

Termination

The Eugenics Agenda



Chris Deggs

This is a work of fiction apart from the bits that aren't

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Foreword

The tall gaunt figure stood alone amid the ruins of the old abbey, his long white hair blowing in the chilly wind. He stood resolute, a man with a mission in life. Now, at long last he had the key to carry out his role, which he believed had been mapped out since his birth. Tucking his muffler into his long dark coat and adjusting his Tam-o-shanter, pulling it down over his frozen ears, he walked to where a circle of stones that stood tall and erect, molded by the ravages of time. He spent a long time scrutinising the symbols engraved in the ancient megaliths before him. To his satisfaction the glyphs corresponded exactly with those on the parchment he held in his gloved hand.

He looked around. Nobody else was about. Then, there, in front of the standing stones he intoned, “Oh, great guide-stones, grant me the will, strength and resolve to do what I know I must do. I know the journey will be hard at times but I must stand resolute in order to carry out my noble task others merely talk about or avoid completely. For the sake of this wretched, misguided species, called human, I must overcome all frailties and sensitivities as would a surgeon cutting out a cancer patient's tumour.”

He stood, as long as he could stand the cold, in the circle, while contemplating the task ahead. The less people who knew what he intended, the better. If he was caught, society would paint him as a monster. But history would hail him a hero, or even a Saviour.

Chapter 1

England 2010

At around 10 am, Air Traffic Controller Dennis Fry became fully alert. “Looks like we have a wanderer,” he announced to those present in the control tower.

Supervisor Jane Sparks, well aware that 'wanderer' was work-speak for plane off course, rushed to his console, asking, “Who are we talking about Dennis?”

He looked at her, ashen-faced. “Air Express flight 67. It's just gone off course and dropped below 5000 feet, somewhere over Fordham Heath.”

“Let me look,” she demanded, staring over his shoulder at the radar screen.

“Shit! We've lost it altogether now. It just went off radar,” he declared.

The supervisor froze. The plane had probably gone down. Gathering her wits, she ordered “Contact the CAA and inform them immediately.”

As he quickly dialled the emergency number for the Civil Aviation Authority, Jane said, “Also, alert the local emergency services.”

“Which one's”

“The nearest centre to 67's last radar sighting, of course?”

Dennis checked his map. “Looks like Colchester.”

“Then alert Colchester emergency services. Meanwhile I'll try and get Harry up here.”

Dennis' 12 years in the job told him the plane had most likely crashed. A cold chill came with the realisation. Radar had been known to fail but only very rarely. Besides, if it were only radar failure, the plane would have been sighted by the tower. In any case all airline pilots are trained to fly without radar guidance when required, so communication breakdown so close to the airport would not have been a major problem. He was shaken back to the present by a voice at the other end of the line. He responded, “Stansted Air Traffic Control here. We've lost contact with Air Express, flight 67 near Fordham Heath.”

“Has the aircraft crashed?”

“We don't know but it seems likely.”

“Your name is?”

“Dennis Fry, Senior Air Traffic Controller.”

“Okay Mr Fry, we'll look into it.”

Dennis stared at the dead phone, horrified at the thought of the carnage awaiting the emergency teams.

Jane eventually tracked down Harry Krackow in the Air Express baggage handling area. He was dressing down one of the staff. She interrupted and getting straight to the point, stated, “Harry, it looks like AE flight 67 has gone down.”

Harry froze. “Do you mean it has crashed?”

“We're not absolutely sure yet but it certainly looks that way. We lost radar contact with the craft over Fordham Heath. Nothing since then.”

Harry, head of flight operations for Air Express, had never had a crash on his watch. Quickly pulling himself together, he responded, “Shit! This is terrible. I'll get right onto it.”

The patrol car was partially concealed at the corner of Turkey Cock Lane and Halstead Road, its occupants lying in wait, looking out for cars speeding through the tiny hamlet of Eight Ash Green. “Did you know the first cop car was a wagon powered by electricity?” Senior Constable Stan Parkes asked, scanning the road ahead.

Unimpressed, Constable William Morrison only managed, “Oh yeah.”

“Cheer up mate. I know sitting in this car is not much fun for a young go-getter like yourself but it's an important part of the job.”

“What, sitting here bored off our tits waiting for somebody to go over the limit? It's a bloody waste of time if you ask me.”

“Well, Colchester Central is not asking you Bill, so stop bloody moaning and count your blessings.”

He did not only stop moaning. He sat bolt upright, nearly hitting his head on the car ceiling in the process, “Bloody hell! Just look at that!” he cried out, as a passenger plane came into view. Smoke billowing from its fuselage showed it to be in trouble.

“What's up?” Stan asked. He didn't need an answer. He saw and heard it. An aircraft, blowing out black smoke, screeched low overhead, as it plunged earthward in the vicinity of Fordham Heath. A huge explosion instantly followed, rocking the ground so hard Stan and Bill even felt the patrol car, which was miles from the crash site, shudder.

Parkes got on the radio. “Charlie Oscar two to base. A passenger aircraft has crashed on Fordham Heath. Should we help with traffic control?”

After a short pause he turned to his mate. “We have to stay put.”

“Fuck it. A change of scenery would be good.”

Chapter 2

Essex, England 2010

Lisa Parton was showering when her phone rang. 'Bloody typical,' she thought, while working the full body conditioner into her short straight hair. Quickly rinsing off, she wrapped herself in a big fluffy towel and trailed water to the phone. It had picked up the message. It was from work. There had been a plane crash near Colchester. She was to get there ASAP. "Shit!" she cursed into the phone. It was her day off and those red patent leather shoes in the sale, she had set her heart on, would soon be snapped up. Sometimes she hated her job.

Harry Krackow was already on his way to the crash site. As Air Express' director of flight operations it fell to him to go to the scene. The company, now in its sixteenth year of operation, had never experienced any such disasters. He had only ever seen air crashes on the news. Now, it was for real and he wasn't looking forward to it one bit. As he drove along the A120 his hands free phone rang. It was Lee Burneski, the airline's proprietor. "Hullo Lee."

"I just received the news. Get to the site and assess the damage."

"Already on my way. Should be there in about 30 minutes."

"Harry, I want you to stick with the CAA investigator. They can be a pain in the ass but be as helpful as you can. I need to know every detail. I don't want any nasty surprises. Have you got that?"

"Yes Lee."

"I believe it is one of our new 320s."

"Yes, and the other one is grounded for maintenance."

"Regular maintenance?"

Harry knew where his boss was coming from. If it was a mechanical fault the ACC would start checking other Airbus models. Air Express was already heavily in debt and any grounded planes could send the company to the wall. "A minor problem with an aerilon, nothing serious."

"It is fucking serious. Get it fixed immediately and have that plane up in the air before ACC come snooping around."

"Right away boss." Harry cursed himself. He should have been onto it but the crash had thrown him.

Lisa Parton raced along the A12, the flashing orange light on her car clearing her passage, as she headed to the crash site. She checked with Colchester police for any updates. The crash had been confirmed and emergency vehicles were being rushed to the site. As air crash investigator her primary task was to secure the crash site to make it easier to determine the cause of the disaster. This could prove difficult with police and rescue personnel, having gotten the jump on her, rushing all over the place. To have the authority she needed, Lisa had to work with the police officer in charge, who turned out to be Detective Chief Inspector Martin of the Essex police.

Frank Martin was already at the crash scene. In all his years in the job he had never seen anything like it. The burning, smouldering debris was scattered over such a vast area it was difficult to see where it began and ended. A large area of Hill-house Wood, a popular picnic place, was destroyed, as the flaming wreckage ploughed through stands of trees, leaving some pieces of the plane

embedded in trunks or caught up in branches. Unrecognisable charred bodies lay amid the wreckage.

Inspector Crane, having secured the crash site, approached him. "You wouldn't even know it is a plane, would you?"

Frank knew what he meant. There were no wings, no discernible pieces of fuselage. The explosion was so powerful it had blown the plane to smithereens. "Nobody could have survived this lot," he said, dourly.

"It's a hell of a mess to clear up."

Frank looked at the sky. Gray clouds were gathering. "Yes, and it looks like rain, which is not going to help one bit." He walked over to the Emergency crew captain. Before he reached him he heard a voice. Turning, he saw a woman, short in stature, with creamy coloured hair. Wondering what she was doing there, he asked, "Hello, can I help you?"

She proffered a small hand, "I'm Lisa Parton from the CAA. I'm here to investigate what happened and why it happened. To do so, I need to secure this site."

Frank had an aversion to pushy types. He Scanned her with his hawk-like eyes. "As to what happened I would say that was bloody obvious. Regarding why, I don't know but I can tell you one thing."

"What's that inspector?"

"Chief Inspector. There were two explosions."

Lisa's eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"My men reported the plane was on fire before it hit the ground." Making a wide hand gesture, he continued, "This mess could only have been caused by another explosion."

She ignored his assumptions. "I see," she responded, making a note in her smart phone. Looking up, she said, "Chief Inspector I will need to speak to your witnesses. When can you arrange it?"

"But I've told you what they said."

"I need to know everything they saw to the smallest detail," she explained, handing him her CAA business card.

He shrugged, "Okay, I'll arrange it with your office. Now, if you will excuse me I have to liaison with the Emergency Team Captain."

As Lisa made her way around the pieces of wreckage, Orange jacketed emergency personnel were putting charred human remains into black body bags. She had to agree with DCI Martin. It looked as though a huge explosion occurred as the plane impacted with the ground. Of course she needed good solid evidence before such findings would go into her report. The whole thing was like some giant puzzle to her. All the pieces once fitted together into a highly efficient extremely technical flying machine. Now she had a jigsaw puzzle comprising thousands of pieces and worse still, most of the pieces were damaged or burned beyond recognition. Wondering where to start in the aluminium and plastic nightmare, her attention was drawn to a movement behind her. She turned around to see a civilian heading towards her. "Who are you and what do you want?" she asked, abruptly.

The man put out his hand. "Harry Krackow, Director of Flight Operations for Air Express. I would like to work with you on this."

She thought this unusual. Normally in air crash situations, airlines involved, immediately go into damage control to cover their backsides. For the first time in her experience a flight operations manager wanted to team up with her. Lisa smiled. "This is refreshing Mr Krackow, with your knowledge of the aircraft this could speed up the process. So do you have the flight manifest?"

He handed her a copy of the form documenting the passenger list and crew details. Another, incident form, stated Air Express flight 67 crashed in Hill-house Wood at 1003 am. On board were 64 passengers and crew.

"Poor Buggers didn't stand a chance," he commented.

She sighed, "First, lets see if we can find the main black box."

As they made their way around the debris looking for the flight recorder, Lisa noted the plane had crashed into Hill-house Wood, destroying a huge bed of bluebells in its wake. It appeared the plane had been ripped apart by an avenue of trees. She also noted there was an awful lot of paper and packaging scattered around. "Harry, isn't all this paper a bit unusual at an air crash scene?"

"This is my first one, so I wouldn't know."

"I remember my first crash. You never forget it," she commented.

"A bit like the first time you make love," Harry mentioned.

"Now, that is something I try to forget," Lisa said, making light of the moment. She played along seeing his remark for what it was. A way to help come to grips with the seriousness of the situation. Any other time, Lisa may have read such remarks as a come on, but not amid such scenes of human carnage. Collecting herself, she said, "Harry, mail is usually carried in fire and impact proof containers. So, what happened here?"

Harry knew she was looking for any fault. "I will check into it. But it hardly has anything to do with the cause of the crash."

She noted his defensiveness. "At this stage we cannot rule anything out, Mr Krackow."

Chapter 3

Hill House Wood 2010

At the hastily erected control centre, Frank Martin overlooked the operation. Normally such a task would fall to a senior uniformed officer, but he was the only one available. He had grumbled about it at first but once he realised the crash scene was most likely a crime scene, he became more animated. He was setting up his cramped temporary office area when he received news that one of his men had found what he thought might be the black box flight recorder. Answering the call, he ordered, "Okay don't touch anything. Give me your location and stay put. I'll have an expert there shortly." Turning to one of his officers he handed him Lisa's card. "Phone this number and tell the woman investigator where to find her black box."

The officer stifled a giggle.

"What do you find that is so funny?"

"Nothing sir," the officer replied, straightening his face.

Rodger Potter, eavesdropping, heard the instructions. He had been waiting to speak with DCI Martin but he now decided to follow the messenger instead. A shot of the black box would be good for the Colchester Clarion. As luck would have it Rodger was the first reporter on the plot. He was already following up a story in the area, checking out some big pumpkins in Aldham, when he heard the news. The opportunity was just too good to miss. Sure, Mr Albert Grossip was annoyed his pumpkins did not rate as high as an air disaster but Rodger had made his decision. The horticulturist had complained and threatened to report the reporter. Rodger was willing to take the chance. After all, his Editor would back him up for using his initiative. Getting the scoop on the crash would help him reach his goal, which was to become a journalist on the crime desk.

Tailing a cop was a tricky business but with all the other red and orange reflective jackets around, Rodger's red leather bomber jacket blended in well. He saw the policeman approach the tall man and the short blond woman. He said something to them and then they all headed off in a different direction, away from the rescue team. The question in Rodger's mind was should he follow or not? Not one to take unnecessary risks, he decided to hold back. But his curiosity, an attribute of his that scared him most, also drove him forward.

Secretly following the trio at a distance was no problem, with so many trees to hide behind. The game of hide-and-seek came to a stop when the trio met up with another cop. Rodger saw him point at something on the ground. It was box-shaped but it was red. Rodger looked through the viewfinder of his camera and zoomed in on the target. There it was, the 'inaptly named' black box of the crashed aircraft, intact and untouched. Mentally pushing the fear of being discovered aside, he waited for a moment when all the conditions would enhance the shot. In the end he had to snatch a quick one before the machine was taken away by the police. He got another two quick shots in before his view of the black box was obstructed.

"Do you think it was sabotage?" Harry Krackow asked, as Lisa and he walked back to the deep crater, where the plane had first hit the ground.

Busy taking photographs of the hole, she missed his question. Then she noticed an open bible about twenty yards from the crater. She tried not to read anything into it. It was an anomaly, not part of the puzzle. What was strange was the lack of wreckage. The crater was filled with small charred plane parts, but no real evidence they came from a passenger jet. No suitcases, clothing, or other personal

effects remained, suggesting to the investigator, the explosive device was placed in the cargo hold. Lisa noted it in her recorded report.

“So, do you reckon it was sabotage?” Harry asked again.

“It certainly looks like it but we need some physical evidence of an explosive device.”

“If anything survived the explosion.”

Giving a knowing look, Lisa said, “You'd be surprised Mr Krackow. There is always something left over – a clue to work with.” At that moment something bright caught her attention. She looked and saw a short Negro, wearing a bright red jacket. “Who are you and what do you want?” she asked aggressively.

The man grinned sheepishly. “Rodger Potter, reporter for the Clarion. I just wanted to get a shot of you both for the paper.”

Harry took command. “I don't think that is a good idea. Now get lost before I call the police.”

Lisa, quietly amused by Harry's abrupt reaction, said, “I've got nothing to hide. You can take my photo.”

Harry shot her a black look. “It's not that Air Express has anything to hide. It's the intrusion I object to.”

Rodger said something that made him seem bolder and braver than he was. Without running it past his internal security, he blurted, “What, like the way the passengers of flight 67 had their lives intruded upon when one of your planes exploded for whatever reason?”

