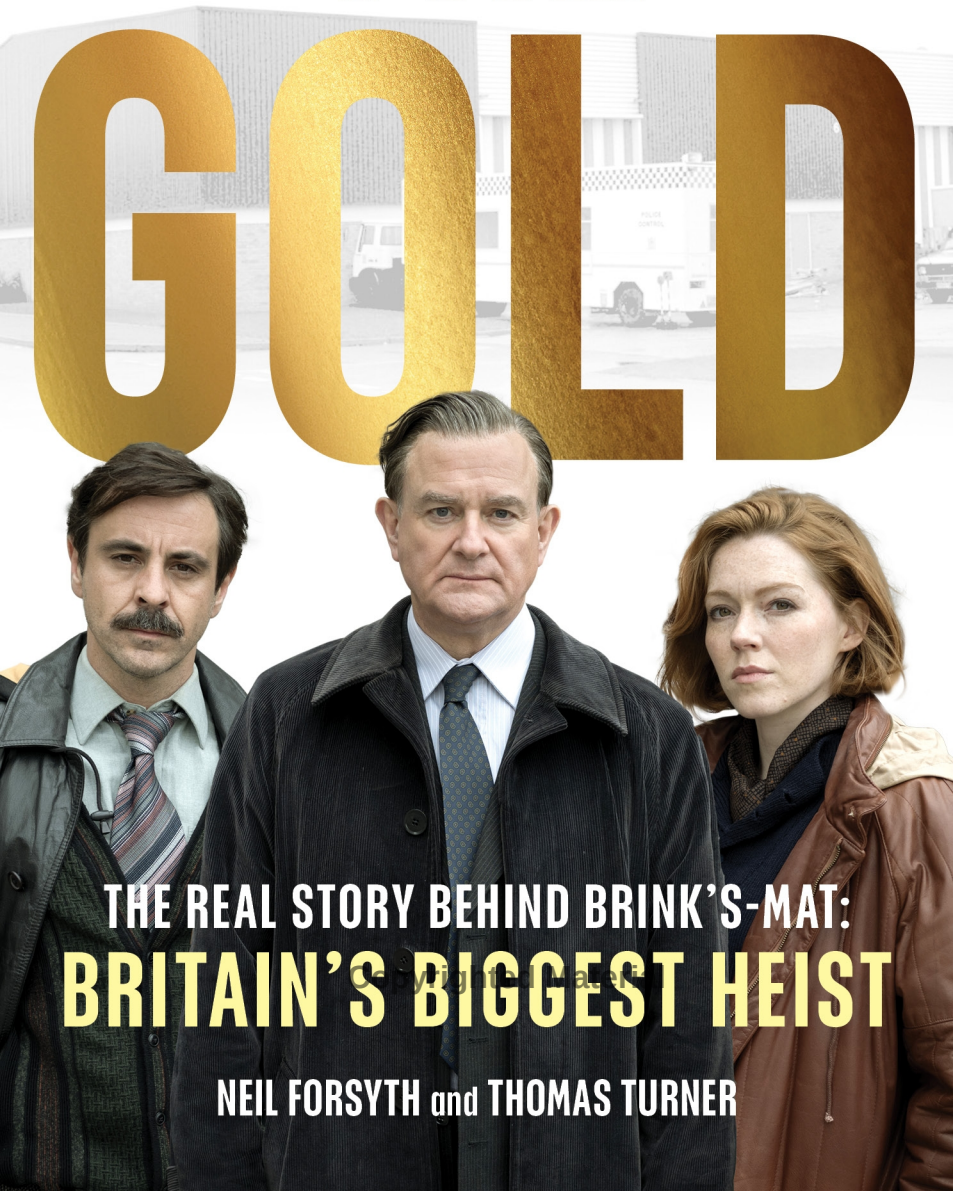
THE GOLD

THE MAJOR TV DRAMA



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BRITAIN'S BIGGEST HEIST

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Introduction

Shortly before 7am on Saturday 26 November 1983, an armed gang burst into the Brink's-Mat depot near London's Heathrow Airport. They expected a significant haul, but what they found was beyond their wildest dreams. Gold bullion worth almost £26 million.

Making off with the gold, the gang committed what was at the time the largest robbery in world history, and unwittingly set off an extraordinary, decades-long chain of events.

The Brink's-Mat robbery took place in a society in flux. Britain was changing. Heavy industries were in terminal decline, with traditional trades becoming little more than folk memories. Old societal bonds were pulled apart as ideas of a new world took shape. Cut loose from tradition, Britain would no longer grow rich from production; instead, money would come from money. The country would derive its wealth from expertise in services. Britain was to become a handler nation. Fortunes would not be made through hard graft but by making a canny investment, cutting a sharp deal, trading with anyone who had the cash. It was a brasher, more individualistic, entrepreneurial world, driven by money.

What was true for society was true for crime. During the 1970s, the cunning burglar and expert safecracker of folklore had been

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replaced at the top of the criminal tree by the armed robber, whose threat of brutal violence offered a more reliable route to success. But by the early 1980s, the supremacy of the armed robber was beginning to slip, replaced by a new generation of criminal entrepreneurs who operated in the shadows, not committing the crimes themselves but making fortunes from buying and selling stolen goods and investing the profits in further criminal enterprise. In this, they were aided by a small army of seemingly respectable professionals; of dodgy lawyers, accountants, bankers and advisers prepared to turn a blind eye to the sources of their clients' wealth while taking their cut.

