

THE WINGS AFFAIR

Prologue

The young man stomped his feet to clear the mud from his cleats as he walked to home base, an old, chipped bat slung over his shoulder. When he got to the batter's box he planted his feet, digging them in with a determined wiggle, and turned his ball cap backwards. Pulling the bat off his shoulder he checked the tape on the grip with a squeeze, took a firm grasp and loosened up with a swing. Finally, he settled the bat above his shoulder, raised his elbows a bit higher, and turned his eyes to the pitcher, a furrow of concentration on his brow.

It was a fine summer day and the glare made both the batter and pitcher squint. The pitcher, calmly tossing the ball between his hands, saw that his adversary was ready and raised his eyebrow at the catcher. He nodded slightly in response to some cue and brought the ball to his glove as he turned sideways. Hesitating for a moment as he studied the determined batter, he pursed his lips in thought and wound up for the pitch. In a heartbeat the horsehide whipped towards home base.

The batter's swing was strong, but low, and the ball sailed into the foul zone with a faint pop. The pitcher watched it with interest and turned back to the batter, his face neutral as he unconsciously massaged his glove. He accepted the ball from the third baseman with a smirk, and settled into pitching mode again. The batter snuggled down and raised the bat, his eyes icy on the pitcher.

I'll show you, smartass, the pitcher thought as he wound up. It was a fastball that whipped through the air with a wicked drop at the other end; the batter nicked it again for another foul. The pitcher kept his passive expression, but was furious that this particular batter was even managing to touch his pitches. "Beginner's luck," the pitcher growled to himself. Again, the batter readied himself and the pitcher nodded in response to the catcher's signal.

This time it was an evil curve with a nasty backspin. Again, the bat connected, chalking up another foul. Inwardly, the pitcher was furious. Outwardly, the only clue of his rage was the white-knuckle grip on the ball when the fielder got it to him. *I'm better than you, and I'm going to make you remember that*. The catcher, unable to get the pitcher's eye for his suggestion, was uneasy as he settled in and tried to prepare himself for the unexpected.

The batter raised the bat, his eyes icy determination.

The pitcher wound up slowly with a tight jaw. As he unleashed the sizzling fastball, his upper lip curled into a wolfish grin.

The catcher knew instantly that the ball was too high, but couldn't move fast enough

The batter, however, had amazingly fast reflexes; the bean ball meant for his head practically burned the air as it passed him at eye level, mere inches from his face. The catcher fell backwards trying to snatch the projectile from the air, but the batter somehow managed to keep his feet as he dodged the missile in an impressively adroit backward maneuver.

A shocked silence fell across the sparse onlookers and field; the pitch was an obvious statement of hate, and many there knew the pitcher wasn't the only one with those kinds of thoughts. After a few tense seconds, someone in the stands clapped. Another yelled, "Play ball, all ready!" The team on the bench grumbled among themselves and glared at the pitcher.

Illya Kuryakin merely regarded the pitcher with slightly squinted eyes as he unconsciously rolled the bat in his grip for a moment. Then he quietly re adjusted his cap and stepped back into the batter's box.

As he set his feet and brought up the bat, the catcher said lowly, "You've been warned, you know. He takes this game way too seriously."

The look the Russian tossed his way was edged in humor. "I've had worse thrown at me," he replied calmly.

The catcher shook his head, not sure if he admired the man or just confirmed his insanity.

The pitcher was chuckling to himself, his eyes twinkling evilly as he readied himself for the pitch. Illya didn't react; he kept his face neutral and calmly regarded the man on the mound. The pitcher's face turned from glee to confusion, then to determination as he set his jaw.

Damn Russkie needs to learn a lesson in humility. The pitcher, trying not to show that he was shaken by Illya's unflappable scrutiny, wound up again and unleashed a hard curve ball, low in the strike zone.

Illya's swing was smooth and calculated, and the connection solid. The ball sailed way into the sky, and the Russian was rounding first base and was well towards second when the pitcher realized it was out of range for the fielders.

Incredulous, the pitcher watched the ball disappear as Illya rounded third. Instantly, he was in motion to take his revenge on the small man for making him look bad in front of his teammates.

Just before he tagged home Illya saw the incoming attacker and launched himself to slide in, hoping to score before the confrontation. The pitcher connected with the sliding agent right on top of home base and they rolled aside in a cloud of dust and swinging fists.

Illya's teammates didn't waste any time in joining the fray, with the fielders close behind. The spectators cheered; some even joined the donnybrook. It was a memorable Sunday afternoon for many.

ACT I: "You're Going Back To College, Mr. Kuryakin."

Napoleon Solo, Chief Enforcement Agent of U.N.C.L.E., New York, dropped into his office chair on this Monday morning with a sigh and carefully set down his mug of coffee. He glanced at this watch - 10 minutes until his meeting with Mr. Waverly, and there was no sign of his tow-headed partner. With a mental shrug he flipped open the report in front of him for a quick scan.

Just then the office door opened and in walked his partner, Illya Kuryakin, his hand in the motion of removing his sunglasses. When he saw his dark-haired partner, he hesitated for just a hairsbreadth then completed the act a bit more slowly, tucking the glasses in his coat pocket.

Napoleon's glance up turned into a double take and the snide comment about being late died on his tongue. His partner had a black eye! Solo felt the corner of his mouth turning into a grin.

Illya, ducking his head, moved towards his desk and set down the small stack of books and magazines he carried in with him.

Solo made a show of looking at his watch, leaning back in his chair, and putting his hands behind his head as he watched his partner's every move with amusement. He raised an eyebrow as the Russian moved to his desk; was that a slight limp, too?

"Well, good morning," Solo said cheerfully.

Illya grunted a reply and plopped into his chair, beginning to leaf through the stack of items he'd brought.

"Rough weekend?" Solo queried innocently.

Illya shot him with a glance. "No rougher than usual."

There was a heartbeat of silence.

"Extra curricular activities get out of hand?"

"Nothing I couldn't handle." Illya continued to leaf through the books, as inscrutable as ever.

Solo opened his mouth again, shut it, and then returned to reviewing the report on his desk. "You aren't going to tell me what happened, are you?"

Illya turned to his partner to reply but was cut off by the intercom. "Mr. Solo, Mr. Waverly wants to make sure you bring the Onofre documents with you," a charming female voice crooned.

"Will do, Marie, I have them right here," he patted the file in front of him. In a seductive tone he added, "I'll see you soon!"

The girl on the intercom was professional enough not to giggle, but her tone belied her feelings. "Anytime, Napoleon." Solo grinned.

Illya snorted, continuing to scan his books. "Probably tonight over dinner, correct?"

"Why, how'd you guess?" He stood and buttoned his jacket. "Come on, Joe Louis Junior, Waverly's waiting." He picked up the file and waited at the door for his partner to join him, and they both entered the hall and walked side-by-side to their boss's office.

When they entered the large office they found their boss leaning back in his chair at the head of the table, enjoying his pipe. "Gentlemen," he said without looking directly at them. "Please have a seat. Mr. Solo? Did you go over that file that was on your desk?" The head of U.N.C.L.E., New York, waited until the men were seated before giving them a glance. As Solo began to speak, he saw his boss also give the dour Russian a double take; in his peripheral vision he saw his partner sink down a little lower in his seat.

"Yes sir, I did. It looks like California will be getting a new source of electricity within the next couple of years."

"Yes, Mr. Solo, the nuclear power plant in San Diego is well on its way to being completed and licensed as planned."

This caused Illya to sit up, his interest piqued. "San Onofre? Unit 1?"

"You know about this power plant?" Waverly inquired.

"Only what I've read in physics and science journals. I understand how the plants are designed and run, but I haven't been following the building schedules."

"Mr. Solo has all the information you will need, which really isn't much. We have received some alarming intelligence in the past month about Thrush's interest in this particular plant."

This caused Solo to sit up. "Why would Thrush be interested in a power plant?"

"Our question exactly, Mr. Solo," Waverly seconded, relighting his pipe. "And if you think about it, the implications are staggering. Thrush could control the entire power grid of the Southwest as a result, or worse yet, get their hands on the radioactive fuel. They may be selling the plans to another government for the same reasons. We don't know."

"It seems that the U.N.C.L.E. office in Los Angeles stumbled across a Thrush courier in possession of classified documents relating to the site. Some deeper investigation as to where the documents came from have revealed that someone related to the design team is leaking these documents to Thrush. The problem is, the suspects are clever in covering their tracks. Thrush isn't even sure who is supplying the information; they only dealt with the courier. We need to find out who is releasing this information and stop it. The only thing we're sure of is the location of the drops."

Solo and Illya looked at each other and waited for the other shoe to drop. "And where was that?" Solo finally inquired.

"The area around San Diego State University in San Diego, California. There are large physics and engineering communities surrounding the campus, and there are many possible sources of this information. The only other clue we have is the courier who delivered the documents to the captured Thrush agent. Their code word was 'Delts'. We've traced that word to a fraternity on campus: Delta Tau Delta."

"How can you be so sure about that connection?" Illya queried.

Waverly chuckled. "It seems that the courier noticed a symbol on the jacket of the young man he got the papers from. It has turned out to be the symbol for the fraternity."

"The Delts?" Solo repeated as Illya raised an eyebrow. The older agent continued. "A fraternity usually has a trait, something all the members have in common. What is the Delts common thread?"

"Pardon? Oh, sports." Waverly replied, distracted, as he ruffled through the file and slipping out several papers.

Solo smiled. "So the Delts are the campus jocks."

Illya frowned. " 'Jocks'?"

Solo chuckled at his partner's lost expression. "Yeah. Jocks. As in part of the safety equipment they wear?" All he got was a blank look from the blond agent. "The athletic supporter, but not the Booster Club?" Still there was no indication of understanding from his friend. Solo waved to his crotch area and started, "It's a slang term for a jock st.."

"Yes, we get the picture, Mr. Solo," Waverly interjected as Illya's face suddenly showed understanding and he even blushed a little as he immediately returned his attention to their boss.

"So you're going back to college, Mr. Kuryakin, to infiltrate the Delts. You, Mr. Solo, will be his outside contact and back up." He handed Illya his papers.

"Why aren't the Los Angeles or San Diego offices handling this?" Solo asked, even though his expression was that of pleasure.

"Because they don't have anyone youthful appearing enough with a strong scientific background, especially in physics. Mr. Kuryakin is the best choice in the North American region."

"So Illya's going to be a jock?" Solo couldn't help but grin hugely, much to his partner's chagrin. "This will be fun to watch! What's his sport?"

"Baseball," Illya said without lifting his head from the documents. "That's why I was told to enroll in an adult city league, wasn't it?" He glanced at Mr. Waverly, who nodded in acknowledgement.

"And how are you liking the all-American sport, Mr. Kuryakin? My scouts say you play quite well."

Illya unconsciously touched his black eye. "The game has interesting strategy, but the differences of opinion can be painful."

Solo gaped. "You got that playing baseball? I wasn't aware it was a contact sport; well, the way most people play, anyway. Why didn't you tell me you were on a team?"

Illya frowned at his partner. "And have you comment on my every play? I hardly think that would have been conducive to my learning the game."

"Well I see you were properly introduced to what, the bean ball?" Solo guessed, waving his finger at Illya's face.

"This wasn't from the bean ball. It was the result of a controversial decision."

Solo opened his mouth, eager to find out more, but Waverly cut him off. "Gentlemen, please! You can discuss Mr. Kuryakin's training techniques on your flight to San Diego." He handed them their tickets, and gave Solo a fat file. "This is what we have on the faculty members and current members of Delta Tau Delta. The individuals with the most relevant scientific background are on the top. Any questions?"

