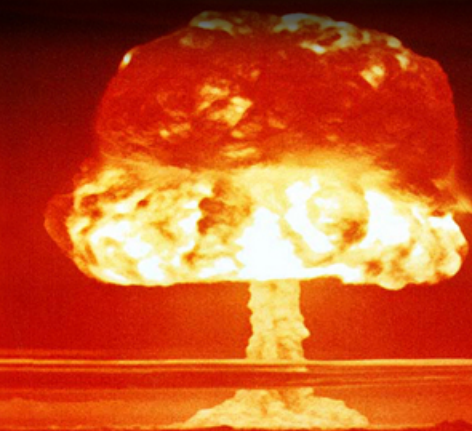


The Brotherhood



*Acquisition
of Power*



Alex Blackwell

Alex Blackwell The Brotherhood
Acquisition of Power



White Seahorse

Alex Blackwell

Please Note

This is a work of fiction. The characters in it are imaginary with the exception of people shaping historical events. Actual historical events are portrayed as accurately as possible. Where characters from this novel are involved, this description is fictitious. If certain characters resemble people in real life, it is because often people in real life resemble characters from a novel.

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About the Author

Alex Blackwell is a frequent author, writing about sailing technology and sailing adventures, contributing to several magazines, websites and e-zines. He has enjoyed a professional career as copywriter, marketer and speaker. Born in Chicago, Alex and his family moved to Clew Bay, Ireland when he was 14.



Because of his mother's German heritage, Alex went to school in Germany, where he earned a Master of Science degree in Marine Biology. After starting an oyster hatchery in Ireland, he went to America for a six-month research project. As many people do, he stayed for 20 years. There he was a partner in a marketing support services firm and commercial printing company which included a book printing division.

Since then Alex and his wife Daria have been sailing far and wide, exploring distant shores, but always returning to their home in Ireland.

Alex's second novel of the *Butterfly Effect* series, *The Brotherhood; Acquisition of Power*, is strictly fiction. Like the first book, *The Butterfly Effect; It Started on 9/11*, it is woven out of the fabric of historical events, his personal experience, and his fertile imagination.

*It is common knowledge that
the events and actions of the past
shape the future.*

~

*Past, present and future
are inextricably connected.*

~

*The future is therefore predetermined
by what happened in the past.*

~

Or is it?

~

*The direction life takes
is not entirely dictated
by cause and effect.*

~

*Chaos plays a much greater role
than most will readily admit.*

~

Such is reality.

~

Such is The Butterfly Effect.

The Brotherhood Acquisition of Power



By

Alex Blackwell

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Prolog

Life and the passing of time can be viewed as a virtually infinite number of parallel and consecutive short stories. The reality is that these stories are all interconnected, interdependent, each one influencing others, and each one being the precursor to what may, or may not follow.

To paint the picture of a specific event and tell its story, one must first look at what may have triggered this, what subsequently led up to it, and how other, sometimes seemingly disassociated stories, affected this time line.

It has been shown that incidents, whether large or small, can also trigger seemingly disassociated events at some point in the future. This is described in Chaos Theory as the *Butterfly Effect*; a butterfly flapping its wings in the forest may be the cause of a catastrophic event somewhere else and seemingly unrelated.

The following is Book 2 of the *Butterfly Effect* series. Herein, as in Book 1, *The Butterfly Effect; It started on 9/11*, you will bear witness to just how one significant event may trigger another. You will see how at first seemingly unrelated stories are inextricably intertwined, each affecting the outcome of the other – right up to the nail-biting end.

1.

The excitement onboard the huge ship was palpable. Months of sea trials were finally completed. They were heading out, escorted by a smaller sister ship and a fleet of other war ships. The Baltic port of Kiel lay in their wake. They were making way north, through the Kattegat. Once past Skagen on the northern tip of Denmark their orders were to head west through the Skagerrak to the North Sea. After passing the southern tip of Norway they were to head north again along the Norwegian coast before sailing out into the Atlantic.

Kapitänleutnant Dieter Bayer was standing next to his commanding officer and best friend Fregattenkapitän Helmut Brehm. They were peering out of the gun slits of the forward gun turret 'Bruno' at a Swedish flagged cruiser paralleling their course. Sweden was a 'neutral' country, but one still wondered.

Helmut and Dieter had been friends since childhood in Königsberg, East Prussia. Both had families that never understood why they chose to go to sea. Helmut's family owned a large farm, while Dieter's family had an estate there, as well as wide ranging business interests.

They had both joined the Kadetten-Korps in 1921, and had crewed together on several occasions. Dieter had been Helmut's first officer when the latter had had his first command. Neither would ever forget their first Christmas at sea. Helmut had brought along a simple, home-made nativity scene, and all the officers and several senior crew had gathered in the officer's mess to sing carols and share in the joy of the evening.

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Four days later, as the fleet steamed west to raid Allied shipping supplying Britain from North America, two large enemy ships appeared on the horizon and opened fire. It took ten agonizing minutes for the order to "return fire" to be given.

Shortly after they commenced shooting, a shell from one of Günther Gneisenau's guns in the forward-most turret 'Anton' struck one of the two ships near her aft ammunition magazines. The battle cruiser exploded and sank within three minutes with the loss of all but three of her crew.

Even though the second enemy ship still rained shells on them and their sister ship, causing unknown damage before retreating, Helmut and Dieter along with most of the rest of the crew had tears of joy streaming from their eyes as they returned salvo after salvo from their big twin 38 cm (15 inch diameter shell) SK C/34 guns. They had won their first major engagement and had overall victory in their sights.

It did not take long for the excitement of battle to wane. The damage reports circulated. Their ship had been hit three times. One to the bow had passed through the waterline and caused a leak in the forward fuel tank.

After assessing the amount of fuel remaining and estimating his ship's range and operational capacity, the admiral commanding the two ships ordered the second ship to initiate commerce raiding on her own. His would steam south to France to effect necessary repairs.



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Through some skillful maneuvering plus a good dose of luck, the commanding officers managed to elude their pursuers, who were converging from all sides. In the early dawn hours two days later an enemy reconnaissance aircraft sighted their battleship by following its oil slick.

At dusk Swordfish torpedo aircraft attacked. To a great extent much of the damage they caused was superficial. However, one torpedo jammed their ship's rudders and steering gear, rendering it largely unmaneuverable. Divers were put over the side, but reported that the damage was too extensive to repair in the rough seas. The pride of their navy was a 'sitting duck', reduced to circling at 7 knots (13 km/h or 8.1 mph).

The wolves drew nearer.



Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Admiral Günther Lütjens sent a radio transmission just before midnight on May 26, 1941 to 'Group West', the headquarters of the German Kriegsmarine. "To the Führer of the German Reich, Adolf Hitler. We will fight to the last in our trust in you, my Führer, and our firm confidence in Germany's victory."

