



THE CHRONICLES OF DALAL STREET

BY
VINAYAK GOEL

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VINAYAK GOEL

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CHARACTERS

1.Rajat - Ambitious and driven employee at Kathuria Investments.

2.Sumit -Diligent and seemingly honest boss at Kathuria Investments.

3.Shanza -Rajat's mother, chairperson of a major consumer goods company.

4.Ashish - Hyper-observant and highly intelligent young man from a humble background, uncovering hidden corporate secrets.

5.Puneet - Accounts head at the mysterious billionaire's company.

6.Sameer - Human Resources manager at the billionaire's company.

7.S.K. -Mysterious billionaire who owns the shell company.

8.Gaurav - Rajat's friend and head of the investment division at Dhir Group of Banks.

9.Anuj - A former security head who is investigating the mysterious circumstances of his termination.

10.Aira - An executive at BlackWolf Security.

11.Roger -The new, intimidating security guard at Ashish's office.

12.Rahul - A stock analyst with whom Rajat has a good relationship.

13.Isha - The receptionist at BlackWolf Security.

14.Amit Vig - A key figure from BlackWolf Security with a familiar face.

15.The Guard -A lonely and underpaid security guard who becomes an accomplice to Ashish's con.

16.Wealth Manager- A sly and opportunistic banker who provides Ashish with information about investment opportunities.

17.The Worker at the Gas Station - A suspicious individual who manipulates Rajat's car.

18.The Pedestrian - An onlooker who witnesses Rajat's accident and offers first aid.



CHAPTER 1: SPARK OF DISCOVERY

CHRONICLES OF RAJAT

Rajat never knew what was to be expected and what had to be done. He just did it and all seemed to go his way. His boss Sumit at Kathuria Investments was a diligent and honest man, as it seemed on the surface. Rajat was out to make a name for himself, willing to do anything to rise to the power he always dreamed of wielding. Authority drove him; money was an object he would always set aside. Brilliant, lucky but none too aware of the events and circumstances happening around him and affecting him. The morning of Saturday, it was a working Saturday and Rajat was not thrilled due to the fact that this was his day, the day to start the planning for starting his own investment firm. His loyalty was never much to him and authority was of utmost importance.

He could not find a way to overthrow Sumit as head of the firm as he lacked any precedent or support from the partners. His plan was based on his mother. Shanza, his mother, was the chairperson of a huge company manufacturing consumer goods who controlled the majority portion of the market. His hope was to underwrite the initial public offering of Dalal Foods to kick off his venture into success and fame. When he went into work that Saturday, he was shocked to see that his boss was absent. Such an event occurred once in a blue moon. His mind was diverted into this event and his curiosity got the better of his desire for power this time. He snuck into his office and decided to take a look around. His eyes were sharp and observant. Papers and stationary were lying haphazardly on his desk as if someone had been investigating thoroughly with intent as intense as the curiosity of Rajat. Rajat recognized a

particular paper to be of great importance. The paper prescribed all the current companies and organizations the company had invested its money into. Rajat being the curious employee decided to take a look at the paper with a keen interest. His brain was tuned to such information and he recognized all the companies that the company had invested its money into except for one. Upon reading the company's name, he realized that it was a logistics management company which had been struggling lately. It made no sense for anyone to decide to invest into it as it was on the verge of losing its entire market share to better options in the market. Also, it was the largest company which had already gone public and its stock had been taking a dive. His heart almost stopped when he looked at the amount invested by the company. It was absurd to invest such a gigantic amount. Why didn't he know that this company was in their portfolio? This information was hidden from him and presumably most of the employees.

He decided to take a screenshot of this paper and left in a hurry representing the demeanor and behavior of a thief fleeing from his crime. When he reached home, he noticed many calls from her mother but decided to ignore them. He went on to analyze the paper and finally it occurred to him. Suh an indiscretion could either be due to incompetence of the investors which he found hard to believe or due to something which could contradict the clean and honest status of Sumit and this corporation. Something was missing in this equation, and the initial public offering which would have been the best chance of Rajat to make a name for him now seemed to slip his mind as he continued to make sense of this information. He knew in his mind that if something had been covered up then he would have a clear shot at the position of his boss. His mind was now set, committed to see something more than what was possible to witness with the naked eye.

CHAPTER 1: SPARK OF DISCOVERY

CHRONICLES OF ASHISH

Ashish was from a humble background with access to little education up till high school. He was a very bright minded and intellectual boy, a prodigy superior to all his peers. Being born with a gift of being a hyper observant, he was always the most aware of his surroundings and deduced the little things a normal person could never. His intellect was however never recognized by his family who would have him working laborious tasks than study and live a life fit for someone of his intellectual stature. His refusal to work during his young age strained his relationship with his father who was a driver and guard for a millionaire hailing from Haryana. His rebellious attitude led him to eventually work as an unskilled executive employed as a helper in a billionaires company.

The office was located in a building secluded from the crowded metropolitan areas and its nature of business was unknown to the public and employees at the bottom of the ladder. The billionaire had never once come to work in the very office owned by him and the work environment was one of mystery. He would try to visit each part of the office to try and comprehend the work done by each of the teams. The first department to investigate was obvious, the accounts department which could disclose all the hidden secrets and conspiracies that were glooming inside the mysterious location. Wednesday night, he decided to creep into the department bullpen by accessing the security code of the accounts head Puneet. During lunch break, he noticed the security code of the accounts head written on the back of his identification card tipping out of his breast pocket. The same day, it was late in the evening and most of the team had gone home. He sat down on a desk, accessed the company server and downloaded all the accounting information and financial reports uploaded on the company cloud server he could find. He opened the files folder and tracked his mouse down the reports list until one particular file caught his eye.

The balance sheet of the firm was now the center of his unwavering attention. The nature of operations and the functions of the company were unknown, the sheet proved his suspicion that the company was nothing but a shell corporation. Its assets in the company were practically nothing. No properties, plants, buildings, receivables or any land. The cash in the bank seemed to have no revenue sources. Liabilities on the other hand were all there actually were. There was this loan, a huge loan taken from the main company owned by the billionaire. His hunch had manifested into a strong suspicion in a matter of minutes. All that was left was to figure out why this shell company was set up. His analytical eyes and eidetic memory were to blame for this discovery. He left the office late at night and decided to sleep on his next course of action.

The next day, he stepped into the elevator to find Puneet and the human resources manager Sameer laughing over the actions of an employee who had apparently been fired last night due to incompetent behavior. The employee who had been fired was none other than the loyal guard Anuj Mata. Upon asking the specifics of his termination, he was ignored. He remained silent and waited for both of them to get off the elevator. He decided not to enter the office and went back down with a desire to unfold more as he believed that he had just scratched the surface. His suspicion grew stronger as it could not have been a coincidence that after the night he snuck into the department bullpen and accessed information which could incriminate an entire organization, the security head who had been in employment for as long as he had been alive was suddenly fired with vague details. Now with sheer determination and intent to satiate his mind, he signaled a cab and went back to his house.

He began researching the company owned by the billionaire, known by the initials of S.K and when it was registered, the growth of the company and when the shell company was set up. Any major decision and activity of the main company around the time of the creation of the shell company could help establish a connection and purpose. After hours of screen time, there was nothing much to go on online. The only way to pursue his suspicion now could only be worked on inside the real world.



CHAPTER 1: SPARK OF DISCOVERY

CHRONICLES OF ANUJ

He was a tall, dark, bald middle-aged man. His hair seemed to be thinning by the second and had a density similar to that of vapor. He had a disgusting habit of scratching his head like a monkey. His lack of education led him to work as a peon in the corporate world. His 20 year work experience commenced with an action of violence. He had started his career off by working as a lowly peon in an agrochemical industrialist corporation but was fired due to a scuffle he had with a visitor who refused to sign his name on the register. With careless disregard he punched the poor man in the face. The lawsuit filed against him seemed to have further left him in ruins. He continued his search for a job with hope but was knocked down to the lowest moments of his life. He was single and never had time to find someone to share his tough life with.

As soon as he moved back home to Bombay with his parents, luck seemed to have taken a 180 degree turn. As he was walking in the streets of Mumbai, he noticed a convoy of vehicles moving in union and a strange pattern of biked behind them. Nine bikes of the same model and plates of consecutive numbers were behind each second alternative vehicle. He had a knack for detecting malice and his gut feeling seemed to control his actions. This pattern had gone unnoticed by the security convoy. Immediately, one bike sped past the convoy in an instant leaving the security with no time to react. He immediately threw a rock at the luxury saloon in the middle which stopped the driver and the bike overshot by a few meters. He ran towards the sedan in the middle of traffic and signaled the convoy to surround the vehicle.

The bikes escaped and Anuj restrained the biker who had fallen from his bike. After this incident, he was employed by the man who turned out to be a billionaire. The purpose behind this attack was left to be investigated by the police who never showed any results. His interaction with the billionaire was minimal and seldom had he ever spoken to him. Although his knowledge about the billionaire and his activities were minimal. What he did understand was that man had a mysterious aura associated with him and his reputation in the public and with other industrialists was rocky at best. With years of service for the billionaire's company in his headquarters as one of the guards, he was made head of security for the satellite office alongside the shore in Mumbai and relocated. This office was full of employees but had none of the security to accompany it. It seemed to be a shell of the incorporation he had been serving as a guard for fifteen years. His duties were simple and all he had to do now was sit inside the control room and register every person who entered. He also had access to all the departmental bullpens and the camera footage. He was solely in charge of the wellbeing of this office and corporation.

His gut feeling was never wrong and his intuition was his biggest asset which continued to help him secure and serve his duties. Such an incident happened when a young boy named Ashish had been employed as a helper in the office. He had always known that his employers were up to no good but this feeling had been flaring lately. He knew in his heart that something was going to happen but could not pinpoint the specifics of this future event. Ashish was a curious young boy who always triggered the guards' radar.

On Thursday, the night shift was taken up by Anuj as one of his guards had taken a leave. Being tired from the long day, he couldn't help but doze off for a few minutes. He did not seem to think much of it as the routine was monotonous and nothing much usually happened. He left the next morning and went to bed. He tried to go to sleep but his mind just would not let him. Something was itching the back of his head. He turned his back and started to scratch the back of his head but found some hair loose and scattered. His scratching had further scraped his thin hair from his head. After trying to sleep for two hours, he finally gave up when someone knocked at the door loudly. Two men in black were standing behind the door. They handed him a letter stating his termination as a head of security at the offshore office. It did not seem to shock him very much. It was like he already knew something like this was going to happen. He tried to call the main office's landline but it was shut and it would not ring. He knew that something had happened yesterday night and he knew that it had something to do with the newly employed boy. He had a sinking feeling as he was beginning to realize that last night must have caused a problem of some magnitude as he had been forgiven for similar indiscretions in the past. For two men to personally come and hand him a letter to his doorstep meant something more was up. He had never even given his new address to the company in which he was employed. He enjoyed solitude and privacy. His closest family had a hard time finding where exactly he lived. He also relocated quite frequently because he did enjoy staying in the same place for long.

It was near impossible to find him. With no immediate future prospects, he found it difficult to let 15 years of service go to waste without an explanation. Access to limited means and his rigidity in old fashioned ways of investigation, he found the contact of his old friend who worked in the private security transfer industry. He left him a long voice message starting with a simple "How have you been"?



