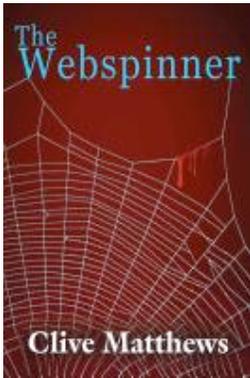
The background of the cover is a dark, rich red. A white spiderweb is centered on the page, its spiral and radial lines clearly visible. In the upper right quadrant, where the web meets the top edge, there are several drips of bright red blood, suggesting a violent or sinister theme.

# The Webspinner

**Clive Matthews**



*Politics & heroin - A glimpse behind the headlines at people caught in a conspiracy of corruption, ambition, intrigue and murder. A forged passport draws an Australian narcotics agent and a French spymaster into parallel missions to defend their countries' interests. But, little is as it appears on the surface. The real politics of France, America, Turkey and Australia are enmeshed in a carefully woven web. The Webspinner has anticipated virtually every eventuality.*

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# **The Webspinner**

*Clive  
Matthews*

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## Prologue

The Mediterranean – off the coast of the French Riviera. 1972

Fernando gave the cabin door a mighty thump and barged in without waiting for permission.

‘*Sirocco*’s on our arse - ordered us to heave to for inspection.’

Corsay leapt out of his bunk and made out the lights of the Customs launch astern.

‘What the hell they doin’ out here this time o’ night? Should be fucking the bar girls by now.’

He raced to the wheelhouse. Something was very wrong. A second inspection only a few hours later, at sea, meant they had a reason, a good one. He eased a couple of degrees to port, a slight correction to increase their chances.

‘Tell ‘em to repeat. We’re having trouble with the radio.’

Corsay checked their position. It was going to be close – damned close. They couldn’t use muscle unless they knew it could be justified in court.

‘They say if we don’t heave to they’ll fire,’ said Fernando. ‘They’ve got a Chatellerault.’

‘They’ve had it for twenty years. How many boats have they sunk?’

Fernando didn’t look re-assured.

‘They need a damn good reason to use it. We haven’t given ‘em one yet. Tell ‘em I’ve bunked down and I’ll come to the radio when I’m dressed. Get ready to loosen the aerial connections to justify the radio fault.’

Slightly more than a kilometre to go. He looked at his watch; tight, too tight. *Sirocco* would be alongside within a minute. His other crewmen were by now clustered at the rail near the wheelhouse.

‘They’ve given us thirty seconds before they open fire,’ said Fernando.

Corsay took the headphones, flicked to transmit, growled, a man dragged from his bed.

'*Destin to Sirocco*, Anton Corsay here. What the hell is this about? You guys having a party? You've scared my radio operator witless. Over.'

'*Sirocco to Destin*. You are ordered to heave to for inspection immediately. Over.'

Corsay thought he recognized the voice. He recalled paying the tab at the Vieux Moulin a few weeks earlier. Violette's girls had ensured them all sweet dreams later.

Less than three minutes to go.

'*Destin to Sirocco*. That you Pierre? You jerking me around here son? We've got some booze if you've run dry, but there's no pussy on board. It'll be a dull party unless you're carrying some of Violette's friends. Over.'

A short silence.

'*Sirocco to Destin*. Monsieur Corsay, this is an official directive. You are ordered to heave to immediately. Over.'

'*Destin to Sirocco*. Pierre? I'm too tired to play games tonight my friend. Go back to the Moulin and tell Violette the entertainment's on me. I'll square it with her when I get this radio working properly. You've got five hundred francs credit. Enjoy yourselves. Over.'

Another silence. Pierre could be knee-deep in shit by now, but that was the risk you took if you let someone else pay for your pleasures. They knew what he was paying for when he picked up the tab.

'*Sirocco to Destin*.' The voice was different, clipped, official. 'Enough of these games monsieur Corsay. You have been formally ordered to submit to inspection. If you refuse your vessel will be stopped by force. Over.'

'*Destin to Sirocco*. I'm sorry, we're having trouble with our radio. Can you hear me? Please repeat your transmission. Over.'

'*Sirocco to Destin*. We are receiving you clearly, now heave to or we fire without further warning. Over.'

'*Destin to Sirocco*. There is some mistake here monsieur; we were cleared in Villefranche a few hours ago? Over.'

*The Webspinner*

Another short silence.

'*Sirocco* to *Destin*. We are aware of your clearance from Villefranche. We have orders to board nonetheless.'

Corsay waited. The faulty radio? An innocent question? Righteous indignation?

'*Destin* to *Sirocco*. This is ridiculous. Your own people have already cleared the ship. What explanation do you have for these outrageous threats? Over.'

There was a silence that Corsay prayed would continue. The radioman on the *Sirocco* would be conferring with someone else. The headphones crackled again.

'*Sirocco* to *Destin*. You will be given an explanation in due course. You are violating the law by refusing a legitimate command to submit to inspection. If you do not comply immediately the consequences will be your own responsibility. Over.'

Less than two minutes now.

The *Sirocco* was pacing them twenty metres away. A few seconds later the Chatellerault barked a line of tracer bullets across his bow.

One minute. Corsay spoke slowly. Every second was valuable.

'*Destin* to *Sirocco*. Impressive fireworks my friend, but you're violating the law yourselves now. We're in international waters. I suggest you drop this, or consider the consequences in court. Over.'

The usual pissant public servant would worry about his career, desperate not to make a mistake. Corsay willed the warning across the gap between the two ships. Think about your pension you arsehole. A bit of luck, a modicum of normal human uncertainty, and he would cross the line.

1972 was a leap year and February twenty-nine struck Corsay as a good day for an important trip - a free day for a freebooter. Nonsense, but the thought amused him. He liked decorating his life and conversation with picturesque flourishes, like naming his boat *Destin*, Destiny.

Many a pair of thighs had parted to grant him mooring rights after their owners had been wine and dined on a smuggler's profits;

entertained by his observation that 'Corsay' already formed two thirds of the word 'corsaire,' a pirate.

As a young marine commando with the Free French he had done the patriot thing, killed his share of *boches*, or krauts as the yanks called them. Then he woke up. The US Army of Liberation was swamped with war surplus supplies. Hungry millions in Europe were struggling for basic necessities. You just had to link supply with demand. After that - arms shipments to African nationalists, wine and spirits across the English Channel, gold and machinery to the European ports and cigarettes from Tangiers to anywhere in the Mediterranean.

