

Private Eye

Private Eye



By David Whyld

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INTRODUCTION

It was the end of another long and miserable day and I don't mind admitting that I was beat. The case hadn't gone well and I was dreading telling the client the bad news the next day. But in the world of high profile crimes that I regularly dealt with, there were times when even the ingenuity, skill and expertise of yours truly weren't enough to win the day. So... tomorrow I would have to tell Mrs Harris that her cat couldn't be found and she really ought to cut down on Whiskers.

Such was life.

* * * * *

The office was dark when I returned which indicated my secretary had departed for the day. After shoeing aside the

bums who were asleep in the entrance, I made my way inside, threw my coat at the coat rack (it missed, landed on the secretary's desk, and knocked over a mug which promptly shattered on the floor.) then staggered through into my office. It was there that *she* was waiting for me.

She was beautiful and she needed my help. (Yes, I *know* what a sad and tired cliché that is - beautiful damsels in distress and all that - but it's true. I swear.)

"I need your help, detective," she said, purring seductively. "And I am prepared to pay a considerable sum of money to you for this help."

I didn't stop to ask how she was in the office when the front door had been locked. When beautiful women offer me money for my help, all other considerations take a back seat.

"Tell me what I can do," is all I said.

She produced a photo. It showed five men sitting around a table, laughing and drinking.

"My father is the one on the left," she explained. "He was supposed to meet me yesterday. He didn't show. I fear..." A dramatic sob, such as only the best damsels in distress can manage. "I fear for him, detective."

She gave me some more information: her father was rich. Filthy, stinking rich (my phrase, she just said "rich"). He was an oil tycoon and also worked the stock market aggressively. He was worth millions. She didn't say how many millions but I got the impression that we were talking a lot of millions here. The kind of fortune that yours truly could only dream about.

"I will pay you-" and here she named a sum which was approximately eight times my usual fee "-if you find my father."

Under normal circumstances, I'd have advised her to contact the police. I'd have also pointed out that her father had only been missing for a day and she ought to wait and see if he showed up on his own.

But that was normal circumstances. Two factors got rid of the normal side of things: firstly, she was beautiful. And secondly, she was beautiful. Oh, and she was rich besides.

I took the case on. Layla Kavallon, for that was her name, left me the photo of her father and a slim file containing information she had gathered about him and his business activities. Then she left. I was to contact her on a daily basis to inform her how the case was going. I watched her depart, and if my attention was focused more on her shapely behind and less on the case as she walked through my door... well, what can I say? I'm only human.

CREDITS

Special thanks to *Laurence Moore* who did an excellent job of testing this game for me.

Any errors still present are definitely down to me and not him.

PLAYING THE GAME

Welcome to Private Eye, a text adventure with a difference.

This isn't the sort of text adventure where you type in commands in the usual format of text adventures - "north", "examine", "kill" etc. There is no inventory and you won't be called upon to solve any frustratingly awkward puzzles. There are (perhaps best of all) no guess the verb issues.

It's a gamebook in text adventure format. If you ever played any gamebooks back in the 80's (Fighting Fantasy and Lone Wolf were the most popular ones) you might be familiar with the idea. If not, no need to worry. Just read on...

The game is split into a number of 'sections' and at the end of each section are a list of options. If you have played enough text adventures in the past, you might well have seen this principle applied to conversation systems; here it's used for the entire game. Simply type in the number which corresponds with the choice you wish to make and away you go. No guess the verb, no struggling to work out complicated puzzles, no huge inventory of countless obscure items to keep track of... just a set of numbered choices.

A typical section might be as follows:

I was sure there was someone following me but trying to catch the guy was proving harder than I anticipated. Drastic measures would have to be taken.

(1) Set a trap.

- (2) Carry on as normal.
- (3) Wait for the guy and have it out with him.

If you decided that the best thing to do was set a trap, you'd type 1. If you wanted to carry on as normal, you'd type 2. And so on...

If you select an option and then change your mind about it, you can type UNDO and it will take you back one step. Is this cheating? You decide.

No other commands are required throughout the game other than the ones listed at the end of each section, although GAMES will produce a list of other games I have written, LOOK (or L) will reprint the section currently on screen (long sections may sometimes occupy more than a screen of text so typing LOOK is a handy way to refresh your memory if the first part of the text has scrolled off screen). LOAD, SAVE and RESTART all function as normal. A transcript for the game can be generated by clicking on Adventure and Start Transcript.

To see this text displayed again during the game, simply type "commands".

GAME INFORMATION

Written with ADRIFT Version 4, Release 45

Started: March 2005; Finished: April 2005

Size: 231 KB; 312 rooms/locations; 1,036 tasks

E-Mail: dwhyld@gmail.com

The latest version of this game can always be found at:

<http://www.shadowvault.net/privateeye.htm>

WALKTHROUGH

The first thing I did was read through the file she had left me. There was some interesting information here and I was pretty confident that all the clues I needed to find her father would be waiting for me within this slim file.

- (1) Study the section marked "known associates".
- (2) Read about Marcus Kavallon's business activities.
- (3) See what he likes to eat for breakfast.

> 1

Interesting indeed. It seems Marcus Kavallon had ties with several figures known in the criminal underworld. I recognised the names of Luis Malazzi and Fiona Trobaggen from dealings I had had with police associates working murder cases. Now, why would a respectable businessman like Marcus Kavallon do business with the likes of Malazzi and Trobaggen? Unless he

wanted a few rivals disposing of 'on the quiet', it was doubtful they could offer him anything he desired.

Still, checking in on them might provide some leads.

- (1) Read some more of the file.
- (2) Leave the file for now.

> 1

- (1) Study the section marked "known associates".
- (2) Read about Marcus Kavallon's business activities.
- (3) See what he likes to eat for breakfast.

> 2

Marcus Kavallon was a major figure in the oil industry, owning no fewer than seven companies which deal in the extraction of oil from the ocean floor and the exporting it all around the world. The head office is actually in this very city, on 14th Avenue, and might be a good place to start.

- (1) Read some more of the file.
- (2) Leave the file for now.

> 2

I push the file to one side and study the photo. At the moment, only the identity of Marcus Kavallon is known to me. Who the other four are - business associates, friends - I don't know.

I stare at the photo as the day ends and then, exhausted, I lock up the office and retire to my crummy little apartment where the parrot I bought years ago greets me with a cry of "Jeez, you're ugly!" I feed him, despite his ongoing insults about my appearance and general sexual appetites (the one about the monkeys is definitely uncalled for) and then slump into bed.

My dreams are filled with visions of the beautiful woman from my office. It's not often I come into contact with beautiful women, except when they're either chasing me away with a knife or taking out restraining orders against me, and so to find one who actually wants my help is sweet indeed.

In the morning, I fall out of bed, struggle into my clothes, and debate how best to start the day.

- (1) Check in at the office.
- (2) Start following up leads.

> 2

From my perusal of the file Layla Kavallon left me yesterday, I have uncovered quite a few possible leads.

- (1) Check out Luis Malazzi.
- (2) Check out Fiona Trobaggen.
- (3) Check out the head office of Marcus Kavallon's company.
- (4) Do some general snooping into the background of the oil company.

> 1

A police informant who I have sometimes leaned on in the past (he's short and the top of his head provides ideal leaning space for my elbow), fills me in on the lowdown regarding Luis Malazzi.

"The guy's a psycho," are his first words. Followed closely by: "a complete psycho." And he finishes off with: "the biggest psycho you're ever likely to meet."

"Tell me something about him that doesn't contain the word 'psycho'," I suggest.

The informant struggles and eventually lets me know that Luis likes to eat dinner in a seedy restaurant downtown: The Purple Poison Den.

"But you don't want to go there," he adds.

"Why?"

"Full of psychos."

- (1) Head to the Purple Poison Den.
- (2) Head into the office.

> 1

Despite the classy name, the Purple Poison Den proves to be a rundown dump that I wouldn't take my own mother to. Shady characters hang around outside and discuss nefarious matters in low tones (I overhear words like "baby sitting", "shopping" and "Christmas cards" and know they're up to no good).

Inside, I look around the place but see no sign of Luis Malazzi who I have seen countless times on police bulletins and wanted posters. Has my informant lied to me?

- (1) Wait and see if Luis Malazzi shows up.
- (2) Head back to the informant and lean on him some more.

> 1

Before long, none other than Luis Malazzi himself shows up. But he's not alone. Flanking him are the two biggest bodyguards I have ever seen. Malazzi clearly believes that bodyguards who stand seven feet tall and weigh eighteen stone and can probably punch through a steel door are intimidating. He's right as well.

I make my way to his table after he takes his seat but the bodyguards refuse to let me speak to him.

"Mr Malazzi dun like cops," one grunts.

"I'm not a cop," I say. "I'm a private detective."

"Mr Malazzi dun like private detectives," grunts the other.

I'm half tempted to claim I'm really a flower arranger but I get the impression that Mr Malazzi dun like them as well.

Which leaves me with a choice.

- (1) Try and force my way past the bodyguards.
- (2) Call it quits here and make my way to the office.

> 1

Forcing past them is about as likely to succeed as trying to force a building to collapse by pushing on it. But Mr Malazzi apparently isn't in a mood to have his bodyguards splat a private detective, at least not while he's having his dinner, and motions them to step aside.

"You got twenty seconds before I have Boris and Hrolf throw you out on your skinny behind, detective," says the mafia boss. "Don't waste it."

- (1) Intimate he has killed Marcus Kavallon and see what he says.
- (2) Say I've got my eye on him.
- (3) Ask him where he was yesterday.

> 2

Malazzi pauses in the act of eating his soup and looks up at me. He smiles. "Perchance, detective, are you threatening me?" he asks politely. "You have come to my area of the city and entered my restaurant and now you are threatening me? You would do well to rethink your course of conduct before you wind up in more trouble than you have ever encountered before."

(1) Apologise before he decides to have his goons stomp me into the floor.

(2) Say he doesn't scare me.

> 2

There are a few moments of deadly silence. I imagine it's probably the same kind of silence that generally occurs when a mouse dares a cat to eat it.

But then, surprisingly, Malazzi laughs!

"Ah, you have nerve, detective," he says, chuckling. "Most of the ones who come here... oh, they are so yellow it is a wonder they can muster the nerve to get out of bed in the morning. But you, you come here to my restaurant with my hired bodyguards ready and waiting to crush your bones into paste, and you say you aren't scared. How amusing."

I'd agree but right now my mind is filled with visions of the bodyguards crushing my bones into paste. I give a quick nod instead and hope he thinks the sweat on my brow is due to the temperature in here.

"You are here about Marcus Kavallon, are you not? My informants tell me that his lovely daughter came to see you. A fine specimen of femininity, is she not?"

I give another quick nod.

"And you wish to know where dear Marcus is. So, detective, do I. Hrolf, give him the package."

Wondering uneasily if 'package' is a gangster euphemism for a bullet in the head, I start to back away but instead the package turns out to be... a package.

"Marcus asked me to keep that for him in the event of a sudden disappearance on his behalf. He believed it was safer with me than any of his other associates as there are few who would seek to cause trouble for me. Take it, detective. Perhaps it will prove fruitful. Perhaps not. I have not perused the contents myself."

Outside, I tear open the package and find several newspaper clippings. They all relate to a murder which occurred a few years back at the cattle market. Later I'll have to make a point of checking that out but now it's probably time I made my way to the office.

