

ILIYA TROYANOV

TWO TRACKS

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A journey into the labyrinth of power

Investigative journalist Iliya is contacted by two whistleblowers from the US and Russian intelligence services within a few minutes of each other.

Scoop or trap? He and his American colleague Boris play along and become involved in a two-track investigation that leads them to Hong Kong, Vienna, New York and Moscow.

The leaked documents lay bare an abyss of corruption, deceit and collusion between criminal oligarchs and the mafia, implicating the American and Russian heads of state. How much is to be believed? Who wins if lies are propagated? Are the two reporters merely pawns in the hands of the intelligence services?

The last to join their team is Emi, a journalist who has made a documentary film about sexual abuse of women and children. Is it merely a coincidence that some of the perpetrators' names crop up in the leaked intelligence documents?

With his unique literary brilliance, Iliya Troyanov juggles fact and fiction in this novel and highlights, as if in passing, how fake news has turned us into accomplices of those in power.

Iliya Troyanov was born in Sofia (Bulgaria) in 1965 and fled to Germany with his family in 1971 via Yugoslavia and Italy. Having spent periods of time in Kenya, Paris, Munich, Mumbai and Cape Town, he now lives in Vienna. His novels and travel books have enjoyed critical acclaim and commercial success and won numerous prizes. His most recent books with S. Fischer are his epic novel *Power and Resistance*, his bestselling non-fiction account *My Olympiad*, and *Fleeing, And Then?*, part memoir, part political essay.

Translated by Simon Pare

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Prologue

I'll call him Boris. That isn't particularly imaginative of me, but the point is to keep someone alive, not to be original. We only met three weeks ago, but now we spend every waking minute together, all day and half the night, in a foam-padded room to shield us from surveillance – by whom we have no idea. There are more than enough suspects. This is a safe haven, the only one we have. We discuss what we need to inside these four walls. We go out to order pizza and brush our teeth then we carry on reading.

Documents. How I hate that word. People used to say “papers”, “confidential papers”. It sounds elegant and no longer applies: we haven't printed out a single document. We're reading them on several laptops. “Document” sounds like an antiquated curse, the clatter of the inkjet printers of yesteryear. Deliberate, menacing. It's hard to say what kind of documents we're reading (trawling through?). Official writs? Yes, they are written, and most of them come from offices (you don't get more official than that). And yet they look unreal in their shadowy existence as a rank and file of files, in no apparent order. Generally, documents are “something written, inscribed, etc. which serves to instruct or enlighten”. Sure, they can instruct us of our errors and yes, they light up our faces (even in the artificial light of this room), but beyond that there is a real risk of a blackout between the lines. Documents serve as evidence, so they say. That may be correct, but we haven't yet found out what they are evidence *of*. Unequivocal evidence.

Read for any long stretch of time and after a point you start to overlook essential information. Only your unconscious (an unreliable witness) still takes it in. Which is why we have to mark the relevant passages, “highlight” them, as Boris puts it. He pronounces “highlight” like “high life”. He's pale and has spent as much time in front of computers as I've spent on dusty roads. His relationship with documents is different; there's something almost erotic about it. We read in English, we read in Russian, but we talk mainly in English, unless Boris calls something out in his mother tongue, in which case I

answer in Russian. He finds my accent funny. We make a good team. He knows about finances, or to be more precise, about corruption and embezzlement, money laundering and tax havens. He's a specialist on the creative facets of greed. I, on the other hand, have focused on the corrosive effects of power. For me, politics is structural violence that needs to be exposed. Boris is more one for looking through documents; I'd rather do interviews. For weeks the two of us in our space capsule have been revolving around questions that could send tremors around the world. Who controls whom? Who's manipulating whom? Who will prevail in this mainly invisible war?

We're making progress.

We're. Getting. Nowhere.

From every hill we scale we spy higher peaks, their slopes rugged and steep with no paths to the top.

When we started this work (slog?), we agreed to call the American president "Leaning Tower" and the Russian president "Mikhail Ivanovich". These code names help us to keep our distance and steel ourselves against their overbearing media presence. Whatever they might be called in our report, the names refer to the two men who stare out at us every day from the TV news with the eyes of dead fish. Superficially, they do not resemble each other in the slightest (how misleading first impressions can be). They're in the process of changing the world, to the detriment of mankind. That's what we want to pin down with proof, however long it might take.

It was Leaning Tower and Mikhail Ivanovich who – unwittingly, but not accidentally – brought Boris and me together. Three weeks ago. Out of the flu (not a typo).

At an airport . . .

