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Editor: Shaun Russell

Deputy Editor: Andy Frankham-Allen

Cover: Will Brooks

Editorial: Hayley Cox & Will Rees

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LETHBRIDGE-STEWART

THE DOGS OF WAR

Based on the BBC television serials by
Mervyn Haisman & Henry Lincoln

Andy Frankham-Allen



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‘Cry “Havoc”, and let slip the dogs of war.’

Julius Caesar, Act 3

1.

Ever had the feeling you’re being watched? It was a feeling familiar to Colonel Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart, and never more so than since he’d arranged to meet with the air vice-marshal. It was a feeling that he’d had all morning while meeting with Trinity House, but he prided himself on being able to maintain his focus. Now he was in his staff car, being driven by Corporal Bishop, en route to the Alexander Club on Piccadilly, and still the feeling was with him.

London was bustling with the early afternoon traffic, bowler-hatted businessmen walking the streets of the St James’s district with their briefcases firmly held in their hands, while young people continued to enjoy the early-Summer weather by lounging about in Green Park, smoking and playing and, no doubt, putting the world to rights with talk about love over war. As the car pulled up outside the Victorian buildings, Lethbridge-Stewart considered that, if General Hamilton was to be believed, he was about to get answers to questions that had been niggling at him since the February. He’d experienced much strangeness since; robotic Yeti, bodiless Intelligences, discovered he once had an older brother who died when they were children, alien jellyfish in the English Channel, and, if Miss Travers was right, he’d even spent a month in 1959 in a world where World War

It never happened and where his brother had never died. The latter he was still having trouble processing, and chalked much of it up to the psychoactive drugs that had been pumped into his system, but Miss Travers' report was pretty compelling – there was too much that corresponded with his memories of that ersatz English village in East Germany to be coincidence. He expected to get further confirmation when he and Sally had their dinner date with Dougie and Penny later in the week.

Until then there was the meeting with the vice-marshal.

'Would you like me to wait here, sir?' Bishop asked.

The young corporal still carried his wounds from electrocution on Fang Rock, his left hand bandaged. But he never complained, barely winced once while driving Lethbridge-Stewart from Chelsea Barracks to Trinity House, and then to Piccadilly.

'Let's not give the traffic wardens an excuse to complain, enough bad elements on Piccadilly as it is,' Lethbridge-Stewart said, referring to the well-known and badly-monitored drug trade that continued to sully Piccadilly's reputation. It always puzzled him that one of London's most celebrated streets should house so many distinguished social clubs, not to mention the Ritz, and still attract such illegal activities. For such a straight road, it could be incredibly bent. 'Return to the Barracks. I'll make my way back on foot. It's not that far, and besides the air is brisk and it'll keep me awake.'

Bishop smiled through the rear-view mirror. 'Yes, sir,' he said.

Despite their best intentions, there hadn't been much time for sleep since they'd returned from Fang Rock three days ago.

He said goodbye to Bishop and climbed out of the staff car, looking up at the Victorian edifice. It was no different than most that lined this side of Piccadilly, yet Lethbridge-Stewart felt a sense of importance about the building. It had a fifty-year history; founded in 1918, the club bought the buildings in 1919 and after major internal construction work, the buildings were formally opened by the Duke of York in 1922, and had since been frequented by some of the most decorated officers in the British Army. As he understood it, the vice-marshal was now the chairman of the club.

Lethbridge-Stewart made to walk up the steps to the door, but stopped, ducking, feeling something brush against his face. He waved it away, but there was nothing there. He ran his hands over his ears and face, expecting to see cobwebs, but nothing. He looked around. The front of the club was pristine, and there were certainly no cobwebs flying around willy-nilly. He shook his head briefly, reminded of many such instances in the past couple of days, and made his way up the steps.

2.

He was shown to the John Braham Room, where he stood out somewhat; his green Scots Guards uniform amid all the blue of the RAF officers. He was directed to a small table in one corner, around which sat two comfortable looking armchairs. In one chair sat the man he'd come to see. Lethbridge-Stewart crossed the room. The vice-marshal, just about on the good side of fifty, noticed Lethbridge-Stewart approach and stood up. He offered his hand.

'Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart,' he said, shaking the colonel's hand firmly. 'A pleasure to finally make your acquaintance.'

'Likewise, Vice-Marshal Gilmore,' Lethbridge-Stewart said, taking the seat offered to him.

'Whiskey?' Gilmore asked, and Lethbridge-Stewart accepted it gratefully.

He sipped it, and hissed at its sharpness. More malt than grain. 'Black Bush?'

Gilmore chuckled. 'You know your malts, Colonel.'

'Well, I have been sponsored by General Hamilton for a long time, sir.'

'Quite so. Although he does favour the Scotch, whereas I prefer my whiskey to have the luck of the Irish.' Gilmore indicated that Lethbridge-Stewart should sit, and so the two men sat, and for a moment the two officers drank in silence,

sizing each other up.

Gilmore's uniform was sharp, his dark hair and moustache peppered with grey, both neat. Lethbridge-Stewart had looked up Ian 'Chunky' Gilmore's service record; tours in India, he'd witnessed the bombing of Dresden during World War II, combat in the Battle of Arnhem, and service with the Berlin Airlift, among other notable roles. The ribbons on his uniform jacket echoed the distinguished record Lethbridge-Stewart had read. Although, curiously, there was a seven-year gap in his record. He'd thought to ring Hamilton, but decided against it, having a feeling that the gap had something to do with the reason behind this meeting.

'No doubt you're wondering about all this secrecy?' Gilmore asked.

'Of course. Hamilton does seem to be quite apt at cloak and dagger of late.'

Gilmore raised an eyebrow sternly, then chuckled. 'Yes, yes he does. And rather longer than of late, I can assure you. Oliver and I are of the same mind on many things.'

'Which is, presumably, why he's sent me to you.'

'Quite. What I have to tell you is way above top secret, Colonel, but the time is right, and Oliver insists you are the right man for the job.' Gilmore reached down the side of his chair and lifted up a briefcase. 'Have you heard of the Home-Army Operational Corps?'

