

Part two.

The met sergeant opened and closed his mouth a few times.

“That’s a Gatling cannon.” He said. “You can’t fire a Gatling cannon in a built up area.”

The man with the clipboard considered this. “Nooo. I think you can. I mean, you could build some kind of regulator, something linked to the safely catch that stopped you firing it, but the problem would be letting it know it was in a built up area. GPS would help, if you were on a world where the locations of urban areas were known in advance and the world *had* a GPS system, but you’d get a lot of multipath errors, and you’d want some way of independently verifying it was a built-up area. Probably some thermometer, detect the higher temperatures caused by the tall buildings acting as sun-traps.” he scribbled something on the back of the clipboard and then looked at it. “well... it might be doable, but, no wait... no. Just no: it would be far too expensive to build.” Without looking up from the clipboard he changed to ticking of boxes in rapid succession from some list. “Perhaps you meant to say something like “Surely you should not be *allowed* to fire a Gatling cannon in a built up area?”

“Damn right! That thing fires what, twenty mill shells? They’d go right through a *wall* and not slow down!”

“Normally, yes. We replaced the standard shells with ones with a very thin aluminium casing, not much more than that you’d find on a drinks can. The shell-casing is atomised by the explosive when it detonates. There is no shrapnel, no large fragments. It his something and then *poof*, a cloud of hot gas, nothing more. “

“Even so...”

“we compared it to NATO seven point six two on ballistics gel dummies. If a single nato round hits a dummy with another three meters directly behind it in the bullets path there is a seventy per-cent chance of the round exiting and striking the second dummy with enough force to be considered “harmful”. With this, whilst there may be nothing left of the first dummy, there is was a zero per cent chance of the second one being hit.” He paused. “Well, when we added realistic replica bones to the first dummy that went up to a ten per cent chance of a fragment of bone from the first dummy hitting the second with potentially dangerous force, but it’s still provably safer than the approved KDA standard for long-arms In single-shot tests.”

“Single. Shot.”

“Ah yes. I see where you are going here. We added a selective fire lever. Snowball here” he gestured to the large white-furred Da’ ramming belt after belt of 20mm rounds into the gun “Can hit a man-sized target accurately with single shot at up to four-hundred meters.” The man, Cuthbert, Smiled again. It was a disarming smile. It needed to be.

“Now, I understand, sergeant, that you have had a man injured, probable alien weaponry, and you requested KDA assistance to try and identify it?” The sergeant stopped, mid-breath. He had been inhaling to yell that he didn’t care how accurate it was it was a bloody Gatling gun, but he was caught off-balance by the change in track. He recognised it as a cheap police trick if ever there was one, but this man looked to be important in the KDA, and might actually be able to help. “Wha- yes. Yes. And can you-”

“I specialise, amongst other things, In competitive weapon studies from the 1850’s onwards including xenotech. William there does up to 1850, sort of, and I do after it. Isaac does maths, so I can’t imagine either has been much help so far, for which I’m sorry.”

“And he specialises in?” he said grumbly nodding to Snowball, who was buckling two of the largest and ugliest automatic shotguns he had ever seen to his waist, as pistols.

“I’ll give you three Guesses. Now until I’ve had a word with my men and a chance to liaise with KDA central offices I’m afraid there is very little I can tell legally you. Once I’ve got you temporary clearance, then I can be a little more open, but until then, the rules just won’t allow it. However I can promise you two things, we *will* work out what those people are armed with, one way or the other, and we *will* do our best to get those hostages safely out. Now If you’ll excuse me, protocol says I need to be briefed by the first KDA on the scene to find out the status of things before I can talk to you any further.

Cuthbert nodded to the Met sergeant, ticked a few boxes of his list, and walked slowly over to Isaac and Will, not looking up from the clipboard.

“See you decided to go with the Wikus Van De Merwe.” Said Will, tapping the calculator in the Kevlar vest with a fingernail as Cuthbert approached. “That.” He said with the air of an aficionado pronouncing judgement of something of great importance. “Makes you look like a tosser.”