Lisa thought Rodger had spunk. Harry thought Rodger was a pain in the ass.

Lisa smiled, “Come on Mr Krackow, he has worked hard for this. Give him a break.”

Remembering his boss' words about keeping sweet with the CAA, he acquiesced. “Okay, but make it snappy.”

The reporter smiled at the pun, whether intended or not, and took his shot. Afterwards, he asked Lisa, “What do you think caused this air disaster?”

“We are not sure at present but it does look as though there could have been an explosive device on board the plane.”

He then turned to Harry, asking, “Do you think the crash was caused by an explosive device or mechanical failure?”

“I am not prepared to speculate at present.”

“And if you were prepared to speculate which would you go for?”

“That's enough questions for now, so go away.”

Rodger, not wanting to push his luck, handed each of them a card, saying, “Just in case you want to call me.” Drops of water appeared on his camera, as the forecast rain began to make its presence felt, so Rodger went on his way.

Lisa walked around the crater, looking for pieces of wreckage. The rain began falling harder. Harry, who had no raincoat, said, “Lisa, I have to get back, Here's my card. Let me know what, if anything, you come up with.”

“Thanks for your help Harry. I dare say we will meet again.” Lisa then donned a light weight plastic poncho she carried in her bag. Then she headed off to an area she hadn't searched.

Thunder rumbled as the summer shower became more intense. There was nowhere for her to take cover, so she battled on regardless. After a few flashes and more rumbles the shower petered out. She continued to sort through some pieces of wreckage when she came across a metal briefcase attached by a chain to the charred arm of one of the passengers. Taking hold of the briefcase she pulled it from some debris. Flinching suddenly, she dropped it. The arm was all that was left of the body it belonged to. Once she was over the initial shock, Lisa took a closer look at her discovery. The strong metal case was locked. Working so close to a decapitated arm was very unsettling, despite her many years as an air crash investigator who had experienced many macabre sights. She took a deep breath and approached the problem scientifically. Using the Swiss penknife she always carried with her, she tried prising open the locks. Finally the catches sprung open. Much to her surprise the case was almost empty. The only item inside was a leather folder titled the 'Ten Secrets'. The correct thing to do was hand the evidence to the police. But her curiosity got the better of her. Lisa untied the cord securing the folder, to reveal a piece of parchment, inscribed with an array of symbols, geometrical shapes and various acronyms.

A quick look at the parchment offered no clues as to what the title might mean. The geometric shapes, abbreviated words and numerical sequences meant very little to Lisa. It looked all very complicated. However, the fact it was so complex, intrigued her. She was addicted to working out puzzles, riddles and cryptic clues and this was just too good to pass up. Besides if she could crack the code it might offer clues about the investigation. Why she focused on this one passenger, or what was left of him, as having some sort of connection with the crash, she didn't know. Perhaps it was intuition or perhaps she was barking mad. She hoped it was the former. She secreted the folder and its contents in her shoulder bag and made her way back to where the police had their control centre. On the way, she wondered if she had done the right thing. Taking evidence from a crash site was a sacking offence, as was not reporting the briefcase and the severed arm. But nobody saw her take it so nobody was the wiser. People do strange irrational things when under pressure and she was certainly that.

Chapter 4

Cape Town, South Africa 1978

Young Matthew had no idea he was an orphan. Nobody had ever mentioned it, so he naturally thought Jan and Erika Hoffman were his real parents. They had always shown him love and care and treated him as if he were their natural son, instilling their Lutheran faith and sending him to Sunday school. There, under the strict tutelage of Pastor Van Keipt, he learned the Christian way of life, which, to young Matthew, seemed to be a mixture of glorification and guilt.

Life in Durbanville was mostly good for Matthew. Unlike most other Protestant white boys his age, who preferred sport and Kaffir baiting, Matthew enjoyed pressing flowers, and sketching pictures around Three Anchor Bay, his favourite artistic location. Tall, yet slightly built, Matthew had to put up with a lot of cruel jibes and countless insults. However, once he was surrounded by Bunsen burners and chemicals he quickly forget the bullies. Science, his great passion in life, extended into his home, where he carried out his own simple experiments. Using elementary household products he combined ingredients to make flashes, bangs and some unpleasant smells, much to the chagrin of his long-suffering parents.

Matthew only came to hear about his natural parentage in early adulthood. Jan and Erika kept any adoption details from him, reasoning that knowing his true heritage was unnecessary and would only confuse him. It was much better for things to go on as they always had. But such wasn't the way of the world and the truth always, eventually, finds a way to reveal itself. Such a revelation took place for Matthew when, while studying chemistry at a Cape-town high school, he received a letter from Markham, Philips and Jessup, a firm of solicitors in Cape West. The senior partner, Francis Markham had important news to impart to Matthew. Intrigued, he contacted the law firm and an appointment was arranged.

It turned out a trust fund had been set up for him that could only be accessed by him once he turned 18. It was only a moderate endowment but it was to change his life. He sat in Mr Markham's office and scanned the document. Looking up at the solicitor he said, "There must be some mistake. This fund is for somebody called Matthew Atreides. My name is Hoffman."

The solicitor pushed a photocopy across to Matthew. "Mr Atreides, Parish records show your natural mother died when you were a baby and your father, having no financial means to support you, had you placed in an orphanage, from which the Hoffmans adopted you. Once he became established in business your natural father set up this fund to help compensate."

Matthew sat stock still, as the words sunk in. Aghast, he contended, "There must be some mistake. If what you say is true my mother and father would have told me. They have always been open and honest with me. They would never have kept this from me."

Markham placed a comforting hand on Matthew's shoulder. "I can see this is a bit of a shock for you. Would you like some tea?"

"Yes, My throat has gone dry."

Mr Markham ordered tea through his intercom. Then he asked, "Do you have a bank account for us to transfer funds?"

Money was the last thing on Matthew's mind. All he could think about was his parents and how he was going to broach the subject of his lineage. "I'm having some difficulty taking all this in."

The solicitor smiled, "Yes, it must be a shock for you. But there is something else I need to impart."

“I don't think I can take any more news today” Matthew responded, his emotions all over the place.

“You also stand to inherit a property.”

Matthew, instantly alert, uttered, “A property! What property?”

“A piece of real estate in Scotland.”

Matthew's green eyes widened. “What sort of real estate?”

Markham checked his notes. “It's called Cambuskenneth Abbey. But that's all I know.”

“This is crazy. What would I want with an Abbey?” Matthew asked, bemused and befuddled.

The solicitor shrugged. “I have no idea Mr Atreides. My function is to simply to furnish you with the facts. The rest is up to you.”

Matthew rubbed his chin. “Let me see if I have this straight. My parents aren't my parents, my mother is dead, my father, whom I don't remember, has set up some sort of trust fund for me and somewhere in Scotland there's an abbey with my name on it.”

Markham sighed, “That's about the measure of it, yes.”

Erika, just home from work, heard crying coming from Matthew's room. She knocked at his bedroom door but there was no answer. She didn't like to intrude on his privacy but something was obviously wrong. She went in and asked, “Matthew, what's the matter?”

Matthew sat, his head in his hands, just looking at her. Then he said, “Guess what I did today.”

“What did you do, darling?” she asked, wondering why he looked so troubled.

“I went and saw a solicitor.”

Erika's face became a question mark. “What on earth do you need a solicitor for?”

“I didn't go to him. He summoned me because he had some news for me. Personal news.”

Erika's face became porcelain white. “Oh dear Lord.”

“Exactly mother, or should I say adoptive mother.”

She froze. Then she said, “Darling, I've always been a good mother to you, haven't I.”

“This is not about that!”

“We've always had a close open relationship, haven't we, dear?”

“In all things barring being open about the most important aspect of my life - my roots. Or did you forget that you got me from an orphanage?”

The accusation hit her like a bucket of cold water. “We were trying to do what was right for you. We've always been your parents and always will be. Your biological father put you up for adoption when you were a tiny baby. We've cared for you ever since.”

Matthew stared at Erika. “Mother, I don't know what is worse. Me learning only now that I am adopted or that this piece of juicy information came from a solicitor.”

Erika's eyes clouded over, then she burst into tears. “I'm so sorry darling. I thought I was doing the right thing. I would never do anything to hurt you darling, you know that.”

Feeling tears welling up again, he said, "Mother, this is a huge shock for me. Now please leave me alone."

Matthew's stepfather arrived home to find his wife in an emotional state. She explained the reason for her upset. Jan, shocked by the turn of events, went to his son's room. There was no response to his knocking. He thought it best to leave Matthew to deal with the news.

Eventually Matthew came into the kitchen to get something to eat.

Jan said, "It was wrong of us to withhold the details of your lineage but we did it for the best of reasons."

Matthew swung round to face his stepfather. "You had no right to keep it from me!"

"You are right. It's sometimes difficult to know how to protect your child. We acted from the best of motives."

Matthew said, "I'm going to look for my real father."

The kitchen went silent. Erika stared at him. Shaking her head slowly, she turned and left the room.

Matthew wanted to go to her, but couldn't. Jan said, "Your mother is very upset. She feels she has let you down. I know it's difficult for you to come to terms with this shocking news. But when you do you will realise we have only ever had your best interests at heart. We will always be here for you."

Matthew's emotions were in turmoil, with anger and sadness both vying for pole position. "Jan, all I know right now is I have to find my father."

Looking Matthew in the eye, he said, "Son, you must follow your heart but do you know where he is?"

"I can find out from Mr Markham. He has been looking after a small legacy left to me by my father," Matthew said, reaching for the phone.

Jan said, "Before you ring him, listen to me. I never met your father. All I know about him is he didn't want to know anything about you. So why do you want to look for him. You will only end up being disappointed."

Matthew became defensive. "If he didn't care, why did he put money in a fund for me?"

"I am not talking about money."

Matthew looked at his adoptive father. Seeing a tear in his eye, he softened. "It may all lead to nothing but it is something I have to do."

Jan smiled weakly, "I know. Take care Matthew and remember, we love you very much."

"Yes, I know," the young man said. "Tell mum, er Erika, I will contact her soon."

Jan shook Matthew's hand. "We are still your parents. Look after yourself son."

Matthew returned to his phone call.

Matthew Atreides researched into his past and found his father's name in some parish records. His name was Albert Atreides and he had advanced from the status of itinerant worker to shoe shop chain owner. Following a long tiring flight from Johannesburg to London and a restless night at the airport Holiday Inn, Matthew managed to track down his father at the main Budget Footwear

warehouse, in Wandsworth. It was a huge shed stacked with every type of footwear he could imagine. He wondered how his absent father could have built himself such a business. Most of the shoes, Chinese imports, would probably wear out quickly or fall apart. But they were so cheap to buy nobody really cared. There was a portable office in one of the corners, Matthew headed in that direction. Some workers stopped and stared at the lanky youth but nobody challenged him. Having located his father, Matthew needed a plausible reason to get in to see him. He needed to be family but not too close. A distant cousin would do. Having passed the secretary's suspicious scrutiny, Matthew found himself face to face with his biological father, whom he had never seen. His father, a tall thin man like him, stood guarding the entrance to his office, barring the young man's way.

Suspicious, he asked, "What do you want?"

Matthew, feeling very uncomfortable, said, "We need to have a talk."

"Then talk. I haven't got all day."

"In private."

Albert Atreides looked at the young man addressing him. "My receptionist tells me you are a distant cousin."

"Matthew's eyes burned into those of his father. "That's not strictly true."

"Then who the hell are you?"

"I am your son," Matthew uttered, nervously. He didn't expect the prodigal son treatment but he did think he might receive some sort of welcome, even a lukewarm one.

Albert stood mouth agape. Gathering his wits, he ushered Matthew quickly into his office and closed the door. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"A Mr Markham told me about the account you set up for me. I've come to thank you, Matthew said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice."

Albert stared at his son. "You came all the way from Africa and hunted me down – to thank me?"

"Yes. Plus I want to know about my roots."

Albert stared at his son, "This is ridiculous. It cannot be happening"

"I also wanted to look at what kind of person would abandon their child."

"I didn't abandon you. I had you placed in an orphanage." Albert said, firm jawed, concerned his secretary might hear.

"You wanted nothing to do with me."

Albert paced around his office. Turning on Matthew, he said, "And that still stands. You have to go and never contact me again. I have a new life with a new family and I can't afford any complications concerning my past."

Matthew flared, "So that's all I am to you, a fucking complication! Look, all I want is to know something about my ancestors and their connection with Scotland."

"I don't know anything about that and I don't want to have anything to do with you. Is that clear?"

"I don't believe you don't care about me. If you don't have any feelings for me why the trust fund?"

"I'd forgotten all about it. I must have set it up years ago to appease any vestiges of guilt I may have had. But I have no such feelings now. You shouldn't have come here. Now please go and don't contact me again."

Matthew stifled a tear. "I thought I'd dealt with some pricks in Cape Town but you really take the biscuit. As far as I am concerned you and your precious new family can get well and truly fucked. You will rue this day." With that Matthew stormed out of his father's office.

His father was no use to him, so Matthew had to find another source of information concerning his heritage and especially the Scottish connection. He contacted the Scottish National Trust and spoke to a Duncan McLaren, who said he would check the records and get back to him. Matthew's inheritance was confirmed and arrangements were made for him to go to Scotland and meet with Duncan, in Stirling, the location of the ancient abbey.

Stirling, Matthew discovered, was once the capital of Scotland. Nestled in the Forth valley and dominated by its magnificent castle, Stirling stands as a proud city, half way between garrulous Glasgow and the more genteel Edinburgh. Duncan was waiting at the railway station when Matthew arrived. Attired in tweed jacket and kilt, he could have been an actor from *Monarch of the Glen*.

"You'd be Matthew Atreides then," Duncan stated, noting the strong resemblance to a painting of his great, great-grandfather."

"So I'm led to believe," Matthew returned, giving no explanation for his strange remark.

"Aye, well we'd best be on our way, before the evening chill sets in."

Upon reaching the abbey ruins, Duncan said, "Well Laddie this your inheritance, what's left of it, which is basically the bell tower, over there." He pointed to the lone edifice, all that remained of a once great and sprawling abbey. "In its day Cambuskenneth Abbey held a very important position in this area."

"What happened to it?" Matthew asked, disappointed.

Fumbling around in an ancient looking leather briefcase, Duncan produced a rolled document tied with a red ribbon. "Before we get into details I have here the deed of rights and all the conditions clearly set out." He handed it to Matthew, saying, "It's been some time since an Atreides used the tower for meetings. What sort of meetings will you be holding?"

"Meetings?"

"Aye, you have exclusive rights to hold meetings in the tower."

Matthew grinned, "I haven't given it any thought. Besides, I'm not ready yet. I have to go back to South Africa"

"Somewhat different to this wee cold place."

"That's for sure," Matthew answered, tucking the document into his inside pocket.

Duncan became pensive. "Now, in answer to your question, according to the Scottish Trust archives, by 1559 the abbey was all but deserted by the monks. It subsequently closed down and most of its buildings were looted and burned. To make matters worse, the military governor of Stirling Castle had a lot of stonework removed, to be used in the castle. Pointing at the bell tower, Duncan continued, "As you can see, only the 13th century campanile remains intact."

"How did my family become connected with the abbey?"

