

ANATOLY  
KUCHERENA



# TIME OF THE OCTOPUS

BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF

WHISTLEBLOWER

EDWARD SNOWDEN

GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS



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A NOVEL

Translated by John Farndon  
with Akbota Sultanbekova and Olga Nakston



AD VERBUM

Published with the support of the Institute  
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The plot and main characters of this story are a figment of the imagination of the author and any correspondence with real people and events is purely coincidental.





*...May they be damned, these interests of civilization; and may civilization itself be damned if its preservation demands the stripping of skin from living people.*

Fyodor Dostoevsky

*Those who would give up essential Liberty to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.*

Benjamin Franklin

*Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: what is soft is strong.*

Lao Tzu

*The heresy of heresies was common sense. And what was terrifying was not that they would kill you for thinking otherwise, but that they might be right.*

*For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? Or that the force of gravity works? Or that the past is unchangeable? If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable – what then?*

George Orwell



## IN PLACE OF A PROLOGUE

The transit area of any international airport is in some ways a kind of beached Noah's Ark. It is not floating off anywhere. It is not threatened by the rising tide of the next flood. Yet it provides a lifeboat for those who have something to be afraid of in this life of misery and hardship.

Ordinary passengers burdened merely by daily cares, baggage, children, domestic problems and lack of time shoot through transit areas like shoals migrating from one shore of the boundless ocean of air to another. They barely notice those who linger longer here.

The more persistent inhabitants of the transit area – often conforming to the biblical 'two of every living creature under the sun' – try to stay unnoticed, keeping away from the well-trod passenger tracks, slipping away unobtrusively into the back alleys and hidden habitable cul-de-sacs of the airport terminal. For those with means, there are, of course, mini-hotels in transit areas, but the cost is way above the ordinary lingerer's budget.

Yes, they are a varied and numerous community, this tribe of transit area dwellers! There are migrants who, by hook or by crook, made it aboard a plane to escape from poor countries that are not even Third World, but fourth or fifth, in the hope of reaching somewhere they might be accepted as refugees. There are young travellers, who move almost like hitchhikers, without visas and permits. There are old hippies, the last outgrowth of the flower children, on the way to eternal Katmandu. There are shady characters, too – characters on the prohibited lists of different states, defaulters on credits, protestors, false witnesses, deserters, heroes of criminal and political cases; ideological fighters against borders, anarchists, extremists and radicals of all stripes, prophets and false prophets, and also the clinically insane, which may not be so different. And then there are the unfortunates who have simply lost tickets and documents.

All these people are waiting for something. Some are waiting for a decision from the authorities, some for money to be transferred from relatives or acquaintances, and others just for documents, objects, or traveling companions ... But there are also those for whom a transit area is the only place on planet Earth where they can feel free.

## SHEREMETYEVO

### INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 07:10 P.M.

Among the transit tribe at Moscow's Sheremetyevo was the young American Joshua Kold – international celebrity, headline newsmaker and also, according to Washington officials, wanted criminal. In the more benevolent English-language media he was referred to as a 'whistleblower'. This means literally 'one who blows a whistle,' of course, but in the USA and other countries the term applies to people who make confidential information public to reveal what they see as violations of laws and ethical standards in their place of work.

To cut a long story short, the concatenation of circumstances conspired in such a way that the transit area of Sheremetyevo Airport became the only place where Joshua Kold could feel relatively safe.

Just what Kold had done to bring him here was little understood by many – even the President of Russia publicly called him 'a strange guy.' But there was no doubt that his revelations had caused a sensation and, in some media outlets, the Kold affair was already described as 'the juiciest spy scandal of all time.'

There is one obvious problem with this nonsense – Joshua Kold's offence was not actually spying...

A spy is someone who works to obtain secrets on behalf of a political system, a state, a group of citizens, or even a religious sect. There are deadly risks of being found out, of course, but this fascinating activity always brings a reward – a remuneration in some form from those the spy serves.

The infamous Aldrich Ames<sup>1</sup>, for instance, was said to have sold the identity of his colleagues and numerous CIA agents to the Soviet

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1 Aldrich Ames was the CIA analyst turned KGB mole who compromised more American agents than almost any other CIA mole. He was convicted in 1994 and is now serving a life sentence.

intelligence services in exchange for a new house and fancy Jaguar. But there are exceptions.

