

CHAPTER 1

‘There you go, Mr. Hawke, I hope that you’re a little more comfortable now. If you find that the pain becomes any worse, just press the button on your left for a little morphine and press the button in your right hand if you need any attention, OK?’

‘Yes, thank you, nurse.’ Hawke rested back in his hospital bed and reflected. He couldn’t abide drugs; the whole business was as volatile as they were. The good times may be OK but the minute you got greedy and wanted more than you could handle, everything would turn to shit and someone would end up dead. The whole situation should be avoided at all costs. That was his philosophy on the subject anyway; quite ironic then, he thought to himself, that his current predicament was as a direct result of the drugs business.

It had been quite an eventful month to say the least and it had all started a few months previous with an anonymous tip which is quite unusual. Nothing is ever free in this game and, being honest with himself, Hawke knew that he should have known better. It wasn’t so much of a tip though, rather a piece of information about a cash distribution warehouse based in Oxford. It was rare that you would get to hear of prime jobs such as this on the criminal grapevine as if someone knew about it they’d already have an angle on it and were hardly likely to share the information. However, Hawke had got this information which intrigued him greatly and from what he knew, no one else was looking at it sideways. The job appeared to be too difficult and risky with a very slight chance of success. Not a problem for Hawke, those were more than good enough odds.

The wheels were in motion and the planning began. Jobs like this were not simple snatch and grab jobs; they had to be planned to perfection with every angle covered. Cash houses know that they’re a prime target and so go to every conceivable measure to ensure that they’re protected from all sides. Getting to know the target inside out was the only way to do it. Go in guns blazing and alarms go off left right and centre and before you know it you’re hip deep in coppers and the light of day becomes a distant memory. Taking the security vans in transit was also out of the question. Not only are they satellite tracked but before you even get inside the driver’s cabin the guy locked up in the back has already hit the alarm and more than likely has destroyed the cash with dye that the cases are protected with. No, if it’s going to be done the plan has got to be cute, hit them when they least expect it and in a way they wouldn’t anticipate.

The inception of the plan was a simplistic masterpiece. Intelligence on the cash house was a necessity and what better way to do that than to have people on the inside, people you can trust and not only that, people that they can trust. It was apparent that they were recruiting staff for the back office as well as for the loading bay area and that was the in that was needed, it couldn’t have worked out any better. Now a company like this aren’t going to take on just anybody, they have trusted suppliers and rigorous background checks, apparently. All it took was a few phone calls from one of the girls in the crew

masquerading as their recruitment company and interviews were arranged. That along with some falsified paperwork, dummy contacts for references and a couple of the crew were hired within days. Rigorous checks? Seems as if they leave that all up to the recruitment agency to do and as the recruitment agency in this case was an unscrupulous bunch of criminals, of course everything checked out nicely.

From there, information flooded back about security schedules; building layouts; collections; deliveries; the whole lot. A couple of months was all it took to gather all of the information necessary, and the longer the insiders were there doing a good job, the more trust they gained and the more access they were given. Simple. Beautiful.

It was after the job that everything started to crumble. Hawke shook his head with a wry smile. He'd had his pants pulled down, got properly rear ended and didn't even get dinner as a sweetener. He knew he should never have started this job in the first place; it was against his principles to do a job that he himself hadn't thought of or planned for himself. But, that's the way the ball bounces sometimes, he thought to himself. Sometimes you get too greedy and make bad decisions. Ever so occasionally, those bad decisions lead to a spanking that you never thought possible. It was a bloody good thing then that he'd got superior crew behind him...

CHAPTER 2

‘Hawke, the target is on its way down to you. You’ve got about three minutes.’

Hawke pressed his middle finger against his ear piece in more of an instinctive reaction rather than to be able to hear more clearly. The female voice that was coming through was that of Vittoria, she was parked about a mile or so up the road acting as look out. The target she was referring to was the security van which was en-route back to the cash distribution warehouse after having made a delivery and was due to pick up its next load.

The cash distribution warehouse belongs to a company called EMDM, European Monetary Distribution Management. Based in Oxford, it serves as a regional hub for major cash distribution to banks and to large establishments that for one reason or another have the need to carry a significant volume of cash on site. It was a twenty-four hour operation with vans scheduled every hour during the night, and more frequently during the day.

