



Crossed
MOVING TARGET

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About the Book

Former Special Reconnaissance Regiment Sergeant Nick Kane always stands by his friends.

So when an old comrade is leaned on by gangsters, Nick's only too happy to help. But Nick quickly finds himself cast headlong into a spiral of violence that will take him all the way to Mexico, searching for justice on the mean streets of Juarez - the most violent city on Earth.

His mission: Kidnap the head of the vicious La Frontera drugs cartel and get him back to the UK to face trial for murder.

All that's standing in his way is the cartel's four thousand trained soldiers, a corrupt army and police force and a former South African special forces colonel who has been paid to track him down. It will take all Nick's skill and courage to bring his man in.

Moving Target is the gripping new thriller from Ross Kemp.

About the Author

Born in Essex in 1964, Ross Kemp worked for the BBC for ten years and ITV for four years as an actor. He then had a change of career and started making documentaries. He has subsequently been nominated for three BAFTAS for his series on Afghanistan, gangs and Africa. He and his team won the BAFTA for best factual series in 2006. He is a patron of Help for Heroes and has spent time on the front line in Afghanistan with 1 Royal Anglian, 5 Scots, 16 Air Assault and 45 Commando.

Also by Ross Kemp

Devil to Pay

Warriors: British Fighting Heroes

Gangs

Gangs II

Ross Kemp on Afghanistan

Ganglands: Brazil

Pirates

Ganglands: Russia

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arrow books

No one knows who they are selling drugs for, who they are killing, or for which cartel.

Antonio Brijones, former member of the Juarez Calle Jon
gang, Mexico

The crackdown against cross-border traffic [between Mexico and the US] [is] forcing Mexican cartels to shift their attentions and potentially their operations, and focus more closely on Europe.

Ed Vulliamy, *Amexica: War Along the Borderline*, 2010,
quoting Eduardo Medina Mora, Mexican Attorney General

Chapter 1

'NICK. IT'S ANDY here. Andy Lyons.'

I know something's up straight away - I can hear the tension in his voice. I haven't heard from Andy in ten years. He was a raw squaddie of seventeen when I was doing my last couple of years in the Royal Anglian Regiment. I sort of took him under my wing. He was an Essex boy like me, came from a pretty rough background, and last time I saw him we were both still in the army.

I might have kept in contact more, but a life in special forces, particularly a regiment as secretive as 14 Company - 'the Det' to friends - doesn't really encourage you to keep up with old acquaintances. Too many questions, really. Andy knows nothing about that side of my life, or at least I thought he didn't.

'Andy. Good to hear from you. How did you get my number?'

'Your wife gave it to me. I got hold of her through Facebook.'

'How did you find her on that?' I always told my ex-wife Rachel never to use our married name in anything she did.

'Friends of friends. I just asked if anyone knew where you'd gone and someone had her contact. Look, I'm in a spot of bother.'

Andy was always the king of understatement, and I've already guessed he isn't calling me up because he couldn't find a golf partner.

'Yeah?'

'Yeah. Look, can we have a chat?'

'What's on your mind?'

'I'd rather talk face to face if that's OK.'

In the background I can hear a kid's voice - sounds like a little girl - asking him who he's talking to.

'Give me five minutes, precious,' he says.

'More kids?'

'Four now.'

'You only had one when I last saw you. How old is she now?'

'Sixteen.'

'Christ. That went quick.'

'Yeah. Look, can I come down and see you?'

'Sounds like you've got your hands full. I'll come up and see you.'

'No, don't do that. I don't want to trouble you.'

'You won't be troubling me. I'll be troubling you for a few beers and a curry, as well as a bed for the night.'

'That'd be great, mate, no problem.'

Truth is that I feel like a bit of a break. It's early November, wet and grey, and I've spent a hard summer working out of Southampton on a little sailing boat - corporate trips, stag nights, hen nights if I'm lucky. And though I like the work, there's only so much fascination to be had from watching Derek from Sales failing to grasp what you've told him for the nineteenth time. I'm missing the company of my old soldier mates.

I drive up from Southampton in my knackered old Mondeo. I'd like a nicer car, but it's a lifestyle choice really. I love sailing, so I do something interesting that I get paid peanuts for, thereby being forced to drive a fourth-hand car. For me that's better than being paid more but being stuck indoors.

