

A person is diving headfirst into deep blue water. They are wearing a patterned crop top, grey shorts, and white diving fins. Their arms are extended forward, and their legs are straight. The background is a dark, deep blue ocean with some coral visible in the lower left corner.

**John Francis Kinsella**

**THE  
CARGO  
CLUB**

**A Clan Story**

# THE CARGO CLUB

John Francis Kinsella

BANKSTERBOOKS  
LONDON- PARIS- NEW YORK

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: June 2019

ISBN: 9781074140045

This is an authorized free edition from [www.ooboko.com](http://www.ooboko.com)

*To*

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



Seville 16th century

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I was young, I often dreamed of becoming an archaeologist, but would I have liked to dedicate my entire life, like Tatiana Proskouriakoff, working on ruins in the jungles of Guatemala, studying glyphs, old stones and developing learned hypothesis on the long disappeared Mayan civilisation?

Being a writer has an advantage, that of being a transient expert. I mean by that writing a book like this one involves a certain amount of research, reading books, studying documentaries, visiting museums, travelling—and in this particular case to Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize, not to speak of Spain, which is of course much nearer home, or to the Philippines, Malaysia, China and Indonesia. That said I am certainly not an expert, rather an informed observer, spinning a tale which I hope inspires you, my reader, to explore our fascinating history, the diversity of the world around us, the places visited in this story, an adventure situated somewhere between reality and fiction.

I have allowed a certain number of approximations and gaps in the historical facts to creep into my story for which I hope you will forgive me. As for the different protagonists, there are several actors you may have met in my past stories, others are real and have been unwillingly drawn into the picture to provide a greater reflection of the world around us.

The same goes for my meanderings, nothing as we know it is straightforward and sometimes I feel the need to answer unspoken questions.

What inspired all the events and adventures? Well, the threads are real, events I have experienced, sometimes embellished, at times understated—given the difficult of

exaggerating the beauty of nature, or stupidity of human kind.

Many of the background stories are taken from the world around us, and why not? Wasn't it Mark Twain who said, 'As if there was much of anything in any human utterance, oral or written, except plagiarism!' continuing, 'The kernel, the soul—let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances—is plagiarism.'

Of course he was right. I could not have written my stories without reference to Wikipedia, history books, newspaper reports, and a host of other sources, not forgetting listening to the many different people, often very learned, who I encountered in many far and often strange places.

The moment we are born we receive information from the world around us and after some 3,500 years of civilisation and the written word it is difficult to say something that has not been spoken before.

That said, writers still struggle to develop their ideas, to find new plots, invent stranger and stranger contrivances, unbelievable complexities, certain resorting to an army of research assistants or even imaginative ghost writers as do certain well-know authors of fiction. I can understand Dan Brown's needs for research in the historical maze of his mysterious thrillers, or J.K.Rowlin for her tales of the fantastic, stories that become more and more outlandish. It sometimes seems certain writers and their editors direct a caravan of assistants, scriptwriters and scenarists more adapted to a Hollywood big budget movie, than the pen and paper of a solitary writer.

Of course writing and publishing is a business and a capitalistic business where growth and profitability count. Not that there's anything wrong with the business of publishing or writing.

I suppose a one man band will never go far, besides, I do have an agent and a New York publisher on whom I depended for a multitude of complex and painstaking tasks, including press and TV interviews, book signing, reaching out to my readers and keeping accounts—of my royalties of

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course.

The idea that all fiction can be reduced to a few plots is logical, it reflects the nature of our human existence, the natural world, the societies in which we live and our history, as well as our own experiences and those of others, recounted in books, films and plays.

Today, a vast number of novels written are romances, stories that will strike a chord in many a reader's heart, love, that confusion of emotions, that great moment in life most of us can experience individually. That often short ecstatic moment, when put in perspective, is however just one facet of the real world in which we live.

When I wander through street markets of Paris, like Marché d'Aligre—not far from my place, where second-hand books are sold for one or two euros, I am constantly surprised by the number of novels written by forgotten authors, 10, 20, 50 and even 200 years old. The stories of men, women, love, travel, adventures, tragedy, crime and war.

It makes me feel small and realise the insignificance of our own lives, even though those stories will fuel the efforts of literary students, teachers, writers, actors and journalists for perhaps generations to come.

Can I defend repeating the stories that have been told and retold? Yes, though our laws, said to protect ideas and creativity, are there to protect rights, the right to make money, often from the words and works of long dead authors. Just look at the tragic lives of Modigliani or van Gogh, artists of whom I wrote of in my book *The Collection*, both died in penniless, compared to those who since made fortunes from their works.

TS Eliot once wrote, 'It is often said that 'good writers borrow, great writers steal.' Now I'm not too sure what he meant by that, but I do remember Scott Fitzgerald used the ideas of his wife Zelda.

John Francis Kinsella  
AKA Pat O'Connelly



Mayan Jade Carving



Gold Doubloons

## PROLOGUE

*If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a movable feast.*

Ernest Hemingway

How I met her was one of those strange coincidences, quirks of fate if you like, which can and do lead to strange unexpected and exciting adventures.

That evening I walked over the Seine towards Île de la Cité where the evening crowd of tourists was as always filling the square in front of Notre Dame. Passing the cathedral, I continued over the smaller bridge to Île de Saint-Louis, I was in no hurry and I paused to look at the Seine watching a heavily laden barge sluggishly making its way upriver, the deep throb of its motor echoing off the ancient buildings lining the river banks.

The weather was fine, a stroke of good luck for Catherine Demain who had expected rain. Catherine was the founder and owner of Librairie Ulysse at 27, rue Saint Louis en l'Île, the oldest travel bookshop in the world, and like the bookshop Catherine was getting on in years.

I made my way along the narrow street that ran lengthways across the island, past art galleries, restaurants and small hotels, and soon spotted a small group of people gathered between the book shop and the ancient church facing it.

It was the Cargo Club rendezvous, a meeting that occasionally takes place on the first Thursday of each month, I say occasionally because during the summer months Catherine moved to Hendaye, a small seaside town in the Basque Country, where she pursued her life work with another bookshop in the same theme situated in a Moresque style building dating from the beginning of the 20th century, once a casino, now transformed into apartments. The sole branch of Ulysee was tucked in between restaurants, souvenir and beachwear shops and surf schools, on one side it faced boulevard de la Mer, the other overlooking the sea.

Librairie Ulysse was a cramped and rambling collection of old, rare and often well worn travel books that ranged from guides to travellers' accounts of sojourns in distant and not so distant countries, some of which no longer exist.

Ulysse, just a convenient short walk from my place on quai des Celestins, was one of my favourite stops when I stepped out, that along with Shakespeare & Company on the left bank of the river, though regretfully the latter had now become a tourist attraction, losing the charm and authenticity of Catherine's place.

Catherine, a member of the French Explorers Club, had received honours from the French Geographical Society, and the Queen of Spain—with a photo receiving the medal from the queen herself as proof, for her contribution to what I suppose is the romanticism of travel and great travellers. As a writer I must say that you couldn't invent Catherine, she is unique. Each year she presides over the Pierre Loti Prize for the most outstanding traveller's book, awarded to the kinds of adventurers who had canoed it up Siberian Rivers, or biked it across the Eurasian continent.

As usual each of us brought a bottle and something to nibble at as we exchanged news, pausing from time to time to make way for a car that crept slowly past—lost on what was a pedestrian only street.

'Pat I'd like you to meet somebody,' said Catherine putting a plastic goblet filled with red wine into my hand and taking me

by the arm. Outside, before the grimy stone walls of the ancient church facing the bookshop, several clubbers were inspecting a powerful looking BMW touring motorcycle equipped for an odyssey to some distant land.

‘Pat, let me introduce you to a friend, she’s from the Basque Country, San Sebastian,’ she said in English, presenting me to an attractive Spanish girl of about thirty something. ‘Pat’s a writer, a regular visitor to Hendaye, he speaks Spanish.’

I didn’t catch her name in the hubbub, as Catherine, always in a hurry, turned to greet a new arrival, leaving me with her charming young friend who informed me she was in Paris on a research project at the French Geographical Society. Her French was quite good, but the conversation with the others was complicated by small talk of shared experiences, the strangeness of their stories and the jargon of their world.

Her English was much better than my Spanish, though after a moment she lapsed into Spanish when she took an amused dig at the eccentricity of the Cargo Club, a group of latter-day adventurers exploring Russia’s Far East—already explored by pioneers in the 17th and 18th centuries, men like Beketov and Ivan Fyodorov, or crossing Peru’s Cordillera Blanca in the belated footsteps of the Conquistadors.

We reverted to French when we were joined by a travel journalist from Radio France, Olivia de Bretteville, who was there for the promotion of *Magadan*, Kim Hoang’s travel book, the story of his eventful voyage across Siberia on a specially modified machine.

With the exception of Kim—the latest laureate of the Pierre Loti prize, the adventurers were not that young, they reminded me more of eccentric bikers than Peter Flemming, or Ella Maillart and Ann-Marie Schwarzenbach—her cumbersome travelling companion, when they set out on their voyages across Central Asia to India.

In 1938 Maillart and Schwarzenbach were considerably better prepared for their adventure at the wheel of Ann-Marie’s brand new Ford Roadster, compared to the hardy 16th century Spanish conquistadors I was currently writing about,

setting out on foot or on horseback to explore strange unknown worlds, just as terrifying as they had been imagined in the legends of lands beyond the edge of the world by ancient Greeks and Romans.

I casually remarked there were few if any frontiers to be explored when for a few thousand dollars you could climb Everest—and perhaps die waiting in line, hazard a trekking expedition in Antarctica, or for the very fittest why not walk to the South Pole.

She didn't entirely agree with me and when her colleague from the Geographical Society appeared, a grey haired man, I took the advantage of the moment to refill my goblet, stopping to say hello to Kim. When I returned, to my disappointment, she had disappeared.

The reason for that was twofold, first she intrigued me, then second was the Geographical Society, as I was certain that somewhere in its archives, at its imposing headquarters on boulevard Saint-Germain, was information relating to an expedition to Honduras that had taken place in the early part of the 20th century.

## OUR CLAN

We are an ad hoc clan. Some people drift apart, we drifted together, forming what is now a tightly knit, if distantly scattered clan, bonded by loyalty, our Irish roots, and money.

To an outsider it would seem incongruous, John with Ekaterina—his Russian wife, Pat with his Chinese wife, Tom with his Colombian wife, and Sergei who wasn't even Irish though his wife was. Myself, I'm getting serious with—well I won't tell you with whom as it will spoil the story, besides I haven't introduced her to the others yet.

Beyond our Irishness, we have one other thing that binds us together, our wealth, we are rich, very much richer than you, and a couple of us richer than mere words can describe.

What do we do with our lives? We do what most of you can't, go wherever the labyrinth of life leads, whenever or wherever adventure beckons, whatever the cost, dollars of course. This is the story of one those adventures, the strands of which are entwined in our different lives and interests, in lands where fortune has led us in search of our respective destinies.

Pat Kennedy - a banker

John Francis - an economist

Tom Barton - an investor

Liam Clancy - a businessman

Count Olivier de la Salle - a French nobleman

Sergei Tarasov - a Russian oligarch

Scott Fitznorman - an art collector and gallerist

Jack Reagan - a property owner

Pat Wolfe - a businessman

Alice Fitzwilliams - a thorough breed stud farm owner

Sarah Kavanagh - a real-estate developer

Ken McLaughlan - a property owner

and yours truly, myself, Pat O'Connelly - a writer



Salvage Vessel & Sonar ROV

## CHAPTER 1

### THE CHINA CLUB

We were back in Paris for the New Year and together with Liam and Camille we'd enjoyed an evening at the ballet, *Cinderella*, with Nureyev's choreography and Prokofiev's music. A nice post-Christmas outing with our friends, followed by diner at Le China, on rue de Charenton, a street block down from the Opéra de la Bastille.

Liam had reserved a table on the ground floor, amidst the blood red pillars, surrounded by the stylishly reserved décor, which reminded me of a Shanghai speakeasy in the 30s, the kind of place I'd seen in movies, or described in books. It was elegant and discreet, square tables, white tablecloths and silver cutlery, its subdued lighting reflecting off the black and white checkerboard marble floor.

I remembered the restaurant from way back, when it was called the China Club. The cuisine was refined Franco-Chinese style based on the best of fusion cuisine, the kind that could be found in certain restaurants in the former French Concession of Shanghai.

Le China was not far from my place and a two minute walk from Liam's new pad, a bit further from John's on the Left Bank. We'd all become Parisians, at least part time.

Why had we embraced the 'three-fanged serpent', Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, which was how D.H.Lawrence had described the French working classes and labour movements when he referred to the Revolution? Not that we were in any sense part of the working class. It was difficult to say, perhaps we'd developed an undefined fatigue with certain aspects of London life, you know—Brexit ennui, boorish money and all that. That may seem strange coming from us, but we tried to

avoid publicity, keep a low profile, abstaining from immodest displays of wealth in a world where there was so much that was wrong.

The year had started in Provence and had ended in Rajasthan. If there was something we could celebrate, perhaps it was the end of 2018. It had been a long year fraught with dangers and crises leaving us wondering what the future held, what was coming next, the world had become a very uncertain place, including France, where its young president was being challenged by the people.

‘Will he survive?’ Liam asked.

‘Of course. He’ll get over it. A good lesson in what arrogance gets you,’ replied Camille.

‘It’s affected the French economy a lot.’

That was true, if France was a business, it would be in a sorry state, burdened with debt and stuck with out-of-date management, made up of technocrats, with the French being dragged down to a common denominator by the likes of Macron—with his illusions of grandeur, surrounded by a privileged clique, the kind my young friend Liam shunned like the pest.

In spite of that, Liam was betting on Paris, building his incubator cum accelerator, he’d fixed his future there after marrying Camille de la Salle, and wisely avoided political affiliations.

‘What does France have comparable to Apple, Amazon, Alphabet or Facebook?’ I replied with a rhetorical question, ‘they employ not far off a million people, not including their thousands of suppliers.’

‘LMVH, Bernard Arnault’s group, has got 120 thousand,’ Camille quickly remarked, ‘and 70 billion in total assets.’

‘It’s not a tech firm *chérie*,’ Liam replied kissing her on the cheek.

‘What about you Liam,’ I asked. ‘Your new man here in Paris, what’s he like?’

‘Well he’s not one of those technocrats.’

Camille pouted. ‘Well I’m one.’

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'I'll make an exception,' Liam retorted laughing. 'François? he's got a real estate background, very tech savvy, was with the Figaro Group and Les Echos, that's the Hersant Group.'

'I've met his wife Caroline, she's very nice. Got her own communications business.'

Liam stood up as John and Ekaterina appeared.

'Had a bit of trouble finding it,' John complained.

'He took us down rue de Lappe, all those bars and crowds,' said Ekaterina frowning.

We all laughed.

We'd lost them in the crowd coming out of the opera, they'd wandered off in the wrong direction.

'Nothing a little Champagne won't cure,' declared Liam waving to the waiter.

'What's the news from Pat?'

'In Hong Kong with the Lili and the children for Christmas and New Year, then the Chinese New Year at the beginning of February. He's got his time cut out between the family, the bank and his adventures in South America.'

'I hope he doesn't end up like Carlos Ghosn.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well the Japanese turned against him and he's ended up in a 16-by-10-foot cell with a tatami mat, a toilet in a corner and the lights on 24/24.'

'Pat knows how to look after himself, besides he now owns almost half of the bank, and Lili's family holds a good part of the rest.'

'How does he manage it all?'

'He's a workaholic?'

'No,' John said with a laugh, 'not at all, he never tires, he's got a natural propensity for working and commanding people—without been seen to do so.'

They all laughed approvingly.

'So you've just got back,' John said turning us.

'Yes, we stopped off in San Sebastian, then here yesterday,' I replied, then to avoid going into details I fired off a question to Camille, 'What about your friend the Marchioness?'

She laughed, since her noble family's fortunes had taken a considerable turn for the better they had made many new friends, including the aristocratic neighbours of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in Norfolk.

'There's a lot of rumours in the press,' I said expectantly.

'Well, I'm not into all their secrets. I met Rose and David here in Paris a couple of weeks ago, a charity event, they were fine. Said nothing about Kate,' she said with a knowing smile.



John and Ekaterina had just returned to Paris from their place in Galle, Sri Lanka, where they had spent Christmas, sunning themselves with their family. They were looking great, Ekaterina as beautiful as always, and John in his usual good form, remarkable for his age.

They had been away on and off for several weeks and were still catching up with events. 'So what's with these riots?' he asked me as though he'd already shrugged them off as part of the usual French scene.

'I suppose its part of the shift towards Cornucopia as you described it John,' I said half seriously.

He shrugged. 'You think so?'

'I don't know.'

'We'll get there sooner or later,' he remarked.

'Where?' asked Liam

'Cornucopia.'

Camille was puzzled.

'Like China, consume and be happy, do what you like, but don't rock the boat.'

'Rock the boat?' Liam said raising his eyebrows.

'Yes, don't upset Party, the state.'

'So the Party decides everything?'

'In a nutshell yes, at least in China,' replied John. 'Part of their social credit system.'

'That's Communism.'

'No, it's evolution.'

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'Evolution?'

'Yes, that's to say technology dependent, as it evolves the elite decides who is useful and what changes are useful.'

'Darwinism.'

'If you like.'

'Not everybody will be happy with that.'

'Who said anything about happiness,' said John in mock surprise. 'I certainly didn't.'

'So we won't be happy then.'

'It depends where we're going.'

'If we're not wiped out by Dan Brown's *Technium*,' said Liam amused by the unfestive turn of the conversation.

'The *Technium*, a superorganism of technology according to Kevin Kelly, partly non-human, inherent to the physics of technology itself,' John said enlightening us. 'But I see your point Liam,' he agreed, 'but not wiped out, just less people.'

We laughed, a little uneasily.

At that point there came a welcome diversion, the sommelier appeared, presented the wine and went through the tasting ritual, followed by our waiters carrying dishes of delicious looking food.

As we set about enjoying our diner, I glanced across the restaurant. A young woman nodded in my direction. She represented one of the stealth-like, almost imperceptible, changes that had taken place in our lives following the drama we'd experienced in Paris a couple of years back. Today we were accompanied by shadows in the shape of drivers, door openers, and straight faced men lurking in corners, especially whenever Pat Kennedy was around, occasionally I recognised one of them as being from George Pyke's outfit.

Little wonder Pat disappeared from time to time, causing a panic when he eluded them, as he often tended to do. He like us preferred to be just one of the crowd, in the hope we wouldn't be recognized by a sharp eyed passer-by.

Leaving the Opera, I'd remarked two of George's shadows following us discreetly, a couple, the girl I recognised as Florence, the guy I didn't know. They were now seated at a

corner table with a view on the door, they too were eating, their wine glasses filled with water.

Outside was a car or two on standby ready to drop us wherever we wanted.

I glanced in their direction, Florence acknowledged me with a small smile that said all was well, I nodded back. They were working, we were relaxing.

Their presence reassured us, protected us from ill intentioned individuals, including paparazzi in search of a photo, or a scoop linked to the Sommières Collection, or perhaps our expedition in Colombia. Being stalked, or permanently watched over by security personnel, in public places was the price to pay for wealth, a small price.



The world had become a very public place, in the past people like us could move about unseen, today with Internet, social media like Facebook, Twitter, bloggers and a multitude of tools, almost anyone could scoop an event, no matter how ordinary it was, a couple of members of our Clan going into a restaurant, or even myself photographed the other day at the check-out in a local supermarket with my friend, spotted by someone who recognised me. Perhaps we'd end up on the

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pages of a celebrity magazine, ‘Writer Pat O’Connelly with mysterious girlfriend’. It was part of our life, but for people like Pat, it was a struggle to keep out of the spotlight.

It was why we often looked for different places to meet, riding on the Metro, dressed down, avoiding the kinds of places—fashionable addresses—that attracted adrenaline driven celebrities in the news.

A couple of days later we met Camille for lunch at Paul Bert, a smart bistro near Nation, a French experience for my friend, I joked, and not far from Liam’s business incubator. We talked about books and museums.

There were now two museums in the planning, the first was for the Sommières Collection in France, and the second in Cartagena. Sommières was on the drawing board, the second still far off, with the archaeological survey still far from complete and it would not be for some months to come

As for the books they were in the works, I had made a lot of progress on the story of the Sommières Collection, but the second depended on several factors still in suspense. Bernsteins, my publisher in New York, was impatient, Jason Hertzfeld reminded me the reading public had a short memory for news events, the sensation provoked by the discovery of the Sommières Collection was fading and even the latest story from Cartagena would soon be replaced by other news. I didn’t entirely agree with him, he was forgetting new museums always attracted the attention of the media, especially when there was some controversy, as was often the case now that exhibitions had been transformed into entertainment products with academics and experts battling over the authenticity of a painting or some antiquity.

The other important factor was both books were non-fiction, attracting, in addition to my existing fans, the attention of a different kind of reader.

## CHAPTER 2

### BRUNEI

*In science the absence of proof is not the proof of absence'*

As soon as South China Sea Exploration learnt of the discovery of an ancient wreck off the coast of Brunei, Scott Fitznorman, one of the firm's two partners, set off for Hong Kong to discuss the salvage of its cargo with Pat Kennedy, who had developed a keen interest in fine art including artefacts linked to China's cultural heritage, paintings, calligraphic works, bronzes and ceramics.

Scott was an old friend of mine, I remember his first gallery on rue Bonaparte on the Left Bank, today he has moved to Faubourg St Honoré, a more upmarket address in certain ways, situated in the centre of Paris not far from Sotheby's. His firm, Asia Galerie SA, is specialised in fine Oriental art and Scott is internationally recognised as an expert in the field.

The wreck, which on first inspection appeared to be a junk dating from the Ming dynasty, did not present any of the usual difficulties that archaeological teams were confronted with, in that it lay in shallow waters, about 800 metres offshore from Tanjong Lumut, close to the edge of a reef at the easterly point of a broad bay.

That said, diving would be complicated by the north-east monsoon, its winds often whipping up heavy waves, the kind that increased in height and force as they moved into the shallower waters.

Tanjong Lumut was a small fishing village, a collection of wooden houses built on a low cliff overlooking a fine sandy beach situated in the Beliat District, the westernmost division of the Sultanate of Brunei—a small independent country, an almost insignificant dot on the map if it wasn't for its oil and

gas riches.

The sultanate lay on the north coast of Borneo, facing the South China Sea, and its capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, on the banks of the muddy Brunei River.



Disappointingly the archaeological team's first dives confirmed the wreck been vandalised by looters, perhaps with the help of certain locals. Several deep craters had been blown into the sand surrounding the remains of the junk's timber ribs that still protruded from the seabed and part of the cargo had certainly been looted.

Such junks would have been laden to the gunnels with stacks of ceramics and bronze wares. The bronzes were still there, at the bottom of the craters—too heavy for unequipped divers to raise to the surface, surrounded by a mass of ceramic shards.

The work had been undertaken after the Brunei Department of Archaeology had accorded a search and inspection permit to Soccaex, a Swiss undersea archaeological research and exploration firm, founded by Robert Guillion in partnership with Scott Fitznorman, in which Pat Kennedy had made a

substantial investment.

Working principally in Southeast Asian waters, they had set up an operation in the historic city of Malacca, on the south coast of Peninsula Malaysia, which enabled them to operate freely throughout ASEAN, a regional community made up of 10 Southeast Asian countries, including Brunei—which had joined the association on achieving its full independence from the UK in 1984.

The terms of the permit they had been granted allowed Soceaex to investigate the historical site within a specified zone, and subject to the results the company would then decide whether or not to commit itself to a full-scale underwater archaeological excavation. If this option was declined, the permit would revert to the Brunei Museum, which officially supervised the expedition.

The exploration vessel, the *Sundaland*, complete with a diving team, had arrived at the site of the wreck two weeks after the issue of the permit, and to facilitate operations a diving barge was towed in and anchored at the site.

Soceaex worked closely with the museum, bearing all costs linked to the exploration, followed by the excavation and recovery of the cargo—if deemed economically justifiable.

Their agreement stated 30% of all artefacts recovered would go to the museum and the remainder to Soceaex, which could sell or publicly auction the cargo at the conclusion of an exhibition in Bandar.

The firm was also accorded the task of locating and reporting illegally salvaged objects from the wreck on sale in local markets and antique shops of the region.

Soon a small team of archaeological assistants and divers arrived, housed in a group of temporary wooden bungalows set up near the village, situated just a short boat ride out to the diving barge. The shallow waters allowed the divers to spend longer periods of time working on the wreck than was usually possible on such sites, even though the junk was partially buried under a metre or so of fine sand.

The spot had been known to the villager's fishermen for

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generations, who had on more than one occasion snagged their nets when storms had uncovered the junk's timbers and cargo, scattering broken porcelain and pottery across the seabed, with, from time to time, shards carried by the currents onto the shore.

It started when local authorities were alerted by an unusual number antique ceramic pieces appearing on the market in Bandar with rumours of the wreck circulating amongst unscrupulous Singaporean antique dealers, which were confirmed when villagers reported seeing unknown fishing boats with hose-diving gear in the bay.

The first findings confirmed the wreck was indeed that of a Chinese junk, dating from the early Ming period, a dynasty that had reigned over China during the 17th to 19th centuries. The Brunei Museum's experts had identified the ship's timber as being cedar, which grew in temperate zones, a good indication the junk had been built in a northern region of China.

The hapless vessel appeared to have foundered on the coral reef and rocky outcroppings, which lay just below the surface at the point of the low headland, and had almost certainly sunk almost immediately.

Divers quickly located the remains of the keel and its cargo over an area of about 350 square metres on a relatively flat seabed, which was littered with pottery and shards over a larger area. In addition a quantity of bronze objects lay in a more concentrated zone nearer the rocks, covered by a layer of shifting sand and silt.

The archaeological team identified a number of brown-glazed *kendi* and teapots of a kind not previously found in Brunei, most of which were identified as being produced by known Chinese kilns.

Amongst the bronze objects were incense burners, ritual food vessels, statuettes and a number of gongs. According to Robert Guiglion, it was a rare cargo and the bronzes probably amongst some of the earliest exported to Southeast Asia. These indicated the probable presence of Chinese settlements

in the region at that time, since such bronzes were used for ritual offerings by the Chinese to their deities.

There also appeared to be a great number of decorated Ming Martabans, large glazed storage jars present, however, apart from the bronzes, the most interesting and valuable find consisted of a quantity of high quality blue and white porcelain tableware items—plates, bowls and different types of decorative vases.

The junk was calculated to have been around 30 metres long and 8 wide and appeared to have carried no ballast other than its cargo. The expert from the Brunei Museum, Dato Seri Yusof, suggested its relatively narrow beam may have been one of the factors that had contributed to the disaster, making the vessel unstable, and causing its cargo to shift in the storm, rendering the junk unnavigable, drifting on the waves until it finally foundered on the treacherous reef.

Soceaex and the museum decided to proceed with the excavation operations which would require two, at the most four months, to complete, salvaging the junk's cargo, but that of course depended on the weather and the monsoon winds, which though favourable at that time of the year, did not exclude the possibility of short and often violent tropical storms.

Scott Fitznorman, who would manage the sale of the cargo, was pleased with the initial results, which indicated the presence of several thousand saleable objects worth in total somewhere between three to four million US dollars.

What was not good was the alarming turn of events taking place 500 kilometres inland to the south-west, in Indonesian Kalimantan. The political crisis, following the announcement of the country's president, Joko Widodo, to stand again in the coming elections, was deepening. As usual angry mobs had attacked shops owned by ethnic Chinese businessmen in Jakarta, with hundreds of people stoned and shops ransacked, following reports and fake news of extortionate overpricing.

Closer to Brunei, crowds had attacked and set fire to a hotel nightclub in the city of Pontianak, said to be owned by local

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politicians and supporters of the president's party. According to press reports many cars were burnt and shops looted as police fired warning shots to disperse the enraged supporters of opposition leader, Prabowo Subianto, a former army general who had strong ties to the Suharto dictatorship.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE SAN JOSÉ

As Robert Guiglion and his crew of divers explored the wreck in the South China Sea, the story of another sunken ship was breaking on the other side of the world. The international media's attention was focused on the announcement of a sunken Spanish treasure ship found in the Caribbean off the coast of Cartagena in Colombia.

More than three centuries earlier, a galleon, the *San José*, the *capitana* at the head of a Spanish fleet, had sailed from Portobelo in New Spain, its destination Seville via Cartagena de Indias. On board the galleon were 12 million *reales* of gold, silver and other valuables. A similar quantity of gold and silver was carried on the *San Joaquín*, the *almiranta*, which protected the rear of the Spanish fleet.

The *San José*, under the Captain General José Fernandez de Santillan, Count of Casa Alegre, was armed with 64 canons and carried 600 men, a huge number for a ship just 40 metres long about to cross the Atlantic. The *San Joaquín*, under Don Miguel Agustin de Villanueva, also carried 64 guns and about 500 men. Don Nicolas de la Rosa, commanded a third galleon the *Santa Cruz*, which carried 44 canons and 300 men. In total the convoy was composed of twelve other vessels, mostly merchant ships, but also two other less heavily armed ships.

On the evening of June 7, 1708, when the treasure fleet anchored off Isla de Baru, 30 kilometres to the south of the city of Cartagena, Fernandez was informed of the presence of an English flotilla under Commodore Charles Wager. The following afternoon as the convoy arrived in sight of Bocachica, the entrance to Cartagena's harbour, they were confronted by the English warships which had been waiting in

ambush.

At about four thirty in the afternoon, Fernandez signalled his fleet to prepare for combat and the armed ships manoeuvred themselves into a battle line to face the English flotilla composed of the *Expedition*, the *Kingston*, the *Portland* and the *Vulture*.

Wager concentrated his attack on the *San Joaquin*, but after a battle of two hours it succeeded in escaping as dusk fell, at which point the English Commander turned his attention to the *San José*.



A terrible exchange of heavy cannon and musket fire followed, with the ships separated by less than 100 paces firing at point-blank range, after an hour and a half, the decks of both Wager's warship, the *Expedition*, and the *San José* were slick with blood. Then, as night closed in, a huge explosion suddenly shattered the *San José*, literally her tearing apart, witnesses spoke of the enormous heat of the explosion, of burning planks and debris falling on the nearby ships. She sank immediately carrying almost the entire complement of 600 officers, sailors, soldiers, officials and luckless passengers down with her, somewhere between the Baru Peninsula and the Rosary Islands.

Wager then concentrated his attack on the *Santa Cruz*,

engaging the galleon late into the night. After a fierce struggling with over 100 dead, the *Santa Cruz* was captured, but the 12 merchant ships with the *San Joaquin* and its cargo of gold and silver succeeded in reaching the safety of the heavily fortified harbour of Cartagena.

The English were out of luck as their prize revealed itself as nothing more than a few chests of silver coins and silver bars, though they destroyed three Spanish ships and prevented the Spanish fleet from transporting the treasure to Europe and funding the Franco-Spanish war effort.

Although Charles Wager became a rich man, his mission was a failure as most of the treasure escaped him, to Cartagena, or the bottom of the deep blue sea where it has since lain for 300 years.

More than ten billion dollars in gold pesos, silver pieces of eight and precious stones were said to have been carried by the fleet.

Where exactly did *San José* go down?

That remained an enigma for three centuries, but it was not the only one, there was also that of a mysterious ship. Why had it not been mentioned in the annals of the treasure fleet? Who owned it? What had it been carrying?

## CHAPTER 4

# UNDERSEA ARCHAEOLOGY

Robert was well-known for his exploration of ancient cargo vessels in Southeast Asian waters, several of which he had successfully excavated with the use of well established archaeology methods. His partner, Scott Fitznorman, was equally well-known, though his domain was Oriental art and antiquities. Together they had organised the recovery and sale of cargoes of antique pottery, stoneware and Chinese porcelain, from undersea sites such as those off the coast of Hoi An in Vietnam.

They had first met some years earlier at a conference organised by the Musée Guimet, the National Museum of Asiatic Arts, in Paris, where they discovered their mutual interests, Robert an underwater archaeologist who felt more at home exploring wrecks in diving gear, and Scott a gallerist and expert whose domain was that of fine art galleries, auction houses and museums in the fashionable districts of great cities.

Together they had founded Soceaex to meet the growing demand of Southeast Asian cultural authorities, to explore and preserve their respective national underwater heritage, which had long been the target of unscrupulous antique dealers with little regard for the archaeological value of the sites they effectively looted.

Soceaex's work had often been funded by museums and private collections, which had options on the rarest and most valuable objects, whilst the rest of the cargoes, essentially commercial goods in those bygone days, were auctioned off to collectors and lesser museums across the world.

The cost of field operations worked out at six to seven thousand dollars a day, and the sooner work was completed

the more profitable the operation. The *Sundaland*, their exploration vessel, was 31 metres in length with a draught of 3.5 metres, could accommodate, in addition to its crew of 6, up to 8 specialists and divers depending on the nature of the operation. Soceaex had bought her secondhand from the Singapore government, an ex-naval vessel, for 1.5 million dollars, a bargain, as she was in perfect condition and adapted for inter-island navigation.

Exactly how long survey and salvage work could take was difficult to fix with precision as weather was always an unforeseeable factor. When the weather turned stormy the surface conditions made raising fragile cargo difficult, increasing the risk of breakage, especially when hoisting baskets on-board.

Under normal conditions the most favourable period for diving in the South China Sea was between May and September, though the shallow waters in the sheltered bay made for good working conditions over a longer period as operations coincided with the change of season.

Surveying the site was the first task, which consisted of fixing a reference grid, consisting of metal frames set up on the seabed which allowed the divers to plot and photograph the exact location of each artefact before it was removed, which served as an archaeological record.

A small laboratory and workshop was to be set up not far from the beach, where specialists could carry out the scientific work necessary for the preservation and storage of the objects recovered from the wreck, each item being inventoried and treated to avoid deterioration in the air after its long sojourn beneath the waves.

After centuries of submersion in the sea, salt penetrated deep inside cracks in the glaze with the risk of damaged to the surface. Calcareous growth was first carefully removed by hand, followed by washing in weak hydrochloric acid and rinsing in distilled water. The deep desalination process was then carried out by soaking the ceramics in fresh water over a period of time whilst monitoring salinity levels, until all

accumulated salt was removed.

A couple of Bruneian soldiers would be posted by the prefabricated cabins erected not far from the beach, to guard the valuable cargo as it was raised to avoid pilfering, or worse, keeping out unwelcome visitors, though apart from the curious most were from the ministry or the museum to inspect objects recovered.



Scott informed his client and friend Pat Kennedy that though there were many large storage jars and ceramics of a relatively average quality, there appeared to be a good quantity of fine decorative objects and table ware of a much greater value including a number of pieces in almost perfect condition, the kind for which collectors would be prepared to pay high prices. Scott's friend, Kate Lundy, an expert in ceramics at the Musée Guimet in Paris, explained these included different types of Yixing ware, blue-and-white porcelain from the famous Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi, the simpler porcelain coming from the Dehua kilns in Fujian province.

The large brown-glazed stoneware jars were used to store smaller objects from the region of Suzhou, and it was possible that these storage jars were made in the same area. There were

also teapots, covered boxes, glazed bowls and water pots, some of which were also stored inside the large jars, which the museum's experts suggested could have been loaded onto the junk in the Chinese port of Hangzhou.

The wreck and its cargo was not unique, already a number of ships had already been excavated and salvaged in the region and according to Robert, there were many more of the same kind to be discovered.

Brunei was a signatory of the UN International Convention of the Law of the Sea, according to which, countries own the area within 12 nautical miles from their shoreline, and a further zone of 200 miles being an Exclusive Economic Zone, giving those with coast lines the rights to fishing and to mineral deposits, but no rights to archaeological objects. In the case of the Brunei wreck it lay well within the 12 nautical mile limit.

To Robert and other specialists, shipwrecks and their cargoes were time capsules, and in the case of the Brunei wreck, the cargo of antique pottery and porcelain was a mine of historical data. The design of the junk, its construction technique and its cargo, were all valuable indicators of every day life, commerce and technology at the time it sunk.

Such information was vital to museums and collectors, whose collections could then be backed up by scientific documentation and dating methods, cross referenced to other undersea archaeological discoveries and comparison to stylistic and technical development in ancient porcelain.

In the past wrecks had been looted by the finders without respect to scientific or archaeological criteria. Times had changed and laws protected wrecks and the history they contained, although looting still continued in many countries and regions of the world, especially in Southeast Asia where collectors of heritage objects were many.

Robert estimated there were over 100 known shipwrecks off the coast of Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, many discovered by off-shore oil drillers, and each year new wrecks were located. The cargoes of certain contained ceramics and

bronzes, which had not only an archaeological value, but also a high market value.

According to Scott's estimations, given the dimensions of the Tanjong Lumut junk, it would have transported around 40,000 objects, a commercial cargo of ceramics and bronze goods destined for different ports in Borneo, Malaya and around the Java Sea, worth with a bit of luck several million dollars on the antiques market.

The Malay Peninsula separated two principal sea lanes. To the west lay the Indian Ocean, with routes extending west to Arabia and Africa, and to the east the South China Sea, with routes leading to East and Southeast Asia. The region and its cities, like Malacca, had reaped many benefits from their geographical position. Malaya, known to Indians as the Golden Peninsula, traded local goods both east and west and its ports offered shipping services, warehousing and accommodation, whilst its kings and sultans became immensely rich by taxing both ships and merchants.

Ships that sailed the maritime Silk Road, mingled with local and regional vessels in the different ports, which rose and fell in importance over the centuries, including the north coast Borneo which had enjoyed a long period of prosperity in the 15th century.

At about the same time, the first Emperor of the Ming dynasty ordered a ban on private overseas trade, a situation that lasted for about two centuries, however, Chinese and foreign traders circumvented the law through contraband and smuggling prospered.

Nevertheless, the supply of Chinese goods fell, prompting local producers and traders in Southeast Asia to respond to demand. The most acute shortage of Chinese goods was certainly felt during the Hongwu reign, when the authorised maritime trading ports of Wenzhou, Quanzhou and Guangzhou were closed. This changed with the Emperor Yongle, who launched a series of expedition under the almost legendary Admiral Zhenghe, whose grand fleets were reported to have reached the East African coast.

## CHAPTER 5

### SAN SEBASTIAN

I met her again in San Sebastian, by the greatest of chances, at the Real Tennis Club, where she was introduced to me by her uncle, Beñat Basurko, a good friend of mine. Beñat had invited me to the ATP Futures tennis tournament, where between two matches he spotted his niece, Anna, and another girl in the crowd. He was astonished when he realised we'd already met, though we didn't elaborate on the brevity of our encounter at the Cargo Club.

Beñat seized the opportunity to invited Anna and her friend to join us for an early lunch at a small typical Basque restaurant about five or six kilometres down the coast from San Sebastian.

Of course we talked about Paris and the Cargo Club, then Euskadi, the Autonomous Basque Country, its food and more precisely the excellent fish on our plates, *Merluza a la plancha*, a subject that brought us to fishing and Pasajes, a small picturesque village to the north of San Sebastian, where Victor Hugo wrote his book *A Year in the Pyrenees*.

The conversation drifted onto the subject of the nearby industrial sea port, the home of a vast fishing fleet that operated thousands of kilometres from Spain, off the coast of Africa, in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

'Few people realise Basque fishing fleets operate as far away as the Seychelles,' Anna remarked.

I was aware of the fishing industry in Pasajes, but nothing much more. I'd once spoken to a Senegalese fishing hand who had retired in Hendaye after working 30 years on French and Spanish trawlers operating off the African coast. He'd told me how the industry had evolved and as local fish stocks dried up,

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it progressively moved down the European coast to West Africa, and across the Mediterranean through the Red Sea and into the Indian Ocean. At the same time technology improved and the size of ships had grown.

‘Do you know large fishing ships haul in up to 2,000 tons of tuna in just a couple of weeks off the Seychelles?’ said Anna firing off her question as if it was somehow my fault. I looked at her amused at the same time noting that apart from her obvious concerns for the planet, she was, as I had already remarked in Paris, very attractive. ‘All processed on factory ships for European consumers,’ she said hammering her concerns home.



I'd seen TV reports and documentaries on the subject.

‘Most of the fish consumed in the EU is fished outside of European waters,’ she added a little less heatedly.

Myself, I'd witnessed the wealth of the Arabian Sea in the South of India, nearly a decade back, in the small town of Kovalam, where I'd spent a lazy month recharging my batteries after writing the *Legacy of Solomon*, recovering from my dramatic experienced in Israel.

‘Are you an ecologist Anna?’ I joked taking a mild dig at her.

‘Yes, I am,’ she replied vehemently. ‘I've seen too much in my field of work as a marine archaeologist not to be an ecologist.’

‘Of course, you told me you are an archaeologist?’ I said

nodding approvingly and thinking of Scott Fitznorman.

‘Undersea archaeology, to be exact.’

‘Yes I remember, sounds very interesting.’

‘Yes,’ she said, getting off the prickly subject of ecology, telling me how the Basque Country had for centuries been the home to fishermen, shipbuilders, great explorers and adventurers.

We returned to the tennis tournament, then, after the last match, headed for the old town where Beñat took us on a tour of the tapas bars. Beneath what at first seemed like a hard shell, Anna turned out to be warm and amusing, genuinely delighted to enlighten my ignorance with stories of the Basque Country and its famous navigators.

It must have been about nine when Beñat decided to take off with Anna’s friend leaving the two of us together, obvious to him we were enjoying each other’s company. We’d discovered we shared many interests in common, history and writing and an intense curiosity about the world we lived in. The evening was warm and deciding to prolong it together came naturally.

After strolling through the narrow streets of the Casco Viejo, Anna suggested eating at a small unpretentious quayside restaurant owned by a friend, its terrace overlooking the Old Port and the San Sebastian Aquarium.

The Spanish ate late, very late, and Anna, in spite of our tour of the tapas and wine bars, announced she was hungry, I wondered how she kept her slim figure after all she had eaten, probably her enthusiasm for tennis.

I was now convinced she was not only extremely attractive, but also very spirited, her dark intelligent eyes sparkling as she talked passionately about her work.

I listened fascinated by this exciting young woman, who told me she was preparing a work on Europe’s 16th century naval expansion and especially the Age of Discovery, opened by Spain and Portugal.

She enthused about her work, obviously delighted to exchange ideas with a writer like myself whose novels often included historically linked themes.

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I didn't disappoint her by reminding her how all but the most notable books, mine included, would soon be forgotten, and along with all those who had read them, or written them, ageing, dying and turning to dust.

If anyone needed proof, they just had to look at the endless piles of second-hand books on street market stalls, many written by long forgotten, once famous, best-selling authors.

Anna talked of how the geography of Europe was propitious to maritime activity with the Mediterranean offering a natural highway to the nations along its shores, which to the north was a confetti of islands and peninsulas surrounded and accessible by generally easily navigable seas, favouring cabotage along coastal routes, from the Black Sea to the Aegean, the Adriatic to the Balearic Sea, between their numerous islands, the most important of which were Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica.

Anna clearly loved her work and I encouraged her to continue with her fascinating lesson.

She did—reminding me how to the east the Med had been closed and the door to the world of the Orient overland, though to the west the Straits of Gibraltar formed the gateway to the Atlantic, France, the British Isles and Northern Europe, all of which encouraged trade and cultural exchange.

The only other comparable region of the world was the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago that stretched from the Indian Ocean to the Philippines and the Pacific, which was however, throughout most of history, covered by inhospitable tropical jungles and exposed to monsoon weather which made navigation seasonable at best, with junks sailing between March and June to avoid typhoons and the southwest monsoon rains.

All this contributed to the development of Europe's knowledge of shipbuilding and navigation, which advanced as technology developed and with the introduction of the magnetic compass, which arrived in Europe from Asia in the 14th century, the transoceanic Age of Exploration opened.

The turning point came with the fall of Constantinople in

1453, until then the hub of the Silk Road trade. The capture of the city that had reigned over the Eastern Mediterranean for over 1,000 years brought the Ottomans to the gates of Europe, cutting the Silk Road and forcing those in the West to seek an alternative route to Asia, which in turn led to the great voyages of exploration by Columbus, Vasco da Gamma and Magellan.

To that date, the Italian city states, notably Venice, and Genoa, had monopolised trade with the Silk Road and the arrival of the Ottomans caused them to finance a series of voyages and expeditions to India and the Spice Islands by the perilous circumnavigation of Africa.

The Republic of Venice became an important maritime power after the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, making it the most important centre of trade in the Mediterranean, through which all goods from the Orient had to pass on their way to most of Europe.

Crusaders, such as Robert of Clari, were amazed at the wealth they found:

It was so rich, and there were so many rich vessels of gold and silver and cloth of gold and so many rich jewels, that it was a fair marvel ... Not since the world was made, was there ever seen or won so great a treasure or so noble or so rich, not in the time of Alexander nor in the time of Charlemagne ... Nor do I think ... that in the forty richest cities of the world there had been so much wealth as was found in Constantinople.

Venetian merchants established trade links that reached as far as Persia and the Mogul Empire, connecting to the many branches of the Silk Road that supplied luxury goods and other necessities to Europe, including textiles such as silks, cottons and brocades, porcelain, pearls, gems, mineral dyes and spices.

In 1271, Marco Polo, a Venetian, set off on his voyage to the East, he returned in 1295 with extraordinary stories of the riches to be found in India and China. At that time Europe imported around 1,000 tons of pepper and 1,000 tons of other common spices annually, and it was said, one pound of ginger

was worth a sheep, one pound of mace was worth three sheep or half a cow, and one sack of pepper was worth a man's life!

By the end of the 13th century, Venice had become one of the richest cities in Europe together with Genoa. But, the arrival of the Ottoman Turks changed that and would eventually weaken the Venetian hold on the Mediterranean and break their monopoly.

Initially trade collapsed as did the population of Constantinople and it took time to re-establish trade routes and alliances. Soon the city, renamed Istanbul, was rebuilt under the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmed II, who established the Grand Bazaar, but whilst the spice trade routes were re-established through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, Portugal had built its eastern empire with extraordinary speed, occupying strategic points across the Indian Ocean, and blockading the entrance to the Red Sea and the Gulf, capturing and burning competing 'Muslim' ships, and diverting the flow of commodities and goods from Asia to Europe via the Cape of Good Hope, giving Lisbon control of the European spice trade.

This led to the decline of the caravan routes and to the supremacy of European seagoing powers, changing hands between Spain, Portugal, France, Holland and Great Britain over the course of the five centuries that followed.

Anna and I talked and talked, the night was silky warm, we drank a bottle of wine, stopped at a couple bars, then her place.

The next morning I suppose we should have been surprised, but it was not so, it seemed natural. I discovered her apartment, which I had not paid much attention to the evening before, its view over the late 19th century neo-Gothic cathedral, a couple or so blocks from La Concha, in the chic city centre. Anna evidently came from a well-to-do family as the large apartment was well beyond the means of most women of her age.

Beñat, Anna's uncle, had spoken of their family, but in truth I'd not paid that much attention, he and I played tennis

together and enjoyed eating out with our friends. It was how he came to invite me to the Real Tennis Club in San Sebastian from time to time, where he had many friends.

Beñat, in fact lived in St Jean de Luz, to the north on the French side of the border. He was an architect who had built a reputation in the renovation of traditional Basque homes, notably *baserri*, large farmhouses, situated in both France and Spain, which were transformed into hotels, restaurants, or second homes for well-off Madrileños who sought the temperate climate of the Basque Country in the summer, as well as Parisians attracted to the region which had become fashionable amongst certain classes who shunned the Mediterranean coast, now too cosmopolitan for their liking.

Beñat was never sure whether he was Spanish, French, or Basque, but glided with ease from one cultural bubble to another and was fiercely proud of San Sebastian, which he crowed was one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and he was probably right.

I spent the next week in San Seb as Anna called it, or Donostia in Basque, putting off my engagements in Paris, discovering things I didn't know about the city and its history, as well as that of Guipizcoa, the Basque Province in which it lay.



I learnt a lot about Anna, her work and its links to those famous Basque explorers. We visited Getaria, where a statue stood of Juan Sebastian Elcano—the first man to circumnavigate the globe, completing Magellan’s great but tragic voyage.

Anna’s research work had regularly brought her to Seville, to the *Archivo General de Indias*—the largest collection of historical documents relating to the Spanish Empire. My curiosity rose a notch when she hinted she was on the trail of a discovery linked to the many ships lost off the coast of New Spain in the 17th and 18th centuries and when she suggested I join her on her next visit, I didn’t need much persuading.

The most astonishing revelation came when I discovered Anna knew my friend Scott Fitznorman, the world was a really a small place, though I imagine there were not that many specialists in undersea archaeology.

If I had been told I would met a friend of Scott’s in San Sebastian I would have laughed. But when Anna told me how she had met Scott in Hong Kong it seemed as if fate was at play. It was at a conference on Chinese porcelain where Anna had made a presentation on the development of the transpacific trade route, opened in the 16th century by the

Spanish navigator Andres de Urdaneta, the *tornaviaje*, with what became known as the Manila Galleons, sailing across the Pacific, between Acapulco and Manila, where Bolivian silver was exchanged against Chinese goods from 1565 to 1815.

Anna Basurko's research would of course have not been complete without studying Southeast Asia, which had been a hub of maritime trade for centuries with Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch traders carrying cargoes of silks, porcelain and spices back to Europe, and Chinese junks exporting manufactured wares to the Spice Islands in exchange for Spanish silver. Of the thousands of ships that sailed those routes hundreds were lost and almost all had carried cargoes that were now of archaeological interest, and some of great market value.

Scott, a long time friend of mine, was a specialist in Asian art and ceramics, internationally known for his galleries and collections of Chinese porcelain, bronzes and other objets d'art including rare tribal heirlooms. He had become a media celebrity after his fortuitous exploits had made world headlines with the discovery of human fossils in Borneo, an astonishing palaeoanthropological find, which had led to a book we had written together on his adventure.

This of course led to Pat Kennedy, who had first chances upon Scott at a Sotheby's evening sale of antique Chinese porcelain in Hong Kong. What fascinated Pat was not only Scott's anthropological discoveries, but his exploits linked to the exploration of sunken junks in the South China Sea, laden not with gold and silver, but rare Chinese porcelains and other artefacts, worth millions and even tens of millions of dollars.

I remember that evening in Hong Kong, Scott had been accompanied by two friends, both old Asia hands. There was Robert Guiglion, his friend and business partner, and John Ennis, a collector who lived in Zurich, they formed a well-known trio in the world of underwater archaeology and rare Oriental porcelain.

Pat invited the four of us to dinner and when we finally parted company it was late, very late, with Pat promising to

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visit Scott's gallery on Faubourg St Honoré on his next visit to Paris.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE CANAL

I suppose our adventure commenced when Pat Kennedy, on a trip to Nicaragua on one of his many projects, received a cryptic message from John Ennis with an invitation to Cartagena in Colombia.

Ennis informed Pat an early 18th century wreck had been discovered off the Colombian coast, it was that of the *San José*, described as the holy grail of undersea wrecks, a 40 metre long, 1,100 ton galleon, carrying a cargo of inestimable treasure from King Philip of Spain's vast, rich, New World Empire. The warship had been lost when it was mortally hit by an English broadside, going down almost immediately, carrying its precious cargo to the bottom of the Caribbean.

The news from Pat's friend coincided with a huge eruption of the 1,297 metre high Momotombo Volcano, not far from the city of Leon, on the shores of Lago de Managua in Nicaragua, where Pat with his archaeologist friend Ken Hisakawa were discussing plans for an archaeological dig in the jungles of Miskito. To Pat's vaguely superstitious mind the two events, the discovery of the wreck and the eruption, were a sign.

A sign of exactly what he was not sure, but in any case it diverted his attention from the disappointing news on the business front, starting with the suspension of the Nicaraguan transoceanic canal project, followed by China's falling exports and slowing economy, the meltdown of mining shares in London trading, and Donald Trump threatening Beijing with a trade war.

The volcano, after laying dormant for 150 years, suddenly erupted, spouting huge plumes of smoke and ash into the sky.

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Momotombo lay at the opposite end of the lake, 40 or so kilometres from Managua and though its sudden eruption posed no immediate threat to the city and its inhabitants, it reiterated the dangers of volcanic activity along the planned route of the transoceanic canal.



Two days later Pat flew to Cartagena to meet his friend.

Pat, an avid reader of alternative histories and lost worlds, was intrigued by his John's unexpected invitation. I understood that, I'd often noticed Pat reading books like *The Lost Caravel*, or *The Spanish Helmet*, which he bought at Hong Kong Airport, where such books seemed to have a success judging from what I'd seen on the shelves in its bookstores.

He'd often talked to me about the Fawcett Expedition, the story of the ill fated voyage of exploration led by Colonel Fawcett, an English adventurer, who disappeared in the Matto Grosso, deep in the Amazon jungle, with all his men in the 1920s, never to be heard of again.

Cartagena was Pat's last stop-off before heading to his London home for Christmas, where he planned to relax with his wife Lili and their two children, take time out to relax after

John Francis Kinsella

an eventful year.

## CHAPTER 7

### A CLAN EVENT

*Chaque homme a deux patries, la sienne et la France*

Thomas Jefferson

Some six months later a Clan gathering took place in the small 17th century church of Saint-Martin d'Aujargues un Provence. The occasion was the marriage of Liam Clancy and Camille de la Salle. The invitations announced Camille de la Salle de Sommières, granddaughter of Comte Olivier de la Salle, with a short summary of the family history that went back to the 12th century, and Liam Clancy of Enniscorthy, Ireland.

I suppose Liam, a commoner, couldn't compete with the titled family, and he didn't try. His money made up for the rest.

It wasn't the first time a titled family down on its luck married a daughter to a rich member of the hoi polloi, though the Comte wasn't exactly hard up, thanks to the serendipitous discovery of the fabulous Sommières Collection<sup>1</sup> in the family château.

The bride's family were few—her parents, the rest were family friends, including two or three bearing aristocratic titles, and local dignitaries. On the bridegroom's side was Liam's much larger Irish family and his friends from Ireland, England, Spain, and of course our far flung clan, headed by Sir Patrick Kennedy now from Hong Kong.

The Clan in a sense was present to oversee the knot tied by its most junior member.

After the picturesque church wedding, the reception was held

at the château, orchestrated by a specialised Parisian firm in a vast marquee set up in the gardens, complete with a master of ceremonies, two bands—one for the afternoon and the other the evening, a dance floor, and catering by un chef étoilé.

It was a dazzling Provençal summer's day, Camille and Liam, radiant, were photographed on the terrace of the château, alone, with their respective families, then with the Clan, followed by guests, and all together.

That evening thanks to the music Jack Reagan had organised to reinvigorate the guests after a long day of eating and drinking, the happy couple were in their element. As the James McCartney's band opened the evening, I looked on wishing my own amour was there to fill that empty space at my side.

Liam told me band was from Hossegor, a beach spot in the Basque Country, it seemed his friends included several surfers. James McCartney, no relation to his namesake, or that one's son, kept us awake until the early hours with the kind of rock classics that got us all dancing, his great versions of oldies like *Prince's Purple Rain*, The Rolling Stones' *Honky Tonk Woman*, James Brown's *I Feel Good*, and Guns N'Roses' *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*.

I didn't realise Liam or Camille were into surfing, but who wasn't now, and it seemed Coolin in Hossegor was the place to go.

The next day Liam and Camille were due to leave on board Sergei's yacht, the *Cleopatra*, sailing from the Vieux Port de Marseille for their honeymoon in the Greek Islands.

Everybody was happy, our Clan approved, it was a good marriage, it was one of reason, and as such it coincided with an announcement by the bride's grandfather on the future of the Sommières Collection.

Olivier de la Salle had agreed with everything concerning the Collection and it seemed the wedding had gone a long way to sealing the arrangement, to the great satisfaction of all. He and the Comtesse could not have hoped for a better outcome, a match for Camille, that combined love and fortune. Only eight months before the fate of the 800 year old dynasty seemed

## The Cargo Club

sealed, then Camille, as in all good fairy tales, found her prince, though I had to admit it wasn't as if Camille with her château and noble line couldn't have found another match.

The Sommières Collection would remain in France, a decision that pleased the French authorities, the château would be restored and the museum managed by the newly created Sommières Foundation, a trust, set up in Monaco by our own James Herring, to which Olivier de la Salle gifted the collection.



The trust was now the legal owner of the Collection, not only holding all commercial rights, but also bearing the responsibilities. The process of accepting trusteeship included the transfer of the assets or ownership into the trustee's hands. The trustee then became responsible for the proper maintenance of the trust's assets, the payment of taxes and fees and fulfilment of all obligations and liabilities associated with those assets.

Olivier de la Salle was now a wealthy man, still owner of the

château, soon to be a going business, which would be leased to the trust, providing him with a substantial income, plus revenues from the planned hotel and golf course, all of which promised a very up market destination for culturally oriented well-heeled tourists.

Olivier could continue to live in the château, or anywhere else for that matter. We'd spoken of a magnificent villa overlooking the picturesque village of Collioure, which Henri Matisse had made famous, a couple of hour's drive south from Sommières.

The collection, would in addition provide all concerned with multiple sources of revenues for their respective inputs. Katya and John, for their contribution via the Tuomanova Gallery, who were attributed the exclusive commercial rights by the trust to the publication and sales of catalogues, books, magazines, films and documentaries, and all reproductions linked to the museum's collection.

It was a happy day for our Clan, a tightly knit, if distantly scattered, clan. We were bonded by loyalty, our Irish roots and our links to INI—Pat's Hong Kong bank.

To an outsider it would have looked incongruous, John with Ekaterina—his Russian wife, Pat with his Chinese wife, Tom with his Colombian wife and Sergei who wasn't even Irish though his wife was, and myself, now getting serious with Anna, who by the way I had not yet introduced to the others for different reasons.

Now, Liam with his not yet one-day-old French wife, Camille, brought the Clan another dimension, and a title to go with it at that, since in France titles were transmissible by adoption *plénière*, according to a law dating from 1966.

We were all rich, that was a broad description, myself many times a millionaire, Sergei a multi-billionaire oligarch and Pat a mega-rich Taipan with the other members of our small clan somewhere in between.

There were no rankings, though Jack Reagan, Ken McLaughlan and Pat Wolfe, were in a sense honorary members, whilst Pat Kennedy was our *de facto* Clan leader.

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Of course all this was imaginary, but that's how it worked, and perhaps the distance and diversity bound us. We were also survivors. We had overcome crises, tragedy, self-doubt and fear.

It was the reason why we were all trustees of the Sommières Foundation, and certain of us trustees of the Fitzwilliams Foundation in London, together we stood strong, apart we could be picked off by the predators that stalked our kind.

We'd all agreed the museum would be dedicated to the memory of Edmond de la Salle, Camille's ancestor, because without him it could have never existed.

That evening as the reception was in full swing in the gardens of the château, Pat, looking rather serious, cornered me, took me by the arm and guided me inside.

'Pádraig, I need to speak to you about a couple of things.' He often called me Pádraig, as you can imagine there are a lot of Patricks and Pats in Ireland.

'I see, nothing urgent I hope.'

'Yesh, it's urgent,' he announced as we stood in the vast hall at the bottom of the grand stairway.

He started lisping with yesh, a sure sign something had gotten him worked up in one way or another.

'So what's on your mind Pat?'

'I want you to come with me tomorrow.'

'Where?'

'Colombia.'

'What!'

'Yesh.' His lisp was even more pronounced, confirming my suspicions. He looked around. 'Perhaps we shouldn't talk here.'

'Well we can go up to my room if you like,' I said half seriously.'

'Yes, let's do that that.'

We took the broad sweeping stairway up to my room on the third floor, which was more of spacious apartment than anything else, its French windows overlooking the gardens where the band was in full swing.

‘Alright Pat. What’s this about Colombia?’

I’d never understand Pat Kennedy. He never seemed to tire and was never short of new and at times bizarre ideas.

‘You remember the story I told you about the undersea research project off Cartagena?’

‘Yes,’ I said cautiously, vaguely recalling something about Scott Fitznorman and a seemingly far fetched story of lost treasure.

‘Well Pádraig, I can tell you we’ve found it.’

‘Excellent,’ I replied, perhaps a little too tartly.

‘You don’t understand Pádraig, it’s worth 17 billion dollars.’

I looked at him not knowing what to say.

‘It’s confirmed, Tom has arranged everything.’

Confirmed what exactly I wondered.

‘We’re flying out tomorrow to set things up. We’ve got all the legal papers now, you know government approvals and the like.’

‘That’s good news Pat.’

‘I want you to come with us Pádraig, we’re flying down in my plane.’

‘Tomorrow!’ I said not believing his words.

‘Yesh.’

‘That’ll be a bit difficult.’

‘I need you Pádraig. I’ll have you back once we’ve met with Tom and seen the site.’

‘But why me?’

‘To tell the story, you know, a book, like for the Collection. John’s coming too, he’s up on history and gold,’ he said smiling.

‘Alright. I don’t think his Katiya will be happy.’

‘Don’t worry about that. I have to speak to him about the Sommières Collection story anyway.’

His phone rang.

‘Yes, I’m with Pádraig. Join us, we’re in his suite.’

I looked at him puzzled. He was rubbing his hands together as he did when he got excited.

There was a knock at the door. I opened it and found Tom

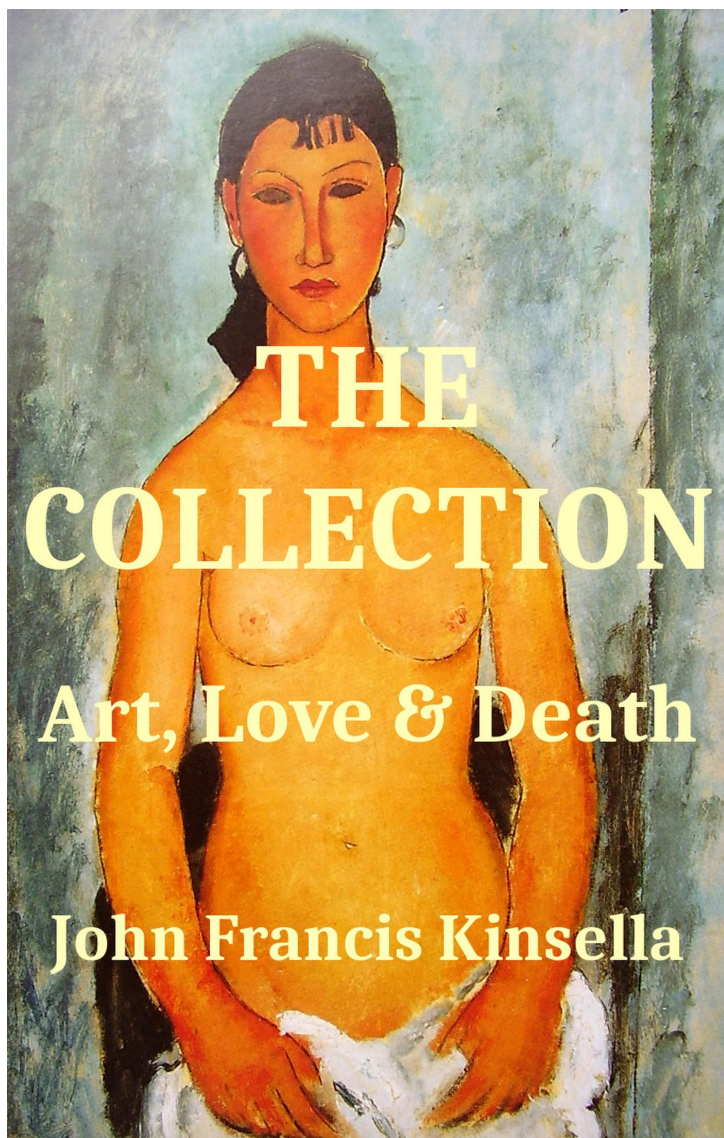
## The Cargo Club

Barton, John Francis and Liam Clancy, grinning like a bunch of kids playing a game.

‘Come in lads,’ said Pat taking charge of things.

‘I invited Liam along too, he speaks Spanish, like Tom of course.’

John Francis Kinsella



I was lost, I mean Liam had just got married for God's sake.  
'What about the honeymoon?'

'They're coming with us.'

Liam smiled, 'Camille jumped at the idea, a honeymoon in Cartagena. We'll take Sergei up on the yacht another time.'

'One more thing Pádraig.'

I wondered what was coming next.

'Olly is coming with us.'

Pat called the Camille's father 'Olly', which would have been disrespectful to the Comte coming from anyone else, but it didn't seem to worry the aristocrat, the two men got on like a house on fire.

Although I was used to Pat's incredible turnabouts, I must say I was really surprised by his project. A few days absence would not upset my plans, what could I do, besides Pat was rarely mistaken in his often seemingly improbable schemes.

We sat down and Pat started to tell the story of the treasure and its recent discovery.

'Tom has been involved with the Colombian government in the negotiations for the exploration and salvage work and now that we've got all the necessary approvals we can start organise the archaeological work.'

'So what's your role Pat?' I asked going along with him.

'You may remember a team of international experts was set up in 2015 after the Colombian Navy and the Archaeology Institute in Bogota discovered the wreck of the *San José*.'

I remembered reading in the press about a lot of legal wrangling between the Colombians and the US salvage company which claimed to have located the galleon.

'Well, with the help of Tom Barton and the approval of the Bogota, I agreed to negotiate an arrangement with that company and the government to finance the project and split the treasure fifty-fifty.'

'As you can imagine, undersea archaeology is a very technical and costly business. It's why we started talking to a specialised exploration company based in a place called Woods Hole, that's about 50 miles south of Boston.'

'Wasn't that a bit risky? I mean getting the Americans involved.'

He shrugged his shoulders.

The galleon was thought by historians to be carrying one of the largest unsalvaged maritime treasures ever, the trouble was there was no definitive proof as to the cargo and its value.

‘The discovery of this ship, one of the most important that navigated in our seas during colonial times, begins a new chapter in the cultural and scientific history, not only of Colombia, but of the entire world,’ Juan Manuel Santos Calderon, President of Colombian, had announced on national television from Cartagena.

Santos followed by declaring his government would accept offers to recover the ship and its treasure, which led to Pat Kennedy, prompted by Scott Fitznorman and John Ennis, backed by Tom Barton and more especially Don Pedro Heridia—his father-in-law, stepping in and negotiating an outline agreement.

The agreement named a Colombian joint-venture company, specifically incorporated for the venture, as the project leader. The principal shareholder of Soccaex (Colombia) SA was a Swiss firm of the same name.

Colombia had not signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, whether that was a good thing or not, I didn’t know, but it meant Colombia would not be subject it to international standards and the need it to inform UNESCO of its plans for the *San José*, which was declared a national Treasury, and its exact position on the ocean floor a closely guarded state secret.

The 64 canon, 3 masted galleon, lay on the sea bed at a depth of 600 metres, partially covered by sediment. The initial exploration, thanks to Sonar imagery techniques, revealed several bronze cannons, as well as other arms, ceramics and artefacts scattered across the ocean floor.

Amongst the thousands of photographs taken by the exploration vehicle, a remotely operated underwater vehicle—an ROV, were several that clearly showed the distinctive dolphin marks on the galleon’s cannons, confirmed by surviving documentary evidence relating to the armaments specially cast for the ill fated *San José*.

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The next morning, in spite of our late night, we were up early. Outside, the catering firm and the hired help had already cleared away most of what was left of the reception.

A Champagne breakfast was laid out in the library and we served ourselves from the buffet. It was another brilliantly sunny day, a wonderful day for the young couple to start their new life.

I was still puzzled by Pat, somewhere at the back of his mind lurked another story. It seemed to me his adventure was a prelude for something else.

I snapped out of my thoughts when Olivier de la Salle stood up and proposed a toast to the shy looking newly weds.

We lifted our glasses and drank to their health.

‘...one other thing...’ announced Olly, as two of the staff appeared with a trolley draped in a dust sheet.

‘I would like to thank John and Katiya, for all they have done for my family and to express our profound gratitude.’

John stood up more out of surprise than anything else.

‘I’d like you to accept this.’

He pulled on one corner of the sheet, which fell away, revealing one of the van Goghs.

John was overwhelmed.

Was it the painting, the dollars, or both?

On second thoughts, however, it could have been a fake, there was also the question of the hair embedded in the paint—yet to be confirmed as the artist’s. Then, on the other hand the painting could have belonged to one of the long gone art dealers, Kahn, or Kaan, Cahn, Kahnweiler, Cahen, or whoever.

Note 1. See The Collection by the author

## CHAPTER 8

### CONTROVERSY

The modern history of *San José* was a complicated affair. It had been at the centre of a long running legal battle between Jack Harbeston, an American treasure hunter, and the Colombian government. Harbeston, head of Sea Search Armada, argued it was he who had discovered the site of the *San José*, back in 1982, situated 17 kilometres off the coast of Cartagena and claimed nothing less than half of the treasure.

However, new laws that have been enacted since Harbeston was said to have located the treasure. If they had acted as salvors, it meant they were acting on behalf of the owners of the ship, that is Spain, or by extension Peru or Bolivia. It was a can of worms and with all the prospective claimants it could take years of legal wrangling.

When President Santos publicly announced the discovery of the *San José* by the Colombia Navy, Harbeston was forced to admit there existed small differences between his positioning of the wreck and that of the Colombians, revealed by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, which could be put down, according to him, to progress in tracking technology.

In fact it was the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute that had located the wreck, admittedly in cooperation with the Colombian Navy. I suppose it was natural that Santos took public credit for the work, since it took place in Colombia's national waters and under his government's auspices.

When Juan Manuel Santos said 'the salvage operation begins a new chapter in the cultural and scientific history, not only of Colombia but of the entire world,' he didn't realise the chapter could be much longer than he had imagined.

Ken Hisakawa had taken the opportunity to introduce his

banker friend to Ed Bryand, an inventor, during Pat's visit to New York for the autumn art sales at Christie's and Sotheby's. Ed was the president of an oceanic research firm, Undersea Explorers Inc., specialised in equipment for seabed mapping.

A cooperation agreement was drawn up with Bryand, who had studied oceanography at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, a department of New York's Colombia University, Ken's Alma Mater, where, not long after graduating, Ed had founded his research company based near the campus, followed by a research and manufacturing centre in New Haven, the home of Yale University, where he was soon building sonar equipment for undersea mapping.

Undersea Explorers, thanks to its technology, had built up considerable experience in mapping sites in the Caribbean and in studying the region's geology, exploring amongst other things clues to the site of the Chicxulub asteroid impact off the Yucatan Peninsula, bringing the reign of the dinosaurs to an end at the close of the Jurassic.

Ken and Ed had shared many adventures in the West Caribbean over a period of nearly three decades and were eager to join Pat in his project.

Undersea Explorers, as one of the world's leaders in oceanic science and engineering, and the development of advanced tools and techniques to study the ocean floor, had offered specialists like Robert Guiglion the kind of equipment and technology, ROVs—undersea drones equipped with Sonar, needed for the exploration of historic wrecks.

Throughout the Spanish colonial era, the loss of ships at sea was not an infrequent occurrence. Anna told me how during the period of the early explorers over 100 vessels had been lost, including Columbus's Santa Maria and Magellan's Santiago, while Cortes lost three ships at Veracruz. However, contrary to popular imagination, not all were galleons, and not all carried gold and silver, a mere handful were in fact treasure ships—returning to Spain from the New World laden with precious cargoes.

Certain ships were wrecked on offshore reefs, or driven by

bad weather into shallow waters, those were soon salvaged as far as was physically possible by the Spanish, who in those days employed Indian pearl divers. The location of others, travelling in the Flota de Indias, as the convoys were known, were recorded by eyewitnesses on the ships accompanying them. Some, however, lost or sailing alone, disappeared without trace.

In more modern times, treasure hunters, thanks to greatly improved diving techniques, explored sites that had been discovered by chance, when fishermen hauled up porcelain, gold coins and other valuable objects in their nets. Then there were also those found by oil companies exploring the seabed, and finally others located by the clues offered in historic documents and legends.

A handful of these treasure hunters were remarkably successful and amongst them was Mel Fischer, who in 1985 discovered the first galleon with its cargo of gold and silver bullion intact. It was the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, the vice-flagship of a fleet of 28 vessels that had left Cuba for Spain in September 1622, it was carrying 47 tons of gold and silver when it sunk in a hurricane off the coast of Florida, under 20 metres of water near to the Marquesas Keys.

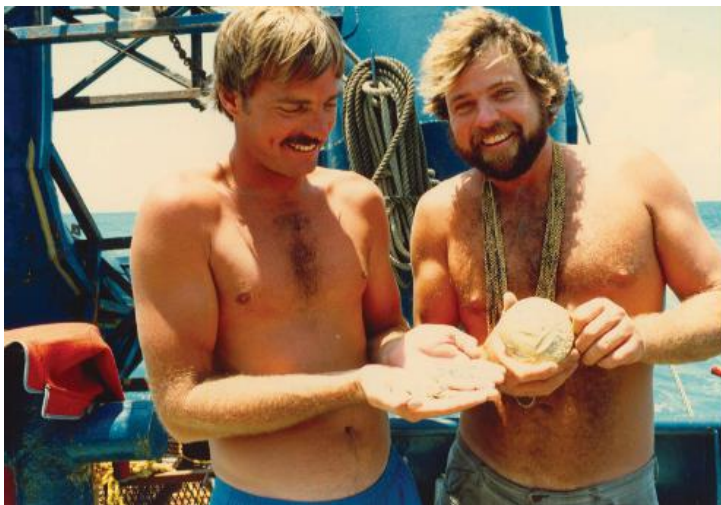
Fischer had spent 16 years searching for the site and was finally rewarded by the discovery of a treasure worth 450 million dollars, which was in fact only half of the total treasure that went down with the *Atocha*, the rest, which was believed to have been carried in the stern castle of the galleon, still remains to be found.

Fisher's story was marred by tragedy, the loss of his eldest son—drowned in 1975, then a farcical incident when he was accused of selling fake gold coins—coins claimed to have been from the wreck of the *Atocha*. The coins, seized from his Key West shop by investigators, were analysed by a non-destructive process to determine the coins' authenticity based on the gold and silver content of the suspect coins.

The results were compared with authentic 18th century Spanish gold coins. The suspect coins contained 93% gold and

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4% silver, while the authentic gold coins from the shipwreck contained 90-93% gold with a relatively high silver content of 6-9%. The gold was real, but the coins were duds, counterfeits, not from the *Atocha*, or for that matter any other shipwreck. They had been sold for between 2,000 and 10,000 dollars, but were in fact worth around 270 dollars, that is to say the market price of gold in 1998.



Fisher, who was seriously ill at the time, had bought the coins from a long-time treasure-hunting associate who had a criminal record of selling fake coins, however, the unfortunate Fisher, who died soon after the case, was accused of selling the coins with a signed certificate stating that he had found them.

The Spanish crown controlled trade to its colonies through the *Casa de Contratacion de las Indias*, based in Seville, a crown agency through which all trade to and from the New World was transacted, and where all records of those transactions were kept and still remain today.

Anna's research, confirmed by undersea archaeology, had proved the quantity of treasure and goods transported across

the Atlantic on the *Flota de Indias* was often higher than that recorded at the Archivo General de Indias, also in Seville.

Spanish merchants in the *Consulado de cargadores*, in Seville, had the monopoly of trade with the colonies, and merchants, acting on behalf of foreign traders, exported their goods on the *Flota de Indias* to the New World. Seville, on the rio Guadalquivir, in Andalusia, was the starting point and ending point for sailing ships and all trade with the New World.

Precious metals were taxed by the Casa at 20% of their value, known as the quinto real, or royal fifth, whilst merchandise was taxed up to 40%, with every ships obliged to keep a detailed manifest of all the goods it carried.

As described by a 16th century witness, Seville was the hub of a vast commercial network,

‘well adapted to every profitable undertaking, and as much was brought there to sell as was bought, because there are merchants for everything ... is the common homeland, the endless globe, the mother of orphans, and the cloak of sinners, where everything is a necessity and no one has it.’

Much of the wealth of the New World was used by the Spanish crown to finance the defence of its imperial possessions in Europe against the Ottomans and its traditional enemies.

This wealth was often pledged for loans to European bankers, who, as the production of precious metals in the Americas declined and Spain's debts grew, finally refused to finance Madrid.

Each year, two fleets left Spain loaded with goods for the New World. They sailed down the coast of Africa, to the Canary Islands, where they halted, taking on water and provisions, before the Atlantic crossing.

On arrival in the Caribbean, they separated.

One part, the *Flota de Indias*, sailed to Veracruz in Mexico, where it discharged its cargo of merchandise, then, for the return voyage took on silver as well as porcelain and silks from China, carried overland from Acapulco by mule train.

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The second, the *Tierra Firme* fleet, destined for the South American mainland, sailed to Cartagena with its cargo, then loaded gold and merchandise, part of it heading for Portobelo to load Peruvian silver, and another part going to the island of Margarita for pearls.

For the return voyage to Spain, the fleets sailed for Havana, where they joined up to form a convoy for the long Atlantic crossing.

As I recounted earlier, the treasure fleet that sailed from Portobelo to Cartagena in 1708, included three armed galleons, the *San José*, the *San Joaquín* and the *Santa Cruz*, which together carried many millions of pesos in gold and silver, the exact total of which varied considerably according to different sources, some estimated the *San José* carried about 4 billion US dollars in today's terms and its surviving sister ship, the *San Joaquín*, about the same.

It was the immense value of treasure carried by the *San José* that justified Colombia's claims to the galleon as part of its national patrimony, and Bogota's decision to classify the location of the galleon as a state secret.

This huge sum can be explained by the fact that over the course of the 300 years during which Spain controlled a large part of transoceanic trade, the *peso*, or *ocho*, was the money of change, and some 4 billion pesos were produced by the Spanish mint, either in Spain or in its colonies, the total value of which in today's terms could be estimated at approximately 500 billion dollars.

Most of the New World production silver came from mines in Mexico and Bolivia, and the gold from Colombia, a large part of which was transformed into coinage or bars, with about 60% shipped to Europe and the rest to Asia—mainly China.

## CHAPTER 9

### A MYSTERY TOUR

Liam Clancy and his new wife, Camille, spent the first day of their honeymoon high over the Atlantic en route for Cartagena de Indias. It hadn't been part of their plan, which was to have been aboard Sergei Tarasov's yacht, the *Cleopatra*, for a Mediterranean cruise.

Instead they found themselves on Pat Kennedy's ultra-long range Falcon 8X jet. Their day would be long, the 9,000 kilometres that separated them from the Caribbean shores of Colombia would be covered by the transcontinental business jet in 12 hours, a daytime flight, landing at six in the afternoon at Cartagena's Rafael Nuñez International Airport.

They, together with their travelling companions, were excited by what promised to be a mystery tour, organised by their friend and mentor Pat Kennedy, known to the public as Sir Patrick Kennedy, head of INI Hong Kong, an international banking giant.

Amongst the passengers was Camille's father, Comte Olivier de la Salle, a French nobleman, a strange chaperon for a honeymoon, though an ordinary honeymoon it was not. The others were members of our Clan of close friends, which included John Francis—the doyen, Tom Barton with his wife Lola, Pat O'Connell, Jack Reagan and Pat Wolfe.

Also present was Scott Fitznorman, a mutual friend, an expert in sunken treasure in the form of art and rare porcelain, the kind that had been traded over the centuries between Asia, the New World and Spain.

As for myself, Pat had asked me to act as chronicler of the expedition, which apart from the surprise sprung on me would be an adventure, though I did not want to be separated from

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Anna, whose absence pained me, she my inamorata and also an archaeologist, who it seemed to me would have made a valuable contribution to our adventure, especially in the assessment of the wreck and its cargo.

Already her absence from the wedding had been a great disappointment, it had unfortunately clashed with an longstanding professional engagement of great personal importance, which she persuaded me she hadn't been able to avoid.

The spacious trijet, designed for up to 16 passengers, had a seating arrangement composed of 10 large adjustable armchairs and a lounge area where the passengers could stretch out or sleep on one of the three divans as needed.

As the steward and stewardess served drinks from the spacious galley, Pat Kennedy told us the story of the wreck of the *San José* and its discovery.

'As I told you in Sommières, Tom has been involved with the Colombian government in the negotiations and with the exploration team. Today we have assembled all the necessary conditions to start the archaeological investigation.'

'So how are we involved Pat?' asked Pat Wolfe.

'Well first of all you may or may not recall a team of international experts was set up in 2015 after the Colombian Navy and the country's archaeology institute discovered the wreck of the *San José*.'

We didn't.

'Well, there's been a lot of legal wrangling between the Colombians and the US salvage company that claimed to have located the area where the galleon sank.

'Thanks to Tom and the approval of Bogota, we have come to an arrangement and agreed with the Colombian government to finance the project and split the treasure fifty-fifty.

'As you can imagine undersea archaeology is a costly and highly technical business. So with my friends Scott Fitznorman and Robert Guiglion we got some help from a company experienced in the Caribbean, they're based in a

place called Woods Hole, that's about 50 miles south of Boston.'

'Americans?'

'Yes, then things became complicated, as I said legal complications.'

Looking at the others I detected a certain dismay.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'The galleon was thought by historians to be carrying one of the largest not yet salvaged maritime treasures, but there was no definitive proof as the cargo and it's value.

At that point a smartly dressed young woman appeared from the galley, whom the others assumed to be a member of the crew.

Myself I did a double take, not believing my eyes. I was speechless, floored.

'Let me introduced Anna, a specialist in marine archaeology, who will provide some background on the naval history of the New World.' Pat announced with a broad smile and a wink in my direction. 'Anna by the way is a good friend of Pádraig, whose role I will tell you about later.'

Anna looked at me with an apologetic and worried smile, waving her hand weakly, afraid Pat's little game would backfire.

The others, as one, turned in my direction, puzzled by the evident link between the new arrival and myself. As I told you I'd not spoken to them about our relationship, I didn't want them making too many assumptions—you know like all friends they liked nothing more than gossip about each others love lives.

'As Señor Kennedy informed you, I am an archaeologist, a marine archaeologist,' she announced, 'to be exact, I'm specialised in Spanish naval history and the trade that took place between Spain and its colonies in the New World and the Philippines.'

I was still getting over my shock, the others darted questioning glances in my direction, but held back as Anna confidently continued, revealing to her listeners they were in the presence of a highly knowledgeable specialist.

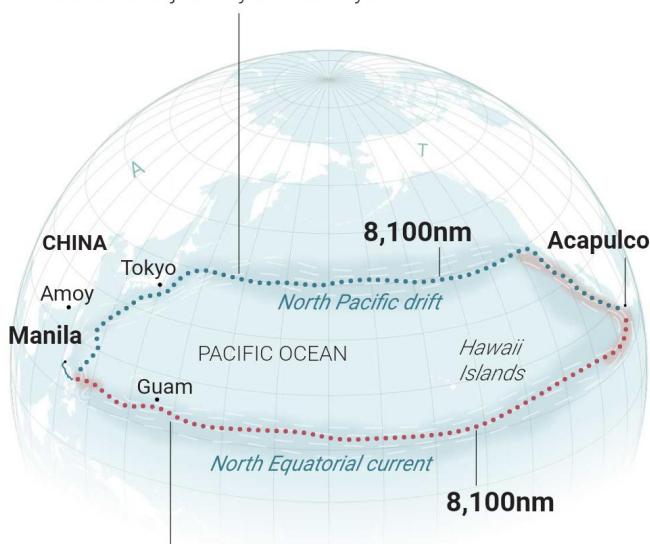
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‘It’s not commonly known, but following the Spanish discovery of the Philippines, by Magellan, a new trade route was opened in 1565 by Andres de Urdaneta, a Basque,’ she underlined with a slight smile, ‘who discovered the *tornaviaje*, that’s the return route from the Philippines across the North Pacific to Mexico.’

Anna’s English was perfect, speaking carefully, pronouncing her words in a low, clear, though very slightly tremulous voice. Her accent was indefinable, as though she had been taught at a good Swiss girl’s school, which was in fact the case.

### Route to Acapulco

Returning to Acapulco from Asia was more hazardous than the outward voyage. More than 20 galleons were lost on this journey over 250 years



### Route to Manila

Calm seas and advantageous winds meant the outward route to the Philippines was usually an uneventful three-month voyage

‘Urdaneta’s route, as it was called, traced the return journey to Acapulco, which until then had eluded European navigators.

‘His first voyage to the Philippines had been under Garcia Jofre de Loaisa, in 1525, when Charles I of Spain sent an expedition to colonize the Spice Islands.’

I was hypnotised as Anna continued the story, telling us how it all commenced with the expedition that set out in 1522 under Ferdinand Magellan on the *Vittoria* to prove his theory

a passage existed around the South American continent to the Spice Islands and the circumnavigation of the globe was possible. Magellan proved his point, he found the passage, reached the Spice Islands, but tragically met an untimely death in a skirmish with a local chieftain on Cebu, in the Philippines, and it was Juan Sebastian Elcano who captained the *Vittoria* on its long and arduous journey back to Seville.

This voyage led to Loaisa's expedition, which included Elcano, it was composed of seven ships, which sailed from La Coruña, Galicia, in north-west Spain, in July 1525, towards the South Atlantic, and through what was to become known as the Straits of Magellan, the gateway to the Pacific Ocean. Theirs was the second ever transpacific crossing and only one of the seven ships reached the Visayas and Mindanao in the Philippines on New Year's Day, 1527.

Loaisa died of scurvy in 1526, as did Elcano. Urdaneta was one of the few survivors to reach the Spice Islands, where he was taken prisoner by the Portuguese—already present via the Cape of Good Hope route, he spent the next eight and a half years in the Philippines, finally returning to Lisbon on a Portuguese ship in June 1536, thus completing the second circumnavigation, a voyage that lasted 11 years.

From Lisbon, Urdaneta succeeded in escaping to Spain, there he reported his incredible adventure to King Charles I, which incredibly provoked little interest. Exhausted by his long voyage and arduous adventure, Urdaneta returned to New Spain where he became a friar, entering the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine.

Anna paused whilst as we absorbed her history lesson, glancing at me apologetically as she sipped from a glass of water, then continued the story.

"Three other expeditions came to nothing, that of Sebastian Cabot in 1526, then Alvaro de Saavedra in 1527, followed by Rudy Lopez de Villalobos in 1542.

"Then, in 1559, Philip II ordered a new expedition for the conquest and colonization of the Philippines, and in view of his knowledge and experience, the now much older Friar

Andres de Urdaneta was designated as its commander, however, he declined the role, accepting that of navigator under Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, who was appointed in his place.'

Myself, I couldn't help wondering what inspired those leaders, most of whom went to their deaths in such adventures. Perhaps it was because life was short and brutal in those times and the lure of fortune offered an escape. But what of the crews, the ship's hands? They surely must have been desperate cutthroats.

On the other hand, Prince Henry the Navigator, son of King John I of Portugal, was said to encourage his explorers setting off in their caravels, telling them, 'You cannot find a peril so great that the hope of reward will not be greater.'

Living quarters would have been incredibly cramped with hammocks and simple mats as beds for the crew. Food would have been poor, consisting of hardtack, beans, chick peas, rice, oil, salt meat and cheese with one litre a day of wine and the same of water, in addition poultry and livestock was carried for fresh meat, all of which would have been supplemented by fish caught at sea.

As for clothing it was extremely basic, a couple of shirts, a pair of trousers, seaboots, a jacket and a cape.

Officers, of course, enjoyed better, though nevertheless cramped quarters, and certainly enjoyed a somewhat better and more varied diet.

All were plagued by scurvy, and any serious illness, injury or wound meant almost certain death.

They were real expeditions, not like our rich man's outing—seated comfortably in a luxury business jet, crossing the Atlantic and the Caribbean in 11 hours, compared to nearly 3 months it took the conquistadores and their successors in their wooden sailing ships.

Anna told us how Legazpi's expedition set sail from Acapulco on November 21, 1564, and arrived on Cebu in the Philippines the following February.

But what was to mark history was the return journey

undertaken by Urdaneta, changing not only the future of the Spice Islands, soon renamed the Philippines, but that of trade between China and Europe.

Urdaneta's route back to Mexico, took him north, where thanks to the Kuroshio stream, the North Pacific Drift with the prevailing east-west winds, he succeeded in making the *tornaviaje*, or return voyage, across the North Pacific, by sailing North to latitude 39, finally arriving in Acapulco on October 8, 1565, after completing a voyage of 15,000 kilometres, 130 terrible days at sea during which 14 of his crew died.

'The account of Urdaneta's return voyage to Mexico,' she told us, 'is preserved in his manuscript in the *Archivo General de Indias* in Seville.'

It was a long and complicated story, a revelation to us who were unfamiliar with the great voyages of discovery made by Spanish and Portuguese navigators, living in our present day world dominated by our Anglo-Saxon narrative.

'So you see, it was 40 years before Spain finally colonised the Spice Islands, renamed by Villalobos, in honor of King Charles's son, Prince Philip, who became King Philip II.'

On the orders of Philip, 2,100 men arrived from Mexico and built the port of Fuerza de San Pedro, which became the Spanish trading outpost and stronghold for the region.

Soon after an expedition led by Martin de Goiti left Cebu for Manila, where in 1571, Legazpi ordered the construction of the walled city of Intramuros and proclaimed it the capital of the Philippines.

This inaugurated the Manila Galleon Trade, linking the Philippines with Mexico, with one or two yearly fleets of ships, huge galleons of between 1,700 and 2,000 tons, built of tropical hardwoods, requiring more than 2,000 trees for each ship according to its size, designed by Spanish master shipwrights at Cavite on Manila Bay, capable of carrying up to 500 passengers, which sailed between the ports of Acapulco and Manila, carrying to the Americas cargoes of luxury goods such as spices and Chinese porcelain, in exchange for Mexican

and Bolivian silver, which in turn financed the Imperial Chinese economy over a period of two and a half centuries.

‘An eyewitness account by Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, gives us an idea of the voyage from the Philippines to Acapulco he sailed on in 1698,’ Anna continued,

The voyage from the Philippine Islands to America, may be called the longest, and most dreadful of any in the world, because of the vast ocean to be crossed, being almost the one half of the Terraqueous globe, with the wind always a-head, as for the terrible tempests that happen there, one upon the back of another, and for the desperate diseases that seize people in 7 to 8 months, lying at sea sometimes near the line, sometimes cold, sometimes temperate, sometimes hot, which is enough to destroy a man of steel, much more flesh and blood, which at sea had but indifferent food.

The Manila Galleon Trade, inaugurated the first worldwide trading route, covering a distance of 25,000 kilometres, linking Seville in Spain with Veracruz in Mexico, Mexico City with Acapulco overland, Acapulco to Manila across the Pacific, and from Manila to Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province in China—the porcelain capital of the world, and back, a voyage that took two years, carrying fine Chinese blue and white porcelain—‘as thin as paper, as white as jade, as bright as a mirror, and as sound as a bell’, from East China to the Royal Court of Spain in Madrid.

‘This,’ Anna told us, ‘explains how I became acquainted with Scott, who as you know is, amongst other things,’ she hinted with an amused smile, ‘a specialist in Chinese porcelain and has considerable experience in Southeast Asia in the recovery of cargoes from undersea wrecks.’

‘So Anna,’ said Pat Kennedy, ‘perhaps you can tell us about the Treasure Fleet.’

She smiled modestly taking Pat’s cue and proceeded to tell the rest of the story.