By 1969 he could afford *Destin*, and another twenty thousand dollars to refit her with Atlantic rigging. Twice since then he had crossed to Miami, aware he was under surveillance, but the authorities found nothing, despite their curiosity about a fishing boat that never unloaded any fish.

Trawling was backbreaking work that left the boat stinking. Nor was he a skipper who made the crew bust their balls creating a fiction for him. That was no way to generate loyalty. No one would be fool enough to mistake a man like himself for a simple fisherman even if he docked with his hold bulging with fish.

*Destin* was simply a pleasure cruiser, claimed Corsay.

Now, hunched over the radio, he found no reason to regret that strategy. Whatever happened a few boatloads of fish would not have changed the outcome.

Fifty-five seconds...fifty

'*Sirocco* to *Destin*. We're several hundred metres from international waters. If you do not heave to your vessel will come under fire immediately. Over.'

'*Destin* to *Sirocco*. I'm sorry, could you repeat your transmission? Our radio's playing up.'

The Chatellerault replied within seconds - 7.5mm bullets at more than seven hundred a minute, enough to sink *Destin* if they shot at waterline.

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Was that such a bad option he wondered? There would be no evidence. Maybe he could sue them. Excessive force. A faulty radio. Disputed accounts of events. An earlier clearance? But that would take years to grind through the courts. In the meantime he faced a huge loss.

Who knew? Who'd talk? Why? What could Customs offer that was better than everyone involved were already getting? How could Customs be sure that some informer wasn't just pissing in their pockets?

Would the *Sirocco's* commander have the balls to risk his career, and possible manslaughter charges, on information that might turn out to be ill founded? It would come back to him disobeying an inspection order, and the strength of their reason for issuing it. That was the margin of doubt. The one thing he couldn't calculate. How sure were they? One last card to play.

'*Destin* to *Sirocco*. You have no legal right to stop us,' he snarled into the mike. 'You've already searched the ship. We were cleared in Villefranche. You people think you can get away with anything. I'm not stopping. You'll have to justify any further action in court. Over.'

*Sirocco's* reply was swift and eloquent. Several dozen bullets roiled the water a metre from *Destin's* bow as the mike crackled.

'Heave to immediately or your steering gear will be destroyed. You have five seconds. Over.' The voice was blunt and final.

'Thirty fucking seconds,' muttered Corsay savagely. He hesitated for another moment then gave the order.

Inspector Michel Braun, Director of Customs in Marseilles, displayed a depressing lack of indecision the following morning. *Destin* was docked at the Customs quay, near the fort of Saint Jean. Gulls wheeled overhead, watching Braun's men rummaging through the ship with tools and probes. Four hours later, having found nothing, they were about to leave. The team leader paused at the hatch and looked at the thick ribbon of concrete above the keel. Braun and Corsay watched as he squatted down and examined it.

‘I’ve never seen ballast that far forward on a ship of this type. Make her a bit sluggish at the helm wouldn’t it?’

‘It was a variation in the design when the conversions were done,’ replied Corsay. ‘The Atlantic rigging changes the regular characteristics. She responds like a forty year-old hooker - does anything you ask.’

Neither of the other two smiled.

Within thirty minutes the first watertight package was eased from a section of smashed ballast. Finally there were eighty-five plastic-coated packages stacked alongside the rubble. They totalled four hundred and twenty five kilos, enough to supply the entire American market for a month.

Braun controlled his satisfaction in front of his men, squatted down next to one of the packets torn by a jagged edge of concrete. He noted the purity of its whiteness, wetted his finger, touched the heroin and tasted it. Its quality suggested a single name.

‘Borsali,’ he muttered, ‘bet my pension on it.’

# 1

A few days later a man sat alone in the Café Mahieu. On the other side of the Boulevard Saint-Michel the pampered legacy of the Medici ego lay rejuvenating in the rain - serried ranks of cosseted shrubs on immaculate lawns; a permanent guard of honour for that select few for whom the paths of glory had led to a pedestal in a park. The Luxembourg Gardens had long been closed for the evening. Above the canopy of haze cast by the streetlights the stars were hidden by a blanket of black cloud. Gusting rain formed silver patterns in the headlights of cars hissing over the wet asphalt.

From the warmth of the Mahieu's glass-walled *terrasse* it made a pleasant spectacle for anyone inclined to introspection. The man at the window table was of a different temperament. He looked at his watch, totalled the slips beneath his saucer, dropped the money on the table and picked his long leather coat off the chair. The waiter drifted to an adjacent table and dabbed its surface with a cloth. The amount was correct to the nearest franc, and the normal tip. He understood the man had no wish to be remembered, no particular intention of returning. He nodded indifferently and murmured '*Au revoir monsieur*' as the man stepped into the street.

The man turned into the rue St. Jacques and followed the route of the pilgrims, hundreds of years before, trekking to the tomb of St. Jacques de Compostelle in Spain. At the military hospital of Val-de-Grâce he tensed at a movement in a doorway - a couple of damp teenagers entwined in passion. Past the Cochin Hospital he paused under an awning and took out a small radio transceiver.

'OK? Two minutes. Over and out.'

Now at Boulevard Arago, checking his watch, striding towards the rue de la Santé where the main gates of the prison faced a café named '*A la Bonne Santé*', a pun on the toast 'To your good health' - the last thing prisoners saw as they began their sentences, the first which greeted their release.

He moved more rapidly now, visibly bothered by the rain, passing the rue Messier where the external guards were drinking thermos coffee and playing cards in barely-heated buses. He brushed the rain from his face, casting a quick glance behind, now within metres of portable steel railing jutting onto the pavement around a tiny sentry cubicle. Inside, the guard sat huddled in oilskins, cradling a submachine gun. He was hardly surprised when the pedestrian's hand bumped the railing, causing him to drop the briefcase with an audible '*merde*'. As much as he was interested in anything other than contemplation of his supper on such a foul night he wondered vaguely that the fellow could see anything with his hat pulled down so far.

The man retrieved it from the pavement, balanced it on the railing, fumbled with the clasp, checking it was still secure, stooped to inspect it. The guard knew nothing about the more bizarre forms of firearms, which cost him his life. The man at the railing sighted along the top of the case and shot him in the chest, close to the heart, a safe shot at short range. The shock of a 9mm dum dum would have knocked the guard senseless wherever it hit. It slammed him against the rear of the sentry box, then the body slumped sideways as though resting.