"Where are we staying in San Diego?" Solo asked. "That nice place on the beach?"

"Mr. Kuryakin will be in the fraternity house. You, Mr. Solo, will be.."

"In a sorority house?" Solo asked innocently, his partner rolling his eyes.

"Hardly, Mr. Solo. In fact, we managed to get you on-campus housing and a position on campus that would allow you access to all areas."

The dark haired agent's eyebrow peaked. "In administration?"

"No, in maintenance. A custodian, to be exact."

Solo glanced irritably at his partner's snicker.

"And remember the importance of this mission, gentlemen. Thrush in control of a nuclear power plant is enough to give any of us nightmares. Please keep that in mind as you face certain . . . distractions . . . inherent with an assignment like this."

"Like co-eds," Illya quipped at his partner.

"And cheerleaders!" Solo added perkily, smiling again.
It was Waverly's turn to roll his eyes. "You are dismissed, gentlemen."

ACT II: "Another Crowning."

During the flight, Solo had tried to brief his partner on some of the basic dos and don'ts of college fraternity house etiquette, the major rule being 'don't stick out'. Illya had listened patiently while skimming a magazine and had asked no questions, much to Solo's chagrin.

"Well?" he finally demanded. "Did you hear anything I said?"

"Every word," his stoic partner replied, not lifting his eyes from the periodical. "I'll blend in." Then his eyes lifted, sparkling, and regarded Solo. "You will have more difficulties, I think. When's the last time you cleaned your apartment by yourself?" He chuckled and returned to the print. "Custodian. I must take pictures."

Solo snorted. "You're just jealous because I have such pretty housekeepers." He adjusted his tie and settled back for the rest of the flight.

When they arrived in San Diego they split up at the airport. Illya was to go directly to the frat house, and Solo to the campus administration office to check in with the university president, the only one to know their real identities. Illya changed clothes in the restroom before departing, the first step to slipping into his role as a student.

Solo watched his partner hail a cab at the curb, and had to admit that he looked the part. He'd changed into chino pants and a striped button down shirt that were popular among the 'surfer set' of the west coast, and at the curb when the offshore wind mussed his hair, Illya looked to be barely 20 years old. He smiled briefly. *Oh, to be 20 again and know what I know now!* the dark haired agent thought with a chuckle. He waited until his partner was whisked off before leaving the terminal himself.

Just before getting out of the cab at his destination Solo slipped off his tie and made himself look a little more casual. He had to look the part of a newly hired custodian to the staff of the university president.



It was a couple of hours before Napoleon actually checked in with the president. He settled his things in the small apartment on the edge of the campus first after getting the keys from the secretary. He checked out all his equipment – radios, tracking devices, explosives and other items before scattering them about the room. Each device looked like the innocent belongings of any apartment dweller; an alarm clock, a small television or simply buttons on a shirt. It would be difficult to recognize the items for what they were even with a close search.

Satisfied, he ran a brush through his hair and headed off to his appointment.

The secretary, a grey haired, matronly woman, nodded an acknowledgement, and told him that the president was now available. If the dour woman was even a bit curious

as to why a mere custodian was meeting with the head of a major university, she didn't show it. She was all business. Solo thanked her and stepped inside the office.

The president's office was comfortable and overlooked a grassy common area. Beyond that was a street edged with a sidewalk bustling with students. An impressive desk sat off center, and behind it a neatly dressed man rose and extended his hand in greeting.

"Mr. Solo," the man started as the agent shook his hand. "I am Victor Meyes, the university president. And I must say that it took several meetings with your Mr. Waverly for me to allow this investigation." He indicated with a sweep of his hand for Napoleon to sit.

"I'm sure it was a difficult decision, sir." Napoleon offered as he sat. "There's a lot of people you have to worry about out there." He indicated the students on the sidewalk with a nod of his head.

"Yes, there's a lot of responsibility with this position. The welfare of the students and staff is a primary concern. After reading all the information your organization had on the incidents, I have to admit that I was shocked and convinced there had to be investigation. Mr. Waverly's plan seemed well thought out and the man ..what is his name?"

"Kuryakin. Illya Kuryakin, sir."

"Yes, Kuryakin. Mr. Kuryakin certainly does have the qualifications but I'm concerned about his ability to blend in. He is much older than the students he's investigating, and well educated. That is the only part of all this that concerns me. I don't want him drawing attention that would result in the students around him getting injured."

"Well, sir, I don't think," Solo started, but was interrupted by the sound of a horn honking from outside. Both his and the president's attention was drawn to the window where they saw a turquoise convertible squeal to a stop at the edge of the lawn.

The car was packed to overflowing with young men, and the girls on the sidewalk scurried out of their way when several of the boys sprang from the car.

The president sighed. "Another crowning."

"Crowning?" Solo asked as he watched the young men gather at the base of a statue in the middle of the lawn, appearing to be rooting someone on from the direction of the car.

"Yes. It's messy, but basically harmless. Sort of an initiation."

"An initiation?" Solo repeated, his attention now drawn to the young man in a baseball cap who was slowly getting out of the back seat of the car. Even without seeing the young man's face, Solo knew who it was and cracked a grin. "Really? What does the .. ah .. boy have to do?"

As the president spoke Solo saw Illya shaking a can and approach the statue. When he got to the base, he raised the can up and Solo saw his partner's face from under the rim of the hat.

"They spray the statue of the mascot with beer."

Just then, Illya held up the can and punched it with a can opener. The spray hit the statue dead in the face, and rained down on the cheering boys as other onlookers scattered to avoid the spray. When the can fizzled out of ammo, the boys dashed for the car, Illya bringing up the rear. He was the last one to leap in the packed back seat as the car squealed away, horn honking. Solo saw his partner toss the can out of the car as it sped away, and wished he could see his expression.

Meyes returned his attention to Solo. “Happens a lot during hazing week at the fraternities.”

Napoleon settled down with a grin, knowing he had some good teasing ammo stored away for the future. “Well, sir, if you’re worried my partner won’t fit in I think you should rest assured that he is, well, experienced in these things and will blend in perfectly.” *Well, he’s experienced now, anyway!* He thought happily.

“I guess we’ll have to see, but I’m not thrilled about putting the welfare of my students in someone else’s hands. But I see the necessity, so good luck, Mr. Solo.” Meyes stood and stepped towards the door.

“So it’s hazing week, is it?” Solo asked, pleased at the thought of what his partner was going to experience.

“Yes. And as a custodian, you’ll get to see the some of the rituals close up. They are generally harmless but messy.” He opened the door and Solo stepped into the waiting area. “And as our newest custodian, you can go wash off the mascot outside for your first assignment. Good day, Mr. Solo.”

The agents smile disappeared as the door closed in his face. The sound of someone clearing their throat caused him to turn and notice the matronly secretary glaring at him.

“Well. I guess I’ll be going, then.” Solo said smoothly as he gave her is brightest grin and turned to go. The woman merely followed him with her eyes and then returned to her typing.

ACT III: "Can't I Just Attend The Event Of Next Week Twice?"

The agents had previously agreed to meet once a day in a different part of the campus. Their first meeting, the day after their arrival, was to the south side of the cafeteria just after the lunch rush.

Solo was pushing a large trashcan on wheels when he spotted his partner poking at a tray of food at a distant table next to an overflowing trash can. He maneuvered the box on wheels near Illya's table and shook out a trash bag.

"Enjoying lunch?" He said lowly, working slowly.

"Is that what this is?" Illya growled. "How do American students get so big on a diet of beer and .." he frowned at the lumpy mass on his plate. "What ever this is?"

Napoleon wanted to keep this scene in his mind: Illya turning his nose up at food! "You don't have to use the meal pass, you know. I take it the fraternity lifestyle doesn't lend itself to borscht making?"

"Funny, Napoleon. And do you know what I found at the fraternity house when I got there yesterday?"

Solo hesitated. His partner found something out already? This may not take very long after all!

"A goat," Illya said amazingly before his partner could reply. "There was a live goat in the living room."

Solo returned to his work, taken aback. "Was it a girl goat?" Was all he could think to ask.

Illya dropped his fork in disgust. "I didn't check. And thank you for ruining my appetite. It seems one of the pledges has to take the goat everywhere with him all week." Illya pushed the tray aside and flipped open a notebook, trying to appear to study. "I am amazed these kids come away with any education at all."

"Well, they manage and they make sure to keep everything in perspective with plenty of fun along the way. I guess you stoic Russians don't have fraternities?"

"Not like this. At least I'm spared all the 'hazing' rituals because I'm listed as a transfer student. I do have to, ah, 'oversee' some of the events, though. The baseball house brothers are in charge of one of the events."

"Which is?" Solo prompted, driven by Illya's disgusted tone.

"Something about a Man in a Box," the blond agent stated. "I didn't ask any details."

"Sure it's not Genie in a Bottle?" Solo said hopefully, eyebrow raised.

"Napoleon, there are no females involved here, if that's what you're thinking." He slapped his notebook shut. "What am I saying? Of course that is what you are thinking."

"Look, Illya. You can get the job done and at the same time learn how to have just plain, innocent fun." Solo said grinning at his partner's unease. "You can learn how to loosen up!"

Illya stood and fixed his icy blue eyes on the dark haired agent for a second. "If I wanted to be loose, I could study you. Now I must get to class." He turned and walked away from his sputtering partner, the corner of his mouth curled into a satisfied grin.



The rest of the day passed rather quickly for Illya. He found it difficult to effectively inspect the campus as he found various frat brothers, cooing girls, or some mix of both usually surrounded him. He developed a theory that the letterman's jacket he wore acted like a people magnet. The interesting new addition to the house had caused a stir in the sororities, too.

"Do you always greet new Delts to the campus like this?" He inquired to a determined blonde that he couldn't seem to detach from his arm.

"Only the cute ones," she purred. "Do you have a date for the Rush Dance tomorrow?"

"Um. I think I may be busy .." he started, but a house mate, Reggie, he recalled, pounded the agent on the back with a ham hand.

"I don't think so, brother! It's the event of the week and all the house will be there to welcome the new members."

Illya, after recovering his balance, replied, "Can't I just attend the event of next week twice?"

The group around him laughed loudly at the comment and the entire crowd moved like an amoeba towards the frat house. Reggie, football team member and Delts vice-president shooed away the non-Delts in the group, which happened to be all female, when they got to the house. "We have Delt business to attend to, ladies, so we'll meet with you later!"

The girls pouted and reluctantly let go of the various arms they had clung to possessively, regrouping into a giggling pack of pony tails mini skirts as they moved off the porch and towards their own houses.

"Let's go, men, the master awaits!" Reggie directed the group into the house. Illya followed obediently.

"The master?" Illya asked one of the beefy teens.

"Yeah, it's the annual opening pep talk from the advisor, Dr. Lindt. It's not too bad, really." The kid seemed rather blasé about the whole thing.

"Oh," Illya replied. He hadn't met Dr. Lindt yet and decided it was a good opportunity to do so.

"And he usually brings food!" The boy added.

When they entered the house, the living room area was packed and the younger members were moving around closing the drapes. Black lights and lava lamps seemed to egg on the rowdiness of the crowd as they munched on cookies that were set around the room in abundance and washed it down with beer from a lone keg in the corner.

"OK, Delts, settle down! Come on, men!" Reggie was standing on the stairs slightly above the crowd and next to another beefy Delt. "Jimmy has a few words for you, so grab a brew and close your yaps!"

