

BIG READS

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE SUNFLOWER MURDER TRIAL

By Rian Malan (Page 39)

11/9 AND THE TERRORIST WHO LOVED BONSAI TREES

By Philip Kraske (Page 51)

ISSUE 185

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

JUNE 2019



*Amazon boss Jeff Bezos
thinks you'd like to live,
with a million friends,
in a giant cylinder
drifting through space*

Caitlin Johnstone disagrees

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Issue 185
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ONE MAGAZINE'S 10-YEAR QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Before I wound up in Toronto and ColdType, I designed **Frontline** magazine, South Africa's top liberal-left magazine, for 10 years during the 1980s as it battled for justice and equality during the final years of Apartheid. Now, we're digitising Frontline, as a case study of prophecy and history. The first digital issues are now on line; more will follow each month.

– **Tony Sutton, Editor**



Read the digital editions of Frontline, exactly as they were published, free of charge, at www.issuu.com/frontline.south

Insights

Grenfell and the collapse of local journalism

By **Carmen O'Toole**

THE delay to the publication of the report into the Grenfell Tower tragedy, which claimed 72 lives in a disastrous – and possibly preventable – fire at the London tower block, has been greeted with dismay and anger by survivors and their supporters.

Inquiry solicitor Caroline Featherstone said, in a letter to survivors and people who lost family in the fire, that writing the first phase of the report proved to be “far more complex and time-consuming” than anticipated. Its release has been pushed back to October.

The big question that needs to be answered is whether Grenfell should have happened at all – and why nobody picked up on the very public warnings from tower residents that just such a tragedy was likely to happen. A growing chorus of voices from local and national



Grenfell Tower burns on nearly all floors with water being sprayed at the building by firefighters way below the flames.

journalism has pinpointed the absence of dedicated local media around Grenfell, saying nobody was looking.

Six months before the fire struck, Grenfell Tower residents had flagged their serious con-

cerns about the tower in a post on their well-established community blog which specifically highlight the very real risk of “a serious fire”.

Why were these warnings not heeded? The tenants’ blog had repeatedly flagged serious safety concerns which would ordinarily be a rich source of local news for on-the-beat reporters.

Dominic Ponsford, editor of *UK Press Gazette*, told me in a telephone interview in August 2017 that the number of local journalists has fallen by at least a half in the past decade. He also described regional print media to be in “fairly desperate times” facing a year-on-year, 10% decline in print presence.

Ponsford has chronicled the issue of the lack of local media coverage about Grenfell. He highlighted that despite the

openly available warnings from Grenfell residents on their blog site, which should have been essential reading for local journalists, no journalists picked up the November 2016 prediction about the catastrophe to come.

Geoff Baker was news editor for the Kensington and Chelsea News from its relaunch in 2014, until he was made redundant through cuts in April 2017. His only reporter left the company a few months earlier. He also covered four other west London titles in his role. Baker told the Press Gazette in September 2018:

If someone had phoned me or sent me a release I would have done it, but it just didn't come on the radar, simple as that. Just because there's so much else to do if you are doing it on your own. To my huge regret I wish that I had ... Whether that would have made the council change their minds I very much doubt it... It was simply that I didn't have the time to pull out all the stops because all the stops were already pulled out on other things.

Grant Feller is a journalist and corporate media consultant. He began his career on the Kensington News and Chelsea News, the two titles had an editorial team of ten and faced competition for stories from the Kensington and Chelsea Times and the Evening Standard (which then devoted more resources to local borough stories).

Asked whether he thought

the concerns of residents would have been picked up by the Kensington News in 1990, Feller told the Press Gazette: "One hundred per cent yes, we would have picked up on that."

If we hadn't found that story ourselves we would have been bollocked by the editor. Any local newspaper journalist worth his or her salt would have been all over that story because of that blog.

We would have known about that local group's concerns because we were very much in the local community. We would have pored over the council meeting agendas and asked questions of the councillors and the officers. But today there is no-one there. Those people can do what they like because there's no journalists looking at what they are doing. That's why local journalism is so important.

In the past decade, hundreds of local UK newspapers have closed and each week brings news of more. Thousands of jobs have gone. Media owners have taken to trying to retrieve revenue from online content. As a result the journalists' "nose for news" has been downgraded with journalists' editorial

priority now to chase stories designed to drive an audience online.

Candyfloss videos of squirrels chasing puppies and crime coverage from cheap CCTV footage is popular with online readers but, as Liverpool City Council's chief executive, Ged Fitzgerald, told me in March 2017, it risks ghettoising cities with crime heavy stories that can scare off people planning to move into or invest in the area.

More and more media commentators are warning of the "democratic deficit" created by the decline of local journalism. Matt Chorley, in his "Red Box" column in The Times, said: "Every time a paper closes, lazy MPs, corrupt councillors, dodgy police chiefs, rip off businesses and anyone in the dock can relax a little. This isn't just nostalgia. The great and the good didn't stop behaving badly because we all got Snapchat and iPlayer. Grenfell Tower tells us what happens when poorer areas lose their voice in the local media. Blogs aren't enough." **CT**

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Carmel O'Toole is senior lecturer in media and public relations at Sheffield Hallam University. This article was first published at www.theconversation.com

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Adding community to the political debate

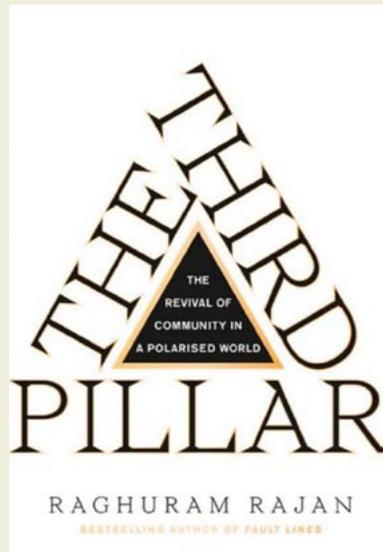
By Trevor Grundy

THE Canadian banker and economist Mark Carney is scheduled to step down as Governor of the Bank of England this summer. Some prominent names are tipped for the job. One is India's Raghuram Rajan, Professor of Finance at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business and a man eminently qualified after stints as chief economist at the IMF and as a former head of the Indian Central Bank.

His new book *The Third Pillar – the Revival of Community in a Polarised World* is a timely contribution to our understanding of why the world is in such a sad, upside-down state.

“This book”, he writes, is an attempt to imagine the future and what we can do to get to a better place. Two of the pillars (the state and markets) are the usual suspects. It is the neglected third pillar, the community, that I want to re-introduce into the debate”.

In a hard-hitting preface, he writes: “Once we understand that the community matters, then it becomes clear why it is not enough for a country to experience strong economic



THE THIRD PILLAR
The Revival of Community in a Polarised World

By **Raghuram Rajan**

Published by William Collins

£20

growth. How that growth is distributed across communities in the country also matters immensely. People who value staying in their community are not very mobile. Since they cannot move to work where growth occurs, they need economic growth in their own community. If we care about the community, we need to care about the geographic distribution of growth”.

He believes that many of the most worrying problems of our time – the rise of populism one of them – can be traced to the diminution of the community.

“The state (pillar one) and the markets (pillar two) have expanded their powers and reach in tandem and left the community (pillar three) relatively powerless to face the full and uneven brunt of technological change”.

His main concern is that politicians are busy centralising power rather than spreading it out to regions and towns so that they can re-build a sense of local responsibility and autonomy – the glue that keeps pillar three upright and strong.

But what happens when the glue fails to stick? He writes: “We used to rely on neighbours, or perhaps the local midwife, to deliver our children at home. Today we go into hospital. We used to offer to take our elderly neighbour shopping because she did not have a car. Today she can order groceries online. Our homes are now less likely to fall down and child mortality is lower, but something has been lost along the way”.

He laments: “In my adult life, I have never been more concerned about the direction our leaders are taking us than I am today”.

The book is divided into

three parts – How the pillars emerged, the imbalance between them that exists at the moment and ways and means of restoring equilibrium.

“I will argue that many of the economic and political concerns today across the world, including the rise of populist nationalism and radical movements of the Left, can be traced to the diminution of the community. Importantly, the solution to many of our most disturbing problems are found in bringing dysfunctional communities back to health, not in clamping down on markets. This is how we will re-balance the pillars at a level more beneficial to society and preserve the liberal market democracies many of us live in”.

Raghuram Rajan is a man to take seriously. His peers will remember that in 2005, he was one of a handful of economists to warn of a financial collapse which rocked the world in 2008.

As we turn the pages, his contempt for both Britain’s Margaret Thatcher and her infamous ‘There is no such thing as society’ mentality is apparent.

“The world as created by the United States after World War Two is reaching the end of its shelf life. There are a number of economies that are large now but weren’t large then, China and (soon) India and the European Union didn’t exist then”.

One is reminded of Antonio

Gramsci’s attempt to explain the dilemma of modern men and women: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old world is dying and the new one cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms arise (*The Prison Notebooks*).

We all know that Raghuram Rajan is one of the world’s best-respected economists. But there are times when he sounds like a politician, or a Governor of the Bank of England in-waiting, with this book serving the purpose of exhibiting a vast knowledge of history from classical times to the present.

Part of the book is devoted to the origins of capitalism and how the impact of the IT revolution has eroded and in many cases destroyed communities the world over. (How it would have improved with a few maps, pictures, graphs).

Other parts warn of a looming economic class war that could fuel a revival not of fascism, or its opposite, Communism.

“Through the sorting of economic classes and the decline of the mixed community, it is also becoming a hereditary one, where only the children of the successful succeed. The rest are left behind in declining communities, where it is harder for the young to learn what is needed for good jobs. Communities get trapped in

vicious cycles where economic decline fuels social decline, which fuels further economic decline. The consequences are devastating. Alienated individuals bereft of the hope that comes from being grounded in a healthy community, become prey to demagogues on the extreme Right and Left who cater for their worst prejudices. Popular politicians strike a receptive chord when they blame the upper-middle-class elite and establishment parties”.

How a man with such emotion for fair-play and decentralisation would fit into chaotic Britain with its greedy bankers and out-of-touch celebrity politicians, we can but imagine.

Right at the end there is reference to possibly the single most disturbing development in world history and it is a subject that this great economist almost ignores – climate change. “I have said little about one our most pressing problems, climate change and associated problems like water scarcity”. (Page 396)

I wonders why.

A book seeking solutions to problems facing communities large and small around the world that doesn’t give space to climate change is like staging *Hamlet* without the ghost. **CT**

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Trevor Grundy is Trevor Grundy is an English author and journalist who lives and works in Canterbury, England.

The war on women is still continuing

By **Antonia Zerbisias**

ON May 15, in the wake of the majority vote by 25 white Republican men in the senate of one of the most impoverished states in the US, #AlabamaAbortionBan was trending both south and north of the Canadian border.

That's because the Alabama abortion ban is one of the most draconian revocations of women's rights since women won the vote, a ban that would force even 11-year-old victims of rape and incest to carry to term.

These forced birthers want to take down *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 US Supreme Court decision that rendered abortion bans unconstitutional. And why not try to reverse it now, what with Donald Trump and his Republican-controlled Senate packing the bench with conservative judges?

If successful, Alabama would bar 'abortion and attempted abortion' by women 'known' to be pregnant, whatever that means. The only exception is to 'prevent a serious health risk to the unborn child's mother'. As for doctors performing the procedure, they are looking at up to 99 years in prison.

This latest vote follows other

'heartbeat laws' in states across the South and Midwest. They essentially ban the procedure when a heartbeat is detected, usually about six weeks into pregnancy, a period when many women do not yet even suspect that they are pregnant and aren't exactly rushing into clinics for ultrasounds.

Indeed, so many states – Arkansas, Georgia, Ohio, Mississippi, North and South Dakota, Georgia, Kentucky and, now, Alabama and Missouri – have passed similar laws that the *New York Times* says abortion bans are now 'mainstream'.

Meanwhile, the annual 'March for Life' demonstrations, to which Catholic schoolchildren are bused in on the taxpayer dime, took place in Ottawa and in front of provincial legislatures across Canada.

Catholic clergymen, MPs and MPPs, including three provincial BC Liberals, spoke to the crowds.

But much was made of Ontario Conservative MPP Sam Oosterhoff's declaration at

the Queen's Park protest that he would "fight to make abortion unthinkable in our lifetime."

"To quote Dr Seuss, 'A person's a person no matter how small,'" he waxed poetic – as if Dr Seuss was a medical practitioner – when confronted by reporters later.

As for Ontario Premier Doug Ford, he just couldn't deal with the topic. He ducked NDP MPP France Gélinas during question period by tapping one of his ministers, who also dodged the question by talking about – what else? – the "job-killing, regressive carbon tax".

Later, Ford's office issued a statement saying "the government will not re-open the abortion debate".

Yet.

Meantime, in Alberta, Jason Kenney got the blessing of anti-choice groups in his successful run for the premier's post. And, although he, too, has said he won't re-open the debate, recall that he was the founder of the 'Pro-Life Caucus' on Parliament Hill. What's more, he appointed Adriana LaGrange, the former president of Red Deer Pro-Life, as his education minister.

So the war on women is still on and my side is still losing: We don't have equal pay. Lawmakers are trying to strip us of the right to control our bodies. And, when we do make babies, we have little access to safe and affordable child care. It's no wonder there are so many struggling single mothers and children who go hungry – in

Canada, in 2019.

It's obvious, let women work and everybody profits, and that includes government coffers via taxation. It's been proven in Quebec.

But in Ontario, Ford has cut child-care centres' general operating funding, which helps pay child-care workers, by \$40-million. He has also slashed the capital funding portion, which is used to build new centres, by \$93-million, leaving only \$10-million in the kitty.

That's a full-frontal assault on women's rights, and a short-sighted one as well.

This month, Oxfam Canada urged federal parties to put publicly funded child care on the ballot. Citing a 2017 International Monetary Fund study, Oxfam reported that a 40 per cent reduction in child-care costs would result in 150,000 highly educated stay-at-home mothers entering the workforce. This would increase Canada's GDP by two percentage points, or \$8-billion a year.

But there's little chance this will happen, even in another 'feminist' Justin Trudeau government. (Remember years and years of child-care promises by the federal Liberals in the '90s?) But at least Trudeau openly stands firm on abortion rights.

As for Conservative leader Andrew Scheer, there's no chance at all. In fact, given his 'pro-life' beliefs, even abortion

rights are at risk.

In Trumpistan, legislative attempts to ban abortion are a blatant sign that women are under attack.

In Canada, the war on women is escalating, but slowly and stealthily, as Conservative governments form majorities across the country.

How soon before we see #VaticanCanada trending on Twitter? **CT**

Antonia Zerbisias, former CBC-TV journalist and Toronto Star columnist, writes about society, media and politics. This article first appeared at www.rabble.ca

Farm country: Don't get fooled again

By **Cheryl Mortice**

I'm a retired public school teacher living in Des Moines, Iowa. I grew up here close to the city limits, with an easy escape to the countryside that was once dotted with miles and miles of small family farms. The sight and even the smells of those small farms were a welcome respite from the congested and busy neighbourhood life I was growing up around.

