Crime & Punishment

A novella about how things can go wrong

Edmund Price
Chapter 1

“What do you do when you dedicate five years of your career to helping someone and they don’t even know you exist?”

“Stop doing it.”

Charles Villa looked uncertain.

The man in his bed, a Korean named Sean Kim, propped himself up on his elbow and looked down at him. “Do you have to help him?”

“I think so,” said Villa. “At least, that’s what the bigwigs in London told me. You’re not to stop until you’ve made this happen,” he parroted.

“Does he like cock?” Kim flicked Villa’s flaccid penis.

“So everyone alleges, but there’s precious little evidence of it yet, apart from the purchase of a few porn mags a few years ago.”

Kim slid down Villa’s body and sucked at his penis until it swelled. “Well, get out there and show him some sausage. Get him to suck dick and then you can both be happy. Or possibly lick your arse. Every boss loves someone who does that. Now, do you want me to fuck you or shall I sit on it?”

“Get me properly hard and then I’ll decide while you’re at it.”

In the end, they fucked each other. Villa fucked a lot of people, it was part of his job, but he also enjoyed letting it happen; it made a change to have someone else do all the work sometimes. And he should know; it was at the heart of how he did his job, rising up the ranks on the backs of other people.

And really fucking people could be very hard work. Case in point: this annoying prick that didn’t even know he existed, but that London wouldn’t shut up about. His name was Edward Reece and he was back in town after a year away.
Frankly, Villa thought he’d got shot of the kid for good, but he’d bounced back. After four years of monitoring him and surreptitiously tapping him on the shoulder to meet some people and get laid, preferably with a man, he’d failed to get the lad to even lick some snatch. He’d seen Reece off to business school, reporting to his superiors in London that he was beyond redemption. If Vila couldn’t do it, no one could and as Villla couldn’t do it, it couldn’t be done.

It had been frustrating. In his view, it was unnatural for an otherwise healthy male in his twenties not to go to a bar and try to pick someone up for sex. And yet that was exactly what Reece did not do. The reason almost certainly being that he was gay but unable to face it, meaning he didn’t want snatch and was afraid to admit he might like some dick.

But Villa usually gave someone a year before he turned on the hose and started pissing all over their lives. Although he’d done that repeatedly, he’d found himself in the unwelcome position of being harassed by London for four years to try to make something happen. And he had completely failed.

Now, he was faced with the unwelcome prospect of having to do it again. He’d lined the boy up in a building with a swimming pool to finally get fit, with a smattering of gays to acclimatise him to the species and a landlord with access to one of the biggest business combines in the territory. And what did he do? Same as before: sit in his living room, drinking and watching science fiction DVDs.

“I can’t concentrate enough to fuck you,” said Villa. “I can’t get that fucker Reece out of my head. He’s really not my problem. He’s a failure who deserves everything that’s coming to him.”

“Is that what London say?”

“London don’t know their arse from their elbow,” said Villa. “They keep asking why I haven’t tried to contact Reece. ‘Perhaps if he’s so difficult to influence, a more direct approach might be beneficial?’ Perhaps they should learn how I run my shop out here. I don’t do that.”
“No. You sit in the shadows and pull strings,” said Kim.

“Exactly. And it is not, absolutely is not, my job to go around chasing borderline alcoholics with no friends who don’t seem to understand that cities have bars and bars are where single men go to get laid.”

“That’s true. But perhaps he needs a helping hand. He might be shy.”

“By my standards, I threw people at him. I’ve lost count of the times I’ve nudged him to go to Propaganda. You know as well as I do that everyone gets one chance. After that, they don’t get any more. If they miss it, they miss out. If by some miracle they get a second chance and miss that too, then woe betide them.”

“It’s the rack,” said Kim. “Your methods are notorious. And how many chances did Reece get?”

“I’ve lost count. And so when Reece failed to heed or indeed even acknowledge the last punishment, next time will just have to be far worse. It’s how I learned and probably how you did too. How can anyone reach the age of thirty and fail to realise someone was reaching out and asking him to suck his cock. What the fuck is Reece’s problem?”

“Are you sure you don’t know, Charles? Shall I put a name to it? I believe you may even have sucked his cock.”

“More than that, actually,” said Villa.

“Lick his arse, did you?” said Kim as he stopped sucking Villa’s cock and licking his arse to spread his legs to give him some lazy relief. As he went in, it struck Kim how much Villa covered up for Reece’s problem.

Aaron Moore was a serious problem for all of them and Kim wondered if London appreciated just how serious a problem he was. He might officially be in disgrace, but he was a little gentleman in a black velvet waistcoat: however hard you whacked him, he always popped up again to trip you up.
And Villa had whacked him several times. He was one of those men that everyone on the Asian inside track wanted to bed at least once. There was something about him, something magnetic, even hypnotic. He could entrance a person, dazzle them with glamour even as he stole their soul.

Villa should know, he was a regular Sir Hiss himself and feared and resented by those who had fallen under his mesmeric spell. There was no better way to get what you wanted than by getting someone else to do it and making them think it was their own idea.

And for that, he used his network. People who had fallen into one of his traps. He rode them like horses and when he found a good one, he rode it until it was exhausted when he’d change mount and ride on until he got where he wanted and could relax.

It was a style that had been common once, but was falling into disuse. Villa represented the bad old days and he did so for a very good reason: the bar was rising in Asia and he wasn’t as good as the new blood. And he knew it, so he laid traps for the horses that were and then, as with all riders, rested on the backs of giants.

So, seeing him with Moore was an eye-opener for Kim. Moore ran rings around him and had ended up riding him. And not in the way Kim was currently doing, although that too on occasion.

And indifferently and very painfully, by all accounts. But with that strange presence and charm that made him so dangerous. Like the best politicians or salesmen, or indeed prostitutes, he was one of those people who could make you feel you were the most important person in the world, that there was no one else in a crowded room but you, that you could tell him anything…and then wake up the next morning to find yourself bleeding in a ditch without a penny to your name.
And he did it to Villa while in his early forties and high on coke the entire time. He was often packing some brown sugar, which he insisted on calling ‘dragon’. He loved to put a bit of dragon in everyone of an evening and, after several hours of drug-enhanced sex, no one was ever quite the same again afterwards. The dragon saw to that; it created a pull, a desire for more, a connection that was almost impossible to overcome.

Villa had taught himself, or actively been taught, the same technique. Indeed, his ability to leave a little dragon behind in those he fucked was becoming something of an urban legend around Hong Kong.

A horse fed and denied its sugar becomes very jittery. The dragon he dispensed created a pull he could use, drawing them to him for more, insisting on a favour or two in return. Or three. Or four. Or...well, it depended. But in the case of Reece, it was turning in to quite a few favours, which was why he was constantly grumbling.

And because Moore was grumbling to him as well. Moore wanted something. Villa was in Moore’s power and Villa couldn’t deliver. Ironically, he couldn’t deliver because Moore had poisoned Reece’s mind, made him deeply introverted and afraid to make exactly the experiment Villa and London wanted him to: to try it with a man. The problem was circular and as everyone got angrier, Villa’s credit as a problem solver was starting to run thin. Out of credit, he was now running on dragon alone.

This made him dangerous. Because a man with a reputation on the line who believes firmly in a punishment based learning structure was exactly what Reece didn’t need. Reece needed love. What Villa offered, because Villa made sure that no one else got to offer anything, was a horse looking for a way out. He’d offer someone the chance to swap sugar for honey if they could only get Reece to do what Villa wanted.

But it was too transactional and done in accordance with a strict timetable that was shared with the horse, but not with Reece and which if the horse failed to deliver on, it got whipped. And so did Reece. Which again was the opposite of what he needed.
Kim always made sure that Villa came first, it was safer that way, before releasing himself. But when they both had, he looked at the man heaving beneath him. It had been good sex for both of them and their relationship was entirely transactional, but Kim had a partner at home who knew exactly what and who he did and why. He said, “Do what the Americans suggest. Let him fall in love.”

All Villa’s post-coital bliss burned away. “I did! I fucking threw men at him. He wasn’t interested!”

“You gave him one day, in reality a couple of hours, and then you failed him. Give him days, weeks, months even. Let them date like ordinary people. If Reece is essentially a virgin, treat him like a virgin – and that doesn’t mean thrown him in the deep end and see if he drowns, it means finding him a coach he is comfortable with.”

“Swap one of my fine stallions for a coach? Amusing,” said Villa. “You forget how I operate. I give people a chance. If they miss it, they miss out. Then they come to me and tell me that they’ve failed. At which point, I decide whether and how to help them unfail. That’s how I built my name and I see no reason to change the habit of a lifetime for one socially crippled walking ashtray.”

More was the pity. And Moore was the problem, as the two of them had discussed before retiring to bed. Moore might snort coke from one end of Villa’s living room to the other, over as many naked chests, backsides and cocks as possible, but he sold it in Seoul. Or gave it away as a kicker and a down-payment on a future favour. It depended who was on the other side and whether they might be up for a little dragon later.

Which he always made sure it did eventually: lines of coke always came with a dash of dragon. And the Koreans who took his white cock with their white coke usually ended up taking it all, hook line and sinker. He and his little right hand man would tour around town and Kim’s employers were deeply concerned that their own employers were getting badly out of their depth.
They’d watched as, over a generation, things degenerated after a previous set of Kim’s bosses opened the door to a previous set of Moore’s bosses. After all, they were all friends, weren’t they? The real enemy was the lunatics on the other side of the DMZ and their Red China backers, growling in their lair in Zhongnanhai and smoking even more of those than Reece, if that were possible.

Now, Korea was ambitious to get ahead. It was just recovering from being a smoking ruin itself. It had crashed in truly spectacular fashion in the Asian financial crisis a few years earlier, hurtling itself into a dead end in top gear. While high on coke. Provided by Moore. And his associates like Villa.

As these crises do, it had shown up a whole host of other problems: as Warren Buffett put it, they had found out exactly who was swimming naked when the tide went out.

Which was a lot of them. Especially those in a network of mutual favours and support, operating with a nod and a wink from the Blue House or elsewhere to do this or that in the interests of national development. Build a factory, take a contract overseas, transfer money to this person who had contacts in North Korea. There would be rewards for those who did.

Until the waters receded and the actions of those in them were revealed. Often with Moore and his friends from the US embassy or trade mission hosting and indeed watching and keeping records.

The Japanese were the past masters at keeping their smut behind closed, preferably locked, doors, but the Koreans shared only some character traits with their neighbours and former colonisers. From the 1970s onwards, the country became more Americanised. And therein lay the problem. While a little fun behind high walls with the rich white boys was one of the perks of not being communist, it was also the best possible way to air your dirty linen in public.
Which in those days was exactly what the Americans wanted. Find out what the elite were doing and, indeed, who they were doing and then take notes, crunch the data and see where the openings were for them. And there was almost always one somewhere, ready and waiting to be filled.

Perhaps not General CH Park directly, but his children and his friends and the children of his friends. And if someone had a cine camera, well those too were one of the perks of living in the modern age in a capitalist society. Boys will be boys. Especially when they’re young and naked and it’s hot and they’ve been drinking and the music’s loud and, well, everyone else was doing it too. So what if no one ever seemed to catch the Americans at it? We were all friends together, weren’t we? Just high jinks.

Very high. Moore made the tapes, called it his little porn collection. No one saw the Americans, because Moore specifically would wait until most others were comatose and then swoop, smacking his lips, on some choice morsel and then release several hours of voyeuristic frustration into it.

It usually helped that the morsel was catatonic, because Aaron Moore didn’t like it when his partners said no. Sex was an exercise in sharing and how could you share if you didn’t relax and let your partner show his true colours? Sex was best when it was unrestrained, he said. So, he would show his forceful excitement and his partners would see red as the intensity of the act, like an inferno, burned away all need for future satisfaction. Their sheer surrender to the moment would manifest afterwards in a sympathetic streak of blood as the sated Aaron withdrew himself.

It was a skill Villa exhibited in reverse. He prided himself in a certain strategic surrender; envelope your partner in the moment and have them feel dominant even as he drained their strength. But in one thing they did not differ: Villa also taped people in his bugged apartment.
Most of his regulars knew this and for those that lacked the necessary circumspection...well, then they had failed, hadn’t they? They had no one to blame but themselves and could expect to have to go to Villa again to plead to unfail.

Those who did this knew it was amazing what people would sometimes say in the ten or so minutes after sex, if it was good enough and the partner coaxing enough. And Villa always liked to have a little encouragement to ensure the horses agreed to provide those favours he called in. He no longer had any shame about strangers seeing him naked, but he knew how many of the failures didn’t want to see themselves being fucked on a tape machine in their boss’s office at work.

Or indeed, fucking each other, which was Moore’s favourite trick. He’d done it to Villa, one of the reason why Villa no longer concerned himself with who saw him naked or who knew that he liked to take Asian cock, age unimportant but good looks a must.

If there was no third party to hand, Moore might arrange one. Indeed, procuring good looking Asians was something he’d got rather good at. He’d finger the boys for a little finger work and then hand the boys on. After which, he’d hand their partners arses back to them on a plate.

And like Villa, Moore was an old-timer. It was all in a day’s work and anyone stupid enough to fall for it had failed and deserved the punishment that followed.

And their punishments became increasingly aligned too as Moore seconded some of his work to Villa. But Moore’s principal demand was, in an increasingly forceful way, for the failure to agree either to drop off a few white lines somewhere, or perhaps to invite one of their friends or colleagues, perhaps their boss, to a little pool party behind some high walls and with loud music. Or just to pay up. But that, as with Villa, whilst it might seem the best option, really was just an invitation to keep paying.
It had been embarrassing for Villa to stand in the office of his bosses in London and watch himself being fucked by a teenaged Asian rent boy, but he’d kept his job and gone back East older, wiser and considerably more alive to the possibilities presented by tapes and a spot of dragon.

Which brought him back to Reece. Kim had told him about an attempt to get him into a sexually-segregated sauna and massage parlour to see what might happen. It had failed when Reece realised he’d have to be stark naked. Since that had been kind of the point, it was yet another deeply irritating insight into the boy’s character and more evidence of how Villa simply didn’t understand who Reece was or what it meant to have been hit in the head by Moore as a child.

It was nice not to be a socially-crippled walking ashtray, to be able to lie against a fit spent man, sweating and panting, as your mind ran free. But such emptiness never lasted long these days and London was panting for results. They were convinced Reece was gay and wanted him out. They weren’t particularly interested in his welfare or his happiness; all they really wanted to do was tell him who he was: not the son of a provincial stockbroker, but the illegitimate son a minor royal.

Kim looked at Villa and pushed away. Time for a cleansing shower. In Villa’s immortal words, the complete Herbert was a Fitz, but too brainless to be worth telling. The problem was London wanted him to know, which meant that someone would tell him sooner or later.

And Villa had the other problem of Moore. That man wasn’t done with him. Or with Reece, whose latent homosexuality he was determined to bring to the front of his mind. And it wouldn’t be because Reece had picked up some nice Chinese bloke in a bar.
Or perhaps it would. But with Villa, the bloke would come with a spot of Villa’s dragon. The same with Moore, officially in his disgrace but in fact on secondment, if that was the right expression, to Grubster Brothers who, with some spirited assistance from Martin Dame & Co, were laying siege to Reece’s new employer, the Royal Alpine Trust, determined to see the RAT take him on as a mole in the organisation.
Chapter 2

“Did you speak to Villa?” asked Roderick Dancer.
“I did.”
“And?”
“He didn’t know what to do,” said Selwyn Jones. “The Grubsters are putting it about all over the party circuit that Reece is the reason our deal cratered and he can’t control them.”
“Is it?”
“No. But that’s not stopping them saying he did. Allegedly, he advised us not to up our bid when we needed to and that his strategy was too clever by half.”
“Was he involved in the price discussions?”
“No; he was far too junior. The fault’s ours, mine actually. Once again, we misread the tealeaves and underestimated the willingness of the government there to take a backhander. And the willingness of other foreign bidders to pay one.”
“Not that you wouldn’t have yourselves...”
“That’s by the by. What’s not by the by is that Moore is also cruising round the yacht club circuit, lounging over the yardarm and mouthing off to anyone who’ll listen, which is everyone in earshot however hard they try to move away, that I’m a crim and my bank should be hung out to dry. I want Villa to shut him up him.”
“So do I, believe me. Whether it’s the Grubsters or Moore, they’re saying the same about us. I wish we’d never hired Reece. By all accounts, he’s a decent banker, if a bit of a sad case, but we don’t need this kind of grief. His team seem to like him, though.”
“So did mine,” said Jones. “He’s jumpy, perhaps because he smokes way too much, and that made my team nervous. But it turns out that’s just because he went through the worst type of break-up, followed by a crisis over his sexuality...”
“...which still didn’t get him out.”
“Which still didn’t get him out. Now, he feels hunted by his ex’s family.”
“Which he is.”
“As I’m starting to discover. But once you understand all that, he’s a fairly normal person.”

“Who’s got two large US banks training their guns on him and us, not to mention a Magic Circle law firm. And Charles Villa apparently can do nothing about it.”

“Nothing to worry about.”

Dancer narrowed his eyes. Yes, Jones was trying for a joke. But it wasn’t funny. “Perhaps not for you,” he said. “You just provide services to HMG and they’ve bailed you out more than once in the past. We provide services to HMQ and I’m not sure if our government would approve of bailing us out to cover for problems arising elsewhere. And while Moore may unfortunately be a long-standing customer of both of us, it’s us who have his account in the name of one of our employees. Thanks to listening to the ‘quiet words’ from HMG, Moore’s run rings round both our organisations and now Villa too, by all accounts.”

“So, what do you suggest? Especially if Villa is up the proverbial gum tree.”

“The proverbial gum tree is up Villa. We have to find someone who can control Moore. Grubster Brothers are a nightmare; the way they shoot from the hip, you’d think their charcoal suits had large white stripes and they carried violin cases. But with some help from Martin Dame, we can keep them just about under control. And they’re starting to regret their decision to make money off Moore’s torturing of our olders and betters and their kids in Reece’s name. The quiet word to hire Moore has placed a loose cannon on their deck that threatens to blow the mast off. Especially since he’s got a lot of money to make up since he was fired.”

“Do you want to talk about that?” Jones asked.
“No. Definitely not now. Focus on the problems one at a time. We do not need Moore telling everyone we trade drugs and then launder the proceeds through our client accounts. If Reece doesn’t want to come out, that’s his business. Villa spent four years failing to get him out and then another year with us that led Reece into bed with a woman. They should let go. But we absolutely don’t need Moore and the Grubsters telling people all the transfers are master-minded by one of our employees and how only he can put the situation right.”

“And we don’t need Moore telling people I gave Reece run of the transaction because I wanted to be the one to get him out. Personally. Or the Grubsters alleging it was because doing so was the only way to stop us being used as a transfer mechanism of convenience by all and sundry.”

“No. And nor do we. But for you, the Rotters or even Gumtree Bank, the problem is mostly transactional. For us, it’s quite different. Running a business built around large pots of money held by rich and important people, often in unstable or fiscally capricious jurisdictions adds an extra layer of complication.”

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“Or two, given the identity of some of your most prominent customers.”

“Indeed. So, I’ve decided to take a leaf out of Gumtree’s book. If Moore wants to allege that an employee is trading drugs, arms and gems through our network, then let’s make it so and say we were told to. We’ll bring Moore into the tent and have him piss out for a change. What do you think?”

“Risky. We decided not to do that ourselves. Once the Trojan Horse is in the citadel, you have to be on constant alert for Greeks with flame-throwers. Better to say you have no idea what they mean and that they’re probably talking their own extensive book. But let me ruminate. I think a nice cognac or three and a big fat cigar might help. Are you going to the party this weekend? And I don’t mean the one at the Yacht Club.”

“I’ll see you there. Why we have to go to Wiseman’s place, I’m not sure. Who buys a house in the Northern Philippines?”

“Well, Filipinos.”
“By all accounts, he’s happily married. It’s so inconvenient, even if it is the price of discretion. I can’t even use the corporate run-about, the bods always want to know where I’m going and why. I just hope it’s worth it.”

It was. The host, Samuel Wiseman, the director-general of Ishtar, Asia’s largest mechanical pumps businesses, had a cliff-top house in the hills of northern Luzon. He’d invited the great and the good of the banking fraternity for the weekend as his share of the ongoing social round. Everyone always invited the great and the good of some fraternity; after all, that’s what the party circuit was.

And fraternity was the right word too. Seniors would be expected for dinner on Friday night. Juniors would arrive on Saturday morning. And Wiseman would leave after lunch, as would anyone else who knew what was good for them. It might be an old boy’s club, but these days not everyone on the party circuit was male. There had been a token nod to Women’s Lib: if the woman had balls, she could make it into the big league.