The Brink's-Mat robbery happened in the midst of all this change. The loose network of criminals who committed the robbery and handled the gold straddled the old and the new worlds, combining traditional craft criminals with upwardly mobile wheeler-dealers and unscrupulous professionals. Together, they took advantage of the opportunities unleashed by the economic and social forces transforming Britain, in deals done in both shady back rooms and smart corporate offices, and with old codes abandoned in favour of opportunity and greed.

Ranged against the criminals was a police force that had become mired in rumours and allegations of malpractice, and legislation that had not kept up with the changing face of crime or society. The investigation into the robbery was an inquiry under the constant threat of corruption, facing opponents with the money to buy a lot of favours. Just as importantly, it confronted a public and media that was sometimes sceptical about its claims, and which showed a willingness to side with the word of the accused over that of the police officer.

The Brink's-Mat robbery is both famous and unknown. Other than the fact that it occurred, few are aware of the events that

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followed. By its nature, it is a difficult story to tell. Much of what happened during and after the robbery is known only to those who took part. Very few of those people, and none of those convicted, have ever spoken publicly about it. After forty years, myths and legends have grown around the robbery and those involved which only serve to obscure the reality further. It is a consistently murky tale, where little is what it seems. Including, we will reveal, the popular story of the robbery itself.

This book is our best attempt to reconstitute the events set in train on 26 November 1983. We have worked through forty years of criminal trials, police interviews, media archives, unpublished records and the diligent work of investigative reporters through the decades. We tracked down and spoke to as many people connected to the case as we could find, in Britain and around the world. Some of those we spoke to we can acknowledge, some we cannot. By painstakingly connecting these glimpses of the story from across the decades, we have recreated and told as clear an account of the Brink's-Mat robbery and its aftermath as is currently possible.

Where the story of the Brink's-Mat robbery ends is a matter of debate. Whether it has ended is another. What is unequivocal is where it begins.

On a cold morning, in west London, in 1983.

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CHAPTER ONE

Unit 7

It began in the dark. On an early Saturday morning in late November, in a trading estate on the south-eastern edge of London's Heathrow Airport, a group of men huddled outside a nondescript warehouse. This was Unit 7, a modern two-storey, brick and corrugated steel construction. Distinctive orange and white shutter doors stretched from the ground to the roof. Above them, a single CCTV camera looked out over the main vehicle approach. From the outside, there was nothing to indicate what the unit contained and, unlike most of its neighbours, the name of the occupant was not listed on the estate's signs. It was just another unremarkable building set among similarly unremarkable warehouses and small engineering shops.

The building's occupant was Brink's-Mat, a leading security firm. Despite appearances, Unit 7 was among the most secure sites in Britain. It was used to store currency, precious metals and other high-risk consignments as the firm's guards moved them between locations, generally through Heathrow Airport, in dark blue armoured vans. Behind the orange and white shutter doors was a secure, concrete-reinforced vault that contained three of the toughest, most secure safes available. It was where the firm's valuable cargoes were usually stored.

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The men gathered outside the building early that morning were the security guards, waiting for a Saturday overtime shift to begin. They stood together by the side door towards the rear of the building. Unlike the main vehicle entrance at the front, it was not covered by a camera. They talked, laughed and clapped their hands to stay warm in the chill November air. The electronic security systems that protected the building overnight meant they could not enter before their shift began. Unit 7 had been unoccupied since 11pm the previous evening, when the late-duty keyman had signed off. The facility was guarded by an infrared detector that reacted to body heat and a microwave system to pick up disturbances in the air. If a key was inserted into the door lock before 6.30am, alarms would start ringing. At 6.30am, an automatic timer switched off the overnight alarm.

While his colleagues waited, Michael Scouse watched from his car, listening to the radio. At 6.30am, he got out and walked to the door. As the supervisor on duty, he inserted his key in the lock and entered the building alone. Inside, Scouse retrieved another key from a safe to turn off the night alarms covering the perimeter walls and windows, and to set the day alarms. Only when this was done did Scouse let his shivering colleagues into the building, locking the door behind them. The building had an 'air-lock' system, with another locked door behind the external door. When all of the guards had passed into the building, Scouse locked the second door behind them and reactivated the alarm. The building was secure. Impregnable.

For the guards, it was another day in the safest building in Britain. They began to prepare for the day's task: transporting a shipment of gold from Unit 7 to Gatwick Airport so it could be loaded onto an 8.30am Cathay Pacific flight to Hong Kong. There were six guards there that day. Or there should have been. Scouse had let in his colleagues Robin Ripley, Kent Clarke, Richard Holliday and Peter

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Bentley. One guard, however, was missing. Tony Black. Scouse was happy to have a team at all. It was only the previous afternoon that Scouse had been told to rustle up some staff to work overtime that Saturday. There had been some grumbling before Riseley, Bentley and Holliday agreed to come in. Clarke and Black agreed immediately. But now Black wasn't here.

