

# 1. BRIGANDS

*Violent altercations at the biker music festival known as the Rebel Tea Party in August 2008 led to a 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.

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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 to 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’s 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.

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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 as 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 last 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. ‘Why 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’s 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 as 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 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 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. A 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'd 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.

'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 on 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 of 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 big fellow like you, but packs enough punch to cut through thirty layers of Kevlar and kill a room filled 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 is 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 crime 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 in 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.