

BRITIZEN JON

Andy Ross is a philosopher, born in Britain.
He did pioneering work in mathematical logic,
earned four degrees in Oxford and London,
and worked for 25 years in Germany in
science publishing and software.
Now in Britain, he blogs at

www.andyross.net

By the same author

LIFEBALL

MINDWORLDS

G.O.D. IS GREAT

PHILOSOPHER

CORAL

BRITZEN JON

A Tragedy in Three Acts

Andy Ross

ROVER

BRITAIN

ROVER

Rover Fiction

An imprint of Ross Verlag Britain

Copyright © J. Andrew Ross 2017

Text build 20181031

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 978-197617588-6

Britizen Jon

ACT 1 – Jon

Access	9
Brexit	11
Career	21
Ministry	31
Treason	41

ACT 2 – John

Promise	59
Revolution	71
Success	81
Revelation	91
Perdition	103

ACT 3 – Kate

Arousal	113
Fortress	123
Terror	133
Firestorm	143
Adieu	153

Thanks	159
--------	-----

ACT 1

Jon

Access

I am Jon Ball and this is my last will and testament. I have been arrested and am being held captive in an army barracks. I guess Britain is under martial law.

I am accused of leading a rebellion against the Crown. If I am to be put before a firing squad, I want the world to know the truth about my campaign.

•

A loud triple rap at the door broke my train of thought. The door swung open with alarming speed. I turned my office chair from the desk to face the intruder.

An army officer stood erect two paces in front of me. The man was tall and fit, with pressed khaki slacks and a knitted uniform pullover, and his black leather shoes were buffed to a flawless shine. His lean face was tanned and his silver hair was buzz-cut to stubble.

“How are we today, sir.”

His tone was assertive, requiring no answer.

“We shall let you go online. We shall monitor your activity and expect you to act responsibly. Anything suspicious and we confiscate the machine – understood?”

I nodded slowly. I had asked for online access.

“Understood. I’ve been busy writing notes for my last will and testament. But I need access to news sites and so on. I presume that’s okay.”

“Granted. We shall treat you correctly, just in case things go tits-up and we have to go before an international tribunal.

We're not exactly flavour of the month for the mob on the streets, as you well know, but we do insist on behaving like gentlemen, and that includes treating you better than you deserve. We expect you to do likewise."

"Agreed. How about some clean clothes?"

I had been stripped of my street clothes on arrest and given a single pair of cheap pyjamas, fresh in a sealed pack from a high street supermarket. That was a week ago.

"I'll see what I can do."

With that, the officer turned and went. I was alone with my thoughts again.

•

The rebellion, if you can call it that, was a very British affair. I issued an ultimatum to the Crown to grant parliament more sovereignty in its dealings with America, on pain of stripping the traditional prerogatives of the monarch altogether and adopting a republican constitution. This was an act of treason according to the royalists. They deemed it excuse enough to call out the army.

That was enough for the mob, on both sides. Soon there were clashes of royalists versus anarchists up and down the country. My government was facing disaster. Once the army showed up in parliament it was all over for us. Since then I have been out of touch with the news. The little notebook computer they gave me was offline, so I just started writing notes. Soon I'll be back online, I trust.

Wait, I need to tell you the back story. I now invite you to read my notes for the whole saga, from the start.

Brexit

The trigger for my political career was Brexit, the impending promise that the United Kingdom would leave the European Union. The dream of the Brexiteers was that Great Britain, that historic union of England, Wales and Scotland, to which Northern Ireland was appended as a clinging remnant of the days when the entire island of Ireland was part of the British Empire, would once again assert itself on the world stage as a sovereign nation, beholden to no one, free to make deals with other such nations, to form a global trading network that might restore British fortunes sufficiently to recall the glory days of empire, when almost a quarter of the land surface of the Earth and a fifth of the world's population fell under the rule of the monarch in London. Those were the days that put the Brexiteers into fits of patriotic pride.

Like most British people with a decent helping of brains, I knew the odds were stacked against so easy a restoration of British fortunes. I knew too that offending our European neighbours was unwise, with bloody centuries of conflict to prove the folly of taking the continental peace for granted, and that throwing a few billion pounds into the union pot each year was better than throwing young British lives into a raging fire every generation or so. But the ardent passions of the voting masses, provoked to boiling point by decades of rabid newspaper headlines from the Fleet Street tabloid press, were not to be cooled by reason.

So I bit the bullet and bided my time. I decided to wait and see how the referendum played out, and learn to ride the tide

of popular passions when the sea looked calmer and the way ahead for the good ship HMS Britannia was written in the captain's log. I was in no hurry to back a loser.

But then turmoil descended. Let's review the transcript of a brief television documentary that a few municipal officials and politicians and I starred in, recorded on the night of the referendum count and edited down from a few hours of life to a minute of television news. (Note to my future editors: insert attachment A here.)

•

The scene is a large hall in a municipal civic centre, equipped with three large wall-mounted television screens, with banks of seats facing each one, and provisioned with refreshments on tables set by the walls. A few members of the Westminster and European parliaments, resplendent in campaigning suits and party outfits as if waiting for the cameras, mixed freely with local officials, who were clad in their usual working grunge like a lower caste among the visiting Brahmin elite. Two television crews fussed with their cameras and lights on low platforms at opposite ends of the hall.

I was suited and booted too, ready to perform if asked, although as a humble party agent my role had been limited to watching my local Member of Parliament tweet a declaration of support for the Leave campaign. I had pleaded with him to listen to the experts, but to no avail.

Suddenly, a Japanese man thrust a microphone toward my mouth. A video camera beside him lurched forward and zoomed in on my face.

“Who do you think will win the referendum?”

“It's going to be close. I thought Remain would win until the immigration issue came up. That brought up some strong

emotions. Now I think the vote is too close to call. I hope Remain will win, but we'll have to wait and see."

"Why do you hope Remain will win?"

"The economic argument mainly. That and the fact that we need friends in Europe. They won't forgive us if we walk out of the club as if we don't care. For them, the EU is about a lot more than trade. It's an expression of solidarity in face of a developing world where Europeans look likely to have less clout with every passing day. So either we hang together or we hang separately."

The crowd around them was milling around and talking, and I had to raise my voice, as did the Japanese man:

"What do you think about immigration?"

"That's the wild card. Britain is an island nation. The idea that we can pull up the drawbridge and shut out the world is always there when things look rough. Somehow people have got the idea that there are too many people in Britain. All our public services are overstretched. There are too few houses being built. Too many immigrants seem too foreign, with demands for special treatment and religious exclusions. What we see is culture shock on a national scale. Once that enters the mix, people stop thinking rationally about trade and so on. All they can think of is getting the foreigners out of their faces, just slamming the door and getting back to how things were before the world went mad."

"Will leaving the EU reduce immigration?"

"Not significantly, no, assuming we don't want to wreck the economy. Half of immigration to the UK is from outside the EU, and leaving won't change that at all. We've had years to control that half and not done so. The idea that allowing in smaller numbers of Polish plumbers or Spanish nurses can solve our problems is daft. The immigrants that cause the

culture shock are the Muslims from Africa or the Middle East who fail to integrate and insist on special treatment. We can stop them coming in, if that's what we want, whether we stay in the EU or not. The Leave voters don't seem to get that. It's like – stop the world, I want to get off!”

“Ah so, thank you.”

The Japanese man looked disconcerted for a moment as he glimpsed another suited figure to interview. He bowed with an embarrassed smile and I nodded.

“You're welcome.”

I looked around for my MP, whom I called Ted. I guessed he might be glad to be rescued from a conversation.

On the other side of the hall, Edward Rodman MP was happily engaged in an interview with a well-known national news correspondent.

“My vote in the referendum counts the same as anyone else's, no more and no less. We are all free to vote as we choose. I have said I choose to vote for leaving the EU. I do so because I want to see Britain regain its sovereignty and exercise it in parliament in Westminster where it belongs. We need to take back control – control of our borders, control of our taxes, control of our spending, and control of our laws and regulations.”

“But don't you think we already have sovereignty? After all, the EU isn't stopping you passing bills in parliament and defying Brussels whenever you don't like what they're doing. What's the problem?”

“The problem is that the EU is pursuing a course of ever closer union, where more and more of the legislation that affects the daily lives of ordinary people here in the UK is being dictated by bureaucrats in Brussels, by officials who were never elected and who are not accountable to us. That has to

stop. I find it hard to justify that encroachment to my constituents. The want to see me fighting for issues on their behalf, not trying to defend the decisions from Brussels that they disagree with.”

“Is this all about perceptions, about your image with your voters? Do you think that means more than the economic arguments for a single market and free trade across Europe? How much must we pay for perceptions?”

“Britain was a trading nation before we joined the EU, or the European Economic Community as it was then, and we will still be a trading nation if we leave it. We may have voted to remain, and I shall be quite happy if we have done so. As you say, the economic argument for staying is strong. Within reason, I’m prepared to do whatever our elected government agrees we should do, and today that government is asking the people for their opinion. Once that opinion is known, the government will respond appropriately.”

“One more question, if I may. If we end up with a fifty-fifty result, without a clear majority for Leave or Remain, do you think we should stay? And if we do, how do you think UKIP will react?”

“You raise a good point. I suspect that UKIP supporters will not be happy with a fifty-fifty result and will keep on campaigning – but we don’t need to worry about that yet. I’m sure the result will be clear enough to set the future course of the government. Ask me again tomorrow!”

“Mr Rodman, thank you.”

I moved in quietly and asked Ted how the interview went. We moved over to a refreshments table.

Meanwhile, across the hall, one of the two members of the European Parliament for the local region, Hannah Wellbeing MEP, was being questioned by a regional news presenter.

“As an MEP you must be worried about your own future career tonight. What will you do if Leave wins?”

“Well, I hope they won’t, of course, but if they do and the government decides to leave, I shall continue to be a sitting MEP until the process completes, which will take a minimum of two years. So I presume I’ll keep my seat in parliament until the next European elections in 2019, which is about the same level of job security I signed up for when I first decided to stand for election as an MEP. I serve at the pleasure of my voters, which means I always have a plan B just in case they change their mind. Right now, I’m focused on the job. There are far too many bills and debates and issues to be getting involved with to stop and think about other things. I love my job and I like to think I’m making a difference.”

“But if they win, won’t the wind go out of your sails? How can you keep going if the British public has voted to give the thumbs down to the whole show?”

“Let’s just wait and see, shall we? I’m an optimist.”

The documentary video went on with panoramic shots to represent the passage of time, with cuts of predictions, early estimates and so on.

Then, at twenty to five in the morning of Friday, 24 June 2016, BBC news anchor David Dimbleby announced:

“The British people have spoken and the answer is: we’re out.”

Cut to another interview with Hannah Wellbeing MEP:

“Out, with a four percent lead – is this the end?”

“This is certainly not the result I’d been hoping for, but of course I have to respect it. All of us will need a few days to digest the exact results and see what implications they have for our work going forward. I hope you’ll forgive me for not saying more now – I need to think about this for a while.”

Cut to another interview with Edward Rodman MP:

“It looks as if you’ll get your parliamentary sovereignty back. Is this a happy moment for you?”

“Happy, yes. This is certainly a historic result. We can all be happy that the democratic process has delivered a clear result, as indeed it usually does. I’m sure most of my parliamentary colleagues will be quite satisfied with the decision and ready and waiting to get on with the job of getting out of the EU. But there’s a lot of work ahead of us to carry out this instruction from the people and there are plenty of difficult decisions to make. It will be a bumpy road ahead for a while. We live in interesting times!”

Finally, the Japanese crew found me again:

“What do you think of the result?”

“I think it may be a mistake to follow through too hastily on this, and I’m sure there are plenty of ways to finesse the result, but it certainly looks like a historic decision to plot a new course for the country, to a destination unknown.”

“Will you work to leave now?”

“I will work to make sure that whatever we do, we do it well. There are plenty of ways to foul this up and wreck the political and economic foundations of the British state, and only a few ways to get it more or less right. So, yes, I shall do what I can to make sure we do it right.”

“Can you say you want to leave the EU?”

“I want to keep faith with the people. If they want to leave the EU, well, I can work with that.”

Final graphics, end of video.

•

That was where it began in earnest for me. My mission was to make Brexit work not only for Britain but for the world.

At Oxford I had been a convinced globalist. Now that may sound like typical undergraduate bullshit, but in my case it was a real commitment to a deeply held view of the world. The view arose from stories my father used to tell me when I was a child.

My father was a physics lecturer. It was a steady job but a lot of work that demanded a clear head and stable opinions. He used to despair of the daily news and cuss quite horribly at politicians on television who said stupid things. He liked Margaret Thatcher – victrix of the Falklands war, he used to call her – and more or less agreed with her policies, but found her insufferably self-righteous as a person. As for Tony Blair, he thought he was a total bullshit artist.

John – my father – thought the “h” in the spelling of his name was illogical, so he named me without it, yet similarly enough to suggest an American dynastic succession, so that I could call myself Jon Ball Junior if I ever wanted to emigrate to the land of infinite promise. The only reason he didn’t emigrate to that land, to the womb of U.S. global hegemony, was that physics involved his reading German, and Germany then tempted him as an orderly place to live and work when Blair became prime minister in 1997.

Anyway, globalism came into his bedtime stories, which he made up as he went along, about life on Earth. His picture was that the planet is a rather small pile of shit, so to speak, seen from an astronomical distance, and has a strange growth on its surface that we in our ignorance call *Homo sapiens*. The main redeeming feature of this growth was that its more well organised “godheads” (he always waved air quotes when he used that word) had worked out a few deep truths about how this fascinating pile of shit worked at the level of basic science, of physics, chemistry and biology.

Fine, you might think – so how come his only son went on to a career in politics? Why not another Einstein? Well, my father used to say that for every good scientist there have to be at least a thousand other people doing other things to make the whole enterprise viable. He said the main reason he stuck with physics, even when he knew he could never win a Nobel Prize, was that he was too ornery a critter to make out in the world of charming people for a living.

By contrast, I was a big and healthy boy who was good at sports and public speaking. I always meant what I said and found that people understood and tended to agree with me – in public at least. Science I found rather hard going, and I hit my mathematical ceiling when I turned sixteen, when girls and music began to get rather distracting.

As for my mother, Carol, words fail me. I loved her, of course, but most people found her intimidating. She was a literature major and rather moody – quite charming with people she liked but abrupt with people she found fault with. She wrote romantic novels, but they were never best-sellers. To me, her only son, she was wonderful, the perfect mother. My parents divorced in 1997, and a few years later she began to show symptoms of dementia and moved into in an old people's home. I visited her as often as I could until a few months before she died in 2014.

So, back to globalism. This planet is a big dung ball, saved only by a few smart people who have figured out that fact. The job of anyone who isn't that smart is to do all he or she can to help those who are, in the hope they can find a way to make life on the dung heap more fun – and above all more meaningful, in the sense that we can share a sense of purpose as we crew Spaceship Earth on its long voyage of discovery through the cosmos.

How does this relate to Brexit? Well, for nations as for individuals, going it alone is a stupid way to make your way through life. A European structure designed to prevent war on the continent and increase the general level of prosperity seems like a good idea. For Britain too, it was a good idea – for a while. But of course it has to work as intended. And the referendum showed all too clearly that the European Union, for all its virtues, has ceased to work as intended, at least for over 17 million Brits.

My fellow citizens had to be coaxed into seeing reason, gently if possible but by force if necessary, to understand that pulling up the drawbridge and hunkering down in Fortress UK was no way at all to improve our future. The early years of the second Elizabethan era may for all I know have been better than its later years, the early years of the brave new millennium, when holy war became a regular phrase on the news channels, but they are no refuge now. Britain must fit into the global puzzle somehow – the nail that sticks out gets hammered!

Career

You may not be surprised to hear that in June 2016 I put my name onto the Conservative list of prospective parliamentary candidates. There were a few forms to fill out, endorsements to line up and interviews to negotiate, but with Ted's support the way was smooth and I was soon ready to stand and fight wherever fortune took me.

I didn't have long to wait. The MP in the neighbouring constituency of Hobbitage decided to retire in early 2017 and I was adopted to stand as the party's candidate in the June general election. The Conservatives had a decent majority there but it was certainly no safe seat, and so I campaigned really hard to get elected.

As luck would have it, the work paid off – I even secured an increased majority. In the hot summer of 2017, I wrote a fictionalised short story for an American magazine about my campaign, which I now quote. (Note to my future editors: insert attachment B here.)

•

The die was cast. At the end of March 2017, prime minister Theresa May submitted a letter to Brussels declaring Britain's intention to quit the European Union, to take effect at the end of March 2019, in accordance with the provisions of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty.

At the time, the opinion polls showed her well ahead of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in popularity among voters. She decided to call a general election, she said at the time, to secure

her own authority for the next five years, in order to steer the ship of state through to the deep waters beyond Europe. She even felt secure enough to run a personalised campaign offering her “strong and stable” leadership for the challenges ahead.

We all know the outcome of the vote on Thursday, 8 June. The Conservative overall majority was gone, Labour looked like winners, and all the pundits predicted chaos.

Now that the prophets of doom have had a while to get used to the new Tory government, propped up with the kind help of the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, the political situation looks calmer, but one must admit that the plans for Brexit are in disarray and no one knows what will happen in 2019.

Try if you can to forget that for now as we go back to the events from April to June in the peaceful and beautiful little south coast fishing port and tourist resort of Breezy Bay, where as a political new boy I campaigned for election as the local Member of Parliament.

At first glance, I was a rising star. I was just 37 years old, I looked good on camera, and I had a PPE degree from the University of Oxford (Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford is the traditional academic pedigree for a young man or woman with ambitions toward service in the highest ranks of British government, as a crowd of cabinet ministers and prime ministers in recent decades can attest). My career since Oxford had focused on journalism, where I had produced a series of prize-winning articles on economics and finance in respectable newspapers and magazines, which had given me a reassuring veneer of expertise. And I was dating a beautiful young lady, who gave the requisite reassurance to the voting public that I was a normal and healthy chap.

I had served a couple of years as a political agent, unpaid but not ignored, under the wise tutelage of a senior MP in a neighbouring constituency, and learned the basics of running a successful campaign – get out there and meet your voters, whenever and wherever you can, and chat them up as if your life depends on it. All the rest is detail.

