

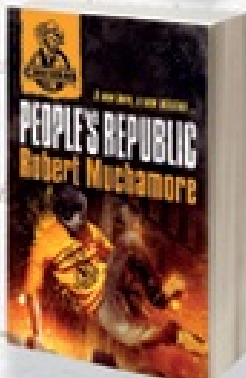
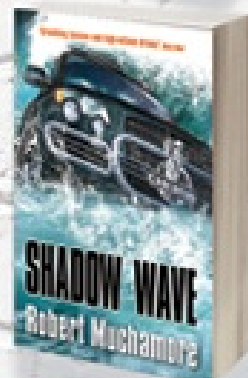
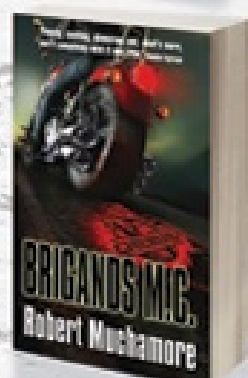
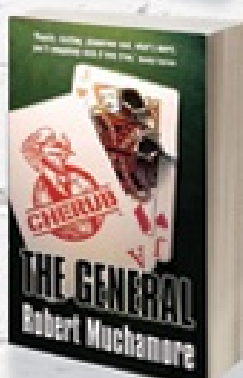
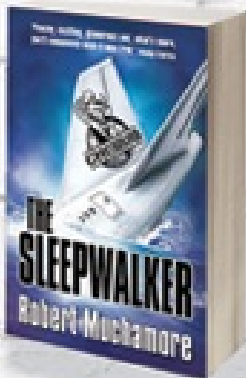
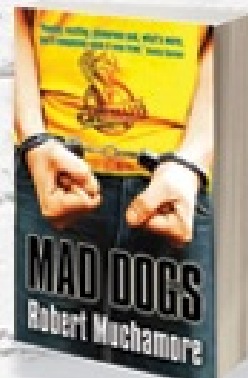
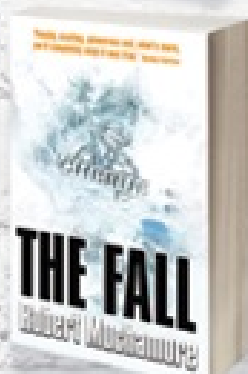
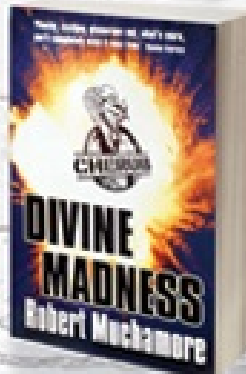
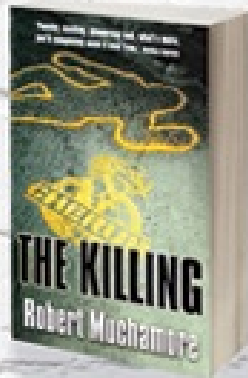
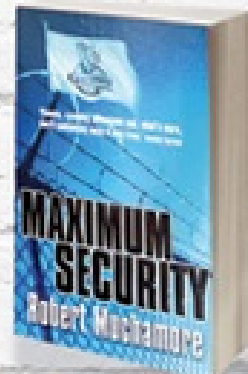
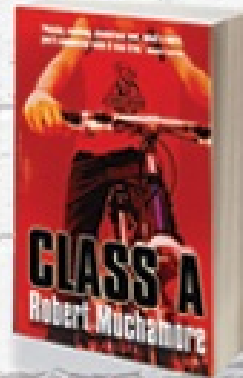
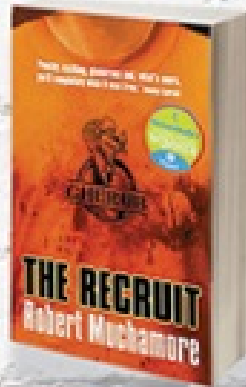
'Crackling tension and high-octane drama' *Daily Mail*



SHADOW WAVE

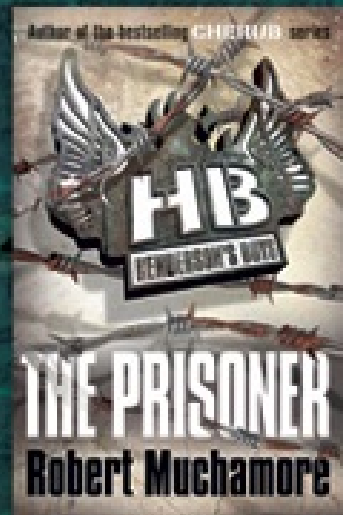
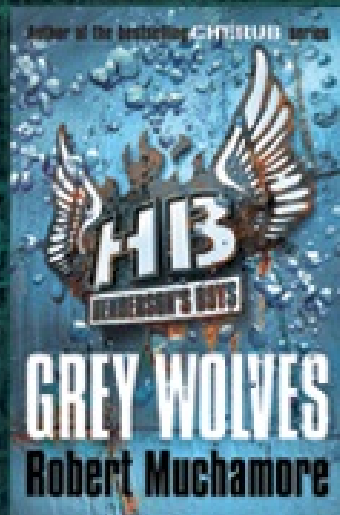
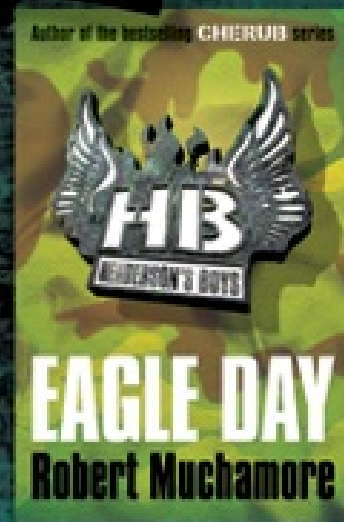
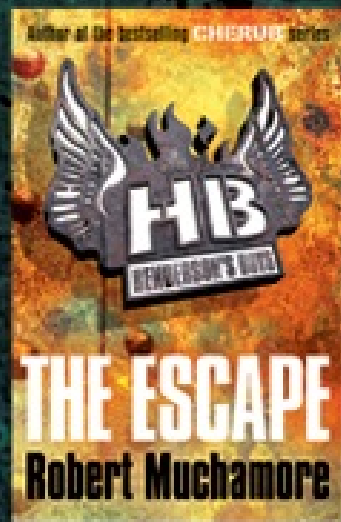
Robert Muchamore

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Robert Muchamore was born in 1972 and spent thirteen years working as a private investigator. *CHERUB: Shadow Wave* is his twelfth novel in the series.

