



— THE — GILGAMESH PROJECT

BOOK IV IBIZA

JOHN FRANCIS KINSELLA

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BOOK IV



IBIZA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Other books by John Francis Kinsella

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Translations

In the works

for

*Tilla, Selma, Eléonore, Noé, Xaver, Elyas, Adèle,
Camille and Antoine*

Virtually every activity in modern life—growing things, making things, getting around from place to place—involves releasing greenhouse gases, and as time goes on, more people will be living this modern lifestyle. That’s good, because it means their lives are getting better. Yet if nothing else changes, the world will keep producing greenhouse gases, climate change will keep getting worse, and the impact on humans will in all likelihood be catastrophic.

Bill Gates

The Municipal Gallery Revisited

I

*Around me the images of thirty years:
An ambush; pilgrims at the water-side;
Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,
Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical pride;
Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
A gentle questioning look that cannot hide
A soul incapable of remorse or rest;
A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed;*

II

*An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand
Blessing the Tricolour. 'This is not,' I say,
'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland
The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'
Before a woman's portrait suddenly I stand,
Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way.
I met her all but fifty years ago
For twenty minutes in some studio.*

III

*Heart-smitten with emotion I Sink down,
My heart recovering with covered eyes;
Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
My permanent or impermanent images:
Augusta Gregory's son; her sister's son,
Hugh Lane, 'onlie begetter' of all these;
Hazel Lavery living and dying, that tale
As though some ballad-singer had sung it all;*

IV

*Mancini's portrait of Augusta Gregory,
'Greatest since Rembrandt,' according to John Synge;
A great ebullient portrait certainly;
But where is the brush that could show anything
Of all that pride and that humility?*

*And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again.*

V

*My mediaeval knees lack health until they bend,
But in that woman, in that household where
Honour had lived so long, all lacking found.
Childless I thought, 'My children may find here
Deep-rooted things,' but never foresaw its end,
And now that end has come I have not wept;
No fox can foul the lair the badger swept --*

VI

*(An image out of Spenser and the common tongue).
John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.*

VII

*And here's John Synge himself, that rooted man,
'Forgetting human words,' a grave deep face.
You that would judge me, do not judge alone
This book or that, come to this hallowed place
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends.*

William Butler Yeats

Unreal City

*Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!
You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!'*

TS Eliot

CHAPTER 1

MARIA SCMITT HADN'T HUNG AROUND to see what happened next. By the time Demitriev realised the bird had flown, she was already checking into the Mirador de Dalt Vila, a boutique hotel overlooking the Mediterranean, ten thousand kilometres from Belize City, on the Spanish island of Ibiza.

There, after inspecting her room, Maria carefully locked the door, double checked the security latch, then collapsed onto the bed and slept until early evening.

The journey from Belize to Panama City, London, Madrid and finally to Ibiza had been long, exhausting and filled with apprehension following Demitriev's intimidating visit to the law offices of Young & Simmonds three days earlier.

The Russian had appeared shortly after Henrique da Roza. The visit of the Brazilian, or whatever he was, had already been alarming enough. But what had really put the fear of God into Maria was the disappearance of Barry Simmonds' passport and documents relating to Cavendish Holdings, which she discovered on arrival at the law firm the following morning.

Maria was very meticulous and immediately sensed something was not right, her files were not exactly in the order she had left them. For ease of mind and to alleviate her suspicions she carefully checked her papers, the drawers of her workspace, Simmonds bureau, the doors and windows. Nothing had been forced, but there was absolutely no doubt the office had been visited by intruders, and not the careless local amateur kind, there were no visible indications of an intrusion apart for the missing documents.

When Simmonds business start to go sour, as his sister May Grafton predicted it would, he was forced to admit his concerns to Maria, afraid of what might happened if his Russian friends became threatening. In particular he warned Maria about Arkady Demitriev, who was no simple attaché at the Russian Representation in Belize City, but an intelligence agent, and an extremely dangerous one at that.

Soon after the mysterious disappearance of her father, Maria, fearing the worse had prepared a plan. With Demitriev's sudden eruption at the law firm's offices, she did not intend to wait around and see what happened next. She grabbed several important documents she had put to one side in the apartment situated above the office which her father had been in the habit of using before his disappearance, stuffed them into the overnight bag she had prepared, just in case, ready with a change of clothes

and a few other necessities, locked the office and headed towards the Swing Bridge.

Along the way she extracted the SIM card from her cellphone, which she crushed under her heel, then on reaching the Haulover Creek she discreetly dropped the phone into its murky waters, after which she hailed a passing taxi and instructed the driver to take her to the Goldson International Airport, ten kilometres to the west of Belize City, where she arrived in time to catch the midday flight for Panama City.

On arrival at Tocumen Airport, she presented her UK passport at the British Airways counter and bought a one-way ticket to London on a flight leaving later that afternoon. The twelve hour non-stop flight arrived at London Heathrow early the next morning where Maria headed for terminal 5, there she bought a ticket on the first flight to Madrid, presenting her Belize passport, with a connection to Denia where she boarded the ferry for Ibiza.

The next day Maria headed down to the BBVA branch in Ibiza Town to pick up the poste restante bank statements held for a holiday rental company—Maya Sol Villas S.L.—that managed her father’s retirement villa, situated just outside of Santa Eulalia del Rio, which until then had been rented to English and Northern European holiday makers, however, outside of the high season and what with the pandemic, it had found few takers.

Maya Sol Villas was owned by a British Virgin Islands trust, also set up by her father, a structure that offered numerous advantages for foreign residents.

Completed and furnished a year earlier the villa was in perfect condition, the pool and gardens maintained by a local agency, leaving Maria little else to do than settle the maintenance charges, collect the few belongings she had brought with her from Belize and move in.

Simmonds also held foreign resident bank accounts with the BBVA, in his own and Maria's name, which allowed Maria to install herself without attracting too much attention. Her plan was simple—keep a low profile whilst she figured how and when she would make her next move, that was to meet with Sir Patrick Kennedy and claim what was due on the Wallace Codex.

CHAPTER 2

ON HIS RETURN from Spain earlier that year, Barry Simmonds had been finally forced to confess that the Ambergris Golf Complex project had well and truly collapsed. He was equally forced to admit the death of George Wallace, found floating dead in his pool, was almost certainly not an accident, and the death of Wallace's friend their Russian investors' representative, Igor Vishnevsky, found washed up on the beach to the north of San Pedro, half eaten by sharks, was the result of foul play.

Simmonds told Maria how together with Wallace's friends he had invested more than six million dollars in cash, loans and leases for the Ambergris site, all 70 hectares, complete with a beach front over half a kilometre long, situated near to Laguna de Cayo Frances.

At the outset it had seemed like a once in a life time opportunity, and it was, except for the fact that neither he nor his partners had foreseen the pandemic, a once in a fucking century pandemic, he had told himself bitterly.

Suddenly the site was worthless, it would be years before buyers returned. Worse still, Vishnevsky turned

nasty and his friend Demitriev menacing. What could he do, it was a situation beyond his control.

Work stopped, then Wallace was found dead. At the time it was put down to an accidental drowning by the medical examiner, as for the police it was an open and shut case, there were more pressing cases for them to attend to in Belize, where the crime rate was one of the highest in the world.

Simmonds had hoped naively that would take the heat off him, then Vishnevsky turned up on the beach, at least what was left of him, the top half to be more precise, the other half had been shared by a the bulldog sharks that lurked off the reef.

It was at that point, as Simmonds was disposing of Wallace's estate, he stumbled upon a safebox in a Panamanian bank, the contents of which led him to Geneva, the discovery of a rare and valuable Aztec codex, and a meeting with Sir Patrick Kennedy—a rich art and antiques collector.

An arrangement was made with Kennedy and an advance payment on the codex, pending authentication, was wired to a Caribbean bank, which Simmo then transferred to offshore trusts and an account in Ibiza.

Returning to Belize after his mysterious trip to Geneva, he announced the good news to Maria—his arrangement

with Kennedy. His sudden change in fortune would enable him to retire to Spain and start a new life.

In the meantime, whilst awaiting the authentication, Simmonds set about preparing his plans to quit Belize for Ibiza in the knowledge the money promised by Kennedy would provide a solid insurance policy if things went awry, as they soon did.

The problem was he hadn't counted on the determination of Demitriev, who suspecting Simmonds was double crossing his Russian friends, sent his thugs to waylay the lawyer and extract the details of his sudden trip to Geneva.

Unfortunately Demitriev's bungling helpers unwittingly killed Simmonds, running him off the road into a bottomless jungle swamp, between the Guatemalan frontier and Belmopan.

Simmonds' young paralegal assistant, Maria Scmitt, was in fact his daughter, a closely guarded family secret. It was why, fearing for his own safety, he confided to her the arcane workings of the Geneva Freeport, where a company he had set up for George Wallace two or three years earlier—Atlantic Fine Arts, had stored a number of valuable objects, one of which had been the codex.

CHAPTER 3

MAY GRAFTON'S HUSBAND, Anthony, had been a Dubliner, like her father Joseph Simmonds who was born into an Anglo-Irish military family. Joseph Simmonds moved to South London sometime after WWII where he married and where May and her brother Barry were born.

Tony Grafton, a successful art and antiques dealer, died in a tragic boating accident during a holiday off the coast of Bray in Ireland, leaving May, who never remarried, to continue his business on Kings Road in Chelsea. The business prospered and May at a good moment sold it and retired to spend much of the year in France or Spain.

Her house on St George's Square was big, and May to simplify life transformed the spacious street and garden floors into her apartment whilst the upper four floors were converted into apartments which she rented to government bodies in and around Westminster for officials on short-term missions in the capital.

May's brother Barry, more than ten years her junior, still in 5th grade when she was at art school, had always been somewhat of an oddball, different, but had surprised the family when he succeeded at Goldsmiths law school and

even more when he took off to join a firm of solicitors in Belize City.

Barry had never spoken to his parents of his friendship with Ursula Scmitt, a Mennonite, who was disowned by her family when she fell pregnant, making it even more difficult to explain the situation to his own family.

One drama led to another, Ursula died from an infection soon after Maria was born, leaving Barry the difficult task of bringing his daughter up alone. In desperation he turned to his housekeeper and her husband, Rosanna and Felix Mendez, who with no children were overjoyed to help care for the child.

Barry finally revealed the existence of his daughter to May soon after their parents passed away. She was saddened and angry he had not told their parents, but that changed when he finally arrived in London with Maria, and May was charmed by the discovery of a delightful child.

May's sole visit to see her niece in Belize had not worked out, the climate and everything about the place disagreed with her and it was decided that from then on Maria spend her holidays in London or France with her aunt.

The arrangement work perfectly and later when Barry and May realised she was not getting the kind of schooling

needed in Belize, Maria was sent to live with her aunt in London, which changed everything for May, as Maria filled the place of the child she'd never had.

After retirement May turned to her real passion, painting, in which she had established a reputation in figurative art and as a portraitist. She held exhibitions not only in London, but also in Ibiza and Provence, where she had many friends from the world of art and antiques and where her paintings were sold in fashionable galleries.

However, when the UK voted to quit the EU, the idea that her freedom of movement in Europe could be cut short forced May to anticipate travel and residency complications—she applied for an Irish passport, which she was entitled to as she was born an Irish citizen, thanks to her father Joseph Simmonds, who had been a born and bred Dubliner. At the same time she applied for and obtained an Irish passport for Maria, which in case of need would allow her to live and travel in the EU when the UK quit the Union on December 31, 2020.

May was more down to earth than her brother and saw the risks when he told her of his investment in the Ambergris Golf Resort, even though she could have never imagined a pandemic nor the impact it would have on her family.

She had been equally skeptical when a couple of years earlier Maria announced her intention to work in her

father's law firm in Belize, but May did not object, not wanting to spoil her otherwise good relations with Maria and her brother.

CHAPTER 4

Pat Kennedy was facing an extraordinary challenge, a race against time, not to produce a new electric car, cellphone, vaccine or some new social media concept, but undertake a project that would irredeemably transform the future of humanity.

To start with biogerontology was big business, packaged in multiple forms and there was no reason for LifeGen, that is to say Pat Kennedy, to pass up what was perhaps the most remarkable business opportunity that had ever existed.

That didn't however mean he was about to offer immortality to the hoi polloi, he would instead propose a system of anti-ageing therapeutics that would relieve the pains of ageing.

The market was inestimable since ageing was felt by most people from about 35 onwards, when the first gray hairs appeared, when the first small wrinkles became visible around the eyes, when the first twinges of pain were felt running up the stairs or on the tennis court, and when the first signs of a midriff paunch or thickening thighs appeared.

That meant a potential market consisting of two thirds of the world's population.

Like successful tech giants his first step was not to make the mistakes of rushing into production, launching marketing and communication strategies, but to tie up ownership, patents, trademarks and manufacturing know-how by establishing a legal shield that would prevent any intrusion into what would be LifeGen's exclusive reserve.

Kennedy had the wealth and the means to undertake the challenge from A to Z, without having to resort to the markets to raise capital.

The undertaking would require a task force which he decided to set up in the City of London at the bank's headquarters in the Gould Tower. The 40 floor tower was under normal circumstances a hive of activity where the coming and going of new faces was part of its daily life—bankers, lawyers, business people and specialists from all sectors of economic life.

Anywhere else attract the attention, lead to rumours, snooping by the prying media always on the lookout for a new story.

To start was the question of secrecy, one that had been simplified by a tragic accident—the deaths of Michel Morel and Henri Ducros. Dr Caroline Fitzroy-Grossman was now head of LifeGen at their research centre in

Sophia Antipolis, a specialist in pharmacology and the ageing process she had worked directly under Morel and Ducros.

Pat instructed his lawyer, James Herring, to establish a team that would set out the rules and guidelines to protect the molecules, formulations, processes and treatments developed by LifeGen. Its work would cover international patent applications, trademark registrations and other legal procedures.

CHAPTER 5

FOR MILLENNIA, MANKIND HAD sought the secret to eternal life. Now, Pat had discovered that if he couldn't live for ever, he could live for a longtime, a very longtime.

The question was what would happen if he lived as long as Darwin's legendary Galapagos tortoise, which the naturalist found in 1835 when he visited the islands on the Beagle. His tortoise, Harriet, ended up in the Australia Zoo, an hour to the north of Brisbane in Queensland, and was said lived to be 175 years old.

The reptile had survived Darwin by well over a century was remarkable in that it had displayed negligible senescence, which meant it hadn't suffer the debilitating consequences of old age.

While the Galapagos or Seychelles tortoises' risk of death remains more or less constant as they ages, the risk of death in humans doubles every eight years. At 30, the chance of dying in the course of the next year is one in 1,000; at 80, it's one in 20.

The question of longevity was Caroline Fitzroy-Grossman's domain, she was a scientist, but longevity and eternal life was field of countless legends, created in the mists of time on the bank's of the Euphrates in ancient

Mesopotamia to the Celtic mythology of pre-Christian Ireland.

‘You’ve heard of Goibniu,’ Caroline asked Pat Kennedy.

‘Celtic mythology?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘The story of Oisín who falls in love with Niamh the fairy queen of Tir na n’Og?’

‘Sure.’

‘Tir na n’Og, the land of everlasting youth, where no one grows old and sick,’ insisted Caroline. ‘Where Goibniu, the smith, brews mead from the fruits of an Otherworld Tree giving those who drink it immortality.’

‘Yes,’ replied Pat quizzically. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘I just wondered why you called it the Gilgamesh Project.’

‘That’s not too difficult to answer, a lot of people have heard of Gilgamesh, but very few of Tir na n’Og, besides that it’s easier to say Gilgamesh,’ said Pat laughing.

Pat knew Caroline came from an Anglo-French family and had been brought up in Dublin, where she had studied pharmacology at Trinity College.

‘I see you’re familiar with Celtic mythology.’

‘My minor at Trinity was Celtic studies and Irish literature, you know science by itself can be a bit dull, besides I wanted to round off my Irish background with a bit of culture.’

They both laughed.

CHAPTER 6

Though Pat put faith in legends he was less certain about democracy, such as it existed, and did not see it as part of his future world. To him the much vaunted system of the democratic world's leader was not a model.

A system whereby an elected leader's term, if completed, could be as little four years, and not more than ten, was perhaps adapted to the 19th century, but as the 21st century entered its third decade, it was beginning to look unadapted for pointing the way forward in a dangerously complicated world, threatened by climate change, pollution, overpopulation and a growing number of authoritarian regimes.