‘Well, in the spring of 1708, the *San José*, armed with 62 its cannons, set sail from Portobelo, a Caribbean port on the coast of what is now Panama, bound for Cartagena de Indias.

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It was a treasure ship, carrying a cargo of 200 tonnes of gold, silver and emeralds, destined for Imperial Spain. The *San José* never reached Spain, she was attacked and sunk 50 kilometres from Cartagena by a flotilla of English ships.'

'Three years ago,' she went on, 'Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia's then president, announced the discovery of the *San José* and his government's intention to salvage its treasure, the value of which, according to some exaggerations, is said to be as much as 17 billion dollars.'

It was easier said than done, for the simple reason there was an obstacle standing in the way, and a huge one at that—the legal ownership of the *San José*.

'Although the wreck was located by a team on the Colombian Navy research ship, the *Malpelo*, led by Maritime Archaeology Consultants, a Swiss firm, and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, a US organisation, in a search approved by the Colombian Ministry of Culture, under the supervision of the *Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia* and *Dirección General Marítima*,' Anna drew a breath, 'the ship and its cargo is claimed by Spain.'

'What?' asked Liam.

'Yes, in accordance with the UNESCO Convention on underwater cultural heritage.'

Spain's legal claims to the treasure had far reaching implications, as hundreds of shipwrecks, dating from the days of its colonial empire, lay scattered on sea beds across the globe waiting to be found and excavated by archaeologists and looters.

Spain had one of the world's greatest underwater historical legacies and enjoyed numerous rights under international law and rulings. This permitted the claim that galleons like the *San José* belonged to the state, in other words it was not a commercial vessel, and had been sunk in an act of war.



Anna revealed the archives in Seville documented some 1,600 Spanish owned wrecks with more than a third in the waters of the Americas.

Some of these had been discovered and their treasure recovered, including that of *La Concepcion*, a converted merchant ship that left Havana for Spain in 1641, loaded with treasure, including some 60,000 coins. *La Concepcion* was discovered in 1978 in an area known as the ‘Silver Bank’, near present day Puerto Rico.

Then there was the case of 11 galleons, carrying gold and silver—valued at almost 56 million reales, which were caught in a hurricane in 1715, off the east coast of Florida, at the mouth of the Saint Sebastian River, near Cape Canaveral. The ships were blown off their route, scattered, lost at sea with all hands, shattered by the violence of the hurricane, their cargoes strewn across the ocean floor. Five of the wrecks had been located and much of the treasure recovered.

A couple of decades later, in 1733, another fleet composed of 4 galleons and 18 merchant ships left Havana for Spain. Then, soon after nearing the Florida Keys, they too were caught in a hurricane, dispersed and sunk over an area 130 kilometres

long. Part of the treasure was recovered by the Spanish authorities at that time, however, much remained at the bottom of the sea, until modern times that is, when certain of the wrecks were found along with large quantities of gold and silver bars and coins and salvaged by modern treasure hunters.

‘The UNESCO Convention of 2001,’ explained Anna, ‘is specifically designed to safeguard underwater archaeological sites, which have become more and more vulnerable as diving technology has progressed. The numbers are almost incredible, in total, according to some calculations, more than 3 million wrecks lie at the bottom of the world's seas waiting to be discovered, which justifies the measures taken to prevent the looting of our maritime and cultural heritage.’

‘Has Colombia signed the convention,’ Olly asked looking at Liam.

‘No.’

The UNESCO Convention was not the only question mark hanging over the fate of the wreck. The *San José* had been at the centre of the long running legal battle between Jack Harbeston and the Colombian government.

In 2015, when President Santos officially announced the discovery of the site by the Colombia Navy, Harbeston claimed that the small difference between his positioning of the wreck and that of the Colombians, did not alter his rights relating to the discovery.

More interesting than Harbeston’s protestations were the photographs presented by Santos, taken by the ROV exploration vehicle that descended to investigate the site, which confirmed without any doubt the discovery of the *San José*. These clearly showed the presence of cannons specially cast for the ship, bearing the dolphin emblems which corresponded to archived documents relating to the *San José*, also visible were parts of the ship’s structure together with what appeared to be ship’s ballast, the kind that was carried on galleons of that epoch.

Anna concluded with a brief presentation on the subject of legal matters relating to the sea and seabed, which were

governed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, an international treaty concluded between 1973 and 1982, signed by 167 parties at the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, and subsequently ratified by 130 countries.

Amongst those who had not ratified the treaty was Colombia, along with Venezuela, and the USA, for multiple and often complex reasons.

Whether that was a good thing or not, I didn't know, but Colombia's abstention had certain advantages in our specific case, as it meant we would not be subjected to certain international obligations, including the need to inform UNESCO of plans concerning our undersea archaeological site.

## CHAPTER 10

### SCOTT FITZNORMAN

**I**t was nearly two years since Scott met with Joe Hamza, a Bruneian, who had been described as a businessman with interests in fine art. The meeting had been set up by Aris Adhianto, Scott's friend in Jakarta, after being told Joe had close business contacts with the 'very top' people in the Sultanate, which seemed like an opportunity worth following up.

Hamza imported antiques from all over Asia to decorate the palaces of Brunei's royal family, a sideline to his other business interests, notably arms and oil.

Though Scott's knowledge of the Island of Borneo was extensive, it was his first visit to Brunei, a small absolute monarchy, which had a reputation of being an unexciting destination, principally because of its Muslim traditions, and the recent introduction of Sharia Law that mandated brutal punishments, including death by stoning for gay sex and adultery, or the amputation of a hand and a foot for theft.

The country's autocratic ruler, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, who succeeded his father in 1967, which now made him the world's second-longest reigning monarch, had often been called the richest man in the world, his personal fortune estimated at 20 billion dollars, thanks to the fact his country was sitting on a vast lake of oil and gas, ahead of Kuwait and the United Emirates in per capita wealth, the 3rd largest oil producer in Southeast Asia and the 4th largest producer of liquefied natural gas in the world.

However, the small monarchy had more recently made the news with the salvage of an ancient Chinese junk, laden with valuable archaeological treasures, including porcelain and

other artefacts, lying on the seabed in its territorial waters, a welcome diversion from the bad press the Sultanate often seemed to attract.

Aris had first met Joe at an environmental conference in Singapore, which he had attended as member of an official delegation from Brunei. The agenda had included discussions on forestry conservation and the development of non-timber resources, a subject of interest since the Sultanate had recently introduced a policy for the encouragement of economic diversification of its non-oil and gas sector, especially for tourism.

The government's idea was to promote its country as a different kind tourist destination, creating an international awareness of Brunei with an accent on eco-tourism, cultural events, exhibitions and that kind of thing, an uphill job in Scott's opinion.

That evening on his arrival at Brunei's international airport, Scott did not have the impression that tourism and culture was a number one priority, the welcome was dismal, there was no great hurry to roll out the red carpet, for him, or any of the other few passengers for that matter.

In any case his arrival was nothing like that of Magellan's ships in 1521, on his historical voyage of discovery, when the *Vittoria*, according to the fleet's chronicler Antonio Pigafetta, was welcomed by several boats, the largest, 'whose bow and stern were worked in gold. At the bow flew a white and blue banner surmounted with peacock feathers ... while some of the men were playing on musical instruments and drums,' carrying 'eight old men, who were chiefs bearing gifts and flowers.'

Checking in at his hotel, the Darussalam, Scott whistled silently in dismay as he glanced around the deserted lobby.

So this is Bandar Seri Begawan, he murmured to himself.

It was obvious the hotel had seen better days. According to the Royal Brunei booking office in Singapore, the Radisson had been fully booked, perhaps their special offer was an arrangement with the Darussalam for unwary travellers, which

was definitely not in the same class as the Radisson. It even had distinct undertones of a second class commercial travellers stopover, the kind he remembered in places like Pontianak in nearby Indonesia.

Some time had passed since Scott had made the headlines following his sensational anthropological discovery in Sarawak. Life had become humdrum and he was in search of a new challenge, he wasn't ready to become a fusty art expert for the moment, which went a long way to explaining his presence in Brunei.

It had been almost midnight when he'd arrived at the International Airport of the Sultanate, where there was a one-hour time difference with Singapore. The terminal was under reconstruction and once inside the building he was almost immediately confronted by a team of over zealous customs officers, who naturally wanted him to open his bags for the most cursory of glances.

Immigration he noted, controlled not only Bruneians and foreigners, but also 'stateless persons', who he later learnt, included the local ethnic Chinese.

There had been no reply to the last message he had sent to Joe, and of course there was nobody to meet him.

He glanced at the price pinned on the back of his room door, 218 Brunei Ringgits, with a cryptic '++', meaning that taxes and serviced were extra. The room looked as cheap as the price. He noted from the drinks list on the mini-bar the beer was unusually cheap, probably some local alcohol free brew.

The flight had been fine, he could not complain about that. The plane had been almost empty, which was no doubt why the ticket had been cheap. Royal Brunei needed to encourage visitors, and from what he had so far seen not many tourists were heeding the airline's appeal.

It was much too late to try to get Joe on the phone again, so Scott settled down with one of the beers, washing down a couple of quinine tablets thinking they might be needed. He then switched on the TV and watched a scratchy version of *Splendour in the Grass* starring Natalie Wood on the in-house

video channel.

The following morning he was up with the sun and called Joe, only to get his voice mail, probably because he was out of range.

He decided he'd first take a relaxed breakfast then explore Brunei, and visiting the ceramic collection at the National Museum would be a good starting point.

The hotel coffee shop, the Chempaka Garden, looked pleasant enough in the bright morning sunlight, there was a small fountain surrounded with dense ornamental vegetation and tall slender saplings as a backdrop.

It was practically empty. He took a seat under a line of large Taiwanese ceiling fans that rotated lazily, pushing the breakfast odours around the room. He looked at the menu as he waited, trying to avoid looking at his nearest neighbour, a Chinese, lounging over his table loudly sucking on his teeth.

Looking around for someone to take his order, his attention was attracted by a new arrival who appeared at the entrance to the coffee shop. For an instant Scott thought he was from St John Ambulance, or a first aid outfit like that. He was dressed in a one piece warm-up suit wearing white trainers, in one hand he carried a holdall, and on his head a traditional Brunei hat, a songkok, adorned with a white band.

Scott then saw the holdall was a sports bag marked 'Blackheath Harriers'. The newcomer was a tourist, or an expat, probably a Brit, in any case a strange bird, making Scott idly wonder whether Brunei got to people that way if they stayed too long.

He returned to his room, it was warm and sticky. He telephoned Joe again. A girl replied, speaking excellent English with a slight local accent, 'Joe is not here.'

'When will he be back?' She didn't know. The girl took his name and said she would pass the message on he was in town.

His first impression was that the small country seemed to be even more laid-back than Indonesia, but without the same charm, then he realised it was Friday. It was a Muslim country and the faithful were at prayer in the mosques.

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He went back down to the lobby, beginning to feel distinctly irritated by the situation that Aris had dropped him into, doubting that business with Joe could be of much interest. Absent mindedly he noted the waitresses were wearing copies of Singapore Airlines outfits, with white armbands, they were unsmiling though they seemed friendly enough.

Scott was then informed by the front desk that an old and beloved uncle of Sultan had passed away and a 40 day mourning period had been decreed, explaining why hotel staff and even foreigners were wearing white armbands, or white bands on their hats, a local sign of mourning.

His mood intensified when an hour later he found himself wearing an armband, 10 Brunei dollars, compulsory, or a fine. A Singaporean Chinese complained under his breath of harassment—mourning was compulsory.

The ceramic collection was closed, normal it was Friday. Scott checked in the phone book, noting Joe's office was located nearby. He decided to visit the Chandranath Complex and discreetly check out Joe's firm. The ad in the Yellow Pages boasted the complex as a modern business centre, but to Scott's disappointment it was a small 3rd floor office, in a very modest building of no particular style, nothing like a 'complex', worse it appeared be closed.

He checked his watch, it was lunchtime, he decided to return to the hotel on foot, a 15 minute walk.

To the left hand side of Jalan Tutong was the Istana Darussalam, modest compared to the more recent Istana Nurul Iman, which counted 1,778 rooms and a banquet hall that could hold up to 5,000 guests, the world's largest residential palace according to the guide he had picked up at the hotel reception. He vaguely recalled The Straits Times reporting it had cost hundreds of millions of dollars, and was in a permanent state of construction with its endless extensions and modifications.

He remembered the scandals linked to the Sultan and his two brothers, the Princes Jefri and Mohamed, known for their extraordinary extravagance and sex parties. Jefri's flamboyant

and un-Islamic lifestyle involved a harem of foreign mistresses including a former Miss America and a luxury yacht he called Tits with lifeboats named Nipple 1 and Nipple 2.

Jefri, the 2nd brother, had been head of the Brunei Investment Agency, but after accusations of corruption, his brother the Sultan despatched a detachment of armed troops to his palace and Jefri was packed off for a long term of exile in London, but not before signing an agreement promising to surrender over 600 properties, more than 2,000 cars, some 100 valuable paintings—including works by Renoir, Manet and Degas, 5 boats, 9 planes, and billions of dollars worth of other assets.

Mohamed, the 3rd brother—with a reputation for disapproving his brothers' wantonness, was given the task of managing the economy, which was in dire straits following his siblings' profligacy, however, he was soon accused of being involved in a commission scandal with a couple of billion dollars disappearing to Hong Kong and was promptly fired.

On his return to the Darussalam, there was a message from Joe Hamza. Scott called back at once. It was like talking to an old friend.

'Hallo Scott, how are you? True to your promise to come to Brunei?' Joe said speaking in English, assuming, mistakenly, Scott like most UK visitors did not speak Malay—the language of the Sultanate.

Scott was surprised by Joe's apparent enthusiasm and his long and winding banter. Recounting how the previous evening he had watched the Royal Brunei plane as it made its approach to Bandar over the sea, 30 miles from the airport, near Seria to the south-west.

'As I saw the plane go by I said to myself there goes Scott!'

It seemed like an odd kind of conversation, but Scott gladly accepted Joe's invitation to dinner that same evening.

With nothing better to do, Scott lunched in the hotel restaurant, eating a very good chicken curry, except for the numerous stones in the rice, and quality of the restaurant spoon, which with a little pressure bent like the cheap kind

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that would have been more suitable in an Iban longhouse.

As he washed the chicken down with a pint of chilled Anchor draft beer he was sure it was one of the long legged varieties that he had so often seen in the *kampongs* in the rest of Borneo, a bit stringy, but tasty.

He was disappointed by his initial impressions of Brunei, which contradicted the myth of the Sultanate's immense riches, it seemed to be a bit of a backwater, lacking the charm that would be needed to attract foreign investors and any significant number of tourists.



Brunei had one of the highest per capita incomes in the world thanks to its oil and natural gas reserves, a formula that seemed to go with absolute monarchies. They needed nobody and Fitznorman sadly reflected they probably didn't need him either, they don't know what they're missing, he thought, as he picked at the chicken bones.

He was out of luck, the ceramic collection would not be open until Monday, and after a desultory tour of the city centre and a look at the gaudy Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque—the kind that abounded in Malaysia and Indonesia,

with its marble minarets and golden domes, he returned to his room.

Joe arrived at seven thirty exactly. He had the look of a local army officer type, a squat build, thick black hair streaked with grey, sporting a military moustache. Smiling broadly and displaying an array of shining white teeth he pumped Fitznorman's hand.

'Listen Scott, it's really good to see you here. Let's go, you don't mind if we pick up my friend from Kota Kinabulu.'

'No problem.' replied Fitznorman.

'She's staying at the Radisson.'

Great, thought Fitznorman, she's in better luck than me, and probably a dam sight prettier. I suppose I'm going to sit there looking on whilst they relish the thought of their after dinner program.'

'She's with Harrisons. Just returned from Hong Kong, a business trip.'

He looked very pleased with himself as he added, 'Just dropped off to see me.'

Joe had reserved a table in one of the few decent restaurants in Bandar, it looked like an imitation English pub. He started by ordering Sydney oysters. Fitznorman was more used to the French version of oysters and on inspecting those presented he couldn't help noticing they were dead.

Throughout the meal he had visions of hepatitis and all other kinds of deadly diseases, wondering what disaster would descend on his bowels during the night. In spite of that it was a pleasant dinner with easy conversation. Joe was full of ideas, and his business plans. He did not know Scott had made a sneak visit his offices at the Chandranath Complex.

Joe displayed all the exterior signs of wealth that they were so particularly fond of in Asia. He wore a solid gold Rolex, a large diamond set in a ring on the little finger of his right hand, and of course he was driving a gleaming new Land Rover, the latest and most expensive model, fitted out with all the extras and gadgets, including a powerful two-way radio set to communicate with places deep in the nearby forests. It was in

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a class well above the average family car and the smaller SUVs Scott had seen crowding the streets of Bandar.

Joe's girl friend, whose name he had not caught and who he had carefully avoided studying too closely, more out of politeness to his host than anything else, did not hesitate to join in their conversation. She seemed to be intelligent, well educated, speaking with an English accent, but it was clear she wasn't English, neither was she Malaysian, rather an undefinable mix. And for the moment, Scott was unable to figure out what the relationship between her and Joe was.

It probably was not very complicated to guess, he told himself.

She was with Harrisons, one of the oldest and best-known trading company in Southeast and East Asia, in addition she appeared to be very knowledgeable about local history, which after all was normal.

The dinner was excessively expensive and Joe made an extravagant show, barely looking at the check, pulling out a thick wad of one thousand Brunei Ringgit bills and peeling off a couple. It wasn't surprising it was expensive, everything was imported, with the possible exception of the rice, and even that was not certain.

'Basically Scott,' he said lowering his voice, 'I am interested in a wide range of business opportunities, including art and antiques, especially tribal art, that's fashionable today. Maybe Aris told you, maybe he didn't, but I have very close contacts with the very top!'

Scott nodded, approvingly, the kind of money spent by the Royal Family must have produced quite a lot of profits.

'My clients are amongst the richest collectors in Asia,' he said with a knowing smile, 'that means they are looking for quality, which is not so easy to find today, quantity yes, but quality no!'

Joe then decided that they should get down to serious business the next morning, starting with breakfast, get an early start to the day. He dropped Scott off at the Darussalam, who as he waved goodbye to Joe, could not help imagining his programme for the rest of the evening with the Harrisons girl.

She was attractive thought Scott wistfully, not bad at all, but she was not available. As he walked up the two flights of stairs to his room he felt a little sorry for himself, wondering what the fuck he was doing wasting his time in Brunei.

Joe arrived on time the next morning for breakfast at the hotel's coffee shop. They started with generalities giving Scott the impression he was stalling, or perhaps he was feeling him out for some as yet unexplained reason.

He listened to Joe, who meandered on about his relations with the people at the 'top', at the same wondering about Joe's night. He hoped he'd enjoyed it, he thought, he could at least have invited me for a drink, and asking himself whether there was some kind of interesting watering hole in the Radisson or not.

Scott snapped out of his fantasy as Joe started to talk about art and culture.

'My relations with the Ministry of Culture are excellent. Today, Scott, our national museum is overloaded with its collection of ceramics, we have much too many pieces, from the Chinese junk, discovered by Total, the French oil company, you've probably heard about,' he laughed then lowered his voice, 'and now I can tell you very confidentially, as a friend of Aris, there is more to come.'

Scott listened slowly picking up interest.

'So, let me get to the point, our minister has decided to sell on the market part of the ceramic collection that's piling up in the museum's reserve.'

'That sounds interesting.'

'Now, in addition, and this is the most interesting thing, the minister is prepared to issue an exploration licence for the underwater excavation of a newly discovered wreck that's also in our territorial waters.'

Scott sat up, the stories of wrecks were something that had interested him and his partner in Soccaex, Robert Guignon.

'This needs an investment,' he announced secretively, 'and our good friend Aris has informed me that this kind of business could be in your field?'

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'It certainly is,' replied Fitznorman, pausing as he searched for the right words whilst appearing businesslike, 'but of course it depends on the origin of each wreck, and more important its cargo. If it's worth the investment then it would be necessary to have the permits to excavate and salvage the cargo with the commercial rights to dispose of the artefacts recovered. That's the key question.' Then smiling he added a reminder, 'I don't have to tell you that I'm a businessman, not engaged in philanthropic works.'

'I understand that Scott, that's why we're here talking together. What's been suggested is a partnership with the National Museum, they would have the right of first refusal of those objects of great historical value, then the rest of the cargo could be sold on the open market. What do you think?'

'It sounds great. What do you propose as the next move?'

'Look, leave it with me. I'll fix up a meeting on Monday with my good friend the minister.'

'Excellent.'

'That's good Scott, listen, why don't I organise a visit to the ceramic collection and the archaeological workshop?'

'That suits me fine.'

'I'll try to get that arranged for tomorrow morning and then the ministry in the afternoon. You have to get one thing clear, in Bandar, all business is done directly, or indirectly, through the Sultan's family, which holds all the key ministries. I know them all very well.' Then with a sly wink he added in a low voice, 'I went to the same school with the Sultan in Kuala Lumpur, when we were young. I'm also on talking terms with Prince Jeffrey, who is also the Minister of Finance'.

He then looked at his watch and suddenly excused himself. 'Scott, I'm sorry I've another appointment, can you look after yourself?' He didn't pause to see if Scott would say no.

'Let's have dinner, I'll call you later!'

After Joe had left, Scott, feeling somewhat more optimistic, set for a little more exploration. It wouldn't require an expedition, the capital had a population of some 50,000 and the whole country covered just a few thousand square

kilometres, about twice that of Long Island, a large part of which consisted of jungle covered mountains and swamps, and made complicated by being divided into two distinct parts, separated from each other by a 30 kilometre wide stretch of Malaysian territory, a vestige of colonial gerrymandering.

Strangely, Brunei didn't resemble a country where the per capita income was supposed to be around 40,000 US dollars a year, someone was getting more than his fair share. It had been a backwater of the British Empire until 1926, when oil was discovered, a stroke of fortune that was to change everything for its obscure ruler, the Sultan, one of a long line of rulers that went back to more glorious times.

Scott discovered outside of certain hotels and restaurants, alcohol was virtually unobtainable and there was no nightlife to speak of. The government demanded quiet obedience to Muslim traditions, and the edicts of the Sultan. In compensation for their respect to these basic rules Bruneians were rewarded with free healthcare, free education, free sporting centres, cheap loans and tax-free wages comparable to Singapore.

The hotel desk had suggested he go to the National Information Centre. Scott found it without too much difficulty, a nondescript timber structure on the banks of the Sungai Brunei, the broad mud coloured river that ran through the small country, which had not always been small, in fact it had a long maritime history that went back to the times when the Sultans of Brunei once controlled all Borneo, and parts of the surrounding region bordering the South China Sea, including parts of what is now the Philippines and Indonesia.

As with the rest of Borneo, most of Brunei was covered with thick jungle, and apart from the coastal regions, this meant the only practical method of transport was by boat, which had led to the development of towns and ports along its rivers and coastal waters, where riverboats of every kind crisscrossed the waters like insects skimming over the surface.

The information centre contrasted with the fine new buildings overlooking the river and would have been more in

place in the village on the other side of the river, Kampong Ayer, which like many traditional villages in Borneo was a cluster of rickety rather run down, unpainted, wooden houses and general stores, perched on stilts, where long legged chickens strutted on top of smoking garbage piles and dogs sniffed around pools of foetid rain water. Kampong Ayer was less than a couple of kilometres from the extravagant palace that had been built on the revenues of the country's oil and gas resources.

The only recent publication he found was a small booklet he had already picked up in Singapore. The other publications were long out of date. He then went to the French Embassy, it too was closed. Saturday, but no doubt it was open on Friday—when everything else was closed.

He then went to the fine INI Hong Kong Bank building, the biggest and most well known bank in Brunei, now fund manager of the Sultanate's immense wealth, after the previous bank, the London based City & Colonial City had been fired under a cloud of mismanagement accusations.

Scott knew its CEO, Pat Kennedy, well he was a good client of his and a collector of Chinese porcelain and other fine objects d'art and tribal heirlooms. Pat would certainly be interested if he could get a deal together with Joe Hamza and his friends.

It was very crowded. On the first floor in the executive section, a Chinese receptionist gave him a Brunei information brochure, and then bid him good day as they were about to close the doors, half day!

He decided a little detective work was in order, check-out some background information on Joe's company, at the 'Brunei State Chamber of Commerce'.

They explained to him over the phone they were quite nearby, about one mile, suggesting he drop by. It took almost half an hour to find it.

The Chamber of Commerce consisted of a couple of rooms including Johnny Esco's 'business centre'. A small hole in the wall outfit. Johnny, a small, sharp, Filipino, who did not look

as if he would ever be very successful, tried to weasel out some information from Scott concerning the reasons for his visit to Brunei. He left empty handed promising to contact Johnny if ever he needed his services, which seemed an unlikely option.

Scott began to wonder what he was going to do over the rest of the day, the local entertainment options seemed very low powered. It would be a hard slog until the Monday meeting with the Minister that Joe had promised. Faced with such lassitude, he decided to return to the Darussalam.

A couple of hours later, refreshed after a nap, he collected a new armband from the hotel receptionist and a map indicating a nearby jogging course. Then carefully weighing up the sky, he took off for what was announced a 35 minute circuit. After 15 minutes, the sky started to fill with heavy threatening black storm clouds.

Soon he felt the heavy drops of rain, it was about a kilometre back to the hotel, the nearest shelter was the Radisson, where he arrived just as it really started to bucket down.

Walking into to lobby the cold air hit him, a refreshing beer, or perhaps a juice was in order. He strolled into the coffee shop, sat down and ordered an orange juice. It was quiet as he sat watching the dark sky and the rain streaking across the large windows looking out onto the gardens.

Pondering over his discussion with Joe, he figured with a permit for the excavation and recovery of the wreck's cargo, it could be a very profitable business, he would have not wasted his time in Brunei, he also wondered about Aris and his wily ways. Apart from that prospect there was not much else to do in the small country, nothing very interesting to see and no nightlife.

It's not Bangkok everywhere, he thought sadly, as the orange juice was placed in front of him. He began to sip the imported juice pondering the view outside that had an air of November in England, except for the brightly coloured tropical plants.

'Hello!'

He looked up surprised.

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'Oh! Hello.' It was the girl from Harrisons.

'Can I sit down?'

'Sure,' he said, still surprised to have his daydream interrupted.

'You look surprised!'

'Yes, I just came in to get out of the rain, I wasn't expecting to see anybody I knew.'

She laughed, tossing her head back and showing her perfect teeth. She was dressed in a short sleeved check blouse and khaki shorts, like from a safari film, looking remarkably fresh.

'I took a long walk. I wanted to see what Brunei looked like.'

'You should have told me, I would have joined you.'

Scott was a little bit surprised, and Harrisons girl could see it.

'You think that's strange!'

'No,' he hesitated 'I just thought that you would have had something else to do.'

'Like what?' She looked at him directly, 'with Joe maybe!'

'Maybe ... why not!' he said weakly.

'You know, Joe is a business friend, but nothing else,' she announced rather fiercely. 'I met him in Kota Kinabulu, then here, on my business trips, sure he would like to know me better,' she said with a laugh, then adding in a more friendly tone, 'but he's not really my type.'

'Oh!' said Fitznorman uneasily trying to cover his embarrassment. He had not expected to meet the Harrisons girl, and had in any case imagined there was more to her relationship with Joe than business.

As if she read his thoughts she retorted, 'I suppose that you imagine that I sleep with him.'

'No, not at all,' he said in an effort to dismiss her remark, even more embarrassed by her directness.

She continued to fix him with her look, then she seemed to relax, and to his surprise she reached out and touched his arm.

'I'm sorry, excuse me, I'm not being very polite.'

'No, no, it's me.'

'No, I'm always a bit aggressive, let's start again, can I drink something.'

'Sure,' he said making a sign to the waitress.

'You know when I come here I always meet Joe, he's one of my customers, and he's very nice, but nothing more.'

'I'm sorry, but listen, you don't have to explain all that to me.' He laughed and to his relief she laughed too.

The tension broke and she told him she looked after fine art at Harrisons. It was an old trading company that had been founded by the British in the last century. Her family headed the business and she had persuaded her father to let her go into the art and antiques market, opening a gallery in Kota Kinabulu, travelling in region, meeting the company's clients and developing new business.

'Isn't it an unusual job for a young woman in Malaysia?'

'Yes, I suppose it is, but I studied history and art in England, it would be a waste if I didn't use my education. My family has been in trading for a long time, I suppose they would have preferred it if I had gone in for a job where I didn't travel, but I like it!'

'Joe telephoned me at three, he said that he was not free tonight, something to do with a minister,' she said, as if asking Scott whether he knew something about it not.

'I don't know,' he replied avoiding the question.

'Listen, if Joe's doing nothing this evening, and you've got nothing special on for the evening, why don't we have a look around town together?' It was an invitation, he was intrigued, and moreover surprised.

'OK, when I get back to Darussalam, if he's left a message, I'll call you, what's your room number?'

He looked towards the window, it appeared as if the rain had stopped.

Outside it was hot and humid, there were large puddles of water on the pavement. He walked back to the hotel, thinking about the chance meeting with the Harrisons girl, he had not even asked her name. He remembered Joe introducing her at the restaurant, but had not caught her name. He had been surprised by her presence, imagining Joe had been mixing business and pleasure. He had felt like an intruder and what

## The Cargo Club

had complicated the matter was the Harrisons girl had not made any sign that she was anything other than one of Joe's girl friends.

It could be interesting, he mused hoping that Joe had cancelled their dinner appointment, as he accelerated his pace.

'Are there any messages for me?' he asked at the reception. The girl looked in the key boxes and produced an envelope, Fitznorman opened it. It was a telephone message, brief and to the point, a problem had arisen and Joe was not available for dinner, he would pick him up at nine Monday morning.

Scott went up to his room pleased and immediately called the Radisson.



They took a taxi to the Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah complex, a modern shopping centre, little different to those that have sprung up in cities all over Southeast Asia. They continued on foot, walking across the bridge to a more traditional open-air market, stopping to try the local delicacies at the small stalls along the Kianggeh River, one of the smaller branches of the Brunei River. As night fell they paused, watching the traders arrive in their small boats laden with their goods for the market. Then taking a boat they visited

Kampong Ayer, an island, said to be the world's largest water village, where she showed him its antique dealers with their traditional Malaysian Keris daggers, brass canons and local hand tooled silverware and jewellery.

They stopped at display of tourist souvenirs and Scott asked the price of a Keris in Malay.

'You speak Malay?' she asked surprised.

He shrugged.

'So you were listening all the time to my conversations with Joe?'

He shrugged again.

She laughed. 'Next time I'll speak in Kadzan.'

Malaysia was a mosaic of 137 languages, which gave many native speakers an advantage over foreigners when it came to private conversations.

Returning to the hotel they took a light dinner in the coffee shop and their conversation turned to Borneo.

'You know in Sabah, we are not Malays!' she said, Fitznorman did not reply, he waited. 'But we are what is called in Malay Bumiputras, 'sons of the soil'. That means we're not Chinese, or some other kind of recently arrived immigrants.'

'What are you then? In any case this is the first time I've been in this particular corner of East Malaysia.'

'This isn't Malaysia, this is Brunei!'

'Sorry.'

'Never mind, come to Sabah with me and I'll explain all that.' Harrison's girl was not only very proud of her state, Sabah, but of all Borneo.

'That will be difficult, I have to continue to Jakarta,' he said thinking she was joking.

'Why?' she said with a look of dismay.

'Business.'

Again she touched his arm, she did not take her hand away.

'Seriously, think about coming to Sabah? It's not far from here, half an hour by plane.'

'I'll do that.'

He was puzzled, it seemed as though she was pressing him,

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as if she had already decided that they had established much more than just a passing acquaintance. She was extremely attractive, but Fitznorman was uneasy, he felt as if he was being pursued. It was as if he was not in control. He was pleased and flattered, not used to that kind of a attention.

‘Then I’ll arrange it!’

They finished their dinner and went to the bar. Harrison’s girl held his arm, and sat very close to him. Fitznorman racked his brain trying to remember her name, but there was no way.

Finally he decided, the sooner he found out the better, after all she was holding on to him as if she owned him, which was not disagreeable, in fact he thought things could not be better. It was a situation that he would never have anticipated, just a few hours earlier.

‘You know I have to confess, I didn’t catch your name the other day, I feel very silly.’

She pronounced her name, but it was lost to his ears.

‘That’s very difficult to pronounce,’ he said,

‘Well what did you call me then—you know, in your mind?’ She laughed at his embarrassment.

‘Harrisons girl?’

‘Harrisons girl?’

‘Yes and that’s what I’ll call you from now on.’

‘Harrisons girl!’

‘Yes, I’ll abbreviate it to HG,’ he joked.

‘Okay!’ she laughed and kissed him on the cheek. Her closeness excited him.

‘Let’s go!’

Without a word they left. In her room she turned towards him, the table lamp glowed softly as she offered him her lips, and kissed him, her hair caressed his cheek as the light reflected through its soft dark strands.

Scott returned to the Darussalam sometime after two. He left her filled with the confidence of lovers who knew that they would be together again, soon.

She was leaving on an early morning flight to Kota Kinabulu, where he promised they would again meet in a week.

Fitznorman slept deeply, with the perfume and softness of HG drifting into his dreams. The next morning he was woke by the ringing of the phone.

‘Hallo Scott it’s me!’

‘Hallo HG,’ he said sleepily.

‘I’m leaving now, I’m thinking about you.’

An hour later he was awoken from his sleep by Joe, informing him that he would be at the hotel at nine for their visit to the collection at the Brunei Museum at Kota Batu.

## CHAPTER 11

### TREASURE

Pat turned to Anna inviting her to complete the story of the *San José* and the treasure fleet that sailed from Portobelo, under the command of José Fernandez de Santilla, on that fateful morning of May 28, in 1708.

Anna recapped the story we were now familiar with. How Fernandez, pressed for time as the hurricane season approached, was anxious to reach Havana, where the rest of the fleet was waiting to set sail to Spain.

She also recounted how the riches discovered in the New World had inspired the envy of Spain's rivals, notably France and England, who preyed on the ships sailing between the Americas and Cadiz. To counter piracy, Spain had set up a convoy system with an armed escorts, a *capitana*, that is a flagship, sailing at the front and an *almiranta*, a vice-flagship, protecting the rear, with armed galleons on the flanks of larger convoys.

Twice yearly those convoys set out from Spain loaded with goods to supply the needs of its colonies. Their route passed down the coast of Africa, pausing in the Canary Islands for provisions before commencing the long Atlantic crossing to the Caribbean, where the fleet separated into convoys, one for Veracruz in Mexico and the other to Cartagena where ships also sailed to Portobelo.

On the return voyage the ships loaded with gold and silver from Peru, as well as Chinese goods brought overland from Acapulco, sailed through the Yucatan Channel in the direction of Cuba. There in Havana a convoy was formed with ships arriving from Mexico, which then sailed along the east coast of Florida, picking up the Gulf Stream as far as Cape Canaveral before turning east for the crossing towards Spain.

The convoy carried passengers as well as their personnel

wealth, including that shipped back on behalf of administrators, adventurers, merchants and colonialists, composed of gold, silver, jewellery, porcelain, indigo and cochineal dyes, exotic woods, chocolate, vanilla, tobacco and sugar.

The crossing was a dangerous enterprise, not only did they run the risk of attack by pirates, but there was the constant danger of storms and the seaworthiness of their wooden ships, the life of which was short with many being old and rotten.

In spite of that the convoy system, which lasted over three centuries and transported vast quantities of bullion and goods between Europe and the New World, many ships were lost, leading to legends of treasure, lying at the bottom of the seas, or captured by pirates and hidden on the many islands of the Caribbean.



Treasure hunters, there were many, men like Robert Marx, a fascinating though controversial character, now 86 years old, one of the pioneers of undersea exploration, who had participated in hundreds of search and salvage operations around the world and written several books on his adventures and the fabulous treasure he discovered.

According to Robert Guiglion, Marx was said to have spent

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20 million dollars trying to locate another treasure ship, the Portuguese galleon, *Flor de la Mar*, lost in a much more distant sea, which Marx described as ‘the richest vessel ever lost at sea, its holds loaded with 200 coffers of precious stones, diamonds from the small half-inch size to the size of a man’s fist.’

The legends and mystery surrounding the loss of *Flor de la Mar* had inspired treasure hunters, adventurers and story tellers for more than five centuries.

Amongst the theories that swirled around the galleon like an impenetrable mist was that of a plot to steal the treasure by enemies of her captain, Alfonso de Albuquerque, or perhaps even the nobleman himself, who sabotaged the ship to hide his crime. Which seemed like a possibility as only he and a handful of his officers miraculously survived the shipwreck and returned to Portugal to tell their story.

The truth would never be known, unless evidence of the wreck and its location miraculously turned up.

Amongst the clues were Portuguese documents relating to the Sultanate of Malacca, situated on the south-west coast of what is today Malaysia, dating from the period between 1509 and 1511, which Anna Basurko had examined, these included the Letters from Alfonso de Albuquerque compiled in seven volumes by various Portuguese chroniclers.

One of these recounts, ‘What Alfonso went through along the route that he took from Cochin to the island of Sumatra, where he was visited by the King of Pedir and Pasai and what else he did up to the time he arrived in Malacca.’

Another spoke of ‘other jewellery taken as spoils from Malacca and put on aboard the galleon *Flor de la Mar*...’

Then came the Achievements of the Portuguese in the exploration and conquests in the lands and seas of the east, describing how they had to brave the fury of the storms at sea and the danger of the many sandbanks near to the coasts after Alfonso de Albuquerque left Malacca.

The story recounts that Alfonso de Albuquerque,

...left Malacca with his galleons filled with trophies, and sailed as far as the Kingdom of Aru, at the end of the region called Timia Point, in Sumatra. There at night his galleon was dashed against a hidden reef and broke up into two parts with the poop in one section and the prow in the other, because the ship was old and the seas heavy.

Alfonso was unable to get help from other ships that had sailed with them. The following morning, Pero de Alpoem, captain of the Trindade, came to their assistance in a ships boat and saved Albuquerque from tragic fate of most of his crew.

The great loss of Alfonso...included two lions in hollowed iron, fine pieces of craftsmanship and artistry, which the emperor of China had sent as a gift to the Sultan of Malacca.

Alfonso returned to the wreck with the help of Captain Jorge Bothello on-board a Caravel and asked the help of local pearl divers. However, it seemed that natives near the coastal area of Pasai could have made off with most of the cargo.

According to another account the treasure included gold, diamonds, rubies, ornate golden figurines with eyes, tongue, teeth, and nails made out of precious stones. Others spoke of 60 tonnes of booty on board when she sank. It was said 2,000 valuable objects were taken from the Sultanate of Malacca's palace alone, and it took three days to load the ships. Certain objects were gifts from the King of Siam to the King of Portugal, but most of the cargo was booty from Malacca.

One of Albuquerque's personal secretaries noted:

On that moment the nau broke in two by the deck and sunk. And with it was lost a great treasure in gold and precious stones, greater as never before in India and never again in the future.

The stories were contradictory. Was the treasure stolen? Did the ship really sink? Had it run aground off Sumatra? If the ship was stolen where did it go?

The answer to those questions remained a mystery, there was no further trace of the *Flor de la Mar*, what really happened to her and her treasure would joined the long, long, list of unsolved enigmas of the deep.



At the Archivo Historico Nacional in Madrid, Anna had studied the history of more than 1,000 galleons and merchant ships lost along the coast of New Granada, a vast territory that covered today's Colombia, Venezuela and Panama.

The Spanish Main had for centuries been the source of legends and tales of adventures, of pirates and privateers. It had englobed the Caribbean in an arc from Venezuela to the Atlantic coast of Florida, then part of the Spanish Empire, which, at that time, not only covered South America, but also the West Coast of what is today the USA.

However, it has often been associated with the more southern half of the Caribbean, from Portobelo to Cartagena de Indias and on to the Orinoco in Venezuela.

From Portobelo and Cartagena the wealth extracted from Spain's colonies was shipped back to Spain, in the form of gold, silver, gems, as well as commodities such as spices, chocolate, hardwoods and also riches that arrived across the Pacific from Asia.

The precious metals and stones came from Peru, Bolivia and Mexico, whilst the spices, silks and porcelain came from the Philippines and China.

New Grenada was bordered to the south by the Viceroyalty of Peru. From there, after the Aztec Empire and Inca empires were seized by the conquistadores in the name of the Spanish crown, huge quantities of gold and silver, looted and subsequently mined, flowed into the European, and then Asian economies.

Silver mines at Potosi In Bolivia, Zacatecas and Taxco in Mexico, were soon producing silver in never before seen quantities.

Silver, mined in Potosi, cast in the form of ingots weighing 30 kilos, or struck as silver dollars, distinguished from those produced in Spain by the Pillars of Hercules linked by an S depicted on the reverse face, which it is said went on to become the familiar sign of the peso and the dollar.

The silver was carried to the coast of Peru by lama and mule trains, where it was loaded onto ships that sailed up the Pacific coast to the Panama Isthmus, there the precious cargoes were carried overland to Portobelo on the Caribbean coast of Panama, and from there shipped by galleon to Spain.

An indication of the quantities of silver transported from Peru to Panama is given by the investigation of another much earlier galleon, also named the *San José*, which foundered in the waters of the Gulf of Panama in 1631. The galleon ran aground on a sandbank near Punta Garachine, where part of the ship's hull broke away, leaving the rest of the vessel adrift, scattering its cargo into the sea east of Isla del Rey, in the Las Perlas Archipelago, as it drifted north, finally sinking near the islands of Contadora, Saboga and Chaperá.

The officially declared cargo included 1,417 silver bars, each weighing 30 kilos, 416 cases of silverware, precious objects and numerous pieces of eight, all privately owned, as well as 73,436 pieces of eight belonging to the Crown and 27 silver cones weighing 8 kilos each.

Much of the silver mined in Peru and Mexico crossed the Pacific to buy goods from Asia, which were carried back to Acapulco on the Manila Galleons, then transported overland to Veracruz on the Spanish Main where they were shipped to the colonies, to Spain and other countries in Europe. This was the Transpacific Silk Road.

Inevitably the riches of the Spanish Main attracted many pirates and privateers, but they were not the only dangers, in the summer and autumn months of the year the region was subject to hurricanes and fierce tropical storms.

According to Anna the treasure fleet that sailed from Cartagena that fateful spring was composed of 14 ships, two of which were known to have been carrying treasure, the *San José* and the *San Joaquín*.

Anna's investigations at the *Archivo Historico Nacional* in Madrid had pointed her to Seville, where the meticulously maintained records of Spain's highly bureaucratic colonial administration were kept, records of everything—expeditions,

discoveries, conquests, claims, treasure fleets, appointments of officials, finances and even shipwrecks, providing an extraordinary source for Anna's research into the role played by Basque explorers and navigators in the creation of *Virreinato de Nueva España* and *Nuevo Reino de Granada*, that is to say Spain's incredibly vast empire in the New World.

There was another source of information in Seville, the *Casa de Contratacion*, or Chamber of Commerce, where the cargoes and insurance claims for all voyages to and from the New World had been registered.

The mass of archived documents was so great as to be humanly impossible to explore, 9 kilometres of shelving, 43,000 volumes and 80 million pages, of which 15 million were in the process of being digitalised. It was not surprising documents disappeared, were forgotten, or were even deliberately lost over the centuries, secrets buried deep in the dusty vaults of the Archivo General, archives which had been dispersed until 1875, in Simancas, Cádiz as well as Seville.

Anna had spent two years toing and froing, between her home in San Sebastian and Seville in Andalusia, where, in the *Edificio de la Cilla*, opposite the main archives, she researched the history of great Basques navigators, one of the most famous of which was Juan Sebastian Elcano, who succeeded Ferdinand Magellan, to complete the first circumnavigation of the globe in 1522, a voyage undertaken by Magellan under the sponsorship of Charles I of Spain—later to be elected Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. It was a voyage of 72,000 kilometres that took three years. Five ships set out from Spain. Just one returned with 18 men, the rest of the 270 man expedition that left Seville died, including Magellan himself, killed on the Island of Cebu. The circumnavigation was completed on the one remaining ship, the *Vittoria* which had been built at a shipyard in Ondarroa along with the four other ships.

The *Vittoria*, an 85 ton carrick, was a mere 20 metres in length and carried a crew of 55, she was named after the church of *Santa Maria de la Vittoria de Triana*, where Magellan

John Francis Kinsella

took his oath of allegiance to King Charles I.

## CHAPTER 12

### THE NEW WORLD

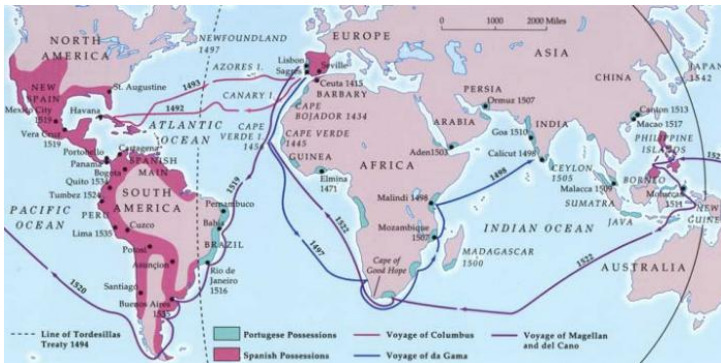
As the Falcon chased the slowly setting sun over the Bahamas, the captain handed over the controls to his co-pilot, taking a well earned rest before the last leg of the flight over the Caribbean to Cartagena.

Pat fell into a restless sleep on the lounge divan as images of Magellan's voyage drifted in and out of his dreams. His 60 million dollar jet was a galaxy of light years away from the navigator's carrack, the *Vittoria*, the only ship to complete the circumnavigation. The 85 ton vessel a mere 20 metres long compared to the 25 metres of the Falcon, though its stern castle rose nearly 10 metres above the waves. It carried a 55 man crew and though it had three decks its living quarters would have been cramped for the explorer's long transoceanic voyage, fraught with dangers unknown to Europeans.

The three masted carrack had been built in the Province of Guipizcoa in the Basque Country, one of Spain's main ship building centres during the 16th century. The *Vittoria* must have had a fearful appearance, totally black like the other ships in Magellan's small fleet, its hull, masts and riggings covered with protective pitch.

Pat could not help thinking how courageous, ignorant of the dangers, or desperate, those men were when the Armada de Molucca, left Seville on August 10, 1519, and sailed down the Guadalquivir River towards the Atlantic, on the start of what was to be an extraordinarily perilous venture in search of a never before explored route to the Spice Islands. Its owners and crew lured by riches, which promised even the most ordinary young matelots the prize of returning home with a sackful of spices, the means to buy a home and retire.

The Portuguese navigator was 40 years old when he set off across the Atlantic on his voyage of discovery. Magellan, like many other navigators of his time, realised the world was round, after having already reached Malacca in the Malayan-Indonesian Archipelago in 1511 by the eastern route, rounding the South African cape and crossing the Indian Ocean, which led him to believe he could find a shorter route to the Spice Islands, one which would bring him riches and honours.



Magellan, once a page in the royal court in Lisbon, was an adventurer, like Vasco da Gama, Columbus, Cortez, Legazpi and Urdaneta, a discoverer of new worlds, fascinated Pat Kennedy, burning an indelible mark into his fertile mind.

When Pat finally found the sleep he sought he was clutching Laurence Bergreen's book *Over the Edge of the World* which described Magellan's adventure and Elcano's return to Seville:

...the eighteen European survivors, attired only in their ragged shirts and breeches, did penance ... walking barefoot, holding a candle, each world traveller slowly marched, still getting accustomed to the unusual feeling of solid, unshakable land beneath his feet. Elcano led the gaunt, weary survivors through Seville's narrow, winding streets to the shrine of Santa Maria de la Vittoria, where they knelt to pray before the statue of the blessed Virgin and Child. They had returned to Seville as sinners and penitents rather than conquerors.

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Their voyage had commenced as a Shakespearean drama, bristling with significance and passion, starring the heroic Magellan, but three years had taken a dreadful toll and the journey was ending as a play by Samuel Beckett. The survivors were shell-shocked, tentative, and chastened by all they had seen and experienced.

The legend of countless treasure fleets had been greatly exaggerated by story tellers over the centuries. The *San José*, was in fact part of the first fleet to set out for the New World in a decade when it set sail from Spain in 1706.

Until the War of Succession a trade fair had been organised in Portobelo, Panama, every year, when over a period of two to three months merchants from both the Old and New Worlds could buy, sell and exchange goods for gold and silver. But, with the start of the European war the fair was suspended, and even when the fleet finally arrived in Cartagena a further two years were to pass before the fair could take place.

In late May 1708, the fair drew to a close and the *San José* set sail from Portobelo at the head of the fleet for Cartagena, in the full knowledge Spain's enemies in the form of an English flotilla had been cruising that part of the Caribbean in the hope of ambushing the *Tierra Firme* Fleet, which they knew would be heavily laden with gold and valuable goods.

Why had they taken the risk? Was it the fault of Alegria's overconfidence in his galleons' capacity to ward off their enemies, or was he pressed to get back to Spain with the king's treasure?

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Nobel Prize winning Colombian author, spoke of the *San José* in his novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*:

In the eighteenth century, the commerce of the city [Cartagena] had been the most prosperous in the Caribbean, owing in the main to the thankless privilege of its being the largest African slave market in the Americas. It was also the permanent residence of the Viceroys of the New Kingdom of Granada, who preferred to govern here on the shores of the world's ocean rather than in the distant freezing capital under a centuries-old drizzle that disturbed their sense of reality.

Several times a year, fleets of galleons carrying the treasures of Potosi, Quito, and Veracruz gathered in the bay, and the city lived its years of glory. On Friday, June 8, 1708, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the galleon *San José* set sail for Cadiz with a cargo of precious stones and metals valued at five hundred billion pesos in the currency of the day; it was sunk by an English squadron at the entrance to the port, and two long centuries later it had not yet been salvaged. That treasure lying in its bed of coral, and the corpse of the commander floating sideways on the bridge, were evoked by historians as an emblem of the city drowned in memories.

Of course there was a certain poetic licence in the great writer's words, but his facts were broadly correct in the Spanish text, which was not the case in the English translation where it seemed there was some confusion over the millions and billions of pesos and the value at that epoch:

*El viernes 8 de junio de 1708 a las cuatro de la tarde, el galeón San José que acababa de zarpar para Cádiz con un cargamento de piedras y metales preciosos por medio millón de millones de pesos de la época, fue hundido por una escuadra inglesa frente a la entrada del puerto, y dos siglos largos después no había sido aún rescatado. Aquella fortuna yacente en fondos de corales, con el cadáver del comandante flotando de medio lado en el puesto de mando, solía ser evocada por los historiadores como el emblema de la ciudad ahogada en los recuerdos.*

Three centuries after the sinking of the *San José*, the exact value of the treasure remained unknown, a mystery hidden behind the veil of time, but it would not remain so for much longer if Pat Kennedy had his way.

Many contemporaries, including the Spanish and English protagonists, believed that the *San José* was carrying vast quantities of gold, silver, and other treasure, destined for the Bourbon government in Madrid as well as for merchants and other private parties in Spain.

But the mystery persisted and even though a good part of the sea battle occurred within sight of the coast, the wreck of the *San José* had never been found, that is until President Santos

announced the sensational news of its discovery at his press conference in Cartagena.

In 1708, the Spanish Empire consisted of Mexico, Peru and *Tierra Firme*, the latter being essentially composed of what is today Colombia, Venezuela and Panama.

During the course of the preceding two centuries, galleons had carried treasure from the colonies to Spain, a large part of which was in payment of taxes due to the Crown for the royal fifth, the remainder being the profits derived from private commerce and personal gain.

The sinking of the *San José* was certainly one of the most dramatic moments in the War of the Spanish Succession that began in 1701. It followed the death at the age of 39 of childless Charles II of Spain, of whom the French ambassador wrote, ‘...the Catholic King is so ugly as to cause fear and he looks ill’.

Thus at the end of 1700, the Hapsburg dynasty of Spain died out, and Philip of Anjou, a French Bourbon, inherited the throne. It was a signal to Spain’s enemies, England and other European powers, that its position in the America’s could be challenged, a revelation that fuelled their own colonial ambitions in the Americas.

Anna described the *San José* as a typical three deck late 17th century Spanish warship, the mainstay of Spain’s transatlantic fleet, capable of transporting cargo and passengers, as well as defending itself and the merchant vessels in its care against pirates and enemies.

She produced a plan outlining the galleon’s main characteristics, that is to say a relatively low forecastle connected by a low main deck leading to an upper deck, and a poop deck high on the aft castle.

The galleon was part of a contract signed by Pedro de Aroztegui with the crown on June 12, 1696, to build a total of four galleons for the Indies run: the *San José*, the *San Joaquín* and two other ships—one of which was the *Espíritu Santo*, of a similar size. It was designed by Antonio de Gaztañeta and built by Aroztegui in 1697, at a place very close to Anna’s

hometown San Sebastian.

The Mapil shipyard, in Guipuzkoa, the Spanish Basque Province renowned for its shipbuilding traditions, was chosen for the construction of the vessels at its yards situated on the banks of Rio Oria in Aginaga. After construction the unfitted hulls with their superstructures were launched on the river and towed to the port of Pasajes, a dozen kilometres distant, where they were fitted with masts, riggings and other equipment.

In 1699, the newly completed 1,066 ton three deck *San José*, 41.40 metres long and 12.55 metres in beam, armed with 44 bronze cannons, set sail for Cadiz, where she remained with her sister ships, patrolling the entry to the Mediterranean whilst the war of succession raged across Europe, whilst the Viceroyalty of Peru and the provinces of the Spanish Main where left hanging in suspense awaiting the outcome of the conflict.

As the rivals fought on land and sea in the battle to gain the throne of the Old Continent's greatest colonial power, what should have been the first Spanish fleet to *Tierra Firme* of the 18th century remained blocked in port of Cadiz as the war raged on. The Grand Alliance combined English and Dutch land and sea power joined by the armies of the Spanish Hapsburgs and their allies, fighting against the Bourbon Alliance.

At the end of the 17th century the Viceroyalty of Peru covered a vast region consisting of almost all of South America with the exception of *Tierra Firme* and Portugal's colonial possession, Brazil on the western façade of the continent.

The Viceroyalty was divided into administrative regions called *audencias*, of which the Audencia of Lima was the capital and its port Callao, linking it by the sea to the city of Panama on the Pacific coast, from where gold and silver crossed the isthmus to Portobelo on the Caribbean side, from where it continued to Cartagena de Indias, the fortified city of *Tierra Firme*.

Cartagena, the Spanish stronghold and the transit point for

Peruvian silver to Spain, was founded by Pedro de Heridia in 1533, the ancestor of Don Pedro, Lola Barton's father.

Cartagena was also a slave market, the first being Africans transported to *Tierra Firme* in chains by Pedro de Heridia. Soon the city became one of the most important in the New World, where slave traders from Portugal, France, England and the Dutch were licensed by the Spanish to carry out their inhuman business at a time when slavery involved not only the New World but also the Old, where the Ottomans are estimated to have enslaved over a million Europeans.

We also discovered that in 1713, the British in the Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of the Spanish Succession, were awarded the right to the *asiento*, that is to say a license for the supply of African slaves to the Spanish colonies, which was later transferred to the South Sea Company by London, a fact that had been papered over in UK school programmes, as often happened when reality didn't correspond with the beloved narrative taught in history books.

Peru became of vital importance to Spain following the discovery of the greatest deposit of silver that ever existed, at Potosi, in the Andean highlands of what is today Bolivia, which then replaced Mexico as Spain's main source of the precious metal in the Americas.

According to the legend of Dick Whittington, the streets of London were paved with gold, a nice tale, but in Potosi the streets were really lined, not with gold, but silver, at least for the arrival of the Viceroy, the Marquis de La Palata, in 1682, when the good traders of the city demonstrated their wealth by paving 150 metres of road leading to the Royal Square with ingots of silver, which were 30 to 40 centimetres long, 10 to 12 wide, and 5 to 6 thick, weighing on an average of 45 kilos, worth in today's money many millions of dollars.

Lima flourished, but after two powerful earthquake over the course of a little more than half a century, it lost its monopoly on overseas trade and its control over the mining region of Upper Peru—renamed Bolivia, and never recovered its former wealth and glory.

In the meantime Don Manuel de Oms y Santa Pau, 1st Marquis of Casteldosrius, was named by Charles II, as ambassador to the court of Louis XIV in France. Then, as a reward for his loyalty, Philip V named him Viceroy of Peru in 1702.

No fleet of any importance had sailed to the Indies since 1701. Then, in the spring of 1706, the armada finally left Cadiz for Cartagena de Indias under the command of Casa Alegre, where it arrived seven weeks later, on April 27. There it remained at anchor for another two years waiting for the start of the Portobelo fair.

Portobelo lay on the Caribbean coast of the Panamanian Isthmus, in the corner of a bay of the same name, a natural harbour, discovered by Columbus in 1502. Founded in 1597, the port became a vital overland link on the route between Spain and the Viceroyalty of Peru, connected by a stone highway *El Camino Real* to Panama City, which overlooked the Pacific on the south side of the isthmus.

The heavily guarded town became the venue to one of the region's largest annual trade fairs and the main port for goods entering or leaving South America. The fair lasted between one and three months during which as much as 12 million gold pesos worth of goods changed hands.

These fairs inevitably became the target of pirates, such as Francis Drake—who is said to have been buried in a lead coffin in Portobelo Bay, and the notorious Henry Morgan, forcing Spain to use convoys with two yearly fleets of up to 70 ships sailing from Spain, one bound for Veracruz, the other for Portobelo—where the arrival of the fleet signalled the opening of the fair.

The dangers were very real, in 1668, the English pirate Henry Morgan launched a surprise attack from the landside on Portobelo and held the city hostage in an orgy of looting, debauchery and torture that lasted 14 days.

On arrival in March 1706, the immediate concern of the fleet's captain general, Casa Alegre, was the preparations for the Portobelo fair. He had not however counted on the

problems caused by the ongoing war in Europe, more precisely that of communications, since the authorities in Lima had received no advance warning concerning the arrival of the fleet until it had arrived in Cartagena.

Castelldosrius, now Viceroy of Peru, sailed from Cartagena on a French frigate, arriving on July 21 in Portobelo, where he had little desire to linger in what was known as the Spaniards' graveyard. His objective was Panama City where he hoped to make the preparations for the arrival of the Peruvian merchant fleet expected that September or October.

After many delays, Castelldosrius finally arrived in Lima in March 1707, where he discovered the Royal finances in a parlous state, for the simple reason the traders had found other markets besides the Portobelo fair for their goods, which due to the war in Europe had fallen on hard times.

The viceroy acted immediately and by the end of the year had persuaded traders to attend the fair, raising the funds needed to finance a convoy of ships, part of which left in December 2007 for Panama and Portobelo.

Thus, nearly two years after leaving Spain, Casa Alegre learnt that the traders had finally left Callao for Panama, carrying on board their small convoy of just 4 ships some 5 million pesos in gold and silver, plus the taxes due to the crown.

Upon receiving the news, Casa Alegre left Cartagena for Portobello on the January 5, 1708, where he took charge of the fair's organisation.

It was the beginning of February before the caravan of traders and their merchandise began their trek across the isthmus for the fair, which finally opened and continued until the end of May.

According to Anna a complete account of the revenues collected by Casa Alegre still survives in the Spanish archives, amongst the many details of the treasures remitted by royal officials during the period from 1559 to 1723, which totalled exactly 1,551,609 pesos.

Sixteen ships left Portobelo for Cartagena, plus a further merchant ship that joined the fleet en route. Eleven days later

the fleet was attacked as it approached Cartagena, by a flotilla of four heavily armed ships, and the *San José* sunk.

The *San Joaquin* escaped to Cartagena with all the merchant ships, except one which was deliberately grounded and burnt to avoid it falling into the hands of the attackers, who though they lost no ships sustained serious damage.

In the wake of the disaster and in the light of enemy forces being present along the fleet's route, an enquiry was opened. It was clear the fleet, in spite of the warnings, had thrown caution to the wind, sure of its ability to ward off any attackers, not wanting to delay the departure of the gold urgently needed by the new Bourbon king, Philip V, to defend his throne.

At that moment many European merchant vessels and warships were present in the waters off the Panama coast, amongst them Commodore Charles Wager, on patrol in the Western Caribbean, who, during a halt off Bastimentos Island, learnt of the imminent departure of the treasure fleet from Portobelo.

Casa Alegre, aware of the presence of Wager's warships had taken a calculated risk by sailing when he did. Unluckily for him the wind was not in his favour and the speed of the fleet was limited by that of its slowest vessel, enabling the faster English flotilla to catch up with him as his fleet neared Bocachica.

In the desperate battle that followed not only was the *San José* sunk, the *Vega Florida* surrendered and the heavily damaged *Santa Cruz* was captured and taken in tow by Charles Wager.

Philip V was not the only loser when the *San José* disappeared beneath the waves carrying its cargo to the bottom of the sea. Wager to his great regret sent the treasure to the bottom and also failed to take the *San Joaquin*. His capture of the *Santa Cruz* was a bitter disappointment, besides it being a ship of 54 brass cannons, its cargo was mainly cacao with just 'thirteen chests of pieces of eight, and fourteen Piggs, or Sows of silver, was all that could be found'.

However, the capture of the *Santa Cruz* made Wager a rich

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man, at the cost of Count Vega Florida, the commander and owner the vessel, even if the crown owned its arms and munitions. As for wealthier passengers travelling on the *Santa Cruz*, they lost their money and belongings, they were lucky to still be alive and be set free, though with not much more than the clothes they stood in.

Ultimately, the story of the *San José* and the armada was surrounded by mystery, confusion and suspicion, the number of ships, the treasure they carried and the account of the battle. Each of the different protagonists sought to avoid blame, protecting their own interests and the existence of undeclared shipments of gold and silver.

Exactly how much treasure went down with the *San José* remained a mystery, however, there was an indication, which is the account of the royal treasure registered on the *San Joaquín*, 4.4 million silver reales as well as pearls and emeralds, which corresponds approximately with what Wager wrote, 'It is said that the king's money is ready to be shipped off and that it amounts to eleven millions of pieces of eight' although there is some confusion over the Spanish coinage.

Amongst those who were shipping personal belongings and merchandise aboard the different ships, were traders, investors, landowners, officials, voyagers and adventurers returning from the colonies. Their goods and baggage would have contained their accumulated wealth and fortunes in the form of gold and silver acquired in the New World being brought home to Spain, for diverse reasons. Part of this would have been in sealed chests and boxes exempt from inspection and as often was the case much of this would have gone undeclared, deliberately hidden, to avoid taxes.

The only thing that made Anna uneasy and the rest of us for that matter was the legal position of the USA, a reference for others in matters of ownership of sunken ships, defined in its declaration on the subject:

Pursuant to the property clause of Article IV of the Constitution, the United States retains title indefinitely to its sunken State craft

unless title has been abandoned or transferred in the manner Congress authorized or directed. The United States recognizes the rule of international law that title to foreign sunken State craft may be transferred or abandoned only in accordance with the law of the foreign flag State.

Further, the United States recognizes that title to a United States or foreign sunken State craft, wherever located, is not extinguished by passage of time, regardless of when such sunken State craft was lost at sea.

That meant the United States supported the principal that a sunken state warship remained the property of that state, regardless of where or when it sank, unless the state specifically relinquishes that right.

All of which was valid for the *San José*, the question was whether the other ships were warships or not, and had they been engaged in a private mission. In any case Spain took the same stand as the US government, which made no difference as far as Colombia was concerned, as it claimed rights to all shipwrecks in its own territorial waters.

Some hours later we finally touched down in Cartagena, where we were greeted by Don Pedro Heridia. Lola left with her father and Tom accompanied us to the Sofitel Santa Clara in the Casco Viejo, where after our baggage was delivered to our rooms and we'd freshened ourselves up we were accompanied by Tom to Don Pedro's residence, a magnificent colonial villa in the heart of the old city.

I must admit we were a little fuzzy after the long flight and the jet lag, but it was early evening and it wasn't as if we were in a hurry to go to bed in a city that throbbed with life and miss the evening Don Pedro had prepared for us.

On arrival in the splendid tropical gardens of his villa, we were welcomed by the sound of the romantic music of Latin America, softly played in the background by a guitar quartet seated near a bar set out with drinks. After a few graceful words of welcome, Don Pedro proposed a toast, then invited us to dinner at a magnificently set table, sparkling under the palm fronds that rustled gently in the barely discernible

movement of the soft evening air.

Seated next to Anna I felt exhilarated by her presence and the start of our unexpected adventure.

## CHAPTER 13

# BEGINNINGS

Scott Fitznorman enjoyed telling HG about his business, his life, embroidering the narrative as she listened fascinated. He was a good story teller and she was a good listener, infinitely curious to know everything about him and his past. Herself, she had many stories to tell of her old family and its long established trading house, which had deep roots in Sabah, in what had once been a distant possession of the British Empire.

At times Scott asked himself if she was not trying to build some kind of a story to make him presentable to her family. It was not exactly what he had in mind, but he amused her by recounting his beginnings in London, a city that had once been at the centre of an Empire that during a time had ruled Sabah.

London maintained a strange relationship with the Commonwealth, a vestige of Empire, whose peoples at the same time revered and resented it. The end of the 20th century had marked a turning point, it was a century during which Great Britain lost its Empire and was uncertain of its future, now embroiled in its Brexit dilemma, culturally, geographically and historically attached to Europe, separated by a few miles of water, and many ideas that belonged more to Kipling than to more pragmatic European thinkers.

Scott's grandfather had been born into an Anglo-Irish family near Dublin, then a subject of the King and his far flung realm. After independence his father had fought as a junior officer in North Africa during WWII, and following the war had built a

steady career in the Commonwealth Office. Fitznorman grew up in the London of the late sixties, when the wind of change was transforming Britain and its relations with its last colonies.

There were no new worlds to conquer and boys of his age were more interested in Rock'n Roll than anything else. Stuck in an unexciting present he regretted a past he had never known, he was a dreamer, at school his performance was mediocre, where he was constantly urged to more effort by his teachers.

He was only awakened from his torpor whenever he was menaced by an exasperated headmaster or a threatening maths teacher, briefly putting on a spurt, shinning momentarily in end of term exams, but only in those subjects that interested him, then sliding back into dull complacency. Apart from those more stressful moments all the ordinary things happened to him, he was brought up in Pimlico, living in a very comfortable apartment in Morpeth Mansions under the shadow of Westminster Cathedral, convenient, as his parents were Catholics.

He graduated from London University, where he managed a dull degree in 19th century British history, and only just. He had little interest in entering government service and in desperation his father, judging his son's academic qualifications as being totally inadequate to earning a respectable living, proposed that he pursue his education at De Montfort University in Leicester, where Scott gained a Degree in Fine Art and Antiques Valuation. With that safely in his pocket he entered a Bond Street auction house, where the family had connections, and married a girl he had met at university.

Life up until then had been fairly easy, during his university years his finances had been assured by his parents, his holidays a happy routine, near Biarritz in France, where they owned a pleasant seaside home. At 27 things changed abruptly, he now had a steady job, a wife and bills to pay, life had become a humdrum routine, a never ending series of commutes on British Rail, shuttling in and out of dull suburban Cheam,

where he rented a modest house, resigning himself to a predictable suburban future.

That ended abruptly when he found himself co-opted onto a team about leave for the firm's first major Asian auction of antique Chinese porcelain and furniture in Hong Kong. It happened when his director belatedly discovered they were short of hands, a flu epidemic had hit the firm and Scott was told to pack his bags, he would be replacing a junior auction room assistant for the event. Thinking back, the only thing he could clearly remember prior to their departure was his panic when he discovered his passport was out of date and the rush to the Passport Office on Petty France, a small street on the other side of St James's Park.

The very instant he disembarked from the British Airways flight at Kai Tak Airport in Hong Kong, he realised the world was a much larger and more exciting than he had ever imagined in his routine uninspiring suburban life.

He discovered an exotic world that he had never even suspected existed, vibrant with life and colour, a strange world that excited and beckoned him, like one of those forbidden women he had often seen in the doorways of Soho, a short walk from the Bond Street auction house.

His attitude changed and the germ of ambition stirred, even if it wasn't yet Oscar Wilde's nobleness. Up to that time he had not been remarked in his work, but his newly discovered enthusiasm was noted by one of the senior partners who observed Fitznorman debating the fine points of British history with a wealthy client during the Hong Kong pre-sale viewing.

He soon turned his attention to Oriental ceramics and over the following years spent with the auction house built a reputation as a specialist in Oriental fine art. At the same time he developed an interest in Asian languages, studying Mandarin Chinese and Indonesian, thanks to which he was posted to the firm's branch in Singapore where he remained for three years.

Marriage and absence were incompatible, he divorced,

preferring the attractions of his work, cultivating new friends and business relations, travelling in pursuit of his ambitions.

The auction house grew and was bought-out by a well-known New York firm, where Scott successfully pursued his career. After a particularly good year and generous bonus, his friendly bank manager fixed him up with a loan on a fashionable apartment near to Battersea Park in London.

He then met a French girl, an art expert in Chinese antiques, who persuaded him to branch out and set-up a gallery in Paris, where after selling his shares in the auction house's generous employee equity scheme he took over a small gallery on the left bank, rue Bonaparte, negotiating a reasonable price with the elderly antique dealer who had called it a day after setting his eyes on Provence for a well earned retirement.

At first, a member of the Oriental Ceramic Society in London, then the *Société Française d'Etude de la Céramique Orientale*, he became an Expert en antiquities. Business was good when the economy was on the up, and less so when things turned down. Taking advantage of a cyclical upturn in property he sold his Battersea apartment for a large profit and opened a second gallery in London.

He was and rightly so pleased with his success, life looked like a stream flowing unperturbedly towards a comfortable future. That vision stopped suddenly when he realised nothing more was going to happen, the path was set, he too would grow old, retire to the South of France, and finally die, and nothing would have happened in his comfortable moderately wealthy though not very remarkable life as a stuffy Parisian art dealer.

To palliate his desires he decided he would start to vary the sources that supplied him with the objets d'art he exposed in his galleries, acquired up until that point through conventional trade channels. By going directly to the source of the Oriental and ethnic art, his stock in trade, he could cut out the middlemen, generate more profit and at the same time satisfy his itch to discover new horizons, away from the mundane routine of day-to-day life at his gallery.

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He became used to travelling, buying rare and unusual objects to stock the gallery at estate sales, auctions, antique shows, fairs and exhibitions, from museums and collectors, mostly in Europe, but also in Asia.

What attracted him was the idea of going off the beaten track to small local dealers far from the big cities. Of course seeking out the source of valuable collectables would involve more time and expense, but with time and patience he was sure he could expand his business and satisfy his growing attraction to distant and exotic places.

He had observed from afar the discovery of ancient wrecks in the South China Sea, now he tested his ideas purchasing lots, selecting choice items for his own galleries, selling off the less interest pieces to wholesale dealers.

As time passed the idea of discovering his own treasure ship grew as he heard stories of fishermen recovering valuable objects from wrecks and black market dealings. But that kind of adventure was filled with financial risks and perils, it was the business of richer men, naval archaeologists, or adventurers, which he had not yet the means to aspire to.

Still, he continued to be nagged by some indefinable yearning and turned his energy towards the idea of creating a new up-market gallery. He sold his share in the gallery on rue Bonaparte, keeping the smaller London gallery. With the capital he invested in a more ambitious antiquities business, Asia Galerie SA, situated on Faubourg St Honoré, just off rue Castiglione.

It was a good move, it coincided with a cyclical boom in the property and stock market and the appearance of a new kind of client with money to spend decorating their extravagant homes.

The gallery was a success and in spite of a lingering restlessness it brought him a very comfortable life style, shuttling to London to develop his second gallery, near to Kings Road in Chelsea, not far from the Morpeth Mansions apartment he inherited from his parents in Westminster.

As the market boomed, he prospered and bought a large

summer house on the Basque coast in France, a ten minute walk from the centre of Biarritz. He then engaged a manager to take care of the day-to-day business of running the galleries, Marie-Hélène Koenig, a no nonsense art expert and business executive, which allowed him to invest more time on overseas business in Hong Kong or Singapore, where slowly he developed new sources, acquiring objects for the business, and visiting New York and San Francisco where he maintained a network of wealthy clients.

Life became good, but Scott was never entirely satisfied. It was not dissatisfaction, rather a yearning for adventure, away from the daily constraints of business, the same feeling that certain men had felt across the ages that drove them to discover new lands and seek fortune. To his great regret, and possible relief, there were no new lands to be discovered at the turn of the new millennium. I can only imagine what he really wanted was to leave his mark, not remain one of the anonymous faces whose passage was left unnoticed, without the slightest trace of their earthly existence.

Perhaps he could make some kind of astounding discovery, which was unlikely, he was no scientist, or then again he could discover the tomb of a Chinese prince, just as unlikely as he was no archaeologist, he was a mere merchant, be it an expert in his field, which in spite of a veneer of glamour consisted of fixing a market value on goods that merely transited his possession, happily leaving a mercantile profit.

Those were the dreams that he assuaged when he started exploring the villages on the edges of the rain forests of Southeast Asia, in search of ethnic art and heirlooms, which ended up in his glossy catalogues of collectors items for sale in London or Paris.

A boat trip up the rivers of Sumatra, Borneo or Irian Jaya were adventures, enjoyable adventures, though not really what could be described as perilous, where the idea of discovering ancient Dutch or Chinese treasure ships resurfaced, the kinds of wrecks the lay beneath the sea off the coasts of Malaysia or Borneo, where large quantities of Chinese porcelain were

waiting to be recovered.

He visited the museums and sites of archaeological interest off the beaten track, such as in Kuching, where there were also very few notable visitors, making for warm welcomes and friendships with some of the venerable specialists in those distant backwaters, though calling them backwaters was not to look down on them, it was a fact, and even those honest men of science and history who oversaw their charges were the first to admit it.

At the outset the collectors of ethnic art or heirlooms and ancient porcelains were few, often composed of diplomats, bankers and businessmen, who had sojourned for long periods in the region, who after acquiring an interest in the arcane field had built up their own collections. However, in more recent years he had seen a growing interest in tribal art from Southeast Asia and Oceania, as wealthy collectors became interested in a hitherto little recognised field, previously appreciated by a small circle of specialists, but now acknowledged by museums, amongst which was Le musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris, one of the largest museums in the world entirely dedicated to ethnic art and its history, built on the south bank of the Seine, attracting a much larger public as new domain of art.



At the end of the 20th century a new generation of specialists started to make their mark, who saw tribal, or ethnic art, for its true value, elevating it to its rightful place, human art expressed in one of its many forms, which was in imminent danger as globalisation reached into even the furthest corners of the planet, affecting little visited peoples, Aleuts, Papuans, Ibans and many others.

The development of man and his art forms had become a key to many of the questions posed, as God was replaced in modern society by knowledge and facts, as the origins of man and the universe were slowly unravelled by geneticists, anthropologists, astronomers and geologists.

The success of his galleries under Marie-Hélène's watchful eye gave Scott freedom to do what he wanted most, to travel, explore and discover new cultures, people and sensations. His circle of friends and contacts in East and Southeast Asia grew, meeting bankers like Pat Kennedy, and as his reputation spread came a regular flow of invitations to visit sites and excavations, where his expertise in the valuation of objects could contribute to demands for funding from governments and institutions.

His certificate of authentication and valuation would facilitate sales to museums around the world, enabling archaeologists to finance their research. His main obstacles were the authorities, who naturally wanted the finds to remain in their countries, but the lack of funding for local museums meant the many finds were destined to dusty storage rooms where they would be forgotten.

The sale of antique cultural objects to foreign institutions funded local museums allowing them to organise exhibitions, print catalogues and fund research. Collections in foreign museums generated public interest in the countries from which the objects of their collections originated, indirectly stimulating tourism and creating a positive cultural image.

Enlightened politicians saw those advantages and helped, though many governments for nationalistic reasons and domestic politics often obstructed the export of artefacts, even when it was temporarily for exhibitions in foreign capitals.

Export through legal channels, where records were kept and items were excavated under archaeological supervision, was quite a different thing from the pillaging of wrecks and sites by unauthorised dealers, who sometimes worked in collusion with crooked local officials.

It was at this point he met Robert Guiglion, at an archaeological conference in the historical coastal city of Hoi An, Vietnam, where Robert was presenting a paper on seabed mapping and the geolocation of ancient Chinese junks off the nearby coast. They discovered they shared many things in common, not only in the field of Oriental art and antiquities, but also their experience in Southeast Asian, and soon started to explore the idea setting up a company together. Their idea was to identify and salvage cargoes of value from the many ancient wrecks that lay on the bottom of the South China Sea, a profitable business, which could attract the interest of museums, collectors, and philanthropists, me, like Sir Patrick Kennedy, willing to invest in the kind of costly operations needed to recover treasures of the past, legally and in conformity with recognised scientific and archaeological rules.

## CHAPTER 14

# MAGELLAN'S CROSS

*Change and decay in all around I see, O thou who changest not,  
abide with me!*

William Henry Monk

Pat Kennedy first made acquaintance with a certain Fernão de Magalhães a year earlier. Magalhães, better known to you as Ferdinand Magellan, the Portuguese navigator, had met with a gruesome and untimely death in the Philippine archipelago during an ill advised skirmish with a local chief named Lapu-lapu on the Island of Mactan.

Sir Patrick Kennedy had fallen on his knees and blessed himself with an expansive Sign of the Cross before Magellan's memorial, outside the Basilica Minore des Santo in Cebu City, much to the approval of an admiring crowd and a group of bustling Filipino journalists alerted for his visit.

Nobody was more surprised than John Francis, who had accompanied him on his journey. John later wryly remarked, 'If I was a believer, I would have said it was like Saul on the road to Damascus, converted by a sudden revelation.'

It was one of those instinctive gestures that came so naturally to Pat Kennedy with his picture hitting the headlines of newspapers and making the lead story not only on TV news in the Philippines, but also in Hong Kong, and across the Catholic world. A powerful banker kneeling before a cross in recognition of the Christian faith, brought to Asia by Magellan and his successors, Legazpi and Urdaneta.

Pat immediately won the hearts of millions of Filipinos and other Catholics across the planet, which together with his very cordial meeting with Rodrigo Duterte, the controversial

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President of the Philippines, admired by a large majority of his countrymen for his strong arm action against drug traffickers and criminals, was a good omen for his first visit to that devoutly Christian country.

The gesture was not lost on nearby China, which had seen a religious revival over the previous four decades, in particular Chinese Christians, the numbers of which were estimated to have grown 10% annually since the passing of Mao a couple of generations earlier. According to some observers, China was on the way to having the world's largest Christian population by 2030.



Pat later told John, he had closed a circle. His Sign of the Cross was not a religious symbol, but had a deeper mystical connection with history. He was an admirer of the Conquistadors, but at the same time harboured a deep regret at the destruction of the ancient civilisations caused by their arrival in the New World.

He saw modern Central America as the melting pot of the New and Old Worlds, and the search to re-establishing pre-Columbian civilisations to their true place in history was close

to Pat's heart.

In the same way he saw the Silk Road to the East, a link between China, the Americas and Europe, as a symbol of his own personal goals, in the form of the Nicaraguan Transoceanic Canal.

The trouble was 150 billion dollars were needed to finance the construction of the canal, and the Chinese billionaire Wang Hung, head of the HKND Group, which had won the contract, had lost a large part of his fortune in one of those cyclical Chinese stock market crashes and was keeping a low profile.

The work had ground to a halt in spite of denials from Nicaragua's Canal Authority. Pat, however, was not discouraged, the Panama Canal had taken decades to complete, a story filled with dramas, including war, disease and bankruptcy, though the latter were not on Pat's agenda.

The canal depended on politics and in China politics had a different meaning to that in the West. The Communist Party ruled and Xi Jinping ruled the Communist Party. The fact that President Xi Jinping was determined to remain in power meant that Pat's position was reinforced in the foreseeable future.

Xi Jinping was 64 years old and if his health held out he could still be in place for another decade, or perhaps for life, thus eliminating political risk from Pat's calculations. The Wu family's *guanxi*, or connections, had played a key role and payback time had come, especially since Pat, the husband of Lili Wu, had become Sir Patrick and enjoyed solid political connections in London, where he had vanquished his enemies, as he had in Moscow and Brussels. Businesses with strong links to political families in China had always flourished and his wife's family was not different.

Pat was a natural businessman, agile, as sharp as a fox and like a cat with nine lives and sooner or later he would be vindicated when the canal project was revived.

He had become the symbol of power at the INI Hong Kong Banking Corporation, so unassailable, universally accepted,

that it was almost impossible to imagine how he could be replaced.

This would have at first appeared to limit his freedom, in fact it was quite the opposite, from his homes in Hong Kong and London, or from his jet, his lines of communications were such that he was never far from the centre of power in those cities, or wherever the bank had established its presence.

Pat was a tireless traveller, ready to board his flying home and office at a nod, jetting to the four corners of the earth to meet political leaders and decision makers to further the bank's and his own ambitions. If Xi Jinping used his new power to undertake the changes necessary to reform China's deeply indebted state enterprises and local governments, then so much the better for business.

For the moment there were few risks visible on the horizon with the exception of North Korea, which would in any case be a game changer for the planet if it ever came to blows.

Xi's dream was the success of his Belt and Road program, which encouraged the peaceful development of emerging countries along its planned route, and why not join the circle via the Transoceanic Canal project at some future point, reasoned Pat.

But President Xi's his task at hand was to persuade the Philippines of China's peaceful intentions in the South China Sea.

Pat had asked John to join him. He had been reluctant to go, but Ekaterina encouraged him, she said he needed a change of air as a wave of Siberian weather descended on the British Isles, though it was not as though John had been spending much time in London what with the work in Sommières where the climate was more clement.

John could count on Katya and Liam to keep a close watch on the work linked to the Sommières Collection. Liam was in Paris, where his growing closeness to Camille de la Salle was reassuring.

With Liam Clancy I suppose John entertained that teacher-student relationship, or perhaps one of a fatherly figure, not

difficult considering his age, more likely grandfatherly, as John had never had Liam as one of his students, who had neither studied history nor economics, in any serious sense that is, but John had seen him as an intelligent young man and realised from the start he would go far, if the right doors opened, and they did, which was not the case for most.

John stopped off in Abu Dhabi to visit the new Louvre of art and civilization, then flew to Galle in Sri Lanka to check out the work on his property, The Plantation, where all seemed to be going well. It was fully booked and the extension would be ready for the coming tourist season.

From Colombo he flew to Hong Kong and then to Cebu City, where he was transferred by helicopter to a private island, owned by Sotero Lee, a Filipino-Chinese businessman, where Pat was his guest relaxing with Lili and their two children.

The next morning they were picked up and flown to the TGU Tower in the Cebu IT Park. From there they were driven through the dense, snarled up traffic, to Beverly Hills, Woolbright Drive, where Sotero Lee's residence sat perched on the hilltop, part of a very exclusive gated community overlooking the Cebu Taoist Temple and a stunning view over the city.

The house and its Chinese garden, surrounded by an imposing wall and heavy iron gates, set between two pillars surmounted by bronze lions, was protected night and day, not only by the guards at the community's gate, but by the Lee family's own security service.

The family had originated from the province of Fujian, and had migrated to the Philippines in the 19th century to seek work and business opportunities, eventually settling in Cebu City.

Lee's business interests included one of the country's regional airlines with links to Hong Kong and Taipei, as well as hotels, construction firms, banks and shopping malls.

With the influx of Chinese tourists the needs of the Philippines had rocketed—hotels, infrastructure, and especially roads as we were soon to discover.

Following the wave of Chinese tourists spreading out across the region was an army of investors and businessmen, buying up everything in the wake left by their newly rich compatriots, who outspent all others, filling hotels, tour buses and cruise ships. Airports had reached bursting point and attractions over saturated, the endless crowds of tourists sending home a never-ending stream of selfies, encouraging their families and friends to join them, escape the Chinese winter that settled over the greater part of that vast region bringing biting winds and bitter cold.

The Chinese together with the growing middle classes of other countries in the region were stretching infrastructure to its limits as their appetite for travel grew at an exponential rate promising an endless boom for investors.

China accounted for over a fifth of the money spent by all outbound tourists, twice as much as US travellers, enough to make investors salivate considering only 5% of Chinese owned passports.

Pat needed John, his friend and advisor, to translate, not the language, he was pretty good in Chinese himself and had already picked up a few words of Tagalog, but for the historical background of the Philippines, its links with China, ASEAN and the US.

But he also wanted John's company, like mine, we were good friends and were not involved in the bank's day to day business, apart from John in his advisory role at the Fitzwilliams Foundation.

Never still for a moment Pat dragged John off to visit the rice terraces of Luzon, one of the marvels of the world dating back to the dawn of agriculture.

Unfortunately the conditions made their visit difficult, what with John's legs and the steep slippery trails. In spite of that the going was nothing compared to the conditions back home in the UK and Ireland, where the worst winter in memory had closed roads, railway lines and airports. In Kildare snow drifts of up to five feet piled up, the worst in living memory.

There was no TV in the rooms at the Banaue Hotel, and with

some difficulty John managed to call Ekaterina from the lobby on his mobile. She told him everything had come to a stop, that Ireland was pretty badly hit by the snow. John called Francistown and they confirmed it was bad and they had little choice but to hunker down and wait for the blizzards to pass.

It was not much better in Banaue where the hotels water supply suddenly failed, with the two men ferrying pails of water to their rooms to flush their toilets and wash. Pat was not discouraged by such minor problems, he found a guide and they set off to a place called the Saddle.

Slowly John discovered why Pat had insisted on his presence, in fact it was nothing to do with the Philippines, which was a pleasant distraction, it was Sommières. He wanted a complete update, John's own personal opinion, which John understood was normal.

John listened patiently as the Filipino guide, Denwil, a real ironman, took them trekking, not a good idea as they were both out of form. A surprise for John as he thought his daily workout kept him fit. Nothing was further from the truth, and Pat, a good few years younger than John, was in an even worse condition.

The weather was rainy and the trail wet and muddy, Denwil got the measure of their capacity very quickly and they didn't go further than a run down hostel, called the Batad Hillside Inn, in a tiny cluster of houses called a village, which did, however, have an extraordinary view point over the rice terraces and beyond, once the mist cleared, the highest peak in the Cordillera that rose to nearly 3,000 metres.

By an extraordinary chance they met up with the Irish Ambassador to Estonia at the Hillside Inn. He recognised Pat Kennedy and the three of them had a few beers together in the ramshackle trekkers' guesthouse. Frank Moore seemed a nice guy, but John wondered what he was doing in Tallinn, I mean Estonia stood between Equatorial Guinea and Mauritius in the population stakes with its million plus souls.

The ambassador had a BA in Chemistry from Trinity, Dublin, then taught the subject for 15 years, or so, which meant he

and John had a couple of things vaguely in common, not that John was a snob, as Frank seemed a very nice guy. As for Pat he had had an unforgettable experience in Tallinn back in 2000, which was definitely not worth mentioning, in fact he became very quiet when Moore announced he was the Irish Ambassador to Estonia.

Frank had also done a stint in Boston, like Pat, and also in Ethiopia, which was a difficult to compete with, even for an inveterate globe trotter like Pat.

From a distance, in a place like Banaue, John had realised Ireland was less and less like the place he once knew, after connecting to the BBC World Service news, not without some difficulty, via his mobile in the hotel lobby, it had somehow melded into being more like a region of the UK, and even a little, like Estonia. Travel, internet, television, all led to convergence, the same fashions and behaviour. Everybody walked around with their mobiles in their hands, wearing the same clothes and for the most part watching the same kinds of films and videos, using the same apps and the same social media.

Evidently the Chinese watched their own thing, used their own apps, just as we did, but the behaviour patterns and consumption were the same.

The world had become a much smaller place and the differences between neighbours became blurred. Scott Fitznorman had once reminded me that Indonesians, Malaysians and Filipinos were very close, as their languages showed and their more ancient populations, and their overlapping Melanesian vocabularies.

Talking about ancient populations Pat's visit to the Philippines was coincidentally highlighted by another event that interested me, and much more Scott Fitznorman.

As Pat belatedly discovered Magellan story, another discovery was announced on the island of Luzon, one which interested Scott Fitznorman to the highest point. Why is a long story, but as I mentioned earlier Scott had made world headlines when he discovered *Homo erectus* fossils in

Borneo, which it turned out were not fossils, transforming him into an overnight celebrity, an event that brought us closer together as we had joined forces to write a book on his remarkable find.

The discovery on Luzon was announced as Pat and John were struggling on the rain sodden slopes of the Sierra Madre, a new species of *hominin* was discovered, found in a cave about 100 kilometres to the north-east of Banaue.



It was another episode in the story of our ancestors, which was becoming more complex with the discovery of each new species. The news was that 50,000 years ago, an extinct human species lived on what is now the island of Luzon, named *Homo luzonensis*, a cousin that stood less than three feet tall.

The story commenced a decade earlier when Armand Salvador Mijares, a graduate student, was digging at the Callao Cave, not far from Tuguegarao, on the banks of the Pinacanan River, searching for the traces of the first farmers on the Philippines. To his surprise, he uncovered several human foot bones and teeth amongst a variety of animal fossils.

The bones were dated as being about 50,000 years old and

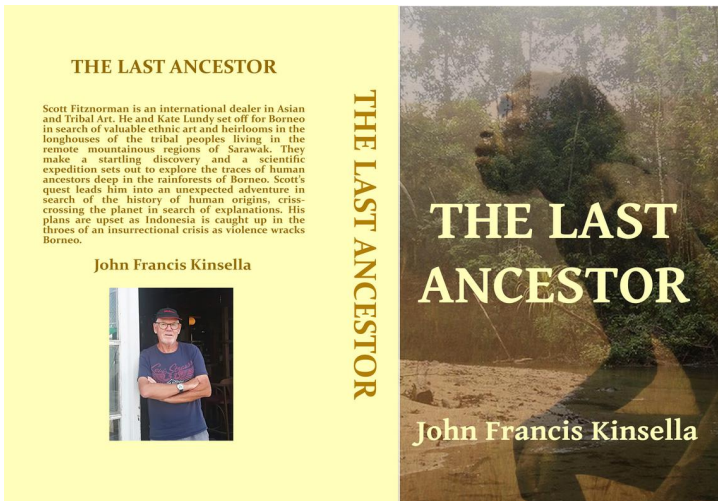
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belonged to at least three small individuals, similar to *Homo floresiensis* discovered on the not too distant Indonesian island of Flores.

Our own ancestors *Homo sapiens* had left Africa only 100,000 years ago and reach Australia about 50,000 years ago later. The question was whether these miniature *hominins* had evolved from *Homo erectus*, discovered on Java, and more recently by Scott Fitznorman in Sarawak. Certain paleoanthropologists thought perhaps small African hominins had extended their territory to Asia, arriving on Flores and Luzon, possibly taking refuge from their bigger cousins.

In any event Luzon had not been connected to mainland Asia for over two and a half million years, so *Homo luzonensis* could have only arrived by sea, preceding Magellan by 100,000 years, or much more as witnessed by the fossilised bones of a butchered rhinoceros and stone tools, found on Luzon, which dated back 700,000 years.