Hong Kong

At 20:16 on 12 October 2018 I received an email. The signature consisted of a consonant followed by an exclamation mark, and the sender's identity was concealed by a long series of numbers. The message (in English) went:

“Science acquires knowledge faster than society acquires wisdom. If you want to do something about that, answer with *Isa* in the subject line.”

I was at Frankfurt airport, in a (“authentic Italian”) restaurant offering a view of planes through wet windows. Unsure of what to make of this email, I turned back to my newspaper. The day had flown by at the book fair in conversations lasting as long as it took to smoke a cigarette. Everyone had enquired about my next project, whether I had a new scoop. I had answered evasively.

Ten minutes later a second message came in.

“Morals shouldn’t stop you doing the right thing. If you would like to receive trustworthy information for that purpose, then answer with *Así* in the subject line.”

Again the sender was a long list of figures and their identity was hidden behind a single letter, a vowel this time, followed by a question mark. The text was in Russian.

It’s hard to think properly while sitting down and even harder when you’re eating. I paid as soon as possible and searched for possible explanations for the two emails between Gate Z15 and Gate Z25. Was it a prank? A savvy sales strategy? Phishing? A sophisticated marketing campaign? A trap? Or was it a genuine contact by a whistleblower? It wouldn’t be the first time – but two within a matter of minutes? Were both messages from the same whistleblower? (The styles were *very* similar.) But then why play around with languages? Was this unknown person trying to test me in some way I couldn’t figure out? My flight was called. Even after reading through the messages several times, all that occurred to me were more questions. When the instruction came to put all mobiles on flight mode (or turn them off, but who does that nowadays?) I typed *Isa* and *Así* into the subject lines and pressed Send.

A response that commits me to nothing, I thought. What risks did I run?

How wrong I was.

* * *

The Wi-Fi connection on flights works about as well as my old vacuum cleaner does, which is to say sporadically. I could access my emails only after we

landed at Hong Kong's Chep Lap Kok airport. I only looked at my inbox again when I was sitting bleary-eyed – long-haul flights in Economy are exercises in deprivation for tall people and former volleyball players – on the Airport Express. The journey to Central took twenty-four minutes, barely time to study the content of two further mails, one of which was apparently from a member of the FBI and the other allegedly from a *Sluzhba vneshney razvedki* agent. Each had a single attached file. The first was marked “Secret”, the second “секретен”. I skim-read the two texts between silent passengers who kept themselves to themselves. Bureaucratic language, pedantic contents. The documents made little sense out of context; there was nothing sensational about them. My sole conclusion was that they seemed authentic.

I made my way on foot, with my light carry-on rucksack on my back, towards Wan Chai, winding my way through bumper-to-bumper cars, and sat down on a bench between two lanes of traffic as if I were waiting for the next (double-decker) tram. Congestion all around me, disquiet inside me. The email in English promised me evidence for machinations I'd often described in my articles, machinations that could be summed up in a single sentence: the mafia isn't a part of the state; the state is part of the mafia. The Russian email promised me information about ties between the American administration and foreign interests. The message concluded with the words: “Until now you have been speculating. Now we want to help you achieve clarity.” A weighty “we”; a grand claim. A secret agent offering clarity? It was absurd enough to pique my curiosity. I had only to answer “Я хочу” and the documents would be delivered to me via secure channel.

How could I have refused?

Having reached my cheap lodgings (the Check Inn, an upmarket youth hostel that was luxurious by international standards), I took a long, cold shower. It didn't stop me sweating though. The English email invited me to go to Pacific Place that same Saturday evening at 6.30 and to “stroll about at your leisure”. An irritating expression. Pacific Place was a shopping mall, I learned at reception. Ultramodern, extremely fashionable, mega expensive, not far away. I sauntered around the curving floors of a glass temple, bought myself a cornet of sesame ice cream in the Food Hall, looked at displays (and the faces peering over my shoulder), pretended to study the menu of a restaurant with a

young woman perching on a high chair outside the entrance. I took the escalator for the umpteenth time.

A woman's voice behind me said, "Don't turn round. Go down a floor." I did as she ordered. The voice, an alto, said calmly, "There is a memory card in your jacket pocket. Buy a laptop. Do not under any circumstances connect it to the internet. Read the documents. If you are interested in a second meeting, drink an orange juice at your hotel tomorrow morning at eight."

I turned left, went round a makeshift wall, took the down escalator and looked around. Behind me were a Chinese mother and her beautiful daughter, both elegantly dressed. The daughter was radiating a faint whiff of depravity. They both ignored my prying glances.

