

Chapter 13: The Plan Forms

Returning home from the next morning's outing at Claude's Café, Sandi and Lionel are once again greeted by the Newton Brothers Heating and Air service van. This time only Agent Marcus is waiting in the van.

"Let me out at the bottom of the drive, please Sandi," requests Lionel.

"Sorry we did not know you were coming today," greets Sandi from her rolled-down window.

"Yes Ma'am, we just need to tidy up a couple of loose ends," reports Agent Marcus. "I have Agent Howe in the van with me. She is going to walk around to the heating unit. We have been monitoring your house since you left for coffee. No one has entered unless they tunneled up from somewhere. So your house is secure."

"Mr. Jones we have your VW Bug, Ruger pistol, and incidentals you provided the DPD at the Creedmoor Rd Kinsger Shopping Center parking lot. Agent Olin is currently in the VW waiting handover it to you. He is the FBI technician who will need to have a mind-melt with you about the micro-SD card and your audio/video recordings.

"If you are ready we can drive up to the Shopping Center and you can meet Agent Olin."

"Let me call Sandi to tell her we are leaving for a short trip to recover the Bug and Ruger," injects Jones. Making the call and alerting her to his pending brief absence, Jones boards the van for the quick ride to the Kinsger Shopping Center.

Jones spots his Bug behind the Enterprise Car Rental parking slots.

"Mr. Jones, this is Agent Olin. He has an inventory and a release sheet for you to document the transfer to you of the Bug with keys, Ruger, and incidentals. Agent Olin, please."

Glancing at the inventory list he quickly checks the items. Finding no discrepancies he signs-off on the transfer. Agent Olin hands him a yellow copy of the transfer.

"Thank you Agent Olin," Jones acknowledges. Jones clears the Ruger.

"Let's all return to the house for a short meeting," requests Agent Marcus. "Then you and Agent Olin can dive into the technical details and secure the evidence for further investigation."

Rallying back at the house around the kitchen table, Agents Marcus, Olin, and Howe seat themselves. Jones brings in a fifth chair from the formal dining room.

"I am assuming that my wife will be joining us since she has had direct involvement in every part of my search except for the Durham gun fight."

"We would rather she didn't participate," rebuffs Agent Marcus.

"Well make a call to have her added to the meeting or you can take it back downtown," rebuffs Lionel.

While Agent Marcus calls for approval Lionel calls Sandi to join the soirée.

“I will be right back. I want to lockup the Mark23 and the Ruger. Then I will gather my notebook and pen. My memory is shorter everyday so I need to take notes, particularly if there is an action or two that I need to take.”

“That is fine. But there is to be no audio/video recording made for security reasons.”

“Ok. The coffee maker is over there. The cups there,” states Lionel as he pulls the milk and sugar together. “There is green tea beside the coffee maker. I use the microwave for 3 minutes with this measuring cup of water for the test.

“I will be back in a couple of minutes. Please make yourselves comfortable.”

Lionel secures the two pistols. He then picks-up his engineering notebook and two thin line pens.

Lionel arrives back at the kitchen table before Sandi and while the Agents are milling around the coffee maker. A couple of cups have already been made and mixed. Lionel sits at the table on the dining room chair. Shortly everyone is seated.

As the meeting is about to begin, Lionel notes date, time, location, and attendance.

“i will be happy to provide you with a copy of my raw notes before you leave this morning, announces Lionel.

Agent Marcus does the honors announcing data, time, location and attendees as Agents Olin and Howe begin working their notebooks. “We are here to bring you up to speed on our investigation and the possible jeopardy in which you to may be.

“First, the two wounded perpetrators are now on their way back to Durham. They will face a host of crimes from receipt of stolen property, attempted murder, possession of a firearm, etc. Both men are Chechen immigrants. One has been in the US for over six years and the other four years. There is evidence that implicates them in a number of violent crimes in North Florida. The US Marshall’s Office has open warrants for one of them.

