



Brunel Police

MAJOR CRIME INVESTIGATION TEAM

SEALED

CONFIDENTIAL SOLUTION

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SEALED SOLUTION

Host answer key - Operation NIGHTJAR

DO NOT OPEN UNTIL VERDICT

HOST EYES ONLY. This is the sealed answer key for Operation NIGHTJAR. If you are a player - **STOP READING NOW:** this sheet names the killer and walks through exactly how the case is solved. Reading it spoils the entire mystery for yourself and everyone at the table. Re-seal the envelope and hand it to whoever is running the game.

1. THE ANSWER - WHO DID IT

The kidnap was never a kidnap. It was a fraud cover-up dressed as a ransom job. The mastermind is the insider; the three men who took, held and killed Julian were hired through a cut-out.



Rachel Vasey GUILTY - MASTERMIND

Chief Financial Officer of Vance Maritime Ltd.
Commissioned the kidnap-and-kill through fixer Liam Croft to bury the £2,418,650 fraud Julian had found.

Charge: Murder (common law), kidnapping, blackmail

Motive: to stop Julian exposing the £2,418,650 she had embezzled through the Meridian Freight shell, and to take a cut of the ransom



Julian Vance DECEASED

34, heir and new board member of Vance Maritime - unlawfully killed by ligature asphyxia after the ransom was paid.

Time of death: between 23:30 on 11 March and 02:00 on 12 March 2026

Decisive exhibits: the Meridian fraud (NB/17, NB/16), the recovered Vasey burner (NB/21) linking her to Croft and the muscle, and the £60,000 crypto cut to a Meridian-funded wallet (NB/18)

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MASTERMIND	Rachel Vasey, 47 (DOB 21 May 1978), CFO of Vance Maritime. Recovered burner 07700 900 803; personal mobile 07700 900 142.
APPLIED THE LIGATURE	Kyle Brennan, 29 (DOB 30 Aug 1996), hired muscle. Burner 07700 900 555. His DNA is on the ligature MG/9.
GRABBED AND HELD THE VICTIM	Dean Pryor, 33 (DOB 12 Jun 1992), hired muscle. Burner 07700 900 471; white Ford Transit van WR65 NXJ (MG/11). £3,400 in marked ransom notes (MG/12) found on him at arrest.
THE FIXER / CUT-OUT	Liam Croft, 41 (DOB 02 Feb 1985), burner 07700 900 388. Connected Vasey to Pryor and Brennan; never met the victim.
METHOD (IN BRIEF)	A kidnap-for-ransom, run through hired men, that was always meant to end in Julian's death by ligature asphyxia.
WEAPON	A ligature - a length of cord - applied by Brennan; recovered at Unit 7, Severn Reach Wharf and exhibited as MG/9.
MOTIVE (IN BRIEF)	To stop Julian exposing the £2,418,650 she had embezzled through Meridian Freight Solutions Ltd, and to take a cut of the ransom.

