

Niall MacRoslin

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Alice N. York



Project  
**Black Hungarian**  
Spy Novel

CAPSCOVIL®

READINGBITS

**Niall MacRoslin**

**Alice N. York**

**PROJECT  
BLACK HUNGARIAN**

**SPY NOVEL**

**CAPSCOVIL**

**A CAPSCOVIL BOOK | GLONN | GERMANY**

## READINGBITS

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# THE STORY

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The Board for Industrial Research and Development has been shaping major political decisions since 1929. You haven't heard of them because no-one has. They're efficient, discreet and ultra-professional. Working under the guise of a multi-faceted consultancy firm.

But a new threat to their customers means all that could be about to change. After much deliberation, a decision has been made.

A new technology is to be tested in an extensive field trial, and the electric car expedition WAVE offers the perfect cover. Naturally, BIRD has no desire to see it succeed. The usual countermeasures are taken and a team is dispatched. The mission is to be low-key, no more than a routine training exercise: an opportunity for BIRD to blood the next generation of field operatives. There is, it seems, little that can go wrong.

But the new recruits are young and impulsive; quick to act when caution should be the name of the game. One bad decision leads to another, and soon the mission is spiralling out of control. What BIRD doesn't know is that there is another elite force on the scene, a crack unit sent by security agency DISECUPRO to protect the technology and its engineer.

Suddenly, all eyes are on WAVE.

# THE PROJECT

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Project Black Hungarian is the first book of its kind:

Real events from the electric car rallye WAVE 2013 are woven into a suspense-packed spy story that also takes current global developments into account.

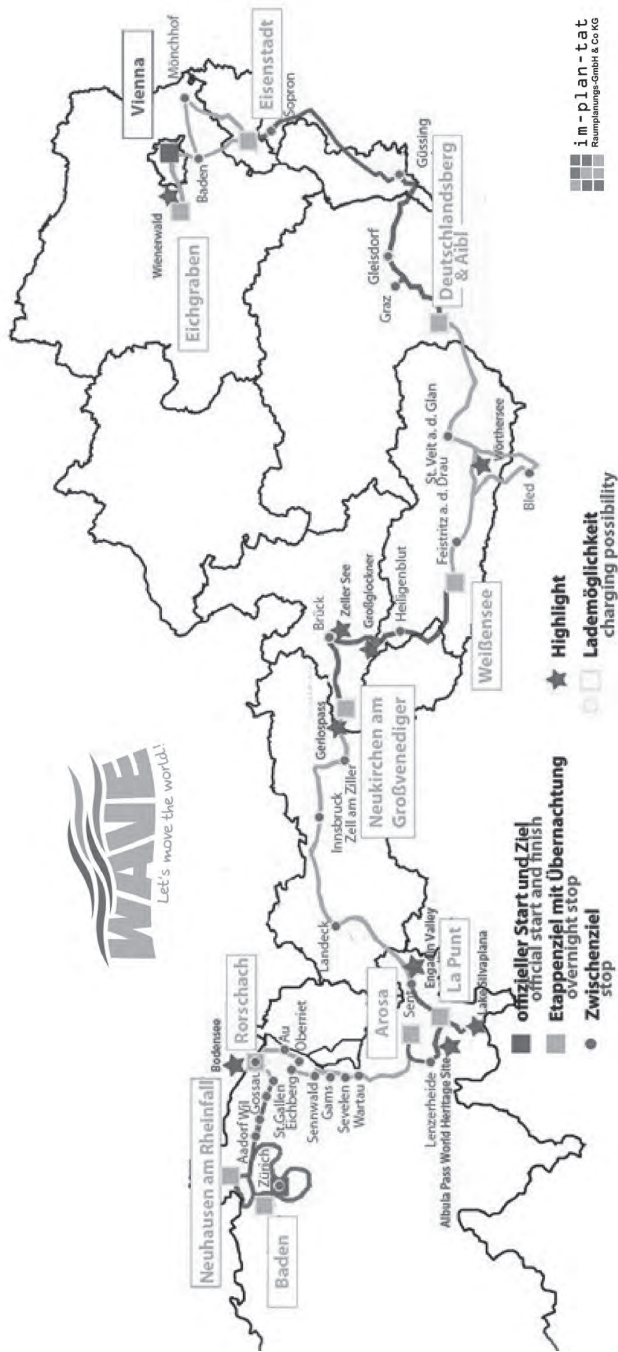
A special delicacy, if you will, is that through the eyes of the spy characters, the reader can take a clandestine peek at how intelligence agencies gather information.

Current developments in the field of electric cars have been taken into account.

The story follows locations along the route of the rallye WAVE 2013.

Selected participants offered to serve as role models for characters in the spy novel.

# THE ROUTE



# THE CHARACTERS

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Christian Adler	CEO of Adler Reilly and BIRD
Dominik Brandt	Director Operations of BIRD
Céline Dufort	Director Finance of BIRD
Walter Mikesch	Director Intelligence of BIRD
Nils Karrat	Rookie hired by BIRD
Hendrik Herder	Rookie hired by BIRD
Alain Blanc	Investor
Peter Prohaska	BIRD spy - Intelligence department
Marc Kudling	Ext. consultant for Evs at Adler Reilly
Uwe Macellaio	Ext. consultant for hazardous materials at Adler Reilly
Magali Zampieri	DISECUPRO agent and bodyguard
Martin Tauer	DISECUPRO agent for IT security
Frank Loden	DISECUPRO Chief of Integrity
Arina Rhomberg	Founder and president of DISECUPRO
Tom Schmidt	Entrepreneur and friend of Alain
Andrej Pečjak	Technologist and Managing Director Institut Metron
Jasna Pečjak	General Manager of Institut Metron
Stephan A. Schwarz	Club president of Swiss Tesla Owners Club
Eva Štravs	Director Tourism BLED
Janez Fajfar	Mayor of BLED
Louis Palmer	Tour director of WAVE
Tamara Hillinger	WAVE participant
Manfred Hillinger	WAVE participant/dep.president Tesla Club Austria
Marco Mila	WAVE participant
Simone Barra	WAVE participant