Lethbridge-Stewart couldn't say he had.

'The UK's best kept secret,' Gilmore explained. 'So far there have been four different versions of the Corps, the last

one assisted the Allied forces in World War II. They had the scientific help of a man known to you. Professor Travers.'

Gilmore paused, but Lethbridge-Stewart wasn't entirely sure what Gilmore wanted him to say. He was aware that Travers had assisted the military in the past, that the man had a very colourful career in many areas.

'Why exactly is the Corps such a secret?' Lethbridge-Stewart plumped for.

'Because of what they do, what they're allowed to do.' Gilmore opened his briefcase. 'I don't like to use the words *above the law*, but they did have certain executive powers granted to them by the Crown. Churchill made a lot of, shall we say, *progressive* use of them.' He pulled out a few sheaves of paper and placed them on the table. 'There are records, of course, but they are buried so deep only a directed search will find them. These papers will direct you to the correct areas.'

Lethbridge-Stewart picked up the papers and glanced through them. 'I hardly have time to search for such records. It's difficult enough to maintain my official cover as it is. Colonel Grierson is already growing suspicious.'

'Use your adjutant. We didn't provide him just for his combat skills.'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked up from the papers at the use of the word *we*. He raised an eyebrow. 'Just what is going on here? After the last few months I think I deserve a straight explanation.'

'I'm sure you do think that, Colonel.' For a moment Gilmore looked at Lethbridge-Stewart, his eyes searching.

Lethbridge-Stewart held his own. Gilmore was obviously his superior, and was still weighing things up, but Lethbridge-Stewart refused to bow down in this. He felt like he'd been operating in the dark since the Underground, and he simply refused to do so anymore.

'Very well,' Gilmore finally said. 'You are aware of the Intrusion Counter Measures Group?'

It rang a vague bell from a few years ago. Lethbridge-Stewart said so. 'I seem to recall something about it being destroyed sometime in '66?'

'Well, perhaps.' Gilmore sipped his whiskey and cleared his throat. 'Created in 1961, it was a scientifically led team, with military *back-up*, tasked with protecting the UK from covert actions taken by hostile powers.'

'You mean aliens?'

'Not exclusively, but often yes. Our first alien encounter was in 1963, in Shoreditch. There we had the help of another man of your acquaintance. Short, dark haired, quite infuriating at times, but equally brilliant.'

Lethbridge-Stewart knew exactly who Gilmore meant. If Gilmore was involved with the Counter Measures Group from '61, that explained the gaps in his official service record. Lethbridge-Stewart was reminded of what Miss Travers had told him on Fang Rock. 'Just how far back does the Cosmic Hobo go?' he asked, careful to use the designated codename, mindful of the other officers in the room.

'There have been reports of him during World War II, in various capacities, some earlier. Some seem to suggest

he was in more places than one at the same time.'

'Well,' Lethbridge-Stewart said, feeling that Miss Travers would approve of his easy acceptance, 'he is a time traveller.'

'Yes, although we weren't convinced of that until the London Event. There have also been incidents in '66 at Gatwick and an antique shop in London, and ten years ago in South Wales. All the same man, judging by the descriptions and witness statements.'

Not to mention Fang Rock, Lethbridge-Stewart thought, but chose not to share that. Although he supposed Hamilton had already shared the information. 'I'm still not entirely sure how this relates to what Hamilton wishes to achieve,' he said instead.

Gilmore pulled several files out of his briefcase. 'Keep these safe, Colonel, but read them carefully. I want them back. They will fill you in on every report we currently have on the Doc— I mean, the *Cosmic Hobo*. And other related incidents.' He placed them on the table but didn't remove his hand off them. 'Nobody, and I mean *nobody*, is allowed to see these. Is that clear?'

'Yes, sir. As crystal.'

'Good.' Gilmore removed his hand and Lethbridge-Stewart placed the files into his attaché case. Now he understood why he'd been warned to bring one. These files were not to be opened now.

'Now,' Gilmore said, sipping his whiskey, 'let me fill you in on a little background.'

'Since about '65 I've been trying to convince High Command of the need for a military-empowered team to

deal with the less terrestrial threats to the UK. The Counter Measures Group was the beginning of that, but unfortunately government influences corrupted the ICMG, and as much I, ah, respected Professor Jensen's opinion, I've always believed that science is not the lead we need.'

That name rang a bell. Something Lethbridge-Stewart had heard. Of course, now it made sense. Gilmore's girls they were called; Professor Rachel Jensen and... Doctor Allison Williams? Yes, now he remembered reading about it in Gilmore's records; Rachel Jensen had become Mrs Gilmore a few years ago.

'Alien threats do not much care for science,' Gilmore continued. 'We need to be able to defend ourselves, not reason and explore.'

Lethbridge-Stewart found himself agreeing with that notion. He had said much the same to Hamilton a couple of months ago. 'I did suggest that the United Nations may be interested.'

'Yes, and perhaps they will be, but not at the moment. Let's deal with what's on our doorstep first, eh? Then worry about the rest of the world.'

Lethbridge-Stewart wasn't entirely sure that was wise. Should aliens invade elsewhere, what was to stop them then advancing on the UK?

'Needless to say, with promotion came new prospects and I soon came into contact with Oliver,' Gilmore continued. 'As I said, we are very much of the same mind. We soon got to talking and I realised he was just the man I needed on my side. It was Hamilton who told me about the

Corps, but he advised me that we needed to bide our time and wait for the right man to select himself for leadership.' Gilmore smiled. 'That would be you, Colonel.'

'And so, Hamilton continues to manoeuvre me into the position he wants me in. As he has done since Sandhurst,' Lethbridge-Stewart said ruefully. Although the details were new, the actions behind them didn't surprise him. Hamilton had singled him out for 'special things' a long time ago. Could Hamilton have known all about the extra-terrestrial threat to the UK even back then? 'Very well. What do we do next?'

'*You* read those files, get your adjutant to discover everything he can about the Operational Corps, and *we* continue to make preparations. Hamilton and I have other people in play. It's not quite time yet, but very soon it will be. We need to be ready.'

