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Beck's Game

Series 1 : Part 6

Mornington Crescent

A FEW HOURS PREVIOUSLY

WATFORD

The Metropolitan Chieftain sat at his desk watching the monitor of his computer. Nine small boxes of monochrome showing the platform, the siphon room, tunnels and other parts of an Underground station. He shouldn't have access to these, it gave him a small rush of excitement to know he did. It would have been bad enough if he'd been watching Watford Underground Station. CCTV of your own station to defend raids was not allowed, but the rules didn't exactly say say CCTV of someone else's station was forbidden. It was rather assumed that if you couldn't have it for your own, spying on someone else's was verboten; but rather than taking that for granted the Metropolitan Chief decided to view this as a loophole, one that he was sure would cause large scale protestations from the other tribes if they knew, but they didn't. He hadn't even shared this secret with anyone in his own tribe.

As far as he was concerned anything to spice things up, to break the boredom, was worth trying. Of course if he was careless and anyone found out, he was sure this would be worthy of a retirement, but that seemed an unlikely outcome.

When his friends had helped to install the equipment to spy they had expected that he'd want it set up for his own station. Instead with just one option from the entire Underground network, one station of which he could hack into the CCTV cameras, his choice was obvious. Other's might have considered it a waste, but no amount of money could equal the knowledge that made him one up on his rival.

He was also confident that his friends would not take his selection personally.

A train pulled up and stopped. Doors opened, passengers alighted... boring though. Anything else? He skipped through more of the images.

The front of the station, and coming out of the office block, who was this? Alex, clearly on a mission. What was he up to?

LATER

OXFORD STREET

The Central Chieftain sat in the back of the taxi thinking carefully. He had not expected the Piccadills, if it have been the Victorians he could have understood; ever since the issue with Leo there had been greater enmity between the two tribes. But what had possessed the Piccadills to do this?

Regardless one of his stations had been taken captive.

'Further update for all Central Players. I am getting reports the Piccadills are loosening their grip on Lancaster Gate. The Chief was spotted leaving, we assume other members must have left by other means. The plan is still in action. The line is closed. Enter at Queensway and we go through the tunnels on foot. Our mission is to get back the station and send a message we will respond to such actions. However let's try and avoid people getting hurt, either of our

tribe or theirs, as much as we can. I will arrive shortly.'

He saved the message and then sent it.

A moment later he pressed record again. 'Further activity, it seems the local authorities are active at Ealing Broadway, keep away from this station until I hear from the King. Repeat keep away from Ealing Broadway.'

POLICE STATION, EALING

'You'll have to say something proper soon,' insisted one of the two policemen who were sat the other side of the desk, a recording device between them.

Neil honestly had no idea what to say. There was no way he could tell them the truth. If he lied... how could he possibly think of a lie that covered all the facts that were on hand and goodness knew what else might come to light.

He had no idea what had happened to the others, but being the one caught in the driver's cabin of a hijacked train with a samurai sword he assumed the pressure was on him.

The King should be able to deal with this, that was what he was for after all, at least one of the things.

'It's complicated,' he tried. If he could call the Central Chief and get him to appeal to the King he might have a chance.

'This is probably the craziest situation I've ever had to deal with,' replied the other policeman. 'And we live in London. For a sword wielding nutter I expected a bit more of a response than sulking though.'

After waiting for the moment to pass Neil tried again. 'I need someone to come and help me.'

'You can say that again,' the second officer continued.

'Look I'd love to say "I know my rights" or to use your procedure against you, but the honest truth is I have no idea what my rights are. I do gather I'm allowed a phone call. If I can just get you talking to the right people, or at least your superiors talking to the right people, this can all be cleared up in a short time.'

'Oh he's one of those,' the second turned to the first. 'Thinks he's above the law and all he needs to do is call his friends in high places to get him off.'

It was with some horror that as ridiculous as that sounded that was exactly what Neil expected to happen.

The first policeman looked Neil in the eye. 'Listen sunshine, it doesn't work like that in the real world. You do realise that this isn't a parking ticket or weeing in the street? You had a sword on a stolen train. Grief! Yes you can have a phone call if you think it will help, but don't go getting delusions of grandeur.'

QUEENSWAY PLATEFORM

The Central Chief waited until the last person of the group had disappeared into the tunnels and turned to the two men left on the platform.

'There's no signal down here so if you run into any trouble use your initiative. You know what that means. I trust you to do what is necessary.'

'What we don't know,' one of the started, 'is exactly what all this is about.'

The Chief frowned. 'We'll pay you the usual risk bonuses that's all you need to worry about.'

'I think I'd still like to know,' the man continued. 'You are right, it is a risk, but I think you all miss what that actually means to us.'

'We're following you-

'Yes, you're behind us.'

'Just go and don't argue.' The Central Chief pointed down the tunnels and then walked off to join his tribe mates, the last thing he needed was a Guardian with a chip on his shoulder. When all this was over he was going straight to the King.

AN OFFICE

The man who had spoken to the King in Hampstead Road hung up the phone with a bang. This was getting out of hand.

'Get in touch with Scotland Yard,' he demanded. 'Tell them I have information for them. Use the code Project Early Hours. Tell them I will personally bring them to a location and show them the evidence. They'll know what it means. Get lots of cars ready. I've had just about enough of these people.'

... STATION

Rhys looked through the glass below him. It was real, not a screen, this was the real world he was looking out on. He felt disorientated.

He did notice that the small amount of extra light, now admitted by the revealed window, illuminated the platform behind him. Taking a step back he could make out it was the District Line and the name of the station, West Ashfield. He'd not heard of this one before, but he wasn't an expert on all the tube stations.

THE BACK OF A VAN

Movement had stopped and although the throbbing of the engine could still be felt through the metal floor below her Sophie heard the front doors open and then the back.

'Get up,' she was ordered.

There was a breeze and Sophie shivered in the cold air. Blindfolded she couldn't see anything.

'Take that round the front,' she heard a woman say. 'Get a move on and open that up.' There was a clanging sound. 'Why won't he answer?'

After a few more moments the clanging stopped and Sophie found she was pushed forward and the blindfold was removed.

'Get her inside and make sure she is secure.' The woman who was speaking swam into view, it wasn't a surprise to see that it was the same woman, Laura, who had been behind her previous kidnapping. Only this time she seemed to be the sole authority figure. Neil had been right.

They were standing outside a barn by the looks of things, in the driveway of a farm, this was not London then. She'd also noticed they had used Neil's van; Laura must have gone all the way to Perivale to take it. She'd very much planned this.

Sophie tried to speak, if only she could work out what this woman wanted with her. They had said she held Oxford Street in this stupid game thing. Oxford Street was not served by the Piccadilly Line, but it was the people who worked that line that had captured her, how and why had she changed hands?

POLICE STATION, EALING

Neil waited, someone had to pick up, even if the Chief was not able to one of his Guardians would do so. But the phone just rang and the longer it went unanswered the less chance anyone would get to the King, which in turn meant the more serious trouble he found himself in.

The policemen who had tried to question him stood next to him. The ringing became an answer phone message.

'Hi it's Neil. I've been picked up by the police and I think this one needs His Majesty to explain it all. I'm at Ealing Police Station, please send someone.'

LANCASTER GATE PLATFORM

After walking through the tunnel with only a torch the Central Chief saw that a small amount of light ahead of him begin to bleed into the darkness. The station the other side of the opening became visible.