It was two o’clock in the morning and tonight would be the culmination of about two and bit months’ of hard work and planning. The early spring air brought with it a bitter breeze and as they were out in almost open countryside with only light shrubbery and trees lining the road that they were on for cover, the elements were quite brisk. They didn’t notice it though, with the adrenaline running high in anticipation, the cold went unnoticed. Hawke knew from his detailed road plan that the van would be passing by very shortly from Vittoria’s check point and from where they were it would take an additional ten minutes to get to the warehouse. There were several routes in to the warehouse and the one they were on was one of them. Each of the routes had been given number and the distributor, as an added cursory security measure, instructed the drivers on which route to take in and out of the premises on a random basis. Hawke assumed that this was so that planning a job such as this would be difficult in terms of planning which route to monitor. Fortunately the security team kept a detailed planned rota for the routing and as Sandra had been installed as one of the insiders in the back office, she was able to find out what the plan was for this evening and relay the information back to Hawke. This was route four in the plan and the two o’clock return vehicle was scheduled to arrive through this route. The security team monitored the vehicle’s journey from start to finish using satellite tracking modules which were installed on all of the vans they used. Any unusual activity, such as an unscheduled stop which amounted to any more than just a few minutes would result in the security office contacting the drivers to ensure that everything was OK and if there were any issues immediate Police support would be requested and they would remote lock-down the entire vehicle, regardless of who was inside at the time. Any money on board would also be rendered useless by soaking the cash in dye. However the latter point was of little concern to Hawke as he knew that this particular vehicle would be empty.

The vans themselves were standard security Ford Transits which operated a timed lock-down for the safe in the back. There was no way to get

around this system in order to get into the back of the vehicle, unless of course you knew how the system worked and where the flaws were. In the right hand rear door of the van there was a hatch, this hatch was used for the driver's mate to pass money into the back, on the other side of that was a guy who then took the money and placed it inside. That was the flaw. Now, although the guy can't get out of the vehicle until the time lock releases, if there's an accident the system has a fail-safe to allow the occupant to exit the vehicle, it can't be any other way – health and safety above cash and security. If you knew what you were doing, you could simulate an accident and fool the system into thinking that an accident had occurred and then get into the back of the vehicle. Simple. The trick was being able to disable the guy in the back long enough for the simulation to take place so that he didn't trigger an alarm. But before that, disabling the driver and his mate was another story, unless of course disabling all three at the same time was possible. That would take a bit of work to achieve. Hawke, though, had the perfect plan, all he needed was a little time and space to work.

The part of the route they were on was fortunately quite secluded and away from a built up area. At this time of the night there was very little through traffic, which meant that they pretty much had the place to themselves and would be able to work unhindered. It was also unlit which aided the covert operation which was about to take place. The foliage around the part of the road that they were on also afforded a good level of cover for the three Ford Escort vans which had been well hidden just off the side of the road. It was nearly time, they had to get ready.

'Pucker your arses gentlemen,' Hawke stated into his microphone that was wrapped around his neck. The communications system that they were using was similar to that of the American security services and allowed complete open communications to everyone without the need to handle any devices. His statement to his crew of four men all dressed in black and with balaclavas on sent three of them into the bushes to await the van and the fourth to assume his role on a push bike. Alex wasn't the best on a push bike at the best of times, so he didn't have to do too much acting to appear drunk and in charge of a bicycle. His erratic manoeuvres in the road would hopefully force the van to slow to a point where they could act. Hawke ducked into the bushes on the opposite side of the road as the headlights of the van began to appear from around the bend.

'Vittoria, take off.' Hawke whispered into the microphone.

'Good luck.' Vittoria stated and then signed off.

The van rounded the corner and began to slow as its headlights rested on the erratic bicycle ahead of them with Alex swerving left and right in what Hawke thought was a genuine disability in being able to control it. The van slowed almost to a halt right in front of where they were lying in wait with the driver flashing his lights in order to get Alex to pull off the road.

'Get your ear defenders on and go!' Hawke ordered.

Alex eventually fell off the bike in the middle of the road as everyone sprung into action whilst the van pulled up to a hard stop. With the van at a

stop, they knew that they only had at best about three minutes before the security centre contacted them. In one swift organised movement, the four men from within the bushes quickly emerged and each threw one percussion grenade underneath the vehicle and retreated. In a matter of seconds they all exploded in one exceptionally loud bang and although the crew were all wearing ear defenders it was still loud enough to cause their ears to ring. Quickly removing the ear defenders they ran toward the vehicle. The resonance of the sound explosion had triggered the vehicle into thinking that an accident had taken place and unlocked all of the doors including the back doors, whilst also disorientating the occupants giving everyone long enough to quickly extract them before any alarms were raised.