The meeting was over. Lethbridge-Stewart finished off his whiskey and stood. 'Thank you for your time, Marshal. It's been... insightful.'

The two men shook hands and Lethbridge-Stewart left the room, feeling the eyes of Gilmore on him as he left.

3.

He barely entered Green Park when he felt it. Lethbridge-Stewart stopped, looking around. People everywhere. An old couple walking a dog. Kids running on the grass, playing with Frisbees, flying kites. Young people lying on blankets, soaking up the sun's rays. But no one seeming to pay him any mind. He was in uniform, cap under one arm, attaché case firmly held in his hand. Not a particularly unusual sight in Green Park, what with the Alexander Club close by, but even so he received the occasional double-take from passers-by. But nothing suspicious, nothing out of the ordinary.

Still he felt it though. A presence. That odd tingling at the back of his neck. The feeling that somebody was watching him.

He shook his head. And surreptitiously patted his holstered pistol. He carried on, smiling to the old couple with the dog; the old man offered a slight salute, and Lethbridge-Stewart nodded in response. 'General,' he said, which elicited a smile of gratitude from the old man. Lethbridge-Stewart had no idea if the man was a general, of course, but clearly ex-military, and the respect shown to him had been appreciated.

Lethbridge-Stewart brushed at his face, again feeling an invisible cobweb brush against his skin. It was a horrible

sensation.

As he continued through the park he was reminded of his picnic in Kensington Gardens two days ago. It was not often he got to simply lounge about and think of nothing but enjoying his time with Sally, and he idly wondered when he'd next get a proper day off. It seemed things were heating up around him, getting ever closer to whatever it was Hamilton (and Gilmore, apparently) were planning. *Oh well*, he thought, lifting his face up towards the warmth of the sun, *might as well enjoy it while I can*.

4.

The surface of the coffee table couldn't be seen for reports and files.

Lethbridge-Stewart stood up and stretched his back. He glanced at his wristwatch. It was almost 11pm – how quickly the hours passed when you got entrenched in top secret reports. And what reports they were!

A few months ago Lethbridge-Stewart knew he'd be the first in line to scoff at them, but he'd experienced too much to consider them anything but truth.

Aliens at Gatwick, a bus load of (alien!) campers killed in South Wales, a spaceship landing in a school playground in Shoreditch! And those were some of the saner reports. And every time the Cosmic Hobo was involved in some capacity – the descriptions differed, but they were always essentially the same. Short man, dressed like some hobo (hence the codename), with dark hair and accompanied by one, or more, young assistant. There were a few reports that suggested a different man – like the events of C-Day, which took place the same time as the trouble at Gatwick. At the former the military were assisted by an old man, so it clearly wasn't their Cosmic Hobo, even though he used the same alias. Reports suggested *that* was a codename, too, passed from agent to agent. At least that was the supposition until the London Event and the eye-witness confirmation of

Professor Travers that *their* Hobo was a time-traveller.

Lethbridge-Stewart shook his head. It wasn't up to him to draw conclusions, that's what High Command was for.

But he did wonder why High Command had not acted sooner, given all the alien encounters over the last forty-or-so years. While Hamilton had him finding evidence, there were countless reports of such evidence being hidden and destroyed long before the London Event.

He walked over to the living room window and considered what Gilmore had said about the Counter Measures Group. Politicians had become involved, playing their own games, working to their own agendas. Lethbridge-Stewart looked out to the lamp-lit Buonaparte Mews and turned his mind to the Vault. Proof, if any was needed, of the reason so much was kept secret in today's world. Supposedly run by the Ministry of Technology, but in reality under the control of Department C19 whose goals were beyond Lethbridge-Stewart's pay grade. For now.

For the first time, he got a sense of just why Hamilton had to move so carefully. There were powerful men out there, men who stood to lose a lot if such things became public. Powerful and dangerous men.

Lethbridge-Stewart narrowed his eyes. Yes, he thought he'd seen something move. At the far end of the Mews, standing on the street corner was a figure mostly hidden by shadows. But not hidden enough. Lethbridge-Stewart had to entertain the idea that he may have been imagining things, paranoia growing over the nature of the files behind him, but he was certain he'd caught that figure look directly

at his flat.

All day he'd had a sense of being followed, but every time he checked he saw nobody. Until now.

Well, then, soon sort that out.

He stepped back from the window, and moved quickly across the living room. On a sideboard near the door lay his grandfather's service revolver. He picked it up as he left, and grabbed his keys from the hook beside the front door. The door closed behind him, and he rushed down the staircase, slipping out into the back garden. He tucked the revolver under his left arm, and walked the road behind his home until he reached the corner. He stopped and peered around it.

No sign of the observer.

Glancing around, watching the stragglers still walking along Bessborough Place, Lethbridge-Stewart made his way past the gardens and stopped at the entrance of Buonaparte Mews. The man had... Lethbridge-Stewart blinked, his eyes narrowing on a figure slumped alongside the far wall of the mews. Pulling out his revolver, Lethbridge-Stewart crossed the Mews and brought himself into the shadows. He closed in on the slumped figure, and knelt beside him.

The man was breathing, but only barely. The result of the knife poking out of his back, no doubt. Lethbridge-Stewart looked down and saw the trail of blood coming from the where the Mews met Bessborough Place, where the man had been standing during his observation of Lethbridge-Stewart's flat. Somebody must have snuck up behind him, drove the knife into his back before the man had a chance

to register the presence of his soon-to-be assailant.

Lethbridge-Stewart's ear picked up the familiar sound of white noise, the kind of white noise that a walky-talky made when the channel was left open. He searched the unconscious, dying man, and found a slim cylindrical metal walky-talky clasped firmly in the man's right hand. He prised it from the hand, and examined it. It didn't look like any walky-talky he'd seen before, but its operation looked simple enough. He pressed the button on its side.

'Man down, over.'

For a moment more white noise came over the channel. Then a click, and a voice. 'Who is this?'

In for a penny, Lethbridge-Stewart thought. 'This is Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart, Scots Guards. The object of your surveillance, unless I'm mistaken. Your man is down. Send assistance. Over.'