“A paper-pushing tosser.” Added Isaac cheerfully.

“Of course. Adaptive camouflage is where you find it. At least I looking like paper-pushing tosser has its advantages.”

“True.” Said Isaac. “Did he notice your clipboard is just the titanium trauma-plate from the vest with a bull-clip on top? I’ve always admired how people get dissected by the calculator and clipboard and don’t.”

“I doubt he even noticed the guns: wear a calculator and clipboard on the front of a Kevlar vest and it’s hard for people to notice anything else. Plus you look funny, and funny isn’t dangerous. Right, what do we have here?”

“Bank heist.” Said Will. “Old fashioned east-London gang tries to rob a bank with old-fashioned east-end weapons, crowbars, sawn-offs, and then when it goes bad they pull out something alien, take two bank cashiers hostage, hop in a transit van, swerve to avoid a dog, we think, crash the transit into that lamppost *there*, and run and hide in that warehouse *there*. The met armed response unit is here in minutes, and one of them goes forwards to check out the scene and get hit by some streak of blue light that lashes out of that window there, he falls over spasming, gets teleported out of there by the Da’, which scares his mates stiff as they don’t know where he’s gone or what’s happening, and that’s about it. Fast forward half an hour and we’re here. Did you arrange the teleport?”

“Yes. We were listening in. The last thing we need is a metropolitan police officer getting killed by an alien weapon two days before the re-negotiation of the Non-tradable items section of The Treaty of Tyrone. If he dies the police will want alien weaponry to fight crime with, and we’ll see no end to the escalation if they do. The computer automatically flanged the police radio-traffic about the bank heist, I was listening in twelve seconds after the first mention of possible alien weaponry being pulled in the bank, and I had teleporter authorisation and a medical-team on stand-by with Da’ embassy KDA liaison ten minutes before he went down.”

“I was just saying, all right every cop on earth having them is one thing, but perhaps if we had Alien weaponry...”

“Then Earths major military powers would see it in use often enough to get an idea of its capabilities, principles of operation and maybe enough to start reverence-engineering bits, and that’s presuming they didn’t get their hands on some via the KDA. We have enough of the damn stuff on earth already, legalising its import in *any* form will end with someone using it in a war, and we all know that wouldn’t end well.”

“But we still get to use it in emergencies! It makes sense that-”

“That if we’ve been managing more than ninety per-cent of the time without it, then its use should be limited to that ten per cent of the time. Last resort. End of discussion. Now, on that point, who else has listened in on the police radio and has come to try and get their grubby mitts on the Alien weaponry?”

“Practically everyone. I recognise most of those reporters. Either the job of Assistant Cultural Attaché pays so little they have to moonlight as paparazzi, or half of the countries with an embassy in London has got someone here, Cuth’.”

“Right, I’ll call Chrystal, then we get to work. Agreed?” said Cuthbert, pulling an iPad out from somewhere under his coat. Will and Isaac nodded their assent, and so he laid the pad on the ground, and turned it on.

Cuthbert and the others took a step back as the iPad’s holographic projector flared into life, flashing the KDA logo about a meter above itself, which should have resolved itself into a floating genetically-modified vixen’s head, but instead broke into static, which resolved itself, ultimately, into swearing.

“Hello? Hello? Oh *bugger* Hello? “

“Hello? Chrystal?”

“Cuthbert code in plea- *Thunk* oh sod I’ve dropped it. Cuthbert, I can’t run a voice scan, the pad’s stuck under the bloody passenger set and I’m driving so I can’t reach it. Can you hear me?”

“Loud and clear. Why didn’t the call re-direct to your car’s hands-free?”