The **CHERUB** series has won numerous awards, including the Red House Children's Book Award. For more information on Robert and his work, visit www.muchamore.com

Praise for the **CHERUB series:**

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SHADOW WAVE

Robert Muchamore



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WHAT IS CHERUB?

CHERUB is a branch of British Intelligence. Its agents are aged between ten and seventeen years. Cherubs are mainly orphans who have been taken out of care homes and trained to work undercover. They live on CHERUB campus, a secret facility hidden in the English countryside.

WHAT USE ARE KIDS?

Quite a lot. Nobody realises kids do undercover missions, which means they can get away with all kinds of stuff that adults can't.

WHO ARE THEY?

About three hundred children live on CHERUB campus. JAMES ADAMS is our seventeen-year-old hero. He's a well-respected CHERUB agent with many successful missions under his belt. Hong Kong-born KERRY CHANG is James' girlfriend. His other close friends include BRUCE NORRI and SHAKEEL DAJANI.

James' sister, LAUREN ADAMS, is fourteen and regarded as an outstanding CHERUB agent. She hangs out with boyfriend GREG 'RAT' RATHBONE and her best mate BETHANY PARKER.

CHERUB STAFF

With its large grounds, specialist training facilities and combined role as a boarding school and intelligence operation, CHERUB actually has more staff than pupils. They range from cooks and gardeners, to teachers, training instructors, nurses, psychiatrists and mission specialists. CHERUB is run by its chairwoman, ZARA ASKER.

CHERUB T-SHIRTS

Cherubs are ranked according to the colour of the T-shirts they wear on campus. ORANGE is for visitors. RED is for kids who live on CHERUB campus but are too young to qualify as agents (the minimum age is ten). BLUE is for kids undergoing CHERUB's tough one-hundred-day basic training regime. A GREY T-shirt means you're qualified for missions. NAVY is a reward for outstanding performance on a single mission. The BLACK T-shirt is the ultimate recognition for outstanding achievement over a number of missions. When you retire, you get the WHITE T-shirt, which is also worn by staff.

May 2009

1. BRIGANDS

Violent altercations at the biker music festival known as the Rebel Tea Party in August 2008 led to brutal gang war between the Brigands Motorcycle Club and their bitter rivals the Vengeful Bastards. The stabbings, shootings and property destruction climaxed in October when Brigands national president Ralph 'the Führer' Donnington ordered a series of successful arson attacks on Vengeful Bastard clubhouses.

But the Brigands' triumph was short-lived. A random police stop on a suspicious vehicle unearthed homemade incendiaries intended for another Brigands attack. Two members of South Devon Brigands were arrested and a search of their London hotel room led to the seizure of firearms, sixty thousand pounds in cash and a laptop containing incriminating e-mails. The messages mentioned the arson attacks on clubhouses and contained financial records relating to South Devon Brigands' illegal weapons-smuggling operation.

Eight of the nineteen full members of South Devon Brigands were arrested and charged. Further searches led to more evidence of criminal activity and the arrest of twenty additional bikers, from other Brigands chapters and associate gangs.

Despite this success the Führer remains in control of the Brigands. But with many close associates in jail he can no longer separate himself from his gang's day-to-day criminal activities. After years of evading imprisonment the Führer is more vulnerable than ever before.

Excerpt from an internal police memo written by Chief Inspector Ross Johnson, head of the National Police Biker Task Force (NPBTF) January 2009.

*

James Adams cupped his hands under a mixer tap, splashed tepid water up towards his face and looked at his reflection in a mirrored bathroom cabinet. He'd let his hair grow shaggy and had straw-coloured bristles across his face. His acne was behaving itself, except for the red volcano near his Adam's apple.

James was going for the biker look, wearing wrecked Nikes, oil-stained jeans and a sleeveless AC/DC T-shirt. The effect was completed by an oversized chrome belt buckle shaped like a skull. He flexed his thick arms and felt good about the way he looked: muscular shoulders, big biceps and thick tufts of hair in his pits. A recent growth spurt would be his last and had left him dead on six feet tall.

'Hey there beautiful,' James told himself. Then he tried to look menacing. He shot a fist towards the mirror. 'What are you staring at?' he shouted. 'You wanna start something? See where it gets you, you Tottenham-supporting nerd. Bang!'

James laughed as the imaginary Tottenham fan crumpled to the ground, but there was no one else in the house to hear. He'd established his identity as James Raven the previous summer while living here with a mission controller and two younger agents, but he was living alone on this second phase of the mission. The back story was that he'd fought with his parents, quit studying A-levels and absconded with his family's Devon holiday home to pursue a career as a full-time rebel.

James grabbed a black leather jacket and slid it up his arms as he bolted downstairs. He then took his keys and mobile from a crystal bowl by the front door. *Hash sixty-nine* took him into the handset hidden phonebook where he tapped the number for his mission controller, John Jones.

'No sign of the Führer yet, boss,' James told him. 'Gonna be at least fifteen minutes late.'

John's placid voice came back down the phone. 'When was the Führer ever on time?'

'Is everything at your end set?' James asked. 'Kerry OK?'

'Tickety-boo,' John agreed. 'Kerry knows her stuff.'

'We can't let the Führer off the hook,' James said seriously. 'I've been on his arse for more than ten months.'

'Any butterflies?' John asked.

'Sweaty palms, stomach churning,' James admitted. 'I've done enough missions now, but there's always a few tense moments.'

John laughed. 'Expect it'll be your last time if this goes down right.'

'Better go, they'll be here soon,' James said, feeling stunned as he dropped the Samsung into his jeans.

Your last time.

The three words made James feel like someone had smashed a brick around his head. He thought about his missions: Help Earth, KMG, Arizona Max, Leon Tarasov, the Survivors, the AFA, Denis Obidin, Mad Dogs, Street Action Group. Was the Führer his last target? Was today the final act of his CHERUB career?

The idea sent a sad ache through James, and remembering what he'd seen in the mirror upstairs made him sadder still. CHERUB agents were kids. They were effective because they were small and innocent and adults didn't suspect them. But James was no child. He was seventeen years old. He had the kind of imposing physique that people crossed the road to avoid and his stubbly face and bent nose looked about as innocent as a Russian battle tank.