There were cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, and usually lots of cats. Barns were exciting and full of life. It's an idyllic memory many Iowans still relish today.

In contrast, pig production now happens inside gigantic industrial buildings warehousing thousands of animals subjected to a rectangular cubicle for life. They're left to eat and drink in these confined spaces, and in about five months they're

slaughtered.

The stench from millions of gallons of manure percolating under their feet and spread on fields travels across our countryside and is toxic and nauseating to breathe.

For 40 years, my biggest worries focused on my middle school students: Were there enough new grammar books? Could they get to school in the snow? Did they have enough to eat at home? But eventually, I started worrying if they, or any of us, should be drinking or cooking with the water coming out of our faucets, or swimming or fishing in the water in our countryside.

Those small family farms in the countryside have given way to an explosion of more than 7,000 factory hog sites. Iowa is now close to being decimated for the sake of massive profits

for a few giant corporations like Smithfield, Iowa Select, Prestage Farms, Hormel, and Tyson Foods.

These concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are practically unregulated and unmonitored. Our state's factory farm inspectors can't even begin to keep track of what happens at thousands of sites.

Tons and tons of manure laden with nitrate, phosphorus, antibiotics, and other chemicals soak into the ground or run off fields and flow into the Des Moines water system. Both of our rivers, the Des Moines River and Raccoon River, are polluted regularly with high levels of nitrate. Iowa taxpayers and water customers have shelled out millions of dollars to clean the poisoned water.

Less discussed are the people who work in these factories and the slaughterhouses where the animals are butchered.

Thousands of immigrants fill these brutal and dangerous jobs.

For decades, politicians spread nasty lies about these workers that have wormed their way into the public mythology in Iowa: that immigrants are taking our jobs, driving up our medical costs, or overcrowding our schools.

We know these families. They go to church with us, we pass them in the grocery aisles and at the post office, and sit next to them at the grandkids' soccer games. No one should believe these lies, but they've seeped into our community like the factory farm manure that poisons our rivers.

It's in the best interest of the factory farm, slaughterhouse, and feedlot owners – and the politicians they support – to keep us at each other's throats. They pit us against each other and make us fear each other. Imagine what would happen if

all of Iowa's struggling rural families and workers cooperated and worked together?

We'd fight wage theft, and demand higher wages and better conditions in the slaughterhouses. We'd crack down on hog factories and clean up our waterways. We'd give more money to our schools so everyone has a great education. We'd fight to get profits out of health care and have Medicare for all.

Iowans, and people in other rural states, were fooled once. I hope we won't be fooled again – and certainly not pitted against each other. Take it from this retired schoolteacher: we've learned our lesson. **CT**

Cherie Mortice is a member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, part of the People's Action network. She lives in Des Moines. This article was distributed by www.OtherWords.org

BENDIB'S WORLD

Khalil Bendib



Billionaire Amazon boss thinks you'd like to live, with a million others, in a giant cylinder drifting through space. **Caitlin Johnstone** disagrees

Jeff Bezos reveals his ugly vision for a future world

GUESS what the best planet is in this solar system?" Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos asked at a recent media event on his Blue Origin space programme.

"It's easy to know the answer to that question", he continued. "We've sent robotic probes like this one to all of the planets in our solar system. Now, some of them have been fly-bys, but we've examined them all. Earth is the best planet. It is not close. This one is really good".

Bezos then went on to discuss his plan to ship humans from the best planet in the solar system to live in floating cylinders in space.

Bezos claimed that the growing human population and growing energy consumption will force us to make a choice between "stasis and rationing" and "dynamism and growth", and claimed that the latter item in his dichotomy is possible only by moving humans off the planet.

"If we're out in the solar system, we can have a trillion

humans in the solar system, which means we'd have a thousand Mozarts and a thousand Einsteins", Bezos said. "This would be an incredible civilisation. What would this future look like? Where would a trillion humans live? Well it's very interesting, someone named Gerry O'Neill, a physics professor, looked at this question very carefully and he asked a very precise question that nobody had ever asked before, and it was, "Is a planetary surface the best place for humans to expand

into the solar system?" And he and his students set to work on answering that question, and they came to a very surprising – for them – counter intuitive answer: No".

Bezos went on to describe how the limited surface areas, distance, and gravitational forces of the other planets in our solar system make settling on those planets impractical and cost-prohibitive, while constructing giant space cylinders closer to Earth which can hold a million people is far more practical. These cylinders would spin to replicate Earth's gravitational pull with centrifugal force.

"These are really pleasant places to live", Bezos said, showing illustrations of what these might look like. "Some of these O'Neill colonies might choose to replicate Earth cities. They might pick historical cities and mimic them in some way. There'd be whole new types of architecture. These are ideal climates. These are short-sleeve environments. This is Maui on its best day, no rain, no storms,



Bezos's plan is to ship humans to live in floating cylinders in space



FUTURE WORLD: Jeff Bezos suggests that the solution to overpopulation and climate change is to ship a trillion people onto giant capsules to live in climate-controlled pods drifting around in space.

no earthquakes”.

No rain? No weather? Just big, spinning cylinders floating monotonously in space?

A trillion divided by a million is one million, which means that the best idea the richest man in the world can come up with for the future of our species is to fill our solar system with a million of these floating homogenised space malls.

“If we build this vision, these O’Neill colonies, where does it take us? What does it mean for Earth?” Bezos asked. “Earth ends up zoned, residential, and light industry. It’ll be a beautiful place to live, it’ll be a beautiful place to visit, it’ll be a beautiful place to go to college, and to do some light industry. But heavy industry, polluting industry, all the things that are damaging our planet, those will be done

off Earth. We get to have both. We get to keep this unique gem of a planet, which is completely irreplaceable – there is no Plan B. We have to save this planet. And we shouldn’t give up a future of our grandchildren’s grandchildren of dynamism and growth. We can have both”.

Now, if you look at the behaviour of Jeff Bezos, who exploits his employees and destroys his competitors, and who some experts say is trying to take over the underlying infrastructure of our entire economy, you can feel reasonably confident that this man has no intention of leaving “this unique gem of a planet”, nor of having the heirs to his empire leave either. When you see this Pentagon advisory board member and CIA

contractor planning to ship humans off the Earth’s surface so the planet can thrive, you may be certain that he’s talking about other humans. The unworthy ones. The ones who weren’t sociopathic enough to climb the capitalist ladder by stepping on the backs of everyone else.

And make no mistake, when Bezos talks about saving the planet for “our grandchildren’s grandchildren”, he’s not just talking about his heirs, he’s talking about himself. Bezos has invested large amounts of wealth in biotech aimed at reversing the aging process and cracking the secret of immortality.

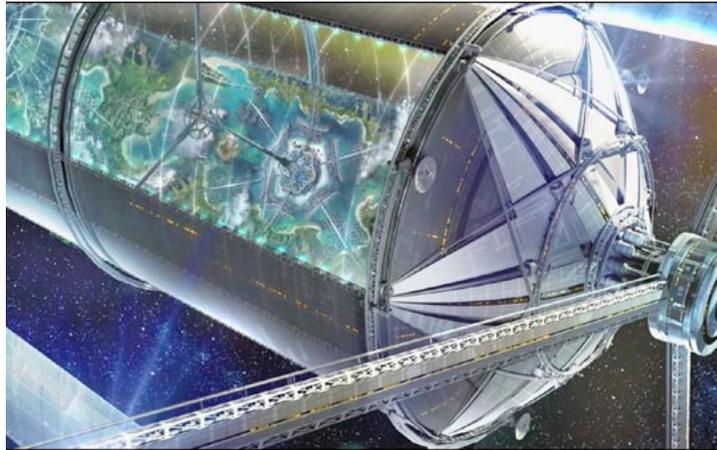
This is the sort of guiding wisdom that is controlling the fate of our species, everyone. The world’s most ambitious

plutocrat envisions a world in which, rather than evolving beyond our destructive tendencies and learning to live in collaboration with each other and our environment, we are simply shipped off into space so that he can stretch out and enjoy our beautiful planet. That's his best idea.

Our plutocratic overlords aren't just sociopaths. They're morons.

Bezos' incredibly shallow vision for humanity reminds me of something Julian Assange said at a 2017 London festival via video link about the way Silicon Valley plutocrats are trying to become immortal by finding a way to upload their brains onto computers.

"I know from our sources deep inside those Silicon Valley institutions, they genuinely believe that they are going to produce artificial intelligences that are so powerful, relatively soon, that people will have their brains digitised, uploaded on these artificial intelligences, and live forever in a simulation, therefore will have eternal life", Assange said. "It's a religion for atheists. They'll have eternal life, and given that you're in a simulation, why not programme the simulation to have endless drug and sex orgy parties all around you. It's like



The fact that anyone would think they could become immortal by digitising their churning, repetitive personality patterns is crazy, and the fact that they'd want to is even crazier

the 72 virgins, but it's like the Silicon Valley equivalent".

I mean, damn. First of all, how stupid do you have to be to overlook the fact that science has virtually no understanding of consciousness and doesn't even really know what it is? Even if these idiots find a way to upload their neurological patternings onto some AI's virtual simulation, it's not like they'd be there to experience it. It would just be a bunch of data running in a computer somewhere, mimicking the personality of a dead person and experienced by no one.

People who believe that all there is to them is their dopey mental patterns have not spent any time whatsoever exploring what they are, and have no idea what it is to be human. The fact

that anyone would think they could become immortal by digitising their churning, repetitive personality patterns is crazy, and the fact that they'd want to is even crazier.

People who think this way should shut up and learn about life, not rule the world in a plutocratic system where money translates directly to political influence.

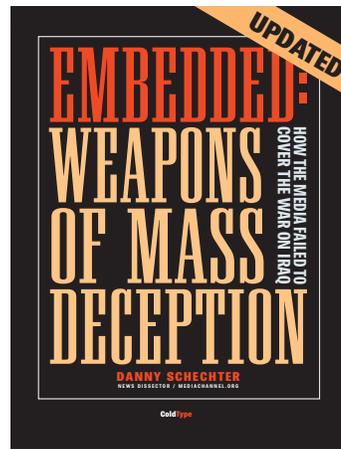
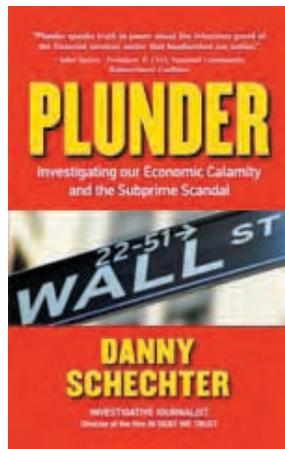
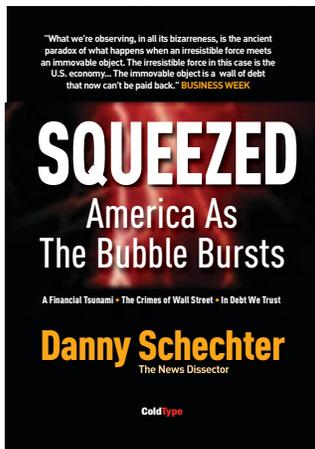
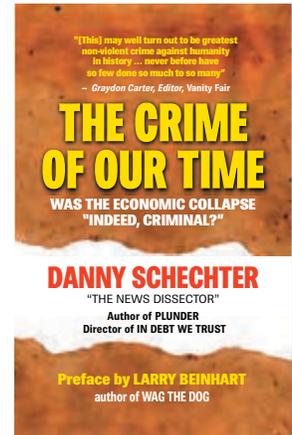
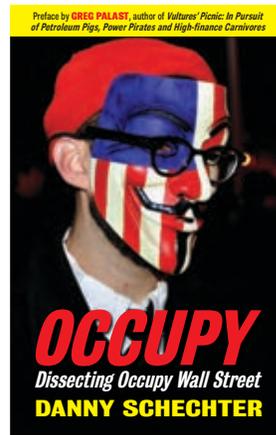
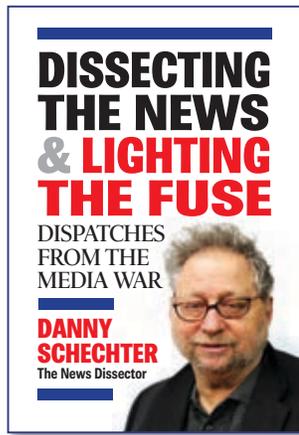
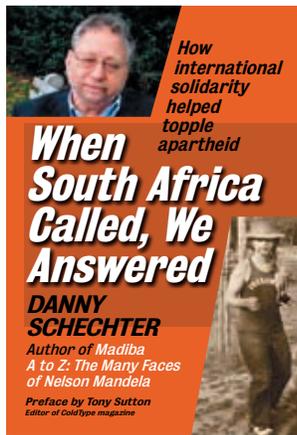
People who think that humans can be happily unplugged from the ecosystemic context in which

they evolved, the ecosystemic context of which they are an inseparable part, and people who think they can become immortal by uploading their wanky personalities onto a computer should shut the fuck up, spend some time alone with themselves, maybe try some psilocybin mushrooms, and learn a bit about what it means to be human. They certainly shouldn't be calling the shots.

The competitive mindset that gave rise to Jeff Bezos is the exact opposite of the kind of collaborative, harmonious mindset we'll need if we're going to overcome the challenges we face on the horizon. **CT**

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Caitlin Johnstone is an Australian blogger. This is an edited version of an article that was first published at her web site www.caitlinjohnstone.com

REMEMBERING **Danny SCHECHTER** 1942 - 2015



15

Danny Schechter, the NewsDissector, was acclaimed as one of the most politically astute journalists in recent memory. As a tribute to him and an appreciation of his work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net. Download them at:

<http://coldtype.net/SchechterBooks.html>

The normal aggressiveness of the US military does not satisfy John Bolton; he wants the country to deepen its belligerence, writes **Vijay Prashad**

EVEN US President Donald Trump, who is getting ready to pardon war criminals, fears John Bolton. Trump had hesitated to give him a seat in his Cabinet (initially because of Trump's distaste for Bolton's bushy moustache). Bolton and General HR McMaster were both in line to become National Security Adviser (NSA). Trump went with McMaster, who lasted a year, so Bolton, called 'The Moustache' by Trump, slipped into this consequential post. The NSA is the main adviser to the US president on foreign policy – often more important than the Secretary of State. Trump, mercurial in his policy-making, therefore, now has the world's most dangerous man whispering at him.

As his trigger finger tightened with Iran in the gun sights, Trump said of Bolton, "if it was up to John, we'd be in four wars now".

Bolton is on record saying that he would like to turn the immense force of the US mili-



Fear the moustache: Why John Bolton makes even Donald Trump nervous

tary against Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela.

These would be additional wars, for the United States remains actively at war in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq and Syria. The United States currently operates more than 100 military bases – many of them in active operations – around the world.

The current aggressiveness of the US military force does not satisfy Bolton, however; he wants the United States to deepen its beligerence.

Bolton is much the typical war hawk. Such people want to send others to war. They don't want to go to war themselves. Unwilling to fight in Vietnam, Bolton smartly went into the National Guard in 1970. In a Yale reunion book, he wrote, "I confess I had no desire to die in a Southeast Asian rice paddy. I considered the war in Vietnam already lost."