He waited for a response. The man's breathing was getting sharper, shorter. He didn't have long left.

'Return to your home. Over and out.'

The voice ended with a click and the white noise went with it.

What the devil was going on? Lethbridge-Stewart couldn't just leave the man dying alone, regardless of why he'd been there. He searched through the man's pockets, looking for some clue as to who he was. Finally he found something. Identification: Sergeant Roger Abbot. The man was RAF!

Lethbridge-Stewart looked up, his eyes roaming the immediate area. Two men stood at the far end of

Bessborough Place, apparently sharing a smoke. Innocuous enough, but then... Gilmore must have sent the man to keep an eye on Lethbridge-Stewart – but why? Protection? Considering the files it seemed likely.

Decided, Lethbridge-Stewart clambered to his feet and rushed across the Mews back to his flat. His abrupt movement attracted the attention of the two men, but Lethbridge-Stewart didn't stay outside long enough to see what they did next.

The phone was ringing as he opened the door. He rushed up the small landing, and picked the receiver up. 'Hello?'

'Colonel, meet me in St James's Park,' said the voice of Ian Gilmore. 'The trap is sprung, and they're closing in.'

5.

Fifteen minutes later Lethbridge-Stewart was at St James's Park, having parked his car on Queen Anne's Gate. Gilmore was already there, dressed in civvies, sheltered in the shadow of one of the many trees that lined Birdcage Walk. Lethbridge-Stewart gripped the handle of the attaché case tighter, as he approached the vice-marshal.

'Were you followed?' Gilmore asked without preamble.

'Not to my knowledge,' Lethbridge-Stewart replied. The two men were gone by the time he got in his car, although the body of the RAF man was still there. No doubt dead.

Gilmore nodded. 'I was.'

For a second Lethbridge-Stewart was surprised by the vice-marshal's candour, until he singled out a couple of men some distance away, unconvincingly pointing at the pelicans by St James's Lake, seemingly interested in the birds. One man kept glancing at Lethbridge-Stewart and Gilmore in what he probably thought was a casual way.

'Subtle,' Lethbridge-Stewart said.

'They've given up on subtle, I think,' Gilmore pointed out. 'They want what's in that case.'

'I assume you have your own men in the area?'

'You assume wrong, Colonel.'

'I see,' Lethbridge-Stewart said, although he didn't. If it was him, he'd have his own men in civvies nearby and

armed. The information contained in the case could not be allowed to fall into the wrong hands. 'Do you at least have some kind of plan? My flat was safer than being out in the open like this.'

'Safer, yes, but too obviously a trap. Seems they wouldn't make a direct move on you there.'

Lethbridge-Stewart narrowed his eyes, reminded of Gilmore's earlier words on the phone, and drew closer to the vice-marshal. 'You used me as bait?'

'I did, Colonel. Do you have a problem with that?'

'No, sir. But I would have appreciated being informed.'

'Well, you're informed now.' Gilmore set off with a sharp step. Lethbridge-Stewart followed. 'I suggest we head to St James's tube station. We need to flush these people out.'

'By going underground?'

Gilmore glanced back, and smiled slightly. 'I *do* have a plan, Colonel. Trust me.'

Lethbridge-Stewart didn't see that he had much of a choice. He was now out in the open with very sensitive documents, being followed by enemy agents who wanted said documents. The bait in a trap. A trap set by the man beside him. Trust was not always easy, especially when it was necessary.

'What about the man you had watching my flat?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked.

'Sergeant Abbot, good soldier. Was there at Shoreditch. He didn't make it.'

Lethbridge-Stewart knew that tone. The regret, fortified

by the knowledge that the death had a purpose. Fallen in the line of duty. Lethbridge-Stewart just hoped Abbot's life was worth whatever was going on.

Gilmore had certainly been right. Whoever those men were, they weren't interested in subtlety. They followed the officers across Birdcage Walk, down through Queen Anne's Gate and all the way to the Broadway. It was nearing midnight, and as such the streets of St James's were emptier than usual, but still not empty enough to confront the two men. They were almost certainly armed, like Lethbridge-Stewart and (he assumed) Gilmore were. Besides, Gilmore wanted to 'flush' them out, and it was for this reason that Lethbridge-Stewart didn't suggest using his car when they walked passed it.

They crossed the Broadway, and continued towards Tothil Street. A little distance ahead of them, on the corner, stood St James's Underground Station. As they reached it, Gilmore nodded ahead to two men more who were walking towards them.

'Not our reinforcements, I take it?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked.

'No.'

He couldn't be certain, but Lethbridge-Stewart thought they were the same two men he'd seen near his home. The polar-neck jerseys and bell-bottoms looked familiar. If so, then they must had got here before him.

'This way,' Gilmore said, ignoring the question, and led the way into the station.

6.

This time of night the ticket collector's booth was empty, while the Underground staff prepared to close the station for the day. The two officers continued past the booth and descended the steps to the platforms. St James's, being served by the Circle & District Line, was a sub-surface station and didn't need escalators. Which Lethbridge-Stewart considered a shame, since the steep steps were working his leg muscles hard. In a way he had not been prepared for this late at night.

Upon entering the mostly deserted eastbound platform, Lethbridge-Stewart realised that it was the first time he'd been in the Underground since the end of February. Not that he used the Underground much anyway, since his car got him where he needed to be, but since February he hadn't stepped foot inside a single station. And now he remembered why. Looking left at the tunnel entrance he was reminded of the deaths of the men under his command. He had lost men under his command before, of course, but it had been different then. Even now, after his experiences in Bledoe, he still saw the Great Intelligence as an unknowable enemy, its objectives unclear. He didn't like losing men in a battle he didn't understand, and that was the feeling he still had while he stood on the platform waiting for the last train of the night.

Brave or stupid, Lethbridge-Stewart wasn't sure, but the two men who had been following them from Birdcage Walk stepped onto the platform. Gilmore showed no sign of noticing, but Lethbridge-Stewart was certain he had. If the vice-marshal wasn't bothered, then neither would he be. Nonetheless, his hand slipped inside his sheepskin jacket and felt the reassuring bulk of his service revolver.