That, however, is another story.<sup>2</sup>



Sir Pat Kennedy had been officially received by the minister of development when he flew into Manila, he saw it as a

working break time to spend a moment with Lili and the children.

Surprisingly Pat had not visited the Philippines, though in Hong Kong he met Filipinos everywhere, they worked in his home, his bank, and even cared for his children.

The Philippines was an overwhelmingly Catholic country and he himself was a Catholic with a strict church-going Irish upbringing, though he had to admit putting his foot inside a church had become an increasingly rare event. He nevertheless felt a soft spot for Christians, and more especially Catholic, believers. His experience in South and Central America had prepared him for what he saw, to the point he even thought he was in another somewhat different Latin American country, especially the colonial cities like Vigan on the north-west coast of Luzon. It was however a disappointment to discover very, very, few spoke Spanish, in spite of Spain's 300 year presence in the country.

John accompanied Pat and his family on their flight back to Hong Kong on the bank's jet. There, in the comfort of the Peninsula Hotel, he forgot the rice paddies and the problems with the crapper in Banaue. The next morning he was joined in his suite by Pat to talk about his museum project just as the TV news from London reported on Theresa May's speech at the Mansion House, on the UK's Brexit negotiations.

Pat laughed at May when in the lead up to her speech she had proclaimed, 'Let's get on with it,' which seemed a little late considering nearly two years had passed since that fatal referendum vote to quit the EU.

They continued to talk about London's problems as they headed for the nearby quay where they boarded one of Pat's fast boats for Shenzhen.

Acclaimed by the Brexit Ultras, it was May's third landmark Brexit speech and expectations of progress were as icy as the pavement outside Downing Street. The Prime Minister announced five vague tests which led observers to declare all bets on a happy ending were off as it became clear Brexit would be much more complicated than voters had been led to

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believe.

The UK was finally beginning to realise that everything wasn't going to be so rosy when it left the EU, as May admitted 'binding commitments' would have to be made to maintain regulatory alignment with the EU in certain areas.

2 See The Last Ancestor

## CHAPTER 15

### MADRE DE DIOS

Anna reminded us of the historical aspects of the *San José* and how archaeology threw light on facts that had been distorted by stories and legends over the course of the centuries. Only after we had hauled the last gold real, the last piece of emerald studded jewellery, the last cannon, and the last pewter seaman's drinking mug from the seabed, would we have a better idea of the history of the Spanish Main in that first decade of the 18th century.

Even today, 500 years after the Conquest of the Incas by Francisco Pizarro, gold was still mined in Peru, in the region of Madre de Dios on the Amazon side of the Andes, where each year one billion dollars of illegal gold found its way to Brazil, Colombia and then to the US and Europe.

Each year miners, controlled by criminal gangs and rebel movements, ravaged many tens of thousands of hectares of rainforest, transforming it into a toxic landscapes tainted with mercury and cyanide.

It was a legacy of the past, but it didn't tell us much more about the men and women who lived under the conquistadores, that is left to our imagination, though it's not difficult to envisage the existence of those who mined and transported the gold and silver from those high cold windswept Bolivian mountains or hot disease infested forests, and the desperate conditions in which they lived their short lives.

We knew even less of the men and women who were transported from Africa to the slave market in Cartagena to work clearing swamps to make the city liveable for the newly arrived colonists.

The story of the conquistadors and their destruction of the pre-existing civilisations in the Americas, their seizure of the Spice Islands, or the sack of Malacca, was another dark page in the history of humanity, but that's the way we see it today, proud of our more recent accomplishments and victory in WWII, overlooking the price paid, pointing to the atrocities of Imperial Japan, the Holocaust, often ducking the questions of Hiroshima and Dresden and the Alliance with Stalin.

History was rewritten by the victors, to fit the respective narratives of nations, where heroes were made of Dambusters, whilst the thousands of dead women and children left in their wake were conveniently brushed aside. It was part of those many things wilfully forgotten, selectively buried, like the violence perpetrated in building and keeping empires and justifying war.

The next morning we returned to Don Pedro's. We felt better after a good night's sleep and an early breakfast in the hotel garden. We felt revived, relaxed by the refreshing colours and the perfumes of the tropics wafting through the fresh morning air.

Don Pedro welcomed us, offered coffee and we got down to business. Tom spoke briefly of the recently formed a Colombian company, which with their lawyers would manage the legalities, the exploration and recovery of the cargo. The company was owned by a syndicate of investors—us, grouped under an offshore investment fund based on the small Island of Nevis in the Caribbean, one of the least reformed tax havens in the region, situated 1,000 kilometres to the north-east of Cartagena.

Pat followed by recapping the story of the wreck, its discovery, his involvement and updating us on the background and plans.

'Tom has been engaged with the Colombian government in the negotiations and now we have all the necessary approvals to start the archaeological exploration.'

'So when do we start Pat?' asked Olivier de la Salle.

'Well, I have a confession to make Olly,' he said uneasily

looking around at us all. 'The story I told you all about the *San José* is....,' he searched for his words, 'untrue.'

No one spoke, the only sound was the soft background hum of the city outside. Pat observed us as we shot alarmed glances at each other.

'The legal complexities and disputes will involve a long process.' He held up a hand to stall our questions. 'While we pondered those questions something new turned up,' he hesitated a moment before continuing, 'A new archaeological discovery was made and the Colombian government has proposed us to focus our attention on that.'

We looked at each other puzzled.

Pat then nodded to Don Pedro who made a sign and a waiter appeared with a trolley, a bottle of Champagne and glasses, broke open the bottle and fill the glasses while we watched the scene with evergrowing curiosity.

The glasses were placed in front of us and Pat proposed a toast.

'To the *Espiritu Santo*!'

As we dumbly lifted our glasses, I wondered why he invoked the Holy Ghost.

'*Sláinte, Salud*,' Pat toasted.

'*Sláinte, Salud*,' we echoed puzzled, not at all sure as to what we were drinking to.

'You may remember I told you a team of international experts was set up in 2015, after the Colombian Navy and the Colombian institute of archaeology discovered the wreck of the *San José*.'

We nodded in unison.

'And, the legal wrangling between the Colombians and the US salvage company, which claimed to have located the area where the galleon sank.'

More nods.

'Well that's true.'

He paused.

'So is the story about the galleon.'

More puzzled glances.

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‘The *San José* is thought by historians to have been carrying one of the largest ever, not yet salvaged maritime treasures. Well, Anna will confirm it, but how can I say it, there is no definitive proof as the galleon’s cargo, or its value.’

Anna acquiesced.

A silenced followed.

‘Now, for that and other reasons we have focused our attention elsewhere, thanks to Anna.’

We hung on his every word, wondering what was coming next.

‘The truth of the matter is our presence here has nothing to do with the *San José*.’

There was a gasp of surprise and dismay from the room.

## CHAPTER 16

### UNDERSEA TREASURE

Joe picked him up at the hotel and they left for the recently opened Brunei Darussalam Maritime Museum, which lay a few kilometres outside of Bandar at Kampung Kota Batu, on the banks of the Brunei River. The museum was known for its unique collection of Islamic Art, a private collection of elaborately gilded Korans, glassware and carpets. However, what interested Scott was its extraordinary collection of ceramics, and especially those recovered from a wreck that had been discovered some years previously by a French oil exploration team working off the Bruneian coast.

Scott Fitznorman was only too familiar with the stories of sunken treasure ships, not those laden with gold and silver, but valuable Chinese porcelain and other antiquities. The discovery of the wreck, some 40 kilometres off the coast of Brunei, by the French oil company Total, had made headlines in the regional press.

Undersea cameras had spotted an unusual small mound on the sea bed 60 metres below the surface and closer inspection had shown it to be the wreck of a Chinese junk, the cargo of which, pottery and ceramics, had spilled out over the surrounding seabed. The oil company dutifully informed the Bruneian authorities who agreed to an investigation by a team of French undersea archaeologists, which led to the full scale excavation the wreck.

It had been the kind of discovery adventurers imagined in their dreams. Now, he, Scott Fitznorman, hoped to negotiate an agreement with the National Brunei Museum to excavate a similar such a wreck. However, to finance the project and set up the museum required by the authorities implied a

considerable investment, and that was where Scott's friend Pat Kennedy came in.

During Scott's frequent visits to Hong Kong he had developed a very friendly relationship with Pat Kennedy, a keen collector, who when told of the opportunity had shown a keen interest in the project and asked Scott to keep him up to date on his discussions in Brunei.

The history of wrecks in the region was long. Over the centuries merchant ships had plied their wares through a vast trading network that covered the entire rim of the South China Sea. Traders bartered porcelain from China, jars from Vietnam and stoneware from Thailand, in exchange for the exotic products of those southern lands, including the regional Empire of Brunei, which had reached its apogee during the reign of Sultan Bolkiah, between 1485 and 1524—at the end of which the Armada de Molucca led by Juan Sebastian Elcano, spent 35 days in Brunei.

Magellan's chronicler, Antonio Pigafetta, described Brunei as rich—a civilisation comparable to that of his own. Brunei had been a destination of huge ocean-going junks, the cargoes of which were bartered for gold, silver, exotic oils, spices, tropical wood and camphor. Many of the same pots and jars returned to China as containers filled with the precious goods the merchants bought or bartered on those foreign shores.

The museum was modern but disappointing, rather dim with a seeming lack of enthusiasm, conviction, or simply neglect, though the reconstruction of the 1997 wreck discovered by the French was interesting as was its cargo of ceramics.

Scott's suggestion he speak with the museum's specialist was dismissed by Joe as first they should hear what the minister had to say.

After numerous telephone calls, Joe invited Scott to lunch in a rather plain Chinese restaurant on the way back to the city centre. It was crowded and very noisy, though Fitznorman grudgingly conceded the fish Joe insisted on ordering was delicious.

Once again the discussion seemed aimless. Scott held his

impatience in check reconciling himself with what was evidently the way of doing business in Brunei. After lunch as they headed back to Darussalam, Joe suggested stopping off at the Radisson, where he pointed to the bar, saying, it would be quiet with few people around in the early afternoon. After settling into a corner Joe ordered two espresso coffees, it really was quiet and Scott's thoughts wandered back to the previous evening and Harrison's girl with a certain feeling a certain emptiness.

'Cheer up Scott!' Joe said interrupting his thoughts. Then laying his hand on his shoulder as if to console him, he announced with a broad encouraging smile, 'I've decided to accept your proposal Scott and represent you in Brunei.'

Fitznorman came down to earth and sat up quickly, he was more than a little surprised, as he had not remembered going as far as making a proposal to Joe, but he held his tongue and listened.

'I have spoken to the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Culture, he's a good friend, married to a cousin. He's fixed up a meeting for us with the Minister later this afternoon. I can now tell you he has given me favourable opinion concerning the public auction for part of the ceramic collection held in the museum's reserve.'

Scott noted the reference to a public auction, which Joe had not mentioned earlier. It meant that he would have to put in an option with a pre-bid, it did not displease him. Then slowly sipping the coffee, a welcome relief from the chilled air in the bar, he felt the gloom lift for the first time since he arrived in Brunei .

'Do you play polo?' said Joe.

'Polo!'

'Never mind, but it's a popular sport in this country!' he paused and then added, 'in certain circles!'

Perhaps the minister was a polo playing prince, thought Scott.

'As I mentioned to you the other day, there are plenty of other wrecks out there Scott,' he said slyly. 'Dozens of other ships, full of antique treasures, lying at the bottom of the sea

waiting to be discovered—even fishermen find them, but their exact whereabouts are well guarded secrets.’

‘Oh,’ said Scott feigning surprise, he of course knew that such ships existed, or had been found and plundered.

‘The ministry people know about these and are willing to give me, that is you and I, an exploration permit...’

‘An exploration permit! So what’s the catch?’

‘There is no catch, I mean there is a price for the permit, and certain conditions, such as preserving and studying the wreck, evidence that our ancient civilization has flourished here for centuries, trading with our neighbours in China.’

‘I don’t understand, Brunei is rich? Why do you want to give this over to a commercial operation?’

‘Brunei is rich, but our oil and gas resources won’t last for ever, besides the state doesn’t have sufficient money to finance every archaeological operation, or build lots of museums. So the ministry is ready to privatise archaeology, if you like, and share the results.’

‘I see.’

‘But we’re not about to go bankrupt,’ he said laughing. ‘We’re still very, very, rich with vast natural gas reserves for our small population, so the Minister has informed me that the Museum, under the patronage of the royal family, would graciously participate in part of the expedition’s costs.’

‘That’s good to hear. So ... the ...,’ he searched for the right word, ‘... fee ... for the permit?’

‘In fact Scott, let me be frank, I mean my services, they have a cost, the permit is a just formality, but there are also of one or two of my friends who have to be looked after and who are necessary for cutting through the red tape.’

Fitznorman understood and they shook hands on a commission for Joe to be calculated on the receipts of the objects sold after the completion of the excavation and salvage work.

Early that evening back at the hotel Scott felt tired but content, Joe’s connections were indeed good. The meeting with the minister had been beyond all his expectations, two

people from the Maritime Museum had been introduced after the minister had agreed to the principal of signing a Memorandum of Understand, that is an outline agreement with a view to reaching a detailed deal later.

This would enable him to investigate the exploration and excavation of the site at Tanjong Lumut down the coast from Bandar. The men from the museum were archaeologists and had handed Scott the copy of a report concerning the site, which also traced the history of production of pottery and porcelain in China and its distribution throughout Southeast Asia.

The minister had described the policy of his government, which foresaw the disposal of surplus items of recovered treasure on the private art market as a means of saving it for posterity, at the same time spreading the knowledge and reputation of Brunei as a historical centre to the outside world. The treasure from the wreck excavated by the French was an example, though it was only possible to display a fraction of the treasure in the small and not much visited Maritime Museum in Kota Batu.

That evening he thought of telephoning to HG in Kota Kinabulu, then to Aris in Jakarta to announce the news, but on second thoughts he decided maybe that it would be unwise, the idea of being eavesdropped made him uneasy.

He picked up the report, settled himself on his bed and started to read.

The wreck was exceptionally large, it was calculated to be over 50 meters long and 14 meters wide with an estimated cargo space of not far off two 2,000 cubic meters. The goods had no doubt been carefully distributed over the junks length and breadth to ensure the stability of the vessel. However, the report postulated the heavily laden junk had either foundered in a storm, or had sunk due to some other disastrous event, such as an attack by pirates and had lain undisturbed on the seabed for more than 400 years just a few hundred metres off the coast.

First inspection indicated that most of the cargo had been

destined for every day use by the local population and was not of the kind valued by kings and princes that had survived across the ages safely stored in palaces. It was porcelain and stoneware that told something of the daily lives and necessities of the people of Borneo in the late 15th century, lives that had left little other trace.

The few items that had been recovered appeared to be the products of the kilns in south-east China, along the southern bank of the Yangtze River. They had been mass produced by skilled potters and artists, but bore an extraordinary wealth of decorative designs made by each individual craftsman.



Scott was very familiar with the history of China and recalled how in the 14th century, Chinese goods including silks and porcelain had been in great demand in places as far away as East Africa, the Middle East and of course Europe, attracting many foreign merchants to Chinese ports. As exports from

the Middle Kingdom expanded at the end of the 14th century, China's southern ports became major trading centres.

Blue and White porcelain from the Ming dynasty had been exported when China was at the summit of its maritime power, with the largest fleet on earth at that time, composed according to some of more than 300 seagoing ships.

To spread the power and influence of the Middle Kingdom, the Emperor appointed Admiral Zheng He, a Muslim eunuch, commander of the fleet, and ordered him to undertake a series of expeditions to seek new partners and open new trading routes.

Zheng was said to have embarked on the first of seven voyages in 1405. His fleet, somewhat exaggeratedly believed to have consisted of sixty huge ocean-going sailing junks with reportedly 27,000 men—a lot of merchants, carried rich cargoes of silks, porcelain and other manufactured goods.

The flag ship was more than 100 metres long, and 30 wide with 9 masts, in comparison the *Santa Maria* of Christopher Columbus was a mere 25 metres long. These junks with their valuable cargoes were escorted by war ships and support vessels loaded with food and animals.

In 1433, exploration suddenly ceased as Mongol hordes from the north threatened China and the cost of the expeditions became too great a charge causing the Emperor to turn his attention towards more pressing affairs at home.

In this way, officially sponsored naval expeditions to foreign lands came to an end, and a policy of isolationism decreed an end to trade with multi-masted ships, which were forbidden to leave China.

This did not mean international trade came to a halt, in effect it fell into the hands of private merchants and traders, those who ran the risk of going against the imperial edict. In this way trade continued to expand and ships as large as one 1,000 tons navigated in Asian waters, dwarfing European ships that had just started to venture into the region.

At the end of the 15th century all trade was officially carried out by foreigners trading in Chinese ports, where merchants

dealt directly with bureaucratic Chinese officials.

The first of the large jars recovered from the Tanjong Lumut wreck by the Museums specialists were made of stoneware, a kind of hard, non-porous, pottery fired in a hot kiln. The great strength of stoneware made this type of jar ideal for storing and transporting solids and liquids a highly valued storage vessel, since no comparable containers of the same quality existed at that time.

The manufacture of porcelain in its diverse forms had been developed over the centuries in China with the use of minerals generally known as kaolinite, a white clay containing feldspar, found in the south of the country, and the few items of porcelain that had been so far recovered from the wreck were identified as coming from Jiangxi province, one of China's major porcelain-making centres.

The decoration of the porcelain was made with cobalt to create the intense blues, imported from Persia, which was the only type of pigment available at that time that did not burn off in the high temperature kilns. This was covered by a transparent overglaze which gave porcelain its smooth feel and bright appearance, highly valued qualities, appreciated in Southeast Asia as healthier, cleaner and more pleasant to eat off than the traditional unglazed earthen ware vessels that had been used in the regions for countless generations.

Most prized by the Sultans of Brunei was the extraordinarily beautiful porcelain of the kind made for the Imperial court in China. At the same time plainer everyday storage vessels and kitchen ware was valued by the ordinary people who lived on the fringe of the South China Sea, who not only ate from fine stoneware plates and bowls, or used jars to store liquid and grain. Scott also learnt associated these objects with religion, as they produced a ring when struck and were linked to their magic and religious beliefs.

Scott had long sought quality *Martabans* and other large stoneware jars for his gallery. These had arrived in Borneo in great quantities over the centuries and had become much more than simple containers. They were considered by the

local populations to have mystical properties. Most *Martabans* were bought for everyday usage, but others were employed for religious purposes. Certain had great value and had been exchanged in Borneo for as many as 25 buffalo, handed down from generation to generation as revered heirlooms. Some tribes, including the Iban, even used them for keeping their dead.

Scott looked at his watch, it was time to called his friend and associate Robert Guiglion, then Pat Kennedy in Hong Kong to inform them of the news.

## CHAPTER 17

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our plans to salvage the *San José* were complicated by the US firm, Sea Search Armada, which claimed it had discovered site of the *San José*, in an operation that had been approved by the Colombian government, which, true or not, apparently went back on its agreement.’

Pat described the situation as a can of worms and recalled Juan Manuel Santos words spoken at a press conference,

‘No sir, this is the patrimony of Colombians—The discovery of this ship, one of the most important that navigated in our seas during colonial times, begins a new chapter in the cultural and scientific history, not only of Colombia, but of the entire world.’

More than three centuries after Wager and his flotilla attacked the treasure fleet, another battle was taking place, the battle for the spoils, between Colombia, Spain and the bounty hunters who claimed to have discovered the wreck.

The facts were the Colombian navy had found the wreck of the *San José* within its own territorial waters, justifying Bogota’s rejection of Spain’s claim to ownership.

It was a battle that would serve as jurisprudence as to the rights over the hundreds of wrecks dating from the days of Spain’s empire in the New World.

‘Which brings me to Anna and her discovery.’

In spite of the repercussions of the disaster that overtook the *San José* and her sister ships, Anna Basurko found it strange that after having ploughed through countless dusty documents amongst the millions stored in Seville, there was no mention of the *Espíritu Santo*.

This could have been explained by changes introduced by the Bourbons when Philip's administration introduced French methods to the existing Spanish bureaucracy, aggravated when anti-Bourbon allies briefly occupy Madrid in 1706, and again in 1710, which certainly complicated record keeping as certain officials resorted to keeping official documents in their personal possession for safekeeping.

In her research Anna examined documents well known to historians, but more interestingly several documents that had been overlooked by past scholars, especially those concerning the other ships that sailed with the treasure fleet on that fateful day in 1708.

Little-by-little Anna found herself increasingly absorbed by a question, which was not the role of *San José* or the *San Joaquín*, both treasure ships, but that of the mysterious *Espiritu Santo*.



Casa Alegre had overseen the loading of the royal taxes and private remittances aboard the *San José* and the *San Joaquín*, the two largest and most heavily armed ships in the fleet. Most of the officially registered treasure, was divided evenly

between the two ships, as stipulated by Spanish law. The third ship the *Santa Cruz* carried a smaller amount.

As for the *Espiritu Santo* the records were silent as it was probably not considered as being part of the fleet.

In addition to the registered treasure for the crown and private individuals, a large amount of undeclared treasure was almost certainly loaded as contraband, confirmed by Spanish sailors captured by the English, who spoke of chests being loaded onto the *Santa Cruz* under the cover of darkness, which was certainly the case for the *Espiritu Santo*.

If it was anything like today, the rich didn't like paying taxes, and it was believed that an unquantifiable amount of gold and silver coins, unworked metal, jewellery, pearls, and valuable objects were carried on the *Espiritu Santo*.

Anna revealed that 10% and more of the treasure that left the colonies was never declared and during late 17th and early 18th centuries smuggling had become rampant because of heavy taxation—the result of the ruinous war.

Transporters, merchants and passengers lived in constant fear at the thought of having to declare all their unminted silver and gold, which would be heavily taxed or confiscated, whether or not the royal fifth had already been deducted, as the crown's treasury agents waited their arrival in Cadiz ready to pounce on undeclared valuables, in sure the knowledge that a large part of the individual wealth carried on the fleet on its return to Spain in 1708 was contraband.

It was a fact that those returning from the colonies smuggled gold and silver, merchants, captains and ordinary sailors, even Juan Perez Espinosa—the Roman Catholic Bishop of Santiago de Chile, who died in 1622, soon after returning from the colonies, leaving 414,700 silver reales as well as 62 gold bars and many gold objects, all of had been imported undeclared.

It seemed as though nothing has changed since those distant days as the same kind of treasury officials still pursued us to cover the mistakes of incompetent government.

That aside, it was important to know if records corresponded with the story, which led Anna to a more detailed search,

necessary to determine the true value of the treasure carried by the fleet and justify the cost of salvaging the wreck.

‘The documents I discovered have completely transformed the story of the treasure fleet,’ announced Anna, followed by a brief and dramatic pause, ‘leading me to the conclusion that the *San José* and the *San Joaquín* were not the only treasure ships in Casa Alegre’s fleet.’

There was an exchange of hopeful glances.

She paused again, as if savouring the moment, looked at us, then drew a breath, ‘Those documents were found in the National Archives in Seville, and confirmed that there was in fact a fourth ship bearing treasure—an armed *urca*, the *Espíritu Santo*, a flat-bottomed, round-bellied vessel, the kind adopted for use in the Spanish treasure fleets for their strength and cargo carrying capacity.’

Now we were attentive, as it dawned on us the *Espíritu Santo* was the name of a ship, and explained Pat’s toast.

José Fernandez, the captain-general of the treasure fleet, had kept this information secret for reasons that still remain unclear. What I was able to determine, is the *Espíritu Santo* was anchored off the coast of Cartagena, at some distance from the rest of the fleet, ready to join it once it set sail for Havana. Was she a lure, or was she carrying the bulk of the treasure? I had no way of knowing.

‘Like others I assumed the *Espíritu Santo* had been damaged, and in the heat of the battle, which raged late into the night, had had probably fled eastward towards Barranquilla. Over the course of the following days, fearing the English, she would have continued along the coast, past Santa Marta, then around the Peninsula de la Guajira.

‘What puzzled me was how the legendary treasure of *San José* had captured the imagination of historians and treasure hunters, but the story of the *Espíritu Santo* had somehow been overlooked, occulted. Why?’

She told us how several witnesses had mentioned the presence of another galleon, which had disappeared into the night in the aftermath of the battle, forgotten, never to be

heard of again, and even stranger, how the records mentioned the names of the all the ships, warships and merchant ships, that had sailed from Portobelo to Cartagena, with the exception of the *Espíritu Santo*, its story for some unknown reason had been buried deep in the kilometres of ancient dusty archives in Seville.

‘We have to remember that in those days documents, logs, manifests and inventories were vague,’ Anna continued, ‘especially those concerning private treasure—that is belonging to individuals, gold, silver and other valuables. The most likely explanation was these were often transported in contraband, which was estimated to be as great as regular trade. It was no doubt to avoid the obligatory royal fifth, levied by the crown, or perhaps for seditious reasons, by noblemen and enemies plotting against the crown, building up war chest to finance their personal ambitions in Spain.’

It seemed that finding the wreck of the *Espíritu Santo* would be an impossible task, finding a needle in a haystack. Worse, according to Anna, almost nothing was known of the existence ship, apart from the fact it was built near Bilbao in Spain.

However, in pursuing her research, ploughing through the vast archives in Seville, Valladolid and Madrid, Anna stumbled on a previously unknown report together with ship’s documents and a *derrotero*, that is a nautical chart, which was dated 1708, and belonged to the *Espíritu Santo*.

The 300 years old report, forgotten amongst millions of ancient manuscripts, recorded how the ship’s log and the *derrotero* had been recovered from Indians in the Alta Guajira in the north-east of Colombia.

The archives confirmed the *Espíritu Santo* had indeed headed east to escape the English and although the manifest did not mention the presence of royal treasure on-board, it did record a considerable amount of declared, and no doubt undeclared, private treasure, in the form of gold, silver and precious stones, as well as general cargo, including, Chinese porcelain and silks, chocolate, indigo, vanilla, tobacco, incense

and exotic wood.

The log told how with a good wind they had made between 5 and 7 knots and had arrived off the point of the Guajira Peninsula. With the hurricane season imminent, their route east along the coast of New Spain, should have theoretically been south of the hurricane belt, but according to the captain's account they were was caught in a violent storm that drove them into the Gulf of Venezuela for shelter. There, given the lack of precision in logs and charts and the vagaries of navigation in the early 18th century, the *Espíritu Santo* lost its way in the night and ran aground on a reef where its rotten hull gave way and spilled part of its ballast.

It was near a spot now known as Puerto Lopez, an unexplored desert on the coast of the Alta Guajira, the home of the Wayuu Indians.

The captain and part of his crew made it to a point on the coast at Puerto Lopez, where the next day according to the documents Anna found, they were attacked by the Wayuu, several men were killed, the captain was captured and kept prisoner.

In the meantime the *Espíritu Santo*, holed and taking on water, was abandoned by its remaining crew, soon after rolling over and sinking, forgotten by all, including its owners who had probably perished on board the *San José*, or disappeared after the sinking of the *Espíritu Santo*. What happened to the rest of crew was not known, but it could be assumed they were marooned and died from exposure, thirst, and hunger.

Whilst prisoner of the Indians, the captain wrote a detailed account of the disaster and this together with the ship's documents, the map and its notations, was found some years later by a group of Spanish monks sent to Christianise the Indians and brought to Cartagena, from where they were dispatched to Spain, then forgotten, lost, deep in the Royal Archives, until their rediscovery by Anna.

The Caribbean Region lay to the north-east of Colombia, Anna explained pointing to a map produced by Tom Barton, with its northernmost extremity facing the Gulf of Venezuela.

‘There, directly adjacent to Puerto Lopez, lies a thin sliver of Venezuelan territory,’ said Anna frowning, ‘the source of a long-standing territorial dispute between Colombia and Venezuela.’

She had reason to look concerned, as in 1987, the dispute nearly led to war when Colombia positioned two corvettes in the disputed waters and Venezuela sent troops and F-16 warplanes to the area. This resurfaced when Maduro raised the question again with a decree concerning maritime defence zones.

It was a desolate region. Inland lay the northern extremity of the Sierra Nevada Santa Marta, known for The Lost City, or Teyuna, as the Tayronas called it, built around 800AD, situated at 1,100 metres above sea level, along the Buritaca River, abandoned following the Spanish conquest.

Anna went on to describe the *Espíritu Santo*, based on the details discovered at the National Historical Archive and the Naval Museum in Madrid, found after wading through a mountain of documents. The 950 tons urca, was 41 metres in length with a beam of 12.5 metres, delivered from the same shipyard that had built the *San José*.

It was designed by Antonio de Gaztañeta and built in Aginaga—a riverside town in the Basque Province of Guipuzcoa, by the Echeveste brothers in 1696, shipbuilders to the Spanish Navy.

The wood came from the surrounding hills whilst the riggings were made in nearby Pasajes and the masts imported from Northern Europe.

Step-by-step, Anna slowly pieced together the story of the *Espíritu Santo*, which had been belatedly dispatched from Havana, where she had been based, to help in shipping the huge amount of gold and silver, accumulated in Peruvian taxes during the Spanish War of Succession.

The *Espíritu Santo* had been ordered to join the treasure fleet, which lay at anchor in Portobelo, fearing the English flotilla that had been reported lurking over the horizon waiting for its depart.

Why the presence of the *Espiritu Santo* had gone unrecorded could have been put down to a secret arrangement made by the Viceroy of Peru, in his own interests, or perhaps those of the crown in Madrid linked to the debts it owed to the foreign bankers, notably the Fuggers, also known as Fuckers—hence the exclamation, who had financed the long war between the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs for the throne, with the French and the Spanish fighting the English, Dutch and Austrians.

Anna like other underwater archaeologists had tracked down several wrecks, which were interesting from a historical point of view, but not of any particular financial significance, as even in the old times the Spanish had developed effective salvage techniques that had enabled them to recover at least part of their precious cargoes lost at sea.

Her experience had proved invaluable in the search and identification of the *Espiritu Santo*, which she explained, consisted of obtaining graphic data of the seabed in areas identified from the map drawn by the urca's captain, at first glance vague, but thanks to detailed modern charts, the reefs and key landmarks were quickly identified by the naval research vessel designated by the Colombian president's office with the assistance of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History, responsible for overseeing all archaeological sites in Colombia, to assist in the identification and exploration of the site.

Many of the wrecks that lay on the floor of the gulf had been located by historians, professional and amateur explorers, and visible to divers, but most were inaccessible without costly, specialized equipment and surface support teams.

The search for the *Espiritu Santo* was facilitated by modern technology, but it was above all the old map which proved proved to be most useful and surprisingly exact, accurately positioning the reefs off Puerto Lopez.

Basically, Anna explained, the zone was explored and mapped by breaking it down into blocks, which were surveyed with multi-beam sonar scans and 3D imagery, the former seeking out anomalies consistent with a wreck on the seabed,

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and the latter creating the images. Points of interest were investigated by ROVs followed by divers, whose task was made easy by the relatively shallow waters.

After 10 days, what Anna described as an anthropogenic anomaly was detected at a depth of 20 to 25 metres, measuring roughly 40 metres in length and 16 metres in width, which corresponded to the form of a collapsed galleon. The naval divers then spotted an anchor, followed by cannonballs and broken Chinese porcelain scattered over the sea bed, and even more interesting a number silver bars and gold coins.



The gold coins were recovered by the divers and quickly identified by Anna as dating from the period prior to the naval Battle of Baru. One of the canons was then recovered and its markings confirmed it was one those cast for the *Espiritu Santo*, thus unequivocally settling the identity of the wreck.

The urca lay on the seabed, surrounded by ballast, mostly rocks, used to stabilise the ship beneath the cargo holds, where it appeared to have settled after rolling over and sinking just off the rocky reef not long after it had run aground.

Anna's theory was proved right, and now the real work

would start. The gold and silver at first view seemed to justify further exploration, but there was no guarantee as to the quantity or value of treasure aboard the stricken urca, or how much of it still remained on the seabed.

It was at that point Pat Kennedy stepped in with Soceaex and engaged a firm of underwater archaeological consultants Itsas Arkeologia, recommended by Anna, specialised in the Spanish colonial period.

Itsas Arkeologia, based in Bilbao, Spain, not only employed state-of-the-art of underwater technologies in its projects, such as multi-beam echo sounders, sea bottom profilers, magnetometers, side scanning sonar and subaqueous GPS, it also had considerable knowledge of shipbuilding over the centuries, when Bilbao was one of Spain's most important shipyards, building galleons and other ships for the Spanish Crown and the *Carrera de las Indias*.

Anna had worked with Itsas Arkeologia on various programmes including the mapping of historical Spanish wrecks in the Caribbean on a joint project with the Colombian government and had located numerous wrecks along the coast between the Panama Isthmus and the Gulf of Venezuela.

On the conclusion of an agreement with the Ministry of Culture, Soceaex (Colombia) SA, was accorded the rights to carry out the salvage of the *Espiritu Santo* with the help of approved foreign partners under the supervision of state cultural institutes.

The arrangement was based on a joint venture stipulating that Soceaex and its partners would not only undertake the archaeological excavation, but also build a laboratory to restore and preserve its treasures, further it would finance and build a museum in Cartagena dedicated to the *Espiritu Santo*, its history and fate, in exchange for which the company would retain 50% of the treasure and recover the full cost of the undertaking, estimated at several million dollars, not counting the cost of the research vessel and special equipment.

An exploration and salvage programme was prepared which included the scientific documentation of the urca's surviving

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hull structure and the description of its cargo—with the participation the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History.

Under the terms of the agreement Soccaex (Colombia) SA, would bear all costs and risks connected to the exploration and salvage programme, as well as the necessary security arrangements.

## CHAPTER 18

### PANAMA CITY

Barely recovered from what now seemed like an endless series of surprises, we left for a tour of Cartagena's old city, the Casco Antiguo, which some of us were already familiar with from previous trips to Colombia. We started at the Museo Historico, essential if we were to understand the history of New Spain and where the adventure that Pat had embarked us on had commenced.

Anna acted as our guide and seemed to take a mischievous pleasure when she stopped to point out an oil painting that depicted the Battle of Cartagena de Indias that took place in 1741, and ended in one of the most resounding defeats in all of British naval history.

It made no impression on her when I limply reminded her we were Irish, a bit like the Basques in Spain and their differences with Madrid.

After the museum we were joined by Don Pedro for lunch in a restaurant situated in the courtyard of a magnificent residence once owned by a Cartagenian grandee, one of the founders of the city.

'Señor Pat,' said Don Pedro, 'perhaps I should tell you the story of my ancestors and Cartagena.'

Pat nodded politely, he'd already heard the story, but didn't want to spoil it for the rest of us.

'Well,' commenced Lola's father with a smile, 'our city was founded in 1533, by Pedro de Heredia, he first arrived on the shores of what was to be New Granada in 1525, when he disembarked in Santa Marta with his men.'

Tom Barton nodded respectfully, he too had heard his father-in-law's story many times.

'Returning to Madrid,' continued the old man, 'he obtained royal approval from the Queen, Joanna the Mad,' he said with

an amused smile, 'to take control of the Bay of Cartagena and New Andalucia, a vast territory that stretched from the mouth of the Magdalena River to Darian in what is now Panama.'

Don Pedro recounted how Heridia then sailed from Cadiz for New Granada with three ships, an armed galleon, a caravel and a patache.

'That's a smaller two masted flat bottomed ship,' explained Anna referring to the *patache*.

'His expedition, in addition to the ship's crews, carried 150 men soldiers 22 horses,' Don Pedro said with laugh. 'Can you imagine it, such a small force to conquer a new world. In any case, he returned to Santa Marta Bay and from there he continued east and reached the inner shore of Cartagena Bay on January 14, 1533.'

Indeed it seemed ridiculously inadequate compared to Admiral Zheng's legendary Chinese fleet.

'There, after a battle with the natives, he founded Cartagena de Indias, which he built with the gold found in the tombs of the Sinus Amerindians, who buried their dead with all their riches.'

He continued by telling them how Cartagena soon became a transit point for the transfer of New World's immense riches to Spain, and the fortunes that were made as the city attracted empire builders, fortune hunters and adventurers, the most successful of whom built mansions and trading houses, whose entrepots bulged with goods. Then, and in order to protect their wealth, and their city—the largest and richest port in the Americas, from the covetous French, English and Dutch, they transformed it into a formidable walled fortress, the vestiges of which were still largely visible.

'Then if you remember the painting in the museum yesterday,' continued Don Pedro with a thin smile, 'the Queen of England ordered Edward Vernon to capture our city in 1741, which resulted in the Battle of Cartagena and ended in a terrible defeat for the English, prompting us to build even greater fortifications, as a result of which we Colombians and our country remained a colony of Spain, until our first war of

independence, which we finally won in 1821.’

That evening over dinner, Pat announced yet another surprise, a day trip to Panama City, no questions asked, informing us we were to be ready early the next morning with overnight bags and passports.

I have to say we were no longer surprised by Pat’s projects and took it in our stride. We were on a mystery tour and Pat was our guide.

We were up at seven and after a quick breakfast were herded like a bunch of tourists into a people carrier outside the Santa Clara. Pat’s PA was there, he was never far behind, busy keeping an eye on the arrangements, as was George Pyke’s man, our euphemism for the ever present bodyguard who watched over Pat night and day.

The PA, a former sergeant major in the Irish Army, not the IRA by the way, Mike Mulcahy, who, after peace keeping missions in ex-Yugoslavia and the Lebanon, had been hired, thanks to George Pyke, for his multiple talents, that ranged from close protection to driver, interpreter to batman, and secretary to bag carrier.

Mike Mulcahy, came from a military background, his great grandfather had fought in the Easter Rising with the Republican Army, and his grandfather in the Emergency—that is during WWII, and his father in UN Peace Keeping missions from the Lebanon onwards.

After early retirement and with a penchant for travel, Mike heeded George Pyke’s call to join his security firm. He was then detached to INI as driver cum bodyguard for Pat, whose needs as he rose to power in the banking group grew, especially after becoming CEO following Michael Fitzwilliams’ death. A terrible drama, an unproven assassination, carried out by what we suspected was a Bratva operation, piloted by the FSB, with or without the Kremlin’s bidding.

Mulcahy worked in tandem with ‘George Pyke’s man’, especially when Pat was in exotic locations like Central America or Colombia, where kidnapping was a going business.

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Pat was in permanent liaison with two other PAs—the executive kind, one in London, the other in Hong Kong, as well as a staff team that often struggled to keep up with their hyperactive CEO.

His Falcon intercontinental jet was managed by a separate company and in the same way he set up the running of his yachts. Different compartments, divide and rule, that was his unuttered axiom.



Before we knew it, we were above the clouds in the Falcon on our way to Tocumen International Airport, Panama, where less than an hour later we were picked up for an unknown destination. The road signs indicated we were heading in the direction of Panama City and then pointed to Flamenco Marina, over a causeway that gave us a magnificent view of city's skyline.

Once arrived in the marina, Pat pointed to a waiting launch which we boarded, our curiosity and speculation stretched to point of bursting.

‘A cruise,’ announced Pat.

We didn't have to wait long, once outside of the marina walls Pat pointed to a sleek looking ship, which from its business-like appearance was not a rich man's toy.

'The *Sundaland II*,' he announced.

The launch drew alongside the ship then one by one we climbed up the gangway ladder to the deck, where a smiling welcome committee was waiting to greet us.

Pat made the introductions, Robert Guiglion and his team.

Pat raised his hands.

'Welcome to our new exploration and recovery vessel, the *Sundaland II*, just arrived from Singapore, across the Pacific, in the skilled hands of Robert and his crew, via Manila and Honolulu.

'We are, all of us partners in this venture, sponsored by our investment fund, and of course INI Hong Kong.

'She is owned by Soceaex, headed by Robert and Scott, a joint-venture, in which we, that is all of us here, are now shareholders, for the business of undersea exploration and archaeology. She replaces Soceaex's older vessel, which had become too small for our projects—here and in Asia. Robert will introduce you to the ship as we set sail through the canal for Colon on the Caribbean.'

We were surprised and at the same time pleased. Pat's venture had all the makings of a real expedition. What was more surprising, for myself at least, was how Anna had kept all this secret, as she had evidently played a key role in the organisation of Pat's adventure. I was discovering more and more of her talents and professionalism with each passing day, which I must admit was a little disconcerting.

With no more to do, the *Sundaland II* proceeded to weigh anchor and was soon moving away from its harbourage as we proceeded to inspect our new surroundings and admire the bay shimmering under the clear blue tropical skies. We were soon turning around the head of the island and in the direction of the suspension bridge towards the Canal and the Miraflores Locks.

Pat told us to relax and enjoy the journey to Colon, which would take four or five hours depending on the shipping traffic along the Canal.

Once we were shown to our quarters and settled in, lunch

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was announced over the tannoy. Robert welcomed us to the wardroom, informing us the crew, scientists and visitors normally ate in the mess, with the wardroom being reserved for meetings, conferences, or whenever special briefings were called for.

As we ate, he described some of the technical features of the boat. The *Sundaland II* could accommodate up to 30 personnel, including as many as 18 scientific and diving specialists. It could remain at sea continually for up to 40 days and was capable of more than 25 knots. 'For landlubbers that's nearly 50 kilometres an hour, that's fast, fast enough to outrun most pirates,' adding with a dry smile, 'even Venezuelan Navy and their coastguard vessels.'

'What about operating costs?'

'That depends on the on the number of crew and other specialists, but approximately, with crewing, divers, basic equipment requirements, victuals and fuel it works out at about 20,000 dollars per day.'

'So three months that will be a minimum of about two million.'

'Right, a minimum, it depends on the number of hands necessary, plus the ferrying of whatever we salvage.'

'She's a modified patrol boat,' Robert continued, 'built in Singapore, for the Singaporean Navy, like our first boat, but bigger. They were both built under licence from a Dutch shipbuilder, Damen Shipyards Group, which incidentally has a ship repair and service facility in Curaçao.'

There were nods of approval.

'She's 65 metres long and weighs 1,900 tons.'

'How old is it?'

'Eight years, she was built for the navy, as I said a patrol boat modified for undersea research work, so she's perfect for our business. The Singaporeans bought a new one, more up to date for their specialised navy business.'

Olly raised his hand. 'What does Sundaland mean?'

Robert turned to Scott.

'Well if you're familiar with Southeast Asia, Sundaland was

the emerged region during the last Ice Age, now Borneo, Malaysia and Indonesia. I'll tell you more about that later, but very briefly it's where Robert and I have been working to salvage the cargoes from the wrecks of Chinese junks, valuable porcelain and other artefacts.'

Olly made a sign of understanding, his family had a long history in Colonial Indochina.

Robert then pursued his presentation.

'Some of you may be familiar with the RV Neil Armstrong, a research vessel operated by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, which is incidentally owned by the US Navy. Well, our ship is slightly smaller, with not so much high-tech stuff, but better adapted for working in shallower waters such as continental shelf waters in Southeast Asia, or in the Gulf of Venezuela.

'Southeast Asian waters are infested with pirates and in my experience speed has never been something to be overlooked, not forgetting the form of the *Sundaland*, which is very similar to that of Singaporean and Malaysian naval patrol boats, is an excellent deterrent against pirates and the like.

'This afternoon we'll arrive in Caribbean, then after Panamanian formalities we'll bring heading directly for Cartagena, where we should arrive early tomorrow morning.'

The afternoon was spent between exploring the boat and admiring the passing scenery and traffic, from huge container ships to leisure boats, as we made our way along the Canal to Gamboa, then across Gatun Lake to the Gatun Locks and finally Colon and Portobelo on the Caribbean.

Amongst the many questions we asked Pat was that of the cost of the expedition. 'We've budgeted a maximum of 3 million dollars, not including the cost of the boat and equipment,' he nonchalantly replied. 'The boat cost us another 3 million, a bargain, which will be recouped 100 fold when the treasure of the *Espiritu Santo* is recovered.'

It seemed reasonable to me even if the nature and value of the cargo was based on pure speculation. I made a mental note to ask Anna about this.

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The *Sundaland II* replaced an older and smaller vessel, also called the *Sundaland*, owned by Soceaex, and was financed by a loan from Pat's bank, it was bigger, faster, better equipped, and above all ocean going, which meant could be stationed anywhere in the world, even off the Miskito coast I surmised, in short it was a part of a long-term archaeological project close to Pat's heart.

Pat calculated that in the very worst case the vessel would transferred back to Asian waters, where it had come from, though the idea of failure never entered his head, he was born an optimist and he would die an optimist.

As for the rest of us, a couple or so million dollars more or less was not a big deal, considering the gains we hoped to make, the *Espiritu Santo* had been identified, was there, and even if the treasure was not entirely as hoped for, there were other advantageous aspects. In my case there was the book, in Liam Clancy's was his media production company, which had been set up produce a TV documentary on the story of the Sommières Collection, and would now turn its attention to our expedition.

As far as Don Pedro and Tom Barton were concerned, they would get the goodwill of the Colombian government, which wouldn't do their business interests any harm.

The accommodation on-board the *Sundaland II* was, as could be expected on a research vessel, a little Spartan, but we all slept soundly as it cut through the calm waters of the Western Caribbean on its route to Cartagena, where we arrived at daybreak the next morning.

The *Sundaland II* was registered in Panama, through Pat's lawyers, following the international practice of many ship and yacht owners to avoid taxes and certain legal requirements in their home countries.

A similar arrangement allowed the private jets and boats owned by the Clan to be registered on the Isle of Man, which lay in the Irish Sea, between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The 572 square kilometre island was a self-governing British Crown Dependency, not part of the UK, nor even the

EU, but of which the Queen of England was the head of state, bearing the title Lord of Mann.

However, the Isle of Man lay conveniently within the EU's customs area and enjoyed tariff free trade throughout the EU and many tax advantages, which Pat and his predecessors had employed to generate substantial profits for the bank.

The laws of the Isle of Man permitted the offshore owners of private jets to import their aircraft into the UK through Isle of Man shell companies that leased them back to their real owners, enabling them reclaim millions in VAT purchase tax.

It was a well oiled system that had served a number of Russian oligarchs, certain of whom had been blacklisted under US or European sanctions, amongst them were Vladimir Putin's good friends Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, as well as Oleg Deripaska, and not forgetting our Clan's own Sergei Tarasov.

CHAPTER 19

HOUGHTON HALL

That evening John amused us with the story of his visit to Houghton Hall with Sergei Tarasov three or four years earlier. He recalled how he with our friend Steve Howard had disembarked from Sergei's helicopter, pausing to admire the magnificent Palladian mansion that stood before them in its 1,000 acre setting of rolling Norfolk parkland. Steve reminded them how Houghton Hall had been built as the home of Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first prime minister, who had led the governments of George I and George II over a period of 20 years, from 1721 to 1742, before resigning following a motion of no confidence.

Walpole's political career came to an end with the famous defeat of the British navy at the Battle of Cartagena de Indias in 1741, which Anna had told us about, one of the greatest debacles in British military history, resulting in the loss of 10,000 men, a third of the British force, compared to a mere 800 on the Spanish side. Little mentioned in British history books, it marked an important point in colonial history, enabling Spain to maintain its Empire in South America for another one and a half centuries. Three years later Walpole died in debt.

Houghton Hall was now the home of the seventh Marquess of Cholmondeley, David Cholmondeley, the Lord Great Chamberlain of the United Kingdom, a hereditary role in the British monarchist system. He was also known as David Rocksavage, playboy, film producer and businessman.

Camille was now a friend of the Marchioness, Rose Hanbury, mother of the Marquess' three children, a former model, who according to the tabloid press was rumoured to be having an affair with Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge.

The occasion for Sergei's presence was the opening of an exhibition of 70 masterpieces from Sir Robert Walpole's art collection on loan from the Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg, in the presence of Prince Charles, the ageing future King of England, father of William.



Sergei, like his compatriot the media magnate Alexander Lebedev, was a patron of 'Houghton Revisited'. The magnificent art collection of 200 paintings, which included works by Murillo, Poussin, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck and Velazquez, was owned by the Hermitage. In 1778, Walpole's heavily indebted grandson, a philandering gambler, had sold more than 200 of the paintings for forty 40,000 gold guineas to Catherine the Great to adorn her palace in St. Petersburg.

The elite gathering, in the splendid Palladian mansion built of York stone, was an important occasion for the Russians, to repair, or at least try to plaster over the cracks that had opened in relations between London and Moscow. For the first time in more than 200 years the paintings were presented in their original settings.

Steve Howard, a good friend of ours and what could be described as an arranger, spotted Tony Blair's strange spin doctor amongst the guests. Howard remembered him from Santorino a few years earlier, at a time when he been an ardent friend of Saif Gaddafi. In contrast to Walpole's outward going ideas, he had been one of the architects of New Labour's immigration policy, responsible for burdening the UK with a massive influx of immigrants, many of whom brought nothing but their hands with them as the world marched towards the era of AI and robotics.

During the years of the Blair-Brown tandem, more than two million immigrants entered Britain, transforming the country as it had never been transformed since Julius Caesar had disembarked on England's shores. The Roman invasion had brought Latin civilisation, the Viking invasions their Germanic language, the Norman conquest the French language, all of which fused into modern English, spoken by 500 million people across the planet and studied by three times that number.

Whatever the new multicultural society would bring it was still in the making. The change had not been created by force, but by transient politicians, laissez-faire policies, stealth and complicity, whilst the majority of voters had closed their eyes. The awakening would be rude. The face of Britain changed forever, without debate, without the least democratic process, or consideration for the effect it would have on the life of its citizens and institutions, the life they had been led to believe they had fought for in two world wars, the idea of the stalwart island fortress that had been drummed into each and every Briton since early childhood in stories and legends, even before they opened the first pages of their history books.

Kings and Queens of England had repulsed papists forces by sword and fire over the course of more than four centuries, then, suddenly, for no reason, without the least protestation, the floodgates were thrown open to an entirely new population, many bringing with them a new and demanding religion with its conflictual precepts.

John reminded us how Tony Blair and his spin doctor, famous for exhorting Brits to get filthy rich, which had not happened, though Blair and his fellow traveller had. It had been in line with New Labour's infatuation with wealth, curious for a former member of the Young Communist League, since become a Lord of the Realm, owner of a multimillion pound four-storey Gothic Revival property, with its wine cellar and two-storey atrium.

We were all amused by John's story, not the least Pat, who was very much more than filthy rich.

## CHAPTER 20

### A MISSING YACHT

*So, if there's class warfare, the rich class has won*

Warren buffet

Some months earlier Scott Fitznorman and Robert Guiglion, on the advice of Bill Palmer—a rich American collector, had got together with Pat Kennedy in Hong Kong. The reason for the meeting had been to discuss the financing for recover the cargo of the Tanjong Lumut junk and the construction of a museum in Brunei.

Walter Hoffman, Pat's manager in Zurich, had spoken to him highly of Bill Palmer, one of their good clients, and his Swiss company, Archaeological Research and Exploration Inc. The project coincided with Pat's own interests, first Chinese antiquities, and second building the image of his bank, INI Hong Kong, through the funding cultural projects linked to China, as Beijing spread its zone of influence across the region.

That the archaeological investigation and recovery work of the junk's cargo of Chinese porcelain would cement Beijing's relations with the tiny sultanate, raised a number of questions, not the least of which were the reasons as to why a superpower, with a population of 1.5 billion, was courting an almost insignificantly small enclave on the island of Borneo, a sultanate, a vestige of bygone times and colonial gerrymandering.

As usual the answer was geopolitics. Brunei's passive attitude to China's aggressive expansion into the South China Sea, could be explained by a flurry of Chinese investments and infrastructure projects in the sultanate, including the building

of 4 billion dollar petrochemical complex, the small country's largest ever foreign investment, on the small island Muara Besar off Brunei's northern tip. There many thousands of Chinese workers had been shipped in by the Zhejiang Hengyi Group, a Hangzhou petrochemical firm, for the construction of the refinery and a bridge connecting it to the capital, Bandar Seri Bagawan.

Chinese President Xi Jinping was honoured by Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah on a state visit to Brunei, the goal of which was to upgrade relations between the odd couple to a strategic cooperative partnership, strange considering a quarter of Brunei's population were ethnic Chinese, non-citizens, deprived of many rights even after generations of presence in the Sultanate.

Ostensibly the pomp and circumstance was to safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea, allowing China to continue its territorial expansion at the cost of the nations bordering the sea.

All that led to the fine idea, the cargo of the Chinese junk would be housed in a new extension of the Maritime Museum in Bandar Seri Bagawan, a symbol of friendship between Brunei and China, under the patronage of Sir Patrick Kennedy's Hong Kong bank.

Pat Kennedy used the occasion to ask Robert Guiglion, whose home base was in Malacca, in Peninsula Malaysia, what he'd heard about the luxury mega-yacht, the *Equanimity*, said to be the 54th biggest in the world, which had gone missing, the whole 90 metres of it, together with its swimming pool, helipad, movie theatre, spa and sauna, staterooms for 18 guests and quarters for its crew of 28.

Robert knew the waters of Southeast Asia well and he with Scott Fitznorman were well versed in the arcane politics of Malaysia and Singapore.

The *Equanimity* wasn't missing in the conventional sense, but unfindable. Why did that concern Pat? Well INI Hong Kong had outstanding loans on the vessel, that was serious enough, though what was potentially more damaging was the

## The Cargo Club

fact that Pat's bank had financed Jho Low, the declared owner of the yacht, embroiled in a sensational case of corruption in Malaysia.

The *Equanimity*, built by Oceanco in the Netherlands, at their Alblasserdam shipyard, had been delivered to her owner in 2013. The extravagant yacht's interior has been conceived by Winch Design, lined with marble and gold leaf, and decorated with several very valuable works of art.



With its twin 4,828 horse power diesel engines, a top speed of 19.5 knots, and a fuel capacity of 271,000 litres, the yacht was capable of going anywhere, crossing seas and oceans.

INI was on the hook for a quarter of a billion dollars for the yacht alone, plus another 150 million for the works of art on board.

Naturally INI was insured, but Pat could not let a few swindling Chinese Malaysian crooks embarrass him.

The yacht was registered in the name of Jho Low, of Jynwel Capital, a Malaysian registered business, bought with embezzled funds, siphoned off from the sovereign wealth fund that went by the acronym '1MDB', with the complicity of former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Low was wanted by the US authorities, on ‘suspicions of criminal mismanagement, fraud, bribery of foreign public officials, aggravated money laundering and misconduct in public office,’ and in connection with money laundering through American banks, they claimed he had transferred billions of dollars in funds from the Malaysian state owned fund to a private account in Switzerland, in the name of Good Star Limited, owned by Low, of which nearly two billion dollars were laundered through US banks.

The *Equanimity* was believed to have sailed from Malaysia and Singapore to Bali, then to the Philippines, where the yacht’s Automated Identification System had been switched off, making it almost impossible to track. However, Pat’s Filipino friend, Sotero Lee, had been alerted by a sighting and had informed the authorities who launched a game of hid and seek with the yacht.

Corruption, profligacy and exaggeration were parts of our human society, and even with the best intentions we were drawn into its many traps, like an innocent baby shower.

I had to look it up, I mean what was a baby that wasn’t even born doing in a shower I suppose you all know, but living in Paris with no wife and no babies I hadn’t a clue.

Well it was as I discovered a baby party, a bit like a Tupperware party, except the guests brought you presents for the baby, born, or yet to be born, presents that would set the average man back months of wages, for a baby born with a silver spoon in its mouth, more like a whole fucking silver diner set in its mouth.

Well who was the object of shower? None other than Meghan Markle, in New York, who was getting ready for the party with friends at The Mark Hotel on the Upper East Side. The friends included Amal Clooney, wife of George, both of whom had been guests at Meghan and Harry’s wedding. Then there was the tennis star Serena Williams. Which was all very nice.

So what! Where was the problem? After all it seemed like Serena was footing the bill for the penthouse suite where the

## The Cargo Club

celebration was to take place. The suite, which boasted of spectacular views over Central Park, costs 75,000 dollars a night, was booked for two nights.

Meghan wasn't going to stay in the suite, that was just for the baby shower party. She was going to stay in a smaller suite, much smaller, a mere 9,989 dollars a night, about the same as several million poor Brits took a year to earn.

I just wondered what Queenie thought of that extravaganza when London was overflowing with a record number of homeless.

I have to admit there was something wrong in the world, when the rich obscenely threw there money around. At least we in the Clan tried to do it quietly.

Megan's friends said they would respect the Duchess, a young woman who by the greatest of chances found her prince, and his family, rich beyond imagination, adulated by an entire nation and at least some of those who lived in the Commonwealth, former subjects of the Queen's father, the Empire over which the prince's great-grandfather had reigned, the richest and most wide flung empire that ever existed, even greater than Spain's fabulous New World Empire that stretched across the Atlantic to the Americas and the Pacific to Asia with its outposts in Africa.

## CHAPTER 21

# THE GALLEON

It was necessary to study the architecture of a galleon to undertake the non-destructive archaeological exploration of the *Espíritu Santo*.

How much of the original structure lay below the sand? No one knew. Robert Guiglion had worked on Asian vessels, the architecture of which was much simpler than that of the larger and taller Spanish galleons, as he and his divers were about to discover. It was where Anna's friends at Itsas Arkeologia came in, recognised specialists in undersea archaeology of the Spanish colonial period, providing Robert's team with knowledge and details of the *Espíritu Santo*'s structure and preparing them for what they were about to dig out of the sand and silt.

The starting point was to explore the reasons behind the development of that kind of vessel. The story began in the early 16th century, when, as trade with the New World grew, Spain was confronted with the problem of finding the ships which could not only carry large quantities of cargo, but were also manoeuvrable on the high seas and capable of defending themselves against enemy attacks.

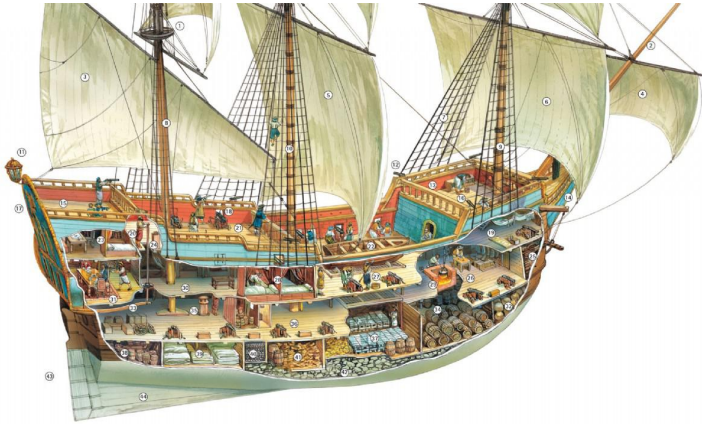
The result was the galleon, a large armed merchant ship, which was perfected during this period and soon became the standard escort vessel that accompanied the convoys of privately owned merchant vessels that plied the seas between Spain and the New World.

A typical galleon was between 30 and 40 metres long and 9 metres wide with two or three decks, and between 25 and 40 cannons. However, while galleons were designed to carry large amounts of cargo and weapons, they had one important

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weakness, their centre of gravity was unusually high which made them difficult to manoeuvre.

Merchant ships, basically unarmed and smaller galleons—*naos* or *urcas* as they were known, carried cargo, treasure, and passengers. Other ships, *pataches*, were still smaller sailing vessels that could be rowed between larger ships, and *resfuerzos*, or supply ships, which carried food and general cargo.



It is worth recalling that the average speed of the fleet was 4 knots, covering about 150 kilometres a day, and that the crossing from Cadiz in Spain to Cartagena in the New World taking seven to eight weeks.

The convoys usually consisted of at least two heavily-armed galleons and two pataches, with as many as 90 merchant ships, which were larger in the beam and designed solely as cargo vessels.

The cargo vessels on the outward voyage from Spain carried goods such as textiles, books, tools and arms. Then on the return trip carried lumber, metals, luxuries, silver, gold, gems, pearls, spices, sugar, tobacco, silk, and other exotic goods. Passengers and military personnel were carried in both directions.

Once the transpacific route was opened, the Manila Galleons began sailing between the Philippines and Acapulco on the Pacific coast of Mexico. This increased the flow of men and goods between Spain and the New World as merchandise was transported by pack animals across Mexico to Veracruz on the Caribbean coast, where it was loaded onto the convoy for Spain.

These long and highly perilous voyages could take up eight months, but like the voyage to the Indies around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope, the profits justified the risks.

As the colonies grew so did the demand in manufactured goods, which Spain was incapable of fulfilling, goods such as textiles, weapons, glass, and paper, which were supplied, via Spain, from other European sources.

It was a vicious circle that demanded more and more gold and silver, a system that collapsed when the burden of maintaining the empire and the financial effort needed to ward off its enemies finally took its toll. As the production of silver declined, and the sun slowly set on Spain's long moment of glory, its monopoly came to an end and the New World was finally opened to free trade.

In two and a half centuries, Spain's mines in the New World had supplied 80% of the world's silver and 70% of its gold, transported to Europe and Asia on a various kinds of wooden sailing ships, including galleons, built by Spanish shipwrights in shipyards scattered across most of the globe, from Spain to the Americas and beyond to the Philippines.

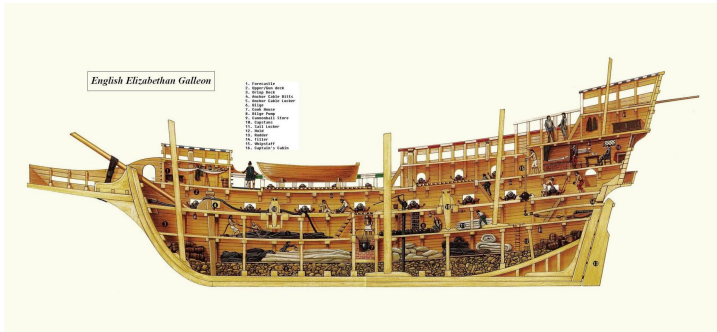
The form of a galleon's hull offered a superior performance compared to its predecessors thanks to its greater length and keel to beam ratio, cutting resistance through the waves, giving it greater manoeuvrability and improved seaworthiness.

The fore and aft castles were general purpose structures, on the one hand providing fortifications against boarding parties in case of attack, and on the other providing living quarters for the ship's officers in normal times.

In the 16th and 17th centuries shipbuilders calculations were less than exact, and at times led to errors with the risk of

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vessels capsizing if the centre of gravity was too high, which was compensated by ballast with the loss of cargo space and manoeuvrability.



The bowsprit and lower forecastle were designed to reduce wind resistance whilst the crew's toilets, 'heads', were situated beneath the figurehead emptying directly into the sea at a point where the waves washed the waste away from the hull.

The Spanish battle tactic of closing in on and boarding enemy ships, required great manpower, larger castles and heavier cannons on the upper decks. This resulted in narrower decks, and the hulls tapering inwards of cargo holds, positioning the heavy canons closer to the ships centre of gravity to give greater stability, which also offered the added advantage of making boarding more difficult.

Improvements were made in steering, riggings and sails, though the high aft castles of larger ships meant the distribution of more sails over the bow section of the galleons.

All this gradually led to larger ships, like the 1,000 plus ton *Espiritu Santo*, reducing manoeuvrability and making galleons more vulnerable to smaller, faster and easily manoeuvrable English warships.

## CHAPTER 22

# OPERATIONS

Venezuela's Maduro regime had one faithful ally—Moscow, whose policy of deliberate harm to British interests made our Clan a target for its subversive operations, a reminder to oligarchs like our Sergei Tarasov to toe the line, a reminder to Ekaterina she was Russian, and a reminder to their families and friends not to trample over Russian interests.

It was just one of our non-archaeological problems, which bizarrely included a long outstanding territorial dispute between Venezuela and Colombia. A glance at a map shows how the Gulf of Venezuela provides a vital maritime access route, connecting Lake Maracaibo to the Caribbean, the highway for Venezuela's petroleum exports, from its vast oil fields and the refineries bordering the lake.

Oil was Venezuela's life blood, its proven reserves by far the largest in the world, greater than that of Saudi Arabia's, and to boot it was, at least until very recently, a major supplier to the US, the reserves of which paled in comparison, facts that went a long way to understanding the confrontation between Washington and Caracas.

Colombia's relations with Venezuela were complicated by a long running border dispute. It started with a treaty fixing Castilletes as the boundary between the two countries in 1941, which created tensions as Venezuela lost a large part of the Guajira Peninsula, aggravated by the fact that the same treaty made no reference to sea, marine and submarine areas, which led to a further dispute over territorial waters and the geometrical method of determining their ownership.

This went to creating friction with intense nationalistic sentiments, inflamed by politicians and the media,

instrumentalised by the Chavez and Maduro governments as a diversion from their own internal problems.

Once formalities were completed in Cartagena, the *Sundaland II* headed for Aruba, where special equipment was taken on board, supposedly for the research programme, though to experienced observers the equipment was substantially heavier than that needed to study marine life. That's what I said, marine life, a ruse invented by the Colombian authorities to justify our presence in the remote but sensitive region, where we were supposed to part of an international scientific programme to study the reefs and marine life along the east coast of the Guajira Peninsula.

On our arrival off the coast of Puerto Lopez, which was not a port, just a name, we dropped anchor. It was early afternoon when Robert Guiglion called us together for a brief to remind us of our different tasks. The team, besides us non-specialists, consisted of archaeologists from Itsas Arkeologia, Robert's divers, undersea engineers and the crew, all experienced in the excavation operations of different kinds of ancient sailing ships, all of which were built in wood and required very painstaking attention to preserve the archaeological record.

It was also a review of the programme, commencing with an outline of the plans and an overview of the technical and safety measures needed to commence operations.

'Our problems are essentially the same here as in Asia, tropical seas and fairly shallow waters. Here we have a Spanish galleon in much the same conditions we're used to in the South China Sea, where we worked mainly Chinese junks, though we've also dived on Portuguese, English and Dutch ships that sailed those seas in past centuries.

'As with the earlier survey of the *Espiritu Santo* site, carried out by the Colombian team, our first task is to fix the outer perimeter. You can see the images we already have are quite clear,' he said pointing to the screen, 'thanks to the navy's low light video colour cameras.

'Some of you are familiar with our methods, but I'll recap for those of you new to this kind of operation,' he said with a

friendly smile. 'Modern technology was introduced to underwater archaeology and exploration after the chance discovery of a wreck some years back in deep waters off the Dry Tortugas Islands, that's situated halfway between and Florida and Cuba.'

Anna pointed to the map on the hanging on the wall of the wardroom. 'To the north of Havana and the west of the Florida Keyes,' she explained, 'along the shipping route used by galleons travelling between Mexico and Cadiz, that carried gold and silver from Veracruz and Cartagena to Havana, where they then joined the transatlantic convoy system for Spain.'

'I'll leave the technical explanations to the expert,' she said smiling and turning to Robert Guiglion, who then proceeded to describe the different state of the art technologies used by the *Sundaland II* for exploration and diving operations.



'In the mid-sixties,' Robert said continuing his story of the Dry Tortugas Islands, 'the presence of a sunken treasure ship alerted marine archaeologists after a shrimp trawler, the Trade Winds, hauled in evidence of treasure lying on the ocean floor, at a depth of around 400 metres, inaccessible to divers in those days.'

Twenty years later that had all changed with the development of new technology, enabling professional treasure hunters to

pinpoint the site of the wreck using undersea remotely operated vehicles, which led to the recovery of thousand of objects from the site.

‘We will use similar material, though with much more advanced technologies. In our particular case here in Colombia we can use divers, it’s not deep, but there will be problems of vision especially when we start using the suction pumps to remove the silt.’

He pointed to the large TV screen of the wall and proceeded to comment a PowerPoint presentation on the different types of techniques that would be employed for the work. ‘The different apparatus you see here are our side-scan and other sonars and tracking systems, ROVs and high definition underwater cameras.’

He paused savouring the kick technology gave him, then continued explaining how the integrated navigation system was capable of generating search grids and graphically displaying the real-time positions relative to the Sundaland.

‘The side-scan sonar transducers on our tow fish emit and receive acoustic pulses, these are transmitted to our control centre where the information is processed. Our system is capable of recording a zone of up to 300 meters on each side with great precision, depending on the form, density and material of the objects detected on, or under the seabed.

‘This way we can have a detailed 3D image of the site and the smallest objects with our three ROVs, each of which is fitted with video and still cameras and a retrieval arm.’

‘So it’s completely independent,’ said Olly.

‘No, it’s too expensive to lose,’ Robert said frowning at the thought. ‘We have an umbilical communications and control cord, even though the ROVs are free swimming. Basically our operators control the ROVs using a joy stick control via a TV monitor, like a drone, remotely manoeuvring the camera and retrieval arm, like that we could detect and recover objects of interest at depths of several hundred metres, which is not the case for the *Espiritu Santo*, luckily it’s in very much more shallower water, which will should make our job much simpler.

‘The wreck itself is approximately 30 to 40 metres long and 10 wide. Here you can make out the remains of the hull,’ he said pointing to the screen. ‘The rest you can see is ballast stones and a few canons. But for the moment we don’t know if its entire, I mean it could have broken into two or more parts, some of them shifting further away with the currents.’

‘With our suction pumps we can dredge sand and silt around the wreck, then the ROVs will position themselves with their hydraulic thrusters, working above the seafloor without stirring up clouds silt.

‘So the delicate work is done by the divers,’ said Olly.

‘Yes and no, it’s a team effort, the manipulator arms can handle the most delicate piece of porcelain without causing damage. But most objects are recovered by hand and raised by underwater lifting bags the most practical and simple way of carrying out submarine works. These can raise weights of up to several hundred kilos to the surface, hooked up to baskets and lifted with harnesses linked to a metal shackle with suitably sized belts.

‘The parachute is inflated by divers who simply introduce an air supply hose into the parachute’s lower opening and adjust the quantity of air blown into the bag to obtain the required lift force. Once on the surface the baskets can be hoisted by our crane and winch.’

‘What’s interesting,’ remarked Anna, ‘is all underwater work is filmed in real-time, so that future archaeologists can study the wreck and our progress for their research.’

The whole operation would in fact be an archaeological excavation programme, not simply a salvage job, with the Colombian government receiving a fully documented scientific report, on what was in effect their national heritage, as the successors of New Spain. Many of the artefacts and much of treasure recovered would be displayed in a new museum, though exactly what and the quantity remained to be seen, as would be the share that could be sold off to collectors, in priority museums, both in the Americas and in Europe, where Spain would have a first refusal.

Over the centuries the wreck with its cargo had certainly shifted and a large zone was defined as a grid for exploration using the towed sonar Robert had spoken of, a torpedo shaped remotely operated vehicle fitted with powerful lights and cameras.

The first results confirmed the depth of the seabed varied between 20 and 40 metres below the ship, where the visibility was generally clear, and whenever a point of interest was detected, divers were sent down for closer investigation.

Technically the site was easy and the depth such, as Robert Guiglion explained to us, that the scuba tanks were filled with normal air, without need of the kind of deep-diving gas mix required for operations below 60 metres, beyond which oxygen in normal air became toxic to the human body.

‘Normally oxygen makes up about 21% of the air we breathe,’ he told us as a matter of interest, ‘but as depth and pressure increases, the concentration of oxygen goes up. Then, at around 50 metres, the oxygen in normal air acts on our bodies as if it was 100% pure.’

He paused, looking at us to see if we understood that. For myself it was vaguely clear, to Anna, herself an experienced diver, it was nothing new.

‘What about the bends?’ I asked.

‘Normally that won’t be a problem for us.’

‘And the raptures of the deep?’

Robert smiled, ‘You’ve been reading Cousteau. Nitrogen narcosis, we shouldn’t have that problem, as I said it’s not deep enough here, but you never know. Our divers are very experienced.’ He looked at us seriously, then at me in particular, ‘So you can dive if you want to Pat, but not alone, I wouldn’t like to have your publishers on my back,’ he concluded with a grim smile.

‘Me too,’ said Anna playfully grasping me in a possessive embrace.

They needn’t have bothered, I wasn’t about to risk my life, even for a chest of Spanish gold.

## CHAPTER 23

### A SHADOW

It was not a good sign when the news broke of an assassination attempt on Maduro in Caracas with accusations that Santos, the soon to step down president of Colombia, was behind the attack.

We watched the event on satellite television, as Maduro delivered a speech at a grand military parade to mark the 81st anniversary of the Bolivarian National Guard, Venezuela's national guard. In the middle of his harangue he suddenly stopped, looked up, startled by an approaching noise. Dramatically, he and his wife's initial curiosity brutally changed to fear as the couple and those around them realised it was a drone.



A second or two later there was an explosion, then a second when one of the two drones crashed into a nearby building,

provoking a violent deflagration. Another exploded above the marching soldiers who broke ranks and fled in panic in a most unmilitary reaction.

Maduro's bodyguards rushed to protect the president as screams echoed and bloodied soldiers cried out for help.

It was a brazen attack, the first ever public assassination attempt by drones, witnessed live on television and transmitted across the planet by the media, present for what should have been a banal drum thumping event.

Maduro escaped shaken but unhurt.

The drone, a DJI M600, similar to those we had on-board the *Sundaland II*, was described as an industrial workhorse, which could be modified according to its manufacturers for a wide range of commercial and industrial uses. Priced at around 5,000 dollars, the basic model could carry a payload of several kilograms, cameras—or explosives.

Accusations quickly flew as Maduro pointed to Chile, Colombia and Mexico, accomplices who had aided Yankee backed terrorists in the attempt to kill him.

A suspect was quickly identified, a Venezuelan, who confessed he had been told to seek refuge at the Chilean embassy from where he would be smuggled to the Mexican embassy, then to the Colombian embassy, and finally over the border to Colombia.

A nice story that conveniently implicated three of Maduro's arch enemies.

We had vaguely discussed very nearby Venezuela, but in reality it seemed as far away, it was as though we were in New York, Paris or London—not next door. Maduro, seemed unreal, a poor copy of Fidel Castro, the pastiche of a socialist dictator from another age.

There were many Venezuelan refugees in Cartagena, and in Colombia in general, but we foreigners could not differentiate between a Colombian and a Venezuelan, the lucky ones were wealthy, most were poor, but both spoke Spanish and both were South American.

The massive migration of Venezuelans was destabilising

Colombia as Caracas accused Bogota of fomenting revolution. No love was lost between the two countries, especially after Colombia accused Chavez and his successor of sheltering its own radical leftist Farc insurgents during the long and bloody years before a peace agreement was signed with the exsanguine rebels.

It was a paradox, Venezuelans, living in their modern country, blessed with vast oil reserves, greater than those of many Middle East potentates, were starving, their currency worthless like that of a proverbial banana republic, as Maduro, in the style of his late predecessor, Hugo Chavez, unleashed his inflammatory discourse against Colombia—Washington's lackey.

Maduro's unlikely, but frightening allies, included Moscow, Tehran and Damascus, whose primary interests were to find allies, those who in return for Venezuela's international support against Washington provided Caracas with state of the art weaponry and military hardware.

Since Chavez, Venezuela's pursuit of socialism had been in the same vein as that of Cuba and Bolivia, with policies that were equally, or even more economically disastrous, success had proven elusive for Venezuela's dictators in spite of the country's vast potential wealth.

Donald Trump had not helped, when at the UN General Assembly, in a bellicose announcement, he told the world he had not excluded military intervention to restore democracy in Venezuela. However, Trump was 100% right when he said people fled Venezuela because of Maduro's socialism, which had led to dire poverty in what used to be a prosperous, if turbulent, nation.

Both Chavez and Maduro had been elected and re-elected democratically, on the basis of surrealistic promises, which Venezuelans were free to accept or not. That said, the power structure and the control of the military was such that it made change difficult, if not impossible, in a what was effectively a one party state.

The two leaders, the first charismatic, the second an

apparatchik, had succeeded in hanging on to power, in spite of all efforts to undermine their regime by the opposition, which had employed considerable political and subversive efforts overthrow the socialist dictatura without success.

The alternative was military force, a coup, an invasion, to topple Maduro, who whatever his faults was not stupid. His reaction was to pre-empt the threat by provoking a diversion, pointing threateningly at an external enemy.

The trouble, at least as far as Tom Barton was concerned, was that enemy was his new country and the prospect of a war between Venezuela and Colombia frightening.

The new Colombian right leaning president, Ivan Duque, to the displeasure of his neighbour, had commenced by signing, together with Peru, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Colombia and Canada, a demand for an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by Venezuela's government under Maduro, addressed to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela was provoked by Maduro's inept policies and lies. The consequences of which were dramatically visible—food shortages and economic collapse, demonstrated by the daily flood of desperate refugees pouring across the border into Colombia, fleeing the economic disaster that was consuming Venezuela with hyperinflation, bankruptcy and collapse.

One of the consequence was a massive smuggling problem at crossings along the 1,300 kilometres border between Venezuela and Colombia, at places like Villa del Rosario, situated on the Colombian side of the Rio Tachira that separated the two countries.

In border cities like Cucuta, Maicao, Arauca, and Arauquita, Venezuelans bought dollars at greatly disadvantageous rates, which were sucked into black market trafficking, using cheap bolivars to buy subsidized Venezuelan gasoline and rice, which was then smuggled into Colombia, and sold at triple the purchase price, still a bargain for Colombians.

It was a downward spiral of inflation, unemployment, crime

and hunger, provoking one of the greatest migrations in recent history, as ever increasing numbers of Venezuelans fled their country with an estimated four million Venezuelans quitting their country in less than four years, compared to five from war torn Syria.

That Maduro directly accused Colombia of trying to provoke an armed conflict with Venezuela was not good news, as he told the army, 'You must be on guard and on maximum alert against the false promises of the criminal and envious oligarchy in Bogota which obeys Washington's orders.' Adding a warning that paramilitary troops were waiting on the border between the two countries with the aim of harming Venezuelans and 'to create a provocation'.

All that would have been food for CNN and the New York Times if it hadn't been for alarming reports that Venezuelan armed forces had entered Colombian territory, followed, to our surprise and astonishment, by claims that the *Espiritu Santo* lay in Venezuelan territorial waters with reports of its cargo being worth several billions of dollars, which would certainly provide a welcome injection into Venezuela's tottering economy.

The news of our presence had leaked and we feared we would soon be seeing unwelcome visitors.

In reality we had little fear of the Venezuelan Navy, a ramshackle affair if ever there was one, if it had not been for the presence of Russia, in the form of naval vessels, oil tankers and other ships. To top that Russia had long experience in underwater diving and exploration as an arm of its naval forces, developed for the recovery of vessels such as the *Komsomolets*, the *I-52*, and the *Kursk*—Soviet submarines lost in disasters at sea.

Robert reminded us they had also worked on the *Titanic* and the *Bismarck* with Finnish built MIR submersibles.

To add to our fears, Sergei Tarasov's sources warned us of the possibility that Russia's Oscar II class vessel the *Belgorod* was also in Caribbean waters, it was a special-mission research submarine, equipped with a docking station in its Hull,

designed for autonomous submersibles and exploration vessels.

Our fears were certainly exaggerated, but the Kremlin's policy of tit-for-tat in its game with the West meant that anything, or anyone who helped its fellow travellers was a target for subversive action. Did the Pentagon, or MI5, know of the *Belgorod's* presence? Most certainly, but in any case they would say nothing, there was no reason to broadcast the level of their surveillance capabilities.

The depth of the waters in the Gulf of Venezuela, a maximum 70 to 75 metres, meant a vessel like the *Belgorod* could lie on the sea bed undetected, acting as a base for undersea operations. The *Sundaland II*, as a surface ship, was on the other hand visible for all to see and with the constant stream of signals and transmissions we emitted, could be easily tracked.

## CHAPTER 24

### THE SITE

There was nothing, no towns or villages, no farms, no roads, we were alone, far from nowhere. The landscape recalled the endless barren, uninhabited, coasts of Libya or Southern Morocco.

From the deck of the *Sundaland II*, the coastline of Alta Guajira greeted us with a wind swept panorama of sand and scrub, giant cardon cacti—many of which were centuries old, and the occasional twisted thorn tree, an environment in which only snakes and scorpions could survive. In short, a vast and hostile desert, covering 25,000 square kilometres, capped by mountains and surrounded by sun scorched coastal plains, a desolate drought stricken land.



It was a startling contrast to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta National Natural Park, not far to the south of Alta Guajira, with the towering snow covered peaks of Mount Cristobal Colon and Mount Simon Bolivar, their lower slopes

covered with lush and varied vegetation.

Our vision of beaches with parasols and bars evaporated, like the sparse early morning dew on the cactus spines, almost as soon as the *Sundaland II* dropped anchor in the transparent waters of the gulf.

There was little wonder the crew of the *Espiritu Santo* had died of hunger and thirst, or were killed by the Wayuu Indians—the people of the sun, sand and wind. Natives of the harsh Guajira Desert, the Wayuu had resisted the conquistadores, attacked their missions, ambushing and killing the soldiers sent into the wilderness to pacify them.

Today there was little to fear from the Indians, but the empty region was the haunt of drug traffickers who took advantage of the barren coast to set up their makeshift factories and relay points, running their deadly cargoes to the Caribbean islands and beyond.

The wreck was situated near a rocky reef about 4 kilometres offshore under the turquoise waters of a broad bay, a site where we would be very visible to passing boats, not that we'd seen any, but the *Sundaland II* was not small and its form would have stood out compared that of local ships, or the rare fishing boats that worked those waters.

The Gulf of Venezuela was in fact a sea, about 200 kilometres wide at our point of anchorage, that is between Puerto Lopez and Punto Fijo on the Paraguana Peninsula in Venezuela. Most merchant vessels, chiefly oil tankers, sailing to and from the Caribbean to the refineries on the opposite coast, or Maracaibo in the south, would be far out to sea, out of view, well over the horizon.

Even so we had no illusions, sooner or later we would attract the curiosity of passing fishermen.

Our plan was that heavier supplies and equipment would be ferried from Riohacha, or better still Aruba, a Dutch island, where less questions were asked. For more pressing needs we set up a supply line with a charter service company that operated a Twin Otter Seaplane and a Britten-Norman Islander, the latter suitable for short landings on the arid wind

swept beaches to our landside. Best was the seaplane which would be safe from drug traffickers, smugglers and gangs, who could lay in ambush in the low scrub covered dunes. But the choice of aircraft would depend entirely on the weather and sea conditions.

The nearest civilised place of any importance was Puerto Bolivar, on the north coast of the Guajira Peninsula, a vast export terminal for the coal that arrived by rail from the Cerrejon open-pit mine, near Barranca, which lay 150 kilometres to the south-east, the largest of its kind in South America.

Cerrejon was jointly owned by BHP Billiton, Anglo American and Glencore, producing over 32 million tonnes of coal a year with reserves of over 5 billion.

By a strange coincidence there was a link to distant Ireland, the ESB coal-powered station on the Shannon Estuary, in County Clare. As the producer of 20% of Ireland's electricity each year, ESB imported 2 million tons of coal a year from Cerrejon. This had become the subject of a moral conundrum, since the power station was scheduled to shut down for environmental reasons, a decision which didn't go down well with the 10,000 Colombian workers who depended on the mine for their wages in one of the planet's poorest and most socially deprived regions of the country.

As rich nations fretted about the planet, countless miners worked, often in harsh conditions, to supply us with our comforts, seeing their lands ripped up and polluted for generations to come by foreign mining giants on whom the survival of their families depended. What did Irish men and women know or care about the Wayuu Indians and their communities, whose hunting, fishing and farming lands had been swallowed by the mine.

'What did pampered bourgeois liberals, ecologists and luvvie's know about those affected by their bleeding hearts,' Anna asked, 'and who would pay for the devastated landscapes left behind after the mines were closed and hydroelectric dams silted up?'

Anna had seen the ruins left by mines and steel mills in the Basque Country, and the effort to rebuild Bilbao, now reborn as a tourist destination. But who would build a Guggenheim in Barranca? That was another story.

The fact remained that in the generation to come, the population of the planet would explode, and the energy demands were such that China, India and Africa would continue to rely on coal, oil and natural gas with all the consequences that brought. That was written in black and white in BP's Outlook 2040, published in 2019.

But that was not our problem, we were more concerned by administrative formalities, which given the distance we were from government centres were facilitated by two officers detached from the Colombian Coast Guard aboard the *Sundaland II*, one to take charge of customs clearance formalities, and the other to coordinate security arrangements. In addition were two specialists from the Colombian Navy, both of whom had been present with Anna during the initial search for the site of the *Espiritu Santo*.



Over the next weeks Pat Kennedy visited us whenever the opportunity arose during the course of his business trips to Panama, Nicaragua or one of the Caribbean island states he seemed to visit regularly. I suppose with all those offshore banking centres he had plenty of reasons to justify his comings and goings. The world was a small place for Pat with distances compressed by his jet, which at times made me think he had a permanent home 10 or 12 kilometres up in the sky, high above us other mortals.

It was why we were not surprised when a message came to inform us he was in Panama, which was nothing unusual, though his invitation to meet him in Aruba was—especially when he hinted at a surprise.

Travelling to and from the *Sundaland II* was no easy task, as I've told you the Guajira Peninsula was an isolated

mountainous semi-desertic region of sparse dry dwarf and cloud forests. But it was the proximity of Venezuela that concerned George Pyke.

Puerto Lopez was flanked by Macuira National Park to the north with roads that led nowhere, to the south a road ran parallel to the Venezuelan border, to a place called Maico 150 kilometres to the south, there it connected to another road that ran another 100 kilometres or so from the Venezuelan border to Riohacha on the Caribbean coast.

Riohacha was the nearest big town having any kind of half-serious airport with regular connections to Cartagena and Bogota. But George Pyke ruled out any thoughts of us travelling overland, venturing into that region and getting lost, instead he insisted we use the charter to fly to Aruba, 160 kilometres away, avoiding the Los Monjes Archipelago, a few rocks belonging to Venezuela, source of an another unsettled territorial waters dispute with Colombia.

The flight to Queen Beatrix Airport on Aruba took just 40 minutes where Pat was waiting. He was delighted to see us, as excited as a 14 year old boy about to spring a surprise on his classmates.

After a few quickly disposed of formalities we were piled into a waiting van and driven into downtown Oranjestad and the Renaissance Marina. There the van parked in front of the Marina Hotel and we followed Pat to the quay on foot.

The mystery deepened.

Stopping he pointed to a catamaran which a small group of tourists were boarding for a round the island trip.

‘What do you think?’ he asked his chest puffed out with pride.

We were puzzled.

‘No, the boat!’

‘Which boat?’ I asked looking at the other yachts and motor cruisers anchored in the marina.

‘That one,’ he said pointing out beyond the quay.

To the right cruise ships towered out above the dock buildings. Further out to the left was another smaller cruise ship.’

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‘There, *Las Indias*.’

‘The black and white one?’ asked Anna.

‘Yes.’

We didn’t know what to say, had he booked a cruise for us?

‘It’s mine.’

‘Yours?’

‘Yes, mine.’

It was huge, more than half the length, though lower, than one of the large cruise ship.

We barely had time to register our surprise when he started to herd us down to a waiting tender. Five minutes later we drew alongside the boat, which once we were closer realised it was really a mega-yacht. Pat pointed us up the gangway to the lower deck where waiting to greet us was the captain with a welcome committee holding trays of cold drinks and towels to mop our bewildered faces.



Welcome to *Las Indias*,’ said Pat with a large gesture of his arms.

Then I remembered, ‘The *Equanimity*!’

‘Yesh Pádraig,’ he replied slightly abashed.

Over lunch on the aft deck he told us the story. Pat had had

his eyes on the yacht since his visit to the Philippines earlier in the year with John Francis. His lawyers, acting on behalf of a company controlled by the bank, had in a secret negotiation concluded an agreement with the Malaysian government for the acquisition of the 90 plus metre yacht, now re-baptised *Las Indias*.

It came at a bargain price compared to 250 million US dollars paid for the mega-yacht by a Cayman Island company set up by its now on the run previous owner, Jho Low, a crooked Malaysian financier, using funds embezzled from a state owned investment company.

The yacht had been seized some months earlier near Bali and handed over to the Malaysians by the Indonesian authorities.

It was a done deal, as Pat's bank, INI Hong Kong, held a mortgage on the luxury vessel which had been financed in part by a substantial loan accorded to Low via his Cayman Islands company. The insurance company had coughed up a large part of the bank's loss and a company set up by the bank covered the fire sale price with another loan.

Pat's acquisition satisfied all concerned, saving a lot of embarrassment all round, including the bank itself which had been taken in by Low, now said to be hiding somewhere in China, who deprived of his ill gotten plaything, obviously disapproved of the arrangement.

The Malaysian government and the US Department of Justice were still unravelling the scandal in which over a billion dollars was fraudulently used to buy the yacht as well as a private jet, paintings by Picasso and other renowned artists, not forgetting prime properties and extravagant jewellery.

Kuala Lumpur was only too happy to find a buyer and offload the embarrassingly high maintenance costs.

*Las Indias* proudly flew the Red Ensign, indicating the yacht was registered on the Isle of Man, offering Pat the prestige of a British vessel, without the tax burden.

The 3,000 ton yacht could accommodate up to 22 guests, plus a crew of 30 to care for them, whilst they enjoyed its swimming pool, beauty salon, massage room and sauna, and if

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needed its medical centre and helicopter pad.

Almost without noticing it they had weighed anchor and Pat announced the next stop, Puerto Lopez.

Wherever he was, from the comfort of the *Las Indias* and its ultramodern communications centre, Pat Kennedy could manage his business empire and at the same time make a detour to inspect the progress of work on the salvage of the *Espiritu Santo* and its treasure.

## CHAPTER 25

### THE YACHT

That evening over dinner in the sumptuous dinning room of the *Las Indias*, Robert Guiglion vied with Pat to amuse us with the story of the missing yacht, as we ploughed effortlessly through the waters of the Gulf of Venezuela in the direction of Puerto Lopez, barely feeling the movement and without the least sound from the yacht's powerful propulsion system.

The Malaysian billionaire, Low Taek Jho, better known to the public as John Low, dubbed 'the Asian Great Gatsby', had tried to hide his extravagantly luxury vessel in Filipino waters after being pursued by international authorities for his involvement in a gigantic scam involving billions of dollars swiped from the sovereign investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), which he had managed for the government of his country.

The former Harrow schoolboy made Gordon Gekko, the fictional Wall Street crook played by Michael Douglas, look like a positive beginner. Gekko became an international symbol for unrestrained greed, but Low had succeeded in elevating greed to another degree of human cupidity.

Six years earlier, for his 28th birthday, he threw a stupendous bash even by Las Vegas standards, it was the most lavish birthday party the city had seen for decades.

As guests and celebrities quaffed cocktails at a huge bar carved from solid ice, in front of a giant indoor Ferris Wheel, Britney Spears sang happy birthday Jho and Leonardo DiCaprio rapped with Kim Kardashian and Kanye West, the young playboy unwrapped his birthday present, a Bugatti Veyron, a 1,000 plus horsepower car that cost a cool 2.5

million dollars.

The party started when Low transferred 700 million dollars from Malaysia's 1MDB development fund into a Swiss bank account belonging to Good Star Limited, a company owned by Low, incorporated in the Seychelles.

Almost at once, Low became a celebrity known for his extravagant parties, in Las Vegas, New York, Hollywood, San Tropez and Dubai, paid for with the money he siphoned out of 1MDB, spent on champagne, gambling, private jets and yachts, surrounded by Hollywood stars and scantily clad starlets and models.