‘Stu, Driver! Cooper, back door! Tre, engine!’ Hawke barked out loud but everyone was already in position as he himself was opening the passenger side door to extract the driver’s mate. Hawke yanked him out with a quickness and threw him to the ground with shouts of don’t move. Pulling the passenger’s arms away from his ears which he was still caressing, Hawke tied them behind his back and secured them with plastic garden ties which were extremely difficult to get out of but were quick and easy to apply. On the other side of the vehicle Stu had done the same to the driver and had already got into the driver’s seat and popped the bonnet so that Tre could get in there and reset the electrics that the percussion grenade had knocked out. Cooper was at the back of the vehicle and had already extracted the occupant in the back and secured him.

‘Cooper, clear up!’ Hawke ordered meaning that Cooper should pick up the occupants of the van, knock them out and then dump them in the bushes. Hawke began to drag his charge over to the other side of the road to speed up the process.

‘Alex! Get rid of the bike and get your arse in the back of the van! Tre, how’s that engine coming?’ Hawke asked.

‘I’m done. Stu, fire her up,’ Tre replied as Stu immediately gunned the engine into life.

‘Excellent! Everyone into the back of the van now!’ Hawke shouted.

The back doors closed and Hawke got into the passenger side of the van and Stu immediately began to speed forward, reaching the speed limit as soon as possible.

‘Right let’s get into character,’ Hawke suggested as they were now making progress to the warehouse. Hawke began to remove his balaclava, top and leggings. Beneath all that he wore the standard uniform that the drivers wear that Kris had managed to procure for them from the warehouse as he had been employed there as a warehouse operative. Bit by bit he was able to remove two complete uniforms by wearing one item at a time underneath his normal clothing before leaving day by day. Stu was doing the same thing whilst being slightly hindered by driving. Hawke, in the mean time, had begun to get to grips with the paperwork and identity cards that they were able to make up with photocopies that Sandra had managed to get for them. They were simple enough to replicate given basic tools like a computer and a

laminating machine. Hawke and Stu were fully in character and were just minutes away from the warehouse.

‘How’s everybody back there?’ Hawke asked through the microphone.

‘Cramped like a mother fucker.’ Came the response from Tre.

‘Yeah well, you didn’t knacker your love muscle on a bloody bicycle seat so you can’t complain...’ Alex moaned. ‘Those seats are hardly made with men in mind and not only from the front aspect, my arse damn near swallowed the fucking thing!’

‘OK, before we start getting into size of Alex’s arse and what he’s being doing with it that would make it big enough to swallow a bicycle seat whole, keep it down in there – we’re about to arrive at the security gate.’ Hawke announced.

Stu slowed the van down to a stop just before the barrier to the entrance to the warehouse complex and waited for the security guard to exit his booth which was situated to the right. The windows in the two front doors were security windows and didn’t wind down so Hawke flashed his ID card through the window anticipating that he may have to exit. Upon seeing the ID though the guard waved up at his colleague still in the booth and the barrier opened. Stu gently pulled away and through into the complex.

‘Shite. Is that what passes for security around here?’ Stu stated with a gentle Irish accent.

‘Don’t complain. At least that’s one less thing we have to worry about.’ Hawke stated with a slight tinge of relief as all the hard work in obtaining the outfits and the van was beginning to pay dividends.

‘Just hope that the rest of the job’s that easy.’ Stu retorted.

There were three loading bays ahead of them, each just large enough for the size van they were driving to pull up to tightly. Already the door to the left was beginning to open and the familiar face of Kris appeared waiting for them. From this point, although Kris was an ally, they could not show any familiarity. The place was covered with cameras and as Kris had been working there for a couple of months, they obviously knew his face. His credentials were fake of course, but they would have to leave Kris behind after the job bound up as if he was also disabled during the burglary so as not to raise any suspicion on his part. In the mean time though, he would be able to allow them access to the inner offices and that was about all he could be used for. Stu drove the van in a short semi circle and backed it up to the entrance of the bay door.