Dmitry Polyakov, a general in GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate), was slipping confidential information to the American side for ‘ideological reasons’ for 25 years – or at least that’s what he said during interrogations in ‘the cellars of Lubyanka’. Whatever the truth, there was a hostile Soviet system against him, and it was no accident that the brilliant winner in the Cold War Ronald Reagan asked Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to pardon him – but the request came a little late.<sup>2</sup>

What Kold did, in his own way, was to show the world a unique example of the loner hero.

At least, that’s how it looked on the surface. The young man with densely compressed lips and a steely gaze had thrown out a challenge to the mightiest power in the world. A plot like this would be a complete no-no in Hollywood, where the screwed up loner would always be defeated by the anti-hero. In American blockbusters, there is almost never a speech about a fight against the system. Kold threatened the system – and so became a target.

Somehow, he had managed to slip away right under the nose of the countersurveillance department of the National Security Agency and get out of the USA. Beyond that, everything was obscured by a fog of uncertainty. All the same, enough information had filtered through the haze to propel hundreds of journalists to the transit area of Sheremetyevo International Airport in hope of finding the star fugitive.

The fact that Kold had become a star didn’t seem to raise doubts for anyone. It was a simple narrative. He had not just tapped on the beak of the American eagle; he had given it thorough, and very humiliating, kick – as if it was not an awesome feathered predator but a feeble country chicken chaotically trying to evade a bike rider.

Feathers flew, and the eagle, making a long chicken neck, shamefully crowed for the whole world. He threatened, he pecked with his beak, he

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2 General Dmitry Polyakov passed on Soviet secrets for 25 years to the USA where he was known as ‘Top Hat’ by the FBI and ‘Bourbon’ by the CIA. His cover was blown in 1987 by Aldrich Ames and others, and he was executed in 1988. CIA officer Jeanne Vertefeuille said of him, “He didn’t do this for money. He insisted on staying in place to help us. It was a bad day for us when we lost him.”

scratched the ground with his claws, but the reputation of the predator had been dented. Why, even the president of a tiny Latin American country was not afraid to declare that he was ready to provide to 'the brave guy Joshua Kold' with political asylum.

So journalists of all colours, after settling in the transit area of Sheremetyevo Airport, first of all started looking for Kold as for a lost puppy, or maybe even a truffle in the autumn Provençal wood.

The younger ones ransacked every corner and peered at every passenger's face – what if the guy was wearing heavy make-up and/or a false beard? They checked utility rooms, too, because, apparently, several incidents involving employees and airport security service had already occurred.

Their senior colleagues bided their time to give Kold a chance to find them, and spent the hours in what is said to be called, in the vernacular of the second most ancient profession, 'collecting the invoice'. These writing journalists talked to passengers, composed descriptions of airport interiors, surfed the internet, collected information on the notorious capsule hotel where, according to hearsay, Kold had been hidden away together with an assistant sent to him by the professional unmaskers 'Mikiliks'. That assistant was of course a very cute and brisk young maiden, and gave the story an additional frisson.

Meanwhile, the cameramen were shooting general views of the transit area to use in cutaways, and also of the crowds of journalists near the smoking room – to dramatize the importance of the moment.

This crowd generally consisted of the 'golden plumes', the VIP cabinet of the journalistic tribe, the people deemed acceptable to the noblest offices, and entrants to most forbidden doors. Accustomed to gaining information in comfort, they had decided long ago that the saying 'going the distance feeds the wolf' is not about them. Indeed, these golden plumes could not understand why nobody had yet delivered Kold to them on a silver platter.

Time was passing. Tension was increasing. Nothing was happening.

07:16 P.M.

A grey-haired press photographer in a jacket with a Reuters logo joined the group of journalists watching the take-offs and landings. The photographer's eyes were as red as an April rabbit's. He carefully rearranged the wardrobe-like case containing his very expensive Canon, took a sip of dreadful coffee dispensed by the machine in an all-too-thin plastic cup and without addressing anyone in particular said:

"Modern airplanes are literally time machines, especially if flying from East to West."

"Do you think so?" asked the rather middle-aged female journalist nearby, without turning her head, lolling aloof and lanky like a tired hunting dog. It was clear to the photographer, that she, like all the rest of the writing and shooting fraternity now passing their time in transit, was rather lonely, condemned to hours watching the toings and froings of those airborne fish through dusty glass.