Scouse started without him. They were used to handling high-value consignments, but today's load was a challenge. When Scouse finished work the previous evening, the vault contained around £750,000 in gold and other metals. Several hundred thousands of pounds in used banknotes were locked in the safes. But more had been delivered after he left. Three tons of gold. It was this that they were to move to Gatwick Airport.

The ground floor of Unit 7 contained the vault and a vehicle loading bay. On the first floor, where the guards convened that morning, there was a radio-control room, a small office and a staff room. Scouse laid out the plan. Riseley would ride in the cab of the armoured van while Bentley drove and Holliday sat in the back with the gold. Clarke would follow behind in a smaller Brink's-Mat Ford Escort van to provide additional security. Black, if he ever arrived, would be on radio duty, maintaining contact with the two vans from his base at Unit 7. But there was a problem. Their Mercedes van only had a payload capacity of two and a half tons. They would have to chance it.

Some of the men were nervous at the prospect. After all, it was while travelling that they faced danger. Security van robberies were an established subset of British crime. A cashless society was a long way off in 1983. Security vans were used to move huge quantities of money between banks, post offices, large employers and big stores. Successful robbers could make off with hauls of thousands of

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pounds at a time. Brink's-Mat's vans were a common target. They were hit while on the move, in brazen, fast, often highly violent attacks. On the road and outside the safety of Unit 7 was where the guards were vulnerable. And to go out there with an overweight van seemed an unnecessary risk. As nerves grew, the doorbell rang.

Scouse walked down the stairs and opened the two doors. Outside was a dishevelled Tony Black. It wasn't unusual for Black to be late; he offered his apologies, explaining that he had overslept, as Scouse led him upstairs. As Black entered the staff room, Riseley glanced at his watch. It was 6.40am. Black appeared pale and apprehensive. He disappeared to the toilet, then joined Scouse in the radio-control room and began rolling a cigarette.

Back in the staff room, the guards chatted while Bentley stood at the sink, preparing tea for his colleagues. And then, a harsh Cockney voice filled the air.

'Get on the floor or you're fucking dead!'

The safest building in Britain had been breached. In the doorway stood a masked figure, pointing a semi-automatic pistol at the guards. He pulled the top of the gun back to cock the weapon. Riseley, Clarke and Holliday dived from their chairs to the floor. Bentley hesitated, thinking it was a practical joke. That was a mistake. Rushing into the room, the intruder raised his pistol and smashed it down on Bentley's head. The guard fell to the floor, hitting his head on a table on the way, two bloody gashes opening up on his scalp.

From the floor, Riseley could make out the gunman: a white man, about five feet, eight inches tall, clean shaven. He had on a dark anorak or car coat over a black blazer, black trousers, white shirt and black tie. On his head, he wore a trilby hat. He had hitched up a bright yellow ski mask that covered all but his eyes as he entered the room, giving Riseley a split-second glimpse of his face. Holliday

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could also see him and noted the crispness of his starched shirt and the herringbone pattern of his hat. He saw a lock of fair hair protruding from beneath the hat. Bentley thought the man looked a little like Inspector Clouseau, the comical French detective played by Peter Sellers. Not that he told him at the time.

The man waved through the open door and more armed masked men rushed into the room. It all happened too quickly for the guards to be able to tell how many there were: three, maybe four. Riseley was an army veteran and to him it looked like a well-planned military operation, with each man knowing where he needed to be and what he needed to do. Speed, aggression and surprise were used to overwhelm and terrify the victims, giving them no chance to fight back.

The four guards were immobilised quickly. Drawstring cotton bags were pulled over their heads, their hands were tightly cuffed behind their backs and their legs were bound with duct tape. Holliday began thrashing on the floor, finding it difficult to breathe. A man rolled him onto his back, loosened the drawstring and moved the bag above his lip so he could breathe more easily. After being hooded and bound, in an odd glimpse of compassion, Clarke was asked if he was in any distress.

Another voice was heard. It was a well-spoken man, clearly used to giving orders. 'Get that radio tuned in,' this new voice said. 'If you hear anything, tell us.' The guards all later agreed that this man was in charge. They heard several men leave the room but could tell they were not alone. The radio was tuned to a police frequency.

From the control room, where he sat with Black, Scouse heard what he later described as 'a commotion'. When he looked out the room, he was confronted by a masked man running at him with a pistol in his outstretched hand, yelling at him to get down on the floor. Scouse flashed a look at Black and muttered, 'Who the fuck's

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that?' Black immediately dropped to the floor; Scouse joined him. He felt a pistol pressed into the back of his neck as the gunman ordered him to put his hands behind his back. A bag was put over his head, and he was handcuffed and kicked a number of times before a voice asked, 'Are you Scouse?' When he confirmed he was, Scouse was lifted to his feet.

Scouse was told to breathe deeply, then felt a knife slicing through his belt and the waistband of his trousers. A can was placed under his hood and he was asked if he recognised the smell. It was unmistakeable: petrol. Scouse felt the liquid being splashed all over him, soaking his genitals, stinging and burning his skin. A voice told him that they knew where he lived, above a television rental shop on Ruislip High Street, and that they had been watching him for nine months and planning the operation for twelve.

