

# THE RATS

## A WHITE HOUSE SATIRE



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*Fiat justitia ruat cælum*

(Let justice be done though the heavens fall)

Legal saying

If the stupidly serious really had any humor,  
they would die from laughing at themselves

Clarence Darrow

The heavens fell on the day Ros March arrived at Turnberry. Scotland needed no lessons in wetness, but that day in February gave one that no one would forget. Ros kept to her standard sitting procedure – unstrap left boot, unstrap left leg. Enough water to stage the baptism of Jesus dripped from her prosthesis onto the pub carpet.

Right from the start the welcome from Shona had been outstanding. The banquette seating in the bay window had become Ros's, except when ill-mannered strangers treated The Wreck as their own.

Did the tight knot of regulars harbor reservations about the stocky thirty-eight-year-old arrival, an Englishwoman with no obvious interest in men, nor even a pretended interest in things Caledonian? Yes, but three words dispatched those anxieties forever: three words that Shona coaxed from Ros just once. Once was enough: afterwards you might as well have painted the words on the 360

bus to Stranraer.

“You’re visiting, are you?” Shona had kicked off back in February.  
‘I’ve been visiting for thirty-three years.’

‘Believe it or not, I’ve signed on at West Cottage for a year. The lease was a bargain. Now I’ve met the owner I know why!’ Ros’s voice reminded Shona of a geyser cleansed and energized by strata of experience.

The landlady’s eyebrows shot up. ‘You sign for a year and then you meet his lordship! Well, that makes you a local for sure!’ The women exchanged names while Shona poured two shots of Arran malt. ‘Slàinte! Welcome to The Wreck’d Schooner.’

‘I’ve met his lordship *and the effing totem pole.*’ Ros rolled her eyes. ‘Which the estate agent left out of the pictures.’

‘Wouldn’t you?’

Shona never heard the lid on Pandora’s box creak when, later on, she gestured to Ros’s leg. Out came the three words: Afghanistan, special, forces.

Well before Easter Ros had become a familiar sight not only in The Wreck but also at the Trump Turnberry. Chatting up the resort manager got her an illuminated display in the hotel’s lobby for her jewelry business. Some days the staff saw Ros in a manual wheelchair getting an upper-body workout; on other days she raced down to

the golf club in a mobility scooter. But as often as not they caught her vehicle-free, doing fitness runs up the four tiers of granite steps between the coast road and the 352-chandelier temple of bling.

The steps' steep incline hid the resort from sight as Ros climbed, but at the top 150 yards of ruler-straight white frontage came into view. The one-time station hotel presided over a landscape of wild and tame spirits: the Irish Sea, the lighthouse and castle ruins, rocky outcrops and manicured greens. Even before Trump's arrival, the landscaping had been egotistical. Nature had had no chance against the dream of a golf course, here in the country that had given birth to the sport.

The view fascinated Ros, perhaps because her own life was a combination of the wild and the tame. Ros One leapt obstacles in a single bound and was lethal with the *peshkabz*, a Pashtun stabbing knife; Ros Two wound up in relationships with duller but quite controlling mortals like her current partner Lee. Lee presided over mistake-free forms at her Post Office counter in Brixton. Only Mbali, her fourteen-year-old daughter, shared Ros's fierce bravery and sense of humor.

'Goodbye, secret woman,' Mbali had joked when Ros explained she was going away for several months. 'Now who's going to iron my school stuff?'

'You!' had provoked the predictable reaction, and a question. 'Why are you going anyway?'

'I need to launch my business,' Ros had replied. 'Someone needs to pay for the handbags to which you wish to become accustomed.' Which was true, although Ros had left out the personal demon that she hoped in her new life to overcome.

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Come May the greenkeepers going about Turnberry at five in the morning saw Ros walking intently on the beach or around the links. She used the time to think up ideas for new jewelry pieces that she then worked on in West Cottage. The day when her business took off came in early June; that day selling her pieces really was like shooting fish in a barrel.

The come-on started with the silk linings of her jewelry cases that said, 'The IEDS of March.' No mis-type, the name of the business teed up perfectly the cause of Ros's lost leg (an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan) and her switch from soldier to artist. American men who had piled on years and money in equal proportion were putty in her hands, and of them the Trump Turnberry had fracked a cavernous supply. On the day in question, a dozen golfers from across the States – retired business school alumni – had been trapped by gusting rain. For three days they were stuck in the resort with their wives and their wallets. Boredom thresholds and spa possibilities having been exhausted, Ros cleared twenty thousand dollars in one afternoon, not to mention two special commissions and three invitations to dinner.

That evening the locals drank several rounds to celebrate their newest arrival finding the makings of a good living. Exactly as some had predicted, the benefits of the Trump make-over – tens of millions of pounds of painting, plastering, wiring and marble contracts – had gone to firms in places like Paris and Milan. What had rubbed off in Turnberry's B&Bs and pubs was penny-wheep.

A few summer afternoons later, Ros burst into The Wreck shouting, ‘Shona! Have a gander at this!’ Ros borrowed a napkin from the pub’s restaurant to lay out a new creation, while Shona poured Ros her pint of Belhaven. For weeks Ros had been trying to come up with something that might be a breakthrough in her industry.

Still warm from being worked on, the necklace was more jaw-dropping than anything Shona had seen before. A feisty dragon had escaped from a fairy tale to prop itself on the napkin’s creases. It overflowed with the bright greens and blues of the Adriatic. The design used gemstones, metalwork and enamel: subtle was not its middle name.

‘Wow! Is it a commission?’ No one in Shona’s world could swallow the expense or the taste of the piece, but visitors to the Trump Turnberry came from a different planet.

‘No, it’s a sample – a prototype. Look –’ Ros closed a curtain and fingered something inside the display box. Electric eels shimmered and swam inside the large stones.

‘Holy hell, how did you do that?’ Shona ran her fingers over the

necklace, awestruck.

‘I reckon I’m going to sell bucketloads. Once I’ve sold four, I’ll give you one. Look at the dragon’s eyes. See anything?’

‘What am I looking for?’

‘Anything.’

Shona shook her head.

Ros gave a four-year-old’s giggle. ‘One of them is a lithium polymer battery. Plus some special forces magic.’

‘You’ve really fallen on your feet, haven’t you?’ In February Shona would have followed up this thoughtless phrase with a hasty apology, but that distance between them had long gone. ‘By the way, did you hear who set up that training company, the one that failed?’

‘Flogging digital apprenticeships?’ Ros put the dragon to sleep.

‘Digital rip-off! They stung youngsters for cash and the rest of us for subsidies. And did anyone get work experience, training or certificates? Did they hell! William Hunter at Prestwick, his boy Ian is affected, but there’s thousands of them. It’s disgusting! Why doesn’t the government check up on these companies?’