When the party of Centrals arrived at platform only the Guardians, who they had sent ahead, were visible, waiting on the platform. Where had the Piccadills gone?

'Either they have moved out or it's a trap,' the Central Chief warned.

WEST ASHFIELD STATION

After the unexpectedness of it had passed it soon became clear to Rhys that this must be some kind of museum in a building somewhere. Looking back out the window he failed to locate even roughly where he was.

But, from what he could see in the half light, the attention to detail at this fake station was amazing. He found himself sat on the bench on the platform once more. There was nowhere to go.

'It's used for training,' a voice called out, Alex.

Rhys thought about ignoring it but realised as satisfying as that might seem, it wouldn't help him.

'I always thought we should have siphon room added so we can train new Players, but then I'd only want the Victorians to have the advantage.' Alex had come close to the iron gates that separated the platform from the realistic tunnels, Rhys had no idea how much of a station they had recreated.

'Is this yours?' he asked surprising himself, it wasn't the most important bit of information he needed.

'No, it's all TFL, well I mean we have a run of it. I'm not sure they even know, but it's a hard life I suppose.'

'Why do you need it?' Rhys had stood up and moved to stand in front of the gates.

'We don't. It's a quirk, it's an anomaly. We play on all the Underground stations in London, we got this thrown in, no one really knows what to do with it.'

'Except maybe keeping prisoners.'

Alex laughed. 'Over night. I mean the office people may want to use it again in the morning. But yes it's vaguely useful as a holding station.'

'So why me?'

'In normal conditions I'd have two courses of action to chose between. Either just ignore you and your backstabbing and let you wallow, or cut you down like the traitor you are.'

In the gloom it was hard to make out any expressions, but from the words alone it was clear Alex wasn't in the mood to be reasoned with. 'I had no choice,' Rhys still tried. 'You know that. I didn't chose to take Greenford over Seven Sisters.'

'You took my friendship, my help and you went and joined the Centrals. Just like they all do.'

Rhys ran his hands threw his hair. 'Alex I didn't do it deliberately, I'm not the same as Leo.'

'Leo, Jessica, does it matter?'

'Your wife?' Alex didn't need to explain anything, Rhys got the story, the same one Joe had told, the Game's toxic effect on normal human relationships and Alex couldn't get over it; Rhys wasn't even sure Alex was capable of comprehending where the blame lie.

'I know this game is messed up,' Rhys started again, 'but there was no reason why we still couldn't have been friends.'

Alex just stared at him.

'I meant it. I mean it. I owe you one. When I lost the flat... the dinner. Everything you were there for me. These tribes, these rules. We don't have to do it their way.'

'Don't start giving me advice on how to play this. What has it been four months? You're still new, you're still nothing. But I want to know why?'

'Why what?'

'Why you lied to me. I've been thinking about it. You wanted to play, you had some connection with the Centrals and...'

'If I'd had access to the Greenford token I could have just rolled up and got it. I believed as much as you did that I was going to become a Victorian. Alex this is all rubbish. You have to let it go. I'm not out to get you...' Rhys stopped, his mind was racing through the implications of the conversation. Leo had been his friend and Alex had said a few times that he had been the one to put him on trial and that the result was that Leo had retired, which was a euphemism... He looked up at Alex standing the other side of the locked gates, spewing nonsense about betrayal. What exactly was Alex capable of?

POLICE STATION, EALING

There had been no reply from the Central Chief and there was no point in continuing to keep trying the number, Neil was becoming concerned.

It was the physical cell that was the problem. If he could just somehow make a run for it... Any accusations against him could be dealt with by the King later, even the escape, he was above the law. But that wouldn't unlock the doors and they still had his things.

He had no idea what had happened to Bernice and the others, but one thing at a time. Sophie and Rhys were his priority. They hadn't come after him, so he assumed they had be captured in the end. As far as he knew the Piccadills were trying to get the location of treasure out of them, or trying to find out why the King had taken such an interest in her.

There was a noise outside his door and the hatch opened. Had the Chief called back?

'How are you getting on?'

'I'd be better outside,' Neil answered.

'Can't do that.' The policeman waited a few moments. 'But seeing as you aren't going anywhere, at least for tonight, I wanted to ask your opinion on something.'

This was unexpected. 'Oh,' Neil replied.

'We have got four very different stories from the others, the driver, the older man, the woman who seems to be his daughter and the other tall woman. And no story from you.'

'As I said it's complicated.'

'We're beginning to see that. Some seem to have been innocents dragged up in this, the driver saying she had no choice, but she doesn't know why. However it was something the other tall

woman said that got us wondering.'

'And you are allowed to discuss it with me?'

The policeman shook his head. 'That's why I'm doing it now.' Neil noticed that he looked around him just to be certain he was alone. 'She said of you that "his lot will probably go to the station to help him but they'll regret it." I mean no one has come for you and you can't get in touch with anyone, so why would they regret it?'

Neil jumped up urgently. 'She doesn't mean the police station. How long ago did she tell you this?'

The policeman shrugged. 'Dunno, during the interviews.'

'Yes it means something. I'm sure one of the stories you were told was that we were all being held captive at Lancaster Gate?' Although it made perfect sense to Neil the time it would take to try and explain it in a way that would get some action was frustrating.

'That was one of them.'

'So some people are coming to rescue... us... from there.' There was no point saying they were actually coming to rescue the station.'

'It's evacuated and closed.'

'Friends of mine would be planning on probably going through the tunnels from Queensway or Marble Arch on foot I guess. They are walking into a trap.'

'No that's crazy.'

'I need you to send a riot car or whatever it is to Lancaster Gate. If it's not too late.' Neil tried to contain himself. 'Call whoever looks after that area and ask them if there is still trouble at the station. Either way tell them that there are probably people trying to get in via the tunnels and that a full on massacre is probably taking place down there.'

Neil hoped that hearing this would prompt some kind of action, neglect by lack of action he hoped was a thing.

BARN

Now she had been captured it seemed Laura wasn't paying her any attention. Since Sophie had been marched inside the barn, tied up and gagged she'd almost been forgotten about. It was only after persistent moaning that anyone had paid attention to her comfort needs.

What Laura had been busy doing was setting up a camera and a laptop. After a while a tripod was brought inside and it seemed she was almost ready.

'Place it in front of the Princess,' Laura commanded.

THE PALACE

The King sat on his throne deep in thought. The room was silent. Around him the memorabilia from the history of the Underground surrounded him.

There was a knock on the big double doors at the far end. He pressed a button to allow entrance and one of his staff members entered.

'The Piccadill Chieftain requests an audience,' she informed him.

'If she'd have done anything else that would have been a surprise. Thank you.' He nodded to the woman who made to leave. 'Are you happy?' he asked and she stopped.

'I don't quite understand what you mean.'

The King stood and went over to her. 'You started working as a Guardian for me when I had Blackhorse Road, before I was even the Victorian Chief. That's a long time.'

'Yes it is.' The woman relaxed a little.

'You were homeless and couldn't believe it when I offered you a job to guard a door for me.'

'Why the trip down memory lane?'

'I mean it, do you feel like you have been fairly treated?'

The woman frowned confused. 'Yes.'

'Good.' The King went and sat down. 'A success story I hope. Sadly they don't seem to all go that way.'

The woman remained where she was.

