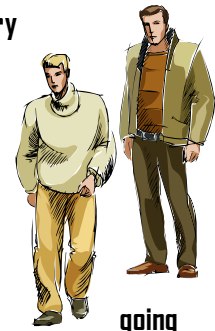


Chapter 14

The following day saw Jason and Will up early. It would be a difficult, but, they hoped, a very worthwhile day. They quickly cleared up the breakfast pots, having washed them in the stream and rubbed them with anti-bac. They donned rough clothing and made their way to the 4x4 behind Farmer Green's barn. The next stop was the police station in the local town.



On arrival, they met Jane Rule and Paul Deed, also dressed in outdoor clothes. A number of officers were also standing around, dressed similarly. They weren't out for a walk in the hills – these were disguise clothes. This was the day of the big 'sting'!

The diggers' van was driven out of the police car park by an officer. The



'sting' was on! Inside the van had been cleared of all gear, which was now in the hands of the forensics team. Policemen began to clamber into the back. Jane Rule and Paul Deed, as wildlife officers, climbed in with them. Jason and Will climbed into the front, alongside the driver.

enough in

the criminal underworld.

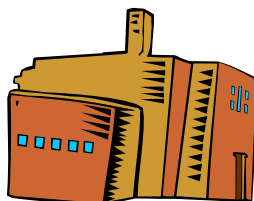
The criminal gang had 'squealed' to Jane and Paul overnight, and they now had all of the information they needed to trap the rest of the gang, including the big boss, Big Vince. No one seemed to know his second name – his reputation was

The journey to Manchester was uneventful, and they finally arrived at the location they'd been given by the gang. Would it prove to be the right one, or were the criminals leading them away on a wild goose chase? Only time would tell. Eventually, they drove into a murky back street, leading down a side road to an old factory. The streets were filthy and pitted with weeds. Litter was strewn everywhere and blew down the street in the breeze.

To the side, stood an old van. It seemed deserted, but, as they pulled in behind it the back doors opened to reveal more police inside. A young man emerged from the van and sauntered over to them. "Can I help?" he said. The driver showed his police warrant card and the man nodded. Jane and Paul appeared at the side of the van. "Hello," Jane said, and she and Paul showed their cards. The young man did likewise. "DI Rod Steel," he said, "Greater Manchester police." How can he be a detective inspector? Jane thought. He only looks as if he left school recently. Must be getting old, she thought!



The three chatted in the street, discussing the tactics they'd use. They bowed to Rod's better judgement, as better than they did. The constables knew exactly clothes detectives and the two baseball caps down across disused factory.



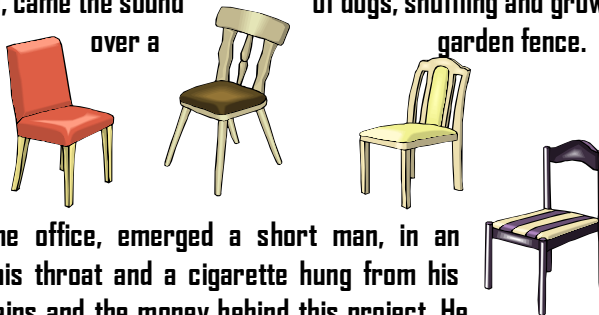
he knew the area so much. Eventually, they were ready. The plain-agents clambered into the van, pulled their their faces, and drove the van cautiously up to the



A head appeared through a small door. It disappeared and two larger doors opened to allow the van entry. The police drove in, heads still down, and parked. The man whose head had appeared bawled out to what looked like a small office up a flight of metal steps, "Van's here, Vince."

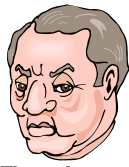


They looked around them, at the ring of hay bales in a large loading bay. There was a varied mixture of seats, stools and benches, where the audience would sit to watch the night's 'sport'. Back in a room they couldn't see, came the sound of dogs, snuffling and growling at each other like warring neighbours over a garden fence.



From the office, emerged a short man, in an expensive-looking overcoat. A red scarf wrapped his throat and a cigarette hung from his lips. This then, was Big Vince. He was both the brains and the money behind this project. He wouldn't need too many brains, Will thought, to be the brains behind this little gang! Behind him were two more men. One was a pudgy-faced man, with grey hair. Another was a slightly taller Asian man. He too was well dressed and looked like a fairly prosperous local business man. It was strange, the sort of people who became mixed up with this sort of crime.

"There's a was betting that Sean?"