"Your great, great-grandfather, Sir Spencer Albert Atreides, funded extensive renovations in 1869. As a result he managed to be granted special dispensation from the crown to set the campanile up

as a meeting place for the Order of the Golden Thistle, an offshoot of the Bavarian Illuminate. Although the Abbey was officially acquired by the crown in 1902, unofficially it became part of the Atreides family property.”

“Since Spencer Atreides used it, has the abbey been used for meetings by the Order of the Thistle?”

“It's correct name is the Order of the Purple Thistle and no, it has not been used by an Atreides for many years past.”

Matthew smiled at Duncan. “Then we'll have to see what we can do about it.”

Chapter 5

England, the present day

Jim Newman had been the managing director of the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) for seven years. Coming from an RAF background that included five years as a safety instructor, he was well suited to the job. As the UK's specialist aviation regulator, the CAA dealt with all aspects of air safety, consumer protection, air space regulation etc. He stroked his moustache thoughtfully as he perused Lisa's report. There were blanks to be filled in but that was to be expected as the forensic investigation was still under way. A knock at his office door alerted him. Whoever it was had passed his secretary's scrutiny so their appointment was kosher. "Come in," Jim said.

Harry Krackow entered. "Hello Jim, hows tricks?"

Not one for small talk, Jim said, "We're waiting for Ms Parton. She's caught up in traffic. Would you like a tea or coffee?"

"A coffee would go down well. White, one sugar."

Jim ordered coffee through his intercom. Turning to Harry he said, "We've got to get to the bottom of this flight 67 incident. It rather looks as though there was some explosive device on board."

Harry sighed with relief. He knew it would be the case. The visual evidence made it very clear. But until the scientists confirm it, the box is not ticked. Now he had some good news for his boss. "So your boffins have confirmed it?"

"A thorough search of the site yielded elements of what could have been an explosive device."

"Then we are off the hook."

"Nobody is completely off the hook yet. And we will be looking into the AE operations."

"No probs there, Jim," Harry smiled.

"I hope not Harry. I know competition between airlines is eating into your bottom line. The last thing we want to do is cause you further hardship. So with your cooperation we will, hopefully get this business sorted out very soon."

"I'll drink to that, Jim."

"Which reminds me, where have those damn coffees got to?"

Lisa, out of breath, burst into Jim's office, "A truck turned over. It took ages to get through. Sorry," she smiled. Then noticing Harry Krackow, she said, "Hi Harry, so we meet again."

"You two know each other then?" Jim asked, concerned about conflicts of interest.

Lisa, picking up on his meaning, covered herself. "We only met at the crash site and checked things out together."

Relieved that there were no complications, Jim said, "Okay, let's get down to business. I believe in bringing this all out into the open. So I will tell you both here and now I have had both Special Branch and MI6 onto me about the air disaster."

"Then they must go along with the sabotage theory," Lisa suggested.

"It's more than a theory. It's been confirmed by evidence of an explosive device," Harry stated.

“What Harry is saying is that in all probability an explosive device was responsible for the first explosion before the plane crashed. The fire ball resulting from impact would have been the ignited fuel remaining in the plane.”

Lisa doubted the remaining jet fuel would have produced such a big crater, but she kept silent on that point. Instead, she asked, “Okay Jim. So why are the spooks interested?”

His next words sent a chill up her spine. “Apparently an empty briefcase was found attached to a severed arm. The case had been forced open and was empty. Somebody at the crash site took whatever was in that case and Commander Jacobs of SB is interested in finding the culprit. However, that's got nothing to with us. So we just let them do their thing while we deal with the crash.”

Lisa's heart skipped a beat. “Maybe the case got damaged on impact.”

“It still doesn't explain why it was empty,” Jim said. He added, “We have more pressing things to deal with.”

Chapter 6

In the past over the channel

“It's not fucking fair.” Elvis moaned, checking his light aircraft's compass bearings. Calla des Solis was left behind for the last time. It was time to start a new life. 'More likely a slow death' the pilot thought gloomily, as Avila and his history there, faded into the distance. Following a nasty divorce, Elvis Hall had decided to stay on in Spain. His air charter business was thriving, so why leave? That was his thinking until he received the devastating news. He remembered staring at the biopsy report and the impassive look on Dr Calveros' face. For Elvis it was a time freeze frame moment. He had stomach cancer, in its advanced stages. It had already spread to his oesophagus and lungs and he needed immediate radiography treatment in Madrid. Elvis could still feel the cold clamminess of his skin. He had put the heartburn and abdominal discomfort down to the stress of his marriage breakdown, not to a terminal disease.

As Elvis flew northwards across the choppy Bay of Biscay, he wished he had thought things out more clearly. He had traded some minor discomfort for major symptoms. His fine fair hair was coming out in clumps. Apart from hair loss, the chemotherapy in Madrid left him with tiredness, diarrhoea, and nausea, side-effects not at all compatible with flying. He vowed and declared he would never undergo such radical treatment again. He was also worried about the Spanish Aviation Authority finding out about the information he had provided. He had told the hospital administrator he worked as an aircraft mechanic. Well he could hardly put his occupation down as pilot, not with his medical condition. It was unlikely that the hospital authorities would check with the SAA but there was always the chance that some over-zealous type at the hospital may do so.

As the French coast and the small town of Vannes came into view, Elvis' mind went back to his stay in hospital, the loneliest time in his life. Stuck in the cancer ward with no friends or family to visit him, he felt very unloved. The nursing staff were very nice and attentive but that was hardly the same thing. He had always been the stoic and dependable one, the pillar of strength who had done all he could to support Consuela in overcoming her alcohol addiction. But in his hour of need there was nobody in his corner. He knew he could have told Lois but he didn't want to involve her. He hadn't communicated with his sister for many years, other than the customary Christmas and sometimes birthday greetings. They had fallen out when she, his big sister, had interfered once too often in his marriage, which was on the rocks but he couldn't see it. The loneliness of his time in hospital, showed Elvis how much he needed to connect with her, his only surviving family. He contacted her and told her he was leaving Spain. He never went into any details, except that he was coming back to England. He could hear the joy in her voice and accepted her invitation to stay with her until he was on his feet.

After flying in a north, north east direction, Portsmouth came into view. The nearest airstrip to his sister's place was Earles Colne, a village not far from Colchester. Elvis had arranged to rent a shed and run his charter business from there. He reached Earles Colne and got clearance to land. Having landed the Piper seneca with a perfect three pointer Elvis had to rush to the toilet. “Fuck that chemo.” he cursed, slamming the door behind him.

Chapter 7

The present day

Lisa parked her car outside 1 Victory Rd, Clacton on Sea. She was relieved to be home. Being at the centre of a Special Branch investigation freaked her out. The fact that they didn't know it was her they were looking for didn't make her feel any easier. Since breaking up with Peter she got lonely at times and this was one such time. She berated herself for thinking about the bastard and about work. She made a coffee and sat down with the cryptic manuscript. Lisa had gotten the puzzle bug off her father. He was always doing crosswords, for as long as she could remember.

She had worked out some tricky conundrums herself. With an IQ of 172 she could have been in with the MENSA crowd, but riddles and puzzling conundrums were personal for her. Even her colleagues at CAA had no idea of how much riddles turned her on. She wished she had a loving man to comfort her when she felt like this. Peter had been that someone, at first. But he had a wandering eye and a body that followed. Yes, it would be nice have a bloke give her a cuddle and bring her a cuppa, when she arrived home from work. But there is always a trade off and she didn't want to lose her independence. She had a weird fantasy in which her male comforter manifested out of thin air whenever she needed him and disappeared when she wanted privacy. As that was not likely to happen she usually settled on the next best thing – a good cryptic crossword. It was better than gorging on chocolates as a lack love substitute. Not that she didn't eat chocolates while she worked out the clues. And the tougher the clue the more chocolates slipped down her throat. Which was why Lisa was broad in the hip, the result of which made her feel unattractive and frumpy.

Her strict upbringing didn't help either. She was programmed to be polite and proper at all times, well maybe not when she was alone, which seemed to be a lot of the time. “Oh well,” she sighed, getting back to the parchment manuscript she had liberated from the plane crash. There seemed to be ten parts to it but she still couldn't find the key that connected all the parts. The odd mixture of geometric shapes, abbreviated words and symbols still had her baffled. Googling geometric images explained some of the individual shapes but did not help in giving an overall picture. She wondered if her intuition was right about the owner of the briefcase being connected to the sabotage.

She contacted her Brother, Rob. He was a bit of a puzzle buff as well. “Hi Rob, it's Lisa.”

“Hi sis. What's cooking?”

“I'm trying to work out a kind of code,”

“Why doesn't that surprise me,” he laughed.

“It's the trickiest one I've ever come across.”

“So, it's got even you stumped”.

“I could do with another brain on it.”

“And you think mine is up to it?”

“I don't know. But a fresh mind on it might trigger something.”

“Can you Email it?”

“It's on parchment but I can scan it in.”

“On parchment! Where the fuck did you get it?”

"I can't tell you that yet. I need to solve the puzzle first."

"Yeah, well if you win something I want half."

Rodger potter parked his red Vespa at the end of the cul-de-sac in Belgrave Place. After securing his pride and joy, a classic Vespa 150, 1957 vintage, he entered the offices of the Colchester Clarion, a daily provincial newspaper and his current mode of employment.

"How it going Rodger?" Buller, an old hack, greeted.

"Trying to keep a low profile," Rodger said, putting his finger to his lips.

"Oh I get your drift, but I wonder how far you will get before the DL radar kicks in"

Rodger grinned. DL was office speak for 'Dragon Lady'. "A bloody sight further if you'd shut up about it," the young coloured man said, scanning the office to see if she had been alerted. He had a file to drop off but he wanted to be in and out before Bernice caught him.

Then he heard her heavy footsteps and it was too late. She had an uncanny knack of knowing what was going on around the place and she had spotted him trying to make a quick getaway. As he headed for the door, he heard her dreaded voice, "Rodger, the very person I want to see." He turned to face Bernice Brigham, the Clarion's editor in chief. She resembled a square being nearly as wide as she was tall. The look on her broad face told him she was not happy. He knew that to avoid her now would only bring greater grief later. So he meekly followed her into her office, a forbidding den from which he may not return. The Dragon Woman was in her lair and he was at her mercy.

"I had to get Richard to follow up on your horticultural piece," she stated, accusingly.

"I did start the interview but..."

"...But you decided the plane crash was more worthy of your inestimable writing talents."

"Oh come on Bernice, I was using my initiative. If it wasn't for my quick action you wouldn't have those shots of the black box."

"Well, Mr Grossip has made a formal complaint against you."

"Big deal. My air crash story sold a hell-of-a-lot more newspapers than bloody pumpkins would!"

"That may well be but while you are working for this paper you will follow up all your assignments," she said, pointing her finger at the tired looking reporter.

Despite appearing tired, owing to his droopy eyes, which were reminiscent of a cocker Spaniel's, he was actually alert. "So, what did you think of my article on the air crash?" he asked, sheepishly.

Bernice lightened a little and smiled, "So you're fishing for compliments now."

"I'm not against a bit of praise when it's due" Roger said, unabashed.

"Yes, well now the excitement is over we can all get back to our normal work." Bernice opened her office door to let him out.

Rodger walked by her without saying a word. He breathed a sigh of relief. It could have been a lot worse.

Back on his scooter, Rodger felt free. Once again he had escaped from the dragon's lair, or rather been kicked out of it. Bernice and he had an odd working relationship but despite her overbearing ways and his cavalier attitude it seemed to work. But he had to work on his own terms. These

included a self preservation no risk policy. The problem was that the no risk assignments tended to limit his investigative skills to church fetes, dog shows and biggest pumpkin type competitions. Being a newspaper journalist who was afraid to take risks limited his potential to get the big stories, which was why Rodger hadn't made the career leap to the crime desk.

Rodger's phobia against personal harm had persisted since his was at school, where he became a magnet for all manner of ignorant, vindictive types. At school, being black, short and slightly built made him a perfect target for racist bullies. They despised Rodger, seeing him as a coward who would run from his own shadow. Although this was a pretty good judgement of character there was no need for them to keep putting it to the test, so much so that young Rodger had to develop effective avoidance skills. This earned him the nickname 'Rodger the Dodger' or just plain 'Dodger' As soon as somebody shouted 'Hey Dodger' the bullies came out of the woodwork and there seemed to be no shortage of them.

Amazingly, despite being treated badly by such ignorant oafs, Rodger still managed to like people. He often wondered if it had anything to do with what happened after the death of his parents. As a young child, losing one parent is tragic enough. But to lose both at the same time was devastating to young Rodger. It happened during their skiing holiday in Switzerland. Rodger received the tragic news from his tearful aunt Mel, with whom he was staying. They had been swallowed up by an avalanche at San Moritz. It was decided by the family, after the funeral, that young Rodger was to be permanently ferried out to his uncle Sam and aunt Mel in the East End of London. Rodger always liked Sam. He was funny and did magic tricks with cards.

Sam was what some people call a 'Jack-the-lad' an endearing term for petty criminals and small time grifters that are very good at separating the gullible from their money. But when it came to family, Sam was as straight as a die. He looked after his family and wouldn't allow any booze or drugs into the home. Sam also did a good line in hot second hand cars. That was until he tried selling one to an off duty copper. He did time for that and this left Mel in charge of the family. She missed Sam and took to the bottle. Her vigilance became impaired and drugs began to find their way into the home. So Rodger grew up among junkies and he nearly became one himself. However, despite their drug dependence his step brothers didn't, as far as he knew, go around mugging people for drug money. In fact they went out of there way to help their neighbours, if they fell on hard times. The neighbours reciprocated of course. The neighbourhood was like that.

It was journalism that rescued Rodger from the brink. He hated school and never ever thought he would want to go back. But he took to evening classes at the Tech College like a duck to water. He saw the program at the local library and, despite his determination to not take risks, he took a chance and enrolled. Rodger had a perceptive, inquiring mind so becoming a reporter seemed a logical step for him to take. Week in and week out, wrapped up warmly in his Red parka he rode to night school on his push bike, until he got his cherished diploma. He now had his bit of paper declaring him a reporter.

Chapter 8

The present time

“He was definitely on the plane,” Elvis Hall confirmed.

“That doesn't concern me. I want to know what happened to the folder,” Matthew stated, as he sat in Elvis' panel Van.

“It could have been destroyed when the bomb went off.”

“Don't be stupid! How then did the arm and the briefcase survive?”

Elvis stared at Matthew. “How do you know that.”

Matthew tapped the side of his generous Roman nose. “Let's just take it that I know. So that means somebody took the contents from the case at the crash scene.”

“Then the pigs have probably got it.”

“I am not interested in your opinions. Find out who has it and get me that folder.”

“Just how the hell am I supposed to do that?” Elvis asked, his heart racing.

“Oh, I'm sure you'll find a way, what with your contacts in low places.”

Elvis reddened. He wanted to smash the bastard in his grinning face but he held back. Who else would employ him in his condition. Besides, one word from Matthew Atreides and his flying career would be over. “I'll see what I can do, but I am not cut out for this.”

“I'm sure you will.” Matthew then ducked his head and got out of the van, leaving Elvis Hall to his thoughts.