‘It’s cuts everywhere – the same old story. William’s lad has dyslexia, doesn’t he? He really could have done with some help.’

‘Aye. Anyway, the company was set up by your landlord.’

‘Surprise, surprise.’

‘He’s clean, of course – he sold out months ago. I’m sure he took the money with him in a large truck.’ Shona furiously polished a pint glass, as if shining it clean could erase the dirty memory. Then, with a resigned shrug she looked up. ‘Anyway, how are you and he managing? He’s not bothering you much, I hope. He should be full on being POTUS Two and Making America Great Again, even though he’s not a bit American.’

‘He’s still obsessed with Trump, who he thinks he’s going to meet.’ Ros’s eyeballs did a synchronized roll. ‘The truth is, Shona, he’s as annoying as hell but I got a whack of dosh for fixing up his set of regalia. If you think that dragon is over the top, try the chain of office he’s invented for himself.’

Shona spat onto the back of her hand and then washed the spittle down the sink. ‘We saw it on the front page of the local rag – gold and shit from shoulders to belly-button. Since he bought that paper, it’s not been fit for fire-lighter. Anyway, he’s round the twist.’

‘But that isn’t the problem, is it?’ Ros replied. Her eye wandered through the pane of glass out to Ailsa Craig, the skull of volcanic rock that glowered at ships from the middle of the Clyde like an angry skinhead. The Wreck’d Schooner had been named for a reason.

In one way or another, POTUS Two had been around the fringes of business for years, getting into scrapes in Scotland and abroad (although he had never set foot in the States). The scrapes had impeded neither his self-belief nor his ability to insinuate a bank balance. From the stories that locals shared, the life of this recent arrival was a delusional fantasy. But, as Ros was pointing out, that wasn't the core of the problem.

'Mbali just doesn't get why I can't have her visit this summer,' Ros continued. 'I did promise that she could. And she's fourteen, she's starting her periods, thinking about what life holds. I get that she'd like me to be around. But she's got to stay with Lee.'

'You're right, Ros. You're only just getting up and running. You need your punters to be loaded so summer's the only season you've got. In the autumn it's the guys on package deals.'

'The truth is Mbali can't stay at West Cottage because of *him*. Just the idea of him looking at her, morning and night—' a violent shudder spilled some of Ros's pint. Having come to Turnberry to face her own demon, POTUS Two had turned out to be another. 'He has no respect for anyone who's not a swinging dick with golden testicles. Believe me, Mbali's pictures stay locked in my suitcase. I'm certain the creep sneaks about while I'm out. You know, all around and into my living room – the one he calls the 'Oval Office'? How nuts is that?'

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A few minutes south of Turnberry on the A77 or thirty minutes' hike along the coast, POTUS Two awakens in the Lincoln bedroom, protected from the sun by thick drapes. The Victorian canopied bed is one of the house's few authentic pieces. Most of the rest of the furniture is French junk put together with the chronological consistency of Dr Who. This will take time to fix, but POTUS Two has time. Everyone assumes he'll be gone in eight years max, maybe two years or less, but since when has 'everyone' been right about anything?

The self-appointed President of the Turnberry Society (POTUS Two for short) clicks the remote and streams Fox News. It was from this exact bed that he had leapt up to flick the switch during Fox and Friends, that time when Steve Doocy had said to flick the lights 'if you're watching.' The lights on screen had moved in pretty good synch, allowing for the satellite delay.

The breakfast show streams story after story: lines a mile long for radiation protection suits in Seoul, trouble over a march in the Midwest and (yawn) the fake banking crisis. POTUS Two will tweet something over a bacon sandwich.

Thoughts about previous occupants of the bed do not detain him, because experts ensured a thorough fumigation. POTUS Two doesn't know what a black man, barely American, got up to in the White House – he doesn't need to, there are websites for that – but a bloodstain confronts him as he swings out from beneath the sheets. He opens the bedroom door with a jerk and bellows, 'Kellyann!' before padding downstairs in POTUS-logoed pyjamas.

Of Kellyann there is no sign, so he slips out onto the north patio to soak up the view.

It's eighteen minutes past eleven in Turnberry; eighteen minutes past six in the morning in Washington DC. The north patio will become a portico as soon as the President of the Turnberry Society crowns it with columns and something portentous for them to hold. The day is cloudless, the fresh morning air served just as POTUS Two likes it, with the uplifting tang of White Whisper paint. The house had to be coated from top to bottom three times before he could name it 'the White House.' POTUS Two liked the chemical tang so much – he thinks of it as the smell of power – that the giant pole bearing the 'Make America Great Again' flag is repainted every six weeks. Directly in front of the flagpole is the twelve-foot totem of Trump – POTUS One – with his jaw jutting and teeth gleaming, an icon surveying his iconic resort across the bay.

POTUS Two is touching seventy and barrel-chested with small hands. He resembles an early-retired head of accounts more than a president. Big ears and black butterfly-wing glasses emphasize the definition that his forehead and eyes lack. However, for everything POTUS Two misses in presence, his imagination more than compensates. Another difference from the man on the totem is POTUS Two needs his coffee. POTUS One's regime of no coffee, no alcohol and no cigarettes has been done before. POTUS Two recalls that it didn't Make Germany Great that time either.

Turning to survey the West Wing – the West Cottage to be exact, fifty yards away – POTUS Two spots Ros moving around the bay-

fronted living room. The room has just been redecorated in creamy gray damask and boasts a bust of Churchill. ‘The Oval Office,’ POTUS Two had explained when showing Ros around. ‘Uh-huh,’ she had said. He grins, because Ros won’t be ‘uh-huh-ing’ when she hears the news he’s got for her today.

Kellyann arrives with his two-cup Pyrex pot. POTUS Two will send her back if the coffee’s not scalding. She attempts a discreet cough but fails. The nineteen-year-old has worked at the White House for two months. In that time her thickly made-up face has sagged, like a washing-line under wet carpets.

‘Kellyann,’ roars POTUS Two, and the housekeeper tenses. He waves a podgy finger and points upstairs. ‘On the sheets. In the bedroom. A bloodstain. A new one.’

Kellyann can’t help herself. She does her best to respond to this accountant’s sexual fantasies but she has been warned about POTUS Two and blood. The pot tips and falls. Her hands cover the private folds of flesh between her legs in embarrassment. The flesh, her hands, are scalded by coffee.