A tear welled, but the adrenaline kick nixed it when he heard the Führer's Mercedes. It rumbled into his cul-de-sac, skimming past fancy houses before crunching up the gravel drive. The E-class saloon was a brute. Top of the line AMG sports model, with a V8, blacked-out windows, fat tyres and fancy alloys.

James recognised the three men inside as he grabbed a rear door on the passenger side. The Führer was in the driving seat, short and poisonous with his miniature Hitler-style moustache. The front passenger was Rhino, a biker and long-time Brigands associate who'd never actually joined the gang. In the back was Dirty Dave. Bald and with a thick moustache, he owned half of the strip clubs and massage parlours in South Devon.

'Morning all,' James said, as he lowered himself on to the tan leather.

He was surprised to get shoved back out by Dirty Dave. 'What's on your back?' he barked angrily.

James panicked as he realised he was still wearing his biker jacket. It bore the patch of the Monster Bunch, marking James out as a member of this feeder gang to the Brigands.

'Wear your patch in a car,' the Führer growled, shaking his head contemptuously as he reached under the dashboard and pulled the lever to open the boot. 'Shit for brains.'

For outlaw bikers the coloured insignia on the back of their jackets was sacred. They often travelled in cars, but it was against the rules to wear your club patch while travelling on more than two wheels.

James backed up and jogged to the rear of the car. The interior of the boot was huge. There was a pink golf bag belonging to the Führer's wife and two leather Brigands jackets folded lovingly so that the patches were on display. More significantly James saw two baseball bats, a pair of crowbars and a cricket bag bulging with guns and ammunition boxes.

'Let's go make money!' Rhino said cheerfully, as James slammed his door and the eighteen-inch alloys spun in the gravel.

*

Their destination was Kam's Surf Club, a dozen miles east of Salcombe. Two storeys high, the restaurant hung precariously close to a cliff's edge, its blue planks weathered by salt spray off the sea below. Kam's food was a mix of noodles and burgers, with a fifties-style counter, vintage jukebox and surf memorabilia hanging off the walls.

The joint would be packed out come tourist season, but that was a couple of months off and the only customers at two on a Tuesday afternoon were German backpackers, cocooned in a romantic bubble. They shared a calamari platter and watched waves crashing in the rocky cove below.

'Service!' the Führer boomed, as he came through the door. 'Mr Kam, stop frying them rats and get your dirty yellow can out here.'

The Germans were unnerved by the presence of four aggressive looking bikers. James was laughing through the swinging doors, eyeing the tanned legs emerging from the female backpacker's cut-off jeans as he recognised Johnny Cash playing *Ring of Fire* on the jukebox.

The chef and owner came out of his kitchen. Kam was stocky, with his straight black hair tied in a ponytail and a striped apron around his waist. He smiled at the Führer, but body language made it clear he was the last person Kam wanted to see.

The Führer turned to James. 'Get the VHS.'

As James headed towards the service counter, Dirty Dave stepped up to the two backpackers. The girl looked at her boyfriend. He was chunky, going for the lumberjack look in his plaid shirt and Aran sweater, but he'd never thrown a punch in his life.

'I don't want trouble,' the German said in stilted English as he raised his hands.

Dirty Dave stopped half a step shy of the table. The Germans recoiled as he reached over and rammed a piece of battered calamari in his mouth.

'Tasty,' he said, nodding as he chewed. 'Dirty Dave likes a bit of the old octopus.'

The female backpacker glanced anxiously at her man. James spoke no German, but it didn't take a genius to translate *let's get the hell out of here*.

Dirty Dave reached towards his trousers. The German flinched, thinking he was going for a weapon, but instead Dave hooked his thumbs around his belt loops and yanked down his jeans. The woman caught the briefest glance of Dirty Dave's flopping penis before shooting back from the table and screaming.

'How's about some English sausage?' Dirty Dave sneered. 'Let me show you the real reason we won the war.'

The male backpacker took a twenty from his wallet and threw it at the table, before grabbing his girlfriend and the backpacks and hurrying towards the exit.

'Aww, come on baby,' Dirty Dave shouted, as he waddled after them with his filthy jeans around his knees. 'Why play so hard to get?'

Rhino and the Führer howled with laughter as James stepped behind the counter. Amidst the dishwashers and beer kegs was a dilapidated security recorder. James ejected the VHS and held it in the air.

'Got the tape, boss,' he called.

'Don't leave it behind,' the Führer ordered, then turned towards Kam wearing a sarcastic grin. 'What the sour face?' he teased.

'How can I pay you when you throw out my customers?' Kam shouted furiously.

The Führer laughed. 'Two customers makes a difference? You had this place *heaving* all last summer. You owe me three weeks. That's seven hundred nicker.'

'Four fifty,' Kam corrected.

‘Price shoots up when you don’t pay me,’ the Führer snarled menacingly, before grabbing Kam by the apron and pulling him close. ‘Don’t think that I’m letting things slip, just because a couple of my men are behind bars.’

‘I can’t pay so much in winter,’ Kam squirmed. ‘You see how many customers I have.’

‘These old wooden buildings burn easy,’ the Führer threatened, as his hands made the shape of an explosion. ‘Poof.’

‘Who else is home?’ Rhino asked.

‘Just my wife and the translator you asked for,’ Kam answered. ‘Back in the kitchen.’

‘Get ‘em out here in plain sight,’ Rhino shouted to James.

As James forced the VHS tape into his leather jacket, he stepped through an archway into a spacious and impeccably clean kitchen. The first woman he saw was Kam’s wife, Alison. She was dressed to wait on tables in white pumps and a pale blue mini-dress. The other woman was Kerry Chang. Kerry was a sixteen-year-old CHERUB agent and James’ current girlfriend, but he couldn’t let on that he knew her and they avoided eye contact.

‘You two bitches get out here,’ James said forcefully.

Alison stepped out of the kitchen as James checked around to make sure nobody was hiding. As Kerry walked by, she gave James a tiny smile and silently mouthed, ‘All good.’

‘Aww, look at this little piece!’ Dirty Dave leered, admiring Kerry as she emerged from the kitchen. ‘Mag-bloody-nificent, though a boob job wouldn’t go amiss.’

Kerry was self-conscious about her small chest and James felt like punching Dirty Dave’s face in. The moustachioed biker sidled up to his girlfriend.

