

Episode VI – Victoria - Deleted Scene

The Original Opening Scene

One scene I was never really happy with in the first draft of the sixth novel in the series 'Victoria' was the opening one. Somehow it lacked that extra something. On the first read through a new opening scene was written, retaining a number of elements of the original one but relocating it from a public cross channel ferry port to a large sea container terminal.

Below is the original raw draft version of the introduction that was replaced:

It was an unusual location to find the Division Commander of the Security Department's Metropolitan Division. The Commander's general dislike of boats meant that the ferry port at Dover would normally be the last place you would expect to find him, even more so when you consider how far outside his jurisdiction of Greater London it was, situated on the south east corner of the Kent coast.

The Commander stood in the Customs & Excise area and looked out of the window as one of the cross channel ferries from France came into the dock laden with holiday makers, booze cruisers and other travellers coming in from the continent.

"That our ship?" the Commander asked his colleague from the Customs and Excise Division.

"Yep" he confirmed "That's the one".

With that confirmation, the Commander proceeded out of the building, down a flight of steps and then over to the docking area as the massive vessel was being secured at the dock side and tied down.

As the bow door of the ferry was raised, so began the convoy of vehicles from within, making their way into the customs clearance area. The Commander headed for the area and clambered into the back of a plain unmarked red van that was parked nearby, inside which was a team from the Anti-Terrorist branch, all armed and waiting for their orders.

"Morning gents" the Commander announced as he entered, closing the door behind him "Our ship just came in so everyone better get ready."

The team quickly checked their weapons as the Commander reached for his radio and called the operation controller who was situated high up above the site on a gantry crane, watching the vehicles and foot passengers leaving the ferry through powerful binoculars.

"Echo One" the Commander called over the radio "Any sign of our visitors?"

"Stand by" the operation controller responded as he rescanned the area, pausing as the vehicle he was looking for appeared from within the bowels of the ship, a fact he confirmed by zooming in on the vehicle's number plate.

"Got them" he called over the radio "White Citroen van, index number Golf Lima Zero Two Oscar November Golf, now exiting the ramp. It should be entering the customs area in approximately ten seconds."

"Roger that" the Commander confirmed before clambering forward to the front passenger seat of the van and sitting down alongside the driver.

"Unit one to units two and three" the Commander called "Move in and take them when Control gives the signal, and lets try and arrest these guys alive this time ok?"

"Target vehicle is passing unit one's van now" the observer called, a fact that was confirmed by the Commander as he looked in the wing mirror to see the anonymous white van proceed slowly alongside and then move ahead, seemingly oblivious to the impending trap that was being set out for them and about to be sprung.

"Control to all units" the observer called as the target vehicle reached the optimum point "Go! Go! Go!"

"Why do I never get to say that?" the Commander mused as the driver alongside him released the brake and put his foot to the floor on the accelerator.

In an instant, the target vehicle was surrounded by the three red vans, from which disembarked over thirty fully armed Security Department officers who quickly surrounded the vehicle.

Seeing that there was no point offering any resistance, the driver held up his hands and got out of the vehicle where he was quickly made to lie on the ground whilst he was searched, handcuffed and taken into custody.

With the initial excitement over, the Commander strolled casually over to the stationary target vehicle, his best gold braided uniform contrasting markedly with the body armour kit of the armed response officers around him.

Carefully he opened the side door of the vehicle and looked inside, whereupon his expression turned from one of triumph to one of puzzlement.

"Davis!" the Commander called over to the operation commander, beckoning him over with a wave of the finger.

"Yes Sir?" Davis responded as he went over to his superior officer.

"Refresh my memory" the Commander enquired "If I recall I approved this joint operation on the basis that we were about to seize, and I quote, a considerable amount of dangerous material."

"Err yes Sir" Davis responded.

"Now I appreciate that my opinion on vegetables, indeed any food considered to be allegedly healthy is to avoid at all costs" the Commander continued "But even I would not classify ten sacks of baking potatoes and two boxes of cauliflowers as 'dangerous material', would you?"

Davis looked across into the van at the contents the Commander was pointing at and scratched his head in equal puzzlement.

"I would say Sir" Davis responded with clear bewilderment at this latest development "that our intelligence may have been a bit duff."

"You don't say!" the Commander retorted with a bit of a wry giggle.

"So what do we do with him?" Davis asked indicating the driver of the vehicle who, now handcuffed, was being bundled into the back of a Security Service vehicle to be taken away.

"Run his paperwork through the usual channels and see if anything squeaks" the Commander suggested "Meanwhile, I am going to go and find my missus."

"Yes Sir" Davis responded before turning away.

The Commander contemplated the vehicle momentarily before turning smartly on his heels and heading back towards the main buildings.

With the armed response teams having now departed leaving a token couple of officers guarding the seized vehicle, the Commander casually started to walk away but stopped when he detected a scrabbling sound coming from somewhere behind him.

Turning around, he took his gun from its holster and looked back at the van, initially seeing nothing untoward.

"You're imagining things" he told himself as a large seagull flew low overhead causing him to look up for a few moments. As he was distracted however, a man suddenly appeared from beneath the van where he had been hiding and made a run for it.

"What the?" the Commander exclaimed as he suddenly realised something was not right and proceeded to give chase after the escaping stranger.

"Lima Mike Zero One from Lima Tango Zero One" the Commander's radio suddenly came alive with the sound of his wife Tracy's voice calling.

"Morning love" the Commander responded as he continued to run after the stranger "Can I call you back only I am a bit busy at the moment!"

"Well I am just outside the main terminal building" Tracy confirmed "Anything I can help you out with."

"There is a chap in a black leather jacket legging it in your general direction" the Commander responded, already beginning to run out of breath "Could you possibly do me the favour of heading him off?"

"On the way!" Tracy responded before jogging back over to the Transport Division red patrol car parked nearby. Quickly she was in the driver's seat with the door closed, the engine started and making off to provide assistance.

The escaping stranger only narrowly avoided being run down by a bus as he ran apparently for his life. By the time he had reached the far side of the ferry port though, the Commander had fallen some considerable distance behind.

Looking around, the running man saw that it appeared he had managed to shake off his pursuer and began to slow down, entering the main terminal building and trying to blend in with the crowds inside.

He made his way through the building, past the various shops and enquiry desks towards the main exit and as he stepped out into the sunshine, he thought he had managed to successfully escape.

Proceeding towards the shuttle bus area to catch a ferry bus into Dover itself, the stranger was suddenly confronted with Tracy, standing in front of him, gun drawn.

"Hold it right there mate" she called.

"Or what?" the stranger defiantly enquired with a menacing scowl in an Eastern Europe or maybe even Russian accent.

"Then I would just have to shoot you" Tracy responded as a matter of fact with a shrug of her shoulders.

"I really wouldn't try it you know" the Commander, who had crept up behind the stranger advised, backed up by his gun placed in the stranger's back "She's really quite a good shot you know."