One thing all Americans should understand about British politics is that it's a shoestring operation. There's no money in it, and every penny spent is carefully invoiced and recorded for the scrutiny of the returning officer for the election. The limits are so tight that any mail shots beyond the prescribed and regulated election addresses are not delivered as regular mail but distributed by hand, from door to door, by unpaid party volunteers who have nothing better to do.

The spending limits affect the office accommodation too. In Breezy Bay we rented a tiny office – it had formerly been a small garage on the street frontage of a commercial office block and had only received a rudimentary makeover to adapt it to its new role – and put up a sign with my name and the party logo above the front door.

The previous MP for Breezy Bay had used this office too, even for his weekly surgeries with constituents who came to him with personal matter when they needed his help. This is another thing about British politics that Americans should understand. Even the prime minister is expected once a week to go back to his or her constituency base and hold surgeries for local constituents. The job of an MP is often more about being a social worker or a psychiatrist than about haunting the corridors of power in Westminster.

The office had a loo in a tiny cubicle behind a refrigerator with an electric kettle on top for coffees, which enabled us on request to greet visitors with instant coffee in motley mugs,

washed out afterwards in the loo cubicle. A small and airless back room for the surgery appointments was dominated by an oversized table for activist conferences and filled in the corners with all sorts of jumble that had once seemed useful, and its walls were hung with iconic portraits – of Winston Churchill, of Margaret Thatcher, and of a few local figures. The front office was the unchallenged domain of Pat, the lady who did all the secretarial work, seated in front of a giant computer screen on a big desk well strewn with papers. Pat vetted all the visitors as they emerged from a security porch hastily built behind the front door in order to hinder potential assassins and terrorists. She was grateful for the porch not for that reason but because it held back the more pitiful souls who showed up from time to time, to rant about the state of the world or to vent an incoherent grievance, or often just to say hello and pass the time of day.

This office, with Pat and any local activists who showed up, was the base and launchpad for my campaign.

One more figure was key to my campaign. That was Isaac, the local party chairman, a wise and canny old man, bald as a coot and no longer as sporty as he once was, but loaded with decades of local experience. He knew exactly where the Tory voters were in each and every local ward, down to street level and often more. As a veteran councillor, he also knew all the local issues that would work as hot buttons for my doorstep work, and he made sure I got acquainted with all the local councillors, giving me the chance to size them up and enlist their support on the streets.

As I said, get out and meet the voters, chat them up, and learn all you can about what moves them and riles them up. Try not to promise anything too specific or to demonise the opposition, and keep a sunny and cheerful disposition, or at

least a serious and purposeful one. Optimism and a sense of purpose – those are the keys to winning their hearts.

To give you a sense of how it went, here are a few typical doorstep encounters (fictional, of course).

Scene one: a quiet street of terraced houses, each with a tiny front garden flanked on either side with a low brick wall and opening at the front through a little gate onto an uneven pavement broken into patches by clumps of weeds. The houses were maybe a hundred years old, and each had its front door and windows painted a different colour from the neighbours, to give an unexpectedly cheery look to the row of openings in an otherwise drab brick frontage.

I pressed the bell on the first front door. No one home. I pushed a leaflet through the letterbox – a spring and a sharp edge made this a hazard that could easily draw blood – and moved on to the next door. Press bell and wait.

The door was opened by a visibly stressed young woman, barefoot, in leggings and a soiled tee-shirt, with rumpled hair and a mobile phone in one hand. I began.

“Hello, I’m Jon Ball. I’m standing for election as your MP and I’m here to ask you what I could do to help you if I get elected.”

Always offer help – this was a piece of advice from Isaac, who had followed it with success for decades.

“I’m sorry, my baby’s throwing up and I’ve got a meal on the stove. My man’s on the phone and – not now?”

“Sure, I understand. Good to have met you.”

The door closed. Push in a leaflet just in case. On to the next door. Press bell.

A young man this time, with ratty hair, dressed in a black tee-shirt and ragged jeans. He looked patient as I delivered my opening sentence and paused for a moment before replying.

“What you could do for me is get me a better place to live. I’m fed up with rising damp, leaky windows, a toilet that doesn’t flush properly, and a bloody, fucking useless landlord – excuse my French – who won’t fix the problems and won’t lower the rent. What can you do about that?”

Sunny and cheerful or serious and purposeful.

“I can tell you the government is working on a crackdown on private landlords who neglect their obligations under the law, but this may not help you in the short term. Have you talked with your local councillor? The portfolio holder for housing? They should be able to put you in touch with the local officials who can offer more concrete help.”

“The landlord talked to them already. Said I should turn up the heating for the damp, close the windows properly and not flush the toilet so often. Should I pee in the sink instead? I’m going down the drain here.”

“Well, if you contact me once I’m elected we can deal with the landlord more effectively. I hope I’ll get the chance to be more helpful then.”

“I think I might vote Labour.”

“Well, it’s your choice.”

I turned and stepped away. Always avoid conversations that are going nowhere. Keep moving. There are plenty more doors to go.

Scene two: a wide street lined with detached properties, each in a surrounding garden, all looking well maintained and cared for, and most with elegantly groomed lawns. The cars in the driveways are expensive models, gleaming brightly in the warm afternoon sun. The main problem in these streets is the length of the walk from door to door.

First door – oak panelling, brass fittings, heavy knocker. A silver-haired lady answered, looking sprightly and smart, as if

on her way to a tea party with the neighbours. I smiled and recited my opening sentence.

“Don’t worry, young man, we always vote Conservative in this household. Is this your first run?”

“Yes, Toby Baggins has decided to retire. He said Breezy Bay deserves some new blood after all these years.”

“Good for him. He was always very kind to us. If you do half as well as him, you’ll be doing fine.”

“I have high hopes, ma’am, but thank you very much for your support.”

“Don’t mention it. Good luck!”

And off to the next. This was easy street.

Scene three: a tall block of flats set on a smooth mound of neatly mown grass surrounded by hedges and trees. Here the residents were usually retired. The corridors were carpeted and smelt of commercial cleaning products. Door one.

A few moments passed before an old man opened the door. He was stooped and frail, with wispy hair and rumpled clothes suggesting an indoor life. I began:

“Hello, I’m Jon Ball. I’m standing for election as your MP and I’m here to ask you what I could do to help you if I get elected.”

“Help? For me? A bit late now, I think. Which party are you?”

“Conservative. We always look after pensioners.”

“Quite right too, but what about the young nippers? They need looking after too, you know. What about jobs for the youngsters? The immigrants are taking them all. What are you going to do about immigration, eh?”

“Once we leave Europe, we can take back control of our borders. Then we can solve the immigration problem.”

“Leave Europe, yes! Never should have joined, I say.”

“Well, we gave it a go, and it didn’t fit. Now we plan to get out and find new partners.”

“Back to the Commonwealth, I say. Canada and Australia are our real friends, not all these foreign Johnnies who can’t even speak English.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear you’re on our side. I hope I can count on your support.”

“I’ve voted already – postal vote.”

“Well, let me not detain you. Thank you again.”

And so it went. Never be drawn on politics. Say what you need to say but don’t start grandstanding. The aim is to win votes, not to argue the toss.

I managed over twenty thousand doorsteps in about five weeks. Work it out – that’s well over five hundred a day. By election day I was knackered!

More fun was a hustings event organised by a local church and staged in the church. All the candidates were there, in a row at the front, and we all gave little speeches, then took questions from the voters in the pews. The rector was the master of ceremonies and kept strictly to the schedule. My speech, after the preliminaries, started like this:

“I am a new candidate in this constituency but I am not a newcomer to Breezy Bay. Indeed, I have been visiting this beautiful little town regularly since I was a small child. But as your Conservative candidate I can last offer you more than mere visits. I can work for you and serve as your voice in Westminster. I can take up causes on your behalf and make sure your voice is heard in the corridors of power. Together we can help shape the government of these islands and make sure our national leaders in Westminster work truly in our interests, and not simply in the interests of other people in other parts of the country, who care nothing for our local

concerns and only want to advance their competing agendas. I shall fight for you, for us, for justice!”

A bit over the top, perhaps, but it worked. My rhetorical epiphany got a spirited round of applause, and after that the other candidates were also-rans. It was all they could do to look the audience in the eyes and speak grammatically. I am almost ashamed to say it, but my experience of debating in Oxford floored them all. From that moment on, I was seen as the front runner.

Election day was my first break from the doorstep work. All I had to do was sit in the office and marshal the helpers who knocked people up to get out the vote, drove people to the polling booths, and sat at the polling stations as tellers, keeping tabs on the turnout and our numbers.

As for the rest, I had to stay up all night at the counting centre, watching the national results roll in on television and keeping a watchful eye on the progress of the local vote. The local exit polls had been quite encouraging for us, so it came as quite a shock when the national exit poll projected a hung parliament. I was glued to the TV screens for the rest of the night. But when our count was done I was the winner. In fact I had won by a handsome majority, bigger than that of my predecessor.

From then on it was all a big haze of people and lights for me. I gave a little speech and let the photographer from the local paper take a dozen pictures. I gave a brief and rather vacuous interview to a television crew, then downed a glass or two of champagne, took a taxi home, and stayed awake just long enough to flop into bed.

It was a big milestone for me. I was on my way up. I was an MP, representing some seventy thousand people. I was their chosen voice in Westminster.

I am now one of new boys in the House of Commons. I am ready to do my bit to see through the legislative agenda spelled out in the Queen's Speech on Wednesday, 21 June. That day was the summer solstice and also the hottest day of the year in Britain, but I was happy enough, sweltering in my smart suit and true-blue tie in the middle of the pack on the well-worn green leather on the back benches. It was my first full day in the house and everything seemed fresh and new. The die was cast.

•

The die was cast in more ways than I knew. The Brexit talks began to unravel, the economy began to tank, Labour began to get its act together, and soon we hit the rocks.

But let's take the story slowly, shall we?

Ministry

Late 2017 was exciting for me as a new backbencher but not much fun for the government or for the country. Rivalries within the party were constantly threatening to break out into open warfare that would split the cabinet and give air time to rebel members who had nothing but yet more confusion to offer, and confusion on how we should leave the EU already meant that the Brexit talks remained stalled.

I focused on networking among the party members in the house, and on getting familiar with the palace. Strange as it may seem to Americans used to lavish appointments in the political realm, the Palace of Westminster is a Victorian slum dwelling tarted up to look like a Disneyland fairy-tale castle. As an Oxford old boy, I was all too familiar with the problem of trying to do serious work within theatrically dysfunctional architecture. Parliamentary insiders called their gothic palace Hogwarts (after the hideous boarding school in the Harry Potter novels) for good reason as they trooped back for each session to suffer another few months of life under the whips (another oddity for Americans – the parliamentary votes are “whipped” by delegated members to ensure party discipline) and under the looming portraits and statues of distinguished parliamentarians from previous generations.

Hogwarts is so dilapidated and rotten that just the urgent repairs will cost many billions of pounds and involve massive disruption to parliamentary business. The result is stalemate, with running repairs going on all around as parliamentary bit players run back and forth on their daily work, pretending

everything is fine while jackhammers blast away and barriers go up around new holes in the stonework. Much of the more useful parliamentary work is done next door in Portcullis House, a modern and unspectacular block where members have functional little offices.

My networking paid off. Soon I was on first-name terms with most of the cabinet and privy to all sorts of intriguing insider info that the media would have paid dearly to splash for public entertainment. I shall not break confidence – even now – by revealing more than the general drift of events, but suffice to say I already felt well settled in the club.

As I sit in my cell in an army barracks typing out this stuff I can't help thinking I could just let rip and reveal all. But my chosen profession required me to sign the Official Secrets Act, whose prohibitions and penalties are draconian, and the British tradition of punctilious observance of even the most arbitrary rules and regulations might yet save my life, so I shall stay true to my oath. Anyway, the trifles of everyday parliamentary business before Brexit seem absurdly trite and shallow now, compared with the hurricanes that have hit us in recent months, and I really can't set my mind back that far without shame at the folly of it all.

What was I trying to achieve? I was a backbench MP with a promising career ahead of me. I had a vision and a purpose – to deliver Brexit, in accordance with the will of the people, and make it work not only for Britain but also for Europe and the wider world. And I had a crisis to work on – a trump card for a rising politician looking for an opportunity to cut a heroic profile.

And what about the beautiful young lady I'd been dating during my campaign in Hobbitage, also known as Breezy Bay? Well, I still was, and a great mate she was too, but we took our

time about climbing to the level where the hazards were below us and a serene vision of marital bliss lured us onward to our biological destiny. I was accustomed from a troubled past to regard relationships with suspicion and their marital destiny as a form of mutual assured destruction (MAD) for the poor specimens involved that served only the perpetuation of the species. (No doubt my parents did more than they had ever intended to sow this seed of doubt.) As a result, I behaved cautiously with young ladies.

She – Clara – was a few years younger than me and the graduate of a less prestigious institution, and she worked as a parliamentary researcher for another Conservative MP. She had been eager to leverage the imagined professional synergy of mating with an ambitious chap like me, while I was just out for a charming companion. She was a zestful and capable woman, with an undeniable power to organise people and get them on her side, and she made no secret of her ambition to become an MP herself one day. I was sceptical – mainly, it shames me to say, because I thought she was naïve on the issues of the day, whereas my opinions were sound – but she did have star potential.

The relationship flourished when I was first elected, and the summer of 2017 (when I wrote insert B) was a time of bliss, punctuated only by visits to the beach to swim in the clear blue sea and enjoy the rays of the morning sun – we were never so wild at nights that my morning habits were ever in serious danger. The first weeks in Westminster were great, too, until we realised we were doomed to each other. Biology had trumped individualism yet again, and so we got married. She was an implacably centrist social democrat and an active champion of LGBTQIA rights. But these notes are not about her.

Returning to the crisis, the party was in danger of splitting as Leavers and Remainers jostled for thought leadership on the Brexit negotiations. Her Majesty's opposition was slowly gathering coherence as it saw a possible path to power and began to pull its more extreme Marxist strands together. And our European negotiating partners, seeing chaos in London, began to lose patience and conclude that the best outcome for them was a quick exit with no strings, which translated for us into a hard Brexit and an uncertain future on the open ocean for HMS Britannia.

The year 2018 looked set to be the make or break period for the entire mess.

My stated ambition was to master the crisis and make the decisive intervention to rescue the situation. My analysis of the root cause of the crisis was that it lay in British nostalgia for empire and British pride in having emerged victorious from the second world war. This nourished a conviction of British exceptionalism that soured to feelings of shame in the late twentieth century at having joined the club for losers in Europe. That shame could only be expunged by leaving the club of losers and striking out alone, boldly, exploring new worlds and reawakening old ties with former dominions and colonies around the globe.

My response to this psychic nexus was to insist on the need for a national reality check. Brexit could work as an act of national catharsis or purgation, after which a cleansed and refreshed nation could find a humbler role in a transformed world. It was clear to me that Brexit was a destructive act in the short term, but that the price was worth paying if the long-term outlook was improved by going through with it.

My plan, then, was to support Brexit on whatever terms were on offer, even to accept a clean break and a blank slate in

2019, if the resulting confusion was survivable. The world would surely pitch in to keep HMS Britannia afloat, even if the terms of the assistance were humiliating and we suffered a few years of chaos. How bad could it be?

In early 2018, I was offered a post as a junior minister in the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU). As a distinguished economist, I was deemed suitable cannon fodder for the front line in Brussels, where heated arguments over the infamous divorce bill that Britain would have to pay (initially mooted to be £100 billion gross, £60 billion net, and later estimated at £60 billion gross, £40 billion net) were still holding up progress on a possible future trade deal. Because of my German connections (my father had lived there for twenty years, and some years earlier I had worked for a year in Frankfurt as an intern on a German financial publication), I was tasked with scoping out German policy makers and bankers to find out how they judged the British liabilities in regard to the divorce bill.

My belated maiden speech in the Commons was not on economics. But it did go down extremely well – in fact it drew forth not only the usual gruff “Hear, hear” ejaculations from the more mature members but also, as I sat down again on the crowded bench, a round of lively and spirited acclaim. This, in all modesty, is not a normal response to a maiden speech. Later, in the bar, one of the more reactionary Tories came up to me and said a star is born.

A few days later, I copied the speech from Hansard and did a cut and paste job on it for an op-ed feature in the Thunderer newspaper. Here it is. (Note to my future editors: insert attachment C here.)

•

Britain is facing its worst crisis since 1940, when its national survival was at stake. We have less than a year left now to decide what we want following our departure from the European Union and to make the necessary preparations for getting it. It will be impossible to fix all the details and we shall have to rely on the good will of our European partners to ensure that HMS Britannia does not capsize the moment she is launched on the voyage of Brexit.

On top of this, our government faces an ever more vocal opposition in parliament, where politicians who should know better are working hard to torpedo our efforts to agree on a framework for progress. Some politicians on both side of the house would like to form a government of national unity, to reflect the gravity of the situation and follow the precedent set by Winston Churchill in 1940, but even this is impossible. For the problem that we face is no longer across the Channel, which would at least enable us to unite to face the common foe, but here in Britain, where no one seems able to agree that an orderly departure next year is truly in everyone's best interests.

In view of this crisis, we need to sober up quickly and face the facts. We certainly cannot afford to indulge in any more philosophical disputation about the wisdom or otherwise of seeking to make new arrangements for living alongside our European neighbours. We are committed to our course of action, and our neighbours have – in some cases reluctantly – accepted that fact and started to make their own new plans accordingly. We shall have ample time to debate the wisdom or folly of our chosen course next year, when the facts of the matter have become clear and the evidence is there to justify an opinion one way or the other. For now, the order of the day is to fall in on deck and batten down the hatches.

Britain is a seafaring nation. I am proud of our maritime heritage and convinced that it will serve us well in the years ahead. We are about to embark on the most momentous and pioneering voyage we have ever undertaken. Eight hundred years ago we pioneered democracy. The Magna Carta was a forerunner of all the democratic advances that have occurred since then, not least among them the American Constitution and the spread of democracy throughout the British Empire and Commonwealth. Three or four hundred years ago we pioneered the Scientific Revolution. Sir Isaac Newton was by common consent the greatest scientist who has ever lived. Two hundred years ago we continued our winning streak by pioneering the Industrial Revolution. We were the first to harness the power of coal and steam and we introduced the world to railways and steamships and manufactured goods of all kinds – “Made in England” became a respected brand throughout the civilised world. With our democracy and our machines, we brought modern civilisation to a quarter of the globe – to a glorious empire on which, as they used to say, the sun never sets.