It was funny how his birthday celebration resembled those of other über-rich individuals—Indian magnates, Russian oligarchs, petrodollar sheiks and Wall Street bankers, when tens, some even said hundreds of millions of dollars, were lashed out on party extravaganzas for birthdays and weddings.

Parties held behind a wall of the strictest security, designed to keep out not only gatecrashers, but also the poor and unwashed, where even guests were banned from taking photos. The rich, to avoid the press and the paparazzi, pre-empting jealousy, obliged guests to hand over their cell phones and even sign non-disclosure agreements.

Inevitably came the question of where Low got his money and it did not take long for the US Justice Department to find the answer. Low owed his fortune to a gigantic fraud that saw the billions of dollars stolen laundered through banks in Singapore, the Cayman Islands, Nevis, Switzerland, and even the US.

The Justice Department was soon on the trail of Low's unjustified wealth ready to seize some 2 billion dollars of assets and possessions bought with the stolen money, including the 250 million mega-yacht and a private jet.



Caught in the web of thievery was Malaysia's former prime minister, Najib Razak, and his extravagant wife, Rosmah Mansor, known as Malaysia's Imelda Marcos, both of whom were charged with corruption relating to the investment fund.

The most incomprehensible thing was Low had been hiding

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in full view of all those who were pursuing him, including Pat Kennedy's bank INI, at Pacific Place on Hong Kong Island, where a three bedroom apartment rental set tenants back 30,000 US dollars a month.

That was however before he slipped out unseen to Macau, across the water, on the opposite banks of the Pearl River, together with his family. His escape was helped by the slow moving wheels of international justice as authorities were hindered by the issue of formal warrants following an Interpol request for his arrest by Singapore and Malaysia.

Low had been on the run aboard his yacht whilst waiting for the results of the elections in Malaysia, praying his friend, the prime minister, Najib Razak, would be re-elected. He was out of luck, the scandal-plagued Razak was soundly beaten and his opponent, the 92 year old Mahathir Mohamed, was elected. Mahathir's first move was to slap corruption charges on Razak, his defeated rival.

John told us how he had met Mahathir on a couple of occasions some years earlier in Kuala Lumpur, and how the former prime minister, an old, old, hand in Malaysian politics, was out to nail Razak.

Low's generosity included gifts to his long time friend Leonardo DiCaprio, paintings by Picasso and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and an Oscar statuette awarded to Marlon Brando for his role in *On The Waterfront*, for which Low, paid 600,000 dollars.

DiCaprio had starred in *Wolf Of Wall Street*, directed by Martin Scorsese, produced by Red Granite Pictures—a film company owned by Low.

Now, Pat Kennedy was the owner of the yacht, and it was us, the Clan, drinking Champagne on its main sundeck as we headed back to the Alta Guijira, whilst Pat gave Robert a guided tour of his new toy.

Quietly, I crossed my fingers for Pat, and our Clan.

## CHAPTER 26

### SPIES

*'O Judgment! Thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost  
their reason!'*

William Shakespeare

George Pyke was alarmed when *Las Indias* appeared on the scene, not that the mega-yacht was the kind of ship that pirates attacked—yet, but rather because it exposed us to the kind of dangers the rich attracted in a dangerous part of the world.

George had flown in some days earlier with reinforcements for his team, *barbouzes* or mercenaries—as Olly liked to call them. Whatever they were they could be counted on, men trained in every aspects of defence and protection with considerable intelligence tools at their disposal.

He was alarmed not only at the situation across the water in Venezuela, but also the development of Russian espionage and subversion in London. His firm had produced an internal eyes only report for us Clan members, all of whom were either directly or indirectly concerned.

The poisoning of Sergei Skripal, a retired officer of the GRU (Main intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff), and his daughter, with a military-grade nerve agent, was the work of Moscow, a demonstration of how its agents could strike down the enemies of the Kremlin, where and whenever it liked, even in the very heart of conservative rural England.

As if to underline the Kremlin's disdain for London, a few days after the Salisbury poisoning, Nikolai Glushkov, a Russian businessman and critic of Vladimir Putin, who had been forced to flee Moscow, was murdered in London.

They weren't the first to be eliminated on British soil, Alexander Litvinenko, a former FSB and KGB agent, was poisoned in a Mayfair hotel with the radioactive isotope Polonium-210.

In 2016, Russia was reclassified by the UK national defence services as a tier one threat to national security, something not seen since the end of the Cold War, as the Kremlin pursued its doctrine, which, to achieve its strategic goals, consisted of military force backed by political, economic, mediatic and or other non-military measures.

Russia's three main intelligence agencies were, unlike those of its Western counterparts, free of interference by politicians, lobbyists and other activists, which gave them superiority when pitted against the Moscow's adversaries, and an unequal battle for MI5 or MI6.

It had been evident to John Francis, who headed the Fitzwilliams Foundation, that the UK had been too accommodating in its dealings with Moscow, giving priority to the considerable financial interests of the City of London in Russia, and an open door for a number of powerful Russian oligarchs and personalities with bases in the UK.

Vladimir Putin, a former intelligence officer, had over the course of two decades expanded Russia's domestic and foreign intelligence services to a dimension comparable to that of the defunct Soviet Union.

As a consequence the *siloviki*—members of the country's intelligence, military, and security services, had infiltrated every branch of the Russia's power structure.

According to our Foundation's sources there were three quarters of a million men and women active in the Russian state security apparatus, all of which made the UK's comparable services risible.

Russia's vision of geopolitical strategy was based on the idea it was engaged in a permanent conflict with the West, which in turn saw Moscow as existential threat.

The lesson learnt following the collapse of the Soviet Union was that Russia could expect no quarter from the US in the

global struggle for predominance, and Washington's front line defence in that struggle—NATO and the European Union.

What would happen to the UK after it quit the EU? As one of NATO's three nuclear powers, the UK maintained a first class military machine, and thanks to the English language and the Commonwealth it projected considerable soft power backed by the financial resources of the City of London, all of which meant the UK and more precisely London would continue to remain a strategic target for the Kremlin.

It was why Russia's intelligence services maintained a strong presence in London, which according to the Foundation's source exceeded 200 handlers who managed an estimated 500 agents and many more informants, including Brits, and Russian expatriates.

Information gatherers included the Russian Trade Delegation, based in Highgate, and then Rossotrudnichestvo, the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, which had offices in Kensington and served 'Compatriots Living Abroad', as well as promoting 'International Humanitarian Cooperation'.

These agencies housed active members of the FSB, the GRU and the SVR, each of which had its own specialties, and as with all such agencies they overlapped. The FSB focused on political affairs, in particular on politically active individuals. The SVR was specialised in traditional espionage activities gathering, not only military and political intelligence secrets, but also commercial data. As to the GRU it concentrated its attention on purely military affairs.

These organisations cultivated subjects of interest, that is to say individuals who occupied, or had occupied, positions of influence and power, and had access to secrets or sensitive information.

Such persons included members of our Clan, their families and friends, certain of whom were amongst the 150,000 Russian expats that lived in Londongrad, a city where a pro-regime Russian oligarch could socialise in private with a broad spectrum of individuals with widely different agendas,

including dissidents.

Sergei warned his friends to never say anything in private that they wouldn't say in public, especially when members, or suspected members, of any one of those agencies were present. And to never say anything in public what they wouldn't like the Kremlin to hear.

Enemies included Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who had spent a decade in a Siberian prison and who now headed a pro-European political platform, Open Russia, funding opposition activists.

Of course there was also our Sergei, who had cut a deal with Moscow whereby he abstained from politics and paid lip service to Putin's regime, in exchange for his freedom.

He trod a narrow path knowing he was watched, that moles were everywhere, even in his own organisation, listening to everything said, reading every document, spying on computers and smart phones.

It was said up to half of Russian expats in London were informants. Men like Boris Berezovsky, a billionaire, who had often complained he was followed by Kremlin agents, met his death in strangest of circumstances, almost certainly a warning to those like him.

One of Putin's enemies was Bill Browder, a hedge fund manager, since transformed into human rights campaigner. Browder employed Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian tax lawyer, who was murdered in Moscow's Matrosskaya Tishina prison. Magnitsky's crime was to have stumbled a 230 million dollar tax fraud, perpetrated by a group of Russian police officials.

Browder had since campaigned to obtain justice and the prosecution of those responsible for Magnitsky's death. He accused Moscow of following him everywhere, complaining, 'At just about every public event I speak there are always one or two FSB people in the crowd. You can spot them a mile off.'

Browder was convicted in absentia by a Russian court of fraud and was sentenced to nine years imprisonment.

From time to time, John's wife, Ekaterina, observed men

outside her art gallery in London watching the coming and going of her visitors. Two or three thuggish looking types, standing there for hours, speaking in Russian and spitting the husks of sunflower seeds on the street corner. George Pyke had them followed and confirmed they were Russian agents.

Britain's political elites were targeted in a different manner, via Moscow friendly lobby groups, cultivated and invited to Russian Embassy events and celebrations, offered trips to Russia. Amongst these were Conservative Friends of Russia whose role was to influence opinion in favour of Moscow.

The Fitzwilliams Foundation was regularly a target of Russian operatives interested in think tanks, academics, commentators and journalists, those who observed Russia's geopolitical activities and the effects on markets and commodities such as metals, oil and gas.

Downing Street backed a Magnitsky Amendment to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, giving authorities the power to impose visa bans and freeze assets, whilst the National Crime Agency stepped up its crackdown on illicit wealth through the use of Unexplained Wealth legislation.

The 'unexplained wealth order', UWO, was introduced to help officials identify and seize British properties and assets suspected of having been bought by dirty money, laundered through banks and financial institutions by corrupt individuals and crime syndicates.

A UWO required persons, British or foreign, irrespective of their nationality, suspected of being linked to crime, or involved in corruption, to explain the nature and extent of their interest in particular properties, and explain how the acquisition of those properties was financed and the origin of the money used in their acquisition.

The creation of the UWO, as part of the Criminal Finance Act, would allow authorities to freeze and recover properties and other assets, if the owners were unable to explain how they acquired assets, the value of which was incompatible with their declared revenues.

The former head of MI6, the UK foreign intelligence service,

John Sawers, rightly pointed out that Vladimir Putin could feel free to treat Britain with contempt, as the UK government was about to risk all by going it alone in its Brexit adventure, just as the NATO alliance was threatened by Trumpism, a policy directed by Donald Trump, who it was said had difficulty in distinguishing between the Baltic and the Balkans, in spite of the fact his wife hailed from Slovenia, an EU nation situated in the Balkans, the region abutting Italy and Austria.

The idea of promoted by certain Brexiteers, that New Zealand, a former British Dominion, could contribute more to the UK than for example Ireland, struck me as incongruous, considering the former's geographical isolation, more than 18,000 kilometres from Europe, with a population, many of whom had their roots in Ireland, that was in fact no greater than that of the Republic of Ireland. That with idea that Australia, even with its 25 million strong population, could replace Britain's allies, France, Germany and two dozen others European nations, required a considerable exercise of backward looking Kiplingesque imagination.

The UK, which had been deeply invested in Europe and its wars, its political decisions, the succession of monarchs, suddenly decided it was not European. A cursory glance at the history of Europe showed the UK involved in every decision or conflict of importance, from the Age of Discovery, when Drake circumnavigated the globe, the second to do so 58 years after Magellan, fought with other European powers to build its empire, fought in the Spanish War of Succession, the Spanish War of Independence, leaving millions dead in foreign fields, often Irish soldiers who had accepted the King's shilling.

Of course the British people, as all other peoples, had as much right to their mythology and narratives as any other nation, however, the geometric variability that had afflicted Europe since the time of the Ancient Greeks and had given birth to the continent's unique vision of civilisation, should have been a lesson in humility to the advocates of the divisive vision that Brexit promised, in opposition to those who tried to shape a coherent destiny for the Old Continent.

The idea that Europe was simply a trade construct seemed totally alien to me, a thought shared by the other members of the Clan.

The Brexiteers and their advocates would have done well to have heeded Winston Churchill, who in a speech delivered on 19 September 1946 at the University of Zurich, concluded:

We must build a kind of United States of Europe. In this way only will hundreds of millions of toilers be able to regain the simple joys and hopes which make life worth living.

True he didn't imply being part of it, but in the face of the British Empire and its Commonwealth not lasting for a thousand years, he would have certainly seen the EU as an alternative option, illustrated by the words he spoke in July 1951 when he warned of 'disadvantages and even dangers to us in standing aloof' [of Europe].

## CHAPTER 27

### DIRTY MONEY & GOLD

*I will do such things, what they are, yet I do not know: but they  
shall be the terrors of the earth.*

King Lear - William Shakespeare

Pat Kennedy spoke of his fears and plans as Brexit loomed, he was however was too long in the tooth to see only the negative aspects of the UK crashing out of Europe. After the necessary readjustments it would soon get back to business as usual. The same thing under another name with the added advantage that the UK, alone in a more competitive world, would certainly find some new tricks.

It was the reason for his presence in Panama, a little restructuring as he called it, part of his own rather special bag of new tricks, which inevitably included tax optimisation strategies. The future of the City of London not only concerned regular banking and financial services, but would also provide a better laundromat for dirty money on the EU's doorstep, working Britain's offshore territories for all they were worth to fill the pockets of the Conservatives' Old Boys' Club.

Pat knew human nature only too well to imagine people were intrinsically honest, over two decades in international banking, not forgetting his background in company finance, accountancy and taxation, he had seen more than enough to justify his idea.

He knew that almost anyone who came into contact with money that was not his or hers, dirty or otherwise, from presidents, ministers, politicians and businessmen down to

high street solicitors and accountants, real estate agents, university and public school heads, showbiz personalities, footballers, luxury car dealers and modest shopkeepers, you and I, will be tempted at one moment or another to help themselves.

I mean just look at Jho Low, or the luckless Carlos Ghosn. Some like them would be caught with their sticky fingers in the cash register, though most would never be troubled by anything other than a twinge of conscience.

How? From tax evasion to outright theft. Justifying their actions by convincing themselves everyone does it—and they were right. Pat knew it, it was how he had gotten to where he was—rich, filthy rich, as the strange Lord had once described it.

The National Crime Agency estimated 100 billion pounds of dirty money passed through the UK each year, aided and abetted not only by banks, lawyers, accountants, estate agents and other professional enablers, but also petty criminals present in the high street economy, trafficking contraband cigarettes, laundering cash in nail bars and car washes, running gambling, prostitution and human trafficking networks, as well as supplying illicit drugs to all classes of society.

The spectrum was vast and even involved public schools, universities, museums and charitable foundations.

The temptation post-Brexit would be enormous as the UK struggled to find a new role outside of the EU, building an offshore anything goes moneymaking haven and attracting criminals of all ilk.

Pat's soul searching was interrupted when Robert Guiglion invited him to inspect at the latest haul of treasure in the wardroom.

There were a few copper *maravedies*, more silver *reales*, *escudos* and *doubloons*, but outshining all was the pile of the gold coins, glinting under the wardroom ceiling lights, as bright as the day they were minted.

The silver came in one, two, four and eight real coins, the latter, the famous pieces of eight, referred to in pirate stories

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and Hollywood movies, were large coins the weight of which varied over time, approximately one ounce, or 28 grammes, sometimes called pesos or dollars. A similar system was used for the gold coins.

‘How much silver is a gold escudo worth?’ I asked Anna.

‘Well gold was considered to be worth 10 to 12 times the value of silver, depending on the period,’ explained Anna.

The first pieces of gold hoisted on board were doubloons, strangely square or irregular in form. Anna told us these were called cobs, minted by hand from sheets hammered out of gold, or silver, then roughly cut to size and stamped with dies, weighed and surplus metal clipped off.

Pat picked one up and turned it over in his hand.



‘What about the ship, the galleon?’ he asked remembering his commitment regarding the archaeological aspect of the expedition.

‘We’re following the rules set out for underwater archaeology, in the UNESCO convention,’ Anna replied, ‘they’re strict and we must conform to their ethical guidelines, that said there’s

not much of it left, it's not like deep oxygen scarce waters in the Atlantic, or the Black Sea, that preserves wood.'

The guidelines stated no excavation should be a profit making venture and that artefacts recovered from a site not be dispersed. However, Colombia had not signed the convention, which in any case was not always realistic, or even desirable to follow, since governments and cultural institutions often lacked the human, or financial resources, needed to set up new museums and collections, or carry out scientifically controlled excavations.

Socceax's experience in Vietnam had shown the discoverers would never be able to excavate the wrecks off Hoi An and other sites for purely archaeological reasons, operations were simply too expensive.

But it was part of our undertaking that all historical and scientific data relative to the wreck and its cargo be studied, analysed and published for learned institutions and academics to use in their research. It was part of the conditions of our agreement with the Colombian government, which in exchange allowed us to keep part of the cargo, and dispose of it as we saw fit, to keep or sell, exhibit in a museum, or hoard in a Swiss vault.

It was the only realistic solution and most historians and scientists were of the same opinion, though the greatest number of people would benefit from the museum option.

Looking at the treasure Pat fretted about the dangers that came not only from Venezuela, or Russia, but from looters and treasure-hunters of all shades. The value of a single gold coin was about 1,250 dollars, for the gold alone, and to many thousands and very much more for rare coins.

'With inflation expected to reach 1,000,000,% by the end of the year in Venezuela the temptation may be too great to resist for some,' I casually remarked.

'Jesus!' exclaimed Pat.



Of course the story of Spanish gold would have been incomplete without an explanation as to its purpose, and John Francis, in his role as an economist and historian, obliged us with a condensed story, starting with Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, who argued one of the greatest changes in the economic history of the world had come with the discovery of the Americas:

The discovery of the abundant mines of America, reduced, in the sixteenth century, the value of gold and silver in Europe to about a third of what it had been before. As it cost less labour to bring those metals from the mine to the market, so, when they were brought thither, they could purchase or command less labour; and this revolution in their value, though perhaps the greatest, is by no means the only one of which history gives some account.

Silver from Mexico and Bolivia, reversed the downwards price trends of the Medieval Period when the metal had become progressively scarce affecting manufacturing and trade.

The influx of thousands of tonnes of silver caused prices to rise dramatically in Europe during the 150 years following the discovery of Potosi's riches as the flow of monetised silver increased and the volume of manufactured goods remained constant.

'When more money flows into an economic system,' John reiterated, 'purchasing power increases and people can buy more goods, but in the 16th century that did not happen because production did not increase, so what did that do?'

'Inflation,' said Anna.

'Right, with more money chasing after an unchanging volume of goods, and Europe's population growing again after the plague, prices naturally increased. In 1568, Jean Bodin, a French politician and philosopher political, pointed to the growing volume of circulating coinage as the primary cause of inflation.'

In the Americas, the situation was different, there Chinese goods were imported via the Manila Galleon trade, paid for in silver, as the Ming emperors refused the entry of European

products into China. In this way Chinese tea and manufactured goods—silk and spices, ivory, lacquer and porcelain, were exchanged for silver pieces of eight in Manila.

The arrival of this Spanish silver had a profound effect on China and other regional economies, in fact hardly any part of the world remained unaffected by this huge flow of silver money.

Spain's policies basically consisted of extending its empire and fighting off its rivals in Europe. That needed gold and more importantly silver, the production and transport of which required substantial investment, especially the building and maintenance of its vast treasure fleet. This was paid for with readily available credit, encourage by low interest rates offered by bankers who knew Spain could repay its debts with the steady flow of gold and silver from Mexico and Peru.

At the same time inflation caused by the increase of money flowing into the economy made the production of manufactured goods too expensive in Spain itself, as a consequence more and more goods were imported from the rest of Europe.

Inevitably Spain went through a series of economic crises and as the production of gold and silver fell and the burden of empire became too great, it fell into decline and its empire slowly disintegrated, as much of its silver ended up in France and England, which then replaced the Spain as dominant powers.

'So Spain found its empire in various stages of collapse as most of the silver that came out of the Americas went to the rest of Europe.'

'Right, to buy agricultural produce and the goods they did not manufacture, or not enough of them.'

'Sounds like America and China today with the fiscal stimulus and the dollar acting like Spanish gold.'

'Yes, it's an immutable cycle,' John said, adding with a wry smile, 'That's why I'm also an historian, understanding and analysing historical cycles is essential if you want to understand economics.'

They nodded in approval.

'Today we're well along in the business cycle, we've squeezed a lot out of the market and the politics of quantitative easing and low interest rates has run its course.

'Remember, our knowledge of any past event is always incomplete, vague eyewitness accounts and biased historians, and our own out of context prejudices are often determined by our xenophobic upbringings.

'Today the supply of gold is inelastic, but in the 16th century that wasn't the case. Remember the value of gold or silver as a kind of money is based on its purchasing power, not its intrinsic value, just like the dollar or euro.'

John continued explaining how the gold standard had brought about a certain stability, but if the supply of the metal quickly increased that stability would disappear, which is exactly what happened when the conquistadores started to ship large quantities of gold and silver from their rich new empire to Spain, creating what was in effect a huge monetary stimulus, which amongst other things started an inflationary cycle and financed wars in Europe. It wasn't helicopter money, but galleon money, as hundreds of sailing ships loaded with precious metals crossed the Atlantic each year, some of them carrying as much as 170 tons of silver at a time.

It was quantitative easing to the power ten.

In any case Spain's newly found wealth had a dramatic effect on its destiny, changing its economy in the same way as the silver trade between the Americas and the Chinese Ming Dynasty did between 16th and 18th centuries, all of which had a lasting effect on the world economy. In fact the silver trade brought about the beginning of the global economy with more than 40,000 tons of silver shipped from Potosi alone by the end of the 18th century.

From 1500 to 1800 Mexico and Peru produced about 80% of the world's silver, 30% of which ended up in China. That was reversed in the early decades of the 19th century, when opium use in China exploded, supplied by the British, paid for in silver, which was then recycled to buy luxury goods from

China.

Up until 1810, European nations had in total spent some 350 million Spanish silver pesos to buy porcelain, cotton, silks, brocades and tea from China in what was a one way trade in goods, which reminds of something today.

However, that situation ended when the British found a product they could sell to China, opium, produced in India. Almost overnight the flow of silver to China was reversed and by 1837 opium represented almost 60% of Chinese imports.

The Potosi mines produced the raw silver which made Spain rich, but it was the Potosi mint, that stamped the pieces of eight, that laid the foundations of the currency that was to finance world trade for over three centuries. Silver coins and bars loaded onto the backs of mules and llamas, for a two month trek over the Andes to Lima and the Pacific coast from where it was carried by galleon to Panama, then by pack animals across the isthmus to Colon, from where it was shipped across the Atlantic to Spain.

## CHAPTER 28

### SPANISH GALLEONS

The Spanish conquistadors projected their sea power in the New World with a massive military presence in the form heavily armed galleons which also served to transport treasure and cargo from the Americas to Spain.

Other European nations coveted Spain's empire and its riches especially their production of gold and silver that financed the ambitions of its kings.

Thus those powerful galleons carried the lifeblood of Spain. They were built for war, their canons aligned on each side from stern to bow, capable of firing devastating broadsides against their adversaries, however, these tall three masted multi-deck vessels were large and cumbersome, and could be outmanoeuvred by the English navy's lighter and swifter ships.

There were also the still larger Manila Galleons, which over a period of two and a half centuries, from 1565 to 1815, sailed the Pacific, linking Acapulco and Manila, two of the key ports IN Spain's New World empire.

As Pat Kennedy had learnt at Cebu, in the Philippines, Andres de Urdaneta, the Spanish navigator, had discovered the *tornaviaje*, that is the transpacific return passage from the Philippines to Mexico, opening a new trade route to the east that supplied the Americas and Spain with the luxury goods the rich craved for as witnessed by the collections of Chinoiseries that can still be seen in royal palaces from St Petersburg to Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Madrid and many other European cities.

According to Anna, the galleons were built in Spain, notably in the Atlantic maritime region of the north-west and in particular the Basque Provinces as well as Cantabria, Galicia and Asturias, all of which had important timber resources and other necessary materials including iron, sails, rope, and of

course the experienced seafaring crews to man the ships.

Then as now industry was the source of environmental problems with deforestation plaguing the shipbuilding industry, as did the production of precious metals that depended on large quantities of mercury for their extraction and much wood to fire the refining processes.

The ships were constructed from seasoned oak and other hardwoods for the hull and decking, employing carpenters, pitch-melters, blacksmiths, coopers, shipwrights, sailmakers, riggings and rope-makers, and armourers.

Galleons, like the *San José*, or the *Espiritu Santo*, weighed from 600 to over 1,000 tons, and required 1,000 and more oak trees for their construction, which represented around a third of the total raw material costs, more than the iron, sails, riggings and other fittings.

For this reason the Spanish monarchy introduced legislation specifically designed to aid shipbuilding, which required many reforestation programmes near the Basque and other shipyards.

But ships were also built in Havana, which over the course of the 17th century became the most important shipyard in the New World, where galleons up to 600 tons were built as well as other types of ships including naos or urcas of up to 300 tons. Strong tropical hardwoods, especially mahoganies, provided solid material for hulls, and cypresses for masts and spars, giving the ships a reputation for solidity and durability. However, nails, anchors, chains, pikes, bolts, tacks, spikes, keys, pins, rings and rudder pintles, cordage, tools, sailcloth, fasteners, tackle and fittings, pitch, tar, and other ships fittings, had to be imported from Spain, especially from the Basque Country.

## CHAPTER 29

### NEVIS

Situated an hour's flight from Dominica, overflying the French island of Guadeloupe, was the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, a former British colony that gained its independence in 1983 and became a member of the British Commonwealth with Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state.

Pat didn't fly in, according to him, air traffic control left too visible a footprint. We sailed in on his new yacht. I suppose you could have said that wasn't exactly discreet, but if you saw the number of super and mega-yachts anchored off Charlestown you'd realise he was just one of the crowd of the ultra-rich, or another extremely well-heeled vacationer enjoying an eye-watering charter.



Our arrival at the harbour quay aboard the cutter was just another of the daily comings and goings between the yachts anchored off the island, which was in fact nothing more than

an extinct volcano surrounded by gentle slopes and coastal flatland. It would be difficult to get lost as the island covered just under 100 square kilometres, 13 kilometres long by 10 kilometres at its widest point, with a mere 12,000 residents.

What brought Pat to Nevis was not difficult to guess, it was a visit to a branch of one of INI's Caribbean interests, an offshoot of the Anglo-Dutch Commercial Bank, originally founded by Malcolm Smeaton, in tiny taxless paradise.

It had only recently become of interest to Pat, to be exact in the wake of a series of investigations following SwissLeaks, the HSBC files, the Panama Papers, the Paradise Papers, and the City & Colonial scandal.

Following the financial crisis of 2008, when the US and European governments were forced to bail out their profligate banks, politicians launched a hue and cry, supposedly hunting down tax dodgers and tax havens, which had enabled the villains to hide hundreds of billions of dollars from their respective tax authorities. But in reality nothing was further from the truth.

The UK, one of the leading offenders with its numerous overseas territories—the economies of which survived thanks to fiscal opacity and the availability of any number of offshore screen companies, was said to have been forced to greater transparency concerning the nebulous nature of the transactions carried out on the many islands it controlled in the Caribbean.

This followed the action of the US Department of Justice in 2010, which obliged Swiss banks to lift the veil that protected their clients from the taxman, Switzerland's share of the world's offshore wealth dropped from almost half to less than a third.

In the same way the British Virgin Islands and the Channel Islands' respective banking sectors shrunk to half of their pre-crisis size. On the other hand, however, nearby St Kitts and Nevis was booming, offering a perfect alternative to tax dodgers, for the simple reason it was difficult to bring pressure

to bear on the small nation.

Tax havens had been likened to a food chain with the City of London, Switzerland and New York at the top of the chain, below them were Luxembourg, Monaco, the Cayman Islands and Panama, followed by a gaggle of third tier offshore havens such as Gibraltar, Anguilla, Cyprus, the Bahamas and Mauritius. At the very bottom of the chain was a confetti of islands and territories, on and bordering the world's oceans, like Nevis, Belize and the Cook Islands, these were bottom-feeders, specialised in the creation of the most anonymous of companies, tens of thousands of them, some of which were cited in the Paradise Papers, their ownership hidden by a labyrinth as convoluted as the sargassum that floated on the seas surrounding them.

The Premier of Nevis, Mark Brantley, a corporate lawyer, responded to the questions from the international press with, 'Why shouldn't you be entitled to a secret?'

We were greeted by Bob Campbell, manager of the INI's very discreet representative office in Nevis. I wondered what there was to keep Bob busy on such a small island. Main Street was a long series of typical two-storey buildings, typically Caribbean with their traditional balconies overlooking the seafront.

On closer inspection many of them bore name plates of lawyers, accountants and administrators, the numbers of whom outnumbered the Nevisians' needs by a huge margin. The services of these professionals were advertised on publicity plaques and panels to catch the eyes of passers-by, amongst them was Morning Star Holdings, founders of the island's offshore industry. Morning Star Holdings had the exclusivity for the creation of limited liability companies, ringfenced structures that gave total protection to the assets they owned, little or no taxes, offering their owners greater secrecy, with few regulations, thus allowing them to do what they wanted with almost total impunity.

Morning Star would set up a shell company, together with nominee directors and shareholders, a bank account and a

stock trading account, for anybody wanting a screen company, protected by a law dating back to 1985, which declared anyone on Nevis, disclosing financial information without a court order, would be liable to a prison term of up to a year, as well as a fine of 10,000 dollars.

So why did Sir Patrick Kennedy want to visit Nevis, slumming it at the bottom of the international financial system's proverbial barrel? A fiscal paradise that had afforded shelter to corrupt individuals like Ukraine's former president, Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Moscow after the Orange Revolution, using the island's structures to hide his stolen assets. Then there was the murder of Sergei Leonidovich Magnitsky, the Russian tax accountant investigating the Browder linked corruption case, where the trail started in Moscow and led to Nevis.

The simple answer was Jho Low, the former owner of Pat's yacht, who held a St. Kitts and Nevis passport since 2011, even though he had never set foot on the island nation, one which was wisely cancelled by the Prime Minister after the 1MDB scandal broke and Kuala Lumpur applied for a Red Notice to be issued by Interpol for Low's arrest for conspiring to launder billions of dollars in illegal proceeds and paying hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes to various Malaysian and Abu Dhabi officials.

Had Low laundered the stolen money through a Nevis company? It was impossible to know, but his passport certainly offered a clue.

St Kitts and Nevis was in the business of selling passports to anyone whose bank account was sufficiently garnished, people like Andrei Pavlov, a Moscow-based lawyer, who was suspected of being involved in the Magnitsky case and the theft of 230 million dollars from the Moscow city tax office. Pavlov was blacklisted by the US and banned from entering three EU member states—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but continued to travel widely throughout Europe on a St Kitts passport. The island, part of the state of St Kitts and Nevis, had its own administration responsible for the issue of

passports.

Pavlov was one of a number of suspected wrongdoers who had bought St Kitts passports, including Jho Low.

Commencing with St Kitts, Mauritius and the Seychelles, the EU had signed 27 visa waiver agreements including countries that now sell golden passports, which offer easy access to Europe and the Schengen zone for up to 90 days.

In any case neither Low, nor Nevis, were exceptions when it came to hiding money, Alphabet Inc.'s Google had moved 16 billion dollars to a Bermuda shell company, saving at least 4 billion in taxes. The procedure involved shifting revenue from an Irish subsidiary to a Dutch company with no employees, and then on to a Bermuda mailbox owned by another company registered in Ireland.

I wasn't in on Pat's secrets, perhaps he was investigating Jho Low's hidden accounts, or concocting a shell company with Bob Campbell to channel the money he ... we ... or certain Colombians would make on the *Espiritu Santo*.

John Francis saw places like Nevis as part of London's future, part of its post-Brexit toolbox. As far as he was concerned, the UK's adhesion to the EU was primarily for economic reasons, not political, and after its departure economic survival would be at the top of its priorities. 'Just looking at London's history in the Caribbean,' John reminded us, 'that alone is sufficient to understand that it had always been in conflict with the continental powers, changing sides whenever it offered an advantage.'

Now that the UK was on the way out, it would be in permanent conflict with Brussels over unfair trade, taxation and political issues, constantly sniping and trying to prise member states from the EU as its own allies.

As Frans Timmermans, Vice President of the European Commission, said, if the EU did not stand up for itself and defend itself, 'those who want to destroy it will have the upper hand.'

Europe, and the UK, stood on the brink of a transformation that was about to change the face of the world, and for once it

was not Brexit. On the one hand was technological progress, and on the other the demographic explosion of Africa.

Cities like Mombasa, Lagos, or Dar es Salam in Tanzania saw their populations multiply at an exponential rate. Dar es Salam, which was built for a population of 35,000 at the beginning on the 19th century, had exploded into a city of 7 million, and the forecast was it would by leaps and bounds reach megapolis proportions with its population reaching 15 million by 2030, then if demographers were right, 100 million by the end of the 21st century.

If Nigeria was anything to go by, with its 200 million population, forecast to reach 800 million by 2100, a wall of Trumpian proportions would be needed to protect the Old Continent, as 50% of young Nigerians declared their future lay in reaching Europe.

A problem John explained that did not concern him as he contemplated his own future. 'Death solves many things,' he said, 'it was final, there was no cancelling it, putting it off, or renegotiating it.'

## CHAPTER 30

### A LIFELINE

Pat Kennedy looked across the bay, the blue line that marked the horizon was Venezuela, a country suffering from the self-inflicted disaster of socialism. Nicolas Maduro was due to be sworn in for a second term of office as Venezuela's president, as the US vowed, during a meeting of the Lima Group—a coalition of American countries, it would not recognise him.

A recently rich oil producer, Venezuela was suffering from a deep economic crisis with severe food and medical shortages and where inflation had soared to over 1,000,000%.

The situation reminded Pat of Cuba 20 years earlier when Fidel Castro still ruled as his compatriots suffered the deprivations of over 40 bitter years of fruitless revolution. Times had changed, Fidel Castro had gone to join Che Guevara in Communism's nirvana, and Fidel's grandson flaunted the Castro family's wealth on social media as Havana celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, which had commenced full of hope under the banner of Fidel and his young bearded revolutionaries.

News that bread, eggs and other basic foods had become scarce following the Trump administration's turn of the screw, whilst globetrotting Tony Castro posted his escapades on Facebook, a regular visitor to Spain which maintained a bilateral relationship with its former colony. In Barcelona, Tony was spotted at La Sagrada Familia, then at a Mayan site in Mexico, as his compatriots in Cuba continued to suffer from repression, shortages, lies, humiliations and miseries.

The question as to who was paying for Tony's pleasure was on the tongues of many Cubans. In Miami, a journalist

commented with a quote from Orwell's *Animal Farm*, banned in Cuba, 'All the animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.'

History was repeating itself in Venezuela with endless suffering for millions, many of whom had already left their homes for Colombia and Brazil in the hope of finding a better life.

Paradoxically Pat's reflections came as he stared at the calm early morning waters from the deck of his magnificent yacht, reminding him he had come a long way since his dangerous adventure in Cuba, meeting el Lider Maximo himself in the strangest of circumstances back in 2000.<sup>3</sup>

Across the Gulf of Venezuela on the Paraguana Peninsula was the Amuay oil refinery, one of the world's largest, supplying in happier times up to 13% of the oil and gasoline imported into the USA. Incredibly a little investigation, by the Fitzwilliams Foundation, revealed that in spite of the rhetoric between Washington and Caracas, Venezuela was the majority shareholder in the Citgo Lake Charles oil refinery in Louisiana, situated half way between New Orleans and Houston.

Citgo was in fact a subsidiary of the Venezuelan government national oil company *Petroleos de Venezuela*. Over 6,000 US employees worked at the giant refinery which was linked to the Gulf of Mexico by the Calcasieu River ship channel. Tankers carried 175,000 barrels a day of Venezuelan crude up the channel to the Citgo refinery, which in turn supplied thousands of American filling stations with gas.

In parallel tankers loaded with 30,000 barrels of refined products sailed back to the Gulf and across the Caribbean to Venezuela supplying the country with gasoline.

The traffic provided a life line for Venezuela, exporting crude and importing gasoline, providing a steady flow of dollars to Maduro's desperate government. In fact it was so desperate it had mortgaged the refinery to meet the payments of government bonds, obligations and compensation for the businesses and industries it had nationalized.

John Francis warned us, 'A few billion dollars of gold from

## The Cargo Club

the *Espiritu Santo* would be a gift from heaven for Maduro, it'll give him vital breathing space, the means to ward off his creditors, because the loss of Citgo would be the coup de grâce for Petroleos de Venezuela, a fatal blow to Maduro's regime.

'Petroleos has huge debts and won't be able to meet the payments due of nearly a billion dollars to their bond holders and any failure to do so will result in the seizure of the collateral, that's to say the 51.1% of the shares of Citgo Holdings, which effectively owns the refinery.'



'In other words Venezuela would lose its American refinery,' said Pat.

'Not so quick, there's a hitch, and a big one.'

Pat looked at Sergei.

'Tell them Sergei,' said John.

'Well, the other half of the shares, 49,9% to be precise, is owned by Rosneft, Vladimir Putin's milk cow, the Russian oil and gas company.'

Pat closed his eyes and sighed. 'That means Rosneft could get partial control of the company.'

'I don't know, I can't see Washington allowing a Russian state owned company to take a piece of the action in the refinery.'

'Ah, that explains the INI Amsterdam briefing,' announced Pat brightening up.

They all turned their attention to him.

‘We’re financing a project in Aruba.’

Olivier de la Salle looked blank.

‘Aruba Olly, that’s a Dutch Caribbean island off the coast of Venezuela. Petroleos refines a quarter of its oil at plants owned or leased on the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao and St. Eustatius.

‘How Come?’

‘Well, Venezuela’s oil is extremely heavy and needs to be mixed with lighter imported oil to meet the quality requirements of its buyers and they do this in those offshore refineries.

‘I see, but...’

‘Our bank is partly Dutch, we have an important European base in Amsterdam, that is besides the City of London, which is unfortunately about to quit the EU,’ he explained.

Olly didn’t know about the Dutch connection.

‘By the way, it was I who engineered the merger with the Amsterdam bank with my late friend Michael Fitzwilliam in 2002,’ Pat boasted glowing with pride.

‘Aruba is part of the Netherlands, entirely governed from Amsterdam, though there is of course a local authority,’ John explained.

‘Ah, interesting,’ said Olivier de la Salle thinking of his Van Goghs back in Sommières.

‘Yes, you see there’s an oil refinery on Aruba, which has been shut down since 2012, unprofitable. So to get around US sanctions, Citgo is planning to start it up again after revamping, and that’s where we came in with a financing package,’ Pat told Olly.

Petroleos de Venezuela was under pressure to gain access to a Caribbean terminal, or another refinery, after the US oil company ConocoPhillips began seizing Petroleos’ overseas assets,

The problem was all of Citgo was pledged to a whole list of lenders and disgruntled creditors and the only solution was to sell off the shares of Citgo to the highest bidder to meet its

obligations.

Venezuela's corrupt and inefficient oil industry was a vital asset as it accounted for about 95% of the country's export earnings. Accusations flew as officials were suspected of corruption in the setting up the joint venture between Petroleos and Gazprom—another Russian company. The fear was other creditors would seize other Venezuelan assets abroad, in an attempt to recover more than 40 billion dollars they claim they were owed.

Law suits had been restrained up to that point as many creditors, in spite of the fact that Venezuela was technically in default on its debts, hoped that Maduro would eventually pay the country's debts.

The trouble was there were too few assets and too many debts, and creditors feared that if they waited too long the cupboard would be bare.

It all hinged around a ruling as to whether Citgo and Petroleos were legally the same as the Venezuelan government or not. If it was, then the assets of those companies would become legitimate targets for creditors and Petroleos could see its tankers and oil shipments seized.

Meanwhile Gazprom with its arrangements in Venezuela continued to use the City of London as a centre for its murky deals.

The City remained a safe haven for the world's dirty cash in spite of denials that it laundered money which echoed like Moscow's denials its agents were carrying out subversive missions in the UK.

Unexplained wealth laws were turned into a farcical charade when it was revealed in a divorce court proceedings the wife of an Azerbaijani banker—jailed for fraud at home, was living like a Saudi princess in London, owning multimillion pound properties in Belgravia, a Gulfstream jet, an Ascot golf course and a mind boggling account at Harrods. The properties as well as the jet were owned by offshore companies in Guernsey and the British Virgin Islands.

Even worse, in the face of all that evidence, the first enquiry

carried out under the new act was a simply demand that required her to explain the source of the money that supported of her extravagant life style.

In contrast high profile tax dodgers were successfully prosecuted in the US and European countries.

It was estimated that over 20 trillion dollars of dirty money was hoarded in various forms in offshore tax havens including hundreds of billions of dollars siphoned out of Russia though London banks since the dissolution of the USSR, making the UK, which owns the greater part of the world's tax havens, most of which were British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean, an accessory to the crimes.

Evidently Brexit, with the UK a fiscal paradise on the EU's doorstep, would shore up the City as the world's leading centre for money laundering, with legitimate investors quitting London for Amsterdam, Frankfurt or Paris.

The City of London made the infamous pirates, corsairs, privateers and buccaneers of the Caribbean look like amateurs, as it pursued its long history, that is to say an institution licensed by the authorities to prey on the unwary—British and other taxpayers.

3 See the author's Offshore Islands

## CHAPTER 31

# LONDON INTERLUDE

*It is unfair to thrust on to unqualified simpletons the responsibility to take historic decisions of great complexity*

Richard Dawkins

The year had opened on a pessimistic note as a severely polarised UK headed towards Brexit and its enemies were poised to take advantage of the dilemma it faced in its decision to go it alone. Among those who rejoiced at the dislocation of the EU was Russia, which had used amongst other resources Russian television channels, registered, broadcasting and retransmitting from London programmes filled with relentless, hard-lined, propaganda against the UK and the EU.

The Fitzwilliams Foundation and other respected research institutions such as Chatham House had warned of the enemy inside the gates with NTV Mir and Ren TV openly broadcasting brazen lies.

John Francis and his team at the Foundation had warned that unlike the softer version of news produced by RT, Russia Today, those other channels retransmitted unequivocally targeted propaganda programmes from Russia into the EU, thanks to the British broadcasting licences held by Baltic Media Alliance, a company registered in central London.

The Kremlin rubbed its hands at the spectacle of confusion at government and parliamentary levels in London, a farce not seen within living memory, with no consensus about the way ahead, which seemed to produce little fears amongst the Brexiteers bent on leaving the EU, deal or preferably no deal at all.

Britain, according to Geoffrey Cox the UK's attorney general,

would come to life after Brexit, and quoted Milton's *Areopagitica* to push his dream:

Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: Methinks I see her as an Eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazl'd eyes at the full midday beam.

As Pat Kennedy remarked, 'the poor wee feeker had been at the magic mushrooms again.'

Personally I preferred Churchill's description of a floundering government, one which had 'decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent.'

What happened next in London was anyone's guess. The UK in a moment of madness had allowed its enemies, notably Russia, to manoeuvre it into a trap, Brexit, by dangling a chimera in the eyes of age sodden and jingoistic voters—sovereignty, as if the UK wasn't already a sovereign nation, in control of its own destiny. Suddenly it risked finding itself with less friends in an ever more complex, dangerous and less comprehending world.

Theresa May persisted in digging the hole deeper, after declaring the UK was seeking a special new partnership with Europe, its closest ally over the proceeding five decades, then going behind its partners backs to plot, divide, deceive and try to inflict pain on the Union. Trust was gone, the EU could no longer have confidence in London, for multiple reasons, the first of which was the UK no longer spoke with one voice.

It was like going back to the reign of Elizabeth I, where Buckingham, Norfolk and other Lords fought it out, in plots and counter plots, as scheming continental princes connived to bend the Kingdom of England to their will.

Since the vote to quit the EU, London had imagined it could play one country off against the other, bypassing the European Commission, endlessly demanding special advantages that neither members or non-members enjoyed, ignoring the problem of Northern Ireland where the risk of

sectarian violence was always present.

May had ignored Ireland until she threw away her parliamentary majority in a miscalculated election ploy, then bribed a small rather extremist party, the DUP, to save her government.

The truth was Britain's strategic importance was slowly being eroded. The UK's global role continued thanks to its close relationships with continental Europe and the Washington. First it was in a growing acrimonious divorce process, and second had distanced itself from Washington, becoming a target of Donald Trump's irascible ire.

Britain had lost an empire and now as it wavered was becoming a growing cause of concern to its friends.

Pat was worried about London property, but the bank was better prepared for any downturn than it had been in the past. INI had learned to live with the ups and downs of property in different markets and its position as a global player enabled it to switch investments whenever a market soured.

Sarah Kavanagh had briefed Pat on London's ghost towers after developers withdrew luxury flats from the market as offers to buy took on an unrealistic turn. It reminded Pat of China's ghost cities, those that haunted Beijing, which lived in the hope theirs would one day become viable thriving centres for China's emerging middle classes.

The latest victim was London's iconic Centre Point, a 33 storey former office block that had been converted into apartments in 2015, only half of which had been sold with offers to buy coming in much below the list prices.

It was a similar story with The Shard, where penthouse apartments worth up to 50 million pounds were still sitting empty 6 years after the tower was completed.

Investors were put off by the prospect of tax increases on foreign buyers which had created an atmosphere of uncertainty, not a good augur considering the wildly optimistic plans for new high-rises across the capital with half of London's new luxury homes failing to find buyers, in spite of offering luxury amenities such as private gyms, cinemas and

swimming pools.

Pat's attitude was a wait and see approach, he was becoming wiser, better spend his energy on diversification into new fields, art and archaeology with an eye on posterity—his future legacy. The kind of ephemeral towers that could be seen from Dubai to Singapore that would soon be replaced by yet more glass towers, empty or not. Men like Sir Patrick Kennedy could not afford hasty moves, it was often better to look the other way, wait until the storm passed, a steady hand was needed at the wheel of a large international Banking corporation in an uncertain world.

The fact remained that there were many absent landlords in London high rises—a sure sign that a large number of such properties were bolt holes for their wealthy foreign owners, many of whom were neither registered nor permanent UK residents.

To Brexit or not to Brexit left that kind of investor in Limbo, after all their idea was not to find themselves trapped in their bolt hole. As far as Pat was concerned his new yacht, *Las Indias*, could always pull up anchor and move on if the local environment got too hot, though it didn't do Jho Low any good, but then he was a crook, Pat had told John—who gently reminded him one could be quickly fall out of favour in places like China or Russia, where those who stepped out of line were never more than a short step away from trumped up criminal justice charges.

He pointed to Fan Bingbing, a leading star of the Chinese cinema, who after mysteriously disappearing from view resurfaced with an apology, in which she wholeheartedly accepted the financial penalties for her wrongdoings, declaring 'without the good policies of the state, without the support from the people, there would be no Fan Bingbing,' tearfully adding, 'I have failed my country which has nurtured me and I have failed the trust society has bestowed on me.'

In the meantime I found myself at the Irish Embassy in Paris applying for a passport. The fact was I had always held a British passport, it had been an easy option when I went to the

US to study journalism. I had been born in London and had a British birth certificate, as a student I saw it as a simple way to avoid the kinds of administrative problems that seem to crop up with a different passport, even if it didn't seem strange to me.

I had never doubted my Irish roots, but now I had to prove to the Irish government that I was indeed Irish.

The embassy was on avenue Foch, a stone's throw from the Arc de Triumph, the consulate was situated in a less glamorous side street behind a forbidding *porte cochère* on rue Rude, and the passport section in a bunker like basement, where poker faced officials behind what was probably bullet proof glass windows processed applications without wasting too much breath on words.

Armed with my birth certificate, my father's birth certificate, and my parents marriage certificate, and a very summary form I had filled in, together with passport photographs, I was informed all was in order, in a few weeks my passport would be delivered by the post. All of which would avoid me being declared persona non grata by the French authorities and the EU when and if Brexit was finally concluded.

## CHAPTER 32

### UNLIKELY MOUNTAINEERS

The news that Colombia was investing in the development of palm oil in regions formerly controlled by the Farc, which had been devoted to the cultivation of coca the primary ingredient for the production of cocaine, reminded Scott Fitznorman of his expedition to Mount Kinabulu in Borneo with HG some months before.

The Tanjung Aru Beach was a luxury resort hotel in the West Malaysian State of Sabah, situated on the northern tip of Borneo. It lay in a luxuriant landscaped garden of twenty five acres, facing the South China Sea, 120 kilometres from the 4,100 meter high Mount Kinabulu.

It was not Scott's first visit to Sabah. He had made a few brief trips from Hong Kong or Singapore to check out the local ethnic art dealers, but had never gone further than the capital, Kota Kinabulu. He remembered reading in a guide book that Sabah was about the size of Ireland, but that was where the similarity abruptly ended, with only a few thousand kilometres of surfaced roads and most of its million or so population living in and around its sparsely scattered towns and villages, the rest was a dense mountainous jungle.

HG had booked them into the beach resort hotel which was surrounded by dense tropical jungle. Only 60 or 70 years earlier head-hunters had roamed the same jungle in search wild bearded pigs, flying squirrel, gibbons and clouded leopards.

He planned to spend a long weekend relaxing with HG, a break from his business and the work in Brunei. Their programme included a trip to the Kinabulu National Park, and the ascent of Gunung Kinabulu, along a trail that was popular

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with the better off tourists, who were still young and strong enough to make the one and a half day climb. Every month hundreds undertook the adventure along the southern approach. HG had reserved beds for the night in the mountain lodge at 3,500 metres where they would pause before tackling the final ascent early the following morning.

Seen from Kota Kinabulu the summit of the mountain resembled a formidable castellated rampart of bare rock, the lower slopes covered with dense tropical forest, where it rained every day and by nine the summit was shrouded by thick cloud. HG had told Scott that for the Kadzans the mountain was the home to the spirits of their ancestors. To the other side of the mountain was Low's Gully, a precipitous valley that had been carved into the mountains in a bygone Ice Age, plunging down in a sheer 1,700 metre drop, named after the British army officer who first climbed the mountain in 1851.



Scott had arrived in the thriving capital of the state, Kota Kinabulu, after a two and a half hour flight in the first class comfort of a Singapore Airlines Airbus. The city was formerly known as Jesselton, after the vice chairman of the Chartered

Company, Sir Charles Jessel, who had founded the settlement in 1897. Before independence it had been a quiet unimposing town when Sabah was a British Crown Colony, then, in 1967, it joined the newly formed Federation of Malaysia.

Scott was picked-up by HG at the airport in a specially built Proton X70, an SUV, the pride of Malaysian industry, constructed by a joint venture firm, partly owned by Mitsubishi. The silver metallic X70 was a special, designed for rough and ready roads and the jungle trails of the mountainous state. It was a status symbol by local standards, where most vehicles were also SUVs, imported Nissans or Toyota Landcruisers.

The people of Sabah was composed of many ethnic groups with more than 100 languages. They were different from those of the Malaysian Peninsula. There were Proto-Malays, Deutero-Malays, but for the most part Kadzans, who were more closely related to the Chinese as a race, having migrated from the north in the distant past. There were also the Murats, who still hunted the teeming wild pig in the depths of the rain forest with blowpipes. Then there were Bajaus who were sea gypsies, whilst the Illanuns were freebooters. Finally there was the ubiquitous overseas Chinese population.

Most of the city dwellers had been Christianised as a result of the British presence that had commenced in the 19th century. This gave them a very different outlook on life compared to that of their fellow countrymen in Kuala Lumpur.

Over the previous decades Kota Kinabulu, or KK as HG called it, had been transformed by resource development projects based on agriculture, timber and minerals, with the capital mushrooming into a city of 450,000 inhabitants. It was a strange mix of old timber structures, some on stilts, and modern buildings along the sea shore at the foot of the steep green hills.

The skyline of Kota Kinabulu was dominated by a 30 story building in the form of a multi-faceted tower, which housed the Sabah Foundation, financed by timber royalties, a monument that would certainly outlast the rainforests of the

state.

The next day they set out before day break with a light early morning breeze refreshing the air. They were driven in the X70 towards the jagged crown of Gunung Kinabulu, which was surrounded by a white halo of clouds. The mountain had been named long ago by the Kadzans, as Akin Nabalu, or the home of the departed spirits, who they believed lived on its peaks. Gunung Kinabulu was the highest mountain between the Himalayas and the mountains of Papua New Guinea.

The road to the first town, Tamparuli, about 50 kilometres to the north was good, crossing a flat landscape of rice fields and scattered small farms, where water buffaloes waited patiently in the fields to start the day's work.

The fields then gave way to tall imperata grass and then to the forest, where they saw the enormous hardwood dipterocarps that rose up to 80 meters into the sky. They left the road for a forest trail, the dense canopy of the surrounding forest projecting outwards above them like a roof, almost blocking out the light of the sun. Gradually they started the climb over the rough trail that wound up the mist covered foothills towards Mount Kinabulu, which towered over the National Park.

They abandoned the mud splattered Proton and HG's driver in an eerie mist at the base camp, where they met the guide who was to accompany them on their climb to the summit. Though it would be physically demanding, the climb was by no means comparable to alpinism, requiring no other material than thick waterproof clothing and sturdy climbing boots.

With their rucksacks comfortably settled on their shoulders, they started their long ascent to the lodge up a stairway of damp slippery logs set into the dark rich earth. The humidity and the weight of the rucksacks soon left them streaming with perspiration, their guide who walked at a brisk pace, left them no choice but to do likewise.

As they progressed Scott got the feeling that they were in a gigantic greenhouse-like zoo. The air was filled with a cacophony of strange sounds, there were myriads of insects,

and the shrill cries of unseen birds hung in the heavy air.

Streams tumbled down over green moss covered boulders. An odour of damp earth and rotten vegetation hung suspended in the air and shafts of light fell like columns of clouded glass through the dark shadows of the forest contrasting with the dark pillars of the giant hardwoods.

The going was hard as they climbed towards the lodge a further 1,500 meters above them amongst the clouds at Panar Laban Hut. On either side was an impenetrable thicket of undergrowth, but from time to time, when the mist cleared, they caught a glance of the jungle covered valleys that lay below.

They climbed breathing the air saturated with a multitude of smells borne by the mist, whilst around them the forest changed from rainforest to montane forest, then bamboo and temperate forest, followed by heath forest and aerial moss gardens. They could not see more than 10 or so metres into the forest where giant epiphytes, orchids, mosses and ferns clung to the trees in a strange beauty, the finally crossing an alpine forest decorated with bright flowers.

Night was falling when they reached the lodge, Panar Laban Hut, an aluminium cabin at 3,500 metres altitude. They felt the chill, which soon seemed to penetrate to their bones, it was not extremely cold, but compared to the heat of the day at lower altitudes the temperature difference seemed enormous.

They dined simply without exchanging more than a few phrases, the fatigue of the day's efforts was having its effect. Their tiny room was rudimentary with two single wooden beds, one of which they abandoned for the soothing bodily warmth and comfort that they found as they clung together.

'Are you cold?'

'Not now.'

'Imagine what we have seen today without the trees, like in the Philippines, or the barelands in Kalimantan.'

'Yes.'

'Our children's future! For what! For chop sticks, pampers and palm oil, we have to stop it.'

'I know,' he said, too weary to enter into a philosophic discussion on the survival of the rain forest, let alone children which were not part of his immediate plans.

It was just before three in the morning, with the dim light of their torches reflecting on the thick mist carpeting the surrounding vegetation, when they set out for a four hour climb, the last couple of hundred or so meters hauling themselves up hand over hand on fixed ropes up a wide grey valley, where cold naked granite broke through the brown sandstone. The glistening slopes looking like the crackled back of a gigantic saurian rising up to the barren summit of the mountain where patches of mist and cloud carried by gusts of icy wind swiftly crossed the harsh landscape.

As daylight broke they could make out the distant coast line to the north-west and islands lying in the South China Sea, to the south and east was the endless form of the dark green mountain ranges that continued to the horizon, and to their backs was Low's Gully.

The locals believed that a dragon lived in the gully guarding a giant pearl. HG pressed herself against Fitznorman for warmth. It was easy for him to imagine how the locals had created their myths in such an awe inspiring and strange place. Their guide warned them of the treacherous edge of the gully around which the summit formed a crescent shaped lip of about half a kilometre around the gully that plunged through the clouds towards the tree line ready to swallow the unwary.

'Your fellow country man, Hugh Low, toasted the Empire with port wine from this point, followed by of generations of climbers doing the same, leaving a mountain of broken glass behind them.'

Scott shrugged, he wasn't going to be blamed for the sins of Empire builders and past generations, and in any case he was Irish, the unwilling foot soldiers of the English imperialists, he thought to himself weakly.

'If the palm oil companies continue at the same rate as today in 10 or 15 years what you can see below will be like this, naked, dead!' HG said waving into the cold air at the fuzzy

blue mist covered green carpet that lay far into the distance below them.

'You can imagine for yourself what that will mean for the future of our people—humanity. Palm oil goes into everything from cookies to soap and lipstick, and even biofuel and parts for our car.'

It was true the fruit of the oil palm tree contained one of the world's cheapest and most multi-purpose of all vegetable oils.

In 20 years its production had quadrupled. Scott had seen it grow to over 60 million tons and it would quadruple again by 2050, consuming vast tracts of rainforest.

'We in Malaysia together with Indonesia are the biggest producers, the rest comes from Brazil and a handful of other countries in South America,' HG insisted.

Scott could only nod.

'Sabah, is part of Malaysia, but its also part of Borneo, my island, which is being destroyed. First logging, then palm oil, one of the biggest disasters created by man in such a short space of time.'

Palm oil was to Malaysia and Indonesia like oil and gas was to Brunei and produced huge natural wealth. The only trouble was, the forests, destroyed for oil palm plantations, were among the most carbon-rich on the planet, and the fires that burnt the forest to create plantations, released vast quantities of stored carbon into the atmosphere. That with continued deforestation spelt disaster for future generations.

Strangely the oil palm was not an indigenous species to Borneo, it was introduced to Malaysia in the 19th century by the British from the Cameroons in Africa, in the same way as rubber trees were introduced from Brazil.

It was the equatorial climate that has contributed to the development of oil palm plantations making year round production possible, thanks to the palm's exceptionally efficient photosynthesis and low soil preparation needs, on top of which it produced a higher yield per hectare than any other oil bearing plant.

'Did you know the fires light to clear natural forests and

create land for more palm plantations represent most of the greenhouse gas emissions in Indonesia and Malaysia.’

‘No I didn’t, but but what I do know is galloping the demographic growth over the last thirty or forty years has more than doubled here and in your neighbouring countries.’

HG frowned.

‘That too has contributed to the destruction of the natural habitat of some of the planets rarest animals, Sumatran tigers and rhinos and the orangutans of Borneo and lesser known species.’

Scott looked out to the horizon, swaying uneasily in the wind as the vastness of nature sucked at him drawing him into the infinite space. He felt the fingers of latent agoraphobia reaching out, his ancestors had not bequeathed him with genes adapted to high altitudes.

HG drew close to him sensing his unease and communicating her own anxieties. Fitznorman understood, but could only nod weakly.

‘Let’s start down, it’s cold here,’ he said.

‘Let’s do that, we can have some coffee at the lodge before we start the descent.’

## CHAPTER 33

### PARIS

Pat Kennedy had recently acquired a *pied-à-terre* at 58, rue François 1er, just off the Champs-Élysées, in the 8th *arrondissement* of Paris. The apartment was at the very top end of the property market with its 200 square metres of living space, situated on the first floor overlooking the elegant street below and its highly expensive boutiques. He had furnished it in a vague version of Louis XIV style, not really bad taste, but rather a vague Parisian style in the vein of what he had seen at the homes of people like Olivier de la Salle.

I glanced around the apartment and could not help thinking that it was not bad for stopovers. Scott Fitznorman had installed himself in an undersized elaborately carved armchair, it was upholstered with the kind of tapestry that some Parisians seemed to appreciate, making it difficult to adjust his solid form to its unergonomic contours.

In armchair's twin facing him sat Pat, curiously his equally solid figure seemed to mould in with natural ease, his left leg hooked over his right knee.

Paul Bazanerie, a very in vogue architect, very much the shortest of the four of us, sat bolt upright on a sofa next to me.

The walls were decorated with oil paintings, some of which were by celebrated artists and others less so, all in stylish frames with subtle lighting. In one corner stood what at first sight appeared to be a huge incongruous black aquarium, though after a moment I realised it was a TV screen.

I was an observer in a certain manner of speaking, more likely because Pat wanted a friend, though by now he had become very friendly with Scott thanks to their common interest in high Asian art, antiquities and what they called ethnic collectables. Pat had invited us to dinner that evening to discuss Scott's project in Brunei, which included not only the

construction of a museum, but also a documentary film, television and publishing rights, not forgetting the question of finance.

It was one of what I call Pat's pet projects, his inevitable venture into main stream philanthropy like many other rich men seemed to get into at one point or another.

After finishing our drinks Pat announced it was time to leave for the restaurant. We took the broad stairway to the ground floor into a high arched coach entrance, one side leading into a courtyard, the other to a large glass and wrought iron door. Pat gave a casual commentary on the history of the building, announcing it had been constructed about 135 years previously at the time when Baron Haussmann had remodelled Paris. He talked with detached pride, rather like a nobleman describing the details of his demeure, pointing to the entrance that had served for the horse driven coaches of the rich owners that led to the stables and servants quarters at the back of the courtyard.

They crossed rue François 1er and walked down rue de la Tremoille to a corner restaurant.

'Good family cuisine,' Pat told them.

Modest families, I thought cynically.

Bazanerie smiled in polite admiration for Kennedy's choice.

'I come here in the evening for dinner when I'm in Paris, it saves making a mess in the flat,' Pat said with a laugh—not that he cooked or cleaned up, he had a cook and a maid to do that.

Scott sat next to Paul Bazanerie along a wood panelled wall facing the dining room with Pat opposite them. Pat insisted they take another drink and the waiter took their orders, a Bloody Mary for Scott, Kirs for Bazanerie and myself, and a Perrier for Pat, then handed us the menus.

'So here's to our good health and sunken treasure,' said Kennedy lifting his glass with the others following suit.

'As I agreed with Scott in Hong Kong, INI will be sponsoring the archaeological and scientific work in Brunei. Apart from the historical aspects it will be a very good public

relations operation for us.'

Scott smiled approvingly.

'So Paul, Scott tells me you have designed several museums.'

'That's right, we've been fortunate enough to work with the Louvre and have designed a number of regional museums here in France and for their overseas joint ventures.'

'Excellent, as you know my family's foundation is interested in sponsoring a number of projects here in France, in Sommières, in Colombia,' adding as an afterthought, 'and Hong Kong of course.'

It was the first I'd heard about Pat's family foundation.

Bazanerie smiled with pleasure, it was not everyday he met a budding philanthropist with the same means as Pat Kennedy.

Pat was being true to form as were his pairs, the über-rich.

The waiter hovered behind Pat waiting for the orders, we looked down the menu then cross checked with each other as if to be sure that we were on the same wave length.

'Foie gras poêlé, I can recommend it, it's prepared here by the chef,' said Pat with pride

The waiter noted three *foie gras* and a *Coquille St Jacques* for Bazanerie followed by the main courses and handed Pat the wine list.

'What would you like, I mean is red OK?'

'Red is perfect.' replied Bazanerie.

'Good, I always drink red, a Medoc, perhaps you'd like a Sauternes with your *Coquille St Jacques*?'

'A Medoc will be fine.'

Kennedy ordered the wine and the waiter left.

The evening clients were part of the smart set that the quarter attracted, from fashion houses and expensive boutiques, from the nearby television studios of Cognac Jay, and wealthy residents. At one table a fifty plus beau entertained his young mistress a flashy dark girl who I guessed was Moroccan.

They changed the subject with Pat and Paul Bazanerie discovering common interests, they were both into golf as a business and were land owners, though the Frenchman was

not in Pat's category as far as wealth went. He had inherited a large, but run down family farm bordering the Basque country, which he had transformed into a golf club. Pat had invested in an exclusive golf club in Limerick. In a sense they were weekend farmers acting out the popular myth of the gentlemen farmer, but neither had the time, nor the real desire, to be anything more than a weekend gentleman, whenever it suited them.

Pat was pleased with his meeting as he could now inform the partners in his projects he had taken a renowned architect on board to prepare designs for his prospective museums.



A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Brunei Museum, represented by its director Hassan bin Gossin, and Scott Fitznorman, representing the consortium formed to explore and salvage the wreck. The key point of discussion was to whom would belong the artefacts recovered?

It was finally agreed that the National Museum would get 30%, of each quality tranche, the remainder going to the consortium backed by INI with an obligation to provide a descriptive record of all items disposed of.

The cargoes of such wrecks often consisted of large numbers of similar goods, normally more than enough to satisfy the need of museums and specialised collections, and once the historical content of a wreck was scientifically recorded and documented, the sale of salvage company's agreed share was generally speaking justified.

The MOU determined Soceaex would carry out the salvage work, Scott Fitznorman's firm, Asia Galerie SA—experts in antiquities, would take care of the sales, and an INI Hong Kong investment unit designated as the financial partner.

It seemed a complicated arrangement, but when it came to commissions and payments to Joe Hamza's friend, not to mind the sale of the artefacts on the international market, it was never unwise to take too many precautions.

Soceaex was officially approved by the Brunei authorities, on the basis of their impeccable credentials, notably work around the coasts of Vietnam and Malaysia, where the firm was certified by the respective cultural authorities of those countries to carry out archaeological exploration and excavation of ancient wrecks in their waters.

Thus the agreement signed with the Brunei authorities allowed the consortium to keep 70% of all recovered artefacts including antique porcelain, pottery and bronzes, which could be sold with export permits issued by the Brunei National Museum, necessary for the importation of the objects into other countries requiring a certified export license from the country of origin.

The terms of the agreement required the consortium members to work in close co-operation with the Brunei Department of Museums and Antiquities to excavate the site, recovering the junk's cargo, inventorying the artefacts and treating them for protection against the effects of the atmosphere after the centuries spent beneath the sea. In addition they were to present architect's plans for the future museum, monographs, proposals for events and exhibitions and compile catalogues. Further they would produce archaeological reports and provide training for selected Bruneian personnel in matters of archaeology, conservation and scientific reporting systems.

What a well financed programme together with technically qualified partners offered was its legal and scientific approach. Soceaex with its team headed by Robert Guiglion was composed of experienced professional divers, with the participation of accredited archaeologists and experts well versed in recognised systematic procedures to carry out their work.

It was calculated that the junk's cargo could be fully recovered during the dry season, that is a three or four month campaign, then on completion of research and restoration work, a series of exhibitions would be planned to present the collection, first in Brunei, followed by a tour of selected

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international museums.

The archaeological survey of the vessel's structure, included measuring and drawing plans so that every detail of the ship was recorded, together with its position of the seabed, dating and describing its cargo and stowage spaces.

Finally a certificate of deposit of 250.000 Brunei dollars was to be issued by INI to the International Bank of Brunei as a guaranty, along with a list of equipment to be imported, the names and CVs of all archaeologists, certified divers and other personnel together with the necessary applications for their temporary work permits addressed to the relevant government departments.

## CHAPTER 34

### SHARING THE SPOILS

The Irishness of our Clan had one weakness, more than one in fact, starting with Sergei Tarasov, who was Russian, then John's wife who was also Russian, and Pat's wife a Chinese citizen. That was not all, there was also Tom's wife, Lola, who was Colombian, and now there was Liam's new wife, Camille who was French. In fact by marriage the Clan was anything but Irish, more like the United Nations.

Our Russian connection was often mentioned in the press, which not only thrived on mysteries and plots, with stories of the rich following closely. The combined wealth of our Clan ran into many billions and our life styles, in spite of our efforts to the contrary, always attracted attention, how could we avoid it, when Pat sailed into a star studded Caribbean port on *Las Indias*, or Sergei on his yacht the *Cleopatra*?

The combined wealth of our Clan was greater than that of many small nations whose influence was courted by politicians and movements of all shades. We, as part of the top 0.1%, had seen our income grow, four times faster than that of the top 1% whose income had grown handsomely. The World Inequality Report 2018 showed that between 1980 and 2016 the poorest 50% of humanity got only 12 cents in every dollar of global income growth. By contrast, the top 1% captured 27 cents of every dollar.

The world was a very unequal place, with that same 1% owning half of its wealth, it had always been like that and it was not about to change, as Yuval Noah Harari remarked, 'While the Pharaoh sat in his palace eating grapes and dallying with his mistresses his subjects slaved building pyramids and working fields.'

And the Clan would certainly continue to enjoy ever growing wealth as we were now part of the elite, the ruling class. It would take a change of cataclysmic scale to change the iron rule by which the rich got richer and the poor were doomed to hungry and misery.

It was undeniable possibility, the caste to which we belonged, could use the wealth and the technological tools it possessed to manipulate and wield power for the better or worse.

That brought us to the question of sharing the spoils of the *Espiritu Santo*, we with our wealth under the banner of Pat Kennedy had undertaken what Colombia could not, giving us the right to half of the haul, worth at a guess four to five billion dollars, the other half would go to the government and the building of a museum.

There was no question as how the loot was to be shared, just the pleasure in the participation in an historical adventure—to what other use could we put the money, in any case it was not as if we were in need of more.

Together in the conference room of *Las Indias* our Clan was assembled to listen to John Francis, who had been given the task of presenting the options the future offered.

Money was no longer a question, collectively the mega-rich now controlled vast economic wealth, which could be translated into power, but to what end? That 0.1% was spread across the planet, in European banks, in Russian oil, gas and minerals, in Chinese businesses, and in Caribbean offshore havens. The rich had the attention of politicians, who, contrary to them, were for the most part transient, ephemeral, the former were protected by the simple fact they were supranational, their power was such, a sell order, or a withdrawal of credit, could undermine many of the planet's most powerful industrial firms or producers of raw materials, and above all their allegiance was to themselves—that is ourselves.

Men like Jack Besos, or Richard Branson, invested in space exploration, Elon Musk dreamt of colonising Mars, Larry Page and Sergei Brin pursued that Holy Grail—eternal life, Bill

Gates dedicated his vast wealth to philanthropy, whilst Mark Zuckerberg discovered God, tried to refashion Facebook, and searched for purpose.

The Fitzwilliam Foundation—the moral conscience of the Clan, had come to the damning conclusion that the world they lived in was doomed, it was the prey of overpopulation, diminishing resources, pollution, climate change, war, poverty, the destruction of wildlife and the unbridled ambitions of certain of its leaders. In short humanity was the victim of itself and its creation—the Anthropocene.

Little-by-little, the Foundation became a tool that that could form opinions, influence politicians, businesses and even the general public. Its reports and analysis of geopolitical trends had gained weight after its foresight had been proved accurate in a number of domains, including predicting Russia's and China's assertive positions in key international spheres.

Could that influence be used in the Caribbean on the Commonwealth of Dominica, a small island state that gained independence from the UK in 1978, to transform it into another Singapore or Hong Kong?

With its 750 square kilometres, almost identical to that of Singapore, less than Hong Kong's 1,104 square kilometres of dry land, and with its position in the south-east Caribbean, Dominica could play a key role as an independent offshore financial centre, providing an alternative model to the dysfunctional models of certain island states and nearby mainland nations such as its neighbour Venezuela.

Malcolm Smeaton's grandson, Malcolm Jnr, held Dominican nationality as well as a British passport, and could claim Carib descent on his mother's side. He was educated in England and after four years at Michael Fitzwilliams' Bank, had returned to Roseau, the island's small capital to manage his father's affairs and enter local politics.

No sooner than Dominica had recovered from the financial crisis, than it was hit in 2017 by Maria, one of the most devastating hurricanes in Caribbean history. The destruction totalled more than twice Dominica's annual GDP.

A year later rebuilding, thanks in part to INI's generosity, was well underway for the new tourist season.

Malcolm Smeaton Jnr was appointed Minister for Planning, Economic Development and Investment, under the impulsion of Pat Kennedy, who after the suspension of the Nicaragua transoceanic canal had diverted his attention to the possibility of building a Caribbean base on the island. Malcolm's appointment was in fact a nod to Pat who had financed the building of a luxury hotel complex to the south of Roseau, providing jobs for many of those who had lost their livelihoods in the hurricane.

Pat Kennedy, for all his public sentiments, was at heart a realist, and had fixed his sights on the Caribbean, and in particular Dominica, the 'nature isle of the Caribbean', situated between the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, which had become one of his principal targets for development.

His friend, Tom Barton, was more altruistic, he dreamt of a new kind of city, high in the Cordillera Oriental, one that could exist in harmony with nature, to demonstrate how humanity could survive the coming ecological catastrophe, that is providing courageous men took the right decisions. Building such a city was not a utopian dream, he told his friends, but for most surviving the danger that stalked humanity was. That danger came from other men.

He had considered other regions of Colombia, where the Cordillera Oriental sweeps down to Lake Maracaibo, where Colombia and Venezuela meet, where rainforest, cloud forests, highland moors and sub-alpine and alpine tundra meet, in that vast wilderness that would serve as a model for the survival of nature's biodiversity.

Colombia's ecosystems ranged from dense Amazonian forests to Caribbean mangrove swamps and the snow-capped peaks of the cordilleras, with one of the most diversified biospheres in the world after its neighbour Brazil.

Of course straddling the borders of the brotherly enemies was an impossible challenge, even if it was to save humanity

from the disaster that was in the making.

Tom's friend José-Maria Yneva, a renowned Spanish professor of architecture, who had often talked to him of the history of the city—that human settlement, the purpose it served and how it had evolved over the centuries, millennia, had proposed a plan for a city, not one of glass towers and highways like Dubai or Singapore, but one of human scale, one with which its inhabitants could identify as home with its focal points and centres of culture and leisure.

The region surrounding Barichara, a landscape of amazing variety, under the eternal springlike sky of the Andean Altiplano, at 1,300 metres above sea level, was an ideal location for his villa nueva, which with nearly 200 hours of sunshine a month could provide a natural source of energy to its all inhabitants.

Along the Camino Real, an ancient road paved with stones built by the indigenous Guane people connecting their villages, extended to Bogota by the Spanish Conquistadores, Tom imagined building a more modern version of Barichara, an easy going city with its 4,000 inhabitants, where he had met Lola, where her family had lived for generations, with its colonial architecture, colourful bougainvillea decorating the balconies of its old colonial buildings, their whitewashed façades contrasting with the ochre roof tiles, streets paved with sand hued cobblestones worn smooth by the centuries comings and goings of its citizens, enjoying a climate that had long attracted Colombia's elite and political classes, where their families could live in a felicitous city, where the air was pure, the rust-coloured earth punctuated by flowering shrubs, green pastures and woodlands, set against the mountain scenery of the Altiplano.

## CHAPTER 35

### A RUSSIAN PLOT

My earlier life as a journalist taught me that Moscow had much to gain from the divisions in the West, and Brexit had created a division in our façade, one of monumental geopolitical proportions. It was equally true to say Moscow was taking advantage of chaos created by Trump and the events in Venezuela, where their backing of Maduro could eventually lead to a new and perhaps violent confrontation.

Divide and conquer was the Kremlin's game and looking at the divisions in the UK they were succeeding. The UK's National Crime Agency had focused its attention on a British business man, Arron Banks, whose links with Moscow had raised suspicions of interference in the referendum via the illegal financing of the Brexit campaign through a series of arrangements offered to Banks by Moscow.

The re-election of the UK's Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015 had created an unhoped for opportunity for Moscow, since in his campaign as leader of the Conservative Party he had promised a referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EU.

His victory had delighted the Kremlin, which had to that point unsuccessfully plotted to drive a wedge between its enemies, prising the UK away from its European allies.

Banks was a willing accomplice, forging links with Russian diplomats and suspected agents, meeting with Moscow's ambassador in London, a sure indicator that the embassy sought to cultivate and support him in the crucial run-up period to the referendum.

Banks had contributed 10 million dollars to the 'Leave.EU' movement, the object of which as its name suggests was to

ensure the success of Brexit. Where that money came from was shrouded in conjecture.

What is clear is his contacts with Russian Embassy staffers in London had led to three potentially profitable investment opportunities, in 6 Russian gold mines, and a project linked to Alrosa—a major Russian diamond mining company.

Banks was married to a Russian, so what, so was John, and Sergei's wife was Irish.

The difference was the way Banks was courted by the Russians, at his first meeting with the ambassador, in 2015, the businessman was served with a special bottle of vodka, that Yakovenko claimed was 'one of only three in a batch made for Stalin personally'.

At the same lunch, he was offered an introduction to a Russian businessman and the possibility of investing in the gold mines. Banks according to his mails wrote to Siman Povarenkin, the Russian businessman in question, 'I am very bullish on gold so keen to have a look.' But he did not stop there, he then turned his attention to the diamond mines, namely those of Alrosa, a state owned company.

The question was why were the Russians courting Banks?

The Banks couple replied to suspicions by cocking a snook at their accusers with a custom license plate on their family car, X MI5 SPY.

In any case the idea of making money from his position as a go-between and getting the UK out of the UK didn't seem to trouble him, even though it would be a game changer for Moscow.

Was it because, like his friend and business partner, James Mellon, the Banks were Brexiteers? True Mellon had made hundreds of millions of dollars in Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and was often linked with personalities close to Putin.

Not only that, Mellon introduced Banks to Nigel Farage, leader of the Brexit movement, whose campaign benefited from Banks' largesse.

By a strange coincidence, shortly after the Brexit vote,

Mellon's investment fund, Charlemagne Capital, was attributed discounted shares in the diamond miner.

Banks, one of the biggest individual donors in British political history, obviously helped the vote to quit the EU, an event that would mark the UK for generations to come, the consequences of which were unknown, and according to one government minister, the brother of Boris Johnson, 'a failure of British statecraft on a scale unseen since the Suez crisis,' in 1956.

Guy Fawkes could have done no greater harm than that inflicted by Banks, an unwitting FSB stooge, and his fellow travellers.

It was not surprising that Banks was a subject of interest to the UK's National Crime Agency. Where had the contributions to Better For The Country—the company that managed the Leave.EU campaign, come from? Through the opaque network of offshore companies he controlled?

The problem lay in the fact Banks was not that well-off and his 10 million dollar contribution to the Brexit campaign was disproportionate to his means. In fact his various business investments were in a rather sad state of affairs, raising the question of dark money and his links to Russian appointees and their friends, and why would they be so keen to enrich an insignificant self-serving individual via phoney business projects and transactions.

When Banks appeared before the House of Commons culture select committee, investigating fake news sources, Banks said of Leave.EU, 'We certainly weren't above leading journalists up the country path, making fun of them, same with politicians.'

When Andy Wigmore—a stooge diplomat accredited to the small Central American state of Belize, and an associate of Banks, was questioned as to his contacts with Russian officials, he replied he discussed the banana industry.

The select committee chairman complained, 'Arron Banks and Andy Wigmore have misled the committee on the number of meetings that took place with the Russian embassy and

walked out of the committee's evidence session to avoid scrutiny of the content of the discussions with the Russian embassy.' Adding, 'From the emails that we have seen, it is evident that Arron Banks had many meetings with Russian officials, including the Russian Ambassador, Alexander Yakovenko, between 2015 and 2017—Mr Wigmore is a self-confessed liar and, as a result, little significance can be attached to anything that he says.'

Arron Banks was co-opted as a front to donate funds to the Leave campaign by Russia, which deployed the vast means it had at its disposal, including its multiple intelligence agencies and dark money sources to manipulate British voters and achieve a geopolitical advantage in a new version of the Cold War.

After all, what was 10 million dollars to render a sundering body blow to the EU, the cost of a couple or so cruise missiles?

The idea that Russia and a small clique of reactionaries engineered Brexit could have seemed far fetched, but as Arthur Conan Doyle's most celebrated detective, Sherlock Holmes, said, 'How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?'

It was telling that Banks' had informed Russian diplomats after meeting President-elect Donald Trump, in the Trump Tower, then on his return to London, he lunched with the Russian ambassador, Alexander V. Yakovenko, during which it is difficult to imagine they hadn't discussed his meeting with Trump.

## CHAPTER 36

### ZURICH

Forbes was a collector, an old client of Scott Fitznorman, they had become good friends over the years with Scott often staying at his White Plains mansion situated just outside of New York, whenever he visited the East Coast. I suppose Forbes was one of those obsessive art and antiques collector, always interested in new discoveries, he had that kind of money. The fact was his main occupation in life was to conserve his income he received from a family trust that accumulated profits from the unexciting but reliable shares in several coal mines in the Appalachians. His so-called business activities were a mere pastime, giving him the feeling of being needed and generating deductible receipts for the taxman.

His Swiss companies were screens to finance the acquirement of new objects for his large collection of art works, which included amongst other things, rare Blue and White porcelain and other pieces often illegally smuggled out of China. Scott figured that gave Forbes some kind of kick and a feeling of doing something exciting in his otherwise spoon-fed life, the trouble was he needed help sorting out the good from the bad whenever a consignment arrived in Zurich or Geneva and Scott with his knowledge of the dark underside of the Asian antiquities market discreetly helped eliminate the forgeries.

Pat Kennedy was an acquaintance of Forbes who held an account with Bank Affenfeld in Zurich, one of INI's offshore holdings. For this reason Pat had pointed Scott in that direction as it seemed like a good idea to separate Soceaex from the risks involved in the different jurisdictions where salvage work could be carried out.

Forbes knew little about Southeast Asia, but Pat thought he and his firm Archaeological Research and Exploration Inc., would be a good vehicle for their plans. Fitznorman liked the name, it sounded serious, in fact it was nothing more than another of the American's many letter box companies, in the Canton of Aargau, incorporated by Forbes' lawyers in Zofingen for tax breaks and a virtual transit base for new objects destined for his art collection, something Switzerland was renowned for.

The outline of the arrangement was the Swiss company would act as partner in a consortium, which would not only undertake the recovery of the cargo on the basis of the undersea archaeological exploration licence issued by the Brunei authorities, but would also serve as an offshore base for any financial transactions linked to the present and future projects.

The arrangement was formalised at Bank Affenfeld's offices in Zurich, which lay just off Bahnhof Strasse, the hallowed ground of that most discreet sector of the Swiss Financial world, in the Affenfeld's wood panelled and staidly furnished boardroom on the first floor of a rather solid but plain building.

Walter Hoffman was not the image of a typical Swiss banker, in fact he was quite opposite to the popular conception of a banker, he was a jovial grandfatherly figure, rather disorganised, full of good humour and fluster.

It was one of those concrete-grey dusty days that is typical of Switzerland in wintertime, unlike the postcard image of pure air and snow covered mountains. Scott had rented a Mercedes at Basel airport and driven the 80 kilometres to Zurich, the direct flight had been full and he had time for the one-hour drive, which he enjoyed in spite of the winter landscape which gave the impression of a strange dead world deserted by nature.

He parked the car at a meter just a couple of blocks off Bahnhof Strasse and strolled up to the bank pausing to look at the displays in shop windows with their stock of sparkling and

## The Cargo Club

über-expensive jewellery and solid gold watches.

On arrival at the bank he was ushered up to the first floor and into Walter's office, Jim Forbes was already sitting there dressed in an old and more than well worn grey tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows, still wearing his scraggy beard, drawing heavily on a long American cigarette.

Who would have thought that eccentric man was one of the richest in New England, old money, not one of those nouveau rich whose fortune had been made on the stock market before the crash, or in one of those volatile hi-tech industries.



‘Well hi there Scott, how are you doing?’ he said smiling and stretching out his hand, he was well over six feet tall and stooped slightly like many tall men.

‘Hallo Mr Fitznorman,’ said Walt, as he was called by Forbes,

‘sit down here,’ he pulled back a chair ‘we haven’t started yet.’

‘Would you like some coffee?’

‘Miss Wechsler where is the Research and Exploration file please?’ He shuffled his papers that were already spread out on the boardroom table. ‘Oh yes and some fresh coffee please.’

He returned to Scott, ‘And how is Sir Patrick?’

‘The last time I spoke with him he was in fine form.’

‘Excellent. So let’s down to business, I understand from Sir Patrick that Scott needs to arrange a guaranty bond for the Brunei Government. Well that’s not too difficult, just a few signatures.’

‘Yes that’s right Walt.’

‘Fine, the second thing is to arrange a letters of credit for an—exploration vessel?’ Fitznorman nodded. ‘... and diving barge in favour of a Swiss company called—Soceaex?’

‘That’s right,’ said Jim. ‘Scott, did you bring all of the papers with you?’

‘Sure here they are,’ he said handing the documents to Walter, they included a proforma invoices that could be used to draw up letters of credit, negotiable in Singapore.

‘What about Soceaex, will you have everything ready on time Scott?’

‘The vessel is in the shipyard, ready to leave once the letter of credit has been opened, as is the barge and diving equipment.’

‘They must need the business,’ said Hoffman unaware of all the background details.

‘No, together with Robert Guiglion, my partner,’ Scott explained for the his benefit, ‘we’d already anticipated the work and took advantage of a decommissioned Singapore Navy vessel, a bargain. Robert is well informed, he’s worked in the region for years and is one of the leading specialists in the field, a great partner.

‘And your man in Brunei?’

‘Joe Hamza, no problem, he has everything under control.’

‘So you can look after everything from here Walt?’ said Forbes approvingly

Hoffman nodded and reached out to Scott for the papers

and looking through them quickly nodded again in agreement.

'Tomorrow the letters of credit should be opened,' Hoffman said, 'and with the time difference the shipyard will have notification tomorrow morning. The same for the guarantee bond for the Brunei government.'

'Great! It looks if things are moving,' said Jim. 'Well let's get lunch now if everything is in order.'

'Sorry I can't join you,' said Walter arranging the papers and handing them over to Miss Wechsler, 'another time I have a lot of work, and I must get all of this off if we are going to earn our living.'

Walter, also a director of Archaeological Research and Exploration Inc., was keen to get the business rolling, Forbes was a good client of the bank's, but Walter had spent a lot of his personal time on Forbes' other exotic projects, without a great deal in return up to then.

Scott left with Jim Forbes, they took the car and drove over to the Butterfly, not a particularly comfortable hotel by Zurich standards, but Jim considered it discreet and he was fixed in his habits, not to speak of the stinginess that plagued old money.

Scott like myself was becoming a little more stoic as time passed. We'd learnt that there were many things unpredictable and one of them was our good friend Pat Kennedy.

'Discovering the remains of the last living *Homo erectus* in Borneo made me think about our lives,' Scott had told me. 'I discovered, I, like you and my friends, control very little in our lives. Look at Pat, did he imagine his life in China, or Liam Clancy his future as the son in law of a recently very rich French count, or Tom Barton his new life in Colombia.'

I had to agree. Perhaps it was all to do with the pursuit of wealth and riches. Which reminded me of a Spanish film I'd recently watched, *Oro*, gold. How greed and the desire to become rich led a group of men and a few women to their doom. It was, I suppose a remake of *Aguirre*, Klaus Kinski's film, or *Fitzgaraldo*, another in the same vein. Gold, greed and blood. And there we were doing the same thing.

'In reality we don't decide much, we get dragged into things by people we can't control,' Scott lamented, 'for God's sake we can't even control ourselves, we can't stop ourselves from getting old, sick and dying.'

We have the luxury of judgement, I silently reflected, not that that matters very much, I mean who's listening to us, things happen and we have to live with the consequences. People make decisions and we chose follow them, or not. That's how I ended up here, anchored off the fly bitten coast of Alta Guajira, aboard the *Sundaland II*, diving for gold coins and bars, the booty lost by other adventurers, now dead four centuries.

CHAPTER 37

GOODWOOD PARK

Scott woke at six, the room was freezing. He had fallen asleep early the previous evening dead beat, forgetting to switch off the air-conditioning. It felt rather like a winter morning in England and he lingered on in the warmth of his bed dozing. When he next looked at his watch it was seven twenty, daylight was filtering around the corners of the curtains.

It took some seconds to realise he was back in Singapore, the time difference with Zurich had knocked him out, that with the thought he wasn't getting any younger.



With some effort he dragged himself out of his bed, drew back the curtains and looked out over the gardens of the

Goodwood Park Hotel which shrouded by a grey-blue haze. Visibility was around half a kilometre in the first couple of hours of daylight, a pall hung over the city a result of the fires that raged in nearby Sumatra. The culprits, according to the media, were the slash-and-burn farmers and plantation owners.

The reality was more complicated, the fires were the result of unresolved conflicts between the large oil palm plantation owners and villagers, concerning compensation for their forest gardens arbitrarily confiscated or 'bought' for plantations. The gardens were the very sites that burned first as the fires spread until the rainy season arrived.

The livelihood of the villagers suffered with the disappearance of rattan stocks, rubber and fruit trees, and other forest products. In addition they suffered health problems with diseases caused by the drought, failed harvests, and a general lack of resources. Their environment had been devastated with forest trails and rivers made impracticable by fallen trees abandoned by loggers. Their despair then turned to anger, frustration and rage as the authorities caught up in the almost permanent political crises ignored their plight.

Scott could hear the low rumble of the traffic which moved slowly along the road outside and could see the tower of the nearby Dynasty Hotel, with its green tiled umbrella roof, standing out from the other buildings on the nearby skyline.

The Goodwood had been his home on many visits to Singapore. The heritage hotel was built in a grand colonial style in a 6 acre park, it was formerly the Teutonia Club, built for expatriate Germans in 1899. The present owner, a Singaporean entrepreneur and banker, with close relations to the Brunei royal family, had been one of the very rare foreigners to have set up a bank in Brunei. The Sultan had often stayed at the Goodwood when he visited Singapore, where naturally he occupied in the luxurious Brunei Suite looking over Scotts Road.

Scott picked up the newspaper that had been slide under his room door as he went to the bathroom, glancing through it briefly, there was nothing of interest in the Straits Times, more

news of the usual crises and a report on Kenya's population that was growing at 4% a year.

No immediate disaster, nothing that could upset the day's plan, he thought sleepily as he stepped into the shower dropping the Times on the seat cover of the toilet. He spent 10 minutes under the hot shower, he had always felt that his morning shower was one of those luxuries in life that was still more or less free and put him in form for a good start to the day.

He had had enough of hotels and had decided it was the moment to acquire a more permanent base in Singapore, property prices were high and would go higher and his business had grown with the fame brought after his chance discovery of *Homo erectus* fossils in Borneo. Now that Soceaex was expanding with the Tanjong Lumut excavation, followed by the sale of its cargo which would involve cataloguing and identifying the artefacts, he needed a place where he would feel at home, to relax and work over the months and year ahead.

But perhaps the real motive was HG, as their relationship developed, he wanted her to see him as more than a transient voyager, to have a *pied-à-terre* in the region—not that he felt ready for any permanent attachment.

The previous evening he had received a call from his friend Erkki Erkkila who had set up an appointment for him with the property manager of the Singapore Port Authority, over at the Hilton on Orchard Road, to visit properties.

As soon as he was ready he went directly to the hotel, where he could first take his breakfast in the coffee shop, the short stroll would stimulate his appetite. Walking into the hotel lobby, he remarked it had seen better days. Now a run of the mill tourist halt, not as he first knew it a good few years back. He couldn't help thinking the person to whom a statue should have been built in Singapore was not Raffles, its founder, but Thomas Cook. Without him the tourist industry in Singapore would not exist.

Most of the tourists were from down-under, past middle age,

short sleeved, hardy looking Aussies gathering with their faded looking wives. They were preparing their shopping expedition, unfortunately the shopping centres in Singapore opened late, about ten-thirty. He noted the more older of the men were wearing their national costume, shorts and long white socks.