Jochen Breuer	WAVE participant
Andreas Wacker	WAVE participant
Angela Wacker	WAVE participant
Erich Camenisch	WAVE participant
Peter Franke	WAVE participant
Jean-Pierre Pané	WAVE participant
Monika Pané	WAVE participant
Florian Berg	Student, writing a field report about WAVE
Stephan Schwartzkopff	WAVE participant
Olaf Feldmann	WAVE participant
Rafael DeMestre	WAVE participant
Anastassyia Jurina	WAVE participant
Ernst Scheufel	WAVE participant
Hannes Hauer	WAVE participant
Gordon Feet	WAVE participant
Leora Rosner	WAVE participant
Robort Michelsen	WAVE participant
Johann Axmann	WAVE participant
Franz Sattler	WAVE participant
Andre Lugger	WAVE Roadside Assistance
Thomas Rot	WAVE Roadside Assistance
Vivien Renlo	WAVE support team
Jaromir Vegr	WAVE support team
Andreas Ranftl	WAVE support team



# PROLOGUE

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## Dominik

### Spring – Vienna

“We need to meet.”

“Now?”

“Now.”

“OK, Dominik – but this had better be good.”

It was. Though he doubted Adler would see it that way. Christian Adler, CEO of Adler Reilly, grandson of Tobias Adler: visionary, emigrant, founder. Tobias, who had come into the world with nothing and bequeathed an enduring legacy; Christian whose wealth was so great he had neglected to think of the next-in-line. Strange, Dominik Brandt thought to himself, to see a dynasty coming to an end before your own eyes.

He was sitting in the presidential suite of the five-star Hotel Sacher, one of Vienna’s many gifts to the rich and famous. The Madame Butterfly Suite, as it was also known, was a vast space, comprising not only a generously proportioned bedroom and art-deco bathroom but six other rooms besides. A spectacular view of the city meant it was a far more attractive proposition than a decent-sized family home.

Everything stood ready for the CEO’s arrival. The long conference table was decked out with coffee, fruit, pastries, and sparkling water, almost all of which would go to waste. At the head of the table, where the CEO insisted on being seated even if it was just the two of them, Dominik had laid a small, immaculately presented dossier containing a précis of the director of intelligence’s findings. The DI could not be there in person, but along with the financial and legal directors would be taking part by video-link. There would be no rap

on the door: the CEO didn't knock – especially when he had been dragged out of a meeting at the UN building. What had it been this time? Dominik couldn't remember. Only that it had been important, and official: Adler Reilly rather than BIRD.

The CEO might not knock – but he *would* expect to be greeted upon entry. When Dominik heard the footsteps – that measured, rhythmical tread which somehow managed to convey both calm and a hint of menace – he sprang to his feet and moved swiftly towards the door.

“Dominik, your timing is flawless as ever.”

Always that air of sarcasm, of superiority. The pair shook hands in a perfunctory manner. The CEO was a head taller than his number two, but older as well by thirty years, his hair now grey where once it had been dark. Both men were impeccably dressed. Dominik watched as the older man helped himself to a glass of sparkling water. What was the difference between them, he wondered? The tailor-made suits, designer watches, expensive shoes, even the tan: that was all the same. But whereas Adler oozed authority, and was, at this stage of his life, a veritable *éminence grise*, he – Dominik – still had an air of schoolboy awkwardness. Their ages, yes, that had something to do with it, but did it not, when all was said and done, boil down to the simple fact of their upbringing? The CEO had that confidence, that insouciance which one associated with people from a certain kind of background: an easy, devil-may-care charm that surely came gift-wrapped with an Ivy League education and a lifetime of financial security. Dominik, on the other hand, was neither insouciant nor particularly charming, and any confidence he had gained was the result of sheer hard work. While the CEO exuded power, Dominik could call only on naked ambition. A distasteful quality, perhaps, but one that might yet come in handy if, as now seemed likely, Adler was to leave no heir.

“Shall we begin?”

“It's all there,” Dominik motioned towards the dossier at the head of the table. As always, he allowed the CEO a few moments to read over the document, taking advantage of the brief lull to freshen

up in the guest bathroom. From there, he heard what could only be described as a snort of derision.

“Electric cars?” Adler was shaking his head. He was old enough to remember his grandfather telling him about the first: developed in Britain by one Thomas Parker, the inventor also responsible for electrifying the London underground. “Is this some kind of joke?” he said. There it was – that calm, that hint of menace.

“No joke, sir. Deadly serious.” Dominik had expected precisely this reaction. Hence the presence of the organization’s other big-hitters. At the mere touch of a button, if required.

“You’re telling me that the outcome of this race is somehow important? What’s it called again?” Adler searched inside the document. “WAVE?”

“No, sir, the outcome has no bearing: it’s an expedition, not a race.” There was a note of relish in his voice. “It’s the test we need to keep an eye on. The technology. If our information is correct – and we’ve rarely been wrong before – there is an electric car in the field with a range of one thousand kilometres. Do you know what that means?”

An impassive stare from the CEO.

“It means if it’s successful, there’s going to be a lot less money coming our way from oil.”

No doubt Adler was thinking that they had been right before. In 2008. That was why they had adopted a holding structure; it was probably the reason the company had survived. “Where did you get this information?” the CEO asked.

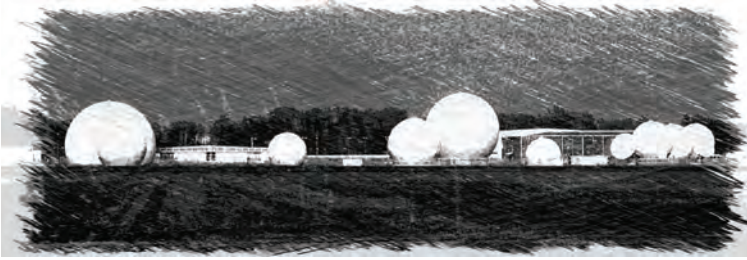
“There was a text message, in London. From a pre-paid cell phone. We don’t know who sent it,” Dominik said.

