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Deadly Game

Written by Matt Johnson

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Deadly Game

Matt Johnson



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Prologue

1999. Romania

The wind can kill.

Relia Stanga recalled her father's words clearly as she huddled against the stone garden wall for shelter.

Winter was around the corner. The east wind was beginning to turn cold. Soon, she would need to take a chance and wait inside the house for the factory bus to arrive. In a few short weeks the winds from the east would bring snow and then, as Father had warned, it would be certain death to wait in the street for the six o'clock pick-up.

One day, she prayed, summers would no longer be spent cutting and gathering wood to see them through to the following spring. One day, there would be food on the table every single day and she would not have to rely on mother for hand-me-down clothes.

One day ... with luck, she would find a new life.

For now, Relia contented herself with wrapping her mother's woollen coat tight around her slim figure, lifting the collar and making herself as small and as tight as possible.

The wall provided the only protection from where she could see the approach of the bus. Miss the bus, no ride. Miss the ride, no job. Miss the job, go hungry.

Home for Relia was a small village on the north-east edge of Romania, near the border with Moldova. She was now seventeen and had spent the previous day with the men, cutting logs. Huge piles were now stacked in the village stores and in shelters people had built in the yards at the rear of their houses. Most of the harvest had been sold. Father and her brother had left at first light to deliver the last of the summer maize crop. With the income, they would buy salted meats that would be eaten once a week with potatoes and root soup.

On their return from the market, the men would be drunk. It was their release. They would meet friends, gossip, moan about the harvest,

play cards and drink. Sorrows would be drowned with home-distilled *țuică*. Relia's father made his own from a family recipe using apples and plums. The women said it was the work of the devil, for the rage it sometimes brought out in the men.

Father was a hard-working man, a good man. But the drink would release his pent-up frustrations and anger. Mother would always bear the brunt of his wrath. The children just kept out of the way. This was the way of men; they had to vent their rage, and using the women stopped them from killing each other. This was the way of things, as it always had been.

But now, Relia had a plan.

Every month or so, the factory would host men from the city. Men from Brasov and Bucharest. Men who wore suits, drove Mercedes cars and talked of incredible adventures.

A friend who was a house servant to the wife of the factory owner told her the men came looking for girls. Relia could barely contain her excitement on learning these girls secured work in places in the city, in kitchens or waiting on tables. They had jobs, proper jobs, and they made enough money to keep some for themselves and send the rest home for their families.

The men would choose the best-looking girls. To each they would give a small, yellow ticket. It was their approval to ride in the warm van on its way to the city – their passport to a better life. The men were due today.

Beneath her worn clothing, Relia was possessed of unusual beauty, and yet they had not noticed her. She was determined that would change. She was slim, pale skinned, and was blessed with shiny, raven-black hair that a woman in the village had recently cut into a neat bob. She had bought a little make-up, and her friend, the servant, had loaned her a dress that would show off her figure. The next time the men came to the factory, Relia was to help serve their drinks.

The bus arrived. It was late, as always, and, as he always did, the driver drove fast to get the workers to the factory by seven o'clock. Relia snoozed on the journey. She didn't mind the potholes, the tight bends,

the heavy braking or the driver swearing. The bus was warm. For nearly forty minutes she could drift into a world where there was no cold, no hunger.

When they arrived at the factory gates, Relia looked across to the owner's house. On the drive she saw his car – a big four-wheel drive. Then she saw the Mercedes, a black one, and behind it, a black van. The city men had arrived.

She checked her pocket, fearing she may have forgotten the powder and lipstick. It was there. As the factory gate opened, she saw her friend. There was a smile, then a wink. Today was the day. Today she was to have her chance.



The day on the factory line passed slowly. Relia was a glue mixer. The factory made shoes. Leather imported from Mongolia was cut, shaped and stitched together by hand. Relia helped make the adhesive that would bind the upper parts of the shoe to the sole. It was easy work. Day after day she simply poured ingredients into containers in the prescribed measures and mixed them for the correct amount of time and at the right temperature. It was the heat of the glue room that made the job sought after in the winter and hated in the summer.

Due to the constituents of the glue, all the workers in the glue section smelled of fish, a fact that earned them the nickname *pesti*. Relia knew that as soon as she finished, she would have to sneak over to the owner's house, use her friend's bath and clean herself. Only then would she be ready to serve the city men and, hopefully, her freshly scrubbed skin and hair would be perfumed well enough to mask the fishy smell.