The well-heeled photographer smiled, combed his hair and began to chatter with the speed of a boxer:

"Oh, progress has given us what only science fiction writers and poets dreamed of before – to outwit artful and ruthless time. Yes, yes, just so!"

"Scam," a girl with bleached hair butted in lazily. She had just come from the smoking room, and reeked of tobacco. "So what's the secret?"

The photographer laughed.

"To be blunt, *ma chérie*, there is no secret; it is all about the laws of physics and observation ..."

"As I said – scam!" the girl snapped back. But she was shushed – and those listening clearly understood that the grey-haired gentleman might lighten the tedium as well as – or rather no worse than – a professional compère or a radio host. And he, being given *carte blanche*, settled down comfortably on the broad window sill and continued:



“Let’s imagine that between eleven and midday you are in the company of the same idle travellers aboard a comfortable airliner – say an Airbus-A330, since frankly speaking, I don’t rate Boeings – at the airport of ... let’s say Bangkok. Yet at five in the afternoon you reappear on the earth at Moscow and inhale its native smoke – which, as we know, is both sweet and pleasant.”

Some listeners hemmed, skeptical about the sweetness and pleasantness of Moscow smoke. The others kept silent and so the grey-haired gentleman continued.

“And yet, my friends that flight takes about ten hours! What is going on? Of course, it’s the difference in time zones, but, you see, such an explanation is too boring and banal. It is much more interesting to think that, thanks to turbojets and the remarkable mechanics of a wing multiplied by the laws of aerodynamics, you have deceived omnipotent time and ripped several hours of life away from its tenacious claws.”

“Yes, but when you fly in the opposite direction, it gets those hours back with percent,” the hunting dog interrupted him, yawning and covering her mouth with a narrow yellow palm decorated with a silver Indian bracelet. “Comme il faut.”

“But the surprising thing is,” the photographer continued undeterred, “That time on the moving plane, as the ingenious physicist Albert Einstein established, is really slowed down. And the quicker the plane flies, the slower time in it passes. Of course, in our case this is virtually imperceptible – some thousand fractions of a second. But if we managed to accelerate a plane near to the speed of light, a person, after staying on board just a few hours according to a place’s time, could return to earth at a time when tens or even hundreds of years would have passed. That is, you could make a trip to the future.”

“Really?!” the bleached blonde girl was surprisingly excited. “That’s amazing!”

It seemed, for a second, that she forgot about the forthcoming hours of fruitless waiting, and found her head filled with the boundless prospects of travel to the future. But the feeble fire in her eyes died away almost as quickly as it ignited.

“But what would I actually do in the future?” she continued despondently. “There’ll probably be the same old press tribe working

with some totally fancy computers. And I can't even cope with the ancient ones in our editorial office. Maybe it'd be possible to go back into the past? Where there are brave men and beautiful women, and wars, and duels, and hunting – just like in 'The Countess Of Monsoro' series – you can get a box set now."

"Someday science will make it possible," the grey-haired photographer said significantly. "Scientists have already established that in one aspect the great Einstein was mistaken to claim that the velocity of light can't be exceeded. As it happens, it can be. And if we accelerate our plane or, more precisely, our spaceship, to superlight speed, we could reach a remote planet 450 light years from Earth in a few days. Then, if we directed our high-powered telescope back towards the Earth, we would see the slaughter of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, or Admiral Kolinyi swearing that he didn't kill his father the Duke de Guiz, or Charles IX firing an arquebus at the running Huguenots, or Catherine de Medici with her poisons. And, of course, maybe all those amazing scenes Dumas père's novel. Though, probably, a lot of those scenes were not absolutely so, or even absolutely not so."

The girl was stunned by the prospect, and made feverish efforts to remember where exactly in her favourite series these names and events occurred.

"You should anchor 'Obvious-improbable,'" the Hunting dog observed drily.

"Glad to serve," the old man bowed graciously though it was obvious he was disappointed.

Meanwhile, at the far end of the transit area, near the entrances to the utility and staff rooms, a well-built man of middle age in a bland grey jacket and blue jeans was striding out clutching a black leather briefcase.

07:21 P.M.

