

James BOND

HAS RETURNED IN

precious • *target*

BY
NEAL KYDD

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2003

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About The Author

Neal Kydd's long love of James Bond 007, resulted in his inspiration for
Precious Target.

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Based on Ian Fleming's
James Bond
007

Precious Target

Neal Kydd

- 1 / The Test 6
- 2 / Crossed Wires Can Kill 13
- 3 / Servants of Nemesis 22
- 4 / Chemical Hell 33
- 5 / Precious Target 37
- 6 / Morgan's Atoll 43
- 7 / Deadly Serum 48
- 8 / A Gentle Word Opens an Iron Gate 50
- 9 / Code of Fear 54
- 10 / Hurricane Betsy 65

1 / The Test

The primary shock wave hit Mayaguana beach at seven o'clock east coast time. A scarlet rain followed, forming large bloody puddles across the deserted streets. Minutes later a deathly hush settled over the island.

8am. Nemesis +1

Deep within the cordoned area a low siren gave the all clear. Slowly, almost gingerly, hermetically suited analysts rose from their concrete tombs and began taking samples from brightly marked sites. The brittle test tubes were carefully placed into flasks filled with liquid nitrogen. Later, schools of dead fish that had been washed ashore were meticulously collected and bagged. By noon most of the work was completed, except the recovery of thousands of blistered birds. Colonel Flint, in charge of reclaim, looked up; peering through his glass visor he noticed the sky had turned a vapid yellow.

An 'Iroquois' helicopter flew over the palm-strewn bays below, spotting to see if the cordon had been broken. Pilot Matt Straker checked his hard deck. The dial read 4,000 ft. If they flew under it there would be no oxygen, and crew and chopper would go down. Beneath them the Tazine cloud was oxidising as planned. Any trespassers would suffer more than prosecution if they crossed into the exclusion zone before midnight. As Straker zigzagged through his co-ordinates he punched a seven-digit code into a small transmitter. Lights flickered, and out to sea a chain of buoys sending magnetic pulses to District H.Q. were automatically zeroed and re-calibrated. There must be no mistakes. The accidental loss of a single, however worthless, human life would endanger the whole operation. Captain Straker had been given strict orders.

After a third sweep across Mayaguana Island the co-pilot signalled their return. “That’s it Matt, all’s well. Never saw anything with two, or even four legs alive, did you?” The pilot shook his head, smiled and brought the stick to the left. He began to focus on a rocky atoll in the distance. “Let’s go home,” he muttered. The hollow in the pit of his stomach reminded him he was one step away from desertion. After Straker had landed the ‘Huey’, and made his report, the dead zone off Morgan’s Atoll was extended to a three-mile radius. The base was now secure. Under compulsory purchase orders several small islands off Bahama Bank had been quarantined for military research. Inside the base Straker caught the lift down and before emerging removed several industrial badges from his uniform and replaced them with American insignia. He strolled into recreation deck 2, sat down, and whispered into David Kincaid’s ear, “Well, fortunately the epicentre did not exceed its predicted size. But what was once a white-sand paradise, with cosy native village, has been reduced to an uninhabitable wasteland.” Kincaid looked worried, he knew that in a few hours there would be no clue as to how this had happened. The poison gas that had passed over the tropical island would have completely disappeared. He must try to find a way to warn the outside world.

9am – Nemesis +2.

Only now did Xavior Pollax allow himself an hours sleep. As soon as central had been informed he’d ordered Flint to close the magnetic cordon. His team would wait until quarter past midnight before launching phase 2. After sealing his private apartments he crossed the darkened room and climbed into a silver sleeping capsule. The top slid silently into place and he relaxed upon its golden cushioning. Clutched in his hand lay his previous life, or all that was left of it, a photograph of the eminent scientist Dr. Gerald Mathers and his children. Inside the pod his

sleep would be artificially deepened, one hour being as beneficial as a natural six.

Colonel Flint was stretched out across two chairs in the autopsy lab. He was itching to get to some air. Christ, this place stank! He'd been on duty for sixteen hours now. It was beginning to take its toll on the infamous temper. He bit down on another blue capsule, enjoyed the bitter taste and heaved an almost desperate sigh of relief. The day had tested his patience to the limit. He opened a specimen bin. Stared at the remains, and almost automatically his thick stubby hand reached out and toyed with a yellowed sliver of muscle. At last, with Professor Pollax asleep, he could take charge . . .

An hour after dawn, and three hundred miles west, a frail sun struggled through the cloud cover and splintered through the slatted blinds of the Blue Hills Hotel, just as James Bond awoke. As his eyes met the light he felt unduly tired all over again. He turned away from the window and drew breath carefully. Over the past two days he had developed a rasping cough, chiefly in the mornings. Last night had brought him one too many Vodkas and all of his quota of Black Turkish cigarettes. The wide gunmetal case still lay open and empty on the balcony where he'd thrown it in disgust. It had been a typical colony dinner; gossiping wives and senior civil servants talking bridge, battleships and the Bahamas. He swung himself out of bed and noted that the ache in his shoulder had eased. Bond thought to himself that a little more light traction might fix it up, but still, deep down, he knew he wasn't one hundred percent. And while on duty that fact could be dangerous. He traced the trouble back to that blasted physical at Dudley. Dammit, he'd not been right since . . . and this irritability was getting

worse. Yesterday he'd practiced his draw in the room for an hour, and still wasn't satisfied with the result. The big Smith and Wesson was an unfamiliar weapon to him, but armoury had insisted he needed the stopping power. Why didn't people leave well alone?

Bond lifted the Hoffritz razor to his face and sighed into the mirror. The lined, yet still clean-cut features stared back at him. It wasn't the toughest assignment he'd known. A relatively simple case as he saw it, but M had told him to beware of complacency. 'Presumption is the enemy of deductive logic 007!' And Chief of Staff had chosen to remind him of that time and time again. But two recent errors, like those he'd suffered last year, had caused real concern. 'I don't mind a man cutting corners occasionally, when he gets results, but this is poor form commander,' the hard stare had cut right through him. So he'd had to endure the most exhaustive of physical and mental examinations. They had x-rayed, sampled, prodded and stretched to breaking point every bone, sinew and faculty he had. To him the mistakes were more a bending of the rules, but protocols had changed. The new breed within the secret service hadn't the remotest knowledge of how to live, just as he held only the smallest instinct about when to die. After his test reports had been filed 002, with his bent for probabilities, gave him no chance at all if he tackled Xavior Pollax alone; said the almost rabid criminal mind would tear him apart. But he'd escaped alive, hadn't he? And he'd brought back the only Tazine canister to reach western intelligence intact. But from now on he couldn't afford anymore 'slip-ups'. The old man wasn't happy with him, had made sure he'd understood it.

However, with his intimate knowledge of the terrain, plus his still sharp wits, he'd won a continuation. From northern Canada he'd picked up this tropical lead. He knew that somewhere in the Bahamas Pollax had found a cave to hole-up in. He also bet high, this man would never

make an honest hermit. After his shave Bond decided on a second cold shower.

On Grand Bahama the Sun beats at 85 Fahrenheit on wet or dry days. Today was dry and hot. And as the last threads of mist were burned off a sparkling turquoise sea, James Bond shut off the steady whirr of the compact cipher machine and gathered his clothes. As he did so voices screamed up from the balcony below him. A young couple were having breakfast. He dressed quickly in a gray worsted suit that had spent the night over a chair, guaranteeing him a dishevelled look. The tiny creases annoyed him a little, but the clear double-o section wire had stated his cover as a middle-class, travelling salesman. Bond opened the wardrobe and appraised his reflection. Mark Hazard of Universal Export had been brought to life again, albeit cheaply. Bond hoped the resurrection wouldn't prove fatal. Picking up an orange he cut it in four and ate it standing on the balcony. Taking a swallow of mineral water he heard the lovers tiff below stop as abruptly as it had started. Kissed apologies were following tears and almost sub-consciously Bond took the cue and went inside. The room itself was dreary. This was definitely not the usual champagne run. Felix Leiter, on the other hand, had opted for much better rooms out of town. The CIA man preferred the mask of a linen suited, big shot accountant. Trust Felix! At times he could compromise a dog.

When Bond finished his third orange he exercised for ten minutes and took some deep breaths. Before he left he locked away his attaché case and placed the wire from London in his inside pocket. Well, hopefully Felix would make something of all this. They had arranged a 10.30 R.V. at Lizard Point. It was agreed that he would arrive first and order elevenses. This time Bond's expense account was to bear the brunt

of their complex passions for simple pleasures. Bond put on his sunglasses and took the stairs down to reception.

It felt good to have a trusted man watching his back again, a trusted friend, no less. Even if, with his restricted remit, the American agent had proved no help in tracing the Tazine canister's manufacturer . . .

James Bond walked casually from the Mcleans Town hotel and crossed into the narrow lane opposite. He looked quickly over his car and got in. A touch on the electric ignition and the old Zephyr roared into life. Bond took the open coastal route down to Freeport. Soon the busy streets gave out to the dusty Queen's Highway and the humid tropical air cooled and relaxed his senses. Turning through Pelican Point he saw the rolling surf lapping against private beach houses that rested on stilts over the water. On service pay he could never afford one. At Bailies Water filtration the road forked, and as Bond made a racing change into second, he was raked by the red Alfa Romeo going in the opposite direction. 'Damn fool!' He cursed. His wing mirror had been smashed. He started to rile for not taking its number, but stopped himself. Instead, he settled further back into the blue leather seat and enjoyed the drive. The old bird was going well. That petrol booster from Q-branch certainly did the trick. A simple trick of course, but the kind Bond loved most.

Nearing the Lizard he reviewed his progress for the coming meeting. The wire from London had given details of the canisters content. T. (toxicology) branch had found two composite poisons. In this case designed for airborne use. The first, Urishiol, which binds to the white blood cell membranes in human skin, was a bio-toxin. Urishiol itself is oily and yellow in colour, getting its name from the Japanese for lacquer. What surprised Bond (and the toxicologists) was the audacity in combining this natural poison in distilled form (a thousand times stronger than found in nature) with oxalic acid, a naturally occurring

neurotoxin. Oxalic acid, commonly found in plant matter, is especially concentrated in fruit leaves.

Particularly disturbing to Bond was how a seemingly innocuous fruit leaf could prove so lethal. But when the acid and Urishiol were mixed and burned at high temperatures the oxidising haze produced was deadly. If any of this gas was inhaled, even a single breath could kill. Large amounts condensing over a wide area would extinguish all life. Its explosive content was fulminate of Red Mercury; a difficult substance to handle and also to obtain. Soviet producers had opened a black market on the stuff, and M had several agents engaged on shutting it down.

A curious by-product of Tazine4 was acute oxygen depletion. Samples of air taken after 1 minute of exposure contained less than 3% Oxygen, against 94% nitrogen. There had been no time for further research on this point.

Bond recalled the footnote, which explained the dangers of mild contact with the gas. Symptoms ranged from acute respiratory difficulties, esophageal and gastric burns, to violent sickness. In high doses death by suffocation would occur. Any unburned liquid splashed on the skin would induce severe blistering and delayed pulmonary edema. The early warning signs of contact were dizziness and bluish lips.

All he needed to know now was, the when, the where, and why . . .

2 / Crossed Wires Can Kill

It was nearly ten fifteen when he reached Lizard Point. The wind-blown south-western tip of the island lay quiet. Its lee shore was prone to fierce storms and had remained undeveloped. On the white sand beach stood the run-down pile of Lizards bar, although the place had a local reputation for serving good coffee and fresh rolls. Bond took an outside table, ordered, and was watching a couple stroll along the jetty when Leiter stepped out of his air-conditioned taxi. Felix nodded to him, but carried on inside. He handed the bartender a small rubber pellet, which looked rather like the centre of an unwound golf ball. "Can you find an envelope for this and stick it on the shelf? A guy will call for it later." The barman nodded. It seemed important enough for Leiter to hand over an inch of 20-dollar bills as a thank you.

