ought to be in position by now. Their task was to act as a tripwire if any of the heavy units sighted by the Dreadnought, or by earlier aerial reconnaissance attempted to approach the Maltese Archipelago.

The A class boats incorporated many of the lessons learned in World War II and included innovations stolen from later Kriegsmarine U-boats. In 1945 the Germans had led the World in submarine design; if the Germans had got enough of their revolutionary new boats into the North Atlantic in time the war might not have ended the way it did. However, the Amphions, in common with many post-Second War designs were the end result of too many compromises. The A class was old technology poorly applied, they had to spend far too much time on the surface recharging their batteries and their underwater performance left them horribly vulnerable to modern anti-submarine tactics. Nevertheless, before the advent of the advanced new Oberon and Porpoise class conventional boats Collingwood had once dreamed of commanding one of the old Amphions, or another of the obsolete boats of her general type and specification, most of his career. Before the October War even that had seemed like an impossible dream.

"We'll avoid getting much closer. I suspect we'll hear or see them long before they know we've been and gone," the captain of the most advanced submarine in any navy in the World outside of the United States Navy declared smugly. "But we won't tempt providence."

"Surface contact bearing zero-six-zero degrees. Many screws but very

distant."

Here in the Libyan Sea the water was over ten thousand feet deep. There were no underwater mountains, no shoaling shores, reefs or sandbanks to clutter and distort, bend or refract sound waves. Big ships advertised their presence many, many miles away. The only things that stopped sound travelling tens, perhaps, scores or hundreds of miles were minor fluctuations in temperature and salinity levels in the water column. The Mediterranean was a notoriously 'salty' sea, one of the few things going for a submariner in its relatively narrow, congested confines.

Simon Collingwood checked the depth reading.

"Bring the boat up to one-seven-five feet if you please, Number One."

At the new depth they would run silent, listen again and establish if the source of the sound was approaching, or moving away. If the listening conditions were better at the lesser depth they would hold at that level, otherwise they would drop back down again into the blackness of the deep. Dreadnought could play this game for weeks on end; the Amphions picketing along their tripwire in the West had no such option. They had to spend several hours surfaced every day or day-and-a-half, or their crews would suffocate and their batteries would run flat.

The surface contact was louder, nearer at a depth of one hundred and seventy-five feet but still relatively distant; at least ten miles away. The problem was that the background noise of many propellers could easily be masking the presence of vessels steaming between Dreadnought's ultra-sensitive hydrophones, and the main concentration of whatever group or convoy of ships was slowly passing from the south-east to the north-west.

A dull, faraway thunder peeled through the depths.

"Periscope depth!" Simon Collingwood wanted to have a look at what was going on before he contemplated his tactical options. There was nothing quite like the human eye for quickly, accurately, viscerally assessing a situation. "Would somebody please ask our passengers to be very, very quiet until further notice!"

This would be a less than straightforward business; hardly any of the 'passengers' spoke English. Thus far most of the interrogation – actually very gentle interviewing over mugs of hot chocolate, biscuits, dried fruits, and sweets for the kids that members of the crew had eagerly donated from their personal stashes – had been conducted in halting conversational French,

pigeon Cypriot, snatches of demotic Greek that a couple of the officers recollected from their prep school days, and literally, by drawing cartoons and by the liberal employment of sign language. The resourcefulness and patience of the average Royal Navy officer and rating was practically limitless, when confronted by frightened women and children whose safety had been entrusted to their tender mercies.

The small, dirty tramp steamer was trailing a plume of black smoke from her single, overly high, stack. A blunt stem, a raised fo'c'sle and transom deck, pole masts fore and aft of the low, blocky amidships bridge superstructure, rust streaked and relatively high in the water, the merchantman wallowed in the short five to six feet high waves piled up by the gusting westerly winds. Now and then white spume rose over her forepeak and she was hidden from sight as either the periscope or her hull fell into a trough in the seas.

The steamer was less than a mile away.

"Down periscope! Make our depth one hundred feet!" He reported what he had seen to the control room. "Two to three-thousand-ton tramp steamer. No flags. Heading north, making a lot of smoke but not exactly pouring it on. She couldn't have been making more than seven or eight knots. The sea state is deteriorating. No other surface contacts in sight."

Max Forton pursed his lips.

They had all felt the boat's smooth, undisturbed progress though the water alter as she had hovered at periscope depth, her motion mildly perturbed by the rising seas above.

"The last forecast we received from Malta warned that a gale was going to blow up sometime in the next couple of days, Skipper."

Collingwood nodded.

North-westerly force six building to force eight. By Atlantic standards a short-lived minor blow that would be over in two or three days; a little unseasonal for this time of year. The seasons and the weather had been messed up since the war. In any event, *winter* in the Eastern Mediterranean was a pussy cat in comparison with the beast it often was in less temperate zones.

"What are the other contacts doing?" He demanded.

"Speed and course unchanged, sir. Range twenty miles plus!"

The commanding officer of HMS Dreadnought frowned in concentration.

If the surface contacts were the Admiral Kutuzov and her escorts; why were their movements so apparently random?

If that was the Kutuzov group on the plot why had they let a slow, helpless tramp steamer go about her business unmolested?

Why was the Kutuzov leading her screen towards the shelter of Crete on account of the sort of stormy weather any Royal Navy destroyer captain would regard as moderately invigorating but nothing remotely worthy of more than a brief passing note in his log?

The galling thing was that he was as sure as he could be – it was not as if any other task forces had sailed over or around him in the last couple of days – that the distant surface contacts had to be the Kutuzov group; and he had absolutely no idea what they were doing.

Again, the faraway drum roll of detonations kissed Dreadnought's cold steel sides. Had the killers on the Kutuzov stumbled across another hapless victim somewhere over the horizon? If so, how had that lumbering merchantman steaming only a few miles away escaped a similar fate?

Was this what it was going to be like from now on?

Fighting an enemy who obeyed none of the normal rites and practices of twentieth century warfare?

Chapter 43

Tuesday 4th February 1964
St Catherine's Hospital for Women, Mdina

Marija Calleja felt groggy, her head hurt and she was utterly humiliated. Her 'sister', Rosa, had tried to comfort her, and Margo was clucking at her like her Mama used to when she was a teenager.

"How many fingers?" The Director of the St Catherine's Hospital for Women asked. *Again!*

"Two!" Marija retorted churlishly. "The same number as before."

Rosa Calleja, her brother's widow squeezed her hand. Yesterday they had unwrapped the bandages around Rosa's head. Patches of her skull had been shaved and her healing wounds, mercifully mostly superficial, and sutures were crusty and ugly looking. Her injured right eye was still half closed but that she retained vision in the eye, - blurred still - was a minor miracle and the specialist from the clinic at Msida had sounded confident when he declared she would gradually recover 'more or less full function', *eventually*. Of the curvaceous, twinkle-eyed bride in the pictures of her wedding day three years ago there was little sign. Her dislocated left shoulder was only now regaining movement, and her right foot and lower leg was solidly encased in a big, clunking cast. Moving from one chair to another, just standing up was an exercise fraught with perils.

Yesterday afternoon Marija had been helping her sister to her feet when Rosa had happened to glance out of first floor window of the treatment room.

'That's him!' Rosa had declaimed hoarsely.

Marija, worried that what she had actually heard was a cry of pain did not immediately register Rosa's meaning, or her urgency. She was focused on supporting her sister in case she stumbled; nothing else really mattered for a moment. It was only when she was confident that Rosa was steady, safe, that she asked: 'Who?'

'The Admiral's son!'

Marija had blinked uncomprehendingly at the other woman.

'Peter!' Rosa had gesticulated painfully, jabbing an arm towards the

window. A thick lace drape was hung across the old tall window for the sake of the patients' modesty. '*Your* Peter!'

'Peter Christopher is not *my* anything, sister,' Marija had protested before she finally made sense of what her sister-in-law had actually said to her. 'Where is Peter?' She had belatedly inquired, sudden consternation furrowing her brow.

'He's in the piazza talking to that nice Mister Hannay!'

Marija had guided Rosa to the treatment couch and made absolutely certain that her sister was not about to fall off it before she had turned and swallowing hard, cautiously pulled back a corner of the curtain and sneaked a look down into St Paul's Square.

Her heart had almost stopped, and then palpitated insanely.

She had stepped back as if a serpent had reared up in front of her.

Three times she had gone down to the Sliema waterfront and gazed across the Creek at the sleek destroyer. *Her* Peter had been on that ship. She had hoped to catch a glimpse of him again, but he had been invisible although men walked and clambered over the decks and superstructure constantly. Last night she had seen the welding arcs burning like stars in the near distance, sparks flying in the night. Other destroyers had eased back into the anchorage in the last day. HMS Scorpion flying the *Leader's Pennant*, and HMS Aisne, immaculate and complete in every way that HMS Talavera, her war-torn sister ship, was not. Marija had felt so guilty slipping away, staring across the waters when she ought to be on duty at the hospital Mdina or comforting her Mama at home in Sliema. It was one thing for her father to tell her that her Mama had her aunts to watch over her, and that her brother Joe was keeping their spirits up, but her place was...

Where exactly was her place now?

She had thought her place was to wait for Peter; to explore that indefinable thing which had grown between them over the years, hoping it developed into something so unlikely as to be beyond her girlish dreams. She had never expected him to come to Malta and sweep her off her feet, to bowl her over with talk of love. But she had hoped he would be her friend and her companion, a solace in every way he wanted to be, and she to him in whatever ways she was able. Marriage and children had never really figured, but in Peter Christopher she had invested her faith in the future and now all that seemed spoiled, broken and beyond repair. Her elder brother had

destroyed the life she had thought she was living; smashed a hole in it as big as the one in the side of HMS Torquay that bomb had torn two months ago. Like that helpless ship, her hopes and dreams had foundered. If she could have found it in herself she would have hated Samuel; the trouble was that she felt only pity. Pity for him and a bottomless well of shame for what he had done.

And now Peter was standing not twenty feet from her talking to Admiral Christopher's flag lieutenant, Alan Hannay!

'Well, what are you waiting for, sister?' Rosa had demanded. It was the first time her beaten and demoralised sister-in-law had found her old self, a hint of the proud young woman who had been to the best schools, and never wanted for anything in her privileged upbringing by her wealthy landowning, *Old Maltese* family.

Marija had stared at her in confusion.

Since Jim Siddall's death Rosa had opened her soul to her, and she had reciprocated. Rosa had recounted nights when Samuel would toss and turn in bed, cry out in the night, talk insensibly as if he was having a conversation with a mad man. In retrospect she was convinced that some small part of her dead husband had recoiled against the monstrous things he had done, and the murder of so many innocent people. Marija had spoken to Rosa about her childhood injuries, the long journey to becoming the person she had become and how, through even the worst times, Peter Christopher had been her strength.

'You love that boy!' Rosa had hissed. 'What are you thinking of? He's outside in the piazza! Do something, sister!'

Still Marija had hesitated.

What of her pride?

What of the dishonour she would carry with her like a shroud forever?

How could she face the man she had spurned thus far?

What must he think of her?

After all these years and after what he had been through in the last couple of months; whatever must he think of her for spurning him so cruelly?

Her feet were rooted to the floor.

'Go sister!"

Suddenly, she had been stumbling and rushing, unsteadily down the stone steps to the ground floor. She had burst out into the watery sunshine of

the winter morning.

But Peter had gone!

She had panicked, desperately looked around.

Peter was walking away with Alan Hannay, they seemed deep in conversation.

Marija opened her mouth to call; no sound came forth. She waved at the retreating backs of the two men. People in the piazza gave her odd looks: *What on earth was the young woman in the pale blue nursing uniform doing?*

The footing within the Citadel – old uneven cobbles - was particularly treacherous for her; not a problem normally because she would walk at her own pace. Attempting to hurry within the Citadel she always ended up her throwing out her arms to maintain her balance as if she was a tight-rope walker in a high wind, or alternatively, stepping so close to the high walls that she could at any moment extend an arm to stop herself taking a tumble.

However, the two men were striding out, in a moment they would have turned the corner out of St Paul's Square into Villegaignon Street.

'Peter!' She called, hardly a sound escaping her dry throat.

She was panicking now.

Losing sight of the two men she began to *run*.

Marija Calleja had not run since that German bomb had entombed her and her little brother, Joe, in the cellar in Birgu on that terrible afternoon in 1942. In her dreams she often imagined running across a road, a field, down a beach into the sea; but she had never actually run since that day when she had dragged her infant brother into the illusory shelter of that dreadful place of death. They had been literally snatched off the street by neighbours, taken inside as the first deafening explosions tore through the surrounding buildings...

That was the last time Marija had tried to run.

Until today, over twenty years later...

She had been running before she knew what she was doing.

Her feet seemed to be flying.

And then she was *flying*...

'Marija, sweetheart!' Margo Seiffert had repeated, worriedly. That was odd because nothing ever really worried Margo.

Why am I lying on the ground?

Marija had blinked at her mentor and friend, the woman whom her own

Mama called ‘your second Mama’ with sincere sisterly fondness and adoration. She realised her face was wet, sticky and she felt a little nauseas. For a moment she thought she was going to be sick. She must have blacked out for a few seconds because strong arms were carrying her inside the hospital the next time she slipped into and out of consciousness. Shortly afterwards, she had been very, very sick. Mostly on herself.

That was yesterday.

Even though she had not been sick since last night, this morning Margo and women whom she had previously regarded as friends, had steadfastly refused to allow her to get out of bed, other than to pay closely supervised but necessary calls of nature.

“I am perfectly all right, Margo,” Marija protested tetchily.

“No,” the older woman told her, “you are not, Nurse Calleja.”

Margo only resorted to *Nurse Calleja* when Marija was being *really* stubborn. Or being stupid, or acting like a child, or being argumentative. Marija did not think she was being or doing, any of those things. She simply wanted to get out of bed!

“Mirror,” Margo sighed, resignedly.

Marija looked at herself.

Or rather, she catalogued the damage. It was not as if she was unaccustomed to viewing her own numerous old scars. She had a very respectable collection – some quite grotesque - of those on her slender frame, enough to make any sober man blanch she had realised from earliest puberty.

If one could not be honest with one self about these things who could one be honest with?

“Three stitches?” She scowled, viewing the leaking gash in her eyebrow above her right eye. Her hand carefully explored her puffy cheek and explored the lower orbit of the eye which was half-shut and mottling black and blue. She looked like she had been in a boxing match. Her nose was sore, she examined it tentatively.

“I don’t think you broke your nose when you fell over,” Margo assured her, turning sternly matriarchal. “In fact, I don’t think you broke anything but how I honestly don’t know!”

“Peter was in the piazza,” Marija started, stopped. Tears were trickling down her bruised and swollen cheeks.

“Yes, I know,” her friend said, a little impatiently.

“I tried to catch up with him.”

“Rosa tells me you were running.”

“Yes, I don’t know how...”

“Well, you were. You were running right up until the moment you fell flat on your face, Nurse Calleja!”

Sometime in the last few minutes Marija had stopped feeling humiliated. She was still feeling sorry for herself, and from the evidence in the mirror she had a perfect right to feel sorry for herself. Long experience had taught her that self-knowledge often comes at a painful personal cost. She had wanted to be with Peter Christopher so much that she had run – albeit only half-a-dozen steps – for the first time in over twenty years to be with him. If she had done that once she could do it again!

If and when her friends ever allowed her out of this bed!

“I want to get up!” She declared.

“So that you can run after Peter again?”

Marija gave the older woman a determinedly vexed look.

“If I have to! Yes!”

Margo Seiffert considered this briefly, before she smiled and shook her head.

“I don’t think that will be necessary, sweetheart.”

Now Marija was beyond bewilderment.

“*Your* young man is outside.”

Marija blinked.

“If Lieutenant Hannay hadn’t been holding him down he would have been climbing up the walls by now.” Margo smiled. “I was going to keep him on tenterhooks a little longer. But I was so sorry for him I promised I’d ask you if you wanted to see him before he has to go back to his ship.”

Chapter 44

Tuesday 4th February 1964
Cabinet Office Briefing Room, Corpus Christi College, Oxford

Her Majesty Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and of Her Other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith entered the ancient room ahead of her Prime Minister. She smiled to the two dozen men and three other women in the ancient wood-panelled borrowed lecture hall as she carefully, and regally – in the quiet, unfussy way which was her signature – descended the steps to the semi-circular space beneath the great, wide blackboard. Privately, the Monarch had entertained many doubts about the apparently reckless rush with which her Government was attempting to transform Christ Church and the surrounding colleges into the new seat of the Mother of Parliaments. Several of her qualms – but not all – had been assuaged by her whistle stop tour of the work in progress around St Aldate's. She had expected the military to be more overtly visible, and for things to be a little more chaotic; in both preconceptions she had been, to her relief, disappointed. The whole of Oxford was alive, buzzing with the coming re-opening of the House of Commons in the exquisite setting of the Great Hall of Christ Church College.

