

Bambi and The Chopper: Episode 6

The Death of The Starsky

by Martin Flett

A group of men are sat huddled round a small table somewhere in Cheltenham. On the table is a map, and one of the men keeps pointing at places, murmuring instructions to his listeners, who are attentively nodding away.

He certainly commands their attention, this man, that much is for certain.

'So that's the plan, and we'll do it any way we can,' he says.

The others continue to nod along.

'If we meet any trouble, we'll have to reduce them to rubble. Enough is enough, it's time to get tough.'

Everyone agrees, and The Rhymer, leader of the Cheltenham Spa resistance, has prepared for war.

The Starsky is quiet, The Barman notes. There are some usual faces missing for this time of an evening, which is a concern. He nips into the back room and dials a number on the telephone, keeping one eye on the bar.

'Hey, man,' The Barman says in a low voice, 'you know what's going down tonight? The place is missing some people.'

'Yeah, I know what's happening,' a voice replies, 'and you wanna be careful, though I thought they'd be there by now...' There's a note of panic in the voice, but he quickly covers it up. 'In any case, just before 7.30, you'd better go and check the Treehouse. Thoroughly. '

'The Treehouse?' The Barman replies.

'Yeah, no matter what. Got it?'

Sure thing, ' and The Barman, somewhat bewildered, hangs up the phone.

It's 7.15pm.

Two figures are sprinting up The Parade. They've just past the Town Hall and now start to struggle on the incline.

'Dude, what if we don't make it?' The Chopper asks.

'Don't worry, man. Let's just keep going,' Bambi replies.

'Why is there never a taxi around when you need one?' says Chopper.

'Because they're all run by The Puppet, of course. Now come on!' Bambi surges ahead, taking the right turn through the market street.

Back at Sha-dez, The Figure and The Puppet have returned inside.

The Figure glances at his watch. 'Almost time,' he says. 'The others should be here any minute.'

Right on cue, there's a knock at the door. The Puppet, without looking at his friend, turns out the light and goes to the door.

'Yeah?' The Puppet says.

For a second, there's no reply. And then a whisper, 'I got da meat!'

The Puppet-Master turns to look at the Figure. 'Cruz,' he says, and unbolts the door. 'Hey kid, what you doing here? This ain't your kinda place.'

'I got da meat!' Cruz repeats. And holds out his hands.

'We ain't got nothing for ya,' Puppet snorts. 'What do you think this is? A kebab house? What do you want?'

Cruz meekly puts his hands in his pockets and shuffles backwards.

The Figure steps in, 'Okay, look, how's this: you tell us what you got, and I'll drop round a half pound of bacon in the morning. Deal?'

'They know!' Cruz splutters, and the men take this as a sign he agrees to the deal.

'Who? Who knows what, kid?' The Puppet says, beginning to grow anxious.

'That Professor, and those two fellas - the ones with the funny names.'

Despite the fact that everyone in this town has a funny name, The Puppet-Master knows exactly who Cruz is talking about.

He turns to The Figure, 'It was them in the alleyway just now. It must've been.'

The Figure glances at his watch once, 'It's seven twenty-three, man. Reckon we can catch 'em before they screw it up?'

'We're damn well gonna try...' and The Puppet-Master is out of the door, sprinting to his Dodge Charger. 'You coming, or what?' he calls back to the Figure, who runs after him leaving Cruz standing in the strip club, just as the first of the night's ladies arrives by the back door.

'I got da meat!' Cruz says, to no-one in particular.

The night before, The Professor visited The Starsky himself, just after closing time and just before The Barman disappeared for the night. The Prof had been working solidly for weeks, and now stood at the back entrance to The Starsky with the first of six crates of melons he had for the pub. The other five crates were in a van hired for the purpose, in a false name just in case anyone tried to trace it back to him. Because these were no ordinary melons; as Bambi and The Chopper had seen, but not quite managed to piece together, The Professor had been injecting each melon with his own concoction of explosives, designed to ignite once an electrical current was put through it. It didn't even need to be a large current; the smallest charge would suffice as long as it was directed correctly. And that's where the second package came in: a gift for The Barman and The Starsky. A new clock with remote setting capability.

At least that's how The Prof was going to advertise it. It was the only way he could explain the need for wiring.

The Barman opened the door to The Professor who stepped inside.

'Shall I take these straight downstairs?' The Prof had said. It wasn't really a question, he had already set off down the steps. Everything about this operation was planned, including the script The Professor was to stick to. There was no room for error.

Once he reached the cellar, he paused, just for a second; it was going to be shame to say goodbye to this place. But some things were more important; 'The Greater Good'. He couldn't face another Scarborough catastrophe, that was for sure.