Bond smiled as his friend returned and sat down. The craggy face beamed at him, "morning James." Bond offered a bread roll and asked, "have you really found the secret of a perfect drive Felix? I must admit I prefer a five Iron. But whatever they put in those little pellets makes no bloody difference to me." Leiter had hinted at this remarkable obsession last night. Now he solemnly bit into his breakfast and looked Bond straight in the eye.

"You know very well I can't tell you a thing more James. Life isn't all golf, girls and guns you know. The superficial is often a deceit, it's the core of something that matters."

"Oh, really?" exclaimed Bond, wondering at the odd subterfuge. "And I thought you had retired from active service. And now, after I find you skulking about out here and of no use to her majesty, or me, you give me the cold shoulder on a perfect round? What the blazes have we come to?" Bond sat forward and slid the London report across the

table. The slim document went straight into Leiter's inside pocket. "Interesting read that, if you know your country code," said Bond, nonchalantly. Leiter grinned. "I might have guessed it was a Boy Scout's solution. Send you a badge did they?"

"Alright, enough is enough!" Bond barked. A slight on the service wouldn't be tolerated, even from Felix Leiter.

"So what have your chaps got on this?"

"Not much I'm afraid." There followed a silence in which the CIA man remained tight-lipped. Bond looked uneasy.

"I could use some slack James."

"Yes, well I asked London to smooth the waves a little and get some priority for us. You must have heard something from your side by now."

"The limey did good they told me. Your ideas on Morgan Atoll certainly look promising."

"Promising? I've traced Pollax all the way from Canada to the tropics and your chaps call that promising! What the devil is Pollax doing out there?" Leiter gestured vaguely toward the sea with his hands. "You're guess is as good as mine pal."

"C'mon stop holding out on me. Who else is involved And what's all this about Red Mercury?"

Leiter picked up his coffee with his hook. "Well, to tell you the truth James we don't really know. In fact there is a slight complication to this case." He took a long swallow of black blue mountain, " It gripes me to have to say it, but our boys think Pollax may be on a U.S. ticket. Oh, I know, I know, and don't give me that look! Anyways, seems as if a Colonel Flint from your mob has a handle on things - a counterintelligence coup, no less. So it's not all one way. Turns out their genetics labs have been loaned by some Cuban dissidents we've been monitoring for some time. There's US dollars in it James, we're pretty sure of that. But nobody's telling which department is responsible. If

they did we'd go into a political meltdown. In fact there's a slim chance this mob have turned renegade on us. But don't quote me on that, for chrissake!"

Leiter was being too careful, almost evasive. No hard facts at all, just bluster. Bond sat back and pushed some Jamaican marmalade onto his rye toast. He began to wonder how they might proceed, crossed objectives were dangerous. He needed Leiter's confidence now; more than he'd ever needed it in the past.

"Felix old friend, do me a service? I want all you can get me on these genetics labs. Plus whatever there is on Mayaguana. Met. reports have noted some odd cloud formations hanging over the place. Don't worry about the larger well known resorts, just those on military lease. Oh, and its off-shore islets, they are vitally important. Also contact every section that has ever had any dealings with your Cubans."

Bond paused and smiled to himself, "And when you've digested that poison report . . . well, you might have some more ideas, ol' man. I'll be at Barracuda Swash if you need me. Look, shall we meet tomorrow? At the strip? I'm going fishing for the rest of today."

"You're asking a lot James. But I'll try. We've got to be damn careful here. Crossed wires can kill! We could both end up in a body-bag." Bond glared back at him. "Alright, I'll do what I can. Sorry, but I must shoot, good luck." Leiter got up and walked back to his cab which was waiting at the rear. He was driven off in a cloud of dust.

Bond sighed, looked at his unfinished breakfast and wondered whether he should retrieve Leiter's envelope. He grimaced and thought better of it. Let Felix play his games. He had bigger worries to curb. As he called the boy over for the check he caught sight of the young couple again; they were making their way towards him. The man still had his arm draped loosely around the shapely brunette. Bond heard them talking. There was something oddly familiar about their voices but he

couldn't quite place the memory. They took a table inside. Bond leaned slightly back on his chair and listened to them ordering.

Suddenly it flashed upon him. Yes, he was almost sure. It sounded like the couple from the room below him, but to get here so soon would have meant them leaving the hotel at breakneck speed. Ah, the little sports Alfa, racing to pick them up? Or a boat? No. It was too much of a leap. He checked his train of thought, no point in lunging about in the dark James. And why on earth would they be following him? Alright, till proven innocent he would keep an eye out for these spying honeymooners. The thrust of a marine engine alerted him. It was the Steber launch coming in to dock. He went to the car and tucked the keys of the Zephyr under the back wheel, then made a show of waving to Williams who was already setting up the fishing chair for him.

As he picked up his change Bond glanced once more at the couple. The man was at the bar, but he couldn't see if he was on the telephone or not. In a way he hoped he was.

At the jetty Williams was all smiles. "Hello James. How are you? Good breakfast I hope?" Bond shook his hand warmly. "Good to see you again, Jack. Would you mind finishing the chair later? I want to get out quickly." "Sure thing. You're the boss." The thin Jamaican took the wheel of the white, Ford powered screamer and brought her about. They headed out to sea with a powerful surge of the twin hydros. Bond took off his jacket and stowed it forward. Sea spray whipped across his shoulders. He smoothed his hair back and rubbed the salt from his face.

As the morning's irritability lifted he turned to Williams. The man was a well-built, six footer from sub-station C. and, by all reports, a useful fellow. But he was a paper shuffler, and rather new to field work. "Ok! You can cut the power now. Take us round the next headland and we'll set up." "Aye aye! You going for a dive?" "No, not today. I'm counting on having more fun." Grinning, Bond said, "Somebody here takes me

for a fool, so let's play along. We'll make a real dummy of me! What do you think?" Williams laughed as Bond laid his coat out and shaped the air over it with his hands. Bond dragged some blankets from below. "Pad me with this stuff, fix me in the chair and I'll swim ashore. Then we'll see what gives." The Jamaican smiled but seemed pensive. "Until you have smoked out the bees . . ." hinted Bond. Williams realised the ploy. "You expect that to work?" Bond spoke more seriously; "I'm expecting trouble of a sort. I think my cover's been broached. Look; when I reach the shore stay below for about half an hour will you. Then bring out a drink."

On the fly bridge Bond got into his swimming shorts and tightly buckled a fishing knife to his leg. While Williams tied the makeshift dummy into the fishing chair and fixed an awning, Bond worked out the offshore currents.

From half a mile out Williams dropped anchor, and while they made their final preparations the boat bobbed easily on the swell. Bond checked his kit and entered the water from the seaward gunwale. The sharp cold snatched at his breath. He wore no flippers or wet suit so this was going to require some effort. He started his swim in a slow, steady crawl. Above him the sky flamed azure blue as the sun began its climb to noon. Between his strokes the rocky bay appeared in the distance like a coiled snake, its black reef winding to and fro across the white silk sands. Bond changed course slightly to allow for the cross current. In twenty minutes he had reached the shore. He carefully made his way up to the tree line and taking several deep breaths to clear the tightness from his chest made for cover. Untying the sandals from his waistband he put them on and moved over the rocks until he could see the boat. The launch glowed, a white fleck against the shimmering horizon. He screwed his inquisitive blue-grey eyes up and looked hard. Yes, there was the

silhouette of him fishing, partially covered by the sunshade. Now all he could do was wait.

The half-hour passed slowly as he watched from the rocky outcrop. Noss Mangrove lay to the west, and Money lay dead ahead of him, shining purple-gray in the stark light. Bang on time Williams came up on deck with a drink. Moments later the blue-shirted figure disappeared below again.

A sharp crack sounded. Bond spun his attention to a clump of sea-grass above the tide line. A hundred yards away he caught the single flash of a lens. Taking care not to be seen he quickly out-flanked the position. Withdrawing his fishing knife, which he placed between his teeth, he crept up behind the sniper who was busy clearing a jam. As he started to take aim Bond waited for the man to exhale, then threw the knife into the sand pinning his left sleeve against the weapon. As the assassin flipped over Bond kicked him hard in the face, snatched up the rifle and pointed it steadily. "Well, well. Hearty breakfast this morning I trust? And what were you hoping to catch for dinner?" The man said nothing. Bond was smiling with recognition.

"Alright - stand up lover-boy and move over there. Now where's the girl?" There was no reply. Bond collected the knife and cut the sling off the rifle. He turned his captive around and tied his hands tightly behind his back. The man was still dazed from the kick. "I think the local police might have some questions for a -" "Go to hell!" rapped the sniper. "I see. Well, for now, where I go you go too!" Bond whirled him around, stuck the gun in his back and shoved him along the sand. Out of sight from the boat he sat him down among some rocks while he went looking for the brunette. She was nowhere to be seen. "It must be a pick-up then, hmm?" inquired Bond on his return. "Or perhaps a signal when the job was done?" James Bond searched the man roughly and eventually found

a numbered slip of paper. But a car arrived just as he was wondering whether or not to force the man to make his call. Bond levelled the rifle at his prisoner again. "Sit quite still. I don't want to have to shoot, but I shall if you move or make a single sound. Nod if you understand." Kurt Frieger nodded.

A squeeze more to the elevation and . . . there! Bond adjusted the telescopic sight minutely as he watched the girl coming down from the tree line. She was slim waisted, pretty, yet seemed rather anxious. Heavy coils of dark brown hair swept the beautifully tanned shoulders. She tottered down the slope; one hand held out for balance, the other clutching a turquoise bag. Bond lowered his sights. The tall scrub grass was making it hard for her to reach them.

He took aim again. The cross hairs drifted over her green one-piece bathing suit. Not exactly dressed for a getaway, Bond thought to himself. He lost sight of her in a dip. She was moving delicately and virtually stumbled into him as he quickly ducked under a palm tree. "Alright that's far enough," ordered Bond. He stood up behind her and clicked off the safety. The girl stopped dead in her tracks. "My name is Bond. James Bond. Now, do be polite and introduce yourself." The girl turned, gasped, both hands flew to her face. The poor thing was rather startled, and on seeing Kurt with his hands tied was about to scream. Bond stepped quickly in and covered her mouth. He motioned for her to sit down and then moved further away so as to keep them both covered. "Stay quiet, and sit very still. I'm not going to hurt you. Just ask a few questions. If you answer me things will be a lot easier. Now what's your name?" The girl was crying silently. "It's Angel . . . Angel Duvet." Bond smiled, "Heaven undercover? Well, it seems you've found my soft spot."