It's chaos as usual when I arrive at the Lep. R. C. Detective Agency. Sometimes I wonder at my parents for their strange choice in naming me Leppin Ryder Chimner but at least it's

distinctive. People see the name Lep. R. C. over the doorway and they stop and stare.

Inside my secretary is polishing her nails, the filing clerk is regaling the tea girl with his war stories (he was sat firmly behind a desk the entire time but that doesn't stop him telling everyone who will listen about the time head office sent black pens when he ordered blue pencils or the time...). My assistant, Jim, is asleep on a bench in the corner. And several irate would-be clients are just walking out in dismay over the quality of service they have received.

A typical day in other words.

No sooner have I sank behind my desk and put my feet upon it - they leave a filthy stain behind but such is a part of the job - than the door flies open and in comes Jim.

"About the Grigori case, boss," he says and slumps down in the other chair. "You want to hear the good news or the bad news?"

- (1) The good news.
- (2) The bad news.

> 1

"Crap," he mutters. "I didn't think you'd ask for the good news and I was kinda bankin' on you not doing that."

"Why?"

"Cos there ain't any." He fumbles through his pockets and ferrets out several pieces of screwed up newspaper that look to have been used, quite recently, to wrap fish and chips in. "Alice Grigori thinks her son stole the remote control and used it to buy drugs. The son, Steve, denies it and says his mother is a witch. The husband, Mike, says the son is a liar and that the mother is a dragon, not a witch. I fingerprinted the son and, sure enough, his fingerprints were all over the house so I'm inclined to think he's the guilty party."

I mull this over. "His fingerprints were all over the house in which he lives?"

Jim nods. "Yup, boss. Got guilty written all over him. Only, of course, he denies it and I ain't sure the mother wants me to break his kneecaps to get a confession from him. What should I do, boss?"

(1) Tell him to put pressure on the son.

(2) Tell him to investigate the mother's story that her son stole the remote control and sold it for drugs.

(3) Tell him to check into the father's background.

> 1

"Pressure him. Right." Jim pulls a pair of knuckledusters out of his pocket and takes a few experimental jabs.

"Gently," I say. "His mother's a client."

He nods. "I'll be the model of gentleness," he adds and leaves my office.

My phone rings and I answer it on the eighteenth ring. It's Layla Kavallon.

"I'm sorry to bother you so soon," she says, "but I was just curious to see whether you had managed to discover anything yet."

"I spoke to an unpleasant fellow who gave me some information leading to the cattle market and a murder which took place," I say.

"A murder at the cattle market?" says Layla, sounding confused. "What does that have to do with my father?"

"Maybe everything, maybe nothing. I'll have to check into it fully before I can say for certain."

"Thank you, detective," Layla says. "I'll wait for your call."

She puts the phone down.

No sooner have I put the phone down on Layla Kavallon than it rings again. Thinking it must be her again with something she forgot to say to me, I answer with, "yes, my dear?" and get a mouthful from the ex. We split up seven years ago over a shameful incident with a stripper, too much wine and a set of seriously loose morals.

I still haven't forgiven her.

"We need to talk, Lep," the ex says. I can hear music and shouting in the background. It sounds like she's in a bar. "Today. Right now."

"I'm working on a case now, Charlotte," I say.

"I'm sure the cats of the world can wait a few more hours. This is important."

Every time the ex calls it's important. Or so she claims it to be. When the dog ate the phone bill - it was important. When Susie got her lunch stolen at school - it was important. When the guy she left me for got knifed by some bums and set on fire -

it was important. Every time she expects me to just drop everything I'm working on and hurry over to her.

"Well, Lep?" squawks the voice on the phone. "You on your way over here or not?"

(1) Tell her yes.

(2) Tell her no.

> 1

So I head over to the ex's house. It's a nice place in the suburbs. Ideal place for raising a family. I ought to know. I bought it.

Charlotte opens the door to me and ushers me inside. The house looks the same as when I walked out seven years ago. Exactly the same.

"The hoover broke?" I ask, wiping a finger along a shelf and picking up a half inch of dust.

Charlotte sighs. She's beautiful when she sighs. Actually, she's always beautiful. That was part of what attracted her to me in the first place. Actually it was the only part that attracted me to her. Her first words to me - "how rich are you?" - should perhaps have warned me but what can I say? I was in love.

"Ted's in trouble," she says.

Ted. Ah. The chap she left me for. Handsome, rich, witty, intelligent, charming - I haven't got a clue what she sees in him.

"Serious trouble?" I inquire. "Trouble that might leave him dead? Disemboweled? A few limbs hacked off?"

Charlotte shakes her head. "Nothing like that."

Pity.

"He's had some trouble at his accountancy firm. The cops have been snooping around and there are some shady characters involved. Criminals."

Ted involved with criminals? Better and better.

"Will you at least have a talk with Ted, Lep?" Charlotte asks. "See if you can help him out? For old time's sake."

- (1) Agree to speak to Ted.
- (2) Laugh maniacally and depart.

> 1

Charlotte breathes a sigh of relief. "Thanks, Lep." On the way out, she says, "I'll stop spreading all those rumours about you and that waitress."

"What waitress?" I ask but the door has already slammed shut.

Ted's office is a small, squalid place in the rough part of town. Only the foolhardy would come here, or those desperate for business - any kind of business. I locate Ted's office easily enough. I have only been here once before when, after a drinking spree with Jim, I wandered past with a brick in hand and spent some time drunkenly lobbing it at the window. Ted, spoilsport that he is, had had the glass reinforced and the brick, when it bounced off, landed on my head and gave me a black eye. I still haven't forgiven him.

But that was then. This is now. Trying to keep a lid on my hatred for the guy, I approach his door and find it locked. Strange. An accountancy firm closed in the middle of the day? I knock a few times and a voice from inside shouts at me to go away. I can't tell if it's Ted or not.

- (1) Knock again.
- (2) Sneak around the back and see if I can find an open door or window.
- (3) Call it quits.

> 2

The office backs onto a grimy alley and here I manage to locate an old, but sturdy, box which I drag under a window and stand on. The window, fortunately, proves to be unlocked and a few seconds later I'm slipping down into a storage room inside the office.

I can hear voices from another room in the office and press my ear to the wall to try and make out what they are saying. One voice is threatening the other, the second is begging, the first is getting angry, the second is begging some more.

The first voice I don't know but the second is Ted's. Sounds like he's in trouble, too.

(1) Try and save him.

(2) Listen.

> 1

I stealthily creep through the office until I find myself outside the room where the two men are. Ted is tied to a chair in the middle of the room and another man, one I don't recognise, is walking around him. The man has a gun in his hand. He looks

about to start pointing it dangerously close to Ted's head and I entertain a sudden (and delightful) image of his finger pressing a little too hard onto the trigger...

But then I shake away that glorious idea and spring into the office. The man hears me at the last moment but by this time I have karate-chopped him across the arm and the gun has gone flying. Before the man can react further, I slam my forehead down into his jaw with enough force to bounce him off the wall. He's out before he even hits the floor.

Ted is shaken when I untie him but otherwise unharmed. He doesn't really thank me for my efforts but hands me a business card and tells me to call the number on it if ever I need help. Then we call the police and have them cart away the unconscious guy with my forehead imprinted into his jaw.

The story turns out to be a run-of-the-mill story: Ted got into financial difficulties due to his unfortunate tendency to always bet on the loser at the race track. He borrowed money to cover his loses, lost more, couldn't pay back the loan sharks and ended up having a debt collector sent after him to have a 'quiet word'. Hopefully with the debt collector locked up and the cops involved, the loan sharks will leave Ted and Charlotte alone.

All in all, a good day's work.

I return to the office to see what has gone down in my absence. No sooner have I sat in my chair than Jim ambles in and plonks himself down in the other chair.

"May have got a tip about the sexy broad's father, boss," he says without preamble.

"She's a paying customer, Jim," I tell him. "As such, she doesn't deserve to be referred to as 'the sexy broad'."

He nods. "Sorry, boss."

"So what have you found out about the hottie's dad?"

He flips through a notebook.

"You ever been to a strip club on the waterfront called The Mermaid, boss?"

I have a brief vision of the place and recall that I've frequented the place almost every evening for the past six years. And some afternoons as well. Not to mention a few mornings. In fact, I've even got my own stool and I'm on first name terms with the strippers.

"Can't say it rings a bell, Jim," I say. "What about it?"

Jim shows me a photo. It has an elderly gentleman doing the conga with a blonde lady wearing entirely too few clothes. And a bra that leaves nothing to the imagination.

"Recognise anything?" asks Jim.

"A couple of things," I answer vaguely. I pull my attention away. "Is that Marcus Kavallon?"

Jim nods. "Sure is. I had a swing by the club earlier on, er, following leads and thought I'd show the photo around. See if anyone knew the old geezer. Turns out they do."

I study the photo again. Alicia, I think. Nice girl. She could do things with a melon you wouldn't believe...

"This might be worth checking into," I say.

"I'm on it, boss," says Jim quickly. "I'll head right there now and sit on the place till I uncover something useful. I won't leave till I get to the bottom of it. I'll even stay there in my own time-"

"I think this requires a more mature presence," I say. And slip the photo inside my pocket. "Haven't you got another case to work on?"

"Er... er..." Jim's attention returns to the present. "Sure have, boss."

"How did it go?"

"Well, I put pressure on the son but he proved a pretty tough customer. Even minus a tooth or two, he still maintained his innocence."

I wince. "I thought I said to be gentle with him."

"I was, boss!" Jim protests. "I didn't even use my bigger wrench."

I wince again. "A wrench?"

"Sure, boss. I ram it in their-"

I hold up a hand. "I don't want to know, Jim. Really I don't."

"You want me to continue with the case then? Or..." He looks sly for a second. "I could come and help you at the strip club, boss. Moral support and all that."

- (1) Keep him on the remote control case.
- (2) Have him accompany me to the strip club.

> 1

Jim's face falls as I give him the news that I want him to stay on the remote control case and I watch him, feeling some slight regret, as he ambles from the office.

On my way out, I check with my secretary to see if there have been any messages. She says no but as the phone rings three

times while I'm asking her and she's too busy checking her makeup in a mirror to answer it, I probably shouldn't take her word for it. Deciding I'll have to fire her one of these days, I head out of the office and make my way to where I've parked my car. As I'm passing an alleyway, a voice hisses to me: "Oi! You! In here!"

I peer into the alleyway but can see nothing.

"I got information for you, pal," the voice hisses again.

Information, I wonder, or a would-be mugger? Only one way to find out.

(1) Head into the alley.

(2) Decide it's a mugger and head to the strip club.

> 2

The Mermaid is the hardest strip club on the waterfront and the sort of place where asking the wrong question can lead to an unfortunate and painful demise. No one enters The Mermaid without a weapon. Even the strippers carry guns and I've seen them used on enough occasions to know they're not just for decoration (although the girl with the magnum built into her chastity belt is certainly a sight worth seeing).

Before entering, I rough my clothes up, brush my head against a wall and try to look as unlike a private eye as it's possible to look. While being a private eye doesn't carry the same kind of stigma as does being a cop - where cops are often used as target practice by drunks wanting to test their reflexes - it's not a good idea to advertise what I do.