Only once I was on the New World First ferry pattering across the bay to Kowloon did I reach into my jacket pocket. Nothing! I rushed to the toilet to turn out my pockets. A microSD card fell to the floor, so small it would have fitted under my tongue. Outside on deck, as I stared through steamed-up glasses at the receding financial towers, I remembered why I had come to Hong Kong – to do research for a report on China's surveillance methods. Smart lampposts had very recently been erected to keep an eye on public spaces (I'd been tipped off by an Amnesty International staff member). Though I had been keeping abreast of the topic for some time, I'd only made up my mind after reading that a game called "Find the Spy" had been introduced into Chinese state schools.

In a shop barely larger than a cubbyhole I bought, without any fuss, as one might buy a biro or a packet of condoms, a pre-installed Huawei laptop and an adaptor for the card. Where is a good place to read secret documents in an unfamiliar city? I didn't feel like going back to my hostel (I belatedly realized that the voice on the escalator had not asked for my hotel address). A museum seemed too exposed, a park too uncomfortable. I wandered aimlessly from one set of traffic lights to the next, a burning memory card in my pocket, a blameless laptop in my rucksack. I ducked into a dim-sum restaurant in a side street on a hunch and sat down at a table in the back right-hand corner. The décor was unobtrusive: diners sat elbow to elbow at rows of wobbly, close-

together tables stretching from one wall to the other. It was quiet, eerily quiet for Hong Kong. I booted up the computer and, picking up a pencil, looked at the menu. One cross, a second cross and a third. I handed over my order and pushed the memory stick into the USB dock. My food came immediately: dim sum filled with prawns and chives, fried rice rolls, sweet and sour pork balls. All the documents were classified as “TOP SECRET/NOFORN”, meaning “no foreign nationals”. People like me. I began reading to a background noise of soft slurping, as soothing as the sound of a mop swishing across a dirty floor.

Despite my many years’ experience as a journalist, it goes against the grain for me to read texts I’m not meant to see. Not because of any moral scruples. I feel absolutely justified in the context of data mining by the big tech firms and privacy invasion by the apparatus of the state, but I still feel like an intruder. I don’t feel guilt, just reluctance. A vault is a suffocating place. Venture into this kind of bureaucratic labyrinth and you can feel death’s claws snatching at you.

The slurping at the next table had ceased, and I made out a voice further away laughing at its own jokes.

It took several minutes to scroll through the list of files, taking the occasional sample. Some of the documents were old and had been scanned long after their publication. Other more recent ones had been written on a computer. Not a single one was annotated. I asked for some jasmine tea. Intercept logs. Tax declarations. In-house assessments. Reports from informants. Research by analysts. Hearings behind closed doors. Media coverage even. I opened file after file, sipped my tea, skimmed the contents and ordered rice pudding from the hard-pressed waitress. The more documents I opened, the more fleetingly I perused each one. A haystack of information and I was like Buridan’s ass, paralysed by too many options. I opened another file at random, paused, skipped from one heading to the next and then went back to the beginning to read the whole thing more attentively from the date and file number through to the signature that our strange civilization regards as guaranteeing the validity of any statement.

(I have wrestled for ages with the dilemma of whether to print out the documents, complete with bureaucratic clichés and paperwork. I decided against it. One day they’ll all be available online and then anyone who is

sceptical about my representation of the facts will be able to make sense of them. Nobody will have enough time.)

Here's a first potted version:

Five people including three executives of the Taj Mahal Casino in Atlantic City (CEO Steve Hyde, 43; Chairman Mark Etess, 38; Executive VP Jonathan Benanav, 33) died on 10 October 1989 when their helicopter crashed into a pine forest near Forked River, N.J. at 13:40 hours. Just before the accident, the main rotor had snapped off, followed by the tail rotor. The pilot's last radio contact was with McGuire Air Force Base at 13:32. The five men had missed their scheduled flight and chartered a different helicopter at short notice – an Italian-built Agusta rather than the Sikorsky they had booked.

These managers had taken part in a meeting at the Plaza Hotel in New York City to announce the welterweight world title bout between Héctor Camacho and Vinny Pazienza in Atlantic City on 3 February 1990. A clash of bigmouths. “Macho” Camacho, the king of the feint and the left hook, was well on his way to becoming a legend. Good taste snuck out of the room when he walked in. He would appear draped in jewellery in a long sequin-covered open robe and, around his neck, a sable collar that looked as if the animal had been combed and blow-dried before being skinned. He spoke in a stream of consciousness punctuated only by uppercuts: “If silence is golden, why aren't all deaf-mutes rich?” He took chunks out of his opponent's composure while Mr Hyde and Mr Etess casually left him to run his mouth. They were used to his extravagant performances; they had already announced the fights between Mike Tyson and Tyrell Biggs (“If I don't kill him, it don't count”), Larry “The Easton Assassin” Holmes, Michael “Fear was knocking at my door big time” Spinks and Carl “The Truth” Williams.