‘So you’re our little ching-chong Chinese translator?’ Dave asked, placing one hand on Kerry’s shoulder and sliding it down her back. ‘You want my number baby? Me dig Asian girls.’

Dirty Dave made Kerry’s stomach churn. He not only had cigar breath and BO, but she’d read the police reports about girls who’d been abused inside his clubs, but were too scared to give evidence against a member of the Brigands. Kerry had the skills to flip Dirty Dave like a pancake, but she was on a mission and had to play her part by backing off and looking suitably repulsed.

‘She’s a bit young,’ Rhino commented, as he looked at Kam. ‘You sure she’s up to translating?’

‘Why can’t you do it?’ Dirty Dave added.

Kam spoke furiously. ‘Because I don’t speak bloody Chinese. I grew up in Exeter, you understand. And my bloody mother was from the Philippines, not China.’

Kerry took a half step back as Dirty Dave’s hand reached her bum. He jerked her back and made it look like he was about to kiss her. Fortunately the Führer stepped in before she had to push him away.

‘Hands off, Dave,’ the Führer warned. ‘You’ve got enough pussy. We need this one for the meeting upstairs.’

Dirty Dave was put out by the rebuke. He couldn’t take it out on the Führer, so he strode briskly across the floor and slugged Kam in the stomach.

‘Nice shot!’ Rhino laughed, as Kam doubled up in pain.

‘Where’s our money?’ the Führer demanded. ‘Little yellow bastard. I bet you’ve got a hundred grand under the bed, ain’t you?’

‘I’ll pay as soon as I can,’ Kam gasped.

‘You see this boy here, Mr Kam?’ the Führer shouted, pointing at James.

Kam nodded as he straightened up. James had no idea why the Führer was pointing at him.

‘James is my up-and-comer,’ the Führer explained, as he eyeballed Kam. ‘He’s young, but he’s hard as nails and I’m putting him on your case. He’ll be coming round here regular to collect your

payments. If you don't pay, expect pain.'

'Why don't you leave him alone?' Alison shouted as the Führer shoved her husband towards James.

'Show our man what you can do,' the Führer told James.

Two factors had enabled James to infiltrate the Führer's inner circle over the previous months: his advanced combat skills made him the ideal person to have on your side during a war between biker gangs, while his youth made the Führer think he was too young to be an undercover cop.

James had no problem when it came to thumping a member of another biker gang, but a hard-working civilian like Kam was entirely different.

'What shall I do?' James said awkwardly.

'Mess him up,' Dirty Dave urged. 'Your choice. Smash his fingers or something.'

James had to think fast. Most young bikers would do anything to impress the Führer. He didn't want to hurt Kam badly, but he couldn't back off without destroying his credibility.

'Can't break his fingers, can I?' James said casually, trying to buy time. 'Chef can't earn money with a broken hand.'

The solution came to James in a flash. He grabbed Kam around the back of the neck and gripped his right arm. Kam was stocky and almost as strong as James, but with no combat experience Kam had no idea how to defend himself as James expertly wrenched his arm behind his back.

From this position the easiest thing would have been for James to snap the arm, but instead he gripped Kam's bicep and violently twisted his upper arm, causing a crunching sound as his shoulder joint dislocated.

James had suffered this injury during combat training a couple of years earlier. A dislocated shoulder looked dramatic and was extremely painful, but was much less serious than a broken bone. The doctor could relocate Kam's joint. He'd be stiff for a few days, but fully recovered within a week.

Not that Kam appreciated James' consideration as he crumpled to the floor.

Alison charged towards James and screamed, as Rhino, Dirty Dave and the Führer laughed appreciatively. James didn't want to hurt Alison, so he intercepted her painted nails as she tried to claw his cheek and gave her a shove. She stumbled backwards into a table, tipping it up and sending condiments and a serviette dispenser crashing to the floor.

As Kerry rushed over to calm Alison down, James put on a show of menace, spitting on the floor in front of Kam's face and pounding his fist into his palm.

'I'd stay down if I was you,' James warned. 'And next time I see you, you'd better have our money or I'll be sticking your hand in the deep fryer.'

2. STRIFE

Kam sat on an upturned bucket in the Surf Club kitchen. He held a pack of ice cubes against his injured shoulder, while tears streamed out of his eyes. Dirty Dave was outside by the bar, while the other Brigands had gone upstairs.

‘It’s just dislocated,’ Kerry whispered in Kam’s ear. ‘After the Brigands meeting we’ll take you straight to hospital.’

Alison didn’t like having Brigands in her restaurant, and was no fan of the attractive sixteen-year-old fussing over her husband either.

‘What do you know about his arm?’ Alison asked Kerry furiously. ‘You don’t look like any doctor I’ve ever met.’

Kerry quelled a mix of nerves and anger. ‘I know first aid,’ she said soothingly. ‘I’m not an expert but I think it’s a dislocated shoulder.’

Alison turned towards her husband and pointed an accusing finger at Kerry. ‘Where do you know *her* from, anyway?’

‘You’ll understand when this is over,’ Kam said, as he winced with pain. ‘Stay calm and trust me.’

‘Trust you?’ Alison hissed. ‘You’ve been shaken down and beaten up. You’re in debt to the Brigands and now those lunatics are holding meetings upstairs in our restaurant. How can you expect me to stay calm? I told you to go to the police months ago.’

‘Keep your voice down,’ Kerry warned, as she pointed up at the ceiling. ‘If they hear you making threats about the police they’ll kill us.’

‘Trust me, Alison,’ Kam repeated firmly. ‘On our daughters’ lives, if this goes wrong I’ll divorce you. You can have everything.’

‘That’s a bloody laugh,’ Alison snorted. ‘What do I get? The mortgage on the house? The debts on the restaurant? You’re so stupid I can’t even look at you.’

Alison stormed out of the kitchen into the dining area. Dirty Dave stood at the small bar, where he had been helping himself to Wild Turkey.

‘Looking nice,’ Dave said, as he raised a shot glass. ‘Sexy in that blue dress.’

Alison turned her nose up and gave Dave the finger before crashing at a table and burying her head in her hands.

‘Must be on your period,’ Dave sneered, then laughed at his own joke.

Back in the kitchen, Kerry looked accusingly at Kam.

‘You should have told your wife what’s going on,’ she whispered.