Illya wondered about that combination of actions as he chewed a cookie and accepted the cup of foam pressed into his hand. Jimmy was the Delt president and all

Illya could see in the weird light was the glowing white of his teeth, letter on his jacket and foam of the beer.

"Welcome back, boys, for another year of Aztec sports domination!"

The crowd cheered and beer rained down. Illya raised an eyebrow at the head butting ritual of the football crowd.

"Soon we will add more to our ranks, making the Delt House the envy of them all!"

Again, the comments were accented with boisterous cheers, rude noises and spraying beer. As they were cheering Illya noticed a man descending the stairs behind Jimmy and Reggie. He was dressed in dark clothes and hard to see in the shadows, but there was a reflection of light in his round glasses where his eyes would be on a pale face. The agent wasn't able to place him at all, and tried to get closer through the pressing crowd for a better look. The man came to a stop next to Jimmy and stood with his hands clasped in front of him. He was very small next to the hefty Delts.

Reggie motioned with his hands for the group to settle down, which it did eventually. When all was fairly calm Lindt stepped down and stood in front of Reggie and Jimmy.

"Hello, boys, and welcome back!" Cheers and raised glasses. "It's good to see you all back and ready for a new year!"

Illya found himself staring at the reflection in the round glasses and after an undetermined time noticed that he hadn't heard a word Lindt had said, but instead had tuned in on the melodious rhythm of his speech. He blinked hard, shook his head slightly and glanced at the faces close to him. He had no idea how long they had been standing there, but the once rowdy crowd now seemed mesmerized, their eyes glassy and locked onto Lindt. Illya immediately turned back to face the man so he didn't stand out from the crowd, but his mind was racing.

They are hypnotized! He realized immediately. He glanced at the remains of the cookie in his hand and slipped it in his pocket. He hadn't eaten the whole thing, and thankfully U.N.C.L.E. routinely conditioned agents against the influences of hypnotism. Drugs, however, were another thing and he was glad he ingested only had a small amount of the cookie especially if his suspicions were correct.

Illya began to focus on what Lindt was saying. It was a repeating statement: 'Now's the time for you to listen, and these orders to be followed.' The agent had no idea how many times the statement had been repeated, as he had focused on the rhythm rather than the words. Lindt then raised his hands and said loudly, "Remember, Delts, and act when called! Now let's hear it for the Aztecs!"

That phrase snapped the crowd from its reverie, and they all cheered loudly. 'Louie, Louie' started playing loudly in the background, and the windows and doors were flung open to the evening air. As the party burst into action, the Delts seemed completely unaware as to what had just happened. Illya watched Lindt step from the stairs into the crowd and disappear.

Illya fought his way through the massive bodies in the direction Lindt had gone, but was unable to catch him. By the time he got to the back door and stepped out, all he saw was a dark sedan pull away from the curb. He cursed his luck. Meanwhile, the air throbbed with the loud music inside the house as the Delts partied on.



Napoleon Solo entered his apartment with a sigh of resignation as he dumped his windbreaker on the worn chair. He'd had a full and busy day 'cleaning' the offices of the

top five faculty members in his stack of files. There hadn't been anything even remotely suspicious in the science professors' offices, save one locked journal stuffed far back in a drawer of one office. When Solo had picked the lock he was both disappointed and delighted at what he found; this particular professor had a thing for several students over the years and there were some pretty revealing entries in there! No wonder he kept it at work rather than home! The agent had a difficult time tearing himself away from that distraction.

Other than that he couldn't believe how boring these men were. He'd just unbuttoned his work shirt and was pouring himself a scotch on the rocks when he heard his communicator warble. He snatched it from the pocket of his shirt and opened it

"Solo here."

"Find anything interesting in the trash today?" His partner's voice asked curiously. Solo could just see his smirk.

"Well, depends on what you call interesting, but, no, nothing relevant to the case." He could also see his partner's cocked eyebrow at the reply.

"Well, I certainly have," Kuryakin said.

"Could you speak a little louder?" Napoleon asked, hearing a chorus of 'Barbara Ann' being sung along with a very loud record in the background. "I hear proof that those boys aren't music majors."

There was a thump and Solo overheard Illya say, "No, thanks," and "excuse me", then a definitely feminine voice said, "Hey, honey, where you off to?" Now it was Napoleon's turn to raise his eyebrow at the pen device. Then he shook his head when he heard Illya say, "Excuse me, I have to go over there." *Leave it to my partner to reel them in then run away*, he thought with a grin.

Finally, the bang of a door lessened the noise. "OK, I have a name for you to check out." Illya started.

"Is it that of the lovely voice you just brushed off?" He asked playfully.

Illya snorted. "Hardly. But I do have a contingency lining up to escort me to the Rush Dance," he added in retaliation. "I hate to accept one and then run out on them."

Solo's humor dried up. "Such problems. What's the name?"

"All I have is Lindt. He teaches in the Psychology Department and coaches the tennis team. I think his first name is Alphonse. Everyone here just calls him Dr. Lindt."

"Why the interest?"

"Well, he just hypnotized the entire house, en mass."

Solo's jaw dropped, but he recovered quickly. "Really? Well that is something. I'm not even sure he's in our pile of files here. How did he do it? I mean, I get the impression that those boys don't concentrate on much except their sport."

"That's the other thing," Illya said. "I have a cookie to get analyzed, so I need to get it to you. Meet you at drop point in a half hour? I'll give you the details then."

"OK, see you there."

"Kuryakin out."

Leave it to Illya to get a whole new angle on the case! Napoleon thought as he put the pen away and changed clothes for the meeting.

ACT IV: "Eureka!"

It was well after sunset when the pair met at the base of Monty Montezuma, the college's brass mascot. Solo sat on the bench closest to the statue, and became aware of his partner emerging from the darkness almost immediately. Illya strolled to the bench and sat, then bent over to adjust his socks.

"You're late," the blond agent growled.

"And you're grouchy. What do you have?"

Illya pulled a lumpy envelope from his pocket and put it on the bench between them, then stood and stretched as he spoke. "This is what's left of the sample. I suspect it contains a chemical that relaxes the subject and makes them more susceptible to hypnosis."

"Nice parties at your place."

"Group hypnosis does tend to keep the rowdiness down."

"So how did they pull that off?" Napoleon queried as he squinted at the remains in the envelope, then tucked it in a pocket.

"The only thing that would work the way this did is if the group had been pre-conditioned." Illya pretended to fiddle with the buttons of his letterman's jacket.

Napoleon frowned. "Why?"

"That's what I'll find out. Meanwhile, get what you can on Lindt."

"Certainly. And you keep yours grades up, hear?" he chided playfully with an evil glint in his eye and a wag of his finger.

Illya snorted, then Napoleon saw him freeze as his eyes locked on two figures approaching out of the darkness from the other side of the common area. Solo's hand instinctively went to his holster, but Illya stayed his partner's hand with a wave of his own. "Until tomorrow, then," the Russian mumbled and abruptly walked off in the opposite direction.

Solo turned and heard before he saw that the two giggling girls in lime green mini dresses and white boots were hard to miss, even in the dark. He leaned back on the bench with a smile to enjoy the view as they walked by.

"Let's walk faster!" The blonde whispered.

"No! It'll look like we're chasing him!" the brunette replied, aghast. "You sure he doesn't have a date yet?"

"Well, no one has said so. And if he was my date, everyone would know!" They giggled again, and the tapping of boot heels increased as they followed the trail of the blond Russian.

Napoleon, after cocking his head at the comments and to further appreciate the amount of leg showing as they disappeared up the walk, shook his head at the conversation and grinned. Illya needed a lot more training in the feminine mystique, but the way it stood now made surveillance of his partner a lot more entertaining!

When the girls were out of sight Solo stood casually, and then strolled towards his room. When he got there he went through the files he had stashed away and pulled the paperwork on Lindt. It was a thin file towards the bottom of the stack that really didn't have much to it. Napoleon pursed his lips; maybe there was a reason Alphonse Lindt only gave the university what it wanted and nothing more; all the agent knew was that it

was time to check out Professor Lindt's office. He plucked the communicator from his pocket and opened it up.

"Open Channel D," he requested.

"Yes, Mr. Solo?" a husky female voice replied.

"Give the local lab the heads up that I'm on my way to drop off a sample for them to examine, will you Ruth?"

There was a low, sultry giggle on the other end. "How did you know it was me?" she asked.

"Ruthie, your voice always makes me tingle," he replied with a smile.

"You, Napoleon, are a tease," she said with humor. "And the San Diego office will know immediately to watch out for you." The double entendre was delivered with a chuckle.

"Thank you, my dear. Too bad you aren't here to tell them in person."

"So, is it sunny and warm there?" She said with a sigh. "I could use a beach day!"

"Can't we all? Maybe when we're through here..."

"Is that Mr. Solo?" The familiar voice of Mr. Waverly sounded over the pen. "Good heavens, woman, don't you have a message to deliver?"

"Yes, sir," Ruth said smartly.

"Mr. Solo?"

"Yes, sir?" he replied, unconsciously straightening his tie.

"Has Mr. Kuryakin made any progress?"

"Yes, sir, he has. It seems there's more to the Delta Tau Delta fraternity than meets the eye and the advisor, Alphonse Lindt, needs a little more investigation."

"Really? Lindt, Lindt . . . I don't recall that name from the briefs."

"He's not connected with the hard sciences in any way, as far as our notes say. I'm just going to check out his office."

"Certainly, certainly." Solo could tell by Waverly's distracted tone that his mind was working overtime. "Let me know what you find. I'll have our resources dig deeper here."

"Yes, sir. Solo out." He closed the pen and donned his dark blue maintenance uniform and headed for the door.



Alphonse Lindt tried to relax in the overstuffed chair of his luxurious penthouse apartment. Absently swirling a crystal snifter of brandy as he looked out over the sparkling lights surrounding the lake below him, he tried to keep the Cheshire cat grin at bay as he enjoyed the elated feeling of success that he felt. Finally, his little 'project' was going to get him somewhere and he could finally upgrade to the stately beach house in La Jolla he had his eye on.

When he'd started his entrepreneurial courier project using the unwitting students of Delta Tau Delta so many years ago he never thought it would bring him to this point! A Board position at Wings Corporation! It was over and above what he'd hoped, but only a start to the plans he had.

There was more to Wings Corp. than the public knew. Their negotiator, Mr. Weddel, had offered him a delectable package. True, his project had gotten him this penthouse and the yacht moored in San Diego Bay, but with Wings behind him there would not only be money, but power. He'd had a taste of what Wings was capable of when Mr. Weddel had first approached him.

Lindt knew that Wings Corporation was the corporate sponsor of the college and other entities in the San Diego area, and was mildly surprised when he'd been contacted to run furtive courier services for them almost two years ago, and greatly delighted at the price they were willing to pay. In fact, Wings had made sure he was their exclusive courier; and with a little peeking at what his boys were delivering, Lindt had figured out where Wings was looking to expand before the fact and had invested in the company at the right times. Over the years, his investments proved solid, and he was making money hand over fist! The fact that Wings was about as crooked as it could get didn't bother him one iota. For them not to be getting caught with all they did, he knew Wings must have their hands in just about everything south of Los Angeles! What power and influence they must have!

Wings had noticed his success, and was impressed. Rather than cut him off, they had decided that they wanted the self-starter on their team. Enter Mr. Weddel with the proposition. There was only one thing he had to do before he accepted the offer with a clear mind: He needed to find out a little more information on the major stock holding organization that Mr. Weddel had mentioned. Thrush, was it?