Scouse, terrified and fearing for his life, was dragged downstairs and told to open the vault. One of the masked men told him, 'If we don't get what we want, if the alarms go off or the police turn up, I'll put a match to you and a bullet to the back of your head.' Scouse believed it.

Back in the staff room, other gang members asked Robin Riseley to identify himself. Riseley knew why they wanted him but he did so anyway. He was dragged to the office, where he was subjected to the same treatment as Scouse. His trousers were cut open and fell to his ankles, and petrol was splashed all over him. The effect was terrifying. 'Right, Riseley, what's your job?' someone asked. He answered that he opened the safes. What neither guard knew at this point was that the petrol had been watered down. It did not matter. The fear was enough. Scouse and Riseley, the two guards needed to open the vault, had been identified, terrorised and were being escorted downstairs within minutes of the masked gang's arrival.

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The security systems at Unit 7 were unbreachable. The contents of the vault were protected by several layers of security, both physical and electronic. Getting into the building through the foot entrance required passing through two locked doors. The outer shutters that allowed vehicles to enter and exit could only be operated from inside.

The vault itself was the secure core of a secure building. Behind the shutters, there was first a large outer door from the loading bay into an inner loading area. It was secured by a padlock and an electronic alarm that could be switched off with a number code. Behind the outer door was the main vault door and another alarm that needed a key to switch it off. The vault door was protected by a combination lock that required two number codes. Inside the vault, the inner section was within a locked cage. Once the cage had been opened, two more alarm systems had to be deactivated. At the very heart of the vault were three safes protected by magnetic shields and locked with keys and number combinations.

The only weakness with the technology lay in the humans who had to operate it. Even then, Brink's-Mat security protocols were stringent. Knowledge of the various code numbers and passwords, and access to the keys, was highly restricted. It was impossible for a single person to gain access to the contents of the vault or the safes. Two people were always required. On this Saturday, that was Scouse and Riseley. Scouse was the designated 'keyman', responsible for the keys. He also knew some of the codes and the passwords for the different alarms. Riseley, as the crew leader and next in command, had codes for the main vault and for the safes.

In the radio-control room, the gunman pressed a gun to Scouse's chin and asked for his combination for the main vault. Scouse did not hesitate in telling him. The gunman then demanded the keys. Scouse told him where they were and the gunman retrieved them.

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The bag was torn from Scouse's head and he saw the gunman had the leather pouch that contained every key for Unit 7.

As he was hustled downstairs to the vault, Scouse was shocked at how well the gang knew the security systems. Later, he would say: 'To be honest, I could have written down the combination numbers, given them the keys and sat upstairs and had a cup of tea. They told me how to get into my own vault.'

Meanwhile, in the office, Riseley was asked for his combination. He offered it up and tried to give instruction on the combination lock, only for a gunman to tell him he would be opening it himself, the alternative being that he'd be burned alive. Soon Riseley was being rushed down the stairs too.

The masked gang passed through the outer door and first alarm systems quickly. When they came to the vault door, they ordered Scouse and then Riseley to each enter their halves of the code. With the vault opened, the gang made their way rapidly through the remaining security systems and came to the three safes protected by magnetic shields. Riseley had the codes for all three safes. Or at least, he should have done.

A few days before, the codes had been changed. Riseley had not yet committed them to memory but had noted them in his diary. The diary was at home. As he travelled through the security measures, Riseley knew what was coming. Him, standing outside the safes, unable to open them. He did what he could, desperately racking his brain while the masked men shouted at him and thrust a gun into his face. As he tried and failed to remember the numbers, one robber was later said to have suggested they give Riseley a moment to compose himself, but was overruled by others who threatened him with such aggression that Riseley concluded he would shortly be killed.

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It appeared that he was right to do so. The yellow-masked gunman turned to his colleagues and said, 'It looks like we've got a hero.' One of them replied, 'It's a shame we're going to have to do him in.' Someone began to strike matches. A knife was produced and Riseley was stabbed in the hand. He was told he would be castrated if he did not open the safes.

The hooded Scouse listened on from a corner, where he had been made to sit on a metal box with a man holding him down with a gun in his ear. Scouse could hear his workmate being tormented as he attempted to remember the combinations. He stood and intervened. 'Leave him alone,' Scouse called out into the darkness, with a desperate attempt at humour. 'He's like that during the week.' The joke failed to land. Scouse was shoved back onto the box and told to shut up. A voice from the gang declared, 'I'm going by 7.30 and if they're not open by then, you're a dead man.'

In frustration, the masked gang turned their attention away from the three safes and to the rest of the vault. A gang member is said to have pointed to a small barrel and asked Scouse – his hood briefly removed – what was inside. 'Scrap,' replied Scouse. It was, but it was scrap silver and highly valuable. Another gang member pointed to a different barrel. Scouse told him it contained palladium sponge, another valuable metal. The gang are said to have become agitated, their desperation growing. They were drifting from the promise of the locked safes and were now clutching at straws. One gang member's attention had been caught by two pallets of neatly stacked grey cardboard boxes. Each was about the size of a shoe box, secured with a metal strap, a handwritten code on the outside. The robber asked what was in them. Scouse looked at the pallets that were, right now, supposed to be on their way to Gatwick Airport. Then replied …

'Gold.'