Andy has moved up in the world - a big modern house to the north of Cambridge on a new estate, double garage,

four bedrooms, smart car on the drive. Very nice - apart from BT tearing up the street as I arrive.

He meets me at the door. Some people change a little over the years, some a lot. Andy's changed a lot. He's gone completely grey since the last time I saw him, and his face is showing the wear of his forty-a-day habit. He doesn't look fit any more either - belly on him, and an extra chin.

'Come in,' he says, above the sound of a pneumatic drill.

'Are we going to be able to talk with that banging away?'

'Sod's law,' he says. 'They dug a hole a week ago, left it and now they've started again.'

As he speaks, the drill stops.

'Knew it couldn't last long,' he says. 'I bet that hole's still there in thirty years' time. Look on the bright side, though: they'll be able to bury me in it.'

He laughs and so do I. We go in. It's a nice set-up: a clean, modern room with a big basket of toys at one end, a deep pale carpet - which is brave with a six-year-old in the house - one of those big corner sofa units in deep brown. We talk some crap for a while, crack a couple of beers. As he drinks, I can see that his hands are shaking.

'What's up?'

'It's my job. I work for the Borders Agency at Cambridge Airport. I'm the operations director there.'

'Congratulations.'

'Yeah. Thanks. Only, well, I ... I got given this the other day.'

He goes out of the room for a bit and comes back with what used to be called an attaché case - combination-number job. He puts it on the dining table and clicks it open. I've been in enough sting operations to be quite good at evaluating amounts of cash. I'd say there was about fifty grand in fifty-pound notes in there.

Then he takes something out of his pocket and puts that on the table. It's a bullet - a 7.62 rifle cartridge. If the

world has a favourite bullet, that's it. It's what an AK-47 takes. You don't often see them in England.

'Who gave you them?'

'Some new bloke at work. Me and a few of the boys go for a drink on a Friday night at a pub near the airport. I only ever have a pint and then walk home over the common. That's when this geezer comes up to me, Spanish I reckon and sticks that case in my hand. Says I've got a new employer.'

'What did you say?'

'I told him to fuck off. Then he opens his coat and shows me a gun.'

'What sort of gun?'

He's toying with his bottle of Beck's, rolling it around in his hands. I've never seen him so nervous.

'Snub-nosed revolver of some sort. To be honest, I was a bit too panicked to really concentrate.'

That's potentially bad news. The .38 is what I might carry if I wanted to hit someone. Light, small, five shots, doesn't jam. Most British gangsters don't have the contacts to get something like that and arse around with converted starting pistols. So we know this guy is serious. Or at least, he's got a serious gun.

'So you reported it straight away?'

Andy looks at the floor.

'No.'

'Why not?'

'He said, "Say hello to Shelley and the kids for me."''

'When did this happen?'

'Two days ago.'

'Anything else?'

'I got a call on my mobile. Flight A231 from Valladolid on Friday will have its cargo sent through without inspection.'

Well, there'll be nothing in that cargo, that's for sure. Whoever's doing this will want to make certain Andy is on side before risking any valuable merchandise.

'You should inform your bosses,' I say.

Andy's eyes go to the bullet.

'It's a game-changer, Andy. You're thinking about this all wrong. You're thinking, "How do I hang on to this lovely life I've worked out for myself here?" Answer is that you don't. This is going to need police protection, real investigation and these guys inside before you'll be safe. Your job at Cambridge is over - at least for the meanwhile - and you'll have to go somewhere else. You've got a choice. Prison,' I tap the money, 'the local crem,' I tap the bullet, 'or you get protection, get moved in your job and start again somewhere else. Best case, they're a bunch of plastic gangsters chancing their arm, they get nicked, it's all over.'

'Do plastic gangsters have fifty K to throw at people?'

I don't bother answering his question, because he knows what the truth is. Of course they don't. They'd come in with just the threat, I'm sure. So what is the truth? Who knows?

'You need the police. Just by having me here you've made your decision. If they know about Shelley, they might have some sort of bug in the house, have you under surveillance.' Paranoid? Maybe, but I'd rather be paranoid and alive than chilled out and dead.

'I hadn't thought about a bug. Jesus.'

'As soon as you tell your boss, you're useless to them. Completely useless. So then they've got to come after you out of revenge. Which they could do but it doesn't make good business, does it? They've already staked fifty grand on you. Why would they want to risk prison by killing someone for no profit?'

