



OFFSHORE ISLANDS

JOHN FRANCIS KINSELLA

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John Francis Kinsella

BANKSTERBOOKS

LONDON - PARIS - BERLIN

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For Tilla, Selma, Eléonore, Noé, Xaver, Elyias, Adèle, Camille and Antoine

Money is a singular thing. It ranks with love as man's greatest source of joy. And with death as his greatest source of anxiety. Over all history it has oppressed nearly all people in one of two ways: either it has been abundant and very unreliable, or reliable and very scarce.

John Kenneth Galbraith

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PROLOGUE

Islands, whether they are separated from the world at large by seas, mountains or deserts, have never ceased to impose their geographical limits on those who live on them. Those, whose aspirations exceed the limits imposed by their islands, have always been pushed to fulfil their dreams and hopes in lands beyond their shores.

This is a story that tells of the ambitions of men, both great and small, seeking to realise their brief dreams by whatever means fortune had given them.

Economic forces, driven by a market frenzy caused by the explosion of the Internet and information technologies, created phenomenal gains in virtual money. At the same time inconceivably sums of money derived from crime and drugs were generated by criminal organisations, and then processed and legalised through the world's banking and financial institutions.

For those who controlled that vast flood of money, virtual reality was never so real, close to dreams of empires and palaces on far away beaches, where the winners could profit from their gains, virtual or real, but in any case ephemeral.

Chapter 1. Habana

Depending on how one looked at it, it may or may not have been a good augur. For John Ennis it was nothing more than an amusing anecdote that the baggage porter told to each new arrival. Their rooms were located on the sixth floor, the whole of which they were told had been rented year round by Al Capone at the height of his infamous career. Capone had been just one of the many figures of organised crime of his time who had been drawn to Cuba by the lawlessness that then reigned.

That period was known as Cuba's age of decadence. It was presided by Fulgencia Batista. Until his election in 1940, as President of Cuba, he had been an important figure in Cuban politics behind a series of puppet presidents. He stepped down four years later, then, after a period in Florida, he returned to Cuba, where he was again elected as president in 1952 and 54, presiding over a brutally oppressive regime. After provoking the Castro revolt, Batista fled the island to the Dominican Republic December 31, 1958. The following day Castro took over Cuba.

Mobsters such as 'Lucky' Luciano and his partner the Jewish godfather, Meyer Lansky were also amongst the Mafiosi who had controlled hotels and casinos in Havana, and what was to become, half a century, later the modern tourist resort of Vareadero.

Batista and Lansky were said to have been so close that they were almost like brothers. In 1953, Batista appointed Lansky as his personal advisor on gambling reform. The American gangster then proceeded to transform Havana into a tropical Las Vegas.

The reign of corruption, gambling and prostitution ended with the flight of Batista and the arrival of the young revolutionary Fidel Castro. Castro installed forty years of fruitless revolution that bled dry a country that was already in a calamitous situation.

With the new millennium, impoverished and in a state of advanced decay, Cuba was ready for the next infernal swing of fortune's pendulum. From the nearby mainland and islands, patiently watching and salivating, a new deadlier version of organised crime prepared itself for the feast, aided and abetted by the international banking system equipped with the most modern technology and condoned by serious government.

The Hotel Sevilla was a splendid edifice built in 1908, near the historical centre of Old Havana, just off the Prado. John Ennis browsed through the hotel brochure as he sat on the toilet; it described the recently renovated hotel in grand style. He had to agree, both from the external appearance and that of the spacious lobby with its elegant Spanish colonial style furnishings, where fine classic blue and yellow ceramic floor tiles brilliantly reflected the light cast by the crystal chandeliers. It was certainly grand, although his initial encounter with the plumbing seemed to

indicate that it was not only the architecture that was turn of the century Moorish style.

Their Air France flight from Paris had been uneventful. On arrival they had been met by a smiling Havanatour representative, who had them transferred efficiently to their hotel in a modern air-conditioned taxi.

He together with Paul Carvin formed a team of no-longer very young freelance journalists, who, with nothing better on hand, had accepted a reportage for the Banque de Credit National, a leading Parisian bank, to garner the pages of its quarterly magazine. John Ennis handled the journalistic content and Paul Carvin the photography. They had worked as a team for more years than they cared to remember, scrambling from one story to another with a light to cynical vein to their reports, which had won them a modest reputation.

They were delighted, two weeks all paid in advance in the Caribbean sun, after a bitterly cold Parisian winter and a miserably damp start to the spring, it could not have been more welcome. Business had not been exactly booming since the end of the last Middle East war and the Indonesian elections. They had no desire to get involved in another war zone - much too dangerous. They preferred good hotels and bars, and specialised in crisis development or redevelopment after the crisis. The shooting part was for heroes and they had no desire to be the subject of a first page tribute to a bloody and quickly forgotten end.

They had two objectives in Cuba, first and most important, as it paid the bills, was a glossy reportage for the bank's magazine, the BCN Quarterly Review, published for its well heeled gold and platinum credit card holders, seeking adventure in the comfort of five star hotels, cocktails and cigars. Then, secondly, there was the somewhat remote possibility of a pre-crisis story on the imminent downfall of the Castrist Revolution.

A couple of days collecting information from the Agence France Press and Reuters databases in Paris had given them a good starting point. They had heard all the usual stories of an exotic Cuba that had become a fashionable destination not only for tourists, but also writers and political observers as the end of Castro's reign inevitably approached. Fashionable it was. Its music, cocktails, cigars, sunshine and easy sex. What was behind all that? What had become of the revolution and its heroes? Was there something brooding behind the Wim Wenders smiling images of indestructible old men, improvising their wonderful Afro-Cuban rhythms in the smooth style of the Buena Vista Social Club? That would really be of interest to the national and international press. Maybe there was a good story to be told!

Of course the Cuban community of Miami, the gusanos, or worms as Castro liked to call them, was informed daily of every event of political or economic consequence that occurred back home in Cuba, the smallest or even most secret piece of information filtered out, in spite of the fact that practically all overseas contacts and communications had been virtually impossible for ordinary Cubans.

Regular and detailed information on the political situation reached Miami via the

privileged overseas Cubans, who travelled without restriction regularly to and from the island, or, from the tragic boat-people known as *balseros*, defectors from the revolutionaries paradise, who came from every level of Cuban society, groups of individuals and families, risking their lives in make-shift boats and rafts trying to reach the promised land of the mighty dollar.

Paul was French and liked to add the qualification ‘*Pied-noir*’. His family had been French immigrants or colonists who after generations in Algeria had been forced to quit after that country’s independence, first to Morocco and then finally back to France, a country he new little about when he arrived at the age of eleven years. He spoke not only French, but also fluent Spanish, which had been one of the imported languages of Europe’s North African colonies.

John Ennis, a journalist, had long accepted Paris as his base from where he led a nomadic life, the bane of his profession. He was a Dubliner who had learnt to appreciate France and call it his home.

Although both men were professionals with long careers behind them, travelling to almost every corner of the world where news was in the making, they had never made the kind of noteworthy scoop required to bring them into the big league of star reporters. They were part of the innumerable faceless men and women who made their precarious living filling the pages of the myriads of newspapers and magazine that lined the shelves of new-stands in shops, stations and airports around the world.

In short, except for a miracle - which was not about to happen - they were not candidates for a Pulitzer, or any other prize for that matter. Life had become for them an endless search for new experiences, new horizons, and an incessant paper chase, which no longer had any real sense, another country, another hotel, another bar, and another story.

Before leaving Paris, they had set out a rough plan for their trip, which consisted of visiting typical tourist sites and resorts, restaurants and bars, not forgetting sampling the country’s celebrated cigars or listening to its music.

As Ennis showered, he remembered the rocambolesque adventures of Jim Wormold, the vacuum cleaner salesman in Graham Green’s ‘*Our Man in Havana*’. The story had started in the very same hotel, named the Biltmore-Seville, where Wormold met the spy Hawthorne in room 501. Cuba had been the inspiration of more than one strange story, both in the past and the present.

The water temperature was uneven and as he attempted to adjust it, struggling with the worn mixer, he heard phone ringing.

Fuck! he thought, it’s Paul, who was in the next room, 619. He’s probably got his fuckin camera in his hand and ready to go.

“*Oiga!*”

“Amigo, you’re ready!”

“I’ve just got in the *putain* shower!”

Paul laughed. “Bon, in two minutes, I’ll knock at your door.”

Paul never missed the least occasion to record on film for posterity an

unforgettable place or face. Photography was not just a job for him, it was a passion, which came before almost all other things, except as he insisted – friendship - and even that had to wait from time to time.

They studied the city map in the vast cool lobby, where they admired from a distance the patio bar with its fountain, resisting the temptation of a quick drink before leaving the hotel. Once out of the hotel they turned right and following the map headed in the direction of the cathedral.

In other circumstances Paul Carvin could have been confused with a member of an expedition, about to embark on a voyage of discovery, dressed in khaki and wearing safari boots. The worn tunic, which fitted snugly over his ample torso, was covered with pockets that bulged and bristled with all the accessories of a photographer, it was a uniform chosen to inform the casual observer that he was dealing with a professional.

Having left the hotel block, the two reporters were surprised by the crumbling decay of what had been once elegant buildings, which at first glance looked picturesque. In the streets, ancient, but gaily painted American cars graciously glided past, rolling unevenly over a maze of potholes, they were no less than wrecks, which by some miracle were still in running order.

Smiling black girls dressed in fluorescent Lycra shorts and body suits passed by, their ample backsides swayed as they walked on ungainly platform shoes. Most of the locals seemed to be particularly relaxed, some tending to the repair of their cars, others lounging in their doorways watching the world go by. They were much poorer, and considerably less European than the two newly arrived visitors would have expected.

It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon in Havana and in Europe 10 o'clock in the evening.

Chapter 2. Sonnen Reisen

At that same moment, John Ryan was checking into the Sheraton Hotel at Frankfurt International Airport. He hauled a regulation size carry-on bag on wheels. He paid cash in advance, mumbling that he had misplaced his credit card. The stiff blonde receptionist checked his passport and gave him a cold once over as he signed the registration card. He shrugged and decided not to waste his breath on any unlikely explanations. He knew only too well that it was unusual for international travellers not to use plastic in that class of hotel, but Frankfurt he reasoned was accustomed to strange travellers. It would have been unwise to use one of the several cards contained in an inside flap of his wallet.

The next morning he took breakfast early, checked out and headed across the foot bridge into the passenger terminal. After a seemingly endless series of check-in

zones and shopping areas he found the desk he was looking for.

‘Sonnen Reisen’, Sun Travels, an airport travel agent specialised in cheap last minute flights for tourists not particularly concerned about their holiday destination. There was no crowd; the Easter holiday rush was another few days away. He stood in line behind the only two other travellers, a couple of young back-packers who were discussing a flight to India with the sales girl. His eyes ran down the list of destinations available that day, hand written in large black letters with a marker pen on a white plastic notice board.

Singapore...no, that reminded him too much of the Barings scandal, Mike Leeson had ended up with a three or four year trip to Changi Prison. New York...not that either, the Yanks had put a lot of money into ‘Swap’. Mexico...didn’t sound bad, he mused thinking of Mariachis, on second thoughts he remembered having heard stories about it being dangerous for tourists and foreigners.

Cuba...hmm, he vaguely recalled being told that it had a certain run down charm from Tony Arrowsmith back in Dublin, a business friend, more of an acquaintance. He mentally rephrased ‘friend’ in the conditional, at least he had been a friend. Arrowsmith was involved in the hotel business in the Caribbean. Kavanagh recalled him talking of beaches, cigars, rum and exotic women, but also and not least he had mentioned it as being not far from those very useful offshore banking havens.

“Cuba?” he said aloud without thinking.

“Ya! It is possible,” replied the sales girl with an encouraging smile, “One thousand two hundred marks for the round trip - ten days, with two nights and breakfast included in Santiago de Cuba.”

“Sounds good,” he replied without consciously distinguishing the difference between Havana and Santiago de Cuba. After all why not, he thought to himself, it can’t be more than just a hop from there to meet Martin Wender in person.

“You’ll need a tourist card.”

“A tourist card!” he replied snapping out of his reverie.

“Don’t worry, you can get it on arrival, a few dollars will see to everything.”

“What passport do you have?”

“Irish.”

“No problem. It’s a Lufthansa charter flight with Condor, leaving at 11.30 from terminal B, check-in starts in half-an-hour. You’ll take it?”

“Okay,” he nodded thinking it’s as good as anything I’ll find today.

She made out the ticket and hotel voucher, then Kavanagh paid in cash and headed towards terminal B to the check-in.

As he tried to decipher the signs to his boarding gate, he suddenly had a misgiving, remembering Arrowsmith’s link with Cuba. He was involved in a tourist complex called the ‘Cayo’ something, near a place called Holguin, or a name like that, financed by the BCN with Castlemain, perhaps that could make a problem he thought. I’ll just have to keep my wits about me, whatever happens I’d

better avoid that place, wherever it is - just in case.

Chapter 3. Siempre Rebeldes

Cuba was in a strange state of limbo. From appearances, a casual observer could not be blamed for thinking that the country looked as though it had just emerged from a ruinous period of war and privation.

The enigmatic revolutionary, *El Lider Maximo*, had brought his country to economic collapse and disaster. He was no hero, just another idealist who had backed the wrong horse. He was not the only one to have believed in revolution, equality, communism and the Soviets and he was not the only one to suffer its consequences.

He was born a wealthy sugar plantation owner's son. At first he became a lawyer and then a revolutionary, overthrowing the corrupt, but typical Latin American dictatorship of the fifties.

Fidel Castro had not been a communist when he arrived in Havana in January 1959 as a young barbudo hot on the heels of the ousted Batista regime, and perhaps he had never been a communist; that would remain a question for future political analysts and historians. As events developed in those early years, Castro had certainly imagined that he could manipulate the Soviets against the Yankees. However, Moscow saw Cuba at best as a symbol of revolutionary communist fervour and in the worse case merely a Cold War pawn in their struggle with the West.

In any case Castro was drawn into the East-West confrontation where he had little or no control of the events that were to result in the Missile Crisis. He became the target of the Kennedy administration's wrath and that of successive presidents of the USA. Castro was seen as the prime menace to the regimes dominated by the United States in the war against communism in Central and Latin America, where Castro's lieutenant, the charismatic Che Guevara, fomented trouble and idealistic revolutionary struggle.

With the development of ties to Moscow and the American embargo, Cuba became totally reliant on the Soviet block for the export of its primary product, sugar, as well as its imports of oil, industrial plant, manufactured goods, services, technology and just about everything else.

With the collapse of communism the consequences for Cuba were in many ways no different to that of the other Soviet satellites, but in certain ways were worst as a result of the continued survival of *El Lider Maximo*. There was no way Castro could be forgiven for the lese majesty and the perceived treachery to the USA. Cuba had a choice, either get rid of Castro or rot in its cane fields, before any change of policy could come about.

The USA, it seems, did not hold a permanent grudge against the Cuban people for whom it offered asylum to those who braved the waves of the Atlantic to reach Florida, across the 150 kilometres of sea that separated Key West from the north coast of Cuba. The result was a thriving community of six hundred thousand Cubans in the USA mainly living in Southern Florida.

By 2000 Cuba had become dependant on the yearly one billion dollars of transmittals from its expatriates in Florida, twenty times as much as it earned from the export of its celebrated cigars, the import of which was forbidden in the USA.

Their other industry was tourism, which counted on two million visitors for the year 2000. The tourists were in preference parked in golden ghettos with sun, sand and mojitos. Contacts between Cubans and tourists were kept to a strict minimum.

It was a long way from the revolutionary rhetoric of Che Guevara, who at the end of the twentieth century had become a legend, on a par with John Lennon - twenty dollar Tee shirt heroes. Whilst Fidel Castro, sporting his beer belly, had become an ageing tyrant with Parkinson's or Alzheimer's lurking in the background, ready to take over at an opportune moment.

His succession would be left to a struggle between second class socialist minded politicians, doubtful Miami capitalists or the Mafiya, ready to divide the carcass of the people's revolution with the other vultures that would be present at the meagre feast.

Che had the good fortune to die a hero, he was still adored by Cubans and many others, sacrificed at the symbolic age of 33 by Imperiums Americana, worshipped as a people's hero, a modern Christ.

Castro's greatest risk would be going the way of Ceausescu, if by chance a wild spark carried by the wind inflamed the Cuban people, weary of his oppressive regime and their continued privation.

Chapter 4. Santiago de Cuba

At first they gave the 'Bodeguita del Medio', a bar famous for its celebrated literary and intellectual patrons such as Hemingway, a cursory glance, it merited no more than that, now a mere tourist trap according to the guide book. Then on second thoughts curiosity got the better of them and they decided a quick look and a Daiquiri would do no harm. Once installed in the bar Paul could not resist the temptation of fixing the scene on film with a couple of furtive camera shots.

An hour later they arrived in the Plaza del Cathedral. It was still light but hot and either the Daiquiris or the six hour time difference with Paris were beginning to have its effect. They took a table on the terrace of the nearest bar, which was situated on the corner of the square and by all appearances another tourist trap, but

the sound of music had attracted them.

There was a small group of musicians ensconced on a narrow podium in the corner of the terrace; they were rendering their version of Compay Segundo's song 'Chan Chan', which for the two visitors just off the plane had the effect of instantly transforming the tourist brochure images into reality, as it had done for many others before them.

Paul lifted his hand and made a sign to the waiter and ordered "Dos mojitos!" in his vaguely Castilian accent. He beamed when his order for the popular cocktail was accepted without the slightest hesitation by the waiter, who responded with a friendly smile. It was by no means the first or last time that two pale faced Gallegos with cameras would order mojitos. What was of more importance to the waiter was the necessity to encourage a good tip in dollars from the freshly arrived tourists.

The mojitos arrived, cocktails of rum, in preference Havana Club, freshly pressed lime juice, a spoon of sugar and a sprig of fresh mint topped up by sparkling water in a tall glass. They quickly down the drinks and ordered two more whilst listening to the music, which only fuelled their ardour to further explore Old Havana before dinner.

It was merely a foretaste to them of what was to come, though it was not in a tourist bar, however good, they would find the authentic Cuban atmosphere of the legendary Trovas. They set off in the direction of Plaza Vieja following an itinerary indicated in their guide book. That would be enough to give them an idea of the attractions of Old Havana before commencing some serious exploration the following day.

Ryan disembarked from the Condor flight and followed the crowd into the terminal building. On the roof of the building the sign read 'Aeropuerta de Santiago de Cuba'. He joined one of the lines, the longest, which was forming before the passport control booths. A little observation would be useful before he confronted the official. At a first glance it looked rather similar to that he had seen on a trip to Moscow.

He began to vaguely understand that perhaps this was not Havana. He had been seated next to an elderly German couple who spoke little or no English, which had limited any exchange to polite smiles. After the flight had left Frankfurt he had eaten the plastic meal and had immediately fallen asleep, relieved after the built-up stress of the previous forty eight hours.

As the line slowly advanced, he tried to observe the procedure at the booths from where he stood without being too obviously curious. After ten or fifteen minutes he had almost reached the yellow line. A young couple was having difficulties. A disembodied hand appeared from the window of the passport control booth indicating to them they should return to the line.

They were smiling and shrugging their shoulders, signifying to those next in line to proceed to the passport control. They offered a slightly worried explanation to

the others waiting in line.

Ryan strained to listen. They spoke in German and his German was almost zero. He got the words in English 'tourist card'. A feeling of anxiety started to manifest itself inside of him, he hoped the girl at Sonnen Reisen had had her facts right.

What would happen if he was put on the return flight? He tightened his grip on the handle of his carry-on bag which reminded him of another problem.

When a uniformed official appeared a few moments later and took the passports of the young couple, he spoke to them softly in an accented but clear English.

"You have no tourist card! Please follow me to the office, it will cost you fifty dollars each!"

Ryan sighed with relief. A question of dollars, he could soon fix that.

Twenty minutes later he emerged from the same office, his passport with the tourist card inside, firmly clasped in his hand. He headed past the baggage delivery point towards the exit where he anticipated the customs inspection. There was nothing, no customs control - nothing - to his very great relief.

The automatic doors slide open and he stepped into the sunshine where he was surprised by a welcome committee in the form of a line of exotic girls, dressed in feathers and high cut sequined body suits showing off some of the longest legs he had ever seen, flashing their toothy smiles at the new arrivals. One of them handed him a brochure and he joined the other somewhat bewildered tourists who were being dispatched to their different hotels.

He felt a new chapter opening as he stepped into the minibus destination the Hotel Casa Grande.

The airport was not far from the city and as they entered the built up area he was surprised by the scene that unrolled before his eyes, it resembled that of a 1950 Humphrey Bogart film. The few cars that he saw were mostly old American models from the very same period.

The houses and buildings were seriously dilapidated Spanish-Mexican style. The people had a South American look with which he was vaguely familiar from TV news reports and films, though many of them seemed to be a lot darker skinned.

The people they passed on the streets seemed to be poor though they did not look miserable or unhappy. Their clothing was correct and clean. There seemed to be a lot of older people. He noted that the streets and pavements were remarkably clean.

The hotel was a turn of the century edifice recently renovated and operated by a French chain. At the top of the steps that led up to the lobby he saw a large terrace bar, overlooking a square, where people were seated enjoying drinks amongst potted palms.

On arriving in his room on the third floor, he opened the window overlooking the leafy gardens of the square, the heart of the colonial city. He checked the map in the tourist magazine he had found on the coffee table identifying the square as Cespedes Park, renamed Plaza de la Revolucion, to the left was the Catedral de Santa Ifigenia with its twin bell towers and Renaissance facade, opposite was the

sixteenth century house of Diego Velazquez.

The late afternoon sun shone on the strollers. Here and there children ran frivolously playing their games as do children all over the world. A small collection of people listened to a group of musicians seated in the shade projected by the broad trees. Older people sat on the long stone benches that formed a low wall surrounding the square.

The scene was idyllic, peaceful and relaxed, evidently nothing of any great importance was about to happen. It was an incredibly refreshing change from the recent days and weeks. He knew almost nothing of Cuba, in fact twenty four hours earlier he had never heard of Santiago de Cuba or its recently celebrated musicians at the Casa de la Trova.

He had a couple of days to figure out his next destination and decided to use the time to learn a little more about Cuba. After testing the room safe, he locked his money securely away and then took the lift down to the lobby to change some dollars for whatever money the Cubans used.

He was politely informed by the engaging receptionist, whom he had remarked earlier, that only dollars were necessary for tourists, even obligatory for almost any payment, for hotels, restaurants, transport, cigars and even tips. He quickly learnt that Cuban pesos were next to useless. Cubans preferred US dollars to any other form of payment, a surprising fact that posed him no problem whatsoever, as had plenty of those.

The next morning he took breakfast in the roof top restaurant where a herd of elderly tourists were attacking the buffet in a geriatric bustle. He chose a table in the sunshine, a safe distance from the group, with a clear view of the cathedral and the Angel Gabriel, or whoever, standing balanced on the pediment with outstretch wings and a trumpet in his hand, as if waiting for some sign.

He was distracted from his second cup of coffee by the cathedrals bell, he looked at his watch and then towards the tower, the bell was striking ten, and to his great surprise he saw a young man striking the bell with a hammer. Apparently there was nothing much of modern technology in Santiago, it was the same as in bygone centuries, he thought with a certain satisfaction.

Whilst he marvelled at the scene a couple of young women in their twenties installed themselves in the sunshine at an adjacent table. They were evidently tourists and appeared to be French, which was confirmed an instant later when they nodded to him politely and mouthed a bonjour. He smiled and returned the greeting.

The blond was not bad he thought, regretting not for the first time, that he had little better than a schoolboy French, not to speak of Spanish where his vocabulary was limited to words such as Paella and Marbella.

He sipped his coffee and looking again saw the two girls had disappeared in the direction of the breakfast buffet. He reached over and helped himself to the guide book that lay on their table. On the inside cover was a map of Cuba; he noted that Santiago de Cuba, without any great surprise, was on the south west facade of the

island.

He then spotted Holguin, which was not that far away, about a hundred kilometres to the north. He did not need to make a note to leave it out of his plans. He replaced the book as the girls returned carrying their glasses of orange juice and plates of sliced fruit.

“Vous pouvez le regardez si vous voulez,” said the blond with a friendly smile.

“Merci,” he replied.

“Vous parlez le Français?” she said immediately detecting his hesitation and English accent

“No, I’m sorry.”

“Oh! You can look at it. Please!”

“Thank you.” he declined, becoming confused by his desire to talk and suddenly aware of his awkward situation, which called for a certain degree of caution.

“I must be going,” he said standing up.

Having definitely confirmed that he was not in the capital, Havana, Ryan decided it was time to get a guide book of his own, which he found in the makeshift lobby shop. He then took another coffee in the lobby bar and applied himself to a thirty minute tourist course on Cuba. Habana, as it was written, was about 700 kilometres to the west.

At the travel agent he found amongst the shops to the left of the hotel on the main square, he checked out flights to the capital, car rentals and hotels. He then spent the rest of the day exploring the city centre, its places of interest and historical monuments with the aid of his guide book.

It did not take Ryan long to absorb a few of the essential Cuban realities, amongst which was the confirmation of what he had suspected given the quaint level of their bell ringing technology. The island’s communications were poor, excessively poor, both internally and externally. He realised that most of the telephone lines had probably been installed before the Revolution. If mobile phones existed, they were certainly far and few between. That news instilled in him a certain sense of tranquillity.

He returned to the hotel and after showering he installed himself in the terrace bar at the only remaining table, overlooking the square where he could watch the coming and going of the locals. He stirred his Mojito with the plastic straw as he drew on the cigar that he had just bought for three dollars at the small stand in the lobby, where cigars were hand rolled by a talkative young woman. The cigar, of an unclassifiable genre, was not bad, perhaps a tiny bit hard to draw on, which was certainly due to it being too humid, most probably because it was freshly rolled he mused to himself, enjoying the very slight movement of the soft evening air.

He felt a huge calm settling on him and could not help asking himself why he had not taken more time relax in the past. Well, he thought in consolation, it’s never too late.

The two French girls walked into the bar looking around for a table without luck.

The blonde recognised him and smiled.

“*Bonsoir!*”

“*Bonsoir,*” he replied with a smile. He indicated the two empty chairs at his table. To his surprise they accepted.

“What would you like?”

The two girls looked at each other and replied, “*Un Daiquiri.*”

“*Deux?*”

“*Oui, merci.*”

“My name is Sean!”

The blond replied, “My friend is Natalie and I’m Marie-Paul.” She held out her hand, which he looked at for an instant before he realised he should shake hands.

“We’ve been in Santiago for three days, tomorrow we’re going by bus to Baracoa.”

“Baracoa!” he exclaimed remembering the Arrowsmith’s tourist complex.

“Yes it’s on the coast about 130 kilometres from here.”

“Oh!”

“*Christophe Colon* landed there.”

“Who?”

She repeated the name twice before the penny dropped.

“Oh I’m sorry, Christopher Columbus.”

They laughed.

“And you, what are your plans, where are you going from here?”

“I’m going to eat something,” he smiled, avoiding the question. “Can you recommend somewhere?”

“Well the hotel is a bit dull, a buffet. We’ve tried a couple of *paladares*. We have another address we’re going to try tonight.”

“Pala...what!”

“They’re small family run restaurants, only three or four tables in people’s houses, but they are really Cuban, I mean it’s in a private house and the family makes the meal.”

“It sounds good.”

“Why don’t you join us!” Marie-Paule laughed.

“Okay,” he replied a little hesitantly. Then throwing off his doubts added “With the greatest of pleasure.”

Chapter 5. A Side Trip

Ennis opened the door to his room. His mind was blurred in a haze of alcohol. The rum and cigars that had not seemed to have had any effect in the Trova were finally taking their toll. The music, the atmosphere, the

excitement of the conversation with their newly found friends had stalled the reaction.

An envelope lay on the floor. Inside it announced that a fax awaited him at the reception.

Bollocks! he thought dimly, throwing the fax on the table.

After a struggle to undress he flopped onto the bed and almost immediately fell into a deep sleep.

A series of detonations awoke him. It took a couple of seconds to realise it was not the overthrow of the revolution but the telephone.

“Buenos dias Señor. We have a fax for you at the reception.”

Shit! he thought looking at his watch. It was nine twenty and a dull thumping resounded in his head.

Twenty minutes later he picked up the fax. It was from Paris, the bank requesting he call Daniel de Forsta, the press and PR manager of the BCN.

It had been Daniel who had fixed them up with the reportage. He was a good friend who had helped them a lot over the years in return for the glamour and friendship of real reporters, even though their reputation was modest. They enjoyed good living, eating and drinking with friends, and night clubbing at the in-spots. Daniel saw them as swashbuckling reporters compared to those he knew in the financial press, or compared his own staid though very secure well paid job as the PR manager at the bank’s Paris headquarters.

He calculated that with the time difference it was three twenty in the afternoon in Paris. He called Paul, then checked with the operator to see if he could make a phone call to Paris.

“Yes Sir, we can open a line, if you deposit one hundred dollars or sign a credit card authorisation.”

That took fifteen minutes and the line was opened.

To his surprise it was direct dialling and he had the bank online at once. De Forsta got to the point speaking in French.

“No problem, it’s just an extension to the job. The Chairman of the Irish Union Bank, one of the members of the BCN group, is going to be in Jamaica,”

“Jamaica!” Ennis interrupted.

“Yes, Jamaica, on a business trip, officially to inaugurate a new hotel and tourist complex that the bank has jointly financed. I’d like you to cover it.”

“When?”

“Next weekend.”

“We’ve only just got here!”

“Don’t worry it will only take two or three days and then you can return to finish the job.”

“It could be a problem, I don’t know what else we’ve got on.” He knew a few days extra would not be a problem.

“Look do it as a favour for me,” de Forsta almost pleaded. Ennis was pleased to

turn the tables. Now de Forsta was asking him a favour.

“Okay, we’ll fit it in, but just for you. When does he arrive?”

“Excellent, David Castlemain arrives on Saturday, there’ll be a reception at the new hotel on Sunday and the official inauguration with the bigwigs. He then leaves for Guadeloupe on Monday.”

“Let me talk to Paul. He should be okay. I’ll call you back when we’ve looked into the travel arrangements and in case there any problems. Book us into the new hotel if that’s possible.”

“Good.” De Forsta rang off leaving Ennis to solve the problem of the other arrangements.

“Don’t look but doesn’t that face ring a bell,” Ennis whispered to Carvin.

Paul replied with a shrug more interested in inspecting the plastic bags filled with cigars and rum that he had bought in the airport shop. They stood in line with the few passengers for the AeroCaribbean flight to Kingston, Jamaica.

“I’m serious, take a look!”

“Okay, Okay,” he glanced sideways, “No, not really.”

“Well he does to me. I’m sure I know him, at least the face.”

At the passport control he managed to get a glance at the passport the other passenger was carrying. He saw it was a Bordeaux coloured European Union type and he could make out what looked like a harp on the cover. Then he saw in gold letters ‘Eire Ireland’.

Once aboard the Gulfstream he tried to get a look at the small carry-on bag the passenger was carrying. He twisted his head to see the name tag. He made out the name, John Ryan.

It did not seem to be familiar. He knew of nobody called John Ryan.

He pulled out his Sony digital camera and caught their fellow traveller with a sneak shot. It was not that good, Ryan was in half profile looking out of the window. Ennis then forgot his curiosity settled down to the drinks and the meal on the one hour flight to Kingston.

The last he saw of Ryan was his back as he disappeared into the international transit lounge. Once having been through the formalities he checked on the departures screen and saw destinations to George Town, London and Miami within the following hour or so. George Town where? He took out the airline magazine and on the map of the Caribbean saw it was the capital on Grand Cayman. Could be he thought, but on the other hand George Town was a fairly common name in ex-British territories. He would check it out on their arrival at the resort.

They were booked on a local helicopter flight to Montego Bay, just a short hop across on the other side of the island. There they checked into the Caribbean Palace where Ennis picked up a copy of the Times of London of the previous day.

He flipped through the pages, nothing special, politics and scandals. The financial section was dominated by Internet and telecoms news. Swap was in trouble its

tycoon owner was unavailable for comment after large losses were announced.

Swap! That was it, Kavanagh! The man with the passport in the name of Ryan looked a lot like Kavanagh. He remembered the face from the launch of a start-up at the BCN branch in the City of London about a year or two before.

A highly leveraged introduction of an Internet New Technology start-up. Kavanagh had rocketed from obscurity overnight to join the start-up nouveaux riches. He, like them, had had the right idea at the right time and also a background in the IT business. His firm, a fairly typical small to middling IT services company had been specialised in services for banks and investment firms in the City. The firm was based in Dublin, it was not a very long established company, that was to say by Old Economy standards, it had been around for about five years or so if he remember the press blurb that had been handed out at the launching. He thought wryly, five years was a life-time in the so called New Economy.

The start-up he had remembered was called Swap, it had shot to front page news when Kavanagh and his partners signed a WAP agreement with a major credit card company and airline.

Wireless Applications Protocol. That was the name in the current net jargon. A technique that would bring the stock market and trading to the mobile phone.

It was ambitious, the mobile phone could access internet for transport, hotels and all the other services, to the mass of international executives that worked in or jetted between both the major and minor cities of Europe everyday.

It was to be a real money spinner. As foreseen the money flowed in like an unstoppable torrent. Swap was awash with almost one hundred million pounds and its shares had shot into the stratosphere, multiplying in value at every trading session.

Kavanagh had rocketed from being just another fairly anonymous businessman, owner of a modestly sized IT company with some 250 employees, to becoming the owner of a huge fortune almost overnight - at least on paper.

According to The Times report that Ennis scrutinised, he was unavailable for comments and a lot of questions were being raised about Swap, which seemed to be in difficulties. According to the report profits seemed to be distant and the share value had plunged over the last two weeks. The investors and spokesmen for the company seemed to be desperately trying to calm the market.

Later in his room he downloaded the Sony digital image to his portable PC, then zoomed it, selecting just Kavanagh's profile, it was not too bad for a sneak shot he thought. He then transferred it by email to their office in Paris asking Juliette to do a search on the mugshot.

Early Monday morning, midnight in Paris, his mobile rang it was Juliette.

"It resembles a person called Sean Kavanagh. We did a thing on him a couple of years back."

"Thanks I remember now."

"He made a fortune on the Internet."

“Right, but there’s a problem. It seems like he’s disappeared. He could be somewhere in the Caribbean. It looks like BCN stands to lose a lot of money they’ve invested in his business.”

“Where did you get the picture?”

He dodged the question.

“Look keep this quiet, don’t speak to anybody, there could be a story for us. Try and find out if he has any business or banking links out here. In the Caymans for example, or one of those other places and call me back as quick as possible.”

“Okay, no problem,” she said ringing off. He could trust her to keep quiet. She had worked with them for several years in their small agency and knew the value of news. Being second was worthless.

The phone rang again over breakfast. It was Juliette working very late as usual, that was the lot of press agency staff.

“They’re saying that he has a holding of some kind in the Bahamas. I’ve looked on the map, it’s not far from where you are...”

“Yeah...not the Caymans?”

“It doesn’t mention that here.”

“Okay,” he replied a little puzzled.

“Not only that but he’s disappeared. It looks like a good financial scandal in the making. The BCN Group is a major creditor to his company.”

Chapter 6. The Cayman Islands

It had taken only forty years to squander what it had taken generations to build, to let the country to fall into a state of almost irreparable ruin as a result of the utopian ideas of its leader. A reference lesson for any Marxist minded politician to learn what can happen when a state’s money is thrown away in distant foreign wars in defence of an alien ideology, such as Cuba undertook on behalf of the Soviets in Angola, Mozambique and other lands.

It was true that there was education and health for all in Cuba...when the dollars existed to pay for drugs and specialist medical equipment. But health and education were traded against poverty and fear. It would take generations to erase those ideas and rebuild the country in a democratic, non-egalitarian but pragmatic form.

Other countries which had the same level of development as that of Cuba in 1958 had done better and without the proximity of the USA and its markets or tourism potential.

Some would argue that in Cuba there was little pollution, that life was simple, industry and mass production as known in developed nations were almost

nonexistent, as was the consumer society. Certain pretended that Cuba was an egalitarian society, but how many would exchange their recent model car, DVD, PC, beer and good food for the daily lot of a Cuban....without doubt very few!

AeroCaribbean flew to Kingston, Jamaica. There were two flights a week. From there Kavanagh had been informed he could pick up a connecting flight to George Town, Grand Cayman.

He booked a return flight for the Friday of the following week. It seemed a good idea, even if he eventually decided not to use the return ticket. The advantage of Cuba was that the international press and satellite TV were almost exclusively reserved for the upmarket tourist hotels, news from outside circulated very slowly amongst Cubans.

The arcane ups and downs of capitalism and the change in fortune of its adepts were not a priority for the Cuban authorities. The only news that seemed to excite them was that of Elian.

As a result, whoever he chose to be, Kavanagh or Ryan, he could fade into the crowd without too much concern and without taking too many complicated precautions.

How many times he could do that was not certain. But he felt that dollars would in any case smooth away the eventual difficulties. He would cross that bridge when he came to it, in the meantime a tourist visa was valid for sixty days, and he had even heard, it could be extended indefinitely by friends and dollars.

The Cayman Islands are situated 300 kilometres northwest of Jamaica and about the same distance south of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. There were three islands, the largest being Grand Cayman with the capital George Town, and two much smaller islands about 100 kilometres to the east.

Grand Cayman was a squiggly island lying in a turquoise sea, a mere 25 kilometres long with a population of only 27,000 or so inhabitants. It was an island paradise with fine white coral sandy beaches and clear waters protected by coral reefs from the ocean. Kavanagh was pleased to note that it was expensive and catered mainly for the rich, and was therefore exclusive.

No questions were asked on arrival at Owen Roberts Airport, he presented his John Ryan passport which was given a friendly but cursory examination. He had now taken on the appearance of a first class tourist. He took a taxi to the hotel which his guide book had informed him was the best on the island.

The Hyatt was located on West Bay Road on Seven Mile Beach, a district known for its nightlife. The hotel was a luxury establishment for the first class traveller, tastefully built in colonial style architecture. The hotel was almost fully booked and Kavanagh accepted, without the slightest hesitation, a three room suite on the fourth floor overlooking the sea. He handed over his Gold Card and checked in, in the name of John Ryan.

It was not unusual that the hotel was almost fully booked, given the size of the

island, and the financial and business interest of a great many of its visitors. The first class hotels had an almost year round season with the possible exception of the hot and humid summer months and even then demand could be heavy.

In the hotel lobby he noted at once that most of the guests were English or American. It would be necessary to keep his face as far away from inquisitive eyes as possible.

After settling in he decided a visit to the hotel barbers shop was on his immediate program. He joked to the young hairdresser that he was on holiday and needed a fashionable style that went with the light beard that he was growing. He asked that his hair be cropped as close as possible. In the lobby shop he then fitted himself out with a smart pair of dark glasses. Looking at himself in the hotel lift he felt very satisfied with his trendy new look, to the point he almost failed to recognise himself.

He found it somewhat amusing that he owned several companies on the island and had a fortune deposited in its banks but had never set foot in the place. His first task was to visit his lawyer, Martin Wender, who would guide him through the maze of companies and accounts that had been set up on Kavanagh's behalf, which ran from Grande Cayman, to the Bahamas, passing through St Martin and the Virgin Islands.

With the help of his guide he swotted up on what he already partially knew. Caymans were British and the crown ensured the stability and continuity of its institutions. The local money, the Cayman dollar, followed the movement of the American dollar. He had known that there were many law firms that could fix up shell companies as vehicles for his financial operations and he had used one of these firms, which is how he came to meet, be it virtually, Martin Wender.

The governor of Her Majesty, the Queen of England, had signed a treaty with the United States of America to provide mutual assistance in order to prevent crime linked financial transactions. The treaty entered into force in 1992 but had remained to a great degree ineffectual.

The treaty foresaw the exchange of information on transactions related to visible crime, such as laundering drug money, racketeering and the like. Kavanagh's investigations had indicated that most white collar crime was virtually undetectable. In any case he had not committed a crime other than provoke the ire of his investors. His companies were sound and he had not stimulated the rise or fall in the value of the shares of Swap by insider trading or in any other way.

Perhaps he had momentarily abandoned ship, but that was in the face of the storm which had arisen over minor details at the outset of his rise to riches, a storm created by the gutter press.

Business in offshore tax havens was quite legal he reasoned, after all it was no different to Foreign Sales Corporations, or FSC's for short. These were American owned companies in tax havens such as the Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda, to name a few. Those companies were used for re-exportation of goods to the final customer of the USA based parent company avoiding taxation on

profits. It was a loop hole in the US fiscal regulations that gave an economic advantage through fiscal gains to companies such as Boeing and other giants but also many less well know small and medium sized businesses.

The authorities in the Caymans pretended that it was impossible to deposit a briefcase full of greenbacks in one of their banks. Kavanagh knew that the reality was quite to the contrary. Of course officially, anonymous transactions were no longer possible, but there was no difficulty in creating the names of fictitious persons or specially created companies, there existed a whole string of law firms available for just that purpose.

Fiscal evasion was not a problem since direct taxes did not exist on the islands and of course there were no currency exchange controls, nor for that matter were there taxes on revenues or profits.

The advantage was of course, as in other tax havens, the penal code of the Caymans punished severely the betrayal of account secrets or the revelation of the identity of companies who invested in the islands. There were no political parties, unions, or welfare state.

The Cayman Islands' banks held hundreds of billions dollars in their accounts, a considerable amount for a population of 27,000 inhabitants. There were over 500 financial institutions, one for every 54 inhabitants, plus 350 insurance companies, 30,000 business companies, and over 1000 investment funds registered there, including the Ryan Investment Fund.

In addition there were the most important international law and accounting firms to serve the needs of so many wealthy customers. Many of the major international banks were content to operate through a simple letter box.

Chapter 7. Limerick Ireland

It had been almost four years since Tony Arrowsmith had first visited Shannon in the County of Limerick on the west coast of Ireland. He remembered it as though it was yesterday.

He recalled looking out of the window of the Aer Lingus 737 as it had descended towards Shannon Airport. The watery sun reflecting a silver sheen off the broad Shannon River. In the bright green fields he could make out the cows grazing and the small clusters of farm houses and barns.

The plane bounced on the patchy clouds as the motors whined and the pilot lowered the undercarriage. A few moments later they landed with a bump and the plane taxied towards what appeared to be a surprisingly big terminal building. It was just after 9.30 in the morning when he disembarked. There was a one hour time difference with France.

His first impression was the provincial air of the airport, a panel announced

Shannon Airport as the biggest duty free shop in the world, curiously another sign indicated the way to US immigration control.

Arrowsmith showed his passport and collected his bag which he had checked in at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport. He walked through the green gate towards the exit from the customs area to the arrivals meeting point. The automatic doors slide open and amongst the small waiting crowd he saw his cousin Pat Kennedy who lifted his hand in a wave, a broad smile on his face.

“Welcome to Shannon Tony! It’s nice to see over here at last,” he said in a firm voice lisping the s very slightly

“Nice to see you Pat, I’m pleased to be here!”

Pat took Tony’s bag and led him through the corridors towards the car park. The airport crowd for the most part had the slightly shabby look of country folk, many of the men had the prematurely grey hair of the Irish that Arrowsmith recognised from his mother’s family, they also seemed to be well built perhaps rather overweight.

“Sorry the weather’s not better, they say it will be fine tomorrow.”

Arrowsmith chuckled to himself, ever since he had been a kid on holiday in Ireland, he remembered his aunts telling him the weather would improve. It was a carefully concealed secret of the Irish Tourist Board that it rained two days out of three in Ireland. That was a statistical fact and that was why Ireland was so green...and damp.

Pat showed him to a top of the range black BMW, he put the bags in the boot and then opened the front passenger door for Arrowsmith. He switched on the CD player for some background music and then the air-conditioning, as if to demonstrate the cars appointments.

“So how are things then Pat?”

“Fine, everything is fine. I’ve fixed up some meetings for you with the National Investment Board.”

“Is that necessary?” said Arrowsmith a little taken aback.

“Yesh,” he replied. Arrowsmith noticed the lisp again.

“It’ll do no harm, they’re good friends of mine.”

“Okay,” Tony shrugged, as Pat said, it would not do any harm.

“What are we going to do today Pat?”

“We’ll head out to the house to drop off your bags then we’ll have some lunch.”

Kennedy’s house stood about a mile back from the Shannon, the land falling away to the river giving a magnificent view across to the low hills that spread away to the south of County Limerick.

The house was a late eighteenth century Georgian style gentleman farmer’s residence. It was a splendid house partially covered with climbing ivy. A fine gravel covered driveway led to the main door of the house, the driveway was lined with tall dark conifers that were set back from the well maintained grass borders of the lawn.

He parked the BMW at the foot of the steps leading to the main door and led Arrowsmith up, pausing and turning at the top to proudly show him the view. Away to the left in the middle distance were the ruins of what appeared to have been a fortified castle.

“What’s that?” asked Arrowsmith pointing to the ruins.

“It’s an old Norman castle, it’s supposed to be haunted,” replied Kennedy rather seriously. Arrowsmith smiled to himself the Irish were superstitious, they saw ghosts and banshees everywhere.

He opened the door into the large entrance hall and showed the way into a large lounge. There was a fire of logs and turf that burnt brightly in the carved stone fire place. The house was warm and comfortable, elegantly furnished with heavy period furniture.

“What can I get you to drink John?”

“Oh! Let me think, I’ll have a scotch and Perrier, no sorry, perhaps that should be an Irish whisky,” he said with an apologetic smile.

“No problem, have a Blackbush with Kerry spring water, that’s our Irish mineral water.”

“Fine.”

An slight elderly woman appeared at the door dressed in a blue house coat.

“John, this is Mrs Kelly, she’s our housekeeper, been with us for a long time. She’ll show you up to your room.”

Mrs Kelly smiled.

“Nice to meet you Sir, Mr Kennedy has told me a lot about you. It must be nice to be home after all those years,” she said in a soft Irish brogue.

Arrowsmith smiled, ‘home’ he thought to himself, he did not think of it as home. He remembered his parents had always called it home, even fifty years after they had left Ireland.

He had always considered Ireland with mixed feelings, it was a place where the country cousins lived, who were naive when they were not downright backward, on the other hand there were the tender memories of his grandparents who had been already very elderly when he was a child, who had loved and spoilt him in their homely way. He remembered the smell of his grandfather’s pipe tobacco, the turf burning in the fire, the steaks his grandmother had fried for him with onions and Irish potatoes she had freshly dug from her vegetable garden. He recalled the smell of the fresh morning rain and the cows, yes the smell of the cows, the taste of country butter and home-made bread.

“So, Sláinte,” said Pat lifting his glass, “That’s good health in Irish.”

Arrowsmith lifted his glass and sipped his whisky, it had a rough edge as Irish whisky always did. He stood with his back to the fire, it was nearing the end of June, but the weather was cool with a damp twinge in the air.

“Where’s Susan?” asked Arrowsmith.

“She’s in town, she’ll be home this evening,” Pat replied without any further details.

“I’ve booked a table at Brury Castle, you know the country club, for half-twelve, so when we’ve had our drink and you’ve freshened up we can be on our way over there.”

Chapter 8. A Caribbean Cruise

Errikson’s only thoughts were for Doudoune, he had enough money squirreled away to ensure them both a comfortable life for the rest of his days. He had managed to sequester over a million dollars from the crooked deals he had managed to put together for his Baltic and Russian friends.

However, it was not his plan to start a new life with Doudoune in Guadeloupe, it was far too expensive, further it was part of France, by extension part of the European Union, of which Sweden was also a member. It could become very uncomfortable for him when the Bottens Handelsbank caught up with his fraudulent transactions, as it inevitably would.

Cuba was his dream, where they could live for a fraction of the cost of that in Guadeloupe. Things were changing there; it was already ‘after Fidel’. In Cuba he could live like a king and set up his own business without too many questions being asked, he could drink Cuba Libra’s and smoke fine cigars. He even saw himself as a latter day Hemingway, cultivating a short white beard.

Marie-Jo’s father was Cuban. It was twenty-five years since he had met her mother at a Caribbean nations’ cultural exchange in Haiti. After their marriage her mother, a Guadeloupean, had lived in Cuba until her daughter, who she had always called Doudoune, was fifteen. By that time life in Cuba had become hard, very hard, with the decline of communism and the penury of just about every essential and the perpetual need for dollars to buy the vital necessities.

The situation suddenly became worse when her mother fell ill and as her health declined and she had no choice but to return Guadeloupe where she could get the right kind of treatment, she left Cuba with Doudoune leaving her husband in Havana.

They returned to the grandparents in Pointe-à-Pitre and for a time life took a turn for the better, then a little more than three years after their return Marie-Jo’s mother died. Her grandparents persuaded her to remain in Guadeloupe rather than return to her father and the uncertainties of an impoverished Cuba.

Marie-Jo grew into an attractive young woman and had no difficulty finding a job at the casino, in nearby Gosier, as a croupier, where she was expected to complete her salary with tips from the clients. Like many casinos they decorated their tables with attractive young women croupiers as a magnet for their male clients.

The problem was that working in the casino she made the wrong kind of friends,

dazzled by money she mixed with French metropolitans and foreign tourists who spent their evenings in the casino playing roulette and blackjack. Many were not only after kicks at the tables but also sought an exotic adventure with the attractive young French black girls. Marie-Jo half reluctantly indulged them in their fantasies in exchange for presents and money, enjoying the luxuries her grandparents could not afford, fashionable clothes, perfumes and jewellery.

In the tradition of many Cubans, Marie-Jo had been brought up as a devotee of the Santeros, believing in Chango and Santeria spirits. It was said back in Cuba that her paternal great-grandfather had been a babalawo, or a priest in an Abakua secret society. The Abakua societies were religions, which had their origins in the Congo, certain in Nigeria. These and others such as Regla de Ocha and Palo Monte were called Santeria.

These religions had been brought over in the ships from Africa by the slaves transported by the Spaniards to work in the sugar plantations of Cuba. The slaves continued to worship their Orishas, or gods, in the secrecy of their wretched huts whilst praying in public to the Christ in the splendour of the baroque catholic churches of their Spanish masters.

Similar such African religions had followers throughout the whole of the Caribbean and Guadeloupe was not an exception, where the descendants of the African slaves believed in everything that was of a supernatural nature and continued their ancestral rites and practices.

At the end of the twentieth century the majority of Cubans were Catholics and believed in the Virgin of Charity, but many followers of the Afro-Cuban religions were the same Catholics who had turned in desperation to the Santeros in their moments of need, in death and sickness, matters of love and marriage, money or work, in school or examinations, as well as in business and politics. It was even said that Fidel Castro regularly consulted the Santeros.

In fact many Cubans were said to believe in Santeria, Palo Monte, Abakua or Christian spirits, all at the same time.

For many babalawos, Elian a young Cuban boy shipwrecked and landed in Florida, symbolised the child who possessed a mystical power. Elian could give protection against sickness and death. Elian was the chosen one.

The saga of the shipwreck boy was of great interest to the Santeros. His survival in the sea during two days and nights was miraculous and the family drama surrounding his return to Cuba became a subject that enflamed popular Cuban passions. Marie-Jo was not an exception; she followed each turn in the legal and political drama avidly.

Elian had unleashed an epidemic of prophecies, which announced his arrival as a sign that a dramatic change in Cuba was about to happen, and many hoped the end of Castro's regime.

The Santero followers amongst exiled Cubans, said that Castro was having problems with Elegua, the leading Orisha in the African Yoruba pantheon, the one who opened and closed roads and who often appeared as a child. Others said

that child-saviours from universal chaos always arrived by the sea.

Marie-Jo believed that in any case Elian was predestined and was an omen that would transform her life for the better. The moment was propitious and she had decided to seize it before it was too late. Eriksson had told her of his decision to start a new life in Cuba the same day as Elian had been picked up by the American coast guards, which was surely a sign.

The problem was to untangle the meaning. Her Orisha had made a prophecy which told her of a new life with a new man. Was the new man Stig? Was the new life new because of the wealth he represented? Was the new life in Cuba?

The Orisha had told her to choose the right moment, to look for a sign.

She had been recruited by Courtauld as a hostess for a party organised for Eriksson twelve months earlier. It had been a great success, Eriksson had been seduced by her charms, lavishing Marie-Jo with money and gifts.

It was four months since he announced he wanted her to live with him, she agreed and they prepared their plans to settle in Cuba, they would build a fine house in Marie-Jo's name as required by Cuban law. They planned to build the house a few kilometres outside Havana, in a small town favoured by the privileged classes.

They would disembark from the Marie Galante in the George Town in the Caymans, where Eriksson planned to make transfers and withdraw money from his bank accounts, they would then take a flight to Havana. Eriksson insisted to Doudoune on the need to keep the plan their own closely guarded secret.

Their cruise to George Town was expected to take five or six days depending on whether they sailed by night or not, or if they decided to make stopovers along the route at Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic or at Castlemain's hotel in Montego Bay, Jamaica before the final run into George Town.

"What's the weather say?" asked Courtauld.

Boisnier shrugged noncommittally.

"Depends."

"Depends on what?"

"That storm over Caracas."

"It's not coming in our direction."

"Not really, it's heading west towards Central America but you can never tell, it could swing around and head north to Cuba."

"We'll not be far from shelter if it starts to look rough, don't worry, we're going to have a great few days."

The Marie Galante was about one hundred or so miles south-west of Port Rico when Boisnier informed the passengers that the weather report's latest forecast indicated that the tropical storm present to the south-east over the southern Caribbean was veering westward in their direction, he told them that according to his estimations they had a good twenty four hour advance which gave a decent margin of safety.

He nevertheless quietly informed Castlemain, as the yacht's owner, of the two

possibilities open to them. The first was to run ahead of the storm directly to George Town, it would not be too difficult as there was a good wind. The second was to head to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic to hold up until the storm had passed, this solution would lose them at least two days.

Castlemain did not like the second solution suggesting that San Juan was nearer. He was surprised by Boisnier's point blank refusal, his excuse was the difficulty with the US Customs. He nevertheless accepted Boisnier's proposal, counting on his experience, to head westwards in the direction of Santo Domingo, he figured it would save them time. Not only was Boisnier relieved at the decision, considering his illicit cargo, but so were Doudoune and Erikkson, who unknown to the others did not very relish the idea of landing on US territory. They were in the majority more concerned to press ahead and settle the business that awaited them in George Town.

That did not prevent Doudoune from being very frightened by the thought of being at sea in the storm, not only was she was superstitious, seeing a bad omen in the storm that seemed to be pursuing them, but she was also afraid of the sea, and with good reason, she like all other inhabitants of the Caribbean islands knew the terrible damage a tropical storm could wreak.

They felt the heavy swell of the sea under the yacht, a forewarning of the coming change in the weather, and decided to retire to their comfortable cabin, leaving the questions of navigation to the seamen. Erikkson tried to calm Doudoune, but his efforts at consolation were of little success, finally he persuaded her to take a light sedative, after which she slipped into an uneasy sleep whilst he turned to the bottle of Absolute Vodka that he had in reserve in the cabin's bar.

Chapter 9. Pat Kennedy

Pat Kennedy had invited Tony Arrowsmith over to Ireland, to visit the old country, as he had put it. It had been nearing Easter when he had decided to pass through Paris for the holiday weekend returning from one of his frequent trips to Amsterdam. His wife Susan had planned to spend the holy weekend with the Sisters of Mercy in a convent at Clonmel, leaving Pat to fend for himself.

Out of the blue Pat had called Tony, who figured that he must have got his number from one of the family in London, since Arrowsmith had been listed ex-directory ever since he had moved to Paris from London.

Kennedy had never visited France before having given it a wide berth; it was not that he was unattracted to the country, but more the fact that he was afraid of the legendary difficulties that foreigners encountered not being able to speak the language.

Pat Kennedy's uncle, Thomas Arrowsmith, had boasted in London of his son Tony who had built up a successful business in Paris as a consultant and of his extensive travels overseas. Armed with that information and a telephone number, Pat had checked into the luxury Crillon Hotel on Place de la Concorde in Paris after being severely overcharged by a Parisian taxi driver, who knew a sucker when he saw one.

It had been at least twenty years since Tony Arrowsmith had last met Pat, who must have been ten or eleven years old at the time. Pat had been an only child held on a tight rein by his mother, who was determined he would be somebody in life, whether he liked it or not. He had been put through a boarding school run by the Christian Brothers who had a reputation for discipline and severity. He then went on to study law at Trinity College, Dublin.

In that sense his parents had been successful. Pat Kennedy's hard work driven by the fear of his parents had resulted in a first class honours degree. He then spent three years as an articled clerk with an old and prominent Dublin law firm specialised in company litigation and taxation.

They were associated with a Bostonian firm, where Kennedy spent another year after having completed his articles. Seven years later Kennedy became a junior partner in the Dublin firm and set up a branch of the practice in Limerick City, where the business opportunities were steadily growing with the foreign companies, which were encouraged to invest in setting up operations in the region. The incentives were part of a promotional scheme run by one of the government-sponsored organisations created for that purpose, the National Investment Board. Three years later he was rewarded and made a full partner of the firm.

Arrowsmith had invited Kennedy to dinner in Paris; he could not have refused, after all Kennedy was his cousin. He was curious to see how he had turned out, having heard of his achievements, his rise to partnership in the law firm.

They had dined at Chez Pierre in the Latin Quarter, a small expensive restaurant, frequented mostly by Parisians, often with their overseas visitors, but also a sprinkling of up-market tourists. It had a certain fifties air about it, the waiters in white aprons over black trousers with waistcoats and bow ties. The food was excellent, traditional French cuisine, which had the advantage of pleasing the visitors and their French hosts alike.

They had exchanged family news and childhood memories. Arrowsmith was ten years older than Kennedy and could with honesty to himself only vaguely remember him as a spoilt kid, whom his brother had slyly thumped on more than couple of occasions.

"You know Tony, Shannon has become one of the main centres of attraction for foreign investment in Ireland," Kennedy told him enthusiastically.

"Really," replied Arrowsmith. It was strictly speaking of no great interest to him. He considered Irish business at best as thoroughbred horses and at the worst provincial grain merchants shouting over large glasses of Guinness in country pubs on market days. But Kennedy was insistent he was a born salesman, his enthusiasm

bubbled over and he was either too thick skinned or plain dumb not to see Arrowsmith's indifference, who listened in polite amusement to the stories to pass the evening.

"You know Tony the NIB, that's the National Investment Board, offers incredible financial assistance to attract new businesses into the country."

"Is that so."

"Yesh, they give grants of up to 100% in certain cases."

"100%!" exclaimed Arrowsmith with genuine surprise.

"Yesh, 100% plus the building and land."

"Plus the building and land!" said Arrowsmith in mock astonishment, realising the absurdity of Kennedy's story.

"That's right," replied Kennedy with a look of naive surprise at the idea that Arrowsmith could think that it was anything else but the truth.

"That's quite extraordinary," Arrowsmith replied absently as he looked at his Sole Meunière with relish, it was a welcome diversion from Kennedy's hard sell. Kennedy finally getting the message changed the subject.

"So how's your business Tony, I've heard you've been successful."

"Well modestly so, you know steady, I suppose I can say that I'm happy, content, it gives me a decent living."

"Where's your office."

"Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, you know just off the Champs Elysee."

"Sounds nice."

"Yes it's not bad."

"I believe you're a consultant."

"Yes that's right, I'm an industrial consultant."

"That's interesting, what kind of industry?"

"Oh, a little bit of everything, mostly construction industry, mainly from South East Asia, South America. I advise companies who want to set up in those countries, or bid for major projects anything from bridges to hotels."

"You mean European firms who want to get out there."

"That's right."

"It sounds interesting."

"What about you Pat, I understand you haven't been idle."

"Well it's a little staid compared to your business, you know company litigation and taxation. The only interesting point is that you could say I'm broadening out, attracting foreign investment into Shannon."

Pat enthusiastically invited Arrowsmith to Limerick to revisit the old country and meet the family again, take a short holiday. In spite of Kennedy's insistence on business the idea appealed to Arrowsmith. Pat could show him around in style. He was drawn by his childhood memories and curious to see if anything remained of them.

It would certainly not be a business trip; in any case the idea of expanding his

business was furthest from his preoccupations. The Swiss trust that he had set up functioned perfectly, there was no reason to make life complicated by creating new work and obligations.

Pat managed to enjoy his dinner, he felt that he had convinced his cousin, Tony, to pay him a visit, in the meantime the atmosphere of Paris excited him and he decided to get to know a little more about France.

In spite of his success he had never really managed to get away from Ireland and its stifling provincial atmosphere, his only serious sojourn abroad had been in Boston, where he had been laughed at for his Irish accent and his unworldliness.

It had only been recently in his dealings with continental businesses that he had developed a taste for foreign travel and had started to spread his wings. He was however handicapped by his lack of languages and experience outside of his narrow professional world.

Pat was a fish in an uncomfortably small pond; he desperately wanted to become bigger fish. He was driven by a force that he did not understand, in fact he did not even realise it, let alone understand it. It had been drummed into him as a child to constantly seek to better himself, in his work, in his relations with friends and acquaintances, even his girl friends, and the need to push ahead had become ingrained into his very being.

His mother had closely supervised his meetings with the opposite sex, seeking a suitable match. She had approved his meeting with Susan Butler, the daughter of a wealthy landowner and gentleman farmer, an old Anglo-Irish family. It was an ideal match, a young and successful lawyer and the daughter of a wealthy family, the local society event of the season.

Regretfully after five years of marriage there were no children...a tragedy for a good catholic Irish family. The women of the family prayed for them and the men bowed their heads in embarrassment, hinting to Pat to get on with it, with the crude analogies worthy of farm hands. Soon there were whispers and gradually the young couple drew apart pursuing their own individual interests to compensate for the family life that their large house lacked.

Kennedy's business took him to Amsterdam for a Dutch electronics firm in difficulties with an assemble plant in Shannon. There he discovered the red light district and after studying it at a distance he looked a little closer and discovered its illicit pleasure and a world he had never suspected existed.

Pat was attracted like a moth to the flame and on every possible occasion found a suitable excuse to visit his Dutch clients in Amsterdam. His new secret life excited him and he decided to explore further afield, Hamburg and Frankfurt, he had no great problem finding his way around, everybody spoke English.

He was naturally a very talkative person striking up conversation with other travellers he met, almost anywhere, in planes, in hotel bars and in exhibitions and conferences, which he discovered were a mine for making new acquaintances. He experimented his ideas by describing the attractive conditions offered by the NIB, whose role was to develop industry and international services in the country that

then desperately needed jobs and investment.

He was persuasive and actually succeeded in bringing investors to Shannon. However, the problem was that they did not need him except for his services as legal counsel, and that aspect did not satisfy his craving to get more involved, he wanted to go further and he was frustrated in his efforts and through his lack of success.

Pat was not really a very imaginative person beyond his own limited sphere of experience, though he was exceptionally thick skinned and persistent, and not easily discouraged from believing that a golden opportunity was almost certainly waiting around the next corner. He had an out of the ordinary tenacity and followed up every real or imagined prospect until it was sucked dry of any potential.

Chapter 10. Free Money

The country club was set in a magnificent park, the club house surrounded by finely trimmed lawns and huge old trees. It had been the residence of an Anglo-Irish titled family for two centuries until it had been sold off by their descendants for the comforts and amenities of Kensington, by a generation whose fortunes were slowly declining and who had sought an escape from the isolation of provincial Ireland. The estate had been transformed into a country club hotel for the upper class county people and wealthy visiting Americans searching for their roots.

Kennedy parked his car near the ornamental fountain and they walked the last fifty yards or so to the reception, admiring the shrubs in full blossom.

“Good morning Mr Kennedy, Sir,” said the doorman lifting his peaked hat, “and how are you today?”

“Hello there Tom, fine and you?”

They walked to the bar where three or four of the regulars nodded to him.

“Fine day Pat,” one of them said through his tobacco stained teeth that clenched a briar pipe.

“Meet Tony Arrowsmith, over from Paris for a few days.”

“Nice to meet you Tony, welcome to Limerick.”

Arrowsmith returned the greeting and they walked over to a table and settled themselves into a couple of heavy leather armchairs. The room had a high carved ceiling, the walls were hung with old oil paintings in heavy gilt frames of long gone country gentlemen, a clock chimed the quarter. There was an air of timelessness, of a life style that had barely moved in more than half a century.

Arrowsmith admired the landscaped gardens from the window, above the sky was still very patchy, the clouds moved quickly as if to escape from the dark shadows

of the showers that he could see slanting down a few miles away over the green hills.

"I asked John Mulligan to join us for a drink," said Kennedy.

"Oh!"

"Yes, he's with the National Investment Board," he replied innocently.

"He's a friend of yours?"

"Yes, we went to the same school together in Limerick City, the Christian Brothers' school."

"I suppose everybody knows everybody here."

"You could say that."

"What'll you have Tony?"

"I'll stick with the whisky."

"Look here's John," said Kennedy rising from his armchair as he saw Mulligan enter with the doorman who pointed him in their direction.

Mulligan looked about forty, perhaps a bit younger thought Arrowsmith remembering he had been at school together with Pat. His hair had a boyish cut and his face was open, maybe a little serious.

"Hallo there John, let me introduce you to Tony Arrowsmith."

"Nice to met you Sir," he replied with a friendly but somewhat stiff professional smile.

He sat down and Kennedy made a sign to the barman and ordered the drinks.

"So you're over for a few days then," said Mulligan with an inquiring smile.

"That's right, call me Tony. Pat told me a lot of nice things about Limerick and convinced me to come and taste the good life."

"It's your first time in Limerick?"

"Yes, my mother's side of the family is from Dublin, well, further south, Kilkenny to be exact." Arrowsmith informed him, not to knowledgeable on the details of Irish geography.

"Nice part of the country."

The chatted exchanging background information sipping their drinks while Pat sat back in self satisfaction pleased to let them get to know each other.

"What are your plans for the next few days then Tony?"

"Well Pat's looking after the organisation I'm just going to sit back and enjoy myself," Arrowsmith replied with a smile.

"Well if you're free tomorrow evening we're organising an evening at Bunratty Castle for some of our overseas visitors, it's a mediaeval banquet, why don't you come along?" he said looking inquiringly from Arrowsmith to Kennedy as if trying to seek his approval.

"It's up to you Tony," said Kennedy.

"Why not, it sounds different," replied Arrowsmith.

"That's excellent," said Mulligan, seemingly relieved. "I'll add you both to the list...what about Susan Pat?"

"She's away for the weekend, the retreat you know, Sisters of Mercy."

Kennedy giving a sign, stood up and led them to the restaurant. It was furnished with dark traditional furniture, on the walls were hunting trophies, the heads of long dead deer and fox amongst crossed swords and shields.

The lunch was served from a copper carver, a side of roast beef, by an elderly waiter as the maitre d'hôte fussed around whispering recommendations and advice in his soft Irish brogue. The beef was excellent perhaps a trifle well done to Arrowsmith's taste. Kennedy chose the wine, to be certain he selected a Bordeaux Grande Cru, one of the most expensive on the list - at the price it could not be bad. Arrowsmith complemented him on his choice and his club, which was assuredly in the style of the well to do Irish gentry.

Arrowsmith could not help comparing the comfort of the country club to the drab poverty that he had remarked passing through the down town areas of Limerick City and its main street. The town bore the hallmarks of poverty, the greasy chip cafes, the young people shivering in their cheap imitations of fashionable gear in the chilly damp wind that swept though the town, the miserable pubs and betting shops and the litter blown in the shabby side streets.

Mulligan bid them good day after the lunch, returning to his office at the National Investment Board. They had agreed to meet him at Durty Nellies nearby Bunratty Castle the following evening at seven.

Pat Kennedy then drove Arrowsmith into town for a visit to his offices that were located at the top end of O'Connell Street. It was the old upper class residential quarter of Limerick City; the houses were three story Georgian style town houses. From the brass nameplates on the doors Arrowsmith saw that most of the houses were the offices of either law or accounting practices. It was surprising he thought, as Kennedy looked for a parking spot, that such a small town could provide a living for so many professional people.

Parking was in short supply and finally Kennedy dropped the car in a back street near the main shopping area in a dilapidated garage that rented parking spaces by the hour. They walked the three or four blocks back to the office.

In spite of the much talked about economic growth of the country, Arrowsmith's first impressions were confirmed by the shabbiness of the people they passed in the streets, young mothers with snotty young children, teenagers dressed only in jeans and thin tee shirts in spite of the cool sixteen degrees. The shop windows displayed cheap goods and were decorated without taste, it was a far cry from the better class high streets of England, not to speak of the smart prosperity of similar sized towns on the continent.

He was surprised by the number of buildings abandoned or derelict, it was a contrast to the comfortable family homes he had passed on the outskirts of the city, as though Limerick was suffering from the same disease of inner cities of the UK such as Liverpool or Glasgow. Three years previously he had remarked the same phenomena during a short trip to Dublin.

There was more than a fair share of get-rich-quick high street businesses. Mobile telephones agencies, Internet and micro-computer shops, satellite TV dish

specialists, photocopy and reproduction equipment outlets, a strange contrast to the run down appearance of the surroundings, much more than the needy city could absorb, most of the businesses were certainly destined to an untimely end.

They arrived at number 43, George Street, it had a prosperous appearance, the door was in a smooth ivy green lacquer with a polished period brass doorknob and letterbox. Kennedy rang the bell and a voice replied from the interphone.

“Good afternoon can I help you?”

“It’s Pat with Mr Arrowsmith,” he alerted them. There was an electric buzz and he pushed the door open. They entered into a well-lit hallway, the walls were lined with polished wood panelling and hung with framed engravings that showed scenes of nineteenth century Limerick.

Kennedy opened a door to the right where a secretary-receptionist sat in a stylish office that blended the modern with the old.

“Hello Mary, this is Mr Arrowsmith.”

“Nice to met you Mr Arrowsmith,” Mary replied giving an immediate impression of efficiency and organisation, though Arrowsmith saw that she blushed very slightly.

“Anything special?”

“No, the post is on your desk and I’ve given the urgent business to Raymond,” she replied.

He then showed Arrowsmith to the other side of the hallway to a comfortably furnished waiting room. He was getting a tour of the premises. Kennedy then pointed to the stairway.

“My office is on the first floor,” he said leading the way.

There was an antechamber that led to the double doors of Kennedy’s office; he opened them with a flourish.

“The inner sanctum!” he laughed.

The office was conceived to impress or intimidate Kennedy’s visitors. A hand tooled leather-covered bureau, Chesterfield armchairs and the walls lined with bookcases, filled with perfectly aligned volumes of legal and fiscal works. Arrowsmith suspected it had been designed on a model copied from a Perry Mason style television series.

On his bureau there were the usual business souvenirs; an eagle in solid silver in a petrified swoop stood on one corner, a gold plated globe on the opposite corner. In the centre placed before a heavy rectangular onyx penholder lay a leather bound document file. It was obvious that Kennedy ran a tight office; everything was in its place, just right.

“Sit down Tony,” he said smiling with self-satisfaction and in anticipation of the complement that he expected.

“Very impressive office Pat,” Arrowsmith said not wishing to disappoint him.

“Thank you, I’ll show you the rest later, upstairs, where the people do all the work,” he said with a slightly embarrassed smile.

He flipped open the cover of the document file assuming an air of concentrated

importance.

“Excuse me a moment Tony, I’ll just take a glance at my correspondence.”

Arrowsmith nodded and looked around as Kennedy went through his papers. It was evident that he had a good practice, he was making money, everything seemed to be new or very near it, the wall panels, the drapes, the wiring to his telephone and personal computer equipment, the carpets, not a detail was out of place.

Kennedy closed the file and looked up smiling.

“Paddy O’Brien has invited us to his place for drinks tonight.”

Arrowsmith smiled, he did not know who O’Brien was, but Pat would unfortunately take care of that question.

“He’s the regional director of the Anglo-Irish Union Bank,” he announced with a self-satisfied grin.

“Is he!”

“Yesh, the Irish Union is the second biggest bank in Ireland,” he explained dropping the sensitive Anglo that had been added after the merger with a British group. “Paddy’s an important man around these parts, and they’re the leaders in this region of the country.”

Arrowsmith smiled wanfully, “That’s very interesting.”

On the other two floors of the building there were offices with clerks and legal secretaries, the style simple but modern with the same impeccable attention to detail. Arrowsmith had counted eleven persons including Kennedy. He calculated at a guess that the practice generated a good few hundred thousand pounds a year in fees. He must have had some very decent accounts to justify such operating expenses.

“Business must be looking up Pat?”

“We can’t complain,” he said a little smugly

“What kind of clientele do you have?”

“Well there’s a lot of small and medium clients, you know farmers and small businesses.”

Arrowsmith nodded.

“Then there’s the bigger accounts, the foreign firms on the industrial estates, the existing companies and the new ones just setting up,” he paused, “there’s also those closing down and going home...not so many recently.”

“It’s true then, business in general is looking good.”

“Well I pleased to say it’s really looking up for the country at the moment compared to a few years back, it’s the Irish tiger, but as I said I can’t complain, whether they’re setting up or closing down I do all right,” he shrugged and then gave a loud laugh.

There was then a silence, as the two seemed to reflect to themselves for a moment.

“I’m also handling a number of litigations for the Aviation Leasing Group, nice business, complicated, but well paid. Look don’t let’s worry about business for the moment, we’ll take a walk and I’ll show you some of the town.”

It was the river that Arrowsmith liked, it reminded him of Kilkenny where he had spent many childhood holidays with his grandparents. The waters were clear and fast flowing, he could see the green water plants that waved and swirled in the eddies and the dark forms of river trout weaving against the light coloured gravel of the river bed. There was no pollution in the West of Ireland, industry had never taken root, it was too far from the main stream of historical British industry, the green island had lacked the natural resources, no coal, no iron, just the almost mythical silver mines.

As he stared into the waters his thoughts wandered, for him the Irish were an almost tragic race of people who had dreamed of greatness in the past, but had been destined to live their lives in the misery of the poor farms and villages, their hopes oppressed by history. The only other alternative had been to escape, across the water, whatever the direction. The ‘Pat Kennedy’s’ of Ireland still dreamed of a great nation in the traditions of Irish mythology, others like the Mulligans got on with the business at hand.