It did not stop there. In 1940 we stood steadfast and alone against fascist totalitarianism for long enough to enlist the aid of the United States of America and the Soviet Union in the fight against a deadly foe of democracy and human decency. And since then, in our emeritus years when the empire has faded into a memory and our great industries have begun to lose their strength, we have stood up for human rights and civilised values throughout the world. We still managed to punch above our weight when we stood stalwart alongside our allies in NATO for forty years until the dead hand of communism was lifted from the face of the continent and the peoples of Eastern Europe could breathe free again.

In all these ways, the ship of state we are proud to call the United Kingdom has sailed gloriously forth as the flagship of the fleet of nations. And we shall do no less now, as we sail into the sunset as far as the European Union is concerned and set our course westward across the Atlantic Ocean to the land of infinite promise, where untold riches lie in wait for those who would dare to grasp the opportunity. America is our destiny. The United States and Canada, and with them Australia and New Zealand, are lands filled with historic promise for what Sir Winston Churchill in his distinguished volumes of history called the English-speaking peoples of this world, the Anglophone nations.

Together, the Anglophone nations will forge a union that for power and glory will put the European Union to shame. For let us not be too modest – together we command the greatest resources and the greatest talents the world has ever known. Let us therefore add one more remarkable chapter to this island nation’s history before the world we know is gone and other peoples with new ideas take up the flag. Until that day dawns, we have a duty to lead.

Let there be no mistake, the advantages and benefits that accrue to native speakers of the English language, the tongue of angels and the tongue of Shakespeare, are massive. We are family, with a shared culture and shared understanding, that no polyglot union of lesser tongues can rival. We dominate world culture, we dominate science and the arts, movies and music, social media and the web – that British invention – and we even dominate the world of international diplomacy. We are streets ahead of the rest, and we can only compound that advantage by working more closely together.

We dare not hide our light beneath a bushel. It will sputter and die if we do not give it the air and space it deserves. We

must forge on, fearless, and defy the naysayers and the doom mongers with new facts and triumphant achievements.

In practical terms, the task ahead is clear. We should make any deal with Europe that we and the Brussels officials can live with, make further deals with further nations around the globe as fast as due process allows, and trust in the power of destiny to favour the bold and leave the weak in their wake. We will rebuild this ancient ship of state as a new Starship Enterprise and our mission will be to boldly go where no man has gone before.

•

To be honest, my jingoism was an act. I could play the role with all the gusto of a ham actor but the words left my inner being cold – in fact they chilled me, with a chill that I could sense as thrilling and even demonic. Had I sold my soul to the devil for the sake of political glory?

My day job in DExEU was going as well as I could have hoped. My work on the divorce bill resulted in a saving of several billion pounds (the details are technical and I have no desire to explain them now) and my boss was delighted. My boss, the secretary of state, was being discussed for the top job, and slipping a big cream envelope embossed with the parliamentary portcullis and containing a DExEU memo with my name on it promising a few billion pounds extra for Her Majesty's Treasury onto the cabinet table would certainly do him no harm – or me, for that matter.

That September, as we all know, the top job went to my boss. When the new prime minister chose his new cabinet, he put me in charge of DExEU. I was over a year short of my fortieth birthday and I was already a cabinet minister. I had just six months to make a success of Brexit.

That six months became a nightmare for Britain and the world. The international scene went crazy when President Trump in America threatened to nuke North Korea – I was told that he had just seen a demo of the smart new B61-12 bunker-buster dial-a-yield nuclear gravity bombs and on the spot decided to send in his forward-deployed B-1B Lancer bombers to drop the bombs onto all the bunkers and key facilities that his newly re-established U.S. Space Command had located on the North Korean map. China responded by threatening to sell off its portfolio of a trillion dollars in U.S. Treasury bonds, which instantly scuppered the dollar in the foreign exchange markets. All this action meant that Trump totally forgot his proclaimed support for a “very, very big” trade deal with Britain. First, he had to win his nuclear war with North Korea.

When the year 2019 began, U.S. administration officials were distracted anew by the preparations in Washington to commence impeachment proceedings against what was now obviously a lame-duck president. The result was that British prospects of a quick and easy deal with the United States looked dead in the water.

Meanwhile, in DExEU, I was suffering panic attacks over whether I’d overlooked some tiny but critical detail in our preparations for Independence Day.

Treason

I have just been told by my royalist captors here in the army barracks that they will graciously grant me online privileges. Suddenly my plan of marching you through my life story is obsolete – once I'm online I'll be back in action in real time, seeking to get back to 10 Downing Street and sort out this ridiculous mess. So I'll try to wrap up the back story today – buckle up your seat belts for a high-speed ride!

•

Independence Day itself went more smoothly than anyone had a right to expect. The pound lost a couple of percentage points, but the markets had already factored in the change and no one expected a rout. The Europeans had agreed to a transition period to smooth out the ride for us, so daily life remained much the same as before. They had lost interest in Brits and were concerned only to extract as much as possible for themselves from the fallout. German car makers were pulling back from the UK and directing their sales efforts eastward, where the formerly communist states were doing well, making them prime targets for premium autos.

I was happy in DExEU. We had weathered a hard Brexit and my junior ministers and mandarins had been tested and not found wanting. In fact, considering the challenge, they had done a bloody good job, and now I was on the front bench I made sure to stand up in parliament and celebrate their achievement to the assembled members. Given the U.S. disaster on the international trade front and the increasingly

ominous threat from the opposition front benches, where a new brand of radical socialism was attracting an inexplicably passionate public following, I thought it only right to spread my quantum of solace.

The next crisis was so fast in coming that the pundits were blindsided. The Spanish government made a grand gesture by sending a naval flotilla through Gibraltar's territorial waters. British gunboats responded, shots were exchanged, and the Spanish government escalated the crisis by sealing the border with Gibraltar and threatening to expel any British residents in Spain who did not have Spanish citizenship. The EU had never been happy with the fudged resolution of the issues surrounding reciprocal rights for EU and UK nationals, so it supported the Spanish blockade and escalated it yet further by raising a new legal challenge regarding the UK–EU border in Ireland. The PM hastily convened the emergency COBRA committee and we decided on a sharp response.

But our foreign secretary, I am saddened to say, bungled the British official response so badly – essentially by raising the demons of several past wars in a preposterous suggestion that the Spanish Armada would be torpedoed on sight by the valiant submarine commanders of the Royal Navy and the Irish republican storm troopers would be sent packing by the magnificent young soldiers of the British Army – that he had to resign. It was a bad hair day for him and a shameful blot on the reputation of British diplomacy.

To cut the story short, I was appointed as the new foreign secretary. I immediately soothed the Spaniards and the Irish, as well as the ruffled bonzes in Brussels, apparently with some success because both issues were quickly defused. My reputation in the cabinet and in the country soared and the media heaped lavish praise on my efforts.

The Europeans proved difficult that year. Billions of euros were lost in the Eurozone by businesses who failed to react nimbly enough to the new regulatory hurdles governing trade with UK customers. Their anger spilled over into a hard line by EU officials on any requested accommodations to ease an effective blockade on new business deals that would involve traffic over the English Channel. The customs holdups were a nightmare for all involved and were a massive disincentive to further cross-channel trade.

British business lost ground in Europe. Americans were still too consumed by their constitutional crisis to leave any bandwidth free for the plucky Brits over the pond who were fighting their new Battle of Britain. Meanwhile the former ANZAC dominions were unable to offer the volume of new deals to make up anything like the shortfall. And the BRICS countries had their hands full dealing with EU states such as Germany, so they barely registered our desperation.

The good news – sad that we should have called it that – was that the pound kept falling and hence exports for which regulatory and customs hurdles were less onerous did well. Naturally that had a downside – imports were a lot more expensive. Soon German cars, for example, were beyond the reach of most customers, and sales fell precipitously. And food prices rose steadily, causing a sense of escalating crisis among poorer Brits. They responded by becoming militant supporters of Labour ambitions to power.

On my watch, the FO had to cope with all these changes and more. We eased tensions with Ireland and Spain quite effectively, we resolved a flare-up with the Netherlands and Denmark over fishing rights in the North Sea, we settled a dispute with France over migrants in Calais before it hit the headlines, and so on. Our work was dominated by issues with

EU states, and it was clear that most of them would never have escalated if we had stayed in the EU. So my enthusiasm for British independence was sorely tested – all I could say was that the battle was worth it if we could animate my idea for a new Anglophone commonwealth. We just had to be patient with America.

The next big British crisis blew up in 2020. King Chioles took an active interest in politics and insisted that the prime minister brief him in unusual detail during their traditional weekly audiences. Our prime minister was not a passionate royalist and regarded this duty as a waste of his valuable time. Soon the media were speculating wildly that the king was unhappy with his prime minister and would like to see the back of him. Chioles was known to have a social conscience and was rumoured to be upset that his poorer subjects were suffering disproportionately from the effects of Brexit, for example with rising food prices, and the media made hay with this idea. Perhaps Chioles would rather his kingdom had a Labour government! Perhaps Chioles would prefer that his kingdom return to the EU! Perhaps the Tories, seeing this, would rather abolish the remaining constitutional powers of the monarchy!

The pressure continued, and when a new scandal – which would otherwise have been trivial – about an administrative muddle in Downing Street emerged the opposition pounced and the prime minister resigned. The deputy prime minister was ailing and said he had no desire to take over for more than a few weeks. So a government with almost no majority was faced with the risk of a general election against a Labour opposition that looked strong enough to win outright.

The succession contest within the party that this triggered quickly descended into farce. The two leading contenders for

the prime ministership were so viciously successful at scoring points off each other that they knocked each other out. Their respective backers became too antagonised by the opposing candidate to relent, and the fight ended in deadlock.

I rode in as the fresh-faced hero in the white hat. I gained the lead in the race by means of a television interview, which went viral in the closing weeks of 2020 as a bold statement of the Brexit vision that cut through the fog of chatter about trivial irrelevancies to focus at last on the real historic issue. Here is a shortened transcript. (Note to my future editors: insert attachment D here.)

•

Anchor: “You’re still a young man. What makes you think you have what it takes to be prime minister at this extremely volatile time in our history?”

Me: “That’s a fair question. In a party that values age and wisdom, my youth and energy may look out of place. On the other hand, we as a nation do face an unprecedented crisis, and it’s clear to me that hardly any of the expectations and traditions a more mature candidate might bring to the table are relevant now. Our newfound independence from Europe is an urgent problem because of its economic impact. I’m an economist – but not an expert economist in the bad sense of that term. I see we need big trade deals, and fast, with people around the world, but I see too that we have our pride and our heritage to honour, and refuse go begging to Germany for help. Anyway, they already have enough to do sorting out the mess in Europe.”

“Do you think in retrospect that Brexit was a mistake?”

“No. It cannot be a mistake to have a political opinion. The great British public were asked what they thought of our

staying in the European Union and they told us. It's up to us as politicians to respect that opinion and make the best we can of it. If that leads us into deep water – as it undoubtedly has – so be it. We politicians will need to learn some new skills, and fast. For that purpose, I think a young leader with minimal ties to the past and to the discredited policies of the past is probably a good thing.”

“Okay, but looking ahead, and accepting that we're now swimming in deep water, what do you suggest we do?”

“Let me correct your metaphor, if I may. The ship of state is steaming in deep water. She's a robust vessel, built to cope with Atlantic storms, and I'm confident that in the goodness of time we shall arrive, unscathed and in good spirits, in a welcoming harbour on the eastern seaboard of the Americas. There, like generations of travellers before us, we shall forge a new destiny in partnership with all those who have already settled there, and build a glorious future together.”

“Let me translate that. You think you can do a trade deal with the new American administration that pulls our nuts out of the fire.”

“Yes. President-elect Newman is a man I can work with. I met him as a senator a few years ago when he was visiting Brussels. We talked about transatlantic trade and investment, and we agreed that there's plenty of scope for more. The big American corporations like Apple and Google are free to do a lot more business in Britain now that European regulations on data privacy and company taxes and so on no longer apply. If we're prepared to be pragmatic about all those issues, and given our need for a deal I'm sure we are, there's nothing to stop us.”

“So ... a deal with Alfred Newman. Was he not critical of the king in a recent speech? Would you not be forced into

another showdown with King Chioles? How would that play out in the Conservative party?”

“Of course, there are still issues to be resolved. No one in Britain wants to question the future of the monarchy, but we have to face up to the fact that the present constitutional role of the Crown arose by a historical accident, frozen into place by tradition and sentiment, and must be open to debate in a Britain that is now defining a new position for itself in the world. We can remain a constitutional monarchy yet remove the king or queen quite a lot further from the daily workings of our parliamentary democracy. If that turned out to be the price of a deeper accommodation with the United States, I for one would see no reason not to consider it. But of course all this is hypothetical.”

“Of course. Let’s move on to Europe. If you were prime minister, how you would prevent the present tensions from escalating into a trade war with Europe?”

“I would say quite clearly that we would rather pull up the drawbridge, close the Channel tunnel, and accept a state of siege rather than agree once more to the imposition of rules and regulations that cause creeping paralysis in our political institutions and undermine our sovereignty. We are British and proud of it. We take no lessons from continental losers on trade and industry, even if they are richer than we are. We go our own way. We go boldly forth to the Anglosphere and a new global role as the historic kingpin in a commonwealth of enlightened nations, no longer in thrall to the pious liberal orthodoxies of the old continent.”

“That sounds like a declaration of economic war. Is that really the message you want to send to Brussels and Berlin?”

“It’s nothing more than the message of Brexit, delivered loud and clear for the hard of hearing. We have lost patience

with the complacent and elitist officials in Brussels who seek to impose death by a thousand cuts on our aspirations to a more bracingly Anglo-Saxon polity. A tired and lazy social democracy has settled like a stifling comfort blanket over the old continent. But we want to feel the cold wind in our face and the raging seas under our ship as we plot a course for the new world. We've had enough of hiding our light under a bushel of political correctness – we want action!”

“With all due respect, you're beginning to sound like a right-wing demagogue. What about the millions of ordinary citizens out there who despair of making ends meet? All your talk of bracing winds and a state of siege is going to terrify them into voting Labour.”

“Let's not mince words. We have a crisis and the rich will pull their weight with the rest of us. At root, the crisis was caused by a very liberal immigration policy pursued for many years, leading to millions of citizens here in the UK who are hardly integrated at all and who don't feel they belong here. What do they care for European niceties? They want to share in the dream – and I'm giving them a dream they can share. Together with America, which has generations of experience of integrating minorities of all kinds, we can forge a dream that fires the passions of all our citizens, not just those who have learned to like their bourgeois links with Europe. The dream, to make it completely clear, is to work together with the other English-speaking countries to build a new identity, a new order on this planet, in which we leverage our shared language to work more closely and more deeply with each other than any previous people in all of human history.”

“Let's return to the possibility of your becoming prime minister. Accepting that you have a new vision, which if I've got it right is to work with America and the other English-

speaking nations to create a new commonwealth, how can you sell this vision to the Conservative party?”

“That’s easier than it might seem. The core countries of the new commonwealth already work together as the ‘Five Eyes’ community in the field of intelligence gathering. All true Conservatives – especially those who are aware of the need to ensure the security of this country in face of new and emerging threats – already know and trust the Five Eyes community. All I’m saying is that we can and should build upon this solid basis of trust to reshape our political destiny.”

“Do the other members of this intelligence community agree with you?”

“I’m confident they’ll be more than happy to do so if I ask them correctly, which means first forming a platform for the implementation of the idea here in Britain, both within the parliamentary party and in the country as a whole. In my present role as a cabinet minister, I can seek to persuade my colleagues. But as prime minister I can get a grip on the issue and get cracking on talks with our Five Eyes partners. Either way, that’s the vision I have to offer. It’s not for me to try to predict whether my colleagues will like it or lump it.”

“The key to your idea is the reaction in the United States, and in particular the reaction from President-elect Newman. Can you be sure he’ll get on board?”

“He has nothing to lose. If we can upgrade the Five Eyes vision to a road map for a new political framework spanning half the globe, Washington will become its central hub, the administrative capital of a new political empire that spans the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. What’s not to like?”

“And there we must leave it. Mr Ball, thank you.”

•

The interview worked as I had hoped. Media commentators were too confused by the Five Eyes idea to shoot it down instantly, and once the message had sunk in that this was just Brexit spelled out in its full implications, the public – or at least a sufficient majority of them – got on board too and cowed the opposition.

At last the Conservatives had a rationale for Brexit that went beyond internal party politics. My party colleagues soon saw this and rallied to the cause. Just in time for the new year I was duly voted into office.

Truth to tell, part of the reason I was swept so easily into power was that no one else wanted to inherit the curse of Brexit. It has already wrecked the political ambitions of three Conservative prime ministers in a row and no one wanted to be the fourth. I seemed to have enough charisma to let me sip from the poisoned chalice and live – so far at least.

As prime minister, I also occupied, by a royal prerogative whose provenance was lost for me in the mists of time, the post of commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The gravity of this role was not lost on me. In a ceremony that I found it impossible to take quite seriously, I was briefed on the British nuclear deterrent – mounted as warheads on Trident ballistic missiles purchased from America, which were ready to fire in four submarines based in Scotland, at least one of which at any given time was on patrol in the depths of the open ocean – and entrusted with the nuclear codes. If for any reason – such as removal from office for high treason – I was unable to perform the duties of commander-in-chief, the next in the chain of command was my defence secretary, a decent and honourable man I called Tom.

It never occurred to me that Tom might betray me – and I'm absolutely certain that he didn't – but something led to my

being arrested and held here against my will in an army barracks. I remain puzzled.

The more ceremonial highlight of my investiture in office was the audience with the king. As any reader of these notes will no doubt know, Chioles is a stern, austere figure with a chilling and even menacing presence to anyone who doesn't know him. The same age as my father but with incomparably more regal and military polish in his bearing and manners, he intimidated me at first. He soon put me at ease, but did so in a way that left me feeling like a graciously tolerated servant, whose task it was to enact the royal will. As I sat meekly in his implacably majestic presence it seemed unthinkable that I might ever act on my own initiative without first discreetly probing the royal will.