He went to the concierge's desk to leave a message for Lee to announce he would be taking breakfast in the coffee shop. As he waited he watched the toing and froing of the hotel office staff and messengers, arriving with envelopes and packages, pert little Chinese girls looking fresh and relaxed in their white shirt-like blouses and short skirts.

He looked around as if expecting to see someone he knew, but there were only one or two young Chinese businessmen, speaking English with Singaporean accents, and a tourist guide picking up her Aussie group.

There was a European leaving with his local girlfriend. She was probably not as good looking as she had been the night before, Fitznorman thought cynically, she looked like an exotic flower—now slightly wilted.

He found the coffee shop and was invited by the waitress to the buffet where he helped himself to bacon and eggs with fresh tropical fruit salad. As he ate he mentally went over his plans for the following few days before the Port Authority representative arrived.

He checked his watch and saw that he would have time to check flights with Royal Brunei Airlines, which was just across Orchard Road in the Orchard Towers Shopping Plaza. He calculated that if he could find a flight the next day in mid-afternoon he could be in Bandar Seri Begawan by the early evening for his meeting with Robert Guiglion and the Brunei Museum people.

Erkki had informed him that the Port Authority arranged accommodation for their expat staff and from time to time had properties for sale, or rent, at better than market prices. James Lee had three houses available, however the choice was not difficult, Scott went for the first they visited, a colonial style home, in the River Valley district, one of those black and

white English faux-Tudor style houses, with the porch, as well as the walls—up to the window sills in red brick. It was like a grand version of an upper class home in the Surrey stockbroker belt, surrounded by well trimmed lawns, flowerbeds and two tall palms on either side of the circular driveway that led to the main door of the house. To the back the garden continued with a lawn and a tennis court.

HG would like the garden where trees were heavier and more sinuous than those in England with epiphytes clinging in hollows formed where the branches spread out from the trunk, long creepers and stranglers hanging from the branches, where brightly coloured birds darted after large insects.

James Lee told him the Singapore Port Authority had inherited the house from the organisation's colonial past and it was becoming difficult to let as expat families got smaller and their stays shorter. Scott agreed to rent the property with a 6 month purchase option.

The district was well shielded from the nearby neighbours, to one side by a park, to the other separated by the botanical gardens, hiding the office buildings that seemed spring up overnight in Singapore, it was difficult to imagine that they were so near to the city centre.

A large veranda overlooked the garden and Fitznorman imagined the garden with HG, filled with guests for a cocktail, or relaxing after a game of tennis on the red clay court on a Sunday afternoon.

Even better the house came fully furnished and with a housekeeper, Mrs Wang, and a gardener who called almost every other day, both for the moment paid by the Port Authority. Lee proposed to Scott the services of a driver, which he declined—he did not possess a car and was not sure that one was really necessary in Singapore.

His next task was the Chamber of Commerce to investigate formalities setting up a branch of Archaeological Research and Exploration Inc., in Singapore, and for the new gallery he was planning, naturally it's business would be Oriental art, but initially it would facilitate the sale and marketing of the junk's

cargo, and offer a transit point for import and export of the artefacts.

No work was necessary and Scott moved into the house the next day and a few days later HG arrived. She was delighted with it and once she'd settled in they set out for the evening, not a celebratory candle light dinner, but Lau Pa Sat, a hawker centre near Raffles Quay. There in the general noise and hubbub, they chose one of the open-air stands that had what they were looking for—lacquered duck, dumplings, soup, ducks livers, Chinese eggs and a variety of vegetables with fried noodles, they both drank Singah beer frothing on ice cubes, followed by fresh pineapples, papayas and mangoes and finished with jasmine Chinese tea as the hustle and bustle of the food hall swirled around them.

It was excellent, there was no Chinese food better than in the hawker centres. Covered in grease and sauce they washed their hands under the open taps at the communal washbasins.

Then laughing in the warm soft evening air they decided to visit the evening market and took a taxi to Bugi Street, famous for its florid reputation of the past, now more respectful of Singapore's strict laws but with a happy go lucky atmosphere where they enjoyed the lights and the movement of the market's evening shoppers amongst the exotic wares and the cries of the stall owners.

HG was not of course a newcomer to Singapore, but with Scott the evening took on a new meaning as they walked hand in hand enjoying the simple pleasure of being together again.

A few days later, after the meeting in Brunei, he flew to Beijing with HG from Kota Kinabulu, making a quick stopover in Hong Kong to update Pat. Scott lamely justified HG's presence as a fluent Cantonese and Mandarin speaker, which greatly amused Pat, explaining she would help him in his meeting with Professor Zhang, a leading expert at the Research Institute of Chinese Pottery & Porcelain in the Chinese capital, who he hope could provide important data on the origin of the wreck and the samples they had brought with them.

## CHAPTER 38

### TOM BARTON

I must tell you how Tom Barton had completely adapted to his new life in Colombia. Happily married to Lola with their two children, he'd even begun to look like a local *hidalgo*, conversing easily in Spanish and now totally at ease with his patrician father in law Don Pedro Heridia.

It was five years since Tom had arrived in Colombia after suddenly abandoning the life he could no longer support in the City of London, where he had been mired in the crisis created when the City & Colonial had seized INI in a politically motivated machination designed to unseat its CEO, our friend Michael Fitzwilliams. Michael was killed some months later in the mysterious explosion of his yacht in the Irish Sea.

His story started at Madrid Barajas International airport, where he'd arrived from London, carrying nothing more than an overnight bag on a Vueling lost cost flight. After a few moments of hesitation he'd headed for the Iberia transfer desk, where he took up a last minute offer, destination Bogota, business class, a twelve hour flight into the unknown.

Once the plane was in the air, the unsupportable burden that had hung on him over the past weeks started to lift. The weather over Madrid was fine, a clear blue sky, and although the summits of the surrounding hills were white with snow, it was a considerable improvement on London's persistently damp, cold and dismal weather.

He settled down to sleep in the comfort of the large seat on the new long haul Airbus A300-600, but sleep did not come easy and in his waking moments he contemplated the reasons for his sudden departure.

His getaway was a long needed break, he explained to himself. How long a break was another matter. He had no fear for his ongoing business at the bank, that would be taken care of during his absence, until he decided his next move—unravelling his thoughts and had a clearer vision as to his future.

It had got to the point where he felt he no longer controlled his own life. Fitzwilliams, Kennedy, Tarasov were caught on an infernal roller coaster, running from what seemed like one drama to another when they weren't in flying somewhere to meetings, conferences, attending receptions and always decisions to be made. Sifting through reports, listening to advisors and deciding which information served to them by their subordinates was useful in their endless pursuit of profit and growth. Which country, commodity, currency or company, to bet on. Where to build a new office tower, condominium, set-up a new manufacturing unit, close an old one, open a new market, it was an endless game of monopoly and to what end? At least that's the way it had started to seem to him, futile, even the Mad Hatters party seemed more meaningful in comparison to the infernal merry-go-round of the City.

The last straw came after the hostile take over of INI by the City & Colonial Bank and the ouster of his friend Michael Fitzwilliams as CEO, followed by the City's attempted grab of Pat Kennedy's holdings in Hong Kong.

He needed to regenerate himself, he had enough of glass towers, offices and hotels, impersonal ostentatious surroundings. He had been living in a crystal bowl surrounded by fawning lackeys, and those hoping that some of his accumulated wealth might rub off, hopeful deal makers, and those who had made it like himself, but whose lives were lost in trying to own the most expensive super car, the most expensive home with the most expensive wife, in the most expensive part of town.

In short, City & Colonial's takeover had created a depressing, oppressive, atmosphere. He needed to feel what real life was about again, to free himself of a situation that was closing in

on him, he, who had been part of the Fitzwilliams' now vanquished chain of command, no longer belonged.

At the same time he had drifted apart from Sophie, he simply hadn't had time to consecrate to building a lasting relationship, constantly flying back and forth between London and Paris, and that was when he wasn't heading off to one of the INI's distant outposts, Moscow, Shanghai, or wherever.



The next morning stepping out in Bogotá, to him a new and city in an equally strange land, he felt a distinct whiff of spring in the air, it was just 10 degrees warmer than Madrid. It was however midsummer in those southern latitudes. Bogotá was five hundred kilometres north of the equator and 2,540 metres above the sea, where the maximum daytime temperatures very rarely exceeded 20°C, or fell below 10°C.

After a little exploration in the city centre, he took a pause on the terrace of a café named Juan Valdas, which according to his newly acquired guidebook was reputed to be one of the best coffee houses in the Colombian capital, a city he was discovering as noisy and dusty, perched as it was high on the Cordillera Oriental, the north-eastern extension of the Andes.

Looking around he studied the other customers, business

people taking a break, a Chinese girl, a tourist like himself, and a few young professionals. Some were looking at their smartphones. An older man sitting nearby was having his shoes shined, which explained the waxy smell of polish mixed hanging in the air mixed with that of fresh coffee.

He ordered a micro machiatta, the sachet of sugar was marked with the word Panela, which he figured was some kind of cane sugar.

Juan Valdas was more like a Latino Starbucks, noisier, easy going in a different kind of way. There was a constant coming and going, the animated chatter of the mid-morning break, people exchanging news with their business friends, or simply take a pause.

They were the better-off Colombians. The customer having his shoes buffed nodded to the fifty-something-year old shoeshine boy, signalling an imaginary spot of dust he had overlooked, and in doing so defined their respective roles. Yellow taxis and large SUVs rolled past on the narrow street. A couple of twenty-to-thirty year olds kissed.

It was time to go, it seemed there was nothing much more to discover in Bogota. Consulting his guidebook, he decided he would head north the next day, in the direction of Villa de Leyva and Barichara, and returning to the hotel with a little help from the front desk he booked a rental car.

After exploring the colonial charms of Villa De Leyva, he continued to Barichara, 250 kilometres south of Bogota on the Cordillera, there he found a small hotel surrounded by a courtyard garden filled with bright flowering shrubs and vines. La Candillaria, a posada, had only seven rooms and apart from his own, the other six were vacant. On the square outside stood a house where Humboldt had once sojourned and a few metres further a signpost pointed to Plaza Mayor, the town centre.

The picturesque 17th century town was a haven of peace, clean, little traffic and no crowds. During the tourist season there were probably many more visitors, but as it was it suited him fine and after a short stroll around the centre he decided

to stay a couple of days more, perhaps exploring the surrounding countryside.

The weather was agreeably warmer than Bogota, the air more breathable—since leaving the capital he had descended 1,000 metres. Early that same evening seated in Portales, a café situated under the centuries old stone arcades on the main square, he sipped a glass of local tinto. It took little imagination to visualise those who had lived in the old colonial town in past generations, during the three or four hundred years that followed the Conquista, when men and women arrived from Spain to discover the douceurs of the lower Andean climate.

Apart from the chatter the only other sound was the campanile ringing the Angelus in a nearby convent. There was a total absence of the kind of unnecessary attention he had become used to in the hotels and restaurants of big cities.

The next morning he took his breakfast in the posada's small garden, surround by its shrubs and cacti. The silence was almost total, interrupted only by the chattering of small brightly coloured birds and the buzz of insects amongst the flowers. The silence had a healing effect, clearing his cluttered mind of the perpetual and needless demands that had taken control his life. The same pressures he had sought to escape after abruptly quitting London in 2008, when the economic crisis closed in.

After breakfast, he set out to explore the stone paved streets of Barichara, lined with rows of low houses decorated with gaily coloured flowers, pausing to look at the small shops and observe passers-by going about their daily business. One or two friendly locals politely greeted him, they were evidently used to the presence of strangers.

He was a gringo and as such could not avoid being taken for a tourist, which he was, but not in the conventional sense, he liked to think, perhaps a nomad, a visitor from afar.

As midday approached he made a few attempts to put his Spanish to use. He had gleaned enough of the language during the property boom in Spain to be more or less conversant, and

more recently in the Basque Country, the region straddling the southwest of France and Spain.

He stopped to buy a Panama, then checked out a few of the bars and cafés. He was pointed to a small and picturesque courtyard in a corner house off Plaza Mayor, where he discovered three or four small eating places for tourists. He chose a table under the shade of a gnarled tree. The menu was in Spanish and English, which helped, the food was unfamiliar, not Spanish, and he opted for a kind of grilled chorizo with strange yellow potatoes and a beer.

There was no longer any doubt, it was the low season, he had not seen more than a handful of tourists. So much the better, he thought sipping his Club Colombia. It was so different from his last fugue, six or seven years previously, when modern civilisation's mad speed had caught up with him. At that time he had headed east. First Dubai, then India, before ending up in Thailand—India he had fled following an outbreak of cholera, and in Thailand, with its crowds of tourists, he had met Sophie.

Those places had been alien, his background and upbringing had little in common with those civilisations. Colombia, although it was different, many things were familiar. He quickly discovered his Spanish worked, and many if not all of the people were of European, or mixed descent, with whom he could converse, evidently sharing the similar cultural values, history, religion, education and government.

In comparison to Tom Barton, Pat Kennedy was a different kind of adventurer. He was driven by an irresistible curiosity, which perhaps had its origins in a form of childhood escapism developed by the presence of an overweening mother. Whatever it was it developed into an unquenchable desire to put the dreary provincial life of Limerick City, and his island home, behind him, in search of exoticism and adventure.

His mother had wanted a different life for her son, different to that she had led as the wife of a driver who worked for the local bus company. During the hard times she had been content to have a husband with a secure job, not well paid, but

in work, unlike others in the family who had been forced to cross the water to find a job.

When her husband, who was older than she by several years, retired, things would have been difficult had not Pat already started to work his way up in the world. Things changed in Ireland, the country had finally thrown off its economic constraints with a surge of growth and prosperity, enabling Pat to repay the efforts his parents had made to provide him with an education.

His marriage to Margaret, the only daughter of a well-to-do farmer and landowner, had been a big step up the social ladder, but to their disappointment, and in spite of her prayers, the couple remained childless.

When Margaret inherited the farm and its dependencies they left the management to a tenant farmer. She, dedicating her life to work with the Sisters of Charity at a nearby convent, he, to his flourishing accountancy firm. As Pat's clientele grew he travelled whenever he found an excuse to get away from Limerick, first to Dublin, then further afield, London and then the Continent.

It was more than 15 years since Pat joined the board of what was at that time the Irish Union Bank. The appointment followed his success in introducing of the Nederlandsche Nassau Bank to Michael Fitzwilliams, then engineering the merger between the two banks to form the Irish Netherlands Bank, known as INB.

From that point onwards Pat became the confident of Fitzwilliams, opening the door to other opportunities, with his position going from strength to strength. He considerably reinforced his role as executive business development director through the successful negotiations with Sergei Tarasov for the creation of an Anglo-Russian holding bank, formed between INB and InterBank, known as the INI Banking Corporation, which was in effect a holding company.

He then fixed his sights on China, starting with Hong Kong, where a new world awaited him, opportunities for a daring banker in a dynamic economy, reminiscent of Shanghai in the

early part of the 20th century, re-adapted for 21st century Hong Kong and its integration into modern China, full of promise, discovery and fabulous gains.

La Peñita Gourmet was a small bar in the Calle Reale, a *cuadra* up from the Plaza Meyor. It was early evening and the bar was a little *triste*. Its owner was a portly señora of 60 or more, who had gained local fame as a breeder of champion goats. The souvenirs of her past triumphs, in the form of dusty trophies and yellowing photographs, decorated the walls of the bar.

A little lost in ordering something to eat, a Colombian, wearing a grey straw Frank Sinatra style fedora, came to Tom Barton's help. Once the problem of the menu was settled, they started talking together, it was a little complicated because neither was very practised in the language of the other. The Colombian introduced himself as Emilio. He was about fortyish, his face kind, exuding an air of patience, encouraging Tom whenever he fumbled for his words. Emilio, an actor, ran the town's cultural centre, teaching theatre and acting, organising cultural events and promoting traditional performing folklore.

After a couple of beers, a friend of Emilio's appeared, an amiable flower-power hippy throwback, who introduced himself as Juliano, an Argentinian, who had settled, at least momentarily, in Barichara. Once Tom had finished his meal, Emilio invited him to join them to a poetry evening at El Pueblo, another of the town's many bars.

When they arrived a small crowd had already gathered in the smoke filled tavern, Emilio made the introductions commencing with Alfonso, an architect, then Muriel a French designer who had set up her atelier in Barichara, followed by many others whose names Tom lost in the happy clamour. It was late when he finally found his way back to La Candillaria, accompanied by his new friends who wished him a noisy good night.

It had been a long time since he had enjoyed himself so much, surrounded by people whose only goal was to enjoy

## The Cargo Club

their evening in pleasant company, exchanging stories with Emilio's guest and vying to show him the region and its sights during his stay in the Altiplano.

CHAPTER 39

¡HABLA INGLÉS!

The next day Tom returned to the small food court for lunch. According to a commemorative plaque set into the wall of the archway leading into the courtyard, it had been created to promote the development of tourism. It was set in the middle of what must have been the back garden of the sprawling colonial style town house and its annexes owned by family of local notables.

He took a seat by the fountain and after waiting five or so minutes, a pretty twenty year old appeared, presented him with a menu, and then disappeared. It was evidently early, just one or two people standing at the other small bars, he was the only client in the eatery.

Five more minutes passed before the girl reappeared. He was discovering the pace of life in Barichara was not the same as back home in London, or even in Bogota, and couldn't help wondering whether things ever speeded up. As he studied the surroundings he imagined little changed even when the annual folk festival got under way, an event which according to Emilio marked the high point of the town's calendar.

Tom looked at the menu again and ordered a beer and a cheese *arepa*. It seemed as if everything in Colombia contained cheese in one form or another. With a forced smile, more like a pout, the girl took the order and disappeared again.

Looking around he admired the gaily coloured flowering shrubs and vines that decorated the courtyard. The silky air barely moved. The only sound came from the gently bubbling of the stone fountain and the cooing of a dove in the tree overhanging his table. There was a sense of timelessness and tranquillity. It was a small corner of Eden.

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Ten minutes later he was served, this time with a shy smile.

*‘Habla Inglés?’* he asked

She made a sign with her forefinger and thumb to say a little.

‘It’s very quiet,’ he said looking around.

‘*Si*, holidays are finished.’

He wondered which holidays, it was already mid-February.

‘Where are you from?’

‘England.’

*‘Inglaterra?’*

*‘Si.’*

‘Is it cold?’

‘Yes, now.’

‘I’d love to go to London.’

She reminded him of a young Bardot, blond hair and flashing dark eyes.

‘Do you live here?’

‘Yes, I work here, my grandfather owns the restaurant.’

‘How old are you?’

‘Twenty—next week,’ she said laughing.

‘You are not a student?’

‘I am learning English and tourism.’

‘Very good.’

‘My name is Dolores, my friends call me Lola,’ she she sticking out her hand.

‘Oh, I’m Tom, Tom Barton.’

She turned and disappeared inside leaving him to finish his meal. Then, as he wondered how he was going to pass the rest of the day, Lola reappeared.

‘You are here by yourself?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you like *caballos*?’

He shrugged, wondering if she was talking about horse meat, perhaps they are it like in France.

‘Can you ride?’ She did not wait for an answer. ‘I can show you the countryside if you like.’

‘The countryside? When?’ he asked startled by the sudden invitation.

'Now.'

'And the restaurant?'

'Close until evening.'

Barton could not refuse the offer from such a pretty girl, even if she twenty and more years younger than him.

'Why not?'

'So let's go,' she said pointing the way. 'The *caballos* are not far.'

They led him down an adjacent *calle* where after about a 100 metres she pointed to a small field where there were three or four horses.

'Here. I will call Jesus. He will fix the saddles.'

Barton, caught off guard, thought she was joking, but was saved from making a fool of himself when an old gaucho appeared.

'Look, that's my *caballo*,' she said pointing a tall light tan coloured mare. 'You can take Bolivar, that one.'

Barton was a little dismayed to see it was even taller than Lola's.

'Don't worry he's very tranquilo, he is 13 years old. He was my father's favourite.'

The old gaucho helped him strap on leggings, then he pointed at the stirrup. Barton obeyed with his foot and in a single movement the old man hefted him up into the saddle with surprising ease.

Before he had time to ask questions they were heading out into the surrounding country at an easy gait. After a shaky start he relaxed, settling into the Western saddle, adjusting to the swaying movement of the animal, marvelling at the unfamiliar hues of the undulating Mediterranean type landscape and the mountains beyond.

'How do you like it Tom?'

'Wonderful,' he replied, and it really was, seated high above the roadside vegetation, the air in his face as Bolivar broke in a trot. Lola drew up beside him, her face filled with her youthful pleasure.

Feeling the warmth of the sun on his face the last lingering

## The Cargo Club

feeling of gloom that had hung over him in recent weeks evaporated. As they broke in a canter he realised there was another world to be discovered beyond the City of London and its unbearable constraints.

He galloped with his youthful Colombian companion across the soft red earth, through strange vegetation, past brilliantly coloured flowers, and towards the mauve and violet hues of the hills beyond, his mind evacuating the echoes of London's omnipresent media, dismissing the exhortations of BBC India and the press that whipped up opinion, reporting the rantings of interested politicians and businessmen, all of which was as irrelevant as the endless commentaries on the exploits of tattooed men chasing balls.



Over the next days Lola showed Tom Barton the countryside surrounding Barichara, galloping through a landscape of amazing variety, under the springlike sky of the Andean Altiplano. Tom was enchanted and Lola radiated with pleasure.

Emilio jokingly warned him he would find himself in trouble,

not only was the town small, but Lola was well known, young and unruly. She had made life difficult for grandparents by her refusal to go to university. In reality she clung to the protective warmth of her grandparent's home in Barichari, where she lived following the death of her parents in car accident, on the dangerous mountain road to Bucaramanga. She had been just 12 years old when her maternal grandparents were suddenly confronted with the daunting task bringing up their tragically orphaned granddaughter.

Lola's grandfather, Don Pedro Heridia, adored her. She was all he had after the loss of his daughter. His family had fought alongside Simon Bolivar in Colombia's War of Independence from Spain at the beginning of the 19th century. At the end of the war the family expanded its large estates that lay between Villa Leyva to the south and Barichara to the north, adding to their wealth and prosperity.

Lola's only real interests were her horses, and her home, the Hacienda San Cristobal, set against the rolling landscape of the Altiplano and the surrounding peaks of the Cordillera Oriental, situated in a region blessed with a year round climate of eternal spring. It was not surprising Lola had rejected out of hand the idea of leaving her home to study in the depressing wet, cold, atmosphere of Bogota.

Some saw her as spoilt and petulant, but Lola's grandmother understood her and coaxed her into learning about the realities of life and what better than a job at the food court in the recently restored property, one of the many the family owned in the town centre.

The spacious corner house had been transformed into a food and souvenir court at the prompting of the mayor, as a contribution to his programme to attract more tourists to Barichara. His plan was to transform the town, already a world heritage site, into an obligatory stopover on the Andean trail for discerning travellers.

Lola found her job in the small café uninteresting and boring, the tourists were mostly old, or young married couples, passing through. Those who stayed over in Barichara, like

Juliao, the Argentinian, she disdained, they were not of her class, and besides that she had little or no interest in that style of backpacker with his knitted Andean shoulder bag, sandals and bongos.

As the days passed Tom relaxed as his riding skills improved and he felt at ease at a gallop. At the same time his feelings towards Lola were confused, was he a father figure, an uncle, or was it something different? She was very young, and beautiful, but their age difference was something else. Lola was no dizzy aspiring fashion model, nightclubber or eco-warrior. Her family life, that of colonial grandees, the Colombian upper class, old money, whose wealth had been based largely on the ownership of land and property and more recently industry and commerce.

'Would you like to see the waterfalls tomorrow Tom?'

'What about your job? What will your grandmother say?'

'I told her I'm having extra English lessons.'

He laughed.'

'Is true,' she said with a pretty pout.

'With who?'

'An Englishman.'

'Did you say he was old?'

'You are not old Tom.'

'I'm not so sure about that.'

'What?' she said not catching the phrase.

'Never mind.'

'Is okay?'

'Yes.'

She threw her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek.

'We can swim in the pool.'

That Monday morning they set out to visit the Cascadas de Juan Curi, near San Gil. They parked the car and after a walk of about fifteen minutes along the bank of a river, they reached the fall that towered more than 200 meters above a pool of crystal clear water.

'You can climb to the top,' said Lola pointing to a ladder and ropes.

'No thanks, I don't feel like breaking my neck.'

'What?'

'Never mind, it's a joke. I prefer to swim.'

It was hot, though not much more than a fine English summer day. There were no seasons, Lola told him, the vegetation perpetually green with flowers throughout the year.

'Nobody comes here?'

'Yes, but only weekends, or in the high season.'

'So, shall we swim.'



He had taken the precaution of wearing his swimming trunks under his shorts and was quickly undressed and in the water. He was surprised by the pleasant temperature.

'Come on,' he shouted to Lola.

'I forgot my, what you say—top.'

## The Cargo Club

He laughed, 'Never mind, I won't look.'

He turned his back and a few moments later she was behind him lacing her arms around his waist.

'Guess who?'

He playfully wrestled her under the water and then splashed off towards the fall that cascaded into the pool over a series of step-like rock slabs.

We can go up, there are more pools, she point to the fall.

They clambered over the rocks, through the cascade to the upper pool where they played like happy children under the fall as it tumbled down the mountainside. Sitting down on a shady ledge, they shook off the water and listened to the splashing stream.

'How do you like it Tom?'

'Very beautiful—like you.'

She put her hand on his and drew herself to him, her lips brushing his cheek.

'*Te quiero* Tom,' she whispered softly.

He kissed her lips and pulled her close. She seemed to melt in his arms. He felt her firm breasts, his desire seem to submerge him.

'No Lola,' he said gently pushing her away.

'Si Tom...'

They lay on the rock, apart from the movement of the water a total calm reigned. Her head on his shoulder and her arm across his chest, he watched the gentle rise and fall of her back as she breathed. Their love had been tender, natural, she was not experienced and had let him guide her.

An hour later they slowly made their way back to the car, their arms entwined, not a word was spoken.

Lola was not very talkative when it came to her grandparents, though it was evident that they were the centre of her world.

What Tom Barton gleaned came from Emilio, Don Pedro Heridia was a local grandee, an important man in the region, often absent for his business affairs in Bogota, Medellin or Cartagena. His splendid colonial home was situated five or six kilometres from the centre of the old town of Barichara,

which Tom had only glimpsed from a distance during his afternoon rides with Lola.

The invitation to the Hacienda was inevitable, which did not make him any less nervous. Lola had told her grandfather he was teaching her English, which Barton realised was rather thin, to say the least. In a small town there were eyes and ears everywhere, commencing with Jesus, the old gaucho.

Barton was picked up at his hotel by a chauffeur and driven to the hacienda where Lola, after shyly introducing him to her grandfather, made some excuse disappeared almost immediately, leaving Tom alone with the tall, aristocratic Colombian.

‘Welcome to Colombia Señor...’

‘Barton—Tom Barton,’ he said introducing himself, somewhat intimidated, not in awe of the Colombian, but rather because of his own awkwardly embarrassing position as a not very convincing ‘English teacher’.

‘So my granddaughter tells me you are teaching her English,’ said Don Pedro raising his eyebrows.

‘Yes, but I am afraid I’m not an English teacher,’ replied Barton, believing it was better to avoid being ridiculous from the start.

‘Oh!’

‘I’m spending some time here in Barichara,’ discovering Colombia.

‘That’s good news. My family came here more than four hundred years ago, with Pedro de Heridia. In 1525, to be exact, when he landed in Santa Marta. My forefather was his brother.’

There was a silence.

‘Señor Barton, I will be honest, my granddaughter is very special to us, she is very young—she is also very headstrong, the temperament of her mother. Lola has never shown much interest in the things many young women of her age seem to be attracted to, fashion, big cities, music.... We have been worried about her future—you see we are, as they say, getting on in age.’

But, he added with a quizzical smile, 'just recently she seems to have become more easy going, happier, perhaps it is your English lessons? *¡Quién sabe!*

Barton choked.

'As I said, I will be direct. My information is you are a serious person. You have means—banking and investment, I believe.'

'Yes,' admitted Barton seeing the old man had done his homework.

'But I am curious as to why you are in Colombia?'

'That's a good question Don Pedro, so I will be equally frank. It is true I have been successful in my investments, but money is not everything. I decided, if you can understand it, to take a pause. Business meetings, hotels and airports, do not make for a happy life.'

'I can understand that. You have no family?'

'No, I am not married, if that's what you mean. My parents passed away some years ago.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Thank you.'

'So what do you want to do in Colombia?'

'Barichara's a nice place, perhaps I'll look at some property here.'

That would be a good idea—and Dolores?

Barton shrugged his shoulders, surprised the two were linked, and lost for an answer.

'There is a big difference in age, she is just twenty.'

Barton acquiesced.

'When I married Lola's grandmother, there was also a big difference in our ages. When we lost our only daughter, Lola's mother, it was very hard for us. Now Lola is all we have. So I will ask you to be good to her.'

Barton nodded numbly. It seemed everything was cut and dry. He confusedly wondered what he was letting himself into, without having the time to think about the future, it was almost a shotgun wedding.

'Our family has consolidated its wealth over generations. I would not like to see Lola married to a poor architect or a

penniless actor. Marrying young in our country is a long tradition. In the past life was hard and people did not live long. Before I die I would like grandchildren. You understand that Señor Barton.'

Barton smiled and nodded, he understood Heridia's urgency and his concern about the family fortune. On the positive side, if that's what it could be called, it seemed as though he had passed a test.

'I have always admired the British—they gave us a lot of trouble over the course of our history, but that is the past. The English were empire builders like us.'

Barton smiled, relieved the don had a good opinion of the British.

'What would you like to drink Señor Barton? Maybe a glass of our very own wine?'

It was time Tom Barton tended to his affairs, there were a few pressing matters, however, it seemed he had burnt his bridges, at least certain of them. If he intended to make his home in Colombia and it was time to ensure his investments were protected.

To start, he instructed his lawyer in London to assure the maintenance of his home and properties in the capital as well as those in France. As for the Emerald Pool, in Dominica, which was no longer so far away, that was being looked after by Sarah Kavanagh's staff.

After winding down the hedge funds he managed, he would bank his gains, the others would be looked after by the bank. He had doubled his earnings since 2010, but all the signs the bull market was coming to an end were there. Wall Street was becoming less attractive as risks grew. When the Ukrainian crisis erupted, he had on the advice of Sergei Tarasov switched to blue chip investments. The previous summer he had got out of oil futures when he realized over production, together with Putin's adventure, made for bad news. He then dumped his American shale investments, sooner or later they would be hit by high production costs, growing stocks and falling prices.

He cut his losses as the Europe Zone stalled. From where he

stood the Old Continent was in trouble, France was stagnating under François Hollande's socialist policies, the euro had weakened, so logically he spread his currency holdings to Swiss francs, dollars and sterling. What he gained on the Swiss franc he lost on the euro and vice versa.

Barton's net worth had grown spectacularly over the previous five or six years. His relations with INI, Tarasov and investment banking had given him access to unequalled sources of information. What information he learnt with the bank was within the rules and very precious to those with the means to invest.

As investment fund manager he had netted massive gains and investors huge profits, his departure left some disappointed but richer investors. As he saw it he had accomplished what he had set out to achieve and it was time to move on.

He had the feeling the market had reached the end of a long cycle, perhaps he was wrong, but in any case he had had a long winning streak. What came next would be more volatility with less visibility, and though he was a lot of things he was not a gambler.

It was time to retire and enjoy his wealth, and even if he was old enough to be Lola's father, many good years lay ahead in Colombia, new horizons, a new life, in a new and exciting world.

CHAPTER 40

CARTAGENA DE INDIAS

When Tom Barton first arrived in Cartagena, he had been enchanted, the city was everything and more than he had expected. There were no visible signs of a war torn country terrorized by the Farc and racked by narco trafficking gangsters, the combined deeds of which had so recently supplied the international media with many blood curdling headlines.

Within a few months in Colombia he had started to feel at home with his Spanish making giant steps. Lola had changed his life and her country was proving to be a land of immense opportunities. He started by buying a piece of land near Barichara and building a home with the help of Alfonso, his new architect friend.

London had seemed far away to him, and the UK, seen from Colombia, conjured up a strange image in his mind, one that he remembered from a television series he had watched as a child, that of Patrick McGoochan as *The Prisoner* set on an imaginary twee English island—in fact Portmeirion in Wales, where the underclass was unseeable, which was certainly not the case in today's Britain, where beyond Knightsbridge and Chelsea, they, the poor thronged.

The politically correct establishment had allowed the millions of additional poor from the third world to pile into their already overcrowded island. BBC India pontificated, preached the good word, and as a reward splashed out extravagant salaries to news readers and weather forecasters, cramming the upper echelons with political appointees, and offering the grassroot masses footy and Topgear.

Nothing had changed since 2007, as for France, a country he

had got to know, and in spite of its faults, appreciate. It was ruled by *gauchist bobos* equally as obsessed by the politically correct and governed for years by mediocrities like Francois Hollande—a lame duck scribbler, and more recently Emanuel Macron—naively inexperienced.

It was a strange world that made me smile when I read stories like those of writer's like Salmon Rushdie, who spoke of the politically correct in his novel, *The Golden House*:

‘...their colleague forced to cancel a production of Eve Ensler’s, *The Vagina Monologues*, because by defining women as persons with vaginas it discriminated against persons identifying as female who did not possess vaginas.’

Democracy in Great Britain and France had in the relatively recent history been paper thin. Two World Wars and the dismantlement of their respective colonial empires had brought a greater distribution of political power. Equality was however an illusion. For those who liked to pretend otherwise a trip to the poorer immigrant districts of London, or Paris, should have been, if visitors cared to open their eyes and minds, an enlightening experience, though in all truth it was a considerable improvement on Orwell’s first full-length work, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, which was published in 1933, the account of his experiences in the two cities in the late 1920s and the extreme poverty he encountered.

Colombia could, to a certain degree be excused for its inequalities, which were everywhere, even after five centuries of metissage the country was still dominated by its *hidalgos* and their kind. The same went for numerous other countries in the New World, including the US. In South Africa, the abolition of apartheid had changed little in the distribution of land and wealth, whilst the Indian Subcontinent was a world of poverty, caste and division. Equality could not be decreed. Hadn’t Tocqueville written the Revolution was a thing of the bourgeoisie?

‘It’s better to avoid the days when the cruise ships come,’

Alfonso remarked as they manoeuvred their way around a straggling group of silver haired tourists.

‘They provide our daily bread,’ he told Barton with wry smile, ‘the more the better.’

They arrived at Calle de la Factoría, close to Plaza Santo Domingo, lined with colourful two and three level houses.

‘These are very interesting because of their spacious courtyards,’ Alfonso explained.



They stopped before a ruined façade, its stucco cracked and falling, the wooden framework of once colourful doors and balconies bleached almost white by the sun.

‘This is the place, the owner should be here,’ the Colombian said peering through the shutters.

Some minutes later a powerfully built man wearing blue jeans

and a white guayabara arrived.

‘*Señors, desculpeme*, I am late.’ Then looking at Barton he added with an apologetic smile, ‘This is Colombia.’

‘No problem.’

‘So Alfonso, this is Señor Barton, *Inglés* I believe?’

‘Sí,’ Barton replied.

‘This property belonged to an old cartagenera family, they now live in Barranquilla,’ he explained wrestling with a padlock and chain on the double entrance doors. ‘It would nice for a boutique hotel, *un calle muy tranquilo*.’

It was a ruin inside, nothing much was left except for the walls and timber beams.

‘*Cuidado, lo siento*,’ he said shrugging and pointing to the rubble strewn floor. ‘It needs work.’

It was an understatement, but Barton, who was hoping to make a better deal, was not deterred.

‘What’s the asking price?’

‘This colonial house is very beautiful with large spaces, arcades and inner patios perfect for a boutique hotel.’

He paused weighing up the two visitors.

‘The total area is nine hundred square metres.’

They waited.

‘The owner is asking three and a half million dollars.’

Barton not able to hide his surprise, remembering the price he had paid for the luxurious Emerald Pool villa on the Island of Dominica<sup>4</sup>. That was in 2008, when the crisis hit. Seven years on, the Americas were booming, the gringos were back, the embers of the war with the Farc were all that remained and Cartagena was on the point of becoming a new tourist Eldorado.

4 see The Turning Point by the author

## CHAPTER 41

### POLITICS

‘Venezuela, has become a very dangerous place,’ Tom told them as he spread out a map, ‘in fact it has been classified as the most dangerous country in the world.’

‘How does this affect you living here then?’ asked Scott.

‘Me? It doesn’t, but we have a lot of illegal immigrants from Venezuela. The Venezuela-Colombia border is more than 2,000 kilometres long—mountains, rivers and jungle. Very difficult to control. There’s a lot of smuggling.’

‘Smuggling?’ Liam Clancy exclaimed.

‘Yes. The basic essentials. Gasoline costs almost nothing in Venezuela, about four cents a gallon, so a tank of gas sold over the border in Colombia, two-thirds of the going price in our gas stations.’

‘Where?’

‘At Cucuta, that’s near the Simon Bolivar international bridge. They’re called *pimpineros*, that’s what they call the plastic drums—*pimpins*. They make about two dollars a gallon.’

‘Is it serious,’ asked Liam, ‘I mean it can’t be that much.’

Tom laughed

‘Serious? Yes it’s a huge loss in tax revenue for the Colombian government and a loss for Venezuela where more the 15% of the gasoline produced in their refineries ends up in neighbouring countries.’

‘That’s huge. What does the law do?’

‘Nothing, at least here. It’s been going on for years. But it’s not just gas. With their oil revenues the Chavez and Maduro governments used the money to win votes, under the guise of socialism. The smugglers sell almost everything, meat, rice, beer, even powdered milk and diapers, at half or even a

quarter of Colombian prices. With all their political problems and the price of oil, their money, the Bolivar, has been devalued, making contraband gas and food stuffs even more profitable.

'It's a disaster for Venezuela, there's shortages of almost everything. Maduro's government's really in deep trouble and things are not about to get better. But we had to keep him happy because of the negotiations with the Farc that were held in Cuba, with Maduro's pals.'

'Incredible.'

'It's an institution. Everybody's in on the act, government officials, police, criminal and even the Farc was.'

Liam laughed.

'What about emigration? Illegal or otherwise.'

'It's always been low compared to the USA or Europe. Before nobody wanted to come to a country that's was fighting against Marxist revolutionaries.'

'But now the tables are turned. Venezuelans are flooding over the border. It's easy they're all Spanish speaking, and have a common history, even if it has been painful, plus the fact they're all Christians, not some foreign ideology or religion.'

'The Pope and the Vatican are not foreign?' Liam asked smiling

'Today no, the Pope's Argentinian.'

They laughed.

'Of course. I see what you mean.'

'And corruption?'

'I'm sorry to say it's part of the Latin American tradition. It's everywhere, take Panama City it's not only a place for rich Americans or Europeans to hide their money, it's also where the cronies of Chavez and Maduro put their nest eggs, the so-called *boliburgues*.'

'Boli...'

'*Boliburgues*, or *boligarchs*, from the Bolivarian revolution. In Venezuela, it's all those who grew rich under the socialist dictatorship.'

‘The *boliburgues* put their dirty money into Panamanian real estate, buying whole bundles of luxury apartments, leaving them vacant like in Pat’s China.

‘Then came the Panama Papers, which exposed the system used by the Chavistas hide their wealth, those who amassed huge fortunes through corruption, fraud and theft.’

‘In Panama?’ asked Scott.

‘Right, in 2003 Chavez pegged the Venezuelan bolivar to the dollar, which gave the regime’s cronies a huge opportunity to fill their pockets, buying dollars at the official rate and sell them on the black market, for often up to 100 times more. Exactly like in Russia after the collapse of the USSR.’

Scott remembered buying antique Chinese porcelain in Vietnam when the hard-line Communists ruled, paying in dollars at black market rates in Ho Chi Min City, making a 10 or 20 fold profit, the problem of getting the goods out, but that was solved by getting them out via Hanoi where there were few controls.

Tom Barton, or anyone who travelled the Hispanic world and its extensions, could run into the Venezuelan *boliburgues* in Miami, Panama, Curaçao, or even in Spain, where unperturbed they bought property and built up their retirement funds, which John Bolton, a former National Security Advisor of the US, suggested Maduro and his friends should use for ‘a long, quiet retirement—on a nice beach somewhere far from Venezuela.’

Maduro and his clique, as was the case for all socialist ideologues, reminded me of George Orwell’s words used against the apologists for Stalin in the 1940s, which were equally valid today, ‘Do remember that dishonesty and cowardice always have to be paid for. Don’t imagine that for years on end you can make yourself the boot-licking propagandist of the Soviet regime, or any other regime, and then suddenly return to mental decency. Once a whore, always a whore.’

Unluckily for the *boliburgues*, they were in the sights the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network and the Lima Group

of 12 Latin American countries plus Canada, and would have trouble in enjoying their ill gotten pension funds. Which was in the case of Alejandro Andrade, Chavez's private secretary, was too late. He, as head of the Venezuelan treasury, had swindled his country out of more than one billion dollars in an exchange rate scam and laundered it to feather his nest in Florida, leading an opulent life style, a mansion on Palm Beach, a jet, a yacht, a collection of classic cars and a stable of 60 racehorses. Andrade was sentenced to 10 years in jail by a US court.

As the noose tightened, crooks of Andrade's kind headed for Turkey, the Emirates and other places to hide their loot.

John Francis had warned Pat about the long arm of the US Justice Department, telling him how a Panamanian based banker had been sentenced to 10 years in jail, for managing the accounts of hundreds of Venezuelans. Matthias Krull had helped them launder funds from Petroleos de Venezuela, the Venezuelan national oil company, via another exchange rate scam.

Others of the Chavista clique were implicated in drug trafficking, extortion and embezzlement of government funds.

Pat was unfazed he was too high on the food chain to be involved in sordid details, at the same time reassuring us that Panama had cleaned up its game and was concentrating its efforts on transforming Panama City into an above board regional financial hub where he planned to expand his bank's business across the Caribbean and Latin America.

## CHAPTER 42

### PANAMA CITY

Pat Kennedy's arrival in Panama City early one evening in 2015 had been prompted by the sudden disappearance of Tom Barton. During a brief halt in London he had picked up Tom's trail, but no explanations.

Pat had asked himself whether it was linked to City & Colonial's takeover in the City? Was there something that he should know?

He had spent most of his time on the London to Miami leg poring over the old maps of Central America, maps he had picked on Charing Cross Road's old bookshops with reading matter on the history of the Spanish Conquest of the New World.

Somewhere high above the Atlantic seated in one of the broad armchairs of his jet he finally fell asleep as he crossed yet more time zones. Whatever the comforts offered by his jet, flying was confining and Pat was pleased to escape his gilded cocoon on arrival in Panama City, feeling reinvigorated and primed for the task ahead.

José Laborda, head of the law firm that managed INI's business in Panama, met Pat and accompanied him to the Intercontinental situated in the down-town area of the city on avenida Balboa, overlooking Panama Bay and the Pacific. A flurry of flunkies guided them to Kennedy's suite high up in the hotel. There, Laborda pointed to the west and Casco Viejo, the old town, suggesting Pat put off any visit he planned until the following day, tactfully warning him of the dangers of

getting lost in Panama City in the late evening.

Laborda wished Kennedy a good evening when Pat excused himself, feigning fatigue and confirming their meeting the next morning at the lawyer's offices.

As soon Pat arranged his affairs and took a shower he descended to the lobby to explore the hotel and its immediate surroundings. It was his first trip to the Latin American mainland for many years and his earlier memories of Mexico and the nearby Caribbean made him a little wary.

A quick reconnaissance confirmed his initial impression of Panama, that is one of surprise, in a certain manner of speaking the skyline was not that different to that of Hong Kong's or Shanghai's. The people on the streets were not unlike to those of Canton, though fewer, nothing could beat China's multitudes, except for India he had been told, a country he had assiduously avoided even though he retained pleasant memories of nearby Sri Lanka.

Where did all the money come from? Pat asked himself. It wasn't as if he didn't know, but he couldn't help marvelling at the result. Panama and places like it were the end recipients of a constant flow of money from every corner of the planet, that is anywhere where money was to be made.

What made that money different was that it that had passed through, or around, the fiscal net of the respective states in which it was generated, escaping all forms of governmental control and taxation, often arriving in Panama by the most devious of routes.

Channelling money to offshore financial centres was an everyday part of INI's business, and that of other banks like it, 24 hours a day, every day, year in year out. Pat was attracted by the idea that anyone with a modestly large bank account could escape what the Panamanians called, the 'frivolities' of British or European governments, in matters of taxation. Investors, if that's what they could be called, could even obtain Panamanian citizenship, and those with substantially more money at their disposition, as in his own specific case, could if they wished retire like a legendary South American dictator in

the Central American republic.

When it came to money Pat was not immoral, he was simply amoral. Moral considerations simply did not exist in his universe, though it was wise to avoid the sanctions of the law, as he had already learnt. Beyond that it was as the Romans put it *pecunia non olet*.

At precisely the same moment Pat Kennedy disembarked at VIP enclosure of Tocumen International Airport, 30 kilometres to the west, Liam Clancy was arriving at the Albroom Bus Terminal, nearer the centre of the city. Pat had travelled Champagne class from London, some 10,000 kilometres distant, whilst Liam, with his newly found girlfriend, had spent about the same time to cover the distance from Bocas del Toro, about 300 kilometres to the west of Panama City, seated in the cramped back row of a bus, above the motor with the heat and noise that went with it. Luckily for them they were spared the odours of the toilet, an arm's length from Liam, it was locked, Fuera de Servicio, announced a scribbled note stuck on the door.

Liam was almost oblivious to the discomfort with Gisela by his side, sleeping on and off and as the hours passed, her sun bleached blonde hair draped on his shoulder, which did not prevent the journey from being any less exhausting.

On their arrival at Albroom, he showed the address on the Plaza Bolivar to the taxi driver who feigned ignorance in the hope of extracting an extortionate fare from the young gringo, but when Liam questioned him in fluent Spanish he smiled crestfallen and announced a somewhat more reasonable fare. Liam was too weary to argue and nodded okay.

Ten minutes later they pulled up in front of the Casablanca, a stylish bar, situated on one corner of Plaza Bolivar. There the two adventurers looking like they had just arrived from a jungle trek were greeted by an astonished Tom Barton, who introduced them to Ariel Romeo, the owner of the apartment booked for their stay in the Casco Viejo. Ariel pointed the way to the entrance of the grand ochre coloured edifice that dominated the plaza, as the concierge busied himself with their

## The Cargo Club

bags.

The spacious apartment was situated on the third floor, it was decorated and furnished in a forties style that corresponded with what had been the former Colombia Hotel's period of past glory, before being transformed into apartments. From the window of the living room was a splendid view overlooking Plaza Bolivar and the pavement terraces of the cafés below.



After showing them around Ariel handed over the keys, wished them an enjoyable stay and left. Gisela threw open the windows to admire the view, she was delighted. Then after quickly freshening themselves up they joined Tom who was waiting below at the bar in the Casablanca.

Wanting to stretch their legs after their long day in the bus they gladly accepted Tom's suggestion of a short walk before diner at a restaurant nearby the French Embassy, two or three cuerdas from the Hotel Colombia, through a busy residential quarter with dotted with fashionable bars and restaurants.

The restaurant was modern-chic, with a terrace overlooking a small square. Tom recommended a gourmet menu, which

consisted of a dozen dishes of selected local specialities, served with first class red and white wines. He calmed their fears, reassuring them that each dish was no more than a couple mouthfuls. The first was beef marrow and confit d'oignon followed by *ceviche*, a delicious local dish of marinated raw fish in a mixture lemon juice, garlic, red onions and spices.

As the different plates followed they relaxed, observing the flow of Panamanians arriving on the square in an almost constant stream of large upmarket SUVs, for whom a dinner of a hundred or more dollars was nothing, an uneasy contrast with a scene they had passed a block or two away in the dark side streets, where poor families squatted outside of their wretchedly cramped dwellings, the smell of their simple evening meals wafting into the evening air, the women watching over their tiny charcoal stoves in the narrow doorways and passages of their pathetic homes, whilst the men sat in resigned silence on the curbstones outside watching their small children play.

A couple of days earlier Tom Barton had happened on the scene, a constant reminder to him of life's inequalities, realizing he was first in line on the bench of the accused. But there was little he could do except promote employment by investing his gains in productive industry.

On returning to their apartment Liam checked his mail. There was a message from Pat Kennedy, announcing he had already arrived in Panama City. He called and agreed to meet Pat next day for lunch, which would leave them the time to settle in. Pat suggested they all get together around midday, and Liam, sensing he wanted explore, proposed the Casco Viejo and what better meeting point than the Casablanca.

The next morning Liam awoke first and whispered to Gisela he would slip out to find something for breakfast. Below, on the plaza, he discovered the Casco Viejo was everything that Bocas was not, apart from the beaches that is, a beautiful, colourful, newly restored colonial city. A waiter at the already opened pavement bar pointed the way to a small 24 hour store

## The Cargo Club

run by a Chinese family, just a cuadra from the plaza, where he bought juice, milk, bread and eggs.

Liam brewed the coffee he found in the kitchenette and served the breakfast on the colonnaded balcony which offered a magnificent view of the cathedral across the plaza, in the centre stood a statue of Simon Bolivar, Latin America's liberator and hero, benignly watching over the passers-by.

It was just nearing midday when Liam spotted the unmistakable figure of Pat Kennedy below, already fitted out with a Panama, stepping out of a large black SUV on the south corner of the plaza, bringing to Liam's amused mind a vision of Graham Greene's tailor, James Wormold.

A couple of minutes later they were below waving to Pat, who was about to disappear down one of the calles that formed a cross road on the corner of the plaza next to the Casablanca.

'Pat, great to see you, this is Gisela, a friend,' Liam said, a little embarrassed before Kennedy, whose was not only his boss, but the CEO of INI Hong Kong.

'Wonderful,' replied Pat beaming with pleasure, clearly approving the young woman, who emanated an image of health and beauty. 'A fine place,' said Pat with a wave of his arm towards the plaza.

'Absolutely, we have a place up,' said Liam relieved as he pointed to the Colombia, 'Tom fixed it up for us.'

'Excellent. Have you had a chance to look around,' asked Pat.

'No, we just got here yesterday, like you. We had diner with Tom last night and he'll join us for lunch. I just have to call him when we've decided where to go.'

'Perfect, tell me everything,' said Pat, delighted Liam had linked-up with Barton.

They crossed the plaza to its south corner and soon found themselves near the spot where they had dined the previous evening. The small square was dominated by a statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the ill fated pioneer of the Panama Canal, whose gigantic construction project ended in bitter failure. Pat stopped and contemplated the statue for a long

moment.

An hour later they were back outside the Casablanca enjoying cold beers beneath a parasol.

'*Zum wohl!*' said Pat pleased to practice his German.

'*Zum wohl!*' replied Gisela politely.

'*¡Salud!*' added Liam.

They all laughed.

'So what are your plans now Liam?'

'Well I'm enjoying the break.'

'It looks like it,' said Pat glancing towards Gisela.

'After, we're planning to stop off at Cartagena in Colombia. Tom Barton is planning to be there too—it seems he's developing something new.'

'I see. A lot of things have happened over the last weeks!'

Liam nodded, it was not his position to comment on the high level manoeuvres in the bank.

'We'll have to be patient, but everything will be straightened shortly. Michael has plans for London.'

'It sounds good.'

'Yes. He's working on a new strategy. That's between us.'

'Of course, and Hong Kong, if you don't mind me asking?'

'Nothing to worry about there Liam, you'll be fine.'

Liam felt embarrassed at being so easily read.

'The future is looking good for us,' he said with a conspirational laugh.

That was certain thought Liam, especially for Pat, it was no secret Kennedy was a very rich man.

'How long will you be staying in Panama?'

'I'm not sure for the moment, but I've a couple of meetings here with José Laborda, he's our lawyer here, you'll meet him tomorrow. Then to be honest I was hoping to get together with Tom. Then I have something to see in Nicaragua.'

'Nicaragua?'

'Yes,' replied Kennedy with a conspirational wink.

The waiter appeared and Liam explained in rapid Spanish they were waiting for a friend.

'I forgot you were fluent in Spanish.'

'Yes, thanks to the Irish Union.'

'The Irish Union?'

Liam laughed.

'Yes, the bank, in 2008, when I was laid me off, there was nothing doing in Ireland, so I sold my pad in Dublin and headed for Spain.'

'Yes, of course,' replied Pat. Liam's story had momentarily slipped his hyperactive mind.

'Set up a consulting business. It's still going. Actually business has picked up quite a bit.'

'So I've heard,' said Kennedy as the details came back to him.

'Look here's Tom now,' said Liam standing up.

Pat greeted Tom with a hug, like an old friend he hadn't seen in years. They ordered drinks and exchanged news. Tom explaining his presence in Colombia, uneasily justifying it with a story of investment opportunities. He carefully omitted Lola, unsure of how he could explain she was just 20 years old, and especially in the presence of Liam Clancy and his new friend.

Pat spoke of Hong Kong, Lili, Lily Rose, and their visit to London. Liam enthused about Bocas de Toro and Gisela listened, surprised at the sudden change in her plans. Barely a week before she was bumming it with her surfer friends on the beach of a tropical island, and now she was sitting in a smart restaurant in Panama City with three British bankers, one of whom she had developed more than a little passing interest in.

Kennedy's morning had not wasted. He had risen early for a meeting with José Laborda, whose family's connection with the Fitzwilliams bank went back to the sixties when his father had been introduced to David Castlemain's father by a mutual friend, Malcolm Smeaton Snr.

During the fifty years that followed the law firm had supplied legal, financial and consultancy services to the Irish bank and its Caribbean emanation.

Beside the usual legal advice relating to investments, contracts and real estate transactions, the firm provided more specialised services for which there was an ever growing

demand—the creation of Panamanian and offshore companies for foreign businesses, or individuals, the setting up of private foundations, the opening of all types of offshore bank accounts, questions relating to the registration of trademarks, patents, copyrights, and last but not least immigration. The latter concerned the obtention of permits, or visas, for the entry and sojourn of foreigners in Panama, and procedures related to the acquisition of Panamanian citizenship.

Panama had enjoyed a privileged position in Central America for more than 100 years, the transoceanic canal was not only of national importance to Washington, but a vital point of passage for worldwide shipping. Then, in more recent times, Panama City had become an important hub for air travel between North and South America with in addition daily connections to Europe and Asia.

Laborda's was a family law firm, just one of the many law firms in Panama City, but smaller than the larger better known providers of legal and trust services such as Morgan and Morgan, or Mossack Fonseca. It offered a more personalised service to its clients in a country where discretion was a way of life.

Panamanian providers of legal and trust services, together with their branches throughout the Caribbean, made it easy for their clients to set up offshore bank accounts, or shell companies, without public disclosure of ownership, or the identity of their directors, in any one of a number of tax havens including the British Virgin Islands, home to about forty percent of the world's offshore companies.

For more demanding clients, they proposed shadowy offshore islands such as Niue, a tiny South Pacific island nation with a population of fewer than 2,000 which offered registration for certain Chinese and Russian clients.

Some of the world's biggest financial institutions, including HSBC, City & Colonial, Société Générale, Credit Suisse, UBS, and Commerzbank, had aided clients set up complex structures via Panama, to hide money from their respective

country's tax collectors and government authorities. Nominee directors, that is stand-in directors, hid the identity of the real owners of bank accounts held by anonymous offshore companies, which together with the laws of secrecy in the different jurisdictions made it hard if not impossible for authorities to track down tax dodgers and other persons of interest.

Amongst the many legal structures establish in Panama were foundations, initially listed as non-profit making organisations, declaring for example the World Wildlife Fund—an international ONG listed by Forbes as one of the world's leading charities, as their beneficiary, a detail that could be changed without the least formality.

Pat had taken the precaution of walking to Laborda's office, situated in an office tower in Riu Plaza, off Avenida Cruz Herrera, a short, but sticky, ten minutes on foot from the Intercontinental. He had learnt one could never be too careful when it came to the bank's business in cities like Panama, a pole of attraction for sensation seeking media investigators.

Pat's concerns, mostly related to his Chinese clients, were discussed directly with Laborda in a business like manner. It was a serious, to the point, without wasting time for the normal niceties of international business. Towards eleven thirty, the discussions, concluded Laborda's chauffeur drove Pat to Casco Viejo, where he dropped him off on Plaza Bolivar.

CHAPTER 43

THE GULF OF VENEZUELA

Captain Alonso de Ojeda was the first European to discover the Gulf of Venezuela and the Guajira Peninsula, in 1499, which incredibly had seen little or no urban development over the centuries that had passed since that time.

Our side of the Guajira Peninsula was an unspoilt paradise of desolate beauty, no roads, farms, towns, villages, hotels, or restaurants. Aboard the *Sundaland II*, anchored off the coast, we were entirely left to ourselves and our work during which Anna taught me how to dive in those translucent waters, an extraordinary experience for me, discovering marine life and the ghostly remains of the *Espiritu Santo* and its treasure in situ as the salvage work of Robert's specialists and marine archaeologists progressed.

With the arrival of Pat's yacht, *Las Indias*, we had everything we needed, a floating palace alongside our place of work on the *Sundaland II*.

In spite of the two large boats and the toing and froing of inflatable and semi-rigid craft, there wasn't much other life in strange wind swept paradise, a few seabirds wheeling above us under the unvarying cloudless azure dome that hung over the turquoise sea—beyond lay the coastline, a monotonous yellow and ochre landscape interrupted by few rocky outcroppings.

The waters were shallow, 10 to 20 metres at our point of anchorage, well off the reef as we didn't want to join the galleon on the seabed. When the water was calm, as it was most of the time, we could easily make out the seabed where a few rocks marked the tail end of the reef that had sealed the fate of the *Espiritu Santo* was still visible, surrounded by sand banks formed by the currents, that came and went over time,

shifting as the flow changed direction.

The wreck was a little further out in deeper water, it was mostly covered by the sand and small corals, surrounded by small meadows of seagrass and fronds that slowly waved in the currents, small shoals of brightly coloured fish darted in and out of what remained of the galleon's wooden ribs and beams and curious turtles passed sometimes pausing to inspect us.

The *Espiritu Santo* was not difficult to reach, but removing the sand would have been easier with a dredger had it not been for the archaeological value of the ship and its cargo.

The work was not complicated, but slow, as over the centuries the cargo had shifted and spread out over a wide zone driven by storms and currents. Every coin, each object, however small, was worth the effort in view of its historical or market value, and no effort was spared, as once we left the site would be impossible to protect from treasure hunters of every genre.

A huge quantity of gold as well as assorted precious stones, pearls and jewellery, along with Chinese porcelain and silver objects was recovered, most of which had been progressively transported for safekeeping to Cartagena aboard naval vessels to avoid unwanted attention from pirates, Venezuelan intruders, disgruntled claimants, or even subversive action piloted from Moscow in pursuit of its regional interests and support for the Maduro regime.

As the days and weeks passed we'd settled into an easy going routine, then as the end of the expedition approached, we relaxed and enjoyed the savage unspoiled nature of the site. However, in spite of our isolation we were constantly reminded of the nearness of human civilisation by the presence of man's footprint, not that of Friday's, but in the ubiquitous form of plastic, carried by the currents from the Caribbean, or Maracaibo.

Maracaibo lay about 300 kilometres to the south, the capital of Venezuela's oil industry, with its four million inhabitants, its dilapidated historic centre, caught in the throes of the Chavez-

Maduro collapse, where nothing worked and pollution was rife with more than half of Venezuela's oil output coming from the dilapidated wells on Lake Maracaibo.

Lake Maracaibo, a semi-closed bay of brackish water, a kind of delta fed by a hundred rivers, drained into the Gulf of Venezuela. Back in 1914 it was a prosperous fishing port, but after the discovery of oil it was progressively transformed into one of the world's richest oil fields, where more than 450 wells pumped oil from the lake bed, but that was before Venezuela collapsed into Soviet style socialism.

Until the arrival of Chavez the lake was a dynamic production centre where oil tankers, barges and maintenance boats serviced the country's principal source of wealth. Today the lake resembles a scene of industrial desolation reminiscent of a post Soviet Mad Max landscape of rusting platforms and 25,000 kilometres of decaying pipelines leaking crude into the lake. An ecological catastrophe, the consequence of the same dysfunctional political bankruptcy that struck down the USSR.

John asked Anna if she remembered the novel *Papillon*, or the film that starred Steve McQueen, she didn't, it was a bit before her time, in fact well before she was born, for me it was one of those iconic oldies I'd seen when I was a kid. Well, it was said to have been based on a true story, that of the book's author, Henri Charrière, who escaped from Devils Island, a French penal colony in Guyana, and reached Colombia where he live with the Guajira Indians, whom he described as:

'seafarers who fish for pearls. Their primary diet is said to consist of fish, turtle meat, turtle eggs and big green lizards, most likely Iguanas. Men and women are dressed only in a loincloth which covers their crotch.'

Far from the tribulations of *Papillon*, we spent most evenings sitting comfortably on the deck of one of the boats, watching the sunset over the coast line. I checked the news back home, a faraway and unreal place. In the UK, Brexit inevitably dominated the news. It would mark our history, that of Ireland, the UK and Europe. The folly created by David

Cameron, who unwittingly carved himself an infamous place in history with the narrowly won referendum to quit the European Union, motivated by his short term party political needs.

Brexit was forged on lingering 19th imperial nostalgia, the persistent illusion of greatness, the xenophobia of Britain's leaders, their lies, their deliberate dishonesty, exercised in the name of democracy.

Obviously people like us, that is the Clan to you, would be little affected, we were citizens of the world. It was those, the majority, who would feel the pain when it came in its many forms.

We would clean up, our bank accounts would swell, but those trapped in the UK would be poorer in the Walter Mitty world of island sovereignty, where a no-deal Brexit would offer the regulatory vacuum that certain hell-bent Brexiteers hoped for, a paradise of unrestrained capitalism, where in the name of profit industries would be freed from EU regulations, tearing down regulatory controls, governing for example the discharge of industrial sewage into lakes and rivers, crop spraying, atmospheric emissions, food and pharmaceutical standards, and labour laws.

According to the conservative Rees-Mogg, regulations that were good enough for India would be good enough for the UK and rolling back high EU standards would benefit business.

The rewards would be huge with the UK becoming a low tax export platform, exempt from the laws that govern other developed nations, seated on Europe's doorstep.

It all seem far fetched to us, far from those concerns as we watched the crimson sun setting on Alta Guajira, where I sipped a chilled beer in Anna's douce company, our skins tingling from the sun and salt after the day's dives, sitting on the spacious deck of *Las Indias*, as she turned over the centuries old gold escudos on the table before us, their glint tinted red by the last rays of the fading sun.

## CHAPTER 44

# PIECES OF EIGHT

As we catalogued the gold coins recovered from the wreck, Anna told the story of how Spain's power had been derived from the fabulous mineral wealth they'd discovered in the New World. When the Aztec Empire and Inca empires were seized by the conquistadors in the name of the Spanish crown, and when the huge quantities of gold and silver, looted and subsequently mined, flowed into the European and very soon after Asian economies.

After the conquest of Mexico and the Aztec Empire by Cortes in 1521, and Peru and the Inca Empire by Pizarro in 1532, by their almost insignificantly small army of soldiers and adventurers, backed by unsuspecting local allies, Spain found itself in possession of an incredibly vast and rich territory that ran from present day California to Argentina.

It started when Hernan Cortes arrived in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, a thriving city of 150,000 souls, described by Bernal Diaz, a companion and chronicler of Cortes:

'far larger than any European city'. In 1519, he informed the King of Spain he could 'not describe one-hundredth of all the things which could be mentioned', as he recounted the details of a market where 'more than 60,000 people come each day to buy and sell, and where every kind of merchandise ... is found, provisions as well as ... ornaments of gold and silver, lead, brass, copper, tin stones, shells, bones and feathers'. Then going on to described Moctezuma's 'vast compound of palaces, apartments, libraries, warehouses, and even a zoo'.

Spain's new empire was governed by viceroys and

administrators, appointed by the King in Madrid to exploit its riches and raise Spain to the richest and most powerful nation on earth, a reign which lasted over 300 years until its long 19th century decline. During this period gold and silver crossed the Atlantic in Spain's galleons, whilst 750,000 Spaniards emigrated to the King's new colonies, mostly young men and women attracted by the promise of land, wealth, and social advancement, they included labourers, craftsmen, soldiers, clerks and priests.

When silver was discovered in the middle of the 16th century in Peru, Mexico and Bolivia, it financed the development of cross Pacific trade with China. Silver coins were struck in vast quantities financing a new Silk Route with Chinese manufactured goods providing the new colonies with their needs and especially luxuries, goods which also traversed the Atlantic to Spain and the rest of Europe.

The question as to why Spain did not expand its empire northwards intrigued us. In fact, Anna explained, Spain did explore the regions beyond the Rio Grande, as always in the hope of discovering new sources of gold and silver.

Many Spanish expeditions had set out to explore the region's to the north of the Caribbean basin in the hope of discovering another rich Indian empire. Their expeditions were not small but composed of hundreds of soldiers, settlers, priests, and slaves, as well as horses and livestock.

They explored what is today Florida, Texas and California as early as 1513, but found nothing comparable to the gold and silver of Mexico, or the rich densely populated lands of the Caribbean whose peoples could be exploited and enslaved.

In 1528, an expedition led by Panfilo de Narvaez set out from Spain to colonize Florida ended in total disaster. Only four of the expedition's original 400 members survived the terrible voyage that ended in Mexico City in 1536, crossing what is today the USA to the Rio Grande, across Mexico to the Gulf of California, then down the Pacific Coast and inland to Mexico City.

From 1500 to 1650, it has been calculated that Spain carried

off 180 tons of gold, and a staggering 16,000 tons of silver, which can be put into perspective if one considers the US production of silver today, using the most modern large scale mining technology, is a mere 1,000 tons a year.

The convoy system that transported the treasure back to Spain began in the 1530s, which though it provided some protection from enemy ships, did nothing to protect the ships from natural hazards such as storms and reefs, not forgetting material failure and human and navigational errors.

The worst disasters occurred in 1715 and 1733 when the transatlantic convoys were caught in powerful hurricanes off the coast of Florida causing huge losses.

The convoy system was a two way route, leaving Seville in the south of Spain loaded with manufactured wares to supply colonists with the needs unavailable in the new colonies, which were traded against precious metals and exotic products of the New World.

In the opposite direction in addition to the goods was the gold and silver that flowed into the Spanish and European economies creating an extraordinary period of wealth and growth.

The use of gold, silver and copper coinage as means of exchange dated back to antiquity because of the enduring characteristics of the metals, however their respective rarity limited trade, manufacturing and consequently growth.

It was the discovery of vast quantities of silver in the New World that broke the monetary bottleneck, ushering in a unit of exchange which was to become the international standard over the of the following three centuries.

The basic silver coins, *reales de a ocho*, otherwise known as Spanish silver dollars, soon became widely accepted in Europe, used by Spain to buy manufactured goods from other European nations. In this way the silver mined in the Americas spread across Europe and then into the global economy.

Spain enforced a trading monopoly with its colonies, excluding all other European powers from direct trade with its

New World possessions. It supplied them with goods including foods, textiles, tools, domestic animals, and weapons, exclusively shipped across the Atlantic on Spanish vessels, in exchange for gold and silver, which went directly to Spain.

Soon mines in Bolivia and Mexico were producing silver in never before seen quantities, principally from Potosi and Zacatecas. At the peak of its production in the early 17th century, Potosi had become a vast mining town with a population of 160,000 inhabitants, including native Peruvians, Spanish settlers, African slaves, becoming one of the world's largest cities, larger than London, Milan or Seville.



The Andean city, situated at an altitude of over 4,000 metres, became the home of the colonial mint. With its bitterly cold winters and cool damp summers, Potosi was an imperial outpost of desperate contrasts, on the one hand were the miserable hovels of the countless workers that slaved in the mines, and on the other were the rich villas of their masters, all of which surrounded by a typical Spanish colonial city centre with its churches, shops, taverns, gambling houses, theatres and factories, attracting fortune seekers, adventurers, administrators, priests and monks as well as criminals and prostitutes.

Surrounding the city were the smelting mills where the ore bearing the silver was ground and refined into bars and sent to

the Potosi mint where it was struck into coinage.

Already in 1561, an emblazoned silver shield, offered by Felipe II of Spain to Potosí, bore the emblematic words, 'For the powerful emperor, for the wise king, this lofty mountain of silver could conquer the world.'

The conquistadors had not discovered El Dorado, but they did find a mountain of silver that was destined to transform the future of Spain and the rest of the world over the course of the following centuries.

After the introduction of the mercury amalgamation process to extract silver from the raw ore, production exploded and a system of forced labour was introduced, the mita, through which Peruvians from the nearby regions were pressed into work in the mines, where they laboured carrying ore to the surface in 45 kilogramme sacks with a quota of 25 sacks a day.

The city's coat of arms boasted, 'I am rich Potosí, treasure of the world, king of all mountains and envy of kings'.

The bullion and pieces of eight that flowed from Potosi transformed Spain into the world's most powerful empire of that time, stretching half way around the globe, the other half was controlled by Portugal.

But nothing lasts forever and the city's population fell to 60,000 by the end of the 17th century, as inflation hit the value of silver and mining operations became less profitable.

In our days Eduardo Galeano's book, *Open Veins of Latin America*, the tragic story of Potosi's suffering, was offered as a gift to Barack Obama by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez in 2009.

'You could build a silver bridge from Potosí to Madrid from what was mined here—and one back with the bones of those that died taking it out,' recounted Potosinos.

The Spanish monetary system was based on a system of reales, which came from the word real, or in English royal, introduced by Pedro I, known as Pedro the Cruel by some and the Just by others, King of Castile and Leon from 1350 to 1369.

By the time Columbus arrived in America, Spain used a silver eight real coin. Then, in 1537, the gold escudo was introduced,

which was worth 16 reales, followed by a gold doubloons worth 2 gold escudos, hence the name—meaning double, or 32 silver reales.

Rich silver mines in Taxco and Zacatecas in Mexico, Potosi in Bolivia, supplied Spain's royal mints in Mexico and Peru, which issued millions of these irregularly shaped coins, crudely produced from the gold and silver, struck with hand dies and then shipped aboard the galleons bound for Europe and China.

The commonly used currency in Europe at that time was the silver *thaler*, or in Dutch *daalder*, and since the silver eight real coins were of a very similar size, purity and value, they became known as *thalers*, a name that evolved into 'dollars'.

These Spanish dollars—each weighing about one ounce, or 28 grammes of pure silver, became the principal and most stable coinage in the Americas over a period of three centuries, accepted as legal tender in the United States until the Coinage Act of 1857 ended its usage.

However, the unlimited wealth that flowed from the Americas proved ruinous, with a profligate and unsustainable level of spending by the Spanish crown, which led to inflation plus the absence of investment in Spain itself and the collapse of its colonial empire, when Spain went from being the most stable country in Europe to the most unstable.

The story as a point of history had little effect on Pat Kennedy, however, it did whet his appetite, he was a romantic and like many before him he was drawn by the legend of El Dorado like a moth to the flame.

Where he arrived on-board the *Sundaland II* the sight of plastic buckets full of glistening golden reales was too much to resist. He, like a child at Christmas, grabbed a handful of doubloons, each one of which was worth something like 3,000 dollars, and all struck from the gold looted from the Inca Empire.

El Dorado had existed and tales of the riches of the Inca and Aztec empires had attracted adventurers, who followed in the footsteps of Cortes and Pizarro in the New World, in search

of gold, lost empires, and rich and forgotten cities.

The story of a king covering himself in gold led to the legend of El Dorado. During a period of 200 years, numerous expeditions and countless men searched the dense mosquito and disease ridden jungles that covered covered high mountains and endless plains filled with dangerous savages, vast river and deltas in search of those mythical cities.

They endured hunger and starvation, mutiny and death, endless suffering and hardships, so well portrayed in Klaus Kinsky's *Aguirre*, or more recently *Oro*.

Most of those dauntless adventurers never saw the slightest glint of gold, many met with a quick death, and most never returned.

Those were the stories that would have deterred all but the most daring adventurers, but not Pat Kennedy, who was consumed by the idea of discovering the legendary Lost City, a site forgotten deep in the jungles of Honduras, the lure of archaeological treasures, and even gold.

## CHAPTER 45

### THE MONKEY GOD

The ruins had first been spotted during an aerial survey conducted on the Miskito Coast of Honduras, one of the few scientifically unexplored regions on the planet, a vast one hundred thousand square kilometre area of jungles, swamps, rivers and mountains, explored in the last century by Theodore Morde, an adventurer and explorer, who emerged from the jungle in 1940, claiming to have found a lost city, the City of the Monkey God.

The site lay in the east of Honduras, a region only accessible by air, to the north-east of the town of Catacamas, beyond which lay a vast empty and almost impenetrable region of mountains and jungle.

The mysterious valley lay approximately 400 kilometres from the capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa, a city of over 800,000 souls, which Pat Kennedy had never heard of until the moment, dodging the surveillance of George Pyke, he bought a ticket for a flight from Managua to Honduras to link up with his friend Ken Hisakawa.

For centuries legends of a lost city abounded, explorers and adventurers had brought back tales of vast stone fortifications overgrown by dense jungle. The local Indian tribes spoke of a vast white house, deep in the rainforest where their ancestors had hidden from the rampaging conquistadores, a paradise lost.

Starting in the 1920s, several expeditions tried to find Ciudad Blanca, as it was known. The most famous of which was that of Morde, sponsored by what is now a department of the Smithsonian Institute, then the Museum of the American Indian.

Morde claimed to have seen the city and when he returned

from Moskitia, and brought thousands of artefacts with him as proof. He recounted the story of how the local people told him of a giant statue of the mythical Monkey God that stood in the centre of the ruined city. But he refused to divulge the location of the city, fearing it would be targeted by looters.

Some time later Morde died in mysterious circumstances, conflicting stories, some say he committed suicide, others he was killed in an automobile accident, but whatever the reality the secret of where his city lay disappeared with him.



In early 2015, a team headed by archaeologists from Columbia University, New York, including anthropologists, ethnobotanists, forestry experts and specialists in 3D laser mapping techniques, set out on an expedition to search for the legendary city.

Their plan was to use airborne the latest 3D laser technology to penetrate the canopy of the almost impenetrable jungle covered terrain. The zone spanned a valley where stone vestiges of what appeared to have been temples found in the dense vegetation, abandoned and forgotten for centuries.

The images produced soon confirmed the presence of man-made structures stretching along the banks of the river that crossed the valley, leading to an ancient stone plaza. In

addition were the ruins of ceremonial architecture, earthworks, canals and reservoirs that seemed to confirm the presence of a pre-Columbian city.

The hidden valley, like the whole region of Miskito, was covered by dense rain forest, where jaguar, snakes, spider monkeys, tapirs had roamed for centuries, which archaeologists believed hid not just a mysterious city, but the remains of an unknown civilization.

The location of the site was a closely guarded secret pending a full scale ground exploration of the site by archaeologists and scientists, and above all to prevent looters and plunderers of the city's yet to be explored monuments.



The history of inca emperors covered in gold and the treasure carried off by Pizarro and Cortes to Spain, recounted by Ken Hisakawa, had left an indelible impression on Pat's mind. Slowly the idea of discovering a lost civilisation took root in his mind in the same way it had captivated the minds of other wealthy men in the past. Pat was rich beyond imagination, he had achieved what few others had, from the new glass tower of INI Hong Kong he could look across the bay, like a modern Taipan, and survey the domain he controlled, from Hong Kong to Canton to Shanghai and Beijing, and the seas beyond, reaching out to Moscow, London and the Caribbean.

A modest Limerick lad had achieved what Kipling had only imagined, Pat was the King, King of a vast financial empire.

His wife Lili and their two children were part of the Wu family, members of China's Red royalty, who toed the line dictated by *Zhongnanhai*, and friends of Xi's inner circle, a fact of which Pat was proud, though politics were not his business, and never had been.

But something nagged him, like an old pain—something was incomplete, it was the hunger for something more, wealth as such had never really interested him, besides, in terms of dollars, pounds, euros, or whatever, he had more than could

be counted.

The Sommières Collection had stimulated his desire, but not satiated it, it had only intensified the desire for more—Western art, Chinese porcelain and antiquities that would fill the museums he planned, part of an idea that was stirring in his mind, that of his future, hopefully distant legacy to posterity.

Ken Hisakawa had filled him with stories of treasure waiting to be discovered in the jungles of Central America and the Miskito Coast beckoned.

In the same way Robert Guiglion's stories of sunken wrecks off the coast of the South China and Java Seas, of the intrepid European explorers and traders who had sailed those seas in past centuries, stirred his fertile imagination.

Pat Kennedy was like a boy with the means to pursue the wildest of adventures, it was nothing new to men like him, men like George Gustav Heye, a rich American who had founded the National Museum of the American Indian in 1922 and sponsored expeditions to Moskitia, or today's Elon Musk whose ambition was to colonise Mars.



From the end of the 15th to the middle of the 17th century, as many as 800 Portuguese trading vessels sailed to distant lands, lands as distant then as Mars is today, and every bit as dangerous—the Spice Islands, China and Japan. The fearsome looking black ships, their hulls caulked and painted with pitch, once laden with their rich cargoes of porcelain, spices and exotic goods set sail for their long voyage home, many months, from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Africa and then the South Atlantic Ocean towards the north.

Many of them never returned, some 150 were lost without trace, laying somewhere in their watery graves, waiting to be rediscovered.

Of course Pat had like every schoolboy read *Treasure Island*, learnt of Sir Francis Drake and the Spanish Armada financed by the gold looted from the Philipe of Spain's colonies, of buccaneers and pirates like Henry Morgan, but Pat, unlike Drake, knew little of where the staggering quantity of bullion and coins came from, or how it crossed the Atlantic to Europe.

However, it was Ken who inflamed Pat's spirit with his account of the lost cities hidden deep in the jungles of Honduras, which did not promise their discoverers precious metals and gems, but a place in history, like Alfred Maudslay, Tobert Maler, Edward Thompson, Sylvanus Morley and Alfred Tozzer and the man who financed them, Charles Pickering Bowditch, who also participated in numerous expeditions.

Pat was a little disappointed, but when Ken told him Bowditch was immortalised by the Charles P. Bowditch chair of Central American and Mexican Archaeology and History at Harvard, he perked up, Pat was not easily distracted from his idea of discovering a new Eldorado, especially when Ken revealed not all of the treasure of the New World had arrived in Spain, but lay at the bottom of the sea.

Those small wooden sailing ships, many of which never completed the treacherous crossing to Spain, were no bigger than many of the larger modern sailing boats that can be seen

in any number of marinas across the Caribbean, but without motors and navigation systems, at the mercy of reefs, hurricanes, pirates and mutinies, some simply losing their way, landing on strange shores, in search of food and water, where many were set upon by savages.

CHAPTER 46

A 20th CENTURY POTOSI

Far from lost civilisations, treasure and the forgotten mountain of silver in Potosi, was a different mine, a virtual one that created more wealth than all the gold and silver mines ever dug from the earth—the City of London—a mine that Pat Kennedy knew well. Each day of its existence the City generated vast profits, trading the multiple instruments linked to business, industry, science and political decisions, often, like in Potosi, made on the backs of men and women paid slave wages in the UK, Europe, China, India and emerging markets.

How much of those profits did banks like Sir Patrick Kennedy's make on the backs of the poor and miserable, to the cost of public health and the natural environment, through crime and corruption, would never be known with any exactitude, but what could be measured and with great precision were the market gains, though little known were the faces of those who pocketed the profits.

I am not pointing a finger at Pat, it is part of our story, and besides I am part of that system, as were all the members of our Clan, which doesn't alter the fact that behind the respectable façade of old City banking establishments lurks a mine of dirty money, as vicious as Potosi had ever been.

Amongst those who worked that virtual mine were certain corrupt Russian officials, evidence of which came to light when an American investor, Bill Browder, discovered how his company, Hermitage Capital Management, had been caught up in a scam that left a trail of blood and dirty money which led to the City of London.

How did that concern Pat Kennedy, well he was CEO of the INI Hong Kong Banking Corporation, a holding that controlled a major banking unit in Moscow through our own

Sergei Tarasov.

In 2004, Browder, an American, became the largest foreign investor in Russia with his 4.5 billion dollar investment fund. A year later he was deported and declared *persona non grata* and his assets seized. Then in 2009, his lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, was tortured and left to die in a Moscow prison.

Browder's grandfather, Earl Browder, had been the founder of the American Communist Party and had even run for president, twice, against Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The question as to how had the grandson of a convinced communist become a capitalist was no stranger than the transformation of Lenin's Bolshevik revolution into an oligarchy of billionaires whose wealth was built on the ruins of the Russian people's assets.

Browder liked to recount how his graduation from the Stanford School of Business had coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall, prompting him to 'put on a suit and tie and become a capitalist'.

When Boris Yeltsin's government started to auction off the people's assets at fire sale prices, it presented what was certainly one of the most remarkable opportunities of the 20th century to make money. An opportunity which wasn't lost on Browder who jumped onto the band wagon and invested in Russian gas giant Gazprom, when its value was almost zero compared to the giant oil companies in the West at that time.

'During the Soviet times, the richest person in Russia was maybe six times richer than the poorest. By 1999, the richest person in Russia had become 250,000 times richer than the poorest,' Browder commented.

During the nineties, the transformation of Russian industry to a free market model took place in a frenzy that resembled the Wild West. At that moment the managers of Gazprom and Hermitage, via a locally registered company, 'legally' conspired to buy shares of the former at a particularly advantageous price reserved for Russian citizens, taking advantage of the chaotic conditions that reigned at that time.<sup>5</sup>

Soon, Hermitage's portfolio swelled to more than a billion

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dollars, but then in 1998, after Russia defaulted on its debt, and Gazprom's shares, in spite of the fact it was sitting on vast reserves of oil and gas, collapsed. Browder refused to panic and hung in, he was rewarded when between 1998 and 2005, the price of oil quadrupled and the Russian Mixed Stock Index went up by nearly 3,000%.



In 2007, Browder was targeted by the Russian authorities and when he attempt to save his investments his company's offices in Moscow were raided and he was accused of tax evasion to the tune of 230 million dollars.

It was at that point Browder hired Sergei Magnitsky to build a case against the government, but Magnitsky was arrested tortured and thrown into a freezing Moscow prison cell where he was beaten to death.

During the same period of time Putin and his allies became immensely rich thanks to Gazprom and their holdings in other key Russian industries.

Browder uncovered a trail of money that led to a number of different financial centres, including London, and discovered his firm had been effectively used in a tax scam by corrupt officials.

It was estimated at least 30 million dollars had transited through British banks and shell companies with nominee directors. These companies included a variety of businesses including interior-design firms, estate agents and even a personal concierge service.

But this was chicken feed compared to the estimates by Britain's National Crime Agency of dirty money laundered in the City of London, which according to their reckoning ran into 'many hundreds of billions of pounds' each year.

The Russian laundromat alone pumped 20 billion dollars out of Russia between 2010 and 2014, much of which was invested in UK property, held by offshore vehicles registered in the British Virgin Islands, Nevis and other tax havens, part of which transited through INI via its many holdings in the Caribbean, London, Moscow or Hong Kong.

5 see Powerpoint gazprom-and-hermitage-presentation

CHAPTER 47

PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Sipping fine wines and whiskies aboard Pat's yacht we philosophised, under the resplendent works of art bought with the money of the Malaysian tax payer, stolen by the yacht's previous owner, now reimbursed by the price for which the vessel, a floating palace, and its contents had been auctioned to Pat's company in a sealed bid.

I suppose Olivier de la Salle and John Francis almost felt at home, both being possessors of collections of fine art. John who had recently added a van Gogh to his, a gift from Olly in thanks for his remarkable work relating to the Sommières Collection.

It was easy in such conditions to talk of questions as to whether or not the Earth's biosphere could support the needs of so many human beings surrounded by the waste we produce, much of it concentrated in toxic doses for the other living organisms on which we all depended.

If anything went wrong, and there were endless scenarios—epidemics, famine and natural disasters, the consequences for our densely packed cities would be of indescribably terrifying proportions, making biblical accounts of divine retribution seem trivial.

In the meantime there were some advantages offered by the planets vast populations in overcrowded polluted cities. Liam had signed an agreement with an IT firm in Delhi to provide engineers and coders for his incubator in Paris, young and highly capable men and women costing a quarter of the price of those he could hire at home or anywhere else in Europe.

Delhi was developing at breakneck speed and Indian schools were producing engineers in every discipline, however there were university quotas linked to caste and religion, which

meant that well-off upper caste Hindu families were constrained to send their sons to the US and UK for better universities when the quotas for their castes were reached.

Urban sprawl was eating up arable land and the idea of building upwards seemed like a logical alternative, however, the densification of cities brought other problems and dangers.

Nice sounding plans were suggested by ecologists, planners and philosophers, but these did not take into account the uncontrollable yet intrinsic nature of the human species.

The forces of religions, of cultural identities, politics and pure human greed made change seem utopian. Laws to enforce the respect of the natural environment seemed inapplicable, wishful thinking, when there were so many poor and inequality was so great. And, if those laws were applied by force, individual freedoms were removed, then humankind and its home would be transformed into a hive of mindless insects.

Pat Kennedy preached the only possible solution, that was to inverse the demographic curve, urgently—now, to create a planet where there was enough for all, where mankind was in harmony with its fellow creatures, those with whom they shared this planet, our only home, on its voyage across a vast and empty universe.

The alternative was abandonment, doing nothing, accepting the world as it was, the human condition as an unchanging fact, and endless misery for the masses.

Only when politicians and leaders accepted the need for a halt in the expansion of humanity's numbers could the planet be saved. In the meantime, their only vision was growth, plans, plans and more plans. Plans for transport, to create employment, to compete, to build more homes, more energy, more land and still more plans.

Only one solution was possible, the reduction of human numbers, negative human population growth. The rest was lunacy, a one-way flight to self-destruction.

In 2019 alone, another 80 million plus human beings would join the existing 8 billion. As many as the entire populations of

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France, Belgium and Switzerland put together, or that of the entire Northeast of the USA. In a decade one billion more human beings would need to be fed, clothed and housed.

Those newcomers would need a billion new domestic animals to supply milk, eggs and meat, requiring 700,000 square kilometres of agricultural land, a territory larger than France, or Texas, every decade.

Humanity had become a galloping infection destroying the natural organic tissue that covered the earth's surface, a gangrene that would, if not controlled, destroy humanity.

The vast flow of transport across Europe, India, China and Africa, highways filled with convoys rumbling on their way, day and night, day after day, week after week, year round, laden with food, goods, endless quantities of sand and cement, an extraordinary variety of raw materials torn from the soil, or to the sound of chain saws pushing nature into its last recesses.



What did it matter? In reality not a damn, with the next swing of time's infernal pendulum the cycle would change, end. How? God only knew, there were so many possibilities, disease, war, famine, the next asteroid, or simply economic collapse and chaos.

As Benjamin Friedman once said, modern Western society was like a bicycle, the wheels of which were kept turning by economic growth. Should that motion slow or cease, the pillars that define society—democracy, individual liberties, social tolerance would falter and we'd soon be faced with the collapse of society as we know it. Unfortunately perpetual motion did not exist and neither were the resources of our planet eternally extensible.

Numerous societies, starting with Göbekli Tepe, had collapsed over the last 12,000 years. The life cycle of civilisations was predictable, rise, glory, pride and fall, and modelling now enabled us to have a better understanding of that cycle, which often ended with ecological stress—due to the depletion of water, agricultural, fishery and forestry resources, which inevitably resulted social instability and the downfall of the ruling establishment often guilty of unjustifiable excesses.

A world in which a wedding at Udaipur in Rajasthan ran up a bill of 100 million dollars, whilst the poor laboured in factories and fields scratching a living for a few miserable dollars a day to keep their families.

In distant geological time the planet Earth had experienced great extinction events, when temperatures rose or fell by as much as 10 degrees centigrade, resulting in the loss of 95% of marine life and 70% of land life.

What did that mean to humanity?

Nothing.

Those events were far away. It was like discussing a distant galaxy, and it was, in terms of time.

But it excited Pat Kennedy, who, like all very rich men, assured of his future, needed a cause, and when from the window of his jet he saw the pall of pollution hanging over cities like Delhi or Beijing, his conscience was awakened by the visible and irrefutable evidence of the direction in which we were all heading.

John Francis reminded Pat of how London in 1950, shortly after the end of WWII, buildings, including Westminster

Abbey and Whitehall, were black with encrusted soot, the legacy of centuries of burning wood and coal, when with the approach of each winter a thick yellow smog descended on London, smothering it, eating the hearts and lungs of its citizens, as it had seemingly always done.

But whilst such pollution was grave, it was not as grave as another couple or more billion human beings and their domestic animals—fellow travellers like cows, sheep, chicken, cats, dogs, rats, mice, insects and a multitude of micro-organisms that depended on us.

The effects of overpopulation and climate change were already exerting their pressure on the Old Continent in ways which European peoples, politicians and observers had not yet understood. The politically correct slammed everything with the glaring exception of demographic pressures.

The poorest felt the brunt—first were those who had been forced to quit their ancestral homes, braving the dangers of deserts, oceans and human traffickers to reach so-called Eden, then the poor already in Eden—forced into unequal competition with the new arrivals for jobs and housing and social services.

Large numbers of people, mostly young men, arrived in London, Paris, Brussels, Cologne, you name it it, they were there, the story was the same, masses of often unemployed, discontent and desperate newcomers, changing the economic and cultural landscape of European cities. They flooded into urban centres, overwhelmed resources and services, created community tensions as racist inspired reaction created fertile grounds for violence, conflict and revolt.

Europe was at the tectonic edge of Africa and the Middle East, where demographic forces exerted volcanic pressures, overloading the delicate mechanisms that maintained the societal balance in the countries confronted with sudden waves of population overflow.

As stresses increased, political forces ushered in new types of intransigent leaders, xenophobes who destabilised age old institutions, such as the British parliamentary system, torn by

the stresses of Brexit, caused by conflicting demographic and societal change, which politicians and pundits refused to recognise, fearful of a world where one wrong word or misinterpretation could condemn a promising career to the trash can.

Europe, like Rome, was racked by the complexities of overextension and the barbarians at its gates. The EU's constituent parts were managed by a vast bureaucratic system run from Brussels, a fundamentally democratic institution, though at times an unmanageable tower of Babel.

It was nothing new, Europe had been managed by empires for centuries, where, whenever the fragile balance of power was disturbed, difficult questions were resolved by war. Today, however, war was no longer acceptable, the price of death and destruction had become too high to pay.

On the other hand the ways and means to finance an increasingly complex political and economic construct was symptomatic of a deep and growing problem. Past unions and empires had collapse under the burden of such complexities, though in modern times technological progress had staved off the reckoning, thanks to the advances brought by coal, steam, railways, electricity, telegraph, oil, the internal combustion engine, atomic power, computers and so forth. How long that could continue and cope with expanding human needs was another matter.

Ever present was the threat that political structures made up of widely different regional entities, such as India and China, which under demographic and economic pressures could descend into anarchy and chaos. The Middle East was an example, from the Arabian Sea to the Atlantic the region was torn by war, and uncontrollable demographics—a fact few politicians considered, and refused to recognise.