But this weekend would be one for the lads. Although the fraternity was not Wiseman’s, it had the witty name of ‘Sam’, meaning three in Cantonese. It was a horizontal agglomeration of several vertical groups. The verticals would meet on Friday night and everyone else would be horizontal on Sunday morning.

All the groups were the same and which one people joined depended really only on personal preference: industry participation or leisure pursuits. All these sessions, whichever fraternity was in attendance could be placed into three groups: those who were looking to get rich, those who were looking for some extra-curricular sex and those who had no option but to come, usually because they had spent too long in the other two groups in the past.

It was an insiders’ club and it had one word that defined its origin: Freemasons. Because getting ahead and promoting the brotherhood and its interests was at the heart of what Freemasons did. Nowadays, Freemasonry was a few old rooms in a much larger house, but the point still stood.
Having used the first part to get where he was, Dancer was looking to spend a bit of time in the second whilst trying to stay out of the third. Because he needed to talk to Moore and the second part was where Moore spent most of his time. He would tell people loudly and often that this was because it was his job, and to some extent it was, but most people agreed that he simply enjoyed it.

The name ‘Sam’ was doubly witty, because as an enduring legacy of Freemasonry, nothing happened in these fraternity sessions that wasn’t in code, usually puns, preferably double entendres. Sam doffed its cap to a group in Italy called P2, a non-Freemasonry group that had been dissolved by order of its government a decade or so earlier. Technically, it had been dissolved two decades earlier, but it had taken another twelve years to reveal exactly what it had been up to and finally bring to heel those members who had faded into the shadows once the initial scapegoats had been lynched.

Sam was a most sophisticated operation than P2 and had learned from its mistakes. It was Freemasonry 2.0. If you wanted to get ahead, you joined. How far you went up the ladder depended on how ambitious you were and how willing you were to suck figurative or, in Aaron Moore’s part of the group, literal cock.

Of all things, it was billed as a *Star Wars* convention. On Friday night, they would discuss funding global defence and the War on Terror. On Saturday the trilogy of movies would be shown in a constant loop in the house’s private cinema, so that attendees could say that they had been able to savour the subtext of the saga as a tale told from the robots’ point of view. Although it didn’t take a genius to make the link, and Grubster Brothers did employ several geniuses, there would also be a session of Sam’s C3PO, the grouping of Grubsters, Martin Dame and Gumtree that, in conjunction with Aaron Moore, was making life so difficult for the Royal Alpine Trust.
Monikers were popular in these groups and Roderick Dancer had chosen for convenience, R2D2. And the members were currently filled with a new hope: the Americans had elected George W Bush and 9/11 had been a god-send, the perfect opportunity to roll back some of the sillier anti-banking legislation pushed through in response to the corporate governance scandals that followed the tech crash.

What made Enron or WorldCom so special that they required the loathsome Sarbanes-Oxley Act? Could have happened to anyone. Frequently did, actually. Vide the Asian financial crisis. No need to give banks the third degree. Just round up a few mid-level scapegoats, stick in the necessary taxpayer funds and move on. No harm done, really.

And deregulate, of course. Get the Asian governments to finally remove all those counter-productive protectionist barriers, designed to nurture corporate national champions. It didn’t matter whether they were banks or industrial companies, they were in the way. And they never succeeded anyway. Samsung and Hyundai were aberrations.

This was the era of globalisation and the fruits of globalisation lay with the multinationals. Like the RATs and its other frat friends. It might not be the gun-toting, take-no-prisoners operation that defined the Grubsters, but it had its ways and was highly trusted for them and was no more happy about being stuck in SOX than any other bank that wanted to rule the world.

And so Sam was a forum to air differences and decide how it would be done. After all, the civilised world was now in a crusade against the forces of darkness. However incompetent their president, the American leadership, and the leaders of any European country that could get its arse organised, were going to do something about it and would need the support of everyone. And that meant the support of the banks.
Which meant payback. And perhaps the occasional kickback. Both for Asian leaders who seemed too dim to understand that deregulation and open markets was the only way to go and of course for the good members of the financial fraternity that undertook such risks to bring these tasks off while operating in the restrictive environment of their annoying SOX. And occasional T-shirt.

Sam was a rarefied group, which was why the rabble would arrive in such volumes on Saturday morning. There were several like it around the world, Wiseman’s was just the one for non-Japan Asia, especially the bit that had once been British, Dutch or French. And, in the Philippines, American.

Dial-up Freemasonry, with its funny handshakes and rolled-up trouser legs, was on its way out. People still remembered the Exodus and, especially among the clients of the RAT, told themselves they were the heirs of the pharaohs. All considered themselves chosen, which was why there was such a queue to become one of the elect.

But fundamentally, they were a group who believed the world belonged to them. And, to a large extent, they made sure it did: they were insiders and always had been. They shared favours and tips and supported one another to make sure they stayed ahead, both collectively and individually. The goal was to ensure that their heirs and successors enjoyed the same privileges they had come to enjoy. After all, what was wealth for, if not for passing on?

High-speed, broadband Freemasonry was really no different. It was just the same made better. Information trafficking at light speed in fat pipes for the convenience of all, Aaron Moore’s one of the fattest. Suck on his pipe of peace and get ahead. Because like the internet, Freemasonry 2.0, with its associated Film Club or Flick Soc, was an American incarnation of a British creation. V for victory, fuck you to the rest.
The old British port decanters and toasts to the sovereign had been retained, the American chosen people could be quite as waspish about their ancestry as any European, but now it was less about saving the world and more about making money. Which suited the ambitious Asians aspiring to join what was still quite a white group down to the ground. The sovereign these days was a gold coin from the Perth Mint.

White, of course, amongst the guests. Like the coins, the servants were mainly brown or yellow, although Aaron Moore assured first timers that their pipes could be quite as fat as any white man’s. Perhaps not, he would then add, as any black man’s, but of course he rarely took black dick these days, much as he enjoyed it.

So, on Saturday, the Asian servants would progressively disrobe as they offered around pipes of sperm or opium derivatives. There would be cigars and brandy and recliners by the pool. And Dancer would take Moore aside and offer him a positon at the Royal Trust.

Because the amount of business Moore and his associates were putting through some of the client accounts was growing exponentially. For all that the US had destroyed the Taliban in Afghanistan, the War against Terror was going extremely badly. They were gearing up to take down Saddam Hussein without a shred of evidence that he had anything to do with anything other than owning some of the biggest oil fields in the world.

Bribing the necessary intermediaries and shipping the necessary arms and other equipment off the Congressional and various Parliamentary books was expensive. Especially since various upsets under the Clinton administration had led to a dialling-back of the original semi-official programme. Now, the worst bits were outsourced to Moore’s stand-alone group, which he’d set up with Russian money.
They needed the Saudis help. But the Saudis, who definitely did have their fingers all over the World Trade Center bombings, were increasingly persona non grata in Washington. And they were rapacious in their financial demands because, in the immortal words of one of his friends in the Brunei National Petroleum Company, ‘the fucking towelheads’ wells are running dry.’

Given this, the US backstage operations were grinding up into fifth gear. And that had meant reactivating even disgraced scum like Moore, with his obsession about fulfilling his sacred mission to out Reece. Because they needed more money than even the US Freemasonry groups could rustle up in appropriately-named ‘campaign contributions’ at short notice from their various film societies.

So they would need the help of the bankers and their fat pipes, down which was pumped the liquidity that comprised the life blood of the global economy. And therein lay the opportunity for the Star Wars Appreciation Group, as one of the Brothers had amusingly termed their little gathering.
Chapter 3

After talking to Moore, Dancer always felt he needed a bath. The man was outwardly smooth, indeed literally so these days for reasons of his own vanity, but inwardly he was a maggoty cadaver.

Dancer had caught him stark naked in the bathing complex, coming off an extended session with one of the available pool boys. Indeed, such was the intimate informality of these gatherings that Dancer had been privileged to watch Moore concluding his exertions as he came off. The boy looked relieved to see the back of him as Moore left him and not necessarily in a good way.

But Dancer didn’t care about the wincing boy, he would doubtless be paid. What mattered was making sure that the slowly but remorselessly rising tide of criminality inside the bank could be blamed on someone, should the need arise. Which it was now clear it would. And that meant Moore.

“Wanna talk? Let’s sweat it out in the steam room,” said Moore. He was caked with crusted white granules amid the drying ejaculate.

Dancer tried not to look at the genitals paraded between Moore’s splayed legs in the steam room. “Would you like a job?” he said.

“What did you have in mind?” Moore replied.

“Come and work for us at the RA. You’re good with people, know how to sweet-talk them. Given how much business you do through us and all the money in your various accounts, why not make it official and work for us full-time. These are uncertain times and it will be part of your rehabilitation. I know the Brothers are refusing to put you on the formal payroll; we will. And I’m sure they don’t pay you nearly enough either.”

“The Brothers pay me shit,” said Moore. “They’re not called the Grubsters for nothing. They take the money and I’m left with grubs. How much they pay the Russians and how much they keep for themselves, I’m not sure, but I’m quite certain there’s precious little for me at the end of it.”
“Well, we’ll give you a lot more grub to enjoy. And make sure you can keep your gold coins. You can stick your nose in the trough and never have to take it out.”

“Not a bad plan, man,” he said. “I am good with my mouth and my silver tongue can reduce any man to Jell-O. But there’s a condition.”

“Oh?”

“I want to meet Edward Reece. After all, that’s been the entire plan for the last decade. I’ve got to bring him out. As Elwood said to Jake, I’m on a mission from God.”

“Well, if you can do that, you’re more of a man than me,” said Dancer.

“I’m all man, darling,” said Moore. “Let me show you. Because the Grubsters are cunts, moaning I was foisted on them for taking a hard-earned buck. Who are they to play holier-than-thou when they cut corners worse than anyone to get to the cash? So, let me get down on my knees and thank you the way you deserve. I think doing things together is something we’d enjoy. You know what they say, if you want a real blow job, go to someone with a dick.”

To Dancer’s alarm, he then proved that adage correct and left Dancer to mull the consequences of his decision, waking up half an hour later, drained in the heat of the steam room.

Dinner that Saturday was a light meal, heavy on the wines. As the amuse bouche were placed in front of them, the guests enjoyed crudity with their crudités. Several didn’t make it to the final round of dishes, tempted away before the end by the dishes with the dishes. Judged to have failed as lightweights who couldn’t control their appetites, they could expect to be blackballed. As Moore was. Repeatedly. Diets were important and Moore kept falling off his in his search for chocolate and other candy.

So, over little sweeties, the talk was of SOX and sex, oil and the world economy’s need for grease, both for financing the upcoming war and who might need to be sounded out to check they were sound to make sure the various upcoming elections were a win-win for all.
Most important of all, what would be the role for the banks in all of this? Exactly how would they fulfil their traditional role of trusted intermediary, standing in the middle and taking a cut from both sides?

On this, opinions were split. Or rather, there was unanimity as to what would happen, but less on how to respond to it. In return for helping them force Asian governments to prise open their markets to foreign capital, their home governments would demand their pound of flesh. Dubya and his crew would make sure of it.

The banks would be kindly request to perform their national service in the interest of freedom and the maintenance of an open, globalised world. No one round the table had any problem with that, they wouldn’t have even heard of SWAG if they had, but some of them were hiding behind stories of limp-wristed old women in their head office legal and compliance departments. It might be tough to get it all through the system, especially if some self-righteous arsehole decided to blow the whistle in the future.

In Dancer’s opinion, these concerns were misplaced. Actually, they were self-serving clap-trap. He knew from personal experience at the RA that people like that could just be bullied out, even from an HR department. Who knew what constructive dismissal meant anyway?

And the concerns were also beside the point, as the Yanks among the company were quick to inform the others. Washington had a febrile air these days and little time and less truck for time-wasters. They genuinely regarded themselves as at war and considered that war rules applied.

For all the talk of open markets and free societies, that meant doing what you were told and doing it without complaining or risk being carted off somewhere without access to a private cinema. Frankly, most of the Yanks around the table were very glad to be in Asia, where Washington and its IRS seemed a long way away. As did the politics of the Middle East with its strong men and shifting allegiances that was coming to consume more of their lives.
Now, it was time to eat, drink and be merry as they made sure to stash away gold bars, gems and simple dollar bills in the basement of their secret global property portfolios. They talked of better times and a return to business as usual once the storm had blown over, but Dancer saw the more level heads around the table shake slowly.

Particularly, but not exclusively through Moore’s proprietary network, gold bars, gems and simple dollar bills were starting to flow through their collective organisations with increasing speed, regularity and size. It didn’t matter which country you were from, if your government had been strong-armed into the War on Terror, so had your organisation. It was simply a case of carving up the work flow and associated revenues.

Which could be substantial. Indeed, a certain amount of inverted Enron and WorldCom flair was required in the accounting departments to hide the profits being produced. Many had some legacy Japanese real estate to provide against or maybe an equity-backed loan to gonebust.com in which to dump it, but for some it was genuinely a problem.

“Up the bonuses,” shouted Jan from the Rotters Bank.

“He might want to take his in cash,” muttered John Smith, technically at the Bloated Sumo Investment Corp, which was wrestling with a very large Japanese real estate portfolio, but who was admitted because he was British and defined pukka.

And he had a point, the Rotters oversaw an appallingly badly run sprawling post-colonial melange of offices across a worldwide list of appallingly badly run countries. It was perhaps the biggest provider of national service of any financial institution on the planet.

“And hire some more Chinese!” said Walter, one of the small but growing Mainland Chinese contingent at the party. “Now we’ve got the WTO through, it’s going to be party time!”
Walter also had a point. And all the bankers knew it. In a darkening world, Mainland China represented new pastures and was the perfect place to dump surplus capital. No one would question where it had gone or why no profits ever seemed to emerge. Franchise investment would be the mantra and the biggest investment was, of course, the bank’s people. And relationship building. Often the same thing, in fact, as the children of clients began to turn up as summer interns.

Dinner broke up with the loyal toast to the sovereign and a shiny Australian coin was placed in the hands of each of the diners who had successfully stayed at the table. Then it was party time.

Dancer went off to play bridge with some of the other private bankers. He had called trumps and won the first hand. He noticed Selwyn Jones in discussion with Moore, both of them looking over to him repeatedly. When he’d won the rubber, he excused himself and joined them.

“Aaron says you offered him a job,” said Jones.

“Yes.”

“And I want to make clear my terms,” said Moore.

“Oh? More?”

“Yes. I insist on getting closer to Reece. You also need to understand that, in the eyes of both your government and mine, it is a priority to get Reece to come out. If he doesn’t, he is to be made to understand that he has made a mistake. Your recent transaction to build up his career to give him the confidence to relax and do so has failed.

“I now hear you’ve been whining that the Brothers and Martin Dame said Reece spiked your deal. It may not be true, but we don’t need to hear any criticism from you. The RAT and Normal Trading Bank are on service to their governments, which are on service to mine, and their job is to get Reece out. Otherwise, your failure becomes my failure and I don’t fail.”

Dancer looked over Moore’s shoulder at a couple of junior MDs at Grubster Brothers, wheeling their suitcases to the front door and rolling their eyes.

“But he doesn’t even know you exist or what any of us want him to do,” said Jones.
“Chalk that up as another failure for you and prepare to report to good old Charles Villa for punishment. Get him out and get me close to him. I fucked that little twerp Wong into line and I intend to do the same to your precious little smoker, Reece. Are you aware that I personally seduced the Duke of Devon?”

Now Dancer rolled his eyes. None of Moore’s war stories were new to any of them and it was his lack of any new ones that lay behind this particular emission of spittle and bile.

“I understand,” said Jones. “I wanted that business, it was a steal that would have transformed our organisation and given us a real business for once. Now, all I get is snide remarks about what my bank is for and who it is I’d most like to take money from to roll over and make space for some real heavy hitters. I think a strategic shit on Reece’s career might be just the pressure valve the bank needs to move on. Especially as so much of the good work’s already been done by our American friends here.”

“Spoken like a true corporate titan,” said Moore and then kissed him on the cheek. “Let’s mosey off and see what we can find, eh?”

Dancer watched them go. Moore had a way of wagging his backside that was very disconcerting. Jones had a rumpled look of a man about to be scrunched up like a piece of used foolscap. He turned away. At least, he hadn’t committed to doing any strategic shits. Quite enough of that happened at these parties already. He wondered to what extent the waiters really cleaned up after they’d cleaned up at the end of the weekend.

He doubted they earned much. The thing about the party circuit was that their members genuinely did believe they were better than everyone else. They had been chosen and then elected and not blackballed. Thus, they were the elect. Unless picked out of the crowd and approached, membership was impossible.
They were the in-crowd and to them went the choicest cuts. Others got the leftovers, dregs, permission to gather up the crumbs from under the many copious tables. And the fact that the Saturday rabble didn’t know about the Friday dinners showed that crumbs fell from many tables.

As they reclined on the pool deck, there really was no thought amongst this group for those who served and serviced them. Those bending over to fill the various plastic cups with wine were really just there to fuck and be fucked. No love involved. Because those in the SWAG fucked those outside the SWAG. Because they were losers who had failed. Because anyone who was anyone was in SWAG or aspired to be. And that was the real beauty of SWAG: you got to blackball your peers.

Or, even better, your betters. Who got fucked as well until they begged with appropriate humility for admission and the recommencement of their careers and all the filthy lucre that came with it. Dancer wondered how long such a party could last. It was one thing for the Americans to introduce fat pipes to dial-up Freemasonry; it was quite another to being broadband to all. Its new members had abandoned any real pretence at improving the world as they shovelled their snouts in the trough.

And Moore had just taken Selwyn Jones off to do what? At this time of night, Moore would have a camera, because Aaron Moore always had a camera. And drugs. And a winning way. Go on, go on, why not? Just a little sniff. It helps you relax, you know.

Dancer suspected he knew. If Jones was off with Moore and the relaxant, Dancer been in a hotel in Bangkok a few weeks earlier. There’d been this lady in the lift. Or he thought she was a lady. She’d smiled almost as winningly as Moore and it had been a long day with some very boring meetings. By the time he discovered she had a penis, they were both essentially naked. She’d put something in his whisky, although that wasn’t really an excuse.
He did the deed and s/he showed him the camera in his bag afterwards. He was judged to have failed and the price would be a job for Moore and some of the Brothers’ stooges from the RA’s corporate lawyers, Elysian Alliance, seconded to the compliance department to watch Reece and report on any minor infraction to the wolves of C3PO circling outside.
Chapter 4

Ten years passed. Reece’s career at the RAT ended very badly. In their collective desperation to get him out, they ended up forcing him out. They harassed him until he had a nervous breakdown and quit. Moore never did meet him, but that was cold comfort. Reece left a bank almost as traumatised as him after a solid fifteen months in which it would be fair to say there was almost no discussion by anyone of any seniority in Asia inside or outside the bank, amazingly apart from him, about Reece’s alleged sexuality, business competence and whether the Grubsters or the RA could get him out and, if not, who would end up carrying the can.

In the end, both Reece and the RAT did. After more than half a decade under siege, with C3PO telling everyone the RA was employing a drug-trading homo wanker adept with his finger who stuck things up his nose as soon as look at them, Reece’s departure just after his promotion came through tore the bank apart.

No one, apart from a surprisingly large group in head office in Europe who made sure to keep their heads down as much as possible, could understand what the hell was going on or why the Grubsters were making such a fuss as everyone else thought that Reece was a nice, if somewhat strange, and thoroughly competent banker.

Those were the days when membership of Sam still had some exclusivity. The film societies were growing, but still mainly for a particularly unpleasant group of sinners. And Sam, whether it was the Grubsters, the RA or their growing band of lawyers, wanted Reece to become a member. And they wanted it because they all knew, but amazingly once again Reece didn’t, that, as Charles Villa had once so memorably put it, the Herbert was a Fitz.
And they wanted it for a reason. The Friday night crowd might look down on the weekenders, but they also climbed mountains of social engagements, made and maintained contacts and sought to improve their standing in the group whose welfare they protected and promoted. They doffed their cap to the golden sovereign and also wanted some genuine class in their organisation. Not perhaps to drop the name as the Flick Soc so readily did, but because being a Fitz mattered to them.

Because the Friday night crowd was part of the establishment of the sprawling house that was the global party circuit. Arguably, it was the establishment. It certainly watched the old ways get chipped away with dismay, even as it acknowledged that it was not immune to the same trends. And that’s why Reece was valuable. Something was being lost that he could refill. And Wong. And even Moore if he was anyone but Aaron Moore. Sam was agnostic over a person’s sexuality, although SWAG was almost exclusively gay. And sex-obsessed. With Moore swanning round, regaling others with stories of what a great lay that other little twerp Wong had been. Ultimately, it had caused Wong to resign in disgust from his Freemasonry group, one so exclusive it was more quill and sealing wax than even dial-up 56k modems.