The rumble and screech of the train approaching.

The few civilians on the platform readied themselves for their last train home. It came to a stop and they all entered. The not-so-subtle followers entered two cars away from them. Gilmore took a seat and Lethbridge-Stewart did likewise, before quickly glancing through the windows of the emergency door. One of the two men were standing at the emergency door of his car, watching them both. Lethbridge-Stewart sat opposite Gilmore, his back to the platform, placing the case on his lap, and the train rumbled eastward.

'How far are we going?'

'Changing at Whitechapel,' Gilmore said simply.

Lethbridge-Stewart nodded. 'Any particular reason?'

'Yes.'

Lethbridge-Stewart understood that some things were need-to-know, and the chain of command existed for a reason, but the vice-marshal was testing his patience with his taciturn responses. Lethbridge-Stewart was only going to allow this to go on so far before he put his foot down. Staff officers had their places, of course, but in the field lack of information could lead to bad command choices and the

loss of life. Lethbridge-Stewart didn't wish to see that happen to him. Not this night.

He glanced briefly at Gilmore; the man was smiling.

'Enjoying yourself, sir?'

'A little bit, yes. You're behind a desk enough to understand how tedious paperwork can get, Colonel. It's nice to be out on the field again. Not something a man of my position gets to do often.'

'Yes, well, I suppose it is an even match. Two of them, two of us.'

'Well, three of us technically, but I suspect that will change soon, and not in our favour.'

Lethbridge-Stewart raised an eyebrow. 'And that's part of your plan?'

Gilmore nodded. 'I know, it sounds risky, but the stakes are high and we need to find out just what we're up against.'

We no doubt meaning Gilmore and Hamilton, and whoever was involved in the setting up of the new Operational Corps. As the train pulled into Westminster, Lethbridge-Stewart kept his own counsel. He had a feeling he knew who those men were working for.

Silence passed between them while the train continued on for the next few stops. It was only as the train left Blackfriars that Gilmore deigned to speak once more.

'Did you manage to read all the files?'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked around them at the empty carriage. He stood up, and peered through the emergency doors either end of the carriage, to make sure they were empty too.

‘Oh, don’t worry. There’s nobody else on this train now. Except the driver, the guard and our guests.’

‘How can you possibly know that?’

Gilmore laughed. ‘I can count, Colonel. I’ve counted everybody who boarded and alighted the train since St James’s Park, plus the guard told me.’ He patted his ear and Lethbridge-Stewart noticed an earpiece attached to a plastic-coated wire running down to and inside Gilmore’s blazer. Clearly some kind of sophisticated R/T, even more compact than the one Abbot had on him. Useful. Lethbridge-Stewart decided he’d have to see about getting his hands on some of that equipment for the Operational Corps.

Lethbridge-Stewart sat back down, glancing at the emergency door. It was only a matter of time before the enemy agents realised they were alone on the train and decided to make their move. Meanwhile... ‘I read what I could. It’s extraordinary.’

‘Dangerous, too.’

‘Of course. Luckily we have outside help... At least, we have had, from time to time.’

‘Makes you wonder, doesn’t it, Colonel? How much danger would we be in without the Cosmic Hobo visiting us?’

Lethbridge-Stewart frowned. ‘I don’t follow. Without his help, it’s possible the whole UK would have fallen to the Great Intelligence. Not to mention his involvement in the Shoreditch Incident... Those battle machines you described; what would have happened if he had not been there to help you?’

‘That’s the thing. As I understand it, the Shoreditch Incident would never have occurred if it wasn’t for him. We were just caught in the middle of a trap he set. The hostiles would never have come to Earth had he not left his technology here for them to find.’

Lethbridge-Stewart said nothing about being caught in the middle of a trap set by someone else.

‘And going by your report, the Intelligence’s incursion of London was a trap for the Hobo. Because of what happened back in ’35 at Det-Sen. The Hobo is dangerous, Colonel, don’t you forget that.’ Gilmore leaned forward. ‘In fact, once the new Corps is set up, I’m going to make it a standing order that if the Hobo turns up again, he’s to be detained. There’s a lot he can tell us.’

Lethbridge-Stewart didn’t like the sound of that. *Detained*. Perhaps Gilmore was right, at least about events back in February and ’63, but the rest of the files he had read didn’t suggest the same thing at all.

The train lurched to a screeching halt and Lethbridge-Stewart felt the arm rest dig into his side. Gilmore almost fell out of his seat, but he managed to balance himself with a hand on the wooden floor. He looked up, for the first time concern plagued his face. This was not part of the plan.

Gilmore stood up and pulled out the silver walky-talky, removing the plastic wire from the top of it. ‘Reynolds, what’s going on? Over.’

The crackle of static, and then, ‘Sir, there’s—’ Reynolds’ voice cut off with a gurgling scream and a deep roar.

Lethbridge-Stewart stood and removed his revolver from

under his jacket. The roar didn't just come from the walky-talky; it echoed from the rear of the train. 'We've got trouble,' he said, his mind flashing back to being surrounded in a dark tunnel, him and his men pinned down by the shaggy forms of... 'That was a Yeti!'

Gilmore nodded sharply, stored away the walky-talky and pulled out his .40 calibre Hi-Power hand gun. 'Just as we suspected.'

'Suspected? You knew there were Yeti down here?'

'Later, Colonel. For now we need to get off this train.'

Lethbridge-Stewart concurred. He didn't relish the idea of being in the Underground pursued by Yeti again, but it would be better out in the tunnels than trapped inside the train. He moved over to the nearest emergency door. The enemy agents were walking up the carriage towards them. He cocked his gun. 'Bullets may not work on Yeti, but they will stop people.' He went to open the emergency door, but Gilmore stopped them.

'No, Colonel. Let's get into the tunnels.'

Gilmore was too eager for Lethbridge-Stewart's liking, but he was out ranked and knew better than to disobey orders. So instead, he made sure he held the case tightly, and set off up the carriage. Gilmore followed him.