Disgruntled former clients and cons I've helped put away tend to congregate to places like this and they have long memories.

I walk through the door, bypass a couple of sailors trying to knife each other in the corner, wander over to the bar and order a beer. Then I consider my next move.

- (1) Talk to some of the customers.
- (2) Check out the strippers.
- (3) Mingle with drinkers and listen out for interesting rumours.

> 1

The customers are in various stages of inebriation from the mildly tipsy stage to the full blown howling-at-the-moon-and-believing-they're-a-small-tree stage. Getting anything more than "woo-hoo!" and "yowza!" from them is a difficult task but

I'm an expert at speaking to bumbling drunks and soon manage to narrow the field down to three likely candidates.

(1) An enormously fat man sitting on a seriously stressed stool who yelps at the strippers from time to time and seems on the verge of getting himself thrown out by the bouncers.

(2) A spotty teenager with thick-rimmed glasses who is sat in the corner and looks around with the kind of awe-inspired gaze generally associated with little kids who stumble into a candy store without the owner present.

(3) A morose fellow nursing a single beer who looks like he hasn't had a good meal in a long, long time.

> 2

"Wow!" says the spotty teenager as I sit at the table with him. He has a kind of country bumpkin look to him, now that I've seen him up close. Probably his first time in the city. "Those ladies... they ain't got no clothes on!"

From the expression on his face, I can well guess that ladies in a state of undress aren't a sight he beholds on a regular basis. Or ever.

"Want me to put in a good word with some of the ladies for you?" I say. "I'm on first name terms with some of them."

The teenager looks at me. His spots are red and raw up close and I find myself leaning slightly away from him in case one decides to choose that moment to pop.

"You'd do that for me? Awww, shucks, you're a nice man you are and no mistake."

"No problem, kid. Just tell me if you've seen this man and the ladies over there are as good as yours."

I show him the photo of Marcus Kavallon and the four strangers.

It's clear from his vacant expression upon seeing the photo that he's never set eyes on Marcus Kavallon before. But he points to one of the others and nods. "That the guy you is looking for?"

It's not but I give a quick nod.

"Him's called Murt."

"Murt?"

"That's all I know. Murt. Dunno if it's his first name or his last name. Just Murt. I've seen him in hurt from time to time."

I thank him for his time, although what use a single name will be in finding Marcus Kavallon I don't know.

"Now the ladies," says the spotty teenager with a desperation that's so obvious it's almost painful.

- (1) Try and fix him up with some of the ladies.
- (2) Admit I was lying.
- (3) Promise to fix him up then make a sharp exit.

> 1

It costs me the best part of last week's pay packet to procure a couple of the ladies to spend time with the teenager, but I feel bad about lying to him. The poor dork.

"His spots burst all over us," one of them says to me, "we charging double."

I get out of their quickly before the inevitable happens.

The office is closing for the day when I arrive there. Jim bids me goodnight and I slump back in my chair and stare at the phone. Time to call Layla and give her the news of how the investigation is going.

"Murt?" says Layla. "No. I don't think I've ever heard of that name before. Why do you ask?"

I mention the circumstances in which the name came to light.

Layla sighs. "A strip club on the waterfront? And you think my father was there recently?"

"At this moment, Miss Kavallon, it's too early to think anything. Tomorrow I'm going to look in to finding out everything I can about a man called Murt. When I call you tomorrow evening, I should have a concrete lead to follow."

"I hope so, detective," says Layla. "I sincerely hope so."

Day two of the investigation into the disappearance of Marcus Kavallon dawns. As usual, it's raining. Crawling out of bed, I dress, drink my breakfast (beer, eggs and toast, minus the eggs and toast) and consider how things are progressing. I'm no closer to finding out what has happened to him, but it's still early days yet. Unfortunately I get the impression that Layla Kavallon is the sort of woman who expects fast results and if many days go by without them, she's liable to take me off the case and find someone else. Today, hopefully, will yield something more concrete than yesterday.

I go over my options and debate what needs doing.

The following list contains things I might know about but also might not know about. Options can only be selected if I actually know about them.

- (1) Check out the murder at the cattle market.
- (2) Speak to Gordon at 1617 Macoset Avenue.
- (3) Delve into Woderick's background.
- (4) Try and find information on a man called Murt.
- (5) Return to the strip club and see if I can find the morose fellow.
- (6) Decide against any of that and check in at the office.

> 1

I've never been to the cattle market before and if the ever present smell of dung is anything to go by, I won't be returning. The newspaper articles I received from Luis Malazzi mentioned a murder occurring here eight years ago. A man called Pedro Gummage was attacked with a blunt instrument and bludgeoned to death behind the Cowpat Café. No one was ever arrested for the murder. What connection this man Pedro Gummage has to Marcus Kavallon I don't know but it was clearly something Marcus felt was worth keeping safe if he gave

it to Luis Malazzi for safekeeping. The only question now is: how do I go about finding information on the murder?

- (1) Ask around the Cowpat Café.
- (2) Hang around the cattle market and see what shows up.
- (3) See if I can get any information from the cops.

> 1

The owner of the Cowpat Café is a hulking, beefy woman called Gus who smokes heavily as she cooks someone's breakfast. I make a point of never eating anything from here after observing the way she often stubs out her cigarette in the bacon.

"Sure I remember it," she says, wafting a cloud of smoke over the sausages. "Terrible thing it were. That bloke getting his head bashed in like that. Really put the folks off their-" she coughs loudly and gobs something into a corner of the greasy, unwashed kitchen "-food. Ain't been the same since. I mean, we run a clean shop here and everything but when a murder goes down... well-" she scratches herself with the same hand she

then uses to drop more sausages onto the oven "-it really does business in."

"Did you know Pedro Gummage?" I ask.

"Seen him around a few times. Not a very clean fellow. Always picking his nose-" she gives me a demonstration "-and stuff. Unpleasant company he kept."

- (1) Show her the photo of Marcus Kavallon and see if she recognises him.
- (2) Ask if she can remember anything else about Gummage.

> 1

"Nope. Don't recognise him," she says. "But him-" she jabs a greasy, bitten fingernail at the man sitting opposite to Marcus Kavallon "-that's Pedro Gummage."

Ah. So Kavallon and Gummage knew each other before the murder, which probably explains why he was investigating Gummage's untimely demise. I wonder who the other people in the photo are. Other friends of Marcus Kavallon's? Are any of them dead as well?

Maybe this is something I should ask Layla Kavallon about. She may know something useful about Pedro Gummage.

Thanking Gus for her help, I leave the café.

The office is pretty quiet when I arrive there. The filing clerk and tea girl are out for dinner; Jim is working on an assignment which, if it goes well, should ensure that the Dinkly Dell School never has its milk stolen again; just me and my secretary (but as she's asleep she probably doesn't count). Nice and peaceful.

I sit back in my chair, focus my thoughts, and go over everything I've learnt today.

I know that Pedro Gummage and Marcus Kavallon were friends (or at least associates) and that Marcus was looking into Gummage's death down at the cattle market. What I don't know is why.

Part of me wonders if this might be a dead end. After all, Gummage has been dead for eight years. What chance do I have of figuring out who killed him now? And is finding out who killed him even relevant to my current investigation? Maybe I should be trying other angles. It could be that I'm missing something really obvious.

I hear footsteps in the outer office and call "is that you, Jim?"

"No," says the man with the gun who pushes the door open.

"It's not."

The gun is pointed unerringly at my head and I've never warmed much to people who point guns unerringly at my head.

"On your feet, Chimner," says the man. "We're going to take a little trip."

I hesitate, wondering if I can reach the gun I keep in the bottom drawer of my desk.

(1) Go for it.

(2) Decide it's too risky.

> 2

Holding up my hands, I come out from behind the desk and the man gestures me into the outer office. My secretary is still asleep and clearly isn't much use at picking up psychic signals as she just ignores the pair of us as we leave the office.

"To the parking lot," says the man. "We'll take your car."

I nod.

"And lower your arms. You're looking like a man being kidnapped."

"I am a man being kidnapped!"

"Yeah. But you're going to be a man being shot if you don't lower those arms."

I sense he's not joking so I lower them.

We reach my car and I take the driver's seat. He sits in the back and while I can't see the gun being pointed at me, I'm sure all the same that it's there.

"Where to?" I ask.

"Just drive for now," says the man. "I'll tell you where once we're outta here."

I drive. After five minutes have gone by and the man hasn't said anything, I ask, "you going to tell me what this is all about?"

"No."

"It's to do with Marcus Kavallon's disappearance-"

The gun prods me in the back of the head. "Don't ask questions and I won't have to shoot you. Now get on the freeway."

The freeway? He means to take me out of town.

As I approach the freeway, I glance to the left and see a glorious sight there: a police car!

- (1) Signal to them.
- (2) Slam on the brakes.
- (3) Do nothing.

> 3

Thinking I'm making a mistake by not signalling to the cops, I instead head onto the freeway. For a while mine is the only car I can see.

"You going to tell me what this is all about?" I say to the man in the back seat.

"You going to shut up before I shoot you?" he responds.

"Shoot the driver of a car moving down the freeway at 80 mph? We'll both die."

"Yeah?" The gun presses into the back of my head. "But you'll definitely die. Maybe I'll be able to pull the car over before it crashes. You willing to take that risk, Chimner?"

I'm tempted to say "yes, go ahead" but right now I'm a little concerned over whether he's serious about his threat. Something tells me it might not be a good idea to test it.

So we drive along in silence for the next half hour. I make a note of checking the road signs so I can tell where we are going. Part of me is a little worried over the fact that I'm being allowed to see this. If the man expects to set me free afterwards, I could very easily lead the police back to wherever I'm being taken. If he plans to kills me, though...

"Just ahead," says the man suddenly. "There's a turn on the right. Take it."

There's nothing for miles around aside from the turn.

"Drive towards those cliffs. You'll find a house. Stop there and get out of the car."

Sure enough, I soon see the cliffs up ahead. And then the house. I slow down, stop the car, get out. A second man appears from the house. This one is carrying a machine gun.

"Well, well, Lep," he says. "Long time no see."

I squint at him and frown. "Have I met you before?"

"Don't remember me, Lep? Pity." He gestures with the machine gun. "In the house. Now. And no funny moves or my friend Robert Smith here-"

"Boss!" hisses the man who has kidnapped me. "What are you telling him my name for?"

The man who seems to know me winces. "Damn. Sorry about that, Rob. Slip of the tongue and all that. At least I didn't tell him you used to be in the marines-

"Boss!"

Another wince. "Double damn! Me and my big mouth. In the house, Lep, before my friend with the tattoo on his rear-

The other man just sighs.

"-gets an itchy trigger finger."

With no other choice in the matter, I step into the house.

It's surprisingly pleasant inside. The man who seems to know me sits me down in a chair in the middle of a lounge and ties my hands behind my back. He sits opposite me on a stool. Of Robert Smith, formerly of the marines and sporting a tattoo on his behind, there is no sign.

"Let's talk, Lep," says the man. "Here's how it goes. I ask a question, you answer it. So long as I think you're being truthful, I don't shoot you. Clear enough? Okay, question one: what have you done with Marcus Kavallon?"

Of all the questions I expected to be asked, this definitely wasn't one of them. This guy thinks that I kidnapped Marcus Kavallon!