“Let’s be getting along,” said Kennedy. Arrowsmith snapped out of his daydream and they walked back to the garage to pick up the car.

As expected Kennedy filled him in on Paddy O’Brien and the bank as they set out in the direction of O’Brien’s place near Killaloe on Lough Derg. He explained the Irish Union Bank was participating in a banking pool, which was financing a tourist complex at Montego Bay in Jamaica.

The bank’s Chairman was interested in investing in up-market hotel development in the Caribbean where he saw a very high growth potential. He was looking into the possibility of setting up a services company in Shannon as a vehicle.

“His name’s David Castlemain, we think it might be interesting for you to meet him.”

Arrowsmith listened patiently. It was obvious that Kennedy was not going to let him go without embarking him on one of his projects.

“Don’t let on that I have said anything to you, we don’t want to upset the apple tart, just listen to Paddy.”

Kennedy had a stock of proverbs and metaphors, which he regularly mixed with amusing variety.

O’Brien’s place was a large modern single story house in an upper executive village fifteen miles from the city centre. It stood on a small rise and its panoramic windows faced to the south.

It was just after six thirty when they arrived, the sun had finally made its appearance and the last of the clouds formed a silver grey band over the hills to the east.

Kennedy parked the car in front of the double garage and as he stepped out a short fair-haired man of about forty-five opened the house door.

“Hello there Pat, nice evening.”

“To be sure it is Paddy.”

“You must be John Arrowsmith, welcome to Limerick.”

“Thank you, nice to meet you.”

Paddy O’Brien was still in his office suit and tie, he looked pale as he took out a packet of Gold Flake pulling out a cigarette with his nicotine stained fingers and with an automatic gesture flicked out his lighter and lit up. Arrowsmith had observed that people still smoked untipped cigarettes, it was old fashioned as were the brands they smoked, the names of which had disappeared from the market in England many years before.

He led them into the house and showed them into the living room, the furniture was modern without a great deal of taste giving a rather cold appearance to the room, it was compensated by the fine view through the panoramic window across Lough Derg.

“What can I offer you lads to drink then?” he said going to a glass bar in one corner of the living room.

He poured their drinks and they stood facing the view that looked out towards the Lough, its waters glistening under the clear sunlight.

“Nice place you’ve got here Paddy, splendid view,” said Arrowsmith complementing his host, as so many others had done before him in a ritual that had become part of the preamble of every new comer’s visit to the O’Brien’s.

“I hear from Pat that you’re from Paris yourself, how do you like over there.”

“Fine, I’m used to it after all these years.”

“I understand you have a business over there?”

“That’s right, small, but that’s the way I like it.”

“Working with the Japs.”

“Well, not exactly, but I suppose you can say that I do quite a bit with Asia, but I also work in other places like South America.”

“Those are the places today, we’ve considered business opportunities in the Caribbean, but I suppose we’re basically a conservative lot so we’ve concentrated our efforts on Europe and the UK, now that we’ve merged with the British group, we’ve got a whole network of branches over there now.”

“Is that so,” said Arrowsmith, listening politely.

“Yes, in the past we were in traditional over the counter banking for our customers, mostly personal accounts and small businesses, and also home loans back here. But with the new policies developed by our Chairman we’ve now become a little more adventurous,” he winked and smiled to indicate an understatement.

“We’ve decided to spread our wings and are going a little further afield, right now we’re looking at some opportunities in the West Indies, but I won’t go into detail on that,” he winked again, putting his finger on his lips in a sign of secrecy.

“What I want to tell you is that we’ve done a lot financing for the setting up of new firms in the Shannon area for example.”

“I see.”

“Yes, you know the NIB, that’s the National Investment Board, gives very substantial assistance to new firms investing here, especially if they fall in the priority categories, such as high tech manufacturing and business services.”

“Do they!” he replied feigning interest.

“Yes, there are grants of up to one hundred percent.”

“One hundred percent!” Arrowsmith was listening to a replay of Kennedy’s story in Paris.

“Sure and we advance the loans against Investment Board approved projects, that enables the investors to acquire buildings and equipment as well as pay salaries.”

“Sounds really very interesting.” Arrowsmith sensed the first flicker of interest, though it sounded too Irish to be true.

“Well we’re not here to talk shop, tell you what John, why don’t you drop by at the bank tomorrow, we can have lunch together if you’re free.”

“It sounds fine with me.”

They half-changed the subject chatting about the economy and then turned to farming and horses as O’Brien’s wife and their two teenage children joined them. O’Brien like many people in his position owned a small farm where the children kept ponies.

It had been a full day and returning to the Kennedy’s they found his wife Susan in the kitchen helping Mrs Ryan with the dinner.

“Well hello John, it’s so nice to met you, Pat’s talked so much about you, you must be tired and hungry after such a long day.” She scolded Pat giving him a wicked but only half playful look.

“Why didn’t you call me and let me know you were on the way?”

The table was laid out in style with cut glass and silver tableware under a sparkling crystal chandelier that hung from the high ceiling in the dinning room. Arrowsmith had difficulties in getting the enormous meal down and his genuine compliments on Susan’s splendid dinner only resulted in his plate being filled again. He turned into bed that evening having eaten and drunk more than he could remember in a very long time.

The following morning he woke at nine and took a late breakfast with the Kennedy’s before the three left, first dropping Susan off at her parents stud farm to the west of Limerick City, where they raised yearlings for the Dublin horse show. After visiting the farm the two men left for the City and their appointment with O’Brien.

They lunched at the George Hotel on O’Connell Street. It was an old hotel in need of renovation with an unremarkable restaurant frequented by a very mixed bag of customers, out of towners and local businessmen with the odd American tourist.

“Well John, I said we’d leave business until today,” said O’Brien with a forced smile.

“No problem.”

“Perhaps you recall last night I mentioned we were considering looking at an investment further afield, well it’s more than just an idea,” he paused and joined his hands together on the table as if in prayer then leaning forward he continued in a lower tone, “our Chairman has visited Cuba, you know on his last trip to Jamaica, it’s just an hour’s flight or so away I’m told.”

Arrowsmith nodded waiting for him to continue.

“Now then, I believe this is a very nice place, not in my style mind you, I’m rather a stay at home type of fellow, a holiday on the Lough with the family is my cup of tea. Well our chairman David Castlemain, stayed at a place called Playa Esmeralda, near Holguin, if I’ve got the names right,” he said mashing the words, “one of his friends there is very big in tourist development, a friend of Castro’s, so I believe. This friend is looking at a new tourist complex. Now David Castlemain needs a consultant to advise him, somebody who speaks Spanish and who is familiar that part of the world. To cut a long story short, after speaking together with Pat, we thought that maybe you could help us.”

Arrowsmith did not know how to react. It was certainly true that he knew the Caribbean fairly well, though not especially Cuba. His Spanish was passable and though it would not qualify him for a literary prize it was more than adequate for business. However, he was not really interested in that kind of line, he was familiar the hotel construction industry, but a tourist complex in Cuba with an Irish investor would be a strange kind of mix to get involved with.

He had learnt the hard way to be cautious in business, he was financially well off and life was easy with very few problems, he had no need for unnecessary complications, on the other hand he had felt an itch, and he was not sure if it wasn’t from the need to do something more exciting in his easy going life.

He was a long way from thinking of pulling out of his business activities, which were more a pleasurable way of keeping himself occupied than a necessity. The snag was that he was not the kind of person content to go plodding on, who would have been happy to let the next twenty years slip away watching life drift by in monotonous comfort. It was probably for that same reason he had agreed to visit Ireland, knowing deep down that Kennedy was cooking up ideas other than a nostalgic trip to the old country.

“What do you have in mind then Paddy, I mean how could I help?”

“That’s the boy Tony,” said O’Brien sensing he had won him over. “What we’ll do is this, let me see...when are you going back now, well I’ll try and fix up a meeting with David in Dublin, what about Thursday, how does that suit you?”

“Suits me fine.”

Bunratty Castle, built in 1425, overlooked the Shannon River in County Clare, just a few miles outside of Limerick City. It was authentically restored in 1954 and over the years the Irish Folk Park, a re-creation of 19th century Ireland, was added onto the twenty-six acre site. The park included a village street, a church,

farmhouses, a watermill and a blacksmith's forge.

They met at Durty Nellies, a strange old pub that stood outside of the Castle gates. Arrowsmith took the opportunity to knock back a couple of good Bushmill whiskies to shake off the damp cold that hung in the air.

Kennedy gave Tony Arrowsmith the full tour, not missing out the least feature of the Castle, and apart for the fine rain there was no doubt that it was a first class tourist attraction, Arrowsmith thought in an effort to convince himself.

Mulligan enthusiastically described the other attractions, in the great barn on the castle grounds Arrowsmith could see a show with an Irish Ceili band and step dancers, then he could visit 19th century Ireland completing the tour to the pubs, craft centres, souvenir shops and restaurants that surrounded the castle. In short it was the full mythical version of an Irish theme park designed to amuse tourists from Boston and beyond.

Medieval banquets were held for visitors in the Castle every night where traditional dinner was served with honeyed mead. That evening it was reserved for the Investment Board guests who were installed at long tables and who noisily knocked back the mead to the music of the harp and fiddle that accompanied a group of pretty young singers dressed in traditional Irish costumes. The girls struggled through their folk songs trying to make themselves heard through the din and bawdy remarks.

By the time they had finished the dinner the noise, the mead and tobacco smoke were starting to have their effects. A dull throbbing was developing in Arrowsmith's head. He was worn out by the forced gaiety, the music, and not least the endless hard sell of Mulligan with Kennedy's never ending dialogue on Irish folklore.

Arrowsmith finally fell into his bed thoroughly greened off, believing he had seen enough of Ireland for a long time to come.

Chapter 11. David Castlemain

Kennedy's secretary had booked him into the Shelbourne Hotel facing St Stephens Green in Dublin. It was slightly run down in a kind of worn out way, with Victorian comforts, but it was practical and he had no desire to tempt fate at the Conrad.

It was an easy walk down Grafton Street to the bank, he checked his watch, it was eleven forty five, he took his time as there was no hurry, the weather was fine and warm for the first time since he had stepped off the plane in Shannon; the summer had finally seemed to have arrived in Ireland.

Castlemain's office was at the bank's headquarters, an imposing modern building with a polished granite facade and smoked glass windows, facing Trinity College

on College Green. It was a contrast to the grim dilapidated nearby back streets. His immediate thoughts, as he admired the building, were that they must be making money, but on second thoughts, he considered the possibility that they had loaned themselves their customers deposits.

He was carefully examined by the receptionist, who after checking with the chairman's personal assistant directed him to the eighth floor. He was met as he stepped out of the lift and guided to Castlemain's office.

"Hello Mr Arrowsmith, how nice to meet you."

Castlemain was quite unlike he had expected, he looked younger than his age, tall and well built, but very slightly stooped and a little bookish looking, at a guess in his mid-fifties. His face was lightly tanned and he wore a soft friendly smile.

"Please sit down Mr Arrowsmith, you wouldn't mind if I called you Tony," Arrowsmith nodded his agreement, "good, what would you like tea or coffee?"

He wore a dark blue pin striped suit and a regimental or college tie. He leaned back in his chair relaxed, he was the result of good breeding and education, he spoke with a touch of an English public school accent. In front of him lay just a single folder which his middle-aged secretary took as she left the office.

"Well are you enjoying your stay in Ireland?"

"Fine, makes a nice change from Paris," said Arrowsmith politely.

"A little bit quiet I would imagine," he smiled. There was a pause, "So you met Paddy?"

"Yes, a nice chap, we had a long talk together."

"Good, I understand he outlined the NIB's programme for attracting international services and industries to Ireland."

"That's correct."

"As you know then Tony, over the years we have supported the NIB's programme with banking facilities for investors, with of course our interests always in mind, we're a private bank, we don't have any special cause other than the well being of our shareholders," he smiled. "That in mind we do believe there is a big potential here in Ireland for investors, however, our problem is not money but having the right people!"

He looked like he believed what he said, it was approximately the same line that Arrowsmith had heard over the previous few days in Limerick, it was company talk, as if Ireland was one big company and they were all toeing the company line with minor variations.

"My good friend Andrew Doyle, the Minister of Labour, put it nicely the other day, he said, 'it's like horses, when you find a winner, then put your money on it'."

Arrowsmith smiled and nodded, feigning interest, in a couple of hours or so he would be on his way back to Paris and away from the amusing interlude in the make believe world of shamrock and grand ideas.

"According to what I've heard Tony you're one of those people who have the knowledge and experience that is needed for the kind of business we are examining in Cuba." He flattered Arrowsmith.

“As I said we’re prepared to back the kind of people who have talent.”

Arrowsmith was unimpressed he had no need for backing and at his age he needed no Boy Scout pep talks.

“Listen Tony, why don’t you consider setting up a project development company in your field over here in Ireland?”

“I’ll think about it David, it sounds interesting,” said Arrowsmith whilst thinking to himself almost the opposite.

“Good let’s have some lunch then.”

They walked up to the Dail, the seat of the Irish parliament, an unimposing building. The sky had clouded over and it looked like they might have a shower. The weather changed so dam quick it was unbelievable, he thought to himself. They turned into a smart looking side street where Castlemain led Arrowsmith into the Irish Pen Club.

It was evident that Castlemain was a much-considered regular; they were shown to a discrete corner table with great fuss and deference. The style reminded Arrowsmith of an updated Sherlock Holmes setting, less cluttered and brighter, but nevertheless very Pen Club.

Chapter 12. An Interview

It was a fairly conventional type of affair, the crowd dressed in their Sunday best, drinks and extravagant displays of food. Whilst the guests attacked the buffet, pretty uniformed hostesses handed out brochures and information for travel agents and tour operators.

Castlemain made his speech, cameras flashed and the local TV recorded the event for the evening news.

He replied, like the professional that he was, to the questions at the press conference, he was knowledgeable and charming, the perfect Irish gentleman.

The two reporters then proceeded to their programmed interview for the BCN Quarterly Review in a small meeting room away from the noisy inauguration. The planned questions and answers concerned the club hotel complex, the BCN and Castlemain’s role in the project as president of the Irish Union Bank.

“Mr Castlemain, can you tell us something about Tom Kavanagh?” asked Ennis changing the subject.

“I thought we were here to talk about the new club hotel!” smiled Castlemain without the least sign of surprise or irritation at the question.

“Yes, but Kavanagh is news, and I think your bank is one of his main investors!” Ennis pressed on.

“You’re right John!” he replied with friendly familiarity. “Let’s take a drink in my suite a little later if that’s alright with you, we would be much more

comfortable.” After a slight pause he then added as an after thought. “I’d also like to invite you to visit Ciudad Cayo Saetia whilst you’re in Cuba, if you have time that is....”

Ennis shrugged his shoulder indifferently.

“What time, let’s say about seven?”

“Fine.”

Paul took a few last shots of the personalities with Castlemain and then they left him with the guests, who apart from the bit players were mostly local politicians and one or two showbiz celebrities invited for the occasion.

The journalists were a little puzzled as to the invitation to visit Ciudad-Cayo-something in Cuba. The impression that Castlemain had left was that above all other things he was a member of that race of persons who seemed to be born to govern or run banks and the like. Whatever happened in life it was certain that he would never be left wanting or carrying the can.

“Hello there, come in. I hope you are enjoying yourselves. If you need anything let me know and I’ll ask the manager to attend to it at once.”

Castlemain was staying in the hotel’s most expensive suite, a magnificent eighth floor penthouse apartment, at least one hundred and fifty square metres plus a huge terrace planted with flowering shrubs and potted palms, and more surprisingly a small but exclusive swimming pool. The suite looked out over the hotel gardens with a splendid view of Montego Bay, well above the ordinary tourists and far from the impoverished Jamaican crowds.

Ennis and Carvin were suitably impressed, even a little overawed, their elan if not broken was seriously deflated.

He invited them onto the terrace, night was falling and they could see the lights across the bay. It was enchanting, the temperature had fallen a little giving a gentle but silky warm early evening breeze.

“What can I offer you to drink,” he said making a sign. A waiter appeared.

“A local cocktail or something more conventional, Champagne for example?”

“I’ll have a glass of Champagne,” said Carvin, “it’ll make a change from the rum.”

“Fine. Champagne for everybody,” he said turning to the waiter whilst raising his eyebrows for approval from Ennis, who nodded in agreement.

“So how did the day go, did you get what you needed?”

“Everything was fine, no problem. A first class inauguration.”

“Excellent. Are you both free next week?”

“Well....”

“I mean you are returning to Cuba?” he lifted his head in question.

“Yes.”

“Good, then I propose you visit something very special, Ciudad Cayo Saetia.”

He was clearly trying to charm them so as to defuse the question he knew was coming.

“That’s very kind of you. There is just one small point however.”

“Yes, anything I can do to help, just try me!” he smiled.

“Kavanagh is news at the moment,” said Ennis softly.

“Oh! Kavanagh. Yes. Quite an unfortunate affair.” He touched the end of his nose, a sign of embarrassment, “He seems to be unavailable at the moment.”

“So it seems, if we understand rightly, from the news reports, there are problems with his company Swap!”

“Yes. We’re hoping that he will show up at any moment,” said Castlemain wanefully.

“The Irish Union has invested in his business,” said Ennis. It was a statement rather than a question.

“That’s right, it has been a very profitable investment. The value of the shares have been up and down a bit lately, that’s the way the market goes,” he said in an understatement.

“Swap has gone down quite a lot!”

“So has the whole market, at the beginning of last week there was quite a crash on the Nasdaq, but it’s picked up again.”

“Except for Swap, it’s not very good when the founder disappears after selling his shares!”

“Hmmm....” Castlemain was momentarily lost for words. “As I said, the bank, as far as I know hasn’t lost any money, you know gains are virtual until you sell!” he said recovering his composure.

“Can you tell us something about Kavanagh, his background....”

“I suppose I can, it won’t do any harm. If I remember rightly he was introduced to me about four or five years back by a business acquaintance, Pat Kennedy.”

The waiter filled their glasses and presented a tray of Jamaican appetisers whilst Castlemain settled down to tell the story.

Chapter 13. Ciudad Cayo Saetia

I § understand that Paddy gave you some of the background on the Cayo Saetia tourist project.”

“He briefly mentioned it, he didn’t go into any details,” said Arrowsmith noncommittally.

“Hmm, what did you think?”

“It’s true I know that part of the world quite well, on the other hand I’m not an expert on Cuba, though I am sure it has a huge development potential for tourism, a bit like Spain in the fifties or sixties.”

They ordered drinks and then examined the menu. Arrowsmith had remembered reading in the Aer Lingus magazine an article on the The Pen Club, an old

exclusive Dublin restaurant, where there was almost always a government minister and a sprinkling of MPs mixed in with some of Dublin's top business people.

"Let me give you some background. The bank has participated in a few hotel investments in the Caribbean. There is one under construction in Jamaica at the moment and we have another project nearing its completion in French Guadeloupe."

Arrowsmith listened patiently waiting for his drink. He was looking forward to lunch having taken a very light breakfast at the hotel.

"We now want to get more directly involved, get away from having a secondary role. I can say it has been a very interesting business for the bank and we want a little more of the action as they say." He smiled at his use of such a colloquial expression.

"I am personally convinced that Cuba, and especially at Cayo Saetia, which is on the north east coast, is an excellent site for investment. Together with our Cuban partners we are looking at a completely new concept for a tourist complex, not only hotels and all of that, but an idea built around a whole town...if some of the legal aspects can be settled, such as ownership!" He looked searchingly at Arrowsmith for a reaction.

"It sounds very interesting David," he replied sipping his Tullamore Dew and Kerry spring water.

"I'll tell you at once, it's a very exciting and ambitious project. Let me tell you a little bit more about my ideas."

"That's what we're here for."

"Fine. Tourist complexes, we've seen plenty of them. This would be something different. In Cuba today, hotels that exist, or are under construction, or even in planning, according to my knowledge, could only be described as offering sun, sand and drinks," Castlemain smiled, "with the possibility of the usual tourist trips to interesting places. A diversion, if you like, away from the boredom that certain tourists can experience being separated from the real Cuba and its people."

"I agree one hundred percent with that."

"What I imagine in Cuba is something different. A new city! A model to demonstrate how they could preserve their way of life with Christian traditions, in a reformed socialist and egalitarian society."

Arrowsmith was immediately on the alert when he heard the word Christian and socialist and it must have shown on his face.

"Don't get me wrong I am not evangelising," smiled Castlemain lifting his hand.

"It would be a city development in harmony with the site we've chosen and Cuban traditions, not a Soviet style dormitory town with its endless blocks of drab flats, nor a golden ghetto where the local population is excluded from the fun and wealth, like Varedero," he enthused.

"We'd build the city on the model of a real and complete Cuban town, like Trinidad de Cuba. Its economy would be based almost entirely on tourism and services, that's to say hotels, shops, bars, restaurants, music, but incorporating the

revolutionary ideals of equality and progress for Cubans and their families.”

“Like the Irish Village at Bunnratty, but on a bigger scale,” said Arrowsmith smiling a little.

“But on a much bigger scale and filled with real people, not a nine to five museum!”

He seemed a little peeved to have his grand idea associated with the Irish Village. Arrowsmith quickly change tack.

“The political and social ideals look good, I suppose it’s been the economy which has been bad with ideas imported from the Soviet Union,” said Arrowsmith. Then adding, “What do the Cubans have as industries by the way?”

“Sugar, nickel, cigars and some oil...that’s about all.”

“I see.”

“...apart from their climate, a tropical paradise one hundred miles from the USA. Their natural industry is tourism, well managed it could bring a decent standard of living to every Cuban!”

“I suppose it could.”

“We could have 1950 style taxis, cigar factories, rum distilleries. Everything in the tradition of the country, but new, with hot and cold running water, air-conditioning, you know everything in working order. A complete Spanish style tourist industry, that operates almost all year round.”

“Sounds really interesting,” said Arrowsmith starting to warm to the idea as he constructed an image of the town in his mind.

“In addition we wouldn’t forget history, there would be a Carib Indian village, Columbus’s landing point, a natural reserve, botanical gardens, the battle for Independence against Spain, the Bay of Pigs invasion...the whole lot.”

Castlemain was carried away by his enthusiasm and it was contagious.

“It sounds exciting. How much will it cost? What about the Cuban government?”

“They are completely sold on the idea and we have initialled a confidential ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ with the Minister of Tourism.”

“Well you’ve said enough. I’m certainly interested to help, if that’s what you want.”

“Listen, what we need now is to set up a development company and carry out a feasibility study. It’s all yours if you want, check it out for us and let me know what you think. We’ll cover all the costs and your fees.”

The whisky had mellowed Arrowsmith and the atmosphere and warmth of the restaurant had eased the chill he had begun to feel as they had walked over from the bank. What had he to lose, he thought, after all it might be a change of scenery and ideas. If they covered all the costs it certainly would not do any harm.

“Why not David, you confirm that to me in writing and I’ll get you a proposal on how we can do it.”

“Excellent Tony, that’s excellent,” he said beaming with satisfaction. “I’ll give you the complete file after lunch and we can start looking at some kind of plan. I’ll look after things with the NIB who are willing to finance fifty percent of the

Ciudad Cayo Saetia Project Development Study Company.”

He went to explain how they planned to set an Irish company near Dublin and it would be baptised Ciscap Development Limited or ‘Ciscap’ for short. The company would undertake the conception, economics, design, planning, construction, promotion as well as management, in fact the whole show...seeking financial and know-how partners, not forgetting operators.

“Sounds fantastic. Why Ciscap though?”

“My staff baptised it Ciscap, they inversed Cayo Saetia making it Ciudad, Saetia, Cayo, Project. It sounded good, so I left it like that,” he explained with a slightly annoyed laugh.

“Oh!” he said a little nonplussed.

“I see the city with a population of ten thousand people including three thousand foreign tourists.” Castlemain quickly pressed on.

“How long would it take, you know the whole programme?”

“I see something like a five to ten year plan.”

They were looking at a two hundred million dollar a year operation on completion. The investment Castlemain had estimated would be almost one billion dollars with infrastructure, roads, water treatment, electricity, schools, a hospital, transport, an airport, supply industries such as bakeries, dairies, a brewery and so on.

Arrowsmith was totally taken by the scale of the idea, mentally visualising the city.

“Just one last thing Tony, this is highly confidential. You can imagine if we can get it off the ground, the same operation could be repeated at many other sites in Cuba not forgetting the rest of the world.”

What Castlemain did not mention was his dream to have the new city called ‘Castlemain’ which Castro had suggested when the plan had been presented to the banker in Havana. Castlemain had reasoned that it was not absurd, after all there were cities renamed after countries in Cuba, there was even a whole province name ‘Granma’ after the leaky boat, named in honour of its first owner’s grandmother, which had carried Fidel together with Che and their revolutionaries from Mexico to Cuba in 1956.

Later that afternoon as Tony Arrowsmith had watched the green fields slip away under the wings of the plane he was having second thoughts at his decision. Perhaps he had been carried away by the whisky and Castlemain’s smooth talking. He wondered what he had let himself in for, was it another Irish dream or the idea of a megalomaniac? He should have slept on it for a couple of days before saying ‘yes’. He closed his eyes, sipping his Champagne; he relaxed back in his seat putting it out of his mind.

Too many projects and too many hours had already been the cause of the break-up of his marriage. His mind wandered as he felt the warm effect of the champagne. His wife had been French. She had left him preferring smart Biarritz

to a lonely home in Paris. She had not been able to support his life as an ambitious entrepreneur, running around the world in search of wealth and adventure.

He remembered when she had explained with firm diplomacy that he had become a workaholic and the time had come for them to reconsider their relationship. He had never had the time or the motivation to contest the divorce and had agreed to all her, not modest, demands for the sake of an easy life.

He had admitted his failings as a husband and he bore neither her nor the French any particular grudge. In fact he regretted not having listened to her good sense early. It was too late anyway.

Chapter 14. Women and Fast Cars

Sean Kavanagh liked women and fast cars. So what, what normal man doesn't, he had often said to himself whenever his family had accused him of never growing up. The difference was that Sean had the means to indulge himself in those pleasures. He enjoyed the role of the eternal playboy; he prided his status as a bachelor having avoided the marriage trap. The money had rolled in from his successful business to pay what was to most men a very enviable life style.

After more than fifteen years in the business he had built as a financial adviser it did not require a great deal of effort to run his team of twenty odd so called advisors or consultants, their titles depended on the current fast talk in the business, they were in effect salesmen.

They sold all kinds of financial products to people from every walk of life concerned about their future, expatriates, doctors, lawyers, teachers, self employed persons and those who needed to boost their retirement prospects. He sold everything from life insurance to annuities, pension funds to investment trusts, all to a broad public, a market that constantly renewed itself.

His firm lived on the fat commissions paid by the companies he represented and the money poured in regularly and he spent it. Time passed by in a never ending party and at forty six years of age he still had a twenty year old girl friend, a fast car and a fancy apartment off Sloane Square, in London's fashionable Chelsea.

He was pleased with his happy go lucky situation, though he shivered when he thought of the past when fortune had not always been so kind.

Sean played the game according to the rules. Generally speaking all the entry fees for the life insurance policies or investment trusts were deducted from the premiums in the first three years, which meant in effect that the value of the investment was considerably less than the sums of money paid in by the policy holder or investor. This system guaranteed the payment of costs related to setting up the contract and above all the sales commissions. In many cases it took years

before the capitalisation of a contract reached the value of the sums paid in.

It was not Kavanagh's concern that many contracts or policies were abandoned after the first few years, to the great expense and detriment of their holders, this was mainly due to a change in their personal situations, when they could no longer keep up the payments or because their employers obliged them to participate in another scheme.

In spite of the hazards of such policies there were always plenty of anxious punters willing to sign up, convinced by the hard sell of Kavanagh's salesmen.

He collected his commissions from every contract he personally signed plus a percentage from the commissions of every member of his team, organised in a pyramidal form with Sean firmly seated at the top.

In spite of the less attractive aspects of his profession Kavanagh was honest and his business was totally legal, to boot he was a nice guy which helped when it came to signing up new customers. How the contracts or policies worked was no secret to those who took the trouble to look closely and read the small print.

He worked hard and played hard taking few real holidays. He was a skilled juggler, though keeping all the balls in the air required his constant presence.

Disaster arrived at Sean Kavanagh's door when the British government's new legislation regulating his business, the Financial Services Act, came into law. It was designed to protect the pigeons that were fast-talked into signing up for saving schemes and policies that ensured the present well being of the seller rather than the future well being of the buyer. The act forbade certain categories of persons from acting as consultants, advisors or sellers, especially those who had experienced personal financial problems.

It was logical to the lawmakers that any person who could not run his own affairs should be disqualified from running those of others.

Sean's skeleton in the cupboard was an ancient bankruptcy that he had had the misfortune to experience at the early age of thirty-one. He had made a lot of money at that time selling a new product, a kind of investment trust, and had decided to accelerate his ride to greater riches by diversifying and investing heavily in the renovation of rundown London properties during a cyclic upswing in the real estate market.

With the assistance of his friendly bankers he bought several properties, large old 19th century town houses in the then up and coming Islington area of London. He engaged building contractors to transform these into small apartments by renovating and restructuring the houses.

He was not the only who got the timing wrong as the bottom fell out of the property market, as it does from time to time. The domino theory was once again proved when the buyers he had lined up disappeared, his partners ran for cover, the building contractors collapsed and went into liquidation with the banks hot on Kavanagh's trail.

Pursued by all and sundry he learnt a most salutary lesson at a relatively early age, one that he would never forget. What goes up must invariably come down.

The bank called in its loans the properties were sold off at a significant loss and Kavanagh ended up in bankruptcy court.

It was a very hard blow, he was not totally discouraged, he was young, and he picked up the pieces and started again. However, he vowed, he would not repeat the same error by falling into the same trap. Property was out and he returned to the business he knew. After three or four years good money started to flow in once again, enabling Sean to pay off all of his debts.

The consequences of his early misadventure into property came home to roost when the Financial Services Act came into force disbaring him from the business. The insurance companies and investment firms that he represented withdrew their agreements in conformity with the new regulations leaving him without his means of income.

In no time Sean was literally on the streets unable to keep up his payments for the high style of living he was used to. Unfortunately he had not thought of his own pension fund. He lost the latest girl friend, the fast car and the fashionable apartment.

To make matters worse he was pursued by the Inland Revenue for unpaid taxes amounting to several hundred thousand pounds.

With disaster staring him in the face he discovered who his real friends were, and fortunately for him there were one or two. There was no question of finding a job in the only profession he knew, the business that the new act had closed door on forever.

He considered flight overseas, but that was out of the question. He had momentarily thought of the USA, even Hongkong or Singapore, but he had no previous overseas business experience, he was afraid of the unknown, he was broke and without the least financial backing to start again, abroad he feared he would find himself in an even worse situation.

At his most desperate moment and completely broke, he was plucked from the threat of the streets and total ruination by his only true friend. He had grown up and went to school with Jim Carmichael, there the two friends had competed with each other, and had also shared their problems and pleasures.

Months earlier, before the crisis, they had even discussed the coming legislation and the consequences it held for Sean, which strangely had not inspired him into taking action to avert the disaster. Sean had thought a miracle would turn up and when no solution presented itself it could only be said that the consequences were entirely due to his lack of action. He had thought by some means or another he could continue his business. He was like a frog hypnotised by a serpent, completely paralysed waiting for the inevitable.

When the decision of his clients to drop him was announced he was stunned. As a result Kavanagh found it difficult to ask his friend for assistance and avoided him. Jim was not put off that easily, there was no question of abandoning his old friend in the face of such a dire crisis.

Jim Carmichael owned a relatively modest IT services company, which after

several years of meandering in software development, without really finding a very profitable niche, had launched into a new growth area for financial and investment software packages for Internet applications. At that time the Internet was an established but relatively arcane communications technology, used mainly by multi-national businesses, financial institutions, and scientific and research organisations for sophisticated applications, the net was almost unknown to the general public.

To help Kavanagh the least Jim could do was to loan him a few thousand pounds, enough to keep his head above water. He then confided Sean's plight to a mutual and discrete business friend, who it averred was having a problem of his own, be it a very minor one. It was a management problem in one of his investments, where as a foreigner he had neither the local cultural knowledge nor the experience to handle, whereas Sean, if he were available, would be a godsend.

The two old school friends had befriended a very wealthy Egyptian investor, Philoxenos Moftan. Phil, as he was called, was a Coptic Christian. His family had invested in real estate in the UK as an insurance against rising Islamic integristism in Egypt.

The Copts of the ancient Christian Church of Egypt were a minority in a sea of Islam, many of them feared for their long-term security. They believed that they were the real Egyptians, much more so than the greater majority of that country's population. They were the direct descendants of the Ancient Egyptians with the language of their church derived from that of the Pharaohs.

Phil's family had practically exiled him to London to watch over their investments. In spite of his wealth and business contacts he had made few real friends.

As a Cairene he appreciated not only the help he had received from Sean and Jim but also their way of combining business with friendship and pleasure, which recalled to him the oriental way of doing things. They became good friends, with Phil enjoying their frequent forays into London nightlife.

Neither Sean nor Jim could have ever been considered as fair weather friends, those who attach themselves to the rich taking advantage of their invitations and money. They both paid their turn of nightclub and restaurant bills and Phil appreciated that, his wealth had put him apart from most of the people he met in London. He considered the pair as equals, compared to many other Englishmen he had met on the unfamiliar London scene, and came to look on them as his real friends.

Sean had guided Phil on investment in the UK, whilst Jim had set him up with software to manage his investments. Phil was a hi-tech fan and followed every new personal computer based business application avidly.

The moment Phil heard of Sean's predicament he reacted immediately, even surprised and a little hurt that Sean had not come to him for help. Phil was not a stranger to misfortune; in his home country it was not unusual that wealthy people fell victims to predatory government officials and corrupt politicians. At such

moments friends and families did not hesitate to aid the victims if necessary by hiding them, even overseas, whilst waiting for the crisis to pass.

He therefore proposed that Sean look into one of his family's investments. It was a 14th century castle in Scotland, which had been transformed into a luxurious tourist hotel. It seemed that Phil was being swindled by the locally hired manager and certain members of his staff. He proposed to Sean that he become the hotel's resident controller for as long as it took to put things back into order.

In the meantime to add one problem to another, Sean's brother, Aiden Kavanagh, who had lodged him in his desperate situation six weeks prior to his departure to Scotland, had received a demand from the Inland Revenue addressed to Sean for payment of a substantial sum of back taxes.

By one of those strange coincidences an ageing uncle, Sean Kavanagh, had passed away some weeks previously. Sean, which is Irish for John, was a very common name in Ireland, it even seemed at times that half of the Irish male population were either called Sean or John. The old man had lived alone for several years with very modest means, having no other nearby relatives than his two nephews, Sean and Aiden. The house where Uncle Sean had spent his last years was owned by Aiden Kavanagh, who had also taken care of his uncles health and daily needs.

Aiden had looked after the funeral and the other formalities. On receiving the demand from the Inland Revenue, he had without thinking further declared to the tax authorities that Sean Kavanagh had passed away, providing them with the time and place of his demise and the date of the burial. From the moment of that declaration all correspondence and demands from the Inland Revenue miraculously ceased.

Sean spent the next twelve months in the Scottish castle under the assumed name of John Ryan, as according to the declaration to the tax authorities, Kavanagh was dead. His new name, which he had chosen, was that of an Irish cousin who had lived in London and had immigrated to Australia a good few years earlier. He remembered his aunt proudly telling him that John had become an Australian, which Sean assumed to mean that he had acquired Australian nationality.

Sean, little by little, recovered his confidence when he realised that there was neither a taxman nor creditor hiding in every tower and turret of the magnificent castle. He played his new role well. His full head of greying hair gave him a distinguished appearance, his face was a little sad as a result of his tribulations, which endeared him to most people.

Sean knew how to handle a team. He could be severe and take tough decisions, no sooner than he was installed he promptly fired the swindling manager and his willing accomplices and after effectively taking control of the hotel he turned the business around generating a good operating profit for both himself and the owners.

He knew his convalescence in Scotland could not last forever nor did he want it to. Phil and his family were not in the business for the operating profits, but on the

other hand as normal business people they went to lengths to avoid losses, their real objective was in the capital gains that they expected from the British property market.

From Scotland he went on to handle another of Phil's hotel operations in London. Once back in the capital he continued to use his assumed name and concentrated on the job whilst keeping a low profile carefully avoiding old contacts. Again the principal object of Phil was real estate investment where another substantial capital gain was made in a little over twelve months.

By that time Sean Kavanagh had had a couple of years to develop new ideas for his own future and to boot a knowledge of the financial aspects of hotel and property investments. He knew there had to be a way to get back into business for his own account, and there was, by developing offshore financial and linked services.

Sean had spent many nights in the hotel's bar listening to his Egyptian friend as well as the hotel's overseas guests. Wealthy travellers who liked to recount their business ventures, far from home and prying eyes, to a friendly upstanding Brit who was a willing listener.

He learnt a lot of new things in a world very different to the daily pile of proposals and contracts in his old London firm, where he had never had the time to sit back and see life from a different perspective.

He took to reading many of the business magazines that he had never paused to read before and discovered offshore financial services in their many varied forms, which, he was surprised to find existed in places as near as the Isle of Man and even in Ireland. He discovered the ease with which an offshore bank account could be opened, and a shell company could be bought.

When the London hotel was finally sold for a good profit, he had come to the conclusion that there were more ways to make money, and make it fast, than trying to sell savings investments to the general public. Sean's role with the Phil had ended with a handsome bonus and he had become a different man with a renewed confidence in life.

Chapter 15. A Passport to Ireland

One thing which had always puzzled Sean was how Phil had become a UK resident. He came and went as he pleased, travelling in and out of the country without any apparent difficulty. There were many wealthy Arabs living in London, especially in the expensive Marble Arch-Edgware Road area. They did not appear to work and they also seemed to come and go as they pleased.

It was just after one of his customary visits to the castle to make a personal check on the family's investment, that Phil, in a fluster, had called the hotel from the

Edinburgh airport. He had mislaid his ticket and travel documents. It took five minutes for Sean to locate a leather wallet that contained the ticket and a passport in a drawer in the private room which was reserved exclusively for Phil's visits.

At first he thought there was some kind of a mistake when he flipped open the passport, but when he saw the photo and the name there was no doubt, to his astonishment Phil held an Irish passport.

Embarrassed that his secret had been discovered he later explained to Sean how he had acquired the passport. He told him how he had deposited a large sum of money in Dublin bank and made a hefty contribution to the order of the Society of Jesus, otherwise known as the Jesuits.

He was then accorded the help of a somewhat eccentric Dublin lawyer, acting on behalf of the Holy Church, which had designated him to help a fellow Christian, a member of a besieged community, the Copts of Egypt, struggling to defend the name of Christ and persecuted by heathens.

Phil explained that the passport was essential for travelling around Europe, an Egyptian passport holder would have been tied down by endless visas applications and administrative delays, a permanent hindrance to his business. As a citizen of one of the countries of the European Union the problem simply disappeared.

The idea of an Irish passport appealed to Sean, it would be an excellent insurance policy and he applied to the Dublin passport office. However, he took the precaution of using his assumed identity, that of his Irish cousin, John Ryan. After obtaining his cousin's birth certificate at the registrar of births and deaths in Dublin with surprisingly few formalities he quickly obtained his new passport.

The UK was excluded for setting up his project. Ireland looked an attractive alternative. His parents had been Irish and the Emerald Isle was just across the water, a little provincial, but definitely not foreign. Dublin was less than an hour's flight from London and he set off with the promise of Phil's help and the necessary seed capital, it was if, Phil had laughed, 'the streets of Dublin were lined with gold'.

He was not at all familiar with Dublin. His last visit had been a short rainy holiday some twenty-five year before. On arriving in Ireland that autumn his main problem was to find a suitable accommodation and after a long difficult search he finally found a house for what seemed a ruinously high price in a Dublin suburb, things had definitely changed with Ireland catching up on UK prices at what seemed to be a huge rate of inflation. He then set out to renew family links with his cousins scattered around the country.

Nearby to Limerick City he made acquaintance with relatives on his mothers side, they were however small though prosperous shops keepers and hard up school teachers. They were definitely not connected into the business world. By chance the wife of one of his cousins had a relative in Limerick City, who was a well know local businessman. A certain Pat Kennedy.

Kavanagh was welcomed with arms wide open by Kennedy, to whom he was another one of the overseas Irish coming home to invest. The tide of immigration

had definitely turned thought Kennedy, ever hopeful of a return to a mythical golden age.

Kennedy was impressed by Kavanagh's background as it was recounted and his stories of Egyptian investors and the London property market.

"What do you have in mind then Sean?"

"I'm thinking about international financial services. I believe that the Irish government is encouraging that kind of business start-up."

"You're sure right they are Sean. They're also offering start-up assistance, you know grants and all that kind of thing, if you set up in one of their special area."

"What I'm thinking about is IT related financial and investment services. My partner Jim Carmichael is specialised in IT and myself in the financial consultancy area."

"Can you be a little more precise, what exactly would you be selling?"

"It's quite simply, companies and banks have specialised online services, that is inter-branch and inter-bank networks for transmitting data. With the development of Internet technology they will be communicating in a much more sophisticated manner, both nationally and international, with anyone who is connected to the Internet. The projections are that this technology will be used for all kinds of banking operations, between banks and also by the general public."

"But what will you supply?"

"We shall develop all the software applications with the banks as our customers."

"I see," said Kennedy, even though it was obvious to Kavanagh that he had lost him.

"In addition we shall build up data base services that we would be housed on our computers that Internet users can access."

"Like what?"

"Imagine from your desk top PC you can get all the flight time tables from Aer Lingus with hotels and things like that!"

Kennedy got the picture; Aer Lingus and flight timetables were just up his street, remembering his next trip to Amsterdam planned for the following weekend.

"Okay, I get you now. What kind of an investment are you thinking about?"

"Well it's not that significant in capitalisation. You know it's more of a people thing than manufacturing electronics for example."

"I see. Do you have a figure in mind?"

"Well, I think it'll require about a million over the next couple of years. Setting up an office, hardware and working capital."

"Let's see, we can get half of that from the NIB, which means half a million is needed! Do you have that?"

"No."

"Well Sean what kind of funds do you have?"

"Between a hundred and fifty and two hundred and fifty," said Sean, knowing that Phil would be good for fifty and Jim likewise, providing that the NIB came up with what Pat had said they would.

“Okay, we can get the rest from the bank if the project is good,” said Pat laughing with glee and rubbing his hands together enthusiastically.

Sean believed him, Pat was very persuasive, he had the proverbial Blarney and laced together with his legal and financial jargon he could convince almost anybody to part with their money, not to speak of the local civil servants, who were almost desperate to find credible investors with suitable projects to promote with the help of the Irish tax payer’s money, so as to justify their own existence.

What was more Pat believed Sean, he believed himself, and in fact he believed almost any stranger that got off the plane in Shannon with what seemed to him like a good business idea.

Chapter 16. Kavanagh

Well Sean, as you know from your visit over the last days, our job here is to develop industry and attract foreign investment to Ireland. I won’t bullshit you with all of the success stories that you can read in the press and see on the TV, that’s not my job,” said Mulligan seriously, “the situation has not always been easy, though with the present economic boom it’s the right moment to invest.”

Kavanagh nodded, he was well aware of the past never-ending Irish economic crises.

“Foreign firms could pull out,” Mulligan continued, “if there was a crisis for example on the stock market or a recession, the money and efforts that we have poured in would go right down the drain!”

Kavanagh put on a concerned look of sympathy and understanding, it was not too difficult. Ireland and its economic problems had been a long story. The Irish problem was geographical, he thought, God had simply put the island in the wrong place. It was unfortunately impossible to pull up the anchor and head one thousand miles or so in a south-easterly direction.

His grandfather and father had recounted the woes until Kavanagh had come to despise their national lack of fortune. He had learnt that the legendary lucky Irishman was the one who had bought a ticket to America. Sure there were the gentry and the great landowners, the Guinness’s and Smurfit’s, they could fly off to London, New York or the sunshine of the Bahamas when things got bad. But for the rest there was the constant fear of unemployment and debt, which had haunted them for centuries with the breaking up of families by forced immigration.

The Celtic ‘tiger economy’ with annual growth rates of as much as ten percent had improved to a previously unimaginable degree the lot of most Irish families. They had reached a standard of living equal to that of Germany, triumphantly cried the press. Perhaps things had finally changed with Ireland’s membership of the

European Union.

The reality, however, was that the Euro exchange rate against the dollar favoured investment in Ireland, as did lower salaries and social charges. The probability was that situation would change with the return of immigrants wanting higher salaries and better conditions, or with on the other hand a turndown in the American economy.

Kavanagh had seen the real poor in Limerick and Dublin, in proportions that could only been seen in Eastern Europe. They were a permanent part of the Irish social scene, the church needed them and good Irish mothers needed them, pointing them to their children; tinkers, as they were often called when they were driven to extreme poverty and homelessness.

“People like you could help us in areas where we have little experience,” said Mulligan.

“Oh! What are those then? said Kavanagh a little coolly.

“International services.”

“International services!”

“Yes, it’s an area where you have been successful Sean.”

“Perhaps, but I’m not really intending to branch out,” said Kavanagh, perhaps a little too quickly.

“Don’t worry about that Sean, we can provide a lot of backup, and you could think of it as additional consultancy business.”

“I don’t know.”

“Think about it Sean, we have people, qualified people, plenty of them, but you could say we need pathfinders, guides if you like...you could be one of those.”

“It’s unexpected, I’m flattered, but really I have to think about it, give me some time.”

“Don’t worry about that, Pat here knows the background, he’ll fill you in on the details.”

The two left Mulligan’s office and Kennedy had difficulty in restrain his glee. Once in the car he let go.

“There, I told you Sean, we’ve got him. He’ll give you everything we want.”

“What’s next then,” asked Kavanagh, who was pleased with the result. They had drawn Mulligan out by playing low key, displaying only a mild interest in his proposals.

“We’ll put together a business plan, that’s the usual way to do it. We’ll have to be quick though so as not to lose time, the NIB can be slow, but in this case we’ll have no problem pushing them.”

Chapter 17. Castlemain in Cuba

Castlemain's first visit to Cuba after many years absence had been with a banking delegation. During that visit he had decided to renew his earlier contacts with Fidel Castro, whom Castlemain had somewhat forgotten during the declining period of international communism and the disastrous collapse that had followed it. He did not consider himself as a friend of convenience, he had always kept contact with his larger circle of friends and acquaintances, sending messages of congratulations and good wishes, for special occasions, such as for anniversaries, national days, birthdays and any other worthy events.

Castlemain was a keen yachtsman, preferring the warm waters of the Caribbean to the cold stormy shores of Ireland. He owned several properties in the Caribbean, including a fine house in Gosier, Guadeloupe where his ketch the Marie Galante was moored. He took a keen interest in all developments in the Caribbean, which he considered to be a zone of particular interest. The bank, through his initiative, had participated in banking pools with the BCN for financing hotels and tourist developments in the French Antilles and more recently in Jamaica.

A couple of years previously during a visit to his house in Gosier, he had been embarked, more by curiosity than anything else, on a so called BCN mission, organised together with the Paris Chamber of Commerce, to explore investment opportunities in Cuba. It had been a typical binge, lavishly laid on for investors with the usual receptions, visits to tourist installations, rum distilleries and cigars factories and of course the Tropicana Night Club.

Castlemain immediately realised that things had changed in Cuba; there was a unique opportunity to be seized and he set about renewing his old contacts. The moment was ripe, the Castro regime was rapidly approaching the end of its reign, Castro was not immortal, but Castlemain could still take advantage of his old relationship with El Lider.

During the visits organised by the Cuban authorities in Havana and its surroundings he had been surprised by the naively painted revolutionary and political slogans adorning public buildings and hoardings, not by the slogans themselves, but by their crudeness, their primitive quality, they were more worthy of an impoverished African banana republic than the revolutionary ideals of Cuba.

They also reminded him of the IRA or Loyalist slogans painted on the walls of Belfast. He shuddered at the thought, those grim inflexible Ulstermen, Catholic or Protestant, caught in a time warp, where their world and ideas stood still, as appeared to be the case in Cuba!

The idealistic images of Che and his Rebeldes with their slogans 'Ayer, Hoy y Mañana Presente Siempre' looked out of date, an incongruous throwback, when compared to the slick posters for Benetton or San Cristobal beer and other products that were making their appearance, which he saw as an encouraging sign of change. As to the political slogans, he doubted that anybody was still inspired by

them, how the regime survived remained a mystery for Castlemain.

That was the way it went, revolutions come and revolutions go, for the banker it was like an economic cycle, boom and bust, and Cuba was definitely in the bust phase.

Florida, which had once been connected by a regular ferry service to Havana, five or so hours away by sea, was a little more than a hundred miles to the north; the island was a tourist paradise awaiting a signal from the US government. It was potentially a prime destination for those snow bound citadens of the northern states of the USA, not to speak of Canada and Europe.

Times had changed, Cuba before its revolution had been a magnet for Americans seeking pleasure and excitement, though the next time it would not be like the gangster ridden thirties and forties, when gambling and prostitution reigned. Of course there would always be vice, but most tourists would be respectable citizens seeking sun, sand and cocktails.

Cuba had all it took as a tourist attraction. A sub-tropical paradise, a friendly Christian population, yes, that was important for Castlemain, even though he was not a fervent Catholic he was nevertheless a church going Christian, if only for appearances, respecting Irish tradition, and why not, it only took an hour once a week and on Sundays.

He had been brought up with Irish Christian values and he took certain of them very seriously, that is to say he aided those who shared the same belief in Christ, they were brothers, with however the proviso they stayed where they were, he did not want County Meath looking like certain parts of London he had glimpsed on his frequent visits to the City. The rest, in their war torn, disease ridden countries of Africa and other unsavoury places, full of infidels or savages, were merely to be prayed for. As for communism it was anathema, an enemy of not only God, but also the very principals his rich family had lived by for centuries. It was an evil spirit that had possessed the Cuban people, for whom the time was now ripe for rescue from the ills of that atheistic dogma.

He calculated there were profits to be made, thanks to modern air transport Havana was no more than three or four hours flight from the northern most American cities. All-in packages would cater for over ninety five percent of all tourist visits, one or two weeks, as in other Caribbean tourist destinations.

He understood that mass tourism required airports, highways, hotels and catering, beach facilities, restaurants, car rentals, travel agencies, breweries, distilleries, soft drink bottlers, trips to restored cathedrals, museums, forts, banking, staff training and so on, the list was endless.

Cuba had all of that in an embryonic form; it would require huge investment to bring it up to international standards. The country had been bled dry by its revolution and now needed new money and investors. He put out feelers through diplomatic channels in the hope that Castro would remember him, would give him an audience.

The greatest risk was that the drug barons from Colombia, or the new Mafiya that controlled Miami and New Brighton, would take over the country. It seemed inconceivable to Castlemain that the US government would allow such a thing to happen, but so many unforeseeable events had occurred in the world over the last half a century that anything was possible.

A certain degree of liberty was necessary, he reasoned, if banks and business were to be profitable. However, there should be a limits set so that businesses could prosper, violence and disorder only destroyed the delicate balance needed to create profits. He imagined a financial centre where funds could freely flow in and profits flow out, tourist complexes and tax free zones.

Politicians would be as they always had been in such countries; there was little chance that would ever change, but hopefully prosperity would ensure that the spectre of revolt by the working class was kept at large. Rebuilding Cuba would require many decades; it also required men with vision, men who had been born to lead. He had learnt from his long experience in Latin America that the money and power of the ruling classes were part of an unchanging and necessary system. It had been part of their Hispanic Christian heritage for five hundred years.

Such leaders were necessary in the new world, which was still a new world. The leaders and hidalgos, as he imagined them, had to be strong to establish order and prosperity in a violent society, so that the masses in those vast territories could work, building a dutiful new Christian world with respect for those who had bestowed on them the chance a worthy life.

He had such a vision of a new Cuba and it was necessary to be there from the very outset.

Chapter 18. Castlemain's Dream

David Castlemain considered the Caribbean as his second home; his retreat on St Martin, his villa and yacht in Guadeloupe, were the result of his family's banking interest in the region that dated back to the twenties, when they had established their banking business in the islands. It was as a hedge against the changes that were occurring in those troubled years, when Ireland had struggled for its independence from the English crown.

He had entered banking as a young man at the time his father had been the majority shareholder and president of the Irish Union Bank in Dublin; it was then a small though prosperous bank. His Anglo-Irish family was amongst the largest landowner in County Meath, in the heart of Ireland, it was horse country where some of the finest animals were breed and exported around the world.

The Castlemains were very conservative, as were most old landed families in the Irish Republic. Tradition was their motto, they were not adventurers, the Dublin

Horse Show for yearlings was the major event of their year. Generations of economic stagnation in the country had led to an exaggerated and stifling conservatism and those who had money had learned how to hang on to it.

As a young man and the scion of the wealthy Irish family he had enjoyed the pleasures wealth had bestowed on him. His greatest contentment came from the visits to the family business in the Caribbean, where he learnt the arcane skills of offshore banking, but it was thanks to his skill with thoroughbred horses and his own talent for polo that he got to know South America. He made many friends in Latin America not only in high society but also in politics and in business, which in any case went hand in hand. Though, as for many young men, some of the friends he made were not always to his father's liking.

Since his father's death, the responsibility of the bank had fallen on his shoulders and life had become much more serious. As time passed and his obligations grew he grew to regret his carefree past.

He remembered with amusement how at the age of eighteen he had longed for a different life, to be able to make his own decisions. The young Cuban revolutionaries and their dreams of changing the world had inspired him. He had visited the country on many occasions, meeting Fidel Castro and even the legendary Che Guevara. He had even tried to convince his father in the mid-sixties to become involved in the economic development of the Cuba, well after the revolution.

It had been a hopeless task; his father would have never helped people he saw as communist atheists, who had overthrown a legal government by force, nor listen to his very young and unrealistic son, who could not differentiate between business and ideals. To make matters worse, as time passed, Cuba was wracked by a series of seemingly endless convulsions as El Lider embarked on a series of catastrophic adventures.

In the late eighties, with the death of his father and the changes in the bank, Castlemain again looked at the possibility of building business relations with Cuba, changes were on the horizon and after the fall of the Soviet Block he felt the moment was ripe.

Castro himself, many years before, had expounded his theories to Castlemain as to the economics of the Caribbean and its thirty-one island nations. He had not seen a future in tourism, in spite of the region having some of the world's finest beaches and a sub-tropical climate.

The majority of American tourists shunned the Caribbean, preferring to spend their money at home in Las Vegas, Florida or Hawaii. As for the Europeans, they were drawn by many other exotic destinations, which were nearer to home, such as Egypt and Israel, or, further afield Thailand for even greater exoticism, approximately the same flying time from most European major cities as to the Caribbean.

"One of the problems is the high degree of crime and harassment on many Caribbean islands," Castlemain had been told by a Cuban Minister of Tourism "In

Cuba our government does not want to see crime develop, it's not good that our people develop the bad habits of rich tourists, particularly during what we call the Special Period, when people have to work harder and be patient, it is necessary we make sacrifices for the future of our country."

The Cuban people had made forty years of sacrifice without seeing the slightest gain, the rich had fled, the middle classes had become poor and the poor were without hope.

"Crime is a consequence of the introduction of envy and bad morals, that is why we have developed Varedero, all-inclusive packages 'sea, sun and sand'," the minister had explained full of high principles, "not forgetting the rum, in Varedero our tourists barely need to leave their hotels."

The fact was that many Caribbean islands found it too expensive to construct hotels and infrastructure, not having the basic industries that supplied the construction materials, cement, steel and piping, which had to be imported, more than doubling costs.

Crime, drugs and sexual harassment were a powerful deterrent to the development of tourism. In addition major international banks were not willing to take the risk of financing hotel construction, whilst potential promoters ran the risk of disaster if their hotels were not filled.

Castlemain had expressed his desire to meet Fidel Castro, but one did not simply make an appointment with the great leader. In fact knowing in advance where he would sleep or even which functions or meetings he would attend was well nigh impossible, except for the most intimate of his circle. Security came before all other things; he had been the target of so many assassination attempts that he had forgotten most of them. Wherever he went his personal doctor, a medical team, ambulances, bodyguards, a military unit and a helicopter always followed him.

It was during a hot and humid July evening, during a brown out that shut down most of Havana, Castlemain received the invitation that he had solicited many weeks before.

He was hustled from his hotel late in the evening and driven at high speed in a bullet proof Mercedes through the dark streets of the city to his meeting with El Jefe Maximo. The meeting place was a vast ornate Baroque style villa, somewhere in the west of the capital. After passing through a pair of huge iron gates, guarded by armed military personnel, he was thoroughly checked and searched by the security service before being admitted.

Once inside the villa he was ushered by a uniformed army officer into a spacious room with Spanish colonial style furnishings. Fidel, who was seated in an armchair, was in the company of four other men, all dressed in olive green military fatigues. He rose to meet Castlemain with extended arms.

"Amigo! How are you?" He looked older and seemed to have shrunk inside of his fatigues. His grey beard looked sparse. "So you see your friend does not forget you! How are you, what is going on in the world?"

They embraced and tapped each other on the back. It was a greeting like in the old days. Fidel invited him to be seated in the armchair opposite him across a low table on which were placed trays with drinks and glasses. After the exchange of banalities Fidel got down to the essentials.

“Times are changing my friend, today Cuba needs investors,” he gave one of his characteristic shrugs, “What we need are joint-ventures with our friends! Investors, such as your bank David, who would like to participate in the development our economy.”

Castlemain was immensely flattered by the use of his first name and ‘tu’, he had not been forgotten by El Lider Maximo, and moreover he had the privilege of being received as an old friend.

It was not in Castro’s style to do something ordinary. However, he was still the eternal revolutionary, looking for a miraculous solution to improve the lot of his people. He had a dream, he was an idealist and every moment of his life was a new challenge, convince those he met and to win them over to his vision of the future.

“You are a land owner, a rich capitalist, it is a fact! But, Ireland fought for its independence like Cuba! You know I have much respect for peoples who have fought against imperialism.”

He made a sign to one of his entourage to serve drinks.

“I know exactly how you feel, I myself was the son of a land owner, my father owned 26,000 acres in Oriente Province. I was trained as a lawyer, so you see we are not so different.”

It was a familiar story; Castlemain had heard it for the first time well over thirty years previously. He admired Castro like he would an older brother, a brother who had the freedom that his own father had never permitted him. As a young man Castlemain had had the freedom to enjoy himself, but never to determine his own destiny. As an only son he was destined to one day run the bank and watch over the family fortune.

“Let me tell you something David, I have a vision of a new Cuba, based on our socialist ideals, not like Russian socialism, which betrayed its friends, if you can help us you will certainly be remembered as one of our heroes.”

Fidel had launched into one of his long late night monologues, but that did not bother Castlemain, he was looking at a living legend, a hero who was offering him a chance to be part of history, something more than just a son who had inherited the wealth of his rich family.

“In my province, where I was born, in the East of Cuba, I would like to create something that will benefit our people and will be remembered. The region is poor, far from Havana, but it is beautiful. A new city should be built as a tribute to our revolution, a model for our youth and that of the world that believes in the revolutionary values of our kind of socialism.”

His face radiated the fervour that Castlemain had witnessed in Castro’s early years.

“It will be built on tourism, but not the kind you see in Varedero, it will be a real

city where visitors can appreciate our values.”

He had a vision that would preserve his revolution and open it to the world, a new model, economical viable without jinteras, corruption and the bolsa negra. It was perhaps the last chance, there was not much time left and he could not fail his people and his place in history.

“If you, with the help of your country, Ireland, help me build this, I can tell you that your name will go down in our history, a friend of the Revolution, it is our project, your project, it is our dream, we shall name it Ciudad Castlemain...you will be the second Irishman, after Alejandro O’Reilly to go down in our country’s history, it is our secret, you will undertake with the help of my compays,” he made a gesture to the men around him, “they will give you all that you need from our side, I am counting on you amigo and I repeat this is our secret, it is not in the interest of the American imperialists that we succeed and succeed we will!”

John Castlemain returned to his hotel late in the night, euphoric. He was unable to sleep in the heat with the air-conditioning out, his mind churning with the thought of the challenge that had been given to him by a real hero of the twentieth century, though irritated to think there had been another Irishman in Cuban history before him.

Chapter 19. On the Run Again

The chimes of the Amsterdam Mint Tower sounded against the clanking and rumbling of the trams crossing the bridge over the Amstel River. An endless stream of bicycles ringing their bells wound their way around the pedestrians; the bicycles seemed more dangerous than the cars.

He had checked with the reception at the Hotel de l’Europe, Phil was not in his room. Kavanagh left a message that he would wait for him either at the American Hotel or in a cafe on the square by the Stadschouberg Theatre. Then taking Leidse Straat he strolled slowly back in the general direction of his hotel, stopping from time to time to look into the shop windows.

On arrival at Schipol Airport the previous evening he had booked himself into the American Hotel, which was part of the Inter-Continental chain. Kavanagh had a corner room overlooking the Singelgracht canal on the second floor. The hotel was a comfortable, but a typical old Amsterdam style building, a strange mixture of Gothic and Nouveau Decor architecture, probably built at the end of the nineteenth century. It was situated just a block from the Stadschouburg Theatre on Leidse Plein, a square with its popular cafes and terraces, filled with Amsterdammers and tourists enjoying a Dutch beer or an espresso coffee lavishly topped with fresh cream and a generous sprinkling of chocolate powder.

He took a seat at one of the front tables facing the square waiting for Phil to make

his appearance, hoping he was not being followed by one of those muck raking newspaper reporters.

The shares in Swap had been sold in many small blocks over a period of ten days. It was a Monday evening, after the close of Wall Street, Kavanagh had informed his two partners that the sale of the last blocks of shares to the market had been successfully completed. They then decided to meet, to plan how they would handle the news, which would sooner or later become public.

After a conference call, the three agreed Phil meet with Kavanagh the following Saturday in Amsterdam, away from Dublin or London. All seemed well. The sale of the shares had passed quietly, unseen, and without any noticeable reaction from the overheated market during a week when the Nasdaq had once again beaten records in New Economy Hi-Tech stocks.

What they had not anticipated was the precipitation caused by the unexpected plunge of the Nasdaq the following Monday. It was after one of those periodic weekend announcements by the American Secretary to the Treasury, Alan Greenspan, designed to calm the markets, of a hike in interest rates and a severe warning of the potential development of a speculative bubble. The market reaction was certainly no more than a passing, though brutal swing, and nothing else.

Swap's shares lost fifteen percent in a single trading session, as did many other such shares.

What they had not foreseen was a whiff of scandal, as newspaper and TV stories broke on Kavanagh's banking arrangement with the Irish Union to obtain the NIB assistance for his initial start-up in Ireland some three years earlier.

Kennedy had called Kavanagh from Limerick to tell him about the story in the local paper. He did not hide the fact that it could be nasty, though brief, and suggested Kavanagh be unavailable for a few days.

When the shares lost a further eight percent the same day, Kavanagh decided to take Kennedy's advice and left for Belfast, where he could discretely take a flight to Amsterdam as foreseen, though a little earlier than planned.

The fall in the Swap shares price continued in spite of a general pause in the market turbulence.

It was the coincidence of a series of isolated but nevertheless indirectly linked events that resulted in a calamitous scandal, ignited by the press, with questions in the Dail to the Taoiseach, the prime minister of the Irish Republic, concerning government policy related to subsidising investors. Certain ministers and officials were accused of having taken advantage of services offered by investors for their intervention with the NIB to obtain favourable decisions and conditions.

By Saturday the shares had lost 38% and the collapse was making hot news in the financial columns. The press linked the crash with the political implications of the NIB's participation in the Swap start-up and the non-availability of Kavanagh for comments.

Kavanagh saw the thick form of Phil arriving in the square and made a sign.

“So what’s it like on the run?” laughed Phil.

“I’m used to it!” said Kavanagh forcing a smile. “A bit of a fuck up! Right!”

“You could put it that way, I suppose. But there are positive aspects.”

“What’s the next move then?”

“I suggest you hang around here for a few days. Enjoy your trip to Amsterdam,” then smiling he added as an after thought, “maybe we can go to the Casino!”

That did not surprise Kavanagh for one moment. Phil was an inveterate gambler and the Casino was just a block away along the same canal that bordered the American Hotel.

“The important thing is they don’t find out that you, I mean we, have sold all those shares, because then the shit would really, and I mean really, hit the fan!”

“What are the chances of that happening?”

“I’m sorry to say – pretty fucking high!”

“Shit!”

They dined early in an Indonesian-Chinese restaurant that Kavanagh had earlier spotted, just short walk away on Korte Leidsedwars Straat, off the square. The food and wine were excellent, but in spite of the fabulous wealth they had acquired they were subdued, almost depressed as they tried to work out a game plan for the next days.

Everything depended on how the market would move and its position regarding Swap, whether the government in Dublin could avoid a scandal and the public’s reaction to the media, who as usual were trying to whip up a witch-hunt.

The whole situation was suspended in a delicate balance, which could at any moment violently crash down on their heads if the news came out on how they had cashed-in their shares, which would certainly be interpreted as treason to the market and its investors or even fraud.

The next day Phil left Amsterdam by an early flight leaving Kavanagh to stew, waiting to see how things developed over the following twenty-four hours or so before deciding to return to London or Dublin.

It was the Sunday Irish Times that launched the hue and cry and led the pack the following morning. It was no wonder that when trading commenced on the Monday morning that the market was dumping shares in Swap.

It was the same press that stampeded investors into the market with the never ending need to fill their financial pages, day in day out, with something to hold its readers, an endless stream of conflicting advice, new era stories, news of business personalities, rising or falling, as proof of their journalist’s two a penny get rich quick theories. The same press, in its desperate need to sell newspapers was prepared to hound just about anybody, even their proclaimed heroes of yesterday, in their daily search for a headline story.

Kavanagh, unaware of the Irish Times’ headlines had moved to the Hilton at Schipol Airport late that Sunday morning, in the hope he could quickly hop on a

plane to London the next day if things calmed down.

That Monday morning he tried to contact his partners without success, leaving messages on their voice mails. When Phil finally called Kavanagh back, he informed him that the worse had happened; the shit had hit the fan and suggested that he lay low. He and Jim Carmichael were embattled with the press and were trying to calm the banks and investors. Phil would call him back that evening.

Kavanagh calmly decided he was on his own, he took the train from Schipol to the Amsterdam Centraal Station, where he bought a one way rail ticket for Frankfurt.

The media decreed a general hue and cry and the authorities set the bloodhounds loose hot on the tail of the swindling upstart, for his capture and public pillorying.

In his hotel room at Frankfurt Airport, Kavanagh watched the BBC evening television news with growing dismay. However, he knew he had taken the right decision, he had not been wrong about those who until a couple of days previously had praised and worshipped him.

The announcement the previous Saturday of the failure of the mediation between Microsoft and the Justice Department of the USA was just beginning to have its effects on the markets.

In Washington, a judge, Thomas Penfield Jackson had announced that same Monday morning, just after the opening of Wall Street, that he would render public at 5 o'clock the same afternoon his verdict in the case.

The verdict would be that Microsoft was in violation of the anti-trust laws, guilty of an illegal monopoly and business practices. The judge qualified Microsoft as a 'predator' taking advantage of its dominant position as the supplier of the personal computer operating system 'Windows' on ninety percent of the world's personal computers.

The consequences would be either the dismantling of the group, a huge fine running into billions of dollars or severe restrictions on the groups activities, by for example forcing them to publish their technical codes that software companies need to make their programmes function with Windows.

In making his decision the judge wiped billions of dollars from of the global economy driven by the New Technology sector.

The result was that the shares of Microsoft fell over fifteen percent in a single session pulling down in its wake all the shares of the Hi-Tech market. The Nasdaq fell six percent in one day after an eight percent fall in the previous week and twenty percent in one month.

Microsoft shares at their entry into the market on 13 March 1986 had been valued at twenty-one dollars; fourteen years later they were quoted at over 14,000 dollars or an increase of 66,750%. The rights of an original single first issue share transformed it into 144 divisions or shares as a result of successive new issues.

The shares of Cisco, the next most valuable company in the world that vied with Microsoft for the top spot, had entered the market at eighteen dollars were worth 21,435 dollars, a growth of 119,000% in ten years.

Kavanagh could not help mentally calculating the results of the fall in Microsoft's shares. They were down from the beginning of the year high of around 120 dollars to 106 dollars on the previous Friday, and at that moment were down to 87 dollars.

He calculated that the 15% of the shares in Microsoft that Bill Gates personally owned, had been worth 90 billion dollars on 1st January, then 80 billion on 31 March and now 65 billion, Gates' fortune was melting like snow in the midday sun, he had lost 14 billion over the weekend alone.

That evening at the Frankfurt Airport Sheraton, Kavanagh eyes were fixed to the Bloomberg News that announced the market had lost another 4.7%, zapping to the DW News he saw Deutsch Telekom had lost over 10% that same day.

Kavanagh had a surging feeling that his actions were justified, he had made the right decision. The crash he had feared was taking form. His decision made, he would leave the hotel for the international airport terminal next morning.

Chapter 20. At Castlemains Retreat

Located at the water's edge on the French side of the island, in a six acre compound overlooking the soft green hills across Simpson Bay, was another of Castlemain's homes, or retreats as he liked to call them. There he was far from the duties that encumbered him twenty-four hours a day during most of the year. He could reflect on the condition of the world, he could also meet the kind of people he would not like to be seen with in public, they included those who carried out certain unpleasant tasks that had to be taken care of from time to time.

"It was a wreck when I bought it, completely overgrown, when we came to see it with the agent - couldn't even find the entrance," he liked to tell visitors.

The house was in a typical wood-frame West Indian style. It was set on a rise; about fifteen metres above the sea, a path sloped gently down to shore, though there was practically no beach, rather a flat narrow rock floor covered with the natural debris that drifted in on the sea. The dense vegetation ran almost to the waters edge, separated only by a raised stone path that led to the wooden jetty that zigged and zagged out to deeper water, where his friends and acquaintances could arrive discretely by boat.

The main entrance was at one end of the rectangular shaped house, on the landside, it was used mainly by the housekeeper and trades people. At the other end was a swimming pool, built onto a terrace that jutted out from the flank of the rise. The pool was kidney shaped, of modest but adequate size, and to one side was a bar decorated with tropical flowering plants. A stairway led up to the bedrooms from the pool area, that opened onto a balcony that ran around the entire house, so that the extraordinary view and perfume of the tropics were never more than an instant away.

Castlemain and his guests mostly used his motor launch to go into town or visit friends, not only was it practical, but it was refreshing and there was a sense of escape during the fifteen or so minutes that were needed to cross the bay. His side of the island was Saint Martin, the French side; the other half was the Dutch side Sint Maarten.

Apart from the immediate vicinity of the house, the vegetation was left almost totally natural, three or four times a year the gardener removed the dead undergrowth to avoid fires and comments of neighbours, who would have preferred a more orderly landscaped view.

Castlemain had chosen rather simple but gay local style furnishings in contrast to the sombre style of his Irish country home. He preferred his Caribbean island retreats to the heavy atmosphere of his family estate in Ireland, which consisted of one thousand six hundred hectares of woodlands and fine farmland that lay in the north of County Meath at the heart of Ireland. The estate was dominated by a great house, built in the latter part of the eighteenth century, its neo-classical stone facade crowned with a blue slate roof, sitting in a dell overlooking a small lake.

There were besides the ballroom, two libraries, twenty-two rooms, kitchens and quarters for the domestics and hired help. The permanent staff of nine persons looked after the every day affairs, but for receptions as many as forty additional staff was necessary, as was the case for their traditional New Year's ball.

Castlemain employed an estate manager as well as a permanent secretary resident at Castlemain House who looked after his personal and family affairs.

Not only did David Castlemain enjoy the leisure of life that his position gave him, he expected respect from those around him, he felt it was due. His awareness of the social position of his family had been transmitted to him by past generations, in spite of his affable good manners he tolerated no truck from such upstarts as Kennedy, whom he saw merely as a useful hands to execute his instructions.

He was the decider, he was in control and above all it was he who took the credits and rewards, wherever they came from. In short he was nothing less than the seigneur exercising his hereditary rights. As time passed and his financial power extended from Ireland to England, the Continent and beyond, he slowly but surely became authoritarian and autocratic. The power to bestow his favours through his bank fed his obsession and desire for power and position.

His strict upbringing had given him the taste for the adventure and excitement that he later experienced in South America. Since his father's death, his obligation to duty in the staid world of banking left him yearning for escape from the boredom of his stifling Dublin business environment. He was born into wealth, it was a natural condition to him and as the heads of previous generations of his family he had never known anything different.

He carefully balanced serious business interests with a careful dose of exoticism, new business ventures, the Caribbean with his yacht, his unusual and sometimes doubtful friends. He liked taking personal risks that made the adrenaline flow, but he took care not endanger his long-term business interests.

He was not blind to the source of certain funds that flowed through the banks that his family owned in the Caymans and Antigua. He, as a respectable member of the banking community, controlled his interests through a maze of trusts and holding companies that cascaded through the secrecy of Switzerland, Monaco and Liechtenstein.

As for other old wealthy banking families the rules had been established over generations in the thickly carpeted offices of the banking establishment in the City of London, where a different set of rules applied to the rich.

Castlemain was intolerant of those who tried to upstage him, he was the one who thought and decided, all those in his service were there to implement his ideas and execute his instructions. Those who bucked the rules quickly found themselves on the street, with little hope of ever finding employment in another banking establishment.

Chapter 21. The Money Rolls In

The value of Swap shares rocketed through the stratosphere in a space of six months, from an initial pricing in punts, or Irish pounds, of £10 to £12,000, with Kavanagh still holding over twenty percent of the shares in the company.

The initial capital of the company at its foundation had been £1000 divided into 100 shares. Kavanagh had held 50%, Castlemain 20% with Jim Carmichael and Phil Moftan holding 15% each.