The shot made no more sound than a popping champagne cork, even that muffled by the rain. A car passed several metres away but the unbroken rhythm of the engine told him the driver had seen nothing unusual. The killer advanced a few paces along the pavement as a rope tumbled from the top of the wall and held it taut as a man appeared above and began descending, hand over hand, fast.

The escapee was still in midair when an umbrella appeared around the corner and turned into the boulevard toward them, inclined to ward off the windblown rain, restricting vision to six or eight paces ahead.

On the pavement both men paused to regard the advancing umbrella, now only metres away. It tilted upward to give the bearer a glimpse ahead; a woman's face, long hair tucked into a raincoat collar, a hint of prettiness. She stopped in shock as the killer drew a pistol and began to level it. The escapee lunged at his companion,

slapped his arm down and shoved him toward a Citroen at the kerbside that had been parked there an hour earlier.

‘Drop it, she’s harmless.’

He paused for a moment and, incredibly, smiled. She still held the umbrella, although her handbag had slipped from nerveless fingers onto the pavement.

‘Sorry if we frightened you *ma belle*. My friend here lost his head for a moment. *Au revoir*.’ He strode to the Citroen and turned to wave at her. Then they were gone.

René Malbec wound down his window and looked back. The prison alarms were silent; no whistles, blaring sirens. No shots. No shouting from the startled residents of the fourteenth arrondissement. Nothing. It seemed unreal he could finally get out of the hellhole without raising even a ripple on the surface of the city.

He laughed then - a deep bellow of relief and triumph that began in his belly, rose deliciously through his chest and erupted as a roar of pleasure. The magic was still with him, the legend enlarged. The price had been more than two years in prison; every day an unrelenting battle against despair. Now he had won again, and there was nothing he could conceive as tasting so sweet.

Oblivious to the rain, intoxicated by freedom, his eyes probed the shopfronts hungrily, memory savouring their contents; whisky, cigars, women’s perfume, clothes that were more than just basic clothing - the mundane rendered tantalising by deprivation.

‘Pontcharadin.’ - a neon invitation to the good life. Malbec laughed again. His own had been a Mouton-Rothschild. The memory was vivid:

‘Congratulations gentlemen. At least your timing was civilised. Danielle’s just finished wishing me a bon voyage.’

The officers of the *Brigade Criminelle* were grim men, nerves tautened by Malbec’s reputation; acutely aware that any mistake could cost someone’s life, but they smiled thinly as Danielle blushed behind the sheet pulled to her chin.

‘Well played Basile. Your coup deserves a toast. There’s excellent champagne on ice in the kitchen. A shame to waste it?’

Commissaire Basile Dubois agreed. ‘Savour the taste René. It’ll be a long time before your next bottle.’

‘While there’s life there’s hope my friend.’ He raised his glass. ‘*Joyeux Noelle messieurs. A la Liberté.*’ - Merry Christmas fellas. To Freedom.

They drank, smiling at his insolence, more relaxed now that his hands were manacled. It was the day before Christmas, 1970.

‘There’s some ointment for your hands in the glovebox.’

Malbec surfaced from the memory and looked down. His hands were raw, bleeding. He had come down the rope too fast. Hadn’t noticed the pain until now.

He grinned. ‘Shit, we’ve got some fuckin’ genius here who thinks of everything. Ointment for Christ’s sake! This is scary.’

The driver didn’t react.

He smeared the salve on his palms and fingers. The rain was easing and the driver flicked the wipers to half speed. They turned into Avenue de Villars and passed the enshrined relics of Napoleon in *Les Invalides*, the burial site of France’s war heroes.

‘Why’d you want to waste the woman?’

The driver shrugged. ‘Too close. Might identify me someday.’

Malbec wound up the window and wiped his face on the back of his sleeve.

‘Bad move my friend. A dark night, rain, stark terror. By now her imagination’s built you into a giant with the face of a gorilla. Civilians only remember the gun when it happens fast. The cops know that. The ID parades are just bullshit for the jury.’

The driver slowed for a traffic light without replying.

‘Start taking out innocent citizens and it gives the cops carte blanche. Mad dogs don’t have civil rights. Killing you saves them a lot of paperwork too.’

‘I’ll keep it in mind,’ said the driver. Two years in maximum and I guess I’d run off at the mouth as well, he thought.

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Malbec caught the intonation and smiled.

‘Whadya use on the guard?’

‘A Welrod.’ He nodded towards the rear.

Malbec pulled the case onto his lap. A seam was cut open to allow access to the trigger. The gun was clipped to the flap below the handle. He examined the tube-like contraption and its silencer.

‘The English gave ‘em to the Resistance to knock off Nazis,’ said the driver. He eased into the kerb, switched off the lights and reached for an overcoat on the back seat.

‘Your people are waiting at the Place de Finlande. Green Mercedes.’

Malbec donned the coat and shook the driver’s hand.

‘Thanks. Hope I can return the favour some day. *Salut.*’

He walked away, collar turned up against the rain, hands in the pockets of the coat. At the corner the Mercedes faced him with its engine idling. The driver’s dark-tinted window slid open.

‘Welcome aboard monsieur Malbec.’

Renzio Vitelli introduced himself as Raoul Degueldre. He was swarthy, heavysset, professionally impassive. Malbec guessed Corsican, although his accent was Parisian. The Mercedes swung into the traffic. Degueldre took a transceiver from the dashboard.

‘Okay, contact made. Thanks.’ He retracted the aerial and pushed the transceiver into the door pouch.

‘Nice clean operation,’ said Malbec.

‘The difference between amateurs and pros - planning. You did the right thing leaving the woman alive. There's gonna to be enough heat without a dead civilian.’

‘How’d yuh know?’

‘Our friend left his radio on transmit.’

Malbec grinned. ‘Got a cigarette?’ His Gitanes were prison issue. All that shit was behind him now. The driver gave him a pack of Lucky Strike.

On the Champs-Élysées they moved sedately past the most expensive real estate in France, turned into a side street and dipped

down a ramp beneath a block of apartments. The garage door dropped softly into place behind them.

They parked and entered a private lift. It rose only five storeys but the ascent elevated an unknowing René Malbec from the realms of crime to the far murkier killing fields of politics.