(1) Say he's got the wrong end of the stick. I'm looking for Marcus Kavallon myself.

(2) Tell him if he doesn't let me go, my associates will kill Marcus Kavallon. (A bluff but if it gets me out of here and away from this machine gun-wielding madman it'll be worth it.)

(3) Refuse to say anything.

> 1

The man raises an eyebrow. "Really? I've been watching you, Lep, and I know you've met with Layla Kavallon. Is she in on it or are you trying to get money from her for the old man's safe return? Well?"

(1) Tell him I'm working with Layla Kavallon to find her father.

(2) Tell him he's 100% correct.

(3) Refuse to say anything.

> 1

"Really? That's not what I heard from Progbanini."

"I've never heard of Progbanini," I say.

He shrugs. "I thought you might say that. The thing is, Lep, you ain't the man I knew all those years ago and right now I don't know what to believe. Marcus Kavallon's disappeared and you've been asking some mighty suspicious questions all over town. I also know your detective agency ain't doing too well financially."

"My colleague's working on a case right now," I say, "and I closed a major case just the other day-"

"Remote controls and missing cats ain't big cases, Lep," says the man. That he knows so much about my day to day business is kind of worrying considering that he currently has me tied to a chair and is carrying a machine gun. "But then the opportunity to profit from the disappearance of a millionaire comes along, are you likely to pass it by? I don't think so. All we've got to establish now, old friend, is just how deep you are into this. And-"

There is an explosion from somewhere in the distance and the man swears under his breath. At the same time, a door on the far side of the room bursts open and in bursts another man.

"Boss!" he cries. "The feds are here!"

"The feds?" says the man. "Damnit! Let me see..."

The two go rushing off out of the room, leaving me all alone.

(1) Wait. Hopefully the feds will be in here soon and I'll be saved.

(2) Try and escape just in case the man decides to come back and kill me.

> 2

It's not difficult to free myself from the chair as I'm not tied very securely. My kidnappers clearly didn't expect to get attacked partway through my interrogation or they'd have done a better job of it. I struggle with the bonds for a minute and finally manage to loosen my hands. A few seconds later I'm free.

Now all I need to do is get out of here.

(1) Leave through the front where the gunfight is going down.

(2) Head back the way I've come.

(3) Wait here and try to ambush the first person to enter the room.

> 2

I hurry along the corridor I was brought along at gunpoint, noticing that it looks a bit different when one doesn't have a

machine gun barrel pointing at his face. I check the doors as I pass each one and finally find one that is unlocked. Ducking into the room, I barricade the door and decide to wait it out in here. If the feds win, they'll come along soon and I can unbarricade the door. If the kidnappers win, this will be a handy place to try and hold them off.

The room appears to be some kind of computer centre judging by all the ancient and battered machines someone has dumped in here. Clearly my kidnappers are not up with the latest technology as I see evidence of Windows 1902 loaded on most of the machines. An idea suddenly occurs to me.

- (1) Try and access the computers to learn information about my kidnappers.
- (2) Search the rest of the room.
- (3) Wait to be rescued.

> 2

Leaving the computers alone, I conduct a quick but thorough search of the room. Several things immediately come to life: there are no hidden guns anywhere in here and there are no other exits. On the positive side of things, I find myself holding

a diary which seems to be some kind of account of what has happened at the house in recent months. Reference is made on numerous occasions to the St Mary's Hospital just south of the city but no reason for why is given. What connection exists between the kidnappers and this hospital?

I hear a knock at the door and a voice shouts out: "you in there, detective? It's the FBI here. Open the door."

It might be a bluff by my kidnappers to make me open the door but as they're armed and I'm not, it won't take them very long to get in here if they want to get in. So I unbarricade the door and breathe a big sigh of relief when it turns out that it really is the FBI standing there.

"You Lep Chimner?" one of them asks.

I nod.

They grab me and drag me out of there. The diary is taken from me. I'm taken to a car parked outside the house, bundled inside, and driven off.

The feds question me for the rest of the day and seem disinclined to believe that I don't really know why I was kidnapped or who my kidnapper was (he got away apparently). They give me a small tracking device to put in my wallet which

will allow them to keep tabs on me if I get kidnapped again. I can activate it by a simple squeeze.

I try to garner some information from the feds about what went down today, and how they knew where I was being held, but talking to them is slightly less useful than speaking to a brick wall. I get blank expressions all around and in the end they simply turf me out and tell me to go about my business as usual. I do overhear one of the agents called the senior agent in charge of the case Igbaron but that's about the only useful piece of information I get.

When I arrive at the office, it's to find everyone has gone home. The first thing I do is grab hold of my gun from its usual resting place in the bottom drawer of my desk. Whoever the kidnappers are, they knew where to find me and it's likely they'll be back at some point. Next time I'll be ready for them. Next time-

The phone rings.

I hesitate before answering it, wondering if it might be the kidnapper who seemed to know me deciding to handle things by phone this time. But then again, it might be someone else and I can hardly go without answering the phone.

It turns out to be Layla Kavallon.

"Detective," she says. "How goes the case?"

I relate my findings of the day.

"I remember my father mentioning the name Pedro Gummage on several occasions," says Layla, "but he always went quiet when I asked him about it and would never say who Pedro Gummage was. But didn't you say he died eight years ago?"

"I did, Miss Kavallon. Your father seemed to be asking questions over Gummage's murder and-

"And maybe the same people who killed Pedro Gummage are behind my father's disappearance? Hmmm. That seems a bit of stretch, detective. Have you discovered anything else?"

I tell her of the kidnap attempt and what I discovered at the house I was taken to.

"And you think these men took you because they realised you were looking into my father's disappearance?" asks Layla.

"Could well be. The one who questioned me seemed to think I was involved in your father's disappearance."

"You? But you didn't even know who my father was before I hired you."

"I know. Tell me, does the name Progbanini mean anything to you?"

"Progbanini? Never heard of him. Why?"

"One of the kidnappers mentioned it. I hoped it might mean something. What about the St Mary's Hospital? I found some information about it in a logbook."

"No. Not that either. I mean, I know where the place is but I don't know of anyone staying there. What does it mean, detective?"

"I'm going to have to check into that, Miss Kavallon," I say. "I'll call you tomorrow evening. By then, I hope to know something more."

I don't feel too well when day three dawns. It's sunny and pleasant which doesn't match my mood one bit. I'd prefer clouds and rain. Part of me wishes for a day off but with the Kavallon case ongoing that's not an option for me right now. Of course, I could assign Jim to it...

The very horror of Jim handling a case of this kind of seriousness has me out of bed, dressed and staggering through the outer office in the space of five minutes. Jim follows me through into my own office and practically frothing at the mouth in his eagerness to hear how the kidnap went. I can see he's disappointed that the kidnappers didn't try to extract a

ransom for my release and even more disappointed that he couldn't have gotten kidnapped as well.

"I miss out on all the best stuff," he mutters.

There are several letters on my desk: bills, eviction notices, bills, winning prize letters, bills... and one slim envelope (wedged between several bills) that is written in a hand I'd recognise anywhere: my old detective mentor, Bribe Magee.

I open it eagerly, wondering just why Magee is getting in touch with me after all these long years. The letter doesn't really tell me much. It just says "I need to see you" and gives me an address and a time. Just over an hour from now. It's like Magee to be cryptic like this but today, with the Kavallon case hanging over me and Layla Kavallon wanting fast results, I just don't have the time for it. Still, I do owe everything I've learnt to old Bribe and it just wouldn't be right if I turned him down without at least seeing what he wants.

- (1) Go and see Bribe Magee.
- (2) Leave it for another day.

The address Bribe gave me turns out to be in the real sleazy part of town. Here, the streets are ruled by vicious gangs and anyone bringing a half decent set of wheels into this neighbourhood is just asking for them to be stolen. Fortunately, my battered old museum piece is greeted with howls of derision from the streetwise punks rather than careful eyeings up of it to determine whether it's worth swiping.

I make my way inside the building Bribe directed me to and climb the stairs as the elevator isn't working. I'm reasonably fit and reach the 20th floor without too much trouble. Alas, Bribe's apartment is on the 76th floor and I'm experiencing heart palpitations by the time I get there. I knock on Bribe's door and my former mentor lets me in. He's changed.

He used to be a tall fellow, now he's hunched over. He used to be fat, now he's razor thin. He used to be clean shaven, now he's wearing a beard. He's also black.

"That's quite a change that's come over you, Bribe," I say uneasily.

"Life changes you, Lep," says Bribe. He ushers me inside. The apartment is in almost as poor condition as he is. "Why, you might wake up one day and find you're a woman. I've seen it happen. Strange but true."

I try to come up with some sensible reply to that but nothing comes. Instead I say, "what have you brought me here for, Bribe?"

"The Kavallon case," he says without preamble. "Drop it."

(1) "But that's the biggest case of my career, Bribe. I can't drop it."

(2) "Why should I drop it?"

> 1

"That doesn't matter," Bribe says. "If you want to live a long life, Lep, you'll drop the case and walk away. Forget you ever heard about Marcus Kavallon and Layla Kavallon. Forget it all. Or else..."

(1) "Or else what, Bribe? Are you threatening me?"

(2) "Give me a reason why I should drop it."

> 2

"Reasons don't matter, Lep. I'm asking you to. I taught you well, my boy. Fifteen years in the game and already you've got the eighty-fifth biggest detective agency on the east side of

town. Remember what I've taught you and, one day, you might even make it into the Top 500 in the entire city. You're there 'cos of what I've done for you, Lep. Remember that."

"I do remember it, Bribe," I say. "But you're making no sense. What's so wrong about the Kavallon case?"

"Everything," he says bluntly.

(1) "You'll have to do better than that. I'm not walking away from the biggest case of my career because you think it's bad."

(2) "What do you know about this case that you aren't telling me?"

> 1

Bribe hesitates and for a second or two, I think he might actually be going to tell me what's on his mind. But then he shakes his head.

"No, Lep," he says. "I ain't telling you. Telling people can lead to people getting decapitated. Twice if they're unlucky. Believe me. I've seen it happen." He nods to the door. "Go if you ain't going to listen to reason and common sense."

"Bribe-"

"Go."

He turns away from me and ambles into a back room.

- (1) Leave.
- (2) Follow him into the back room and question him further.
- (3) Search this room.
- (4) Leave for now but wait outside the building and see if anything happens.

> 4

I leave the building and stand on the far side of the street. And wait. Nothing seems to happen for several minutes but then a long, dark limousine pulls up outside and several men get out. They have the look of hard thugs about them, the sort of men who could quite happily beat someone to death without batting an eyelid. One of them stays in the car, smoking a cigarette, while the remaining four head into the building. I grow uneasy as I watch them and while there's no reason to assume they're going up there to see Bribe, I can't help thinking that that is precisely the reason they're here.

- (1) Leave.
- (2) Go and speak to the smoker.

(3) Call the police.

> 2

The smoker looks up at me as I tap on the window and, after staring at me for a bit, winds the window down.

"What?" he barks.

He looks like a prize fighter, almost too big to fit into the car. He's also carrying a gun. Something tells me that causing trouble for this fellow would be a very bad idea.

(1) Ask him what he's doing here.

(2) Ask him about Bribe.

(3) Attack him.

(4) Leave.