'I hope they're listening to that,' says Andy.

We both laugh a bit.

'Why did you call me, Andy?'

'We always got on. I was trying to think of someone who might be able to advise me, and you were the only bloke I thought might have a clue. You always seemed to know what you were doing when we were in the Battalion.'

'That it?'

'I know you did some stuff after.'

'How do you know that?'

'I saw you. I was on foot patrol in Northern Ireland and I saw you sitting in a car. I guessed, you know, you weren't there on your holidays.'

I'd told my commanding officer it wasn't a good idea deploying me at the same time as my old regiment. He'd told me to shut up and do my job. Seems I was right to consider it a risk.

'Let's go for a drive,' I say, passing him my phone.

We leave the house and get into my car. I've had half a can of beer and normally wouldn't like to drive - particularly in these circumstances. You'd be amazed how much even that amount can affect you. It might not matter too much if you're just bimbly down the shops, but if you're called upon to do something a bit more demanding, it can make a difference.

Still, the advantage of the car is that, if we are under surveillance, it's much harder for anyone to listen to what we're saying. I'm not anticipating having to get lively behind the wheel, but you never know.

I start to drive into Cambridge. I check the mirror. No one following straight away.

'Call your boss,' I say. 'Your wife's gone away with the kids?'

'Yeah.'

'They're going to need protection too. I'll lose any tail and then I'll drive to whatever cop shop we need to go to.'

Andy looks white as a sheet, but he makes a call to his supervisor. Luckily this is the sort of thing the Border Agency plan for and he has an idea of what to do. We're to meet him at a hotel in central Cambridge and he'll have the cops with him. Andy gives him the address of his wife and kids, which is reassuringly up in Cumbria at her mum's.

We pull in to the University Arms hotel – a big, imposing Victorian building with a weird modern basement car park stuck on the front – and I’m immediately relieved to see a man Andy appears to know in the foyer. It’s his boss, a man called Philip Patterson. He wants to know who I am, and Andy explains that I’m a mate of his who he’s asked to come over and look after him until he gets to the police.

‘Well you can go now,’ says Patterson. ‘We’ve got a room upstairs to interview Andy, and there are two armed coppers here.’ He nods to a couple of blokes behind him who are leafing through some flyers on the reception desk, trying to look inconspicuous.

‘Thanks,’ says Andy.

‘Sure,’ I say. I shake his hand. ‘You’ve done the right thing, mate.’

‘Where are you going to stay?’

‘I haven’t really thought about it.’ I’d sort of assumed I’d crash at his house, but clearly that’s off the agenda now.

‘Look, let me put you up here, it’s the least I can do.’

I tell him I’ll be all right at a service station hotel, but he insists on checking me in.

‘Well, cheers,’ I say.

‘Yeah, we’ll meet up for a beer when this is all over. And here, I owe you your petrol as well.’ He takes out his wallet.

‘Forget it. Just stay safe.’

‘I will.’ We briefly embrace. As I turn towards the car park to collect my bag from the car, I have no idea that that’s the last time I’ll see Andy alive.

Chapter 2

CAMBRIDGE IS A nice town. The day is bright blue, cold and lovely, and I think that I'll have a look around the place. To be honest, I've always fancied a go on one of those punts, but it's not the sort of thing you do on your own. I walk around for a bit, marvelling at the architecture of the university. Some of this stuff goes back to the fourteenth century. The city's like something out of a film - one of those ones about an England you don't think exists if you come from a council estate in Southend: tall spires everywhere, girls with scarves flying behind them riding bikes with baskets on, loads of public schoolboys - a few of whom will doubtless end up as army officers within not too long a time.

I'm thinking about Andy and hoping he's going to be OK. Well, I know he's going to be OK now, because he's in police protection. Who's behind this? Whoever it is has got some nuts and doesn't mind taking a fifty-thousand-pound punt. Really, it doesn't make sense. I know drug dealers sometimes use this tactic in South America and South Africa, even in the States. But it depends on a corrupt system. This is why it works in places like Colombia and Mexico, where - let's be honest - corruption among the police has got to be widespread. If you can't rely on the police to protect you, then the choice between cash and a bullet - the silver or the lead, they call it - becomes pretty unavoidable. Here, though, while police corruption isn't unheard of, it is rare. And they're not going to stand by

while some drug dealer murders you and your family. Or worse, as is the case in some parts of the world, do it themselves. So, like I say, it doesn't make sense. The drug dealers would need more clout to be able to make their threats real.

