

The Enigma Source

The irony of paper money in the digital age. How long will it take governments to realize that hard currency, with its analog tangibility, can be displaced overnight by a crypto-currency from a rival nation? Savings simply erased, commerce turned off, and whole populations in economic suspended animation. Bold predictions, but in hindsight how could we not have foreseen the inevitable outcome?

...The Enigma Chronicles

Chapter 1 – Did You Really Need A Different Introduction?

Present Day

In his cheeriest voice, Otto greeted, “Bruno! How are you, friend? It’s been ages since we’ve spoken! I was beginning to think that our last round of business was the end of our interactions, but I am delighted to see I was mistaken. How can I help you and your associate? It is not often that I am approached by one of Interpol’s finest cyber detectives and one of the governors of the International Monetary Fund, commonly referred to as the IMF. May I assume that this has something to do with the latest developments in the crypto-currency markets and the ensuing theft that occurred?”

Bruno sat dumbfounded for a moment, unable to respond. In his Instant Message window on his PC, he was alerted to a new message.

How does this man know that I'm on the call?

Bruno, somewhat dazed, responded:

You said you wanted the best...no one sneaks up on these people...

Otto puzzled a moment then asked, “Bruno, are you still there? Are you okay? Is there a sound problem on your end?”

Finally Bruno cleared his throat and responded, “Otto, this is my anonymous calling line that goes through a bank of anonymizing servers just so I can have a completely cloaked conversation with people demanding extreme security. How did you know it was me? And, furthermore, how could you possibly have guessed who was on the call with me? Finally, why do you suspect we are calling about crypto-currency matters?”

Otto suppressed a smile and innocently replied, “Oh, pardon me, Bruno. Have I made some misstatements to your distinguished guest?”

Bruno clucked his tongue in annoyance and then continued, “On second thought, I don’t really want to know all the tricks of the magician. Allow me to introduce Tonya Van Den Berghe from the International Monetary Fund.

“Otto, I was asked to make introductions, but as you can see, Tonya, these are the people we call on when we need that which cannot be done. I’ll leave you two to talk in private. I assume that the voice tunnel is encrypted, Otto, after my initial but naïve outreach to you. Good day to you both.”

Otto didn’t have time to reply to Bruno’s hasty departure, so he offered, “Tonya, apologies if your call didn’t catch me unawares. We work very hard at being informed. Then when we are called upon to help we can take up the assignment quickly. How may I be of service to you and your organization?”

Tonya, relatively young but well-educated and informed about the world stage, quickly moved past her initial surprise, almost smiled and acknowledged, “Otto, I believe your demonstration clearly proved your point of your organization’s effectiveness. You are correct, I am calling with regards to crypto-currency matters and some very high profile thefts, from which we believe we have been compromised.

“To that end, I would like to meet and discuss the contents of a package I need to provide you. It will give you all the details we have so far, but there are some things that I cannot discuss over the phone, even though I rather believe that the line is certainly encrypted. Would that be possible?”

Otto nodded and answered, “Understood. In a chat window that I’m opening up on your computer, I will place the location of a cyber-DropVault. We use this with special customers for

secure document and data sharing. It will help us to begin work immediately with current information. When and where would you like to meet? I presume that time is of the essence.”

Tonya smirked as she replied, “You know it, Mr. Magician!

“I will upload the information within the hour. I would like to meet with you or possibly your right hand designate the day after tomorrow in Paris. I would prefer that we keep discussions on this topic out of our headquarters in Washington D.C., though I assure you I have the support of our Managing Director in this matter. I can of course provide credentials.”

Otto reviewed the background information on Tonya, including several photos, being provided by ICABOD, the team’s Artificial Intelligence Supercomputer. The young woman had graduated in the top of her class from Harvard Business with a focus in International Finance, with no extraordinarily high financial portfolio and her remaining two years of education debt being paid monthly. The photographs provided included professional headshots of her even smile, heart-shaped face framed by shiny chestnut colored waves that just reached her shoulders. The photo date was three months ago and included her physical attributes of height at almost 1.8 meters and a lean 59 kilograms. It struck Otto that her facial lines were very sophisticated, yet she seemed approachable.

He commented, “Based on the nature of the discussion, credentials will be necessary. I will have you meet with Wolfgang Mickelowski, our Financial Director in Paris, at noon on Wednesday. Unless you have an objection, we will arrange for the meeting to take place in a secure conference room at Regal Financial in La Défense, just west of the Paris city limits. I have an associate on the Board of Directors of the main branch of the institution’s headquarters in Zürich.”

Tonya replied, “That is very agreeable. Thank you, Otto, I look forward to meeting with Mr. Mickelowski.”

The call was disconnected and Otto called Wolfgang. Wolfgang and he chatted for a few moments and decided the best course of action was to assemble the team. They agreed to a time, and Otto waited for the package upload from Tonya to read en route.