Matthew Atreides was sure of two things. The first of these was that the plane crash, which culled around 70 useless eaters, as he referred to the common people, was caused by parties unknown, to teach him a lesson. The second thing was that they set out to destroy the 'Ten Secrets' code, the only known copy. They hadn't achieved their goal and the item had survived the crash. But now, according to his source in Special Branch, it had gone missing. Matthew needed it back so he was able to decipher the mystery of the standing stones at the abbey. He had found out that the Ten Secrets went back to the time of the early Knights Templar, who, after the Crusades, had built up a veritable banking and property empire throughout Europe. They even had their own fleet of ships, and they were highly secretive about their internal affairs. Following a purge on Friday 13th October 1307, persecution of the Templars was most strenuous, especially in France. However, despite the intense witch hunt against them, many of the knights managed to escape from La Rochelle, with much of their treasure intact, in the Order's fleet of ships. After fleeing the Pope's wrath in France the remaining members of the Order established settlements in Scotland and Ireland. Amongst their treasures was the Ten Secrets, a secret code that when cracked would reveal the sequential steps to complete world domination.

Matthew had heard about the Ten Secrets from Ian St Clair, the curator of Stirling Smith museum and Art Gallery, which boasted the earliest known Christian grave stone in Scotland. Duncan McLaren had introduced Matthew to Ian at a Trust function. In was held in the banquet hall of the historic Stirling Castle. After a few drinks conversation centred around Cambuskenneth Abbey. During the interchange Ian said, “There is another interesting connection between your great, great-grandfather and the abbey, Matthew,”

“Oh! What's that?” Matthew asked, intrigued.

“History has it that Sir Hugo Deveaux, one of the Templars who settled in Scotland, was given a special task by the Order. Fearful that the papists would seek out their prize in Scotland, Sir Hugo was given the task of finding suitable hiding places for the Templar's treasure, which was still on the ships. Apparently he chose to bury some items in the Stirling burial ground. He reasoned that a burial ground would be the last place the papists would suspect. Among this booty was a mysterious document called The Ten Secrets.”

“The ten Secrets! What is that?” Matthew asked, more alert.

“I don't know exactly but legend has it that whoever is able to correctly decipher it can become master of the world.”

Matthew laughed, “Ian, I think you are having a lend.”

“No Laddie. As true as I stand here that is what the code is supposed to represent.”

“So where did this document come from?”

Ian took a sip of single malt. “Along with many other artefacts it was liberated from the Holy Land during the Crusades. It stayed hidden until sometime in the 1780's, when the burial ground was no longer used as a cemetery.”

“So, where does my great, great- grandfather come into this saga?”

Ian explained, “Apart from being the Grand Master of the Order of the Purple Thistle, Sir Spencer Atreides was also an amateur archaeologist. Apparently he was digging in the disused burial ground, when he came across a metal box containing the Templar's 10 secrets. He spent many years trying to decipher them but to no avail. Then, through his connection with the Order of the Purple Thistle and its association with the Bavarian Illuminate, he heard of a man in Prussia who may be able to help him.”

“And did he?”

“Alas, Laddie, we dinnae know. You see, Sir Spenser went to Bavaria to seek this knowledge but both he and the Ten Secrets disappeared, never to be heard of again.”

Matthew's hand flew to his mouth. “My God! So my great, great- grandfather vanished without trace?”

“I'm afraid so. The last thing we do know is that he met with a Herr Herman Von Schlossinger, a man closely associated with Adam Weishaupt. What happened after that, who knows?”

“And what about the document in question?”

Ian shrugged. “It's rumoured that he showed it to Von Schlossinger but that is merely speculation.”

After that Matthew became obsessed with finding the missing code. He felt it might give him some clue about the fate of Spenser Atreides. But even more important, he wanted to crack the code himself.

Lisa looked at the e-mail image of her and Harry Krackow. She hadn't expected the reporter to send her a personal copy. She then looked at the pieces of paper scattered around her coffee table. The shapes, numbers and letters didn't seem to follow any of the cryptic sequences she knew of. Popping another chocolate into her mouth, Lisa knew she was stumped. Sighing, she laid back on the lounge and closed her eyes. After a couple of minutes she sat bolt upright. Of course, she needed

someone to confide in, somebody who could help her solve the puzzle. But who could she trust? It had to be somebody who was at the crash site, somebody who had shared in the whole horrific and bizarre experience. Not Harry Krackow. If he had something on her the investigation could be compromised. Then she thought of the e-mail and the Negro reporter. The danger there was that he might reveal her misdemeanour in a story. She slumped back feeling defeated. Then she sprang up again. He wouldn't reveal her secret, not if there happened to be an even bigger story for him, if he kept quiet. It was worth a try.

Rodger was going through his e-mails when he came across one from someone called Lisa. It was the short blond woman from the crash site. She had left her phone number and wanted him to phone her. He wondered what it was about. They didn't know each other from Adam. They had only exchanged a few words, so what could she possibly want? There was only one way to find out. He typed, I am curious as to what you want from me. Satisfied with his message, he pressed send.

Elvis took a mouthful of coke to wash down the pill. The stomach cramp was subsiding a little. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. His piles were playing up and he was passing blood. He looked out of the van window at the two men. They seemed to be having a heated conversation. Then he saw Niles hand over some cash. The other man walked away and Niles was returning to the van.

“Well?” Elvis asked as the doctor seated himself.

“He'll do it. These low lifes will soon want paying for scratching their arses.”

“Every labourer is worth their hire, my father used to say.”

“It's bad enough having to do Matthew's dirty work for him without trying to guess what it is about.”

Elvis, fed up with Niles' whining, looked at his passenger darkly. “I used to be curious about his motives but now I don't give a fuck.”

“With that attitude he must have something big on you, Elvis.”

The driver countered, “And what's he got on you to make you clean up his shit?”

Niles, not wanting to divulge his sins, smiled, “Maybe its best if we avoid the personal stuff.”

“Yeah. So when is your man going to get back to us?”

“He'll ring me when he has something.”

“Yeah, well it had better be soon or I don't give much for our long term futures.”

Rodger looked at the e-mail again. It still didn't make a lot of sense. Lisa said she had something of interest to show him. It was a puzzle that may well point to the reason for the plane crash. If he is interested they could meet, but not at her place. The family had a caravan in Wivenhoe. They could meet there. Rodger found the messages bizarre but enticing. What did Lisa mean about a puzzle and what did it have to do with the air disaster? With piqued curiosity, he e-mailed back asking for direction details.

Niles sat beside Elvis in the van. He had never harmed anybody, not on purpose anyway. He was a doctor, sworn to the Hippocratic oath. So when he was called upon to physically harm another

person he baulked at the idea. "This is taking things too far, Elvis. It's against my ethics to go around hurting people."

"Yeah, well take it up with Matthew. But be warned. This folder somebody stole from the briefcase is very important to him." Then, turning to the older man, he asked, "So what did your friend find out?"

"His hardly my friend."

"Whatever. So what did he say?"

"We can narrow it down to three people, discounting the police. A woman air crash investigator, A bloke from Air Express, called Harry Krackow and some reporter from the Clarion. He was seen snooping around."

"So who do we start with?"

"The woman, Lisa Parton lives alone. Let's start with her."

"So where do we find her?"

"She lives in Colchester. Matthew got her address."

Elvis Hall drove his van down Winnock Rd, past the Kendall road turnoff. "It's just over there, on the right," he said, pointing at the block of six apartments.

Niles checked his doctor's bag. His equipment was prepared and in place. He grabbed his bag, then hesitated. Looking pleadingly at Elvis, he moaned, "I'm a doctor. How the hell am I supposed to do this?"

"I'm just the driver. It's not my problem," Elvis answered, dispassionately.

"It will be if I fuck up. You're in this too, remember."

"Oh for Christ's sake, walk by the place and check it out. If she's there you have to find a way to get inside. If she's out, case the joint. It's not fuckin' rocket science"

"That's easy for you to say. I don't want to hurt her."

Elvis raised his eyes, "Jesus, you probably won't have to. Just find out if she has it. If so, with a bit of intimidation she'll probably show a bit of sense and fess up."

"I bloody hope so but how will I know if she is telling the truth or not?"

"For fuck sake just get out there and do it."

"But supposing she doesn't have it, what then?"

"Then we go and talk to the reporter."

"I mean what happens if she reports us to the police?"

Elvis, pissed off, stared at the doctor, "It's your job to see that she doesn't."

"And what if she does have it but lies about it?"

Niles stared daggers at Elvis but said nothing. Then he opened his door. He snarled,

"Good luck and if you're not back in 30 minutes, I'm out of here."

Niles scowled at Elvis. They did not get on at all and the doctor hated having to rely on somebody he disliked. He climbed out of the vehicle and felt the chill of the evening greet him. Hefting his bag, Niles took the first step on a perilous journey that would irreparably change his life.

The loud sharp rap broke Lisa's concentration. Who could be at her door, she wondered nervously. She didn't usually have people calling in the evening. "Who is it?" she asked from behind the locked front door.

"Police. We need to ask you something about the plane crash. Open the door please."

Lisa froze. She was working on the parchment code and she didn't have time to stash it. "Just a moment, I have to get dressed." Bluffing, she grabbed the Parchment, shoved it into the leather folder and quickly hid it under a cushion on the lounge. Satisfied it was concealed sufficiently, she went back to the door. Upon unlatching and opening the door she was confronted by a tall man with thick charcoal hair. "Come in," she invited. Once they were both indoors, she asked, "So officer, how can I help you?"

Niles looked down at the blond woman. She couldn't have dressed so quickly, which meant she had kept him waiting while she was doing something else. Hiding a folder, perhaps. "We are trying to locate a folder that was taken from the aircraft wreckage."

She calmed her breathing. Stalling for time to gather her thoughts, she uttered, "Oh, what folder would that be?"

"It was in a briefcase that was attached to a severed arm. The brief case was empty when the police found it."

Lisa thought it a strange turn of phrase for a police officer but paid it no more heed. "And what makes you think I would know anything about it?"

Niles glanced at his watch. He had no time to play around. "The person it belongs to is very rich and has powerful friends. So it would be very wise for anyone who has it to hand it back or they could be in deep trouble."

"In what way?"

Niles, sweating, running out of time, came straight to the point. "Do you have the folder, Ms Parton?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name, officer," Lisa said, becoming suspicious of the man's abrupt change in attitude.

"Inspector Golding. Now, I suggest you give me the folder."

"Where's your ID, officer?" Lisa asked, cursing herself for letting him in.

"I left it in my car. Now, tell me where the folder is."

Lisa grabbed her phone. "You won't mind me checking with the police station then."

This wasn't the way it was supposed to go. Things were getting out of hand. Niles became very nervy. The play acting was over. He grabbed the phone off Lisa and roughly pushed her onto the lounge.

"Just as I thought. You're not from the police."

All pretence gone, Niles, opening his doctor's bag, said, "This is the last time I will ask you nicely. Hand over the folder."

She stared at him with her narrow piercing eyes. With tears welling, she said, "I didn't mean any harm. Please don't hurt me."

"Get me the folder, now."

She scrambled up and ferreted under the cushion. Withdrawing the leather folder, she handed it to him. "Now, please leave me alone."

He smelled her fear. He was in command and she was at his mercy. Her snivelling weakness gave him strength. To his surprise he was beginning to enjoy it. "I'm afraid it's not that easy, Lisa. I don't want to hurt you," he said, pushing his face into hers. "But you have seen me and that puts me in a very difficult situation."

Her ash grey eyes widened in fear. "I won't say anything. I promise. I stole the folder and I don't want my boss to find out, so I'm no threat."

"I have to have time to get away. I know you'll call the police so I just have to do something to keep you quiet for a while."

She paled at his words but with her china white skin it was hardly noticeable. Then she stared at the syringe he took from his bag.

Grinning evilly, he said, "Just a little something I prepared earlier."

"What is it?" she asked.

"It will just knock you out for a while," he said, grabbing her right arm.

Instinctively she jerked her arm back. "What are you doing?" she asked, although it was perfectly obvious.

"Just a small prick and you will be asleep," he said, grabbing her arm. Lisa, petrified, instinctively struck out at her assailant. But Niles, being physically stronger, soon overpowered her. With one hand over her mouth to stifle her screams he stuck the hypodermic into her arm. In a reflex action, she bit his hand hard.

"Arrrgh, he screamed and cursed, "You fucking bitch!" As she slumped into a heap, Niles panicked. He grabbed, his bag, the syringe and the file and quickly made his exit.

Elvis had the engine running, as Niles climbed in. "Why did you let her scream?" he asked. "You've probably woken up the whole fucking neighbourhood with that racket."

Niles said nothing and nursed his injured bleeding hand, wrapping it in a handkerchief, pulling the knot tight with his mouth. "You're going to have to help me with her."

"What the fuck are you on about.?"

"Help me put her in the back of your van."

"So you did top her?"

"Just give me a fucking hand."

"You're a big boy. I'll back up and you toss her in."

Niles showed his crudely bandaged hand. "I've only got one good hand."

Elvis snickered. "Did the big bad lady hurt little diddums?"

"Very funny, dick head. Now give me a hand."

Chapter 9

Wivenhoe 2010

The day started off promising for Rodger. The sun was up by 7am, but the cotton wool clouds greyed over before nine. The reporter rode his Vespa, rugged up, with a muffler tucked into his red anorak. He sat proud astride his metal beast, as traffic flowed past in an almost continual stream. Confident the day would bring forth good things, he whistled as he rode. Feeling exhilarated by the ride from Colchester, he continued onward to Wivenhoe and the mystery that awaited him there.

He slowed his scooter down as he approached the built up area of Wivenhoe. Stopping where Colchester Rd morphed into Rectory Rd, he checked the map on his smart phone. Using satellite mode, he looked for Keelars Lane. He was right on target, right on time and very close to his destination. Lisa was to meet him at 10am. It was now 9.50. With near perfect timing, Rodger turned into Keelars Lane. Overnight rain had left the lane to the caravan muddy with intermittent puddles. Rodger rode his bike slowly to avoid skidding and any splash-back.

Approaching the small caravan, Rodger became concerned. Nobody appeared to be around and no vehicles were parked nearby. Pushing his Vespa onto its stand, Rodger approached the caravan and tentatively knocked at the small metal door. There was no answer. The door was unlocked but he resisted looking inside. Rodger quickly became upset by plans that didn't work out. He tried slowing his rapidly beating heart by deep breathing. He reasoned that there was no problem; she was just running late. It was not unusual for a woman, he grinned.

Ten more minutes elapsed and there was still no sign of her, or anybody else for that matter. He decided to give her another ten minutes. Then what? He tried her mobile number but there was no answer. He wondered what to do. The door 'was' unlocked and she had said she had something to show him. Maybe it was inside. He pulled opening the door. The coast appeared to be clear, so he stepped inside the small caravan and looked around. There was no note to be seen. But there was a digital camera on the fold-out table. Rodger looked at it, wondering if it had been left there purposely for him to find. He wanted to see what was on it but was hesitant. Cameras are usually personal items, not for public scrutiny. There again, he reasoned, it could have been left there to give him some clue as to what was going on. Considering this to be the most likely option, Rodger picked it up and checked to see what was recorded on the memory card. The images of local scenes did not offer much as potential clues. From the caravan door he scanned his immediate surroundings. The coast still appeared clear. He picked up the memory card. Putting it in his coat pocket, he zipped up his red anorak and left the caravan. He hated loose ends and this was certainly one of them. Lisa still hadn't shown and there wasn't any way he could contact her. He sent a SMS and decided to have a look round the small town and drop in to see if she had turned up, later. As he mounted his scooter a Range Rover stopped a few metres away. An irate man jumped out of the vehicle.