A world in which it was thought by some that everything comes back to the climate crisis, because everything is affected by it—the political order, social order, food, water, the migration of people. They had got it all wrong, to Pat's mind it was humanity that affected the climate and not the inverse.

Neither democracy as it existed, or authoritarianism were part of the future as he saw it—a smaller world, one with a greatly reduced population, a much increased life expectancy and a greater well-being for all its inhabitants.

A leader chosen by his ability to raise the vast sums of money needed to undertake an election campaign was not a criteria for leadership. Especially when contributions came with conditions, from an occult world of anonymous donors and dark money.

Trump, the villain, had spent a mere fifth of the dark money as had his rival. Money from PACs—political action committees or political nonprofit organisations not required to disclose their contributors.

Anonymous donors, individuals or corporations, gained access and influence to decision makers, in other words thanks to dark money, they, unknown to the public were given private credit by those they had backed.

All of which was anything but democracy, not much better than Putin's Russia, run by American oligarchs who had produced Trump and continued to undermined the system with dark money.

Pat paraphrasing Kafka's words, every promise evaporates leaving behind but the slime of a new regime.

If life could be prolonged, wasn't it possible to find wise men to govern society, a stable society, one without the race to growth and expansion, which over one hundred centuries had led to the dystopian world that was now visible to even the most recalcitrant optimist.

Pat had no need to watch the imaginary dystopian worlds of Hollywood, he lived in one, yes, he had seen the slums of Manila, Delhi, Rio, Mexico City, Cairo, Mombasa. He had seen the rust belts of America, England, Russia and China. He had seen the Amazon burning, from his yacht the flotsam and jetsam of plastic on the oceans. His eyes had been burnt by the fumes of oil refineries, chemical plants and smouldering mountains of garbage. He had sadly seen the ruins of war and the refugees fleeing the terror rained down on their already ruined towns and cities by bombs, from one side or the other, so as to 'save' them.

It was not difficult to imagine a future when the US and its Western allies would no longer be reliant on the Gulf for oil and gas and their support for the House of Saud would collapse. Who then would stop the mad Ayatollas from marching to Mecca?

The middle classes in the developed world offered charitable donations to the poor in Africa and other benighted corners of the Earth suffering from malnutrition and disease as a salve for their own consciences, little did they know that a mere 1% of the money sent to alleviate poverty reached the desperate at the end of the chain.

A smaller world would be a more beautiful world. Civilisation had its limits, after 10,000 years, it had revealed the bestial face of humanity, far from the Garden

of Eden when man had lived in harmony with the rest of nature.

Dystopia was here, for real.

Pat's vision was to restart, rebuild that world with the knowledge gained from the more enlightened face of civilisation, without religious dogma, political ideology, create a form of equality that ensured all could eat and live without fear, one overseen by elders chosen amongst the wisest for their experience as in ancient Athens.

John warned him Athens had had its tyrants, it was easier said than done, but admitted there was no choice, that or endless dystopia.

Overpopulation was the cause of multiple ills, including hunger, inequality, oppression, destruction of the environment, loss of biodiversity and resources. Less people, better educated, more healthy and happier would be better for the planet Gaia.

'Of course that doesn't mean killing off the rest,' John said with an apologetic laugh, 'but by convincing the world to have much fewer children.'

'How?'

'Easy, with the promise of longer life and better health!'

'Hmm.'

‘Two or three generations could do it. It would solve all the problems facing us.’

CHAPTER 7

THERE WAS NO DOUBT IN Kyril Kyrstoforos' mind, humanity was fighting a losing battle in its efforts to stave off the looming climate crisis. He was saddened by the solutions proposed by governments and international bodies, which were no more than band-aids over the wounds inflicted by whalers harpoons on the back of a 200 ton cetacean, one of the many species threatened with extinction.

If politicians allowed, and even encouraged, populations to grow, trapped in the vain hope that somewhere in the future the problem would solve itself, as it certainly would, nature would take charge and with a terrible vengeance—the coronavirus was a mere taste of things to come.

Politicians and energy firms pointed hopefully to green technologies—wind, solar power and electric vehicles, to wean society off fossil fuels. The trouble was one evil replaced another, the raw materials and space needed for these new technologies brought their share of woes with profound ecological consequences, impacting the planet's ever shrinking biodiversity.

The move towards zero pollution was only attainable with less people, if humanity was to live in harmony with nature.

The trouble was that issue was always sidestepped.

The demand for minerals, such as lithium and cobalt, needed to make batteries for electric cars or for storing energy generated from wind and solar power, would increase exponentially as civilisation abandoned hydrocarbons, creating new and complex ecological problems as well as health issues in distant places like Bolivia or the Congo.

The same went for information technologies, a huge consumer of electrical power, copper and other more exotic metals.

The questions asked by pundits and politicians was always how they could cope with increased demand, increased urban waste, toxic materials, nuclear waste. Very few gave consideration to reducing these so called needs, and those that did imagined an unrealistic world where city dwellers cultivated vegetable gardens and raised goats on the roofs of their condos.

The storage of nuclear waste and all the rest would be manageable if populations were reduced, and they could be, in just one or two generations. One child or no children families would halt demographic growth and within three

generations the world's population would fall by a quarter.

There would be no need to expand the storage of nuclear waste, mine Alaska and Antarctica or rake the ocean beds for new material sources.

Rather than take measures to halt the uncontrollable proliferation of humanity and its hungry mouths, the world's leaders listened to those who salivated over resources in the few last remaining wildernesses including the oceans' depths, mindless of the dangers of unleashing an explosion of pollution in already fragilised milieu, destroying the last untouched ecosystems, those filled with strange life in a barely explored worlds.

Of course that was too much to ask from men whose unique and overarching interest was their own re-election.

At least Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk had set their sights on mining the desolate landscape of the Moon or Mars, where they could find and process all the resources needed for a happier and prosperous and smaller planet Earth.

The mindless nonsense talked about mineral deposits in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone of the Pacific Ocean could be forgotten. The destruction of New Britain be healed. The Amazon, African and Indonesian rainforests regenerated.

CHAPTER 8

PAT HAD ASKED THE Fitzwilliams Foundation to study different hypothesis concerning the evolution of Chinese power, a question intimately linked not only to the future of his bank, but of the world in which he, his family, friends and employees lived in and would live in in the future, perhaps long future.

The conclusion of John Francis and his geopolitical experts was not good, their conclusion was that if the Chinese Communist Party persisted in its rigid authoritarian policies, domestic and abroad, it would inevitably lead to conflict, a vision confirmed by Joe Biden's promise to reinforce Washington's alliance with Japan and its other allies in East Asia.

That world was an unpredictable place was nothing new, besides whatever else happened, it remained an inescapable fact of life, that from the moment we were born, conceived, we were on a one way conveyor at the end of which was death. It had been like that from the very first instant life appeared on planet Earth.

However, life was not equal for all of Earth's creatures, some lived longer, Darwin's legendary tortoise 250 years,

the Greenland shark 800 years, the prickly pine 7,000 years, and the creosote bush 11,000 plus years.

In the case of man, a few lived to 100 or a little more, but throughout most of humanity's existence, until the dawn of civilisation, most men and women lived not more than 20 years. Rome was not much better, though the first emperor, Augustus, lived to 75. Today, in developed nations, men and women can expect to reach 80, and more and more 100. The record went to Jeanne Louise Calment, a French woman from Arles, who it is claimed lived to 122 years and 164 days.

Now, biogerontologists believe there is no reason why life expectancy cannot be pushed well beyond that, in addition the suffering associated with long life can be attenuated, even eliminated, a simple question of bioscience and time.

Cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease are the scourge of ageing with an exponential increase in suffering over the passage of time, when the risk of death increases with each passing year, doubling every seven or eight years.

As Pat Kennedy approached 60 he thought of his father, a retired bus driver stumbling towards the cliff's edge, out of shape, hard of hearing and shortsighted, but it would have been wrong to think the overriding factor was a body was worn-out by a life of mind numbing routine, long

hours and an unhealthy diet, no, the truth was he suffered from the same ills as all other humans, namely the senescence of the cells that made up his body.

Senescence caused the uncontrolled mutation of his cells, the decline of his immune system, and the onset of age-related diseases.

Pat was persuaded science held the solution to preventing those diseases, to reverse the ageing process, the causes of which had been identified by biogerontologists. His goal was not only to extend life, but to prevent the disease that had always gone with ageing, frailty, decrepitude, incontinence, loss of memory.

He wanted to live longer, not in decrepitude, but in good health to achieve the goals he had fixed in his mind. What was the point of living a quarter of his life in a care home, a withering old man who needed someone to wipe his arse two or three times a day?

Until recently, very little was known as to what caused ageing, the mechanism. Now drugs such as *dasatinib* and *quercetin*, have reversed certain signs of ageing, slowing and reversing the process. Whilst other drugs like *spermidine* and *rapamycin* have reduced the decline of the health in laboratory animals—mice, worms and flies.

In the same way young stem cells have added the equivalent of ten years, in human terms, to the life of mice.

Mounting scientific evidence had convinced Pat that his project was credible, the tools were there and the volume of research had increased exponentially, promising the kind of breakthroughs that would push the frontiers of senescence back

Paradoxically the problems of overpopulation could be solved by longevity, the desire for a longer healthy life would be a powerful incentive for leaders to persuade their followers a smaller population would eliminate the hunger and misery that uncontrolled population growth engendered.

Of course immortality didn't mean death would be banished, people would continue to die. Science didn't eliminate the risk of being hit by a car when crossing the road or those of dangerous sports like skydiving. The same went for infectious diseases that lurked in the jungles of Nicaragua that Pat liked to explore with his archaeologist friend Ken Hisakawa.

If he led a reasonably normal healthy existence, it probable that Galenus-1 would increase his lifespan significantly more than current life expectation. But how much longer? That he would have to wait and see. Much more important was the promise of curing the disease of

ageing that went with longevity, the ability to be able to enjoy good health longer, practice sport, and benefit from the normal kind of pleasures in life that any man or woman could enjoy at the age of 40 with the added knowledge and experience of a person two or three times that age.

When the cost of caring for the elderly reached unsustainable proportions, the cure for aging would become justifiable, in addition, being sound of mind and body, they would be able to contribute their knowledge and experience, to society, at the same time a less numerous younger generation would become more precious.

CHAPTER 9

‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT THE market potential is Pat?’

‘Billions, I can’t tell you how much. There’s never been anything like this, it’s why I want cast iron exclusivity.’

‘I see, normally the pharmaceutical industry legally protects its discoveries by patents that offer market exclusivity for its molecules and protects its investments with a monopoly for the duration of the patent, normally 20 years. The trouble is obtaining a patent and preserving market exclusivity is a complex process.’

‘I want you to put everything you’ve got into this James, there’s no limit, it’s the most important project I’ve ever undertaken.’

‘I understand Pat, I’ll do everything to ensure the patents for your new compounds or molecules will guarantee your foundation exclusive ownership, rights and possession and will prevent others from copying them during the life of the patent and its extensions.’

‘We’ll need close scientific, financial and industrial coordination with our legal team if we are to develop watertight patents.’

‘Scientists invent, lawyers patent,’ James told Pat, ‘but sometimes the cultural gap between the different disciplines can complicate the process.’

The pharmaceutical industry had been faced with a steep rise in the cost of developing new molecules, sometimes billions of dollars, which had become an increasingly serious obstacle to the development of new drugs. If Pat Kennedy had invested heavily in LifeGen, the cost of Galenus was up to that point modest compared to the development of many new blockbusters.

The reason was simple, Galenus had been a fortuitous discovery, thanks to the Wallace Codex and Simmonds. A debt that Kennedy could not afford to overlook.

The first step in the legal process undertaken by James Herring was to file applications at the United States Patent and Trademark Office, describing the molecule, compounds and their uses, and it had to be got right first time as new information could not be added once the application had been filed.

He explained what happened beyond the 20 years depended on the initial patent and improvements and uses that could be developed since the compound had been patented, as the patent became a prior art reference that had to be considered when seeking additional patent protection. As a result, new patent protection generally

covered new formulations or uses not disclosed or proposed in the original patent.

‘For example Pat,’ James told him, ‘when the patent of Eli Lilly’s antidepressant drug Prozac reached expiration, the company developed a once-weekly, sustained-release, formulation and obtained patent protection.

‘So you see it’s critical to develop a long term strategy for maximizing patent protection and product life cycle from the very start, if we are to develop a response to the disease that causes ageing, genetic damage, cellular senescence and mitochondrial dysfunction ... and capture the market.’

CHAPTER 10

HENRIQUE DE ROZA WAS SHOCKED by the morning news as images from Hong Kong were flashed on US channels of police arresting dozens of pro-democracy activists in a dramatic escalation of China's crackdown with the largest police operation since the new National Security Law was put into effect in the territory.

Henrique had neglected his friends at home after more than a year's absence in Brazil, drifting apart from his girlfriend, Wangshu, who returned to her family in Wuhan.

The arrests were the latest measures in Beijing's battle to stamp out all remaining opposition in the territory after millions had taken to the streets over the previous two years in often violent protests.

Certain of those arrested were seized in their homes and taken off in handcuffs to face charges of sedition, a crime that carried a maximum penalty of life imprisonment under the new laws introduced in Hong Kong by Beijing, shocking observers who deplored the authoritarian methods and deplored how the Pearl of the Orient had been transformed into the Purgatory of the Orient.

Beijing, undeterred, pursued its sinister programme of disinformation, focusing on social media platforms, a tactic modeled on Russia's cognitive warfare programme, designed to transform the public's perception of reality through rumors, propaganda and agents of influence propagated through Chinese and foreign-language media networks.

As he took a light lunch at the Belize City Radisson, Henrique felt a mood depression creeping up on him with his lack of progress into the disappearance of Simmonds. At the police department he had met a blank wall, then discovered the law offices of Young & Simmonds Partners closed, padlocked. There remained one last possibility—Rosanna Mendez, Simmonds' housekeeper.

The villa too was locked up and he found Rosanna in the garden of her small house on the edge of the property. She seemed very guarded when he spoke of Simmonds. He decided to change tack and as she came from a Hispanic background, he switched to Spanish in the hope of gleaning information she would have perhaps not otherwise divulge.

At once she seemed her open up a little and when he gently pressed her on the whereabouts of Maria Scmitt, he couldn't help remarking Rosanna spoke of her with certain warmth and even pride. He was equally surprised by the fact she did not seem overly concerned by Scmitt's

absence. He pushed on and by more gentle probing, noted Rosanna spoke of *su hija*—his daughter.

‘*Su hija?*’ he asked.

‘*Si señor*, Maria is Señor Simmonds’ daughter.’

Henrique kicked himself, how had he overlooked that possibility. Simmonds’ daughter. That changed everything.

‘Do you know where she is?’

Rosanna suddenly clamped up realising she had said too much and Henrique did not press her any further. He would need Rosanna later.

Returning to the Radisson he found Mike Watson waiting for him. They went to the bar where once seated in a quiet corner Watson announced Demitriev had been recalled to Moscow. Victor Sanchez, Mike’s contact in Mexico City had informed him the Russian’s departure had been sudden and unexpected, a clue that something unusual was afoot in Moscow, there had been too many disappearances, a sure sign there was more to meet the eye than a simple routine recall.

He asked Mike to see what he could turn up on Maria Scmitt and then reviewed what Pat Kennedy had told him of Simmonds. There was not much, in fact there only one other salient clue and that was the existence of Cavendish

Holdings, a shell company probably set up by Simmonds, domiciled in the Cayman Islands and the payment of one million dollars to that company by Kennedy.

With the help of INI's services in London, Henrique followed the trail of the one million dollars. It had ended up at the Anglo-Dutch Commonwealth Bank in Dominica, one of the INI holdings, from where it was broken-down and transferred to other nebulous bank accounts in the Caribbean and more curiously to an account at the BBVA's branch on Ibiza in Spain.

CHAPTER 11

MARIA SCMITT WAS STILL looking over her shoulder, it took time to settle into the villa, adopting an uneasy routine, she had few close friends and was not yet ready to reach out to the one person who could help her, Aunty May.

Though it was late in the season the weather was fine and Maria took advantage of the fact there were few tourists with the continued travel restrictions discouraged the usual crowd of vacationers. In normal times Santa Eularia des Riu, situated on the east coast of the Island, was a quiet town, favoured by a more mature class of tourists, now, as the pandemic stalked its favourite gathering places, it was even more quieter than its neighbours.