CHAPTER 2: A DOUBTFUL DILEMMA- DISCOMBULATION

CHRONICLES OF RAJAT

His phone kept ringing and buzzing. It was silent. He paid no heed to his device. His inbox was filled with voicemails from an unknown landline number. The laptop was on the bedroom desk. Rajat was in the kitchen cooking up some eggs and instant noodles. He wasn't any MasterChef of some sort but had the capabilities to provide unhealthy components to his body. He went to the printer and printed the snapshot of the paper containing the confidential information of the company. This sort of report was meant to be reserved for the higher ups and the top management. He was doubtful that anyone from the office excluding Summit could even have access to this information. That is why it was so precious to him. It was hard to believe that it was lying on his desk so carelessly. He placed the paper on the desk and opened the final accounts of the firm on his laptop. He started to work out the differences column by column, matching all the investment amounts and returns in the sheet with the accounts of the company.

He ended up with a difference of an amount just over hundred crore, he had never comprehended that his firm has the capability to invest such a gigantic amount in a single company and also keep it off the books. He couldn't earn this amount by taking even five companies public, let alone just his mothers. He was now doubting his line of work, how good it was to be in power of his own firm which could not earn him a fraction of what he had discovered? Was it better for him to rather confront Summit and take him down to then have both power as well as wealth. It was the firm time that the concept of money was tempting the mind of Rajat. His confusing dilemma was however halted by a knock on his door. As soon as he opened the door, his mother rushed inside the apartment with frustration.

"Why haven't you been answering my calls? My board has been raking it in with me and now they seem to be losing trust that I can take this company public!". Rajat was taken aback and flustered as he suddenly ran to the room ignoring his mother's words to hide the paper print out and close his laptop. His mother rushed in and showed him his phone. It was filled with missed calls and voicemails from his mother as well as an unknown number.

"My boss is calling me for an urgent matter, I promise to take care of the IPO as soon as possible, besides i will have to contact some banker friends as well". After reassuring his mother, he got in the car and in fact did go to a bank to meet his friend, but not for the purpose he had promised earlier. Gaurav was a head of the investment division at Dhir Group of Banks. His bond with Rajat was strong as they had been friends since they were in university. Rajat described him as a loyal friend but with a strange superiority complex with a need to prove him on various occasions. This could sometimes drive him to impulsive actions. He personally thought that Gaurav was not completely deserving of his position. He drove to his office and asked him to keep their conversation completely confidential.

He slid the paper across his huge desk along with the financial statements of the company. Gaurav could not make anything of it at first. You seriously don't know what that is? That's the Holy Grail! "Said Rajat with a tone of mockery." This seemed to tick him off. With complete confidence, Gaurav said that he would look into it deeper and further and connect the dots at a much faster pace than Rajat. Although it took him quite a while, about 2 hours more than his friend, he finally figured out why Rajat had handed him the papers.

He immediately called Rajat and informed him of this hundred crore debauchery. Rajat was in hysterics. After laughing for a whole of five minutes, he finally said-

"That isn't why I handed the papers to you, fool, you had to find out how my firm managed to invest this amount off the books and why."

"I knew that, I was just reminding you in case you forgot"- said Gaurav in a confident and boastful tone. Rajat had completely forgotten to discuss hosting the IPO; his primary job was to find banks and institutions to underwrite the shares for the company. His plan was now set in stone, simply to find the hidden sources of money. Whether to rectify this shady situation or use it as a cheat sheet to strong arm his boss into submission was the only dilemma he had his doubts on. There was the emotional turmoil of morality attached within one path, while a heavy opportunity cost associated with the other. Rajat had not contemplated the effects and consequences he would have to face if he continued down any of these paths. Suddenly his phone rang once again; it was Gaurav who had just received a loan request by the new company which happened to be in the same line of logistics as the failing company his firm had made such an illegal commitment amounting to exactly 100 Crores. Moreover, the start-up had been solely responsible for the trouble that the company had been facing. This was owing to the fact that the new start-up had apparently made a groundbreaking discovery in logistics management, light years

ahead of its competitors. However, there was more to this story narrated by the curious banker. A profound sense of hope enveloped Rajat as he sat on his chair bewildered of this new lead he had received.



CHAPTER 2: A DOUBTFUL DILEMMA- DISCOMBULATION

CHRONICLES OF ASHISH

On Monday morning, he went back into the office. Pretending everything to be normal, he stepped outside the elevator with the same gusto he always upheld earlier. He immediately noticed that the guard inside the control room had a head full of hair. Anuj had been replaced by a man who appeared to be much stronger and fiercer. He was quite fair skinned and upon taking a proper glance at the man, he seemed to be of Caucasian ethnicity, a rare sight in India. He gave Ashish a menacing look as he passed by. Immediately, the new guard stepped outside and stopped Ashish from passing any further.

“New protocols are now active, you now have to deposit your Aadhar card with us before going any further, and each area of the office now has fingerprint locks used only by those who have access to it. Further, the area of the office behind the accounts department has been freeze and no one can enter.” The young boy was bewildered at the decor of the place he used to work at. It was swarming with security and almost all the workers were new. The old ones Ashish recognized were nowhere to be found.

The barren office once before was now appearing like a top notch police station. The strangest thing was the id card the new guard was wearing around his neck. Thanks to his memory, he was able to remember the name of the new guard. His name is Roger, a quite peculiar name in the streets of Mumbai. His suspicion seemed to be accurate, he was a foreigner appointed for a special purpose and not for the general security and wellbeing of this former shell of an organization. His uniform also seemed to state the company from which he was appointed. In fact, all the guards seemed to be wearing the same uniform. Their uniform was pitch black with the words 'Sentinels' stitched in white near the breast pocket. The uniform was of rich quality and made of fine cloth. There was no doubt that the security appointment was expensive and costly. Ashish had no role in the office now as the familiarity with the employees wasn't there anymore. He wasn't called for the menial tasks like delivering papers and documents, guiding guests into rooms etc. He sat in the common room waiting for any kind of work. Immediately, it struck his mind to sneak into the file room to gain access to the appointment details of Anuj. Since earlier he was unable to find any vital details regarding any link between the shell company and the main company, the mysterious circumstances of the termination of the security head was virtually the only arrow in his quiver.

His logic was based on the feeling that if he had suddenly been fired after years of faithful service, he would surely not sit at home and move on silently. Such a belief led him to pursue the actions he had in mind. Although it was impossible to access the file room, the data was also kept online in the company server. There was just one problem, digital files were unreliable and could be tampered with. Documents in the file room, especially the older ones, were hardly changed and tampered with. They couldn't dispose of them as it was essential to keep a record of the people who worked for them in case any kind of incidents were to happen. The company made their entire employees fill out their contact information,

emergency contacts and a residential address. Ashish himself had provided a false address to the company as he didn't wish to provide details of his personal life.

"A smart and sensible man couldn't give every single detail of his life, but a loyal man could".

Ashish assured himself of this.

He walked up to the control room to find the guard still there. His plan was to wait till night and enter once the guard was shifting the night duties. The security cameras were sure to catch him, since they were now upgraded to enable night vision. He could not get away doing the same as he did earlier. If he committed to doing this, there was no going back. He was sure to get caught. However, his mind was set as he had his whole life ahead of him and nothing to lose; he left the office for lunch break. The burden of not continuing the path he had discovered and the consequences of facing the power figures in action left an impression in his mind. He left the office to analyze the depth of the situation. Roaming the entire market in the streets of Bombay, he found clothes on display in a shop which were similar to that of the guards, although not so rich in quality.

An idea struck his mind as he entered to ask the tailor to stitch the words 'Sentinels' precisely near the breast pocket. He packed a briefcase with these clothes and stuffed it inside the bag he used to carry every day. As he poured the last of his savings in this little shopping endeavor, he had prepared everything that was needed. The same night, the guard was getting ready to leave his station with his briefcase. The replacement was waiting beside the elevators.. He changed into the uniform of the guards and held the briefcase in his left hand. He had earlier noticed that the guard was left handed as he was wearing his watch on the right wrist. He was counting on the dark to disguise his looks just enough to let him slip by. He had a strong assumption that the briefcase carried by the guard should have had some significance as he carried it around everywhere he went.

"Take this briefcase to the boss, and come back in precisely 15 minutes. I won't wait much longer."

It was a risky gamble. If any of the words he said were unusual to the guard, he would have been in big trouble. He was ready to scam away in case the guard caught on to his deception. Surprisingly, The guard nodded and took the briefcase from Ashish's left hand. He breathed a huge sigh of relief. After a few minutes, just as the guard Roger came out to check on the arrival of his subordinate, Ashish crawled across the dull wall and slid into the control room behind the guard's back. With just a few seconds to spare, he found the files room on the big screen monitoring all the areas of the office. After taking a closer look, he found a familiar space in the left corner of the files room. It closely resembled the space around the coffee machine and water cooler. The floor tiles were of a similar pattern and some water was spilling through the door. Ecstatic of his discovery, he hid under the desk waiting for the guard to return. As soon as the guard entered to pick up the briefcase, Ashish crawled on the floor and immediately made a break for it as soon as he got out of the room. He entered the hallway and ran towards the water coolers. He found the file room door just beside the water coolers. It was just beyond the accounts bullpen and inside the restricted area.

It was now or never. He placed his thumb on the door hilt unlocking the fingerprint lock. He rushed inside and looked for the administration folders. He opened the drawer and scrolled across the documents. They were organized in an alphabetical order. He found the document recorded under the name of Anuj Mata listed as the security head in administration. Scrolling across all the pages, he quickly snatched the folder from the desk and made a run for it once again. As he was running across the hallway, the alarm sounded and the guards started to gather in front of the young culprit. He skipped the elevators and jumped down the stairs. Completely skipping the last staircase and cushioning his

landing with his wrist, he ran across the streets evading the charging cars. With a heavy breath, he sat on the bench after running for a good 2-3 kilometers.



CHAPTER 2: A DOUBTFUL DILEMMA- DISCOMBULATION

CHRONICLES OF ANUJ

Aira had known Anuj for over a decade. Ever since he had diverted the bike attack, Anuj had been in charge of arranging some of the security convoy that was needed from time to time. Not for the billionaire, he was set in his choices made by the inner circle of his company. Anuj arranged for transporting some of the precious goods the billionaires had a habit of buying from time to time.. Aira was an executive of Black Wolf Security, a small yet effective company in the industry. Anuj had a strong intuition and when researching the companies he could trust, he found this to be the best choice. After having talked to an executive of the company Aira, he was convinced that this was the suitable option. Being small in size, it could provide better quality of men who were more skilled than those companies having a large scale of operations. Moreover, this company would give more importance to them as clients and make greater efforts to satisfy them as they had a small roster and could focus more on the important clients, especially the company of a billionaire. Such an arrangement between the security specialist and Aira happened about once a month, only to carry the rare imported paintings and stones bought by the billionaire to add to his collection. They were picked up from the Jawaharlal Nehru port and delivered in an underground warehouse close to the headquarters of the anonymous billionaire. Over the course of these years, Anuj and Aira had developed a friendship which superseded their business relationship.

At the end of the long voice message the former security specialist had sent to Aira, he had hoped that the termination of his employment did not mean the termination of the business relationship with the firm and Black Wolf.