Kam sighed. ‘Alison wasn’t supposed to be working today, but my waitress called in sick.’

‘We’ve got to keep Alison calm,’ Kerry said.

‘I can’t believe what that punk James did to my arm,’ Kam groaned. ‘I hope they lock the little prick up for a long time.’

Kerry smiled inwardly. Kam had agreed to cooperate with the police to stop the Brigands extorting money from his business. He’d been told that Kerry was a young looking nineteen-year-old police cadet, rather than a sixteen-year-old CHERUB agent, but he had no clue that James was also working undercover, or that it had been James’ idea to set up a sting operation inside his restaurant.

Outside, two Chinese men stepped out of a big Lexus. The older of the two moved slowly towards the Surf Club entrance, in a stooped posture. As he rapped on the frosted glass above a sign that read *restaurant closed due to electrical fault*, his son opened the trunk of the limousine and lifted out two

Louis Vuitton bags.

‘Mr Xu,’ the Führer said warmly, as he opened the door and shook the old man’s hand. ‘Come upstairs. Traffic not too rough, I hope.’

Mr Xu barely spoke English and made no sound, except a sigh when he saw the two flights of stairs.

Xu’s son Liam was completely different. He was in his mid-forties and looked like some kind of movie villain, with his tailored suit, dark glasses and a diamond-crusted Breitling chronograph on his wrist.

‘How’s tricks?’ Liam said as he put down his designer luggage.

The Führer had met Liam several times, but Liam’s English skills didn’t stretch beyond greetings and restaurant menus. As a substitute for words, the pair did a manly dance of back slapping, grins and laughter.

Kerry approached them and stood formally, feet together with her hands held neatly behind her back. ‘I’m here to assist with any language difficulties,’ she explained, before bowing slightly and repeating the phrase in fluent Mandarin.

As Kerry walked up behind Liam and the Führer, James came down from the top of the wooden stairs and offered an arm to a grateful Mr Xu. The Surf Club didn’t do much business outside summer season, so the top floor was closed for winter. The L-shaped dining-room had a desolate atmosphere, with chinks of light creeping around the edges of shuttered windows, plastic sheeting over the bar and chairs stacked on table tops.

Rhino sat in the centre of the room next to two tables pushed together. On top were five automatic weapons, clips and boxes of ammunition. The rest of the tables had been pushed back against the walls, creating a clear path to a metal target box at the end of the room.

Liam charged towards the guns, as James helped his frail father settle into a dining chair.

‘State of the art,’ Liam stated excitably, as Rhino offered him white gloves so that he didn’t leave fingerprints.

‘You’ve got a good eye,’ Rhino complimented, watching Liam pick a small machine gun off the table. Kerry hurried to translate. ‘That’s the MP7 you asked for. Retractable stock and multiple sights so you can use it three ways: assault rifle, machine gun, or even out in your hands as a pistol. The four-point-six-mil’ round is small, but it’s good up to fifty metres. It’ll slip under the jacket of a bloke like you, but packs enough punch to cut through thirty layers of Kevlar and kill a room full of them with anyone you don’t like the look of.’

‘Beautiful,’ Liam said admiringly. ‘I know plenty of people who’ll sell me a gun, but only you guys bring in this kind of fancy kit.’

‘Nobody else has our contacts,’ Rhino boasted. ‘The Brigands over in the States were stealing weapons almost before they first mounted their Harleys. Most gun dealers have one connection. We have *dozens*, and we’ve been dealing with most of them for years.’

Liam turned the gun in his hand. ‘What about the special ammunition? Can you get hold of it?’

The Führer took over Rhino’s sales pitch. ‘Would I sell you a gun you couldn’t shoot?’ he smiled. ‘These are used by the German army. Now I’m not saying you can get bullets as easy as a standard nine-millimetre, but anything the German army uses can be had one way or another.’

‘And we’ll supply each gun with a thousand rounds,’ Rhino added. ‘Just to get you rolling.’

As Liam exuberantly pointed the machine gun towards the target and wished for a mirror so that he could see himself posing, Mr Xu leaned towards Kerry and whispered in her ear.

‘Mr Xu asks about your recent difficulties with the police,’ Kerry said stiltedly. ‘He’s interested to know how you continue to do business after all the arrests, and if it’s safe for us to do so.’

‘Parking tickets,’ the Führer answered airily. ‘I’ve been in this game for thirty-odd years. Bought, sold, ducked, dodged and I’m still here. I’ve seen people come and go, but the only trouble I’ve ever had is parking on a yellow line and doing fifty-five in a forty-mile-an-hour zone. And believe me, prison is a young man’s game. I’ve got no intention of getting locked up at my time of life.’

The Führer sounded confident, but James knew it was a lie. Before the war with the Vengeful Bastards and the arrest of half his men, the Führer kept his weapons dealing at arm’s length. Standing in a room with guns on the table, speaking to two men holding bags of cash was the kind of business he would have passed on to a subordinate. But gang wars aren’t cheap and the Führer had to take risks.

‘So we’re all happy?’ Rhino asked, as he slid an ammunition clip across the tabletop. ‘Target box set up if he wants to try shooting. The kid picked this place ‘cos there’s no neighbours within half a mile.’

Liam reached eagerly for the clip, but his father disapproved of his son’s posturing with the weapon. The old man spoke brusquely in Mandarin and Kerry translated.

‘Mr Xu says that the weapons are excellent. He wishes to conclude business quickly and return to London. He trusts that the rest of the stock will be up to standard, and asks you to begin inspecting the money quickly to ensure that you’re fully satisfied.’

Rhino leant towards one of the Louis Vuitton bags and unzipped it, but the Führer swatted him back.

‘It’s on trust,’ the Führer said.

‘Of course,’ Liam smiled.

While working with the Führer, James had learnt that the level of trust between criminals became greater the higher up you went. The chances of street dealers ripping one another off in a small drug deal were high. But a half-million-pound weapons deal between the Führer and the Chinese criminal syndicate for which the Xus worked went through on mutual trust, because the consequences of any dispute would be devastating for both sides.

‘Here’s a key, and a map showing the lock-up where the rest is being stored,’ the Führer explained as he handed Liam a padded envelope. ‘Will you be wanting your luggage back?’

Mr Xu smiled as the Führer shook his hand.

‘They’re excellent fakes, a lucrative business of ours,’ Kerry translated. ‘Mr Xu says that your wife might like them, and that they’re indistinguishable from the real thing.’