Later events have shown, I guess, that I should have taken that impression of servitude more seriously and acted on it. Arrest for treason is no light matter. It puts me into history books as a troubled and troubling figure, so unless I gather my wits enough to perform a deed so historic that all lesser misdeeds are forgiven, the stain will serve to blot my record for the duration of British history. These are the depressing thoughts that fill my brain as I sit in my cell.

To cut a rambling story short, I was now 41 years old and the prime minister of the United Kingdom. I had a mandate to transform that kingdom, and plenty of ideas as to how I might do so, not least among which was a bold scheme I'd hatched to transform Britain by shaking up its entrenched and ossified elite beyond all previous measure by locking it into a global alliance ruled from America.

In retrospect, my critics will accuse me of seeking not so much to shake up that elite as rather to fuck it up beyond all recognition. And it didn't take me long to do so.

In February 2021, I flew to Washington and talked with President Newman. Here is part of the transcript of our joint press statement on the meeting. (Note to my future editors: insert attachment E here.)

•

The White House press room was full to capacity as the new U.S. President Alfred Newman and the equally new British prime minister Jon Ball stepped up to their podiums.

“Prime minister Ball and I have just enjoyed an extremely fruitful discussion on future relations between our two great nations. We’ve agreed to form a high-level working party to discuss a framework for an Anglo-American Alliance, which in the fullness of time may be expanded to include Canada, Australia and New Zealand and will open up the prospect of developing an ever-closer union of sovereign states, to be centred here in Washington, and charged with the mission of playing a leading role in world affairs over the entire globe outside the continental regions of Europe, Asia, and Africa. This alliance will seek to play a dominant role in the global regulation of maritime and aerospace affairs and will leverage that dominance to set and enforce the rules for cyberspace and the global governance of big business and finance. We conceive the Anglo-American Alliance as a strategic project for the coming decades. Its effects will be felt by each and every person on the planet as the greatest and most powerful force for good the world has ever known. Here I hand over to my friend and partner in this historic new initiative, prime minister Ball. Over to you, Jon.”

“Thank you, Alfred, and thank you to all our hosts here in Washington who have made this visit so enjoyable and so productive. As President Newman said, the Anglo-American

Alliance will be the heart of a historic new partnership that will transform the governance of global affairs. As Britain disentangles itself from the European Union and seeks a new global identity, it finds no more fitting partner for this bold enterprise than the United States of America, whose birth as an independent nation, freed from the imperial clutch of the mother country some 250 years ago, heralded a rise to power and glory that one may well say has rivalled the power and glory of the empire that Britain left behind in the twentieth century. Since then, the British bonds of friendship with the commonwealth countries, especially Canada, Australia and New Zealand, have grown yet firmer, and can only improve in shared membership of an alliance. Together, in a union of sovereign nations, we can forge a new and more intimate relationship based on a shared language and history, and a shared conception of the values and the heritage we seek to pass on to future generations. The new alliance will be global in scope and reach, and will do all it can to live in friendship with China and the European Union, and with every nation that shares our wish to see the planet governed with wisdom and justice, in peace and ever-increasing harmony, until the fruits of our endeavours lead our descendants on this Earth to a destiny beyond our present dreams.”

•

The media resonance of the AAA initiative was encouraging and I had high hopes of inspiring King Chioles with the idea. But he was not amused. In fact, he was appalled that I had floated the idea globally without discussing it in depth with him first. He saw it as even more dangerous than the dream of European unity that so recently had almost swallowed the realm over which he claimed sovereignty. He was particularly

incensed that the alliance would be ruled from Washington, leaving London as a mere provincial capital on a par with Canberra or Ottawa (with all due respect to those fine cities). I dare not say more, on pain of compounding the disrespect to the Crown that may yet cost me my life, but you get the drift. Royalists nationwide were now out to get me.

Worse yet, the parliamentary party was upset. My cabinet colleagues had signed off on the concept and encouraged me to float the idea with President Newman, but they had never imagined we would come forth with a joint statement that seemed to commit the diplomatic resources of both nations to implementing the vision without more ado.

In all honesty, I must say I hadn't expected Alfred to take up my idea with such enthusiasm. I guess I was offering the crown jewels for free, so it shouldn't have come as such a surprise – but it did. He and I are now joined at the hip on this issue whether I like it or not. Anyway, his condition for acceptance was minimal: get the king out of his face!

So there it is. Royalists have a right to say I sold them out. But come on, guys, this is the age of global everything. The idea that we can hobble the future prosperity of 65 million Brits by subjecting them to a soap opera starring a first family surrounded by a load of old tourist tat and presenting that tat and that reality show as the symbol and embodiment of our national sovereignty – that idea is surely a treasonous betrayal of the hopes of those good people.

The increasingly vocal opposition led by the Labour party did indeed see the absurdity of that idea and rose up against the royalist fringe of the Conservative party. The royalists in turn split off from the rest of the party, the better to focus their energies, and formed what was in effect a party within a party. The Labour mobs up and down the country used the issue as

a symbol of their mounting fury over austerity and against a Tory government that had taken their passivity for granted for a decade. As spring turned to summer, looting and arson broke out in several big cities.

I decided to act. I chose my AAA initiative as the wedge issue and told my cabinet we needed the freedom to discuss the alliance proposal with President Newman – without the king breathing down our necks. If push came to shove, I said we should threaten the king with taking the monarchy out of politics altogether.

My cabinet colleagues were sceptical. Some of them were obviously worried about the royalist wing of the party. But after a while my will prevailed and we drafted an ultimatum on the spot. We then agreed to run with it.

I was clear on the issue of principle behind my ultimatum. Brexit Britain had no hope in hell of prospering outside a solid alliance of shared interests with like-minded nations. If Europe was out, America was in. For me it was practically an equation of physics. Once the Brexit bomb had exploded over London, there was no serious alternative to the AAA idea. And as a man of destiny, it was my mission to assist its birth into reality.

But the royalists reacted fast. I guess someone approached the army chiefs, who were reliably monarchist and saw the mob rule in the streets as a direct threat to the nation.

I have no idea what sort of plots they hatched. All that is for future historians to trace. All I know is that soon I faced a perfect storm of mobs in the streets, dissent in parliament, and wild media rumours of secret talks between the king and his generals.

The next session of parliament didn't last long. A squad of armed soldiers in full combat gear burst into the chamber while a speech was in progress and formed a corridor to the

table bearing the ceremonial mace. The commanding officer strode through this corridor and declared that they had come to arrest the prime minister for treason. He pointed at me with an outstretched finger and the front pair of squaddies stepped forward. They grabbed me and pulled me (gently enough, I must say) up onto my feet and marched me out to an army lorry parked on the forecourt. I was then bundled into the dark interior and driven off like a convict.

And here I am, waiting in my cell in an army barracks to hear my fate.

ACT 2

John

Promise

Exploiting my prerogative as Jon's father, I edited his notes. Along the way I took the liberty of changing a few words, so you have me to thank for any undue elegance of style that may have crept into the text. Jon wrote no more notes, so I shall take up the story on his behalf.

First let me introduce myself. Until I retired last year, my day job was editing physics books for a publisher based in Heidelberg, in Germany. I had moved here from a university lecturing post in England in 1997, just after Labour leader Tony Blair swept into power on a landslide and introduced the world to "Cool Britannia" and other absurd ideas under the guise of making a clean sweep after the prolonged rule of the "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher and her grey successor John Major.

Jon was then 17 years old. I left him at school in England, in the capable care of his mother, Carol, my former wife. Jon was old enough to cope with my departure, and indeed went on to win a scholarship to the University of Oxford, to read Politics, Philosophy and Economics – the degree that far too many British politicians have wasted their talents to acquire, to the obvious detriment of their ability to see the urgent need for change in British politics.

To his credit, Jon saw that need. But he chose an odd way to act on it. By joining the Conservatives he risked moral and ideological contamination of the foulest kind, namely that of degenerating into a mouthpiece for an arrogant and corrupt establishment that quietly feathered its own nest behind the

preposterous façade of a royal court housing a first family imported centuries ago from Germany to fulfil a perceived need long lost in the mists of time. Forgive me for ranting – this is Jon’s story.

Jon’s elitist education groomed him for national service at a level befitting his abilities. A few years of honest toil as an apprentice in the pseudoscience of economics led him to the great parliamentary talking shop in Westminster, where his mastery of the art of rhetoric soon marked him out from the other young thrusters in his cohort. In no time at all he was elevated to the post of junior manager for a subordinate elite composed of Whitehall mandarins.

My tone here is hard for a physicist to avoid. Economics, rhetoric, and management are not skills I can envy, though to give my son his due he did excel at those arts. To have made it to the top job as prime minister is impressive, and for that I congratulate my boy.

Let’s get on with the story. In America, Jon had spoken of a vision for a new alliance, and for that allegedly treasonous outburst he was arrested and held in captivity by the army. Now that’s more like it – sticking it to the establishment and provoking an insane reaction!

As soon as Jon was online again he contacted his cabinet colleagues and caught up with the news. Commanded, one may imagine, by a meddling king, the army had perpetrated a putsch. The king was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. By royal prerogative, he delegated the exercise of that supreme power to the prime minister and the secretary of state for defence, in that order. The entire cabinet was in a state of paralysis, and the defence secretary, Tom Warboys, was unable to make contact with his senior commanders. He assumed the king had taken personal command of the army but no one

knew for sure. The highest-ranking army officer, Field Marshall Sir Tarquin Biscuit-Barrel, had issued a press release immediately after Jon's arrest announcing simply that the army had intervened to restore law and order in the cities where looting and arson had broken out, a state of emergency was in force, and troops were imposing martial law in the stricken city centres. At the same time, he said, the prime minister – my son Jon – had been arrested, both for his own protection and for private consultations on the details of his discussions with President Newman in America.

As an emigrant from the Sceptred Isles, I kept in regular touch with the British media but skipped the fine details. I find German media quite reliable and plenty enough for my everyday needs, at least together with American sources such as CCN and the New York Times. So the riots in British cities had taken me by surprise. As I devoured the stories, it soon became apparent that the Tory government had been culpably complacent about the readiness of the lower classes to buckle down and accept austerity while the elite continuing to pay themselves far more than they were worth. Artificial scarcities of national grants for local councils and of land allocated to new housing compounded the miseries of the lower layers of the social hierarchy.

All this stands in stark contrast to Germany. Since I have been here I may have become excessively fond of the place, but nowhere in my experience is the neglect of housing and public infrastructure and the provision of exclusive privileges for the rich so crass in Germany as it is in England. Yet the German industrial machine continues to generate wealth for the nation on a scale greatly exceeding that created by what remains of British industry. There are lessons to be learned there, and I can only imagine that sheer stupidity among the

ruling classes in Britain prevents them from drawing some obvious conclusions and raising their game accordingly. My diagnosis of the cause for this stupidity is simple – education. British leaders tend to be educated in the arts and PPE. By contrast, many of the German leaders have been trained in the more exacting disciplines of science and engineering.

But I digress. The riots in British cities revealed a widely shared commitment to a far more radical socialist agenda in politics, which the ruling elite seemed simply to have missed. They imagined that their own horror at the prospect of Joe Steel and his bunch of red revolutionaries coming into power was shared by at least a majority of the masses. In fact, they had lost touch.

Naturally, therefore, when the scale of the problem at last became apparent, the reaction in ruling circles had a touch of panic about it. I have no doubt that the king and his generals suddenly realised they had to act fast and that Jon, my son, had somehow failed to register the gravity of the crisis as he showboated with the U.S. president in Washington. So they stepped in smartly, using the charge of treason as an excuse to stage an act of high drama in parliament and thus perhaps to cow the rioting masses into submission.

The story continued unabated. With parliament suspended and troops on the streets, public anger boiled impotently for a while. Joe Steel continued to stage incendiary rallies – the generals dared not arrest the Labour leader – and the masses began to sense their collective power. Pressure grew for an end to martial law and for a return to normal with a general election. The problem was that the rulers realised the winner would be Joe Steel, and they were not about to throw away their perilously slender hold on government so easily. It was an uneasy deadlock.

A few weeks later Jon was allowed to return to Downing Street. Indeed he was driven back in an army staff car, with all the civilities appropriate to a parliamentary head of state returning to his duties after a business trip. But he was not allowed to exercise the power of his office. Field Marshall Biscuit-Barrel continued to be the spokesman for the putsch leaders, and he continued not to name his fellow putschists or appear in person in public. His pronouncements came in carefully staged videos where he sat in his army uniform with medals and service ribbons (with scrambled egg, as they say) at a big mahogany desk in front of a union jack drape.

I was reminded of putsch leaders in banana republics in years past. It was a sad decline for my old mother country, and I was glad I had adopted German citizenship just before Independence Day.

At last, in September, King Chioles made a statement in a brief video news release. He invited the elected government to take up its duties once more under the continuing prime ministership of Jon Ball. He said he had granted Jon a royal pardon for the charge of high treason and explained that a few hours of friendly fireside discussions had removed the grounds for the charge. He expressed the hope that Jon's government would continue to serve until the next general election in June 2022.

I was surprised. Sitting in my sunny lounge in Dossenheim in Germany, I talked via Skype with Jon. He was in Downing Street. Here is the relevant part of our conversation.

•

“Hi, Jon, good to see you again. You're looking well.”

“Thanks, dad. Yes, I'm fine, apart from a bruised ego after months of army hospitality and hours of fun enjoying the

discreet charm of our king's exceptionally wise and insightful philosophical opinions.”

“You have my sympathy. I hope he hasn't converted you to the royalist cause.”

“Not quite, but he has persuaded me to appreciate the wisdom of patience. If we don't rock the boat, there's a good chance – with the help of the Democratic Unionists – that my government can hang on until next June. That way, we both get what we want, namely to keep Joe Steel and his red mob out of power. We need to keep the ship of state afloat for long enough to ride out the backwash from Brexit and to reset our course from Europe to America.”

“What then? Does Chioles want to take over the steering? How can you keep his hands off the wheel?”

“Good question. Britain is a sovereign nation and he's the sovereign. Short of starting a revolution, I don't see how I can keep parliament in control when another army putsch is always looming over us as a threat.”

“Well, don't bow to it. You have the people on your side. I'm sure they'd rather see Joe Steel take over than accept the autocratic rule of a king kept in power by the army.”

“I wouldn't bet on it! You seem to forget that letting a red mob take over in parliament is a far more terrifying prospect to your average provincial Conservative voter than a puppet prime minister serving at the pleasure of an established king with centuries of glorious tradition behind him. I was elected to serve those voters, not to throw away my mandate and let the state be torn apart by the passions of a mob.”

“Hmm, I see your predicament. But the mob is strong and Joe Steel can win the next election just by promising an end to austerity. How can you keep the party together without bending to the royalists and taking dictation from the king?”

“The only rational choice is to bend to the royalists. We wouldn’t survive another decade of strife like the one we had over Brexit. So long as the United Kingdom is organised as a monarchy, it’s my job to uphold that organisation and make the best of it. Later, if and when we decide to enter into an alliance with America, we can reconsider the whole question of constitutional powers and so on.”

“Sounds to me like a cop-out. But even if you do manage that, how can you work out a deal with President Newman without first making a move to check the king?”

“We’ll see. Newman is a reasonable chap. A global alliance is bigger than a king on a throne in a tumbledown palace.”

•

Jon was in a bind. I feared he would end up as a loyal servant of the Crown, unable to do more than serve the will of the regal embodiment of British sovereignty.

One reason I was glad to become a German citizen is that the constitution here in the Federal Republic is a modern and rational document that defines the architecture of a polity meeting all the needs of European life in a climate where the aim of ever closer union on a continental scale bids fair to put a final end to centuries of strife between nation states. Interestingly, the document was drafted by a team including British constitutional experts in the aftermath of the second world war. Germans lost a dysfunctional and toxic Reich and gained a state-of-the-art organisational form that has served them well ever since.

I recall with shame the British jingoistic nationalism of my childhood. All around me were patriotic celebrations of the proud achievements of the stiff-upper-lip British heroes who emerged victorious from the war, from books recounting their

exploits to war comics for boys to flag-waving movies that stirred the spirit of Brits of all ages. Like most young Brits, I took it all in without question and only later learned to appreciate the view from the other side.

That view was dismaying. The Nazi war machine had been a fearsome beast that in the early war years was unbeatable. The Blitzkrieg tactics used in Poland and France were more than the British army could take. Completely outfought, the British forces in France retreated to Dunkirk and suffered a major military defeat.

The Battle of Britain that followed was a narrowly avoided defeat that morphed into a war of attrition during the Blitz. The desert war in Libya became a series of defeats for the British army when it faced the Afrika Korps that continued until the front line was driven back to El Alamein in Egypt. Meanwhile, German U-boats were sinking British ships in appalling numbers in the North Atlantic.

Britain was saved from certain defeat by two big events. First, the Nazi war machine began its colossal assault on the Soviet Union along the Russian front. This was the historic mission of the Third Reich – to destroy Soviet communism once and for all in a military bloodbath in order to open up the lands in the east to German colonial expansion.

Second, the United States of America, provoked in part by Japan, joined in the war against the Third Reich. With the Soviets absorbing the bulk of the German war effort and the Americans helping out with warships to fight the U-boats, aircraft to bomb German industry, and tanks for the poor Brits in Egypt, Britain could breathe easier.

The rest of the story, up to final victory in Europe and the partition of Germany in 1945, is well known. The important point for me, recalling my childhood jingoism with shame, was

that the Soviet Union and the United States won the war and the British Empire survived for long enough to fight alongside them. Its biggest contribution to the Allied victory was the RAF air war over Germany, where thousands of big bombers pulverised German cities and killed several hundred thousand civilians. That contribution was generally agreed to have been of limited military value, bought at excessive cost. Worse, it exposed the British warlords, Winston Churchill chief among them, to accusations of moral depravity. Victory muted the accusations and emerging news of the Holocaust and related Nazi crimes expunged them, but my disgust with the whole bloody business remained.

This is relevant to the British yearning for Brexit, which you may recall is what drove Jon into politics.