The Queen turned and faced the gathering of newly nominated Privy Counsellors, allowing herself a ghost of a smile. The men and the women settling into the benches in front and above her included many unlikely candidates, as many opponents and critics of the Unity Administration of the United Kingdom as outright supporters. She was beginning to understand that this was a trait of her new, and remarkable, Prime Minister. Margaret Thatcher did not waste time manoeuvring around obstacles, she confronted them head on. Moreover, the closer she approached that obstacle, the faster she went!

Seated at the left hand of the bottom step, the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West, Enoch Powell was hurtfully erect in his Sovereign's presence, wearing his terrible scars like a badge of honour.

The Queen stepped towards him, motioning him *not* to rise to his feet. The poor man would have had quite enough difficulty in journeying from his hospital bed to this place without her wishing to cause him further, completely unnecessary discomfort.

"I am glad that you were able to be with us this morning, Mr Powell."

The gaunt, tortured figure bowed his head.

"It is my honour to be at this place at this hour, Your Majesty."

The legend of how the terribly injured MP had risen to his feet and gone to Margaret Thatcher's aid when the gunman had opened fire during the 'great debate' at Cheltenham Town Hall, had granted Enoch Powell an odd cult status of exactly the kind he detested. That he had suffered a painful flesh wound in the episode was simply grist to the mill. Having tried to shield the Angry Widow - his most implacable political foe – from the assassin's bullets, he had collapsed and been rushed to hospital.

In the aftermath, even the iron heart of the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West had been softened – a little – by the obviously sincere solicitude of his rival. Margaret Thatcher had visited him, very privately, in hospital the next day and wished him a speedy recovery.

'Our destiny is to continue our debate in a place fitted to the occasion,' she had informed him. 'I look forward to that day.'

The Queen focused on the business of this day, lifting her face to meet every eye in the room.

"I apologise to you all for the brevity and the cursory nature of your admission to the ranks of *My* Privy Council."

The thirty-seven-year-old recently bereaved mother, whose husband was still in the early stages of a long road to recovery from the injuries he had sustained during the regicidal attack on Balmoral which had claimed the life of their infant son, Andrew, was not and never would be entirely comfortable with the modified constitutional role she had assumed in recent weeks. Having been brought up all her life to be apolitical, completely above the fray, she had been obliged by the absolute necessity of the situation to rebuild a sense of national unity to stand, foursquare behind *Her* Ministers and *Her* Government. Gone were the days when the Royal Assent was a rubber stamp framed in archaic Norman French; in this brave new World she exercised real power of a kind that would have been intimately familiar to her early Georgian antecedents.

“In these difficult times *your* Queen needs the counsel of patriots of all parties and political persuasions. More than that, it is vital that the true dimensions of the threats we face, and the challenges we must surmount, are understood by as many of our people as possible. *My* Government *will* deliver everything it has promised in terms of political reforms and the normalisation and relaxation where possible, of the harsh civil order and austerity regime under which most of our people still live. However, before we can ‘heal ourselves’ we must first confront the deadly perils facing us and our vital interests in the wider World. *My* Government is convinced that if we fail to do battle with our enemies abroad, those enemies will inevitably seek us out in our own land. What then would become of our efforts to rebuild? What then would become of the great reconstruction that fills all our dreams?”

The quietness was neutrally deferential.

“It is *My* intention to locate *My* family close to the seat of Parliament in Oxford. Plans are afoot to this end at Blenheim Palace at Woodstock. Much of that estate is already in use by the Ministry of Defence but one wing of the great house is being readied to receive myself, my children and the Queen Mother. Prince Philip will join us when he is fit enough to withstand the journey.”

The Queen glanced to Margaret Thatcher as if to say ‘one more thing and I will surrender the floor to you’.

“Please take me at my word when I say that I am fully cognisant of the uneasy constitutional role I have been required to fulfil in this crisis. My primary concern in moving from Scotland to be near *My* Parliament is to be closer to the representatives of *My People*. The Sovereign cannot and should not be aloof in times such as these.”

This said the diminutive woman took a chair and her Prime Minister stepped forward.

“Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen,” Margaret Thatcher began, sparing a moment to flash a tight-lipped smile at Enoch Powell, “in normal times I would have been required to account for my actions before the House of Commons several times by now at Prime Minister’s Questions. Until that institution is restored I propose regular sessions such as this. While the format and protocol of *PMQs* is neither appropriate nor workable in the current circumstances I hope this will go some way to discharging my

responsibility to communicate with the elected representatives of *our* People. It will also serve to better inform you, and I, in our future private and or, public dealings. Some matters of State are rightly secret; but most need not be. That will be my guiding principle in our discourse."

Enoch Powell made as if to speak. He remained silent, waved away his partially formed, unspoken objection with his good hand.

"These are grave times," Margaret Thatcher declared, setting her face against adversity and becoming the living embodiment of her alto ego, the Angry Widow.

"You may have heard of a sinister and mendacious movement known as Red Dawn."

Everybody had heard that expression, it was like a curse that no amount of secrecy, D Notices or misinformation could crush.

"It is the unanimous opinion of the Chiefs of Staff Committee that *all* our Crown Colonies and Possessions in the Mediterranean, and all the territories of our remaining friends and of the neutrals alike in that part of the World, are threatened by hostile forces which survived the October War."

She let this sink in.

"Admiral," she went on, the Commander-in-Chief of All British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre having been promoted full Admiral, retrospectively effective as of 1st February, "Sir Julian Christopher anticipates that the Island of Cyprus will be invaded shortly. Given that Crete already appears to be in the hands of Red Dawn, as is the entire Aegean Basin, and that Greece, notwithstanding pockets of determined resistance – will surely fall in the next few hours or days, the strategic outlook in the Eastern Mediterranean is bleak. It might be that Red Dawn's immediate objectives are the subjugation of Greece and the southern Balkans, and the capture of Cyprus. It is more likely, given the way Red Dawn seems to operate and the naval forces – mostly former Soviet vessels – that we have detected exercising in the Sea of Crete and elsewhere, that Yugoslavia and Italy, and inevitably, Malta will be the next targets."

"Forgive me, Prime Minister," Enoch Powell interjected. "Surely we must hold Cyprus as a bulwark against further Red Dawn adventures in Asia Minor and the Levant?"

Margaret Thatcher shook her head.

"We cannot hold Cyprus, Mr Powell. Any more than we could hold

Crete in the Second War. If we had the active support of other countries in the region, as opposed to the wary neutrality of the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Israelis, and even the Jordanians, we might have some hope of mounting a meaningful defence of Cyprus. Frankly, we are too weak to be strong everywhere. Operation Manna saved our people from starvation and the worst ravages of the winter; but only at the price of exhausting the Fleet and scattering our men and resources across the Commonwealth. The cream of our offensive ground forces was destroyed in Germany in the October War, ever since the war the Home Army has been distracted in Ulster, or committed to supporting the Police, or guarding vital national assets like power stations, ports and communication hubs. Every spare man we have, the equivalent to perhaps ten front line infantry battalions has been sent to the Mediterranean. Every available ship that is in any sense fit to fight has been sent or is even now departing for Gibraltar or Malta. Likewise, several of our surviving V-Bombers have been transferred to Gibraltar and Malta. However, we cannot be strong everywhere and Sir Julian Christopher refuses to reinforce an untenable situation on Cyprus. In the next few hours HMS Blake will sail from Limassol carrying away the thirty-eight nuclear warheads previously held at the CENTO storage facility at RAF Akrotiri. The majority of the aircraft based at Akrotiri and their support personnel have already been evacuated to Malta and Egypt." She quirked half a smile. "Who would have thought that of all the leaders in the Middle East, that Mr Nasser would be the one man who has grasped the true implications of the catastrophe threatening the whole region?"

"Will the Egyptians fight with us?" Enoch Powell asked flatly.

"They may," Margaret Thatcher replied. "Their ports and airfields in the Nile Delta are already open to us. The Foreign Secretary tells me that President Nasser is beset with factions inside his regime and his military, the Army mainly, who are intrinsically isolationist and anti-British."

"It was ever thus," the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West agreed. "If Cyprus falls, then what?"

"If Cyprus falls I pray that we can hold on long enough for our American allies come to our rescue."

Chapter 45

Tuesday 4th February 1964
Headquarter of the Commander-in-Chief, Mdina, Malta

The flash signal from RAF Akrotiri landed on Admiral Sir Julian Christopher's desk like a hand grenade. Except with this metaphorical live hand grenade there was no way he could put the safety pin back into the 'locked' position because the bomb had already gone off.

> **Initial reports indicate the detonation to be in the general range of ten to twenty kilotons. It is likely that the bomb was onboard a small ferry which had made the trip from Turkey heavily loaded with refugees and was being escorted into port at Limassol in a sinking condition by HMS Londonderry. The detonation occurred approximately three hundred yards from where HMS Blake was moored. HMS Blake has partially capsized and is lying in forty feet of water. The wreck of HMS Londonderry partially obstructs the deep-water channel of the inner port. No information regarding casualties is available at this time.**

Up until that moment the worst news that morning had been that his flag lieutenant, Alan Hannay, had respectfully requested a transfer to sea duty. His request had included the supplementary information that he was aware of several vacancies in the wardroom of HMS Talavera, and that he had already established that the commanding officer of the said ship would be happy to have him aboard in the capacity of Supply Officer and Purser. Notwithstanding, he was unlikely to find a flag lieutenant half as capable as young Hannay, in good conscience the C-in-C did not have the heart to stand in the boy's way. In times like these if a man wanted to put his hand in the fire; who was he to hold him back?

HMS Dreadnought's report of a tramp steamer steaming unmolested beneath the guns of the Admiral Kutuzov group suddenly assumed ominous – actually, chilling – new significance. Another such vessel had clearly sailed

into Limassol harbour. Any ship laden with refugees, or apparently fleeing from the madness in the Aegean or Asia Minor could be a potential thermonuclear booby trap and would henceforth have to be treated accordingly.

This just got worse!

The Blake and her cargo of thirty-eight nuclear warheads lay on the bottom of Limassol harbour. At least one of her escorts was lost – partially blocking the harbour, it seemed - and most of the other vessels in the port would be damaged or sinking. A bomb that size would have wrecked most of the port, killed practically everybody above ground half-a-mile away and seriously burned and injured anybody within a mile. In a fiery split second the planned, tactical evacuation of Cyprus was now so morbidly problematic as to be impossible.

And what was to stop the bastards using further nukes?

Julian Christopher went to his door.

"I need to speak to Air Vice-Marshal French," he said urbanely, as if he needed to have a chat with his deputy about a cocktail party. "And round up the Operations Staff. We'll assemble in the Situation Room in fifteen minutes."

Daniel French listened intently for some moments. The phone line clicked and whistled; proof the scrambler was doing its job.

"This is a bad business," the other man agreed. "Do you want to delay going to War Stations until we have more information, sir?"

"No. We'll hit the alarm button now, Dan. I can't spare frigates and destroyers to maintain an exclusion zone around the Archipelago; I'll leave that to the RAF. If you could talk to your American opposite number please. There are more US aircraft at Luqa and Ta'Qali than British, so if he's willing to throw his lot in with us, so be it."

Down in the bowels of the building, sunken into the living rock upon which the ancient Citadel was founded, a dozen worried men were awaiting the Commander-in-Chief's arrival. From their expressions each man had been drastically recalibrating worst-case scenarios.

Julian Christopher understood how important it was that he set the right tone. The Staff needed to know that although what had happened at Limassol was a setback that the C-in-C was still in control of the situation.

"The bad news is that my flag lieutenant has asked for an immediate

transfer to sea duties," Julian Christopher announced sardonically as the circle of officers opened to allow him to walk up to the big table where several maps were partly unfurled. "It seems the young man is in cahoots with my son, the *Hero of Lampedusa*." This drew a couple of snorts of amusement and generally lessened the gloom. "I've sent Hannay on his way to the Talavera. No point delaying at times such as these. However, while it would be churlish to complain overmuch, I fear that young Hannay's absence means that the refreshments normally available at these conferences might not be up to the normal standard."

"Bad show!" Somebody sympathised.

There were other guffaws of strained amusement.

"The situation isn't good," Julian Christopher went on. From his tone and confident bearing a disinterested observer might have concluded this was a routine meeting and he was keen to get it over and done with so he could enjoy his luncheon. "I for one didn't anticipate what has happened in Limassol. Nobody did. As of now I am declaring War Stations throughout the Theatre of Operations and all War Book Options are in play *except* Arc Light. Dan French is organising an extended air blockade of the Archipelago. A one-hundred-mile War Exclusion Zone is now in effect and any unidentified vessel or aircraft entering that Zone without prior authorization will be liable to attack without warning. I will be detailing off the Sixth Destroyer Squadron and elements of the Twenty-Second Escort Flotilla to intercept targets which refuse to turn back when challenged by aircraft."

"What do we do about Cyprus, sir?"

"The Victorious Battle Group will proceed to Cyprus to support the evacuation of all personnel, their dependents and all portable military assets. V-Bomber conventional bombing strikes will be scheduled if enemy ground activity interdicts the evacuation. All non-movable military assets will be destroyed so as to not fall into enemy hands. If Red Dawn attempts to salvage any munitions of any type from HMS Blake I will request an Arc Light strike on the ship."

Julian Christopher had spoken crisply, with clarity and unshakable conviction. But just in case any of his senior staff had not got the message he laid on a second layer of indefatigable certitude.

"Please make it clear in all your words and actions that I will defend the

Maltese Archipelago to the last man. This is where we stand and this is where we will remain." He looked around the table. "No surrender, gentlemen."

Chapter 46

Tuesday 4th February 1964
St Catherine's Hospital for Women, Mdina

"I think Marija and her visitor would probably like a little privacy," Margo Seiffert suggested wryly, extending a helping hand to Rosa Calleja. Another woman dressed in the pale blue of the hospital's nursing staff supported the injured young woman from the other side.

Suddenly, Peter Christopher was alone with Marija.

For long moments neither of them spoke.

The man's eyes clouded with concern as he surveyed the woman's desperately bruised face. One eye was black, the other threatening to follow suit. The wound in her eyebrow looked horribly angry and the tears trickling down Marija's cheeks cut him to the quick.

"I," he began, lost his courage and had to start anew. "I imagined, dreamed really, about this day. About all the ways we might meet at last." He was standing at the foot of the bed, his hands in constant nervous motion. "But life is a funny old thing, isn't it?"

Marija nodded mutely.

Peter moved a step closer, hesitated.

"You've had a rough old time of it lately?" He muttered.

"So, have you," she retorted timidly, shyly, horribly self-conscious.

I must look awful!

He shrugged.

"Dr Seiffert said you knocked your head? That you had a touch of concussion?"

"Yes..."

"I had a taste of that a couple of months ago. I felt groggy for a couple of days afterwards."

Marija did not know how it happened but she was beginning to feel less ill, less edgy, less afraid, more herself, normal. Her normal self would have held out her hand, sought out physical contact. And that was what, intuitively she did now; she extended her right hand towards the man.

He took it and with immense care and perched on the side of her bed.

Her hand disappeared into his much larger paws.

Marija studied his face. White scar lines of recently healed injuries on his brow were merging with his new Mediterranean tan. She had expected him to be more boyish, joking, but that was not *this* man because right now he could not be that man. He had been through too much lately and he was too worried, too frightened for her.

"How did you imagine we would meet for the first time?" She asked, involuntarily lowering her eyes.

"I'd be on the deck of a big ship and you'd be on the quayside," he said, relaxing a fraction. "You'd be standing apart from the crowd and when I spotted you you'd be looking straight at me."

"Men!" Marija scoffed gently. "I was on the waterfront at Sliema the night when you brought HMS Talavera into the Creek. Lieutenant Hannay asked me to meet you when you came ashore with your father." She made herself meet the man's gaze. "I could not. Not after what my brother did..."

"I don't care about any of that."

"But you should. Your father is a great man," she pursed her lips, "and scandal follows great men..."

Peter Christopher pressed Marija's hand.

She looked away.