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The approach to the Turnberry clubhouse was guarded by a clock and a fountain. The black-and-gold clock looked like a borrowing from a steampunk fashion shoot; it proclaimed the time and ‘Trump Turnberry’ in four directions. The fountain was a cornucopia of foursomes – bearded philosophers, yawning lions, pouncing jaguars,

embarrassed fish. Topping the camp montage was the lead singer from a Roman boy band in a toga. Standing beside this vision, Ros saw her host's car begin the curving, half-mile descent from the hotel. POTUS Two had been talking to the resort manager.

That morning's invitation had been to lunch in the Duel in the Sun, the clubhouse's homage to the finish between Watson and Nicklaus in 1977. Ostensibly POTUS Two wanted to say thank you to Ros for inscribing *E pluribus unum* into the chain of office of the Turnberry Society. Doubtless in his own mind he was the one who had arisen from the many. A hostess led them to a window table. The green leather armchairs were the color of newly-cleaned money. From them POTUS Two and Ros looked out towards the lighthouse a mile away. Ros thought it only fair to sting her host for lobster, landed along the coast at Girvan. POTUS Two didn't react. Instead, he was in high excitement about his news.

'He wants to meet both of us!' POTUS Two gesticulated at the resort. 'The owner. Trump.'

Ros looked up. 'Really?' When she first arrived, looking to build up American business, chasing her private demon and trying to suck up to her freak landlord, she had blurted out that she'd always wanted to meet Donald Trump. 'When?'

'Maybe a couple of weeks. It has to be private because as President, he hasn't officially got anything to do with his golf resorts, or his other businesses. But the Royal & Ancient were scouting around here two weeks ago, and they told the manager that they'd be back

in a month. It'll be about having The Open here again. Trump wouldn't miss that conversation for the world, but he can only turn up by accident, you see. Privately.'

No one Ros knew came close to POTUS Two's ability to string out endless fantasies with new implausibilities or preposterous 'facts.' The energy they consumed must have been gargantuan. Even a short sit-down with the fantasist was exhausting, like playing eighteen holes with a magician who re-arranged greens, bunkers and ravines in the blink of an eye. She, a mere mortal, had to hump her clubs caddyless each step of the re-arranged way. Undiluted admiration was the only way to navigate the course. 'Amazing. But why would Trump want to meet us?'

'Not here. We'll talk after lunch.' POTUS Two dropped his voice several decibels. 'As President of the Turnberry Society, I have something he wants.'

With the nub of the conversation deferred, they pitched into small talk. From Ros's point of view this was worse than a two-hour dental appointment. But because the small stuff quickly ran out, the conversation turned to big stuff.

'You're part-American, are you?' Ros asked.

POTUS Two shook his head. 'English, pure and proud.'

'So why fly the world's largest flag saying "Make America Great Again," if you don't mind my asking? Because you hope to meet

Trump?’ POTUS Two had changed his email signature to include a photo of the totem and flag next to his address: *The White House, Girvan Road, Turnberry, Ayr, Scotland.*

‘The flag says what it says, plain enough.’

‘But does it say what it means?’

‘What do you think it means?’

‘Your flag’s not about America, or at least not America today. It’s code for something else – America at a particular time. That’s why it’s “again”.’

‘There was a lot of good in the 1950s – washing machines, proper families, even the Cold War. At least we knew we were right.’

Who were the ‘we’ if we weren’t Americans? Ros had been thinking about it. ‘How about the 1850s? When some American families had different kinds of washing machines? Slaves. At least “we” knew we were white.’

POTUS Two’s fork stumbled mid-way to its destination. ‘My dear, whoever knew you had such a lurid imagination?’

This from the nutter who thought Ros’s living room was the Oval Office! But Ros wasn’t finished. The delusions were a distraction if you wanted to shine a light into POTUS Two’s darkness. ‘I didn’t imagine your regalia, for example. You got your chain on eBay, you

said.'

'Yes, sold off by some impoverished town in the north of England with a name like Heptonwhistle. The kind of place that once made all the world's socks but has been on its knees for years. On its knees five times a day, these days.'

Ros squirmed. But for her year's lease, she would have moved somewhere else there and then. In the meantime she needed to crouch behind the shelter of some facts. 'It's no municipal chain from the north,' she said. 'An eighteenth-century shipowner in Bristol had it made because he wanted to prance about at meetings of his lodge.'

'The sailing ships struck me as a good local connection. The Wreck'd Schooner, for example.'

'You bought a celebration of the slave trade. And I fancy you knew that.'

After silence congealed over the rest of the meal, they set off on one of the paths to the lighthouse. The route included – incongruously in such a manicured setting – an unkempt airstrip dating from Turnberry's wartime service. The lighthouse looked down on the overgrown stumps of Turnberry Castle, birthplace of a king – Robert the Bruce.

'Trump owns this incredible slab of Scottish history. For a would-be Scot he doesn't have a lot to show for it, does he?' POTUS Two

remarked. ‘Do you remember when he visited his mother’s house on Lewis?’

‘A pretty fleeting visit according to the media.’

‘Two minutes.’ POTUS Two struck a pose in front of the ruins. ‘Mary Anne MacLeod was born in Tong, house number 3, in 1912. She moves somewhere larger – New York – in the 1930s and bears five children, including Donald J. So here is where I, wearing my regalia as President of the Turnberry Society, and with the benefit of a doctorate in genealogical science, will certify that Donald J Trump is a direct descendant of Scotland’s bravest king, Robert the Bruce, the victor of Bannockburn. Imagine that on Fox News.’

Ros’s jaw dropped. To hide her shock she bent down. They were standing close to the championship tee for the tenth hole, a 565-yard par five. The ball had to soar over sea and rocky headland and defeat wind to land safely. Ros reminded herself that she lived in a world of alternative facts. Whether Trump was descended from Robert the Bruce was irrelevant. Whether POTUS Two had a doctorate in dish washing, let alone genealogy – who cared? What mattered was who whacked their story with the right club and total focus and belief. ‘I can see that would get his attention.’

‘It’s better than that – because it’s about genealogy, I deal directly with family and skip past all the White House minders.’

‘What’s my angle, then?’ asked Ros.

'A highly decorated special forces soldier, lost a leg fighting radical Islam in Afghanistan and now making a success of a fantastic business. You're Trump's perfect person. Besides, you want to meet your lifelong hero.'

Ros threw up in a patch of gorse, disguising the spasm as a coughing fit. The disguise was poor but POTUS Two was in a world of his own imagining. She let him return on his own via the links to the clubhouse and his car. Instead she picked her way through tufted green, clustered yellow and blossomy white grasses down to the beach, taking the half-hour coast route home in solitude. By the time she got to West Cottage she hoped POTUS Two would have long disappeared, chasing another mirage.