“It’s not my car; I’m in one I borrowed for the evening. I didn’t want to turn up for my date in a bullet-proof vehicle. I can’t use the close-range scramblers in this, the vibrations would deafen me.” Cuthbert nodded. They still hadn’t fixed the glaring design fault with the close-range scramblers’ software: Unless both ends of the call had scramblers on, neither could. “The call, the actual phone signal over the cell network should still be scrambled, but people near you can listen in to what you say Cuthbert, understood? Avoid anyone suspicious with microphones.”

Cuthbert looked at the rows of almost-paparazzi. “Understood. Might have a slight problem there, but I’ll deal with it.”

“The Black Van Paparazzi again? How many look like real reporters, and how many look to be government?”

“I’d say about fifty-fifty. All the usual suspects are there. Box five-hundred have sent their usual chap, but he just looks like he’s interested in who else has turned up, not us. Same with the French. The CIA has a laser microphone aimed right at me, the screen on my calculator, yes you, I see you, don’t try and look innocent now I mention you. Lord knows why they bother, we share all info about KDA operations in Britain deemed to be pertinent with The Security Service, and they share everything with the CIA anyway. We’ve got the Russians with a laughably badly disguised directional mike, the Chinese with no microphones but a female lip-reader I recognise from the last time I worked with their embassy here, both Koreas, That very pretty girl who’s almost certainly Mossad, that rather glum looking chap whose probably with the Iranians, standing as far as possible as the pretty girl from Mossad, of course, both Palestines, as far as possible from each other, and some people I’ve not seen before but who are almost certainly Columbian as they’re driving Colombian embassy cars.” Cuthbert nodded to the rows of not-reporters, then said so that they could all see and hear him

“William, could you be a good chap and go ask each and every one of them for their ID and Proof of right-to-work in the UK? If they pull Diplomatic immunity cards, escort them out for their own safety and get their names for our formal complaint forms. If they have Diplomatic immunity but refuse to admit it, which most of them will, arrest them, escort them out of sight, give them my name for *their* official complaint forms and then release them and we’ll sort out the headache in the morning.”

“Dumping more paperwork on my desk, Cuthbert?”

“Wouldn’t dream of it Chrys. I’ll have the paper work on my desk. That way I can delay it until the last possible minute, and then hand in a twenty-thousand word statement they’ll have to memorise for the hearing if they want to take the complaint to the next level.”

“The rule saying the person making the complaint must show themselves to be familiar with the version of events presented by the person they are complaining about at hearing, or risk have their complaint thrown, out probably wasn’t envisaged to be used like that.”

“There’s not rule against using it that way. Of all the KDA complaints procedure bits, that’s the bit I always liked most. Ah, that seems to have cleared them off. Isaac, don’t wave to the spies, bad form old chap.”

“ ‘Bad form old chap’...really? Are you doing the harmless and slightly dim paper-purser routine again? You know that calculator-vest makes you look like complete tit.”

“It’s supposed to Chrystal. Okay, Will’s spooked the spooks. We can probably talk now.”

“What’s the situation?”

“Met officer down, Da’ embassy gave me teleporter access, so I got him to some Da’ medics within five seconds of the radio saying ‘man down’. Still no word on his condition, but if there’s no word by now, it’s probably a good sign. Da’ medicine’s good, If people die under Da’ medicine, they do it right away, as a rule. If you live half an hour then chances are you’ll make a full recovery.”

“He’s at the embassy? That could cause us legal problems, Cuth’.”

“He’s on-board the *Reconciliation*. Their medical-bay is better at combat casualties, which is just as well, for a warship.”

“Legal *nightmares*. We’re not even officially supposed to know it’s in orbit.”

“It was the only good teleporter option I had. I’ve already arranged the statement: evacuated to a Da’ facility connected to but not part of the Da’ embassy in London, where he was treated by an expert trauma-team on-loan from the Da’ Military. Once he’s stabilised and sleeping we’ll teleport him to the Embassy, and transport him straight to an NHS hospital once he’s in no medical risk and once we’ve put the word around that any attempt to dissect him to try and learn about the alien weapon that wounded him will be frowned on by the KDA and also dealt with by the Da’ in no uncertain terms. He’ll never be in danger, and never even know he was off earth, and we’ll never have actually lied.”