And even though Wong was also a Fitz, or a Fritz or possibly a Frits, they couldn’t get him back. Nor, and this was the immensely frustrating part, could they ever get Reece past the Saturday night revellers to a quiet Friday night session. Moore, in his obsession with getting back into Buckingham Palace, always threw others in his path. By the truckload.

And it didn’t help that most of the drunken revellers bumping into him, approaching him for sex and generally hoping to line their own pockets, were being directed Moore’s way by C3PO, now since the departure of Reece from the Royal Trust, the Gang of Four or sometimes, in honour of Moore’s centrality within it, the Party of Five. Or by someone else embittered by years of failing to get through to him or fulfil his mission, like Charles Villa.
It was deeply frustrating. For all they were sure that Wong was a superlative lay, he’d given up demonstrating the fact. And while Moore was absolutely convinced Reece would be just as good, it was now self-evident to anyone with eyes to see that Reece should be protected from him at all costs.

Because, if Moore did one thing on this Earth, it was fuck people. And none of them ever really got over it or past it. Charles Villa, who also fucked people for a living, certainly hadn’t been able to and was now the semi-public face of Moore’s drugs trading.

And when the RAT suggested Reece approach Villa for help with solving Wong’s problem with Moore, it made the Grubsters talking their own book look like teddy bear’s picnic. The RAT had been hoping Villa would destroy him once and for all, even as they told Villa it was his one final chance at redemption with his erstwhile bosses in London.

So, the problem had become circular: Moore was insisting he be allowed to meet Reece, but he could under no circumstances be allowed to do so. Unless someone pensioned him off or shot him in the head, no progress could be made and the more unreconstructed elements in the Gang of Four could keep throwing film buffs at Reece and then telling him he’d failed when he couldn’t make it to the table for sushi and tapas.

Sam wanted Wong to shoot him in the head. But Wong, although more than happy to do so, had been fucked by Villa one too many times in the past as well and was very circumspect about how it should be done.

He wanted to know Reece was safe, which with Moore, Villa and half the global Flick Socs following him around, was a matter of debate. And that debate among the C3PO members usually resulted in them coming up with some new threshold for him to meet before they would order Moore to get out of the way.
Because some of them also wanted him to go to tea with the Queen. Because the Queen was ultimately the global head of the Freemasons and much of the mess related to that fact, as Moore would gleefully repeat. In turn, Villa’s erstwhile bosses in London had also once included it in their delivery instructions and never quite changed the order, even though most now recognised it would be counter-productive.

The RAT had driven Reece to paranoid depression in his belief that everyone was following him and trying to find out if he was gay. He then had a second nervous collapse when he did finally come out and the Gang of Four and their lawyers, notably on the initiative of the Royal Trust, decided that, after a decade and a half of sniping first at them and then by them, they’d really rather he didn’t come out at all.

They couldn’t handle him finding out all the things they’d said about and done to him on the ostensible grounds that he was a loser who deserved it for failing to realise what people were trying to tell him was available. Among the elite, things had degenerated into a lot more serious a mess than having to work out how to carve out the loot from Dubya’s diamond transporting business.

And the really annoying thing was that, in the most technical sense, because that was what the small army of lawyers was employed for now that the Elysian Alliance had been replaced with White Wash, Green Fields and Red Rack‘em, what the Brothers said about the Royal Alpines, Reece and indeed, unfortunately, him as well as several others, not least Moore, was employed to do, was actually true. From a certain point of view.

And as he recovered from his second nervous breakdown and the RT got to time out a legal claim for corporate bullying, Reece was discovering the same thing. A part of him actually wouldn’t mind having tea with at least someone in the royal family, so long as he wasn’t hustled into some choreographed photo-op with a circle of uninvited vultures observing in the eaves and marking his card as a fail if he stepped on the cracks in the parquet floor rather than the squares.
They were at an impasse as Moore, Villa and parts of C3PO, particularly the RATs, deliberately failed Reece in their desire to get their own personal objectives met. Which they did in part for financial ends and in part out of pure spite. This was because their abject failure to get through to Reece for so many years left a legacy of bitterness and resentment the depth of which Reece didn’t fully understand.

And nowhere more so that at the RT, where having promised their royal clients repeatedly to deliver him and then failed to do so, there was a degree of hatred inside the institution that meant it struggled to think rationally about him. Particularly when the Brothers and their lawyers were needling it and a dozen of its employees daily and telling them they could have got Reece and Wong to shoot Moore dead years ago if the RT hadn’t insisted on delivering Reece to the Palace. After which, of course, it would have been child’s play to actually do so.

Screwing up the IVF of Reece’s child to leave her with a genetic deformity may have been its greatest crime, although the bank continued to argue that Reece had been given the option to abort and hadn’t done so, so that he was the one who had failed. Not many people agreed with that argument, particularly given that at the time Reece still didn’t know that people were trying to get him out because they wanted him in Sam. And the Quill and Parchment Preservation Society. Or anywhere where he’d be safe from the grasping selves of the upwardly mobile among Asia’s great and not so good. But the QPPS was judged for the longest time to be the most appropriate home for him. And then he could perhaps finally go to bed and rest. Or even just pass out on a recliner.

But screwing up the genetics of an innocent man’s child simply because it could and because the man took no notice of them because he didn’t know they were there was not unique in the corporate annals of the RAT. And that was where the Brothers’ needling really hurt.
The bank was a loyal servant of the state. Several states, actually, given how small its mountain home was. And being a big bank from a small country, it naturally spilled beyond its borders. A bit like the Rotters Bank had before it was reduced to slag and whose concrete boots had dragged down three of the banks that sought to dismember it on its way to the bottom of the harbour.

Like Selwyn Jones’ Normal Trading Bank, it had made itself available to those who wanted to use it and no one had wanted to use it more than Moore’s former employers in the US government.

Indeed, Sam was called that for a very good reason. Quite separate from being Mr Wiseman’s personal – and absolutely not Christian – name, it was full of RATs. And P2 in Italy had also been full of RATs, although they were called ratty Alpine Bankers at the time. Indeed, when Freemasonry was upgrading from quill and parchment to typewriter and copy paper, the AB had been intermediary in chief for the money transfers.

Dancer hadn’t understood the full of it until he left the Trust, by then almost as ruined as the RA, which had undergone several successive bail-outs, amounting to several tens of billions of US dollars for its inability to control its activities in the US.

But after he did and joined the Central Bank of Albion, whose losses from buying the Rotters Bank just as the world economy collapsed were the biggest in worldwide corporate history, which of course could have happened to anyone, he found that the RAT had form.

Indeed, in a moment of candour, the blasphemer in chief against Reece, Tom Spring, who ran the Brothers in Asia and once worked at Genteel Exterminators, a smaller but very magical law firm firmly in the circle of trust, once called the place a ‘criminal enterprise’.

Of course, the RATs didn’t see it that way. They felt dumped on, obliged to do work that no one else seemed able to do themselves. They felt they’d had both Moore and Reece foisted on them, by Dancer, and that everything that had happened to them since was down to them. They’d never done anything else wrong. Honest, Gov. Cross my heart and hope to die.
It didn’t help that, quite irrespective of where what blame lay, and there was blame aplenty for all, a combination of Villa’s high profile, Moore’s loud mouth, Reece’s messy and very public learning process and the spread, indeed sprawling, of the various Flick Socs as Asia grew and indeed the sheer monumental difficulty of getting Reece’s attention in the first place, meant that everyone knew something.

Or thought they did. And Reece had also left a surprisingly strong imprint in the minds of colleagues and clients. Annoyingly, mostly favourable. Even among many of those closest to him who’d had their lives turned over by any or all of the Brothers, Moore and Villa and the growing army of lawyers employed to keep the whole unwieldy mess on some sort of even keel.

And the Brothers had been ruthless in turning up wrongdoing and then exploiting it. Moore was not a popular man, one reason the Brothers kept his stipend low and usually paid in kind rather than cash. As he so frequently complained, he was indeed paid shit as he worked off his employer loan.

But he was also a past master at buck passing. He outsourced both his work and his problems and much of that he had now delegated to Villa. Villa had a professionalism that Moore lacked, but when it came to Moore and Reece no one lasted long and now he was little more than yet another ghastly copy of Dorian Grey.

Not that the Royal Trust was much different. Outsourcing their problems, complaining about what was happening and expecting others to deliver them a solution was becoming a problem for everyone. Moore might be the devil and Villa his handmaiden, but the RAT’s holier-than-thou attitude was losing it what little sympathy still remained to it.

Even among the many who had or did work there. Including Dancer, who knew he was no saint and was grateful for his cushy sinecure at CBA, for all that it came with a hefty sting in its tail.
And many of Reece’s colleagues whose various peccadillos had cost them either deal fees, promotions, jobs or even ultimately their life savings, depending on their figurative ability to stay at the trough without gorging at it. Which surprisingly few were able to do in Asia in the go-go years after the Asian financial crisis and the rise of China. Sometimes, it seemed that the global financial crisis had really happened somewhere else.

And given that their form went back to Reece’s childhood and even beyond, the Trust’s whining had a hollow ring to it. When the Savoyard government wanted to raise an under the table loan to recapitalise Banca Aurelia, their own equivalent of the Rotters that had fallen so deep in the shit it had effectively drowned in it, the RT was at the centre of it.

The money to thank the leadership of the loyal opposition for raising it was paid by the chief executive of the country’s largest state-owned enterprise to the Trust. RT then took a hefty cut before passing it on to the leader of the opposition via Conrad Grebel, the head of BA’s London branch.

Grebel’s biggest sin was working for BA at all. He was in fact a 1980s version of Dancer. He was an arrogant man who considered himself one of the elect, because he was also a Freemason, although not in the heretical Savoyard grouping, T5. He was brought low by those who administered T5 who lacked his arrogance but considered themselves nonetheless chosen and entitled to make a great deal of money for themselves and their friends while spreading the gospel of doing it their way by hook or by crook.

Grebel went to a couple of boring meetings on a business trip, was accosted by a lady of the night or two on the way home to bed, unwisely bedded both her and him and never got away again. When it became clear not just that BA was a festering can of worms that might simply collapse into slag at any moment as it sought to muscle out all the competition for insiders’ favours, but that the rot was coming into it through its principal shareholders as well as its political masters and regulators, he tried to get away.
But there weren’t any sinecures at CBA available back then; that bank was still a model of Calvinist abstemiousness. T5 found him and killed him and it was twelve long years before the Savoyard institutions could get on top of them and another fifteen years until its legacy was mostly expunged from government and society. In the meantime, the country was reduced to somewhere between international irrelevance and a bad joke.

Because in the days before even the battles between Betamax and VHS for dominance of home entertainment, the world still had both its Freemasonry societies and its nascent Flick Socs. And in the Unwilling Republic of Savoy, the biggest Flick Soc was T5. In fact, it was the only Flick Soc. You were either in it or you were nobody.

It had been founded just after the war, when the abolition of the monarchy also abolished its old quill and parchment Freemasonry society. After all, what was the point of having a society dedicated to lauding the sovereign when there was no longer a sovereign to laud?

So the non-sovereign set up a non-lodge. And everybody joined. Because that’s where the money was. And the status. And the power. And the preferment. And, frankly, everything. Savoy was traumatised after the war; it hadn’t even known which side it was fighting on during the war. Or who it’s leader was: the king or the Dear Leader.

When both went, a vacuum emerged. Into which stepped the kindly Americans. They had already used their Savoyard connections in New York to help pacify the south of the country as they overran it in the later years of the war and they simply extended a winning formula to the whole country in 1945.

The legitimate goal was stopping Stalin from spreading communism any further into western Europe. The less legitimate goal was stopping the revival of an independent and confident Britain and France, let alone Germany. The means was taking control of and then manipulating existing power structures. Such as the old political establishment in Savoy, centred around its vain and vainly hopeful pretender, the Prince of Tripoli.
He joined. The government of national unity joined. The heads of the Dear Leader’s state-owned enterprises and various domestic and international security departments joined. And then everybody joined. Everyone could take part and get ahead as long as no one did anything to rock the boat. All jobs would be carved up between the boys and everyone could have a cut.

But in exchange everyone was guilty of taking a cut and everyone had to keep their mouths shut, their noses clean and their faces that looked like butter wouldn’t melt in their mouths as they protested their outraged innocence that anyone could accuse them of being anything less than 113% honest.

But behind the high walls, the clean noses were used mainly to snort the coke more effectively. Boy, could the hit be good then. And there were of course many, many boys to hit on, with a ceremonial photo at the end with the bare-chested PT to say, ‘I hit that!’

Butter wouldn’t melt in their mouths because they were so often full of someone else’s cheese. Many other mouths stayed shut because they had a gag in them. This might be on a bed behind those comforting walls, in a ceremonial dungeon or beneath less comforting walls in a dirt-strewn alley. Perhaps they might even be in a journalistic news department with an order handed down by a judge who was, of course, also in T5. As were the editors of the newspapers. And the TV and radio stations. And their controlling shareholders in Parliament and the various ministry buildings.

T5 rendered the trappings of the democratic state irrelevant, since nothing important happened that didn’t happen within the confines of T5, over a card or dinner table, over a cognac or a cigar, over a coke smeared teenage temptress or rent boy, over a wine barrel with your hands tied behind your back and a gun barrel up your arsehole.
And T5 went global for Savoy when the South Americans started to join in the 1950s. It was tailor-made for countries with the trappings of democracy and a desire for national resurgence wrapped around a corrupt, maggoty elite dragging a once-successful country into isolation, penury and ridicule while they made off with the proceeds. It was the very definition of T5 in action.

Latin habits of patronage were widespread across both Savoy and the eponymous Latin America. In fact, it was remarkable the extent to which the ancient Roman habit of *patrocinium*, whereby the *patroni* protected and promoted their *clientes* in return for the support and loyalty of those clients had survived into the middle of the twentieth century in so many countries that had once comprised the Roman Empire.

Freemasonry, whether representing actual continuity or its echo in those republican societies, played its part. The primary lodge was always headed by the national sovereign or representative and it defined a model perfected by the British: that of the open elite. Anyone could join so long as they passed certain tests and conformed to certain norms, in Britain’s case a public school education, enough money and, in most cases, a commitment to the public good.

Few other countries managed to remember the last bit. Public good to them meant *res publica*, the republic, and in those republican societies, often rendered republican by some political or military trauma in their past, *La Repubblica, sono loro* or equivalent in other languages. The republic was theirs, a plaything for their enjoyment and a tool for their advancement and the advancement of post-war American norms.

And anti-communism became boring after a while. Open markets, global capital, deregulation and freedom, freedom, freedom were much more sexy ideals as wealth began to flow as freely as the champagne and the corporate jets to private islands worldwide.
Into this nexus, the old Alpine Bank had fallen. In fact, it had fallen in twice. Savoy was next door to the Holey Cheese Confederation and the HCC had a large Savoyard population, who helped to keep the retirement funds of their many members south of the border secure. AB grew fat on such business.

And when they decided harvesting client portfolios in the Alps wasn’t sexy enough and used some of the accumulated cream to buy a British investment bank for a song, they fell in a second time. For Boring Cousins really wasn’t boring at all. It had a long list of clients from the British elite. Including most of the members of Britain’s Freemasonry groups.

These had weathered the changing times since 1945 somewhat more successfully than their cousins across the water but, courtesy of the Thatcherite economic and social revolution, were beginning to undergo the same psychological changes. New money was coming in and with it new mores.

Boring Cousins had capitalised on this. Indeed, it was why it existed. It had been grown fat on the Big Bang in London’s financial district and been laid low by its consequences in less than a decade. For a while, it had been the most high profile of Britain’s new financial institutions, an aspirant old country equivalent of the Grubster Brothers in the US.

And for many of the same reasons: it owed its initial rise to prominence to T5, because it obtained its first big break in the 1960s arranging a loan to construct Savoy’s new transport systems. With comfits all round at the end.

Both parts of the new Royal Alpine Trust lived off the fruits of other people’s labour, coming together to rise to greater and greater heights of international prominence until the new glorious RA was laid low in a global earthquake, just about the time Reece fled the place. It had still not fully recovered and continued to whine that the punch bowl had been taken away, that no one loved it or seemed willing to help it.
Or parts of it were. The other parts saw the problem. These were the bits where Reece had once worked and many of them wished as fervently as most of the others in the Gang of Four that their private bankers would disentangle either themselves or Reece from the worst of their clients, particularly any or all of T5, the royal family, Moore, Villa and the need for endless national service on behalf of the global Flick Socs that crusted like barnacles on the fat pipes of broadband Freemasonry.

Moore was still on the payroll, his stipend a blind eye to the accounts he ran there to deal with all the shit the Brothers gave him as a result of his connection to the Russians. The trauma it was all causing now that Reece was out and thoroughly unimpressed by the mess that had been made in the ostensible name of achieving quite a simple goal that was also fundamentally none of anyone else’s business, was tearing the RT in twain. The private bankers and investment bankers both wanted to be shot of the others and more and more often wanted the others simply to be shot.

For it was becoming increasingly clear that Reece was being deliberately withheld from their masters in London. And the more they whined that he ‘had’ to help them deal with Moore’s entanglement with the British royals and his obsession with meeting Reece and completing his mission, the more it became clear that he ‘had’ to do no such thing.

Everybody needed to calm down. Especially the RT and its shared private banking clients of Dancer’s at CBA, who were, truth be told, at the very heart of the mess.
Chapter 5

Wiseman invited Villa to coffee at his flat. Whereas Villa was driven around in a battered old Volkswagen whilst living in a flat where you could barely move for antiques, Wiseman drove himself in a new Mercedes and lived in a flat that was mainly open space and a few things he liked. Villa might have plenty of sex, but he was single. Wiseman got rather less sex, but was happily married. Villa’s life was very private, although widely gossiped about. Wiseman’s was rather more public and hardly gossiped about at all.

Apart from his parties. Which were infrequent and held only when it was his turn. At which point, he would open his house in northern Luzon for whoever was on the guest list that month. It kept them all away from his daily life in Hong Kong.

It was true that he would attend, he was after all the host, but he made a strict point of mysteriously vanishing no later than two o’clock on Saturday afternoons. Actually, not so mysteriously. He simply went back to Hong Kong to watch TV and perhaps take his children to soccer practice.

Those Sam weekends were a chore, although undoubtedly a necessary one since if he took himself off the roster, someone else would simply take his place. That was how Sam worked: it was self-sustaining and he would have blackballed himself by default. People wanted to be there. They wanted to network and get ahead. And, from two o’clock on Saturday afternoon, to get some head.

Villa did his entertaining one to one, or sometimes two to one, in private. Sam did it in groups in public. Yes, with cameras, but no, not taking part as well. The cameras were as much to keep an eye on people like Moore as they were to record the activities of the other guests.
And Wiseman didn’t provide the serving staff, only the house. Sam, more specifically its SWAG organising committee heavy with Grubster Brothers alumni and their associated hangers-on, provided the waiters. And kept account, paid off the bills and settled any remaining scores at the end.

The reports were that his house had been trashed again. Mainly thanks to Moore, of course. He’d got high, rubbed most of the guests up the wrong way and a few boys the right way and everyone had got over-excited. In the general hubbub, a lot of bad karaoke had been performed to the accompaniment of smashed crockery and various artefacts and other art works on display.

There was vomit everywhere, a few cracked skulls, the swimming pool would need to be drained twice, whilst the filters of the hot tub, if not the hot tub itself, would need to be replaced. The walls would need painting to cover over the Star Wars quotes daubed on them and the sofas with their cigarette, cigar, marijuana and bottom burns were probably beyond repair.

But memories had been made, new members had been inducted into Flick Soc and plans had been formulated over how to deal with Grexit and the possibilities of a slowdown in China. Most agreed it had been another great weekend and a few guests had even written him thank-you emails.

Overall, Wiseman was glad he had a house to dump all his problem entertainment into. Those members of Sam who weren’t avid members of Flick Soc would be coming over again to his Hong Kong flat for some tapas the upcoming weekend. They were still deeply concerned about Moore and Reece and wanted to talk further. Hence, his request for Villa to join him for coffee.