If any of the journalists had paid attention to this person, the real Babel in the transit area would have begun. The fact is that the owner of the leather briefcase was none other than the Lawyer, who fortune had made the intermediary between the Russian authorities and Joshua Kold, and who would thus gain international fame through no efforts of his own, a fame very rare for representatives of the Russian legal profession.

As it happens, the Lawyer was rather blessed by luck. From the very beginning of his law career, his mandators – for some reason this is what he called his clients – had been celebrities engaged in improbable adventures. There was the successful media magnate caught trying to walk out of a government residence with a box containing one million dollars taken from under the copying machine. There was the former Minister of Justice whose photos in a sauna in the company of naked girls once filled the Russian tabloids. There was the wife of the opposition leader – a deputy of the Russian parliament – who accidentally, according to investigators, shot her husband on the eve of his carefully planned military coup. There were enough plots in his mandators' list for ten thrillers. And though the possibility of writing them up had sometimes crossed the Lawyer's mind, he'd never had the time to get round to it.

The Lawyer had already met Kold – and nearly all the world media had reported it. Just exactly what these two very different people talked about remained secret, of course, but the international public learned that the Lawyer had given Kold as a gift a Russian abc-book, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *'Crime and Punishment'*, a small volume of stories by Anton Chekhov, the *'History of the Russian State'* by court historian Karamzin, and, in a makeweight, several words of encouragement transmitted by the Lawyer from the highest Kremlin offices.

Meanwhile, the nervous tension among the representatives of the second most ancient profession reached its apogee. The correspondent of one of the alternative internet portals, a gloomy young man with a bony face – there is a saying about such people: ‘not strong, but nervous’ – bleated provocatively:

“He’s probably under the wing of intelligence agencies in Lubyanka. There ‘gutting’ gets extreme.”

“Well, maybe not ‘gutting,’” the robust guy from Gazety.ru pompously responded, “It’s not ’37 now. Now it’s called ‘debriefing’. But on the intelligence agencies you are bang on, colleague.”

The Lawyer grinned to himself because he, unlike these knights of quill and keypad, knew that the one they were waiting for in hope of snapping in a photo, getting a quick quote from, or even a sensational interview, wasn’t in Lubyanka. And there was certainly no notorious ‘gutting’ – the stakes were too high.

“And in the USA, there are no transit areas at all,” the grey-haired gentleman from Reuters declared.

“Yes, that’s so right!” the gloomy young man added. “There they have such a highly developed transportation system that all eventualities are considered in advance!

“Well – it’s the most free country in the world,” the blonde girl said, tapping her shoulder.

The photographer smiled sadly, but decided not risk pursuing this unpromising discussion.

07:33 P.M.

The journalists didn't notice the Lawyer. He was nimble and skilled enough to avoid drawing attention to himself. Opening a non-descript grey door, the Lawyer stepped quickly through it and appeared in a small room with a big table in the middle place in such a way that you could only get to other door on the opposite side of the room sideways, squeezing along the wall.

A poker-faced person in the uniform of the airport security police was sitting at the table. The Lawyer showed his ID card and the policeman nodded and pressed the button. The door behind him opened with a quiet buzz.

The Lawyer squeezed past the table, walked through the door and found himself in a space strikingly different from the hi-tech style of one of the world's most modern airports.

Instead of plastic, polished stone, glass and metal, here the tree was king. Heavy oak panels covered the walls and ceiling. The parquet, velvet drapery, leather sofas and floor lamps bearing the coat of arms of the vanished empire helped transport this small hall back into the time when the foundation stone for the Aswan dam was laid upon the Nile, when Soviet rockets in Cuba were put on standby, and Khrushchev banged his shoe on his desk at the UN General Assembly in a protest against the Philippines delegate.

The person on duty here had the uniform of an officer of the Federal Guard Service. He double-checked the Lawyer's documents and opened an elevator door in front of him. Here too everything was from the Soviet period with brass buttons with digits for the floors, an ebonite phone and an ashtray wired into the elevator wall. The Lawyer pressed the button with the digit '7' and the elevator plummeted as if into an underworld.

Of course, Joshua Kold was a key player in the global geopolitical game conducted from time immemorial between the largest states of the world. So it would be absurd to assume he'd be simply left to the mercy of fate in the transit area of Sheremetyevo airport. He could not be left as prey to journalists, and, above all to the agents of interested intelligence agencies who might try anything from banal elimination – after all, nobody hurried to hand over umbrellas with poisoned needles to the museums – to no less banal kidnapping (Mossad had great experience in this kind of thing).