Until recently Maria had never been attracted by the younger crowds or the kind of in-places that drew them in Ibiza town and San Antonio, the island's famous nightlife—the haunts of the island's wilder vacationers.

Maria discovered late nights and the clubbing scene far from Ibiza, in Cancun, thanks to Igor, and unknown to her father. Now alone, she was afraid, and did not care to linger out after dark.

In a way Ibiza had been at the origin of her troubles. It started when she'd introduced Igor Vishnevsky to her aunt in London. May was charmed by the cultivated, elegant, former banker, who like many well educated Russians was a connoisseur of the arts.

On more than one occasion he had joined Maria at her aunt's villa in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence or on Ibiza, where he had told May the long story of how his family, former czarist aristocrats, had been art collectors and how he, a former banker at VTB, had successfully invested on Wall Street.

As for May, her father, Maria's grandfather, had been an art dealer and she had often travelled with him to France and Spain where he bought and sold works from living and dead artists.

Ibiza had long been a vibrant art scene and a source of source of inspiration to painters, designers, sculptors, photographers, musicians, writers and creators. It was that which had attracted her aunt to the island and then her father who though he had not nourished any particular feelings for its cultural attractions liked the easy going atmosphere.

May had first visited Ibiza as a girl, when artists, writers, hipsters, bohemians and bon vivants of all sorts, flocked to the island, lured by its beaches, mild weather, easy going culture, a place where they could reinvent

themselves, following in the footsteps of the fifties beatniks, the first counter culture movement to settle on the island.

It was there in the company of her father she first met some of the often strange personalities of the world of art. One of them was Elmyr de Hory, probably the most famous, or rather infamous, painters of that time who had chosen the island as his home. Elmyr de Hory was in fact one of the most extraordinary forgers in the history of contemporary art, who had made a career of creating fake masterpieces.

He was the original Talented Mr. Ripley. Elmyr de Hory enchanted everybody he met, including Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor, Montgomery Clift, Rita Hayworth and Orson Welles. May remembered his hilltop villa, La Falaise, the paintings—oils, gouaches, watercolors, pencil, and pen and ink drawings as well as the statues that decorated it, his impeccable style and charm, his ever present assistant and companion Mark Forgy.

Born in Hungary in 1906 as Elemer Hoffmann, he studied art in Budapest, Munich and Paris. Between the wars life was difficult and he like many others drifted into petty crime and ran into trouble with the law for check fraud, counterfeiting documents and falsely claiming an aristocratic title.

Elmyr honed his skills in Paris, where after selling a pen-and-ink drawing of his own as a Picasso, he branched out selling works he forged to reputed galleries in Paris, claiming to be a Hungarian émigré, an aristocrat selling his family's art collection.

Graduating from paper to canvas he bought old paintings of little value in street markets which he recycled by scraping off the paint for his forgeries, then covering the finished works with varnishes that gave them an appearance of age.

Moving upmarket to New York, he forged his first Modigliani oil painting, which he sold to the Niveau Gallery on Madison Avenue, then enlarged his scope with works by Matisse and Renoir whilst using different identities.

Soon he teamed up with two crooked art dealers to sell his forgeries to collectors around the world, falsifying certificates of authentication and sales invoices. Their scam lasted nearly a decade until a wealthy American collector discovered the fraud—40 fake paintings, and unmasked de Hory.

The Hungarian fled to Ibiza where lived the life of a bon vivant during Franco's dictatorship, making friends with actors, writers, artists, and rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous.

Elmyr de Hory's extraordinary career came to a close when threatened with expulsion to France, he ended his life by his own hand, terrified by the thought of prison.

The only certainty about the extraordinary life of this remarkable forger was the uncertainty of the legend surrounding him and the extent of his forgeries many of which still decorate the walls of renowned museums.

Today, such forgeries were easier to identify thanks to new forensic techniques such as x-ray fluorescence and raman spectrometry. But the story of de Hory was a lesson that was indelibly engraved on May's mind and served her during her career as an art and antique dealer.

When Igor spoke about investing in art, May asked him if he knew anything about painting, not artistic appreciation, but about what was valuable, authentic, prices, sales, ownership history, trends and fashions.

He had to admit he knew little, but had the means to invest.

She asked him his budget.

He made a gesture that May interpreted as meaning a great deal, after all he was a banker, had rich friends, and led the life of an oligarch.

She suggested investing in paintings of slightly contemporary artists, certain of whose works could be

bought for anything from a couple hundred thousand dollars to five million, excellent investments, painters like Hans Hoffman, Alexander Calder or Joan Mitchell or less costly works of Cy Twombly for examples.



Cy Twombly 1928-2011

SILEX SCINTILLANS

3 sheets \$8 million

‘Easy to buy, no waves, no media sensations,’ May told him. ‘Easy to transport—a few feet square or so,’ she added waving her hands in the air.

Igor was impressed.

That was how May had recommended the services of her brother Barry to Igor, who became one of the cogs in Vishnevsky’s very compartmentalised investment schemes that ranged from real estate to art. Simmonds set

up the offshore companies and bank accounts, Wallace took care of projects and logistics, and May was the artistic consultant.

CHAPTER 12

SEVERAL DAYS Passed before Maria called her aunt in London, announcing her presence on the island, she then set about trying to contact Kennedy. That turned out to be much more complicated.

She then recalled the visit of Henrique da Roza at the law firm's offices in Belize City. His card announced him as Director de Estrategia de Inversión para America Latina — INI Finance & Development — Sao Paulo — Brazil. She figured he had a sufficiently important role at Kennedy's bank and besides that he had not had the pushy threatening air of Demitriev. She remembered that although he had been somewhat reserved, distant, there had been a hint of understanding in his manner.

It was mid-morning in Central America. Maria picked up her cell and keyed in de Roza's number.

She was in luck.

Henrique replied in English.

She guardedly announced herself and her need to speak with Pat Kennedy, person to person, refusing to tell Henrique where she was.

Henrique called Pat Kennedy who was pleased with the news. He agreed to meet Maria Scmitt, but first he asked Henrique to check out her background, family details, where she was, and what exactly she wanted.

Henrique called Maria back and they agreed to meet in London.

* * *

Four days later Maria arrived at the Four Seasons on Hyde Park Corner in London for lunch. She was a little guarded but otherwise pleased to see him in somewhat different circumstances, noting how good looking and charming he was, a fact she'd overlooked during their first stressful encounter in Belize City.

Their lunch lasted nearly two hours during which time she warmed to him, a feeling that was evidently mutual, as Henrique discovered she was more attractive and open than he had remembered. In any case he walked her back down Birdcage Walk, past Buckingham Place and then up Rochester Road to Saint George's Square in Pimlico, where she introduced him to May Grafton.

By the end of the afternoon Henrique had pieced together Maria's story and that of her family. May Grafton and Maria Scmitt admitted that Simmonds, their respective brother and father, had gotten himself involved with some dangerous people and feared something

terrible had happened to him, overlooking the fact that it was through them he had been introduced to the Russians and their violent Mexican accomplices.

Belize was a dangerous country, a transit point for drugs en route to North America, by land or air, with gangs like MS-13, Mara Salvatrucha, Barrio 18 and the 18th Street Gang. Common crime and a murder rate of 400 per 1,000,000 inhabitants, made life dangerous compared to the UK's ten. Crimes were rarely solved and murder was the usual recourse for vengeance in business disputes and other common grievances.

In Simmonds' case not only had he had the misfortune to get involved with a gang of ruthless Russian kleptocrats and their vicious friends, but he had chosen the wrong moment, though like so many others he could not have been blamed for not for anticipating the pandemic.

Vishnevsky an overambitious former banker had promised the earth to his powerful friends, his mistake was to have sold them a pig in a poke, that is he and his partners—commencing with Wallace, then Simmonds, both of whom had paid the price when Arkady Demitriev was instructed to step in to clean up the mess provoked by the Covid fallout.

That left May and her niece, neither of whom suspected the true nature of Simmonds discovery in the Freeport and

how it had led to Kennedy's discovery of the Galenus molecule.

Once back at the Four Seasons, Henrique called Pat Kennedy and it was agreed that he together with Maria fly down to Nice to meet him.

He felt better, he hadn't found Simmonds, but had found his family, who he suspected knew more than they had told him, for the moment.

CHAPTER 13

THE NEXT MORNING THEY boarded Kennedy's jet, on standby at London's City Airport, a shuttle service to Nice for key people whilst Kennedy managed his affairs from Beaulieu-sur-mer and his yacht during the lockdown.

London had been transformed into a ghost town as the Covid crisis deepened, people spied on each other denouncing their neighbours, the tabloid press ran lurid stories on quarantine breakers—preferably in bikinis, police broke up rave parties and politicians thrashed around as Bojo looked more mop haired than ever as he announced his empty promises and his ministers spread lies and fake news with the kind of condescending smile that politicians and true believers dispensed in the knowledge that only they were in possession of the real truth, one that the uninitiated had difficulty to grasp. Their eyes gleaming in the conviction that they had chosen the righteous path, pitying the opposition, the ignorant and lesser mortals.

Beaulieu was a breath of fresh air a release from the oppressive atmosphere of London. Their hotel, La Reserve, adjacent to the marina, had an unusually laid

back atmosphere in the absence of the visitors normally there at that time of year.

They were picked up by Kennedy's chauffeur and driven to La Villa Contessa, just a few minutes from the hotel. Passing through the vast ornate gates and along the palm lined driveway they arrived at the grand terrace where they were met by Kennedy's majordomo. They were awed by the opulence of the banker's Riviera home as they were led to the elegant office suite situated in ground floor wing overlooking the luxuriant gardens.

After the usual introductions Pat invited them to be seated around a low table surrounded by stylish Art Deco easy chairs and offered them refreshments.

'I'm sorry I couldn't meet you in London Maria,' he commenced. 'A little complicated for me at the moment.'

Maria dismissed his excuse with a polite smile and a wave of the hand.

'Henrique tells me your father is missing,' he said expressing concern.

'Yes, we're extremely concerned, our family that is, my aunt and myself. It's been three months now.'

'I'm sorry to hear that.'

‘My father informed me before his disappearance that you had an agreement together,’ said Maria getting to the point. ‘I have his copy here.’

She opened her document case and withdrew a photocopy of the agreement made in San Sebastian five months earlier between her father and the banker, which she presented to him.

‘Yes, we’ve tried to contact him several times, it’s why I asked Henrique to visit Belize.’

‘Of course, I’m sorry about that, but I was careful about meeting people who came to our office as a lot of things happened since the Covid pandemic.’

She explained how the Belize authorities had declared a lockdown at the end of March when the first cases appeared, then no cases were reported for nearly two months and the state of emergency was lifted at the end of June.

‘Yes, it was about that time I met your father in San Sebastian.’

‘Of course. His troubles started when tourist arrivals stopped, then in April his Ambergris Golf Complex ran into trouble and by early June the bank pulled out and his local partners too.’

‘I see.’

‘When he returned from Spain things seemed better, then at the end of July he disappeared, when I was in London with my aunt.

‘Before he disappeared he told me about his business difficulties and where certain papers were kept in the event something happened to him.

‘After I returned to Belize I contacted the police but they could do nothing. Belize is a small country.

‘I continued the business at the law firm where I was his assistant. I’m a chartered solicitor. Then Henrique appeared in November, followed by a Russian, Arkady Demitriev, who presented himself as a consular attaché. The day after his visit the office was broken into and several papers disappeared.’

‘Oh.’

‘Yes, that’s when I realised something bad was happening and why I left for Ibiza. I’ve been there for about a month now.’

‘I see. So what can I do for you Maria?’

‘I’d like to know what has happened to the codex?’

‘I can assure you the codex is in safekeeping, in Switzerland, in the Geneva Freeport.’

‘And the owner?’

‘The ownership, according to the document signed by your father—from Cavendish Holdings, a Cayman Island company, was transferred to Zürcher Kunst AG, a Swiss company based in Zurich, against a preliminary payment of one million dollars, and according to the agreement a second payment, equivalent to 50% of its final valuation.’



Geneva Freeport

‘Has a valuation been carried out?’

‘Yes, an expert evaluation had been made based on sales, auction houses, Christie’s and Sotheby’s.’

‘And what was that figure?’

‘It’s an estimation, 20 million US dollars.’

‘So, if I understand rightly, unless otherwise agreed, nine million dollars are due to Cavendish Holdings.’

‘Yes. There is only one question, now that Mr Simmonds is not available, who represents Cavendish Holdings?’

‘I do. I have the papers to certify I’m the sole shareholder and managing director of the holding company based in Belize.’

‘I see.’

‘Is there any obstacle to that payment?’

‘No that I can think of, but I’m not a lawyer.’

‘So how do we proceed?’

‘I suggest involving my lawyer, James Herring, if you agree?’

‘I don’t see any problem with that.’

‘Excellent. I’ll call James and we can set up a meeting. How long do you intend to stay in France?’

‘Perhaps you haven’t been informed, I’m now resident in Ibiza, it’s very near, an hour’s flight.’

‘I see ... and Belize?’

‘My father was in negotiation with a new partner and I don’t see any reason to change that, it can be done without

my presence, which means I won't be returning to Belize for the moment.'

'Good.'

Pat was impressed by the businesslike attitude of the young woman.

'I have just one problem.'

'I'm listening.'

'Demitriev.'

'Ah, Henrique has informed me about Arkady Demitriev. I'll speak to our security department to see how we can manage that question.'

* * *

James Herring himself, a good friend of Pat Kennedy, flew down to Nice with one of his law firm's junior partners who he left to settle the details after discussions with Pat Kennedy and Maria Scmitt.

This left Henrique free to discuss his business with Pat Kennedy and the question of Demitriev who, according to Mike Watson and his friend Victor Sanchez in Mexico City, was a particularly dangerous individual.

After addressing those questions Henrique relaxed and enjoyed the weekend in Provence, visiting Nice and its

Old Town with Maria who was much more self-assured as the clouds that hung over her future started to clear.

With her villa in Ibiza and ten million dollars in her bank account Henrique figured she should have few worries.

CHAPTER 14

HENRIQUE ASSUMED HIS mission in Belize was complete and he would be returning to Sao Paulo, however, he had not counted on Pat Kennedy's plans for him.

Pat Kennedy had other priorities, most important was the future of Galenus, and considering his own personal future now promised to be long, he would need people like Henrique da Roza, Liam Clancy and Anna Basurko.

Henrique had displayed his capacity by resolving the question of Simmonds, in part—at least the Wallace Codex, and what happened next in Belize could be taken care of by Watson, the journalist with whom Henrique had developed a good relationship which could prove useful for future developments in Mexico and the Caribbean.

Kennedy's agreement with Maria was straightforward, she had not been seeking a confrontation, she was realistic, now with that business settled and ten million dollars in her bank account she could seriously think about her future plans.

She felt better than she had for a longtime, but was still determined to solve the disappearance of her father. She commenced by returning to London to her aunt's where

she could to discuss the future of her father's villa in Belize and the question of Rosanna and her husband Felix who were like family to her.

Meeting with Henrique had been a lot to do with her new optimism and he promised he would stop by in London after Pat Kennedy asked him to remain in Beaulieu for a few days to discuss his future business plans.

* * *

The year had started with an unexpected change in Henrique's personal financial situation. His career had commenced at an INI investment division front office trading desk, where he had experimented with a personal account by investing in various securities, which though it was permitted at INI was not the case in all investment banks. His portfolio was nothing spectacular, neither in value nor originality, but over three or four years thanks to a dynamic market he made some handsome gains by investing in Apple, Tesla, Alibaba and Amazon.

However, none had been as spectacular as Bitcoin, the cryptocurrency he had discovered as a student at the London School of Economics back in 2011 when he invested 500 dollars in the Satoshi Nakamoto's cryptocurrency. At the time his friends had pulled his leg, but he believed that the financial crisis of 2008 had

ushered in a new era in finance and progressively upped his bet.

He had remained stoic as the Bitcoin rose and fell, like a proverbial stock market rollercoaster, resisting temptation to dump the cryptocurrency. Now nearly a decade later he reaped his reward, his investment was now worth many millions as the Bitcoin passed the 40,000 dollar mark.

Macau his home had a long history as a place of gambling dens, but those who gambled were outsiders, from all over China and the rest of the world, families like his were wiser, nurturing their investments.

* * *

Pat had recognised Henrique's talents and treated him as a protege, in the same way as he had with Liam Clancy.