After three months the owners, seizing the opportunity in a booming market for Hi-Tech stocks, took the decision to increase the capital to £3 million by the issue of 600,000 new shares, of which 400,000 were to be subscribed to immediately at an initial price of £10 per share, half of those being reserved for the existing shareholders and the other half being offered to the market, they were snapped up on the first day of trading. All the shares were tradable on the markets.

The founders paid into Swap cheques equal to the value of their new shares, with monies advanced by a loan facility from the Irish Union Bank. At the end of the first week of trading the value of the shares had had increased from £10 to £200. The owners then sold shares onto the market for a sum equal to that of their loans from the Irish Union, they then repaid their loans together with interest calculated at an annual rate of 8% for a total period of ten days.

Kavanagh sold 10,000 shares for £2 million and paid back the advance to the bank plus the interest of about £5,000 and pocketed £995,000. In only ten breath-taking days he had made a paper profit of almost £19,000,000 based on the value of the 90,000 shares he still held.

The other three partners carried out the same operation. The company had already

reached a market value of I£80 million and then continued to surge ahead by leaps and bounds at a dizzying speed, driven by the blind speculation of the punters. That had been merely the start and in the months that followed the shares again multiplied by almost twenty times.

The value of Kavanagh's shares made, an already fairly wealthy man, on paper that is, the owner of a great fortune; greater than almost any other person in the Republic, he was a billionaire in Irish Punts.

The 200,000 shares that the company had initially sold to the market had brought in a mere couple of million Irish Punts at the offering price, which were peanuts compared to their subsequent value. The directors then took the decision to take advantage of the rise in the market value of the shares and the frenzy with which the punters were throwing money at Hi-Tech stocks. They sold to the market the remaining 200,000 non-subscribed shares, thus creating a large capital reserve, which would keep the company in cash if the going got bad.

He with his partners had become 'dot-com' multi-millionaires, like another couple of hundred or so fortunate players around the world, from Hong Kong to India and from London to New York and San Francisco.

How many of them would keep their fortune was another question. It was not the first time fortunes had been made by speculation or break-throughs in new technologies. From the South Sea Bubble to Railways, from Steel to Automobiles, both lucky and daring men had become immensely rich overnight, many to lose their fortune almost immediately.

Kavanagh's previous brushes with disaster and misfortune had made him a very cautious man under all the brouhaha that surrounded his rise to instant fame and the delirious state of the stock market. He had become a national celebrity, recognised in the streets of Dublin by passers-by, he was invited to talk shows and to press interviews.

As a celebrity in a small country his every move was under the scrutiny of the media. The readers of the press wanted to know more about this new Irish hero. Who was Sean Kavanagh? Where did he come from? What was his trick? His beginnings with the NIB were being held up as an example for would-be-investors in Ireland and its booming Celtic Tiger economy.

Chapter 22. A Different Vision

Raul Cienfuegos was a member of the elite close circle of military men that surrounded Fidel Castro. They watched over his security and maintained the image of the manly Spartan world of a revolutionary. He was not of the same generation of Castro, but he carried the name of Camilo Cienfuegos one of the three heroes of the Revolution together with Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.

Camilo Cienfuegos had been killed in a plane crash in October 1959.

Fidel Castro was the godfather of Raul Cienfuegos and had decided on a military career for the young Raul after his uncle's untimely death. It was the duty of the revolution to care for the families of the people's heroes.

That night when Castro had received Castlemain in Havana, Cienfuegos had been present. He did not have the same vision of the future as that of his godfather. He had tasted the rotten fruit of the Revolution, the corruption and despair that enveloped it. A monument to such a failure was an insult to the suffering of the Cuban people who had endured the grinding poverty of four decades, in a system that reeked of destitution and was falling apart at its seams.

In spite of that, Raul Cienfuegos admired El Jefe, he was a living legend, and maybe history had failed him. But time had worked its relentless machine and Fidel Castro's last hour was approaching. The flag would be passed on, that was the way it was and always would be. Men like Jose Marti and Manuel de Cespedes had risen to carry the banner of their country, Fidel Castro was another giant and soon it would be the turn of a new flag bearer, Raul Cienfuegos believed he was that person, it was his destiny.

Cuba desperately needed a new leader for its reconstruction, for the future of the people, but not useless monuments to glorify his godfather's failure.

Cienfuegos had a different vision, the vision of a new Pinochet, where a determined military man could rebuild a strong and vibrant economy, such as that of Chile. But Cuba was an eternal slave to sugar with the mentality that two generations of communism had bred. Cienfuegos needed capital and he was not prepared to exchange the misery of communism for an impoverished military dictatorship.

Carlos Ortega shared certain of his ideas and offered him his support with the money and power he controlled, to build a new Cuba, without the bitter old men from Florida nursing their old grudges from a bygone era.

New cities would be built, but according to his plans and not that of a dead ideology.

Raul Cienfuegos vowed that Ciudad 'Castlemain' would never be completed by that foolish Irishman, let alone be named after him, he would bide his time until the moment was ripe.

Chapter 23. The New Economy

Jim Carmichael's business in the UK grew quickly, profiting from the subsidised services of Sean Kavanagh's Irish firm, Investec. The Irish firm concentrated on developing its home market with new customers, mainly banks and insurance companies.

Among those customers was the Irish Union Bank, which had merged with the Anglo-Cooperative Bank, a group of regional banks in the North of England. Both banks had European aspirations but lacked competitive size. The new group was named the Anglo-Irish Union Bank.

The Chairman of Anglo-Irish Union was David Castlemain, who had engineered the merger and pursued the growth of the group, forging links with the French BCN, selling them a ten percent share of the new group, gaining access to their extensive European network.

Within four years Investec's sales had grown to over £8 million, producing a modest profit. Investec was then launched with a great publicity campaign onto the Dublin new companies stock exchange. Castlemain's bank took a thirty percent stake in the company, seeing a strong growth potential with the development of the Internet.

The bank raised capital and encouraged the company to spread its wings. Investec had commenced the development of applications for mobile telephones and Internet services, technologies that would enable the mobile telephone to access Internet services. Further into the future it would be possible to see the correspondent at the other end of the line, watch movies and music videos in high quality colour images. A fabulous market.

At the outset the new technologies were of no great interest to the general public, who saw them more as the distant dreams of specialists. But the phenomenal growth of mobile telephone exceeded all forecasts and the Internet exploded into the domain of the general public.

Castlemain, who followed closely the markets in the USA, and take-off of the Nasdaq New Technologies stocks, decided together with Kavanagh the moment was right to float a new start-up. The shares would be traded on the Dublin Exchange and the Alternative Investment Market in London.

His ambition was to equip the Irish Union Bank with an Internet capability, to provide its customers with Internet banking, so that any one of them at any time in any place could get instantaneous access to their accounts and the bank's services. Users could carry out transactions, from paying a restaurant bill to renting a car, or, even buying shares and transferring money from their accounts to any connected location in the world.

The stampede into the new company, baptised, Shannon Wireless Applications Protocol, otherwise known as Swap, was unforeseeable and astonishing. The frenzy followed the same New Technology Internet related phenomena in the USA, the UK and continental Europe.

The so-called New Economy was on the march and nobody but nobody wanted to miss out on the chance to make a killing on the stock market in new technology stocks.

Castlemain adroitly left the task of drawing up the legal documents incorporating CISCAP Construction & Development, as a limited company under Irish law, to Pat Kennedy. The capital was one hundred thousand Irish punts, although at that precise moment only one hundred had been paid in. The object of the company according to its articles of association was to provide overseas consulting services for the development of the tourist industry as well as undertake any other kind of business decided by its directors.

Irish company law was very accommodating regarding private companies. Their owners and directors had a very large latitude in determining the development of the business, provided that they filed their tax returns on time, and keep the registrar of companies in Dublin informed of all official decisions and changes that the directors were obliged to register.

The directors of the company included Pat Kennedy, Tony Arrowsmith and David Castlemain's wife Nancy. The registered offices were established at Kennedy's business address in Limerick City, whilst they awaited approval from the National Investment Board for their financial participation.

A feasibility project had been submitted to the Investment Board that described in generous terms the objectives of the new company, which included; consulting services for the creation of new hotels and tourist centres, management and training as well as financial services.

The base for income calculations was the contract from the future Ciudad Cayo Saetia Development Consortium, which over a five-year period would bring almost fifteen million Irish pounds into the company and create fifty new jobs in the Shannon area. In addition the feasibility analysis foresaw that the company would endeavour to place Irish made equipment and materials in the projects to be developed, thus providing further employment and business prospects for the country.

There was no doubt that Kennedy had prepared a first class application. He knew exactly how the NIB functioned and what was needed to obtain their approval. Arrowsmith provided the technical data, based on the information that had been supplied from Cuba and financial calculations by Castlemain's specialists.

The feasibility had calculated a budget of eight hundred thousand pounds the first year, covering office facilities, salaries and expenses. The second year would require two million and for each of the three following years four million pounds. Those estimates could be recalculated upwards if the business justified additional funds.

What was important in the calculations was the participation of the NIB in the form of cash grants, which could be as much as one hundred percent of the estimated funds needed for certain items but never less than fifty percent.

Kennedy had calculated total grants of £7 million over the five-year period, if the

NIB accepted the total package, that was a minimum, and there was relatively little doubt that they would approve the project on the basis of the backing from the Irish Union Bank, who would participate in cash and loans to cover all the needs.

It was just after ten in the morning as they drove to Kennedy's office in the driving rain, typical of the West of Ireland. It was the third Tuesday of the month and as normal at the NIB, the investment committee met at ten to recommend for approval any new investments. Mulligan had promised to call Kennedy, just as soon as the meeting broke up, normally before midday, to inform him of the committee's decision.

Arrowsmith left Kennedy to get on with his business and passed his time drinking coffee and flipping through the newspapers in the meeting room. In his mind he went over his position, it was not at all critical to his future whether the project was approved or not, but over the six months leading up to that moment he had let himself become involved to a much greater degree than he could have imagined on his first visit to Kennedy in Limerick. He had put a considerable amount of effort into the project and it had become a challenge and even a matter of personal pride.

Arrowsmith looked at his watch, it was just after twelve, he stood up and went into the secretary's office. She looked at him regretfully.

"No news yet Mr Arrowsmith," she announced.

"Anybody with Pat?"

"No."

He opened the door of Kennedy's office, he was on the phone. He put his hand over the mouthpiece and made a sign.

"Sit down, it's Mulligan."

"Yesh John, I see, good we'll do that," he said seriously into the phone.

"Okay, this evening at the club, bye for now."

He put down the phone and then jumped up rubbing his hands together with glee.

"They've approved it."

"Your secretary said they hadn't called!"

"That's right, I called Mulligan on his direct line, it was after twelve, they'd just come out of the meeting."

"So what did he say?"

"He couldn't say too much, we'll see him at the club this evening. Don't worry though everything is okay, just a couple of small points to be clarified."

"Excellent."

"We're in business," Kennedy beamed.

"Did he say how much?"

"No."

Chapter 25. Another Start-Up

Let's see now Sean," Kennedy said to Kavanagh, "what we want is a business plan together with the product description, and a market report. I suggest you give me the outline for the financial part which I'll have my staff complete and then you look after the marketing and product part."

"Is there some kind of time table?"

"Yesh, first we take an off the shelf company as a vehicle for the project. That's easy, it costs £100. That company will present the business plan, say for the end of next week, just in time for the next submission date. The whole procedure takes a couple of months."

He then went on to explain that once the business plan had been finalised it was then submitted to the NIB for appraisal. If it passed that step it was then presented with any modifications necessary to the Investment Committee that met every first Thursday of the month. If the committee approved the project it could be under way almost at once with the assistance of the bank that would open accounts and advance the funds.

"It's very bureaucratic, but it works and not only do I know all the ropes, but all of the lads," he winked and laughed.

The company was bought from one of his cronies who had a string of ready-formed limited companies for sale. Kennedy changed the name, at the Register of Companies in Dublin, to Investec Ltd.

They prepared the business plan, which was approved without any difficulties. Jim Carmichael and Phil Moftan providing the product and market reports.

Just about two months later Kennedy and Kavanagh sat in the offices of the Irish Union Bank in Limerick with Paddy O'Brien, the regional manager, to open accounts.

At that point Sean Kavanagh had not advanced a single Irish penny. They needed £250,000 for the first year in addition to the grants that would be provided by the NIB.

"Okay!" said Paddy, "First I'll open a new personal account for Sean here, then we'll advance a loan of £250,000 paid into his new account. Right!"

"Okay," replied Kennedy whilst Kavanagh tried to follow.

O'Brien called his secretary and just a few moments after Sean had put his signature on the forms the account was opened, credited with £250,000.

A chequebook was produced and Kavanagh wrote out a cheque of £250,000 from his new account to Investec Ltd., which was deposited in the company's new account at the bank.

The secretary then drew up a certificate of deposit in the name of Investec for £250,000, which O'Brien slide over to Pat.

Pat as a director of the company then wrote a cheque out from the new Investec

checkbook to Kavanagh for the same sum, which Kavanagh deposited into his newly opened personal account. The loan was then repaid to the bank, and “Hey presto!” the transaction was terminated.

A certificate of deposit for 250,000 virtual Irish pounds had been created.

“Now lads when you have the grants and everything else tied up with the NIB, we can look into loans for a similar sum to the grants.”

They had in effect half-a-million Irish Punts to start the business rolling.

Kavanagh felt elated, there was a lot of work ahead, but he was firmly back on the road again.

What Kavanagh had not realised was that he had personally received a payment from the new company of £250,000 - a transaction which would come back to haunt him.

The certificate of deposit was the last piece of paperwork necessary for the formal approval of the NIB.

Chapter 26. The Bottens Handelsbank

The Bottens Handelsbank, one of Sweden’s principal regional banks, was also the Irish Union’s correspondent bank in Scandinavia. The Handelsbank had concluded an agreement to participate in the banking pool that had been formed by the Irish Union to finance the Ciscap Consortium.

To ensure the good relations and liaise with the Swedes during the project construction, David Castlemain had asked Arrowsmith to brief Stig Eriksson in Stockholm on their latest plans.

Eriksson was a laid back Swede, he thought he had seen it all, his seemingly incredulous bulging blue eyes gaped at Arrowsmith as he described the construction plans for the first phase. Arrowsmith felt that the going was hard as he waited for Eriksson’s reaction.

“You know Tony, it’s simply that I look at it like a military problem.”

Arrowsmith could hardly retain his surprise at Eriksson’s sudden diversion to the army, but he held himself back and listened.

Eriksson leaned back in his chair, it was evident that he was used to people listening to him. His jacket was unbuttoned and his gut thrust out from a shirt that he had outgrown, his tie had been pushed to one side and the shirt buttons strained to hold back the mass of flesh.

“Yes, you have to have discipline if you want to win the business war. An army cannot tolerate those who do not respect the rules. The Handelsbank is like that with its personnel, we have to pull together. That’s why we’ve been successful in our aggressive property market strategy.”

Arrowsmith felt relieved, for a moment he had thought that Eriksson was

negative, but he then saw that he had been merely weighing up Arrowsmith, establishing the pecking order, as he saw it.

“You follow the rules Tony and the bank will go along with your plans, I’m not what can be called a technical man, I keep an eye on our investment,” he said almost as a warning, “but I know David well and our business relations have always been excellent.”

“That’s nice to hear Stig.” Eriksson had made the point that he was a confidant of Castlemain. Arrowsmith smiled to himself, Eriksson did not convince him with his over exaggerated self importance.

“Have you a copy of the construction schedule?”

“Yes, everything is here,” said Arrowsmith dipping into his briefcase, “there’s also an up to date copy of the financial plan with the present financial structure showing the different investors, banks and the other participants.”

“What’s it looking like then?”

He went on to explain the details and how the financing had been structured. For the first phase the Irish Union would take 25%, the BCN pool 30%, and the Handelsbank 15%, and the remainder coming from various investors such as franchisers and hotel groups.

“Excellent, looks like things are moving well, on our side the timeshare partners, Golden Holiday Properties AB, have already started to prepare their advertising campaign, which will be launched early next year. I’ve seen some of the preliminary designs, very nice.”

“That’s good news Stig.”

“Yes, I like to keep things organised, my army background,” he said throwing Arrowsmith one of his superior looks.

Arrowsmith wondered maliciously to himself which army that was, if it was the Swedish army it was a long time since they had been able to put their theories into practice.”

“So Tony, what are the arrangements for our meeting in Pointe-à-Pitre?”

He referred to a ‘meeting’, in reality a week’s cruise on Castlemain’s yacht with Doudoune, Eriksson’s magnificent girl friend, a tall coffee skinned Guadeloupian, she was slim, chic and well spoken with a dazzling smile. Arrowsmith wondered what she saw in him, it was definitely not his gut and concluded it could only be money.

The meeting was no more than an excuse for another of Eriksson’s trips, part of the perks for services rendered.

The Caribbean was so exotic and exciting to Eriksson compared to the frigid atmosphere of the Swedish bank and monotony of Stockholm. The freedom he had enjoyed in recent years through his trips to Tallinn, in newly independent Estonia, where the bank was financing development projects, had given him a taste for the high life. The success of the business he had introduced to the bank from Estonian investors had pleased the management. They were generating good profits helping Eriksson’s newly found customers invest in the real estate projects that the bank

was financing.

In Tallinn, the women Eriksson met had the type of easy morals, were a vague reminder to him of the Sweden of the seventies, when he had been much younger. However, the motivations were different, in Tallinn only dollars counted, 'flower-power' had no exchange value. Apart from that Estonia was just another Baltic country, close to Scandinavia, in both in its climate and its peoples. The Estonians reminded Eriksson of their cousins the Finns, for whom he had more than a certain disdain.

Eriksson lived for his moments of escape away from the heavy silence of his suburban home, the overpowering green of the summer and the never-ending snow and cold of the long winter months. He lived forty kilometres from Stockholm's city centre, a life composed of endless commuting, forced Nordic restraint, self discipline and 'honesty'.

His responsibilities, until the political changes in the Baltic States, had been limited to domestic property and Scandinavian investments, with the occasional outing to London or Paris.

Tallinn had given him his first taste of something different, but Guadeloupe had offered him an exoticism that he had never known and that he had only vaguely imagined existed, for the rich and fortunate. The nearest he had come to such a life was during holidays in Palma de Mallorca, amongst the masses of fellow Scandinavians and other northern Europeans, celebrating their two week summer orgy by consuming vast amounts of beer under the hot Mediterranean sun, observing from afar, from the terraces of portside cafes and beaches, the yachts of the rich anchored in the ports or bays of the island, imagining their golden existence.

Guy Courtauld had given him a taste of the 'jet set' life that he had only dreamed of. From the deck of the Marie Galante, Castlemain's splendid yacht, Eriksson saw not only the marina and sailing club from another perspective, but also the world. He watched the tourists from the hotels and cruise ships passing on the quay, who filmed him with their video cams, as he nonchalantly sipped his glass of chilled Champagne, consciously posing on the polished mahogany deck. They were certainly envious and he had no doubt that they imagined him as one of the rich and easy.

Eriksson was easily seduced, especially after Courtauld had put their oft-used plan into action, introducing Stig to Doudoune, who worked in the Casino at Gosier. She was one of the many attractive, free and easy girls that hung around the yachting crowd.

Eriksson fell into the trap, and from that point there was no difficulty in manoeuvring him into obtaining the approval of the Handelsbank participation in the project financing.

Arrowsmith's visit to Stockholm had been a mere formality, a facade, and the

occasion to announce to Eriksson the arrangements for his next trip.

The participation in the financing by Handelsbank, gave the project a broader international image, beyond that of its original promoters. It had had the effect of being the catalyser to close the banking pool arrangement. For there was not only its financial contribution, but also the guaranteed market it would bring through its subsidiary, Golden Homes Properties AB, that would promote the sale of the timeshare units to Swedes hungry for the tropical sun and a stake in the future property boom.

“Well Stig if everything is clear with you we’ll leave on Friday, everything is arranged, I’ve booked our seats on the flight to Paris and then on to Pointe-à-Pitre.”

Arrowsmith was not looking forward to the long trip in the company of Eriksson, there was no other alternative, the Bottens Handelsbank participation was a coup that David Castlemain’s financial genius had conceived and was cemented by Guy Courtauld’s hold on Eriksson.

Chapter 27. Ivan Pavlov Garcia

The Irish development company set up their representative office in Havana. They had a staff of over twenty people, almost all of whom were locals with the exception of the managers, three expatriate Irishmen.

One of the main objectives Arrowsmith had set out for the representative office was to seek suitable partners that would invest and develop certain of the lots into which the Ciscap project had been divided.

The local manager, Patrick Devereux, a cosmopolitan Irishman with an old Anglo-Norman name, spoke excellent French and Spanish. He had been recruited in Quebec, where he had managed a major hotel construction project that had come to an end.

Devereux found through his friends in Quebec a potential investor, a Cuban, a wealthy expatriate Cuban who held a Canadian passport, Ivan Pavlov Garcia.

Ivan Garcia, as he preferred to be called, was one of those many Cubans with a Russian father, Igor Pavlov, who during his military service for the Red Army in Cuba had served as an interpreter. His father had been born in Tallinn, Estonia, at that time a Soviet Republic. In the good old days many Soviet citizens had married Cuban girls, but when Russia fell out of favour, most chose to leave Cuba for their old country, bringing home with them a bitter-sweet memory, leaving their wives behind.

Many banded the day they made their decision to return, the USSR had changed. Such was the case for Estonia, but on the contrary, for the good. Estonia had gained its independence with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, and was taking advantage of its traditional cultural links with Finland with its highly developed

economy, both countries sharing the same language, be it with some variations.

Igor Pavlov had returned with his family to Estonia in the mid eighties, a Soviet Republic, then struggling for its independence against the rapidly failing Soviet regime. His son Ivan quickly left Estonia for Quebec to escape conscription into the Red Army.

In Canada working with other Cubans expatriates and refugees he successfully speculated in the property market. He then invested in Miami, a home to a large Cuban population, where he accumulated handsome profits as a result the property boom, when the American economy entered a long and sustained period of prosperity that commenced shortly after the 1991 Gulf War. He then turned his interest to Guadeloupe, building condominiums for the growing number of French Canadian holidaymakers.

He maintained strong contacts with Estonia, buying choice old commercial property in the centre of Tallinn, which he renovated and let to foreign businesses setting up in the country. Thanks to his prosperity his father had been able to retire in comfort taking the nationality of the newly independent Estonian Republic.

Ivan Garcia had speculated on office buildings and other commercial property, but had not been previously been involved in hotels. After the financial aid from the Soviet Union to Cuba suddenly dried up in 1991, and the country started to open to tourism, he realised that there was a market to be tapped.

His first investment was the acquisition of a run down, once luxurious, hotel in Old Havana that his company restored to its previous grandeur. He soon realised that apart from a few luxury hotels at beach resorts, most hotels catered mainly for business travellers or were located in the business areas of the cities.

When the tourists started to arrive by the planeload, they wanted sea, sand and sun with all facilities at affordable prices. The majority could not afford the up market prices of the first class hotels; in addition the city locations were unacceptable. There were more than enough five star palaces. The new wave of tourist wanted beach locations, with sports and entertainment facilities. Garcia then set to building tourist hotels, for package holiday groups, which were soon to dominate the market.

With his experience in Cuba he was an ideal 'build and operate' partner for one of the Ciscap lots.

Chapter 28. Eriksson

He sat drinking coffee in Arrowsmith's office on avenue Franklin D.Roosevelt in Paris. His bulging watery blue eyes fixed Arrowsmith, he looked like an incredulous fish, he still wore the same poorly cut suit, his stomach pushed against his shirt causing it to gape, pulling on the buttons, his

bright red tie bore the stains from a recent lunch. Before moving to the capital he had spent most of his life in Sundsvall, a soulless hole, three hundred and fifty kilometres north of Stockholm, most of the year a grim icy waste where smart dressing was an unknown and unnecessary luxury.

Erikkson imagined he knew the world, it was true he had travelled for the Bottens Handelsbank, investing the saving funds they managed, however he had observed it mainly from dreary hotel rooms.

Erikkson likened his management style to the army, in which he had served his military service as a lieutenant. Arrowsmith was not impressed, as far as he could remember the Swedish army had spent a most of its time watching international developments from the isolation of the neutral democratic-socialist position of its governments, their last battle had been so long back that it had been forgotten.

“You know Tony, we are not so sophisticated as you down here in Central Europe, we’ve only recently come out of the forest,” he said less as a sign of admission, but rather in derision for the French, whom he saw as effete and far from Scandinavian standards of honesty and seriousness. ‘Central’ to him meant that Paris was midway between north and south, but nevertheless a country of ‘blackheads’ as Swedes sometimes contemptuously called southern Europeans.

You said it, thought Arrowsmith, as Erikkson continued his lecture on tourist development in the Caribbean. As long as you come up with your investment funds you can think of it as you like.

The following day Arrowsmith had commenced early, walking from his apartment to the Metro at Nation, in 12th district of Paris, it was just after seven, dark and cold. What else could have been expected from a cold February morning he had sighed to himself as he shook off his sleep. He took the Metro to the Gare de Lyon where he alighted. It was depressing, the station was old with cast iron stanchions dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, it had been recently painted a garish orange. As he crossed the foot bridge to the opposite platform, the foul odour of urine and the homeless reached his nostrils, it was an odour that he detested; it nagged him, not out of sympathy with the poor and unwashed, but by rather the fear that it was a disease that could somehow be catching.

He waited on the middle of platform for ten minutes, three trains passed and Erikkson was not on one of them. He paced backwards and forwards looking at his watch, they had enough time, but his natural anxiety pulled at him. The fourth train passed, he picked up his bag and walked down the platform towards the exit. He found Erikkson sitting waiting on one of the plastic seats, half hidden behind one of the cast iron stanchions. Arrowsmith swore to himself, the stupid bastard hadn’t the good sense to stand-up and look around.

They exchanged greetings and headed in the direction of the main line station, crossing the crowds of early morning workers huddled up in their shapeless clothes. The two men arrived in the bright modern TGV high-speed train terminal, the departure board indicated that train N°607 was leaving platform 15 at 7.45am, as scheduled. They validated their tickets in the automatic machines and proceeded

to the train. The crowd had changed, smartly dressed businessmen and the occasional skier mixed in with them.

It was just three hours to Geneva, where they were to be met by Guy de Montfort. He had fixed up a meeting at a branch of the Swiss Credit Bank nearby the Windsor Hotel, where they were booked overnight. De Montfort had opened an account for Stig Eriksson, into which he had deposited one hundred thousand dollars in return for Eriksson's services of assuring the Bottens Handelsbank's participation in the funding of the first phase of Ciscap. The Handelsbank was to join the pool of investors that had been put together by the Irish Union, taking a fifteen percent share in the financing of the investment.

The Bottens Handelsbank had been introduced as a potential investor by Castlemain. Eriksson, the Bottens Handelsbank's property investment manager, had first been invited to Cuba on a fully paid trip, then enticed to Guadeloupe, the French island in the Caribbean, ostensibly to visit the BCN sponsored Hotel Club; a new tourist hotel which was in final stages of completion.

Castlemain had no illusions about how such business was carried out and had no qualms in offering men of Eriksson's ilk a cruise on his yacht, a sweetener followed by gifts and money, to get their commitment in his projects.

Eriksson's visit to Guadeloupe had been a great success, thanks to Guy Courtauld, one of Castlemain's many friends in the region. Briefed by Castlemain, he knew how to take care of customers such as the Swede. He had got the measure of Eriksson, full of Vodka, as soon as he had stumbled off the Air France flight at Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, in the French Antilles.

Chapter 29. Les Marchand de Biens

They called themselves rather pretentiously *Marchand de Biens*, or translated into English; Property Merchants. The expression was a little out of date; it had been popular in the late eighties during the last property boom in Metropolitan France. In effect they were Real Estate Agents and had their head offices in downtown Pointe-à-Pitre, in an uninteresting modern, but poorly maintained and out of place multi-storey building, the Tour Cede.

Serge Amadis with Guy Courtauld were partners and owners of Caribbean Property Development SA, the name had sounded grander to them in English. They did not spend that much time in their dreary head office, preferring the luxurious sales office situated on the main square of the town.

Gilles Michel managed the administrative and legal aspects of the business in Tour Cede. He was what could be described as a minority partner in the business, holding a five percent share, on whom they totally depended for his professionalism, which gave an air of respectability to some of the more distasteful

aspects of their business.

Besides their real estate business, they represented two timeshare promoters, Prestige, a Paris based company that had built two complexes on the island, and Worldwide Leisure Homes, a Canadian promoter and timeshare exchange organisation.

They were not specialised in any particular sector of the real estate business, the island was too small for that. They took what came, mainly buying and selling property, but made a good regular business in managing the time-share properties. In addition they took on property development with Metropolitan companies, handling one or two projects a year, depending on the general economic situation.

Their business was good, but they wanted to broaden their activities and get into property development for themselves, whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself, such as the planned hotel club in Basse Terre.

Property business was a cutthroat affair and they were hard-nosed wheeler-dealers, they had to be to survive and survive they did, living in great style. They owned large villas, with swimming pools, surrounded by tropical gardens nearby Deshaies, known as the Emerald Island, at the edge of the natural park on the flank of the mountains that ran from north to south, dominated by the active volcano, la Soufrière.

They shared a company boat, a large high-powered Guy Gouache, anchored in the Marina at Gosier. They used the boat freely to entertain selected customers or friends, trips around Basse Terre to the Cousteau Park, where they anchored overnight, or sunbathing on Parrot Island, drinking rum maracudja and lambi.

They enjoyed their private lives, well away from the main tourist areas, where luckless tourists were confronted with indifferent restaurants and scowling waiters, charging extravagant prices for fresh fish. The two realtors fished from their boat or bought fresh lobster directly from the local fishermen on the small beaches on the west side of the island.

The tourist districts were their hunting grounds. There, they employed salesmen for miserable salaries, the likes of Jean Christophe, a young man left over from a package tour, whose job was to pull in tourists with smooth talk, inviting them to a free cocktail in the show apartments, where their experienced staff extolled the virtues of investing in a holiday home under the palms of the Caribbean.

They looked at the tourist with a professional interest, at the same time despising them. The profile of the typical tourist was according to Serge Amadis – ‘Des cons, middle-managers, small business people and shopkeepers, who arrived on charter flights with the wife and two kids for ten days in paradise, who, when they returned to their suburban monotony, would bore their friends and neighbours talking of their holiday for the rest of the year or even longer.’ They were the gogos who dreamt of a life of leisure in the tropical sunshine, but ended up paying for the extravagant life style of the two ‘Marchand de Biens’.

The trouble was that tourism had become democratic, any secretary from Birmingham, Frankfurt or Lyon could spend eight days in Bali or Cancun on a trip

subsidised by the works committee.

Caribbean Property Development had their sales office in a splendidly restored Colonial two story house, built in wood with ornate iron work balconies, the roof bordered by zinc plate cut into delicate forms, like fine lace. The house faced the main square of Pointe-à-Pitre, Place de la Victoire. At pavement level was the real estate office with the sales and reception for visitors. Serge and Guy had their luxuriously appointed offices on the first floor with a view onto the coconut palm and thick trunked tropical trees in the square. On the second floor was a luxurious apartment, which they often used on weekdays, avoiding the thirty-kilometre trip home or loaned it occasionally to their privileged friends.

Their most recent project was to build an exclusive and expensive hotel club in Basse Terre. They planned the publicity launch in grand style with the arrival of the transatlantic yacht race, 'La Route du Rhum', and all the television and media publicity that went with it.

For the event they had rented a penthouse on fifth floor of a stylish apartment building, almost three hundred square metres of luxury, overlooking the Gosier marina, facing the yacht club.

Chapter 30. A Cargo

The cocaine tightly packed in bales, consisting of a number of smaller waterproof plastic covered packages weighing a few kilos each, was loaded by night from a launch onto a fast motor cruiser anchored a few miles off the port of Maracaibo, in the neck of water between the Lago de Maracaibo and the Golfo de Venezuela. The cocaine had arrived by road from the narco-industry's clandestine laboratories, located in the area surrounding the town of Santa Marta on the north coast of Colombia, where it had been transformed from a raw paste into a refined product.

The cargo, totalling nearly three tons of pure cocaine, had crossed the frontier between the two countries, which were separated by the Sierra Perija Mountains. It arrived at intervals on different four-wheel drive vehicles to avoid the border patrols. It was a simple precaution, there were very few night patrols, it was far too dangerous for the police, the narco-traffickers and smugglers were heavily armed and did not hesitate to fire.

The cargo had a market value of over one hundred million US dollars and its journey could take several weeks via the Windward Island and the Canaries before arriving at its final destination in Europe.

Boisnier had received coded email instructions to rendezvous with the motor

launch and a gofast off a coral reef called Bird Island some 200 kilometres to the west of Guadeloupe. The weather forecast indicated favourable conditions, the main criteria for the drug runners, good cloud cover but little wind and with the moon on the wane giving them a fine but dark night.

The Marie Galante was carrying a full load of nine thousand litres of gasoline to refuel the gofast and enough for the motor cruiser if necessary. The cargo was to be transboarded at night, one in the morning, which would enable the gofast to make the four-hour run up to Sint Maarten under the cover of darkness. After the refuelling Boisnier would then return to Pointe-à-Pitre, where he was scheduled to pick up Castlemain and his guests for their seven-day cruise to the Caymans.

Boisnier was experienced in refuelling operations, the risk was small, and it usually took not more than half-an-hour, depending on sea conditions, to pump the fuel from the yacht's tanks to the gofast.

The three boats made their rendezvous exactly as planned and the refuelling went without a hitch in the calm sea, as did the transfer of the cargo to the gofast, just as it had done on previous occasions. As they disconnected the pipelines, the motors of the gofast, which had been ticking over at a regular rhythm, stopped. After more than twenty minutes of effort there was no way they could restart the motors, they were powerful and highly tuned with electronic fuel injection. There was an electrical problem, which could not be easily solved.

The captain of the motor cruiser had the choice of either taking the gofast into tow or abandoning it, if he agreed to take it into tow then he adamantly refused to retake the cargo, the risk of being stopped by coast guards was too great with a gofast in tow. They would have to make for Portsmouth in Dominica for repairs, where in any case the combination of a gofast and the motor cruiser would be immediately suspect.

The gofast drug runner was not about to abandon his boat, the captain of the motor cruiser called Baranquilla by a satellite phone equipped with a scrambler. Boisnier was offered a million dollars to transport the cargo to a pick up point off the Saba Bank, where he would be met by another gofast from Sint Maartin. At first he refused to take the risk, it was out of the question he explained, the owner's Caribbean cruise was due to start in two days, if the Marie Galante was not in Gosier as foreseen a search would be launched. Boisnier was nevertheless sorely tempted by the money, which would resolve all of his financial problems.

The offer was raised to two million with clear sign of threat, the narco-traffickers were not interested in his commitments when such huge sums of money were involved, he had no choice but to accept, with the condition that the pickup point could be arranged off the Caymans after he had disembarked his passengers, a week from then. He had really very little choice; the crew of the motor cruiser was armed and could certainly take the ketch if necessary and dump him and his crew overboard to the sharks.

It was agreed, it would cause about a week's delay, but the cargo was of much greater concern than the loss of a few days. They were not worried about Boisnier;

there was little risk that he would double cross the narco-traffickers, if he valued his life. The cargo was swiftly transferred to the Marie Galante and stowed in the ballast compartment. A GPS emitter was put aboard the Marie Galante so that the narco-traffickers could follow her course over the following days. They would communicate with Boisnier to arrange a new pick up point for the drugs.

The Marie Galante arrived in Gosier around eleven the next morning, a busy time of the day in the port with the coming and going of pleasure boats and would not attract any undue attention. They had been out ostensibly trying their new navigation equipment on a test run around the French island Marie Galante and nearby Dominica.

During Boisnier's absence Courtauld had organised the preparations for the cruise that afternoon supplies and fuel were loaded on board. Then the cook and cabin attendant boarded and immediately set to work in preparation for the arrival of the passengers. Finally a technician from the navigation equipment supplier came onboard making the last adjustments and checks on the new equipment, before the owner and his guests joined the yacht at six that evening ready for their richman's jaunt across the Caribbean.

Boisnier was nervous, though he was not the least concerned about his two Guadeloupean hands who sailed the ketch with him. They could be trusted and were well paid for their work and silence. But almost three tons of cocaine on the boat was good for at least twenty years in prison, which at his age meant he would die behind bars.

The local customs and police were no real threat unless something unexpectedly went wrong. He had always gone to great pains to maintain good relations with the authorities avoiding the usual petty tricks of the local charter boats, smuggling in alcohol and cigarettes. He made sure that the families of the officials had their weekend cruises in the off-season and the free rides down to Martinique when the occasion arose. When in port he often invited them aboard for the evening pastis.

With three tons cocaine literally under his feet he seemed to smell the stuff and was almost certain it could be smelt for a couple of miles around. He had always carefully avoided direct involvement in narcotics up to that point, refuelling was a limited risk, but he knew the taste of easy money was like a drug, once tried the risk of being hooked was great.

As soon as he was at sea he would feel happier though that was not a guaranty and his troubles were far from over with seven days cruising the Caribbean. The boat could be boarded and searched in a spot check at any one of the ports where Castlemain chose to make a stopover.

Chapter 31. A Voyage of Discovery

Boisnier skippered the steel hulled yacht, a ketch, the Marie Galante, for its owner David Castlemain. Boisnier, a Frenchman born in New Caledonia, a sometime adventurer, who in spite of his reputation disliked taking senseless risks. Amongst his many and varied talents he was a highly experienced seaman and a certified professional skipper.

When, from time to time, the yacht was chartered by Caribbean Property Development for one of its frequent promotional cruises, Guy Courtauld took over as Boisnier's first mate.

Courtauld was Boisnier's total opposite, an amateur though first class seaman, who whenever the opportunity arose derived an unequalled pleasure from racing the large yacht in heavy seas with, in the opinion of certain persons, a total disregard for the risks incurred, sailing on occasions with an inadequate crew, both in experience and numbers.

The 33.5 metres long ketch had been built in 1964 by a Dutch yard and was designed for worldwide navigation; it had been rebuilt in 1993 with the addition of the most modern fittings and comforts.

Castlemain boasted that his personal company in Guadeloupe had paid just over one million dollars for the boat, a snip compared to the price of a new boat, which would have cost him up to seven million dollars. The ketch had two 250 HP Gardner six cylinder engines that could do eighteen knots, thirty three kilometres an hour for landlubbers, as Boisnier explained, that was fast for a sailing yacht. It could hold up to nine thousand litres of fuel, in two tanks, giving it a cruising range under power of just over five thousand kilometres.

The ketch could carry eight passengers. It had two staterooms and two double-berthed cabins, fitted out in Cuban mahogany and marble in the bathrooms. In addition were the skipper's cabin and quarters for the crew, a galley, and a radio and navigation centre. It was a fine boat with its two masts rising to almost one hundred feet above the water line. The deck fittings were in the finest teak and mahogany.

To sail such a boat needed the highest degree of skill, balanced on the heaving fore deck adjusting the sails and riggings or at the head of the one hundred foot masts was not for the weak hearted or inexperienced, at sea there was a constant threat of danger.

Under ocean going racing conditions and full sail the ketch required a crew of up to eighteen members and could theoretically, in favourable racing conditions, cover over 500 kilometres under sail in twenty-four hours. Most of the time, it sailed under power for the comfort of its charter passengers, who for the most part were well off tourists playing at being yachtsmen. In normal weather conditions and under power, the ketch covered up to 800 kilometres a day.

For most of the year Boisnier rented it for charters. He advertised it as a five star

service with full air-conditioning, cordon bleu cuisine and a capacity for eight first class passengers. It could be chartered for groups at twenty five thousand dollars a week all included, or individually for four thousand dollars per person a week, on condition that he could find at least five passengers.

The cruises aboard the Marie Galante normally consisted of a seven day circuit in the Windward and Leeward Islands, stopping at spots chosen by the passengers, though longer cruises could be booked to other destinations. The passengers were guaranteed to be far from the large tourist cruise ships routes, visiting picturesque ports and deserted beaches with white coral sand and clear water.

For Castlemain the deal was profitable - when Boisnier could afford to pay the rental. In theory Castlemain's tax write-off covered the investment and the financial charges, whilst the Irish Union Bank covered the costs whenever he invited the bank's business guests for a cruise.

Boisnier's constant problem was to fill the boat during the season, at least twenty-five complete weeks every year. It was not that people who could pay three or four thousand dollars a week did not exist, there were simply not enough of them and charter competition in the islands was fierce. On many charters the boat did not have a full compliment of passengers, or, he was forced to offer cut prices to fill the boat.

Whether the boat was full or not he still had hefty costs, harbour charges, wages, maintenance and repairs. The result was that he frequently found himself in arrears with his rental payments to Castlemain, who though he was not pressing, took advantage of his position as owner, when the arrears became too great he became overbearing and patronising.

Boisnier would have been trapped had he not had the liberty due to the great distance that normally separated him from Castlemain. It allowed him to make the other arrangements necessary to supplement his income, enabling him to keep his freedom at sea, the thing he valued most.

Whenever Castlemain arrived for one of his frequent Caribbean cruises, with his high placed friends or important clients of the bank, mixing business with pleasure, Boisnier and his crew sailed the ketch to pick up the guests at the designated port on one of the islands. He normally handled all of the everyday problems leaving Castlemain to play the skipper at the twin helms when it amused him.

Castlemain was nevertheless a good sailor. He could ably captain a crew under competition and had in the past honourable defended himself against the best in races such as the Antigua Classic Week.

"You could sail around the world in this boat without any problem, but with the silly bunch of bastards I normally sail with we hardly ever put out the sails," Boisnier often sighed.

The yacht was fitted with the latest satellite navigation system, a Global Positioning System, which had a precision of five to ten metres at sea. The central unit was linked to the helm so that the boat could be navigated automatically or à vue as desired. Every few seconds the boats position was updated and displayed on

a monitor.

Courtauld was technically outstanding with the sophisticated computerised navigation and weather forecasting system, he was however not a good navigator with natural skills, more a technician, but with the best technology available on board he had not the slightest problem to plot a route and hold it, that was until the system broke down, when he became totally dependant on Boisnier's skills.

Reading the weather was still as much an art as a science, but they were assisted by the European Weather Centre at Reading in England, which transmitted digitalised information on the weather to vessels equipped with suitable computers and faxed maps that showed the latest weather developments.

Castlemain had originally bought the boat through a charter company that had been set up together with Xavier de Montfort. They had planned a fiscal write off by completely rebuilding the boat to cater for up-market charters. His intention had been to combine business with pleasure and renting the boat for charters to Boisnier to cover the operating costs.

The charters proved to be insufficient and the operating costs high. The pleasure turned sour for Boisnier until Courtauld suggested he could help with the costs by turning the boat to a more profitable occupation, seducing investors seeking fiscal relief in the French Antilles.

A weekend on such a boat was enough to convince even the most reticent investors that the skipper, whether he be Boisnier, Courtauld or de Montfort for the occasion, was a member of the jet set that they were about to join. They rarely failed to sign up after cocktails, as the sun set through the riggings behind the prow of the Marie Galante, against the coconut palms the lined the shore of Les Isles des Saintes.

For every completed deal Boisnier was paid a commission in addition to a basic fee for each passenger trip made for Caribbean Property Development clients.

Boisnier together with Courtauld were to sail the boat up to Nassau Town in the Bahamas where they would pick up Arrowsmith. Then they would head back directly south to the Cuban island of Cayo Coco. It should be a decent trip as the wind and the currents were favourable in an east to west direction and they were well out of the hurricane season, though storms could develop at any time of the year. The boat could turn in a smart 16 to 18 knots in favourable conditions under motorised power with canvas rigged when the westerly trade winds were blowing behind them.

Boisnier had arrived in Guadeloupe some ten years previously. He had always led a globetrotter's life, as a sometime navigator, sometime reporter or writer, seeking excitement or adventure wherever new opportunities presented themselves. He had landed in Guadeloupe as an international correspondent for a Parisian newspaper, to cover the anti-Communist guerrilla movements in Central and South America and the developments in Cuba. At first he had enjoyed the pleasure, being a press correspondent he was often pointed out as a minor personality, but he soon realised

he was badly paid. What was worse he realised that covering minor wars in the Americas was a dangerous job; he discovered that the bullets in Colombia were real and the guerrillas were deadly serious.

With his knowledge and experience as an ocean going yachtsman and game fisher, he tried to find a job in the charter business, but without success following the economic crisis at the end of the eighties.

He lived beyond his means, but his opportunity to rectify that came when he met Guy Courtauld and turned his hand to real estate, Courtauld recognised that Boisnier was a natural salesman even if he was not a great businessman. They made a good team at the right moment with business slowly picking up as customers started arriving and as Caribbean cruises became more democratic, reaching out to the middle-income groups from the USA and Europe. Airport passenger facilities and runways were extended to handle mass tourism and wide-bodied jets setting the conditions necessary for a boom in tourism.

He had made some good money, but then became bored; a salesman's life was not for him. Things took a turn when Xavier de Montfort came up with the idea for the charter company with Castlemain. He introduced Boisnier to Castlemain who immediately took a liking to him, admiring his free wheeling style of life and the endless stories of his sometimes-unbelievable adventures around the world, he proposed to Boisnier to oversee the refit of the Marie Galante and then offered him the job of skipper on the yacht.

Boisnier accepted with enthusiasm and revelled in the newfound glamour that such a boat attracted, he spent money at an astonishing rate, much greater than he could have imagined, and he became addicted to a life style that he had difficulties to maintain.

When with Courtauld they turned the boat to selling real estate, apart from the occasional attractive and bored wife, it was a come down. He could not support the endless whinging of overpaid doctors, dentists and their too often overweight pushy wives, about taxes and their struggle to make a living to support their spoilt kids.

As the bills to his suppliers or the rental Castlemain became pressing, Boisnier supplemented his income using the boat as a refuelling tanker, providing a service station for the gofasts that ran the Caribbean routes between the Colombia and the islands. During his years as a correspondent he had made a lot of unlikely friends in Central America. He knew that there were plenty of opportunities in that business and a lot of money to be made, but he was careful, he did not relish a long jail sentence and above all in a South American jail.

Boisnier was not the kind of man to settle down to serious business and living, he needed a constant change of scenery around him, new faces, and new challenges.

His meeting with Eriksson, who had been a cruise guest of Castlemain, offered Boisnier the opportunity of assisting him on certain trips he made between Sweden and Estonia, during the Caribbean off-season. The idea appealed to Boisnier providing a change of scenery in a cooler climate. Eriksson's business of money

laundering and running counterfeit currency was another possibility for Boisnier to supplement his income, which could perhaps give him the chance to one day become the skipper of his own boat.

Couturier arrived at the marina in his Jeep and started to unload the last minute provisions, extra wine and lobsters. They had planned their six-day cruise heading up to Nassau in the Bahamas, threading their way through the islands. Their first planned stop would be at San Juan in Puerto Rico then following the coast line of the Dominican Republic before turning north to the Turks and Caicos Islands before finally arriving in Nassau. Depending on their speed they would anchor overnight in the one of the multitude of bays or by one of the small offshore islands.

Bustling up the gangplank Courtauld called out to Boisnier who was below examining the reports that were being faxed from the weather centre.

“Hey gimme a hand up here!”

Boisnier’s head appeared, transpiration glistening on his tanned head.

“What up?”

“Nothing, I need a hand with this lot.”

“Okay, the forecast looks great by the way, just a little bit of heavy weather to the east, won’t worry us. Looks like were in for a nice trip. ”

“With Kennedy!”

“He’s okay.”

“Where is he by the way?”

“He should be here in about half an hour with Castlemain, Stein and the girls, that’ll give us the time to get the rest of these things stowed away.”

Kennedy had made a detour to Pointe-à-Pitre with Castlemain and the two girls, to buy films for his underwater camera. Boisnier said he had been complaining his diving mask leaked, he wanted something new.

“The others here?” He asked nodding his head in the direction of a crewman pulling on a winch on the forward deck.

“Sure everything is in order, André’s in the galley preparing for this evening and Joe’s checking the generator, as soon as Castlemain shows up we’ll be off.”

The ketch needed a five man crew under normal sailing conditions, but they rarely got much more than the forward sail up, more for show than anything else, it was too much hard work. Their cruises were much more relaxed under power and avoided accidents with the likes of inexperienced guests such as Kennedy, who would be sure to get himself in a knot with the rigging.

Boisnier and Courtauld knew the Marie Galante, and its crew who were of old experienced sea hands, the weekend would be fine, if the heavy weather stayed over the east Caribbean.

They lifted anchor on time and the ketch manoeuvred smoothly out of its mooring as the passing tourists looked enviously on, wishing that they too were rich.

Kennedy and his party sipped drinks and acted out their part, aloof, pretending to ignore the land bound strollers. The boat slide over the water, the hum of the motor

barely audible.

They were soon out in the bay and the shore shrunk into a low line of coconut palms with the hills in the background. The sea was smooth, just a gentle swell as the ketch gathered speed and they set about stowing their affairs for the next couple of days on board.

Courtauld returned to his maps and charts while Boisnier took over the helm, there was very little movement in the bay, it was too early for the jet foil ferries returning from Marie Galante, there was just a container ship coming up the coast line of Basse Terre and the usual sailing boats that hugged the shore.

They intended to anchor overnight just off Plymouth on Montserrat and continue the next day sailing north. It was an easy four day cruise up to the Antigua for their guests, it was a trip that Boisnier had made so many times he could almost sail by view without any difficulties.

“Let’s get down to some serious business now, drinks! I’ll fix up some Champagne for the girls and a ti-punch or a Mojito for us.”

“You’re worried that the girls may get drunk.”

“Sure if we lose them overboard it’ll be a shitty trip - without any sex,” said Courtauld pouring a good measure of rum into the cocktail mixer.

“It’d be better if it were Castlemain and Kennedy overboard,” replied Boisnier roaring with laughter as he saw Kennedy’s head appear around the cabin door.

“What’s that?” said Kennedy.

“Nothing Pat, just having a laugh at your expense, here take this tray up without dropping it, it’s for the girls, not too strong, a Champagne cocktail with plenty of fruit juice, we don’t want them drunk yet!” He grinned.

Kennedy managed the tray up the steps onto the deck, steadying himself in a precarious fashion against the handrail as the swell lifted the ketch. Stein was amusing Castlemain and the girls with one of his stories of Caracas, they laughed and he paused pointing to the drinks, then grabbing the tray before Kennedy in his clumsiness strewed the lot over the deck.

“Pat you’ll never be a sailor now,” he said imitating Kennedy’s accent to Castlemain’s great amusement.

“Come along now girls, get some of this into you,” Stein held out a pair of glasses, then picking up the cocktail flask in an almost religious gesture, pulled open the lid and sniffed. “Hmmm, this’ll put some hairs on your chest,” he said filling Doudoune’s glass and lasciviously eyeing her overflowing bikini top.

Courtauld and Boisnier joined them on deck for the ti-punch, one of Guys potent rum cocktails. They had a full ship, eleven including themselves, two couples, plus the two crew members who busied themselves with the ketch. André, the mate, watched them from the helm, whilst Henri busied himself with preparations for the dinner in the galley.

About three or four kilometres to the starboard the darkening coast of Terre Basse rose up into the clouds that shrouded La Soufrière, the lights of Pointe du Vieux Port started to twinkle. They made a steady eight knots, the swell had subsided and

the warm air together with the effects of the punch softened their mood, they savoured an almost mystical moment, which they knew was a rare experience that was not to be spoilt.

“Did you know that not far from this point Columbus landed on his second voyage to the Americas,” said Stein pointing towards the dark coastline that had become barely visible, except for the lights of the cars that wound their way along the coast road.

To the north the sky was cloudless and the moon shone brightly over the sea. The motor throbbed gently as André reduced speed, in an hour they would arrive in the port of Isle des Saintes where they would dine on board before making a late evening tour of the small port and its bars.

Chapter 32. Timeshare

Credit card deposit after champagne and six hours pressure selling, that was their technique for the small punter buying a week’s timeshare in a one room studio. For the bigger ones interested in a three or four room unit it required a softening-up process...that was a little longer, including a quick trip on their boat around a small island, Ilet-à-Cochons, in the bay, Petit Cul-de-Sac. For those with real money to spend, it was the whole works with a mini-cruise on Castlemain’s ketch.

In Europe’s single market the largest across frontiers transaction made by most average Europeans was a holiday home, their dream home. Unfortunately for some the dream home in the sun often turned into a nightmare.

The market had been given a bad reputation by Spain in the eighties where prices were way above their real value. When the property down swing came apartments were being auctioned off on the Costa del Sol for a pittance. A great many developers went broke, only those who had the foresight to invest carefully and keep a cash reserve survived. Before sales picked up again in the late nineties developers had to overcome the bad reputation they had built up in the earlier boom.

In the eighties it was estimated that twenty percent of all deals in Spain went sour through faulty title deeds, hidden debts, lack of planning permission and essential services. That frightened away a lot of potential buyers, resulting in the French looking for something nearer home. That was easier said than done. However, with the fall in the price of air fares, the French West Indies became a good bet. The buyer was still in France, with French law, money and banks.

That was when Amadis and his company Caribbean Property Development miraculously recovered after hovering on the verge of bankruptcy. At first, when the tropical hurricane ‘Bertha’ had swept across the island causing havoc and

destruction on a scale that had not been experienced in living memory, it had appeared to accentuate their problems, but when the French government declared the hurricane a 'natural disaster' it was a gift from heaven.

It was with the reconstruction and substantial aid that the French government gave the island Amadis seized the opportunity, he received very substantial compensation for the damage done to his unsold apartments and holiday villas. He had many well placed friends who facilitated a more than generous compensation for the damage, real and invented. He restarted by building his first timeshares with the aid of the Canadian timeshare operator, Worldwide Leisure Homes, who had a major base in Miami for the North American market.

The concept was simple, a holiday home was too expensive for most, but it was not impossible for the average salaried Joe to consider buying a share in a holiday home. One or two weeks a year, at a fraction of the price it would cost to fully own an apartment or a house.

Once the legal complications had been ironed out by the lawyers it became easy to sell the idea. However, there were many difficulties which were carefully played done by the promoters, whose sole interest, in many cases, was to sell their development as quickly as possible and move onto the next project

Timeshares were sold using high pressure sales techniques, amounting in certain cases to extortion by unscrupulous promoters. Timeshare companies were often registered in tax havens such as the Channel Islands in Europe or the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, these were based on a fragile trustee system. It had been described as a Timeshare bomb waiting to go off by a British reporter during the property boom of the late eighties. It went off as he had predicted, with developers going bankrupt, leaving thousands of timesharers without their holidays of a lifetime.

The Timeshare industry operated in a legal vacuum with only Britain's 1992 Timeshare Act providing any real protection for consumers. The European Union's Timeshare directive then gave a mandatory cooling-off period. It introduced rules and defined how companies should operate.

In the eighties the corruption in the Spanish property sector was widespread, with hundreds of properties being built without planning permission. The building quality was often poor. Those who complained were threatened and bullied by developers.

Often developers took out a second mortgage on the property which was hidden from the buyer. Under Spanish law it became the new owner's debt, who could not get the deeds to the property until it was paid.

The laws in Guadeloupe, though being French and in line with those of the EU, were as extensive as those of the USA, where their laws had cleared the sunshine states of real estate and timeshare crooks, making it a fast growing market for certain European countries.

Though Florida had many advantages it could not compete with the European environment in the ex-colonial Caribbean islands, in spite of the high quality of its

homes, the prices in Florida had become too high, and bad press gave a poor image of the state with the violence that had sometimes effected foreigners.

The French preferred to be in a French speaking environment, the Dutch in their former territories like Sint Maarten, and the British in Bermuda or the Bahamas

Chapter 33. Guadeloupe

Arrowsmith pulled into the driveway, parking his Land Rover on the grass by the steps that led up to the entrance of the Villa. It was situated in Baie-Mahault not far from the local sporting club. Casis, a Creole dog, arrived at full speed to welcome him carrying a coconut in its mouth.

There was nobody in sight, just the sound of music coming from inside of the house. He picked up the coconut and launched it across the garden towards the umbrella palms and araucaria, then paused for a moment watching Casis tear after it into the vegetation.

He walked up the steps into the cool shade and found Courtauld on the first floor terrace, he was lying in a hammock suspended from the timber columns, dozing peacefully to a George Pludermacher's interpretation of a Mozart piano sonata that echoed through the huge salon.

On a rattan side table was a tray with glasses, an ice bucket and a bottle of home made punch. Courtauld's left arm hung limply from the hammock above an empty glass that stood on the floor, he snored, his mouth hung open and his glasses lay lopsided on his brow. The Siamese cat that lay under the hammock barely lifted its head. It was a pity to wake him.

Arrowsmith sat down, took a glass and poured himself a drink that he sipped looking out at the volcano, La Soufrière, in the distance. It had been a heavy humid afternoon and it looked as though a storm was brewing up, a strong breeze rustled the leaves of the banana trees in the garden just below the terrace. He dropped a fistful of ice cubes into the glass admiring the tropical garden, Mangoes surrounded by Bougainvillaea, Hibiscus and yellow Alamanda.

He turned back to Courtauld who snorted as a fly buzzed his face. He was unshaven, wearing a well worn dishevelled Cerruti tee-shirt. His hobby was distilling fiery home made rums, hard alcohol barely disguised with the flavour of pineapple, bananas or mango, and he did not stop simply at the bottling but was well into the art of tasting the stuff.

Arrowsmith waited, there was no hurry, in any case there was not much to be done that evening, whatever they decided it would have to wait until the next morning.

Heavy drops of rain started to fall and lightening flashed. Casis stretched himself on the floor of the terrace as he sensed that there would be no more fun in the

garden that evening and as night fell rain started to pour down rustling the leaves of the trees.

Courtauld opened his eyes and tried to focus them, trying to recognise Arrowsmith and figure out where he was and what time it was.

“Salut,” he said in a soft low voice. He rubbed his eyes taking in the situation.

“Tony....”

“Salut Guy, enjoyed your little nap?”

“What time is it?”

Arrowsmith looked at his watch.

“Nearly seven.”

“Time for the local news!”

Courtauld was suddenly up and in a deft movement headed barefoot into the salon towards a low table, picked up the TV remote control and pointed it at the television.

“Something special?” asked Arrowsmith.

“Wait and see!”

Arrowsmith was intrigued, he was not expecting anything unusual.

The screen lit up and he saw the news reader who was announcing new tariff arrangements for the protection of banana imports into the European Community from the Caribbean, a never ending bone of contention with the USA.

“Don’t keep me in suspense, what’s new?” said Arrowsmith with impatience.

Courtauld laughed.

“Wait!”

The announcer went on with a stern face to another news item, the impending civil service strike backed by an interview with a union representative.

Then the announcer’s face relaxed and smiled as he changed the subject.

“And now some good news for the island’s tourist industry.”

The screen flashed to a view of waving palms and a sandy beach, where a news reporter with a microphone in his hand stood facing Jean-Louis Brel.

“Hey that’s Brel!” exclaimed Arrowsmith with surprise.

“Today at Gosier a new hotel complex has been given the go-ahead by the local authorities and Monsieur Brel of the international hotel group, Prestige, has arrived for meetings with the local promoters to inaugurate the project,” announced the TV news anchorman.

Brel beamed as the reporter swung the microphone to him.

“I thought you’d like that!” said Courtauld.

“Congratulations!”

“Not so quick, we still have a fly in the ointment, we still don’t have the complete site.”

“Oh!”

“I don’t think it’s a very great problem, a local hanging out for a better price, we’ll work something out for him or the black bastard will have an unexpected trip on the Marie Galante...one way!” he said roaring with laughter.

Chapter 34. A Place in the Sun

The island of Guadeloupe in the French West Indies was a Dom-Tom, that is to say one of the France's Overseas Territories and Departments.

The Dom-Tom's were politically and administratively an integral part of the French Republic, departments and regions of France. Their populations were French citizens and enjoyed all the privileges and advantages of being part of France and the European Union.

The black majority of Guadeloupeans were generally called simply Guadeloupeans or Antillais, whilst the small minority of whites born on the island, descended from the original French settlers, were known as Békés. Those French in temporary residence or as visitors from continental France were referred to as Metropolitans.

The economics of the West Indian Dom-Tom's were unfortunately of dramatic simplicity. Their total export earnings from goods and services leaving the island were a mere one tenth of the value of their imports, the difference being made up by the central government in Paris in the form of transfers to another French department, be it far from mainland France.

The population was some 400,000 persons. Those employed worked in government services as civil servants, in the police, health and education and all the other tentacular emanations of the French government administration. They were the privileged, unmoveable, with guaranteed jobs and pensions.

Less than ten percent of the population worked in the agricultural sector, of which the main exports were bananas, sugar and rum, all of which suffered from overproduction and unfavourable trade agreements.

The remainder of the population was employed in the primary industry of the island, tourism. Tourism was the hope for the future, in spite of the fierce competition from just about every other island nation in the Caribbean region.

Guadeloupe was privileged compared to most other Caribbean countries, enjoying easily one of the highest standards of living in the region. In spite of that almost thirty percent of the working age population was unemployed, they were however compensated by generous benefits of one kind or another by the French state, benefits that most other populations in the region could only dream of.

Some Guadeloupeans chose the only other alternative, which was to face the rigours of life in cold unfriendly continental France, far from *la vie douce* of their tropical island.

There existed a tiny independence movement which had no hope of ever winning power, as long as the manna continued to flow from Paris.

As a result of the difficult economic situation of the island, and the other Dom-

Tom's, which also suffered from the same problems, the government in Paris offered spectacular fiscal incentives for certain types of investments in the islands which would stimulate the development of the tourist industry.

Whilst those investments were designed to serve the population in general, the greatest profits more often than not went to a limited number of the privileged classes.

Amongst those were Serge Amadis and Guy Courtauld, both Békés. The two partners were specialised in selling to the Metropolitans whatever they wanted for the biggest profit possible, in order that they, the Békés, could live everyday in the same manner that the Metropolitans could only hope to enjoy, at the best, for a few days a year.

Almost every Metropolitan who visited the French West Indies was hypnotised, if only momentarily, by a dream of a place in the sun, under a coconut palm overlooking the beach and the blue coral sea. Most woke up from their dream with just a pleasant memory, whilst a few tried to turn the dream into reality, imagining they could leave their ordinary life and live like the rich or retire in the sun, with the result that the dream was transformed into a nightmare for more than a few.

"Let me tell you about the great Caribbean illusion," said Boisnier settling down to his favourite subject.

"Investment in real estate under palm trees, or scams by smart con artists such as Amadis, who turn fiscal fantasies to their advantages, have cost naive would-be investors, or pigeons, as I like to call them, a lot of hard earned money," he sipped his planters punch and lit another tax free cigarette.

"Amadis' scam is to present investments in the Dom-Tom's as miracle solutions to the pigeons, these appear very attractive because the fiscal advantages are very real."

"Real!"

"Sure! Take for example a hotel and timeshare complex situated in Guadeloupe, a fairly well off individual tax payer can deduct directly from his taxes over five years, 25% of sum invested in the purchase of an apartment."

"I see," Arrowsmith shrugged, evidently not very impressed.

"Hang on now, in the case of businesses, companies can deduct 100% from their taxable profits."

"Now that's more interesting."

"Right, so the trick is to transform individual investors into French limited companies. Like that they can benefit from a higher rate, that is if their personal tax rate is above 35%. The advantage of this legal trick is evident, I mean take someone investing as a individual, a million dollars, they could only deduct 250,000 dollars over five years."

"Okay," said Arrowsmith now listening carefully.

"But...if this investment was made through a limited company then the whole sum would be deductible in the first year from his taxable revenue," Boisnier smiled and pleased with his revelation he took a heavy slug of rum.

“Now, I don’t want to bore you with too many figures, but imagine if someone reaches the maximum of taxation level of 56.8%, they could deduct 568,000 dollars immediately instead of 250.000 dollars spread over five years.”

“It’s beginning to sound interesting.”

“You’re starting to get the hang of it. Now listen to this, if the same hotel complex acquires a boat, then the investor gets three different advantages at the same time!”

Arrowsmith started to make mental calculations whilst Boisnier continued his explanations.

“The investor can first deduct his 568.000 dollars, and he can get the added value tax of 18.6% included in the million he has invested reimbursed immediately, that is 156,820 dollars, and then he can deduct each year from his revenues the annual amortisation calculated for a period of 6 to 8 years excluding taxes, that is 843,180 dollars, or a further deduction of 478,926 dollars - if he is in the 56.8% tax level!”

He eyes were bright as he excitedly told his story, he knew it by heart, having used it to exploit his sales skills to innumerable naive investors over the previous ten years.

“So you see, this person having invested a million can recover through tax deductions 1,203,746 dollars.”

“But that’s more than he’s invested.”

“Absolutely! That’s the beauty of the little scheme of our friends Amadis and de Montfort, and you won’t believe this, but this incredible situation can be improved if you borrow the initial investment of one million, because the interest can also be deducted!”

“I don’t believe it, that’s too incredible!” he said, nevertheless accepting Boisnier’s explanation, “but tell me why the government encourages this type of defiscalisation!”

Boisnier laughed.

“There’s the catch. It’s not difficult to understand why...investments in the Dom-Tom’s are extremely risky and I mean risky!”

“I see,” he sounded a little disappointed.

“Even the well known hotel chains have difficulty in reaching an occupancy rate equivalent to international standards. For example in Saint Martin, the number of rooms that have been built is disproportionate to the demand and the number of yachts is greater than the market needs,” he smiled regretfully, thinking of his own situation.

“That’s the catch then,” said Arrowsmith, who in spite of the disadvantages did not appear to be too put off by the news.

“Well the real catch is much more subtle and unfolds slowly, long after the sharp salesman,” he added relishing his explanation, “like me, has disappeared from the scene.”

“Tell me then.”

“Well the law, requires that the investments are kept for a minimum of five years

without losing the tax breaks. That means that the investor is obliged to operate his hotel or boat for five years, and generally with high operating costs, I'm speaking from experience."

The Marie Galante had been bought under the defiscalisation scheme by Castlemain with the help of de Montfort through one of his companies. Boisnier ran charters to offset the maintenance costs and encouraged rumours of his real financial difficulties so as not to attract too much attention to his own conspicuous high living.

"You see the law does not impose an obligation to make profits," Boisnier laughed, "they are too clever for that, what they want to do is to ensure that the investor not only buys the boat, the time-share or hotel, but also he acts as an entrepreneur running a commercial operation."

"I see, job creation!"

"Right! Now the investment of a million dollars needs something like between 300,000 to 600,000 a year in staff costs, management and advertising for a boat like the Marie Galante for example! Even more for a hotel."

Arrowsmith laughed, it was a commonly known fact that Boisnier was having difficulties as a charter operator and the joke was around that he had never been out of them. It also explained why he supplemented his income by helping Courtauld with sales for his wealthier customers. He picked up a commission by confidentially whispering to them over drinks that their investment 'was a real opportunity not to be missed' during their mini-cruise on the Marie Galante, normally the last step before signing up.

"Therefore, a million invested could save 1,2 million in taxes but could cost the investor maybe 2 million in five years, if there is no profit on his investment. The fascination is in the tax breaks, which makes the investor overlook the profitability."

"That's what attracted you in the first place?"

"You've got to be joking, I didn't have a damn penny, but let me tell you that's where I made a lot of money - real money!" He boasted, discretely avoided going into the details of his rental agreement with Castlemain.

"So what happens in the end?"

"Well after five years the poor bugger's only choice is to sell."

"...and?"

"...and unfortunately, all that the really serious buyers are interested in... is the profitability! What is even worse is that buyers of existing property do not benefit from the tax breaks."

"So what happens then?"

"Well the poor fuckin investor is a prisoner, not only can't he sell his boat or hotel, but he has to pay the costs of operating the damn thing, without the least profit, unless... he practically gives it away, which is where our friend Amadis comes back into the picture."

“Tough luck!”

“Yeah tough, and that’s why I would be in shit street today,” he admitted finally, “if it wasn’t for my friendly banker, Castlemain, who writes off most of the running costs of this rich man’s toy as business expenses through his banking deals, by bringing his friends and clients on promotional Caribbean cruises!”

“I see, well at least he’s found his place in the sun.”

“You can say that again!”

Chapter 35. Amadis

Tony introduced you to my partner, Serge Amadia.” Arrowsmith looked at a man whose age was difficult to determine at first glance, he was dressed young, a pastel Bordeaux coloured jacket, a silk shirt open at the collar displayed a thick gold chain, and pale blue slacks with white suede shoes, his hair was blond almost certainly out of a bottle, coifed in a bouffant style.

Amadis gave a Arrowsmith a sour, forced, smile.

“We’ve been partners since more than ten years now, Serge apart from all the other things looks after the finance, thank God, that means he holds the purse strings and controls budgets,” said Guy.

“Nice to meet you Serge.”

Amadis shook Arrowsmith’s hand indifferently. He reminded Arrowsmith of a Bond Street hairdresser, at ease with women but uncomfortable with men he was not familiar with.

Arrowsmith could not help recognising Amadis’ sexual preferences, and Amadis instantly recognised Arrowsmith as not being of his tendency, or to his taste. A polite indifference was immediately established between the two, an unspoken ‘leave me alone and I’ll leave you alone’.

“Serge is directly involved, like myself, in project development and financing, that’s our business,” he said, meaning their real estate development company, “and once things are up and running, Serge sees that everything goes according to schedule on the money side.”

Their business came to them aboard the Boeings and Airbuses that arrived every day from Paris, loaded with potential customers. Their role was to have the products ready and to pull in a sufficient volume of visitors to their show apartments so that the ratios worked out, based on their experience one in ten visitors could be transformed into a possible buyer.

Serge Amadis owned a magnificent white and blue villa, on a rise in Baie-Mahault, it had eight bedrooms and was situated on several hectares of carefully maintained tropical gardens, there was a huge swimming pool complete with

visitors changing rooms and a splendid bar and barbecue lay to one side. The garages were hidden to the other side of the house in the shade of bougainvillea and tall coconut palms.

That evening he had invited the international TV personality, Marc Gable, as the guest of honour, together with his close associates, to a poolside celebration, before the start of the Caribbean Film Festival that coincided with the arrival of transatlantic yacht race 'La Route du Rhum'. There were one hundred and thirty guests, a very mixed crowd of Békés, Guadeloupeans and Metropolitans, both residents and visitors.

Arrowsmith walked around the terrace to the poolside and saw Courtauld engrossed in conversation with Gilles Michel and his wife, Tihui, a Laotian Mong, who was looking around bored.

"So where's the famous Gable then!" he said interrupting them.

Michel shrugged and ignored him returning to his conversation with Courtauld.

"They're too busy with business talk," said Tihui sulkily pleased to find somebody that she could talk to, "Gable's in the house with Serge."

"Oh..."

"Why is there something important?"

"Not really, I just hoped to catch him before the party really starts...before they're all pissed," he added with a laugh.

Courtauld turned to him, "Hey, Tony how are the arrangements for the interview tomorrow at the hotel?"

"No problem, it's all set up, in the gardens with a super view of the hotel and the name in the background...just one small problem with Gable."

"What's that then?"

"I'll tell you later," he said glancing at Tihui.

"If I'm bothering you I'll leave you alone," she said angrily turning and walking off towards the bar where she had recognised a couple of new arrivals.

"What's the problem then?"

"Gable wants me to lay on a few friends at the yacht later."

"Friends!"

"Don't be dumb, you know, a few whores and poofers, for one of his funny parties, as well as coke and the rest."

"Oh!"

"Yeah."

"Why didn't he let us know earlier?"

"Search me, the important thing is we lay it all on."

"OK leave it to me, let's go inside and see Serge."

The three of them entered the house through the French windows to the study, where Amadis was serving Gable a fresh drink from the bar. Gable turned towards them.

"Hello there, how's it with our promoters!"

"Fine Marc and you?"

“Have you got some nice property lined up for me to see?”

“Everything is laid on, there’s a good choice, not only on the island but also on Marie Galante and Dominica.”

“Great!”

“We’ve set the boat up for a couple of days around the islands, so you can relax and enjoy the visit.”

Guy Courtauld spied out Arrowsmith who was alone admiring the pool. He took him by the shoulder, “Hey Tony, this is Xavier de Montfort.”

De Montfort was from the south-west of France, a tall well built blond haired man with a rich tanned complexion though a little wrinkled. He was a well-off fiscal consultant who business was tax avoidance by a number of legal incentives and loop holes, which helped his wealthy clients pay less tax.

“If you have a tax problem Xavier’s your man,” he added. “Tell Tony how it works, its interesting for his education.” He then disappeared, called by Amadis.

“It’s easy Tony,” he said with a friendly laugh fuelled by his punch, “you bring them out, all hotel and flight expenses paid, for four or five days. They come for the defiscalisation, like our friend Marc Gable,” he said nodding in the celebrity’s direction, “though he is not the typical buyer.

“How does it work then?”

“They have nothing to lose except their peace of mind, when the problems start piling up over the three or four years following their investment, after that they don’t care any more, because it’s written off.

“If they buy then their trip is gratis, if they don’t then they pay. What’ve they lost, nothing, they’ve had a few days holidays in the tropics, and there’s a good chance they’ll be back.

“Guy here sets up a day’s game fishing, with boat trip to Marie Galante and then a send off diner when they’ve signed the contract engagement. The year end is a good moment, when the cold and rain starts to set in France and when they have to start calculating their taxes.”

Xavier de Montfort’s business hinged essentially on the promotion of property investments for tax breaks in the French Antilles. He worked very closely with Caribbean Property Development and the BCN in Paris.

He also arranged for his wealthier clients’ bank transfers to tax havens in the Caribbean, disguised as payment for consultancy and marketing services, as well as the imports of goods into France at over-inflated prices, the difference being transferred to offshore accounts and shell companies.

Chapter 36. An Architect

Stein played his *putain de piano*. The popular theme tune of the film The

Titanic resounded in the large room, and in spite of the whisky or perhaps because of, it was a very moving performance. Another glass of scotch and he played 'Feelings', accompanied by the voice of his archaeologist girl friend, her speciality was the obscure science of 'pebble culture'. As his fingers danced backwards and forwards over the keyboard, a very slight chill crept into the air after the warmth of the day. They paused to sip their coffee and took another refill of scotch.

