

# Buyout

## Prologue

On 16th December, at 3pm, they were all assembled in the large conference room at the London offices of Titanium Capital: the management buyout team, Nathan Turnbull, bankers, accountants, lawyers and a host of others whose function was not exactly clear – at least to the bemused MBO team. In all, there were twenty seven people in that room. Five thousand miles away in Los Angeles, Jeff González and the Rothorpe Corporation team were connected by conference phone, e-mail and fax. This must be the real thing at last, supposed Roy.

During the next several hours, pile after pile of official-looking documents was brought into the room, and each of the MBO team was required to sign them. The last glimmers of daylight had long since disappeared as Roy contemplated the document in front of him, which must have comprised at least a hundred sheets of paper. He turned to the red-haired youth who had placed it on the table.

‘And what exactly is this one?’ asked Roy.

‘Oh, this is the package of covenants which you agreed with the bank,’ he replied. ‘Please sign quickly, as I have several more documents for you.’

Roy signed and passed it on to Steven. This was a surreal experience; they were all just signing piles and piles of papers, whose import was completely unknown to any of them. They just had to rely on the competence and integrity of their advisers.

Whilst the MBO team were busy dealing with the seemingly endless conveyor belt of papers, the whole room had become a hive of activity. Phones were ringing; fax machines whirring; and everywhere, there were people hunched over laptops dealing with the mass of e-mails flying back and forth. The MBO team felt like passengers on a white-knuckle fairground ride, with no real understanding of the events unfolding around them, and certainly no control over what was happening.

At around 10pm, someone brought in several very large pizzas in cardboard cartons, and a box full of cans of soft drinks. As this impromptu feast was distributed and consumed, it somehow made the whole scene even more surreal; everyone sought to continue working, in the midst of the increasingly chaotic setting, with discarded cartons, cans and half-eaten segments of pizza adorning almost every horizontal surface.

Roy couldn't help but smile as he observed Moray Ferguson, the lawyer, attempting to eat a slice of pizza, which he held in his left hand, whilst typing awkwardly, single handed, with his right. As Moray stared intently at his screen, the pizza gradually wilted, until eventually a gooey blob of cheese, with a piece of red pepper attached, fell onto his keyboard. Moray uttered a fearsome-sounding curse which Roy had not heard before – he supposed it must be of Scottish origin. The oath was delivered at such a volume that the general hubbub in the room stopped abruptly as everyone turned to see what had happened. At the sight of Moray trying to scoop the sticky mess off of his keyboard using a ruler, the room erupted into

laughter; it was a welcome break in the tense atmosphere. The break was short lived, though, as everyone quickly resumed their activities and within a minute the place was buzzing once more.

And then, abruptly, at around 1.30am, everything seemed to grind to a halt: the phones, the fax machines; everything fell silent. Nathan tried to get in contact with Jeff González to find out what was causing the delay, but all of a sudden, González was 'unavailable'. This didn't sound good. Nathan and several of the others left the room, leaving everyone else more or less kicking their heels.

Roy felt a sickening sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach; all the optimism and euphoria he had felt a few hours earlier had now evaporated. He feared the worst: that Rotherpe Corporation was going to renege on the deal at the last moment. He knew that if the buyout failed, up to three hundred people would lose their jobs – and he would be one of them. Furthermore he would have to pay back the £100,000 he had borrowed to finance his stake in the deal.

For Mick McNulty, the situation was even worse. He had already lost his job, and he was in debt to the tune of £200,000. If the deal failed now, after everything he and Carmen had been through, it could spell the end of his marriage, which was already hanging by a thread.

There was nothing that any of them could do now but wait.