After the accident there had been an FBI investigation on the basis of an informant's report that Steve Hyde, a very religious Mormon, had been at loggerheads with his employers and had repeatedly – and unsuccessfully – demanded more stringent provisions to comply with the Bank Secrecy Acts (BSA). Furthermore, the FBI had received an anonymous tipoff – a xerox of a postcard (scanned here) with a photo of a helicopter on one side, and on the other side, in typewriter font:

“Sikorsky. Russian-made. Never crashes!”

An investigation was opened against persons unknown on suspicion of murder. I struggled with the technical aspects of the report. The findings were that although sabotage was relatively unlikely, although it could not be categorically ruled out. Everything pointed to a fatigue crack in the metal rotor.

The Taj Mahal Casino's owner claimed that he had almost flown with the others ("there was a 50/50 chance"), but the final report contradicted this assertion. He had never had any intention of taking the crashed helicopter and had planned instead to derive a public relations advantage from the accident. According to one of his co-workers, he had "given a phone interview only hours after the tragedy, briefly muting the line to whisper to those present that 'You're going to hate me, but I can't pass up this opportunity before reconnecting the journalist with the words: 'You know what? I was actually supposed to be on board that damn chopper myself.' "

The postcard's sender couldn't be traced, nor could the contents be explained beyond reasonable doubt.

In the years that followed, the Taj Mahal became a popular playground for the East Coast Russian mob and was visited by hordes of mafia bosses in Ferraris and Rolls Royces, high rollers who received comps worth up to \$100,000 per person including fine dining, champagne, cigars and all kinds of entertainment. Helicopter flights too (from a company called Executive Helicopter owned by Joseph Weichselbaum), mostly in a Sikorsky. They "enjoyed every privilege" as they laid \$100 bills on numbers and colours, not always to bet, sometimes simply to launder money.

The U.S. Treasury accused the Taj Mahal Casino of flouting anti-money-laundering laws 106 times in the first 18 months after it opened in 1990, among other things by not registering all daily takings of over \$100,000 with the authorities as prescribed. As recently as 2015, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) imposed a \$10 million fine on the casino for breaches of the Bank Secrecy Act.

Some of the names in the files couldn't be deciphered because they had been blacked out (clearly even leaks can be redacted). The black bars were like a blindfold on me.

I took a few deep breaths. The artificial light in the restaurant struck me as more garish than before. The combined details would have been no more than a footnote in the history of organized crime had it not been for the fact that the employer of the five casualties was none other than Leaning Tower, the current President of the United States and former owner of the Taj Mahal Casino, a favoured rendezvous of boxers and choppers, the Russian mafia and gamblers. In Atlantic City, where I myself had sat only a few years back, surrounded by jingling temptations, two machines away from a woman whose one-armed bandit lit up noisily and suddenly turned all philanthropic. Jackpot! The woman leaped to her feet and performed a pirouette to a cancan tune amid a throng of other players. The woman was screaming as if she were doing a bungee jump, a photographer captured the moment of ecstasy, and two casino staff paid out \$28,000 to high fives all round. The euphoria gradually dissipated as the onlookers, masking their envy behind over-the-top congratulations, walked away. The woman sat down at the same machine and carried on playing beside a friend of hers who was busy slamming buttons in the same silent frenzy.

Nothing is more fleeting than hard-fought happiness.

The young waitress made it clear to me that I should pay and then leave. The proverbial Asian politeness has long since seeped away in China.

I read through the night in my hotel room, one document after the other. My initial suspicions were confirmed: these documents were a treasure trove of unrelated items, a mass of disparate details. I would have to connect the scattered dots, because revelations without any coherent narrative provoke only blank incomprehension.

Sisyphus came to mind.

Around five o'clock in the morning I fell into an unsettled sleep. Jetlag, hours staring at a screen and my inner turmoil had combined to create a cocktail of agitated exhaustion.

At eight I was sitting by the glass wall of the hotel restaurant, demonstratively sipping a large glass of orange juice.

* * *

(pp. 56 – 63) Translated by Iliya and Alexander Troyanov

New York

Eureka!

On the eleventh night, with sore eyes, a twinge in my left shoulder and a nervous twitch in my right leg, I came across an astonishing document. I read it several times, printed it out and placed it in my large edition of „War and Peace“ as a contemporary Dramatis personae. In a separate file I noted further relevant facts under the respective names. The detailed protocols (which would take up too much space at this juncture) prove that the FBI had been bugging various apartments in this building since 1984.