"Where the hell did you learn that?" Asked Arrowsmith.

Stein caressed the Schimmel, his grand piano; it was one of his treasured possessions, which had given him countless evenings of untold pleasure.

He learnt to play when he was a boy and then, during the Second World War, refined his skills.

He then softly swung into 'The woman I love' by Gershwin.

Isaac Stein was an architect, an extroverted genius, who was known for his monuments that had been inspired by the extraordinary architects of the Middle Ages, who had built the Palais des Papes in Avignon, or the Cathedral in city of Montpellier, where he lived in a magnificent seventeenth century residence built by a rich nobleman of that period. He had restored and filled it with a surprising blend of furniture and fittings that spanned centuries past and future, with an incredible disregard for the opinion of the Ministry of Culture's Historical Monuments Department.

In his vast living room, situated on the first floor on the house, the lacquered Schimmel contrasted with the austere lines of the Chinese iron wood furniture and fifteenth century tapestries from Liege. The floors were tiled in black and white Carrare marble, recovered from an Italian palace. His Alpine Hound lay before the log fire that kept the evening chill out of the old stonework.

Stein had been heavily influenced by the military architecture of late Middle Ages and renaissance. The forts of the conquistadors, that he had discovered when he had lived in the Caribbean during a turbulent period of his life, when he had become enamoured with Che Guevara and the hope that Castro had brought to the poor of Central America and the Caribbean. He also admired the logic of the forts of Vauban, who had been another of his sources of inspiration. Smooth noble stone, in straight lines, monolithic geometry softened by harmonious, uncluttered towers and turrets.

Brel had engaged Stein to design the Conquistador's Palace that Prestige had built in Cayenne, which had been voted the most outstanding hotel design of the year, winning several international awards.

Stein had designed the hotel complex in Guadeloupe and was irritated by the delays caused by the financing; he had other commissions that were waiting. He was not a run of the mill architect, he selected his projects, he had more offers to design new projects than time, his time was limited, incredible though it seemed, he was pressing eighty, though looked a very fit sixty, he was a creative but highly temperamental artist, who would probably live forever thought Arrowsmith.

"What do you mean?"

“Well, that’s the style of a night club piano player.”

“I suppose it is.”

Stein stood up and walked over to the bar, a marble altar.

“Let’s try this new scotch I’ve discovered, it’s a single malt, it’s supposed to be over thirty years old, a little young!” he laughed.

‘I’m not a whisky specialist, I enjoy a whisky but I have to admit I can’t really tell one from another,’ confessed Arrowsmith.

“You’re just a fuckin ignorant Irishman,” replied Stein.

He poured two glasses of scotch and added a little water for Arrowsmith.

“So, here’s to you, Sláinte!”

Arrowsmith lifted his glass.

“Sláinte!”

“How is it?”

“Fine.”

“When I was young, during my university days at Cambridge, I started playing in the local pubs, I needed the money.”

The house, composed of four stories including the ground floor, was built in the creamy white limestone of Montpellier. On the upper three floors balconies overlooked the square. The ironwork of the balustrades was cast in intricate designs. The windows were framed in stylish carved stone surrounds. A handsome balustrade in carved stone surrounded the roof garden. The house was deep, the front part was Stein’s working and living area, to the back was the kitchen as well as the living quarters for his house keeper and her husband, his Portuguese chauffeur.

In his garage, in a tight functional courtyard, was a black Renault Turbo-Diesel for his day to day needs and a white Renault Alpine for weekends he spent in his villa, in the old seaside town of Palamos, north of Barcelona, with his friend Philippe Gonzalo or on his sloop anchored in the port.

Arrowsmith had parked his rented car in the underground car park, near an Arc de Triomphe a couple of hundred meters from Stein’s place. His house was ideally situated, just behind the Faculty of Medicine and the Palais de Justice in the city centre.

“Why choose Montpellier?”

“That’s a long story, but you may be surprised to know that it’s the town the most frequently cited by the French as the place where they would most like to live. It’s not surprising, the climate’s perfect and the city is extraordinarily beautiful,” said Stein proud of his adopted town.

“I’ve read it’s one of the oldest university towns in Europe. If I’m right the city was founded by the Romans and the university was created in the fifteenth century,” Arrowsmith added, watching as Stein paused plunging into his long memory.

Stein put down his glass and turned over the plans spread out on a huge sixteenth century Spanish table.

“I came to Montpellier when I returned from Cuba in 1961, I was a young man then. I had a good business in Havana, the Cubans and South Americans liked my work, they had imagination.”

“Why did you leave?”

“I had no bloody choice boy, I practically left in a hail of bullets, an invasion, the fuckin Bay of Pigs. I lost every thing except my Oldsmobile, a few suitcases and my girl friend of that time. We took the last boat and three weeks later we landed in Marseilles and headed up to Paris.”

Stein was a remarkable person who had had an exceptionally long and full life, in spite of his age he was bounding with the energy of a man thirty years younger.

“Unfortunately or perhaps fortunately I had an accident, about a hundred kilometres from Marseilles, there were no autoroutes then, a bloody farmer on his tractor pulled out from his farm and hit me on the front wing. The nearest Oldsmobile dealer was in Montpellier and they arranged to have the car towed there for repairs.”

“An Oldsmobile dealer!”

“Yes, American cars were quite common at that time in France. Well, to cut a long story short, by the strangest of chances I ran into an old friend, Jacko, in a restaurant of all places. I had studied with him in Cambridge, he had just been commissioned to direct the renovations in the Historic Centre of the city. I told him my story, you know Cuba and all that, and he immediately proposed that I join him.”

“So that’s how you landed here.”

“More than thirty five years ago. We formed a partnership, very successful, we understood each other perfectly. Jacko passed away almost twelve years ago now, poor bugger! I carried on, there was no choice, what else could I do, this is not a business, it’s a way of life.”

Chapter 37. Huberts Real Estate

Hubert and Sandrine Valentine, lived with their two children and three dogs at Pointe Canot, which formed the westerly side of Anse Vinaigri, a small bay about five kilometres from Gosier. It was on this point of land that a tourist complex was planned by Caribbean Property Development. Hubert’s home and the land surrounding it covered three hectares, it was typical of the island, dotted with a few coconut palms and vegetable plots. The land was on a rise overlooking the sea with a magnificent view of Basse Terre across the ocean.

Hubert worked in the regional office of an international business firm in Pointe-à-Pitre, where he occupied a modest administrative position. His home would have been different if it had not been severely damaged by the tropical storm ‘Bertha’,

the roof had been torn off, and the work that he had invested in a market garden centre had been destroyed, and all the savings that he had invested were lost.

He considered himself as relatively lucky compared to the many others on the island who had been left homeless by the storm. He had not read the small print in his insurance policy, which did not cover natural disasters, he had also been ineligible like many other Guadeloupeans for obscure reasons for government compensation and assistance, as a result he did not receive a single cent in compensation, either from the state or his insurance company.

He had been heavily mortgaged and indebted and had not the means to repair the damage several years after the cyclone. Sandrine's health problems were another burden as he struggled to maintain his standard of living.

The news of the planned tourist complex was difficult to interpret as well as the exact location of the site. Maybe he could sell the land and recover his losses, or perhaps with the new hotel adjacent to his land the price would rise, on the other hand he could provide the hotel with fruit and vegetables or rent boats to the tourists.

That Saturday morning he had awoken with a thick head, the previous night his cousin had visited him and together they had emptied a litre bottle of his powerful home made rum.

"Move yourself Hubert, there's a visitor," said Sandrine pushing him.

"A visitor? Tell him to come back later."

"No man, it's somebody from Gosier, looks important, from the hotel."

"Hotel?"

"The new hotel they're going to build next door!"

Hubert made an effort and pulled on his trousers and a tee shirt. He made his way onto the veranda, his head throbbed.

"Mr Hubert, how do you do! My name is Amadis," he held out his hand and put on a dazzling professional smile.

Hubert shook his hand weakly, trying to pull himself together. He felt embarrassed as he looked at the impeccable White standing before him.

"Please sit down," Hubert said indicating a rattan easy chair on the veranda, "would you like some coffee?"

Amadis thought that he certainly would not like a coffee in such evidently unhygienic conditions. He shuddered at the mere thought.

"Yes, that would be nice," he accepted, making a supreme effort, it was not the moment to upset the man, in any case he would not be obliged to drink the stuff.

They sat down and Sandrine brought them coffee and returned into the house leaving the men to men's business, however once out of sight in the living room she remained within earshot of the conversation.

"I'm from Caribbean Property Development, we represent Prestige," Amadis announced grandly, "perhaps you have heard of us?"

Hubert nodded a little worriedly.

"That's good, we're going to build a holiday complex just over there," Amadis

pointed beyond the shrubs that bordered the garden. "It will bring a lot of benefits to the island, we have the full support from the Governor, you know business and jobs."

Hubert nodded again.

"What are your plans for the future Hubert...I can call you Hubert?"

"No problem," he paused, his head felt thick, he tried to figure out where Amadis was heading to, and he knew that it was important. "The future! Well things have been difficult since Bertha, financially, a lot of people lost everything," he said sadly.

"That was a calamity for us all," Amadis added, trying to appear sympathetic.

He remembered that he had not been on the island at the time, it had been the time of the year when the climate was better at Saint Trop. For him it had been seen from afar, like one of those never ending disasters that happened to far off underdeveloped places and especially to the poor. He recalled how business had been bad and how the storm had been a miracle, which had helped him and Guy Courtauld to get out of what could have been a nasty situation. The very thought of financial difficulties made him shudder, as did the idea of poverty.

"It was the end of a lot of dreams for people like me. Things were just beginning to look good, then in one night everything was destroyed," said Hubert.

Amadis picked up the coffee cup hoping that it would change the subject, he lifted it to his mouth before realising the risk, then suddenly coming to his senses he quickly put it back down.

"Listen Hubert, I understand how difficult it has been for you, perhaps we can help?"

"Help?"

"Yes, this piece of land, your land, it could possible be of interest to us, tennis courts and parking, we need tennis courts and parking for the hotel."

"Tennis courts!"

"We could offer you a good deal...what do you think?" he said cautiously.

"Depends."

"Listen Hubert, why don't you come down to our offices and discuss things, my staff will draw up a proposal, it's a pity it can only be used as parking and not construction," he added, putting on a regretful air, "it was very nice meeting you and your family, why don't you think things over? Call me on Monday and we can fix a day so that we can get together in town."

Amadis held out his hand magnanimously, almost as if he expected Hubert to kiss his large carved ruby ring. He then turned and left. Hubert watched him disappear some moments later with dirt and gravel flying from his tyres on the unmade surface of the road that led back up to the motorway.

"What was that about then?" asked Sandrine who had reappeared on the veranda.

Hubert scratched his head, his instinct gave him a feeling of distrust, Amadis was without any doubt one of those slick White Metros that had always ended up

stealing the best from the Guadeloupeans.

“They’re interested in our land.”

“Interested!”

“They want it.”

“I told you I don’t know how many times to go down to the town hall and check over the applications and approvals for building permits.”

That was all that Hubert wanted, what with his hangover and Amadis’s visit, and now Sandrine’s nagging, it was too much.

The following Monday at midday, Hubert walked over from his office to the square facing the town hall. He had called a friend in the planning department that morning and asked him to help. Any other way it would have been difficult for Hubert to get past those stuck-up receptionists; they would have obstructed him for the pleasure of it.

Hubert saw him sitting on a bench under the tall trees that lined the square, he shook hands with Hubert, who then sat down next to him with a questioning look.

“Well man, I don’t know if I’ve got good news for you or bad news,” he said frowning.

“Go on man don’t keep me in suspense!”

“It looks like your land is right in the dam middle of their hotel!”

“In the middle?”

“Yeah, you see your place is at the extreme point where the land juts out into the sea, it’s got the best view. That’s where they’re going to put one of the main buildings.”

“What about me?”

“What about you! What about you Hubert, I don’t know, at least they can’t do anything without your agreement. That’s if it’s not declared to be in the public interest to acquire your land.”

“Public interest!”

“That means for the public good, you know for the benefit of the community.”

“They can’t just take my land!”

“No, sure, you have to be compensated.”

“How!”

“That means the authorities would put a purchase order on the land.”

“How much?”

“That I can’t tell you, I mean I just don’t know.”

Hubert sat trying to absorb the news, if the price was right, then the deal couldn’t be that bad.

“So what will happen next?”

“I suggest you go and see your man.”

“What’s the land worth?” he said looking at his friend for a long moment.

“Well Hubert I’m not an expert, but I can give you a rough idea what it’s worth to a developer like Prestige.”

That afternoon Hubert called Amadis and fixed an appointment at his office for the next day at five. He arrived a little late, as he was not free before office hours had ended. He was intimidated by the luxury of Prestige's offices, the floors were tiled with imported marble, that added to the cool impression that the silent air-conditioning created. He announced himself to the receptionist, who had been forewarned of his visit and laid on the charm.

"Come this way Monsieur Hubert, Monsieur Amadis is waiting for you."

"Valentine! Monsieur Valentine!"

She smiled and led him up the broad stairway adorned with fine wrought iron rails. He turned his head avoiding looking at her smooth shining calves as he followed her. She paused before the door of Amadis's secretary and knocked before entering.

"Monsieur Hubert," announced the receptionist.

"Valentine!"

"Monsieur Hubert, please come this way Monsieur Amadis is waiting for you."

Hubert followed her through a double door into the president's office. It was an office used mostly for public relations meetings by the two owners and designed to impress the impressionable, which was Hubert's case.

"So nice of you to take the trouble to come over Mr Hubert, please sit down. What can I offer you to drink?" said Amadis walking over to the bar, "one of our classic punches?"

Hubert nodded and sat on the edge of one of the thickly upholstered leather armchairs.

Amadis then poured the drinks into heavy crystal glasses and placed them on the table.

"So let us toast to our prosperity and that of our families."

They picked up their glasses and toasted. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence as they sipped their drinks.

"Well I deduct that your visit to us indicates your interest in talking business!" said Amadis giving one of his best professional smiles. "Am I right?"

"Mr Amadis..."

"Please call me Serge."

"As I understand it you would like to buy my land?"

"Let us say that we are interested."

"This land has been in my family for a long time, my grandfather and his father fished off the coast here and sold their catch in the market place, they also grew vegetables there, which fed our family."

Amadis nodded politely, he had checked the records and knew that Hubert's family had owned the land for generations.

"I had plans for this land, but that was all destroyed by Bertha. Today I want something better for my children and if by selling the land I can find a better house along the coast then I'm interested."

“I thought you’d see the advantages.”

“If the price is right then I’m prepared to do a deal, if not I can wait, my family has waited a long time,” he paused, “what do you have in mind?”

“Let us say three million,” smiled Amadis generously.

“I was thinking of twenty million,” said Hubert quietly.

“Twenty million!” Amadis almost dropped his glass. “Twenty million!”

“Twenty million man, that’s what I said, twenty million.”

“That’s a lot of money for a tennis court,” said Amadis quickly recovering his calm.

“What you build on the land when it is yours is your business, but my price is twenty million.” Hubert stood up, “Think it over Mr Serge and let me know.” He turned and left the office, leaving Amadis with his mouth opened and his glass in mid-air.

The phone rang some moments later in Amadis’ office, it was Courtauld.

“All tied up?” Courtauld asked smugly, as though it were a foregone conclusion.

“No, we’ve got a problem with our fuckin Mr Valentine,” hissed Amadis.

“He didn’t accept our offer!” Courtauld exclaimed. “What’s the problem then?” he added disconcertedly.

“He wanted twenty fuckin million!”

“Twenty million for his shack, he’s crazy!”

“Maybe not so crazy as you think, that black bastard has been talking to somebody since I last spoke with him.”

“Look Serge let’s get this settled quickly and smoothly, we don’t want things to get out of hand now. If there’s any official arbitration it could take months and months, we can’t have our schedules upset at this stage in the game.”

The land was well worth, to Prestige, the sum Valentine had asked. The total investment was over six hundred million Francs, but twenty million was well outside the budget that had been drawn up and presented to the bank. They had calculated less than a tenth of that amount, any difference with the budget would come out of their own profits.

Amadis took it as a personal affront to have to give in and make concessions, to what he considered to be an underdeveloped black. He needed time, as Courtauld had said they had to be careful, nothing rash, he would wait a couple of days to gather a little more information on Hubert’s position with the Register of Land and Mortgages.

By midday the following day, Amadis already had the information that he wanted. Hubert Valentine had a loan with the French Antilles Bank, controlled by the BCN, secured by a mortgage on his property. With a call to the bank he learnt that he was behind on his payments.

The loan had been taken out seven years previously to improve the property, an extension on the house with guest rooms, fresh water and sewage installations and a new surfaced access road. There had been no problem during the first eighteen

months; the work had been carried out according to schedule. It had been almost completed and the repayments to the bank had been punctual. Hubert's modest salary had been supplemented from the income derived from his market garden and the occasional friends and Metro tourists he lodged.

The tropical storm 'Bertha' had flattened everything putting all Hubert's efforts back to zero, since then only the bare minimum had been put back into order. Valentine had no new capital available or the capacity to take on new loans. He was struggling to keep his head above water, however, the instructions to the banks had been to take an easy position regarding those who had been hit financially as a result of the cyclone.

'We've got him by his black balls,' Amadis thought to himself, taping his gold pen on his note book as he picked up the phone.

"Just tell the lawyers to get those black bastards out by any means, that's what fuckin lawyers are for," Amadis shouted down the phone to Gilles Michel, "and if they can't do it then we'll do it our way."

Chapter 38. A Cuban Brewer

The Cubana flight CU704 touched down without the slightest bump at Havana International Airport. It was the first visit of both Mulligan and Kennedy to Havana, or to Caribbean, in fact it was their first visit outside of Europe. As they disembarked, they turned stumbling over each other grinning and gawking at the sight of the pretty Cuban ground hostesses, dressed in their tight uniforms and decorated with red flowers in their lapels.

They cleared passport control without any problem, collected their baggage and were met by Arrowsmith and Martinez of Sierra Maestra. He led them out to the pick-up zone where a white streamlined Toyota Executive Transit was waiting for them. The driver loaded the bags whilst they climbed in. It was cool and refreshing after the heat of the airport, it was air-conditioned and fitted out with comfortable pivoting white leather armchairs.

It was early on a Saturday afternoon and the traffic was very light as they headed down the Avenida de la Independencia in the bright sunshine towards central Havana. Martinez whilst pointing out the sights, he explained to them that nothing had been planned for the rest of the afternoon, they would meet again for dinner, in the meantime they could spend the time resting after their long flight from London. Business would wait until Monday when they would discuss the co-operation agreements and on Tuesday fly down to Holguin to visit the site.

They were booked into the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, the finest hotel in the country, which had been immaculately restored, the facade was a brilliant white in the tropical sun, contrasting with the greenery of its royal palms and gardens, the

hotel stood on the rocky outcrop that overlooked the Malecon and the Gulf of Mexico. It was certainly Havana's most splendid hotel, which had lodged stars such as Frank Sinatra and Clark Gable during its period of glory. In Arrowsmith's opinion, for a down town hotel it certainly deserved the epithet. They checked-in at the reception at the end of the vast cool lobby in white marble.

Soft background music tinkled from a grand piano, played by a young Cuban in a black tailed evening suit, as they were led to the lifts by the deputy manager. Arrowsmith followed them to their rooms, seeing that they were comfortably installed, he agreed to call them later after they had showered and unpacked.

From his own corner room, on the fourth floor of the new wing, Arrowsmith looked out over the sea, boats of all shapes and sizes ferried their passengers and goods to the other shore or to distant ports. In the distance he saw the Casablanca ferry as it approached the Havana Landing. Down to the right guests tanned themselves by the hotel pool, whilst waiters hurried back and forth carrying trays of exotic cocktails.

Arrowsmith looked at his watch, it was clear that Kennedy and Mulligan were raring to go, there was no point to disappoint them, he picked up the phone and called Pat Kennedy's room.

"Yesh," replied Kennedy as though surprised the phone should ring.

"How's it going, are you ready?"

"Almost, just ten more minutes."

"OK take your time, let's meet in the lobby in twenty minutes, tell John now."

The waiter found them a corner table on the terrace overlooking the Malecon and they ordered three San Cristobal beers, brewed by the Sierra Maestra Breweries & Distilleries, they could not have ordered anything else, thought Arrowsmith as he sipped the cool beer.

"Cheers!"

He had not been mistaken in his impressions, there was a forced appearance of nonchalance, that barely concealed their excitement. They had never seen or imagined such colours, smells, brilliant greenery and intense sunlight. They were lost for words, waiting for Arrowsmith to guide them and explain the strange sights and sounds. It was another world waiting to be explored.

Arrowsmith gave them the standard tour, starting with the Catedral de la Virgen Maria de la Concepcion, or more simply Catedral de la Habana. What ever it was called, they regarded the cathedral with respect and awe, as Irish Catholic believers, with the vague thought that they were being observed, however far they were from home. They then continued to the Plaza des Armas and the Capitol, before finishing the afternoon cooling off by the hotel pool, their white skins exposed to the fierce sunshine.

Martinez picked them up at eight, he had booked them for dinner and the breathtakingly spectacular open air show at the Tropicana night-club, one of Havana's famous night spots. Kennedy and Mulligan got their first close

experience with Cuban women, the attractive jineteras in the guise of ‘dancing students’ who frequented the night-club. In spite of the jet lag, it was difficult to tear them away from their new friends, with whom they had exchanged lessons of Cuban and Gaelic whilst dancing, at first shyly at arms length to the surprise of the ‘students’, before being coaxed into a more sensuous embrace.

Monday morning they were still in a state of cultural shock as the Mercedes made its way westwards along the Malecon, a six lane boulevard that ran along the sea front, to their right the boulevard was lined by three or four storey buildings painted in colours of lemon, rose, purple and aquamarine, which were in an extraordinary state of decay. The car made its way unhurriedly through the curious traffic of Havana, with its ancient American cars, that glided with a curious grace of the aged, painted brightly to hide the wrinkles, like worn out old whores.

They had been met by Martinez at the hotel, who had joined them in the coffee shop. They had managed a reasonably good night’s sleep still feeling the effects of jet lag but enjoyed a solid American breakfast, accompanied by a mixture of fresh tropical fruit slices.

The offices of Sierra Maestra were in a relative modern tower about five kilometres from the centre of the city, half way to the Havana Jose Marti International Airport; on a corner of Avenida de la Independencia overlooking the railway and the Autopista. Ernesto was waiting for them and after introductions he led them to a large twelfth floor conference room. A smartly dressed girl served them cool drinks.

“Make yourselves comfortable I’ll be back in a moment.” Ernesto disappeared leaving the three Europeans alone.

Kennedy glanced around the room wide eyed. It was magnificently furnished with modern dark red tropical hardwood furniture and buffalo hide covered armchairs. In the corner of the room stood a marble bust of Jose Marti, adorned with a vase of white flowers. A picture of Fidel Castro in a gilt frame hung on one wall and on another a large painting of the three Rebeldes; Castro, Che and Camilo Cienfuegos. It was very strange surrounding to the two Irishmen.

The air-conditioning hissed softly as they waited for Ernesto to return. Kennedy and Mulligan spoke in hushed voices, as though they were in a sanctuary, glancing sideways at the Jose Marti bust. It was the Irishmen’s first close encounter with a foreign, that is to say non-Irish, rebel who had struggled for independence from a colonial power. They were puzzled by the discovery.

The double doors opened, Ernesto led a slight silver haired Cuban wearing a dark grey suit into the room. It was difficult to give him an age, perhaps sixty five, maybe more, but from the deference shown to him it was evident that he was the headman. They were followed by three younger men in white short sleeved shirts with dark ties.

“Let me introduce you to Mr Carlos Gonzalez Montero, Mr Antony Arrowsmith.”

He bowed slightly and then shook hands with each of the visitors with a slight tap on the left arm in the Cuban manner. They were introduced to the others and

invited to be seated at the conference table.

“Welcome to Sierra Maestra Breweries & Distilleries, Mr Arrowsmith,” Gonzalez said softly, nodding to Kennedy and Mulligan. “I have followed your discussions with Ernesto very closely and I am pleased with the progress that has been made. As you know we are the largest distillers and brewers in Cuba, we have been in the business for more than one hundred years.”

He paused looking at Arrowsmith with a grave but at the same time kindly expression, he was making the point they were not beginners in business and did not expect to be treated so.

“Our interest in the project in Cayo Saetia is what could be called part of our diversification into the leisure industry. We hold large tracts of plantation land in the east of our country, which have been exploited for sugar cane, for, I can safely say, centuries. But with the world prices of sugar today it is no longer interesting to produce sugar, however, this land is ideal for tourist development.”

He was giving his blessing to the project, which had been described to him in detail by his men and the Ministry of Tourism. It was a mere formality and it was evident that the Cubans had prepared the ground at very high level.

They were shown through the double doors for lunch in the guest dining room that was adjacent to the conference room. From the table and display of food and drinks that was set out before them, they were to eat in a style in which very few Cubans would eat that day or any other day.

As Ernesto led the way Montero discretely took Arrowsmith very gently by the elbow, holding him back to one side in the conference room..

“Mr Arrowsmith, I understand from John Castlemain that you are a very well travelled man,” he said speaking confidentially, it was more of a statement than a question.

“You know in Cuba times are changing and apart from our magnificent project, I fear that there are some lesser but pressing matters that I have to attend to, as very soon we shall be obliged to do things ourselves. I mean what you call the ‘Free Economy’. Sierra Maestra will have to fare for itself, just like companies have done in the ex-Soviet countries.”

Arrowsmith listened with attention, it was for a reason that Montero was confiding in him.

“We need to buy fertiliser and oil and unfortunately we have too few dollars!” he smiled in apology. “That may not seem important, but though the future may look bright, we must be careful that we are still alive when we get there,” he paused, “a man of your experience can perhaps help us?”

“What other means of payment are available,” Arrowsmith asked with tact.

“Today we only have sugar, but if our project goes ahead then will shall diversify our activities and revenues.”

“I see it’s like the old barter system.”

“Unfortunately not quite so, today sugar prices are low whilst oil and fertilisers are high.”

“What I want to avoid is that our prerogatives fall into the hands of unscrupulous people. I can trust David Castlemain and I understand he can trust you.”

Arrowsmith nodded a modest thanks.

“Help us to finance the deal in Europe and I shall ensure that our business is a success.”

Arrowsmith inclined his head again in agreement.

“My man Ernesto will provide you with the details. By the way keep this information strictly to yourself, your friends here need not know.”

“I will do that Señor Montero.”

“Let us eat now, I am sure you are hungry.”

Chapter 39. Cuban Sugar

It took three days work and a lot of patience in George Town for John Ennis to worm out the information on the Ciscap promoters. Working the net from his hotel room, with his satellite telephone link to Paris, he gradually pieced together the arcane structure.

The BCN side seemed to be relatively transparent as well as their involvement with their Irish and European partners, though at the meeting in Jamaica, Castlemain had seemed to be a little cagey with his information, which was understandable from a banker. He had suggested that Ennis contact the project head, Tony Arrowsmith, directly for greater details. However at that moment it was the Cuban side that was of interest to Ennis.

To start with he had discovered, without too much difficulty, that Sierra Maestra Breweries & Distilleries owned a company called Caribtrade SA, a Panamanian registered company, which was in reality a Cuban sociedadade anonimas. A rather curious arrangement, on the one hand it was a semi-autonomous state agency for foreign trade, and on the other was a private venture backed by powerful Cuban government figures.

Where he had more difficulty, was in the unravelling of the different activities of Caribtrade SA. It had tentacular operations through a variety of different subsidiaries; there was Caribtour, a hotel and travel organisation which brought 500,000 tourists to Cuba every year. Caribtour had branches in several major European capitals.

Then there was a subsidiary called Caribsugar, which was specialised in refining, importing and exporting sugar. Caribsugar in turn owned several trading companies, each specialised in the export of different products; seafood such as lobsters, and meat products which came from the herds of cattle he had seen grazing across the Cuban countryside, but he had rarely seen on his plate in Cuba except in the most exclusive and expensive restaurants, finally there was a

company exporting cigars and rum.

He found that the Caribtrade group even owned a small merchant fleet, composed of low tonnage ships of less than 5,000 tons, registered in Panama, which could certainly move goods in and out of Cuba, circumventing all the bureaucratic procedures by going through their own private ports.

At the small local Chamber of Commerce, in George Town, which was unsurprisingly well equipped for an offshore business and banking centre, Ennis consulted the business guides, not only of the local companies but also those of other such offshore banking havens.

By cross checking information and names he discovered that certain directors of Caribtrade were partners in a firm called 'Caribconsultoria y Juridica Internacional', specialised in legal matters, which without doubt worked to overcome the legal problems that a group like Caribtrade would confront in its multiple activities across the Caribbean. This firm worked closely with 'Bancarib y Financiero', a bank in which Caribtrade was part owner, which also traded in international stock and commodities and was registered in the Caymans.

The bank operated a subsidiary company which appeared to be set-up to handle joint-ventures and investments from foreign companies called 'Caribinvest y Consultores SA'. One of their clients was Cubanotel specialised in hotel development which provided support and advisory services for investors.

Through a couple of calls to the offices of the Miami Herald, he was put in contact with a reliable Miami Cuban association, from whom he learnt that these business organisations had powerful men behind them in the SCEC, the State Committee for Economic collaboration. Further the same men manipulated decisions taken in all the key Cuban ministries such as Ministry of the Interior, Foreign Trade, Tourism, Sugar, Economy and Planning, even the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers.

It was very evident that tourism had become the largest industry on the island; it had kept the Cuban economy afloat with the hard currency it earned and was the only potential growth sector. When the economy finally opened up, the country would no doubt be invaded by retirees from New York to Chicago, who would arrive in droves to take advantage of the sunshine and the low cost of living and property.

Certain names appeared to crop up several times in the different organisations, one of which was that of Carlos Ortega. Ennis had remarked Ortega's name, since the articles of incorporation of the companies showed that he was Chilean, born in Santiago de Chile, which seemed a little strange for Cuban businesses. His role gradually became clearer when Ennis turned up his links with Russia. He discovered that Ortega had amongst other things, the role of a kind of Tsar, empowered to negotiate and collect debts from the Americas, owed to Russia, dating back to Soviet times.

He then checked newspaper data bases, where reports showed that Ortega was mixed in a number of affairs which were suspected of being linked to the Russian

Mafiya. That was not too difficult when dealing with Russia, since it was estimated by some specialists, that the Mafiya controlled an astonishing fifty to eighty percent of the Russian economy.

In the past Cuba had been a Soviet surrogate. The debt of Cuba to the Soviet Union in 1990 was estimated by various sources at between ten and thirty billion dollars, a sum which was disputed by Cuba since it depended on the exchange rate that was used between the dollar and the rouble. Ortega was paid a commission, like a tax farmer, on all that he recovered, whether it be in money, goods or services.

As Cuba had almost no hard currency, he set up barter deals in commodities, with Russia importing nearly two million tons of sugar, equal to fifty percent of Cuba's sugar exports, and Cuba imported two million tons of Russian oil. The terms were no longer preferential, like in the good old days, though prices were fixed so as to offset certain parts of the debt.

Ennis made his own approximate calculations, using the prices quoted in The Financial Times of the previous day, the price of 'brown' unrefined sugar '11' was at 6.4 cents a pound and white sugar 200 dollars a ton for 50 ton lots. His calculation showed that the present annual production of 3.6 million tons of non-refined sugar, at a little over six cents a pound, made around 500 million dollars. Refined sugar would be over double the price.

A lot of money, he thought, it was no wonder the Russian Mafiya was interested.

Checking out the role of sugar in the Cuban economy, he learned that it was what could be called a mono-culture, one of the mainstays of the economy. Back in 1970 the plan had called for an annual production of ten million tons, a target, which was not reached. In the 1980's four fifths of exports from Cuba were sugar and almost seventy percent of the sugar went to Soviet Union.

With the end of the Soviet Union the Cuban economy collapsed, contracting by between thirty to fifty percent over a five year period. As a result a 'Special Period in Peacetime', that is to say a program of extreme austerity, was declared in 1990 by the Cuban government.

The most important moment in the year in Cuba was, and still is, the zafra, that is the sugar harvest. The sugar production plan was fixed at government level by an organisation called, Junte centrale de la planification.

The success of the zafra depended on fertilisers, pesticides, petroleum and machine parts, which Cuba could no longer afford to buy, with the result that the economy spiralled down into a black hole and sugar production fell to under four million tons, a mere fraction of its past levels, compounded by world prices being at the lowest ever level ever.

Chapter 40. Playa Esmeralda

It was a one hour flight from Havana to Holguin, about 700 kilometres directly to the east of the capital. Holguin lay in Oriente Province, fifty kilometres from where Fidel Castro had been born to a servant whom his father, a rich sugar plantation owner, later married.

Arrowsmith was to visit Playa Esmeralda, a beach resort, to the east of the town of Gibara, a charming old colonial maritime port. He would then visit Cayo Saetia that lay further to the east.

As the Airbus approached Holguin from the sea, Arrowsmith saw Maniabon Hills sweeping down to the coast line in the distance, bordered by the turquoise sea.

The Holguin Airport was modern, designed to cater for package tours holidays. There was a new extension to the passenger terminal under construction and as the plane taxied to its parking area he saw further construction work with almost completed hangars, which were probably freight and maintenance buildings.

He was due to be met by Ernesto Chibas on arrival. There were no formalities, he had cleared immigration and customs in Havana. As he left the baggage reclaim area he saw an attractive girl holding a cardboard sign marked 'Welcome Mr Arrowsmith'.

Arrowsmith made himself known and she slipped the sign under her arm and held her hand out as an equal.

"Bienvenida! Welcome to Holguin Mr Arrowsmith, I am Maria, Ernesto's assistant," she smiled making a sign to a small dark skinned boy who with a large grin presented a cool drink on a tray.

Lucky for Ernesto thought Arrowsmith taking her hand, admiring her young curves.

A driver took his bags and the girl led him to a private room in the VIP lounge where Ernesto was waiting. He was about forty, of medium height wearing a white pleated guayabera shirt. He looked like what Cubans called a 'chino', with a strong open face, his shiny black hair swept back.

"Hello Mr Arrowsmith, welcome to Holguin, I'm Ernesto Chibas."

He invited Arrowsmith to sit down, a girl appeared and offered him a chilled towel perfumed with jasmine, another girl offered him a refill of tropical fruit juice.

"It's your first time in Oriente?"

"Yes, it's my first visit," replied Arrowsmith. "but I have already had the pleasure of visiting Cuba on several occasions."

Arrowsmith had already made a weekend trip to Baracoa some hundred or so kilometres to the east a few years previously, when he had been visiting Santiago de Cuba. Many of his friends at that time had talked of the beauty of the site, just a very short flight from Holguin. However, he preferred that Ernesto commence the visit without any preconceived ideas on the opinions that he himself could have

had from past experience.

“We’re staying at the Discovery, it’s about half-an-hour’s drive from here, as soon as you are ready we can be on our way.”

Ernesto spoke with a slight American accent. Arrowsmith later learnt that he had spent four years at university in the United States.

“The driver has taken your bags?” It was more of a question to Maria than to Arrowsmith.

They then proceeded to the arrivals entrance, Maria moving ahead of them to alert the driver. The sun shone brightly enhancing the beauty of the nearby low hills that lay in the distance on both sides of the airport. There was an air of cleanliness, things had that Cuban carefree look, there was none of the signs of rush and panic that often reigned in tourist airports on the arrival of a flight in off the beaten track tourist destinations.

A sparkling white Landcruiser pulled up before them, the driver jumped down opened the doors and then carried the bags to the back. Ernesto invited Arrowsmith to sit next to the driver so that he could see the road as they drove to the hotel.

“It’s about thirty or forty kilometres from here to the north coast, a bit more than half an hour’s drive.”

They joined the main north-south road the linked the town of Gibara to the airport, driving at a very relaxed pace. The road was good and the traffic was almost non-existent, to the right were hills covered with dense vegetation and on the left the ground was relatively flat lined with sugar cane plantations and fields.

“You’ll like it here Mr Arrowsmith.”

“How’s the weather at this time of the year?”

“It’s still the dry season, soon the wet season will commence, a little hot right now.”

“So it’s still the tourist season?”

“Right, there’s a lot of Europeans, your summer holiday season is just starting and there’s also a lot of Canadians, it’s late spring up there.”

“I see.”

“It’s always the tourist season here, but there are less visitors during the rainy season. We also have a lot of tourists from Germany and more and more from Spain and Latin American countries, especially Argentina.”

They arrived at an intersection in the middle of which was a bronze statue, behind was a hoarding showing Fidel Castro and Calixto Garcia, a hero of the war of independence from Spain.

“What’s that?” said Arrowsmith pointing at the monument.

“That’s Cristobal Colon, he landed near here in 1492.”

Arrowsmith nodded, he had read in the guide book that there was a long standing dispute about the site of his landing in Cuba, but he did not pursue his question. The road widened out, on the left and right houses and buildings appeared, they were on the outskirts of Gibara. The traffic increase a little as they approached the town centre, the nearby hills rose behind the low skyline giving an agreeable

appearance to the remarkable small Cuban town.

“We’ll take the coast road, like that you’ll see the beaches. Another fifteen minutes and we’ll be there,” announced Ernesto.

They turned right onto a long straight road that rose in the distance to a series of low hills. They were soon caught behind buses and small trucks that laboured against the slope belching out clouds of black smoke. The driver in a series of what seemed to Arrowsmith reckless manoeuvres overtook the buses and trucks and arrived at the pass that traversed the hills. As they continued down the other side Arrowsmith saw the coastline and the sea.

Arriving at Playa Esmeralda they crawled behind a string of horse drawn vehicles along the beach road. He was surprised at the changes that had that tourism had brought. The small resort was crammed full of small shops and stalls with bright displays of tee-shirts, jeans, imitation leather goods, and the whole tourist paraphernalia.

There were a number of bars and small restaurants, offering menus of lobster and tiger prawns with tanks of sea fish for the amateurs of sea food. For the less adventurous tourist were the ubiquitous pizzerias and hamburger bars.

At that hour of the day the tourists were stretched on the beach that lay to the right side of the road, grilling under the potentially dangerous ultra-violet radiation of the tropical sun, acquiring the obligatory tan in the short time their tour operator had allotted them between their visits to crocodile farms, cathedrals and plantations.

Arrowsmith looked at the beach, it was not crowded, but it was a far cry from the desert island of the brochures. In the distance he could see a sea scooter skimming over the waves, there was a hand glider towed by a powerful speedboat, there were also water skiers, and a couple of pleasure boats anchored offshore.

In the light traffic that moved slowly forward were tanned tourists seated in their small rented Suzuki 4x4s or on motorbikes. Beyond the noise and movement of the town centre there were several hotels. It was a tourist paradise said to be a future Varedero

Leaving Playa Esmeralda the coast road to the south rose again passing a couple of up-market hotels that lay further back, surrounded by luxuriant gardens with flowering shrubs and coconut palms. The road zigzagged over the tree covered hills giving a fine view along the coast onto the small bays that lay between the promontories.

They arrived at Guardalavaca where the Discovery lay in a stunning small bay with a private beach; it was a modern building, built onto the steep slope in the form of terraces. The hotel club was considered by many to be one of the finest in the Cuba. As they approached the entrance there was a control post and barrier to keep out the unwanted, the guard stepped forward, recognising Ernesto’s Landcruiser, saluted and lifted the barrier.

After a minimum of formalities Arrowsmith was ushered into a luxurious apartment overlooking the bay. The large terrace was almost like a private garden,

three sides were lined with flowering plants and from the apartment above hanging plants draped down, forming a shady half curtain over the panoramic window. From the terrace the only other buildings visible were a few scattered houses on the surrounding slopes. Several ocean going yachts lay at anchor in the bay and docked at the quay were two luxury motor cruisers.

He changed into a pair of beach shorts, took a beer from the bar and installed himself in an easy chair under the shadow of a sun shade and admired the remarkable view. He could see that there was not much exploring to be done, the club had been located at a deliberately isolated site, several kilometres away from the more popular tourist beaches. It was exclusive, designed to keep the curious package tour groups from the Ruhr, Birmingham or Toronto at large.

The shimmer of the heat, the intense light, the soft buzz of the insects and the gentle noise of the waves breaking on the beach lulled him into a half sleep. He felt content and did not regret his decision to visit Oriente and its beaches. He decided that he would enjoy the coming few days in a leisurely investigation of the resort.

He realised how the tourist complex, as seen from the Discovery, had seduced Castlemain. He knew nothing of the tourist business, but he would play the role of Candid and make the most of it, it would be a refreshing break from his normal business.

He had visited many of the renowned tropical tourist paradises, including Bali, Tahiti, St Martin, Penang and many lesser known places. They were all very similar, artificial paradises, clean sandy beaches, well watered gardens with neatly trimmed lawns, chlorinated swimming pools, tennis courts, shopping arcades and restaurants. For the evenings there were the Trovas or their equivalents, local folklore shows and dances.

It was not that he did not enjoy such organisation in small doses, but it soon became tiring and he found encounters with nature in its unspoiled state much more fascinating, if sometimes threatening.

An objective report for Castlemain would not be too difficult to put together and Ernesto could certainly provide him with some solid background data. Arrowsmith had an open mind, it was not his intention to become more deeply involved beyond giving Castlemain a professional opinion, in a sense it was a favour, but in any case it was a far from disagreeable task.

Ernesto was in the lobby as agreed at exactly six. He told him that they were to have dinner at the Palm Park Plantation, a new hotel at Bahia de Bariay on the road to Gibara.

The Palm Park had been opened only one month before. It consisted of a two hundred and thirty room four star tourist hotel, an apartment complex and a tourist shopping centre on a fifty acre site. The Palm Park was set between the low wooded hills and the beach with plantations to the north and south perimeters.

Ernesto explained that the Palm Plantation was marketed mainly to travel agencies catering for the mature middle range European or Canadian tourists staying for four or five nights. They were also groups from Argentina and Mexico

on overnight stops, but that was temporary as a stopgap during the start-up period.

Many of the package tours ended their circuit with a few days on the beach, so that the tourists could recover from the stress and fatigue of early morning calls and days of endless bus rides to a never ending list of cathedrals, cigar factories and butterfly farms.

Long staying guests or individual arrivals were very few, the site lacked sufficient facilities and attractions, only the overflow from the up market hotels during the peak season could be expected. It would have been better for younger couples more interested by the simple sun, sea and sand formula, but was probably out of the range of their budgets.

They dined in the 'Caravel', a night-club restaurant designed to offer a touch of luxury and exoticism for the holiday makers as a relatively expensive extra. It was situated on a fifth floor roof terrace of the hotel. During the day there was no doubt a marvellous view out over the bay, however night had fallen and just a few dim lights could be seen from the local fishing boats.

The Caravel offered a broad choice of cuisine from the Caribbean islands. An astonishing array of dishes was laid out on the buffet before them, stuffed crabs, prawns, lobster, exotic vegetables.

Ernesto invited Arrowsmith to commence, helping him with the difficult choice. Arrowsmith ate with relish sampling the rare variety of tastes, it was a welcome change from the typically bland Cuban cuisine.

On a small stage in the middle of the restaurant a small group of musicians assembled and after some moments of preparation commenced to play soft rhythmic Afro-Cuban music. Four coffee skinned dancers then appeared with sensual hips swinging and the smooth natural grace of Cuban women. They were dressed in scanty pink sequined costumes decorated with fantasy jewellery and feathers. The length of their legs exaggerated by their high heels, they moved their legs in unison, their hips seemed disjointed as they moved their thighs laterally, their sparkling brown eyes gazed into the lighting.

"They're from the Tropicana," Ernesto informed him. "Cuba is famous for its dancers and has several schools to train them."

Arrowsmith nodded and grunted at that piece of information absorbed in studying the details.

The dancers left the floor and the music continued whilst the two men continued their dinner enjoying a modest Cuban wine.

"What do you think of our hotel?"

"It's beautiful, the architecture is very impressive," replied Arrowsmith graciously.

"This was our first development alone, we had already participated in a couple of other hotel development projects as minority partners, which introduced us to the business, almost everything is new in Bahia de Bariay, not so long ago it was just a small isolated village."

"Yes, I can imagine that," said Arrowsmith recalling the beach as he had first

seen it, almost unspoiled ten years previously

“Tomorrow we shall visit the site for the Ciscap, I have arranged for a helicopter so that you get a complete idea of the site, the representatives of the Tourism Authority of Cuban and the Board of Investment will join us.”

“Where is the site?”

“It’s about forty or so kilometres to the south east along the coast. It’s difficult to get to but we have the helicopter, like that we get a good idea of the whole site.”

“What time do we start tomorrow?”

“I’ll pick you up at ten.”

“Fine.”

“Let’s go then, I think you’ve had a long day and we’ll have plenty of time to explore Playa Esmeralda’s night life during the next few days,” he laughed as from what Arrowsmith had seen it would be very scant.

“Suits me.”

The following morning Arrowsmith ate a full American breakfast on the terrace of his apartment; he had slept well and awoke earlier with the time difference. The sky was unchanged, blue, and the sea along the littoral was a transparent turquoise.

He looked at his watch, it was just after eight, he had more than two hours before his meeting. He decided he would pass the time with a stroll exploring the details of the bay.

Beached on the sand were four long narrow fishing boats, their once bright paint faded in the hot sun. The sand was already hot, sand crabs scampered into their holes. As he passed by the outcroppings of rock on the waters edge he saw brightly coloured fish darting through the clear calm water the lay between the beach and reef.

His first impression was confirmed, it was an unspoilt isolated site ideal for a few days relaxation, but it was sure that after a short time it would become monotonous for many visitors except for those who liked the sea and underwater diving along the coral reef.

The island of Cayo Saetia was even more isolated and totally undeveloped, a few rooms in a simple lodge on an island devoid of all amenities. Fine for a few hours observation of the wildlife. After all it was a natural paradise...for the animals. A tourist city as envisaged for Ciscap would need a great deal of infrastructure and other facilities, but it was clear that the site would be unique and the absence of existing structures would ensure that the authenticity would be guaranteed.

Chapter 41. A Barter Deal

Barter trading was one of the oldest forms of commercial exchange,

practised in biblical times before money existed. It was still used in the twentieth century and would no doubt continue for as long as men had no other means of exchange in times of hardship or crisis.

Arrowsmith knew the mechanism well and by a curious coincidence had used it in Cuba for the construction of a paper mill at a town called Jatabonica early in his career, well before their economy fell into dire straits. However as Montero said times had changed. Cuba held little political interest once the Cold War had ended and their only tradable commodity, sugar, had to compete on the world markets at the going price.

Nevertheless, its ex-mentor Russia still needed cheap sugar, and in exchange Russia manufactured vast quantities of low price fertilisers, it was also a major exporter of oil. It was surprising that the Russians needed anything given their rich resources, but that was the fate of those who had embraced the disastrous economic system of communism.

He envisaged that the best arrangement would be to set up a deal in a neutral country, as the relations between Russia and Cuba had become worse than strained, they were little less than acrimonious. They mutually exchanged bitter accusations. Russia accused Cuba of being a nation of thieves who alone had consumed one half of Soviet foreign aid, whilst Cuba accused Russia of betrayal.

Tony Arrowsmith called an old business friend based in Moscow, Mika Koskinen, who could advise him. Koskinen, a Finn, had lived in Moscow during the time of the Soviet Union, leaving in 1987 and then returning after the fall of Gorbachev. He was a highly respected specialist in Russian affairs, having graduated in Russian Political Science and Economics at Lenin University.

He was the president and owner of a Russo-Finnish company, which represented a number of large Finnish companies and groups trading in industrial machinery and chemicals.

The two friends agreed to meet to discuss the matter in London, where Mika had a conference scheduled on Russian trade development for British exporters.

London was less than three hours from Paris on the Eurostar, ideal for short visits, city centre to city centre, avoiding the endless hassle of the Paris and London airports.

As the train approached London Arrowsmith tried to catch the name of one of the stations that flashed by, the setting sun over the shabby brick houses and council flats dazzled him, he caught the sign Herne Hill, as far as he remembered that was not far from Clapham Junction, just a couple of miles from Victoria, the train would soon be arriving, then he saw the gasometer and Battersea power station, only a few more minutes to Waterloo, the train was on time. As soon as the train was in the station he planned on taking a taxi to his hotel where he could relax for a couple of hours.

Tony Arrowsmith always felt a little strange returning to the London he had left so many years ago to take up residence in Paris. Many things had changed, not

only the skyline and such obvious details, but also the people and their attitudes, which in some instances had evolved, though in others had remained remarkably timeless. He was the first to admit that he himself had changed, for the better or for the worse that was for others to judge.

The Eurostar pulled into Waterloo Station, where he was affronted by what must have appeared to foreigners as rather frightening scene with an array of the severe looking representatives of the state, police dog handlers, customs and immigration officers, and security personnel, more suited to a police state than that of an ancient democracy. It was naturally for the benefit of the population at large. He thought wryly that it had never stopped bombers, drug traffickers or illegal immigration; it was obvious that the whole act was in the wrong place, on the other hand it probably provided a lot of jobs and perhaps a sense of security.

He looked ahead, experimenting at avoiding eye contact with the Orwellian faces of the law enforcers, and their air of restrained aggression. He was about to join the long queue waiting for taxis, when he abruptly changed his mind and took the Underground to Hyde Park Corner, a short walk to the Four Seasons Hotel. He liked that spot, a few minutes stroll from the hotel along Piccadilly and he was in the heart of London as he knew it, or, a slightly longer walk to the south and he was in Pimlico, the district where he had grown up.

He had often thought of buying an apartment in London, but for the little time he spent there he preferred to be pampered at the hotel. It was a stone's throw from where he had started work as a young man, at an engineering consultant's office in Berkeley Square House, in Mayfair.

He had taken the habit of reserving the comfortable suite he had discovered at the Four Seasons, it was quiet and the discrete ambience of the hotel was relaxing, a refuge from the crowds and traffic. Generally the only meal he took at the hotel was an English breakfast, but from time to time it was practical to invite one of his friends to lunch or dinner in the hotel's fine restaurant.

Mika Koskinen was due to arrive late that evening from Moscow and Arrowsmith was looking forward to inviting him to the places he himself knew and did not know in London.

They dined in a small restaurant in Mayfair before heading off to a nightclub opposite the Ritz Hotel, which more resembled the kind of establishment that was typical of Moscow than London, but where they could drink and dance.

Mika explained that the barter deal could be set up through a bank in Riga, the capital of Latvia. It was conveniently neutral and was perfectly suited for the import and export of commodities, as it had been when Latvia was part of the USSR.

Oil and fertilisers arrived from Russia in the terminal at the Port of Ventspils on the Baltic Sea. Sugar could be imported through Finn Sugar in nearby Finland where it could be processed and re-exported to Russia.

Mika's old friend, Pieter Holmqvist, represented the Bottens Handelsbank office in Riga. He could support the deal with suitable credit lines put at their disposition

by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the EBRD, or Berd as Arrowsmith liked to call it using the French acronym, set-up to aid the countries of the ex-Soviet Bloc. It appeared a straightforward deal and perfectly transparent. The Cuban, Montero, would not be disappointed.

If the credit arrangements functioned as Holmqvist described, the only possible obstacle would be obtaining all the necessary papers from the Russians and Cubans. If all went well, Arrowsmith would have fulfilled his engagement to the satisfaction of both Montero and Castlemain.

Chapter 42. Partagas

Kennedy and Mulligan left the Nacional Hotel in the direction of the Partagas Cigar Factory, which according to the instructions given by the concierge was nearby the Capitol. There were tours organised from the hotel, but after being guided around by Kennedy's cousin Arrowsmith for the last few days it was time to explore by themselves, after all they decided they could read a street map as well as anybody else.

They had been told that it was only about six cuerdas from the hotel on the corner of Dragones and Industria. They found the Capitol without any difficulty, they could not miss it, it was an enormous building copied stone for stone from the Capitol in Washington in the 1920's. It had been built as the seat of the Cuban government and presidential palace, but was subsequently transformed into museums and the Cuban Academy of Sciences. The presidential palace had been relocated by Castro, firstly in what is today the Museum of the Revolution, built by Fulgencio Batista as his palace, and then to the modern Plaza de la Revolution, a monument to tasteless monolithic Eastern-European style architecture.

They made a quick circuit of the Capitol and spotted the factory without any problem. On the pediment of the building the name was written in large letters Partagas Real Fabrica de Tabacos, the factory, a sombre red building, dated back to the foundation by the owners of the business in 1845. It was considered the best producer of fine cigars in Havana, with an output of five million cigars a year.

There were a few bizarre characters parked in front of the visitors entrance to the factory, each doing their act to collect a few coins from the generous tourists, who arrived by the coach load for organised visits.

They discovered by a cursory glance into the dingy entrance of the factory a motley group of Cubans, who seemed to be trying to organise a pressing crowd of tourists, and looking beyond the confusion further into the building they saw that it appeared to be just as dim, grubby and as worn out as most of the Havana that they had already there had seen.

Without further discussion they decided to go directly to the factory's cigar shop,

which was situated adjacent to the main entrance, to see what exactly they were selling. It was much smarter inside the shop, but again there was a thronging crowd. Canadians and French tourists packed against the glass counter, where the two sales persons were lethargically trying to cope with the cries of the tourists desperate to spend their money during their brief visit to the factory, the sales pitch consisted of announcing the price with a take it or leave it shrug.

The two new arrivals only just managed to get a peek into the glass display cases and the price list fixed on the wall.

“Look, a box of 25 Partagas Coronas at £8.20 for one cigar that made over £200 a box!”

“It’s a bit expensive!” complained Mulligan.

Even Kavanagh, who normally did not look too closely at prices, thought it seemed expensive for a smoke. As well as having taken the pledge he was also was a non-smoker and was surprised at how much a cigar could cost in such an obviously poor country.

“Never mind, we can buy them at the hotel shop, it’s not worth all of the hassle here,” they reasoned a little disappointedly as they left the factory.

“Hola, psst, amigo!”

Kennedy looked around, a Cuban was gesturing to him, he was a good looking Latino, a European-Spanish type, about thirty years old, he was sitting on a low wall that surrounded the Capitol gardens on the opposite side of the street to the Partagas factory. He was with a girl friend wearing a mini-skirt and a brief tee shirt that showed off her slim midriff.

“Hey, amigo you wanna buy cigars?”

“Yesh.”

“Comma-wi-me amigo, I ave a friend who works in the factory, our price is much lower!”

“Let’s have a look,” said Kennedy to Mulligan who shrugged, they crossed the street following the two jinteros into a sombre looking building.

The building at first glance seemed to be abandoned, a ruin, in fact it was no different from the great majority of buildings in Havana. It had been built before the revolution and forty years without upkeep had taken their toll.

The jinteros showed them to the entrance of an apartment; they went in through a front door that consisted of open iron bars, very much like that of a prison cell. At the end of a short hallway they were shown into a small plain room, the walls were painted with white distemper, it was lit by a single neon tube, giving a hard white light. The furniture consisted of two or three wooden chairs speckled with white paint drops, in one corner stood a fairly large refrigerator on the top of which sat family photos of small children.

They took a seat a little nervously wondering what they had got themselves into. Glancing around they took in the scene. The floor was covered by dismal creamy brown plastic tiles. In a corner there was a small sink and a tap that dripped. A

stale odour hung over the small apartment.

“Don’t worry, my name is Lina,” said the girl detecting their anxiety, “we will wait here, the cigars will be here in five minutes. Miguel will bring them.”

Lina was close to what is described by Cubans as a criolla, that was to say of Spanish appearance, with an olive skin, dark eyes and long black hair tied low on the nape of her neck. She could have been Miguel’s sister.

They exchanged names and made an effort at small talk. She told them how life was difficult in Cuba and how little money they had.

Kennedy inspected her closely and could not help finding her attractive in an exotic way. The small room seemed to exude a certain forbidden eroticism. He could see through the opening behind Lina, there was a small back room with a bed.

Miguel returned and showed them a box of twenty five Cohibas and a box of Montecristos.

“Sixty dollars!” he said pointing to the Cohibas. “Forty dollars!” for the Monte Cristos.

They accepted without any further discussion to Miguel’s surprise. Then Mulligan asked if it was possible to have two boxes of Cohibas.

“Wait here five minutes,” said the young man and after a quick exchange in Spanish the girl disappeared.

After a short wait she re-appeared agitated.

“The police are outside, you must go!”

“What about the cigars!”

“We will bring them to your hotel, where are you staying!”

“Nacional.”

“What room number?”

They gave the room number and the girl said they should leave separately. Kennedy by the back, Mulligan by the front.

Out the back door Kennedy found himself in a sordid yard enclosed between the buildings, a concrete stairway, a fire escape, led upwards. He saw the sky above almost hidden by a tangle of ladders and pipes; the ground beneath his feet was half flooded with stagnant pools of pungent black water.

Lina indicated to the stairs of the fire escape, which were blocked with a mass of debris, an iron gate, sheets of corrugated metal, old plastic buckets and metal cans.

He clambered over the rubble with difficulty to the first stair landing, then up to the next, which was covered with a jumble of scaffolding in metal and wood with a tangle of rusty wire, which had certainly once held it together.

She led the way scrambling onto the scaffolding and prudishly tried to hold her tiny skirt down. As he looked away discreetly, avoiding the view, he thought that the skirt was more like a curtain pelmet than an item of clothing.

“Climb over there!” she said pointing to an adjacent balcony about a metre away from the concrete wall of the stairway.

It was impossible; he could not pass his bulky shoulders through the mass

obstructing his passage. There was a young Black on the balcony, who seemed to apprehend the risk of the gringo falling down into the yard at the bottom stairwell, he refused to lend a hand in spite of the exhortations of the girl.

She made a sign to him to re-descend the stairs. He was now covered with red rust and white dust from the badly weathered concrete. Once back in the yard, she knocked on a decrepit door, there was a loud and rapid exchange in Spanish with a young man who suddenly appeared.

“No...no, no! No!” a woman’s voice cried from on the other side of the door.

The door opened, a heavily built but elderly woman made a symbolic effort to block his access. The young man gently but forcibly helped her to one side and Kennedy passed into what appeared to be a dark shabby apartment, it took a few instants for his eyes to adjust to the semi-darkness, the apartment was grim, reeking of damp and old age and poverty.

The girl led the way and showed him the front door of the apartment and indicated the direction to take. He found himself back in the cavernous entrance hall of the building, it had probably been a prosperous down-town shopping arcade many years before, it was now a ruin of broken walls, hanging wires, and puddles of stagnant water that leaked from the rusty pipes.

He made his way to the street, waiting for Mulligan who had the cigars. Across the avenue on the pavement of the Capitol stood a policeman of the PNR in his blue uniform. He made a beckoning sign to Kennedy, who had no choice but to obey.

“Passport!”

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders. The policeman made a sign towards the plastic bag that Kennedy opened for inspection. It was disappointing, just a guidebook and a street map. He had hoped for more, an opportunity missed. It was not unusual for police to boost their meagre salary by a little extortion from naive tourists. The policeman turned away feigning disinterest and Kennedy walked further along the pavement to the corner of the block looking for a sign of Mulligan.

The girl appeared on the opposite pavement and proceeded in the direction of a run down corner cafe. He crossed the road to join her. She pretended to ignore him, but nodding sharply towards the cafe, her eyes fixed firmly ahead.

Once in the cafe he saw Mulligan who was greatly relieved to see him again.

“Jesus, did you see the police. What’s going on?”

Lina explained that it was illegal to sell cigars outside of the official shops and hotels. The police surveyed tourists and the jinteros who tried to sell them cigars.

“The police make problems for us, they want money. Don’t worry I will come to your room, at six with my brother Miguel everything is O.K!” she smiled nervously.

The two sheepishly returned to the hotel rather shaken by their little adventure.

“Jesus, what a wretched place, did you ever such a thing, Holy Mother of Christ!” said Mulligan.

“Yesh, we were lucky we could have been arrested.”

“They’re so poor, I can hardly believe it. Do you think we’ll get the cigars?”
They had left sixty dollars with the couple.

“Never mind,” said Kennedy thinking about Lina. “We’ll get our cigars and that’s the end of that. Don’t let on to the others what happened.”

John Ennis could not avoid observing that Cuba was a paradise for single European men. He had seen the same thing in other cities from Bangkok to Moscow. Poverty pushed young women into prostitution in order to survive. In Cuba many European male tourists liked black girls - negritas and mulattas. Scandinavians and Germans seemed to have the greatest penchant for the darker skinned girls.

Paul Carvin amused himself trying to photograph short, fat, one legged, balding, not so young men with tall black girls in their shimmering fluorescent Lycra cycle pants, walking hand in hand, he was curious to get into the dance halls to see them dance the salsa.

Ennis noticed a man in a clean white pleated guyabera shirt who seemed to be interested in them. He did not look like a jintero, perhaps he was an informer from one of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution. There were plenty of informers who spent all day at their windows watching what went on in their cuadra. He could however be from the Ministry of the Interior, after all journalists were to be watched carefully.

The government had set up Varedero and Cayo Largo to keep tourists and Cubans apart in their different worlds. But male tourists wanted sex, excitement and Cuban girls, the forbidden taste of the exciting negritas and mulattas. Everywhere there could be seen such mixed couples, holding hands in silence, for lack of a common language. Foreign women wanted to meet a handsome Cuban chino and dance at the Palacio de la Salsa in the moist tropical heat to the electrifying beat of the congas and batas.

The streets were overflowing, it was Saturday night and tourists merged with the local crowd. The poor tried their luck offering souvenir coins with Jose Marti’s image, or some with a little more imagination offered poems, beautifully hand written on simple sheets of paper, in a surprisingly fine literate style. Here and there jinteras flashed smiles at the male tourists, in the hope that they would be invited to a dance hall or nightclub.

At just after six, there was a knock on Kennedy’s door, he opened the door and Lina was standing there holding plastic bag in her hand with a smile that displayed her fine white teeth.

“Come in.”

She was dressed differently, she wore flat shoes, her skirt was of a fairly respectable length and she had chosen a high buttoned pale blue blouse, it was obligatory, to avoid the problem of getting past the hotel doorman. There was in theory a law against Cubans visiting hotel rooms, the patrolling Vice Squad, when it suited them, cracked down on the jinteras. On the other hand the Ministry of

Tourism frowned on severe crackdowns on the girls, as it was not good for business. However, the general rule was that if the girls looked well dressed enough they encountered relatively few problems, and that applied especially to attractive criollas like Lina.

“Here are the cigars,” she opened the bag to show him. “Do you have the rest of the money?”

“Yesh,” he replied handing over the eighty dollars he had prepared.

She took the money, folded the bills and deftly slipped them into a small pocket on the side of her skirt.

“Nice room you have Pat!”

She walked over to the window. Kennedy looked at her. She had a nice figure, nice legs and she was pretty.

“Where is your brother?”

“He had something else to do,” she replied nonchalantly, “do you have something to drink?”

He opened the mini-bar and made a gesture, indicating to her to choose what she wanted.

“An orange juice will be OK,” she smiled sitting on the edge of the bed and crossing her legs.

“Would you like me to stay for a while!” she asked him coyly.

“If you like,” he replied with a forced air of disinterest, trying to hide his mounting excitement as he realised that he was being propositioned.

The telephone rang, it was Mulligan. Kennedy lay naked on the large bed, his skin red from sunburn; he had been in Lina’s arms for thirty minutes.

“Oh! Hallo John. Well I’m a little tired, a bit of a headache. I think it’s the jet lag or the sun. Why don’t we meet later!” He put down the phone and returned to Lina who waited patiently looking at him with her large dark eyes. She knew instinctively that she had found a willing benefactor whom she could count on for as long as he was in Cuba, and perhaps a little longer.

A surveillance report reached the desk of the head of security at Cuban Minister of the Interior some hours later. He was pleased with the information that his men had collected. A little talk with the girl, Lina, would convince her to keep him updated on the movements of the Irishman, Kennedy. He wondered if he was related to the other Kennedy who had caused so much trouble for Cuba, in any case Colonel Cienfuegos would be very happy to know his instructions were being carefully followed to the letter.

Chapter 43. A Pick-up in Antigua

Arrowsmith flew into Antigua on a Bandeirante, a Brazilian built twin engine aircraft. The island was just to the north, a short hop from Guadeloupe. The plane was about half full, there were just sixteen seats, he could stretch out. Through the window he had a good view of the islands; the small aircraft's cruising altitude was no more than two or three thousand metres.

He could make out boats and ships that appeared motionless on the shimmering sea and wondered idly if the Marie Galante was one of them, the meeting point was fixed in Falmouth Harbour to the south of the island.

The regular drone of the motors made him feel sleepy, just the slight bump from time to time kept him awake. There was a change in the pitch of the motor and the plane banked, he could see a large island ahead and they started their descent to Antigua.

Castlemain had called him, it was urgent, a certain Ishkov was no longer available, an accident or something. Ishkov was to have settled a banking arrangement for the Cubans in Antigua.

Castlemain's explanations had been rushed and unclear, the only thing that came through was the urgent need to keep the appointment at the bank. He would get further instructions on arrival in Antigua.

The instructions were there sure enough and Arrowsmith was more than a little unhappy. There was an envelope with a cash order in the name of Ishkov for \$200,000 which was to be delivered by the Leeward Islands Bank, one of the multitude of banks in Antigua that conducted doubtful business transactions and was certainly a vehicle for fiscal evasion and money laundering.

Castlemain had with his usual efficiency set up the arrangements with the bank, with the result that there was nothing much to do except relax and try to enjoy the sunshine. At the Leeward Islands Bank he had handed over the order with Ishkov's signature, everything was fine, the cash would be prepared in US dollars and could be picked up the next morning, there were no other formalities, no currency exchange restrictions and no limits on banking transactions on the island.

It would have of course been simpler with a wire transfer to an account opened in the name of a Cuban Vice Minister of Tourism or one of his family, that would have been much cleaner, unfortunately cash was wanted, and Castlemain had preferred that Arrowsmith deliver it personally and hand it over to the Cuban in Havana, that way he was sure that it arrived at the right door and intact.

In the circumstances Arrowsmith took greatest care to keep a low profile. In spite of the mandatory banking secrecy on the island there were leaks, it helped the Antiguan authorities to maintain an image of vigilance and demonstrate their respect for international treaties. Any indiscretion could mean information being leaked to the French customs authorities on Guadeloupe, if it served the interests of the Antiguans. The French were always alert to tax fraud and laundering of illegal

money by nationals or residents.

However, it was the Russians that Arrowsmith feared more, they had other means of getting what they wanted and were totally without qualms when it came to the use of violence. He shuddered at the thought, making a mental note to keep as far away as possible from them, especially Ortega and his associates, who having befriended Kennedy were becoming embarrassing acquaintances.

After arriving at the International Airport, he took a taxi to St Johns; it was just five miles away. After checking into his hotel he selected a small roadside bar with a good view and sat at a rickety table shaded from the sun by the tall palms that lined the seafront. He ordered a beer and started to thumb lazily through the guidebook he had bought to orient himself.

There were numerous banks in down town St John's and he wondered why Castlemain had made the pick-up arrangement there, or more to the point why he had not picked up the money himself, it would have been so much simpler. Arrowsmith collected the money the next morning and then took a taxi to Falmouth Harbour on the south of the island, where following Castlemain's instructions he was to join him on the Marie Galante, which was cruising the islands with his guests and was scheduled to sail to Cayo Coco in Cuba.

He was not totally at ease with the idea of the cruise. Although he had a total confidence in Boisnier, the Marie Gallant's captain, and his seamanship, the constant though minor difficulties with the navigation equipment and Courtauld's dismissal of those problems had irritated him. He would have preferred a short flight to Havana, but Castlemain had insisted on doing it his way, making the hand-over to the Cubans at their agreed place of delivery. Arrowsmith knew that he would not feel relaxed until the ketch was in the harbour at Cayo Coco and the money handed over.

There were a good few boats moored at the new jetty, though he quickly found the Marie Galante. He was out of luck they were all gone, shopping no doubt. He could not leave the cumbersome pilots bag with the money nor his own luggage on board unattended and had no choice but to install himself in small bar facing the jetty and wait for them to show up.

Finding the Marie Galante had not been the only thing on his mind, he was not really looking forward to the trip to Cuba; he was not a great seaman. His childhood memories of those grim Irish Sea crossings reminded him that the only thing certain about the sea was its unpredictability. He consoled himself by the idea that most visitors held, that the Caribbean was always as smooth as it was at that moment, shimmering in the late morning sunshine.

He put down the guide book he had bought and made an effort to survey the scene, pleasure boats of all kinds lay at anchor in the harbour, there was little activity, so much money tied up in unused or underused hardware, the consumer society of the rich he reflected. It would all change in a week's time when the tourists started to flow in for the Christmas holidays.

He picked up the Herald Tribune he had bought together with the guidebook; the

paper was two days old. Not much news, ten thousand billion dollars cash in US currency circulating in the ex-Soviet Union, he was not surprised to read a large part of it was in forged bills. He wondered if Ishkov was a Russian.

Arrowsmith checked the exchange rates, French francs, Dollars, British pounds, nothing unusual. He turned to the inside cover, tropical storms and flood damage in Venezuela, that was somewhere off to the west, or was it south, he always lost his orientation in the Caribbean, too many islands. He looked up in the direction of the sun as if to get a fix, it was not of any use; he had never been good at those Boy Scout things with solar compasses.

An hour later Castlemain and his joyous passengers had showed up looking like they had emptied half the island's shops, overloaded loaded with booze and shopping bags. Once everything was stowed on board and they were settled in Boisnier lifted anchor and they set sail westward for Cuba. Castlemain's friends included Eriksson and his girlfriend, Stein, the architect, and a couple of others besides Courtauld. Kennedy had already left the Marie Galante, he must have crossed him the previous day or that morning, as he was flying out to Dublin where he had some pressing business.

Boisnier confided to him that Ishkov was or had been a Russian. He was seriously indisposed at that moment, lying in a Miami police morgue. A shotgun blast had practically blown his head off. His killing had suddenly compromised Castlemain's arrangement and the Cuban Vice Minister was not a man to keep waiting when it came to a question of money.

Ishkov had been mixed in a fray between Colombians and Russians. According to police reports he was said to have been stoked up on coke and vodka and had tried to pay for drugs with counterfeit dollars. One of the Colombians caught him with a shotgun blast that blew his head off for his troubles. South Beach had become a dangerous place.

Arrowsmith was uneasy with Boisnier's revelation, things had become annoyingly complicated. It seemed that Castlemain had a penchant for complicating things, as did some of his associates. Courtauld complicated things and for that matter Boisnier also complicated things. He felt it was becoming too involved; he did not really need that kind of trouble, it had never been his intention to mix in with their affairs. There was no choice but to see this last thing through, after that he would have to put things straight with Castlemain.

Castlemain had other ideas that he was not about to discuss with Arrowsmith. For some time the banker had realised it was not as simple as walking in with money and know-how to create a dream for Castro. He had good reasons to suspect that the Russian Jewish Mafiya, who were well entrenched in Miami, had been used by the Cuban and Colombian interests to sabotage his project in favour of some other kind of deal they were putting together.

Early that evening, without the passengers noticing, the wind had dropped and the ketch was barely advancing. The air seemed heavy and moist as they talked sipping their before diner drinks. The smell of the lobster grilling on the after deck wafted

towards them; with a normal wind it would have been lost in their wake.

“Hey Guy the wind’s dropped, better get the motor going or we’ll never get anywhere at this rate,” shouted Boisnier.

“Let’s get that sail in,” said Courtauld throwing back his drink.

He turned with Boisnier and they started to winch down the slack mainsail.

“Perhaps we should check the weather report.”

“It’s still fuzzy, the reception.”

“Never mind try!”

During the previous night their satellite link had started to give trouble, it was not the first time; maybe it was the navigation unit or the weather to the south.

The cook had set the table in full style on the centre deck, the wine was in the ice buckets and the salad and freshly baked bread were laid out.

Erikkson was full of life and looked forward to his dinner. He had made a late appearance after a heavy lunch and an afternoon session with Doudoune, she looked in good form in spite of her efforts to satisfy Erikkson in the king-size bed of the forward cabin.

“Smells good,” said Erikkson beaming in anticipation of the feast.

The sea was smooth and once the boat picked up speed driven by its powerful motors, assisted by a very light breeze that had picked-up. They settled down to cocktails and Boisnier got onto one of his favourite subjects, the Miami Russians, who had chartered the Marie Galante for two or three cruises before he figured out what they were up to, and how dangerous they were.

South Florida had become the operations hub for the Russian Jewish Mafiya. They had money and lots of it. They did not hesitate to kill; they had international reach and were into drugs and just about every other illegal activity in the Caribbean. They saw Cuba as a potential base for recycling their vast quantities of doubtful money.

Cuba was an investment zone, a development area for them. They were prepared to work with whomever it required to build up their position. However, the Cuban Communist Party nomenklatura had their own ideas and detested the Russians. They intended to develop their own privatisation after Castro and certainly did not need Russians who were Jews to boot.

The Mafiya had stripped Russia of its assets, money, gold, raw materials and arms in one of the greatest organised thefts in history. The proceeds had been transferred to offshore accounts around the world, especially to Antigua and the Cayman Islands, by the corrupt Russian banks that they controlled.

The Cubans were not about to let the Russians do the same thing with what little they had. They had virtually declared war on the Mafiya and the gausanos who had joined forces with them.

Antigua was one of the most visited islands in the Caribbean. It had more than fifty banks for a population of only 75,000 inhabitants, certain of them owned by Russians who used it as a money laundering and transfer centre.

Criminals could switch their monies backwards and forwards through the accounts of numerous shell companies, using Antiguan and other offshore banks around the world, operating twenty four hour a day in a bewildering electronic labyrinth, making the origin of the monies virtually impossible to trace.

Monies often ended up, after their torturous circuits, in respectable European banks, where it was used to set up legal business operations or to buy luxurious villas in Monte Carlo or Cannes, allowing criminals to profit from their drug trafficking or pillaging and live in respectable luxury.

Arrowsmith thought about the dead Ishkov, whom he had never known, Russians of his kind lived a short and dramatic lives. There were quite a few such Mafiya in Antigua, as well as in the Caymans, they flew in from Miami in their private planes to launder money and have their sit downs in privacy to work out their deals. Cuba was the next territory on their list for criminal colonisation.

