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A KNOCK AT THE DOOR: SPECIAL AGENT PARANOIA AND THE G8 INFO-LINE

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There's a knock at the door. We look at one another. Our replacements aren't supposed to be here for hours. We leap into action and follow our prearranged roles. I grab the phones and head for the toilet. Neil runs to wake up Pete. It's Pete's job to buzz in anyone who comes to the door and has the right password but he won't wake up. Neil shakes him and runs to put the maps away. None of this should concern me. I'm struggling with the backs of the phones: I need to get those sim cards out. If this is a raid they're going down the pan, flush. I perch on the edge of the bath, sim cards in hand, hand hovering over the toilet. I'm listening for sounds of a front door crashing in or the harsh shouts of a police raiding party. I look at my hand and a thought goes through my mind – these fuckers will just sit in the bowl and get retrieved, I need to make sure they get smashed to pieces...

Friendly voices filter under the bathroom door. A quick chuckle at the situation and I let myself out. It's the next shift turning up early because it's hard to get here at the right time in the middle of the night. They have no idea of the bowel movements they've just induced. When we take them through the routine, they're going to think that cabin fever has set in. Well, it all makes sense when you think it through.

We introduce ourselves to those of the next shift we don't know. It's a funny thing, we're in a potentially dicey situation and paranoia is running at full pitch,

yet I feel fine about these people I don't directly know being able to place me here. It's a bit like *Goodfellas*, or *Six Degrees of Separation*. Something needs doing, there's a risk of arrest, and a friend approaches you. Do you know anyone who can be trusted and will be up for this job? Yeah, I'll ask so-and-so, they're sound, they're goodfellas, they're friends of ours. That's how affinity groups network for semi-clandestine stuff. You rely on the judgement of your friends about their friends.

Teas all around and then the phone rings. Good, this'll give them the chance to see how it works. We're running the Info-Line. A highly complex plan has been developed. Thousands of cards have been distributed around Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling asking people to phone information in to one of three mobile phone numbers or to get in touch if they need to find something out. (Each number is for a different network in case one goes down or has no coverage in certain areas around Gleneagles.) The cards also tell people to subscribe to a text messaging system. If the cops shut down the advertised numbers, we've got two sets of back-up numbers we can send out to try and keep the information flowing. The system works best during the morning of the blockades with people spread all over central Scotland wanting to know if they are the only ones blockading the road. If we start a barricade here will there be anyone to join us? But when you answer the phone you have to be careful. You need to consider everything you say. We work out that it's best to take the question, say 'Hold on, wait a sec,' put the phone against your chest and talk it over with the other people there.

Everything you say you've got to be prepared to justify to a judge. You can't be seen to direct people. You say: 'We've heard reports that there are blockades on such-and-such a road.' Or: 'The BBC is reporting a demonstration at this point.' Or: 'You are not the first person to ask if your group is alone in those woods, we've received five other calls from groups near your position waiting to blockade the road.' You have to talk a weird language. You come across a bit like a politician being interviewed. Some callers click on to what you're doing straight away while others continue on confused. Even worse, some people recognise your voice and blurt out 'Hey, is that —?'

These precautions may seem a little over the top for something so innocuous as running a phone line, but there's good reason for it. After the Gothenburg anti-EU summit protests of 2001, eight Swedish youths were sentenced to between one year four months and two years four months in jail for doing something very similar. They'd been less cautious, running their 'Information Central' from a tent at the convergence centre. They were openly collecting information and directing people to the most useful places. That precedent was enough to concentrate our minds.

Our info-line was run from a 'clean' flat and when travelling there you were supposed to use 'counter-surveillance techniques' to make sure you weren't being followed. That is, any counter-surveillance techniques you'd picked up from trashy spy films. The thing is, we needed to do it, or at least I think we did.

Take this example: I was walking through Edinburgh in the days directly before the protests when I thought I was being followed. This guy seemed to have stuck with me even when I'd started to walk aimlessly. I did what any good secret agent does and paid into a cinema, settling down to watch the film. He followed me in. Ten minutes later I grabbed my bags, headed for the toilets and then slipped out the exit. No one seemed to be following me, so I went to the station to rendezvous with the person I was supposed to be meeting. But as I came out of the station, there he was again! That same man walking back towards me. I stared at the fucker, but no sign of recognition showed on his face. He could have been a copper, a journalist out to track down the 'secret leadership' or some guy killing time before catching his train. Fuck knows.

It's not a healthy state of affairs playing James Bond, you can never quite work out what the fuck is going on, and if you did it too much, you'd soon lose track and live your whole life in a corrosive netherworld of suspicion. Still, I'm not denying it's fun for a bit, and I still have a little laugh when I think of my state of mind as I hovered over that toilet.