The European Union was designed to prevent anything like the two world wars from ever defacing the old continent again. The union had roots in the European Coal and Steel Community founded in 1951, which soon morphed into the European Economic Community, founded in 1957. This became the European Union in 1993. By the time Brexit was in the air, the union had accumulated 28 member states and was generally agreed to be a success – and an inspiring model for regional integration around the globe.

All well and good, but what happened? Why did the dreams that animated me so warmly when I moved to Germany turn so sour for so many Brits?

To understand that, we need to recall a few more bits of history. By the way, do forgive me for all this moralising – you can probably tell I'm fond of preaching and would likely have ranted about hellfire and damnation in an earlier and more primitive age. Let's just be glad we now have physics to divert the energies of people like me!

The history we need is the end of the cold war and the emergence of globalisation. And to cover that, we need to look back into history, back to the years leading up to the bourgeois revolutions – the American Revolution, in which the British Empire lost its colonies in New England, and the French Revolution, in which France got rid of its king.

Philosophers in Europe all traced their thoughts back to the ideas that animated Plato and Aristotle, and all of them debated with each other over the centuries to create what we regard as the unquestioned background of all our thoughts in politics and the rest. That legacy of ideas led to democracy, liberty, equality and fraternity, rational logic and the scientific method – the breakthrough constellation that powered the rise of science and the demise of religion.

The American and French revolutions were victories for reason and popular democracy over older traditions based on religion. The idea that the king or queen stood to the state as God stood to humanity as a whole was an early victim of the revolutions. Americans wanted no part of the British Crown and the French revolutionaries wanted to put an end to their decadent line of kings. Germany at the time was a patchwork quilt of tiny states – except for Prussia, where the king had forged a military state of impressive power.

Prussia was the birthplace of the German war machine. The kingdom faced the Russian Empire to the east and was on the front line of the divide between Eastern and Western Christendom. In the Prussian coastal city of Königsberg, the philosopher Immanuel Kant built a powerful system of ideas to defend the bourgeois revolutions.

The French Revolution ended with the emergence of the warlord Napoleon, who marched his armies all over Europe. As he did so, the German philosopher Hegel built on Kant's

work to build a new system of ideas and give moral support to the Prussian state, which included his own base in Berlin. Just a few years later, the German socialist revolutionary Karl Marx developed those ideas into the founding ideology for Soviet communism.

Prussia became the driving force behind the unification of Germany under Otto von Bismarck, to form the Second Reich – the first had been the Holy Roman Empire that had loosely unified much of central Europe for a thousand years until Napoleon destroyed it.

Believe me, all this is relevant to Brexit, as I hope to show. The point is that Germany was the up-and-coming power in Europe, with great ideas behind it and an unparalleled legacy of achievement in philosophy, mathematics and music – and yet it had no empire.

All the peripheral states of Europe, including France and Britain, had their colonial empires. They expanded outward and carried European civilisation to the ends of the Earth. British sailors, who had learned their skills in the rough waters of the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, were well placed to make most of the running, as far as Australia and Antarctica, to span the globe and build the empire on which the sun never set – a line that my son Jon learned from me and quoted in his maiden speech in parliament.

German attempts to expand their influence in Europe led to the two world wars. British attempts to divide and rule in Europe lay behind British resistance in both cases. Because Britain was an island power, it preserved its antiquated polity based on a powerful hereditary monarchy into modern times. All across Europe, the ebb and flow of war had erased the old structures and replaced them with rational ones rooted in the ideas of philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. Only on the

British Isles, where a royal court had dug itself in, was an imperial dynasty still ascendant.

So now we arrive at the punch line. The European Union was the latest incarnation of the continental yearning for a deeper and more comprehensive political union, to make an end at last to the constant wars that had ravaged those lands and build instead a structure for future peace and prosperity. But the Brits had not been keeping up. They were still lost in political fantasies that most Europeans had outgrown, either in their bourgeois revolutions or in the socialist revolutions that were later rolled back when Marxist ideas were shown to be unworkable.

Permit me one last framing thought, which as a scientist I cannot resist adding. Any natural ecosystem evolving along Darwinian lines will sustain the rise and fall of species in response to environmental pressures. Evolution works most powerfully in a large ecosystem with open borders, as it did in the Eurasian land mass after the Americas cleaved away due to plate tectonics. The ecosystems of the Americas – and of Australia – proved unable to resist the invasion of stronger species evolved on the Eurasian land mass. Islands are liable to preserve barely viable forms that perish when faced with new competition – recall the dodo on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. And so it is with the island polity of the United Kingdom, which cannot survive for long in face of globalisation.

Let me stop there for now. Britain was in a bind, and Jon promised to act as the hero to rescue it – but surely not by saving the king and his antique court.

Revolution

My wife Kate is an American journalist. She works for CCN, mostly in Germany but often in London or Atlanta, Georgia. She gets around a lot and I hold the fort here.

A few weeks after my call with Jon, Kate flew to London to interview Joe Steel. Here's an extract.

•

Joe Steel is the Labour leader and the leader of the opposition in the British parliament in Westminster. I touched base with him on his way between speaking gigs in the northern cities where rioting broke out over the summer.

Kate Kraut: "What are the burning issues that fired up the rioters this summer?"

Joe Steel: "The root cause is years of shameful neglect by the government in Westminster. Just about every British city outside London is struggling – with finding enough funds for investment in public services such as health and education, with building and maintaining its civic infrastructure, with providing decent housing for its residents that they can afford to rent or buy, and with integrating the young people in immigrant communities who feel ignored and discriminated against – and some of whom are at risk of radicalisation."

KK: "That's a challenging list of issues. How can you do better than the government at addressing them?"

JS: "We need an end to austerity. The financial crisis was 13 years ago and still the Tory government is using it as an excuse to curtail public spending. The big banks are all doing well

enough to give their staff generous bonuses, thanks to government handouts years ago to rescue them, all paid for by the taxpayers, and yet we still hear that there's no money to keep our cities alive. Well, there's plenty of money for Trident nuclear submarines and for American fighter aircraft to go on our new carriers and for refurbishing the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace, and even for pay rises in parliament, so there ought to be some left over for the cities too. It's elementary social justice – and this Tory government is ignoring it and directing all its time and energy instead on trying to find new ways to pay for Brexit by prostrating itself shamefully to the American president.”

KK: “If Brexit is proving to be so expensive, why are you and your Labour colleagues still for it?”

JS: “British voters voted with a clear majority to leave the EU, and I for one am a democrat who respects the wishes of the people. The European Union is an elitist institution run by unelected and unaccountable officials for the benefit of a privileged class of politicians and international businessmen, so I can well understand why British voters chose to leave it. My job is not to try to work around that choice but to accept it and make it work for the benefit of the honest and decent people whom I represent.”

KK: “If you were prime minister, what would you do in your first six months to turn around the country and make a start on the social problems you mentioned?”

JS: “I would do all I could to ease the terms of Brexit by seeking to return to the single market and the customs union. This is the least we need to preserve jobs and to prevent a further catastrophic fall in living standards. I would accept the jurisdiction of the European court of justice over matters concerning EU citizens in the UK and British citizens in the

EU and over trade disputes between the UK and the EU, I would continue to abide by all existing EU legislation on product standards, working hours, minimum wages, health and safety, and so on, and I would refuse to accept any trade deal with the United States that compromised any of the rights and standards we currently enjoy. On top of all that, I would impose higher corporate taxes on business profits and higher income taxes on millionaires. With that extra income I would improve public services, begin to invest again in our neglected cities, and reduce the budget deficit.”

KK: “That sounds like a straightforward middle-of-the-road position, not very radical at all. So why do the Tories call you a red revolutionary?”

JS: “You’ll have to ask them that.”

•

Kate is my second wife. Jon is okay with her but he remains loyal to the memory of his late mother Carol. My marriage to Kate is businesslike and Jon respects that.

When she was back home in Dossenheim, I asked Kate why she’d given Joe Steel such an easy time in her interview. She said he seemed a pleasant chap, with no apparent desire to stage Stalinist show trials or liquidate reactionary elements, and with his silver hair and stubbly beard he looked just like anyone’s cuddly old grandad. Anyway, she said, she saw it as her job in CCN to give even the most controversial figures a chance to put their side of the story.

The next time Jon called me up, I asked him what he’d thought of the interview. He was at home with his wife Clara in their apartment in north London. The video link was good and I could see the autumnal treetops through the window behind his desk.

“Tell me, Jon, what did you think of Kate’s interview with Joe Steel last week? I thought she was very soft on him. I can guess that many of your colleagues thought the same.”

“Yes, it wasn’t on message for us at all. We have to paint him as a radical or too many voters might begin to like him. But he does have a radical side. Kate should have asked him about Marxism and the Trots, Cuba and Venezuela, ban the bomb marches, NATO, the nuclear deterrent, Palestinian rights activists, Islamist sympathisers, or the Boycott Israel campaign – you name it, the whole menu of trending radical causes among the champagne socialists.”

“Perhaps. What about your chances in the next election?”

“Not so good. We’re still all over the map on how to cope with the fallout from Brexit. The cabinet is still on board with the American alliance but we’re having to tread very carefully to avoid upsetting Chioles and calling down another putsch. My guess is that we’ll end up being forced to do most of the things Steel listed in Kate’s interview.”

“Perhaps Kate was sending you a hidden message!”

I went back to my own concerns soon after the call. There was nothing I could do to save Jon from himself or Britain from its populist folly. I was writing a physics textbook and explaining how the Heisenberg and Schrödinger approaches to quantum mechanics were really equivalent. This led to the whole enchilada of QED – quantum electrodynamics – and Feynman diagrams and the strange idea that in the quantum world everything that can happen does happen, all at once.

The next event worth noting came toward the end of the year, when Kate asked President Newman a question during a White House press briefing.

•

“Thank you, Mr President. Kate Kraut, CCN. Sir, you talked with the British prime minister Jon Ball earlier this year and announced plans to work on forming an Anglo-American Alliance. Do you have an update on those plans – is your administration still going ahead with them?”

“Yes, we are. We share a huge number of interests with our friends in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and I hope we can formalise some sort of agreement within the next year or so. The main focus initially will be on global security and on working out a shared strategy for regulating and harmonising trade, internet traffic, tax regulations, and laws surrounding human and workplace rights, all on a global basis. After that, we can consider integrating our economies more deeply and removing border controls for more and more trade and traffic within the alliance. For all this, our model will be the European Union, which took about fifty years to get to where it is now. We don’t plan to rush it.”

“Just a follow-up on that, if I may. Will any of this help Britain cope with the fallout from Brexit and perhaps lead to a comprehensive trade deal with Britain?”

“There’s not much we can do to help the British manage Brexit, I have to say. It’s not our ball game. We will offer moral support, of course, but we already have good trade links and there’s not much scope for a big increase in the sort of trade that would help Britain – unless we took a big hit ourselves, which I have no intention of allowing. Speaking personally, I still think Brexit was a dumb idea. Americans need an easy gateway to the European Union. Britain used to perform that role admirably, but now we’re developing a plan to work more closely with Germany.”

•

I had been following Newman's progress on building closer links between America and Germany with interest. Whatever Brits said about the special relationship, the U.S. bonds with Germany were pretty close too. Indeed, in some ways they were even closer.

The reason was not hard to find. Look at their ancestry – over 50 million Americans claim German ancestry, whereas only some 40 million claim British ancestry. About a million Americans speak German, which makes it the third language in the United States after English and Spanish. In both world wars, it took a hard push to get Americans to tip the balance on the side of Britain and France against Germany.

During the cold war, Americans were in the comfortable position of standing strong to fight on the same side as the Germans and all their other allies in NATO to ward off the menace of Soviet communism to the east – the same threat the Third Reich had almost terminated with military ferocity during the 1941–1942 fighting seasons. In readiness for that colossal fight, hundreds of thousands of young American servicemen (and women too) were stationed for many years in Germany, where they were pleased to find friendly hosts, excellent accommodation and amenities, and a widespread readiness to learn enough English to cope with the daily entertainment of getting more acquainted. The German love of America for its stalwart defence of Germany against the Soviet threat was ardent and unreserved.

By contrast, the British attitude to Americans who were in Europe to defend the West was often tinged with imperial arrogance – one always sought to remind the vulgar Yanks that they were colonial upstarts whose ancestors had once been subject to the British Crown. It was a fine way to make friends and influence people. Yanks responded by admiring what they

could of British life and culture – which mainly meant British accents, British manners, British scientists, the Harrier jump-jet, James Bond films, Monty Python and the Beatles – and treating all the rest with pity or contempt. The two nations were divided by a common language, and in the end it was Americans who took that cake and ate it.

I know, I know – these notes are supposed to be about Jon and his struggle to manage the fallout from the Brexit bomb. But I hope you can see the relevance of these didactic asides. I am a physicist, and as such I am keenly aware of the importance of a framing narrative for any explanation of a phenomenon of interest. You want to know why the sun shines? Then make yourself comfortable and prepare for a lecture on the physics of nuclear fusion. Nothing less will do. The same goes for understanding what Jon was up to. If I simply give you the personal blow-by-blow, it will all make about as much sense as a chimpanzees' tea party. Just sit back and enjoy my narrative flow.

As Jon saw it, Brexit was a strategic pivot in Britain from Europe to America. But under Barack Obama, America had begun a similar pivot from a transatlantic focus on Europe to a transpacific focus on China and east Asia. Result – Britain was turning just as America's back was turning.

A lesson I've learned in Germany from several physicist friends who work in the nearby headquarters of a big global software company is that globalisation requires a planetary view. Managing global operations 24/7 requires three shifts for the global support teams, centred respectively in Europe, America, and China. Tricky problems are handed off from zone to zone as work shifts end and as new colleagues come online. This way of working is routine in all industries with a serious online presence.

There are thus three primary focal zones on the planetary surface where you can expect to see developments that affect the future governance of the human species on this planet – Germany, California, and an extended coastal region around the Chinese city of Shanghai. Japan and Britain are ineligible for such a pivotal role because they are too isolated – their island status disqualifies them. Of course, we have a way to go before this vision of human governance becomes real, but the changes will begin to come thick and fast in the ramp-up to the Singularity when artificial intelligence learns to rule the world, when a colossal Google brain stationed in, say, Alaska (where the electricity bills for cooling the brain are lower) begins to take up the load of managing human affairs more efficiently than humans can manage themselves.

Okay, I just put my wild card on the table. The world is globalising fast, thanks to technology that we physicists have conceived and birthed for the benefit of life on Earth. When the fruits of our labours ripen to fertile adulthood, the little national polities that currently dung the Earth with their little worldviews and little loyalties will be ploughed under, just as phlogiston and the aether were ploughed under when we moved on to energy and bendy spacetime.

You can see now, perhaps, why I was less than impressed by Jon's struggles with Brexit and its implications. This was a very little squabble in a very little goldfish bowl. But he was my son and I wished to see him flourish and prosper. If he was bothered by political turmoil in the British Isles, then so was I, because I had invested my hopes in his success.

A revolution in human affairs is waiting in the wings, and all of us need to do our bit to prepare for it. Globalisation is the keyword, not in the bad sense of seeing greedy capitalists make vast profits from evil schemes to trick and cheat the masses,

but in the good sense that we shall evolve a social order that enables those of us who play along to prosper as never before and to embrace the future with optimism. The technocrats in Germany and California and China have seen the light, and all the rest of us need to get in line and help them make their practical yet inspiring vision a reality that works as intended for all of us.

Seen in that light, the historic rivalries between Britain and Germany, or between Britain and France for that matter, or any human group and any other, are trivial. All of us face an existential reckoning. When centuries ago native Americans first met invading Europeans with terrifying new technology, their tribal loyalties were toast. Their battle cry should have been – Unite to face the new threat!

The same applies now in Europe. Germans, as I've seen during my years here, have been disciplined and punished and frightened for long enough – for many generations now – to see the new threat. Brits, isolated on their rocky outcrop beyond the shores of the mainland where their fond illusion of invulnerability remained unchallenged, seem not to have noticed the change. Time to wake up, lads.

•

Kate was more glued to current affairs than I was. When we entertained Jon and Clara for an overnighter in Dossenheim for the New Year celebrations, which locally meant fireworks in the streets and Freddie Frinton doing a very British comic turn on television, she took the opportunity to quiz Jon quite mercilessly. At the stroke of midnight, she compounded her merciless attentions by snogging him with surprising passion. I'd been exchanging idle chat with Clara and finding it hard to get as worked up as she was about LGBTQIA rights, so when

midnight came around I kissed her only politely before the customary smooch with Kate.

When they had gone the next day, Kate told me what she had learned from Jon. He was in trouble again, but it was all rather too murky to explain properly. He faced unrest in the cabinet, which was nothing new, and stiff opposition from Labour, which was nothing new either. But he was also facing the imminent collapse of his Anglo-American Alliance idea.

The problem, of course, was President Newman, who had German ancestors and felt a lingering attachment to the old heartlands of Europe. He saw that chumming up with Brexit Britain would cut him off from European developments, which were in fact more important for American peace and prosperity than a special relationship with Britain.

In particular he saw an increasing threat from Russia. After the revelations about Russia that came out during the Trump impeachment proceedings, it was clear that a serious collapse of law and order was spreading in the Kremlin kleptocracy. Europeans had no stomach for a new military crusade to put things right and were tempted to appease the regime, if only to ensure continuing gas supplies in winter.

This threatened to undo the whole transatlantic alliance. The only reasonable option was to forget about an English-speaking alliance – which in a world of instant and perfect Google translation was a cultural anachronism anyway – and talk up a truly global alliance between America and Europe on the one side and America and China on the other. Brexit Britain would be sidelined in a global revolution.

Success

Before we go on, I feel the need to tell you more about my wife Kate. She was over a decade younger than me and she still looked good naked. With a slender and sporty figure and a smooth overall tan topped with short blonde hair, she was generally regarded as a sexy lady. The only reason she went for me was that she had a thing about men with brains – and in all modesty my brain is better than most.

Kate's charms were not reserved for my own enjoyment. She ran and swam regularly, and liked to hang out afterwards in the popular local saunas, where naked men and women sweated freely together as they relaxed in the heat. I am man enough to have no problem with all this. My lust for sex is abating as I mature, and if she feels the need to mate with a young stud from time to time I can take it – so long as I'm the centre of attention whenever we're together.