I decide to sit down and have a cigarette at a big pub near the river, a swift coffee under the patio heaters of its concrete plaza before the drive back to Southampton. It does make me laugh when I consider that in a city of lovely little old boozers, all nooks and crannies, real ale and history, I've picked the only one that looks like an Essex supermarket, but hey, you go with what you know.

I draw in the smoke and start to think. Maybe I'm jumping to conclusions in thinking it's drugs. Andy said it was a Spanish bloke who approached him. I know there's an awful lot of drug money there, and it's a favoured point of access to Europe for the South American drug gangs. It helps if you share a language with the people you're dealing with. You also understand them culturally a bit better, know how they're going to react if you squeeze them in certain ways. Terrorism's caught up in narco money, so I do know a bit about this. The 500-euro note - the money launderer's friend, because large amounts of cash can be shifted about using relatively few notes - crops up more in Spain than it does anywhere else in Europe. Like, seriously more. A quarter of all bills in circulation are in Spain - far more than you'd expect. On the positive side, they're useful to the police because they use them to track money laundering.

All this is in my head when I notice a flash of sunlight from up on the bridge. I don't think anything of it, but it takes my eye. It's then that I notice a person with a camera turning away slightly and realise that he's got a big zoom lens on it. Now, I have spent long enough doing surveillance and long enough in the holiday business to know the difference between the cameras you need for

each. In the Det - and the Special Reconnaissance Regiment, as it became - we had extensive training in photography. So I know you don't need a 500mm telephoto lens when you're out and about snapping the architecture - not unless you're doing some serious detail. I watch as he pans around. The camera pauses on the balcony of the restaurant across the road, then moves to the street that leads up to the bridge before lingering on me. He's using completely the wrong lens for the job he seems to be doing - taking photos of street scenes. Now, if this bloke was directing his camera up at some gargoyle on one of the churches, I'd regard it as completely normal to be using a lens like that. However, he isn't. He's pointing it at me sitting outside a pub that looks like a 1980s Sainsbury's. So why would you want a photo of an ex-squaddie smoking in front of a pig's ear of a building when you can go and snap some fit student bird outside a five-hundred-year-old architectural masterpiece? I know this sort of slice-of-life stuff appeals to some art students, but there's got to be a limit, hasn't there?

Am I paranoid? Maybe. He could just be a bad photographer with more money than sense to spend on flashy lenses. But it won't hurt to go and have a quiet word with him.

I get up and walk towards the bridge, pausing a moment as if looking out over the water. From the corner of my eye I see him starting to walk away. He's wearing boating shoes, blue jeans, a red checked shirt, one of those padded gilets and a Ferrari baseball cap. He's around thirty-three, six foot one, dark hair, pale complexion. He's carrying a big blue camera bag over his shoulder, so, as I suspected, he has a few more lenses to choose from.

I walk along after him, not too quick at first, but before long he starts to run.

Seems the pretence is over. The thing is, he's got a big bag weighing him down and a camera round his neck. He

runs about two hundred yards up the street of half-timbered houses and shops till he reaches a main road which is temporarily too busy to cross. That's when I catch up with him. Whoever this bloke is, he isn't a major-league drug gangster. He looks about fit to faint.

He turns sharply left and runs down the main road towards a traffic island. There are some big gates to a park there. This is ideal. We can find a shady nook and have a little chat.

I catch up with him and take him by the elbow.

'Do you know who I am?'

'No.'

'Well, if you don't want to find out, I suggest you come with me.'

'I don't know anything about this.' His voice is not as middle class as his look.

'About what?'

He starts to stammer and I walk him into the park. There's a bench and I tell him to sit on it.

'You've got no right to question me.'

'And you've got no right to photograph me and I've got no right to ram that camera up your arse. I should sit down if I were you.' He catches my look that tells him he'd better do as I say for his own good.

He sits down.

'Who are you?'

'Kevin.'

'Kevin what?'

'Kevin Barstow.'

'And why's a nice boy like you taking photos of a nasty man like me?'

'I wasn't, I ...'