“From what we learned they are under the impression that they were renting the two SUV’s and the bobtail to move some furniture they were going to pick-up. They continue to imply that you fell into road rage and began driving erratically. They were frightened by your actions. Then when you burst off the Durham Freeway they went to see if they could be of assistance. But you threw that smoke grenade and started shooting at them first.

“We have not yet shown them the parking lot and main entrance videos or the shell casing maps yet. That may spring a different recollection.

“Unfortunately, we have not yet recovered the cell phone to which the Apple Air Tag is synced. If it shows up that will be a positive tie-in.

“Time to take a breath. Agent Olin, please continue.

“We think you and Mrs. Jones are in a red zone of danger. We have no idea who paid to have the ChexChen fan club meet on your way home from the VA. Obviously, someone has an interest in what you have been discovering regarding the disappearance of Frank Rana and Stacy Banks. The ‘news’ that you discovered micro-SD card’s contents that might possibly tie-back to Frank’s dis-

appearance is more likely to have been the trigger for the gun fight rather than the typical Durham drugs, rival gang feuding, or road rage.

“That is why we are recommending extreme caution. We suggest that you use caution as you go about your routine such as the morning coffee spot and gathering. If you have a location where you can live for a few weeks to two months you should consider that.

“With your agreement, we are going to provide both of you with new cell phones. The new phones are just like yours with a couple of enhancements that allow us to know your location and when a an icon is activate will transmit to our case duty office whatever the micro acquires.

“What about our sons and grandsons? Should they exercise caution?” asks Sandi.

“Yes. After we have made arrangements with you we will meet with them to discuss risk levels and approaches,” interjects Agent Olin.

“What can you do to help us” asks Lionel. “We have close family relatives in Texas and Oklahoma. We also have one cousin in North Carolina who may be able to help board us for a while in a remote location.”

“You should think about separating,” suggest Agent Marcus. Mr Jones your face and automobile are known now to your bad-boy adversary. Your wife’s face and Acura probably are not known to the adversary.

“What do you think about separating with Sandi going to her sister’s place in Dallas. Sandi’s sister is widow who has since remarried but kept her first husbands last name. The new husband a long time CCH holder in Texas with plenty of hunting experience. Sandi’s sister also owns a lake house and has access to an exotic hunting ranch in West Texas.

“My cousin in North Carolina has a house on the Cape Fear River just off NC Hwy 217 in the Waters Edge development of Erwin. She uses this house off and on between her place in Florida and trips to Ireland. It has a garage with to bays for car with space for a boat trailer. It has limited access from the river and and HWY 217. The Cape Fear River serves as its backyard border.

“I will contact her to see if I can rent it for a couple of months.

“Both of those are good options. Until we set things up for you two do not break your routine. We will have a watch for your routine. If you run into trouble just pop the icon and activate the microphone. Agent Howe will take charge of insuring your phones are sync-ed with the new FBI cells.

“Agent Howe and I will leave you to work with Agent Olin on gathering the technical evidences.

“By the way nice shooting. Giving us a couple of live bad-boys to work was a real break. I hope you can do something similar on the technical side to push us forward.

“Before we break let’s review the action items:

- 1> Jones separate one to Dallas and one to Erwin. Action: Jones. Two days from now.
- 2> FBI to assist separation travel. Action Agent Marcus. Three days from now
- 3> FBI to supply enhanced and sync-ed cells for Sandi and Jones. Agent Olin today
- 4> FBI Olin and Jones to have mind-melt over technical details and consolidate items for use as evidence. Agent Olin-Jones today.”

With everyone agreeing that the action items and who has them, Jones goes to the copy machine to make five copies to give the participants.

With that Agents Marcus and Howe depart in the service van. Agent Olin and Lionel go to the workshop/office.

“This is where the magic happens,” jokes Jones. “Let me turn-on the audio/video recording equipment.”

Turning-on the recording equipment he documents the date, location and participant. Agent Olinwaves to the camera.