He threw back the remaining brandy and deposited the snifter with a decisive thump. Since it was the Thrush members that had decided to draw Lindt into the Corporation, he decided he'd better know all he could about them. After all, they would be working for Alphonse Lindt someday, and it was best to know your competition!



Solo slipped stealthily into the Psychiatry building and easily entered Lindt's office thanks to his massive ring of campus keys. Neat as a pin and classily decorated, Solo immediately got the impression that this was a man who thought highly of himself. Lindt wasn't a department head, as the office size indicated, but wanted everyone who entered here to think he was worthy of such a position.

Numerous academic certificates were on the walls intermixed with collectable art. Bookshelves displayed bronze and sculpted statues and very few books. *This man sure likes to surround himself with nice things*, Solo appreciated mentally as he began to search.

It didn't take long for Solo to come up empty handed. Lindt wasn't one of those scholars that amassed written material; save the row of textbooks on a lower shelf, reading material was at a minimum. "Either he has a photographic memory or not much about his chosen profession interests him," Solo mused as he stood back to visually survey the room again. Keeping in mind the obviously fastidious nature of Lindt as suggested by the room as a whole, Solo examined every detail carefully. He was almost ready to dub the search a bust when he noticed something odd in one corner of the room where a shiny ceramic lion with jeweled eyes and of Chinese descent sat majestically on the floor in one corner.

Behind the lion the agent noticed the frayed edge of the carpet, which should have been tucked neatly away. Immediately he was on his knees as his hands maneuvered the surprising light lion aside. *Porcelain!* He thought with appreciation. *Nice!* With the statue aside and now out of mind, he picked at the frayed edge and was rewarded when it peeled out of the corner easily. Underneath, the padding had been removed and in its place was a small stack of oversized folders. "Eureka!" Solo smirked as he retrieved the items and sat at the desk to read.

The top folder contained a list of names separated by years, the current year on top. Solo easily recognized the list of Delta Tau Delta members along with Illya's fake name penciled in on the bottom. There was one check mark next to his name in a column topped with today's date. The rest of the other names had at least two and up to four checks next to them. "Cookie treatments?" The agent mused out loud. Some names had asterisks after them; usually those names also had the most checks and were listed in more than one year. "Delivery missions?" he wondered, impressed by the detailed record keeping. Then again, he wasn't surprised after what he'd deduced from this office.

The last page was a list of dates with check boxes. One date was for the next morning and had no checkmark after it. "Delivery dates, I bet," he surmised out loud as he put that file aside and moved to the next.

The letterhead caught his attention immediately. WINGS CORPORATION surrounded with a stylized set of bird's wings. The papers were a written offer of employment that lacked actual wage numbers but lots of percentages of Wings, Corp. income. He didn't know much about the company, but the name typed below one of the signature lines rang a bell: Donald Weddel. Removing his belt buckle that was actually a camera, Solo photographed the contract and the list of names and moved to the last folder.

This was perhaps the most impressive of all the folders. Lindt had kept amazingly detailed records of his investments, and the total in the 'Net Worth' column was staggering. "Either he invests his professor pay very wisely, or Dr. Lindt has a lucrative side business going here. Very lucrative." He photographed the sheets, replaced his buckle and carefully stacked the folders back in their corner hidey-hole. He gently replaced the lion and patted it on the head. "Good boy," he said with a smile, and slipped from the office.

He didn't notice that one hollow eye of the jeweled lion eyes held a tiny camera that had just recorded the sentiment.

ACT V: "What's Your Contribution Been So Far?"

It was just past dawn when the two agents met again. The handsome, dark haired Napoleon was rubbing his eyes tiredly as he nursed a steaming cup of black coffee when the wiry Russian jogged up to him in a grey sweats with 'UCSD' emblazoned on the front. Illya kept the hood of the sweatshirt up over his head as he stopped behind his partner slumped on yet another park bench.

"We have to stop meeting like this," Illya puffed as he began some stretching exercises. "It looks like it's wearing you out."

"It's not the meetings, it's the night life," muttered the senior agent.

"Well, then, keep your mind on the job instead of the dating pool," Illya quipped.

"I am, I'll have you know. I've been doing your *and* my homework."

"Finally. Payback for all those reports I've done for you."

"Well! Aren't we contrary this morning!" Solo quipped in reply. "Youth and exuberance wearing you thin?"

"Not exactly, but trying to watch for odd behavior is quite a challenge. Odd behavior seems to be the norm in that place." Illya sounded perplexed and determined at the same time.

"Maybe this will help. I have the lab results on the cookies."

"Already?" Illya replied, surprised. "You got them in the middle of the night?"

"Yes, that and a roll of film developed. What's your contribution been so far?" Solo growled.

"Sweat, obviously. What did you find out?"

"You were right about the cookies. They were laced with a tranquilizer that the lab guy says would make someone much more susceptible to hypnosis. I also searched Lindt's office and got pictures of some hidden documents."

"What kind of documents?"

"Here's a copy of everything for you," Solo slipped an envelope from his breast pocket and handed them to Illya, who slipped it under his sweatshirt. "Basically it's a list of Delts that I assume have been hypnotized and used as couriers, Lindt's investment records and an offer of employment."

Illya frowned as he continued to stretch. "Could you see if they were related somehow?"

Napoleon pinched the bridge of his nose to clear his tired and fuzzy mind. "I saw a several dates correlate between what I think are courier runs and Lindt's investments. I think Lindt has peeked at some of the documents and made investments based on the information. He makes money on the courier operation, too. Quite the self employed individual."

"Any links to Thrush or is he working alone?"

"There's where the employment offer comes in." Solo explained what he'd seen.

"The Wings Corporation?" Illya questioned with a frown. "Never heard of them. But Donald Weddel is the sure indication that Thrush is involved somehow. He's their top counselor, isn't he?"

"Yup. Donald Weddel has drafted the biggest contracts for Thrush to date. Graduated top of his class from Harvard Law School and is known as a tough litigator. Since he's involved, there has to be something big cooking."

Illya was thoughtful for a few seconds. "So, Lindt isn't Thrush yet?"

"We can't even be sure if he knows who Thrush is, but it looks like they'd make a good team." Solo sighed. "Look those over. And I think there's a delivery scheduled for today so keep your eyes open." He stifled a yawn.

"I could say the same to you. Get some sleep. I can't afford to have my only back up fall asleep at the car."

"At the wheel', you mean. And your heartfelt concern is overwhelming. I've managed to save your behind many times just fine." Solo waved his partner off with a tired flick of his hand. "Go. You have Rush Week duties to attend to."

Illya rolled his eyes in displeasure. "Yes. It's been so much fun so far."

As Illya jogged off towards Fraternity Row Napoleon Solo headed to his apartment to rest his eyes. He knew how tired he was when he wasn't amused at the thought of what Rush duties his partner may have to encounter.



When Illya returned to the frat house, he received a hopeful gaze from the goat staked by the back door. The agent paused. "Trust me, that grass is better eating than anything you'll get in there," he said lowly as he passed. When he entered via the kitchen door, there wasn't much motion. Many of the occupants were up but barely awake, proving the time honored theory that most college students would sleep until noon if allowed. The only other person that seemed to have his act somewhat together besides Illya was Jimmy, the house president. He was posting a paper on the refrigerator.

"All right brothers, here's the timetable for the day. The Rush Dance starts at six so we need to at least try and stay on schedule."

"When are the new brothers being announced?" One bleary eyed boy mumbled, his head resting in his hand at the kitchen table.

"It's on here. Two o'clock." Jimmy spied Reggie coming down the stairs and intercepted him as Illya eyed the schedule. He groaned inwardly as he saw his name listed as one of the attendants to the Man in the Box, scheduled for 2:30. The only good thing about the detail was that he knew it couldn't possibly be too difficult to learn his duties, and it probably involved beer. Probably *only* involved beer. Then he began to wonder how beer *could* be involved with a Man in a Box. . .

The phone ringing disrupted his thoughts. As he turned he saw the receiver batted off the wall by a fumbling, not yet awake brother. "What?" he grumped in the mouthpiece. "Just a minute. REGGIE!" He let the phone drop and it hung there, swinging gently back and forth against the wall like a pendulum.

Reggie shuffled into the kitchen, eyes droopy with sleep, and he grabbed the receiver. "low?" he asked sleepily. Illya was about to go to his room to look at the pictures, but something about Reggie's face stopped him.

With the receiver to his ear, the once droopy eyes had suddenly widened and unfocused. "Yes," he said quietly after a minute, then listened a bit longer. Without

another word, he hung up and stared at the phone for a few seconds, then shook his head and continued on with his morning routine as if nothing had happened.

The unfocused look was familiar to the agent. It was the same look the group had when Lindt had spoken to them the night before. When Reggie went upstairs to change, Illya raced to his room, locked the door and spread out the photos. After studying them a few minutes, he came to the same conclusion as his partner: There was a delivery scheduled for today. Quickly, he changed into casual clothes and grabbed his books, stuffing the photos between the pages as he went down stairs. Not seeing Reggie, he asked around and was satisfied that the boy was still upstairs. Illya sank onto a lumpy couch and automatically opened a text book.

"What're doin'?" A huge brother mumbled as he flopped on the couch next to the agent, who bounced roughly as a result and had to grab the notebook on his lap to keep it from launching from his lap.

"Studying?" Illya replied brightly.

"Oh. Yeah. Gotta try that sometime." The big boy covered his yawning mouth with a huge hand. "You passed Algebra already?" The jock asked.

"I think so," Illya replied, thinking *'when I was ten years old!'*

"Then you can help me pass it this time," the giant stated. "Coach says if I can get a 'D' this time I can keep playin'"

"If I may ask," Illya said after a moment, "how many times have you taken Algebra?"

The beefy boy frowned and held up his hand, counting out four fingers. "Three. Actually, I'm not sure. Coach keeps track for me."

"Three times." Illya repeated calmly. "OK, then, I know where to start."

The boy looked confused. "Where?" he asked curiously.

Illya looked at him carefully. "Why, at the beginning, of course," he said slowly.

The big student smiled after a moment and clapped the agent heartily on the back. "I knew you looked smart!" he said happily, not noticing he'd nearly unseated his new tutor. He stood and offered a ham-sized hand. "I'm Buck. I'll get with you later, OK?"

"Fine," Illya replied as he accepted a handshake that swallowed his hand completely. He was relieved when he saw Reggie coming down the stairs. "Gotta go, Buck. See you later."

"OK!" Buck headed towards the kitchen as Illya fell in to follow Reggie. There was a lot of foot traffic heading to the campus but following the jock was easier than he'd expected because the boy stayed to the edges of the campus, sometimes going the opposite direction of the crowd.

When Reggie got to the intersection of two streets he pulled out a stack of colored papers from his notebook and, starting with the first parked car on the corner, began putting papers under the windshield wipers. He continued on methodically, car by car, and when he got to the eighth car Illya sidled up to the first car and read the paper. It was a flyer for the football team's opening game the next night with Arizona State. Although the flyers seemed innocuous, the agent suspected the distribution to be a cover for an exchange.

He was right. When Reggie reached the last car parked on the curb, Illya saw an envelope appear out of the car window as Reggie placed the flyer under the windshield. The student then tucked the envelope in his notebook and crossed the street. As the agent shadowed his movement from mid block, he was able to see the license plate of

the car as it pulled away from the curb. Memorizing it, he continued to follow the student as he pulled out his communicator.