The strong bond shared between him and the executive could have helped gain some insight over the specifics of his termination. If they were contacted for any transfer, Anuj could use it as an advantage to gain some answers. If something had happened the night before he was let go, he was sure that Aira would have some kind of knowledge about it. His intuition assured him that his termination was not a routine budget cut but the consequence of a series of peculiar events. The company had been in a great place and to his knowledge it was rich in cash. When he was transferred to head of security for the satellite office, he was made aware of the financial situations and future projections so that he could operate the administration accordingly. Such was the trust that he had gained from the officials in power of the parent organization. The chairman of the board was assumed to be the billionaire, although no one knew exactly who filled that role. The guard had never personally met the billionaire, but was made sure of his approval through the pawns of his board.

No termination of management could have gone through without the knowledge of the higher ups, and knowing his reputation it was unlikely that they would have let him go unless something serious happened. His mind pictured the juxtaposition he faced. What could he gain from knowing about the situation? Was he to report the matter in case something shady was discovered, would he request a higher position than what he was removed from, was he to risk everything he had worked for to miraculously fix the potentially dangerous situation. With the weight of unanswered questions, he went out of his apartment to gain some fresh air. He didn't have any friends who could provide a fresh perspective on the situation. When he returned to his apartment and opened his computer after a long time, a notification appeared with a chirping sound effect. The icon which looked like an envelope had a new number on the upper right corner. Intrigued, he decided to click on the icon. In the right side of his application, he found the one and only message he had received since the purchase of his computer.

The time stamp revealed the notification to have been received just 30 minutes before. It seemed that when he was out for a brisk walk to clear his mind, he had received a job offer with outstanding wages and excellent benefits. He was offered more money to be earned in a week than what he was previously earning in 3 months. The offer was from an unheard organization who seemed to have been new to the market. His position was to be the on field logistics manager. He could not accept the offer without researching the background, it was in his nature. The company did not have a digital presence despite being launched in such a modern era. "No, it wasn't that the company had never created any digital footprints, they had been scrapped."

The guard made such a claim after researching for a better part of an hour. The basic information he could find regarding the company Express Emporium was not anywhere near enough to accept an offer. The company was a start-up in the logistics management industry and had made a breakthrough using artificial intelligence. However, for such a thriving company to scrap its digital presence and hide all information from the public was puzzling and odd. He had been tempted by the offer made to him and the peculiar circumstances of the company that the phone ringing beside him was ignored. Once again his intuition flared as he thought as to why a thriving company with money to splash around was suddenly scared of its digital space. The phone on the table was now flush with notifications on the lock screen. A slight gaze to the left made Anuj notice his phone acting up. Within a few seconds, he picked up his phone and with a crystal clear vision, he saw that his friend Aira had replied back with a thrilling message...



CHAPTER 3: CONNECTION OF THOSE CLAIRVOYANT

CHRONICLES OF RAJAT

As the feeling of disappointment over the dead ends he had pursued had started to sink in, his phone started buzzing due to the incoming call from his banker friend Gaurav. The news about a startup requesting a loan to the exact amount of the rumored lawsuit rendered him ecstatic. More ecstatic than when he had discovered that he had been offered to underwrite the public offering of a multi-million dollar food company.

"The name of the start-up is Express Emporium. Apparently, they had a groundbreaking discovery in technology to help logistics management with artificial intelligence, but they went silent a few weeks ago."

Gaurav had conveyed this information to Rajat after he asked for the details of this startup. They had been operating in secrecy for the past few weeks and Gaurav was now under the assumption that they had been preparing the documents needed for availing a large financial assistance. Rajat seemed to think otherwise. Working at a trading floor in the infamous Dalal Street, he had eyes and ears to all the rumors and gossip of the crude corporate world. Recalling one particular conversation he had with a co-worker at lunch, he had heard a rumor of a very harsh suit filed

against a startup which had made a mysterious discovery. Rumor was that some foul play between the founders could also have been possible. Although the exact specifics were not discussed, the spark in his mind had been lit. The conversation with Gaurav rekindled that spark into a flame. Although he had trust in Gaurav as a friend, he kept this information about the alleged foul play between the founders to himself. In his mind, he wanted not to interfere with the work of his friend since clearly the company had not disclosed that details and the true purpose of their request to him. This meant that the company did not want to make their information available to the bankers, and any unconfirmed rumor could put the natural course of their plan to jeopardy. By letting things play out as the company had planned, it would be easier to observe and investigate. After Hanging up the phone, he started pondering about the connection between the entries made by the firm and the alleged suit. He had confirmed his suspicion, now what was left was to take action. The first step of the plan he now had to take was to prioritize this mission while still trying to maintain a cover to his mother, his firm, his boss who had been missing since that day and to the outside world.

The place of operations of this startup was unknown and the research on his laptop also turned up to be empty. He had to work the old fashioned way and rely on the word of Dalal Street. The next day, he headed into work with a mission to interrogate and investigate. To act as if everything was normal, he arrived late as he usually did. He entered the office building and found his boss Sumit's office to still be empty. When he gazed into the office, the desk was completely organized and the office was as clean as if it had been vacant and undisturbed for a long time. As he sat in his office, a tip sheet was handed to him by the stock analyst. Every morning before the market opened, the traders were given a tip sheet with news and recommendations about companies and their stocks. It was logical that the researchers preparing these tip sheets would have access to most of the news of the various companies and markets.

If their company was practicing in bad faith as he had seen in their accounting entries, he was sure that more of such activities were bound to happen. Once someone crosses a certain line, it is almost impossible for them to step back. The researchers were the most likely to engage in such a practice of insider information. With them being the most likely chance of Rajat obtaining any lead, he left his office and walked to the office of the only researcher he had a good relationship with.. Due to the fact that Rajat always chose to ignore the tips and recommendations and still produced more than optimal results, most of the researchers despised him except for Rahul. Rajat entered his office with the most forced smile mankind had ever known. With a bag of goodies and traits to tempt the analyst into a small favor, he asked him

"I need to cash in a tip. I heard from some guys a new start-up is looking to raise their second seed round. They are looking to pursue their logistics management system using artificial intelligence and need approximately 100 crores this time. Do you know any information about where I can find them and their founders so that I can persuade them to give us their business?"

"Come to think of it, I last heard of them a few weeks ago but they have gone silent since a suit has been filed against them. It will be very hard to find the founder. Rumors say that the founder had been involved in some shady deal which led him to this situation. Instead of the founder, can I find the address of their last known office and the number of their chief technological officer?"

Rahul's reply pushed Rajat over the edge.

"But now you owe me one, and that bag is not going to cut it"

Rajat did not give much more thought to this statement. He left in a hurry with the address of the office written on a torn piece of paper and the personal email address of the CTO. As soon as lunch time started, Rajat packed his work briefcase and scrambled out of the building. With the address feeded on his device's satellite navigation, he went and got in his car. With a revving noise of his engine, he pressed his foot on the accelerator and just before launching his car he muttered "Godspeed!"

CHAPTER 3: CONNECTION OF THOSE CLAIRVOYANT CHRONICLES OF ASHISH

With all the information he needed to pursue his one and only lead in his hands, he got up from the park bench he was resting on. The intense sprint he ran to flee from his now former office had drained his energy. After all the havoc, chaos and planning he had decided to lay low for some time and take a breather. He left the park and went back to his home. He knew that his home was secure as he had given a false residential address to his employers in case of such a situation. He walked back to his building with a cheeky grin on his face as if he was the Grinch having just stolen all the Diwali gifts and presents. What he had in his arms was surely a gift for this guard as well as a curse for those who had just stolen it from.

The severity of his actions had not completely caught up to him, he had put a target on his back and the willingness of the company to hire such professionals from abroad was surely an indicator that something serious had happened. After entering his apartment and lying down on his bed, he decided to act on his primary priority which was taking a good night's rest. For him this was the calm that one experiences before suffering through a storm. He put his phone in his bedside drawer and tucked himself with his tattered blanket.

He muttered to himself "After this mess, I have to get some new blankets." With his eyes slowly shutting, he fell asleep for a few hours. It was 4 am in the morning. He had obtained his much needed 8 hours of rest. He found it difficult to sleep again and decided to look at all the details of the security connoisseur. He jotted down the residential address in his navigation. It was a short 5 minute journey on foot. To his surprise, the address of the guard was in his neighborhood. There was no way that Ashish would not have heard of him as he knew almost everyone in his neighborhood. Was it possible that the loyal guard also gave a false address? There was only one way to find out. He dressed himself and went out in the middle of the night. After walking for a few minutes, he arrived at the location as per his navigation system. He recognized the building immediately. This place was enrooted to the office and he would pass by this building almost every day. His suspicion was now stronger. Although Anuj arrived a little earlier than him to the office, it was not possible that Ashish would not have spotted him one day or the other. With a sad look on his face, he entered the building and walked up to the apartment which hopefully sheltered the man he was searching for.

"Thud, Thud, Thud"

He knocked on the door three times. It was around 5 am in the morning. It was unlikely that anyone inside would be expecting visitors. After waiting for a few seconds, the door was opened by a man.

"Hello, I am looking for my uncle Anuj Mata. It will be my first time meeting him as it was my father's last wish for me to mend their relationship. Can you please tell me any information you might have and where I could find him?"

In a sleepy tone, the man replied,

"Yes, I know him. He was the one I bought this space from. According to these neighbors, he moved around quite a lot to maintain anonymity. Anyway, here is his current address which he gave me to send any documents or mail he might have received here." After thanking the man from the bottom of his heart and swearing never to disturb him so early in the morning again, the boy ran off with the new address. The new location was on the other, nicer side of town, much closer to the office, for him to move from here to there clearly mean a substantial boost in money. After thinking about it for a minute, this relocation signified the commitment of Anuj to his new promotion. It explained how he got the money that he needed to relocate as well as his motive to do so as it was much closer to the office. The only explanation he had in mind for why the address was not updated is that the company must have forgotten or Anuj had decided not to disclose his new location. The second explanation contradicted his first assumption of why he had moved.

The most plausible explanation for it thus seemed to be a simple oversight. To get to the new location, he needed to avail a taxi, so he went back to his apartment for a few hours. With a few hours now at his disposal, he had breakfast and got to thinking of his next moves if he could not find Anuj at the new location. Within just a few minutes and coming up with no ideas, he decided to take action and postpone his brainstorming session to when it was needed. He signaled a taxi and began his journey. The taxi driver was familiar with the area and the ride was comforting to the young boy. These were perhaps his last peaceful moments before poking the bear even further. The new building was just as the boy had imagined. Much more lavish than the ones he was used to.

As he entered the building, he got inside the elevator and went up to the third floor. Room no.13 was rented by the security head. When he walked up the hallway, he tried to notice anything familiar such as any belongings of the man but found nothing. Finally, in front of him was the door behind which could be the answer to all his questions. His goosebumps activated as he proceeded to ring the doorbell. Nervous and agitated, the boy rang the doorbell three times. With no answer, he was now starting to worry about what he had started to investigate. Just as Ashish turned around to go back with a disheartened and distraught expression, the door swung upon behind him. Startled by the noise, with a thrilling guise he turned his back and found a tall, dark and bald man in front of him.



CHAPTER 3: CONNECTION OF THOSE CLAIRVOYANT

CHRONICLES OF ANUJ

His phone was buzzing into oblivion while he continued to stare at his screen drooling at the tempting job offered to him out of the blue. Becoming an on field logistics manager packed some serious benefits along with a massive increment. The downside was that he knew nothing about the company and the circumstances under which he was offered the job were suspicious at best. When he finally averted his gaze to his phone, he noticed a message from his friend Aira. The message was all in capital letters. The message said that their company had been hired for another transfer three days from now. The freight had to be picked up at midnight and delivered in less than 1 hour. The transfer was of a valuable commodity purchased under the name of the parent company. This time, instead of Anuj who usually overlooked the transfer, it was arranged and overlooked by a foreign multinational security company. Their transfer vehicles requested were really specific and

The weapons held by the personnel were also specifically demanded. In addition, the transfer was accompanied by a personal convoy arranged by the foreign company itself. The drop off location had not been disclosed to them and they were simply to follow the personal convoy of the foreign company.