Her walk took her parallel to the course's fourth to eighth holes but in reverse order. This stretch of the links lay above a fringe of sand five to ten feet wide. Keeping her left leg on firm ground she breathed deeply to exhale the madness. Ros still believed what her mother had told her about ozone and sea air, although science had since found the revitalizing zest to be sulfides produced by mud microbes.

Ros didn't doubt that POTUS One would at some point visit Turnberry, his prize Scottish golf course. How could he resist chalking up an Open Championship, to add to Turnberry's collection of 1977, 1986, 1994 and 2009? 352 chandeliers cost a lot of money, money that Trump hadn't spent for no reason.

She wanted to dismiss POTUS Two's ramblings about a meeting in two weeks as delusions, but here Ros stubbed her right toe on something. Sure, he lived in a Cirque du Soleil world of private facts. But like his icon, perhaps he did maintain a vestigial connection with reality. After all, POTUS One had started as the amateur against sixteen Republican professionals in 2015, and look what happened.

Ailsa Craig, a thousand feet high, called out to Ros across the water. She had been reading up on its history. Now a bird sanctuary and the home of blue-hone granite for curling stones, for most of the twentieth century Ailsa had been a bird death-trap. Puffins and other burrow-nesters had had their young chewed alive by an exploding population of rats. Originally rat-free, following a series of shipwrecks the first rat seen on Ailsa was killed by a dog in 1889: within a year the dog was killing 59 in one day to no effect. That autumn of 1890, the lighthouse keepers killed 900 of the rodents.

Ninety years later, the bird populations were still being eaten alive. One study of herring gull clutches showed nearly two hundred eggs yielded only eleven fledged young; the corpses of chicks had gnaw marks on their legs and heads. In the nineteenth century Atlantic puffins had thronged the island in numbers that darkened the sky; in the twentieth century they had vanished entirely. Come 1991, the landowner, scientists, volunteers and the Royal Navy decided to take the fight to the enemy. Five tons of Warfarin were delivered by helicopter.

Scientists measured the rats' presence on Ailsa by scattering hundreds of wooden spatulas saturated with fat – chewsticks – around the island. To start with, every chewstick was gnawed; by April 1991, six hundred fresh chewsticks went untouched. Ailsa became a bird sanctuary once more. In time, over one thousand fledgling gulls were observed and in 2002 puffins returned to breed on the island.

Ros knew of no Warfarin that could wipe the Earth clean of human rats: self-obsessed, rapacious and alarmingly dangerous predators for whom the precious meant nothing. But if one day such a remedy did come about, she wondered what chewsticks society should use to monitor progress or sound alarms. In the meantime, just in case POTUS Two's imaginings about a visit by his hero proved to be real, Ros would make herself ready.

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The day POTUS Two had been waiting for came not two but six weeks later, in August. With mounting scepticism Ros had been waiting for it as well. For her the day kicked off with two phone calls. The first came from Khaled, POTUS Two's driver, telling her where to be and when. Did she need a lift? No, she would hop on her mobility scooter. When Scottish Muslims had put blue, green, black and white together to make their own tartan, POTUS Two had mocked them savagely, but still he hired Khaled as his driver. Naturally he cut Khaled's wages during Ramadan, because the Muslim's concentration would be low during the afternoon. Khaled had simply laughed and sucked it up as another kind of fast:

*insh'allah* – POTUS Two's money was better than Uber's. Khaled laughed again now as he brought news of the visit: he had never seen POTUS Two so twitchy. It was like he was going to meet Elvis.

Ros was pretty twitchy herself as she changed into green parade dress, but she kept up the previous six weeks' intravenous drip of disbelief. All Khaled's call meant was that POTUS Two *believed* his meeting with Trump was on, and had instructed Khaled accordingly. A call from Shona thirty minutes later gave Ros a jolt. 'I got a text,' Shona said. 'You know William works at Prestwick? Air Force One has just landed. Trump should be at Turnberry in twenty minutes.'

There was nothing to see on television, but a tourist tweeted a picture of six black limousines shooting out of the airport. Meanwhile at Turnberry, the local police conscripted golf flags into service as a security perimeter. Reinforcements of Glasgow 'polis' would take a couple of hours to arrive, filling out their overtime dockets on the way; until then the objective of the President's Security Service was to isolate the promontory on which the lighthouse sat, rather than the resort as a whole. Games were canceled in mid-play. By the time POTUS Two and Ros reached the checkpoint at the fourteenth hole, a helicopter had offloaded sharpshooters and a coastal protection boat was heading down the Clyde.

Restoring the yellow-and-white 1873 lighthouse and keeper's lodgings had been part of the Trump investment. Golf fans could now book the tower's Presidential suite, with balconies offering views in every direction. A photograph in the clubhouse showed Trump (sporting a 'Make America Great Again' cap) interrupting

his 2016 campaign to cut a ribbon here with Donald Jr, Eric and Ivanka. In 2017, Eric returned with actors in mediaeval dress to invoke the memory of Scotland's hero-king.

Approaching the checkpoint, POTUS Two threw out a straight back and a commanding jaw to control his jitters; Ros struggled to keep a straight face. A tic had taken her left cheek hostage, signaling the security detail like a flashing headlight (so she felt). Surely the two of them were about to be sent packing, two kids in party get-ups trying to trick-or-treat the most powerful man in the world. POTUS Two had cloned one of Trump's regular looks, a blue suit with a red tie and MAGA cap, but his chain of office clanked at each step. Ros was kitted out as a Royal Marine with beret and medals. They exchanged greetings with the resort's general manager while the Secret Service checked their passports against a list.

POTUS Two was thoroughly scanned, armpits, groin and all, not forgetting the chain and the case carrying the scroll that would declare Trump's new ancestry. Ros stepped out of the mobility scooter so the agents could inspect it separately. Then they turned to her artificial leg and to her.

'Lift your medals, ma'am,' was not so much an instruction as after-the-fact commentary. A cold metal wand depressed Ros's left breast. Then the two visitors were through and being lined up by a photographer. While POTUS Two exchanged more nothings with the general manager, Ros set her eyes on the horizon. She focused deliberately and started to breathe again. To the left, the lighthouse. To the right, the remains of the castle sunk in a hollow, like a

decayed molar in a jaw. In front the Clyde changed color as quickly as Ros's cheeks in response to the scudding clouds and stiffening breeze. Behind, the helicopter gunned its motor, its noise and blast effortlessly trumping the seagulls.

And then the windbag was with them, all grin, hairspray and hand gestures. POTUS One played with POTUS Two's cap. POTUS Two took out the scroll. Waxy redness hung from it like roadkill. The photographer framed the two men and then Trump on his own; holding the certificate, not holding the certificate; with the ruins, without the ruins. The most powerful man in the world grinned like the cotton-candy kid with his own, specially confected, place in history.

