

Chapter 13

The next day was a little overcast and cold. The surrounding hills were a faint smudge in the half gloom of dawn when the two SOU agents awoke. They'd set the alarms on their mobiles last night, as they didn't want to be caught snoozing when the police arrived. They quickly breakfasted – it had to be a 'cold camp' this morning. Nothing could give them away and spoil the operation!

A little time passed, but it was still very early when the police arrived. Jane and Paul arrived and began to sort out where they should position the officers they'd brought with them. They were dressed in body armour and helmets – you just couldn't know if these criminals might be armed! The two SOU officers reflected again on the fact that it was not at



unusual for officers to be shot at and injured in the course of duty against badger diggers.



Jane and Paul indicated to the police officers where they wanted them, in the surrounding undergrowth. They quickly deployed to their positions. They didn't know how long it might be until the diggers turned up – morning, afternoon, evening? One thing they did know was that they'd have to sit quietly and patiently until something did happen – if it happened!

The IT lads set themselves up in the well. It allowed them to get low to the ground and just have the cameras peering through the undergrowth. They'd record the whole procedure, which could then be given in evidence against the diggers. They'd spent a few days tracking the movements of Sean O'Vile and some of his associates. New technology, developed by Durham Police themselves, made it so much easier to track criminals around the country!



Dr Alec Chance of the forensics team was busying himself about with his equipment. It was his work that had pinpointed Sean O'Vile's involvement in the first place. DNA analysis gave the police an important weapon against this kind of thug. Forensic science was moving very fast, the SOU men knew, and that could only make their job so much easier.

Jason and Will discussed the tactics with the wildlife officers. "As we discussed," Jane said, "we should have a couple of 'wolves' posted at each end of the wood. Jason and Will, you volunteered for that one. You told us to listen for fox barks," she said. "Then we'll know that action is coming!" The two special ops men nodded and left to collect their gear and make last-minute preparations.

There were police vehicles hidden in the barn up at the farm. Mr Green had been only too happy to help out. He didn't want these people on his land any more than the police did. Hidden a little farther out were police with large German Shepherd dogs. The dogs were still and silent. They knew exactly what they had to do. They had been well taught by their handlers.



They'd let the diggers get to work first, and then they'd surprise them. It was important to catch them in the act of putting the dogs down the sett and actually digging for the badgers.

Will and Jason, dressed in their camouflage gear, deployed to the two ends of the wood, where the men would probably enter. Once in the wood, Jason and Will would close the trap, cutting off quick escape. The two agents thought back to their time in

the Special Forces. It was nice to be back in action again.

Once everyone was in position, it was just a waiting game. This was the boring bit! Each man and woman hoped that things would happen quickly and it would be over soon. No one wanted it to drag on. The only good thing that came from a long wait was the opportunity to watch the local wildlife. Once the wood had settled again, the birds would begin to come back and go about their business. They might even get a glimpse of a mammal, though the mammals tended to smell the men from a distance, and stayed away.

A couple of hours or so had gone by, when a sharp fox bark came from one end of the wood. It was the end away from the farm – the people obviously didn't want Mr Green to know they were there. The bark was followed by two more. Everyone knew what it meant!

The police shrank down and mimicked the shapes of the boulders and trees they were hiding behind. They were as still as kids on a playground playing statues. Every man and woman held their breath. Nothing had to go wrong!

Time seemed to stand still until a group of men entered the clearing where the setts were. Sean O'Vile led two other men, and Charlie Asinine and Jim Dim brought up the rear, trotting like little lap-dogs in their wake. They were clearly enjoying being with the hard-cases. Two of the men had dogs on leashes. They were muzzled to stop them making a noise. The police dogs that were in attendance were lying flat to the floor. The police didn't want the diggers' dogs to get wind of them just yet. The German Shepherds would do exactly what their handlers told them when the time was right.



The men approached the sett they intended to dig, attended by the two teenagers, who fawned over them. "They're over 'ere," said Chav.

"Main sett," added Yob. "Yer bound to get some 'ere."

Once in position, the men decided into which hole to deploy the dogs. They finally decided on a large hole toward the top of the sett. Presumably, they thought digging might be easier there. A shock awaited them! Nets were laid on the other entrances. One of the dogs' muzzles was slipped and a radio collar fastened around its neck. The radio receiver was switched on, and a digger stood ready. The dog was pushed into the large hole and, after a slight hesitation, it disappeared under the ground.



"Not long now, lads," one of the men said. They nodded; the tension building. What would the outcome be? The digger with the radio receiver looked puzzled. He took off the earphones and looked at the others.

"The signal's gone haywire," he said. "I can't get nuffin." He moved over the sett and tried in a number of locations where he judged the chambers to be. Each time, he shook his head. After a while, he gave up. "There's signals all over the place," he said, looking totally bemused.

O'Vile went to the sett entrance and called the dog's name. "Scrapper, get out 'ere now!" he bawled. Then he thought better of it. Noise might attract the farmer. Little did he know that lots of sets of eyes were watching his every move.



By this time, Jason and Will had made their way carefully back to the edges of the clearing. Jason's form was a flitting shadow as he blended with his environment to be invisible to the men. Will snaked low on his belly until he could see the whole proceedings. The two agents would be in place and ready when the time came.



One of the men picked up a spade and began to dig. "I don't think we'll get anything from the dogs. Must be something wrong with the collar or the receiver. I reckon there's probably a tunnel or chamber about 'ere." He dug down about 30cm until his spade rang like a bell. "What the..." he exclaimed. He dug and scraped at a small area. "It's concrete!" he exclaimed. "We'll 'ave to try somewhere else, if we want the badgers from this sett!"