"You are going to have real shiners on both eyes," Peter observed sympathetically. He grinned and she mirrored his expression momentarily.

"It is not funny."

"No," he agreed.

"I was stupid," Marija declared, finding her everyday voice for the first time. "I shouldn't have locked myself away here like a nun."

"A nun?"

"That is what I have been all my life, I think."

The man frowned, not knowing quite where she was going.

"Yesterday, I was stupid," she reiterated. "I saw you in the piazza. And then you were gone. I thought I had lost you forever," she shrugged philosophically, "so I *ran* after you! How stupid is that?"

"You *ran*?"

"Like I once ran when I was six years old."

Peter Christopher wanted to wrap her in his arms.

But how do I do that without hurting her?

"I ran for three, four, maybe five paces," Marija continued, recounting her 'stupidity' with very nearly happy self-deprecation, "before I remembered that I cannot run." She gesticulated at her face with her free hand. "As you see, Peter."

"But for four or five paces you *did* run, Marija," the man pointed out with a pride that stung his eyes and threatened to raise a lump in his throat.

"I thought I was about to lose you forever..."

"No chance!" He murmured vehemently.

And before he knew it Marija Calleja was in his arms, her face buried in his shoulder and they were both crying.

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher was over an hour late reporting to Captain 'D' in his immaculate day room at the stern of the Weapon class destroyer Scorpion. The 'Leader' of the 7th Destroyer Squadron was moored fifty yards away from HMS Talavera.

"I apologise for my lateness, sir," he blurted as soon as the cabin door closed at his back. "I have no excuse. It was my fault."

Captain 'D' was a greying, generously proportioned man of around average height with alert, possibly querulous green eyes that appraised the junior officer with keen intent for several long seconds.

Nicholas Davey had left the Royal Navy, retiring to build and race yachts on his fifty-fourth birthday. That had been in 1961. After the October War he had volunteered his experience and his services to the Admiralty in its relocated HQ buildings in Plymouth. He had flown out to Malta shortly before Christmas to take command of the Scorpion. On Boxing Day, he had been promoted to Captain and directed to reform the 7th Destroyer Squadron, collecting together the available Battle and Weapon class Fast Air Detection conversions into a single homogenous fighting unit.

"Goodness me," he grunted, ponderously rising from behind his desk where he had been sifting through his other captain's readiness reports. "Damn me if you are the spitting image of your father when he was younger!"

Peter Christopher deduced from his new commander's tone and general demeanour that he was not in trouble for his tardiness in making an appearance.

"So people say, sir," he concurred flatly, still standing rigidly at

attention.

“The C-in-C’s flag lieutenant sent me a message you’d been delayed at HQ,” Captain Davey guffawed. “There’s supposed to be a huge flap on this morning! Presumably, we’ll hear about how it affects us sooner or later, what?” He stuck out his hand in welcome. His grip was firmly enthusiastic. “Sit yourself down, you look like you could do with a stiff drink, young man.”

“My, er,” Peter Christopher struggled to explain, not quite crediting what he was about to voice, “my, er, fiancée had a nasty fall yesterday, sir. Getting bombed off Cape Finisterre and the Lampedusa affair didn’t shake me up half as much as...”

Captain Davey laughed.

“You’re getting hitched?”

“As soon as possible, sir. Although, Marija says that won’t be for a month or so. Her face is a bit of a mess at the moment and her mother will want to make her wedding dress, and she has a big family, and,” he halted, grimaced apologetically. “Sorry, sir. I’m sure you’ve got more important things to do than hear me witter on this way?”

“Probably,” the other man chuckled. “Have you known ‘Marija’ long?”

“Since I was a teenager, sir.”

“Oh, I didn’t realise you were out here when your father was CO of First Cruiser Squadron?”

“Er, no, sir. I’d never been to Malta until a few days ago.”

Captain Nicholas Davey did not hide his confusion.

The younger man hurriedly attempted to clarified matters.

“I only met Marija face to face for the first time three hours ago, sir.”

This of course, did not really clarify anything in particular but before Peter Christopher sowed further seeds of confusion the alarm bells began to sound throughout the ship.

Chapter 47

Wednesday 5th February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 12 miles south of Paphos, Cyprus

It was twenty-four hours since they had heard the distant eruption of the bomb in Limassol harbour. On the surface a gale was blowing, a short-lived Mediterranean winter storm. In a day or two the sea would be calm again. Two hundred and fifty feet down there was no wave motion, all was still.

And HMS Dreadnought was at war.

While the Victorious Battle group came up from the south to fly off personnel from Akrotiri and her escorts took turns off-loading evacuees from Limassol and other smaller ports, including Pathos, Dreadnought was standing sentinel barring the south-western approaches to Cyprus. Her orders were simple; to hunt and kill anything on or below the waves that trespassed in her patrol 'box'. The small British garrison on the island had withdrawn into the hills and forests of the hinterland, HMS Blake's two undamaged escorts, the destroyer HMS Decoy and the frigate, HMS Salisbury were at the eastern end of the island performing a similar blocking role. Hawker Hunters operating out of Akrotiri were attempting to provide air cover for the two surface ships but Decoy and Salisbury they were out on a limb, dangerously exposed to submarine or air attack.

"Captain," a timid voice murmured.

Simon Collingwood turned and smiled, light-lipped at the woman holding a steaming mug out to him. She was ready to flee if he so much as batted an eyelid. The woman was slim, uncomfortable in the unfamiliar – two or three sizes too large – dark blue boiler suit she had been given to replace her torn and soaked kaftan and shawls. She was barefoot, her feet two sizes too small for any of the spare plimsolls the crew wore. Her dark eyes were framed by the scarf concealing her hair. He found himself wishing she would not look at him with such unquestioning gratitude and unsettling *awe*. Her name was Maya Hayek and she, her younger sister and three children now occupied Dreadnought's commanding officer's cabin. The children, aged five, three and two, a boy and two girls were orphans whom

the sisters, aged twenty-three and twenty had rescued during their desperate flight from their home town of Golbasi, twenty miles south of the capital Ankara, to the coast.

All the rescued women had wanted to help with cooking, cleaning, and sewing. In truth there was little for them to do except serve meals, hot drinks and look after their children. The boat was operating as silently as possible and movement between compartments was limited.

"Thank you, Maya," he mumbled.

The young woman lowered her eyes.

Most of the adults they had taken onboard were Muslims although one of the old men was a Christian, but his Catholic Orthodox observance was a mystery to Dreadnought's crew for it bore little resemblance to anything with which they were familiar. Maya had asked him in which direction Mecca lay, he had pointed to the compass repeater in the bulkhead above his cabin's single bunk. She had sighed her shy understanding. That was nearest they had come to a conversation since she had been aboard, other of course than the long, slow 'interviews' crew members had conducted with the refugees. Those interviews were over, the last fragments of information extracted, distilled and sent back to Malta for dissection and analysis.

Maya backed away and was gone.

"Service with a smile, Skipper," Max Forton chuckled.

His commanding officer glowered at him.

"Range to targets constant!" Dreadnought's Executive Officer hurriedly confirmed.

Conventional wisdom suggested that any large-scale invasion of Cyprus from Turkey would logically come ashore on the northern coast. There were plenty of bays, coves and sandy beaches and few obvious natural defence lines. But Red Dawn did not do things that way. Red Dawn murdered, burned, looted and raped wherever it went, it set off nuclear bombs in crowded ports, it clearly did not understand the meaning of 'concentration of masse' in warfare.

Simon Collingwood had not been remotely surprised when the sound room reported a veritable armada steaming slowly down the western end of the island. Dreadnought had moved a little to the east and waited. If he had been in charge of the Red Dawn fleet preparing to land its hordes he would have sent out a screen of ships; both as an outer picket line of defence against

attack and to drive any lurking submarines deep, away from his troop ships. Today his enemy had deployed as if nobody had yet invented the submarine.

Dreadnought had crept into the fold and now the sheep were at the mercy of the apex predator within their midst. The prey seemed to have no inkling of the presence of the two hundred and sixty-six feet long merciless black steel shark moving in for the kill.

“Flood all forward tubes if you please, Number One!

Tubes One and Two were loaded with Mark XX homing fish; the other tubes with old-fashioned Mark VIIIs with warheads four times the size of the modern torpedoes. Dreadnought had sailed from Gibraltar with a full set of six Mark XXs and eighteen Mark VIIIs.

“Helm! Make your course two-eight-five degrees!”

The invasion ‘fleet’ littered several miles of sea in front of the coast north of Paphos. It comprised big and small fishing boats, a couple of small ferries, a ten thousand ton angular-looking liner, even an old rusty Liberty ship. The escorts, two Krupny class destroyers and three smaller Riga class destroyer escorts were too busy shelling the town and the empty countryside to the north to notice HMS Dreadnought creeping among them.

The Mark XXs took out the bigger Krupny class ships. Single explosions triggered by the magnetic resonance of each hull detonating their warheads directly beneath each destroyer. One hundred and ninety-six pounds of Torpex was amply sufficient to form a rapidly expanding ball of air under its target, lifting and in the process, unnaturally, outrageously stressing the keel. Both Krupnys, their backs broken foundered slowly while Dreadnought began to pick off the other escorts.

Two of the first four Mark VIIIs failed to find a target.

All six tubes were reloaded with Mark VIIIs.

The third Riga class escort tried to hide in the mob of ships that made up the invasion fleet. Simon Collingwood went about sinking any target worthy of a heavyweight torpedo until there was virtually nowhere for the Riga-type destroyer to hide. By then the day was darkening and the sea was covered in oil, wreckage and bodies. Two burning merchantmen had run themselves ashore. Three miles off shore the stern of the old Liberty ship was still afloat, the rest of the vessel was gone.

The destroyer escort had no idea where Dreadnought was.

She fired salvo after salvo of anti-submarine mortars, several in and

around the wrecks or boats and rafts lashed together by the survivors of other ships. Two Mark VIIIs fired at a range of less than eight hundred yards reduced her to scrap. Her shattered carcass sank within seconds.

Every hour or so as the hunt went on Maya had brought Simon Collingwood a fresh mug of tea or cocoa; each time he muttered an embarrassed ‘thank you’ and gone back to the killing.

The execution complete HMS Dreadnought ran south at twenty-five knots to take up a blocking position twenty miles south-south-east of Paphos.

Chapter 48

Wednesday 5th February 1964
HMS Talavera, Lazaretto Creek, Malta

A Maltese pilot had come onboard to oversee HMS Talavera's departure from Sliema Creek, briefly out into the open sea, and through the Grand Harbour breakwaters to her rendezvous with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary oiler Brambleleaf in Rinella Creek. The idea of manoeuvring the destroyer in confined waters still gave Peter Christopher nightmares but already he was beginning to believe it was not perhaps, quite as daunting a job as he had first imagined. Notwithstanding, it remained disconcertingly, exhilaratingly strange and very new to be responsible for *everything*. With her bunkers brimming over the ship had felt and moved much more surely under his feet on the journey out of the Grand Harbour, around Valletta and back into the long, broad Marsamxett Anchorage. Past St Elmo's Bay to the left where the wreck of the old Tribal class destroyer Maori had been sunk in 1945, past Sliema Creek on the right, all the while steaming slowly under the great ramparts of Valletta on the left, and the ruins of HMS Phoenicia to starboard, he had bled off speed and steerage way beneath the Floriana bastion, before edging stern first into the narrowing Lazaretto Creek where a small tug had nudged and coaxed Talavera's deadweight until she was able to moor beneath the high starboard freeboard of the fourteen thousand ton Royal Fleet Auxiliary armament support ship Resurgent.

The first man up the gangplank was Lieutenant Alan Hannay.

"Permission to come aboard, sir?" He inquired nervously, as he saluted with practiced crispness.

Peter Christopher welcomed his new Supply Officer with several tersely delivered, somewhat tongue-in-cheek pieces of advice.

"Leave the ordnance to Guns," he directed as the two men walked towards his day cabin. He could not get used to 'owning' the Captain's day cabin, it seemed wrong. Two months ago, he was a junior watch keeper, the ship's technical 'whizz', now he was in command. "Miles Weiss has his department under control and notwithstanding he's a marvellous fellow, he'll

eat you alive if you step on his toes. He's also the Executive Officer, so that's another reason why you don't want to muck him about. Talk to the Master at Arms and the Chief Petty Officers about whatever we're short of and what we need as soon as possible. Oh, and don't *ever* give the Master at Arms a direct order."

Alan Hannay frowned, not knowing if his new captain was pulling his leg.

"Er, I don't understand, sir?" He confessed.

Peter Christopher shut the day cabin door behind them.

"Ask him nicely. Things will work out better that way. You've never been to sea Alan. On a ship this size the senior Chief Petty Officer is closely related to God. I can give him a direct order, so can the Executive officer on a good day, and when he's at home in England Mrs McCann can give him a direct order," he smiled, "and perhaps, my father."

"Right you are, sir. I'll mind my Ps and Qs with Chief Petty Officer McCann."

As if on cue there was a knock at the door.

"Come!"

Spider McCann and Lieutenant Miles Weiss came in.

"Mister McCann," Peter Christopher announced, "this is our new Supply Officer and Purser, Lieutenant Hannay. I'd be obliged if you'd detail somebody to show him around the ship."

The small, chiselled little man eyed the newcomer. His hard, unblinking stare was studiously neutral, forensically intense.

"Welcome aboard, sir!"

"Thank you, er, Mister McCann."

Miles Weiss put his hands on his hips as he watched the unlikely duo depart.

"Hannay must be mad waving goodbye to a cushy berth at HQ at a time like this?"

"I'm astonished my father let him go, actually."

Talavera's Executive Officer wasted no time getting down to business: "Resurgent has two hundred rounds of four-point-five inch AP and about a hundred Common. That'll leave us about a quarter light, sir."

"We'll take whatever she'll give us, Guns. Don't forget to let our new Supply officer have your wish list."

"The engineering 'wish list' alone is more like a volume of *War and Peace*, sir!"

"Well, in that case we'll find out what Mr Hannay is made of sooner rather than later. I've got a conference on Scorpion in an hour so I better get my skates on." The two young men, friends without an obvious care in the World before the October War, exchanged rueful looks. "I'll leave the ship in your capable hands then!"

They very nearly laughed out loud; neither of them actually believed the Navy would be so stupid as to give them a real fleet destroyer to play with. Not so long ago Miles Weiss had had his guns and missiles, and Peter Christopher had had his smorgasbord of expensive, ultra-sophisticated radar and electronic warfare wizardry; no two pigs in shit could not possibly have been happier and now *they owned the whole ship*!

Aboard HMS Scorpion Captain 'D's' day cabin was crowded. The captains of the other ships of the 7th Destroyer Squadron; HMS Aisne, HMS Oudenarde and HMS Broadsword had each brought their executive officers. Peter Christopher was very aware that in terms of seniority he was significantly junior to the other four lieutenant-commanders in the cabin.

Captain Nicholas Davey called the conference to order.

"After yesterday's excitement," he began, chortling. Everybody guffawed. The previous day four United States Air Force F-104 Starfighters had approached Maltese air space without turning on their IFF – Identification Friend or Foe – transponders and the ground controller at Luqa had declared an alert. It transpired that half the air raid shelters had been locked and both Luqa and Ta'Qali had been so choked with aircraft of every conceivable type that it had been impossible to scramble a single additional interceptor to support the existing combat air patrol. Urgent remedial measures were being taken to rectify both issues. Helicopter operations had already been transferred to alternative fields, including Hal Far, which had been largely de-activated when RAF Luqa's runway was extended, freeing up tarmac space at the two main bases. "Yes, after yesterday's excitement it seems that things are pretty grim in Cyprus and on the Turkish mainland. One of our submarines sank a whole invasion convoy but HMS Salisbury was sunk by air attack and HMS Decoy badly damaged. Victorious is now close enough to provide minimal air cover for the initial evacuation. I don't know exactly what that means but at least something is happening and we're

not completely on the back foot. The Big Cats," the cruisers Lion and Tiger, "are on their way to support the Victorious. Anybody who has strolled along the side of Lazaretto Creek knows that the poor old Sheffield *isn't* now going to attempt to catch up with the Big Cats. The latest plan is she'll offload all non-essential personnel and anchor in the Grand Harbour, probably behind the northern breakwater as a floating gun battery. As to our fate," he grinned wolfishly, "we're off to greet our American friends in the morning, gentlemen!"