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In 1983, about twenty tons of gold passed through the United Kingdom per week – much of it going through Heathrow Airport. Brink's-Mat carried almost all of it. Most of that Saturday's unusually high load of gold, due to be flown to Asia, had arrived from Johnson Matthey, a London-based gold and precious metals refiner that could trace its origins to 1817, which supplied gold to the Bank of England. It had been ordered by Johnson Matthey's customers in Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Each customer had ordered a different amount and each wanted their gold in different sized ingots. The Republic Bank of New York in Singapore had ordered 1,000kg, packed into twenty boxes with fifty 1kg bars in each. The Sumitomo Corporation in Tokyo wanted 500kg, packed into ten boxes with fifty 1kg bars in each. The DG Bank in Frankfurt had asked for the same. The Mitsubishi Corporation in Japan had ordered 200kg but wanted it in half-kilo bars, packed one hundred to a box, four boxes in all. The Eastern Trade Corporation of Dubai wanted 470kg, but it asked for even smaller bars: 4,000 of them packed into sixteen boxes.

When all these orders were put together, the result was sixty boxes, or 2,670kg of pure gold, arriving at Unit 7 from Johnson Matthey. A Brink's-Mat van had been forced to make two runs the previous evening to transport the cargo from the Johnson Matthey vault in Hatton Garden in central London to Heathrow. Another sixteen boxes of gold had come from Engelhard, the American precious metals company, with each box containing twenty-five 1kg bars. By the end of Friday night, there were seventy-six boxes of gold, each about the size of a shoebox and each bound with a metal securing strap, in the vault at Unit 7. Loaded onto two pallets, they were similar in size to a large domestic freezer. Each ingot was about the size of a chocolate bar. The total weight, three tons, was about as much as two family cars.

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There was a moment of silence before the gang grabbed at the boxes. One of the robbers slid a knife through one of the straps and opened a box. The atmosphere in the vault turned on a dime. Jubilation, excitement and frantic planning immediately ensued. It was the first time that people would be confronted and seduced by the Brink's-Mat gold without knowing what to do next. It would not be the last.

The gang debated how to remove the boxes. Scouse was asked who could open the shutters to let in their van. Tony Black, he told them. Black was still upstairs, lying handcuffed in a pool of petrol that had dripped from Scouse. He was moved into the radio-control room. The other guards heard the sound of the shutters being opened and of a vehicle being driven in. A robber shouted, 'We're going to need another van!' The shutters were opened again and the guards heard what they presumed was another vehicle drive in.

The robbers began to load the gold, making use of the depot's own forklift. As the gold was hurried from the vault, Scouse observed to one of the robbers: 'You load it quicker than we do.' Once again, Scouse's joke received a difficult reception. He was taken upstairs, where he was hooded again, with his legs bound with tape. He was handcuffed to pipework and locked in an office. Before Scouse's mouth was taped shut, one of the robbers asked him, 'Are you all right, Mick?' Scouse asked that water be poured over his shirt and trousers; he still feared he could go up in flames.

Riseley was also manhandled upstairs and pushed into a cupboard, where Black was already cowering, and punched violently in the stomach. Amid the pain, Riseley felt only relief. They wouldn't have put him in the cupboard, he hoped, if they still planned to kill him. This appeared to be confirmed when he heard a robber tell him, 'It's a good job it's Christmas.'

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From the loading bay, there came the sound of an engine being started. One of the robbers went round loosening the guards' bonds and hoods, casually threatening them with death if they tried to raise the alarm. Clarke heard one of the robbers shout, 'Thanks ever so much for your help and have a nice Christmas.'

With that, the shutters were closed and the robbers were gone.

The ordeal had lasted little over an hour.

Outside, it was only just getting light.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Inside Man

After the chaos came silence. Scouse gave it a few minutes, to ensure the gang really had left, before calling out to check whether his colleagues were still alive. They shouted back, one after another, to confirm that they were. Bentley set to work freeing himself. Handcuffed to the staff room's pipework, with his head throbbing from a pistol whipping, he used his teeth and a set of keys to tear through the tape that bound his hands and legs. He then lifted his feet against the wall and, by pushing himself backwards, managed to snap the chain between his handcuffs.

Bentley rushed to the office where Scouse was locked in and kicked a hole in the door. Inside, he is said to have found Scouse dripping with petrol, handcuffed to a pipe and demanding that Bentley hand him the phone. While Scouse dialled 999, Bentley freed Riseley and Black from the cupboard. Meanwhile, Scouse was battling trauma. He was aware enough to call for help and to switch the phone to an outside line when it failed to connect. But he was also viscerally terrified by the ordeal. When the emergency services operator fired standard questions at him, Scouse was unable to answer coherently. He struggled to make himself understood, then slammed the phone down. It rang with an incoming call. Scouse picked it up.

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A few miles away in Hayes, Alan Bullock, the workshop manager at Norman Reeves Trucks, phoned the Brink's-Mat depot shortly after 8.20am. His mechanics had been servicing a Brink's-Mat Ford Transit security van when its sensitive alarm system had been triggered. It was a common occurrence and Bullock knew the routine. With the van's siren ringing in his ears, he had to call the depot at Heathrow, ask for help and then wait for one of the company's keyholders to drive round and deactivate the alarm. Bullock first received no answer, then the engaged tone and now he got Scouse. This time, Scouse spoke with clarity: 'Phone the fucking police! We've been turned over!'