> 3

Without warning, I clench my hand into a fist and thump the smoker in the face. He's clearly not expecting this as he's out like a light before he can even reach for his gun. I grab it off him and consider my next move. Fortunately no one seems to have witnessed my attacking him.

- (1) Rush into the building.
- (2) Wait for the men emerging.

> 2

I crouch down in the back of the car and keep an eye on the front of the building. I have the man's gun and hopefully the element of surprise will give me the edge I need on them. Just then, a walkie talkie carried by the unconscious man blares into life: "Nobby, come in. You there? Nobby?"

- (1) Answer it and say I'm the cops.
- (2) Answer it and pretend to be Nobby.
- (3) Don't answer it at all.

> 1

"The cops!" barks the voice on the walkie talkie. "Christ! Lads, we're rumbled! The cops have got Nobby! Abort the mission! We're outta here!"

The walkie talkie goes dead.

I decide it's common sense to get out of the car while I can as the men seem to have decided against going after Bribe. I stand on the far side of the road and watch them emerge. They seem

surprised when they don't see police cars surrounding them and even more surprised at finding Nobby unconscious in the front of the car. They cast suspicious glances around but don't see me on the other side of the road. For a worrying moment, I wonder if they might head back inside and finish off the job, but then common sense seems to get the better of them and they all cram into the car and drive off.

Bribe is still paranoid and still convinced he's got people after him when I reach his apartment, huffing and puffing from the lengthy climb up the stairs. But at least now I know his fears are justified. Then again, that's probably a bad thing as fictitious fears aren't as dangerous as the five men in black I saw. If they were here once, they might well come back.

"You need to get out of here, Bribe," I say.

He gives me a piercing look. "You saw them?"

I nod.

"They're evil. They'll kill you as sure as look as you, Lep, and they've got powers you wouldn't believe. I'd tell you what they are but I know you wouldn't believe them so there's no point. I doubt you'd even believe that such powers were believable, let

alone believe in the actual powers themselves. And I further doubt-

"And they might come back for you, Bribe," I say, eager to cut him off. "You have to leave. Now."

He seems to come to his senses. "You're right, Lep. Damn 'em. They ain't gonna take me alive. Hell, they ain't even gonna take me dead if I can help it, although if I'm dead at the time that might be kinda hard. Anyway, I'm outta here."

He doesn't stop to pack anything, he doesn't even pick out a coat, but simply walks out of the door and is hurrying down the stairs a minute later. I try to follow him but he moves surprisingly quickly and I lose him. But at least he is safe now.

Several hours pass...

I'm going through some paperwork (actually, reading a comic book but it's made of paper so it still counts), when Jim wanders in and slumps in the chair opposite me.

"How's the case going?" I ask.

"The remote control case is going nowhere, boss," says Jim, his earlier enthusiasm for the case, his biggest to date, thoroughly gone. "I've lost count of how many witnesses I've

beat and how many restraining orders I've had taken out against me. And if I get one more cop telling me that threatening to shove people off a bridge 'cos they won't confess is against the law..." He shakes his head. "I really need some assistance on this one, boss."

I can't help him myself because I have to concentrate on the Kavallon case but maybe there's someone else.

- (1) Assign Nathan, the filing clerk, to give him a hand.
- (2) Assign Sandra, the tea girl, to give him a hand.
- (3) Tell him he's on his own.

> 1

"I can work with Nathan," says Jim. "He's old and slow and a bit dim and he smells and his war stories are made up and he eyes up female suspects and he sometimes wants to accuse people of being guilty 'cos they didn't fight in the War. But he's the best man we've got. I'll fill him in and let you know how it goes, boss."

Jim leaves.

Now to decide what I'm going to do with the rest of the afternoon. I need something to show Layla Kavallon when I call her this evening and she isn't the sort of person to keep hanging around if I can't produce results. I need to find out something worthwhile today. Or else...

- (1) Check out the opera house that Marcus Kavallon has an interest in.
- (2) Head to the Bourbon Bar and see what I can find out about the mysterious Murt.
- (3) Go to St Mary's Hospital.
- (4) Find out about classical composer Pivretti.
- (5) Follow the lead on the note I found and visit the Sleaze Pit.
- (6) Or just spend a quiet afternoon in the office catching up on some paperwork.

> 3

St Mary's Hospital lies several miles south of the city and from a distance appears quite pleasant. It's to one side of a lengthy stretch of highway, with fields growing all around, birds singing... and then I get closer to it and see that it's not quite so nice after all. The walls are grey in colour, the front façade has

the look more of a prison than of a hospital, and the sign out front dispels any last hopes that this might be a nice place: "St Mary's Hospital For The Criminally Insane".

Ah. It's a loony bin. And not one for the usual brand of loonies who sit around all day drooling and scribbling with crayons on the walls, but one for the psychopathic nutcases who make our society such a joyous place to live in. What connection could Marcus Kavallon have to this place? Or am I just wasting time following a dead end lead that isn't going anywhere? Well, I've come all this way so there's no point in not at least checking the place out.

I park out front and make my way to the reception area which less resembles the typical reception area of a hospital and more the prison that I'm secretly convinced this place really is. The receptionist - male, six foot six and carrying a rifle - certainly gives that impression.

"Yus?" he grunts upon seeing me enter. "Wot you want?"

(1) Tell the truth - that the St Mary's Hospital came up during an investigation into the disappearance of millionaire oil tycoon, Marcus Kavallon.

(2) Pretend I've got relatives staying here and want to see them.

(3) Make an excuse and leave then try to find an unlocked door or window round the back and sneak inside.

> 1

The receptionist/rifle-toting guard raises an eyebrow.

"Wait," he orders then ducks into a back room and has a whispered conversation with someone I cannot see. This goes on for several minutes before the receptionist/rifle-toting guard emerges with a huge black man, carrying a tyre iron in his hands, who he introduces as a nurse.

"I am Henri," says the tyre iron guy in the same kind of broken English as the first guy. "You are a detective, right?"

I nod. "Here to check into possible leads between-"

Tyre iron nods. "Yes. My colleague has told me as much. Follow me please."

He leads me down a corridor, up several flights of stairs, and into a room, bare save for a table and a chair.

"Wait here please," says tyre iron and leaves the room. The door locks a second later. I am alone.

- (1) Try and break out.
- (2) Wait - and hope - for tyre iron returning.

> 2

It's hard just waiting. I have visions of tyre iron being in cahoots with the kidnapers and returning any minute now with them in tow, all ready and eager to give me a telling off (with machine guns most likely) for getting away from them once. When the door opens, I'm half-tempted to throw myself at the guy coming through it in an attempt to wrestle his weapon away from him to use in self-defence... but that's when I realise that the man entering the room is dressed in a white overall and has a shaven head. An inmate of the psychiatric hospital.

"My name," he says without preamble, "is Cedric Mosswinter. If you are here, detective, I suspect it is because my good friend, Marcus Kavallon, has disappeared." He smiles sadly. "As it was predicted many years ago."

- (1) Ask him what he means.
- (2) Ask what he's doing here.
- (3) Ask what connection he has to Marcus Kavallon.

> 3

"We were friends, for many a long year," says Cedric. "Until they got him."

I frown. "Who are they? What are you talking about?"

"Them," says Cedric. "The ones who want to uncover the event. The ones we've been fighting again." He sighs. "Them."

"Tell me who they are," I say. "Tell me where I can find them."

"You can't find them," says Cedric. He looks worriedly around the room. "They find you. By this time, detective, they'll know you have been here and they'll be waiting for you."

"How do they know I've been here? Cedric, you're making no sense."

"No. I'm making perfect sense. I think that's why they had me locked up here. Because they knew that I knew of them and by locking me up here, they sought to discredit my opinions in the ears of anyone who would listen."

(1) "Why are you here? This is more than just a psychiatric hospital."

> 1

"Why am I here?" Cedric smiles. It's not a nice smile. "Why, because I killed my wife." He laughs suddenly. "Took a hammer and gave her a good ol' Lizzie Borden with it. Then I went after my brother and his wife. Gave them Lizzie Borden twice over. Then-" He stops smiling and sighs. "They made me do it, you see. They had my son. They-"

The door opens and tyre iron comes in.

"That's enough, Cedric," he says, taking the inmate by the arm. "C'mon, back to your room."

"We're not finished," I say.

Tyre iron looks at me. "Yes you are. Believe me, detective, when he gets like this he's not doing anyone any favours. Starts rambling about conspiracy theories and how they are out to get him. But he insisted on speaking to any private detectives that came here asking about Marcus Kavallon and when you showed up..." He shrugs. "I hoped it might help but it hasn't. C'mon, Cedric. Move!"

I follow them out of the room but find my way blocked by several security guards.

"We're to escort you off the premises," says one.

"What if I don't want escorting off the premises?" I ask in my best intimidating voice.

Which doesn't do one bit of good.

"Then we'll throw you from the premises."

I decide I might as well be escorted.

Something about Cedric, and not just what he said, is bothering me by the time I reach my car and acting on a hunch I pull out the photo Layla Kavallon gave me. Sure enough, Cedric Mosswinter (then with hair and quite a bit heavier) is one of the men with Marcus Kavallon.

Evening rolls around with depressing regularity. Just for once, I fancy it would make a refreshing change to go straight from afternoon to midnight with no pause in between. But today it's evening as usual.

And the inevitable call to Layla Kavallon to keep her informed as to what I've discovered today.

"Well, detective?" she says. "I'm waiting."

"I found another of the people in the photo you gave me," I say. "Does the name Cedric Mosswinter mean anything to you?"

"Yes," says Layla. "He was a friend of my father's. Years ago. I don't remember much about him but I know they were close friends for quite some time. Where did you meet him?"

I relay the events at the St Mary's Hospital.

"He killed his wife with an axe?" says Layla, sounding more than a little shocked at the idea. "That doesn't ring true with the Cedric I remember. Maybe he was framed. Or maybe..."

"Either way, Miss Kavallon, I have uncovered another lead." I don't mention to her that Cedric didn't really tell me anything useful and fortunately she doesn't ask. "I'll speak to you again, Miss Kavallon. Tomorrow night."

"Very well, detective," says Layla. "Did you discover anything else?"

I start to tell her about Bribe Magee and his warnings regarding the Kavallon case but something stops me. Now isn't the time. Maybe when I've spoken to Bribe again, I'll be in a position to tell her more.

"Nothing further for now, Miss Kavallon," I say.

"I'll await your call tomorrow evening, detective," she says, and hangs up.

No sooner have I put the phone down than Jim ambles in.

"Me and Nathan are working the remote control case from every angle, boss," he says, checking his notebook as if inspiration lies within its creased and wrinkled (and tea-stained) pages. "But so far we've hit a big fat blank. Either no

one knows anything, or they're hardened criminals who don't break under pressure." Jim sighs. "We're beat, boss."

- (1) Tell him to keep on with it but on his own. Nathan will be needed in the office to do the filing.
- (2) Pull him off the remote control case and assign him to something else.

> 1

Jim nods wearily. "Sure thing, boss. I'll let you know how it goes."

Like a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders, he staggers from my office.

As the morning of day four of the Kavallon case begins, I mull over my options and consider how I might best spend the day.

