

HACK

World Bank In Crisis



Chris Deggs

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

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First Edition

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Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this book to the World Bank for helping me to write a better story, after they had hacked into my computer and deleted my research and first draft.

I would also like to dedicate this story to my loving friend Lyn who sat many hours with me editing this book.

I also dedicate this book to the Lakota Sioux nation for having the vision and courage to develop the first fractal banking system in the world.

Foreword

On February 21, 1993, beneath a gloomy white sky, over 100 armed police stormed the slum of Badia East, in the bursting mega-city of Lagos. Bulldozers bearing down caused thousands to flee, as the authorities quickly destroyed the crude houses. The police went ahead of them, cracking their batons against the ramshackle corrugated iron of the shanties. "IF YOU WANT TO LIVE AND LOVE YOUR LIVES, MOVE OUT NOW!" the officers shouted. Thousands of people, quickly grabbed what they could of their meagre belongings, taking only what they could carry, fled in panic. The lucky ones managed to escape the line of hulking excavators as they moved in, using their hydraulic claws to smash the crude homes to smithereens. Within mere hours the neighbourhood resembled a landfill rubbish dump.

Among those fleeing was Bimbo Omowole Osabe who had lost track of her children in the panic and chaos. Concerned, she turned to go back and for them but they were nowhere to be seen. Chased out of her sister's hovel home with 8-year old Gustav and 6-year old Catriona, she had lost sight of them in the panic. Attempts at going back inside the remains of the shanty town, to see if the lost children were hiding from the terror, got her shot. Her sister, whom she was visiting at the time, was at the market buying cleaning products when the urban clearance attack took place. By the time she had returned, her modest dwelling had been completely demolished and Bimbo Omowole Osabe lie dead on the ground.

Gustav and Catriona, caught up in the refugee exodus from Lagos, were swallowed up by the terrified escapees, who moved blindly away from the devastation, with nowhere to go to. When Gustav woke up that fateful Saturday morning he was oblivious to the fact that he and his sister would be made homeless and would have to spend the night in the open street at the mercy of the elements. He knew nothing about the politics involved. He had no idea who Babatunde Fashola was, or elections, or why he lied to be voted into power as Lagos' state governor. Even if he had been aware of such grown-up stuff Gustav's only thoughts were about how he and his little sister would be able to survive.

Gustav watched, staring at the unbelievable devastation, as residents scrambled to remove zinc roofs and valuable possessions under the menacing eyes of dozens of heavily armed officers of the Nigerian Police force. To make an example they had arrested young men early in the day, keeping them in a 'Black Maria' vehicle, on site. By the end of the day Gustav, tired and very hungry, huddled with his sister in a doorway, while the police still chased uncomprehending residents from their homes, with batons and guns; while bulldozers pulled power poles and cables down over their heads.

As night fell on the stricken community Gustav and Catriona joined countless newly homeless people lining the rail road tracks that passed through the devastated community, abandoned; left to defend themselves and protect their salvaged belongings through the night. Gustav cuddled his sister as she cried for her mother. Little did Gustav know, at the time, that Badia had been earmarked as one of the host communities for 'slum upgrading' activities under the \$200 million

World Bank-funded Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance project. As with other communities, the Lagos State Government had failed to abide by the specific terms of the World Bank's conditions that mandated it to minimise involuntary resettlement. When displacement became unavoidable the government was supposed to ensure compensation and resettlement to those citizens displaced. None of this happened and the World Bank let Nigeria get away with it.

But Gustav and Catriona somehow survived and, as they became old enough to understand, learned that the resettlement monies, instead of being used for rehousing, had been used to upgrade the very railway line that caused East Badia to be razed to the ground. Gustav and Catriona grew up with hatred in their hearts. In their idealist but naive beliefs they determined that third world communities would not be treated in such an off hand way again by powerful international banking corporations. Somehow they would find a way to have their revenge.

Chapter 1

As Shamseddin Khosseini entered the new Assembly building in Beharestan Square, he knew it wasn't going to be an easy morning for him. As Iran's Economy Minister he had to put forward a convincing case to the IBRD representative. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had made it abundantly clear that he was relying on Shamseddin to put forward a credible proposal to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Before having to face the IBRD the Economy Minister went into the small Mosque in the parliamentary building and prayed to Allah for guidance and inspiration.

Shamseddin much preferred the old bicameral legislature, which had been abandoned after the Islamic Revolution but he couldn't turn back the clock any more than he could make the meeting go the way he wanted it to. The Pol-e-Tabiat, or Nature Bridge, was an important project for the Islamic nation but it needed IBRD credit for its construction. The initial application had been accepted subject to a thorough investigation. Following such, the loan was cancelled, owing to the global lenders adopting a new lending strategy, known as the CAS (Country Assistance Strategy) Iran went against the Bank's articles of agreement. Under the new ruling the \$1.2bn loan for the bridge was cancelled because the government had not co-operated in investigating 'high level' corruption in the project. The Economy Minister, shocked at the IMF decision appealed against the cancellation and, after a few corrupt heads rolled, had another chance to present his case.

He proudly showed the architect's drawings to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ali Emami, the IMF assessor for the Asian region, explaining the importance of the pedestrian bridge, which had been touted as the 'third symbol of Iran'.

Having listened to the minister, Emami said, "Now that you have complied with the CAS I see no reason for the loan to be rejected."

Shamseddin smiled broadly. "That is indeed wonderful news."

"However, it's not as simple as that."

"What do you mean?" the minister asked, puzzled.

"To receive any further World Bank funding your country has to curb its nuclear development."

Shamseddin stared at the IMF consultant. "As I understand it development and humanitarian assistance is not part of UN sanctions."

Ali, hated the fact that the World Bank had 'moved the goal post' in the middle of negotiations but the 'Satanists' made the rules. There was nothing he could do about it. Feeling sheepish, he explained, "That was true but is no longer the case. Under the CAS agreement the IRBD look at the borrowing nation as a whole." (What he didn't say was that U S lawmakers had pressured the World Bank not to lend to Iran and had even threatened to withhold US funding to the IBRD if it approved new lending.)

Shamseddin, caught between the World Bank rock and the Assembly's hard place, threw his hands up in frustration "They can't do this to us!"

“I'm afraid they can. Their money, their rules.”

In a media release President Ahmadinejad accused the World Bank of 'discriminatory behaviour' for refusing to authorise new development assistance to the country. He said, “The World Bank's actions were depriving a member country of developmental resources.” He argued that based on an inquiry, made by the legal department of the World Bank, developmental and humanitarian projects were excluded from the imposed sanctions on his nation.

A spokesperson from the World Bank responded, saying, “As we have informed the Iranian authorities, because of recent sanctions and uncertainty surrounding individual banks, we are reviewing all our disbursement arrangements.”

James Scrivens, Managing Director of the World Bank, felt uncomfortable with some of the latest changes to the bank's lending policy. Development Policy Lending, on the face of it, seemed a good thing. The release of DPL funds had become dependent on 'satisfactory' assessment of performance against a set of indicators in the form of institutional or policy reform measures that reflect progress in implementing a country-owned reform programme. James had criticised it for its lack of sensitivity to countries that could only satisfy the guidelines after being upgraded to a point where they could satisfy the indicators. His warning that such policies alienating poorer nations fell on 'mostly' deaf ears.

The Big Four had very acute hearing, however, and didn't like what they heard. A representative from the Federal Reserve Bank called upon the MD. In the unscheduled private meeting the representative said, “James, I'm not here to criticise your personal views. Every body has a perfect right to their opinions. That's what separates the free world from oppressive regimes that do not respect humans rights.”

James wiped his glasses and replaced them. “So why are you here?”

“Just to make sure we're all singing from the same song sheet.”

“Is there any suggestion that we're not?” James asked, baiting.

Not at all. You and your board are doing an excellent job. It's just that slight ripples in the WB boardroom have reached wave proportions in the FRB. Certain people do not appreciate being labelled 'insensitive' to the needs of the poorer nations.”

James, standing his ground, said, “My concern is that if we make make it difficult for third world nations to meet the new more stringent guidelines, they will go to our competitors for their loans. The FRB has to realise that the WB is no longer the only institution to extend credit to struggling nations.” Without actually mentioning China he felt he'd gotten his point over.

The representative just smiled. It was time for the stick, albeit one covered in velvet. “James, we have been watching your career with great interest. You are well placed for a position on the board of the 'Big Four', when one becomes available. You just have to demonstrate that you support Federal Reserve Bank policy making without question.”

He took the hint. His career prospects were much more important than his opinions.

Deep down he knew he would always abide by FRB guidelines. He may well kick and scream a little at first but in the end he'd always buckle under. Mainly, because the FRB wielded the power and could make things very difficult for the WB if it had a mind to. When it came down to it he was always a stickler for the rules. Known around the firm for his strict 'play it by the book' attitude to his job, James Scrivens hated it when anyone in the organisation flouted the rules even to the slightest degree. To his mind all cards had to be laid on the table – the good, the bad and the ugly. Mostly, these days, it was ugly. But, since the secret meeting he kept his council on such issues.

James obtained his business degree from Georgia State University and, after embarking on a promising banking career, in 2002, became an executive director on the board of the International Monetary Fund, representing 12 economies in South-east Asia. In a meteoric rise to the upper echelons of international financing James became elevated to the rank of Financial Director in 2005. Just one year later he was named 'Euromoney Finance Executive of the Year' by Euromoney magazine. By this time he had been promoted to World Bank Managing Director, the office he currently enjoyed. Some would say he had been handed a poison chalice but he welcomed the challenge.

Such a challenge had reared its head concerning criticism of the World Bank in the media. The institution was accused of setting third world nations up for plunder and invasion by loaning them more money than they can possibly afford to pay back. Some nations had been strung along in a never-ending system of debt while Western corporations invaded and took over their national economy. Although he personally sympathised with some aspects of the accusations, James still considered it a very narrow-minded view and determined to sanitise the bank's mission at any opportunity. Having cleverly fielded his interview on 'Finance Today' a section of 'Good Morning America' back in the office things were about to take a turn for the worse.

“The portly, balding man, wearing a deep frown, strode into the VPs office, holding a Manilla folder. He passed it to her. “You'd better read this. I received it just a hour ago. Annette Dearing passed it on to us as soon she received the thank you note.”

“Thank you note from whom?” Edith Quintrell asked, puzzlement shaping her face.

“Look for yourself,” he said, pointing at the paper clipped note attached to the read-out.

Edith scrutinised it, saying, “What on Earth does it mean? I would have thought the Iranian Economics minister would be the last person to thank us.”

“Precisely. Unless it's some sort of sick joke.”

“Perpetrated by whom?” she queried, staring at the puzzling missive in her hand.

Mayer shrugged. “We'd better find out before upstairs knows about it.”

“You'd better find out, you mean.”

He momentarily stared into space, then nodded, “Right, Edith. Leave it with me and I will look into it.”

She hesitated, then said, “With respect, Mayer, this needs to be given priority. If this is from an outside agency someone has managed to get under our radar.”

“That's why I brought it to your notice.”

She responded, “That's your area of expertise. Find out how it happened – and quickly.” As he turned to leave, she added, “You're right about keeping this on a need to know basis. Keep this between us for now and tell no one who doesn't need to know. We need to isolate this and get to the bottom of it – fast.”

“Understood, Edith but I want it recorded that I brought this to your notice as soon as I received it.”

“Don't worry, Mayer. Just do your job and all will be well.” After Mayer had left her office Edith, shaken by the contents of the message, needed some help from the spirits, in the form of a bottle with 'Wild Turkey' on it, she kept in her draw for such moments. Fortified by two fingers of bourbon she reread the private press release from Reuters. The report began with: Iran has accused the World Bank of 'discriminatory behaviour' for refusing to authorise new development assistance to the country.

There was nothing unusual about that. The Sour grapes syndrome complaints – her name for countries that didn't meet World Bank loan recipient standards – came with the job. But this was different, very different. She read on:

Iran's Economy Minister Shamseddin Khosseini, has had a change of attitude towards the IRBD and has publicly thanked the World Bank for reconsidering, in its favour, the loan from the International Monetary Fund.

Her phone rang. The Washington Journal was on the line and wanted to speak with her. She took the call. “Edith Quintrell speaking.”

“Ms Quintrell the Washington Journal. Is it true that Iran has been granted a loan from the IRBD For their bridge project after it had been rejected twice?”

“Something has come to our notice about this. We are investigating the source.”

