

#### Chapter Forty-Four

On Thursday evening, as Ralph stood by the curb awaiting Griff's arrival, a dense, wet fog descended upon San Francisco. He had just swallowed the last bite of pizza, a slice that he had deftly conned out of a local vendor, when the battered little car pulled to a stop before him. Running the back of his hand across his lips, ridding himself of the pizza's greasy remnants, he slid into the passenger seat and slammed the door.

"Hey, mon, be gentle," Griff beseeched, while easing into traffic.

"So, whot's with the change of plans?"

"We got some news, mon."

"Whot kind of news?"

"First, you tell me what you was doin' at the compound the other night."

"Oi told you, personal shit."

"We agreed, mon, we's in this together, all of us."

Ralph scratched his head and gazed out of the window. "Oi was tryin' to find out whot they done to me, twas all."

"You mean what they done to us, right?"

"Yeah," Ralph said, throwing up his hands in surrender.

"So, tell me about the girl you thought they killed."

"You callin' me a liar?"

"No, mon, jus' wanna be sure you wasn't seein' things."

"Yeah well, tweren't no frickin' hallucination, oi saw the dagger go into 'er chest. An' she weren't no stranger, neither, ... the frickin' nightmares 'ave been keepin' me awake all night."

"Sorry, mon," Griff replied, while swerving to avoid an oncoming taxi.

"That frickin' Kerberos, oi'm gonna get 'im," Ralph promised.

"We ain't no S.W.A.T. team, mon and you ain't the *Terminator*."

Ralph clenched his fist and pounded it against the dashboard. "Don't make no fuckin' difference," he said.

Griff parked the car, one wheel up on the curb, several feet from their intended destination. They exited and made their way through the maze of a garage and to the back room. "You ain't

gonna believe where this guy has been," Griff exclaimed, addressing the group while pointing a finger at Ralph.

"We gotta come down hard on that murderin' Kerberos," Ralph interjected.

"Why is that?" Tommy asked, as he blew across the mouth of an empty beer bottle.

"Oi seen 'im stick a girl in the heart ... a right nice twist, she was," Ralph replied, remorsefully.

"He stabbed her, just like that?" Tommy asked, incredulously.

"Twas part of some frickin' devil ceremony; she was the bloody sacrifice," he said, shaking his head in disbelief while the others sat staring, their mouths agape.

"Well, that ain't the half of it," Griff said, breaking the silence, "tell 'im Tommy."

"You see, Ralph, I was doin' my phone thing ..."

"Yeah great," Ralph broke in, with disinterest, "how 'bout givin' me the grit an' leavin' out the shit?"

"You know," Tommy said, angrily, "I don't need to take this crap from anybody!"

"OK, sorry, old sod. Go on an' tell yah story."

"I found out something very interesting. It seems that the guys from NAPCO have been up to more than drugs ..."

"That ain't news to me," Ralph interrupted, "but keep goin'."

"So, I heard this conversation and the Russians were talkin' about a large sub-basement underneath the compound where they're storin' a mess of contraband arms."

"Arms you say? What kind of arms?" Ralph asked, as he rose from his chair and began pacing the room.

"Don't know for sure but I heard words like, shrike, amram and stinger but there were others that I can't remember."

"Dem's is missiles," Griff interjected.

"How do yah know that?" Ralph inquired, as he reached from behind one of the women and grabbed her breast, resulting in a resounding slap.

"You finally got what you deserve, mon," Griff said, doubling over from laughter.

"Never you mind that, answer the question," Ralph barked, while rubbing his cheek.

"Video games, mon. They's like the real thing."

"What do you think they're doin' with that shit," the girl who had just slapped Ralph asked, as he chased her around the room.

"Well, darlin', they ain't for playin' games," Ralph replied, as he slipped a finger into the waistband of her jeans, preventing her escape.

"No," Griff said, "they be sellin' 'im but to whom?"

"Well, don't matter none," Ralph replied, smiling mischievously, as he slid the palm of his hand down below the

waistband and grabbed the girl's butt while she giggled, "whoever they are ain't up to no good."

"So, what are we gonna do?" Tommy asked.

"Don't know 'bout you, old sod, but me an' this fair wench 'ave some catchin' up to do," Ralph responded, his hand wandering, unrestrained, inside of her jeans.

"Yah, mon, we be thinkin' hard on this one," Griff commented, "they ain't no street gang and we ain't no *Rambos*."

"Amen," Tommy added, "I think we should call in the troops."

"Who you gonna call, mon, the cops, the Feds? How we gonna explain where the information come from? No, mon, me thinks we better sit on dis awhile."

"Not too bloody long," Ralph said, "oi ain't gonna let that murderin' Kerberos get away with whot 'e done."