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MEMORANDUM

***From*: Office of the Director of the Joint Intelligence Committee**

***Subject*: Revised classifications of the British governmental departments**

***Security*: TOP SECRET**

DEPARTMENT 1	Office of the Prime Minister
DEPARTMENT 2	Cabinet Office
DEPARTMENT 3	Home Office
DEPARTMENT 4	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
DEPARTMENT 5	Ministry of Defence
DEPARTMENT 6	British Army
DEPARTMENT 7	Royal Navy
DEPARTMENT 8	Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service
DEPARTMENT 9	Her Majesty's Treasury
DEPARTMENT 10	Department for Transport
DEPARTMENT 11	Attorney General's Office
DEPARTMENT 12	Ministry of Justice
DEPARTMENT 13	Military Intelligence, Section 5 (MI5)
DEPARTMENT 14	Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)
DEPARTMENT 15	Royal Air Force
DEPARTMENT 16	Northern Ireland Office
DEPARTMENT 17	Scotland Office
DEPARTMENT 18	Wales Office
DEPARTMENT 19	**CLASSIFIED**
DEPARTMENT 20	Territorial Police Forces
DEPARTMENT 21	Department of Health
DEPARTMENT 22	Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ)
DEPARTMENT 23	Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)

PROLOGUE

MOJAVE DESERT, NEAR CALIENTE
CALIFORNIA, USA
FOUR WEEKS AGO

Eight black-clad Operators made their way silently over the lip of the canyon, spacing themselves evenly out along the length of the ridge.

They bristled with weaponry, although not the kind they were used to carrying; they wore no stakes on their belts, no ultraviolet grenades or beam guns, no T-Bones. Instead, each Operator was carrying a suppressed SPAS-15 shotgun loaded with wireless taser cartridges that could immobilise a human being from four hundred and fifty metres.

Their target lay fifty metres below them: a wooden cabin built into the steep slope beside the dry riverbed that wound its way along the canyon floor. It was a small square building, with a white roof and a stone chimney emerging from its centre, and a wooden porch on its far side. The cabin was the last-known residence of an individual who was, as far as anyone was able to ascertain, unique: a vampire who had been cured of his condition and now went by the name of Adam.

The team had lifted off forty-five minutes earlier from Papoose Lake, the headquarters of National Security Division 9 that lay inside the military facility known throughout the world as Area 51. The flight time had been barely twenty minutes, but the team's orders had been to set down more than ten miles from the cabin, drive to within two, and hike the rest on foot. Adam was apparently no longer a vampire, and it was assumed that his supernatural senses had disappeared when he was cured, but General Allen, the NS9 Director, had no intention of leaving anything to chance.

The eight Operators had made their way silently through the barren rock and sand of the desert as the sun pounded down from overhead, the climate-control systems inside their black jumpsuits working overtime to keep them cool, until they arrived at the perimeter of the target zone and the squad's leader, Special Operator Tim Albertsson, had called in for final clearance to proceed. The response had arrived directly in his ear in the form of a single word.

"Go."

Albertsson led them down the canyon, moving silently at the centre of the wide spread. As they approached the cabin, his team spread out as if by remote control. The three Operators to Tim's right, and the three at the opposite end of the line, broke away and circled round the cabin. Two stopped on each side, facing the flat wooden walls with their shotguns raised, as the Operators who had been at the ends of the line met silently on the far side. Tim and the final member of the squad stopped five metres short of the rear of the cabin, forming the final edge of a perimeter of matt-black uniforms and steadily pointed weaponry.

Satellite reconnaissance had shown heat inside the cabin, but had been unable to positively identify its source. It was too diffuse: the product, it was suspected, of a wood-burning stove in the centre of

the two rooms. Privately, Tim Albertsson believed they were going to find nothing in the cabin, and was highly sceptical of the intelligence that had been provided; a cured vampire, who had supposedly *been* cured in Nevada as part of a highly classified NS9 research project that nobody inside the Department was aware of, and whose existence and location had come from a source that General Allen would not discuss with anyone.