The reply came two hours later: "I thank you in the name of the whole German nation - Adolf Hitler."

The second part of the reply read: "To the crew of the *Schlachtschiff Bismarck*: all Germany is with you. What can be done will be done. Your devotion to your duty will strengthen our people in the struggle for their existence - Adolf Hitler"



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The sustained bombardment of the *Battleship Bismarck* commenced at 8:48 that morning. Shortly after the 'forward command position' had been hit ten minutes later, both of the forward gun turrets, 'Anton' and 'Bruno', were destroyed. Helmut Brehm was killed instantly, as was everyone in forward-most turret 'Anton'.

Twenty minutes later the 'after command position' was destroyed and the aft-most turret 'Dora' was disabled. The proud battleship received countless further heavy hits resulting in a fire amidships. Turret 'Caesar' went out of action after a hit at 09:50. All weapons fell silent at 10:00. *Schlachtschiff Bismarck*, the pride of the German Kriegsmarine was dead in the water.

As the Germans were preparing to scuttle their ship, three torpedoes fired by the British cruiser *Dorsetshire* hit the crippled battleship's side. She sank at 10:36. Of the 2,200 men that had shipped out from Kiel just six days earlier, only 110 were saved by two of the British ships before they fled fearing reprisals by German U-boats.

A further five sailors were subsequently saved by the German submarine *U-74* and the fishing vessel *Sachsenwald*. One of them was Kapitänleutnant Dieter Bayer.

2.

The Blessingham family, Andrew and Sandy along with their sons Peter and Sean, moved to Ireland in 2003. They sailed across the Atlantic in their own boat leaving behind careers, friends and family. Having lived in the New York Metro area, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, known globally as 9/11, had troubled them deeply. Sandy's Cousin Marissa had been one of thousands of victims of this horrific attack against humanity.

Andrew's family lived in Westport, Co. Mayo, but he and Sandy chose to live in Kinsale on Ireland's south coast instead. Perhaps it was to have some space for themselves; they were never entirely sure what had motivated them at the time. All either of them knew was that they were very happy with their decision to leave America. They were also very happy with the life they had created for their family in Ireland.

Andrew spent most of his time writing. Sometimes it was travelogues, at other times he would try his hand at a novel, though completing one had as yet eluded him. Any chance he got, he took on boat delivery assignments either as captain or crew. That way he had visited many ports in Ireland, the UK and on continental Europe.

Twice he had been asked to assist on a trans-Atlantic delivery. Each time he accepted with excitement at the prospect, but also sadness at leaving Sandy. It was just that he loved being out at sea. More recently he also felt a real need to separate himself physically from his family, friends, and every day surroundings from time to time.

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Sandy had brought her work with her from the US. One of her former clients had offices in New York, Paris and London, so she had jumped at the offer to continue working for them. She thus got her city-fix several times a year by flying to one of these cities for meetings. She openly admitted really loving any visit to Paris, and London was not so bad either. Similar to her beloved husband, these trips away from their home were a balm to her soul.



To some extent Peter, the eldest Blessingham son, followed in his father's footsteps. He had graduated near the top of his class in computer science at University College Dublin, Ireland. As far as his parents knew, Peter was going on for his doctorate.

Only Peter had different ideas, vague at best, but they were nevertheless 'his'. He had tired of academia. It was all so mind-numbingly slow. Some of the lecturers knew less than their students. They were still stuck in the age of transistors and resistors. Peter did not want to become one of 'them'.

Shortly after graduating Peter moved in with two of his classmates: Tomas from Brazil and Pradip from India. They had managed to rent a house on Victoria Road in Rathfarnham, Dublin.

The house was in the middle of a row of more or less identical red brick houses. This had on one occasion been the cause for a little difficulty in finding their door. Despite that, the location could hardly have been more perfect. Perhaps it was the 10mb high speed broadband internet connection, essential for their work. Perhaps it was the anonymity of living in a middle class neighborhood. Whatever it was, for Peter, the setup was as good as it could get.

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He thought his two friends were unbelievably clever. What he didn't know was that they knew that his programming capabilities far surpassed theirs. He also was unaware at first that his new flat mates' passion was seeing who could gain entry into a given computer system first. They belonged to a loose group of computer hackers who called themselves 'Sprites'.

It was all a game to them. As it was all 'just for fun' and caused no real harm to anyone, Peter soon joined in with enthusiasm.

The top picks were government agencies and the military; the bigger and more powerful the country, the better. The trick was to hack into a computer system, create a back door, and then hide a fun program somewhere inside. When this was done, the back door was divulged to the others and their challenge was to find the hidden program, usually a virus, and kill it without activating it.

In addition to working his way into practically any system faster than any of his co-conspirators, Peter turned out to be particularly devious. His latest 'virus' was three interdependent programs. They all just idly did nothing while checking that their counterparts were still there.

When Pradip happened to find one of the programs buried deep in a computer Peter had hacked in America, he shouted "I got you, you little sucker!" before typing the kill code. He looked over to Peter beaming.

Peter just shook his head and grinned. "Look again," was all he said.

Pradip logged back into the AT&T mainframe as an administrator. He stared at his monitor in disbelief. The neat columns of numbers and lines of code morphed into a smiley face which stuck its tongue out at him.

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By deleting one of the three mini programs, Pradip had caused the other two to start overwriting all the data on the target computer. At the same time they wrote a script that would place this smiley face on every computer logged into the system, before transferring itself onto these computers.

The virus quickly spread from one switching station to the next. Sixty thousand people lost their telephone service. An estimated 70 million phone calls went uncompleted.

Not wishing anyone harm, Peter had written a degeneration sequence into the code. Within seven minutes the virus had disappeared without a trace. It was as if it had never existed.

It only took three days for the AT&T software engineers to get their network back online. They were certain it had been a virus. However, they never found how it had gotten in. They also never found a trace of its programming, save the devastation it had left behind. They suspected that some employee somewhere had brought a thumb drive in to work. This was, of course, absolutely prohibited. They were never able to prove anything.

The FBI, on the other hand, had long suspected that something like this would happen. They were just in the dark as to where and when. The further they dug trying to find the source of the problem the less they saw.



News of Peter's attack spread like wildfire among his peers. Although his name was never revealed, suspicions that it was indeed him popped up quite soon. His status among the Sprites rose to that of a Deity.

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The members of his group were rapidly running out of money. Computers and associated equipment were not cheap, and Peter and the other hackers also, quite incidentally, had to eat on occasion.

Peter devised a program which he inserted into three major European banks. It added one tenth of a cent 'bank fee' to every transaction. Being such a small amount, the computers rounded the transaction down to the nearest penny when it came to accounting. The 'fee' never actually appeared on any statement.