So, as soon as Kold got off the plane from Hong Kong he was taken at once if not under protection then at least under intense guardianship, and smoothly but persistently forwarded to that oak hall with floor lamps from where the elevator carried him away into the top secret destination of Bunker A.

The history of this shelter thirty metres down is fascinating and deserves a separate novel. It is closely connected with the history of the creation of Sheremetyevo airport and the destiny of the Soviet leader of that time, Nikita Khrushchev, who intended to catch up and overtake America and complete the triumph of communism no later than 1980.

Awed by the scale of London's Heathrow airport, Khrushchev gazed at the surrounding coppices and woods as he paused on the ladder of the Tu-104 after landing at the drab airfield of the Air Force of the USSR not far from Sheremetyevo village, and muttered: "It will be necessary for us to build something like in London."

Those who needed to hear the phrase, remembered it and took it as a guide to action. The first Soviet international airport quickly accepted Boeings and Caravels, but for the convenience of official government delegations one extra but rather essential trifle was needed – ensuring the safety of the top officials of the state.

Maybe their enemies would rattle the saber, the USSR wouldn't yield, and nuclear warfare could find the country leaders anywhere. Fuel was added to the fire by messages from the USA provided by 'moles' working for the Soviets who had dug into the earthy depths of the Yankee state apparatus. It became clear that under Denver International Airport – the biggest in the world, by the way – the Americans had constructed a huge

bunker capable of housing all the heads of the country and members of their families in case of a nuclear attack.

Thus, the need to construct Bunker A under Sheremetyevo airport was determined, and the goal achieved, as well as possible in the country of developed socialism, ‘in a short time, ahead of schedule’.

For decades, the bunker stood on ‘alert’ with all its rooms ready to receive high-ranking guests at any second, with all life support systems checked and ready and every safety system in perfect order.

Of course, one might assume that *perestroika*, and especially that post-*perestroika* time in which hundreds of similar useless objects were destroyed, would not have spared Bunker A. But the democratic leaders of Russia cared as much for their safety as their totalitarian predecessors, and so the bunker continued to serve, hidden under the new terminals of Sheremetyevo as a relic being, a theromorph of another ancient reptile that conjured horror by the mere fact of its existence.

For all these years, none of the highest dignitaries of the Soviet empire ever visited Bunker A – fortunately, there was no need. The same was true of the leaders of new Russia. And so Joshua Kold became the first – and the only – inhabitant of the bunker.

The Lawyer sometimes wondered: how does he sleep thirty metres down? Don’t ghosts of the past eras disturb him in this place where six workers died, according to hearsay, in the lift mine of the bunker during a construction glitch?

It is much better to ask such questions over a glass of fine cognac or vintage wine, in a nice, friendly chat. But Kold, it seemed, wasn’t willing to be on friendly terms with anybody, and kept himself closed and detached, justifying his surname. Perhaps some positive news might perk him up, or bring him out of his stupor, but the message the Lawyer was carrying to the inhabitant of Bunker A hardly promoted a positive spirit.

07:42 P.M.

The elevator stopped, the next officer on duty opened a door and stood aside to let the Lawyer pass.

In front of him there was a corridor with all the same oak panels, and a thick carpet pathway to muffle the sound of footsteps. The doors were marked only by stark alphanumeric codes, and the dim light glowed from opaque plafonds in the ceiling.

There was one more guard post to negotiate, at which the Lawyer had to open the contents of his briefcase to a Federal Protective Service officer. Then at last, turning round a corner in the corridor, after passing through highly secure isolation compartments designed to protect against the penetration of toxic agents, the Lawyer stopped at a door marked very simply 'Lounge.'

For reasons only they knew, the journalists above, with the special powers of concentration and highly developed cynicism of the all-understanding and all-knowing professional, were sure that the whole world danced to their tune.

But from down here, at a depth of thirty metres, they seemed like the bunch of kids the cunning and artful piper from Hamelin led astray. The piper, as is well-known from the story, very dexterously coped with rats, but also drew children away with no less success.

Then chasing unnecessary thoughts and allusions away, the Lawyer knocked on the door and pushed.