Criminal and suspected criminal owners/tenants of 725 5th Ave, New York, NY 10022-2582

Tevfik Arif (formerly Arifow)

Owner of the Bayrock Group, offices on the 24th floor. Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Arif spent seventeen years working for the USSR Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which under the direction of KGB officers carried out systematic industrial espionage against the West. Moved to Turkey in the early 1990s, where he developed hotel projects. Moved his business to the USA in 2001, founded the Bayrock Group. Initially its only employee. Later hired Felix Sater as managing director.

(Friend and business partner of Leaning Tower: Leaning Tower: „Arif brought the people from Moscow up to me ... It was like the an assembling line“).

Bayrock Group LLC

A property development company, occupied offices on the 24th floor from 2002 to 2008. Opaque corporate structure. In 2007, transferred future revenues from the SoHo Hotel and other projects to FL Group, an Icelandic hedge fund based in the British Virgin Islands, which managed the capital of Russian oligarchs and was controlled by Moscow, in exchange for an upfront payment of \$50 million. Bayrock was used for money laundering and tax fraud, according to several informants.

(The Bayrock Group entered into license agreements with Leaning Tower, for the SoHo high-rise for example, a joint venture between Bayrock and the Sapir organization, in which it has a 25 percent stake. Presumably Bayrock supplied information about investments by Russian oligarchs to Moscow, an important control instrument for Mikhail Ivanovich).

Chuck Blazer

FIFA official, long-standing member of the Executive Committee. Pleaded guilty to accepting bribes, embezzlement and tax evasion. Rented on the 49th floor: \$18,000 per month for his apartment, \$6,000 per month for a second apartment for his cats. Blazer became friends with the Russian president and voted for Russia to host the 2018 World Cup.

(The 2018 FIFA World Cup and the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi, both orgies of corruption, cannot be covered in this report).

David Bogatin

Bought five apartments on the 53rd floor for \$6 million in 1984, just a few years after arriving in the USA. Intention of the purchase: money laundering for the Russian Mafia, according to documents of the New

York Public Prosecutor's Office, Second Circuit. Sold the apartments to members of the Colombo family (*one of the five families of the American Cosa Nostra*). Sentenced in 1992 for tax evasion. Like his brother Jacob, high-ranking member of the Russian Mafia, close associate of boss Semyon Mogilevich, CEO of YBM Magnex International, a company founded by Mogilevich in Pennsylvania in 1995, which committed stock fraud worth 150 million dollars on the Toronto Stock Exchange.

(Note the early timing of the apartment purchase. Was this a test balloon?)

Oleg Boyko

Russian oligarch. From 1990-1995 owner of the National Credit Bank, since 1994 member of the Supervisory Board of Sberbank. Personal banker to former Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Founder and Chairman of Finstar Financial Group. Major investor in various casinos, later in the lottery business in Russia and Ukraine. Acquired apartment 63A-B in 1994.

(In cash, directly from Leaning Tower, at a time when he was in urgent need of money).

Mel Cooper

Sentenced in 1985 to ten years imprisonment on charges of loan sharking, extortion and organized crime together with the Gambino mobsters Michael Franzese and Carlo Vaccarezza. Acquired the first of two apartments on the 45th floor in 1995. Repeated complaints from neighbors to the property management company about his dogs Cookie and Cookie Jr, who „bark hysterically when someone walks down the corridor“, led to a court case in 2007. Sold both units in 2013.

(A 35-year-old woman from Long Island, one day found out that Mr Cooper had a criminal record whereupon she left him. He then proceeded to sue her for \$392,000, the combined value of all the gifts he had bought for her over the five years of their relationship, arguing that he had made these “investments” in expectation of an impending wedding – which the lady, a Russian blonde, strenuously denied: there had never been a wedding announcement, nor a wedding date. Whether there had been a marriage proposal could not be clarified in court).

Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier

President of Haiti from 1971 to 1986. Bought a 54th floor apartment for \$1.6 million in 1983 through Lasa Trade and Finance, registered in Panama.

(Playboy and kleptocrat, with annual revenues of over \$100 million. As Mikhail Ivanovich likes to say: "Better to own a country than a company")

Ernie Garcia

Acquired apartments on 48th and 49th floor. Director of the used-car company DriveTime. Pleaded guilty in 1990 to bank fraud in connection with the collapse of Charles Keating's Savings and Loans *(large savings bank, huge scandal involving a number of prominent politicians)*.

Sentenced to a suspended sentence.

