

THE  
GILGAMESH  
PROJECT

BOOK II  
LA ISLA BONITA

JOHN FRANCIS KINSELLA



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*for*

*Tilla, Selma, Eléonore, Noé, Xaver, Elyas, Adèle, Camille and  
Antoine*

*I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying.*

*Woody Allen*



*In the empty field, in the morning,  
the body waits to be claimed.  
The spirit sits beside it, on a small rock--  
nothing comes to give it form again.  
Think of the body's loneliness.  
At night pacing the sheared field,  
its shadow buckled tightly around.  
Such a long journey.  
And already the remote, trembling lights of the village  
not pausing for it as they scan the rows.  
How far away they seem,  
the wooden doors, the bread and milk  
laid like weights on the table.*

*by Louise Gluck*

## PROLOGUE

SIMMONDS, A SMALL-TIME LAWYER IN BELIZE, is the executor of the estate of one George Wallace. In the course of his work Simmo, as his friends call him, discovers a rare and valuable Aztec codex hidden in a safe deposit box in a Panamanian bank by the deceased.

Realising the potential value of the codex he takes off for San Sebastian in Spain in the hope of finding a buyer, namely Sir Patrick Kennedy, a rich banker and collector of art and antiquities.

Simmonds makes an agreement against an initial payment of one million dollars whilst waiting for authentication tests. In the meantime he returns to Belize, where not long after he disappears. The hard pressed police department manifested little interest as there was no indication of foul play, besides disappearances were not unusual in that small Caribbean country where crime, tropical swamps and shark infested waters abounded.

Igor Vishnevsky, a business associate of Simmonds did not disappear. On the contrary his body, identified by a hotel room card found in a back pocket, turned up floating near the beach

at the Coral Cove Resort on Ambergris Caye, according to the autopsy it had been exsanguinated—drained of all its blood.

All that was left of the Russian's legs were a few shreds of flesh and shattered bone, a shark attack, concluded the police report, which didn't explain the life jacket and what was left of a nylon rope knotted to it.

The Russian was suspected as having been part of a conduit that managed investments for highly placed Russian officials, buying and selling property, and channeling the profits to a Cayman Islands holding company that invested them in UK prime property.

Vishnevsky, according to the Mexican police, was resident in Cancun, where he had arrived some eighteen months earlier, travelling on a Cypriot 'golden' passport, which accorded the holder the right to live, work and travel freely in all countries of the EU as well as travel visa free to 176 other countries, including most countries of the Caribbean and South America. The cost of such a passport set back the holder two million euros, in the form of an investment in Cypriot business or real estate.

Vishnevsky was one of several thousand non-EU citizens who had bought a Cypriot passport under the scheme, mainly Russians, but also Ukrainians, Chinese and Middle Easterners, all of whom had one thing in common—their wealth.

Vishnevsky's mistake was to encourage top Russian government officials to invest in the luxury condominium and golf complex on Ambergris Caye, in reality a peninsula—near to the border with the Mexican Yucatan, which led to questions being raised by the opposition, led by Alexei Navalny, as to how they, not so richly paid officials, could invest large sums of money in such valuable assets.

The Russian was liquidated after the collapse of his real estate deals which threatened to expose Oleg Sedov—a member of the Russian state security apparatus, and VTB—known in banking and diplomatic circles as the Kremlin's bank, as being implicated in money laundering and the illegal transfer of funds via Cyprus and Belize, which Western intelligence agencies suspected were being channeled into subversive operations carried out by the FSB, SVR or GRU—operations that ranged across the geopolitical board—from London to Caracas, creating an embarrassing scandal at a moment when opposition to Putin was on the rise.

As the American presidential elections approached and Brexit negotiations reached a critical point, the sudden death of Vishnevsky, known for his activities in intelligence circles, could attract unwanted attention as cyber operations intensified to discredit Biden by linking him to his son's shady business dealings in the Ukraine.

Wallace, through Demitriev, then Vishnevsky, had discovered an endless source of what seemed like easy money, which he moved through a complex web of companies and bank accounts, a system that little by little escaped the control of Vishnevsky, who was busy leading the high life in Cancun, entertaining a flow of highly placed Russian officials discovering the Yucatan's rich and exotic pleasures—beaches, golf, cruises, parties and the wonders of the Mayan civilisation.