This one tenth cent was then transferred through a series of sister banks via EFT, before entering a virtual river of money that was constantly being transferred in an ultimately circular fashion between hundreds of branches, never hitting an account anywhere. Each transfer being insignificantly small, this seemingly random and ultimately huge flow of money remained undetected for years. When a clever technician did eventually stumble on it, it was quietly stemmed and nothing was ever made public. The origins of the money could not be traced and no one was ever quite sure how much money was involved. The whole thing was ultimately attributed to a computer glitch. Neither the police nor the press was ever informed, lest this embarrassing situation be made public.

In the meanwhile, however, the Sprites were able to cautiously siphon off any funds they might need. When asked about his finances by his parents, Peter merely said he had obtained a good job at Google. They were quite pleased with the news even though they had deduced that Peter was no longer attending university.



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A year later, Peter found himself with access to the bowels of a computer mainframe belonging to the United States National Security Agency (NSA). It had taken him several weeks of grueling work to get past their defenses undetected. He was enthralled. He had not told his friends what he was up to.

Pradip and Tomas were both totally absorbed by their hacking games. He wanted more. What he found here was even better than he had hoped for.

The computer system he had wormed his way into was huge. It contained more information than anything he had seen before. Data was being fed in through many virtual 'pipes'. He easily spotted these secure ports in the system's fire wall, and followed them to their sources; other computer systems within the NSA, the FBI, the CIA, as well as other state agencies.

However, data was also coming in without going through a dedicated open port. He had never seen anything like this before. It was as if the whole firewall was in some way porous allowing bits of information to enter.

As he delved deeper, he was astounded to see that this flow of information cumulatively accounted for the largest inbound feed. To his dismay, he was unable to target its source. This became an obsession. The data itself was interesting, but he ignored its distraction.

The information, he soon learned, was coming through countless temporary ports or openings in the NSA firewall. The moment data started to flow the port was sealed and firewalled. Whatever was pushing in this information was far more secure and secretive than the NSA's systems. Peter wanted in.

He wrote hundreds of little programs. Typically, these web robots or bots perform simple and structurally

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repetitive tasks at a much higher rate than would be possible for a human. He assigned each bot a potential port number. If the particular port were to be opened for even an instant, his program should be able to sneak in and keep it open, giving him a door to pass through to the mystery computer system.



Nothing happened. Days passed. Peter forgot to eat. He could not sleep. Eventually it was Tomas who came over and flicked off Peter's computer monitor. He would never dream of touching the actual computer.

Peter looked up at Tomas bleary-eyed, "What the fuck!" he exclaimed without raising a finger.

"Come buddy. It's time for some shut-eye. Whatever you are doing can wait. Your body needs to recharge its batteries." He said taking Peter by the hand.

"Yarumph," was all that came out. Peter got up when Tomas pulled, and promptly fell.

"Pradip, call a doctor. Peter is out cold," shouted Tomas.

"Oh Shit!" retorted Pradip. "We can't have the fucking cops come down here!! Gimme a hand, we have to get him upstairs!"

Together they dragged Peter up the stairs from their lair in the basement. Tomas locked the door and pulled a dresser in front of it. Only then did Pradip make the call.



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The ambulance arrived twenty minutes later. One of the two medics looked Peter over and asked, "What happened?"

"He has been working like he was possessed," answered Tomas. "I don't think he has slept or eaten anything for a day or two."

"Has he taken any drugs or medication?"

"No," answered Tomas.

"Do you know if he has diabetes or a heart condition?" asked the medic.

"Not that I know of. Pradip you know of anything?"

"No, Peter never said anything." answered Pradip.

"Here," said the medic handing Pradip a clipboard. "Fill in his name, address, and your contact information."

"Sure," replied Pradip, filling in the required fields.

"OK, let's get him into the ambulance," said the medic, while his colleague hooked up an IV.

They lifted Peter's inert body onto a stretcher, wheeled him out of the house and into the ambulance.

As the ambulance pulled away, Pradip exclaimed, "Shit, we didn't even ask where they were taking him."

3.

Dieter Bayer had scant memory of what had transpired after the shell struck his turret 'Bruno'. Helmut was gone, that much he knew. He had seen the chunk of shrapnel hit his friend in the side of his head just before he too blacked out.

The next thing he knew was that he was in the water being dragged down by his clothes. Something bumped into the back of his head. He reached up and his hand caught a rope. Struggling with his very last strength, he managed to pull himself up.

He awoke some time later cold and wet. Totally disorientated he raised himself up on his knees. He was on a life raft in the middle of the ocean. Immediately dizzy he collapsed onto the edge of the raft, his head and shoulders out over the water. He found himself slipping. Self-preservation caused his right hand to reach out and grab a rope. He hung on for a moment and rolled back into the raft. He closed his eyes and drifted off again.

Feeling a little stronger, Dieter sat up a second time. Bewildered, he looked around for the mighty *Bismarck*. He saw nothing but debris as far as he could see. There were countless bodies floating past his raft, every last one of them was dead, many missing limbs. The ones not wearing life jackets were disappearing. He looked on as they sank. There was nothing he could do but watch the corpses, unoccupied life jackets, and bits of wreckage drift by.

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He saw some motion in the water. A man's head moved. It had been kept above the water by his life jacket – but only because he had happened to be on his back. Dieter reached out and grabbed the inert figure. He held on for some time before attempting what he knew to be impossible.

Dieter heaved the man upwards. He felt his strength fail him, yet he still persisted. The man's shoulders were over the gunwale of the raft. Dieter pulled, leaning back. The other man did not budge. He pushed off with his legs, giving it his all. He lost his balance and fell back. In doing so he managed to pull the other man half way into the raft.

After a while Dieter roused himself and struggled to pull the rest of the man onto the raft. There he lay alive and breathing.

"What's the point," thought Dieter. "We are both going to die soon anyway."



Just as the sun was setting, Dieter spotted a ship. He quickly reached for the canister of signal flares he had seen tied to the raft. Holding one up and out towards the ship he pulled the ignition tab as he had been instructed during the months of preparation and sea trials. The tab came free and nothing happened. He dropped the rocket overboard and took out a second one. It too failed. The ship was steaming away to his left.

There were three more flares in the canister. If they also failed he was doomed. Totally dehydrated, his head was swimming with the exertion. He pulled out another signal rocket, pointed it skywards and forward of the ship. He pulled the tab and *whoosh*, the rocket took off, its flame singeing the hair on his arm. A bright red

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burning ball appeared overhead. Dieter was elated. He would be saved.

He grabbed the last two rockets and fired them off in quick succession. Both arced high in the evening sky and burned brightly. He watched the ship steaming further away. They had not seen him. Dieter lay down utterly dejected. He closed his eyes willing God to take him quickly.