Ishkov had enjoyed his moment of glory, women, champagne, drugs and nightclubs. He had bought a villa in Antigua through one of the Russian mob's crooked lawyers. He partied in the villa at weekends flying in his girls in a five-seater plane he owned.

He had been one of the shady characters that Castlemain used from time to time for his special assignments, security staff he called them. It was natural that an international banker such as Castlemain employed personal security staff and it was unavoidable that certain of those personnel were sometimes a little shady; it was the nature of their profession. Castlemain kept them carefully in the background as far from the public view as was possible.

However, Ishkov, who had been fifteen years earlier a Soviet Olympic boxer, was something different. He acted as an occasional courier who undertook delicate jobs for Castlemain, such as the delivery of money filled briefcases to certain destinations. Castlemain's head of security a tough ex-British army Red Beret had first hired him.

Ishkov had been reliable until he became too involved with the Russian Jewish Mafiya in Miami and Brighton Beach, who had given him a taste of high living, which he paid for by running cocaine for the mob.

The plan had been for Ishkov to collect the money from the bank. The papers had been prepared in advance with instructions that Ishkov make the withdrawal. He was then to carry it to Havana where he was assured of a safe passage through the customs and deliver it directly to the Minister against the officially approved certificate of incorporation of the new Cuban joint-venture company, a *sociedad anonima* in the presence of Ernesto Chibas.

Chapter 44. Back in Cuba

Once returned to Havana the two journalists decided that they had the makings of a good story, which did not scoop the end of the Castro regime, but it was a story that had the potential of making sensational copy back in Europe, if their suspicions turned out to be true. First there was Kavanagh the runaway financier. Then there was a banker who seemed bent on creating a megalomaniac multi-billion dollar dream for Fidel Castro, in the old leaders last desperate bid to leave a monument to his revolution. And finally, there was a sinister South American businessman, Ortega, whose links to the Russian Mafiya and the Colombian drug cartels seemed to compromise certain highflying Irish businessmen.

A visit Cayo Saetia would give them first hand information as to whether Castlemain's project really existed. After checking out the means of transport they decided to travel by road, renting a car from Havacars, an agency conveniently located in the shopping arcade of the Sevilla Hotel.

The map of Cuba indicated the nearest town to Cayo Saetia as Holguin, about 750 kilometres to the east of Havana on the north coast of the island. It would take them a couple of days driving to reach Holguin and another two days to check out Cayo Saetia. For the return they could drive back visiting the southern coast and visit the town of Trinidad.

Their plan, which was within the brief of their BCN reportage, to visit the sites of interest, and at the same time, gave them the possibility to further investigate their story.

Ennis, via his satellite link, asked Juliette, in Paris, to collect as much information as possible on Castlemain's project, then to check on Kavanagh and his possible links to Ortega. It would help them to piece together the story.

They planned to follow the motorway from Havana to Santa Clara where according to the map it terminated, they would then continue their route on the main single lane roads.

They calculated on a night in Ciego de Avila, approximately just over half way, with the motorway they should make good time the first day and would arrive in Holguin the afternoon of the following day.

Carvin drove the rental car, a Daewo Cielo, it seemed to be in good condition and more important the air-conditioning worked. The Cuban motorway was a surprise. After leaving Havana the road was almost deserted. Each of the few vehicles they saw seemed to obey a different set of rules. The preferred place for Cubans to repair one of their frequent breakdowns appeared to be the fast lane and as a result they had to concentrate on the road to avoid unexpected surprises.

Nevertheless they made good time; the road was monotonous, bordered by sugarcane plantations and on the horizon low mountains as they approached Santa Clara. It was known as the gateway to the east. They decided to stop there for a

quick lunch in the city centre, at the Libre Hotel on the main square. The hotel had been the head quarters of Che Guevara in 1958, the marks of shrapnel still remained on the hotel facade after the battle that took place when the revolutionaries seized the city.

Paul took the obligatory photos of the Che Mausoleo, where the remains of the legendary hero were laid to rest in 1997. It would almost certainly be more revered than that of Castro's last resting place in the centuries to come.

After Jatabonica the road became slower, encumbered by everything from Cuban cowboys on their horses to buffalo drawn carts. They reached Ciego de Avila in the late afternoon, where most of the traffic appeared to be horse drawn. They checked into the Hotel Santiago-Habana, a simple not very notable establishment, but at least it was in the centre of the town compared to the Soviet style monstrosity that they had spotted a couple of miles outside of it.

Once in his room Ennis linked up his satellite communication line and downloaded the information that Juliette had been able to gather on the Cayo Saetia project and Ortega. There was nothing new on Kavanagh.

John Ennis read from their guide book that Cayo Saetia was a small island, 42 square kilometres, a game reserve, a kind of safari park, where tourists could take a trip to see the animals in Cuban ex-army Jeeps, or, on horse back. It appeared that the approach to the island was by a tortuous road full of potholes that followed the coast of the Bahia de Nipe, on one side, and the Sierra del Cristal on the other. It needed almost three hours by car from Holguin passing through Mayari and Nicaro, two small industrial towns. An alternative but equally bad route existed via Antilla, on the west side of the bay.

It all sounded interesting, but the question was could they visit the site, if it existed, and could they collect any useful information.

Holguin was the fourth largest city in Cuba, with a population of a quarter of a million. It could not be described as a tourist centre, but rather an industrial town, situated in the middle of an important sugar-producing region. They were booked into the Hotel Pernik, a large uninteresting hotel on the Plaza de la Revolucion, in the Lenin District, which had been described as Moscow with palm trees.

In the hotel Paul, with his excellent Spanish, quickly struck up conversation, that was to say his usual friendly banter, with the waitresses and the house keeping staff. With the help of a couple of bottles of French perfume, he had brought for such purposes, and a few dollars, he was quickly guided to one of the housekeepers who could help them.

Her brother lived in Antilla, a small port on the Bahia de Nipe. She told him that a construction site with a camp existed on the island. There was a road on a strip of land that crossed the narrow stretch of water that separated the island from the mainland. A road ten kilometres long then led to the construction site. It could also be reached by boat from El Ramon on the Punta Manglarito or from Nicaro on the south side.

From the hotel travel agency they booked a visit to Cayo Saetia with a guide who would accompany them. The next day they set out in their rented car in the direction of Nicaro. The road was as bad as they had been informed and in a little over two hours they arrived at the quay where they took the boat across to the island.

Their guide Rafael told them that the construction had commenced almost two years earlier. It was no state secret, just another tourist complex as he described it, without any particular interest except for its size. It was a small city. A harbour had been built on the bay side to facilitate the importation of the construction equipment and materials, all of which came in by sea either from Havana or directly from overseas.

The island tours were designed for the visitors to observe the imported wild life, zebras, antelopes, ostriches and other animals. The two reporters were transported in an ex-army jeep and it took quite some persuasion and a few dollars to convince the driver to show them the construction site, for the simple reason he could not believe they were not interested in the animals and the splendid scenery of the forested island, dotted with hills and small unspoilt coves tucked into the thirty foot high cliffs that ran along the sea shore.

The Ciscap site was spread over some hundred or more hectares that undulated with the natural contours of the land. There were roads and houses under construction that appeared to be designed like those of a typical Spanish colonial city. There was a main square, flanked on one side by an astonishing 17th century style cathedral under construction and on the other by a vast colonial administrative palacio.

Everywhere, vehicles, construction equipment, men and materials moved in a buzz of activity that they had not seen since their arrival in the country.

It was exactly as Juliette had informed them, a complete new town, a replica of a city in the style of Trinidad de Cuba, a green field Spanish colonial city.

Castlemain had been completely open with them. To all appearances there nothing doubtful, it was a kind of theme park and what was wrong with that, they had asked themselves doubting their earlier suspicions.

Was Castlemain linked to Ortega, or on the contrary was there a conflict of interests between the two men? It was evident from what they had seen that the city had the full support of the Cuban authorities and a project on such a large scale could not have avoided the approval of El Jefe.

Perhaps they reasoned, Ortega represented the interests of an emerging opposition group, if so whom. Their knowledge of Cuban politics was extremely limited.

Chapter 45. A Visit to Paris

Angel Montero arrived in Paris together with Ernesto Chibas on the first day of May, ostensibly for the Utel conference, a hotel and tourist industry event. Angel was a smart young Cuban of about twenty-five years old, his only apparent fault, that Arrowsmith quickly remarked, was the tendency for his face to become very red when he drank alcohol. He was the youngest of Carlos Montero's children and the only son, amongst four daughters.

Arrowsmith picked them up at the Grande Hotel on rue Scribe and they dined nearby in a small traditional French restaurant, Chez Pauline, on rue Villedo. The dinner was nothing special, but the restaurant was discrete. Sipping their coffee and cognac, Ernesto produced a couple of photocopied pages from his inside pocket. The first had the letterhead Ministerio del Desorollo and was written in Spanish. A second photocopy was the last page of the Concession Agreement.

The letter of the Ministry for Investment was a simple letter of transmittal for the signed agreement. The signatures of the ministers and the official seals of the Ministry of Investment and the Ministry of Tourism endorsed the last page.

"Wonderful news Ernesto, let us drink to this," Arrowsmith made a sign to the garçon and ordered a bottle of Champagne.

"Tony, is everything ready for Zurich?"

"No problem, we will meet my friend there exactly as planned, together with your man from the embassy and we shall hand you what is due against the original documents."

"Excellent, let us toast to our success!"

In an almost euphoric mood they exchanged anecdotes and experiences whilst toasting to the glory of Cuba, Ireland, France and Ciscap.

Ernesto, who had arrived via Milan, where they were making marketing arrangements for the Ciscap, told Arrowsmith that Cuba was investing heavily in advertising in Italy and had been encouraged by the success of the campaign.

The pair planned to continue to Berlin the next day and finish their trip in Zurich on the Friday, where they would be met by Arrowsmith together with Xavier de Montfort, who would hand them the £1,000,000 against the signed documents for the fifty year concession at Cayo Saetia.

A month earlier they had initialled the papers in Havana, against the promise of one million pounds in cash for the final signature, to be handed over to the designated representatives of the minister in Zurich.

They saw it as a business transaction, necessary for the development of the project, ostensibly for 'consultancy services', as such arrangements were frequently attributed. Arrowsmith considered the deal perfectly normal; to him business functioned like any well tuned motor providing it was correctly oiled.

After dinner they drove to the foot of the Sacre Coeur and took the funicular to the summit and after a quick tour ended up in the 'Grenier', where though the

atmosphere was rather touristy they enjoyed the Karaoke.

At midnight Angel suddenly departed in the direction of a fashionable discotheque to Ernesto's relief, who confided to Arrowsmith, as they drank a nightcap, the difficulties of travelling with Gabriel Montero's son.

Following a clumsy arrangement of Eriksson's to offload counterfeit currency, two men were arrested as they tried to leave Pointe-à-Pitre airport for Cuba. They were carrying a large quantity of French currency and counterfeit US\$100 bills after arriving the previous day from Baranquilla in Columbia according to police.

James Gurton, a Londoner, and Seamus Delaney, an Irish citizen, were arrested after being stopped by French customs authorities at the airport. Police found 4,495 fake \$100 notes in the men's suitcases and almost 500,000 French francs in large bills.

The pair had been followed in Point-à-Pitre, on the Tuesday by plain-clothes police officers who had observed them in discussions with locals suspected by the police to be involved in drug trafficking and illegal currency activities. They were said to have offered to sell the fake bills for 200 French Francs each.

The suspects had agreed with the locals to bring the money to a hotel in Point-à-Pitre where they would exchange it against Francs. The pair then travelled to Baranquilla on the Wednesday and returned with counterfeit currency that was exchanged for French francs.

Boisnier was lucky and not for the first time in his life, he had used an assumed name in dealing with the two middlemen who had been introduced by Eriksson's Russian friends and there was no way they could identify him unless by a direct confrontation, which was unlikely as they were quickly shipped off to Paris pending further investigation.

He would have to rein in Eriksson's enthusiasm or they would themselves soon end up in jail.

Chapter 46. Ortega

Pat Kennedy had been impressed by the huge old southern style house where Ortega lived, it lay between the La Gorce Golf Course and Indian Creek, just a couple or so miles north of Miami Beach. Its colonnade facade was hidden from the outside by a heavily wooded park.

Stout iron railings and high brick walls kept out the unwanted. Automatic gates with a TV surveillance system controlled the coming and going of all visitors.

It was built in real stone, a solid structure designed to last, not one of those wood-framed types with clapboard finishes, which looked like the genuine thing but were destined for obsolescence within thirty years, if not swept away in the meantime by

a Caribbean hurricane. The trees were real, a couple of hundred years old.

Expensive cars were visible in the driveway, where black gardeners cared for the lawns and shrubs whilst armed security guards patrolled overseeing all activities. At the private quay were moored several boats. They included a high-powered motor cruiser that was locally known as a cigarette boat, a pointed craft capable of speeds of up to 80mph.

Pat Kennedy had first met Carlos Ortega at a Saint Patrick's Day party held at the International Chamber of Commerce in Dublin. It was a traditional bash for foreign business people, both expatriates and travellers passing through Dublin. It was part of Irish folklore and the myth was accepted in the spirit of St Patrick's Day, which was celebrated all over the world by serious drinkers, Irish and foreigners alike.

Kennedy was however a teetotaler, he had taken the pledge, certainly the only one at the party. However he did not frown on drinking, as he knew it facilitated contacts, loosening tongues, which in other circumstances would have remained still, on rare occasions away from the emerald isle he even partook of a wee drink himself.

In Dublin for a couple of days on business, he was certainly not going to miss a Saint Patrick's Day party, with the possibility of meeting overseas visitors and making new acquaintances, who never failed to be stimulating and could even lead to business opportunities.

Ortega had discovered Ireland many years previously. The Irish Republic happened to be neutral by its constitution and as a consequence was technically a bystander in the Cold War. As a result Shannon airport was a convenient refuelling point for Soviet and Cuban commercial aircraft flying between Havana and Moscow.

Shannon airport was of a dimension, which some kindly described as oversize, others said it had been conceived by megalomaniacs; in any case those who had conceived it were long gone. They had been local politicians who had dreamed of Shannon becoming a major international airport, strategically placed between the capitals of Europe and North America. Unfortunately, with the arrival of modern transatlantic jet travel, the dream had evaporated like the vapour trails of the 707's then 747's that bypassed it at ten thousand metres.

The consequence was that the Shannon Airport Authority was desperately short of business, seizing almost any opportunity to collect landing fees from airlines that needed to make a re-fuelling stop, not forgetting the duty free sales the could be generated from transit passengers in the 'Biggest Duty Free Shop in the World'. When Aeroflot arrived it was manna from heaven.

The Moscow-Havana-Moscow run proved to be a boon, with the arrival in the transit area of Russians and Cubans starved of consumer goods. That was of course before the airport authorities realised that the Russians could be even more fighting drunk than the Irish. It became a regular spectacle to see Red Army soldiers, who travelled in civvies, in fighting form as the result of consuming great quantities of Vodka during their long flight. They disembarked in the Shannon transit lounges

causing some memorable battles.

The Airport Authority could turn a blind eye to that, but when Red Army soldiers decided that they neither wanted to go to Cuba or return back to Mother Russia, doing the bunk into the Irish countryside, it was too much.

During the Cold War period, Ortega used neutral Ireland as a convenient base for his furtive activities on frequent occasions. He could meet people in Dublin that would pose a problem in England or France, not to mind Germany, which was creeping with spies and agents of all kinds.

Kennedy was excited when he was introduced to Ortega and their discussion almost immediately turned to Cuba. He could not resist showing off his knowledge of Cuba by dropping the name Cayo Saetia, which intrigued Ortega.

Cayo Saetia in Oriente Province was Castro country. He had been born in a small village called Biran and had married the daughter of the mayor of Banes. She had links to the family of the former President of Cuba, Fulgencio Batista, who himself was born in Banes.

One of the largest land owning families in the province were the Castro's, they had owned a large plantation that employed three hundred people.

Cayo Saetia itself, had once been favoured by top members of the Communist Party, and was an exclusive resort for game hunting. There were antelope, zebra and even ostriches, all of which had been imported for the exclusive sport of the high level party cadres and important foreign visitors.

So, why was Kennedy so interested in that area, the ex-army general and close friend of the defunct KGB asked himself.

It did not take long for Ortega to worm more details out of Kennedy, who once he got going, could hardly retain himself from talking of Ciscap, he was excited by his new acquaintance, a Cuban insider, whom neither Castlemain nor Arrowsmith knew.

The instant that Kennedy indiscreetly unveiled the details of the business, Ortega immediately took the decision to cultivate contacts with the loquacious Irishman, whom he recognised as a naive but valuable information source in Ireland, and also a potential associate partner whom he could control using as a front to one of his many international operations.

When Kennedy invited Ortega for the 'Shannon tour' he accepted at once and two days later he was received royally in Kennedy's office.

Ortega together with his man, Campo, arrived at the office of Arrowsmith at 42, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, in the eighth district of Paris. Arrowsmith had heard the bell ring and made his way up a narrow flight of stairs to the fifth floor. A new door had been installed, a typical Parisian anti-burglar proof door that the owners had deemed necessary after a couple of 'night visits'. Nothing had been stolen and one of his suspicious secretaries had suggested industrial espionage. It was a possibility, but nevertheless a remote one thought Arrowsmith, flattering himself with the idea that there was something worth stealing in the office.

Carlos Ortega was a Chilean, a tallish, thickset man in his late fifties, dark skinned with greying hair, he smoked heavily and anxiously. When in France he used a luxurious apartment nearby the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, and during the summer months he frequently stayed in Antibes in an opulent villa.

He had been a high ranking military commander, an army general, close to Salvador Allende, at which time he had close relations with the Soviet sponsors of the Allende regime. With the dramatic death of Allende and the collapse of his regime, Ortega fled to Canada. He later set up a second residence in Cuba where the authorities, as sympathisers of the defunct Allende, helped him to enter into business relations with Cuban state owned business organisations.

Ortega embarked on a new career as a specialist in Latin American affairs, working closely with the Cubans and the KGB in the heyday of Russo-Cuban relations. He had a vast scope of activities ranging from Angola and Mozambique to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Chile.

An abrupt transformation occurred with Mikael Gorbachev's dissolution of the Soviet Union that set off the process of privatisation of industry in the newly independent republics. For three years or more, Ortega was forced to live off the fortune he had accumulated in his lucrative trading arrangements within Comecom and its partners, whilst Moscow revised the rulebook and changed the players.

In 1993, things started to fall into place in the new Russia, everything was up for grabs and Ortega seized the opportunity as he saw his old KGB and GRU cronies find their place amongst the entrepreneurs and nouveau riche. Vast sums of money disappeared; six hundred billion dollars vanished into overseas accounts. It was used amongst other things to finance lucrative operations in the export of Russian products from the 'combinats', and the import of luxury goods and foodstuffs for the emerging consumers and the impoverished masses fed by government subsidies. Exactly where the wealth of Russia had disappeared nobody knew, but as time passed the question became purely academic.

Ortega had been close to the inner circle of Fidel Castro, though after the fall of the Soviet Empire and its economic system, his influence waned as Russia and its friends fell into disgrace and were execrated as traitors to socialism. He was constrained by the events to adapt his strategy to the capitalist future, which was taking form on the horizon, by using his influence to bring capital into Cuba from Latin America.

Having been a semi-permanent resident in Cuba for twenty years, he had a perfect understanding of how the country's system functioned. As a Chilean he was naturally a Spanish speaker. He knew whom to pay when, how and where. He had not overlooked establishing close contacts with the Miami Cubans, certain of whom had kept a foot in both camps ready for the inevitable changes that were to come.

His business in the new Russia had grown rapidly, but with the collapse that followed the stock market crash in Moscow in August 1998, he experienced another setback, losing a very considerable sum of money, the rouble lost 70% of

its value against the dollar almost overnight.

However, the flight of capital following the stock market crash was transformed into a golden opportunity for Ortega, who turned his attention to directing the flood of dollars that were pouring out of Russia in the direction of the offshore banking havens of the Caribbean.

He was no longer a young man and needed stable investments to realise his ambitions. He knew that the 'after Castro' was already taking form as he observed the rapid development of the Cuban tourist industry and realised there was an opportunity to be grasped.

The question was to find a suitable vehicle that would enable Ortega to take a firm foothold in the key business sectors, building on solid investments. One of the existing sociedades anonimas he controlled with his Cuban associates, such as Caribtrade, could develop a controlling interest in such investments and Kennedy was the fortuitous person who could open the door to a participation in the Ciscap development. Caribtrade was registered in Panama, and with the aid of Cuban laws conceived to assist foreign investors and operators, it was perfectly suited to his plans.

It was natural that his friends in Latin America had in the early days tended to be socialists, not to say revolutionaries. With the departure of Pinochet as the Chilean leader and national reconciliation, leftist parties were again making an appearance on the political scene.

Ortega had long been suspected as having close contacts with the rebels in Colombia and Peru. He came and went as he pleased in Colombia, where politics, drugs and money were inextricably entwined. He was strongly suspected by the CIA of being involved in laundering drug money. In fact Ortega was a key link in the laundering of the profits from the Colombian drug trade.

Coca was transformed into cocaine in the jungles of northern Peru and southern Colombia and then smuggled into the USA by a multitude of routes, road, sea and air via the countries of Central America and the islands of the Caribbean.

The huge sums of money earned from narco-traffic was laundered in the USA and transferred to banking havens in the Caribbean. The quantities of money were so great that laundering became a vast industry implicated in every imaginable kind of criminal activity.

Ortega kept his hands clean through arms length operations, only handling money in its ultimate 'clean' form. He was the front for the investments that rendered the money respectable. He avoided whenever possible direct contact with money, but from time to time the inevitable happened. In which case, it was treated as funds collected from the Cuban immigrants in Florida and for local American-Cuban politicians or Cuban lobbies. There were numerous collections of cash in schools, churches, supermarkets, shopping malls and businesses. The 600,000 Cubans gave generously as did US sympathisers and other Latin Americans.

In Florida he maintained a strictly respectable facade. He owned, indirectly through one of his many offshore companies, an impressive home on one of the

Bay Harbour islands and operated as an international business consultant, a 'fixer', through a Panamanian front company, set up for commodity trading which was fronted by an expatriate Cuban.

Their business was mostly in Russian fertilisers and oil exported to Central America and the Caribbean. Business with the ex-Soviet Union was normal, though serious doubts lingered in the minds of the US authorities as a result of the many unsavoury aspects of its nature, such as offshore accounts and suspected money-laundering.

Ortega had initially fled to Canada from Chile and obtained Canadian nationality in 1975. His Canadian passport enabled him to move freely in North and Central America. Canada had always had a very flexible policy towards political refugees such as those Cubans opposing the Castro regime, or, in earlier times supporters of Allende who had fled the Pinochet regime.

With his Canadian passport he came and went as he pleased, travelling overseas and to the USA, where he had also acquired a green card resident permit, thanks to an influential congressman who supported his application, in return for which Ortega made a considerable contribution to the congressman's re-election campaign fund.

That day in Paris, Ortega was accompanied by one of his close financial advisors, a Frenchman, a rather strange character, Arrowsmith had thought. He was tall, well built in his late forties, wearing an off-white jacket and an exotic open necked Caribbean style flowered shirt. Maurice Campo's father was Spanish, a communist who had taken refuge in France after the defeat of the Popular Front by Franco in the Spanish Civil War. He had then immigrated to South America, where Campo had been born in 1947. Maurice Campo returned to France in the mid-sixties.

Campo gave the impression of being rather effeminate in spite of his size; he had thick wavy hair, full lips and slightly lisped.

Ortega was dressed in a pale grey double breasted designer suit, his tie loose, under his arm was an expensive leather document case which he placed on the table of the meeting room.

As Arrowsmith smiled to Ortega and offered him a coffee he realised he was in a quandary. Why was Ortega there? Was he an emissary from an influential member of the Cuban government? What should he do with Ortega? Should he join him the following week in Moscow? He wondered why he had accepted Kennedy's introduction to the out of the ordinary personality, who had presented himself as an important businessman with privileged links to key members of the Cuban government.

If he joined Ortega in Moscow he could be compromised, and if he declined to join him he could be missing a tentative contact with unknown persons, who could be disappointed by his refusal. Why should important persons try to contact him in this way, he was not sure. If it was important there would certainly be other occasions for contacts.

He would have to stall Ortega and wait for news from Mika Koskinen who was at

that moment in Finland. The previous evening he had faxed the Ortega papers to Helsinki and Moscow, the time difference meant that he would receive replies that morning when he arrived in the office.

Unfortunately all the documents that Ortega had given him were in Russian, though he could decipher the names of the ministries and the oil companies that was as far as his Russian went. Moscow would translate and Finland would comment.

His secretary discreetly called him from the meeting room; he had a call from Mika Koskinen in Helsinki.

“Crooks!” was his reply to the dismay of Arrowsmith. “Crooks!”

He put down the phone and pondered how he could politely get rid of the cumbersome presence of Ortega in the adjoining room.

Chapter 47. Bad Money

The idea of an old style strong leader in Cuba appealed to Ortega’s sense of history. Under Allende he had never imagined anything other for the future of his country. As a military man Ortega understood the meaning of organisation and discipline, politics were for civilians, that is to say once the military had assured control.

Ortega had been converted to the idea of the concentration of capital as opposed to the distribution of wealth he had dreamt of as a young idealist, before the realities of the world had become evident. He had seen how the accumulated capital in Soviet state owned enterprises had been pillaged by the strong. It had been unfortunately inevitable as the consequence of an unreasonable ideology invented by unreasonable men.

The same thing would happen in Cuba, either the future ex-communists would grab off everything for themselves or the Yankees would do it for them.

Raul Cienfuegos had a vision that would channel the creation of new wealth into building a new Caribbean power, independent of the Americanos and the European neo-colonialists, both of whom had long oppressed the development of those island nations, leaving them the crumbs of their banana and sugar economies. The profits of tourism should stay in the Caribbean, the sun and sea were their own renewable resources, not to be exploited by foreigners pumping out the profits and leaving an abandoned ruin when they decided it was propitious to leave.

Ortega had no doubts about Cienfuegos who was young and would learn the hard way. It required force to bring a country of eleven million back to work and prosperity. To start he would do it Cienfuegos’ way, but in exchange he wanted his own men in the right places with the economic concessions he needed to realise his own plans.

Carlos Ortega had the financial power to bring in the type of investor who was not too concerned with rights issues and democratic ideas. Investors from the USA, Central and South America, and Europe.

He had drawn up a list of the industries and businesses where he wanted major holdings; the main hotel chains, restaurants, night clubs, casinos, brewing and beverage companies, telephone companies, oil, tobacco, airlines, and last but not least banking.

That would give him enough leverage to bring in all the money that Cienfuegos wanted for the reconstruction of the country without the interfering gringos and their meddling institutions. The Yankee controlled world bank had already ruined a good number of countries emerging from the shadows of socialism.

He needed a free hand unhampered by an excess of rules and regulations; rules prevented the creation of wealth, which investors needed.

Behind Ortega was the money he invested for Russians, Colombians and the traditional Mafia. He was their merchant banker ensuring that the monies were invested where they were safe, earning the greatest profits guaranteed free of questions and crippling taxes.

His knowledge of global markets had enabled him to build his wealth in the arcane world of commodity trading with the resources plundered from Russia, together with his laundering of oil and mineral export revenues, which were either undersold or illegally transferred with his connivance to offshore accounts. His diversification into money laundering and banking was a stepping stone to the creation of a business empire with a respectable facade, run to his rules.

Chapter 48 Crime & Corruption

The Caribbean 2000

His territory of predilection, as a Latin-American, were the countries of the Caribbean basin, and, as a life long friend of international socialism, the countries of the ex-Soviet block. Ortega laundered money coming from a variety of sources of organised crime.

As a businessman he provided his services to crime and corruption, by a system organised mainly on a case-by-case basis for enterprising white-collar criminals of various backgrounds. He put them into five classes; politicians, military, police, government officials and businessmen.

Though he avoided using criminal organisations to carry out his own business activities, he did not refuse to provide them with his services by investing the considerable quantities of money they derived from their crimes, be they narcotics or racketeering. Small time crooks and cheap swindlers he avoided like the plague,

they were unbusinesslike and above all unreliable.

The great advantage of his system was that not all of his clients were professional criminals, though criminals they were, they needed his services mostly for specific operations. When the profits of their crimes were safely hidden away they then got on with their everyday business, until another need arose for his services.

He cultivated his relations in all the right spheres, treating his customers and potential customers as friends, lavishing them with gifts and invitations, as would certain top level but discrete international businessmen. He was known publicly as a fixer of deals, a commission agent, a trader in commodities and also a successful property investor.

Politicians mostly earned their dirty money from favours to the other four classes. The military earned their dirty money from arms purchases and sales, but also organised their own criminal activities in protection and racketeering, prostitution, and drug running. Police and law enforcement organisations were mostly involved in corruption, aiding and abetting the other classes.

Government officials had a wide range of opportunities to earn their dirty money, from the sale and purchase of the states needs, approval of import and export licences, construction and infrastructure projects, licences for hotels, restaurants and drinking establishments, documents such as passports and driving licences and a long list of other opportunities to earn bribes of all kinds.

Businessmen, both national and foreign, provided the market to the all of other categories, paying for the services required, at the same time skimming off the cream from their extravagant profits, to be hidden away from jealous rivals and their home country's tax authorities.

It was a vicious symbiosis that was fed by the gains from all the diverse forms of criminal activity and corruption.

Ortega dealt directly with the top men, but used middlemen when dealing with the more sordid activities such as those involving the police.

He channelled the flow of money to offshore banking establishments and investment funds, from which he could launder the gains transforming them into respectable investments, preferably in any business where cash transactions were favoured, where in turn the profits could be recycled to finance his multiple other operations.

Ortega catered to a very select group in the top echelons of the five classes and pocketed up to thirty percent of the money that flowed through his system.

Kennedy had been chosen by Ortega, as his unsuspecting agent, once Ortega had learned of the existence of the Ciscap project. It would provide him with a cover to build a legitimate financial base that could be extended across the island under the political protection of Cienfuegos. In Cuba he could finally achieve the position of power and authority that had eluded him since the fall of Allende almost thirty years before.

To cultivate Kennedy he decided invite him to Miami and have him visit the chain of tourist hotels and clubs which he controlled through his network in the

USA, Mexico and Colombia.

The objective was to use Caribtrade as a means of gaining a foothold in the coming open economy of Cuba, which he knew was surely near, exactly as he had done in Russia. His holding in Caribtrade with its emanations was designed to infiltrate the key economic sectors of the Cuban economy, through projects such as Ciscap, building up his interests and broadening his activities into the most profitable sectors of the country's economy.

He was in a hurry, time was passing by quickly, he was keenly aware that the greatest attention to detail was needed to succeed in his plans. His first attempt to build a power base in Cuba had ended in near disaster for him in the 'Ochoa Affair' when in 1989 a group of senior army officers, led by the General Arnaldo Ochoa, were found guilty of corruption and drug trafficking with Colombian drug smugglers and were executed by a firing squad. Ortega had narrowly escaped detection thanks to his relations with the KGB who successfully covered up his involvement.

Ortega and his kind were nevertheless aided by politicians, both by men having good intentions and fools. Amongst them was a Caribbean nation's Prime Minister who had declared that he was against any interference by the OCDE in local affairs, saying that many small states of the Caribbean needed that type of investment, which was 'legal', in spite of the fact that the Cariforum, composed of the French Dom-Tom's in the Caribbean with the ACP states in the Caribbean, which were parties to the Lomé convention, were faced with a major political problem of drug trafficking and money laundering.

Chapter 49. The Laundry Business

Each year over three hundred billion narco-dollars were generated around the world. That was about the same as petro-dollars, calculated at twenty dollars a barrel. The difference was that oil was a normal, legitimate, internationally traded commodity. The narco-industry was an ignoble criminal activity, an international trade in drugs that ended in depravity and death for certain, condemned by every law-abiding nation on earth.

Oil sheikhs could freely deposit their legally gained dollars at any bank and buy whatever pleased them, palaces, jets, Rolls Royce's, or, even tanks and guns.

The narco-industry as an illegal activity was necessarily clandestine. The revenues could not be deposited in the local bank, or, at any other respectable bank, without having been first suitably laundered - that was to say made clean - legalised.

Each kilo of cocaine generated three kilos of dollar bills, a huge material problem for criminals to store and transport.

The United States had become the headquarters of the world narcotics industry and its leading customer. According to analyses made by the Federal Drug Agency, every dollar bill printed by the US Treasury bore traces of drugs within one year of it being issued.

Laundering or legalising the money became a vast industry. It consisted in the purchase of objets d'art, planes, boats, cars, luxury goods, real estate and businesses, but that was far from absorbing the vast quantities of money that flowed into the markets every day.

It was necessary to bring the money into the financial system, through either moneychangers or offshore banks created uniquely for that purpose. Their object was to change the dollars into local currencies, to issue bankers cheques, which could be deposited into major banks, to transfer the money from small accounts, centralising it in large accounts in foreign countries by bank transfer to major banks, such as the Chase Manhattan Bank in the USA, the BNP in France and HSBC in the UK, in sums of one to twenty million dollars. The laundered monies could then be invested in the financial markets, businesses and government bonds.

Some launderers set up street front shops in main shopping districts of big cities. They then spent money in the shops to buy goods and services, which they did or did not consume according to their plan. The principal was that the money entered the business chain and arrived into a legal bank account. Certain cities were literally invaded by the launderers, who brazenly went as far as setting up dozens of their high street retail outlets in the city centre, trading at a loss but all handling large sums of cash.

Through another method, in countries outside of the USA, honest businessmen bought dollars at discount rates from traffickers against local currencies to effect purchases of imported goods on the international market, such as motor vehicles, computers, televisions, and industrial equipment.

The system was operated by organised crime, mainly the Russian Mafiya who co-operated with the Colombian drug cartels and traditional Mafia organisations such as the Cosa Nostra.

The Russian Mafiya had acquired their working capital by stealing it from their country with the complicity of government members, high-level party officials, the military and above all the KGB, who had known that the Soviet system was on the point of collapse, well before it officially happened. During the period leading up to the collapse they stole everything that was movable as well as fixed business assets, government reserves, savings, bank deposits, raw materials as well as ships, aircraft and vehicles, both civil and military, swindling the Russian people of everything they had collectively owned.

The Russians Mafiya in the USA operated out of Brooklyn and Miami. Miami had become the financial capital of the Caribbean, South and Central America, with an uncommon number of South American banks established in the city.

With their money they bought condominiums in the smart districts of Miami and sumptuous mansions on Fisher Island. South Miami had become the centre of a

ruthless and sophisticated underworld operation.

They were building a criminal empire that had already spread through the Caribbean and had fixed as the next victim for their rape; Cuba.

In the Miami area over fifty percent of all properties were owned by offshore companies. Even boats, planes, cars, offices and office equipment were owned by such companies. Ortega, as his associates, owned nothing personally in the USA and the US government had no jurisdiction over such foreign-based companies and banks.

Those who controlled those businesses jetted around the world, on Paraguayan, Fijian or Jamaican diplomatic passports, out of reach of investigators, all expenses paid, evidently without questions being asked by the offshore companies and banks that they clandestinely owned. Globalisation and international trade with relaxed travel restrictions enabled criminals to operate worldwide.

Their offshore banks and companies were located in places such as Anguilla, or Barbuda and Antigua, which had one bank for every fifty-six persons.

Curiously eighty five percent of these tax havens were controlled by the USA or Europe. Some of the most important such tax havens in Europe were Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Isle of Mann and Channel Islands.

Law-abiding citizens, businesses and governments condoned these tax havens. Why? To enable certain citizens, Castlemain amongst them, to avoid taxes and to carry out the dirty work that made business run.

The laws which governed the deposit or transit of funds in these banks were covered by what was called in US legal jargon, 'plausible denigration', which meant that providing that the banks had no reason to suspect that they were doing business directly with criminals or their agents, or, that the immediate source of the funds being moved was an illegal organisation, then there was no crime or participation in a criminal act, since the person or company dealing directly with the bank was beyond suspicion. The law did not require them to suspect or investigate anything further down the line than their immediate customer.

Twenty percent of all bank deposits in the world were located in offshore banks. Whilst Switzerland, in the heart of law abiding Western Europe, accounted for one third.

Money laundering was an immensely profitable business with between fifteen and thirty percent skimmed off by the launderers for transforming the money in legal funds.

Every single day of each year, the equivalent of 1,400,000,000,000 US dollars were transferred or exchanged through the world's money markets, making it impossible for law enforcement agencies to sift the good from the bad.

From this one percent, or fourteen billion dollars daily, was generated exclusively from criminal activities such as drugs trafficking, illegal arms deals, racketeering, prostitution, gambling and corruption. The French authorities in a conservative estimate admitted that in France alone the equivalent of six billion dollars of dirty money entered into the country every year, the reality was certainly much greater.

There lay the interest of Ortega and his associates for gaining control over Cuba's future. It was simply a virgin territory about to be invaded by criminal forces, who planned transform it into a huge industrial laundry business, compared to the laundrettes, which operated in the Caribbean.

To say the world was slowly being taken over by criminal forces was not an exaggeration; the US government had been warned of the threat by all of its administrative branches and law enforcement agencies including the CIA, the FBI, the IRS and the Federal Drug Enforcement Agency.

Chapter 50. A Finnish Sauna

The two men cooled off drinking iced beer between sessions in the sauna on the sixth floor of the Helsinki offices that housed Mika Koskinen's trading company. The office was designed for the way Finns did business, with a luxurious private sauna; it was far from prying eyes and was supplied with a good stock Karhula IV beer and Finlandia vodka.

They strongly suspected that Kennedy had been up to some unsavoury business with Ortega. Mika Koskinen had warned Tony Arrowsmith that Ortega was an extremely dangerous personality to get mixed up with. Ortega had had long relations with the KGB and with its successor the FSB. He was known to have been involved in money laundering and counterfeit currency, as well financing very shady business operations from the proceeds.

Arrowsmith's friendship with Mika went back many years, it had developed through his Russian business adventures, and it was no exaggeration to describe his activities in Russia as adventures. Arrowsmith knew Russia from the early seventies during the glory of the Soviet Union when Moscow was another planet and Breznev was as mysterious as Dark Vader.

At that time the USSR, was in the perception of the general public, a hairs breadth from conquering the world whilst the USA was embroiled in an unwinnable war with North Vietnam and Cuba a Soviet aircraft carrier, just a few minutes flight by atom bombers from the coast of the USA.

Every aspect of the Russian Empire had a cold superiority. Arrowsmith remembered visiting Leningrad in 1974, where he saw the inefficiencies of communism, but he clearly remembered putting it down to a Spartan philosophy, possibly superior to that of the West, which was perceived by the young generation of the time as a degenerate consumer society, bogged down on all fronts by political and economic difficulties.

On the other hand Mika's studies of Russian Civilisation at Lenin University in Moscow had taught him very early on that Marxist-Leninist philosophy was rotten from the inside out. His studies in Russia been sponsored by the Finnish

government whose every interest was to know their dangerous neighbour.

However, he had learnt that Russia was not unpredictable; neither were the Russians, they could be seen coming a long way off, they thought carefully about their plans and then carried them out brutally. Chechnya was a fine example, the same mentality continued into their new society, even the Mafiya behaved according to the same model, as did almost every person who had been brought up under Russian communism.

Those who were clever, really clever, such as Ortega, exploited the system for every thing it was worth. He used KGB methods to obtain intelligence, he used the brutal methods of the Russian security forces to enforce his plans, and he used the methods of Stalin to eliminate all obstacles, real or perceived, for the fulfilment his ambitions.

Kennedy had put his head in the lion's mouth and with every passing day he was nearer to the destiny that waited such naive men.

Arrowsmith had at the outset been introduced to Mika through the Finnish Commercial Consul in Paris in the eighties. The consul had recommended Mika as honest and a reliable source of business advice in Moscow during the confused period between Perestroika and the fall of Gorbachev, before the rise of Boris Yeltsin's corrupt capitalism.

They had both found many things in common in their appreciation of life, both in leisure and business. They travelled together extensively through the USSR and its successor the Community of Independent States looking for new business opportunities.

Arrowsmith's visit to Helsinki had been to progress the Cuban barter deal, but was also an opportunity to obtain information on Ortega, as discretely as possible and to find out whether the rumours that he had heard of Kennedy's machinations had any serious base.

They were approaching a critical moment in Cayo Saetia and he saw Ortega as an undesirable and extremely dangerous element, in view of the potential political evolution of Havana. If USA business was to return in force to the island, association with the likes of a Mafioso such as Ortega would be damaging.

Outside the temperature was minus twenty-two degrees and the snow sparkled under the lights of Stockmans across Mannerheimintie. The trams carried office workers and the last shoppers home. They decided to dine at the Intercontinental Hotel where Arrowsmith was staying; ten or fifteen minutes walk from the office.

They could follow that up with a drink at the bar of the discotheque downstairs where they could relax watching the girls dance.

Chapter 51. Miami

The two men arrived at Miami International Airport early on the Friday evening and took a taxi to the downtown Sheraton Hotel which overlooked Biscayne Bay. The arrangement with Vasquez was that they wait for his call the next morning.

Their plan was to discuss Salgado's interest in the project and then take the daily American Airlines' flight down to Baranquilla the Sunday afternoon.

The meeting had been set up by Ivan Garcia who had introduced Salgado to Kennedy as a wealthy industrialist and a potential investor. Kennedy first had thought that Salgado was a Miami Cuban; it was not until after they had agreed to the meeting that he had discovered he was a Colombian.

Kennedy had received an information package, which had indicated that Salgado Industries were located in the city of Baranquilla, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. They were involved in a wide range of speciality chemicals, mostly detergents and fertilisers, supplying the local and regional markets.

There had been a general softening of attitudes in the United States towards Cuba. The relations between the two countries had been gradually defrosting and travel restrictions had been loosened. Academics and students were beginning to travel for study in Cuba and Cuban musicians were touring the USA.

The anti-Castro Cubans in Miami were beginning to lose their influence. The CANF, Cuban American National Foundation, was the largest exile organisation representing the Cuban community in the USA. It was modelled on the pro-Israel lobby, and was a formidable fund raising machine. There were however, allegations that it was involved in a series of bombings and other anti-Castro plots.

Miami was changing rapidly. Forecasts indicated that the Latino population was expected to make up seventy percent of the population of Miami-Dade County by the year 2020. They would be second and third generation Cubans, or immigrants from other Latin American countries. Cuban-Americans were already twenty percent of Florida's electorate.

The downtown area of Miami was run down, it was almost like a Latin American town, with its small city blocks or *cuadras* as they should have been called. All signs and notices were in both English and Spanish in the shops. After crossing Washington the area became very seedy with its poor Hispanic and Black populations.

They met Vasquez at the Miami Book Fair, at a stand of publishers specialised in revolutionary style literature. The tall young man who accompanied him spoke English with an American accent, but was a fluent Spanish speaker.

They took a cab to South Beach, over the MacArthur Causeway facing the Port of Miami, where the cruise ships were lined-up like a waiting cab rank, they included the 'France' once the pride of France that had been re-baptised the 'Norway'.

The port was the called 'Gateway to the Caribbean and Central America', where

tourists not only from the USA but Europe and Japan started their dream cruise. Each ship seemed to be capable of taking one or two thousand passengers, which represented a formidable industry and a huge number of people who could pay for a week or ten days on a first class cruise liner in the Caribbean.

Kennedy marvelled at Ocean Drive with its Art Deco buildings and hotels painted in pastel colours. The cafe terraces were filled with attractive young people. The Tropical Cafe seemed to be a fashionable and noisy place. Red Ferraris, Mercedes coupes, Jaguars, a 57 Oldsmobile and a Porsche were ostentatiously parked at the roadside in front of the glitzy bar.

Vasquez invited Kennedy to lunch at Page's, a restaurant close by his offices. They chose a table on the pavement terrace taking advantage of the bright sunshine, in the pleasant, dry December weather. Vasquez ordered a seafood Pesto Peine and Kennedy a steak; Vasquez then selected a Beaujolais Nouveau from the wine list.

The population of Miami was a bewildering mixture of strange people to Kennedy; across the street he observed a mad old dame dressed in shamrock green, who looked like she had jumped out of the Muppet show. She dropped a coin into the newspaper vending box and took a copy of The Miami Herald.

She was succeeded a little further along the sidewalk by a panhandler, who deftly inserted a paper clip into a parking meter to extract a coin. At a nearby public telephone a man shouted down a public phone in Spanish, though he looked like an American, a few instants later he slammed down the phone screaming Cojones, a word Kennedy had heard on more than one occasion in Cuba.

Kennedy had always known that Americans were a little crazy after his year in Boston, but in Miami they seemed to be just one step from the asylum.

Vasquez had his Miami offices nearby on Lincoln Jefferson in a small classy looking building called the Van Dyke. His offices and a personal apartment covered the whole penthouse level, surrounded by a broad terrace, and climbing plants covered the walls and latticework. The roof of the penthouse was covered with red Roman tiles.

Vasquez had a pale skin slightly freckled, a square face and his hair a bore tinge of red. He was about fiftyish. He could have been Jewish, although he gave no hint as to his origins.

Vasquez informed Kennedy that they were booked the next day, on an American Airlines flight direct from Miami to Baranquilla, the flight time was about two and a half hours flying over Cuba and the Caribbean to the north coast of Colombia.

The following morning they left the hotel in the direction of the airport under heavy sub-tropical rain. The West Indian taxi driver, indifferent to the water cascading off the flyovers, well exceeded the 55 miles per hour speed limit indicated by the panels.

They met Vasquez at the check-in, struggling with the other the Central American Hildalgos at the first class counter, pushing and bustling in the generalised chaos of passengers, friends, baggage porters and a mass of excess baggage.

After boarding they were efficiently directed to their seats and were settled in with a drink brought to them by the hard-bitten airhostess of the American Airlines Boeing 727, who seemed more suited for service on Algerian Airways, as was the ancient aircraft. It surprised him that American companies flew such antiquated aircraft.

Chapter 52. Baranquilla

The American Airlines' 727 made its approach from the sea and then after overflying the river swung back in a wide curve to the north and Kennedy caught his first glimpse of South America. From a distance Baranquilla looked a modern city, it was surrounded by broad spaces of flat land with a few farms separated by broad swaths of uncultivated land, to the right flowed the broad mud coloured river.

As plane taxied to its parking place they passed the carcasses of old DC8's and 707's abandoned to the elements. The terminal building was fairly modern. After having their passports stamped and their baggage checked with a cursory glance they were met at the arrivals gate by Dan Oberman and a driver who took them their hotel in the city centre.

Kennedy had read that a German Jew, who introduced steam navigation on the Magdalena River in the early part of the 19th century, had developed the city. Immigrants came from the Lebanon, European Jews, Palestinians, Germans, Italians, Spanish, French, English, North Americans, Syrians, and Africans, they had all flowed in joining the local populations of Colombian Indians.

The Magdalena River that lay to the east of city was a huge fast flowing river, transporting to the sea its masses of floating vegetation as all tropical rivers seem to do, its waters were a greyish brown heavily laden with silt carried from the mountains and jungles not so far to the south.

Kennedy was booked into the El Prado hotel, in the Zona Norte, a residential area away from the old city centre. The hotel was built in classical Spanish colonial style surrounded by manicured palms and luxuriant gardens, here and there were huge buttressed tropical trees. In the open spaces and terraces were potted plants in large terra cotta jars.

The El Prado had been opened in 1930, its Spanish colonial architecture adapted to the tropical climate, ventilated by natural openings. It was of an open rectangular form surrounding large gardens, in the centre of which was a fine swimming pool lined with chaise longue and low tables.

It was entirely in harmony with the exuberant vegetation of the gardens and protected from the noise of the outside traffic and the view of the passers-by. El Prado was a refined hotel, meticulously maintained, with old fashioned lift

attendants and porters in resplendent uniforms.

That evening, a Sunday, Kennedy dined alone in the hotel restaurant, its cuisine was excellent a mixture of North American, European and South American styles. He ate an excellent Caesar salad followed by a grilled Langosta and going against his teetotaler rule, which seemed to be becoming a habit, ordered a half bottle of Chilean Chablis. The waiters were old professionals watched over by a caring maitre d' hôtel.

The broad tree lined avenues of the Zona Norte with its fine villas and fashionable apartment buildings gave an appearance of easy going prosperity. The population was rich and good looking. But the proximity of the very poor neighbourhoods made a dangerous mix.

The next day he was met by Oberman for a visit to Salgado Industrias. Dan Oberman was an Argentinean Jew. His family had originated in Poland and had fled to Argentina at the outbreak of World War II. As a young man he had had a great admiration for his fellow countryman, Che Guevara, and he still had. At eighteen years old he left for Israel full of young men's ideas of revolution and kibbutzim.

The Salgado plant was located in the suburbs ten kilometres from the city. The traffic in Baranquilla appeared to be without any apparent rules but was somehow orderly. The elegant quarter gave way progressively to less affluent areas. Here and there was a horse or a donkey drawn cart. Then there were small factories, oily garages, broken down pavements and wild vegetation trying to reclaim its territory.

The centre of the old town in contrast with the Zona Norte was without interest, there were cheap cafes, shops, trucks, buses and no particular point of architectural interest, they were two different worlds.

The dirt-poor suburbs reminded Kennedy of Cuba, without the rich centre of Baranquilla and the filth that generally pervaded in the presence of poverty. Poor peasants immigrated to the city in search of work, moving into the slum areas of the old city centre near the river port.

Overhead was a tangle of wires and electrical cables. The houses and streets became more and more dilapidated, lined with heaps of rubble. Overloaded American style trucks rumbled past like mechanical monsters belching thick black smoke. It was dry and dusty; the rivers were empty as a result of El Niño. Open flood drainage canals were dry and looked surprisingly clear of garbage, but that did not prevent water leaking from broken mains or drainage pipes, leaving damp green streaks on the slopes.

On the outskirts of the city there were grimy warehouses and plants, vacant sites, rubble, plastic bags, pylons and power cables. Roadside vendors displayed their wares outside factory gates. Here and there were open-air makeshift cafes struggling for survival in the dust and heat.

It was hot and dirty like the outskirts of the cities of many underdeveloped countries. Soldiers and hard looking overweight cops menacingly observed the traffic and the coming and going of the workers. Even the dogs were the basic back

to nature animals. Overfull buses resembled US school buses and probably were, recycled for a second life.

Oberman chain smoked some kind of foul smelling local cigarettes, he looked like a typical bearded Spaniard as he drew on a cigarette and deeply inhaled the smoke, with his throaty smokers voice, the half swallowed words poured out in a stream of barely intelligible words with heavily rolled r's as he spoke to the driver. Oberman wore a white Panama hat, it was not that he affected a particular style, but he obviously felt comfortable with his hat under the hot tropical sun.

Oberman's fortunes were finally looking up after a long downer. Until he had met Ortega the brave new world of Israel had become a tarnished dream, a routine of job and family in a consumer society surrounded by hostile Arabs, in a never ending conflict that was not about to go away. He was forty-seven and decided that he could no longer wait to take action if he were to seek a better life. At least there were opportunities in the Americas and a future to be made for his family.

Dan worked a twelve-hour day and had travelled most weekends; Sunday was a working day back in Israel. His life had become a grind of airports, planes, and hotels and in between nothing but a small stuffy small office, breathing the acrid fumes of a chemical plant, writing reports and looking after the endlessly uninteresting paperwork.

The influx of Russians immigrants into Israel had changed many things for him; life had become more competitive with an oversupply of highly qualified people. More than eight hundred thousand Russian Jews lived in Israel by the sacred 'Right of Return'. The Russians were often highly qualified in science, engineering and economics.

At the same time Russian money poured into the country. Israel too was an offshore haven for money laundering. Israeli banks accepted large cash deposits and it was said that suitcases of money were exchanged with impunity at the Dan Hotel that overlooked the beach in Tel-Aviv. Israel also offered an added encouragement...it did not extradite its own citizens.

Israel was a halfway base, between the USA and Russia, for Russian Jewish Mafiya activities, where Jews holding Israeli passports came and went as it pleased them.

Very late Oberman had realised that he had been blinded for a good part of his life by unrealistic idealist visions. He lived with his wife and two children in a small apartment in a not very attractive suburb of Ashdod in Israel. His future did not look brilliant whilst around him he saw the new arrivals making fortunes and living in a style that his salary at Ashdod Chemical Industries could never give him.

A young woman, an economist, one of the many Russians that had joined Ashdod Chemicals, had introduced him to Ortega in Tel-Aviv. Ortega's English was poor and his Hebrew was unsurprisingly nonexistent. Oberman whose mother tongue Spanish and who spoke perfect Hebrew and English would assist for as a translator. Ortega was meeting banks and businesses concerning investments in

Israel and the introduction of foreign capital.

Ortega in his long experience as a military and intelligence officer recognised Oberman's talents and discontent, his knowledge of Latin America and his background in Israel could be exploited for his own benefit. He had invited Oberman to visit him in Florida hinting at the opportunity for better things.

Oberman had no misgivings about Ortega. His assistance at Ortega's meetings in Israel left him in no doubt as to his real business. He nevertheless decided that he would throw his lot in with him in spite of the risks involved, such occasions were rare.

He had accepted a job that Ortega had proposed to him as Business Development Manager with Salgado Industrias in Baranquilla, a nebulous role where he worked for Salgado and undertook various tasks for Ortega's organisation.

He regularly arranged for the transport of the products Salgado Industrias manufactured, detergents powders and fertilisers. Goods manufactured under licence at the Salgado plant were delivered in 500 and 1,000 kilo plastic big bags from their plant by container loads to their customers in Central America, the Caribbean and the USA.

Jaime Salgado had built his new plant under licence from Ashdod Chemical Industries that Dan Oberman represented. Oberman's role was ostensibly to develop the marketing of its products in the Americas.

Kennedy together with Dan Oberman arrived at the country club of Salgado, in a clean, green and rich suburb of Baranquilla. A chauffeur driven Mercedes had picked them up at the hotel.

Salgado was the perfect host. He ordered grilled lobsters followed by the best Argentinean filet steaks accompanied by excellent Chilean wines. They talked of business, international affairs and then turned to exchanging stories of their respective countries, Colombia and Ireland.

"We are pleased to have you visit our country Pat and we hope we can visit you in Dublin in the near future."

Kennedy was flattered by the attention of his hosts. The music played in the background and he wondered if maybe he would be able to invite one of the girls he had seen at the bar in the background to dance.

"Dan has explained to you a little about our business?"

"Yesh," he replied as he attacked a tropical fruit salad topped with mango-flavoured ice cream.

"We export chemical products mainly to the regional market but also to the USA. We are thinking seriously about setting up an operation on Europe and according to Dan and Señor Ortega, Ireland looks like a good strategic place."

"I see," he replied politely.

Salgado had been given a detailed report by Oberman on Kennedy and his business activities that Ortega had investigated in Ireland. It was clear that Kennedy was experienced but not that worldly in certain matters, which suited their needs. Ortega had been right, the Irish link seemed to have the all-necessary

qualifications for the extension of their business into Europe.

“What are your plans for the weekend Pat?” asked Salgado.

“Well, I thought I would relax a little before I return to Miami...”

“Let me see, what I suggest is that you spend the weekend in Cartagena, its not far from here, a beautiful historical city, built by the Conquistadores.”

“It sounds nice.”

“It would give you an opportunity to meet one of our shareholders, a very good personal friend of mine, Jose Delrios.”

It sounded fine to Kennedy, he was delighted at the idea of exploring further afield, it was his first visit to South America, and the opportunity to investigate the no doubt hidden delights of these unknown cities alone, on the southern edge of the Caribbean, was not to be missed. Meeting new people opened new doors and led to new opportunities. He was pleased with the way his relations Ortega had permitted him to spread his wings, it had also given him an unexpected independence from Castlemain and Arrowsmith in the New World.

The system was simple, the new detergent powder packing line filled ‘big-bags’ of 500 and 1,000 kilos. It was an easy matter to introduce twenty kilos packs of pure cocaine into the core of a 'big-bag' filled with detergent powder. Twenty big bags would be loaded into each container for shipment to Tampico, Mexico, where it was transported by road to Matamoros then run over the border to Brownsville on the US side.

The earnings from drug running were recycled by Ortega’s organisation into property development and tourism in the Caribbean with the help of Alberto Vasquez of Salgado Industrias. Vasquez lived in Bogota where he controlled all the local political and financial arrangements, travelling frequently to Tampico in Mexico and Florida to ensure the smooth running of their distribution system.

Chapter 53. Cartagena de Indias

The driver spoke very little English and it appeared that his main objective was to get to Cartagena and be back in Baranquilla as quickly as possible. He had tried Spanish on Kennedy but to no avail.

The distance to Cartagena was about 120 kilometres. There was a good toll road between the two cities and at 140 kilometres an hour he figured they would be there at about midday, if they survived. Cartagena de Indias was the city’s full name, it was the Capital of the Province des Atlantico.

Dan who sat in the back had almost immediately nodded off; he was trying to catch up on his jet lag without much success. Kennedy was not about to wake him since once awake he would pull out another of his foul cigarettes.

The undulating countryside looked parched, it was the dry season but the driver

explained it was due to the effects of El Niño. The hills were heavily wooded with low trees and they saw very little agriculture, just a few white hump back cattle that grazed on the parched land.

“No agua,” said the driver as he sped to the next bend where Kennedy hoped no stray horse or cow was lurking to send them flying into the shrub.

“The rain comes in autumn,” he tried again this time in Spanish to Kennedy who looked blank, not understanding a word.

“The rains come in autumn,” Oberman translated without opening his eyes.

Good, thought Kennedy, he had enough rain in Ireland and enjoyed fine weather, there were no clouds, just there was a little haze and the temperature hovered at around 28°C.

The guerrillas, a Marxist-Leninist movement called the Farc and the Guevarists of the ELN had developed a hostage taking industry with each of its divisions having a financial target set by leaders. Exorbitant ransoms were set for the victims on a scale relative to their financial means. In the case of foreigners it was high, they had recently demanded 600,000US\$ for the release the German representative of Mercedes.

Ransoms not paid invariably meant death for the hostages.

Their technique was to set up roadblocks on a section of fairly isolated road, then to search the vehicles caught in the net for suitable hostages. Their targets were government officials, business people, foreigners, and even children and babies.

The result was a very low volume of inter-city traffic on the main highways, the wealthy travelled by plane when the links existed, the less wealthy travelled by taxi and the poor travelled by bus.

The guerrillas controlled an area, El Bloc Sur, the South Block, left to them by the Colombian government as a kind of official no-go zone, with its capital San Vincente del Calguan. The regional ‘commandante’ was Jose Delrios, a revolutionary intellectual and also the movement’s treasurer. One of his main jobs was to ensure that the money, which flowed from the drug traffic in his region and over the border to Ecuador, was safely placed overseas for the purchase of arms and services for the Revolution.

In the jungles in the south of the country the organisation of cocaine smuggling was a major operation requiring logistics on the scale of a large military operation. The rebels and the cartels had bought arms and aircraft, heavy lift M18 helicopters, artillery and 25,000 firearms including assault rifles from the Russian Army. When they had failed in an attempt to buy a hundred million dollar diesel powered submarine for a knock down price of six million from the Russian navy base in Kronstad, they bought plans from Russian naval engineers to build a smaller version themselves in Colombia.

As Kennedy had waited in the hotel he caught a glance at the headlines of the local newspaper on the lobby stand, it did not require a linguist to understand that ‘El

Heraldo' announced the heavy losses of the Colombian regular army in a battle against the guerrillas in the southern provinces of the country.

Cities like Baranquilla and Cartagena were far from the battle zones and were havens of peace in comparison, nevertheless they had a moving population of rich tourists and business people, potential targets for the guerrillas.

The Colombian army was omnipresent, stationed in front of public buildings and major hotels, at important crossroads and at the entry to cities and towns. The military was impressive, heavily armed with the latest American materials in arms, transport and communications with all ranks wearing smart uniforms in a military manner, which would have even impressed a Key West officer. They were far from the traditional image of the legendary scruffy South American soldier traditionally portrayed by Hollywood.

Oberman, awoken by violent bumps in the road, explained to Kennedy, why the driver drove so fast, accelerating whenever he saw a vehicle parked on the side of the road. He would not stop even for an accident. The Landcruiser was fitted with bullet-proof windows and armoured plating in the doors.

There was almost no traffic; the toll was no doubt too expensive for most Colombians. Kennedy figured that there must be a crowded road running parallel to the highway. From time to time he saw the sea that lay to the right and occasionally a few villas. The sea looked choppy and they could feel the wind that swept inland in gusts that rocked the Landcruiser.

The only thing that broke the monotony was a lone egret that stood in the middle of the road; taking off gracefully at the last moment as the Toyota Landcruiser sped towards it at 160km/h Kennedy could not help noticing the road signs that indicated the speed limit of 80km/h. It was good that there was practically no traffic and that the road was well maintained.

He thought that the region must be normally dry as he saw cactus trees here and there. The riverbeds were also dry and there were almost no leaves on the trees.

They passed a small village with one or two caballeros and a few small black pigs that scuttered for cover. The only thing that effectively slowed them down to the 40km/h limit at the entry to the village were the speed breakers, which the driver respected not wanting to damage the suspension which could cause him trouble with his boss.

They passed a lone holiday condominium that overlooked a beach, obviously for the wealthy. There was a sign in Spanish and English indicating that aid was near in the case of accident, a lot of fecking good that would be to me lying dead in a dry field, thought Kennedy.

Another sign showed two eyes half closed as a warning against falling asleep at the wheel. Maybe the driver would have liked to drop off for a short nap but Pat was very much wide awake watching the vultures standing on the road side that were probably weighing him up for a next possible meal.

They arrived in Cartagena after a little more than an hour's drive and the tension Kennedy had felt away once he saw the town. It reminded him of Trinidad in

Cuba, but in an infinitely better state of conservation, the buildings were well maintained painted in the preferred ochres, yellows and greens of Spanish colonial towns.

They arrived at the Hotel Santa Teresa which had surprisingly been a convent, now restored and transformed into a beautiful hotel in typical Spanish style. It had been built in 1617 facing the massive fortified walls that surrounded the city overlooking the sea. They entered through a pair of great wooden doors into the lobby area which faced a centre court planted with palms, an ornamental fountain spouted its jet into a small blue tiled water course that ran the length of the court.

Behind the reception desk, which was remarkably like an altar, hanging from gold plated chains was an impressively large oil painting of the Madonna and the infant Jesus in a massive gilt frame in the form of a cross, no doubt inherited from the convent.

Kennedy felt a twinge of satisfaction to know that he was in the company of good Catholics though a little confused as to the presence of such holy objects in a hotel.

The bellboy carried his bags to the room and proceeded to show Kennedy the installations, TV, safe box, air-conditioning, bathroom and bar.

“Have a nice stay Sir,” the bell boy said, adding, “if there is anything you need...anything...please ask me,” and just in case Kennedy missed the point, he discretely lowered his voice, “a lady, if Sir would like, just let me know.”

Cartagena de Indias was a beautiful city surrounded by the original walls erected by the conquistadores. The houses and buildings were fully restored to their original form with painted timbered balconies decorated with flowers and hung with flags, it was a true delight for visitors.

The beauty of the tropical city that had been the military and administrative centre of the Spanish Empire in the Americas dazzled Kennedy.

However, in the background a war without mercy was being waged with the guerrillas. The headlines of the morning paper had cried out the deaths of seventy soldiers, thirty wounded and eight prisoners, after a fierce battle the guerrillas.

Kennedy could not avoid seeing the heavily armed military personnel before the hotel and guarding all the key buildings of the city, in a state of permanent readiness against terrorist actions.

The guerrillas were fighting for what seemed a lost cause, La Revolution, what revolution, he wondered. Certainly to eradicate poverty, to redistribute the national wealth, who knew, evidently the legend of the Che lived on.

The population consisted of a mixture of Europeans, Indians, and the descendants of African slaves. Five hundred years of history had produced an astonishing mixture that was still incomplete. There were beautifully dressed and attractive women contrasting with the small dark Indians and black peasant women carrying manioc in baskets balanced on their heads to the markets.

Kennedy noted that the national parliamentary elections were due to be held that Saturday and for security reasons all bars and cantinas would be closed, it would not be a good night to celebrate his success with Ortega. In fact Kennedy would

have preferred to be back in Havana with Lina rather than face any troubles that might arise. It would perhaps be better to delay his departure until Monday or Tuesday.

They left the hotel and turned into one of the colourful side streets passing a blind lottery ticket seller. It seemed to Kennedy that half of the population seemed to eke out a living by selling lottery tickets. Many of them were comparatively well dressed. 'Mille miljones de pesos!' cried the blind seller. Even Kennedy understood. It sounded an incredible sum of money, but sadly, that was what the dreams of the poor were made of.

They arrived in a small bar-restaurant, which was empty, it was too early for dinner, only one table was occupied. Dan pointed him towards that table where a thickset man was seated. In spite of the dim lighting he wore dark glasses.

"So Pat, this is my good friend, Jose Delrios!" Dan laughed as they embraced. Kennedy seemed to understand there was a complicity between the two men and perhaps a joke that he had somehow missed.

"Nice to meet you Jose," he said shaking hands and thinking that he looked like a latter day Che Guevara except for the fact that the beard was neatly trimmed and he wore Ray-Ban dark glasses.

"Jose is a good friend of Señor Ortega, he's in the export business in the south of the country," Dan laughed again, this time Kennedy joined in, not quite knowing why.

"I understand you are also in business Pat?"

"Yesh, I'm in investment. Hotel construction, and IT....you know computers and that kind of thing," said Kennedy, with a look of false modesty on his face.

"Jose is thinking about investing some money in Ireland!" said Dan

"Is that right!" said Kennedy perking-up, "what kind of investment would that be?"

"In the export business. My organisation has money that it would like to invest offshore. You know here in Colombia, there are problems, inflation, political difficulties, devaluation and other things. We'd like to have a shelter for our money."

"I see, what can I do for you then?"

"Well first open a bank account in Dublin," replied Dan, "then we will transfer the money from one of our banks, in Antigua for example."

"I can do that, how much is involved?"

"About ten," said Jose looking at Dan questioningly. He paused then added, "to start with."

"Ten what!" asked Kennedy mentally trying to select a conversion factor for Colombian pesos.

"Ten million dollars."

"That's a lot of money!" said Kennedy a little taken aback.

"Is it a problem?" asked Jose.

"No....I don't think so, I'll just have to check one or two things....but I don't

think there are any problems.” His accountant’s thinking with its built-in calculator had taken control, he was working out what there was in it for himself, he could get five percent from that, five hundred grand he thought and unconsciously rubbed his hands together.

Jose, a fine observer of men, noted with satisfaction that he had his man, at the same time he wondered if it would not be more profitable to kidnap the naive ‘gringo’. They were plenty of other ways to launder drug money. On second thoughts no, the Irishman was a business friend of Señor Ortega and that would definitely not be a good move.

Chapter 54. In the Jungle

Dan Oberman had told to Kennedy that Delrios was looking at a project to export his Colombian coffee to Europe. Ireland with its Tax Free Zones looked to them an ideal distribution point for the UK and continental markets. Delrios was willing to finance the setting up a trading company in Ireland for that purpose.

The idea appealed to Kennedy, who had for a long time been seduced by the irrational idea of converting the Irish, a nation of tea drinkers, to drinking coffee. It was certainly lot smarter than drinking ‘a nice cup of tea’. He could not resist the temptation when Delrios proposed visiting the coffee plantations that his organisation ran in the south of the country.

It was a one hour flight from Baranquilla, in the company’s Lear Jet, over the Cordilla Centrales to the jungle air strip nearby the coffee plantations, where Ortega’s organisation ran a large hacienda, fifty kilometres from Puerto Asis, near the frontier with Ecuador, one thousand two hundred kilometres directly to the south of Baranquilla.

Puerto Asis was a town of 80,000 people in the Province of Putumayo, a wild frontier town with its mostly unpaved streets and where men paraded with guns in their belts. The surrounding jungle was controlled by the Farc guerrillas, who watched over the largest source of cocaine production in South America with some 60,000 hectares of coca plantations.

Ortega’s source of income was not only in corruption and money laundering, but also in a hardy Andean shrub that grew notably in Peru and Colombia, it was called coca. It was from this plant that cocaine was extracted.

In Colombia the production of coca had more than doubled in recent years. It was mainly produced in the regions of Putumayo and Cacqueta, which were the strongholds of the left wing guerrilla movement, the Farc, in the mountainous jungles in the south of the country, on the borders with Peru and Ecuador; countries that also illegally exported coca paste to Colombia where it was refined

into cocaine.

The Farc, which was the largest guerrilla group in the country, had 17,000 men under arms and protected the drug industry, whilst extracting a tax of some 500 million dollars a year, to buy arms and sustain their war with the Colombian government. They were not alone, nor were the left wing organisations the only culprits, right wing paramilitaries groups also owned and operated laboratories for the processing of the drug.

More than 100,000 Colombians had lost their lives and another 300,000 had fled their homes as a result of the civil war in the country and the wealthy lived in fear of kidnapping and extortion.

Colombia was the home to the world's biggest narco-industry, accounting for 80% of the cocaine imported by the USA. After a decade of war against cocaine the supply of the drug in the USA remained abundant and its price stable.

The USA in its fight against the cocaine industry gave little consideration for democracy and human rights. At the same time as it had supplied arms to fight the drug barons, it had provided money laundering services and chemicals for the refining of the cocaine. The CIA in its struggle against drugs monitored the activities of all persons or organisations, political or otherwise, suspected of being involved in the drug industry, amongst the suspects was Ortega.

On the airstrip were several small aircraft were parked including a white and blue Bell 407 helicopter which Delrios proudly pointed out to Kennedy.

“Our latest acquisition!”

“Very nice,” replied Kennedy politely. His knowledge of helicopters being about as great as that of his knowledge on the history of pre-Columbian civilisations.

“It cost us one and a half million dollars. It's the only way we can get around in this part of the country, there are virtually no roads, only trails.”

“Business must be good,” Kennedy remarked.

“Coffee is having a good year. Crops were bad in Brazil, bad weather. We also have emerald mines in the north, not far from Bogota, which are doing quite well, there's plenty of money around with the American economy booming.”

Delrios did not mention the thousands of kilos of cocaine that left regularly for the USA and other destinations, which enabled them to finance the purchase of equipment and materials for their business operations as well as arms.

Peter Davy was the pilot of one of the two Lear Jets, they were owned by one of Ortega's Swiss offshore companies for tax and other purposes. The Lear Jet had a six hour flying time, for transatlantic runs, they followed a northern route via Reykjavik, Bangor, Miami and Baranquilla, or alternatively to the south via Sint Maarten and Las Palmas to southern European destinations. The refuelling stopovers were compensated by the privacy and the availability of the aircraft. They were fitted with eight comfortable seats that could be reclined into couchettes. Normally the jet carried only four passengers for space and comfort on transatlantic runs.

Davy was a talkative Brit who was fluent in Spanish and French, fifty years old, a

professional and dedicated to a business where there were more pilots than jobs. Working for Ortega was rewarding and interesting and required a pilot with the long experience of Davy. His only weakness, if it could be called that, was that he was womaniser intent on pursuing anything in a skirt.

His home was near Marseilles on one of the picturesque calanques not far from Marignan airport. Marignan was thirty-five minutes by regular flight from Zurich, the European base for the Lear Jets.

It was the first time that Kennedy had been in such a region. He had watched the last vestige of civilisation slipping away as the Lear Jet climbed from Baranquilla and headed south. Before them lay more than one thousand kilometres of jungles and mountains, stretching out on all sides, to the border with Ecuador.

Once arrived at the plantation Kennedy had an intense feeling of isolation and distance from the rest of the world. The people were different, they seemed rugged and hard. There were Indians who looked wild and the whites looked uncivilised. He stuck closely to Oberman and the pilot.

The hacienda was magnificent, just as in a Western he thought, though more exotic, green and without the dust. There were horses and what looked like cowboys though he saw few cattle. To his alarm many of the men carried arms.

That evening they ate a parilla of beef chuletas to the buzz of insects that fluttered in the lighting over the terrace. In addition to Delrios, Oberman and their pilot Peter Davy, there were several men he had not met before including army officers in their uniforms. Delrios explained to Kennedy that an early visit to the coffee plantations had been organised for the next day. He then proposed that he join an army operation in the nearby jungle, as an observer, to close down an illegal coca paste factory. He assured Kennedy that there was not the slightest risk.

Kennedy wondered why the army should be used to close down a factory, he was confused by coca, was it another version of cocoa, a chocolate drink, or coke as in Coke Cola, in any case why should it be illegal. Not wanting to appear stupid he kept his questions to himself and nodded his agreement to Delrios, who snapped out orders in Spanish to one of the military men for the next day's operation.

They set out at six thirty the next morning to the coffee plantations that lay on the surrounding hills. They turned out to be disappointing and of only mild interest to Kennedy, once he had seen that the plantations were nothing more than endless rows of uninteresting green bushes, with the berries ripening on their small branches. It was too early to be up for the likes of inspecting berries on coffee bushes. The essential was that he had seen them and could be considered an expert back in Ireland.

In the not too far distance he saw the mist clinging to the mountains and the canopy of the dense jungle that stretched like a carpet before his eyes. The view looked menacing as he imagined his plane crashing down into the endless jungle. He was no longer sure that his presence was all that important for the army operation. He had no choice as he was quickly driven to the airstrip and put aboard

an army helicopter. The helicopter flew low over the jungle and thirty minutes later they circled and landed in a clearing, where they joined a small army unit ready to leave for the drug trafficker's jungle factory.

The group set out by army Jeeps over muddy laterite trails to a meeting point about an hour's drive over the jungle covered hills to meet up with the main group. The roads were simple trails, there were few means of transport, the local population travelled mostly by river.

He was introduced to an officer who explained in a rapid Spanish to his guide the outline of the operation. Kennedy was uneasy to see how heavily armed the men were, and could not help noting how tight their jaws were, it was not the kind of rabbit shoot he was used to.