“Did you have to make him so fat?”
“He needs to learn self-discipline for himself.”
“And your decision to bankrupt his maid?”
“She knew what she had to do. And she failed. She was fair game.”
“You took her life savings and made her unemployable. If Reece hadn’t settled her bills, she could never have come back.”
“As I say, she failed.”
“She has a sick relative.”
“The gods are cruel and fate is fickle. She failed.”
Wiseman sighed and refilled Villa’s coffee cup. Yes, the gods could be cruel. “Do you think the nine months in China was a success?”
Villa’s eyes flickered.
“His course, the course that would have made him happy and put him on a path to fulfil his dreams by pursuing the hobby he genuinely enjoys was put back by a year.”
“He had the option to date that boy Kwok and didn’t take it up. Consequently, he forfeited the right to go back to work and was available to pursue other avenues to get him to his destination.”
“None of which have so far worked, have they Charles? Least of all the time in China. You took him away from his friends and support network and put him in a pokey room where he watched DVDs for nine months. And the man you lined him up with only did it because you told him to and Reece had visibly less interest in him than he did in Reece.”
“I put him in a fresh environment with new opportunities, which he failed to capitalise on. He failed. He could have made a play for that Tse boy, but he didn’t do that either. If he came back a virgin who had failed to uncover Tse’s hidden depths and weighing an extra twenty kilos, don’t blame me.”
“We’ll come back to Giovanni Tse and his hidden depths in a minute. As to Bobby Kwok, did you really think it was necessary to get him a criminal record for failing to get Reece to take him out?”
“He failed. He knew we wanted to get Reece laid and he knew the prize was both love and financial security if he could do it. And he didn’t have to take drugs in that club.”
Wiseman looked down as he said, “You have a way about you, Charles. There’s a cold logic to what you do, but these are people’s lives.”
“May I remind you...”
“No need. I know. And I don’t like that either. You learned your trade from your bosses in London. You were judged to have failed and took up new responsibilities as a result. But Tse and especially Kwok are little people. You are not. You have the full picture, while they did not. No one knows better than you what Reece knows, or more to the point doesn’t know, and the truth is this: he didn’t know anything. And you sent them out like lambs to the slaughter.”

“They failed, Sam. They failed! I...someone...anyone has to get Reece to wake up and on board and they all failed. They needed an incentive to do better in the future.”

“Because you told London he would be ready in weeks of them getting together, whereas you know from painful experience that it can take decades with him to even introduce himself to someone. When a person misses as many opportunities as Reece has, it’s no longer failure, Charles. It’s something quite different. He’s not what you have assumed him to be: someone who’ll be like other people, go out to clubs and get himself laid, hustle to join to a private club just because it’s marked ‘exclusive, members only’. it’s simply his character.”

Villa rippled. It wasn’t pleasant to see. It was like a small earthquake caused by a series of detonations going off inside him. The rage passed, leaving him looking drained.

Wiseman continued. “I’m aware that London also persists in not facing up to this reality and tells you and others, including me on occasion, that more of the same will eventually deliver results. I know they can’t lift a finger without reaching out to point it at someone and blame them. But that doesn’t obviate the mess that’s been created or that you’ve contributed to.

“Don’t have people try to make him fat again. Don’t place unnecessary obstacles in the path of men that he’s genuinely interested in and who might like him and don’t try and obstruct his reconstruction of his life just because he’s wrecked so much of yours. As you are painfully aware, he didn’t know he was doing it, whereas you did and do.”
“Sam, take that back. I’ve been trying to help. I do everything I can to accelerate things.”

Wiseman took a deep inhalation. “Not so much, Charles, if the truth be told. Yes, courtesy of Aaron Moore, you have some very specific complications in your life over and above Reece directly. Moore I would no longer wish on anyone and, bad as Washington is – and they are very bad – London is, amazingly, far worse.

“Nevertheless, you have been living with this issue in your in-tray for longer than I’ve been in Asia. You relish setting Reece the stony path that London demands and the Royal Trust eggs on to them. And you all do it for the same reason: as recompense for his…what’s the word I’m looking for? Oh yes. Failure!!!!”

Villa refilled his own coffee cup. London’s agitation, desperation, anger, frustration, blind fury, incomprehension, call it what you will, was starting to make even Moore’s more irritating habits look bearable. Wiseman, loathe as Villa was to admit it, might have a point.

“The Gang of Four demanded it.”

“Not strictly accurate,” said Wiseman. “The Gang of Four also promised London to deliver him to them and failed and, like you, decided to apportion a hundred percent of the blame onto him when a large part of the group were agitating for him to fail so they could get off the hook again. And the Gang of Four is now a Gang of Two. Plus, I grant you, several hundred lawyers in all five continents. But in taking away Bobby Kwok and making it well-nigh impossible for Reece to get him back, even when the Americans demanded it, you delayed things by years.”

“Giovanni Tse was entitled to a turn. And you may recall that the Grubsters insisted on him being taken away. As punishment for getting fat.”

“I do. But they un-insisted on it a long time ago, but Reece’s path has got narrower and stonier all the time.”

“Royal Trust insisted.”

“And now we get to the nub. When the Grubsters stopped insisting, the RATs started. And may I remind you that the Grubsters are looking to make the Gang of Two a Gang of One.
“I acknowledge that a large constituency in each bank would prefer not to make amends and would relish any excuse that one of their other peers can come up with for not settling and for otherwise delaying things. But I think, or I hope, you will agree that delays by RT are no longer to be deemed appropriate.”

Villa had no reply to that. A large coterie of lawyers over a great deal of pizza for the associates and sushi for the partners had, over a series of very expensive nights and weekends a few years back, come up with a very stony path that Reece had to follow to the letter for the banks to disgorge the compensation funds they had previously agreed with their political masters.

The path was specifically designed to please those same apoplectic bosses in London, whose considerable and considerably under-utilised minds, enjoyed amazingly complex solutions to otherwise quite simple problems and relished almost as much seeing Reece fail for the damage he’d done to their own comfortable careers. London was in such a tizzy over Reece, it almost beggared belief and Wiseman knew it was something he had to sort out.

Every time Reece landed in Britain, they assumed he was there to sign on the dotted line and do what the lawyers had set out in their long briefing notes. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, he left again without even acknowledging their presence.

The hundredth time, he would do something entirely within character that again went completely against their expectation, such as engage in a speed race through the city to complete some utterly mundane task so as to avoid several hours of revenge pesterings by members of the global Fiick Socs, the result of which would be a measurably negative level of interest in the possibility that he might be a lost member of the British royal family with the chance to sit down to a twelve-course banquet at Buckingham Palace.
London simply hadn’t bothered to pay enough attention to his life to notice what the Gang of Four and their lawyers were doing to him. Having told their own political masters that this was finally the time when Reece would sit down and sign up, each time he left without doing so and with them angrier than ever.

They had trusted that the banks and lawyers would indeed deliver when it was now increasingly clear that a large part of them were determined to do the opposite and they all had to go away again to grovel to the Palace and spit with rage to Wiseman, Villa and the various banks and lawyers.

And it wasn’t even that Reece was uninterested any more. It was indeed as Wiseman said: the whole atmosphere had become so unbelievably poisoned that his route to happiness had become so narrow as to be non-existent and rational debate about how to widen it was sometimes simply impossible.

The path was turning from stony to broken glass and Reece knew it, as did those members of the Friday night dining society who were continually thwarted by the hordes of SWAG members in their attempts to get him there. And even as he finally tried to navigate a way through, the second half of the lawyers’ plan was constantly kicking in: if he deviated by even one millimetre, he was legitimate roadkill. It was frankly amazing sometimes that he only ever nudged a few bollards.

Only desk jockeys in London, the irredeemably self-obsessed, other complete idiots and very, very bitter people thought the current path was sensible. The problem was there were a lot of the last group. The large group in London had the least right to take that view, given that they hadn’t actually had to do anything except complain for most of the last couple of decades.
It was in Asia that the feelings were truly raw. The banks were raw because Reece now knew what they’d done and was periodically prodded by miscellaneous North Americans to tell anyone who’d listen. Which was a lot of people, given how much time and money the organising committee had spent offending those people in the first place in order to force Reece to take notice of them all.

In fact, Reece’s over-riding problem now was finding a way to stop people listening to what had happened to him, something that the British were not helping him enough with enough by going out to rein in both the Royal Trust and its bloodhound, Aaron Moore.

If the banks as corporations were raw, the staff within them were sometimes flayed. So many had had their lives turned over by the Grubsters over the years and so many had secrets they were willing to pay to keep hidden. Many lives had been destroyed far more thoroughly than Villa’s. And often with Villa’s active involvement.

And so few of them actually had relationships with Reece worth talking about. In their attempts to connect, the Gang of Four, Villa and the rest had trashed what relationships he had and made everyone else he met either a mercenary or too scared to go near him.

He’d left both his last banks with nervous breakdowns over this and for Royal Trust to try to reach out all seemingly lovey-dovey when they were in fact consumed with anger, resentment and simmering and entirely misplaced hatred towards him was an exercise in Reece repeatedly being the bigger man and trying to ignore what had happened, even as others needed him not to.

Such as the Grubsters, who’d had enough of the RT’s time-wasting and had seen half a dozen extremely nice men, all of whom Reece liked, prised away from him one way or another in the name of him having stepped in some way off the narrow, stony path into the road or failed to show sufficient initiative or imagination.
But in reality, when showing initiative often meant being tempted onto another part of the path, frequently so someone could try to curry favour with London or settle a score with someone else, or simply to help one or other banks avoid the need to settle, the exercise was a value-deductive exercise in futility. Especially for Reece. Indeed, for everyone except the lawyers.

Meanwhile, never allowing himself to be forgotten, Aaron Moore continued to hanker after the chance to put Reece in front of the Queen of England. His behaviour held a certain sad logic, but really was one only shared by London and Villa on a bad day.

Everyone else thought the world had moved on. The world was going to shit, not least because of the actions of Aaron Moore, and real governments had bigger fish to fry than tea invitations.

And after a lifetime of bad pay and passed-over promotions as punishment for failing to notice the people trying to get him to Buckingham Palace, Reece should finally be left alone too. Then, he could live his life in financial comfort with someone he could genuinely love.

The result was that Moore, like the Royal Trust, was his own worst enemy: he delayed an end to his own suffering in the hope of finally achieving his life’s mission. In the process, he was annoying everyone.

For he was facing ruin as well. In very poor health, his finances were in ruins. And as a consequence of being pushed from pillar to post by the banks and their representatives, Reece had ended up reporting him to the police in three countries.

The inability of the White House to stop the FBI from opening a file on him was one of the reasons Washington was so angry, given that Moore was ostensibly a US government employee. Now, they were vying with the RCMP in their determination to see him banged up. Although the RCMP had a greater tradition than the FBI, or indeed the Montreal police, of being open to practical alternative suggestions, if they could be proved to exist.
Villa knew this and knew it was why the Grubsters had changed their tune and why Wiseman was now so actively searching for a solution. Villa could see the thoughts scrolling through his head, not that he particularly needed to; it wasn’t the first time they’d had this discussion, although it was the first time they’d had it in such a frank and decided way.

“What do you think, Charles?”

“I won’t say I agree,” said Villa. “I have my ways and they are the ways of many others. Especially London. And, in the past, Washington. But I do hear what you say. Indeed, I’m inclined to concur. I have tried to help and I have tried to accelerate things, but I have also done so subject to very narrow tolerance of deviation. It is certainly the case that the path is currently so stony as to be barely visible.”

“He is essentially climbing a mountain by himself,” said Wiseman. “His last visit to London left them hysterical. Again, they under-estimated Moore’s continuing ability to dissimulate and cause trouble. Given all the frustration of others, we cannot have another round of petty vengeance and blood-letting. It all needs to stop. Tell me you agree, Charles.”

Villa nodded.

“Thank you. Please find a way to tell the Royal Trust that their approach is counter-productive in a way that they won’t interpret as meaning that their strategy of avoiding a settlement and demanding full exoneration is succeeding.”

Villa looked Wiseman in the eyes and couldn’t decide whether to laugh or cry. “That may be difficult.”

“I know. But please do it. Otherwise, yours will be much of the blood that is let.”

“I think I might have a word with Moore.”

“I think that could be a very good idea, whatever you decide to do. Because there’s one other thing, Charles.”

“Oh?”

“The drugs. The drugs trading needs to stop. Otherwise, your failure will be complete and you’ll be banged up too. And not in a good way.”

Villa decided not to comment as he bid Wiseman a polite farewell.
Chapter 6

Moore was fairly bouncing as he came into Villa’s flat. He took off his shoes and then his socks, reaching forward to peck Villa on the lips.

Villa pulled back as Moore pulled him in and gave him a smacker, trying to prise open Villa’s lips for some tongue. But Villa wasn’t having that today. “Take a seat, Aaron,” he said.

“Jerk me off, Charlie boy,” said Moore. “It’s been a week since my last emission and I’m feeling sinful.”

“Maybe later, if you’re good,” said Villa. “But first I want to talk to you about Reece.”

“I know,” said Moore. “Isn’t it great! Everything coming up rose-buds. I’m gonna finally get to screw the little prick. Or big prick, so I hear. Or maybe it’ll screw me. Either way, once I’ve wormed by way into his bed-chamber, he’ll be screwed, of course.”

Moore’s conversation never really changed, more was the pity. He considered himself an optimist, most others considered him a fantasist. But like a copper Tigger, he was the penny that kept bouncing back. Very bad boy.

Villa’s factotum delivered some coffee and disappeared and Villa sat in his winged armchair, deliberately directing Moore to sit on the sofa away from him. “How’s Wong?” he asked.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” said Moore and leered. They’d both slept with him, although in Villa’s case in an attempt to destroy Moore, something which could also be described as both of them having failed!!! Wong was still bitter about it. Another Villa-induced complication. “Although I hear you have your sources,” Moore added.

“I do. And I don’t see any rose-buds in your horoscope, Aaron, so please listen.” He poured the coffee. “Sam Wiseman asked me, very politely, to stop the drugs trading.”

“Jay’s in London.”
“And that’s a non sequitur. Jay Moon may well be in London, Ontario, but that has only interrupted the very limited supply of drugs previously being transported to Koh Samui. It doesn’t alter the main story of what your Russian friends are up to, even if British Airways are still parsing what it means that BA has lost its most valuable customer now that J is more-or-less permanently ensconced in M’s capital, waiting to be paid o’.”

“Why do they still send that crap out on Line?” Moore asked. “Aren’t we beyond that? It’s served its purpose; we’ve got Reece’s attention. Why not pay off the lawyers and shut down the operations room?”

“As you know, they largely have,” said Villa. “But clients expect it now. And with some kind of something now way overdue in Mainland China, interest in the Grubsters’ under the table disclosures about their economy and politics, with a few other messages run over the top of them, are read more avidly than ever. People fight to get their hands on them. I know I read them. Although I’m not sure I can always parse them all.”

Moore said nothing. He’d seen the particular Line and the last two words were p’d o’ – they could refer to Jay Moon being paid off or paid out or j’, as the copy writers sometimes termed Wong because he didn’t speak French nearly as well as Moore did and had an obsession with contractions, waiting to also be paid out or alternatively pissed on or, very possibly, pissed off, by what was going on around him.

Because everyone knew that Wong’s unfortunately long history with Moore made him the perfect person to help bring this mess to an end. Indeed, one of the reasons his life was almost more difficult than anyone else’s was the hope or determination of the Gang of Four and their masters in London and, increasingly Washington, that he would do exactly that.

Wong knew more about the drugs trading than anyone apart from the people doing it. Not that Villa, because that was what Villa did, hadn’t inveigled him into one symbolic drop. Which still made him uncomfortable, even though it was a drop in the ocean compared to what else was going on.
And he was the only one with a real incentive to pin some of it on Moore. And indeed Villa for the reasons above. Because the most annoying thing about Moore by far was his Teflon white birthday suit. Nothing stuck to his skin at all, not even these days body hair – especially not after all that chemotherapy.

“Anyway, we’re drifting from the point,” said Villa.

“Yes, you are,” said Moore. “If you want to stop the drugs, stop distributing them.”

“Stop having your Grubster friends deliver them to me. Preferably by finally telling everyone why the Russians have them send them to you. And stop cashing the cheques that come in once I pass it all down the line.”

“I need the money. Wong’s cut me off, the whining little shit. I have obligations to meet.”

“Not least to that poor boy in London.”

“Fuck him,” said Moore. “Anyone who runs up a two hundred thousand dollar credit card bill deserves to eat all the shit he bought.”

“He bought it for you, as you well know,” said Villa. “And at your instigation. He’s been under your thumb for over half his life and he doesn’t know any other way. You can handle feast and famine, but his life is an exaggerated roller-coaster of ups and downs that’s been that way for as long as any of us can remember.”

“Indeed,” said Moore and jaggled his arms above his lap and he made a few pelvic thrusts.

“We can discuss that further another time,” said Villa. “Stop the drugs trading. Or I go to jail. And if I go to jail, you can bet that hairless backside of yours that you will too.”

“No one’s going to jail,” said Moore. “They simply wouldn’t dare. That’s been the whole point: they can’t afford it to come out.”

“Have you read Reece’s website? He put your photo on it. Basically gave your home address and told everyone exactly what you’ve been doing.”

“He can’t prove it.”
“He doesn’t have to. It’s the one thing London are happy with him about, not least because it’s got my name on it too. If any policeman is instructed to stumble over it during his doughnut break, we’re both dead meat. And a lot of policemen are currently having to forget that they’ve printed out hard copies, scanned the pages and emailed them to their superiors with a request for advice. In far more countries than you were reported in.”

“As I say, I won’t be arrested. I’m too valuable.”

“Maybe. But please recall that the operations room’s Line that ‘the colonial hangover pink’ hating big prick that keeps failing to deliver is now cordially detested by the entire family of the Chinese’ is not just a reference to Wong’s frustration with Reece. It’s also a reference to how many are frustrated that Wong too hasn’t yet acted to cut your head off, Mr Tall Poppy. And it’s a reference to the fact that the Chinese government hate both you and me for doing what we do.”

“It’s our job.”

“No. It’s our daily work. Because that’s the set of blinkers we’ve put on and forgotten to take off. Shipping out drugs to the people we’ve compromised and then using their bank accounts to launder the proceeds through all those banks using accounts set up under some variant of Reece’s name and then passing the money back to the Grubsters for distribution to the US and other governments has become our daily work. Our job was to get Reece to admit he was gay, put him in a stable relationship and have him meet the royal family. We did one, did two and then smashed it repeatedly and completely failed to do three.”

“That’s the difference between you and me,” said Moore. “Passing money back to other governments is more than my daily work, it’s my day job. My daily work is actually to ring the Commies, whether Chinese or Welsh, with enemies until they finally crumble into dust. But my day job is to raise money for governments from the laundry process and do the jobs that no one else wants and has been for many decades, as you well know. And not the US government, as you very well know.”
Flecks of foam were coming from the edges of his mouth. The more unreconstructed elements within the banks were offering Moore protection if he could finally destroy Reece, whose politics were far more liberal than the Line writers had ever imagined, much to their consternation when he began to express them. But in this, the banks worked for the governments and Wiseman was about as senior a representative of the US government as Asia was likely to see.

"I do know, Aaron. And that’s exactly the problem. They don’t want even you to do those jobs any more. And they certainly don’t want your backers doing them.

And this was the problem. The problem engulfing London was actually not new. What was new was the manner in which that problem had now arrived in Washington and was engulfing that city. That was what gave everything so much urgency.

Someone, basically the Grubsters in their prodding of Reece to break the RT’s logjam, had released a dam. And the main plank in that dam was that Moore was in hock to the Russians. Yes, he facilitated, coordinated and otherwise generally supervised and outsourced the drugs trading and other illegal transfers and movements on behalf of half a dozen different governments. But he then used almost his entire cut of it to pay the Russians, who stood behind him with a gun to his head.

He’d been living with it so long he sometimes forgot, humans’ adaptability in this respect could be remarkable, but that was the truth. The Russians were taking his money. Actually, the Russians were taking the Americans’ money more generally and, as any newspaper headline for a year could tell a casual member of the reading public, it went all the way into the White House, the powder-smeared buck coming to a stop on the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office.

That’s why Wiseman and those behind him wanted the drugs trading stopped. And it was why he wanted the banks and their lawyers to stop playing games. Enough was enough as this began to destroy the US both within and in its foreign policy abroad.
“Getting one man to admit he was gay, something that we actually did more than five years ago, has now reached ridiculous extremes,” Villa said.

“You know it’s not just that,” said Moore.

“The drugs trading is. That part is exactly related. It was all our punishment.”

“Maybe. But how will the US control its allies in the future without a little shit against their names?”

“What’s the point of an ally, if it’s broken on the wheel and simply wants to get away?”

“I still think we can do part three. I want to introduce him to Liz.”

Again, Villa decided not to comment as he bid him a polite farewell.