‘Most kind,’ the Führer smiled, as Kerry helped Mr Xu back to his feet.

James’ heart accelerated as he saw the Xus heading for the top of the stairs. Everything was going to plan, but he was still edgy. The police had fitted the Surf Club with hidden cameras and microphones. They’d have the whole deal on tape, and the Führer’s boast that he’d been dealing guns for more than thirty years couldn’t have been more perfect.

But now came the dodgy part. The police didn’t want anyone to have a chance to destroy evidence or grab a weapon. They planned an overwhelming assault, moving in quickly with armed officers arresting everyone in the meeting and grabbing the cash and the envelope with the location of the weapons.

None of the officers hiding outside knew that James was working undercover, so he could expect rough treatment. And with guns and ammunition lying around, the situation could turn into a shoot-out if the cops slipped up.

3. BLENDER

Kerry helped Mr Xu downstairs, with Liam and the Führer walking behind. The first sign of police was the clank of two aluminium ladders hitting the side of the building. Clad from head to toe in black, and sporting Kevlar helmets and sub machine guns, the firearms officers jumped on to the first floor balcony and wrenched at wooden shutters covering the windows.

In theory, two shutters had been loosened in preparation for the raid, but it didn't work out. As the officers battled with sheets of chipboard screwed to the window frames, Rhino snatched an MP7 from the table top and slammed in a twenty-round clip.

At the same moment, another pair of officers hit the swinging front doors on the ground floor.

A shout went through a megaphone outside. 'This is the police, everybody down on the ground.'

'Fuzz,' the Führer shouted angrily, before acting with typical decisiveness.

He gave Mr Xu an almighty shove before doubling back up the stairs. Kerry held the old man's arm and couldn't free herself or get hold of the banister. She fell with Mr Xu, crashing helplessly down seven steps.

They would have hit the floor, but for the two firearms officers coming through the doors. One officer was supposed to aim her gun up at the men coming down the stairs, while her partner's job was to charge into the kitchen and deal with Dirty Dave. Instead, Kerry and Mr Xu clattered into the two officers, knocking them into an alcove containing a long dead payphone.

The hitch with the shutters and the bodies falling down the stairs only delayed the firearms officers by seconds, but it was the difference between a decisive take-down and complete chaos.

James was horrified. He didn't want to be near Rhino and the firearms officers when they started shooting and made a quick run before diving behind the upstairs bar. Daylight flooded the room as the shutter finally came loose.

Rhino hesitated with the MP7. Did he really want to take on two expert marksmen in full body armour? But there was no way he could drop the weapon before the officer started shooting at him.

So Rhino shot first. He was no marksman and he blew his twenty-round clip in two short bursts, hitting the floor, the ceiling and everything in between except for the police officer. The lucky officer kept his cool and took aim. Two shots punched through Rhino's chest, killing him instantly.

From behind the bar, James had no idea what was happening. He expected to hear either Rhino, or the sound of the firearms officers stepping in through the balcony, but all he picked up was the sound of metal cartridges rolling over the floor where an ammo box had been knocked off the table.

'I'm unarmed,' James shouted, as he bobbed up with his hands in a surrender gesture.

He saw Rhino. The force of the bullet had knocked the biker backwards out of his chair. Blood was beginning to pool on his chest, while his jaw had locked in its final shocked expression.

There was no sign of the firearms officers and James knew why: unlike soldiers, police officers are trained for absolute caution. They wouldn't enter any space without knowing exactly what they faced and had jumped down off the first-floor balcony at the first sign of confusion.

'This is the police,' a megaphone outside announced. 'You are totally surrounded by armed officers.'

'Screw you piggies,' the Führer shouted, as he charged around the top of the staircase. He saw Rhino, but didn't flinch. 'Poor bastard. You OK, James?'

'Had better days,' James said warily.

The Führer kept low as he raced between the tables. He grabbed one of the MP7s and picked up a couple of ammunition clips before pulling a wodge of twenty-pound notes from one of the money bags.

‘What are you doing?’ James gasped. ‘Police marksmen are deadly. They’ll shoot you.’

Not that James minded the prospect of the Führer getting shot; he just didn’t fancy being caught in the crossfire.

‘Death or glory,’ the Führer spat. ‘Adolf never surrendered and I’m bugged if I’m going to. No grab a gun and help me get the hell out of here.’

The Führer turned as he heard boots coming up the stairs. ‘Stay back,’ he shouted, before spraying bullets indiscriminately down the staircase. Then he looked at James. ‘Why just stand there? Grab a gun or something.’

Despite years of training, James had lost concentration at a critical moment and squandered the opportunity to knock out the Führer before he’d grabbed a weapon.

‘I’ll stay here if it’s all the same,’ James spluttered. ‘Take my chances, do a few years in your offenders.’

The Führer swung the MP7 towards him and smiled menacingly. ‘I wasn’t making a request,’ he said. ‘Fight or die, you little pussy.’

A chill went down James’ back. It wasn’t the first time he’d had a gun pointed at him, but he never felt so certain that the person holding the trigger would kill him at the slightest provocation, maybe even for the fun of it.

There was more screaming downstairs as James rounded the bar. It sounded like Kerry. He stepped gingerly over the blood surrounding Rhino and reached towards the last MP7 lying on the table, but something hit the floorboards a couple of metres behind him and the room began filling with smoke.

‘CS,’ James shouted.

‘Think you’re clever?’ the Führer screamed wildly, before firing the machine gun out of the window.

James’ eyes and the back of his throat burned as the incapacitating gas swirled around him. It was like breathing hot soup, but the Führer managed to grab the collar of James’ leather jacket and yank him towards the back of the room.

He opened a fire door with an almighty boot and James inhaled fresh sea air. They were on a wooden balcony overlooking the waves. In good weather it was Kam’s most sought-after dining space but today’s wind was bitter and the sea crashed against jagged rocks stretching down more than thirty metres.

The cops had surrounded the three sides of the building that backed on to dry land. They’d assumed that nobody would be crazy enough to jump over the balcony on to the cliff face and the gas billowing out of the first-floor windows made it difficult for them to see what was going on.

‘It’s probably not as bad as it looks,’ the Führer said, as he gave James a half smile. ‘You jump first.’

*

Kerry fell awkwardly, turning her ankle as she slipped between the bodies of the two firearms officers and knocked her chin against the side of the payphone. For a horrible moment, the officers thought they were under attack.