“Are you saying there has been no change of heart from the IRBD concerning this?”

“We do not take such things lightly. Once we have made a decision it's final. I would appreciate it if you would give us 24 hours to verify what has occurred before going to press.”

“Ms Quintrell, I appreciate your honesty concerning this strange twist of events. I'm Brian McCarthy on the finance desk. Ask for me.”

Edith needed another shot. She had come over unsure and weak, which is exactly how she felt. Yet, how else could she have fielded the call. A denial would have left the WB with even more egg on its face. Now she had been given just one day to sort out the problem. Putting the document on her desk, she spoke into her intercom. “Mary, send me the Iranian dossier.” Opening the folder on her screen she scrolled to an article outlining the reasons for the World Bank's refusal, in 2005, to consider a CAS 'Country Assistance Strategy' package for Iran because its practices went against the Bank's articles of agreement. Further reading confirmed there had been a reassessment since that time, in which the loan was rejected for the second time. That was the latest communication the bank had had with the Iranian Economy Minister. So how had Iran received the IMF loan? Edith thanked her lucky stars that the call had come to her, not the Managing Director. Then she froze. Now the media had a whiff of the Iranian fiasco, James Scrivens could be contacted at any time.

She could no longer keep it from him. She pressed his number. “We have a problem and need to meet.”

“What sort of problem are we talking about, Edith?”

“Front page news. We have to talk urgently.”

He'd known Edith for many years. She was solid and not given to crying 'wolf'. “Very well. You'd better come up now.”

She emerged from the lift on the top floor of the World Bank building. The plush carpeted corridor was empty. She came to the door marked James R Scrivens, Managing Director. She knocked and walked in.

James stood to greet her. “Do sit down and tell what this urgency is about.” She sat in one of the leather Lazy Boy arm chairs and handed him the Reuters read-out. Then she sat back, waiting for his response.

He reached for his reading glasses and scanned the piece of paper. He looked at her, a puzzled look replacing his genial smile. “I thought we had rejected this loan,” he snapped.

“We have.”

“Then how come?...”

“...I have no idea. It could be a hoax, or perhaps something more sinister.”

“Have we received anything else?”

She shook her head. “That's all Mayer gave me.”

He sighed, “Leave it with me. I'll have to contact Reuters and set them straight.”

“With respect, James, We'll look like incompetent fools.”

“What do you suggest we do then? We have to make some kind of statement.”

She rose, “Let me get back to Mayer and see what he's found out.”

“Very well, Edith, but the damned clock is ticking on this.”

Didn't she know it.

After she'd left he contacted an old timer he knew, a political sub editor from the press agency. “Bill, it's James Scrivens here.”

“Jimmy! Haven't heard from you for some time. To what do I owe this enormous pleasure.”

“Listen you sarcastic old bastard, your lot are sitting on a story that puts us in an embarrassing situation. Do you know who's handling it?”

“What's the story?”

“About a controversial loan to Iran.”

Bill scanned his monitor for results. “That'd be Brian McCarthy or Tom Plume. Do you want me to connect you?”

“No. Not yet. But can you tell him to expect my response soon?”

In the basement of the building Mayer, showed Edith an e Mail. “This might go some way to explaining things,” he said.

Edith stared at Mayer, then at the e Mail. “You received this a day ago. Why wasn't I shown this before?”

The head of security, knowing he had messed up, tried, “I thought it was a hoax. But now we have confirmation from Reuters I don't think it is.”

“Are you saying this is the work of a hacker?”

“It may well be. It does look as though somebody has found a way to get into our accounts”

“How the hell could that have happened? Get me a print of the e Mail right now!”

Mayer, fearing for his job, said, “You're not going to show Mr Scrivens, are you?”

She turned on him. “Of course I am. He has to know what we dealing with.”

“It's not our fault,” Mayer pled. “Nobody has gotten into our accounts before. This is very troubling.”

“You don't say,” she retorted, with more than a pinch of sarcasm in her voice. “Are you able to fix the problem?”

“There are things we can do?”

“That doesn't answer my question. Do we need to get an outside expert to sort this out?”

“Leave it with me and I will let you know.”

Back in the MD's office, facing James she took a deep breath. “It looks as though somebody has found a way to get into our accounts,” she said, handing him the e Mail print out.

He read:

Federal Reserve Banking is a fraud. Until the banking institution realises this and does something about it certain poor nations will receive an early bonus in their Christmas stockings.

Watch this space.

He stared at the message, then at her. “Why didn't you show this to me before,” he barked, tossing it onto his desk.

“Because I only just found out,” she said, annoyance showing in her voice.

“But we received it nearly 24 hours ago and only now you bring it to my attention.”

She had no wish to put Mayer in a bad light but fair was fair. “Yes James, and I was given it five minutes ago.” She added, “Mayer is working on finding the leak but so far to no avail.”

James rose from his seat and paced around the office. “It would be bad enough if we'd made the

decision to reject Iran's loan but the directive came from our government.”

She stared at him wide-eyed. “I knew nothing about that. I didn't know the White-house could intervene in such a way.”

That's neither here nor there. Go back to Mayer and get him to find the best people to deal with computer security. I have to contact the White-house.” Then, as though grasping onto hope, he said, “You don't think this could be some sort of hoax, do you?”

“James, the Iranian Government doesn't think so.” He showed mild disgust. “That's a cheap shot.”

“Just stating a fact, James. They have been granted an illegal loan from us with ridiculous terms of repayment and we just have to wear it, I'm afraid.”

He gave a perceptible nod, “Edith, get Mayer to find someone. I'm leaving this in your hands.” *Thanks a bunch*, she thought.

As she walked to the elevator she secretly prayed her people would get to the bottom of the matter before outside help was called for. World Bank policy was clear and simple. Once the loan request from an applicant country had been rejected for not meeting the required criterion, that was it. There was no appeal and the case was closed. Never, in all her years as 'Director of Operations' had Edith come across such a case. She prayed that Mayer had pulled a rabbit out of the hat, before she got there.

As she entered the security centre the worried look on Mayer's creased face said it all. Any progress?” she asked, all ready knowing the answer.

He shook his head. “No further progress, I'm afraid.”

She took him aside. “We have to bring an expert in to deal with this.”

The security director, in attempting to defend his territory, slowly shook his head. “We never outsource bank business. It has to be dealt with right here, in house.”

“You argue with the MD about that. But I wouldn't advise it.”

He stood his crumbling ground. “Who can we trust on the outside with the bank's business? All the cyber experts are fucking hackers. Jesus, it's like trusting the welfare of the chickens to a fox.”

She looked at him fiercely. “You do not have the luxury of choice. This leak has to be plugged, and soon.”

“I really thought we could get it fixed.” He looked at her. “I've never come across anything like it. Whoever it is is very good at covering their tracks.”

“Let me know as soon as you have somebody.”

James Scrivens was on the phone when Edith arrived back at his office. He glanced at the middle-aged executive officer, for whom he had great respect. Their dealings outside work had been rare but cordial when they occurred. He was attracted to her, despite her greying hair, disguised by tinting. Today the worry lines etched into her face showing everyone of her 57 years. He looked up blocking the receiver with his hand. “That's Mayer. He's trying to engage someone outside of the bank?” He added, “It's the short notice that's the problem. That and the difficulty of vetting someone

quickly enough.” It wasn't satisfactory but it was all he could expect. Back on the phone, he said, “Don't worry about their CV. We haven't got time for all that. Get me someone here, pronto.”

Cutting off the call, he said, “I called the IFC. They checked and gave me confirmation of this Iranian Loan. He waved the damning read-out from the International Finance Corporation, in front of her.

Edith, seeing a mixture of frustration and anger in his eyes, said, “James, he's doing all he can to fix the problem.”

“He's being too fussy.”

“He's concerned that we don't end up with an even bigger security breach.”

“Edith, get a special 'non disclosure' contract drawn up. That will cover the security angle. Quite frankly that's the least of our problems. We have to stop this hacker.”

Puzzlement deepened her frown lines. “Why don't we just get the FBI onto this.”

“Too risky. They'll go beyond their brief. We can't afford this business getting into the media. It will have to be an independent source who can keep their mouth shut.”

“I just think Quantico, with all their resources, could really speed things up,” she argued.

“If we do use the Feds it's my decision. I won't be browbeaten into going down that path.” After sending Edith off with a flea in her ear, he spoke into his intercom. “Get me Dale Prentiss at Wells Fargo.” James reckoned he was the easiest of the 'Four Horsemen' to talk to.

Upon hearing Dale's voice, he said, “We need to meet urgently.”

“Sounds serious.”

“I can meet you at the club at one.”

The discreet and very private Alibi Club was founded by seven Washingtonians in 1884. Since then it has only ever had 50 members at any one time. Dale Prentiss and James Scrivens were both fortunate enough to gain membership after two of the 'good old boys' had passed on. The three storey brown town house, only a few blocks from the White House, stood anonymously amid grander buildings, with just a discreet brass plate near the main entrance bearing its name in copperplate type.

As they enjoyed an excellent luncheon, James regaled Dale with the unfortunate Iranian business.

Dale listened avidly as the worrisome tale unfolded. He responded, “Quite a pickle indeed.”

“Yes, and now Iran has a cast iron contract and is rubbing our noses in it.”

Dale nodded, thoughtfully.

James said, “I don't mind telling you this has made us look very incompetent.”

“Not the image you want to put over to future debtors.”

“There doesn't seem to be any solution that's not going to stop the bank's face getting egged. Have you ever tried keeping uncooperative cats in bags”

“You’d better make sure that no more escape.”

To make things worse I have to give our version of events to the Reuters chief this afternoon.”

Prentiss grinned, “Well you can hardly go cap-in-hand to Khosseini and say it was an error and ask for your money back.”

“Exactly! But to make matters even more difficult I have Robert Zollick on my back, threatening to withhold funds from us if we approve new lending to Iran. Now I'm caught between the fucking proverbial rock and a hard place.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“For one thing, get that bloody leak plugged ASAP.”

“Who will you get to do the job?”

“I've left that little task with my head of security.”

“Is that wise?”

James stared at his colleague. “What do you mean?”

“Bruised egos. By hiring someone outside to do his job he's showing himself to be incompetent.”

“I take your point but he didn't come over that way to me.”

Dale thought about it, then said, “I do know a local firm who specialises in security breeches, I think they're called Cybersec. I'll confirm it and send you the details, if you like.”

“Are they discreet?”

“The owner has prior hacking charges hanging over him.”

“Could be useful. Thanks.”

After lunch Edith turned to the harried looking security boss. “What did he say?”

“He said to check on a company called Cybersec.”

“Do you know of them?”

“Reasonably new outfit. Run by Alex Meyer, a hotshot techie with an I Q going off the chart.”

“Then get them on board.”

“He looked straight at her. We've received another e Mail.”

“What? From the hacker?”

“It looks like it.”

“What does it tell us?”

He shrugged, “Not a lot. But there is a demand of sorts this time.”

“Let me see it.”

“Yes. Just wait a minute though.”

“What for?” she asked his back.

“I need a coffee.”

She eye balled him. “Are you kidding? This is a damn site more important than your caffeine buzz.”

“I haven't even had lunch,” he complained.

“The machine's on the other side of the building. Can't you show me the e Mail first?”

“He brought it up on the screen and left her to it. Mayer had to clear his head. The walk to the beverage machine, which was approximately 400 metres away, was his token exercise for the day. Being stuck in front of banks of monitors that scrutinised all parts of the huge World Bank complex had him seated most of the time. He had read somewhere that feeling good about doing exercise was as good as the exercise itself. So, having walked nearly half a kilometre with a vendor dispensed coffee he headed back to his office.

Edith read the e Mail:

Federal Reserve Banking is a fraud. Until the banking institution realises this and does something about it certain poor nations will receive a bonus in their Christmas stockings. It's time for Fractal Banking.

Watch this space.

Edith re-read the message. Turning to Mayer, who stood beside her sipping from a polystyrene container, she said, “It's the same message as before with that odd bit about fractal banking, whatever that's supposed to mean.”

“Yes. It is odd and rather daring?”

“What do you mean?”

“Every time a hacker makes contact they make themselves vulnerable. Generally they would be economical with their messages. This guy breaks the rule by repeating the same message.”

“So, have you been able to track the e Mail?”

“He's using something like 'Hide My Ass'. It has a disposable e Mail account option that allows him to set an expiration date.”

“Which , I suppose, is soon.”