Chapter 49

Thursday 6th February 1964
Tigne Fort, Sliema, Malta

HMS Scorpion was the first of the long, sleek grey hunters to slip her moorings, glide out of Sliema Creek into Marsamxett and point her clipper bow towards the open sea.

Marija had grown up in a household where the men all worked, or were destined to work, in the Admiralty Dockyards. The men of her family, including most of her uncles and cousins were therefore, self-appointed connoisseurs of naval architecture and design. This meant that all she had to do was glimpse a silhouette on the horizon for a split second and she instantly knew the speed, armament, sea going characteristics, machinery layouts and each and every one of the mechanical quirks and foibles of that particular class of vessel. Moreover, ever since Peter had finally followed in his father's footsteps, his letters had been full of nonsense about advanced and horribly sophisticated electrical, sensing and 'computational' – she had no idea what this term meant – devices; she had thus acquired a sound working familiarity with the ships of the Mediterranean Fleet that, had he known about it, any Soviet spy worth his salt would have given his eye teeth to possess...

But of course, her brother Samuel had been exactly that hadn't he?

...A spy.

As she stood beneath the sheltering round tower of antique Fort Tigne on the highest vantage point of Point Dragut opposite St Elmo's Bay, Valletta, Marija and her companions had ring side seats from which to watch the departure of the 7th Destroyer Squadron.

Marija's head was still in flux, a hopeless chaos of jangling thoughts as she came to terms with the new reality of her life. Peter had seen her at her worst, beaten down and with her face a mess, humiliated beyond measure and all he had wanted to do was hold her in his arms until the bad things went away. She had never wanted him to let her go.

'I'm sorry,' he had said all too soon. 'I have to go. My ship...'

She had understood.

Really, she had understood.

‘I thought we’d have more time to get used to things. Talk about the future,’ he had apologised. ‘But things are,’ he had shrugged, ‘strange.’

Marija had nodded her agreement.

The only thing that mattered was that he was here and he was still *her* Peter.

‘Marry me, please?’ He had asked without further preamble. ‘Marry me and we’ll sort out the rest of our life later.’

Marija had nodded and started crying again.

He had wrapped her in his arms until it was time to go.

‘Yes,” she had said. ‘Yes, yes, yes...’

This morning she needed to rediscover her lost equilibrium. The last few days had been filled with madness and she had to re-find her balance, and somehow begin to silence the cacophony of competing voices in her head.

She gazed at HMS Scorpion.

As a child she had thought a scorpion was a bug with a horribly painful sting; but apparently a Scorpion was also some kind of medieval ballista used in siege warfare. Her father had told her this and many other completely useless, oddly fascinating things about the ships he had worked on over the years.

The Weapon class ships were slightly smaller than the *Battles* which came after them. One of the reasons the Weapon class ships looked a little unbalanced – rather ugly, actually – in comparison to practically every other type of British fleet destroyer, was that they were the first class to have ‘in-line’ engine and machine spaces. Previously, British destroyers had had a boiler room forward of an engine room. This was fine but if one or other of the ‘rooms’ was disabled in action the ship was dead in the water. The Weapon class had a port and a starboard combined boiler and engine room, one set of machinery for each propeller basically. The Americans had been doing this for years but their ships tended to be bigger, and in order to implement the new layout in the relatively small Weapon class hulls two funnels were required. Hence the stumpy exhaust vents trunked through the lattice foremast, and the peculiar looking stunted ‘pipe’ sticking up amidships between the box-like radar and generator rooms. The Navy had not known what to do with the Weapons after the Second War until a handful of them

were converted as Fast Air Detection Escorts along with six of the later Battles. For reasons only known to the Admiralty – Marija's father speculated that somebody had done the stability sums and belatedly discovered that the Weapons were too small to carry the full radar and sensor suite of the modified Battles – Scorpion and her sisters had only been partially converted and re-equipped for their new role. Unlike the Battles' double bedstead four-ton Type 965 aerials, the Weapons made do with a single, older single bedstead model. The Weapons had also been left with their original Squid anti-submarine mortars and refitted with a pale shadow of the electronic counter measures wizardry of the converted Battles. Another oddity of the Weapons was their four-inch calibre main battery; previous classes had carried 4.7-inch guns, and subsequent designs the 4.5-inch semi-automatic naval rifles of the Battles.

One was sometimes moved to ask exactly what went on in the heads of naval architects, Marija reflected. Her father quietly detested the Weapons as 'war time lash ups'. He said the turbines installed in the whole class were 'accidents waiting to happen'; the original design was so suspect that several years ago a major redesign had resulted in the removal of the steam feed to part of the reversing turbine. While this had reduced the number of major breakdowns it had also drastically cut the power available to retard the forward motion of the ship, guaranteeing that the ships of the class would handle leadenly in normal, everyday situations. In comparison, the bigger Battles handled much more nimbly both in the open sea and in harbour.

The next ship to nose cautiously out of Sliema Creek was Scorpion's sister, HMS Broadsword. Wisely, Captain 'D' was moving his clumsy Weapons out of harm's way before the three Battles, HMS Aisne, HMS Oudenarde, and Peter's patched up HMS Talavera cast off.

From where Marija stood the bulk of Manoel Island hide HMS Talavera from sight. She had been taking on stores – replenishing, as the Navy called it – moored alongside a big store ship in Lazaretto Creek all night. In the way of these things Talavera would be the last ship to leave port, as befitted her Captain's tender years and lack of seniority. The Royal Navy tended to be a stickler for these things.

"You ought to be sitting down," Dr Margo Seiffert complained, shaking out a shawl and draping it around her young friend's shoulders. "The idea of coming down here at this ungodly hour wasn't for you to tire yourself out

standing up on your hind legs for hours on end!”

“I am perfectly fine, Margo,” Marija insisted.

HMS Aisne eased out of Sliema Creek; the water churned white under her transom as she swung gracefully into the middle of the deep-water channel to the sea. The air shimmered with heat above her single funnel, and the sound of her blowers whispered across the water. On her foredeck and at her stern, seamen stood at one-yard intervals, lining the rails. The ship’s pennants fluttered, the big White Ensign cracked now and then as the wind caught it.

Next came her sister, a carbon copy; HMS Oudenarde.

Finally, in the distance HMS Talavera emerged into Marsamxett, straightened down the line of the anchorage and began to pick up speed, following the other four ships of the 7th Destroyer Squadron.

Without her discarded amidships deck houses and with her cut down main mast and comparatively naked stern the Talavera seemed incomplete. Two single twenty-millimetre Oerlikon cannons were now mounted on top of her stern deckhouse and brand-new whip aerials had been rigged aft of the funnel. Her great lattice foremast looked different, too.

Marija squinted in the early morning light.

Perhaps, they had fixed the gun director radar?

“Doesn’t she look so fine, Margo!”

Margo Seiffert put her arm around her younger friend’s shoulders.

Slowly HMS Talavera crossed the mouth of Sliema Creek beneath the ramparts of Valletta and drew abreast of Fort Tigne.

As the sun broke through the haze a strange thing happened.

All along the side of the destroyer men suddenly raised their caps.

And on the open bridge men waved.

Margo Seiffert laughed softly.

“My god,” she murmured, “like father like son...”

Marija hardly heard her speak.

She waved back.

Chapter 50

Thursday 6th February 1964
Special Air Mission 26000, 240 miles NNW of Lisbon

"The Enterprise and the Long Beach have passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, Mr President," General Curtis LeMay reported. "I take it all back. The Navy can get its thumb out of its butt when it really wants to!"

Jack Kennedy was wearing a thick cardigan and had a blanket over his shoulders. He could never get comfortable in jetliner seats and often, as today, the pressurized cabin seemed very cold. However, his singular human frailties aside, he was in a relatively sanguine mood.

"How many of their escorts had to stop to refuel in Lisbon and Gibraltar?"

"Most of them, sir," grunted the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

What had happened in Cyprus – what was till happening in Cyprus – was an object lesson in the predictable consequences of a failure to manage the peace. After the October War, which he respectfully believed to have been the biggest geopolitical FUBAR in human history; the subsequent US's decision to pull out of Europe and attempt to exact an immediate 'peace dividend' had now resulted in a potentially even more catastrophic FUBAR.

Fucked Up Beyond All Repair did not begin to describe the current race to disaster. Now they were throwing irreplaceable military assets into the fire knowing it might already be too late. The Brits had lost a cruiser, several destroyers and frigates and hundreds, maybe thousands of people they could not afford to lose trying to get out of Cyprus. Red Dawn – *for all he knew the was still fighting the Soviet fucking Union* – or whatever these bastards called themselves, were throwing unarmed militia ashore on Cyprus in their tens of thousands, driven forward by a hard core of heavily armed 'real soldiers'. The British were holed up in the mountains and forests in the middle and west of the island and around the Akrotiri – Limassol area. "The Brits are sending out everything they've got to meet our boys before they reach the narrows between Sicily and Tunisia."

"What's the latest on the British carrier?"

“She’s still afloat, Mister President.” But only just. Initial analysis suggested that a submarine had put a nuclear-tipped fish into one of HMS Victorious’s close escorts. The thirty-thousand-ton fleet carrier had very nearly gone over on her beam ends, caught fire and was now drifting half-way between Alexandria and the south coast of Cyprus.

“That’s four nukes that we know about?”

The Greek garrison of Thessalonica had been resisting the invaders, blocking Red Dawn’s complete domination of the northern Aegean, so the enemy had nuked it. Details were scarce but every indication was that a big bomb, perhaps, in the megaton yield range had been detonated above the city. The fall out cloud had almost certainly drifted back over a large concentration of Red Dawn’s own besieging forces but when you were dealing with lunatics that sort of thing was par for the course. Athens had surrendered within hours and now Red Dawn’s conquering horde was sweeping across the rest of the Hellenic World like a great, burning braid.

Yugoslavia, that enigmatic closed kingdom of fractured and divided ethnic and religious enclaves united only by Tito’s iron grip, might conceivably halt the immediate westward advance of the tide from the east. However, if the preliminary reports about nuclear strikes on the suburbs of Belgrade turned out to be true, all bets were off.

After the forthcoming Anglo-US-Portuguese conference in Lisbon SAM 26000’s next port of call was Cairo; which would have been unthinkable until recent days. Israel had talked about collective defence and the links between her people and the peoples of the civilized, democratic World but the only man in the region who actually wanted to discuss real war-fighting co-operation – possibly involving boots on the ground and war planes - with both the British and the Unites States Governments was the forty-six-year-old President of Egypt, *Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein*. So, once Jack Kennedy, Margaret Thatcher and the dictator of Portugal, *António de Oliveira Salazar*, had concluded their business – the ceremonial initialling of a draft interim tri-partied mutual support and defence pact - the US delegation was flying on to Cairo.

Yes, the President of the United States of America knew it was insanely foolhardy. Yes, he was flying into a war zone, and yes, if anything happened to him it was possible that in the leadership vacuum fresh disasters might befall civilization. Jack Kennedy and his closest advisors understood they

were playing poker for the highest stakes; winner takes all. There had been a trans-Atlantic telephone conversation between the President and the British Premier during which the pros and cons of them *both* going to Cairo had been seriously discussed; eventually they had decided that really was courting fate. Besides, British relations with the Nasser regime had never recovered from the Suez debacle; the Anglo-French invasion with Israeli connivance to invade and seize the canal six years before the October War. Jack Kennedy's predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, had ordered the invaders to withdraw on pain of potentially disastrous financial sanctions. Faced with an economic meltdown the British and the French had backed down and the Israelis had withdrawn their troops. Subsequently, the then British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden had had to resign and his successor, Harold MacMillan, had spent the whole of his Administration patching up the 'special relationship'. Clearly, the Egyptians had not forgotten their humiliating mauling at the hands of the two former colonial powers. Although Anglo-Egyptian relations had thawed sufficiently – in the light of the rapidly changing strategic situation in the Eastern Mediterranean – to allow for the re-opening of Alexandria to Royal Navy warships, it had been agreed that any suggestion of a formalisation of military ties and obligations was probably a thing best heard from the lips of an American President rather than a British Prime Minister.

After touching down at a rainy Lisbon Portela Airport, the President, his Secretary of State, William Fulbright and General Curtis LeMay were whisked across the tarmac to a waiting Sikorsky SH-3 Sea King, one of two flown ashore by the USS Enterprise for the President's use. Minutes later the two helicopters were racing low across the Portuguese capital to the Palácio de São Bento, the home of the national Parliament.

Margaret Thatcher and her small retinue - Sir Thomas Harding-Grayson, the Foreign Secretary; William Whitelaw, her Defence Minister; and Admiral Sir David Luce, the First Sea Lord representing the British Chiefs of Staff – were waiting in the ornately gilded and high-ceilinged reception room prepared for the hastily arranged 'summit'.

It was the Angry Widow who set the tone for the potentially thorny discussions they were about to embark upon by smiling, stepping up to Jack Kennedy and pecking his cheek. The platoon of waiting pressmen and photographers were so surprised that, for good measure, she paused a

moment and planted a peck on the American President's other profile.

António de Oliveira Salazar, the professorial seventy-four-year-old Dictator of Portugal, watched the kisses and the subsequent friendly, almost jocular hand-shaking and back-slapping between the male members of the respective delegations with diffident unease. For all that he was of that generation of European dictators – he had been born eight days after Adolf Hitler, whom he had detested long before any of Europe's allegedly 'democratic' leaders – his had been a relatively benign three decades in power. He preferred to ridicule, occasional harass and dispossess, sometimes imprison real trouble makers, but otherwise to steer clear of the majority of the odious expedients his fellow pre-war dictators had got up to in their vainglorious pomp. He believed the two crowning triumphs of his life were staying out of the Second World War and saving his country from a civil war like the one which had tormented neighbouring Spain. He also believed that in the disastrously altered landscape of the post-apocalypse World it was vital that he sealed a pact with the last two countries on Earth capable of guaranteeing the independence of Portugal.

Against the dark tide of events in the Eastern Mediterranean Spain was no bulwark; it was isolationist, fascistic and beneath the surface bitterly divided by its civil war and the years of vicious bloodletting since. Moreover, the antiquity of the equipment and the incompetence of the Spanish military had been ruthlessly exposed by a handful of British ships and modern jet aircraft. Besides there could never be a rapprochement with Francisco Franco Bahamonde for no man could sup with such a venomous viper and confidently expect to survive.

Only one thing utterly baffled António de Oliveira Salazar, and that was the force of nature that was Margaret Hilda Thatcher. Meeting her that morning for the first time he had been a little swept off his feet in much the same way a man on the street would react to meeting a movie star. He had read the English newspapers which described her as a 'blond bombshell' and the 'new Boadicea'; reserved judgement until he had actually met her. The woman was a marvel. All she had to do was walk into a room and the result was to stiffen the resolve of every man therein. It made no difference that at this moment the naval power upon which her country's future depended was being systematically eroded; destroyed piecemeal by a remorseless enemy. She remained optimistic, implacable as if success was a foregone conclusion

rather than a distant, illusory chimera.

Unlike many ‘summits’ or international ‘meetings’ or ‘conferences that António de Oliveira Salazar had attended over the decades, this one dived straight into the meat of the matter.

“How long can your forces hold out on Cyprus, Margaret?” Jack Kennedy asked, wondering how the use of the Angry Widow’s Christian name would be received.

“Well, *Mister* President,” she retorted, “I think Sir David is better qualified than I to answer that question.”

The First Sea Lord was rheumy-eyed.

“We have already lost the battle for Cyprus,” he said bluntly. “Presently, the issue is whether we can do anything to save the fellows we’ve left behind. In the short-term our units are well dug in. However, even minimal air re-supply may not be practical.”

“I can have two wings of B-52s flying out of England within seven days,” Curtis LeMay declared. Give me air bases in the Mediterranean and I can have C-130s dropping supplies day and night in ten days’ time. CINCLANT tells me he’ll have three SSNs east of Malta inside a week. Can your boys hold out that long. Five to ten days?”

“We have approximately four thousand effectives and as many dependents, civilian workers, auxiliaries and so forth inside our lines. At present the enemy has no artillery and his air strikes are poorly co-ordinated and badly directed. The terrain is in our favour but our people are vastly outnumbered. Given the nature of our foes I don’t think ‘giving up’ or surrendering is an option. Holding on is the only thing our people can do in the circumstances.”

Margaret Thatcher was grim.

“Red Dawn is *raping* that island.”

General Curtis LeMay was not going to move on without mentioning the Elephant – the bellowing, foot stomping, enraged bull Elephant - in the room.