Rodger still still like a stunned mullet.

The grey haired man eyed the diminutive Negro. "What are you doing here?"

"I, I was supposed to meet Lisa Parton but she hasn't turned up."

"So who are you and how do you know Lisa?"

This was getting awkward. "I don't actually know her but she wanted to see me." Then Rodger asked, "Who are you?"

The man pointed through the trees at a large property. "I live over there." He added, "You are on private property. I let Lisa keep her caravan here."

Rodger forced a nervous smile, "Well, she's not here so I'll be going then."

The man looked down at Rodger, "Who are you then?"

"Rodger Potter. Why do you want to know?"

"So I can tell Lisa who's been snooping around when I ring her."

"Good luck with that Mr? She's not picking up."

Chapter 10

In the past

Dr Niles Golding found himself in deep trouble. His eyes darted nervously around the room, carefully avoiding those of the constable guarding him. Both the Fraud and Vice squads were interested in him and that did not bode well. He was jerked from his reverie when the door burst open and two plain clothes officers entered.

Jarvis switched on the tape recorder, announcing, "Detective Inspector Jarvis and Detective Sergeant Lowry have entered the room." Looking at his suspect, Jarvis said, "interview between Dr Niles Golding and D I Jarvis recommencing at," he glanced at his watch, "2.05 pm." He turned to Niles. "So doctor, how do you explain the kilo of cocaine found in your flat?"

He responded, "I have no knowledge of it. Somebody else must have put it there."

"It was found concealed behind a false panel in your bathroom cupboard. Who would have known that such a secret compartment existed?"

Niles knew his story wasn't plausible and the bastards were playing with him but he was smart and wouldn't fall into their pathetic trap. "I share the flat with a friend. She must have known about it."

"Are you saying that your friend placed the drugs in your bathroom?" Jarvis pressed.

"We share the bathroom." Niles quickly answered, hoping it made his story sound more credible.

"Is this friend Dr. Madeleine Stace?"

"Yes."

Jarvis turned to his offsider. "Bring her in for questioning." He thought he saw Golding's brow crease a little but didn't want to read too much into it. Jarvis recorded, "D S Lowry has left the room." He then scowled at Dr Golding, "You have already admitted to using prohibited class A drugs and we find a large quantity in your gaff. Yet you blame its presence on your flatmate, with whom you have been having a personal as well as professional relationship."

"That's not illegal, is it." Niles retorted. They'd obviously been doing their homework on him.

"Slightly unethical but not illegal." Jarvis then said, "Doctor, while we wait to hear what Dr Stace has to say about your accusation, another officer, this time from the Fraud Squad, will be asking you some questions. Don't worry though, I will still be here."

'Some cold fucking comfort' Niles thought, churning inside at what the Fraud Squad may have uncovered. He heard Jarvis announce his departure and the entry of the constable sent to guard him.

Niles, looked at the long chain of events that had gotten him into this mess. His mind wandered back to a seemingly obscure fact of his childhood. He had liked green for as long as he could remember. Coming from a farming background there was usually plenty of green around. As a child, young Niles, a keen learner, realised that everything is made up from electromagnetic energy. He remembered, from his science lessons, about a man called Newton, who split light up into different colours. Of all these colours green resonated with Niles. He discovered the word comes from the old English 'growan', meaning to grow. In some cultures it is associated with health and well being. In Islam it is a holy colour. Green is the balancing frequency in the spectrum and balance pertains to healing and being healthy. This association between the colour green and growth and health was the trigger that steered young Niles towards a medical career.

Jerked from his reverie by voices, he noticed that Jarvis and another officer had entered the room. They went through their mantra on the tape recorder and then, the new one, called Inspector Press, took over.

“Dr Golding do you know of a company called Holst Pharmaceuticals?”

“Yes, our practice deals with them. Why?” Niles queried, both wanting and not wanting to hear the answer.

“Have you had any dealings with a Suzanne Harrison?”

“Yes,”

“In what capacity?”

'Keep cool' Niles urged himself. They are obviously fishing. “She works for Holst Pharmaceuticals.”

Press smiled thinly. He stared at Niles, “She has been fired subject to prosecution.”

Niles, wide-eyed, feigned surprise. He knew the bitch was becoming too greedy. “Oh, what has she done?”

“Apparently she was Holst's most ambitious and successful representative. She was very good, won the Salesperson of the years award 5 times consecutively. No one at Holst's had achieved that before. In fact she was too good at her job and that raised some suspicions. We began investigations at the behest of her boss and soon we were talking to people, much like yourself doctor. At first they were all very tight-lipped but one GP came forward with a confession and solid evidence.” Press grinned at Niles, who was visibly squirming in his seat. “But there's no need for me to explain this because you were also part of this little scam, weren't you doctor?”

Niles, fidgeted, clasping and unclasping his hands. “I don't know what you mean.”

Press opened a folder and produced a bank statement and handed it to Niles. “Is this a copy of your bank statement for the last year, doctor?”

Niles looked at it. He couldn't see anything incriminating. “Yes why?”

“Look at the credits from Langham Investments; you will notice the same sum has been deposited into your account monthly for at least the last twelve months.”

Niles still bluffing, asked, “So?”

“Did you know that Langham is Suzanne Harrison's maiden name?”

Niles went deathly white. No he didn't fucking know that. “I want my solicitor present.”

Jarvis passed him his mobile phone. “Make your call Dr Golding.”

He was left alone again. It would take the practice's solicitor at least an hour to get to the nick. He wondered where his life had begun to unravel. It had all progressed so well. After being educated in a number of private schools, he had gained entrance to the London School of Medicine, where he qualified as a general practitioner. With his first class degree he was soon accepted as a partner with a firm of doctors in Swansea. His father warned him that his cynical retorts would land him in trouble one day but he hadn't taken any notice. He gained some notoriety at university for this barbed remarks which, in an odd way seemed to empower him. By treating others as garbage he felt better about himself. This problem, his bitter and cynical attitude to life in general, became an uncontrollable habit. When patients complained about his rudeness, the senior partner questioned

him about his attitude Niles just laughed it off, asking, "Doesn't anybody have a sense of humour these days."

Reflecting on his behaviour Niles' realised his cavalier attitude had hurt the feelings of others, particularly those of Mary Hughes, the practice receptionist. He enjoyed rubbing her up the wrong way because he couldn't stand her squeaky sweetness and the way she always saw the bright side of dark situations. Knowing she was stuck in a bad marriage, her sugary exudation made Niles feel like vomiting. He would say things like, "It's amazing how you stay so positive when you have such a shitty life." Mary was overweight and was always trying different diets. So another one of his favourite jibes was, "Mary, I see the diet is working," when it obviously wasn't.

The fact that his ego was also a problem with one of the other partners, only served to make him exploit the balding chubby physician further. Niles' slanting green eyes, thick charcoal coloured hair and lithe physique was topped off by tanned skin, which made him look more like a film heartthrob than a doctor. He remembered being called to task and was told, in no uncertain words, to lay off Mary and to stop prancing around like some ballet prima donna. But Niles just could not help himself and soon his patient list diminished. He became depressed and, uninspired with his lot, turned to the bottle for solace. He was told he had become a liability to the partnership and was asked to leave the practice. This only served him to become more self destructive. But by this time he didn't even care.

When the police officers returned to the interview room Abigail Prance said, "My client wishes to cooperate fully concerning your fraud allegations but had no knowledge of the drugs found in his flat."

Press looked quizzically at Jarvis, who raised an eyebrow.

Jarvis explained, "It's a separate inquiry, nothing to do with the fraud case."

Press nodded, "Very well, let's stick to the fraud. Perhaps your client will tell us what happened."

"I will speak on behalf of my client, inspector. Dr Golding was suffering from stress and depression when Suzanne Harrison approached him and offered him a way to make a little extra cash."

Press interrupted. "Records show that Dr. Golding had earned in excess of 50,000 pounds in the previous tax year. Why would he risk his medical career to make, as you put it 'a little extra cash?'"

"Like I said, my client was in a vulnerable emotional state, partly to do pressures financially."

"What was the nature of these financial pressures?"

"I hardly see where that has any relevance to this case, inspector. Let us just say the extra cash would have been helpful."

"What did Dr Golding have to do to make this extra cash?"

"He had to endorse the Holst products and where possible, use them exclusively. Suzanne Harrison cleverly manipulated doctors by offering them financial and other incentives to help her sales bottom line."

Inspector Press didn't buy the poor doctor routine one bit. "Did the doctors in the practice order their own supplies?"

"In my client's medical practice doctors place their orders for medical supplies through one person. It is his or hers job to take responsibility for these orders. My client wishes to point out that it was his job to stock-take and order supplies"

"How convenient," Jarvis interjected.

Abigail prance shot him a dark look.

Press continued, "So your client, who by his own admission, was on the take, also ordered for five other doctors in the practice?"

"That is correct."

"Did he influence the products used by other doctors in the practice. Before you answer, bear in mind that we are checking the orders put in by other doctors and what they received."

Niles squirmed about on his seat. Abigail, seeing his discomfort, said, "I need to confer with my client about this."

Jarvis, having had enough said, "Why don't you cut the bullshit? You said your client would cooperate fully. We know he is guilty of fraud, as do you and your client. We know he manipulated the orders to build up his commission from who was it? Oh yes, Langham Investments. So why not save us all some time and trouble?"

Abigail smiled sweetly. "Gentlemen, we won't be long."

While Abigail Prance conferred with Dr Golding, Press drew Jarvis aside, "I know how frustrating it can be when you're left in the background, but all your outburst achieved was us showing them our frustration. I had the bastard by the balls and was about to reel him in. Now, because of you, I have to play him a bit longer."

Jarvis responded, "It makes my blood boil. The privileged bastards of this world, they got it all and still they are not satisfied."

"Don't worry, I've got him. I'll just have to wait a little longer to nail the corrupt bastard."

"I don't want to lose my licence," Niles said in confidence.

"Dr Golding, you are being charged with a serious offence and you may well lose your licence. The police have a very strong case against you. My recommendation to you is that you plead guilty and let the mitigating circumstances work to lessen your sentence."

Niles gripped the edge of the desk. "Do you mean gaol time?"

"It's a distinct possibility. However, from what you tell me, after being asked to leave the partnership you became deeply depressed and turn to alcohol. You drank a lot. After a particular blinder that left you in a gaol cell for the night you decided to clean up your act."

"Yes, that's right."

She eyed him squarely. "That will definitely seal your fate. So we will say you were upset about leaving the partnership and you became depressed. Now the police know you spent one night in a cell for being drunk and disorderly so we say it was the only occasion. We will say you are passionate about helping people but you couldn't find a position that suited your qualifications."

Niles liked the spin. She was good. His mind wandered back to when he was fired from the partnership. He certainly wanted to put his shingle back on the wall, so he applied for and got a position as GP at a new medical centre, run by Dr Madeleine Stace, a beautiful blonde practitioner a few years his senior. He knew there was chemistry between them and they were soon meeting for a social drink after work. He also joined Maddie in a flutter at the casino. Niles liked Maddie's refreshing openness about all things. She disliked his acidic sarcasm and after it had elicited wincing looks a couple of times, he had done his best to curb his mouth and even bit his lip on occasions. Niles could be charming when he wanted and he really laid it on for Maddie at their first dinner date. It went well enough for them to see each other again. Maddie saw beyond his cynical

defences and helped him bring out his underlying humane qualities, attributes scorned when he was young. His farmer father tried getting Niles interested in shooting wild rabbits but young Niles never had the temperament for what he saw to be barbarous acts. His father whipped him with his belt for spoiling a shot that was about bring down a rabbit. Niles could still feel the welts when he thought about it. He changed his mind after that and tried to outdo his father. Now, after all these years, he was able to show his sensitive side but he only did so in privacy with the beautiful blonde doctor.

Niles and Maddie got to know each other well and Maddie introduced him to her circle of professional friends. Niles liked being part of her social group. They took turns in throwing lush parties, an exciting scene new to him. They all ate and drank too much and had a great time. It was at one of these gigs that he snorted his first line of coke.

He was jerked back to the present when Press and Jarvis entered the room.

Abigail said, "My client admits influencing other doctors in the practice to use Holst products."

Press said, "I think it went further than that. I have testimonies from other doctors in the practice who told me they only used Holst products because your client told them their usual brands weren't available."

"That was true, sometimes," Niles blurted out, noting the withering look from his lawyer.

"Sometimes!" Inspector Press commented. And what about other times, when you deliberately misled your colleagues so you could earn some more commission?"

"Once or twice. That was all."

Chapter 11

In the past

Matthew Atreides was no man's fool. He had some understanding of the way the world game was played by the powerful ruling elite. He understood that if he wanted to be a player he had to be accepted into the world of this super powerful clique. This, his main goal in life, became an obsession but one he cleverly disguised from friends and colleagues. In order to keep his focus on his main game Matthew used self discipline, an important attribute he learned at a very young age, in the strict Lutheran religious community in which he grew up. He soon learned the righteous ones who took the switch to him for his sins, were themselves transgressors of the word of God. Some of them even indulged in criminal activities that involved prohibited substances. On more than one occasion young Matthew, saw senior Johannesburg police receive envelopes from members of the righteous Lutheran Brethren. From this he learned a lesson. There was a law for the poor and a law for the rich and he was determined not to be poor.

Matthew had to relocate with his family when Jan, a diamond cutter, was offered a job at the Kimberley mine. He soon settled in and enjoyed life in the Northern Cape capital. There he attended St. Patrick's college in Du Toitspan Rd, where he received his high school education. Whilst there young Matthew first discovered his desire to become a chemist. He also discovered something else that set him up for his goal in life. He became part of a covert fraternity called 'The Bones Society' a white members only group. It blatantly copied the Ivy League 'Skull and Bones Society' even down to the naked confessional. He noted that 'Bonesmen' got away with things non members did not. In fact many non members, especially the coloureds, were blamed and punished for transgressions committed by Bones Society members. It was here that Matthew Atreides got his taste for power and position in society. From his experience at St. Pat's he learned, among other things, that representative democracy was a sham. By allowing people to vote for the politician of their choice maintained the illusion that they have some power over government. He soon learned that true power resides outside of governments; that governments can be relied on to do the right thing for the ruling elite because they are bought and paid for. By the time he graduated, Mr worldly wise Atreides was determined to be in with the power lobby of the world.

Matthew became so obsessed with the idea of being one of the big global players that he was determined to get noticed. So when the opportunity came about for him to attend a conference on 'Population and Development' he grasped it with both hands. During the luncheon at the Conrad Hotel in St. James. It cost him five hundred pounds for a seat but if that's what it took for him to be in with the people who mattered, so be it. He listened rapt as the keynote speaker, multi billionaire oil baron Jim Rockerman Jnr. Outlined his message. "It is imperative," Jim Rockerman stated, "that our globalisation agenda brings all of Earth's inhabitants under one global state, one that is run by those best equipped to govern it. And, gentlemen, that means us."

Matthew, joining in with the rapturous applause, followed his every word. This powerful and courageous man was saying the things others, like him, may have thought about but dared not voice.