“Okay, that’s good, I can work with that. Nice call.”

“Thank you. I still believe that politics should have no role whatsoever in either police work or the courts, but even I don’t want to see a dead bobby on the news right before a major treaty renegotiation. “

“Good. But remember, dead bank clerks would look even worse. Proceed with caution Cuthbert. I’m giving you full authority on this matter, including authorisation to tell the Metropolitan Police anything you deem pertinent and to slap gag-orders on them if you need to. All usual assets are at your disposal, do whatever you think best, but please, please *please* don’t screw it up. Tread lightly”

“I’ll shall endeavour not to. I am tact itself.”

“You gave Snowball a Gatling gun.”

“It passed all the usual safety checks. Provided it is authorised by their head of division or acting head of division, and unless an official objection is made within three days, brackets seventy two hours exactly close brackets, of a field agent announcing his or her desire to purchase, any and all equipment that passes the standard field safety tests may be adopted *Pro Term*.”

“My office closes at seven, and you handed in the paperwork at six-fifty nine in the evening the Friday before a bank-holiday weekend, Cuthbert.”

“Did I?”

“And you also handed in your minutes from every days’ planning meeting from the last year, all your divisions over-time forms, twelve case-files for my consideration, and a I recall this one distinctly, a forty-thousand word rebuttal to an official complaint you reserved from the Israelis, that you wanted me to check-over for you because you wanted me to cross-reference all the legal points you raised in it with both Israeli state law and *Jewish religious law*. All stapled together into one mass.”

“I didn’t want any to get lost.”

“On an evening when you *knew* I had a date at eight, with the only heterosexual male member of my species currently living in central London, when you *knew* our schedules wouldn’t sync up again for at least three months.”

“To be fair, I didn’t actually expect you to take the paper work with you to the restaurant and hide it under the table and check it whenever he looked away.”

“What was I supposed to do? I know when you’re up to something.”

“We’ll, it can’t have put him off, you got a second date.” Cuthbert paused, aware he was getting into dangerous territory. “Er, how did it go tonight, by the way?”

“Fine until you called me and set off the scramblers on my phone during dessert and flashed the words ‘hostage situation will keep you informed’ up in three foot high glowing letters via my holo-pager.”

“Sorry, but you would kill me if I didn’t keep you informed of something like this.”

“Damn right. I’d have killed you either way, except he really didn’t seem to mind. To be honest, I think he might be finding the idea of dating a KDA administrator slightly...exciting. Looks good for a third. You still shouldn’t have got me with that giant document for the first date, though. If you ever go ahead with your plan to retire to the countryside and raise rare-bread chickens, I *will* make your life a living hell until the day you die just for that little stunt.”

“You’re a fox. I can outlive you. Okay it was a low blow, but the paperwork for Snowball’s gun and the other... odd requisitions... wasn’t even *in* there. I gave them to you separately. I gave them to you *first*. I distinctly showed it to you, and put it directly in your hand.”

“Yes, and you said, ‘Chrystal, could you look at this please’ and handed me a clipboard, and then *just* as I raised it to my eyes and you added ‘Oh, and, well, If you get a moment in the next few days...’ and then you and Will dumped the decoy document on my desk and ran for the door. You *knew* I’d think the first thing you gave me was to distract me while Will and you man-handled that *tome* onto my desk. You *wanted* me to go for the giant dossier of useless information!”

“It’s not my fault you trust me so little that when I tell you the complete truth you never believe me. I have never, *never* directly lied to you.”

“*Directly*. I’m a *fox* and most of the men I grew up with weren’t as bad as you.”

“When I’m good, I’m good.”

“Be good now, Cuthbert, we don’t want these people to kill anyone.”

“I’ll be good, and don’t worry.” Said Cuthbert. “They swerved to miss the dog. I *think* that I may have the measure of them.”