The three badger baiters clanked down the iron staircase. "fight tonight, gentlemen," said Vince, with obvious glee. No doubt he already counting the cash that he'd earn from the admission price and the went on at these grisly meetings. "Got us some good badgers, have you Vince asked."

The police team hustled out of the front of the van, being careful to keep their heads down. "Yeah, got some good 'uns," replied Jason, trying his best to sound like Sean O'Vile. The men approached the van, smiling. Another man came up from behind the van. His was the head that had appeared at the door.

"Let's have a look then," said Vince, approaching the rear doors of the van. Will opened the rear doors of the van, allowing the other policemen to pour out, to the astonishment of the criminals. Vince stared at them, uncertainty etched upon his face. He shrank back, into the two men following him, who also stared in disbelief at what they saw. No badgers in sacks. No diggers, grinning from ear to ear. Just a group of very large policemen, whose eyes seemed to bore into them.



Suddenly, another gang member, who'd appeared from the dog room, turned, snarled at the policeman, now behind him, and ran for the door. In the rush, he knocked the policeman sideways and grabbed the door handle. He ripped it open and jumped out - straight into the arms of a very burly policeman who was there for that exact purpose. He shuddered to a halt and shrank to his knees. His head hung low.

In the melee, Vince and his partners tried to scatter in all directions. Again, their plans were foiled as the police sprang into action and grabbed them. They were bundled unceremoniously back to the van, where they joined the 'doorman' and his snarling friend. Vince looked like a beetle, crushed underfoot.

"It's nothing to do with me! I don't know anything about it!" whimpered the grey-haired man, wringing his hands.

"Oh, stop flapping yer gums!" cried Vince. "We're nicked, and you know it!"

Jason was busy on his phone, calling the local RSPCA inspectors. They'd arranged to stay out of the way until the police were done, and then come in. You never could tell if a badger baiter might recognise one of the local lads, and that would give the game away. He and Will then went straight to the dog room. A few minutes went by and a number of RSPCA officers entered, carrying graspers and cages. A policeman directed them to the room.

"Right," said Jane Rule to the crowd of policemen. "I want this place searched from top to bottom before we move this lot to the local nick. Don't miss anything!" Paul divided up the group of men and women, and directed them to various jobs and places. Forensics officer were also busy.

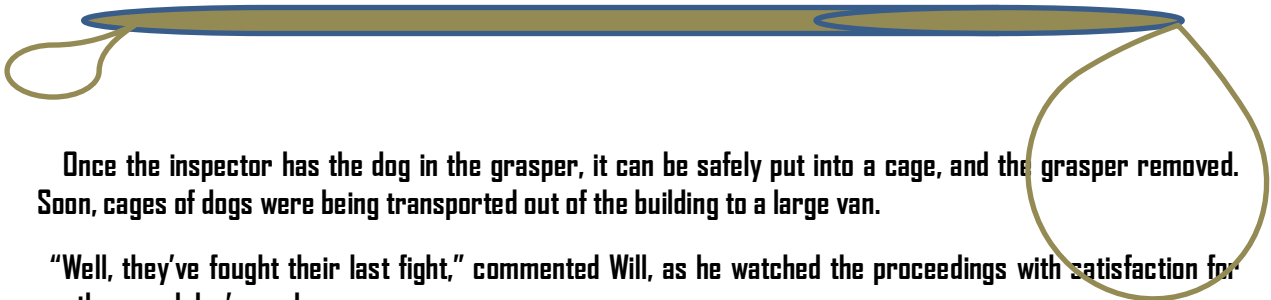
Jason emerged from the dog room. "Ten dogs," he announced. "All pit-bull types. Lots of them have 'medals'."

"Medals?" one policeman asked.

"Yes," cut in Jane. "When these dogs fight, they get some terrible injuries. You wouldn't believe it! But, of course, they are never taken to a vet for treatment. That would be a bit of a give-away as to what is going on. So, the baiters treat them themselves, the best they can. They end up with lots of scars, which the baiters call the dog's 'medals'. It's a bit sick, I know, but that's the facts."

A cacophony of noise could be heard from the dog room, as the RSPCA inspectors caught the dogs and put them into carrying cages. It wasn't an easy job. The inspectors were wearing thick gauntlets, with steel rods down the fingers, known as anti-rabies gloves. The steel rods stopped animals from biting their fingers. They also used long graspers to catch the dogs.

Graspers are long metal tubes. A wire runs down the middle, to a large loop. At the other end is a small loop. When an inspector gets the big loop over the dog's head, he pulls on the small loop to tighten the big one. It doesn't hurt the animal. It's a bit like putting a collar and lead on, except that this lead is stiff! This stops the dog running at the inspector.