I take the camera off his neck, turn it on and scroll through the memory. There's photos of me at the pub, and also some of me and Andy going into the hotel the night

before. Really disturbingly, there are about ten of Andy picking his kids up from school.

'You want to explain?'

'There's nothing *to* explain.'

'I'm losing my patience here, Kevin.'

He swallows hard. 'I'm a private investigator. I've been hired to follow that man who was with you last night and build up a picture of who he is and where he goes. The ones by the school are old photos. I just haven't deleted them.'

'You've sent these off to someone?'

'Yeah.'

'Who?'

'I can't say, client confidentiality.'

'Believe me, Kev, you can say and you will.'

'I don't know. I was given a payment and an email address to send them to, that's all.'

'So you don't know who you're working for?'

'No. I—'

'Yeah?' I don't let him finish. This idiot hasn't bothered to check out his client, meaning he's aided and abetted intimidation at the very least, potentially far worse.

'If you hurt me, I'll go straight to the police,' says Kevin.

'No you won't,' I say. 'I will.' I take out my phone and dial Andy's number. No reply.

I don't really know what else to do, so I call 999, explain that I've detained someone who might pertain to an important investigation. Ten minutes later a police car pulls up, and there's a bit of arguing because the cops haven't heard about the threat to Andy.

Still, they listen to what I have to say, look at the photos and try to check out my story. Eventually they manage to get through to CID, who confirm what I say. They nick the private eye and ask me to attend the station to make a statement, which they say might take a while because

they'll have to decide who's going to interview me and who I'm going to make my statement to.

You would imagine that there's lots of inter-agency co-operation between the Border Agency and the police, the police and the intelligence services, the intelligence services and the army. Sometimes there is and it works well. Other times, particularly at the start of an investigation, the channels of communication aren't there.

I expect it's going to take a bit of time to sort all this out, so I relax. To be honest, I'm feeling good that I've provided the cops with something to go on. The thing I'm worrying about most is whether the hotel are going to charge me for overstaying my parking permit.

The private eye is taken down to a cell and I'm left to mooch about drinking coffee by the custody desk, watching the various lowlifes being brought in, processed and released. I've been there about five hours and have virtually read the print off the posters on the wall when there's a big buzz and lots of cops running about. Some sort of emergency. No one tells me anything, though. All that happens is that I'm moved out of the main area into a blank little interview room where the only entertainment is counting the wiggles on the polystyrene tiles on the ceiling. I've been there another couple of hours when a big plain-clothes copper comes in.

'Mr Kane?'

'Yeah.'

'Detective Inspector Peters.'

Behind him are three other blokes - also plain-clothes coppers as it turns out. They introduce themselves. Peters is Cambridgeshire CID, there's a Brightson from the Border Agency, a Philips from SOCA - the Serious Organised Crime Agency - and a Davies from the Met CID.

This is the first time that I get an inkling something's up.

'Can you describe your relationship with Mr Lyons?'

says Peters.

'We're old army friends.'

'And you happened to be visiting?'

'No, he called me up and asked me for advice, so I came up to see him.'

'What sort of advice?'

'He said he'd been threatened at work.'

'And what did you advise him.'

'To report the matter immediately. What's happened?'

He ignores my question. 'Are you aware of Mr Lyons being caught up in any criminal activity?'

'Depends what you mean by caught up. I'd say someone threatening your life unless you accept a bribe is fairly caught up.'

'He hadn't, to your knowledge, had any involvement with organised crime before?'

'No. I'd be very surprised if he had.'

Peters nods.

He then has me run through my entire association with Andy, my whole military career. He gets the hump when I tell him there's lots I can't discuss, but there's no way round that. I've signed the Official Secrets Act and I'd be breaking the law by telling him.

The 'This is Your Life' interview goes on for about an hour before Peters sits up straight and says:

'You need to know that Andy Lyons was killed at about six thirty this evening.'

I'm reeling, shocked. 'How? He was under your protection!'

'The policemen protecting him were killed too. We're still establishing the details, but there was some sort of explosion.'

I can hardly speak. No one has ever used that sort of method in England in anger. An explosion is bold; it might even suggest some sort of military connection.

'I told him he'd be all right,' I say. 'I mean, there's no point in killing him once he's gone to the police, is there?'

The logic doesn't add up.'

'No,' says Peters, 'it doesn't. Which is why we were hoping you might shed some light on the matter.'