“It's already been deleted from the server. This is a html copy in the cashe. It's not interactive.”

“Can't you get into this 'Hide My Ass' site and find his account?”

“People who use such mailing services are not that stupid, Edith. Besides, you can join up without providing personal information.”

“So it doesn't really help,” She sighed, despondently.

He smiled, “Cheer up. That's just one possibility.”

“What do you mean?”

“We can sometimes find the advanced information of the e Mails, such as the IP address, by looking for advanced settings by the e Mail address on gMail for example. We can then use an app like Saikat.

“What does that do?”

He looked at her. Feeling better now he was able to show his expertise, he gushed, “It finds IP addresses from which we can ascertain the e Mail sender.”

“So if you can do that why haven't you tracked this hacker?”

He sighed, “This guy is much smarter than that”

Edith said, “So that's that then.”

Mayer frowned, “We'll keep working on it but, basically, yes.”

“Get onto this Cybersec, fast.” She added, “And print me out a copy of the e Mail to give to James.”

Sharing the hacker problem with Dale had James feeling a little better. Edith was waiting for him in his office. “Edith, why are you back here?”

She handed him a print-out of the latest e Mail from the hacker. He read it, then looked up at her. “And Mayer says there is nothing our state-of-the-art security team can do?” James Scrivens said, incredulous.

“Not so far.”

“Has he found out anything at all about the hacker?”

She shrugged. “Not a lot. Except that Mayer says he's good – very good. He has left a number of false trails, none of which lead to him.”

James looked straight at his VP. “That is not what I want to hear, Edith. I want a solution, not more excuses. Get onto this Cybersec yourself.” After Edith Quintrell had left his office James looked at the print out again:

Federal Reserve Banking is a fraud. Until the banking institution realises this and does something about it certain poor nations will receive a bonus in their Christmas stockings. It's time for Fractal Banking Watch this space.

What was meant by fractal banking, he wondered? He shrugged it off, having more important things to concentrate on, such as the ailing economy. Having been at the sharp end of international banking for many years he knew FRB had its problems, some of which seemed to have no long-term solutions. He knew that for every \$X amount deposited, banks promised to return \$X plus any accrued interest, minus bank charges. But at the same time, banks lent on or invested the \$X in ways not always 100% safe. So he was well aware that it's a statistical certainty that sooner or later any given bank would go bust, and not be able to return the \$X. But FRB, for all its faults seemed to deliver most of the time. Besides, he thought, what would anyone put in its place?

Speaking into his intercom he said, “Get me the IMF assessor for the Asian region.”

Ali Emami received the call. “James, how can I help you?”

“You handle the Iranian account – right?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Has the IMF done some kind of deal with Khomeini regarding a loan.”

“No. Of course not. Why?”

“Iran has been granted the loan we refused to give them.”

“That's impossible. I would have known about it.”

“It seems somebody has breached our client accounts.”

“Oh my God!”

“I'm just marking your card so you don't get any nasty surprises.” Having dealt with that, James had another message to attend to – from N M Rothschild. He wasn't looking forward to that one.

Chapter 2

Four weeks earlier

Vadim Koskya was the first to receive an unexpected but very welcome wind fall from PrivatBank. Just when the unemployed street cleaner was about to retrieve his last 30 hryvnia from an ATM in the Central Department Store, the machine churned out a wad of notes. Instead of 30 he received 3000 hryvnia. He stood wide-eyed as the extra notes came out of the slot. Pocketing his windfall he felt elated. He would eat well that night. But first he would buy a new coat. The one he wore was old and threadbare in places and his aging bones didn't cope well these nights, what with the Ukrainian winter drawing on. If he had stayed longer by the ATM he may have become even richer as, at random times during the day customers received wads of free money. The machine would work normally then, for no apparent reason it dispensed extra piles of money, without the customer inserting a card or even pressing a button. Many lucky customers, like Vadim, just happened to have been there at the right moment. Other ATMs operated by PrivatBank began acting the same way, leaving the lucky ones with a huge smiles on their faces.

Paul Vladiskaski, the Managing Director of PrivatBank in Kiev wasn't smiling. In fact he wore a deep frown as he looked at the damning figures on the readout in front of him. He couldn't believe it. Close on 3 million hryvnia had somehow gone missing from the bank. The accounts readout showed the huge shortfall. "How is this possible?" he asked his chief accountant.

Denis Yaroslav, wearing an expression of puzzlement on his thin face, shook his head. "I don't know. I've been over these figures many times and I have no idea what has caused this discrepancy."

Paul glared at the numbers cruncher. "I don't know! Is that the best you can come up with?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

Paul glared at his numbers man. "Well that's not good enough. I have a director's meeting in just two weeks and I have to know what the hell is going on by then. Do you understand?"

Denis backed off. "Yes sir. We will find out."

Vladiskaski reached for the tablets in his draw. His damn ulcer was playing up again. It was all very well his doctor saying, "Avoid stress Paul," He knew nothing about the banking business.

Alex Meyer had reached his destination, or so his NavSat told him. He parked his late model Chevy van emblazoned with the pixelled Cybersec port cullis logo painted on each side. He retrieved his tool kit, locked the vehicle and headed in the direction of the warehouse sporting a huge diamond icon above the entrance.

Alex liked to portray a cool dude look, with his Rayburns, fashionable stubble and tousled dark hair. During an earlier incarnation, ten years prior, he'd gotten involved with 'Anniki' a clandestine group

of geeks who got off testing out their hacking skills. Unlike other groups at uni, their base was a database; they never met each other on the 'Outernet' their name for the so called 'real world'. They shared their illegal conquests in cyber chat rooms, couched in geek code that only they understood. For young Alex, a cyber wizard himself, it was exciting, stimulating and scary, especially when they actually found themselves inside the cyber sanctuaries of government agencies. To cover up his covert activities, Alex Meyer hung out with a wild crowd at the American University, where he got his degree in computer science. Always popular with the female coeds he got invited to all the 'frat' parties, where he met Irina. She was studying on the same course as him. She was different to all the American girls he knew. They became good friends and soon they were going steady. Coming from a Ukrainian background her values were different to his, except in their shared interest, computer security.

Irina Kosyrev came from an orthodox Christian background and she believed in monogamous relationships. This arrangement suited Alex at first and he found himself settling down with her. But after a few months it became an unsettling experience for him. They split up and she went back to the Ukraine, while Alex went back to booze, drugs and partying. Armed with his degree, after leaving uni, with the financial help from a wealthy but dead uncle, he had the start up capital to set up Cybersec. His business soon expanded from a modest workshop run from home into the flourishing business he had set up in Sunrise Technology Park, where he offered network monitoring, incident response. Professional phishing and malware monitoring and on demand or scheduled vulnerability scanning.

Since opening his business in Washington DC his client list had steadily built up to the point where he and Matt contemplated taking on more staff. Client's were generally happy with the Cybersec service but they became very nervous when their computer security systems developed glitches, such as this one, at Jewelry 4 U, which, although newly installed, seemed to be blocking other legitimate functions on the computer network. Alex always told his clients there might be teething troubles. Most accepted this as part of the settling in period. But the client he was currently visiting was a bit of a panic merchant. Harvey Glint, a short middle-aged guy with a large voice, who ran a chain of jewellery 4 U stores in the Washington area, went into panic mode, demanding immediate attention, as soon as the system acted up. Which was why Alex decided to handle his nervous customer himself. He got his tool box and entered the warehouse. Dressed in overalls with the Cybersec logo sewn in he made his way to the office, where he was met by a tall lady with rosy red lips and pony tailed hair.

She extended a well manicured hand. "I'm Lara Scion. Mr Glint isn't available. He told me deal with you. He has left you instructions on his note pad."

As their hands met he wondered what she meant by 'instructions', after all he was the expert.

"He said something is blocking his e Mails."

"What does he mean?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. That's all he said."

Alex smiled. "Leave it with me."

Cybersec was one of the many new companies that had set up in Sunrise Technology Park, in Reston. Matt Stone, Alex's business partner, running the office, responded to the call with his usual greeting. "This is Cybersec and my name is Matt. How can I help you?" He was getting ready to deliver the spiel about using the latest technology and installing and monitoring the system when he was cut short by a female foreign sounding voice.

"I want to speak with Alex Meyer."

"He's out of the office. Can I help?"

"My name is Irina Kosyrev. I work at PrivatBank in Kiev. We have need of your services,"

"Kiev, that's in the Ukraine, isn't it"

"Yes."

"It's just that we only do work in America."

"Please tell Alex I called. I give you my number."

"Alex! How do you know him?"

"We were close friends at American University."

Matt took her contact details and went back to his computer. The Cybersec Website needed a little maintenance and that was where his expertise came in. As he opened up his page editing programme Marjory Brookes walked in. She had a knack of commanding centre stage wherever she went.

Looking up at the voluptuous blonde, he said, Hi Marj, how can I help you?"

"Where is he?" she demanded.

"Sorting out a technical problem at the Jewellery 4 U warehouse. I can call him if you like."

"No, don't bother."

She had wild hair and a streak to go with it. Perching on the corner of his desk, she said, "So what's happening today?"

Matt thought she exhibited a carelessness about her, like the way she seemed oblivious to the fact her short skirt had ridden up her thighs. Either that or she was being particularly provocative that day. Matt had experienced her 'queen of tease' act on more than one occasion. It was his turn to do the shocking. "Some girl from The Ukraine rang up asking for Alex."

He derived guilty pleasure from her reaction of masked surprise and concealed anger. He laughed, "She wants us to do a job for some bank in Fucking Kiev. Can you believe it?"

Marjory regained her composure. "How does someone in fucking Russia know about our little company?"

Matt shrugged. "She said she knows Alex. That's all I know,"

"I'll ring him and find out," she said with more than a hint of venom in her voice.

Matt said, "Make sure you give him her number," he winked.

Giving him the bird, she pressed Alex's contact on the phone.

Alex had just finished checking the computer's security system and changed some permissions when his phone rang. It was Marjorie.

“Hi Marjie, babe. What's up.”

“Your girl friend from fucking Russia rang.”

His mind did a double take. “I don't have any Russian girlfriends.”

“She told Matt you were close at uni.”

Then he realised who she was on about. Fuck! A blast from the past.

Matt mouthed “Ukraine, not Russia”.

“Whatever, Her name is Irina or something like it.”

Alex thought she might have flipped. “Slow down Marjie. What is this all about?”

Not quite sure she looked blankly at Matt, who reached for the phone.

“Hi, Matt here.”

“Matt what the fuck is Marj on about?”

Taking a deep breath Matt outlined the message.

“Christ, I haven't seen her for years. So what's Marjie getting all heated about?”

“You know our Marjorie.” Matt added, “Anyway I told this Irina we don't do foreign jobs.”

“Oh you did, did you. Well that's not just your call.”

“I thought it was company policy.”

“We're not some big corporation. We make the rules as we go.” Packing up his tools Alex added, “I'll ring her and find out what it's all about.”

As Alex keyed in the number Matt had given him he wondered why he was doing it? He hadn't seen Irina for at least five years and Cybersec had never done overseas jobs because they were too expensive and time consuming. He hadn't given her a second thought since he and Marjie had gotten together. But now, all of a sudden, she was important to him again. He melted when he heard her voice.

“Alex, is that you?”

“Yes Irina. I was surprised to get your message after all this time. Why did you call?”

“I work for PrivatBank in Kiev. Somebody is hacking into our system and it is costing the bank much money. They are very clever and we can't stop it happening. We need help.”

Alex Meyer figured it would be something like that. “How is it costing the bank money?”

“Our ATMs are all over city. Some are dispensing large sums of cash at random intervals. The only

way we stop it is by shutting down ATM systems. But it is not practical solution.”

“What do you think I can do that your people can't?”

“Investigate where we cannot.”

That evening, it was Marj's term to host dinner. They'd been in a relationship for over two years and had slipped into a pattern of cooking evening meals alternatively for each other at least twice a week. As they sat around her table eating her delicious Chicken Marsala, she brought up the subject of Irina's call for help. “So, did you phone your Russian 'girlfriend'?”

He sighed, “I phoned Irina. Her bank is having trouble with some of its ATMs. They want me to look into it.”

“You mean 'she' wants you to look into it.”

“Okay, 'she' wants me to investigate.”

Taking a sip of Sauvignon Blanc, she looked at him. “Why should we care if PrivatBank is sharing its largesse around. They make billions each year.” she scoffed.