“I’m not really in the mood, Aaron.”
Roderick Dancer did not enjoy his meetings with CBA’s most important private banking clients. It was well-known that its private bank, Sparrows, was by appointment. Indeed, it was one of the selling points of the bank in its marketing materials, two things that marked it out as a very down-market up-market bank. It was, one might say, the Harrod’s of international banking: over-priced and used mainly by Arabs.

Dancer had helped to shut most of it down and sell large parts of the rest to people who could handle Arabs. The old CBA had been happy to lend a hand when politely invited for a quiet word by HMG, it had been game for pretty much anything in its quest to be the world’s number one. That’s how it had ended up with the Rotters Bank and become the world’s number one in bankruptcies.

It had learned its lesson as thoroughly as Dancer had and now was about as modest, suburban and middle class as its clientele. Especially the Windsors. Once a month, Dancer would attend a meeting in the West End with the family’s financial advisers.

At those meetings, he could sit and let his junior do the talking, absorbing all the information he’d need for the quarterly meeting with the family themselves at their suburban home near Slough. At the WC, as it was affectionately known, he usually met the Marquess of Canterbury, one of the Queen’s middle children and the one most concerned with the good order of the family finances.

These meetings had been difficult from the moment the MC realised that Dancer had once worked with Reece at the RA and failed so very spectacularly to get through to him. But they had recently become extremely fractious for reasons that were, much to his blessed relief, neither his nor CBA’s fault.
The accounts at Sparrows were essentially glorified current accounts. To the extent that members of the royal family paid for taxis, groceries and utilities, the bills went through Sparrows. But unsurprisingly, as a good banker, from the beginning he’d sought to persuade the MC to have the family transfer more of its overall savings to Sparrows. Especially as much of it was with the RAT, which was still listing badly in the water as it struggled to come to terms internally with what had happened to it.

After several quarters of politely being told where to shove it, the royal family being traditionalists and loyal to past relationships almost to a fault, now however, he’d started to get his wish. Each month, a bit more money was landing in the Sparrows account and it was coming from the RA.

“Thank you, sir, for trusting us with more of your business,” he said after he’d run over the highlights of the family finances.

“Hmph,” said the prince. “Are the RATs going to fail? Because if they manage their own money the way they manage mine, they won’t have much left next year.”

“I don’t think so,” said Dancer. “They’re mainly herbivores now, cropping at the sweet grass of their clients’ accounts. Skim off a little of the cream and leave the milk for the customers. They’ve wound down the bulk of their trading operations and outsourced most of the execution of client instructions to other banks. If there’s a risk, as with most banks these days, it’s probably either in China or regulatory. Or possibly both.”

“Can I trust you?” asked the prince.

“I hope so, sir.”

“I know you’re aware of how our accounts were managed at the Royal Trust. Indeed, if I recall, you were instrumental in hiring Mr Moore into the bank.”

“I was. Although his account was already active well before I joined.”

“Hmph,” said the prince again. “Be that as it may, it was never my understanding that whatever might happen in our account would involve the removal of our own funds from it.”

Dancer frowned. It wasn’t his understanding either.
“And yet, our accounts are certainly being depleted.”

“Is the money you’re sending here a transfer of capital away from the RT? It’s certainly true that they’re bigger in private banking than we are. If not, shouldn’t you perhaps do that?”

“Yes. If I could. But your Mr Moore makes it very clear that we’re not to rock the boat. Our good behaviour will be rewarded if we look through the current high level of transfers and any decline in our balances will be swiftly reversed.”

Dancer had spouted enough tosh in his life to recognise it when he heard it spouted back. And to recognise a cry for help. “Ignore him and move a block of money,” he said. “Either your equities or your bonds. Just make sure you have some genuine savings on hand and at all costs ignore the pleas and threats of your bankers; they’ll always whine and cajole if you let them. What you don’t want to do is enter a crisis with all your liquid savings in the hands of someone who can turn the tap off or shut the door in your face.”

The prince flinched and said, “You’re probably too young to remember Suez. But that’s what the Yanks did to us then.”

“So, don’t let them do it again to you now, sir.”

“Moore’s threatening to spill the beans if we take our money away from him.”

“As I understand it, he’s already done it. On some blog site in China. And in Japan.”

“Well now he wants to do it in England. ‘Put the Mail and the Sun together and create an explosion that will level houses’, as he puts it. Or, in Canada, ‘expose the grand banks as the sand banks they are’.”

Dancer closed his eyes and breathed out slowly. So, even the royal family read those bank Line notes, the sheer internationalism of which was only now coming to light. But they did have a depressingly high accuracy rate, even if like the prophesies of Nostradamus there could be little certainty about when some of the events would come to pass. Like Wong and Reece getting together to report Moore to the authorities.
It really depended how active the rats at the RAT had been in fucking up Edward Reece’s personal growth process recently. “And Reece has done it too,” he said.

“Eh?”

“I have it on good authority that Reece has also disclosed in public pretty much everything there is to be said on the matter. Including Mr Moore’s personal activity in this building.”

“So I heard. But nothing has yet changed. Except the balance of our accounts in a downward direction.”

“As I understand it, everyone is waiting for somebody else to fire the starting pistol,” said Dancer. “Which, as I further understand it, means persuading Mr Wong to fire it.”

“Yes,” said the MC. “I remember Mr Wong. Very smart chap. A little cocky, if I recall. Somewhat more circumspect, I understand today.”

“I think we all are, sir.”

“I think so too.”

“Move the money, sir.”

“And Mr Moore?”

“What more can he do? Mr Reece sent most of the information to the broadsheets and the BBC and the powers that be ended up having a word with the various editors. The Sun and the Mail may be scum, but they know a genuine red line when they see one. And I think they’ve seen enough of the white Lines as well over the years to know that they also need to wait.”

‘I see. Those who are the talk of the town are often the last to know, or words to that effect, I understand.”

“Indeed, sir. Indeed. Now, please move the money. Or a Yank will lock it up a second time and you won’t be able to say you weren’t warned this time.”

“You’re serious that something’s going on?”

“If I’m hearing you right, for all that you hate Reece for making such a hash of everything, Mr Moore is in too deep. Taking client money is too blatant. Someone will notice beyond you, sir. And then either Mr Moore will take the rest or someone will try and stop him. Either way, your account will be disrupted.”

“Sounds sensible. What about the Russkis?”
“That I can’t say. I simply don’t know. But I can say that the Americans are not used to being in this position and they’re not enjoying it at all. Unlike us, you sir, they’re not going to stand for it much longer. And when the Americans get angry, they tend to lash out aggressively and often without much discrimination.

“Indeed, if you follow closely what Mr Reece is actually doing, he’s being prodded by one group of Americans, namely the Grubsters, to get another group of Americans, namely those with the power to act, to do exactly that: to both the Russians and a third group of Americans that includes and is exemplified by Mr Moore.”

“I see. That is a new perspective. Thank you, Mr Dancer. Very helpful. Now, please leave me as I have some calls to make to the Holey Cheese Confederation.”

Dancer was more than happy to leave. Telling the royal family it was about to go bankrupt was not really his idea of a fun morning out. He hadn’t met Wong himself, but he knew a small army of people who had and he decided to put the feelers out to see if there was anything he could do whatever it was he was meant to do, perhaps make a complaint to the police somewhere. Almost certainly in Hong Kong, because that’s where most of the drug trafficking was centred. In RAT’s private banking department client accounts.

He would also go and see Charles Villa. Because that man was the epicentre of this mess. It might ostensibly be about Reece, and even Wong and Moore, but it had long since ceased to be about either of the first two. Now, it was about those who had created this extraordinary mess over so many decades and how best to clear it up without being front-page news for the next year and a half.

And doing it while Mainland China was hopping mad and baying for blood twice as loud as Washington. They were insisting on vengeance for all the things Moore had said and done against them over the span of his career, including selling drugs into the country and working unceasingly for the end of communism.
It really didn’t help either that some spiteful little shit in London has authorise the partial destruction of bronzes from the Beijing Summer Palace in retribution for the one big occasion on which Reece was deemed to have *failed***!! That event, more than any other, had poisoned the atmosphere for everyone as the Gang of Four rubbed their hands that they were off the hook again and everyone else cried into their beers, gins, whiskies and red wine.

Given the shaky economic situation in the country at the moment and the notorious sensitivity of its political class to external criticism, the seemingly endless stream of articles distributed by the Brothers’ stooges in other financial institutions predicting an imminent collapse of the economy and end to the regime as double entendres for the state of relations between Moore and Wong or, increasingly, Reece, was viewed as highly counter-productive for good international relations.

Especially as China, for all its many faults, was one of the only remaining countries without a military-industrial complex threatening to overwhelm the formal mechanisms of government. Because it had that structure well under control. It wasn’t called T5 or the Freemasons in China; it was called the Communist Party and elements within it were fighting hard to retain some semblance of pragmatic socialism within it as much of the rest continually sought to flip it into Mussolini, or possibly Kuomintang-style, Fascism.

As Dancer understood it, the Americans had broadly learned their lesson: it was much easier to destroy than to build. Since 1945, and especially since Suez, they’d followed a policy that they’d hankered towards for decades before: to step into Britain’s comfortable Eton slippers around the world.

Unfortunately, they hadn’t fully appreciated that populations around the world generally accept the government they have, especially when it’s not obviously bad as Britain’s mostly wasn’t. Slack, lazy and low-level incompetent perhaps, but generally not vindictive, petty or cruel. And the stress of conquest had usually happened in a previous generation, sometimes many generations before.
What that meant was that the change of British to Americans was anything but smooth. The Americans were able to destroy, but proved largely unable to build. There was, outside immediate crisis zones, no incentive for the newly-liberated to subject themselves to others. And phrases such as ‘he may be a dictator, but he’s our dictator’ just don’t really sound right. They were certainly not the kind of remark the British made, or at least too loudly.

Soft power can be exaggerated, particularly by British politicians with not much else to shout about, but old links do remain in place: trade routes, holiday practices, social exchanges, business groupings, military alliances. And the shadow of the British Empire lingered further afield than the post-Brexit Westminster Bubble.

Not enough to create a viable set of trading relationships, but enough to create the psychological and moral backbone for world order, if handled right. Doing things because they were right was a British virtue, even if one these days better practised in Germany.

But the point remained. The US had made a mess, no example better than Saddam Hussein’s Iraq or poor benighted Afghanistan. In microcosm, another appalling mess had been made in Hong Kong, with enough blame to hand around for everyone for years to come. But if ending the mess in Hong Kong helped to end the mess in Washington, so that in turn the mess in London could be cleared up, then the reality was that it was the duty of everyone who knew what was going on to make it happen.

And that meant action from people like Dancer and Villa and not leaving it to Reece, pushed from pillar to post by lawyers trying to save the Royal Trust the money it ended up spending on legal fees, or Wong, who had been burned, quite literally, by this one too many times in the past.

Dancer went home and called up Villa, who wasn’t at home. He was off calling around town, trying to find the best way to stem the tide of shit spewing out of every orifice of Grubster Brothers, which looked like it would submerge everybody.
Chapter 8

“Gio Tse?”
“Yes.”
“Sam Wiseman. I don’t think we’ve met, but thank you for meeting me.”
“You said you might have some business for us? I understood from Jo at The Entertainment Venue that you’re looking for someone to help you with your graphic design?”
“Yes. And also no. I do want some help and am looking to commission you to produce design work for our exhibition, but what I really want to do is talk to you about Charles Villa.”
Giovanni Tse looked mystified.
“You do know Mr Villa, don’t you?” said Wiseman. “He said you’d met in the past.”
Tse stared at Wiseman. He understood the question. People really only met Charles Villa for two reasons: either they were a legitimate business contact, in which case he met them in his office, or they had a problem they needed solving, in which case they met him in his apartment. Since Villa was now of retirement age, the first group was shrinking in number.

It was the second group that mattered. And it was a large one, a couple of hundred strong all told. And, most of them persons deemed one way or another to have failed in the past, a depressingly large and indeed growing proportion of whom were persons deemed to have failed to get Reece onto a stable path to the life many hoped he’d assume, whether as some kind of saviour in the fulfilment of prophesy, the husband to Wong or just settled with one of the men RT’s lawyers and Villa’s associates kept pushing him away from.

Giovanni Tse was one of those men. He’d largely given up any hope of persuading Reece to love him. In this respect, it didn’t help that he still had feelings for his previous partner, so it would have been an uphill struggle for both of them.
But Reece was a livid scar in his life almost as much as for Villa and the others. Because, like many others, Tse had been inveigled into making contact with Villa on the vague promise that Reece would make him rich and happy. Or at least turn his life around. And money had been dangled as a central part of this. Villa had his methods. People came to see him, explained the nature of their problem and threw themselves on his mercy. He would then talk them through the implications of accepting his help and, if they agreed to the terms, settled it as a personal contract in the bedroom. He had a surprisingly high success rate. Until it came to Edward Reece. Then, everybody failed. Including Tse. Repeatedly. And he was punished. Repeatedly. And this was what Wiseman wanted to discuss.

"Yes, I did meet him," said Tse. "He helped me when I had a problem."

"And how did that work for you?"

Tse thought and then said, "Not that well. It worked at first, when I managed to get Edward to start exploring his sexuality and then to date another guy called Bobby Kwok." Wiseman nodded. "But then, after they broke up, Charles wanted me to set up house with Edward, but Edward wasn’t interested. He and I have been in and out of a relationship ever since. In fact, it’s basically got worse every day."

Wiseman was well aware of this. At the instigation of the Royal Trust’s wider Flick Soc, who swarmed around Reece trying to find out if he would finally help them, something pushed onto them by the Gang of Four and their lawyers to please the bosses in London and hopefully get the banks off the hook, their operating room had made Tse’s life arguably even stonier and narrower than Reece’s.
Particularly after one of Tse’s colleagues, a man who’d featured prominently in the banks’ Line articles and consequently been prodded to defame Reece across the much of the world’s arts and entertainment industry, died suddenly a month or so after he met Reece. Tse was living under the shadow of the consequences as he tried to manage his business in the centre of the public eye.

“But how was it that you met Villa in the first place? I’m assuming you already knew him when he first asked you to help Reece.”

“Yes,” said Tse. “I went to him because of a problem I was having with my ex-boyfriend. We’d been together since I was sixteen and he was quite a lot older than me. Somebody told me he was cheating on me with much younger men and asked me to help expose him. I wasn’t able to, so I went to Mr Villa for assistance. He agreed to help me, but wanted me to help Edward as well.”

Wiseman narrowed his eyes. “Is that quite right, Gio? I mean, why make it a precondition that you help Edward Reece before he’d help you?”

Tse saw that Wiseman already knew the answer and wondered why exactly he was being asked. “How well do you know Charles, sir?”

“Pretty well.”

“And are you familiar with his methods?”

“I think so, but I imagine each person is slightly different, so please tell me your story.”

“I had an abusive teacher at my private school here in Hong Kong.”

“I see. And by abusive, I don’t think you mean that he shouted rude words at you.”

“No. Or rather, yes. When he was rubbing his erection against my butt and threatening me with the police if I told anyone what a loser I was.”

“And you were how old?”

“Thirteen when it started. My partner seemed a blessed relief to me when I met him aged sixteen. He might have been twice my age, but that was better than four times. But why are you interested in Charles?”

“Tell me why he wouldn’t immediately help you.”
“Because one of his favourite techniques is to have people face their demons. If they’ve suffered some kind of problem, he likes people to go through it again, step by step. He calls it an exorcism, casting out the demon and leaving you pure again and able to move forward.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad.”

“It depends on what the problem was and how badly it hurt. In my case, it hurt a lot.”

“Because your school teacher didn’t just rub his erection in your backside while talking dirty, did he?”

“Actually, he did. It’s just that when I started to object and he found his threats didn’t work, he got violent. I pushed back. We fought and I knocked him over. He hit his head and nearly died. He didn’t mention it in the hospital and I never said anything. But it came up during my time with Charles. When we re-enacted it, I almost killed him too.”

That, Wiseman hadn’t known. “He didn’t like that, I imagine.”

“No, he didn’t. He said he had a recording of what I’d said about my teacher, how hurting him so badly was my fault even if it was technically an accident. And he said I was violent and a trouble-maker and had to learn discipline. He said I should do some work for him and benefit from his experience. And if I did, Edward Reece might be able to help me. Then, Charles would help me with my old partner, who was damaging my attempts to set up my own business.”

“And so you agreed?”

“Yes.”

“And how were you to pay him? Did he want money? I can’t imagine you had very much, if you were setting up your own business.”

“Is this what you really want to know, Sam? May I ask who you are?”

“Call me an industry colleague, or a competitor of Mr Villa. We come across one another in our business day to day and I want to know more about who he is and how he conducts himself. Perhaps I can learn something.”
“I see,” said Tse. “Well, he offers three main payment options. The first is cash, a large lump sum or a proportion of any likely proceeds. I couldn’t afford that. The second is penitential service, which is the option I chose like most people: you have sex with him and then agree to be celibate for six months. After that, you remain open to doing whatever favour he may ask of you in the future without question, which he promises will be mutually beneficial if done right.

“There’s a catch, though. When you sleep with him, he gives you a little bit of dragon to help relax you and make the session go smoothly. After that, people say that the drug has the effect of binding you to him at quite a deep level that is very hard to shake off. I didn’t do it in the end, because of knocking him over.

“The last one is to go on his payroll. And he’ll pay you well, more than a million US dollars a year, if you do it right. The problem is, and I suspect you may know this already Mr Wiseman, you have to agree to either distribute drugs for him or allow your bank account to be used to launder the proceeds, preferably and usually sooner or later, both.”

“The reason being?”

“Your name leaks into the market and people come calling, asking for hush money. So you get dragged in deeper. And the services you perform get bigger and more high profile and even though the gross pay goes up, the net proceeds usually start to drain away quite fast.”

“You’re quite right, Gio. I did know that, but I was hoping to meet someone who knew about it in more detail. You see, I sympathise with much of Mr Villa’s behaviour and won’t deny that I have ‘persuaded’ people to do what I want in the past as well. But I don’t like drugs and I particularly don’t like it when someone whom I feel ought to know better is involved with them and encourages others to get involved as well. So, will you help me ‘persuade’ Charles to stop doing it?”

Gio’s eyes flickered. “The drugs come from Grubster Brothers, or so I’m told. And Charles told me Grubster Brothers were warning I might be sued by the American relations of the man who died.”

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“Gio, we’ve only just met, but let me assure you that in this case, Grubster Brothers are not your enemy. The drugs come via a single individual who is a consultant of theirs, rather than an actual employee. He has now become as embarrassing to them as he has become problematic to me and to you. And to Charles Villa. But the American has a hold over Charles that he is unwilling to stand up to. I need a little leverage and think a few names willing to speak up in return for an amnesty might be just what I need. Now, will you help me?”

“If you pass me your phone, I’ll put the names into your contacts list.”

Wiseman handed over his phone and, as Tse WhatsApped over the contacts, he asked, “Tell me. How do you feel about Reece? I understand that the process of helping Charles Villa has been unpleasant and frustrating, but how do you feel about Reece as a human being, even I presume as a man?”

“He’s looking for love. Since coming out, he’s been trying to find someone he can be happy with and settle down with. Watching him struggle with this has made me appreciate my own unhappiness better. We’ve had some good times and he can be considerate, but I feel that my previous partner, for all his faults, might be able to give me more of what I need than Edward can.”

“How about finding somebody new?”

“I don’t have time.”

“Have you tried?”

“I spend too much time around Edward.”

“Let me see if I can help you with that too. I wonder if your ex will really make you happy beyond getting you away from Edward and helping you to stabilise your business. I, and to be fair Mr Villa as well, am a big believer in people being emotionally happy. The difference between us is that Charles too often sees it as a reward for good behaviour. I see it as the foundation of a stable and rounded personality.”
Chapter 9

“Wiseman’s putting the screws on me.”
“That’s a first; I didn’t think he had the balls. Do you think he’ll screw me if I ask him nicely?”
“Very likely, Aaron. And not in a good way, so shut up. He’s rounding up all my tribe and getting them to turn State’s Evidence. He wants me to shut up shop and it’s time for me to agree. And for you to agree as well.”
“I can’t, I won’t and you know it. And if I can’t, you can’t Villa.”
“In that case, expect me to turn State’s Evidence.”
“You wouldn’t fucking dare. And at your age, you’d never get out of the slammer alive, although I expect you wouldn’t mind all the screws screwing you until kingdom come.”
“Maybe. And despite my age, I’d probably be in there a lot longer than you. I take better care of my health. Especially below the waist.”
“Well, fuck you too, Mother Superior. But the fact remains that I owe the Russians and the Russians expect to get paid. And unless and until someone stops the Russians touching me for my hard-earned wads, the US tech sector is going to continue to lose trade secrets and you’re going to continue to sell my drugs. Or, more precisely, their drugs. And remember who I work for.”
“You mean the Russians?”
“Fuck you, Villa. You know exactly what I mean. As the US Department of Trade’s permanent representative on AmCham for Asia, I’m a trusted voice in Washington. People come to me for advice and heed my suggestions. And if I suggest that you’re a limp-wristed toe-rag who should be hung out to dry once and for all, perhaps even pushed under a bus or run down by a bunch of horny Asians in skimpy briefs, you can expect that to be what happens to you. So fucking shut up and get with the programme.”
"No. You get with the programme, Moore. Your Russians are wrecking the entire world. When Donald Trump and Xi Jinping both agree you’re almost as much of a danger to world peace as your former sparring partner Kim Young-Bum in the People’s Paradise of Korea, it’s time for you to realise that they’re not the kind of people you want to be friends with.”