He insisted moving him from his hotel to a guest room in the villa. It was a pleasant change for Henrique as he could speak Cantonese with Lili, Pat's wife and their children as well as the Chinese nanny and Lili's secretary.

Pat Kennedy also spoke Cantonese, a little garbled to Henrique's mind, but not bad at all for a foreigner.

'So how is life in Sao Paulo?' Pat asked Henrique.

‘Hectic,’ he replied with a laugh. ‘Seriously I’m getting used to it. Sometimes it seems very far away from the rest of the world.’

‘It is Henrique.’

Kennedy paused weighing up the young man. ‘It’s a year since you left Hong Kong I believe?’

Henrique nodded.

They had much in common. Henrique had been projected by the force of events into another world, from his home in South China to Brazil, as Pat Kennedy had 25 years earlier when he left Limerick and discovered the world.

Pat was still moving, he had homes in Hong Kong and London, his wife Lili was Cantonese, his two children were growing up in a fast changing world. Both of Pat’s homes were undergoing unexpected change, Hong Kong falling under the control of an authoritarian leader in Beijing, London quitting the EU to go it alone on a wild adventure in a world where it had not the advantages it had when Victoria became Queen of England .

‘So, how do you see the situation in Hong Kong?’

‘It’s not good, I’m sorry to say the pro-democracy movement has lost. The pandemic gave Beijing the upper hand, that with its authoritarian methods, a Leninist single

party and leaders unafraid of crushing all opposition. You're familiar with the Chinese proverb of killing a chicken to frighten the monkeys.'

Pay smiled.

'I'm afraid we're too few and too weak to resist them.'

'So what's your concept of democracy Henrique?'

'A balance.'

'And the goal of your revolution?'

'My idea? To restore the balance.'

'What happens to the revolution then?'

'It goes to sleep.'

'I see. It doesn't continue like in Cuba?'

'No, revolution,' continued Henrique, 'is a means to an end, to restore balance, not empower its leaders, not oppress the people.'

'Do you believe in democracy Henrique?'

'Democracy is a nebulous thing, idealistic, what is more important is justice and freedom. Freedom that respects the freedom of others.'

'Doesn't Communism offer well-being to most?'

‘True Communism, but not Leninism, Bolshevism or Maoism, they’re forms of dictatorship in disguise, giving power to a dangerous clique.’

‘So how would you describe an ideal society?’

‘Can I speak freely?’

‘Of course.’

‘You’ve the story of Socrates and his ship of fools?’

Pat shrugged.

‘Imagine we are about to depart on a long sea voyage, who would we want in charge of the vessel? An experienced seafaring captain? Or the fool who shouts the loudest?’

Pat smiled.

‘Yet we persist in thinking the fool who shouts loudest is fit to guide the ship of state.’

‘A paradox. I believe Socrates liked ships.’

‘Yes. Life is a paradox, after all Socrates, ships or no ships, ended up being forced to drink hemlock.’

Pat liked the young man.

CHAPTER 15

‘THAT EVENING AFTER DINNER Kennedy got down to business.

‘Tell me Henrique, what are your plans?’

‘For the moment I’m still learning,’ he replied carefully, playing his hand carefully. He’d learnt a lot about cards growing up in Macau. He told Kennedy how his family had been and still were traders, import-export, mainly with Portugal, less so with the rest of the Lusophone World, a complicated business as the distances were vast. It was why he had opted for banking and finance. But that was changing fast as Brazil grew, but was still long term.

‘You’ve been with the bank ... five years.’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you have any outside business interests?’

Henrique felt a little uncomfortable.

‘Yes I have some investments.’

‘Investments?’

‘Yes, stocks and cryptocurrency, which I declare according to the bank’s rules.’

'Of course, have you made any money?'

'Yes,' he replied a little uncomfortably.

'Very much?'

'Yes,' he had to admit.

'I see.'

Pat Kennedy had checked Henrique's background with the bank's HR department when he had sent him to Brazil more than a year earlier. There was no rule against one of the bank's employees getting rich, there were many such examples including his own.

'Are you happy with us?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Our plans in Brazil are long term, they're not based on trade, but banking, the money we can make in Brazil through banking. Trade with China is heavily in favour of Brazil—agrifood and raw materials.'

'Yes, unfortunately relations between Macau and Brazil are minimal. China has ignored its Macau card, its Portuguese cultural background, language and history. Macau's role has been reduced to providing entertainment for China.'

Pat smiled, Beijing was not always very perspicacious.

‘There is a reason why I’m asking you this Henrique, it’s because I can use your talents elsewhere.’

Henrique didn’t know how to reply.

‘We have a company not far from here, nearby to Nice, in Sophia Antipolis to be exact, called LifeGen. It’s specialised in research into longevity.

‘Recently a tragic accident cost the lives of its two directors and now Caroline Fitzroy-Grossman, a specialist in pharmacology and the ageing process, is its managing director. LifeGen’s work is linked to an important plan we are developing and we need someone with your kind of experience and knowledge of INI’s working to help manage those plans.

‘Tomorrow we’ll go over to LifeGen at Sophia Antipolis and I’ll introduce you to Caroline.’

Henrique didn’t know what to say. In little more than a year changes had been coming fast and furious.

‘You see INI is a shareholder in a Portuguese pharmaceutical company, Belpharma, which has a long history in Ireland, Goa ... India and Macau. It was founded by an Irish family established in Portugal at the end of the 19th century, the Gallweys, originally from Cork.’

Pat explained how their main production site was in Ireland, to the south of Dublin, in County Wexford.

‘It’s a family owned business, modern and dynamic, but lacking the capital to grow, and a new generation which has other plans, with whom Michel Morel had been in discussions to buy part of their company. The grandsons want to branch out into fintech which presents an opportunity for us.

‘Our plan is to buy out the family with an offer they can’t refuse, a once in a lifetime opportunity for John Gallweys, who by the way is now going on for 81. His father founded the company in 1960 when John had gone up to Trinity to study pharmacology, John is now pushing 80, his son Christopher is 44 and the grandchildren at school.

‘Christopher has pharmaceutical and agrifood interests in Brazil and wants to concentrate his investments there, he can’t compete with the Big Pharma, development costs for new medicines are too high and there’s not enough money in manufacturing generics unless it’s in a country Brazil.

‘So we buy out the business except for Brazil, we get a ready made base to develop and market a modified Galenus product, John Gallweys the capital to invest in Brazil.

‘Go to London Henrique, speak with Liam Clancy, then meet Gallweys. This is top priority, more important than anything else we are doing.’

Pat had little time for family businesses, they rarely survived the third generation, though there were always exceptions. Wealth didn't breed ideas, hunger, need and ambition did.

The same went for centralised governments, communism and socialism, they were brakes on creativity, China was a case in question, its leaders saw its successful sons like Jack Ma of Alibaba as threats to their power. It was why they took men like Ren Zhenfei of Huawei down, when his popularity threatened to overshadow that of Xi Jinping—mockingly dubbed Winnie-the-Xi.

* * *

Pat Kennedy had seen his very considerable wealth jump in 2020, but compared to the top dozen or so billionaires he still had a way to go. As for China it counted well over 800 billionaires and most had gotten richer whilst the rest of the world cowered under the shadow of its most successful export—the Covid-19 corona virus.

One of China's success stories was Zhong Shanshan, a 12th grade dropout who was now worth not far off 100 billion dollars, jockeying between Mark Zuckerberg and Larry Page for the 6th place in the race to become the world's richest individual.

Zhong Shanshan, who was born in Hangzhou in 1954, had dropped out of school in the chaos of the Mao's Cultural Revolution. He had made his wealth by imitating bottled water brands like Evian and Perrier, founding Nongfu Spring, the first large-scale bottle water company in China.

As far as Pat's analysis went Nongfu was overvalued, he had seen high flyers bite the dust in China, especially when they threatened Beijing as had Jack Ma of Alibaba and Ren Zhengfei of Huawei.

What interested Pat about Zhong was a pharmaceutical company, Wantai, in which he held the majority stake. Wantai that produced vaccines including an anti-Covid nasal spray, which had seen its shares rocket from 2 to 40 dollars in less than a year with its market capitalisation growing to 18 billion dollars.

Pharmaceuticals was big business and if Pat was to achieve his objectives, Belpharma and Galenus-1, under the right management, had an extraordinary potential. A vaccine granted those who received it immunity against disease—they could expect to live their allotted three score and ten years, on the other hand Galenus-1 would grant them everlasting life.

Belpharma's facilities including those for the manufacturing of small molecule oral drugs, testing,

laboratory, offices, packaging and warehousing, all of which would have to be adapted and expanded

Pat felt Henrique was the man he needed to coordinate his strategy for the development of Galenus-1. The potential in the field of biogerontology—more precisely as a cure for old age, and the development of a commercial product was prodigious.

Commencing with a pharmaceutical company capable of producing the Galenus molecule and the formulation of a compound on an industrial scale.

Time was of vital importance as was the patent application process and all the legalities necessary to protect the rights of LifeGen, in which Pat Kennedy was the founder and majority shareholder. The deaths of its two operational directors saw their shares reverting to the company in conformity with the articles of association drawn up at the time LifeGen had been incorporated.

Pat Kennedy's plan was built around the acquisition of the biopharma manufacturing company in Ireland where there existed a solid experience in the industry with more than 300 life science companies in the field of biotechnology and pharmaceuticals.

Life science was a vast domain that covered the study of plants, animals, viruses and bacteria, single-celled organisms, and even cells. With nearly nine million

species of animals, about half a million species of plants, countless species of bacteria and viruses, there were more than thirty different branches of life science to explore.

There were of course the multinational giants including Johnson & Johnson, Roche, Pfizer, Novartis, Sanofi, GlaxoSmithKline and the other big names, producing drugs related to cancer, diabetes, heart and respiratory diseases, depression, osteoporosis, schizophrenia and many other illnesses. These businesses were excluded from Pat's plans, there was no question of Galenus falling into the hands of such powerful groups.

CHAPTER 16

AS BOJO SET ABOUT HIS PLANS for Empire II or Singapore-on-Thames with his fintech big bang, or whatever, Pat Kennedy looked on in the knowledge that whatever happened his bank would make money, which was always the case when uncertainty intensified.

New FAANGs were in the making and with Liam Clancy in control, INI would seek them out. FAANG, the acronym that referred to Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google—now Alphabet, made up 15% of the S&P 500 index with a capitalisation of 6 trillion dollars and there were others—Tesla, Microsoft, whilst China had its own home grown giants.

Longevity brought another meaning to long term planning as Pat Kennedy eyed Brazil and Colombia as well as other emergent markets.

As long as the US kept printing money it pushed financial and property assets into a bubble which he knew would eventually burst, for the moment, however, that system was not about to change.

Politicians were heavy handed, as were governments and administrations, juggernauts—driven by career motivated public servants, led by ambitious elected

leaders, a great many of whom had little or inadequate education and training in specialised fields—not the best candidates to captain Socrates' ship.

How did Pat Kennedy see his own qualifications?

To his mind he had the necessary leadership qualities, if not he would have never reached the position he now held as head of a powerful transnational banking corporation, qualifications—he had those, experience—he had that too and his future promised now him the time and strength to build on that experience.

Even the strongest men withered when the disease of old age sapped their force. Pat like all men had witnessed the ravages of age, he had witnessed the glory, decline and deaths of once powerful leaders, idols, rockstars, sports men and women, those he had admired, even idolised, in his youth.

He was reminded of human frailty when he saw the sobering images of the Beatle Paul McCartney, shirtless in St. Barts, a pale withered torso of 78 year old man. Then there was Pat's neighbour in Beaulieu, Sean Connery, who he remembered as a frail trembling old man, it was impossible to believe the virile Bond of 1962 could have succumbed to the ravages of age. Pat had emulated his dress style, had watched his screen adventures, like millions of others—Her Majesty's handsome bronzed secret agent, fighting the evil Dr. No's assassin, whose

bionic hands were capable of crushing steel, or in the arms of the heroine, Ursula Andress—in her unforgettable white bikini.

If men like Winston Churchill had not degenerated into wheelchairs invalids, condemned by nature, what could they have achieved? Would they have benefited from their experience to improve the lot of mankind? There was also the terrifying thought of the world Joseph Stalin or Pol Pot would have created if they had lived a century more in the full vigor of their evil careers.

CHAPTER 17

AS THE SECOND WAVE STARTED to bite with the UK variety of Covid-19, known as B-117—a more contagious strain of the coronavirus, spreading like wildfire, Pat Kennedy decided to set up base on his yacht. Moored alongside was the *Sundaland II*, his exploration vessel, which acted as a buffer zone between *Las Indias* and the outside world.

No one boarded *Las Indias* without first transiting by the *Sundaland II*, now a support vessel providing a protective barrier, where guests and crew members were tested and where all goods and materials were sanitised.

In that way Pat was ensured of a Covid-free zone, protected from the comings and goings of visitors and crew members.

It was part of his new approach to living, after all there was no point in having the means to live forever if he risked being contaminated by a virus carried by lesser mortals.

The *Sundaland II* with its helipad, tender docking station and onboard guest accommodation, allowed visitors and incoming crew members to undergo testing

and isolation prior to transfer by tender to the mother vessel.

In this way Pat Kennedy isolated himself whilst the pandemic raged, visited only by his family and close friends, none of whom could avoid transit and control on the support vessel.

Following their visit to LifeGen, Henrique was the first to test the new procedure. He was not only on good terms with Pat Kennedy, he was also very familiar with both vessels having spent three months aboard one or the other in the Amazon a year earlier, when Pat Kennedy's team filmed Indians—a documentary, produced by Pat's friends Matt Balder and Kyril Kyristoforos.

During those weeks in the Amazon, Pat Kennedy had used Henrique as his interpreter, assistant and adviser, discovering the multiple talents of the young man he had whisked out of Hong Kong when the authorities had clamped down on the pro-democracy movement of which Henrique was an active member.

In that way Henrique had become him emissary in Latin America, part of his plan to expand INI's business to the continent, a Lusophone, in addition to Tom Barton—Pat's friend, the son in law of Don Pedro Heredia—his partner in Colombia

Henrique during his three years as a student in Europe had spent a year at the NOVA School of Business and Economics in Portugal, followed by a year at the LSE and a 10-month internship with INI, at its HQ, in the Goul Tower, situated in the heart of the City of London.

He knew London well and had lived in Pimlico where he shared a flat on Eccleston Square with another couple of Portuguese speaking Macanese students.

Henrique had mixed ideas about returning to London and as for Ireland he had visited the country once on a summer break during his student years. On the other hand Kennedy's plans drew him towards the challenge. He was at a crossroads, wealthy in his own right, in part due to his own patience, or conservatism, in any case he had not yet found his vocation, though he was clearly motivated by the ideas of the pro-democracy movement in China and by extension human rights and the future of the planet he lived on.

Since he had been forced to flee Hong Kong, Pat Kennedy had been like a second father to him, dispatching him to the safety of Brazil, an experience that had opened his eyes to the diversity of human society, from the business districts of Sao Paulo, to the favelas of Rio, the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, and its cities—Manaus and Belem, and Iquitos to the west, upstream in Peru.

* * *

As Henrique rediscovered Las India's, he was watched from the shore by Arkady Demitriev through a pair of powerful binoculars. The Russian was being pressed for news by Sedov in Moscow, who had in no uncertain terms reminded him he wasn't on the Riviera on holiday.

Demitriev had followed up several leads, including a discreet stakeout of the property of Anna Basurko's friend, Pat 'Dee' O'Connelly, where the couple had isolated themselves in Guethary, on the French Basque coast, which had not produced any meaningful clues as to Simmonds mysterious visit to Spain.

He had then turned his attention to Luis Gutierrez, a botanist, who the couple had joined for a conference at the Getty Center in Santa Monica in California a few months earlier, followed by visit to a botanical garden in Palm Springs and a reserve in the desert nearby owned by Phytotech.

Phytotech, a company created by Gutierrez, had its laboratories in Grasse, not far from Nice, which supplied the cosmetic and perfume industry with essences extracted from desert plants.

Demitriev, after following Gutierrez to Sophia Antipolis, where the botanist had visited LifeGen, had

become confused. The links between Kennedy, Simmonds and Vishnevsky were becoming blurred.

There were too many loose ends, too many blanks.

He knew Vishnevsky and his pal Wallace had been stealing from their Russian partners, but how exactly was still unclear and unfortunately the three accomplices were now dead, in his mind the fault of his Mexican helpers, in Sedov's view his lack of care.