“Here is where I have been storing the micro-SD copies of the original micro-SD card. That original card is believed to have been destroyed by the NCSU fire. I would have to check the date but it is in documented on one of the earlier recordings. The event revolves around Prof Yakubu and a team of his students who successfully cracked the password using rarcrack. That unlocked the 210203_dahlongega.RAR archive file. That archive file held a collection Clonezilla files for extracting and rebuilding an exact copy of the computer that Frank was using just before he and Stacy disappeared. Within the collection of files I recognized the Clonezilla log file. That file contained the user name and password for an administrator account, gonza, which I believe was Frank’s.

“From there it was a matter of greping through emails using a search pattern file that grew as the knowledge grew about the contents. Eventually the search completed the email traffic and the home directly of gonza also known as Frank and rana@anetswarf.com. The emails provided a top level view of a project called Spinnaker. One email indicates back channel communication existed between Frank and a developer with the username, gator. The subject of the back channel communication was not revealed.

From there we went to the the /var/ folder which had not only the syslog but also pointed to a keystroke collecting agent, a local svn, and local web applications.

“Once the /var/svn was found to be available in web format, we were able to read development artifacts. The development artifacts discussed the ‘Spinnaker project managed by Catalina Software Engineering of Sunnyvale, CA. That entity no longer seems to exist.

“Spinnaker can be described as a false-flag application. By that I mean the developers were creating one thing but the managing company was going to use it for an insidious purpose. The project’s purpose was to create a mass of virtual citizens, register them, and the vote absentee. There did not seem to be any political party playing games. But it seem to be a bigger frog in a much larger pond that was playing.

“In my opinion predicated on what I have learned, Frank keystrokes were be recorded as he worked. The hidden agent recording keystrokes periodically uploaded the key stroke data to an unknown entity somewhere in the Internet ether. The agent was using /var/metrics folder to store the the recorded keystrokes. The computer I was using was strictly isolated from the Internet. So collect keystroke files backed-up in the var/metrics folder.

“Frank was also maintaining a local copy of the his work and the ‘Spinnaker’ in the /var/svn/repos/eclipse_devwrk/trunk/e4Sys/ project. Specific information about the Spinnaker project and the associate religious order is detiled in the sql and todo_list/user_stories subfolders.

“One can guess that if the Catalina Software Engineering firm was the monitoring entity they would eventually stumble across the Frank’s usage of a local svn with its treasure trove of the Spinnaker project artifacts.

“I believe that is why Frank and Stacy disappeared just prior to the project close-out meeting. I can not determine whether the the couple decided to vaporize or whether they were forced to disappear. All I can tell you is that if you load a computer with the Clonezilla image of Frank’s computer AND it

is connected to the Internet there is a high probability that you will be able to 'touch' the same entity that was stalking the Spinnaker developers.

"My thoughts:

"1> The FBI could use that capability to 'touch' the that entity. The in-coming processing of the keystroke file is highly likely to have set files execute bit set to 'off'.

"2> The FBI should look at cron. I have not looked at Franks's computer cron schedule to see if a bundle of keystrokes is sent as a file at a specific time or if a channel is opened at a specific time where the bad-boy entity polls a collection of sites to see if they have keystroke files to upload.

"3> The original micro-SD card was formatted as exFAT. The copies I made are all NTFS. Whatever difference there might be due to that is unknown.

"With the exception of these three micro-SD cards and the image currently on the computer I normally use this ThinkCentre machine as my LinuxCNC Simulator. We can rebuild the image of the LinuxCNC Simulator. It will take about three hours if I recall correctly. Or I can do it at my leisure later this afternoon.

"If you have a large travel drive with you I can transfer all my audio/video files to you as well.

"So that is essentially all I know technically about the contents of Franks computer and the Spinnaker project.

"It is all yours now."

"Mr. Jones thank you for the technical disclosure. It will be helpful in our investigation."

"Oops! I forgot. I gave a copy of the micro-SD card to Detective Berry of the Durham PD."

"DPD transfered that copy to us already. But we have not yet started a forensic investigation of that yet. We wanted to hear what you had to say technically first.

"I will meet with the team after lunch to discuss a path forward based upon what you have provided this morning."

"What can Sandi and I expect?