When Bolton made this personal decision, his heroes – Nixon and Kissinger – began their illegal and barbaric bombing of

Cambodia and Laos. Between Bolton's decision not to go to Vietnam and the US retreat from Saigon, 3,304 US soldiers died along with uncounted numbers of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian people.

In government for most of his life, Bolton worked hard against the good side of history. A key part of his work was to help the cover-up of the Reagan administration's role in supporting the Contras and in the Iran-Contra affair. After the left-wing Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua in 1979, first the Carter and then the Reagan administration assisted the military and the oligar-

**Bolton is much
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Such people want
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chy to form *la contrarrevolución* (the Counter-Revolution) or the Contras.

Trained by the United States, the Contras used the most brutal methods against ordinary people to undermine the Sandinista government. When the US Congress – pushed by public opinion – stopped overt US funding for the Contras, the Reagan administration illegally sold arms to Iran, whose profits went to fund the Contras. This was the Iran-Contra scandal.

Bolton fought to block Senator John Kerry's attempts to investigate drug-smuggling and gun-running by the Contras in Nicaragua. He refused to allow documents on the Iran-Contra affair to be turned over to Congressman Peter Rodino. Bolton did the heavy work for the administration, which nonetheless found his language to be often "contentious and intemperate" – as White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater said in 1987.

Intemperateness is the mood of Bolton. In 1994, he said of the

UN Secretariat building in New York that if it “lost ten stories, it wouldn’t make a bit of difference”. Chilling words, but Bolton lived them. He spent years trying to undermine any decent

arms control treaty in the United Nations framework and he spent years trying to shield the United States from any international accountability.

In 2000, Bolton ridiculed the “Church of Arms Control” – the phrase a clear indication of his attitude to peace, one shared with large sections of the US ruling class.

It was Bolton who pushed the George W Bush administration in 2001 to walk away from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, an act that sent belligerent signals to Moscow.

It was Bolton again who egged Bush in 2003 on to smash the Agreed Framework of 1994 between the United States and North Korea. When US intelligence – whose credibility was damaged by the Iraq materials – said that North Korea had begun to enrich uranium, there was to be no further dialogue. Bolton later wrote, “This was the hammer I had been looking for to shatter the Agreed Framework”.

It was Bolton once more who urged Trump to depart from the Iran nuclear deal, and, most chillingly, it was Bolton who killed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1988.

Bolton’s record is clear. But so are his words, not only his speeches, but also his deeply

The European Union, which pretends to be superior to the United States, must not be allowed its ‘endless process of diplomatic mastication’

informative book – *Surrender Is Not An Option* (2008).

The fulcrum of his thinking is this: that US power must be unchecked, and it must be used to ensure the perpetuity of US domination. There will be no surrender to any multi-polarity or to bi-polarity (China and the United States). US domination is absolute and should be permanent.

Few US elected officials have the guts to disagree with this disagreeable worldview. They salute the flag and send the bombers to spread the stars and stripes across the globe.

What are the hindrances for this permanent and absolute US dominion?

1. The United Nations, and any international treaty or body, should not be allowed to interfere with US actions. The UN must be “reformed”, says the US regime, which means that the UN should be brought to the heel of the White House.

2. The European Union, which pretends to be superior to the United States, must not be allowed its “endless process of diplomatic mastication”, wrote Bolton in his book. It must be silenced.

3. The substantial adversaries of the United States – Russia

and China – must be cut down, their vulnerabilities used against them. Sanctions are an effective tool here, since to go to war with them would be, even for Bolton, suicidal. Overthrow of the main allies of Russia and China – places such as Venezuela and Iran – would further weaken these aspirant states.

4. Regime change against countries such as Venezuela and Iran, as well as Cuba and North Korea, would not only weaken Russia and China but it would also send a strong message that no one should ever defy the United States.

Bolton has a coherent worldview. His hawkish peers – both Republicans and Democrats – don’t have his nerve. They’ll back this regime change war (Venezuela) or that (Iran). They will do so pretending that they are being pragmatic and are responding to “intelligence”. But none of these wars of aggression – whether against Iraq or Iran, Afghanistan or Venezuela – are merely driven by pragmatism.

Bolton lays out the full agenda. He is more a mainstream US intellectual than the mainstream would like to admit. The US mainstream is Bolton with manners. Their normalcy is merely Bolton’s philosophy in bits and pieces. **CT**

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Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. This article was produced by *Globetrotter*, a project of the *Independent Media Institute*.

Sun, sea, sand, and donkeys

(Plus Brexit and climate change)



The uncertainty of Brexit has led to a surge in holiday reservations in England's oldest seaside resorts. But that boom may be short-lived

Words and photos by Tony Sutton

Dozing holidaymakers relax on the beach at Skegness, in Lincolnshire. In the background, hordes of wind-mills rise from the North Sea like an armada of alien invaders.

VISITORS to Skegness, on Lincolnshire's 'sunshine' coast, at any time from Halloween to Easter will understand why the area voted so heavily for Brexit in 2016.

Designated the "most deprived seaside area in Britain" in 2013, its streets, raked by brutal North Sea winds, are almost desolate. Deserted stores and shuttered amusement arcades and restaurants proliferate, while betting shops, pound stores and charity outlets taunt those hardy enough to brave the elements.

But when Easter arrives, the change is dazzling. Skegness – the seventh most popular tourist destination in England – and Mablethorpe, its smaller neighbour, burst into life, the population exploding from 25,000 to 300,000 as tourists cram seafront hotels, sidestreet boarding houses, and mile upon mile of crowded caravan parks.

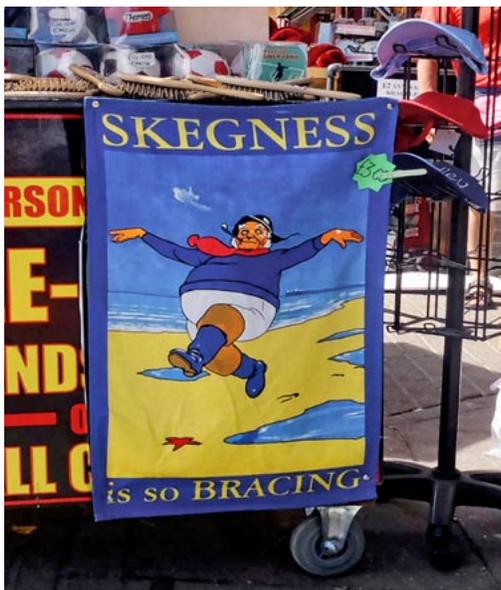
They come seeking fun and sunshine, away from the stresses of what is left of big city industrial life, sharing laughter and joyful screams on garish amusement rides and dropping coins into jangling slot machines. Their children ride patient donkeys and build castles on never-ending sandy beaches, then dash off to splash in the cool, grey-green North Sea. After the fun, everyone feasts on greasy fish and chips with large pots of hot, steaming, tea.

The Lincolnshire holiday resorts, along with others spread out along the nation's coastline, came to life when the passage of the 1938 Holiday Pay Act gave workers the right to a week's paid holiday each year. They hit a peak in popularity during the late 1940s as more than five-million Britons herded coastwards each summer. Their appeal began to wane in the 1960s as cheap air travel and cut-price foreign holidays introduced families to exotic and affordable destinations with





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Above: Lazing in the sunshine, in front of the Pleasure Beach fairground.

Far left: Donkeys await their young passengers.

Middle: Tea towel displays the town's famous Jolly Fisherman logo and slogan *Skegness Is So Bracing*.

Left: Skegness is 150 miles north-east of London.

guaranteed sunshine and warm, blue, sea. But as the younger and more adventurous flocked abroad their parents stayed loyal to long-established local destinations. That pattern has continued over the years, as can be confirmed by the number of mobility scooters at the Lincolnshire resorts, their elderly riders weaving erratically along narrow footpaths under the vigilant gaze of prudent pedestrians.

This year, however, according to tourism body VisitBritain, Brexit uncertainty has created a £20-billion bonanza for British resorts. The confusion that surrounded the original March 29 deadline for leaving Europe has been a big gift to coastal resorts, with wary Britons deciding that taking a chance on the notoriously unpredictable UK climate is better than facing the disruption likely to be created by a tumble in the pound's value.

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This boom will probably be short-lived: climate change is raising fears of severe flooding along the Lincolnshire coast. It has happened before, although only the elderly will recall the terrible deluge that ravaged England's East Coast, killing 307 people in a mighty storm during the night of January 31 and February 1, 1953. Sea defences have been strengthened since then, although the tidal surge from a 2013 flood that overwhelmed a pumping station 40 miles from the shore served as a strong warning against complacency.

Residents and tourists are constantly reminded of flood danger by a profusion of bright red street signs with the bold white letters ER (Evacuation Route) that will lead them to safety should disaster occur. Local MP Matt Warman, answering criticism from business leaders after the installation, pointed out that flooding ranked second to terrorism in government priorities, and the signs would stay put. Meanwhile,





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Above: Slot machines and fast food at a Mablethorpe games arcade.

Far Left: What's for dinner? Fish and chips, of course!

Middle: Not everyone is interested in the seaside activities.

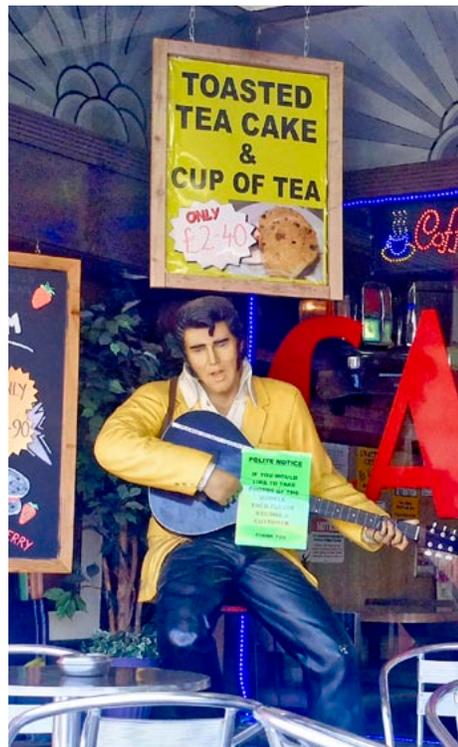
Left: Donkey Preservation Society on patrol.



the local council has banned new housing estates, and is building flood barriers in the surrounding area.

Climate change will heat up the world by 1.5C over the next 12 years, says a new UN report. Great, say sceptics – hotter weather means better summers, and that will make Skegness a serious alternative to European sunspots. Such wishful thinking masks reality, for rising sea levels will swamp the Lincolnshire coastal towns. If that happens, enterprising Brexiteers will no doubt find a way to turn disaster into a marketing opportunity – they will probably entice future visitors to its waterlogged streets by changing the town's slogan from *Skegness Is So Bracing* to *Skegness: Venice of the North!* **CT**

Tony Sutton is the editor of *ColdType*. He was raised in a small town 20 miles from Skegness.



Above: Naughty, but nice! X-rated sugary delights on sale at a Skegness candy store.

Left: Toasted tea cakes, a cup of tea – and Elvis! All for £2.40. The sign on the guitar advises photographers to become customers before snapping ...

Over the past few years, the global ruling classes have used every weapon to marginalise, stigmatise, delegitimise, and eliminate dissent. As the US elections approach, it's about to get worse, writes **CJ Hopkins**

Democracy versus the Putin-Nazis

BACK in January 2018, I wrote about The War on Dissent, which, in case you haven't noticed, is going gangbusters (*you can read it in ColdType Issue 153, at www.coldtype.net/reader.html – scroll down to find issue*).

As predicted, the global capitalist ruling classes have been using every weapon in their arsenal to marginalise, stigmatise, delegitimise, and otherwise eliminate any and all forms of dissent from neoliberal ideology, and in particular from their new official narrative ... “Democracy versus The Putin-Nazis”.

For over two years, the corporate media have been pounding out an endless series of variations on this major theme, namely, that “democracy is under attack” by a conspiracy of Russians and neo-Nazis that magically materialised out of the ether during the summer of 2016.

The intelligence agencies, political elites, academia, celebrities, social media per-



THE WAR ON DISSENT: Cover story in ColdType Issue 153

sonalities, and other organs of the culture industry have been systematically reifying this official narrative through constant repetition.

The Western masses have been inundated with innumerable articles, editorials, television news and talk show segments, books, social media posts, and various other forms of messaging whipping up hysteria over “Russians” and “fascists”. At this point, it is no longer just

propaganda. It has become the new “truth”. It has become “reality”.

Becoming “reality” is, of course, the ultimate goal of every ideology. An ideology is just a system of ideas, and is thus fair game for critique and dissent. “Reality” is not fair game for dissent. It is not up for debate or challenge, not by “serious”, “legitimate” people.

“Reality” is simply “the way it is.” It is axiomatic. It is apothegmatic. It’s not a belief or an interpretation. It is not subject to change or revision. It is the immortal, immutable Word of God ... or whatever deity or deity-like concept the ruling classes and the masses they rule accept as the Final Arbiter of Truth. In our case, this would be Science, or Reason, rather than some supernatural being, but in terms of ideology there isn’t much difference.

Every system of belief, regardless of its nature, ultimately depends on political power and power relations to enforce its beliefs, which is to

say, to make them “real”.

OK, whenever I write about “reality” and “truth”, I get a few rather angry responses from folks who appear to think I’m denying the existence of objective reality. I’m not ... for example, this chair I’m sitting on is absolutely part of objective reality, a physical object that actually exists. The screen you’re probably reading these words on is also part of objective reality. I am not saying there is no reality. What I’m saying is, “reality” is a concept, a concept invented and developed by people ... a concept that serves a variety of purposes, some philosophical, some political. It’s the political purposes I’m interested in.

Think of “reality” as an ideological tool ... a tool in the hands of those with the power to designate what is “real” and what isn’t. Doctors, teachers, politicians, police, scientists, priests, pundits, experts, parents – these are the enforcers of “reality.” The powerless do not get to decide what is “real.” Ask someone suffering from schizophrenia. Or ... I’m sorry, is it bipolar disorder? Or oppositional defiant disorder? I can’t keep up all these new disorders psychiatrists keep “discovering”.

Or ask a Palestinian living in Gaza. Or the mother of a Black kid the cops shot for no reason. Ask Julian Assange. Ask the families of all those “enemy combatants” Obama droned. Ask the “conspiracy theorists” on Twitter digitally screaming at anyone who will listen about

The powerful are not arguing with us. They are not attempting to win a debate about what is and isn’t “true”, or what did or didn’t “really” happen. They are declaring what did or didn’t happen

what is and isn’t “the truth”.

Each of them will give you their version of “reality”, and you and I may agree with some of them, and some of their beliefs may be supported with facts, but that will not make what they believe “reality”.

Power is what makes “reality” reality. Not facts. Not evidence. Not knowledge. Power. Those in power, or aligned with those in power, or parroting the narratives of those in power, understand this (whether consciously or not). Those without power mostly do not, and thus we continue to “speak truth to power”, as if those in power gave a shit. They don’t. The powerful are not arguing with us. They are not attempting to win a debate about what is and isn’t “true”, or what did or didn’t “really” happen. They are *declaring* what did or didn’t happen. They are *telling* us what is and is not “reality”, and demonstrating what happens to those who disagree.