Alex responded, “Maybe because it's our business. It's what we do.”

“Yes but we don't do it in foreign countries.”

Alex said, “This is a huge opportunity for us to become internationally known.”

“And, while you're swanning off to Eastern Europe, to catch up with your fucking Babushka doll who is going to be minding shop here?” Marjorie challenged.

“Come on Marj, let's step up and expand ourselves.”

Marjorie pressed, “And who is going to look after our local client base while you're away?”

“I'll be working with the PrivatBank security people. You and Matt are perfectly capable of running the show here.”

Marjorie gave Alex a dark look. “Do I look like I got stupid written on my forehead?”

“What do you mean?”

“Alex, I know why you're itching to go to Kiev.”

He grinned, “You think it's because of Irina, right?”

“Are you telling me it's not?”

He stared at her. “Jesus Marjie, it's just a fucking job. She's offering us a big contract here, so get over it.”

“As long as that's all she's offering,” she mumbled, taking a bite of her chicken.

The next morning at Cybersec Matt looked at Alex. “Mate, this is a bad time for you to take on this PrivatBank contract. We're overloaded with work as it is.”

Alex smiled. "You'll do alright. If you need to out source any work just hire who you need from the 'H' list."

Matt sighed, "So you're really going to fucking Kiev."

"I'll go and check it out. If it looks good I'll take on the job. Fuck mate, getting a major bank on our CV can only be good for business."

Matt grumbled, "That's another thing. We all agreed banks are far too much trouble to take on."

Alex grinned, "C'mon mate, where's your spirit of adventure?"

Chapter 3

One week earlier

Alex Meyer wasn't even born when Hacker groups began flourishing in the early 1980s, with the advent of the personal computer. Before then, the term 'hacker' simply referred to a computer hobbyist. Later, when computers still had inferior security systems, Alex joined 'Annaki' a hacker group, which, out to make a name for itself, boasted its conquests on line in various chat rooms. Alex spent a lot of time in Hackers Lounge, where he shared access to information and resources, while learning hacking skills from other members. He saw himself as a kind of romantic back room activist. But the law saw him and his type as being anything from a nuisance to being dangerous cyber criminals threatening national security. (They weren't automatically labelled 'terrorist' back then.) Somehow he managed to escape the crackdown on Cyber criminals and, like many other seasoned hackers, found himself on the other side of the fence, where he was now paid big bucks to prevent companies and corporations from being hacked. Now, Ukraine's biggest bank needed his expertise. Which was why he was currently waiting at Borsipol Airport.

Alex woke to a prodding sensation on the skin of his arm. It turned out to be a security guard who's job was, it seemed, to deter people from sleeping on the bench seats in the airport. His plane had landed at 6 am. He'd followed the herd of fellow passengers through customs and grabbed his luggage off the carousel. He then looked around for a raised card with his name on it. But there was no sign of Irina. Alex yawned as exhaustion hit him. He'd had little sleep on the flight to Kiev so even the hard benches in Terminal F at Borsipol Airport looked inviting. He dragged himself up and stared at the guard. "Jesus, can't a guy get some sleep around here?"

The guard stared back, uncomprehending.

Alex grabbed his luggage and walked outside the terminal. Trying Irina's number the intermittent mobile network allowed him to make contact. "Hi Irina, I'm at Borsipal."

"Oh Alex! I'm sorry. I will be there in one hour," He noted his phone was low on charge but, luckily, nearby was an electrical socket for charging mobile phones. He took out his International adapter and connected his phone. This meant hanging around for an hour so Alex went to a small cafe about 100m away. He grabbed a coffee and toasted sandwich to go, hoping he'd get back to his phone before some light-fingered passer by made off with it. He was also aware that his phone could be hacked as it recharged. He countered this happening by using a voice mail password.

Irina arrived 90 minutes later, in an Audi A3. She phoned him from the taxi rank, urging him to hurry, as she was illegally parked. After tossing his baggage into the rear of the hatchback he kept, what he jokingly called, his Hack Pack, in the front with him. It contained some precision tools, he didn't want tossed around. As Irina drove towards the city, Alex was amazed at the areas of pure primeval forest, which was occasionally punctuated by huge billboards covered in Cyrillic. Then they reached the outskirts of Kiev and the ubiquitous Gray concrete tower blocks so reticent of ex-Soviet cities.

As she drove into the city the traffic became heavier as multitudes of commuters came into the metropolis to work. Irina said, "First I take you to your hotel, then we go to bank."

"Sure, but I want a coffee first."

As they pulled up out front of the massive Premier Palace Hotel, where Alex had a suite booked. A porter was on the spot, waiting to take care of his luggage. Irina waited in her car, while Alex signed in and collected his electronic pass key from the desk. Having got his belongings safely stashed in his suite, Alex rejoined Irina. "Now for that coffee."

They parked in Pushkinska St and found a table in Cafe Blues. The outdoor life-size sculpture of a sax player made the place hard to miss. Cafe Blues occupied the ground floor, with the main restaurant on the first floor. As they drank coffee, Alex said, "It's good to see you again."

"You too, Alex," she smiled.

"I was surprised when you said you were leaving America."

"She didn't feel comfortable delving into the past. "This is land of my birth. My family is here."

Sensing her reluctance, he changed the subject. "You're head of your bank's I T, aren't you?"

"Yes," she answered hesitantly, wondering where this was going?

"So why can't your people catch these hackers?"

"Because they are very clever. Somehow, they are able to get into our ATM codes and change programming. We are perplexed. So I thought of you."

"We've never dealt with clients in foreign companies, let alone banks."

"PrivatBank is very respectable and has integrity. You will be treated well."

Alex scoffed, "You work for them Irina. Of course you would say that. But I have an inherent distrust of all banks and I'm taking a big risk here."

She retorted "So you think I try to trick you, somehow."

"No Irina. It's not that. I'm here so I will take a look at your problem. But I'm not promising anything."

"That is understood. There is basic fee and large bonus based on results."

Alex drained his mug. "Right, let's go to your bank then."

The Regional office of PrivatBank was a surprise for Alex. Located at 27 Yaroslaviv Val Street, it being the bank's main city branch he expected something more opulent than the three storey building splashed with green signage. Having parked in her personal parking spot, they walked to the main entrance, where she swiped her security pass. Then they were inside the bank. It was still too early for all but one or two diligent employees and the office cleaners. Alex found out it was only 7.30 am Ukraine time and adjusted his watch accordingly. Irina got them watery coffee from the dispenser, then took him to the security centre with it's bank of screens monitoring customer activity, or lack of, in it's many branches. He turned to the strikingly beautiful brunette. Properly seeing her for the first time in 12 years Alex smiled, "So show me what's going on."

She sat at a computer and brought up some data. Turning towards him, she smiled sweetly. He still had that boyish charm that attracted her to him in the first place. But this was business and her job was on the line. She pointed to some figures. "These numbers are taken from our ATMs." Indicating some highlighted machine locations, she added, "These ones have been behaving erratically lately."

"In what way?"

"They have been paying out money randomly for passers by to pick up."

Alex, who had never heard of such a thing, stared at her, eyebrows arched. "How much is that costing the bank?" he asked.

Pointing to the screen, she said, "These figures show the amounts of money unaccounted for. So far it adds up to around 3 million hryvnia."

Alex whistled through his teeth. "Ouch, that must be hurting the bank!"

"Yes, and it continues because, somehow, somebody is hacking into our system. We keep coming to dead ends. That's why I called you."

Alex looked at her. "I need a report of all the steps you have taken."

She said, "Yes but first you must meet with Paul Vladiskaski, our managing director."

"Where is he?"

"Not here yet, Alex. He won't arrive before ten."

"Then why are we here this early?"

"She smiled, "I wanted you to myself first, before you are swallowed up by the system."

He grinned, "So what are we to do with this stolen time?"

"Catch up over breakfast. Are you hungry?"

"I could eat a small pony," he grinned.

Her face went blank. "I don't think they serve horse meat."

He laughed, "Where?"

"Follow me, she said, leading him back out into the bank car park.

Sitting in the Spotykach, Alex tried the brynza, which comprised local salty sheep cheese, wild white mushrooms and bits of scrunchy pork fat. Irina laughed at the look on her friend's face, as he sampled the traditional fare.

The sour look on his face gave way to one of pleasant surprise. "It's not at all bad," he conceded.

"So what do you think of this restaurant?"

He grinned, "Sounds a bit like getting the measles."

She looked blankly at him, then said, "Paul Vladiskaski has to give nod on your assignment here. He will listen to me but with the bank losing millions you will have to sell yourself to him."

He stared at her. "I thought you would already have that covered."

“We need your expertise. That's why I had to get you over here. I'm sure he will see that. But just in case...”

“Seriously Irina, I'm not at all happy with this. As told you I generally make it a rule not to do security troubleshooting for banks. I'm prepared to make one exception for you, but I'm not going to beg for the job.”

“It's not like that, Alex. The way business is done is different over here. I make decisions for my department but there is still a strong patriarchal tradition here. If you don't want to see him I will deal with it myself.”

It wasn't just banks but any big institution that Cybersec avoided. At first Alex saw them to be the way to go, to get paid the big bucks. He soon changed his mind though. They tended to have their cyber security networks who only called in trouble-shooters as a very last resort. Even then with resentment. On top of that there seemed to an unwritten rule that the bigger the company the slower they were at paying their bills. Yet here he was contemplating working for the biggest bank in the Ukraine. He was beginning to wish he had stuck to the golden rule he and Matt readily agreed upon – never to work for foreign companies outside the states. Maybe rules weren't made to be broken.

Paul Vladiskaski had come up through the ranks. He started of as a bank teller in Poltava, where he was born. He had fond memories of fishing with his father in the Vorskia river. He also had bad memories of his father's black moods which stemmed from torture he had suffered at the hands of the Wehrmacht, who invaded Poltava in 1941. Young Paul Left his home city and took up work with PrivatBank in Kiev, where he was soon promoted to assistant manager. Looking at the memo that had been sent exclusively to him, Paul saw the first black mark against his name. The missing funds had been hacked during his watch and he had to accept responsibility for the short fall. Head office had been on his back about downsizing the I T department. He had fought against it but now they had failed in sniffing out the cyber terrorist their worth was in question. Worse still, like Alex, he hated working with foreigners. But unlike Alex he especially hated working with Americans for whom he harboured a distinct distrust. Now he had to hire one and he wasn't well pleased.

Paul Vladiskaski had the typical hard slavish features. Alex put him in his mid fifties and noted he was carrying extra flab.

Irina introduced Alex. “This is Mr Meyer from Cybersec.” Paul looked at the unshaven Yank with unmasked distaste.

Alex sensed his distrust.

Paul, using stilted English, said, “Mr Meyer, you will be dealing with very sensitive information that is private and confidential. So how do I know you can be trusted?”

Alex stared at the manager. “Do you want my to help, or not?”

Irina tried smoothing things over but made it worse. “It's not personal, Alex. He distrusts anything American.” “Oh, so his insult is against all Americans.”

He moved closer to Paul Vladiskaski. “If you don't want my help that's fine. I'll just bill you for my time and be out of here.”

Irina Kosyrev stood aghast.

The Managing Director expressed a mixture of apoplexy and surprise.

She turned to Alex. "Can I see you for a moment, in private." Outside the office she turned to him. "You just insulted the Managing Director."

"He just insulted every decent living American."

She tutted. "Go back in and show him your credentials. Show him that he can't do without you."

"Why should I? He can go and get fucked."

Putting her hands together, as in prayer, she pled, "Please Alex, for me."

He sighed, "All right, I give it one more go but if he gives me any shit..."

"He won't. He's not stupid. He knows he needs you."

The bank manager had calmed when Alex and Irina re-entered his office. He turned to the American. "So can you fix problem?"

"First I will need a thorough report on what has been tried so far. Then I may be able to answer your question." Alex paused, then handed Paul Vladiskaski a Manilla folder. "This is a record of Cybersec's achievements so far. You will also find our invoice for services rendered."

Paul scanned the document, his glasses sliding down his nose. Pushing them up to his bridge, he looked at the invoice. "Can you guarantee success, Mr Meyer?"

Alex looked at the man as though he were crazy. "No, of course I can't. I don't even know what we are up against, Mr Vladiskaski. On the face of it whoever is behind these cyber attacks isn't greedy and isn't doing it for personal gain. In my experience this makes them the most difficult kind of hacker to deal with."