From all of this, it was clear that something even more important than expensive antiques was to be transferred to a safe and secure location. It was also safe to assume that the drop-off location was not the usual one and somewhere new and in the knowledge of only the higher ups. If he pursued this ordeal, then he could not pay attention to the job offer. Since the job offer did not give any deadlines, he could get to it later if nothing panned out of his investigation. Stalking that transfer was the best opportunity to learn exactly what was in the cargo and what it could be used for. It could also provide him answers to why he was fired and could it have been due to something that might have happened in the transfer arranged by him. For some reason, he had a feeling that his longtime friend Aira was more loyal to her company than him. He certainly would not risk his job by giving classified information to even his own mother let alone a mere friend. Either Aira was kept in the dark about the happenings of some transfers or she was not completely transparent with him. His Intuition had never once let him down.

Nevertheless, it would be his first time getting personally involved in one of the transfers. He could not know what to expect and had to be ready in case of anything that may go wrong. He could neither trust the personnel of Black Wolf and he could certainly not trust those foreigners appointed. He had three days now to prepare for all the possibilities and think of a plan to stalk the vehicles. The new job offer was now his backup plan in case his efforts were all in vain. Although the new company was unheard of, he could certainly still meet up with one of the officials to get a better knowledge of what he could get himself into.

With a better perspective on this situation, he laid out a piece of paper and started working on a plan. He drew out a basic layout of all the possible routes from the Netaji sea port. He could possibly wait out near the port and follow the convoy from a distance. He needed proof of what he had seen so he had to take a night vision camera to capture anything he might find interesting. It was possible that the personnel provided by Black Wolf were newly involved in the deals of the company and had switched loyalty so there was no trusting them. The contents inside the convoy were the most probable to cover up any illegal activities such as kidnapping, extortion, money laundering and god knows what else. All the possibilities flooded his mind except the one of the contents inside being simply a valuable painting or antique. Next, he plotted all the warehouses that he knew of the company which were scattered all over Mumbai. There was one near the satellite office where he was transferred, one near the headquarters and some were on the outskirts of the city. He recalled that the instructions were for the consignment to be delivered in less than one hour. Thus, it was easy to rule out all the warehouses outside of the city. There was also the possibility that the delivery location was not a warehouse owned by the company and something else entirely.

After a few more minutes of thinking, he got up from his chair when he heard a doorbell ring. Who could it be now? His location was known to the company where he worked even though he did not share the details. Was it possible that there was a bug in his apartment? Were they onto his plan to tail the transfer? If so, he was in trouble and he had no choice but to leave this apartment for good and go to a neutral location. He sneaked up to the door making sure no sound could tip off anyone. In a slow and steady fashion, he peeked through the small peephole in the door. The doorbell rang two more times. It was none other than the young boy who worked with him at the satellite office, Ashish! His whole mind seemed to turn upside down. How had that boy managed to

find where he lived? Was he involved with the company or was he fired as well? There was no doubt anymore that his original suspicion was correct and that boy was somehow involved in the proceedings that led to this situation. With a conflicted mind, he decided to wait and think for a few minutes before answering the door. As he watched through the peephole, the boy turned back towards the hallway with a disheartened look on his face. His expression and disappointment seemed genuine and Anuj failed to detect any malicious intent. With reluctance, he finally opened the door and the boy looked back at him with a face that displayed the joy that one experiences when one finds their long lost treasure.



CHAPTER 4: LABORS OF THE VALIANT

CHRONICLES OF RAJAT

He was driving at a pace well beyond the Mumbai speed limit. The intense traffic of the Bombay streets weren't enough to even halt his lead foot. His dashboard screen displayed the location which was still quite a distance from his current whereabouts. A long haul from the metropolitan surroundings of Mumbai . Being a new company, it was expected for their office to not be located in such an exclusive area but this office was located just on the outskirts of Mumbai. Even so, it was a peculiar location for an up and coming company to be located. As he drove out of the city and got on the highways, he noticed all the warehouses and large storage units to his right. All of these were privately owned by large companies. He recognized the units of one of the companies he had pursued in his

early career. The hardware company was responsible for catapulting him to the position he held today. After a moment of nostalgia, he drove off into the distance at light speed. Ending his long journey with a sharp push on the brake pedal after spotting the location, he opened the door hurriedly and stopped the navigation system. He gazed around the dusty atmosphere to any kind of sign of their company. Spotting a guard wearing blue in front of the entrance door, he approached him and asked "Hello sir, do you know where I can find this company by the name of Express Emporium."

The guard seemed somewhat prepared for this question as he answered in a scripted manner,

Good morning sir, the company has been expanding and moving its offices to somewhere in the city. It has also reduced its on field manpower and encourages work from home culture, so most of the people now work from home to contribute to preserving the environment."

Although it was a feasible explanation for them relocating and not having an active office as of yet, there was clearly something amiss. It seemed that the guard had given this exact answer various times before and was given a script to follow. He still wanted to take a look inside the space as he thought that there was something waiting to be found. How could he get inside the offices without notifying the guard? The answer was simple. There was no need to slip by unnoticed as money was the ultimate cloak of invisibility. Based on the average wage of a guard in the Mumbai area, he calculated about half his monthly salary to be about ten thousand rupees. With a poker face, he laid out his wallet and carved out ten thousand rupees. After counting them thoroughly in front of the guard, he put them down on the guard's desk and asked if he could enter for exactly ten minutes. Pointing to the money, he said "One minute for each thousand"

The guard silently nodded with a face devoid of any emotion and allowed Rajat to enter. He took the flight of stairs to the office floor and avoided drawing any attention by using the elevator.

He needed to take a look at the surroundings and using the elevator would be walking blindly into the lion's den. Making nary a sound, he climbed up the last staircase and was standing outside the door of the office. There was no indication of there being any office there now or before. He peeked through the glass paned door and found the whole floor to be abandoned. He opened the door and started walking slowly up to the area that seemed to be the former reception desk. It was safe to assume that the cleanup crew of this space was also inactive ever since the space had been abandoned. The window panes were sealed with shades covering them. Sunlight was solely responsible for the illumination of the space. He turned right from where he was standing and found himself standing in front of a long hallway. He decided to take a look further down the hallway area. Walking past silently, he came by the office of the CEO to the right of the hallway. There was of course no one present. The founders of the company had assumed the roles of the CEO, CTO and CFO. Therefore, snooping around their former offices seemed to be the best option. He opened the door captioned CEO and entered the empty space. He sat on the chair behind the desk and opened all the drawers and cabinets to find any sort of clue. All of them turned out empty.

"This company has a knack for covering their tracks."

Determined to leave no stone unturned, he decided to renege on his promise to the guard and cross his ten minute time limit. The other offices were further down the hallway about fifteen feet from the office of the CEO. Next was the office of the CTO. This office seemed much fit for someone who appreciated technology. The space had not yet been properly eradicated of all its traces. Odd for a company that had a pattern of covering its tracks. He entered through the door and followed the routine. Digging up all the drawers and cabinets, he still found nothing. It seemed that the founder had an attachment to his job as the office was decorated with lively wallpaper which had not been removed. There was a poster of Bill Gates and many tech founders and billionaires. This

office was also much cleaner than the others. Someone had been looking after this specific place.

"Creeeeaaak"

There was a long screeching sound from somewhere from the opposite wall. Someone was in the office next door. Panic and fear struck Rajat as he hid inside the desk. Suddenly, he saw a pair of black loafers walking inside the office. The man was murmuring something inaudible. He was in quite a hurry. After pacing up and down the length of the office, he stopped in front of the bookshelf. Quickly, the man moved all the books slightly. After a few moments, there was a loud sound of something creaking. Rajat could not concentrate more and his mind went blank. All he could do was lie under the desk in silence. Five minutes later, the man was gone and Rajat had no idea what had happened. It seemed that he had entered a state of ignorance where he could not remember what had just happened. He fearfully sat up minding his head from the desk and went to inspect the bookshelf. With not much time left and the sunset approaching, there wasn't much lighter and he opened all the books on the shelves. Just as he was on the verge of giving up, he found something written on the first page of an autobiography of one the biggest entrepreneurs of the time. Just before the introduction page, there was a note scrawled in blue ink,

"My dream will be taken, and me along with it. I knew that I could not trust them. I should have read between the lines. They were always out to get me, the ones I started with. Corruption by competition, the offer was hard to resist."

At the end of the note, there was an address for somewhere back in the city. This sealed it, it was now clear that this man was in danger. Involvement in something like this meant certain consequences, more devastating than mere loss of money. Nevertheless, he had to see it through. He still had to figure out his firm's involvement in something as scandalous as this. He packed the book with him and

ran past the hallway and down the flights of stairs. It was almost sun set now and the guard was not there anymore. He ran past the exit and got into his car. Jamming the key into the switch and twisting it, he drove off with lightning speed and quickly made a turn to return back to the city.



CHAPTER 4: LABORS OF THE VALIANT

CHRONICLES OF ASHISH

In front of his eyes was the very man who he had been looking for ever since this charade started. Standing three feet away from the man made him realize his towering height and stature over his feeble structure. In a stuttering manner, the boy finally said, "You are a hard man to find. I figured with your loyalty you would have given your correct address but you did not on purpose. Care to tell me why?"

Anuj just looked at the boy with silent and curious eyes. He gave no reply to the boy and then proceeded to shut the door in his face. Ashish was appalled at this reaction and instinctively stopped the door from slamming shut with his palm.

"Don't be rude brother. You know that company is not what it seems right?. It's a shell company set up to cover something up for the main company you worked in for years. I know that you weren't involved in all this, so tell me what you know."

He spoke in a calm yet commanding tone. This seemed to have annoyed Anuj a bit. The boy noticed that the former security agent was giving him a weird look. After about three seconds of staring at the man, he decrypted his look as an expression of being annoyed, a bit impressed and somewhat proud of the boy. It seemed that the former agent saw the boy as a younger version of himself. A few seconds after this standoff, the agent let go of the door and signaled the boy to come inside the apartment. With a sense of optimism and pride, he stepped into the apartment and glanced around the whole living space. The interior decor was rusty and fitting the character of the agent. The agent now broke his silence and replied,

"Yes, I know but first tell me why you ended up there and what you have to gain from all this?"

"I have nothing to gain as I am nothing. I come from a simple family who do not acknowledge me. There is nothing much to tell. The man seemed surprised by this reply as if he had just solved one of the most complex mysteries. A sense of relief enveloped the man as he said to the boy,

"Very well, I know why you came here. Now, this place is not safe as some guys from the main company showed up here even though I hadn't changed my address."

This meant that there was a good chance they knew about what they were up to. Relocating to an unknown location was the best option. He still somehow had the sense that Anuj had not yet taken him in his complete confidence. Something was still off about this whole thing, he asked the former agent to relocate to his house. However, the agent refused to do any such thing before he told the whole story of how he got there. In the next ten minutes, Ashish recapped the happenings of the last few fun-filled days to the man who was taking all the information in.