The populations of Iran and Iraq had increased fourfold in six decades, as had the countries of North Africa with Egypt exceeding 100 million, and Sudan's increasing 7 fold.

Europe could build barriers to keep out the poor, who were drawn by the magnet of employment and generous welfare

states, walls were not a very attractive political solution, but were inevitable if those states wanted to avoid collapse.

Like other richer regions, Europe would see its nations evolve into two tier societies, where a small elite lived a privileged life of luxury with the rest condemned at best to a nullifying Cornucopian uniformity.

Looking back at the glory of the British Raj in India, and especially Delhi, where Lutyens imposing parliament buildings still stood as a monument to the British Empire, who could have thought England would be reduced to Theresa May grovelling cap in hand for favours in Brussels, whilst Tata closed Jaguar and Land Rover plants and Lakshmi Mittal shut down UK steel mills.

The UK seemed to be hanging onto the ghost of an empire, now part of history, like that of Spain's New World, or Portugal's scattered empire, both of which had once circled the globe when their wooden sailing ships armed with their iron cannons ruled the waves.

Would authoritarian China succeed the West, would India survive, in any case the UK seemed about to slide into dignified hardship, like the old lady she was, pining for her long gone youth and vitality.

## CHAPTER 48

### THREATS & CONSPIRACIES

Seen from the Gulf of Venezuela the news of Russia's aggressive naval action 15,000 kilometres away in the Sea of Azov was an indicator of how little the Kremlin cared for world opinion and a warning not to underestimated the threat it represented as the tone rose in Caracas against Washington.

It came as no surprise to Nato defence ministers, who were in the midst of reviewing the alliance's forces necessary to deter any Russian move westward, after the Kremlin's seizure and annexation of the Crimea, and its continued support for pro-Moscow rebel groups in eastern Ukraine.

There were other theatres of action, notably in the Middle East, however, those were visible. What was more dangerous in the long term was the reinforcement of Russia's naval power which could reach out to Moscow's more distant allies, and of particular concern to us, Maduro's regime in Caracas.

However, Moscow was playing a complex double game and was certainly not anxious to see the market flooded with cheap Venezuelan oil, when they themselves worked to support their own prices, given Russian oil exports covered 70% of the national revenues.

But a demonstration of force was never a bad thing and when naval vessels appeared in the Gulf of Venezuela, it served to divert attention from the Kremlin's weaknesses on the home front, as posturing always did, especially when tensions continued to flare up on the Black Sea as Russian and Ukrainian naval forces skirmished.

The prospect of war with Ukraine had seen the Kremlin positioning its ground forces on its frontiers where it feared Kiev might be tempted to retake breakaway regions in the

Donbas.

But that wasn't all, warned John, as always trying to put the fear of God into us, Russia was developing its military strength all the way along its western flank, from the Black Sea to the Baltic.

The Kremlin, however, also resorted to subtler tactics in its confrontation with the West, where it mobilised its so-called friends, in reality pawns like Lord Barker of Battle, aka Greg Barker, a former energy minister, who had served business interests between Moscow and UK for more than two decades.

Barker, a Russophile Tory life peer, had defended Oleg Deripaska and his energy business, the En+ Group, a leading integrated aluminium and power producer listed on the London Stock Exchange, in his fight against sanctions imposed by Washington.

EN+ and Rusal—the Russian aluminium producer it controlled, to the extent of 48%, was one of the world's largest, and when the latter was hit by crippling sanctions Barker defended his decision to stay on as chairman of EN+ as being necessary to represent minority shareholders, who made up about 13% of the group. Its principal institutional investors included the Qatar Investment Authority, a sovereign wealth fund, and the Singapore-based AnAn Group, a partner of China's CEFC China Energy.

Barker unwittingly contributed to Brexit by supporting the interests of his Russian friends for whom the rewards in detaching the UK from the European Union were considerable in view of the Kremlin's geopolitical objectives.

Moscow had consistently manipulated various right wing movements, whose ideas not only went in the direction of its ambitions, but recalled the naivety of the friends of Berlin in the thirties who failed to see the dangers of Hitler's ambitions, English men and women, including press barons, who historian Piers Brendon described as 'mad, bad, dangerous-to-know beasts in the newspaper jungle who did what they wanted'.

Strangely enough the Russians were not the only ones who

had an interest in the political debate in the UK. Millions of dollars had been raised from anonymous US donors to support British right-wing think tanks which were among the most vocal in the Brexit debate. Of these, four stood out, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Adam Smith Institute, Policy Exchange and the Legatum Institute, all beneficiaries of financial backing from interested US parties.



What precisely did they hope to gain from their investment? That was a question I asked John Francis. Why were wealthy Americans mixing in British and European politics?

He enlightened me by explaining they were all were proponents of unlimited and unregulated free trade for the greater benefit of American big business. In addition these think tanks were part of the Atlas Network, which connected hundreds of free-market organisations in over 90 countries, all dedicated to ‘the cause of liberty’.

The Institute of Economic Affairs sought the removal of tariffs and controls on financial services, hedge funds and banks. They also saw the scrapping of EU regulations on data protection, pharmaceuticals and food safety and chemicals, as part of their objectives.

The facts were clear, they had an agenda that was as

subversive as that of the Kremlin. The hope of opening the British economy to unlimited penetration by US businesses and especially the restructuring of the state controlled British National Health Service for the profit of the US healthcare business.

With the UK out of the EU, London risked becoming the playground of greater powers, not unlike Finland during the Cold War, or even God forbid, Shanghai in the twenties and thirties.

Which was no exaggeration as the situation in nearby Venezuela demonstrated, inflaming relations between Washington, Caracas and Moscow, when the latter declared, 'By showing sarcasm and arrogance towards the Venezuelan people, the United States is preparing a military invasion of an independent state. The transfer of American special forces to Puerto Rico, the landing of US forces in Colombia and other facts clearly indicate that the Pentagon is reinforcing the grouping of troops in the region in order to overthrow the lawfully elected incumbent president Nicolas Maduro.'

I could see our little treasure hunt being caught up in a conflict where powerful interests vied for the future control of Venezuela's huge oil reserves once Maduro and his clique were evinced.

The disturbing news came some days later when Caracas accused the Colombians of threatening their territorial integrity at the frontier zone near Castilletes, a disputed area where there was a long standing conflict between the two countries.

Caracas denounced the presence of several Colombian and foreign naval vessels, in other words the *Sundaland II*—our salvage vessel, Pat's yacht—*Las Indias*, and the naval patrol boat that shuttled the gold recovered from the *Espiritu Santo* to Cartagena for safe keeping.

It was time to wind up our work as quickly as possible before Venezuelan naval vessels turned up with the risk Caracas with the backing of Moscow would provoke an incident.

Involving Sir Patrick Kennedy and his banking empire would

be to great an opportunity to miss, embarrassing the UK government and with far reaching consequences coming at a time when Downing Street was struggling to get itself out of the Brexit quagmire.

We in our Clan, most of us dual nationals, had supported Remain in the Brexit debate. We believed in the concept of a united Europe, each of us had a broad experience of living beyond the shores of our respective places of birth and saw our homes in a global perspective. The UK was a small nation, Ireland a much smaller one. No single European nation could face up to the world alone as the 21st century was about enter its third decade.

Those of us who knew Russia well understood its sinister goals, re-establishing itself as a leading player in an ever multipolar world. A strategy that raised a number of questions the question as to why certain UK organisations such as the Legatum Institute had suddenly found a cause, throwing itself into the Brexit campaign?

Until Cameron had launched his disastrous referendum, the Legatum Institute, an Old Boy style think tank, had been struggling to make its voice heard above the crowd. Then, almost overnight, it became one of the UK's most vociferous advocates of a 'hard' Brexit. There was nothing wrong in that, we lived in a democratic society and everyone had a right to his or her opinion. But when Steve Baker, a long-time supporter of the think tank, and a Brexit minister, called Legatum the 'UK's leading voice of pragmatic free trade', warning lights started to flash.

John reminded me what the historian Ronald Syme said when talking of the Roman Empire, 'whatever the form or name of government, be it a monarchy, republic or democracy, an oligarchy lurks behind the façade,' and it seemed to me the same thing went for certain elements of the Conservative Party.

I suppose the same thing could be said of Russia, made worse by the corruption it inherited from the Soviet Union which was as rampant as ever.

Amongst the ruling Conservative oligarchy was Liam Cox, who ran the UK's Department for International Trade. He hired another of Legatum's former advisers, Crawford Falconer, as the UK's chief trade negotiations adviser, with responsibilities second only to Fox himself.

The reason for this sudden rise to prominence could only be attributed to the institute's funding and its links to a number of personalities who were known for their friendly relations with Moscow.

The Legatum Group was founded by a New Zealander, Christopher Chandler, a billionaire, who was now advising key pro-Brexit government ministers. Based in London, in the heart of Mayfair, the Legatum Institute, part of that group, was a business. The Legatum Institute Foundation, which was set up as a charitable offshoot of the Legatum Institute, professed to a declared goal—the promotion of a free-market, low-regulation economy.

The greatest part of the think tank's income came from the Legatum Foundation Limited, an offshore company, part of the Legatum Group, and donations from various interested persons and organisations.

But Legatum was not alone, there was also the Institute of Economic Affairs, IEA, another right-wing think tank, a registered charity, based at 55, Tufton Street in Westminster, where meetings were held with the Adam Smith Institute, the Centre for Policy Studies, and other murky, not very transparent lobby groups.

If you don't believe me then all you have to do is read how Kirill Babayev, a spokesman of the oligarch Mikhail Fridman—a Putin crony said to be worth of some 20 billion dollars, told an audience in Moscow how to wheedle the way into the British Establishment, by hiring a few 'grey-haired' members of the House of Lords, to act as 'consultants', or non-executive directors, of your company. For just a few thousand pounds a month they'll usually agree to take a seat in your boardroom,' he told his listeners, 'even if they don't know a thing about the operations of the company whose

board they sit on'. He went on to explain how once they're on the board, doors start to open, meeting the right people becomes easy, or even getting your company on the London stock market.

The Russia connection had worked its way into the British establishment through the wealth of Russian oligarchs, buying political influence with the help of Conservative Party grandees, including former Foreign Secretary, Lord Hurd, and Lord Powell, both of whom were engaged as paid advisers to Fridman's Alfa Group.

They were not alone, members of parliament, Lords, and even members of the Royal Family were or had been on the payroll of Russian oligarchs.

David Cameron had accepted large donations from the wife of Vladimir Putin's former deputy finance minister—Lubov Chernukhin, who at a fund raising event paid to play tennis with Boris Johnson, and more recently an evening attended by Theresa May and six of her government ministers, held at Goring Hotel in Belgravia, a favourite haunt of Britain's royals, which set the oligarch's wife a modest 150,000 dollars.

Then there was the case of the strange lord, a non-executive director of the giant Russian conglomerate Sistema, which boasted stakes in Russia's oil, energy, banking, retail, telecoms and tourism sectors, controlled by billionaire Vladimir Yevtushenkov, a Putin confidant.

The naivety of snuggling up to the Russian bear or nominating Putin for the Nobel Peace Prize, as did Lord Truscott, was mind boggling.

Even the Royal Household turned out to have lucrative ties with Russian. Sir Michael Peat, who served as Private Secretary to Prince Charles, was a non-executive director of Evraz, a steelmaker which operated in Russia and the Ukraine, listed on the London stock exchange and counted Roman Abramovich as one of its main shareholder.

Then there was Prince Michael of Kent, patron of the Russo-Britain Chamber of Commerce since 1992, a descendant of the last czar, a fluent Russian speaker, who ran a consultancy

firm specialised in Anglo-Russian cooperation with many profitable business links in Russia. The prince's son was said to have joked his father had no trouble paying the rent on his Kensington Palace apartment as he 'makes an awful lot of money in Russia'.

Russia had a direct interest in promoting Brexit with all the subversive means it had at its disposal, for the simple reason it would destabilise a strategic rival. Those who doubted that needed to look no further than the chaos provoked by Brexit, which had led Whitehall into a disastrous impasse.

Relations between Russia and the United Kingdom had reached the lowest point at any time since the end of the Cold War, which was reiterated by the Brexit minister, Philip Hammond, who admitted in a speech at the Chatham House think tank, '... the only country who would like us to leave the EU is Russia. That should tell us all we need to know.'

Moscow's conflict with Kiev was born of the latter's decision to sign, or not to sign, an Association Agreement with the EU. Ukrainian nationalists saw Russia as a threat to their independence and the EU was the only possibility at hand to defend them from Russian incursion.

Russia, on the other hand, saw the prospect of closer Ukrainian ties with the EU quite differently, with the EU as a force seeking to impose its values on what Russia saw as its 'near abroad'.

It was difficult to deny Russia was getting what it wanted, that is Brexit, in one form or another, which would deprive the EU of the benefits of one of its largest economies, weakening the UK with whom it had a conflictual relationship as demonstrated by the Skripal affair, part of an ongoing subversive war waged by the Kremlin's agents.

## CHAPTER 49

# ONE FRIEND TOO MANY

*‘There is only one way to understand Dominica. You have to walk across it and along it.’*

Alec Waugh, Typical Dominica 1948

Malcolm Smeaton Jnr joined forces with a marine architect, David Jackson, to promote his investment projects designed to put Dominica on the tourist map, but not the cruise ship type—here today gone tomorrow. Their eyes were on the wealthy and very wealthy who sailed into Dominica on their outsized yachts.

Jackson had started out in designing boats in the family owned yacht building and repair company near Southampton in the UK. After sailing to the Caribbean in the mid-70s, he saw business opportunities beckoning and set up a yacht service and repair yard in St Lucia, which he later expanded into a broader business, from repairs to sales, as well as charters, and then marina management with branches on other islands including service and repair yards for mega-yachts across the Caribbean.

It was when he set his eyes on more ambitious infrastructure projects he met Malcolm Smeaton Jnr at a yachting and tourist development symposium for investors in the British Virgin Islands, who persuaded him Dominica offered great opportunities. The unspoilt English speaking island sorely lacked infrastructure, forcing visiting sailing boats and yachts to anchor offshore, with few service and facilities to encourage them to prolong stay.

In that way their Prince Rupert Bay project was born, a

## The Cargo Club

marina that would open the island to visitors, ideally situated between Guadeloupe and Martinique, close to St. Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, and the Virgin Islands, the stomping ground of a growing number of rich yacht owners.

The small town of Portsmouth lay in the centre of Prince Rupert Bay, a perfect geographical setting combining the prerequisite amenities for a marina with the natural park.



Michael Fitzwilliams' Caribbean interests coincided with those of his friend, Malcolm Smeaton Snr, who had facilitated numerous transactions for INI in what were known as the British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean—Anguilla, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands and Montserrat as well as the British Virgin Islands.

It was in these territories Sergei Tarasov created special purpose and structured investment vehicles for many rich Russian politicians and businessmen, which offered the advantages that offshore tax havens do, where the rich hid their wealth, but also a means hiding the rich from their respective financial and fiscal authorities through a labyrinth of screen companies and trust funds.

There was little doubt Putin was a kleptocrat and the fact his regime found a compromise with Sergei Tarasov no more than confirmed the rule, which was business first, that is

profits for the inner circle, thus ensuring loyalty to the leader. Authoritarian rule slapped down any sign of opposition, fending off enemies and preserving the Kremlin's hold on power and the flow of money that greased the wheels of the kleptocracy.

Putin's vision of a Greater Russia was closer to that of the Czarist style empire than the out-of-date Soviet model, with territory, power and wealth now counting more than ideology.

His method was to bend the wills of men like Sergei, rewarding them for obedience with the freedom to make money.

What Vladimir Putin feared most was encroachment on the Federation's borders and defending them was one of his prime policies. This meant controlling the near abroad, that is the countries of the former USSR, weighing on their leaders and their foreign policies, building buffer zones with the intention of preventing former Soviet countries from forging alliances with the West, notably NATO.

Putin deplored the defeat of Soviet Russia in the Cold War, which had resulted in a unipolar world. He accused the US as being an expansionist subversive power, using NATO to encircle Russia, which speaking objectively was true, or at least as true as Washington's accusations against the Kremlin.

On the contrary, however, he pushed his rhetoric too far when he likened the position of the US on the world stage to that of Nazi Germany's.

Putin was a nationalist who embraced the concept of a Greater Russia, echoing the Eurasia Movement's vision of Russia's place in the world, which saw it as a land power and the US as a mercantile sea going power, likening it to Rome and Carthage, fearing for Russia's destiny, like that of Rome's enemy in the Punic Wars.

His oft repeated call for sacrifice and his nationalistic dialogue warmed the hearts of many Russians, nostalgic for the days of the Soviet Union with its vast continental territory, a unique commonwealth of peoples, playing a key role in world affairs.

Putin had of course never heard of Malcolm Smeaton Jnr, it was a pity because Smeaton managed a large chunk of Russia's hidden offshore wealth through his banking interests in the Caribbean. It was his business and what he had done for others for the best part of his life.

His family owned Anglo-Dutch Commercial Bank had been founded in Jakarta at the beginning of the 20th century, serving the interests of British and Dutch businesses in their respective country's colonies in the East Indies, and through its branches and representative offices across Southeast Asia as well as Hong Kong and Shanghai.

At that time Shanghai was one of the world's greatest cities with a population of three million, a vast metropolis at the mouth of the Yangtze River, the gateway to the heart of China, a booming industrial and commercial centre. The Bund, in the International Settlement, was the symbol of the wealth and success of Shanghai. It was an extraterritorial treaty port and governed by the Shanghai Municipal Council which was effectively controlled by the British.

The Smeatons' Jakarta based bank along with its branches in had prospered even into the early war years. Then, December 7, 1941, after the Japanese fleet attacked Pearl Harbour, the imperial powers' dominoes fell in rapid succession. The morning following Pearl Harbour, the foreign concessions in Shanghai were seized by Japanese forces and Hong Kong attacked early the same day. On Christmas Day 1941, Hong Kong surrendered. Manilla was occupied January 2, 1942, then Kuala Lumpur on January 11 and finally Singapore February 15. By March 1942, the Japanese conquest of Europe's colonies in Southeast Asia was complete.

With the fall of Singapore the fate of Indonesia was sealed and the Smeatons took refuge in Australia. There they remained until the US unleashed its terrible revenge on Nagasaki and Hiroshima and Japan surrendered.

The Smeatons returned from Australia in the autumn of 1945 and retook control of the family possessions and banking business in Singapore, and then in Jakarta, where the Dutch,

with the aid of British forces, had moved back into their colony after the Japanese occupation.

However, in 1946, the independence movement under General Sukarno had other plans as to the future of their country and a desultory war was waged by Indonesian independentist forces against their former masters. Finally, in 1949, Amsterdam was forced to accept the end of their centuries long rule in the Dutch East Indies and modern Indonesia was born.

As a wind of change swept through Southeast Asia, the Bandung Conference, held in Java 1955, invented the Third World. Malcolm Smeaton's father saw troubled times ahead when in 1957, Malaysia became independent along with Singapore, the latter being part of the newly created Federation. There was no future for Europeans in this new world and Malcolm Smeaton, encouraged by his father, turned westwards.

Malcolm, who had spent his childhood in Jakarta and Melbourne, his youth in Singapore, was dispatched to London to further his studies at London University, where after two dismal years he, the scion of the old banking family, banished the idea of a career in grimy, cold, damp, foggy London with its post-war austerity- forever.

At that time Singapore was in ebullition, first race riots, then expulsion from the recently created Federation of Malaysia. After the independence from the Federation, the future of small Singapore, led by Lee Kuan Yee, with its mainly Chinese population, looked dim, inciting Malcolm to seek a new base in the hope of saving his family's fortunes.

In Britain, as successive governments, already in dire financial straits, struggled to finance the welfare state and fulfil their engagements overseas, taxation pressures grew and the wealthy fearing for their money turned to the newly independent Caribbean territories.

It was a signal for Smeaton who immediately headed for the Caribbean where independence and self-government was taking shape with the prospect of new opportunities for

bankers and the prospect of tax shelters.

The Bahamas seemed like a good starting point, it was British and nearby to the USA, a place in the sun for the rich, where Americans could hide their money from Uncle Sam, though the Duke of Windsor had disparaged the islands as a 'third class British colony'.

London's cumbersome colonies in the Caribbean had been described by V.S. Naipul as 'part of the jetsam of an empire', and a high level official in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office when asked how they would survive quipped, 'they would turn themselves into tax havens'.

After Smeaton Snr. debarked in Nassau, after his long BOAC flight had hopped across the Atlantic and North America from London, he not only found sunshine and palm trees, which reminded him of his East Indies home, he also discovered offshore banking—a potential goldmine. The Bahamas proximity to the US mainland was especially attractive to American citizens, with the English language and a British style administration to reassure visitors. Then when islands became self-governing, British law allowed 'virtual' residencies, which permitted companies to incorporate in Britain without paying taxes, laws that also applied in self-governing British territories such as those in the Caribbean.

Now this is the important point. The concept of virtual residency went back a long way. It was established as a precedence in British law in 1929, after it was successfully argued the Egyptian Delta Land and Investment Co. Ltd., though registered in London, did not have any activities in the UK and was therefore not subject to British taxation. This effectively made Britain a tax haven, as companies could incorporate in Britain without paying British tax on their activities outside the UK. The ruling was not only valid for the UK, but also the entire British Empire, which of course included the Bahamas.

Another ruling, in 1957, this time by the Bank of England, reinforced the concept. With the emergence of the Euromarket, Threadneedle Street recognised that transactions

made by UK commercial banks on behalf of non-resident clients were not considered to have taken place in the UK.

As a consequence such transactions were effectively offshore and therefore outside of the Bank of England's jurisdiction, or for that matter, any other UK regulating authority.

The Euromarket was created following the Suez Crisis of 1956, in response to restrictions on the use of pound sterling in trade credits, allowing the use of US dollars in commercial exchanges by non-UK businesses abroad, transacted on their behalf by banks located in London.

As in earlier similar such rulings, these transactions were considered to be offshore since they were made on behalf of non-residents, in foreign currency and overseas, even if the contractual documents were drawn up in the UK.

The result was the creation of a new, non-regulated, banking environment beyond the jurisdiction of the Bank of England, or any other central bank.

Thus, it was in this legal environment offshore finance was born.

Malcolm Smeaton Snr. was quick to seize the opportunities offered by the system and incorporated his first offshore bank in Bahamas, the Anglo-Dutch Nassau Bank.

When the status of the smaller British islands in the Caribbean changed from that of colonies to states in free association with the UK in 1967, the former colonial power retained control of external affairs and defence, Smeaton incorporated another bank in Dominica, a small almost forgotten former British possession that lay between French Guadeloupe and Martinique. There he calculated he would be totally free from prying Brits with whom, he, being part of an old colonial family, had never been really been at ease, his suspicion bordering on mistrust, especially of London's political classes and the UK's ruling establishment. The Smeatons had witnessed the fall of Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, and British treachery in the face of Japanese ambitions in Shanghai, as well as the collapse of the British

Empire and the subsequent abandonment of its colonies to their sort.

After Malcolm Smeaton Snr. passed away his son took over the bank, he was also called Malcolm, which obviously led to some confusion, but it was part of a family tradition.

I knew Malcolm Jnr. quite well, as a banker he was anything but a City type. The veneer his parents had achieved in educating him in England's best schools and universities only went to hiding his Caribbean roots, that is a taste for parties and women, the young attractive ones that came with the yachts, which in no way lessened his professional qualities, but went a long way to developing his relations with politicians and businessmen across the Caribbean, talents appreciated by his friends back in the UK where his old boy network attracted considerable business for the bank and its links to the string of offshore banking and fiscal shelters across the sunblessed region.

Dominica's government under the impulsion of its minister of tourism had backed various projects, but the problem of funding had always been an obstacle, first there was the financial crisis, which had frozen investment, then came the devastating hurricane.

Pat Kennedy sailed into Prince Rupert Bay aboard *Los Indias* and anchored offshore to the north of the small town of Portsmouth, not far from David Jackson's home near to the Cabrits National Park. The bay had been described in bygone days as a haven where, 'the whole of British navy may safely ride at anchor all seasons of the year, and be well supplied with necessaries not to be found at English harbours in Antigua', or any other part of the English West Indies, the rendezvous of the British fleet.

Dominica, described as the Caribbean's 'nature island' was an almost untouched natural site with about two thirds of its territory covered by dense tropical forest, the home to over 1,500 plant and animal species, with waterfalls, streams, lakes like Boiling Lake and Titou Gorge where the islands geological past was laid bare with visible evidence of its volcanic past in

the lava and pyroclastic rock formations.

Its Morne Trois Pitons National Park was the only natural park in eastern Caribbean, classed as a world heritage site by UNESCO. It was one of the remaining two islands in the region still populated by Carib Indians. In short an ideal destination for ecotourism, scuba divers, snorkelers, hikers and rock climbers.

The trouble was not only had the island's tourism projects had been plagued with problems, but David Jackson had developed a reputation for keeping bad company, and not the least his women friends, the latest of whom was Elizaveta, a shapely Russian blonde, thirty years younger than him, who it seemed had worked as a cruise ship interpreter.

The news that David Jackson had been found lying dead in his blood bed had not only sent an electric shock through the island, but attracted UK tabloids that would delight in a scandal that linked Jackson to Smeaton and Smeaton to Sir Patrick Kennedy's banking empire.

Jackson had been stabbed to death and his place ransacked, though his money and jewellery had not been touched. Logically the police would have liked to question Elizaveta, who according to the neighbours was visiting Guadeloupe, as she often did, where she it seemed she had friends.

Police inquiries revealed she had flown to Point-à-Pitre, travelling on a Czech passport, then to Port of Spain in Trinidad, and from there to Curaçao, where she had taken a direct flight to Caracas, barely an hour's flying time away from the Dutch island.

Flying to Caracas in Venezuela, a pariah state, was a long and complicated business, which required a certain amount of foresight, raising a number of questions including amongst them the suspicion she had deliberately sought to cover up her tracks.

But why?

Who in fact had killed Jackson remained a mystery, and solving it would be beyond the possibilities of Dominica's small police force to solve.

## The Cargo Club

Malcolm Jnr. was in a state of shock, he had spent the previous evening with Jackson at his place outside of Portsmouth, a quiet evening talking about business and local politics without the least sign of trouble.

Dominica did not have a reputation for violence compared to other countries in the region, such as St Lucie, and homicides rarely involved foreigners.

At first it seemed like a random crime, that was until we discovered he owned the Curaçao yacht repair yard that had recently been used for routine maintenance work on the *Sundaland II* and Pat's yacht the *Las Indias*.

Why was he targeted, was it something to do with the treasure?

Whatever the police thought we had our own ideas, first and foremost there was the link to the treasure, then there was the possibility of mistaken identity, perhaps the killers had mistaken Jackson for Malcolm Jnr, but that left the question as to the role of his Russian girlfriend who had disappeared. Was it warning, a plot by the Russians? Perhaps to help Maduro, or put the pressure on Sergei, frighten Pat off Dominica where many Chinese investors were present?

It wasn't long before the immigration department turned up Elizaveta's immigration details, effectively she was Russian, but it came as a shock, and a warning, when we learnt she was a long-time resident in Caracas, a cultural attaché at the Russian embassy, a position often associated with FSB agents operating under diplomatic cover.

Russia was visibly stepping up its pressure on Washington, it had just flown two Tupelov Tu-160 Blackjack into Caracas—long-range strategic bombers—Russia's equivalent to the B-52, capable of delivering an atomic bomb.

Not only that there was talk in the Russian media of setting up a permanent base in the country, which if you think about the parallel with the Cuban missile crisis, was a very bad idea, not forgetting the 19th Century Monroe Doctrine, an indicator of how the US would react to other major powers moving

into North or South America.

The Russian bombers were accompanied by two other aircraft—an An-124 transport plane carrying specialised backup equipment, and an Il-62 airliner carrying support personnel and diplomatic staff, all designed to show support for Nicolas Maduro.

It followed Maduro's meeting with Putin at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow, when agreements were signed concerning Russian investment worth six billion dollars in Venezuela's oil and gold production industries.

Venezuela's oil output had all but collapsed, but the truth was Moscow's intention to invest in the country seemed an empty promise considering its own problems, especially as Maduro's government already had difficulty in repaying its debts existing loans to Russia with oil, the exports of which had almost dried up.

Whatever, we did not hang around waiting for the answers and promptly set sail for Colombia, the fact was geopolitics did not concern us, but murder only made us work harder, complete the job and get out.

CHAPTER 50

BOCAS DEL TORO

Liam smiled when he recalled how five years earlier when a taxi had dropped him off at the Ferry Xpress terminal in Colon, a port on the Caribbean coast of Panama.

Dusk was falling when he was pointed to the departures hall where he joined a bustling crowd of Central and South Americans before a bank of check-in counters. His destination was Bocas del Toro, an archipelago that lay at the eastern extremity of Panama, near the border with Costa Rica.

Once the formalities were completed he made his way outside to the embarkation point. He was surprised by the size of the *Adriatico*, it towered above him like a cruise ship, though it was in fact a recommissioned Mediterranean ferryboat, operated by an Italian line.

The passengers were mostly younger people, Panamanians and other Latinos, setting out for what was described as a weekend cruise to the islands. Once on board Liam was pleased to discover the *Adriatico* was completely refitted with the kind of stylish facilities expected on a modern ferryboat—brightly light shops, restaurants, bars and a stage set for on-board entertainment.

He was directed to an upper deck and his cabin, described by the ticketing agent as an outside suite. It was cramped, not exactly a suite at the Hilton, but he was not complaining, he would be spending just one night on-board the ferry, which was scheduled to arrive in Bocas del Toro mid-morning the next day.

According to Pat Kennedy, Liam's visit to Panama was a necessary part of his banking education, since offshore banking formed a profitable part of INI Hong Kong's private

banking services for its wealthy clients, and as an up and coming protégé of Pat Kennedy his understanding of the role of Panamanian and Caribbean banks in their business was a key to the future.

But behind that Pat had other plans. Liam spoke fluent Spanish and his presence would help discover Tom Barton's plans and possible ulterior motives for his sudden departure. Not that he distrusted Tom, it was simply to remove any doubts in a complex situation, where the stakes were enormous, after all Tom Barton had close contacts with Sergei Tarasov, who had also gone to ground as Pat fought off the politically inspired grab of the bank by City & Colonial.<sup>6</sup>

Pat's project to introduce his protégé to Panama and its banking culture fitted in neatly with Liam's own vacation plans, which had been in suspense following a dramatic series of changes at the bank in London. What could be better than a couple of weeks in Central America, a region he knew little of, but had heard much of in Spain, a vacation that would be combined with an introduction to the bank's representative in Panama City.

He would be in his element with his Spanish, and the idea of discovering Latino culture was enticing, an excellent opportunity to discover the New World, where apart from banking, he had heard the surfing was good and the girls hot.

However, all that changed when he was contacted by Tom Barton, who had seen his posts on Facebook and suggested they get together either in Cartagena or Panama. Naturally Liam informed his boss, who was delighted with the news and announced his imminent arrival in Panama City.

Liam's first disappointment was with the girls, friendly enough, and certainly exotic, but they were not the Shakiras of his imagination. Their curves were much rounder, perhaps he had gotten used to the Chinese girls he had met in Shanghai and Hong Kong. The food he had eaten so far in Panama had been highly calorific, which probably went a long way to explaining their derrières.

The next morning he was up early to see the coastline, but

was out of luck, it was too far off and all he that was visible were the mist covered mountains. Breakfast was the next option, there in the restaurant he saw the girls serving themselves vast quantities of the rich food, which provided the explanation, confirming his earlier idea.



It was nearly eleven when the ferry dropped anchor, a kilometre offshore from the Bocas pier. Disembarkation would be effected by lighters, with the passengers shuttled to the pier in groups of 15 or 20 persons. The chaos that ensued was in part due to the Italian-Panamanian crew and the disorganisation onshore. Liam conjured up images of the scenes of the panic on the Costa Concordia, but few passengers complained, at first their stoicism seemed to contradict Latin American's reputation of fiery temperament.

Then, just as he swallowed his impatience, relaxing and waiting for the situation to unravel itself, the public address system announced disembarkation had commenced. In a flash the stoicism was gone, in a flurry of cries and jostling of elbows the dense crowd of passengers pressed forward.

Once onshore Liam was disappointed by his first impressions of Bocas del Toro. It appeared, to his non-ecologist mind, a ramshackle collection of timber framed houses and small hotels with colourful tin roofs, interspersed between numerous bars and trip organisers.

He had no difficulty in finding a hotel in the town centre, and a room with a view. From his balcony, he could see the outlying islands and the huge form of the Adriatico, incongruous compared the low lying buildings onshore, making the small boats that criss-crossed the waters around it look like insects.

He spent the afternoon exploring Bocas, a world away from what he had imagined, totally unlike Spain, perhaps a little like certain isolated and underdeveloped beach spots and islands he had visited in Southeast Asia, without modern hotels, or tourist infrastructure. Perhaps the diving would be better, but that was not his thing, on top of that the surfing looked tame compared to that he had enjoyed on the Basque Coast.

The next morning, he awoke to a grey and heavy sky. A strong wind whipped squalls of rain against the window panes of his room, sending him even deeper into the dumps. Once the rain cleared the desk informed him he could take a bus from a nearby square to the beaches.

After breakfast the weather brightened up and he made his way to the bus stop, a couple of blocks away from the small hotel. There he latched onto a small bunch of guys and girls heading for Boca Dragon, a small beach a few kilometres to the east he was told. The bus was small and already more than half filled filled with local day-trippers. They piled in and it set off along a bumpy winding road, past a landscape filled with lush and unruly tropical vegetation, interrupted here and there by clearings surrounding timber framed houses on stilts.

Half an hour later they arrived at a beach dotted with a few rather small ramshackle bars and restaurants. Several of the local passengers boarded waiting motor launches, apparently to the islands that lay opposite.

The rest set off on foot in the direction of the beach, and Liam followed, past the bars, then along a path they told him led to another beach. The surroundings were dispiriting, a tropical slum, run-down homes, sullen dogs and forsaken palm trees. It was about twenty minutes before reached a long board-walk, crossing a water filled bog, surrounded by what

seemed to Liam a primeval jungle. Unexpectedly it debouched onto a white sandy beach bordered by tall shady palms, a postcard image that ended about a quarter of a mile further in an impenetrable mangrove.

Floating on the translucent sea were the launches he had seen leaving the bus stop twenty minutes earlier, their passengers already installing their parasols, setting out their picnics, or wading in the shallow sea.

Music echoed from two or three small bars that plied drinks and food for the day-trippers. The paradisaical beach was bordered by exuberant nature. Scattered in twos and threes along the white sand were not more than a couple of dozen or so people, mostly locals and other Latinos sunning themselves, or cooling off with Bilbaos and piña coladas as they listened to the sounds of salsa drifting through the air.

It was perfect, he regretted his hasty judgement. As he was to discover Bocas was a place to sleep, eat, drink and have fun once darkness fell, during the day vacationers headed to one of the island's many small beaches, or snorkelling off the countless uninhabited islands that made up the archipelago.

The gang he had latched onto chose a spot dumped their gear and disappeared, plunging into the clear waters with their masks and snorkels leaving him alone with Gisela, a German girl, who seemed to have decided to keep him company as he was without mask or snorkel.

Pulling off her baggy tee-shirt and slipping out of her jeans, she pointed towards the sea, inviting Liam to join her. He followed her example, pleased he had managed to get the beginnings of a tan in Sanya over the New Year holiday. Then, turning his attention to his new companion he was startled to discover that under those not very attractive clothes, she had a stunning figure and a golden tan.

After a refreshing swim, he invited her to eat in one of the small bars. The menu proposed fresh langouste and when Liam asked if he could see them, the waiter pointed to the sea and beckoned them to follow him. The langoustes were kept in a wire cage under the clear water, alive and fresh, ready for

the next client.

Liam pointed to a three or four pound specimen and the waiter pulled it out for inspection. They nodded in approval and the waiter headed for the grille.



Gisela told him she was touring the Caribbean, stopping here and there to explore the sights and relax on the beaches. Her golden tan, which contrasted her clear blond hair, confirmed she had been absent from Germany some weeks. She was travelling on a low budget and was just as delighted with the fresh langouste as Liam was in inviting this attractive girl to eat with him on the secluded tropical beach far from the usual tourist haunts.

Her English was near perfect, her Spanish nothing to be ashamed of either. She recounted to Liam how she had finished studying medicine and was taking a sabbatical before deciding what to do next. She had been travelling mostly alone, making friends, like those she had met in one of the town's many scuba bars.

Gisela spoke enthusiastically of her twin passions, scuba diving and undersea hunting, the first with breathing

equipment the second without. Liam knew next to nothing about diving, the coastal waters of Ireland were too cold for the sport to appeal to him as a good way of spending his weekends.

Her next stop was Santa Marta in Colombia, the oldest city in Colombia, she told him, surrounded by beaches and the mountains of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, its coast bordered by coral reefs, a fabulous spot for diving enthusiasts.

By the end of the afternoon Liam was captivated by his new friend and excited to discover their routes crossed in Cartagena. They quickly decided to make the next leg of their journey together. In the meantime Gisela told Liam she would teach him something about diving.

She was not the hot Latino he had imagined finding, but she was a great alternative, she had a stunning figure and together they could speak English and Spanish, though Liam's German was limited to the point he preferred not to voice his Dad's Army imitation for fear of being ditched out of hand.

He was enthralled by this unexpected, breathtaking, adventurous, new friend. She glowed with health, as a diver she did not smoke and unlike a certain number of the girls they met in Bocas, she was neither tattooed nor decorated with body piercing. He later discovered all that was frowned upon at medical school, not only was it unhealthy, but the risk of infection for her and her patients made the fashion strictly *unerlaubt*.

6 see The Turning Point

## CHAPTER 51

### THE COLLECTION

Ekaterina called John, as she did everyday, if not several times a day, this time to update him on the Collection, nothing of great importance, all was well. But in the art world, far from our treasure hunt off the Alta Guajira coast, another story was breaking, a mystery surrounding Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* at the National Gallery in London.

The work was described as 'one of fewer than 20 known paintings by Leonardo' when it sold for a record 450 million dollars in 2017, only to disappear without trace amid increasing doubts about its attribution to the Renaissance master.

Months after the Louvre in Abu Dhabi suddenly cancelled its planned unveiling, the picture was now facing an apparent snub from the Louvre in Paris, which was understood to have cancelled plans to display it in its major Leonardo exhibition.

To Ekaterina's mind contemporary painters were finding favour with collectors, though early 20th century masterpieces had the greatest pulling power as far as museums and sponsored exhibitions were concerned, and only a handful of living artists had high public appeal.

'Don't forget John, it's business,' she once again reminded him. 'People don't go to Venice to see the latest Chinese painter.'

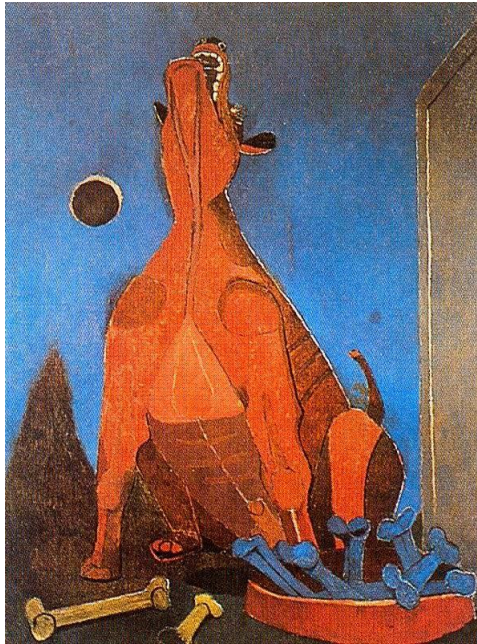
She was right, only Ai Weiwei could pull a crowd in London or Paris, it was the works of painters like Modigliani that were bankable—now the only artist to have broken the 150 million dollar price twice.

The trouble with Modigliani was the number of fakes said to be in collections and hanging on museum walls.

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Some 12 months earlier Tom and Lola Barton had joined us at the New York art sales, where Tom unsuccessfully bid for Rufino Tamayo's *Perro aullando a la luna* painted in 1942, which went for 5 million dollars, it was the first time the Mexican's work had appeared at a Sotheby's sale.

Ekaterina said it reminded her of Alisher Usmanov, who compared Alexei Navalny to Sharikov, a slob, in the shape of a dog that takes on human form in Mikhail Bulgakov's 1987 novel *Heart of a Dog*, a slovenly and narcissistic incarnation of the New Soviet man. Kataya cynically commented they were all dogs, Soviets and oligarchs.



Usmanov was like Lakshmi Mittal, John Fredriksen, Hans Rausing and Roman Abramovich, all billionaires flying the UK flag of convenience.

Certain commentators seemed disappointed that some works hadn't reached their reserve prices at the sales, but to my mind

their disappointment was more than exaggerated as the asking prices were between five and ten times the prices paid two or three decades earlier. And when I think of the tragic life of Modigliani and the prices paid for his works, the injustice seemed out of this world.

The Modigliani had gone for almost 160 million dollars at Sotheby's, which along with the other paintings sold at the auction and Christie's the week before had given us a good indication of the value of the Sommières Collection.

We were talking of something like a billion dollars.

*Nu couché (sur le côté gauche)* fetched the fourth highest price ever paid for a work of art at auction, but it was not the highest price paid for a Modigliani. Three years previously another painting by the artist had gone for 170 million.

Though there were no fireworks, there were two happy people at the end of the evening, first was the seller, John Magnier, an Irish billionaire who'd bought the work in 2003, at Christie's, for nigh on 27 million, he'd pocket a huge profit after paying fees and other costs, better than any other financial investment, second was Sotheby's as the sale had notched up the highest price of any work in its 274-year-old history.

Ekaterina talked to him about the Russian Orthodox Church's decision to unilaterally sever all ties with the Constantinople Patriarchate, an event that worried her, like it did many overseas Russians. The seat of the Orthodox Church mother church was in Istanbul, and Moscow was upset by its move toward creating an independent church in Ukraine.

It was mixing politics with religion, which made no sense to her and many of the faithful, a decision taken by the Russian church which effectively barred its followers from participating in ceremonies including communion, baptism and marriage at any church wherever it was controlled by the Constantinople Patriarchate.

It would lead to one of the most serious schisms in Christianity for centuries causing a profound crisis within the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople had been moving towards the creation of an autonomous church in Ukraine, though he had not for the moment decreed a Tomos of Autocephaly, that is the formal procedure that would create an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which the Ukrainian government had pressed the Ecumenical Patriarchate to enact, in its role as the head of the worldwide Orthodox community, to recognize the Ukrainian church as autocephalous, that is independent, thus revoking a decision of 1686, which had effectively put the Ukraine church under the authority of Moscow.

Sever ties with the Ecumenical Patriarchate was a decision fraught with dangers, as it could provoke violence between communities in the already dangerous confrontation between Moscow and Kiev, provoking the ire of Vladimir Putin, who saw the last links of his Greater Russia slipping away with the schism.

The Russian Orthodox Church claimed 150 million followers, half of the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. With schism the Russian Orthodox Church would lose a large number of its followers drastically affecting the influence of Moscow, something that would not please the Kremlin with far reaching political implications since Kiev was historically considered the birthplace of Russian Orthodoxy.

Russia has long seen the Ukraine as an extension of Russia, Little Russia as the czars had called it, with Moscow as the rightful leader of the lands of Rus, the legitimate successor to Kyivan Rus, which included Russia, Belarus—which Vladimir Putin was already pressurising into a union with Russia, and the Ukraine.

Pat had taken off for New York with Olly. They were now as thick as thieves with Olly stringing along with him on his multiple jaunts—business, family and pleasure. The news that a bottle of 1945 French wine had been sold at a Sotheby's auction in New York for over half a million dollars had them talking.

It was a bottle of Romanee-Conti, a rare Burgundy, which

had smashed the previous record, an 1869 Château Lafite Rothschild, sold in Hong Kong almost a decade earlier.

Olly told him the Romanee-Conti was produced in the Côte de Nuits region, part of the Côte d'Or, which runs from Lyons to Dijon in France.

The vineyard covered just four acres, which produces just six thousand bottles a year, though the 1945 bottle was one of six hundred.

'Not as good as yours Olly,' Pat reassured him.

It amused me to watch the two opposites, Olly, a conservative French nobleman from a family whose roots stretched back to the Middle Ages, and Pat, behind the image of a powerful banker was an easy-going self-made lad from Limerick in Ireland.

Comte Olivier de la Salle, who had until recently struggled to maintain his vast family demeure, near Sommières, in Provence, had been catapulted to fame and riches with the discovery of what was now known as the Sommières Collection of early 19th century modernist paintings collected by his grandfather and forgotten for nearly a century in the cellars of the family's château.

There was another reason for Pat's continued presence in New York, he was looking for another place to park his wealth, and he now wanted Olly's opinion, he was cultivated, well-travelled and had taste, even though his family had in recent years struggled to maintain its family château in Sommières.

It was nearly 10 years since Pat had become enamoured with China, but now like many Chinese he needed a marble and bronze bolt hole and New York, a city with perhaps the world's highest concentration of ultra-rich, that is an elite with a minimum of 30 million dollars, seemed to offer just that.

Pat and Lili had an option on a place they had in Midtown Manhattan with Sarah Kavanagh, one with views over the United Nations Plaza and the East River to one side, and the other towards the Empire State Building. The penthouse in 50 United Nations Plaza was a duplex covering the entire 42nd

## The Cargo Club

and 43rd floors. When Sarah announced a British diplomat would be his neighbour on the 38th floor he frowned, as to Lili she didn't like it, or the district, she preferred something with a view over Central Park.

The pad, at the summit of a stylish glass tower, would have set Pat back upwards of 25 million dollars, a mere bagatelle for a man of his means, an investment that was sure to turn in a profit when he tired of it, with Sarah putting it back on the market with an assured added value.

Today, there existed a quarter of a million ultra-rich individuals, and their ranks were growing at a phenomenal pace, creating a science fiction world where the elite lived on another planet compared to common mortals.

I have to confess our Clan lived on that planet, a couple of us were even at the top of its pile, echoing Frank Sinatra's song:

*Start spreadin' the news, I'm leavin' today  
I want to be a part of it  
New York, New York  
These vagabond shoes, are longing to stray  
Right through the very heart of it  
New York, New York  
I want to wake up, in a city that doesn't sleep  
And find I'm king of the hill  
Top of the heap  
These little town blues  
Are melting away  
I'll make a brand new start of it  
In old New York  
If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere  
It's up to you, New York, New York  
New York, New York ...*

Many of those ultra-rich had heeded Frank Sinatra and set up home in New York, one of the safest places in the world to park their cash. Ever since London had falling into the grip of Brexit, and China, threatened by Xi Jinping's megalomania—

who was beginning to look like its new emperor, and whose whims could one day make Hong Kong a less enviable place to live, Pat in his willy ways was quietly sounding out the market for a pad where he could hang his favourite works of art, where they would be safe from grabbing hands, where he could perhaps one day retire, or where his children could study to become citizens of the world, his, not yours.

It was an affirmed fact, the world of the 21st century was looking volatile, but for the moment the rich still had mobility and could change their bolt holes whenever the heat got too much.



Pat was looking at one of those slim new residential towers on Park Avenue, an eyrie in one of those surreal fingers that reached into the sky transforming the Manhattan skyline,

designed by Raphael Viñoly, one of the tallest residential building in the world, where apartments were going for more than 10,000 dollars a month, and penthouses for a quarter of a billion.

They were familiar to Pat, like many Hong Kong towers, where the residents could isolate themselves from the trams and buses, watching the ferries scoot across the harbour like water boatmen on a pond.

I have to admit, we the Clan, like other fortunate people have seen super-prime property become an asset investment, a kind of safebox, in which we can shelter our money, more tangible than investment funds and shares, in volatile financial markets, from London to New York and Hong Kong, like yachts, more visible than works of art, trophies that can be tasted like fine wines and admired like beautiful women.

The taller and more expensive the better, slender towers, some of the most extraordinary edifices ever built, looming over Central Park, for the hoi polloi and sans dents to see, rising high into the sky, steel and concrete forts reaching for the stars, their ethereal forms casting their vast shadows onto the milling masses below.

Far better than nouveau riche Dubai, and better still, further from Tehran.

## CHAPTER 52

### COLOMBIA

Why Colombia and Central America? Well, the roots of our story, that is the Clan's, go back a long way, beyond the tumult of City & Colonial grab in Hong Kong, when Tom Barton, to the dismay of Pat Kennedy, abruptly liquidated his holdings in London and disappeared.

I've told you of his sudden eclipse and how Pat set out to find his friend, in whom he had an implicit trust. His goal had been to remove any lingering suspicions as to the motives for his disappearance if only to protect the bank from unjustified accusations.

Tom's reappearance in Colombia intrigued Pat, for many reasons, and not the least was his own long standing business interests in the Caribbean and more recently in the canal project in Nicaragua.

The story of Pat's own fascination for Central America went back much further, more than two decades, when he was still wet behind the ears in the ways of the world outside, the days during which the defunct Pablo Escobar's influence was still felt, when Pat left Barranquilla on the Caribbean coast of Colombia to embark on a voyage full of dangers to the south, deep into the country's isolated jungle regions bordering Ecuador.

His journey was motivated by a certain Ortega, a dubious businessman, whose links to the opposing factions in the civil war were more than ambiguous. Police, army, political parties and 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.

Pat remembered the moment when the Lear Jet climbed over the Andean cordilleras that seemed to stretched on forever, then the vast jungle regions that covered the major part of the country, the home of the Farc guerillas and Escobar's successors.

He recalled the intense feeling of isolation and distance from the rest of the world on his arrival at what he had been led to believe was a coffee plantation, which it was, but not only. The people he met were different, rugged and hard, wild looking Indians, and Europeans, most of whom bore no much more than the thinnest veneer of civilisation.

The hacienda was magnificent, as in the Westerns he remembered, though more exotic, green, without the dust. There were horses and what looked like cowboys, though he saw few cattle. To his consternation many of the men carried arms.

That first evening he joined his new friends for a parrillada and beef chuletas to the buzz of insects fluttering in the lighting over the tables set out before the grand house. He remembered Delrios, Dan Oberman and their pilot Peter Davy, as well as the omnipresent army officers wearing battled fatigues. Delrios had informed Pat that an early visit to the coffee plantations had been organised for the next day where an army operation had been planned in the nearby jungle to close down an illegal coca paste factory. He had reassured him there was not the least risk of danger.

Pat wondered why the army should be employed to close down a factory, confused by the meaning of 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 his subalterns concerning the next day's operation.

Pat was awoken after a restless night, it was still dark, after a quick breakfast he joined Delrios in an army Jeep and was soon speeding past the coffee plantations that lay at the foot

of the surrounding hills. Suddenly they pulled up and climbed out and as Delrios exchanged information with his men Pat inspected the endless rows of uninteresting green bushes, with their small grapes of berries ripening on their leafy branches, disappointingly uninteresting.

It was too early to be up for the likes of inspecting berries on coffee bushes, though having seen them he could speak as an expert back in Ireland.

In the not too far distance the morning mist still clung to the mountains and the canopy of the dense jungle stretched out like a green carpet before his eyes. He was no longer sure that his presence was all that important for the army operation.

Unexpectedly the sound of engines cut through the cool air, turning Pat saw beyond the edge of the plantation was an airstrip where a helicopter was waiting and before he knew it he was hustled under the thumping rotor blades and bundled on-board.

As they flew low over the menacing jungle images of crashing down into the endless expanse of green flashed through his mind. Thirty minutes later they circled and to his momentary relief and landed in a clearing, where they joined waiting the Jeeps of a small army unit ready to leave for the jungle factory.

Following over a muddy laterite trail that cut through the jungle they soon arrived at a predetermined meeting where they joined up with a larger group. There Pat was introduced to an officer who explained in rapid Spanish to his guide the outline of the operation.

Pat's unease rose several notches when he saw how heavily armed the men with tightly clenched jaws, it was clearly not going to be the kind of rabbit shoot he was used to back in County Limerick.

Dimly he began to understand that he was about to witness a military operation against an illegal drug factory, but was confused by the roles of Delrios and Ortega. 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 with the territory 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 either the officer in charge or the guide was difficult to follow. Kennedy wished that that Oberman or Davy had stayed with him. What at first glance had seemed to be an interesting outing was beginning to take on a very alarming air. The other two men had left that morning on a round trip to Barranquilla, 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 proceeded on foot. They followed heavily armed soldiers who advanced cautiously towards the site of the suspected narcotics factory.

Pat remembered the fear provoked by the sudden stutter of automatic rifle fire. The soldiers ducked and he dived into the rain sodden undergrowth and mud. Then silence, as acrid blue smoke from the gunfire rose in the damp air through the leaves and branches of the trees. The soldiers cautiously continued their advance towards the jungle factory. Pat picked himself up, brushed the mud and damp leaves from his clothes, his heart beating at a rate 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 rifle fire had been simply a tactic to frighten those who may have remained in the camp.

He discovered 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 laboratories in the north of the country.

An army officer explained in approximate English for the benefit of Pat that the jungle factory would be burnt and all the material destroyed. He nodded seriously, wondering whether the whole operation had not been set up for his sole benefit.

Another factory would appear in a day or two and business would continue as usual once the military returned to their base.

Informants were everywhere, brothers, sisters, cousins, and friends, both sides exchanging information on operations planned by the authorities. It was a game of hide and seek, where the 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, situated amongst the vast coffee plantations that covered the nearby hills and plantations surrounded by dense jungle and mountains, lay in a region only 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 coca growers cultivated and harvested their crop of coca leaves and transformed it into a raw paste before transporting it north.

Police and officials were willing accomplices to the drug traffickers and the drug barons, who continued to operate with impunity throughout Central America and Mexico up to the US border region. Corruption was rampant at all levels in Latin American countries where the traffic of narcotics was aided and abetted at all levels of society.

The coffee plantations were controlled by the Farc and

## The Cargo Club

coffee 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 central government in Bogota.

In 2000, the plantations Ortega controlled were an important exporter of Colombian coffee to international markets. They were just 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, whilst the Colombian authorities accepted the billions of dollars in aid from the US government, in their fight against narcotics and their never ending struggle against the Farc and other opposition movements. Then as now 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 coastal cities ready for export. From Barranquilla, or Santa Marta at the foot of Pico Cristobal Colon overlooking the southern flank of the Caribbean, the cocaine was shipped by sea and air

to North America via the Caribbean islands or by land across Central America and Mexico.

That was a very long time ago and though times had changed since Pat's foray into the coke factories of the Colombian jungle, more people in the UK used cocaine as a recreational drug than in any other developed country.

After a tumultuous return to Ireland and thanks to the fortunes of life, Pat, after befriending the Irish banker, Michael Fitzwilliams, CEO of the INI Banking Corporation, had become his alter ego, a trusted though subordinate friend, graduating to confidant and advisor over a period of two decades, rising to the board of directors. Then after Michael's tragic death, succeeding him as head of the international banking group, now based in Hong Kong.

In spite of Pat's remarkable success and his integration into the Hong Kong world of business and banking, his world was fraught with dangers. Not the kind he had known in Colombia, Estonia, or more recently London, but the kind associated with the political transformation that was taking place in the former colony, Beijing creep he called it, others called it insidious encroachment.

From his office, high in the bank's Hong Kong tower, though the mist he could make out the bridge that crossed the Pearl Delta, the longest in the world, linking Hong Kong to Zhuhai and Macau, part of a network of infrastructure linking the Greater Bay Area of the great cities of Canton Province together, a powerhouse of 100 million people. But at the same time Beijing drew Hong Kong closer, as was inevitable, the idea of having all his eggs in one proverbial basket awakened Pat's survival instinct and the unconscious urge to diversify his options—there were many and the Caribbean-Central American region was one.

Hong Kong had always been a temporary affair, as had the lease on the New Territories agreed with the Qing Imperial Court in 1898, a piece of land about 1,000 square kilometres abutting what was then the fishing village of Shenzhen on the mainland overlooking the Pearl River.

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There lingered a strange feeling of unbelonging, which extended to his London home, now vaguely threatened by Brexit. Like the other members of his Clan, Pat was Irish, but time had distanced him from his homeland, which now seemed small, though he baulked at calling it parochial, it was home, though he couldn't see himself or his family living there after the excitement of Hong Kong and the many other exotic places to which he now felt attached.

The future was the future, today today, that was the way he looked at life. But he never forgot, the future, as long as he had lived, had always caught up on him. He now lived in what had once been the future. Time was relentless and the decisions he took at each instant conditioned the days to come as they sped towards him, his family and his children.

## CHAPTER 53

### THE BEACH

That idyllic morning, Liam newly equipped with a mask, snorkel and flippers, set off for the jetty with Gisela. There they boarded one of the waiting motor launches, joining half a dozen other snorkellers for a day's diving off one of the many small islands that lay to the west of Bocas. The archipelago formed part of the Isla Bastimentos National Marine Park, which covered more than 13,000 hectares.

After half an hour's ride, the sound of the motor ringing in their ears, their tee-shirts wet from the waves that slapped the hull and the spume that flew through the air as they sped over the water, the launch slowed. Before them was a low lying island, the boat turned towards an opening in the reef that surrounded it and headed towards the shallow water. Beyond the white sandy beach that lay before them was a wall of dense vegetation, mangroves, tropical hardwoods and tall palms that leant out over the sea.

A few metres offshore the boatman cut the motor and pointed to the beach. Gathering their lunch boxes and diving material they slipped into the shallow waters and waded to the shore, there they turned and waved to signal all was well. The boatman made a sign of goodbye, then pointing the launch towards the reef he gunned the motor and sped off with a roar in the direction of one of the nearby island where he would drop the other divers.

A couple of minutes later the only sound that could be heard was that of the waves and the cries of the birds. Strangely enough there were no insects, it was probably not the season.

'We'll stay here, there's plenty to see in the lagoon,' Gisela said looking left and right along the blinding white sandy

beach.

'What's in there,' asked Liam pointed towards the dense vegetation.

'Nothing I suppose, I mean there's mangrove and forest, mostly swamp forest.'

'Swamp?'

'You know, the ground is covered with water and natural debris, palm fronds, coconuts, tree trunks and all that.'

'What happens if the boat doesn't come back.'

'Don't worry, we'll live on langouste and coconuts.'

'And water?'

'We can collect that, it rains most nights.'

There was a silence as Liam contemplated being stranded on a tropical island alone with Gisela. After a moment he smiled.

'What's up?'

'I just thought it would be nice.'

'For a time.'

Gisela was a realist.

'We'll start by exploring the lagoon.'

She pointed to the mask and snorkel, then the flippers.

'You know how to use them Liam?'

'More or less.'

They waded into the sea as he experimented different positions for his snorkel. The water was as clear as crystal. Small fish darted off as they moved out into deeper water. Liam shouted and pointed to a starfish about a foot in diameter.

'There's lots of them, just be on the lookout for caymans.'

'Caymans!' exclaimed Liam wondering what offshore banking had to do with their swim.

'Yes, crocodiles.'

'What!'

Fleeting moments like those were impossible to hold and a couple of days later the Adriatico sail out of Bocas. It was early evening as the sun set over the hills that formed the frontier with Costa Rica when the huge ferry turned east. Three blasts on the horn and it left the magic of unspoilt

beaches and the small charmingly ramshackle Caribbean town behind. Soon, latter-day hippies, rastas and backpackers would be replaced by grounds of tourists once developers set to work building hotels and all inclusive resorts. Given another ten or fifteen years Bocas would probably be ready to compete with Phuket, Punta Cana or Varadero.

But that was the least of Liam's worries—he was not on the ferry. He was wondering whether he had made a mistake in not taking it to Colon and from there to Panama City by train. The trouble was he had reached the point where he accepted almost anything Gisela suggested. Not only would the bus be slower, but he was certain it would be much more uncomfortable.

The following morning they were up before dawn to catch the launch that left Bocas for Almirante on the mainland at six. The trip took thirty minutes speeding across the sea in semi-darkness, past the shadows of mysterious forest covered islands.

The bus station was exactly as he imagined a small Central American bus station would be like. Travellers with their oversize piles of baggage waiting for their buses to Panama City, or other towns along the route to the east. The drivers left their badly tuned motors running for the aircon, ejecting poisonous diesel fumes into the air around them. It was a stark contrast with the lush green forest covered islands that lay just a short boat ride behind them.



Their arrival in panama city coincided with a gathering of heads of state for the Summit of the Americas with a state diner set in Panama Viejo's historical park. The fact neither Liam nor Gisela were on President Juan Carlos Varela's guest list was of no consequence to the young couple who were not even aware of the great event, nor the presence of the great leaders, who with the exception of Barack Obama they had never heard of.

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The park was the site of the first Spanish settlement on the Pacific coast. It was founded in 1519, and became an important port for galleons arriving from the Viceroyalty of Peru laden with gold and silver.

At the beginning of 1671, Henry Morgan, attacked the city with 1,200 men after marching across the jungle covered isthmus from the Caribbean coast. Morgan sacked the city, terrifying its 10,000 souls, raping, burning and killing. Many of those taken prisoner were sold into slavery.

During the attack the Spanish defender, Captain General Don Juan Pérez de Guzman, blew up the gunpowder magazine in the desperate hope it would frighten off the pirates, but the fires and explosion destroyed the city. It was later rebuilt at a more defensible site to the west, a peninsula, around which was built a system of walls and fortifications, the present day old town of Panama City, Casco Viejo.

Pat was fascinated by the story of Henry Morgan, who also sacked Granada, the rich colonial city founded in 1524 by Francisco Hernandez, situated on the shores of Lake Nicaragua.

In December 1663, Morgan and his men made their way up the San Juan River, crossed the lake to reach its eastern shores, where with their Indian guides they trekked through dense unexplored jungles to reach their objective. Unperturbed by their journey fraught with danger, Morgan launched a lightning attack on the city, hitherto reputed impregnable. The Spaniards were taken by surprise and after a short fight its defenders were neutralised rounded up and locked in the cathedral. The city's other inhabitants fled whilst Morgan and his men plundered churches, monasteries and colleges, before departing loaded with gold, silver, jewellery and other valuables.

It was the start of Morgan's long and notoriously successful career as a privateer on the Spanish Main. Henry Morgan, the son of a Welsh farmer, was knighted by King Charles II, and became Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica where he died a rich man in 1688.

After being shanghaied to Barbados, where he was forcibly indentured, Morgan's career as a soldier commenced after being pressed into an army led by General Venables and Admiral Penn, sent by Cromwell in 1654, to capture Santo Domingo from the Spanish. The English forces with a fleet of 35 ships and 8,000 men were repulsed by the Spanish and found refuge on nearby Jamaica, a backwater of little interest to the Spanish.

In 1664, as second in command of an expedition against Panama led by Edvart Mansvelt, Morgan was master of his own ship, a mercenary licensed to attack and capture enemy ships by Charles II, part of cash strapped England's attempt to grab part of the action from the rich and all powerful Spanish New World empire.

After Mansvelt's death Morgan, his protégé and vice-admiral, became head of the fleet, and in 1668, captured Portobelo which he held for a ransom of 350,000 pesos, that is 20 million dollars in today's money.

The main event of the Summit was the consecration of the reconciliation between the US and Cuba, when the American leader declared the days of US meddling in Latin American affairs relegated to history.

Panama knew something about the history of Yankee skulduggery in Latin America, which was marked by the Spanish-American War, the result of which was the protectorate of Cuba, and the secession of Panama from Colombia.

In 1903, a treaty between the US and Colombia granted the use of the Isthmus of Panama to the US and was ratified by Washington, however, Colombia was unsatisfied by the terms and demanded the conditions be renegotiated. The US refusal signalled a Panamanian rebellion, prompted and encouraged by Washington, leading to the independence of the isthmus from Colombia which was powerless faced with the overwhelming supremacy of the US navy.

Just a few shots were fired with one casualty, who Pat Kennedy learned was an unlucky bystander, a certain Mr

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Wong, a Chinese citizen, killed by a shell fired from a Colombian gun boat.

The untimely death of Mr Wong, written Wáng in standard Mandarin, seemed at first glance like a bad portent, but Pat recalled his visit to the museum at Miraflores, where he learnt thousands of Chinese had worked on the construction of the canal, and many of them had left their bones. He brushed the idea aside, after all Wong, or Wang, was a very common Chinese name.

Following Panama's declaration of independence, Washington moved fast and barely two weeks after, the newly created state, the Republica de Panama, signed a treaty that granted the US exclusive and permanent possession of the Canal Zone against a payment of ten million dollars in exchange, and an annuity of a 250,000 dollars, starting nine years after—the time deemed necessary to finish the canal commenced by Ferdinand de Lesseps ten years earlier.

It was the start of a long and contentious presence of the US, which finally ended when the canal was ceded to the Panamanian government in 1999 by Jimmy Carter.

## CHAPTER 54

### THE PILLARS OF NEW SPAIN

The production of gold and silver required the use of mercury which was produced from local cinnabar, a naturally occurring mineral compound composed of mercury and sulphur.

Cinnabar was extracted from the Santa Barbara Hill, near Huancavelica, and transported to multiple processing centres that surrounded the city, where it was milled and smelted in furnaces, the mercury content was vaporised to separate it from the other elements and then condensed into liquid form which was transported to Potosi.



The resulting waste loaded with heavy metals was dumped around the city creating a deadly toxic environment.

In Potosi the silver ore mined from the mountain was finely milled, mixed with water, salt, mercury, iron, and other ingredients and spread out on stone courts where it was trod

under foot during about a month to accelerate the amalgamation process.

The compound was then washed to remove the waste and the amalgam was then heated in furnaces to separate the precious metals from the mercury which was evaporated and recycled, a process that went back to Antiquity when the Romans first described mercury amalgamation refining process.

In the 17th century the Viceroy of Peru, declared that Potosi and Huancavelica, which were separated by 2,000 kilometres of mountainous Andean trails, were 'the two pillars that support this kingdom and that of Spain' and Luis de Velasco, noted 'if there was not mercury, nor would there be silver'.

Between 1550 and 1800, an estimated 136,000 tons of silver was produced in New Spain, whilst some 196,000 tons of mercury was consumed in the amalgamation process, part of which was imported from Spain, as was evidenced by the cargo carried on La Galga, which sailed from Spain to Mexico loaded with 667 chests of mercury, each weighing 70 kilos.

By 1650, Potosi had become one of the largest city in the world with a population of 160,000, this included the Mita, another of the key elements in the production of silver, where local Indian men were forced to work two months in Huancavelica and twelve months in Potosi, in deadly, dangerous and toxic conditions.

## CHAPTER 55

### MISSING IN THE JUNGLE

Pat had caused a sensation when he hit the front page of Hong Kong's newspaper, the South China Morning Post, with the sensational headline 'Banker Missing in Jungle'. It followed the news from the HKND Nicaragua Transoceanic Canal Company's office in Managua, dramatically informing Lili her husband had gone missing.

Pat had become a local media figure, a kind of hero, in the battle against the UK bank City & Colonial, when he repulsed their attempted takeover of INI Hong Kong. Then turning the tables he retook control of INI London after his friend and mentor Michael Fitzwilliams, INP's CEO, had been ousted in a politically motivated takeover by City & Colonial.

The story had commenced when Pat set out for the Rio San Juan, a river that formed the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, on a fact finding mission related to the transoceanic canal's controversial path, without taking the precaution of taking a company guide Lili without news from her husband, frantic with worry, had called Tom Barton, imploring him to help and set out in search of Pat.

Pat was an adventurer, it was in his skin, a characteristic that manifested itself soon after he had established his accounting firm in Limerick City. On completing his studies in Dublin he had headed for Boston, Massachusetts, to gain work experience at a leading corporate bank. His year in America had whetted his appetite for new things and on his return to Limerick life became routine, not through of an absence of interest in his business, but because of an intense desire to discover new horizons.

As the only child of parents who knew their modest place in

Irish society, Pat had been straight-jacketed and pressed into studying for a career that would assure him of a better material life than they themselves had known in Limerick.

His mother had never ceased to hammer into him the need to succeed, the effect of which spurred him on, sharpening his value of hard work and diligence, but at the same time he nursed the idea that once success was ensured he would one day explore the mysterious corners of the world that had beckoned him from the pages of his childhood encyclopaedias.

Once established, his first business forays overseas led him to Amsterdam and Hamburg to meet firms that had set up businesses in the Shannon Free Tax Zone. Amongst his discoveries were the lurid attractions of those cities, that only went to stimulate his thirst for the exotic.

That led him to Michael Fitzwilliams' uncle, David Castlemain, head of the Irish Union Bank at that time, who set Pat on the path of an adventure he was never to forget. An adventure that had led him to Cuba, Mexico and Colombia and to the brink of disaster.

Some people were dogged with bad luck, but for Pat Kennedy it was the opposite. As he put it, he came out of his near disastrous brush with Irish justice smelling of roses, going on to a banking career with Fitzwilliams, which eventually led him to Russia and then China.

His new life had not however dampened his adventurous spirit and Lili was not surprised when her husband announced his interest in Wang Jing's project in Nicaragua and his plans to visit the country for a first hand investigation.

Tom Barton knew his friend and was not overly concerned about his safety, but he could not refuse Lili's appeal for help. The next morning he set out in Don Pedro's Cessna Citation, destination Managua, a 1,400 kilometre flight via Panama City. Tom's task was complicated by border disputes between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and between Colombia and Nicaragua over maritime boundaries and islands, which explained the need for a short stopover in Panama where the Cessna was registered.

After formalities in Managua the Cessna then headed in a southeasterly direction over a vast region of virgin forest and mangroves to San Juan de Nicaragua, otherwise known as Greytown, situated on the Caribbean at the southern end of the Miskito Coast.

Tom was met by a representative of the Canal Company on his arrival at Greytown Airport, a desolate airstrip surrounded by dense jungle, Gomez informed him there was no news of Pat Kennedy's whereabouts. That people went missing for days in the vast jungle covered region was nothing unusual, he told Barton. Their first step would be a stop in Greytown itself, where he could explain his plan to locate the banker.



Barton agreed and climbed into the waiting Landcruiser, setting off along a dirt road in the direction of a jetty where a launch was waiting to take them to San Juan del Norte, also known as Greytown, a one street town lined by a motley collection of typical wood framed Caribbean houses with their ubiquitous painted corrugated iron roofs.

They stopped to eat at a guest house, where Gomez produced a series of river maps, explaining it was possible to take a fast launch to El Castillo, the midpoint between Greytown and San Carlos on Lake Nicaragua, a distance of about 50 kilometres, which could be reached in two or three hours. From there they could continue if necessary to San Carlos where the river joined the lake.

The journey was monotonous. Tom Barton was little

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interested in the wild life Gomez pointed to from time to time on the river banks which were covered by impenetrable jungle. It was difficult to image Kennedy, or his guide, attempting to explore by foot. If they had encountered a problem with their boat it would have been best to wait until until one of the local pangas or botes passed, which would have surely spotted them.

Gomez told him the river was full of crocodiles, but it was rare they attacked humans, though another possibility, that of foul play, could not be ruled out.

As the boat made its way down the Rio San Juan, Gomez hummed the tune of the Eagles iconic *Hotel California*, voicing the last lines:

*We are programmed to receive.  
You can check-out any time you like,  
But you can never leave!*

Barton enquired at San Carlos and Castillo where they were told gringos often passed through, they all looked the same, backpackers and adventurous tourists.

They overnighted in San Carlos, then decided to make their way back down the river. At Castillo they stopped to eat in a ramshackle posada. The owner said he remembered a man of Pat Kennedy's description who had talked with a Chinese, or a Japanese, who had overnighted there. He checked his guest-book and pointed out the name it to Tom, who, although he was no specialist in Oriental languages, recognised the words written as Japanese.

He snapped the entry with his cell phone and mailed it to Lili. A couple of hours later his telephone buzzed—a message from Lili, confirming the name was Japanese but nothing more.

A few more inquiries and Barton learned they must have passed the two men on the river as had left in the direction of San Carlos early the same morning. He was puzzled, he was well aware of Pat's unpredictable nature, but not his absence of communication.

He immediately informed Lili of what little he had discovered, then as there was no point in hanging around on the San Juan River and returned to Greytown where he flew to Managua hoping to glean more information at the HKND offices.

## CHAPTER 56

### KEYNES

John Maynard Keynes, published his forecast *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren* in 1930. In his words the modern age opened with the accumulation of capital, which began in the 16th century, a consequence of the treasure of gold and silver brought from the New World into the Old.

Now, almost a century after he had penned his essay, I found it salutary and at the same time disturbing to read the great man's thoughts.

Keynes spoke of the increased technical efficiency that had been taking place then, faster than could be controlled, at a time when the Britain's industry output was greater than ever before, with a net surplus on foreign trade—'greater than any other country', even the US, a surplus he proposed be used for new foreign investment.

Theresa May, her government, and other recent governments, would have done well to take note of the economist's essay.

He went on to speak of 'the enormous anomaly of unemployment in a world full of wants'

'What can we reasonably expect the level of our economic life to be a hundred years hence?' He asked. 'What are the economic possibilities for our grandchildren?'

Well, we are there now, here in the future.

Keynes noted that from:

'the earliest times of which we have record—back, say, to 2,000 years before Christ—down to the beginning of the 18th century, there was no very great change in the standard of life of the average man living in the civilised centres of the earth. Ups and downs certainly. Visitations of plague, famine, and war. Golden intervals. But no

progressive, violent change in the period up to the beginning of the 8th century.

This slow rate of progress, or lack of progress, was due to two reasons—to the remarkable absence of important technical improvements and to the failure of capital to accumulate.

The absence of important technical inventions between the prehistoric age and comparatively modern times is truly remarkable. Almost everything which really matters and which the world possessed at the commencement of the modern age was already known to man at the dawn of history. Language, fire, the same domestic animals which we have to-day, wheat, barley, the vine and the olive, the plough, the wheel, the oar, the sail, leather, linen and cloth, bricks and pots, gold and silver, copper, tin, lead and iron was added to the list before 1000BC, as well as banking, statecraft, mathematics, astronomy, and religion.’

As one of the most influential economists of the 20th century, he traced the beginnings of British foreign investment back to the treasure Drake stole from Spain in 1580. Keynes recalled, in that year when Drake returned to England bringing with him the prodigious spoils of the *Golden Hind*, Elizabeth I, one of the principal shareholders in the syndicate which had financed the expedition, was with her share able to pay off the whole of England’s foreign debt and balance her budget, with about £40,000 in hand, which she invested in the Levant Company. From the profits of the Levant Company, the East India Company, Britain founded an empire and became great.

He went on to explain how every £1, which Drake brought home in 1580, had become £100,000 in 1930.

John Francis had quipped, ‘It was a pity that Spain that its kings had not invested their wealth in the future.’

The incredible story of Spain’s discovery of the New World is even more astonishing when we consider that it contained unimagined riches not only in natural and human resources, but also in gold and silver. A story of dreams and fairy tales.

Where did this treasure come from and what became of it?

First came the treasure of the Aztecs, and if that wasn’t enough it was followed by that of the Incas. Two separate civilisations that had developed almost independently of the

other on the American continent.

By now we're familiar with the story of the Conquista, but it's nevertheless worth recalling a few salient points. The story commenced in April of 1519, when the Spaniard Hernan Cortes de Monroy y Pizarro Altamirano, Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca, landed with his expedition in Mexico near present-day Veracruz. The title sounds great, in fact he was an hidalgo, son of a minor noble and fairly hard-up family—at a time when 10% or more of Spaniards were nobles, from the small town of Medellin in Estremadura, a not very rich region of Spain.

Cortes with his small army of 600 conquistadors discovered the vast Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan and after an epic adventure conquered the city and captured its tragic King Moctezuma in 1521, the story is marvellously told by Bernal Diaz, a companion of Cortes, in his unique account of the conquest.

The Spaniards ransacked Tenochtitlan, carrying off the Aztec's treasure of gold, silver, jewels and a multitude of priceless objects d'art.

Part of the treasure was sent to the King of Spain, this was the quinto real, or royal fifth. Most of the gold and silver treasure from the Aztec and Inca empires was melted down, only small quantity of their unique works of art survived and were displayed for a time in Spain before they too were melted down.

Anna told me of the detailed lists of loot the still lay in the archives in Madrid and Seville which bears witness to the sack of Tenochtitlan.

Together we'd visited the fabulous collections in the museums of Mexico City and Bogota, where we glimpsed the glory of the lost civilisations.

Half a millennium later it was difficult to judge the events of the past when mind sets were do different, but the destruction of an entire and unique civilisation was hard to justify.

By a strange quirk of fate the conquest of the New World was a family affair, Cortes' mother was a second cousin once

removed of Francisco Pizarro, who soon after his family relative set out to conquer the Inca Empire.

In 1532, Pizarro sailed down the Pacific coast of South America to Peru where his expedition made its way to Cuzco, the heart of the Inca Empire. There they captured Atahualpa, Emperor of the Inca, who to their astonishment offered to fill a large room half-full with gold and twice over with silver as a ransom. They were even more surprised when Atahualpa fulfilled his promise.

Gold was abundant in Peru, witnessed by Atahualpa's portable throne of 15 carat gold that weighed 90 kilos, which the Inca had collected as tribute from their vassal states.

Cuzco was sacked with as much gold looted as the ransom of Atahualpa, art treasures, melted down, lost forever. By 1533, Pizarro had accumulated over 6,000 kilos of gold objects which were melted down and twice that in silver, a staggering fortune pillaged by the insatiable greed of the conquistadors, a vast fortune which was divided up between Pizarro and his men.

The royal fifth, shipped to Spain in 1534, was the first instalment of what would become a river of gold and silver flowing from the New World to the Old, which had commenced as a trickle in the first years of the 16th century when silver shipped to Spain was in the order of 150 kilograms annually, and by the end of the same century rose to nearly 3 million kilograms annually.

CHAPTER 57

EL CASTILLO

Ken Hisakawa told Pat he was an American, a Japanese-American. His family had come to the USA in the 1930s and had been interned in California during WWII. After the war they moved to New York where his father studied medicine and set up practice in Upper Manhattan. True to tradition Hisakawa's father married a Japanese-American from California and Ken was born.

Hisakawa grew up like any other American kid and after graduating from high school attended Columbia University, where he studied history and archaeology before going on to specialise in Meso-American history, and in particular the rich civilisation of the Mayas, following in the footsteps of Tatiana Proskouriakoff. After a period of field research in Mexico and Central America, he returned to his university to teach and carry out research in his field.

Ken Hisakawa had the studious look of an Oriental academic, polite, sometimes talking with his hand in front of his mouth, and slightly bowed. That was misleading, he was in reality explosive, and in spite of his slight figure was ready to confront any perceived aggression in pure American style, baseball bat in hand and questions asked after. It had earned him more than one beating in New York when he bit off more than he could chew, but it never deterred him from defending what he considered right.

He unnerved Pat when to demonstrate a point he pulled out a vicious looking automatic after *el dueño de la posada* warned them of river pirates and other denizens of the jungles of Gracia a Dios.

Ken Hisakawa was convinced that the Chinese had been to

the Americas before the Europeans. His proof was a map purchased in 2001, by a certain Liu Gang, a Chinese attorney, from a Shanghai antique dealer. According to notations on the map it was a copy made in 1763 by a Chinese cartographer, Mo Yi-tong, of an original map Ming-dynasty dating from 1418. Reference was made to early navigators from the Ming and Yuan dynasties as well as Arab explorers. Hisakawa believed evidence of these first explorers could be found at Central American sites where they would have landed, brought by the same winds that opened the route to the Philippines in the sixteenth century, to and from Central America.



The fortuitous meeting with Hisakawa set Pat in the unexpected direction of the northernmost point of the Miskito Coast, which adjoined La Mosquitia in Honduras. As an expert on pre-Colombian archaeology, Hisakawa had been hired by Environmental Resources Management to work on the environmental and social impact assessment commissioned by HKND relating to the possible path of the canal. As a result thousands of artefacts dating from pre-Colombian times were handed over to the Nicaraguan government in a well publicised demonstration of the canal company's goodwill.

Notwithstanding the gesture, Hisakawa not only disapproved of the methods, he perceived the report as a cover-up, biased and designed to hid the facts. Not wanting to enter into open conflict with the authorities who backed the project, which was not only a dangerous undertaking in Central America, but

would prejudice his ability to work in the region—one of the great centres of pre-Colombian civilisations, he left to join an expeditionary team being put together to investigate the legendary City of the Monkey God across the border in Honduras.

Pat's meeting with Hisakawa, just as the archaeologist was en-route to join the expedition in Honduras, was one of those strange chance meetings that changed lives. The dramatic discovery of a lost civilization deep in the remote Honduran jungle and the discovery of the legendary City of the Monkey God, presented a once in a lifetime opportunity, Hisakawa told Pat. The existence of extensive plazas, earthworks, mounds and pyramids, pointed to the existence of a hitherto unknown culture that had it seemed suddenly vanished from the face of the earth more than a thousand years before.

Hisakawa had been putting the finishing touches to his work and gathering his material at El Castillo after several months in the jungle. Recognising Kennedy as not being the usual kind of backpacker or tourist, Hisakawa had responded to what seemed a first casual curiosity about the canal project. But quickly the two men found themselves carried away by the intensely passionate history of Central America.

As the archaeologist enthused about the vestiges of pre-Colombian civilisation and lost cities Kennedy became enthralled and was soon almost begging to join the American on his journey to join the expedition in Honduras.

They talked deep into the night carried away by their enthusiasm. It was not an exchange fuelled by alcohol, neither of the two men drank more than two or three beers, what bore them through the night was their common passion for adventure and exploration. Hisakawa, realising Kennedy was a very unusual man, with considerable financial resources, the kind of patron scientists like he dreamed of, quickly acquiesced—on the strict condition that Pat swore to absolute secrecy. The fear was the site of a hitherto unknown civilisation, in a country as lawless as Honduras, would attract the attention of looters and bandits.

## CHAPTER 58

### CHINA

Pat was becoming concerned about the turn of events in China. First was the trade dispute with the US with Trump haranguing Beijing, then and probably more important was President Xi's personal ambitions as life long supreme leader, characteristic of one-party systems.

Like all dictatorships, in which citizens lived in fear and officials became sycophants, the tyrant soon became detached from reality, ignorant of the world beyond his realm, with the almost certain risk the self-proclaimed leader would blindly lead his loving people towards an Orwellian dystopia.

Deng Xiaoping, following the death of the Great Helmsman, had launched his reforms and under a system of collective leadership, transforming China into a modern state, and although it remained nominally communist, it adopted a successful form of market capitalism and enacted many liberalising reforms, and more recently clamped down on blatant corruption.

That was now in danger and Pat Kennedy wondered what the future held for his banking empire as Xi continued on his path, demolishing China's collective leadership system, purging any high ranking non-complaisant official if they failed to manifest any thing less than their absolute loyalty to the paramount leader.

Two high profile figures had suddenly disappeared from public view without explanation, first was Fan Bingbing—China's highest-paid film actress, who topped Forbes magazine's 2017 list of highest paid Chinese celebrities with an annual income of 300 million yuan. Then came Meng Hongwei—head of Interpol, who was detained on his return

home from Interpol's headquarters in France.

When Fan Bingbing resurfaced it was with a public apology for tax evasion and a fine of 883 million yuan for tax evasion and other offences.

As to Meng, he was accused of corruption in Xi's clean up drive and Interpol accepted his resignation with immediate effect and appointed an interim replacement.

Observers saw the moves as a policy to eliminate opposition which over a six year period had seen the purge of hundreds of thousands of officials including almost 200 leaders at ministerial level, many of whom ended up in prison.

High profile personalities like Bo Xila, the powerful Chongqing party boss, tried in 2012, were designated as examples to demonstrate no one was beyond Xi's reach.

To top it all, as Xi took over the reins of the armed forces and many key policy committees, 'Xi Jinping Thought' was enshrined in China's constitution, an honour that had only been previously accorded to Mao and Deng Xiaoping.

The result was the nascence of a reign of creeping fear and paralysis, preventing development at all levels of society, from the village level through to county level and right up to provincial level. A retrograde step reminiscent of the past and disasters that accompanied absolute power and policies dictated from the top, regardless of practical considerations.

The fear was China would slide into a police state, reinforcing the kind of laws that went against the needs of the country's very diverse regions, illogically propping up vastly indebted and inefficient state-owned enterprises, at the expense of the country's small and medium-sized businesses all of whom would end up victims of the supreme leader's grandiose ambitions.

'You really think so?' Pat asked questioning John's analysis.

'Yes. The accumulation of bad debt has never done anyone any good, overheated property markets, oversized state enterprises, inevitably undermine an economy. You've seen what happens in extreme cases like Colombia's neighbours, Venezuela, Cuba, and those who emulated the defunct Soviet

bloc,' John Francis told him driving the lesson home.

'Xi is surrounding himself with sycophants, in addition he seems to have a poor understanding of macroeconomics and any error could have grave consequences.'

Pat sniffed, he didn't like the truth.

'You have been warned Pat. It's never good to put all your eggs in the one basket.'

'I'm listening John.'

In the long run Xi is much more dangerous than City & Colonial. Alienating his country's neighbours with his power play in the South China Sea, could have fatal consequences, pushing Trump could be very dangerous for the world, though it would create a diversion distracting the masses from the economic consequences of Trump intensifying his justifiable trade war.'

'Justifiable?' asked Pat.

'Yes, never forget it was America's indulgence that transformed the Chinese economy into what it is today.'

Where the Andes dropped into the Amazon rainforests of Caqueta—a Department of Colombia, over 1,000 Chinese engineers and workers were building a hydro-electric dam destined to provide sufficient power for almost a quarter of the country's needs.

Wherever Tom Barton travelled in Colombia, or its neighbours, he witnessed evidence of a vast Chinese plan to extend its influence and presence along the Pacific façade of the South American continent. Once regarded as the *chasse gardée* of Washington, Chinese interests were now carving out a place on the continent at lightening speed.

Tom was quick to see how his links to China could be of use, as projects from Chile to Honduras for sea ports, canals, refineries, dams, roads, railways and bridges, were being planned and financed by Chinese banks and built by Chinese engineers.

South American leaders hailed Chinese investment and flattered Beijing's leaders for their interest in the development of their respective countries. For a century North Americans

had scorned the world that lay beyond their southern border as underdeveloped, unstable, dangerous and at best an export markets for their manufactured goods within the protectionist framework of Washington's policies.

Washington had not measured the transformation of Central and South America as the consumer society reached every corner of the continent. As for the region's leaders they realised consumerism replied better to their citizens needs than revolution and Marxism, as globalisation and Cornucopia reached out to every town and village thanks to introduction of modern logistics and technology.

Chinese credit oiled the mechanism of exchange, not only satisfying the needs of governments and consumers across the planet, but also that of China's industrialists and workers.

Beijing was accused of imperialism as its companies acquired mineral rights and market shares, the same companies were accused of environmental and worker abuse, but it was no worse than that which US businesses had practised for as long as the gringos had meddled in Latin American affairs, fomenting revolt whenever it suited them, including the Putin style putsch that led to the secession of Panama from Colombia a century earlier.

Rafael Correa, President of neighbouring Ecuador, was a persistent critic of Washington's policies towards his own and other Latin American countries. Coming from a modest mestizo background he was not endeared to the US, which he held responsible for his father's suffering and death after being imprisoned for drug smuggling.

Correa had refused to renew the US lease on a base at Manta on the Pacific coast by announcing, 'We can negotiate with the United States over a base in Manta if they let us put a military base in Miami.' He had once joked that Hugo Chavez's comparison of George Bush to Satan was disrespectful of the devil.

Like many others, if not all Latin American countries, Ecuador had been held on a tight leash by the US, through the IMF and the World Bank. Bankrupt in 1999, the country

struggled to recover and when China appeared in 2010, in the form of the China Development Bank, with money and promises, Ecuador had not hesitated to seize the opportunity.

Correa viewed the presence of China as a diversification of his country's foreign relations policy, rather than a substitute for the US. However, Ecuador, as an oil producer, be it modest, saw the bulk of its petroleum exports, representing nearly half of its revenues, go to China via PetroChina and Sinopec, both state-controlled Chinese companies.

The risk in Tom Barton's eyes was the loss of control of natural resources if the conditions of the contracted debts could not be met, giving China the leverage to demand further concessions. Meaning producers of oil, minerals and other natural resources risked being drawn into loan-shark style deals.

Barton had often witnessed Chinese business methods, how they flattered visiting delegations, offering them luxury hotels, tourist trips, banquets and karaoke evenings where alcohol flowed and girls abounded.

The greatest risk however, was China itself. If the Chinese government was forced to draw back, then South American states and companies would find themselves stranded high and dry with a mountain of unfinished projects. And there was every reason to think this could happen if China was forced to concentrate its resources on its problems at home, those of falling growth and labour demand with hundreds of millions of Chinese workers and peasants caught in a poverty trap. This together with an ageing population and a 'one family one child' society threatened the future of China and its magnanimity towards developing economies.

## CHAPTER 59

### THE GOLD FLEET

Over the course of the 17th century, Spain was constantly confronted by its enemies in the New World, those who coveted its possessions, its wealth and its power, all of which was underpinned the steady flow of gold and silver from New Spain.

Slowly the French gained power in Europe, and following the example of the English and Dutch established footholds in the Caribbean.

In 1628, the Dutch dispatched a fleet into the Caribbean under Admiral Piet Heyn to capture the treasure fleet. He captured ninety tons of gold and silver, causing Philip IV of Spain to suffer a nervous breakdown when he heard of the loss. Six years later the Dutch seized Curaçao, establishing a permanent base off the coast of New Grenada.

Following the lose of its treasure, Spain ordered its ships to travel in armed convoys and soon its fleets were mostly composed of warships.

In 1629, the fleet was made up of over 20 armed galleons carrying 4,000 soldiers, and by 1638, the reinforcements were sufficient to repulse another Dutch attack.

The Dutch introduced frigates, which were half the size of the Spanish Galleons, faster and more manoeuvrable and carrying the same number of cannons. Their new tactics consisted of fire power rather than boarding.

Soon the English seized Jamaica, then in 1656, the English navy, under the command of Robert Blake, captured the treasure fleet off the coast of Spain and again the following year off of the Canary Islands. Then in 1668 and 1671, Henry Morgan led attacks on Panama and Maracaibo.

Pirates, buccaneers and privateers attacked Española, Veracruz and Cartagena, forcing the inhabitants of the latter to pay 8,000,000 pesos to spare the city.

As Spain's power declined so did its production of silver. That of Potosi peaked around 1600, slowly falling to about two thirds over the course of the century with much of it going to the transpacific trade.

In 1700, Charles I of Spain died, leaving Spain politically, financially and globally weak and the ensuing War of Spanish Succession finally brought about the collapse of the Spanish Empire, which in that year, besides its New World colonies, included possessions in Italy, the Spanish Netherlands, the Philippines.

He died childless and his heirs, members of the Austrian Hapsburgs and the French Bourbons, saw the attribution of an undivided Spanish Empire, to one or the other, as threatening the European balance of power, which inevitably led to war.

By the end of 1708, the struggle had reached a stalemate, whilst Spain, though no longer the dominant European power, was still a major player.