Wallace had persuaded the Russian everything was in order, it was the way things were done locally, he explained. And it was, business boomed, the tourist industry knew no limits, investors fought to buy land and build tourist resorts.

Who could have imagined the pandemic, a scenario from a Stephen King novel, the streets of Cancun were deserted, the usually packed shopping centres fell silent, the beaches emptied, and the Ambergris development in nearby Belize went belly-up.

Wallace's had not only invested the Russian's money in local real estate, but also in Cancun, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, all of which were enmeshed in local corruption as cash flowed freely, driving up land prices with buyers fighting over sites as greedy politicians scrambled to get their snouts in the trough.

Dirty money was laundered as funds were shunted between accounts owned by obscure shell companies registered in Belize, Panama, the British Virgin Islands, Cyprus and other offshore tax haven, all of which enabled corrupt politicians and businessmen to hide massive sums of money from their governments.

Wallace, thanks to the companies Simmo set-up, had built a well-oiled investment scheme on behalf of Vishnevsky's Russian friends with companies registered in offshore jurisdictions that ploughed cash into real estate developments he targeted. In that way the money was not only laundered, it avoided taxation and shrouded the identities of the ultimate beneficiaries behind an opaque screen.

The trouble was Vishnevsky had become careless, too trusting, but above all, he like everyone else could have never imagined a pandemic, it was not in his or even the FSB's gamebook.

Simmo had turned a blind eye to the true nature of Wallace's business and as a result paid the price. In a way he had been luckier than the hapless Igor Vishnevsky, who had ended up as shark bait, towed behind an outboard off the Belize Barrier Reef, the waves sown with bloodied pigs guts, guaranteed to attract the Bull Sharks lurking off the reef.

Though the Belize police did not go into details, it was technique known to them, a punishment for cheats and double-dealers, invented by the pirates and drug runners that plagued the frontier zone between Belize and the Mexican state of Quintana Roo.

‘Can’t blame them,’ confided the Police Commissioner when he reported the Russian’s death to the Chief Justice, ‘Vishnevsky must have tasted as rotten as his reputation ... those sharks usually leave nothing.’

# CHAPTER 1

ARKADY DEMITRIEV DECIDED HE NEEDED to join the dots. There was something he was missing. Simmonds' presence in San Sebastian was totally out of character with the mundane life he had lived up to that point in time, that is apart from his adventure into local real estate, when he had gambled all on a throw of the dice.

Simmonds, a small-time lawyer in Belize City, had never, at least as far as what Demitriev knew of him, travelled much outside of the Caribbean area, and only when his clients' business needs demanded it, which was relatively rare.

Simmonds' law firm handled business matters as well as property conveyance, wills and probate, mostly for expatriates. In more recent times his business services had grown as the demand for offshore shell companies and bank accounts increased, these were generally one shot affairs, for which he charged his overseas clients around one thousand dollars and upwards.

It was like that he became involved with Wallace, an English expat like himself, who provided him with a regular flow of clients, Russians and the like, who needed his legal services to hide their money in offshore tax havens.



Russia had no diplomatic representation in Belize, its affairs were handled by the Mexican Embassy, and Arkady Demitriev, a counselor for economic affairs based in Mexico City and consular affairs in Cancun. Demitriev, like certain other embassy staff, was a member of the Russian state security services, as a GRU agent his role was to manage certain of Moscow's covert interests in the Caribbean region including business transactions to circumvent US sanctions imposed on Venezuela as well as operations in British and former British territories.

Demitriev handled George Wallace, a longtime fellow traveller living in Belize, and had introduced him to Igor Vishnevsky, a former banker with VTB, a state owned bank in Moscow, who had set himself up in Cancun. Vishnevsky had involved high-up Russian government officials in real estate investments set up by Wallace with the help of Simmonds which had gone sour with the Covid pandemic. They had been compromised and wanted their money back. Unfortunately for Demitriev, Wallace and Simmonds had been eliminated by his bungling helpers, leaving him to solve the problem or suffer the consequences.

Unraveling Simmonds last moves had been complicated by an unusually brief visit to Panama City and his inexplicably sudden departure to Madrid.

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