"It all started when I accessed the reports on the company server by sneaking into accounts. I figured out that the financials were not what they seemed and this office and the company was a cover up for something at worst illegal. He just could not figure out what was exactly going on in the main company and decided to ask you about anything you knew. I made up my mind and stole your employee file from the file room. They knew about me and I ran from them and went back to my house where they could not find me. Then I came to you so it is safe to assume that my house is safe. Now, let's go!"

This story still could not convince Anuj to move to his home temporarily. After a few seconds of silence, Ashish finally stopped beating around the bush and asked the man to give all the

information he had regarding the billionaire and the activities of the company. It was obvious that he was trusted as he was made head of security for the satellite office. There had to be a specific role filled by the former guard which was now filled by a foreign guards. Anuj didn't seem surprised at the information that was relayed to him regarding his replacements and the company being up to something.

"I know that you still don't trust me, but I told you all that I did and took you in my complete confidence. I ask that you extend me the same favor and tell me what you know. I don't expect you to accompany me in all this, you can do things your own way but at least help me take my own path."

He finally wore the guard down. It was the moment of truth. Everything he speculated could be changed in a matter of a few words. As the guard's lips started moving, Ashish quietly sat down on the couch and crossed his hands in an orderly fashion. It was five minutes into the whole story that Ashish now finally began to get a grip on the whole ordeal. In five more minutes, he filled out all the missing blanks and his mind started to work on a course of action.

The main points were the upcoming security transfer for the anonymous commodity to be moved and the mysterious job offered to the man at such a time. A coincidence was unlikely and the plausible cause was the start-up was trying to distract Anuj from the main motive. Two things now had to be done, discover the relationship between his former company and the new startup and uncover all the little details about this new company. The next step was to follow and stalk the transfer and gather the necessary proof. The first step was rather difficult to pull off as Ashish had no way to find out anything much as he had no connections with anyone on Dalal Street. Corporate Mumbai was a world unexplored for him. Anuj was his best hope. Immediately, a thought immediately struck his mind. Impersonation was the answer once again.

Just like when he had imitated the foreign guard to gain his answers, he could simply imitate a wealthy investor to gain access and 'inquire' about the start-up. Allocation of work was the most important step. The work of researching the connection with this start-up was taken up by the youngster, the work of creating and formulating a plan for the security convoy was taken up by the seasoned guard. The boy was filled with excitement over the thought of working with his desired partner. He waited for the guard to dress and prepare for his assignment to visit Black Wolf security and gather Intel for the plot. The agent came out looking like his former self in his prime, sharply dressed with stylish black loafers resembling a James bond villain. Being hyper observant, he noticed a metal gleaming out of the man's jacket. It was a pistol. Now pondering about his own preparation for the job, he asked the man for a final favor. In a few minutes, the boy walked out of the man's closet sharply dressed as well, blending well with the likes of those wealthy. He borrowed a simple black briefcase and strapped it to his palm.

"Can I also take your baton?"

The agent was surprised at his deduction. Apparently, he kept a baton below his bed in case of any emergencies. With a proud look on his face, the man nodded and gave him the approval. They made a pact to meet at this very location outside the building in exactly twenty four hours after having completed their assignments. The boy felt that he was enacting Hrithik Roshan in the movie 'War'. With the duo formed, the boy headed off to his assignment targeting the large string of banks based in Dalal Street.



CHAPTER 4: LABORS OF THE VALIANT

CHRONICLES OF ANUJ

He was still skeptical. He could not fully understand the purpose of why the boy was so dedicated to get involved in such a dangerous situation. Although the youngster was smart and witty much beyond his years, he still could not fully trust him before finding out the true purpose and Intentions he had. The boy had made some very sharp observations and was on the right track, after all he had figured out the satellite office to be a mere cover up which had the whole world including him fooled. Although he was aware that his main role was to organize the secret transfers for the main company, he still hadn't figured out the main intentions behind the satellite office.

It being a shell corporation could open up a lot of possibilities, the most prominent being money laundering. The agent first needed to seek out the purpose of the boy so he could finally have confidence in his actions and partner with the youngster. He asked the boy what he had to gain from doing all of this. The answer seemed to surprise him a bit. The boy had said that his intellect was neglected by his parents and family which probably led him to this position. Now it all connected in his head, years of experience had taught the man how to read people and uncover their true emotions on a particular subject. He had probed in the right place, a boy who never gains the praise and appraisal from his family he deserves seeks it out from strangers, no matter what lengths he has to go to obtain it. This was the case with the boy.

His intentions stemmed from his internal desire to seek the praise and gain approval for the gifts he possessed and for someone to acknowledge it, be it a dangerous company or even the authorities. With now a clear read on the boy, he was finally able to convey his side of the story. Recapping the events of the past few days, he left nothing out. To his satisfaction, the boy had already concocted a conclusive plan from all the information he received. The plan was based on delegation of the two tasks between them. The boys had to gather all the information regarding the mysterious new company which had offered the agent a lucrative job offer and uncover its link with their former company. He was to enter the Black Wolf office and gain access to all the people who were to be involved in the upcoming transfer and gather all the information they could need to infiltrate their plan. Anuj had a proud look on his face. In his mind, he knew that he had to let the boy know that his intellect was acknowledged. He retained his silence and gave him the proudest look, the look a father gives his son upon passing the pedestal. The boy seemed to be moved by the gesture, he was filled to the brim with confidence and trust in the agent. It was as if the former guard had signaled the boy not to let him down.

After working out their delegations, the agent went inside his bedroom. He opened his closet and inspected all the clothes he had. In the right side corner was a uniform the man had not worn in ages. He took the hangar out of the suit and put it on. He wore a shiny piece of black loafers and packed a pistol that he kept locked in his night side drawer. Ready for action, he came out of the room only to be stopped by the boy. The youngster wanted an attire of his own. With a humble request to borrow some of the man's clothing to aid his ingenious plan to imitate a wealthy investor, he went inside the man's room and came out looking like an affluent spoiled offspring of an important figure. However, he was not done and still had one more favor to borrow.

"Can I take your baton?"

The agent was taken aback by this query. Finally, one more dot seemed to connect in his mind as he figured the boy's ability to be that of hyper observation. Such ability is not just a mere gift, it has to be trained. Internally, the man was satiated with his choice as a partner, young and inexperienced but one with wit. He nodded to give his approval over the boy's question and both of them headed out for their assignment. Rushing out of the building packed for action, he stopped for a second and realized that he had to wait and signal for a Sab. Quite anti dramatic after the past half hour, he thought to himself as he entered the back seat of the pristine yellow vehicle. He whipped out his cell phone and instructed the driver to drive to BlackWolf security.



CHAPTER 5: JOKERS IN THE PACK

CHRONICLES OF RAJAT

The address in the end of the note was the main point of concern for the man. As he turned back his car to go back into the city, he was now more afraid than ever, pondering what exactly he had gotten himself into. Who was the man who had broken into the office? That man had the exact knowledge of where to look inside the office so it was unlikely that they had access to the same information he did. His car was now low on fuel. He decided to stop by at the gas station to refuel and gather his thoughts. He had no extra time to stop and eat so he wanted to get something at the gas station itself. He took a slight detour from the city and pulled his car into the station lot. He ordered the worker to fill up the tank fully and handed him Rs/- 5000 before the worker could even respond. The worker was somewhat impressed by Rajat and his tomboy attitude and rushed to get the car filled. Rajat entered the small kiosk and grabbed some potato chips and a ready-made sandwich. He went to the cash counter and found no one. There was nobody monitoring the cash counter, there was something off about this whole location. Suddenly, it struck him. Was his car still there? He knew that something about that worker was askew. Something was itching his mind. He sprinted out of the kiosk and bashed in the

doors. There was no sign of his car where he had left it and the worker was nowhere to be seen. He ran around the petrol pumps in a panic with a small sandwich reaching out of his pocket. With no car in the main lot, he zipped around to the pocket corner and his car in a narrow valley. There was a water pipe and a tub next to his car. He stopped for a second and decided to slow his gait and become cautious. He sneaked up to the car and found the worker behind the boot working on the left rear tire.

He immediately yelled,

"Oye!, what the hell are you up to?"

The worker was startled. In a frightful tone, the worker replied,

"Wait sir, I was filling your car and noticed a slight dip in the left side corner. I simply filled the tank and was checking for a tire puncture just in case."

"Well, is there a flat tire?"

"Not as of yet, just for safety I'll pump some air into the tire. No charge of course!"

Rajat was reasonably satisfied with the workers answer and decided to peacefully eat his sandwich in the meantime. After a good five minutes and his hunger now satiated, he was ready to drive off in the car after having some sufficient downtime. His fear of the man was slowly now slipping his mind as he started to play some music in the car. He rolled down the windows and accelerated the car to an even 100km/hr more than the speed limit. For the first time, he was enjoying this whole ordeal. He was now back in the city and just fifteen minutes away from the newly discovered address. As he continued along this route, he realized that the address was towards the urban complexes in corporate Mumbai he was much too familiar with. He now had to slow down his car and accommodate the typical traffic and crowd on the Mumbai roads.

As he was breaking his speed, his car suddenly swiveled, twisted and turned wreaking havoc across the red light. His mind was in hysterics and his body bumped all the corners of the cockpit. The car swiftly turned to its back and hit the pedestrian pillar and launched the airbags into the frightened man's face. A crowd gathered around the accident and the general consensus was that the tire had burst causing this incident. It seemed to the public a mere coincidence, but there was more at play here. The left corner tire had burst the exact tire that was being "mended" by the worker. His first instincts were correct, the worker was up to something shady. He had a mild concussion due to his head banging off the steering wheel and the side door handles a couple times. It was hard for him to think straight. The door was opened for him by some people and Rajat got out of his vehicle slowly. The crowd was gathered around and a man asked how he was and if he wanted to go to the hospital.

However, as much as Rajat needed the help, he was now paranoid more than ever. The only way out of this situation was to see it through; he had to get to the address before anything further could have happened to him. It was clear that he had poked the bear and there was no way out now. He was in bed with some well-connected people and the repercussions were evident. He walked up the sidewalk with his car still crashed by the pole. He picked up his phone from the floor and inspected it for any damage. He called the police and informed them of his car accident and described it as a mishap. His car company always offered their own personalized towing services; he availed their offers and called for a tow truck to take the car to the company mechanics. He had wasted quite a while on this mess. One citizen offered to provide him with first aid and without thinking about it too much, he took up their offer. After being patched up, he went on to the address displaying an uncanny resilience never before seen on him. The address was not much for now, he could see the building. His jogging now accelerated into running. The address was a building, a skyscraper

situated in the heart of corporate Mumbai. The building was surrounded by the offices of the firms Rajat had known by heart. His own office was not far away from here, about five minutes of walking was sufficient. He opened the letter once again and noticed the details about the address. As he read along word by word, he noticed a small logo just in the fine print. There was something scribbled deep between the two lines. It was not visible to the naked eye. There was definitely something inscribed. The office was dark so he couldn't have noticed it. He approached one of the guards by the entrance of the building and asked for a flashlight. He focused the flashlight on the inscribed area but still couldn't make anything of it in the broad daylight. There was some shade from a planted tree by the building. He sprinted to the location and focused the flashlight once again.

"BlackWolf"

A single word was inscribed on the page between the lines. He literally had to read between the lines.