Rockerman continued, "We will be the architects and instigators behind the formation and implementation of this New World Order simply because it has to be done and somebody has to take the lead and be resolute and strong," Thumping his fist on the rostrum for emphasis, he said, "You people are here today because I believe you have what it takes to get on board and help us see this master-plan unfold"

Matthew saw it very clearly. The blinkers had been removed and he saw the light. Jotting some notes on his pad, he waited on the great Man's next words.

“In this modern manifestation of Aristotelian governance, we will be the political leaders, the international bankers, the industrial military complex, the corporate CEOs, the scientists, the professors, the lawyers, media magnates, NGO heads etc. but first we are faced with a mammoth task and we must not be squeamish. We must find ways to reduce the human population by around five billion, if our great plans are to be successful.”

There was silence in the room. This was the first time Matthew had heard such a bold statement. He noted at the surprised looks of stark surprise on the faces of those around him. Hoping his face showed no shocked expression, Matthew nodded in agreement. He felt driven to comment. Speaking out, he said, “Mr Rockerman, I fully support your stand and I am with you all the way.”

Jim Rockerman scanned the diners and his eyes came to rest on a tall slender gaunt looking man with hair like a Newtonian wig. He asked, “And who are you?”

“Doctor Matthew Atreides sir.”

“Well Matthew Atreides, welcome to the future on earth, if we are to have one.”

Matthew left the conference with a mixture of elation and frustration, The former because he had found what he saw to be the key to his mission in life; the latter because nobody seemed to be taking action. The way he saw it most people had no real reason for being. What do people do? Basically they eat, shit and make babies – too many babies. And when they can't make them naturally scientists find way to produce them artificially. Well all that had to stop! Most people on the planet, to Matthew's way of thinking, were just 'useless eaters', contributing nothing towards the future on Earth. The conservation lobby kept tinkering away at the edges but they couldn't make any real difference while humans bred like rabbits. Matthew wanted to shout his global message from the rooftops, THIS CANNOT GO ON! but who would listen. He determined to do something about it. After all somebody had to take affirmative action and if the task fell on his shoulders, so be it. The more he thought about it the more he became convinced that he was the right man for the job.

In the post meeting rush for the exit, Matthew had no idea he was being pursued. “Well done you.” he heard the person say. Looking around he found himself face to face with a man sporting a tweed jacket with elbow patches.

The stranger said, “Let me shake your hand for standing and speaking out as you did.” Then, almost as an afterthought, “The names Arthur Chatsworth. I say would you like to have a drink with me at my hotel, so we can put forward some ideas.”

Matthew smiled thinly, “Matthew Atreides. Yes, why not but I warn you I am a man of action, not nice words.”

As they sat at the Conrad bar in the Hilton Hotel, in St James. Small talk soon changed into the subject of saving humanity, “So, how were you planning on helping Jim Rockerman,” Chatsworth asked, supping his beer.

“I'm not sure he's the one who needs my help,” Matthew taunted.

“I didn't mean it literally. I meant supporting the principle of human population management in general.”

Chatsworth sipped his scotch. “So, do you have any ideas?”

“Some.”

“Such as.”

Matthew swept back his white hair. “If I told you that I would have to kill you,” he said, with a wink.

“Okay. So we're strangers and I could be anybody. I get that, Mr Atreides. But I'm serious here. Maybe we could work together on this project.”

Matthew nodded sagely. “Perhaps we could but it needs to be bigger than just us. We need some heavyweights on board.”

“Like a kind of think tank”

“More than that Mr Chatsworth. We need people have can make things happen below the radar.”

So who is Arthur Chatsworth? Matthew mused, A quick Google search revealed he was listed in Burke's Peerage as the Duke of Somerset. Now Matthew was interested and read on:

He was the son of Richard Rodney Somerton Fitzwilliam Chatsworth and Bethany Rose Malcolm and was educated at Eton College; commissioned into the Coldstream Guards where he got promoted to Lieutenant; held the office of Hereditary Keeper of Stirling Castle; was president of British Horse Society; Marlborough Fine Art; 652nd in Sunday Times Rich List.

He looked all too squeaky clean to Matthew, until he came across a juicy tidbit. Arthur Chatsworth has been criticised in February 2008 when a Swansea councillor discovered, via the Freedom of Information Act that the duke had been paid 342 thousand pounds for a 70 ft bridge to be built over the River Tawe. It may have been morally reprehensible but not criminally illegal. Matthew smiled, maybe he could work with Lord Arthur Chatsworth after all.

Chapter 12

The present day

“I won't do it!” Niles stated vehemently.

Elvis couldn't care less about what would happen to Niles but his neck was also on the line if they stuffed up. Matthew Atreides was not a man to cross and Elvis did not fancy becoming one of his problems. He also knew that he couldn't browbeat the good doctor into doing his bidding. So he tried reverse psychology. “Mr Atreides made it perfectly clear that this was of the utmost importance to him.”

“Mr Atreides can get fucked. I'm not doing it.”

“He was desperate and that is when his at his most dangerous.”

“Then he needs to hire a professional to do the job, not me.”

Elvis wanted smash the doctor in the face, knock some sense into him. He said, “Well, Dr Atreides, being such an understanding man, might see your point, but I wouldn't bet my shirt on it”

“I am not a murderer,” Niles protested.

“So what was the little package we deposited in the river – dirty washing?”

Niles hated Elvis' whimsical sarcasm. “So you think this is fucking funny, do you?”

The pilot knew the doctor was all bluff. “What I'm saying is you've done it once so you're already a murderer, so what's the difference,” he shrugged.

“How many more times do we have to do that mad man's dirty work?” Niles complained.

“And I thought he was your saviour.”

“So he helped me out once. Do I have to pay for the rest of my life?”

Elvis held the van door open. “Just get in the fucking van and let's get it done with.”

Deep down Niles knew refusal was useless. He was bought and paid for. He mused over events out of his control that had moulded him like a piece of clay in Matthew's hands.

He had been given 3 years and had his medical licence suspended for 7 years. The news made front page in the tabloids and came to the attention of Matthew Atreides. He made a practice of employing and surrounding himself with damaged people. Seemingly respectable, professional people who had dark pasts they would rather hide. Their secrets were safe with him, providing they were loyal to him and carried out his orders without questioning them. For many of these people, Matthew was their only chance at regaining their respectability in society.

To help Dr Golding, Matthew had set up a lunch date at Whites to meet with an influential friend.

As they dined, the government insider said, “Do you know, back in the 1800's there were only a few gentlemen's clubs functioning in London. This one, Boodles, Grahams, Brookes and Cocoa Tree.”

“Fascinating but I have a small favour to ask.”

The insider dreaded this. Matthew's small favours tended to end up as bloody big ones. “What is it, dear boy?”

The chemist handed the insider a folder, “GP, got himself in a bit of a pickle – a bit of piddling fraud. They stuck him in chokey and took away his practising licence.”

The insider put on his spectacles and scanned the document. He then looked up at his guest. “Seems like more than piddling fraud to me. He played favourites with one pharmaceutical company for his own personal gain. He was also charged with dealing cocaine.”

“Yes, well I would like to get him an early release and have his licence reinstated.”

The bureaucrat laughed, “Really Matthew, you crack me up sometimes. Even if I was willing to undergo your little mission how on God's earth do you think I could influence the Home Secretary.”

“You are well placed. You have his ear.”

“Yes dear boy, and he will send me off with a flea in mine.”

Matthew fixed his man with his jade green eyes. I really think you should consider my request seriously before discarding it, being the loving family man that you are.”

The White's member blanched. “You wouldn't dare. That was spoken in the strictest confidence as a member of the order.”

“Yes, and by refusing to do my bidding you have broken the oath that protects you.”

The bureaucrat became a bag of nerves. “It's not that I don't want to help. It's just that you impose upon me an impossible task.”

“Oh, I think you are underestimating your influence at the parliamentary court.”

Matthew was secretly pleased with himself. It was the first time an initiate of the Gaia Guide stones had questioned him and refused to carry out his dictate. He had handled it rather well and his opponent was reduced to a quivering jelly. The bones-men's initiation confession certainly had its uses.

In due course Niles Golding was granted early release. He was summoned to go before the review board to have his medical qualifications assessed. It came as a surprise to him when, having been escorted from his cell, he was taken to the governor, who explained the conditions of his relief, one of which was to attend NA meetings. Niles had no idea why he was getting early release or who was behind it but he was soon to find out. A car was waiting outside the prison. The driver watched as the heavy doors open and Niles Golding walked out into the sunshine – free. Elvis looked at the photo and then at the con. They matched. He flashed his headlights. Niles walked towards the stationary car.

Niles wondered who the strange looking guy was. He had a feminine air about him as His white hair was tied in a plait and the lemon yellow pants he wore were outrageous. Yet Niles could see that he had a commanding presence about him. “So who are you?” he asked.

“The man who got you freed and who is attempting to have your licence restored.”

Bemused, Niles asked, “Why have you done this?”

Matthew smiled, “Your case interested me. Tell me doctor, what is it that you want most?”

Niles took in the tasteful surrounding, stylish furniture upholstered in lemon coloured kid hide, expensive ornaments and state of the art media centre. Outside was an Olympic size swimming pool, sheltered by a tinted plexiglass roof. “I want this. Well not your home but I want to live surrounded by such luxuries.”

Matthew held Niles close by his shoulders and looked into his eyes. “Your life has been wasted. You need me to help you up the ladder of fame and fortune. You are a beautiful and intelligent man. Niles Golding I can help you get the things you desire but you have to give your life up to me for the next 4 weeks. Are you prepared to do that?”

“What have I got to lose?”

Matthew laughed raucously. “Precisely my friend. Precisely.”

Niles found himself rapidly caught up in the crazy secret world of Matthew Atreides. He was taken to Cleve Laboratories to be shown Matthew's daytime job. He was formally introduced to Elvis Hall, Atreides' private chauffeur and pilot. He then announced, “Niles, we are flying to Scotland.”

“Why?” Niles asked, warily.

“To visit my country seat.”

“You want me to meet your family?” Niles queried, his face a question mark.

“None of my family live there.”

“Then why?”

“Don't you like surprises?”

“That depends on the surprise.”

Niles looked out of a port hole window of the twin-engined Piper Seneca at Stirling, a smallish town in Scotland's central belt, roughly midway between the sprawling aggressive Glasgow and the urban sprawl of the refined Edinburgh. Matthew pointed out “That's Stirling Castle, built on that huge volcanic rock. Nearby you can see the bell tower, all that is left of Clanbuskenneth Abbey, where we will be going.”

“Why are we going there?”

“Because that is my family seat.”

Niles grinned, “Now I know why your family doesn't live there.”

Matthew turned to Niles, a knowing smile playing on his lips. “Something much more important takes place there.”

“What?” the doctor queried, his eyebrows raised.

“It's part of my little surprise Niles.”

Niles looked at the River Forth below, silvery grey, snaking through the valley. “Where's the airstrip?”

Matthew smirked. “Stirling doesn't have one, that's why we have a skilful pilot,” he said, patting Elvis on the shoulder.

The pilot just gritted his teeth and concentrated on his flying.

Niles felt the plane drop and head towards the up rushing rocky landscape. Gripping his seat with white knuckles, his grave concern about the picturesque mountain scape racing up to meet them far outweighed its aesthetic appeal.

However, Elvis had landed there before. He skilfully manoeuvred his Piper to land on the flatter piece of land near the abbey ruins. Niles, relieved to be standing on solid ground, looked at the stark vista. The air was very chilly at that altitude and Niles was pleased he wore a fur-lined suede jacket. Despite being wrapped up against the weather he still felt the cold biting into his bones. He blew onto his hands to stop them from freezing. Then he noticed a kilted man walking towards them. "Who's the welcome committee?" he asked.

In answer, the man approaching, said, "I'm Angus MacFee, curator of the abbey."

Matthew shook his hand. "Matthew Atreides. Where's Duncan? I sent him my instructions."

Angus eyed the vulturine man. "Aye Mr Atreides, but ye must realise that the Trust has many properties to oversee."

"So have you received my instructions."

"Aye, you have permission to have sole use of the abbey over the weekend. But it's going to be verra cold up here. So you're going to need a fire. Do you know how to make torches?"

"No"

"That's what I thought. I'll send Willy Foreman up here. His on the Trust committee and he knows all about ancient torches." Angus turned to go. Then, as an after thought he asked, "Is there anything else you'll be needing?"

"Just make sure the caterers are here tomorrow morning."

"Aye Mr Atreides."

Niles, already feeling chilled bones, said, "Are we staying up here tonight?"

"Yes, now follow me, I want to show you something."

As they walked around the square-shaped bell tower Niles, feeling increasingly like Matthew's dog, saw a stone circle, on a small plateau.

Matthew became very flamboyant. He ran into the middle of the circle throwing his arms in the air. "Welcome to the Gaia Guidestones."

"What are the Gaia Guidestones?"

"The way of the future Niles and I invite you to be part of it."

Puzzled at Matthew's irrational behaviour, he said, "Part of what, exactly?"

"When we meet with the others here tomorrow the picture will become clearer for you."

"Others! What others?"

"The other members of course. Surely you didn't think I was putting this on just for your benefit."

Niles didn't know what to think. He took in the circle of 12 standing stones. "What do these have to do with it?"

"At the moment not much. But once the work on them is finished they will become very significant indeed."

“Significant Matthew, in what way?”

“In this abbey I am known as Grand Master Atreides,” he corrected.

Niles laughed nervously. “You are kidding.”

Matthew's Jade eyes fixed on Niles “I do not kid about anything concerning the Gaia Guidestones.”

Following a sleepless night, owing to the sharp mountain chill and lack of adequate heating, Niles was up very early. He had a magnificent panoramic view and towards the east, saw a reddening in the dawn sky. He wondered what sort of weird club he was being drawn into. It was all probably quite harmless, a club for the boys, a weekend wind-down from the pressure of the cities. He was dying for a mug of hot coffee but that would have to wait until the caterers got there. Nile's teeth started chattering, so he headed back to the stone keep. Then he saw the pilot coming towards him. The man had a thick coat a woollen muffler and a beanie covering his ears. Niles ventured, “What do you make of this place then?”

Elvis, having spent a cramped night in his plane, stopped short as another stomach cramp nearly cut him in half. Grimacing, he took a swig of scotch from a small silver flask he had picked up in Toledo. Seeing Niles shivering, offered him a drink.

Niles downed a swig, immediately benefiting from the warm sensation. “Thanks, that's just what I needed. But are you okay?”

Elvis kept quiet about the whiskey being medicinal for his pain. He knew, as the pilot, he shouldn't be drinking. “Just one nip in the morning, when I'm flying. But I'm grounded today so what the hell.” He took another belt and handed the scotch back to Niles. “So, you're one of them, are you?”

“Who's them?”

“One of Atreides crew. Or should I say grand fucking master?”

“You're not being very respectful to your boss.”

Elvis glared. “You'll soon find out,”

“What do you mean?”

Elvis kept silent. He's made his point. If the idiot didn't work it out that was his problem.

As the morning progressed a number of men arrived in, helicopters, 4WDs, light aircraft and even one on a motorbike. The catering company was busy setting up a portable feast and Matthew rushed around keeping a check on how the event was progressing. He set Niles up with a portly gentleman wearing a monocle. Matthew said, “Niles, this is Phericides. He will school you on what will soon take place.”