"Listen, Villa. I’ve spent my entire life with a bunch of guys who are not the kind of people I want to be friends with. You included, sometimes. OK? But that’s what I do. It’s what I signed up for and it’s the life I know. Whether they’re in Washington or Moscow...”

"Vladivostok."

"Or Vladivostok, they’re the world I know and I’m comfortable with them. I get money, I get recognition, I get to fuck the Duke of Devon. Don’t make problems where none exist."

"Listen to yourself, Aaron. Sam Wiseman, that’s Sam Wiseman, wants us to stop. The problem exists. And if you’ve forgotten, go back to that bloody operations room of yours at the Landmark Mandarin, stop throwing darts at the photo of Reece and start reading some of the Lines the team are putting out. That’s your lot who are running money through Donald Trump’s accounts.”

“What if they are? What do I care about the Orang’ cry-baby?”

“It was embarrassing enough when it was the Duke of Devon’s accounts, it’s nails on a blackboard to Wiseman to have it all going through Trump’s. And it’s only a matter of time before they do something about it. And, in case you haven’t noticed, it’s been quite a few years since you got the Duke of Devon on a shagpile rug.”

“Fuck you,” muttered Moore sotto voce.
“In fact, if it wasn’t for the Royal Trust and their determination not to pay out to Reece until everyone, especially Wong, declares them spotless and guilt-free in every respect, even though their own HR department is starting to resign out of sheer mortification at what they’re learning about their own institution – and those are the guys who can stomach almost anything – as well as the increasingly forlorn hope of the English freemasonry community that Reece will consent to wave a magic wand and put the world miraculously to rights again, the Yanks would already have yanked the rug from under your feet, bless your little cotton socks.”

“Fuck you,” repeated Moore.

“So, say the word and you too can be a State’s Evidence and enjoy the protection of all the departments of your state. Then, you can do something constructive like work to bring down your old friends from the GRU that give you such a blast with the Vladivostok clique of Nashi. The world has enough problems without you single-handedly expanding the size of the Russian shadow state by undermining two of the most important democracies in the world.”

“Expanding the size of shadow states has been my job since I was eighteen years old, Mr Goody Two-Shoes.”

“For the Americans. Who don’t want you or anyone else to do it any more.”

“For whoever would pay me. And that was rarely the Americans, just as the Limeys very rarely paid you. Tell me again. How big was your collection of antiques until I started paying you?”

“Not that big.”

“No, it wasn’t. And how many apartments did you own?”

“Not as many as now.”

“No. Power, influence, respect, yes. But money? Not so much. And as you’ve learned from me, it’s really money that brings permanent power, influence and respect. Your country used to know that.”

“We live in a region where essentially every single country has experienced first hand the dangers of a hollowed-out political system. You brought Korea to its knees and sought to do the same to Southeast Asia...”
"I did bring Wong to his knees."
"We’re all well aware what you did to Wong. And to the many, many others. Not least that innocent, if deluded, boy in Canada whose life you’ve taken away..."
"Fuck you, Villa. I gave him a life he’d never have experienced otherwise!"
"Yes; anal sex at fourteen, AIDS before he was thirty and a lifetime of low-level criminality and painful sex in between that will blight what’s left of his prospects as you leave him to starve in your empty love nest."
"Fuck you, Charles. I’ve supported that useless spendthrift little fool for a decade and a half. He’s almost destroyed my marriage and my business prospects. Not to mention melting down all my credit cards. And I’ve lost count of the number of cars he’s totalled."
"And the number of your secret bank accounts he’s emptied."
"That too, the little fucker."
"One of which banks then tried to kill Edward Reece’s daughter by detaching her from him in a busy Hong Kong street."
"Don’t blame that on me. If they’re too stupid to know when the cunts at Grubsters are spinning a Line..."
"She was seven."
"So was the girl in the furnace at McCloud’s. What’s your point?"
"My point, you murdering fucker, is that you need to stop noshing with the NASHIs and start putting this right. Even the Russian SVR is having kittens about the VV clique."
"Don’t blame me, blame the fucking Yanks. They’re the ones who went out to undermine all the governments they could find with their trowel-head lookalikes. I’ve set up more fucking film clubs than you can shake a death stick at.
“I’ve got out of the Dear Leader’s bed in the morning in Pyongyang in time for tea and crumpet in the Blue House boudoir in Seoul in the afternoon. I’ve shagged the heir to the court of St Michael and the filthy-arsed frog prince who lorded it over the suede-patch. Who have you done, apart from a series of complete losers whose main crime was to sit too close to Edward Reece on the ding-ding?

“And I did it for the good of the good old US of A, Old Glory herself. And in the furtherance of the interests of its own deep state, Dwight’s military-industrial complex, aka the Brotherhood of Man, the V-sign flipping cunts.

You’ve got a problem with me? Go and see them. I take black dick at every opportunity; those RA look-alikes wouldn’t cross the road to spit on an African-American gentleman.

And you know why they let me in? Because I gave them cachet. My family’s the oldest white family in North America. Both in the US and in Canada. So they can eat shit and die. And so can you, you cunt.”

“Yes, Aaron. Many did eat your shit. And smoke it too. From the caches you also brought them in your increasingly slack arsehole.”

“Fuck you, Villa. Yes, they did. If you have a problem with that, go and talk to my mentor at the White House who told me that Senators should learn to do what they’re told. If the world’s got problems, it wasn’t because of me and a bunch of vodka-swilling furballs in VV; it was because the US doesn’t know honour in its own Capitol Building and is in no position to lament the fact that it’s now reaping the bitter harvest it so gleefully sowed back in the fifties, sixties and seventies.”

“Fuck you, Moore. Go to Cambodia and get down on your knees and beg for forgiveness. And then tell everyone why. And why you’ve fucked that poor boy in Canada into an early grave.”

“Fuck you, Villa. I’ve been to Cambodia and regularly got down on my knees to blow that spend-thrift little fucker. Into the middle of next week, I’ll have you know.”
“But you haven’t said sorry and you really haven’t explained to anyone how you came to work for the Russians in the first place.”

“Goodness of my heart, Charles old bean.”

“And you smashed that man’s business. Get down on your knees and beg for his forgiveness.”

“I’m sure I have no idea what you’re talking about. Now, if you’ve got nothing useful to say, you can get down on your knees and blow yourself. I’ve got ministers to minister to, not to mention some trading to arrange.”
Chapter 10

Wiseman touched down at Phnom Penh’s surprisingly modern international airport and took a taxi to the Imperial Hotel. It was run by the Tombola Group and had the same old-world colonial charm of Safe Haven’s fabled Tombola Hotel.

It was his first visit to Cambodia and he was impressed. It was quiet and much more orderly than he’d expected. The rooms of his hotel were comfortable and the service slick. He decided to walk the fifteen or so minutes to the White Swallow bar, where he’d been told Reece’s friend Humble could often be found having a quiet drink.

Humble was a bar owner himself, but had given it up to a business partner a few years earlier. His passion was drawing and when not eyeing up the talent at PP’s biggest gay bar, he’d be sitting at one of the wooden trestle tables outside sketching.

He’d met Reece there by chance some months earlier and they’d started an on-off relationship. Humble had actually picked Reece up, which was fortunate as Reece still had the pick-up skills of a teenage virgin and tended to sit in gay bars listening to the music and failing to talk to anyone, in the worst cases reading a book.

But by all accounts Humble was almost as troubled as Tse and Wiseman was curious to find out how Reece was perceived when he was away from the hothouse of Villa’s minion sex toys and the banks’ growing army of hysterical lawyers.

Wiseman’s eyes and ears in the country, which included a significant number of lawyers under cover, reported that there was something different about Cambodia. It was as if a dampening field had been placed around it that made it Moore-proof.
Inside this protective bubble, Reece was quite different. He was actually half an inch taller. He was also, and this was the important bit, extremely attuned to the mood of the people. He’d immediately liked the place and returned for the sake of it, not meeting Humble until his third trip. Even more surprising, they’d liked him.

The effect had been observed in only one other place: Royal Hill. And a quick examination of the two revealed a connection: Moore was despised in both. In Royal Hill, he’d killed a seven year-old girl and caused a man to try to commit suicide. They were far from the only people he’d killed and, for a time, killing people had been part of his job description. But the two in Royal Hill were judged to be innocents, the little girl especially, the young man roped in to rope him in after evidence accumulated as early as 1992 that he was going off the rails.

And that evidence began here, in Phnom Penh, before 1992. And, so Wiseman had been told, it began with Humble. He proved easy to find. Not sketching, but still sitting at one of the trestle tables, chatting to the bar owner and some tourist. They were talking English, which made it easy for Wiseman to introduce himself into the conversation. Humble invited him to join them. They were discussing restaurants.

Eventually, the tourist went inside the bar. It was getting later and the glass doors were steaming up in the air conditioning as the men waited for the weekly cabaret. It meant Wiseman largely had Humble to himself.

The man was in his early forties and very good-looking, Chinese in appearance but with the darker skin common to southeast Asians. He had a beautiful smile and gorgeous brown eyes, happiness in his smooth skin and a full head of thick black hair. But there was something not quite right about him, an air of lassitude. It was involuntary and certainly not intended as an insult to Wiseman, who suggested they go somewhere and get something to eat.

“I’m not gay,” said Humble. “I just like the atmosphere here.”
“Don’t worry. I’m not either,” said Wiseman and pulled out some photos of his kids. “I’m Sam.”
“Humble.”
And that gave Wiseman the opening he needed to ask if he was the Humble his friend in Hong Kong, Edward Reece, had mentioned. After a few moment’s consideration, Humble waved down a tuk-tuk and they went to a simple Chinese restaurant and then to very colonial style bar with some very colonial hangover type westerners propping it up.
But they sat outside and Wiseman allowed Humble to see that, yes he’d tried to pick him out of the crowd specifically but no, it wasn’t to have sex and no, he wasn’t trying to hurt Reece.
“I don’t like people to know I’m gay,” Humble said as their drinks arrived. “It’s difficult in Cambodia and people remember. But I did have a partner from Europe, who still lives here. He’s quite a lot older than me and we were together for a long time. He was unfaithful one too many times and I walked out. He likes his boys young and I became too old.”
“Does that happen a lot in Cambodia?”
“I met someone who went through something similar in Hong Kong.” And Wiseman built a conversation from there. They stayed late into the night, Humble was a night-owl and didn’t have work to do the next day, since he’d given up his bar.
He’d started dating his European lover more than twenty years ago and it was clear the relationship sat uneasily on his mind. Their break-up had been acrimonious and they were still fighting over who got what.
“Why did you introduce yourself to Reece?”
“I’d heard about him and was curious to meet him. When I saw him, I thought he looked hot. We ended up hitting it off.”
It was turning into a surprisingly common story. Wherever Reece went, and that meant absolutely anywhere he went anywhere in the world, there was always someone who wanted to meet him.
In their efforts to get him out and on his stony path to heaven or oblivion, the Line writers had got to both Royal Hill and Cambodia. And they’d done so for a simple reason: Moore had done something there. And specifically, what Moore had done in Cambodia was Humble’s brother.

And that was what Wiseman wanted Humble to talk about, although he was well-aware that on a first meeting, getting the man to talk about the sexual abuse of his brother would be difficult.

“Did you come here for a holiday or to find out about Edward?” Humble asked.

“Actually neither,” said Wiseman. “Really to find out more about the man that says he’s Edward, but isn’t. They say Edward is distantly related to the British royal family and that this other man wishes he was.”

“What’s the other man’s name?”

“Aaron Moore.”

“And where’s he from?”

“America.”

“And what’s your interest in him?”

“I don’t like him very much and I’m trying to help Edward.”

“You know exactly who I am, don’t you?”

“No. Not exactly. But I think I have some idea and I want to check. Did you meet him when you were a boy?”

“July 1st, 1988. I was thirteen. I was with my brothers, the youngest of whom was eleven. We were hungry. He offered us hamburgers at his hotel. I’d never seen a hamburger, hardly even heard of them; I didn’t know you could buy them in Cambodia.”

“And could you?”

“Of course not. It was 1988, the country was still in civil war after the Vietnamese kicked out the Khmer Rouge.”

“But you didn’t find out about the hamburgers until you got to his hotel?”
"There was no hotel. He was on a motorbike and he said we should follow him to the hotel down the road. He said my brother could ride on the back, because he was the youngest and wouldn’t be able to keep up. I tried to stop him getting on the bike, but Aaron roared away and it was me who couldn’t keep up.

“My brother told me he was half naked and clutched his chest, struggling to keep on. We’d never seen a white man before and certainly never seen body hair. Now, he was clutching at it as we clung on for dear life. There was something exciting about it; I suppose you can say it was my gay awakening, although we were much too innocent to have conscious thoughts like that. At one point, when the bike went over a pothole, my brother’s hand fell into his crotch and he moved his own to keep it there. He was semi-hard.

“But I’ve thought about that day a lot and believe now it was with a different kind of anticipation. You see, he took us to the guard post of the local Russian military adviser. He and the Russian had had a fight the day before. Actually, he wasn’t Russian. It was still the days of the Soviet Union and he was from Uzbekistan. He was half-Turkish and his name was Islam. Aaron had tried to seduce him, that was one of the things he used to do. He wanted to get Islam, who was married, on tape so his government in the US could help their warlord take over the province from the Russian’s warlord.

“But Islam tricked him. Aaron was thirty and should have known better, but Islam had worked out what he was trying to do and got one of his warlord’s Khmer soldiers to turn off the recorder and then tape them himself. When he showed the tape to Aaron afterwards, he forced Aaron to give up both his video recorder and his entire supply of vodka and cigarettes.

“Aaron was furious and wanted revenge. And he’d decided that revenge should be me or my brother. He had another supply of vodka and more cigarettes, as well as a new video recorder.
“He offered Islam a make-up session of cards to let bygones be bygones and hinted that, if all went well, he might be willing to offer more than just the head he’d given Islam’s Khmer the night before. In return, Islam said he might return the video recorder, which Moore had borrowed and which his commander wanted back because of his own sex tapes that were on it. Islam told me later what they were: images of villagers the Americans’ warlord had massacred. The commander and his men, including Aaron, had had sex with their bodies.

“Of course, the Russians didn’t have any hamburgers, but there was some borscht and it had meat in it, which I’d hardly ever tasted. Aaron told me the soup was hamburgers and Islam noticed. They then played strip poker, while I served them drinks.

“They each won several hands and played forfeits of kissing one another and eventually jerking each other off. Aaron had insisted that I also strip when he first became naked and I won’t deny there was something arousing to me about watching two adult foreign men having sex.

“They were drunk by then, of course, and Moore noticed I was getting a sort-of erection. He stroked it Islam started joking about how much fun it would be to blow me, to see if a pre-pubescent boy could have an orgasm. Of course, this was exactly what Aaron wanted. As Aaron played with my brother, Islam turned to me and, with his back to Aaron, winked. Then he jerked me off.

“I was very surprised, and scared, but I let him do it. It was fun and I saw from the wink that he was playing a joke on Aaron. I didn’t come, my body was underdeveloped from lack of food, but I did have an orgasm. I see that what Islam really wanted was for Aaron to then try and blow me so he could get it on tape to beat him and steal all his supplies again.

“And Aaron did, although I didn’t come again; unlike the Russian, he was jerking himself off and it frightened me. But then, something happened that I think Islam hadn’t expected. When the Khmer came in and showed Aaron the second recording, Aaron got violent.
“He hurled his vodka glass at the wall. It smashed and showered me with broken glass. When Islam shouted, Aaron did it again. By this stage, I was scared. The men were drunk and very big.

‘Then, Islam pulled his gun. He forced Aaron to his knees, shouting all the time for him to stop attacking. Aaron put up his hands and Islam barked at me to get dressed and leave. I did as quickly as I could, as Islam told his Khmer friends to jerk themselves off over Aaron as a punishment, while he held him down with a pistol to the back of his head. I ran away down the road, but I’d never been so far from my village before and didn’t really know where I was.

“When I got tired, I sat down for a rest. And that was when Aaron rode up. His face was blazing thunder, but then it cleared away as he saw me and he gave me an amazing smile. I was relieved to see him and hoped he’d give me a lift back to my village.

“But after a few kilometres, he saw a reed shack by the lakeside. He suggested we wash and we both stripped off and skinny dipped. I didn’t want to, but didn’t want to say no. He was bruised and had come in his hair.

“He had a towel in his backpack and we went into the hut to dry off. That’s when he started touching me. After a while, he was jerking me and then kissing me. I said no, but he said if I was good, as a reward, he’d take me back to my village. So I consented.

“He laid me on the floor, fingered me and then fucked me. He did it bare back and with only some spit for lubricant. I was still a boy; it was very painful.”

“How painful?”

“Afterwards, my asshole was bleeding. For a week. I decided I would never be gay; it was wrong. And when I was with my other partner, I made sure I was always the top. It made me feel better to fuck a white man. Especially as he used to hurt me too.

“I think the fact that I would never bottom for him was one reason he cheated on me so often. Although it doesn’t explain why the boys were always so young. Edward is the first man I’ve let go on top for a very, very long time.”
“Did Aaron take you home afterwards?” Wiseman knew the question sounded callous and Humble’s face showed he didn’t like it. But Wiseman also knew part of the story was missing and he wondered how much more.

“No. one of Islam’s men took me home. Islam sent him to make sure Aaron had left and to look for me and check I was all right. He found both of us at the same time. And got his third recording. Aaron didn’t notice until he’d finished. When he saw as he looked up afterwards, he simply got dressed and left. But it was obvious that something inside him died that night. If he looked angry like thunder before we went into the shack, he was like a typhoon afterwards.

“Islam arrived and told me to wash and get dressed and then they took me home. They explained to my father what had happened and Islam promised to get some money from Aaron for a doctor. But when he came with it later, he told my father not to seek revenge. He needn’t have bothered; my father was far too scared to try to get vengeance on an American.

“The money wasn’t much, ten dollars I think. Aaron also came back later. He said he was sorry, but he really needed the video recorder back, and preferably the tape as well. Would we help?

“My father lost his temper and ordered him to get out. Aaron did and his quietness then was even more scary than his violence or anger. And I was right to be afraid. He came back later and threatened to shoot my puppy unless I helped. The brother who tried to protect me at the roadside, stepped in front of me and Aaron shot him instead. And then our dog, when it tried to attack him.”

Humble stopped talking. They sat in silence until Wiseman said, “Thank you for telling me. Have you ever seen him again? Did he ever come back to Cambodia?”

Humble shook his head. It was surprising to Wiseman how little emotion he’d shown. “I’ve never seen him, but he came back to Cambodia a couple of years ago with his lover for Chinese New Year. He’d just got a new job as chief trade representative for the American mission in Thailand, running their Bangkok office.
“They were right next to Cambodia now and he brought some friends here. They all got drunk in the bar of the Imperial Hotel, started playing loud music and dancing on the bartop. His lover, Jay I think his name was, who lived in Hong Kong, did a striptease.

“The hotel management asked them to stop, but they said they were paying and could do what they liked. They were rich and we were poor and Khmer should do what we were told. The Singaporean manager told them he wasn’t poor and they should stop or he’d call the police; they were upsetting the other guests. They told him to go fuck himself, but took the party back to their suite on the top floor.

“I heard about it. I was running a bar, as I told you, and my friends told me what had happened the next morning. Someone set off a firework in the bar as they left and the place was completely trashed. I confirmed it was Aaron who was the ring-leader, I already knew he was in the country, because ever since he returned to Asia with AmCham I kept a close watch on where he went in case he came back to Cambodia.