His mind felt enlightened. He rushed back to the building and returned the flashlight to the security guard. After catching his breath for a second, he asked the guard if there was anyone named BlackWolf in the building. His eyes wandered to the security guards breast pocket stitched with the logo of an animal. Promptly, he figured it out. Before the guard could reply, he asked the guard if he was employed in a company named Black Wolf. The guard replied yes and said that he was employed by Black Wolf security that was situated on the 8th floor. He further explained that they provided the security for the building as well. It was clear that the CTO wanted the person who found the note to go to BlackWolf security. He entered the building and informed the receptionist inside that he wanted to go to Black Wolf security. The receptionist noted his name inside the registry and he got inside the elevator. There was no one inside the lift. He up to the eighth floor not knew what was in store for him. It could be either a dead lead or people waiting for intruders with guns. As he heard the ding sound of the elevator

doors opening, he could hear the thumping of his heartbeat. Time seemed to slow down. Sweat started to drip down his chin. As the view beyond the elevator doors was clear, he saw a normal office with nothing suspicious about it. He walked into the office and waited by the reception area. He approached the receptionist and made up a quick cover story,

"Hello madam, I am here for a meeting in conference room A regarding Express Emporium."

He whispered the last part as if something was secret about it and only some of the people were confident about the matter. He noticed the name of the lady to be Isha. He deployed his charms and widened his eyes and asked the lady in the kindest way,

"Isha, I trust that you will not disclose our meeting. Only some people know about this matter and I trust you with this."

The lady was obliged to say yes and even led Rajat to the conference room. He waited for the lady to leave and got to investigating what exactly was wrong in this place and why he was led there. The message indicated that the man was either kidnapped or his discovery was taken from him. If he could find traces or any paper trail, he could crack this whole case wide open. While he was standing in the middle of the conference he was approached by a man, a dark skinned, bald and tall man who had a sense of intense purpose in his eyes. It was as if he could recognize why the man was here, it was an even more intense hunger for finding the truth within these walls.



CHAPTER 5: JOKERS IN THE PACK

CHRONICLES OF ASHISH

The boy left the building and parted ways with the guard. Although they were headed in the same direction, he was a tad behind the guard wondering about whether he was going to pull off his con. It wasn't going to be his final one, but one of the most enticing. He finally had the chance to use his wits and intelligence to do something useful and much more stimulating than working as a peon. He chose the branch of the bank just beside the financial district of the fort where the Bombay stock exchange was located. This branch was in the most prime location in all of corporate Mumbai, most likely to know the juiciest information of all happenings of players in Mumbai. His cab dropped him off just a few meters away from the entrance. Pretending to be a spoiled rich man child was an easy task, but to back up his acting with evidence of his wealth was going to be near impossible. He had no money to spend and was wearing a borrowed set of the only expensive clothes the former agent had. He entered the building and looked around for any man who could accompany him to the offices as a fraudulent personal

security guard to enhance his status. His best bet was to persuade one of the guards in the basements, parking lots. They were likely to be the most underpaid. Assuming it to be a safe bet, he went down to the parking lot and looked for a guard who could fit his profile. After wandering around the pillars, he found a man who could fulfill his desire, a man who looked lonely and desperate for the tiniest bit of stimulus and excitement. From his demeanor, he made an educated guess that his presence was unknown to most of his co-workers. He was walking a beat alone in the corner. The boy approached the man and made him a simple offer, to accompany him and stand beside him while he went up to the bank floor and act as a rich kid to con his way into top secret information. The guard was astonished at what he was hearing. For the first five minutes, the guard could not believe his preposterous story and found it to be a joke. After a few more minutes of convincing, the guard finally obliged and left his station. With the smile of a fox, the boy pressed the elevator button with the guard standing behind him in the black uniform. He stepped into the vast offices of the bank and went up to one of the receptionists.

"Hello sweetheart, I recently just lost my Ferrari while gambling and my Papa is now insisting that I make some good investments from my trust fund."

He spoke with the attitude carried by the studs he had watched in the many shows and movies he had seen. He spoke almost at the peak of his voice, making sure that the people around him could hear every single word. The guard behind him stood tall, even preventing one common worker rushing in front of the boy to cower and make way for the young boy. The boy had an aura surrounding him communicating his power and superficial farm to the workers of the vast bank. He demanded in a loud tone making sure to make a ruckus around him,

"Bring me the bank manager and set a meeting with the head of the investments division, I will not tolerate any more procrastination, my patience is wearing out."

As expected, a 'wealth manager' from one of the offices came out from his office and approached the lad and his pretend protector. He personally escorted the boy to his office and ordered one of the peons to fetch both of them a piping hot coffee. The guard was now amazed, stunned walking behind the boy. His eyes could not believe the deception that the boy had managed to pull off in just a matter of minutes. The boy sat opposite the wealth manager. The manager seemed just right for his purpose, a sleek looking man resembling the traits of a cunning fox. It was almost as if his greed and desire for his rupees was oozing out. The pretend guard was standing beside the boy now nervous of anyone finding out about his absence from his position. With a smug look on his face, Ashish asked the man in front of him to relay all the information he had on 'Investment Opportunities' in young start-ups.

"Go Big or Go Home!"

The boy declared this motive to the room. The manager was somewhat confused; he did not understand his motive and purpose. However, the boy seemed to be spoiled and dumb, he figured that impulsive risky decisions by the boy meant a greater commission for the bank. He had to fuel the boy's fire to invest as much as he had, the greater the amount the greater the profit for him. With a smirk on his face, he decided to comply with the boy's demands and started to ramble on about all the start-ups he knew and how he could contact them and get some leads. Instantly, he was stopped by the boy.

"Tell me everything that you know about this Express Emporio."

The man was startled at this question. It seemed that he had an interest in this failing company. With immense doubt in his mind, the man answered his query and told everything he had known about the startup; regarding its rise and fall as well as the rumors of foul play with some of the workers and the competition. Nevertheless, it was a dead end. The boy was content with everything that he had gotten to know about the company.

There was definitely something going on with the job offered to the guard out of the blue. It made no sense since the company was bankrupt. The email had to be a fake. He just had one last command for the manager.

“Give me the number of anyone you knew in the company.”

He was in luck. The manager had known one of the founding members of the company since his school days, however his friend had not been in contact with him for a few weeks. Right around the time the company had gone under. Reluctantly, the man gave him the number and the boy was on his way. Before his grand departure, the boy shouted at his bouncer inside the main hallway of the bank to fetch him his new ferrari at once. With a devious smile on both of the impostors' faces, they pressed the button on the elevator and were off. After ensuring the bouncers economical safety, the boy waved goodbye to the man and headed back to his agreed-upon 'base' of operations expecting the agent to have completed his task.



CHAPTER 5: JOKERS IN THE PACK

CHRONICLES OF ANUJ

The taxi dropped him off a few feet away from the entrance. The building was in the finest and most prime location in all of twenty-first century Bombay. He walked up to the entrance with a fierce and determined expression. No security guard was confident enough to stop and question the man in black about his intentions and whereabouts. Anuj had not notified his friend Aira of his arrival as he had a feeling that he could be honest with her. Simply put, if he was in her position, he would sure as hell not consider compromising his long term high ranking position in his firm to help just a friend who he would seldom talk to. It was imperative that he maintained his secrecy and carried out his operations in deceit. He carried himself up to the eighth floor through the lift. As quickly as possible, he hurried past the main reception. Strategically dressed as the common man in this specific work environment, he was a common man no one would look twice upon. The office was swarming with men who looked just like him, being the office of a security firm.

. His sole purpose was to investigate the office and find out all the details about the upcoming security transfer completely undetected. The best option was to first take a look at all the scheduled meetings and conferences that were to happen for the day. If he could pinpoint the proximity of the transfers and just find one of the people involved, he could simply impersonate them and take their place. Firstly, it was important to log on to the company server and access the scheduled transfers. He walked up to the main hallway and snuck into one of the empty cubicles. The work computer was still logged in. He opened up the ERP system and started to look at the very first place. The workflow of the day showed that there was a meeting scheduled in Conference room 'A' regarding an upcoming transfer marked as of utmost importance. It made sense that this transfer was the one he was looking for. He clicked on the meeting details to finally gain some insights on the answers to the questions he was sent here for. . The details of the meeting were locked and could only be accessed by the authority level of one of the managers and of course Aira. He walked out of the cubicle with an extension of his earlier planned course of action. He called up his friend Aira.

"Hey Aira, as you know I have been let go from my earlier position but I can't just sit at home and feel sorry for myself. Can we schedule a lunch today so I can discuss some things with you and get some things off my chest? I feel I can be a good addition to your firm."

With some more rounds of questioning, Aira agreed to some lunch. He learned in fact that the bathroom stall was now one of the safer locations to hide in one of these spaces and hatch his diabolical plans. With half an hour passing by and Anuj still sitting on the toilet with his pants on, it was finally time for his 'lunch'. Aira was never that punctual, but never so late to disappoint or frustrate the other party. It was a safe bet to enter her office now. No surprise, she had already left for lunch. . The perfect opportunity has arisen once again. He entered through the glass door and sat on the seat behind the computer. The cushion was still warm, she had just

recently left. The computer was locked. He was stumped. With no idea on how to unlock the computer, he was out of options. He sat silent for a few seconds contemplating his next moves. He could sneak into another office and log on from there but that seemed to be a high risk among an office full of people with a security occupation. In a blinding rage, he smashed down on the desk not knowing a keyboard was lying right where his fist had landed. The keys he had smashed on the keyboard were smashed with some parts of the plastic scattered about the desk. As he looked up to the screen, the desktop was unlocked. A blessing had been endowed upon him, information he had desired for was finally accessible to him. He opened up the system he had logged on to earlier and opened the meeting details which were earlier locked. The security accessibility had already been granted onto this desktop as he had suspected. He looked at the parties involved in this transaction.

To his surprise, there was another company on contract along with black wolf security. A foreign company contracted specifically by the company he used to work at, it had been contracted by the very company he had formerly worked for. The officers on the hook for this job on behalf of black wolf were limited to only three. It seemed that the major part of the operation was assigned to the company from abroad. Only one vehicle for the convoy was delegated to Black Wolf, the main truck for the transfer belonged to the other company. There was one man from Black Wolf assigned to the job, his name and face seemed familiar to him. The other men were strangers as well, but their faces were not recognizable. This particular man was without a doubt someone Anuj had met or seen before. Either the man just had one of those faces, or his intuition was once again leading him down the ambiguous path. 'Amit Vig'. He had to have been in the building somewhere. Nevertheless, one of the other men had a resemblance to him and he decided that it was best to take his place. He noted down everything on the screen including the location, time, date and people involved. He had burned his bridges with Aira.

His one last job was to sneak into the conference room and wait whoever had to be there. He walked out of the office and navigated his way into the conference room. It was empty and it was almost time for the meeting to take place. No one was anywhere near the conference room and anytime someone looked like they were heading towards the room; Anuj would step out of the office and hide behind one of the doors. After another half hour or so, he got tired of this regime and finally sat on one of the chairs inside the room. His phone was buzzing with messages from Aira but he ignored every single one of them. The door behind him swung open and a man walked inside. Look behind. He was completely caught off guard. The man looked exhausted, completely off his natural stride. Anuj was terrified of his position being revealed but the strange man had no clue that he was. It seemed to him that he had no clue why he was there as well. As he was stepping inside the office, Anuj was still in the process of decoding the look on that man's face. The guard felt as if he had been through something like this before, 'Deja Vu' as they call it. After a moment of thinking, he finally realized that the mysterious man had the same look on his face as the boy. He had a feeling that one last rendezvous of stories was next...