Demitriev knew little of how Vishnevsky had become an apprentice art collector, financing his collection by skimming the margins on commodity contracts negotiated by friends in Moscow via offshore companies in the British Virgin Islands.

Vishnevsky's partners in crime set up a system of buying works at New York fine art sales, Bonham's, Christie's, Sotheby's, as anonymous telephone bidders settling the payment on their purchases by wire transfers, their acquisitions shipped to freeports in Europe, out of view, technically in transit, where they could be secretly sold to collectors at a later date without ever leaving the warehouses.

Sedov was certain Vishnevsky with the help of his accomplices had stashed his collection away for safekeeping, but the details of where could be extracted from from him and his pals, Demitriev had botched his

job with the heavy handed methods of his badly chosen friends who had ended up killing Wallace, Vishnevsky and Simmonds.

Often, auction house had no idea who was selling or who was buying, in addition the value of any work was fundamentally subjective and therefore easily manipulated. Art could also be smuggled or otherwise transported with ease and related transactions could be conducted privately and anonymously.

Fine art was the ultimate refuge against inflation, devaluation and taxation, and the Swiss Freeport the ultimate safehaven, protected by law, neutrality and secrecy.

Art was recognized as a highly portable asset, confirmed by over 300 years of referenced auction prices. The significance of the 1955 Picasso, Women of Algiers, realising almost 180 million dollars at a Christie's auction in New York or Leonardo's Salvator Mundi over 450 million dollars, and each time a new record was made, was that all works of art were revalued upwards with their owners becoming that much richer.

At the same time, Deloitte characterised art as a high-risk investment, illiquid, opaque, unregulated and with high transaction costs, at the mercy of erratic public taste and short-lived trends. Artworks did not generate cash,

risks could not be hedged, and expenses were incurred in the form of storage, insurance and associated costs.

In the long run, however, the market value of fine art had tended to outperform cash, bonds and gold, but underperform compared to equities, which was not the primary concern of money launderers.

The Leonardo was worth the equivalent of 200,000 ounces of gold, or a bit more than six tonnes, and considering gold was 20 times heavier than water it was highly untransportable by normal means, compared to the small, 66 by 45 centimetres (25 x 18 inches) 8 millimetres thick, walnut panel on which the Leonardo was painted, which weighed a bit more than a couple of kilos without the frame and could be carried under the arm of a ten year old child without difficulty.

Fine art was a growing business as real estate as an investment was targeted by EU directives and under the growing scrutiny of authorities, not to mention banking regulations as anti—money laundering laws progressively shut down traditional banking conduits.

Vishnevsky's compartmentalised setup had been run by his willing assistants from a company in the British Virgin Islands—a British overseas territory, where political corruption was rife, where there was strong opposition to setting up a public register of beneficial ownership of locally registered companies, and even though the UK's

Foreign Office acknowledged the BVI's own criminal justice system was ineffective and unimpartial, it did little to change an arrangement that was in the City of London's interests, in spite of London's obligations in the BVI which was after all only nominally independent.

CHAPTER 18

MOSCOW BECAME EDGY as protests continued in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, forcing the Kremlin to crackdown, detaining thousands at rallies in cities across Russia, from Moscow to Siberia, the Far East and Vladivostok.

Sedov watched from the window of his office in the FSB headquarters as protesters chanting ‘Putin thief’ gathered in subzero temperatures waving Russian flags outside the buildings as police units closed metro stations and nearby streets in a forlorn effort to stem the flow.

Vladimir Putin struggled to respond to Navalny’s videos posted on YouTube as anger boiled over over after years of falling wages and the frustration engendered by the pandemic.

At the same time Sedov felt the heat as accusations flew in Moscow with the Kremlin, annoyed by the growing wave of revelations of corruption targeted his inner circle, reproaching the FSB for going soft. Even Navalny dared to come home, which would have never happened in Brezhnev’s time when dissidents would have simply disappeared, snuffed out.

The latest revelation was Putin's one and a half billion dollar Italianate palace, located in Gelendzhik, Krasnodar Krai, on the Black Sea, in a magnificent park of 7,000 hectares, which dwarfed Monaco, and was said by Navalny to include a theatre, casino, an ice rink, a church and even a strip club.

There was no denying the vast palace existed, it was there for all to see, and a video filmed by a drone was posted on YouTube, seen more than 100 million times, evidence together with floor plans to back the dissident's claims.

The secretive walled site was guarded night and day, a private estate, or was it a state, a state within a state, financed by money pumped from a Gazprom subsidiary, Teplo Invest, in exchange for immense privileges, managed by members of Putin's inner circle under Igor Sechin, chief of the Russian oil giant Rosneft and the billionaire tycoon Gennady Timchenko.

The Kremlin's men protested it belonged to Arkady Rotenberg, Putin's former judo partner, who'd sold a stake in a gas pipeline construction firm, he owned with his brother, in 2019 for about 100 million dollars, which was supposed to justify the means with which he had bought the palace. The question should have been how he came across a pipeline company worth that kind of money?

Rotenberg replied in a video published by Mash channel in Telegram, ‘There was a rather complicated facility, there were a lot of creditors, and I managed to become the beneficiary.’

How utterly serendipitous, ‘I managed to become the beneficiary.’

Rotenberg was among the Russian officials and business executives blacklisted by the US and other Western countries following Russia’s annexation of the Crimea.

As boys growing up in Leningrad, Rotenberg and Putin had joined the same Russian martial arts club and had remained friends ever since. Later, when Putin joined the KGB, Rotenberg became a judo instructor.

In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Putin returned from East Germany—an ex-KGB agent without a job, and was hired by Anatoly Sobczak, mayor of Leningrad, his former economics professor. Putin rose to vice-mayor, during which time his friend Arkady Rotenberg received approval to form a new judo club in the city

As Putin climbed the ladder so did his friend Arkady.

Soon after Putin became President of Russia, Rotenberg, by chance took control of a state owned drinks firm, he then founded a bank, invested in oil production and won

a contract to build a 2,500 long pipeline from the Arctic for Gazprom—the state owned energy giant, at a hugely advantageous price. With the patronage of Gazprom, Putin’s boyhood friend became a billionaire.

In the same way murky off-the-book arrangements used state cash to finance the extravagant life of the Strongman’s mistress Svetlana Krivonogikh and her daughter Elizaveta as well as his current mistress, former gymnast Alina Kabaeva, head of a pro-Kremlin media giant and shareholder of Rossiya Bank.

Kabaeva controlled major newspapers and TV stations in Russia as chairman of National Media Group, which were owned by another inner circle oligarch, Yury Kovalchuk.

With so much money sloshing around at VTB, described as a financial disaster—which without state support would have gone bankrupt many times over, it wasn’t difficult to see where Vishnevsky got his ideas from and figured he should deal himself in, which normally, with a bit of luck, would have gone unseen, but with the Covid pandemic, compounded by Trump and Putin’s woes, he found himself snared in a trap he could have never anticipated.

VTB was strictly speaking a Kremlin slush fund, not a bank. It provided financing for whatever whimsical project suited the Kremlin’s men. In a sense Vishnevsky

had been silenced, one to cover the cupidity of those who had approved of his projects, and two as a warning to others who thought they had a free hand to help themselves.

It was why Demitriev had been instructed by Sedov to put order a little order in the house.

CHAPTER 19

WHEN MARIA FINALLY ACCEPTED something terrible had happened to her father, she decided to speak about the Wallace Codex and the Geneva Freeport to her Aunt. What Maria wasn't aware of was her aunt's complicity in Vishnevsky's scheme and how each of the partners in crime had been rowing his or her own boat, at times little or no exchange of information, logical, after all their arrangements were not exactly for trumpeting around.

May was alarmed, two of her partners had been killed, and there was little doubt in her mind that her hapless brother—Barry, had suffered the same fate, which only went to confirm the world of art and antiquities was one the seethed with crooks, swindlers and even murderers, though the Russians with their dirty money and methods had given it a new slant.

She had been instrumental in introducing Barry into the arrangement, in fact it wasn't the first time he had facilitated the lives of certain of her friends in the art world by setting up companies and bank accounts for their arcane transactions.

That they were arrangements she only half approved of had never deterred her from taking advantage of them, given Barry's particular talents, especially when she sold her Kings Road antique business to a Parisian dealer, helping her avoid heavy taxes.

Conventional wisdom had seen art and antiquities as a business in which traffickers with the participation of temple looters, crooks, forgers, middleman and buyers worked together for gain, profit and possession.

More recently a new twist had been introduced and art had become a means of money laundering, starting with dirty money, the result of theft, corruption and trafficking, being used to legally buy known art and antiquities at public sales organised by famous internationally known auction houses, via offshore companies, with acquisitions transported to and stored in freeports in Switzerland, Luxembourg or Singapore, where they were privately sold at some future date, transferred to private collections and museums, with payment effected via the international banking system.

An example was the live-stream bidding for a painting in New York auction, Sandro Botticelli's late 15th century artwork, Young Man Holding a Roundel, which was sold to an undisclosed buyer for 92 million dollars. Two bidders had competed for the painting at the live-streamed Sotheby's auction.

The painting, which captured the Dorian Gray-like qualities of a young man, came from the estate of a late Manhattan real estate billionaire, Sheldon Solow, who bought the work at Christie's in 1982 for one million dollars. In the intervening years Solow had racked up a gain of more two million dollars a year, or about 11% annually in terms of compound interest.

Crookery at art sales lacked the drama of daring Hollywoodian art heists—though on occasions there were clever forgeries, but in general it was not the grist fiction was made of. The bidding process didn't resemble that of sensational record breaking sales of works by Leonardo or Botticelli, since the launderers generally targeted lesser works which were nevertheless of considerable value, as witnessed at the New York sale of the Botticelli, when dozens of less sensational works were sold for between 70,000 and 3,500,000 dollars.

It was simple, to bid online through a Sotheby's platform, anyone could connect to the auction house's site and create an account. Then, after browsing the auction catalogue for a given sale, login—24 hours in advance and select the option 'online bidding'.

On the day of the sale, registered bidders logged into the online salesroom from their device, then once the sale started they were free to bid, for the objets d'art in question—paintings, antiquities, jewellery, watches,

furniture and even automobiles 'delivered to the bidders door', wherever that door was.

The system had been exploited to the full by Vishnevsky and his associates hidden behind a heavy veil of secrecy. It offered solid guarantees as bona fide auction houses had the obligation to ensure an object d'art had not been looted, stolen or forged. There were no banking restrictions and objects d'art were easily transportable not like millions of dollars in cash which would immediately attract the attention of law enforcement agencies.

There was a further advantage, the sale of art involved multiple jurisdictions, many of which had little or no special academic or scientific resources in the field and cooperation was complicated by conflicting interests between those jurisdictions as well as those in their respective private sectors.

Tackling crime related to art and antiquities was a vast interdisciplinary field, which involved history, archaeology, anthropology, various scientific disciplines, sociology, museums and collections, law enforcement agencies, security and insurance.

Art crime was estimated at well over a billion dollars yearly linked to financial crime, money laundering and corruption.

It was organised as an ad hoc network, not unlike other forms of trafficking, where loosely connected interchangeable parties hid crime in a transnational movement of funds and artefacts. It was exactly the organisation that coalesced around Vishnevsky, each member taking advantage of the opaque nature of the system for his or her own personal gain without much regard to the others.

Such a system was vulnerable to appropriation, which was precisely what Wallace had attempted, for which he paid the price, as did Vishnevsky and Simmonds, leaving the surviving member of the quartet, May Grafton, faced with the complex task of putting her hands on the stash of treasure in the Geneva Freeport.

Little did Maria Scmitt realise it, but she held the fine thread that led to the loot, one that Demitriev was determined to unravel, but whether it was to be restored to Sedov and his friends was in increasing doubt.

CHAPTER 20

SEDOV HAD PARAPHRASED Feliks Dzerzhinsky's words with a cutting accusation, 'The fact that Scmitt is still free is not her achievement, but rather a failure on our side.'

Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka, the Soviet secret police, was reputed for the terror he inspired in his victims. He was clear and to the point: 'We represent in ourselves organized terror—this must be said very clearly.'

His actions left little doubt as to his methods, the victims of the Cheka were led to the basement of Lubyanka prison in Moscow where they shot in cold blood without formality, a tradition that continued as witnessed by the death of the lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in another notorious Moscow prison in 2011.

The reference was lost on Demitriev, but not the words. If it wasn't the Bolshevik Red Terror, it was something more subtle and the Kremlin's men, not known for their charitably and understanding, wouldn't hesitate to finger him if it got them off the hook.

Another Russian had enemies in Moscow, Sergei Tarasov, Pat Kennedy's friend and associate, who had

voiced his fears to about the cause of the crash that had killed Michel and Jean-Yves. The helicopter had been attached to Tarasov's yacht the Cleopatra and according to Sergei, on the afternoon of the tragic event, he had reserved it for his own use, but after a last minute business complication he had changed his mind, leaving it available to pick up the two directors of LifeGen.

Kennedy had called in George Pyke, instructing him to have Ares carry out its own crash investigation and probe into the background of certain of the Cleopatra's crew members, some of whom were Russian and could be FSB or GRU plants.

Tarasov had against all hope rebuilt his relations with the Kremlin after a dramatic run in with his enemies and their machination in which he was accused of fraud, corruption, tax evasion and misappropriation of InterBank Corporation funds for his personal gain.

InterBank, the Russian arm of Kennedy's INI Holding, had been hit when the oil giant, Yakutneft, had violated covenants on a five hundred million dollar bond by defaulting on its payments. It came at precisely the same moment the Minister of Finance decreed InterBank participate in a bond issue to bolster state revenues following Moscow's occupation of the Crimea.

Tarasov refused.

In retaliation Tarasov's interests were, on order of the Ministry of Finance, sequestered by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation to prevent the transfer of funds overseas, in particular to foreign banks or businesses controlled by his friends and associates.

INI had bet big on Russia, but not only on gas and oil, the bank had also extended important loans to Russian promoters for prime residential and commercial real estate developments in the Moscow and Saint Petersburg regions.

CHAPTER 21

PAT KENNEDY'S PATH TO the summit of INI had been meteoric, nothing had destined him to become the head and principle shareholder of a large multinational banking group, one which at the outset had commenced its existence as a small Irish family owned bank—the Irish Union Bank, in 1926.

He smiled when asked if he was one of the Kennedy clan, that is JFK's clan. But Kennedy was a common family name from the West of Ireland and all Kennedys could trace their roots back to those regions.

Patrick Kennedy—JFK's ancestor, had emigrated from his native Dunganstown in County Wexford embarking for America at the port of New Ross in 1848, his wife, Bridget Murphy, hailed from Owenduff, also in Wexford.

The Kennedy's had arrived in the New World as labourers, peddlers, coopers and manual workers, their fortune and standing in society progressed with each new generation until Joseph P. Kennedy was appointed ambassador to Great Britain and his son elected President of the United States of America.

Our Pat Kennedy's path to wealth and fame was more rapid, though he was far from being the leader of the

Western world, though perhaps with time, which he now held in his grasp, he might become more than a rich banker, providing he avoided a fatal accident or an assassin's bullet.

In 2000, he became an advisor to David Castlemain, the then chairman of the bank, which merged with, and then took control of, a group of regional banks in the North of England.

Soon after Pat Kennedy's business relations with European investors in Ireland fostered an association with the Nederlandsche Nassau Bank, an Amsterdam bank, and their fusion in 2008, forming a new group, INB, earning him a non-voting place on the board of the new entity as business development director.

By 2010, Kennedy, as a full director of INB, under a new chairman, Michael Fitzwilliams, engineered an agreement with Sergei Tarasov, a Russian banker and businessman, and together with his InterBank group, a new financial holding was formed between INB and InterBank—the INI Banking Corporation, an Anglo-Russian joint venture.

The new holding, based in the City of London, extended loans and financial services to the booming Russian oil and gas industry for exploration, production, pipelines, refining and other ventures. It was a rock solid business—the demand for oil and gas would never fall, neither would

the price of fossil energy resources. The same went for the other commodity sectors they invested in—nickel, copper, aluminum, fertilizers and timber.

During the first four years the joint venture prospered under the benevolent eye of the Kremlin and profits soared. But the bankers had not counted on the consequences of Vladimir Putin's territorial ambitions, whose visions of a Greater Russia belonged to another age.