'Can you send in the Piccadill Chieftain please?' the King asked. 'Might as well get this over and done with now. A bit of a waste of my time considering what's coming at some point soon but I gather it must be done.'

The woman nodded and walked back to the doors.

In the few moments alone the King went and looked at some of the old photographs around the room. History. From early steam trains, people sheltering in the Blitz, the opening of the Jubilee Line, there was so much that had happened in these tunnels.

The doors opened and the Piccadill Chief stormed inside.

'Welcome,' the King greeted her as she flew passed. 'To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit to my palace?'

The Piccadill Chief stopped just beside his desk. 'Drop the games, you know.'

The King took a step back. 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue.'

'I said "stop it".'

'From Osterley to Lancaster Gate to Mornington Crescent. It's been quite a journey.'

'And this is where it ends.' She reached for his phone and pulled the wire out of its socket. 'It's time to talk, you don't want to not cooperate.' The Piccadill Chief waved around the room. 'You sit here safe, overseeing the Game. On a whim you raise and crush the tribes.'

'Because you are the only tribe left to have your name cleared, is that what this is about? Honestly if you wanted to prove you hadn't hijacked a train, I'm not sure hijacking a station is exactly the way to go. And yes I did just deliberately ignore your threat just now... or is that a paradox now I've said it?'

'We both know we had nothing to do with that runaway train. You just decided to, what? Embarrass us? You've always had it in for us, what was that stunt of hiding the token for Arnos Grove in the station?'

'Ok I'll take that one, you were irritating me over Heathrow.'

'Which is more proof in itself. You know what I think it is? We were playing too well.'

'I don't care about how well any tribe does.'

'Malice? Boredom? Like a small boy with a daddy-long-legs?'

'Discretion.'

The word stopped the Piccadill Chief. 'What?'

'You want absolution? I hereby grant it to you and your tribe,' it was said impassively. 'But I think that will not matter too much soon.'

'You know of Laura?' The Piccadill Chief seemed impressed.

'I know of many things, and most of them are things that are thought hidden.'

'She intends to end it all.'

'Does she now?' Just as he spoke there was a loud knock on the double doors. 'They all come here in the end.'

POLICE STATION, EALING

The hatch in the door opened again, this time for just a second. Then the door was unlocked and both policemen stood there indicating Neil should follow them.

They said nothing until he was led outside and sat in the back of a police car.

'It seems you are right and we have a hostage situation,' the policeman who had spoken to him previously informed him. 'Scotland Yard had already been given instructions to go and investigate. We told them what you said and they told us to bring you to them.'

WEST ASHFIELD STATION

Somewhere Alex had found a switch and the imitation platform had lit up. After Rhys realised the conversation was not going to break out of the cycle of blame he retreated and sat as far away from Alex as he could, taking in the details of the station.

He did have to admit he was still curious as to exactly what had happened with him getting the so-called wrong token.

A noise as if an expression of surprise being suppressed caught his attention and instantly he was standing and hurried back to the gate. Alex was stood with his hands up in front of it and there was a man holding him there with two fingers on his shoulder. The man himself was wearing a hooded top so that he looked somewhat like a monk. Next to him was a middle-aged man watching through the grating of the locked gates.

'So you're the prisoner,' the second man said when he saw Rhys.

'Who are you?' The locked metal work of the gate strangely made him feel safer.

'It's not an advantage worth keeping,' the man took a step to the side so he could be seen. 'I look after the Metropolitan Tribe. I gather you were the failed apprentice I've heard so much about. He was so desperate, he hoped he'd buy loyalty.'

'I'm not a Victorian.'

'Oh I know what happened, it's good to keep your ear to the ground. My friend guessed he'd be here.' The Metropolitan Chief pointed inside. 'We all use it for a holding cell, it can be a bit awkward at times when two tribes go to war and both want it, at least it passes the time. You're still new. This one,' he patted Alex on the shoulder. 'Longer term, but years ago, at the beginning, it was more freestyle. You know what it's like, they always bring in Health and Safety concerns and before you know it you need to fill in a form to blow your nose. I heard the Victorian Chief once chained a raider he caught up for three days and only fed him vegan food. Of course nowadays he'd be forced by law to make that an option.' He nodded to the monk man who took his hand from Alex's shoulder, pushed Alex to the floor and pressed down on him.

'Of course the new King made things more civilized when he came in.'

'You're being civilized? That's not the word I'd have used. Get off him, you're hurting him.'

'Ah, you still care about him. You do remember that he locked you up? Between me, you and the lamppost, did you know this one isn't actually so popular amongst his own? Seems he has plans to overthrow his own management, the rest of the tribe aren't so impressed. I mean why would they care? They all mainly have nexus stations...' He paused. 'In theory me and him should at least see eye to eye, the Victorian Chieftain is no friend of mine, but I can't seem to warm to this one either.'

'Ease up.' The man nodded to the monk who released the pressure on Alex although he remained where he was. 'It always makes me laugh. I mean we use it as a prison but we have to make sure we put the keys back on the hook when we've finished. Alex, where'd you put the keys, man?'

Alex, still in a heap on the floor, just groaned.

'Don't make me search you,' the Metropolitan Chief complained. 'It'd be wholly undignified for both of us.'

Alex slowly lifted a hand and drew the key out of his pocket.

'Throw it to me.'

Alex did as he was told.

The Metropolitan Chief unlocked the gate and pulled it back to allow a small gap, the other man stood guard to make sure neither of them tried to escape.

'Get in,' he demanded.

Lifting himself enough to crawl Alex made it through the gate. Rhys momentarily considered the merits of trying to overpower them. It must have been noted as the monk man looked at Rhys and raised his hand threateningly. 'Spack off,' he shouted.

When Alex was inside the gate was shut and locked behind him.

'So now you are safely in there, why am I here?' The Metropolitan Chief took a step back. 'Well as I said your chief and me, we're not so close... I don't know about you but I'm bored. I've been playing this game so very long. I'd started doing what I could to sabotage him as much as possible, just to pass the time. I mean, who needs the money any more? It's not the money, it's the Game, so they say. Even then I feel I need a little more. But the Victorian Chief, he's so desperate for approval from those higher up, it irritates me.'

Alex was lying on the floor and Rhys went over to see if he needed help, he wasn't a medic but he seemed alright, enough to try and push himself away at least.

'I thought it'd be fun if I bribed the Victorian Chief's Guardians. You know, have them in my pocket. It's harder than it looked, until I realised what they wanted wasn't just more money, but to be taken a little more seriously. It's quite disrespectful the way some of them are spoken to. And they talk to each other, I mean we're so uptight about tribes and rivalries that we forget the rest of the world aren't so interested. Guardians will chat to any Guardian.'

The monk man was standing a distance from the gates but he seemed to notice a cue and stepped forwards.

'So I encouraged this, I mean if they see me as on their side, or that they are the same as me we can achieve things together. Soon it wasn't just your chief's Guardians I was ingratiating myself with.' He turned to the man with the hood who pulled it back. 'I think you know Sven...' The Metropolitan Chief smirked. 'Did you like that bit of amateur dramatics? We practised that.'

Alex sat bolt upright but seemed to understand there was no point in saying anything.