There's so much wrong with this story, thought Albertsson, as he made a final check of his squad's positions. *I'm not sure I buy any of it.*

Despite his reservations, Albertsson understood why his squad had been sent to the desert. If Adam was real, and *had* been cured, then he was quite simply one of the most important people in the world – perhaps *the* most important. What had been done to him might offer clues that led not only to victory over Dracula, but to the complete eradication of the vampire threat. The Director could hardly ignore such a possibility.

"Ready One," he said, speaking into the closed communications link that carried his voice directly into the ears of his squad. "Non-lethal only."

Seven Operators chorused their agreement back to him. Albertsson moved, stepping lightly on the balls of his feet, and approached the window in the rear wall of the cabin. John Brady, a third-year Operator who had come to NS9 from the Marines, shadowed him, keeping the distance between them constant. Albertsson reached the wall of the cabin and set his back against it, his shotgun raised to his shoulder. He took a deep breath, then darted his head out beyond the window frame and looked inside the cabin.

The main room doubled as both kitchen and living room; below the window was a metal sink, with a battered sofa sitting in the

centre of the floor beyond it. To the right stood an antique chest of drawers, the top of which was patterned with angular lines of dust. To the left, a wood-burning stove vibrated gently as it coughed smoke up the chimney and out into the clear desert sky.

There was no sign of their target.

As I expected, thought Tim, cursing silently. *He's gone, whoever he is.*

"Bedroom," he said.

"Clear," came the immediate reply.

Tim stepped out and took a closer look through the window. There was nowhere the man could be hiding: no cupboards, no trapdoors. And as he scanned the small dwelling, he realised what the lines of dust on the dressing-table top were. They were the marks left by photo frames that hadn't been moved for a long time; the kind you only moved if it was necessary, like when you were leaving a place with no intention of ever coming back.

"Jameson," he said, addressing one of the Operators positioned along the cabin's front wall. "Move in. I want the place swept in five minutes so we can get the hell out of here."

"Roger," said Chris Jameson. As Albertsson and Brady made their way round the cabin to join up with the rest of the squad, Jameson pushed open the unlocked door and stepped inside. The last thing he would ever hear was a tiny click from beneath one of the floorboards, as his boot stepped heavily on to it.

Tim Albertsson rounded the corner of the wooden structure, and had a brief moment to marvel at the remarkable beauty of the snaking canyon before the cabin exploded with a vast, shuddering roar.

The wooden walls and roof blew up and out, splintering into a deadly cloud of flying wood as a huge orange fireball with a black heart bloomed up out of the ground. The sound hammered into

Albertsson's ears as heat blasted across the front of his uniform and the shockwave hurled him into the air. He tumbled, the horizon rotating wildly before him – desert, sky, desert, sky, desert, sky – until he crashed down to earth, his back and shoulders slamming against the hard-baked ground, and all he saw was grey.

When his vision cleared, he was looking up at a vast column of black smoke. His eyes were watering, his ears ringing, and he wondered, for a terrible moment, whether the blast had struck him deaf. Then he pushed himself up on to his elbows, and the howl of pain that burst from his mouth as his battered shoulders ground together reached his ears, and he knew it had not.

Thank Christ, he thought. *Oh Jesus, what the hell was that? It felt like a nuke going off.*

Gritting his teeth against the pain, Tim pushed himself up on to unsteady feet and surveyed the chaos before him. Four of his squad were lying on the desert floor, their eyes closed; each had been thrown at least ten metres by the explosion. John Brady was nearer, his face pale, his eyes wide and staring, his hands beating the ground rhythmically as he visibly tried not to go into shock. Tim lurched towards him, and saw what had happened to his friend.

Brady's legs were gone below the knees; all that remained were blackened stumps and shreds of uniform. Blood had splashed up his body and across the orange ground, but not in the quantities that Albertsson would have expected; the terrible wounds had been cauterised by the fire that had caused them.

Tim stared, his mind trying to come to terms with what he was seeing. Then he twisted the dial on his belt that controlled his helmet's comms system, praying as he did so that the technology hadn't been damaged in the blast. For several agonising seconds, there was only silence. Then a voice spoke into his ear.

"Code in."

"Albertsson, SO413," said Tim, his voice trembling.

"Go ahead."

"Operators down, emergency medical evac required, my location. At least one critical injury, double amputation below the knee. Severity of other injuries unclear."