“Get me Dufort.”

Of the three that were soon to join by video-link, the financial director was the only one Adler trusted one hundred percent. He had no time for Legal, and viewed Walter Mikesch, the director of intelligence, with a suspicion that bordered on contempt. Probably this was because the latter made his living unlocking people’s deepest, darkest

secrets – the irony being that Adler himself had provided the key.

Dominik had often wondered just how far the CEO's influence must extend for him to avail of nigh-on unlimited access to databases from all over the world. A whole country's emails, text messages, and phone conversations could be analyzed and divided into the most minuscule categories, streamlined to focus on a single person and their immediate environment. Detailed profiles of an individual's life, containing information both the private and professional, could be drawn up at the touch of a button.



To the outside world, Christian Adler was the face of the international consultancy firm Adler Reilly, founded at the turn of the nineteenth century in the US. Nevertheless, some years ago, he had distanced himself from the day-to-day running of Adler Reilly in favour of cultivating a complex network of favours and counter-favours, which could be cashed in at any moment, anywhere around the globe. In that sense, he was merely carrying on the work of his grandfather, Tobias, who had established the Board for Industrial Research and Development, or BIRD, in 1929, after unforeseen circumstances had left his consultancy firm on the verge of ruin. BIRD, a top secret organization whose 100 members were hand-picked from Adler Reilly's own employees, was responsible for ensuring that the consultancy firm retained their dominant position in all market sectors. Though specializing in lobbying, BIRD's global representatives also dabbled in illegal surveillance, blackmail, espionage and sometimes even murder: whatever it took to keep those in power in check.

In the meantime Dominik had done the necessary, and Céline Dufort appeared before them on one of the conference room's three

projector screens. Another zap on the remote control and she was joined by the remaining two members of the committee. The CEO may not have asked for them specifically – nor, in practice, was there a lot they could do at this stage – but their presence was still a requirement when important decisions were being made.

“Céline, how nice of you to join us. Your radiance is undimmed even by satellite.”

She squirmed.

“Tell me if what Mr Brandt here says is true.”

Céline Dufort, elegant, sophisticated, but old enough to be immune to the questionable charms of her CEO, replied: “Dominik is right as always. Though perhaps he should have mentioned that oil is only part of the story. What do the initials ICE mean to you, Mr Adler?”

A moment’s pause. “Internal combustion engine.”

“Precisely,” she continued. “The automobile industry has invested so much in the internal combustion engine that a change now would spell disaster. Think of all that training gone to waste, not to mention the cost of new research and development. But even that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Walter has more details.”

The CEO turned reluctantly towards his director of intelligence. Dominik was certain that it was Adler’s connections in industry and government that made him believe he had the upper hand on Walter. The DI’s department received an annual budget of tens of millions of dollars, paid on standing order. Aside from Adler, only Céline Dufort knew the precise details of this arrangement.

“Thank you, Céline. The electrification of the car industry would necessitate a whole range of new measures, all of which have serious implications for our business partners. It would mean a new charging infrastructure and back end system, as well as a complete overhaul of the service industry. The automobile industry may be a massive, well-oiled machine but it is not equipped to deal with the requirements that will soon be placed upon it. Take charging stations, for instance.” Walter Mikesch paused. “Drivers expect their navigation systems to

tell them not just *how* to reach their destinations but *if* they have the range to do so. If the battery is running low, drivers need both the charging stations *and* the onboard technology to locate them. Then you have the fact that EVs are built differently from their traditional counterparts. They are not nearly as prone to breakdown and require less maintenance. In other words, mass-market adaptation would see the service industry suffer hugely: not just the service centres themselves, but all those selling replacement and spare parts, as well as other consumables. To cap it all, there's a wealth of new jobs to be created, a generation of developers and technologists to be trained, and as Céline has already indicated, a significant group of experienced professionals who will suddenly find themselves on the proverbial scrapheap—"

The DI was cut off mid-flow. "Meaning? In English, this time." The CEO's gaze was back on Dufort.

"Meaning that the continuing development of the electric car directly affects our business interests. The core activity of our most significant Western clients stands to be damaged beyond repair. Existing structures and arrangements that were decades in the making could be torn apart in one fell swoop. As for power dynamics, I hardly need say that they'd change overnight. You could wake up tomorrow and find the industry as you know it gone forever. This is real. And the stakes are higher than they've ever been before."

"And what does my – my team of *experts* – propose?" Not even so much as a glance towards Intelligence or Legal.

That was Dominik's cue. He was getting frustrated. Hadn't Adler read the file?

"We are proposing, sir, that the technology cannot be allowed to succeed."

"You want to send people in?"

Dominik nodded. "There's still time to get them on the list. We need to make sure this product is binned before it gets anywhere near the market. WAVE is just a test."

"I thought it was an expedition," the CEO smiled to himself.

Dominik was unmoved. For all his occasional awkwardness, he

was a good actor. Don't panic, he told himself. He could see that the CEO was reluctant to cede to his wishes. People of his age were often either deeply suspicious of technology or disinclined to take it seriously. With Adler, he suspected the latter. After all, he hadn't got this far because of technology. But then again, Dominik mused, he hadn't got this far on merit either.

At last Adler spoke again, his playful side now no longer visible: "OK, but keep it low-key. Probationers only. And one more thing. I don't want to hear another word about it. Understood?"

With that, he was gone. He hadn't even waited for Dominik to respond.