George Gijeli

Immigrant from Albania. Convicted of attempting to bribe a public official with \$100,000 in order to free a fellow countryman from prison. Has been living on the 29th floor since 1991, employed as building

superintendent. Introduced a kickback program in which he traded jobs for payments.

(This accusation is contained in a 2004 complaint by the Service Employees International Union. A worker named Ioan Ghilduta testified in court that he was forced to pay Gijeli 1000 US dollars and a gold cross in exchange for a job in the building. „Sure, all the guys paid that. It was common practice if you wanted a job.“)

Verina Hixon

Acquired three duplex apartments on the 64th and 65th floors for \$10 million in 1984. The money came in part from union boss John Cody, with whom she was friendly (whether intimate or not has not been ascertained). The Teamsters Local 282, which he managed, was closely associated with members of the Cosa Nostra. From 1976 to 1984, John Cody was an associate of the Gambino mob, paying \$200,000 annually to Carlo Gambino (see attached report for the Governor of the State, 1989). Cody was convicted of extortion of protection money. Approached an FBI informant to try and have his successor at Local 282 Robert Sasso murdered, and was subsequently convicted of attempted murder. Hixon was evicted from the building in 1989 for outstanding payments of \$300,000. She filed for bankruptcy protection and the apartments were put on sale.

(When the mysterious Hixon was asked in court what she does for a living, she replied, „That's a good question.“ When asked what she did for Cody, she answered „I lit up his life“. In 1999 she moved into an apartment at 12-14 East 64th Street and became friends with her neighbor Ivana T.: two girls from Central Europe, one from Zlín, the other from the Vorarlberg village of Alberschwende).

Steven Hoffenberg

Chairman of the financial services company Towers Investors. Moved into a suite on the 15th floor in 1993. Pleaded guilty in 1995 of defrauding investors of a total of \$475 million, according to the SEC „one of the largest pyramid schemes in history“. Sentenced in 1997 to 20 years in prison, a \$1 million fine and restitution of all debts. Released in October 2013, according to the Bureau of Prisons.

(A pious example of successful rehabilitation, Hoffenberg emerged from obscurity in the election year 2016 as a born-again Christian, founded the Political Action Committee „Get Our Jobs Back“ to support Leaning Tower's presidential candidacy and promised a campaign contribution of \$50 million, which he never paid. In an interview he praised the tolerance of his former landlord: „He is very objective, he doesn't care what the color of your skin is, or what race you are, or if you are being charged with something, he only cares whether you can pay“).

Robert J. Hopkins

Managed one of the largest illegal gambling operations in New York, with a weekly turnover of approximately \$500,000. Ran his Operations in over 100 stores across Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. Close contacts to the Lucchese Clan (*one of the five Cosa Nostra families in New York*). Acquired his maisonette apartment on the 59th floor as early as 1981, two years before the building opened. Made a cash deposit (*allegedly \$200,000 dropped from his briefcase onto the conference table*). Was indicted for ordering a murder in 1986. The victim was a member of a rival gambling ring. After pleading guilty to a lesser charge, the murder charge was dropped.

Vyacheslav Ivankov

Nicknamed „Yaponchik“, the Japanese, a ruthless assassin. Head of one of the most powerful clans in the Russian mafia. Shortly after he bribed his way out of a Siberian prison camp in February 1991 - he had been convicted of extortion and drug trafficking - he was unleashed on the Chechen mafia in Moscow, causing such a bloodbath that Yaponchik became a liability, which is why he was sent to the USA in 1992. Entry with a forged business visa. Immediately after his arrival, he received a suitcase containing \$1.5 million in cash from an unknown person to set up a criminal enterprise with a billion-dollar turnover out of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Recruited two Afganzy combat brigades (*veterans of special units from the time of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan*). For years on our most wanted list. Went into hiding until he was spotted at the Taj Mahal Casino in Atlantic City. His trail led to a luxury apartment at 725 5th Ave, where he was arrested. Sentenced to nine and a half years in prison for extortion.

(The story ends, as so often, at the cemetery, on a Tuesday in the autumn of 2009, when about a thousand people wearing black leather jackets, sunglasses and gold chains paid their last respects to the mafia boss, with wreath ribbons in gold, a sea of flowers of greetings from all the "little brothers" between Kaliningrad and Magadan, at section No. 50 of the Wagankovo cemetery in Moscow, where he was buried next to his mother and not far from the singer Vladimir Vysotsky. He owed his nickname to the "hero from Odessa" Misha Yaponchik, who according to Isaak Babel carried „autumn in his soul“ and about whom more songs were written than about any other gangster in the world).