7.

The enemy agents didn't appear to be in a rush, which troubled Lethbridge-Stewart somewhat. He had a feeling he and Gilmore were being herded like sheep, with a wolf waiting for them. The driver wouldn't have stopped the train without good cause. Yeti blocking the way would be cause enough. He had many questions, but they would have to keep. For now. First they needed to get out of the train. He looked back, past Gilmore.

It was hard to see through the narrow emergency doors, even though several behind them were now open, but he could see enough to spot a Yeti a couple of carriages back. Smashing its way through the narrow gap between seats, ripping out the poles usually used by passengers for balance. The enemy agents didn't seem bothered that the Yeti was closing in on them. It was no threat to them.

Perhaps he had been wrong. Had the Great Intelligence returned? He had seen it take over people before.

They had reached the first carriage. Lethbridge-Stewart had no intention of checking the driver's cabin, no matter what Gilmore wanted. He'd seen what Yeti could do. He stopped in the small gap between carriages. It wasn't much, but with a struggle he felt sure he could climb to the top of the train. There was a bit more space above the train – enough for them to escape. He looked back, through the

windows to the tunnel outside. There! Another, smaller, tunnel branched off a short distance away. If they could climb to the top of the train, and then slide down, they could avoid the Yeti that were obviously waiting for them at the front of the train.

He told Gilmore his plan. The vice-marshal looked up at the map above the seats. 'We're halfway between Monument and Tower Hill, which means...' He nodded. 'Yes, that tunnel must lead to the old Tower Hill Station, or Mark Lane as it used to be called. After you, Colonel.'

Lethbridge-Stewart pocketed his revolver and handed the case to Gilmore and then, with some difficulty, clambered up the gap between carriages. He coughed at the dust on top of the train, and found himself having to lie almost flat to avoid banging his head on the roof of the tunnel. They really didn't allow for much space when building these sub-surface tunnels. He reached down for the case, idly wondering what road they were beneath. Aside from the recently opened Victoria Line, he knew that the Underground tunnels tended to follow the roads above, from station to station, to avoid tunnelling beneath houses and other buildings. It was a logical concession back when the Underground was first built, but techniques had improved a lot since those early days, as the Victoria Line proved. Pity he couldn't dig upwards. Escaping to the surface would have been preferable to being chased by Yeti in the tunnels again.

Gilmore handed him the case, fired a couple of shots into the carriage, and began to climb.

Lethbridge-Stewart shimmied backwards until he was level with the branching tunnel. He turned himself around, and slid over the curve of the train's roof. He banged his chin against the metal edge of the window frame, before hitting the tunnel floor hard. A shudder clawed its way up his spine, and for a brief moment he lost control of his nervous system and thought he was going to fall to his knees, which would no doubt mean smacking his face into the side of the train.

What he saw inside the carriage forced him to regain control. One of the two men aimed his gun at the ceiling of the carriage, where Gilmore was shuffling in reverse to join Lethbridge-Stewart. The colonel took a step back into the side tunnel and removed his revolver. He aimed and shot. The first bullet splintered the glass, and the second shattered it. Now both men were facing him, re-aiming their guns. Lethbridge-Stewart didn't waste time. He fired twice, each shot finding its target. Both men dropped.

Gilmore landed beside the train, his descent smoother than Lethbridge-Stewart's had been. He looked through the window, then at Lethbridge-Stewart. 'You could have left one of them alive, Colonel.'

'Yes, I could have. But then you might be dead. Sir.'

Gilmore looked back at the train. 'Yes, well...'

The tearing of metal interrupted them and both men turned to see the Yeti ripping its way through the side of the train carriage. It might as well have been made of tin-foil for the resistance it showed the Yeti.

'I suggest we get moving,' Gilmore said, and picked up

the attaché case off the dirty floor. He replaced his revolver and removed a small torch, which he threw over to Lethbridge-Stewart.

‘I see you came prepared.’

‘All plans have a risk factor, Colonel. Being stuck down here was one risk I accounted for.’ Gilmore glanced back at the Yeti, which was now free of the train. It was forcing its way down the small gap between train and tunnel, straight towards them. ‘After you,’ he said, and Lethbridge-Stewart turned, pressed the torch switch, and they both set off.

8.

‘We’re going deeper. This is not the way out,’ Lethbridge-Stewart said, his tone no longer coached with respect. He had allowed Gilmore his head, in deference to the man’s rank, but they had passed a junction some time ago, somewhere between Aldgate and Liverpool Street, at which point Gilmore had taken the lead even though the tunnel he chose went further down.

The roar of the Yeti remained ubiquitously close. They had been walking for miles now, and it didn’t seem like the Yeti was drawing nearer. Just preventing them from backtracking.

Gilmore glanced back, his expression hard to read in the near-darkness. ‘Very well, Colonel, perhaps it is time to bring you up to speed.’

That time was long past in his view, but Lethbridge-Stewart said nothing, hoping his silence would say everything he felt like saying.

‘I’m sure you’re aware of the citadels built beneath London,’ Gilmore began.

‘Like the Admiralty Citadel near Horse Guards Parade?’

‘Yes. Of course most were built during the last world war, but some of them remain in preparation should the balloon go up and the Soviets strike. There have been rumours of other such places under London; not bunkers,

but research facilities. Storehouses for secrets certain shady organisations do not want the government to be aware of.'

Lethbridge-Stewart wished he could be surprised, but after recent months, not to mention the contents of the files... 'Such as the Vault?'

'The Vault, the Forge... others. Including, apparently, some institute set up by Queen Victoria, if you can believe that. But the Vault is the main problem right now. They've been stockpiling the detritus of recent alien encounters, like the London Event, that trouble on Fang Rock...' Gilmore stopped and waved the torch. 'Do you see that?'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked. A source of light ahead. 'Perhaps we should turn the torch off?'

Gilmore glanced behind Lethbridge-Stewart. 'The Yeti doesn't seem to be getting closer. I think they know we're coming. No sense risking tripping up for the sake the element of surprise which we don't even have.'