The “Democracy versus The

Putin-Nazis” narrative is our new “reality”, whether we like it or not. It does not matter one iota that there is zero evidence to support this narrative, other than the claims of intelligence agencies, politicians, the corporate media, and other servants of the ruling classes. The Russians are “attacking democracy” because the ruling classes tell us they are. “Fascism is on the march again” because the ruling classes say it is. Anyone who disagrees is a “Putin-sympathiser,” a “Putin-apologist,” or “linked to Russia,” or “favoured by Russia”, or an “antisemite”, or a “fascist apologist”.

Question the official narrative about the Gratuitously Baby Gassing Monster of Syria and you’re an Assad apologist, a Russian bot network, or a plagiarising Red-Brown infiltrator. Criticise the corporate media for disseminating cheap McCarthyite smears, and you’re a Tulsi-stanning Hindu Nazi-apologist.

God help you if you should appear on FOX, in which case you are a Nazi-legitimiser! A cursory check of the Internet today revealed that “far-right Facebook groups are spreading hate to millions in Europe” by means of some sort of hypnogenic content that just looking at it turns you into a Nazi.

Our democracy-loving friends at the Atlantic Council are disappointed by Trump’s refusal to sign the “Christchurch Call”, a multilateral statement encouraging corporations to censor the Internet ... and fascism is fashionable in Italy again!”

This post-Orwellian, neo-McCarthyite mass hysteria is not going to stop ... not until the global capitalist ruling classes have suppressed the current “populist” insurgency and restored “normality” throughout the Western world. Until then, it’s going to be pretty much non-stop “Democracy versus the Putin-Nazis”.

So, unless you’re enjoying our new “reality,” or are willing to conform to it for some other reason, prepare to be smeared as “a Russia-loving, Putin-apologising conspiracy theorist,” or a “fascism-enabling, Trump-loving Nazi,” or some other type of insid-

Prepare to be smeared as “a Russia-loving, Putin-apologising conspiracy theorist,” or a “fascism-enabling, Trump-loving Nazi,” or some other type of white supremacist, mass-murder enthusiast

iously Slavic, white supremacist, mass-murder enthusiast. Things are only going to get uglier as the American election season ramps

up. I mean, come on ... you don’t really believe that the global capitalist ruling classes are going to let Trump serve a second term, do you? **CT**

CJ Hopkins is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, ZONE 23, is published by Snoggsworthy, Swaine & Cormorant Paperbacks. He can be reached at cjhopkins.com or consentfactory.org.

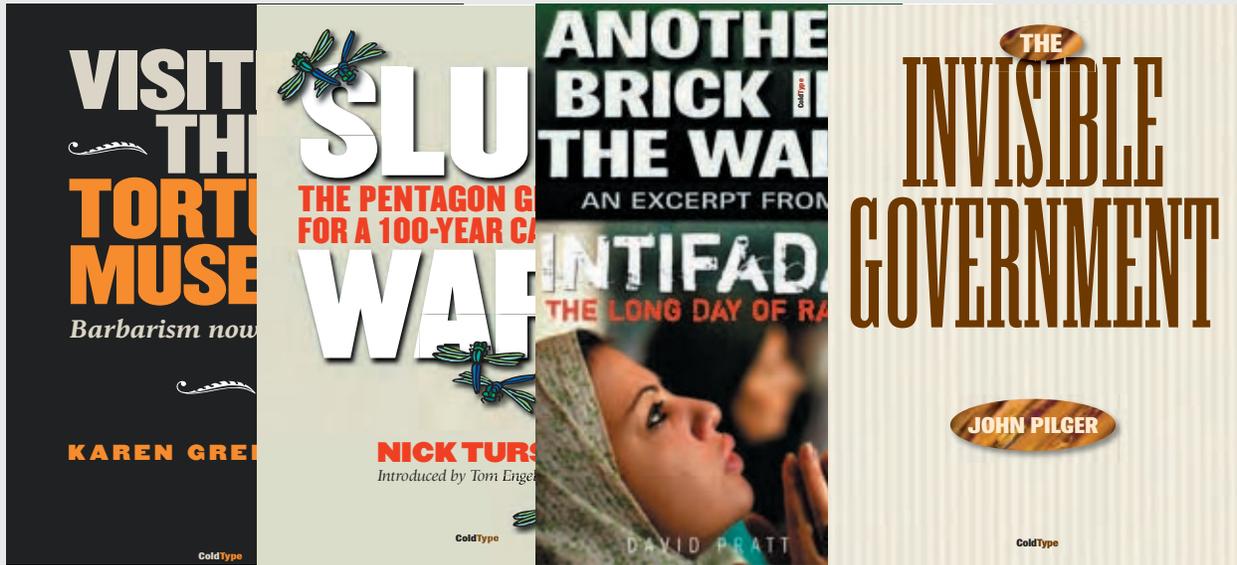


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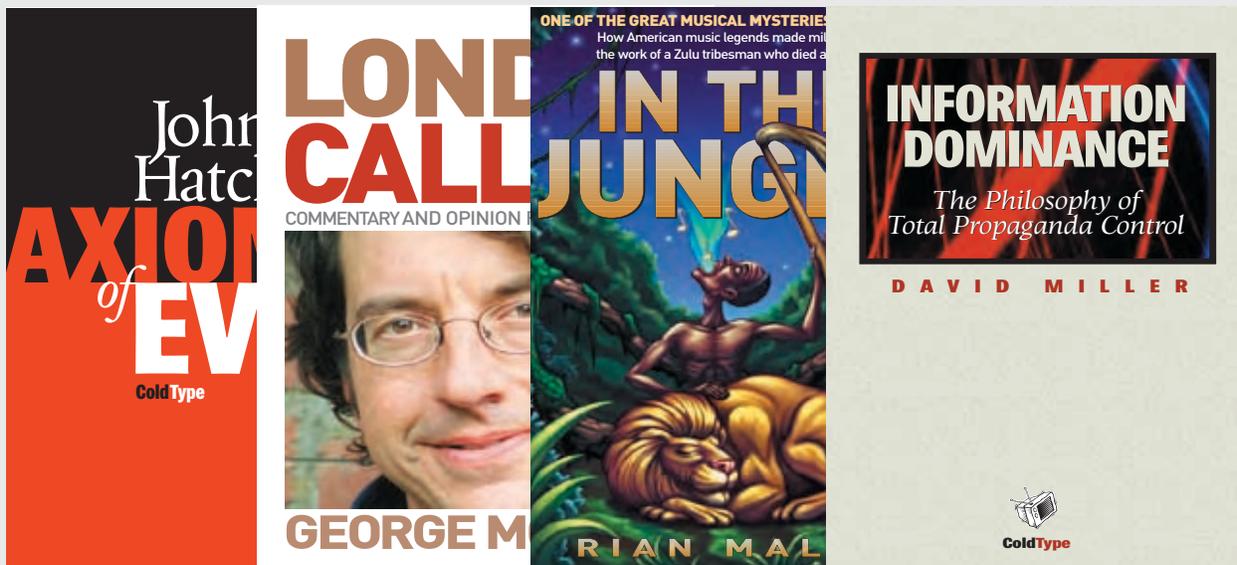
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Tributes to the 22 victims of Salmon Abedi's bomb detonated at Manchester Arena in 2017.

The first to suffer was Syria; since then the effects have been spreading in the region and beyond, to Africans and Europeans, writes **Mark Curtis**

How the West's war in Libya spurred world terrorism

EIGHT years on from NATO's war in Libya in 2011, as the country enters a new phase in its conflict, I have taken stock of the number of countries to which terrorism has spread as a direct product of that war. The number is at least 14.

The legacy of the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi – pursued by UK Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and US President Barack Obama – has been gruesomely felt by Europeans and Africans. Yet holding these leaders account-

able for their decision to go to war is as distant as ever.

The 2011 conflict, in which NATO worked alongside Islamist forces on the ground to remove Gaddafi, produced an ungoverned space in Libya and a country awash with weapons, ideal for terrorist groups to

thrive. But it was Syria that suffered first.

After civil war broke out there in early 2011, at the same time as in Libya, the latter became a facilitation and training hub for around 3,000 fighters on their way to Syria, many of whom joined Al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State-affiliated Katibat al-Battar al-Libi (KBL), which was founded by militants from Libya.

In Libya itself, a rebranding of existing Al-Qaeda-linked groups in the north-eastern area of Derna produced Islamic State's first official branch in the country in mid-2014, incorporating members of the KBL. During 2015, IS Libya conducted car bombings and beheadings and established territorial control and governance over parts of Derna and Benghazi in the east and Sabratha in the west. It also became the sole governing body in the north-central city of Sirte, with as many as 5,000 fighters occupying the city.

By late 2016, IS in Libya was forced out of these areas, largely due to US air strikes, but withdrew to the desert areas south of Sirte, continuing low-level attacks. In the last two years, the group has re-emerged as a formidable insurgent force and is again waging high-profile attacks on state institutions and conducting regular hit-and-run



Caricatures of Muammar Gaddafi in Old Square, Street Al Oroba, Al Bayda.

operations in the southwestern desert. Last September, UN Special Representative to Libya Ghassan Salame told the UN Security Council that the IS “presence and operations in Libya are only spreading.”

After the fall of Gaddafi, IS Libya established training camps near Sabratha, which are linked to a series of terrorist attacks and plots.

“Most of the blood spilled in Europe in the more spectacular attacks, using guns and bombs, really all began at the time when Katibat al-Battar went back to Libya,” Cameron Colquhoun, a former counter-terrorism analyst for Britain’s Government Communications Headquarters, told the *New York Times*. “That is where the threat trajectory to Europe began – when these men returned to Libya and had breathing space.”

Salman Abedi, who blew up 22 people at a pop concert in Manchester in 2017, met with members of the Katibat al-

Battar al-Libi, a faction of IS, several times in Sabratha, where he was probably trained.

Other members of the KBL were Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the ring-leader of the 2015 Paris attacks on the Bataclan nightclub and sports stadium, which killed 130 people, and the militants involved in the Verviers plot to attack Belgium in 2015.

The perpetrator of the 2016 Berlin truck attack, which left 12 people dead, also had contacts with Libyans linked to IS.

So, too, in Italy, where terrorist activity has been linked to IS Libya, with several individuals based in Italy involved in the attack on the Bardo museum in Tunis in 2015, which killed 22 people.

Tunisia suffered its deadliest terrorist attack in 2015 when a 23-year-old Tunisian armed with a machine gun mowed down 38 tourists, mainly Britons, at a beach hotel in the resort of Port El Kantaoui. The perpetrator was reportedly an adherent of IS and, like Salman Abedi, had been trained in the camp complex at Sabratha from where the attack was staged.

Libya’s eastern neighbour, Egypt, has also been struck by terrorism emanating from the country. IS officials in Libya have been linked to, and may have directed, the activities of Wilayat Sinai, the terror-

ist group formerly known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which has carried out several deadly attacks in Egypt. After the fall of Gaddafi, the Western Desert became a corridor for the smuggling of weapons and operatives on their way to the Sinai. Egypt conducted air strikes against militant camps in Libya in 2015, 2016 and again in 2017, the latter following the killing of 29 Coptic Christians near Cairo

But Libya has also become a hub for jihadist networks stretching south into the Sahel, the geographical transition zone in Africa between the Sahara desert to the north and the Sudanian Savanna to the south.

Libya's 2011 uprising opened a flow of weapons into northern Mali, which helped revive an ethno-tribal conflict that had been brewing since the 1960s. By 2012, local allies of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had taken control of day-to-day governance in the northern Mali towns of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. After France intervened in Mali, the ongoing lack of governance in Libya precipitated several groups to relocate their operational centres to Libya, including both AQIM and its offshoot, Al-Mourabitoun, from where these groups could acquire weapons more easily.

With Libya as its rear base, Al-Mourabitoun under its leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar was behind the attack on the Amenas hydrocarbon complex in eastern Algeria in January 2013, which left 40 foreign work-

The European Union, which pretends to be superior to the United States, must not be allowed its 'endless process of diplomatic mastication'

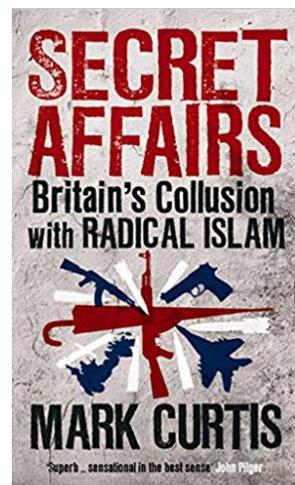
ers dead; the gun attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali in November 2015, which killed 22 people; and for the attack on Hotel Splendid in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which killed 20 people in January 2016. Al-Mourabitoun has also attacked a military academy and French-owned uranium mine in Niger.

The fall-out from Libya spreads even wider, however. By 2016, US officials reported signs that Nigeria's Boko Haram jihadists, responsible for numerous gruesome attacks and kidnappings, were sending fighters to join IS in Libya, and that there was increased cooperation between the two groups. The International Crisis Group notes that it was the arrival of weapons and expertise from Libya and the Sahel that enabled Boko Haram to fashion the insurgency that plagues north-western Nigeria today. There have even been claims that Boko Haram answers to IS commanders in Libya.

In addition to these 14 countries, fighters from several other states have joined IS militants in

Libya in recent years. Indeed, it is estimated that almost 80 per cent of IS membership in Libya is non-Libyan, including from countries such as Kenya, Chad, Senegal and Sudan. These foreign fighters are potentially available to return to their own countries after receiving training.

The true extent of the fall-out from the Libya war is remarkable: it has spurred terrorism in Europe, Syria, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Islamic State, although now nearly defeated in Syria and Iraq, is far from dead. Indeed, while Western leaders seek to defeat terrorism militarily in some places, their disastrous foreign policy choices have stimulated it in others. **CT**



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Mark Curtis is an historian and analyst of UK foreign policy and international development and the author of six books, the latest being an updated edition of *Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam*, available at Amazon. His website is www.markcurtis.info

Mike Pompeo's claim that there is solid evidence of Iran's intention to attack US forces in the Persian Gulf is almost certainly a fabrication, writes **Philip Giraldi**

Pandering to Israel means war with Iran

THE United States is moving dangerously forward in what appears to be a deliberate attempt to provoke a war with Iran, apparently based on threat intelligence provided by Israel.

The claims made by National Security Advisor John Bolton and by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that there is solid evidence of Iran's intention to attack US forces in the Persian Gulf region is almost certainly a fabrication, possibly deliberately contrived by Bolton and company in collaboration with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

It will be used to justify sending bombers and additional naval air resources to confront any possible moves by Tehran to maintain its oil exports, which were blocked by Washington last month.

If the US Navy tries to board ships carrying Iranian oil it will undoubtedly, and justifiably, provoke a violent response from Iran, which is precisely what Bolton, Pompeo and

Netanyahu are seeking.

It would be difficult to find in the history books another example of a war fought for no reason whatsoever.

As ignorant as President Donald Trump and his triumvirate of psychotics Bolton, Pompeo and Elliott Abrams are, even they surely know that Iran poses no threat to the United States.