'So that'll be the end of us then,' Sven said. 'I genuinely don't think you saw or understood the way you, or most Players, treat Guardians. You think we don't know what is going on, that we're the second class citizens of this world. We can play games too. There was a chance if you'd had support you may have displaced the Victorian Chief. But the way you speak to me or the other Guardians... we felt we need to have a voice, it had become personal. I think you forgot how often you sent me to that shop to make sure they still had the Seven Sisters token. When you introduced me to your friend, I thought it best you didn't increase your support so made the arrangements.'

'You did the switch? Where did you get the Greenford one?' Rhys found himself asking.

'Who do you think your King uses to run his errands?' Sven turned his attention to him. 'A token is cleaned and he reissues it, or gets one of his Guardians to do it; as we said we work together not as tribes. So not hard to intercept a token, when the King asked it to be re-issued we took it instead thinking it might prove useful, and so it did. I thought it'd be a sting to Alex for... well exactly what happened and I was right. It was... satisfying.' He paused and then gave a slight laugh. 'You should see what we actually did with Seven Sisters, we thought of it today because... well that's going to be interesting.'

'Why didn't you just take the station?' Rhys asked.

'What become like you? I know what you Players are like, present company excepted,' he turned to the Metropolitan Chief. 'Generally we don't want to be trapped in the Game, we hear it's hard to get out of. It's more rewarding to frustrate your plans. Incidentally I might as well

hold my hands up and say it was me that trashed your B and B room.'

'But you worked for me.' It had been the first thing Alex had said and it sounded weak and pathetic.

'I think you'll find all your Guardians have gone AWOL. It's amusing because as Players you can't do the same. It doesn't matter, with help from our friend here,' he indicated the Metropolitan Chief, 'our day starts. Why not now?'

The Metropolitan Chief laughed. 'I don't think any of the Victorian's will have any Guardians any more. In fact maybe no tribe... the Piccadills seem to have started a night of chaos, why not continue it? We were looking for a good time to do something.' He waved at Rhys and Alex. 'Night all. Oh this is finally fun again.'

Rhys sat down on the bench, now he was locked in here with an even more angry and betrayed Alex.

THE PALACE

The King closed the doors after he had finished speaking to the visitor.

'Problems?' The Piccadill Chieftain asked.

The King did not respond.

'From my own eavesdropping I gather the police are not taking the hint and leaving the scene at Lancaster Gate? Well I gather my tribe and the Centrals are at war down there so it's probably wise to keep them out of it.'

'The Centrals won,' the King replied.

'What?'

'That was the full time score. The police did indeed get down there and I'm allowing them to do their thing. I think everyone probably needs a bit of a calm down. What I do also gather is that whilst the Centrals had their Chieftain with them, the Piccadills were wondering where their chief had gone. Do I let them know she'd gone to make a deal with a Victorian? Or should that be a Central? You did just confirm you'd done that.'

The Piccadill Chief took a step back but the atmosphere was broken by further knocking on the door.

'Honestly,' the King complained, 'it's like Piccadilly Circus round here.'

A woman was waiting for him as he opened the door, in her hands was a laptop. 'Do you wish to speak to Laura now? She says she's the holder of Oxford Circus,' she held out the laptop.

'Thank you, yes I know who she is.'

Bringing the laptop inside the King strode across the room ignoring the moving image on the screen until he had placed it on his desk.

'I believe you required an audience,' he said.

Laura appeared on the screen. 'I don't appreciate waiting.'

'I'm a busy man,' the King joked but suddenly introduced an iron edge to his voice. 'We can't just have everyone turning up and causing problems. I believe you want to bring about the end of the world or something?'

On the screen Laura stepped away from the camera. 'All I wanted was to walk away from the Game, but you wouldn't let me.'

The King refused to react.

'I know if I just try and leave my life will always be in danger. But then what if I was granted special permission?'

Still nothing.

'So I did some digging. I think I need to introduce you to someone.' As she spoke she moved the camera to show a young woman bound to a chair. 'We're not even in London, so I doubt

you'd find us.'

The King just waited.

The Piccadill Chieftain, apparently forgotten, watched fascinated.

Laura held her gaze for as long as she could but the lack of a response baited her. 'I have your daughter.'

The King looked at the screen but remained silent.

'I know you got her a job where you could keep an eye on her, you looked after. With your money and influence it wouldn't have been hard. Of course we will start to wonder why that is. Did you think it was a secret? It seems your friends sometimes blab. But it got me thinking and that was before we start on these rumours that you are trying to make the title of King, or I suppose Queen in this case, hereditary.'

Still she tried for some acknowledgement, still he gave her nothing.

'So these are my demands. Let me go, give me your assurance that I can leave the Game safely with my money and she will be safe. Otherwise I can make things difficult for you, I can tell everyone the truth and they won't like that. Anarchy with an overthrown King might just end it all, at least for you so let's see how much personal damage I can cause. Or I could just make that personal damage literal and to a different person.'

'AND,' the Piccadill Chieftain called out. 'I think there was another stipulation.'

Laura looked up and into the scene. 'I didn't see you were there.'

'Forgotten about me already?'

'Our visions are so different that seeing as you are there you can tell him yourself.'

The King turned to face the Piccadill Chieftain.

'For all your making us your scapegoats and misusing your powers... You are no longer fit to rule. I will be Queen from now on.'

WEST ASHFIELD STATION

'I hope you see I am not the enemy here now.' Rhys helped Alex to stand and moved him over to the bench.

'I'll be ok.' He pushed Rhys away.

'Sorry, but at least that's one mystery solved,' it seemed appropriate.

'Look.' Alex started, 'we've got bigger problems than you realise.'

'Sophie and Neil-'

'No you idiot. Didn't you hear what they just said. The Metropolitan Chief's been influencing the Guardians to rebel. Not just to me. They all the work for us, guard our stations, defend us and go on missions... if they all band together... That idiot doesn't know what he's done.'

'Sounds like he's started an uprising.' Rhys froze in horror. He'd got his own Guardians and although he hoped he treated them well he didn't like the sound of this. 'Everyone has them, even up to the level of the King..'

'Yes.' Alex nodded. 'We've all been looking for an entire tribe to blame for the runaway train...'

'What if it wasn't a tribe?'

Alex was on his feet. 'We need to warn the King'.

'How?' Rhys asked. 'We're locked in here.'

Alex let out an exasperated sigh and bent down to pull a spare key out of his sock. 'We just need to give them time to get a distance.'

BAYSWATER ROAD

When they had said “they” wanted to see him Neil had feared the worst. He'd been given his phone back in case “they” tried to contact him. No one seemed to know who “they” were.

When the police car had pulled up at Lancaster Gate Station he found his chief waiting for him. It seems the Centrals had gained back control of the station before the authorities had then taken it off them.

Being underground the Chief had not got his messages, nor had he been able to get to the King to sort out the situation. However on winning the battle they had come up to ground level and had refused to let the Piccadill captives go until they knew all Central Players were safe. Rhys and Laura were the only ones unaccounted for.

Although knowing they were to keep a distance from the Players the local authorities seemed confused with new direction from above, so everyone was made to wait for someone really high up to personally arrive and take charge. In the confusion the Central Chief had taken advantage of the situation, as best as was possible.

'The damage isn't as bad as it could have been,' the Chief told Neil. 'But the King will have to do something.' It was hard to have a conversation with a couple of PCs behind them.

Neil's phone started ringing. Unsure what to do the policeman nodded allowing him to answer it, but with their supervision.