George Guido Lombardi

Owner of a maisonette on the 62/63rd floor (the building only has 58 floors). Real estate investor and alleged Italian count. Prominent supporter of the Lega Nord. Secretary of the Friends of Russia. Founder of the People's Front for the Liberation of Europe, a network supporting extreme right-wing movements.

(His wife, who has known Leaning Tower far longer than her husband, was married to a millionaire in her first marriage. When he died, she inherited 300 million US dollars. However, at an inopportune time, in the middle of the Palm Beach ball season. Since the sixty-year-old "didn't want to miss any of the parties", she had the deceased put on ice for the next forty days to organize a lavish celebration three days after his death, at which Beluga caviar and Dom Pérignon were served and fancy explanations for the absence of the landlord were dished up)

Paul Manafort

Lobbyist for foreign governments. Bought apartment 43G in 2006 for \$3.675 million, mortgaged for \$3 million - current market price \$2.7 million - shortly after he began working for aluminum oligarch Oleg Deripaska and received an initial payment of \$10 million from him. Privately indebted to the tune of \$17 million.

(Having overseen the campaign of a pro-Russian candidate in Ukraine, he managed the campaign of a pro-Russian candidate in the USA).

José Maria Marin

Former FIFA official from Brazil. Under house arrest. Only leaves his apartment to go to church.

(Sentenced to four years in prison for bribery.)

Susetta Mion

Italian. Lives on the 32nd floor. Accused by her niece of stealing \$15 million in cash, jewelry and furs from her own family. After being convicted of theft by an Italian court, she fled to New York. Her relatives accused her of having bought the \$2.3 million apartment with the proceeds of the theft, that included a 17th century oil painting, an Hermès armchair, a Yamaha baby grand piano and pear-shaped diamond earrings. She paid \$3.2 million for two more apartments.

(From her mother's last letter: „Give me back my fur coats that you stole from my closet. Put all my jewelry back in my safe, which you emptied. Hang all my pictures that you took from me back onto my living room walls.“ Susetta Mion is friends with Leaning Tower’s daughter.)

Hillel "Helly" Nahmad

Art dealer of Lebanese descent, owner of a New York gallery. Bought the entire 51st floor for \$18.4 million. Head of the Nahmad-Trincher gambling ring, for the purpose of laundering money in excess of \$100 million. After two years of surveillance, apartment 63A was raided in April 2013, which led to the arrest of 30 suspects. Sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of \$6.5 million. Nahmad spent five months in prison. *(According to the Panama Papers, Nahmad's father David was the owner of a Modigliani painting which, according to the legitimate Jewish heirs, was stolen from a Parisian gallery during the Nazi occupation.)*

Roberto Polo

Financier of Cuban origin. Nickname: The Cuban Gatsby. Bought six apartments in 1983 on behalf of offshore shell companies. Organized lavish charity balls. Arrested for embezzlement in Italy in 1988. A New York District Court issued a default judgment that he owed thirteen of his

clients more than \$120 million. His paintings were confiscated, his assets sold. Re-arrested in the USA and extradited to Switzerland in 1993, sentenced by a Geneva court in 1995 to five years in prison for embezzlement of \$124 million.

(The extraordinary Roberto Polo – „Only mediocre men never get into trouble“ – who once partied with Andy Warhol, Robert Motherwell and Grace Jones, owns a valuable collection of more than 4000 paintings. At his trial, five of his clients testified that he used their money to buy art without their consent and that he issued false statements. In his defense, the curator of the Louvre, Daniel Alcouffe, vouched for his exquisite taste. Since he has bequeathed parts of his collection to various museums, mainly in Spain, he has been allowed to rewrite his criminal biography in the media)

Tamir Sapir (birth name Temur Sepiashvili)

Businessman, originally from Georgia. Bought a \$5 million condo on the 58th floor in 1994. Resident in the US since 1973. Started working as a cab driver in New York. Member of the Vyacheslav Ivankov mob in Brighton Beach. Close relations with the Uzbek oligarch Mikhail Chernoi. Worked in the Soviet Interior Ministry in 1984. Partner of the Bayrock Group in a number of real estate projects. His Executive Vice President Fred Contini pleaded guilty in 2004 to 13 years of involvement in criminal activities with the Gambino clan.

(Allegedly borrowed \$10,000 upon his arrival in New York to open an electronics store on Fifth Avenue, which, according to his official biography, attracted so many Soviet visitors that Sapir was subsequently able to make a major entry into Russia's burgeoning oil industry and Manhattan's real estate business).

Felix Sater

Managing Director of the Bayrock Group, has worked on the 24th floor since 2000. Spent 15 months in prison for assault in 1991. After his release [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was granted. As a result [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] with the collaboration of [REDACTED].