If they believe at all that a war is necessary, they no doubt base their judgment on the perception that the United States must maintain its number one position in the world by occasionally attacking and defeating someone to serve as an example of what might happen if one defies Washington.

Understanding that, the Iranians would be wise to avoid confrontation until the sages in the White House move on to some easier target, which at the moment would appear to be Venezuela.

The influence of Israel over

US foreign policy is undeniable, with Washington now declaring that it will "review ties" with other nations that are considered to be unfriendly to the Jewish state.

For observers who might also believe that Israel and its allies in the US are the driving force behind America's belligerency in the Middle East, there are possibly some other games that are in play, all involving Benjamin Netanyahu and his band of merry cutthroats.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that foreign politicians have realised that the easiest way to gain Washington's favour is to do something that will please Israel. In practical terms, the door to Capitol Hill and the White House is opened through the good offices of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Israel is desperate to confirm its legitimacy in international fora, where it has few friends in spite of an intensive lobbying campaign. It seeks to have countries that do not have an embas-

sy in Israel to take steps to establish one, and it also wants more nations that do already have an embassy in Tel Aviv to move to Jerusalem, building on the White House's decision taken last year to do just that. Not surprisingly, nations and political leaders who are on the make and want American support have drawn the correct conclusions and pander to Israel as a first step.

One only has to cite the example of Venezuela. Juan Guaido, the candidate favoured by Washington for regime change, has undoubtedly a lot of things on his plate, but he has proven willing to make some time to say what Benjamin Netanyahu wants to hear, as reported by the Israeli media.

The *Times of Israel* describes how "Venezuela's self-proclaimed leader Juan Guaido is working to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel and isn't ruling out placing his country's embassy in Jerusalem, according to an interview with an Israeli newspaper published Tuesday".

One would think that Guaido would consider his interview sufficient, but he has also taken the pandering process one step farther, reportedly displaying huge video images of the flags of both Israel and the United States at his rallies.

This deference to Israel's interests produced an almost immediate positive result with Netanyahu recognising him as the legitimate Venezuelan head of state, followed by an echo chamber of effusive congratu-

lations from US (sic) Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, who praised the Jewish state for "standing with the people of Venezuela and the forces of freedom and democracy".

Donald Trump's esteemed special envoy for international negotiations, Jason Greenblatt, also joined in, praising the Israeli government for its "courageous stand in solidarity with the Venezuelan people".

A similar bonding took place regarding Brazil, where hard right conservative leader Jair Bolsonaro was recently elected president.

Netanyahu attended the Bolsonaro inauguration last December and the two men benefit from strong support from Christian Evangelicals. Bolsonaro repaid the favour by promising that Israel would be his first foreign trip.

In the event he went to Washington first, but the state visit to Israel took place in April, just before that country's elections, in a bid to demonstrate international support for Netanyahu.

Brazilian Jews constitute a wealthy and powerful community which reacted positively to Bolsonaro's pledges to fight corruption and high crime rates while also repairing a struggling economy.

They also appreciated his stance on Israel. He committed to moving the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, though he has backpedalled a bit on that pledge. And he also

promised to shut the Palestinian embassy in the capital Brasilia. He famously asked and answered his own question, "Is Palestine a country? Palestine is not a country, so there should be no embassy here. You do not negotiate with terrorists".

Bolsonaro's pro-Israel anti-Venezuela credentials also endeared him to Donald Trump on a visit to Washington in mid-March which was described by the media as a "love fest".

The Brazilian leader's visits to Israel and the US as well as Guaido's promises to Israel reveal that the foreign policies of Tel Aviv and Washington have become inextricably intertwined, with supplicant nations and politicians wisely seeking to do homage to both regimes to gain favour.

It is a development that would shock the Founding Fathers, most particularly George Washington, who warned against entangling alliances, and it means that American interests will be seen through an Israeli prism, a reality that has already produced very bad results. **CT**

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Secret archives show the US helped the Argentine military to wage the 1976-1984 'dirty war' that killed 30,000 people, writes **Rui Diamint**

Argentina: Truth, justice and declassification

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HISTORY books may never tell the full story of the dictatorship that terrorised Argentina from 1976 to 1984. But newly declassified United States military and intelligence documents recently delivered to Argentina offer new details about the country's brutal military junta.

The archival documents were the fourth and final batch of 43,000 declassified US telegrams, military records, intelligence and confidential memos that were given to Argentina following an extraordinary 2016 agreement between Argentine President Mauricio Macri and former US President Barack Obama.

"Argentines now have more information about a dark period of our history that will allow us to continue strengthening justice, seeking and finding the truth", Macri said on Twitter, after receiving the 7,500-document report on April 12.

The archives narrate the human rights abuses com-

mitted by Argentina's military government, often with the assistance of the United States. They include the forced disappearances of 30,000 people, international assassination squads that stalked their victims abroad and the kidnapping of hundreds of babies born in detention.

The US declassification effort began under persistent pressure from Argentine human rights groups founded to uncover the atrocities of the dictatorship – a period I have spent my academic career studying.

Argentine democracy was interrupted by military coups six times in the 20th-century.

The declassified documents outline what happened after the last coup, staged in 1976 by Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla. It gave way to the cruellest, most repressive and violent eight years of Argentina's history.

In August 2000 representatives from Argentina's Center for Legal and Social Studies and

the original Grandmothers and Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo – a human rights group that locates the lost children of the dictatorship, which has since splintered into several factions – met with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

That encounter led to the declassification of 4,700 State Department documents in 2002. Those documents included US diplomatic cables, memoranda, reports and meeting notes related to the Argentine dictatorship, and revealed clear US involvement in the junta's "dirty war".

Now, Argentina has the military and intelligence archives behind these operations, too. The declassified documents show that US intervention in Latin America went well beyond giving "a little encouragement" to Latin American military regimes, as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger put it in 1976.

Argentina was the operations centre for Plan Condor, a US-organised alliance between the dictatorships of Argentina,



President Mauricio Macri holds a DVD containing 7,000 pages of CIA, FBI, NSC, DOD and State Dept. records of documents relating to the Argentine dictatorship's death squad operations from 1976 to 1983.

Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, created in 1975 and operational until around 1980.

Fearing the spread of communism across the Americas, the Ford administration offered these rightist military regimes everything from counter-insurgency training and financial assistance to intelligence briefings.

With US support, Argentina's junta kidnapped leftists, dissidents, union leaders and anyone who looked remotely like a threat. They tortured detainees, and then threw them alive and conscious out of airplanes into the River Plate, near Buenos Aires, or dumped their bodies in mass graves.

Pregnant women were killed after giving birth, their babies adopted by the families of childless generals. People under police surveillance informed on

other neighbours to appease the junta, then were abducted and tortured anyway.

The US eventually grew uncomfortable with the activities of its Argentine allies. In 1976 Robert C Hill, US ambassador to Argentina, reported to Washington that the number of people detained by the junta must "run into the thousands" and, with Kissinger's knowledge, confronted the Argentine government about its human rights abuses.

"[Argentina's] security forces are totally out of control", Assistant Secretary of State Harry Shlaudeman told Kissinger in 1976.

The US withdrew its support from Plan Condor after Jimmy Carter became president in January 1977. Carter, a Democrat, hoped to see democ-

racy restored in Argentina. That would take another six years.

Argentines have learned the details of this sadistic regime little by little. Even in the waning days of the dictatorship, human rights groups began filing freedom of information requests and writs of habeas corpus with the dictatorship, to little effect.

The law began to work in democracy's favour again after Argentina's first post-dictatorship leader, the late President Raúl Alfonsín, was elected in 1983. He created a truth commission that uncovered 340 secret detention centres across Argentina and identified 8,690 "disappeared" people.

Once some perpetrators and victims were known, the victims' families could file suits to hold the people who oversaw torture centres criminally responsible for their loved ones' disappearance.

Painstaking archival research, interviews, investigations, lawsuits and prosecutions have followed under every administration since, albeit with differing levels of priority.

Much of what is known about the fates of those abducted by the military regime was discovered in the basement of the Argentine Air Force in 2013, where “black lists” of identified leftists were archived.

However, the newly declassified US archives offer little new information that might bring closure to thousands of Argentine families whose loved ones remain, officially, “disappeared”.

As of 2017, 2,979 people had been tried for their role in the dictatorship. The charges include crimes against humanity, arbitrary detention and kidnapping. Another 593 cases remained in process.

The newly declassified US

Much of what is known about the fates of those abducted by the military regime was discovered in the basement of the Argentine Air Force

telegrams and confidential communications may spur new prosecutions. They include the names of government officials and informants complicit in Plan Condor, as well as details on the torture techniques used to extract information from detainees.

“The release of these documents stands as a uniquely valuable contribution to the cause of human rights, the cause of justice and the cause of our fundamental right-to-know”, said Carlos Osorio, a Latin America analyst at George Washington University’s National Security Archive.

In 2014, under President Cristina Fernández, Argentina began its own declassification programme, alongside that of the United States. Among other disclosures, it published thousands of dictatorship-era archives, including 648 pages documenting the staffing and day-to-day operations of the military junta’s foreign ministry, including its relations with the United States.

Argentina’s commitment to uncovering every dark detail of the dictatorship derives from a national sentiment that its democracy depends on understanding the past.

Nunca Mas (Never Again) has become the rallying cry of a population that insists that history should not repeat itself. **CT**

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The Curious Case of the Sunflower Murder Trial

A black youth died in a fall from a pick-up truck after being caught stealing sunflower seeds from a rural South African farm. But did two Afrikaners murder him, or was it a tragic accident?

Rian Malan
investigates

IT is judgement day in the sunflower murder case. The parking lot outside Mmabatho courthouse is clogged with police vehicles. Thirty-odd EFF members are dancing and singing in the parking lot. A fleet of pick-ups and cars arrives, bringing Pieter Doorewaard (28) and Phillip Schutte (35) to hear their fate. The two Afrikaners have already been found guilty of murdering a teenager caught stealing sunflower seeds on their boss's property at Coligny, 205km west of Johannesburg, and then kidnapping a witness in a futile attempt to shut him up. Today they are here to be sentenced.

Judge Ronald Hendricks appears, resplendent in his scarlet robes, TV lights gleaming off his shiny black pate. He begins with a brief summary of his earlier findings before turning to the task at hand. You have

... All Coligny's liquor stores were looted, along with dozens of shops in a satellite township. The targets of these attacks were whites and Asians ...

been found guilty of “disgraceful and appalling crimes”, he tells the accused. Crimes that tore a small town apart, thereby precipitating a “revolt” on the part of black people grown weary of white racism.

According to Hendricks, Coligny's blacks were also let down by police, who failed to “perform their duties” and arrest the murderers when the community appealed to them to do so. Hendricks characterised the riots that followed as “self-help”, which is fair comment, if not in exactly the sense intended. All Coligny's liquor stores were looted, along with dozens of spaza shops in a satellite township. The targets of these attacks were whites and Asians, some of whom also had their homes burned down.

On the other hand, Hendricks conceded that the accused had not “directly” intended to murder the sunflower thief, adding that he would therefore refrain from imposing the most severe sentences allowed by law. Doorewaard would spend an effective 18 years in prison, while Schutte served 23.

These prison terms came as a disappointment to the father of the deceased, Saki Dingake, who

said the judge's leniency made him feel unwell. “I was hoping for something higher”, he said. A representative of the Economic Freedom Fighters party (EFF) said his party was also hoping that the murderers would be put away forever. “Our province is infested with racism”, he said. “We were hoping life sentences would send a clear message”. The National Prosecuting Authority said the sentences were “appropriate”.

And so, at last, justice is done in the case of Mathlomola Moshweo, a diminutive 16-year-old found lying on a gravel road with a broken neck on April 20, 2017. To his right lay the sunflower field where he was caught stealing seeds. To his left, mealie fields march over the horizon. His family home – a shack in an informal settlement – lies just over the horizon. His mother is already looking for him. Her heart will soon be broken. One wishes it were otherwise, but we won't hear much more about Moshweo in this story. It is not about him. It is about the extraordinary trial that led to his alleged killers' conviction.

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Coligny, 150 km west of Johannesburg, scene of the incident in which Mathlomola Moshweo died.

Google Maps

... He looked up and saw a fat white man riding around on a quad bike, trying to capture a young boy who had apparently been stealing sunflower seeds ...

Part One: **The Witness**

F the sunflower murder case ever becomes a movie, the narrative will be structured around the life and times of Bonakele Bendel Pakisi of Thalblogeng, Coligny's satellite township. At the time of these events, Mr Pakisi was 26. He lived in a house inherited from his late parents and presented himself on Facebook as a dashing cosmopole, consorting with beautiful women and posing alongside gleaming new vehicles. In reality, he was unemployed, aside from sums earned as a part-time informal-sector butcher. Indeed, he was so poor that his girlfriend Elsie had to lend him a cellphone so that they could communicate.

According to Pakisi, that cellphone was in his pocket on April 20, 2017, the day of the alleged murder. This information is taken from a statement he gave to police a month later. In it, Pakisi tells us that his day began at 6am, when he went to see an Asian trader who had asked him to help slaughter a cow. But when he got there the cow was not ready, so he asked the trader to advance him R150 and agreed to come back later. He then convinced the owner of a nearby liquor store to open up and sell him eight quarts of beer. He put the beers in his bag and set off to drink them with a policeman friend.

Just after 7am he was walking past a sunflower field on the outskirts of town when he heard a gunshot. He looked up and saw a fat white man riding around on a quad bike, trying to capture a young boy who had apparently been stealing sunflower seeds. Another white was sitting behind the wheel of a pick-up parked on a nearby footpath.

Pakisi walked closer. Saw the fat white man collar the boy and load him onto the back of the pick-up. Heard the boy scream, "Mama, help me, I am dying". The truck then accelerated into the sunflower field, where fat white man threw deceased off the loadbed. Fat white man alighted,

picked him up and repeated the exercise. Boy was thrown off three times in all.

At this point, the whites noticed Pakisi watching. The guy on the quad bike drove over to him and asked, what did you see? Pakisi said, I saw nothing, but the white man didn't buy it. He drew a gun and ordered Pakisi onto the back seat of the quad bike, and thence into the loadbed of the pick-up. Pick-up and quad bike drove in convoy to a nearby farm gate, where the whites abandoned the bike before setting off on an hours-long hellride into the surrounding countryside. Fat white man sat on the back of the truck, holding a gun on his two captives – Pakisi and the sunflower thief, who lay motionless in the load bed, bleeding from the mouth, ears and nose.

According to Pakisi, the whites feared that the boy might die and were determined to terrorise him into keeping his mouth shut. Towards this end, they stopped from time to time in lonely places, where he was beaten, shot at, forced to drink hard liquor and eat his own vomit. In the end, one of the whites knocked him out with a heavy object and he woke up alone in the veld.

Back home, Pakisi heard that a young boy, later identified as Moshweo, had been fatally injured in an accident near the sunflower field that morning. Not so, said Pakisi. I was there. He began to talk about the dreadful things he had seen and experienced. Word spread. Militants began to mutter about apartheid-style atrocities and heavy-handed Boer racists. By Sunday, those militants were by some accounts threatening to attack police unless the killers were arrested immediately.