The girl pouted and gave Kurt one of those 'I told you so,' looks. Bond sat opposite them, imagining Kurt had never told Angel much about his line of work. Whoever teamed them up must be quite mad, he

thought. He considered the girl. Angel was certainly prettier than any statue of her kind; minus the tearstains she'd brush up a treat. Bond threw her Kurt's handkerchief. "Dry your face please, and buck up a little." She did as he bid. "Now, Miss Duvet, how -" Bond was interrupted by the boom of a pistol shot. A large red hole suddenly appeared in the centre of Kurt's chest and he lurched to one side. The bullet had passed through his lung. The man was struck unconscious before he'd known what hit him. As the gun fired again Bond dived to the sand and rolled over toward the rocks. In a final death throw Kurt arched his back and fell on his face. Angel screamed. Bond shouted, "Get down blast you! No, I mean flat down!" The girl obeyed and Bond levelled his rifle, firing twice into the trees. He then took the girl's hand and ran to a small gully. The shots had come from the road. How stupid could he have been. The girl was driven here. She was not alone. Suddenly he heard an engine start followed by a screech of tyres. He sprinted up the incline, halted, took aim and got a shot off at the rapidly disappearing Alfa Romeo. When he got back to the beach the girl was slumped over Kurt's dead body sobbing. "Please, you must come with me Angel. There is nothing we can do for him now. I'll notify the authorities. I promise we'll sort the rest out later." He bent and touched the girl's shoulder with something approaching tenderness, "Look, I don't for one minute think you're mixed up in all this. I'm sure it's a terrible shock." He pulled the girl free and they ran to the shoreline. The speedboat was already in. Williams shouted to them. "Everything alright James? I got here as fast as I could!" "Yes, we're fine. Now help the lady aboard and cast off."

As the twin hydros thrust them away from the scene of Kurt's murder, Bond composed a cipher which Williams sent to sub-station C. The daily code was changed every second and fifth day. It had taken Bond a few moments to work out where he should start. He went below

with the girl and settled her with a drink. “Here, swallow this, make you feel better.” Angel shivered a little and took the glass. It had been a tough break. She gulped at the whisky and coughed loudly. “There, what did I tell you?” said Bond cheerily.

On reaching Lizard Point James Bond inspected the bullet hole in the arm of his jacket. It was a neat shot, but by no means fatal. The boy was not a professional hit man. Bad choice of gun, and wrong advantage Bond tutted to himself. But of course the man who had killed Kurt was. That fact told a different story. Williams tapped Commander Bond on the shoulder. He pointed to where Lizards bar had once stood. To Bond’s horror there was nothing left of it. Just a smouldering pile of charred wood. Even the outside tables hadn’t survived. In fact not a soul had escaped the inferno, which raged just a few minutes after Leiter’s departure. Bond went below to question the girl again. He must try to piece together what the heck was going on.

3 / Servants of Nemesis

Seven men sat around a large ring-shaped glass table. Placed in front of them were silver nameplates and three coloured folders of reports. All eyes waited stoically for what was coming. Five years of careful preparation and planning, on an international scale, had led them to this moment. It was to be the defining mandate of their work. The meeting was finally brought to order. ADC, Serwen Holland, introduced everyone, then he began his address. “Military objectives and civilian research have finally combined under the sheltering wing of three governments. As our representatives, from Britain, America and Africa, you had been called here to attend a final briefing; to witness the funds invested and the technologies proved.

We all know gentleman what that means. Our work here is almost complete. We are to dispense with our cover story at last. There will, of course, be no announcements, no extortion, no demands or media manipulation of any kind. Nothing will be told to the remainder of the world’s great nations. I now hand you over to Alpha 1.”

Professor Xavior Pollax blinked slowly. Sat at the head of the table the wiry, reed voiced, habitual idealist, who’d lived up till now a bitter and somewhat disillusioned life, scribbled a brief memo. His attention taken up by the short, balding Senator Balham, who was contemptuously twirling the huge globe at the centre of the council. The disturbed man had refused to sit down. He preferred to pace around and around, spinning the globe this way and that.

“Gentleman!” The senator shouted above the murmur of voices, interrupting Pollax as he drew breath to speak. “I have read all the crap, heard all the stories, the projections and so on, about my out-fit. When we supplied the Red Mercury I said it signed a death warrant for each of

us. My guess is that you will have done, and maybe thought, the same. We have all been used gents. Oh, please don't look so surprised. If Xavior Pollax has his way, we will be dispensed with, believe you me. Mark my words, this council shall not live to see his predictions for the world's future!"

The voices grew louder again. Pollax pulled at his cuffs. He called for a respite, needing a moment to calm himself. It wouldn't do to murder the man in cold blood. "Mr. secretary, if you please?" he asked. A guttural whine rose above the rumbling objections as the ageing secretary interceded, "Gentleman, I beg for order. Let us hear each argument in detail. Let us not prejudge our own or others fears, or indeed our neighbour's bravery, until we are sure that they are true concerns spoken from the heart."

"Pah! Pollax has no heart," snapped the senator, whose behaviour had brought a tick to Steven Wells' face. A principle technician who'd known Pollax for years, he realised all too clearly that today was not a day to take a step backwards. More than anyone else he understood they were all living on borrowed time, from the moment they became servants of Nemesis, they were dead men.

Pollax began in a whisper; "There are no limits here gentleman. No holds are barred. We aim to carry out our original intention, unmodified by side issues or any shred of faint-heartedness. There is no room for that! We have turned the products of years of environmental research into a deadly assault. Of course, your efforts will be rewarded, first with survival and then key positions in the new regime. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

One conquest at a time gentlemen. In the cities the destruction of the tiny amounts of ground level ozone, which is absolutely essential to life, will slowly ensure our ultimate success. Pollution will do the rest for us. Without natural amounts of ozone in the outdoor air we breathe, nearly

every living thing on earth will die from massive chemical and biological pollution. To guarantee this we will annihilate the great plankton rafts that encircle the earth - they alone provide a third of the air we breathe. Over larger cities Tazine4 will reduce the oxygen content in the atmosphere, down to 3%." He paused, the bodies listening looked frozen.

"Of course this cannot be achieved overnight. There will be four distinct phases. Phase 1, is complete. Phase two begins tonight, and after the third wave of Tazine4 pods strike home, no city on the pacific seaboard will be able to draw breath. The global suspension of earth's oxygen system will be complete in a few days. Without oxygen replenishment life will suffocate, afterwards only the genetically altered soldiers at Morgan's Atoll will be able to go out on the surface. These nitrogen breathers will be tasked with clearing the refuse from paradise. In five years, possibly less, the planet will be more hospitable to the likes of us.

Pollax gathered pace, he began to smirk a little as he flattened his palms to the table and said, "Nemesis will create a New World! - a smaller world, I grant you, but one governed by this council!

Frank Bryce shook his head. What did he care? So he'd retire and do what the hell he liked. Bryce asked what would survive on the surface, if anything at all. Pollax waited, as if savoring the bitter question for as long as possible. "Then with a sardonic smile he said, "Oh, I dare say one or two old-world communities may survive, but for how long? They will pose no threat."

Bryce seemed happy enough with the answer. The brown suited South African saw heaps of gleaming diamonds encrusting his life. The end was mechanical, Pollax was as indifferent to human extermination as he was to squashing insects.

The other council members sat stupefied.

Now! I don't need to utter again the tremendous opportunities on offer here, they are unique gentlemen. I do admit that only now have we been able to combine hitherto unconnected projects, and reveal to you our most deadly secret. As we speak merchant ships throughout the oceans are unknowingly carrying our cargo.

Now! There will be no more retractions please, Senator -”

“Why not? Will you crush them out with your Tazine fist Pollax! Gentleman I don't plead for my own freedom, but for life in some measure or another to survive. I vote against Nemesis, and its genetic programs of modification. I vote against you, Xavior Pollax!” Balham hit the globe hard with the flat of his hand. It whirred like a top in response. Every face jumped. He then turned on his heel and stormed from the council table to the exit. He glared at the guard who sternly waited for Pollax to nod, before allowing him to leave. Pollax smiled, the senator had forgotten that this council had never been a democracy.

In the ensuing silence Colonel Flint got to his feet and began his report. With an ominously determined look around the thin, sensitive mouth he detailed project Nemesis. Major Kovac interrupted Flint after only a few words. “I don't remember agreeing, or signing over our monies for this. I seem to recall that the question of plankton elimination went undecided. Even though these delicate rafts are monitored from space, we do not entirely understand the ramifications of such an attack. Senator Balham is right. A world without any life whatsoever, except that which survives in the deepest oceans, is inconceivable.” With a nervous hand he removed an old pair of tortoise shell glasses from his protuberant hyperthyroid eyes. The man was literally shaking.

Colonel Flint, full of scathing cynicism, spat out a lurid argument. “Not every animal will die. Stocks have been modified for food. Balham is exaggerating these problems.” He argued the point for controlled revival, several of the faces watching became streaked with terror as he

referred to surviving organisms as a problem. In their view the outcome of the attack wasn't at all well understood. The ADC mopped his brow gently. Sweat was trickling down and running into his empty eye socket. Few of them had dreamed it would actually come to this.

Flint was pacing himself. It didn't look good. He could read panic and sense cowardice from a mile away. A soft alarm spoke in his earpiece and he sat down rather heavily, shuffled his papers up into a neat stack, then marched smartly to the door. He had another pressing duty to perform. Wells stared hard at Pollax and wondered what would become of them all, because at the end of this very day, history would not be there to decide. The painted globe stopped spinning. The meeting was adjourned. Pollax sat back. He closed his eyes and began to meditate. The group sat still. Alpha 1 pressed a button beneath the arm of his chair and suddenly the room was lit with a blue domed light . . . The faces unfroze as fear coursed through them. Twelve minutes later, when the soft hiss of gas had caused panic, blistering flesh and a slow choking death, only two men got up and returned to their quarters.

James Bond climbed out of the Zephyr, took hold of Angel and strolled into the busy market. Piles of brightly coloured vegetables lay next to red bananas, purple star-apples, and tangerines. On another barrow sat a vast mound of green pineapples. "Ever thrown one of these 'grenades' at anyone?" Bond joked, picking up a fruit. Angel giggled and began to hum along to the timbre of a harmonica. The music broke up the chattering noise of the crowds and they dodged rickety barrows and cycles on their way to a drinks stall. More people were arriving from surrounding villages, after disgorging their contents their shabby buses turned in the square to lazily make their way back into the mountains.

Swayed by the gentle calypso Bond held Angel close as they tucked themselves under a striped umbrella. "Want something to drink? This is sweet rum, tastes delicious and is ice cold!" She shrugged, he bought two and they sat down on some wicker chairs that had seen better days. The owner was a tall, ragged trader who wanted to haggle with them for trinkets. Bond selected a coral bracelet, turned it over in his fingers. "Pretty thing! I'll think about it." He took out the slip of paper he'd taken from Kurt, "Does this number mean anything to you?" The trader looked at Bond carefully. "I dunno man, make no sense to me. Where dya get it?" Bond shook his head and took the slip back. Angel quickly thanked him for the drinks and they moved on. At the next stall Bond drew another blank. On the third attempt a young Jamaican took a guess, "Well mister, mebee it's a berth at the dock? I seen numbers like that when I pick up the rum 'apples for pa."

"I see. Which docks?" The boy was eyeing a teenage girl who seemed to be interested in him. She clicked a string of seashells together and played coy. The lad turned, he was obviously embarrassed and looked quickly back at Bond. "Mebee on west pier, at Old Bahama Bay?" he offered. "Ok, thanks." said Bond, and handed the lad five dollars. The shoeless chaperone suddenly looked very pleased with himself and went off to meet his girl.

"You can be very nice when you want to be, James Bond," said Angel with a grin.

"I'm always nice, to nice people." Bond brushed at his sleeves; damn he looked a mess.

On the drive down to the docks he decided that Angel must stay in the car.

"I don't want you wondering off with that hit-man on the loose, alright? So, stay put and keep your head down. By the way, do you

happen to know the killers name?” Angel looked tearful again. He hadn’t wanted to frighten her, but by the look she gave him it was obvious he had. He decided not to question her further, at least not until tonight, after drinks and dinner. There wasn’t always time for sweetness and light, tact and prudent thinking. As far as he was concerned they had entered the war zone.