Dominik switched off the video link. What to make of it? Hadn't Adler always said that the Board for Industrial Research and Development took priority? That the consultancy firm was only there for when people started asking questions? To allow BIRD to operate in the first place? What had changed? Dominik was damned if he knew. He cast his eye across the conference table and the expensive pastries that adorned it – *he* certainly wasn't going to eat them – before heading towards the window for a final glance at the newly departed CEO. He saw the old man hail down a taxi, and wave it away grumpily as soon as he realized it was an electric, one of around 150 in the Austrian capital: the latest in a series of environmental schemes designed to make the city a pollution-free zone.

The second cab he hailed – God be praised – was a more traditional model.

Dominik Brandt watched as his superior climbed in and sped away into the distance.

# CHAPTER ONE

---

## Dominik

### Spring - Vienna

A day had passed since the meeting of the executive committee – the evening spent working, late – and Dominik was still in Vienna. It wasn't out of any great affection for the city, which he had always found preening and self-satisfied, too full of people like Adler, but because he had agreed to catch up with an old friend. Normally, of course, such a notion would have been anathema to Dominik.

Indeed, he doubted whether he had ever uttered the phrase “it'd be good to catch up” to a fellow human being. He certainly hadn't last night, at any rate, when he had called the Thai ambassador to the UN, Chaipura, to arrange the meeting. Meeting? There, you see. He wasn't even sure if Chaipura could be properly classed as a friend. That said, Dominik did know that it was time for him to start cultivating his own network. If he was serious about taking Adler's place, he needed powerful connections of his own. In this regard, Chaipura fitted the bill perfectly.

The pair had met at the Grand Palace in Bangkok the previous year during the opening ceremony for one of Dominik's bridges. “Bridging for a sustainable tomorrow”, a project that aimed to improve road safety and farm-to-market travel links by building bridges in developing countries, had been one of BIRD's most successful enterprises to date, and not just because it vastly increased the organization's sphere of influence. It had also done wonders for the public image of Adler Reilly, in whose name the whole thing had been carried out. Moreover, it had been Dominik's brainchild, and – this was the crucial point, the one that had ultimately secured his promotion to director



of operations – funded almost exclusively out of the public purse. A venture that had won people’s hearts, benefitted the global power players, and barely cost a dime. What wasn’t to love? Best of all for Dominik, however, had been the opportunity to shake the hands of countless presidents and prime ministers across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, with the odd king or queen thrown in for good measure.

The ceremony itself had been stunning, a truly regal event graced by His Majesty the King of Thailand, and culminating in a breathtaking fireworks display from across the Chao Phraya River. Chaipura had been one of the many local and international dignitaries present, and after he and Dominik had exchanged the necessary pleasantries, they had been surprised to discover a mutual passion for sailing. Later, Dominik had been ever more surprised to find himself suggesting that the two of them take to the water together when they were next in Europe. What was he doing? Was he really so lonely? Or had he subconsciously sensed an opportunity that he could store away for use at a later date?

Either way, there would be no sailing today in Vienna, despite the blustery spring wind. Only CEOs could play golf and go sailing on Wednesdays, as Adler was only too fond of reminding him. For now Dominik would just have to focus on work.

Despite the lingering presence in his thoughts of the London-bound Adler, there was a noticeable spring in Dominik’s step as he made his way out of the hotel north along Kaertner Strasse and toward the underground at Stefansplatz. No doubt this feeling was triggered by the prospect of seeing Chaipura again: after all, the ceremony in Bangkok had been the scene of his greatest triumph, and that in a three-year period where, the initial months following the project’s inception notwithstanding, he, Dominik, had grown increasingly accustomed to the trappings of success.

The Austrian capital’s U1 line was, he had to admit, less glamorous than the Grand Palace – being with ordinary people is necessarily less glamorous than consorting with kings and queens – but it did nothing to dampen his spirits. As he alighted at Kaisermuehlen, he

felt safe in the knowledge that this latest endeavour, a mere question of sabotaging, rather than pioneering, new technology, would run just as smoothly as the last.



All the while, a different feeling altogether was beginning to take root inside him. It was linked, he felt sure, to this sudden sense of infallibility, the knowledge that under his stewardship a potentially tricky global venture had come to be viewed as an unqualified success. Or maybe it was something to do with the imposing silhouette of the Vienna International Centre. Strange, at any rate, that the home of the world's foremost peace-keeping organization should evoke in him the desire to upset the status quo. Nothing serious. Just a little trick to highlight the inefficacy of the United Nations in-house security system.

The entrance was more akin to airport security control, and, having passed through unscathed, he alighted at visitor registration. There he decided to pay for a guided tour. After his passport had been subjected to further scrutiny, he was handed a visitor ID complete with its own number and barcode, which accorded him access to the main building. But Dominik had no desire to join the chattering mass of tourists waiting on the other side. From experience, he knew that all he had to do to go unnoticed was to act as if he belonged. There were some four thousand civil servants from one hundred different countries working in the vast concrete expanses of UNO city, as the building was colloquially known, and in his suit, shirt, and tie, Dominik could have passed for any one of them.

He made his way purposefully over towards one of the security barriers, scanned his ID and walked straight out into a restricted access café. As expected, no-one paid him the slightest bit of attention; any employees in the vicinity were all too busy dealing with the various requests of the tourist group.

He ordered a cappuccino and waited. The flags of the 144 member states fluttered in the breeze as if to applaud his actions. Dominik felt no guilt. He knew that Adler would have behaved with exactly the same sense of entitlement.

He called Chaipura to let him know where he was. He realized that here on this terrace, it was international, rather than Austrian, law that applied. Chaipura was a small, scholarly man not given to outbursts of emotion or, indeed, words of reproach. However, when he saw Dominik, he looked decidedly flustered. Possibly he was concerned that the latter's presence would in some way reflect badly upon him. In truth, it had barely been registered.



“Dominik, it’s a bit of a surprise to see you out here.” Rare for him not to initiate proceedings with a more banal greeting. But then the eyes and mouth softened to form a wry smile as he regained his composure and offered a cordial hand. “It’s good to see you. There was something you wanted to discuss? Come on, let’s finish your guided tour.”