'I've brought you the private detective,' I say. 'Beyond that I can't help. Did you find any listening devices in his house?' Jesus, poor Andy.

'No.'

'Did you look?'

'Yes. Or, rather, we were looking when it was attacked.'

'Is there CCTV on that estate?'

'No, but we'll check the neighbours. People sometimes have it for home security, and you never know what you can pick up.'

'More than check them,' I say. 'If there's no bug in the house, then he might have been watched from across the street. If there's an empty house there, that might be it.'

Suddenly it hits me.

'BT were digging up the street when I arrived. He said they'd done nothing on it for a week. You should check that out and make sure it really was them.'

'We'll do that.'

'Have you moved his wife and kids?'

'Yes. Look, I'm sorry, it's about assessing the nature of the threat. Normally an armed policeman on the premises is enough to deter people. Moving him to a safe house seemed a little over the top.'

I can't argue. If I'd been assessing him as a close protection subject I might have moved him, but I might not. There was no history to suggest the response was going to be this violent.

Almost without thinking, I say what's on my mind.

'This is something new, isn't it?'

'Yeah,' says Peters. 'I think it is.'

Chapter 3

IT DOESN'T OCCUR to me that I might become a target myself. I was an old friend of Andy's but my association with him wasn't a strong one. I've hung around in Cambridge because the cops asked me to stay for a few days and because I want time to think, free of distraction.

It must be habit that makes me move to a motorway service station hotel at Birchanger Green. It's cheap and it allows me to nip down and see a few mates in Essex, but - although I don't think about it at the time - it also makes me quite difficult to get to. Motorways are full of CCTV, as are service stations. It would be hard for someone to come for me there without getting caught on camera.

As it is, I don't much feel like catching up with old friends and need something to take my mind off the whole thing. I decide to go to the pictures in Braintree.

In retrospect this seems like a very stupid idea. But at the time, when you don't think you're a target, why would you bother taking precautions? Yeah, I was in the private eye's snaps, but he was just gathering information on Andy's associates. I mean, the threat was to Andy and his family, not his network of friends. Wrong.

I choose a comedy to watch but I'm not in the mood. To be honest, I'm not in the mood for anything. About halfway through, I finish my popcorn and decide to head back and try to get some shut-eye.

I make my way back to the car park. It's half full. Ingrained habit makes me take a quick look beneath the

car - too long in Ireland to feel easy if I haven't done that. As I stand, I notice a big Merc with people in it. Four blokes. The engine's not running and I tell myself I'm being paranoid. Even if I'm not, what am I going to do about it? Running off and leaving my car seems a little over the top, confronting four blokes is a big ask and I'm going to look like a nutter if I go up and start questioning them and they've got nothing to do with this. And if they are the people who did Andy, then I'm putting myself in danger by approaching them.

Best thing is to calm down, breathe deeply, get in the car and head for the exit. So I do.

It's then that the lights on the Merc come on and it starts to follow me.

I check the mirror. Can't see anything because it has its headlights on full beam.

We make it to the barrier of the car park and I've got my window down, ready to put the ticket in. It's then that I hear the doors of the Merc open. Paranoid or not, I'm out of there. The barrier's only half way up as I gas it. It scrapes up and over the roof as the Mondeo lurches forward. I feel a massive impact from the back and I realise the Merc has rammed me. All right, game on.

The Mondeo slews across the street with a sick squeal, hits the kerb and I know even before I try to drive forward that I'm not getting far in it.

One thing they hadn't counted on - which makes me suspect that I'm not dealing with professionals - is that all the Merc's airbags have popped, making it briefly impossible for them to see.

One thing's certain, I can't stay here. Almost before I know it, I'm out of the car and sprinting for the multi-storey.

I make it over a wall into the car park as rounds start snicking into the concrete all around me. Silenced rounds. That shouldn't make too much difference to someone

reporting this. If I can stay alive, these goons haven't got long. Braintree's dead on a Sunday night, but nowhere's that dead. The police will have to be here soon. The metal jackets are whizzing past my head, slamming into cars, setting off alarms. I run in a zigzag and duck into a stairwell. Six floors. Excellent - they can't get a clear shot at me here. Once up there, however, there's no way down. Not so excellent.

I hammer up the stairs, can't even take the time to get my mobile out. As I climb, I can hear the goons slamming through the bottom floor and sounds of squealing wheels. They've got the Merc back in and are driving up the ramps to block that way of escape.