At West Pier docks Bond found the office and sauntered in. “Hello there! – sorry, new around here, can you tell me which dock this load’s due in on?” The man stopped puffing on his tatty cigar and held the paper at some distance from his eyes. After a few moments the sullen, short sighted official said, “Nah, not a berth - despatch number - from, er, dock 150. You gotta shipment in? Can I see the papers?” Bond took the slip back. “Of course. Won’t be long.” He left the smoke filled office and crossed the quay to the slipways at 150. Bond looked around briefly.

A large American, wearing a typically loud shirt, was sat on a mooring bollard by a luxury cruiser. A weighted line looped back and forth over his hand. Bond saw the dock number painted on the asphalt by his feet. “Wouldn’t happen to know where the crates are stacked from this dock, would you?” Dark eyes gave him the once over.

“This dock is private fella. Goods come in, go through the master, then get spirited away. You waitin’ for summin’?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. Number 1357.”

“Thirteen fifty seven, s’an army number. Off the reef, or the atoll I’d say.”

“Morgan’s Atoll?”

“More ‘an likely. Give your address to that man by the sedan. He’s just seeing Mr. Blakeley off. Mighty fine customer that Blakely! Don will make sure you’re contacted. Hey, you British bud?”

“Spent time there. Thanks for the tip.”

The yank shrugged. As Bond walked over to the Customs officer the American agent smoothed his red sunset shirt and folded his bulk into the forrard hatchway of the cruiser. He ambled downstairs. In front of him, sitting at a walnut dining table was Felix Leiter. "Well that's him alright. Wonder what it is he's picking up? Mebbees shooting for the other side now?" Leiter put down the last card in his game of patience.

"No, not James. You see the girl?" Loud shirt licked his lips, "nope, but I guess she's in the car. She'll keep a whiles."

"Remember she can identify you. So keep outta sight will ya? She might not take kindly to the man who murdered her brother . . ."

When they reached their hotel Bond was famished. He picked up a club sandwich and retrieved a heavy suitcase from the luggage lockers near reception. "When we get inside Angel, stay by the door until I've cleared the room, OK?"

"Yes Mr. Bond! Whatever you say." "Look, I . . ." Bond sighed to himself and gave up. He returned in a few moments. "Alright, no one has paid me a call, after you." Angel stepped into the room. "The bathroom is to your left, darling. You clean up first while I unpack." Along with his clothing the large suitcase contained cigarettes and brandy. Angel showered while Bond discarded his creased clothes and fixed himself a drink. The Brandy was a welcome home he'd been looking forward too. Bond shouted through the bathroom door, "Are you done, miss Duvet? Angel? A man needs to wash from time to time!"

"Alright, coming!" Bond hovered. "Got everything you need?"

"Yes - won't be long." He put his hand to the door handle, thought better of it and instead tidied away Mr. Hazard's crumpled suit, muttering to himself, "This is our last goodbye old' chum."

An hour later he stood clean-shaven and immaculately dressed in a blue linen suit with a white sea-island cotton shirt. Neatly pressed and brushed, James Bond felt more like his old self again. Even the woozy feeling he'd had all afternoon had almost gone. Angel came up to him wrapped in a towel. "My my, the new you! But what about my clothes, James?"

"We can go down to your apartment in a minute." He pulled at her towel. She pursed her lips, looked crookedly at him - the dark eyes were wiser than he gave her credit for. Bond knew that look. "Don't worry yourself. In your case Angel, I'm not on a wing and a prayer - at least not yet." Bond smiled, moved toward her, but then caught sight of the evening paper she'd placed on the bedside table. A headline grabbed his attention - He lowered Angel gently onto the bed, then reached across her for the Evening Post.

Republican Senator Dies in Crash.

United States Senator, Robert Balham, was found dead this afternoon when police recovered the twisted wreck of his red, Alfa Romeo. The imported car was found at the foot of Peak Constance. It's known that the summit's narrow roads have been under repair recently. The car was thought to be travelling too fast for the unfenced turnings, veered off the road, and plunged over the edge. The driver was also killed. Both bodies were cut with difficulty from the wreckage by the fire department. Senator Robert Ian Munnings Balham, IOC, was known to be on holiday from Illinois. His recent fishing trip off Morgan's atoll had brought in one of the largest Barracuda ever found. Unfortunately the remains of the driver were unable to be identified. Nassau Police are making further enquiries.

Angel had read the article over his shoulder. "You know him?"

"No. But it might be important. The smashed car was the one you arrived in. Who owns it?" Bond put the paper down.

“I don’t know,” she said impatiently. Angel went over to the window and gazed out. “The man just arrived at the Hotel. Kurt was driven away this morning before I left. I knew what he was going to do, tried to do. We argued at breakfast about it.”

Bond preferred to say nothing. He thought about Balham, knew he was a thorn in Washington’s side. There were those on Capital hill who wouldn’t miss him much. But what was the connection? Morgan’s atoll, and the car? The facts crushed co-incidence into intention. Balham must be mixed up in this caper somehow. There came a knock at the door.

“Room service sir!” Bond got up quickly and checked the balcony. He hadn’t ordered room service.

“Just a minute!” he shouted. Bond drew the Smith and Wesson from its leather holster on the bed and tucked it in his trouser waistband. Standing away from the door to the left, he pushed Angel back in the shower room. “Stay in there and keep quiet, please.”

“Really, you are such a bully James!”

“I wish you’d do as you’re told, just once in your life!” He shut her in, muffling her complaints - readied himself. Another knock. He flicked the latch . . . stood back, his hand on the gun,

“Come in!”

The door opened slowly, “Package for Mr. Bond, sir.” A profusely sweating porter came into view. He put the heavy crate down, lazily wiped his head on his sleeve. Bond looked to see if there was anyone with him, then casually gave him ten dollars. “Thank ya kindly sah,” the porter wheezed. Angel had already escaped and crept round the bed. She was watching Bond drag the wooden package in. “My god, what’s in it James?”

He was struggling with the crate and spoke with effort, “I thought I told you to stay inside! I don’t know what’s in it.” She stood over him

holding a slim knife. He smiled, “better let me have that, eh?” After Bond opened the crate, what finally lay on the floor shocked them both.

4 / Chemical Hell

Colonel Flint was stood in a concrete pit. The whole of his six-foot frame filled the trough's width. The hard jaw and calloused fists were clenched, in true testament to his inner nature. At the trough's opposite end, 4 metres away, lay an iron cage. Flint was making final preparations for its visitor. Two cylinders of Tazine and four oil drums of salt water were ready for opening on the ground above. "Ok. Bring him down," he shouted. Flint's voice echoed in the subterranean chamber. "And be quick about it!" "Yes sir," came the reply. Flint smiled grimly as the details went over in his mind. In ten minutes the temperature would be raised to 60c. They were well beneath the tide line in bunker 4B, so if anything did go wrong the place could be flooded. But being a meticulous planner he was convinced nothing would. His visitor would soon be dead.

A short steel haired man was taken from a holding cell and pushed toward the pit. A tough looking sergeant held him over its lip. Flint smiled up at him. "Your son has betrayed you," he said. The man winced and shook his head. "No. I don't believe that. I must speak to him. He will obey me. You can trust Kurt." Flint had always enjoyed this part; the begging for mercy without a hope. "There is no more time for negotiations. We warned you what would happen if he failed." Flint signalled the crew for a hand. As he was lifted clear John Friege was put into the cage and the salt-water barrels opened. In two minutes the pit was flooded and the air temperature had climbed to 35 degrees. The man made no further pleas. The sergeant reached into the pit and locked the cage door. "Alright, everybody out!" came the order. A domed blue light was turned on and the great doors to the bay above them were closed. Once they were shut the place was sealed up tighter than Fort Knox.

Inside central control Flint typed an access code into the computer. It sprang to life. The top window read ARMED. He punched in another password and a valve opened on the Tazine. The bay's temperature gauge was already reading 60 degrees; its windows misted over. A camera trained on the pit showed Frieger on the floor of the cage. He was holding his breath under water. Jesus H! He'd rather drown than breathe that damned gas. Flint knew the water would be extremely hot now. But not as high as the air temperature needed to condense the Tazine. It wouldn't be long before Frieger needed to surface. In fact if the cloud condensed into the water the results would be much the same. And not a whiff of oxygen in the whole place! Flint felt his mouth moisten at the prospect. This would be a delicious death. He had disliked Frieger since he'd first clapped eyes on him.

Without explosive power the poisonous yellow cloud formed slowly. Its oxygen depletion factor rising all the time. A technician suddenly swung round as he heard the hiss of an airlock opening from Bay 6. Professor Pollax came into the control room. Flint grinned. "Ah! You have come to enjoy the death of a traitor Professor? I am so glad." But Pollax wasn't smiling, he looked like thunder. "Get Frieger out! Get him out at once!" Flint looked dumfounded. "But he -" "You have my orders." "But the assassination failed - I" "Would you like to take his place Colonel Flint?" The Colonel looked at Alpha 1. If he didn't obey he knew where he would end up. He muttered, "No sir - I -" Xavier's thin voice rattled back, "Then get him a suit!"

John Frieger saw several men running toward him. His eyes were streaming. He felt as if he were burning alive. Unable to take a breath he began to panic. As soon as the cage was opened he blacked out. Flint gritted his teeth as saw the limp figure dragged away. How Frieger had survived that chemical hell he never knew. A voice crackled to life on the P.A. "You will make sure the clean-up is carried out perfectly, Flint. The

sterilisation program will not be affected. We move to Nemesis 3 in four hours. Good afternoon gentlemen.”

Xavior Pollax had received the report of Kurt Frieger's death at the same time as Flint. Now only the girl's blood could be of use to the enemy. But Flint's stupidity had almost cost them dearly. John Frieger was almost family. He'd play ball as long as he knew his adopted son was alive, . . . and vice versa. The perfect squeeze! But there was no use in meddling with arrangements at this hour. He needed Frieger for just a few more days. He would have to do something about Colonel Flint, but not just yet.

Pollax walked from the control room and into his training complex. He was tired of talk. When push came to shove few could pull a trigger on their own kind. At key points in life one had to do one's own dirty work. His introduction to this ethic at Browndown military research centre, all those years ago, had been in the development of an incendiary gel. It burned as hot as magnesium ribbon, clung to the victim, and could not be extinguished with water or foams. Many tests had been carried out, only a few of them on corpses. Ever since this point he had been driven to the obvious conclusion that these people were not fit to govern him. What gave them the right to choose whom the state could murder, and whom it should save? Money and power . . . damned economists! They were the force behind state sanctioned killing, no doubt of that.

Pollax folded back an inlaid screen. Behind it the rooms black painted walls were studded with copper ingots emblazoned with his monogram, X.P.X. Each one of these little ingots activated a hidden function of the room. The floor, walls and ceiling concealed many deadly weapons and traps. Pollax depressed three buttons and a gun appeared from the ceiling. It fired two shots, which with incredible perception he avoided. A knife sped out of the wall behind him and a random series of darts flew from both walls and floor. In a flash he rolled, dodged and

leapt into the air. After a swift series of acrobatic turns the human fly depressed another ingot and two wooden targets appeared. He smashed one with his left hand and cut the other in two with his right. Snarling, but keeping his nerve, he turned aside as three axe blades shot harmlessly by him. Finally he pushed the large ingot on the master panel. He then sat still for one minute in the centre of the floor.

There was a high pitched deadly hiss. Pollax breathed deeply and then laughed at the yellow fog billowing from three pipes. Rapidly the oxygen level crashed. He sat meditating until Tazine4 had completely oxidised, after which he left the studio and went to level three. Here he could watch a recording of his little performance. Satisfied with his combat readiness he made preparations to call DDHQ. A few seconds of similar film had once been shown to a british agent - 002. How James Bond first escaped this man was clearly a miracle.