The Lounge was a large room with a sofa, several chairs, a small billiard table up against a wall and an oval table of walnut under a massive triple-armed chandelier with opaque plafonds. A wall clock in a wooden case ticked, emphasizing the silence in the bunker.

Joshua Kold was sitting at the table looking like a diligent pupil with straight back, and hands on the table. He was clean-shaven, except for a small hipster beard, and he was dressed in a grey shirt,



jumper, and jeans – all reminiscent of a student concentrating before an important exam. The illusion was supported by the pile of books to the right of Kold. The Lawyer skimmed their spines – reference books on law in English, the Bible, George Orwell’s ‘1984’, and also Dostoyevsky’s ‘*Crime and Punishment*’ and other books gifted by Lawyer on his previous visit.

On the table, there was a metal tray with couple of glasses and several small bottles of water. There was a flat screen TV on the wall behind Kold. In the corner, there was the already familiar floor lamp with the hammer and sickle hidden, and nearby there was a door connecting to another room, most likely, a bedroom.

The lounge didn’t smell at all like the rest of the bunker with its thin, almost imperceptible odour of Cold War – a smell of dampness, rusty metal and burnt electrical wiring. Here it smelt quite civilized – coffee, good perfume and fried bread.

“Good afternoon!” the Lawyer said softly.

Kold raised his shining black eyes towards him. Seen through the glasses, they reminded him of olives.

“Good afternoon, hello,” the young man got up and shook hands with Lawyer. He had a palm as dry and firm as if turned from a tree. “Sit down, please.”

“Thank you.” The Lawyer put his briefcase on a floor, pulled up a chair and sat down opposite Kold. “How are you? How do you feel? Where there any requests, wishes?”

There was a pause. Kold opened the folder and pulled out a sheet of paper on which there was some writing.

“I’m fine,” he said calmly, scanning the writing. “Only one request. Let Ms. Morisson meet me no more than once a day, and only in the briefing room, not here.”

Rebecca Morisson was the plenipotentiary representative of Mikiliks, the scandalous international revealers of secrets, and maybe the girlfriend of its founder Augusto Cassandzhi. Cassandzhi had already been hiding for a long time in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. In Kold, Cassandzhi at once saw a kindred spirit and disciple. How Kold saw ‘the great unmasker’, as Cassandzhi was called, is unknown, but he obviously didn’t favour Ms. Morisson.

The Lawyer remembered that in a lobby of the Presidential Administration there was talk that all the story of Mikiliks and the attempts to catch Cassandzhi were well and skilfully thought-through provocation.

“But there remains the question of what Kold’s business actually is,” he thought, examining his subject. “In our information century any release of compromising data is a Pandora’s box and who gets what out of it nobody knows.”

“I’ll let them know your request,” the Lawyer nodded. “Anything else? How are you fed?”

“Thanks, the food is ok.”

“How are the conditions?”

“Perhaps, it might be more comfortable up above.” Kold said raising his eyes to the ceiling. “But hardly safer.”

“Aren’t you afraid to become the new Nasser?” the Lawyer asked.

“Who is that?” Kold inquired disinterestedly.

“Well, it’s a well-known story. Mekhran Karimi Nasser, Iranian political refugee. In 1970 he was exiled from the country for his participation in antigovernment activities and protests. He wandered for several years between different countries, and finally obtained citizenship of Belgium and, respectively, a passport. In 86, Mekhran travelled from Belgium to London where his relatives lived, but at Heathrow airport it transpired he had no documents – either he lost the passport or it was stolen. The British returned Mekhran to the airport of departure, the Charles de Gaulle in France. There it became clear that he couldn’t return to Belgium for the same reason – there were no documents. But then there were also no legal reasons to deport him from France. It was noted that he had entered the country absolutely legally because at that time Mekhran had documents. So he got stuck in the transit area of Charles de Gaulle. Do you know for how long?”

“No, I don’t know.”

“For eighteen years!”

“Why couldn’t the Belgians just give him a duplicate passport?” Kold made a gesture of bewilderment.

The Lawyer shook his head.

“No, to put it simply. Under Belgian law, the paperwork requires the presence of the person the passport is issued to, but then it is impossible to enter Belgium without documents.”

“Catch 22?”

“Exactly. Though after nine years of life at the airport, having already become not just a local celebrity, but a fixture of the transit area of Charles de Gaulle, Mekhran suddenly received from the Belgian Foreign Ministry an offer by which the country was ready to accept him without any documents. And you know, he...”