“What if Red Dawn nukes your defensive concentrations in the middle of the island, Prime Minister?”

Margaret Thatcher looked the burly air force general in the eye.

“Who exactly would we bomb, General LeMay?”

“Troop concentrations, transportation hubs and enemy units at sea.”

“If we can locate and identify those targets we can bomb them with

conventional weapons, General," she said waspishly. "With a minimum of civilian, non-combatant casualties. How many more nuclear bombs do we need to let off to poison the whole planet?"

"Red Dawn don't care about that, ma'am."

"Well, I jolly well do care!"

Chapter 51

Thursday 6th February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 178 miles NNE of Alexandria

Captain Simon Collingwood rotated the periscope mast through three hundred and sixty degrees a second time. In the south the pillar of smoke from HMS Victorious's fires climbed high into the atmosphere, slowly drifting north-west on the wind. The wind had veered around in the last twelve hours, piling up the short, grey waves of the dying storm.

The Soviet Foxtrot class submarine had surfaced twenty minutes ago; and ever since then she had rolled and pitched sickeningly as the short, steep waves buffeted her.

"She's still just sitting there," he reported to the control room at large.

"Do you think she knows we're here, Skipper?" Max Forton, Dreadnought's Executive Officer inquired idly.

"After the last few days nothing would surprise me, Number One!"

"She could be an Egyptian boat?"

"Down periscope!" Simon Collingwood joined his friend at the plotting table, staring ruminatively at the symbols. There were no Royal Navy ships within seventy miles of Cyprus, precious few ships anywhere east of the Libyan Sea. The Big Cats – the cruisers Lion and Tiger – were now in company with HMS Hermes east of Malta, operating in a patrol area approximately between 19 and 20 degrees East on more or less the same latitude as the Archipelago. The picket line of 2nd Submarine Squadron 'A' class diesel-electric boats had pulled back to 21 degrees East. Apart from Dreadnought and the Victorious's surviving escorts, the Royal Navy had been bombed, torpedoed and 'nuked' out of the Eastern Mediterranean.

"Bandit One is venting her tanks!"

"Is she getting under way?"

"Negative, sir."

Simon Collingwood and his Executive Officer swapped raised eyebrows; they had been doing that a lot the last fortnight. Their new foes did a lot of surprising and a lot of very stupid things. Other than when they attempted to

set cruel traps or exploded a nuclear warhead in a civilian harbour, there was very little evidence of careful, professional consideration in their antics.

"Bandit One is just sinking, sir!"

And that was what the Foxtrot class submarine continued to do. Sink. She sank for several minutes and then, when she passed through the seven hundred feet mark, she imploded with a dull, tearing 'whumf' that even over two thousand yards away and five hundred feet higher in the water column made Dreadnought momentarily shudder.

HMS Dreadnought's commanding officer was beginning to ask himself what sort of madmen he was fighting.

Mission accomplished.

Boat damaged, dead in the water.

Never mind, flood the ballast tanks and wait for the boat to reach her crush depth.

All over, no need to write an after-action report...

Max Forton sniffed, he would have pawed the deck in vexation but it would not have looked dignified.

"Good thing we didn't waste our last Mark XX on that silly beggar," he observed unkindly.

Simon Collingwood returned to his command chair.

He was handed the engineering department's latest fault list. Dreadnought had been commissioned with such alacrity – some would say recklessness - last spring that there had been no opportunity to rectify the inevitable defects that a completely new design throws up. The boat was suffering the cumulative effects of dozens, scores, possibly hundreds of little patches, adjustments, and botched repairs which really ought to have been addressed by experts in the calm, controlled environment of a dockyard rather than in an ad hoc, 'needs must way' at sea in between and sometimes under combat conditions. The boat was designed to run at twenty-eight knots submerged; she had never managed more than twenty-six knots, at the moment he only dared take her up to twenty-one. It had been impossible to pump out Number Three Torpedo Tube after the battle with the invasion force off Cyprus because the bow door would not shut. Below three hundred feet the boat leaked in the turbine room bilge and aft around the shaft packing. Worse, Dreadnought was getting progressively *noisier*. Even the air in the boat was getting thicker, the circulation and scrubbing equipment

overloaded by the extra people on board and the extended periods running silent with every available piece of kit, including air pumps, turned down low or switched off.

Simon Collingwood passed the clipboard to his Executive Officer.

“Stand down from quiet running routine.

His orders gave him licence to roam the Eastern Mediterranean ‘interdicting enemy communications’ and that was what he intended to do until or unless his ship broke. There was no invasion to block; it had already happened. There was no carrier battle group to defend; it was limping south towards Alexandria while HMS Victorious’s crew fought her fires. Having twenty-two civilian refugees onboard was not ideal but the intelligence they had provided had more than paid for their bed and breakfasts. In the Royal Navy a man made the best of a bad deal. The tradition was the thing; one fought until one – or one’s vessel – could fight no longer and even then, giving in was not an option. Defeat was simply one’s cue to think and work a little harder at the serious business of confounding the Queen’s enemies.

“We will run northwards towards Limassol. Assuming we don’t bump into anything on the way we will re-assess the situation when we get there.” Dreadnought had a Mark XX homing torpedo and four heavyweight old-fashioned Mark VIIIs loaded in her five working torpedo tubes. Captain Simon Collingwood had no intention of leaving them unemployed when it was so patently obvious that it was his duty to launch them into the sides of the ships of the abomination of Red Dawn!

“Helm! Make your course zero-nine-five degrees!”

He waited for his orders to be called back in acknowledgement.

“Make revolutions for fifteen knots if you please, Number One!”

Sensing a presence by his shoulder the commanding officer of the Royal Navy’s only surviving combat ready offensive weapon in the Eastern Mediterranean glanced over his shoulder.

Maya Hayek was patiently waiting while he made the necessary arrangements to recommence his marvellous, magical, spaceship like vessel’s private war against the plague of *Krasnaya Zarya*.

“Your... Cocoa... Capitan...” She murmured shyly, lowering her twinkling eyes in a slightly melodramatic show of redundant humility.

Simon Collingwood almost burst out laughing.

The weariness and the tension of constantly operating on the absolute,

ragged edge of one’s capabilities, with one’s nerves stretched very nearly to breaking point for hours on end, suddenly evaporated and he felt for a moment, twenty years younger and without a care in the World.

And all because a pretty girl whom he would never have known existed but for the nightmare of this new war had made eyes at him!

It was a funny old World.

Chapter 52

Friday 7th February 1964
Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Mdina, Malta

Admiral Sir Julian Christopher was impressed but not overly surprised by how quickly his former flag lieutenant, Alan Hannay, had made his mark in his first sea-going posting. The boy had hardly been gone twenty-four and there were people already baying for his blood!

In the handful of hours the boy had been HMS Talavera's new Supply Officer before the 7th Destroyer Squadron had sailed to rendezvous with the much depleted USS Enterprise Battle Group, he had succeeded in mortally upsetting the captain of the RFA Resurgent, and two middle-ranking Mediterranean Fleet logistics staffers. The Commander-in-Chief chuckled to himself as he strode up to the ramparts for his early morning coffee. As always, he was immaculately presented and his manner was such that a stranger arriving at his Headquarters who had not been reading the newspapers or listening to the radio – or had been on Mars the last few weeks – would not have guessed that the Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations was currently overseeing the collapse of British military influence in much of the region.

It went without saying that he hardly viewed recent events with equanimity; but the end of the World was not yet nigh. Any subsequent inquiry, should he live long enough to suffer its forensic, possibly politically twisted verdict, would probably concur with his analysis that Cyprus was not a 'tenable base for operations in the current emergency'.

In retrospect, his assessment of the viability of a 'controlled evacuation' of the old CENTO warhead stockpile and the bulk of the British presence on the island had been self-evidently over-optimistic, not to say flawed. He had not believed that Red Dawn would be so rash as to use nuclear weapons, selectively or otherwise. Not least because they probably did not have very many fully generated, viable warheads to hand; and their enemies still possessed huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

Soviet systems and designs were known to be more elementary than the majority of those developed by American and British scientists; but first principles remained, when all was said and done, first principles. The business of actually persuading a warhead to detonate was a less than straightforward procedure. Although numerous nuclear arsenals may have survived unscathed all over the Soviet Union; Red Dawn's problem was that the command and control infrastructure had to have been comprehensively dismantled by the October War, rendering most surviving weapons, to all intents, inert. In the United Kingdom and the United States that crucial command and control infrastructure had been damaged, but otherwise survived. Every single warhead in British or American stockpiles was as useable and therefore as tactically deployable today, as it had been on 27th October 1962. If the trans-Atlantic allies wanted to re-run the October War all they had to do was hit the button. Julian Christopher's mistake had been in taking it for granted that the leadership of Red Dawn would know that.

Julian Christopher regarded his error of judgement in this respect to be, in retrospect, inexcusable. That everybody else had made the same erroneous assumption was no comfort. What had happened in the last few days had been such a catastrophe to British arms in the Eastern Mediterranean as to be on a par with what had happened when Empire's forces first encountered the Japanese in Malaya in the winter of 1941-42. Two decades ago Imperial strategists had assumed that Singapore was impregnable; yet a Japanese Army that depended on bicycles for its mobility and was outnumbered two to one by the defenders had captured the most heavily defended bastion of the British Empire in the Far East in a matter of weeks.

For Singapore in 1942 read Malta in 1964.

No battle plan in history had survived first contact with the enemy.

The Commander-in-Chief of all British and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations liked to think he had recovered from his initial *shock* with unseemly haste. Plan A was broken so he had gone to Plan B. Since Cyprus could not be evacuated in a 'managed fashion' the garrison would have to hold the island as long as possible and get on with the job of bleeding Red Dawn dry. Losing HMS Blake in such a terrible way and losing so many other ships and most of the fine men on them hurt a lot but bad things happened in war; that was why people who had been to war were not usually very keen to fight another one. The bloodier things got the more

important it was to accentuate the positive.

HMS Victorious had anchored at Alexandria that morning. Her crew had put out her fires but the ship was half-gutted and listing with four hundred dead and missing. There was no count of her wounded yet; the figure was likely to run to hundreds including many who would surely die of their burns or would be blinded for life after looking into the heart of the new sun which had briefly burned within a few hundred yards of the carrier's port side. Even though the nuclear–tipped torpedo, with a warhead in the fifteen to eighteen kiloton range, had detonated beneath the keel of HMS Undine, a Second World War destroyer converted into a Type 15 fast anti-submarine frigate in the 1950s, the fireball had reached out for the carrier. Its thermal shockwave had scorched her port side and ignited aircraft, fuel and munitions on her crowded flight deck. The over-pressure blast wave had smashed into her steel flanks in the moments before a great wall of water had virtually rolled her over – all thirty thousand tons – onto her beam ends. The great ship would have foundered if she had not, by some outrageous fluke of hydro-dynamics been partially sucked upright again by the huge volume of water previously hurled several thousand feet in the air by the explosion falling back into the pit in the sea created by the initial explosion. It was a fluke that had saved at least a thousand lives, and for that the Commander-in-Chief was happy to thank God!

The tape recorder was already set up in his office when he marched in and slapped his cap, heavy with fresh gold braid on his blotter. He looked to the hard, scarred man in the brand new, locally tailored suite.

"Well," he grunted, "I'm here. What was so damned important it couldn't wait until I'd finished my breakfast, Colonel Rykov?"

The former KGB man waved for the Signals Corps subaltern who had set up the equipment and doggedly guarded it like his life depended upon it, to leave. The man snapped to attention and saluted the C-in-C.

The door closed with a loud click.

"The man you are about to hear speaking is called *Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov*, Admiral Christopher."

The name was unfamiliar to the Englishman. However, he had known Arkady Pavlovich Rykov long enough to know that, whatever else he was, he was not a man overly moved to waste his superiors' time. He said nothing, waited to be told the bad news. Given that the man Sir Dick White, the Head

of the Secret Intelligence Service, had – for reasons best known to himself because the C-in-C thought he was mad - appointed Head of Station of MI6 in the Central Mediterranean had gone to the trouble of setting up a big, reel to reel tape recorder in his office at such an ungodly hour of the morning, it was a little after five o'clock, he had every reason to believe that whatever news the defector had brought with him was probably unbelievably bad. In his experience good news in the middle of a losing war rarely arrived before a man had had a chance to eat a hearty breakfast.

"Yuri Vladimirovich was born in Nagutskaya, near Stavropol in the old Russian Empire in 1914. He was the son of a humble railway official. His father was of Cossack stock, his mother the adopted daughter of a Finnish-born Muscovite watchmaker. He was orphaned by the time he was thirteen but he was a resourceful boy. He worked as a telegraph clerk, and for a while as a deckhand on a Volga steamer. He graduated from the Water Transport Technical College at Rybinsk in 1936."

Julian Christopher moved behind his desk and sat down. He did not invite his guest to take a chair. Arkady Rykov never accepted a seat in the presence of a superior unless he was ordered, directly and unequivocally, to 'bloody well sit down!'

"Yuri Vladimirovich became Secretary of the Komsomol, or as you would know it in the West, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League when he was at college in Rybinsk. By 1940 he had risen to be First Secretary of the Central Committee of Komsomol for the Soviet Karelo-Finnish Republic during which time he participated in partisan guerrilla warfare against the Finns and their German overlords. It was in those days that his 'potential' first emerged. He was a prominent man in the Komsomol, but not so prominent as to be 'purged'. That was a particular talent a man had to have in the Motherland if he was to gain advancement before Nikita Sergeyevich's regime inherited the abattoir that Iosif Vissarionovich and that animal Lavrentiy Pavlovich left him."

It was not until the ex-KGB man had so efficiently and expeditiously *resolved* the problem presented by the surviving members of Samuel Calleja's original Red Dawn terrorist cell, that Julian Christopher had understood why Dick White had recommended the man to him in such ambivalent terms. But of course, when one learned that the man had, supposedly, been Stalin's interpreter, Lavrentiy Beria's pet assassin, and

Nikita Khrushchev's protégé it went without saying that only a fool would ever be comfortable in his presence.

Julian Christopher had asked Dick White if he trusted Rykov. The Head of the Secret Intelligence Service had hesitated.

'No. But then it is always a mistake to trust a man,' he had hesitated again, 'or a woman who has betrayed his, or her, own people. Arkady Pavlovich is one of those men one must watch at all times.'

The C-in-C had asked the spymaster if Clara Pullman was Rykov's 'partner in crime or his jailor', and the veteran Head of the Secret Intelligence Service had replied: 'I wouldn't put it in those terms'.

Exasperated Christopher had demanded: 'I want to know if *somebody* is watching the bloody man *at all times*, Dick!'

'Yes and no.'

That was the trouble with spymasters; a man could never get a straight answer out of the blighters!

"At the time of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 Yuri Vladimirovich was Ambassador in Budapest," Arkady Pavlovich Rykov continued. "Afterwards, members of the Politburo joked that Andropov suffered from a 'Hungarian complex'. And why not? He had witnessed officers of the *Államvédelmi Hatóság*, the Hungarian secret police being dragged from their offices across the street from the Soviet Embassy, beaten, tortured and lynched from lamp posts by the mob. Until that day I don't think it had ever occured to Yuri Vladimirovich – or to any of the 'big men' of the post-Stalin Soviet leadership – that the poletariat that they claimed to speak for could turn on their masters so fast, or with such uncompromising brutality, literally overnight. It was Andropov who persuaded Nikita Segeyevich to crush the Hungarian *rising*. That was the moment Andropov realised that even the most monolithic single-party state hegemony was vulnerable to the mob. Watching those Hungarian secret policemen swinging from those lamposts in Budapest was probably what convinced Yuri Vladimirovich to throw in his lot with *Krasnaya Zarya*."

"And why exactly are you telling about this man, Colonel Rykov?" Julian Christopher asked testily.

The former KGB man viewed the Englishman with dead eyes.

"Because I think that Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov is the leader of Red Dawn."

Chapter 53

Friday 7th February 1964
Cabinet Office Briefing Room, Corpus Christi College, Oxford

The Prime Minister jumped to her feet and fussed around a somewhat embarrassed, horribly uncomfortable Enoch Powell as the tall, gaunt man limped painfully into the room. He settled with stiff formality in the chair Margaret Thatcher insisted on holding for him. It was at once unbecoming and somehow, touching. Whatever his ideological, doctrinally political differences with the blasted woman she kept treating him like an ally! The newcomer acknowledged the other men present in the small former Don's study off the main stairs.