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Tonya Van Den Berghe studied the desk phone, then reached for her personal cell phone that was still capable of making an encrypted call, and dialed a familiar number from her contact list identified by only an icon. Once the encrypted call was launched, she steeled herself for the pending conversation.

It seemed like an eternity before the call connected, and a pleasant voice answered, “How did the call go with Bruno’s recommendation? Do we have the services of this unbiased group in Switzerland?”

Tonya replied, “Yes, Madam Director, we have their services, but, boy, what a creepy call! I mean, he knew right away who we were and almost to the letter of what we wanted. It was almost like Otto had written the Statement of Work, and we were simply interns verifying the Terms and Conditions. Bruno was so undone he bailed from the call, and I finished the negotiations.

“Madam Director, I am not completely comfortable with this type of contact, no matter how highly your Interpol contact, Bruno, recommended them.”

The smirking voice on the other end of the call asked, “Do you feel we are on the right trajectory?”

Tonya had some trouble reeling in her irked state of mind but offered all the professionalism she could muster.

“Yes, Madam Director, we are on the right trajectory with these people. Not only did they know exactly who was calling over a supposedly anonymized voice channel, but they picked up on my presence, while correctly surmising the nature of the call. I’ve not witnessed this kind of digital sleight-of-hand before, and, well, it made me feel like I was right out of the University again.

“Since I took this job with your organization, I’ve only been embarrassed and humiliated twice during my tenure. The time you first pulled me aside and suggested that I not dress like a low class/no class call girl, and now this time with Otto the Magician.”

The Director chuckled and gently reminded, “Oh, so not the time I stumbled into your office after hours and almost interrupted you with, what’s his name? Well, never mind. What are our next steps with the Magician? I assume they took the project, but what fee did you settle on?”

Tonya swallowed hard and admitted, “I..., we didn’t discuss a fee, only where to meet and where to ship the advance materials so his team could begin work.”

The Director giggled slightly and commented, “I’m glad your taste in men has improved over the years, but remember that even a low class/no class call girl discusses price before putting the goods on the table. This is most unlike you since you hardly ever get rattled on assignment.”

Now mortified, Tonya nearly stammered, “I didn’t get rattled. Okay, I did get a little rattled, but when we meet in Paris I can...”

Now thoroughly enjoying the teasing she was delivering to her associate, the Director soothed, “Tonya, it is okay this one time with Mr. Magician. I can tell you that because he did the same thing to me many years ago. I was just like you, an up and coming professional who thought she could hold her own in a male dominated world of high finance. My ego had to be ambalanced off the premises the first time I encountered him. I was pretty sure you were going to have a similar session.”

Tonya was dumbfounded at the statement, but before she could say anything the Director responded, “That encounter helped me to get to this position. I’m hoping that someday it will help you get here too.”

Tonya, now somewhat chastened, quietly offered, “Thank you, Ingrid. I will try and be that person you believe I am.”

Ingrid stepped back into her hard edged Director role as she sharply reminded, “Understand, we need all the resources we can muster to intercept these disruptive cryptocurrency Johnnies and their cottage industry before one of these products catches on. We need time to get ours to market before we lose control of global finance. We don’t want to be caught making buggy whips while the internal combustion automobile is being rolled off mass-production lines as was done in the early 1900’s. Time is not on our side in this matter, so whatever Mr. Magician wants to charge is fine. If he and his organization can help us hold our position until we are ready, then his price is chump change compared to what our next position will be. If he doesn’t, then he will be paid with useless currency, and none of it will matter anyway.”

Tonya swallowed hard and stated, “Yes, Madam Director. I understand.”

Chapter 2 – **It Looked Good on Paper** ...The Enigma Chronicles

The panic and tension thickened throughout the building as each person entered, then frantically pushed and shoved those ahead of them to gain the front spot to demand their funds. The directors watched the increased madness through the glass meeting room walls, yet were powerless to stop the ever growing chaos. It was a classic run-on-the-bank scenario like the old films and photos portrayed from the 1920s in the U.S. There was no shortage of desperate people having an anxiety attack concerning their funds. No one wanted to wait patiently in line for their money. The pushing and shoving continued to escalate within the line but did not quite reach the head of the line. Police were there to try and keep order, but most of them ended up joining the human tidal wave of desperation. This was just one frightened mob in one location in this small struggling country oppressed by debt. Some of the other banks in this small country had wisely refused to open until communication avenues with the panic stricken improved.

In this former thriving city, the military, which was really only a volunteer militia, was called out to assist when martial law was declared. Its lack of success in controlling the crowds added to the chaos. Comprised primarily of weekend warriors, the militia had never been trained to be a true peacekeeping force. Friends and family begged and cried to them for personal support efforts, and the militia members' subsequently weakened resolve was like accelerant on the crazed population. The police began to exit once they received their funds, leaving only the privately hired mercenaries, politely called internal security, to protect the banking institutions.