- (1) Discuss matters with my former mentor, Bribe Magee.
- (2) Meet Sebastian at the Starlight Café.
- (3) Check with the coastguard in case Marcus Kavallon has been locked in a safe and dumped at sea.
- (4) Head to the museum and see if I can find Mortimer.

(5) Maybe I should swing round the cathedral and see if Noddywink is there.

(6) Mugger gave me a list of possible locations. I could check some of those out.

(7) Do some more digging into Marcus Kavallon's business and see what shows up.

> 7

I run some background checks on Marcus Kavallon with my informants and see what I can find out about him. There's nothing major that comes to light that I wasn't already aware but one of my informants, a seedy fellow called Tick who has a strange obsession with the walls in his grimy apartment, mentions an associate of Kavallon's called Mortimer who I might want to check out.

"Nasty piece of work and no mistake," says Tick, batting an eyelid at the wall. "Got an apartment in the Cringe Building on 7th Avenue in Cheeseville."

"Cheeseville's out of town," I say. "It's quite a drive."

Tick shrugs. "True, but he had dealings with Kavallon quite often and they weren't good friends, despite working together. You should at least speak to him."

"I'll that do."

"Fine. Oh... Lep?"

"Yes?"

"Bring a few bricks next time you come to visit, okay?"

I promise him I will then get out of there as quickly as I can.

I'm eating my dinner in a café not far from the office (the food's terrible but at least it's cheap) when an overweight fellow slides into the seat opposite me.

"Mr Chimner," he says. "I have a proposition for you."

I give him the once over. He doesn't look like a male prostitute so I nod for him to continue.

"The name's Aaron Spivvy and I need to hire you," he says. "My wife has gone missing in New York and I want you to drive down there and find her."

"I'm already working a case," I say.

Mr Spivvy pulls out a chequebook and a pen. "Name your terms, Mr Chimner. I am prepared to pay treble what your current client is paying."

Treble? With treble wages, and a lengthy trip to New York to boot, I could be rolling in the cash. Sure, I'd feel bad about

leaving Layla Kavallon in the lurch like this but she can always hire another detective and I'll be willing to hand my notes over.

- (1) Accept Aaron Spivvy's offer.
- (2) Decline it.

> 2

Aaron Spivvy sighs. "You're making a mistake, Mr Chimner. A big mistake. You'd have got a nice trip for your trouble but now-" He stops himself, perhaps worrying if he has said too much.

"Are you threatening me, Mr Spivvy?" I demand.

He laughs nervously. "Of course not, Mr Chimner. Threatening you? Me? Ha, the idea is preposterous! My, is that the time? I really must dash..."

He doesn't dash. I guess a fellow of his generous proportions isn't really built to dash, but he sure moves at a fast amble. I debate going after him but decide he must just have been some loony and finish off my dinner instead.

When I arrive back at the office, it's to find Nathan waiting in the guest seat for a quiet word with me.

"Filing isn't fulfilling the void in my life that was left when my goldfish died," he says. "I've told you about Flopsy, haven't I?"

I not hastily, eager to avoid another rendition of *The Tragic Death Of Flopsy The Goldfish*.

"So I was wondering if I could do some detective work to brighten up the day," he goes on. "Nothing too dangerous but just something to pass the time."

"Detective work is highly skilled work," I say, quoting something my former mentor, Bribe Magee, once said to me. "You need years of training to begin to understand the complexity of it and anyone lacking that kind of experience could well miss a vital clue that could ultimately prove fatal for the case."

"Jim does detective work," says Nathan.

Which pretty much sinks my argument.

(1) Let him do some detective work. At worse, I can get him to do the tedious legwork I don't have the time for and Jim is just too inept at.

(2) Keep him on the filing.

> 1

"Sure thing, Nathan," I say. I shove some papers over to him. "There are some details about the Kavallon case that I haven't got round to checking yet. Let me know what you come up with."

Nathan takes them as if they were made of gold and gives me a beaming grin. "I shall not let you down, sir. Rest assured, no stone shall be left unturned and I shall get to the bottom of this investigation if it is the last thing I ever do."

"And the filing..."

"Will also be done, sir. Thank you for this chance. You shall not regret it."

I'm already regretting it but I just nod and Nathan departs.

The time of the inevitable phone call to update Layla Kavallon on progress rolls around and I dial her number with a certain amount of trepidation. Is what I have discovered today enough to keep her satisfied that I am making a reasonable amount of progress? Or is she going to decide she might be better off having someone else handle the case for her?

Only time will tell...

Layla sighs when I relay what I have discovered about the fellow called Mortimer.

"Cheeseville is a good drive out of town, Mr Chimner," she says, "and if it proves unworthy, then you've wasted an entire day. Can't you have one of your assistants drive out there?"

I reflect on the idea of sending Jim along and wince at the very thought.

"It's one day, Miss Kavallon," I say smoothly. "If Cheeseville turns out to be dead end, then it's just a matter of hours wasted. If, however, it proves to hold the key to ascertaining the father's location..."

I trail off and let her consider that possibility. It's a long shot admittedly but Layla seems to accept it at face value.

"Very well, Mr Chimner. Call me as soon as you get back from Cheeseville."

And day five dawns. My waking up is pretty much the same as it has been for the previous four days but, today, I feel like I might finally make a break.

With many things to do today, I go straight from my apartment to...

Where exactly?

- (1) Follow up some of the leads given to me by Sebastian.
- (2) Head out to Cheeseville to see Mortimer.
- (3) See if I can dig up some dirt on Vance Criminy, the chief of police.
- (4) Head to the Plaza.

> 2

The Cringe Building is every bit as unimposing as its name suggests. It's even leaning slightly over at an angle that is quite bizarre to look at and, from the viewpoint of anyone actually living inside the building, quite frightening as well. I make my way into the lobby and peruse the tenants' list displayed to the side of an elevator that hasn't worked in many long years. Mortimer, as my sheer bad luck would have it, is right the way at the top of the building.

Fortunately, the Cringe Building is every bit as small as it is unimpressive and poorly named, so the top floor is also the fourth floor.

I reach Mortimer's apartment door and stand there for a moment, reflecting on the best way to handle this.

- (1) Kick the door down, grab him by the throat and threaten to beat the living daylights out of him if he won't co-operate.
- (2) Knock on the door and ask to speak to him.

> 2

A thin-faced man answers, sees me standing there, and tries to slam the door in my face! Fortunately I've had a lot of experience with people slamming doors in my face (one of the hazards of the job, you might say) and I've got my foot in the door before he can slam it all the way. Then I shove the door in time-honoured fashion and send him sprawling.

"Mortimer, I presume," I say as I stride into the room.

The man looks up at me and wipes his jaw. "You're making a big mistake coming here, Chimner. You don't know what you've got yourself mixed up in."

- (1) Tell him to enlighten me.

> 1

He snorts. "Yeah, right! Have you any idea what he'd do to me if I told you anything?"

"What would do to you?" I ask.

The man shakes his head. "Not a chance. Whatever you do to me won't be half as bad as what he does to me. You might as well leave, Chimner. You're getting nothing from me."

(1) "I want answers, Mortimer. I want to know why you had your goon try to brain me at the Bourbon Bar."

(2) "Then let's hold this discussion down at the police station, shall we?"

> 2

Surprisingly, Mortimer laughs! "The police station? Chimner, you really haven't got a clue what's going on, have you?"

"Tell me then."

"No. You want to take me to the police station, you do just that. See how far it gets you."

(1) Take him to the police station.

(2) Threaten to beat him up if he won't co-operate.

(3) Leave but wait outside then follow him.

> 3

It takes a while for Mortimer to emerge and when he does, he makes a special point of checking all around him for potential snoopers. He doesn't see me, of course, as with my long history of snooping on people (starting with a girl in school called Michelle who I had the hots for and who later on took a restraining order out on me) I'm an expert at the game. Mortimer is a doddle to follow as he heads across town, slips into a bar and has a beer. I sit at a table just behind his and observe him meet with a beefy fellow with a crew cut.

"Chimner's onto me!" he protests. "He came to my apartment. He-"

"You tell him about the beach house Criminy has in Bodango Bay and the party he's got set up for this weekend and the 'special guest' he's got?" the other man asks, clearly not the type of fellow who knows there's a time and a place for asking long and detailed questions. And this isn't it.

Mortimer shakes his head. "No. Of course not. I didn't tell him a thing. But the guy's gonna be coming back and when he does-"

"Fine, fine. I'll send someone over to keep an eye on you. Lay low for a few days. By Monday, this whole thing oughta be over and done with."

The two talk for a while longer but I've got what I wanted to know: Vance Criminy, the chief of police, is somehow mixed up in this mess and he has a beach house at Bodango Bay where he's got a 'special guest'. Could this be none other than Marcus Kavallon himself? I could be reading too much into this but both Mortimer and the beefy fellow with the crew cut are in this thing neck deep so it's possible that a trip to a certain beach house in Bodango Bay is called for this weekend.

I've barely arrived back at the office before Jim comes rushing into my room and announces, "solved it, boss!"

"It?" I ask, my brain several seconds slower than usual in keeping up with Jim.

"The remote control case, boss!" he says, giving me a hurt look as if he's disappointed that I've forgotten.

"Oh yes. Hmmm." I slump down into my seat, trying to remember what was last happening on the remote control case. In the end, I just say, "fill me in, Jim."

"Turns out it was the son's friend," Jim goes on, checking his notebook for the facts. "I met her a couple of times when I was checking around but there was nothing - aside from eighty-six convictions for theft - to lead me to suspect her so I just never

bothered questioning her at all. But then just this morning, I was getting kind of desperate trying to figure out just what leads I hadn't covered and there was her name. Sylvia De Knott."

"The famous Remote Control Burglar," I say, recalling the name.

"The one and the same! So in short order I questioned her and she confessed the whole thing. Open and shut case, boss." Jim beams. "I think I deserve a promotion after all the hard work I've put in here," he adds hopefully.

So I promote him to Assistant Private Eye from Associate Private Eye. Fortunately, he's got a very poor memory and so doesn't realise that before he was an Associate Private Eye he was an Assistant Private Eye.

Almost floating due to his sheer enthusiasm over his 'new' post, Jim departs my office.

I while away the rest of the afternoon catching up on paperwork. My leads are pretty much all followed and if I haven't discovered enough to point me in the direction of where Marcus Kavallon is, I doubt I'm ever going to discover it.

But a strange thing happens when I try to call Layla Kavallon to inform her of my latest progress. She's not in! Her butler informs me she has gone out for the evening and isn't expected back until Monday. Very strange in the middle of an investigation into her father's mysterious disappearance.

But it buys me some time at least. Hopefully by Monday, I will have either found her father or at least have a good idea where he is being kept.

I'm not usually in the office on a Saturday but with the Kavallon case going ahead at full speed, it doesn't seem a good idea to take a break for the weekend.

Day six...

I yawn, roll out of bed, and decide what I'm going to do with the day. Normally I'd spend it doing what every private eye does on a weekend - getting hopelessly drunk and/or arrested. But now I have a case to work on and it can't wait till Monday.

Time I was making a move, I decide. The only question is... where to?

- (1) Drive up to the beach house at Bodango Bay.
- (2) Wait for Vince showing up.
- (3) Head down to pier 13 at the docks.
- (4) Call it quits for today and have the weekend off.