It was at that point the galleon *San José* was set to sail from the Portobelo, via Cartagena, for Spain, laden with gold, silver and emeralds worth according to some estimates about 17 billion dollars in today's money.

Anna told of the many ships lost at sea over the course of Spain's presence in the New World. It was not a rare thing as sailing in those wooden ships over great distances was a perilous undertaking in an almost unknown world filled with countless dangers.

From the very start Columbus lost the *Santa Maria*, then Magellan the *Santiago*, Cortes lost three ships in 1520. However, very few of the hundreds of ships lost between the 16th to 18th centuries were treasure ships.

In 1596 the merchant ship *San Pedro*, transporting a cargo of gold, silver and jewellery to Spain, sank on Bermuda's inner reef. Among the treasure recovered from the *San Pedro* was a

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gold pectoral cross with seven emeralds, said to be one of the most valuable pieces of jewellery ever recovered from a Spanish wreck.

Unfortunately, in 1975, the cross, which part of the Bermuda Maritime Museum's collection, was stolen, replaced by a plastic copy.

In 1662, the Spanish merchant ship, *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, left Cuba for Spain as part of a convoy of 28 ships, and sank off the coast of Florida. Then in 1985, it was discovered near the Marquesas Keys by Mel Fischer, an American treasure hunter, with its treasure intact consisting of gold and silver bars as well as coins worth a cool 500 million dollars, which considering inflation and the price of gold in several billion as I write.

Anna told us the story of Odyssey Marine Exploration, an American company based in Tampa, Florida, founded in 1986, specialised in the salvage of deep-water shipwrecks. Their *raison d'être* was the billions of dollars in treasure and valuable artefacts laying on the ocean floor.



Odyssey claimed to have assembled the world's most advanced deep-sea technology and equipment together with the most qualified and brightest researchers, engineers, technicians and scientist to carry out the objectives, namely surveying and mapping 60,000 square kilometres of seabed and more than 14,000 hours diving using the latest robotic technology.

Their story revolved around the recovery of treasure from *Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*, a Spanish frigate sunk by a British naval squadron off Cape St Mary, Portugal, in October 1804, with 500 million dollars of gold and silver coins aboard, which was recovered in 2007 by Odyssey.

The treasure became the centre of an epic five year legal battle over ownership of the 594,000 gold and silver coins found scattered over the ocean floor and victory for the Spanish government, which ended when Odyssey Marine Exploration was ordered to return its haul to Spain.

The treasure, found by one of Odyssey's remote-controlled, deep sea robots at a depth of 1,100 metres, was recovered from the Atlantic seabed in May 2007, then secretly brought ashore in Gibraltar from where it was illegally transported to Florida.

The coins matched the Spanish vessel's cargo of coins, minted in Lima, Peru, and the cannons found at the site matched were those of the Mercedes. The coins filled 600 barrels, and belonged to Spain and the descendants of the 250 Spanish sailors lost when the vessel blew up.

Soon after the treasure left for Florida, a Spanish warship intercepted the 80 metre long *Odyssey Explorer* salvage vessel and forced it into the Spanish port of Algeciras and arrested its captain.

Recently a small part of the treasure of 600,000 coins went on display at the National Sub-Aquatic Archaeology Museum, in Cartagena, Spain. Anna saw it as a victory for the Spanish government against companies such as Odyssey, and the plundering and illegal traffic in cultural heritage, setting a legal precedent, and providing Spain with the legal means to protect

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the hundreds of its vessels lying on the seabed around the world.

Olly, now an expert in Modern Art, was amused by a Wikileaks anecdote, linked to US state department cables that revealed American diplomats had offered to support Spain's claims to the treasure, in exchange for help in recovering a painting by Camille Pissarro from Madrid's Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, which was owned by an American citizen.

## CHAPTER 60

### RICHER & RICHER

Pat Kennedy's home town, Hong Kong, was the world's leading ultra-prime market property market, where a greater number of 25 million dollars plus home sales took place than any other city in the world with well over over 200 such sales taking place during the year according to Sarah Kavanagh.

After Hong Kong came New York, then London, which was less favoured by the mega-rich buyers due to the increases in taxation and fears of what Brexit held in store for them.

It was simple, the rich were becoming richer and they fuelled the growth of ultra-prime residential properties. Most of London's ultra-prime properties were situated in Mayfair, Knightsbridge and Belgravia, all of which lay within the boundaries of the City of Westminster, favoured by the ultra-rich that had flocked to the UK, whose numbers had increased by 400, bringing the total number of those with fortunes of more than 50 million dollars to almost 5,000—that is 8.5%, compared to the average Brit who saw his total wealth increase by 1% to 250,000 dollars, which may seem a lot, except you have to realise that half had more than that, and the other half less—dwindling down to zero.

Pat Kennedy, who had seen his total wealth grow phenomenally, was not about to emulate Chow Yun-fat, a Hong Kong actor known for his role as Li Mu-bai in *Crouching Tiger* and *Hidden Dragon* and as Sao Feng in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, who announced he would bequeath his fortune to charity after he dies.

However, like Pat, Chow Yun-fat could be spotted taking the tram to Aberdeen or Star Ferries to Kowloon, or stopping to

eat at one of the city's many food stalls.

'This money isn't something you possess for ever. When you're gone one day, you have to leave it for others to use it,' Chow Yun-fat told the press, which wasn't the case as Pat was concerned, Lili and her family would take care of his fortune if ever he was to disappear in one those distant jungles, or any of the other exotic places he delected in.

Lili's family had know bad times. As a leader in the People's Liberation Army her grandfather had escaped the madness of the Cultural Revolution. In the madness that Mao had unleashed, Wu Yeye had smuggled his family out of Canton in the dead of night, down the Pearl River by boat to the safety of Hong Kong and Macao.

As the frenzy reached its peak Red Guards ran wild, rampaging through the streets, destroying the symbols of the old bourgeois world. The chaos and violence increased when schools and universities closed, freeing students to pursue the destruction of the Four Olds—old customs, old habits, old culture, and old thinking. They physically and verbally attacked their teachers, school administrators, Communist Party members, neighbours, friends, relatives and even their parents.

When normality returned, Wu's son, Lili's father, turned his attention to the textile factories the family, in an opaque arrangement with other Communist leaders, still controlled. Following the death of Mao and the arrival of Deng Xiaoping, he invested all his efforts in expanding production to meet the growing demand as China reformed.

As Wu liked to explain, Southern Chinese always followed a different path. They were historically more open to the outside world. Thanks to the proximity of Hong Kong, his links with the People's Liberation Army, and his position in the Guangdong government, he was encouraged to develop his multiple and diverse businesses.

During that propitious period Wu's brother remained in Hong Kong, where with his cousins he built up the family business, becoming one of the colony's richest man thanks to Deng's creation of a Special Economic Zone in Shenzhen,

created to take advantage of the British Colony's financial strength and its links with the world outside.

On the 28th floor of the Jardine owned Mandarin Oriental Hotel, in Central, the heart of Hong Kong, a Chinese investor and his wife listened attentively as Sarah Kavanagh of Guthrie Plimpton's took them on a virtual tour of an upmarket property development for sale in London.

The investor was one of the many cash-rich mainland Chinese who was taking the precaution of spreading his bets. Many feared the Chinese property market had started to resemble that of the US in the period leading up to the sub-prime crash. It was why the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the People's Bank of China had taken steps to cool the market, triggering a rush for alternative assets overseas to protect newly found wealth.

The event was part of a campaign launched by Guthrie Plimpton to promote prime London property in China. Sarah Kavanagh was hosting the weekend venue designed to provide prospective buyers with an introduction to homes abroad, notably in London, Marbella, Cannes and Dominica, with INI Hong Kong offering buyers its services for setting up accounts, financing, transfers and legal assistance.

The properties proposed included the Gould Cheyne Walk development, for which Sarah proposed a visit to London, offering serious buyers from Guangzhou, Shanghai and Chongqing accommodation in a first class hotels accompanied by a Chinese speaking guide to visit its properties.

Purchases by Mainland Chinese had accounted for over forty percent of new luxury home sales in Hong Kong. That is until the Special Administrative Region imposed a fifteen percent tax on foreigners, meaning Mainland buyers, which had the effect of pushing investors into the arms of real estate firms like Guthrie Plimpton that offered buyers overseas alternatives, notably London.

The über-rich's appetite for London property was growing fast, forcing prices higher and higher as they snapped up super-prime properties, proof that globalisation knew no

limits. At Guthrie Plimpton's, Sarah Kavanagh knew it, she was in a position to, she was at the very heart that encouraged the scramble. Sarah had moved up the ladder, in three or four years she had become one of the real estate agent's leading consultants, her domain prime property, just a notch away from super-prime, that is properties from ten million pounds upwards. She had been promoted following her success in Dominica, where she was accredited with the successful introduction of the Emerald Pool II development to Chinese investors. She had hit the headlines after being photographed shaking the hand of the new Chinese Premier on his first visit overseas—surprisingly to the Caribbean.

London had a lot going for it, there was political stability, the City, the English language, a multi-ethnic society, a fair degree of religious tolerance and of course outstanding fine property like for example Brompton Square, where a six-bedroom house could sell for 25 million pounds up.

As London's poor helplessly looked on such homes were often occupied a mere four to six weeks a year by their owners, who not satisfied with their magnificent properties, invested in expanding them downwards, iceberg homes, and not only beneath the house itself, but also under the garden and outbuildings, with the addition of ultramodern kitchens, garages, gymnasiums, cinemas and even swimming pools.

The über-rich could spend anything between ten and one hundred million pounds for a London home with the record reaching over 200 million. They came from Russia, the Middle East, and from France, Spain and astonishingly Greece barely recovered from the crisis that had racked its political and financial institutions, with a quarter of them part of the British plutocracy.

London was also a top destination for investment in commercial property. It was a good time for INP's property fund. London was a safe haven and compared to continental Europe the attraction of phenomenal gains drew investors from all over the world.

The slowing down of the Chinese economy had become a

reality confirmed by the China Securities Journal in a front page editorial. The journal announced capital inflows had slowed with investors turning away from emerging markets as the US the dollar strengthened with the Fed speaking of an end to its policy of quantitative easing.

China was threatened not only by significant capital outflows, but also its growing debt burden, which had passed the 220% GDP mark. Any deleveraging by Chinese banks would have a serious impact on the country's economy, transforming the hoped for soft landing into something much harder than planned.

Hong Kong's wealth gap had widened as had popular discontent over the two decades that had passed since the former British colony fell under Chinese rule, a period during which the city's mega-rich residents, many of them from Mainland China, continued to flout their great wealth in ever increasingly ostentatious displays.

The destabilisation of world markets had Pat worried about China, now his main market, but not China's ability to pursue its goals, rather the effect of political adjustments across the world as a consequence of China's emergence as a super power, made him more and more concerned about have his eggs in one basket, as John Francis had put it.

Russia had already served as a lesson after Putin's political objectives had caused INI and its partners considerable difficulties.

It was why development in South and Central America had attracted him. Now there was also India, a vast market which seemed to be on another trajectory. Part of it was in the modern capitalist world, the rest in an agricultural economy, much of which seemed to be unchanged since the time of the Moguls. The interaction of these two apparently non-compatible parts could propel India on a similar development trajectory like that China had known decades earlier.

But that was the future, Shenzhen, Hong Kong's burgeoning neighbour, was the present, and Pat was not only investing in its high-tech production capacity, but also in its start-up sector,

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an environment where giants like DJI, Tencent and Huawei, were headquartered, together with Internet giants like Baidu and Alibaba, making the megapolis, not only a world-class hardware maker, but also an incubator of software, an innovation hub, with deep pockets and with an endless supply of young talent from all over China.

Pat moved the pieces across his chessboard and waited to see what happened. Liam was one of these, and his role would be to link up Paris, Delhi and Shenzhen, in a supranational network of innovation and future technologies.

## CHAPTER 61

### PANAMA CITY

Whilst Liam Clancy was discovering the charms of Bocas del Toro, Tom Barton listened to Don Pedro a few hundred miles to the south, at the family hacienda in Barichara. The patrician Colombian backed his government's investment policy, casting aside the shadow of the country's violent and drug-fuelled past.

'Tell your friends confidence is growing in Colombia, Tom, even though there's still a lot of progress to be made. A great transformation has taken place over the past decade.'

Barton nodded, it was not just hype, he had seen for himself how Colombia was moving forward, even if the image of a narco trafficker's paradise still lingered.

'Here, personal relationships are what everything is about. We spend a lot of time building and maintaining these.'

'It's like that in Asia.'

'Perhaps, but here we have *corazon*.'

'Yes, I can understand that.'

'That's why things take a little more time, a little difficult for North Americans to understand,' he said, then adding with a laugh, 'and mortifying for our Asian friends.'

'Colombia is situated strategically between the North and South. We have turned a page, the days of Escobar are long past and the conflict with the Farc will soon be settled for good. Today we say: Colombia, *el riesgo es que te quieras quedar*.'

Barton nodded with a smile that said everything.

'Our president, Juan Manuel Santos, has the approach needed to get us out of the impasse that prevented us from moving forward. You know 10 years have changed a lot in

Colombia. Our middle class has grown to over 30% of our population, and at the same time poverty, though it's still common, has dropped.

'Nearly all our major cities are prosperous, just look around and you can see names like Cartier, Louis Vuitton, Armani, Zara and Disigual everywhere. Things are looking good for business with our growth rate at 5%, and an acceptable rate of inflation. Today we offer a lot opportunities for investors. It's a much better place for doing business than it was before, better than our neighbours, better even than some of your European countries, including Belgium and Italy,' he added with an apologetic smile.

Barton agreed, what he had seen confirmed the old man's words.

'Last year your future king visited us.'

Barton was nonplussed, he wondered who his future king was.

'Charles.'

'Oh, I see.'

The both laughed as Barton wondered why foreigners often seemed to imagine Brits as being on familiar terms with royalty.

'Our problem is infrastructure and transportation,' Don Pedro continued, 'that's why I have to fly everywhere. As *los norteamericanos* say, time is money.'

'That's true,' Barton concurred.

'But moving goods is a more serious business, getting them to and from the coast, Barranquilla or Cartagena, is hugely expensive.

'Buenaventura is our most important port, it's our gateway to Asia and will play a role in the Pacific Alliance, that's the free-trade pact with Mexico, Chile and Peru. Unfortunately Buenaventura is an exception when it comes to prosperity, it's got justifiably a bad reputation, drug wars and all kinds of unpleasant business.

'Unfortunately Buenaventura remains a city where crime and violence are the products of poverty. It's where Colombia's

evils live side by side, where the chainsaw has become a symbol of the city.'

'Chainsaw?'

'To chop up the gangs' victims,' said Don Pedro wrinkling his nose at the thought of it. 'Their business is cocaine, illegal gold mining, smuggling and lots of other bad things. Our government has still another battle on its hands there.'

Narcotics were omnipresent in Latin America—its dark face, only the week before, Barton had read, the head of the Knights Templar drug cartel had been captured by the Mexican police as part of a crackdown on gangs. Gangs and cartels controlled cocaine from Ecuador and Colombia as it transited through Central America on its route to the US.

In Buenaventura, warring gangs, known as *los malos*, spent a good part of their time fighting turf wars in the city's poorest neighbourhoods. The remains of those that fell foul of their laws were tortured to death and their remains scattered in the nearby jungle, or tossed into the river, after being dismembered in the miserable wooden huts known as *casas de pique* overlooking Esterio del Pinal, which led out to Buenaventura Bay and the Pacific.

'Many of the gang members are, or were, part of the Farc. They had little choice but to turn to organised crime once the war started to wind down,' Don Pedro continued with a cynical laugh. 'It was the only business where their skills could be could be put to profitable gain.'

Barton looked worried and his future father-in-law hurried to reassure him. 'Don't worry, here in Barichara life is very quiet. There is little poverty and we have a good police force.'

To the amusement of the Colombian, Barton forced a relieved and slightly falsetto laugh.

'Here, let me fill your glass.'

## CHAPTER 62

### HOTEL COLOMBIA

It was late that afternoon when Tom Barton's phone rang, it was a text message from Liam Clancy announcing they were nearing Panama City. Tom replied informing him he would be waiting at the Casablanca bar on the corner of plaza Bolivar in Casco Viejo. He had rented a studio apartment for Liam in what was once the Hotel Colombia and where he himself was staying.

Tom Barton had been engrossed watching CNN News as anchorman announced Vladimir Putin had signed an agreement with Cyprus, that gave Russian navy ships access to the island's ports, an information did not bode well for the future, as the deal coincided with a new flare up of tensions in the Ukraine. Russian interests in Cyprus, an EU country, had continued to grow and the very thought of Russian air bases on the island was enough to send leaders in Berlin, London or Paris into a fit of shivers.

The Hotel Colombia had started out as the Colonial. It was built in 1937 by a Peruvian architect Leonardo Villanueva together with Viktor Tejeira. Villanueva, it is said, was inspired by a visit he made to Seville in 1925, designing the edifice in an extravagant mixture Neocolonial and Andalusian styles.

At the time it opened it was certainly the best hotel in Casco Viejo, the historic centre of Panama City, though in more recent times it had fallen into a state of serious neglect and disrepair, before being renovated and transformed into private apartments.

The Casco Viejo was undergoing a vast renovation programme with most of its historic monuments and buildings being restored to their past glory and its fine homes

transformed in luxury apartments or hotels. In spite of that, a good number of ancient apartment houses, for lack of money, remained grim slums—homes for the very poor.

What surprised Barton on his arrival in the old town were the many façades and their barred windows looking onto empty weed strewn plots, the interiors razed, waiting for investors. He guessed Panama's Casco Viejo was ten or more years behind Cartagena de Indias in its transformation into a tourist centre.



On the days cruise ships docked at Colon, day-trippers flooded into the old town on flash tours. 'We did Panama' with brief pauses at the city's splendid colonial churches and history museum. It seemed to Barton few visitors bothered to spend more than fifteen minutes, or half an hour, at what was an extraordinarily rich and interesting presentation of Central American history and Spain's Colonial Empire.

But who was he to judge, his interests were different, he had more time, as had many, often more cultivated individual travellers. Day-trippers had just sufficient time for a summary visit, lunch and a few photos to mark their passage.

From his apartment Barton had no further to go for dinner than the elegant Casablanca, which had nothing in common with the Moroccan city in style or cuisine, apart from the

shared Spanish name. It was situated on one corner of the Hotel Colombia, facing the cathedral on the opposite side of Plaza Bolivar. The Casablanca was a first class restaurant with a valet parking service for those who drove in from their skyscraper condos in Punta Patilla or Boca La Caja.

It took a little time for Barton to put his finger on that something which was missing in Casco Viejo, *ambiance*. It had no soul—yet. Everything was new. The recently restored buildings of the old town, some dating back centuries, that now housed hotels, boutiques, coffee shops, apartments and museums, were owned, rented or staffed by strangers to the old town.

The poor had been evicted, or were hidden out of sight in the Old Town's more dismal side streets. They were so poor and shunned it was difficult to comprehend how they had been forgotten in the flurry of restoration. They represented the worst face of Central American capitalism, beyond the pale, beyond Thomas Piketty's reckoning.

After 400 years of colonisation and 100 years of North American domination, Panama's economic and social system resembled to a certain degree those of its Central American neighbours, with wealth and power held by a privileged few. Leaders such as Castro, Chavez and Morales had started out with the intention of reforming their countries, by turning to socialism, others had chosen an authoritarian path, but neither had produced notable material improvement for the very poor.

Casco Viejo, the old town, was much smaller than Cartagena's Casco Antiguo. In fact it was just one tenth of Cartagena's surface and its population proportionally even smaller. After Barton's calculation its monuments, hotels, restaurants and shops would always be second to Colombian city as a tourist attraction.

## CHAPTER 63

### A FILM FESTIVAL

The last time I'd been in Colombia was for the Cartagena International Film Festival, not exactly Cannes, but infinitely more exotic, and also the gateway to the Latin American market with its 600 million cinema goers. The city's 55th film festival was a major cultural event in the Hispanic world with almost 300 films competing for a golden India de Catalina.

One of the favourite's was Rodrigo Garcia's film *Last Days in the Desert*, a fictional portray of Jesus Christ's 40 days in the Desert, starring Ewan McGregor in a double role, of both Jesus and Lucifer. Garcia, the son of Colombia's literary giant and Nobel Prize winner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, was the film's writer, director and producer.

Strangely, the film was produced in the USA, in English, starring a British actor in the lead role, and Ciaran Hinds, another Brit as the father, Tye Sheridan as the son, and Ayelet Zurer, an Israeli actress, as the mother. It wasn't a Colombian film, and perhaps it wasn't supposed to be.

Pat had been excited by the presence of the Irish and Scots actors, myself by Rodrigo Garcia—son of the famous writer, and writer in his own right, and Liam Clancy by the glamour of it all.

I had been a special guest at the Cartagena Hay Literature and Arts Festival that January, which in previous years had invited authors such as Carlos Fuentes, Ian McEwen, Salman Rushdie and of course Colombia's own Gabriel Garcia Márquez. This together with knowing Ewan McGregor, and a little string pulling by Don Pedro, brought a few of our Clan together at the awards ceremony and gala diner.

Pat had been surprised when Barton recounted how the Hay festival had been founded in the small Welsh town of Hay-on-Wye, known for its 40 odd libraries, which had been organizing book festivals all over the world for near on 30 years—literary get-togethers that Bill Clinton once remarked were Woodstocks of the mind.

Pat was delighted to be present at the film festival, which with the presence of Scottish and Irish actors seemed, at least to him, to have a Celtic air about it. Faced with the glorious past of the nations where he found himself more and more frequently, in particular China and Russia, he felt a pressing need to discover his own origins, and in the quest for his own cultural identity had almost become obsessed with modern Celtic culture, and in particular with the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas.

To his growing annoyance foreigners always confused Ireland with England, plus the fact that Celtic history and culture were almost unheard of beyond the fringes of Western Europe.

In his search for a modern icon, whose poetry he could cite, Pat had rejected the best known Irish candidate—Brendan Behan. The Irish bard did not fit in with the image of modern Ireland, at least as far as Pat was concerned, and his mother had frowned on the man as a drunk, a disgrace to Ireland, Behan was remembered for his drinking, wit and literary talent, and for many Irish people in that order.

Our booze driven compatriot, Behan, had been a fierce Irish Republican, at times a poet, mainly in Gaelic, mostly a playwright and novelist, but always a drinker, who preferred to talk about what he was going to write, famous for his quips, 'I only drink on two occasions—when I'm thirsty and when I'm not.'

At times perspicacious, Behan had once said, in the days before Ireland escaped the impoverished destiny forced upon it by London, and at a time when the Irish Church prayed for the conversion of China, 'The Chinese are more Christian than the Irish—at least they provide free health to their people.'

Whatever the public criticism or acclaim, Pat saw Behan as a man of the past, the wars were over and good riddance to them and their horrors, things that brought forth the kind of men and brutality that Pat had always taken pains to avoid. Ireland had changed, it was modern, a vision Pat had valued since his youth; he had pushed the impoverished, dark, grim, Ireland of the past from his mind, always reaching out to future, which he had often discovered lay beyond its shores.

Seen from China, or Russia, Ireland was an insignificantly small place, and its drunken Gaelic poet as part of the Eireann Isle's folklore best forgotten, along with many of the violent Republicans in Ireland's post-independent history, which did not however mean Pat condoned England's role in Ireland, there was good and bad, but as a proud though rational Irishman, the time to move on was long past.

Of course Dylan Thomas was pretty good at riotous drinking, but his poetry and fine declamation inspired Pat. The Chinese were always asking him to join in their Karaoke sessions, which he did willing, he was anything but shy, but in his search for something Irish or more specifically Celtic, which made Ireland seem greater vis-à-vis the Chinese, he had discovered, for more serious occasions, the Welsh poet.



As a writer I cannot help mentioning Stefan Zweig who lived in Brazil during the last two years of his life and who on his voyage from New York to Rio de Janeiro on an ocean liner was inspired to write *Conqueror of the Seas*, the story of Magellan.

When the Viennese-born writer moved to Petropolis near Rio de Janeiro, as one of world's most translated authors, he spoke of Brazil as a 'Country of the Future', which didn't prevent him from taking his own life together with his wife Lotte a couple of years later.

Today with its new president Jair Messias Bolsonaro perhaps the future imagined by the writer had finally arrived, as the city of Petropolis inaugurated an exhibition under the affiche Stefan Zweig Lives!

Writers and poets reminded me of the International Book Fair at the Corferias Exhibition Centre in Bogota, one the most important literary events in Latin America, during which I'd planned to carry out some search for the novel I was writing as well as getting together Tom.

The book fair got off to an inauspicious start when a signed first edition of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by

the Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez was stolen. A pity since the fair was dedicated to the memory of Garcia Marquez, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, who died the year before at the age of eighty seven.

I am a fan of South American writers, including another Nobel Prize winner, Mario Vargas Llosa, whose concerns about the world appealed to me:

*Si el mundo sigue el proceso en el que la palabra escrita es reemplazada por la imagen y lo audiovisual, se corre el riesgo de que desaparezca la libertad, la capacidad de reflexionar e imaginar y otras instituciones como la democracia.*

It had coincided with those two Russian bombers flying into nearby Venezuela, to provide encouragement to Maduro, which immediately brought to my mind the Cuban Missile Crisis, a moment when the world looked nuclear destruction in the face—apocalypse, tens of millions of deaths and even more agonisingly from the effects of radiation and the terrible hardships of an inevitable Nuclear Winter.

I was of course too young to remember that, and to someone of Liam Clancy's age it was almost pure science fiction, a scenario straight out of a Hollywood disaster movie. He evidently wouldn't have remembered Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

To the rest of us present, Tom, Pat and myself, had barely known the Cold War, when the US and the USSR stared each other down, their fingers on buttons that could have launched a storm of ICBMs—American Polaris and Minuteman missiles or Soviet SS4s and R30s, that would have certainly sent the world back to the Stone Age.

In 2015, when negotiations were being finalised in Cuba for the normalisation of US-Cuban relations, an hour's flight from Cartagena, those who remembered the drama of the Cuban Missile Crisis were enjoying their retirement, and its principal actors long dead, with the exception of Fidel Castro—a frail, trembling ruin of his once fiery self, who was on his last legs.

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What worried me was the recent turn of events in Moscow that brought the threat a new confrontation. Not that Russia had the economic power to face off the US, but there was its nuclear arsenal, the world's biggest, and a substantial rearmament programme. Come what may Vladimir Putin was bent on taking his country down the dangerous path of nuclear blackmail.

## CHAPTER 64

### MARK TWAIN

We couldn't help being worried about Pat hacking his way through Central American jungles looking for lost civilisations, and with good reason. Every year tens of thousands of Central Americans were murdered with nearly 20,000 in the Northern Triangle alone, a zone situated between Lake Nicaragua in the south, the Mexican provinces of Quintana Roo in the north-east, and the Chiapas in the west, a deadly triangle that englobed six countries. A lot of that was to do with drug trafficking and gang warfare, but kidnapping was high on the list and a rich man like Pat Kennedy would almost certainly draw unhealthy attention.

It was sufficient reason for Tom Barton to be seriously concerned about Pat's safety. His friend's fascination for Central America was fraught with danger.

Pat Kennedy was oblivious to those facts as he plunged into a collection of Mark Twain's newspaper articles. What attracted his attention was the writer's correspondence for the San Francisco Alta California in 1867, published in a book entitled *Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*, in which the writer recounted his travels across Nicaragua during his voyage from San Francisco to New York.

At that time it was another world and travelling was for the fit or the desperate. Clemens, better known by his pen name Mark Twain, had neither a weak constitution nor was he desperate. As a journalist he had the means to travel in comfort, not like those who travelled in steerage on a voyage that took weeks and could cost the weakest their lives.

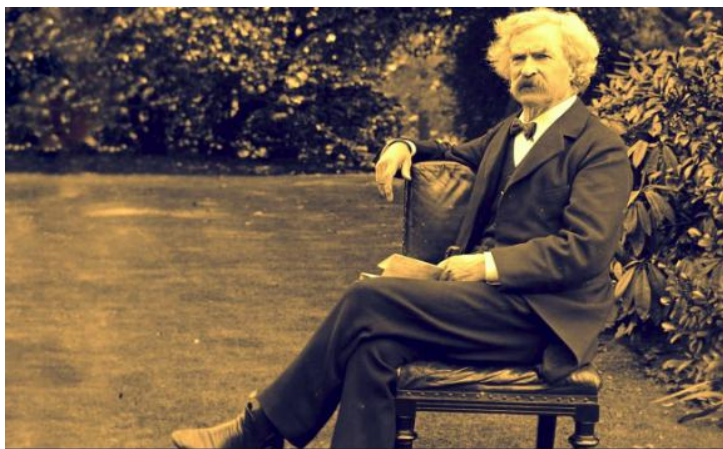
Pat had flown from Panama City to Managua, the departure point for his voyage of discovery, the goal of which was to

## The Cargo Club

explore for himself the route of the future canal.

He set from the capital in a chauffeur driven Toyota south, towards Rivas, a little over 100 kilometres distance, there they turned right for the village of San Juan del Sur. It lay in a small protected bay which had been chosen by nineteenth century shipping companies for its calm waters that were ideal for anchoring steamers offshore, offering protection for lightering cargo and passengers.

In December 28, 1866, Mark Twain with 7 other passengers, after a 10 day sea voyage from San Francisco on the steamer America, were on the first boat to disembark in the small Pacific port, from where they continued overland on rickety diligences drawn by mules and horses for the 12 mile journey across the isthmus that separated Lake Nicaragua from the ocean.



At that time San Juan consisted of a few tumble-down wood framed shanties, a ramshackle cholera ridden landing stage that served as a transit point for passengers and goods en route between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of America. Until 1851, it had been a sleepy fishing village, then, with the discovery of gold in California, everything changed as thousands of fortune seekers and adventurers headed West.

Pat Kennedy discovered a surfers paradise with its unspoilt beaches, hotels, restaurants and tourist musts. There was little point in lingering and Pat instructed the driver to continue to La Virgen situated on the banks of Lake Nicaragua, less than half an hour by car, a journey that had taken Mark Twain three and a half hours through a landscape he described as:

'bright, fresh green on every hand, the delicious softness and coolness of the air the interest of unknown birds and flowers and trees.... Many of the trees were starred all over with pretty blossoms. There was no lack of vegetation, and occasionally the balmy air came to us laden with a delicious fragrance. We passed two or three high hills, whose bold fronts, free from trees or shrubs, were thickly carpeted with softest, greenest grass—a picture our eyes could never tire of. Sometimes birds of handsome plumage flitted by, and we heard the blythe songs of others as we rode through the forests. But the monkeys claimed all attention. All hands wanted to see a real, live, wild monkey skirmishing among his native haunts. Our interest finally moderated somewhat in the native women; the birds; the calabash trees, with their gourd-like fruit; the huge, queer knots on trees, that were said to be ants' nests; the lime trees; and even in a singular species of cactus, long, slender and green, that climbed to the very tops of great trees, and completely hid their trunks and branches, and choked them to death in its winding folds—so like an ugly, endless serpent; but never did the party cease to consider the wild monkey a charming novelty and a joy forever.'

The writer went on to describe the 400 passengers on horseback, muleback, and in four-mule drawn diligences, as the 'wildest, raggedest and most uncouth procession' he had ever seen.

Arriving at La Virgen, to the south of Rivas, Pat, from a small lakeside jetty, contemplated the dark form of Concepción, the huge volcano that rose out of Maderas Ometepe Island. It looked menacing as a sharp squall whipped up the waves as a bank of dark clouds scuttered across the otherwise blue sky.

According to plan a fast boat had been hired to take him across the lake to San Carlos, following the 19th century

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passage taken by Mark Twain and the planned route of the canal. The distance was over 100 kilometres, a steady journey of six or seven hours, there were no towns of interest on the Island or on the south shore of the lake.

Settling down Pat soon tired of the monotonous view of the lake and the volcanoes. He pulled out Twain's account of his journey and started to read:

The Daily Alta California, March 16, 1867

New Year's Day.

Out of the midst of the beautiful Lake Nicaragua spring two magnificent pyramids, clad in the softest and richest green, all flecked with shadow and sunshine, whose summits pierce the billowy clouds. They look so isolated from the world and its turmoil—so tranquil, so dreamy, so steeped in slumber and eternal repose. What a home one might make among their shady forests, their sunny slopes, their breezy dells, after he had grown weary of the toil, anxiety and unrest of the bustling, driving world. These mountains seem to have no level ground at the bases but rise abruptly from the water. There is nothing rugged about them—they are shapely and symmetrical, and all their outlines are soft, rounded and regular. One is 4,200 and the other 5,400 feet high, though the highest being the furthest removed makes them look like twins. A stranger would take them to be of equal altitude. Some say they are 6,000 feet high, and certainly they look it. When not a cloud is visible elsewhere in the heavens, their tall summits are magnificently draped with them. They are extinct volcanoes, and consequently their soil (decomposed lava) is wonderfully fertile. They are well stocked with cattle ranches, and with corn, coffee and tobacco farms. The climate is delightful, and is the healthiest on the Isthmus.

Our boat started across the lake at 2 pm, and at 4 am the following morning we reached Fort San Carlos, where the San Juan River flows out—a hundred miles in twelve hours—not particularly speedy, but very comfortable.

Using Mark Twain's words, as a writer myself, I remember he said something like this, 'As if there was much of anything in

any human utterance, oral or written, except plagiarism!’ continuing with, ‘The kernel, the soul—let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances—is plagiarism.’

Of course he was right. I couldn’t have written the story of Spanish gold, or any other story, without Anna’s help, or that of Wikipedia, history books, newspaper reports, and a host of other sources, not forgetting listening to the many different people, often very learned, who I encountered in many far and often strange places.

As Robert Harris, in his novel *The Ghost Writer*, wrote in a citation concerning his central but unnamed character, the ghost, in the story:

We are the phantom operatives who keep publishing going, like the unseen workers beneath Walt Disney World. We scuttle along the subterranean tunnels of celebrity, popping up here and there, dressed as this character or that, preserving the seamless illusion of the Magic Kingdom.

Naturally we are inspired by our own experiences and those of others recounted in books, films and history. Personally the way I see writing can be summed up by the words of Bret Easton Ellis, ‘You do not write a novel for praise, or thinking of your audience. You write for yourself; you work out between you and your pen the things that intrigue you.’

But, going back to Pat’s story, his ride was not as comfortably sedate as the steamer described by Mark Twain, Pat’s was a jarringly noisy two deck river boat. Fortunately the wind had dropped as had the waves when he settled himself on the upper deck, which not only offered a better vantage point, it also avoided the spray allowing him to relax and enjoy his reading matter and study his collection of maps.

CHAPTER 65

ANOTHER PASSAGE

**R**io Brito was a muddy stream that flowed into the Pacific at the narrowest point of the Rivas Isthmus in the south of Nicaragua. It was the spot chosen to build an ocean port at the entry to the planned transoceanic canal. From Lake Nicaragua the river disappeared into the dry savannah-like woodland areas to the west of Rivas, an unremarkable small town crossed by the Pan-American highway.

Before the construction of the Panama Canal, the only alternative for American transcontinental transport was by sailing ship around Cape Horn, a hazardous voyage for sailing ships, and even after the arrival of early steam ships the journey was long and fraught with danger.

Before the North American transcontinental rail-road was built there was an alternative route that had existed since the time of the Conquistadors—the overland route via the Rio San Juan in Nicaragua, which became an important passage for travellers between New York and San Francisco wishing to avoid the treacherous Cape.

In the middle of the 19th century the commercial exploitation of this route was granted to the American shipping magnate, Cornelius Vanderbilt, by the Nicaraguan government. Ships from New York sailed up the San Juan River from the Caribbean to Lake Nicaragua and across to Rivas, where passengers and goods were transported overland to the Pacific, across the low hills of the narrow Istmo de Rivas, to the Pacific by mules trains, horses and stagecoaches.

Napoleon III formed the Nicaraguan Canal Company in 1869, but his project came to nothing when he was deposed after the Franco-Prussian War that ended in the Emperor's

humiliating defeat and exile. Any further idea of building a canal in Nicaragua was abandoned due to the country's chronic instability, which forced governments, businessmen and investors to seek an alternative route, finally choosing Panama as the site to build their transoceanic canal.

San Juan de Nicaragua, situated at the mouth of the Rio San Juan, formerly known as San Juan del Norte or Greytown, on the Caribbean coast, was founded by the Spanish explorers who arrived in 1539.

Later the small town fell to the English, who, with the Miskitos and Zambos, descended from African slaves, controlled the Miskito Coast on and off until the independence of Central America from Spain in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars.



In 1848, the British took control of the town and renamed it Greytown, attaching it to the Miskito Kingdom, a British protectorate to the north.

Soon after, Cornelius Vanderbilt set up his shipping company in Greytown and the town became the eastern terminus of a booming transoceanic link, with tens of thousands of travellers passing through each year on their way to the Pacific during the California Gold Rush.

Sailing ships and steamers from New York and New Orleans docked in Greytown where passengers and goods were transferred onto river boats that made their way up the San Juan River past dense tropical jungles to San Carlos on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, which, almost thirty three metres above sea level, drained into the Caribbean via the Rio San Juan.

At the time when Vanderbilt's company transported passengers overland from the lake shore to the Pacific, a plan to build a canal had already been envisaged. However, when construction of the Panama Canal started the plan was shelved. Then, to pre-empt competition with the Panama Canal, a treaty was signed with the Nicaraguan government in 1916, giving the Americans exclusive rights to build a canal along Vanderbilt's route. It was not until 1970 the treaty was finally rescinded, leaving the door open to other projects.

Hernan Cortes is said to have written to the King of Spain: He who possesses the Rio San Juan could be considered the owner of the world.

Pat Kennedy had driven from Managua to San Carlos, where a fast launch was waiting for him at the point where the lake emptied into the Rio San Juan. He had planned an expedition, more like an excursion, to explore one of the proposed routes for the canal as part of his ad hoc fact finding mission, which he deemed necessary before investing time, effort and much money in Wang's canal project, not wanting to end up like Ferdinand de Lesseps—bankrupt and discredited.

In the scandal that ensued charges of corruption were made against de Lesseps and his son Charles along with Gustave Eiffel, who after a long trial received long jail sentences, which were later annulled, though certain of the accused did serve jail sentences. Baron Reinach, the Canal Company financial advisor and agent, committed suicide, and others fled to England.

San Carlos was not like he expected, it was a muddy shanty town with tumbledown shacks and shabby wooden buildings perched on stilts over the river banks. There he changed boats

for the journey would take him nearly two hundred kilometres, through what was a vast nature reserve; an uninhabited pristine tropical jungle, to Greytown, where the river, which some called el Desaguadero, drained the lake into the Caribbean.

The first leg led to El Castillo 70 kilometres downstream, a couple of hours from San Carlos. The once powerful Spanish colonial fort with its thirty two canons, the bane of river pirates, was perched on a grassy knoll overlooking a cluster of gaily coloured houses that lined the banks of the river. The Castillo de la Inmacula was a sombre, moss-covered, stone mass, built to dominate the strategic junction on the river where the crocodile infested rapids formed a natural barrier, making it easy for the Spaniards to intercept enemy ships, where only experienced boatmen could navigate the treacherous stretch of the river.

From then on any remaining vestige of civilisation was left behind as the river wound its way deep into the jungle. On either side of the muddy green waters of the river lay a dense rain forest, silent except for the cries of birds and the whooping of howler monkeys.

Mark Twain, one of Vanderbilt's passengers on his Rio San Juan riverboat steamer, wrote a description of the area in 1886:

Dark grottos, fairy festoons, tunnels, temples, columns, pillars, towers, pilasters, terraces, pyramids, mounds, domes, walls, in endless confusion of vine-work—no shape known to architecture unimitated—and all so webbed together that short distances within are only gained by glimpses. Monkeys here and there; birds warbling; gorgeous plumaged birds on the wing, Paradise itself, the imperial realm of beauty—nothing to wish for to make it perfect.

Travelling from West to East in the middle of the 19th century was the Russian revolutionary, Mikhail Bakunin, who crossed Nicaragua on his way to New York and Europe, from Siberia via Japan and San Francisco, to spread his idea that revolution was instinct and not thought, destruction so long as there was anything to destroy, and rebellion when there was

nothing to rebel against. All of which was put down to Karl Marx's orderly mind midsummer madness.

Bakunin could have never imagined teams of engineers, geologists and environmental specialists from Communist China, working on plans, mapping topography, in preparation for an invasion of giant earth movers, for what would be one of the largest engineering projects the world had ever seen, comparable to China's gigantic Three Gorges Dam. The future canal would be capable of handling supertankers and giant container ships of much greater tonnage than the Panama Canal, even after its multi-billion dollar expansion.

As Pat Kennedy pored over the technical, financial, environmental and commercial feasibility studies, he recalled all such mega projects such as the Aswan Dam and the Three Gorges Dam had been derided by experts of every ilk, predicting doom and disaster. That did not deter Pat, to his mind it was a noble cause that would pull millions of Nicaraguans out of their misery.

Even the existence of two volcanoes rising above Ometepe Island on Lake Nicaragua did not deter the investors, though the volcanoes were a permanent reminder that Nicaragua straddled an active geological hot spot with all its inherent risks.

## CHAPTER 66

### VANDERBILT

The excitement of discovering the City of the Monkey God deep in the jungle of eastern Honduras had overtaken Pat's concerns over the canal. He with his newly made Japanese friend bumped over the dirt road that climbed through lush-green forest towards the base camp in a small village on the jungle edge. It was not unlike all the other such villages, its wooden houses and their plaited palm roofs, chickens pecking insouciantly at the dirt as small black pigs rooted in the encroaching undergrowth.

Far to the south in Nicaragua it seemed as though the canal project had drifted into the doldrums, there was little movement despite HKND's claims the construction of the first phase, a port on the Pacific Coast, would begin before the year end.

The lack of visible movement on the ground was clearly discernible, apart from the occasional Chinese engineers surveying the terrain. This compounded with the sudden stock market setback in China had rattled Pat and it had taken a visit to the Panama Canal museum to rekindle his enthusiasm. There he discovered the history of the first transoceanic canal and the difficulties of such a vast undertaking. Pat was forced to admit the 2020 deadline for completion was looking optimistic and realised it would require time, perseverance and courage, to overcome the many obstacles on the long road to success—political, financial and physical.

Cornelius Vanderbilt, the American railway magnate, had attempted to build a waterway in the 1850s and as a triste monument to his effort the mast of his dredger was still visible, emerging from the waters of Morgan's Lagoon near Greytown

in south-east corner of Nicaragua.

The dream of cutting a canal across Nicaraguan isthmus dated back centuries. It was Ferdinand de Lesseps who put an end to the idea when he broke ground for the Panama Canal in 1881. Before that date, Nicaragua had been the most likely option for a transoceanic waterway to reduce the journey from California to the East Coast of the US.

The Chinese billionaire involvement in the canal was the fruit of a meeting in 2012 with the son of Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega. It came as Wang Jing sought to expand his telecom business into the country, the poorest in the Western hemisphere after Haiti.

Wang imagined the potential Nicaragua offered, it was virgin territory, abandoned by its neighbours and above all left to its sad fate by the US. There were sea and air ports to build, the development of tourism as in nearby Costa Rica and Panama, and the creation of free trade zones. Nicaragua's geostrategical location would open a new gateway to lucrative North and South American markets, an attractive new manufacturing and distribution hub with its population of eight million, a willing labour force that could be put to work for the production of consumer goods with costs even lower than those of China.

China was cautious, and for complex diplomatic reasons did not want Beijing to be seen as being directly involved. In fact China did not even enjoy diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and the risk of being thought to mess with the US in its own backyard was too great.

Moreover, Nicaragua was one of the few remaining countries to still recognise Taiwan, a fact that went a long way to explaining Beijing's reluctance to be seen as being directly involved in the project, leaving that role to HKND, a private company based in Hong Kong.

Rumour had it Wang was the son of a high-ranking military official and a grandson of Wang Zhen, one of the Eight Elders of the Chinese Communist Party, a die-hard conservative, notorious for his hard-line stance on the Tiananmen demonstrations, all of which would make the

entrepreneur a princeling in the ranks of China's so called Red Royalty.

His connections went a long way to explaining why his company, the Xinwei Group, was one of the first private firms to be able to invest in China's space industry, normally an exclusively military industrial establishment affair. Xinwei, a certified vendor to the People's Liberation Army, planned to put thirty two telecommunication satellites into orbit, something that was inconceivable in China without state approval and the evident backing of the military.

When the news arrived it felt like a body blow. The shock caused by Wang's decision to postpone the start of his transoceanic canal construction was like a bolt out of the blue. Pat had been aware of the rumours circulating about Wang's losses, but he had not realised the tycoon's situation had been so dramatic.

The Chinese stock market crash had laminated Wang's fortune, which at the start of the year had been estimated at over 10 billion dollars, the fall was vertiginous 90%, a spectacular reversal of fortune. If his information was right, Wang was worth a mere one billion dollars, less the Pat's own growing personal fortune, which he was not about to risk like de Lesseps had on his ill fated Panama project.

The news news of Wang's astonishing reversal of fortune came just as Sandinista lawmakers overwhelmingly approved a motion that granted the HKND Group a concession to design, build, operate and manage the canal and a whole series of linked projects, including two deep water ports, airports, an oil pipeline, six tourist complexes and free trade zones.

With the environmental study just being approved and excavation on the canal scheduled to start toward before the end of the year, the project director spoke of fine tuning, but the announcement of a 12 month delay was a bad omen.

As usual bad news never came alone and before Pat could absorb the implications, which in reality was not more than a loss of effort and face, the Shanghai stock market index took another dive. After regaining a little ground in August it

plunged 5.5%, which meant even more pain for Wang.

It had been a lousy year and as things were going, thought Pat, it was heading for an even lousier end.

Ominous cracks were appearing in China's financial markets with the announcement its biggest brokerage, Citic Securities, part of China Citic Bank, the 7th biggest in China, was in trouble. It seemed that a stupendous error on their part had been the cause of China's stock market turmoil.

The bank was founded in 1979, under Deng Xiaoping, by Rong Yiren, a so-called Red Capitalist, whose family of industrialists was one of the few of the pre-1949 period to have survived Mao's revolution.

'Rong went on to become Vice President of China,' Angus MacPherson, INI's managing vice president, told Pat. 'Which shows anything can anything can happen in China. It's a story directly out of one of your Lu Xun novels,' he added with a wry smile.

Rong's family had owned an industrial empire of flour and cotton mills in Shanghai and when the Communists took over rather than flee to Hong Kong or Taiwan as many businessmen did, they stayed. His family continued to run their company until 1956, when all private businesses were nationalised. However, they were compensated and he was appointed the vice-mayor of Shanghai.

Citic Securities, having overstated its over-the-counter derivatives business by a gargantuan one trillion Rmb, explained the errors were the result of technical glitches. But deliberate misreporting was suspected so as to conceal the situation of their clients.

Angus McPherson was not surprised by anything, his long experience in Hong Kong and Mainland China was not just limited to banking, he was also well read in modern Chinese literature which offered numerous tales of roguery in the days when international powers reigned over the Treaty Ports, among those were the classics of the period: *Shanghai Morning* and *Midnight*, both written between 1930 and 1950, when rich Chinese business brazenly manipulated markets in

their race to get richer.

Citic's chairman resigned and the firm's executives arrested following the stock market's crash with the Shanghai Composite Index falling by over 40%. Short sellers and fund managers were arrested in classic Beijing style as banks were raided and brokers were accused of insider trading.

It was why Pat saw Venezuela with a certain optimism, Maduro's exit would open the country to vast opportunities and INI was positioning itself to participate in the feast.

The Caribbean and Latin America had become a zone of interest for INI. It counted countries like Belize with its 15,000 square kilometres and 350,000 inhabitants, and Brazil with a population of 200 million and 8.5 million square kilometres.

Belize wasn't like Brunei, sitting on a lake of oil and gas, though it had about the same population—small. Not everybody was lucky enough to have the kind of money to squander as did the Sultan and his brothers, which explained why Belize had decided to set itself up as an offshore tax haven.

The policy of Belize, even though it was small, was to attract as many immigrants as possible, including those from Indian and China, to boost its population and justify its existence vis-à-vis its neighbour Guatemala, which not being satisfied with what it had, wanted a large piece of its smaller and poorer neighbour.

It was unjust, but that was the way of the world.

But its potential as an offshore banking centre did interest Pat Kennedy. Belize offered many advantages. First it was part of Caribcom, that is a group of 15 island states that included many tax havens, with a population of nearly 20 million, as opposed to the Central America Integration System made up of Panama, Nicaragua, Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic with a total population of over 50 million. Then secondly it was a member of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States made up of 33 states and 650 million people.

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In all Latin America was a vast market for Pat Kennedy and his Hong Kong based bank, one that could not be overlooked, especially as China was developing its business in the region at a lightening pace, and Pat was placing his pawns in strategic locations across the Caribbean basin—where he could count on his friend Tom Barton, now firmly established in Colombia with the kind of political connections his family enjoyed.

## CHAPTER 67

### FOOLS GOLD

As we dived for gold, at the other end of the South American continent the G20 met for a session of rubbing shoulders, preening and sniping.

With the exception of Theresa May, who found herself sidelined, in one of the most humiliating positions for a British prime minister as far as I in my journalistic-author career could remember.

The G20 coincided with John's return to London, where there was momentary relief with May's absence. There the press had turned its interest to the news that the Adam Smith Institute had deleted promises on its website to provide access to government ministers in exchange for donations.

John remarked the parallel with Aaron Banks was too embarrassing for the think tank, 'power lunches and patrons dinners with influential figures, including politicians, ministers, journalists and academics,' for anyone who cared to cough up a donation of a grand a year, and for those ready to shell out five they were offered a private events list, 'from which you can choose the Power Lunches and Patrons dinners you wish to attend', a bargain compared to the 10 million dollars the Russians had contributed for the service of the Leave campaign.

It was not the first think tank to be questioned on the problem of contribution ethics. The CEO of the Institute of Economic Affairs had been filmed by an undercover reporter promising access to a minister in exchange for funding a report on agribusiness.

I reminded John that the Fitzwilliam Foundation and its close ties to Sergei Tarasov could be pointed at, a fact he

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accepted whilst recalling, one, the Fitzwilliam Foundation was not a charity, and two, Sergei's clash with the Moscow three or four years back, when he fled for his life with his family to Ireland, more than absolved him from the suspicion of being a Kremlin stooge.

John overlooked Pat Kennedy's links to Russia through INI Moscow, where he trod a very narrow path.

INI itself could have been summed up by one of the Adam Smith Institute's founders, Madsen Pirie, who wrote, 'It [the institute] was a very messy patchwork and it took us years to sort it out. We used the term, Adam Smith Institute, loosely to cover all our activities, no matter which heading they occurred under.'



Many questions were raised about the political campaigning activities of another network of think tanks and groups linked to an address in Tufton Street in Westminster, a stone's throw from our Fitzwilliams Foundation at Queen Anne's Gate.

As John looked closer into the Leave campaign he discovered the building on Tufton Street was owned by the

HR Smith Group headed by Richard Smith—a pal of David Cameron. Smith was engaged in right-wing politics and his property on Tufton Street was the home to several Eurosceptic and global warming denial groups.

The property bought at the end of 2009 for five million dollars was remarkably like our own building on Queen Anne's Gate owned by Sergei Tarasov. John Francis knew it well, it was not far from his old school, Westminster, next to The Adam Smith Institute which housed eight different Eurosceptic organisations, including Vote Leave, and against other things such as climate movements.

In recent years it had developed a more radicalised, reactionary, image, as in a sinister upper-class British plot to undermine any rapprochement with Europe, such as the former Conservative chancellor Lord Lawson's climate-sceptic Global Warming Policy Foundation.

A cabal of establishment plotters and fellow travellers determined to reach their ideological goals by undermining democratic institutions by disinformation and the corruption of ambitious and easily led politicians and officials.

John Francis explained to his friends how the UK's lack of an institutional memory of life outside the EU would put a brake on Downing Streets ambitions to build a 'Global Britain'. The difficulty lay in the fact that no high civil servant's, or diplomat's career went further back than January 1, 1973, when the UK entered the EU, and Brussels took the lead in much of the field of foreign relations. A young man starting out in the Foreign Office at the beginning of 1973, would now be in his seventies, retired, probably sunning himself in Provence or Tuscany, as all the knowledge and experience gained in the intervening five decades by younger diplomats working with Brussels was about to be ditched overboard.

It would be a step into the dark with 'Global Britain' a vacuous concept for an island that no longer ruled the waves, as the European three power alliance with France and Germany as partners was jettisoned overboard, when

Downing Street led by its stubborn premier abandoned them in its perilous go it alone adventure.

The question remained who would help London if the Falklands were invaded again, or if Gibraltar, or some other British rock was threatened—Pakistan, Malaysia, or New Zealand?

Organisations, like Global Vision, claimed the City of London was prevented from reaching its potential by oppressive EU regulations, which Pat from his seat in Hong Kong did not agree with, which I suppose was justified considering Michael Fitzwilliams and Pat himself had been a victims of Downing Street's manipulations to grab INI in favour of the City & Colonial bank five years earlier.

There was no love lost between the Clan and reactionary cliques in London, like Civitas, which never forgave us for being Irish upstarts who saw the EU as a lever against the British establishment.

Pat Kennedy as a fellow Irishman had found his role in Hong Kong, far from the contemptuous smug attitudes of the City establishment, where his discovery of nearby Shenzhen coincided with his own fulgurant rise to power. Since the death of Michael Fitzwilliams, John Francis had taken on his mantel and guided Pat with his knowledge and experience, John had seen the changes in Hong Kong over many decades, and witnessed the extraordinary explosive growth of its cross-border neighbour.

In the 1970s, Shenzhen had been an insignificant fishing village at the end of the Kowloon-Canton rail line. That changed when Deng Xiaoping launched his reforms and established it as one of his Special Economic Zone in 1980, in the first step to open China's economy to the world.

In 40 years Shenzhen's population exploded to 12 million, transforming it into a booming megapolis, a pole of attraction, at the centre of which were the tech giants Foxconn, Huawei and Tencent, creating a technopole comparable to Silicon Valley.

Shenzhen, a brash new city, sported Hong Kong-like

skyscrapers, shopping malls, hotels, convention centres, museums, as well as entertainment and sports facilities.

The city had its rough edges with never ending construction sites and road works, its crowds—mostly migrants from the interior of China, less refined than Hong Kong, grittier, closer to the soil, with their way of life, reflected in eating places and exotic menus, noisy, liking loud music and blaring TV, thriving in the outside life of the warm southern climate of southern China.

Further to the south of our treasure hunt, in Colombia's neighbour, Brazil, the new government of Bolsonaro opened the Amazon forest to agriculture. He was not alone, the same thing was happening across all of South America.

The idea that the collapse of civilisation and the natural world was on the horizon, seemed unrealistic to younger people. It was not that they did not believe in climate change and collapse, it was more to do with the fact they had no reference point, they were young.

On the other hand men like John Francis with his age and experience had seen the world how it had been yesterday and could compare today's world with the past, especially the natural world.

World renowned naturalist, Sir David Attenborough, addressing COP24, a UN climate change conference, at Katowice in Poland warned, 'Right now we are facing a man made disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years, climate change,' he said. 'If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.'

Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary general told the delegates, 'Climate change is running faster than we are and we must catch up sooner rather than later before it is too late. For many, people, regions and even countries this is already a matter of life or death.'

Their predictions had obviously made little impression on Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a retired military officer, President-elect of Brazil, responded by attacking the UN's position vis-à-

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vis his policies in Amazonia.

## CHAPTER 68

### ARCHAEOLOGY

Looking out from the plane I could see Constanta far below us as we crossed the shore line of the Black Sea, then Sevastopol and Kerch. I was reminded of the ongoing confrontation between Moscow and Kiev, below men were looking at each other through gun sights in one of those eternal confrontations over territory and power.

But what interested Anna more than those conflicts was the discovery of what was reported to be the world's oldest intact shipwreck, discovered 10 kilometres below us, under the Black Sea.

The wreck, believed to be that of an ancient Greek vessel, was remarkably complete with its mast, rudders and rowing benches present, had lain undisturbed at the bottom of the sea, for more than 2,400 years, at a depth of almost two kilometres where the almost total absence of oxygen had preserved it almost intact, contrary to the conditions in the Gulf of Venezuela and their destructive effect of the *Espiritu Santo*.

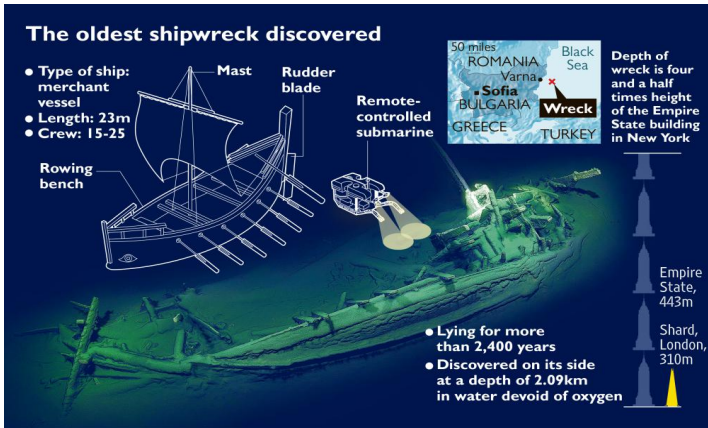
Anna told me it was nothing short of miraculous, something she had never believed possible, a find that could change our understanding of shipbuilding and seafaring in the ancient world.

The 20 metre long vessel was a trading ship of a kind depicted on the familiar black-figure potteries of ancient Greece, the kind on which Homer's Odysseus had sailed, past the rocky island of Anthemoessa where the Sirens lured mariners with their songs. Odysseus plugged his crew's ears with beeswax and ordered them to tie him to the mast to resist their seductive calls.

The ship was one of more than 60 wrecks spanning more

than two millennium found by a team of maritime archaeologists and scientists exploring the Black Sea to study the impact of prehistoric changes in sea levels.

But that was another story, our destination was New Delhi, en route for Colombo in Sri Lanka. We were travelling with John, who amongst other things had business meetings with Tata and Mittal on post-Brexit strategy.



John had planned a Christmas break with Ekaterina at the Plantation, his retreat in Galle, and on the way had promised to show her the Taj Mahal at Agra, before heading down to Colombo, where they would be joined by the children with their nurse and Ekaterina's parents for the holiday far from the pressures of London.

India was another point of focus for INI Hong Kong, its CEO, Pat Kennedy, had multiple reasons for diversification, amongst them was the realisation that China was approaching a plateau and it was time to expand into new markets.

China's growth would continue, but signs of change were already visible, telling him another story. The first was the prosperity of China, already a consumer society, reminiscent of Japan in the nineties, an economic superpower, about to dominate the world—which never happened.

The derive of the Chinese leader to a Mao style life long presidency was not a good sign, authoritarian governments never lasted long in modern human society.

Double digit growth was a thing of the past and the government's massive stimulus, following the financial crisis, had not prevented it from dropping to 6%, in reality much less, but still by any standards huge.

All the signs were pointing to a decline in 2019, as Trump pursued his trade war, which would encourage others to do the same as China's exports, to compensate the loss, flooded Europe and other regions.

The recent fall in China's stock market had set the warning lights flashing as weakness in retail sales were more evidence that its consumers were not heeding their leaders exhortations to spend.

Apple, whose iPhones were not only manufactured in China, but was also the huge country's top of the market brand, was trapped by its own success as China became a mature market, where sales predictably plateaued. All this was reflected in the year end crash in Apple's share price.

Pat had watched China's total debt creep up and as its debt to GDP ratio approached 300% he knew it was time to look seriously at the bank's long-term investment strategy.

For our trip, as a writer, I had taken the precaution of reading Rudyard Kipling's *Letters of Marque* written in 1888, the title of which refers to a commission issued by a belligerent state to a private person, permitting him to employ his vessel as a ship of war. In short a privateer.

It was strange how I was drawn to this curious link, however tenuous, between the privateers of the Caribbean and the princes of Rajasthan.

Kipling wrote to his cousin, Margaret Burne-Jones:

Since November last I have been a vagabond on the face of the earth. But such a vagabondage! Did I tell you how the Pioneer took me over and bade me go out for a month into Rajputana—the home of a hundred thousand legends and the great fighting pen of India. They gave me did my generous masters Rs 600 a month and paid my

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railway expenses. Ach Himmel. Was there anything like that dissolute tramp through some of the loveliest and oldest places upon the face of the earth.

I wrote a series of letters called 'Letters of Marque'—by the way it is running still—and I railed and rode and drove and tramped and slept in Kings' palaces or under the stars themselves and saw panthers killed and heard tigers roar in the hills, and for six days had no white face with me, and explored dead cities desolate these three hundred years, and came to stately Residences where I feasted in fine linen and came to desolate way side stations where I slept with natives upon the cotton bales and clean forgot that there was a newspaperly telegraphic world without.

Oh it was a good and clean life and I saw and heard all sorts and conditions of men and they told me the stories of their lives, black and white and brown alike, and I filled three note books and walked 'with death and morning on the silver horns' and knew what it was to endure hunger and thirst.

Kipling relied on the accounts of James Tod's, 'Annals of Rajasthan' as a guide. In 1818, after the chiefs of Rajputana had accepted the protective alliance offered to them by the British, Tod was appointed by the governor-general political agent in the western Rajput states. After he left India, Tod spent the rest of his life arranging and publishing the immense mass of materials accumulated during his Indian career.

Regretfully Kipling is now considered as a politically incorrect pariah, which in other terms, at best, was nothing more or less than whitewashing history, or at worst, rewriting history, which did not prevent Anna and myself from marvelling at the colours of Rajasthan, a land of diverse cultures and a rich and tumultuous history with an astonishing number of palaces built for the Rajputs, the sons of kings and princes, surrounded by bustling old towns and a desartic landscapes.

## CHAPTER 69

### PARIS

*We're like children in a playground . . . We're not paying attention.  
We worry more about . . . what name somebody called someone  
else . . . than whether AI will destroy humanity. That's insane.*

Elon Musk

It was late Saturday afternoon when Liam Clancy left the apartment on rue François 1er de Serbie in Paris, which Pat Kennedy had loaned him, far from *les classes dangereuses*. He had arrived early that morning from Bogota and catching up on his jetlag had slept until three. Camille, who had been with her mother in Sommières, planned to return early Sunday evening, leaving Liam to spend the best part of the weekend to recover from his trip to Santa Marta ready for the busy week ahead.

He had been warned by his driver of the demonstrations in Paris, but had not paid much attention, it was part of life in the French capital and 10 days absence had not prepared him for the events that were taking place on the nearby Champs-Élysées.

After showering and taking a coffee he set out to take a stroll and take a breath of air, walking in the direction of avenue George V. He was surprised by the absence of traffic and the crowds wearing fluorescent yellow vests, obviously part of the demonstrations.

To the right, on rue Marbeuf, in the distance the crowd was denser enveloped in a cloud of white mist, beyond he saw flames. Curious, he turned down the street where he caught the pungent odour of what he assumed was tear gas.

Casually dressed with a warm overcoat, wearing a beany and

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trainers, he looked like many of the other younger men present and joined the crowd unremarked. As he approach the Champs-Élysées he heard the crack of flash-ball riot guns fired by CRS special forces and saw tear gas cannisters falling amongst the demonstrators.

Pulling his scarf over his face he continued past the mob of demonstrators, mixing with photographers and lookers on. Though the Champs was closed off, the barricades had been pushed to one side and a few metres beyond, a gang had turned over a police car from which flames were licking from the open passenger door.

The CRS suddenly charged and he found himself running with the mob back down rue Marbeuf as tear gas canisters flew over his head.

He made his way back towards George V and cut through to avenue Kleber, where he found a full scale battle raging amongst burning cars as a mob ran wild looting the expensive boutiques the lined the street.



It was a week since the previous already violent demonstration, one of the reasons why Camille had left to join her mother at the château in Sommières. But Liam had never

imagined the violence had reached such an insurrectional degree, especially in his comfort zone theoretically far from any *classes dangereuses*.

France was going through one of its regular upheavals, alarming to observers, but he had little fear that it was more than the usual Gallic violence that he saw as letting off steam.

That said, France, like other Western countries, as a consequence of globalisation, had experienced deep social fractures, the price to be paid for the transformation to a new economic model for which the working classes were sacrificed, a model was not only weakening the those classes but society as a whole.

Liam wondered whether in a way the state had become an enemy of the people by its desire to force change on those who did not want those changes.

Whilst people like Liam got richer the working and lower middle classes got poorer, with many being plunged into precarity.

He was back in Paris for the 4th edition of Paris Open Source Summit that was to be held the following week in a suburb to the north of the city, the Paris Docks, at La-plaine-st-denis, a venue for congresses, exhibitions and trade-shows.

It was a tech show that would be attended by 150 firms including big names such as Microsoft, but mostly lesser known companies and startups, a hunting ground for Liam and international investors on the look out for the next Uber.

Many of those investors would be present at the Elysée Palais, the official residence of Emmanuel Macron, for a diner to promote investment in France where he was to launch an appeal to Silicon Valley venture capitalists to invest in France.

It did not look encouraging with Paris transformed into a battle zone as rioters looted and ransacked boutiques and businesses in the heart of Paris, projecting a chaotic image on international media. What big US tech funds such as Andreessen Horowitz, Sequoia Capital or General Atlantic would think was unpredictable, but in any case it was not positive, though it would offer an opportunity to Liam, who

young as he was, knew it was a passing crisis.

The two-day roadshow would visit Liam's incubator near the Gare de Lyons not far from the Bastille where he planned to host an event at Ground Control, which he had booked for the Friday where Sir Patrick Kennedy, Sergei Tarasov and John Francis would speak on investing in high-tech.

Macron urged investors to build French businesses rather than move them to the US. However, Macron would have his work cut out to repair the damage done to France's image by the riots couple with the knock-on effect of the UK falling out of the EU.

For Liam, France, in spite of not being high up on the list of startup hubs, was a good base for a worldwide network, linking multiple hubs, as Paris offered a new generation of tech-savvy entrepreneurs with a large pool of engineers produced by France's top universities every year.

The trouble was the lack of funding, the kind available only in the US, where billion dollar unicorns seemed to pop up every month. Liam's Irish, Spanish and French startups had attracted several hundreds of millions of euros, but he needed much more, in an environment where successful French startups like Zenly's was swallowed by SnapChat.

In London, Europe's leading startup hub, Liam had his finger on the pulse of the area centred around the Old Street roundabout in East London, a hub for tech start-ups that was attracting young, tech-savvy, innovative, entrepreneurs.

The district was known for having attracted major players such as Google, Amazon, Intel, Facebook and Microsoft.

It was a target for talent spotters looking for talent and promising start-up accelerators, one of the reasons Liam had attended Unbound London, an event where young talent and investors mixed to seek opportunities.

Whatever the outcome of Brexit, business would continue and Liam saw London's tech industry as an important talent hub with more than 200,000 specialists that had attracted a 2.5 billion pounds in venture-capital funding the previous year.

However, London had little by little become less attractive as

a home to people on the move, true it was a cosmopolitan city, but its attraction as a European, outward-going capital had been seriously damaged by the Brexit fiasco.

The image of a desperate Theresa May in her eccentric fashion style pleading with Brussels for concessions and extensions to bail the UK out of a situation of its own making was ludicrous and had seriously damaged the UK's international image.

Combined with the growing gig economy the situation had done little to increase the average Brit's confidence in in his or her future as uncertainty and job insecurity grew.

Unemployment had continued to fall, but what kind of employment was on offer to the Brits of the 'lost decade' that had followed the crash of 2008, over the course of which income growth in Britain had stagnated.

At the other end of the scale, our Clan seemed to drifting away from London. Pat Kennedy in Hong Kong, Sergei more often in Dublin, or Moscow where he seemed to have mended his bridges, Tom Barton in Colombia, Liam now in France, and myself who had made Paris my home a long time ago now. Only John had a more permanent base in London, because of his children and Katya's gallery, though Brexit had cast its long shadow over that, prompting her to open a gallery in Paris, a base from where she could manage the Sommières Collection with the help of Camille.

Liam crossed his fingers and hoped Macron made the right decisions, though from recent evidence, especially that linked to his murky bodyguard, Alexandre Benalla, that was not guaranteed. What George Pyke had told him of Benalla and his friends was not a good omen for the future.

According to John, the French economy, like that of other developed economies, had continued to create wealth. The problem was that wealth was unequally distributed and for many people unemployment, insecurity and poverty had increased.

As usual the rich had gotten richer making for an increasingly polarised society. This gave rise to populist movements like

the *gilets jaunes*, a movement that had sprung lower-middle classes and better off traditional working classes, all of whom had been overlooked in the race to globalisation. The gentrification of large cities and the replacement of the grass root French by immigration had separated the elites and professional classes and their cohorts from those in the hinterlands, a forgotten people. It was a pattern that was repeating itself across all of the more advanced industrialised economies.

John warned that Artificial Intelligence would wreak havoc in the jobs market, not in 50 years time, but tomorrow—now—as you read this, provoking a crisis parallel to that of the industrial revolution, as the need for humans in multiple sectors would simply disappear.

The concentration of capital, the transformation of commerce and distribution by robotics, the downsizing of the middle-classes, levelling of incomes, the spread of Cornucopia.

People had difficulty in understanding the economic motivation of those last three points, but it was simple, increasing the purchasing power of consumers, all confounded, increased mass consumption. That meant redistributing incomes, from the middle-classes to the lower classes. Why? Because the middle-classes tended to squirrel their surpluses away in property and savings. If the incomes of the lower classes were increased they would increase their consumption of essentials and consumer goods. The only real way to do this was through the levelling of incomes, which was in fact already visible in all developed economies. In this way retail distribution would grow, at the cost of certain discretionary purchases, of course that would effect the manufacturers of those optional goods, but overall industry would be better off.

That doesn't mean overall prosperity would be less, but more evenly distributed, in the same way living standards would rise, also more evenly, upgrading the overall quality of consumption.

In brief the concentration of capital in businesses like Amazon and Alibaba and the robotisation of distribution

would transform consummation and would usher in a different kind of Brave New World. Happy and obedient consumers provided with their daily needs, entertained by Netflix and sent on vacation by giants such as RWE.

RWE? You've never Heard of them? Well they're probably behind your package holiday and the airline you fly in.

In 2014, Stephen Hawking suggested that AGI—Artificial General Intelligence—the intelligence of a machine that could successfully perform any intellectual task that a human being could, would spell the end of the human race. Alan Turing, in 1951, had already predicted that machines would outstrip our feeble powers and take control.

Singularity would take over and humans become extinct, it sounded like science fiction, but the truth is, AI is everywhere around us, thanks to advances in chip design, processing power, and big-data hosting. In general we have no idea how ubiquitous AI already is, in finance, industry, communications, air travel and a whole host of other sectors, replacing humans, better than humans.

John's vision of Cornucopia was already with us as jobs disappeared by the millions, unneeded by the new race of ultra-rich ensconced in high towers, on their yachts and in their jets. I say that seated in the bank's jet, whilst you, the masses, are surveyed by facial-recognition technology systems, like China's Sharp Eyes program, which gathers surveillance footage from dozens of major cities, observing 1.4 billion citizens, attributing or deducting points on the basis of each individuals behaviour, in a Big Brother-like Social Credit System.

For the benefit of who? Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, or a Trumpian leader? The truth would be closer to the interests of Google or Baidu.

Stephen Hawking was no doubt right when he warned, 'We only have to look at ourselves to see how intelligent life might develop into something we wouldn't want to meet.'

I was glad when John told me that writers would still be needed as I hadn't planed to retire in the near future. That said,

there were more and more writers and new books published. Of the 100,000 new books published in the US each year, less than 500 made it to the New York Times Bestsellers List, and only a handful of authors managed to stay on that list 5 weeks.

It was odd to think it was sufficient for an author to have written a single book that made the NYTBL for one single week to be labelled a 'bestselling author', a label that sticks for life. That plus the fact that individual book sales for best selling authors, fiction and non-fiction, numbered between 2,000 and 8,000 copies, far from enough to make a living.

Writing aside, the thought of tens and hundreds of millions unemployed was alarming. John's vision of Cornucopia would partially protect those of us living in the developed world, but could it be put into place fast enough to prevent the collapse of our society. Already large parts of the UK suffered from the consequences of the crisis that was hitting high street retailers and manufacturing sectors like the automobile industry where jobs were disappearing at an alarming rate.

The demand for workers in social and care services would increase as it would for IT specialists, but they would create a greater divide between low and high paid jobs with greater competition in education, the haves and have nots, a phenomena already visible across the gig society where hungry Deliveroo workers forked into the meals they were delivering.

But what was populism? John taught Liam it was inherent to democracy, us against them, left against right, the ordinary citizens against the elite, the poor against the rich, the under privileged against the privileged.

Coming from a less privileged class, Liam sympathised with the protesters—that is too say a reaction against authority. As an Irishman his ideas had been formed by centuries of rebellion.

Soon, in January 2019, Ireland would commemorate a century since the Dáil—the Irish parliament, had met in Dublin and declared the war of independence, the ultimate stage of two centuries of struggle against the English. The Irish state was born in blood, as civil war broke out, ending in

partition and the Troubles. Now, after a peace of twenty years, Brexit threatened to relight the flame of violence.

On 21 January 1919, the Dáil Éireann reaffirmed the 1916 Proclamation with the Irish Declaration of Independence, which had delivered a Message to the Free Nations of the World, stating that there was an ‘existing state of war, between Ireland and England’.

Liam remembered the declaration that had hung on the wall of his grandfather’s home as long as he could remember:

Whereas the Irish people is by right a free people:

And Whereas for seven hundred years the Irish people has never ceased to repudiate and has repeatedly protested in arms against foreign usurpation:

And Whereas English rule in this country is, and always has been, based upon force and fraud and maintained by military occupation against the declared will of the people:

And Whereas the Irish Republic was proclaimed in Dublin on Easter Monday, 1916, by the Irish Republican Army acting on behalf of the Irish people:

And Whereas the Irish people is resolved to secure and maintain its complete independence in order to promote the common weal, to re-establish justice, to provide for future defence, to insure peace at home and goodwill with all nations and to constitute a national polity based upon the people’s will with equal right and equal opportunity for every citizen:

And Whereas at the threshold of a new era in history the Irish electorate has in the General Election of December, 1918, seized the first occasion to declare by an overwhelming majority its firm allegiance to the Irish Republic:

Now, therefore, we, the elected Representatives of the ancient Irish people in National Parliament assembled, do, in the name of the Irish nation, ratify the establishment of the Irish Republic and pledge ourselves and our people to make this declaration effective by every means at our command:

We ordain that the elected Representatives of the Irish people alone have power to make laws binding on the people of Ireland, and that the Irish Parliament is the only Parliament to which that people will give its allegiance:

We solemnly declare foreign government in Ireland to be an

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invasion of our national right which we will never tolerate, and we demand the evacuation of our country by the English Garrison:

We claim for our national independence the recognition and support of every free nation in the world, and we proclaim that independence to be a condition precedent to international peace hereafter:

In the name of the Irish people we humbly commit our destiny to Almighty God who gave our fathers the courage and determination to persevere through long centuries of a ruthless tyranny, and strong in the justice of the cause which they have handed down to us, we ask His divine blessing on this the last stage of the struggle we have pledged ourselves to carry through to Freedom.

## CHAPTER 70

### DELHI

It was Liam's first visit to India and the shock was not just psychological, it was physical, starting with his eyes, smarting from the pollution, his nose running and the irritation that started to pick at his throat. His driver struggled to advance through a tangle of vehicles under the blue haze that hung over the city like a dome. After an impossibly long journey from the airport the driver announced they were finally approaching the hotel which lay in the heart of New Delhi.

Liam despaired as he observed cows ruminating on the central separation of the Outer Ring under the Nehru Place Flyover near Kalkaji Mandir metro station. They crawled past the so-called residential colonies and enclaves with their leafy streets and upmarket low rise apartment buildings, some unfortunately facing the polluted ring.

Along the wooded avenues perpendicular to the ring in the Safdarjung Enclave in South Delhi, and Green Park were vast multimillion dollar residential complexes that formed a startling contrast with the dwelling places formed by greasy tarpaulins under the footbridges.

Liam like us was booked into the Imperial nearby to Connaught Place. Built in 1931, the Imperial was an elegant colonial style hotel, from where John told us we could easily visit the many historical sites of New Delhi.

The luxury of the hotel was incomprehensible when I thought of the huddled masses of poor, dirty, grimy, children, young mothers with infants in their arms, begging on the ill light pavements of Delhi, or on construction sites, all breathing the poisonous fumes produced by the monstrous

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traffic chaos outside, and in a country that planned to put a man into space and bought advanced jet fighters to ward off its real or imagined enemies.

In spite of that, or because of that, India could boast an impressive growth rate of 7.5% as it plunged into a catch up race with China.



The inevitable question asked by a visitor to India was that of the benefits or harm caused colonisation? Of course the rule practised by all civilisations was always to the advantage of the coloniser, from early civilisation to the start of the 20th century, and Britain's colonisation of India was no different.

The latest accusations came from the Indian economist Utsa Patnaik who came to the conclusion that Britain siphoned nearly 45 trillion dollars from India between 1765 to 1938.

At the root of this impossible to imagine sum was trade. Before the colonisation of India, Britain paid for the goods it bought with money or through barter.

In 1765, after the East India Company extended its presence on the subcontinent establishing a trade monopoly, Patnaik claimed it began collecting taxes using part of the taxes to finance trade and the export of goods to Britain and its possessions and markets. This enabled the Empire to finance its industrialisation and expansion.

Of course the East India Company was a commercial undertaking, designed for gain, as is Apple, Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Ambani's company Alliance.

When the British Raj took over in 1847, the monopoly came to an end, but one monopoly replaced another as trade was carried out by paper currency issued by the British Crown. The currency in the form of special bills was acquired for gold or silver from London.

So traders would buy the bills from London with gold and silver to purchase goods from Indian producers, who cashed the bills at the local colonial office, receiving rupees in exchange which had been collected from the producers in the form of taxes.

The profits in gold and silver thus ended up in London.

Patnaik also claimed that revenues from India were used to finance to out down revolts in India and the war in China as well as the settlements in the colonies including Canada and Australia.

The burden of taxation and debt was such that India endured two centuries of suffering and the blame for its backwardness was entirely placed entirely at Britain's door, depriving India of becoming an industrial powerhouse like Japan, in contradiction to Niall Ferguson's narrative.

During the 200 year history of British rule in India, per capita income stagnated, industry collapsed whilst famine and disease was rife.

Be that as it may, it is worth remembering that under the Mughal Empire, which the British replaced, the population stood at 160 million in 1700, today it stands at 1.4 billion, which is an entirely Indian feat, as is the number of cows that stand at about 300 million, contributing more to global warming than the vehicles the animals obstruct.

Perhaps the Brits should claim reparations and apologies from Rome for five centuries of colonisation that led Europe to the dark ages.

Or, better still, as an Irishman, Dublin should claim compensation from London for 800 years of occupation and

oppression by the English crown.

That was a philosophical question and our immediate concern was shopping—for clothes, the dress code included *saris* for the ladies, *sherwanis* for the men, and *churidars* for both. Together we all headed off on a joyfully exotic shopping spree seated in a luxury air-conditioned people carrier, its smoked windows to hide us from the wretched street dwellers. I suppose we could have been compared to bloated overfed aliens visiting another world, gawking out at street urchins making back flips, their faces painted with large princely black moustaches, once an indicator of social class, at a time when untouchables were forbidden facial hair.



The wedding was held in Udaipur, a romantic destination, known as the city of lakes, a must for the well-heeled tourist and a gathering place for the rich. Amongst the foreign wedding guests were Pat and Lili Kennedy, John and Ekaterina Francis, Liam and Camille Clancy, Comte and Comtesse Olivier de la Salle, and myself, yours truly Pat O'Connelly—an internationally known author and friend of the rich. There, I've said it, me, a crusader for causes, a friend of the rich, and in the company of my Anna.

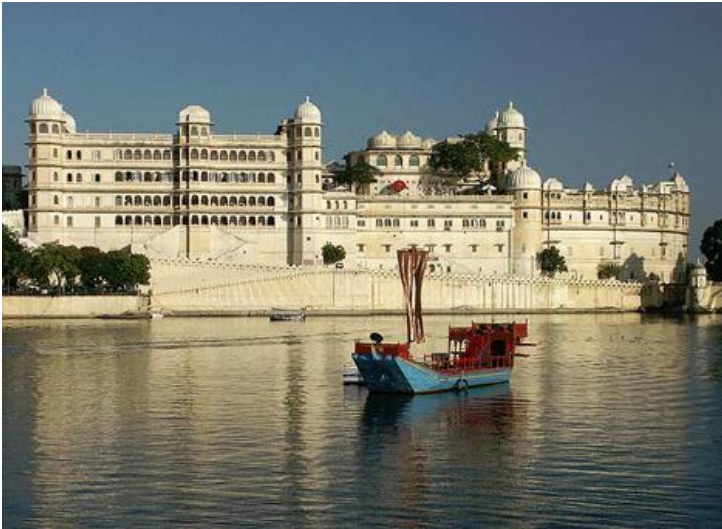
Until the surprise invitation, thanks to Camille de la Salle's friendship with Isha Ambani, who she had befriended during an exchange year at Stanford, most of us had barely heard of Udaipur. Isha invited me after I'd been introduced as the author of the Sommières Collection, the story of the fabulous art treasure left by Camille's grandfather.

It was one of the perks of being an internationally known best-selling author and a member of the Clan, that's Pat Kennedy's Clan, our ad hoc billionaires club that had its roots in Ireland and friendships with the late banker Michael Fitzwilliams, who Pat had succeeded and surpassed as an empire builder.

I was interested in Rajasthan for the role it played in the Silk

Road and Opium Trade, both of which were central to Spain's Empire and the competition it inspired from rival European powers.

My story would not be complete without a word of the forces that launched the start of what was to become a truly globalised economy, the roots of which lay in the Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494, which divided the newly discovered lands beyond Europe between the Portuguese Empire and the Crown of Castile.



The lands to the east of a line along a meridian 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands, off the west coast of Africa, were attributed to Portugal, and those to the west were attributed to Spain.

This resulted in a two pronged development with the two powers finally confronting each other in the Spice Islands—Portugal via the Cape of Good Hope, across the Indian Ocean to India, then Sri Lanka and across the Bay of Bengal to Malacca in Malaysia, and Spain through the Straits of Magellan and across the Pacific Ocean to the Philippines.

The confrontation was resolved by the Treaty of Zaragoza, in 1529, which defined the areas of Spanish and Portuguese influence in Asia, thus settling the claims to the Moluccas Islands, where they both met and fought at Ternate, a small island in the Moluccas to the south of the Philippines, and declared the Moluccas were within their respective zones of influence according to the Treaty of Tordesillas.

The story of Rajasthan went back to the weaving and the spinning of cotton which had existed in the region for over 4,000 years, block printed fabrics dyed with resistant mineral pigments exported as far as ancient Egypt.

In more recent centuries, Indian silks also travelled through Rajasthan, then part of the Maratha Empire—successors to the Mughals, along the silk road on the way to the coastal ports of Barbaricon, Barygaza, Bombay and Goa, from where they were carried on sailing ships to Europe by Arab, Portuguese and Dutch traders, bringing riches to the princely states thanks to caravanserais on the Grand Trunk Road that ran across India from the mouth of the Ganges to Bombay, passing through Mughal Delhi, linking China to the West via the Silk Road.

Rajasthan was unified by Akbar who established the Mughal Empire and reigned up until the beginning of the 17th century. A century later the Mughal Empire went into decline and the Marathas integrated Rajasthan into their own empire about the time the British arrived setting up the autonomous Princely States that recognised the suzerainty and the paramountcy of the British crown.

In the late 17th century, the Industrial Revolution in Europe brought profound changes to the economy in that Indian cotton was exported to supply mechanised textile mills in Lancashire causing the collapse of India's traditional textile industries with India becoming a net importer of machine produced textiles.

Today Rajasthan was India's biggest wool and cotton producer and its main source of opium, as it has been the case for centuries, with these commodities the source of its wealth

throughout its long history, the wealth created kingdoms, that built palaces and attracted invaders from Alexander the Great, the Mughal princes and the British.

Agriculture was at the heart of the Mughal Empire, exporting tobacco, cotton, sugarcane, pepper, ginger, indigo, opium and silk. The rulers taxed agricultural goods and as agricultural expanded in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Mughals grew rich as international trade developed and prospered around the Indian Ocean. With the arrival of European traders, India markets expanded with high demand for cotton textiles in Europe for summer wear and underwear. Calico, from Calicut, was in great demand paid for with silver from New Spain.

The Mughals welcomed the Europeans allowing them to establish trading forts along the coast. The Portuguese were the first with Goa, followed by the Dutch, French and English. This resulted in the foreign domination of Indian trade and India itself, bring with it the decline of the Mughal economy.

Signs that foreign domination was now fully reversed and Indian Princes had returned came when INI Hong Kong started to manage the overseas investments of Mukesh Ambani, a modern maharaja standing at the head of a vast energy and telecom business empire with a fortune calculated by Forbes at 44 billion dollars, whom Pat was trying to persuade to build a partnership by expanding his bank, INI Hong Kong, into India.

Pat had been invited to the bash in Udaipur, and Bombay where the rich Indian owned one of the world's most extravagant homes, an incredible 27 floor skyscraper.

Pat had little difficulty in getting the rest of us invited to the do, not only were we rich, but we were now international personalities linked to the fabulous Sommières Collection, and the story of the *Espiritu Santo*—leaked in the New York Times. However, Pat's motivation, apart from our keeping him company in Rajasthan during the three day's of festivities, was the gathering of our Clan to review our own affairs in a fast moving world.

I'd invited Anna to join me, our first trip together, beyond

that of our business in Colombia. It was my Christmas gift, a little in advance, better than proposing a Jimmy Choo experience. We'd flown to Delhi where we met up with the Clan and then flew into Udaipur in Rajasthan, about an hour's flight, we'd have liked to go by road, but John, who knew the subcontinent well, told us the conditions were bad, and after what we'd seen in Delhi we believed it.

Isha Ambani, the daughter of Mukesh Ambani, was marrying Anand Piramal in New York, the son of another billionaire, who at a meeting of investors at Goldman Sachs in New York, had discovered his fiancée, Isha, a friend of Camille de la Salle.

At this point I have to say we were just a small group among more than 2,000 high flying guests at the extravaganza in the extraordinary Mughal city, where all the palaces and hotels had been requisitioned at huge cost for the prenuptial party, which I am told was a mere bagatelle for the bride's father.

Among the guests was Ekaterina's model friend Natalia Vodianova, as well as a host of Bollywood superstars and international personalities.

The fête lasted two days with visits, discos and lunches, culminating in an exclusive concert starring Beyonce in the City Palace, a vast Mughal edifice built over a period of 400 years by the princes who ruled India before the arrival of the British.

The palace overlooked Lake Pichola, a view of spectacular beauty that included the palaces and temples built along and near to the shores of the lake and on its two islands all of which was framed by a breathtaking backdrop—the Aravali Mountains.

Rudyard Kipling mentioned the lake in his *Letters of Marque*, 'If the Venetian, owned the Pichola Lake, he might say with justice, see it and die'.

The fresh water lake was formed over centuries to provide the surrounding towns and villages with drinking and irrigation water and its setting amongst the surrounding hills provided a site of great beauty encouraging the local princes to build their magnificent palaces on its shores and its two islands,

Jag Niwas and Jag Mandir, one of these being the stunning white Lake Palace, built for Udaipur's Mewar princes in 1746, which appears to float on the lake's mirror-like waters.

I was surprised to learn the extravaganza was organised and produced by Sky Production, an Israel based wedding planning and decor company.

We were lodged at the Kempinski Leela Palace overlooking the lake and soon set about exploring the fabulous site. We had flown from New Delhi to Udaipur's small airport on Pat's jet, just one of the many jets that crowded into the city's small airport stretching it to bursting point.

The bridegroom arrived for the lavish concert on horseback to the sound of drums and trumpets along the streets lined by cheering crowds as though the Mughals still reigned over India.

In India it was in the marriage season and the dates for the ceremonies chosen by astrologists,

Each of us had received elaborately embroidered and gold plated Dolce & Gabbana boxes containing the exquisitely printed invitations, a series of cards which folded out to reveal details of the events to be held during the festivities that were to last five days.

Beyonce was flown for the modest fee of more than 6 million dollars for a 45 minute concert, during which she performed her hits *Perfect* and *Crazy In Love*.

The extravagance and contrasts of India, reminded me of my own world back in Europe and more in particular Stephen Zweig's biography *The World of Yesterday* written on the eve of events that were to change the world for ever, as his disappeared before his eyes, just as mine was disappearing before my eyes.

I concurred with John's vision of the coming Cornucopia society, but feared the price—an oligarchy of the rich and powerful, where the consuming masses consumed and obeyed, where the intermediary classes were economically disempowered and their wealth confiscated. A ruling oligarchy, where capital was concentrated, enjoyed the freedom of great wealth, protected law, enforced by privileged classes—law

enforcement and bureaucratic that endured the smooth functioning of Cornucopia.

The consuming classes would be entertainment by sport, showbiz, easily accessible culture and travel, attributed in the form of rewards for individual contributions to the collective well-being of Cornucopia and those who lived in it.

In brief it was parallel to communism, built around the overwhelming power of the oligarchy, where the coercion was silent, ever present, ensuring unquestioning submission to the decisions of the oligarchy, where individuality and expression was stifled. The slogan was—consume, consume, consume, with any deviation from Cornucopian values condemned as degenerate, as in the totalitarian states of the 20th century.

That may sound extreme, but power turned the heads of those that wielded it, transforming them into the instruments of a predatory state.

In India, China, Brazil and developing countries in Africa, it was a race against time to create a middle class, the driving force of the economy, a race to privilege. In European countries such as France and the UK, it was a race to destructure the middle classes.

The idea of equality for all was laudable, but at what price as humanity expanded exponentially, as it had done all through the 20th century, when age old traditions continued unchanged from the days when man's share of the world was much smaller.

A billionaire's wedding in Udaipur and Bombay costing 100 million dollars, with the presence of Democrat Hilary Clinton and a galaxy of show biz stars, simply reinforced the idea that the world was a playground for the super rich, where the capitals of former colonial powers, England and France, were the homes of the world's oligarchs, who openly flaunted their wealth, and the people was transformed into poorer and much reduced citizens, good for nothing more than re-electing their more and more authoritarian political leaders, who grovelled at the feet of the supranational oligarchy.

In India the masses had not changed in 50 years, the rich

resembled the old Raj, though they were not of royal lineage, though they rubbed shoulders with what was left of it, as if justifying their taste for unlimited extravagance. It was no different to the British royals who mixed with the world of showbiz and nouveaux riches.

Buckingham Palace was of course the home to a constitutional monarch, that is a powerless symbol, who did nothing more than perform at official events and visit hospitals and old people's homes. The palaces of the rajahs on the other hand were seats of power, where rulers were surrounded by ministers, administrators, soldiers, lawyers, architects, engineers, specialists in hydrology and agriculture, treasurers, diplomats, priests, elephant, camel and horse carers, butchers, bakers and candle stick makers, as well as slaves. Surrounding the palaces were vibrant towns with markets, temples, caravanserais and the homes of traders, cottage industries and the homes of the common folk, and beyond the city walls were farms and quarries and factories.