Here inside the country's central bank, Mathias wondered how long he and his directors would be safe behind the internal security force and bulletproof glass. The images from the outside cameras convinced him that trying to go out to his favorite restaurant for lunch would be insanely unwise. It occurred to him that if this mob scene couldn't be brought under control, he

and the other directors would be trapped here. He began to feel queasy at the thought of surviving on vending machine food until the mob was contained and under control, which might take days.

Mathias had a way of working with any group due to his ability to appear like those around him. He could be imposing if he rose to his nearly two meters and 90 kilograms, with his broad shoulders, squared facial structure and dark well-groomed hair. His suits were custom made in Hong Kong of the finest materials, which suited the part he was playing in this scenario. This experiment had failed! Not because the technology didn't work, but because people believed they were being swindled out of their money. What Mathias and the other directors had failed to realize was that, in order for the regular population to make ends meet, they had to operate in or with the underground economy. To function in the underground economy, cynically called the EU, one needed hard currency for conducting business, which was highly mobile even if it was fiat money. Yes, several European governments had declared fiat money to be legal tender, but historically, money was backed by physical commodities such as gold and silver. They lacked understanding of the continual devaluation as those resources dwindled.

The sales pitch by Mathias, captured the ear of the authorities with his British accent, suggested that by shifting everything to digital currency, the government could put an end to the EU. Then they would finally get the tax revenue they'd been missing. The powers-that-be had completely missed the fact that the loss of mobile hard currency would simply drive the entire population, heavily dependent upon the EU, into a subterranean-subsistence level of poverty. The governments involved in this joint experiment had made the easily missed classical mistake of pushing the population into a position where they now had nothing left to lose. Now with the

poorly trained but armed militia joining the frightened mob, and no police willing to defend the new world order, things could not have been blacker for the digital currency plan.

One of the larger well-fed directors meekly asked, “Did the specialty donuts get delivered this morning? Can you ask the private security persons if they are on their way up?”

At that same moment, gunfire cracked several corners of vertical glass panes in the directors’ meeting room. The eminent threat of the fractured glass walls was immediately on the minds of the directors at the table.

Alois Dutch, who was always addressed as Dutch, entered through the lavatory door adjacent to the boardroom. He was imposing in his loose suit which obviously concealed his holstered handgun. His gravelly voice barked, “The donuts are here, but the coffee is still brewing! Who wants to wait, and who wants to go? The chopper is on the roof, but there is only room for three!”

Mathias frowned and retrieved his own personal 9mm semi-automatic. He promptly made the selecting votes. All the frightened directors stared in shocked disbelief as Mathias shot them all in rapid succession. After one shot each to the head, Mathias turned to Dutch and calmly stated, “We now have room for the donuts, but let’s pick up coffee along the way. I would like to have room for the cream and sugar to be added.”

As a seasoned mercenary, Dutch wasn’t surprised at the efficiency of the meeting’s abrupt ending, so he responded, “Good by me. I’ve always thought the coffee here isn’t strong enough for my tastes.” Dutch was about the same size as Mathias, but with the blue eyes and blond hair which echoed his German heritage. The lines of his face, permanently turned down mouth and haphazard scars spoke to his uncompromised lifestyle filled with brutality.

Then they both got low as they moved out the back door, away from the disastrous scene, and quickly moved toward the exit and the stairwell that would take them to the helipad on the roof. Mathias had snatched his ever-close metal briefcase, containing his standard escape materials, after eliminating the competition for seats in the helicopter. The special purpose briefcase was also bullet-proof. With its side sling, it made for a perfect shield should any more stray rounds head his way. As they climbed higher in the stairwell, the noise from the lower floors receded, and it was almost quiet as they got to the last door which led directly to the roof.

Dutch did a quick spot check from out in front and then motioned to Mathias to follow. They both swung quickly into the helicopter. Once the door closed, Dutch pounded on the glass behind the pilot and with a thumbs up indicated it was time to go. The pilot pulled the helicopter up to clear the building edge then smartly pushed the craft forward, gaining as much speed as quickly as he could.

Dutch smirked as he commented, “Maybe we need a new line of work. I mean, there must be something wrong with getting your whole agenda adopted by the Finance Minister, rubber stamped by the governing body of this backwater country, only to have to leave with our donuts, yet leave the coffee behind as we run for our lives.”

Mathias ground his teeth in anger and remarked, “You know, I can ask the pilot to take you back and drop you off if you prefer.”

Dutch knew he was on thin ice so he offered, “Alright, I’m fine here.” Then he shifted the discussion as he added, “I have to admit, we almost pulled this one off by the numbers. But just like my CO used to say after a failed operation, *it sure looked good on paper!*”