A little later, or was it an eternity, he heard the thrum of a diesel engine growing louder. He sat up to look, and there it was. The ship had turned and was heading straight for his raft.

When the ship was close, its engine was shut down. With all the strength he had left he shouted, "Seid Ihr Deutsche? – Are you German?"

The answer came quickly, "Jawohl!" Yes, they were.

Dieter sat up waving his arms shouting hysterically until dizziness overcame him and he collapsed in a heap.

As the ship came alongside his raft, they lowered rope ladders and two seamen climbed down. He and his shipmate were bodily carried and winched aboard, clothed, and put into a warm berth.

The ship was the fishing vessel *Sachsenwald*, deployed as a meteorological weather observation ship. Her commanding officer Leutnant zur See Wilhelm Schütte made every effort to ensure the comfort and well-being of the two survivors he and his crew were proud to have rescued.

The *Sachsenwald* arrived in the Gironde River heading towards Bordeaux harbor on June 1st. Dieter and Otto Johansen, his shipmate who had since somewhat

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recovered, were transferred to a smaller motor boat and brought ashore with all due haste.



An Adjutant met Dieter at the dock. He clicked his heels together and raised his right arm in salute. "Heil Hitler," he barked.

In navy fashion Dieter and Otto raised their hands in a more leisurely manner and replied, "Heil Hitler."

"Kapitänleutnant Bayer, Ich habe für Sie eine Botschaft. (I have a letter for you)," he said pulling an official looking envelope out of his uniform tunic.

Dieter accepted the letter with trepidation. He opened it immediately, aware that there were two sets of eyes watching his every move.

The first thing he saw was the Party Eagle of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP or colloquially in English 'NAZI'). He suddenly felt quite ill. The sick feeling in the pit of his stomach disappeared almost as fast as it had come over him. As he looked at the letterhead a second time he saw that it was from the Nordische Rundschau, the party political monthly magazine produced in Kiel and distributed to the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, and Kriegsmarine.



"Dear Kapitänleutnant," it opened and then continued formally. "After personal and telephonic discussions with Group West, we are taking the liberty of presenting you

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with the request to be our correspondent on your visit to Norway and on the subsequently ensuing battles involving the Bismarck. Our request would pertain to the description of your personal experience, so that the Fatherland would be properly informed as punctually as possible. We ask for your forgiveness for the delay in getting this question to you, and hope that you would nevertheless be able to fulfill our request. Based on our current rates, compensation for your time as well as a reimbursement of your outlay for postage will most certainly follow.

Heil Hitler!"

The letter was signed by the regional editor in Kiel. There were also several other indecipherable signatures around the page, obviously from other officials who needed to approve the outgoing correspondence.

Dieter smiled to himself. "Delay?!" They must have written this letter the moment they received the news that he had been rescued. The party was obviously looking for information from an officer to corroborate or refute the official reports they had received prior to the *Bismarck's* sinking. The urgency of the letter's arrival also meant that they wanted to get it to him before he was shipped out again. He would have to be very careful as to what he sent them.



Although his wounds were not at all disabling, Dieter was given leave a week later to go home to his family outside Königsberg in East Prussia. He thought this to be quite unusual, as any naval personnel, particularly officers, were in high demand. Otto, the seaman who had been rescued with him, had been deployed onto the *Sachsenwald* two days prior. There had to be more to this than Dieter could see.

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Ill at ease, he made his way to the train station, but not before stopping at the officer's canteen. The trip home might well take him several days. Who knew which trains were running with the war effort in full swing. His best bet was likely to be a train heading for the Eastern Front in Russia.

4.

Peter awoke with a splitting headache. He tried to get up, needing to pee urgently. He couldn't move his arms or legs. He started to struggle and felt little tugs at his arms and chest.

Just as his eyes started to focus, he saw two men and a woman dressed in white come into his room. The men rushed to either side and pushed his shoulders down while the woman jabbed a needle into his arm. The lights dimmed and then his thoughts faded. His bladder emptied down the catheter tube and into the attached bag as intended.



Sometime later, he had no idea of how long, he opened his eyes and looked down at a man lying in a hospital bed. It was strange. The man looked vaguely familiar. In fact he looked very familiar. It was someone he knew intimately. For a moment he thought it might be he, who was lying there, below him on the hospital bed. Of course that was preposterous. Peter just could not place who it was and closed his eyes again.



Peter awoke looking up at a white ceiling. There was a smell of antiseptic. He smiled. This was a day for the record books. Either Tomas or Pradip had cleaned the house.

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"Cool," he thought and smiled. He closed his eyes again and fell asleep.



Still not knowing where Peter had been taken to, Pradip and Tomas did the one thing they were good at. They hacked the computers at the Healthcare Services Executive.

"I can't believe their defenses are so out of date," Pradip remarked when it took him less than ten minutes to get through the firewall.

"Hey! Didn't I read somewhere that personal medical records are worth ten times as much as credit card details?" asked Tomas as he accessed a data file containing every person in Ireland.

"I have his record," he continued, "only there is nothing about him being admitted to any hospital."

"You gotta be kidding," exclaimed Pradip. "Are these guys still in the stone age? Not only is their security a joke, but their computers are not even talking to each other."

"OK," said Tomas. "So let's check the hospitals..."



Someone was holding his hand. There was pressure on his upper arm. He opened his eyes and looked up at a beautiful face framed with pulled back dark red hair. It was an angel in a white coat.

"Where am I?" he croaked.

"Welcome back," the beautiful apparition said smiling.

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Confused he asked, "Where did I go?"

"You're in Saint Vincent's Hospital," she said warmly.

"You had a severe case of hypoglycemia and electrolyte disturbance from not eating, drinking or sleeping. You went into a coma, and if your friends had not called an ambulance you may well have had severe brain damage or even died," she said in a slightly accented voice that Peter knew to be that of an angel. He smiled up at her.

"Does my family know I am here?" he asked.

"I don't know, but your two friends were here. The doctor said you were no longer in any real danger, so we left it at that."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Nurse Juliette," she replied still smiling.

Peter was smitten. She was a human, and the most beautiful person he had ever seen.

"Now you just relax. I'll be back in a while with something warm for you to drink. If that stays down, we'll see about some real food," lovely Nurse Juliette said.

"How about a 30 ounce steak? I could eat a horse!" Peter exclaimed weakly.

"In time, my dear. In time," she said closing her notebook and leaving his room.



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Peter felt someone in his room and awoke just as Juliette was placing a tray on his bedside table.

"I see you're awake," she said.

Peter noticed her green eyes for the first time.

When he nodded, she continued, "Drink this, and if it agrees with you, I'll see about that steak."

