

# Starting Monday

by John Bruce

'Come in, sit down.' The tall figure, gaunt but tanned waved to a chair some way in front of the desk. The office was fairly large, and quite sparsely furnished. It looked new, and tasteful.

'Did you find your way here OK?' He looked earnest, nodded with good humour. I'd met the sort before, hard, entrepreneurial, what I call an XYY man after the rare chromosome condition and 70's TV series. Like all TV it had picked just parts of the condition, the easy, sensational ones. Lanky and violent. Psychopathic. A little-fingernail sketch that seemed to fit him so well, give me what I needed to deal with him.

The office was fairly well hidden, set back off the main road in a newly built court, but it wouldn't have made any difference how hard it was to find, I'd allowed plenty of time. Plenty of time for the car to break down and for me to continue by taxi, plenty of time for traffic hold-ups, plenty of time to allow for misunderstood directions to have delayed. None of these things happened, and as I sat in the carpark across the road from the small archway that led into the Dutch roofed offices, I considered again if I was really wasting my time.

I'd only been out of work a couple of months, and I'd found it just an agreeably long Christmas holiday. My wife was worried by the lack of money, did overtime to try and compensate, but I saw it as a chance to get the swimming pool dug, get another room plastered. Nevertheless, here I was, attending an interview for an office based position in an employment agency, when I'd never before considered doing that kind of work. I was a sales rep, King of the Road most of the time, mixing paperwork with daytime TV every other Friday. Lots of experience, lots of different fields, but always straight sales, always in the great outdoors. But months ago, when I was still trying to sell advertising space to Skip hirers, the small ad in the classifieds had caught my eye, and here it was again. The location was good, no more early starts / late finishes, the on-target-earnings were good, perhaps it was my niche found at last, I rang and was invited for interview much to my surprise.

And here I was, sitting on a well padded chair, listening to 'call me' Edgar describe his unexpected operation, finding jobs for lawyers all over the country from a modest set of offices in the outskirts of Ipswich. His slightly plummy voice rang cool and clear above the rush of the PC that filled the corner of the room with its blue light. We'd been through my CV, the one I'd prepared specially for him, omitting most of my jobs and all of my periods of unemployment. It listed sales target after sales target met and exceeded. Some of it impressed, some of it was true.

'We've had someone else who had a background in construction sales. Piers, he's doing very well. On the Financial Services Division. I think you, though, would be particularly suitable for Legal. You've got the voice for it, the intellect.'

'Yes, the legal side does interest me particularly.' My friends called it pedantry. Edgar watched my face carefully. My eye contact was pre-eminent.

'Well, David, what do you think of the position?'

'It sounds a very exciting opportunity.' I tailored my voice to sound as correct as his, chose my words with care. Quite interesting would not have got me anywhere. 'When do I start?' He smiled, we rose.

'Let me show you the Legal Division in operation' and we crossed the gabled landing to the neighbouring office.

'Attention folks, this is David Williams, he's just having a look around, maybe coming to work for us.' Later, I noticed that six desks complete with PCs were arranged haphazardly about the room, and from each a refreshingly young looking consultant had raised their heads and smiled. But that was after, after I had moved on a stage, after the decision. I would work there, had to work there. She was sitting in the corner opposite the door, her smile only as polite as the others, but its impact on me devastating and permanent.

'This is Jane.....'