The manager nodded. "Mr Meyer, give me a progress report in one week. We will take it from there."

Alex nodded. "That seems fair enough."

Paul Vladiskaski reached for a form and handed it to Alex. "Sign this please."

The Cybersec man picked it up and scrutinised it. It was a standard confidentiality document. He had to promise to keep all business between him and the bank completely private. He signed it and handed it back to the manager. "There you are. If there's nothing else, Mr Vladiskaski, I'll get started."

Irina took Alex to the I T centre. They went down some steps into the basement. Alex grinned. It amused him that companies often kept their I T people away from the rest of the workers, as though they were some alien species. They also packed them in the least commercially viable space. The room had the usual stuff: a bank of computers, servers, printers and scanners. There were four people at their work stations. Irina introduced them. Indicating them one by one, she explained, "This is Borys. He specialises in programming." Alex acknowledged the bull of man with gentle eyes.

Then, pointing at the only other female in the room, Irina said, "This is Hanna. She's our complex numbers genius."

The dark haired woman wearing horn rimmed glasses, blushed at such an accolade.

"Next we have Denys. He's the one to ask if you want to know anything about the bank."

Alex nodded.

"And finally we have Ivan. He specialises in computer graphics." She looked at her people. "Alex is here to help us find our hacker."

Seeing the defensive, worried looks on their collective faces, Alex assured, "I know what you are thinking. But I'm not here to take your jobs from you. I'm here to help you. So we work together as a team – right?"

Irina translated and they nodded.

Well that's a good start, Alex thought. "So bring me up to speed."

Irina handed him a folder, which he took. "Read that first, then ask any questions."

He felt claustrophobic in the small windowless basement. "I'll take it away with me and catch up later." She said, "I'll come with you then I'll be on hand to answer any questions."

He wondered if there was anything else attached to her suggestion. He grinned, "Great Idea."

Borys didn't think so. He had the hots for her but had never voiced his feelings.

They sat on a bench in Paulov Gardens. Irina remained patient as Alex read the report. He noted that the bank used a Windows 32 bit system. He looked up at Irina. "They probably used a default master key."

She gave him a blank look. "How does that work?"

"They use a CD to infect the machine, probably with malware known as 'Back-door MSIL Tyupkin. Later they return to the machine and use the programme to get the machine to dispense money with no need for verification."

"But they don't go back to collect the money. Strangers find it."

Alex nodded. "That makes it more difficult to catch them at it."

Irina said, "So what's in it for them?"

"Search me." He read some more then said, "I don't suppose any of the lucky people who found themselves with an unexpected windfall were caught on camera."

She brightened. "Oh yes, we do have some footage."

"Then I want to see it."

"Sure, but we haven't been able to get anything from it."

"Then I want somebody to show me each of the checkpoints."

"Sure. I get it organised." Then she said, "If you're right about default master key how do we deal

with problem?”

“It won't be easy. Tyupkin accepts commands only in the dead of night on random days of the week. This keeps the exploit well-hidden at the time.”

“Have you dealt with it before, Alex?”

“Not personally.”

“How can we stop them then?”

“Let me see what footage you have on these ten machines. We may be able to catch them that way.”

She frowned, “Our people have spent hours going over them and come up with nothing.”

“Scammers have to be on the premises to install the malware. Now, I know it's difficult to differentiate between a scammer and a regular customer, especially from afar and it may well be that they are blocking the screen with their bodies. But there may just be a clue to help us.”

Alex was on his sixth mug of coffee for the day to help him keep concentrating on the surveillance camera footage. Nothing was jumping out at him. Occasionally he could see passers by take money from the tray without showing any ID. He couldn't see any patterns forming but didn't expect their would be. He knew that when a malefactor ran the programme they needed a specially generated PIN based on an algorithm unique to the malware. But there wasn't any indication that the customers taking money from the trays keyed in anything. That was puzzling to him. He then focused on the lucky passers by to see if the same person or persons had collected from more than one ATM. Each customer was dressed differently. Both men and women had pocketed the free cash. None had come forward and reported their find. But that was no surprise.

Just then Irina approached him. “Have you found anything useful, Alex,”

He threw his arms up. “Nothing that I can see. We're missing footage from 6 of the cameras.”

“Yes. Sorry about that. Maintenance isn't always up to date.” She added, “Ivan is ready to show you the rogue ATMs.”

He stood up. “Good. I need a break from this. Besides, I want to test something out.”

“Oh! What's that?”

He winked, “I've got my own Tyupkin code pin.”

Seeing the surprised look on her face, Alex grinned, “Don't worry, I won't keep the money.”

Chapter 4

One week earlier

Ivan Miloski considered himself an open minded sort of person. His winning smile concealed his

growing concern about a Russian invasion. During small talk, as they waited with a hoard of commuters at the station, Alex asked, “How did you get involved in the computer business?”

The genial Ivan said, “I was raised by foster parents who want me to work in the sausage business. I wanted to follow a career in art.”

“So what did you do?”

“As soon as I could I left home. I come to Kiev to get work and eventually got into an industrial art college. It wasn't the best but it got me my diploma in computer graphics.”

Just then their rail car arrived. Alex Meyer didn't enjoy being in large crowds, so being sardined between Ivan Miloski and other sweaty bodies in the overcrowded rail car, made him feel very uncomfortable.

Ivan, who spoke good English, said, “So what do you think about our metro.”

“Don't you have a car.”

“Yes, but driving around the city not as fast or as pleasant as this.”

“Not as pleasant! Just how awful can it be?”

Ivan laughed. “You don't want to find out. Besides this is the fastest way to get around.”

As they stopped at every station, Alex found that statement hard to believe.

They eventually disembarked at Petrivka, the location of the first hacked ATM. Alex soon appreciated the huge number of commuters that used the underground rail system, as he was swept along in a surging thong, each person pushing to get to the turnstiles first.

Once they were in the busy street Ivan said, “Pretty quick huh? And only 4 hryvnia.” Alex didn't comment.

Ivan felt some tension between him and the American. His way of dealing with it was to try and impress him with his encyclopaedic knowledge of his homeland. He asked Alex, “Did you know that the deepest Metro in Europe is in Kiev. It is the Arsenalna Metro station?”

“I'll try remembering it for my next pub trivia night.”

For the next five hours the pair stood around, observing the tainted ATMs. Travelling to the ten machines took some time as it involved more trips on the metro. All in all Alex only had about 15 minutes at each ATM. Only a few people used them during that time.

Ivan stamped his feet to keep out the evening chill. “This is a waste of time, Alex. Lets pack it in.”

Alex, in his own world, said, “I need to get back to the office.”

“What for?”

Rubbing his hands together, Alex looked at the irritated Ukrainian. “I want to check something out on the security camera footage.”

“What's so important it can't wait until tomorrow.”

Alex turned to the young man. “We might be looking at this all wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have to check that footage again. Just get me back to the office and I'll take it from there.”

“If you're onto something, I'm in. We've been looking at that stuff many times and it's told us nothing.”

“Look, I'm not guaranteeing anything. I may be completely off track but you're welcome to come and help.”

Ivan grinned, “Okay, let's go.”

Alex Meyer yawned. It had been a long day and the effect of the flight was definitely getting to him. But he couldn't sleep while this thing was nagging at his mind. The excitement of actually finding a pattern in the seemingly random customer use of the ATMs made his heart race. It couldn't wait till morning.

As they scrutinised the footage taken of customers at the ATMs, Alex looked over at the young Ukrainian. “Can you spot it?”

“Spot what?”

“A pattern.”

Ivan looked at him blankly.

Alex explained, “It occurred to me while we were watching the bank customers today. None of them worked the machines with their hands in their pockets.”

Ivan shrugged, “What's that got to do with anything?”

“Maybe nothing. But look at this guy,” he said, freezing the footage. “He's got his hand in his jacket pocket.”

“So,” Ivan said, unimpressed.

“Look! He's not using a card but he's getting a wad of cash from the machine.”

“So he was one of the lucky ones. We already know that.”

Alex, having isolated and saved, a number of single images from the footage, opened his photo editing programme and brought them up on his monitor screen. He turned to the tired and irritable Ivan. “Each of these images shows somebody getting a windfall from one of the ATMs. And each one shows the recipient of that windfall with his hand in his pocket. Do you think that's just a coincidence, Ivan?”

“It is a bit odd, I suppose.”

“Odd!. No it's perfectly normal for anyone using a remote pin generator in their pocket.”

Ivan's mouth dropped. “If you're right about this then it wasn't random after all. In which case it's theft.”

“It's theft anyway,” Alex corrected. “The point is that we could be looking at a very well organised team of hackers.” He paused to take out his phone.”

“Who are you ringing?”

“Irina of course,”

“This time of night. She won't be very happy.”

“We need to get the team together right now. Phone the others.”

Ivan hesitated. “But are you sure about this?”

“I am now. It's the only thing that makes any sense.”

By 11.30pm The grumbling PrivatBank cyber security team was assembled. Alex took them through what he had discovered.

Irina tousled and sleep deprived said, “Are you saying that it was all manipulated and made to look as though it was just random?”

“It certainly seems that way. Look, these people went to a lot of effort to attack those ATMs so I didn't buy the idea that they weren't interested in the money.”

“Is it possible to generate pin from remote control?” Denys asked, using reasonable English.

Alex said, “I don't know. I've never heard of such a thing but I bet that's what they are hiding in their pockets.”

“So where does that lead us?” Hanna asked.

Alex faced the group. “We now know this scam is well organised and brilliant. We also know the machines aren't the problem. So now we have to focus on who could be doing this. So I want you all to get searching. Hackers love to boast about their exploits. Hit the hacker chat rooms and see what you can find out.”

While Ivan translated to the rest of the team, Irina sidled up to the American. “That was brilliant Alex. I don't know how we all missed it.”

He grinned. You guys thought it was random so you weren't looking for patterns. Me, I always search for patterns. Now all we have to do is find them.”

“Yes, that's not going to be easy.”

“Maybe it's time to get the police involved.”

Irina shook her head. “No, Alex, the bank would never have it.”

“But this gang have robbed your bank. Of course the police should be involved.”

She took Alex aside. “Banking is all about customer confidence. If the word got out...”

“...Yes, I know all that, Irina.” Then he brightened, “Hey, I've got an idea.”

“What?”

“They don't know that we know how they did it.”

“So,” she shrugged.

He grinned widely. “I think I know how to stir things up.” Logging into hackzone Alex checked out

the latest topics. There wasn't anything relevant so Alex had to start his own conversation, which meant he had to expose himself early on. Still it couldn't be helped. Taking a slug of energy drink, he steeled himself. He opened his account in 'Hackchat' a sophisticated Website with language translation ability. As hackers usually speak in shorthand codes and street slang it wasn't perfect but it was the best on offer. Using his handle, 'Softhat' his avatar, appeared near the typing box. Choosing the English translation option, he typed: "Hi Guys, thought u might want 2 know sumthin." He waited for a response.

It took ten minutes, then someone wrote:

Scuzman: "OK man, watz happenin."

Softhat: "Tyupkin code pin activated by remote. Ever heard of such a thing?"

Scuzman: "Cool, if it was possible."

Cyberbeck: "What would ya use it for?"

Softhat: "I hear some dudes are using it for getting funds from ATMs."

Scuzman: "Fuckin' cool, if it'd work."

K-os: "How did ya hear that?"

Softhat: "Usual way. Some dude boasting."

K-os: "Who was the dude?"

Now Alex was interested. K-os wasn't playing by the rules. You didn't use the chat room to get personal information.

Scuzman: "Com'n dude. Ya don't ask things like that."

Thank you Scuzman, Alex sighed. Now he had to find out who K-os was but not while in hackzone. He logged out and got the attention of the tired group. He yawned, "I got a guy called K-os nosing around. He could be a lead so lets concentrate on him." He then said, "Okay guys. Thanks for getting involved. Now let's all get some sleep."

After a brief rest, 3 hours sleep in the office, Alex was back on track. Fuelled by black coffee, he woke up Irina, who was curled up on a couch, covered by her mink coat. "Good morning Irina. It's time to get to work."

Forcing open an eye she stared at him. Then, realising who he was, said "Fuck off Alex, I need more sleep."

"You and I both but what do you know about the PT?"

She dragged herself into a sitting position. "Limited Knowledge Penetration Test. It could compromise normal business operations. Paul Vladiskaski would have to sign off on it."

"Well it's necessary."