Bullock hung up and dialled 999. 'I've just called the Brink's-Mat warehouse at Heathrow,' he shouted at the operator. 'They've been robbed.' As he spoke, behind him in the workshop, the siren on the Brink's-Mat van continued to shriek in warning.

The alarm was raised around 8.20am. At the depot, Bentley had freed his colleagues. The six stunned guards gathered in a daze. Bentley used a handkerchief to mop blood from his head. Scouse tried to get into the radio-control room to activate the panic button but found the robbers had locked the door. It did not matter. Within minutes, the first police arrived on the scene.

In the early morning of 26 November 1983, Detective Sergeant Bill Miller of the Flying Squad had been on a surveillance job in east London, watching a post office van that police believed would be the target of an armed gang. His radio had crackled with new instructions and, for Miller and others, a new destiny. They were to make their way across London to the scene of the robbery at Heathrow. With him was Detective Inspector Tony Brightwell, a young, ambitious detective, known among his colleagues for being upright and thorough.

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Brightwell and Miller were among the first police to get to Unit 7 following the robbery, arriving around thirty minutes after the alarm had been raised. To Brightwell, the ground floor of the depot appeared simply as an ordinary warehouse. Upstairs, it was a different story. He found total disarray – upturned furniture, abandoned hoods and ropes, and an overwhelming stench of petrol. It was a scene that spoke of violence.

Back at Scotland Yard, news of the robbery spread through the offices of both the Flying Squad and the Criminal Intelligence branch. With its emblem of a swooping eagle, the Flying Squad was regarded as an elite force within Scotland Yard. As a result of various corruption scandals, its remit had been changed in 1978 from investigating any serious crime to focusing on the growing issue of armed robberies. Its members were tough, streetwise detectives. Their approach was to mix with the criminal underworld, talking to criminals on a daily basis, gathering intelligence and information about crimes. Flying Squad officers needed to be self-motivated, skilled at interviewing suspects and running informers, and excellent thief-takers. They also needed to be brave, as the squad specialised in pavement ambushes of armed robberies in progress. Officers had to be prepared to tackle armed criminals face to face.

The Flying Squad were supported in their battle against armed crime by the Criminal Intelligence branch, known internally as C11. Set up in 1960, it was a small unit of around fifty officers. Once a criminal had been targeted, detectives from C11 would be brought in to keep them under surveillance, monitor their movements, and watch their acquaintances. Any important information would be passed on to the officers of the investigating squad. Most of its work was clandestine and highly secret, with its detectives deliberately shunning the limelight.

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By the time the Flying Squad's commander Frank Cater had arrived at Unit 7, a well-rehearsed investigative machine was already at work. Scene-of-crime specialists began gathering what evidence they could. The hoods, handcuffs and industrial tape that had been used to secure the guards were collected. A fingerprint officer dusted surfaces, a photographer captured the aftermath of the robbery, and an illustrator drew a map of the depot's layout. David Stickland, the depot manager, arrived to take an inventory of what remained and what, therefore, had been taken. The final haul taken by the robbers would be detailed as: seventy-six boxes of gold bars and ingots, one pouch of platinum ingots, one pouch of diamonds, one box of palladium sponge, one pouch of travellers' cheques and one box of assay certificates. The total value of the stolen goods was £26,369,778, of which the gold was worth a dominating total of £25,911,962.

It was immediately obvious to the police that the robbers had left little evidence at the crime scene. Besides the contents of the safes that they had not been able to access, there were some empty pouches and three drums of precious metal waste. Everything else had been taken.

The next few days saw a flurry of activity. Statements were taken from anyone the police could find across the Heathrow trading estate and environs. An appeal for witnesses prompted calls from all over the country from people who claimed to have seen vehicles that might have been carrying gold. Through the private investigations firm, Robert Bishop and Co., the gold's insurers offered a reward of £2 million for information that led to its recovery. The police made sure word of the reward went out to their network of criminal informants.

The informant system was fragmentary and shrouded in secrecy, but many Scotland Yard detectives worked with registered informants who received payment if they passed on information that

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led to arrests. Detectives were encouraged to meet informally, even to socialise, with known or suspected criminals as a way to gather information. Cater asked his men to squeeze their informants as soon as the inquiry into the robbery began and the offer of a record, no-questions-asked reward was designed to encourage criminals to talk. Newspaper reports hinted that information had been received as a result of the offer and that it had 'loosened underworld tongues'.