Tarasov was forced to flee, taking refuge in a home he owned in Kerry, Ireland. He was judged in absentia by a Moscow court, on trumped up charges relating to tax evasion and fraud. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment, his assets frozen and an international warrant issued for his arrest. At the same time the Moscow court demanded that his assets in Ireland and the UK, estimated at more than one billion pounds sterling, be frozen pending his extradition.

The fact was like other oligarchs he had been discreetly transferring his movable assets, namely cash and shares, to the safety of various offshore vehicles. His decision to move InterBank's subsidiary property investment business to London, did go down at all well with the Kremlin's master.

Tarasov held many secrets, secrets that were better hidden—forever, secrets that could have cost him his life.

Fitzwilliams' untimely death in an unexplained explosion on his yacht had been a warning and Tarasov knew his enemies would not hesitate to target his family.

However, Tarasov had been no ordinary member of the Kremlin's inner circle, his ties to the Bratva and the successors of Nikolai Yakovlevich Dermirshian, the head of one of Russia's Mafiya fraternity had been and still were hidden by its impenetrable code of omerta, further, Tarasov's banking group controlled an overseas empire that held the secrets of just about every major business in the Federation.

Whilst the banker had been evicted from the INI Moscow Bank, he remained the majority owner and chairman of IB2, an independent holding headquartered in Luxembourg, which controlled interests in oil and gas, asset management, commerce, insurance, retail trade, telecommunications and utilities.

IB2 had been founded in 1998, during the Yeltsin presidency, by Tarasov to protect his personal earnings against the uncertainties of that era. Over the course of one and a half decades IB2 built up its share holdings in diverse companies in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Cyprus, the UK and the USA as well in Fitzwilliams' different banking units in London, Dublin and Amsterdam.

His untimely death would release a flood of documents that would be fatal to the Kremlin and its men.

Tarasov finally traded a promise of silence for his life and the lives of those close to him in the course of a series of secret meetings in Zurich, between Tarasov's lawyers and those of the Russian Finance Ministry. A Byzantine deal in which the banker ceded the totality of his oil and energy assets in Russia and certain overseas holdings in exchange for criminal charges and claims on his overseas assets being discreetly dropped.

At the same time INI Holdings recovered control of InterBank with Tarasov as its nominal head.

The agreement was much the same as when the Russian President had pardoned his enemy Mikhail Khodorkovsky, two years earlier, after calling him a common thief. The luckless Khodorkovsky, who had spent ten years in Siberian prisons, had in exchange promised to refrain from all further involvement in politics.

The Kremlin's methods were at the root of Kennedy's decision to develop the bank's business in China, starting with Hong Kong, where a new world awaited him. He imagined a mixture of twenty first century Hong Kong and Shanghai as a vision of the legendary Middle Kingdom, full of promise, discovery and fabulous gains. A decision he did not yet regret, but one that taught him

to fear and anticipate the vagaries of authoritarian government.

Anything was possible in a world where it was suggested that Donald Trump, after his bizarre outburst against the US intelligence community and his equally inexplicable praise of Vladimir Putin, was an unwitting agent of Moscow, his vanity and narcissism had made him a natural target of the Kremlin's manipulations, he was, what Lenin liked to call, a useful idiot.

Trump, a young and successful American businessman, had by marrying a Czech in 1977, at the height of the Brezhnev's reign, had inevitably made him the target of KGB recruiters like very many others in his position when Czechoslovakia was under the iron fist of the USSR.

One of the KGB's goals was and still is kompromat—obtaining compromising material on suitable targets. The story told of former KGB agent Vladimir Putin by Artyom Borovik, a Russian journalist, 'There are three ways to influence people—blackmail, vodka, and the threat to kill,' is credible. The fact that Borovik died in a plane accident shortly after writing a damning expose on Putin, was the kind of convenient solution Dzerzhinsky would have approved, 'Our enemies are now suppressed and are in the kingdom of the shadows.'

CHAPTER 22

LUIS GUTIERREZ PULLED UP behind a line of polished sports utility vehicle on the palm-lined drive of the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort and Spa in Indian Wells, on the outskirts of Palm Springs. Beyond, under a stunning azure sky were the foothills of the Santa Rosa Mountains rising steeply out the Coachella Valley. It was there Phytotech's botanical reserve lay, and where the next day he would be accompanying Henrique da Roza and Caroline Fitzroy-Grossman on a guided tour with Chris Gallweys of Belpharma—the Irish pharmaceutical company that would soon produce the various Galenus compounds.

Gallweys, the grandson of the founder, besides anything else was an obsessive golfer, had chosen the Esmeralda for its setting, an extraordinary landscape of well watered lawns that stretched as far as the eye could see, but above all the nearby 36 hole Indian Wells Golf Resort.

Even Caroline, who besides being taken back by the strange emptiness of the resort, was taken back by its extravagance even though she had visited some pretty opulent spots on the French Riviera. The void contrasted with the unabashed Babylonian style with its seemingly

endless palm studded gardens under the ever-changing light and colours of its improbable desert setting.

As they were led to their rooms they were met by a bewildering maze swimming pools—one of which came with a real sandy beach complete chaises longues and curtained pavilions, which did not surprise Gallweys, it was evidently not his first visit to Indian Wells.

Though Henrique got along well with Caroline and appreciated her seriousness, he found Gallweys somewhat more complicated, although they both shared a Portuguese background. He was friendly enough, easy going, a little conservative and somewhat aloof. Henrique had difficulty putting his finger on it, perhaps it was Gallweys' old Portuguese family attitude, privilege, or perhaps it was just golf, which was not Henrique's thing, although golf had become very fashionable in China with the well-off flying to Hainan for golfing weekends.

The truth was Christopher Gallweys was absent, more interested in his own fintech projects with his Silicon Valley friends than the future of Belpharma, which would soon be controlled by one of Pat Kennedy's holdings.

To Henrique's mind Gallweys that posed a problem, one the need to replace him, quick, and two to prevent security leaks related to the Galenus projects.

The first problem was solved by a retention clause James Herring had foreseen in the agreement that could be activated in the case of nonconformity with stipulated conditions. The second was much more complicated as Gallweys already possessed inside information which if divulged to competition could be damaging to the Gilgamesh Project, even though patents would protect against intellectual property infringement.

The fact was they were there to discuss *Larrea tridentata*—the creosote bush, and *Jatropha dioica*—an Aztec plant also known as *sangre de drago*, dragons blood, from which various molecules could be extracted for use as templates in the synthesis of the Galenus-1 compound and in the treatment of various cancers.

There were multiple questions, starting with the economics of extracting certain molecules from plants compared to the experimental synthesisation process developed by LifeGen, the there was the question of the time frame required for the development of plantations, production, scaling up processes in Mexico or other biotopes, including the Alta Guajira in Colombia where costs would be much lower, where security was better, and where regulatory conditions were less complicated than for example those of California related to modifications of the biotope.



Larrea tridentata in Sonoran Desert

In addition was an agreement with Gutierrez to lock his firm Phytotech to LifeGen and Belpharma for Pat Kennedy's Gilgamesh Project.

Henrique needn't have worried, to his surprise, then relief, Gallweys announced his departure, cutting short his presence for an urgent meeting in San Francisco, leaving him with Caroline Fitzroy-Grossman to discuss the details with Luis Gutierrez—both of whom, being Californians, spoke the same language and in more ways than one.

* * *

Once business was complete Henrique headed south to Cancun, where he caught up with Mike Watson, who

informed him that Demitriev had not resurfaced after his recall to Moscow, a situation which posed more questions than it answered.

Watson then joined him for a stopover in Belize where Simmonds & Young's offices were untouched though the discussions with Wilfred Thompson had progressed with Maria agreeing to hand over the partnership to the son, though as usual things happened slowly in Belize.

Their inquiries as to the disappearance of Barry Simmonds were met with blank stares, as were their questions concerning Vishnevsky's murder. Life was cheap in Belize, murders and disappearances commonplace. Simmonds and Vishnevsky were already forgotten.

Henrique spent a morning at the law firm's offices going through files and selecting various documents needed by Maria. He then visited the Mendez family at Simmonds' villa and reassured Rosanna that Marie was in good health and would continue to take care of their needs until she felt it was safe to return to Belize.

He then headed back to London where he was pleased with the thought he would be seeing Maria again before he left for Belpharma in Ireland.

CHAPTER 23

NOT ONLY WAS PAT KENNEDY rich, very rich, he, and those like him, had seen their wealth explode over the course of 2020. The richest like Jeff Bezos had seen his wealth surge by 13 billion dollars on one single day when the shares in his company Amazon rocketed as the pandemic surged across the US.

It was the largest single-day rise in individual wealth ever recorded. He was not alone, in fact the world's billionaires had seen their combined wealth rise by hundreds of billions. It confirmed that sad saying about the rich and the poor. However, it made Pat Kennedy determined to use his wealth to build a better world, one that would offer humanity a better future, though perhaps not everybody would agree with his vision, religious leaders, those like political leaders for whom numbers represented power, like Xi Jinping or Narendra Modi, and perhaps businessmen like Bezos for whom numbers represented consumers.

The idea that the rich should bail out the poor was not a good idea to Pat's way of thinking, because it would only reinforce the status quo, that is to say more of the same.

Now was the moment to change, but the nature of politicians was unchanging. In any case few successful politicians left poorer, many were already much richer like Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping, who were firmly ensconced and the idea of quitting was not yet an urgent question. Many other lesser figures feathered their bolt holes, including the former Saudi head of intelligence, Saad Aljabri, who got richer siphoning off billions from companies funded by Saudi Arabia for himself, his family and friends.

The fact was there was no limit to human cupidity in a world where a handful of men saw their collective wealth bound by half a trillion dollars or more during the global health crisis.

Pat put the problems of humanity down to population growth, as humanity spread like a virus into every nook and cranny of the planet, destroying all other forms of life as it progressed.

It was simple, pundit wokes pointed their fingers at Jair Bolsonaro—the devil reincarnated, but was it his fault that the population of Brazil had grown from 17 million to 217 million in one single century, 200 million more mouths to feed, to shelter, to provide work for—in nature’s last remaining continent-like wilderness. And what did Brazilians do? They cut the forest and tilled the land to feed themselves as well as the burgeoning populations of

Asia, as Europeans had done in New England three centuries earlier.

In the same way the British Empire was accused by Indians of being at the source of their ills and in general of the Subcontinent, maybe, but was it England's fault that the Subcontinent's population had been multiplied by 25 or 30 since the beginning of the 19th century when Britain's Indian Empire covered today's India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Burma the collective population of which is now near two billion?

The same went for China and Africa.

All of which imported food in one form or another from Brazil and the Americas.

If that wasn't slouching toward armagedon then what was? Pat asked himself. Dystopian? Perhaps, but in any case the metaphorical comparison with Jurassic Park was not far fetched, the monster had escaped its island and was wreaking havoc wherever it went.

CHAPTER 24

UNKNOWN TO HENRIQUE, and more importantly to the late unlamented Barry Simmonds, Maria Scmitt, Simmonds natural daughter, not only knew Igor Vishnevsky, but she had been close to him, very close, a secret she had carefully concealed from her father.

The death of Igor had been a terrible shock for Maria, coming soon after that of Wallace.

Vishnevsky had warned her of Demitriev, a ruthless GRU agent, piloted by Oleg Sedov, who had cultivated Wallace as a Russian asset. In reality Igor Vishnevsky was a playboy who revelled in the life he had discovered on the Mayan Riviera and saw no reason not to take advantage of the system set up by Sedov's friends who skimmed tens of millions from the exports of Russian commodities.

Maria had introduced Igor Vishnevsky to her aunt in London who was charmed by the cultivated good-looking former banker, whose like many well educated Russians was a fine connoisseur of the arts.

On more than one occasion he had joined Maria at her aunt's villa in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence or on Ibiza, where he had told May a long story of how his family, former

czarist aristocrats, had been art collectors and how he, a former banker at VTB, had successfully invested on Wall Street.

Explaining how it was unwise to be seen publicly investing in art, he persuaded May to help him in his project as a budding collector. Little did she realise he was no oligarch and his funds were those siphoned off a system designed to serve the interests of corrupt elite Kremlin officials.

At first it had seemed like an amusing game to May Grafton, oblivious to what she was getting herself into, an elaborate system of corruption that enabled Vishnevsky's masters to build an offshore real estate empire across the Caribbean, where they could prepare their bolt holes for the moment their day came to an end as it surely would.

The weakness of Vishnevsky's system was revealed when the pandemic hit the real estate investments projects he had engineered.

It was the deaths of Wallace and Vishnevsky that awoke May to the danger, putting the fear of God into her and her niece. Maria had been innocent of Vishnevsky's machinations, blinded by the handsome playboy, discovering his game when her father confessed to his problems and revealing the story of the Wallace Codex.

It was some time before she with her aunt dared think about the works of art stored in the Freeport acquired by May on Vishnevsky's behalf via a shell company set up by Simmonds according to the instructions of his client George Wallace.

As for Simmonds' fortuitous discovery of the codex, it had been by pure chance he had stumbled onto the safe deposit box in Panama City when going through the formalities following Wallace's untimely death.

Amongst May's circle of friends in France was Charles d'Albignac, a young and influential somewhat right leaning politician, a member of Emanuel Macron's party, which covered a fairly broad spectrum of political opportunists. d'Albignac was an elected parliamentary Representative from Chalon-sur-Saône, a middle sized city in the east of France, not far from Geneva. He came from a strong Catholic background, which appealed to many traditional middle class French voters in spite of his coming from an old family that still proudly bore the coat of arms of the Ducs d'Albignac, even though nobility had not been recognised in France for more than a century.

As Macron and his government struggled with the pandemic, in what was a pre-electoral year, Albignac mulled over the idea of launching a new party that would bear the label Democratic Liberal Socialist Movement, which though preaching a centrist line, would support a

nationalist vision, advocating a strong centralised state, refusing the nation's loss of sovereignty to the European Union, a movement that was closer to Boris Johnson's UK, than Macron's France.

Charles d'Albignac, who was attracted to May's niece, was a frequent visitor to the villa in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where during an art week he introduced Maria to Camille de Sommières.

Maria was of one mind with Camille and they met together again in Paris where they visited museums and art galleries, talked of the Sommières Collection drifting on to Ibiza and her Aunt May.

She told Camille the story of her aunt's meeting with Elmyr de Hory on Ibiza where he moved amongst the cultural figures of the time who visited the island, certain of whom had peopled the life of Camille's great uncle in the first half of the 20th century.

The story of Elmyr de Hory nagged Maria, she couldn't help wondering if the paintings in the Freeport were fakes, even though her aunt had overseen their acquisition. The trouble was most of them had never been actually seen by May.

Camille spoke of Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas, Fugita, Man Ray, Peggy Guggenheim, Hemingway, and Matisse

who frequented the cafés popular with artists—Le Dome and La Rotunde, where de Hory had been a habitué.

He had also been a regular visitor to Sylvia Beach's small bookstore on the rue de l'Odeon, Shakespeare & Company, where James Joyce would often give public readings of his books and though Elmyr understood almost nothing of what Joyce talked about, he was fascinated by the Irishman.

Camille, whose family owned the Chateau de Sommières where the family's famous art collection was housed in fine new museum, invited Maria to visit Sommières with her aunt, not more than an hour and a half's drive from Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.

Maria accepted as it would be an opportunity, to discuss her collection, as she described it, and questions of authentication and valuation, involving Camille's friend, Ekaterina Tuomanova.

CHAPTER 25

A WEEK LATER AS MAY and her niece enjoyed a private visit to the Sommières Collection with a commentary by Camille's parents, the Comte and Comtesse, her house on St George's Square in London was being broken into.

Arkady Demitriev had carefully chosen the moment, a weekend when the other apartments in the grand Victorian house were empty and May Grafton was in France with her niece.

Demitriev's men were experts in such tasks—GRU agents specialised in break-ins. One opened the door of the large house in the shadow of its porticoed entrance, then after neutralising the alarm entered May's street and garden level apartment and signaled Demitriev and the second accomplice the way was clear. It was child's play and soon the Russian was sifting through the papers in her office whilst one of the others opened the safe.

It wasn't long before he found correspondence and invoices relating to artworks bought at sales in New York and other cities. He soon traced them to the Geneva Freeport.

He almost cried out in triumph when he realised he had put his finger on Vishnevsky's scam which explained Simmonds' mysterious trip to Geneva six months earlier; the link to Atlantic Fine Arts and the cash transfers to Cavendish Holdings by Kennedy.