Solo's pen warbled for his attention as soon as he stepped from the shower. He wrapped the towel around his waist and snatched the nagging pen from his pile of dirty clothes on the floor.

"Solo here."

"Did I wake you?" The Russian accented voice sounded hopeful.

"Almost. That was my next destination."

"I hate to shatter your sweet dreams, but the drop is going down and I have an idea who the recipient is. We're headed to the Psych building."

"Lindt. Any idea who passed the papers?" His partner passed on the license plate number and car description. "I'll run it right now. You keep an eye on that kid." Solo adjusted the pen, and spoke into it again. "Open Channel D."



Nearly a half hour later Illya's pen called him. "Kuryakin."

"Where are you?" Solo's voice asked.

"I'm in the quad area south of the Psych building sitting on a bench. My target has been sitting on another bench with an open text book, but I don't think he's studying."

"What makes you say that?"

"Napoleon, I've lived with these boys for a while now. Unless he's been hypnotized to study, I doubt any of those kids have developed that habit."

"Maybe he's a changed man." Napoleon's voice was right behind him.

Illya didn't jump from surprise, but instead calmly closed the pen and raised his eyebrow at his partner as he turned to glance at him. "A herd of elephants would be quieter than you, Napoleon."

"And you're as obvious as a horse at an opera sitting here and not even giving the pretty girls a look." Solo said quietly as he smiled at a passing pair of co eds. "I have the car registration information. Does the name John Lighten sound familiar?"

Pretending to read his text book, Illya replied, "The scientist? He's part of the design team at San Onofre. Looks like we found the leak."

"I wonder what he's leaking now?" Napoleon mused.

"One way to find out. I saw Reggie over there slide an envelope under Lindt's door, then he came out here and sat down. Doesn't look like he's going anywhere."

The agents stood to move to the Psych building when Solo pushed Illya back down on the bench with a hand to his shoulder. "Hang on a second. Look."

Both agents watched as Lindt stepped from the building and glanced around. His eyes stopped on Reggie, and he walked up and greeted him with a handshake. When the boy rose to his feet, they saw the professor pass an envelope to him and pat him on the back. They parted, Lindt heading to the main campus and Reggie walking the opposite direction along the front the Psych building and away from the agents.

"Back to work," Illya mused, standing again.

"I'll check Lindt's office to see if he recorded anything," Napoleon said as they moved off.

Illya moved easily now, as the crowds had thinned with the start of classes. He ducked his head to slip on his dark glasses when he bumped into someone. "Oh, pardon me," he turned and said automatically. The man he'd bumped scowled at him and moved to button his jacket closed, but not before the agent saw a glimpse of a shoulder holster beneath. The man continued on without comment, and Illya noticed a second similarly dressed man walking with him.

The agent turned slightly and watched the pair enter the Psych building where Napoleon had disappeared moments before.

Act VI: "Aren't You On The Wrong Campus?"

Solo easily entered Lindt's office and went directly to the porcelain lion. This time he simply pushed it aside, the hollow eye facing the wall. The dark haired agent lifted the carpet and retrieved the files. Flipping through them, the only difference he saw was a check next to today's date. "Delivery completed, I guess," Solo mused as he put the papers back. He'd just pressed the carpet back down when he heard a noise; the shadows of two men could be seen through the frosted glass in the office door.

Immediately he stood and faced them as they pushed the door open. The lead man, a lean looking tough, froze. "What are you doing in here?" he growled, suspiciously eyeing the uniformed custodian in front of him.

"Dusting?" Solo said, trying to look surprised.

The second man looked over the lean man's shoulder, then glanced behind him. "Where's your cleaning cart?" the tough inquired, turning back to inspect Solo. "Hey." He pushed by the lead man and closed the door. "I know you."

"Perhaps from the faculty mixer?" Solo said politely, moving out from the corner.

"No! You're an U.N.C.L.E. agent!"

The first man snapped his fingers and grinned evilly. "Yeah! Napoleon Solo! That's it!" Then they both went for their guns.

"So nice to be recognized!" Solo replied quickly as he kicked the first man's hand away from his holster and jumped on the second man.

They fell in a heap as the first thug recovered his balance and managed to pull his gun just as the office door slammed open and hit him squarely in the face. He went down instantly with a breathy groan.

The second goon had managed to draw his gun, but Solo, had both hands wrapped around the barrel and was managing to keep it away from his body. He heard the door open and the thud of a body, then heard the chilling voice of his partner. "Stop or die."

The wrestling match stopped instantly as the goon felt cold metal pressed behind his ear. The voice alone was enough to stop him, and he released the gun. Napoleon, glad those icy eyes weren't fixed on him, jerked the weapon away.

"What took you so long?" The senior agent snapped as he stood and brushed off his clothes.

"You're welcome," Ilya replied, pulling out his communicator. "I'll call for a pick up. And now you've made me lose my student."

"I'm sure we can find you another," Solo replied calmly.



"It's Solo, all right," muttered the man at the head of the conference table as a dignified group watched the images on a screen that had dropped from the ceiling. "I wasn't expecting to see him on this coast." The image view was low as if shot from near floor level and showed a fish eyed view a neat office. The form of Napoleon Solo had just turned towards the eye of the camera and was now approaching it. His hands reached out to the sides of the lens as he moved the camera contained in the porcelain lion to the side. "And whenever he's about there's a good chance that his partner's lurking around, too. Has he been located? What brought them here?"

"We haven't found Mr. Kuryakin yet, and we don't know what information they have, sir. We only got this film moments ago."

"WHAT?" The man roared, pounding the table as he stood. "That film is supposed to be recovered every morning before Lindt arrives!"

"Uh, er, yes, sir. There was a small problem with the retrieval team this morning. The backup team had to be sent in."

"Problem? What problem? Why wasn't I informed?!"

"We were just going to report that to you, sir. It seem the original retrieval team has, uh .. disappeared."

"WHAT? How can a mere two agents be this disruptive this fast?! Have they been here, undetected, longer than we think?"

"Well, sir, they are Solo and Kuryakin, U.N.C.L.E.'s best and all, and we have kept security at a minimum to keep a low profile . . ."

"That's no excuse! I want them found and brought here immediately!"

The screen behind the man flickered through Lindt's day, then Lindt moving the lion aside, and finally showed Solo again entering the office, but this time the lion camera was turned to face the wall, revealing nothing more.

"Yes, sir! The basement, sir?"

"Well, I certainly don't want them in my OFFICE!" the man roared. The others around the table flinched and tried to make themselves smaller in their seats. "Now do it! I don't need Thrush Central to hear of this incident."

"Yes, sir," the red-faced man squeaked as he scurried out the door. By then, the film showed Solo replacing the lion and two other forms on the floor in a heap behind him.

The head man shook his head in disgust at the film, and turned slightly redder at the shadowy image of Kuryakin talking on his communicator in the background behind Solo. "Turn that off!" he barked, straightened his tie as he calmed himself. The others quietly studied the papers in front of them, glad they hadn't been Carlton Nash's target. They'd each had their turn on that spit in the past.

Only Donald Weddel was not cowed, seated at Nash's right hand with a satisfied smile unwavering on his lips during the tongue-lashing. Now, he cleared his throat. "Mr. Nash?" His strong voice sounded.

Rush, now in control, settled into his massive leather chair with a squeak. The monitor disappeared into the ceiling. "Yes?" He replied civilly.

"In the light of this discovery shall we step up Professor Lindt's recruitment? Our goal can still be achieved if we move quickly."

"Yes. Yes, you're right. I'm sure those two will be out of the way soon. I see no need to abort the plan.

"Yes, sir!" Weddel agreed with a cold smile. "In fact, I have an idea on how to corral the problem."

Now it was Nash's turn to smile. "Go on," he said, leaning back in his chair.



The clean up in Lindt's office was quick and efficient. Since most of the professors were in classes and it was rather early in the morning, there were no questions by the university staff. Solo headed to his apartment to catch some long overdue sleep.

Ilya had returned to the frat house to shed his running clothes and return to classes with only speculation as to where Reggie had dropped that envelope after Lindt had passed it to him. He had an idea that Wings had to be involved, and knew that his next step would be to find the corporate headquarters and check it out. A feeling of relief washed over him as he realized the Rush dance would have to be put aside as the cover of darkness was the best time to infiltrate the company. But there was still that Man in the Box thing; he sighed at the inevitable. Maybe something would come up, like a shoot out or a torture session. He could only hope.



It was late in the morning before Solo settled down for some sleep. He dropped off quickly and was happily dreaming of the beach and bikinis when he jerked awake, instantly on alert. All he saw before dropping off again was the broken window over his head and the cloud of gas enveloping him like a shroud.



Alphonse Lindt wasn't at all surprised to find Mr. Weddel waiting for him in the hall outside his second class of the day. They shook hands, and stepped back into the empty classroom. Weddel shut the door.

"Professor Lindt, my colleagues at Wings would like to see you immediately regarding their offer of employment."

Lindt kept the satisfied feeling of excitement from his face. Finally, a chance to see the board face to face! He'd already been working on a plan to seize control. Wings only knew about his courier business; how he conditioned the couriers was his secret alone, and could easily be adapted to the board! It would simply be a matter of time before he, Alphonse Lindt, would be in control of Wings Corporation!

Keeping an appearance of being annoyed, he glanced at his watch. "Well, I suppose I could have my assistant take the rest of my classes for the day. Give me a minute to arrange it."

The Wings Corporation had a beautiful building in Point Loma overlooking San Diego Bay. When Lindt was ushered into the opulent conference room the sun was just visible through the tinted windows just beginning its drop to a colorful sunset.

"Professor Lindt." Carlton Nash offered his hand. "Glad to finally meet you face to face. We are very impressed with your courier service, and how you have taken the initiative to improve your financial status in a most interesting manner. Please have a seat and listen to our proposal."

The talk didn't go at all like Lindt had imagined. First, they locked the conference doors. That's when he noticed the large men standing in the back of the room, guns bulging obviously from their belts, and the expressions of fear on the rest of the board members. Only Nash and Weddel beamed with confident smiles. Lindt felt himself begin to sweat.

Before the hour was over, Lindt was dazzled. He knew real power when he saw it and recognized that Thrush was the actual power behind Wings. Mentally putting his own plans aside, he decided to bide his time and align himself with this man in front of him. Carlton Nash would be his ticket to more power than he could ever imagine!

"Now, there's something we'd like you to do for us, Professor," Nash stated, leaning back. "We have a subject for you to condition."

"Condition?" Lindt sputtered. They didn't know that his couriers were hypnotized, did they? "What do you mean?"

Nash's eyes burned brightly as he leaned towards the small man. "How stupid do you think we are? We didn't contact you because of your delivery services. We contacted you because we admire your, shall we say, 'training techniques'. We know all about you, Professor." And then he finally put his proposal on the table.



When Napoleon Solo finally came around, he wasn't in his room any longer. Instead, he found himself strapped around his chest to a chair with his arms and legs immobilized to the arms and legs of the chair. It was a windowless room with the only light coming from a hooded light bulb hanging from the ceiling. It smelled musty.

"Hello?" He called. "Room service?" The only noise he heard was the gentle humming of the building's heartbeat. He looked down and saw he was still in his maintenance uniform and tried to wiggle free to check his clothing for any of his hidden devices, but was not successful. The buttons alone were ample enough to get out of the room since they were explosive, but first he had to get out of the chair. After a while, he gave up with a sigh and knew he simply had to wait and see what happened.