'Hello.' He was stopped by the rush of information coming at him from Rhys. The Guardians were behind the runaway train and now they were revolting. 'We are trying to get to the King as soon as possible, but we also need to find and stop Sven and the Metropolitan Chief. We're calling the Palace but there's no answer; so you have to go there.'

'Not so easy, the police are here,' Neil mumbled as best he could.

'This is Alex,' a new voice came on the line. Neil understood now was not the moment to think about the implications of this. 'As long as you can out run them or get away you won't have anything to worry about. Use any resources. The Metropolitan Chief and Sven have gone to start an uprising. You have to go now!'

Neil hung up and looked around him, there were several police officers about, but he'd managed to drift a little away whilst talking. It was a risk but it seemed one that had to be taken.

He edged out to the roadside. Surprisingly the main road wasn't closed and at this time of night traffic was fairly sparse. They wouldn't expect this.

Everyone was looking in different directions, now was the best moment he'd get. He ran off in the direction of Marble Arch. There were shouts and then they were after him. Forcing himself to sprint as fast as he could he realised as good practice raiding could be for him, a policeman got better exercise. They were coming.

Faster up the road, he only had go a little further. This would be a close thing, and not a little scary he had to admit.

Just coming along the road was an old Routmaster. Waiting for it to draw level Neil threw himself off the pavement and on to the footplate as the bus sailed passed. He was out of sight before he could see the policemen's reaction.

THE BARN

The King stood next to the Piccadill Chieftain and both were looking into a camera. The King had still had not said anything

Laura watched the action on the screen.

'So what's it to be?' Laura asked. 'Seriously say something.' She knew what he was doing but

her patience had given in, it didn't matter.

After a few more seconds of silence she decided she needed to try something else. Going over to her captive she placed the laptop where Sophie could see it clearly.

'You may have wondered why, this the reason for your situation,' she told Sophie who was also refusing to speak. Like father, like daughter. 'Sophie, this is your dad.'

Sophie looked at the picture. 'What!? No, that's Lawrence-' she started.

'What do you mean?' Laura demanded.

A phone started ringing and the man who had bound her went off to answer it.

'He was training me in my first week. He's not my father.'

'According to the information I have you don't know who your father was.'

Sophie almost laughed. 'No, but it can't be him...'

'That confirms it.' Laura picked the laptop back up so she was facing the camera. 'Why else would the King come and oversee her new job?'

Whatever happened, now that Sophie knew it was Lawrence who was the other side of the screen, she felt as reassured as she had done when he had been with her during the nightmare of her first week.

THE PALACE

The King was still in front of the laptop screen when an urgent banging came on his door.

He pressed the release button and Neil charged into the room.

'Sorry to disturb you but your phone's not working.'

'I wonder if the other Royal family get visitors like this,' the King joked.

'Seriously. Has Rhys and Alex got here yet?'

The King shook his head. 'More people due?'

'The Metropolitan Chief has stirred up an uprising in the Guardians. He indicated they are going to do something tonight and it seems it was them that caused the train to runaway.'

The Piccadill Chief looked stunned.

The King just nodded. 'Yes, I know.'

'What do you mean "you know?" I've just charged across the city with the police on my tail...'

'Yes unfortunate side effect of playing dumb. Also the government seem to want to get involved in our business, I'll have to sort that in a bit, one thing at a time. I didn't know the Metropolitan Chief was planning for something tonight, as far as he is capable of planning anything, so that's helpful, that's actually very helpful. Thank you.'

He looked back at the laptop, 'Ok, there are more important things happening and this has gone on for long enough,' now the King spoke it was authority. He then turned to the Piccadill Chief. 'Now what was this about you wanting to be Queen?'

'You what?' Neil asked but was ignored.

'You've heard what's coming.' The King continued. 'Do you want to take over, save me from solving this one and then clearing up everybody else's mess? Feel free, seriously.'

This time it was the Piccadill Chief who remained silent.

'I thought not. By the way, how is my friend, Malcolm? He should have called earlier. If he isn't ok, well someone will pay for that. But I would have helped on that occasion had I known exactly what was going on at the time.' He looked at Neil. 'You should have called. But I guess you weren't to know, never mind.' He then waved at the laptop. 'Hello Sophie. Sorry you appear to be a bit tied up, but it's good to see you are safe.'

He waited a second then turned his attention to Laura. 'So you are threatening Sophie hoping you will be released from the Game? What exactly are you going to do to her? Leave her in a barn in Dacorun? Yes I know where you are. I'm the King I can trace a laptop. Incidentally if I'd

ever come across someone put two and two together and make seventeen before you put them in the shade. Sophie is not my daughter. I'll happily give you a DNA sample if you really need it proving. I don't have any children and, seriously, you believe the Metropolitan Chief's gossip? Goodness me you are gullible.'

The King nodded over to Neil. 'By the way, you heard what the man said. The Guardians are revolting tonight, they're quite angry with us, and you have run away alone with a bunch of them...'

Like the Piccadill Chief before her Laura just froze.

'Don't worry Sophie, you are safe,' the King continued, 'they know full well you are innocent, I mean they saw what happened to you, well... they did it to you.' He raised his voice. 'Guardians I understand your issue and will talk to you if you bring Sophie back here safely. We'll see what we can do, thank you. Oh do what you need to with Laura but remember you think you're the good guys.'

'But they... the runaway train...' Neil interrupted.

'Yes I know,' the King replied. 'One thing at a time.'

He turned his attention once again to the others. 'So the Guardians are planning something with... well all of us I've no doubt, but as far as I'm concerned I'm going to have to sanction you both for this. I mean you and my friend the Chief here, teaming up and double crossing your own tribes for personal gain, well we'll have to tell them about that. I imagine the deal was that if she got to be Queen you'd get your release and you helped her by threatening Sophie? So what should I do? A new Piccadill Chief and I'm thinking a loss of a nexus for some back end kind of place... let me think, you used to be Grange Hill didn't you? You see when you tried to bribe me for a nexus before, that's before your became disillusioned, you should have thought it was too easy. I saw the greed rising at the same time as distaste, but that conscience only swept in when you realised you could end it all and still be, let's understate, "comfortable". It was just a case of waiting, give you enough rope and all that.'

'Daughter or not, you still have some kind of interest in her. Let me out of this game, I mean it.'

The King nodded. 'You mean you really are serious about wanting to leave the Game?'

Laura glared. 'Yes!'

'Oh well in that case...' he paused. 'Of course not. You, like everyone else, had the option to read everything before you signed and to walk away. But you saw the money and when it became too real, after you had taken enough of our riches, you think you can just go on your terms? Happy to take but not to give, not to play your role. And when you don't get what you want you throw this tantrum? You try and destabilise the established way, one that is important to keep the GeeYous safe and to ensure we don't return to the dark days. No Laura, like everyone who asked before you will be denied. This is the punishment for your, our greed. We are condemned to play to the very end. If you try and escape, you can be retired.'

She looked horrified on the screen.

'We play until the end?' Neil muttered. 'There is no end.'

'Who told you that?' the King smiled. 'The Game ends when the treasure is found.'

PIMLICO PLATFORM

'Keep your head down. We don't know if there are any Guardians still manning the station' warned Alex. 'Centrals shouldn't even be on this line.'

The train slowed to a halt and the doors opened. Rhys and Alex waited for several others to alight before them.