They began to make their way to an interpreter’s booth in one of the centre’s fourteen conference rooms. Chaipura had mentioned that there would be more privacy there. As they waited for the elevator that would take them to the sixth floor, however, a thin film of sweat began to form on Dominik’s forehead.

“Dominik, is everything OK?”

But there was no response, the object of Chaipura’s gentle concern having been momentarily transported back to an incident from childhood. Dominik had been an overweight child, not drastically so, but enough to incur the teasing of his fellow classmates. Their jibes had taken on a crueller aspect following an incident on a school trip. Dominik could no longer remember the destination, only that at the train station he had chosen to take the elevator instead of the three flights of steps that led to the station exit. Somehow, he had become

stuck there. There had been some sort of power failure and the shaft, unable to convey its only passenger to his destination, had been plunged into total darkness. Perhaps if he had had company, the outcome would have been very different. He would have had someone there to keep his spirits up, to tell him that these things sometimes happened, that there was nothing to be ashamed of. Unfortunately, the absence of such a calm head meant that after a mere half hour of confinement, with only a mounting sense of panic to accompany him, Dominik had lain crumpled on the floor, sobbing helplessly, for once not displaying even the slightest interest in the bag of sweets he knew was still lodged in his satchel. When he was finally found, some four hours later, his face was puffy and his eyes an almost bloody shade of red. Worse still, he had wet himself.

He never quite lived the shame down. The kids said he had taken the elevator because he was lazy – which was true – but somehow a rumour had spread that it was his excess weight which had prevented him from making good his exit before the darkness descended. Total nonsense, obviously, but reality is a slippery notion, and it wasn't long before he believed that part too. Against the charge that he had been unable to control his bladder, meanwhile, he had no defence. The children had been merciless, taunting him everywhere he went, mentioning it whenever he seemed to be on the verge of making a new friend. It had made the rest of his school life hell. A different person might have got over it, might have been able to save it under the filename “unpleasant childhood memories” and move on; Dominik had let it take over his life. In adulthood, he was ascetic, fastidious, and obsessed with being in control, but for all that, a man who had never quite forgotten the helpless little boy inside.

“Do you mind if we take the stairs?” Dominik said finally.

“No, of course not. I had forgotten how much you like to keep fit.”

Once they had ascended the six flights of stairs, the small talk interspersed at regular intervals with Chaipura's heavy breathing,

Dominik was surprised to discover that the conference room into which they emerged was almost completely brown. Brown floor; brown chairs and desks; brown gallery; brown walls; brown roof panneling. Perhaps monochrome was the secret to securing lasting international peace. The pair made for one of the interpreter's booths situated in the gallery above the main stage. It was shrouded in darkness. Chaipura didn't switch on the light.

"Funny, I can't seem to shake the feeling that we're engaging in something illegal."

"In the UN?" Dominik smiled. "I don't think you have anything to worry about."

"So, what is it I can do for you?"

"A favour. Those two kids who did the security for you at the Grand Palace. Something's come up. Can you get hold of them for me?"

"I can give you their details, sure. Is it for another event?"

"Something like that."

Chaipura started to reach for his wallet. "I think I might even have it here." A few moments passed while he sifted through the assortment of business cards that he kept on his person. "Bingo. They come as a team. Good luck finding this one though." He pointed to one of the names on the card. "He's more into partying than work. Could be anywhere."

For the second time during their short exchange, Dominik Brandt smiled, this time to himself. He didn't think BIRD would have any trouble locating his whereabouts.

After all, for Walter Mikesch's department, someone like Nils Karrat was only ever a click away.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### Nils

#### Spring – Sylt – Zurich

Sylt was a place of contrasts. Although measuring less than one hundred square kilometres, Germany's northernmost island had long been established as a major party destination for the country's rich and famous.

Back in the old days, the Hamburg media had decamped here in droves in the hope of gaining exclusive access to the private lives of the nation's pop stars, actors, and playboys. Recently, however, interest had shifted from celebrities to the island itself. The western shoreline was gradually being eroded, and it was said that a single stormy weekend could result in the loss of 100,000 cubic metres of sand. The damage, which was a result of global warming, could only be partially offset by a multimillion-dollar effort to curb the erosion by flushing vast quantities of sand onto the Frisian island shore. As if a group of children were desperately heaping dry sand on their castles in the face of the inevitable tide.

For Nils Karrat, all this was of secondary importance. The island's shrinking coastline was far less diverting than its endless supply of beautiful people. Nils had spent the day admiring them from his position on the beach and, as he made his way towards the Sansibar, his thoughts turned to the evening ahead. A couple of drinks and then on to Kampen? After all, what were holidays for? He had come to Sylt to let his hair down and was prepared to go wherever the night took him. In a place like this, there was always the chance he would meet someone...

He grinned. If, to avail of the corporate speak that had somehow

infiltrated even the *demi-monde* of “unofficial surveillance”, he were to list his *core competencies*, his technical expertise would come a distant second. Certainly, he was good with technology, but it was his way with people that made him stand out from the crowd. People – but women in particular. At just over five foot nine, he wasn’t the tallest, but he more than compensated for his lack of height with his good looks and charm. Wiry and slim, with longish, straight, dark-brown hair that he was wont to flick back when it fell in his eyes, he also had the good fortune of being both an excellent anecdotalist and a practised listener. What women really liked about Nils, however, was the fact that he obviously liked them too. There was no agenda with him. Being with women wasn’t a way of impressing the boys, comparing conquests across a table of empty beer bottles and shot glasses. He simply enjoyed their company, and more often than not this interest was repaid in kind.