When the sun rose the following morning, the police cells were still empty, so the militants set forth on a protest march down Coligny's main shopping street. There were only five policemen in Coligny that day, the rest of the town's force having been sent to quell violent anti-corruption protests in two nearby towns. The march turned

... Makgaola Foso stepped into the magistrate's shoes, assessed the facts and granted bail. The militants rioted again, burning down several houses ...

into a riot. Dozens of shops and bottle stores were looted. Armed white right-wingers arrived to defend their terrified kinsfolk. Major violence threatened.

At around 5pm that evening, two white males contacted police to say they wished to turn themselves in. Pieter Doorewaard and Phillip Schutte worked for Pieter Karsten, Coligny's richest farmer and businessman. They said, it was us at the sunflower field, driving our boss's Ford Ranger. We spotted a juvenile stealing sunflower seeds and carried out a citizens' arrest that involved no violence at all. We were taking this boy to the police station when he jumped off the back of our pick-up and fatally injured himself. It was an accident, they said, and Pakisi's story is a complete fabrication.

At this point, police investigations were still in their infancy, and the cause of Moshweo's death had yet to be determined. This didn't stop politicians like provincial premier Supra Mahomape from declaring that there could be "no confusion" about where the guilt lay: it was the Boers. "Had they caught a white child, I don't think they would have done it", he thundered.

After several nights in police cells, Doorewaard and Schutte applied for bail. The magistrate appointed to hear their application chickened out when Coligny's courthouse was surrounded by school children chanting, "The police are thugs and whites are killers". A braver man, Makgaola Foso, stepped into his shoes, assessed the facts and granted bail. The militants rioted again, burning several houses owned by whites and Indians.

By now, Coligny was world famous. News accounts tended to gloss over the fact that the entire conflagration had been triggered by a lone witness whose credibility had yet to be tested. In South Africa, this was not an important factor anyway, because Bendel Pakisi's narrative had stirred memories of a time when white farmers were masters of all they surveyed, given to disciplining "their" blacks with klaps, sjamboks and

sometimes guns. For some black politicians and Twitter fanatics, the sunflower murder proved that this era had never ended. For them, this transformed the case into a morality play that had little to do with guilt or innocence and everything to do with a single question: would the whites, at last, be made to pay?

Part Two: **The Trial**

MMABATHO High Court, March 20, 2018. Judge Ronald Hendricks is a graduate of Pretoria University's law school. Sharp-tongued and stylish, his record is unblemished save for a platinum royalties dispute in which he was criticised for favouring government-aligned baKgatla royals over the claims of their subjects. Some say he is destined to become the next Judge President of North West Province. He was an ANC member until he became a judge in 2003.

From the outset, it was clear that state's case in the coming trial would rest largely on the testimony of a single witness, the aforementioned Bendel Pakisi. Such cases are governed by a huge body of legal precedent stating that a sole witness must be held to a high standard of reliability, and confirmed where possible by evidence from independent outsiders.

When the sunflower murder first made headlines, it seemed that such witnesses would be fairly easy to find. The crime scene lay within sight of a sprawling informal settlement, and beside a fairly heavily travelled road. According to the Boers, Moshweo was not alone that morning. He had a companion who hid away among the sunflowers and surely saw what happened next. If not, there was a farmhouse 200m away. Anyone present there that morning would surely have heard a gunshot followed by screams and a revving engine.

There were three more potential witnesses working in the municipal graveyard 700m away,

... Pakisi claimed that the Boers repeatedly assaulted him with “fists, feet and open hands” before knocking him out with a blow to the back of the head ...

close to the spot where the Boers allegedly dumped their quad bike.

A kilo or so further on, on the outskirts of Coligny, there are several grain silos with a parking lot attached. This is a public space, normally full of trucks on a business morning. Maybe someone saw a pick-up pull up that morning, carrying on its load bed a bearded white man holding two black captives at gunpoint.

If not, detectives could have tried talking to Pakisi’s neighbours. According to Pakisi, the Boer killers showed up on his doorstep around 4am one morning, threatening to kill him if he didn’t shut up. Surely someone heard the roar of their engine, and the sound of them banging on Pakisi’s door.

If all else failed, there was an aspect of Pakisi’s story that could have been corroborated almost effortlessly. He claimed that the Boers repeatedly assaulted him with “fists, feet and open hands” before knocking him out with a blow to the back of the head. By his own account, this left him with injuries (cuts on the mouth and a swollen eye) that would have been visible to everyone he dealt with in the next several days. This included several friends, a school principal, a cousin and at least four policemen or women, all of whom would surely have been willing to testify that Pakisi bore the stigmata of his ordeal at the murderers’ hands.

The absence of any such evidence was the great mystery of the sunflower trial, because it would instantly have sealed Doorewaard and Schutte’s fate. Instead, Pakisi stood entirely alone, telling a story that remained uncorroborated in all its essentials. Why? It’s hard to say, because huge chunks of the police investigation are a closed book to outsiders.

At the start of the trial, Brigadier Clifford Kgorane, head of North West Province’s Organised Crime unit, took the witness stand and told how he was sent to Coligny on the morning of

April 24, 2017, to put an end to the anarchy that had almost engulfed the town. He arrived to find the police station under siege by protestors. He invited them inside to air their complaints. They introduced him to Pakisi, who had by that time produced a statement formalising his charges against Doorewaard and Schutte.

After hearing Pakisi’s tale, Kgorane set forth to do some detective work. He drove Pakisi to the spot where he’d allegedly seen a pick-up careening around the sunflower field while a fat white man repeatedly hurled the deceased off the load-bed. He found some fading tyre tracks on a foot-path, but there was no trail of crushed plants to mark the passage of a heavy vehicle. Kgorane also ordered forensics to seize and examine the accused’s pick-up for blood stains. None were found.

Finally, he searched for spent cartridges at locations where Pakisi claimed he was shot at. Again, the effort was futile, but Kgorane nevertheless felt that “all the elements of murder” were present in Pakisi’s sworn statement, and that it was enough to go on with in the meantime. He ordered the suspects to be arrested in public, in accordance with the demands of protestors. In another move intended to relieve political pressure, he removed the officer handling the sunflower investigation and appointed one of his subordinates, Lt Col Petrus Nkosi, in his stead.

After that, Brigadier Kgorane returned to the provincial capital. He was unable to say what happened next, because he was not the investigating officer. If the court wanted to know about subsequent detective work, he said, it would have to ask Warrant Officer PN Seponkane and Lt Col Petrus Nkosi, both of whom were expected to testify in due course.

WO Seponkane is a detective at Coligny’s police station. Because there were initially no claims to the contrary, police at first approached Moshweo’s death as an accident. WO Seponkane followed the standard procedure in such a case, opening an inquest docket and arranging to

... When a new statement came to light in court ten months later, it contained a perplexing change: the number of suspects had grown from two to three ...

attend the post mortem, scheduled to take place four days later. Discussions in court suggest that he and Pakisi knew each other, and that there was “bad blood” between them as a result of an earlier arrest involving public drinking.

According to Pakisi, a crowd turned up on Seponkane’s doorstep a few hours after Moshweo’s death. As he described it, the crowd consisted of “the community” and “EFF people” who were “very angry” about the manner in which Seponkane was dragging his feet in the sunflower investigation. “I was present”, said Pakisi. “They listened me while I explained them. Seponkane said I should leave because I am mentally disturbed. On that same day he ran to the police station because he said the community wanted to assault him and they even wanted to burn his house”.

Is this true? Not according to a statement sworn by Stanny Mnyakana, principal of one of Coligny’s primary schools. Three days after the incident at the sunflower field, on a Sunday afternoon, Mr Mnyakana was watching a soccer game when Bendel Pakisi pitched up in the company of friends identified as Steve and Tebele, who asked the principal to listen to Pakisi’s story. Pakisi proceeded to talk about seeing “two white males” committing murder in the sunflower field. Steve said he was planning a protest march for the following morning. “I told them this was not the correct procedure”. said Mnyakana. “Let’s inform the police rather than resorting to protest”.

“I then called WO Seponkane”, he continued. “WO Seponkane was not in possession of a state vehicle but he set out on foot to collect the vehicle at the police station and came to meet us at the (soccer) ground. WO Seponkane then took Bendel to his office and obtained his statement”.

Aspects of this statement would later be disputed, but we will return to that in due course. What is important for now is that Pakisi initially told Seponkane the same story he’d told Mr Mnyakana – the killers were “two white males”. Next day, Pakisi repeated this version to

Brig Kgorane, who was taken to the spot where Pakisi had seen “two white males” throwing a young boy off the back of their pick-up. Kgorane noted Pakisi’s descriptions and passed them on to crime intelligence officers, who were ordered to trace and arrest “two suspects”.

Kgorane exited at this point and Lt Col Nkosi took over the investigation. A month later, according to court testimony, Pakisi announced that he was dissatisfied with the statement taken by Seponkane and wanted to swear a replacement. When this document came to light in court ten months later, it contained a perplexing change: the number of suspects had grown from two to three.

Blame for this “error” was initially laid at the door of WO Seponkane, with Pakisi claiming that Seponkane had him sign blank pages and then added false details to his statement in what was presumably an attempt to discredit him. It might have ended there if Brigadier Kgorane and others hadn’t been offered exactly the same story: there were two white killers, not three. This was enormously important detail. In court, Pakisi said he was watching from 15m away when the whites first threw the deceased off their pick-up. In the next several hours, he repeatedly stood face-to-face with his white abductors while they punched and manhandled him. How could he possibly be confused about their number?

Pressed to explain the discrepancy, Pakisi pointed fingers at the police. I didn’t change my story, he insisted. It is their fault. “Is Warrant Officer Seponkane not able to come here in court and answer for himself?”, he asked. “I cannot answer for him”. He was equally adamant that he’d informed Kgorane about the Third Man. Asked why the brigadier had testified otherwise under oath, Pakisi stood his ground. “I explained to him about three people”, he declared. “(Kgorane) said he would have to do his duty in the correct manner and that the third person must be apprehended”.

Someone had to be lying here. If Pakisi was correct, it had to be the policemen. Conversely,

... Pakisi insisted that he'd tried to report the sunflower murder to police hours after it happened, only to be chased away by an unfriendly female officer ...

if the cops were correct, Pakisi was the liar, and a totally unreliable witness to boot. Lt Col Nkosi was positioned to break the deadlock, because he was by all accounts present during all Pakisi's interactions with the brigadier. If Nkosi confirmed Kgorane's version – Pakisi initially spoke of two killers, not three – the state case might have collapsed right there.

Perhaps that is why lead prosecutor Rapula Molefe closed his case without calling Nkosi or Sepongane. This created huge problems for the accused, whose fate rested on proving that Pakisi's testimony was not to be trusted. According to the court record, a defence lawyer telephoned Seponkane during a break in the trial and asked if he was willing to testify. He initially said yes, but changed his mind a day later, informing the defence team he was unable to help "in light of the fact that he is fearing for his own safety and also for the safety of his family".

With both investigating officers out of the picture, the trial came to turn on discrepancies between Pakisi's sworn statements and his evidence in court. This was a gruelling process that lasted almost four days and often ended in confusion, usually because the statement-takers were not on hand to resolve disputes about exactly what Pakisi told them.

In Statement 1, for instance, Pakisi sees the accused throwing the sunflower thief off their pick-up at 9.10 am. It was common cause that the accused showed up at the police station to report what they termed an accident just after 9.45 am. This left too little time for the Boers to take Pakisi on an extended hell ride into the surrounding countryside, with four protracted stops along the way. This potentially serious problem vanishes in Statement 2, where Pakisi says he reached the sunflower field just after 7am.

In Statement 2, Pakisi says the Boers ordered him to strip off his jersey and mop up the blood streaming from Moshweo's mouth and nose. This is said to have happened in the sunflower field, at the very start of his ordeal. In court, he said this

incident happened hours later, on the banks of a farm dam.

In Statements 1 and 2, Pakisi says the Boers shot at him with a rifle. In his evidence-in-chief in court, he said the Boers were armed only with handguns.

In court, Pakisi insisted that he'd tried to report the sunflower murder to police hours after it happened, only to be chased away by an unfriendly female officer. As Pakisi put it, "She said I am drunk I should go away otherwise they will arrest me". In a written statement, he tells a different story: "I did not go straight to the police station to report the matter. The reason I did not go to the police station is that I was afraid I may come in contact with the suspects on the way".

In Statement 2, Pakisi goes on at some length about events at a place called Hanwell, taken to be a reference to Henwil Chickens, an industrial meat processing plant about 20km north of Coligny. Pakisi was expected to take the judge to Hanwell during an inspection in loco, but Pakisi avoided the place entirely. The defence put it to Pakisi that he did so because the chicken plant employs 100 people, at least some of whom might reasonably be expected to have noticed a macabre cavalcade passing – Pakisi running for his life while Boers on the back of a Ford Ranger fired rifle shots at his heels – if such a thing had really happened. At which point the witness dropped a bombshell. "The names that you are calling they are like foreign to me", he said. "I am hearing them for the first time from you".

Counsel for the defence reached for the relevant statement and read Pakisi's own words back to him: "We reached Hanwell abattoir and stopped the van there". And then asked the obvious question:

"So that one is a lie?" – "Yes".

"It is a lie from a statement you signed after you have read it through?" – "Yes".

"It is a version you narrated to (Lt. Col.) Nkosi who reduced this statement to writing?" – "I have

... On four occasions, they'd caught juveniles stealing sunflower seeds and handed them to police, who released them into the custody of their parents ...

never produced such a statement. I do not even know where is Hanwell”.

“So where would Colonel Nkosi get this information if it was not coming from your mouth?” – “Colonel Nkosi is the one who was investigating. I was not investigating”.

And so on. According to the defence, “80 per cent” of Pakisi’s court testimony diverged to some degree from the versions laid out in his written statements.

Towards the end of his stint on the witness stand, Pakisi offered a revised version of the yet another crucial element in his narrative. In Statement 2, he said he saw accused number two, Schutte, throwing Moshweo off the pick-up three times in all. In court, he said he’d actually witnessed only one throw, and just assumed there were others because the pick-up kept stopping and starting as it laboured across the sunflower field.

The defence asks why Pakisi is yet again altering his story. Pakisi replies that he is simply adding new details as they come to him. The exchange continues thusly:

“Do you mean that as you sit there some things come to you for the very first time still?” – “That is correct because I have been disturbed, I have been disturbed on my health and my mind”.

“Did you tell the prosecutor about these problems before you started to testify here?” – “Advocate Molefe and his group knows about my problems”.

“The problem is that when you say even now things are coming to you for the first time, my predicament is that when I close the cross-examination you can remember tonight something else is that not true?” – “Yes that is correct because I have flashbacks I can remember every time what occurred”.

One senses that the defence heaved a sigh of relief at this point, assuming that the prosecution’s only witness had just taken himself out of contention. All that remained was to play the defence’s trump card.