It was beef broth. For Peter the salty hot liquid had the most wonderful flavor on earth. He slurped it up as fast as he could and then savored the saltine crackers that came with it.

His head was now much clearer. He remembered the work he had been doing just before everything had gone blank.

"I need to get home," Peter said when Nurse Juliette returned some time later. "I'm in the middle of an important project that I need to complete."

"I'm sure it can wait," she replied gently resting a hand on his shoulder.

"No, you don't understand, I need to get back now!" he said sitting up. "Otherwise...." His head started spinning from the exertion and he dropped back onto his pillow.

"Otherwise you're just going to be here even longer," Juliette said laughing quietly.

When Peter next came to, Pradip and Tomas were standing at the foot of his bed looking awkward.

"Hey guys!" he said.

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"Hey to you too!" exclaimed Pradip. "You sure gave us a scare. How are you doing? What did the doctor say? How long are they keeping you?"

"Well, I have no idea what happened," replied Peter. "I feel great, just very hungry, I have not seen any doctor yet – just the lovely Nurse Juliette and I have no idea how long they are keeping me. I don't even know how long I have been here."

"It's been two days, and we've been worried sick," burst in Tomas. "Jesús Cristo, we thought you were dead. An' then we didn't know where you were. Don' never do that to us again!!"

"Two days!? Shit!" exclaimed Peter sitting up. "What about my work? What about my computers? I gotta get back and see that they are all OK!"

"Your stupid computers are just fine," said Pradip. "All we did was turn off the monitors. We didn't touch a thing. You'll see."

Once again dizzy, Peter lay back down on his pillow. "Right," he said. "I'll call you guys when I know what's going on. No, wait. I need my mobile phone. And, while you're at it, I'm gonna need some clothes. I can't go around in this night dress with my ass sticking out."

5.

Karl Friedrich Bayer, Dieter's father, was heir to a steel empire founded by his grandfather in 1810. When it was established, the business had five employees. By the time of his father's death in 1887, twenty thousand people worked for the Bayer steelworks, making it the world's largest industrial company and the largest private company in the German empire.

Karl Friedrich worked himself up from being an apprentice accountant to shop manager. His skill at his work had certainly contributed to his unprecedented speedy ascent up the corporate ladder. More so, perhaps, it was his totally ruthless ambition for control. He took over the family business at the early age of 21, shortly after he married his second cousin Marta Bayer, who would inherit 20% of the company from her father upon his death.

When he was 27 he acquired a 1,000 hectare tract of land near Wehlau (modern day Znamensk), East Prussia from the son of a wealthy Prussian Baron in a drunken game of Skat, to this day a popular card game. Suffice it to say that everyone at the table had had far more to drink than they should have had, with the sole exception of Karl Friedrich, whose personal Schnapps bottle only contained water. It was not that he eschewed alcohol; he just ardently felt the need to win.



A few weeks later, Karl Friedrich took a train to Königsberg (modern day Kaliningrad). From there he continued on to Wehlau. The old Baron was furious.

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However, he had no choice and conceded to show Karl Friedrich the parcel of land. It was instant love; gently rolling meadows, interspersed with mature beech woods.

In the ensuing years Karl Friedrich first built a modest house. He then expanded this bit by bit into a full-fledged country estate, befit of any gentleman of high standing. This was his home. This was his love. His passion was business and finance.

The steelworks were just the beginning. His next business undertaking was banking. He hated the money grubbing Jews and worked hard displacing them from 'his' city. At the same time, he did everything in his powers to help working class Germans save their money and grow, while making ever more money himself. His other ventures in Germany included textiles, and chemicals.

His latest foray was into mining. For this he had branched out into South America, specifically Brazil. Mineral rights and land were cheap there, as were the politicians.



Karl Friedrich was not a political man per se, though he did have very strong ideological convictions. The Germans, Teutons by heritage, were without a doubt in his mind a superior race. He firmly believed Teutons were natural leaders and that it was Germany's role to be the rulers of the western world. Germany would lead the other countries into the future.

In that, his philosophy was similar to that of Adolf Hitler, whom he secretly thought to be a megalomaniacal fool. Karl Friedrich knew Adolf well and at times considered him a friend. They met quite

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frequently. Adolf had even been his guest at the estate on a number of occasions.

Whereas they easily agreed on the Germans being superior, Karl Friedrich felt that Adolf's definition of the Aryan Race was flawed. Adolf claimed he could scientifically measure a strict hierarchy of the human race. The "master race" he saw as the most pure stock of the Aryans. He based this on the Nordic race; these were people with light-colored hair, light-colored eyes, fair skin, long and narrow skulls, and a tall stature. Following this were the other sub-races of the actual Aryan race, which Karl Friedrich knew to include the peoples of European and Western Asian heritage.

However, Adolf disagreed with this definition. At the bottom of his hierarchy he defined the "Untermenschen" or sub-humans. These he perceived to be parasitic and dangerous to society. Herein he included the Slavs, in particular the Russians, Serbs, and ethnic Poles. Lowest of all in his racial policy were Gypsies and Jews. Both of these he eventually deemed to be "Lebensunwertes Leben", life unworthy of life.

Hitler's attempt at the annihilation of the lesser people, Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs among others, Karl Friedrich considered stupid and wasteful. Even worse was Hitler's removal and subsequent extermination of all Germans he considered inferior, those who were mentally ill, physically deformed, homeless, or of low intelligence.

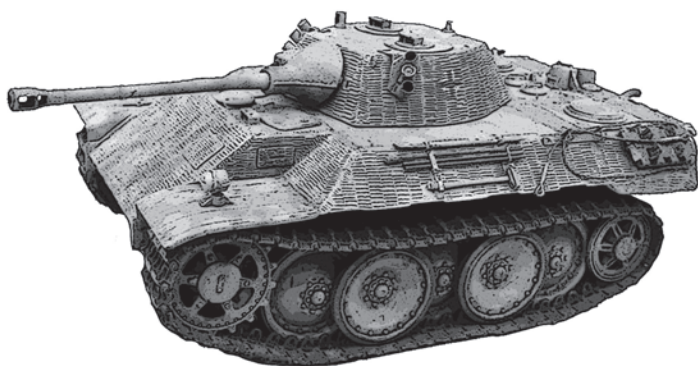
Karl Friedrich believed these were all possible workers and should be used to their greatest potential for the betterment of Germany. He was certain that Adolf Hitler's fanaticism would be the undoing of him and probably of Germany as well.



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In 1933, Adolf Hitler made Karl Friedrich Bayer chairman of the *Reich Federation of German Industry*. Karl Friedrich ousted Jews from the organization and then disbanded the board, establishing himself as the sole-decision maker.