"Despatching now. ETA thirteen minutes."

Albertsson cut the connection and dropped to the ground beside John Brady, unbuckling his belt as he did so; it came free with a series of thuds as the weapons and kit attached to it fell to the ground. Working as quickly as he could, Tim slung the belt under and around his friend's thigh then looped it round a splinter of the devastated cabin. He turned the piece of wood, tightening the belt round Brady's leg until his friend let out a scream of pain.

Good sign, he told himself.

He grabbed his knife from where it had fallen, sliced off the left sleeve of his uniform, and quickly repeated the process on the ruined right leg. When it was done, he staggered to his feet. Brady had passed out as Albertsson tightened the second tourniquet, but his pulse was regular, if dangerously weak. Across the steep canyon side, the remainder of his squad were drifting towards consciousness, letting out low groans and grunts that made their way directly into his ears. He counted again, knowing with dreadful certainty what he was going to find.

Himself. Brady. Four others.

Six Operators.

Two of his squad were missing.

Albertsson turned and faced the burning remains of the cabin; the heat emanating from it was overwhelming, and he was only able to take a few stumbling steps towards it before being driven back.

He stared into the inferno, searching for a way to dispute what his eyes and brain were telling him.

If I can't see them, they're gone.

A loud groan in his ear roused him from his thoughts, dragging him back from the edge of shock. He tore himself away from the blazing remnants of the cabin and began to attend to the members of his squad who *had* survived, patching wounds and splinting broken bones. He got Owen Meadows, the young Texan who had transferred from the Rangers only three months earlier, up on his feet, ordered him to keep an eye on John Brady, then redoubled his efforts, scrabbling back and forth across the steep, treacherous slope of the canyon.

Albertsson was pressing a square of gauze to a hole that had been gouged in Megan Irvin's forearm when the steady thud of helicopter rotors began to shake the desert floor. Tim jumped to his feet and saw the Black Hawk above the distant eastern horizon, flying fast and low towards their position. He was about to tell what was left of his squad to prepare themselves for evac, when Meadows shouted that Brady's heart had stopped.

"So what happened?" asked Julian Carpenter.

He was sitting on the narrow bed in his cell on Level H of the Loop, staring at an ashen Cal Holmwood. The Blacklight Interim Director had cut his connection with Bob Allen in Nevada only minutes earlier, and the shock of what his American counterpart had told him was written all over his face.

"Brady didn't make it," said Holmwood. "They got him on to the chopper back to Dreamland, but he arrested again and they couldn't restart his heart a second time. He was pronounced in the hangar at Papoose Lake. NS9 scrubbed the cabin, and found traces

of Jameson and Denham, barely enough to fill a Petri dish. They were all but vaporised by the blast."

"What was it?" asked Julian. "What did Adam use?"

"Dynamite," said Holmwood. "Under the floorboards. God knows how much of it. They're trying to trace it, but they're not expecting much luck. You can buy dynamite in every builder's merchant in Nevada."

"And a pressure trigger by the door?"

Holmwood nodded. "You talked to him, Julian. Did he seem like the type of person who would do this?"

"No," said Julian. "Not at all. But desperation makes people do strange things, Cal."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, he probably realised that once *I* knew he'd been cured, there were going to be people who would want to know how it happened. Maybe he didn't feel like spending any more time as a lab rat."

"But he talked to you," said Holmwood. "Voluntarily. He told you what happened to him, admitted he was cured, and let you leave. Why would he do that?"

"I don't know," said Julian. "He told me that the cure wasn't why I had come to see him, that I was there for some greater purpose. Maybe he thought that was more important."

"Your vision," said Cal. "What you saw in the cave."

Julian shrugged. "Maybe. Or maybe he knew there was no point in trying to pretend that he wasn't who I thought he was. Maybe he just wanted me gone as quickly as possible so he could run."

"We need to find him, Julian," said Holmwood. "It was already urgent, and now three NS9 Operators are dead. I need everything you know about Adam, everything he said to you, anything that

might give Dreamland even the slightest clue about where he is. How long do you need?"

Julian looked at his old friend and saw fiery determination flickering in his eyes; despite the burden of leadership that had been thrust upon him, and the seemingly endless setbacks that Blacklight and its international counterparts had suffered, it was still there.