Kennedy dimly began to understand that the operation was against an illegal drug factory, but was confused by the roles of Delrios and Ortega that seemed vaguely ambiguous to him. The army was in effect protecting their interests against encroachment by right wing independent paramilitary groups that fought both the Farc and sometimes the government.

It was a complex arrangement where the territory was divided into a mosaic of rival interests, where the army whilst looking after its own business activities tried to maintain a certain status quo between the warring factions.

The English spoken by the officer in charge and the guide was difficult to follow. Kennedy wished that that Oberman or Davy had remained with him. What at first glance had seemed to be an interesting outing was beginning to take on an alarming air. The other two men had left that morning on a trip up to Baranquilla and back, to deliver some important packages for Delrios and pick up communications equipment that had just arrived from Panama.

They continued a short distance by jeep over the slippery trail to a clearing where they continued by foot. They were preceded by heavily armed soldiers who advanced cautiously towards the site of the suspected narcotics factory.

There was a sudden stutter of automatic rifle fire. The soldiers ducked and Kennedy dived into the rain sodden undergrowth and mud. There was a silence, the acrid blue smoke from the gunfire hung in the damp air, then the soldiers cautiously continued their advance towards the jungle factory. Kennedy picked himself up brushing the mud and damp leaves from his clothes, his heart beating at a speed he had never before experienced.

The makeshift camp was abandoned, as such camps usually were a couple of hours or even less before the arrival of the military. Cooking fires were still smoking. The firing had been simply a tactic to frighten those who may have remained in the camp.

There was a motley collection of makeshift huts constructed from branches and rough planks covered with corrugated iron roofs and palm fronds. In a sump dug into the earth coca paste was in preparation and the crude tools necessary lay where they had been precipitously abandoned.

Coca was cultivated by poor farmers and the leaves were harvested by Indians,

transported by foot in plastic sacks to the factories where it was transformed into a crude paste. The process was simple; the coca leaves were dried and immersed in a mixture of sulphuric acid and kerosene. The mixture was left to macerate for some hours and then filtered and dried into a paste which could then be transported to the laboratories in the north of the country.

The military officer explained through a translator for the benefit of Kennedy that the jungle factory would be burnt and all the material destroyed. Kennedy nodded seriously wondering whether the whole operation had not been set up for his sole benefit.

Another factory would be set up in a day or two to replace it and business would continue as usual once the military had returned to their base.

Informants were everywhere, brothers, sisters, cousins, and friends, on both sides exchanged information on operations planned by the authorities. It was a game of hide and seek where both parties pretended not to know where the other was.

The Colombian armed forces were too small and lacked mobility as well as the means to carry out an effective combat against the narco-industry mercenaries.

The hacienda was situated amongst the vast coffee plantations that covered the nearby hills. The plantations were surrounded by the dense jungle and mountains, in a region accessible by air or a long and difficult journey overland. The plantation and its airstrip were also collection points for unrefined cocaine from the surrounding region, where poor coca growers cultivated and harvested their crops of coca leaves and transformed it into paste before it was transported north.

Police and officials were willing accomplices to the drug traffickers and the drug barons who continued to operate with impunity in the border cities with the USA. Corruption was rampant at all levels of the Latin American countries aiding and abetting the traffic of narcotics.

The coffee plantations were controlled by the Farc. Coffee was used as a cover for the much more profitable cultivation of coca, the profits of which were used for the purchase of arms and other materials in the futile struggle against the government in Bogota.

Chapter 55. A Long Journey

The plantations that Ortega controlled were an important exporter of Colombian coffee to international markets. They were also another one of the many covers for his multiple illegal business activities, which included money laundering on behalf of the Farc.

The production of coca paste in the mountains of southern Colombia by the Farc and their supporters was worth many hundreds of millions of dollars and Ortega's role was to legitimise the enormous wealth for the guerrillas.

The police, the army, political parties and the drug cartels were intertwined in a complex tangle of conflicting relationships. The civil authorities needed the money to fight drugs, but also accepted money from the drug cartels to fund election campaigns and buy arms to fight the guerrillas.

The Colombian authorities accepted the billions of dollars in aid given by the US government, in their fight against narcotics, as the principal source of funding the struggle against the Farc and other opposition movements.

The cocaine commenced its long journey from the mountains in the extreme south of the country to the Caribbean coast in the north. The paste was refined into the finished product in laboratories in Baranquilla and other coastal cities ready for export. From the cities of Baranquilla on the coast, or Santa Marta at the foot of Pico Cristobal Colon, 5,800 metres high, overlooking the southern flank of the Caribbean, the cocaine was shipped by sea to North America via the Caribbean islands or through Mexico.

Mexico was one of the main channels to the USA for drugs, accounting for over fifty percent of the drugs imported into the country. From Mexico the cocaine continued its voyage, overland into Texas and California.

The sea route used 'gofasts', high speed power boats, that made their runs at night in the international waters of the Caribbean at speeds of over eighty kilometres an hour, well beyond that of any coast guard vessel. They were refuelled by a variety of boats anchored at fixed points along their route in international waters. The trips normally took between five and eight bone breaking hours riding the waves.

They delivered their vile cargoes of pure cocaine for the rich North American and European markets. The merchandise was transhipped at night, outside of territorial waters, to different types of craft, sailing boats, motor cruisers, fishing boats, merchant vessels and even seaplanes.

A single trip was well worth the risk, a quarter of a million dollars for the skipper and a hundred thousand for a hand. A cargo of two tons of pure cocaine was worth twenty million dollars to the narco-traffickers in the Caribbean and worth two hundred million in New York to the dealers.

Heroin was a new product for the narco-traffickers and was worth ten times more than cocaine, as a consequence it was a highly prized diversification by the narco-industry.

Transit through the Caribbean islands accounted for two hundred tons of cocaine shipped to the USA yearly, having a market value of twenty billion dollars. Law enforcement authorities seized less than ten percent of the illegal contraband. The authorities were overwhelmed by the task and the impossibility of controlling the vast disparate armada of drug runners, from the 'mules' carrying small quantities to the professional well-equipped drug runners transporting thousands of kilos.

The professional drug runners, besides being criminals in international law, were dangerous mercenaries and smugglers of all sorts and origins, They were skilled navigators and could rendezvous with the precision of a few metres at any given

point on the open sea in the darkest of nights. After a few trips certain could hope to settle their debts, others retire in comfort back in their hometowns, setting up a small business or buying a restaurant or a new fishing boat. Some lived for the sheer thrill of danger whilst others were hardened criminals. There was a never-ending stream of candidates willing to take the risk of prison or death, men of all nationalities Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and Colombians. Some were professionals who owned their boats; others were hired mercenaries who captained the boats of the cartels.

The cocaine was transferred in international waters beyond the jurisdiction of the United States coast guards. The transfer was made to boats and craft of different types amongst the hundreds of thousands of boats that cruised in the coastal waters off Florida and the Keys, making control and detection an impossibly great task for the authorities. The narco-traffickers were equipped with the very latest navigation and radar equipment that enabled them to avoid the coast guard patrols and pinpoint their rendezvous, without the loss of precious time and avoiding the risk of detection.

The US government waged their long war on the drug cartels and Mafia, but the demand for narcotics grew at a faster rate than the means to combat the traffickers. Every single day over five thousand Americans tried cocaine for the first time. The government was slowly but surely losing the war.

The US Coast Guard patrolled their coastal waters and kept nearby international waters under constant surveillance and with its aircraft and helicopters noting the movements of all suspicious vessels. They had even started to get delivery of their own powerboats to match the speed of the drug runners. But their numbers were disproportionately small compared to the number of vessels smuggling drugs into the USA, without taking in account the traffic to Europe and other destinations.

The drug cartels, some of the most powerful criminal organisations in the world, controlled the shipment of narcotics from Baranquilla to Sint Maarten in the Windward Islands, which was a major transfer point for the drugs towards Europe. The Netherlands controlled the southern half of the island with a lax attitude to drugs, attracting narco-traffickers of all kinds. The island's corrupt officials facilitated the criminal business and were in league with the drug traffickers, especially the Colombians.

The huge numbers of pleasure boats that visited the island, motor cruisers and sailing boats, made it almost impossible for the authorities to control all the comings and goings of all vessels, they had neither the means nor the will.

The traffickers shipped their goods to Europe through its soft underbelly. Tons of cocaine arrived in Spain via the Canary Islands by container and on pleasure boats. The drugs were then redistributed in smaller quantities to Spain and Italy or into Greece, Albania and the eastern Adriatic shore. The goods were then smuggled up to their final destinations, the markets of Northern Europe by road.

The diversity of the transport ensured that the risk was spread, avoiding detection and loss of the valuable cargos. The narco-industry by experience had built into its

calculation an average loss of ten percent of the goods shipped from Colombia.

Thierry Boisnier was one of a multitude of links in their chain. He used the Marie Galante as a tanker for refuelling stops in the Caribbean for the gofasts between Colombia and the islands of Santo Domingo, Sint Maarten and Puerto Rico. Others made their runs between Santa Marta in Colombia and Aruba in the Netherlands Antilles.

The Marie Galante with full tanks could supply several thousands of litres of fuel to the gofasts without difficulty. It provided Boisnier with a steady income with a minimum of risk. There were no suspicious tanks or cargo holds, the ketch required no extra fuel tanks which would have attracted the attention of coast guards in the case of it being boarded for inspection.

Fuelling took place at night taking no more than thirty minutes. The ketch's radar had a range of several nautical miles and could detect any approaching vessel well in time to distance themselves from the gofast, both vessels keeping their engines running during the refuelling operation.

Boisnier never took the risk of carrying drugs on the ketch, the presence of which could have been detected, even after unloading, by dogs or sniffing instruments.

The narco-traffickers laundered their money by the purchase goods for dollars in the USA, which they then illegally imported into Colombia against payment in pesos.

Colombian exchange regulations made it complicated for those wanting to import goods purchased in dollars from the USA. The Colombian authorities imposed excessively high customs tariffs that encouraged individuals and businesses to smuggle in the goods they needed. The way around the regulations was simple, buyers paid brokers in Bogota in pesos. The US brokers then paid suppliers of the goods in dollars and the goods were delivered via a free trade zone in a third country such as Panama or Aruba. The Colombian broker then credited the account of the narco-traffickers with pesos.

The brokers ran a highly lucrative business working at discount rates of up to twenty percent on each side. The goods arrived illegally, smuggled through one of the many ports on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, without paying Colombian customs duties.

Another method was to smuggle goods into Colombia paid for in the same manner. The goods were then sold through *sanandrecitos*, illegal tax free markets, San Andres was a Colombian island with an official tax free zone in the Caribbean created to facilitate legal trade.

Goods such as cigarettes, alcohol, electronics, appliances and car spare parts were exported from the USA via tax free zones in Central American countries. The Colombian authorities were incapable of controlling the stream of smuggled goods; they were too corrupt and ill equipped to deal with the volume of customs documents through which they could have traced illegal operations.

The USA authorities estimated that money laundering through black market peso

exchange was one of the most dangerous forms of money laundering. More than five billion US dollars were exchanged into Colombian pesos for the purchase and illegal import of US goods into the country every year.

The market for military equipment was a lucrative business for many American companies which did not look to closely at the source of payment for their wares. The payments, which in many cases came by wire transfer from unrelated sources and offshore tax havens, included laundered narco-dollars.

The US contributed billions of dollars to the Colombian state whilst the narco-traffickers contributed billions of dollars to the parallel economy. The narco-traffickers with their vast revenues made their own laws and ran their own economy.

The guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the Farc, from their base in the village of Los Pozos, controlled a swath of southern jungle, the size of Switzerland, or over three percent of the national territory.

The Farc and the government held sporadic discussions in Los Pozos which resulted in almost nothing concrete except for the government's concession of that region to the rebels, based on the realisation that it was impossible and fruitless to try to recover the territory.

The narco-industry held Colombia in its iron grip. It was composed of an unholy alliance between the coca growers, for the most part poor farmers, Marxist guerrillas, drug cartels, the military and the politicians

The Marxist guerrillas in league with the coca growers and drug traffickers controlled almost half of the country. The narco-industry was so lucrative that it had become the very reason for the guerrillas continued existence. It had enabled them to subvert the country's fragile democratic system, buying politicians at the highest levels, military commanders, the judiciary system and undermining the country's economic system.

The money generated by the narco-industry even attracted paramilitary movements linked to the local army units that wanted to muscle in on the huge profits.

The coca plantations were found mainly in two of the countries southern provinces, both controlled by the Marxist Farc the most powerful guerrilla organisation.

The state of lawlessness was so great and had lasted so long that the military had gone as far as protecting the Medellin drug cartel and even one of the country's presidents had even accepted contributions from the Cali cartel.

On the other hand the guerrillas had fought for over forty years and their ideology was exhausted and no longer corresponded to the political reality of their country's needs, a mere five percent of the population supported the guerrillas. The guerrillas refused to conclude a politically negotiated peace, preferring the hundreds of millions of dollars from the narco-industry and protection money that financed the comfortable status quo. They had become a well armed and well fed bandit organisation, that from its jungle stronghold held their country as a hostage to

sustain their make-believe ideological existence, they were mere mercenaries to the narco-industry. Drugs had become their only *raison d'être*.

The huge quantities of monies generated gave them the incentive to continue their charade by all means possible within the triangle that was formed by the borders of Colombia, Brazil and Peru.

Chapter 56. Brel

It was a sad little room on the third floor over looking a narrow sunless court. In one corner stood a paperboard inscribed with the remains of a Russian lesson. It was small, hardly three metres by two, the furniture was modern cheap white lacquered fibreboard.

Arrowsmith presented Gresinski the terms proposed by the Swedes, as usual the Frenchman was hesitant to admit the terms of a foreign organisation were without some kind of a hidden drawback, and like most of his countrymen he said 'no' before being pushed in saying 'yes'.

Arrowsmith had parked his small Renault in a public underground car park just off the boulevard Italians and walked down to the bank's offices. The rush hour was over, the traffic had been relatively light, it was a fine dry morning in early April, a change from the previous weeks of seemingly never ending rain and cold.

Arrowsmith wondered if the Banque de Credit National was really as serious about the business as Castlemain had tried to convince him. It was a little puzzling, as he would have thought they would have accepted Castlemain's plans without hesitation. No doubt he pulled strings at a higher level and perhaps it was necessary to be seen going through the usual analytical procedures he reasoned.

He was simply following Castlemain's instruction to meet with the Irish Union's European partner, and in any case there was nothing to lose in talking with Gresinski. Gresinski was the BCN's home based Regional Manager for the bank's Caribbean and Central American zone's activities.

Gresinski was what could have been described as an experienced Latin-American financial specialist, that was to say that he had studied and acquired an in depth knowledge of the region - as an expatriate - not from the occasional visits that usually consisted of hand shaking and lunches. However, he was still young, at the most thirty-seven or eight. He had accumulated ten years of banking experience in Mexico City and Caracas. It was a lot, since those countries had opened their doors to the presence of foreign banks relatively recently following the liberalisation of their economies.

He spoke Spanish and excellent English. His father had been with the bank as their regional manager for many years in Mexico City. Gresinski had been brought back to Paris to persuade the bank's customers in France to develop their business

in the Caribbean.

French businesses had been reticent to invest in that region, that is with the exception of French overseas territories, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana. They lagged far behind their European competitors, they were low risk takers, mostly involving themselves in French government supported projects. The BCN had only recently been privatised and was still adapting to the change. Having been a state owned bank had been encouraged by the government to act as an instrument to stimulate the interest of French investors in the burgeoning region.

Gresinski knew Sierra Maestra Breweries & Distilleries; they were solvent with substantial reserves and a high growth potential, once the obstacles of the socialist regime were removed. They would be considered a good client for the bank; the question was to persuade the BCN management to give its full backing the project.

The door opened and Gresinski appeared, embarrassed and ruffled. He was a Jew, his skin was fair and freckled, his hair was curly and a darkish red colour. He wore expensive thick tortoise shell glasses of a rectangular form that seemed to be fashionable amongst bankers.

“Mr Arrowsmith, I’m sorry I’m late,” he flustered and going on without a pause, “please excuse this meeting room, we’re in the middle of renovations and unfortunately the other rooms are booked.”

The place looked like it needed it, Arrowsmith thought to himself, somewhat disconcerted by the shabby reception he received. It was a fancy address situated amongst the century old head offices of the established French banks, but it was old and cramped. All the renovation they could do would not change things very much, they would still be a like a bunch of civil servants in a just recently state owned bank, in dull confined office quarters.

Gresinski wearing an apologetic smile made a distracted effort to arrange the papers in a dossier he had placed on the table. Arrowsmith shrugged as if it did not matter, but at the same time put on a hurt look. He would take any advantage he could, however small.

“It’s no problem, I’ll try to give a little more warning next time,” he said smiling, knowing well that he had given more than adequate notice for his visit.

“Well let’s try and see if we’re a little better at business,” said Gresinski forcing a smile as he fumbled his dossier opened, “let me see now, Monsieur Castlemain and his partners, the Sierra Maestra Breweries & Distilleries, are looking at a new tourist complex at Cayo Saetia in Cuba. I have a report from our Havana representative, which I can tell you is very positive,” he said with a certain relief. “That’s good to hear.”

“Yes, Cayo Saetia will be a good bet for some time to come...providing the scares about Fidel’s political and economic policies don’t get to much international press!”

Arrowsmith frowned.

“Don’t worry, it’s not the case for the moment, the Cuban government seems to be taking the right measures to avoid any exaggerated reports.”

Arrowsmith had read articles in the press; he had even seen television reports on the subject, but had never considered it as a real problem in terms of business. It had become a media fad to project the end of the reign and after-Fidel scenarios.

“What about the bank?”

“Us! That’s not our immediate concern, we are looking to the future, Cuba appears to be a reasonable bet in the tourist sector, at least at the moment, that’s what we describe as a risk assessment question, linked to a global appreciation of all the other risks involved. But, the situation could become much more acute if public opinion was excited. But don’t let’s worry about that for now, after all France has had terrorist and other problems and the tourists still keep coming,” he smiled.

“Good, I see your point,” Arrowsmith made a mental note of Gresinski’s comments.

“Our investment committee has given a favourable opinion on an eventual participation in the loans for the project, subject to a finalised list of the other financial partners involved.”

Arrowsmith confirmed the availability of Sierra Maestra’s own funding possibilities together with that of local banks. He reiterated the Irish Union participation in the loans, and their contacts with the Canadian group.

“Do you know Prestige?” asked Gresinski.

“Prestige? No.” Arrowsmith shrugged.

“Prestige is a French financial group whose principal interests are in a number of top hotels and tourist complexes. They have a large part of their investment in the French West Indies and Polynesia.”

“No I don’t know them, why?”

“They’re one of our clients, a good one at that,” he paused hesitatingly, “they’re looking for participation in new projects in those geographical areas where they are not presently established...and also, I say this in the strictest confidence, possible partners in their new venture in the Caribbean.”

“I see,” said Arrowsmith noncommittally.

“As I said they are good clients of the BCN and it is possible that their association in the type of project you are looking at would give a French flavour, that could tilt the loan participation in the right direction!”

Arrowsmith recognised the direction in which Gresinski was pointing him, it was not unusual of French banks to involve French businesses in projects that looked promising. It was a service both to themselves and their clientele, ensuring new markets without the development costs, involving a French partner who they knew well and were an additional source of guaranties, who could keep them in close contact with the development of the business.

It was not up to him, it was a question for Castlemain, and after all it had been Castlemain who had directed him towards Credit National. It would not do any harm to learn more about Prestige, it could even be useful.

Gresinski looked enquiringly at Arrowsmith, who was deep in thought, weighing

up the potential advantages and disadvantages of a new partner. In his experience the more partners the more complicated the business became, especially in the initial stage, but if it was necessary to make the BCN happy then it would have to be considered. In any case sooner or later other partners would have to be introduced, the scale of the project imposed that.

“Look, why don’t you let me arrange a meeting with the Jean-Louis Brel, he’s the president of Prestige.”

“Why not? I think it could be interesting.”

“Good!” Gresinski said visible relieved.

Prestige’s offices were in an elegant late nineteenth century building that overlooked the Parc Monceau in a plush district of Paris. Arrowsmith was shown into Jean-Louis Brel’s office on the ground floor. The office was large and airy; the French windows were opened onto the private garden that separated them from the park. Brel’s office was furnished in ships style, with dark mahogany furniture and bookcases, adorned with antique ship’s instruments and brass fittings, old maps and charts in elegant frames decorated the walls.

“Mr Arrowsmith please come in,” said Brel placing his heavy pipe in a heavy yellow bohemian crystal ashtray, “it’s very nice of you to take the trouble to come to see us,” he said in excellent English.

“A beautiful office you have Monsieur Brel.”

“Thank you, to be honest I’ve never really thought of it as an office,” he said taking Arrowsmith by the elbow and guiding him towards the French windows, where he could admire the garden. They stepped outside onto the flagstones of a path that wound its way around the flowerbeds and shrubs towards the tall ornate iron railings that separated the garden from the park.

“It must be very relaxing to work in such a work environment,” said Arrowsmith.

“Most of the time,” Brel laughed, “let’s go in I think it might be a good moment for some coffee, or perhaps you prefer tea, what do you think?”

Arrowsmith looked at his watch unconsciously, it was just after eleven, a coffee would be fine.

“So you’ve talked to our good friend Gresinski at the BCN,” he did not wait for Arrowsmith to reply, “he’s been very helpful to us with the extension that we’ve just completed in Tahiti...very competent and reliable.”

“I know BCN through our Irish bankers the Irish Union.”

“Yes of course, a fine country.”

A secretary served two strong expresso coffees and left them.

“As you know Prestige is specialised in the tourist sector, up market hotel business. Recently, that is in the last four or five years we have entered into the time-share business. We’ve been very successful, very profitable,” he said with a certain satisfaction, concentrating in what seemed to Arrowsmith to be a kind of homage to the word ‘profit’.

“We have decided to expand this area of business and are in the process of

acquiring a site in Guadeloupe that we will develop into a hotel and time-share complex.”

Arrowsmith nodded, that was what Gresinski had already broadly explained to him, Prestige was engaged with a local company called Caribbean Property Development. Brel went into the details of his firm’s business.

“We are also seeking involvement in other tourist areas...in Cuba for example!” He continued concentrating, scribbling on the corner of a note pad with a gold pencil, he suddenly stopped and looked directly at Arrowsmith as if he expected a reaction.

Arrowsmith held back giving no particular sign of interest and waited for Brel to continue.

“What about you, tell me a little of your business plans?” Brel smiled.

“Well, I think I can safely say that we have certain ideas in common, that is to say the people I represent, the Irish Union Bank and their partners the Sierra Maestra group in Cuba. Our project, Ciscap as we call it, is advancing nicely. The Cubans have started to accumulate good experience in operating tourist hotels and complexes, but they are rather limited in marketing, we believe that there is a huge potential in the new concept for the project we are developing.”

“Let us continue over lunch, I’ve taken the liberty of booking a table at the George V, if that suits you, my driver is waiting for us,” Brel said smiling and glancing at his watch.

Ten minutes later Brel’s Jaguar pulled up at the extravagantly refurbished George V and he led Arrowsmith into the hotel. The style was not to Arrowsmith’s taste, too pompous, but it was clear that Brel was a regular from the deferential welcome he received from the restaurant maitre d’hôtel, who led them to a table that that offered a good view of restaurant but was at the same time discrete.

Brel was what could be described as an anglophile, one of those Frenchmen who admired all that was traditionally upper class British. He was a snob and affected the imaginary style of an English gentleman. He had built up his company Prestige from a modest house building enterprise that had started out in the suburbs of Paris twenty years previously. Progressively, with the long boom in the French property market, he had built his profits on the capital gains made from generous bank loans and the willingness of home buyers to pay prices indexed on the cost of construction during a high inflationary period.

Prestige went from individual homes to housing schemes and apartment blocks and then into commercial property. It was through the latter that he went into partnership with an old friend, Xavier de Montfort, an investment consultant, to build his first hotel in Guadeloupe, with all its fiscal advantages. It was a hotel residence offering the traditional hotel service or accommodation from the simple one-room studios with a kitchenette for basic self-catering to luxury multi-bedroom apartments.

The development had profited from several regional grants offered by the French government, linked to a number of tax breaks and other fiscal advantages for the

investors. Prestige was riding high even though its financial management could not have been described as exactly tight, by international standards their accounting practices were somewhat slack, fortunately the inflationary tendencies of the market took care of cost overruns.

Brel lived in style, a twelve-room *hôtel particulière*, as the French called their fine Parisian town houses, located in the chic sixteenth *arrondissement*. Summer weekends he could be found at his house near the golf course at Deauville, or, in the marina at Port Grimaud on the Côte d'Azur where he kept a sailing yacht.

He was basically of a conservative nature and the dynamism that had pushed him as a younger man had faded into a comfortable complacency, based on the certainty of continuity without risk. That spring morning as he followed the CNN reports of the mopping up operations in the Balkans following the victory of the Americans and their allies and the establishment of a new order. Brel could not see any looming economic recession on the horizon and for that matter nor did the markets.

Brel's meeting with Castlemain was an instant success, he was seduced by Ireland and Castlemain's lineage, a high class country gentlemen, but above all by his banking background and excellent business relations. Brel saw Castlemain as a solid source of financing and Castlemain recognised Brel's knowledge and experience in the hotel construction business.

The Irish Union was Brel's idea of a perfect partner, with its president David Castlemain, who he imagined would let him get on with the real business, building a first class tourist establishment.

The situation that presented itself was an ideal opportunity for the Irish Union, which could use Prestige's experience for the Cayo Saetia development, and would at the same time acquire an unexpected partner in the Caribbean market.

A co-operation agreement was drawn-up and a study was confided to the Irish company to investigate the pooling of construction and financing resources for the project to be developed jointly by the two groups.

Caribbean Property Development, long-standing business friends of Castlemain, with the backing of Prestige were putting together a luxurious new development for a hotel and time-share development in Guadeloupe. They were on the point of acquiring a splendid new site nearby Gosier, which would however require some considerable investment and landscaping, after the run down properties that occupied the site had been demolished.

The time-share units would sell like hot cakes in a market that had never been better. The financing however needed some original ideas as they had recently experienced some difficulty in raising new capital, nothing serious but there was increasing competition for money in the buoyant property development market.

To find fresh capital resources they needed a new partner, in preference a partner experienced in property development in the Caribbean, that was perhaps to much to hope for, however when the Canadian entrepreneur, Ivan Garcia, indicated his intention to participate once the details were settled, it removed all the problems,

that is to say with the exception of the last parcel of land which remained to be acquired. It was nothing more than a detail that would be soon taken care of.

Chapter 57. The Red Arrow

Ortega had persuaded Kennedy to take the train to St Petersburg with one of his body guards, Alexander ‘Sacha’ Kutzmenkov, a huge young man of about thirty years old with an appetite and capacity to drink, which matched his size.

Travel by train was one of the surest methods of transport in Russia, mainly because of the unpredictability of the winter weather conditions when northern airports could be snowed in. The railways worked like clockwork, in spite of the age and condition of the trains. The trains were however not that uncomfortable and were considered safer than the internal Russian air links. Ortega did not want to risk his investment aboard an ailing and poorly maintained Tupolev.

The trip to Russia had been conceived by Ortega as part of his design to gain a firm grip over the impressionable Kennedy. Ortega had demonstrated his influence and impressed Kennedy with his political and business relations. He had shown him another world that he knew nothing of and had learned to look on Ortega differently, with awe and respect.

As the week drew to an end Ortega announced to Kennedy’s surprise that he had been booked for a visit to Saint Petersburg where he was to be joined by Eriksson and Boisnier. He would then travel to Finland, from where he would take the ferry for an overnight excursion to Tallinn, Estonia, some eighty kilometres across the Gulf of Finland. In Tallinn together with Boisnier they would collect some important documents for the development of Ortega’s Cuban business.

“You will enjoy the trip Pat, in any case you have nothing more to do here over the weekend!”

“Yesh Señor Ortega,” he replied through a fog of Vodka. He would never be able to explain to his wife Susan the drinking he had done as a sworn teetotaler. But he pushed that back into the fog, as there were a lot of things he had done in the previous few days that he would have great difficulty in confessing to Father Brennan back in Limerick.

Kennedy did not ask too many questions, he was out of his depth, he followed Ortega around shaking hands and unsuccessfully trying to refuse Vodka, but willingly meeting the stunning Russian girls that Ortega plied on him.

“After you can go on to Stockholm to meet the Bottens’ president with Stig,” Ortega said stroking Kennedy’s shoulder, as though the change in plan was the most natural thing in the world.

If things worked as Ortega had carefully planned, Kennedy would fall like a ripe

fruit into his hand, in fact he was already in his hand though Ortega needed a little leverage just in case, for those unforeseen events that have a nasty habit of popping up.

Ortega used a well run-in technique developed and refined over seventy years by the MKVD, the predecessor of the KGB, the KGB itself and its successor, the FSB, whatever the name it was the same organisation and given the never changing conservatism of the Russia system it would probably go on for ever.

Eriksson and Boisnier were to meet Kennedy at the Nevsky Hotel on Nevsky Prospect in Saint Petersburg, where they had been holding meetings with Ortega's bankers. The three would then travel on to Finland.

Kennedy's mouth felt like as though it were lined with a couple of millimetres of dental plaque and at eleven that evening as he settled down in the night train he thought to himself that his armpits had begun to smell like a Russian shit-house. It was the third day he had spent drinking and whoring in a whirlwind of dinners and parties, meeting and shaking hands with a dizzying number of personalities, politicians and businessmen not to speak of the girls.

They had a first class compartment to themselves. There were two bench type seats, which were transformed into couchettes for the night. They were separated by a fold-down table, on which open sandwiches of salmon eggs and caviar had been set down on a silver tray with a bottle of vodka and four bottles of imported beer with glasses.

Kennedy stared with mounting curiosity as Sacha proceeded to empty onto his couchette a plastic bag that advertised a Finnish supermarket in Moscow. He withdrew a length of black multiple strand plastic sheathed cable and placed it on his couchette, then a red and white plastic gadget.

"Alarm!" he announced to Kennedy.

Kutzmenkov closed the compartment door firmly, and then proceeded in what appeared to be a practised manner to wind the cable into a series of knots around the door lock then extending it to the rail of the clothes hanger on the compartment wall. He then he took an old trouser belt from the bag, the artificial leather had cracked to the point of almost breaking the belt in two where it had been frequently buckled, he fastened it tightly around the alarm to the growing astonishment of Kennedy, he then fixed the belt to another rail above Kennedy's pillow and a cord from the alarm to the door handle.

"Now you will see!" he pulled the cord sharply and a small jack was jerked out of a socket on the side of the alarm. A sharp modulating screech was emitted for a few seconds before Sacha re-inserted the small jack back into the socket. It was not exactly ear piercing and Kennedy suspected that it would not wake up the worn out babushka any more than the rattle of the worn bogies over the equally worn tracks. Not to disappoint him Kennedy made signs of being impressed.

Finally Sacha plugged the air vents in the door explaining that this would prevent robbers from spraying knockout gas into the compartment.

Kutzmenkov was pleased with himself, but the finality of the arrangement dismayed Kennedy when he realised that if nature called during the night Sacha may not appreciate being awoken to let him out.

Sacha indicated the food and vodka to Kennedy, who invited him to go ahead, which he did wolfing down the blinies and sandwiches with large gulps of vodka alternated with beer directly from the bottle.

As the train rattled towards St Petersburg, 600 kilometres to the northwest, Kennedy settled into an uneasy sleep. The springs of the wagon were worn and at each uneven point on the track they went into what seemed a never ending series of oscillations with the bogies, sleep was difficult. Soon the pressure either real or imaginary mounted on Kennedy's bladder. The more he tried to push the thought of a piss from his mind, the more it invaded his thoughts.

He switched on one of the dim night lights and pushed Sacha on the shoulder.

“What's wrong!”

“I need a piss.”

“What!”

“I need to go for a piss.”

“Shit!”

“No, a piss.”

“Shit!” Sacha lifted his huge body sleepily from his couchette and started to fumble with the alarm. A few minutes later he pulled the compartment door open.

As Kutzmenkov carefully watched over his ward, Kennedy trod carefully over the lengths of worn carpet towards the toilet as though frightened of picking up some awful microbe. The stench of the toilet woke him up instantly and alerted him to the pool of urine on the floor, balancing on tip toes with his feet far apart he managed to hold steady himself with the swaying of the train which seemed to come in waves, he then hurried back to his compartment where Kutzmenkov sat irritated on the side of his couchette with the bundle of belt and wires in his hands.

Kennedy together with Boisnier hurried in from the snow and made their way around the cleaners, who had the never ending job of clearing and swabbing away the watery black trails left in the lobbies and entrance halls by the passing feet of guests and visitors.

It was late in the afternoon when they checked out of the Nevsky Hotel in St Petersburg. A dark blue Mercedes waited for them outside the hotel, it was dirty, that was to be expected, the wet snow had turned dust of the Czarist city into a quagmire of mud and water.

There was an endless discussion at the cash desk and Sacha called Kennedy back to the hotel desk, where three dollars extra were required for a phone call to Moscow, which had only just come through to the checkout desk. After some discussion on the cross exchange rates between sterling and dollars they returned to the Mercedes.

“They're are so fucking stupid,” shouted Boisnier, “the bill was over six thousand

dollars and they make a fuss over three dollars!”

They climbed into the Mercedes and headed out of the resplendent though rundown city towards Viborg, some 150 kilometres to the northwest and Finland.

After leaving the city, the road was as not as bad as Kennedy had been led to believe, the traffic was light and the surface was in a reasonable condition. The only difficulty was to restrain the Frenchman from his desire to ask the driver to stop, so that he could piss on the green metallic monument at the city limit, which commemorated Napoleon’s defeat in 1812.

About one hundred kilometres from St Petersburg it started to snow heavily, it was apparently no problem for their Russian driver, he had been born in the snow and no doubt he would end his days in an icy grave. Frequent police controls reassured Kennedy that road pirates were a thing of the past.

After about an hour they pulled off the highway onto to small road covered with thick fresh snow and drove slowly towards a small Russia village, where the driver had informed them they the shops were open. The shops consisted of a line of dismal kiosks where they bought a bottle of vodka and three bottles of mineral water, the drive to Helsinki would be long and refreshment would be needed to keep their spirits up.

Chapter 58. The Sally Anne

Kennedy together with Boisnier boarded the Sally Anne ferry boat in the port of Helsinki at four thirty on the Friday afternoon. Björn Naseman, Eriksson’s assistant, had been instructed to book them a twenty-four hour mini-cruise to Tallinn in Estonia. Once arrived in Tallinn they were to meet Demirshian an Armenian, and Lauristin an Estonian. The object, according to Eriksson’s plan, was the exchange of one million real Swedish kronas against five million counterfeit US dollars.

“It’s been set up like an army operation,” Eriksson had told Boisnier.

I hope it’s not the Swedish army again, Boisnier had thought to himself regretting his involvement in another of Eriksson’s crazy plans. It was risky enough trying to offload the fakes, but putting his head into the lion’s mouth by coming to Estonia was over doing it. He had outlined the deal to a weary Kennedy, who only half listened, tired after his arduous week of drinking, eating and whoring in Russia. Boisnier had taken care to omit the fact that the dollars were counterfeits as well as the exact sums involved. Boisnier told him disingenuously that the arrangement was designed to avoid Estonian currency exchange regulations.

The ferry was the simplest way to arrive in Tallinn, in the guise of plain tourists. There were no passport formalities required other than providing the Bottens’s travel agent in Helsinki with their basic passport details, name, date of birth, date

of issuance of the passport and its number. There was nothing simpler, they became part of a group visa, the group consisted of several hundred Finns, out for a weekend of drinking and dancing, with six hours in Tallinn as an excuse.

The travel agent, who had accompanied them to the port, presented them with an envelope, after the check-in formalities that he had accomplished on their behalf. It contained four tickets, two for Mr and Mrs Kennedy and two for Mr and Mrs Boisnier. He apologised explaining that there had been a misunderstanding handing them four boarding passes, two cabin keys, four tickets for a bus trip in Tallinn, and four boarding passes for the return trip from Tallinn.

"I'm sorry about this mix up, it's too late to change things now, too complicated," he laughed. "Just present your own boarding passes, keep all the other tickets with you in the same envelope all the time, on board and in Tallinn. When you get back I'll have to get the reimbursement for them, OK!"

They boarded the ship, each presenting his own tickets and were pointed to the lift that brought them down to the fourth deck. They checked into their cabins, 412 and 414, on the port side with a view onto the sea. They busied themselves settling in until the ship weighed anchor, slipping out of the port with hardly a sound or vibration from the engines some thirty minutes later.

Kennedy knocked on the door of Boisnier's cabin.

"Come in, the door's open."

"Hey, how's things?"

"Great, what about you?"

"What was all that about the tickets?"

"No idea, the stupid sods are incapable of making a simple reservation, just hang on to the other tickets we'll give them back on Monday."

The two cabins were identical, modern and comfortable, fitted with two single beds, a separate bathroom and a large TV. The ship was only one year old, constructed by Rauma Shipyards in Finland, according to a brass plaque they had seen as they had boarded.

"The only thing now is to find one of those Estonian girls they told us about to fill the other bed," said Kennedy laughing, feeling a little more relaxed, pleased to have 'escaped' from Russia.

"Let's forget about that for this trip we'll do that on the way back."

"I'm only joking."

"Good, what about a drink, let's find out where the bars are."

They found a bar on the ninth deck, where there were already a few Finnish couples seated at the tables with large glasses of beer before them. The bar was not only for drinking but was also a discotheque which would no doubt liven up later in the evening after the holiday makers had settled in and eaten.

They ordered a couple of drinks at the bar, a beer for Boisnier and a coke for Kennedy, then they took a table facing the view as the Sally Anne gracefully left the Port of Helsinki behind them. Endless rocky pine covered islands slipped past, here and there they saw the traditional summer and weekend homes of Finns,

houses built of ochre painted clapboard not far from the water's edge, where small jetties led down to the moored outboards.

Very few of the passengers were not Finns. The two day trippers had agreed to keep a low profile so as not to attract unwanted attention, to behave simply as curious foreign tourists, as they were in a manner of speaking.

They had more than twelve hours ahead of them before they arrived in Tallinn. The distance between Tallinn and Helsinki was only eighty kilometres and the sailing time was normally not much more than three hours, but speed was not the objective of the boat's passengers, what was more important to them was a night of drinking duty free beer and dancing. The excessive taxes imposed by the Finnish government on all alcoholic drinks, made even beer a luxury and the mini-cruises were the traditional excuse for a vast binge.

They dined in one of the restaurants sampling a nondescript Scandinavian salad buffet, followed by the invariable and unimaginative Finnish poached salmon. It was towards ten fifteen when they left the restaurant and they decided to take a stroll to explore the huge ship with its shops and bars.

They then headed towards one of the bars for a nightcap, it was crowded and they sensed an air of excitement and anticipation in the revellers. With the first few notes of a traditional Finnish tango - almost a national dance - the would be dancers headed towards the disco floor in a frenzy, jumping on the pre-selected partner and in the case of pre-emption grabbed the next nearest female, as though it were the last dance of all time. The women almost never refused an invitation, that would have been un-Finnish.

Pushing their way towards the bar they ordered drinks, surveying the surroundings in the never changing habit of the prowling male, and the eternal hope of an easy catch. There were not many unaccompanied women, which was to say those that were available were either too young or worse too old. They settled down to discussing the task ahead before calling it a day and returning to their cabins.

Kennedy was awoken by the sun streaming through the large panoramic window, the weather seemed to have changed for the better, he checked his watch, it was just after seven. The distant throb the boat's huge engines had discernibly increased in tempo, the nights coming and going in the Baltic had ended, they were finally headed towards Tallinn.

He joined Boisnier for breakfast in the restaurant, where they checked out the map of the city. The tour included a bus ride to the city centre nearby the post and telegraph office, from there they were to walk to the main square of the old town, a green Moskowitz taxi would be waiting to take them to the Olympia Hotel.

Chapter 59. Tallinn

The Sally Anne docked and after an interminable problem with the dock side stairs, which appeared to have hydraulic problems, they disembarked and were herded towards a row of waiting buses. They climbed aboard one of the buses and were soon bumping over the uneven roads of the ex-Soviet Republic of Estonia. A pretty guide gave a non-stop stream of incomprehensible information in Estonian to the tourists.

At first view it was similar to the other countries of the old Communist world that Boisnier had visited, run down and drab. As they left the port area things seemed to cheer up somewhat. The passers-by were almost indistinguishable from their nearby Finnish neighbours, they were brightly dressed in light clothes in the unseasonably warm weather, the young women with their blond hair were attractive, even if there was slight a hint of them being over dressed and over made-up.

The bus pulled into a square where they climbed out and were relieved to see the post and telegraph building as per their instructions. Checking their map they then headed towards the old town, over the tram tracks and past the stalls of flower sellers. It was just after 9.30 Saturday morning, but they could not help remarking that there were very few cars. In just over ten minutes they reached the practically deserted Kirku Plats, the main square. It was strange that such a square was without the Saturday morning market and hubbub that could be found in just about any other town in Western Europe.

They paused and looked around, as if checking that they were not being followed, the era of spies was over but they had heard a lot about the Mafiya that had sprung up like mushrooms in the newly independent states. Boisnier hung tightly on to his bag containing the Swedish money.

“You know what a Moskowitz looks like?” Boisnier asked Kennedy.

Kennedy, a little puzzled, thought for a moment.

“No...what about you?”

“No.”

They walked around the picturesque cobbled square that rose to one side, facing them were two or three cafes with tables and chairs set outside in the bright but cool sun.

“Let’s take a coffee?” suggested Boisnier.

“No, if the taxi arrives we won’t have time.”

Boisnier shrugged. They made another circuit of the square checking the streets leading into it, there were no taxis, there were no cars. The only thing remarkable was a couple of down-and-outs, looking like a pair of dead souls, their skin black with filth and their dirty blond hair hanging dishevelled over their foreheads, stinking even at a distance of ten metres.

They hurried away as if it was a contagious condition.

“Perhaps it’s a pedestrian area,” thought Kennedy aloud.

“What shall we do now?”

“Nothing, we just wait, there’s nothing else to do!”

A worn out greyish saloon bumped into sight and made a slow tour of the square. They observed the car with indifference as it pulled up in front of one of the cafes. The driver climbed out and looked around and then disappeared into the cafe.

Boisnier pulled out a packet of cigarettes, put one between his lips and drawing heavily lit it up, he puffed the smoke out without inhaling it, his smoking was almost a nervous tic.

They looked into the shop windows only half interested, wondering what to do next.

“Mister Kennedy?”

Kennedy looked around, it was the driver of the grey saloon. He was unshaven and his shirt was grubby and unbuttoned down to a hairy bulging stomach.

“What!” exclaimed Boisnier warily.

“Are you Mister Kennedy?”

“Who are you?”

“I am driver, we go to Olympia.”

“Very nice,” said Boisnier, “let’s go then!”

They quickly crossed the square and as they climbed into the car, Kennedy realised that perhaps when the car had been new – a considerable number of years before - it could have been green.

“Is this a Moskowitz?” Boisnier asked the driver.

“What you say?”

“A Moskowitz.”

“No, we go to Olympia.”

“Don’t confuse him for Christ’s sake,” Kennedy told Boisnier speaking quickly just in case the driver would understand, “he’s just the bleedin driver.”

Five minutes later they pulled up in front of the Olympia Hotel, a monstrous twenty-five story megalithic block of bad taste, which had recently been built by the Finns to develop the newly independent republic’s tourist industry. The driver showed them into the lobby, where he quickly introduced a person whose name they did not catch and left.

“Mr Kennedy, my name is Geidar Aliev. I am a friend of Demirshian, even though he is an Armenian,” he said with a broad smile, “we shall take my car to meet him, it is about ten kilometres from here, fifteen minutes, come!”

They followed him to the car park where he proudly showed them a new Volvo and climbed in. He drove somewhat recklessly towards a large avenue and headed eastward at great speed away from the old town of Tallinn. In the distance they recognised the skyline, it was the new town they had seen on the horizon from the Sally Anne as they had approached the port.

Twenty minutes later, amongst the soulless monuments to fifty years of planned

socialism, Aliev parked the Volvo, near to the litter-strewn entrance of a seventeen-story apartment block.

“I’m sorry the lift is not working, but we are lucky we only have seven floors to Demirshian’s.”

They arrived panting heavily in front of a flaking blue door on the seventh floor. Aliev knocked several times in what appeared to be a code. Kennedy looked at Boisnier who lifted his eyebrows nervously at the melodramatic procedure.

The door open slightly and they were inspected by an overweight woman of Russian appearance. She made a sign to Aliev and they were ushered into the apartment and were shown to a living room. It was clean and well furnished, though it had a rather plastic kitsch appearance, brightly coloured icons decorated the walls. They were left alone two minutes before Aliev returned with two men he introduced as Demirshian and Lauristin.

“So Mr Boisnier, you have kept your rendezvous, we like people who keep their word,” said Demirshian, a thickset swarthy man of about forty.

He wore a fixed smile that Kennedy, who stood just behind Boisnier, was not too sure whether it was threatening or not.

“Naturally we kept our word,” Boisnier returned forcing a nervous smile.

“I am pleased,” Demirshian returned.

This time, Kennedy who listened in silence was sure that there was a hint of threat, his stomach suddenly feeling slightly queasy.

“What can we offer you to drink...vodka?” Lauristin the Estonian asked relaxing the atmosphere, “or beer?” he added as an after thought.

“A beer would be very nice,” said Boisnier hurriedly whilst Kennedy made an effort to appear relaxed, wondering what the hell Ortega’s idea was to have sent him there anyway.

That’s what you get for playing around with foreign crooks, who looked like the cutthroat Chechens he had seen on the hotel TV in Moscow, he thought to himself grimly.

Lauristin instructed the woman in Russian to bring in the drinks. Kennedy tried to weigh up the situation, there were in a nondescript apartment in a suburb of Tallinn, with members of what was certainly the Russian Mafiya, about to transact an illegal currency deal, handing over three million Swedish Kronas against a large quantity of one hundred dollar bills, C-notes as Eriksson liked to call them.

Good-for-I-don’t-know-how-many-years-in-prison, if we don’t get our throats cut, he reflected to himself helplessly.

The Russian women reappeared with a tray of drinks that she set on the dining table, which was covered with a plastic lace tablecloth. Lauristin poured the drinks whilst Demirshian looked on silently.

“So let us drink to good business,” he said with a fierce smile. He then stopped and fixed them with his dark eyes, “You do have the money don’t you?” Before either of them could answer he laughed, “Yes of course, you wouldn’t be here otherwise, would you!”

They lifted their glasses and gulped their beers nervously.

Demirshian made a sign to Lauristin who left the room and returned some moments later carrying a khaki kit bag that he placed on the floor with a dramatic flourish.

“Our money!”

“Five million!” added Demirshian with a crooked smile, leaning forward he tugged at the cords on neck of the kit bag. He pulled out a box of chocolates and opened it; it contained a packet about the size of a thick paperback book, wrapped tightly with newspaper. He waved it at them then he tore one edge open. They just had time to see the green bills, then he tossed the chocolate box to Boisnier.

“Please check!” he said waving at them in an offhand manner.

Boisnier handed the box to Kennedy, who opened it carefully on the table, inspected the bundles of new 100\$ Super Notes wrapped in what appeared to be a US Federal Reserve wrapper, and then extracted a single bill. He then pulled out his wallet and took out a new one hundred dollar bill, which he laid on the table alongside the other. They had to be careful. Boisnier had told Kennedy that a lot of forgeries were around.

He inspected them both carefully, remembering what he had been told to look for. The bills were crisp, slightly rough in the heavily printed areas, but not limp, shiny or waxy. Then with a small magnifying glass he took from his pocket, he compared the bills in detail for a long moment, the printing was sharp and well defined, the water mark was hardly noticeable until he held it up to the light and the hologram looked like the real thing.

“I’m not an expert, but I can say they look like the real thing,” he said laughing at his joke, finally leaning back with a look of admiration.

The others laughed louder, he was a little surprised they thought him so funny, perhaps that was the Russian sense of humour.

“Mr Kennedy we’re not amateurs, these bills are of a quality previously unknown in our country outside the currency printing division of the Central Bank,” said Demirshian with a smirk. “I would also like to remind you that we are partners, in case you have forgotten.”

The penny slowly dropped. Kennedy understood. The notes that he was looking at were forged, counterfeit currency.

Holy Mother of feckin Jesus Christ! It was that fecker Eriksson’s fault, he and his Estonian tarts, who was compromising him with this crooked deal, Kennedy thought to himself, he quickly rationalised that it was not his affair, though he could not push the idea from his mind that he had already become dangerously over-involved in a game which seemed to be going very seriously beyond simple amusement.

One of Kennedy’s qualities was that in spite of everything he had a mind as quick as an Irish fox especially when it came to squirming out of a situation or turning it to his advantage, ideas flashed through his mind. Something would come up once he was out of this bandits dive, he told himself. In the meantime he clung to one of

his favourite adages 'in for a penny in for a pound', he could not resist thinking that if he could worm a profit out of the deal he would.

"So perhaps we should check the kronas!"

"No problem!" replied Boisnier. He unzipped his rucksack and pulled out a heavy, thick, brown manila package, though much less impressive in size than the Armenian's packet. The exchange rate was a mere fraction of the rate for real dollars.

"There you are, count them."

Demirshian nodded to Lauristin who opened the package, he flipped expertly flipped through the wads of one thousand krona bills.

"No problem."

"Excellent!" grinned Demirshian, looking pleased for the first time. He poured them a good shot of vodka, picked up his glass and lifted it in a toast.

"To our success...and our investment."

Kennedy and Boisnier lifted their glasses and drank, Kennedy choked on the vodka, but felt a great deal more relaxed as the throat-cutting scenario started to recede, and his stomach was warmed by the fiery spirit.

"Now let us talk a little about our other business, first our investment, and then a little favour - you have brought your boat tickets with you by the way?"

"Yesh," replied Kennedy hesitantly exchanging glances with Boisnier.

"Good, we'll come to that after, first our investment. As agreed with our good friend Stig, these kronas will be deposited at the Bottens Handelsbank branch here in Tallinn, he will use this money and our agreed share of the dollars, once they have been banked, to set up our investment in Cuba. When the procedure is run-in we shall deliver the rest at regular intervals."

They nodded.

"As I said the quality of our bills is absolutely impeccable. As you have certainly seen on CNN, our country is going through a grave economic crisis. Unfortunately the cost of living for the Gosbank's engravers and printers in Moscow has not kept pace with hyperinflation, which is bad for our 'ex-empire', as you say," he paused and then emptied his glass of vodka. "I say unfortunately - that is to say for some. We have been lucky, as certain specialists at the bank have decided to join the capitalist movement by printing their own money." He gave a hearty laugh grabbing the vodka bottle and refilling his glass.

"Our only problem is that there is so much counterfeit money in circulation, many milliards of dollars, which even our own high quality product is subject to much suspicion, it draws too much attention. Not only that, we also have to compete with 'dirty money'!" he laughed again, "from other businesses! But who cares, it's all in the family!"

Chapter 60. A Catalan

Gonzalo was a Spaniard, from Barcelona, and he always made a point of proudly proclaiming himself a Catalan. He had made his money the hard way, building up a civil engineering and construction company from nothing over a period of twenty years, starting with small profits that he reinvested, progressively building his team, investing in men and loyalty. Soon he had built a company with sales of more than 200 million dollars.

He was heavily built and tanned with a mass of white hair swept back in thick main, he had just celebrated his fifty fourth birthday. He was a friendly easygoing man who inspired confidence, his team did not achieve their success through stress but through a desire to be close to him and win his friendship.

Philippe Gonzalo's firm just concluded the deal as the main contractor for the Ciscap hotel club complex. His firm had established its reputation in the seventies and eighties, in the construction boom in Spain, building hotels and condominiums, in the tourist resorts along the country's Mediterranean coast and in the Canaries.

Philippe Gonzalo Construcione had built time-shares for Prestige in Tenerife and Las Palmas. PGC was competitive offering an attractive style and finish for the tight contract specifications that Prestige, imposed on its contractors. The Ciscap deal was to be their first major contract outside of Spain, there had been stiff competition from French contractors, but Gonzalo had made an exceptional effort, the recession in Spain had been long and hard, over construction and too much competition, he had seen it coming and had started to explore overseas markets. His previous contracts with Prestige had been modestly profitable. The high profits of the seventies and early eighties were gone forever as far as he was concerned, maybe it was time for him to get out, the excitement and pleasure had long since faded, he had more than once thought of selling his company and recently had discussions with a large French group wanting to enter into the closed Spanish construction market. This group was interested by the potential of the Latin American market, which could be more easily developed from Spain, a member country of the European Union as was France.

It had been Isaac Stein, the architect, who had introduced Gonzalo to Maurice Campo, a director of Ortega's holding company in Monaco, which controlled the French construction contractor. Gonzalo was not sure of a quick conclusion, France had also gone through a severe crisis in the construction industry, perhaps they needed new markets, but he was unsure, he had spent his life concentrating on Spain, he was in spite of his position in business inexperienced in international affairs.

If the offer from the French was attractive, perhaps it would be the moment to sell, it was not a question of simply getting out, but having more time for his family and enjoying life whilst he still had good health. Gonzalo thought that Campo was a conchone but if he could help him to make a good deal then that was

fine, it was a question of price and timing, time was uncontrollable, it passed so quickly that he was beginning to lose track of the months and years not to mind the weeks.

Gonzalo's children were at university, he could hardly remember their schooling, his wife had looked after that whilst he had spent long hours at the office and in long meetings, in a haze of cigarette smoke and cognac, in hotel rooms in towns that finished by resembling each other to a point that he could barely distinguish one from the other.

He had not taken any real holidays for years, at least what could be called a holiday by his wife. There was just the occasional sailing weekend with his good friend, Isaac Stein. Gonzalo spent the little free time he had at his villa on Majorca or his weekend home to the north of Barcelona at Palamos, but his weekends were more often than not invaded by guests who always seemed to be business linked, then there were the never ending telephone calls, urgent business, even on their boat the phone never stopped ringing.

That weekend in Havana he had left the discussions to care of his staff and he had isolated himself at his beach hotel to try to relax and reflect with a clear mind on his future.

As he sat by the pool amongst the plants and flowers of the gardens watching the tiny yellow and brown humming birds dart from flower to flower like large butterflies, he realised that the greater part of his life had gone and he counted the time that remained, it was time to enjoy the few years of good health that he hoped lay before him. He decided there and then that it was the moment to sell, the offer he had from Campo's investor was too good to turn down!

Ortega's holding would not only pay a handsome price in cash, no credit, no financing arrangements, and in addition they would also take over all the debts. Half would be paid in Antigua, the half other in Spain. That way he would avoid the crippling taxes and have more than enough to ensure a good life for his children and grandchildren.

For Ortega it was a simple thing to buy Philippe Gonzalo, he had seen many men like him who lacked the courage to take what they wanted in life. Ortega could offer himself anything that money could buy, money was the thing that he possessed as much of as he could ever possibly need, and much more.

He lived to fulfil his insatiable and unrelenting desire to accumulate wealth and power. Half of his life had been consumed by Cuba, the island had become an obsession, and the idea of rebuilding it was on the scale of his ambitions.

Gonzalo's construction company was a mere instrument amongst others needed to fulfil his plans, as were its contracts with Ciscap.

Chapter 61. Two Friends

We now come to the second business!” he said dismissing abruptly his explanations and forcing a smile. “We have two friends who will join you for the return trip, Iris and Marietta!”

Kennedy threw a surprised glance at Boisnier who plunged his hand into his pocket and pulled out his cigarettes.

“They will be going to Finland with you.”

“To Finland!” Kennedy gulped, praying silently, Mother of Holy God help us!

“Yes, Finland, my dear Mister Kennedy. You do have two extra boarding passes?”

Shit! Shit! Like a couple of newly feckin born lambs. Kennedy groaned to himself. These fellas are worse than the IRA.

“Yes, that’s right, we do have a couple of spare boarding passes,” he finally squeaked out.

“Good, I knew we could rely on Stig to get things organised correctly,”

Demirshian smiled broadly, pleased at the dismay his little surprise had caused.

That bastard Erikkson, I’ll have his feckin balls, first smuggling forged banknotes and now feckin tarts, Kennedy fumed to himself.

Demirshian called out in Russian and the heavy woman appeared again. He snapped out an instruction and they heard the apartment door close as she left.

“Don’t worry my friend, they are nice girls, pretty!” He winked at Kennedy. “They will cause you no problems.”

Five minutes latter they heard the door of the apartment open and the woman appeared followed by two attractive girls in their mid-twenties. They were of the Finnish type, blond hair, blue eyes and fair skins. They were dressed as typical young Finnish tourists, clean and simple in Levi jeans and Benetton T-shirts, each of the girls carrying a small knapsack in her hands.

“So, come in, don’t be shy!” Said Demirshian, and then turning to Kennedy and Boisnier he added, “Let me introduce you to Iris and Marietta.”

The girls smiled holding out the hands as the introductions were formalised.

“They will carry our ‘papers’ and board the boat separately. Then they will then join you in your cabins, what are the cabin numbers?”

Kennedy was not sure whether he was relieved or not as he examined the girls. Lauristin quickly slipped the chocolate boxes containing the bundles of dollars into Silja Lines duty free plastic shopping bags, and then he packed them into the girl’s knapsacks.

“You,” he pointed to Kennedy, “will take the money ashore in Helsinki, they don’t trouble genuine tourists there!” he added.

Then looking at his watch he said, “I think it’s time you should be on your way, we shall meet again in Antigua!” He stood up and held out his hand. “Bon voyage.”

“Thank you, see you in Antigua,” replied Kennedy whilst thinking, not if I can help it.

Geidar Aliev drove them together with the two girls to a corner of the square nearby the Post and Telegraph office. The four of them got out of the car and walked in the direction of the buses, waiting in line for the return of the day-trippers.

“Look for bus number thirteen,” Kennedy said to Iris who seemed the livelier of the two.

A number placed on the front windscreen identified each bus; number thirteen had brought them from the Sally Anne. It was easier said than done, the Finnish tourists were punctual, even early, and were already piling into the first available bus, encouraged by the tour guides who wanted them back on board as quickly as possible, avoiding unnecessary delays in the departure of the boat.

“Just get on the first one you can,” said Kennedy nodding them to push ahead. The girls climbed into the first waiting bus, the guide then barred the way, the bus was full, indicating to Kennedy and Boisnier to take the following bus.

Ten minutes latter the bus pulled up alongside the quay on which the Sally Anne was docked and they were soon up the gangway pushed by anxious Finns behind them, apparently afraid of being abandoned in Estonia. They had no time to worry and were hurried past the Estonian controllers who collected their boarding passes without a glance.

There was no sign of the girls, there was a crowd packed around the lifts, so they hurried down the stairs to fourth deck where the girls were waiting nonchalantly, examining their makeup in the large mirrors that decorated the lift lobby.

“Hello there, every OK?”

“Fine, fine,” said Iris, “let’s go to the cabins.”

The two girls followed them to the nearest cabin, which was Boisnier’s, and they went in. They dropped the knapsacks on the floor and sat on the couch looking around at the cabin.

“Very nice,” said Iris. She spoke an excellent English.

“It’s the first time you’ve left Estonia?” asked Kennedy.

“No I’ve been to Leningrad and Moscow,” replied Iris, “but it’s the first time I’ve been to the West.”

“You know Stig Eriksson then?”

“Not really, I’ve met him, he’s Marietta’s friend.”

“I see.”

“So where’s the other cabin?”

“Next door.”

“We’ll take that then,” Iris said making a sign to Marietta. They both jumped up and she held out her hand for the key.

“Thierry will go with you to make sure everything is OK.”

Chapter 62. Back in Civilisation

The return trip to Helsinki was direct taking only two hours and on arrival they disembarked without the least formality. Eriksson's assistant Björn Naseman, who had already collected the two girls, met them at the exit from the ferry terminal. He dropped Kennedy and Boisnier off at the Vakuuna Hotel, which faced the central railway station, where they were booked for the night. As Boisnier stood at the hotel entrance, the bags on the pavement, he observed the coming and going in the large square and could not help thinking that the strange station looked almost Hitlerian with its massive architecture.

"I will pick you up for dinner at eight - you like jazz, don't you?" Naseman turned and was gone with the two girls before either of them could reply.

After checking-in and they took the lift to their rooms on the sixth floor a little puzzled as to the next step.

"What now?"

"Feck knows!" replied Kennedy.

"Too bad for the Estonians...they were nice."

"You're just getting horny."

"What about that?" said Boisnier pointing to the knapsacks.

"We can't just leave that in our rooms whilst we're out for dinner. I don't trust anybody, if we loose it those bastards will cut our throats."

"Look we'll stick them in one of the suitcases and leave it locked in the left luggage downstairs, the hotel staff here is honest, Okay?"

"Good idea! We'll do it right away."

It was eight o'clock when Naseman accompanied by the two girls, who had dressed themselves up in what were unmistakably new outfits, picked them up. He drove them to a jazz club called 'The Village', behind the Parliament building, not more than three or four minutes from the hotel by car. They went down to the club in the basement where he paid the entry fee and then took a table in a corner, as far as possible from the musicians.

"You like Salsa, they're playing Salsa tonight, Finnish version!"

The two girls were excited by their new surroundings, now looking even more attractive in their new clothes and makeup, stimulated Kennedy and Boisnier.

"Well before we get on with enjoying our evening, let's get a couple of business items out of the way," said Björn Naseman.

"What's the deal then Björn," said Kennedy superciliously.

It went over Naseman's head; he was too thick in Kennedy's opinion to see himself. He was tall, somewhat over-weight, and a moustachioed poofter to make things worse. That's how he got ahead in Sweden, Kennedy thought to himself. That's why that fecker Gable likes the little bastard.

"Tomorrow morning we will drive to Pori. That's about three hours from

Helsinki by road. In Pori I've booked an air taxi, which will fly us to Sundsvall. There's a lot of passenger traffic between Pori and Sundsvall, I mean for this part of the world, you know paper machinery engineering companies."

"What time do we leave?"

"Early, six, it's best like that. There are practically no formalities, and as we do a lot of business with those engineering companies there's nothing unusual, a piece of cake."

"That's fine with us," replied Kennedy looking at Boisnier.

"I've fixed the girls up with Finnish passports, so there'll be no problems. As for the special goods you're transporting, pack them in your suitcase, there'll be no checks, just act normally and there'll be no difficulties, okay!"

"Okay."

"So let's enjoy ourselves."

The jazz club served Mexican food, or at least the Finnish version. The music started an hour later, a nine piece Salsa band, it was without any doubt a local version, ear splitting, without rhythm and monotonous. Kennedy was about to tell Boisnier that he had enough when Boisnier grabbed Marietta and left for the small dance floor. There was no other alternative by to do the same with Iris.

The rhythm was Finnish, but Iris was Estonian and had dreamt of this moment, enjoying the pleasures of the West. She put all that was missing into the rhythm and when the music slowed she pressed her body against Kennedy, who represented the excitement she had been anticipating. This was a man who had money and influence in the West, he could bring her to that tropical island that her father had talked about, the name of which she could not even pronounce. Her father and Demirshian had instructed her to carefully follow the example of Eriksson's friends. Eriksson was to them a model of those businessmen who had succeeded in the West.

Iris' father, Landseberg, had been an apparatchik in the ex-Soviet intelligence system, he had adroitly moved over to the independence movement at the right moment, keeping friends with all those who could be useful, both in and out of power, nevertheless times were difficult, only hard currencies were of any real long term value. It would be a long up hill climb to consolidate his position in the newly developing capitalistic society, for that he needed money, and a lot of it.

He had been introduced to Eriksson by Anders Johansson, a Swedish businessman, when a Swedish investment group visited Tallinn, and had immediately seen how the Swedish banker could serve his needs. He had known Johansson for some time, he travelled frequently to Estonia where he had fallen under the charm of one of his daughter's friends, Marietta.

Landseberg had taken advantage of Johansson's liking for Tallinn and his infatuation to introduce him to a friend, Demirshian, an ex-KGB man, who had strong connections to the Russian and Chechen Mafiya. Demirshian using subtle KGB methods had soon introduced Johansson to his friends in Bashkiristan, who

operated a large pharmaceutical plant, using him to channel funds from Estonia and Russia to Sweden.

The latest arrangement was another step to accelerate his enrichment and allow his daughter to enjoy some of the perks of his system, holidaying in the Caribbean on a Finnish passport acquired with freshly printed dollars. There was no point to attract unwanted attention by the lengthy visa procedures in Tallinn when they could take advantage of the EU passport. With Iris present she would be able to keep a watchful eye on Marietta and Eriksson.

Iris, a childhood friend of Marietta, had remained so even after Marietta's family had fallen from grace under the communists. Marietta's father had been interned in a psychiatric asylum by the regime, to cure his democratic and independentist deviation, and had returned a broken man after the communists had been ejected.

Though Marietta was a pretty girl she was perhaps more than a trifle naive, when she had met Johansson she had been encouraged by Landseberg who took advantage of her innocence. However there had been no way that Landseberg could detach his own daughter Iris from her friend Marietta and neither did he want to. Landseberg, who denied nothing to his daughter, had finally resigned himself to the fact that wherever Marietta went so would Iris. When Iris learned of Marietta's departure to Sweden and the Caribbean she needed no more than a few moments to decide that she would join her with her father's help.

Kennedy needed no encouragement as he danced close to her, holding her narrow waist he pulled her gently close to him, Iris offered no resistance. He could feel the softness of her hair and the warmth of her breasts pressed against him.

The music stopped and the leader of the Salsa band announced something that Kennedy could not understand in Finnish. A blast of the trumpets told him that it was time to return to their table as the band broke into a noisy version of 'Maria'. Iris took him by the hand tightly and guided him back to their table, she sat down still holding his hand and looked at him tenderly, directly into his eyes.

The next morning they left the hotel as planned at six in the taxi they had been booked by the travel agent, a luxurious minibus fitted out with red velvet upholstery, the passenger seating arranged in an 'L' shaped form, with a table, TV, bar and a supply of hot coffee in thermos flasks and Danish pastries. Iris took the seat next to Kennedy.

"How are we this morning then!" Said Naseman not expecting an answer as he took the thermos and poured coffee into the plastic cups he had set out on the table.

There was no reply. They had not drunk that much the previous evening but the night had been too short, the last two days had been exacting and had taken their toll in stress and fatigue. They just wanted to relax, but there was still another demanding day before them. Only when they had unloaded the money at the Handelsbank and were on the flight out of Stockholm could they really relax.

The drive to Pori was without incident; very little traffic just the monotony of flat endless pine covered landscape. The airport at Pori was tiny and there was no more

than a cursory glance at their passports before they walked out onto the tarmac and climbed aboard a twin engined Cessna. Less than thirty minutes after arriving at the airport they were already taxiing to the runway and shortly after were climbing to small plane's cruising altitude over the Baltic.

Naseman gave his usual self-satisfied smile and winked at Kennedy as if to say I told you so. The flight lasted just over an hour and they landed at Sundsvall airport on schedule. They picked up their bags from the conveyor and passed the passport control without the slightest sign of suspicion from the lone official. Naseman had been right; counterfeit currency smugglers did not use those small provincial airports.

Chapter 63. Johansson

They took the scheduled flight from Sundsvall to Stockholm and were in their rooms at the Sheraton Hotel in the city centre just after three in the afternoon. They quickly changed into business suits and ties, and then took a taxi to the Bottens Handelsbank head office where Eriksson received them.

"Welcome back to Stockholm," he beamed looking enquiringly at the brief case that Kennedy carried, "everything went well, Björn telephoned me from Sundsvall, in case you didn't know."

"Every was fine Stig, just fine. Perhaps I can hand this over to you now."

"No! No!" Eriksson lifted up his hands in worried surprise.

"My dear Pat this will go into the safe deposit box that we have reserved for you," he dropped his voice, "there's no way we can put that into an account just like that! It needs a little time and patience. We will provide you with a safe deposit box and Björn here will also have a signature and key."

"No problem, suits me, in any case it's not mine."

"Why not, you will have your share for your efforts. By the way where are the girls?"

"They're at the Sheraton, no problem," said Naseman.

"Good, let's get these formalities over, then you can relax, we shall be flying to Florida and Grand Cayman tomorrow. The flight leaves at midday. Tonight you are in Stockholm and are my guests."

Eriksson had booked a table at the Opera Restaurant. They were joined by Johansson who spared no expense to impress his girl friend Marietta and the other guests. The dinner was first-class accompanied by an excellent Chateau Margaut followed by Moet et Chandon Champagne, extravagantly expensive in Sweden, with wild strawberries and finishing with a vintage Armagnac.

Lifting his glass Eriksson proposed a toast to their success.

"To our project Pat...and welcome to Marietta and Iris."

They lifted their glasses, the girls eyes glowed with happiness and excitement. They were convinced Eriksson was a man of substance. Tomorrow Marietta would go to Upsala where Anders Johansson had arranged everything for her and Iris in preparation for their Caribbean holiday.

“Tell me Stig,” Kennedy lowered his voice, “I don’t want to spoil our dinner with difficult questions, but how will you be able to put the money into an account.”

“Don’t worry Pat, you worry too much you know. But I will answer your question. First, even the Bank of Sweden would have the greatest of difficulty in detecting anything unusual in those notes; they are of the highest quality. I think our friend Demirshian told you a little bit about their origin. It’s no exaggeration when I say they come from the Bank of Russia’s printing house.”

They then spent an hour in the discotheque in the Sheraton, whilst Johansson showed off to Marietta and Kennedy continued his flirtation with Iris.

Eriksson had at the outset been attracted by the excitement of dealing with high flying international businessmen and their deals, a relief from the boredom of his staid banking life, he considered his assistance simply as a favour to one of the bank’s customers. He had been introduced to Demirshian by a Johansson, a Swedish businessman, who had needed help in paying commissions for an industrial plant that his firm had sold to a large semi-state owned pharmaceutical company in the Russian Federal Republic of Bashkiristan. It was a relatively uncomplicated arrangement, setting up an account in a Tallinn bank and paying a couple of hundred thousand dollars into the account for the pharmaceutical company’s corrupt managing director.

Demirshian was pleased with the way Eriksson had handled the affair, smoothly without the slightest hitch or delay. He proposed extending the arrangement to other business transactions and little by little Eriksson was drawn into more complicated and crooked dealings, readily accepting money and the women he was offered in Tallinn.

The money was easy and he developed a fascination for the hard drinking men and their women who seemed to move in a world of their own with a total disregard for law and authority. He had earlier suspected their affiliations and his suspicions were slowly but surely confirmed. His new friends were members of the nebulous Russian Mafia.

He had become very friendly with Anders Johansson, who had originally introduced him to Demirshian. Johansson, a self made man and had spent his life building up his business, Pharmchem AB, a pharmaceutical and chemical engineering firm in Upsala, a town near Stockholm, his markets were entirely export oriented. During the cold war period business had thrived, but since the changes his business had struggled, going from bad to worse, strangled by the need for export licences controlled by the Swedish government, as most of his customer countries were outside of the Western club of nations, and the technology could be easily converted by specialists for the manufacture of chemical or biological

weapons.

Pharmchem could only survive through considerably kick-backs to government officials in their traditional Asian and South American markets for the sale of their more conventional plants, where unfortunately the Swedes were too high priced in comparison with their American or Japanese competitors.

Johansson saw a solution to his problems in cashing-in on Demirshian's need to transfer out of Russia the mass of dollars generated from the crime syndicates; money from drugs, prostitution, illegal arms trade and racketeering.

It was in effect money laundering in a complex system covered by the sale of highly priced, nebulous, Swedish engineering and consulting services to Russia and other countries of the ex-Soviet block. The Russians were invoiced for the use of patents, licences, engineering and consulting services, the monies were then paid to the Pharmchem account at the Bottens Handelsbank in Stockholm.

Then payments were made by Pharmchem to accounts in Luxembourg and Switzerland to companies owned by the Russians for pharmaceutical and chemical equipment designs supposedly delivered to Russia. It was easy as there was no transfer of goods, simply intellectual services and licences in the form of plans, specifications and processes for the cultivation of biological organisms, for which it was difficult to estimate their real value.

Only twenty or twenty-five percent of the funds remained in Sweden as overhead costs, the declared profits being just enough for the firm to remain respectable and continue its business.

Eriksson became Johansson's accomplice, facilitating all of the movements through the bank and anticipating any difficulties. After some hesitation he co-opted his assistant Björn Naseman into the system. Naseman joined him as a willing partner assisting him in his manipulations in return for greater freedom. Naseman had some unusual tastes but he was competent in his job. The extra money he earned enabled him to pay for his frequent snorts of coke and the special clubs where he met his strange friends. Eriksson, as his boss, opened the door for foreign travel, where Naseman could indulge in his taste for young men having the same sexual preferences as his own.

Demirshian, on the advice of Eriksson, used the laundered monies to invest in property in Estonia, Spain and the Caribbean enabling him and his associates to build a small and respectable property empire, out of reach of the predatory Russian authorities.

The funds received by the Swiss companies were transferred to a number of different offshore banks owned by the Russian Mafiya in Antigua and other small Caribbean countries.

Pharmchem also used its cut to settle payments to suppliers in third countries such as Singapore and Hongkong for goods and services supplied to Pharmchem in the form of assistance for the signature of contracts in Indonesia and the Philippines, where it was practice to pay large commissions to politicians and officials for their services.

These commissions represented considerable sums of money and up to twenty percent of the value of certain contracts, which were worth many millions of dollars; it was an unavoidable necessity to make such payments, without which business became impossible.

The idea had been good at the outset; Eriksson got his kicks from parading as an international wheeler-dealer banker. He then realised the dangers, slowly fixing in his mind a plan to transact just enough business to build a comfortable nest egg for an early retirement in the sun. What he had not counted on was the demand becoming so great and persistent bringing with it the need of much greater risks. It had become difficult to refuse the demands of Demirshian who threatened him with exposure and worse if he refused to provide his crooked services.