He supported the "*Adolf Hitler Endowment Fund of German Industry*", managed by Martin Bormann, head of the Party Chancellery, who used it to collect millions of Marks from German businessmen. As part of Hitler's secret rearmament program, Bayer Steelworks expanded from 35,000 to 112,000 employees, plus somewhere in the region of 50,000 Jewish slave laborers building the most sophisticated weapons of the time.



WWII Leopard Tank



When Karl Friedrich along with the rest of Germany heard about the demise of the *Bismarck* on May 28th, his heart sank into deep despair. His younger son, who had been so very promising, was gone.

Both of his sons had joined the war effort with his blessings; Dieter in the Kriegsmarine, and Frans Joseph in the Wehrmacht. Granted that it had been his wish

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that they both should become cadets and attain ranks as officers, but he most certainly did not want them to be placed in harm's way. They were his heirs, and he had very firm plans for each of their futures. This was all now in jeopardy. Only Franz Joseph remained.

Two days later he received a cable. Dieter had been fished out of the sea by the German weather observation ship *Sachsenwald*! Karl Friedrich, elated, put a personal call in to Erich Raeder, Oberbefehlshaber der Kriegsmarine (Commander in Chief of the German Navy). He explained that it was of vital interest to the Reich that Dieter be released from duty and sent home at once. The future of the Reich depended on him.

Karl Friedrich Bayer was a major contributor to the war effort. Much of the steel in the German arsenal came from his factories. His financial support was also significant. Now, with his chairmanship appointment to the *Reich Federation* from Adolf Hitler himself, he had considerable influence. Dieter was sent home with all due haste.

To ensure that his other son would also remain safe and would be able to fulfill the destiny he had mapped out for him, Franz Joseph was also summonsed back home to the estate near Königsberg. His commanding officer had similarly received orders directly from High Command to honorably discharge Major Bayer with immediate effect.



With both of his sons home, Karl Friedrich Bayer set to work explaining his vision of the future to them as well as the roles he had preordained for each of them.

"Meine Söhne, since your mother passed away 21 years ago giving birth to your stillborn brother Johan, I have

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been working on a grand scheme for the betterment of our beloved Fatherland," Karl Friedrich started, somewhat formally addressing his sons, as he had always been prone to doing.

They were in the spacious central living room, seated around a beautiful low table made with intricately inlaid satinwood. In front of them a fire blazed in an ornate steel grate below the heavy dark oak mantel. Dieter and Franz Joseph looked at each other questioningly. They both knew something was afoot. In fact they had both known their father was planning something for quite some time. Both were eager to be part of whatever it was.

"When I heard of the terrible demise of the magnificent battleship, *Bismarck*, and assumed that Dieter was lost with most of his shipmates, I thought that much of my work these past decades may have been for naught. When I then received word of his miraculous rescue, I knew this to be a sign from the Divine Creator. I must put my plan before you now, and not wait one moment longer."

"But what is your plan?" interjected Dieter, always questioning everything. "And what is our role in it?"

Their father smiled. He looked at his sons sitting across from him in the home he had built. For the first time in a long while he felt calm and confident. His sons had grown up strong of will and body, and equally important, they had both proven to be highly intelligent and capable leaders.

"It is as simple in its principle, as it will be complex in its design and execution," he replied. "You will recall that I started in comparatively humble circumstances. What you see around you here and the luxuries we enjoy daily were made possible by the considerable amount of wealth I was able to build up in my short lifetime. These

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resources have also brought considerable power and influence with them.”

“I was one of a handful of people who provided the resources for the National Socialist Workers Party to grow and become the powerhouse they are today. Adolf Hitler became a personal friend of mine – surely more because of my money, and my steel, than my good looks!”

His sons laughed heartily at this. Both had known their ‘Uncle Adolf’ since their teens.

“I have of late become somewhat disenchanted with where our ‘Führer’ has been taking this great country of ours. Don’t get me wrong. What he has accomplished in recreating Germany is truly amazing. However, I am not overly happy with everything he is doing. This war has been a huge waste of valuable resources, not to mention the huge loss of life. Our nation’s future leaders are being slaughtered. Whether we will actually gain anything from the war is becoming increasingly doubtful. The cost has been so very high that we may never fully recover.”

“Yes, we made huge advances in the ‘Blitzkrieg’ and our forces are still dominating. I admire the Nazi’s cunning and ambition. The part I abhor is their mindless brutality. And then there is the ‘Endlösung’. I am sorry, my sons, I know this sounds like treason but you both know what my feelings are about killing anything needlessly. Lord knows, I have no love for the Gypsies or Jews, but killing them all is not a ‘Final Solution’, it is a sinful waste of perfectly good laborers.”

“If you would like me to stop now, say so, and I will never speak of this again. You both have productive careers ahead of you and I do not wish to deprive you of the paths you may have chosen.”

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"If you would like me to continue, I will, and you will both be complicit in what follows."

There followed a moment of silence, while each weighed up the consequences of going further.

Dieter was the first to rise from his seat looking grave. He looked at his father, who was having second thoughts about putting his sons in such a predicament.

"Herr Vater," Dieter started formally, addressing his father, inclining his head slightly in the direction of his father in a respectful bow. "I am fully aware of the gravity of this situation. I believe I know where this is heading, as your philosophy on life in general and with regards to our Fatherland in particular has been no secret to either of us."

He paused. His father frowned, fearing rejection by his sons.

"My Father, I for one would be deeply honored to follow in your footsteps, to carry forth the work you have done and to bring your dreams for a better and stronger Germany closer to fulfillment."

Dieter sat down. Franz Joseph rose to his feet.

"My Father, I too have a very good idea as to why you have brought us here and what you would like to put before us today," he said in a strong and clear voice. "I too would be honored to walk in your footsteps if you find me up to the task."

Karl Friedrich Bayer got up out of his chair and walked over to the log basket next to the fire. He selected and tossed three logs onto the already blazing fire, clearly stalling for some time. He then came back to the table and reached for the cognac bottle before charging their heavy crystal glasses.

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He said nothing until he had sat back down in his chair.

"Franz Joseph, Dieter, my beloved sons. What I have done in my short life is hopefully just the beginning. There are several others with whom I have exchanged ideas and we have created '*Die Brüderschaft*', *The Brotherhood*. This is not a subversive organization, and we certainly do not wish to do anything to thwart Adolf Hitler's plans. On the contrary we all wish him well and will continue supporting him and his cause as best we can."

"Our goal has been to build the foundations for a future Germany, for a new order, a true superpower. Call it a continuation of the Third Reich, call it the Fourth Reich, that is unimportant. Right now '*Die Brüderschaft*' is small, with limited powers. To join this elite cadre, a man or woman must be a leader in industry or science, must be of pure Teutonic German extraction, and must also swear an oath of absolute secrecy and loyalty to the cause. Every member of The Brotherhood has the entire financial, political, and social resources of all its members at their immediate and unquestioning disposal. The long term goal is for The Brotherhood to become more powerful than any individual or collective country."