‘Don’t shoot,’ Kerry squealed.

In a state of confusion, one officer backed out of the building, while his colleague found her feet

She aimed her gun up the staircase as planned, but Liam already had his arms aloft in a gesture of surrender.

As Kerry untangled herself from Mr Xu she saw Dirty Dave holding Alison by the throat. He pulled back his arm and punched her in the face with his huge fist.

‘You set this up, didn’t you?’ Dave roared, as he punched Alison again. ‘This isn’t over. We’ll get you. We’ll burn your daughters for this.’

Dave was powerfully built and Alison flopped like a doll as he threw her around. Kam stood in the kitchen doorway yelling at Dave to stop, but could barely move with his dislocated shoulder.

Kerry looked outside hoping to see a line of cops charging to the rescue. But the unarmed officer had retreated back in the road, awaiting an all-clear from the firearms team.

‘Hey, dick wad,’ Kerry shouted, as she stormed into the restaurant.

She ducked as she heard machine-gun fire upstairs. This was Rhino being shot dead, but Kerry had no way of knowing and was scared for James.

Dave laughed at Kerry’s determined expression. Alison was barely conscious after the punches and Dave held her up by the hair, like a limp trophy.

‘Were you in on this too?’ Dave shouted. ‘Come closer, see what you get.’

Kerry didn’t need a second invitation. She hopped forward and pivoted on the ball of her left foot. Before Dave knew it Kerry’s right foot had swung through the air and smashed into his temple. Alison slumped to the floor Dave crashed against the bar in a daze.

‘Not such a big man now, eh?’ Kerry screamed, and launched the hardest Karate chop of her life. It hit the base of Dave’s skull with such force that his head snapped back, dislodging one of the vertebrae in his neck.

Dave now lay on the ground in between two bar stools, gasping desperately as he realised that he couldn’t feel his legs. Meanwhile, the firearms officer had regained his composure and was coming back through the swinging doors.

‘Hands where I can see ‘em,’ he shouted, approaching with his gun ready to shoot.

‘We’re all good here,’ Kerry shouted as she raised her hands in the air.

‘I can’t move my legs,’ Dirty Dave howled.

Kerry breathed deep as three unarmed officers rushed into the room to take control. Then she looked anxiously up at the ceiling, not knowing whether James was dead or alive.

*

James yelled as he made the three-metre drop from the first-floor balcony. He hit the rocks hard. The tough leather jacket saved his arms, but his jeans ripped and both legs bled as he rested on a natural ledge. It was another twenty-five metres down to the waves.

James had climbed steeper cliff faces during training, but this one was nasty. The sea spray created a perfect microclimate for the slimy green algae that covered most of the rock face. It was slippery as hell, and turned to an oily paste under your fingertips when you tried to get hold of anything.

Up above, the Führer tucked the compact machine gun into his belt and swung his legs over the side.

‘Who wants to live forever?’ he told himself, and jumped off the railing.

The results weren’t good. James was seventeen, he had climbing experience and was in great shape. The Führer was almost sixty and carried a lot of excess weight. After bouncing painfully off the cliff face, he grabbed at a jutting rock, but couldn’t hold on and gained momentum as he tilted sideways and plunged.

James dived to one side, narrowly avoiding the Führer's falling boot. He'd have bet his last pound that the Brigands' president was going all the way to the sea, but the Führer's leg hit a narrow gap between two rocks and became wedged.

The full weight of the Führer's falling body wrenched against the trapped leg. The thigh bone shattered as a jerking motion dragged the Führer's lower leg deeper into the gap between rocks. The Brigands National President patch on the Führer's jacket flapped in the wind as his body dangled upside down, supported by the smashed thigh bone speared through his jeans.

James had seen grisly injuries on missions and in training, but this looked the most painful by far.

'Please,' the Führer pleaded. 'Somebody help me out here!'

James considered climbing down, but the algae-covered rocks were lethal and his eyes and throat burned from the CS gas. Even if James made it there was no way he'd be able to lift the Führer. Instead, he studied the rocks, working out his best path back to the top.

After a precarious swing supported by a single finger hold, James had a simple climb of less than two metres before he reached a steeply sloping shelf. From there he crawled up to the road, troubled only by the last few plumes of CS.

'Please,' the Führer was bawling. 'Somebody get me.'

There were three cops waiting to arrest James when he reached the top of the cliff. He raised his badly grazed hands and they handcuffed him without any fuss. Hopefully John Jones would get him released before he reached the police station.

A smile from Kerry was some relief as he got frogmarched to a police van, but the cuts on his thighs made walking excruciating.

'How the hell do they get him up from there?' one of the cops asked as James walked past. 'Helicopter or something?'

'Let him stew,' an elderly officer standing close to the Führer's Mercedes replied cheerfully. 'It's about what he deserves.'

James thought of all the things the Führer had done - in particular the way he'd killed the entire family of fellow CHERUB agent Dante Welsh - and decided that he wouldn't mind if the rescue team took its time.

4. NURSE

It was dark by the time Kerry approached the automatic doors of South Devon Hospital. The stress of the mission was off. She was tired but cheerful as she crossed scuffed blue floor tiles and smiled at the nurse reading *heat* magazine behind a counter top.

‘James Raven,’ Kerry said. ‘He’s in room sixteen J.’

Sometimes you know you’re going to get nowhere and the nurse’s thin lips and raised eyebrow told Kerry this was one of them.

‘Visiting hours is between three and six-thirty.’

‘But I took *two* buses,’ Kerry lied.

She was on a mission. Her expenses would be paid, so she’d taken a taxi.

‘Rules are rules. Patients need to rest.’

‘But I was told I could see James at any time because he’s in a private room.’

‘Who told you that? Whatever, they’re wrong! Nothing after six-thirty.’

Kerry gritted her teeth. ‘I checked the hospital website before leaving home.’

‘Oh, the website,’ the nurse said, as she cracked a mischievous smile. ‘You can’t take any notice of *that*. It hasn’t been updated since we opened three years ago.’

Kerry groaned as she backed away from the counter. ‘Thank you for being so helpful,’ she said sourly.

The nurse was used to unhappy customers and took no notice. Outside, Kerry squatted against a bollard and pulled out her phone, intending to call James and tell him that she couldn’t get in. Before dialling she got distracted by the ambulance rolling up at the accident and emergency unit.