“Refused!” Kold smiled with his short, fleeting smile. “I studied psychology. It’s so simple: popularity and public attention are like a drug. Once tasted, ninety percent of people can’t refuse and try to recapture it again and again.”

“True, true,” the Lawyer nodded again. “So Mekhran left the transit area and went over to the airport hotel only after he fell seriously ill. The most ridiculous thing is that he moved neither to Belgium, nor Great Britain, but lives in Paris now and feels good.

“Emigrants are always like that: where it is good, there is home,” Kold murmured.

“By the way, Steven Spielberg did a quite famous movie based on Mekhran’s story “‘The Terminal’ starring Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Didn’t you see it?”

Kold tugged his shoulder, then nodded.

“Now I remember. Yes, I saw it.”

The Lawyer was irritated. He’d just spent several minutes telling this man something he already knew. But, maybe Kold is just too affected and couldn’t concentrate?

Mekhran Nasserri was neither the first, nor the only prisoner of transit areas in airports. In this same Sheremetyevo transit area, Zara Kamalfar also spent ten months – after fleeing Iran too, by strange coincidence,.

The husband of this unfortunate woman who belonged to a Muslim sect of dervishes was executed in 2006, and she fled with her two children through Moscow to Germany, hoping to receive shelter there and get political asylum in Canada.

The German officials, however, remained deaf to the tragedy of this family and sent Zara Kamalfar and her children back to Russia. After

being forced to stay in the transit area, the refugees had almost no means of support. In a video appeal to the world, Zara said: “Life here is hard, very hard... We fill a bucket of water in the toilet in the middle of the night away from the eyes of the authority to take a bath. I have no place to wash my clothes, all doors are closed to us... A policewoman pushed me, I hit the wall and blood began to flow from my mouth. I don’t cry because I have to be strong. Children shouldn’t see my tears. I laugh to give them hope, so they can fight, so they withstand.”

After a while the children began fall ill from lack of sunlight, scant nutrition and a shortage of vitamins. The daughter developed a skin disease and the son had scurvy. All the same this story ended well since after ten months the Canadian authorities allowed the Kamalfar family to fly to Vancouver and gave Zara and her family residence permits.

But if Iranians were political refugees, then Englishman Gary Peter Austin simply missed his flight at a Philippines airport since his e-ticket had been inexplicably cancelled. The situation was complicated by the fact that he had run out of money and so was stuck ten thousand kilometers from Foggy Albion.

He spent New Year in the airport of Manila, and altogether spent twenty three days there, after turning into a local tourist attraction. In the end the unfortunate Austin’s ordeal ended when either a passenger flying to the Netherlands took pity on him and brought him a ticket – or he was helped by the British Embassy.

And the story of German Heinz Müller seems almost a good joke. Müller arrived in Rio de Janeiro to meet the woman of his dreams. They had become acquainted on the internet and agreed to meet, but to the great disappointment of this German Romeo, his Brazilian Juliet didn’t want him.

As a result, Heinz ended up in the middle of a foreign country without any money for his return ticket. He lived at Virakopus-Campinas airport near Sao Paulo for several days until he was taken to a local clinic for psychiatric assessment.

There are also some volunteers among the captives of transit areas. Japanese man Hiroshi Nohara stayed for 117 days at Mexico City airport without any apparent reason. His tickets and documents were in good order, and Japanese diplomats were constantly keeping an eye on him, ready to provide him with a new passport at once if necessary.

The story among journalists was that this little Japanese man was simply craving celebrity. And there was no doubt Nohara was happy to be interviewed, pose for tourists, crying out: 'Terminal-2!', with clear allusions to the Spielberg movie. And yet he always refused to explain what he was doing in the transit area.

The final twist in this stationary Odyssey was even more mysterious. One fine day in December 2008 a young Japanese woman called Oyuki literally took Nohara by the hand, forced him to buy a ticket and they departed together for Japan. And nobody heard any more about them.

And if for some transit areas were a shelter, then the famous Chinese dissident Fan Chzhen Hu used them for political struggle. For 92 days, Fan Chzhen Hu lived at Tokyo's Narita airport in protest against the Chinese authorities' refusal to let him come home after treatment in a Japanese clinic.