5 / Precious Target

Angel Duvet looked more relaxed as she sat in the bar of the Blue Hills Hotel, iced Champagne being the best healer of ills at the worst of times. Dressed in a strapless evening gown of primrose satin, she was every inch the charming companion, if a little too composed. Bond, who hoped he'd gotten the full story from her over dinner, now realised how vital it was to keep her alive. He stood on the long verandah, with his back to the ocean, flicked open his black lighter and lit a cigarette. Night fell, and the sky held a soft shimmer that reminded him of warmer nights with colder hearts. Angel came up to him, she put a kingsize Chesterfield to her lips, Bond lit it and snapped the flame out. "Let's take a walk. I haven't enjoyed the island so much. I wonder, is it the company?"

"Like I said over dinner, relaxation is good for conspiracy."

Bond caught her scent, citrus and spiced melons, mingled with tropical air. The perfume reflected what he thought of her. Strange how a man invents things about a girl he knows so little of, a girl that interests him of course. They wandered along Gold Rock beach together, saying nothing for several minutes. The sky was clear, the stars bright. Her footprints left sleepy trails on the foreshore as the waves dragged their shapes into shadows. Bond was carrying her shoes, he kept a close eye on her and the nearby road. Eventually he told her his plan. "I'm going to take us over to East Town. We'll pick up the boat. It's not safe for you here." Angel walked in front of him, faced him and held him still. "You've got to try and help Kurt's father. Promise me that, and I'll do whatever you want."

Bond shifted aside, "I thought Angels never made threats."

"What threat . . . ?" Bond took both her hands. The long day was ending.

“Alright I promise,” he said, and kissed her on the mouth. She strolled away.

When they got back to the hotel Bond checked for messages. The puzzling thing was, Leiter hadn’t returned his calls. Before they took their taxi across the island he scribbled a swift note and left it at reception.

Williams was waiting at the small ferry when they arrived. He was glad to see Bond who immediately gave him an interim report. They bundled Angel below, it was too risky to traipse about with such a desirable cargo in full view. “We must act fast, Jack. I’ve wired London to check Angel’s story, but am awaiting confirmation. Suffice to say that Kurt Frieger had been the girl’s fiancé. A man forced to make a hit on me to save his father’s life.”

Williams was excited. “We must be getting close James. The fight’s on. By god it is!” Bond remained indifferent. He sketched out a few more details. Kurt Frieger had been working undercover for Pollax who was holding his father hostage. But when caught by the CIA, Kurt had been instructed to kill Bond.

“But why do the CIA want you dead?”

“Bond sighed, “I don’t know. I’m hoping it’s all bluff.”

“But that was a close call today. The other guy meant business!”

“Yes, but it was all too easy to put together . . . I guess we may never know.”

Angel came out on deck in a short, blue striped dressing gown. She explained the triple cross to Williams, telling him, “Kurt couldn’t avoid the contract on James, but afterwards he intended to leave the island for Hawaii. He wasn’t a bad man – you must believe that. People are forced sometimes to do things they wouldn’t dream of doing, especially to save the life of someone they love. Kurt wanted to plead his Father’s case; through the press if necessary. I told him the god-forsaken plan was

doomed from the start!" She walked to the stern, folded her arms and Bond thought he could hear her crying.

He reflected on the day . . . thought about the awful looking creature that had been so carefully wrapped and crated. A specimen of either Pollax's work, or Frieger's insanity. Whatever it was, it couldn't have lived long. Maybe this was the evidence Kurt was going to use against Pollax? Hmm, the man was growing in his estimation. Bond began to wish he'd been able to save him. "Alright Angel, go below honey, and get some sleep."

It was eleven O'clock. The drone of the engines slowed. Bond gave the orders; three hours sleep, one shift each, he'd take the first watch. From the cockpit he

re-examined the file on Jon Frieger for the last time. Station C had sent over everything it had.

Born in '40. Ran Epsilon and Phi projects at Browndown for three years. . . .

unravelling of human paleogenetics was funded by the British govt. . . . the proven success of Xenone (a gene-unlocking compound) – its formula sold to powerful pharmaceutical researcher, Xavior Pollax . . .

Bond ran his eye quickly down the pages.

. . . having furnished Xavior Pollax with the means to wreak havoc on the human genome, Frieger was now wanted by MI6 and just about every other organisation!

Christ! Surely there was no more precious target. John Frieger had a lot to answer for.

But there was very little here to add to his knowledge on Pollax. Some sketchy articles in the press, general background, nothing extraordinary.

Bond pulled a miscellaneous document out and read the typed newspaper report. 'Man wakes from Coma after eight years!'

Gerald Mathers awoke from a coma last night . . . Bond broke off.

The name rang no bells. As he read on again he learned that Frieger had helped this modern day Lazarus with a revolutionary treatment. Bond reset the cipher, sent a wire to see what the local stations had on Gerald Mathers.

Later, stood on the fly bridge, gazing out on a glassy sea, Bond detected the heady threat of world domination. When they got nearer to Morgan's Atoll its smell grew sickly sweet, like a slow rotting cadaver - once experienced, impossible to forget. Jack Williams, seeing his silent concern climbed up and handed him a drink. "Thought you could use this." Bond sipped the neat vodka, nodded his thanks and returned to his work.

He needed more to go on. The case was continually frustrating him. Skip reading he waded through page upon page on plant life, its development, its genetic inheritance . . . after an hour he'd almost glazed over. He still couldn't figure it out. What was missing? He'd learned that plants absorb genetic material from other species, which could be turned on and off due to predators or environmental changes. Could the illustration hold true for man? After all, this was nature's ultimate defence system - a code of adapt or die. He should understand that better than most. But what if it was turned against man . . . and how did paleogenetics tie-up with Tazine? Christ! The facts of the case were bewildering.

The whirr of the cipher machine interrupted his confusion. He tore off the tape and decrypted the message. 'Gerald Mathers. Research Chemist. Hit and run victim. Woke from an eight year coma five years ago. A revolutionary treatment, which aids growth and revitalises

dormant neurotransmitters was tested on his failing body. In an incredible last chance . . .’

Good God! It hit bond like a sledgehammer. Had Frieger unwittingly created Pollax, from Mathers. That had to be the connection. When Mathers awoke he was altered in some way; unknown complications perhaps, cortex damage, personality disorder? Whatever Mather’s ticket to hell, poor Frieger soon found himself at the mercy of this demon! The fog of ignorance had finally lifted. But where did it leave him, and where did the whole family fit into this?

Bond calmed himself . . . He was still tired, concentration was proving difficult. He imagined Pollax needed a means to get his cards into play. Plus insurance that a modified species would survive the force it used to annihilate others. But who would believe all this? Bond had to read deeper between the lines. If only he could make a stab at a plan - damnation! It was no use. He had gone as far as he could. It suddenly struck him that he could no longer guarantee the safety of Jon Frieger. How would he explain that to Angel?

Moreover, what the hell should he tell London? He knew doubly well that outlandish theories made bad reports. M would merely laugh at him and recall him. But the nagging hunch he was holding onto argued that Pollax was certainly immune to Tazine, and he’d somehow modified himself further to survive in a depleted oxygen zone, perhaps as a nitrogen breather. Bond shook his head. It was too incredible to be sent as a signal. Another nagging headache was the fact that if it was Leiter who had burned the bar, had the incendiary been meant for the loving couple or him? Bond remembered Leiter’s statement about the core of things . . . Felix may be under deep cover; in that case he could expect no help. Signals would tell him nothing, base would know nothing. If the agent was running his own agenda, this was the natural outcome.

Bond went below and spoke to Williams. “We must reach the atoll by dawn at all costs. Are you willing to go ashore and whatever the bloody truth is, kill Xavier Pollax?” “Williams nodded once. It was enough. That part was pure and simple. The rest could wait. Bond reasoned that if Pollax was stopped then maybe the whole show would collapse. But unfortunately for James Bond, trouble was never pure and rarely simple.

6 / Morgan's Atoll

The zombie had taken a mouthful of decaying flesh and was running in Bond's direction. There was only 50 yards to cover before he would reach the border to safety. Broken signs flew up all around him.

Danger!

Minefield

He weaved his way through them. Explosions tearing at his skin. He glanced left. An odd billowing cloud was racing along side him. He took one last gulp of air and then realised it would be his last. The acrid stench made him retch. He lunged out and tore the curtaining down that separated him from the sleeping Angel Duvet. The noise woke them both up. When he opened his eyes a stinging sweat ran into them. The nightmare had terrified him. Angel was sat there with a pitying look on her face. Her slim berth wasn't at all comfortable. And she'd taken over an hour to get to sleep. She sighed, slipped over to Bond and stroked his face. The long scar on his cheek rippled under her fingers. The matted dark hair fell across his forehead. He reached up for her and pulled the little brunette into a deep kiss. She put both hands on his shoulders and pushed him away. "I'm sorry James, it's not that -"

"Oh, never mind Angel. It's me who should apologise. But if I ever had a last request, well, it would be for you, my little Angel Duvet." His strong hands still held her slim waist. Hands that could love or kill. Perhaps kill as easily as Kurt had been murdered. The sudden thought of her brother's death pushed her into James Bond's arms again, she shuddered and hugged him tightly. Could this man's death put her back into her father's arms? If she made love to him, would it help? The heavy coils of mahogany hair spilled across Bond's stomach. He looked over her shoulder at the clock. It was 6am. He should get up and pin the

charts; it wouldn't be long before they reached the atoll. He could hear Williams moving about on deck already. Angel folded a bare leg over him and whispered something in his ear. In return James set his Sea-master alarm for a further half-hour. No use in being on parade before the brass showed up, he mused. Her angelic arms snaked around his shoulders as he pulled open the yellow silk pyjama top she was wearing. He suddenly rolled on top of her and looked into her eyes, "What is it James?" she whispered, "I must be the only devil to have re-entered heaven," smiled Bond . . .

At 7.15 am both men were on deck in their wet suits. Angel helped James on with his aqualung and Williams strapped the plastic explosive carrier around his waist, "Well James, this is it. You know I'm new to this game but I'll give it my best shot. Wish me luck!" Bond reflected on his taking Williams along. "The going will be tough Jack, but we'll pull through." They both grinned at one another, "Good luck Williams." Bond looked back at Angel and signalled the A OK.

From his starboard look-out Morgan's Atoll looked peaceful in the dawn light. Bond was sure the magnetic cordon had not been breached, anyway they would swim under it as far as possible. This was a minor worry. A final check for ammunition and air status and from off the port gunwale they rolled quietly backwards into calm sea. Both divers stopped at twenty metres before levelling out. The reef was straight ahead. Swimming quickly Bond felt relaxed and ready. Although he was dying for a cigarette he remained focused. He looked back for Williams, saw his 'O' signal and returned it. Diving to thirty-five metres the light faded, and from the shadowy depths their twin trails of bubbles dissipated before they reached the surface. Fast eddies from off the reef buffeted their legs as they flipped along. Bond was surprised at the lack of marine life. Had Pollax been testing poison gas here as well? Perhaps all his team were immune? No matter - since their first meeting in Canada,

Bond disliked Pollax intensely. The man had gotten under his skin. He'd past caring whether the megalomaniac was under US. Protection or not.

The moment they landed ashore they buried their wet suits and cleared the promontory. The sharp coral and inland cliffs had made the island almost impregnable, but keeping the reef to his back Bond struck out on a path towards some low buildings. The map of the atoll had shown only dense undergrowth here, but the clearing ahead indicated diggings of some sort.