If we listened to our charming guide we would have believed there was nothing but a long line of kings and princes with unpronounceable names and of course wars.

The world would be a better place with just 1.5 billion human beings. But as John reminded us, when he first visited Sri Lanka, 50 years before, the world's population was already 4 billion. Then in the following half century it doubled with India and China alone adding over a billion.

We had done our bit too, Ireland, when I was a kid, had a population of 3 million, now it was pushing 4.5 million.

Most of us humans lived in cities, where José-Maria Yneva reminded us we been gathering for 10,000 years, since the invention of agriculture, when the supply of food could be assured and organised on a regular basis.

The system worked remarkably well, to the point that cities like Delhi, Beijing, Mexico and so many others are in gridlock, where the pollution is asphyxiating, where the disparities between the rich and the poor are huge, and where in spite of the conditions the poor and desperate flock, fleeing their dead

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end homes in the hills and plains of the countryside far from the promises of civilisation.

## CHAPTER 71

### CARITA BEACH

We flew from Delhi to Jakarta in Indonesia where we met up with Scott Fitznorman to attend a conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage around which rumours were circulating concerning the discovery of the 16th-century Portuguese vessel.

The *Flor de la Mar* had foundered in a storm during the night of 20 November 1511, off Timiang Point in what was then the Kingdom of Aru in Sumatra, with the loss of treasure worth an estimated 2.6 billion dollars in today's terms, a fabulous prize that awaited the finders.

Only Dom Afonso de Albuquerque, its captain, a nobleman and admiral who would become Portugal's second viceroy to India, survived together with four other men.

Malacca had controlled the narrow, strategic, Strait of Malacca, through which all sea trade between China and India passed and the capture of Malacca was part of a plan by the Portuguese king, Manuel I of Portugal, who feared the Spanish would arrive in the Indies via the Pacific route before them.

Albuquerque's plan was to consolidate the Portuguese possessions in India, alongside Hormuz, Goa and Aden, so as to exclude and replace Muslim trading presence in the Indian Ocean.

In 1511, Albuquerque with a force of 1,200 men, captured and looted Malacca, amongst his men was Magellan, then 31 years old and still a modest officer. It was in Malacca, Magellan bought his servant Enrique, said to be 14 years old at the time, who 8 years later left with the explorer's Armada de Moluccas for his voyage of circumnavigation when he was listed as a supernumerary and interpreter. Historians have

speculated Enrique was of Filipino origin, or at least his parents were, as he later helped his master when they arrived in the Philippines in 1521.

Albuquerque sailed with his loot on the galleon *Flor de la Mar*—60 tons of gold and treasure including pearls and precious stones, pillaged after a 12 day siege and the capture of the Sultanate, one of the world's richest cities in those times, destined for the court King Manuel I in Lisbon.

The *Flor de la Mar* left for its journey home up the Straits of Malacca along the coast of Sumatra in the direction of India, when after just two days at sea she was caught in a sudden and fierce storm, foundering according an eyewitness account with almost all of its crew and passengers in shallow waters when trying to find refuge on the coast, 'the old and glorious *flora de la Mar* was wrecked on the beach. Her old and rotten body opened itself and the ship was cut in two pieces. Her back completely embedded in the sand was demolished by the waves.'

If this was the case the ship, which had the highest fore and aft castles of Albuquerque's fleet, would have probably still been visible and what could have been recovered would have certainly been salvaged by the locals once the storm died down.

Others surmised that if the 400 ton *Flor de la Mar* broke in two after hitting a reef, the storm would have no doubt caused considerable damage to what remained of the hull with the loose cargo spilling out onto the seabed, which, according to reports included, 'the most rich objects ever seen'. Albuquerque had intended to offer them to Dona Maria, the Queen, and to the King himself. Amongst the precious objects on board was a four leg table on which the Queen of Malacca used to take her meals that was worth 80.000 Cruzados. Even the merchants of Malacca offered 300.000 cruzados to get it only for its precious stones. She was also carrying four sitting lions made of gold with perfumes inside which had been amongst the treasures looted from the Sultan's chamber, 'their eyes, tongues, teeth and nails were made of precious stones and their estimated value was 200,000 cruzados.'

Scott Fitznorman explained ROV's sonar would have had difficulty in detecting the metals on-board the wreck, such as canons or its cargo, because of the huge quantity of other metallic objects accumulated over the centuries along the Straits of Malacca. If the wreck was there it would have been most certainly silted over and undetectable by ROVs.

According to Anna, the 36 metre long vessel, an India galleon, called a *nau* in Portuguese, or a carrack in English, with its three masts and six sails, square on the foremast and mainmast and lateen on the mizzenmast, was considered one of the largest and finest vessels of its time. It had been built in Lisbon in 1502, and on its maiden voyage to Goa in India, was captained by Estevao da Gama, a cousin of Vasco da Gama.

It seems however to have had a reputation for being difficult to manoeuvre due to its instability after having undergone many repairs and modifications over the course of its nine year career.

In any case the ship's structure would not have survived and in all probability, it would very difficult to locate precious object, coins and gems in the silted seabed, reputed for its currents, where the galleon was said to have sank, unless local fishermen knew where it lay from the objects they recovered from time to time in their nets, secrets they would for obvious reasons not be in a hurry to divulge.

According to Anna's explanations, larger ships of 600, 900, and even 1,500 tons were later built, though the normal India galleon was between 400 and 450 tons, which made the *Flor do Mar* a prototype of what was to be the typical 16th century India galleon.

Initially, *Flor de la Mar* fought in Portugal's battle against the Ottomans, blockading the Gulf of Ormuz in 1507, then Goa in India, and finally Malacca when the ship had passed its best years.

Apart from the booty looted from Malacca, the *Flor de la Mar* was said to have been also carrying in its vast hold a tribute from the King of Siam to Manuel I, as well as Albuquerque's personal fortune. In all it was probably the

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most valuable cargo of treasure ever carried during the Age of Exploration by a Portuguese ship.

At that time maps were the equivalent to state secrets of the highest order and when a large chart relating to the Spice Islands was obtained from a Javanese pilot, Albuquerque enthusiastically described to King Manuel I of Portugal, in a letter dated April 1512:

... a piece of a chart, taken from a large chart of a Javanese pilot, containing the Cape of Good Hope, Portugal, and the land of Brazil, the Red Sea, and the Sea of Persia, the Clove Islands, the navigation of the Chinese and the Gores, with their rhumbs [points of the compass] and direct routes followed by the ships, and the hinterland, and how the kingdoms border on each other. It seems to me, Sire, that this was the best thing I have ever seen, and that Your Highness would be very pleased to see it; it had the names in Javanese writing, but I had with me a Javanese who could read and write. I send this piece to Your Highness, which Francisco Rodrigues traced from the other, in which Your Highness can see where the Chinese and Gores come from, and the course your ships must take to the Clove Islands, and where the gold mines lie, and the islands of Java and Banda, of nutmeg and mace, and the land of the King of Siam, and also the end of the land of the navigation of the Chinese, the direction it takes, and how they do not navigate farther. The main chart was lost in the *Flor de la Mar*. With the pilot and Pero de Alpoim I discussed the meaning of this chart, in order that they could explain it to Your Highness; you can take this piece of chart as a very accurate and ascertained thing, because it is the very navigation by which they come and go. The archipelago of the islands called Celate which lies between Java and Malacca, is missing.

However, two underwater salvage companies made unsubstantiated claims that the galleon had been found in the Java Sea, close to Semarang in Indonesia, far from Sumatra. They based their claims on images beamed by ROVs, the kind of underwater drones used by oil companies.

The Indonesian authorities failed to confirm the story and spoke vaguely of the reports claiming that the shipwreck has been located, announcing if documents relating to the

discovery were confirmed they would work ‘through cordial bilateral channels’ which was unfortunately complicated by a dispute between Malaysia, Portugal, and Indonesia.

As we were planned to stay in Jakarta a few more days Scott proposed an excursion, one possibility was Semarang, but there was nothing to see and it seemed too far. Instead he suggested we visit the Sunda Straits between Java and Sumatra, where the volcano Krakatoa was active, an idea which pleased Anna.



Leaving our baggage at the Borobudur and just carrying a couple of overnight bags we set off with Scott and his girl friend to Carita Beach in large Toyota SUV he rented, it was approximately 150 kilometres away and with the traffic took us three hours.

We arrived late Thursday morning after an early start. The beach hotel where Scott had booked rooms was in fact a large colonial style bungalow run by a German couple situated at the entry to the town. Gert Sachs, an old acquaintance of Scott's, welcomed us warmly, his hotel was an upmarket establishment for tourists and well-heeled Indonesians getting away from Jakarta for weekend breaks.

The hotel restaurant opened onto a private beach, and not only good food and good music, promised Scott, but a

spectacular view of the volcano across the straits. It was great and we looked forward to a couple of days adventure with Scott taking us out to visit Anak Krakatoa.

That evening started with a tropical downpour which ended abruptly when we went for diner overlooking the beach where we were treated to an extraordinary display as the volcano glowed against the night sky emitting frightening noises, the Forges of Vulcan Anna remarked, as it entered into a violent eruptive phase, throwing flames high into the sky, glowing red, clearly visible across the water that separated from the monster.

They next morning we were disappointed when Scott informed us that the boat trips to the volcano were suspended because of the eruptions which during the night had become more violent, more explosive.

With nothing else to do we took a long walk along the beach and ate *nasi goreng* in small restaurant where we could see the smoke from the volcano rising high into the sky as we watched the coming and going of fishing boats. The weather was hot and humid as the rainy season settled in for the next three or more months, mostly heavy rain in the late afternoon or during the night.

That evening we wandered through the local street market undecided as to whether we should return to Jakarta or not the next day. Finally we decided not to change our programme, spend a lazy Saturday at the beach and return Sunday morning as originally planned.

All through Saturday the volcano rumbled like a giant quarry at work and that evening after preparing our affairs for an early start we took an early diner and listening to the music player by an Indonesian band from Aceh, they were Bataks reputed for their music, playing Christmas and romantic songs.

Scott amused us with the story of how he when he was much younger had climbed up the cone of Krakatoa with John Ennis and a girlfriend after sailing to the island with Neil Whitman, a former pilot with Qantas, on the *Fidji*, an ocean going sailing boat.

'We sailed from here, Carita Beach, together with three young English geologists, they wanted to say they'd been to Krakatoa.

'It was different then, straw huts with no aircon,' he said laughing, 'difficult to sleep listening to the irregular crash of the waves on the beach.

'We were woken at 5.30 in the morning by a young man holding a breakfast tray stood in the half-light.'

'*Selemat pagi tuan, makan pagi*,' Scott said imitating the boy. He spoke good Indonesian.

He clearly remembered that day when they emerged from their bungalows, there was a very light morning breeze, the sea was smooth as it often was early in the tropics as dawn broke, like glass. The *Fidji* was anchored a short distance offshore, barely moving to and fro with the lazy draw of the small waves, which seemed to have the consistency of thin oil. The fresh air acted like a miracle, clearing the heaviness from his head, though he still felt like he needed a couple of hours more sleep.

Sachs told them they were getting the last things on board boat and they'd be ready to leave in about half an hour or so.

A couple of the boys from the hotel were loading a small inflatable dingy fitted with an outboard that bobbed gently with the movement of the sea.

'How're yuh doing?' Neil Whitman's voice boomed out raucously over the water. They looked up and saw him standing on the prow of his boat, next to his girl friend, Mel, both looking full of life.

They waded into the sea towards the dingy, threw in their bags and clumsily scramble over the side, as a lone wave lifted it high in the water and the boys struggled to hold it steady. One of them lithely slipped into the dingy and with a deft movement started the outboard and turned towards the *Fidji*.

Whitman stowed their bags and offered them mugs of hot coffee. They stood a little unsteadily, familiarising themselves with surroundings on the deck of the *Fidji*. Ennis looked around admiringly, he had not really looked very closely at the boat the previous evening as they had caroused at the beach

bar, its vague outline had been barely perceptible in the dim lights of the hotel. It was a 25 metre ketch, its two masts towered above the deck. Through the long windows, set into the side of the raised cabin he saw that the *Fidji* was comfortably fitted out with spacious living quarters.

Scott preferred bigger motorised boat he was not much of a sailing enthusiast and apart from the occasional weekend sail boats were not really his thing.

The beach now moved gently and they had a clear view of the coast beyond, which rose in a series of fairly steep hills covered with thick vegetation and trees. The huts of the small hotel looked bleached by the sun, there was not much movement apart from the boys at the spot where the dingy had returned and beached.

Krakatoa was a small volcanic island in the middle of the Sunda Straits between Java and Sumatra. Today it is commonly called Anak Krakatoa, which in Indonesian meant baby Krakatoa. It was torn from the womb of the volcano Perbuatan on the 26 August 1883 in a gigantic explosion that ripped the island apart.

The explosion was heard as far away as Sri Lanka and Australia, the volcano split in two and the caldera collapsed and sank into the sea. Originally the island was about 9 kilometres long, 5 wide, and the volcano and was believed to be extinct. It rose to over 800 metres and the whole island was covered with luxuriant vegetation. The eruptions had begun in May of that same year and the activity gradually increased until it reached its terrible climax on 26 and 27 August, when the final eruption occurred.

Scott watched the edge of the otherwise taut sails that flapped from time to time as the wind turned and the *Fidji* rose and fell on the waves.

The coast of Java was just a line on the horizon, there was a steady wind, not enough to break the waves but it produced a fairly heavy swell. 'What happened after the eruption?'

'After 1883, there was no further major volcanic activity. Heavy tropical rains soon cut deep gullies in the layers of ash

and pumice the covered the island and as they did they uncovered the seeds of plants which had lain dormant under the ash.'

'Did anybody visit the island after the eruption?'

'Yes, there was a fellow called Cotteau who visited Krakatoa in May 1884, he found that it was still a barren volcanic desert, the only living thing he saw was a spider, which was probably carried there by the wind.'

Whitaker took it in turns at the helm with Mel, who took the opportunity of a pause to get out a pannier of sandwiches that the hotel had prepared and several bottles of cold beer; it was after ten and the sea air had stimulated their appetites. As they ate and drank watching the seabirds that followed them.

Suddenly there was a loud but dull explosion, they all turned to the western horizon, where they saw a vertical jet of white smoke in the sky rising above the grey blue form of an island, it was Krakatoa.

'What the fuck was that?' shouted Whitman.

'The volcano!' said Hawkins, one of the geologists, nonchalantly.

'The volcano, they didn't tell me the fuckin thing was still active! Jesus Christ man!'

'Don't worry, they're only small eruptions,' Hawkins insisted.

There was another crack and streamers of white smoke arched slowly through the distant sky.

'What about my bloody boat,' screamed Whitman.

'Don't worry, I tell you its nothing,' Hawkins said looking at his pals for support.

The bearded one replied, 'No he's right, it's really nothing, there probably won't be anything more now for a few days.'

Whitman was not reassured. He took a beer from the icebox and sat down by one of the winches, his eyes worriedly fixed on the horizon.

'How far are we away now?' said Ennis hoping to change the subject.

'About six or seven miles I'd say, about an hour at this rate, if we don't get hit by a fuckin ball of fire,' Whitman said testily.

'Don't fret you old sod,' said Ennis trying to smooth him.

'Really, nobody told me that that dammed thing was still active.'

'Don't worry Neil, nobody's been killed there for over a hundred years.'

'Well I don't want to be the first, and I don't want any of that shit falling on my boat.'

They all laughed relaxing a little bit after the initial surprise.

'What's it throwing up anyway?' Ennis asked Hawkins.

'Mostly pumice and stuff like that, nothing really big, more noise and smoke than danger,' he said with a serious expression, telling them that it was his expert opinion.

'I hope you boys are right,' said Whitaker.

Anak Krakatoa was a smoking grey cone of cinders and pumice that rose directly out of the sea, flanked by dense green vegetation at its base and no beach to speak of.

They anchored about 20 or 30 metres offshore. Whitaker lowered the yachts inflatable dingy into the smooth water. They clambered over the side followed by Mel. They paddle the dingy to the beach, which was not composed of sand as it had appeared from the distance, but fine white pumice.

Ennis dived into the water from the deck of the *Fidji* followed by Scott and swam to the shore. The water was silky smooth and very warm. The lumps of pumice stone that floated around them astonished Ennis, miraculously bobbing around on the gentle swell.

They planned to stay overnight using the boat as a base camp and once their material was on the beach they set off leaving Whitaker and Mel to look care for the supplies. The island was small, in reality it was the rim of what had remained of the crater, but it was growing slowly, day-by-day, already reaching a height of 300 metres.

Hawkins and his two friends had planned to climb to the summit of cone and invited Scott to join them. He estimated a couple of hours or so would be sufficient. They intended to take temperatures and measure the concentrations of gases.

The going was easy to start with, but as they progressed the

angle became steeper. Hawkins pointed the way ahead, avoiding the blowholes, where hot sulphurous gases escaped from the volcano. He tested the ground as he progressed making sure it was solid, explaining that dangerous cavities existed below the sometimes-fragile surface. As they advanced the ground became less stable, it was composed of loose cinders and ash, two steps forward then sliding one step back. The temperature of the ground had increased, because of the heat from the volcano and also the sun. We panted heavily and pressed on. As we looked behind, the beach seemed to lie far below the steep slope. We felt uneasy thinking of the eruption that they had seen just a few hours earlier.

Hawkins and his friends pushed on, as Scott followed by John trailed behind. When they arrived at the summit it was a disheartening sight, the mountain of ash and cinders fell away, dipping some 50 metres before rising again to a much steeper cone, the real volcano. It had been hidden by the secondary and smaller cone that they had just climbed.

The two friends had enough and made their way back down. Hawkins and his friends were soon tiny figures, like insects, as they continued their climb to the summit up what appeared to be an almost vertical slope.

It was almost dark when they returned to the beach, where Whitaker had set up a barbecue and a camp table for dinner. After plunging into the warm sea to refresh themselves, they settled down with beer and ice that had been brought from the *Fidji*.

They sat drinking and talking late into the night, before settling down to sleep under the stars the filled the tropical sky. Both slept deeply that night, in spite of the nagging thoughts of the dangers that lay beneath their rough and ready beds dreaming of cataclysmic eruptions following their discovery that the volcano was a living creature, a heaving, dangerous and unpredictable, fire breathing monster.

Anak Krakatoa, the child of the legendary Krakatoa, was a small volcanic island that had emerged from the ocean half a century after Krakatoa's deadly eruption in 1883.

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When Krakatoa erupted in the 19th century, a jet of ash, stones and smoke shot more than 20 kilometres into the sky, plunging the region into darkness, and sparking a huge tsunami that was felt around the world.

Within a few decades after the eruption a new island emerged from the sea, Anal Krakatoa, which now towers 350 metres above the sea, growing higher each day.

‘It was an even greater disaster here when the volcano erupted,’ said Anna. ‘It’s incredible to think so many people were killed by the eruption and the huge tidal wave that it set off.’

‘Yes, we’re sitting on the Ring of Fire, volcanoes, earthquakes and all the rest,’ said Scott smiling.

It was a good story and we decided to order another bottle of wine as the evening mellowed. It must have been some time after ten when there something seemed to have happened in the back of the restaurant.

Gert Sachs suddenly appeared, wide eyes, rushing in, waving his arms and frantically shouting something incomprehensible.

We looked at each other alarmed.

There was a movement of panic.

It took a few instants before Scott realised what was happening.

‘Tsunami!’ he shouted. ‘Move!’

He point to the gardens and the rise and the woods beyond the hotel and the road, we ran for our lives, following the waiters and hotel personnel knocking over tables and chairs in the scramble towards the higher ground and safety.

We waited but nothing happened. There had been no earthquake, at least anything we felt. I can’t say we were frightened, perhaps puzzled. Sachs told us to stay put whilst he tried to find out what was going on. There was no water, but ground which we stood was perhaps 10 metres about the sea.

Then the all the lights went out. It seemed like an eternity before the standby generator cut in and we started to realise something serious had happened.

Phones were ringing and there was talk of a tsunami. Soon

news was coming in of buildings being destroyed and roads cut. We sat outside waiting until one or two in the morning when first reports of deaths and extensive damage was reported on the reported on social media and the TV.

Scott decided we return to Jakarta at once as Gunter said he would send one of the hotel boys to guide us through the small roads over the high ground to Jalan Raya Carita which had apparently been spared.

The rest of the night was a nightmare as we negotiated our way around towns and villages hit by the wave, luckily the bridges had stood the shock.

It took a couple of hours to get past Jambu Beach, which we later learnt had been hit by one of the highest waves, reported to be about one metre high, which didn't seem very much, but caused huge damage, roads blocked by debris, overturned cars, collapsed buildings and fallen trees. Fortunately, the further we moved north the less the beach areas were affected, then turning east we left the Straits behind, though the traffic was a nightmare as ambulances and rescue teams tried to get in as streams of weekend visitors tried to get away from the coast fearing further waves.

It was eleven in the morning when we arrived in Jakarta, exhausted, back at the Borobudur where we had rooms until the early evening when would would leave for the airport. Needless to say we sat glued to the TV as news came in of the disaster. More than 160 were dead and hundreds injured in what was the consequence of an undersea landslide caused by the collapse of Anak Krakatoa's cone, which tragically coincided with an unusually full moon high tide.

We were horrified by the scenes of the concert where the band was swept sway as the stage collapsed and spectators were swallowed by the wave.

To have been so close to death and destruction had a profound and sobering effect on us as we prepared to return home for Christmas. It had arrived so suddenly without warning so soon after we had watched the eruption as though it was a firework show.

## CHAPTER 72

### CHRISTMAS

**I**t was somewhat alarming to learn that the Dublin City Council had cancelled Christmas lights ceremony. Perhaps I was being superstitious, but the last that happened was during the Financial Crisis which had brought Ireland to its knees.

Every year Santa Claus took part in a parade through Dublin to switch on one million festive lights, but news that the city's council had decided to abandon the traditional Christmas event because of health and safety concerns seemed like a bad omen.

In any case my plan was to spend Christmas in San Sebastian with Anna and meet her family.

It was 10 years since I had bought the house in Dublin, from Liam Clancy by the way, and a lot of things had happened since then. Liam had become very rich and I myself hadn't done badly at all, thanks to the investments Pat's bank had made on my behalf.

I hadn't returned to Dublin for months, things had been hectic and I was still working on the story of the Sommières Collection, which had been delayed by Pat Kennedy's Caribbean adventure.

My new book 'Spanish Gold' would hit the market for Christmas along with the news of the treasure of the *Espíritu Santo*. Bernsteins promised the sales would be good and they were already lining up film and TV rights.

We flew back to Madrid and then San Sebastian where Anna was looking forward to being with her parents for the Christmas celebrations, the Spanish were big on traditions.

Myself, I had become footloose and following Anna was easy, besides, I had friends in nearby France, over the border from

San Sebastian, in Hendaye.

The shock of the tsunami had pulled us up short and we realised after a year filled with dramas and adventure life was fragile, the unexpected, as ever, lurked around the corner waiting to trap the unwary.

On arrival at San Sebastian Airport, we were greeted by spring-like weather, with a temperature of 22°C announced for the afternoon. We took a taxi to Anna's apartment, in the Area Romantica, which seemed suitably named, on the corner of Elcano and Peñaflores, overlooking Gipuzkoa Gardens, there we crashed out and slept until early evening.

Indonesia seemed far away as we headed over to Anna's parents place in Antiguo, on the west side of La Concha, where the family was gathered at their large villa overlooking the bay.

Anna was happy to be home, I was happy to be with her, though I must admit a little uneasy, a bit like an intruder, finding myself in a Spanish family, who thankfully spoke castellano rather than Basque, which would have presented me with a serious problem of comprehension.

My Spanish was good after years of summer sojourns in the Basque Country, where I found my friends like the Reagans in Hendaye, close to what had been one of Michael Fitzwilliams favourite haunt, Biarritz.

Christmas, or *Navidad*, was an extended affair in Spain, like most of their traditional holidays, starting on Christmas Eve and continuing through the week to the New Year celebrations, and then onto *el Día de los Tres Reyes Magos*, Epiphany, on the 6th of January.

Anna's parents were delighted to have her home and in a way our adventure made us the centre of attention after our adventures in Colombia and the drama we narrowly escaped in Indonesia.

The family gathering included Anna's brother and sister with their respective spouses, and her young nephews and nieces who were waiting excitedly for their presents, not from Santa

Claus, but *Olentzero*, a giant Basque peasant wearing a traditional beret, a farmer's smock and espadrilles, smoking a pipe.

After a joyful *Nochebuena* dinner, during which seemingly endless dishes of seafood and fish were served, we headed to the cathedral for midnight mass, a family tradition that was not to be missed, then, in the unlikely case we were hungry, we returned to her parents for a very early breakfast before making our way back to Anna's where we slept until midday.

With Christmas and our Indonesian adventure, I had forgotten about the world and was surprised by the sudden crisis that had hit the stock markets. Overnight the Tokyo market had plunged a huge 5%, adding to the pain of recent months and the maladroit commentaries of Donald Trump who sent shivers through the markets with his unpredictable character.

I wondered what Pat Kennedy thought and what the future held, were we about to enter another period of financial turmoil and uncertainty, the year ahead promised to be rude as Brexit took effect and the US-China trade war entered a new phase.

In the meantime we could settle down, counting our gold doubloons as the price of gold rose, as Anna prepared her learned academic papers on the archaeological results of the *Espiritu Santo* exploration, and I writing my book *Spanish Gold*.

But getting rich had its traps, it depended how you got rich and to what degree you were in the public eye.

Take Denise Coates for example, the head of a gambling firm in the UK, called Bet365, had paid herself a lot of money last year. In total she collected 345 million dollars in a record-breaking pay deal for the CEO of a British company, 60 million more than she made the previous year.

That's almost a million dollars a day. But not that much considering punters had bet a staggering 73 billion dollars with her firm on everything from horse racing to cricket.

Her pay package was the equivalent to that of nearly 10,000

Brits on average incomes at a time when the country was caught in a frenzy of gambling addiction as her company reported a year-on-year increase in revenues and profits of 25% and 31% respectively.

What did that matter to the Clan who had picked up a billion dollars in treasure from the *Espiritu Santo*, I asked himself, not a hoot considering Pat Kennedy was worth not far off 20 billion, that's four times Denise Coates' worth.

The problem lay in how the public perceived the image of the billionaire. Pat Kennedy was a banker, that was respectable for most people, John Francis was an intellectual, that was good, Sergei was an oligarch, that was not good, Liam was a young man on the way up, that was good, I was a writer that was good, but running a gambling empire was bad, bad, though Coates business model was in reality no different to many other internet successes. But with mathematical, statistical data and algorithms making money on betting was easy, in other words they fleeced the poor, I mean the poor were the ones who gambled, except for the Queen.

It was reminiscent of street corner spivs in the UK's collective memory, which could have been more colourful, if Coates continued her family high street betting shop business and hadn't been seen raking in huge gains at the expense of the ignorant, unwashed, poorer classes, hooked on internet.

In other words she was almost in the same league as pornographers, money launderers and drug dealers, though the former seemed to be gaining a fine veneer of fashionable respectability as the use of 'recreational' cocaine spread through society.

## CHAPTER 73

### JANUARY

It was Sunday morning and with John and Ekaterina we stopped at a pavement table of a café on a street corner of Marché d'Aligre, not far from the Bastille. It was January, damp but not too cold, we ordered hot chocolate and croissants, a typical mid-morning Parisian snack.

Liam and Camille were still somewhere in the 19th century covered market shopping for lunch. They had recently moved to an apartment on rue Antoine Vollon, more in keeping with Camille's ideas, to which Liam was quickly adapting, bobo, as the French say. The apartment they're been renting near Pat's place off the Champs-Élysées was too nouveau riche, fine for Middle Easterners and the like, but not for Bono's like the young recently married couple.

We were talking about art and the museum to house what was now known as the Treasure of the *Espiritu Santo*, somehow the conversation turned to Len Blavatnik, who Ekaterina studiously avoided. Blavatnik had made billions as a Kremlin insider and was now distributing it like money was going out of fashion to universities and institutions in the US and UK, investing in respectability, and connections when you think of the million contributed to Donald Trump's inauguration committee.

Blavatnik was not good press, a whistle blower in the form of Charles Davidson of the Hudson Institute's Kleptocracy Initiative, had quit his role at the head of the initiative after Hudson had accepted a 50,000 dollar from Blavatnik for a table at its annual gala.

Davidson had informed the press the Russian kleptocracy had entered the donor pool of the Hudson Institute, as

Blavatnik was precisely what the Kleptocracy Initiative was fighting against, the influence of Putin's oligarchs on America's political system and institutions.

It was part of the Blavatnik Family Foundation's strategy which had already pledged a huge 200 million dollars to the Harvard Medical School, creating the Blavatnik Institute and Blavatnik Harvard Life Lab.

Blavatnik's links to oligarchs including Oleg Deripaska and Viktor Vekselberg, another oligarch both targeted by US sanctions, raised many questions, as did his connections with Kremlin-linked businessmen, Dmitri Pyatkin, Aleksandr Fraiman and Igor Annensky.

Which all pointed to his being a friend of the Kremlin, a figure whose immense fortune was built on his political connections to a corrupt inner circle of kleptocratic oligarchs.

Such gifts bear a price and it was why we members of the Clan avoided gifting a practice that inevitably led to questions. Accusations of money laundering through charities and honourable foundations only brought the honour of these institutions into doubt.

Blavatnik, who also held UK citizenship was one of the largest donors in the history of the London Tate for the new extension to its gallery of the left bank of the Thames.

Blavatnik's wealth was estimated at 20 billion dollars, making him the UK's richest man. His donations running into many tens of millions had undeniably help the Tate, making it difficult to raise moralising questions, money without which 6 million visitors could not have viewed the collections on show.

Which led the Tate's former director, Nicholas Serota, to declare, "The generosity of this gift is almost unprecedented in Tate's history."

Blavatnik was a neighbour of Sergei, after the prodigious philanthropist bought a palatial property in Kensington Park Gardens, one of London's most prestigious addresses, splashing out 50 million dollars.

Evidently we didn't want to be tarred for dodging taxes, hiding behind foundations and building museums, it would be

## The Cargo Club

wise of us to keep a very low profile and avoid being seen in extravagant restaurants and hotels, one of the reasons Liam had moved to his more discreet address.

It wasn't a bad thing that Pat was out of view, exploring the jungles of Central America in search of his Lost City.

## CHAPTER 74

### A LEADER EMERGES

Wherever we went George Pyke was not far behind, it was not a question of paranoia, but where there was money there was crime and the Caribbean was infested with crime—white collar, organised crime, unorganized crime, drug related crime and wanton crime.

The danger came as Venezuela lurched towards total collapse following Maduro's disputed re-election and new international sanctions imposed on Caracas.

As the crisis intensified the dangers of piracy off the Caribbean coast of Venezuela jumped dramatically, especially targeting foreign yachts anchored off isolated coasts, as we were, even boats as large as the *Sundaland II* could be attacked by gangs of dangerous armed criminals aboard fishing boats.

The situation in Venezuela had degenerated to the point that desperate fishermen had turned to smuggling, drug trafficking and robbery. Even members of the coastguard were tempted to try the luck with extortion, targeting unsuspecting yachts and commercial vessels sailing too close to the Venezuelan coast.

Robert Guiglion and his crew were not new to this kind of threat and were trained in the use of firearms. Back in their Southeast Asian home waters, certain areas were infested with pirates, some of whom targeted even the largest vessels, including oil tankers and container ships.

George provided four Spanish speaking professional guards trained in maritime security and armed with the kinds of weapons necessary to dissuade most kinds of criminals, and always very visible.

The recovery of the treasure coincided with the appearance

of the *Antioquia*, an *Almirante Padilla* class light frigate of the Colombian Navy, a reassuring sight, as the dangers were very real, south of Trinidad and Tobago, off the Venezuelan coast, a pirate attack had left at least a dozen dead and in another attack the captain of a fishing vessel was shot dead.

Anna and I had just arrived to wind up the expedition with some further dives for the archaeological programme, when Tom Barton called to tell us of the dramatic events in Caracas and rumours of violence with the possibility of subversive acts to divert attention from what appeared to be a popular uprising. To avoid any risk we headed for Barranquilla and jumped on a flight to Miami. There we could catch up on Anna's reports and follow events on TV from our hotel on Miami Beach whilst enjoying an unexpected side moment with just the two of us together.

Just a few hours after Nicolas Maduro was sworn in for a second term as Venezuela's president, the sounds of banging pots were heard in Caracas with cries of 'Maduro assassin!' and 'Free Venezuela!'

Suddenly it seemed like Caraquenos had woken up, their mood had shifted as inflation approached an astronomical 10 million percent with the exodus of Venezuelans reaching three million scattered across neighbouring countries.

Then, almost from nowhere a new political figure emerged, Juan Guaido, who declared at a rally following Maduro's inauguration he was ready to assume the presidency himself in the place of the 'usurper'.

His declaration came soon after he was released by the secret police after being arrested by masked men who intercepted the white van that was carrying him to a political meeting outside Caracas. The brutal arrest was filmed and shown on television across all of South America.

On January 5, a few days before the inauguration ceremony, the 35-year-old Guaido had been nominated President of the country's National Assembly, controlled by the opposition, but which had been stripped of all powers by Maduro.

Guaido's declaration offered Venezuela an alternative, with

his promise to restore constitutional order as he spoke of the misery that afflicted his country trapped a 'dark but transitional moment'.

'We're entering the most dangerous stage of our history,' Guaido told his compatriots. 'We will oust Maduro and his gang from power.'

Brazil, announced it recognized Guaido as president. Canada joined with the Lima Group, and called the Maduro regime a 'fully entrenched dictatorship'.

Juan Guaido, a member of the Popular Will opposition party, said he would only take over, as president, with support of the armed forces and called for protests January 23, the anniversary of the fall of the military dictatorship in 1958.

'It should be the people of Venezuela, the armed forces, and the international community that give us a clear mandate to assume the presidency,' he declared, in accordance with Venezuela's constitution which stated a presidential vacancy could be filled by the head of the legislature—*asumir las competencias para conformación de un gobierno de transición*.

'Guaido, I already got your cell ready, with your uniform,' Iris Varela, Minister of Prisons, tweeted. Which did not prevent the National Assembly from formally launching the constitutional process to remove Maduro, declaring his presidency illegitimate, raising the spectre of civil war and regional destabilisation.

A few days later as the annual knees-up got underway in Davos tens maybe hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans poured into the streets of Caracas to protest against Maduro on the anniversary of the 1958 uprising that overthrew the military dictatorship.

'Freedom, freedom!' they cried, a slogan that seemed familiar to Pat.

Maduro had just been sworn into office for a second term at the same moment the country's inflation was forecast to reach 10 million percent in 2019.

After 20 years of Chavez and his successor Maduro, the Venezuelan economy had collapsed, but now hope had arrived,

in the form of Juan Guaido, a 35-year-old engineer, just elected as President of Venezuela's National Assembly, who could look to the support of Washington after Mike Pence, the US Vice President, issued a video message to Venezuelans promising, 'We will stay with you until democracy is restored and you reclaim your birthright of libertad.'

Juan Guaido seemed to have heard his words as he led an immense crowd in the street, a woman stumbled and fell, in a Jesus-like gesture he helped her up, touched her cheek, then acclaimed by the crowd continued through the throng towards his destiny shortly declaring himself interim president of his beleaguered country, a saviour ready to sacrifice himself in his bid to force Maduro from power.

Pat Kennedy was not at Davos. It was the first time he had missed Davis in ten years. He was back in Central America with Ken Hisakawa supposedly running after lost civilisations. My thoughts were different, he was running, but away from something.

Pat had never given much thought to what those who worked for him thought about, or anybody else for that matter. Ecology was where the birds lived, the cows in the field in Ireland. Jungles and deserts were adventure playgrounds.

He saw no injustice in his vast wealth, in fact he had never stopped to consider such ideas.

The news from Davis was unsettling for the rich, a backlash or something like that was troubling them. Since the financial crisis of 2008, they had all gotten richer, much richer, bailed out by the taxpayer, who in doing so had gotten poorer.

For the first time Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's newly inaugurated president was in Davos. Bolsonaro, who to the great joy of many, had some months earlier been declared Brazil's next president, which for certain was a tragedy in the making, though for Tom Barton it was an opportunity, a bulwark against Venezuela and the catastrophic policies of Chavez and his successor Maduro, even though Brazil's new president was accused by the leftist opposition of being a far-right, pro-gun, pro-torture populist.

The former paratrooper pledged to crush corruption and crime won by a comfortable margin supported by the country's middle classes and those who suffered from crime.

Years of socialist government had not resolved any of Brazil's problems, which had in fact grown worse as favelas sprawled out from large cities in every direction. The cause like in so many developing nations was rampant demographic growth and corruption, which many in Brazil blamed on the Workers' party, until the impeachment of its president Dilma Rousseff.

At the same time hundreds Venezuelan migrants, fleeing the political and economic disaster that had taken hold of their homeland, crossed the border into Brazil every day. They arrived in Boa Vista, the capital of north-western Roraima state, in one of the many camps for migrants opened in the city. Men, women and children seeking shelter from the ravages of Maduro's bankrupt socialist regime.

As the crisis deepened in Venezuela, Donald Trump issued a sever and personal warning to Nicolas Maduro, 'You will find no safe harbour, no easy exit and no way out. You will lose everything,' he said in a speech in at Florida International University in Miami, before large a crowd waving American and Venezuelan flags. 'We seek a peaceful transition of power, but all options are open.'

All that was far from the snow-capped the Swiss Alps, there in Davos an unusual odour penetrated the corridors of the outrageously priced hotels and chalets, that of fear, as the world order they had become used to seemed to be crumbling.

The hitherto, silent, unwashed, masses, who Pat had often observed in Central America, India, the Philippines, Russia and China—from a distance, like a visit to the zoo—were making threatening noises,

He had prayed for Russia and China when he was young, an abstract gesture for a young lad in Limerick City, who at the time had never even travelled to Dublin. The Russians and Chinese could have been Martians.

The influence of the existing world order seemed to be

crumbling faster than the price of prime property in London's central districts, as Brexit, Yellow Vests, rightist governments in Italy, Hungary and Poland, and to top it all Trump in the Whitehouse and a belligerent ex-KGB man in control of the Kremlin led the march.

What Pat feared most was a trade war between the US and China, which was bad enough, but if it spilled over into the rest of the world, coupled with populist movements, could provide the ingredients for a long period of economic instability.

Many thought the rich only had themselves to blame, after all it was they who had been instrumental in creating discontent, telling the masses austerity was necessary whilst they stuffed their own pockets, at the expenses of the workers and middle classes who had seen their situation progressively degraded.

They had lobbied and funded politicians into offering them tax breaks and allowing them to vote themselves opulent remuneration packages and their friends' huge dividends.

Oxfam reported one single minibus could hold the richest individuals on the planet, all 26 of them, whose collective wealth equalled that of half the planet's population, and grew by an obscene 2.5 billion dollars every day.

Was I part of the rich? Yes, so was every member of the Clan, but it was the role of those who governed us to control the machine that distributed wealth.

The yawning gap between the very rich and the rest of us did not happen overnight. I am witness to that, the winner take all syndrome. Where a few cinema stars, celebrities, footballers, tennismen, artists, writers, businessmen and a narrow privileged class that included certain of our politicians and top dogs in the administration, walked off with all the rewards.

Political leaders of all shades offered the rich, the tech giants Amazon, Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Facebook and others, a red carpet and allowed them to transfer the profits to tax havens, including the Caribbean islands, many of which were British controlled.

Little wonder popular anger overflowed, taking political and

financial elites by surprise, and when they announced their contributions to build university departments, museums and art collections, or rebuild Notre Dame, was to their way to buy a penance, or immortalise their names, or simply as tax write-offs.

To top it, expressing his exasperation with British leaders, who seemed incapable of taking a timely decision, Donald Tusk, speaking at a joint news conference with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, said, 'I've been wondering what that special place in hell looks like, for those who promoted Brexit, without even a sketch of a plan how to carry it out safely.'

## CHAPTER 75

### A STRANGE FIND

As soon as the danger seemed to fade, we headed back to Puerto Lopez as the expedition started winding up its work. With most of the treasure recovered and what with the crisis in Venezuela it was better we take call it a day, take time out to study the huge amount of data we had accumulated, turning our attention to other tasks, archaeology for Anna and writing for myself.

It was at that point on one of the last dives a metal chest was hauled on board. It was not the first, the others had contained jewellery and coins, probably the personal effects of the passengers.

This one was somewhat larger and heavier. We gathered around and carefully open the coral encrust box. To our surprise it contained statuary and carved objects in stone, surrounded by sand and dulled by 400 years under the sea.

A little disappointed the diving team drifted off as Anna examined the objects more closely. 'Jade,' she announced, picking a heavy piece up in both hands, a head about 15 centimetres in diameter, the others were masques and carved objects.

Carefully she brushed away the sand then announced the objects as Mayan, some were in green jade others were multicoloured made up of different kinds of stone.

'We'll need an expert, but I'd say these didn't come from Colombia, probably from the Maya region to the north, Guatemala or Mexico. Perhaps a passenger curious about the Indians.'

'Are they worth anything?'

'Always thinking about money Pat,' she said to me.

'No, I'm just wondering about their archaeological value.'

Pat Kennedy appeared.

'Anything interesting?'

'Some pre-Columbian artefacts.'

He looked closer. 'Mayan,' he announced.

Anna nodded approvingly. 'You're an expert Pat.'

'Well I've seen a lot of this stuff. I could ask Ken.'

'Good idea.'

'Can I take a couple of pieces?'

'Theoretically were not supposed to, but why not if you promise to bring it back,' she replied mischievously.

'I promise,' said Pat laughing.

'I'll clean it up.'



That evening Pat photographed a head and a small mask and mailed them to Ken and then to René Viel in Honduras.

The next day he received a reply from Viel, who confirmed it was Mayan, it resembled Kinich Ahau, the sun god, a Mayan divinity, found in a tomb at Altun Ha near Belize City in 1968. The jade head was discovered by a Canadian, Dr. David Pendergast of the Royal Ontario Museum, together with forty other carvings. It was one of the largest Mayan jade carvings ever found, dating from around 600AD, a unique piece for its size, especially as the Maya had no metal tools, meaning it was carved from a single block by stone tools, using sand as abrasive to finish and polish it.

Viel asked Pat to meet him in Guatemala City with the head so that he could examine it before any pronouncements were made. Pat immediately informed Ken and agreed we visit Viel in Guatemala so that we could authenticate the carvings.



Pat Kennedy first met René Viel in China, at a conference organised by the Institute of Archaeology in Beijing, on the Maya World, where papers had been presented to a conference on a project to explore and restore a temple at Copan. The two men hit it off almost immediately, both loquacious extroverts, both sharing a passion for the the world around them.

Professor Viel had invited Pat to Guatemala where he promised to organise a series of visits to archaeological sites where Chinese, Japanese and American archaeologists were currently working on different restoration projects. Pat agreed with a hint that his bank would finance one of the digs as part of its support for scientific and educational programmes, but until we turned up the unexpected artefacts the opportunity had not arisen.

We flew into Guatemala City, accompanied by Ken Hisakawa, and George Pyke—ostensibly to take care of security considering Guatemala was high on the list of dangerous countries. George was a long time confidant of Pat's, his firm managed all aspects of the banks security for

more than a decade, initially close protection of the founding members of the Clan, then branching out into all aspects of banking security, Pat and Liam assisting him in the acquisition of specialised IT firms and start-ups. I suppose George could have delegated any one of his men to accompany us, but he wanted to see for himself the kind of dangers Pat was getting into as-well-as enjoying a well earned break.

Pat's his goal was complicated, as usual, his way of thinking was difficult to fathom at times, he could be as inscrutable as the Chinese, it was a paradox as at other times he could be read as easily as an open book.

On this occasion he had two things in mind, one was business—to a somewhat lesser degree, but his real goal was to explore the history of the Mayan Empire, the civilisation that had created the Lost City of the Monkey God.

The general idea was to visit the key Maya sites and a couple of ongoing digs to get an idea of what we could expect in Honduras.

I suppose George could have delegated any one of his men to accompany us, not only to see for himself the kind of dangers Pat was getting into, but because he himself, now at the head of a prosperous business which depended to a great extent on the bank's patronage, was obligated to look after his number one investor.

Pat had a good knowledge of the history of Central America and the Caribbean, but it was piecemeal and Ken Hisakawa had decided to take matters into hand encouraging Pat to take up the invitation to Guatemala, where the Mayas, one of the Americas' most brilliant civilisations, had been born and flowered long before the arrival of the Conquistadores, who not only proceeded to destroy it but also its history.

Fortunately for the Guatemalans—the sons and daughters of the Mayas, the vestiges of the civilisations where everywhere from the Pacific to the Caribbean in the form of the vast cities carved out of stone that were witness to their achievements. Their literature had been destroyed by the fanatical Spanish Friar Diego de Landa Calderon, who after burning their

written treasures in an *auto da fé*, was struck by guilt and proceeded to write a history of the Mayas, regretfully flawed by his lack of knowledge of their language and culture, but nevertheless written when many of their social and administrative traditions were still visible.

Pat's insistence that I accompany them as chronicler, was unnecessary, I was a very willing participant, to record the story in the continuation of our current Latin American adventure, which would soon be approaching the end of its initial phase, and the idea to pursue it at some future date with an expedition to the Lost City. I brought Anna along with the excuse we could use her knowledge of Central American, as an historian and translator, all of which was true, and quickly proved her value by taking over the planning of our programme with Willy Posadas, who would be our guide, charming and highly competent according to Pat's Panamanian lawyer, who had recommended him.

We were met at the airport by Willy accompanied by Maria Gutierrez an archaeologist from the National Museum who worked with René Viel. It was early evening and a small bus was waiting to take us directly to Antigua, the first capital established by the Spanish in Guatemala, about 50 kilometres distance west of Guatemala City, which Maria told us would give an overview on the colonial empire. There, Willy had booked us into a small hotel, Los Pasos where we arrived looking like one of those small tour groups, which is precisely what we were.

Luckily we had avoided the regular flights into Guatemala by flying in on Pat's jet. Air travel had become infernal even for those travelling in business and first. The crowds, the queues and delays. Passport, security, customs and sanitary controls. And that was without the regular class peplum, businessmen, most of whom were lower to middling ranks, the tourist masses from retirees to backpackers, travelling masses, tourists, the poor underdeveloped and immigrant workers, immigrants, asylum seekers, all with the shoes and belts in their hands subject to humiliating security searches like queuing at a sheep

dip.

Roads were little better wherever you went the traffic was snarled up with accidents and road rage ever present, especially when we were seen as plutocrats with our top end of the market transport.

It was why the next morning we visited the small city on foot, which had a remarkable number of churches and religious edifices. I couldn't help noticing that Pat, being an occasionally lapsed Catholic, paid particular attention to Maria, I suppose a streak of guilt lingered somewhere in his soul.

Antigua was the capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala, founded on the site of a Kakchikel-Maya city in 1524, when it became the capitaneria of the new Spanish colony, which included a large part of Central America including adjoining parts of Mexico.

Pedro de Alvarado y Contreras arrived overland with a force of 180 cavalry, 300 infantry, crossbows, muskets, 4 cannons, with powder and ammunition and gunpowder, reinforced by thousands Mexican foot soldiers, and proceeded to subjugate the Mayan lands of what is today Guatemala.

The Kaqchikel people's main city, Iximche, was, in July 1524, declared the first capital of Guatemala, Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala. It lay under the shadow of the two vast and active volcanoes which were to wreak successive disasters on the new capital, forcing the Spaniards to relocate it on two occasions after their all their efforts were destroyed.

Alvarado then brought all of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador under the control of Spain for centuries to come, making Guatemala a vice-royalty, one of the three or four vice-royalties of the Spanish Empire, that lasted over 300 years thanks in part to the help of the all pervading dominance of the Christian religion, witnessed by the vast Convent and Temple of San Domingo in Antigua, still visible in the fervency of Guatemalans today.

Our visit to Antigua was a quick overview, according to Maria, not of Mayan history, but that of the conquest and the Christianisation of the Mayas. It seemed not much gold or

silver was discovered by the Spanish, but there was cochineal, a dye extracted from insects, which became the main export from Guatemala along with cacao, the drink of the Mayan gods.

I knew nothing about cochineal, but it appeared to have been introduced to Mexico 1200 years ago, from Peru. It was produced from insects collected from cactus, the prickly pear, and used a natural red colouring in our food and make-up. The insects were ground-up to produce a deep red ink that was used for food, amongst other things to colour Starbucks' Strawberry Frappuccino, candy, grapefruit juice. and lipstick.

In Mexico, the Aztec ruler, Moctezuma levied an annual tribute of cochineal dye on dependent states in the 15th century and cochineal became Mexico's second most valuable export after silver in the colonial period.

In medieval times red clothes were an important status symbol, with the result that red dyes commanded high price. Cochineal was introduced from Mexico by the Spanish expedition to Mexico in 1518, producing a deeper and longer lasting red than madder and its source was kept a secret for nearly 200 years.

At the end of the afternoon we flew by helicopter from Antigua to Lake Atitlan, half an hour's flight over the Altiplano with an incredible view of the three extinct volcanoes that abutted the lake where we overnighted in the Atitlan Hotel, a splendid lakeside establishment.

There, more for tourism and to admire the lake, we took a powerful speedboat to visit the picturesque towns along the lake shore.

The first European sailing ship than sank in the waters of the New World was the Santa Maria, the flagship of Christopher Columbus, which sank on Christmas day off the coast of Haiti. It was the first of hundreds that were to be splintered on rocks, foundered in hurricanes, or sunk by pirates and enemy fire, gone without trace below the waves of the Caribbean.

Anna had catalogued the wrecks of 800 shipwrecks off the coast of Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Panama, Costa Rica, the

Dominican Republic, Haiti, Bermuda and Florida.

The objective of her research was to identify the sites for naval, historical and academic reasons and fill the empty spaces left by the disappearance of the ships and their cargoes.



It seemed the vast majority of ships were lost in hurricanes and tropical storms with a small fraction on reefs and an even smaller part due enemy action and less than 1% to pirates.

So much for Black Spot and *Treasure Island*.

Many of the wrecks were associated with the trade fairs at Portobelo in Panama that attracted a large number of ships from Spain and other countries. Amongst those from Spain certain carried religious works of art to decorate church's and monasteries, as the still abundant statues and religious objects bear witness, institutions that formed the pillars of authority that dominated, and still do influence, the populations of the New World.

We continued their journey to Lake Atitlan which lay on the same ring of fire as Indonesia. In all Guatemala had 15 active volcanoes, three of which surrounded the lake. Volcan Atitlan was the only one active in recent history, it represented a source of powerful symbolism not only for the Maya's but also their successors.

Anna and Ken got along great together, both were scholars and spoke Spanish, as for Pat he was enjoying his new

discoveries like myself though less so George. He was very professional about the whole trip, after all it was his responsibility to look after us in a country and region that had a reputation for violence and he didn't want Pat wandering off by himself.

Our guide Maria was an attractive but rather intellectual meztizo, she was no run of the mill guide, she was a specialist in Mayan civilisation, also as a woman kept Anna company, even though Anna was used to living in a man's world, though women like Tatiana Proskouriakoff and Linda Schele had made outstanding contributions to the understanding of Mayan history.

I suppose we looked like many of the small tour groups that we crossed on the cobbled streets of the old colonial city, which had become a World Heritage Site and was still undergoing restoration after centuries of wear, neglect and damage by the frequent earthquakes that struck the region often with devastating effect.

Antoine de St Exupéry, the French aviator, was intimately linked to Central America. He was married to a San Salvadorian, Consuelo Suncin, and in 1938, he made headlines when his plane crashed 16 kilometres from Guatemala City after running out of fuel. During the three months he spent in Antigua recovering from his injuries, he wrote *Le Petit Prince* inspired by the three volcanoes that overlooked the lake.

Aldous Huxely wrote in his 1934 book *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, 'Lake Como, it seems to me, touches on the limit of Permissible picturesque, but Atitlan is Como with additional embellishments of several immense volcanoes. It really is too much of a good thing.'

I can't pass without mentioning Miguel Angel Asturias, Guatemala's own literary giant, winner of the Nobel Prize, whose novel *El Señor Presidente* was a platform against social injustice and the dictatorship of his country under Manuel José Estrada Cabrera who ruled over a period of 22 years at the beginning of the 20th century. That injustice continues, more to do with the country's exploding population and the

dictatorship of the Catholic Church than politics.

George informed us of the action we should during the night in the event of an earthquakes, describing what he called the triangle of life, that is crouched in a foetal position close to the bed, providing us with some protection from falling debris. It was of course alarming, but it made our adventure more exciting.

I wandered off to the market Square in Solino, a small town on the other side of Lake Atitlan, it was like so many others with what was to us Northern Europeans so exotic, but differentiated from all others towns by the volcanoes, huge, overshadowing every other feature of the lake and it's surroundings.

Olivier de la Salle showed particular interest in the story of the conquest, his family with its long line going back eight or more centuries had a sense of history, which was demonstrated by its survival. Saved in extremis by a stroke of fate, a sort of trust you could call it, put by for a rainy day by his grandfather Eduard de la Salle, in the form of the now famous Sommières Collection.

The Collection projected Olivier de la Salle back into the higher ranks of France's surviving aristocracy, not that he had ever left it. In his case the family would have been saved by the suitable marriage of his daughter, Camille, to one of the better off descendants of the noble families of the Ancien Régime, those who had succeed in business, the army, the media, or in politics.

More than two centuries after the Revolution, when many nobles lost their heads to the guillotine, they were still there. Proud of their roots, their values and their way of life, one foot in the past, but another solidly rooted in the realities of the third millennium. That was not to be, instead, Camille, the daughter of Monsieur le Comte, had married a commoner, a very rich one who had introduced Olivier de la Salle into another world, that of new wealth, vast new wealth, the wealth of our Clan.

We were pleased to have Olly amongst us, who gave us our

letters of noblesse and introduced us in turn to another world, his.

Pat and Olly had become bosom buddies, and although they were separated by their origins, Sir Patrick Kennedy and Comte Olivier de la Salle made a perfect pair, each of them compensating for what the other was missing.

Each parading his title, one real, the other bestowed via the Queen's honours lists. One with real wealth, the other with the tattered remains of wealth, though now saved by the greatest of stroke of fortune.

But hadn't it always been like that?

Many of the conquistadors were penniless hidalgos who had built, or rebuilt, their fortunes by the sword in the New World. In Guatemala the Spanish discovered a rich and agreeable land, which was theirs for the taking, given their military and technological superiority, where the people, once subjugated, were docile and willing workers who knew their land.

Pat was not just a tourist, he was also on one of his fact finding missions, autopsy he told me, a subtle survey of the business opportunities related to expanding his Caribbean business across all of Central America, where the population was growing at an exponential pace, in rich lands, where the once ubiquitous socialist dictatorships were no longer fashionable.

There was clear evidence of growing prosperity as cornucopia overflowed and spread its benefits into the region.

Nevertheless, violence reigned in the old centre of Guatemala City, where traffickers from different Cartels controlled the flow of narcotics from Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia, countries where coca was cultivated with its derivatives transiting Central America on its way north to the US.

Guatemala City with its three million inhabitants, was the focal point of countless thousands of desperately poor peasants that flowed in from the Altiplano in search of work each year.

That morning our plan was to the National museum in the

John Francis Kinsella

centre of Guatemala City, or 'Guate' as Willy called it, but it seemed Pat Kennedy had other ideas.

## CHAPTER 76

### ARCHAEOLOGISTS

One of the archaeologists who contributed to breaking the code of the Mayan language was Tatianaovna Proskouriakoff, who was born at the beginning of 1909, in czarist Russia, at Tomsk in Siberia, so far from the steaming jungles of Honduras that it is difficult to image how by the strangest of destinies she was to become one of the key figures in the study of Mayan history.

She went to school at the time when Sergei Shchoukin was discovering modern art in Paris and was starting his remarkable collection of works by Picasso, Matisse and Gauguin.

Then with the start of the Great War everything changed, her father was commissioned to oversee the production of armaments in the US bought by the czarist government and the family left for New York as their country was seized by the chaos following a series of ignoble defeats on the Russia army inflicted by Germany.

They arrived in New York in early 1916 from where they moved to Ohio. Then, in 1917, events that were to lead to the October Revolution commenced first was the abdication of the Czar, the fall of the Kerenski government and the finally with Bolsheviks seizure of power, there was no question of the family returning to Russia. They moved to Philadelphia.

In 1924, the Proskouriakoffs became US citizens, soon after Tania was enrolled at Pennsylvania State College to study architecture, where she graduated in 1930, a bad time to start a career just after the Crash of 29 and the onset of the Great Depression.

During the early 1930s, Tania volunteered for drafting work

at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, which was exhibited and remarked by Linton Satterthwaite who proposed she undertake the work of drawing the materials collected on the Piedras Negras expeditions along the Usumacinta River on the border between Mexico and Guatemala.

In 1930, aerial photographs from Charles Lindbergh's flight over the Maya region had shown hitherto unmapped archaeological sites in the jungles. As a result the museum sent a team, including Alden Mason, curator of the museum's American Section, to further explorer the sites.



Then, in 1931, Mason chose the site of Piedras Negras for the museum's first major Maya project. Subsequently, it was the glyphs on these sculptures that led to Tania Proskouriakoff deciphering the texts. Mason chose Satterthwaite as his archaeological assistant, launching him on a lifelong career in the field of Mayan archaeological studies and in 1936, Satterthwaite proposed Tania join the Piedras Negras project to carry out the field work involved in drawing plans of the site's architecture, which he described in a letter written to Sylvanus G. Morley:

The party will consist of Peggy and myself, Frank Cresson ... and in addition, Miss Tatiana Proskouriakoff, the graduate architect and artist who has been helping as a volunteer for about a year. She is the

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girl who drew the shell inscription so beautifully for me. While her main job will be making plans of buildings, if there is any time to spare I may start her on a job which has been in the back of my mind a good while. That is, I think all Piedras Negras sculpture should be carefully drawn to scale.

It was interesting that two Russians had played a role in the research into the archaeological story of the Mayas. First was Tatiana, 'Duchess' to her family and 'Tania' to her friends. The second was Yuriy Valentinovich Knorozov a Soviet linguist who found the key for the decipherment of the Maya script.

Knorozov's story is blurred by the dramatic anecdote that he had saved an incredibly rare Maya Codex in the last days of WWII during the fall of Berlin, when he pulled it from the flames about to consume the National Library where it was preserved amongst hundreds of thousands of other works.

The truth was more prosaic, revealed to the Mayanist epigrapher Harri Kettunen, shortly before he died in 1999:

'Unfortunately it was a misunderstanding: I told the story [about finding the books in the library in Berlin] to my colleague Michael Coe, but he didn't get it right. There simply wasn't any fire in the library. And the books that were in the library, were in boxes to be sent somewhere else. The fascist command had packed them, and since they didn't have time to move them anywhere, they were simply taken to Moscow. I didn't see any fire there.'

Further the 'Codex' was not a codex, but a rare edition of a book containing reproductions of the three Maya codices which were then known: the Dresden, Madrid and Paris codices.

As for National Library, it was in fact the Preußische Staatsbibliothek, the then largest scientific library in Germany. During the war some 350,000 volumes destroyed and a further 300,000 disappeared, more precisely ending up in Soviet and Polish collections, and in particular at the Russian State Library in Moscow, which I mentioned in my book *The Collection*.

Our little expedition, if it could be called that, with Pat's jet,

helicopters, SUVs, river cruisers and *Las Indias*, seemed ridiculous compared to Tatiana's epic voyage to Piedras Negras, which was in fact normal in those now distant days of the 1930s. She sailed from New Orleans to Progreso in the Yucatan and then took a train to Campeche, where she boarded a schooner to Ciudad del Carmen, from where she made the last 300 kilometres by riverboat to Monte Cristo and on mules to Palenque, before finally setting up camp at Piedras Negra.

That was the start of a new career where her knowledge of architecture could be put to use in a totally different field to that she had imagined as a student, archaeology, which became an all consuming passion for the rest of her life.

I watched Juan Guaido direct on TV in our hotel in Guatemala City as he made his appeal to the Venezuelan Army to abandon the Maduro regime and come over to his cause, to liberate his country from the bankrupt old style socialist regime. He was talking in Ecuador just before he left to return to Caracas for the start of the Carnival, where mass demonstrations were expected during the holiday.

## CHAPTER 77

### COPAN

Pat announced he would be giving the archaeological museum a miss and took off, business he said, leaving us in the care of George Pyke and Maria Gutierrez. The museum was small and disappointing and we headed for an early lunch after George informed us Pat would join us that evening in Copan, travelling by helicopter, much faster and less tiring.

It was no problem for us as we didn't want to miss seeing more of the country and with nothing further to do we left Guatemala City behind, travelling in a large and comfortable people carrier, in the direction of Copan about 240 kilometres to the north.

At first the road, known as the Transatlantic, was good apart from the inevitable works as it wound its way twisting and turning across a dry mountainous region of no particular interest, it recalled certain arid regions of Spain or Mexico, with a fairly constant flow of heavy goods vehicles to and from Puerto Barrios, Guatemala's Caribbean port to the north.

Willy spoke to us the days of the United Fruit Company when it controlled plantations, railways, ports and pulled the political strings, ensuring the take over by dictators who obeyed Washington and above all the Company. Those days were long gone, or were they? Delmonte was still the biggest producer of bananas in Guatemala, with its vast plantations and it was not alone.

After a long period of strife and civil war, democracy now reigned. Revolution and communism had ceded their place to the spread of Cornucopian consumption and material values, abandoning the futility of revolution and guerilla warfare, when the people were inevitably caught between the hammer

and the anvil.

A couple of hours later we turned off the Transatlantic in the direction of Copan, the mountains giving way to a broad flat greener valley and the temperature rose several degrees.

Copan, situated across the border in Honduras, a country where there were the indigenous population, that is the descendants of the Mayas, was lower than Guatemala, it was also was the last known city to the south of the territory occupied by the Mayan civilisation, unless that is Pat's idea of a Lost City proved to be true, and that city if it had existed was Mayan.



Night was falling when we arrived at the border, El Florido. Willy took care of the formalities and we were soon on the way to our hotel in Copan, the Posada Real, two kilometres from the ruins.

Earlier that afternoon Pat had arrived by helicopter and had been met by René Viel at the small airport at the entry to Copan. Pat's friend was not only an archaeologist he was also director of the Rio Amarillo Archaeological Park at the Copan Ruins.

Like a couple of old pals they grabbed each others hands, hugging, back slapping and exchanging goodhearted greetings.

With Pat's approval they drove directly to the site where he visited the museum as a foretaste of the next day's tour of the ruins with his friends, then headed for the hotel.

'So my friend where are you hiding the head?' asked René

Viel.

'I haven't brought it with me.'

Viel's face fell, he had been expecting to see the jade artefacts recovered from the *Espíritu Santo*.

'Don't worrying you'll see it tomorrow evening.'

'Evening?'

'Yes, I hope you'll be free. I'm planning a little trip for you.'

Viel frowned.

'A trip to Livingston.'

'Yes, Rio Dulce, then up the river to Livingston where my boat will be waiting for us.'

'Boat?'

Viel had no idea what kind of a boat Pat was talking about.

'*Las Indias*. We couldn't officially take the objects out of Colombia, so I got around it by taking them to Cartagena via Guatemala,' Pat explained highly amused by the idea.

Viel nodded in agreement, even if he did not fully understand Pat's arrangements.

By the time they arrived at the hotel we were already checked-in and half an hour later we join the two for drinks and diner. René Viel, one of the world's greatest experts in the field had spent most of his life studying the Mayas and teaching archaeology.

We were up early the next mornings, an agreeable time of day in those small tropical backwaters, when the heat of the day was still far off, when the chatter of birds in the trees and flowering bushes was omnipresent as daily life slowly got under way, where the urgency of big cities and their commuter traffic was totally absent. It was little wonder that men like René Viel chose the life they did.

René fell under Anna's charm and delighted to give us a conducted tour starting with the museum where he recounted his oft told story filled with his nuggets of rich knowledge interspersed with amusing anecdotes.

He got along fine with Pat and Ken. Having spent 20 years teaching archaeology at the University of Brisbane in Australia, he not only spoke perfect English, with a French-Australian

twang, but was also fluent in Spanish after long years of research at Copan and other Central American sites.

After visiting the site and its splendid museum—where many of the stele, statues and carving had been placed for protection from the elements, we left for lunch in Copan during which time I had the opportunity to speak with him alone and question him on the Lost City.

He was adamant, there was no city, just some villages and other minor vestiges of what he called the Selin Culture. I decided not pursue the subject which in any case was bone of contention between different archaeologists.

René had worked with Linda Schele one of the renowned specialists in decipherment of the Mayan script, which he had now got down to a fine art. But when pressed for his, or others opinions, on specific subjects, he shrugged off my questions wryly telling me archaeology was 10% science, 40% guesswork, and 50% fantasy.

He like certain other archaeologists believed that the collapse of ancient Copan's society was so sudden, that the Mayas left unfinished buildings and abandoned their tools.

After the visit, avoiding a long roundabout road trip, we were ferried by helicopter to Rio Dulce, where a Berada motor yacht was waiting to take us to Livingstone. The rather sedate but powerful three deck sea going cruiser, owned by a wealthy Brazilian who chartered the boat out during his absences, had at top speed of 20 knots, which was just right for the two hour downriver cruise.

Drinks and a buffet lunch was served as René gave us a running commentary on the sights, first the Spanish Castile, then the small islands and bird sanctuaries with impressive colonies of cormorants, pelicans, cranes and other birds.

He told us how in the past archaeologists, such as Tatiani Proskouriakoff, had travelled to Piedras Negra and Copan under much more uncomfortable conditions in the 1930s and 40s.

I must admit the more I learnt of Tatiana Proskouriakoff, the more I admired her. She had been cultured, appreciated

## The Cargo Club

literature, music and art, as witnessed by her visit to the Chicago Art Institute in the early 50s, when she commented, ‘Their collection of post-impressionists is splendid particularly Matisse, Utrillo, Braque and even some fine Americans.... I spotted, too, a good Orozco who is my favourite of the Mexicans.’



In the 1930s, it was daring of a young woman to venture into the Central American jungles, a man’s world, filled with dangers. It coincided with Anne-Marie Schwarzenbach’s journey to Mesopotamian archaeological sites in Iraq and her voyage with Ella Maillart to Afghanistan, the difference, however, was Schwarzenbach’s family were owners of Switzerland’s second greatest fortune—derived from its silk mills in and around Zurich, whilst Tatiana’s family were Russian émigrés who had been forced into exile by the Bolshevik Revolution.

In addition, Tatiana was an architect and archaeologist, who dedicated her life to the study of the Mayan civilisation and deciphering its complex system of writing.

I reminded myself to speak with Ekaterina of her famous compatriot when we joined up with her and John at Playa del Carmen, where they planned a break during Alena's school holidays to relax and visit the sites of Tulum and Uxmal.

Tatiana's most important contribution to the study of Mayan glyphs came when she overturned the idea held by many scholars that Maya inscriptions were of an astronomical or religious nature, and related to the passage of time.

Tania demonstrated the inscriptions at Piedras Negras were almost certainly of an historical narrative, identifying glyphs for birth, the accession to power of individual kings and dynastic sequences.

Thanks to her work about 80% of Maya inscriptions were now readable and the writing system largely deciphered.

An hour later we passed El Golfete and entered the winding limestone gorges of Rio Dulce, the walls of which were covered with dense tropical vegetation. After leaving the gorges we approached Livingston where numerous abandoned boat hulls greeted us in the stream and along the river banks, their only passengers pelicans and gulls who looked at us with the barest of curiosity.

We disembarked at Livingston, where we discovered a different place from the rest of Guatemala, the local people, mostly Garifunas, added to the exoticism, they were descended from a mixture of Carib, Mayan and African cultures. Their story began in 1635 when a ship carrying slaves from Nigeria was wrecked off the Island of St. Vincent. The survivors mixed with the Carib Indians and a new culture was born. However, they were forcefully deported by the British and Spanish, transiting by different islands before finally ending up in what is now known as Livingston in Guatemala.

After a short tour of the town we took lunch in a small restaurant, Bahia Azul, on the main Street, we could have eaten on the yacht, but Pat's curiosity decided otherwise, there we ate grilled lobsters and drank Gifiti, a local concoction, a must for tourists, like us, and Gallo beer.

After lunch we were picked up by the tender from *Las Indias*

which was anchored a couple of miles offshore. Once aboard the yacht set sail for Belize city about 140 nautical miles to the north, where Pat informed us we would arrive early the next morning.

René Viel was overwhelmed by *Las Indias*, just as the others were when Pat first turned up with the yacht at the site of the *Espíritu Santo* off the coast of Alta Guajira a couple of months or so earlier.

Once René had recovered his senses he turned his attention to the Maya jades, which Pat had delivered to the main salon on the upper deck. Now in velvet lined polished hardwood presentation boxes which he opened slowly, one by one.

‘What’s interesting Pat, is to know where the jadeite—the stone, came from. Take the Altun Ha jade head, was carved from one large solid block, it came from the Motagua River Valley region of Guatemala.’

We anchored a couple of miles off the shore as there was no harbour to speak of as *Las Indias* being about the size of a small cruise ship could not risk venturing into the shallows nearer to Belize City water front, and took the tender into the Ferry Terminal and after a few formalities walked to the museum.

The museum according to Maria had been a prison, built in the middle of the 19th century, when Belize, or British Honduras as it was then called, was a British colony. It was only in 1993 the prison was transformed into what is now the Museum of Belize, a short walk from the Ferry Terminal.

Unfortunately the original jade pieces were locked away in a safe at Central Bank of Belize, replaced by copies, though we were well received and given an informative tour of the collection. Belize was poor and archaeology was underfunded.

We spent the evening on *Las Indias* where we watched the news from Venezuela, which was hit by power blackouts and general chaos. The drama excited Pat’s enthusiasm, the idea of a rich new market was mouth watering, once Maduro was gone refineries would be rebuilt, oil exports would be renewed, then new infrastructure, hospitals, hotels and utilities would be

built.

The nationwide blackout paralysed airports and hospitals, cut phone and internet services, and shut down water supplies. Worse was Maracaibo, hit by a wave of looting and violence not seen for decades with businesses sacked, countless Venezuelans were injured in clashes between looters, security guards, the police and military with armed gangs robbing the looters.

It was like a war zone with wounded pouring into hospitals where the aircon had failed, where there were no medical supplies, anaesthetics, electricity or telephones.

The news from London seemed risible in comparison as the Brexit drama was played out, a comedy where Theresa May's incompetence was compounded by the anachronistic figure of Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition, both of whom left the UK suspended in a stunning leadership void.

The next morning we set off by road for Tikal, in Guatemala, about 220 kilometres directly west. I suppose we could have flown there, but Pat wanted to see the country and placed himself in the front seat next to the driver in one of the two large SUVs laid on for the trip.

The first of our three objectives was Yaxha, a two hour drive, situated just over the border from Belize. Tatiana Proskouriakoff had described the site as charming, and it was, with an annual average of just 40 visitors a day according to René, that was very few considering it included the rainy season when access to the site became difficult, if not impossible. Even in the dry season, which it was now, the going was slow over rugged dirt roads pocked with outcroppings of bone-jarring rock, past a landscape of low, dense brush, apparently infested by rattlesnakes and coral snakes, scorpions, and fire ants, which we were told was nothing compared the nearby sites that few people ever visited.

The site had been explored by a German, Teobert Mahler—who had mapped Tikal towards the end of the 19th century, but being near the border with Belize few visitors stopped by given the poor relation with Guatemala which had an ongoing

territorial claim on Belize.

We were the sole visitors clambering over the temples and pyramids, pausing to hear René's commentary, before eating in a small restaurant by the lake to the sound of howling monkeys, a menu prepared a very short notice, spaghetti with tomato sauce and Marie Sharp's Tabasco, watermelon and beer.

George seemed to be paying a lot of attention Josefina, a pretty and fashionably dressed Guatemalan who had joined us to facilitate the border formalities and our hotel and eating arrangements in Guatemala.

We then set off for Tikal across a rolling landscape covered with dry forest, scattered with fields of maize, in what was called *una zona amortiguamiento*, that is to say a semi-protected zone for controlled usage, which was probably the case 1,000 or more years earlier, when the population of Tikal was estimated, according to modern methods, to be as much as 300,000 souls.

All of the land would have been densely cultivated to feed the large population, criss-crossed by roads and irrigation networks. The roads would have certainly not been broad as the Mayas possessed neither the wheel nor beasts of burden. All goods were exclusively transported on the backs of men, women and children.

Tikkal lay inside a national park, its imposing vestiges surrounded by the dense forest, which had consumed what had been the de facto capital of the Mayan civilisation, following life changing climatic events in the 9th century AD that had brought about its collapse.

According to Willy, jaguars still roamed the national park together with tapirs, deer, wild pigs, turkeys, crocodiles and many other exotic creatures.

We left our vehicles and approached the site on foot, following the well traced paths through the forest, along the Calzada Mendez a road leading to the Grand Plaza, working our way past different pyramids to the tallest, the 65 meters high Temple of the Two Headed Snake, built by King Yaxkin

Caan Choc in 470AD with its 176 steps to the summit, which we climbed and admired the panoramic view across the forest, stretching to the horizon and beyond.

Pat seemed more interested in the nearby ruins that were still overgrown by the forest, sites for future archaeologists. I had little doubt he had the Lost City in mind. Anna, Maria and René gave us their learned versions of Maya history filled with the anecdotes of their own experiences and those of their illustrious predecessors.

René explained that Tikal had been one of the most important Mayan centres for over 1,500 years, starting about 700BC. During the Classic Period between 300 and 900AD its population grew and the city dominated its neighbours such as Yaxha, competing with rivals, Calakmul to the north-west and Calakmul's ally Caracol, now in Belize, until it reached the summit of its power before its still unexplained decline.

Tikal was the largest archaeological site excavated in the Americas, covering 576 square kilometres of rainforest, some 16 square kilometres of structures had been excavated, but much of it still remained to be explored by archaeologists.

After being abandoned by the Mayas, the city was reclaimed by the tropical forest and a millennium later was long forgotten, until in 1848, a humble Guatemalan *chiclero*, Ambrosio Tut, searching for *zapota* trees that produced the gum that Chiclets were made of, stumbled on the overgrown temples. The discovery was reported to Modesto Mendez, Governor of the Provincia of El Peten, who with a team visited the site and sketched the sculptures, temples and plazas. The discovery was published by the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1853 and soon, as the age of science and discovery expanded, explorers followed by archaeologists visited the site and the first excavation works began.

That evening we stayed at the Camino Real Hotel, on the banks of Lake Peten Itza, near Remate, where we talked late into the evening speculating on future discoveries that could be made. René Viel did not need to persuade Pat to participate as a sponsor in the different projects being planned and was

careful not to discourage his friend when he raised the subject of the Lost City in Honduras.

We flew back to Belize on a scheduled flight the next day when René whetted Pat's appetite for more as he spoke of his archaeologist colleague, Geoffrey Braswell, who made an extraordinary discovery in 2015, a jade pendant found at Nim Li Punit in southern Belize.

Braswell described it, 'It was like finding the Hope Diamond in Peoria outside of New York,' as the artefact was found on what were the outskirts of the Maya world. The large carved jade pendant, which was no doubt worn on a king's chest during key religious ceremonies, was housed at the Central Bank of Belize, along with other national treasures.

It was the second largest Mayan jade artefact found in Belize to date, just a few millimetres thick, probably sawn off a block with string, fat and jade dust, a work of great skill and patience.

The pendant was inscribed with a text composed of 30 glyphs relating to its first owner and found in a tomb dated to around 800AD, together with other jade objects at Nim Li Punit, a site situated on a mountain ridge in the Toledo District of Belize, 400 kilometres to the south of Chichen Itza in Mexico, where similar but smaller such objects were found.

Braswell's team together with local workers were excavating a palace dating from around 400AD when they discovered an intact tomb containing the remarkable artefacts.

The precise inscription was unclear, but concerned the winds, which brought the vital monsoon rains needed each year for crops grow, and the rituals and incense scattering ceremonies to the gods, with a Mayan date that corresponded to 672AD.

According to Braswell, René told us, 'It had immense power and magic.' Perhaps it was an offering to the wind god? In any case two carved stele found on the site depicted a king wearing the pendant and scattering incense, with dates of 721 and 731AD. Then around half a century later the pendant was buried. For what reason, it was difficult to say. In any case it coincided with the collapse of the Mayan kingdoms and evidence shows the population declined and many sites were

abandoned including Nim Li Punit itself.

‘The general thinking is climate change caused the failure of crops and the collapse of Maya civilisation. A message to us all,’ concluded René.

## CHAPTER 78

### LA CIUDAD BLANCA

The Miskito Coast, a vast region of dense mountainous rain forests, situated in the north-east of Honduras and Nicaragua, was the domain of jaguars, poisonous snakes, insects and flesh-eating bacteria—*Mucocutaneous leishmaniasis*, transmitted by sand flies.

In this almost impenetrable jungle several pre-Columbian sites had been discovered with evidence indicating they had been occupied until the arrival of the first Spanish explorers.

The legend of La Ciudad Blanca, or the White City, had long existed, but to archaeologists, like René Viel, there was no city as such, rather a series of scattered ruins that represented the sparse remains of a number of settlements.

The Rio Platano region, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, was the home to a number of Indian groups including the Pech, Tawahka, Miskito and Garifuna communities.

John had constantly reminded me that civilisations didn't develop for the sake of some future archaeologists. They were an intrinsic part of human behaviour that sprung up spontaneously when conditions were propitious to their development, offering their founders better conditions in the struggle for survival.

Civilisations underwent frequent change, upheavals due to the changing world around them, and when confronted with invaders and enemies who had invented better tools, arms and strategies for survival.

We only have to look at the turbulent events in the Arab world, the so called Arab Spring. Which, however, for the moment, seems to have changed very little. Egypt has become more oppressive than under Mubarak. The ruling families in

the Gulf kingdoms, in spite of skyscrapers and shopping malls, are in fact absolute monarchies, and Iraq suffers from divisions not seen under Saddam, whilst Syria lies in ruins.

Across the Caribbean, Venezuela was going through the throes of change as a failed version of society collapsed.

John slipped easily into his role of professor, telling us how in the distant past the human species survived in harmony with its natural surrounding. But man's success had upset the unchanging natural environment and its steady state equilibrium. Too many humans on the planet upset that equilibrium and human society needed to change or fail.

Nature never offered more than minimalist solutions through genetic mutations, which, even though they occurred instantaneously, they required time to spread through a population. In the natural world around us the solution for most species was to retreat into their ever shrinking biospheres, as man encroached on and occupied their habitat.

Many animals store their foods, predators hid their the carcasses of their prey to provide them with meals over a period of several days, squirrels store nuts to see them through the winter, and men learnt to do the same, drying meat, collecting and storing wild grains.

Observation led them to knowing when and where grains and animals prospered, which in turn led to sowing, harvesting and storing food. Farming and agriculture was born, initially a subsistence economy, but in favourable condition and surplus food resulted in small communities, where headmen and specialist skills emerged, in other words individuals who were not engaged in the daily tasks of tending the fields or domestic animals.

Groups of villages appeared with common interests, family, language, traditions and beliefs.

It was a short step to alliances that offered protection against those who coveted their land, animals and women. Others skills developed charismatic leaders, hereditary kings, warriors, priests, merchants and tradesmen, and soon civilisations were born, prospering, spreading, fighting with their neighbours to

control their resources, until they exhausted their resources or climatic changes brought about collapse.

One of the strange sites in Guatemala was seeing Chinese archaeologists present on the Mayan sites, not from the People's Republic, but from Taiwan which had maintained relations with Guatemala, aiding it in its territorial dispute with Belize that date back to the 1859 Wyke-Aycinena Treaty.

Archaeological exploration in Central America had been dominated by Europeans and Americans for one and a half centuries and today's presence of Chinese signalled a new page in the search of Mayan history.

It was certainly the sign of the revival of China's ancient civilisation as Wang Wei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Archaeology, and Li Xinwei, a colleague at the Institute of Archaeology in Beijing, led a team of Chinese researchers at Copan, in Honduras, carrying out work on the western side of the courtyard. There they discovered glyphs on a wall that indicated a passage leading to the 'underworld' mentioned in Mayan mythology.

Curiously as with Wang's work in Egypt, Li said the Copan project offered comparisons between the Mayan and Chinese civilizations, which he believed had many similarities.

The fact was all civilisations had similarities, after all they were human, on the planet earth.

Li pointed out that the first men in the Americas had migrated from Northeast Asia about 15,000 years ago, adding that they, the Chinese, shared the same ancestors. No doubt true, but his observations were motivated by a certain form of nationalism and not necessarily scientific, considering the evidence of the Denisovan population that had spread into East Asia and as far as Australia.

## CHAPTER 79

### BELIZE

As we approached Belize City on our way back to the Caribbean, Pat pointed to a filling station, he wanted a pee. Once he'd relieved himself he wandered over to the bar, as usual he was curious to see how daily life was.

Suddenly, George Pyke appeared, gun in hand, pulling the surprised Pat back to the vehicle, slamming the door shut. I didn't hang around and piled into the SUV, followed by the driver who slammed it into gear and put his foot on the gas, leaving a trail of burning rubber as we slomed out of the filling station.

George had pushed Pat onto the floor. Then peering out the back window his slide his gun back into its holster and announced the danger was past.

The driver quickly explained as he was paying for a can of Coke two armed men had appeared, it was a hold-up, a relatively common event in Belize City.

It hadn't taken us long to realize Belize was a lawless place which hadn't alarmed Pat, cool in most situations. It seemed like a good sign to him, a place where many bankers feared to tread, but with much potential. On their short visit to the city three days earlier, he had remarked an unusual number of nameplates for law firms and plaques indicating consulates for countries that included Malaysia and Taiwan, as well as the usual honorary consuls in such countries.

Belize was a 'low-tax jurisdiction', that is to say a tax haven and in the purest sense of the term, providing the incorporation of offshore companies, locally denominated International Business Companies, within hours. These IBCs did not pay taxes on earnings from abroad, but were excluded

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from doing business in Belize. However, they had the advantage they could receive offshore income as dividends, capital gains, earned interest and revenues, which paid by IBCs incorporated in Belize to non-citizens were tax-free and required no reporting.



In the early 1990s, not long after full independence, following the example of many other former British territories, such as the Bahamas, Jamaica, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, the government of Belize enacted legislation that allowed it to become a tax haven, creating the kind of environment that would attract offshore companies.

In addition, Belize International Trusts included a permanent exemption from personal and business taxes on earnings generated by assets in a trust. Estates also receive comprehensive exemptions from taxes related to inheritance, succession and gifting.

One of the major provisions in the Offshore Banking Act allowed financial institutions with a minimum of \$25 million in capital to apply for an unrestricted license for banking operations without local regulation.

As restrictions were progressively imposed on traditional tax havens such as Switzerland and Luxembourg, Belize offered secrecy to companies, foundations and trusts incorporated in the country, guaranteed by banking regulations that mandated names and account information only be disclosed after the submission of documentation related to criminal investigations, by court order.

The absence of exchange controls offered offshore businesses incorporated in the country the possibility of transferring unlimited amounts of currency without reporting requirements with the advantage Belize had no tax treaties with other governments.

More surprising was the fact that Belize was included in the fair taxation category of jurisdictions by the EU Council, whitelisted for improving its tax regime to the benefit of entrepreneurs and cross-border investments.

That did not prevent Belize from being a crossroad for drug trafficking, with its vast isolated regions without roads where clandestine airstrips allowed narco-traffickers to fly in and refuel in the small country without air defence systems and its capacity to monitor the movement of small aircraft at night close to zero.

Conditions that resolved Pat to investigate further with a view to establishing a local operation for his bank via Malcolm Smeatons' bank as a suitably opaque screen.

## CHAPTER 80

### A PRESS CONFERENCE

Whilst a press conference was being held at the Palacio de la Inquisicion in Cartagena, at the other end of the world a group of treasure hunters were jailed for up to five years. Their South Korean company claimed to have found a sunken Russian treasure ship, dating from the time of Czar Nicholas II, containing billions of dollars in gold. The treasure—5,500 boxes of gold bullion and 200 tons of gold coins, was said to have been shipped from St Petersburg to Vladivostok aboard the Dmitri Donskoi, a 5,800 ton first-class armoured cruiser of the Imperial Navy, which sank during the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 at the time of the Russo-Japanese War between Korea and Japan.

The value of the treasure had been wildly estimated at somewhere between 9 and 125 billion dollars prompting punters to invest tens of millions of dollars in the treasure hunters' company.

They would have done well to have consulted the Central Naval Museum in St Petersburg that said there was no evidence to support the claim of gold in the wreck.

At least the Korean scammers didn't end up as prisoners in the gruesome Palacio de la Inquisicion which is also Cartagena's Historical Museum, situated on Plaza de Bolivar, a magnificent restored colonial style palace—apart from the dreadful machines of torture displayed in its courtyard, which dates from 1770, and faces the large plaza with its palm studded gardens flanked on one side by the Catedral de Santa Catalina, and appropriately, at least on this occasion, opposite the Museo del Oro.

The Historical Museum was protected by an impressive cohort of armed soldiers, police and security personnel who filtered the guests through to the press conference on the

second floor of the palace.

It was a big event with the presence of Ivan Duque Marquez, Colombia's new president who was accompanied by the minister of culture, the president of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History, naval admirals, and naturally the mayor of Cartagena de Indias.

The media was there in force, national television, CNN, the New York Times, the list was long. The star of the show was the *Espiritu Santo* and a temporary exhibition of its treasures, gold and silver bars, Spanish reales, chains, crosses, jewellery and ornaments. President Marquez spoke of a great national treasure and introduced Don Pedro Heridia, Sir Patrick Kennedy, Scott Fitznorman, Robert Guiglion, and the team the press.

Then turning to Anna, Marques poured praise on her, telling the world without her efforts the *Espiritu Santo* and it's treasure would have never been known let alone discovered.

The attention of the media was immediately focused on this attractive young woman, beautifully, though soberly dressed for the occasion. The image of the marine archaeologist excited the press almost as much as the gold that sparkled behind the brightly light armoured glass display cases.

The images were flashed across the planet and we became instant 24 hour media celebrities. It was a huge boost for Colombia and more especially Cartagena. Pat Kennedy took advantage of the situation to announce investment plans in the country together with his good friend Don Pedro Heridia including a new museum to be built in the Getsemani area of the city between the smart residential districts and the Casco Antiguo.

The total value of the recovered treasure, included 940kg of gold bullion carried in 28 chests, 32,400 gold doubloons, gold chains and crosses, 2,100,000 pieces of eight, 2000 kilogrammes of silver bars, a chest of emeralds, 3 chests of various other precious stones, and multiple objects in gold, silver, precious stones and works of art. It was difficult to fix a

value which would required long work by numismatists specialised in rare coins—the value of which could exceed many times the spot price of the gold they contain with certain worth tens and even hundreds of thousands of dollars. Then there were the precious stones that would required the knowledge of gemologists.

All that without overlooking the value of the fine works of art recovered, which led us to estimate it the total value could reach nearly four billion dollars, shared between the Colombian government and the Clan's partners. We were two billion dollars richer with the treasure stolen from the people's of New World by the conquistadors, over which I'm sorry to say we would lose no sleep.

When asked about his future plans Pat smiled and vaguely hinted at a second field campaign to conclude the archaeological work on the *Espíritu Santo*, the site of which was protected by the Colombian Navy, and his interest in an archaeological field work somewhere in Central America.

## Epilogue

We'd gone home, the treasure was securely locked away in the vaults of a Colombian bank and across the border in Venezuela the revolution had for the moment failed. The news was elsewhere. China, Iran and Donald Trump.

Juan Guaido, cut a small figure, the crowd too had gone home, and Nicolas Maduro's regime, which had bled Colombia dry, was still hanging on, backed by its vicious allies in Tehran and elsewhere.

The power of the street had faltered, failed, from time to time dictators packed their bags and fled, it was not the case in Caracas. More often than not dictators died in office like Stalin, Mao or Franco, others lasted decades, the power of the people could do nothing against a determined tyrant.

What made revolutions? One thing that was certain it was not the street, it was only when a tyrant's court turned against him, or powerful allies called it a day, like the friends Nicolae Ceausescu's or Viktor Yanukovych, did they succumb to their destiny.

Witness the Arab Spring, nearly a decade on, all it the street had rendered was death and more dictators. Only in democracies can real change come, slowly, but even they can fall victim to populism, had not Hitler's party been democratically elected?

Had Louis XVI deployed his army against the mob in 1789, there would have been no revolution. Perhaps Maduro's army would cut a deal with Guaido, though for the moment Maduro's friends have not abandoned him.

What kind of retirement could Maduro expect? Fidel Castro's bearded revolutionaries had heralded 70 years of Communism, which continues in spite of the latest embargo, while the daughter of Cuba's outsted dictator Fulgencia Batista ended up

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homeless in a Fort Lauderdale doorway in 2017 at the age of 81.

Where did that leave Venezuela? Well, as far as Pat was concerned, it was for the moment written off,, something for John Francis to ponder over, or me his friend Pádraig to write about.

Maduro's reckoning would come, sooner or later he would confront his fate. In the meantime Pat eyed his other prospects, there was all the rest of Latin America, not forgetting Belize and Dominica, those anything goes offshore banking havens.

THE END

## Apologies

I hope you my reader will forgive me for my endless mistakes: grammar, spelling, syntax, facts and omissions. These I fear would take another lifetime to rectify, which I don't have given my advancing years, that plus the fact I have so many other stories to tell and observations to make on our world. Perhaps one day Google and AI will find a way to remove this burden from story tellers, who like me are not sufficiently applied, as my headmaster once told me.

## 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 years, starting in 2000, when I wrote *Offshore Islands*, and Pat Kennedy was launched on his initially precarious international career.

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

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

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

This is a story, a novelised account of events, real or not,

John Francis Kinsella

where the fictitious characters are fictitious, and where the real characters, such as Vladimir Putin, Nicolas Maduro, Theresa May and Emanuel Macron, are real.

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

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

John Francis Kinsella, Paris, June 2019

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Other books by John Francis Kinsella

Fiction

Borneo Pulp  
Offshore Islands  
The Legacy of Solomon  
The Prism  
The Lost Forest  
Death of a Financier  
The Turning Point 2007-2008  
The Collection  
A Redhead at the Pushkin  
The Last Ancestor  
Cornucopia  
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Literature

Translations

Le Point de Non Retour  
The Sorrow of Europe  
The Temple of Solomon  
Jean Sibelius - A biography  
Understanding Architecture  
L'île de l'ouest

In the works

A Biography of Patrick Wolfe (Fiction)

## THE AUTHOR

John Francis Kinsella has written thirteen novels and translated books on architecture and archaeology from Spanish and French as well as biographies of travellers and music composers from French to English.

From an Irish background he went to school and studied engineering in London. Travelling extensively in business he has used his experience to construct his novels. He moved to France in 1972 where he has homes in Paris and the Basque Country





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