Colonel Georges Bernier, head of security for the *Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage*, the SDECE, France's equivalent to America's CIA, parked his Citroen. All the way from his home in suburban Lesigny there had been but a single topic on every radio station, the escape from prison the previous night of Public Enemy Number One, René Malbec. One of the reporters had collared a reluctant Commissaire Basile Dubois, the man who had arrested Malbec two years earlier:

‘Malbec differs from other criminals in one respect only, his ego is larger. He’s a glory-hunter. Criminals are small men with big egos. In Malbec’s case this factor is pathological. He needs to laugh at his adversaries, demonstrate his superiority, that’s why he always identifies himself. He sees himself as the rogue cavalier, but if anything threatens that illusion he’s capable of anything’

Bernier locked his car. He was an unremarkable man, late fifties or early sixties, average height and build, bland clothes, no visible characteristics other than a straight-backed posture that suggested, perhaps, a military background. His face accurately reflected a kindly, vaguely worried appearance. One of the world’s ‘grey’ men. Only a close study of his eyes indicated that there may be something more.

In the foyer of the former barracks on the Boulevard Mortier occupied by the SDECE two Service Six men were waiting for the lift. Like half the commuters in France they were discussing Malbec’s escape. Six controlled the reservists network.

Bernier said casually that Malbec could have made a useful ‘contact’ in other circumstances. ‘Big egos are our stock in trade.’

‘You’re not the first to have that idea Georges. We actually used him in ’63. He was a lot less famous then.’

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‘Really? Anything interesting?’

‘Yeah, just before the Brits granted independence to Malta. Foreign Affairs was interested in the negotiations. The naval base I suppose. Someone came up with the combination of the Governor’s safe and Malbec got in with a transmitter, found whatever they were looking for and sent it before he was caught.’

The lift arrived. Several metres away a clerk from the payroll section hurried toward the opening. Bernier pressed the ‘close’ button.

‘What happened?’

‘Governor’s security arrived. He just had time to get rid of the transmitter. Somehow he persuaded them he was working for one of our services - pure bluff - we were running him through a cutout. For him it was just another burglary. Since he was apparently a member of the club they put him under friendly house arrest while they checked him out.’

Bernier nodded. Whenever allies caught each other’s agents they were interrogated for a while, on the offchance, then deported for the sake of future goodwill, as long as the agent hadn’t killed anyone, or discovered any State secrets.

‘It was loose surveillance with a junior officer who was busy seducing his own girl. They went to the local nightspots and he met the Governor’s daughter. No one warned her off. He was just a mysterious, charming Frenchman. By the time they woke up she had to be dragged out of his bed. The Governor’s security were rather embarrassed so they decided Malbec must be one of us and sent him packing on condition he kept his mouth shut.’

‘Was his story verified?’

‘As much as it could be, but with Malbec nothing’s ever clear-cut. He’s an Olympic bullshit artist.’

They dispersed to their offices. Bernier called for coffee and braced himself for the day. The mass of reports from SDECE offices throughout the world meant it was 6.30 pm before he worked his way down to the report on Renzio Vitelli.

It came from Alain Boitel, the SDECE’s attaché at the Paris headquarters of the Police Judiciaire, and outlined a request from the

Australian Commonwealth Police for details on a man detected entering that country on a false French passport.

The description and photograph identified Renzio Vitelli - owner of a bar in Pigalle, an area of Paris noted mainly for artists and brothels – no recorded charges or convictions. An apparently model citizen. That information was dispatched to the Australians, one of a thousand routine exchanges daily between international police forces.

Boitel's job was to monitor police operations that could relate to the SDECE's own activities. He had recognised Vitelli as an *honorable correspondent* - a 'contact' within a vast network of people cultivated, or paid, for their abilities in every conceivable field: doctors, student leaders, diplomats; pilots willing to overfly secret installations; police able to modify or extract files; journalists prepared to use their professional cover for covert purposes, and criminals, for things that no one else could, or would do. It was run by Service Six.

Officially Renzio Vitelli had no police record. His real-life dossier was held in a confidential section that recorded people with links to the State's security apparatus whose activities had brought them to the attention of the police. The SDECE had argued for years that all records on its personnel should remain in its own archives, to ensure security. Successive presidents had decreed otherwise. Too many agents had committed crimes for the SDECE to become the sole repository of such records.

President Charles De Gaulle regarded his secret service as a pain in the national arse, whose contribution barely outweighed the problems they caused. Former President Vincent Auriol had described its predecessor, the BCRA, as an '*aerie des cagouards*' – a highly placed nest of thugs. De Gaulle agreed.

Bernier knew it would take years of diligence before the French Government trusted its own spy catchers. When the file arrived he scanned it rapidly, noting the usual litany of shady deals and minor action postings in the old Gaullist enforcement and fundraising organisations. He rang the head of Service Six and was assured that the file was up-to-date; Vitelli had not been engaged for several

months since organising a clandestine shipment of spare parts for Mirage fighters to the Middle East. He rang Boitel.

‘Keep your eye on this but make sure the PJ doesn’t register your interest in Vitelli. The boss is sensitive about the network after the Delouette mess. We don’t want anyone using this to score a cheap point off us.’

‘Understood,’ said Boitel.

‘Anything on that passport?’

‘A straightforward underworld job - Antoine Leveque - one of the best. The *Brigade Criminelle* held him in isolation for prolonged interrogation, to pick up his customers before they ditched their passports.’

Bernier considered pulling Vitelli in and letting him rot in special detention until he explained his activities. But he would have a fallback. The SDECE did not engage amateurs for the jobs people like him were used for. His cover story would check out without involving anyone of importance and that would be that; a rap on the knuckles over the passport and his associates would be alerted, then Bernier would lose his present window into whatever was happening.

He told his deputy, Paul Leclerc, to put Vitelli under surveillance. He was probably just engaged in some nefarious free enterprise and could be warned off after his contacts were established.

This, however, was not going to be easy. The watchers had lost him twice; once in the rabbit warren of the Latin Quarter where he vanished in the maze of alleys, and later in the labyrinthine metro station at Montparnasse during peak hour where a watcher would have to virtually cling to his coat tails to stay with him. Neither officer had the impression Vitelli had purposely eluded them.

But that was the point, mused Bernier. Show how clever you are and it’s an admission of guilt, which makes it harder for you next time. If the opposition were not sure you were onto them it left them with the problem he now faced - low-grade surveillance, or the high cost of close scrutiny?

He postponed the decision and told Boitel to quietly pull the police file on Vitelli’s activities in Australia. He sighed with fatigue and

looked at his watch, 7.15pm. His wife would be annoyed at yet another ruined dinner. He packed a couple of urgent matters into his briefcase and left the office. Outside the metro he noticed a billboard for the latest edition of *France Soir*: 'Monsieur Leo Arrested'

In 1874 a British scientist chemically bonded morphine with acetic acid and produced diacetylmorphine. It was mass-produced under the trade name 'heroin' by the German Bayer company, from 1898, as a treatment for infant respiratory ailments.