Sir Richard 'Dick' White smiled grimly at the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West. They had not had much to do with each other when they were in MI5 during Hitler's war, but they had known of each other and had since watched each other's careers with interest. Dick White's counterpart and contemporary MI5, Roger Hollis, had never been flavour of the month in Edward Heath's United Kingdom Interim Emergency Administration, and lately he seemed to have been permanently side-lined shuttling between Belfast, Cheltenham and Langley, Virginia, or completely ignored by the Angry Widow's entourage. Dick White had forewarned the nation of the menace of Red Dawn; Roger Hollis had allowed that bastard Kim Philby and the other Cambridge traitors to slip through the net before the war and for all they knew, failed to uncover goodness knew how many other bad apples since.

Enoch Powell had pigeon-holed William Whitelaw, the Angry Widow's man at Defence as a sound, amiable fellow destined for a middle-ranking career in Government. It had taken a nuclear war to advance him into the Cabinet. As for James Callaghan, he viewed him was a big man with a puny intellect barely capable of keeping his own rag tag Party in order! Conversely, Tom Harding-Grayson was a man the Member for Wolverhampton South West might have relished crossing swords with in other circumstances. The man had a mind like a razor's edge. Sir Henry

Tomlinson, the Cabinet Secretary was another man to be reckoned with. Not such a formidable intellect as his old friend, the Foreign Secretary, but a brilliant, infinitely patient, innovative strategic operator marvellously suited for his present, impossible task.

Enoch Powell eyed the reel-to-reel tape recorder, a grubby, metallic monstrosity balanced on a low table that looked as if it was about to collapse at any moment.

Margaret Thatcher addressed the newcomer.

"The listeners down at GCHQ in Cheltenham picked up this speech, or rather, diatribe, last night and again this morning. The man who is speaking is, or purports to be a spokesman for *Krasnaya Zarya*. GCHQ prepared a transcript but it occurred to me that as you are an accomplished linguist and a Russian speaker to boot, that it might be advantageous to listen to the recording with, if you are up to it, your translation and commentary. The transcript we have really doesn't provide many insights, and the finer the nuances of these things can be very hard to encapsulate in black and white, don't you agree?"

Enoch Powell nodded mechanically.

He hated the way the woman got under his skin!

"If I can be of service," he shrugged. "So be it."

The tape began to play, the big spools whirring softly.

The voice was beset with static burps and hisses. It was a level, evenly-paced voice delivering a scripted, charmless monologue with a disconnected indifference. It was a voice almost totally without empathy, or humanity. This much every listener could divine without knowing a single word of conversational Russian.

"This man has spent a lot of his life in the Moscow milieu," Enoch Powell decided. "Perhaps, he came from the Stavropol Region. There's a trace of something else in there, too. A suggestion of a Karelo-Finnish accent?"

Margaret Thatcher blinked at this.

It was all she could do not to stare at him, in fact.

How could he tell that much from the man's first three or four sentences?

The terribly scarred, half-blind man who regarded himself as her dedicated bête noire within the Conservative and Unionist Party of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, had immersed himself in his task. He began

to translate, his version pointedly more colloquial than the bald transcripts on the laps of the other men in the room.

"For over a year we have been girding our loins for the great patriotic battle to avenge the firestorm inflicted upon us by the sworn enemies of International Socialism. They attacked us when we were in our beds. They murdered our women and our children without mercy. They struck like cowards and now they will pay for their genocide."

There was no applause, nothing but the voice. A voice that was as remorseless and unforgiving as the mind of the man behind it.

"There can be no peace treaty with the murderers. There will be no peace with the murderers. The Motherland might be in ruins but from its ruins the survivors will have revenge. While the Great Satan America has wiped its bloody hands this last year we have been gathering..."

Enoch Powell scowled momentarily.

"Do we know who this *apparatchik* is?"

"Andropov," Tom Harding-Grayson told him. "Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov. He was appointed to the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union just before the October War. He was the Soviets' Ambassador in Budapest in 1956."

"Oh," the politician breathed, thinking his thoughts. He carried on translating. *"Our purpose is revenge. Our password is revenge. Our creed is revenge. The Americans waged war on our women and children so we shall wage war on their women and children. In Istanbul the forces of the old regime tried to stand before us. We went into battle driving their women, their children, their old and their sick before us into the muzzles of their guns. That will be our way of war. No mercy! Scorched earth!"*

Enoch Powell looked around the room.

"This could be one of Stalin's speeches rehashed?"

"Quite so," the Foreign Secretary concurred.

"The American puppet regime in the Mediterranean tried to resist us on the island of Cyprus. Our great horde has driven them from their bolt holes into the mountains and forests where they think they are safe. The British have abandoned the people of Cyprus to our justice, our retribution, our vengeance. When we over run the British in their enclaves we will burn their children alive and ravage their women. Those who survive will become our slaves."

The Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West shook his head.

He continued to translate for several minutes and then the low-key harangue changed a gear and for the first time Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov's voice shook with something like real emotion.

"The army, the navy and the air force of the New Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has fallen on the uncontaminated lands of the American lackeys in Turkey, Greece and the island of Cyprus. This is but a beginning, a first flexing of the sinews of Krasnaya Zarya. Our Motherland is desolated so we shall seize new lands as yet undefiled by the curse of radioactive death. We shall take such lands as we please and subdue them to our will. To the peoples of Yugoslavia, Italy, and to the peoples of the Middle East I say turn upon your infidel overlords and join our crusade. When Krasnaya Zarya has conquered the Mediterranean Basin, we will turn south and devour the canker of the Jewish State forever. Turn upon the British interlopers in your midst now or become our enemies in the coming struggle."

"Oh, God," Tom Harding-Grayson groaned. "Now the blighters are trying to whip up a bloody *jihad* against us!"

"That is hardly likely to happen in the current situation," Enoch Powell retorted, his ear tuned to the dreary tone of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov's discourse. The man had a text that ought to be burning off the page and electrifying the ether as it was broadcast but mostly, he droned like a sulky schoolboy forced to recite Sophocles. "Notwithstanding that most of the Arab countries of the region will be riddled with stay behind former Soviet apparatchiks, some of whom will no doubt be *Red Dawn* vipers in the nest."

He concentrated hard for a moment.

"Too the oppressed people of Malta; I command you to rise up against your Imperialist jailors. Cut their throats while they sleep. Burn them in their houses. Attack them on the streets. Hang the pro-consul Christopher from a lamp post, drag his collaborators out onto the streets and stone them..."

Enoch Powell took a ragged breath.

"I think the man is barking mad," he remarked dryly.

Chapter 54

Friday 7th February 1964
HMS Talavera, 27 miles SSW of Cape Spartivento, Sardinia

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher rested his elbows on the forward bridge rail and tried to zero-in his binoculars on the approaching American ships. Two days earlier than expected the USS Enterprise and her nuclear-powered consort, the fifteen-thousand-ton cruiser USS Long Beach were creaming east at twenty-eight knots. Even miles away the great bulk of the Enterprise stood out of the water like a fast-moving steel island. The outlines of the approaching carrier and the unique, unmistakable, high, box-like superstructure of the cruiser were like shining beacons of new hope.

"Scorpion is signalling, sir!"

The twenty-seven-year-old captain of the Battle class destroyer acknowledged this and waited.

"The Squadron will form up in line astern and make revolutions for fifteen knots!"

The five destroyers of the 7th Destroyer Squadron had quartered the rendezvous point at twelve knots for the last five hours, now as dusk hurried towards them from the east the two US Navy superships rushed ever nearer. McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantoms had been overflying the British destroyers for the last three hours, orbiting, occasionally disappearing to the north or the south. Talavera's double bedstead Type 965 air search radar had been painting other aircraft, each squawking old-fashioned NATO-friendly IFF codes. It was not so much like the cavalry arriving to save the day, as one's old friends belatedly turning up to help one defend one's house with a very, very big stick.

HMS Talavera's position in the welcoming gun line was at its stern, as befitted her commanding officer's lack of seniority and the ship's somewhat reduced combat effectiveness. Unlike the other destroyers in the Squadron, Talavera had no meaningful electronic warfare capability, no surface-to-air missiles or anti-submarine mortars.

Once Talavera was cruising four hundred yards astern of the fourth ship

in the line, her sister HMS Oudenarde, Peter Christopher ordered the bridge talker to open a channel to the ship-wide public-address system.

"This is the Captain," he announced.

Goodness, that still sounds odd!

He had thought he would get used to it faster; and he had been wrong. He was the commanding officer of one of Her Majesty's ships and he was engaged to be married! It was too much to take in all at one.

"Just to let you all know that the USS Enterprise and the USS Long Beach are approaching at speed from the west. We will be taking up screening positions shortly after nightfall. That is all."

The plan was to escort the two big American ships through the narrows between Sicily and North Africa at high speed during the hours of darkness to place the super-carrier close enough to Malta to – with the aircraft already based on the island – provide an 'iron umbrella' over and around the whole archipelago, thus securing it as a base for offensive operations in the east. Every defensive position needed an anchor, and Malta, as it had been in Hitler's War, was to be that vital hinge upon which all 'allied' operations in the Mediterranean would revolve.

South of Malta the 7th Destroyer Squadron and the two American superships would be joined by the Big Cats, the cruisers Lion and Tiger and their escorts, which had been recalled from their abortive mission to strengthen the now decimated Victorious Battle Group. Meanwhile, HMS Hermes would dock at Malta and hopefully, rectify her ongoing boiler and turbine troubles.

The Enterprise and the Long Beach reduced speed to eighteen knots until the five British destroyers had surged into their pre-arranged screening posts; and then the race to Malta re-commenced. The big ship poured on the power and the Weapon and Battle class destroyers struggled to keep up. When HMS Broadsword was unable to sustain thirty knots she was abandoned in the night as the rest hammered into the darkness.

Watching the huge ultra-modern, somewhat terrifyingly American ships in the fading light before the helter-skelter sprint to Malta began in earnest, Peter Christopher's spirits had risen, as had those of every man who laid eyes on the newcomers.

The USS Enterprise was like a sheer wall of grey steel rising out of the water, with her flight deck crowded with the most advanced and deadly

aircraft in the World. Peter reminded himself that he had seen huge fleet carriers before and when all was said and done, impressive as she was, the Enterprise was just a *very* big aircraft carrier. Enterprise was twice the size of the Ark Royal or the Eagle, the Senior Service's biggest, forty-thousand-ton floating airfields, and nearly three times as big as the Victorious or the Hermes, but basically, she was still *just a huge aircraft carrier*.

But she was so huge...

The USS Long Beach was another kind of beast; a futuristic-looking seven hundred feet long ship that might have been built straight off the page of a science fiction magazine. Instead of an old-style superstructure and funnels the nuclear-powered anti-aircraft cruiser had a single raised box bridge and CIC – Combat Information Centre – located a fraction forward of amidships. This over-sized structure looked out of all proportion to the rest of the ship especially when the Long Beach of was bow or stern on to the observer. The 'box' towered well over a hundred feet above the waterline. The ship's armament was every bit as futuristic as her silhouette: she had Talos surface-to-air missiles capable of hitting targets eighty miles away; Terrier missiles for defence out to a range of thirty miles, ASROC, an anti-submarine rocket system to depth charge submerged targets ten thousand yards distant, torpedo launchers, and two five-inch guns in turrets amidships for surface action or shore bombardment as required. Peter Christopher could hardly imagine what wonders a man might find if he was allowed to roam *that* amazing ship!

The Enterprise and the Long Beach had left their conventionally-powered oil-guzzling escorts in their wake, one to two days behind; and the big ships' fleet train was strung out all the way across the North Atlantic. Elements of it might be in the central Mediterranean sometime in the next fortnight but nobody was holding their breath.

No man on any of the British destroyers charging into the night in company with their newly reconciled, much bigger *friends*, doubted the leap of faith, or the sincerity of the unambiguous signal that the presence of the Enterprise and the Long Beach, unescorted in dangerous waters sent for the future. The United States of America was back in the fight with her re-discovered allies. Placing the US Navy's two most modern and potent assets in harm's way was the sort of demonstration that no words on any treaty in history could possibly have matched.

“There was an inconclusive surface action between the Mediterranean Fleet and most of the Italian Navy around here in November 1940,” Lieutenant Miles Weiss, Talavera’s boyish Executive Officer said to his captain in the darkness of the open flying bridge as the roaring wind of the ship’s passing buffeted them. “The Battle of Cape Spartivento.”

“Oh, really?” The name rang a very distant bell but Peter Christopher had never been a stickler for knowing the particulars of each and every battle the Navy had ever fought.

“It was the last time the Fleet took a backward step in the Med in Hitler’s War. It was escorting the old Ark Royal so that the carrier could fly off aircraft to defend Malta. Our capital ships, the Ramillies and the Renown, if memory serves, weren’t really a match for the Italians. The old Ramillies was too slow and couldn’t keep up with our cruisers, and Renown only got into the fight very briefly so our cruisers ended up trading broadsides with Italian battleships. After about an hour our chaps set off back to Gibraltar and the Italians let us go. Churchill wanted the admiral in charge, Admiral Somerville, I think it was, cashiered but the Navy wouldn’t hear of it. I think you father might have been on one of the cruisers in that fight, I can’t remember which one. Perhaps, I’ll look it up one day.”

Peter Christopher glanced at the radar repeater and looked out into the blackness of the night to where the great bulk of the USS Enterprise lurked in the darkness.

“Funny old thing history,” he chuckled. “Perhaps, this is the moment when we stop taking backward steps in this war?”

Chapter 55

Friday 7th February 1964
HMS Dreadnought, 117 miles WSW of Paphos, Cyprus

Captain Simon Collingwood slapped the message sheet down on the Wardroom table with undisguised disgust. Around him his department heads and senior non-commissioned officers waited for him to speak, every man sensing his weary disenchantment.

Only the Executive Officer was absent, on watch in the control room. He and his captain had already chewed over the contents of the offending sheet of paper that now lay malignantly on the Wardroom table.

Simon Collingwood opened his mouth to speak.

At that precise moment two very young children burst into the compartment, the one evidently chasing the other and both toddlers hugely and loudly enjoying their game. Moments later a flustered, very embarrassed young woman pursued the two innocent miscreants.

Maya Hayek grabbed the slightly larger of the infants, a boy by the scruff of the neck and unceremoniously wrapped him in her arms so he could not flee. This completely spoiled the second child's fun. The little girl contemplated hiding under the table in the forest of legs. Thinking better of it she meekly surrendered to her adopted mother.

"I... Very sorry... Capitan..." The young woman with the limpid brown eyes stammered, horribly guilty and self-conscious.

To Simon Collingwood's astonishment the little incident had miraculously detached the black dog mood from his back. He had been livid, disappointed, felt betrayed when he had received Admiral Christopher's orders. Suddenly, those orders did not seem so defeatist or so 'stupid' as he had initially determined. In fact, they seemed entirely rational in the circumstances of the war in the Eastern Mediterranean, the evolving tactical situation elsewhere and the particular conditions now prevailing in his command.

"No damage done, Miss Hayek," he assured the young woman in what he hoped was his most emolliently paternal tone.

The woman lowered her eyes and fled with the two infants.

The commander of the Royal Navy's only – and increasingly tired and battered – nuclear-powered submarine tried to remember what he had been about to say.

Oh yes...

"We have been ordered to return to Malta at our best speed," he declared. "Dreadnought is to avoid renewing contact with the enemy. Several US Navy SSNs are expected to begin operating in the Ionian and Libyan Seas sometime with the next five days and the C-in-C doesn't want to risk us inadvertently tangling with each other until such time as robust standard operating procedures have been established and tested in exercises simulating actual war conditions. The C-in-C is also cognisant of the fact that the boat is badly in need of dockyard time. These considerations allied to aerial reconnaissance indicating that the enemy has no major surface units deployed south of the line Crete-Cyprus provides an opportunity for Dreadnought to dock at Malta and to make good defects. The C-in-C ends his message," he took a breath, "*please extend my personal thanks and congratulations to every member of your excellent crew for the exceptional service you have rendered Queen and country in recent days*."

Simon Collingwood looked up.

"The C-in-C also looks forward to meeting with and shaking the hand of all on board when we get to Malta."

There were smirks and guffaws around the table.

"I suppose we ought to break out a Jolly Roger for our entrance into the Grand Harbour, sir?" One wag proposed.

"The Executive Officer already has that well in hand!" Simon Collingwood allowed the levity to circulate the cramped compartment for a few seconds. "Right. We're still a long way from base and the nearest friendly ship is in Alexandria right now. Everybody needs to be on their toes the next few days. There are people out there who would dearly like to do us harm. Keep your wits about you, gentlemen. That will be all."