CHAPTER 6: ONE LAST CON

An hour had passed inside that room. It was almost astonishing that the two men had been sitting inside that room under an office full of guards for such a long time. They were not supposed to be there. It took them about that much time to catch up on the events that had happened to them over the past few days. The magnitude of information relating to the past week was overwhelming and to a normal person very difficult to comprehend in such a short span of time. Rajat's story was as complex as either one of the protagonists experiencing the adventure of their lifetime. Anuj now had a logical assumption behind the connection of all the circumstances. Rajat's firm had an illogical investment in a failing company; the very company which was responsible for the downfall of the company they had invested in was now the company which had gone under instead. The same start-up had offered him a job, at a very abrupt time even though its founders were nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, Rajat had gone on to investigate the former office of the start-up, only to find a mysterious note by the CTO of the company which led Rajat to exactly the place he had gone on to investigate an unusually heavily secured transfer by the company he used to work at. Rajat was also in a car accident orchestrated by a stranger at the very petrol pump near the former office of...

the start-up. As complicated as it all was to digest in under an hour, they had not even begun to tie in the connection of the young boy's story and how his actions further cemented this thrilling saga. It was clear that this was some sort of a corporate feud multiplied with horrendous levels of corruption and illegal atrocities. The CTO was clearly involved in foul play and since he was missing, the most logical assumption was that he was either kidnapped or extorted into fleeing. Most probably, the CTO was a victim of his other two unidentified partners whose intentions were never truly aligned. Was it possible that the other partners somehow cut a deal with their biggest competitor and sold out their invention and silenced their partner? Or were they never on board from that start and manipulated their sequence of events to weave out a bigger plot? It was clear that the three companies were involved, the 'billionaires', the failing competitor and this start-up.

All three characters from each of these companies had now crossed paths with each other, pondering on what to do next? Were they truly beating the system or unintentionally playing out their roles as intended by a mastermind. If the invention discovered by the start-up was so groundbreaking that it could be the sole reason for such a mess, they could not rule out the possibility that the discovery was not simply about logistics management and the companies involved were suppressing something much bigger. All these thoughts were following the guards mind as he and Rajat made their way back to the house. With all the information he needed in his grasp regarding the upcoming top security transfer and one last lead to investigate, he was now unnerved beyond belief. Rajat had known in his mind that there was more to the story than even the skilled guard was letting on. He had to wait it out for now. Both men reached the guards flat to rethink their strategies in light of the recent events. The young boy was waiting beside the apartment door excited to have reported his mission successful. All three entered the flat and closed the door. They had twenty four hours to get their stories straight and gear up.

One day of rest was now more important than ever, especially for Rajat. His injuries were minor, but severe enough for him to slow down his roll and get some much needed rest. The couch was made up for the boy, the bed was given to Rajat after everyone had sympathized with his predicament and the guard decided to tie up one last loose end. In the black wolf office, he had recognized one of the men on duty for the big transfer, his face was remembering the very man he had never properly seen but stopped from accomplishing his goal. On the day of his recruitment into the company he would work at for the better part of his career, one of the bikers who had attacked the convoy had his helmet cracked. Anuj had noticed a prominent scar on his left cheek and a small pimple above his left eyebrow. His skin was frazzled and brown. He was sure; this was the very man he had stopped on that very day. That night, while everyone was asleep the guard left the apartment. He was advised by both the men not to go out there alone now, but his mind was made up. He had to conduct one last investigation. He was tied up in all of this since the very beginning; so many coincidences one after another had led him to the brink of his reasoning. His mind was now beyond logical thinking and his imagination was running wild. It had completely taken over him. The stillness of the night surrounded the building as he left his companions for the very last time. Dawn was bright and early that night; the young boy woke up first followed by the trader. The guard has not yet returned and his absence was known to both the men. Their anxiety peaked as they couldn't find a single trace of the man whose apartment they had slept in last night. The night was supposed to be their calm before the storm. Their agreement to not go out there alone had been violated and their safety, location had been compromised. 'It does not make sense for the guard to go out there alone'- Rajat said to the young boy.

The boy nodded. The logical conclusion was that he was taken by force and kidnapped but if that were the case both of them had to be taken too. Something in the back of their mind was now a front .

Both of them were not afraid to say it out loud to realize that the guard had been hiding something from them. After packing all their stuff in a hurry, they left the apartment for good and decided to stay in another safe house. Neither of their homes was free and the risk was too great to bear, the only possible location was Rajat's mother's house. With reluctance, the young boy agreed with Rajat and both of them headed out to stay put for the next few hours....

There was still no sign of the guard. Rajat and Ashish had reached their destination after availing a series of different cabs just as an extra safety precaution, it was essential to leave no stone unturned. As Rajat rang the bell of his mother's house, one thing which had completely slipped his mind until now came back to him. The IPO of his mother's company! He had completely forgotten about everything he had promised his mother in amidst the entire frenzy that had been his life the past few weeks. A chilling thrill went down his spine as the door opened and he saw his mother on the other side. The look on his mother's face was terrifying to Rajat as well as the young boy standing shy behind the trader.

"Why are you here"?

The mother asked Rajat in an angry and disappointed tone. "After everything that has happened, you promised me but didn't even bother to call me once?"

Rajat had his whole answer planned out in his head, he was going to explain the whole situation to his mother. The boy behind him knew what Rajat was going to do at that moment. It wasn't a wise decision to expose his mother to any of the shenanigans they had been up to. It would risk her being collateral damage. Besides, nothing good could come of her knowing about the dangerous situation all three had got themselves into. The boy placed his hand on Rajat's shoulder and shrugged at him. Rajat could tell what the boy meant by that gesture and stopped his sentence in the middle. He simply said,

"Sorry, We just need to stay here for a few hours."

It was an emotional moment for the mother as she could tell something was wrong with her child. Her voice inside her head was asking her to berate her child some more but her heart said otherwise. She quietly let both of them in, and left them alone for the next couple hours. Both of them went upstairs to Rajats's old room. It was quite a lavish house, all amenities one could need inside one single bedroom. Ashish had never quite imagined that he would be sitting inside of such luxury in such a short amount of time. Rajat still had a brooding look on his face, the weight of the heavy demands he would have to meet in a couple of hours was finally troubling him. He had now realized the complete depth of the grave he had dug for himself. The young boy with him still had a carefree expression on him, he had not fully matured enough yet to decode the consequences of his actions. His whole life had been still ahead of him, he could have done anything from being a professional footballer to a tech savvy billionaire who owned the same companies where he was once employed.

These thoughts occupied Rajat for the better part of the hour, while the boy was still exploring some of the activities left untouched in Rajat's vast room. The few hours left flew by as both of the men were engrossed in their own world, not a word exchanged between the two. Both of them were silent for the rest of the evening. They decided to leave without informing anyone inside the house. They carried their bags, gear and silently went past the main door. Before leaving, the boy asked Rajat to pack up a good chunk of money as they would need it in case of any emergencies and preparations. There was still no sign of the guard who had gone astray. A glimmer of hope still resided in both the men that the guard was well and waiting for them at the pickup location ready to execute their plan. They decided to leave the cab around one kilometer away from their final destination to avoid any suspicion and maintain their secrecy. From there, there was a steady ten minute hike to the location.

They decided to keep an eye out for anything weird and of course look for the guard as well. Any vacant street beside the main road was checked by both of them not only to find the missing guard but also look for the perfect hiding spot. The deal was about to down in minutes. There wasn't any time left for them to look for the guard or scout any locations anymore. They were still a few hundred meters away from the pickup site. Fortunately, during their side quest in the back alleys to find the guard, they had found a one way going in the direction they were headed. They decided to depart from the main road and go through the narrow one way. It was a sketchy area with stray puddles lying haphazard waiting to be stepped in. However uncomfortable, it was the safer option than being spotted on the main road. The blackness of the night sky added to their masked demeanor. After a quick jog, they had finally reached their destination.

They decided to wait in the back alleys and come out only when needed. As they walked up to the exit of the alley and looked onto the main road, they found a huge facility on the other end with massive sized trucks shipping out from an exit. The trucks were pitch black with no branding on them, behind the trucks were a fleet of cars. More cars than they could imagine. No doubt in their minds, this was the convoy. In a rush, after waiting for the last car to put out, they decided to run through the alley to cut off one of the cars on the main road. Sprinting as fast they could; wind flushing their cheeks and they passed by the buildings. Their goal was to cut off the last car in the fleet without being noticed and disguise themselves as agents in the convoy. Simple to plan, but almost impossible to pull off, as they reached the entry to the road on their left, they were delighted to see that the trucks were still in sight. This meant that the last car was still a couple seconds away. They walked up the exit and waited patiently for the last car to pass by. The cars behind started to arrive and both of the men started to sweat. In a few seconds, they could either be in that car as an agent or a hostage.

The second car now passed by. The last was just a few feet away. The windows were of course tinted black. Quickly, the boy pulled some pointy thumb tacks out of his bag and threw them on the road between the two cars. In a flash, the last car sped over the spiked road. Within a few moments after covering a few meters, the car spiraled to a halt while the second car continued to speed away. Both the boys ran up to a car stranded on the road and in a hurry tried to open the door. Assuming it was locked, Rajat had a metal scale in his hand to bypass the car locks. However before he could attempt his break in, the door opened for both the boys. Rajat and Ashish had a panic attack with both of them gripping on to one another in fear of what was to come. Perhaps it was not the wisest move to attack a car in a security convoy without any backup. The door opened to reveal a single man sitting on the driver's seat. A backside view was granted to both the boys as the man inside the car was bald headed and dark skinned. The guard had finally made his appearance. Both the boys were relieved and unnerved to see the guard inside the car. As anxious as they were for their upcoming adventure, they were more than eager for the big reveal of the guard's plan. They got inside the car, both of them got into the backseat of the car with the guard up on the driver's seat. The second car was now slipping out of view as it continued to speed on. With the car tires punctured, there seemed no way for them to follow the convoy.

"There would have been no reason for the thumbtacks if you would have told us what you were upto."

The boy seemed almost frustrated as he said these words to the guard. The guard remained silent and answered that he still can't tell them what exactly he had done to accomplish this.

"Both of you will just have to trust me. Now, first of all these are tubeless tires so they don't get flat punctured. I just stopped the car because I noticed that it was you guys. You guys shouldn't have interfered in this, I have to go about this alone"

The guard persisted with both of those men leaving the car as soon as possible. In the back of his mind, he knew that after all that they all had gone through they were not going to oblige and leave willingly. With no more energy left and the convoy getting away, any more arguments could risk exposing his disguise. He just drove the car as he pressed his lead foot against the pedal and accelerated at light speed. He was much more anxious now that both of his companions had joined him. In addition to his own concern for safety, he was now much more concerned for both of the men behind him. It was clear that none of them had experience in anything like this. It was best for him to brief them about the final plan once again. He offered up some vague details on how he encountered one of the guards on duty for the convoy from Black Wolf and took his identity. The next steps were to simply follow the convoy and take some pictures of the destination, the deal, the people involved and also take some pictures of the commodity being transferred if possible. They followed the cars in black metal until one of the trucks in the front finally came to a halt. As the young boy peeked through his binoculars, he could see one of the drivers of the truck switching places from some random guy walking on the sidewalk.

