

SPECIAL POWERS OR TRAINING

by Phillip Berrie

Chapter 1

The dignitaries ambled down the lavishly appointed corridor unaware of the tension in the squad of Australian Federal Policemen assigned to escort them. To them this meeting was a bit of a lark, an international pressing of the flesh for the sake of the press and public. All the important decisions had been made ages ago and lesser functionaries would work out the details. All they really had to do was chat and enjoy the pleasant surroundings of the five star luxury resort they were in. Lunch was the next item on the agenda.

In the security command room, things were not so laid back. Earlier in the day a call had been received concerning an attempt on the British Ambassador's life. The entire security apparatus had gone on high alert when the Ambassador had decided to continue with the planned schedule. Such things were not uncommon, but the aspect of this call that still sent a chill down the spine of Superintendent Clarke was that the call had come in on his own private mobile number.

Clarke surveyed the array of monitors in front of him. Everything appeared to be in order. A detail in the kitchens was on watch for possible poisoning attempts and all the air conditioning plants were locked and guarded. The island itself had been designated a no-fly zone for the duration and the radar tower at the airport on the mainland was to alert them if anything entered their airspace. Clarke's main worry was the hotel staff. They were all long-term employees and had been thoroughly vetted, but the human element was always such an unknown quantity in his experience.

Through the monitor Clarke watched as the last of the delegates left the corridor and entered the dining room. He was just about to reach for his schedule when he noticed a sudden movement by one of his officers. A small dark object was bouncing across the floor towards the still closing doors. Somehow, the man managed to get his foot in the way and the object — which Clarke knew instinctively to be a grenade — was

deflected so that it bounced off the door and the wall to and sit spinning on the floor in the middle of the corridor.

Clarke watched in horror as the four officers realised their fate. Then he gasped in surprise, as the same quick-footed officer did something that was either unspeakably brave or really stupid. As the others ran for their lives the young man stepped forward and proceeded to kick the grenade away. His foot made contact and the grenade flew about three metres before it exploded.

The image on Clarke's monitor went to grey-flecked snow and all hell broke loose in the command room.

The whine of the motors and the whap, whap, whap of the rotor blades as they sped up made being understood almost impossible. The grim-faced paramedic gave a quick 'thumbs up' to the worried-looking police and first aid officers on the tarmac and then heaved the door shut reducing the noise level inside the helicopter to a more reasonable level.

He looked down at his patient. The face that showed above the blanket was covered with mottled black and blue bruising. "You can relax now, Jamie," the paramedic said and leaned over to give the pilot the 'go' sign.

The pale skin of the patient darkened and became as black as pitch.

"How are you feeling?"

"Pretty sore and sorry for myself, Sir," came the reply.

"Well I'm afraid you are going to get worse. In fact, you are going to be dead on arrival. Can't have the press asking you any embarrassing questions, can we. But don't worry, you'll likely get a full state funeral."

"Did we get him, Sir?" asked the dead man with a grin.

"What Woman got him climbing out of the sewer system; he never saw what hit him." The man extracted a can of cola from an insulated medical bag and handed it to his patient. "There you go. You've earned it."

He then passed another to the pilot and presented a third to the empty seat next to him, "Joanna?"

And suddenly, she was there, small, mousey, but definitely there. "Thanks, Cypher. It's thirsty work cleaning up after our grandstanding hero over there."

"Hi, Joanna. Pretty stupid huh?" said the patient contritely, as he levered himself up on one elbow.

"You did good kid", she said and raised her can in respect.

"Clarke going to cooperate?" asked the man called Cypher.

"Yes," replied the woman. "I showed him my warrant card and gave him the perpetrator. He's quite happy to claim the glory for himself."

"Good. Let's go home people."

Switch woke to a pounding headache and the taste of defeat. He was lying in a medical facility somewhere and had one hand attached to the bed by a set of handcuffs.

What had gone wrong? he wondered, as he eased the pressure on this wrist. Getting through security and close to the target without using his power had been tough, but he'd done it. He'd even pulled that lame stunt as directed, though it would have been child's play for him to kill the Ambassador in his own fashion. Then, instead of following up on the hit, he'd left the scene as ordered to avoid revealing his powers to the authorities. He'd almost made it too, until something had hit him from behind. Now, here he was looking at two of the least friendly Australian Federal Policemen he'd ever seen.

"I have to inform you that you are under arrested for suspected terrorist activities," began the uniformed Policeman with Seargeant stripes on his sleeve. "Anything you say—"

"Fuck that for a joke. I'm outta here," said Switch in his thick London accent.

Then, with but a moment's concentration he switched with the Seargeant and, while the other officer was still wondering what was happening, pulled the man's handgun from its holster and with savage glee shot them both at point blank range, twice.

Smiling, Switch pocketed the weapon and sauntered over to the window to look out through the blinds. From outside there came the sound of running feet, but they were way too late and the would-be rescuers were just as surprised as the First Assistant Secretary to the British Ambassador when they burst into the room to find him there.

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