The reason I'm telling you this is that Kate seemed more interested in my son Jon than was proper for a stepmother. She was impressed by his pole position in the British political hierarchy for one thing, and given her job I can hardly fault her for that, but she also seemed to feel some chemistry with him, to judge by their New Year snogging session. I began to feel troubled about them.

•

Jon's Conservative government faced a general election in June. The auguries looked ominous and Jon was unsure how to plan his campaign. Should he launch a Project Fear based

on the horror scenario of a red revolution under Joe Steel or should he accentuate the positive by promoting his vision of an Anglophone alliance?

He decided to run a positive campaign. Project Fear had gone badly wrong for the Remainers in the campaign leading up to the Brexit referendum, and it was always a bad idea to focus too hard on demonising the opposition – it only made them look powerful and built them up as a force for change, which was precisely what most voters wanted. But his dream alliance was getting a cool reception in Washington.

I talked with Jon via Skype in March when he was getting his plans together.

“Hi, Jon, how’s it going?”

“Hi, dad, good. The long campaign’s going smoothly, but we don’t seem to be getting Joe Steel’s numbers down fast enough. Unless we start pulling ahead in the polls soon, we can forget about a big majority. I don’t want five more years of cherry-picking the manifesto and whipping every vote.”

“No, obviously. Have you considered adopting a few more Labour policies? A softer line with the EU, for example, or a bit more investment in the inner cities.”

“I’m stymied there by our royalists. They’d call up another putsch and put Generalissimo Biscuit-Barrel back in charge. We go it alone in the world and we crack down on the scum in the streets – either that or we go down with guns blazing. We didn’t plant union jacks all around the world in the days of empire or beat the Jerries in two world wars or stick up two fingers to Brussels only to give in now to a ragtag bunch of malcontents who don’t know what’s good for them. If I don’t toe the party line I’ll be back in a barracks again – but this time with a firing squad to look forward to.”

“I think you’re exaggerating.”

“You don’t know the Conservative party. Our hard-core members are further out to the right than you realise. They’d rather see blood in the streets than water down the party line with a lot of guff about welfare rights and the need to accept rules and regulations written by foreign powers. The United Kingdom is our home and our castle!”

“It was your choice to join their party in the first place. Whatever prompted you to go along with such a bunch of pantomime villains when you could have joined the Liberals and kept your ideals intact?”

“What, and say goodbye to power for a generation? Their ideals are not worth a monkey’s fuck if they can’t put them into practice. I’d rather make a few compromises than sit on the sidelines my whole life long.”

“Watch your language. Ideals are what makes our life on Earth worth anything at all, even if you have to die before you can see them through. Okay, apply the argument you’ve just so inelegantly formulated to winning the election. Make a few compromises with the EU and stay in power. If your royalist hardliners can’t see the wisdom of that, well then throw them out of the party.”

“Maybe. By the way, did you read Kate’s piece on tensions in the Baltics? I thought it was rather good.”

“No, but thanks. I’ll look it up.”

Later I looked it up. I agreed with him. Here it is, in part.

•

Kate Kraut, Talinn, CCN: Here in Estonia on the NATO front line with Russia tensions are rising. Russian military movements along the border with Estonia and Latvia are alerting NATO commanders who fear a repeat of the alarm six months ago during the quadrennial Zapad exercises in Belarus,

when hundreds of tanks simulated an attack on the Suwalki gap between Belarus and the Kaliningrad exclave.

Russia is still unhappy that the three Baltic states became independent when the Soviet Union broke up in 1991. The states contain large Russian minorities and offered valuable access both to the Baltic Sea and to the Kaliningrad exclave, which is part of Russia but cut off by land from the rest of the country, rather as Alaska is cut off from the rest of the United States. The shortest land bridge is the Suwalki gap, which is a 100 kilometre length of border between Poland and Lithuania that runs from Kaliningrad to Belarus.

NATO forces in Lithuania and Poland are too small to halt a major Russian military attack. If Russian minorities and saboteurs destabilised the Baltic states like they destabilised Ukraine when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, an armoured column starting from Belarus could establish a land corridor to Kaliningrad too quickly for NATO forces to be sure of stopping it. Only the threat of a major escalation can ensure peace in the Baltic region.

•

This interested me. The city of Kaliningrad used to be called Königsberg and was in Prussia. The philosopher Kant lived and worked there. Now Kaliningrad was a heavily defended naval base for the Baltic fleet, a kind of mirror image of the massively fortified German outpost it had been during the Third Reich until the Red Army destroyed it in 1945.

Kate had spent a week in Tallinn to file that story. Perhaps she took time out with an upstanding young NATO trooper after sweating with him in an Estonian sauna. And perhaps I should learn not to speculate about my beautiful wife. She was quite capable of looking after herself.

There was a strong NATO presence in the Baltic states. Britain had several hundred troops in Estonia and there were usually a few RAF Typhoon fighters based there too. Among the NATO states, Germany, France, and Spain also deployed contingents along the front. The problem they faced was a lack of standardisation in weaponry and supply chains.

This is a pet peeve of mine. National pride gets in the way at the worst times and places. Britain invented the tank, so the British army had to have British tanks even though most European NATO partners had German tanks, which were good. The British army fielded a grand total of two hundred and odd tanks, so the development effort for the things was utterly disproportionate to the return.

I hear you asking what this has to do with Jon and Brexit. Well, the EU was making a big effort to standardise defence procurement, and Britain had abruptly exempted itself from that effort. Brexiteers said NATO was already quite enough cooperation on the defence front, thank you, and any efforts to do more would only encourage another dictator to rise up on the continent and endanger Fortress UK.

Jon was at risk of playing to precisely that mind-set. If his diehard royalists had their way, even the RAF Typhoons – excellent aircraft, developed and built in a European team effort involving Britain, Germany, Italy, and Spain – would probably be replaced by expensive American jets. The result would be a poorer European defence against a real threat – Russian aggression in the Baltics.

Small countries far away, you say. Even Brexit Britain can field effective forces when it counts. But what happens when British tanks on the front need spares and the only spares available are the Spanish stocks for their German tanks? And what if that leads to a defeat and a sudden need to evacuate the

British contingent – another Dunkirk, so to speak? No flotilla of British small boats could sail out to the rescue by running the gauntlet of Russian subs to retrieve our boys from the eastern end of the Baltic Sea!

In the modern world, the front line for Fortress UK is not the Channel and the North Sea but the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea. Yet Brexiteers are still antagonising their NATO partner Spain over Gibraltar. That sort of stupidity in British leadership has led to so many blunders and disasters in the past it's a tragedy. And my boy was cutting so close to continuing such stupidity that I feared for his soul.

Sorry, I'm ranting again. Over on Fortress UK, Jon was running his campaign for re-election under the slogan "Make Britain strong again" – as if anything but Tory stupidity (and Tony Blair and criminal bankers and UKIP) had ever made it weak in the years since Margaret Thatcher was in power. For me it was the hammering of the word "Britain" that set my teeth on edge – you don't get Germans banging on about Germany like that nowadays.

When the time was ripe in April I called Jon again.

"Hi Jon, how are you?"

"Hi, dad, good ... good. Actually, not so good. The poll numbers are still looking weak for us and the economic data is terrible. Inflation, prices rising faster than wages, inward investment decreasing – and we're supposed to be the good guys when it comes to managing the economy. All we can do is insist that the other lot would manage it even worse if they got the chance. That doesn't sound too great."

"What about the cities and the riots and so on? Is all that under control?"

"Well, sort of. People still complain about welfare cuts and bad housing, of course, but that's just the standard chorus of

losers in the background and we don't really care about it as long as we can drown them out by singing the praises of our innovators and wealth creators. Actually, what worries me is that my thing with the Anglophone alliance is languishing. All the other leaders say 'Great, we like it,' and then do nothing at all. No new trade deals, nothing."

"Are you surprised? That's free trade for you. It's not their job as leaders to force businessmen to invest here or there. You should know that already – they can only set the tone. If a corporate hotshot wants to source his widgets in China, who are they to stop him? The only way Britain can compete on that front is by paying Chinese wages to manufacturing workers. Try that in Britain and you'll be lynched."

"Sure, free trade is a slogan and we need to finesse it, but I just can't sell a return to the EU single market to my cabinet. They'd slaughter me."

"Sure. How's Clara? Have you got her pregnant yet?"

This had become a rather ironic excuse for a running joke between us ever since Jon mentioned it years earlier.

"No, not yet. She says after the election will be better, when stress levels are down and so on. Always something."

"I never had that problem with Kate, I'm glad to say. After you came along, my urge to procreate abated. But now you have to make sure you do your duty."

"Kate told me that too. I'll do my best."

My heart skipped a beat. When did she get involved?

"Kate? She told you that?"

"Just in passing, at the New Year. She was explaining why you were sometimes so short with me."

"Hmm ... I shall ask her about that."

•

The game changer came in May. It was so subtle that most people would have missed it completely, and I only caught it myself because of a chance comment from Kate. She was back from a trip to London to interview Jon and a few others about the military tensions in the Baltics, and she gave me a debriefing on the trip that set me thinking.

“Jon was much cheerier than I’d expected. His campaign has picked up a little and he thinks he can win a majority in June. He says his audiences with the king have warmed up a notch and he’s even begun to like the old geezer – that was his word, by the way.”

“And another one down, another one bites the dust. He’s turned into a loyal servant of the Crown.”

“I don’t think so, but he was grateful for the video. It has to be worth a few million votes.”

“Video – votes?”

King Chioles had starred in a video docudrama about his first two years on the throne. It was a classic grovel to royalty – I watched it on YouTube – and about as vomit-worthy as all such productions, but it chimed in perfectly with the Tory vibe of British greatness and the magnificence of its legacy and traditions. The implicit message was that all the subjects of the Crown were equal in potential, if only they worked hard, stopped complaining about problems they could solve by themselves with a bit of gumption, and showed a healthy spirit of optimism and faith that the best days of Britain lay ahead. Chioles came over as a wise and mighty father figure for a nation facing challenges. Even the military putsch was glossed as a necessary precaution at a troubled time to keep the nation on the narrow path of virtue.

The rest is history. Jon won his working majority, earned the trust of his party, and reaped the usual congratulations from

national leaders worldwide. Kate beamed on camera as I watched the results roll in on CCN, and I could see she'd been willing him to win even more intensely than I had – for me it was the usual fatherly concern for his son's success but for her it looked more personal.

I know – what in a woman's face on camera could seem more personal than a father's concern for his only son? Well, I was neutral on his politics and thought a defeat might even inject some iron into his soul. He struck me as a callow youth at times, insensitive to the suffering of others and too eager to accommodate the pantomime villains in his party. But Kate beamed like a lover, almost like a deer caught in the headlights, envisioning the glory of victory as if it were her own. I was sure something was up – but I had no desire to upset our marriage with accusations that would instantly go nuclear and ruin three lives.

•

The eastern front of NATO was in danger. Having advanced to the borders of Russia and Belarus, NATO forces faced stiff resistance in the marathon battle of wills to stay strong until the autocratic ruler in Minsk and the macho kleptocrat in the Kremlin were replaced. Both of them were surely ripe for replacement by presidents heading more enlightened and democratic governments. It was obvious that we in the west had a strong interest in facing regimes that would cooperate more constructively with NATO and the EU.

In this game of life and death, Brexit Britain had no good reason to let down the side by acting independently. Yet the UK government headed by my son Jon seemed to feel the need to take every opportunity to bait the Russian bear and react to its military posturing – which was largely intended to placate

Russian voters who might otherwise have agitated for a more aggressively Stalinist tone from the Kremlin – as a direct threat to the security and integrity of Fortress UK. Perhaps again this was largely for domestic purposes, on the theory that loyal Tory voters in the Home Counties might otherwise have pressed for a return to direct military rule. Whatever the reason, I was mightily unimpressed, and I told Jon so during our next online conversation.

“Look, Jon, there’s a question I have to put to you. What the hell is the point of antagonising Russia with all this talk about shooting down Russian bombers that fly near British airspace and sinking submarines that probe British waters? Can’t your ministers see that’s just feeding into the tensions on the eastern front?”

“Sure, but we need the tensions to remind taxpayers that defence spending is worthwhile and they can expect another putsch if they start any more riots. Win-win, I’d say.”

My son was going rogue.

Revelation

Over the summer Kate was happy and playful. She went on trips to Berlin, London, and Atlanta, but she also spent time at home cheering me up. On sunny afternoons we sometimes went down to the Neckar river in Heidelberg, where a grassy flood plain on the north bank would attract hundreds of people to relax in the sunshine as if they were at the seaside. Kate would lie in just a thong to top up her tan while I sat in sloppy clothes and a sunhat reading physics paperbacks for new ideas on how to make the weirdness of quantum physics palatable to the great reading public.

Brexit Britain was sinking into a sad quagmire of political bickering over the continuing need to conform to various EU regulations on goods that may or may not end up in the EU, on customs holdups that were still leading to regular huge backlogs and truck lines stretching for miles beyond Dover, on fishing intrusions around UK territorial waters and so on. It was pitiful to see, and unworthy of a once-great nation. I was glad to be out of it.

Germany was – and is – a very civilised place to live. The Romans occupied the Rhine valley over two thousand years ago and many traces are still evident, for example in some straight roads and in an old stone amphitheatre on a hilltop overlooking Heidelberg where Nazi supporters used to stage torchlight rallies. The old city centre of Heidelberg survived the USAAF and RAF bombing war unscathed – the Allies spared it as a cultural treasure, like Kyoto in Japan – and walking there takes the visitor back centuries.

For reasons that will become clear soon enough, I feel the need to tell you another long and winding story. I trust my previous stories have convinced you that their relevance to the saga of Jon in Brexit Britain is real, even if it may not be easy to spot for a while. Let me reassure you that as a former publishing editor I take great pleasure in cutting irrelevant bullshit without mercy.

This story concerns religion, which has new relevance to the future of Europe in the looming possibility that Islam might supplant Christianity as the dominant religion on the continent within a few generations. The popular association of Islam with cultural subversion and global terrorism bore some responsibility for the outcome of the Brexit referendum by moving UK voters to demand hard border controls in the hope that this might keep Britain safer. The hope is surely illogical, but that's not the point of my story.

The Abrahamic patriarchies are revealed religions, which means they derive their appeal to believers from shocking or amazing revelations of the awesome power of God. These revelations are reported in the respective holy books of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Just about all the revelations seemed to contradict or affront science and rational thinking, and hence posed a challenge for textual scholars to reconcile them with modern thinking.

Like many cultural achievements of western civilisation, this enterprise of textual criticism reached a peak in Germany between about a hundred and two hundred years ago. The result was a critique of Christianity that stripped away its old foundation in superstition and led many Germans either to adopt a more inner or moralistic approach to their faith, like that pioneered by Martin Luther some five centuries ago, or indeed to lose their faith altogether. Such critiques led many

Jews to lose their faith too, at the same time as they were beginning to integrate themselves into mainstream Christian society. As an aside, we can expect many people with Muslim roots to do something similar in coming years.

For reasons that are irrelevant to my story, the assimilated Jews were often smarter than their German neighbours and soon began to dominate the thinking professions, leaving the displaced former Christians feeling cheated and angry. The result was a rising tide of racist hatred that broke into a flood during the Third Reich. Today a similar catastrophe could in principle result from the mass immigration of Muslims into Europe – but again this is not my point.

Brexiters will not admit to such ignoble passions, since it taints their nationalist mission in ways that seem too much like those that less than a hundred years ago led millions of more or less decent and ordinary Germans astray, swept along in a tide of nationalist madness that led to the ghastly atrocity of the Holocaust. Nationalist passion need not lead to genocide, of course, but a glance at popular British tabloid newspaper headlines in the last few years reminds any scholar of the Nazi era too vividly of the crude headlines the Nazi newspapers used to scream out.

As a physicist, I must remind you that none of this is hard science. This story of the deep background to Brexit is my subjective view, influenced in large part by the fact that I'm now living within the language community that bears the enduring guilt and shame induced by the Nazi genocide. No natural law says such things must happen in Britain too.

You might be thinking this is a bit rich – now he hints that Brexiters are at risk of turning into Nazis! You can relax – my intention is only to point out that mass immigration of Muslims exposes the whole continent of Europe to the risk of

passions like those that boiled over in Germany. Britain is not exempted from that risk merely by virtue of its island status, and Brexit has not reduced that risk.

Jon rhapsodised in some of his speeches (recorded here in earlier pages) about the pride one may take in being British and about the unique glory and value of the British heritage. An elementary logical inference from such rhetorical garbage is that a holder of any other nationality has by that fact alone a lesser status and a lesser claim to boast in grandiose terms about his or her heritage. That way lies discrimination against such nationals – of the sort that the British government had the effrontery to threaten against citizens of other EU states in the three years up to Brexit – that all too easily can lead to violence and so on down into the abyss.

Was that my winding story? Not quite, because the Nazi atrocities exposed a deeper story, and for that deeper story my years of residence here in Germany give me a feeling for its resonance that may be harder to portray in a few simple words – so I'd be grateful for a bit of sympathy on this one. The deeper story sheds a further light on Brexit that may enlighten or dismay any British nationalist who dreams that Britain may one day forge far enough ahead to leave the Germans in the rear-view mirror.

The moral of the deeper story is that the price of any leadership is high and may be too high. It goes like this.

The German-led critique of revealed religion was a global effort but Germans took the lead in putting its consequences into action. One consequence flowed from the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, and was that the truth or even the sense of any human appeal to a transcendent God was bounded by human psychological limits and by the horizons of science as we know it – which expand, of course, but within history, and

in lockstep with known facts. All the gods of all the religions were put into an anthropological perspective.

Sorry if this sounds like atheist preaching – this is just my report on a historic development. And the point of bringing it up here is that German nationalists decided – hey-ho – that they might just as well invent their own religion, or rather mythology, to get away from that old Abrahamic stuff. The man who did so most effectively was Richard Wagner, the great composer, who created a colossal and ponderous set of mythic operas and built a theatre in the town of Bayreuth to stage them with the desired bombastic effects. These operas inspired the leaders of the Third Reich.

It gets worse. Once a new generation had grown up in the shadow of this operatic mythology, and also been corrupted by the works of such brilliant but unsound philosophers as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, they were fired up for mighty and historic deeds. This was hot, intoxicating nationalism, exceptionalism on steroids.