In the USSR, the People's Republic of China, and other countries with oppressive regimes, dispatching undesirable elements abroad and depriving them of their nationality was by no means rare, but only Fan Chzhen Hu ventured to fight for the right to return. Most surprisingly, he managed to draw international attention to the issue and China relented, their prodigal son back. The dissident was put under house arrest immediately in Shanghai, but this hardly frightened Fan Chzhen Hu who had already spent three years in Chinese prisons for illegal entrepreneurship.

08:03 P.M.

All these various facts flashed through the Lawyer's mind as he collected his thoughts. A tough conversation, with a lot of things depending on it, was ahead of him.

"Mr. Kold, this time I come to you without any gifts, but with news." The Lawyer undid his brief case and took a transparent file out. "There is good news, and not so good news. Which should I begin with?"

Not a single muscle on Kold's face moved. He simply nodded. For some reason, the Lawyer focused on his big ears. From the depths of his memory of a physiognomics course, he dragged up this theory: "Big ears are a sign of independent judgment and determination. They are also a sign of developed intelligence linked to extraordinary acts."

"Let's start with the good news," Kold said at last.

"This is a letter from your mother," the Lawyer said, taking an envelope from the brief case. "It was sent through authorized representatives. Here."

Kold quickly skimmed the letter, then, apparently, started to read it from the beginning, much more attentively. At last, he put the letter aside.

"The Russian side," Lawyer continued, "That is, the Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation received an official letter from the Attorney-General of the USA Mr. Eric Older. This document can be considered as the reaction of the American side to your petition for provisional asylum. Mister Older writes that," the Lawyer glanced at the text of the letter, "You are accused of stealing state-owned property according to section 641 of Article 18 of the Code of the USA; the unauthorized information transfer of national defense interests according to section 793 sub-clause 'd' of the same article of the Code; and also of the voluntary search and transfer of classified information to a person who doesn't have the corresponding permission, as in section 798, point 'a'.

# CONTENTS

IN PLACE OF A PROLOGUE . . . . .	9
SHEREMETYEVO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 07:10 P.M. . . . .	11
07:16 P.M. . . . .	14
07:21 P.M. . . . .	17
07:33 P.M. . . . .	19
07:42 P.M. . . . .	22
08:03 P.M. . . . .	28
08:30 P.M. . . . .	32
09:08 P.M. . . . .	59
09:57 P.M. . . . .	79
10:12 P.M. . . . .	92
10:34 P.M. . . . .	96
11:35 P.M. . . . .	108
11:56 P.M. . . . .	124
00:17 A.M. . . . .	140
00:47 A.M. . . . .	149
01:21 A.M. . . . .	160
01:49 A.M. . . . .	182
02:28 A.M. . . . .	193
02:53 A.M. . . . .	201
03:29 A.M. . . . .	211
03:55 A.M. . . . .	224
03:55 A.M. . . . .	232
04:24 A.M. . . . .	236
IN PLACE OF AN EPILOGUE . . . . .	249

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A frightening, prophetic vision of our world...

In Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, fugitive US intelligence officer Joshua Kold is held in limbo, unable to leave the airport's transit area. He is on the run, after blowing the lid off the terrifying reach of covert American global surveillance operations. Will the Russian authorities grant him asylum, or will they hand him over the clutches of the global octopus eager for revenge for his betrayal?

As this gripping psychological and political thriller unfolds, a Moscow lawyer takes Kold to a secret bunker and grills him intently on just why he did it. Upon Kold's answers hang not only his own fate, but much, much more as the true extent of this chilling 1984 world unfolds.

Anatoly Kucherena is the famous Russian lawyer who took on the case of the American whistleblower Edward Snowden whose revelations about US intelligence operations sent shockwaves around the world in 2013. *Time of the Octopus* is a fiction, but it is based on Kucherena's own interviews with Snowden at Sheremetyevo, and provides the basis for Oliver Stone's major Hollywood movie 'Snowden' starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt, one of the movie events of 2016.

According to Stone, "Anatoly has written a 'grand inquisitor'-style Russian novel weighing the soul of his fictional whistleblower against the gravity of a 1984 tyranny that has achieved global proportions. His meditations on the meaning of totalitarian power in the 21st century make for a chilling, prescient horror story."

Is Kold simply a traitor, or the courageous hero of a terrifying struggle against the dark forces of oppression?