God, he looks tired, he thought. *How did it come to this? Henry gone, Cal in charge, and me in this cell, useless to everyone.*

"Julian?" said Cal. "I asked you how long you need to prepare a report on everything you know about Adam."

"I'm sorry, Cal," said Julian, shaking his head. "I'm afraid I can't do that."

1

SAFETY MEASURES

Kate Randall put the folder down on the desk and closed her eyes.

She was sitting on a plastic chair inside her office in the Security Division, and had just finished reading through an Intelligence Division projection that had been commissioned two weeks earlier. Its cover was marked *Provisional Forecast of Losses and Damage in the Event of the Establishment of Supernatural (Type V) Social Dominance*, a typically dry title for a report whose true purpose could be summed up far more succinctly.

It was a prediction of exactly how bad things might get if Dracula came to power.

Kate had expected it to make grim reading, so much so that she had let the report sit on her desk for almost an entire day before summoning up the courage to open it. Now she wished she had left it longer; the numbers contained within the pale yellow pages were so awful, so terribly, dreadfully *huge*, that she could barely comprehend them.

She had been asked to present the findings at the next meeting of the Zero Hour Task Force, scheduled for the following morning, and she was already dreading the reaction they were going to elicit from her colleagues, who were struggling not only with the imminent

arrival of Zero Hour itself, but with the seemingly endless list of other problems that had befallen the Department in recent months: the violent, treacherous defection of the Task Force's former member Richard Brennan, who had tried to kill both Kate and her boss, and who, it was presumed, was now at Dracula's side, telling him every plan they had made; the continued freedom of a number of the patients who had been turned and released from Broadmoor Hospital; and, most potentially devastating of all, the article the late Kevin McKenna had written under the influence of Albert Harker, an article that detailed the existence of both vampires and the men and women who policed them, and which was now out there, being read by an ever-increasing number of people.

"What do you make of it?"

The voice was familiar, but Kate still jumped in her seat. Standing by the door to her office, holding his own copy of the report, was Major Paul Turner, the Department's Security Officer and Kate's commanding officer. He was looking at her with a thin smile on his face.

"Jesus, Paul," she said, her heart racing in her chest. "Sneak up on me, why don't you? There are vamps who aren't as quiet as you."

"Sorry," said Turner, the smile testament to the fact that he wasn't. "Try not being so easy to sneak up on."

"I'll bear that in mind next time I'm sitting in my office in the middle of the day," said Kate, although a smile had now risen on to her face as well. "Can I help you with something?"

Turner waved his copy of the Intelligence Division report. "What do you make of it?" he repeated.

"It's horrifying," said Kate. "But I expected it to be. What about you?"

"It's worse than I thought," said Turner. "Not by much, but it's worse. And it's going to cause panic through the Department if it gets out. It has to stay Zero Hour only, at least for now."

"Agreed," said Kate. "No sense circulating the worst-case scenario."

Turner nodded, and threw his copy of the report down on to Kate's desk. She watched him run his hands through his hair, and marvelled at the evolution their relationship had undergone in recent months.

When she had first arrived at the Loop, her immediate response to the Security Officer had been the same as almost every other Operator's: outright terror. Turner was stern and cold, so much so that he often seemed more like some kind of military robot than an actual breathing, feeling human being. But then she had started dating his son, Shaun, who had been so different to his father that, were it not for their almost identical physical appearance, you would have doubted they were even related. Shaun had been passionate, and impulsive, and short-tempered, and loud, and full of life.

Until he died.

Was murdered, she reminded herself. *He didn't* die. *He was murdered by Valeri Rusmanov.*

In the aftermath of the loss of Shaun, Kate and his father had found themselves clinging to each other like shipwreck survivors to a barrel, desperately trying to keep alive the memory of the boy they had both loved. As a result, when Turner had needed a partner to run ISAT, the Internal Security Assessment Team that had been charged with investigating every serving Operator after the revelation that Richard Talbot, the original Director of the Lazarus Project, had spent his whole life in Valeri's service, Kate hadn't hesitated; she had walked into his office and volunteered.

Turner had asked her if she was sure, had warned her that