> 1

Bodango Bay is a good two hour drive. I take the interstate northwest out of the city and stop at a roadside diner for breakfast along the way. As I'm washing it all down in the toilet out back, I hear a voice outside the cubicle hiss: "You in there, Lep?"

A familiar voice. But not one I can place on the spur of the moment. Who knows I'm here? Hopefully no one. I have a moment of worry when I wonder if perhaps Criminy knows I'm onto him.

- (1) Stay quiet.
- (2) Admit I'm in here.

> 2

"Yes, I'm here," I say, seeing little point in denying it. Whoever's out there must know I'm here unless they've been going up and down the country knocking on cubicle doors on the off chance I'm in one of them. "Who is that?"

"It's me, Bribe. Bribe Magee."

I open the door and see, sure enough, that it's Bribe standing there. He looks considerably better than when I last saw him. Healthier. More full of vitality. White. More like the Bribe I used to know years ago.

"You're looking good, Bribe," I say.

He nods. "Same to you, Lep. You're looking-" His gaze travels down to where my trousers are around my ankles. "Revealing. Tidy yourself up and come with me, my boy. We need to talk."

"You're going to get yourself killed, Lep," are Bribe's first words to me when I join him in the station café. "Going against Vance Criminy without any kind of backup. That's mad talk."

"A few days ago you were rambling about 'them' coming to get you," I point out. "You're in no position to be calling people mad."

Bribe shrugs. "Things have been hard since my favourite baseball team lost the kick off. Life just didn't seem worth

living. And then, a few months back, I got hired to do some digging into a murder supposedly committed by none other than our chief of police."

"Vance Criminy," I say.

"One and the same. The more I dug, the more it seemed he had killed the poor chap. And then, one day, they came for me."

(1) "Are you going to tell me who they are this time?"

> 1

"They, Lep," says Bribe, "are Blurgle and his goons. Blurgle is one of Criminy's associates. Ex-CIA, ex-SAS, ex-FBI. Ex-human as well. He came to my office one day and poisoned my goldfish, turned off the fridge so the milk spoilt, poured sour milk over my desk (the stench was appalling I don't mind admitting), scrawled offensive graffiti over my filing cabinets." Bribe sighs. "Oh, and he killed my secretary as well. Forgot to mention that. Nasty fellow all things considered. He said he'd do the same to me if I didn't drop the investigation. I swore at him. He retorted by dragging me outside and having his goons set my hair on fire. I can't help but think he got the better of that discussion."

(1) "What happened then? Did you go to the police?"

> 1

"The police weren't an option, not when you're investigating a murder committed by the chief of police. So I tried to handle matters myself. I fixed up my office, hired a new secretary and decided not to let Blurgle get me down. Of course, he killed my second secretary. Not to be bested, I hired a third. He killed her as well. I hired a fourth. She got run over but I'm sure it was Blurgle driving the ice cream van. By this time, the recruitment agencies were getting reluctant to let me take new secretaries on and, truth be told, the funeral expenses were beginning to bite. Then my office got burnt down so the problem of not having a secretary just went away."

(1) "And after that...?"

> 1

Bribe runs a hand through his hair. "After that, I kind of lost it. Blurgle was having men follow me to make sure I didn't keep looking into the murder I suspected Criminy of committing. It got so I couldn't leave my apartment without some shady

character following me around everywhere. I'm surprised he didn't just kill me, but maybe he liked toying with me and destroying every last thing I held precious - did I tell you he spray-painted my signed Elvis poster? Damn swine. That day you got the message from me, I'd finally started to come out of my shell. I was looking over my case files, the ones I kept in my apartment, and had noted a connection between the murdered guy and Marcus Kavallon, the business oil tycoon. I'd also heard on the grapevine that you were looking into the case, Lep. Bad move. If Criminy suspected you were investigating a kidnapping that might lead to him, he'd have you killed."

(1) "So you tried to warn me."

> 1

Bribe nods. "Sure did. I figured I could convince you to drop the case and step aside. That way, you'd be safe. Of course, when you came to see me I was in one of my horribly paranoid states and so you naturally didn't believe a word I was saying."

"Sorry about that," I say.

He waves it away. "Not to worry. I wouldn't have believed me right then, considering the state I was in. But what I didn't

realise was that Blurgle still had people watching me and when you came visit me, he must have decided it was time to stop messing and put me out of my misery. So..." Bribe smiles. "I got my act together and got the hell out of there. And now I'm here. And together, Lep, you and me are going to rescue Marcus Kavallon from Vance Criminy."

- (1) "How do I know you're not in this with Criminy?"
- (2) "Great. Let's go."
- (3) "I don't think so, Bribe. This is my case."

> 2

"Good move, Lep. I knew you could be trusted." Bribe sketches out a rough plan. "It'll be risky with just the two of us but we've got the element of surprise. What I propose is..."

That the two of us travel to the beach house separately. That way, if one of you gets caught, the other can continue with the rescue mission.

"I'll sneak in as soon as I get there and scout around," says Bribe. "I've got a whistle that sounds remarkably like a goat being sick. One blow means I've found Kavallon and I'm on my way out with him. Two blows means I've run into trouble: get

the hell out and call the cops. Hopefully we'll get a few who aren't corrupt and who Criminy doesn't have some kind of major influence over."

It's not much of a plan but, right now, it's all there is. Bribe leaves the café first and I follow several minutes later.

Bodango Bay glistens beautifully under the mid-morning sun. It looks somewhat similar to a tropical paradise I once spotted on a postcard and thought might be a nice place to retire to one day when I hit pay dirt. Who knows, maybe if things work out well enough today then I'll hit pay dirt after all. But when I retire, I plan on it being a long way away from anywhere that Vance Criminy might keep a beach house.

One thing I didn't realise from the crummy map of Bodango Bay I had was just how huge it is. It stretches for several miles and there look to be a couple dozen beach houses here, most of them the size of mansions and with high walls and security gates to boot. Finding which one Marcus Kavallon is being kept in - if he's here at all - is going to be more than a simple case of peeking through a few back windows.

(1) Check out each beach house until I come to the correct one.

(2) Knock on the door of the nearest one and ask for directions.

> 2

The helpful couple inside this beach house give me directions to where I can find Vance Criminy's place.

"But you don't wanna go there, pal," says the man. "Guy's one nasty piece of work. Some kinda gangster I think."

"He's the city's chief of police," I say.

The man grimaces. "Same thing," he says and the two disappear inside.

Following their directions, I make my way to the beach house.

The name 'Criminy' is emblazoned on the plaque to one side of the imposing gates set into the high wall which surrounds this beach house. The wall is topped with spikes and broken glass and looks pretty unclimbable. I don't see any sign of guards but considering the height of the walls, and the thickness of the security gates, they probably aren't required.

(1) Sneak around the back.

(2) Climb over the wall.

(3) Bang on the gates and demand entry.

> 1

The back of the beach house hangs, quite precariously, over the edge of a cliff with a sixty foot drop to sea-encroached rocks beneath it. It must be one hell of a view but I sure wouldn't like to live here if I was prone to sleep walking. Unfortunately the back of the house looks every bit as impregnable as the front and the idea that I'm going to get in here isn't looking very likely.

(1) There's an open window partway up the back wall of the beach house. I could try and reach that.

(2) Or if that doesn't appeal to me, I could head back around the front and try scaling that wall.

> 1

It's risky even approaching the window what with that drop looming but I realise this is perhaps my best - and only - chance of getting inside. The front of the beach house will be guarded even if the guards aren't evident. Here is where I have to get in or it's no go.

I edge closer to the window, bracing myself against the wall, ever aware of the drop below me. Closer... closer... closer...

And then I hear voices from the room beyond the window!

"We wait for Noddywink arriving," says one. "Then we put the plan in motion. As agreed with L."

"Fine, fine," says another voice. "And she still thinks we're going along with her?"

"Yes," says the first voice. "She's easily swayed when large sums of money is at stake. She think we'll hold up our end of the bargain so she's going to hold up hers." A snort. "I love how gullible some people are."

The voices grow fainter as the two speakers leave.

I wait for a minute then pull myself through the window and into an empty room. I'm in!

I creep across to a door and inch it open. A corridor is outside, leading left and right. Nothing about either direction strikes me as better than the other so it looks like a case of just choosing one and hoping for the best.

(1) Left.

(2) Right.

> 2

The right hand branch of the corridor leads along the length of the beach house before splitting up into three further corridors. One heads towards the front of the house, another leads to stairs going up and the final to stairs going down. Straining my ears, I can hear voices from the corridor leading to the front of the house but nothing from the other two.

- (1) Head to the front of the house.
- (2) Head up.
- (3) Head down.

> 2

I make my way to the upper floor. It seems mostly deserted and if Marcus Kavallon is being held up here, he's been hidden extremely well. However, I do stumble across one useful piece of information, jotted down carelessly on a notepad: "Decided not to proceed with LK. Better deal surely to ransom MK and pocket the proceeds myself. May have to arrange for LK to have an accident."

LK? Layla Kavallon. So it looks like Layla Kavallon has conspired with Vance Criminy to have her father kidnapped.

And now Criminy is planning to double cross her and ransom Kavallon. Interesting news.

"See anything you find interesting, Chimner?" a voice asks from behind me.

I freeze. I know that voice. It's-

"Vance Criminy," I say, turning to see the man himself standing in a corner of the room. "The game's up."

"Hardly." He raises the rifle he's carrying. "But your game is most definitely up."

Before I can react, he brings the rifle slamming down on my head and consciousness flies out of the window.

A throbbing head is a regular occurrence in my profession and waking up without one just wouldn't be the same. All the same, this one really throbs. It feels like my entire head is about to split open...

Fortunately it doesn't. It just carries on throbbing.

After a while I manage to stop groaning long enough to open my eyes and look around my less than appealing surroundings. I'm in the basement of the beach house (at least I'm assuming

it's that basement) and, unsurprisingly, the one door out of here is locked.

There's a small window high up on one wall but as it's only three inches wide, and barred, the odds of me getting through there don't seem very good.

Needless to say, my gun is gone.

- (1) Try and break the door down.
- (2) Fake unconsciousness and wait for someone entering and, hopefully, overpower them.
- (3) Wait and hope for the best.

> 3

Of all the faces I expected to see when the door was opened, Ted's wasn't one of them. I wondered at first if I was dreaming. It wouldn't, after all, be the first time I had had a dream in which Ted's face was prominent - usually being dissolved in a vat of acid, or caved in with a crowbar, or bent out of shape with two hundred steel hooks. But, this time, it was no dream.

"Christ, Lep," he mutters. "You get yourself into some dodgy situations and no mistake. What the hell are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Ted," I say, getting ready to spring at him.

"I'm a guest of Vance Criminy's," he says. "He's throwing some kind of party this weekend and half the businessmen from the city have been invited. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw some of his cronies carrying you down here. What did you do - threaten to kill the chief of police?"

"It's a long and complicated story, Ted," I say, "but Criminy's not the model citizen you think he is. He's a crook through and through."

"Crook? He's the goddamn chief of police, Lep! You're making no sense."

(1) Explain about Marcus Kavallon and Criminy's involvement in his disappearance.

(2) Jump at Ted and overpower him.

> 1

Ted's eyes narrow as I relate to him what I know. He still looks suspicious in the end but I can sense he at least doesn't think I'm outright lying.

"Charlotte always said you were honest to a fault," he admits.