Yet POTUS One was no kid in a playground, Ros reflected; no clown in a fairground, no victor from a battleground, no sage of business, no honest plumber draining a swamp. Those were all delusions. Here instead was her private demon in the flesh, the man who thought that Armageddon was a fashion label. What to him was the beauty and fragility of seven and a half billion lives, but an all-you-can-eat mass of sugary strands, to be used up and spat out as needed. POTUS One was a human rat. The evidence was easy to see. In the fight against human rats, other humans were the chewsticks. Gnaw marks on disposable people were the clue.

They were near where Ros had previously thrown up; it took all her powers of concentration not to do so again. She'd made a plan – with military training, of course she had. The plan was to ignore Trump's face and voice and to concentrate on the deepest aspect of

her target – his hands. Pointing fingers, fleshy palms and pumping fists, usually these were like yapping hunting dogs, signaling the presence of a master on a horse who bore a message. But with this man the horse was riderless: the prestidigitation was the message.

When the time came to play her part, Ros bit down hard and saluted. Turnberry had offered her the best chance for her to confront her incubus, the man who mocked women, disabled people and threatened the end of the world; here he was. POTUS Two had fixed a ringside seat and done most of the talking for her, but the next bit would be down to her alone.

‘Attaboy, soldier!’ Trump returned Ros’s salute. The ex-Marine faced the teenage graduate of New York Military Academy, a private boarding school that had helped make America great again by selling out in 2015 to Chinese investors. From there Trump had made it to Commander-in-Chief without ever dirtying his hands with the real thing. ‘You Brits are such fantastic soldiers and Allies. The best! Your service makes me so grateful and so humble to serve as Commander-in-Chief.’ He paused, the riderless horse looking for an easy track. ‘I hear you took the fight to radical Islam in Afghanistan.’

‘I was a Royal Marine, sir! We take the fight to the enemy.’

‘You look them in the eye.’

‘We look them in the eye, sir!’

‘You put yourself in harm’s way.’

‘We put ourselves in harm’s way, sir!’

‘And everything that’s precious, all our values, our homes, our good jobs, you keep all of that safe.’

‘Yes, sir. Permission to speak, sir.’

‘Of course, soldier. Granted.’

‘This medal ...’ Ros’s voice cracked. She pointed to her largest medal, a beast comprising a gold star, a crescent and a ribbon in black, red and green. The whole thing was clunky enough to have fallen off POTUS Two’s chain. ‘The Star of Afghanistan. Only three awarded to foreigners – unbelievers – sir. I would like you to have mine. To wear it as you take the fight to the enemy.’

Trump paused. Was he touched? POTUS Two beamed.

‘May I?’ asked Ros, unfastening the clasp. Trump bent down. She had thought the next bit through so many times. ‘Before you put it on, sir, if you hold it up to the sun—’ she put the gaudy metalwork in his right hand and the ribbon and clasp in his left ‘—there’s a message woven into the ribbon. The Pashtuns believe only a great leader can see it.’

Six feet of presidential stature turned towards the sun, the Star of Afghanistan lifted in outstretched arms. POTUS Two, two inches

shorter, squeezed in behind for a peek.

‘You better believe it!’ exclaimed Trump. ‘It says—’

The sliver of explosive in the medal was not enough to kill, Ros knew that. There was no way she could have fooled the scanner with more. But was there enough to do the job she had planned? She had sweated the calculation so many times. The job was to take out his hands: no more tweeting, groping or molesting; no more signing, saluting, fist-pumping or knuckle-crushing. No more golf. No more taking the piss out of people with disabilities. Every day for the rest of Trump’s life some Hispanic wiping his ass: Ros couldn’t see anyone in the First Family volunteering for that duty.

‘For all of us, Mbali,’ she whispered. She pressed the extra button on the scooter’s control panel to unleash the special forces magic. Would the Secret Service blast her into the next world before she saw the result? In the end Ros had an aeon, two seconds and a half, to assess the scene and compose her ‘after action’ report.

Hot blood spattered her face and redecorated the links as if from two wayward agricultural sprayers. That didn’t distract her – she’d been there, seen worse. There was a price to pay if young girls were to grow up in a world in which menstruation was the source of human life rather than its stain. POTUS One’s right arm shattered two inches above the wrist, with everything below blasted to oblivion. On the left arm, part of the wrist and the fourth and fifth fingers (ringless) were still attached. Her eyes followed the other fingers skyward, like a golf cameraman tracking a shot.

The Secret Service fusillade demolished her rib-cage, but the way Ros saw it, taking the fight to the enemy was the job she had signed up to do.

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**Donald J. Trump ✓** @realDonaldTrump · Wow, SO MUCH SUPPORT for Country, Flag and Trump! Radicals/terrorists always lose. Military and Drs the best. Back to work!  
#AmericaFirst #USA

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POTUS One awakens in the real Lincoln bedroom: it hadn't taken the First Lady long to make clear that the apparatus of sickness wasn't welcome in the Presidential suite down the hall. The Lincoln bedroom is stuffed with intravenous drips and high-tech medical kit, not to mention monitoring cameras (no one mentioned the cameras but he knows).

POTUS One is feeling great, so great, never better. Siri tweets on his behalf: another great day in the White House, making more great jobs in the greatest country in the world. Well, what with bringing back the draft – he hasn't finally decided on that – some of those jobs might be in Korea. But that's such an incredibly successful military strategy right there, the best generals from around the world are standing in line to find out how he did it.

Surviving assassination is a most holy sacrament. For a couple of days even the liberals had shut the fuck up!

He watches re-runs – *Valkyrie* with Tom Cruise is a favorite, or recycled news from the day itself. Turnberry is so close to Prestwick airport and the helicopter was right there – within twenty minutes he was on the operating table in Air Force One, climbing over Ireland with medics linked by video to the best surgeons in the States. They didn't just shoot the lead terrorist and kick the shit out of the guy with the bling: within seconds telephone analysis had yielded the whole cell – the driver, the pub landlady and the guy on the inside at Prestwick. Siri had tweeted for him a snapshot of the Koran open inside the driver's dashboard!

The hands? What hands? POTUS One chuckles. It's no issue! Saul Lewicky, the best hand surgeon in the world has briefed him personally. It's incredible the transplants this guy has done. The new hands will be bigger, better, stronger – easy over, sunny side up, frittata, however he wants them. If he wants human, he can have human, but Silicon Valley is gagging for him to go bionic. POTUS fancies one of each, which should be fantastic for his golf handicap. On the GiveAHand website 45,206 patriots (up 214 overnight!) are offering part of themselves for transplant. *Mi mano es tu mano.* Director Wray has pledged a thorough FBI screening of donors for drug use, criminality and undocumented entry.