"I am not at liberty to address that question," responds Agent Olin. "Agent Marcus is your point of contact on that kind of non-technical aspect of the investigation. I will be the one to address any technical question for you or make technical request of you. Do not respond to any telephone, email, text messages, etc. asking for information, data of copies. Please report such requests to Agents Marcus, Howe, or me."

"I am going to call for the service van. Agent Howe will be driving. When she arrives we should go outside to meet her and then walk around to the heating unit. She will be carrying a small box with your FBI phones and automobile trackers. Regarding the trackers just plug the units into the USB power on the Acura and the cigarette lighter of the Bug. Be advise that the cell phones transmit location even while giving the appearance and behavior of being turned-off.

"I will call this tomorrow to insure the cells and trackers are working properly. We will go over the 'mayday' button sequence with you at that time."

Agent Olin makes a cell call to the service van. Agent Howe arrives and exits the van with a small box and a clipboard. Agent Olin meets her at the front door. Agent Howe hands off the box to Agent Olin. A brief round of greetings start. The box is placed inside. Lionel and the two agents walk around to the heating unit. After a brief period of standing around with hands on hips and pointing occasionally, Agent Howe hands Jones the clipboard and a pen. Lionel is instructed to fake a scrolling

signature. Lionel thanks the agents and returns to the house to start preparations for lunch. The two agents make a show to tweaking the widgets at the heating unit and quickly depart in the service van.

After lunch Lionel goes to the workshop/office. Just to be safe he creates a new Clonezilla backup image of the ThinkCentre which is currently running under Frank's image from the micro-SD card plus any modifications that may have occurred while Lionel was reviewing the contents. This backup Clonezilla image is made on a separate, new micro-SD card.

About an hour into the backup Lionel receives a call from Agent Marcus.

"We want to move ahead with the travel and separation for a few weeks," affirms Agent Marcus. "Question: Did you or Sandi see or visit your son's family after you started working on the micro-SD card from Frank?"

"No, with pandemic and cold weather the last time we saw them was early January. And I started working the Song Yet Sung and micro-SD about a good week before that. I believe that only Sandi and I knew that I had a backup image of the 210203_dahlongea.rar archive. As my audio recordings should indicate that copy was generated originally because the original was in 'exFAT' format. I had to make a copy on storage media formatted to NTFS so my 'old' computer could use it."

"Okay, good. Just start moving forward with Sandi's and your separate travel plans. That is still scheduled for about two days out. The FBI will foot the airfare to DFW and eventual return."

The call closes shortly and Lionel checks the status of the Clonezilla backup task currently underway.

It takes the Clonezilla application roughly an hour and a half to complete the the back-up. He restarts another Clonezilla session. This time he restores the prior image that was on the 'ole' IBM ThinkCentre, LinuxCNC simulator' computer. The restore takes almost three hours to perform. The Clonezilla restore task finishes while he is barbecuing salmon with garlic butter.

Following supper cleanup Lionel changes course.

"If I am going to be traveling for the next few weeks, I had better finish Will's puzzle box. It has been sanded and should be ready for its finish. I can do that tonight. I will let it dry overnight and then check it in the morning."

Instead of going to the workshop/office he goes to the garage. He takes a final look at the wood surface of Will's puzzle box. He finds the sanded surface suitable and satisfactory. Preparing the work area he assembles mechanics gloves, clean rags, q-tips, a maple wood stain, stir stick, a painter's helper, mineral spirits, drying rack, and plenty of paper and cardboard to cover the work bench. Putting the gloves on he shakes the wood stain, uses the painter's helper to open stain, checks it with the stir stick, uses the rag to blotch a test pass of stain, sweeps the blotched rag with the grain of the bottom of the box. All appears satisfactory. He then stains the box followed by the lid of the box. Completing both pieces he allows them to dry.

The cleanup takes almost as long as the staining.

With that Lionel calls it an evening and adjourns to the reading space. Before beginning tonight's read, he checks his cell for text message and emails. He has received a message from Mark

Anthony (Agent Marcus), “A white van with a green step ladder on top will follow you in AM. Expect call from booking agent when you arrive for java.”