

THE CHEAT KILLERS

A HARRY BLACK THRILLER

GORDON WARDEN



For my wife, a never-ending source of inspiration and love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could almost thank everyone that I've ever met, for contributing to my imagination.

However, there are people who have directly helped in my maiden writing voyage.

I list them, not necessarily in order of importance, but the stage at where their contribution came in during the process of writing this first book.

John Diamond, Nigel and Tracy Flitton, Kathryn Bohme, Paul and Liz McHale, Nicky Honeywell, Dawn Colman and of course, my wife Robby.

Many thanks also to Bill Cottis, who patiently 'played dead' on a cold, tiled floor and was the model for the front cover of this book.

Finally, a thank you to our children Ben and Katie, just for putting up with their parents.

A QUICK NOTE

This is my first book.' I sincerely hope you'll enjoy it and perhaps read more in the Harry Black series.

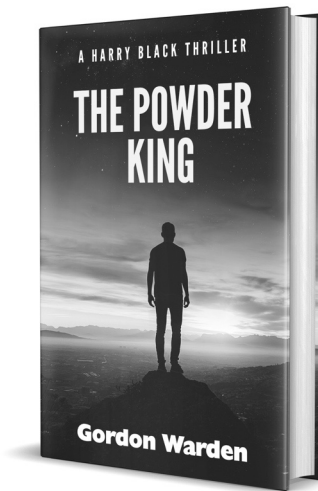
My second book, 'Who Is The Tigerman' has been released and is available on Amazon, and a third is underway.

In the meantime I have just written a novella, again following Harry Black, which you can have for free on the very next page.

Kindest wishes, Gordon

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PROLOGUE

They'd had such a wonderful time, so he couldn't understand why he was suddenly being looked at in such a sorrowful, almost apologetic manner. By the time he realised, it was already too late.

Paul Hamilton slid sideways from his seat and fell onto the tiled floor, his body joining forces with the remnants of the smashed plate. He lay amongst the fragments like a surreal jigsaw.

The almost empty champagne glass still stood on the table where he had been sitting, almost proudly, as if defying the surrounding mayhem.

His blurring vision directed itself towards a new, and unfamiliar figure that stood over him. He strained to speak, his mouth moving, but no words were forthcoming.

Harry Black stared ahead, willing the passengers to hurry and sit down. He scowled at a couple who were standing in the centre aisle of the plane arguing, blocking others from taking their seats.

He peered out through the cabin window, rubbing ineffectually at the glass with his sleeve. The flickering lights of the various service vehicles were pixilated against the driving rain that swept across JFK Airport. Terminal staff rushed around, pulling their yellow hoods tightly.

Finally, the last of the passengers were on, the cabin doors shut, and it was nearly time for the stewards to perform their usual mime of what action to take should the plane crash.

Harry contemplated the empty seat next to him, with an anticipation of leaning across and getting some sleep.

A few rows ahead, the argumentative couple, who were finally sitting in their places, continued their exchange in not-so-restrained, hissy tones while fellow passengers watched with interest. A free cabaret was always welcome on a boring flight.

He closed his eyes, his thoughts drifting back to recent events.

It had worked out well; Vincent Dempsey was now behind bars, and Harry had received plenty of well-deserved praise.

When he had first arrived in New York, the reception had been cool. Whilst there had been welcoming handshakes on his first day working with the NYPD, he could detect an underlying air, which he could understand. Who the hell likes someone coming into their territory from another country and interfering in an investigation?

But he had done just that. He knew that he had earned the respect of his American colleagues by catching Dempsey. The thought made him smile.

A waft of perfume interrupted his thoughts.

‘Excuse me, do you mind if I take this seat?’

‘No, not at all,’ he said, attempting to conceal his sudden irritation.

Harry looked up to see the source of the enquiry. An attractive lady smiled down at him. She seemed to be in her late thirties and had long, blonde-streaked brown hair. She was wearing a crop-top and jeans.

‘Are you sure you don’t mind?’ she asked, as she slid next to him.

‘No, not at all,’ Harry said, now being almost over-effusive, ‘it’s great to have a flight companion.’

Her face relaxed into a smile. ‘Jane Cooper,’ she said in a soft British accent, offering her hand. ‘I found myself wedged in between two men who were going on about some Boston football team, who apparently have red socks, so I wanted to find a more peaceful place to sit.’

‘No problem,’ he said. ‘Pleased to meet you. I’m Harry Black.’

Her grip was cool and firm, and as she shook Harry’s

hand, an oversized bracelet nearly slid off the end of her wrist and onto his own.

‘Sorry,’ she laughed, pushing the jewellery back up her arm. ‘I bought this at the airport and now wish I hadn’t!’

‘No problem. Incidentally, that Boston football team is actually known as “Boston Red Sox.”’

‘Really? You’d think they’d find a better name.’

They laughed and, with the ice broken, settled back in their seats ready for take-off.

After half-an-hour of dozing, Harry woke up feeling a sharp nudge on his elbow. Some turbulence had caused her shoulder bag to overturn, and it was now resting against Harry’s arm.

‘Sorry,’ she said, leaning over to rescue the spilt contents. ‘And I was just thinking how peaceful you looked.’

‘Doesn’t anyone when they are asleep?’ Harry asked with a grin, enjoying a further waft of perfume.

‘No,’ she said. ‘Some people twitch in their sleep, some frown, some fidget...’

‘Have you had a lot of experience watching people sleep then?’ Harry asked, immediately wishing he hadn’t.

She grinned at his discomfort. ‘I’m not exactly new to life, you know!’

They laughed and Harry put up a hand to stop a passing steward.

‘Could I have a beer, please? And can I offer you anything?’ he asked his companion.

‘That would be lovely. I’ll just have a coffee, thanks.’

‘Actually, could you change my order to a coffee, please?’ Harry said. ‘I think I’ve over-done it on the booze recently.’

They fell into a comfortable silence as they sipped their drinks.

‘So, what do you do?’ he asked, eventually. ‘For a living, I mean.’

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