2. HOW IT WAS DONE - METHOD & STAGING

1. **The fraud underneath.** Over roughly two years Rachel Vasey, CFO of Vance Maritime, drained £2,418,650 out of the company through fake freight invoices paid to Meridian Freight Solutions Ltd (Co. No. 13442087, incorporated 08 September 2021) - a shell whose control the accountancy report traces to her. Meridian invoices the parent for haulage that never moved; the money lands in an account she can reach. From Meridian about £1,210,000 is traced onward to a personal account, the rest withdrawn or dissipated. The forensic-accountancy report (NB/17) and the Companies House record (NB/16) carry the paper trail.
2. **The trigger.** Julian Vance, newly appointed to the board, was given the management accounts and noticed the Meridian payments did not match any real freight. On Friday 6 March he emailed the PA to convene a board meeting and made working notes naming Meridian (email thread NB/3). He was, in short, days away from telling his father, Sir Roland, and ending Vasey's career and liberty in one move.
3. **The cover story.** Rather than be exposed, Vasey decided Julian had to die - but a board member murdered the week he queries the accounts points straight at the finance department. So she disguised the killing as a stranger kidnap-for-ransom. Through fixer Liam Croft (a cut-out so she never deals with the muscle directly) she hired Dean Pryor and Kyle Brennan to take Julian, hold him, run a ransom, and then kill him so the fraud died with him. A ransom also let her skim a cut.
4. **The grab and the hold.** On Monday 9 March at about 23:10 Pryor and Brennan seized Julian outside the Lansdown Bar on Whiteladies Road. The van (white Ford Transit WR65 NXJ) left Clifton at 23:12 on ANPR; Julian's phone went dark at 23:14; the van reached Avonmouth at 23:41. He was held at Unit 7, Severn Reach Wharf, an empty dock warehouse. A first ransom email (£1m, 48 hours, no police) went out 08:20 Tuesday; a proof-of-life photo followed at 14:05, its metadata fixing it to the Avonmouth dock cell.
5. **The ransom.** A voice-changed call at 19:30 Wednesday set the drop. At 22:30 on Wednesday 11 March Sir Roland left £500,000 in cash on Clifton Down and £500,000 was sent in cryptocurrency to a wallet on the Bytestack exchange. The cash was always doomed to be partly recovered; the crypto was the clean half.
6. **The kill.** With the money in hand the men had no reason to keep Julian alive and every instruction to silence him. Between 23:30 on 11 March and 02:00 on 12 March, Brennan applied a ligature to Julian's neck while Pryor held him; he died of ligature asphyxia. The ligature was left at the scene and recovered as exhibit MG/9. The men cleared Avonmouth at 02:30 (ANPR). The body lay in the unit until Friday 13 March, when dog-walker Glenis Purdew found it at about 07:35 and a 999 call was logged at 07:39.
7. **The cut.** Over Thursday and Friday a £60,000 slice of the £500,000 crypto ransom was cashed out to a second wallet - one funded from Meridian Freight. That £60,000 is Vasey's skim, and it ties the "untraceable" ransom straight back to her own shell company (crypto-exchange statement NB/18).

3. THE PROOF CHAIN

Each link is provable from a document the players hold. The chain runs through four tiers: (A) the kidnap and murder are real, (B) the hands that did it, (C) the ransom and the money, and (D) the mastermind behind it. Follow them in order to reach the only safe verdict.

#	WHAT IT PROVES	HOW A PLAYER GETS THERE	DOCUMENT / EXHIBIT
Tier A - the kidnap and murder are real			
1	Cause of death - this is a homicide, not misadventure.	The post-mortem records death by ligature asphyxia with a deep ligature furrow to the neck, and fixes the death window at 23:30 on 11 March to 02:00 on 12 March. No accident or self-harm fits.	RT/14