"It's not like her to say anything nice about me," I say.

"She wasn't." Ted looks around the basement. "Jeez, Lep. I don't know what kind of crazy stuff you're mixed up in here but Criminy is a bad guy to get on the wrong side of."

"I told you what it's about, Ted."

"Yeah, yeah."

"And I saved you from the debt collector."

He winces. "Fine. Okay, Lep, I'll give you a chance." He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a gun which he tosses to me. "I bought that for self protection after the debt collector paid me a visit. Never had the nerve to use it. But I think you need it more than me right now. Just one thing, Lep."

"Name it," I say.

"If this goes down wrong, you never got the gun from me."

And before I can make a reply to that, he departs, locking the door behind him.

- (1) Lie in wait for whoever enters the basement next.
- (2) Shoot the lock off the door.

> 1

I crouch behind the door and wait... and wait... and-

And then the door comes flying open and a morose looking fellow stalks into the room.

He looks around, fails to see me, and turns to leave. That's when I step out from behind the door and point the gun at him.

"Damnit!" he mutters. "I knew we should have killed you when we first grabbed you."

"Who are you?" I ask, the man looking very familiar from somewhere.

"Nathaniel Murt," the man says. "I work for Vance Criminy. I'm head of his security detail." He looks at the gun barrel pointed at his face. "You going to shoot me then or what?"

- (1) Ask him where Marcus Kavallon is being held.
- (2) Order him to escort me out of here.

> 1

"He's here," says Murt, "but this isn't what it appears to be-"

"Has he been kidnapped?" I ask.

Murt nods.

"That's exactly what it appears to be." I gesture with the gun.
"Lead the way."

Murt leads me out of the room and into a narrow corridor. He approaches a door and fumbles with some keys.

"You're making a big mistake, Chimner," he says as he goes to open the door. "You think you can just waltz in here and rescue Kavallon? This is Criminy's beach house! The damn chief of the damn police! He'll crucify you for this!"

I prod him with the gun. "Maybe. But the first bullet is yours, Murt. Remember that. No funny moves."

He curses and opens the door-

And a shot rings out.

It takes Murt in the face and throws him against the wall.

"Step into the room, Chimner," calls a voice from beyond the door. "Now. I've got a gun to Miss Kavallon's head so you'd better do as I'm saying."

I peer around the doorway nervously. Sure enough, standing there is none other than Vance Criminy himself. A gun is pressed against her temple. I also see a huge fellow with a face like a bulldog eating a wasp and a tall, thin fellow in SAS gear.

"Got out, did you, Chimner?" Criminy says. "You're smarter than I thought you'd be. And you even brought a friend to play. How nice. These are my associates: Noddywink-" the huge

fellow "-and Blurgle-" the tall, thin fellow. "Now we're all introduced-

"The game's over, Criminy," I say, hoping I sound a lot more confident than I feel. I might have a gun but then so does Criminy and his associates. And the odds are definitely not in my favour. Not to mention the fact that Criminy has a gun to Layla Kavallon's pretty head and is liable to shoot her the moment I try anything. "You might as well give it up."

"No." Criminy jabs the gun into Layla's neck. She gives a gasp of fear and tries to struggle but Criminy just laughs. "What happens now, Chimner, is that you drop your gun and I don't put a bullet through Miss Kavallon's pretty face."

"You shoot her and the next bullet's got your name on it," I warn.

Criminy shrugs. "I'm willing to take that risk." He looks at me with a smile. "Are you?"

Of all the decisions I have made so far, none are more critical than this. One wrong move and both myself and Layla Kavallon are dead. But I don't really see a way out of this. Not for both of us anyway. Whether I shoot Criminy or not, the odds will still be against me and I can't shoot him and his cronies before one of them blows my brains out.

Sometimes difficult choices have to be made. And here it might well be a case of sacrificing Layla Kavallon so I can get out of here in one piece. Either I act and hopefully save myself, or I throw down my gun and hope for a better chance later on. One way or another, it all comes down to this.

- (1) Risk everything and shoot Criminy.
- (2) Throw down the gun and wait for a better opportunity.

> 1

Without even stopping to think if I'm making a terrible mistake here, I raise the gun and shoot Criminy in the head!

I fancy that I see a moment's disbelief in his piggy little eyes just before the bullet strikes home. And then, abruptly, his face is gone and he's staggering backwards. Blurgle and Noddywink seem equally surprised and I quickly spin on my heel and shoot Noddywink. The huge fellow gives a roar of pain and staggers back, his face fountaining blood. Before I can get off a third shot, Blurgle comes crashing into me and the two of us go down in a heap. Blurgle is far faster and stronger than me, but a life as a private eye has taught me the benefits of dirty fighting and there's more painful in this world than a well placed knee in the

groin. Blurgle's eyes cross over and I bring the gun smashing down on his face. Out he goes.

I'm just struggling back to my feet, congratulating myself on a job well done when a gun fires and a blinding pain tears into my leg...

Through a haze of disbelief and pain, I look up to see Layla Kavallon standing there, the smoking gun still pointed at me.

"Damn it, Chimner!" she fumes. "You spoilt everything!"

"Spoilt everything?" I say. "I just rescued you. And killed Criminy. And the others. What did I spoil?"

"You weren't supposed to kill everyone. Damnit!" Layla swears several times, using words I was sure a high class dame like her wouldn't know. "You were supposed to break in here, rescue my father and be gone from here. Then he was supposed to be so relieved over being rescued by a private eye that I'd hired that he'd put me back in his will, the miserable old swine. But now you've ruined it."

"Wait," I say, swaying a bit from side to side in confusion (and probably the shock of being shot as well). "You set this up?"

She gives me an angry nod. "Yes! Marcus wrote me out of his will after the other unfortunate deaths in the family that he suspected I'd caused. He didn't know for certain it was me but

he made damn sure I wouldn't inherit a cent if he croaked. So I hatched this scheme: hire Criminy and his goons to kidnap the old fool, hire a private eye to find him and then gain all the credit in the end. But now..." She glances at the dead bodies of Criminy and Noddywink and the unconscious body of Blurgle. "Now you've ruined it. There's no way I'll ever be able to cover this up. And if I know Criminy, he'll have concealed a full written report of this whole sorry incident in case anything went wrong. Even now, there'll be someone racing to hand it in to the authorities. I'm screwed."

Layla laughs. "But at least I can make sure you don't live to see another day." She raises her hand, points the gun at me, and squeezes the trigger-

BLAM!!!

And then I'm watching in surprise, and more than a little relief, as Layla Kavallon sinks to her knees. Her pretty face is pretty no more due to the bullet hole drilled between her eyes.

"Man," says Bribe from the doorway. "That's one evil bitch."

I look at him. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Oh, couple of minutes. Just wanted to hear what the evil harpy had to say. For posterity." He produces a small tape recorder with the record button pressed down.

"What if she'd shot me?" I ask. "Again?"

Bribe shrugs. "Don't worry, Lep. I had her covered. Sorry about the first bullet, by the way. I was down the corridor rescuing Kavallon when I heard the scuffle. Never figured his daughter for the hellion she turned out to be."

"Kavallon's safe," I say, realising that the case is over and I'm still in one piece. One very battered piece admittedly but I'm alive. "Bribe," I say.

"Yes, Lep?"

"I hope you're in the carrying mood because I don't think I can walk out of here-" is as far as I get before my fragile grip on consciousness fades and I go out like a light.

Epilogue

It's a month later and things have returned pretty much to normal at the Lep. R. C. Detective Agency. I'm still working high profile cases involving missing cats, kids playing truant and wrongly directed mail.

Jim seems to be more of an asset now, though, than he used to be. Solving the remote control case looks to have given him a real boost in the enthusiasm stakes and he now applies himself to his job with a ruthless efficiency that leaves any school kid thinking twice about taking days off.

On top of that, he seems to be working well with Nathan who I am considering promoting from the lowly rank of filing clerk to office administrator (which is actually a filing clerk but takes somewhat longer to say).

From time to time, I take out the photo given to me by Layla Kavallon at the start of the investigation. Four of the men I know: Marcus Kavallon, Pedro Gummage, Cedric Mosswinter and Nathaniel Murt. The fifth? Him I don't know. It's not, as I had first suspected, Vance Criminy. Having seen the former chief of police (now pushing up the daisies in Ravenholme Cemetery), I can say it's definitely someone else. Blurgle? No.

Noddywink? No. Kavallon himself claims not to know the identity of the man and while I have my suspicions about this, there is little point in pressing him.

Perhaps some mysteries are better left unsolved.

I hear from my former mentor, Bribe Magee, a couple of times a week. He's getting back into the profession and we talk often about the Kavallon case. He seems happier than I've known him for years and it's good to hear from him again.

The only real fly in the ointment is the gunshot I received during my rescue of Marcus Kavallon. Despite a fortnight in hospital (all bills paid courtesy of Mr K himself), I walk with a pronounced limp and my often had dream of one day winning the gold medal at the Olympics is looking more and more unlikely all the time. In a way, I guess I should consider myself lucky that I escaped the beach house at all, but when it rains, and my leg sends shivers of blinding pain up and down my side, it's hard to feel lucky.

Other than that, things have been pretty quiet. My payoff didn't come from Layla Kavallon, due to her timely demise, but her father was more than pleased about being rescued. My old debts have been settled in full and there's enough in the office petty cash to cover quite a few drinks when I feel in the mood. Heck, I might even get the sign out front painted. It fell off eight years ago and half-brained a traffic warden and then got run over by a steam roller and then an elephant stamped on it (don't ask) and it's never been the same since. A new coat of paint might be a good idea.

Little about the case bothers me right now. Sure, maybe not everything was resolved in the end but I understand the actions of Layla Kavallon and Vance Criminy as well as they need to be known.

The phone rings...

I reach for it with a mixture of anticipation and dread; anticipation that it's a new client and a new case; and dread that it's a new client and a new case.

"Detective!" cries the voice. "I need help!"

"Calm down, Ma'am," I say in my best reassuring voice. "Tell me what the problem is."

"It's my cat, detective!" the speaker goes on. "He's gone missing..."

And life goes on...

And there you have it: the conclusion of Private Eye. Did you do well? Certainly, you reached the end of the game in one piece and rescued Marcus Kavallon to boot. You also exposed his daughter Layla as the conniving so-and-so that she really is and made sure she got her just comeuppance.

But did you reach the best ending in the game? You achieved a score of 4. If that is 4 or more, then you did indeed reach the best ending in the game and can rest with the surefire knowledge that you did everything right. If it's less than 4, you might have done some of the things that were required but you didn't do them all. Maybe you should try again and see if you can reach the best ending of them all.

Your rank:

Score 4 or more - Better than Sherlock Holmes himself.

Score 3 - Almost on par with Sherlock Holmes.

Score 2 - Private eye extraordinaire.

Score 1 - Reasonable private eye.

Score 0 or less - Hang your head in shame. Really. Jim could have done better.

I'm floating in space, limbo, nothingness - or whatever that indefinable void is that you tend to see at the end of things when everything else has been said and done. A number of options seem to be available to be right now:

I can RESTART the game and play it a different way. Maybe I'll find some things I missed this time.

I can LOAD a previously saved game and play the game onwards again from that point.

Or I can simply float here and feel secure in the knowledge that I've reached the end of Private Eye.