‘Stand by everybody. From this point on it’s radio silence.’ Hawke said as he checked his watch. It was a quarter past two and Hawke had allowed only forty five minutes to get everything done from this point to be able to leave and be away before the next van arrived and raised the alarm. He and Stu exited the van and walked over to the bay door to meet with Kris in a formal manner. At this time of night the staff were on skeleton crew and Kris was the only one in the loading bay area. He showed them through, slowly allowing time for Hawke to judge the movement of the camera on the left hand wall as they walked beside it. The camera, he knew from Kris, would cycle

round the bay in thirty second intervals. Each of the cameras in the building were set to do a full sweep from left to right in thirty seconds. This allowed a window safely of fifteen seconds with a maximum of twenty seconds to move after the camera had reached its full arc to one side before it got into a position where they could potentially be visible. Hawke also knew, given the position of the camera, that once he gave the instruction for the guys in the back of the van to exit, they would be able to hug the wall on the way in and then huddle directly underneath it without being seen for the entire arc.

They continued to walk slowly and Hawke secretly watched the camera's movement. The moment it reached just over mid way facing and moving away from the bay entrance he gave the instruction to move. The guys piled out of the van into the bay area and made their way to the huddle point. Kris, Stu and Hawke continued to walk normally through to the door ahead of them which lead to a corridor into the main offices.

This was where the plan got tricky and would be the slowest part to complete. The corridor, according to the information that Kris had obtained, had one camera centrally situated which covered the entire length of it. Again, this was on a thirty second interval sweep spending fifteen seconds at each end. This allowed for movement up the corridor at a maximum of one person at a time, so Hawke had to plan a synchronised movement to be able to accomplish getting his crew to the end of the corridor. From there they would be in an area not covered by cameras which lead to the offices, the canteen and the security office. They needed to get to and secure all three areas.

The corridor itself had several doorways on both the left and right with the camera being mounted on the left hand wall. The doorways were recessed into the corridor wall so much so that they allowed space for one person to stand tight in the recess without the risk of being seen by the camera. As Kris, Stu and Hawke reached the door they stood aimlessly chatting whilst the camera in the bay continued its sweep. The timing here had to be made with pinpoint accuracy for the plan to succeed, any mistakes and the game was up. They waited for the bay camera to reach just over the halfway point facing and moving towards the bay door, the crew, still dressed in their black outfits with balaclavas on, huddled beneath it. Quickly Kris opened the door to the corridor ahead and walked through whilst both Hawke and Stu donned their balaclavas once again. A couple of seconds passed seeming like an eternity, the bay camera steadily continued its course and was nearly at the maximum arc facing the bay door. Eventually Kris coughed in the corridor as a signal that it was safe for them both to enter. They did so quickly as the bay camera reached the mid way point to face back at the door to the corridor. Kris continued to walk through the corridor as both Hawke and Stu entered, heading towards the canteen. The camera was beginning to make its return journey back to face the door to the corridor as they both headed quickly towards the underneath of the camera. Stu stopped short inside one of the recessed doorways on the left as Hawke arrived quickly underneath the camera itself. They waited for the camera to start moving back towards the other end of the

corridor and as it reached mid way, Hawke instructed one of the crew to make his move.

As the corridor camera hit the exact mid way point, Hawke moved up to the next recessed doorway and stood tight inside. Stu made his way from his recessed doorway to underneath the camera and Alex was the next through the door to take Stu's place. Again the camera made its way back to the door of the corridor and freed up Hawke to make his move to the end of the corridor out of site of the camera to wait for the rest of the crew to join him. As he did so, Stu began to move from his position all the way up to join Hawke. Knowing that there was a little time left Hawke took a quick look to see what position the camera was in, and saw it was at the mid way point and so gave the instruction for Ray to move underneath the camera and for another from the crew in the bay area to move into the corridor. The sequence continued and eventually after several minutes the whole crew made it to the end of the corridor.

Knowing that timing was quite tight, they quickly moved toward the canteen where they knew from the schedule that Sandra had provided them with that the security guards will be making for the canteen area for their break. There were four guards in the building at any one time acting as both security and reception during the night shift. They also held the keys to the safe where the money was kept and on arrival of a pick up or delivery, Kris would have to call them in order to gain access to the safe and would be accompanied at all times. This is in addition to the two security controllers which were in the security office monitoring the cameras and the movement of the vehicles. At two thirty the four security guards would converge for a break before swapping responsibilities for the rest of the shift.