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#	WHAT IT PROVES	HOW A PLAYER GETS THERE	DOCUMENT / EXHIBIT
2	The scene confirms captivity - he was held, then killed.	CSI at Unit 7, Severn Reach Wharf recover the ligature (MG/9), the restraints (MG/6) and the victim's blood (MG/3). A bound man in an empty dock unit is not a stranger mugging gone wrong.	CSI scene report · MG/3 · MG/6 · MG/9
3	The abduction is documented - taken on Monday, moved to Avonmouth.	ANPR has the white Transit WR65 NXJ leaving Clifton at 23:12 (grab 23:10 outside the Lansdown Bar) and at Avonmouth by 23:41; Julian's phone dies at 23:14. The proof-of-life photo's metadata sits on the Avonmouth dock cell.	NB/12 · NB/4
Tier B - the hands that did it			
4	Brennan applied the ligature.	The DNA report (lab ref SFS/26/0512) on the ligature MG/9 recovers the victim as the major component and an interpretable minor component, best recovered from the knot, matching Kyle Brennan (likelihood ratio ≥ 1 million; Pryor and Croft excluded from the ligature). He is the killer's hand on the cord.	DNA report (SFS/26/0512) · MG/9
5	Pryor grabbed, held and drove.	The fingerprint report puts Pryor's marks on the restraints (MG/6) and inside the seized van (MG/11, WR65 NXJ, registered to him). The van is the abduction vehicle from step 3.	Fingerprint report · MG/6 · MG/11
6	The two men were together at Avonmouth across the kill window.	Cell-site puts burners 07700 900 471 (Pryor) and 07700 900 555 (Brennan) on the Avonmouth dock cell through the death window, leaving at 02:30 (ANPR). Their burner chat (NB/5) co-ordinates the hold and the "finish."	NB/10 · NB/5 · NB/12
7	They admit the abduction in interview - and name a fixer.	Under interview (RP/1 Pryor, RP/2 Brennan) both place themselves at Severn Reach Wharf and say they were hired and paid through a middleman, not by anyone they ever met from the family.	RP/1 · RP/2
Tier C - the ransom and the money			
8	The ransom was demanded and paid.	The Telegram ransom thread (NB/4) and the voicemail of the voice-changed call (NB/7) set £1m and the Clifton Down drop at 22:30 Wednesday. Sir Roland paid £500,000 cash and sent £500,000 in crypto.	NB/4 · NB/7
9	The cash ties to the muscle.	£3,400 in marked £50 notes from the Clifton Down drop were recovered on Dean Pryor at arrest and exhibited as MG/12 (serials match the drop). The cash half of the ransom is in the hands of the men who held Julian.	Custody record (Pryor) · MG/12
10	The crypto is not untraceable - and it bleeds toward Meridian.	The Bytestack statement (NB/18) shows the £500,000 ransom wallet, and a £60,000 slice cashed out Thursday-Friday into a second wallet funded from Meridian Freight. That second wallet is the skim.	NB/18
Tier D - the mastermind behind it			
11	Motive - Vasey was about to be exposed, by Julian, for £2,418,650.	The forensic-accountancy report (NB/17) traces £2,418,650 routed from Vance Maritime to Meridian Freight (Co. No. 13442087 on Companies House NB/16), a shell whose control NB/17 ties to Vasey. Julian's board emails (NB/3) name Meridian and call the meeting that would have ended her.	NB/17 · NB/16 · NB/3

#	WHAT IT PROVES	HOW A PLAYER GETS THERE	DOCUMENT / EXHIBIT
12	The link to the muscle - Vasey's burner runs the job through Croft.	The recovered Vasey burner (NB/21, 07700 900 803) shows traffic to Croft's burner (07700 900 388), including at 23:40 Wednesday: "it has to be tonight, then you're clear." Croft's number then relays to the muscle (NB/5/NB/6). The £60,000 cut (NB/18) lands the money back on her.	NB/21 · NB/6 · NB/18
13	The broken alibi - she places herself at the drop she said she missed.	Vasey's account (RP/3) is that she was at home all Wednesday evening. ANPR reads her car (KS19 VPN) near Clifton Down at 22:48; cell-site puts her personal phone (07700 900 142) on the Clifton Down cell across 22:46-22:52, with the recovered burner (07700 900 803) serving the same Clifton Down sector. The alibi is a lie she had no reason to tell unless she was running the ransom.	RP/3 · NB/12 · NB/10

The clinching links: steps 10, 11, 12 and 13. The fraud (NB/17) supplies the motive, the recovered burner (NB/21) puts Vasey's hand on the wire to Croft and the muscle, the £60,000 crypto cut (NB/18) routes the ransom into her shell company, and the broken alibi (her car KS19 VPN read near Clifton Down at 22:48 on NB/12, plus her personal phone 07700 900 142 serving the Clifton Down cell across 22:46-22:52 and the recovered burner there on NB/10) destroys the one lie she told. Take those four together and Vasey is the only person who had the motive to want Julian dead, the means to commission it, and a provable presence she tried to hide. The muscle did the deed; she bought it.