Some leads came in from the public. There were reports of one or possibly two suspicious blue vans seen near Unit 7 around the time of the crime. At a press conference at Scotland Yard on Tuesday 29 November, Cater told around sixty reporters that one was thought to be a box-shaped faded light blue work van, possibly a Commer, probably ten to fifteen years old, with the letters XKS or YKS as part of its numberplate. It had been seen near the depot with two men inside at around midnight on the Friday night, six and a half hours before the robbery, and again between 7.55am and 8am on the Saturday morning, just as the robbers were leaving the area. It was spotted turning out of Green Lane, the location of Unit 7, onto the main road towards Feltham. It had 'appeared very heavily laden and was riding low upon its suspension' and its engine was 'very laboured and under stress', Cater told reporters. The driver was said to have had a light-coloured moustache and was thought to be wearing a beret. The second van was thought to be a dark blue Ford Transit or Bedford and had been seen on the trading estate between 6.15am and 6.30am on the Saturday morning. At the press conference, Cater also showed the boxes in which the gold had been stored and the canvas drawstring bags that had been used to hood the guards.

This was the type of public-facing activity to be expected in the wake of a high-profile crime. More significant was the immediate actions of the detectives on the ground, skilled operators who

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looked at the Brink's-Mat robbery and knew what they were seeing. To the experienced officers of the Flying Squad, several things were immediately obvious. This was clearly the work of a group of professional criminals. The job had been quick and organised, and they had left very little evidence. However, what the detectives also immediately suspected was that the criminals might have left something else behind.

An accomplice.

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For an unbreachable building to be breached, it has to happen from the inside. Unit 7 showed no signs of forced entry; the robbery had happened on a Saturday, when the building was manned by a skeleton crew, and had coincided with the vault being unusually full. In addition, the robbers had detailed knowledge of the depot's security systems. Right from the start, Miller and Brightwell sensed an inside man. It could have been someone on duty, someone who worked elsewhere in the company or someone who had recently left. On this occasion, though, with no sign of forced entry, the detectives started with what was in front of them: six terrified guards, one of whom might be equally terrified at the prospect of the discovery of their hidden role.

For the Flying Squad team, steeped in knowledge of London's criminal underworld, there was only a handful of criminals capable of mounting a raid of such scale and audacity. By 1982, Criminal Intelligence had developed a secret 'Top 100' list of serious criminals operating in the capital. The job, as ever, was to find the links. When someone from a non-criminal background is corrupted, it is invariably through a social or familial link to someone of more committed criminal intent. The Flying Squad's attention, therefore, turned to the guards. And who they might know.

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Having victims of a horrific armed robbery as suspects was not easy. The detectives had to balance a respectful approach to traumatised individuals with applying enough pressure to establish whether a guilty party was hiding among them. One by one, the guards faced extensive questioning by detectives accustomed to interrogating hardened professional criminals. They were asked to repeat everything they could remember about the events of the morning: whether they had seen anything suspicious when they arrived for work, where they had been in the building, what they had seen and heard. They were asked for descriptions of the robbers' voices, clothes and weapons. As the questioning continued, it became more forceful. The guards were asked about when they had learned they would be working overtime that Saturday, when they had discovered what was in the vault that morning, and whether they had any reason to be suspicious of their colleagues. Detectives probed for holes and inconsistencies in their answers.

From the outset, Scouse and Riseley were regarded as the prime suspects. Both men were clearly rattled by their experience, and both had suffered blistering from the petrol that was poured over them, but only they had access to the codes and keys needed to access the vault. Their houses were searched and their interrogations were the harshest. 'They were put through the hoop,' Brightwell would later recall. After several days of investigation, the police had seen enough. Scouse was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the robbery.

For Scouse, his trauma had reached a new level. Exhausted and scared, he blamed his erratic performance under police interrogation on shot nerves. 'One would ask me a question and I would answer it,' he later recalled, 'then one of the others would jump in and say, "Five minutes ago you said y.' So my brain would start to backtrack,

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what did I say five minutes ago? Somebody had set me up. And that was what was at the back of my mind: who's done it?'

A breakthrough came when Cater gave the go-ahead for a video reconstruction of the raid to be made after the idea was suggested by a young detective sergeant. It was a novel approach, taking advantage of the spread of new home-video technology, and nothing like it had been tried before by Scotland Yard. Each guard would be individually recorded walking the police through their memories of the robbery. The plan was to find a story that didn't add up.

The prime suspect, Scouse, went first, gradually taking Brightwell, Miller and their Flying Squad colleagues through his movements from arrival at the depot, pausing to answer questions and check his statement. His story was flawless. It was either well rehearsed or true. The other guards followed. Some were nervous, some were angry, but no one tripped up.

And then came Tony Black. Visibly nervous and with a cigarette in his hand, Black took Brightwell through his version of events. Even though he had been singled out by the robbers to operate the shutter doors, he claimed to have seen very little: 'I can remember sort of seeing someone in the background, you know, it wasn't clear, but, but he was someone in the background,' he told the detectives. When asked if he had seen the vehicles that had been used to carry away the gold, he claimed he had seen nothing, even though the switch that operated the shutter doors was in the radio-control room beside a window looking out over the loading bay below. 'From where you were standing, could you see the shutters open?' Brightwell asked him. 'No, I was looking in the corner.'

At this point, Black was in various levels of danger. Increasingly nervous, his screen presence was becoming a difficult watch. 'It was obvious,' said Bill Miller, in the understatement, 'the man wasn't

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right.' More pressingly, Black's story was presenting him quite the physical challenge. There was simply no way he could have opened the shutters without having a clear view, through the window, of the robbers' arrival and departure. When Miller asked him to show how he opened the shutters, Black was under pressure.