Not only that, but Johansson held him in a firm grip from the Swedish side, his business had picked up and was prospering thanks to Eriksson's help. As Johansson had gained experience in dealing with Demirshian, and began to understand the mechanism of the Russian's business he realised that there were huge profits to be made with relatively little risk. The only problem was that the weak-kneed Eriksson could upset their nice arrangement. It was a problem he would deal with when the time came.

Escape had become the only exit for Eriksson. Doudoune would help him; together they planned to enjoy a golden retirement in the far away sun and pleasures of Cuba. There remained just a few loose ends to be tied up before he could escape to his new life.

Chapter 64. The Promoters Meeting

Castlemain had called a meeting of the Ciscap promoters in Ireland. It was time to go public and increase the share capital substantially. It was two years since the project had been officially launched and the Cuban government had approved the overall plan. A concession for the development and exploitation of the site had been granted for fifty years. Land clearing was well advanced and most important the construction of the first phase was progressing nicely.

It was time to report to the promoters on progress and seek new investors and franchisers for the second phase. Castlemain planned to present to the existing shareholders his proposals for increasing the capital of Ciscap to £100 million with half being offered in options to the existing shareholders and the other half being raised on the market.

With such a capitalisation they had the lever to raise loans of three or more times the capital. That would enable them to complete Phase I and launch Phase II for the new city.

The promoters were not all shareholders. There was the National Investment Board, which had provided the means for the Irish founders to create Ciscap. There were the Cubans who had ceded a fifty-year concession against future rents, they also had the power of veto, which enabled them to have a say in all decisions, even though it was the shareholders who risked their capital in the venture.

The principal risk with Ciscap for the foreign investors was that it was located in Cuba, and a semi-private project, which was a contradiction in itself. This meant that there were no guarantees from the Cuban government, whose worth would in any case have been doubtful. The real estate and businesses could not be offered as securities, as the existing Cuban legislation did not foresee such contingencies, since up until the first timid legislative changes everything had belonged to the state, as in all communist countries.

The result was that the whole risk was borne by the shareholders, however, that was not sufficient to deter the investors who followed the lead of the many foreign groups who had already successfully invested in the tourist industry in Cuba on sites such as Varedero. Ciscap was however another story, in that it was a whole new town, created by a single consortium, together with its tourist installations and all the needs of a complete new city and its inhabitants, both foreign and local.

Cuban politics were the focal point, both for the existing and future investors. The same questions were endlessly discussed; what did Castro think, how old was he, who would replace him, when would the American embargo be lifted?

To Arrowsmith it was a miracle that they had got so far, but he kept that thought to himself, he was enjoying the project like he had never before enjoyed such a challenge.

Castlemain had blind faith, he was almost fanatical in his vision, he had a dream and wanted to go down in history with a city named after him in the Caribbean. He already saw his name on the map of Cuba, he savoured the sound of the name Ciudad Castlemain, it was a good name for a city he thought.

The promoters' meeting took place in a castle at Newmarket-on-Fergus, County Clare, an easy thirteen miles from Shannon Airport.

The 16th century castle was set in a magnificent wooded estate with lakes and complete with an 18-hole golf course.

Castlemain had reserved the best suites for his most important guests who included the Cubans, Arrowsmith and Brel. Unfortunately there was also Kennedy, whom he could not overlook and for whom the banker's secretary had reserved a somewhat less comfortable suite with a view on the car park.

There were also the banks; Eriksson from Bottens Handelsbank, and Gresinski who represented the BNC, not forgetting the National Investment Board, without whom the whole process would have been impossible.

He had also invited Sean Kavanagh, who represented one of his more brilliant investments. He was an outstanding business personality in the public eye, who would participate in the media coverage of the event and the presentation session

for new investors, his rise to fame and his vast fortune would almost certainly encourage other investors. In total there were thirty odd people including the architect Isaac Stein and the franchisers, not forgetting a couple of selected press representatives with the BNC public relations manager from Paris, Daniel de Forsta.

The climax would be a public presentation and a gala dinner with the Mayor of Limerick and the Minister of Development from Dublin.

It was a high mass, designed to bestow a blessing on the project and consecration of the construction work on the site which was showing visible progress, thus encouraging the continued assistance of the project's investors and backers.

Sean Kavanagh, who was neither a golfer, a drinker, nor an enthusiast for that kind of get-together, was nevertheless present, his main interest was to keep Castlemain happy. He was not acquainted with the majority of those present, with the exception of Castlemain and Kennedy, nor was he particularly interested in Cuba, a country of which he knew almost nothing. To avoid being alone in the Irish countryside he press-ganged his partners Jim Carmichael and Phil Moftan into joining the weekend, both of whom enjoyed a good round of golf.

Kennedy found Castlemain in the main meeting room giving final instructions to the staff who were setting up the projectors and writing boards for the presentations.

"So Pat how is life?" Castlemain asked Kennedy.

"Fine, I think I have an interesting investor for the project."

"Is that so?" said Castlemain raising his eyebrows in mock disbelief.

In spite of the fact that Pat Kennedy had introduced two of Castlemain's star players, he was held in low esteem by the autocratic banker. He did not see Kennedy as one of his caste but rather as a one of Ireland's working-class farmers, and what even worse a distasteful arriviste. It did not prevent Castlemain from using his talents though he did not like to encourage the impression of familiarity.

"Yesh, he's a South American."

"A South American! Good for you Pat!" he looked at his papers cutting off the conversation.

Kennedy was not to be put off and tried another gambit.

"How do you think the dollar is going to move?"

"The dollar?"

"Yesh, the exchange rate against the Euro."

"My goodness Pat," he paused with a look of surprise at such a question, "well...first if I knew I wouldn't be wasting my time here....and secondly I wouldn't let on to you!"

Kennedy gave up and wandered off, his chin in the air to seek more congenial company. He would keep Ortega to himself, he would represent him as a private investor using Ortega's money to purchase his own options for the new share issue.

In the lobby he grabbed Arrowsmith and introduced him to Kavanagh, hijacking them both to the bar.

“This is Sean Kavanagh. You know Swap!” he said to Arrowsmith who looked puzzled.

“Swap, the Internet company,” Kennedy told him surprised that he did not instantly recognise Kavanagh.

“Oh yes, I sorry. You’ve done rather well on the stock exchange,” he smiled.

“Not too badly,” replied Kavanagh politely, “you’ve not done too badly yourself!”

“I’ve been lucky. Do you know Cuba?”

“I’m sorry to say nothing except for ‘Cuba Libras’,” he tried jokingly.

“Well you have to come by and see our project. It’s a wonderful country, beaches and palm trees. . . .not to mention the cigars and the women,” he smiled knowingly.

Nothing was furthest from Kavanagh’s mind than visiting Cuba. He was not a great traveller, though somehow he had always seen himself in his imagination in Miami as one of the Jet Set, well known to a few selected friends, rubbing shoulders with the famous, enjoying discrete luxury and celebrity. He preferred chic blondes; he was not interested by the dark skinned exotic West Indian women he pictured in Cuba.

Chapter 65. A Happy Interlude

They swam in the clear waters of the coral sea, he could feel her body swimming against him, nudging him, they were like a pair of dolphins, moving with a natural unconscious closeness. Just below them were a multitude of coral formations of all shapes and colours, small shoals of fish weaving through the clear waters, damsel fish darted in and out of pink anemones as yellow butterfly fish and squirrel fish patrolled their territories in swift passes to ward off intruders. The sea pulled gently on them as they swam around the outcropping of rocks at the point of the small bay. She pointed down to the left and right drawing his attention to the slug like sea cucumbers and the starfish.

The rattle of the water in his snorkel and his forced breathing were the only noises he heard as he swam in the suspended underwater world. They slowly turned back towards the beach swimming with lazy movements until their bodies touched the sand. Rising out of the water they glistened like strange amphibians still wearing their masks and snorkels, their bodies reflected the fierce sunlight.

They walked slowly up the beach towards the house, the minute sand crabs darted away disappearing in their holes in the blink of an eyelid as they approached.

On the boarded veranda they took the towels draped over the wooden rail to dry off the salt water that prickled on their skins. Her blond hair darkened by the water clung to her head as she smiled at him in unspoken pleasure. Arrowsmith had not known such a profound feeling of happiness for a very long time and marvelled at

the suddenness and unexpectedness of their meeting.

The sun was sinking quickly behind the horizon and the cacophony of the crickets and frogs had started. Olga slipped her arm around his waist and kissed him lightly on the cheek. He glanced at his watch hoping that time would stop and feeling a queasiness inside knowing that the moment would remain in his thoughts long after. The irreversible countdown to separation advanced inexorably, just two more short days.

Arrowsmith had overstayed his visit in St Martin and there was pressing business awaiting him in Dublin. He was confused by what had happened, it was like being hit by a bus, the shock of unexplainable force with unforeseeable consequences.

They took the helicopter service that ran from Grande Case to Juliana Airport where he left a tearful Olga at the passport control.

She was as confused as he, she had always imagined she would be capable of controlling the development of her relations with the man she had sought, but this was different she was devastated by his departure.

Chapter 66. Le Pays Basque

He collected his baggage from the last Madrid flight of the afternoon and quickly left the small airport. It was another of the local bank holidays, one of those innumerable Spanish fiestas. The last taxi had left and only the airport bus remained which he took to the centre of Bilbao, there he found another connection to San Sebastian about 100 kilometres away to the north through the low mountains of the Basque country that ran up to the French border. The road was good, a modern toll highway twisting and turning as it rose and fell between the steep pine covered hills, passing compact towns and villages that sprouted endless high-rise apartment blocks in ochre brick.

After ninety minutes they arrived in San Sebastian, Donestia, where Arrowsmith walked to the small regional transit railway station and from a call box telephoned to Hendaye. Everything was in order. He then took the next commuter train that seemed to stop every couple of hundred metres until it crossed the Bidassoa and terminated its journey at the French border town of Hendaye Ville some thirty five minutes later. He followed the small crowd and filed past the abandoned passport control post.

He entered the hall of the main railway station and looked at his watch, it was just after five fifteen, de Montfort should have been there at five, he looked around and then walked out to the car park; there was no sign of him.

It was raining and windy, weather not untypical of the Basque country that was open to the unpredictable Atlantic weather. Perhaps he had had difficulties with the traffic, though his villa was just ten minutes away it was the eve of a holiday

weekend. He watched through the glass doors observing the coming and going of cars and taxis. Finally a large silver Renault pulled into the parking area, it was Xavier de Montfort. Arrowsmith saw him, made a sign and walked out to and climbed into the car.

They shook hands. "Everything okay?"

"Sure, no problem."

"Good."

They made their way through the small town centre and in ten minutes they were in de Montfort's large villa. It was called Mendi Txiki which meant small mountain in Basque. A Spanish nobleman had built it in the early part of the century; evidently from its size and gardens it had been a period when domestic help was abundant and inexpensive. The villa was in local stone with wood balconies and shutters in a dark red, one of the three favoured colours of the Basque country. It overlooked the Baie de Chingudy facing the cathedral of Fuentarrabia.

He had seen that de Montfort was agitated and once inside the villa he could barely hold back his words as Arrowsmith looked irritably at the holdall that de Montfort placed on a low table.

"It's all here, Irish pounds," said de Montfort with an air of embarrassed relief.

Arrowsmith unzipped the holdall and opened one of the manila envelopes.

"Irish pounds!"

"Yeah, why? Is that a problem?"

"Yes, er, no, I mean it's not very bloody discrete, if you see what I mean."

"There was no other choice."

"Well who wants fuckin Irish pounds, the Cubans don't even know what they are!"

"That's the way it is, you can change them!"

"You're fuckin joking, can you see me walking into the exchange office with one million bloody punts!" he said losing his calm.

Arrowsmith stared at the holdall and sighed then calmed down, there was no point in getting worked up, and in any there was little he could do about it.

"Okay, it's the amount we agreed?"

"Right, the equivalent to ten million Francs, in one hundred punt notes."

"Good, on Monday I'm leaving for London and then to Paris where I'll meet the Cubans. Then we'll all meet in Zurich on Friday, the money will be handed over to them as agreed."

"Isn't it a bit complicated?"

"I'll bloody well say it is, fucking Irish pounds, and I suppose there's no trace back to Dublin? Which is what we wanted n'est pas!"

De Montfort bowed his head, it was not his fault but he was taking the cane. It was all the fault of that stupid bastard Kennedy who had not thought to inform the bank that the cash should be in pounds sterling.

Xavier de Monfort, originally from Bordeaux, a large powerful man, he wore a

close cut beard, and usually displayed a ready and sincere smile. He was normally of a jovial nature, full of information about his adopted country, Euskal Herria, or the Basque Country. He loved to parade as a Basque playing pala in the trinket courts around the local countryside where pala and the other traditional racket ball games were played. He spoke a smattering of Basque enough to impress his visitors and told endless stories of the mountainous region of the Pyrenees and its hardy Basque inhabitants.

Arrowsmith nodded, to make matters worse he was not at all happy about going through Heathrow, with its maniacal controls, it was typical of the Brits, he thought, they always reacted after the horse had bolted, they had never seemed to stop the IRA or others exploding their murderous bombs when and where they wanted.

“Listen, on second thoughts you bring it to Zurich. There’s no way I can go through London with that. I am meeting the Cubans in Paris and I can’t drag that around Europe!”

“That’s not what was really foreseen!”

“I’m sorry if you can’t agree then I’ll have to speak with Castlemain. Do it! I’ll see you’re looked after.”

“Okay! Okay!” replied de Montfort only mildly cheered up by the prospect of getting something extra for his troubles, at the same time apprehensive by the prospect of going to Switzerland with the money, it was not the Swiss, they did not object to money coming into the country and discretely avoided asking questions, it was the French who could make a problem, a big problem, if there was a border check.

Castlemain could have sent the money by inter-bank transfer through the bank with no difficulties, but he insisted on remaining invisible in such deals, corruption of government officials was not exactly good banking practice.

Arrowsmith had no choice...part of the money was his.

“What shall we do for dinner?”

“Up to you, is it safe leaving the money here?”

“No problem, I’ll put it in the safe, then we’ll go to the Trinket and have a drink, it’s a bit early, after we can eat.”

They left the house and drove to the Trinquet, a local restaurant and bar well known for its pala courts. They knew the local crowd there, it was a good idea, it was a bit too chilly for the time of the year to eat outside.

“By the way, I almost forgot, we’re invited for an after dinner drink with Max Argand on his boat,” he informed Arrowsmith.

Because of the parking problem de Montfort was forced to leave his car a good ten minutes walk away on one of the side streets leading off the Baie de Chingudy. They strolled along to the Marina where the ‘Tomahawk’ was berthed, it would not be difficult to find, it was by far the biggest in the marina, at berth B08 according to Argand. The ‘Tomahawk’ was thirty metres long and five and a half wide at the

stern.

To the south the mountain Les Trois Couronnes dominated the view and to the west the Jaizkebel watched over the Spanish town of Fuentarrabia. The Alcazar and the sixteenth century church across the Bidassoa River were just behind the masts of the sailing boats moored in the marina. The evening crowd was much more dense than usual drawn by the boat show that occupied what was normally a large public car park at Sokoburu.

Chapter 67. Thalasso

Max Argand owned a fine home not far from Hendaye, close to the village of Urrugne in Basque Country of France, it was a small mid-eighteenth century château that he had renovated with the help of Isaac Stein, transforming it into a stylish residence with all the comforts of the nouveaux riches, with nine guest rooms for his friends, a gymnasium and jogging course in the woods on his land that surrounded the house.

“You understand John my friends need discretion, they come down here to relax, here they have everything they need, the pool, the sauna. If they get tired of that they can take out the boat in the marina at Blanco’s.”

Serge Blanco’s was a luxury health resort hotel at Hendaye Beach facing Fuentarrabia on the Spanish side. The locals called it the ‘Thalasso’. It was a fashionable health centre for the wealthy, it naturally dispensed thalassotherapy to those who afford it, or could convince their doctor that the French National Health service would look after the bill, curiously there never seemed to be many needy or seriously ailing clients taking advantage of the massages and mud baths.

Moored in the marina was Argand’s extravagant ocean going motor yacht, sailing was not his thing, it was far too slow and required too much effort. The Tomahawk had been built a French yard; it was a Guy Gouach 3000, a magnificent boat, 30 metres long with three decks and capable of a speed of 32 knots. With a capacity of 18,000 litres of fuel it could cross the Atlantic from the Canaries to the Caribbean without the slightest difficulty in three days.

It was justified as a professional accessory for Argand’s television shows, to entertain his guests, the stars and celebrities who appeared each week in his spectacular presentations.

Argand’s television producer was also his close friend, Marc Gable, who produced and presented Argand’s fortnightly sports show on European and American pay television. They enjoyed a huge success sponsoring top-level international sports meetings around the world, excerpts of the best events were screened every Friday evening on their TV show ‘World Sports Report’. However they owed their success to a new and original formula that they had developed.

They covered not only all top sports but devoted half of their show to the glamorous lives and loves of the star players, attracting a large female audience.

Argand had made a fabulous amount of money in the space of five years and had become an internationally known figure in the world of sports. He had cleverly reinvested his money in hotels and restaurants guided by the recommendations of his friend and financial advisor Xavier de Montfort.

It had been in Guadeloupe, where Argand had sponsored a world boxing championship meeting, he had met Courtauld. Courtauld had tried to sell Argand the idea of participating in the new hotel club complex to be built at Gosier, encouraged by de Montfort. They struck up a friendship motivated mutual interest and Courtauld, a sports fan, jointly sponsored a return match, which was a financial success and a first class promotional operation for Caribbean Property Development and Prestige Hotels.

Argand's motor yacht was based in Europe during the summer months and in the Caribbean during the winter. At the beginning of May he had decided on a few days rest aboard the yacht, joining it in Saint Martin for the crossing to Las Palmas, before it continued its crossing with a stop over in Mohamedia, Morocco, and finally Palma de Mallorca.

The Tomahawk could comfortably sleep eight guests in four cabins, while Argand had a suite that covered the full width of the boat, reached by a lift from the main deck. For the Atlantic run his crew was six and the crossing from Saint Martin they would need eight days including the stops.

Stein was to join them for the run from Point-à-Pitre, as well as Gable who liked to vaunt his skills as a sportsman, though there was not so much sport on such a motor yacht except in its small gym, boredom was more the rule for such trips aboard the Tomahawk, especially when the weather got rough, ruining appetites, drinking and card playing sessions.

Arrowsmith had no intention of making the trip with Argand, eight days on a motor cruiser was much too long to support in their hollow company, too closed in, too tiring, with the constant drone of its motors and air-conditioning and the endless movement. The crossing was by no means guaranteed calm and the vast open stretch of water was too much for his very limited seamanship.

Gable had other plans for the Tomahawk in the marina at Gosier. Their business required vast amounts of money to set up the sports meetings to maintain his prime time slots, to cultivate the stars, and maintain the jet-set image.

The celebrations and parties went on night after night in the marina or at anchor in the bay. The coming and going of the motor launches during the day with food, drink and personnel, and during the night with guests and TV crews.

Under the cover of the almost constant arrivals and departures another cargo was loaded onto the boat, pure cocaine, almost two tons.

The TV and sports stars, the minor celebrities and hangers on that drank Champagne and paraded themselves before the cameras on the deck of his boat knew little of the cargo that was hidden in the false bulkheads below the decks,

neither did they care, they were too full of themselves, their fixed smiles that had made their dentists rich, their empty conversation. They also were the clients of the dealers, sniffing cocaine at one hundred dollars a gramme.

The girls with their silicon tits and silicon lips, the men with their hair implants and face lifts. The noise of the music was so loud that their conversations were limited to sentences of three or four words. The majority of the men were interested by the men and the women by the women.

When the week long party finally came to an end, the Tomahawk departed from Gosier, after a flurry of goodbyes from the local celebrities, officials and organisers not forgetting the television reporters, for its long trip back to Europe via St Martin and the Canary Islands.

Gable disembarked at Las Palmas leaving the final run to Palma de Mallorca to his crew. He returned to Madrid and San Sebastian by air where he awaited news of the successful delivery of the goods.

Marc Gable had sensed that there was a killing to be made in the stockmarket. The Nasdaq was forging ahead each day in leaps and bounds in Hi-Tech share trading. He was a man who was persistently unsatisfied by his lot in life; in spite of the wealth he had accumulated in showbiz he felt it was not enough. He had instructed his broker to invest in hot shares that were riding high in the economic boom.

To his satisfaction his worth increased daily and he boasted that he would soon be a dollar billionaire. He invested profits and future profits of Argand's company, Argand Productions Inc., in shares and borrowed heavily against their market value from the company's American bankers.

When the crash came Argand Productions was deep in debt, owing over one hundred and fifty million dollars to the banks.

Running cocaine on the Tomahawk into the Canaries and Mallorca, was his only hope of staving off financial collapse, each trip was worth tens of millions of dollars. With his links to the Miami Mafiya he could deliver up to two tonnes of cocaine on each trip to Europe aboard the Tomahawk. The cargo had a market value of over two hundred million dollars.

The Tomahawk carried nineteen tons of fuel and ten tonnes of water. A small reduction in the fuel and water requirement by one or two stops left more than enough capacity for their cargo. In any case a couple of extra tonnes were no problem for the Tomahawk. The displacement of the motor cruiser over one hundred and twenty tonnes, the cargo changed practically nothing to her water line.

Gable was an international celebrity known for his success and wealth and his arrival in Marbella or Mallorca simply attracted his fans and the media, but never any possible suspicion as to his illegal activities.

Chapter 68. Bowled Over!

The first time Arrowsmith saw her she was selling swimwear on the beach at Simpson's Bay near Castlemain's place on St Martin. He observed her from a distance; she stopped from time to time deftly changing her swimsuit under a large beach towel, then returning to do the same stretch of beach in a kind of fashion parade for the women sunning themselves on the sand.

She carried a transparent plastic covered display rack for the various models and a chic holdall in which she meticulously transported her stock; no self-respecting female would buy what looked like a previously worn swimsuit.

She handled her customers in a business like manner. She was no poor girl trying to scrape a living from the tourists on the beach. It looked like a good business, her customers seemed to appreciate her advice and from what he could see the swimsuits were expensive with the tractations that went on in USA dollars, French francs and Dutch florins.

The locals seemed to know her and she exchanged friendly smiles and remarks with them though she gave short shrift to the single male tourist. The customer's husbands or boyfriends got a different treatment, polite smiles, keeping the conversation to business and to how a certain swimsuit would look on their wife or girlfriend.

He discovered that she worked for a chic boutique nearby the beach, it was only natural to promote direct sales on the beach when the women's minds were on swim wear and they probably enjoyed a moment's break from sunbathing to do what all women loved to do, shopping for clothes!

It was she who started conversation with Arrowsmith in a small beach bar where he had stopped to take a fruit juice. She paused under the shade of the palm thatching to change the holdall from one shoulder to the other, glancing at him.

"Would you like to buy a present for your wife?" she smiled hopefully showing him the display rack of swimwear.

"I don't have one," he smiled a little ruefully.

"Your girl friend then?" she laughed.

"I don't have one either," he returned, feeling a little better about it.

"Unlucky you!"

He shrugged his shoulder.

"What about buying one for me?"

"A swimsuit!"

"No a drink!" she giggled at his stupidity.

"Sure, it must be hot in the sun."

"It is, not too many customers today, it's Wednesday."

"Wednesday?"

"Yes, the tourists arrive at the weekend and buy new swimsuits for the beach, and on Thursday or Friday they buy them to take home, when they have any money

left.”

He noted she had an accent and if he was not mistaken it was Russian.

“Where are you staying?” she asked inspecting him curiously.

“Up there,” he nodded towards Castlemains villa.

“The villa?”

“Yes.”

She was impressed and interested.

“Do you have any ladies staying with you?”

“No.”

“I just wondered in case they would be interested by these,” she said lifting the rack.

He bought her a papaya juice, which she drank quickly.

“What about you, do you have a boyfriend?”

“No.”

He mulled over that sipping his drink through the plastic straw.

“How about having dinner with me?” he asked hopefully.

She inspected him again.

“Where?”

“I don’t know!”

She laughed.

“OK, I’ll met you at the villa at seven and we’ll see.”

She picked up her bags and continued along the beach without the least glance back.

Arrowsmith was perplexed, but not unhappy.

It was exactly at seven when she turned up wearing a white off the shoulder dress in wild silk and a finely knitted cardigan without buttons, her shoes gave her an inch or so more in height.

She was not too tall but the heels gave her appearance the final touch, that turned men’s heads. She wore glasses that she had not worn on the beach that gave her a slightly studious look. Her lips were full and she smiled easily displaying her well formed white teeth.

“Hi, here I am.”

“Welcome.” Tony smiled in pleasure.

“I forgot to ask your name, I’m Olga.”

“Tony.”

Olga was twenty-six her hair was tinted a very pale shade of red like many Nordic blondes, the opposite to England or France, where blondes were more fashionable.

Her figure was perfect, her dress displayed the smooth tanned skin of her shoulders, it was as though her body was covered with a fine elegant glove, she was in the full glow of youth and her natural unaffected laugh that put him at ease. Olga was a Russian from Riga in Latvia, part of an uncomfortable minority in the

newly independent and nationalistic state.

She had studied linguistics at Lenin University an almost useless subject in the post-soviet world where she then lived. Her Latvian was fluent compared to that of her Russian parents. However, it was her English that enabled her to find a job with a Swedish bank, paid in solid Swedish kronas, which permitted her to live in comfort, protected from the vagaries of the weak currency of her country.

Olga's boss, Margarita, a heavily built, forty five year old Swedish woman, was married, but had strong lesbian tendencies. She developed an infatuation for the younger woman, admiring her beauty and sympathising at her plight in the grim post Soviet economic situation.

At the end of Margarita's contract in Riga she found a job for Olga at the bank's headquarters in Stockholm. Two years later Olga obtained a Swedish passport with the help of Margarita.

Margarita had two grown up children. She realised to her regret that her relationship with her protégé could not go on forever and wisely saw that Olga needed to build her own life.

Olga had carefully put aside her money in the hope of finding a warmer climate in which to settle, Stockholm was infinitely richer than Riga or Moscow, but it was still in the cold and snow.

The opportunity came during a holiday with Margarita in St Martin in the Caribbean. It had been one of Margarita's visits to her Swedish friends on the island who were also customers of the bank. They owned several prosperous fashion boutiques, one of which was in Simpson's Bay. They were part of the small Swedish community that lived on the island, descended from immigrants who had settled on St Martin in the nineteenth century as fishermen and who had long since made their fortune in business and tourism.

They had jokingly asked Olga to stay to help out in their boutiques, she accepted. They adopted her at once, she was pretty and intelligent and a friend of Margarita, who had assured them of her conscientiousness and honesty, qualities greatly valued by the protestant Swedes.

Olga had had little experience with men, Margarita had protected her at the bank, warding off would be suitors and ensuring that Olga frequented the right company, even outside of the business hours she kept.

Olga feared returning to Riga where the Russian minority was rejected in spite of the exhortations and threats from Moscow. She kept in close contact with her parents, who had both taught at the University of Latvia and had suffered in the successive economic crisis, losing their savings and seeing their already meagre salaries reduced to a misery. Olga helped by regularly sending enough money to supplement their wages enabling them to enjoy a better standard of living than their less fortunate colleagues.

By avoiding personal relationships in St Martin she had been sure of a quiet life, building up her savings and dreaming of the day she could set up a boutique of her own. Unfortunately, the island was extremely expensive and she soon realised it

would be a long and arduous task to establish a business of her own.

The time had come for Olga to make an important decision for her future. Her relationship with Margarita had been rich in experience, but inevitably their relationship had evolved and she felt the need for a more conventional relationship. She knew she would always cherish her friendship with Margarita, who had changed her life and who besides her parents was certainly the person for whom she held the greatest love and respect.

Her thoughts had gradually turned in another direction and she began to think of an old fashioned solution - a suitable man. There were plenty of men around, but it would have to be the right one, not a mere tourist on a package holiday, whose luxury hotel gave the appearance of affluence, but who was in reality nothing more than a bank or an office worker. Nor should she fall into the trap of a playboy or worse a married man.

It would have to be a kind man, a wealthy man, a stable man - that was a tall order - it would not be easy. But Olga was determined and once she had set her mind to a purpose she had that Russian tenacity and perseverance to see it through until she got what she wanted.

As she studied Pat Arrowsmith she realised that he was a suitable candidate and that she would have to win him over quickly before he disappeared.

She lived in a small one-room apartment in the town centre, a studio as it was fashionably called, the name did not change the reality, her sole companion was a Persian cat.

That evening she suggested a restaurant, which in any other circumstances could have been described as a romantic spot, but they were oblivious to the surroundings, they were only interested in each other, exchanging details of their lives without the least reserve. She told him of her family, of Margarita, and he told her his story, his past marriage, his pleasures as a lone bachelor, his business life.

They returned to the villa and where they embraced each other as though it were the most natural of things, as though they had always loved each other.

They lay in his bed, the smooth tight skin of her thighs and abdomen pressed against him, her head fell back and glancing down he saw the fine dark triangle of hair push eagerly upwards, before her full lips opened and softly pressed against his open mouth. Her warm delicate fingers reached down to grasp him and guide him towards her.

She was a willing but undemanding lover, she knew instinctively how to bring Tony to a deep and satisfying climax without the desperate or demanding struggle that he had known in some women. With Olga, Arrowsmith enjoyed a moment of sublime calm, escaping the stress that had entered into his life and that Castlemain always created in his wake.

He walked from the Madeline to rue Vignon where Eriksson was staying in a hotel of the same name, Hotel Vignon. From a short distance he saw Eriksson seated at a pavement table in front of a café. At first Eriksson did not recognise him, then he rose smiling and invited him to take a coffee at the wicker table. Rue Vignon was a narrow street lined with shops and typical nineteenth Parisian buildings, many of which had been transformed over recent years into offices.

It was eight-thirty in the morning and in that part of the city there were relatively few people about and little traffic, the bulk of which was still struggling to reach the city centre.

Next to Eriksson, on an adjacent chair, was a Bordeaux coloured pilots' bag. He nodded towards the bag with his head to say that 'it' was there. Kennedy hoped he would not open it on the street.

They drank their coffee and Kennedy suggested that they go to the hotel room where there would be more privacy. The hotel small but totally refurbished in the style of a first class establishment. Eriksson's room was on the 5th floor. Once inside the room he handed the pilots bag to Kennedy. It was almost bulging, packed with wads of new one hundred dollar bills.

"They are perfect, there is no detector in Europe that can differentiate them from the real thing –to all intents and purposes they are the real thing!" His chest seemed to puff up in pride as though it were he who had printed them.

Sweden was a perfect transfer point for the counterfeit money. There were no customs controls in the European Union. The money as usual came in from Tallinn via Helsinki, then on to Stockholm.

The bag was heavy, but Kennedy had no choice but to carry it with it with him when at five minutes past nine they left for the representative office in Paris that looked after his private business affairs. Kennedy had slowly reconciled himself to the idea of receiving counterfeit money after his escapade in Tallinn, as though it were some kind of game with big rewards.

Eriksson had recently set up a small company specialised in financial services, in fact it was nothing more than a letter box company, though it did have a couple of bank accounts that made it a convenient vehicle for transferring legally small sums of money for his various non-official banking activities.

The representative office that handled his affairs knew nothing of his function at the Bottens Handelsbank only that he was a prosperous Swedish businessman. The representative office was itself an honest firm that acted as an administrator, looking after reporting and tax matters. Eriksson personally looked after the bank accounts and transfers.

It had been Doudoune who had given him the idea of the Paris set-up. In that way he transferred money to and from Guadeloupe, a French Department, as a simple

transfer from one bank to the other on the national territory.

It was much simpler than he had imagined. France with its reputation as complicated proved to be quite to the contrary. The representative office was specialised in looking after Nordic businesses and several of its staff being mostly expatriates spoke Swedish fluently.

They took lunch at the Svenska Klubben in a building on rue de Rivoli opposite Les Jardins des Tuilleries. It was a hot day and the cool of old stone entrance and stairway to the club was welcome after the ten-minute walk from rue Vignon. Kennedy transpired heavily as he clung tightly to the weighty pilot's bag that was now his.

The Swedish Club was on the second floor. Eriksson was familiar with the club having been there on previous visits to Paris. It was a home from home. The staff and members spoke Swedish, there were Swedish newspapers, beer and herrings, and of course aquavit.

It was rather a drab place thought Kennedy, it was not unlike a provincial businessman's club in Ireland, and it had much less style than the Brury Castle Country Club.

"Let me tell you something Pat, our friend Kurov is experienced at handling the transfer without any problems, so don't worry, you needn't go through the same trouble like the last time, there's plenty more where that came from." He nodded towards the pilot bag.

Kennedy tried to smile as he forced down the herrings not touching the beer, not to speak of the what seemed to be home brewed aquavit, fortunately there was a good supply of bread with butter. He would have preferred a nice cup of tea. Nevertheless, he was pleased with himself as he instinctively touched the pilot bag that sat on the floor against his chair. Eriksson with his usual lack of sensitivity did not even suspect the discomfort that an Irishman could have with smoked eels and pickled herrings.

Kurov was a Russian Jewish émigré, with big ambitions and a small brain. He was a dangerous thug and member of the Russia Brooklyn Mafiya, who operated with Ortega's friends on Miami Beach.

Kurov had asked Eriksson to make arrangements for a loan at the Irish Union Bank in Dublin against a security in the form of US Treasury bearer bonds. The money from the loan would then be transferred to a London bank where it could be drawn on as needed. In addition Eriksson was to look after a large sum of dollars in 'Super Notes', new one hundred dollar bills, and bearer bonds, which Eriksson would have Kennedy keep at Kurov's disposal in Ireland.

"Remember Pat, this is our business, keep it to ourselves, there's no point to speak to anybody else, I mean for example Ortega, he can be very unpleasant. We have ourselves to look after."

"Don't worry Stig, I won't let on to anybody else," he replied with a serious air. In spite of his habit of bragging, Kennedy carefully compartmentalised certain transactions when it was in his interest, especially when it came to money. That

was probably part of the training and professionalism in financial and fiscal matters he automatically applied when dealing with his clients.

Chapter 70. Saint Petersburg

Erikkson?"

"Yes Erikkson."

"A bloody Swede!"

"Yes he's a Swede, he with the Bottens Handelsbank."

"I don't care which bank he's with, let me tell you something."

"Tell me!"

"You know how a Swede gets his rubber boots off?"

"How?"

"By farting!" Koskinen roared with laughter.

The Mercedes accelerated down one of the many elegant tree lined avenues of St Petersburg, passing an army truck filled with pale faced young conscripts, weaving through worn-out Lada's and shiny BMW's. The crowds of office workers were already running towards the red trolley buses.

As night fell and they passed the Moscow Gate monument that celebrated the defeat of Napoleon in 1812. Wet snow splattered the cracked windscreen as the car tried to slip through the gaps in the traffic. Arrowsmith had the impression that the temperature had risen; perhaps it was around minus four or five.

"Seriously, for Christ's sake!"

"Okay," he said still laughing. "I don't know too much about Erikkson, but I do know he's involved with another Swede called Anders Johansson, he sells stuff for the pharmaceutical industry."

"Are they involved in business in Russia?"

"I'll say they are, they have supplied things to Bashkiristan."

"Bash...what!"

"Bashkiristan, Ufa that's the capital, it's a Republic in the Russian Federation south of the Urals."

"What have they supplied?"

"Some kind of pharmaceutical laboratory I think."

"So what's Erikkson doing?"

"He's involved with some kind of Mafiya."

"So - any business in Russia is called Mafiya, isn't it?"

"These really are Mafiya, I've got a Finnish friend there in Ufa and I can guaranty they are real Mafiya and bad...very bad."

Kutzmenkov asked the driver to stop at a foreign currency exchange bureau; he needed to change a few of his new one hundred dollar bills for Roubles. It was

easier said than done many such bureaux were closed for inexplicable reasons. An armed guard with a bored expression stood at the door in his drab army uniform, Koskinen continued to talk about girls, he was certainly feeling horny. Arrowsmith recognised the Ainichkov Bridge over the Neva River and knew that they would be at the hotel within a few minutes.

“I see,” said Arrowsmith absorbing the news.

“One of the key figures is a crook called Demirshian. He’s involved in just about everything illegal possible. Drugs, rackets, counterfeiting, money laundering and women – with big tits,” he laughed.

“You can’t stay serious for a moment!”

He turned his attention to the passing scenery, looking admiringly at the endless avenues of fine stately buildings, gardens and squares, conceived by the numerous dukes and counts who had been masters of the Czarist Empire and too greedy as had been their successors, the party chiefs.

Times had changed and once again power was in a transitional phase, in the hands of the Mafiya, whilst the politicians argued over lost causes and the inheritors waited in the wings for the call of the people.

The hotel was almost new, the Nevsky Palace. They met in the bar at the far end of the lobby at six. It was a little quiet, the pianist, a young woman looked bored. They took a corner table and waited for the others to arrive. As they looked around several tables were occupied by young women, who looked quite attractive thought Arrowsmith.

“Professionals,” announced Koskinen.

He turned his attention to business, he wanted to show Arrowsmith his latest acquisition, a furniture factory that had cost Finnish investors one hundred million Finnish marks and had been picked up for a song from a desperate Helsinki bank after months of strangulation by the suppliers of wood, who also happened to be Koskinen’s friends.

“With friends in Russia you can do anything, with enemies....”

The factory lay in an inner suburb of St Petersburg on a modern industrial zone where most construction had been long been abandoned.

Once they passed through the doors of the modern looking factory it was as though they had been transported a few hundred kilometres to the north-east. It was Finnish organisation and technical perfection down to the least detail.

They were met by the factory manager, Marti Raitakari, a quiet but likable Finn, with long experience in the woodworking and furniture industry. He described the difficulties of working in Russia. The problem was not the staff, who were competent and hard working given the training and the incentives, good jobs were few and far between. The main problem was the authorities who were disorganised and corrupt. Then there was the unreliable transport system and the power company. It took hefty bribes to get anything moving and protection money to stay in business.

Marti invited them to his new apartment for a before dinner drink and meet his friends. They followed his Mercedes back into the city. They stopped at the lights and the tramcars slide by with a metallic whirr. The driver of the Mercedes started and then turned left bumping over the rails. The traffic almost resembled that of a Western capital, perhaps somewhat more fluid for six forty five in the evening.

His apartment on the fourth floor was impeccably renovated with high original ceilings. It overlooked the ice covered Moika River where the embankment curved opposite Peter the Great's Stable built in 1720, nearby the church where Alexander II was murdered in 1881.

Marti was a collector of fine art and enjoyed classical music. The walls of his apartment were covered with paintings new and old that he had collected in Russia. His wife lived in Finland whilst he led a bachelor's life in St Petersburg, returning to Helsinki for business or weekends.

He warned Arrowsmith of the danger of becoming involved with the Russian Mafiya. They did not hesitate to use violence openly, the previous manager of the furniture plant had been shot down whilst taking a coffee with a business friend in the arcade of the Nevsky Palace Hotel. He and a bystander, a British businessman, an innocent hotel guest, had been killed and two other persons injured. He had not come up with a payment for protection having complained to the local police. After a year's investigation the police had not made the least progress in finding the killers.

Chapter 71. Riga

The Bottens Handelsbank was very active like many Swedish banks in the newly independent Baltic states. It was only ten years or so since those countries had the unexpected good fortune to throw off the Soviet yoke.

The Bottens had set up a branch in Riga, which was engaged in the financing bilateral trade with Sweden and also worked on a number of projects financed by the Berd in London. Holmqvist had curiously accumulated the roles of being the local head of the Bottens and at the same time the representative of the Berd.

Through a complex arrangement, the Berd was to finance indirectly part of the Ciscap project, through a barter arrangement whereby Latvia supplied Russian oil and fertiliser against Cuban sugar. Ventspils, the main shipping port of Latvia had been in the very recent past a major port for the Soviet Union to the Baltic and Western Europe, it continued to be so as the port was connected by pipeline and railways to the Russia networks, bringing bulk products to western markets.

Mika had set the deal up and as middleman would collect a solid commission. The essential however was that Arrowsmith fulfil his engagement with Carlos Gonzales Montero of Sierra Maestra, to help him export his sugar crop and import

the fertilisers for his sugar cane plantations. Cuba needed ten million tons of oil a year, therefore the bartered oil would be sold to the state refineries. The old communist system 'sugar for oil', with Cuban sugar vastly overpriced, no longer functioned, it was everyone for himself.

The modernisation of the port of Ventspils as well as the investment for the environmental rehabilitation of the port zone after fifty years of soviet pollution was being financed by the Berd as part of their on-going programme in the country.

"You're friend Kennedy has been up to some monkey business!"

"So you told me," replied Arrowsmith referring to Mika's call a couple of weeks earlier.

"Ortega wants the sugar deal."

"Ortega?"

"Yeah, he has some old friends in the Ministry of Sugar in Havana, he has promised them the deal with a share of the commissions."

"But what does Kennedy have to do with it?"

"It's not really clear, but it seems that Ortega has been showing him around his hotel investments in Mexico, treating him like visiting royalty."

Mika recounted the information that he had obtained from a friend in the Russian Ministry of the Interior concerning Ortega. He had undisputed links with the Latino and Russian Mafiya in money laundering.

He described the explosion of drug addiction in Russia and the how huge sums of money derived from drug trafficking were moved in and out of the country. How heroin, imported from Afghanistan and Tajikistan by the Mafiya, had spread to every corner of the country and how cocaine was becoming the fashionable drug amongst the nouveau riche in Moscow and St Petersburg.

He went on to explain how Ortega laundered money from deals with Russian producers of oil and fertilisers, vast quantities of these commodities were exported, though only part of the payments ever returned to Russia, the lions share going to some offshore tax haven and recycled into other businesses.

"What's the market price of sugar today?" Mika asked as they turned to the triangular arrangement of oil, sugar and fertilisers.

"Let's see sugar is around six cents a pound on the Sugarworld NCSE."

"So half a million tonnes is sixty million dollars. Half a million tons of oil or three million barrels is roughly the same, that's a combined barter deal of 120 million dollars with say ten percent for Ortega, not bad ten or twelve million dollars."

"Yeah, anybody who could do that once or twice a year wouldn't have a retirement problem."

"That's nothing for him, just the tip of the iceberg, because he works for the big Russian oil and fertiliser companies trading in millions of tonnes of products and siphoning of huge amounts of money to the offshore bank accounts for the Russians."

“So, I suppose he doesn’t want anybody muscling in on his territory.”

“Right!”

“I still can’t see why he’s so interested in Kennedy?”

“Respectable investments, laundering money stolen from the Russian people, laundering Colombian drug money! He’s using Kennedy to transform illegal money into legal investments, such as Ciscap or through some other some nice innocent Irish industries!” he said laughing at the thought.

Riga airport looked like any other Baltic city airport in winter, a line of three snow ploughs abreast moved slowly along the runway. The difference to the experienced traveller was the Russian built Tupelov’s of Aeroflot transformed into Lidosta Riga, the national airline, and a bunch of about fifteen Antonov’s lined up at one end of the tarmac.

Arrowsmith passed through the passport control without any problem, but Boisnier, who had no dollars - only French Francs, was diverted to a visa bureau in the corner of the small cold airport.

Holmqvist wore a slouched Fedora and a long black belted coat. Arrowsmith thought that the Swede was playing out the role of a reborn Baltic Baron.

The road into the city was monotonous; the only distraction was the backbreaking bumps as the car hit the deep potholes in the road or swerved to avoid them. It had started to snow and through the windscreen the swirling white flurries had a soporific effect.

The building housed both the Riga Bottens representative office and that of the Berd. It was in an elegant ornate pre-war building. The stairs were in marble, covered with a purple carpet, on each landing highly polished double doors with carved architraves in dark wood led into the office areas. The reception area was decorated in glass and marble. It was typical of a bank, inspiring confidence and continuity.

Holmqvist was a Swede; he was head of the investment section at the Bottens. His job was to assess businesses and industries for investment; he boasted that in three years he had visited more than ninety potential companies in the three Baltic States.

As far as Koskinen was concerned he was a fagot and Arrowsmith agreed he was un vieux pedal with his fedora, camping his vision of long gone Baltic nobility.

“Our job is to get his money to set-up the barter deal,” said Koskinen his jaw firm with determination, “then we can seriously think about big tits.”

Kutzmenkov was somewhere behind, he had eaten at least the equivalent of the other three at lunch, and several strong dark beers. Arrowsmith had expressed his serious concern that Kutzmenkov would explode splattering them with a mixture of shit and dark beer.

“Let us be serious for a moment,” replied Koskinen. “We need their money.”

“Good morning,” said Arrowsmith, putting on one of his charming smiles for the receptionist, a blond who was evidently bored sitting in front of her word processor

all day. At first she put on a severe smile and then relaxed, he was evidently not a serious customer. She called Holmqvist on the phone and a few seconds later he was there - without the fedora.

“Ah, good morning, welcome to the Berd as they say in French or should I pronounce that bird?” as he preferred to refer to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development that had been set up to aid the reconstruction of Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union.

They laughed and followed him into the meeting room, which was obviously designed for the formal signing of agreements and large loans, which had unfortunately not been forthcoming contrary to the plans of the bank’s first president, the extravagant Frenchman, Jacques Attali or his successors for that matter, business in the East was much more complicated than had been at first thought by the bank’s creators.

“Look Tony I think you should come back to Moscow with me to look into the Ortega thing otherwise we’re going to have some problems.”

“I didn’t plan on that Mika.”

“Neither did I, but I don’t want to waste my time on this if that bastard is going to steal it from under my nose. I also need a retirement plan!”

Chapter 72. Yaroslav

They hurtled down the brown tracks traced in the thick snow on the M8 from Moscow to Yaroslav, passing the row of snow ploughs ranged across the highway and convoys of heavy grim trucks. Some would have said that it was an improvement on earlier times, Arrowsmith was not so sure huddled on the back seat as the car slide around one of the hulking ploughs, he would have preferred the comfort of his room back at the Palace.

“Are we safe at this speed?” Arrowsmith asked, “I mean the tyres...road holding!”

“Da.”

“Are you sure?” Arrowsmith asked after a moment of silence.

“Niet,” Koskinen smiled shrugging his shoulders.

Arrowsmith let out a nervous laugh. There was nothing else to do but sit back and leave things to Sacha, their driver, and to fate.

The day had started badly with the minibus breaking down only three or four kilometres from the hotel in the heavy morning Moscow traffic. By the greatest of chance they were just five hundred meters from Koskinen’s apartment and after a hopeless effort on the starter they abandoned the minibus, making their way to the apartment on foot, leaving the driver to make arrangements for another vehicle.

They were heading for Azotphos, a huge fertiliser complex. During the Soviet period that type of factory was known as a ‘combinat’. It currently employed seven

thousand people, less than half of that in the eighties. It produced nitrogen and phosphate fertilisers, almost two million tons a year.

It had been privatised in 1993; share certificates had been distributed to the combinat workers, one of the first real transfers of ownership from the state to the people in the history of Russia. They were non-negotiable, there was no market for such shares, thus there were in a sense worthless. When the top management offered to buy them for cash, the workers eagerly sold them for a few soon to be worthless roubles. The result was a handful of individuals in the top management had gained total control of the combinat and in doing so became rich while the workers became poorer than ever.

In the past the fertilisers had been distributed according to an annual plan decreed by the Ministry of Planning, without need of a sales or marketing organisation by the combinat, as a consequence, in the post-Soviet economy, the management was forced to learn the rules of market economy from zero; setting prices, seeking customers and making profits. A difficult task under the best of circumstances for a bunch of inexperienced ex-communists, not to mind a country going to hell on a roller-coaster

However, they did learn and they learnt quickly, setting up a Swiss company, which they nominated as their official agent and who collected the customer's payments for goods delivered to export markets. Setting prices was easy - check international prices in the American Weekly Chemical News, deduct ten percent - that was the selling price, whatever the real costs.

Profits making was even easier; all the monies from foreign sales were diverted into offshore accounts, as a result the newly privatised combinat ran with a catastrophic deficit at the state bank, which became insignificant with the successive devaluations of the rouble. Their profits were not simply profits, but one hundred percent profits, all salted away in offshore bank accounts far away from predatory politicians and the risk of holding reserves in almost worthless roubles, the value of which fell vertiginously every day. It was fabulous, over two hundred million solid American dollars a year directly into the bank accounts of the new capitalists.

Mika wanted them to supply the fertilisers for Cuba. It was not easy; they sold all they produced, whether the quality was good or bad. The only requirement was payment against documents along side ship in Ventspils, with a down payment of twenty percent deposited and confirmed in their account in Switzerland.

Mika had good friends at Azotphos; they were willing to trust him at his word. He simply wanted to know whether Ortega had approached them and what he had asked for.

They were not the only sellers, there were several ex-combinats of the same style capable of fulfilling the order, but in any case his friends at Azotphos would know who was in the market for one hundred thousand tons of fertiliser at around 350 dollars a ton, and who could deliver the fertiliser on schedule. Thirty five million dollars was a good contract, with financing backed by the Berd and the Swedish

bank.

In the distance a figure waved them down at what appeared to be a police checkpoint. Antonov stopped and then stepped out of the car, he followed a pink-cheeked police officer to a cabin on the side of the road, Koskinen followed him. After a few moments Arrowsmith decided to join them to stretch his legs, it took less than a couple of seconds to abandon the idea, the bitter cold wind bit into his pampered western body and he quickly scrambled back into the warmth of the car.

“What’s the problem?” he asked Koskinen when he returned with the Sacha.

“They are just checking on the computer to see if the car is not stolen.”

The motorway gave way to a normal two lane road, there were few trucks and even fewer cars, the snow covered road became almost white and the car shook and vibrated as it continued at an unrelenting pace over the hard compacted uneven snow.

They stopped in a small tree lined town, it was dominated by an Orthodox church with four green onion shaped domes and a bell tower. Timeless Russian houses stood on each side of the road, most were built in wood though some were in brick or stucco faced, brightly painted in red, green and yellow pastel shades, their snow covered gardens were surrounded by low uneven wooden fences. Elegant low buildings that had probably not changed since Czarist times, lined the streets in the town centre.

Just before leaving the town Koskinen pointed to a small oddly modern style building with an aluminium facade, Arrowsmith could decipher on the writing the sign in Cyrillic, it said Magasin. Inside the small supermarket a row of babushkas seated side by side shouted in unison to Arrowsmith to close entrance door he had left open to the wind and the whirling powdery snow. The shelves were empty and the accumulated grim and dust told him that they had not sold out their stock recently, at the back Arrowsmith saw a shelf lined with Vodka bottles – all empty!

Mika bought a kilo of biscuits, they returned to the car to eat their lunch, Finlandia vodka and sweet biscuits from the ‘Magasin’.

A few kilometres further from the village they stopped and urinated in the snowdrift on the side of the road, laughing as Arrowsmith told Sacha his eyes resembled the ‘piss holes in the snow’ after his drinking session the previous evening.

The swirls of fine powdered snow rose from the surface of the wide and almost empty road. The skyline was punctuated by the pylons of the electricity grid and the orange flames that rose from tall metal chimneys in a nearby refinery.

A hodge-podge of worn out chairs lined the waiting room, the wall partitions were in cheap bare planks of unvarnished wood as was the floor, if there had been a varnish it had long disappeared. Koskinen, with a stream of lecherous comments, observed the coming and going of female staff from an adjoining room, as Arrowsmith looked at a sad sack of potatoes standing in the corner of the waiting room through the vague blurry haze from the vodka and whisky that Koskinen had

pressed on him in the car that he now regretted.

Mikalov was not in his office and his secretary with a disdainful gesture relegated Koskinen and the others to an anti-chamber. Antonov in his style of ex-KGB officer turned in circles in the narrow corridor.

Mikalov arrived agitated but smiling, he was a bundle of energy in a sea of despair.

“My friends how are you, I am so sorry to keep you waiting, we are overloaded with work.”

After a long discussion on the state of the Russian economy he invited them to lunch. The dining room was set up for feast, an extraordinary display of food and drink. The dinner service sparkled under crystal chandeliers and the wine glasses were pure kitsch, decorated with an extravagant excess of gilt.

After the formalities they settled down to the subject of their visit. Azotphos had received a demand from Ortega’s organisation. Their enquiry had been declined, not directly, but by a dissuasively high price and long delivery date.

“We have had difficulty with your friend,” he said alluding to Ortega, “he is unreliable, as are his banks.”

“I see,” said Koskinen introspectively.

“We are open to dealing with you, hopefully through the Swedish bank, that is not an obligation but it would help with the delivery.”

Koskinen understood it was an unavoidable condition.

“But don’t forget Ortega has powerful friends.” Mikalov added as a warning.

The local hotel must have been at one time modern, its large entrance hall and sweeping stairway bore witness to that, but that was the past, it had been transformed into misery with its foul toilets and the pervading smell of powerful bleach polluted the hall reaching through into the vast bar.

“We have no beer.”

“No beer?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

A long discussion ensued in Russian. Then there was silence.

“What did they say?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing.”

“Yes nothing, the manager does not order beer.”

There was a further silence.

“But many customers ask for beer.”

They were waiting for the over night train to St Petersburg. The hotel bar was the only half civilised place to wait after Mikalov had been obliged to leave them. Ordering beer or soft drinks was a hopeless situation and they resigned themselves to another bout of vodka.

The next morning they descended from the worse than drab Bolshevik style train

in St Petersburg, Arrowsmith waited in the black slush whilst Koskinen searched for the driver. A line of women stood under the falling snow proffering bottles of hard to find vodka for sale. They arrived at the Europa, a hotel of renovated Czarist splendour, Arrowsmith headed for the marble toilets, where he defecated in the luxury of a sparkling clean and spacious cubicle, then washed and shaved. Koskinen and Kutzmenkov waited in the hall under the light of the sparkling chandeliers.

The vast art décor breakfast room was restored to past glory, the atmosphere was sedate as shy pretty girls in starched uniforms served the tables, they looked well brought up, it was an image from a far distant past. A pretty guitarist, elegantly attired in a black evening dress, played soft Spanish classics seated under the potted palms. Arrowsmith marvelled at the carved wood balconies, the stained glass roof and superb stained glass windows, which crowned the room, suggesting an extraordinary airy and luminous cathedral.

They sat at a round table set for at least eight people, laid out in impeccable style with fine silver and chinaware. Antonov loaded his plate from the buffet with enough food to feed half of St Petersburg's hungry. Koskinen tried to flirt with one of the shy blond waitresses, quickly abandoning his gambit in favour of an attractive German girl he had spotted seated near the buffet.

Returning, some moments later, a lonely croissant on his plate, having accomplished his reconnaissance mission, he announced, "She has nice blue eyes," and after a pause added with a wicked smile, 'and big tits'.

Chapter 73. Moscow

They drove in a Volga which had seen better days, taking the Sadovoye Koltso or Garden Ring, a very broad avenue that circled the centre of Moscow. The low sun shone directly in front of them, reflecting a leaden sheen from the worn surface of the road and the roofs of the cars.

They had arrived back the previous evening and Arrowsmith had decided to look deeper into Ortega's manipulations, following their visit to Azotphos and check out any other reliable sources of information.

"This was a car of the high nomenclatura before," Koskinen explained with a wistful smile, "today they have Mercedes."

Arrowsmith was reminded of the comforts of the Western cars by a bone jerking series of bumps, at the same time the driver stamped on the brake projecting him forward.

The early spring had made a sudden appearance, it was warm, over twenty degrees; the buds on the trees were opening giving a thin aura of green. The road had some very impressive holes, the driver snaking skilfully between them and the

tramlines, as did the other vehicles, resulting in a constant uncoordinated weaving motion of the traffic.

The driver was rather short and slightly built probably from one of the Central Asian republics; he wore Ray-Ban sunglasses and sported a sharp moustache. He had a tendency to speed and Arrowsmith was frequently forced to remark the fact to Koskinen out of an aching sense of self-preservation.

“What Russian doesn’t like speed,” said Koskinen interpreting the drivers comment with a wry smile.

“Dead ones!” replied Arrowsmith grimly, images of collisions with the never ending lines of silver birch that lined the roadside and twisted rusty Russian metal in his mind. The reality was probably not quite as bad as his fertile imagination told him. Red Ladas and SUV’s at considerably greater speeds recklessly overtook them at every opportunity.

Ortega’s omnipresence had begun to create a worrisome source of concern, but there was another more immediate and personal matter to be attended to; Arrowsmith had promised Olga to contact her old grandmother and to help with some money if possible.

The temperature had reached an astonishing twenty-six degrees, it was dry and dusty, and Moscow suddenly seemed to be covered with a layer of dust, though no doubt the result of years of accumulation. He walked in a residential district behind the Kiev railway station, it was hopeless task to find the grandmother’s apartment block amongst the run down buildings, not speaking Russian and the Muscovites wariness of foreigners was of little help. Olga had told him that her grandmother was a fervent believer attending religious services every day a nearby church. Arrowsmith found the church without too much difficulty, its golden dome shone in the sun, a bright contrast to the grey surroundings, it was undergoing restoration. He was immediately shown to a pope, one of those directing the work, a certain Father Sverdelov.

Sverdelov was an Orthodox priest, a pope, trained at Sergi Posad the centre of the Russian Orthodox Church. As a functionary of the Church he was the eminence grise to an elderly but important bishop.

Fortunately for Arrowsmith, Sverdelov spoke good English and after listening with what appeared to be a sincere interest promised to assist Arrowsmith to find the old lady. It would take a few days and when Arrowsmith returned to Moscow from his trip to Ufa hopefully there would be some positive news. Arrowsmith had hinted that he would make a generous offering to the church in return for the help.

“Mr Arrowsmith, that is very kind of you and I appreciate that, but one other thing, I would really like is to introduce you to a friend, a business friend, Anatoly Lavrin, his office is not far from your hotel off Tverskaya, I will join you if you are free.”

“When?”

“Now, we shall take my car.”

Arrowsmith could not refuse if he was to get help with finding the old lady. The pope's car was a new black Volvo. It looked as though Sverdelov was not one of the poor. They talked of the Church and the future of Russia.

"It is a great future business!" Sverdelov explained to Arrowsmith. "There are one hundred and fifty million Russians crying out for spiritual guidance, that is a good business!" he quickly added with a pious smirk, "mind you we are not the Mafiya! In any case most Russians would prefer the old system."

"The old system! You mean before communism?" asked Arrowsmith a little confused by the man-of-god's remark.

Sverdelov laughed. "No my friend, Brezhnev's system!"

"Oh!" replied Arrowsmith weakly.

"What has capitalism brought them? Nothing! If not insecurity and poverty. The rich are few, the poor are many, and they are both in need of our help, the rich pay us to absolve their sins and gain respectability, and the poor need our salving balm."

The reality was a little different. The state had restored the Orthodox Church to its past role during Tsarist times as the official Christian Church of Russia, which like every other Russian institution was desperately short of money; it needed to train new priests, to renovate its places of worship and monasteries, set up schools and help the poor and sick.

As a consequence the church had gone into business and there it did not refuse aid from souls to be saved, honest or otherwise, believers or not. Sverdelov was part of the new generation and did not hesitate to cultivate relations to advance his ambitions, as men of all religions, such as he, had always done. If money could serve God and restore the power of the church, it could also serve Sverdelov.

Larvin's office was on a street off Tverskaya Prospect, the principal fashionable avenue of Moscow, lined with stores catering for the wealthy, stocked with expensive imported fashion goods. Per. Sadovskikh was a nondescript side street and N°6 faced a small run down garden. The architecture was known in Moscow as Stalin Gothic, it was a sad building dating from the late twenties, painted yellow with sculptured relief in white.

The neighbours opposite gave the tone of the district, the impoverished Jordanian and Ugandan embassies. The door was made in a cheap looking varnished plywood, it was an add-on to the original door, it had the look of a doubtful nightclub, with a tiny rectangular window for the purpose of inspecting visitors.

Arrowsmith entered the aluminium lift and pressed for the 4th floor, nothing happened, he then remember to press the green button marked with what he supposed was 'Close' in Russian, with a jerk the doors closed and the lift started.

Anatoly Lavrin's office, once inside was bright and modern, and appeared to be busy, there was an air of efficiency with the ring of telephones as well-dressed secretaries came and went with sheafs of papers in their hands.

"We are building up demand through imported goods.

“What kind of goods?”

“Everything from Frutella, Trill birdseeds, BMWs or air-conditioning units.”

“Doesn’t that harm local produced goods?”

Lavrin laughed.

“Local production does not exist, unless you want to buy tank turrets or crude oil. Seriously, Russian factories produce sausages, bread and things like that. Imports teach the consumer about new products and quality, then we set up manufacturing joint ventures with foreign companies.”

“You put up local capital?”

Lavrin laughed again, “If you like! We provide the land, the building, the construction permits and recruit the management and staff. The foreign party provides the product, marketing know-how, the machinery and working capital.”

Working capital was often Russian money, coming back into the country after a long and devious route overseas, under the protection of foreign companies and offshore accounts. This state and local Russian business partners were obliged to treat foreign capital differently to that of local investors, whose money when deposited in Russian bank accounts could be blocked or even confiscated by various ruses of the state.

Arrowsmith had seen the empty streets lined by grim apartment blocks, and the strange almost total absence of parked cars, which in any other European capital blighted the life of its residents by their overwhelming presence. There were few shops, though those which existed were not in short supply of a wide variety of imported foodstuffs and goods for the consumer starved of attractive goods for so long, the local street markets were a vision of misery with their tiny irregular piles of low quality potatoes and onions, it was not difficult to see how Lavrin had built up his wealth in such a short time.

That evening joined by Mika Koskinen, Lavrin, Arrowsmith and the pope dined at the Sirena, a Russia restaurant favoured by the nouveau riche business class. Arrowsmith enjoyed the meal starting with what the menu called ‘a fisherman’s snack’, which consisted of caviar piled on three perfectly spherical cold boiled potatoes, presented on a bed of sour cream and echallots, accompanied by chilled Vodka served in a carafe embedded in a solid block of ice.

“Fishermen don’t do too bad!” smirked Mika swallowing his Vodka in a single gulp.

“Anatoly can help you in Ufa, with his partner, the Orthodox Church.”

“The Church?” Arrowsmith wondered if it was another of Koskinen’s pleasantries.

“Yes, Father Sverdelov here, is also responsible for business development for the Church, they have invested in Bashkiristan, a mostly Muslim republic, as missionaries.” Koskinen was greatly amused by Arrowsmith’s perplexed air.

“Don’t worry, Anatoly will explain.” They had discovered they had common friends in Ufa.

Koskinen outlined their programme for the visit to Ufa where they were to meet with Jari Punkari, a Finnish construction engineer and consultant, who had information on Eriksson's involvement in Bashkiristan and where the Handelsbank was financing the construction of a pharmaceutical plant.

The next morning they left early for Domodedovo Airport, some fifty kilometres to the south of Moscow, it was a model of post Soviet air transport, to say it was severely run down was a gross understatement, even the concrete walls were crumbling away. On the tarmac was an impressive fleet of Russian passenger aircraft, but judging from the covers on the jet intakes they were not anticipating flying that day or probably any other day soon.

The car instead of pulling up at the passenger terminal took a side road, which led to a high gate that after a short moment opened automatically; they then headed across the tarmac towards the foreign passenger terminal.

The flight took a couple of hours over the flat Russian steppe to Ufa which lay at the southern tip of the Ural Mountains, south of the city of Perm. On arrival in Ufa, the capital of the Republic of Bashkiristan, Jari Punkari, a hugely overweight Finn, met them.

Punkari operated a construction and consultancy business specialised in the hospitals and health care clinics. He had built a clinic in Ufa catering for the needs of the new ruling class and as a result had become the confidant of Jamil Novotsky, head of the Bashkir Mafiya. Novosky was one of the local partners in the clinic, without his presence almost no new business could be set-up.

Jari ensured good medical care abroad and hard to get medical drugs for the family and friends of local politicians and Mafiya members. When he was not in one of the ministries, he spent most of his time in the local hotels and nightclubs, setting up deals and keeping close to his clients.

They met in the hotel bar on the first floor where Arrowsmith saw for the first time in person what very evidently were young members of the Mafiya. They were ensconced in a spacious corner of the bar which was obviously their reserved domain. There were about a dozen of them sitting back comfortably on large couches around low tables. Three of them were perched on the armrests. They were with their girls, mostly blondes. Some of the men were good looking, not unlike Italians, others more Turkish looking, only one or two could have been described as typical Russians. They were all fashionable dressed in the rather flashy style of their age group.

The leaders shook hands with Timo and one of them embraced him kissing him on the cheek in pure Mafiya style as would have suited their Sicilian counterparts. The girls were young and very pretty, they all looked relaxed and confident, enjoying an innocent evening of privileged youth.

That evening Jari invited them to join Jamil Novotsky and his friends for dinner in a night club on the outskirts of Ufa. They would enlighten Arrowsmith on the

production of counterfeit money that was being printed by Ortega's friends.

The friends looked very doubtful and seemed to splash an endless supply of dollars around ordering foreign Champaign and Cognac. They drank quantities of alcohol that Arrowsmith had never before seen and seemed to become argumentative. Novotsky having drunk a considerable amount of Cognac boasted he could supply Arrowsmith with whatever currency he wanted for a third of its face value and confiding to him that it was produced to order by his men who worked at the Perm Printing Factory, four hundred kilometres to the north of Ufa.

Mika explained that the factory was one of Goznak system enterprises in Russia. For about 175 years it has been the only manufacturer of monetary units and securities in Russia. The Perm printing factory had been founded in 1941 as part of Goznak. Certain of its workers, struggling to survive, had taken to setting up their own illegal business of printing the currency of any country to order in collusion with Mafiya gangs.

As the drinking and noise grew more and more aggressive, Koskinen decided it was the moment to leave, and bidding farewell with the promise of future business they left the basement level night club restaurant with Mika climbing up the stairs to street level hoping they would find a taxi. The street lighting was dim but they could make out the form of two traffic police who stood on the road about two metres from the curb side making spot checks on the passing cars. Mika asked them where they could find a taxi.

"Further, near the Russia Hotel," he pointed with his baton.

"It's a long way," Mika told Arrowsmith.

"Ask them to stop a car for us," Arrowsmith joked.

Mika talked in Russian to the nearest policeman and pulled out a five Rouble note.

"Niet!" He waved the offer away, the older policeman approached pocketed the note with a practised movement of his hand and waved down the next car.

"I told them you were with the foreign delegation and you had a bad leg," Mika laughed as he climbed into the car and started to negotiate the fare with the driver.

Mika explained their abrupt departure by the fact that Jari's friends were hardened criminals and it would have been unwise to linger with them once they had been told how the counterfeit currency system functioned.

They left the hotel at five in the morning to fly back to Moscow pleased to get the greatest distance possible between them and the company of the previous evening.

The Bashkiristan Airlines Tupolev Tu154 certainly won the first prize, as far as Arrowsmith was concerned, for the dirtiest aircraft he had ever had the doubtful pleasure to fly in. His knees were crammed against the seat in front and he inspected a lump of chewing gum stuck to the window surround, the grime was real ingrained grime not simply 'overlooked' dust.

The jet engines had a heavy lumbering sound as though they were thinking ahead to the next move. Arrowsmith did not like to think of the age of the plane and

concentrated on the fact that it had been designed and built at the height of the Soviet era by solid engineers, nevertheless the idea of the present day maintenance standards persistently crept its way back into his imagination, the lack of parts, the lack of interest and professional conscience. He had seen academics and scientists struggling to live on the most miserable of salaries that could not pay the price of a dinner in his hotel, whilst the youthful Mafiya thugs lived like princes.

They arrived back in Moscow's Domedovdeva airport a mass of rust, crumbling concrete and battered aluminium, considerably worse than any he had seen even in Algeria that had chosen Russia as a model after independence.

The airport was indescribably chaotic. They had obviously missed Kutzmenkov who was to pick them up, they could have waited, but it would have been like finding a needle in a haystack in spite of the garish nouveau-riche appearance of the vehicle that Kutzmenkov drove, a green Cherokee Jeep with imitation tiger skin seat covers. He had fixed a blue gyrotory lamp on the roof, which he switched on whenever he was in a hurry, which was generally the rule. Koskinen checked the line of waiting cars; the Jeep was not in sight. He checked at the Intourist office in vain. A taxis was the best solution, they could be at the office in a little over an hour if the morning traffic permitted.

They had been accosted by several taxi touts outside the Intourist office and one had followed him in, they struck a deal after a spirited but useless protestation from Koskinen, seventy dollars take it or leave it, then the tout presented a driver whom they followed to the car park, where they were shown to a worn out old Volga. The taxi was of the same vintage and condition as the airport. But for once Arrowsmith was pleased, the driver drove with extreme caution, he imagined that the least effort or any attempt to go beyond the speed of one hundred kilometres an hour would have signalled the death knell for the car fragile with age. The drive into Moscow was extremely sedate, except for the occasional sigh uttered from the tired motor and the grinding of the brakes as the traffic built up and they edged their way towards the centre of the capital in the morning rush hour traffic.

They struggled through the endless tangle of Ladas, Volgas and trucks mixed with more than a few Mercedes and Volvos. The stench diesel fumes from the buses and trucks strangled Arrowsmith. Moscow was in gridlock, it was two hours since they had quit the airport and with the unpredictability of Russian appointments Mika started to worry about their presence for the meeting.

The taxi was badly overheating and the warning light for fuel was flashing. The towers of the Kremlin had been in sight for more than half an hour but they were not moving.

The drive made a u-turn to head for another bridge and the north ring, the traffic flowed easier and he started to take risks speeding when he could on the wide avenues in spite of his poor brakes.

Looking from the taxis he saw endless publicity hoardings announcing the services of an astonishing number of banks. There were 1,500 so called banks that in reality only took deposits, offering almost none of the normal banking services

such as loans.

The proliferation of banks in Moscow since the dissolution of the Soviet Union had been a startling phenomena, every ambitious golden boy seemed to head a bank and the fledgling stockmarket attracted the same species. It was not surprising that the success of the banks inevitably attracted the Mafiya and the killing of bank managers became an every day event.

Chapter 74. A Visit to Tampico

He checked-in to the La Quinta, a motel near the border crossing and ate a pizza at Denny's, a diner next door, where the food was mostly Mexican. Kennedy did not like Mexican food, at least the typical fare; it gave him a serious dose of turista. It was a mixture of things unfamiliar to him, such as tacos and tortillas, the soft sticky composition of which he could not clearly identify.

The drive down from Houston had been uneventful on a dreary flat road, it was nevertheless a good road and Kennedy enjoyed it, averaging around 70 mph in his comfortable rented car, an almost new rented Buick.

The only town of any interest was Corpus Christi, where he made a short detour stopping to eat. The rest of the road was an endless stream of MacDonaldis and cheap diners, scattered between Holiday Inns and cut price stores.

He arrived in Brownsville in the late afternoon. The town was different, it was completely Mexicanised, many years before the population had been black, but they had moved on to the North and the jobs it had offered at that time.

An old man at Denny's had recounted how in the early sixties it had been typical southern town, where the main activity was the military base and the frontier post with its police and customs services. Buses had then been segregated, with blacks in the back and whites in the front. Kennedy wondered to himself what they had done with the Mexicans.

Ortega had decided to accelerate Kennedy's involvement in his plans by having him visit one of his organisations hotel investments in Mexico and had invited him to make the detour on his next trip to Cuba. Tampico was not really a very accessible place to visit from Europe. The obvious choice for Kennedy would have been to fly to Mexico City and then take an internal flight up to Tampico.

By carefully studying the map he saw there was an alternative and he had chosen to enter Mexico by road from the USA, for the sheer pleasure of the trip. With his Limerick travel agent and their map they worked out what appeared a good flight to the border via Houston.

Kennedy flew into Houston from London, where as scheduled he should have taken a connecting flight to Brownsville on the American side of the border, facing

the town of Matamoros close to the Gulf of Mexico.

Kennedy had decided to discover for Mexico for himself ‘to be as knowledgeable as the other smart Alecs’ he figured. He had had more than enough of those stuck-up Dubliners such as Castlemain, not to speak of the big city boys from London and Paris who seemed to know everything and never ceased explaining things to him, as though he was naive or worse a country bumpkin, as he suspected they saw him. After all he reasoned it was he who had introduced Arrowsmith into the business and now he would do the same with Ortega without Castlemain ‘upsetting the apple tart’.

On arrival in Houston, after a long uncomfortable flight with a turbulent jet stream, he decided he had had enough of planes for one day. He cleared immigration and collected his bags, as he was obliged to do so on entering the USA, then taking the green lane at customs he headed for the exit, abandoning his connecting flight, going directly to the car rental desk where he hired a car. He had decided to visit Texas by driving down to Brownsville, where he was informed he could drop off the car at the local airport.

The airport at Brownsville was small compared to Huston, very small. After dropping off the car he took to a taxi into the city centre where he checked into a motel, La Quinta, a stones throw from the border.

As instructed, after his arrival in Brownsville, he was to call Ortega’s man, a certain Jose Aguirra, who would drive him down to Tampico. After his visit to Tampico, Kennedy planned to fly to Mexico City and on to Havana.

He checked in and once in his room dialled the Matamoros number of Aguirra, a woman answered and informed him that he would be picked up the following morning at his motel.

From the motel room he could see the frontier control point and an impressive high fence across a river or canal, on the other side was Mexico, effectively sealed from the USA to prevent ‘wetbacks’ from crossing illegally into the country.

It was about six when he set out to explore Brownsville. The shock was rude; it was unlike any American town he had ever visited. He knew the North quite well after his yearlong sojourn in Boston twenty years previously during his work experience with the law firm, but this place was unlike anything he had ever seen apart from Cuba, but it was not exactly like Cuba either, there was much too much movement.

Perhaps, he thought, Brownsville was like Mexico. There was traffic, the coming and going of Greyhound style buses, shops, neon lights and bars. Brownsville was not rich like the rest of the USA, but it was definitely not poor.

He wandered into the shops and supermarkets where the only language he heard spoken was Spanish and where the customers and salespeople alike looked Mexican, even the advertising on the packaging was in Spanish. He felt foreign.

He wandered down what appeared to be the main shopping street, past bus stops where crowds patiently waited, their arms loaded with plastic bags and large cardboard boxes, which according to the pictures on them, contained everything

from hairdryers to microwave ovens.