'Let's just hope your friend and the King can do something from their side. We can stop the Metropolitan Chief making things worse but the damage up until this point's another issue.'

As always Alex was marching ahead and Rhys was finding it hard to keep up with him. 'One question, how do you know the Metropolitan Chief and Sven will be here? Don't they have an uprising to get going?'

'Getting inside his head,' was all Alex said. He was still refusing to slow down and before he knew it Rhys had to charge up the escalators to find him again.

THE BARN, DACORUM

Whilst the King was giving his sentence on her Laura stood transfixed to the screen. Sophie found her mind wondering, how was Lawrence this King? Was what he said true? Not about not being his daughter, there was never a chance of that, but that the people who were working for Laura would turn on her?

She didn't have to wait long for an answer, when it was clear Laura was absorbed in watching the laptop as her plans fell apart, one of her captors crept up to her and released her from her bonds. The man nodded for her to quietly get up and follow him.

He led her outside.

'Fran and Emma will take care of her,' he whispered when they were outside. 'I got a call, it's time to stand up for ourselves. You know where the King is? He told us to take you to him, why?'

'I've no idea or why everyone is calling him that, but he came to help out when my colleague was on holiday. He's from Mornington Crescent I think.'

'Well we want to talk to him so that's where we go next.'

'I suppose I have to come with you, he did say that,' Sophie admitted. 'And if I don't I'm kind of stuck out here.'

PIMLICO OFFICES

The door to the main block had been forced open. Alex said nothing and barged straight inside as Rhys found himself left behind once more.

The stairs were dark but it seemed Alex only intended to climb to the first floor. Catching up with him he stood outside a door that also showed signs of being forced open.

'Shush,' Alex mimed to Rhys.

Building up the strength he pushed himself inside. As the door opened Rhys tried to understand the scene.

This was obviously where the Victorian Chief ran his business, he was tied up in the corner. The Metropolitan Chief and Sven were sat at a desk looking at a computer screen.

'Ok you caught us,' the Metropolitan Chief confessed as Alex approached, then he smiled. 'We needed a centre of operations and Watford is too far out. We thought about Highbury And Islington for a short while but I knew we had everything we needed here. Besides,' he beckoned Alex in closer. 'Guess what we found.' He waited a second. 'No you never will. He,' he pointed at the man tied up on the floor, 'has illicit CCTV equipment. Look.' Excitedly he showed Alex the screen, then deliberately aimed his words at the Victorian Chief. 'If the King ever found out about this... somebody wouldn't be a chief for very much longer... Oh grief that means you might get in,' he said directing his comments back to Alex. 'You Victorians are such a mess. Still it doesn't matter. Sven over there is busy convincing the other Guardians to do what they want. They are far better team players than us lot. Did you know I'm hearing reports the Piccadill Chief sent her lot into a fight at Lancaster Gate so she could make a deal of some sort with a nexus holder who doesn't even have a Piccadilly Line? Well we had to tell

her tribe that. The Guardians are sharing all the secrets tonight.'

'I don't need the gossip,' Alex growled. 'So what happens? They all just walk out?'

Both the Metropolitan Chief and Sven looked up. 'Some are a little more angry than that. I mean think about it. We literally pick these people up off the streets, or we approach decent hard working employees and business owners and tell them we'll give them money to do what we say, not just employee them, we insist they are at our beck and call. We're paying them enough to tempt them, but little enough they don't quite have their self respect.'

'Not all of us...' started Rhys.

'New Players always think they're better. Think about it, you're not really are you?'

'Spare us the lecture,' Alex grumbled.

The Metropolitan Chief grinned. 'Ok yes I'm boring me as well. Some will probably just walk away. I mean up until now we'd be anxious if they didn't turn up right? And if they asked to leave... Some will want paying, they'll know the Players have more money then we've been letting on. Other's might try and take over the station, but that's not a good idea.'

'We've advised they don't do that.' Sven spoke as if there was no history between him and Alex, a sign he was now out of his employ. 'I mean we think we might be able to do better than you lot, but it never works out that way in the end. Threaten them to empty their bank accounts yes. I mean you lot go about above the law, it's not exactly going to help you when you need it.'

'It's also two months until payday... if we get another payday, so a lot of Players will have to survive without.' The Metropolitan Chief stood up from the desk and stepped towards Alex. 'I mean we've stopped bothering about actually being rich right?'

Rhys paused to let the words settle. 'Have you ever done the maths?' he started. 'How are we all this rich on just ten percent of the what passengers spend?'

'What?' The Metropolitan Chief looked confused from a moment. 'That's beside the point. What was I saying?' He stopped for a moment. 'Oh yes; remember how I said the Guardians were team players? Well there might be some different teams to be honest. You'll never guess what some of the more militant ones have done?'

'They arranged the runaway train,' answer Rhys.

'Well that's disappointing, but yes! We didn't tell them to did we?'

'No,' Sven agreed.

'They were a more proactive lot. We think they are wanting to cause such a fuss it ends it all for good. That the government will have to get involved. They were lucky no one got hurt. That wasn't wise.'

'You're not in control of them?' Alex sounded horrified.

'That's the whole point.' The Metropolitan Chief laughed. 'No one's in control of anything.'

ARNOS GROVE

Fifi stayed in the ticket hall. She felt weird, she'd not liked doing that to Sophie. As it was no one was telling her what had happened after she'd left and Sophie was not answering her phone, it couldn't still be going on?

She didn't feel right going home so just hung about her station, lost.

One of the cleaners that she employed to stand guard for her had been on the phone most of the evening. He wasn't cleaning or guarding, what was he being paid for?

Just to do something out of frustration she decided to have a word with him.

'Excuse me,' she started when no one other than the staff member that she also employed was about about. 'I don't pay you to spend all evening on the phone.'

The man looked at her. 'Actually you might be interested in that phone conversation.'

'Really?' Fifi frowned.

'Betty?' the man called. 'I'm just going to take this one to the bank. The call was to tell me tonight is the night.'

Betty nodded. 'Ok Love.'

'What is this?' Fifi asked.

'I wouldn't cause a scene, no one will come to help you. We're going to your ATM so you can empty it. Don't fight it'll just take longer.'

THE PALACE

A banging on the doors interrupted the King from what he was going to say next. Instead he just pressed the release button and let whoever it was in.

Neil turned to see who it was. A man, dressed in a suit marched in followed by a policeman and then the woman who worked for the King.

'I'm sorry,' she started. 'He's got a lot of police cars outside.'

'But that's...,' started Neil until he realised only he seemed surprised by the identity of the man and no one was paying his outburst any attention.

The King nodded. 'It's fine, I expected a visit.' He made a show of waving the men into the room. 'Join the party. I think there may be a few more along in a moment.'

'We are here to arrest you,' the man started.

The King held up one finger to stop him. 'Before you finish that thought, you might want to take a listen to what's actually going on.'

'What's actually going on is that your lot are out of control. An attack on the train network four months ago, and another one today, both at Lancaster Gate. I'm told two drivers are attacked at the start of, not one but two, sort of stand offs. We've just come from there.'

The policeman approached the King holding a pair of handcuffs.

'Under the terms of the agreement,' the King responded, 'unless any members of the public are actually hurt by us we are free. I mean we are free anyway, nothing to do with you, as even you two don't count as members of the public, but no accusations can be levelled at us.'

'No members of the public hurt? Did you not hear what I just said?' the man had walked right up to the King. 'Get him,' he said to the policeman.