The convoy then started to move once again. The driver who had left the truck simply walked away from the vehicles in the opposite direction. The next few minutes of travel were confusing to all of the men inside the car. The route the convoy was taking was not as expected as the one prescribed by the guard. It should have been headed towards the harbor of Bombay to collect the items they were to transfer. Such was the routine that was taken every time until now. As they took a sharp left from their route, it gave them the unnerving confirmation that they were definitely not heading to the destination that they had anticipated. The harbor was in the direction completely opposite to where they were heading. The guard was completely surprised by this plot twist. He asked Rajat and Ashish to figure out the potential locations they could be

heading as fast as they could.

"It's never a good sign to be taken by surprise during such an operation as this. We need to be prepared".

Both the boys took their devices and opened their satellite navigation applications. Every single destination such as any warehouse end route, any offices and any locations of interest were taken into account and discussed, but as soon as they expected to stop at one of their selected locations, the cars would continue to speed away with no breaks. Every single misfire would make each of them sweat even more. It had been almost an hour since they had been chasing the convoy in disguise and they were almost out of the main city. The route was now much more familiar to Rajat. He could now make out the familiar roads and landscapes which he had once embarked upon to reach the office for the start-up he had searched for. The route was now much more familiar to Rajat. He could now make out the familiar roads and landscapes which he had once embarked upon to reach the office for the start-up he had searched for. Instantly, his gut feeling flared as he knew that they were definitely headed somewhere related to the mysterious start-up. It seemed that they were finally about to find the missing CTO and the other parties related to this whole debacle. He convened the new piece of information which had just popped up into his head to the room.

They all were now convinced that this was either their final destination or it was at least a pit stop enroute to the final destination. Nevertheless, they had no choice but to follow through with whatever was in store for them. After continuing to head in the same direction as the office for a few more minutes, they were convincing that it was exactly as they had deduced. With just a few hundred meters to cover, all three of them started to gear up with cameras, stun guns and some steel batons. The final moment before the dormant action had arrived as the cars in front stopped to a complete halt just across the office building. All the people inside the security cars got out of their vehicles and

marched up to the office building in unison. It was now midnight and not a stranger was in sight. Even the office building guard who had initially stopped Rajat was absent along with any kind of security. Only the guard got out of the car as he asked the other to stay put. He followed the other guards into the building, not a single eye could distinguish between the man in disguise and the other guards on duty. Although they were asked to stay in the car, both of them could not help but follow suit and sneak their way past the crossroads and into the office building. As expected, the whole flock walked up the flights of stairs and entered into the office floor of the start-up.

"I have been to this exact location and in a similar situation. Follow my lead so that we do not get caught. Don't separate yourself at any cost, the guard can handle himself."

They continued on to follow the men in black until they reached the office of the CTO. It was all fitting in like a puzzle. One of the guards on duty entered into the space and approached the bookshelf. He picked up the exact book on the back of which was the note and placed it on a circular wooden platform on top of the shelf. With a buzzing and creaking noise, the shield slides to its left to reveal a narrow hallway heading downstairs. The man signaled two of the men in black behind him to accompany him downstairs as he selected out Anuj and one other agent. Both of them accompanied the man into the narrow hallway. Rajat and Ashish had no choice but to wait as all of the remaining agents were keeping a firm eye on the entrance.

As Anuj traveled down the hallway stairs and into a small room, he saw what his eyes could not begin to believe.

A man sitting on a table with a computer turned around and averted his gaze on the guard in disguise..

Suddenly, the other men switched sides from Anuj over to the anonymous man. The disguise had been uncovered; it seemed that this man inside this mysterious room had known that he was coming. As the fraudulent guard reached down to his pocket to

pull out a weapon, two men stepped down the stairs with their hands raised above their heads. Instinctively, the guard looked back to see none other than his two companions being forced down the stairs with rifles pointed to their backs.

He immediately looked toward the anonymous man in front of him and asked if he was the billionaire of the company where he worked at or the CTO of the start-up they were looking for. The man answered,

"Both."

As dangerous as it was for all three men, the young boy still felt the need to ask the mysterious man in front of him if this was finally the time for his big reveal. The billionaire chuckled and replied by saying that the young one was indeed the most curious. Anuj now asked the man the most notorious question of all, why they three made the targets of his plan were and what was so special about them.

"The tension in this room can be cut with a knife".

Rajat whispered this to Ashish as they both shared a small chuckle. As serious as the situation should have been for them, the billionaire noted that they weren't acting their parts as expected.

"Without further ado, let me explain your long awaited questions. You see boys; there was no CTO and no start-up. It was all me. You see, the company where you boys all worked at were mine. All shells of their former self. The truth is, I made all my wealth from setting up these shell companies and using them to do my bidding. One company for my finance and money launders, one for my illegal trafficking of 'persons of interest' and one for security and image. All these 'corporations' help me conduct my business. My business model is simple; I am the instrument for the foreign governments to do their bidding. You surely see now why I selected you lot and led you exactly here, each one of you were just too loss of the truth. Rajat, your unfortunate discovery of the classified investments led you here, the money that was invested was my cash just invested back into one of my business 'legally'.

Your boss tried to smuggle money from me, so he paid the price for it. It seems that in a final act of defiance he left that paper out in the open. Ashish, your discovery of my accounts led me to tighten up the security there, and ultimately led you here. Finally, You Anuj who worked in my main company for so many years, I transferred you once and I wanted to do that once again to this start-up but you just smelled something funny this time. This is the reason that all of you are here."

"What the hell do you do for these foreign customers of yours?"

The guard asked the still unnamed billionaire in front of him.

"Fine, so you have to die anyway, I guess I'll spill the beans. My foreign customers are from the governments who like to work under the radar. They send me the information of their persons of interest and some companies they want me to shut down and I either ship off the people to them or simply kill them. This one time, the government of Syria asked me to give them a man who was exporting so many arms and weapons to their terrorists that it was crippling them. I am a man of no nation who sells simply to the highest bidder."

"In summary, you are just a traitor who sells out its own country for profit and spread your corruption to the corporate world of this city."

Rajat made such a bold statement that it confused the billionaire.

"In short, yes but not just this city, my reach is not confined by Mumbai. Most of the companies which you know are owned by me, whether you realize it or not. I am a plague for this nation."

The guards' face lit up as soon as he heard those words out of the billionaire's mouth.

"Thank you so much".

Suddenly, all the men in black surrounding the billionaire pointed the guns at him and told him to get down on his knees with his hands behind his head. The billionaire was perplexed beyond belief.

"A tip for next time, make sure that the men under those masks are truly your men."

The billionaire was now angered at the smug tone of the three men in front of him.

A SWAT team with officials of the police force entered into the den.

"It is now time for my big reveal."

"When I was in the Black Wolf office, I realized that one of the men on duty for this convoy was one of the bikers that day where I had 'saved' you from an attack. So, I did some digging of my own and found out that one of the bikers after the day of the attack had gone missing. It was the very man I had attacked. He was the one on duty for this transfer you had set up for us so I took his information from the office and tracked him down. That was when I found out that you were never truly their target that day, the target was your partner. The one who you set a target on. He was traveling in the same vehicle as you were. You wanted your partner gone as he was the one reaping all the profits while you were doing the dirty work.

So you were the one who hired those vigilantes to attack your partner and hurt you in the process so that you could get off scot-free. What you didn't expect was my interference that day when I stopped it. So you hired that squad again and murdered your partner in cold blood and made new identities for everyone involved, including that man who was now working in Black Wolf. It took me exactly one minute to get this information out of him as well as a testimony. He even confessed about the murder and where you hid the body. After I got the authorities involved, I planted some men from the force into your convoy. Luckily, my uncle was a police captain so I pulled in some favors and also got the man immunity in exchange for you. The police are on their way to the body right now. The fact that they are now here with rifles tells me that they found the body... Now that we have a list of all the companies you were actually in charge of as you boasted to these officers, we can start cleaning up your network..."

Rajat and Ashish seemed the last bit frazzled by this revelation of their partner's grand plan. It was as if they knew about this kind of plan all along, even without any kind of verbal exchange of information.....

"There is just one problem with your plan my friends, good luck getting a jury to convict me... Besides, my customers wouldn't like that very much. Your lives will never be the same....."



SUMMARY

In a dramatic and intricate narrative, Rajat and Anuj find themselves entangled in a web of corruption and deception; a labyrinthine scheme orchestrated by a billionaire whose criminal activities span multiple industries. The story begins with Rajat and Anuj inside a secure room, surrounded by guards and a young boy, piecing together their recent experiences and the shady dealings of a failing start-up that was a façade for the billionaire's illicit operations. Rajat's firm had been embroiled in a questionable investment, leading to the downfall of a competitor and raising suspicions about the start-up's legitimacy. As the plot thickens, Rajat and Anuj discover that these interconnected companies are part of a larger scheme that reaches the highest echelons of power.

Anuj's decision to investigate further, despite warnings, leads him to uncover deeper layers of the conspiracy. Rajat and the young boy retreat to Rajat's mother's house, trying to stay under the radar while formulating their next move. The tension escalates as they

plan to intercept a convoy of black trucks and cars linked to the billionaire's operation. Using strategic maneuvers, including causing a car to stop with thumbtacks, they manage to follow the convoy to its destination.

The convoy leads them to a building that matches the one Rajat had previously investigated. Inside, they discover that the security is overseen by none other than the billionaire himself. The billionaire's grand scheme is revealed: the so-called start-up was a front for a network of shell companies involved in illegal activities, including trafficking and widespread corruption. Rajat and Ashish are shocked to learn the extent of the billionaire's operations, which manipulated companies and governments for enormous profit.

The narrative reaches its climax with a dramatic confrontation at the billionaire's office building. The guard, now revealed to be an undercover agent, explains his role in infiltrating the billionaire's security team and exposing the criminal empire. His collaboration with Rajat and Ashish, along with the intervention of authorities, leads to a police raid that dismantles the billionaire's network. The story concludes with the arrest of the billionaire and the unraveling of his elaborate scheme, leaving Rajat and Ashish to reflect on the complex and dangerous world they had navigated.



VOCABULARY

1. **Entangled** - Involved, ensnared, entrap.
2. **Web** - Network, mesh, web work.
3. **Deception** - Fraud, deceit, trickery.
4. **Labyrinthine** - Complex, convoluted, intricate.
5. **Orchestrated** - Arranged, coordinated, managed.
6. **Illicit** - Illegal, unlawful, forbidden.
7. **Facade** - Front, mask, appearance.
8. **Legitimacy** - Validity, authenticity, legality.
9. **Interconnected** - Linked, connected, interrelated.
10. **Echelons** - Ranks, levels, tiers.
11. **Maneuvers** - Tactics, moves, strategies.
12. **Intercept** - Block, stop, seize.
13. **Convoy** - Escort, procession, train.
14. **Trafficking** - Smuggling, dealing, trading.
15. **Dismantles** - Disassembles, breaks down, takes apart.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vinayak Goel: Emerging author and finance enthusiast

Vinayak goel is a promising young author with a profound interest in finance and the corporate world. Currently a student in the 11th grade at GD Goenka, Vasant Kunj, vinayak is already establishing a unique voice in storytelling, particularly in the genres of suspense and mystery.

His debut novel, *The Chronicles of Dalal Street*, is a captivating blend of his fascination with Mumbai's dynamic financial district and a gripping narrative that explores the darker facets of corporate intrigue. Vinayak's writing is deeply influenced by his strong interest in business, economics, and the volatile nature of the stock market.

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