That was enough for Jane Rule. They'd been filmed in the act of badger digging, and had even admitted, on film, that they were indeed, digging for badgers. The detective sergeant rose from the bushes, flanked by her burly detective constable. "Hello lads," she greeted them. "Not having any luck?"

The men looked from one to another, slowly weighing up the situation in feeble minds. The teenagers cringed and sank to the ground, wailing.

More police rose from the undergrowth. One was on his radio. It seemed moments until more police and very large dogs crashed through the bushes. The diggers' dogs began to growl and bark at the new-comers. "Speak!" called the police dog handlers, and their obedient dogs began a cacophony of barks, enough to be heard in the village! The diggers' dogs strained at leashes, but the men held on tightly. They knew their dogs were no match for trained police dogs.



The two SOU men, at each end of the clearing stepped from their hideouts.

"Stand still!" shouted Paul Deed. "You are under arrest for the crime of badger digging, contrary to the 'Protection of Badgers Act 1992'. You do not have to say anything but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something you later rely on in court. Anything you say may be given in evidence."

"It is a serious offence to kill, injure or take a badger, or to damage or interfere with a sett unless a licence is obtained from a statutory authority. You're nicked!"



The men looked wildly around them, uncertainty etched on their faces. "Run for it!" yelled O'Vile. The men began to run towards the entrances to the wood. Jason stepped out in front of two of them. His hard eyes showed no emotion. His words were cold as ice, hard as granite. "Stand still!" he bawled. The two men still ran. He grabbed one as he tried to pass, and threw him to the ground. A policeman appeared and held the criminal. A police dog barked at his face. He lay on the floor, quivering.

Jason leapt to his feet. His eyes fastened on the other man and he ran like the wind after him. His hard muscles propelled him forward. His feet felt sure on the solid ground. The wind in his face! His instinct to hunt, to destroy came into play. Swiftly, Jason caught up with the man and threw himself at his legs. The man flew forward, Jason's arms wrapped tightly around his knees. He fell, trying to break his fall with outstretched arms. Jason grabbed the man's arms and pushed them up his back. "Stay still!" he yelled. Then he bent to the man's ear. "I don't intend to hurt you, but I haven't ruled it out!" he whispered. The man lay still and moaned.

Will also caught his prey. He'd run for one corner of the wood, and had led Will a merry dance through the trees. The man had stopped, momentarily, trying to find the best escape route. He'd spotted a gap in the fence and ran for it. Unfortunately for him, Will had seen it first and had angled off towards it. The two men arrived at the gap at the same time. The thug turned and pulled a wicked-looking knife from his belt.



Will looked at the man. Would he use it? It was hard to tell. He might, if he was desperate enough! The two men had circled each other, staring into each other's eyes. Not a face to meet on a dark

night, thought Will. Each man looked at the other, weighing the danger. Suddenly, Will had fainted right and his opponent reacted. He lunged in that direction... just as Will had hoped. Will's leg suddenly flashed upward in a karate kick, and caught the man's wrist. The knife had flown into the undergrowth. The thug looked at his empty hand, startled, and tried to run. Too late! Will was upon him in a flash and brought him to the ground with one deft sweep of his leg. The man hit the earth with a thud that drove the wind out of him. He lay, gasping on the ground like a fish in dust! Will then frog-marched his opponent back to the clearing.

The police sat the men and teenagers down and were searching them for weapons. The police dogs stood near, growling and snarling as their handlers had taught them. The diggers' dogs had lost their confidence in the face of the huge Alsations, and had lain down, with their paws over their muzzles.

"Well, what have we here?" said Jane Rule. "Sean O'Vile. Nice to see you, Sean."

"Sam Mean," she continued.

"And brother Bill too.



"Fancy meeting you here!"

"Keeping it in the family. That's nice!"

"And who do we have here?" she asked, looking

at Chav and Yob. "This is Charlie Asinine and Jim Dim", Dan told her.

She looked at Dan. "Yes, that really is his name, he chuckled."

"Yes," said Paul Deed. "I remember these two from my visits about the fox in the snare. Swore to me that they weren't involved in anything like this! Much too gentle!"

"Well, well. Now what are we going to do with you two?" she asked. The two teenagers cowered and whimpered. "Take them back to the station," she ordered a policeman with a dog. "I don't think they'll give us any bother - particularly with the dog in attendance. The two climbed to their feet and tottered along, glancing back at the huge dog, who barked whenever they did. He knew exactly how to keep two wastes-of-space like these two in place! The police marched the criminals back to the farm, where the police vans were waiting to transport them back to the station. They knew they were going down, and were resigned to their fate.



The IT men and the forensics team worked at the site and eventually began to clear up their equipment. Dr Chance waved to the agents, as he carried his equipment back to the car. The cameras were dismantled and packed away in their boxes. The evidence they would provide would be crucial, and would certainly send the men to prison.



The two SOU agents climbed into their own 4x4, which had been parked behind the barn, and made their way to the station to make their own statements and to help with the evidence. Will would send the report to HQ via his laptop later in the evening. All in all, it had been a very satisfying day.



After long hours at the station, the two men returned to their camp, dirt-caked and bone weary. They lit a fire and set about making a meal - with plenty of strong coffee. A crescent moon hung in a star-spangled sky as they settled down. Tomorrow would be another day.



<http://www.rspca.org.uk/education/interactiveresources>