The Professor shuddered, swiftly put down the crate, and returned upstairs. No use dawdling, he told himself, this had to be done.

One by one the crates were taken to the cellar before The Prof retrieved the final package from the front of the van: the clock. It was neatly wrapped, albeit in brown paper, and tied with string in a bow.

'Just a little something for you,' The Prof said. 'It's state of the art; designed it myself.'

Intrigued, The Barman began to untie the parcel. 'But why? What's it for?'

'Just because,' The Prof said. 'We're always coming in here, and it's about time we knew exactly when we needed to leave.' No word was to be a lie, that was the rule The Prof had made himself when writing the script for the evening. It didn't have to be the whole truth, but it had to at least fit.

'A clock! Brilliant! Thanks!' The Barman had finished opening the present. 'Now I can prove that it's closing time! But...wait...what's this wire for?'

'I said it was state of the art...' The Prof began, and then proceeded to explain in detail how it was possible to link a clock by radio waves to a central computer, which could ensure the clock was always bang on time.

He liked that line - 'bang on time' - it's literal meaning was perfect. And still no lies were told: it was possible to link a clock in this way, The Prof had invented that as well, quite by chance, while coming up with this plan; he never said he'd made THIS clock capable of it.

'Well, you'd better install it,' The Barman had responded. 'I'm no good at that kind of thing.'

The Professor obviously already knew this; he'd done his research. He wasn't going to let such a thing interfere with the plan at such a late stage.

And so it was that The Professor was able, unchallenged, to hang the clock behind the bar and run the length of copper wire down, through the floor boards, into the cellar, and through the very centre melon, contained in the crate in the exact middle of the six stacked together.

The Professor then drove away, returning the van to its lot under the cover of darkness for the rental company to check-in in the morning.

In Cheltenham, four of the men who had sat round the map are climbing into a car. One of them is The Rhymer.

'It'll be good on the road, as long as we're not followed,' The Rhymer says. 'We'll be in Leamington by 9, if we don't waste any time.'

'What time are we meeting your contact?' One of the other men asks.

'I told him tomorrow at 10. We'll all be awake by then.'

They close the car doors, start the engine and drive off towards the motorway.

The Barman looks at his watch, nervously. 'I should've stayed in Scarborough,' he says outloud, just as the door opens.

It's 7.28.

'Dude!' cries Bambi as he bursts in, closely followed by The Chopper. 'We gotta get outta here!'

The barman looks up, 'You're the second person to suggest that this evening. What the hell is going on?'

'No time to explain,' Chopper says. 'Just get out back to the Treehouse. We should be safe there.'

A Dodge Charger screeches to a halt outside and, moments later, the front door swings open once again, just as the back door closes.

The Figure and The Puppet-Master, guns raised, scan the empty bar swiftly, spotting the swinging back door. But the Puppet's eyes are drawn to something else: there's a wire running from the clock on the wall, trailing down beneath the floorboards.

Concluding that The Prof had succeeded in at least part of his plan, Puppet knows he needs to act fast. 'Damn it! They've escaped!' he yells. 'Get out!'

As they turn to leave, the clock ticks, marking time in its usual way. Only this time, as its long hand moves over the 6, it triggers a small current, which travels down the wire attached to the wall, following it all the way to the floor, where it moves, out of sight, in a split second, towards the 6 crates of melons stashed secretly beneath the Starsky the night before.

In an instant, there's a flash and a boom. Wood splinters, glass shatters; a fireball tears up through the floor, bringing molten melon with it, scorching the entire bar. The doors are blown off their hinges; the tables and chairs are flung, flaming, through the smashed windows into the street. The Puppet-Master and The Figure, caught in the doorway by the blast, are sent flailing into the air with the debris. As they hit the tarmac outside, there's another crack from the building behind as the walls of the once famous pub give way under the force of the explosion. Within seconds the whole place is turned to rubble, a cloud of dust and ash fills the air, and the faint smell of melon juice carries across the town.

The Starsky is dead.

Behind the rubble of the flattened bar, a tree still stands, its wooden house still embedded in its branches. Bambi, The Chopper and The Barman are sprawled on the floor having scrambled up the tree and into the Treehouse just before the blast hit.

Bambi extracts himself from the pile of bodies and peers out of the door.

'Whoa, man! Looks like we just made it out in time!' he says.

'The Barman joins Bambi, 'My pub,' he says, dejectedly. 'My perfect pub!'

After a brief pause, The Chopper speaks up, 'Hang on, back there, as we walked in, didn't you say something about Scarborough?'

'Yes,' The Barman replies, 'there's a story to tell about that.' Then, getting to his feet, he adds, 'I guess there's still The Shetland. Fancy another pint?'