We all know the facts about the Third Reich. A big and well-developed nation went supernova. It exploded. It blew out an expanding shell of invading armies and violent death and destruction (remember here the expanding cloud of chemical elements cooked up in a supernova) to leave behind a new world, a world of two superpowers, and a stateless people in a wasteland (this is the tiny star left behind in the supernova metaphor). The Reich was gone, and in its place stood an ordinary administrative region at the heart of a transformed Europe. The operatic myth was gone too, trashed.

A modern observer of this astonishing national suicide may well ask what the point of it all can have been. This is the second consequence of the critique of revealed religion. The marginalised minority whose primary asset was the God of

revealed religion was of course the Jews. The supernova mythology of the Wagnerians devalued that asset to zero in Nazi eyes, so they felt empowered to trash the minority as a race of evolutionary has-beens, best cleared away. And that's precisely what the lesser functionaries of the Third Reich did in the years 1942–1945, before their own appalling regime was cleared away in its turn.

In retrospect, this was a unique national achievement. An abyss of human potential for evil was revealed that broke all previous records. To those who still clung on to revealed religion, this dizzying depth of evil implied the existence of a correspondingly awesome power for good – in other words, it was a vivid revelation of a transcendent God that burst all previous bounds.

As a physicist, I used to say the atom bomb did the same sort of job more directly by exposing the need for a more transcendent political solution to prevent a global war that would end civilisation as we know it. But now we tend to think the bomb is just another weapon, more effective than the rest at keeping the peace but morally as neutral as a handgun. The unique moral dimension of the double murder (of Germans and Jews) is lacking.

So ... what's the point of my deeper story? It's certainly not that Germans perversely took the lead over Britain in national greatness by beating all records for murdering Jews. That would be an obscene suggestion. No, the point is that by analysing old religion, creating a new one, and acting out the consequences to the bitter end, they added a chapter of biblical magnitude to world history. The historic empire of the German people is now a cautionary tale of good and evil that will be told and retold for a thousand years. This was no mere trading empire or marriage of convenience with ancient and

forgotten peoples who lacked the power to resist British guns and colonial rule. It was a shining light – a supernova – in the moral firmament.

Every Hollywood drama needs a bad guy. Germany played that role well for a blockbuster drama that broke all records. It did so just in time, historically, before a nuclear thrashing could end its hope of postwar recovery for good.

The only way Brexit Britain can achieve global stardom of that magnitude is by performing stunts so perilous they risk catastrophe on the supernova scale. And today that would probably end in getting nuked off the map.

I say don't do it. Make peace with Europe and settle down comfortably until the new world order begins to take more coherent shape. But who am I to tell my son what to do?

•

Back to Jon's day job in the rogue nation across the Channel. The summer heat brought out the rioters again. This season the army was called out early in the proceedings to prevent the generals from taking matters into their own hands later. But again the damage to city centres was severe enough that the national economic statistics took a hit. The pound sank further and inflation rose another notch.

As prime minister, Jon sought to rally the national will to raise its game by publishing a rousing speech in the *Thunderer*. Here it is.

•

Britain is facing dangers as perilous as any it has faced since 1940. Since our brave and historic decision six years ago to leave the stifling company of our continental neighbours in a protectionist union, we have forged a lonely path across the

seas in the good ship Britannia, trusting in a fate that favours the bold to deliver us to a destination that will enable us to prosper again as a free and independent nation. No longer will we take no for an answer from a foreign power or let meddling outsiders tell us how big our eggs should be or how straight our bananas. We are British, and proud of it.

But we face challenges. We must raise our manufacturing productivity and our output. We must learn to export again on an industrial scale. We must invent new products and discover new ways to make old ones more efficiently. We must become more self-sufficient in food production. We must build more houses, more roads, more railways, and above all more opportunities for our younger generation.

No longer can we blame the continental Europeans for our own shortcomings. We must face the facts and accept that too many of us are not pulling our weight. Too many people sit idle at home and expect welfare benefits to pay their bills. Too many people are slackers at work, showing up and going through the motions but not putting their heart into it, and yet expecting to be paid as well as the go-getters who grasp the bull by the horns and get stuck in. Too many parents expect the schools to do the parents' job and teach their children how to behave, how to take responsibility for their own poor choices and weak willpower when it comes to eating sweets or taking drugs or indulging in casual sex or wasting time when they should be doing their homework. All this has got to stop.

In some ways we faced an easier threat in 1940. We could all see the danger of defeat in a bombing war and feel the horror of invasion by stormtroopers who would kill innocent civilians and install a bloodthirsty dictatorship in our capital city. But now the threat comes from within. Anyone who fails to understand the risk of national decline into poverty and

anarchy if we continue our present course is the enemy. Anyone who fails to buckle down and accept the burdens of citizenship is the enemy. Anyone who dares to resist the lawfully elected government for the sake of half-baked ideas about a communist society or a fundamentalist caliphate or a free-for-all that would impoverish everyone is the enemy.

We are a nation with a history and a heritage. We are proud of our constitutional monarchy, proud of our king, proud of our parliamentary institutions, proud of our men and women in our armed forces and our emergency services, proud of all the unsung heroes who get up and work hard every day to keep this magnificent kingdom running. We want to be proud of our nation tomorrow too, and next year, and in the years to come.

We must pull together. We must punish the slackers and root out the troublemakers. We must be fearless in pointing out the enemies in our midst and confronting them.

My government is on your side. Of course I offer you my blood, sweat, and tears as I toil on your behalf, but I also offer more. I offer you my support in your endeavours to make this nation a better place to live, a nation cleansed at last from the scum left behind by lazy clean-ups in the past. We need to purge this nation and, with the brisk passion of a conscientious housekeeper, put an end at last to the sloppy ways of those among us who prefer dirt and disorder to a bracing bout of honest work.

No longer can we tolerate the grubby compromises we made in the past with idlers and slackers, with people who throw trash in the streets and let their dogs poop on the pavement, who ride their bikes in pedestrian zones and spit in the streets and park on double yellow lines and curse and swear on public transport. All these are small but telling symptoms,

drops that wear down the stone, so to speak, of a society going to rot, in decay, on the path to national decline. We all need to shape up and pull ourselves together, for the good of the nation as well as ourselves.

In dutiful obedience our beloved king, I am your captain on the good ship Britannia as we sail the seas in search of a welcoming port of call. I am entitled to expect sharp discipline and instant obedience from the crew, not mutinous defiance or slovenly insolence. As Admiral Lord Nelson told his men before the Battle of Trafalgar that put an end to the naval ambitions of the upstart continental dictator Napoleon, England expects that every man will do his duty.

•

I was appalled. My son was turning into a demagogue! Soon he'd be closing down the borders, rounding up the enemies of the people, building out the concentration camps, and closing in on a hideous new heart of darkness.

I asked Kate what she thought. She had seen him briefly a few weeks earlier in London.

"I'm sure he's fine. This is just red meat for his royalist wing. He has to keep them on board and that's just the sort of rhetoric they go for – Churchillian, nautical, long runs and cold showers, stiff upper lip, all the oldies but goldies. Just chill and trust him – he's too warm and cuddly to be able to play the Supreme Leader for long."

That chill again. Warm and cuddly?

"I don't trust him an inch, not now he's started playing a double act with the king. And now I don't trust your opinion of him either."

"Well, you did ask for it!"

"What exactly did he tell you about this red meat thing?"

“Not much more than I’ve told you. He’s playing the role they want him to play. It’s the only role that will go down on the street if the aim is to reassure his base and set a red line for the rioters.”

“He seems to be enjoying it too much.”

“Look at you, the stern father! Do you want to put him over your knee and spank him?”

I waved a hand in mute surrender and turned away, struck to the quick by an image of Jon lustily spanking a nude Kate before getting stuck in and doing his duty.

But let me not end this section on a bum note. Since we have just considered the topic of revealed religion, let me quote instead an earlier essay by Jon on the subject of Islam. It was published in the *Grauniad* in 2020 when he was still foreign secretary.

•

Many people in Britain are understandably upset at the idea that Islamic customs and traditions might steadily encroach on our native ways in the years to come.

I was reminded of this on a recent visit to Breezy Bay, a charming town on the south coast in my own constituency of Hobbitage. I sat in a restaurant overlooking the beach and admired the busy scene as afternoon shaded into evening.

At first, while the sun still shone brightly, the seafront was crowded with what appeared to be mostly native English men and women and boys and girls in colourful swimsuits having fun in the usual way. But then, as dusk began to fall, the Muslims began to appear. A group of young men came first and started to play a lusty game of football, then a big group of women arrived, all swathed from head to foot in flowing black gowns, and stood in a gaggle, like penguins, until some

of them began to paddle nervously in the shallow water. My previously cheery mood sank like a stone and I found myself contemplating what the Nazi-era historian Oswald Spengler called the decline of the West.

Now you may think this reaction is quite unwarranted by the facts. Integration is a slow process, and is one we should not seek to accelerate artificially by coercive means. Yet the presence in our midst of about three million Muslims – and the prospect of this number growing in the years to come – suggests that some of the changes that may occur will be in the direction of our adapting our traditional English ways to better accommodate Muslim sensibilities.

I am inclined to resist such adaptation. Nothing I have so far learned about the faith and practice of Islam makes me warm to it. Christianity is a spiritual faith rooted in ancient Roman civilisation and softened in its application by many centuries of critical attention by western philosophers. It has become part of the furniture of our lives, so to speak, and does not hinder our pursuit either of science or of pleasure.

Islam, by contrast, is a faith that was spread by the sword. Although its founding revelations came to a prophet steeped in Christian ideas, the later course of his faith diverged quite sharply from the Christian ideal. We need not fear bigotry when we say this is not a faith we wish to encourage.

I will not go so far as to say Muslims should abandon their faith or go and live elsewhere, but I would invite them to consider the spiritual heart of their beliefs. They will find an equally welcoming home for that heart both in Christianity and in the works of the philosophers.

Perdition

I regret to say I began to lose sympathy with Jon's political career. He was drifting so far off to the right and having so little success in repairing a nation broken by Brexit that I despaired for him. And if he really was fooling around furtively with my wife Kate then I wished him downcast, thrown out of office and humiliated.

My own affairs were not going too well. My textbook on quantum theory was a complicated and frankly rather tedious project. I'd started out with grand ambitions to outline a new way of appreciating the hard stuff about entanglement and collapse of the state vector, but then discovered that what could be said had been said, by others, already, and what could be thought but not said had been thought but not said by them too. The acid test was the mathematics – invent a new equation and prove its utility and the world would be my oyster – but innovation on that front was far beyond me. So I plodded lamely on, feeling stupid.

Kate was dashing around the world with astonishing zest. Maybe it was just my age, but sometimes it exhausted me just seeing her, packing her case and calling cabs and getting up early for the airport and so on. She seemed quite unfazed by her hectic pace and quite uninterested in making more time for quiet days with me. But then what sort of company was I for a lady like her?

Jon had still failed to get Clara pregnant. What was wrong with them I had no idea – but of course the silence there fed my deepening suspicions.

Jon's next article in the *Thunderer* was a shocker. In case you think my liberal sensitivities are too tender for my opinion to be trustworthy, let me simply present the document for you to judge.

•

The British people deserve better than a kingdom broken by rioters and anarchists, by fundamentalists and communists, by dissidents and criminals of every kind. From today, I have authorised our brave servicemen and women in the cities to arrest troublemakers and looters on sight and detain them at His Majesty's pleasure in a facility far away from the scenes of their crimes. We have already erected a new detention facility on the Isle of Wight that can be extended if necessary to hold up to a million people.

You may feel this is a rather harsh reaction to a problem that may be amenable to a less draconian solution. If so, let me reassure you that the problem has become too dangerous for the government to risk failure and defeat by temporising with soft and ameliorative measures. The risk to the security of the state and its instruments of national control is real enough that I, for one, am not prepared to gamble with all that we hold dear for the sake of appearing friendlier to our enemies than the circumstances can justify.

As of today, the Isle of Wight is a forbidden zone for any and all visitors from the mainland who have not been issued with a visitor's pass by the emergency occupation authorities who control the island. The occupation force is authorised under King's Regulations to use deadly force to keep order. Many of the island's residents are being asked to relocate to the mainland, where they will in due course be rehoused in new accommodation of equivalent standard to what they left

behind. Those who stay will be asked to accept restrictions on their freedom of movement. The Royal Navy will patrol the waterways around the island and again is authorised to employ deadly force if necessary to prevent illegal maritime or aerial traffic to or from the island.

You may ask what will happen to the detainees on the island. The only answer I can give at this stage is that they will be handled in a manner appropriate to the danger they would represent if they were let loose to wreak their havoc and mayhem on the innocent citizens of our great provincial cities. You may rest assured that our continuing responsibility to the precedents set by our history as a civilised nation will be uppermost in our minds as we begin the arduous process of screening the inmates of the camp and of preparing those of them that can be salvaged for a return to civil society as peaceful and productive citizens. As for the rest, all I can say now is that we are deeply conscious of our responsibility to the heavily burdened taxpayers of this kingdom not to lavish more national treasure on the administration of justice than the heinous crimes of the inmates deserve.

Our army has been hard pressed of late to perform its many duties in face of government budgetary pressures, and we are keenly conscious of the need to make the best use of the manpower at our disposal. We shall therefore withdraw troops from overseas deployments wherever this is militarily possible in order to redeploy them on the Isle of Wight. In particular, we shall withdraw the British ground contingents from the Baltic states. We have already informed our NATO partners of our intention.

There is no reason for law-abiding British citizens to be worried by any of these developments. The authorities have the situation in hand and will do all they can to protect and

reassure the general public. Those who should fear these developments are the troublemakers and criminals who have caused us to introduce the measures. They will know who they are and will doubtless seek to escape justice. We are therefore, again as of today, sealing all the external borders of the United Kingdom and refusing exit to any person who cannot provide convincing documentary evidence of their reason for leaving. All visitors from overseas to the kingdom will be subject to enhanced screening too, in case the troublemakers in our midst seek to call in reinforcements from overseas.

The land border in Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland presents a special difficulty. In the present state of emergency, we cannot treat it as an exception and are sealing it too. We trust the loyal British citizens of Northern Ireland will understand the need for the closure and will adapt their daily routines accordingly without protest. For those who do not, again we stand ready to apply military force if necessary, including detainment for offenders on the Isle of Wight.

My government understands the need to preserve a calm and civil face both to the British citizens whom it represents and to the outside world, and will seek to maintain the usual state of calm in all possible ways. But make no mistake, we are on the brink of a national emergency that could descend into anarchy if we do not act decisively now, before the need emerges for direct military rule. For this reason, we in the government have already begun talks with opposition leaders in parliament to explore the idea of forming a government of national unity if at all possible.

•

As you see, the Titanic was sinking. Holed by an iceberg in the summer of 1916, HMS Britannia had taken a good while to

flood, but now there was no mistaking she was doomed. As the captain on the bridge, my son Jon would be expected to follow nautical precedent and go down with his ship.

I can't tell you how glad I was to be safely installed in Germany. And I can't tell you how infinitely sad I was that my only son should have got himself into such a pickle. What I can tell you is that I was now mad as hell that the British people, my blood stock, should have done something so stupid six years earlier as to defy the very institution that was designed to prevent such a catastrophe from ever again occurring on European soil.

But life must go on. I made a cup of coffee and went back to work on my physics book. Now it seemed like a consoling presence in a world going mad. Pecking on the keyboard to type the TeX command sequences for mathematical symbols was a mindless displacement activity for a soul in torment. But not enough – I went for a walk in the woods.

The television news in the next few days was like a series of snapshots of tumultuous life on the ever more sloping decks of the Titanic. Russian agitation in the Baltic region increased and America sent a thousand troops to replace the British contingent in Estonia. European NATO members complained that events in Britain were endangering their security and both the Netherlands and France increased their naval patrols in the English Channel. Spain threatened to expel the British ambassador in Madrid and increased its naval patrols around Gibraltar. The Republic of Ireland sent troops to its northern border and refused entry to British citizens fleeing by boat from the British mainland.

More days passed as the daily news bulletins ratcheted up my inner tension. Kate jetted off to London to report on the unfolding crisis from Ground Zero.

Jon's next lead article in the Thunderer made my heart sink. It reads like a briefing for a descent into hell.

•

The British public can rest assured that the government is doing all its power to stabilise and resolve the situation in the provincial inner cities and around the British borders. Now that we have formed a government of national unity, with myself as prime minister, we can get cracking on sorting out the problems with the energy and resolve that they will doubtless require. We have already begun to make progress on the most urgent problems.

Overnight curfews have now been imposed in the inner cities, including London, where riots have been breaking out regularly. Police and army personnel will work together to enforce the curfews, and drivers should expect vehicle road checks anywhere near an inner city.

Any businesses such as pubs and convenience stores that depend on evening or overnight trade in the inner cities will be required to cooperate with the operation of the curfews, which will include spot checks for patrons of the businesses and checks that the business staff are correctly documented. Since the government is imposing the curfews on a temporary basis during a state of emergency, it cannot accept liability for any damaging effects on those businesses and urges their owners to remember the national interest comes first.

Border checks in Northern Ireland on the crossing points to the Republic of Ireland will be made more rigorous, and the staff there will be reinforced with army personnel and armoured vehicles. The Irish government has called a halt to all cooperation with us and we must draw the consequences. We shall reinforce our naval deployments around Northern

Ireland to foil any attempts to get around the border controls by smuggling goods or people back and forth using small boats. If the Irish government continues its present policy of non-cooperation, we shall consider imposing a sea blockade around the entire island.

Border controls along eastern and southern England to regulate the flow of goods to and from the continent will not be relaxed until the European Union relaxes its border controls on those same goods. We want free and frictionless trade with the continent, but this must work both ways. The damage to the UK economy from these controls is serious, and will lead to substantial job losses in the near future if we cannot find a resolution, but we place the blame for the damage firmly on the EU side. We in Britain are renowned worldwide as champions of free trade whereas the EU is well known for imposing punitive tariffs on trade for political reasons, so we shall not be the ones to back down on this issue. On the contrary, we shall continue to escalate the pressure until the officials in Brussels who are orchestrating the economic carnage at last see sense.