Despite certain reservations, a decision was made, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Since then, especially for [REDACTED]

Several times during the investigation [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] testify.

(„According to several informants, Bayrock was used for the purpose of money laundering and tax fraud“, the FBI states above. There is but a single informant: Felix „He prefers to enter any business through the back door rather than the front“ Sater. The blacked-out passages certainly state that his father was a lieutenant in Semyon Mogilevich's syndicate. According to former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, his work as an informant was „crucial for national security“. Allegedly, he tracked down and bought up shoulder-fired ground-to-air anti-aircraft missiles before they could fall into the hands of terrorists. How did he manage that? Would that have required contacts with Organized Crime? In 2000, Sater was named an „unindicted accomplice“ in a \$40 million stock fraud case. He supported the authorities investigation, which led to the conviction of six gangsters, including the nephew of Carmine „The Snake“ Persico and the brother-in-law of Sammy „The Bull“ Gravano.

After Bayrock was shut down, Sater maintained close contact with Leaning Tower. He became his „Senior Advisor“ in 2010, even though Leaning Tower had been made aware of his criminal past and his connections to the Russian Mafia on several occasions.)

Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov/Alimshan Tochtachunov

Nickname „Taiwanchik“, little Taiwanese. Uzbek oligarch from Tashkent, both a Russian and Israeli citizen, heads an international gambling and money laundering ring. Led his syndicate from a 40th floor apartment. According to several informants, a „vor“, a Russian mob boss. Was arrested in Italy, where the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled against extradition to the USA in 2003, after which he was released. Has lived in Russia since.

(On the Interpol list of the ten most wanted criminals in the world immediately behind Bin Laden and El Chapo, who, unlike him, have since been caught or killed. In 2013 he appeared at the Miss Universe Pageant in Moscow, in the VIP area, just a few steps away from Leaning Tower).

Vadim „Dima“ Trincher

Born in the USSR, citizen of Israel and the USA. Bought apartment 63 A-B in 2009 for \$5 million from Oleg Boyko. Head of the Taiwanchik-Trincher organization. Together with Anatoly Golubchik he ran the world's largest sports betting ring. Sentenced to 5 years imprisonment in 2014 for money laundering, illegal gambling, organized crime and racketeering.

(Vadim Trincher is a well-known poker player, his biggest success was an impressive win of 731,000 US dollars in a 2009 tournament at Foxwoods Casino).

Joseph „Joe“ Weichselbaum

Owner of a helicopter charter company that flew high rollers to the casinos in Atlantic City. Strong Mafia connections. Lived in two adjacent apartments on the 49th floor, which his girlfriend purchased for \$2.35 million after he served a prison sentence for trafficking and interstate dealing of Colombian cocaine out of Florida.

(Leaning Tower wrote in his letter of recommendation to the court that Weichselbaum was a valuable member of the community, a „conscientious, forthright & diligent“ person. Whether because of this letter or the fact that the court was initially presided over by Leaning Tower’s sister, Weichselbaum was sentenced to only three years in prison. He was released after 18 months).

Sheldon Weinberg

Lived with his wife in a rented apartment for \$180,000 a year, his son Jay next door in a smaller apartment. Committed fraud against Medicaid by filing false statements totaling \$28 million. Sentenced to 21 years in prison for grand theft and conspiracy, his sons Jay and Ronald to 8 and 5 years respectively.

(With the help of specially developed software, father and sons were able to invent patients, including fictitious medical records, in such large numbers that they could bill millions. Thanks to these ailing souls, father and sons lived the high life. The father fled before the sentencing. Thanks to the TV show „Unsolved Mysteries“ he was caught shortly afterwards in Scottsdale, Arizona).

Note: Additionally, an exceptionally high percentage of apartments in this building are owned by limited liability companies registered in Panama, Puerto Rico, Dubai, British Virgin Islands and elsewhere,

including Dalimar Assets; Azalea Properties; Hibiscus Properties; Lionson Tower; Yellow Diamond. The real owners are not known.

Such a document is purely the result of hard work. Remarkable that someone in the FBI went to all this trouble. What was the response to this high level of criminal activity in the President's Tower?

None whatsoever.

The Tower of Terror.

My imagination caught flight, I saw in my mind's eye the activities of all the parties involved, possible conspiracies and impossible conflicts, sex, drugs, crime, dogs and cats, art and kitsch. All the ingredients of a good TV series needs (much better than The Apprentice). I daydreamed for a few minutes, played it out a bit longer, the plot developed rapidly, a potential smash hit, I ought to sell the idea to a producer as soon as possible while Leaning Tower is still standing.