"Can't we just keep it in this department?" She stretched, "Get me a coffee." As she stood up she staggered against him. He hadn't felt her that close in years.

It felt good and he gave her a hug. "It's great to see you again."

"You too. But right now I need a wake up hit."

As they sat drinking the thick coffee, Alex said, "If we gather sufficient info we can ensure we don't affect normal business ops."

"Is that possible?"

"Yes, if we begin preliminary research by reviewing publicly available info relating to targeted ATMs. Like why did they choose those 10?"

She looked at him sideways. "You try to avoid telling Paul Vladiskaski."

He sighed, "I'll take the heat if he finds out. But we have to get moving on this."

"Do we tell Ivan and others?"

"The least who know, the better. Let's just keep it between us at this stage."

Buoyed with enthusiasm Alex began the PT search. He looked for any info pertaining to ATM operations that included news releases, newspaper articles, company reports, SEC filings and the corporate Website. From experience he knew that hackers commonly used these resources to gather potentially vital info as intelligence for their illegal operations. Such information might relate to the placement of the bank's ATMs, hardware and software used, surveillance etc. Being a hacker he could think like one and knowing what made them tick was an important part of the job.

Irina, now more alert, checked on traffic to the corporate Website over the previous 6 months, specifically where inquiries pertaining to ATMs were concerned. She discovered that an internal user from PrivatBank called Scoop had posted many questions on the bank's forum page about ATM technology. She alerted Alex to this.

He said, "It might be nothing but see where it takes you."

She looked at him. "Alex, it make sense that it would be inside job."

"I would have thought you guys had already covered that angle."

She shook her head. "No. We didn't think it was that organised."

Alex's eyes raised. "Okay, concentrate on finding out who this Scoop is."

By 9 am Irina had discovered there had been multiple instances of unexplained periods of full utilisation of the outbound Internet links during odd hours. She pointed this out to Alex.

He delved into his tool kit and handed her a disc. "This is nMap. Use it to footprint the external network."

"I haven't heard of this. What will it do?"

"We can find out which servers are being used."

She installed the app and it went to work. Soon it focused attention on an FTP server curiously installed outside the firewall. A port scan against the box returned extremely troubling results. Showing Alex, she said, "Look, apart from port 21 there's at least another half dozen open ports. It's

leaking like a sieve.”

He noted that port 139 was running Netbios, allowing extensive information leaks and, even more troubling port 3437, which ran a service that prompted for a password, was wide open. Alex ran NetCat and found that if no valid password was given in three seconds the connection was terminated. Port 14120 was running the second FTP service outside the firewall. He turned to Irina. “Our insider certainly knows his stuff.”

The other team members were still searching the hacker chat rooms, Alex took Irina aside. “This shit takes specialised knowledge. I think it has to be one of your people.”

She stared at him. “Are you suggesting one of my team is in league with the hackers?”

“What I'm saying is that we have a serious security breach here.”

“My God! I never considered...”

“... That's what he's banking on.”

“What should I do?”

“Keep them looking for this K-os. Make them think they're doing something useful. Meanwhile, you and I get something to eat.”

“Okay, but what are we going to do?”

“Bring your laptop. Get the personnel files on your team.”

She hesitated, then said, “I hope you're not right.”

“This is no time for misplaced loyalty, Irina. We have a job to do. If you can't be objective then...”

She glared at him. “...I am being objective.”

He smiled, “Good. Now I'm starving.”

Chapter 5

One week earlier

The Spotykach was Wi-Fi friendly so the pair went there for breakfast. It was full of white collar workers, mostly office types. Alex went for Bell pepper egg in a hole, while Irina preferred Deruny. While they waited, she set up her iPad. “I don't like to do this.”

He covered her hand with his. “It's necessary to eliminate them from our enquiries.”

“It might not be someone from my department.”

“That's true but the obvious thing to do is start with your people.”

“I suppose so.” She scanned through the names. “Borys has been with bank for 5 years. He start in

customer service, then got diploma in IT two years ago.”

“Does it list hobbies, interests?”

“Just that he like jogging and fishing.”

“Who's next?”

“Hanna. I recruit her 3 years ago from security firm. She like dancing, swimming and collecting antiques.”

“Hm, collecting antiques.”

“A lot of people collect antiques. It doesn't make them criminals,”

“No need to get defensive, Irina. I'm just making mental notes. Who's next?”

“Denys. He's been with the bank for 25 years. He got diploma in financial planning and joined as a sales representative to sell bank's additional products and services. He join the Finance management team 10 years ago.” “

So, how did he end up in IT security?”

She shrugged, “I don't know. I didn't recruit him.”

The food arrived and they ordered coffee.

Alex said, “So that just leaves Ivan.”

She looked up from her food. “Ivan is personal friend. I trust him completely.”

He looked in her eyes. “Irina, you know we have to do this.”

She sighed, “I suppose so. He join the bank seven years ago. He is computer genius, you know.”

“Oh! In what way,”

“He was already writing computer games in high school.” She stopped and looked at him. “You're not thinking...”

“...You obviously are.”

“But he would never...”

“...Look, I'm not saying it is him but he is a very good candidate.”

“You said yourself it could be someone else in the firm.”

“Yes, I know. I realise you are hoping that's the case.”

“Of course.”

“That would make it a hell-a-va lot more difficult to track them down. We would have to look at everyone's records, including Paul Vladiskaski's.”

Irina finished her potato cakes. “So where do we go from here?”

“Someone has been coming back at night to hack into the banks ATM data files. Security should keep a log of comings and goings. We'll start there.”

Back at the office Irina introduced Alex to Strovsky, the senior security guard.

“What do you want?” The Russian asked, brusquely.

“Access to your records concerning people working after hours.”

“They are all filed. Can you be more specific?”

Alex looked at Irina.

She said, “Records going back six months.”

Antresol shone out on Shevchenka Boulevard buzzing with night life as street credible sophisticates lounged around, smoking and drinking. Viktor leafed through a magazine as leisurely spun DJ music played in the background. Seeing another Hax man approaching, he beckoned him to sit down. Okay, I'm here. So what couldn't wait?”

“The bank has hired an American to sort out their ATM problem. His name is Alex Meyer from Cybersec, an IT security company he owns.”

“Don't worry. As long as they think the give-aways are random they'll never latch onto us.”

“That's just it, Viktor. He knows about the remote controls.”

“Shit man! How did he find out?”

“Jesus man, it doesn't matter about how he found out.” Viktor pondered the problem. He looked at the other Hax man. “Shut him down.”

“How am I supposed to do that?”

“Get into his shit and make him a non person.”

“I'm not sure I'm up to that.”

“It's simple man.”

“Simple. Yeah, I've heard that before.”

“Seriously man. You just use the microphone in your mobile to record the hums and whirs made by the CPU. You can decrypt secure information that way.”

“That simple, huh?”

“Yeah. It works on noise, man. Use U snoop or one of the other sound amplifiers. It identifies certain parts of his info and extracts his e Mail contents. Then you've got him.”

Irina wore a smug look. None of her people had shown up on the logs. She turned to Alex. “I knew none of my crew was involved.”

Packing his tool kit for the day, he said, “Is there anyway someone could get in without being logged?”

“Of course not. Only somebody with a encrypted key card could get in and they would have to pass

the desk.”

“There's no other way in.”

“No! The Bank's locked tight.”

Alex nodded. “I guess we'll have to go through the log. But I'm beat and it'll have to wait until tomorrow.”

“Do you want a ride?”

“That'd be good, Irina. But I'm not good company at the moment.”

“It's sleep I need, not good company.”

It was going to be a daunting proposition to check all through the logs and Alex prayed it wouldn't come to that. He still wasn't convinced that all members of Irina's team were clean, especially Ivan, his chief suspect. He needed to put something to the test. He managed three hours sleep before he was rudely woken by his phone alarm. It showed him it was nearly midnight. He finished his coffee, donned his hooded parka and gloves and went out into the cold night.

Twenty minutes later saw him outside the head Kiev regional office of PrivatBank. Through the glass door he could see one guard at the desk. He walked along the length of the front of the building, which housed a number of businesses. Alex went around the side and found a gate that led to the rear of the premises. The gate was padlocked but climbable. It rattled as he clambered over, eliciting loud barking from a guard dog somewhere along the row. Alex's heart was thumping. He thought about turning back. He used the flash light in his phone and waited for the dog to quieten down. The back of PrivatBank was 4 businesses along. He made his way surreptitiously along the path until he came to a door displaying the Green and White bank logo. It was locked of course and he didn't have a key. So who would have a key? He wondered. All the ground floor windows were secure and most likely alarmed. Looking up with his flash light he spotted a window on the second floor that looked partially open. But how to get up there. He hunted around for evidence of a fire escape but this wasn't New York. There was a drain pipe but it was nowhere near the open window. He was no Commando. He broke into computers, not buildings. He needed a ladder. Maybe one of the other businesses had one hanging around. A couple of shops along there was a shed with wooden pallets piled against it. He thought about piling them up to get to the window but soon gave up on that idea, Then his light shone on something metallic, It was a ladder lying along the ground.

With the aluminium ladder placed securely against the wall Alex began his climb. The noise disturbed the dog, which began barking again. He had to get inside quickly before some guard came to investigate. Although he was on legitimate business the guards wouldn't see it that way. He silently prayed they wouldn't find the ladder. It was best not to think about it. As he reached the window he discovered it was stuck half open, making it difficult for him to squeeze through. The only way was for him to go in head first. Using his flash light he ascertained it was a toilet window in the hand washing section. Pocketing his phone, Alex edged through the window, his fingers searching for a handhold. It was tricky in the dark but he managed to land inside with a few slight bruises and a bit of a thump, unleashing a new round of barking.

Irina had given him a layout plan of the building so he could find his way around. He checked it and

located the toilets, which turned out to be the womens' restroom. It made perfect sense if there were only male guards. Entering the the woman's private domain was instinctively taboo so they were hardly likely to check it. Alex felt he was definitely on the right track. Now he had to get to the IT security office, undetected. There was an elevator but for stealth he decided on the stairs, which acted as an emergency measure. Carefully opening the fire door he trod softly as he descended the steps that took him to the basement. Once there he unlocked the office door with his key card. The room was in total darkness other than the blinking LEDs of dormant machines. His phone light provided enough illumination for him to navigate the office. One desk top was on standby and was still warm. Inserting his flash drive in a USB port he opened up his Sher-unlock app on the computer. A user was currently connected. This was better than he thought. 21 MB had been downloaded since the last time the server had been restarted, earlier that day. His anonymous logins were unsuccessful and his app's attempts to guess the password also failed to gain him entry. Searches based on the hacker tags in the banner returned only links to listings of various hacked pubstors. Feeling frustrated and deflated he tried an IP address search but it failed to reveal its public listing in any warez of pubstor directories. He could only assume the site was being traded via Internet Relay Chat. Interestingly, in the next hour it took him to document his observations, 186 MB of files had been downloaded from the rogue FTP site. This was much bigger than mere ATM fraud.

He heard a sound and spun round in his chair to the direction of the noise. A dark shape loomed in front of him. As Alex rose to meet the intruder, he felt a sharp pain against the side of his head, then nothing but blackness.

Chapter 6

Karen Hughes said what a lot of people merely thought. She had the evidence and could no longer keep quiet about what she personally knew to be true. It gnawed at her mind during the day and gave her sleepless nights. The burden had become too great for her to shoulder alone and she needed to pass the disturbing information on before it was too late. But it had to be someone she could trust implicitly. Somebody who was as foolish and fearless as her. Karen didn't see herself as being courageous but felt her life was under threat and she needed to get her information to the right source. Bradley Whitacker was well known for his exposes' on corporate underhandedness. As a freelance journalist he had published many shocking stories about corruption in big business. He was the person she chose.

A former senior executive and, as such, an insider at the World Bank, she was ready to divulge all. The agreed to rendezvous point, the Banneker memorial in Benjamin Banneker Park afforded a wonderful view of the Potomac River. Karen looked nervously around her as she waited. It was becoming chilly and she was glad she was wearing a warm coat. At 60 years old she felt the cold much more these days. She kept checking out different people, wondering if they were spying on her. Karen stood looking out at the gently flowing river when Bradley Whitacker turned up. He had longish greying hair and a two day stubble. She appraised him taking in his casual look. His dark green corduroy jacket with elbow patches clashed with his bright red woollen muffler. "Hi, I'm Karen.

He looked at the people sitting around or feeding the ducks. "Let's go somewhere quieter."