He takes a slash in the sink while a butler helps him with his robe; POTUS One isn't going to stand for some goofball holding his dick when he pees. When the doctors have checked his morning

readings he'll have breakfast in the Yellow Room. Now he runs the country by dictation: Judy is today's First Stenographer and is she hot! He had tweeted a picture of Judy's cleavage with the words, 'Liberals happy now America's got a real dictator.'

The Yellow Room opens onto the Truman balcony, but POTUS One doesn't go out. In truth since he returned to the White House POTUS One hasn't ventured down even one floor to the *piano nobile*. The second floor, the social media and the television are now his domains, and he is happy with them. Besides, the west colonnade is all jackhammers ripping out the press center. He is restoring the Roosevelt swimming pool. Nixon had the indoor pool built over, but POTUS One needs physiotherapy, not the lamestream media.

Saul Lewicky's colleague enters with a radiant smile. He's in a white shirt and tie; POTUS One likes that kind of thing. The youngster is a rising star, he's treated three royal families. He looks up from his iPad. 'Good morning, Mr President, how are you this morning?'

'It's another fine morning in America. We're going to create some great jobs for some great people.'

'Your dedication is incredible, sir. Did you remember that Saul is coming to see you this afternoon? I know he's looking forward to that.' The young man taps his tablet. 'The overnight readings are very good, no issues there I'm happy to say. But how is the laughter? Better?'

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That evening the weekly conference named CATO took place in the West Wing, in the vice-president's office. CATO was the Veep, the Chief of Staff, the National Security Adviser, Saul Lewicky and Lewicky's young colleague – no family. CATO and the fact of Lewicky's visits to the White House were shrouded in the thickest possible fog because Lewicky was a professor of psychiatry at Massachusetts General. He had never been introduced as a transplant surgeon, the idea had simply been put out there. POTUS One's imagination had done the rest.

Lewicky kicked off. 'Here's the paradox: POTUS is improving but worse. He remains delusional about what functionality, over what period of time, he will regain with new hands. That's par for the course – it slots right in there with how he's going to replace Obamacare, fix the tax system and win in Korea. For this patient that is condition normal. You guys get paid to sort that out, not me.'

'Then where's the improvement?' demanded the Veep. 'And what's worse?'

'Think of it like this. Psychologically speaking, all of us in this room are like cars – cars with different capabilities, histories and personalities but basically the same steering, drivetrain and braking systems. For all of us, the rubber hits the road – the road being reality – in the same way. All of us need a little cushioning of the ego: that's what the tires do. We learn to keep the cushioning at a

safe pressure. POTUS is something else, more like one of those airships at the end of the 1930s. He floats above reality, but with one or two strong tethers. Try to bring him down to the ground to run like the rest of us – well, it isn’t going to happen. Politically, you can call that letting him be himself. Psychologically I have to call it a fundamentally different reality structure.

‘Losing his hands was like losing some motors on the airship – serious, but not fatal. More serious is that the attack has opened a slow puncture in the fabric of his reality. Symptomatically, what’s happening is he’s hearing laughter. He’s hearing people laugh at him. We’ve played all the psychotropic tricks we can, but he keeps hearing the laughter more. Here’s the reported episodes per day for the last four weeks, with duration and intensity.’

Lewicky’s colleague slid copies of a graph stamped ‘TOP SECRET’ across the table. The Chief of Staff whistled. ‘You’re saying what, professor? That he’s losing his mind? That he’s *imagining* laughter?’

‘Absolutely not. POTUS does not, for example, imagine that in the chair opposite him or under his bed or somewhere that he can’t see, a non-existent person is laughing. Nor is he hearing “voices in his head.” There are quite specific tests for that, and we have carried them out.’

Lewicky’s colleague nodded. Lewicky continued, ‘What is happening is that generally at night, but increasingly at other times, he realizes that real people – nameless but perfectly real people out there, the

Resistance we might call them – are laughing at him. Which they are, at least when they're not weeping or nauseous.'

The Chief of Staff leaned forward with a growl. 'What do you mean, *they are*? Where's the evidence?'

Lewicky faced him down. 'Out there. I laugh at him myself. Outside the bunker, you'll find a lot of people do. I mean, this is a deluded little guy in a job a million times too big. All of you know I never wanted this patient, so give me a chance and I'm gone. The rub, clinically speaking, is this: because he is hearing real laughter that he didn't hear before, he is improving. Reality congruence is increasing. But the airship is leaking whatever's kept it afloat this long. Soon, rubber will be hitting the road. When that happens, there will be hell to pay. Think of it like the mother of all cold turkeys.'

When the doctors had gone, the Veep poured Scotches. 'Fuck,' he said. Round and round the Constitution the three men went, weary heads of semi-functioning parts of the Executive, wan, distressed and stuck. 'Every time we come back to the same thing. It's got to be resignation,' concluded the National Security Adviser. 'It's not only the dignified route, it's the only viable route. He's got to choose to go.'

The Veep tried lightening the mood. 'Just get the mirrors on the second floor put back.' Prior to POTUS One's return to the White House, the second floor had had a generous supply of full-length mirrors, Federal, Victorian and *belle époque*. 'He tries not to let us

see, so when you visit him these days, he's always sitting. Have you noticed? But the attack's completely fucked how he walks. It's—' the Veep searched for inspiration '—Monty Python.'

He leapt up, swaying ungainly with fists balled. He swung his right leg in front of the left but too far over, precipitating a lurch and a facial spasm before he dragged the left next to it. And then again, with greater exaggeration. By the time he made it to the west-facing windows, the room had collapsed into laughter, the nation's top brass letting off pressure like fire hydrants in a heatwave.

Tears rolled down the Veep's cheeks until a man with no hands, flabby skin (not the best) and wrinkled genitals kicked open the door. The emperor was wearing an open, monogrammed robe, its silk belt dangling to the floor, untied because untieable without assistance. He screamed a phrase over and over again, as if it were a magic spell. The words may have been 'You're hired!', or something similar, but they'd heard it all before. He'd recover under sedation.