Morphine derives from the unripened seedpods of the opium poppy, *papaver somniferum*, which grows prolifically in the arc of mountains from Turkey and northern India to Thailand. After the poppies bloom the petals fall away from an egg-shaped seedpod, sliced by the peasant farmers who later scrape away the congealed opium sap. This is sold to dealers who heat it in water with lime to precipitate out the morphine and codeine that weigh 10% of the raw opium. Filtration and ammonium chloride produce a light brown crystalline powder - base morphine.

Conversion to heroin is a sophisticated process requiring knowledge of chemistry. While it can be produced by anyone with sufficient training the best quality requires a special aptitude. Leon Borsali, born at Ajaccio, Corsica, in 1917, was a bashful, antisocial individual with nothing in his youthful demeanour to augur his later celebrity as 'Monsieur Leo,' the most talented of the heroin chemists at the heart of the famous 'French Connection.'

While most were satisfied with a daily production of ten to twelve kilos, between 70-80% purity, Borsali achieved up to seventeen kilos a day, attaining a purity of 96%, referred to by addicts and dealers as 'French champagne.' Its quality became a standard of reference for narcotics officials worldwide. The Corsican milieu paid well for his talents and ten years later the former shop assistant owned properties spread over hundreds of hectares.

In 1964, police caught him supervising a full-scale laboratory. He emerged from Baumettes prison in 1970, a ruined man, his health impaired by years of inhaling acid. But he had kept his mouth shut.

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His suppliers and customers had remained his own affair. This was a considerable credit in the ledger of a man seeking to re-establish his fortunes.

After several months convalescence he re-appeared in an attractive villa overlooking the coast near Marseilles. For eighteen months Borsali's affairs prospered, allowing him to indulge his taste for fine wine and expensive furniture. On March sixteen, 1972, the Marseilles narcotics squad invaded his privacy yet again and discovered a hundred and twenty kilos of highest-grade heroin in a sophisticated laboratory on the property.

As he was taken, pale and emaciated, back to Baumettes, 'Monsieur Leo' knew the game was finally over. Aged fifty-nine, in poor health, he faced a certain twenty-year sentence. Whether it also occurred to him that his arrest signalled the end of an era, and the demise of the 'French Connection' is doubtful, as was his awareness of being simply a pawn in a much larger game.

Several days later, Leon Borsali, tore up his bed sheets in Baumettes prison and hanged himself.

The decor lived up to expectations of an apartment on the Champs Elysées - crafted furniture, Aubusson tapestries juxtaposed with original canvasses of minor Impressionists, displayed by individual lighting.

Its owner, a mandarin in the Diplomatic Corps, on an indefinite posting to New York, had no need to lease the flat. He had other reasons. French Intelligence agencies sometimes needed accommodation for dignitaries visiting France incognito, on missions necessitating total privacy. The owner was flattered to be approached.

The SDECE's representative was an amiable man in an expensive suit. Daniel Ricard admired the gilt-framed Caillebotte in the lounge, commented intelligently on Signac and Bazille. They discussed painting for a while. Ricard supplied references from others who had entered similar agreements, asking only that the owner's enquiries be restricted to the proprietors. These leasings, while routine, were State Security, and only conducted with people like himself; discreet, connected to the organisations that underpinned the country. Subsequent assurances from a prominent merchant banker, and a high profile stockbroker satisfied the owner.

When he called Ricard with his acceptance his secretary regretted he was out of the office. Ricard rang back later and arrangements for the lease were subsequently sealed over an excellent cognac. The owner was due to leave the following Thursday, content that his property would not only be secure, but he had a contact within France's major intelligence agency.

Such was the provenance of the apartment, whose present occupant was stretched out on a cream suede sofa in front of the television. On the screen a young singer, Sylvie Vartan, shuddered with passion as she delivered the final notes before dissolving into a station break for Channel Two that was replaced by the main newscast for the day.

‘Police throughout the country have been drafted into the search for René Malbec since his escape from La Santé prison two days ago.’ Behind the announcer the exterior of the prison faded and the camera cut to a photograph of the escapee, tall, dark, the sardonic smile of a man who had made irrevocable choices and was prepared to live with them.

‘Sightings of the fugitive have been reported at the border town of Hendaye, Calais, as well as Versailles, Nantes, Rheims and Madrid.’

On the sofa, the man whose photograph was being circulated throughout Europe grinned. They’d be seeing him in Moscow, Tibet and Timbuktu within a few days.

‘The search for René Malbec is being led by Commissaire Basile Dubois, who arrested him after a long investigation involving the tracking of his accomplices.’

‘You got lucky, you cunt, won’t happen again’ grunted Malbec as the scene changed to an obviously weary Dubois besieged outside the *Palais de Justice* by a horde of journalists.

‘Commissaire, how is it possible that a man who has already escaped three times from custody in both France and America has been allowed to do so yet again?’

‘Your choice of words is a bit careless,’ snapped Dubois. ‘He was not *allowed* to escape - he obviously had help, both inside and outside the prison. A man inside a cell cannot draw a bolt on the opposite side of the door.’

‘But surely that’s the point Commissaire. If Malbec had help inside the prison doesn’t that indicate that security procedures at La Santé are dangerously lax?’

‘This is the first time anyone has crossed the walls at La Santé for a hundred years. Can you name me another prison with that record?’

The journalist tried again. ‘Does that mean Commissaire that, despite the indication of collusion within the prison service, you regard security measures there as adequate?’

Dubois, who had slept for only six hours since being awakened at three in the morning two days earlier, restrained himself with an effort visible to several million viewers.

‘It simply means, *monsieur*, that I refuse to draw conclusions until I’ve examined all the evidence. It’s a mental discipline some members of the press could consider if they want to be regarded as professionals.’

Malbec raised his whisky in tribute. ‘Bravo, Dubois. Still as tough as old nails, you bastard.’

A microphone was thrust forward and a television reporter took up the refrain.

‘Is it true Commissaire that when you arrested Malbec you drank a toast to his freedom?’

Dubois managed a tired smile. ‘We shared a drink. He made the toast.’

Malbec lounged back and crossed his legs, smiling broadly. Dubois stonewalled the journalists until the camera switched back to the announcer. Viewers were reminded that the only other escape in the prison’s history was in 1963, when Lieutenant Alain Bougrenet de la Tocnaye, convicted of the attempted assassination of General de Gaulle at Petit Clamart, left through the front gate, with forged release documents.