The shops gave way to small restaurants and bars. A little thirsty he turned into a dimly light bar and ordered a coke, he drank it slowly whilst studying the surroundings. He tried to strike up a conversation with the barman but to no avail, his Dublin accent and the barman's Mexican English were incompatible.

A girl walked in from the street, she took a stool at the corner of the bar and ordered a drink, and then looking around she fixed her eyes on Kennedy, inquisitively for a moment, and then smiled at him. He smiled back, which she appeared to take as an invitation, taking her drink in her hand she moved to the bar stool next to him.

"My name is Rosario," she held out her hand smiling. She had large white teeth and was quite pretty if that was the word, though a little too much makeup. Her wavy black hair was held together at the back of her neck by a large pink plastic clip in the form of a butterfly. She wore a black skirt and tee shirt.

"Hello, I'm Pat."

"Pat! You're from here?"

"No, I'm from Dublin."

She frowned, and then laughed. "In Texas?"

"No Ireland."

"You wanna buy me a drink?" she said, forgetting the question, which seemed too complicated for the Gringo.

"Yesh,"

She nodded to the barman who put a Corona on the bar.

"What are you drinking?"

"Coke."

"Oh! Where are you staying Pat?"

He took out his hotel registration card and unsure of the pronunciation showed it to her.

"La Quinta, the motel!" she laughed placing her hand on his thigh.

"Yesh." He looked down her low cut tee shirt as she leaned forward.

"How long are you staying Pat?"

"Just tonight, tomorrow I'm going to Tampico, driving!"

"Tampico! I'm from Tampico! You take me with you Pat?" she said playfully.

"You live here in Brownsville," said Kennedy looking at her and thinking that she resembled Lena a little. She had that kind of skin and hair.

"Yes, I work in a real estate agency here," she shrugged, "it's a fairly good job, not that well paid, but I have a resident's green card."

They talked and Rosario worked on Kennedy, warming him up. She was serious about going to Tampico. She explained she had a week's holiday and wanted to be back with her family for Easter, it would save her the fare and in return, if he wanted, she would be happy to show him around Tampico.

"I'm serious Pat, what about taking me? I'll be no problem, you have a car?"

"Well not exactly, I have a friend who is picking me up."

“An American?”

“Mexican.”

Rosario explained that she could work things out with a Mexican, who would understand her better than a Gringo. Kennedy nodded in agreement.

“So let’s go!” she said getting up.

The barman gave Kennedy the tab and he pulled out his dollars and peeled off twenty dollars placing them on the bar.

“Keep the change!” said Rosario to the barman with a wink, grabbing Kennedy by the arm and heading towards the door before he had time to react.

She walked with Kennedy to La Quinta, leaving him at the door, saying that she had to collect her bag and would return in an hour.

Rosario was as good as her word and knocked on his room door exactly one hour later. He had waited for her a little anxiously, unsure of himself, wondering whether it was a good idea or not, but when he heard the knock on his door he felt a slight movement in his crotch at the pleasurable thought of her in his bed.

Kennedy’s confidence was growing; he had the feeling of being a man in control of his destiny, jetting around the world, meeting people, women, making important decisions. His efforts were starting to pay-off, his business with Arrowsmith, the shares he had bought in Swap had made him a wealthy man, both real and on paper, and his relations with Ortega confirmed his flair for international business.

Yes, Kennedy knew where he was going; at least he thought he did. The small town accountant was making it in the world, amongst the rich and powerful.

He opened the door and Rosario entered with a smile, and then kissed him gently on the lips.

“Did you miss me Gringo!” she whispered in Spanish.

The next morning Jose Aguirra arrived at the hotel and was not particularly surprised to find his client Kennedy with a girl. Ortega had told him to look after Kennedy, he was important, but he had also told him that Kennedy was different to the American Gringos.

Rosario quickly explained in English, for the benefit of Kennedy, that she was Pat’s good friend. Aguirra shrugged his shoulders indifferently, if Kennedy had taken a shine to her that was his affair. He was the boss’s friend.

They got the bags into the big Ford Cruiser and set off to the border, where they joined the queue of vehicles at the U.S. control points, crossing the border some minutes later, without the least problem. On the Mexican side, Kennedy was given a visa by what appeared to be a military man, it was quick and efficient, he was the only one to need a visa. Then a customs officer asked them if they were carrying guns, Aguirra replied no. They then headed in the direction of the road to Tampico through the centre of Matamoros.

The scene that met his eyes driving through the centre of Matamoros excited Kennedy. It was really different, bustling, and colourful, not like those lifeless American cities. There were pavements and crowds on the pavements, street sellers, and disorderly traffic.

Everything he saw on the road as they drove south was of interest to him, it was a pity that Jose drove so fast, he would make up for that, he had a few days ahead of him to discover the mysteries of Mexico. He had never visited the country, his only knowledge of it came from the Westerns he had seen in the Limerick cinema on Saturday afternoons when he had been a kid.

The road from Matamorros to Tampico was poor, with endless road works for widening the narrow, flat, road, but in spite of that they managed to average a good speed.

Jose had turned on the car radio, as all Mexicans he liked the permanent sound of music, as loud as possible. Kennedy enjoyed the music especially the Mariachis that completed the romantic image.

It was evening by the time they arrived in Tampico, the road had been long and they had stopped several times for lunch and refreshments. Rosario had slept for most of the time, but when awake she took care of Kennedy, caressing his neck and hair to remind him of her presence.

He had had a good night with Rosario and felt relaxed; he would enjoy himself over the next days. There were no important business meetings; he was as he said to himself on a tour of inspection at Ortega's invitation. Rosario was different she was classier than Lina in Cuba, she was, how could he say it...more understanding, softer. Perhaps it was because she was not a communist. He felt relaxed and pleased with life.

He checked into the Hotel Inglaterra, which stood on the city's main square, facing the cathedral and the administrative palacio. It was like all Central American towns. Rosario left after telling him she was going to make a quick visit to her parents. She returned to the hotel an hour later, where she joined him for dinner with low lights and soft music in a nearby restaurant.

Over dinner she listened to him attentively as he described his business achievements. He proudly explained that he knew important people in Tampico, who owned the Miramar Club Hotel, then how they would invest in his projects in the Caribbean; she listened with interest gently encouraging him.

"You see Rosario, they would like to invest in my project, I'm playing hard to get, I'll take their money though!" he winked knowingly to her.

"You are a good businessman Pat, why don't we drink to your success."

For once he accepted and ordered a bottle of sweet Champagne. He enjoyed it; it was not so different from Coca-Cola he thought.

He talked and talked and was pleased it seemed like Rosario was impressed. He did not remember too much after returning to the hotel and was awoken the next morning by Rosario, when American breakfast was delivered on a trolley to his room; he simply drank the coffee eager to get out and explore Tampico. He wanted to try one of the typical local cafes, which he had spotted nearby the hotel. The menu contained set breakfasts printed in Spanish and English. He noted quickly that there was not a single tourist or foreigner visible, not even in the hotel.

Ortega had made Kennedy's reservation at the Inglaterra for his first night in Tampico. He wanted Kennedy to arrive rested and fresh for the big tour the next day. He knew that first impressions were important and did not want him to arrive directly at the Club tired in the evening after the long car drive. It would have been simpler if Kennedy had taken a flight from Matamoros to Tampico, but since he had wanted to see the country Ortega had not discouraged him, even though he knew that the coast road was flat and uninteresting with not much to see.

Aguirra had informed him that Kennedy was with a girl called Rosario, which seemed to please Ortega who had simply replied with a remark on the quality of Mexican hospitality.

Rosario now had Pat in the palm of her hand and joined him for the visit to the Club Hotel, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Jose picked them both up at ten; they were expected at the hotel half an hour later. According to Rosario just six or seven kilometres from Tampico.

Kennedy was surprised to see that Tampico was remarkable like a Cuban town. The roads were filled with older model American cars that glided past more or less noisily in the streets of the city centre, which he noted was divided in *cuadras* like Havana.

Ortega's hotel complex had been built one of the finest beaches on the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico, not far from Tampico. The climate was a typically sub-tropical, hot and humid, with an average year round temperature of 24°C. Tampico was almost five hundred kilometres south from the Texas border. It was possible to fly directly from the USA to the Tampico International Airport and there were also daily local flights from Monterey, Mexico City and other towns.

The Miramar Club had been developed as an all inclusive sun and sand tourist resort, mainly for North American holidaymakers during the winter season. Mexico, as part of NAFTA, the North American economic association together with Canada and the USA, offered a relatively inexpensive, uncomplicated winter holiday to the middle classes with golf, tennis, sailing and other sports.

Cuba was out of bounds for the average American and the other Caribbean islands were considered by many as either too expensive, too dangerous or too foreign, the later being the case for the French West Indies.

Playa Miramar had fine white sand washed by the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and was surrounded by woods, that fortunately hid the Petrobas oil refinery and the poor suburbs of Tampico from the tourists eye.

Tampico was a typical Mexican town, built on the north bank of the Panuco River. It offered shopping and night life for those who wished to venture out of the club as well as the historical centre of the city with its cathedral and public buildings, which had been built over a period of four hundred, commencing with the early Spanish colonial period in the 16th century.

Nevertheless Tampico was not a traditional tourist magnet. Ortega had invested there because of its proximity to the USA, its beach and climate. It was a discrete,

conveniently away from the mainstream of mass tourism, where not too many questions were asked by a city that needed to attract tourism.

After leaving the city centre the main road in the direction of the Miramar Beach gave way to a network of very poorly maintained local roads. The Ford bumped slowly over the water filled potholes through a series of extremely poor outlying villages with unmade side roads lined with ramshackle dwellings, where children played in the streets amongst barking dogs and chickens that scratched the dirt.

There was an air of ruin and decay about the shanties built in cinder blocks and where the occasional flash of scarlet Bougainvillea seemed to mock the misery. In front of one of the homes was a small pig tethered by a piece of string to a rusty pole.

The smell of the nearby oil refinery hung heavily in the air, between the trees could be seen the crackers and flames from the excess gases that curled up against the clear blue sky. Kennedy was a little disappointed, it did not seem to him like a tropical paradise.

The road terminated abruptly at a roundabout in front of the beach where a few old cars were parked, a couple of taxis and a bus waited. On the beach stood a lone and insalubrious snack bar surrounded by an accumulation of garbage, wrappings and plastic bags on the sand.

The driver turned to the right taking what seemed to be a private road through the wooded surroundings, then following a high wall and arrived at the club five minutes later.

The wall was interrupted by two huge carved Aztec pillars supporting a heavy double gate, it was the entrance to the club and a giant bronze plaque welcomed guests with Bienvenida a Club Miramar cast in highly polished letters.

The Ford was checked-in at the gatehouse where the security guard telephoned to the reception to announce their arrival. Once past the main gate they were in another world of waterfalls, palm trees and giant cactus. Here and there were uniformed gardeners tending to the finely cut lawns and tropical plants. A few moments later they pulled up before the potted palms and flowering shrubs that adorned the steps leading to the reception area, which was designed in the form of a Maya temple, where a radiant Ortega was waiting to welcome them with the resident Mariachi band playing 'South of the Border'.

A smiling girl offered them tropical drinks adorned by orchids on a silver tray. Boys ran around the car to take the bags. Kennedy was overwhelmed by the sudden change and the sumptuous reception offered to him, as though he was a visiting Hollywood Star.

Ortega held out both arms and to Kennedy's embraced him, bussing him on both cheeks, then together they followed the hotel manager and assistant manager who guided the cortege to the presidential suite.

He was given the royal treatment and any negative impression was quickly fading as Ortega's well-oiled and oft used machine was set in motion, a process that had

been repeated on countless occasions for visiting to politicians, lobbyists, bankers and gangsters overwhelmed him.

The club was a model that Ortega adroitly used to demonstrate the experience of his organisation, it was also the vehicle he would use infiltrate the Ciscap project via Kennedy, who was feted during his three days in Tampico like he was never to be again to be feted. Ortega was pleased with Rosario, who had accomplished her role perfectly, having skilfully seduced Kennedy uncovering all of his plans and intentions regarding Ciscap, exactly as Ortega had planned.

About an hour before dinner Ortega joined Kennedy in his suite; it was the moment for a friendly tête-à-tête to discuss their business matters.

“So Pat, how do you find my hotel? Impressive, no?”

“Very impressive Señor Ortega.”

“As you see we have the know-how and the experience.”

“Yesh, it’s a first class operation.”

“Good Pat, my friend, let’s get down to some serious business. Have you considered my proposals, have you talked with your partners?”

“I have Señor Ortega.”

“...and?” said Ortega a little impatiently.

“I have looked into things very carefully and we can accept a new financial shareholder, with my firm representing your interests.”

“Excellent Pat!” he stood up and grasped Pat by the hand shaking it and embracing him at the same time.” Kennedy was getting used to it now, though he still thought it a little strange for grown men to go around hugging each other.

“We are partners then!”

“Yesh.”

“So how do we proceed?”

“Its easy Señor Ortega, you deposit ten million pounds at the Irish Farmers Bank in Dublin.”

“The Irish Farmers?”

“Yesh, its best if the money comes through them, it would look a bit funny coming through you directly.”

“I see.”

Ten million was a mere trifle to Ortega; he could put in two, three, ten times that sum. The principle was to get his foot in the door.

“I will instruct my bank to transfer the monies and will have the papers drawn-up, giving you the power of attorney to act on my behalf. As I explained before I want to keep a low profile. One other point, the concession and know-how agreement?”

“That’s OK too. You will get the concession as the Hotel Club operator in that part of the Ciscap development.”

“Wonderful news Pat, wonderful news.”

It was another front in his vast system for the laundering of illegal funds and the legalisation of his crooked business interests through a respectable Irish bank and development company.”

Chapter 75. A South Sea Bubble

The sensational growth of his companies, Investec and Swap, could have gone to Kavanagh's head in one way or another. However, the effect was to the contrary. Sean Kavanagh very soon came to recognise a South Sea Bubble in the making, one that the Bear market Cassandras had predict as inevitable. Their warnings were lost in the hysteria of the market, in the rush by every species of investor, great and small, panicked by the fear of missing out on the distribution of new riches.

He had unexpectedly joined the Britain's top thousand richest people. Many of those held shares in start-up companies; the wealth was in paper money. Kavanagh would soon be forty-six and had firmly made the decision to stay rich. He had no use for paper money he wanted his wealth in real money, whatever it took to do that.

Unless money was spent it had no value. He had always had had pleasure in spending his money and had no intention of leaving it to the government or anybody else for that matter, with the possible exception of something for his brother. He had found a solution that helped him in his direst moment of need. As for the others if they wanted money they should make their own as he had always succeeded in doing in spite of the difficulties he had encountered.

His greatest fear was a reversal in the market situation, it always happened sooner or later. He reflected very carefully on the possible consequences of a potential crash, the timing, and how it would affect him personally. It would be too difficult to start again, he remembered his past misadventures in the property market, not forgetting his most recent experience in financing and investment, when his so called business friends dropped him like the pest.

He had no illusions as to the fickleness of human nature and how fortune could swing in both directions. If people started to lose their money he would be transformed from hero to villain overnight.

He was rich and he intended to stay that way, by whatever means it took. He could only count on himself when the dogs were set loose. He had looked after his two close friends and he did much soul searching as to whether he should confide in them the plans he was starting to explore.

Even though he very sincerely felt that he had fulfilled his past debts to both Jim and Phil, by the royal profits from their participation in his enterprises, he hesitated before deciding to sound them out on the eventuality of a crash and the idea of building a shelter fund together.

When he voiced his apprehensions as to the markets and the idea of setting up a

shelter fund, he discovered the idea had already passed through their minds. Their reasoning was very simple; the quantity of money involved was so great, that never again in a lifetime would such an opportunity occur, not even in ten or twenty, or even a thousand, lifetimes.

They reasoned that the market was extraordinarily overvalued, more than at any time in the last one hundred and fifty years. According to statistics the price-earnings index ratio had already reached 33 and in January 2000 it reached 44, based on the Dow Jones Industrials.

Their shares in Swap were quoted on the FTSE New Technologies listing, where the price-earnings ratios made nonsense of any serious calculations, earnings were non-existent and prices were astronomical

If ever there was a bubble then this was it. Things were going to get hot, and it was inevitable that they were going to go through a turbulent period. It would be better to face the future crash whenever it came, richer rather than poorer.

They agreed that Kavanagh put into effect a contingency plan. With the greatest care he prepared to dispose of a significant part of their shares, so as to ensure that whatever happened their future they would not be financially endangered.

Over a period of six weeks he sold a large number of their shares in discrete small packages to offshore shell companies he had bought, all the transactions were carried out during the course of daily trading, these shell companies acted as a screen to avoid attracting the markets attention to himself. The shares were then sold on the London and Dublin markets equally discretely by the same companies he had bought for that purpose.

The proceeds were then transferred through several offshore bank accounts, disappearing to all intents and purposes into the ether, leaving no trace for those who could have tried to follow the trail.

Every single day, throughout the international banking system there were hundreds of thousands of electronic transfers, totalling over two trillion dollars, as a result it would have been like trying to find a needle in a haystack, or to determine who was doing what and for which reasons.

International stock markets and the banking system worked twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, in almost two hundred countries and thousands of cities in the most surprisingly far flung corners of the globe.

Those shares in Swap traded on the market, exchanged hands almost every ten days in the frenzied atmosphere of the merry-go-round, the same furore had taken over the buying and selling of almost all other shares on the New Technologies markets. Kavanagh's gains had been transferred to offshore accounts by means of the very tools that his company Investec had developed for its banking customers.

It was not clear to him whether he had carried out any illegal trading, after all they owned the shares and he had sold them, be it through his shell companies, to willing buyers on the open market place. Swap was in good health, even if overvalued, with a capitalisation totally disproportionate to its actual value, bearing no relation to its sales or profits. The market theoretically valued its future profits,

whilst he was interested in the immediate profit he could make from the market value of Swap shares.

As Kavanagh's profits from the sale of the shares flowed over the wires to the shell companies that he owned in George Town, Grand Cayman, another event was taking embryonic form that very same day.

In a quiet corner of a smoky pub, favoured by young couples, on St Patrick Street in Limerick City, Paddy O'Brien's secretary, Mary Doolan, was engrossed in conversation with a new boyfriend, a good looking young journalist at the Limerick Echo. It was Friday evening and Mary had already downed an unreasonably number of strange concoctions, mixtures such as Tequila, Curaçao and Pineapple juice. She was so impressed by Pdraigh Fitzgerald's stories that she could not resist letting on to him on the inside secrets of the bank. Pdraigh swore 'on my mother's death bed' he would never let out a single word.

"It was the Irish Union Bank that set-up Kavanagh and it was myself who prepared the papers," she whispered as he took her hand in his.

One detail led to another and it was a short hop to uncover the nature of Kavanagh's virtual investment.

For the young reporter it had all the makings of a good muckraking scoop and his editor after discretely checking out a few details put the story on the front page of the Friday morning edition.

The NIB had been subject to one of the recurring bouts of public criticism, when a major American company, which had received large grants, had pulled out of the Shannon Airport Business Zone with the loss of 150 local jobs. The Kavanagh story reinforced one of the favourite themes of the Limerick Echo - the misuse of government funds.

That same Friday morning Kavanagh's offices first, then his home were besieged by reporters, he was unaware of the sudden precipitation of events, as he was heading peacefully towards Belfast airport by car. In the boot was a light travel bag, into which he had slipped a thick envelope containing several thousand dollars in cash, with 'his' spare passport in the name of John Ryan, he was always careful when travelling abroad and liked to travel with sufficient of cash to cover any unexpected events. He was booked on a scheduled flight to Amsterdam, where he was to meet his partner Phil Moftan, as planned to discuss the results of the week's transfer operations.

Within twenty-four hours of the news in the Limerick Echo, the national TV, Telefis Eirean, was reporting the story. It was transformed into a full blown political scandal with the NIB at the centre.

Reports of investigations into Kavanagh's background quickly flowed in, these led over the water to Scotland and London. The next morning the Financial Times reported the news of his disbarment under the Financial Services Act, which was spread across the front page and followed with details of his earlier misadventures

in the property business.

Kavanagh was quickly labelled by the national newspaper, the Irish Times, as a crook, who had misused Irish tax payers money and what was worse was that after all was said and done, he turned out to be nothing more than a swindling Brit posing as a son of the Eirean Isle.

Immediately Her Britannic Majesties tax authorities became interested in him, he certainly owed them monies both from the past but more interestingly from recent transactions.

When the news broke that Kavanagh had unloaded his shares in Swap with the money evaporating into thin air, then his unexplained disappearance, the affair erupted into a financial scandal of a dimension not seen since the Mike Leeson and Barings Bank affair.

The dismayed government in Dublin saw their image of Ireland as a base for New Technologies and a Financial Centre tarnished, and the opposition after their blood.

It coincided with the sudden fall of the London Stock Exchange followed by that of New York, where the Nasdaq plunged to its lowest level of the year. World markets trembled in fear of contagion and of a financial crash in the New Economy and its darling, New Technologies.

Chapter 76. A Little Investigation

His phone rang, it was Juliette calling from Paris. John Ennis had called his office early that morning to checkout some of the details he had been trying to piece together.

“John, I contacted your friend Barton at the DST. He’s very talkative, probably trying to pick up some info himself.”

“What did he say?” asked Ennis a little impatiently.

“Well your friend Ortega has been banned from France. Persona non grata! Suspected of some highly distasteful business with the Russian Mafiya and possibly Colombian drug cartels!”

“I see, anything else?”

“Oh yes, he has been involved with one of Castlemain’s friends in Ireland, Pat Kennedy!

“Well, well,” replied Ennis with a soft whistle. “OK, listen Juliette, email me everything right away. Keep this to yourself and then check up on Castlemain and his business here in the Caribbean, a project called Ciscap in Cuba,” he spelt out the word Ciscap, “quickly if you can.”

He rang off and started to put a list of names down on paper of those who seemed to be linked to Castlemain in one way or another. Ortega and Castlemain seemed unlikely bedfellows, but there was a connection, there must be, the odds were too

great that so many things should lead back to Castlemain. How was Kavanagh involved in all that? Why was he in Cuba, why had he gone to George Town? Was it something to do with the stockmarket crash and the growing Swap scandal?

On the other hand there was not necessarily something wrong, although Castlemain had been a little too smooth in Montego Bay, perhaps he was hiding something. It was now obvious that he had been trying to fob them with the trip to Cayo Saetia.

Once back in Havana contacts with the outside would become much more difficult and there remained little time to collect and piece together the puzzle before their Caribbean mission came to an end and they returned to France. Whatever happens there's no way I'm going to get something to write about unless I move my arse, Ennis thought to himself determined to seize on what was beginning to look like a scoop.

He found Paul sunning himself by the pool tapping his Cuban *claves*, two round polished sticks of hard wood that he was tapping together, producing a rhythmic clicking sound like a one note xylophone, popular amongst Latin American musicians. Paul had become enamoured by the Caribbean, but more in particular Cuba and its music, he was eager to get back to his mojitos. His thing was photography and Grand Cayman offered nothing that could be compared to Cuba, there was little more worth shooting, only rich tourists, he had become quickly bored with George Town.

Chapter 77. A Mafioso in the Sun

Andrei Kurov was shot dead entering the Atlantis Casino on Ulitsa Tverskaya in Moscow. His body was sprawled in the dirty snow brightened by his blood only two days after his return from the USA. Two neat bullet holes, shot at close range, in the head, the mark of a real professional.

He had been in one of his characteristic brash moods as he had flown back to Moscow after more than a decade in the Miami sunshine. He had slugged Veuve Cliquot from the bottle, speaking movingly about caring for his ailing mother and his retirement; he planned a set up a small business in Moscow. Those who knew him well that meant racketeering and drug trafficking.

However, it was clear that Kurov's motives for returning home involved self-preservation more than a visit to his ailing mother. He had fallen out with Ortega and the new mobsters who had taken over Miami Beach.

Behind his bravado lay fear, hidden beneath his suntan and the thick gold bracelet he sported with a diamond studded Rolex. He dreaded the idea of financial hardship and old age in the misery and harsh conditions of the poor in modern Russia. He was no longer in the same class of the new generation of gangsters. He

had gone soft; he had got involved in the kind of business he no longer had the necessary guts or intelligence to handle, mixing in affairs that did not concern him, such as with Kennedy and the Estonians.

His problems started with the decision of Ortega to eliminate Eriksson, he had confided the task to Kurov as a test. The Swede had become a risk and had grown too greedy, attracting attention in Russia by moving large quantities of forged bank notes and bonds with that two faced Caucasian gypsy, Demirshian.

Ortega did not need that vodka sotted Swede with his cheap mulatta shooting his mouth off about that kind of business around Havana or anywhere else. Not only that, but the problems in Chechnya told him of the need to distance himself from Demirshian and his friends for a while.

Kurov had been full of cocaine the evening when he had left the Ortega residence on Indian Creek, instead of getting one of the men to drive him to Eriksson's hotel, he had taken the cigarette boat in the direction of the Port of Miami.

The police estimated he had been travelling at over 80mph in a 25mph zone when he had hit a cruiser, slicing it in two on the inter-coastal waterway, the cigarette boat had ended up ramming a dock near a condo almost five hundred yards away from the crash leaving bodies and wreckage behind it.

With over fifty thousand miles of waterways and three quarters of a million boats in the state, water travel was a common form of transport for many Florida residents and especially those who lived on the banks of the inland waterways such as Ortega.

Kurov, miraculously unhurt but shaken had fled the scene his mind befuddled by cocaine, hailed a passing taxi to take him to the Down Town area to Eriksson's hotel where he bungled the job, shooting an innocent tourist. Not that the tourist was a problem, that happened all the time in Miami, but the risk was that Kurov be linked to Ortega, which would have much graver consequences.

The Miami Beach gangsters had labelled Kurov as 'The Tsar'. It was a term of contempt rather than a compliment; they had observed him develop a preference for a princely life-style rather than attending to his business, that was to say in organised crime.

His friends and acquaintances, described the fifty-five year old Kurov as a worried man. He did not want to meet his end as his partner and close friend, who was gunned down at his Miami Beach home two years earlier.

Kurov panicked, with good reason, he fled Miami to London carrying with him a large quantity of the mobs counterfeit dollar bills and bonds which he hoped to be able to negotiate with Raymond Reagan, one of Kennedy's men who had been innocently used to carry out his dirty work as his boss jetted around the world in style.

The Miami Beach area, a ten kilometre strip of Florida coastline, was altogether different from the place it had been when Kurov and four other Russians arrived after fleeing Cuba and the PNR, the Policía Nacional Revolucionaria, who had been investigating drug trafficking, over ten years previously.

In 1990 Miami Beach had become a bolt hole for certain Soviet expatriates and fugitives who had quit Cuba as the relations between the two countries had become bitter and filled with mutual recriminations after fall of the Soviet Empire. It had since become the front line in the drugs war as ruthless gangs, most of them Cuban but also Russians, whom the Cubans openly detested for their superior attitude and their racist attitude, battled for the control of the US multi-billion dollar cocaine trade.

The Russian gangsters, who ran the Miami Beach drugs trade with their Latino counterparts, had earned a reputation for their brutal methods.

There was no visible evidence to link Kurov directly to crime on the Miami Beach, but there was little doubt that he was close those operating on the wrong side of the law. It was not without reason that the city had been renamed ‘Crime Beach’ and the gangsters had become more vicious as the stakes had grown.

Kurov’s gangland execution was carried out as an urgent \$5,000 contract when his arrival in Moscow was announced to Ortega. Ortega had learned of the disappearance of the counterfeit bills and bonds by their owners who wanted them back and had expedited two strong-arm villains to London to ensure the goods were returned.

Federal Drug Agency officers had been observing the activities of the Russians, and informed Scotland Yard of the departure to London by the two mobsters, unfortunately a little too late to intercept them. They were Dublin before the police picked up their trail again.

Miami Beach was infested with Russian criminals and drug runners. “There are places where they have completely taken over. They have their own infrastructure and form tightly knit groups, which make it very hard for us to penetrate,” the Agency had told the British police.

When Kurov had settled in Florida ten years previously he had been a redoubtable figure. Those who came across him treated him with respect. His past made people think twice before criticising him. However, in recent years, he had been confronted by new Miami gangsters hardened by their experience in Eastern Europe, who distrusted him and disliked the attention he attracted by his ostentatious life style.

Kurov ran a club, which had been the scene of shootings, stabbings and punch-ups linked to drugs and traffic in counterfeit currency, since it had been opened three years previously. It had been bombed and the man who was once considered untouchable had become vulnerable. It was time to get out.

Even Kurov’s former Cuban cronies began to feel he was a liability. “I had a lot of respect for him back in Havana, but a few years after he moved here Kurov started acting like a jerk.” said another Russian gangster living in Miami Beach. “Down here you do a bit of business and keep a low profile.”

While some of Kurov’s drinking partners grew rich on drug money, Kurov found it increasingly hard to support the expensive life style to which he and his wife

Tatiana had become accustomed to. “Andrei owes a lot of money to the wrong sort of people,” said an underworld source told the press.

Kurov’s business interests including an Cuban restaurant, a bar and a night-club, had taken a turn for the worse and a couple of years back he had put his villa on sale which was worth a million dollars to raise fresh cash, but did not find a buyer.

Kurov was shot down by a tattooed drug runner from Moscow nicknamed the ‘Chaika’, seagull in Russian, who told those who cared to listen, “Miami Beach had got too nasty for faggots like Kurov.” Chaika earned his name from sea bird calls he used as signals to his accomplices waiting on the beaches for the smuggled cocaine that arrived on the gofasts.

The Chaika openly boasted he would never stand trial for a murder he committed. His victim, a Colombian who had crossed him, was tossed overboard from a gofast tied up in a sleeping bag weighed down with stones, The Chaika recorded the screams and played them over the telephone to his friends. “We had very little trouble since then,” he boasted.

Each year some two hundred million dollars of Colombian drugs were intercepted and confiscated off the Florida coast, a mere fraction of the total quantity imported into the USA.

“It was where the drug runners taught the mobsters the business and where the mobsters provided the drug runners with cash to work.” The US Customs described it as a symbiosis that had developed between the production end of the drug industry in Colombia and its marketing counterpart in the USA.

Chapter 78. The Plot

Time had passed and Raul Cienfuegos had made his preparations with his group of young officers who shared his vision of the future. It was time to take action against those who wished to preserve the communist revolution, to prevent them from consolidating their position. They were trying to seduce the Cuban people with window dressing, making the worn out old whore of revolutionary politics look like a fresh young novia.

The Cuban Communist Party or CCP, which had been established in 1965, was omnipresent in all corners of Cuban society through its different organisations. There were 100,000 Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, or CDR’s, that represented seventy five percent of the total population. Almost every Cuban was a member of an emanation of the CCP, either through youth organisations, cultural organisations or unions.

What would happen after Castro? A look at the consequences of the death or downfall of seemingly immortal communist leaders across the world was a good

indication, with one or two exceptions, such as North Korea. In Cuba that version was improbable since no successor had been groomed to continue Castro's work. Castro's own children had left Cuba, they had sensibly chosen to live abroad. The probability that the system would fall apart was extremely high.

Nevertheless, it was in the interest of a large number of politicians, government officials and those having a vested interest through jobs or privileges, to try to ensure the continuity of the system.

They were the principal enemies of Raul Cienfuegos. To change the system he needed money, to pay his soldiers and police with real money, vast quantities of money to provide jobs that would ensure a decent standard of living, not the miserable survival existence that they had had to live with under Castro. Money bought loyalty, money bought allies, he was a realist, never in history had people fought for non-ideological ideas without a full stomach and a solid roof over their heads.

He would offer them a future, a materialist future, food in their stomachs, not the empty illusion of Fidel's communism.

The trouble was that Cuba was poor - dirt poor - possibly one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Cienfuegos was forced to make a pact with the devil - Ortega and his associates - to attract the money he needed. He would reckon with Ortega later, when he achieved his goals.

He did not want Yankee money, with the strings and obligations to respect their human rights ideas, utopian legislation governing money and ownership, for a country where such rights had never really existed for the masses. He was not against those principals, but in time, when he controlled the country and cleansed it of the communist disease that had eaten at its body and soul, there would be enough time for that.

His spies had carefully followed Castlemain's men, Arrowsmith and Brel. They were decent men, competent and ambitious. Unfortunately for them it was time to implement his plans, commencing by crippling Cayo Saetia, removing its head.

Castlemain with certain of his associates were about to leave Guadeloupe for Grand Cayman on his yacht according to the reports from his informers. Cienfuegos' men would ensure they never arrived at their destination.

Chapter 79. A Storm Breaks

Boisnier set the sails to take advantage of the wind that was now blowing strong, at the same moment Eriksson hit the Absolute. As the Marie Galante swiftly plunged through the waves the other less experienced sailors also took to their cabins while Castlemain and Boisnier thrilled with the sport of handling the fast yacht that was running fast ahead of the wind.

It must have been an hour or so later which Doudoune was awoken by a crash. The bottle of Absolute that had rolled off the table and fallen to the floor slithering across the cabin as the boat rolled heavily.

Looking at Eriksson she saw that he was slumped deep in the chair with his head lying on the ship's table facing the porthole. She pulled herself out of the bed, groggy from the sedative she had taken, and stepped unsteadily towards him. His eyes were half open as was his mouth; his face was a motley ruddy white. His reddish blond hair hung limply over his forehead.

In a panic she opened the cabin door and screamed out, Courtauld came hurrying out of the adjacent cabin.

“What’s wrong?”

“Stiggy! Stiggy!” She pointed into the cabin.

Courtauld instinctively felt Eriksson’s pulse, he knew he was a heavy drinker with a predilection for Nordic style binges, but the open eyes were a bad sign.

He barely felt the failing pulse and called for help. With difficulty they got his ninety-five kilos onto the cabin bed. Courtauld stepped out of the cabin and talked quickly to Boisnier.

“He seems to be in a bad way.”

“Is it the Vodka?”

“I don’t think so, I think he’s had an attack on some kind!”

“Shit! Shit!”

“Tell Castlemain!”

After a heated discussion they agreed they had no choice but to head for San Domingo, there was no point to go back to Ponce, where Eriksson could have probably got better treatment in an American hospital. Castlemain insisted on going west. They could leave Eriksson with Doudoune together one of the crew who would stay to assist her through the difficulties.

They radioed ahead to alert the port for an ambulance. By the time they approach the port of San Domingo Eriksson was already dead. There was nothing they could have done, but they decided against telling the bad news to Doudoune who was totally dazed, in a kind of trance. Arrowsmith promised Doudoune that he would return from George Town to help her, knowing that she was stranded now that Eriksson was dead.

One of the Guadeloupean crewmen stayed with her and was instructed to help her with the financial problems and her return to Guadeloupe or Cuba. Castlemain had instructed their agent by radiotelephone to settle the money problems and inform Eriksson’s Swedish family and the Bottens, who would have to look after the formalities and repatriation of the body to Sweden.

It was early evening as the ambulance headed out of the port, its sirens wailing in the direction of the hospital. The Marie Galante had already set sail in spite of the warning from the Harbour Master. Boisnier figured they had over twenty four hours good sailing ahead of them before the storm hit.

Before leaving Guadeloupe the weather forecast had reported a tropical storm,

which had formed in the Atlantic east of Trinidad and had swept up into the southern Caribbean over Venezuela, causing torrential rains and mudslides in Caracas, with the loss of many lives in the favalas perched on the mountain side above the capital.

The satellite image showed the spiral form of a cyclone that was moving slowly northwards, the forecasters had announced that it would lose its intensity over the following forty eight hours becoming a mild depression with heavy rains by the time it arrived over the south-west Caribbean and the Central American region.

That would be well south of them and should not be of any worry, Boisnier had decided. Nevertheless as a good seaman he had taken careful note to follow the movement of the storm hour by hour.

They had lost over twelve hours with the detour and stop in San Domingo. Castlemain calculated that by setting full sail they could race ahead of the storm, which was heading in a north-westerly direction according to the weather report, the yacht would veer directly west to the Caymans. He figured at the worst that only the edge of the storm would affect them.

Castlemain wanted to get to George Town as soon as possible to settle his business affairs before travelling on to Cuba. He was a busy man and could not spend more than the time he had allotted to pleasure. What was more important it was essential that he initiate the transfer of the monies promised to Montero's political friends in Havana to avoid a major crisis at the Ciudad Cayo Saetia site. It was his habit to personally look after such delicate affairs, the less that others knew of such transactions the better.

The next evening the Marie Galante headed through the Jamaica Channel, south of Guantanamo, in the direction of Cabo Cruz, at the westerly tip of the Sierra Maestra. To Arrowsmith's surprise Boisnier was still fretting over the precious hours lost by their stop in San Domingo, though there was a good wind blowing the weather remained fine and clear and there was no sign of the storm that had been the subject of so much discussion.

The radio reports that Boisnier still managed to tune into seemed to indicate that the storm was gathering speed and veering further to the west than the weathermen had forecast. His experience warned him never to underestimate the unpredictability of the weather and especially tropical storms.

Over the following hours they maintained full speed in the clear weather and in spite the heavy sea enjoyed the sunshine and sat back, there was little effort needed to keep the ketch underway. At the rate things were going they would be safely in George Town the next morning as the storm turned in a north west towards a large Cuban island called Isla del Jovenes.

It was night and they were about six or seven hours out from George Town when the storm suddenly caught them with its lashing gusts of wind, pushing them ahead and violently whipping the sails. Boisnier hauled in the sails and the Marie Galante ran under the full power of her two 250-horse power engines. As boat was

violently heaved by the waves fear and misgiving slowly began to replace the earlier bravado of the inexperienced passengers.

It was two thirty in the morning as Castlemain fought the wheel with Boisnier as the wind shrieked and rain lashed the boat at over 150 kilometres an hour. Their heading was directly west and with luck he figured they could make it into port without too much difficulty if the storm veered north as expected from the last radio forecast they had heard.

The motors were turning at full speed whining furiously as the props thrashed the foam almost gasping as the boat rocked and heaved. The waves were now five or six metres high. Below de Montfort had collapsed on his bed vomiting bile, sick from endless heaving of the boat as it rode through the storm, he was beyond caring.

Arrowsmith was holed up in the navigation cabin hanging on to the table, desperately trying to get some sense out of the radio. After more than two hours of being buffeted by the storm there was an unexpected calm, the pitching and rolling eased and the sea seemed to be less agitated, the boat hummed smoothly through a miraculously changed sea.

The passengers and crew barely had time to give a sigh of relief when the one of the motors fell silent, followed a few instants later by the other. A moment later Boisnier came crashing down the stairs.

“What the fucks up!” he shouted as he tore the motor room door open. A blue cloud of diesel fumes and smokes poured through the door.

“What’s going on for Christ sake man?” Castlemain shouted.

The lights flickered and went out, then came on again as the batteries took over.

“The motors have stopped!”

“I know that for God’s sake! Get them going again!”

Boisnier pressed on the starter. There was a whine and a clanking.

“It’s the gear box! A shaft or something’s bust!”

“My God, what a fuckin time for that to happen!”

De Monfort appeared at the door of his cabin.

“Are we there?”

“Get out of the way man!” shouted Castlemain pushing him to one side.

The boat gave a roll and the wind started to howl like a jet engine. The boat was drifting wildly, turning broadside on to the waves, which had started to pick up force again.

“Get her around with the fuckin wind! Get some fucking sail up!”

A good seaman like Boisnier could in theory sail out the storm. It depended on how bad it became.

The ketch swung around with the wind behind it. For the next hour they fought through the storm, pushed by the hurricane force winds up 180 kilometres an hour, they no longer controlled their heading and struggled in a north westerly direction.

Boisnier figured that they must be somewhere north of the Caymans, between the Pickle Bank and the Archipelago de los Jardins de la Reined.

Their lighting and power for the electrical equipment, with the engines down, now depended on the batteries and how long they would last was anybody's guess.

He pulled on the wheel as he tried to keep the Marie Gallant in line with the wind, which was veering. Suddenly it went slack, the ketch no longer replied to the wheel. It veered around with the wind to its starboard flank and started heeling over as the wind tore at the two sails that had been driving them through the waves.

"Get your fucking lift vests on!" shouted Boisnier, "We're going to founder!"

"Send out a distress signal!"

"The god dammed radio is out!" shouted Arrowsmith appearing on deck tightening the cords of his life vest.

The boat heaved as a mighty wave rolled her broadside into a deep trough. Then came another wave that seemed to flow like a huge black torrent over the boat. Arrowsmith felt himself lifted bodily into the water, with a crashing and cracking that told him that masts and riggings were coming down. Detachedly he noted the water he gulped was warm and tasted the salt in his mouth. The sea swirled in a violent flood around him.

Then the boat seemed loom over him as he was pulled by the wash. He lost consciousness, hit by something hard, literally thrown at him by the force of the waves.

The Marie Galante powerless and rudderless, swung around and heeled over in slow motion. The white keel half submerged floated during a short moment, tossed on the huge waves like a piece of insignificant flotsam in the dark of the night before going down stern first, the prow seemed to linger briefly like a floater then it was gone with its crew, passengers and illicit cargo of cocaine.

Their only hope would have been the American Navy that had been running exercises to the south of the Pickle Bank, but the big war ships had their own problems and were running for clear weather to the south.

Chapter 80. Fraud

Andrei Kurov sat on his flight from London for Moscow believing that his retirement fund had been safely tucked away by the two Irishmen in Dublin. There was no way they would attempt to double cross him knowing his terrible reputation.

At that same moment three men were assisting the authorities in Dublin Friday after police from both sides of the Atlantic announced they had uncovered an attempted fraud involving \$30 million in fake U.S. Treasury bonds.

The three from the Ireland and Britain were arrested Thursday after a week long operation conducted by the Irish police and a U.S. Secret Service agent detached to

the City of London financial district. A fourth person was understood to have left the country.

The police struck after the team allegedly deposited fake Treasury bonds in a Dublin bank. Sergeant Pdraigh Kelly of the Dublin police would not name the institution involved, saying only that it was a part of a major bank. Other sources identified it as the Irish Union Bank.

The bonds, purported to date from the 1970's, but were probably produced by a sophisticated computer controlled printing machine, normally only found in plants that printed security paper the police said. They were being examined by U.S. agents.

"There's nothing genuine about them. They're fraudulent documents, probably made by real professionals." said Jim Gallagher, Secret Service attaché at the U.S. Embassy.

The bonds would have probably been used to obtain smaller sums "from investors unaware of the authenticity of the documents," Detective Inspector Seamus O'Rially of the Dublin police said.

Frauds involving U.S. currency were common, Gallagher announced adding that the very same day police had seized a quantity of counterfeit one hundred dollar bills in Limerick City, believed to be part of a much larger quantity, however bonds of the type involved in this scam were uncommon.

A spokesman for the Dublin police said the amount of money at stake was quite astonishing. Unofficial sources said that the police had been alerted on the basis of information from Scotland Yard in London.

Forty police and specialists had participated during the surveillance and arrest of the suspects. The police reported that criminals often tried to use the fake bonds as a guaranty to borrow money or to obtain an advance on the interest from this type of obligation.

Two Limerick men and an Englishman named Harry Rossiter from Liverpool were believed to be amongst those being held at Mountjoy. They were said to be helping police with their inquiries.

Chapter 81. A Balsero

Arrowsmith coughed and slowly took in his surroundings. He was in the sea, he had been unconscious. For how long he did not know. He remembered the storm, the boat capsizing. He gasped for breath, the sea was heavy but seemed to be calmer, the sky looked to be a degree less dark, perhaps it was an illusion. He seemed to be floating without difficulty. His life vest gave him good buoyancy. He remembered having firmly tied it on in the storm before being pitched overboard.

For a moment he imagined he had vaguely seen a light. But it disappeared as the sea fell; perhaps it had just been his imagination. He simply needed to hang on. He wanted to live. He felt a force within and he instinctively knew that he had a chance. The sea was warm. His head hurt he must have been hit by something as the boat capsized.

He remembered the balseros how they had survived storms during days and nights. Where were the others, he called out. It was useless, the effort hurt his throat and the noise of the sea swallowed his shout in the darkness. He needed to conserve his energy. He felt thirst, it was a strange feeling surrounded by water. His lips, mouth and throat were sore from the salt.

He had seen the pictures of the balseros on the TV, and thought of the thirst they had suffered and sharks, not to speak of the sub-tropical sun. His head was bare; he was only wearing a polo shirt and shorts.

He had no feeling of time. He became aware of a tiredness that began to invade his body.

Then the light was there again. It seemed brighter this time, he did not know if it was the Marie Gallant or perhaps another boat. He felt the sea tugging at him, there seemed to be an undercurrent. There was a break in the clouds and he saw the white foam of the waves.

A powerful surge was pulling at him; the sea rose and thrust him under a huge roaring wave. Even his life jacket could not resist. He was propelled through the roaring watery darkness. After what felt like an eternity the force of the current slackened and a came almost to a stop. His lungs almost in his mouth he was shot to the surface gasping desperately for air. Then still gasping he realised that water was almost totally calm.

Behind he heard the crashing of the waves and realised he had been carried through a gap in a reef. He was in a lagoon. The light was on the shore and he could see other dimmer lights nearby. He thrust out towards the shore. After a long effort his feet touched the sandy bottom. He waded up to the beach and fell down in a surge of heaving emotion and relief. He thanked God for the first time since his childhood.

With the light of dawn he saw small houses behind a field. The sky was leaden grey and there was still a wind, it was dying, the tail end of the storm, he figured he must have been in the water for one or two hours.

To his left, about three or four hundred meters away, was what looked like a hotel. It was about five or six stories high. It must have been that he had seen from the sea. A tourist hotel. It had a name on the roof.

He struggled to take off his life vest and pull his ideas together. His lips were parched and swollen from the salt. He looked at his Breitling. It was 6.45. He was drying quickly in the warm air. He smoothed the wrinkles out of his polo shirt and shorts. Then smoothing down his hair, he walked up the beach to the vegetation and threw the life vest far into the grassy undergrowth, a wild mixture of cane and tall grass.

He made his way to the hotel. He was now a guest, be it a scruffy one, having taken an early morning walk. A little unsteady on his feet he walked up the steps that led to a large open lobby. There was a night guard who nodded half interested to him.

“Buenas!”

“Buenas!” replied Arrowsmith forcing a smile and walking on. He was in Cuba.

The guard looked at him as he proceeded up the steps. All tourists are crazy the Cuban thought. The gringo must have been up early inspecting the damage from the storm.

Arrowsmith walked past the reception. He headed towards the restaurant. It was closed. He saw behind the glass doors waiters and waitresses setting out the breakfast buffet. To his right he saw on a door the sign for men’s toilets. He pushed the door and entered.

His mouth under the tap he gulped down the water through his swollen lips. For the first time in his life he understood what real thirst was. He would have drunk anything and to hell with the ‘turista’ or any other water borne disease.

In the mirror he combed his hair with his fingers, there was a bruise near the hairline, mauve, the skin open, though any blood had been washed away by the sea. He tried to make himself look respectable. A last look and he thought not too bad after a shipwreck and a night in the sea.

His wallet was still in his buttoned down back pocket. He took it out and looked at the contents. Wet dollar bills. He smoothed them out. There were 432 dollars and 700 French francs, wet, but none the worse for wear. His credit cards and his identity card were present.

He placed the notes between sheets of toilet paper and made a small roll. He left the toilets saw the restaurant open and he made his way in barefoot to the breakfast buffet.

The tiredness that he felt sweeping over him would have to wait, he had spent at least a couple of hours in the water, he was not exactly sure how many, but the effort had exhausted him. He forced himself to think clearly, there were new dangers, first his illegal though unavoidable entry into the country, would the Cuban police be understanding, a balsero in the wrong direction? He needed time to think.

Had Castlemain and the others survived? Had they made it ashore? In any case Eriksson was dead! What that implied he was not sure, but if Castlemain was dead the whole Ciscap project was in peril, how would El Commandante take that?

There were so many questions it would be better to lay low for a few days. The last thing he needed was to fall into the hands of some local corrupt PNR; he had heard enough stories to give him serious doubts about what could happen.

It would have been better to have landed on some other island, he thought, ungrateful to the gods who had saved him. Then it slowly dawned on him that he had been incredibly lucky to have come ashore anywhere at all!

The waiter appeared at his table and asked him his room number, he responded

almost mechanically with a number which seemed to satisfy the waiter, there were only a couple of early birds and the chances were that it was not their number.

In spite of the difficulties with his lips he wolfed down the breakfast with a litre of fruit juice. He decided it was not wise to hang around any longer, he stood up and giving a friendly nod to the waiter he left.

He explored the vast lobby where he found a brochure of the hotel. Hotel Ancon, Playa Ancon, Trinidad, it announced with a view of the hotel and beach with smiling guests. It was logical the Marie Galante had been south of the coast of central Cuba when it had foundered in the storm.

A girl was setting up her souvenir stand by the steps that led to the beach. He bought a straw hat, a pair of plastic beach shoes and a tee shirt that sported a picture of the Che. He then collected a few tour brochures and headed for the entrance where he saw a couple of taxis waiting in the car park. He asked the driver to take him to the centre of the Trinidad.

The taxi had pulled in behind a line of three or four ancient Buick's or Chryslers. The street was cobbled with large uneven stones which were most effective speed breakers, it descended towards what he imagined was the centre of the town. He was on calle Piro Guinart. A couple of vendors were selling bocaditos filled with small slices of ham cut from the bone to the drivers and travellers.

As he got out of the taxi he was accosted by a jintero speaking English who asked him if he needed a room. He felt tired and weary letting himself be convinced without any discussion. In any case that was how rooms in private houses were rented in Cuba, he had heard that on his previous visits.

The jintero showed him to the large double door of a house, N°216, not more than a few metres from where the taxi had stopped, he called through a barred window and the door opened. A man of about forty-five showed him in into a spacious, sombre, but cool reception hall. After a few words with the jintero he closed the street door.

"My name is Rodrigez," he said holding out his hand. How many nights do you want to stay?"

"Three."

"You are alone?"

"Yes."

"It's twelve dollars plus three dollars for breakfast."

He led him to a courtyard, off which were two rooms. He showed him the first, there was a double bed, it looked clean and comfortable.

"Okay, I'll take it."

"Can you pay me now?"

"No problem."

"You have some luggage?"

"It's coming...my friends," he said hesitatingly and paid Rodrigez from his fold of dollars which were now dry.

The Cuban asked no more, he had seen plenty of tourists travelling lightly, it was not his problem, the gringo looked respectable, he had money, he turned and left him in the room. Arrowsmith closed the door and dropped onto the bed and almost immediately fell into a deep asleep.

Chapter 82. The Roccade

S andrine's only hope was to invoke the traditional voodoo of Guadeloupe to ward off the misfortune that Amadis had brought upon them. It was her only hope against the powerful béké. Hubert, however, decided that the spirits needed some practical assistance. He waited for an opportune moment when Amadis left his Mercedes in the car park at the Casino. He carefully unscrewed the coupling of the break fluid distributor until the fluid dripped rapidly; he then sealed it with quick setting glue, which would give when sufficient pressure was applied.

The roccade at Pointe-à-Pitre was a racecourse for small cars in a hurry to go nowhere and nothing else to do even late at night. At precisely the same moment the aircrew of the Cubana flight struggled to help Mulligan with oxygen, Serge Amadis slammed into the pillar of the flyover at about one hundred and twenty kilometres an hour. It was not an excessive speed for the motorway, but at that point it twisted and turned, it was also narrow, leaving no room for error. Adamis had drunk more than his usual amount alcohol and in the rain, under the poor lighting of the motorway, which went from dark to light in a disconcerting fashion, he was surprised by the bend, stamping on the brake, which under normal circumstance have sufficed to slow him down giving him a good fright, but the circumstance were not normal, the glue burst and the brakes failed to respond. He had not fastened his belt and was projected through the windscreen flying into the oncoming traffic where he was crushed to a bloody unrecognisable pulp by an oncoming delivery truck.

The mangled car was transported to a nearby garage and parked in a yard amongst irreparable wrecks of past accidents that stood rotting under the tropical sun. By the time the Mercedes experts arrived to inspect it several days later the coupling had been tightened and all traces of glue had been removed. The accident was put down to driving with an excess of alcohol in the blood, corroborated by witnesses from the Casino where Amadis had been seen to be drinking late that evening.

With the disappearance of the Marie Galante with all hands in the hurricane, Caribbean Property Development's projects were suspended. When the new developers took over the project, the purchase of his property was transacted on the basis of an honest valuation that Hubert had taken care to have had carried out during the intervening period.

Chapter 83. A Tourist

Arrowsmith looked at his watch, it was almost six and the daylight was fading quickly. It took a moment to figure out where he was. He got up and went into the courtyard where he saw Rodriguez who showed him the bathroom, a couple of doors to the right along the patio.

The bath was an old enamel tub, the shower seemed to be heated by what looked a dangerous electrical contraption, he took the risk and after showering under the lukewarm water felt refreshed and relaxed.

There were a couple of other tourists outside, two French girls, who nodded politely towards him. In the hall was a large colour TV, surprisingly it was tuned to CNN.

Rodriguez had informed him that they served no meals except breakfast, but there were a couple of restaurants in the square in front of the cathedral up to the right, Arrowsmith had passed it on the way into the town.

“Oh! Señor, may I see your Tourist Card?”

Tourist Card! Christ! He thought, that’s just what I don’t have.

“It’s with my friends, they are not here yet!”

“It’s no problem, just in case of a police control, I need the number of the card, write your name in the book here with your address and signature, you can give me the card later.”

He filled in the guest book writing his name, with London, England as his address, there was no need to complicate things with a Paris address.

The restaurant was surprisingly stylish and new, he took a table and ordered a beer and fried chicken. Fried chicken had never tasted so good, he had been starving. He ordered another beer and tried to take stock of the situation.

Trinidad was on the south of the island, an old Spanish colonial town that was a tourist destination. What he had seen so far did not indicate there that were many tourists present, maybe it was the time of the year or perhaps he was in the wrong area.

How could he find out about the Marie Galante? What he had seen from the taxi that morning indicated that Trinidad was pretty primitive.

He walked back to the guest house, the evening was warm, there were very few people on the streets, he could hear the loud sound of televisions or radios from two or three of the houses, it was like all Latin countries, he thought, there was only one setting for sound, loud!

There were virtually no cars and almost no street lighting, he decided to call it a day and return to the hotel.

The next morning after a decent breakfast prepared by Rodriguez’s wife, he

explored the town. The main street was a couple of blocks away where he found a few shops scantily supplied with goods, he bought a few essentials, a couple of tee shirts, soap, a towel. He also bought a map and a guidebook. He had also discovered a bus station nearby the guesthouse.

Arrowsmith tried to strike up a conversation with Rodriguez, he got some useful travel information but as for other news he drew a blank. It was clear that the rest of the world was far away. Trinidad was a poor town even though it was, according to his guide book, a World Heritage Site by the United Nations.

There were a few busloads of tourists who clearly arrived and departed the same day; he had seen no real tourist hotels except for the Ancon Beach hotel.

He returned to the hotel with his shopping that he dropped in his room, it was quiet, so he set out again to find a suitable place for some lunch, it was getting hot and the shutters of the houses were closed to keep out the heat of the day.

He saw many of the houses were in such a delicately advanced state of ruin that they appeared to have been conceived by the designer of a theatrical scene seeking to transmit his artistic inspiration to the passers-by. In spite of their condition the houses were lived in.

After exploring the almost deserted streets he found an attractively renovated villa that had been transformed into a bar restaurant, there were even waiters dressed as waiters. It had a picturesque look and in addition seemed to be clean. He chose a table and ordered a bocadillo and a beer.

As he studied the guide drinking his beer, the two French girls from the guesthouse arrived, they were with a man who immediately disappeared through the door marked 'Servicios'.

They gave him a friendly smile and turned to the menu the waiter had presented to them. When Arrowsmith looked up again the man had joined them and was seated with his back to them. He overheard an English accent as he spoke.

Three musicians appeared, a guitar, a bass and bongos, they softly played and sang Cuban songs. After a while they asked the girls what they would like played.

They laughed indecisively and their friend asked for 'Dos Gardenias'. It was evidently he was close to the blonde, whom he kissed softly on the cheek.

Arrowsmith suddenly realising his good fortune as he enjoyed a moment of unexpected pleasure listening to the soft music; he lifted his head and closed his eyes letting his mind drift feeling his skin tingling under the sun.

"Tony!"

He opened his eyes with a start and looked up at somebody he recognised.

"Kavanagh!" he blurted, "Sean Kavanagh!"

"What are you doing here?"

"And you!"

Getting over the surprise, they examined each other a little warily. The two girls looked on puzzled, not knowing how to react.

It was difficult getting started but they both realised very quickly that the reason for their presence in Trinidad was somewhat special.

“Have you heard about Swap!” he said in a lower voice glancing around.

“No I’ve been away for a couple of weeks, I was with Castlemain, he vaguely mentioned there was something up.”

“Where is he!” said Kavanagh sitting up.

“Sit down Sean,” he said kindly pointing to a chair, Kavanagh sat down, on the edge, as though it was too soon to sit down comfortably.

“I...I think he’s dead!”

“Dead! You mean....”

“Dead, yes I’m afraid so, unless there has been a miracle.”

Arrowsmith told him the whole astonishing story. When he stopped he waited for a reaction. Kavanagh was looking at him questioningly as if he wondered whether he could trust him.

“Then why are you here...on holiday?” he offered wondering why a multimillionaire was slumming it in Trinidad with two fairly ordinary looking girls, though the blond was not bad, rather than on a yacht with some fancy models.

“Well....” Kavanagh said weighing Arrowsmith up. It was evident to Arrowsmith that he was in some kind of dilemma, perhaps a friend in need.

He told him the whole story, it was a great relief, the last ten days had been a burden and he had needed to speak to a friend.

“So we’re both on the lam!”

They laughed and ordered two more beers.

“The girls who are they?”

“That’s Marie-Paul who I met here, the other is her friend.”

“Are you staying in the guest house?”

“Yes.”

They both laughed. They felt the spontaneous comradeship of people in strange and difficult circumstances, far from home.

“I have to find out about the boat...you know if they are dead?”

“And I have to find out what is happening in Dublin, if there is a warrant out for my arrest?”

There were some serious matters to settle, but now they were two.

Chapter 84. A Visit to Mountjoy

It was not every day that Pat Kennedy put his name to a document that covered the transfer of almost ten million Irish Pounds to his personal account even if it were lodged on behalf of other investors.

He signed with a flourish and pushed the documents across the table to Jim Maloney standing up at the same time and holding out his hand. He smiled broadly

but was nonplussed at the sight of Jim Maloney who seemed to shrink back, leaving Pat puzzled, his hand suspended in space.

He was vaguely aware of a noise behind him, the door opening; there was a rushing movement. Before he had time to realise what was happening he was thrown violently to the floor, face down and his arms pulled up behind him. His wrists were pinched painfully as sharp metal was clamped onto to them. The room was full of thudding bodies, falling chairs and cries. A momentary silence fell on the room and then an authoritative voice declared, "We are police officers, you are under arrest for importation of funds from a criminal organisation through the Irish Farmers Bank."

Bedlam broke out again as protests filled the room. It had barely penetrated Pats mind what was happening as he was roughly hauled to his feet and bundled from Maloney's office, through the public area of the bank past the astonished customers and out onto the pavement, where several police cars were waiting with their lights flashing and motors running. He was vaguely aware of the strange almost fearful stares on the faces of the curious bystanders who had gathered to look on.

"Will somebody tell me what's happening?" He blurted out as he was pushed between two burly Gardai onto the back seat of one of the waiting cars, the doors were slammed and the car accelerated off with a screech of tyres and the wailing of the siren.

"You'll know soon enough Sir!"

The Sir was pronounced in a kind of threateningly aggressive fashion, as though it were distasteful in the police officers mouth.

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see when we get there."

They followed hot on the tail of the leading car, weaving dangerously through the Dublin traffic, which seemed to have to a stop momentarily as in a dream.

Fifteen minutes later Pat recognised the grim walls of Mountjoy prison as the cars approached the huge iron doors, which slowly swung open. The procession of cars skidded into the cobbled yard and the prisoners were quickly pushed out and led into the grey stone building and up several flights of stairs where they were separated off into different interrogation rooms.

Pat sat on a chair in the stark room, a single naked light bulb lit the room, the light was reflected off the grubby white walls, it curiously reminded him of Lena's place in Havana He was left alone still handcuffed as the steel door closed with a heavy thud. Then there was a silence.

There were no windows and it appeared as if the room was sound proofed. It was difficult to judge how much time had passed, his hands held by the cuffs behind his back made it impossible to see his watch. He tried to collect his thoughts, understand his situation, what had happened, but it was too difficult he was in a bewildered state of shock. He was overcome by a sudden tiredness and seemed to fall into a trance-like sleep.

He was awoke by a heavy key turning the lock, the door swung open and two plain clothes men entered the room accompanied by two-uniformed Garda.

“So Mr Kennedy, let’s go over today’s events, shall we!” said the squat grey haired plainclothes man pulling out a packet of untipped Craven A and lighting a cigarette. The other man placed a cassette recorder on the table and carefully switched in on whilst one of the uniformed men approached Pat from behind and on a nod from the grey haired man removed the handcuffs.

Kennedy rubbed his sore wrists and stretched his arms painfully observing them with suspicion. His three hours of confinement had achieved the desired effect. He was frightened, but calm and ready to talk.

“Yesh Sir,” he replied with his nervous lisp very pronounced.

“We’ll start from the beginning then, shall we.”

“Have you travelled recently to Colombia?”

“Yesh, I have. Why are you asking me that, I want to know why I’m here?”

“We’ll ask the questions not you!”

“Have you been travelling to Mexico and Miami?”

“Yesh,” he replied sullenly.

“What is the source of the money you transferred to your account at the Irish Union?”

“The money is from foreign investors.”

“We have reason to believe this money originates from the traffic of narcotics!”

“Narcotics!”

“Don’t be naive Mr Kennedy, you have been followed over the last six months by the European Narcotics Agency. You have frequented a Chilean well known to our services, whom we have long suspected as the legal front for money laundering on behalf of the Colombian drug cartels and the Russian Mafiya.”

Almost four hours later it seemed as if he had gone over his story a hundred times, he glanced at his watch it was just after seven and he had still no idea of what he was accused of. Slowly his confidence was returning, his interrogators were not very intelligent men. The police left the room and some minutes later one of the uniformed men returned with a mug of tea and a thick cheese sandwich, which he placed before Kennedy.

“Get this inside of you now.”

Ortega a drug trafficker that sounded very unlikely, the man had an honest business. After all he was a practising Catholic. Kennedy figured out that there must be some kind of a mistake.

The cell door opened again and he was led to the interrogation room.

“Sit down Mr Kennedy. Tell us what you know about Mr Castlemain and his yacht?”

“Mr Castlemain? He’s on business in Cuba!”

“Is he now?”

“Yesh, and what’s more he can vouch for my business activities!”

“Well I see you’re not very up to date with your information.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, because you see because Castlemain is missing at sea.”

“Missing!”

“Unfortunately yes, his yacht seems to have gone down in Rose.”

“Rose!”

“Yes hurricane Rose!”

Chapter 85. Sheremetyevo Moscow

Ortega was feeling thoroughly pleased with himself, the sugar deal was virtually in his pocket. The vice-Minister sat in front of him contentedly, ten days in Varedero was just what was needed to start enjoying the money that Señor Ortega was to put into his account in the Caymans.

The vice-Minister was heartily sick of endless problems in his country, the fault was with these criminals from the south, Chechens, Georgians, Armenians all the same, born criminals even their ten year old children siphoned the gas from your car right under your nose, he had told Ortega. It is a good thing that we taught them a lesson, they should be completely wiped out, they are nothing more than a criminal race.

The leggy blond hostess offered Champagne to the Minister and his wife. He refused, preferring a good healthy shot of vodka, which was what normal men drank. The motors of the private Antonov business jet roared and they toasted to their success lifting their glass as the nose of the jet lifted into the wintry sky at Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow.

At a height of eighty metres and a speed of 350 kilometres an hour the jet crashed back onto the runway and exploded with a ground shaking roar, exploding into a million pieces in a huge fiery ball of smoke and flames.

At the same moment an American businessman was delighted by the news he would finally be on his way home, getting out of the dammed country and its eternal shortages and corruption. The Captain of his jet had finally found three thousand litres of kerosene, which would ensure they would leave Moscow that night.

In the dense traffic leaving the airport in the direction of Moscow two Chechen airport workers rubbed their hands as they headed back home to the city suburbs in their cousins worn out Volga. They would have enough time to buy fresh meat and vodka, then enjoy the evenings traditional celebration with their families and a rare dinner of roast lamb, plenty to drink, some money for the women and children to buy presents and repair the taxi. With luck would still have a little money to send to their brothers fighting for freedom in Grozny.

They were well pleased with themselves, the American pilot had paid them royally in dollars for the kerosene they provided him with to refuel his jet with earlier that evening. They had momentarily borrowed the Antonov's refuelling tanker for the job and after filling the American jet they topped up the tanker with plain gasoline and a little anti-freeze for good measure.

Chapter 86. Back to the Caymans

On their arrival in George Town, Olga was waiting to meet them at the arrival's gate. Arrowsmith introduced her to Sean and Marie-Paul and they took a taxi together to the Hyatt.

"Call your journalist friend and we'll give them an exclusive interview. You've done nothing wrong, the market is back where it was, perhaps Swap's shares have not gone back up to their previous highest level, but the management has done a good job and have been able to convince the market that the company is intrinsically good."

"What'll you tell them?"

"We'll tell them you had a nervous breakdown, you know stress and all of that."

"What about the money?"

"Don't worry, remember the mountain of cash the company is sitting on, the proceeds from the last flotation, it's huge, and even with a cash burn rate of a million a month the future is still looking good."

"I suppose so, but journalists are special, those bastards on the Limerick Echo started this!"

"Never mind, our friends Ennis and Carvin won't say no to our offer, it's a golden opportunity for them to retire, remember they have to think about their future as well, they're not exactly rolling in money," he winked slyly and laughed.

"That bastard Kennedy's in jail, probably will be for some time to come, that's his fault for getting involved with money laundering and the Mafiya."

"Ortega is out of the way, we have nothing more to fear from his strong arm boys and we can get on with our lives."

"As for myself perhaps I'll try to salvage Ciscap."

"Castlemain would have been the one in the shit, the Irish Union had over-stretched itself financing too many dodgy or crazy projects with too many crooked politicians. He could well have ended up in jail like Kennedy, but that would have been unlike Castlemain and his kind, they always find a way out!"

The Englishman told the gardai that Kennedy had asked him to ‘launder’ money from the sale of US Treasury Bonds by opening a bank account on behalf of a certain Kurov. The accused denied uttering the documents knowing them to be forged and with intent to defraud the bank.

Mr Desmond Rafferty of the Irish Farmers Bank said that he met the men on April 20, when Kennedy handed him the US Treasury Bonds as security for a loan. Rafferty told the court that in the twenty-five years at the bank he had never seen such bonds offered in security against such large sums of money for loans. Kennedy said he was merely acting as a broker for a 5% commission.

Mulligan, the only witness who could have given evidence in Kennedy’s favour, took off from Havana at eleven in the evening on a flight via Amsterdam to Dublin, shortly after take off he appeared to have suffered a stroke. The flight had a scheduled stop at Santiago de Cuba, where he was taken off and transported to hospital in a Cuban army ambulance. The doctors announced a massive overdose of cocaine, which resulted in a total paralysis. He spent more than three weeks in the intensive care unit before he was in condition to be brought back to Dublin. He then spent another eight weeks completely paralysed before finally moving the fingers of his left hand.

The gardai had wanted to question Mulligan, who was suspected of aiding and abetting Kennedy. In addition he was suspected of being engaged in drug trafficking – according to the PNR report his baggage contained one kilo of pure cocaine.

Kennedy was found guilty and sentenced to five years imprisonment at the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court for attempting to defraud the Irish Farmers Bank of £10,000,000. Judge O’Hara agreed with the prosecution counsel that Kennedy had sufficient knowledge that the bonds were forged and from a doubtful source. Kennedy was an experienced and well-qualified financial and fiscal expert and as a consequence was fully aware of his actions.

Senior officials of the Bank of Ireland had alerted the Garda Fraud Squad to the attempted fraud, when the men had asked for a very large loan purportedly to finance an international commodity trading operation by a recently set up Limerick based company, International Sugar Ltd., in which Kennedy was a director. Kennedy had presented supporting documents from a Cuban trading company to this effect. However, Garda Detective Coogan, told the court that the Cuban Embassy had no knowledge of the said company.

According to an expert witness from the US Embassy, the bonds were part of a batch of forgeries believed to have been printed in Russia.

Kennedy was due to appear in court again in July on another charge relating to counterfeit US currency, which was found at his home during the investigation into the stolen bonds by the Gardai.

Kennedy's wife issued a statement to the effect that he was innocent and that John Castlemain the CEO of the Anglo-Irish Union bank, now missing in the Caribbean, had instructed him to assist the persons presently indicted with him. She at her husband's request quoted words spoken from St. Peter in the New Testament:

"Who can harm you if you devote yourselves to doing good? If you suffer the sake of Righteousness, happy are you. Do you not fear what they fear or be disturbed as they are, but bless the Lord Christ in your heart. Always have an answer ready when you are called upon to account for your hope, but give it simple and with respect. Keep your conscience clear so that those who liable and slander you may be put to shame by your upright, Christian living. Better to suffer for doing good, if it is God's will, than for doing wrong."

Tony Arrowsmith screamed with laughter as he threw the Irish Times on the deck, "The most fuckin comical thing I have ever heard. Serves the cheating bastard right!" and asked their chef and barman another round of drinks for Kavanagh and their two journalists friends on the Marie Galante II as they sailed from Gosier for a cruise to celebrate the acquisition of his new yacht.

As to Mulligan when he finally spoke it was a strange English mixed with languages he barely knew, Spanish and Gaelic. He was medically incapable of giving the least evidence to help Kennedy or his judges who were intent on making a political verdict to deter those who dared bring the Republic into disrepute.

The Spanish police were said to be interested in Mulligan's wife, who was last seen in Marbella with an up and coming Irish pop guitarist living the life of a jet-set star. She had found the pilots bag that Kennedy had confided to Mulligan for safe keeping for the late and regretted Kurov.

Chapter 88. Home

It was six in the morning when the two journalists arrived in Paris, tired but pleased to be home. They had flown in from Miami after having first stopped over three nights in George Town to settle the arrangements with Kavanagh and Arrowsmith.

It was an excellent arrangement; it guaranteed the two journalists an income for life, simply from the interest on the capital that the two Englishmen had deposited for them in a trust in George Town.

That trust would cease to provide them with an income if the trustees were to discover that the journalists had infringed their obligations to the trustees, which was 'to refrain from publishing directly or indirectly any information relating to the trustees', who were Arrowsmith, Kavanagh plus the partners of Wender's law firm

in George Town.

They had agreed that John Ennis write a book on Castlemain's activities in Cuba, his relations with Fidel Castro, and his 'mysterious' disappearance at sea. The exposé would present Arrowsmith and Kavanagh in the most favourable light and naturally the trustees would approve the final text before publication.

As to Arrowsmith and Kavanagh they had decided that in spite of the untimely end of Castlemain and company at sea, a yacht was an attractive idea and why not a charter service – strictly for friends of course!

Chapter 89. Cayo Cinco Balas

The sun settled over the coconut palms that lined the white coral sand beach, the air was still, the lagoon shimmered like a mirror. He contemplated the white sand watching the crabs scurry to and from their holes.

It was the kind of paradise that millions of Europeans and Americans dreamed of. The grilled lobster was almost ready, it was a pity he had no butter sauce to go with it. Lobster almost every day could be tiring, but a sea bass was a change, when he was lucky.

This would be a wonderful place to build a villa or why not a hotel, he made his mind up that when he got back he would ask one of his consultants to look into it.

That was the problem, if he got back, perhaps never. He had made the tour of the island many times and he was the only inhabitant except for a few loggerhead turtles.

David Castlemain settled down to his dinner of grilled lobster accompanied by a clamshell filled with coconut milk, vintage 2000. He did not know it, but his island was one of a small group called Cayo Cinco Balas, it was situated about 80 kilometres south west of Trinidad de Cuba and had last been visited some six years previously by a couple of fishermen sheltering from a storm.

- The End -

POSTSCRIPT

A twenty six nation Financial Action Task Force issued a list of fifteen countries that had tax laws allowing criminals and their organisations to hide and transfer their ill gotten gains around the world.

The list included the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Cook Islands, Dominica, Israel, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Panama, Philippines, Russia, St Kitts and Nevis and lastly St Vincent and the Grenadines.

A French parliamentary committee listed Monaco, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man as places to hide illegal monies.

Drug traffickers, organised crime, corrupt politicians and government officials, terrorist organisations and white-collar frauders laundered their gains freely in those safe havens.

The Caymans was the fifth biggest banking centres in the world, with more than 500 billion US dollars in assets.

Oxfam, the international aid organisation, estimated that fifty billion dollars were siphoned off annually from poor countries into accounts in offshore financial centres.

The tax haven countries where Western businesses and corporations could without fear avoid taxes year after year, were: Andorra, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Island, Cook Islands, Dominica, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guernsey-Sark-Alderney, Isle of Man, Jersey, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Monaco, Monserrat, Nauru, Netherlands Antilles, Niue, Panama, Samoa, Seychelles, Saint Lucia, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Tonga, Turks and Caicos, US Virgin Islands, Vanuatu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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 seven years, starting when the very first signs of the sub-prime, sovereign, euro, debt crises appeared in early 2007. I have trawled numerous British, Irish, US, Russian, French, Spanish, Chinese, Israeli 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, 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, the Philippines, 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, the information from this information world. 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 crises.

The is a story, a novelised account of the events leading up to and relating to the economic ongoing crises, where the fictitious characters are fictitious, and where the real characters such as George W Bush and Tony Blair are real.

The stories of 2010-2012 and 2013 are recounted in tomes three and four of The Turning Point.

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

John Francis Kinsella, Paris, March 2013



Other books by John Francis Kinsella

Fiction

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Offshore Islands
The Legacy of Solomon
The Prism
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The Turning Point 2007-2008
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