'I'm not sure you properly heard what you said. How many members of the public were actually hurt four months ago by us?'

The policeman grabbed the King and placed the cuffs on one of his wrists.

'You're forgetting the drivers. Knocked out and their trains hijacked.'

'Yes they must have known how to drive one. I never advised using actual Underground workers as Guardians.' The King muttered to himself, then he said louder. 'No I hadn't forgotten. It's the bit about it being done by us that I'm focusing on. The people behind that were not Players. We are innocent.'

'You're claiming it wasn't you?' the man was indignant.

'Yes,' the King replied. 'Neil here will tell you,' he waved at Neil as the policeman was trying to attach the other handcuff, eventually succeeding.

'No, you're coming with us. There is a car waiting outside. If you have any line of defence you can make it at the station.'

The King remained where he was. 'Do you remember that thing I just said right now?'

The man ignored him. 'Seeing as you won't cooperate,' he turned to the policeman. 'Use the stun gun.'

'That thing I just said about it's only if we attack members of the public that we might have an issue?'

The policeman reached for the device on his belt.

'And then I said randomly that you two don't count as members of the public?'

The man pushed him forwards, the King stumbled and fell. 'Neil that was for your benefit.'

Neil shook himself. 'Oh right.'

As the King was on the floor out of the way Neil leapt on the policeman from behind, knocking him over and then threw the stun gun away. The King now struggled but managed to get up and threw himself at the other man who fell over. Despite being handcuffed the King fell on top of him so that he was sat upon the man's chest.

'Why throw the stun gun away?' the King asked Neil.

'Sorry, uncomfortable.'

'Never mind.'

With both visitors trapped under them the King called out to the woman who was standing by the door, 'Could you bring some rope please? There are two them and only one pair of cuffs. Oh and can someone find the keys please? I feel I'm rather hogging the use of them at the moment.'

PIMLICO OFFICES

'I don't know why you are still standing there gawping at us,' the Metropolitan Chief said. 'You're just getting in the way. Do we have to tie you two up as well? Seriously, you both just walked in here? How stupid are you?'

'We're here to put a stop to this,' Alex replied.

'Yeah, just the two of you? I suppose if you somehow managed to untie this one,' he pointed at the Victorian Chief still bound and gagged on the floor. 'That'd be a fun moral dilemma to watch if I had the time.'

'We do actually have some extra help,' Rhys commented. 'We just wanted to distract you a little first so you wouldn't see them entering the building, we thought you'd be accessing the CCTV.'

'What do you mean?' The Metropolitan Chief ran back to the screen. 'I don't see anything.'

'Because they're already here,' Rhys replied. 'You see unlike you and maybe the rest of the Players, in the few short months I've been playing I've looked after the Guardians who work at my station. So with a threat to their income, they agreed to come and help... as friends.' Rhys turned to corridor behind him. 'You can come in now,' he called. 'It wasn't so long ago I was desperate, I've still not forgotten how I felt I was treated by "the system" it made me treat others well, and this, I think, is a lesson I won't forget.'

The room filled up with more people.

THE PALACE

Both the smartly dressed man and the policeman were bound to one of the old carriages on display in the Throne Room.

The King was at the desk and closed up the laptop as the image of Laura had long gone. He looked at the Piccadill Chief. 'Is this what you imagined being the monarch would be like? No?' He waited for a reply, there wasn't one. 'Ok you go and sit in the corner. We're done now.' Strangely she obeyed.

Neil stood watching unsure of what to do.

'How do you treat your Guardians Neil?' The King asked.

Neil shrugged. 'Probably not as well as I should.'

'I think this is a big lesson for everyone to be honest. Sit down, it'll be a bit of a wait, and if we go up there the police will be after us until I can do something about that. I'm afraid we're trapped.' He leaned in conspiratorially. 'Don't mention the drivers of the latest siege,' he whispered. 'I'll have to lie about that, trust her to mess things up.' He indicated the Piccadill Chief.

Neil did as he was told. 'What's going to happen?'

'Some Guardian's will just disappear, good on them. Most will just try and get their rights, fair enough. Some will go for the Players. And whilst they are all in this together it was a minority who wanted to make such a big statement, as always some go too far. Oxford Circus is where the train stopped. That was Laura's station. A Guardian learns about the Game from the Player they work for, they end up with similar outlooks. Her lot are currently in Hertfordshire with her but they will want to end the Game like she does. She tried bribery, they more drastic action; she probably had no idea it was them. Make yourself comfortable.'

'What are you going to do?'

The King sat a couple of seats away from him. 'Why should I do anything? Up there are a load of police cars waiting for him,' he pointed to the man, 'to bring me out. I won't give in to that. I have to worry about the protesting Guardians, on the whole they just want to air their grievances; I should listen to them. The Game will continue, I mean things will always go back to oppression they always do one way or another, but we can see what we we can do for the moment.'

'How did you know the Guardians were behind the runaway train?' Neil asked.

'Not too far away from here a wise man who didn't exist once said "when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth". I just discounted who it couldn't have been. You lot aren't supposed to use CCTV, some do, I need to get round to dealing with that, but I can request recordings if I need them. I just drew the conclusions and watched the footage. They were careful not to be in it, but not enough to cover the tracks of not being where they should have been and then lying about it. Then once you know they are capable of doing something like that you ask why and what their eventual goal is. People say this Game works on a different morality to the real world, when you take that morality into consideration you make the leap that the Guardians are, as always, somewhere in the middle ground.'

SOPHIE'S HOME, COCKFOSTERS

Sophie's mum hung up the phone; Sophie had gone out with friends straight after work and lost track of time. It was unusual of her not to call but she could stop worrying about one issue at least now. She checked the time, she could give her sister a call.

It went to voicemail.

'Margaret I've been doing some thinking, if it's got to the point where we have to put Dad in a home then we've no choice. I know it's expensive but we need to get together and work out something.'

She hung up.

Sophie's cabinet was in the living room. She wished her daughter would stop buying junk. Out of curiosity she fiddled with the drawers on the top. It was a nice piece, it was just they had enough of them. She pulled the drawer open, it wasn't empty. Reaching inside she pulled out what looked like a fob watch. This must have been left in here by mistake. Odd looking piece. Fiddling with it she opened the lids on both sides. There was an engraving. "To make this work take it - deep within the curve of the early hours." It was like a crossword clue.

Sophie's mum smiled as she thought about it. It wasn't like a crossword clue, it was a clue.

What had she accidentally stumbled across?

Taking the strange device with her she went upstairs, she'd look into this tomorrow.

INSIDE THE VAN

A reversal of fortune. Laura was now in the back with a Guardian and Sophie found herself in the front with the others.

They made their way through the narrow roads and darkness, passed farms and villages back towards London.

'What are you going to do when you get there?'

The driver kept his eyes on the road.

'Close this all down one way or another. It seems Laura will get her way.'

THE PALACE

Whilst they were waiting Neil started to examine the exhibits in the display. He was looking at some of the older versions of the Underground map when the phone on the desk rang. When had it been reconnected? He was aware of the King answering it, and found it amusing when he was informed the call was for him, although he put it on speaker rather than give him the handset.

'Neil, it's Rhys. We've found where they are organising this from. My Guardians didn't have the issues the others had so are helping us; you might have to do some work with yours, but they are not angry with you specifically. The Metropolitan Chief had taken the office at Pimlico as his headquarters, but we have it under control now.'