Finally, the bulletin moved to other subjects. He was switching channels when the door was rapped, timed knocks. The code was repeated before he opened. Vitelli wore thin cotton gloves that he retained during his visit. He carried two suitcases.

One contained an assortment of the potions and powders of a makeup artist, expensive wigs, beards and various spectacles.

‘Do you really need all that crap?’ grunted Vitelli. ‘Can’t you just grow a beard, dye your hair?’

‘To each his own methods Renzio. Do I lecture you on the benefits of being charming to attractive women?’

‘Like what? You gotta ring ‘em every day and they cost a fuckin fortune for presents and meals.’

‘You ignore the payoff my friend – the pleasure, the refuge when things get tough. What else you gonna do with your money? Never seen a bankroll yet that I wanted to fuck.’

‘They bleed you dry - spend your dough as fast as you make it.’

*The Webspinner*

‘OK, so stare at your assets statement and play with yourself. I prefer to play with real women.’

The second case held photographic gear and a canvas sack containing a pair of Smith and Wesson .38 revolvers with shoulder and belt holsters. Malbec hefted both guns with satisfaction. Vitelli said nothing - makeup was for queers, actors and politicians, but an affinity for guns he could understand.

Malbec took the makeup into the bathroom. When he emerged even Vitelli was impressed. The brown hair was dyed black and parted in the centre. His eyebrows and lashes matched the new colour and his stubble concealed behind a full beard and moustache. A pair of glasses with thick black rims completed the transformation.

‘This’ll do for passport shots.’

‘Not bad,’ conceded Vitelli reluctantly. ‘You could apply for a job with the cops in that getup.’

Malbec grinned, happy as a kid at a fancy dress party thought Vitelli.

They worked with the lights and cameras until satisfied they had what they needed. Vitelli pocketed the film and prepared to leave.

‘Any particular names you want on the passports?’

‘Pick ‘em from the phone book,’ replied Malbec. He was playing with one of the revolvers, rotating his wrist with his arm extended in the firing position, testing the trigger tension.

‘No, hang on.’ He smiled. ‘Make one out in the name of Ramier - Henri Ramier. It’s a private joke.’

When the Australian Commonwealth Police file arrived on his desk Colonel Bernier was pleased to note that they were co-operating. As in Paris, Vitelli had obviously taken precautions since the watchers there also lost him several times. On one occasion he was retraced at Sydney airport disembarking off a flight from Perth. Bernier suspected the report contained little more than a listing of the occasions that Vitelli had exercised his training in evasion techniques. Then he struck paydirt. The Corsican’s precautions must have been purely routine.

He re-read the entry then rang Leclerc. ‘Check if we have anything on an Australian mercenary named Benson Croffman, then check with everybody else, especially Military Intelligence.’ He spelled out Croffman’s name to ensure Leclerc got the English spelling right and added a few details that might help the archivists.

The taut white bikini complemented her tan. She emerged from the sea with the casual self-awareness of every physically attractive woman. The waves curled in to the shore and bubbled into glittering fragments. An iridescent sun silvered the droplets on her firm flesh. A group of lifeguards eyed her and flexed their muscles as they carted their lifeboat to the water.

‘Wish that big bugger with her would piss off and give a bloke a chance,’ said one as they splashed through the surf and heaved the boat over the top of a wave.

Patrick Guinane was dozing on the sand, his head on his forearms. She twisted her mass of black hair and wrung it above his back. He twitched as the water lanced his baking skin.

‘You’re taking a risk woman. Not responsible for my actions when I’m aroused.’

‘You looked like nothing could ever arouse you.’ She flopped onto a giant towel and reached for sunglasses.

‘What type of arousal we discussing here?’ muttered Guinane.

‘Try intellectual for starters and we’ll see where that takes us.’

He rolled over heavily onto an elbow and blinked.

‘The mind works best when the body’s at rest, *Mens sana in corpore sano.*’

‘Latin, for God’s sake. You’ve obviously got no future as a cop – you’ll be tagged as either sexually suspect or a prize prick.’

‘I keep my deeper side hidden at work. Just do the job, one of the boys, only talk about footy and the races, and the lowlifes we send to prison’

‘So I get the real Patrick. Your mates just get the facade?’

*The Webspinner*

Guinane had never been sure of the dividing line between façade and reality. Not the right time to explore it. He laughed and stood up. 'I surrender, going to work up an appetite.'

'First arousal, now appetite. You detect a common thread here, detective?'

He grinned. Keep it simple while the vibes look positive. He walked to the water's edge. Tall, tanned and powerful, a stubborn chin and short, straw-coloured hair. Too solid for the feline grace of the natural athlete, but as close as training would allow. But it was no healthy competitive spirit that had honed his physique.

Teenage Patrick - dogged by bouts of crippling boredom; wrecked two cars seeking release in speed; joined the police for the buzz with the fuzz; later tried alcohol. On a patrol a dickhead took him down with a lucky punch that sobered him up permanently - violated his pride. A night of black desperation; he charged out of his flat, ran through the streets like an animal, forcing himself past his natural limits, faster and longer. Somewhere, beyond reason, an imp of the perverse found satisfaction. He collapsed in an alley, vomiting, somehow purged. He began attending the police gym regularly.

The boredom was burned out by the heat of exertion, but it took rigid willpower. He pushed his body to its limit as a form of revenge. At a lower level, an arrogant pride in physical accomplishment beyond the capacity of most men.

He lunged forward and dived over a breaking wave. The cool water shock on hot skin released a bubble of energy. He raced straight out, fast, slashing the water. While the pleasure was still there he turned and swam back, not wanting to reach the point where it became an effort. Part of him was as sick of effort as the other part needed it.

Above the beach, Tamarama cove, around the point from Bondi, his own flat was part of a rectangular monolith whose main attraction was the magnificent view. Two massive panes of sliding glass admitted the soft tang of ocean, the rustle of waves on sand. Ten days

earlier he had taken it at the start of an overdue holiday, coinciding with his transfer back to Sydney. He considered a trip to the Barrier Reef but finally bought a decent stereo and settled for the beach on his back door.

The air was losing its shimmer, the lifeguards pushing their craft into the boathouse. Guinane watched the sun lovers trickling homewards, and tried not to notice those who left their rubbish behind.

His companion was dozing; an uncomplicated arts graduate who did something creative in a television studio. She was tall. Her ripe brown length against the white towel tempted him to lick the flecks of dried salt speckling her skin, but they had not reached that stage yet. An undefined 'friend' lurked in the glens of her conversation. He yawned ostentatiously.