They then put everything carefully back into place and left, the whole operation had took barely 30 minutes.

Demitriev had less success with Kennedy, whose homes were in a different category to that of May Grafton's. What puzzled him was the link between Kennedy and Anna Basurko—an archaeologist. That the banker was a rich art collector didn't explain her presence in the picture. He still couldn't understood the link that joined her and Scott Fitznorman to Simmonds—together or individually, and the evident secrecy that surrounded their meeting in San Sebastian with Kennedy.

He had several pieces of the puzzle, Kennedy, Gutierrez, Basurko and Lifegen, but couldn't figure out how they fit together.

One of the missing pieces was the Wallace Codex, but as yet he knew nothing of that and until he did Kennedy's leitmotif remained a mystery.

CHAPTER 26

DEMITRIEV HADN'T COUNTED on George Pyke's security firm Ares, which had installed covert cameras and alarms at May's place on Saint George's Square, but the Russians by neutralising the alarm system had delayed the fail-safe alert and by the time security firm became aware of the anomaly they had departed. Unluckily for them their visit had been filmed and Arkady Demitriev quickly identified.

Cross-checking his biometric data with Ares' records, another name turned up, that of Milan Hasek, identified as a Czech national, who had been traced to a hotel in Nice a few months earlier, after being filmed by security cameras snooping around La Villa Contessa in Beaulieu and LifeGen's offices in Sophia Antipolis. Hasek had been tracked down to a hotel in Nice's Old Town.

The fact that the alarm had been neutralised and the safe opened by the Demitriev and his accomplices told George Pyke they were not dealing with a simple burglary, but a Russian intelligence operation for an as yet unexplained reason and their intrusion into May Grafton's apartment a cause for serious concern given Demitriev's recent presence in Nice.

George Pyke immediately informed Pat Kennedy who instructed him to reinforce security with round-the-clock protection for May Grafton and Maria Scmitt as well as at his villa and LifeGen.

CHAPTER 27

HENRIQUE DECIDED TO MAKE London his base and rather than take up temporary accommodation he decided to buy a property, which whatever happened would be an investment.

Growing up in Hong Kong and Macau he was not drawn to old properties, he wanted something that resembled his Hong Kong apartment but larger and after scouting around he decided to have a look at what an agent told him was the new chic—Chelsea Harbour, which sounded good, only a ten minute walk from Pat Kennedy's London home on Cheney Walk.

Encouraged by remembering the Hong Kong-based conglomerate Hutchison Whampoa had invested in the district, he asked Maria to accompany him, a woman's opinion in such matters was always good.

Both were much too young to remember the grimy coal fired Lots Road power station, built in 1904, now a gloomy empty red brick hulk, waiting to be transformed, like Bankside and Battersea power stations, the former now the Tate Modern, and the latter soon to be a fashionably new district overlooking the Thames, complete with shopping centres, offices and apartments.

Hutchison's plan was to transform the site, now renamed Chelsea Waterfront, with two slender towers of 25 and 37 stories, whilst the power station would be converted into apartments with shops, restaurants and bars on the ground floor.

The site, which straddled Chelsea Creek, would include three new pedestrian bridges, a water garden and a Thames-side footpath.

Henrique was more attracted to a penthouse in the existing residential complex overlooking the small harbour, waiting two more years was not part of his programme.

However, Henrique was not the only prospective client from Hong Kong, there were a good many others seeking to escape the iron dome that was descending on the city as rumours flew that exit controls would soon be imposed by Beijing. It was estimated that 300,000 Hongkongers were candidates for exile in the UK, those that had the means, whilst ten times that number—those holding British national overseas passports, qualified for settlement in the UK.

Henrique had already held a Portuguese passport, a Macau family tradition, and could move freely within the EU. His parents held Portuguese nationality according to laws in Macau, a Portuguese colony, until its transfer to China at the end of 1999, acquiring nationality by *jus soli*

and *jus sanguinis*, thus he the son of Portuguese citizens had inherited their dual nationality.

Many other residents of Macau, of either Chinese or Portuguese descent, or both, thus held Portuguese citizenship.

CHAPTER 28

MAY GRAFTON HAD POINTED Vishnevsky towards the Freeport, a secure storage for art and other valuables, which had been at the centre of a bizarre affair concerning another Russian—Dmitry Rybolovlev, an oligarch, and his friend, the lawyer and art dealer, Yves Bouvier.

It commenced when the Russian accused Bouvier of cheating him on the prices of paintings acquired on his behalf over a period of ten years.

Rybolovlev, who made his fortune in the fertiliser business after the collapse of the Soviet Union, had spent a staggering two billion dollars buying more than 35 masterpieces from Bouvier, including the *Salvator Mundi*, which was later resold for a world record price.

The affair highlighted the little known world of freeports and their opacity, with the Geneva Freeport described as a storage facility for the international elite, where Bouvier's firm was the largest tenant in the warehouse that was essentially owned by the Swiss government.

The story of the Freeport and Bouvier's scam had inspired Vishnevsky plan, that was to buy paintings at public auction through a trust set up by Wallace via

Simmonds. May Grafton selected the works from catalogues or at sale previews, she then took care of the bidding and payment via the trust and had them sent to the Freeport in the name of Atlantic Fine Arts—another vehicle set up by Simmonds.

As far as Rybolovlev's affair was concerned, it collapsed when the *Salvator Mundi* was sold at a vast profit and the case finally abandoned by the Swiss judicial authorities.

Vishnevsky's case did not have a happy ending, Wallace was murdered—drowned, Vishnevsky ended up as shark bait and Simmonds swallowed up by the dark fetid waters of a Belizian swamp.

The Freeport stored 23 paintings acquired by Vishnevsky, to be precise a company he had theoretically owned. In fact Barry Simmonds had been its managing director and Maria a director, appointed by the first subscriber—also Simmonds, elected by shareholders, just two—Simmonds and Maria Scmitt.

It was part of the official procedure for setting up a Belize IBC with Simmonds the subscriber and nominee shareholder, theoretically holding the shares for Vishnevsky.

After the burglary of May's apartment the ownership of the paintings was transferred from Atlantic Fine Art to a

Swiss company and they were moved to another storage area in the Freeport, and Atlantic liquidated for good measure.

The manouever served two purposes, one it prevented Demitriev and his friends from putting their hands on the paintings, and two, on Ekaterina Tuomanova's recommendations, the paintings could be authenticated by the Fine Arts Experts Institute, conveniently situated inside the Freeport's zone, an independent organisation, a private scientific institute specialised in the authentication of paintings, sculptures, ceramics and other historical works using the latest scientific techniques.

In that way the paintings remained safety in Switzerland and did not have to leave the Freeport for authentication and valuation. In addition Geneva could be reached by road in a few hours from May Grafton's place in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.

Ekaterina Tuomanova, a specialist in the complex world of contemporary art where the market had become the reserve for tycoons, rock stars and royalty, offered the services of her gallery to dispose of the paintings and with May's approval, Maria accepted.

Before joining Christie's, at its Russian subsidiary, situated opposite the Kremlin walls, Ekaterina, with her formal art history qualifications, had worked with well-

known Russian collectors as a consultant and curator for various exhibitions.

On entering the auction house she commenced with the company's training programme for auctioneers, where expertise went with academic training, before starting work as a consultant in the old masters department, then moving on to contemporary art as new markets opened and new artists appeared.

Business thrived and she progressed to business development director, responsible for events such as the mid-Twentieth Century Contemporary Art exhibition at the Pushkin Museum and the development of relations with state museums, private collections and art foundations across Russia and the Federation.

Annual auctions in Moscow were devoted solely to Russian Art, much of it pre-Soviet Modernism, and more recently, contemporary art. Christie's also offered its clients many different services, including estimates and insurance valuations, as well as arranging for the shipment of consigned or purchased art works.

More especially she organised exclusive receptions, dinners and forums for Christie's most loyal collectors to discuss individual artworks on a confidential one-to-one basis.

Ekaterina participated in the planning for biannual sales, the hosting regular exhibitions and lectures in Moscow, covering a broad range of fields, from old masters to impressionist and contemporary art, at the Ivanovsky Hall and Pashkov House in the centre of Moscow.

After moving to London where she now lived with her husband John Francis and their children, she established a modern gallery at Chelsea Harbour, of the kind that was fashionable London, near to Chelsea, Knightsbridge and Notting Hill Gate.

The Chelsea Harbour gallery was a new London PWC—Post War and Contemporary—landmark for the world of art, where size counted, PWC dominated the market, and style and exclusivity was everything. It was not hackneyed to say it was who you knew, neither was the idea think big. The market targeted was that of the rich and very rich, private showings, that is to say invitation only.

The gallery, aptly named Ekaterina Tuomanova, was specialized in broking, acquisition and advisory services. It was amongst the nearly three hundred international galleries at the fair that were offering works by over four thousand artists.

Art was a strange business as the products a gallery bought and sold were unique. Ekaterina's business was buying and selling art for her clients.

There were several kinds of contemporary art, that made by artists now dead, for which the quantity of work was by definition unexpandable, this group was made up of famous artists, known to all, whose works were of huge value, followed by a second group appreciated by specialists though of a much lesser market value, but still figuring in the thousands of dollars, finally were dead artists who would probably never be known other than by local museums and institutions as part of local history.

The living artists were the international monstres sacrés, a handful, like Jasper Johns, Jeff Koons, Ai Weiwei, David Hockney or Damien Hurst, whose works sell for millions, even hundreds of millions, then a whole crowd of artists well known in the world of art and collectors in their respective regions, followed by a legion of hopefuls most of whom would never make it beyond shows put together by the mundane kinds of galleries that can be seen in any city almost anywhere.

The scarcity of an artist's work increased prices. Some artists such as Picasso or Chagall were highly prolific in their output, both lived to very great ages, others were much less productive and certain like Modigliani died young.

Working with collectors and museums, knowing when a work of art comes on the market, was a question of who

you knew, and Ekaterina knew a lot of very wealthy art collectors and had built a solid reputation.

She explained to Maria that there were two types of investigations in art, first that linked to new discoveries, and second the authentication of known works when a forgery or some other scam was thought to exist.

The former could be paintings like those that had for decades languished in the cellars of Sommières and were worth hundreds of millions. The latter either worthless junk or reproductions.

The first thing was to visualise a work for which Ekaterina, based on her experience at Christie's and in her own gallery, had developed a second sense when it came to an authentic work. There were of course clues the brushwork, signature, signs of real age—minute damage.

If it resembles the style of a famous artist an expert could identify it from his catalogue raisonné—a detailed history of all his known works.

Then these are academics, museums, auction houses and even family members of modern or recent artists.

Then for forensic science there are laboratories specialised in materials such as pigments and supports, with carbon dating methods and spectrographic analysis.

The result would be a certificate of authentication.

The authentication work of lesser known works by famous painters commenced with forensic investigation that required a detailed scientific examination and analysis of each work. In parallel was provenance research which required data base searches, the examination of museum records as well the lengthy study of documentary and photographic evidence.

Ekaterina proposed a pre-authentication assessment, that is to say a professional opinion, which would justify the claims and investment required to determine the credibility of the owners claims, which in itself would be a lengthy, difficult and time consuming investigation.

Once the pre-authentication was completed, and if it's conclusions were sufficiently positive, the Fine Arts Experts Institute would undertake the second phase, that is to say the forensic identification necessary for insurance purposes as well as providing possible future acquirers with the legal guarantees necessary.

Of course the paintings bought by May in reputable auction houses were authentic and came with guarantees, but there were others acquired via Vishnevsky's acquaintances of which the provenance was uncertain.

Good provenance was an indicator that work of art was genuine and by the artist whose signature it bears.

At any moment in the life of a work of art, questions of authenticity could be raised, especially if a buyer was about to bid millions of dollars for the privilege of owning it. In general, works were accompanied by documentation, known as provenance, which provided solid documentary evidence justifying its claim to authenticity.

CHAPTER 29

DAMIEN JONES, A SENIOR partner of Wood Jones Estates, a real estate agency established in 1854, guided Henrique on a tour of Nine Elms. Situated on the opposite side of the Thames to May Grafton's place in Pimlico, Nine Elms was a vast born again London neighborhood, stretching across a 230 hectare riverside site from Vauxhall Cross to Battersea Power Station, home of the newly inaugurated US embassy.

As they walked past luxury residences flanked by supercars sporting Qatari or personalised number plates, Jones gave an upbeat commentary, however, the bundles of unpaid parking tickets bulging under the windscreen wipers of the nouveau rich toys did not escape Henrique's attentive eye.

Nine Elms was the biggest regeneration project in Europe, the brainchild of Boris Johnson, dating from the time when he was mayor of London and David Cameron the UK's prime minister.

What had been a district of derelict warehouses and decaying factory buildings had been transformed into a forest of competing luxury condominiums, a mass of

concrete towers, clad with garish facades of mirrored glass, coloured plastic panels and fake bricks.

In spite of the 5,000 homes being completed, and three times that number in the pipeline, Nine Elms had the air of a ghost town.

Did it remind him of Sao Paulo or Rio? No, definitely not, it was cold and triste, it was far from the rhythm, bustle and colour of Brazil. Across the nearby railway tracks, facing hundreds of overvalued empty apartments, was a vista of grim social housing projects.

Perhaps the owners, absentee investors and landlords, hidden behind shell companies in off-shore tax havens, would rent them to the Chinese fleeing Hong Kong. In the meantime they were monopoly pieces to be bought and sold by speculators following the vagaries of financial markets, which according to Henrique's information was not going in the right direction as developers struggled to offload their stocks.

Local wits called it Nine Elms disease.

London's cold speculative towers were evidently not enjoying the success hoped for by developers. Henrique turned heel cutting short the visit and headed back to Chelsea, if he wanted to live in Macau or Hong Kong he would have stayed there.

Suggested to his guide they look at the Kings Road area in Chelsea, Jones smiled wryly and recalled for Henrique's information Donald Trump's remark after he turned down an invitation to cut the ribbon at the new US embassy: 'A lousy location'

They laughed and Jones announced he had something that would suit Henrique off Knightsbridge, a townhouse on Donne Place, ten minutes walk from Kings Road, a snip for five million, a pied-à-terre in London, and a good investment.

That afternoon Henrique visited the house in the company of May and Maria, it reminded him of The Avengers, a TV series he had watched when he was a kid—John Steed's mews house.

The next morning he made an offer.

CHAPTER 30

THE PREVIOUS OWNER OF PAT'S yacht, Las Indias, Jho Low was still on the lam, wanted for his role in what was one of the biggest frauds ever. His partner in crime the former Malaysian prime minister had been judged and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment.

Low was one of those who had attempted to buy a golden passport, the kind that Barry Simmonds had brokered for certain of his clients, which accorded citizenship to holders and unrestricted access to the EU, which drew money-launderers, criminals, fugitives and corrupt politicians—especially from countries where where inequalities were rife.

Igor Vishnevsky had held a Cyprus golden passport, and the news that Low had been involved in a plan to invest nearly seven million dollars in property in Cyprus to obtain his passport application, raised eyebrows in certain Kremlin circles as to how Sedov and his man Demitriev had overlooked the source of Vishnevsky's wealth, precisely how he had got his hands on that kind of money.

Before setting himself up in Cancun Vishnevsky had made himself a reputation as a smart property investment manager at VTB. He spoke fluent Spanish and with the

backing of a group of Russians close to power had set himself up in Cancun to buy property in the Caribbean with the funds they filched in one way or another.

With his background and their money his backers had counted on him to make them richer. Vishnevsky did not have any money to speak of himself, a situation he intended to change, though in the meantime his backers were generous, he was well paid and ran a large expense account, for a Russian, but nothing more.

Not content with the kind of kickbacks that were common Caribbean real estate development, he found a weak point in the Russians' skimming conduit and Sedov's friends wanted the details with how much they had been stung for, and if possible get their money back.

But Vishnevsky had been eliminated too quickly, before he had told Demitriev and his friends what he had done with the money, how he had siphoned it off and who his accomplices were.

People like Sedov didn't like being made fools of, it was not good for their reputation and was pressing Demitriev for results.

If Jho Low's attempt to acquire a golden passport had been unsuccessful Demitriev did not have that kind of a problem, his Czech passport was real, procured by the

services of the GRU in the name of Milan Hasek, a real person, a Russian sleeper in Prague.