Williams was caught unawares as the bunker roof slid back beneath his feet. As he tried to balance and signal Bond he felt the lancing pain of a hunting knife pierce his throat. It severed his windpipe. He fell quietly to the ground and James Bond had no inclination that his fellow operative was dead. Resting a second, Bond was scanning the buildings when a concrete door slid back to his right and a net sprung over him. He lashed out, but the steel mesh held him fast, trapping its lone wolf in seconds. Bond soon realised it was useless to struggle. He looked out for Williams, tried to get his bearings. He knew he'd be taken below soon. A white suited technician stared blankly back at him. Suddenly a voice he recognised came out of the ground. "Hello James. Glad you could join us." It was Felix Leiter. His colt 45 levelled at Bond's chest. The metal net was pulled away and Bond stood upright. Now, goddammit, was there a slim chance? He waited for a sign from his opposite number. It never came. Instead Leiter walked forward and struck Bond hard on the temple. A white sun exploded in Bond's head, collapsing him into numbing blackness.

Lab A. level 3

A hypodermic needle was withdrawn from the tanned bicep. The syringe was emptied. James Bond's blood dripped from a long pipette onto a glass slide. Frieger inserted the arterial sample into a gas analyser,

wiped the beads of sweat from his tense, high forehead and wished his crippling headache would cease. At the same time his assistant lowered an identical specimen into a plasma separator. All the previous isotope tests had registered positive. This test was purely procedural, but Frieger had to be sure. The two vampyric machines shook as they gorged themselves yet again on microscopic particles of human blood, tearing open the fragile cells, absorbing their mineral contents and finally, after reaching satisfaction, informed their feeders of the exact taste.

Bond shifted his weight to the left. He'd woken up minutes ago to find himself lying on a laboratory slab. His arms were strapped down and his ankles cuffed. He'd read the sign by the door three times: IMPORTANT! Specimens must be heparinised, and analysed within 10 minutes. If it is not possible to analyse immediately, the specimen must be stored on ice up to a maximum of 30 minutes.' The words eventually came into focus and made sense. He scanned the lab for an exit. This rat was about to rebel!

Frieger walked over to him. His Austrian accent was understated. "Ah, you are awake my friend! Never fear. I have made all the tests I need, thank-you. You have been most co-operative." Bond recognised the man. He decided to test him. "Your son is dead Frieger. Why are you still here? Pollax has nothing on you now, so before long he'll dispense with your services. Help me, I'll see what I can do."

"I have died too many times in these past years Mr. Bond, and I know all about my son. Life is not always what we wish it, or expect it to be. That is why you are here now, because I have discovered that my research has been compromised! How it happened is not really important, only that it has. A lifetimes work under threat, Mr. Bond, will drive any man to harsh measures. But perhaps you have not been informed of your good luck?" Bond was mystified. What the hell was

Frieger on about? The man was as mad as Pollax. Here he was, lying flat on his back being vivisected - now what sort of luck was that?"

"I can see your government saw fit not to explain, eh?" Smirking happily to himself, Frieger went about his business talking all the while. "First tell me something. How have you been feeling lately?" Bond was determined not to say anything. If they'd drugged him he'd fight it out as long as he could. Damn interrogation, damn this job! He felt his strength coming back as the adrenaline surged through him. If he could just inch free a little he'd strangle this man. Bond calmed his response. "I'm feeling fine Dr. Not a feather out of me. Fit as a fiddle!" Frieger laughed gently. "You have been tired, irritable, coughing in the mornings? A little dazed, a light confusion during your duties -perhaps? This is perfectly natural, Mr. Bond. But come, come now - sleep. I will find a way to get you an appointment with Xavior Pollax. Have no fear, he is just as keen to meet you, as you him." The sharp needle pierced his side and Bond drifted back into the arms of darkness.

7 / Deadly Serum

In the nerve centre of Morgan's Atoll, operation Nemesis had begun its countdown. Phase three would launch in one minute. Two helicopters loaded with Tazine4 would soon be on their way to the Florida Coastline. James Bond stood cuffed and chained to a control-level railing. Leiter had said nothing more to him. He knew Bond too well to give away details. Bond was entirely in the dark this time. He wondered if they'd got hold of Williams and the girl. If the balloon went up were they going to be safe from armageddon? He remembered the Frieger family had all had injections of Xenone. To a certain degree they would be immune to whatever it was that Pollax had planned. Xenone took at least a month to begin its effects, so as an emergency serum for Angel or Williams it was useless.

Two guards were holding him, while another covered him with a sub-machine gun. Whichever way he turned there was no escape. No hope of a diversion. Bond realised he'd finally bitten off more than he could chew. He couldn't, as yet, see a way to end this. Pollax confronted him. The thin face was inquisitive. He seemed to be looking right through Bond. Bond waited for the customary speech, full of boasts and braggadocio. It never came. Pollax turned away and signalled to a technician. Bond was somewhat surprised, but he kept his eyes on the man. Pollax turned back to him. "You'll see that a man is best judged by his deeds, Mr. Bond. Not by his words."

Colonel Flint moved to the dais above Bond. He stared hard. "You are about to watch the use of a weapon made by your chief ally 007. It has cost countless millions of dollars. Your own government has known of its existence for years. It is a perfect successor to nuclear warfare. It

leaves no collateral damage whatever! Flint smacked his lips and marched back to his station at the right hand of Pollax.

Xavior ordered the large bay doors open. In the next ten minutes Bond watched the Pollax manifesto become fact – Two choppers left the base and an illuminated map projected details of various merchant ships ferrying the Tazine warheads. Carried to their destinations on civil shipping they would be scattered across the massive rafts of plankton throughout the world's oceans. Once detonated they would extinguish the planet's oxygen resource in a few days.

8 / A Gentle Word Opens an Iron Gate

“You think you’ve got it all planned Pollax. It’s no use. The gas will kill everything. There will be nothing left to reclaim. This is a scorched earth war you’ve got yourself. All the seeds on Mayaguana are dead. Sterilised! Didn’t you check? Our scientists did!” Bond was clutching at straws. Pollax hadn’t blinked an eye at his claims. This man’s determination was bullet proof. Bond had come up against the power of governments in the hands of a single man before, but this man was able to control it. Pollax wasn’t after money, or political gains, just an insane kind of freedom. Some of the capsules had detonated a few minutes ago. The pacific trigger mechanism had passed its fail-safe check moments later. More deadly charges would be released in 30 minutes. That was it. Could he possibly make any difference now?

James Bond saw the giant screen in front of him go black. Pollax turned to Flint. “Colonel, take Mr. Bond into Bay 4B. I believe you are expecting another visitor.” He then removed his head set and laid it down. “I reserve no politeness for you, James Bond. You are to be taken away and executed by my men.” The cold order hung in the air for a moment; Bond said nothing.

Colonel Flint ordered him to be released and taken out. When the party reached the pit in Bay 4B Bond was pushed into the cage. “No politeness for you, Mr. Bond!” Flint chuckled, mimicking Alpha 1’s voice. The address system crackled into life again. “Close bay doors! Cut surveillance.” Flint stiffened. “Wait!” he called. “The team is not clear. I repeat the team is not clear!” The great doors began to fold shut and the cameras closed down. Flint’s death would not be broadcast. Pollax gave his final address. “I am terminating your employment Colonel Flint. Do not think it is a matter of personal revenge. Only the fact that with you,

my friend, the tongue speaks but the head doesn't know. A case of stupidity aggravated by moronic intentions. Goodnight Colonel Flint!"

The rest of the guards panicked and ran for the door.

James Bond watched Braddock Flint turn almost purple with rage. The ex-paratrooper suddenly leapt into the pit and tore the cage open. "Change of heart Flint?" said Bond. Flint pulled him out and threw him along the trench. "If I'm going to die, then I'll kill you first!"

"Old loyalties die hard, hmm?" As he spoke a valve turned and seawater began to flood the bay. A slow hissing began. Flint aimed a punch, but stopped to look up. A yellow mist was gathering above them. Bond was already sweating. The place was like a furnace and growing hotter all the time. As the temperature climbed threads of floating poison encircled the two men. Death was stalking its prey. Flint pulled his clothing tight to himself as he lashed out again at Bond. The vicious kick missed its target. Bond moved past him to the left and cannoned a punch into his kidney. He followed up with a another blow to the back of his head. The colonel buckled under its force. "It's no use Flint. We'll both be dead in a few moments." Bond dropped to his knees out of breath. His skin was crawling. His eyes stinging like hell. He noticed Flint's face had begun to peel; saw the soldier douse himself with seawater and then stagger back towards him. Bond heaved himself out of the trench and into the bay. A knife spun high over his head in a last frustrated effort of the Colonels' to kill him. Bond turned slowly around. The oxygen level had fallen drastically and Flint's eyes were swollen, they looked about to burst. "Lay down Flint! For god's sake get back in the water!" Bond shouted. The man was gasping, spitting, choking to death, his face red as raw meat.

Curiously Bond was having a better time of it. Even though he felt his skin was on fire he managed to breathe in shallow gulps. As flint fell awkwardly into the trench of water his limbs started to thrash about.

Pink foam bubbled to the surface. Bond made a tremendous effort and crawled on his stomach toward the bay doors. Before he reached them the flood overtook him. He swallowed a mouthful of seawater as the wave picked him up and smashed him against an iron piling. He clung on, the level rising slowly. Bruised and hurting all over he pushed himself off the stanchion and tried to tread water. He could taste that fresh water was now being sluiced into the bay. Bond was stupefied. Is this what Frieger had meant? His research compromised? By god it was all making sense to him now. Those bastards at Dudley. They had really done it to him. He'd been used as a human guinea pig. They had immunised him against the Tazine gas with Xenone injections. Bond recalled a lab technician's statement just before waking one morning, "I cannot tell if it is an over refined serum. But what has got him this far is certainly working." M had chosen not to use bombers, or shock troops, just him drugged to the nines and sent to kill one man. There was no going back this time. His was a suicide mission."

Slowly the Tazine Oxidised and the blue domed light went out. The flood began to subside, but not the acrid smell. He was up to his waist in water now. He hoped the system would drain completely. The two guards who'd fled earlier floated by him, blistered, swollen, rag-dolls tossed in a tide of pain. Yet one was not quite dead. He grabbed at Bond's shirt. As Bond held his head above water the burned face mouthed almost imperceptibly, "Ser . . . vice . . . service hatch." The head wheeled about and Bond realised the blind eyes were aimed at the back wall. He took some keys from the sergeant's jacket and then let go of the corpse. He swam for several more minutes, until finally the water was knee deep and he could wade across the concrete floor. Bond shivered, the extractors had come on and the sound was deafening. Sterilisation had begun. A red mist poured down on him, turning his skin and clothes scarlet. He clapped his arms about his shivering body. Jumped up and

down. 'Must try to keep warm. Count damn you . . . or sing!' he shouted at himself. It was below freezing now. Cautiously making his way to the rear of the bay he climbed up onto a thin ledge. His hands were shaking and he'd lost all feeling in his feet. The small doorway was just yards away from him now. He inched along a bit further, pressed his weight against the freezing metal, lost his footing and scrambled for a better hold. A few more feet, then he reached out and smashed his fist against the little glass housing above the hatch; pressed the emergency release. Rubber sealant cracked, the door vibrated; finally slid open. Air rushed in at him. Thank god! - warm air. The hatchway was less than two feet wide, but it was wide enough to set James Bond free.