'Feel like a drink, or two?'

She stretched and refastened the bikini strap before rolling over.

'I'm feeling expensive. Beer never does much for me.'

*'Paris vaut bien une messe.'*

'Is this your normal pitch, or are you working hard here? First Latin, now French. The accent's atrocious but I'll bite. What's that mean?'

'In the sixteenth century the Protestant king of Navarre was offered the throne of France on condition he converted to Catholicism. He said Paris was worth attending Mass for.'

She thought about it then laughed. 'I'm not making any offers, I just fancy champagne, and not some carbonated lollywater.'

Guinane figured that champagne was for launching new ventures, perhaps for despatching absent 'friends.' She adjusted the bikini around her heavy breasts and looked at the sea, an amused glint reflecting primal intuition. He was under no illusions about controlling this game.

'What did you have in mind?'

'French. You reminded me. Veuve Cliquot or a relative,' she replied, collecting her things.

'What do you drink on your birthday?'

‘Depends who I’m with. Sometimes water’s enough.’

Checkmate.

They tramped across the sand to the pathway that climbed to his building. Another couple were descending, latecomers grabbing a last minute dip. The woman, a trim blonde in a loose cotton shift, hesitated for a second when she saw Guinane.

‘Hello Pat, ... back in Sydney?’

Helen Wyman. His heart thumped. Memory picked him up, swirled him around like a killer wave, and dumped him two years in the past. For an instant her shock was mirrored in Guinane’s face. They struggled through mutual introductions. He registered a Ben Croffman with her.

‘Didn’t Harry tell you I’ve been transferred?’ He was the last thing her father would mention to her. His shopping list would have ranked higher. ‘They’re understaffed here. I was thrown in to plug a gap.’

Two gulls circled overhead, swooped toward them in a strafing trajectory, then peeled away. A whole sky to play in, just the present, no past to ruin it.

Croffman was well-built, self-reliant face, solid voice, masculine. A bubble of antipathy rose in Guinane’s gorge. He forced a smile, floundering, asked Croffman, his own line of business, gauche, but the best he could do right then.

Croffman returned the smile, but the dark eyes were distant, probably irritated at the delay when there was so little sunshine left.

‘Import and export, a glorified shopkeeper. Buy it in one place, sell it somewhere else. Nothing very interesting.’

‘I wish my job took me to boring places like Italy,’ said Helen, fidgeting with her bag, looking anywhere but at Guinane. A breeze tugged at Croffman’s unbuttoned shirt, revealing an old scar, across a tight abdomen.

What to say? How to end this? Guinane could never remember the rest of the dialogue. Something about Croffman importing perfume from Italy. They struggled through the necessary social banalities and finally escaped from each other.

In the flat he made whisky sours, showed her the bathroom, and drifted unconsciously to the window. The people on the beach were too far away to distinguish Croffman and Helen Wyman.

The ice in her glass tinkled eloquently. 'Great view you've got.'

The past and the present. Conflicting emotions and conflicting circumstances. Different times, different people. Impossible to resolve in half an hour. Sometimes these things take a lifetime to sort out.

'It's an old story. Nothing very original but we both got hurt.'

'How old?'

'Two years.'

'Regrets?'

'Looks like it, or I'd have handled that meeting better. It's complicated - messy and complicated.'

'Is it history, or are you still carrying the torch?'

'It's over. A jolt from the past. Never expected to see her again.'

'Good time to get the champagne. Two bottles. Some regrets need a good soaking.'

He grabbed his car keys. When he got back she was still in the bathroom. He'd never figured out what women do in bathrooms that took so long. He put the Chandon in the freezer. The beach was deserted except for a couple of kids clambering on the rocks.

'Are we on the same wavelength?' She was wrapped in a towel.

'I was waiting for you to finish.'

'Start pouring. If you look at that beach again I'm out of here.'

He uncorked the champagne, filled their glasses. 'Here's to absent friends.'

'Stop being clever. You'll ruin it. Let's just go to bed, or wherever, and see where that takes us.'

The towel dropped to the floor and he forgot all about the beach.

Guinane woke late, unwilling to face the day. The girl had left earlier, after a final session from which he slid back into indulgent dozing - images of tanned flesh, full breasts, mutual desire - a healthy, happy, desirable woman.

*The Webspinner*

But something was lurking in the depths, detectable only to an instinct reluctant to investigate it.

He lingered over breakfast with poor appetite, which didn't make sense given his strenuous pleasures of the previous night. He flipped through the *Sydney Morning Herald*, tinkered with his car, ate a light lunch and eventually drove over to the gym. He pushed his reluctant body through a series of exercises but the juices refused to flow. After chatting to a couple of acquaintances he declined their invitation for a beer and went to a cinema. 'Gone With The Wind' was back on one of its perennial re-runs. A good film, but watching it alone was a woeful way for a grown man to spend a summer afternoon he thought morosely.

When he left the cinema the darkening city was bracing itself for the night's diversions. Neon splashed its subliminal glamour over people seeking pleasure; restaurants filling with chattering groups, nightspots beckoning revellers, some with partners, others searching.

Guinane returned to his flat ill at ease, irritable, unable to pin down the cause. Several telephone numbers offered diversion, not least his companion from the previous evening, but loneliness is less a thwarted desire for company than inability to share a state of mind; even more acute if the underlying thoughts are incoherent.

He poured a beer that slowly went flat on the windowsill. Phosphorescent whitecaps pounded the beach below. Two years now since Helen arrived unexpectedly at his flat. The morning after Frank Elliot's death – not only a fellow officer, but also his best mate, who might still be alive had Guinane been more cautious that night.

Two years - and two episodes of searing pain within only ten hours of each other. A man had to move on, bury the memories in order to function, but Christ it still hurt. Love and death still gnawed at him - twin cancers, linked, but attacking from different directions.

Helen had her own key. The only reason they were not living together was Harry. She was his only child, Guinane his subordinate officer.

She found a girl in Guinane's dressing gown pouring tea. He was on the couch in a towel, blinking his way back to reality. The shock in

her face was etched into his memory forever. She left immediately, without a word, closing the door gently, as one would lower the lid of a coffin. The soft click of the lock still resonated.

He rang every day. Once she replied but hung up immediately. His letter came back unopened. He tried to talk to Harry but his face was closed and he was always too busy. A couple of weeks later Guinane requested a transfer to Canberra - approved with unusual speed. Facing each other in the office had become unbearable for both men.