His hands were becoming numb when he finally heard someone rattle the lock on the door. Solo turned, surprised to see Professor Lindt enter followed by a well dressed man and none other than Donald Weddel.

"Aren't you on the wrong campus?" Solo politely inquired of the professor. Lindt looked surprised, and glanced at Nash.

"We weren't the only ones watching you," Nash informed Lindt. "And I have no doubt that U.N.C.L.E. has been watching other things, too. We need to know what they know," Nash said with a nod towards Solo.

"And he can help us in other ways, too." Weddel smiled. "Greetings Mr. Solo. This is Carlton Nash and I'm . . ."

"Donald Weddel, Thrush lawyer. Can't think of any job lower on the ethics scale."

Weddel laughed. "So you do remember me! I'm flattered. I promise, though, after today you won't remember much. Too bad. You'll be a great loss to your organization, but a fine addition to ours." Weddel held his chin with his hand in mock surprise. "Oh! But you won't realize you're working for Thrush, either! What a shame. Destroying a mind is such a terrible thing."

"That's enough," Nash snapped. "Professor, all the items you asked for will be here momentarily. Meanwhile, here's the sedative you asked for." A slight, frightened looking man in an ill fitting suit handed Nash a small, black case and scurried away. Nash popped the case open and offered the filled syringe to the professor.

When Lindt lifted the syringe, Solo saw that his hand shook slightly. He tried to meet the professor's eyes, but the man kept his head bowed as he worked and the agent barely felt the needle enter his vein.

ACT VII: "What Is The Meaning Of Life?"

After his morning classes Illya returned to the frat house to find it abuzz with activity. The new brothers were to be announced during the afternoon party preceding the Rush Dance. The agent blended in with the others in preparing the house and kept an eye open for Reggie.

Reggie returned, breathless, shortly after noon and oversaw the final house preps. He appeared to be his normal self now, and Illya's careful prodding revealed that Reggie had a completely different idea of where he'd been this morning; his trip to Lindt's office and points there after were completely absent from his memory and replaced with the alternate reality of sleeping in. Soon, the house was filled with Delts and pounding music as the celebration began.

The new brothers were called, given their jackets and a list of ordeals they had to endure to be official Delts. The football boys had physically challenging Keg Toss, the swim team hosted Bobbing for Beers and the baseball representatives monitored the mentally testing Man in the Box.

The Man in the Box duty was all Illya expected and more. The beer was expected. Playing guard to a drunk frat brother in a cardboard box was more than expected, but not really surprising. One by one the new brothers were ushered into the room and told to kneel in front of the Box, which was a good idea because by this time standing in itself was a questionable endeavor. The Man, hidden in the Box, would ask a mind stimulating question like "Have you ever made it past First Base?" and the Pledge would have to respond. The room had at first been packed with ball players suggesting questions and taking turns in the Box, but after awhile Illya was the only chaperone left. By the time the last Pledge was ushered in, the Man, accompanied by his own bottle of Jack Daniels in the now dilapidated Box, was completely unintelligible.

"Whadhesay??" The swaying Pledge slurred. "I can't unnerstan 'im."

Join the club. Oh, yes, that's the point of all this isn't it? Illya thought as he decided to stop this silly affair. "He asked 'What's the meaning of life?'"

The Pledge blinked slowly at the agent, then at the Box, where the sound of snoring could be heard. "Beer?" the boy guessed. "Girls? Beer 'n girls!"

Illya grabbed the boy's elbow and ushered him to the bedroom door. "You got it. Congratulations." When they stepped into the crowded hall, Illya announced that the Man in the Box had left the party. No one seemed to care as 'Wild Thing' began to thrum the air.

With sunset coming soon, Illya slipped to his room and changed into a dark sweater and pants and tried to contact his partner. When there was no response, he contacted the San Diego office directly. "We haven't heard from Mr. Solo since the pick

up this morning," the woman replied professionally. Then with a questioning voice, "Is that the Beatles I hear?"

"I believe so," Illya replied, acknowledging the noisy background. "Did you get any information from the two that were picked up?"

The woman, back in professional mode, filled him in on the few bits of information they had gotten out of the pair. They were retrieving film from the office and were to take it to the Wings Corporation address.

"So the room was bugged. That means they know who we really are." He glanced at the bedroom door that was trembling from heavy knocking. "Inform Waverly that my cover is blown and these kids are now at risk. I'm getting out of here and am checking the Wings address. Kuryakin out." He didn't wait for a response and clicked the device closed.

"Hey!" A slurry male voice demanded from the hallway. "Whatcha doin' in there?" Female giggling accompanied the question. Illya calmly pocketed the pen as he opened a window and slipped out into the late afternoon.

The rooftop under his window was over the front porch and the window so frequently used as an exit that there wasn't even a screen on it anymore. The agent could hear the party under him and feel the vibrations of the music in his feet. He shook his head again in disbelief and made his way to the edge.

Suddenly he felt something zing through his hair followed by the familiar, muffled sound of a silenced gunshot. Illya dropped and rolled off the edge of the porch, his ungainly fall broken by a group of students. The girls shrieked first in fear and then in delight as the Russian untangled himself from the pair of boys he'd landed on. They didn't appear to have heard the shot; no great surprise with the volume of noise in the air.

"Excuse me," he muttered struggling to get to his feet. Young hands helped him up and he slipped away with a quick thanks going in the opposite direction of the shot. When he was away from the crowd, he prepared for a deadly game of cat and mouse by going over the layout of the area in his head. He eyed a car at the end of the alley, but as he moved to it another silenced shot nipped his arm.

Thrush! I've got to get away from these kids before one of them is hurt, he thought, heading for the canyon he knew was one block over. The zing of another shot buzzed he ear and he began to duck and weave his way to the cover of the canyon. *I just need to keep out of their way until dark,* he reasoned, diving into the brush of the canyon. As he moved deeper into the cover of the thick mesquite, Illya calculated that the origination of the second and third shots indicated at least two, possibly three, pursuers. The ping of yet another shot off a boulder near his head made him dive deeper into the canyon, oblivious to the scrapes and scratches from the brush.

The bottom of the small canyon offered good cover and he moved parallel to the campus, away from the shots. He could hear faint music from the streets above, and shouts of men he assumed were the ones responsible for the shots. A glance at the sky between the towering eucalyptus trees above him revealed clouds edged in pink; sunset was near. He settled behind a large boulder to catch his breath and assess his wounds.

Only a flesh wound, the bullet had grazed his bicep and left a small hole in his sweater, which was edged in blood. The wound itself had stopped bleeding, but he couldn't say the same for the various and sundry scrapes on his exposed skin from the brush. He even found cactus spines in the fleshy part of his palm, which kept him busy as the sun set.

With the darkness on his side, Illya moved back up to the canyon rim. He saw at least three figures moving in the darkness peeking into the canyon from the rim, and was thankful he'd changed into the black sweater and pants. Slipping between watchers, he found his way down an alley and worked his way between two houses until the street was in sight.

A happy group of students on the other side caught his attention, and he quickly combed through his hair with his fingers, flinching at the pain in his bicep. Glancing around, he stepped onto the lighted sidewalk from the dark alley between houses and immediately noticed the foot traffic. On the street cars honked and cruised slowly, boys shouted and whistled while girls greeted each other. Music blared from everywhere, and everyone seemed to be heading in the same direction. *The Rush Dance*, he thought.

The agent also noticed a pair of solemn men stationed at a corner just as they noticed him and began to move. One spoke into his hand and kept his eyes locked on Illya. Keeping his distance, he crossed the street between cars and was immediately greeted by a group of girls and pulled into their company as they moved across a small lawn to the Rush Dance.

"We were wondering when you'd show!" squealed one.

"Oooh, you look so sophisticated in black!" Crooned another who hooked his elbow.

"You here with anyone in particular?" A third one breathed in his ear.

"Ladies! Good evening. Ah, yes, in fact I'm supposed to meet her inside." He glanced back and saw his followers joined by three more, their eyes intent on him. "And I'm late!"

"Well, then, let's go," the girl on his arm pouted. "I'd be very upset if I was your date and you missed me!"

"Uh, yes." Was all he could think to say.

"Maybe we can change your mind!" A fourth squealed as they moved along. The others agreed heartily.

Illya allowed the gaggle of giggling girls to surround him and move him like an amoeba into the dance hall via a side door. The crowd was in the midst of swaying to the Doors' 'Light My Fire' with throbbing strobe and black lights accenting the pounding decibels. The place was packed, and a banner proclaiming the Rush Dance flashed in refraction to the strobes.

The girls couldn't resist and began to dance as soon as they hit the crowd allowing Illya to slip away to the side crowd with a smile. The girls simply shrugged, some throwing a kiss, and began dancing with each other.

Illya found a corner where he could see if the goons had followed him. 'Light My Fire' gave way to Mick and 'Ruby Tuesday' and the bodies slowed to the sway of the slower tune enabling the agent to see the half-dozen burly men as they waded through the crowd towards him. Eyeing the double doors of the main entrance he quickly calculated that he could just make it to the doors ahead of the thugs. What happened then would have to be decided when he got there. He moved that direction, his white blonde hair starkly visible with each flash of the strobe.

As he made his way through the pressing crowd Illya felt hands on his face and body as he moved along and simply ignored the cooing girls and forward suggestions. It was difficult to be polite, especially when one hip-hugger clad, braless, bare-midriffed blonde beauty pressed right up against his back and squeezed his buttocks in appreciation as she whispered a suggestion in his ear followed by a tickle with her tongue.

Non-plussed, Illya simply stopped, turned and gently but firmly moved her back with his hands on her shoulders. She batted her eyes at him as he said, "Sorry. Look me up in another decade," and melted back into the crowd as her pink lower lip poked out in a pout. "They must take a class to learn that behavior because I'm sure they didn't learn it from their mothers," he mumbled as he reached the double doors.

The opening rift of "These Boots Were Made For Walkin'" followed Illya out the door, Nancy's voice still clear outside when the doors closed where a different kind of crowd gathered. There were several clusters of kids, smoking, drinking and laughing in more private conversations. Illya hatched an idea the second he saw a loud circle of football frat brothers off to one side of the large front lawn that included his new friend, Buck. He headed in their direction.

"Hey, brother!" They greeted, shoving a beer in his hand. Their dates, clinging to their massive arms, smiled brightly at the blond agent and passed giddy glances to each other. Illya glanced to the doors and saw the first of the goons push his way out as Nancy Sinatra sang, "*These boots are made for walkin' and that's just what they'll do...*"

"Hey," Illya said to Buck, who happened to be the biggest guy there. "I heard the Arizona guys talking about this year's team," he started.

"They expressed lots of FEAR, I'm sure!" Buck boasted to the roars of his buddies as he slapped Illya on the back.

Managing to keep his feet, Illya joined the laughter for a second then said, "Well, no, not exactly. In fact, they said the defensive line looked like a bunch of .. um, what was the term? Oh, yes, I remember: Chorus girls."

"WHAT?!" Roared the beefy letterman. "We pounded them into the ground last season!" His cohorts agreed lustily.

"Where are those chumps?!" A second large guy growled.

"Well," Illya turned to look and waved vaguely at the front doors. "Just inside. They also said your game book looks like a kindergarten reader so you'd understand it. Oh, there they are now!"

Brushing the girls off their arms like so much lint and dashing the beers to the grass, the lettermen huddled with Illya in the center.

"We'll show those jokers defense!" Barked Buck. "Shuttle Formation, move on three! BREAK!" With a unified roar and clap they made a line on the grass between Illya and the regrouping Thrushmen.