The crew took up strategic hidden positions in the canteen as indicated by Hawke and waited for the security guards to make their entrance. They knew that they couldn't make a move until all four were in and accounted for and when they arrived, the crew would have to act fast to secure them before the guards could raise the alarm. They didn't have to wait long for all of them to arrive all at once. Immediately as they rounded the doorway into the canteen everybody leapt into action.

'Get down! Face Down, on the floor, hands in front of you!' Hawke shouted as he jumped out gun in hand. The security guards stood almost dumbfounded and horrified at the masked gunmen that surrounded them. Stu, Alex, Cooper and Tre took a security guard each and forced them to the floor whilst disrobing them of their communications belts, baton weaponry and keys. Hawke held the gun on them as the crew tied each of them up, hands to feet behind their backs, with the plastic ties to prevent them from being able to move and gagged them. They left them in the middle of the canteen chests down and then began to make their way to the security office.

The five men then quickly moved out from the canteen to the hallway and ran down the entire length until they arrived outside the security office door. Quietly they made their way up to it and Hawke checked his watch. It had taken them in total fifteen minutes to get to this point and they were

running slightly behind schedule. The plan was that they should have taken control of the security office by now so Hawke knew that they had to act fast. Hawke gesticulated to Cooper to move to a position to kick the door down and to then throw a flash bang grenade inside the office. This type of grenade had the effect of making an incredibly loud bang whilst also emitting a severely bright flash temporarily rendering anyone caught in the blast blind and deaf and pretty much disabled for about thirty seconds, other than that it caused no damage. Cooper being the largest and most muscular of the group would be able to easily take the door down in one action.

Cooper took his position and removed the trigger pin from the percussion grenade. He rocked back and forth in readiness to kick the door down which also acted as a timer to count off three seconds of the five second delay on the grenade detonator as they needed for it to go off almost the instant Cooper threw it in to disable the two guards inside from raising the alarm. Hawke in the mean time indicated for the others to take a few paces away from the office so as not to be affected by the percussion explosion.

Cooper then made his move. He leaned back, cocked his leg so that his knee was almost at chest level and let out an explosive kick landing just to the left of the door handle. The door immediately gave way, splintering wood from the door surround and leaving a foot sized crack in the door itself. He threw in the grenade and immediately leapt out of the way. It went off almost mid air as it travelled into the office with an almighty cracking sound resembling that of a thunderclap. As Cooper was moving through the air Hawke had already roused the others into action and they all piled inside the office, guns in hand.

‘Don’t move!’ Hawke shouted at the two guards who were already on the floor cradling their now bleeding ears.

‘You two, secure the guards!’ Hawke barked whilst indicating to Stu and Tre who immediately responded. They tied the guards up with the plastic garden ties hands to feet similarly to the others in the canteen.

‘Everyone back to the loading bay.’ Hawke ordered as he took hold of Alex whilst the others made their way back. ‘Get the tapes.’ He said to Alex meaning the back-up security tapes which Sandra had told them about. Whilst she was working there she was responsible for changing the back-up tapes which were situated in an office to the front of the building inside a cupboard, inside a linen closet. They were there for two purposes. As a fail-safe in case the main system went down for some reason but also as a hidden back-up in the event of a robbery where the main tapes could have been taken. Hawke knew that this was the kind of information that was gold dust and without it, they would have been fingered for sure. Alex then quickly made his way out of the security office to recover the tapes as Hawke surveyed the security equipment in front of him. He could see in the monitors that his guys were already in the corridor on their way to the bay area and Kris had also joined them. The security guards tied up on the floor were writhing around in a vain attempt to free themselves. Hawke quickly located the six VCR’s which were underneath the desk and began to press the eject buttons on all of them. The

tapes slowly ejected and Hawke collected each one and placed them into a small bag which he had in his pocket, switched off the monitors and then started to make his way to the bay area to join the rest of the crew.

The guys had already opened the back of the van and Kris was beginning to line up three big bag trolleys. Hawke checked his watch, they now safely had twenty minutes to get the job done and get away.

‘Lets move it chaps, twenty minutes! Keys!’ Hawke shouted. Cooper threw Hawke the two sets of keys that he had removed from the security guards and he and Kris made their way through an entrance that was centrally situated within the bay area. It was a short walk to the front of the safe entrance and the guys followed up behind them ready with the bag trolleys. The safe had two main security access points; a code and two key locks. Kris knew the code as he had watched the security guards type it in many times and they weren’t overly cautious about hiding it, and typed it in. The two keys had to be inserted and turned simultaneously. Hawke threw Kris one set and he took the other in hand. They both stood poised to enter the keys staring at each other as they did so.