4. RED HERRINGS EXPLAINED

RED HERRING	WHY IT LOOKS SUSPICIOUS	HOW IT IS CLEARED
Marcus Vance - the obvious mastermind	Julian's older half-brother (38), passed over as heir, carrying a £90,000 gambling debt, and on record "threatening" Julian. He looks like the man with motive, money trouble and a grudge.	CCTV places Marcus at a Cabot Circus casino across Monday night and into the early evening of the Wednesday (MG6C unused schedule); his "threats" (digital messages) are about a personal loan, not Julian's life (creditor letter NB/19); and the will of the deceased (NB/20) leaves the estate substantially to the family trust, with Marcus taking only a modest legacy - so Julian's death gains Marcus nothing.
Diana Vance - the will beneficiary	Julian's stepmother (56) and a beneficiary under the family will - the classic "follow the inheritance" suspect.	Diana was at a charity gala on Wednesday evening (guest list and gala photos), giving her no opportunity; and the will (NB/20) leaves the estate to a trust, so she gains very little from Julian's death.
"It was a simple stranger kidnap for ransom"	The ransom emails, the proof-of-life photo and the cash drop all read like an opportunist gang who grabbed a wealthy heir for the money and panicked.	A pure money job releases the hostage once paid; here the victim was killed the same night the ransom landed (RT/14, NB/4). The kill was the point, not the cash - which means someone wanted him dead, not just paid.

RED HERRING	WHY IT LOOKS SUSPICIOUS	HOW IT IS CLEARED
“The crypto half is untraceable”	£500,000 went out in cryptocurrency, which the demand implied could never be followed.	The Bytestack statement (NB/18) traces a £60,000 slice out of the ransom wallet into a second wallet funded from Meridian Freight - Vasey's shell. The “untraceable” money is exactly what convicts her.
“The muscle acted alone”	Pryor and Brennan are caught with the van, the prints, the DNA and the marked cash. It is tempting to stop there and call it a two-man crime.	Both say in interview (RP/1, RP/2) they were hired through a middleman; the burner traffic (NB/5, NB/6, NB/21) runs muscle - > Croft -> Vasey; and only Vasey had a motive (NB/17) to want Julian dead. The men were the hands, not the head.

Fair-play check: every herring above is resolved by a document the players hold - never by a fact that lives only on this sheet. If you add a herring, plant its rebuttal in the evidence pack first.

5. SCORING & DEBRIEF NOTE

This case has two answers - the hands and the head. Score them separately; a table can crack the muscle and still miss the mastermind, which is the real solve.

THE MASTERMIND (RACHEL VASEY)	4 points - required to truly “solve” the case. Naming the CFO as the person who commissioned the killing.
WHO APPLIED THE LIGATURE (KYLE BRENNAN)	2 points - identified from the ligature DNA on MG/9.
WHO GRABBED AND HELD (DEAN PRYOR)	1 point - the van WR65 NXJ, the prints on MG/6/MG/11 and the marked cash.
THE FIXER / CUT-OUT (LIAM CROFT)	1 point - the middleman between Vasey's burner and the muscle.
CORRECT METHOD & WEAPON	1 point - a kidnap-for-ransom always meant to end in death; ligature asphyxia (MG/9).
CORRECT MOTIVE	2 points - the £2,418,650 Meridian fraud Julian was about to expose, plus the ransom cut.
FULL PROOF CHAIN (ALL FOUR TIERS)	2 bonus points - cited the exhibits in order, A through D.
CAUGHT A RED HERRING	1 point each - explained why Marcus, Diana, the “stranger ransom”, the “untraceable crypto” or the “muscle acted alone” is cleared.

Host debrief: after the verdict, read out the proof chain in §3 tier by tier - first that the kidnap and murder are real (A), then the hands (B), then the money (C), then the head (D). Open the floor on the herrings in §4. The intended “solve time” is roughly 90-120 minutes for 1-6 players; if a table stalls on the mastermind, nudge them toward the £60,000 crypto cut (NB/18) and Vasey's car (KS19 VPN) read near Clifton Down at 22:48 (NB/12) rather than naming anyone.

SEALED BY

This answer key was prepared for hosting *Operation NIGHTJAR* and sealed prior to play. It is a game artefact only and forms no part of any genuine investigation.

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Game Host

DATE SEALED - 18 MARCH 2026

GAME HOST - HOST / GAME-MASTER

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