They talked as they walked along the nature trail that formed a circular park. She explained that the global financial system was dominated by a small group of corrupt, power-hungry figures centred around the privately owned US Federal Reserve Bank."

"That's not exactly news Karen. It's all over the Internet."

"Look, this is not just some conspiracy theory. The network has seized control of the media to cover up its crimes. I tried blowing the whistle on multiple problems at the World Bank and was fired for my efforts."

"Give me something solid and I'll investigate it," Bradley said.

"I can give you a network of fellow whistle-blowers to corroborate this."

He stopped and looked her in the eye. "Why are you putting yourself at risk?"

"Because this corruption in high places has to end, Bradley and I need someone of your calibre to expose it."

He nodded. "So what do you have for me?"

She handed him a memory stick. "It's all here, including an explosive 2011 Swiss study published in the PLUS ONE journal on the "network of global corporate control."

“What is it about?”

“A small group of entities — mostly financial institutions and especially central banks — who exert a massive amount of influence over the international economy from behind the scenes.” She looked him in the eye, “Bradley, what is really going on is that the world’s resources are being dominated by this group. These 'corrupt power grabbers' have managed to dominate the media as well. Nobody is allowed to stand in their way.”

“What are your credentials, Karen?”

“As an attorney I spent two decades working in the World Bank’s legal department, so I had plenty of opportunity to observe the machinations of the network up close. Once I realised we were dealing with something known as 'state capture'...”

“...What's state capture?”

“It's when the institutions of government are co-opted by the group that's corrupt. As a result, the pillars of the US government — or at least some of them — are dysfunctional because of state capture; this is a big story. This is way bigger than even Watergate.”

He could see it was. He nodded, “What do you want from this, Karen, apart from a fee of course.”

“Peace of mind, Bradley. Sweet peace of mind.”

Little is actually known about the workings of the World Bank. James Scrivens, like everyone else employed by the global corporation, only knew what was necessary for him to carry out his role as MD. Officially the WB was described as being the international financial provider of loans to developing countries for capital programmes. Although, as MD, James had a hand in both of its institutions: the IRBD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and the IDA (International Development Association) he managed the former. He fervently believed he was doing a worthwhile job, a conviction strengthened each time he read the short, succinct framed mission statement behind his desk. Which read:

'The World Bank's official goal is the reduction of poverty'.

Many people read this well promoted statement. Very few, if any, asked what its 'unofficial goal' might be. According to its 'Articles of Agreement' set up by Bretton Woods, all decisions had to be guided by the bank's commitment to promoting foreign investment and international trade, as well as that of capital investment. Every loan had to follow strict well laid out rules. James Scrivens, also the Vice President on the bank's board of directors, firmly believed in the bank's official goal, which he saw to be a noble cause. He polished his glasses with a handkerchief and sifted through his in-tray for anything that required an urgent response. One document titled “Attention Managing Director World Bank, caught his eye. He had been expecting some response from the big four but was also dreading it. As soon as Shamseddin Hosseini had publicly thanked the World Bank for deciding to provide Iran with the loan he knew the proverbial shit would hit the fan – him being the fan. Both the British and American governments wanted to know why the WB had gone against their directive to hold back on any loans to Iran until they had agreed to stop making WMDs. They stated, in no uncertain terms, that the WB decision had undermined their efforts for peace in the

region. He had two choices: to accept responsibility or admit their security system had been hacked. His buzzing intercom brought him to attention. Marjorie, his PA advised him he had a strategy meeting in board room two. He looked around his desk 'New Loan Plan' file. He needed it with him despite the fact that the 60 pages of near-incomprehensible economic-speak, made little sense, even to him. Some economist had dreamt up yet another theory to streamline money lending. He sighed as he grabbed the document and headed off for the meeting.

Some 25 bank executives were seated around a large table when James walked in. Small groups were talking among themselves and a heated argument was brewing between Xian Zhecha and Bertrand Baddie. James Scrivens called the meeting to order. He then held up the 'New Loan Plan' document. "You've all received a copy of this and had time to study it's content. So what are your thoughts about this new way to extend credit?"

Xian Zhecha stood up. "The plan is radical. It proposes a new way to set up loans to developing countries but it is a potential disaster for indigenous peoples, the environment and human rights."

Bertrand Baddie, the Chief Financial Officer stood up. "In reply to the Chief Ethics Officer's concerns this new instrument to advance development effectiveness, which focuses on 'results lending' extends credit according to results achieved by former projects. I think we should approve this initiative without delay."

Zhecha stood up again. "I stand here on behalf of NGOs: International Rivers, Friends of the Earth US and Bank Information Centre, all of whom see this new Instrument to be a clear intention to allow countries to sidestep dozens of tough, and expensive, social and environmental safeguards which recipients of World Bank loans must normally meet."

Ana Betacourt, head of legal affairs and claims, spoke up. "I applaud this bold initiative because it allows the WB to carry out its job without too many restrictions. I believe this job is to help developing nations with projects that benefit that country. I do not think it is our job to interfere with any of that country's policies other than those directly associated with the project."

Zhecha was up again. "According to the proposals, the new instrument would eliminate or greatly dilute 25 existing safeguards and policies. They include those that apply to forced resettlement, natural habitats, physical and cultural resources, indigenous peoples, forests, safety of dams and environmental action plans. Most of these policies have taken years of pressure by NGOs to secure."

The VP said, "Does anyone else here agree with Mr Zhecha's sentiments?"

The Vice President of the Middle East and North African centre of operations, Hafez Ben Khali rose. "This bank is one of the world's largest providers of loans for mega-projects. At present before we sign on these loans we take into consideration the affect of the project on the local populace. Through this process we have discovered many projects that are particularly damaging to local people, the environment and the climate. If countries wanting to build giant dams, roads, power and water projects are to be largely freed from acting in a socially responsible way, the NGOs fear bank lending could lead to more forced evictions and human rights abuses."

James listened to the various views. The for and against factions seemed pretty balanced. He had

enough ideas to tender his report but he was in no hurry to do so. Addressing those assembled, he said, "Thank you for your input ladies and gentlemen. As we do not have a consensus we will table the motion for another meeting in a months time. You will be advised of the details in due course." James rose and left the room. He knew they had gone through the motions and achieved nothing. This waste of time would continue until the big four: Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Citigroup and Wells Fargo authorised the changes, after which they would go ahead. His report could go some way to help defining the small print but would have little effect on their decision.

Edith was waiting in his office when he arrived back there.

Seeing the agitated look on her face he asked, "What brings you here in such a state?"

"Mayer was waiting for me when I arrived this morning. There's been another e Mail from the hacker and a report from Reuters." She handed him a print copy of the report. "I think you ought to read it."

He took it from her, closed his door and sat down at his desk. The readout stated that a \$1.2 billion loan had been re-granted to Bangladesh for its Padma bridge project."

He looked up and stared at her. "I thought it had been cancelled."

"That's just it. I checked the report this morning. It clearly states that the loan was originally approved in February 2011, but allegations of corruption in the tender process led to us freezing the loan by October of that year."

He stared at her. "Who's overturned our decision."

She paled. "I fear it's the hacker, sir."

"My God! I hope not." he uttered.

He checked the e Mail on his computer. He looked at it, frowning. It read:

You did not heed my message. We repeat 'Federal Reserve Banking is a fraud'. Until the banking institution realises this and changes to a 'fractal banking system', which will be fairer for everybody, poor nations like Bangladesh will receive an early Christmas present.

Watch this space.

"It certainly seems like the same person."

"What do they mean by 'Fractal' banking?"

"I have absolutely no idea." James stood up his fists clenched by his side. "Thank you Edith. Leave this with me."

"Shouldn't we try to find out what this fractal banking is about."

"No. Get onto those Cybersec people and find out why they're not solving this problem."

"Their main expert is overseas at present. He's expected back any day."

James thumped his fist hard on his desk. "Not good enough! I want action now!"

"Sir, we're all under a lot of pressure over this. Do you want me to check out other companies?"

“No. get me fucking Alex Meyer. And do it now!”

As soon as she was gone he used his intercom, “Marjory, get me Gavin Wilson right away!” He picked up the directive from the big four. Now, with the latest illegal distribution of funds he had no other choice than to report the whole damaging saga.

Chapter 7

4 days earlier

Alex came to with a duck's egg size lump on his head. Groggy, he groped around in the darkness for his phone. He found it near the chair. Luckily his assailant hadn't taken it. Using his flash light he searched for his flash drive. It was missing. Now he couldn't prove a thing. He knew the hacking was far more serious than tapping into a few ATMs. That was just the start. But with no solid evidence his efforts had been useless. His head was throbbing like crazy and he needed to sit back down. He felt the lump. There was no blood. He realised he must have disturbed the hacker, who had hidden when he entered the room. Once the assailant knew what he was up to he made his move.

Then Alex got an idea. He had a spare flash drive with him so he woke up the computer and connected to the Internet. He then went to 'hacksoft.com' and downloaded 'cryptosense', which he then installed on his flash drive. Now he could get back into the system. The penetrating programme started from scratch. As it worked its way through a list of commands to be given to the programme in the server it was trying to subvert, it created two piles: one where the target programme offered up the data it was supposed to, and the other that listed all the error messages. Armed with its experimental data the virtual 'penetrator' worked backwards recreating a simile of the target programme but without any erroneous code. It was perfect and Alex had his proof. Now he had to get out of the building undetected. Using the stairs he exited at the second floor. His fears were confirmed once he found out the ladder had been taken away. With his planned escape route blocked he had to go down to the ground floor and brazen his way past the security guard on duty. It was 4:21 am and his unauthorised presence would take some explaining. Taking a deep breath he went for the authoritative approach. Fronting up to the official, he said, "While you've been sitting here a crime has been committed."

The guard's blank look of utter incomprehension showed the man with his feet up, drinking coffee, couldn't speak a word of English. At that point another guard walked into reception. He shouted something that Alex didn't understand. But the pistol in his hand spoke volumes. The American raised his hands. In desperation he repeated the word "Paul Vladiskaski." This provided a little comprehension and a lot of confusion. The guards, realising the intruder knew of their boss – some demigod to them – frog marched him off the premises. Once outside, he breathed a huge sigh of relief. The early morning coldness hit him with full force. He was shivering by the time he reached his hotel. The night clerk gave him a stern look as he asked for his key. Alex smiled and went to the elevators.

Back in his room Alex crashed into a deep sleep. A couple of hours later he couldn't figure why the tune of 'Don't worry, be happy' was playing in his head. Then he realised it was his phone. He fumbled for it and discovered Irina was on the line.

"Where are you Alex, Ivan has discovered something very useful."

“Steady on, Irina. I've got a splitting headache.”

“So you were drinking last night. It's 11 o'clock. Get over here as soon as you can.”

“I wasn't drinking. I was hit over the head.”

“What happened?”

“I'll tell you when I get there.”

Irina met Alex away from the others. She felt his head. The lump had gone down but it was still there. “What happened to you, Alex,” she asked.

“I was attacked by the hacker, here last night.”

She stared at him. “You were here last night?”

“I couldn't rest. I had to find out if it was possible to get into the bank without going past the guard.”

“But I told you that...”

“...Irina, come with me,” he said, taking hold of her hand.

She followed him round the back of the building. He pointed out the half open window.

She looked up at the window, then at him. “You broke in!”

“Yes, I found a ladder and got in through that window,” he said, pointing. The hacker must have gotten in that way as well. Except he didn't use the ladder.”

“Did you get to see who it was?”

“No, but I must have caught him in the act.” He showed her his flash drive. “And here's the evidence.”

She stared at the tiny device. “But I thought they already have what they need to get money from ATMs.”

He fixed her in his gaze. “Irina, this is much more serious than hacking those machines.”

“What do you mean?”

“Lets go back to my room and look at this,” he said, indicating the USB stick.

“Why can't we look at it here?”

“Because I think it is one of your people.”

She looked at him aghast. “Are you serious?”

“Never more so. Why would someone else use a computer in your department?”

Back at his hotel Alex booted his laptop, inserted the stick and Sher-unlock did the rest. The Internet Relay Chat file opened, showing a code pertaining to the triple encrypted high profile commercial bank accounts.

Irina stared at it, agog. “My God! Someone is stealing from the main accounts.”

He looked at her. “Not someone. This is a well organised group.” Then he said, “You go to the bank and tell Paul Vladiskaski and find out the extent of the damage.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Get back into the chat room. I have to do some phishing.”