Once the inspector has the dog in the grasper, it can be safely put into a cage, and the grasper removed. Soon, cages of dogs were being transported out of the building to a large van.

"Well, they've fought their last fight," commented Will, as he watched the proceedings with satisfaction for another good day's work.

Just at that moment, a policewoman called from the office. "Guv, I think you'd better come and see this." Jane and Paul made their way up the metal staircase to the grubby and untidy office. The officer was holding a couple of packages, wrapped in plastic. Jane unwrapped the larger package. Smaller packages of powder were inside, each in its own plastic bag.

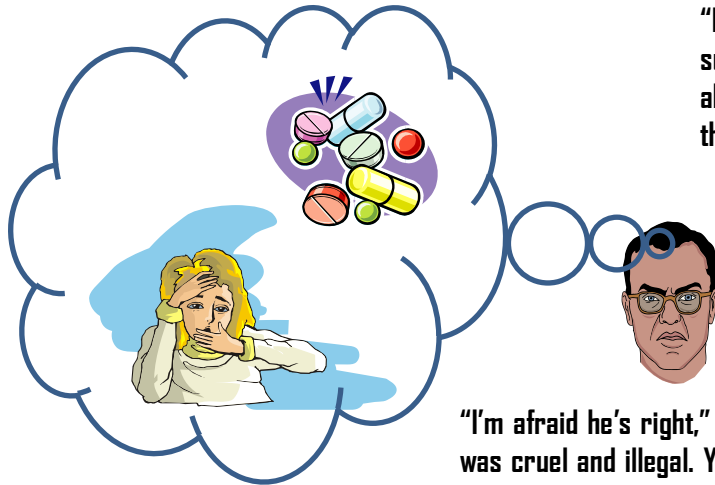
"Well, well. What have we here?" she said, unwrapping one of the smaller packages. She sniffed the contents and then, with a wet finger, dabbed a tiny amount onto her tongue. "Heroin," she announced. Paul picked up the two larger parcels and the detectives made their way back to the floor.



"Know anything about these, do we?" she asked Vince.

"Never seen them before in my life," he retorted. His eyes were on the floor, as he knew that things were going from bad to worse.

"I'm guessing," probed Jane, "that this was the pay-off for the diggers. They'd take it back and sell it to vulnerable and silly teenagers, on the streets, and make more money from other people's downfall!"



"Drugs?" asked the Asian man, clearly surprised by the find. "You didn't say anything about drugs when I said I'd put money into this! I thought it was just the fighting!"

"Hold your mouth!" spat Vince. "You're in this as deep as the rest of us. We're all going to prison, so get used to it. Ignorance is no defence in law!"

"I'm afraid he's right," cut in Jane. "You knew what you were doing was cruel and illegal. You're all in it together. Better get yourself a good brief!"

A moment later, there was more drama. A policeman gave a gasp and hauled a man out from behind a packing case. He looked shocked and very worried. The agents and Durham police just looked at him, supposing that he was just another gang member. Rod Steel, however, gasped in amazement and made his way straight over to the man. "Councillor Edward Bilk!" he said, still not sure he could believe his own eyes. "What on earth are you doing here?"



The man just looked at him, and at the crowd of Manchester police officers who had all stopped to stare. They all knew exactly who he was. "Councillor Edward Bilk is a member of the local council for this area," Rod announced to those who didn't know him. "Perhaps you'd like to explain your presence here down at the station. I hope it's good!"

Bilk simply lowered his head to the ground and marched out, with a police officer on his arm, to the waiting cars. "It's amazing the sort of people you find caught up with this sort of criminal activity," commented Will. "I suppose his career is over."

"He's finished," agreed Rod. "No one will ever offer him a job, after he's found to be involved in this sort of crime. Would you?" The others shook their heads. It was a shame, really, thought Jason. Here was a man with a good career. No problems; and now he's thrown it all away just to be involved in criminal activity like badger baiting. All right-thinking people would avoid him in the future. What about his family? How would they feel to see him go down for such a sick crime as badger baiting? These silly people just didn't stop to think about things like that.

The day's work at the local police station over, the officers and SOU agents made their way back to County Durham. It was all over for the two RSPCA men. A gang of criminals would spend time behind bars for their horrible crimes and badgers across the country would be safer tonight. They'd have to come back to court to give evidence, of course. What would the next job be, they thought?

Dan broke into their private thoughts. "When do you need to move on?" he asked. Could you stop another day or two? The agents nodded. "Good," he said, "I've arranged a badger watch at a really good sett for tomorrow night." The agents grinned at him. That would be great!