

# Hunter

Slaughter and Pallet sat anxiously as Chief Detective Clark Southern read the case files they had put together. No one had spoken for five minutes, and it was beginning to become unnerving. Slaughter fidgeted on his swivel seat, his bulk spilling out and ached for a fag. Pallet chewed vigorously on some gum. They were sat opposite one of the most decorated detectives in the Police force. Thunder rumbled outside and the sky was thick with cloud. Cold and hot temperatures jostling high above them. Clark Southern shuffled a new document, picked up a pair of tweezers and turned the page, looking through his square glasses. Pallet had heard the reason why he was so good was because of his attention to detail. Slaughter looked up tenuously and took in the old, creased blazer and old man jumped underneath. His thick silver brows glistened like slugs under moonlight. A grandfather clock clunked sullenly in the background, weaving a guttural tock like mice between the antiques and pictures strewn around the office.

Suddenly and unceremoniously Detective Southern slapped the files down, dropping his tweezers. “Well gentlemen,” he chuckled as if harbouring a private satisfaction, “we’ve got ourselves a hunt.”

Slaughter and Pallet looked at one another. They already knew this; their work up to the GECS find had brought up dead ends and there was no guarantee of finding a chink in the firm they barely knew anything about. Pallet was the one to try and ease the conversation on. “We think so Detective, hence why we came to you.”

“I think we need to follow the breadcrumbs thoroughly.” There was a wobble in his chin, a tremor of age.

“Okay.” Pallet replied. Had he left too much of his brain in all the grisly murder investigations of old? “I’ve read all your reports and supporting communications and it’s clear you’re knocking off the small guys but no more. It’s like removing cobwebs but it doesn’t remove the spider. The spider just comes back and makes more webs.” Pallet and Slaughter said nothing. The clock chimed.

“We know this.” Slaughter said ungraciously.

“Clearly not.” Southern snapped back. “You’re taking out spider webs that lead to nowhere. The main culprit isn’t even there. You’re scurrying in the basement when you need to be in the banquet halls.” He looked vicariously at them both as if they would contribute to what he was about to say next. “So, we need to find legitimate firms that lead to this legitimate spider.” Both wished he would stop with the metaphors and they couldn’t read his mind. “And then, once we’ve found the legit firms, link them back to this –” he waved his hands, “GEC or whatever their called.”

A light bulb came on in DC Pallets mind. Maybe they had been thinking about it completely the wrong way. Why

would a regulated big fish, certainly employing an army of lawyers, leave any tracks that were easy to pick up. They would never want to leave any fingerprints on firms that planned to commit a fraud. It was too easy. They needed to play the whale at their own game and go swim in their waters; they needed to find a trail where they may least expect it. Southern saw the glow appear from Pallet. “Got any complaints?” he asked; the hairy slugs on his brow levitated again.

“Loads.”

“No, from registered, above-board firms making all the right noises. The banquet halls gentlemen!” The two policemen stumbled over their words. This was the direction they hadn’t been looking and they felt a film of stupidity percolate around them. At SCU they always went for the obvious and easy with taxpayers’ dollars on the line. An unwritten understanding nationwide was that it was easier to go after burglaries and car thefts than high finance. “Boys, take out all the bad actors, like you’ve been doing and what are you left with?” The two policemen equivocated. “The good ones of course. That is where is the first bread crumb might be. Find a way in, anything, where its least expected. A bridge. From complaint to clearer.”

Slaughter took a deep breath and mustered the courage to speak. He had been slogging night and day and had taken a lead in all the raids they had done so far, none leading anywhere bigger, let alone GECS. The document they found wasn’t even signed; GECS might not even be aware of it. There was a universe of excuses, traps and alibis. “Sir,

we've done this though. If there was any way in, we would have followed it."

The old man shook his head. "No no no," Clark grumbled, and looked at them both, pinballing; his cold icy eyes showing no expression, hardened from the callouses caused from so many harrowing sights, "The bees." He added. His words took Slaughter and Pallet aback. Another illustration. The old timer had lost it. They stumbled over what to say next that wouldn't risk getting on the wrong side of the decorated career detective. "The brokers boy. The bees are the brokers. The legit ones. GECS," the office went deathly still, "The queen."

Slaughter shuffled forward, "But if they're so legit there won't be anything we can do to pin something on them let alone a whale such as GECS." The detective leaned back in his worn, creased chair and stared into the near distance. Sirens dappled the air outside.

"Detectives," he then said in a contrite voice, "if you scatter the worker bees the queen is left exposed. She can't feed herself without her workers." His voice dimmed, "Good or bad, panic sets in." The two policemen stared on vacuously. "Theres always something. Someone. Keep doing what you're doing. Ruffle the hive, chase down complaints, anything at all, big or small and find an in. Slowly, starve the queen. Disrupt the hive."

"But- "Slaughter begun to say.

"And when you've found the tiny slither of a gap," his voice darkened, "leave the queen to me."

Slaughter and Pallet felt no further forward but something told them they needed to do what they were told. The pressure was on. "Just get me that gap." He ended.

DC Pallet and Detective slaughter nodded. "Gentlemen," Clark Southern said spritely, putting his glasses back on, dragging another evidence box to him, "Shall we get to work?"

# Bees

From that day Pallet and Slaughter tried to scatter the hive as quickly as possible. They got clearance to increase the size of their small team and started systemically working through the “legit” broker list on the GECS Website. Slaughter had his reservations and grumbled daily; “why the hell would they put a list of firms online if they were knowingly doing something wrong. This is stupid.” Pallet each time tried to steady the truck and keep going, even though the pressure from his superiors was only increasing. Bringing more staff in meant more resources and more money and patience was wearing thin. Each day that went by without something that lead to GECS or something bigger was a day to long. The Special Crime Unit started chasing up complaints and concerns, feeding in and asking questions of Action Fraud, hotlines and the FCA to see if they had anything. In the back of their mind they knew GECS was overseen by the FCA and it kept the ember glowing. Some firms had been accused of pressure selling and normal selling tactics, and others going dark for a time. Pallet and Slaughter decided to use every reason to open an investigation into all of them, and because of that yet more staff were needed.

“Scatter the hive.” Pallet told his team, “That’s what our chief Detective said. Let’s go.” And adjusted his radio as they parked outside a new office, for a new firm that they had never heard of. Slaughter sat next to him, can in hand. Under his breath he said, “Let’s see if these firms are any different from the others.” From the list of firms they found online they found legitimate complaints that may lead to something; they weren’t necessarily enough to close the firm but they didn’t need to kill. “Scatter remember,” Pallet said back, “Scatter, not kill. Killing comes later.”

Slaughter looked over to his partner and nodded. Pallet returned the nod. Jack then pulled out his radio and punched in, one by one, the lines for the different SCU teams standing by and multiple locations. They were about to conduct a multi firm raid for the first time, across multiple post codes, multiple teams, multiple leads under multiple warrants that held on by a thread only because of a sympathetic judge.

“Ready?” Slaughter growled.

The line crackled, “Ready one.” A voice replied.

Everything rested on them finding something.

“Ready Two?”

“Two ready.”

Time was ticking.

Five teams gave the all clear. “Hear goes.” Pallet mouthed.  
“Go.”