As they stood in the weak sun, Niles was only half listening as Phericides went on about Gaia Guidestones being an off shoot of the New World Order. “You Niles have been chosen to become initiated into the Brotherhood of the Gaia Guidestones.”

Niles turned on him. “I have been chosen! What is that supposed too mean? Chosen by whom?”

“It is not to be questioned. Just see it as a great honour.”

“A great honour!”

“It is indeed a great honour. The Grand Master must have seen something in you of which you are not aware.”

Niles felt trapped. He couldn't easily get off the mountain by himself. But if he stayed he was at the mercy of whatever lay in store for him. "Surely I have a say in this. Supposing I disagree and don't want to become part of this. What then?"

Phericides bristled. "Then you will miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime. Between us, the members of this brotherhood, we have influence in just about all facets of society. You will represent the Gaia Guidestones in the medical profession."

"What do you mean, represent? I am merely a GP, not a top level bureaucrat in the Ministry of Health."

"Once you become one of us you will have tremendous influence at your fingertips."

Niles thought about at the mysterious ancient bell tower, the enigmatic stone circle and Matthew, the self-acclaimed Grand Master. He asked, "Is this some kind of secret society?"

Ignoring the question, Phericides answered, "Did you know that Adam Weishaupt founded the Bavarian Illuminati on May 1st 1776, the year of American independence from Britain."

Ignoring the trivia, Niles said, "So, the answer is yes then?"

Phericides had his own agenda and wouldn't let Niles distract him from his task. "He did this with Baron Rothschild funded support. Under their patronage he was able to be the founder of the German expression of Illumination."

"Are we something to do with the fucking Illuminati then?" Niles asked, annoyed.

Phericides tutted. "There's no need for obscenities."

"Then answer my question."

"No doctor, we are independent." He said, "Now listen to what I have to say. It will become important to you."

Niles wondered how but kept silent,

The plump teacher continued, "The Bavarian Illuminati were not the first illuminates. Their origins can be traced back to the 16th century Muslim cult 'the Roshaniya of Afghanistan'."

"Who are they?"

"An Afghan secret society, barely mentioned these days."

"That doesn't answer my question."

The portly gentleman looked at the handsome doctor. "Roshan means 'light' in Dari and Pashto, the Afghan lingos. The only other thing I know of any significance is that in 1907, Habibullah Khan, Amir of Afghanistan at the time, was inducted into Masonry in Calcutta, by the highest-ranking Freemasons in British India. In true Roshaniya tradition he took the first three ordinaty degrees all at once."

"Why was Afghanistan, a dust bowl of dirt tracks and caves, so important?"

"It had importance to British Masonry as a trade route but even more importance was it's poppy supply,"

"Heroin!"

Phericides laughed, "You seem surprised." Niles didn't respond so he continued, "The Amir knew this and so did his illustrious sponsors. That's why it remains important to this day."

Niles turned to the fat man. "So what's these guide-stones got to do with it?"

"The Grand Master believes they will be a circle of power."

"But you don't. Is that right?"

The big man swung round on Niles. "It's not wise to make presumptions." Then he calmed down a little.

The doctor asked, "Are the Guidestones part of the New World Order?"

"Many of those working for the NWO are not aware they are doing so. This is not so with the Brotherhood of the Gaia Guidestones. We are all perfectly cognitive of our role in world affairs. However, the conspiracy would not exist if everybody knew what was going on. Certain people became privy to certain knowledge on a need to know basis only. Controlling the controllers is central to the Brotherhood's success. Matthew Atreides, the Worshipful Master, took his tenets from Weishaupt who was behind the Bavarian Illuminati."

"What does he have to do with this?" Niles asked, gesturing with a wide sweep of his arms.

Just then a horn was sounded. Phericides said, "We are being summonsed. It begins."

The bell tower was transformed for the meeting. A scarlet rug covered much of the stone floor, with an elaborately carved rostrum set up in the centre. Behind it stood Matthew Atreides the Grand Master of the Gaia Guidestones, attired in richly bedecked flowing robes, his hands resting on the rostrum. The Guidestones members filed in and took their seats on the scarlet cushions covering the bench that ran around the inside perimeter of the tower. It was like a scene from a medieval film or book.

Once all members were seated, Matthew began, "Brothers of the Gaia Guidestones, chaos is the starting point of all societies. From this chaos emerges order, usually after a lot of blood has been shed. Order, my brothers, comes at a price. Our world is once more becoming chaotic and it is now our turn to guide it towards order and balance. To achieve this lofty goal we have to take it upon ourselves to stand strong and resolute in what we have to do. And what we have to do is secure a future on this planet for the worthiest in mind and body."

One of the enclave, a corpulent man with a resonant voice said, "Grand Master, can you speak of the practical application of this goal?"

"Gentlemen, our vaccine is almost ready for distribution. You will each be apprised of the role you will play in getting this to the 'useless feeders' plaguing this world." Matthew looked around his group. Now, before we get into the reports, let us recite the oath by speaking our pledge."

In one voice the members recited, "We guardians of the guide stones pledge that we will dedicate our lives to restoring the balance needed for human survival on Earth. To this end we will do what it takes to achieve this mighty and noble goal. We will not shy from our sacred task because it seems impossible. We will not allow our human sensibilities get in the way of the honoured duty."

Matthew, with his flowing white hair and lanky build, looked very much the master of ceremonies. Looking for Niles in audience he said, "Niles Golding, step up here."

Niles came forward tentatively, wondering what to expect. He still wasn't sure about hooking up with these strange robed men. But being part of such an influential fraternity could well work to his advantage. Phericides came forward and told Niles to sit on a chair, put in the centre of the floor for the occasion. He whispered close to the doctor's ear, "Just relax and go with it."

Niles wondered what he meant. He soon found out. His wrists were shackled to the arms of the chair and a blindfold hood was put over his head. To his horror he could neither move or see. Christ, he

could be the victim of some elaborate psychopathic ritual. Maybe they didn't want him – just his blood. Despite the chill he sweated profusely. Then he heard Matthew's words.

“Do you solemnly declare that you by your honour that unbiased and uninfluenced you freely offer yourself as a candidate for the mysteries of the Gaia Guidestones?”

Niles knew he had to answer yes. Yet to do so meant agreeing to whatever came next. The tower went completely silent. The pressure grew. He had to respond. Haltingly he mouthed, “yes.”

“Do you declare upon your honour that you are prompted to solicit the privileges of the Guidestones your belief in this institution, a desire for knowledge and the sincere wish to be useful to your fellow brethren?”

“Yes.” Niles then felt somebody interfering with his clothes. Then cold air on his naked chest. Shivering, he felt the point of something sharp press against his heart. Rigid with fear, Niles could hardly breathe. Then he heard Matthew's voice again.

“The point of this sharp knife pressed upon your naked left breast is to warn you of your fate should you attempt to reveal the secrets of the Guidestones unlawfully.”

What secrets? His mind was asking. He didn't know any secrets.

“Now, Niles Golding, repeat after me, “Oh, Almighty father of the universe, at this time in our present convention, that this Guidestones candidate may henceforth dedicate and devote his life to thy service and become a true a faithful brother among us.”

Niles, with a little prompting, repeated the words. In chorus the gathered brethren said, “So let it be.”

The Grand Master continued, “Endow him with the competency of thy wisdom that by the secrets of our art he may be better enabled to display the beauty of brotherly love, truth and justice in thy holy name. Amen.”

“Amen,” the gathered brethren spoke in unison.

Niles, still hooded, confused, scared and yet strangely excited, was led by Phericides out of the tower, and down to the circle of stones, where his hood was removed. Then his arms were stretched out and he was manacled to the tallest of the menhirs. “What's happening now?” he asked, trembling with fear and the cold.

Phericides answered, “Stay calm and all will be well.”

“What, after I've been frozen to death?”

The other members gathered around the circle of upright stones. Then the Grand Master intoned, “Niles Golding, You have been shackled to the stone as a mark of your newly found dedication to our cause. You will stay there for the period of one hour during which time you can reflect on your pledge to the Guidestones and ask how you can best help this noble cause.”

Niles just prayed the bizarre ritual would soon be over.

Chapter 13

England 2008

Angela Madison knew Matthew Atreides had been drawn to her from the first day she came to work in his laboratory. The feeling was mutual. Although he wasn't the kind of person she would have normally been attracted to. His long white hair, gaunt features and feminine gestures, suggested a cross between a pallbearer and a hair stylist. He was in fact a scientific genius, a man driven to achieving a name for himself. He told her he was taken by her deep dark eyes that put him in mind of black marble. Despite her outrageous hairstyles, at the time scarlet silky straight hair, she proved very proficient at her job as research scientist at Cleve Chemicals. So much so that she now headed a research team looking into bacterial infections and how to combat them.

Dr Madison's team of scientists had produced DteT, a variant of DtaP, an immunogenic strain of anti tetanus. But she was becoming concerned because it was being targeted at pregnant women when all the medical journals she had read warned against such practises. She had to speak with Dr Atreides about it.

She found him in his office and knocked on his door, entered, and faced him.

He looked up from his work, "Ah, Dr Madison, How is our baby going?"

A bad choice of words, under the circumstances, she thought "It's about DteT. I heard that it's being shipped to Angola once all tests are finished."

He stared at her. "I don't see why that would disturb you."

"Is it true that it's being tested on pregnant women?"

He knew where she was coming from. Guidelines on prenatal care in the United States suggested that DtaP vaccinations should, where possible, be delayed until the postpartum period. Matthew smiled, "Dr Madison DteT is different. Our test study is for women who haven't had any anti-tetanus jabs. It is not harmful to women in their first trimester."

Madeleine felt some relief. "Thank you Dr Atreides for clearing that up for me."

"I'm glad you came to me about this little misunderstanding." As she turned to leave, he added, "Our vaccine is to be given to Angolan women who have never received any tetanus shots. It is recommended by the WHO to be given any time after ten weeks of gestation. It's a huge breakthrough, largely thanks to you and your team. Well done."

She smiled as she left his office. But her elation was short-lived when she returned to her lab.

Patrick Small, the assistant wore a frown on his red bearded face. "Dr Madison, I need a word in private."

"Certainly, Come into my office."

Once inside, Dr Small voiced his worry. "It seems that one of the DteT samples has gone missing."

"Missing! Are you sure?"

"I checked the stock listed. I counted the samples three times. We are definitely one short."

She stared at him. "How many of us have a key to the sample cupboard?"

He looked at her, fear showing on his face. "Just you, me – and of course Dr Atreides."

She was silent for a moment, her brain in turmoil. At length she said, "Bring up the computer records. We'll go over them together."

Patrick did so. They checked the data together. There was definitely a missing DteT sample in stock. They went over the computer records again but the result remained the same. This was a major breach in safety and security. By rights she should report the loss to the GLP. A missing sample could be used unethically by some sick or disgruntled person, out for some kind of weird revenge. But if she reported her findings to the Good Laboratory Practices Department they would be trampling all over Cleve Chemicals, making Matthew Atreides angry, especially as he was close to making a very lucrative deal with the British and American governments. The missing flask was both puzzling and worrying for her. If only Matthew, Patrick and she had access to the steel cupboard that held the samples, who else could have opened it and stolen the flask? She looked sideways at young Patrick, then mentally shook her head. No, it couldn't be, could it? She pondered. It wouldn't have been Matthew and it certainly wasn't her. So who could it be?"

Just outside Rickmansworth, on the A4145m, Matthew Atreides turned his Range Rover into the driveway of Cranwell Farm, once owned by the Cranwell family, now owned by Arthur Chatsworth. The chemist pulled up outside the main house and waited for the farmer to emerge. The porch light went on and Arthur Chatsworth stepped outside, pausing to find and pull on his gumboots. Matthew knew he was going to regret wearing his trainers.

Chatsworth said, "How are you Grand Master?"

"Call me Matthew while we're here."

"It seems strange Matthew, especially as we are about Guidestones business."

"We are about survival business, Arthur."

"Did you bring the sample?"

"Let's walk as we talk, away from the house."

Arthur laughed, "Your paranoia is showing, Matthew."

Ignoring the remark, Dr Atreides said, "Have you got the pilot group ready?"

Arthur Chatsworth looked at The gangly genius. "Under control old man. Duchess Chatsworth is on some committee about support for young mothers. They are going on a field visit to St Thomases, where tests are being carried out a young pregnant women."

Matthew showed puzzlement. "Are you saying that Lady Chatsworth is going to carry out the test with those women?"

Arthur looked at the tall man. "Don't worry old boy. Abigail is solid. We discuss everything and she is more than happy to do her bit."

"Are you telling me that she knows about the Guide Stones?"

Arthur winked, "Almost everything."

The evening sky, changing its mind about red, was rolling out the grey. So Arthur produced a torch. Looking heavenward he commented, "Looks like it could even more rain tonight."

"So we'd better get a move on."

Arthur Chatsworth, the current patriarch of the five generation family, had expanded the family business, investing in various rural properties scattered around the Home Counties. He spent a great

deal of time checking on his subjects and properties in his modest empire, which meant he spent a good deal of time away from the bosom of his family. His family accepted the legitimacy of his frequent absence; this gave Arthur chance to pursue his other interest, the Gaia Guidestones, of which he said not a word.

Following Arthur's chance meeting with Matthew, he had been instrumental in putting together some important and influential people, pro global government types, who had put in the hard yards and built respectable enterprises that were very successful in their field. After the inaugural meeting at Cambuskenneth Abbey, Arthur quickly became an advocate of the cause and he adopted the code name 'Aristotle'. After the Gaia Guidestones plan was revealed Arthur offered to use his wife's connections to carry out experiments. This suited Matthew Atreides very well, especially as DteT had to have a proven track record before the Brits and the Yanks would delve into their government coffers for its use in Angola.

As they walked back to the doctor's car Arthur said. "Remember the first time we met?"

"Of course, I'm not senile yet, Arthur. Why do you mention it?"

"I was just wondering how many other people at that meeting have taken this mission beyond words."

"Well, we certainly have and that's what counts. Once the sterilisation drug in DteT takes effect the African population growth will no longer be a problem."

Arthur smiled broadly. "There will be an outbreak of serious proportions and nobody will track it back to us."

Matthew open his front passenger door, reached in and withdrew a cylindrical steel container the size of a thermos, which he handed to his Lordship.

"Ah, the sample!", Arthur said reaching for it.

"Just how is your good lady going to go about delivering the doses?"

"There will be six in the early stages of gestation. They all understand they will be injected with DteT, which they now of as an anti tetanus vaccine, They have all signed waivers to this effect."

"What happens when they all have miscarriages. They might think it more than a little strange."

Arthur frowned, "I hadn't considered that."

"You haven't thought this through. We have to come up with another strategy and we don't have much time."

"What do you suggest?"

"The test cases have remain anonymous and isolated from each other. Can you arrange that, Arthur?"

The Duke of Somerset stared at the scientist, saying nothing. Then he said, "I don't think the memsab is up to that, old man. But there is an obstetrician who owes me a favour."

"Can you guarantee his discretion?"

"Yes, I think so. What with what I know about him."

"It's simply an anti Tetanus trial – right."

"Right." Arthur took hold of the flask. He knew that once the women were injected there was no turning back. He also knew the rejected fetuses would be down to him. Killing a healthy fetus

was murder. He wondered if he was up to the task. Looking at Matthew, he said, "Tell me we are doing the right thing."