‘On three, ready?’ Hawke asked.

‘Go for it,’ Kris replied.

‘1... 2... 3...’ Hawke counted off and on three they both entered their keys. ‘Again, on three. 1... 2... 3...’ They both turned the keys and the safe clunked into life. Several locking mechanisms could be heard releasing and the door then sprung open. Hawke quickly took hold of the door and threw it open as Kris stepped back.

Inside the safe, which was spacious to say the least, were several rows of shelving wrapped around each wall stacked to the brim with money packed within white linen bags. Each of the bags was labelled with the denominations contained inside and was printed with a barcode which would be scanned before the bags left the premises. Hawke quickly checked some of the labels to find where the larger denomination bags were kept. He was only interested in taking as many of the larger denomination bags as they could get into the lock box cage in the van within the time they had.

‘Bingo.’ Hawke stated flatly, having come across the bags he was after. Kris joined Hawke inside the safe along with Cooper and they began to offload the bags from the shelf. One by one they started to throw the bags into the trolley which Tre was now in charge of.

Quickly filling the trolley up, Tre swiftly wheeled it into the bay area where Alex had now returned and positioned it behind the rear doors of the van. Both Alex and Tre started to load up the lock box cage by throwing the bags in unceremoniously. Meanwhile, Stu had moved up to the safe with the second bag trolley and Hawke and Kris had already started to load it up with the assistance of Cooper. Eventually the trolley was filled and Stu quickly made his way back to the van as Cooper took charge of the third bag trolley. The guys at the van then started to off load the second trolley as Kris and Hawke began to fill the third.

The plan was working like clockwork and Hawke took a few moments to check his watch. They were just crossing the ten minute mark and he knew he had to get moving. The third trolley was almost full, and Hawke was content that this was enough. He wasn't interested in the other bags as they were either filled with coinage or smaller denomination notes that would be too cumbersome to deal with; the higher the denomination the less the baggage. Besides, their haul this evening would be very substantial.

With the third trolley now full, they all headed back to the van to do the final off load. Hawke and Stu removed the balaclavas to get ready for the drive out as the guys continued to pile the bags into the back of the van. Accomplishing their task, Hawke threw in his bag of security video cassettes as did Alex.

Hawke then looked across to Kris. 'There's only one last thing to do here.' He stated solemnly.

'Yeah, let's get it over with.' Kris said dejectedly knowing that he was about to be bound up and gagged for the next half hour or so before the next van arrived.

Kris laid on the floor face down and Hawke gently began to tie his hands and feet together with the plastic ties whilst the rest of the guys got into the back of the van and closed the doors. Stu made sure that the rear doors were secure and then made his way to the front of the van to take his position as driver once again.

'Any other day and I'd kick your arse for this Hawke.' Kris retorted before Hawke applied the gag.

'Given your situation I wouldn't be so cocky, Kris.' Hawke chided. 'Besides, you wouldn't stand a chance.' He added as he tightened the gag. 'I'll see you back at the restaurant, and good work.' He said leaving Kris lying in the bay area.

Hawke then made his way to the passenger side of the van as Stu started the engine. He began to pull away slowly having to check himself so that he didn't drive away too quickly as his adrenaline levels were still running high. They made it to the exit barrier and to both of their amazement it opened almost straight away. Hawke waved in the general direction of the security booth and then Stu made steady progress away.

Hawke looked across at Stu who returned the look. Immediately they began to laugh loudly at each other and shook hands.

'How about them apples eh!?' Hawke shouted at Stu, knowing also that the guys in the back would be able to hear them through the communication system they were still wearing and the level of excitement in the back of the van was becoming more apparent in Hawke's earpiece.

'All credit to ya, Hawke, that was one hell of a piece of work you put together there!' Stu responded.

'It's a credit to all of us, son, but it's not over yet.'

They were heading back down the route that they had come from, making their way back to where they had left the three Ford Escort vans.

‘Quieten down, quieten down.’ Hawke asked into his microphone. ‘Right, just to remind everybody. Once we’re back at the vans we need to offload the cash into each of them and then dump this one off-road. I’m going to take van one. Stu and Alex take van two and Cooper and Tre take van three. Once we get on to the main roads take your different routes and then converge on the safe house that Ray has sorted for us. You all know where that is. OK?’