"Looks like they don't think you can hurt them," Illya noted. "Look!"

About nine Thrush goons had gathered into a line, their eyes locked on Illya, who had stepped slightly aside to be clearly visible. The Thrushies grinned wolfishly as they began to move in his direction.

"HUT!"

The goons blinked in surprise, their attention diverted. "*You keep losin' when you ought to not bet!*" Emitted from the dance hall.

"HUT!"

They stopped in confusion, their eyes now on the hunched linemen. "*What's right is right, but you ain't been right yet!*" Nancy wailed on.

"HUT!"

The line charged with a collective roar as the goons' mouths dropped in unison. They froze like deer in headlights as the wall of muscle and letterman jackets pounded towards them. Illya allowed himself a satisfied grin as the players mowed over the hapless Thrush, reversed, and did it again. He dashed into the darkness to the sound

boisterous cheers, howls and squealing girls and Nancy saying, '*Are ya ready boots?
Start walkin'!*'

ACT VIII: "I Think We Can Ditch Them If They're On Foot!"

The low murmurs of voices and the squeak of chairs were the first thing Napoleon Solo noticed when he became conscious of his surroundings. He was no longer in the dark basement; when he cracked open his eyes he found he was in a bright, windowless office. The room was simply but completely furnished in a business style office.

When he moved, he discovered his wrists were cuffed together behind the back of the chair he sat in and the chair was sturdy enough to discourage moving. In fact, it was a well-padded, rather comfortable chair placed against a wall facing the front of a large desk. The only door was to his right and closed.

The voice he'd heard was coming from the frightened looking man behind the desk. The poor man had a white-knuckle death grip on a phone receiver as he was whispering desperately in the mouthpiece, and kept throwing the agent wide-eyed glances as he spoke. Solo was sure the man would run out screaming if he said 'boo'. The wooden nameplate on the desk labeled the poor soul as William Grabert, Financial Officer. Below that was a familiar stylized wing logo.

After a string of whispered "Yes, sir!" Mr. Grabert hung up the phone and began shifting papers around on his desk nervously. "Um," he said, making a pile with the papers. "Er, Mm .. Mr. Solo, you aren't to go anywhere."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Solo replied with a grin. "Can you tell me .."

"I can't tell you anything!" Blurted Grabert. "I mean, I have nothing to tell you."

"Ah," Solo nodded. "Not even the time?"

"The time?" Grabert looked slightly relieved. "Uh, I .. well, sure." He glanced at his wrist watch. "It's just past 4:30."

"In the afternoon?" Solo looked around the office. "There are no windows."

"Oh, right!" Grabert laughed nervously. "Morning. I like to start early." He returned to his papers, a bit more in control.

"I see," Napoleon said slowly. "No coffee, I assume?"

"No. No coffee." Grabert began to work again.

"Anyone else here?"

Grabert stopped again and gave him a nervous grin. "There's always someone here, Mr. Solo."

"Ah." Solo nodded. Again, Grabert returned to shuffling papers and Solo surveyed the room looking for a camera. He noticed a narrow heating vent over Grabert's head and squinted to see if there was anything mounted in the vent. He didn't expect to see a pair of blue eyes looking back at him between from behind the grate. He raised his eyebrows and settled back with an *'it's about time!'* expression on his face. He saw the eyes glance at Grabert, then saw his partner holding him a small, round capsule between his fingers.

"Hey," Solo said, making noise to cover the plunk of the capsule on the carpet. "Don't they serve breakfast here?"

Exasperated, Grabert looked up, not noticing the small cloud rising behind his chair. "Look, Mr. Solo, I'm not here to keep you happy, I'm here to .. to .." Like a marionette whose strings were suddenly cut, Grabert fell forward on the table, his orderly piles of paper fluttering to the floor.

"I'll be back," Illya said as he disappeared.

Solo waited patiently, and within minutes the office door cracked open and allowed his partner to slide in.

"What took you so long?" Solo nagged as Illya unlocked the cuffs. The dark haired agent rubbed his wrists and stood.

"I'm sure they were expecting me so I had to be cautious. I didn't come here to find you."

"Just a bonus, I supposed. Expecting you? How do you know that?"

Illya quickly relayed his escape from the Rush dance and subsequent journey to the Wings Corporation Headquarters. Checking the halls, he motioned Solo to follow.

"How did they know where to find you?" Solo whispered.

Illya glanced back at him, hesitating before he replied. "Either I was recognized or someone told them." He ducked into a dark conference room, Solo on his heels. "It turns out Lindt's office was wired for video."

"So they recognized me and you," Solo reasoned, but the lingering look his partner gave him was not lost on him. "You don't think I told them, do you? The drug/hypnosis thing didn't work on me, either."

"How do you know?" Illya said. "From what I've seen, they place a whole new memory in place of the treatment. We both may be remembering false events. We both have been exposed to the conditioning," he paused. "And some of us for a longer period than others."

Solo straightened at the implication. "You don't think I was affected, do you? That's ridiculous! We're both conditioned against that very thing!"

"Yes, well, you're probably right." Illya brushed him off and peered out of the window. "Can we get out of here, please? I got something from another office that we need to check on." He pulled out a small measure of explosive putty and began forming an exit hole on the plate glass window. It was still dark enough outside to escape without being seen.

"What is it?" Napoleon asked, following his partner to cover behind a sturdy chair. The "pffft!" of a burning explosive ended with a "pop!" and a section of the glass dropped out to the grass one story below.

"A list," Illya said, heading to the new hole. He crawled out to a very narrow ledge outside and began to slide his way over to a nearby drainpipe. His partner was on his heels the whole way.

"A list of what?" Solo steadied the downspout as Illya made his way to the ground. He joined his partner on the grass moments later and they dashed to the cover of the landscaping.

They crouched behind a flowering bush as Illya oriented himself. "It looks like a list of new supervisors for the San Onofre power plant. They have a training class today in San Juan Capistrano." He rose to dash off.

Solo mulled that over then tugged his partner back by the sleeve. "And why does that interest us?"

"Because it was in the envelope I saw Reggie deliver to Lindt. There was a distinctive stamp on the front I recall seeing when Reggie first got the envelope from Lighten's car, a gold seal of some sort. The training is supposed to start later this morning, so we have to hurry."

They moved quickly through the brush to where Illya had parked his transportation. They stepped to the sidewalk, and the blond agent stepped up to a bright yellow Volkswagen Beetle. Solo stopped in his tracks.

"You've got to be kidding," he said unbelievably as he studied the car.

"It was the best I could do on short notice," Illya replied brightly as he opened the door. "Besides, it's economical on gasoline!"

Reluctantly, Solo glanced around. "Couldn't you have borrowed a sporty, red convertible?"

Before Illya could reply there was a gunshot and the glass of the passenger door shattered. "Too late!" the Russian yelled as he jumped in and fired up the puny engine. Another shot forced Solo to dive through the broken window as his partner peeled away from the curb. Several pings sounded on the side of the car as they sped off, and Solo looked nervously behind them.

"I hope they aren't chasing us in a car. I think we can ditch them if they're on foot!"

"Just hang on," his dour partner replied, intent on escape as the tiny car squealed around a corner. Several more jig-jags and a jaunt the wrong way down a one-way street finally convinced the agents that they hadn't been followed. Illya slowed and parked the vehicle on a dark street. "I saw a few guards on foot outside the building, so I'm sure they didn't get to a car. We're clear."

Solo surveyed the surroundings carefully as they exited the Beetle and only saw the slumbering form of an ill-dressed bum in the doorway of a closed business. He wrinkled his nose as the thought of what he would smell like. "Nice part of town you selected. How do you propose we get to San Juan Capistrano since now that they know to look for that?" He swept his arm in the direction of the insect shaped car.

"Train." Illya said simply, combing his hair with his fingers and straightening his jacket. "That way. Do you need a gun?"

"As a matter of fact," Solo replied, patting his pockets, "I do." His partner tossed him a small revolver that was usually strapped to the Russian's ankle. "Don't lose it. I paid for that one myself."

Solo examined the weapon. "Figures. Bare bones style." He tucked the gun in his waistband.

"Ingrate," the blond grumbled as they moved off in the early morning darkness towards the train station.

They obtained tickets for the first train of the morning and watched the sky lighten over the eastern hills with the rising sun as the Pacific Ocean sparkled in the dawning light. Surfers dotted the shoreline as the train raced north.

"That looks kinda fun," Solo noted as the surfers rode the waves to shore.

"You don't like swimming," Illya pointed out.

"I could like it if there were surfer girls waiting for me on shore." Solo reasoned.

"I should have figured that," Illya concluded. "I'll be back," he then said. He rose, and walked the aisles. "Looks clear," he said on his return. He pulled out a paper from an inside pocket. "Here's the list. I remember some of these names from the journals I've read. They are going to be the top level managers of the Onofre plant on completion."

Solo perused the list. "Sounds like a perfect group to have on your side if you're interested in controlling the plant."

"Exactly." He pointed to a subtitle on the page. "And it looks like this is the first of a series of meetings. Lindt's technique would be perfect to obtain that goal based on what I've seen of the Delts."

As his partner spoke, something suddenly didn't seem right to Solo, and as uncomfortable as it made him, he couldn't seem to push aside the feeling of suspicion surrounding Illya. He was holding something back, his instincts told him. "Why didn't you tell me about the gold seal on the envelope?" he said, trying to sound casual.

"I only remembered when I saw it in the office," Illya responded without hesitation as he folded the paper.

Solo reached over and took the paper. "And how did you find this list and me in that entire building?"

Illya let the paper go without resistance. Solo saw his eyes shift in his direction as he tucked the list away.

"I could hear your inane chatter a floor away," he said slowly. "And like most powerful businessmen, they put themselves on the top floor."

"True," Solo replied, then fell silent. The rest of the ride had a palatable feel of tension. Solo was battling with a nagging feeling of suspicion centered on his partner, and found himself questioning where the Russian's loyalties really were. There was so much to his past that was unknown, and for the last few years there has been no indication of betrayal, but Illya Kuryakin was a smart man. Was he aloof for a reason?

He shook his head, alarmed at the thoughts, and tried to push them aside, but they wouldn't go completely away. The only thought that came forth was, who else would like to have information on a nuclear power plant in the United States, especially one so close to the coast and approachable from the sea? Only one other group came to mind: Russia.

ACT IX: A Spy In The Ointment

Little alarms were going off in Illya's head; he knew there was a problem brewing. Napoleon had been unusually quiet during the train trip, and was still that way on their arrival at the small, seaside town. He'd noticed the looks and tone of the comments he'd made towards him, and figured the paranoia had to have been planted in his partner's mind. *To what end?* He thought, now suspicious of the fact that they hadn't been aggressively followed. *And has this train of thought been planted in my mind as well?* The closer they got to the small hotel where the training was to take place, the heavier the agent's feet felt. *Why do I feel like I'm walking into a trap?*

The agent also knew that his careful attitude would now be read as suspicious by Solo. Mentally, he made the decision to focus on the detail at hand, which was to stop Lindt and dismantle the Thrush hierarchy disguised as the Wings Corporation.

The listings for the hotel events told him where the training was to be held, and they decided to let Lindt come to them. The hotel itself was high on the cliffs overlooking the sparkling Pacific Ocean, and the conference room was on the first floor level and had generous windows taking advantage of the view. Side doors opened to a patio and there was a small lawn edged in hedges between the patio and the cliffs.