During the day, four girls were interviewed by the city men. Three of them were selected for employment, given their tickets and instructed to send messages to their families that they would not be home that night. In fact, they might never be home again. With one exception, Relia could not recall selected girls having ever returned to the villages. Who could blame them? With a new life in the city, money in their

purses and, probably, husbands, there was no reason to come back to such a lowly life. Some would write, many would send small amounts of money, but none came back to the poverty of the villages.

The one that had returned had been the wife of one of the city men. She had spoken of having made her fortune, of the bright lights and excitement of the city, of girls marrying American soldiers and of the opportunities available to those willing to leave the villages. As she spoke, she held the young factory girls spellbound. The older women weren't convinced. 'If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is,' they would mutter. But the young women wanted their chance and it was them the city men came to see.



That evening, Relia avoided the queue for the homeward-bound bus and crept slowly around the back of the factory. Here, she knew she could find the gate to the owner's house. It was locked, as always. The owners thought all the workers were thieves.

At the arranged time, six o'clock, her friend Elisabeta was waiting.

Elisabeta unlocked the gate from the inside and the two girls then scurried along the concrete path towards the house. In the half-light from the windows of the house she could see the garden was green and luxurious, nothing like the sun-parched yards of the village. It was the first time she had seen behind the high walls into this secret place. Only the owners and selected house staff were allowed such a privilege. Relia had heard the stories and now, with her own eyes, she could see it was as beautiful as they said. To one side there was even a swing and a fountain.

Relia paused for a moment to stare. It was just like she had seen in the well-thumbed magazines that sometimes appeared in the factory for the workers to look at during their breaks.

Voices came from the house – male voices – laughter.

'Hurry,' her friend whispered. 'We mustn't be seen here.'

Relia understood. If they were caught, it would be assumed they

were stealing. They would be dismissed if they were lucky, jailed if the owner called the police. The *politia locale* were good men, in the main, but they would always believe a respected factory owner over a poor village girl.

Elisabeta stopped as they reached the small door that led to the servants' quarters. She pressed a single finger to her lips then gently opened the door.

The first thing that struck Relia was the heat. Even in this part of the house, it was warm and comfortable. In the village they could only afford to heat one room. Here, there were radiators in all the rooms, and even in the corridors.

That evening, Relia enjoyed the longest, hottest bath she had ever experienced. She scrubbed her hands, her feet, her face, all the while sniffing herself to check the smell of fish was fading. She washed her hair four times before she was satisfied the aroma was gone.

Elisabeta sprayed her sparingly with a body perfume. Relia would have liked a little more but her friend was insistent. The owner's wife gave it to all the female staff so they wouldn't carry their body odours into the main rooms. There was one spray-can each per month, and they were expected to make it last.

When Relia saw the dress Elisabeta had prepared for her, she nearly wept. It was thin, silk-like and hugged her figure. Although blue, it was such a dark shade as to almost appear black. The design was sleeveless and reminded Relia of pictures she had seen of film stars like Marilyn Monroe. It was sexy.

The dress was a colour all the household staff wore to serve dinner. But for Relia it had a different purpose. Skin tight, it emphasised her curves and suggested hidden treasures. On this night, it was to lure the city men.

At eight o'clock, the head girl sounded the brass gong in the hallway to signal dinner was prepared. Elisabeta served at table and had arranged that Relia would support her. The girl who normally filled that role had agreed to hide in her room for the evening. Elisabeta was sure her absence would not be noticed, especially when the men saw Relia.

The plan worked. The men fell silent the moment they set eyes on the new girl in the dark-blue dress. Smiling, the owner asked who she was, and while Elisabeta explained, the oldest of the city men beckoned Relia closer. . When the owner had grunted his approval, the old man immediately asked Relia if she would take up a chance to be his personal assistant in Brasov.

Relia nodded and then backed away as the men negotiated a price to secure her services. She heard the figure of two thousand lei being argued over, before the owner and the elder city man shook hands. The deal was done. There was much laughter and the men returned to eating and drinking.

That evening, as the chosen girls waited for the city men's van to be made ready, they wrote letters to their families. The factory owner's wife had suggested it, and even helped them with the wording.