His wet feet left indistinct prints on the tiles. The long descent from the bays lit by emergency power eventually delivered him to a recreation deck. Feeling his way along the steep corridor, Bond pulled a thin braid of wire from his trouser waistband. The guard was stood against the wall ahead. Bond ducked under a flickering light, threw the keys past the man and moved swiftly in to slip the garrote over his head. Strong hands shot up and clawed at his face. He tightened the wire noose with all his might. The body convulsed. Seconds later the struggle ceased. The guard lay dead at Bond's feet. He took the colt automatic and moved on. Turning right he saw a luminous arrow pointing to level three. Reaching the lift Bond prised the double doors an inch apart and wedged his gun in the gap. He fired upwards three times. A shower of sparks tripped the emergency override and the doors fully opened. He climbed out through the top hatch and entered the lift shaft. There was a service ladder to his left and he leapt for it. Catching the rungs he bruised his wrist and dropped the cell keys. Damn! He'd hoped to free Williams or Angel. His situation was growing more and more desperate. Bond prayed that Leiter was only bluffing his double cross.

9 / Code of Fear

Twenty one minutes until Tazine release. Pollax took a last look round. After the pods were airborne he would be a thousand miles away. The fulminate of Red Mercury would cause a percussive shock wave guaranteed to deploy the Tazine to remote locations. He breathed a slow deep breath of satisfaction. A loud disturbance killed the tranquility. Escorted by armed guard Dr. Frieger had entered the room.

“Ah, my surrogate father! How are you Dr. Frieger?” The voice was racked with sarcasm. “And what have you been doing helping the British spy, hmm?” Spittle formed at the sides of the horribly taut mouth. “I asked a question.” Frieger raised himself up.

His reply cut the air. “I no longer work for you Xavior. My son is dead, yes, but you see a long time ago I gazed into the mirror . . . There, staring at me, was the flabby-mouthed face of a crook. That is what I had become. Today I am a crook no longer.” Pollax slapped the man hard. The calloused hand opened a deep cut above Frieger’s left eye. But they were suddenly thrown to the floor as an explosion rocked the facility. Another deep growl shook the ferroconcrete stanchions that supported the decks. Ceilings and floors vibrated with the shock wave. Pollax slammed his hand onto an alarm. It gave no sound but brought iron gateways down on every exit to the surface. No one could leave until he gave the code. He knew immediately that this time James Bond had drawn first blood.

Matt Straker rushed in from bay 7. He moved closer and whispered something to Pollax. The pilot seemed anxious to make good their escape. Pollax eyed him suspiciously. “Guard! Take our professor back to his lab. Seal it, then loosen his tongue a little. I must know about Bond. You may think you will not tell me what I require to know doctor, but I

shall squeeze it out of you, have no doubt.” Straker watched the old man leave then said his piece.

“Time to leave, Dr. Pollax. This place has had it - the foundations are pre-war. Three submarine pens have all but collapsed.” Pollax relaxed and smiled at him. “No, you are misinformed Captain Straker. The damage has been confined to sector 3. The recreation centre. We know exactly who betrays the cause. You have outgrown your use!” Straker jumped aside, drew his revolver, but a bullet struck him full in the chest. The thin wisp of smoke that came from his jacket seemed to surprise him. He dropped to his knees. Blood spilled from his nose and mouth. He hadn’t seen Pollax move.

James Bond surveyed the damage. The plastic explosive had caused two stanchions to buckle and a third to crack. But as yet there was no flood. No early tide came to effect his rescue, or more importantly, Mathers’ death. There simply wasn’t enough plastic to do the job properly. But maybe his efforts had finally riled Pollax. Bond hoped they had and took the lift back up to control. A warning light flickered on and off. He felt the distant rumble as one of the piles gave way. The lift reached level three, the cables wrenched, he was thrown hard against the doors. The cage suddenly screamed to a halt and Bond barely managed to scramble out before the metal box went into free-fall.

Angel poked her head out of the hatchway. It was a perfectly sunny day outside with high white clouds drifting over a calm sea. Looking to the horizon she noticed a thin plume of gray smoke coming from the atoll and wondered what was happening. The transmitter set by James Bond before he’d left remained quiet. Only the boat’s radio broke the silence with its occasional burbled coastguard and weather reports. Angel

decided to fix herself a drink then sunbathe for a while. Finally the tanned long legs settled onto a striped collapsible bed. She propped her head with a white towel and stared up at the sky, her eyes fluttered, then closed. It was nearly four o'clock when a soft thud against the bow gently woke her. "James! is that you? Are you back darling?" She stood quickly, shouted again, but there was no answer. As she called out once more she picked up a loaded flare gun, put the weapon behind her and tucked it into her swimsuit. Two rubber fins suddenly came over the side and landed square at her feet with a wet 'thwack!' Angel turned round and saw him standing there, right in front of her.

"Who the hell are you?"

The beaming face said smoothly, "I'm Felix Leiter. And I know exactly who you are. But does your friend James Bond know?"

"You're trespassing. Get off this boat!"

Leiter settled himself against a lacquered white bulkhead. "Sorry, I'm the new captain. Now, you are Angel Mathers, aren't you?"

"No, I'm Angel Duvet! And this is piracy." She glanced at the radio then back at Felix. The agent looked into her piercing dark eyes. The girl was livid, her gaze hard. "Duvet an old college nickname is it?" he smiled.

"Don't . . . !"

"Your birth name is Mathers. C'mon, you may as well be truthful."

The cool presence and engaging manner didn't stop her hating this man.

"Alright, I am Angel Mathers. What's that to do with you?" Felix kept his eyes pinned on the girls hands. They seemed itching to do no good.

"Just the small matter of Xavior Pollax being your father, that's all. The man you hoped would accept you back, if you delivered him James Bond. But why did you lie? Especially about Kurt?"

“I didn’t. He -” Angel turned slightly, then whipped back and fired the flare gun. Leiter saw it coming, quickly ducked the white plume, which streaked harmlessly out over the water and exploded in a green dance of lights. She rushed him, threw out her fist, Leiter struck it hard with his gun. Angel yelled, staggered back in pain and fell off the cockpit into the well-deck. She lay there, sprawled out holding her elbow. “Damn you Leiter!” she hissed, “I’ve broken my arm.” Leiter stayed back. “No miss I don’t think so.” He picked up the Orion launcher and checked that the other barrel wasn’t loaded. Smoke drifted back across the boat. There was a high smell of cordite. Felix took off his wetsuit, fastened this rather dangerous Angel to a deck rail and went below. He reset the encrypter and sent a wire to base. All he could do now was sit and wait, but at least he had beauty for company.

A deep gash opened across Freiger’s cheek. The beating had gone on for more than fifteen minutes. A sharp pain brought him back to his senses a little. “Don’t pass out on me now Doctor. I’m just getting started.”

Frieger gave no reply. He just had to sit and take it. A splayed cigar butt was pushed into a petrie dish beside him. Another whack, a crunching thump. How much longer would he have to hold out? He’d told Bond where the explosives were. In return the whole installation was now groaning and rocking beneath him. Charges had obviously been set. There were guards running everywhere. A sense of resignation settled on him. A cold finality. He could almost feel death offering him its hand. His work on Pollax had brought about his own demise, the ideals of his youth had come to a debased end. He briefly saw the face of a young, bright natured girl with long dark hair; a pretty creature

Mather's first daughter. She held his focus for a while. The pain in his body subsided. Would the same abstraction occur in the girl too? He wondered. He'd not had long to work on her. Perhaps she'd fare better. Of course Pollax had cared nothing for her since his first modification. His egotistical fantasies, his blatant snobbishness and overt misogyny; all abstractions grown upon such a brilliant mind. Such a pity. Why should he care now? Angel had delivered her promise - but the man was beyond human sensibilities. No! Angel was different. Frieger passed out as another blow struck his face. Pollax stepped out from behind the screen. "Enough. It's too late. I was weak, yes! Even I. But no longer." The grey suited hand lifted the gun once more.

The Caribbean Institute for Meteorology 6pm

Daniel Peterson put down the telephone and slumped back in his chair. His fingers drummed on the table as he nervously sipped his Coke. Two hurricanes were forming not 500 miles from where he sat. Both 'Betsy' and Clara' as they were affectionately known, were little more than a day away from the Bahamas.

He caught the eye of principle scientist Frank Miles. "These babes are looking so sweet Frank. I've never seen bigger." He wasn't wrong. The winds were sustaining a 70 knot speed. His call had up-rated the warning from Tropical storm to Hurricane.

"Oh, c'mon Pete, we might see a change in direction yet. Watch 'em drift harmlessly out to sea, what dya think huh, maybe tomorrow?" Frank was on positive pills today. It was often like that in this job. "Well, maybe - and maybe not," considered Peterson. "We've got convection like you wouldn't believe - Betsy is filling up with more energy than a nuke!" Pete had his own name for Betsy - Hogg's breath - and his own

reason for hating her. Two years to the day he started work at the Caribbean station, he saw his home town devastated. His family survived, but they lost their house; his wife still haunted by the sound of their roof being torn off and blown down the street. It was \$10,000 dollars worth of damage. "Make sure you put out a directional warning Pete - Clara looks to me like she's hitting Cuba, maybe 3am!" If Frank's prediction was right then the heat energy released would be equivalent to the annual U.S. production of electricity! Daniel put his feet up and looked again at his monitor. It was going to be a long night.

James Bond burst into the control room. Pollax was gone. He looked at the body of Agent Matt Straker, probably a CIA plant from years back. Where the hell was Pollax? Had he escaped already? Bond accessed an open terminal took a quick run through the various logs then began his radio message, he hoped it would get through.

The wire detailed shipping crates, freight types and company names. He pulled the plug, got out and ran to an exit grating. The ground was shifting around him. It wouldn't be long before some kind of collapse occurred. No one had seen the girl or Williams. Perhaps they really had made it back to the boat. No, that was wishful thinking, not intelligence . . . he should check the cells, but they were located in the docking area, near the very bays he'd escaped from. That whole area might be under water by now . . .

But he had to go back, he must be absolutely sure – A shrill alarm sounded. A rasping announcement told him that Bays 3-8 were flooding. Decks up to area 4 were being shut down. Nemesis remained unaffected. My god! The program was unaffected. 'Christ!' whispered Bond. I'm too

late. This place is shutting down, Pollax has launched his plans, murdered his help and is probably escaping. Damn this man!

Felix Leiter watched the two 'Iroquois' helicopters approaching him from the north west. He had forced a Pax1 wire through. It carried a pre-determined code for the strike force needed to knock the 'Hueys' out of the air. That order had somehow been countermanded. The agent shook his head from side to side. How deep did the rot go? There was no telling. Leiter bit his lip and hoped Bond could abort the mission, if not . . . The machine Pollax had created was devastating in its power of command and execution. He looked at Angel. What was the point in keeping her like this? Nothing would be gained by it, even she had been used like a pawn by the madman of Morgan's Atoll. He wanted her to know exactly whose side he was on. Retirement loomed in his mind. Either he was too old for this crap, or something radical had changed. No one knew what side they were on nowadays. The cold war was over, the luxury of a black and white life had ended with it. In those days you either sold out to the opposition, or kept going, it was as simple as that.

Leiter undid her cuffs. He took out a document wallet. Unzipped it. A blood soaked red shirt with green palms spilled onto the deck. "You might recognize this?"

"I made sure he knew whose side I was on." Angel shook slightly. Picked up the doth and immediately threw it over the side. The man who had murdered Kurt was dead. She read it in Leiter's eyes. He was a spook alright, but at least he understood when to do the right thing, and when to tell the truth. Angel smiled meekly at him. When she'd gone

below Leiter locked the hatch and made for Grand Bahama. It was all up to Bond now. He'd watched his friend's back for as long as he could.

Weather warnings, repeated on and off during the last couple of hours gave an updated position for Hurricane 'Betsy'. Leiter heard that it could hit Bahama Bank in the early hours of tomorrow morning. Another cyclonic storm was brooding over the Florida coast, having changed direction that very afternoon. He took down the awnings and storm rigged the boat. Spreading the chart out he plotted a course for Grand Bahama. He could be there in 6 hours if the fuel held and some luck came their way.