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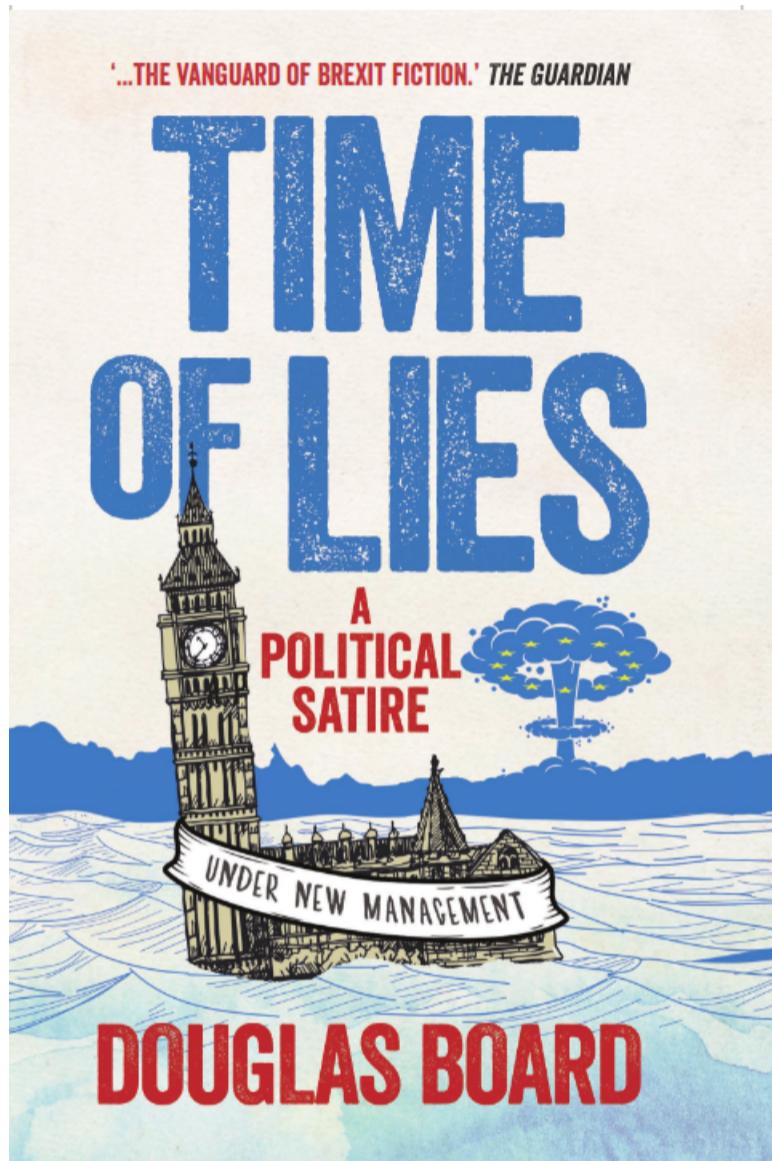
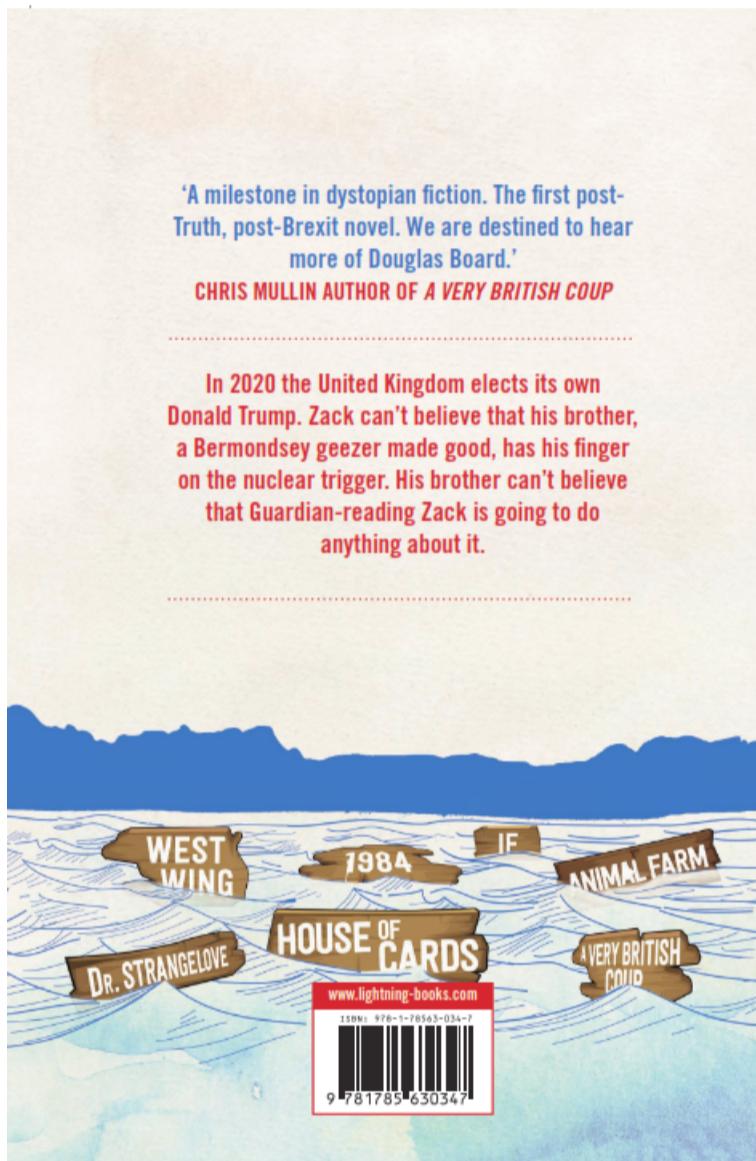
*@BoardWryter*

*This story is a satirical exploration of delusion. All the characters and events are imaginary, and in no sense representations of real life. However the eradication of rats from Ailsa Craig in 1991 is true, and documented in 2001 by Dr Bernard Zonfrillo of Glasgow University here.*

*Douglas Board (@BoardWryter) is the author of the satirical novels **Time of Lies** and **MBA** (see below). Non-commercial reproduction of this short story, unaltered and including this copyright notice and other end-notes, is permitted.*

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# TIME OF LIES



My book of the moment: Douglas Board is a truly talented satirist and has our Brexit era nailed.

**Matthew d'Ancona,**  
*Guardian and Evening Standard*

A milestone in dystopian fiction. The first post-truth, post-Brexit novel. We are destined to hear more of Douglas Board.

**Chris Mullin,**  
author of *A Very British Coup*

A riveting satire that's so insightful it's scary.