"The short term goal is for each and every one of us to amass the maximum amount of wealth and attain as much power and influence as possible in our respective sphere of operation. This way we can better help other members do the same. United we are strong."

"As I am fully aware that this will all not come to fruition in my lifetime, it is time now for me to pass things on to the two of you. These are lofty, but attainable goals, so you too will need great patience. You too will probably have to let your sons and daughters continue in your footsteps. Perhaps by then it will be time to reap the rewards of our collective work."

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The senior Bayer paused. He looked from one son to the other and back again. Clearly satisfied with what he saw, he adjusted his posture, grimacing briefly; his back had been giving him severe problems of late.

“Franz Joseph,” he then continued. “Your job from hence forward will be to learn, understand and grow our businesses here in Germany to the best of your ability. The industries I started with, steel, banking, and chemicals, have need to be rethought and rekindled. Times have changed. The financial sector, banking in particular is in turmoil, and rife for picking. With your cunning and head for numbers I know you can excel.”

“Dieter, I am handing you my interests in the Americas – particularly those in South America, where there is huge potential. I have been moving people, good German people there for years already. Others have done so as well. There are now many German colony villages scattered throughout the continent. What they need is a strong leader.”

“In addition I have already invested 500 million marks in South America. I am currently secretly liquidating a further 200 million in Government Bonds, which you will be receiving once you get there. The region is rife with corruption. Use all the tools at your disposal and I know you will exceed my expectations.”

“In case you were wondering how I have been able to run so many different businesses, I have, over the years built a team of very able executives, who each oversee a specific industry or region; men who I trust with my life. They will brief each of you on our strengths and weaknesses. They have been instrumental in finding new opportunities and exploiting these for our benefit. With them as your lieutenants, you should have no problem accomplishing what needs to be done. You will, of course, add to their ranks as the need arises with your own trusted executives.”

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"I will be here on the estate should either of you need me. I will not meddle in your affairs, but I do expect to be kept apprised of everything you do. You never know, this old dog may have a useful suggestion now and then."

Karl Friedrich leaned back in his chair and smiled at his sons. He knew full and well what a bombshell he had just dropped in their laps. It would be a while before either of them would fully see the enormity and gravity of what they were embarking on.

He raised his glass, untouched until then, and said, "Dann lass uns darauf trinken! – Then let us drink to that!"

Both sons rose as one and shouted, "Zum Wohl!" raising their glasses into the air.

Karl Friedrich also rose and said in a more somber voice, "Zu *Eurem* Wohl! – To *your* health! *Ihr* seid die Zukunft. – *You* are the future."

They all simultaneously drank their cognac and slammed their glasses down on the table. Not one of them spoke. They just looked at each other solemnly. There was no need to swear anything. Each of them knew what they needed to do.



Almost as soon as he had relinquished his power, Karl Friedrich's health began to deteriorate. The pressure of work had helped subdue the pain. His troublesome back soon became almost debilitating.

Dieter and Franz Joseph visited him regularly. They often brought business associates along to discuss current developments and opportunities.

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By the end of 1942 physicians attended to Karl Friedrich round the clock. It was as if his life's work had kept him alive and well. It was not just his physical health that declined so fast. He also quickly became senile, though he lost none of his forcefulness.

When the Red Army arrived, in stark contradiction to the Nazi propaganda of the 'Endzieg', that Karl Friedrich had come to vehemently believe in, they simply rolled right through his beloved estate. How and precisely when he died, Dieter and his brother Franz Joseph never learned. They never had a body to bury. They just knew their father was gone and that the estate had literally been leveled. This more than anything else strengthened their resolve to fulfill their father's wishes to the letter.

6.

Six days after being admitted to hospital Peter Blessingham was released. Fortunately for him, his student insurance had not yet lapsed, so everything was covered.

Pradip and Tomas came to bring him home in a taxi. This was just as well as he was still quite weak. When they got back to the house, Peter grabbed an apple and went straight downstairs to his desk. Everything was just as he had left it. He punched the buttons and lit up the monitors surrounding his chair.

Except for one blinking green box on the main screen nothing seemed to have changed. The box read simply, "Yippie". One of his little 'bots' reported its success. It had opened a hole to the secret supplier of information to the NSA computers. But was it still open?

It was an odd sensation that Peter and his friends often discussed. When any of them had gained access to a remote computer it felt as if they were actually in there as a virtual being. So it was this time as well for Peter. As his fingers typed away at his keyboard and his eyes looked at the numbers and letters scrolling down the three monitors on his desk, he felt that he was in there, physically crawling through the hole his bot had opened.

Once inside Peter gasped, "This is the biggest motherfucker of a computer I've ever been in!"

As expected, the enormous storage banks contained indecipherable gibberish. Peter smiled and got to work.

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Thirty-six hours later he had cracked the encryption. That had to be a record of the longest it had taken him since he joined the Sprites. But the information still didn't make sense. All he found was clear text sentence snippets, phone numbers, email addresses, Twitter account names. What was the point? He dug deeper and started seeing a pattern. He wrote a series of little programs. On his seventh attempt a few hours later, the data started to link up. By dinner time he had tweaked his program so that all the information was clear.

This computer system was collecting and processing information on everything and everyone. He found feeds from Facebook, Yahoo, Google, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and countless other social media sites. He found a river of email and another of SMS text messages. He searched and found some of his own text messages which freaked him out. This was blanket surveillance on an unprecedented scale.

Next he came across a database of phone calls: made and received. This had an associated table of keywords used in the conversations. In some instances, how many he could not fathom, there were links to actual recordings of the conversations. Peter relaxed back into his chair.

"This is an automatically generated relational database – incredible," he thought.

Suddenly his eye caught a flashing message on the monitor directly in front of him. *"Intruder Alert"*. He sat bold upright in his chair staring in disbelief. Someone was hacking *his* computer!

He quickly went on the defense. "Boy this guy was good!"

Peter parried and thrust with his virtual opponent. He wrote a quick trace bot and let it loose. The opponent

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vanished, but not before Peter saw that he or they had come through the same open port that Peter had used.



Two days later on a fine September morning that was otherwise lost to the three Sprites in the basement, the doorbell of their house rang. Peter didn't even know that they had a doorbell. Pradip went upstairs to see who it was.

"Hello, I'm here to see Peter Blessingham," the big, older man said when Pradip cautiously opened the door. "Tell him it's his Uncle Jack."

7.

Franz Joseph Bayer set to work the moment his father had given him the responsibility of running the expansive German enterprises doing everything in his powers to help the German war machine during what, in reality, was its final hour. He had been an early supporter of Nazism among German industrialist youth. He joined the SS in 1931, and never disavowed his allegiance to Hitler, his uncle Adolf.