He found a table and sat down. Before he had a chance to order, however, he was surprised to see a waiter approaching with a bottle of 2005 Roederer Cristal Brut and two glasses. It was one of the most expensive items on Sansibar’s wide-ranging drinks menu. Confused, Nils turned to the other guests on the outdoor terrace before looking over towards the single-storey, glass-panelled beach shack from where the champagne had emerged. Nothing there. How odd. He wasn’t *so* good with people that they’d donate an expensive bottle of Cristal without his having been introduced to them. He sighed, knowing that he’d have to send it back. He couldn’t afford a tenth of the price.

“Look, I’m sorry. I’m not quite sure what’s happened here but I think there’s been a mistake,” he said, thinking that, whatever happened, this little incident had to be a good sign.

“There has been no mistake, I assure you. Unless, that is, you are *not* Nils Karrat.” The smooth, authoritative voice hadn’t come from the waiter but from a figure that had, like the champagne, apparently appeared out of nowhere. He was about the same height as Nils, tanned with close-cropped, blond hair and sunglasses, and dressed like a member of the jet-set. “May I take a seat?”

Nils, feeling more and more intrigued, motioned for him to sit down.

“Thank you. I have a proposal for you. You like champagne, don’t you?”

Nils nodded, stifling a grin. It was like something out of a Bond film. He waited, curious to see how things would play out. For now, there was no harm in accepting a free glass of champagne. With a bit of luck, he thought to himself, this Bond would be more Roger Moore than Daniel Craig. Nils could cope with a casually raised eyebrow and a bad pun; he was less keen on the idea of being beaten up and left for dead.

Still, it was strange. Nils couldn’t shake the feeling that he had seen this man somewhere before. He tried to jog his memory. In the meantime, it wouldn’t do any harm to hear what he had to say.

“When we finish, I’m going to give you twenty-four hours to consider my offer. I won’t make it a second time.”

Nils spent the next few minutes listening in awe, as the man outlined not only the nature of his proposal but the rewards on offer. It soon became clear that this was about much more than a simple job. It was about developing new projects in emerging markets, taking responsibility for multimillion-dollar deals, and shaking hands with presidents and monarchs across the globe. About halfway through the monologue, with the aid of a business card that had been passed discreetly into his possession, Nils was sure of two things. First, he knew where the pair had come into contact; and second, it wasn’t going to take him twenty-four hours to consider what Dominik Brandt, Senior Management Consultant New Businesses, was proposing.

The deal was simple: Dominik’s company represented a client that was in the process of developing electric vehicles for the mass market. Although he omitted to say how, Dominik had learned that a potentially revolutionary piece of technology was to be tested at an EV event in central Europe. Naturally, the company was interested in finding out more. He realized what he was asking wasn’t exactly kosher, but if Nils accepted, his job would be to locate the technology



and submit a report of his findings. Top secret, of course. No-one was to know he was there.

As if to ward off any reservations that Nils might have, Dominik then emphasized that it was a competitive market and that this sort of thing went on the whole time. These days, there were even university courses on how to wage economic warfare. Dominik knew because he had attended one himself. It went without saying that if Nils was successful in locating the technology, there would be an even greater opportunity just around the corner. No-one at the headquarters in Zurich doubted Nils' ability to get the job done. They had been most impressed with his work in Thailand. The hidden camera was a wonderful innovation, so unobtrusive and effective. And the word was that he had designed it himself. How did it work again?

"The tie?" Nils asked. Although he knew that he had seen Dominik in Bangkok, he wasn't sure exactly what he had been doing there. Nor why it should make the slightest bit of difference what anyone in *Zurich* thought. Nils had landed the Thailand gig in Austria, not Switzerland. Still, he supposed the answers would reveal themselves in time. The way Dominik had spoken, as if socializing with the world's leading figures was the most natural thing in the world, had made quite an impression, and it was time to step up. "Well, it's quite simple, really. It's no different from any other camera, except that the lens needs to be small enough to fit inside a necktie. But the rest is pretty much the same. One-touch video recording, then USB to download the footage." He neglected to mention the fact that he had also developed a high-capacity battery pack that enabled the device to stay powered for three times as long on a single charge.

"I am impressed by your modesty, Mr Karrat. But let me assure you, if it really was that simple I would not have travelled from Hamburg especially to meet you. Nor would I be able to offer you such generous remuneration for your services." Brandt pulled out an expensive-looking pen from his breast pocket and scribbled a figure on the napkin before passing it across the table.

Nils gazed open-mouthed at the sum he had just been offered.

“There are certain conditions attached. First, if you agree to work for us you must carry out our instructions to the letter. To the *letter*, Mr Karrat. Any deviation from the role you have been assigned and you will forfeit your entire wage. That’s non-negotiable. Second, on no account can you mention who you are working for or what you are doing. We have taken the liberty of providing you with a cover story. The event organizer has kindly allowed you to join the expedition under the proviso that you write a video blog and publish it on your website. Use your own name by all means.”

“OK, anything else?”

“Yes: bring your friend. The one from Bangkok.”

With that, Dominik was gone. Nils sat back and reflected on what had just happened. Perhaps a more cautious individual would have been taken aback by Dominik’s approach. Nils, however, was flattered. Of all the people in the world, he thought to himself, Dominik had chosen him. He knew that if he could get this job right, then it wouldn’t be long before he too was travelling the world in Armani. Thailand, his last overseas trip, had been fun, but he had been forced to stay in a backpacker’s hostel, which had detracted from the glamour somewhat. This time it would be different. Anyone who could afford to spend that much on a bottle of champagne would make sure his employees were well looked-after. Besides, if Dominik was to be believed, this was only the beginning. Nils pictured himself in Venice, in Jakarta, in Marrakech: life would be nothing but one great big, all-expenses-paid party!

He steadied himself.

*If he could just get this job right.*

First things first: Hendrik. He lit a cigarette and took out his cell phone.

“Hey, dude. I wasn’t expecting to hear from you so soon.”

“Believe me; I’m just as surprised as you are.”

“So, what gives? I thought you’d be on your second bottle of champagne by now.”