“Oh, about that! Denys made contact with K-os.”

“Did he find out anything useful?”

“He thinks K-os is one of the gang. So perhaps you should work with him.”

“No. And don't tell him you have spoken to me about it.”

She turned on him, “He is clean, Alex. I stake my life on it.”

“They're all tainted by this – even you.”

“Me. You think I'm the hacker!”

“No, of course not. But I have to look at this objectively.”

Once Irina had left, Alex got to work. Logging into Hackchat he checked for any responses to his ATM thread. There was one from K-os. It read: Tyupkin code pin cool dude. But don't how to use RC.

Softthat: “Me neither. Gotta find some big H to find that, man. If anyone out there can login remote pins share the juice with us.”

K-os: “Reckon if someone has that juice they gonna keep it private.”

Soft hat: “That's not in the spirit of sharing K-os, man. How we gonna shake up da world if we don't all pull together.”

K-os: “Reckon its bullshit man. No fucker I know has got that nous.”

Softthat: You could be right, dude. Reckon it's a myth.”

Alex left the chat room and grabbed a coffee. He had thrown down a back-handed challenge. He reckoned he had the nature of hackers down pretty pat. If there was one thing a hacker hated more than not having their covert exploits known it was not having them believed. If Alex's instinct was spot on somebody would be in the chat room claiming to have done the deed. He checked his cell phone and discovered some one was using a sound app to break in. As he had AS Anti Hacker installed, it had blocked the intruder. But it told him the hackers were onto him. He was about to go back to the chartroom when his phone rang. It was Paul Vladiskaski. He wanted Alex back at the bank, straight away. Alex guessed Irina had told him about the bigger problem.

Chapter 8

3 weeks before

James Stigley went about quietly cleaning out his desk. As soon as colleagues found out he was on the nose with top management he got the pariah treatment. Once you were kicked out of the World Bank the higher the rung you were on the more toxic you instantly became. So he quietly swept his awards into a box, along with all his other personal things. His sin was that he had peeped behind the World Bank's self-righteous curtain and seen the monster lurking there. James, 57 years old, felt he could no longer serve the WB, once he knew both The WB and the IMF were owned and controlled by 30 to 40 of the wealthiest people in the world. For over 150 years they had planned to take the world over through money. He could have quietly retired but he had staged it so they would have to fire him. Blowing hard on his whistle had decided that.

He had pointed out, as a special guest on the 'Tonight' show, that his role as chief economist of the World Bank had shown him that every country the IMF/World Bank got involved in ended up with a crashed economy, a destroyed government, and sometimes in flames resulting from riots. James Stigley smiled knowing full well he would be fired for his transgression and that the president of the World Bank would not comment on his dismissal.

Before James Stigley was fired he took a large stack of secret documents out of the World Bank. These secret documents provided him insurance against losing his sizeable severance package. These documents revealed that the IMF required nations:

to sign secret agreements of 111 items:

In which they agreed to sell off their key assets – water, electric, gas, etc. in which they agreed to take economic steps which are really devastating to the nations involved.

In which they pay off the politicians billions of dollars to Swiss bank accounts to do this transfer of a country's fixed assets.

If they do not agree to these steps they were cut-off from all international borrowing. Today if a country can't borrow money in the international marketplace, they cannot survive, whether they are people or corporations or nations. If these measures don't work they use the CIA to infiltrate and overthrow the government and plant lies about the former government and/or even rewrite history.

James Scrivens felt he had no choice but to fire James Stigley. Why the Chief Economics Officer, after a flawless 30 years in banking, went off the rails on the Tonight Show, completely failed him. Having survived that incident, which weakened his credibility as MD, this hacking business and the unqualified World Bank handouts was the last thing he needed. Since that damning expose on the programme all the conspiracy theorists were coming out of the woodwork, giving their version of why the World Bank was such an evil institution. Of course it was nonsense but nonsense could do a lot of damage.

Chapter 9

Big Ben announced it was 10.am, as the bowler-hatted gentleman alighted from the taxi in St Swithin's lane. Suitably attired and armed with briefcase and umbrella he looked like any other gentleman heading to work. However, he was different. He played a very special role in the City of London. As one of five representatives that met each day in a small wood panelled room at Rothschild's London headquarters, he was a member of the secret elite. And he was running late.

The chairman looked at his gold pocket watch and frowned. Having been appointed by the Rothschild bank to preside over the small enclave who oversaw gold price fixing twice daily (10.30 am and 3pm). It was 10.32. He couldn't wait any longer. Then he saw the man enter the room, looking harried and hurried. It somewhat bemused the president that although NM Rothschild had mostly withdrawn from trading, the price of gold was still fixed there twice each day. He addressed the five members of the LBA (London Bullion Association), who comprised representation from Barclay's Capital, Deutsche Bank, Scotiabank, HSBC and Societe Generale. Although most of the financial business was carried out over the phone it was still considered important for the 'Financial Five' to meet in person. It was better if they were all on hand to deal with any crises that came up, such as the World Bank being compromised by a hacker.

“What has been done about this outrageous affair?” Barclay's asked.

The chair replied, “They are getting an independent firm to track down the criminal responsible.”

Scotiabank said, “Loosing over a billion dollars is bad enough but the bank's integrity and credibility is at stake.”

“The US President and the British Prime Minister have been briefed concerning this,” The chairman stated.

Societe Generale commented, “Is this an internal problem?”

“We don't know yet,” the chair answered. Then he said, “An outside firm will have to be made privy to certain confidential bank information. This could be risky as security experts often have advanced hacking skills. But there really seems to be no other solution.”

“What about using The FBI. Surely they have people looking into cyber crime all the time,” Deutsche said.

“The World Bank thinks that could create bigger problems. We need to keep this business in house, if we can.” The chairman stood. “Now let us go about our business gentlemen. I will keep you apprised of developments.”

The Ukraine was on the brink of civil war, according to Putin, which was why John Oxley travelled to Kiev for a meeting with four key Ukrainian politicians, all of whom wielded tremendous influence in the new, Jewish controlled administration. Oxley, although of Catholic Irish descent on

his father's side, posed as a fully paid up Zionist. As such he found himself in good company. The recent shock revelation that Ukraine's new president, Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenuk were hard-line Zionists came as a stunning blow to most Ukrainians, as their nation was one of the staunchest anti-Semitic countries on Earth. This accounted for Putin's assertion that civil war was on the horizon. But John Oxley, a special agent for the CIA, wasn't there to try to avert such a confrontation. His main reason for the visit was to open US intelligence resources to Ukrainian leaders about real-time Russian military Manoeuvres. His other reason was to seek out Alex Meyer and recruit him to deal with the World Bank problem. Poroshenko, although not privy to all the details still put Ukrainian secret service agents at Oxley's disposal.

Alex's chat room project was paying off. K-os had agreed to meet Alex in person. The agreed meeting place was old disused subway. Alex thought it quite surreal that the space was filled with elderly people dressed in traditional garb, dancing to folk music. K-os, who turned out to be a 'Homie' type, in his late twenties, explained that the old folk had no money to rent a spacious room to dance in and so the mayor's office had given them permission to gather underground where they could carry out their harmless pursuit and reminisce on the days of their youth.

Wondering why they were meeting in such a bizarre location, Alex said, "I keep hearing things on the news about a coming civil war here but I haven't seen any signs of it. People, like these old folk, continue to carry on as normal."

K-os stared at him. "You know nothing of our embattled history." Pointing at the dancers he explained, "Why do they dance? Because they survived the 'Holodomor'. Seeing the blank look on the American's face, he said, "It's the Ukrainian word for 'famine genocide'. It was man-made and killed between 7 and 10 million people in 1932 and 33."

"My God! I never knew..."

"...Why should you? It's our history, not yours," K-os responded, brusquely.

"Who was behind it?"

"The cursed Zionist Stalinist Bolshevik regime. Those old dancers remember only too well that it was Jewish commissars, in particular the Jewish mass murderer Lazar Kaganovich who stood by and watched gloatingly as my ancestors starved to death. Now they control this country again. Which is why the PrivatBank and other institutions are being targeted by the hackers."

Alex stood transfixed to the spot. "Are you saying they are hacking into the bank for political reasons?"

K-os laughed. "Everything here is done for political reasons. Now we have to fight the stinking Zionists who, with your country's help, have wheedled their way into our government. We are helpless against their power. So we have to use any weapon at our disposal."

"Such as hacking."

"It's our most powerful weapon because we have the power to wreck their economy."

"Are you one of them?" Alex asked, chancing his arm.

"Why do you ask?"

“You seem to know a lot about their motives. So who are they?”

K-os, suspicious, said, “Why do you want to know?”

“It's purely professional. Anybody who can activate the Tyupkin code pin by remote control is a genius and is somebody I'd be proud to meet.”

K-os looked at him suspiciously. “So you figured out what's going on.”

“Just doing my job.”

Police sirens rent the air. Cops poured into the subway, startling the dancers.

K-os glared at Alex. “You fucking dog. You set me up.”

“Tell me who they are, or I give them this recording. Indicating the approaching police, “They've got nothing on you without this.”

K-os's eyes darted back and forth. “Fuck you. Carbanak.”

“And who's your man inside PrivatBank?” Alex said, showing the hacker his note taker app.

“You expect me to betray my brother.”

Alex grinned as the hacker was marched off by the police.

Back at PrivatBank Alex was shown through to the managing director's office. Irina Kosyrev and a man, wearing a dark suit, he didn't know, were already there.

Paul Vladiskaski took the lead. “What is revealed here stays in this room. Is that understood.”

They all nodded. Alex was going to speak but the manager stilled him.

“Just listen to what I have to say. It appears that this gang of criminals has infiltrated some of our bank accounts. We have located most of the victims in Russia, the US, Germany, China and here. It also appears that the ATM scam was used to distract us from the real crime.” Turning to Alex he said, “We can only be thankful to Mr Meyer who has alerted us to this situation.”

Alex turned to Paul Vladiskaski. “Through information received we now know that a cyber gang called Carbanak is behind this.”

Irina became alert. “The police have been after them for over a year but had nothing solid to pin on them.”

Paul Vladiskaski, having been apprised of the daunting revelation that one of the bank's clients had lost in the region of \$7.3 million was even more disturbed by that client's intention to sue his bank. Another, who had \$10 million stolen, due to hackers entering his online banking page, had held the bank responsible and demanded openness on its behalf and involvement by the police. Despite these damaging demands he had to keep the issue in house. Looking straight at Irina, he said, “We are not going to involve the police.”

“The police are questioning a hacker named K-os, as we speak,” Alex pointed out.

Paul Vladiskaski, startled, responded, “Have you told them about the hacking.”

Alex handed over a small cassette. “No. And they won't find out without this.”

“What is it?” the manager asked.”

“A recording of my conversation with K-os. This is the breakthrough we've been waiting for.”

The director froze. “You told the police about this?”

“They wouldn't have been interested in arresting the hacker, otherwise.”

Paul Vladiskaski stared at the American. “I knew you Yanks couldn't be trusted. Mr Meyer, you have contravened our agreement. Your contract with us is null and void. You will leave these premises immediately.”

Alex turned on Paul Vladiskaski. “Fuck you and your bank. I have fulfilled my job in half the time you gave me. Don't give me any bullshit about void contracts so you can get out of paying me. You will pay me my due”

“You signed a declaration of confidentiality. By you breaking that agreement you are lucky you are not being arrested.”

Alex fronted up to the quivering manager. “You will be hearing from my lawyers.” With that he stormed out.

Irina followed. Catching up with him she grabbed his arm. “I'm sorry it ended this way.”

He spun on her, snarling, “You didn't even back me up.”

“I'm sorry but I cannot afford to lose my job.”

“You just let that jumped-up prick walk all over you.”

“I think he treated you unfairly but he thinks you have compromised the bank's credibility.”

Alex said, “Never mind about that. I have to leave so I want you to have this.” He handed her the small tape cassette. “If K-os doesn't tell the cops anything about Carbonak they have nothing on him. This recording contains contact details and is your leverage against your ass hole of a boss.”

She took the tape and gave him a hug. “I wish things had turned out differently.” He stood back, holding her at arms length. “Take care Irina.”

“You too, Alex.”

“One other thing.”

“What's that?”

Who, on your team, has a brother?”

“Why?”

“Just answer the question please.”

“Only Denys, as far as I know.”

“Then he's your man. He's brother is K-os.”