In court, Doorewaard and Schutte offered the following version of the events of the fateful day. They said they started work at 7am, and spent the early part of the morning at their boss’s workshop in Coligny’s centre. Just after 9am, they got in the pick-up and drove off to collect peanut samples in a field five kilometres outside town. On their way back, they saw two kids stealing sunflower seeds. They said they did not drive into the field because they couldn’t (their employer had recently dug a trench to discourage vehicles from the nearby informal settlement using his sunflower field as a short cut to town.) They stopped in the road alongside the kids. Doorewaard rolled down his window and shouted, “What are you doing?” One boy ran and hid in the sunflowers. The second – Moshweo – stopped and climbed onto the load bed when the Boers ordered him to do so.

According to the accused, this was a low-stress situation. On four previous occasions, they’d caught juveniles stealing sunflower seeds and handed them over to police, who issued warnings and released them into the custody of their parents. They said they were planning to do the same with Moshweo. They slung the evidence (one or two sunflower heads, worth around R60) onto the back of the pick-up and set forth for the police station.

As they rounded the first bend, Schutte said he saw a flurry of dust and movement in a side rear-view mirror. He spun around, saw that the boy had vanished, and shouted, “He’s jumped off”, or words to that effect. Doorewaard performed a U-turn and drove back. The boy was lying motionless in the middle of the road, bleeding. Doorewaard and Schutte said they were reluctant to move him because his injuries seemed extremely serious, so they asked two passersby to stand guard while they raced to the police station, 1.8km away, to organise an ambulance.

At this point, Doorewaard and Schutte were

... Someone was lying here, and it was hard to argue with Vodacom's records, said by an expert witness to be "99.99 percent accurate" ...

carrying three cellphones between them. Vodacom records showed that the accused made or received 23 calls on those phones between 7am, Pakisi's best estimate of the throwing-off incident, and 10.08, when someone called from Coligny police station to say an ambulance was on its way. All these calls were handled by Vodacom's Coligny tower.

If the accused had indeed abducted Pakisi at gunpoint just after 7am and taken him on an hours-long, 47.6 km ride to lonely places where he could be terrorised without anyone seeing, many if not most of those calls would have been relayed by outlying Vodacom towers. But Vodacom's computers registered no such calls at all. Instead, they showed that Doorewaard and Schutte had indeed remained in or close to Coligny throughout the critical period.

Furthermore, Pakisi's narrative did not allow for the only actions that might have invalidated the Boers' electronic alibi. To avoid detection by outlying towers, Doorewaard and Schutte would have had to switch their phones off as they left Coligny and then race back into town every few minutes to make or receive calls. Again, this is something Pakisi could not possibly have forgotten – a series of bone-jarring journeys over rough dirt roads, repeated again and again at terrifying speeds. But there are no such journeys in Pakisi's story. Someone was lying here, and it was hard to argue with Vodacom's records, said by an expert witness to be "99.99 percent accurate".

The law as we know is an ass, but centuries of legal precedent establish the rules of engagement here. If the defence presents a version that could be "reasonably, possibly true", the court should accept it. Conversely, the state is required to prove its case "beyond reasonable doubt", especially if the charges emanate from a sole witness whose credibility is open to question.

Defence lawyers thought they'd done enough to win an acquittal. They were wrong.

Part Three: The Judgement

MMABATHO High Court, October 10, 2017. A swarm of TV cameras tracks Judge Hendricks as he takes his seat on the bench and starts summing up the evidence, all 1,000 pages of it. Nearly an hour passes before he gets down to the serious business. This is a case, he says, where the charges rest heavily on the evidence of a single witness. The law therefore requires me to treat such evidence with caution. "A court may convict on the evidence of a single witness (only) if it is satisfactory in all material respects", he says, "or if there is corroboration for such evidence".

Hendricks goes on to list 12 inconsistencies in Pakisi's evidence. Were the Boers armed with a rifle or just hand guns? Did it really matter that Pakisi said he'd never heard of Hanwell? Or that he'd amended the number of times he saw the deceased thrown? "You have to look at these things in context", says Judge Hendricks. "Errors do not mean a witness's testimony should be rejected in its entirety. They could result from cultural or linguistic confusion. They could be mistakes on the part of detectives".

Alert readers will note that Pakisi's most spectacular flip-flops – changing the time of the murder from 9am to 7am, and elevating the number of attackers from two to three – are not mentioned here. Indeed, they never made it into Hendricks' judgement in any form. This was the fruit of keeping investigating officers Nkosi and Sepongang off the witness stand; it allowed howling contradictions to be pushed into the deep background, which in turn enabled Hendricks to reach his most important conclusion: "The evidence of Mr Pakisi is honest, truthful and reliable".

Once that was settled, Pakisi's version became the yardstick against which Hendricks measured all the accused's protestations of innocence. They said Moshweo was cooperative when they ordered him to accompany them to the police station, but

... Doorewaard and Schutte said they assumed the deceased had jumped, but could not rule out the possibility that he'd fallen accidentally ...

that couldn't be true, because Pakisi heard him screaming for his mother. They said Moshweo climbed onto their pick-up voluntarily, but that couldn't be true either, because Pakisi saw him hoisted aboard by the burly Phillip Schutte. They said the boy jumped, but that was obviously false, because Pakisi said the deceased was incapacitated by the first throw off the pick-up and spent the next several hours lying on the pick-up's load bed in a pool of blood, unable to move because of his injuries. "He could not all of a sudden get up and jump from a moving van", said Hendricks. "This is highly improbable".

With that possibility discounted, Hendricks lays out his view of what really happened. The boy was fatally injured when the Boers threw him off their pick-up. When they realised Pakisi had witnessed their deed, it became necessary to shut him up. Towards this end, they kidnapped him and tormented him for hours before knocking him out with a blow to the back of his head. After that, they returned to the outskirts of Coligny, where they dumped the dying boy in the middle of the road and then raced to the police station crying, help, help, he jumped.

It is common cause that the last part of this story is true; when Doorewaard and Schutte pitched up at Coligny's police station that morning, they said, please call an ambulance, someone has "jumped" off our pick-up. In court, they qualified this, stating they hadn't actually seen Moshweo leap; one moment the kid was there, the next he'd vanished. They said they assumed he'd jumped, but could not rule out the possibility that he'd fallen accidentally.

This became an issue in another section of Hendricks' judgement, the one dealing with corroboration. As stated above, the law requires charges emanating from a single witness to be corroborated by independent evidence from neutral outsiders. Hendricks found a powerful instance of this in the strangest of places – the testimony of Dr Ruweida Moorad, the pathologist who performed an autopsy on the deceased. "Mr

Pakisi testified that the deceased was thrown from the van", said Hendricks. "This evidence is supported by the evidence of Dr Moorad".

But it isn't. If anything, Dr Moorad's evidence refutes Pakisi. In court, he said he saw the deceased grabbed by the scruff of his neck and his belt and hurled off the back of a moving vehicle with his arms stretched out to break his fall. The essence of Dr Moorad's evidence was that this sort of fall would inevitably have resulted in injuries to Moshweo's hands and wrists, and she observed none during her autopsy. The absence of such injuries, she said, suggested that the boy was not anticipating his fatal encounter with the ground, which in turn suggested that it was "more probable" that he fell accidentally. At no point did she even come close to suggesting that Moshweo's injuries proved he was thrown. In fact, she conceded under cross-examination that his injuries were consistent with the sort of jump hypothesised by the Boers.

If Doorewaard and Schutte's version was reasonably true, the law required Hendricks to accept it. He chose not to because Pakisi was truthful, and Pakisi said the boy was thrown. If so, Pakisi's account of the state of the accused's vehicle was presumably truthful too. "The back of the pick-up was full of blood", he said. If so, why did the accused leave it parked in the street for twenty minutes while they were reporting an accident to police in the charge office? Seems an odd way to cover up a murder.

Toward the end of his judgement, Hendricks notes that he was struck by the fact that Pakisi got certain details right. He said Doorewaard was driving the pick-up, and Doorewaard agreed this was correct. He said Moshweo was bleeding from the mouth and nose, and this was accepted by all parties. He provided police with descriptions that fit the two accused – one heavy-set and bearded, the other tall and thin. According to Hendricks, Pakisi could not possibly have known such things if he hadn't been on the scene.

At first glance, this is a reasonable assumption,

... This takes us right back to where we started, with whites saying one thing, blacks saying another, and a mob rumbling in the background ...

but it doesn't necessarily carry the day. Pakisi had a friend in the police. Perhaps they discussed the case. If not, we know that Moshweo lay bleeding in the road for more than 40 minutes before the ambulance arrived, surrounded by a small knot of onlookers. Did someone share their observations with Pakisi? We don't know. But here's something we do know. At the outset, Pakisi told a slew of detectives that the killers were strangers. A month later, he declared that he knew one of them, this being Pieter Doorewaard, accused number one. If Pakisi knew Doorewaard, why didn't he say so at the outset? Why waste the police's time with cryptic allusions to a tall, thin mystery man?

So many doubts, so many unanswered questions. In the end, Hendricks seemed to be swayed above all by the literary merits of Pakisi's story. "One thing that needs special mention", he said, "is that Mr Pakisi describes different scenes and everything that happened at those scenes. One can think of no cogent reason why Pakisi were to be so innovative if it did not in fact happen. This is almost rocket science". On this basis the accused were both found guilty, and sentenced to long prison terms.

I have a literary theory too, for whatever it is worth, Pakisi is too young to remember much of apartheid, but he would have grown up listening to stories about farmworkers ill-treated by "the Boers". Perhaps he had such an experience himself. I suspect that aspects of his story might be true, because it would otherwise have been difficult for him to maintain the requisite degree of narrative coherence. But it didn't happen at the hands of Doorewaard and Schutte, and it didn't begin in that sunflower field. If he'd really seen whites throwing a young boy off a pick-up, the details would have been engraved in his brain. And he would have remembered their number forever.

Against this backdrop, I was not surprised when I opened a newspaper the other day and read that Pakisi had recanted. According to the Afrikaans weekly *Rapport*, the sole witness was

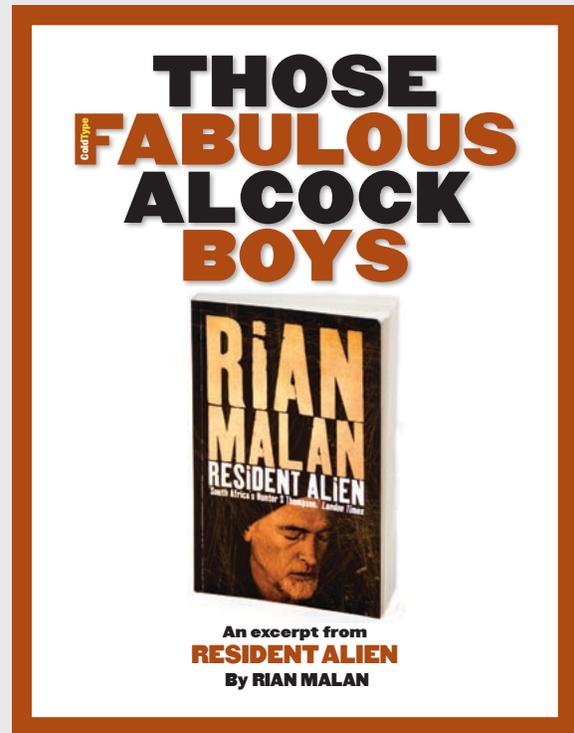
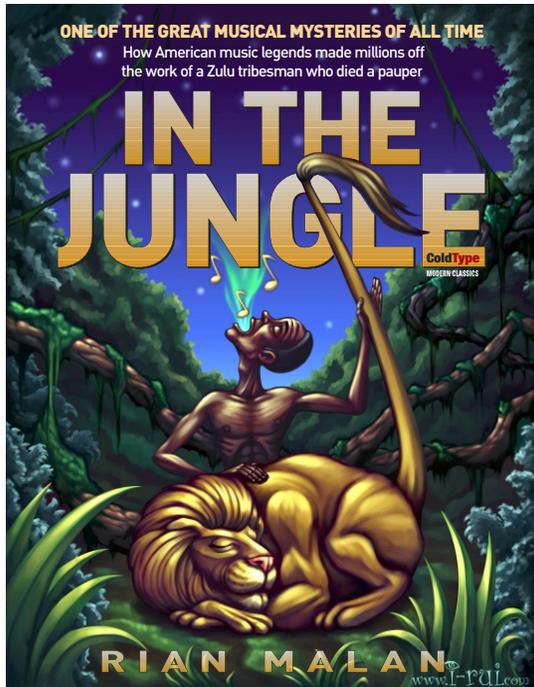
befriended by Paul Morule, a lay preacher who works for Doorewaard's uncle, the businessman/farmer Pieter Karsten. Morule secretly tape-recorded Pakisi confessing that his story was a fabrication. He then took Pakisi to see a lawyer, who also recorded a confession. Asked to comment, Pakisi conceded that the voice on the recordings was his own, but claimed he'd been offered R3-million to change his story. And shown a gun, as if to demonstrate what might happen to him if he didn't.

This takes us right back to where we started, with whites saying one thing, blacks saying another, and a mob rumbling in the background. The mob has been there since day one, threatening violence at every turn. When the "killers" were not arrested immediately, the mob looted Coligny. And when the "killers" were granted bail, the mob burned houses down. Now the mob (in the form of the Mafikeng branch of EFF) is demanding the immediate arrest of the "racists" who attempted to subvert the course of justice by offering Pakisi a bribe. "The EFF stands combat-ready to deliver these criminals to where they are supposed to be", said an EFF statement. "We don't want to remind the police what happened the last time they delayed to arrest the accused but they must know that in the absence of justice, anarchy prevails".

The problem with the mob is that it does not demand justice, just a preconceived outcome: Doorewaard and Schutte are guilty and must be savagely punished. From day one, it was clear that the mob was a factor in the decisions of policemen and magistrates, and that some were afraid to defy it. We cannot know to what extent this shaped the sunflower murder investigation and the ensuing trial. But we can say that the mob is hungry, and that nothing will appease it save white flesh. **CT**

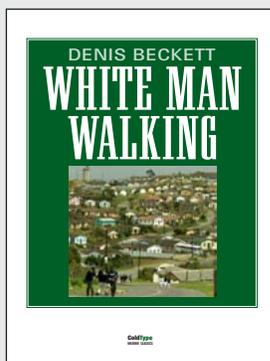
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Rian Malan is a South African author, journalist, songwriter and musician. His autobiographical book, *My Traitor's Heart*, is a global bestseller.

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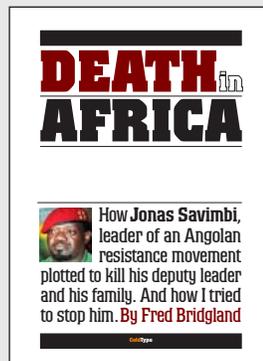


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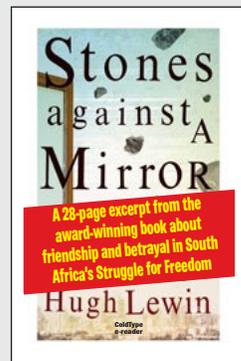
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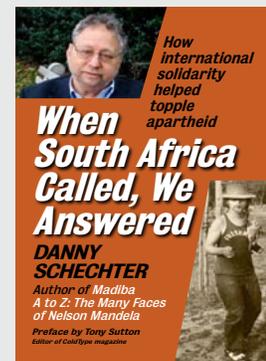
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AN EXCERPT FROM THE NEW NOVEL BY PHILIP KRASKE



And the Terrorist Who Loved Bonsai Trees

A woman arrives at her office and is attacked by military types. Then terrorists, caught planting a bomb, flee to the same office. A bad start to everyone's day

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CHAPTER ONE

THE 100 block of Charlesdrew Street in Jersey City, New Jersey, displays at its midpoint a line of elegant three-story brownstone duplexes that border a cracked sidewalk, which itself borders a potholed street. Lying directly across the river from glamorous Manhattan, it was an odd place for American History to point her saintly finger, and much less at the brownstone at 126 Charlesdrew, the converted offices of a small Internet-advertising firm called Hallerbee Net Research. But she did: on that sunny Tuesday morning, the ninth of November, when Trudy Schelling entered Hallerbee as its new employee and exited thirty seconds later as America's number one new terrorist.