The scientist answered, stone-faced. "It is neither the right nor wrong thing. It is the necessary thing."

Arthur Chatsworth watched the tail lights of Dr Atreides' car, as it drove away. He looked at the metal flask he was holding. His mind went back to the day at the club when Dr Fames asked him for a very big favour. The man was a drunk and a gambler and brought disgrace to the science of obstetrics. Arthur, being the big-hearted man that he was, came to his rescue. Now the doctor was in recovery and it was time for him to balance the books.

Arthur was proud to playing an active part in the grand plan. He had to show the Grand Master he was worthy of his trust. Now he had to face the Dutchess and tell her the plans had changed.

Chapter 14

Cleve laboratories 2009

Apart from his rather unique appearance, his green eyes and thick, wavy, long white hair, worn like a Newtonian wig from the 1800's, Matthew Atreides seemed quite normal. The bright shirts, predominantly orange or yellow, he usually wore marked him more like an arty type rather than a research scientist. The brightness and warmth in his attire belied his almost total lack of compassion for his fellow man. To him compassion was a weakness and one of the causes of what he saw to be, the dire human situation. For these reasons he could well be labelled as a sociopath. Yet some would hail him as a scientific genius. He could also be considered a mass murderer while being congratulated as a brilliant problem solver, albeit a cold calculating one. As for Matthew Atreides, he just wanted to test his limits and see just how detached he could remain in problem solving. He saw himself to be the angel of death, a necessary entity carrying out a job very few people had the guts for. He couldn't allow himself to think anything else.

On one occasion, as he monitored his infertility vaccine, which had been manufactured in an independent laboratory, his mind wandered back to his childhood years in South Africa and in particular an early mentor, Rusty Hergh. He had gotten to know Rusty, a petty criminal, during his Cape Town days, while he was growing up. Rusty, a wily old dog, knew all the tricks to avoid the cops when engaged in his evening work, a bit of breaking and entering. Even at 65 the old fox could shimmy up a drain pipe, slip in window, relieve a sleeping couple of their encumbrances and slip out again without them even knowing he had visited them. Dogs could be a problem but not when they were sleeping peacefully after ingesting some laced raw liver. Rusty taught the young Matthew that you don't do time for the crime. You do time for getting caught. Matthew considered this bit of wisdom as he checked the progress of his vaccine. Another two weeks and the test cases should show results. Then, all going well, governments would be using his special products.

Dr Ivan Kleen walked down the corridor, flanked by two advisors. He was a veteran when it came to dealing with the press, but this was different. It was personal. Jemima had a perfectly normal pregnancy with no complications. So why had she spontaneously aborted ten weeks into her gestation? But it wasn't only her miscarriage that was brought to the attention of the media. There had been a spate of such incidences in the Home Counties, three of which that also resulted in the death of the mother-to-be. Dr Keen faced the barrage of flashing lights and questions fired at him, with his usual calm and professionalism. His job was to assure the media that Dr Frames, who had had overseen the treatment of the six young pregnant women in question, was in no way to blame for what amounted to a number of unusual reactions to commonly taken medical procedures.

One of the Media present, a young journalist trying to make a name for herself, asked, "Did Dr Frames commit suicide because of what happened to his patients or was it for more personal reasons concerning his alleged gambling and drinking?"

Damn! Where had she dug up that? Dr Kleen wondered, thinking about how to field, what amounted to an accusation. "Dr Frame's untimely death is a tragedy for his family and all his medical colleagues. All we know is that he became emotionally distraught over the deaths of the three young women in his care."

Another journalist picked up the baton. "Are you saying that his alleged gambling debts and drinking problem had nothing to do with it, Dr Kleen?"

"There was nothing to suggest that he took his life owing to personal problems."

"Will you be holding an inquiry into the new anti tetanus vaccine given to see if it had anything to do with the tragic deaths of the three young women who died under Dr Frames' care?" a TV journalist asked.

“A thorough investigation is taking place to see if these incidents could have been avoided. Now, no more questions. The media will be kept apprised of any significant findings. Good day ladies and gentlemen.”

“Can you assure me that the deaths of those three women had nothing to do with harmful side-effects of your vaccine?” Lawrence Springton asked, in a secret meeting at Cleve laboratories.

The Frames affair had the potential of wrecking the deal. The American government had put the contract for the vaccine on hold as they monitored how the British would handle the disaster. Matthew, putting on a brave face, said, “Those incidents had nothing to do with DteT. If any blame is to be apportioned it has fall at the feet of the medical administration who put a known drunk in charge of obstetrics. What were they thinking of?”

The Health Minister fiddled nervously with his Harrow tie. “I’m afraid you word won’t be good enough when my opposition number tables his motion about controversial drugs, in Parliament. All six test cases had miscarriages. That can’t just be explained away is an unfortunate coincidence.”

“Why not, seeing as that is what it is. And nobody can prove any different, can they?”

“No Matthew that’s true. But how can I get our government to commit itself to the project unless they have assurances that DteT is safe. I mean, damn it all man, we can’t have H M Government being accused of genocide in Africa, can we?”

Matthew handed over a folder marked DteT pilot study. He smiled, “This should allay any fears and get your people behind us.”

Lawrence Springton picked up the folder and opened it.

Matthew prayed it would pass scrutiny. The statistician had done a good job but would it be convincing enough for the government steering committee.

Springton looked up at the scientist. “Who exactly is this Precision Consulting Company?”

“The independent body that collated the results of our field tests.” Matthew took the folder and pointed to the statistical analyses. “As you can see the number of subjects who suffered some kind of negative side effect is way below the norm, even including the original six cases.”

“Yes but how do we explain how those cases were concentrated in such a localised area, Dr Atreides?”

“It’s an unexplained anomaly. That’s all you have to say.”

Lawrence picked up the file. “I’ll take this with me.” As he rose to leave Matthew’s office, he waved the document, saying, “This is a help but it it has to be thoroughly checked out.”

Matthew silently prayed it would stand up to intense scrutiny. He had no idea who PCC was. Arthur had dealt with that side of things. He smiled, “Of course Minister. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Nothing sells the media like baby abuse and this is the way they sold the story. The media were all over Cleve Industries like a rash The Sun headline 'Baby Killer Drug' had Matthew contacting his legal people. He employed Garrett Mellman, a professional spin doctor to liaise with all media. Having gotten the press and TV off his back he arranged to meet with Arthur Chatsworth and James Pemberton, who penned the PCC report.

It was the first time Matthew had been to the New Churchill’s Gentlemen’s club. One of the longest standing such clubs in London it was The Duke of Somerset’s venue choice for the meeting. Fittingly very posh and bubbling with class and polish it was both very elegant and extremely

exclusive. Matthew looked across the table at the balding man who put him in mind of the George character in the TV soap 'Seinfeld'. "Tell me about PCC, Mr Pemberton.

James cast a glance to Arthur, mentally willing him offer support. "I am PCC."

Matthew did a double take. "You are PCC!"

"That's right. It's an on line company that carries out corporate investigations."

The scientist couldn't believe it. "So you carried out a report on DteT for your self?"

"Dr Atreides I did it for you at Arthur's behest."

Matthew sat staring at the man. "I have given your bogus report to the Health Minister and it is going to be closely scrutinised by a parliamentary committee." He turned to Arthur, "Jesus. What the fuck have you done?"

Arthur, seeing some other diners taking an interest in the conversation said, "Steady on old man. Keep your voice down."

James said, "Relax Dr Atreides, I'm very good at what I do. The Health Ministry have already contacted me and I have sent them my credentials, which are very impressive, if I may say so."

"Completely fabricated, I suppose," Matthew sighed.

Lawrence Springton scrutinised the PCC report. It looked kosher as long as no one delved too deeply. The Cleve Laboratory contract meant it would cost the government millions in damages it pulled out. Besides making him look incompetent for making a disastrous decision the budget blow out would affect foreign aid to Africa. His reverie was interrupted by his intercom. The Deputy Prime Minister was on his way to see him. This didn't bode at all well.

Dennis Bloom was announced by Lawrence's P A. He strode into the Health Minister's domain, "Good morning Lawrence. I hope you're well."

Lawrence had never been friends with whom he referred to as 'the PM wannabe. "Yes thank you. But I'm sure you haven't come all this way to share pleasantries."

"Right. The PM wants to know if you've sorted out this Angolan vaccine business."

"He handed Dennis the report. "100 cases and no nasty side effects."

Dennis placed the report on the desk without looking at it. "Look, the PM is concerned about our interests in Angola. Things are a bit shaky there at the moment. The Chinese are trying to get the diamond concessions before us. We can't let that happen."

"Of course not. We are ready to go ahead with the programme but we're being held up by the opposition's motion concerning Cleve Industries."

Dennis pointed at the report. "If that holds up the PM wants you to move on the vaccine programme."

Lawrence turned on him. "What, before the opposition have proposed their motion."

"It's just delaying tactics. Besides our legal people reckon the contract is solid."

Lawrence smiled, "So I have the green light."

"Yes, Lawrence, but I think it is fair to warn you if the motion goes against us the PM will be on the war path after your scalp."

“So I get thrown to the wolves.”

Dennis smiled, “You trust in your report, don't you?”

The media was still demanding answers about the deaths of the pregnant women. Stories about the families who had lost loved ones and their unborn babies filled the front pages. Lawrence Springton knew that without satisfactory answers it wasn't going to go away. He entered the media centre and took his place at the podium “On May 10 this year I received a report about the deaths of three young women in the early stages of pregnancy. Another three women had early miscarriages. All these incidents occurred in the EAST Anglian geographic area. We have been diligent in finding out why these events took place. What we have discovered is that all six women were given a anti-tetanus jab to protect their unborn babies. Another 1000 tests have proved successful with no deleterious side effects so we're quite sure the tetanus shot wasn't the cause of those anomalies.”

A journalist asked, “Is it true that DteT a new, experimental vaccine was used on these women?”

“Yes it was DteT, which had already immunised 1000 woman with no side effects.”

“Who carried out the statistical study?” another asked.

Lawrence said, “It was carried out by PCC an independent body.

“Is it true that there are plans to use this vaccine in Africa?” a journalist from the Mail asked.

“Yes, as part of our foreign aid programme.”

“Are you going to pursue the cause of the three deaths or are you just putting it down as an ‘anomaly’?” a reporter from the Guardian asked.”

“Could the vaccine used on he six woman have been tainted in some way?rus have escaped from a scientific laboratory?” asked a woman journalist from the Sun news paper.

“First, let me explain something. It is not a virus. E coli is a bacterium. It is not an airborne disease. That will be one of the things looked at in the investigation.”

“Could somebody have stolen some of the vaccine and doctored it?”

Lawrence answered, “There haven't been any reports of missing samples at from any scientific facilities in the country. If there were it would have been reported.”

“What if it was not reported to the GLP?” the Sun reporter persisted.

“Any breeches of strictly set down rules pertaining to safety and security concerning potential dangerous substances can have the laboratory in question having its licence removed.”

And so the questions droned on. Lawrence tolerated it. It went with his job.

Some people who thought they Knew Matthew Atreides considered him too good to be true. He often regaled friends with his altruistic Oxfam work in Africa. That was after he graduated with honours with a Masters in chemistry. Ironically, it was during his time with Oxfam that Matthew saw the human problem to be one of overpopulation. The more he thought about it the more it seemed the starving millions in Africa served no use to the world. They were lame ducks, draining the public purse. He initially took such ideas on board from Elizabeth Sams, a woman he came to both admire and lust after. She was married to a diamond mine manager, who spent a lot of time away from the marital home. Matthew spent a good deal of time in her marital home with her. Beguiled by her sexually, he began to listen to her population management ideas, adopting them

himself. He was saddened when she announced she was moving closer to the mine to be with her husband, Feeling alone and unloved, Matthew left Oxfam and Africa, to settle in England.

Matthew Atreides read people with an uncanny accuracy. So much so that he was able to massage their weaknesses. This power helped him to control others to get them to do his bidding, even if they were not aware they were being manipulated. His pretend charm and flattery was very convincing. Tall in stature, with a slim feminine build, he came over as a gentle soul. Despite not being handsome in the classical sense, Matthew's elegant Roman nose was offset by prominent cheekbones in a face lined with experience. He considered himself a good actor where others may well have seen him as a con man. But nobody had him down as a mass murderer. Yes, his friends knew he had lived and worked in Africa but nobody knew much about his experiment there. Guests, at a party thrown in his honour mysteriously suffered food poisoning after he had surreptitiously laced the cock-au-van with a rather nasty but non lethal bacteria. This was his first attempt at causing an outbreak of disease to occur. He felt some guilt afterwards and moved away from Johannesburg society, to a life of solitude on a boat.

One day he came across a black youth beaten and badly bruised. He got him back to his boat, where he laid him on some sacking. The youth was beautiful to Matthew. He was very drawn to the youth's coal black eyes and shiny ebony skin. But he didn't need any further complications to his life. The youth was very weak and may well have died if Matthew had not intervened. His first instinct, when he saw the battered youth, was self preservation. The sensible thing to have done would be to have thrown the handsome kid overboard. But when he looked up at Matthew and their eyes met for the first time, his soulful look quickly caused Matthew's anger to abate. So, instead of destroying the youth, as a worthless encumbrance, something in him stirred and he nursed the boy back to health.

Chapter 15

Germany present day

Claude Sutherland hadn't been to Berlin since his fieldwork days. He emerged with the flowing crowd from Stadmitte Underground Station and walked past the iconic 'Checkpoint Charlie' from the cold war days. The city brought back fond memories, from before, when east was east and west was west. He saw the Mercure Hotel and Residenz Berlin Checkpoint Charlie and wondered if somebody in the BND did have a sense of humour. Claude booked in and was shown to his suite. Being the director of MI6 could be harrowing but it did have its compensations. Having dismissed the porter he took off his shoes and massaged his hot swollen feet.

Having freshened up, Claude dressed in a navy pinstripe suit, donned his ubiquitous bowler, which was at odds with his Nike trainers. He met Adolf Erhmann from the BND in the bar. Erhmann stifled a smile as the penguin like MI6 boss approached him.

“Claude Sutherland. Pleased to meet you.”

Erhmann, standing up ramrod straight, clicked his heels together. “Herr Sutherland, it is good to meet you.”

Claude looked around the bar. It was nearly empty. “Are we meeting here?”

“Only for a drink. We haff a private room organised. So what would you like to drink?”

“Lager will do nicely.” He looked quizzically at the German. “So why are we here?”

Erhmann ordered the drinks. “Let us find a quiet place to sit.”

Once seated with drinks served, Erhmann said, “In answer to your question, we may have found the party responsible for bombing the air plane.”

“Do you mean Air Express flight 67?”

“Ya. Of course we cannot be certain but we do have somebody in custody who may well have planted the bomb.”

Claude smiled, “That is great news Adolf. So when do I get to question your suspect?”

“It is not as simple as that. There are procedures to go through.”

There always were, in Germany, he thought. “Such as?”

“You know, Herr Sutherland. It is what you English call red tape.”

“So will get to speak with him?”

“That all depends on the Israeli Embassy.”

Claude sat wide-eyed, “Are you telling me the suspect is a Jew?”

“An Israeli citizen, yes. Now perhaps you see why we haff to tread carefully.”

Claude rubbed his chin. “I suppose that means somebody from the Israeli Embassy will be present at our meeting.”

Adolf grinned, “Herr Suthe