Shortly after he took control of his father's holdings in Germany, Franz Joseph was allowed to annex many industries in occupied nations, including Arthur Krupp steel works in Berndorf, Austria, the Alsacian Corporation for Mechanical Construction (Elsässische Maschinenfabrik AG, or ELMAG), Robert Rothschild's tractor factory in France, Škoda Works in Czechoslovakia, and Deutsche Schiff- und Maschinenbau AG (Deschimag) in Bremen.

Franz Joseph continued to use slave labor; Prisoners of War (POWs) and civilians from occupied countries were added to his 'workforce' of Jews and other undesirables. He personally sent representatives to concentration camps to select laborers.

Beginning in 1943, Allied bombers targeted the main German industrial district in the Ruhr. Sadly, most of the damage at Bayer's works was actually to the slave labor camps.

Despite the bombings Franz Joseph saw to it that the tank production continued to increase from 1,000 to

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1,800 per month. However, by the end of the war, with manpower shortages preventing repairs, his factories ceased production.

After the war, the Ruhr became part of the British Zone of occupation. The British dismantled the Bayer factories, sending machinery all over Europe as war reparations.

Franz Joseph was arrested and sent to Landsberg prison. At his trial, held from 1947 to 1948 in Nuremberg following the main Nuremberg trials, Franz Joseph and most of his co-defendant Bayer executives were convicted of crimes against humanity.

His treatment of Slavic and Jewish slaves was considered to have been particularly harsh. Even so, he never understood the basis for the charges. In his mind he considered them sub-human. He saw his treatment of his slaves as being benevolent. 'Allowing' them to bequeath their worthless bodies and souls to the betterment of the German people meant that they might later die a more noble death.

As to the 'plunder' charges he was convicted of, to his dying day he contended that taking over other industries was merely availing of business opportunities.

Franz Joseph Bayer was condemned to 12 years in prison and the 'forfeiture of all of his property both real and personal,' making him a pauper. He was a broken man. He had failed his father. He died in prison a year later of 'unknown causes'.

8.

James McLean, director of the American Institute for Material Matters (AIMM), a super clandestine US government organization known only to a handful of key NSA and CIA personnel, sat at his desk in a dark mood. It was September 2017. The latest election in the US had brought an end to the years of deadlock between Congress and the President. The stock market subsequently soared from one high to the next.

The European Union had reversed its austerity measures as each country in turn sorted out its financial woes. In Ireland they were talking about the rebirth of the Celtic Tiger. People spent money like there was no tomorrow, while prices rose to levels never seen before.

The general wisdom in some quarters was that it would all soon implode and America would once again be the leading super power. The American economy would prevail solely on the basis of economic diversity. But McLean wasn't buying it.

There was one problem, and this is what troubled him so deeply. In his heart of hearts James knew that it was all a house of cards. The world financial circle was inextricably interrelated. If Europe crashed, then so would the US. If the combined European economies continued growing at their current pace, the EU would soon be more powerful than the United States. This would in turn cause a decline in the US economy.

To make matters interesting, the Russian economy went into a tailspin in late 2014. They were now in a deep dark recession. Worse than anything the west had

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ever seen. Would this eventually pull Europe and the rest of the world down into the same abyss? So far the oligarchs had managed to protect their resources by shifting them into western assets, thereby fuelling western economies. But how long would that hold out?

He had been sitting in front of his bank of monitors for days searching desperately for a solution. He sent one query after another to the vast computer system buried in the disused coal mines next door.

"There just has to be a way out of this morass," he thought dejectedly.



A bright red message popped up unexpectedly on his monitor: *"Intruder Alert!!"*

"That's not possible!" he blurted out to no one.

He hit the intercom button on his desk and shouted, "Talk to me someone. What's happening?"

"Director, Tom Klaussen. We've been hacked. We've already locked him out and are tracing the source."

"Ok Tom. I want to know who this was, where they are and what they took. And I want it now!"

James was appalled. He was sick to his stomach. This was utterly impossible. The computer system that was the beating heart of the AIMM had originally been designed twenty years ago by a computer genius named Marissa Geraghty. She had perished in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in Manhattan back in 2001. Her computers had vaporized with her.

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She had, however, had the foresight of building an exact duplicate system in a disused coal mine in Pennsylvania. James sat in front of a terminal connected to the newest iteration of this system, aptly named *Marissa*. It was millions of times faster and more powerful than the original creation, though it still ran a version of the same operating system she had created nearly 20 years ago.

The computers far below him monitored and processed every email, every phone call, every text message and every bit of information transmitted anywhere in the world. Theoretically the computers knew, and James and his technicians had direct knowledge of, anything anyone was saying or doing. If the sheer volume of the data collected every minute was mindboggling, then the processing of it was virtually incomprehensible. But that was where Marissa's genius had been so vastly important. She had developed algorithms that found connections between disparate bits of data. Combined in this way the information provided leads and hard evidence, which enabled the AIMM to track down terrorists and other subversives. James then either put in his own operatives, or, as was most often the case, passed the information on to the NSA, CIA or FBI.

It had taken his team of thirty technicians four years to unlock Marissa Geraghty's backup computers – four long years of trial and abject failure. Even then it was pure chance that they had stumbled on the digital master key: Marissa's genetic code. They had not cracked it. They found it.

Even without the super-sophisticated safeguards *Marissa* had put in place, knowing everything also meant that her namesake was, or rather should have been, un-hackable. If someone was trying to get in, *Marissa* should have known all about it, before it ever even happened.

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Now this had all been transformed into one big lie. His head of IT security tracked down some punk kid in Ireland who had waltzed right in as if there had been a door with a big welcome sign. Fortunately, his people had found nothing amiss, no viruses or trojans, and no back doors for others to use. It appeared as if this had been a totally 'innocent' hack.

But the enormity of the situation did not end there. "No, that would have been too easy," thought James as he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

The kid "just happened" to be Marissa Geraghty's nephew!

"Well, doesn't that just take the cake!" he exclaimed out loud. "Maybe, just maybe, Marissa had given her relatives a copy of her security key, leaving me to spend years trying to crack it."

James had one asset in Ireland he knew he could trust implicitly. The big Irishman Jack O'D had retired there a few years ago.

"If anyone can turn this around to our benefit, it's Jack," James mused. "I need to know how that kid did it. In fact, Jack'll need to bring the kid here. Keep your friends close. Keep your enemies closer."

"Whose quote was that?" he wondered, suddenly realizing that he had been muttering to himself. "Sun Tzu in the *'Art of War'*?"

"No. Now I remember it was Machiavelli in *'The Prince'*."

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By

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