Lethbridge-Stewart shrugged. 'Better than stepping on rats, I suppose.' They continued on. 'Where are we anyway?'

'If I'm right, I think we're close to the old Shoreditch Railway Station. Shut down some time ago. Conveniently.'

'Why convenient?'

'Well, we had our suspicions, and seems I judged right.' Gilmore smiled, a sight Lethbridge-Stewart could now see thanks to the source of light increasing as they drew nearer.

He returned to their previous conversation. He wanted all information he could get *before* they met the enemy. 'The Vault is in Northumberland, so why would there be Yeti in the Underground still? Did you not read the report about

what happened in Bledoe?’

‘I did, but the Yeti destroyed by the death of the Intelligence in Bledoe were only those removed from the Vault itself. To think they were *all* the Yeti the Vault had in their possession is to underestimate the General.’

Lethbridge-Stewart had heard of the mysterious General; Miss Travers had filled him in on what she had learned in her few months at the Vault. ‘So, I take it you think this General, and by extension the Vault, has possession of one of the citadels?’

‘Oh, we know he does,’ Gilmore said, his tone grim. ‘But the problem has always been finding it. Hard to shut something down if you don’t know where it is.’

Lethbridge-Stewart could see how that would be. As much as he knew about the citadels, and that wasn’t much, he knew there much not known about them. Including how many there actually where. Hard to locate something that, on paper, didn’t even exist. He smiled to himself, appreciating the irony of how that related to his ongoing assignment.

‘And that’s why I was used as bait?’

‘Yes, we knew the General would want what’s contained in those files. The plan was to draw his people out. We hoped they’d attempt to retrieve them from you, but that changed when they killed Abbot.’

‘So we both became bait?’

Gilmore nodded. ‘Of course. I wouldn’t ask any of my men to do something I wouldn’t do myself.’

Lethbridge-Stewart decided not to point out that he

wasn't one of Gilmore's men. 'So, you had men in position at Whitechapel?'

'No, in Shoreditch. As I said, we had our suspicions about the location of the Vault's citadel. But, obviously the General had different plans for us.'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked around him at the dank tunnel, at the rats which scurried along it. 'Herding us to his lair?'

'Something like that.'

They stopped at a corner. Gilmore removed his walky-talky. He pressed the send/receive button a few times. Lethbridge-Stewart recognised the signal he was sending. Gilmore pocketed the walky-talky and torch and pulled out his revolver once again. 'Shall we?'

'I don't see why not.' Lethbridge-Stewart cocked his gun, just in case.

9.

The entrance to the citadel was open. It was as Lethbridge-Stewart expected. Clean, well lit, the open space within the citadel was lined with equipment now outdated but still functional, including a computer in the far corner, its spools turning as it processed information. Four doorways led off to smaller room; no doubt sleeping rooms and other conveniences. But none of that mattered to Lethbridge-Stewart; what did matter was the man sitting in the middle of the open space. Covered in a very familiar web inside a pyramid made of Perspex and steel was the unmistakable form of Professor Edward Travers.

He had been missing for weeks. Miss Travers, his daughter, wasn't overly concerned as, she said, he often went on his travels without notice. This time she had been wrong. Her own paymasters had her father, and Lethbridge-Stewart was pretty sure the professor was not a willing participant.

No wonder the Yeti were helping the agents of the Vault.

Lethbridge-Stewart raised his pistol and aimed it at Travers.

'What are you doing?' Gilmore hissed.

'The Vault is bad enough, but you don't know what the Intelligence can do. I've stopped it before, and I will do so again.' Lethbridge-Stewart's finger tightened on the trigger.

This wasn't the first time that Travers had been used by the Intelligence, and Lethbridge-Stewart berated himself for not realising that Travers was the obvious gateway for the Intelligence's return. Other than Staff Sergeant Arnold, Travers was the only man known to have been possessed by the Intelligence. And back in March the Intelligence had resurrected Arnold. Travers was the obvious choice now. Lethbridge-Stewart should have seen this coming.

'I'd rather you didn't do that, Alistair.'

Lethbridge-Stewart's finger relaxed, but only slightly. He turned his head to look at the man who had entered the room from one of the doorways.

Dressed in an immaculate suit, hair fashionably long, was one of the 'holy trinity' of Sandhurst – Leslie Johnston. Unlike the other two, Lethbridge-Stewart and Walter Douglas, Johnston had left the military shortly after graduating from Sandhurst. His ideals just didn't mesh well with military discipline, and the so-called trinity was soon split up. Lethbridge-Stewart had heard little from Johnston in the last few years, and now he understood why.

'Don't tell me you're the General?'

Johnston smiled. 'That would tie everything up in a nice little bow for you, wouldn't it, Alistair?' He shook his head. 'No, I'm not the General. But I'm the closest thing to him, as far as this little operation is concerned.'

Gilmore looked from Lethbridge-Stewart to Johnston. 'Who are you? And just what is this "little operation"?''

'I'm surprised you don't know, Vice-Marshal. I thought you knew everything about the Vault.'

‘If I did, I wouldn’t have needed to set up this trap.’

‘Oh yes, you’re little trap.’ Again Johnston smiled. ‘Hasn’t quite worked out as you planned, has it?’

Gilmore kept his expression blank.

Lethbridge-Stewart introduced Johnston. ‘Although why he’d bring back the Great Intelligence is madness, even for him.’

Johnston walked over to the pyramid, completely ignoring the guns pointing at him. ‘Is that what you think we’re doing here?’ He shook his head, and gave Lethbridge-Stewart a look of disappointment. ‘Come now, Alistair, I was never the sharpest of the trinity, but even I was never that stupid. Oh no, we’re simply pushing the limits of the research Miss Travers’ began up in Northumberland. Wireless transmission.’ He nodded behind them, and the men turned. The Yeti stood blocking their retreat. ‘Baloo there, for instance, is being controlled directly by Edward’s mind. No need for radio transmitters, no need for aerials, or cables, direct control from the human mind.’ He indicated the large computer in the corner of the room. ‘Imagine if we could apply that to the computing systems of the world. Linking them up into a wireless computer network.’