Panic does strange things to a man. In the case of Tony Black, standing in the Brink's-Mat depot with stern detectives watching his every move and a camera whirring, it sent him briefly into the world of physical comedy. He demonstrated opening the shutters while contorting himself into the corner of the room, his arms stretched out and his face pressed into the wall. The overriding challenge for the detectives, aware of the camera's presence, was to refrain from laughter. Back at Scotland Yard, there were no such restrictions. That afternoon, the film was shown to the rest of the Flying Squad officers. Several times. Every time Black came on screen, the room jeered as though he were a B-movie villain.

The police had one good reason to suspect Black. Soon, they had another.

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Through their detailed inquiries into each of the guards' backgrounds and family lives, detectives discovered that Tony Black's sister Jennifer lived as common-law wife with a man called Brian Robinson. It was the link they had been looking for.

To combat the increase in violent armed robbery in the capital, during 1980 and 1981, Scotland Yard's Criminal Intelligence branch had run an operation to increase their knowledge of the gangs and individuals responsible. It was codenamed Operation Kate, after one of the secretaries working on it, and sought to build up a detailed picture of the small hardcore of south-east London professional criminals who specialised in highly organised, spectacular armed

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robberies, and who supplied weapons to other, lesser gangs who focused on smaller targets.

The operation was top secret, with the officers involved reporting directly to the commander of Criminal Intelligence, Brian Worth, and was one of the biggest undercover intelligence-gathering operations ever undertaken by Scotland Yard. For nearly a year, the Scotland Yard surveillance teams placed suspects under observation, tapping phones and analysing businesses to establish the sources of the money behind them.

The surveillance work yielded a mass of intelligence on the suspects and the connections between them, all of which enabled the police to put together an accurate picture of which individuals were likely to work together. By the end of the operation, the police had information on about 200 individuals, with about twenty identified as the hardcore. Worth said, 'We discovered that we had confined in south-east London twenty or so of the most adept, enterprising, violent, ruthless robbers in the entire country.' In the immediate aftermath of the Brink's-Mat robbery, the Operation Kate files and photographs provided a ready-made list of suspects for the Scotland Yard investigators.

So, when Black's link to Brian Robinson was established, the Flying Squad were elated. They knew that Robinson was a major figure in the south London criminal underworld and believed he was an armed robber; in the past three years he had beaten two armed robbery charges because there was not enough evidence against him. They also knew he was closely linked to a number of other suspected criminals. They were closing in. Black's account of the robbery had collapsed. Furthermore, the detectives were now focusing on Black's trip to the toilet shortly after his late arrival at the depot on the morning of the robbery. The toilet was downstairs, near the pedestrian entrance.

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And then they discovered a photo among the intelligence files. Taken by a Criminal Intelligence surveillance officer a few weeks before the robbery, it showed six men coming out of a south-east London block of flats together. Of the six, five could be identified. They were all significant criminals of a type that tended to come together for one reason. Brian Robinson, Micky McAvoy, Tony White, John Fleming and John Lloyd. On 28 November, the *Evening Standard* reported that detectives believed the raid had been masterminded by a criminal they nicknamed 'the Colonel'. The same man was thought to have been behind Britain's biggest cash robbery, the £7 million raid on the Security Express depot in Shoreditch, east London, in April 1983. That won't have helped Tony Black's frame of mind. The Colonel, as half of south-east London knew, was Brian Robinson.

The police had their suspects, but they needed evidence. They needed to break the inside man.

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At 8am on Sunday 4 December 1983, Flying Squad detectives arrived unannounced on the doorsteps of the six guards. The target was Black. The others were taken in as cover, including the increasingly unfortunate Scouse.

Black was asleep when the police began banging on his door. Like the others, he was taken to Hounslow police station. While the others were questioned methodically, Black was interrogated. Brightwell led the questioning, supported by Detective Sergeants Alan Branch and Nicholas Benwell. It was to go on for more than six hours. They walked Black through his statement. He insisted it was true. Brightwell pointed out various discrepancies and suggested Black might want to reconsider. When Black insisted on his innocence, he was charged with armed robbery. Still, he stuck to his

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story. The detectives revealed they had found Black's work diary, where he had written '6.30' against the date of the robbery. Black said this was the time he was due to start work. Brightwell pointed out Black had not written his start time in any other day. Black didn't have an answer for that.

After a day of toying with the suspect, it was time to move in for the kill. Brightwell casually asked the question the officers had been building toward: 'What does your brother-in-law, Brian Robinson, think about the robbery?' Black was immediately unsettled. Brightwell then played the second part of his plan. He knew Black was unfamiliar with a police cell. They told him that he was being detained until the morning and sent him back to the cells, with the Robinson revelation for company.

The interrogation resumed the following morning, Monday 5 December 1983, at 11.32am. Brightwell and Branch walked through Black's growing list of inconsistencies. But the battle had already been won. Black asked for a cup of tea. When it arrived, he sat for a moment with the mug steaming in front of him and a heavy silence settling in the room.

Then Tony Black looked up and asked, 'Where do I start?'

Brightwell answered. 'Let's start at the beginning, shall we?'

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