“I called the police myself. I told them they shouldn’t put up with this kind of vandalism. They raided the hotel and tried to get into the suite. The hotel manager told the police he had the situation under control and said he didn’t want to prosecute. The police could see drugs everywhere through the door, but didn’t go in.

“There were Khmer in Aaron’s party, members of the parliament. After the police had gone and Aaron returned to Bangkok, I started having problems. The local triads came round asking questions, looking for money. They’d come and sit in my bar and start causing trouble. After the first time I called them, I found I couldn’t get the police to help.

“My business began to go down. The triads came back and asked for money. I wouldn’t pay. When they asked for more and I still wouldn’t pay, they trashed the place. In the end, I sold it. I didn’t get much money for it.”

“What do you do now?”

“I help out friends with their restaurants and bars, do some cooking, teach the junior chefs. Education’s important; it helped me.”
“You speak very good English.”
“I got a scholarship to learn in Europe. Actually, someone sponsored me. It was a man named William Wong. When I was in my late teens, he came here and found me. He was looking for me, actually. Because he knew about me from Aaron.”
“I don’t understand.”
“You see, he’d also suffered because of Aaron Moore. Just as Islam made Aaron kneel down with a gun to his head while Islam’s Khmer soldiers came on him, Aaron had made William kneel down while Aaron’s Chinese triads came on him. And they made a tape of William with Aaron and some other people as well. He’d had a very bad time and was looking for some other people who’d also had a bad time because of Aaron, to see if he could help them.
“And he helped me. If it wasn’t for him, I’d never have come to Phnom Penh and opened my bar. And I’d never have gone to Europe or met so many interesting people. It’s just a pity he wasn’t able to stop Aaron from destroying my bar. I know he’s been trying for some time to find a way to make Aaron stop hurting people, but I don’t think he’s been able to so far.”
“I’m trying to see if I can help William,” said Wiseman. “I know him too, or at least I know very well who he is. Is there anything else you can tell me?”
“Aaron doesn’t come here very much. He only likes to stay at the best places and here that means the Tombola Group hotels. But after that weekend, he’s not really welcome in their hotels, so he hasn’t come back. But his lover Jay does come back sometimes. He brings drugs.
“He gets them from this Englishman, Mr Villa, and then he takes them to a few places in southeast Asia, Vietnam and Cambodia mainly. He puts them inside his socks, where the powder gets caught in the weave of the fabric and can be washed out later, dried and collected.
“He gives it to one of the members of our Parliament. That was my mistake. I knew our government is corrupt, many governments in Asia are corrupt, I know. And it’s Aaron’s job to know people. But I didn’t know Aaron was still so close to some of our important politicians.
“I found out later that he was looking for ways to get close to our king and his family. I don’t think he was able to, though. We’re a very close people, the Khmer. We are brothers. We don’t like Aaron Moore and I think even our politicians wouldn’t let him near our king.”

“Thank you. Do you think your police are tracking this man Jay?”

“I think so. Yes. Everyone who comes into the country goes through immigration and has to show their passport again when they register at hotels. Jay came here a lot, and to Vietnam, as well as Koh Samui. I expect police will have a record.”

“Would it be all right if we kept in touch?”

“Yes. I’d like that. It’s good to talk about these things sometimes.”
Chapter 11

When Wiseman got back to Hong Kong, he considered what to do. Aaron Moore was an embarrassment to his country. Worse than that, he was destroying it in the eyes of the world.

He might work for the US government, but his obsessive adherence to his life-long goal of bringing Edward Reece into the British royal family had done more damage to the US than any number of Russian drug smugglers.

Yes, the US was hoist by its own petard. After the European powers had been weakened in the first world war, the US had considered how it could subvert their authority, especially that of the UK. Looking at how their own country worked, they researched the nexuses of power and quickly unearthed the Freemason networks.

It had been almost the first place they looked, given the centrality of Freemasonry to the US’ own power structures. No one got far in Washington, and very few got very far anywhere else, without at least nominal membership of this group. And they might be notationally separated into different lodges, but they acted as a group. They protected one another and promoted one another’s welfare both within the lodges and between them.

To some extent, this should have made them no different to any other old boy’s club. But it did. Freemasonry was different because of what Freemasons believed, especially in a society removed from the Old World like the US. Freemasons believed, quite profoundly, that they were divinely chosen. They were rich and powerful because they deserved to be; they had been born to be rich and powerful, success was their birthright and would be the birthright of their heirs and successors.
It was this emphasis on heredity in Freemasonry that made the sense of superiority it engendered so engrained among its members. In the Old World of Europe, this was leavened, especially in the lodges headed by each nation’s royal families, by a strong sense of public service. But beyond a drive to build a new nation and a new world order, and get rich in the process, this was largely missing in the US.

But building a new Jerusalem became a divine mission, a manifest destiny to show the world that they knew best and could solve its problems, if only the world did it their way. And it seemed to work. After all, the inside clique very successfully built late nineteenth century America, even if the result was the trusts that then had to be busted by Teddy Roosevelt.

In Europe, war and the defeat and disruption war brought made Freemasonry warped. Nowhere more so in the inter-war years than in Germany, where the sense of divine mission to build a better society and world had been damaged but not destroyed, ‘betrayed’ the word was, by the abdication of the Kaiser and the subsequent armistice.

As Hitler sought to rebuild the nation, he built on the strong existing power structures of the German Freemason network to justify his concept of a second Thousand Year Reich that would transform Europe and the world.

And that is where the Jews came in. Freemasonry did indeed trace its intellectual and spiritual origins back to Israel, Egypt and the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It believed that the Israelites were indeed a chosen people because they possessed insights into the divine denied to normal mortals.

European Freemasons and indeed US and other groups around the world believed they were the same. Indeed, because they believed they were the same, many came to believe that they were descended from the Israelites.
They believed not just that they were culturally superior, but that there was something in their genetics and the genetics of the ancient Jews that made them racially superior to other humans. This superiority was ascribed to many different reasons, but ultimately to one thing: that those who were ‘in’, chosen or elect, possessed a rare gene from the earliest days of humanity, now lost to the general population. They believed that this gene was particularly prevalent amongst Hebrews and that they also possessed it.

Hitler believed he had it. After all, famously a rumour has existed since the 1920s that he had a Jewish grandfather. And it’s beyond doubt that he believed he was racially superior and leading Germany on a divine mission. He pulled on the magic threads of Freemasonry to draw the German elite together and take the country to unparalleled heights, only to fly too close to the sun and bring it crashing down to Earth.

Of course, even without war and defeat outside Moscow and then at Stalingrad, it had started to crash down to Earth. His economic model was a failure from the beginning and one extremely plausible explanation for his military aggression after 1937 was that the country was going bankrupt as a result of its deficit-spending reflation policy.

Indeed, it is not widely known that he tried to blackmail the UK into funding his economy as part of their Appeasement programme. After King George I took the throne in 1714 and the shock of the ‘15 by the Stuart dynasty Old Pretender the following year, the Hanoverians took the Great Seal of England, which had not been lost by James II in the River Thames, to Hanover for safe-keeping.

They did this for a very good reason. As is well-known, their claim to the throne was shaky indeed, because he was only chosen himself because he was the closest Protestant relation, with more than fifty Catholics having a better claim to the throne. If the legitimacy of the Stuarts was weak, that of the Hanoverians – and the House of Windsor are still Hanoverians through the female line of Queen Victoria – was almost non-existent.

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And this matters. Or it mattered to the close-knit elites of eighteenth century Europe, and indeed mid-twentieth century Europe. To consolidate their grip on the throne, the Hanoverians basically decided to hold England hostage. They took the Great Seal, without which, according to tradition, no Act of Parliament was legitimate and hid it in a cupboard in Hanover. Where it got forgotten and left behind when Hanover passed out of the control of the British royals in 1837 when Queen Victoria was declared ineligible to take the Hanoverian throne because she was a woman.

Hitler offered it back to the British at the end of the 1930s and they even asked how much it would cost. He said it would be half their kingdom, which in the 1930s meant India, the Middle East, Egypt and all Germany’s old possessions under British control.

The British considered offering money instead and approached the US for a loan. The US also demanded half their kingdom, in this case Canada and India, as well as all the network of ports and military bases that Britain had assembled around the world to supply its global possessions.

Both alternatives would render Britain and the remains of its Empire as a client state of either country. Both offers were turned down and war came.

The *Indiana Jones* movies are not entirely wrong. Germany did search for sacred Jewish temple artefacts to support their cause, because that’s what German Freemasonry required. They even found some, which Hitler believed until the end would cause the allies to surrender. But, in the end, their reach was beyond their ability to grasp and it became clear that Germany would fail.

In his rage, Hitler turned on the Jews. Having already rounded them up, now he started to destroy them. If he couldn’t win, then he would take them down with him. After all, he genuinely feared them because the solid German socio-political elite in their nineteenth century Freemasonry groups genuinely believed that the Jews were divinely chosen. The Holocaust destroyed the pride of both groups, because why would God punish his elect in such a way?
The Second World War shattered Europe even more comprehensively than the First. There were dangerous power vacuums and an aggressive Soviet Union looking to step into the gap. Where it could, the US did likewise, building on what remained of existing power structures in Western Europe. For frightened and impoverished European elites, those structures existed most simply among the networks of Freemasons, already long connected to their elite brethren in the US.

P2 in Italy is the best known of the groups the US assembled or reassembled after the war. Set up in 1945 itself, it was headed by the heir to the Italian throne and came to encompass everyone of any importance at all to the Italian state. It was, at its heart, purely and simply a tool of US foreign policy.

Designed initially and successfully to stabilise Italy against communism, it became an end in itself to control the country and anywhere else that it could be spread. Including, significantly, the Papacy, which was for a long time after 1945 effectively an Italian institution.

By the 1970s, P2 had become a quasi-fascist shadow state, whose aims were primarily the furtherance of the interests of its own members inside the country in an oligopolistic clique and the furtherance of US power abroad.

This was achieved through the control of that elite by systematic corruption of those members by one means or another, especially but not exclusively by involving those members in criminal activity on behalf of the US, such as trading drugs or arms to subvert hostile regimes.

They did the same thing in the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and France. Even Brazil and Japan, which had imported European precepts of royalist Freemasonry in the nineteenth century. But the country they really wanted to control was the one that had suffered the least in the War and where the elite was still best-established: the UK.
Freemasonry was notoriously strong in that country, where it was openly headed by the royal family. Indeed, the formal modern Freemason lodges were set up by the Hanoverian royal family soon after taking the throne exactly to confirm their legitimacy as sovereigns, when it was widely questioned by pre-existing masonic groups themselves.

It took two steps for the US to gain control of the British power structure, but they eventually managed it. The country was already deeply in debt as a result of the loans taken out in the US to fund the war. When in 1956 the UK and France acted, without formally consulting or warning the US, to seize the Suez Canal, the US closed the trap. Access to dollars was suspended, the UK suffered an immediate financial crisis and both countries were effectively defeated.

The British government fell and the man primarily responsible for the defeat, the finance minister Harold MacMillan, became the new Prime Minister. It was effectively a US coup d’etat and MacMillan then followed the infamous British policy of the ‘Special Relationship’, namely systematic and sustained grovelling to the US at every stage, that has become the most notorious hallmark of British foreign policy. Under US pressure, effectively the entire British Empire was dissolved within a decade of Suez.

It did so because the US still wanted to take it over. But it couldn’t do so openly in a climate of anti-colonialism, so it sought to do so by stealth. As in 1938, it still wanted to take over the network of ports that the UK controlled and it wanted to take over the elites that the UK had nourished in its colonies on their way to self-government and independence.

Those elites had mostly been educated at British public schools or universities, which were the prime entry point for young future Masons to meet one another. For at the top of their society, the British could be remarkably colour-blind.
What they cared about was an ability by the newcomers to absorb the ethos of the elite. In return, the elite would absorb the diversity of its new members. After all, British Freemasons believed profoundly that other races possessed this unique genetic marker of racial superiority in equal measure to themselves. They believed that it was dispersed across humanity and tended to manifest in those who rose to the tops of their societies. Therefore, anyone who was at the top of their society or rising towards it potentially possessed the gene.

Consequently, an Indian, Nigerian, Chinese or anyone else was potentially admissible so long as he absorbed the ethos of public service, honour, secrecy and mutual support and promotion that characterised British Freemasonry, primarily as inducted through the education of their young at British or British-style public schools.

With the collapse in their self-confidence inflicted by the defeat at Suez, which was comparable to the collapses experienced by other European elites in 1940, and the ending of the wilder dreams of a British revival as encompassed in the idea of a New Elizabethan Age, the US progressively infiltrated the British power structure through the Freemasonry network and the Conservative Party with which it was closely intertwined.

Ultimately, this got them where they really wanted to be: to the British royal family and specifically to its younger generation. Because those who could control the royal family could control the British power structure. And potentially the power structures of Her Majesty’s Realms and Territories beyond the sea, even perhaps places like India where British ideas and ideals had seeped deep into the national consciousness over the centuries and where the British had come to believe that the gene was highly prevalent.

The US used exactly the same methods in the UK as they used in other countries from Korea to Argentina and stories of bung-bunga parties involving the Queen’s children have already been reported in the newspapers.
The alleged rape by Prince Charles’s servant, Michael Fawcett of footman George Smith made global headlines in 2003. But this was merely an overspill of what was going on behind the scenes, where the US was deliberately seeking to corrupt the younger royals. And one of the people they used was Aaron Moore.

How could the US get so close to the throne itself? Because through their own Freemasons, they knew the dirty secret of the British Freemasons: that the British royal family, the Hanoverian dynasty, suffered from an inferiority complex. It didn’t have, or feared it didn’t have, the gene that marked out the elect and which was meant to be strongest amongst those at the top of the Masonic hierarchy. The royal family believed, fundamentally, that they were frauds.

More to the point, so did the entire British Freemasonry movement. All the rituals and structures and secret ceremonies and closed communions were set, co-opted or amended by the Hanoverians after 1714 for one purpose and one purpose only: to provide a veneer of legitimacy that was otherwise lacking from the new dynasty’s claim to be the leaders of the leaders of society, many of whom were quite convinced that they themselves did have the gene.

Indeed, many of the royal marriages since have been attempts by the royal family to acquire the gene from other British or international families. The marriages of George VI to Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon and Prince Charles to Princess Diana were exactly designed to achieve this, but also failed when it transpired that neither of those families had the gene in any great strength either.

Because the gene was special. It opened the door to a particular kind of peacefulness, that the Buddhists call ‘emptiness’. Whilst many people can achieve emptiness through the assistance of others, those in whom the gene is strongest can do it entirely by themselves. It opens the door to a sense of communion with the universe that is profound, but can also close the person off from others.
This is the essence of why its members consider themselves elect: they can literally distance themselves from others, who cannot disturb them in any way. It is the essence of Buddha’s concept of inner peace and the iron mind and while it can be acquired gently, it can also sometimes be shocked into trauma victims as their bodies search for a way to survive stress.

True Freemasons who can achieve this peacefulness themselves, like many Buddhist, Hindu and other meditative groups, even Christians, build on this sense of communion as a group, but do not inherently need to.

However, those who lack the gene or in whom its influence is weak must achieve it as part of a wider group. These groups can then decide whether or not to admit the applicant as a member and share their peaceful sense of emptiness. As a result, this emptiness is a conditional gift granted by the insiders to the outsiders. Such is the essence of Freemasonry.

The British royal family are, in this respect, outsiders. They can only obtain emptiness within the confines of a Freemasonry community, when they are meant to be able to generate it themselves. And they hate it. And the Americans knew it.

And they came up with a way to play on it. They found people in whom the gene was strongest and introduced them to the royals. And they never found one stronger than Aaron Moore.

Until they came across first William Wong and then Edward Reece. If the gene is strong in someone, it is most easily disrupted by someone in whom it is also strong. Or, alternatively, by a very large number of people in whom it is weak but who form a united community.

The US sent Aaron Moore to disrupt both men’s lives. Wong’s they did very successfully, almost killing him more than once. Reece’s they did rather differently: they made it very difficult for him to discover he had his talent at all.
The problem was that the British royal family was getting desperate. They had fallen further and further under the control of the US as the Americans steadily ate away at the traditional values of the British elite. This occurred especially after the emergence of Margaret Thatcher and the transformation of the Conservative Party into a radical neo-liberal force for deregulation and American economic and political values. A similar corruption occurred of the Labour Party under Tony Blair and the destruction of his credibility in the sands of Iraq.

The UK became very publicly a tool of US foreign policy in world affairs. In private, however, the royal family also became a tool as their bank accounts were used for illicit US drug trafficking in the same way as everyone else, from politicians in Tokyo through prelates in Rome to investment bankers in Hong Kong.

And they still lacked any legitimacy. Because they became shunned by true British Freemasons, desperate to preserve what was left of their community, and dependent on US facilitators like Moore for access.

So, they began a search for people who could help. They found Wong and Reece, but those men had already been damaged by Moore because both British and American Freemasonry groups became aware of the men at the same time and the US got to them first. So, they persuaded the wider Freemasonry network, especially the network in Asia where both men lived, to bring them on board.

And those networks comprised the elites in their countries too, especially in a city like Hong Kong which has traditionally lapped up the trappings of the British elite and is full of members of the British elite as well, working for its conglomerates, banks and law firms.

A plan was born to get Reece’s attention. His schools and then his employers became involved, as did his friends and his limited number of lovers. As each group failed, more were asked to have a go. And all had Masonic links, because saving the Masons was what it was all about.
Over time, this group became the Gang of Four with their lawyers. It became the Party of Five as they hired or retained Moore, whose ability to disrupt Reece’s mind had always been so profound. They involved Charles Villa, an unofficial representative of the British state in the city who steadily assembled a roll call of all those in whom the gene was strongest and corrupted and suborned every one of them that he could.

Ironically, he suffered from the same problem as the British royals and derived much of his power from controlling those who were more powerful. It was a significant factor in the reason he behaved the way he did: he needed to be able to reward or punish people who did what he wanted, intimidate and corral them into doing his bidding or he wouldn’t be able to do his job. They would simply cut him off.

It was one of the greatest career confidence tricks Wiseman had seen and entirely in keeping with that of the British royal family and the intermediaries they employed in London in their desperation to have Villa or someone or anyone to reel Reece in and bail them out.

The banks employed people like Villa, who was intimately entwined with them through Moore’s drug trading and money laundering on behalf of the Russians as well as through his connections to London, to get his network to block Reece and his path to emptiness and peace in an attempt to suborn him as well.

Because if Reece was blocked, the banks would never have to take responsibility for the damage they had done to him and more specifically to Wong over a period of decades in their ostensible work for the British and other governments to bring him to the royal family. And if he was suborned, he could be forced to do their bidding. Indeed, Reece could potentially be used as a tool to control the British state by whoever controlled Villa.

Because, overall the entire process had long since degenerated into a self-serving attempt to protect their hides of those involved who had made such a mess of it over the years and further the interests of shadow-states and even Mafiosi worldwide.
Hence the reason Reece’s path to peace and success was so narrow and stony and so constantly overthrown. Reece was never meant to have found out what the others had done, or only to have done so once he’d either been so compromised that he was no better than the British royals or the others bankers who traded drugs ostensibly in his name or so inculcated into the majesty and mystery of emptiness and the wonders of creation that he simply forgave them and told them it had all been a quite understandable misunderstanding.

Both courses of action were so extreme as to be fundamentally somewhat silly. Emptiness and inner peace are, in Buddhism, only tools. They are not ends in themselves, which is happiness. And everything that has happened to Reece has been designed to make him unhappy, with happiness being made conditional on him knuckling under and doing what he’s told by an increasingly desperate group who see their traditional power and status slipping through their fingers.

Which is exactly the behaviour that true Freemasons shun. It is the action of the Charles Villas and Aaron Moores of the world, who have made life a living hell for its Giovanni Tses and Humbles. Especially the several hundred individuals in Hong Kong identified and targeted by Villa and Moore, and within that the two dozen or so who know either or both of Reece and Wong personally.

These, through Moore, Villa and the banks and their lawyers working together, have been ground as close to submission as they can be in the determination of their torturers to fulfil the desire for happiness of others, specifically the British royal family and their hundreds of thousands of hangerson, at the expense of the happiness of Reece and Wong.

Which is why the drugs trading has to stop. The US and its policy of controlling the world through local secretive elites has created a hydra. It also demonstrably hasn’t worked, particularly since the end of Communism removed its intellectual justification.
Fighting Islam, which also values emptiness and whose bedrock Arab population are also regarded by Freemasons as part of the chosen elect because of their relationship to the Israelite patriarch Abraham through his concubine Hagar, represented a poor quality alternative, and Communist China not much better, where the Party is built on Buddhist-Confucian elitist traditions as well.