James Bond carefully approached what looked like an expensive suite of private apartments. Faced with a huge bronze door that was obstinately barring his way, he tried his shoulder once more against it. It was no use. No amount of force could budge it. His shoulders ached from trying. He should have saved some of the explosives for getting out of this rat hole. Pollax watched him on the monitor. The man looked dead-beat. A far cry from the suavely dressed partner that walked his daughter along Golden Beach,

but at last the hunt was over. The prey had come to him. He depressed a button on his consul and to Bond's surprise the door slid upwards. Slowly he walked into an empty rectangular room. A low silvered light illuminated the room. All the walls were painted matte-black. A curious panel of copper switches and dials faced him on the far wall. It looked disused. A smaller door opposite him remained shut when he tried it. What was this place? 'Nothing like home sweet home is there, Pollax,' muttered Bond. But the curious austerity of the room impressed him. There were knotches on the walls that resembled bullet damage. He

closely inspected the ingots emblazoned with the initials XPX. A startling voice suddenly spoke from a loud speaker.

“Mr. Bond! Welcome to my home. I was wrong about you. I admit that after our first meeting I thought you would never return. Instead you have penetrated my organisation and have been able to turn even my lifelong friends against me. That is, of course, regrettable. I don’t know what kinship you shared with Frieger but before he died I can tell you he told me nothing of any use. The man was strong in that way. Death came as a release to him. And now, perhaps, to you.” The bronze door behind him slammed down. A faint click, hardly noticeable, alerted Bond and he hit the floor fast. A steel trident had shot from the left wall and clanged harmlessly off the end door. The dark room seemed to be a metal cell. “That’s just for starters, Mr. Bond. Just to let you know I aim to have fun.”

“If you stay any longer, Pollax, you’ll go down with this place. By now bombers are on their way here from Fort Lauderdale. I’m expendable, was sent to tie you in knots, to keep you busy while we bust up your operation. There’s no escape for either of us.”

He heard another faint hiss and an odd movement threw a distinct shadow. A machine gun descended and began to blaze, sweeping the room with short bursts. The noise was deafening. The bullets ricocheted off the walls and floor. One cut deep into his thigh. Bond fell to the ground in agony but rolled over so he lay as flat on the floor as possible. He shuffled to a corner, looking up he saw the ceiling was full of small grooves and coves. Christ! How many weapons were in this place? Was it a torture chamber? He pulled his gun and fired into the copper ingots on the wall. Immediately razor sharp blades left their hiding place and struck the wall opposite. There was a loud crackle of electricity and blue flashes illuminated the dungeon. Bond fired again and again into the control panels. The silvered glow went out and a light flickered on, a thick yellow

light that poured over him. Then a single hard spot shined onto his sweating face. He stood up. The blood from his leg was pooling on the concrete floor. Well, if this was going to be it, he'd take it standing.

"Had enough Mr. Bond?" Bond said nothing. He stooped and pulled one of the broken ingots off the wall and fired the automatic into the complex wiring that ran in the ducts behind. Ripping out another ingot he felt a lancing pain in his shoulder as a heavy weight hit him full on. A set of exercise bars had appeared, they were criss-crossing the room. So that was it. This is where the devil himself trained. Well, at least he'd smash his lair. To have come this far was something. He climbed onto a silver bar and scaled a long pole with niches cut into it. Once he was at roof level he fired the last of the clip into one of the concave holes.

For a moment nothing happened. Then a part of the ceiling slid back. A long tank was revealed. Was it a generator? James Bond was planning, scheming like never before, his determination at full throttle. He climbed into the small gap beside the tank as the machine gun in the room fired again. He must be off camera now, surely? There was a deep grinding noise and the tank slipped to its left. His bullets had penetrated it. It was leaking some kind of fluid. When the stuff hit the ground it bubbled and splashed and bounced in small globules; quicksilver or acid? Bond asked himself.

No, the bitter smell gave it away, it was Tazine4! Now what? A dull boom came from beyond the ducting. There must have been a collapse somewhere below. Abruptly giant sparks jumped from one of the sockets, and an effect which resembled ball lightning sputtered across the floor. His ammunition had certainly damaged something. He held on to the cabling above and stamped down two more ceiling panels. With a heavy kick he hit the tank with all his might. It broke free and crashed down onto the rear door splashing the walls with fluid. Thick fumes followed, he covered his mouth and nose as best he could, swung down on a bar

and double kicked the door with all his might, it gave an inch or two. He tried once more – doubts flew through his mind, my god he was reaching his last effort, could feel it in his body. He'd lost a lot of blood. If he fell now the acid would blister the hell out of him in a few moments. He couldn't possibly survive it. Another swing, his hard kick was rewarded with a wrenching sigh as the door finally gave way. He caught hold of a lower bar and swung himself out of the room.

As he entered the wide luxurious bedroom he saw Pollax sitting at a white table. He looked curiously listless. His head and torso were at an odd angle. What the hell? A stanchion had come loose, it was trapping his upper body. One side of the desk was all smashed in. But the dark silent form was still moving, so Pollax was still alive. His face contorted, he tried to say something . . . Bond took no chance whatever, he brought the butt of the Colt automatic down on the nape of the man's neck, once, twice, and then again. The terrible smile never faded. Bond stepped away, waiting for the breath to grow faint. After a few seconds Gerald Mathers lay dead. Bond tore a long strip of cloth from his own shirt and bandaged up his wounded thigh. He examined the body, the man was crushed from the legs down. The face still leered at him, the lips curled back in a grotesque rictus. "No need to get up!" said Bond, "I'll see myself out." And he picked up the small consul and pressed as many buttons on it as he could. Nothing happened. Even the emergency power had failed. Bond sat down heavily and wondered if anyone would find him here. He hadn't the strength to leave.

10 / Hurricane Betsy

The weather was appalling. They were both forrard, looking out of the cabin windows. Dark clouds, heaped up in picturesque disorder, bleached their faces with sheet lightning and a heavier rain began soon after they went and sat back down inside. Angel picked up her drink and a peal of thunder cracked and rolled over their heads. Its boom shook the cups and saucers lying on the table. Felix had dropped the anchor and had checked the storm rig. Everything was neatly tied down. The wheel-house was locked and all engines stopped. They would ride the thing out. A radio broadcast was interrupted yet again by forked lightning. Angel was praying it wouldn't strike the boat.

“Do you think James is safe, I mean, do you think he made it?” she asked. Leiter looked at her sharply. “After what you persuaded him to do on your behalf, James would have run round the installation three times to save Frieger, if he had to. There is no use denying it. We monitored almost everything both of you said to each other, since you met at Lizard point.”

“Then he must be dead . . .” She lit another cigarette. The words were spoken with a tone of finality. Leiter had taken pity on her. He knew she wasn't such a bad kid. For the last couple of hours he'd asked her plenty of questions. The time seemed right somehow.

“Kurt your fiancé, was he? Surely not!”

“I lied about Kurt to protect him. He was my brother, not my fiancé. As well you know. Don't try this shit on me! Please. We were looked after by John when Dad had his accident. After he came out of the coma, well, let's just say he wasn't the dad we once knew and loved. But I would still have done anything for him. Now it's all ruined. My father's most likely dead, poisoned by his theories, if not by Tazine.”

An enormous explosion roared over the noise of the storm. It couldn't have come from the atoll. Leiter looked out. A yellow dye was floating on the surface of the ocean. The waves near it rose and crashed down with yellowed crests. A helicopter had ditched in the sea nearby, lifejackets and bits were everywhere. A parachute billowed in the swell next to the boat. The green silk folding and unfolding in the currents. If any transport had left the island then it had hit the storm. He didn't dare think it could be James Bond. He turned the radio up, there was a faint broken voice amongst the static.

'Hurricane Betsy tore through the western tip of Grand Bahama at 6pm. She had followed the bank for nearly one hundred miles. Nassau News called it, 'turmoil and chaos flying hand in hand'. The voice faded . . .

Between the broadcasts Leiter sat listening to his own mixed thoughts - Twenty deaths had already been confirmed. Spiralling winds still ripped at sea and shore. In shallow lagoons, calm translucent waters were being whipped into froth like beaten egg whites. The sky pressed down on the islands, locking the weather front in position.

Neither Leiter, or Bond heard the end of operation Nemesis. The Tazine release which exploded at precisely 11pm, killing the chopper crews instantly and scattering wreckage over the Florida Keys, was sucked into the whirlwind of hurricane Clara . . .

The Caribbean Institute for Meteorology 11.30pm.

After checking the reports of two helicopters tracked flying into the worst weather front any pilot could imagine, Daniel Peterson sat bolt upright in his chair. His fingers were drumming faster and faster on the desk. Empty cartons of juice were flicked aside as he slapped the side of his monitor. The machine responded with much brighter colours and contrast.

“Frank, you’re really gonna freak at this. The eye of the mother of all winds is dropping out. Somehow the air is changing and we are losing shape and speed at equal rates. It’s bad news all round for Betsy. I reckon she’s finished. Ya know, I’ve never seen a storm drop its payload so quickly. Barely 40 knots now and still dropping. The centre is still pretty full of water though, and there is a high metal content. But oxygen is way down. Jeez! There is nothing left to convect . . . this one beats the hell out of me!”

“Let me see? You got a fault, mebbe? I’ll check the measurements later. We’ll get to the bottom of it eventually Dan, but it looks as if you’re darn right, Betsy’s finished. And I thought the old girl had more in her than that. Just a twelve-mile shift and she would have joined Carla in Florida. Boy what a fun time those gals would’ve had.”

Frank took up a cigar from the wooden box he kept in his desk for special occasions. He sat back and lit the stubby Havana. Took a long slow draw to get it going, then blew out a cool blue plume of smoke from his nose. This was just too good to be true. The odd explosions they had been notified of hadn’t showed up on satellite, or the coastal radar. So there was obviously no need for alarm. He tapped his ash into a plastic cup. Anything out in that storm would be torn to smithereens anyway. Whoever those guys were, well, they were never coming back!

The storm had slowly passed overhead. Leiter and Angel were drifting off to sleep when a loud thump from the well deck disturbed them. Felix got up slowly and went to the hatch. The same thump sounded again. He checked his gun, drew back the bolt. Rain immediately flew in at him. Outside the sky was still leaden, its dark clouds threw down shadows that whipped across his face. A long black

shape wandered into view. Propped against the rail in a tattered blue wetsuit stood James Bond. Leiter felt his heart rise.

“You took your time getting here, James, tea’s gone cold.”

“Sorry, I got a bit of a headache this afternoon . . . and missed the boat.” Leiter grinned. “For god’s sake get inside, we’ll catch our death’s out here.” Bond shuffled into the cabin. Angel stood up, the girl was caught between undying admiration and fear. Had he found out the truth? Bond held himself steady, then with a wry expression said, “Thought you might have come to get me, instead I had to fly out here with a chap called Kincaid. He was killed when we hit the storm, but thanks for waiting.” Bond literally fell into her arms and hugged her. “Hope my Halo isn’t too tarnished, I’m sure you know who I am?” He said nothing and stepped back. She took off the tattered wetsuit jacket for him, then made him sit down. Bond looked at her with his clear gray eyes. “I’ve never known a woman who wasn’t praying for something. And refusing to forgive an angel might get me into real trouble.”

She eyed the great purple bruises that patched his chest. It was obvious to her he’d a very tough time of it. Bond rallied himself. “No doubt you’re going to explain everything to me Felix? But for now, get me a cigar Leiter,” The American agent laughed, it was an old joke, but one which told him his friend, James Bond, was doing just fine.

James Bond will return...