Nils laughed. He was – though it was considerably cheaper than the first.

“Listen, I’ve just met this amazing guy.”

“Nils – I don’t know quite what to say...”

“Oh, give it a rest! You know what I mean. It was a business deal. I think I’ve just landed us a pretty sweet job.”

“OK, let’s hear it.”

Nils related the events of the last hour, while his friend listened in silence.

“So, where do I fit in?” Hendrik asked when Nils had finished.

“How do you mean?”

“I mean what’s my role in all this?”

“I guess he didn’t say.”

“He didn’t say? So basically some guy in a bar bought you an expensive bottle of champagne and offered you a stupid amount of money to do what? Spy on a bunch of people driving electric cars? Come on, Nils, doesn’t that seem a little strange to you? He didn’t even tell you who he worked for, let alone how he knows about me.”

“Oh relax, will you? He’s connected to Bangkok in some way, that’s how he knows about you. As for who he works for, it’s fucking undercover surveillance, Hendrik. He’s not going to come steaming in and tell us absolutely everything, is he? Though now I come to think of it, he did say that he was a management consultant, based in Switzerland.”

“OK. But you still haven’t answered my first question.”

“About your role? Well, he asked for you specifically so he must have something in mind. Come on, Hendrik. It’s a lot of money. Think of what we could do with that sort of capital. Plus, it’s only ten days. What’s the worst that can happen?”

A pause. “Should I make a list?”

Nils knew that was a good as a yes. In truth it had been a little unfair of him to allude to the business; the mere mention of money would have been enough. Hendrik didn’t have any, and the debts left by his parents were beginning to spiral out of control.

“One more thing,” Nils said. “How quickly can you get to Zurich?”

Arriving at Zurich central station two days later, Nils and Hendrik had been instructed to make their way to the Savoy, where they would be received by Dominik himself. As they entered the spacious lobby, however, they were dismayed to discover that they had been stood up. There was a large chandelier, a spiral gilt metal staircase, and a wonderful oak-panelled reception desk – but Dominik was nowhere to be seen. Although there were two members of staff behind the desk, neither of them accorded Nils and Hendrik so much as a second glance.

“How much did you have to drink the other night?”

“Not enough to dream all this up, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

Precisely what Nils didn’t need. After more or less assenting over the phone two days before, Hendrik had grown increasingly sceptical as the hour approached. On the way to the hotel he had even mentioned the proximity of Zurich’s main prison to the city’s financial district, as if the fact that a European capital should contain both a banking quarter and a penitentiary was somehow confirmation of the link between wealth and criminal activity. And now Dominik’s no-show would give him further ammunition. Nils looked across at his friend. There it was: the quizzically raised eyebrow; the *I told you so* glance that was usually the preserve of unhappily married couples. For someone who was quite content to spy on people for money, Hendrik couldn’t half come over all moralistic when the mood took him.

But then again, Nils thought to himself, that was probably what made them such a good team. Where he was friendly and outgoing, Hendrik could be shy and thoughtful, preferring to exercise caution against Nils’ natural sense of adventure. In life, too, the Fates had dealt them markedly different hands. For Nils it had been a straight flush: loving parents, liberal upbringing, and a fully funded scholarship at a prestigious technical college; now he had his own company and was beginning to make his way in the world. Hendrik, on the other hand, had been on a losing streak for as long as anyone could

remember. A few years back he had buried his parents and kid sister following a car accident; later he had lost a lot of money on the sale of the family home. There was no inheritance, only debts. He had needed a risk-taker like Nils to help him get back on his feet. Now the two were flatmates, business partners, and firm friends.



Just then, Dominik walked in and Nils breathed a sigh of relief. He was dressed slightly less extravagantly than on the previous occasion but still looked the part in a slim-fit suit and brown patent leather shoes.

“Gentleman, I’m terribly sorry to have kept you waiting. I had to drive my sister to the hospital at the last minute.”

Nils didn’t remember Dominik mentioning anything about his family on Sylt. Still, memory was unreliable – particularly after a couple of bottles of champagne.

To his surprise, it was Hendrik who spoke first.

“Nothing serious, I hope?”

“A nasty fall, but fortunately everything is fine now. Families need to look after each other, wouldn’t you agree, Mr Herder? I’m Dominik Brandt, by the way,” he offered his hand. “Mr Karrat, good to see you again. Now, I’ll leave you two to freshen up.” He gave Nils a scrap of paper containing an address. “See you at one o’clock on Bahnhofstrasse.”

“Did you see that?” Hendrik asked an hour later as they made

their way down Bahnhofstrasse and left towards the lake, where Brandt's company offices were situated. "The way he offered to take my second bag up himself."

Nils had also been a little surprised. This wasn't the Dominik Brandt he had met on Sylt, but rather a more caring, considerate version. No matter, he thought to himself: as long as Hendrik was back on side. When they reached the door, they found Dominik waiting this time.

"You never mentioned you worked for Adler Reilly," Nils said.

"That's because I don't. At least not directly."



As he led them through the spacious confines of the Adler Reilly compound, Dominik explained that the company he worked for was in fact a subsidiary of the consultancy firm, though it retained offices here in Zurich to save on costs. It was financially independent from its parent company and enjoyed all the flexibility of a stand-alone business, but remained more interested in developing projects than acquiring its own premises. "Recruitment is a priority too," Dominik added, with a smile.

From the open-plan offices, whose glass fronts overlooked the city below, it was through to a small private room with a table and two chairs facing a projector screen. No doubt it would soon feature the first of many PowerPoint slides. Nils wondered when the use of a PowerPoint presentation had become synonymous with quality. The idea was everywhere you looked. Business meetings, university lectures, even primary school classes. If technology was a means of protecting yourself from the harsh realities of the world, then the role of the PowerPoint presentation was to distract you from the shortcomings of its author. Somehow humans were no longer capable of directly engaging with anything other than technology; it had become the filter through which genuine experience was distilled. Nils sighed. Despite being a people-person, he knew that he was part of the problem.