Because the Chinese have always been quite as capable at identifying those with the gene as any European. The best has always been defined in China as being those best able to achieve emptiness. The Communist Party today is stuffed with members in whom the gene runs strong.

And bad as the official US hydra was, when layered onto the unofficial Russian hydra emerging with the fall of Communism into whose hands Aaron Moore had fallen and then the use of both networks by the British royals, banks, lawyers, Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all to break through the early conditioning of the Americans over Edward Reece, the result has been the most absurdly over-complicated, counter-productive and value-deductive process the world may ever have seen.

At the heart of it was US foreign policy and the need to be able to create and operate both official and unofficial power transmission networks. What has become out of control is the unofficial channels, with Moore’s network effectively an unofficial unofficial channel. The banks have been inveigled into more and more undercover fund-raising for covert operations by the US and its suborned allies, exactly counter to every tenet of official government pronouncement and has had the effect of systematically corrupting and ultimately criminalising every significant power nexus in the world.

With the arrival of the blackmail of the US president by the Russian shadow state, this process has reached its logical ultimate end point. The US had already corrupted the Pope, as is clear from the collapse of the Vatican Bank’s Banco Ambrosiano affiliate and the associated death of Roberto Calvi off Blackfriars Bridge in London. There is essentially no one left of any importance still to be corrupted.
Which is when it becomes time for a Teddy Roosevelt. Wiseman is not so arrogant as to call himself a Teddy Roosevelt, but he knows where to start: Aaron Moore and his network gets shut down. Reece is allowed to go free. The banks and their lawyers stop obstructing the process. Villa stops shipping drugs to his network and tripping others into compromising themselves to add to the list of bank accounts to launder things through and pressure points to drop a little dragon into Reece. Moore hands himself over and is allowed not to serve out his final years behind bars.

The banks can tell their governments that the job is done and there is no more need for them to do national service, shipping cocaine, armaments, renditioned terrorism suspects, diamonds, gold or anything else through their networks.

Or at least, certainly not in Asia. With Reece free, there is no justification for any more of this. For sure, it will take time for governments to unwind the mess in their home countries and vested interests are vested interests who don’t want to change. But the US policy mechanism put in place in 1945 has visibly run its course. Getting Reece over the line was the last fig-leaf of justification for continuing it and it is ironic that it became the British who ended up obstructing it for almost two years.

Aaron Moore can be said to have succeeded or failed, depending on the reader’s viewpoint, but given who he is, rewarding him for his behaviour beyond putting him out of everybody’s way seems an odd thing to do.

Edward Reece deserves to be left alone. Similarly, William Wong, who has truly had enough. In Kate Middleton, the royal family has actually found someone with a relatively strong gene and Prince George will be first semi-legitimate monarch of the UK for over three hundred years, according to the Masonic viewpoint.
If left alone, there are many men who could make each of Reece and Wong happy and several who might be willing to. Whether the original plan to have them pair up together makes sense is unclear, but decreasingly obvious. They share different interests, as has become apparent, and do not know each other at all well. Either way, both would need to be left alone, if they were to be able to find out.

It’s the pushing of Reece from pillar to post that is so unnecessary. He has already achieved emptiness and it takes sustained payments by the banks by both their lawyers and Moore and Villa’s networks to obstruct it and stop him from regaining it.

Yes, the banks, especially the Royal Trust, are scared. In a climate where casual criminality has become the norm, they have committed a stack of crimes a mile high in their ostensible drive to bring Edward Reece to Buckingham Palace. They want to know they are safe.

But if following him around for over four years without ceasing doesn’t tell them that, then nothing will. And the idea that Wong is going to make life difficult for them becomes irrelevant when the consequences of not allowing Reece and Wong to get on with their lives is books like this or the website www.blackmailingruSSIans.com, that Reece put up naming all the banks and law firms involved and then linking them to global Freemasonry and the British royal family, as well as to Moore and Villa.

It is time for the Royal Trust to let go. Yes, in arranging the genetic deformity of Reece’s daughter, in whom the gene is also strong, they committed an unforgivable crime, but that cannot be allowed to justify the destruction of both the British royal family and the US White House in their attempts to avoid the consequences of their actions. This practice of vindictively committing self-harm when thwarted is easily the most unpleasant characteristic of the British approach and now profoundly disliked by other observing governments.
Indeed, it would not be unreasonable to say that if half the problems the world has faced is Moore’s egotistical desire to have tea with the Queen one more time, the other half is the Royal Trust’s awareness of the depth of its criminality and desire to avoid the blame. And in its desperation to be told that it hasn’t really committed any crimes and that everything will be all right, it has inadvertently caused everyone, specifically Edward Reece, to find out not just that the Royal Trust is guilty but that its guilt wracks its corporate soul day in and day out.

So, instead of demanding forgiveness for itself, the Royal Trust should be begging for forgiveness from Reece and Wong. It should give up demanding that Reece accede to its determination to go to Buckingham Palace and give him the space – and the emptiness – to decide if he would like to. Which will occur when he is happy.

Which will occur when the Royal Trust has finally both backed off and backed down. And called off its hired dogs, not just in the banking and legal sectors, but amongst the swarm of low-level initiates that surround it in its Flick Socs.

Because most third party observers, even the Grubsters who to a large extent caused the mess to get so particularly bad, think the Royal Trust is now in the wrong. The British royal family and much of British freemasonry has been engaged in a confidence trick for several centuries; there is no particular reason why they can’t carry on into the future, especially since the royal family is gradually rebuilding its genetic capabilities.

If they believe they are suffering a crisis of legitimacy, this can be no worse than they have suffered continually since they displaced monarchs in whom the force did run strong, to coin a phrase.

Their ceremonies are no longer working, they say. That simply means there are no true individuals with the gene among their members. And that means nothing other than that groupings forced together to meet a specific historical need that no longer exists has run its course.
Reece, it is said, is the Herbert who doesn’t know he’s a Fitz. Well, he’s been told that he’s seeded from an informal attempt by the British royals to tie their bloodline to a family which does indeed have the gene. But so what? Primogeniture and legitimacy of the sanctity of marriage beats genetic heredity in the eyes of the law every time. He is not going to become the king of Canada, whatever Moore sometimes says. No Fitz ever became king of England.

What is he to be? The moderator of the English freemasonry assembly? How often does it want him to do it? Does he get free time? Will be allowed privacy and retirement? Or will he be worked to death by those, extending far beyond the British royal family, who don’t have the gene and crave the peace of emptiness for their own entirely selfish purposes of career advancement, wealth, power and the corruption of others?

The answer is self-evident. No established elite likes to be told it is obsolete. The viciousness with which Reece is pushed around is testament to the aggression of a cornered group that knows it has forfeited the right to exist and is hoping to simply intimidate someone into doing its bidding. For free, if possible. And paid if only he masters a course so tortuous that no one can pass it, because it is designed to be failed.

The goal was for Reece to achieve emptiness. He achieved it and it scared the crap out of the banks and their lawyers. So the goalposts were moved and Reece was once more ‘deemed to have failed’.

Because when Reece is in emptiness and in communion with the universe, two things happen. All the truths of his life are revealed, including all the actions of the banks and their lawyers and anything known about any other people also in emptiness.

But that is the small part. The much larger part is that he loses himself in an emptiness so profound that no one can get in, just as Wong does. When Reece achieves emptiness the opposite of the goal of the British freemasons is achieved: he shuts everyone out. Similarly, when he blocks access to his mind which causes complete carnage among initiates.
Indeed, much of the work of the banks, lawyers and others has been about finding a way control Reece so that he can live a life whilst continuing to provide a free service to the other Freemasons and their swarm of hangers-on. Because when he shuts them out, just how few people truly possess the gene in strength is revealed: millions of people become cut off from emptiness.

Indeed, when Reece engages with emptiness, the true nature of inner peace is indeed revealed as a Masonic pyramid. Some people possess the gene in stronger measure than others. Those who have it more strongly can connect those who have it more weakly in a narrowing pyramidal hierarchy of capability.

And Reece, Wong and indeed Moore are all very near the top, so conversely when Reece follows Wong and disconnects to block others, the pyramid shakes to its very foundations.
Chapter 12

If Aaron Moore wasn’t going to be allowed to bring Edward Reece to tea with the Queen, there was no carrot for him to cooperate with Wiseman and others. He had been led to understand he’d be quietly pensioned off once the process of bringing Reece up to speed had been concluded.

However, that process had become so messy, tortuous, delayed and acrimonious that the pendulum had swung to the opposite extreme: more and more countries were calling for the stick to be applied to him as it had been to others. Mainly were calling openly for his arrest, not least his own.

It was ironic that of all the affected countries, only those worst hit by the blackmail, particularly the UK, was still supporting him, desperate not only to bring Reece into their fold but also to cover up what had been done to their elite, particularly their royal family.

Everybody was looking for somebody to blow the whistle. The original plan had been to quietly cover everything up and no surprises for guessing that that plan was cooked up by the UK. But that was before both Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, two catastrophes brought about directly as a result of the in-fighting of those involved and their insistence on code and symbolism.

The various clashes of egos and score-settling among the participants who had failed so spectacularly for so many years, if not decades, was at the heart of the problem, leavened by a reluctance of the banks to pay the money they had undertaken to pay and the continued problem of Aaron Moore, a man used because he was useful but otherwise despised.

After realising just how little Edward Reece knew about what every Freemason in the world had been discussing for three decades, it was hoped that William Wong would be the one to help.
Reece had left several police forces and media outlets half-pregnant and that had exacerbated the problem, since his approaches had been made with incomplete knowledge and in a manner that lacked the subtlety desired by both the British and the banks they had subcontracted the problem to.

Nevertheless, the very act of making the police forces half-pregnant had built up a well-head of pressure for Moore to be brought to book by frustrated law enforcement officials in a dozen jurisdictions. In line with popular understanding, senior police forces contained large numbers of Freemasons, but these were also well equipped with the gene and highly capable of seeing through the self-serving obfuscation of those running the process.

This had created an unlikely coalition of allies pitching the FBI, Montreal police, Vancouver traffic cops, London’s metropolitan police, the Surete and governments from Canada through Cambodia to New Zealand, not to mention Mainland China which loathed Moore, as well as even official figures in Russia, against the British establishment, the government of Singapore and several large banks.

Others fitted on a spectrum in between, grading on a scale of probity against expediency in an inverse relationship to the extent to which they had been compromised by US policy. The most virulently hostile were those, like William Wong or the CBA, which had suffered most and come out the other side to tell the tale. For them, the view was simple: never again.

It was a position the more level-headed officials in the US, such as Wiseman, had also arrived at and who were now searching for a solution. The whistle needed to be blown by someone with the requisite degree of inside knowledge, which essentially meant Wong, Moore or at a push one of the more compromised people around them such as Villa or even Moore’s lover, Jay Moon.
But the process kept falling over on the desire of everyone to avoid any of the blame for the delays, especially the delays after Reece began to become aware of what had happened, landing on them, not least the RAT which continued to insist that it had only followed orders and couldn’t be held responsible for the failure of others to deliver.

The problem was that the level of their vindictive behaviour and insistence on a narrow path was only explicable or justifiable in the context of accepting the logic of the Victorian punishment/reward incentive learning process. This was best exemplified day to day by Charles Villa. Although his actions were entirely within keeping with the approach of his erstwhile bosses in London, one of everybody’s problems had always been his desire to rebuild his own personal relations with them before he died. At the expense of the process and Reece’s success, if necessary.

The thing was that most others simply didn’t think this methodology worked. Particularly not with so many watching like hawks or perhaps vultures, bitter and vindictive as a result of so many delays, so much heartache and so much punishment to them and by them for which they feared retribution as well, the RAT being the most high profile example.

So, while Wong might be the perfect person to blow the whistle, of all people it was the RAT that most wanted the process to complete who was blocking him most from doing so. Their argument was that he was simply too much of a wild card and would tell everyone what the RAT had done. Consequently, in practice, they would rather see a continued delay than a resolution.

The question then became, how important is one bank even if it does bank the British royal family and even if it has been compromised to such an extent significantly (but not solely) because it was asked to do national service for the UK and other countries?
The answer was that a cornered bank will be able to find a very large amount of money if it finds itself under threat of its very survival. And most people were too tired of a process that now was little more than working out which bucket to dump Moore and the RAT in before everyone else could go home.

Moore had been offered a suspended jail sentence and enough money to retire on, on condition he turned state’s evidence in the US or queen’s evidence in Canada and died within five years of his cancer and had accepted the offer.

Wong had agreed not to sue the Royal Alpine Trust on condition that they paid out in full the agreed amount to Reece for what they’d done to him and his daughter.

Reece had also agreed not to pursue the ultra-‘hard Brexit’ of full separation from all other routes that Mainland China had been urging on him.

And here lay the problem: Mainland China had urged ‘hard Brexit’ on Reece because they didn’t believe that the RAT would honour its side of the bargain. They believed it would need to be brought to its knees before it behaved in the way that everyone else expected both it and others to behave after so long working on this.

And they had a point, exemplified by the continued delays and obstruction caused by the RAT in its insistence on both full exoneration and the right to monitor Reece and, by implication, potentially Wong for the rest of their lives.

Wong categorically rejected this last demand and therein lay the impasse. Wong wanted privacy for both himself and Reece after the process completed, the RAT wanted ongoing observation rights. In their words, they ‘didn’t trust him’ not to spill the beans at some stage in the future on what had happened, and what they’d done.
A compromise existed, for Reece to achieve permanent emptiness and full communion with all others in emptiness, which effectively meant ongoing observation rights if the RAT had any employees in emptiness themselves, but the RAT had rejected this as too private and had directed the single biggest part of their funds to obstructing Reece’s repeated attainment of emptiness and trying to make him believe it was conditional on their support. In some ways it was, but in the opposite way to most people: in those where the gene was weak, they needed help to connect. For Reece, the RAT had to hire communities to actively block him.

He’d come to term the people doing this to him as the ‘fuck you brigade’, because he would always be greeted with a ‘fuck you’ when he achieved a goal that others would consider quite normal.

The reason was because it potentially entirely obviated any need for him to meet or help the British royal family, beyond Wong doing this by blowing the whistle. Many still hankered after completing the original plan, a caucus race with comfits for all and no punishment for anyone, least of all the RAT and Moore.

The problem was the drugs trading and the associated growth and increasing strength of the shadow states. The US knew it had made a terrible mistake and needed it to stop. Allowing the Russian shadow state to recruit Moore and then have him build a parallel underground funds system, alongside the ‘official’ underground system set up by the US in the 1950s where Moore had been trained, had created a monster that threatened to consume everything, including the Russian state and possibly others.

This drugs trading had to stop and the illegal transfer process re-regulated in more official channels. And stopping Moore, whilst a necessary first step, would not be sufficient. In this respect, the British no blame, comfits all round, let’s go home for tea approach was inappropriate. Removing Moore and his network was merely the first stage, although the only stage that would require Reece or Wong.
After that, the banks and others who had enjoyed their supposedly unwelcome national service would need to face up to their actions and whether those had indeed been requirements of their governments or simply something they’d wanted to do and then justified as a requirement.

And this was where the problem with the RAT really lay. For when any person or organisation protests their innocence that loudly, it can only be because they are guilty as sin. And the CEO they hounded out certainly believed they deserved to lose their banking licence, whist Tim Spring, a senior lawyer and dedicated blasphemer in chief against Reece had termed them as tantamount to a criminal enterprise.

Even the Grubster Brothers, who had done a great deal wrong, had been persuaded by Wiseman to see reason and were now trying to help. In this, it was useful that Spring was still at the bank and so had deep insight into what a criminal enterprise actually looked like.

The Grubsters knew that the compensation they had been requested to make to Reece was cheap at the price in the context of what had occurred. They also knew that Reece had also resisted efforts to get him to either raise or lower the amount and had, when the opportunity arose, actually assisted him in accelerating the end of the process so they could pay up and bow out.

Because for them, and for the RAT, the problem lay mainly – although not exclusively – in Mainland China. Which was why the Mainland Chinese authorities were in such a good position to be concerned about how it would all end.

Both banks had outsourced much of the legal misbehaviour to their partially-owned Mainland China affiliates, which they were hoping every day would go bust and thus remove their legal liability in any court case. Indeed, another absurd aspect of this process was that the Mainland Chinese government was expending valuable foreign exchange reserves propping up their currency to stop these businesses going under until the rest of the process had been completed.
Corrupting the White House and bankrupting China was a ridiculous case of the tail wagging the dog to get Edward Reece out and dressed up for tea at the Palace. If it constituted payback, then that was yet another example of the vindictiveness and petty-mindedness into which the process had descended.

So, Wiseman was left searching for a solution. And this was to show the RAT how continually trying to make Reece fail in with their insistence on everything being done entirely their way was actually harming their own interests.

The officials in London wanted Reece delivered on a plate, wrapped up in a bow. Three of the four banks and most of their lawyers knew it could be done basically tomorrow if the fourth would get out of the way. But the RAT had its own explicit and specific agenda. In its possession as a financial institution and as one with Moore on the payroll of the primary financial assets of the royal family, it exemplified and to some extent embodied British Freemasonry.

And more than that, through its long links to P2 and other related groups, it was associated with similar levels of criminality across its entire private banking business and had been for decades. The merger of the old Alpine Bank that had served T5 with the Royal Trust of Basel that served the royal family to create the Royal Alpine Trust was in effect a merger of Bonnie with Clyde.

And the RAT knew it. And so did everybody else, especially Moore, Villa and, above all, Wong. And they were shitting themselves that someone would tell. Which is why they wanted to pension people off. But only if they got the right to spy on the innocent in the way that they would not accept for themselves.

Reece had also found out, although unlike the others, he couldn’t prove it. Unless he got together with Wong. And that’s what they were really afraid of. In a process where most had kept some kind of grip on their sanity, the RAT had lost theirs. Reece was never meant to have known as much as he now did, in its way his discovery a punishment for the RAT that it should have foreseen.
One way or another, Reece’s personal growth had been obstructed at every turn, from such simple things as making it difficult to have swimming lessons to improve his breath control to making it essentially impossible to get a job. And it had been obstructed by the very people tasked to ensure that exact personal growth in a process dogged by hatred and a desire for vengeance on everyone but themselves.

Wiseman had determined that the RAT and their puppet masters in London needed to calm down. For demanding yet more punishment for Reece simply would drive him further away. They had already essentially destroyed his interest in helping them through their repeated speed trials and petty obstacles and punishments, attempted and otherwise.

These had often taken place without him either knowing, noticing or sometimes even caring, much to their extraordinary frustration and a testament to the degree to which their approach was at odds with his fundamental personality as disrupted by Moore in childhood. The Canadians called him one of the most destructive people on the planet for a reason: he wasn’t like other people. And he wasn’t like other people for a reason.

First the British and then the Americans had damaged him at a profound, almost molecular, level. He had essentially never been happy ever in his life and so didn’t know what it felt like or miss it when he didn’t experience it. As a consequence, trying to make him unhappy as a punishment never worked because he had no happiness to miss or aspire to recover. In his entire adult life, Reece had probably had less than 18 months of genuine happiness and possibly much less than that.

And that was another dirty secret of both the British and American Freemasons: it suited them to have him that way. For when he was unhappy, he was easier to control. They could use his capabilities for their own ends without him even knowing.
And in this, by far the most hypocritical part of the entire process was dangling potential lovers in front of him and then yanking them away as soon as he showed any real interest. It was essentially like torturing a puppy.

And all because the British royals couldn’t act as High Priests any more and the Americans wanted to rule the world. The Americans had now been shown the error of their ways and it was time for the British to see the error of theirs. In this, the solution was for London to calm down and to instruct the RAT to do likewise. And Moore. And, for good measure, Villa.

Then, and only then, could Reece’s narrow, stony and exceptionally unattractive path be widened again and progress made in clearing up over seventy years of mess that now threatened to destroy large parts of the global political structure.
A description of tropes appearing in Crime and Punishment. Perhaps the most famous novel written by Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. Originally in Russian. “What can I tell you? I've known Rodion for a year and a half: sullen, gloomy, arrogant, proud; recently (and maybe much earlier) insecure and hypochondriac. Magnanimous and kind. Doesn't like voicing his feelings, and would rather do something cruel than speak his heart out in words. About Crime and Punishment Manga: Nisha is shocked when she meets her mother’s new boyfriend Perry, who’s come to punish Nisha for what she did to him in the past. Summary. Legal Disclaimer. The Use of The Manga and Other Promotional Materials are Allowed Under the Fair use Clause of the Copyright Law and Copyrights and Trademarks are Held by Their Respective Owners. © 2019 Mangazuki. All Rights Reserved.