The commanding officer of HMS Dreadnought had never cared for overlong, discursive briefings, conferences, or meetings of any kind. People confused the word 'meeting' with 'party' far too often in his book. The one was business, the other pleasure. The two did not mix, especially on a devilishly complicated and vulnerable thing like a nuclear submarine

operating in a war zone. Moreover, while off the boat he might consider Max Forton a friend, he was no other man's friend on his boat. He was the captain, end of story. At any moment he might have to order any or all of the men in the Wardroom to their death. He did not have the luxury of friendship onboard his command and he despised any captain who did not understand this basic tenet of command.

Collingwood remained in the Wardroom as most of the others departed. Two men attempted to doze in one corner, and another swung himself into the hammock slung between two improvised hooks at the aft end of the compartment. The refugees were accommodated in the cabins of his officers, his people made the best of things. It was amazing how quickly men adjusted to new realities.

He began to work through a sheaf of defects lists, supply requisitions, status reports and personnel files. There were readiness updates, training recommendations, evaluations, medical summaries of the health and remedial treatments administered to the twenty-two refugees. He soon became absorbed in his work, so absorbed that he was unaware of the pair of wide dark eyes staring at him from an inch or so above the edge of the Wardroom table.

He blinked at the child.

"Sorry, sir," blurted a steward, "I didn't see the little beggar come in."

"Leave her be, Adams," Simon Collingwood half-smiled. Once upon a time he had imagined that knowing, and remembering, the names of every man aboard would be virtually impossible. Not counting the unwilling civilian dockyard workers who had been compelled to come along for the cruise, Dreadnought's complement was one hundred and thirteen officers and men, several of whom had only joined the boat at Gibraltar. "I very much doubt that she is a Red Dawn assassin."

"No, sir," the other man agreed with alacrity.

The girl's name was Yelda, which Maya had explained meant 'summer rose' in her native tongue. The child had inquisitive, tawny eyes and a mop of black, tousled hair.

Simon Collingwood sighed.

There was something badly wrong with a World in which Yelda could find herself orphaned, homeless and a passenger on a nuclear hunter-killer submarine in the middle of a war.

Chapter 56

Friday 7th February 1964
Special Air Mission 26000, Over the Nile Delta

General Curtis LeMay was fit to burst a blood vessel. Well, several actually. All the communications equipment on the Presidential VC-137 – a specially adapted and modified long-range Boeing 707 – was supposed to be 'hardened' to survive close proximity to the EMP, the electro-magnetic pulse, emitted by a large nuclear explosion. Like so much of the hugely expensive garbage supplied to the United States Armed Forces to appease and grease the palms of grasping defence contractors and their gutless clients in the House of Representatives, it transpired that seventy-five percent of SAM 26000's communications suite was now *junk*. Although the aircraft had been thirty miles away from the first airburst, and at least fifty from the second; practically the only systems that had survived were the short-range air-to-air intercom, and the air control circuit to the Egyptian civil and military command centres. He stomped back down the jetliner, his brows knitted and his expression black as night.

"Our best guess is that the first ICBM was meant for Cairo, Mister President," he growled like a bear with both feet snared in the jaws of the same trap. "It went off several miles approximately south west of the southernmost pyramid," whose name he had forgotten in the walk back from the cockpit.

"The Pyramid of Menkaure, sir," an aide murmured helpfully.

"The other strike was in the Ismailia area. The wind is from the west so the fallout from the Cairo strike is going to be a problem. Ismailia?" The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff shrugged. "There's just desert east of Ismailia."

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth President of the United States of America was the calmest man in the cabin.

"Bill Fulbright ought to be in Israel by now?" He asked rhetorically.

"His flight was scheduled to touch down in Tel Aviv about the time of the second strike, sir," Curtis LeMay confirmed.

“Who can we talk to at the moment, General?”

“The Egyptians,” the big man grunted unhappily.

“Where the nearest international phone?” Jack Kennedy asked, a sardonic half-smile playing on his lips. “I need to call home before this gets out of hand. And I need to do it soon.”

“We need to get out of the combat zone, Mr President,” an aide blurted.

Jack Kennedy and his senior military commander weren’t listening to anybody else in the compartment.

“Alexandria, Mr President. The Brits set up an emergency communications relay station as soon as Nasser opened the port to them.”

“That’s where we go then.”

Curtis LeMay had seen this coming.

“The pilot says that the runway at Alexandria is ‘marginal’ for this aircraft, sir.”

Jack Kennedy frowned and cut to the chase: “I don’t care if we crash so long as we get back in contact with the rest of the World, General!”

Chapter 57

Friday 7th February 1964
HMS Talavera, 47 miles SSW of Malta

Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher had been watching the USS Enterprise launching and recovering aircraft most of that morning. The day had dawned dull and hazy but as the hours went by the sun had burned off the mist and the wind had veered around from the west to blow fitfully out of the north east. On the open bridge of the destroyer, loping comfortably through the three or four-foot-high swells at twenty-seven knots it was the sort of day a destroyer man lived for. Pacing the big carrier and her consort, the anti-aircraft cruiser USS Long Beach at a range of between two and six miles, the air search radars of the four vessels – HMS Broadsword had still not caught up - of the 7th Destroyer Flotilla scanned the surrounding heavens for threats and tracked the Enterprise's aircraft as they quartered the skies far beyond the visible horizon.

Periodically, Peter Christopher studied the Type 965 repeater screen on the bridge. His eyes were as attuned as those of any man on the ship to the flickering, ever-changing returns detected by the great, revolving double bedstead aerials high above his head.

Even several miles away the roar of jet engines boomed across the sea as jets took off and landed on the USS Enterprise. HMS Talavera's captain still could not get used to how big *that* ship was; over eighty thousand tons of steel and ultra-modern technology capable of steaming faster than any of the aging *Battles* and *Weapons* of her temporary screen. The first of the super carrier's conventionally powered escorts was due to come on station later that afternoon, two of the very latest *Coontz* class guided missile destroyers, the USS Farragut (DDG-37) and the USS Mahan (DDG-42), each bristling with guns and rockets and equipped with the latest sensor suites.

How do I get myself invited onboard one of those destroyers?

"Kye, sir," Petty Officer Jack Griffin said, respectfully pressing a mug of steaming hot chocolate into his captain's hands. It was a balmy day but with a twenty-seven-knot wind coming over the bow and a patchy overcast which

often hid the sun it was not warm on the bridge.

"Thanks," Peter Christopher grinned. The red-bearded petty officer had been an enigma to every captain he had ever served under until David Penberthy - Talavera's previous commanding officer whom Peter still thought of as 'the Captain' - had assigned the ship's black sheep to the Radar and Electronic Warfare Division. The young technical whizz and the trouble-making senior rating who had a knack for finding himself knocked back a peg every few months, had formed an oddly brotherly relationship in which each man knew intuitively that he could trust and absolutely depend on the other in a crisis.

"Signal from Scorpion!"

Both men turned but something made Peter Christopher glance at the Type 965 repeater before he strained to decipher the rapidly flashing signal lamp on the Leader's bridge wing.

"What," he gasped.

He had never seen the screen do that!

"SCATTER! SCATTER!" Jack Griffin yelled, not really believing the signal code he had seen HMS Scorpion flashing.

The bridge intercom buzzed angrily.

"SCATTER!" Called the talker.

Peter Christopher suddenly realised what was happening; and what the impossibly fast, ghostly traces on the Type 965 repeater signified.

"Hard port wheel. Sound the collision alarm! Maximum revs on both screws!

He waited until the bells started clanging throughout the ship.

"CLEAR THE BRIDGE! EVERYBODY ON DECK GO BELOW! CLEAR THE DECKS!"

The orders were broadcast throughout the ship.

"Come port to course zero-seven-zero!"

The destroyer heeled into a racing turn, her stern sliding imperceptibly to the east as her screws churned and her rudders bit into the cold waters of the wintery Mediterranean.

Peter Christopher was operating on auto pilot.

There was no time for fear; no room for weakness, hesitation or for worrying about things over which he had no control.

He dropped his mug of hot chocolate on the deck and dived for the hatch.

Sliding, skidding, he fell into the crowded enclosed conning bridge moments before the whole world suddenly lit up.

Chapter 58

Friday 7th February 1964
The House of Representatives, City Hall, Philadelphia

The Vice President of the United States of America took a deep breath and attempted to interrupt the British Prime Minister a second time.

"Madam Prime..."

"Mister Johnson," Margaret Thatcher retorted before the grim-faced Texan could say another word. "Neither American nor British sovereign territory has actually been hit by a nuclear strike thus far. I will *not* order a strike by *my* V-Bombers until or unless the territory of one or both of our countries has been defiled. Nor will I entertain any talk of a 'retaliatory strike' until I know against whom, and where, that retaliation should be properly directed."

"Madam Prime Minister," Lyndon Baines Johnson drawled, having waited for the Angry Widow to pause to draw breath, as he had known even she would have to at some stage, "preliminary reports indicate that both Cyprus and Malta may have been targeted in this attack. What are those islands if they are not 'sovereign territory'?"

"That is not the point, Mister Vice President," Margaret Thatcher re-joined, like a schoolmistress correcting an inattentive pupil's blunder. "I am not going to sanction a renewed global nuclear war because somebody, we still don't know who, appears to have randomly launched what remained of the Soviet strategic missile arsenal at targets in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. There are circumstances under which I will fight a war with nuclear weapons; but there are no circumstances under which I will use the filthy things simply to wreak 'revenge'."

"We need to keep all our options open."

The Vice President held the telephone handset away from his head as two men in Navy Blue uniforms knocked cursorily at his door and broke into the room.

"The President is alive!"

"Prime Minister. Wait one minute please!"

“The President’s aircraft is down at Alexandria and he’s in contact with the Command Room via the British relay station at Alexandria.”

Johnson sighed a shuddering sigh of relief.

“I heard that!” Margaret Thatcher said. “Alexandria?”

“Yes, Prime Minister.”

“You will need to speak to the President, Mr Vice President,” the woman declared. “He and I also need to speak urgently.”

“We’ll keep this line open, Prime Minister. I’ll be back to you as soon as possible.”

Jack Kennedy sounded like the coolest man on the planet when two minutes later the connection was put through to the Vice President’s Office.

“What is our status?” The President asked.

“DEFCOM TWO.”

“Very good. Tell me what you know, Lyndon.”

“LeMay’s people at SAC think the guys who launched the strike flew their birds with whatever targeting co-ordinates they had pre-configured around the time of the war fifteen months ago. Either that or they just fed the wrong numbers into their birds. So far, we’ve got the two strikes in Egypt, one in the sea thirty miles south of Cyprus, a strike somewhere in northern Italy, another two or three in Yugoslavia,” he hesitated, “and at least two in the sea south west of the Maltese Archipelago...”

Chapter 59

Friday 7th February 1964
Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Mdina, Malta

The air raid sirens were wailing like demented banshees in the near and far distance across the whole Maltese Archipelago; little good would it do if the next strike was half-a-dozen miles closer to land.

Admiral Sir Julian Christopher stood on the ramparts of the old citadel looking north beyond Comino and Gozo. Indistinct in the haze the great nuclear mushroom was beginning to fray around the edges, and drift downwind. The pillar of fire had detonated fifteen miles north east of Gozo before the alarm had sounded. The air defence radar net had spotted the second missile, and correctly predicted it would be over fifty miles 'long'; but been unable to predict landfall – or sea fall – for the third missile. It had briefly been lost in the clutter of electromagnetic disturbance generated by the first strikes. The 'long' strike had detonated within the pre-arranged 'operating area' where the newly arrived USS Enterprise, USS Long Beach and the 7th Destroyer Squadron was patrolling in anticipation of being joined by the rest of the Enterprise's Battle Group – designated Task Force Twenty-One - in the coming days.

Peter's ship was down there somewhere...

The third ICBM, following about a minute behind the first two had come down in the sea between the uninhabited islet of Filfla and the southern coast of the main island. Thus far, the warhead had not detonated. If it had exploded – and had been of a comparable explosive yield as the weapon which had gone off north of Gozo – most of the people on Malta would be dead or dying by now.

That it had not gone off was not luck, good or bad; it was just war. War was chaos; chaos was war. At the end of the day there was no rhyme or reason why the one missile that was more or less on target had had a faulty warhead. It did not matter. The only thing that mattered was that the bloody thing had not gone off and that Malta had survived.

The Commander-in-Chief of all United Kingdom and Commonwealth Forces in the Mediterranean surveyed the half of the island of Malta that he could see from his vantage point high in the gallery of what had been the RAF Central Officers' Mess prior to his reactivation of the dusty, forgotten emergency World War II era command centre in its bowels two months ago.

God, had he only been back on Malta two months?

It seemed like a lifetime; a second lifetime in fact.

They had sent him to the Mediterranean to 'hold the line' but nobody had known what nightmares lurked just below the horizon. He had arrived in time – literally with minutes to spare – to witness the bombing of his island base by US-supplied Italian fascist A-4 Skyhawks, and by four Strategic Air Command B-52s. Irreplaceable men and ships had been destroyed, over a thousand civilians killed or seriously injured and his ability to fight a modern war hamstrung. The reconstruction of the command and control system the bombers had destroyed was still a work in progress, barely begun; too many good men had been killed and too many purpose-built facilities wiped off the face of the Earth. Everything he had done in the last two months had been damage control; deep down he had known that the emperor had no clothes and that British power in the Mediterranean hung by a thin thread which could be severed at any time. The disasters in the eastern seas around Cyprus had been as inevitable as they had been predictable, but the only alternative would have been to evacuate the island without a fight and running away would have sent entirely the wrong message to current and future allies in the region and elsewhere in the World. He had made his plans, factored in casualties, but not the numbers or the mindless, brutal ruthlessness of his enemy. What sane man could make rational preparations to combat an enemy whose manner of making war was to fight like medieval berserkers driving women, children and old folk before them as they assaulted one's lines? How could he hold back madmen who thought nothing of levelling a besieged city with a one megaton air burst, or who employed nuclear-tipped torpedoes and booby-trapped merchantmen to attack one's ships?

But he should have anticipated as much.

What had happened in the eastern seas was his fault.

Notwithstanding he had never had enough ships, aircraft or infantrymen, or any kind of reliable intelligence framework to underpin a strategy to counter what had actually befallen his over-stretched command, he was the

man in charge.

Ever since he had learned of Red Dawn's existence he had had few illusions. From that moment onwards, the game had always been about one thing; holding on long enough for the sleeping might of the American colossus to awaken.

Cyprus was gone.

For nothing it seemed.

The two QRA – Quick Reaction Alert – V-Bombers based at Luqa would be airborne by now. The other three V-Bombers would be scrambling to get off the ground. At least one of the stood down aircraft was always loaded with a nuclear weapon.

Arc Light, the power to reignite Armageddon lay with the Prime Minister. Sometime in the next sixty minutes the thirty-eight-year-old widowed mother of twins would have to make the most terrible decision of her astonishing life to date.

Julian Christopher heard a sound behind him.

He turned to find a steward waiting patiently.

"Can I get you anything, sir?"

The older man chuckled.

"A large Scotch would hit the spot," he confessed with a wry guffaw. "There's a bottle of Royal Lochnagar behind the bar." A present from Margaret Thatcher, the second bottle she had sent him since he had come to Malta. The steward was a middle-aged man with the leathery hide of one who had been in Malta many years. Everybody other than the C-in-C and the lowly Mess Steward had gone down to the bomb shelters carved out the living rock of the Citadel rock. "Pour yourself a stiff one, too. A man shouldn't drink alone on a day like this."

Chapter 60

Friday 7th February 1964
The Communications Room, Corpus Christi College, Oxford

"We have clearly been attacked by former Soviet weapons most likely based in the Soviet Union," Jack Kennedy drawled.

Margaret Thatcher was tempted to quibble with the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' but thought better of it. She reminded herself that she was speaking with a born again Atlanticist, a man who had rediscovered his defining political and personal convictions in recent weeks. Before the October War he had believed that an attack against an ally of the United States of America was an attack against them *all.* Now he was restating this sacred article of faith.

"We must retaliate," the President of the United States of America declared without joy.

"I agree, Mister President," the Angry Widow replied. "But..."

"For all we know there may be new strikes against our heartlands at any time," Jack Kennedy remarked.