Lethbridge-Stewart was no technician, but he could see the advantages of such a network of communication. And the disadvantages. ‘So, the Vault is working for the betterment of British industry after all?’ He tried not to laugh. ‘Judging on my experience with the Vault, I find that hard to believe.’

Johnston shrugged. ‘It doesn’t matter what you believe.’

He turned to Gilmore. 'You looked troubled, Marshal.'

'I'm recalling C-Day.'

'Ah yes, one of those incidents we know so little about.' Johnston held his hand out. 'Give me the case. The files contained within are essential for our research. Even our resources can't get hold of Professor Brett's work.'

Lethbridge-Stewart's response was to tighten his finger on the trigger. 'You know that's not going to happen.'

'Not while you draw breath, Alistair?' Johnston shook his head. 'Baloo can certainly take care of that.' He sighed. 'But let's not sink to threats. I don't want to kill you, but I do need those files.'

'Then you have a choice to make,' Lethbridge-Stewart said.

The two old friends were at an impasse.

'If this is for the betterment of the UK, then how do you justify the deaths?' Gilmore asked.

'The cost of progress. Our Yeti have been roaming the Underground for months. Initially through more conventional remote control, but recently, thanks to Miss Travers and her father here, in new and interesting ways. We've been testing the reach – how far can this wireless control spread? You'd be surprised by the result.'

Lethbridge-Stewart wasn't interested in the results, and was surprised that Gilmore wanted to talk things through. From what Lethbridge-Stewart had read about the man, Gilmore was not a negotiator, at least not back in his group captain days. Perhaps experience had taught him the wisdom of asking first and shooting later. Not Lethbridge-

Stewart, as far as he was concerned questions could be asked later. Good men had died.

‘This ends here,’ he said.

‘Yes, I’m afraid it does. But not the way you hope.’ Johnston lowered his hand and leaned in close to Professor Travers. ‘Kill Gilmore,’ he whispered.

So much for diplomacy. The Yeti behind them moved, its arms raised, claws out, and advanced on Gilmore. Instinctively the vice-marshal turned and fired. He must have read the reports, known that bullets with largely ineffective against the robotic beasts. Lethbridge-Stewart knew better. The only way to stop the Yeti was to stop the one controlling them. Before his conscience could argue, he moved his pistol from Johnston and fired.

The bullet tore through Travers’ shoulder and the old man cried out in pain. He tumbled forward, out of the pyramid, and collapsed on the floor. To his right, Lethbridge-Stewart saw the Yeti stop dead in its tracks.

‘Damn you!’ Johnston hissed, and made a hasty retreat.

But he didn’t get far. Before he could reach the doorway that presumably lead to another exit, a small squad of RAF men emerged and trained their weapons on him.

Lethbridge-Stewart smiled and looked at Gilmore. ‘Stalling?’ he asked, remembering the signal the vice-marshal had sent. Clearly these new walky-talkies had a better range than conventional R/Ts.

‘Of course, Colonel. You don’t really think I care for his justifications?’ Gilmore walked over to Johnston, who even now was looking around for some way to escape. ‘A good

officer knows when he's beaten, Lieutenant,' Gilmore said.
'But then, I doubt you were ever a good officer.'

10.

Lethbridge-Stewart sniffed the night air, glad to be free of the musky underground again. Gilmore's men had been waiting in the Totter's Lane junkyard near the old Shoreditch Railway Station, but had triangulated the hidden citadel's position with Gilmore's signal. Finding the rear entrance had been simple enough – it was only a few streets away from Totter's Lane.

Lethbridge-Stewart now stood outside the junkyard, waiting for Gilmore to finish inside, where he was talking to Hamilton via R/T. There was a wet paint sign on the blue gates, which bore the legend *I. M. FOREMAN – Scrap Merchant*. He wondered if Mr Foreman minded the RAF using his junkyard as a base of operations – Lethbridge-Stewart supposed he must be okay with it, after all according to Gilmore it was the same junkyard he'd first encountered those alien battle machines in '63, not to mention the Cosmic Hobo himself.

He heard Gilmore call him and stepped inside the junkyard. The vice-marshal stood beside a Bedford military truck.

'Hamilton has men on the way here now to secure the underground facility, and we've called for an ambulance. Professor Travers will be taken care of.'

Lethbridge-Stewart nodded. 'Good. He still doesn't recall

how he got there?’

‘No. Last thing he remembers was leaving Wilshire.’

‘Almost four weeks ago. Probably for the best. What of Lieutenant Johnston?’

‘That’s a bit more difficult,’ Gilmore said, not looking happy about it. ‘Whoever the General is, he’s has more clout than we realised. People are being sent to collect Johnston, we have to rendezvous with them at RAF Northolt.’

Lethbridge-Stewart smiled. He could see where Gilmore was heading with this. ‘Some distance between here and Northolt.’

‘My thinking precisely. We’ll get what we can out of him before then.’ Gilmore indicated the truck. ‘We might need to pass through Central London. Perhaps we can drop you off near St James’s Park?’

‘That would be appreciated, Vice-Marshel Gilmore.’

‘My pleasure, Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart.’

Lethbridge-Stewart saluted Gilmore and climbed into the back of the truck. Several RAF men, armed, sat either side of Johnston, who was cuffed. He looked up as Lethbridge-Stewart took a seat. He smiled.

‘You can wipe that grin off your face, Johnston,’ Lethbridge-Stewart said. ‘Will be a while before you reach RAF Northolt, and before you do, you and I are going to have a little chat.’

He heard the passenger door of the front cabin close. No doubt Gilmore getting in. With a shake the truck departed the junkyard at Totter’s Lane. It had been a long night, but ultimately a productive one. He didn’t even mind Gilmore

using him as bait. They'd put paid to the General's misuse of Miss Travers' research, for now at least, and saved Professor Travers. And, more importantly, uncovered a weak spot in the Vault's infrastructure. Lieutenant Leslie Johnston.

His old friend may not like to admit it, but he would tell Lethbridge-Stewart everything the colonel wanted to know. There were many routes to Northolt after all. Not all of them quick.

The End

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