

“Policing by consent is all very well.” Said Will, sipping from his cardboard coffee cup. “But it would be a lot easier if the criminals didn’t have bloody alien weaponry.”

“Well, yes.” Said Isaac, sipping from his own. “But we *do* work for K.D.A. Division Thirteen. The title of our Division, unless they’ve re-branded us again, is ‘Forbidden and Restricted Technology and Phenomena’ so it’s not particularly unreasonable that we’d be the ones they’d call out when the criminals *do* have alien technology. We’d be pretty much out of a job if they didn’t.”

“Well yes, but my main problem is they have alien weapons and we *don’t*. The Met armed response units probably don’t complain about being called out to deal with armed criminals, but at least *they* can shoot back with weaponry on the same basic tech-level. If you forced them to fight back with .. with *crossbows*, I think they’d see where I’m coming from!”

“If they were armed with crossbows they could still probably do the job, if the guy behind it was well enough trained. Crossbows are pretty awesome.” Isaac considered this some more. “Don’t you have a crossbow in the car?”

“Yes, but were not getting it out: It cost eighty quid and I haven’t even had a chance to practice with it yet. My point is, why do *they* get the ray-guns when we just get the gun- guns?”

“What? Guns that shoot other guns?”

“You know what I mean.” He looked over the police cordon. “Are they still there?”

Isaac shrugged, then held up his now empty coffee cup demonstratively and tossed it over the barrier. It rolled a few metres down the street, and just as it was about to come to a halt, a streak of light *whirled* out from an upper window of the old warehouse and it leapt in the air as if it had just been hit by a bullwhip. It then rolled, a gash cut in its side, to the gutter of the alleyway, joining the *Lilt* can Will had chucked about fifteen minutes earlier. Will and Isaac looked at each-other and then walked, calmly, a little further away from the armed hostage-takers. However when they got back to their car, they mysteriously found they were walking quite quickly and slowed it down, in case the Met Sergeant saw.

The Met sergeant saw. He glared at them, and went back to listening to his radio. After a moment he put it down again and stalked over.

“Were you throwing stuff over the barrier? This is a fucking hostage situation! My men and the suspects are jumpy as hell! What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Will stared, nonplussed.

“Sorry. I don’t do hostage negotiation.”

“Sorry? I-” The Met sergeant paused. You got the impression he was counting to ten. He started again. “Have you made any progress on working out what those... those *thugs* are armed with?”

“No, sorry. Were still waiting for the medical report from the Da’ embassy. Your officer who was hit, he can’t have died or they’d have called already, if that helps.”

“You don’t know what they’re armed with?”

“No, sorry, I don’t do weapons.”

“You don’t-”

“Not comparative weaponry. Not after eighteenth century Japan.”

“When the hell does that come in useful?”

Will continued to look aggressively nonplussed. He didn’t have to take this from the Met.

“Last Tuesday wasn’t it Isaac?”

“Yup. With the Ninja waitresses.” Isaac caught the Sergeants Expression. “Don’t ask.”

“And do you do-”

“No, not really. I do computers, Cryptography and High explosives.” He pre-empted the next question. “There’s a surprisingly large amount of maths if you want to use explosives right; the skill-sets *are* partly transferable.”

The met Sergeant stared. “What branch of the K.D.A. did you say you worked for again?”

“They’re called divisions, and we didn’t.” Said Will. “Look, we don’t like this anymore that you do, and we really do want to help. I’d like to square with you, I would, but when your man went down he was evacuated to the Da’ embassy, because someone at the K.D.A. thought that that was the only way he’d get the medical treatment to stay alive. That takes a lot of strings pulled, and attracts a lot of attention from other interested parties, so until I get word from my boss, I can’t tell you *anything*, because by now *anyone* could be listening and... Ah. Here comes the cavalry.”

The Met sergeant turned.

Vans were racing down the street towards the cordon they’d put up to keep the public out. Three of them in perfect formation, each big, and black and shiny and sinister. An arcane and intimidating array of antennae and satellite dishes on the roof or each one, tinted windows, and foreign-looking number plates. Without breaking their close formation they cut ahead of the only other vehicle in the street, a large red, slightly battered people-carrier with a roof rack full of children bikes and a no less than three humour bumper-stickers, forcing it to break sharply, and headed straight through the gap in the cordon marked “police vehicles only” moments before the met officer could close the barricade. They then pulled up dangerously close to the scene, as if they owned the entire fucking world, and paused, brooding.

“Oh boy.” Said Isaac. “We’re in trouble now.”

And suddenly the doors of the first Van In Black opened, and out stepped... reporters.

“Alright!” Yelled Will “Get those scavengers out of here! Arrest them if you have to! Duff them up! But get them out! Bloody freelancers” He muttered to the Met Sergeant. “Ever since we actually arrested and prosecuted Rupert Murdoch on the basis that so long as he owns more the fifty-one per-cent of his paparazzi machine he can *personally* be held criminally responsible for anything illegal they do, we’ve seen no end of these Black-ops, no-paper-trial, paid-in-cash-only reporters. I don’t know why the boss tolerates them.”

“They create a nice diversion from anything we may do.” Said a voice. “And besides, they sometimes show us things on-camera we’d not have spotted otherwise.”

The Met Sergeant turned. The Red People carrier was parked next to them. It had a Mazda badge but it was no model he recognised from any manufacturer and looked about as generic people-carrier-ish as was possible. If you set out with the aim of designing "Generic" and put a man who collected bottle caps and smoked a pipe in charge of the project, then this would be the car you got. It was, red, but it *felt* beige. He'd not heard anything when it pulled up, which worried him, but not as much as the fact it would have apparently had to pass through two solid barriers to get there. A man had gotten out, possibly the designer of the car, or at least another chair on the parish council of Beigefold, Surrey, and was walking towards them. In twenty years on the force, The Sergeant had never seen someone so... average. Height, hair colour, everything. Brown shoes grey/black/blue/brown suit, brown coat.

He wore a Kevlar vest under his coat. It had a calculator in the pocket.

This all seemed odd.

"You know." Said Will. "You could have flown, you'd get here faster. Or at least used the Van's adaptive camouflage".

The Beige man frowned, as if mildly confused.

"It's a red people carrier with two children's bikes on the roof rack, and a set of depressingly sad humorous bumper-stickers. Why on earth would I need adaptive camouflage?"

"I'm sorry." Said the Met Sergeant. "But who exactly are you and what the hell just happened?"

The man smiled, briefly, and pulled a clipboard out of the pouch that was supposed to hold the vest's ceramic trauma-plate. Then he smiled again. It was a really *good* smile.

"I'm very sorry, but K.D.A policy is never to give-away the surname of its agents, special agents, operatives or other employees. So I suppose you had better call me Cuthbert. And I'll be just happy to help you in *any* way I can." He smiled again. Behind him, a large male Da' got out of the van backwards, dragging a 20mm Vulcan Gatling cannon.

"We are here to help." Said the Man.