"There may be," she admitted. "But," she repeated, "what I was about to say is that I'd have thought that if the enemy was going to go for the jugular, as it were, he would have done so with his first rather than in a subsequent wave of attacks?"

The man at the other end of the line in a bunker beneath Alexandria had asked himself, and his advisers exactly that question.

"What do your people in England say?"

"Like your advisors they are divided, Mister President." She paused, looked around the crowded room at the pinched, worried faces and eyes of the radio technicians and her inner circle of Ministers. "However," she qualified, "I am very clear as to my personal stance on retaliation. Having considered the scientific evidence submitted to and by the three Governments; The USA, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom in the years before the October War, to the negotiations we all hoped would result in a general agreement to ban the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons,"

she took a deep breath. She was not in the least worried if the President of the United States of America, his advisors or any of her own close colleagues took umbrage to be reminded of inconvenient facts which she felt to be paramount. "Having reconsidered that evidence it is clear to me that if very many more nuclear weapons – particularly of the larger types that we retain in our stockpiles – are detonated in the atmosphere life itself on our planet will be threatened, and perhaps, ultimately doomed. Yes, we have the capacity to 'carpet bomb' every inch of territory we *suspect* that the evil stain of Red Dawn has touched or holds, but at what price Mister President?"

"Prime Minister, we are at war."

"I know we are at war, Jack," Margaret Thatcher remarked, employing the President's Christian name without thinking it at all odd. Whatever their temperamental, ideological, and emotional differences they were united she believed, in a great common purpose. "Goodness knows how many of *my* people have perished in the last days and weeks. But you and I have a higher duty than simply to look to the good, or to the survival of our *own* people. If I learned one thing from my predecessor, Ted Heath, it was that there is a greater cause to which we must all aspire if we are to rebuild a World fit for our children to inherit. Do we honestly want to so poison our World that every second child is stillborn, to so poison *everything* that we risk breeding a new, mutated version of the human species?"

Jack Kennedy said nothing.

"Even before the war the levels of Strontium-90 and other isotopes directly related to the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons, for example Iodine-131 and 133," Margaret Thatcher hectored with increasing vehemence, "were many times higher in our children's bodies than before 1945. Presently, radiation levels in the United Kingdom are routinely two to four times higher than pre-October War. Radioactive isotopes that accumulate in bone marrow and the thyroid gland have half-lives measured in tens of years. We are have already embarked upon a potentially catastrophic millennia-long physiological experiment in living with levels of radiation that previously," again she snatched a breath of air, "*short-term* exposure to which would have permanently disqualified *any* worker in the nuclear industry from *ever* working with radioactive substances again. Many of our people already live with a visceral terror of the invisible poison in the air we breathe. Frankly, does anyone really know many more bombs we can let off

before *that* air which we must all breathe is blighted forever?"

"Margaret," Jack Kennedy sighed. "If we allow our enemies to prevail we have no right to survive."

"Jack," she responded, hearing the sickness in his heart. "I don't know the truth of what happened that that day fifteen months ago. However, what I have learned in my short time in 'the hot seat' is that in the final analysis one must do what one believes to be right. I am sure you did what you thought to be the right thing. But that was then and this is now. You and I have a choice. Either together we unleash the fires of Hell on our foes; or we draw a line in the sand." She waited for the man to stop her. In the silence she drew strength. "Or we make a statement for all time that in the heat of battle *we* had the moral courage to abjure the use of nuclear weapons for the greater good of all Mankind."

"And what if a second wave of ICBMs rains down on our surviving cities?"

"Then we shall walk towards perdition together, Mister President," Margaret Thatcher declared, in a trenchantly strident tone that Boadicea of yore would have recognised. "But wouldn't you rather march with me towards the high moral ground? Wouldn't you prefer to be able to look your children in the eye in ten or twenty years and say that '*I did what I knew to be right!'* on that dreadful day in February 1964?*"*

Chapter 61

Friday 7th February 1964
HMS Talavera, 44 miles SW of Malta

Captain ‘D’ had informed Lieutenant-Commander Peter Christopher that he planned to take HMS Scorpion under the burning super carrier’s stern so as to add ‘my fire hoses to those of the Enterprise’s own fire fighters’. He had cordially inquired whether the captain of the Battle class destroyer ‘was game’ to ‘join Scorpion in the endeavour?’

It had never occurred to Peter Christopher to hesitate for a moment.

‘I’ll be right beside you, sir!’

Damage control parties under the direction of the Executive Officer, Miles Weiss, the Master at Arms, Spider McCann, and his new right-hand man, Petty Officer Jack Griffin had hauled hoses forward onto the fo’c’sle and threaded another virtually to the cross-brace of the towering lattice foremast. Every available man seemed to be on deck wrestling with the snaking canvass monsters, braced for the moment when every pump on the ship went to work.

The heat of the raging inferno on the USS Enterprise’s flight deck began to burn unprotected skin at two hundred feet. Only men in full anti-flash balaclavas, fire-proofed overalls and clumsy asbestos mittens could venture onto the bridge or further forward. Other men ducked behind the superstructure as Talavera to port, and the Scorpion to starboard nosed slowly under the overhanging maelstrom.

The carrier was steaming slowly into the wind at around seven knots to stop the fire blowing down the length of her eleven hundred feet long flight deck. Incredibly, helicopters were shuttling to and from the stricken USS Long Beach, where the cruiser slowly foundered some ten miles to the south. With fires blazing out of control on the latter third of the flight deck and in at least one of the hanger deck compartments below it; men were *re-fuelling* Sea Kings near the bow so that the mercy missions could continue uninterrupted. Many of the Long Beach’s survivors had been lifted onto HMS Oudenarde and the recently arrived HMS Broadsword which Captain ‘D’ had sent to her

aide while enlisting Talavera in the courageous, self-evidently foolhardy attempt to pump sea water into the stern of the huge carrier.

HMS Aisne had been within a mile of the airburst; she was gone with all hands. The USS Long Beach had been almost as close to the epicentre of the blast. Her enormous box-like bridge – which had looked like something out of a Buck Roger's comic – was part crushed, part shattered and everything above deck was wrecked or hanging over her side. One of her forward missile magazines had caught fire and every few minutes a fresh explosion racked the doomed cruiser. Like the Enterprise she sat beneath a spreading pall, her fires flashing red and orange between the banks of roiling, oily smoke. Unlike her huge consort she was dead in the water, sinking by the bow and listing twenty degrees to starboard in the unusually benign Mediterranean wintery chop.

"Stop PORT!" Peter Christopher shouted.

Above him and to his right the fires roared deafeningly. The destroyer drifted into the carrier's churning wake. He had read about small ships being dragged into the sides of big ships – really big ships – and the Enterprise was the biggest thing he had ever seen afloat. Next to the leviathan Talavera was dwarfed into virtual insignificance. Through the smoke he glimpsed the Scorpion working nearer and nearer to the impossibly high grey steel flank of the monster.

He cupped his hands to his mouth and bawled: "Turn on the fire main!"

He and Miles Weiss had hurriedly discussed the complete insanity of what they were trying to do as if it seemed like the most routine of peacetime evolutions. It had been a short, abbreviated little chat. Peter had informed his friend that he would try not to collide with the American aircraft carrier; while Miles Weiss was to worry about putting as much water as possible onto and into the burning ship. They had decided not to worry about the risk of being blown up by a stray bomb or a rocket falling off the fiery stern of the Enterprise; and if there were further big airbursts in the area they would deal with that nearer the time. The best plan was to worry about the things they could do something about and ignore everything else. They hoped Admiral Lord Nelson – and Peter's father back in Malta, if it still existed – would approve.

Something blew up onboard the big carrier.

Shrapnel and debris rained down within a few feet of Talavera's bow.

The stream of water from the two hoses on the fo'c'sle reached out for the Enterprise, touched her grey flank near the waterline and slowly, slowly crept up her side as the destroyer drew closer and closer, and even closer until the streams of water boiled violently off nearly red-hot hull plates. Belatedly, the hose high up in the foremast coughed and burped into action. It spewed forth a less concentrated jet of water but serendipitously, almost immediately every drop it discharged from its lofty nozzle was pouring straight into a blackened, flaming gash in the plating ten feet beneath the armoured flight deck.

"Half-astern STARBOARD!"

Filthy grey-black smoke was tumbling down into the ever-narrowing gap between the Talavera's starboard side and the Enterprise making it impossible to know, at any given moment, how much clearance there was between the ships.

Talavera was so close to the behemoth that she was pitching and rolling in her wake. There was a brief, unhappy rending of metal as the end of the starboard aluminium yard of the foremast scraped along the side of the bigger ship and disintegrated.

Water from the hoses was pummelling the sides of the carrier.

Talavera was so close the jets of water turned to soaking mists as they played on the superheated plates, struck the massive overhang of the flight deck, and poured over the edge of the overhanging steel cliff like small waterfalls. As the water fell onto the deck it sizzled before slowly, it began to cool the metal underfoot. One of Scorpion's fire hoses misdirected a torrent of water directly across the Talavera's bridge, momentarily knocking Peter Christopher and several other men down.

Struggling to his feet he realised the ship felt strange beneath his feet.

"Full astern BOTH!"

It was too late.

HMS Talavera's bow swung in an inexorable, slow arc towards the impregnable bulk of the burning super carrier's stern.

There was another huge explosion high overhead.

The burning carcass of an F-4 Phantom lurched over the side of the flight deck, balanced for a precarious, heart-stopping moment and then rolled off the Enterprise directly above HMS Talavera's bridge.

[The End]

Author's Endnote

Thank you for reading this book; please remember that this is a work of fiction. I made it up in my own head. None of the characters in *'Red Dawn – Book 4 of the 'Timeline 10/27/62 Series'* - is based on real people I know of or have ever met. Nor do the specific events described in *'Red Dawn' - Book 4 of the 'Timeline 10/27/62 Series'* - have, to my knowledge, any basis in real events I know to have taken place. Any resemblance to real life people or events is, therefore, unintended and entirely coincidental.

The *'Timeline 10/27/62 Series'* is an alternative history of the modern World and because of this real historical characters are referenced and their words and actions form significant parts of the narrative. I have no way of knowing if these real, historical figures would have spoken thus, or acted in the ways I depict them acting. Any word I place in the mouth of a real historical figure, and any action which I attribute to them after 27th October 1962 *never* actually happened. As I always say in my Author's Notes to my readers, *I made it up in my own head.*

As with real historical characters, real historical ships are treated in a documentary - where they were and as they were deployed - fashion up to and including 27th October 1962. Thereafter, all bets are off because in this post cataclysm timeline, *everything changes*.

The books of the Timeline 10/27/62 series are written as episodes; they are instalments in a contiguous narrative arc. The individual 'episodes' each explore a number of plot branches and develop themes continuously from book to book. Inevitably, in any series some exposition and extemporization are unavoidable but I try – honestly, I do – to keep this to a minimum as it tends to slow down the flow of the stories I am telling.

In writing each successive addition to the Timeline 10/27/62 'verse' it is my implicit assumption that my readers will have read the previous books in the series, and that my readers do not want their reading experience to be overly

impacted by excessive re-hashing of the events in those previous books.

Humbly, I suggest that if you are 'hooked' by the Timeline 10/27/62 Series that reading the books in sequence will – most likely - enhance your enjoyment of the experience.

———

As a rule, I let my books speak for themselves. I hope it does not sound fuddy-duddy or old-fashioned, but broadly speaking I tend towards the view that a book *should* speak for itself.

However, with your indulgence I would like briefly – well, as briefly as is possible without being overly terse – to share a few personal thoughts with you, the reader about the *Timeline 10/27/62 World*.

I was not yet seven-and-a-half years old in October 1962 when I realised my parents were paying an awful lot of attention to the radio, devouring every line of print in their daily newspaper and were not quite themselves, a little distracted in fact, now that I think about it. I heard the word 'Cuba' bandied about but did not know until much later that the most dangerous moment of my life had come and gone without my ever, as a child, knowing it.

I was not yet eight-and-a-half years old when one day in November 1963 the World around me came, momentarily, to a juddering halt. I had heard the name of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and I even knew that he was the President of something called the United States of America. I did not know then that he was a womanising, drug dependent and deeply conflicted man who had lied to the American people about his chronic, periodically disabling illness which in any rational age ought to have disqualified him from the Presidency; *but I did know that he was a charismatic, talismanic figure in whom even I, as a child more interested in soccer, model trains and riding my new bicycle, had invested a nameless hope for the future*. And then one day he was gone and I shared my parents' shock and horror. It was not as if a mortal man had been murdered; JFK had become a mythic figure long before then. It was as if the modern-day analogue of King Menelaus of Sparta - hero of the Trojan

Wars and the husband of Helen, she of the legendary face that launched a thousand ships - had been gunned down that day in Dallas.

The Cuban Missiles crisis and the death of a President taught a young boy in England in 1962 and 1963 that the World is a very dangerous place.

Many years later we learned how close we all came to the abyss in late October 1962. Often, we look back on how deeply Jack Kennedy's death scarred hearts and minds in the years after his assassination.

There is no certainty, no one profound insight into what 'might have happened' had the Cold War turned *Hot* in the fall of 1962, or if JFK had survived that day in Dallas. History is not a systematic, explicable march from one event to another that inevitably reaches some readily predictable outcome. History only works that way in hindsight; very little is *obvious* either to the major or the minor players *at the time* history is actually being made. Nor does one have to be a fully paid up chaos theoretician to know that apparently inconsequential events can have massive unforeseen and unforeseeable impacts in subsequent historical developments.

Consider the example of Adolf Hitler.

If *Corporal* Adolf Hitler had died in a gas attack on the Ypres salient in Belgium on 14th October 1918 – as he might well have died that day – it is possible that there would have been no Holocaust, no Nazi Party, and no death camps.

Notwithstanding, with or without Hitler it is also possible, more likely probable, that there would have been a second general European War two or three decades later, albeit not the one we actually had. Hitler's war aims in 1939 were strikingly similar to the Kaiser's in 1914, unsurprisingly because most of what we regard as being *his* war *aims* were in fact drafted by members of exactly the same military caste which had been so keen on war in 1914 and had been so embittered by Germany's crushing defeat in 1918. While I readily concede that no senior officer of the German General Staff went so far as to write a book extolling the necessity for lebensraum – or

‘living space in the East’ – Hitler was by no means the only man in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s who publicly and unashamedly yearned to expand the Pax Germanica, the *German Peace,* into the Baltic States, Poland, White Russian and the Ukraine. Moreover, it was not Adolf Hitler who invented the ‘myth of the betrayal of Versailles’. The invention was the convenient fig leaf behind which the High Command of the vanquished German General Staff hid behind – all the better to gloss over its numerous egregious military and political war time blunders - to undermine and discredit the democratic legitimacy of the post-war Weimar Republic which to a man, its members detested.

Adolf Hitler was an undeniably horrible, bad, psychopathic despot who was very good at public speaking and without him German history between the World Wars would have been different in character but not necessarily in outcome. Basically, there is no way in which we can actually *know* that Corporal Hitler’s demise in the 14th October 1918 gas attack would have prevented World War II; or with or without the little corporal’s survival, that another even more catastrophic and tragic war was, sooner or later, inevitable.

I do not pretend to *know* what would have happened if the USA and the USSR had gone to war over Cuba in October 1962. One imagines this scenario has been the object of countless staff college war games in America and elsewhere in the intervening fifty-three years; I suspect – with a high level of confidence - that few of those war games would have played out the way the participants expected, and that no two *games* would have resolved themselves in exactly the same way as any other. That is the beauty and the fascination of historical counterfactuals, or as those of us who make no pretence at being emeritus professors of history say, *alternative history*.

Nobody can claim ‘this is the way it would have been’ after the Cuban Missiles Crisis ‘went wrong’. This author only *speculates* that the Timeline 10/27/62 Series reflects one of the many ways ‘things might have gone’ in the aftermath of Armageddon.

The only thing one can be reasonably confident about is that if the Cuban

Missiles Crisis had turned into a shooting war the World in which we live today would, *probably*, not be the one with which we are familiar.

A work of fiction is a journey of imagination. I hope it does not sound corny but I am genuinely a little humbled by the number of people who have already bought into what I am trying to do with *Timeline 10/27/62*.

Like any author, this author would prefer everybody to enjoy his books – if I disappoint, I am truly sorry – but either way, thank you for reading and helping to keep the printed word alive. I really do believe that civilization depends on people like *you*.

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Cover artwork concepts by James Philip
Graphic Design by Beastleigh Web Design