CHAPTER 31

PAT COULD NOT BOAST THE NEAR two hundred billion dollars of Jeff Bezos, but he was rich, very rich, and his path to wealth and fame resembled that of Bezos, commencing twenty plus years earlier, when Fortune smiled on him, lifting him out of and high above the crowd, from the anonymity that is the destiny of most men, to a position of extraordinary preeminence.

Was their inconceivable wealth objectionable, certainly, but no more than the poverty that destined others to dwell in the darkest corners and gutters of our cities, life was unjust, it always had been.

Bezos once told journalists, 'the only path I can see for deploying such financial resources is by converting my Amazon winnings into space travel'.

Pat thought likewise, but his project was Salvator Mundi City, high in the Cordillera Oriental of the Colombian Andes, far from the moral principles that were slowly drawing the planet into the gaping maw of dystopia.

It needed more than moral principles, a handout of one dollar to each of the ten billion humans that would soon inhabit the earth would not change their lot by one single iota, it would be gone by dusk, another few spoon fulls of

rice, whilst ten billion dollars in the hands of one righteous man could build a new future for humanity, providing that human society was of a dimension compatible with the resources of the small blue planet it lived on in its long voyage across the universe.

Like other men who attained great wealth without war, Pat was drawn towards a goal, a mission, one beyond personal empire, that of the collective well-being, sharing his good fortune with his luckless fellow beings, his reward would be that same feeling that goodness that comes from what giving to others gives, the power of benevolence, of sanctity.

Perhaps the Pope felt that way, he mused to himself.

Wealth was a form of insurance that would protect its owners when things went wrong—war, famine, plague and natural disasters. The rich and powerful had always pulled up the draw bridge to keep the enemy and pestiferous out. But first they let those they depended on in, to defend their domain and work, they would need them to till the fields once the danger had retreated.

Pat ploughed hundreds of millions into *Salvator Mundi* to build a liferaft for humanity as it drifted towards the shoals. His project was not driven by the idea that humanity was running out of resources, but that humanity was on a destructive path, not only destroying itself but all that which surrounded it and depended on.

He did not dream of unlimited resources, his vision was unlimited wellness, equilibrium with nature, harmony, which could be found on earth if men lived like the ancients in Athens, but where energy was harnessed to replace the iniquities of slavery.

Neither did he share the idea of Jeff Bezos that the Earth be a place to live, of leisure, where the only industries were those of high tech and where mining and heavy industries were moved out into the solar system.

Pat's idea of creating a new city, a colony, was nothing new, it had been going on for thousands of years, the Greeks were one of the first, in the Mediterranean, like the Phoenicians, the Romans, then the Spanish and the English who enlarged their ambitions.

At the beginning of the third millennium humans were still driven by expansion, the need for new land, territories and resources. Unfortunately there was less and less of all that, as human activity encroached with growing speed into the last remaining enclaves of nature—the Amazon, Antarctica, Siberia and Alaska, turning their eyes towards the oceans' deeps.

Certain cast their eyes onto the oceans where floating city-states could be created just like Mad Max's Waterworld.

Then there was Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos whom imagined founding colonies on Mars, where they, like Cortes and Pizarro, planned to carve out their own private empires, beyond the laws of Earth, where businesses like Amazon would be the new East India Company—founded in 1600 to trade in India, the South Seas and the Qing Empire in China.

CHAPTER 32

BACK ON EARTH MOSCOW watched uneasily as Alexei Navalny persisted in his defiant challenge to the regime, even as he was sentenced to a penal colony for two years and eight months—a clear message from the Kremlin they were determined to break him.

Behind the Kremlin's fears was a system riddled with corruption, exposed by Navalny's campaign with videos and images to back his accusations.

In the wake of his sentence, demonstrations broke out in towns and cities, from Petersburg to Vladivostok, and more than 10,000 people were arrested by the police reinforced by units of the state security apparatus employing the strong-arm methods the Kremlin was reputed for, backed by compliant judges, as television networks controlled by the ruling clique smeared Navalny streaming fake news.

It was against this background men like Sedov and Demitriev operated, a state riddled with corruption, where its leader, his inner circle and their friends siphoned billions from resource based industries to feather their own nests as an uncertain future without Vladimir Putin started to cast its shadow on the horizon.

The Kremlin feared the people, it was why all opposition was brutally struck down, exiled, like Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Garry Kasparov; murdered like Anna Politkovskaya who was shot down at the door of her home; Boris Nemtsov suffered the same fate, shot dead in the street within spitting distance of the Kremlin walls. The last man standing, Alexei Navalny, was now behind bars, and many feared for his life.

Contrary to popular belief most tyrants died in their beds, but inevitably they did die. The question that trouble Pat Kennedy was what would happen to the world if tyrants lived for ever?

Pat was at least pleased to see China's Jack Ma had resurfaced. His unexplained absence had been a reminder that the methods employed by Trumpianism, xenophobic Johnsonianism and Xi Jinping's authoritarianism were roads that led to destruction. John Francis reminded him of Jack Ma's words, 'We shouldn't use the way to manage a train station to regulate an airport. We cannot regulate the future with yesterday's means.'

CHAPTER 33

PAT HAD GROWN A SHORT BEARD, he was dressed a little more negligently, reclusive. There was a reason, he was not going downhill, on the contrary he had never felt better, he was bursting with energy, every morning he swam in his pool or set-off for a five or ten kilometre run along the hilly coast—followed by his personal security guard. He ate well and slept well.

The trouble was he was looking unmistakably younger, much younger, a condition that would lead to uncomfortable, embarrassing, questions.

The same went for John Francis in London, but he was much older and the difference could be hidden by heavier clothes, the idea he was perhaps colouring his hair. London was also in lockdown, so he met fewer people.

It was strange to be hiding when everything suggested they should be doing the opposite.

The rejuvenation effects of Galenus-1 were visible at a glance, undeniable. What concerned them both were the possible side effects, a downside, but for the moment none were visible and their medical check-ups manifested no negative signs. What happened in the long run was impossible to predict, only time would tell.

The fact is they were laboratory specimens, observed very closely by Rob McGoldrick and his team of neurologists at University College Hospital's new state-of-the-art facilities in London with its cutting edge technology.

They were guinea pigs, more precisely primate laboratory animals, in a project shrouded with secrecy by an agreement drawn up by James Herring's law firm.

Meanwhile, Luis Gutierrez was exploring the harvesting of creosote plants in California, Mexico and in desertic regions of Colombia where Zygophyllaceae was endemic. The idea was the lab scale process would be scaled up with first phase carried out at the Salvator Mundi site—a conventional distillation process to produce a primary concentrate. The second phase would be carried out in Ireland—a process of cryogenic extraction in special reactors at the Belpharma site in Wexford for the crystallisation of the molecules for use in the final compound.

In the desert states of the US the evergreen shrub grew up to four metres in height, its brittle branches producing small dark olive green aromatic leaves at the tips. Certain creosote plants were known to be several thousand years old, amongst the earth's oldest living organisms. The largest clone in Johnson Valley, California, was estimated

to be 9,400 years old and as much as 11,000 years old at other sites.

The density ranged from 448 plants per hectare in the Sonoran Desert to 959 plants per hectare in Rock Valley, Nevada, representing up to 20% of plant cover.

Similar values were recorded Mexico's Chihuahua Desert where harvesting costs would be considerably lower with plentiful labour.

The technical and logistical questions could be resolved relatively easily, however, the real issue lay in the philosophical and societal questions.

Some said history would be written Before Covid and After Covid, perhaps, but history would be irredeemably changed by Galenus-1.

If Covid-19 vaccination queue-jumping was anything to go by, with cheapskate celebrities, politicians and wealthy individuals willing to go to extravagant lengths to get served first, it was not difficult to imagine the kind of scramble a remedy for eternal youth would provoke.

Celebrities like Kate Moss or Victoria Beckham would be first in the stampede to recover their fast fading youth and look like their twenty year old daughters, ready to spend a large part of their fortune to do so.

Certain people would kill to find the secret and one of them was Arkady Demitriev, who putting Sedov's orders aside, had set his sights not only on Maria Scmitt's fortune but also Kennedy's secret.

CHAPTER 34

FROM THE PAPERS DISCOVERED at May Grafton's London apartment Demitriev put together the pieces of the puzzle he had collected little by little over a period of six months and for the first time began to perceive the beginnings of a coherent picture.

It compensated for his initial disappointment at the Freeport where he met with a blank where his enquiries met with the terse reply Atlantic Fine Arts no longer possessed an account.

An information that reinforced his conviction that Kennedy and his friends were hiding something, what exactly eluded him, but it was something that justified some impressive security measures being deployed at LifeGen—a research laboratory specialised in gerontology and life extension owned by Kennedy.

LifeGen was one of the pieces of the puzzle, the others included Phytotech in Grasse owned by Gutierrez along with his botanical reserve in the Joshua Tree National Park in California. Then there was the symposium at the Getty Center in Santa Monica entitled 'Tenochtitlan and the daily life of the Aztecs' where Luis Gutierrez made a presentation followed by a round table discussion on

medicinal and aromatic plants in Mexico. That was followed by Kennedy's interest in Belpharma a pharmaceutical production company in Ireland where the ubiquitous Henrique da Roza suddenly popped up again.

Simmonds' visit to Geneva had been the start of what resembled a chain reaction and Demitriev's training taught him to look for the catalyst, an element that had escaped him, until he recalled Simmo's meeting with the archaeologist, Anna Basurko and her friend the antique dealer, Scott Fitznorman who had attended the symposium at the Getty Center, followed with a visit to the botanical reserve.

Archaeology linked with botany and pharmacology seemed like unlikely bedfellows, but a pattern was beginning to appear. What his training as an agent specialised in intelligence gathering told him was, the greater the number of people that shared a secret the easier it became to find a weak point in the shield that protected that secret.

The pandemic had made life become complicated for his line of business—bars, cafes, restaurants and nightclubs were closed, the place where casual encounters could take place, propitious for evesdropping and hearsay. Few hotels were opened, the usual meeting places were restricted, places like beaches, public parks and gardens, museums closed, concerts and sporting events cancelled.

Travelling had become complicated with frontiers closing, on-off lockdowns, quarantines and curfews. He returned to France where he decided to concentrate his efforts on Kennedy, LifeGen, Phytotech, Grafton and Scmitt.

For that he engaged the services of a hacker, Anton Fedotov, known to the Russian intelligence services for his specialty—hacking business networks, not to commit vulgar fraud, but to collect valuable technical and marketing data, which could be moneyed in the firm of research studies by Fedotov's team.

Fedotov's proposed setting-up hacks into LifeGen, Phytotech and Belpharma's IT systems as well as the personal devices of those persons targeted—their smartphones and laptops, in the search for clues, starting with keywords in a tight net that targeted communications between Kennedy and the other subjects.

Fedotov, a former GRU specialist worked on of the edge of the darknet where criminals traded in information linked to the most sordid aspects of human nature from the vilest forms of pornography to drugs, terror, arms trafficking and kompromat.

The Russian saw himself as a security expert, a businessman, more than a cut above the rest of what he saw as a mainly criminal community.

Hacking was a specialty that was allowed to freewheel in Russia, given the Kremlin's complaisant attitude, one that verged on approval, seeing it as an arm that undermined its enemies, namely the West. It couldn't have contrasted more sharply with the position of the US and other Western nations, all of which severely reprehended and punished hacking.

Hacking into the personal devices of individuals like those of unwary targets like Maria Scmitt and Anna Basurko was a cakewalk, on the other hand Phytotech had a firewall though nothing comparable to that of LifeGen which was girded by George Pyke's Ares data protection system. Pat Kennedy's devices were on the other hand almost impenetrable, but once his communications or those of LifeGen and Phytotech arrived on the devices of unprotected third parties they could be more easily read.

It was not long before Fedotov delivered a list of keywords to Demitriev who in a glance focused his attention of three of them—Gilgamesh, Galenus and codex.

The first two puzzled him, but a quick check with Wikipedia turned up the Legend of Gilgamesh, as for Galenus he was an ancient Roman physician.

APOLOGIES

Belize is a pleasant small laid back country, situated on the northern edge of the Caribbean, struggling to survive in these trying times, to which I apologise for the image I may have painted in my story.

On the other hand Russia and China are redoubtable adversaries to Western Democracies, who will use all means, fair or foul, to reach the goals set by their leaders, and I do not apologise for the image I may have presented here.

The UK in its bid to go it alone has exposed itself to their ruthless methods and its financial centre, the City of London, will become the platform for a new kind of war, where money, power and influence are traded in a struggle for domination, and where false friends and self interest compete at the expense of Her Majesty's willin subjects.

All that I have written here is pure fiction ... unless otherwise stated, or not

I hope you, my reader, will forgive me for my endless lacuna related to facts and omissions as well as my usual grammar, syntax and spelling derivation. All of which, I fear, would take another lifetime to rectify, which I don't have given my advancing years, that plus the fact I have

so many other stories to tell and observations to make on our world. Perhaps one day Google and AI will find a way to remove this burden from story tellers, who like me are not sufficiently applied, as my headmaster once told me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book could not have been written without the data and information published on the Internet and in the world press collected over a period of years, starting in 2000, when I wrote *Offshore Islands*, and Pat Kennedy was launched on his initially precarious international career.

I have trawled numerous British, Irish, US, Russian, French, Spanish, Chinese, Israeli, Colombian newspapers, news blogs and specialist Internet sites, and books (authors' cited). And of course Wikipedia.

During this period I have collected information during my visits to the USA, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Indonesia, India, Dubai, Thailand, Cambodia, Libya, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Mali, Morocco, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Brazil, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, the Philippines, the UK, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain and Italy. To this I have added my experience in other parts of the world, notably Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Taiwan, Japan, Burma, Switzerland, Algeria, Russia, Scandinavia, the Baltic Countries, Poland, Hungary, the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Turkmenistan, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Egypt, the Caribbean, Central and South America.

I present my thanks and excuses to all the willing and unwilling contributors to the information included in this book, I am not the first to tread in the footsteps of Jack London, using the information supplied to us from those who convey it. I have tried to verify all the facts, but this is an impossible task. In my humble opinion most data reflects real events and the opinions of the vast majority of persons affected, directly or indirectly, by the multiple events and crises that constitute our collective existence.

This story is a serialised novel of events, real or not, where the fictitious characters are fictitious, and where the real characters, such as Vladimir Putin, Nicolas Maduro, Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Emanuel Macron, are real.

The story of 2000, and its sequels in 2010-2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, are recounted in my other tales.

With my very sincere thanks to all contributors, direct and indirect, knowing and unknowing, willing and unwilling.

John Francis Kinsella

Paris, March 1, 2021



Other books by John Francis Kinsella

Fiction

Borneo Pulp

Offshore Islands

The Legacy of Solomon

The Plan

The Prism 2049

The Lost Forest

Death of a Financier

The Turning Point 2007-2008

The Collection

A Redhead at the Pushkin

The Last Ancestor

Cornucopia

A Weekend in Brussels

The Cargo Club

100 Seconds to Midnight

The Gilgamesh Project

Book I The Codex

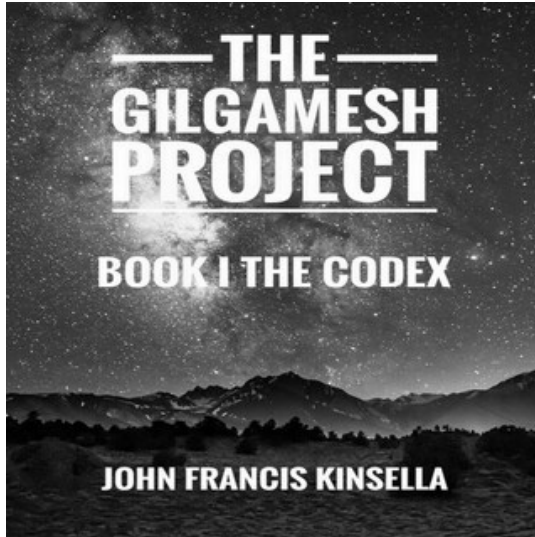
Book II La Isla Bonita

Book III La Villa Contessa

Book IV Ibiza

AUDIOBOOK

Book I The Codex is now available in Audiobook form, narrated by the author. It can be found at many well-known distributors.



Non-fiction

An Introduction to Early Twentieth Century Chinese
Literature

Translations

Le Point de Non Retour

The Sorrow of Europe

The Temple of Solomon

Jean Sibelius A biography

Understanding Architecture

L'île de l'ouest

In the works

A Biography of Patrick Wolfe (Fiction)

Book V of The Gilgamesh Project, will be published
in April or May 2021.