A patient and her oxygen bottle were wheeled through another automatic door. Kerry glimpsed a crowded waiting room inside and a glance up the face of the building confirmed that accident and emergency was in a separate building to James’ room, but a covered walkway linked the two.

Kerry hesitated. Her natural instinct was to be good, but she wanted to see James and she’d spent ages working out how to download the news footage of the Führer on to her mobile phone so he could watch it. And besides, this was hardly major crime. The worst that could happen was a security guard kicking her out.

The accident and emergency waiting room was as hot as hell. Druggies and drunks staggered around, sick kids screamed and there were old people who looked like they should be dead already. The only thing missing was the kid with the potty stuck on his head like you always see in movies.

Kerry’s CHERUB training kicked in. The first rule of any break-in was to case the joint. She found a seat in between a kid with a badly gashed knee and an overweight man with breathing difficulties and started looking around.

There was a numbered ticket system for non-urgent patients, but the figures on the dot-matrix board never seemed to change. The receptionists were stressed out with forms and ringing telephones. The PA system paged doctors, requested cleaners, or ordered porters to take patients upstairs for X-rays.

Kerry had come to cheer James up, so she’d dressed skimpily in open sandals, short black skirt and a denim jacket over a tight white T-shirt. Trouble was, it also pleased the dude with barbed wire tattoos sitting opposite.

‘If you stare any harder they’ll pop out on stalks,’ she said acidly, before standing up.

Amidst the chaos, Kerry decided to act confident and hope for the best. She cut purposefully around

the main counter, walked between a row of cubicles with the sick and wounded inside, then peered down the corridor that led to the wards.

The door at the far end needed a swipe card, so she pretended to read a leaflet – *Are you entitled to winter flu vaccination?* - until a porter strode towards it. She kept a few metres behind, then dived forward after he'd passed through the door, grabbing the handle an instant before it locked.

She held the door until the porter had disappeared, then passed through and turned in the opposite direction. For all her efforts, Kerry found herself standing by a lift, five metres from the reception desk she'd approached ten minutes earlier. Fortunately, the woman remained engrossed in a soap-star scandal and didn't glance up as Kerry waited for the lift to the fifth floor.

The rattly elevator was big enough for two beds. A helpful map on the back wall told Kerry where to go. The corridor into which Kerry emerged had large windows overlooking the car park and surrounding countryside.

James was in 16J, a single room, usually reserved for private patients. When he clambered off the cliff top, James was losing a lot of blood from the cuts on his legs and soon began feeling faint. He'd been ambulated to hospital and admitted under his mission alias of James Raven. He was still under arrest and had a police guard sitting outside his room.

'I had a call from the boss to say you might be coming,' the young officer grinned, as his eyeballs walked up Kerry's legs. 'I'll have to pat you down before you can go in though.'

'Knock yourself out,' she said, before sighing and holding out her arms.

'Biker scum like that in there, doesn't deserve a pretty girlfriend like you,' the officer moaned. Kerry let him look at the phone in her pocket and peek inside her little black handbag. 'These dudes might look cool on their bikes but...'

'Spare me the lecture, Granddad,' Kerry interrupted. 'Can I go in or not?'

'Can you believe this shit?' James called, as Kerry came into his room.

He angrily jangled a hand cuffed to the frame of his bed.

Kerry laughed, then shrugged. 'It was more important to get you stitched up before you lost too much blood. John said he's sorting out a helicopter to take you back to campus. You'll be James Adams again by tomorrow morning.'

'You know what the worst part is?' James asked. 'I can't go for a piss without that pig out there unlocking my cuffs. He falls asleep, so I was shouting for like half an hour. Then the pervert stands right in the room with me while I'm going. I hope I don't need to take a crap before they let me out here.'

'Now there's a mental image I could have lived without,' Kerry grinned.

James wore a hospital pyjama top and boxers. As he sat up Kerry saw the dressings covering large cuts on his thighs.

'You look bloody amazing,' James said, sliding his free hand up Kerry's leg as she perched on the corner of the bed. 'You should dress like that more often.'

'Thought you'd like the slutty look,' Kerry smirked. 'But never again. Guys keep ogling me, it's creepy.'

'You should be flattered,' James said. He tried pushing his hand up between Kerry's thighs but she clamped her legs together. 'Come on. I could *totally* nail you in that outfit.'

Kerry laughed as she pulled James' hand off and placed it on the bed. 'You're a randy goat. You'd want to nail me if I'd turned up wearing an Eskimo suit.'

'Yeah,' James grinned. 'But not as much.'

'Lauren said she texted you but you didn't reply,' Kerry said. 'Dante's well chuffed about that.'

Führer. He says he owes you one.'

'Cops took my mobile when they arrested me,' James explained.

Kerry reached into her pocket. 'I've got something for you, actually.'

'Condoms?' James asked eagerly.

'No,' Kerry said, tutting and shaking her head. 'Do you *ever* think of anything apart from sex?'

'I do think about football a lot, but not when I haven't touched you all week.'

Kerry ignored James and played with the menus on her phone until she found her video clips. She cued up a news report and passed the handset to James.

The clip started with a helicopter shot of the Surf Club. As the camera zoomed in a voiceover explained how motorcycle gang leader Ralph Donnington had tried to escape from a police raid.

'The picture's all blocky,' James complained.

'I think you can get higher quality, but I was trying to do it quickly,' Kerry explained.

But once the zooming stopped, the picture improved and James saw a close shot of the Führer dangling by his horribly fractured leg.

'Oh my god,' James gasped, as he looked away. 'That's *bloody* horrible. Was this local news, or national?'

'It started off on local,' Kerry said. 'But it got picked up. Now it's on the BBC, Sky, ITN everywhere.'

The news reporter spoke through the phone's tinny loudspeaker. '*Donnington was left dangling for nearly three hours as an RAF helicopter and the local lifeboat crew tried to find a way of safely lifting the middle-aged biker clear of the rocks. Police also say that they've seized over four hundred thousand pounds in cash and a cache of automatic weapons from a lock-up garage near Bath.*'

James looked up from the screen as one of Kerry's sandals hit the floor beside his bed. She then swung her leg across James' waist and moved forward so that her long black hair dangled in his face.

'Knew you couldn't resist me for long,' James grinned.

'There's a cop right outside the door,' Kerry said. 'So you're only getting a snog.'

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