'Are you excited?' one of the girls asked Relia, as the owner's wife collected their envelopes and left the room.

But Relia didn't answer. The owner's wife had left the door ajar and, through the gap, Relia could now see her dropping the little stack of letters into one of the sacks they used for rubbish in the factory.

'Relia?' asked her companion, a tiny frown knitting her brow.

Relia shook herself and smiled, but a gnawing sense of worry remained.

'Yes,' she replied. Then, trying to sound more certain: 'Yes, I can't wait.'

Chapter 1

*Metropolitan Police Headquarters, New Scotland
Yard, Central London, October 2001*

Dawn was breaking over the capital.

Grahamslaw watched the circle of moisture form on the glass. It was early and, despite the double glazing, the cold autumn air had penetrated to the inner surface. His warm breath created a small, clouded patch that grew with every successive exhalation.

Twelve floors down, traffic was starting to build up into unbroken lines. Most were delivery vehicles that, by now, would have completed their allotted tasks and were heading back to their depots. There were one or two private cars, but not many, and very few of those drivers would be heading to the underground car park below the building in which he stood. That was almost exclusively reserved for operational transport and the few luxury cars the Met retained for the exclusive use of the most senior ranks. From the black, box-like shapes discharging heavy grey exhaust fumes, it looked to the anti-terrorist detective like most of the snaking, weaving lines were formed by taxis.

The Anti-Terrorist Commander checked his watch. Ten past six. Toni Fellowes was late, but that wasn't a real cause for concern. Provided the MIS officer turned up within the next twenty minutes he would have plenty of time to get to his next meeting. For now, he was determined to enjoy what were probably the only moments of tranquillity he would experience that day.

A noise from the corridor caused him to turn towards the door. Squad members were starting to arrive for work. The skeleton night team would be pleased to see the first arrivals. A quick handover briefing and they would be on their way to their homes and some welcome sleep.

Turning towards the desk – a large, oak affair that had followed him up the ranks and through a plethora of different offices – he cast an eye

over the report that lay waiting to be read by Ms Fellowes. Time for one last check through. Swinging his large chair around, he sat and began to read.

Metropolitan Police

To: Director T Dept, MI5

From: Commander SO13, Anti-Terrorist Squad

Cc. Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner 'SO'

Date: 29th September 2001

Re: Operation Hastings – Executive Summary

Sir,

This interim report deals with the recent attacks on serving police officers in London, their aftermath and the conclusions I have reached through my investigations.

In recent weeks, four Metropolitan police officers and one MI5 officer were killed on duty as a result of terrorist action.

These were:

1. Inspector Robert Bridges (attached Marylebone Police Station)
2. PC John Evans (attached Hackney Police Station)
3. PC Roderick Skinner (attached Barkingside Police Station)
4. PC Giles Duncan (attached Marylebone Police Station)
5. Nial Monaghan, MI5

Inspector Bridges and PC Duncan were killed as a result of an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by suspects 1, 3 and 4 listed below. PC Skinner was shot dead outside his home address by suspects 1 and 3. PC Evans was shot by suspect 2 during a street check of a suspect vehicle, which, it transpired, was carrying equipment and material intended for use in terror attacks in the capital. Suspect 2 was shot and killed by the armed response crew that responded to this incident.

Attempts were also made by suspects 1 and 3 to murder Inspectors

David Heathcote and Robert Finlay, Sergeant Michael Holbrook (all attached Stoke Newington) and PC Kevin Jones (attached Hornchurch).

Results of investigation – summary

Investigations carried out by SO13 determined these murders and attempts were not the result of random attacks on uniformed police officers doing their duty. Early on in the enquiry it was established that Inspectors Bridges and Finlay, and PCs Skinner and Jones all formerly served in the army together as members of 22 Special Air Service Regiment (SAS).

During the course of the attacks, SO13 were able to identify five suspects:

1. Declan Costello, born Ireland, now deceased
2. Seamus McGlinty, born Ireland, now deceased
3. Dominic McGlinty, born Ireland, now in custody and remanded at HMP Belmarsh
4. Michael Hewitson, born Kentish Town, now in custody and remanded at HMP Belmarsh
5. Richard Webb, alias Selahattin Yildirim, born Ireland, now deceased

Enquiries have now established that, following attacks on Inspector Bridges and PC Skinner, an approach was made by MI5 officer, Nial Monaghan, to involve Inspector Finlay and PC Jones in a plan to intercept and terminate the attacks on other former soldiers.