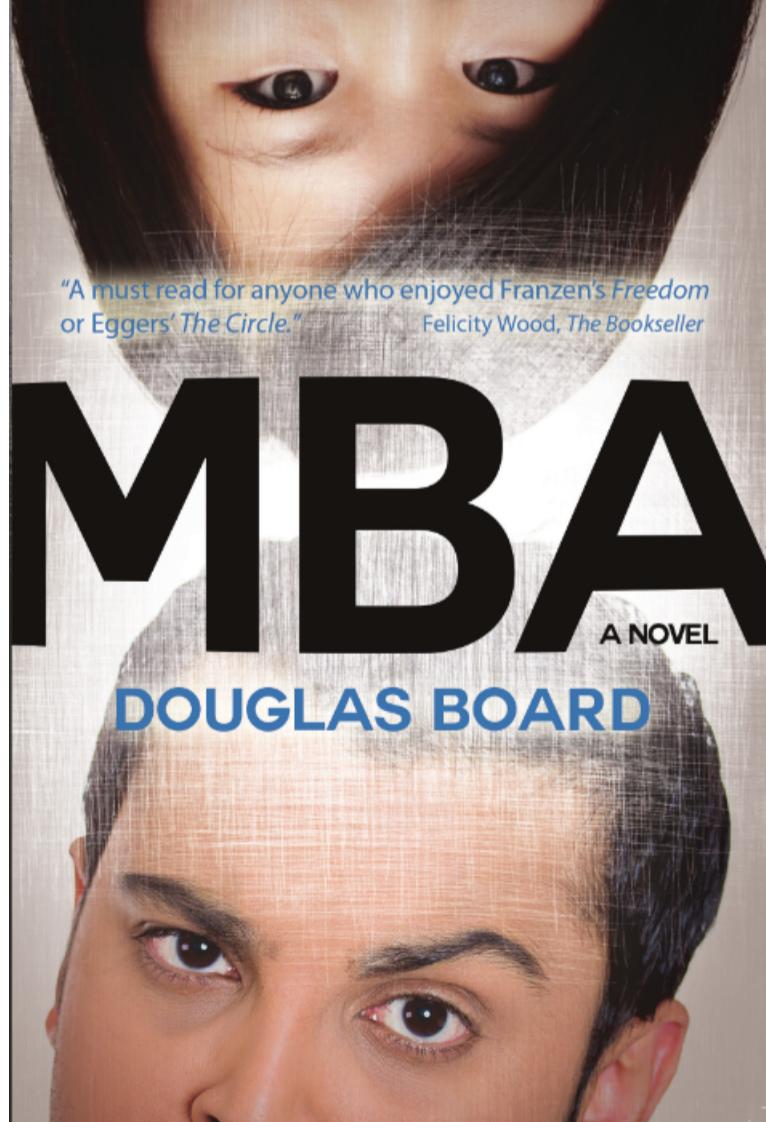
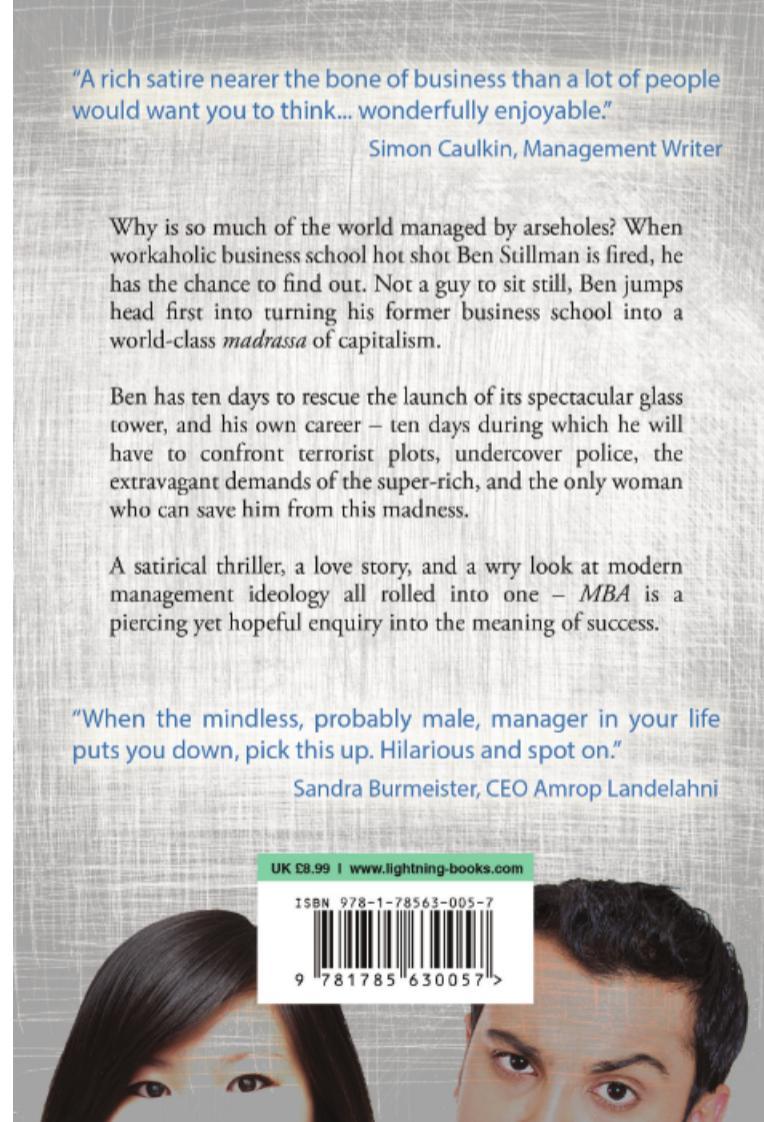
## Buzz magazine book of the month

*Time of Lies* has you laughing out loud whilst ruthlessly dissecting our troubled times. A funny, exciting and provocative read for anyone wanting to reflect on recent political upheavals.

**Wendy Alexander,  
former leader of the Scottish Labour Party**

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# MBA



A must-read for anyone who enjoyed Franzen's *Freedom* or Eggers' *The Circle*.

**Felicity Wood,**  
***The Bookseller***

Board's hilarious fiction debut might be required reading for anyone considering an MBA—if it weren't for the fact that it might result in laying most MBA programs to fallow. He takes no prisoners in this piercingly cynical yet oh-so-funny take on business school as creator of that unique breed: "homo economicus."

**Donna Chavez,**  
***Booklist Online***

Douglas Board has produced the next instalment of a great literary genre: the campus novel. Instead of following thwarted historians, faux-radical sociologists or cynical literary scholars, Board uncovers a cauldron of corporate claptrap, hubris and hard lessons which anyone who has been to business school will instantly recognise.

**Professor André Spicer,**  
**Cass Business School, City, University of London**

Douglas has done what many great artists do: reveal truths accessibly. Read *MBA* once for the fun of it, and then again to ask yourself the hard questions it poses about leadership and success.

**Fields Wicker-Miurin,**  
**board director and social entrepreneur**