He looked at the dark valley of beach flanked by streetlights and wondered if she went there often, whether she would ever go again. His mind played back the encounter with the clarity of a film; the blonde hair teased by the wind, the outline of the lithe figure through the cotton shift, the soft femininity of her eyes and the crease of tension between her eyebrows. And, unbidden; the scar on Croffman's abdomen, his controlled demeanour, a masculinity that had rankled. He ran the images back and forth as realisation, curiosity and an inner ache congealed into a decision. The past was beyond his power to change, but the torch was still flickering. It had nothing to do with blonde hair or blue eyes. It was the woman herself. Pure personal chemistry.

Twenty four hours later a phone rang on a nondescript public service desk in Canberra. Steven Yeldham lifted the receiver. Andrew Davis, Commissioner of the Commonwealth Police, was on the line.

'Steven?' No one ever addressed Yeldham as Steve, 'how're you doing? The bureaucrats given you some aircon yet? '

Yeldham smiled thinly. The national capital was sweltering through a heat wave, mid thirties for days. Inside the ramshackle fibro-cement buildings housing the Australian Narcotics Bureau the difference in temperature was negligible. The Director of the fledgling service was a patient man with his own ambitions. If he envied the air-conditioning enjoyed by Davis a few blocks away he was not about to admit it.

'Guess it is a bit warm, been too busy to notice. How're things with you Andrew?' Yeldham never used diminutives.

Davis grinned at the stiff response he had expected. Yeldham was ostensibly the quintessential bureaucrat; cautious, meticulous, conservative in manner and dress, a stickler for regulations. Yet there were inconsistencies in those dinner party epigrams that sought to pigeonhole him for quick comparison with his peers. There was an element of unpredictability no one had ever quite defined - no single act or utterance to justify it, just something people felt, and only then after several months acquaintance. Davis respected the intelligence and determination of the man who was in the process of building a national narcotics agency from the ground up.

‘We’re keeping the bloody Minister off our backs; you know how it is - like history, one damned thing after another. Got a few minutes?’

‘Of course, what can I do for you?’

‘Ever heard of Renzio Vitelli?’

Yeldham frowned. ‘Can’t say I have. Is he one of ours?’

‘Ours at the moment, but there’s a drugs possibility so we’ve sent the usual notification to Harry Wyman. This Vitelli flew into Sydney on a forged French passport a couple of weeks ago. The French say it came from one of the best forgers in the country, someone who only deals with pros. They asked us to let him roam and see where it led.’

‘As long as they’re onto him I guess it could be useful to have a future favour to call in. What do you know about him?’

‘Runs a bar in Paris, forty eight years old and bugger all else. That’s what’s interesting. He doesn’t have a police file, and this is a country that keeps files on jaywalkers. If he’s a cleanskin what’s he doing with a pro passport?’

Yeldham tapped his pen against his chin. ‘Organised crime or government agency,’ he mused aloud.

‘They’re the only people who can get their files wiped’

‘What was he doing here?’

‘Too early to say but there’s a couple of developments. He slipped the leash a few times but we saw him meet a bloke called Benson Croffman, a Vietnam vet who’s apparently resting between engagements as a mercenary.’

‘The meeting was coincidence or they knew each other?’

‘It was certainly arranged but our man had the impression they hadn’t met before.’

Davis described the surveillance. Yeldham listened, occasionally jotting a key word. Davis paused. Yeldham noted the change of tone.

‘This is all in the file we sent to your people. There’s one thing though I left out.’

Yeldham’s pen came to rest, but poised, ready to strike.

‘What’s that?’

‘A few days after he met Vitelli this feller Croffman moved into a block of flats in Randwick. The thing is Steven that Helen Wyman lives in the same block, and lately he’s been seeing her regularly.’

‘What do you mean exactly.’

‘Movies, the beach, restaurants. Their relationship appears to be fairly intimate,’ he added delicately.

Yeldham sighed audibly. ‘Ummh - still, it’s possible I suppose.’

‘Yeah, anything’s possible, so I’ve put it under wraps for a while. Harry’s a good man and at this stage what his daughter does with her life is her own business. Still, I thought you might like to know.’

‘Thanks Andrew, I appreciate that. Maybe just coincidence, but worth noting.’

‘The French have asked for anything on Croffman. I’ve held back Helen Wyman’s name as circumstantial, not relevant to their enquiries. If it does turn out to be relevant there could be a stink. What do you think?’

Yeldham considered this. ‘Your decision Andrew. Maybe let it run until we know more? I’d be grateful if you could keep her out of the domestic paperwork and send anything on her direct to me, with a copy of the full file.’

Davis agreed and rang off. Yeldham walked to the window and stood in thought. Despite the heat there was no trace of sweat on either his forehead or the armpits of his crisp white shirt. He buzzed his secretary and asked for several files. She in turn asked the Records Supervisor who duly dictated the names to his assistant with an order to get them up to Yeldham immediately.

*The Webspinner*

‘Wonder what this Croffman’s up to. Seems to be a popular bloke at the moment?’

‘Whaddya mean?’ grunted the supervisor.

‘Paddy Guinane was asking about him yesterday. Phoned to see if we had anything.’

‘Do we?’

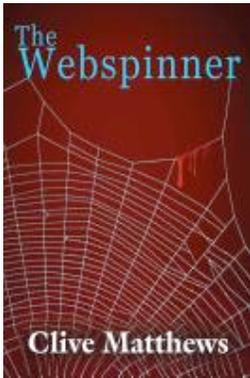
‘Not much, just a summary from the Feds. He’s a mercenary who’s been knocking around with a bloke who came in on a false passport.’

‘Didja log his query?’

‘Nah. Paddy said it wasn’t official, just a bloke he was curious about.’

‘Well you’d better log it now. For all I know Yeldham’s just talked to Guinane about it, and I’ll get my arse kicked from here to Melbourne if he doesn’t find it listed’

Yeldham read the files with close attention, pausing at the final entry on Croffman. He buzzed his secretary again and ordered the personal file on Senior Investigator Patrick Guinane. That done he picked out the file on Commander Harold Wyman again and began to re-read it.



*Politics & heroin - A glimpse behind the headlines at people caught in a conspiracy of corruption, ambition, intrigue and murder. A forged passport draws an Australian narcotics agent and a French spymaster into parallel missions to defend their countries' interests. But, little is as it appears on the surface. The real politics of France, America, Turkey and Australia are enmeshed in a carefully woven web. The Webspinner has anticipated virtually every eventuality.*

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