No-one in his line of work relied on their wits any longer: instinct had been superseded by the presence of high resolution software.

In the far left-hand corner, diagonally behind the projector, was a desk with two contracts sitting together side-by-side. There was something strangely ceremonial about the layout. Add a vase of flowers and it would be as if Nils and Hendrik were two newlyweds signing the register upon exchanging their vows.

Nils wondered if there had been a marriage by PowerPoint yet, the order of events relayed in bullet points so that the public could share in the joy of the happy couple without ever having to look in their direction.

Dominik invited them to sit down and they were soon joined by a bearded, dark-haired man in his thirties.

“Marc Kudling is our technical expert,” Dominik said. “He will provide Mr Karrat with support in Zurich while Mr Herder is out in the field. First, though, I wanted to say a few words about our motivation.”

Nils was momentarily taken aback. He had to stay in Zurich while Hendrik was off gallivanting around central Europe? Not that Hendrik would be doing much of that. Still, maybe that was the point. Objectively seen, he was a much safer pair of hands than Nils: a far more reliable proposition than a party boy whose motto was *work hard, play harder*. It seemed unlikely that Brandt was unaware of Nils’ fondness for a late night or two. Maybe he felt he could keep a closer eye on him in Zurich.

“So far we have been very careful not to divulge too much information.” Dominik had the floor again, and Nils dismissed all other thoughts from his mind. “This is partly because we don’t want people exchanging idle gossip. And partly because there are still a number of things we don’t know ourselves. I wonder if either of you have heard of super-credits?”

“They’re an incentive designed to encourage car manufacturers to supply ultra-low carbon vehicles.”

“Very good, Mr Herder. As matters stand, certain EU measures

dictate that no new passenger car should have CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of greater than 130 grams per kilometre. The amount had originally been set to fall further by 2020, to 95 grams per kilometre. Due to Germany's intervention this has been pushed out by one year. But these figures are just an average. According to current legislation, super-credits allow an EV with emissions of less than 50 grams per kilometre to be counted as two and a half vehicles, enabling the manufacturer to emit the equivalent extra amount of CO<sub>2</sub> from the rest of their fleet. The regulation can be applied to a maximum of 20,000 vehicles in total per manufacturer. What this means in practice is that two EVs with theoretical CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 50 grams per kilometre allow a car manufacturer to sell *five* gas-guzzlers with emissions of 200 grams per kilometre and still come in under the target average of 130 grams per kilometre."

Nils was beginning to wish that Dominik had used a PowerPoint after all.

"Would you believe that in spite of this rather generous regulation, certain factions of the automobile industry are lobbying for delays in the reduction of the target average!"

"Unbelievable," Hendrik was shaking his head.

"So where do we fit in?" Dominik continued. "Well, as I have already intimated to Mr Karrat, we represent a client developing electric vehicles for the mass market. Some weeks ago, our client, a modest outlet with a genuine interest in promoting EVs in order to lower CO<sub>2</sub> levels, came to me in some despair. There had been whispers at a trade show that this year's WAVE trophy was to serve as the testing ground for a game-changing new technology. Needless to say, no-one knows who's behind it. It could be a large company, or a small company working for a large company. It might even be a subsidiary that enjoys financial independence from its parent company, rather like we do from Adler Reilly.

"The point is, anything's possible. If I were a betting man, however, I'd say there's a major player involved somewhere. The rumour goes that the technology is not being developed out of any environmental



concern, but rather as a kind of feasibility study. Should it be successful, whoever is behind it will make sure the design is kept under lock and key until such time as it makes financial sense to unveil it. Now, to outsiders, this might all seem like a step in the right direction.

“But the reality is that what’s rumoured to be happening at WAVE could set the electric vehicle industry back years. Our client is absolutely convinced that this technology is being developed purely out of the manufacturer’s desire to exploit existing EU legislation and use EVs as a means of expanding their production of gas-guzzlers. I hardly need point out that such a manoeuvre would constitute a very real threat to the enduring welfare of our planet.”

Nils was surprised by the emotion in Brandt’s voice. The man he had met on Sylt was a far more controlled figure.

“Now,” he continued, “whether that’s all true or not, I cannot say. Nevertheless, I feel a responsibility to my client to confirm at least that this technology exists. That’s where you two come in. Only when we know what we’re dealing with, can we begin to take appropriate action. Your brief is to find this technology and await further instruction.”

Dominik’s final sentences were accompanied by the sound of Hendrik making to rise from his chair. Nils put his head in his hands. Shit. All that money; all that time spent persuading him. Only for him to...

But wait, he was heading towards the desk. Nils could hardly believe what he was seeing. It was more than just out of character; it was absolutely unheard of. Without even looking at the conditions set down within, Hendrik turned to the last page of the contract and signed his name.

He hadn’t even bothered to wait for the technical expert.

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## The Authors

### **Niall MacRoslin**



Niall MacRoslin was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. Upon finishing school, he swapped the grey skies of Scotland's capital to read modern languages at Trinity College, Dublin. Somewhere in the midst of his Irish sojourn, Niall developed a love of all things German and decamped to Lake Constance for a year.

Since his return from Baden Württemberg, Niall has worked as a teacher, book reviewer and proof-reader. He has also successfully completed an MSc in Translation Studies, supporting himself in the meantime by taking jobs as a waiter, barman and – briefly – charity shop manager. All of which he believes stands him in good stead for his new career as fiction writer.

He currently lives in London, where the grey skies remind him of home.

### **Alice N. York**

Alice N. York was born and raised near Munich, Germany. Following her profound hunger for all things technical, she studied industrial and production engineering, and took on the challenge of playing the game.

Before starting her second career as a writer she travelled the world and worked in several sales and marketing positions in technological industries.



Now she has remembered her roots and is following her heart. It still tells her: Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Alice currently lives just outside of Munich near the Alps.

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