At the top, I come out into the murky Essex night, planes taking off and landing at Stansted flashing their lights in the distance. There is one bloody car parked up here. Luckily it's an old Volvo. I always carry a Leatherman. It's got a decent blade on it - which I suspect isn't strictly legal - and a host of other stuff which I've found pretty useful over the years.

Now I just use it to smash the Volvo's window. I pop the lock, get in and curl up low behind the steering wheel, almost crouching on the floor as I work the ignition. I have done this so many times in training, it's second nature. I'll have a few seconds before they realise I'm in the car - the pile of smashed glass will give it away - but it's seconds I'll need. I still haven't had time to call 999 but I'm hoping the amount of noise will alert someone. No sirens yet, though.

I hear the first goon come out of the stairwell, calling to his mate. The door goes again. The second man must be on the roof too.

One of them sticks two rounds into the car, though I'm convinced he can't see me. The windscreen shatters. He's aiming high, though I don't know what damage he expects to do firing through a Volvo's engine block.

I have the wires in my hand, my foot on the clutch and the car in first gear, ready to go. I count to ten. I want to give them time to come closer. I squeeze the wires together, the engine jumps into life and I bang the accelerator and slip the clutch, sitting up only as far as I need to see where I'm going. No need to steer, the idiot's right in front of me, with his gun up at the side of his face pointing into the clouds like Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*. Well he should have it pointed at me, because the clouds aren't going to run him over. He's got a balaclava on, but I can see the surprise in his eyes as the car hits him. His body slams into the bonnet, his head coming through the shattered windscreen before he rolls off. I can just see his mate behind him running for the stairwell as if in slow motion. At the last second he dives aside, but I've clipped him, hit him in the leg. The Volvo slams straight into the stairwell and my face bounces off the steering wheel, breaking my nose, but the airbag saves any worse damage.

No time to worry about that. I jump out of the car. Goon two is on the floor holding his leg and screaming. His gun's been knocked from his hand and it's about ten feet away from him. He tries to crawl forward to get it but the pain's too much for him. The Merc is squealing up the ramps, must be nearly on top of us by now. I could hoof it down the stairwell, but I don't want this lot scraping their boys off the floor and running away.

I run over and pick up the revolver. It's a First World War Webley - very much a UK criminal's weapon. Probably been gathering dust in someone's grandad's loft for eighty years before getting sold off to these idiots.

I quickly check the shells. Three left.

The bloke on the floor's screaming like a little girl. I take that back. My daughter got a greenstick fracture aged nine falling off her bike and made less noise. Good, I'm glad he's in pain and I'm glad he's attracting attention.

Here comes the Merc, slewing around the corner like something out of *2 Fast 2 Furious*. I jump into the doorway and pretty much fall down the first flight of stairs. I'm now protected by the bulk of the Volvo and the brick of the top of the stairs.

A click and a dull thump. I'd know that sound anywhere - it's a tear gas canister. Sure enough, it comes rattling down the stairs towards me. Great. I can't pick it up because it's going to be red hot if it's been fired from a gun. I kick it away from me as far as I can, scrunching up my eyes in an effort to protect them. No way of running now. I get flat on the stairs and point the gun upwards. My eyes are streaming and my vision is blurred but I'm trained to resist the panic this causes. Furthermore, this stuff isn't as bad as the stuff I trained with. A bizarre thought goes through my head - I bet it's US tear gas. That's five times more dilute than the kind we use over here. It's not pleasant but, through training with it so much over the years, I've developed some resistance.

The goon comes over the top of the Volvo and peers in. He hasn't got a gas mask, which is a bit of an oversight and means he's going to have difficulty seeing me.

I see the gun come up and I fire blindly, two rounds. He disappears, and his gun comes crashing down the stairs. I'll have that. Upstairs I hear two more shots. The screaming stops and I hear the Merc pulling away. I have to get out of this stairwell - the gas is making it unbearable. I feel my way down the stairs to the floor below, get out into the car park and roll behind the nearest car. I hear the Merc going down the ramps. I also hear another car. Police? I hope so. Maybe not, though. I feel for my phone and dial 999 blind. I get through, and five minutes later I hear the sweet sound of sirens and the call 'Armed police!'

I throw out my gun. Never in my life have I been more pleased to be nicked.