Everyone responded positively to Hawke’s instruction as Stu brought the vehicle to a stop just off-road up from where the Ford Escort vans had been left. They all exited the van and began to prep the three vans lying in wait at the side of the road, still unlocked for quick access.

‘Coop, go and have a quick check of our heroes will ya?’ Hawke asked wanting to make sure that they were still there and between the lines, if they were awake, to knock them out again.

‘K,’ Cooper said.

‘Start unloading everybody as quick as you can.’ Hawke asked checking his watch once again. They were about five minutes over schedule which was OK as Hawke had built in a comfort zone within the plan to accommodate a delay, but they still had to move quickly.

‘They’re still out,’ Cooper informed Hawke as he made his way back to the van to help with the unloading.

‘You haven’t killed them, have you?’ Hawke asked not actually really caring.

‘Nah, they’re still breathing, you want me to off them?’ Cooper asked.

‘Leave ‘em as they are, Coop, no need to bring any unnecessary heat down on us. Besides, there’s no point offing people unless it’s absolutely necessary. A clean job is a good job.’ Hawke replied whilst catching a bag thrown by Alex and subsequently throwing it into the back of the Escort van.

‘Why are we doing this again?’ Tre asked.

‘Weren’t you paying attention at the meeting?’ Hawke responded sarcastically.

‘Course I was paying attention!’ Tre responded sucking his lips in the way that only black people seem able to do properly.

‘Obviously we can’t stay in this van for too long as it’s going to be hot property after the alarm has been raised, and once the guards are freed, they’ll track it and shut it down.’

‘Yeah, I understand that bit, but why are we taking three vans in different directions?’

‘A couple of reasons. One: damage limitation. If one of us gets caught, we still end up with a good score. Two: a column of Ford Escort vans is going to raise quite a few eyebrows not least of which by the Police who are going to be all over the place in a matter of minutes. We split up, we have a better chance of slipping under the net.’

‘Good thinking,’ Tre responded a knowing nod.

‘Yeah, that’s what I pay myself for.’ Hawke answered.

Eventually the three vans were each filled with cash and the security van emptied. Hawke took the two bags of security tapes and dumped them in the passenger seat of the Escort van he was taking.

‘Stu, dump the van in the bushes as far as you can get her and cover it up,’ Hawke asked.

Stu got back into the van, started the engine and began to drive it off the road. Cooper and Tre got into their Escort van and started up. They began to move off and Cooper rolled down his window.

‘See you back at the safe house!’ Cooper shouted as he wheel-span off down the road.

‘Wanker.’ Hawke responded at the childish driving, hoping that Cooper still had his ear piece in.

Alex made his way into the passenger side of the Escort van he and Stu would be taking as Stu was busy trying to obscure the security van from view with the shrubbery and bits of tree that he’d just driven through. In the mean time, Hawke got into his van and started the engine. Gently pulling out onto the road he crept forward to make sure that the van was well out of view for the moment in case any passers-by happened to drive through that may be able to spot it. Satisfied that everything appeared to be OK, he rolled down his passenger window whilst Stu was beginning to make his way to his vehicle.

‘Nice work Stu, didn’t realise you had such green fingers.’ Hawke joked.

‘Ah feck off ya cunt!’ Stu responded in a strong Irish lilt.

‘See you back at the safe house.’ Hawke responded with a smile then gunned the engine and made his way off.

Stu got back to his van and with Alex made to follow suit. The safe house was only another fifteen minutes away from where they were which meant that they wouldn’t be on the road for too long. Hawke had been very specific on this point during the meeting as once the alarm was raised the Police would be very hot to pick up anything that may look suspicious and so getting off the road as soon as possible was the best course of action. He also knew that the Police would be more interested in searching the major highways and local motorways rather than considering that the perpetrators of this crime would remain local. One of the criminals’ rule of thumb is that you never shit in your own back yard which is why they travel fairly long distances to do large jobs and won’t stay local for very long. Hawke considered that a mistake. By all means travel a long distance to do a job, as they had done in this case, but make sure you’re off the road as quickly as possible. Staying local was logical and a safer bet rather than travelling back home with heaps of stolen goods, knowing that the Police were out looking for you. Frequent stops also meant that you could change vehicles more often and this served to keep everyone one step ahead of the authorities, and that was just where Hawke liked to be.