Monaghan was known to both Finlay and Jones as their former Commanding Officer at the time these officers were all serving in the SAS in the 1980s. Finlay and Jones were persuaded to assist Monaghan in what they believed to be an attempt to identify those responsible for murdering their former military colleagues and to prevent further murders.

The activities of the suspects and the resulting incidents can be summarised as follows:

1. Street search of lorry by police patrol car led to the unplanned shooting of PC Evans.
 2. Planned IED attack targeted and killed Inspector Bridges, with the collateral death of PC Duncan.
 3. Planned shooting of PC Skinner.
 4. IED attack on a car due to be carrying Inspector Finlay resulted in serious injury to Inspector Heathcote and Sgt Holbrook.
 5. IED car bomb attack at home of Inspector Finlay caused injury to Explosives Ordnance Disposal Officer, Rupert Reid.
- And following the approach made by Mr Monaghan to Finlay and Jones and their involvement in his plan:
6. Shooting attempt on the life of PC Jones, resulting in serious injury to the officer and the death of Declan Costello.
 7. Attempt on the life of Inspector Finlay, together with his wife, resulting in the death of Richard Webb.
 8. IED car explosion causing the death of Nial Monaghan.

Result of subsequent enquiries

In attempting to establish a motive for these attacks, several lines of enquiry were pursued, including surveillance of officers Finlay and Jones. It was established that these two officers were making their own efforts to identify the terrorists and were likely to be in possession of relevant information as to motive.

It was further established that Finlay and Jones had secured access to unlawfully held firearms, explosives and equipment in order to pursue their efforts.

With the authority of the Home Secretary, a decision was made to allow Finlay and Jones to continue, under surveillance, in the hope they would lead the enquiry team to the attackers and enable arrests to be made.

Motive

In 1980, while serving with the SAS in Northern Ireland, Robert Finlay was attacked by four armed men. In the resulting firefight, Finlay killed three men, one of whom was the brother of Richard Webb.

It has now been established, beyond reasonable doubt, that the reason for the attack on Inspector Finlay was a result of a personal sense of grievance and a desire for revenge on the part of Richard Webb.

Correspondence found in the possession of Nial Monaghan reveals the attacks on the other former SAS soldiers appear to be due to a desire on Monaghan's part for revenge, he having formed the belief his wife committed suicide following the revelation of affairs with men serving under Monaghan's command. Our evidence is that Monaghan and Webb were co-operating on this murderous campaign.

There appears to have been no separate motive in the murders of PCs Evans and Duncan, who appear to have been killed because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Since the deaths of both Monaghan and Webb, the attacks have ceased. This tends to corroborate the preceding evaluation.

In conclusion

Dominic McGlinty and Michael Hewitson are awaiting trial on charges of conspiracy to murder and to cause explosions.

Following the decision of the Home Secretary to allow Finlay and Jones to operate in an armed unsupervised role, a report was submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service as to whether either officer should be charged with any offence. The decision was made (with Home Secretary and DPP authority) that no criminal action would be taken against either officer.

Inspector Finlay, together with his family, is currently being provided with secure accommodation by MI5 and is expected to return to work soon.

PC Jones has made a good recovery from his injury, has declined the offer of secure accommodation and is also expected to return to full police duties in the near future.

Media interest

While some speculation has appeared in the press with regards to the attacks on Metropolitan officers, no mention has been made or theory attributed to the involvement of former armed services personnel.

The Metropolitan Police Press Bureau has ensured all arrests resulting from this operation have been credited to police enquiries. Deaths of suspects have been attributed to self-inflicted injuries (Webb) and lawful police action.

Full report

My understanding is that Director 'T' has tasked MI5 officer Antonia Fellowes to act as support officer to the Finlay family and PC Jones and to complete a final confidential report to the Home Secretary on the activities of Monaghan and Webb.

Respectfully submitted,

William Grahamslaw
Commander, SO13
Anti-Terrorist Squad
Specialist Operations Directorate
New Scotland Yard

Chapter 2

Just as Grahamslaw reached for his pen to sign the report he sensed he had company.

He looked up and saw Toni Fellowes standing in the doorway. 'May I join you?' she asked.

Without speaking, the Commander indicated his visitor should use