'Good. What's happening with the uprising?' Neil asked.

'We're trying to talk to the more influential ones,' Rhys replied.

'Get as many of them as possible to come to the Palace,' the King instructed. 'They have a grievance, let them say their piece. We want the more reasonable ones here as well as the militant.'

'Ok will do,' Rhys replied.

COVENT GARDEN

Among the GeeYous enjoying a late night out, Boudicca hurried to get back to her station. With little evidence she had done anything wrong the police had had to let her go.

She tried calling the Piccadill Chief again, still no answer. Was it true what the Metropolitan Chief had told her? If so she'd be demanding answers.

PIMLICO OFFICES

'Word is out the King is willing to listen.' Rhys hung up the phone. 'There will be a crowd heading to the Palace. The more influential ones will pass the message on,' he nodded to Sven. 'Thanks for unwittingly leaving the contact details out for us.'

'I think we've done everything we can do here,' Alex indicated the room. 'We need to get to the Palace.'

'What do we do with everyone?'

Alex looked at Sven and both the Metropolitan and Victorian Chiefs, now all bound and abandoned together. 'Can your lot get them to West Ashfield?'

'I'll just ask them.'

THE PALACE

The phone rang once more, the King answered it and spoke for a moment.

'Time to go upstairs,' he announced to Neil when he had finished. 'You can wait here,' he told the Piccadill Chief. 'Keep an eye on our friends. I'm sure I can trust you that. Remember you have nothing to gain and nothing left to lose.'

MORNINGTON CRESCENT ENTRANCE HALL

The gates had been locked shut and the entrance hall was empty when Neil emerged up there. Outside they could see several police cars and people in uniform.

'Wait here,' the King told him. 'I just need to make a quick phone call.' With that he headed further inside where he couldn't be heard.

Neil waited feeling a little awkward and not really knowing what to do with himself.

After a few moments the King returned. 'You will know who I am,' he announced from the other side of the gates.

'Where is...?' the police woman standing nearest to them started.

'Safe downstairs and he'll be out in a bit when we have cleared this up. There seems to be some big misunderstanding. You will get a call to straighten it out from the powers that be.'

Her phone rang on cue.

'I think you need to take that,' he added.

A van skidded to a halt on the street outside.

'Ah and I think the answers to all our problems have turned up,' the King announced.

'That's my van,' Neil complained.

As the woman answered her phone the man from the van could be seen getting out but was hesitantly looking at the police around the station.

'Let him know it's safe to approach,' the King advised. Still deep in conversation the police woman waved him over and he and some of the van's occupants slowly followed.

'What is going on here?' Sophie demanded when she got closer. 'You told me you were called Lawrence.'

'I am called Lawrence. I wasn't born The King, that would have been a very pretentious of my parents.'

He turned to the man. 'I believe you have threats to make. Where were we? You stole a train?'

Sophie froze. 'What? Not the... You were behind the train accident?'

The man nodded. 'This Game of theirs has to stop.'

Sophie recoiled. 'I work on that line. I was terrified.'

'We had to do something that made the authorities realise what this lot are like, you don't understand.'

'I've been tied up, held hostage several times and I think one of my co-workers has been murdered.'

'Then you do know.'

Sophie pulled away from him. 'What I know is that if you want to complain about unacceptable behaviour you don't climb on down and do worse yourself.'

'We had to draw attention. You should see how some of us are treated. Look what they did to

you.'

'People could have died if your stunt went wrong.'

The man paused to phrase his words. 'It was always going to be ok. It had to end.'

'How do you know? I was in my first week of the job. What would have happened if I messed up on my instructions? Do you know how close those trains ended up before the power ran out?' She was shouting at him.

'It had to end,' the man repeated but he didn't sound so sure.

'So after that you kidnap the person who you are angry with for kidnapping me, even though you actually carried me into the van and the barn yourselves... you're no better than the rest of them.'

'You don't understand,' the man tried again.

'Go on then, explain yourself.' Sophie glared at him.

The woman finished on her call and the King waved her back.

'If we hadn't stolen that train this lot would have just carried on.'

Sophie went to say something, but safely behind the locked gate the King interrupted and took over.

'And I think you've just heard the confession you wanted,' the King interrupted. 'Meaning me and my lot are innocent of all charges, exactly as your superiors have just told you.'

The police officer considered this for a moment and then nodded.

'I'd take them away, arrest them,' the King pointed at the group from the van. 'No better than terrorists really; all of them.'

'What?' Neil demanded.

'What?' Sophie demanded.

'Including her, you know she works for TFL, could be an inside job. Worth looking into. And I think there will be some more of his lot arriving to cause trouble in a bit. Quiet a lot more. You'd better be prepared. You'd better get them all, they're all in it together. If you could just leave someone on guard for me?'

Neil stepped up to the King and pushed him. 'You know that's not true. You said you would talk to them, let them air their grievances.'

'I did say I only look after Players, not Guardians. And GeeYous are really not my responsibility,' the King replied.

'You can't. What about Sophie?'

The King shrugged. 'Who's Sophie?'

With that he turned and walked back inside and down the stairs.

The other side of the locked gates the police that were present started to round up the Guardians as well as Sophie.

'Stop, she's innocent!' Neil shouted but no one paid him any attention.

THE WAREHOUSE, PERIVALE

Rhys stood looking at the cars in various states of repair around him in the main area of the warehouse.

'It's foolish,' Neil warned.

'I knew it wasn't going to be the exactly civilised.'

Neil stood fiddling with a wing mirror. 'There is no way out. If you go the King will send people after you. You know what he did.'

'I don't care. I want to distance myself from this as much as I can. There is no excuse to justify what we get away with, what we do. The law just turns a blind eye to it all and does whatever the King demands. It's obscene and I'm surprised you aren't doing the same.'

'I've been trying to do that for years.'

'Maybe with so many Guardians gone...'

'They'll just find new ones. The King keeps his lot pretty loyal as it is. Wait and see what happens with Sophie. We can try and think of something to help her. She needs us, right?'

Rhys reluctantly nodded. 'That angers me the most. He just got her arrested, he knew she was innocent.'

'So stay and do something about it,' Neil pleaded.

Rhys paused for a moment and then let out a breath. 'For her sake... But I'm not bothering with Greenford any more.'

'Hate to break it to you, but it was because you were able to keep your Guardians loyal it didn't end up in riots and anarchy... how are you going to pay them? If you don't pull your weight the Chief won't pay you. Worst of all possible scenarios. Not that they'd be your biggest concern.'

'So I am trapped.'

Neil stepped away from the car. 'At least you got to that conclusion in a shorter time than I did.'

'Why force us to keep playing? What does it even achieve?'

'There are many myths and legends. Maybe we should start to take a few of them seriously. It seems there is one way out.'

'What's that?'

'The King said it. The Game ends when the treasure is found. We all just ignored it. I did until Laura used it to trick me. But if even the King believes it, maybe that's where all this came from, a search for something.'

'And someone is funding it? Someone higher than the government? They must want it pretty desperately.'

Neil looked at Rhys. 'And if we find whatever it is, the Game ends and we're all free.'

Rhys sighed, 'Just what have I got myself into?'

This is a series one story for Beck's Game. The series terminates here.
Change here for Series Two (Coming Soon).