She was poorly cast for the role of villain; a mighty effort of inventiveness would be required to make her one. Blond and short – just over five

feet tall – she had a pleasantly doe-like face and an athlete's build come by honestly: she had been a star gymnast at Cornell on full scholarship, this until a shoulder-shattering fall on the balance beam ended her career. It also left her with an odd stride: her left arm swung diagonally in front of her torso as if she were sawing wood.

Furthermore, nothing about Trudy was even distantly villainous. She was devoutly religious and a regular at Mass. She had rarely had luck with men, and had even called three of them “creeps” to their faces. This was the only real insult in her arsenal, but to her it covered every miscreant in the pantheon of human evil between litterbug and axe murderer.

She didn't like the man getting out of the van and watching her cross the street. Now he was approaching. Jumping up the six steps to the front door of Hallerbee, she reached into her bag and grabbed her stun gun and flicked the switch to

turn it on. She rang the doorbell, panic rising in her because she could hear the man behind her hopping up onto the sidewalk, then the lowest step.

“Come on!” she pleaded softly. With a buzz, the door opened, and she darted in, shoving it closed with her foot. Now another man loomed up before her: athletic-looking, dressed in a kind of green-black uniform, not quite like a janitor: smarter. He towered over Trudy, but most people did. His short hair seemed to make his little ears stick out even more.

“Hi. You Gertrude?” he asked with a grin.

“Yeah, sure am. Whew! There was a guy...”

And now the man snatched a huge hank of her hair.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Trudy squawked.

“Okay, got her”, he called up over his shoulder, hauling her farther into the house.

“On the sofa, Sandusky”, answered a man’s voice from that direction, dry as an eye-doctor’s.

The man pulled her three steps that way, then sank to his knees under the hoarse bray of Trudy’s stun gun, which released 10,000 volts into the most unfortunate testicles in the history of maleness. He melted to the floor, releasing her. Shoving her hair back, Trudy looked around: to her left, a largely barren living room with a chewed sofa lying wounded at an angle, missing its little legs on one side. Some half-dozen oldish people, either asleep or dead, lay or sat slouched in old armchairs and the sofa, and the one that gazed back at her had the dull look of a doll that had lost its stuffing, his filthy pant cuffs turned up in order not to drag on his shoes. A pretty Chinese-looking woman sat on the floor against the sofa, looking at Trudy as if irritated by her arrival. It was only later that Trudy realized that she was frightened for her.

“Shit! Shit, Sandusky’s bought it! Move move move move move!”

In front of her, at the top of the stairway, was none other than Steve Hallerbee, an electrically jaunty man with a pointy jaw and V-shaped grin. He was dressed in the same jumpsuit as the first man, and Trudy realized now that this was not janitorial garb at all, but military: his pants were tucked into tall jackboots.

The front door, of course, was no option. Trudy dashed past the foot of the stairway and down the hall. Her shoes seemed to make a horrible, creaking clatter on the bare floorboards. At the far end was the back door of the kitchen – which, two steps on, she saw, was held shut with a fat chain gripping the door handle tight to an unused shelf support on the wall. She turned right into the first doorway.

“Trudy, hold up. I got something for you. A gift for your first day”, called Steve Hallerbee.

By reflex Trudy was polite. “Great, can you bring it down?” she called, slamming the door shut.

She found herself in a small functioning office. The massive metal desk, scarred and battered, held a big laptop computer facing the desk chair as if awaiting its orders, and a chunky printer set on a board that slid out of the desk.

“She’s in the office!” yelled Hallerbee.

Trudy had already tipped over a round, metal wastebasket and set it lengthwise between the door and desk, and now snatched an unopened block of printer paper from the desk and jammed it – stomping it down with her foot – between the wastebasket’s bottom and the door. The door handle turned, the wastebasket budged an inch, the paper budged an inch, the desk budged a lengthwise inch – and then stopped against the wall opposite.

“C’mon, Gertrude, this is all a misunderstanding”, the man panted, banging on the door. “Open up”.

“I’m calling the police and you creeps are going to *get it!*” Trudy snapped over her shoulder, hitting the security button atop the window sash and sliding it up. “And by the way I said to call me “Trudy.””

“We *are* the police”, the man, shoving hard against the door.

“Oh, like I’m gonna believe *that!*”

“It’s jammed”, Hallerbee said to a second one who now arrived. “It’s jammed solid”.

“I’ll tell you what”, said Trudy. “Slide your id under the door, and I’ll take a look at it”.

“Okay, just hang on. I’m getting it out!”

Trudy snatched her purse and good-shoes bag. She climbed onto the window sash and looked

down: it was a six-foot drop to the little space between the Hallerbee brownstone and the next one.

“All right, now just take it easy. Here it comes...”

Which was all Trudy heard before jumping out and sprinting towards the back patio.

The back wall, bordering an alley, was three feet taller than she was, but she charged it, rammed a foot against the bricks, leapt up and cleared the top by belly-flopping over.

She caught a bus and rode all the way into Manhattan, on the sound principle that when one loses a job the best thing to do is to jump right into getting another.

Thus had Gertrude Ingrid Schelling, the bumpy name by which the entire planet would soon come to know her, kicked off 11/9.

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Of further events on Charlesdrew Street that morning, little need be said.

All the world knows the story of how the five men entered the Empire State Building – 9:07 AM on the security video – and patiently went through security, little halos shining above their swarthy features. They rode an elevator to the fourth floor, the highest one of the base of the building that directly borders the sidewalk. This floor held an office that had been vacated a month before by a Norwegian shipping-container representative. They forced open a temporary door to the space, opened a window on the 34th Street side, dropped a string tied to a weight out the window, and with the help of a confederate down below drew in two ropes, each heavier than the last. With the latter, they drew up two of three wooden crates from the van, each big enough to hold a household air conditioner.

The men never opened them. When the good guys did, some hours later, the two already hauled up would prove to hold, in one crate, a number of tools and a variety of electronic meters, and in the other, some type of gizmo with a lot of electronics. It occurred to someone – the skeptics, known as “11/9 Truthers”, would later wonder why – to run a Geiger counter over it immediately: “It nearly blew the needles off the machine”, said one officer.

It would quickly be dubbed a “baby bomb”, according to FBI sources, and held enough punch to vaporize everything in a radius of fifty meters and, more to the point, destabilise the hundred-floor building and topple it into the street.

The men had prayed first; this needs mentioning. An accountant who was walking up the stairs for his morning exercise heard the long mooing of “*Allah-u-akhbar*”: “In cha Allah”: “May the will of God be done”.

On this lovely Tuesday morning, however, God’s will took the burly form of NYPD Officer Havershall Hicks, thirty-six years earlier named for a great-great-grandfather born into slavery on a Virginia plantation, a cultural detail widely trumpeted by day’s end.

With a single four-story glance at the Keystone Kops moving job before him, “Shally” Hicks formed a low opinion of both the movers and their technique. He didn’t like the flurrying arms of the bushy-headed man in the street who was urging his colleagues to pull the second box up fast. He didn’t like their school-bus-yellow rented mini-van parked half on the curb. Nor did he like the man’s milky smile at him as he waited for his friends at the top to pull the box in and undo the knot.

Yes, Officer Hicks was just doing his duty when he asked Raschid al-Bousapha to get his papers – permits, licenses, the usual – out of the truck. And he certainly didn’t deserve the bullet in the gut that he got for an answer.

The jig was up, and four floors above, the other five men knew it. They sprinted down the stairs and out the front door into the yellow van, which al-Bousapha thoughtfully had waiting for them right outside.

The New Jersey State Police spotted them as the van exited the Lincoln Tunnel into Jersey City. Two local units were presently on its tail and more were coming. A helicopter, careful not to trouble charging airliners on their glide paths, also hovered nearby.

After some blocks of chase, Raschid al-Bousapha swerved into Charlesdrew Street. By now three squad cars were following him; one sped down the alley behind the brownstones, hoping to cut off the mini-van at the intersection with Bernel Street. But halfway down Charlesdrew, al-

Bousapha jammed on the brakes. His men shoved open the back doors and opened fire with three handguns, as the squad-car videos later revealed. Calling to his men, al-Bousapha ran up to Hallerbee Net Research, firing his chunky automatic at the door lock as he ran. The other five men ran inside with him. A few seconds later, they heard the sickening sound of gunshots as the first of the Hallerbee employees met their deaths.

The standoff had begun.

And from there, as everyone remembers: threats, bullhorns, telephoned demands, panicked evacuations of surrounding houses; policemen crouching, reporters purring, tiptoes hurting, photographers squinting. “Seemingly”, “reportedly”, “apparently”, “allegedly” – all the wet nurses of modern journalism rose to the task of covering a live crisis. SWAT teams unpacked lockers, Special Teams stretched muscles, local police chiefs sipped bad coffee, the White House expressed concern. Chin-stroking specialists from every fief in specialdom gathered at each end of the 100 block of Charlesdrew Street, where a little carnival of professionalism crackled and hummed, all at the service of the Public Good and the extinction of Public Danger.

And as the minutes ticked past, speculation spread its great white wings, soared, banked, wheeled, swooped and glided on every network TV show in the land. “Best bets” were postulated, “scary versions” articulated, and “worst-case scenarios” despaired over. Newscasters echoed them, reporters tweeted them, and coffee-mug-gripping experts formed panels to flesh them out:

They’ll ask for a deal with the Israelis, said an ex-CIA officer.

We do not negotiate with terrorists, said an ex-Marine commander.

The material objective is to make them see the hopelessness of their situation, said a hostage expert.

A surgical strike, recommended an Air Force pilot with AfPak experience, though he admitted that “collateral” might be “an issue” for owners of nearby houses.

A floor plan of the brownstone was miraculously discovered, swiftly brought forward and delicately analysed. *Now I would imagine, Karen,*

that the hostages are being detained here, in the kitchen at the back.

But what if these men are hopeless – desperate – to start with? the anchorwoman objected. I mean, what is the state of mind running through these guys’ heads? And the scary thing is this could happen on any American street. That is all of us in that house.

And then – everyone was cut off in mid-opinion – a young woman burst out the front door of Hallerbee and staggered down the front steps to the sidewalk, just barely managing to keep her feet: her hands were bound together with a strip of cloth, and her shoulder-length hair hung down in front of her face – an Oriental face. She reached the sidewalk and limped into the street. Then a gun barked in the house and the front bay window shattered: two shots hit her in the back. Her legs collapsed under her, she fell forward, and her hair swept like a parachute over her Vietnamese beauty – Ellen Nguyen, according to the company webpage photo – a lovely chiselled face with broad cheekbones that angled down to a fragile chin.

On went the circus. Spectators speculated, photographers photographed, experts ex-spurred, and the gruesome scene with poor Ms. Nguyen was replayed over and over, always with the magical caveat that the video was “gruesome” and that “parental discretion was advised”. Soon Ms. Nguyen, her hair tumbling over her like a magic spell, became more icon than person.

Then an excited assistant ran to the anchorwoman’s side and handed her a paper. Yes, the FBI had just confirmed that they were in telephone talks with the terrorists.

A group of Hallerbee id photos popped up on the screen, including Trudy’s. Reporters also began to profile them: their work histories, families, hobbies – everything. They knew that Steve Hallerbee – bearded, and not the one that Trudy had met – had two children and that Ellen’s parents had immigrated to America in 1979, after the fall of Saigon. The information gave the victims personalities and did much to fill out the narrative.

Twelve hard-working professional young people in the prime of life, intoned the congressman. *I wonder which ones were assassinated as these terrorists-losers ran into the house.*

Then, sixty militarily precise minutes – another item that would later drive 11/9 Truthers nuts – after Ellen’s escape, it was the bearded Steve Hallerbee who made a break for freedom. Only Truthers would wonder how he and Ellen Nguyen had managed to open the heavy front door with their hands tied behind their backs. Still, you had to admire the reflexes of the TV technicians at the control panels. No sooner had the front door opened again than television screens filled with the awkward, down-the-street shots of the building.

Hallerbee descended the steps hastily but sideways, as if able to bend just one knee. His hands behind his back, his head bobbed groundward as if on a spring. Commentators would later wonder if he hadn’t been beaten earlier. He took three long strides, passing Ellen Nguyen, and then two shots to the back of the head blew his face off. He dove head-first into the street, his lower jaw ripped backward by the force of impact.

Now two bodies lay in the street.

The hostage expert observed that the “window” for a negotiated resolution was closing and expected an attack.

The disgusted terrorism expert again disagreed, saying it was foolish to try anything against “trained terrorists” in a situation like that. *By now they’ve got the whole place laid out with explosives. Your only closure is by negotiation.*

The anchorwoman was startled. *Explosives? Could they be carrying explosives?*

Are you kidding? exclaimed the ex-Marine.

It seemed that no terrorist worth his beard was without a charge or two of C-4. And as if by magic, “explosives” now became the watchword. The terrorism expert said that they surely had explosives and the “extensive knowledge” needed to use them.

A SWAT team armoured car now drove slowly – “a leisurely, tourist-in-Paris pace”, as one news magazine would later put it – down Charlesdrew, angling to place itself up on the sidewalk, between the brownstone houses and the two bodies in the street.

Had the pick-up of bodies been negotiated? One police spokesman replied cryptically that this was “ongoing”.

The terrorists, however, being mere terrorists and not seasoned football players, took the bait. They never realized that the armoured car was merely a diversion.

Because now the Special Forces – later identified by Pentagon sources as an elite “Team A” – were speeding up the alley in their own armoured vehicle. Just as they reached it, “Team B” blew up the back wall along the alley – “breached” was the military’s term in every journalistic mouth for the rest of the day – just in time for Team A to roar through the hole.

They didn’t get far. Because the terrorists, just as the experts had said, had mined the house with explosives and now blew it off the foundations.

The dust cleared; sadness filled the void of excitement. By the time the six o’clock news aired, the terrorists had been identified to a man: three Iranians, one Saudi Arabian, and two Syrians; it seemed they had left their passports behind in their safe house some miles away, quickly discovered. Their ringleader was Raschid al-Bousapha, an Iranian whom the CIA had on their files as belonging to the Revolutionary Guard.

And Gertrude Ingrid Schelling, some very incriminating papers and computer pendrives found in her Newark apartment, was named the seventh terrorist.



11/9 AND THE TERRORIST WHO LOVED BONSAI TREES

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