The agents made their way to the hedge, and found that they had a clear view of the conference room. They laid flat, waiting, the air thick with tension between them.

"Napoleon," Illya asked lowly, deciding to take the bull by the horns. "I'm not sure your mind is on your job here, and I think Lindt has something to do with it."

The look his partner locked on him gave him a chill. "I don't think Lindt has anything to do with it. I just realized some things that I never put together before," Solo checked the weapon Illya had given him as he spoke.

"Like what?" Illya asked, his own gun hand itchy. In his peripheral vision he saw the conference room beginning to fill.

"Like, why is your background so sketchy? And why are you so tight lipped about your personal life? You're too good of an agent to be let go by the Russian government."

Illya could feel sweat beading on his forehead. "Napoleon, think. Think hard. We've been partners for years now. Have I ever given you reason not to trust me?"

Solo, his eyes clearly burning with what Illya interpreted as hate, glared back. "No. But that doesn't mean anything if you're a double agent. In fact, that would strengthen your position." Suddenly, Illya saw the muzzle of his own gun mere inches from his face backed by the smoldering eyes of his partner. "And now I have proof."

"You have nothing," Illya replied evenly, his eyes cool. "You have suspicion planted in your mind, and that's all. Think, Napoleon. Think about all these past years. You have to trust me!"



On the other side of the patio in the conference room, the gathering had moved from the refreshment table to the large conference table. As the men sat, Lindt and Nash entered and stood in the back of the room, nodding approvingly at the food consumed and drinks accepted. One man stood and introduced himself as the head of personnel at San Onofre, and gave a brief history of the plant.

As he spoke, Weddel entered the room quietly and sidled up next to Nash. "So far, it's going how we planned," he whispered to his boss. "We avoided any dirty business at the Headquarters, and they are here now, somewhere."

"Is security here?" Nash asked softly.

"Yes. They are posted at inconspicuous spots with explicit instructions not to shoot unless shot upon."

"Fine. Are you sure he won't shoot at us?"

Weddel chuckled. "We have Solo so paranoid that he'd shoot his own mother but the impulse to run will be too much. The fight or flight reactions were high in him."

"And you're sure the no shooting at us thought was also implanted?"

"Yes. We will be safe, and he'll take out his partner for us, neat as a pin. Our hands will be clean. U.N.C.L.E. will have a hard time finding their wayward agent. He'll be so paranoid that they won't be able to get within a mile of him."

Nash glanced at Lindt. "Even with all the study we've done on his method, it's still difficult to place one's own life on it, isn't it?" he mused out loud. "And you watched the whole procedure? He hasn't backstabbed us? Planted anything unknown in Solo's mind?"

"I was there the whole time." Weddel glanced around. "We're clear. And all these men here have had a good first dose of Lindt's compound based on what's gone from the table, here."

"Good. I'll leave you to monitor things here. I'm going back to the office so I'm not around when things happen."

"I'll keep you informed." With a quick handshake, Carlton Rush left the building.

Donald Weddel settled into a comfortable chair in the back of the conference room to oversee Lindt's first treatment. When the psychologist was introduced and stood, a sudden shouting match outside drew everyone's attention to the patio. Weddel jumped in his seat then had to keep the smirk from his face when he looked outside.

Two men had leaped to their feet from behind the bushes, engaged in a shouting match. Startled at first, the talk in the room sputtered to a stop as all eyes turned to the windows. A blond man and a dark haired man were in a bitter argument, the details muffled due to the windows and distance. Suddenly, the dark haired man pointed something at the blond, and a loud "crack!" was heard. The blond flew backwards out of their sight.

"Oh my God! He shot that man!" yelled one of the supervisors. Before any of them could move, the dark haired man turned and ran.

"Call the police! Stop him!" The group scattered, most of them going to the windows.

Weddel stopped the men trying to leave. "We've called the police already. Please, stay put. They will want statements!"

A few men pushed the patio doors open and ran to the hedge. "He's on the beach! He's not moving! He needs help!"

Weddel made his way to the hedge with Lindt by his side. The looked over the cliff to the beach below to the body sprawled on the sand. Weddel had to fight to keep the grin off his face, but Lindt looked scared, his eyes wide open in fright. Calmly, Weddel put a hand on Lindt's forearm. "Just as we planned," he said lowly. "Good work. Thrush will be pleased."

Lindt swallowed and nodded nervously, looking a bit more relieved.

Act X: "Have We Got A Deal For You!"

Solo ran until he was sure he was safe. It was difficult to focus on the one thought placed in his mind, and that annoyed him to no end. The annoyance was short lived, however, when he thought about the alternative. If it wasn't for the U.N.C.L.E. conditioning, he wouldn't be able to focus on anything, and that gave him a chill. His partner had managed to get him back on the right track when he was on the verge of total engulfment.

Illya, he thought as he shook his head. *I hope he convinced the audience he was dead, because he sure convinced me!* Dragging his thoughts back to focus again on his mission, he pulled out his communicator pen and contacted the San Diego office to complete the second part of their plan.

The nagging feeling of paranoia was always there in his mind, but mostly manageable now that he was well aware of it. His first stop was to be the Medical section to clear his mind. His second stop was going to be to the hospital to spring his partner.



When he finally roused himself, *Illya* discovered he was in a stretcher being loaded into an ambulance. He ached all over; the decent from the cliff had been mostly controlled, the last part had been a freefall. His head was throbbing, so he figured it probably took the brunt of the fall. He wiggled his fingers and toes, satisfied, then became aware of the stinging pains in his upper arm and side.

"You're a lucky man," a voice said. "I've taken dead bodies from the bottom of those cliffs."

The agent focused on the face speaking at him and felt a blood pressure cuff on his arm. "Lucky is a point of view," he mumbled in return.

"Well, as far as I can see, you only have scrapes and bruises. Witnesses said you were shot, but I don't see where. The police will want to talk to you at the hospital."

"I'm sure they will." He took a moment to relax. Napoleon should be arranging his removal from the hospital and a cover story about his horrible demise from the fall. He decided to take advantage of his last minutes of life and get some rest.



When Alphonse Lindt arrived at his home that night, he was ecstatic. There was no end to where Thrush could take him! Working with Carlton Nash had been a real eye opener and he was glad he'd decided to throw in with him, at least temporarily. After he

was in tight with Thrush, Nash would simply be another rung to climb over to get to the top.

Gleefully, he poured a congratulatory drink for himself and retired to the living area to admire the lights of the city below. With a satisfied chuckle, and he reached to snap on a small lamp on a chair-side table.

"Don't. I like the mood."

The voice made him jump nearly out of his skin, and the crystal glass fell to the floor and bounced on the thick carpet.

"Hey!" He yelped as two figures rose from his overstuffed chairs. "But .. but.. you're not supposed to.."

"To what?" Solo inquired.

"Be alive or be sane?" Kuryakin finished.

"Uh...wha, what d-d-do you want?" Lindt stuttered, completely aghast to see the two agents in front of him. The hospital had said the blond one was dead, and the other one should be out of his mind with paranoia! He sank onto the couch, his knees unable to hold him anymore.

The dark one, Solo, smiled a disarming smile. "Have we got a deal for you!" he began, rubbing his hands together.

Lindt began to sweat.



The two agents escorted Lindt to the Wing Corporation late the next day and walked right through the reception area without a hitch. Now that the agents were supposedly out of the way, security had been reduced to the outside perimeter, and even that was light.

Dr. Lindt was nervous but managed to get the agents to the basement without interference. Getting Nash down was more problematic, but with a little coaching from Napoleon and a chilling glare from Illya, was able to concoct a reason for the Wings President to come down, alone, after most of the staff left for the day.

He marched into the room, obviously irritated. "OK, this had better be good . . ." His tirade was cut short by Solo's gun in his back and Illya's quick movements. He was gagged and restrained to the very seat that had held Solo within seconds. His eyes burned with fury.

"Now," Solo began, holstering his weapon. "We can start. Dr. Lindt here has agreed to help U.N.C.L.E. in exchange for keeping out of prison and the gas chamber, and you are going to help us bring down Wings. You won't remember any of this any way, so I guess we just may as well get started!" He withdrew a syringe from his pocket and handed it to Lindt who then began to implement his part of the bargain with shaking hands.

Meanwhile, with access to Nash's office, Illya began the process of planting incriminating evidence against Thrush, starting with Donald Weddel. With the papers the agent was stashing in Weddel's office, Thrush and Nash would want him eliminated as soon as possible. And the paranoia and drive to liquidate Wings and flee would be so strong in Nash, Thrush wouldn't know what hit them.

The only thing left to do was pick up John Lighten, the Onofre Design Team member who leaked the plans, and that was done with a phone call. Word of his arrest would only bolster the paranoia being planted in Nash's mind and Kuryakin couldn't help but smile at the simplicity of the plan. No explosions, so shootouts, no grand exit,

but a satisfying end anyway. Numerous bandages covering various minor scrapes, a slight headache and a chance to make the U.N.C.L.E. softball team; there could be worse endings to a mission!

It took all night to plant the concocted evidence throughout the building and destroy the internal security surveillance tapes, which would add more paranoia fuel to the fire. When dawn was near the tired agent joined a frazzled-looking Lindt and a pleased looking partner in the basement.

Napoleon sighed a satisfied smile. "I love a happy ending," he noted. "The San Diego Office has cleared out Lindt's home and office. Nash is going to believe his own mother is out to get him!"

Illya nodded and yawned. "All I want is a good breakfast and some sleep."

"You are just too easy to please. Doctor? Are he ready?" Lindt nodded and they began to untie Nash. "He's going to find himself in his office, convinced he's stayed up all night piecing together Weddel's betrayal." Solo chuckled. "That's one lawyer whose shoes I wouldn't want to be in," he consulted his watch, "in two hours!"

Lindt and Solo escorted the drowsy man to his office, sat him in his chair, and signaled Lindt to wake him up.

With a few words, Nash blinked and shot to his feet. His eyes wide with surprise. "You will not regret telling me all this," he growled at the three of them, extending his hand. They each shook it solemnly in turn. "When Weddel is out of the way and I relocate, I'll repay you. Good day, gentlemen." By sitting and turning to his paperwork, they were dismissed.

The three of them walked down the hall. "He's going to spend the rest of his life hiding. Now that I've showed my obvious willingness to cooperate, do you think U.N.C.L.E. may want to swing a deal?" Lindt asked hopefully.

"Maybe," replied Solo. "But until then, be happy to have a single prison cell."

"Oh, Napoleon. I think U.N.C.L.E. could be persuaded to take an interest in the Doctor's work," Illya said lightly. "All he needs are some special cookies to start with."

Lindt brightened. "Really? Perhaps you two would like to work with me . . ."

They each grabbed an elbow of the Doctor and propelled him out the front doors. "Don't start," Illya said. "By the way, Nash said he was going to repay us. How?"

Napoleon smiled as he walked down the drive and met their ride from the San Diego office. "It seems that we'll know when Carlton Nash has made his dash to safety, wherever he perceives that to be, when the Delts suddenly get a very large donation from an anonymous local businessman. And with the holdings Wings has, the Delts should be in party favors for a long, long time."

"Great." Illya shoved Lindt in the waiting car loaded with agents and slammed the door. "The beer industry will be very pleased." The car sped off and another took its place and waited for them to get in. "By the way, did I ever have time to impart on you the insight I picked up from the Man in the Box, and whether I should include it in our final report?"

Solo gave his partner a perplexed look as they slid into the backseat and headed to the airport.

FINIS