Russian incursions into our airspace and our territorial waters have increased. We judge this to be an opportunistic response to our current problems and is being stepped up in order to gain intelligence that may later be used against us, and therefore we condemn any and all such intrusions in the strongest possible terms as acts of unprovoked aggression to which we reserve the right to respond with deadly force. We have authorised the pilots of Royal Air Force fighter jets to shoot down any Russian aircraft they intercept while flying near British territory at their own discretion. We have also authorised Royal Navy submarine commanders to torpedo without warning any Russian naval vessels they find straying

into British territorial waters. We will not pussyfoot with the Kremlin on these territorial incursions and demand that they cease forthwith.

As you see, the British government is acting with courage and resolve to tackle the issues that have been thrown onto our plate. We would ask all patriotic British citizens to stand firm behind us, united in solidarity as we face the slings and arrows of an angry fate. Together we can prevail, and build up the kingdom on these islands to such majestic heights as we have never seen before, to face the world as victors, to show generations yet to come that time has not dimmed the indomitable spirit of this island race. As Winston Churchill said when Britain's wartime destiny still hung in the balance, never, never, never give in.

•

This is not the boy I raised. What happened? I despair, I rent my garment and scatter ashes upon my head. I cancelled my subscription to the Thunderer and buried my head in my physics books, my face burning with shame.

•

I let Kate read these notes and she said there was way too much philosophy in them. Well, too bad, I retorted. She said she'd be happy to take over and finish the story.

Since the rest of the story is too awful, depressing, and tragic for me to contemplate writing with anything like the requisite authorial calm anyway, I said fine, do it. So she did. The result follows.

ACT 3

Kate

Arousal

Hi, I'm Kate, wife to John the father and stepmother to Jon the son. As I sat and read through the notes of both father and son, I could hardly believe how inadequate they are for any normal human reader. Jon's notes are sketchy and rough for the good reason that he was writing them under duress, but John's philosophical ramblings are self-indulgent beyond all decent limits.

Let's see if I can do better. As a journalist, I can at least hope to get the facts right and in the right proportion. As an American, I can adopt a little more distance on the Brexit nonsense that started the whole thing off. And as a woman I can humanise our young hero more effectively than his woolly-minded father managed to do. One little thing I'll do the same – I'll stick with British English, just for the sake of consistency (although my working language for CCN is of course American English).

But before I start on Jon, let me correct the outrageously poor impression you will have got of me from John's notes. He seems to regard me as some sort of free-spirited sex doll, eager to flaunt my body at any opportunity and betray my husband behind his back. Believe me, nothing could be further from the truth.

Like many Americans, I am a straight arrow about sex. I do it with people I care a lot about and I don't do it with anyone else. If no one around me objects, I like to go around naked, sure, but that has nothing to do with sex and much more to do with feeling free and in touch with the fresh air. My work

outfits are boringly conventional and never provocative. I can only regard it as sexist when a man blows this aspect of my personality out of all proportion. Let's just not mention my appearance again.

As for John the father, if you saw him in the flesh you would most likely not be impressed. I never found his body very sexy, but he was really smart and witty. He's pale and slightly flabby, not overweight but lacking in muscle tone, and his buzz-cut silver hair frames a lined and careworn face. Now his only son is gone he looks his age.

Jon the son was something else again. He was hot, with a warm and virile charm that reminded me of a young George Clooney. Unlike his father, he always dressed meticulously, in expensive tailored suits, and when his shirt was buttoned up he wore silk neckties with conservative colours and patterns. His shoes were of black leather in a classic Oxford design, worn with black socks, his dark hair was trimmed short and his chin was always smoothly shaved. He was tall and well proportioned, he was fit and well-muscled, and he had finely expressive hands with beautiful nails. In short, he looked like your classic movie hero stroke dream lover.

I first met Jon in the year 2000 when he was still a student and saw him regularly once or twice a year from then on. We always kept the spare room ready for him, just in case, and occasionally he came with a girlfriend, but none of them lasted until he met Clara. I've met her several times and she's very sweet and wonderfully polite. She was still pregnant at the funeral and I haven't seen her since, but of course I'm looking forward to meeting the girl I guess I should get used to calling my step-granddaughter.

•

To business. In late 2022, Jon the prime minister was faced with a perfect storm of crises that threatened to derail his national unity government completely. British inner cities were in lockdown but still threatened to explode into rioting and anarchy at any moment. Regular shipments of detainees were observed going to the camp on the Isle of Wight but there was a complete official embargo on news of what was going on there, and given the military presence no reporters had so far dared to try their luck.

The international scene was no better. Northern Ireland was beginning to look like a war zone, with tanks on the streets on both sides of the Irish border and violent protest marches in Belfast.

On Britain's other borders, traffic through the channel ports was moving so slowly that the tailbacks of freight trucks often stretched for miles and business leaders were furious at the losses they were racking up. The pound was sinking fast and the FTSE index was sinking faster, whereas the DAX index in Frankfurt was doing relatively well, still sinking but nowhere near as fast.

In America, President Newman sided with his Irish base and declared his solidarity with the Republic of Ireland in a pair of tweets that were quickly retweeted globally:

We support the Irish people and their government in their natural wish to see the island completely freed /
... from the royalists in Westminster and reunified under Dublin rule as an EU member state.

Only a few days passed before a group of Irish volunteers assembled in Philadelphia and pledged to fly to Dublin and offer their armed support in the struggle against the British Crown. A petition in support of the volunteers attracted over

a hundred thousand signatures and pledges to the fighting fund soon reached many millions of dollars. Seeing all this, President Newman confirmed his tweeted statement and signed an Executive Order committing the United States to support for Irish reunification.

Meanwhile a similar movement was gaining momentum in Spain for the forcible return of Gibraltar to Spanish rule. An armada of Spanish navy vessels assembled in the port city of Algeciras just five miles away across the Bay of Gibraltar and a few thousand Spanish troops formed up for battle at the land border. It looked serious for the Brits on the Rock.

To add to Jon's troubles, a Russian Bear spy plane flying over Scottish territorial waters was shot down by an RAF Typhoon fighter jet, with the loss of all the crew on board. The Kremlin threatened retaliation and warned that it would increase submarine patrols around British waters.

I interviewed Jon in London for CCN in late December. Here's the main part.

•

Kate: "This has been a distressing year both for you and for the British government, hasn't it?"

Jon: "You could say, that, though I prefer to put a positive spin on it and say it has just been the sort of turbulence we always expected from Brexit. It's our responsibility to put the best face we can on it and carry on regardless. There are plenty of underlying positives that in the long term will work to our advantage. All we have to do is hold the course until the storm is behind us and we can enjoy plain sailing again until we reach our destination."

"What would count for you as the end of the storm? Do you think you can hold on to Northern Ireland?"

“We will seek to hold on to Northern Ireland for just as long as the majority of the population there wants to be part of the United Kingdom. We appreciate that many of the former loyalists there are having new doubts and are tempted by the EU offer of additional development funding for the province, and we cannot do more than we have done to try to persuade them to stay, but so long as we can preserve a friendly relationship with the Dublin government we see no great cause for concern. We are happy to accommodate any Northerners who might wish to migrate to somewhere in the remainder of the UK.”

“That sounds like you’re giving up on Northern Ireland.”

“Not at all. We govern there at the invitation and pleasure of the inhabitants. If they want us to go, we go. The only alternative would be a war that would do more damage on both sides than could ever be justified by the benefits.”

“Okay, let’s move on to another problem. What can you do to hold on to Gibraltar?”

“As for Gibraltar, we caution the Spanish government not to try to resolve the crisis by force. We can deploy enough forces in defence of the Rock to render any military solution extremely expensive, and we see no merit in letting a shooting war break out between two NATO member states.”

“And Russia? What further consequences do you see from the downing of the Russian spy plane?”

“We hope the Russians will see sense. A Bear aircraft is large enough to hold a nuclear missile in its bomb bay, so of course we have to err on the side of caution and shoot it down if it flies too near our airspace. And if Russian submarines deploy in our waters we shall torpedo them without warning. We understand that the Russians would do the same if we sent a submarine into their coastal waters.”

“Turning now to economic matters, how can you persuade the European Union to ease up on its border controls?”

“We can’t. We have no leverage with the EU. We can only do our best to ensure that our regulatory compliance is as close to perfect as possible and that our customs procedures are as rigorous as the EU would wish, and after that it’s for them to see the benefits of free and frictionless trade. The EU is a sovereign organisation of member states, just as we are a sovereign state, and any deal we make can only be on the basis of mutual agreement. We’re doing our best to keep our side of the bargain and it’s up to them to keep theirs. Failure to do so damages both of our economies in terms of lost opportunities for profitable trade.”

“But isn’t there more you could do to allow resolution of the issues in dispute through the mediation of the European Court of Justice?”

“There’s no way we can accept any ECJ judgements as binding on us. We will never recognise the jurisdiction of ECJ and we’ve made it plain for several years now that this was not a question we had any intention of revisiting.”

“But the ECJ made judgements you accepted for about forty years, so what’s the sudden new problem there?”

“Our electorate voted for Brexit. They did not vote for a continuing legal jurisdiction over British trade disputes by a European court. That’s a red line for us – we will only accept judgements from British courts to resolve British disputes.”

“This position may seem unreasonably stubborn to many observers, so can you say more on why the ECJ is suddenly so out of favour?”

“Yes. British law has a different basis than continental European law. For many centuries now, we have evolved a body of common law based on precedents. The Europeans

have developed a system of originally Roman law based on principles. We work from precedents, they apply principles. We like what we have and we see no reason to change.”

“For international viewers, can you explain more exactly how UK law is based on precedents?”

“Well, I’m no lawyer but our judges look at previous judgements and try to resolve new disputes in a similar way. For example, our law for motor vehicles was developed on the basis of our law for horse-drawn carriages. The basic idea seems to be that if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

“And European law, Roman law?”

“Again, I’m no expert, but European law, like the law in the Roman Empire, is codified, so judges can simply look up crimes and punishments in the books and do what they say. We in Britain are unhappy with that because the judges are more or less free to write what they want in the books. We feel that leaves too much scope for political bias.”

“But their law seems to work quite smoothly in Europe. Would it be so hard to go along with it for trade disputes?”

“Well, yes it would. We are British and proud of it. Look, imagine Americans were asked to submit to the jurisdiction of a foreign court. Your public opinion and your president would never accept it. Bowing to any such judgement would be a national humiliation.”

“With all due respect to the United Kingdom, the United States of America is still a superpower, whereas the UK is a small country that it seems fair to say is struggling to stay afloat economically. Would it not be wise to eat humble pie?”

“Never! I am answerable to the great British public, and a true Englishman will never, never, never give in, to recall the words of the greatest Englishman of all time, Sir Winston Churchill.”

“I remember you used that quote once before and I took the time to look it up. Churchill went on to say, ‘except to convictions of honour and good sense’ – so isn’t it perhaps time now to listen to good sense?”

“Perhaps, but I’m not the judge of that. The British public will make its views known if they think it’s time to relent, but now all I hear is wild battle cries – Don’t give in! Do your duty and stick up two fingers to EU law! Stuff their bloody court! – and all I can do is represent that view as robustly as I can. Anything else would be political suicide.”

“With all due respect, you seem to be running scared of people who have been whipped into a patriotic frenzy by irresponsible tabloid headlines. As prime minister, shouldn’t you be acting as the voice of reason here? Can you really tell me the headline writers are the voices to follow?”

“The headline writers have tapped into a vein of popular sentiment that it would be crazy for me to ignore. It’s my job to carry the people behind government policy, and if that’s impossible, then it’s my duty to adapt that policy until the people are willing to fall in line behind it. The will of the people is something it can often be hard to define, but here it seems loud and clear. Either I ride it with as much spirit as I can muster or it tramples me down.”

“Even if it means war with Spain and Russia?”

“Especially if it means risking war with Spain and Russia. If I fail to show leadership now, some mad demagogue will quite possibly emerge and take over by force. I hold the line for our traditions, our establishment, and our democracy. If I relent, it could all come tumbling down.”

“That’s a tremendous burden. Getting more personal now, do you think you can survive all these crises? Is it hard on you to ride the tiger like this?”

“It takes a personal toll, sure. But I have to say it’s exciting to be the captain on the bridge as we ride out a storm of historic magnitude. If we get through it, I’ll be a hero. And if not, as Churchill also once said, I’ll probably be strung up by an angry mob on the nearest lamppost.”

“Whoa! That’s a hard line to follow. Thanks, Jon.”

•

During this interview, Jon had been as relentlessly charming as usual. We had spoken in a press room in the hallowed chambers of the Palace of Westminster, which as Jon said in his notes is a run-down Victorian pile in desperate need of renovation. When I asked him about this, he said he would personally vote to build a new, more modern and practical parliamentary building, but many of his colleagues said they wouldn’t be seen dead in any such monstrosity, so he let the issue go and tried to make the best of it.

Jon was a sensitive and thoughtful man, and during the interview I sensed some irony in his tone and a few doubts behind his expressed convictions. But the irony never held him back – on the contrary, it seemed to push him to manic exaggeration, to an almost demonic determination to press on regardless, come what may. Any doubts he may have had were well concealed, and he would never have admitted to them in the formal frame of an interview.

The strange thing about Jon was that he never voluntarily revealed his inner thoughts to me at all. As a stepmother – and a young and uninhibited one too – I was too far away from the ideal he doubtless still treasured of his real mother Carol. This was quite right, of course, and I never had the ability or the desire to play that role, but I had hoped I could have offered him a just little more moral support in life. Later he outgrew

that, of course. For the last few years he had his wife Clara, who took over that role so completely there was no room for us oldsters at all.

Let me close this section with an anecdote. Years earlier, Jon had emerged from our guest room waving what looked like a paperback novel. “Albion aroused is a fearsome and terrible beast!” he declaimed grandly, for all the world like a ham Shakespearian actor in the classic tradition. I was running from bedroom to bathroom at the time and I thought he was using the phrase to wave away my state of undress, but now I see it as a prophetic prefiguration of his political career.

Albion aroused, as Jon found out, was a beast.

Fortress

The American media perspective on what they began to call Fortress UK was ambiguous. Media figures who had backed Donald Trump in his earlier days were generally robustly in support of the bold British assertion of national sovereignty, tradition and territorial integrity. More progressive voices saw the writing on the wall and expressed despair at the poverty of imagination in the British version of independence, not to mention outrage at the deterioration of respect for human rights. None of them said America should back Britain with anything more than words.

My talks with Jon over the years convinced me that he understood why “the special relationship” meant much more to Britain than to America. The United States is a nation of immigrants from all over the world, most of them from Europe, and the group claiming British ties is just one among many. More pointedly, the original Thirteen States had to fight a war against the armed might of the British Empire to win their independence and their freedom from an aloof king and his hated taxes.

What Jon seems not to have understood is that his idea of forming an Anglo-American Alliance to unite America with Britain and the former “white” Dominions was a non-starter. Apart from the obvious racist undertones, the alliance would suggest a reborn and purified empire with Britain in the senior position. No true American would accept an alliance with Britain on any other terms than that Britain was a lesser partner, in no way privileged above Canada or Australia. The

problem was the Crown. So long as Britain was a monarchy, untouched by the forces that had swept aside such nonsense in the rest of the enlightened world, it was a pariah state as far as union with America was concerned.

The Irish question was an obvious example to show why Americans were unable to side with Fortress UK. The Irish community in America was at least as beloved as the groups claiming descent from English or Scottish ancestors, and the Irish had given America some of its greatest presidents, yet Jon's government had still failed to endorse the reunification of the people of Ireland under the government in Dublin. It looked like an evil shadow of previous colonial wars, where the British Crown asserted an absolute right to prevail over all opposition. No American could go for that.

The spat over Gibraltar was similar. It recalled troubled U.S. memories of the Falklands war of 1982, when British prime minister Margaret Thatcher had won the title of "Iron Lady" for beating the Argentinian generals to retain control of the tiny islands offshore from Argentina. Americans saw this as a fight to rid the world of old colonial dependencies, and they only relented when it became obvious first that the British would win and second that the islanders had been so thoroughly anglicised that their democratic wishes were too clear to be ignored. In both cases it would have been cheaper and easier all round to repatriate the anglicised inhabitants to the mother country and give up the patch of land.

Giving up territories is no easy matter, as both Ireland and Gibraltar show only too well. Americans would fight for the Pacific island of Guam or for Alaska if it came to that. But if a friendly ally like Japan wanted Guam and if Alaskans felt inclined to join Canada, Americans would feel less aggrieved than Brits seem to feel over Ireland or Gibraltar.

Jon was smart enough to see all this. His problem as a senior politician was that he was committed to serving the British establishment, come what may. After generations of retreat from empire, the British people seemed to have had enough. “Here and no further,” they seemed to say, “Not another step backwards, stand and fight!” As their elected representative, Jon obviously felt he could do no other than to fight on their behalf.

Americans tend to respect blunt truths and brute force over endless diplomacy and tactical retreats. But a managed retreat that leaves good will intact is better than a bloody war – as the generations of British politicians who managed the retreat from empire saw clearly. Frankly, I had expected Jon to show similar guile when tackling the issues of Ireland or Gibraltar. Instead, he seems to have tried to appease the worst instincts of his base.

All this is fine and dandy for commentators who can sit back and debate the pros and cons. But the human rights abuses on the Isle of Wight were something else. Americans saw a reprise of the whole Guantanamo Bay story and many of them were incensed. I took up this issue with Jon in our next interview, held in the spring of 2023.

•

Kate: “Many people around the world are worried about the lack of news from your government about the humanitarian situation in the detention facility you established on the Isle of Wight. Is there any more you can say about that?”

Jon: “Not much, I’m afraid. We agreed that our policy would be to release as little information as possible to the news media until we had established a situation where the purpose of the action was in sight of being accomplished, and that

situation is still far from visible, so I'm going to have to stonewall on this line of questioning. All I can say is that we are aware of the intense interest in this question around the world, as you so rightly say, and that we firmly intend to explain as much as we can as soon as we can."

"You must understand that people have urgent questions about actual or possible human rights abuses that can't wait until your government in its wisdom decides that things have calmed down far enough for it to seem safe to release an official statement. We need answers now."

"Indeed, we understand that. But you can rest assured that we have no wish to damage our worldwide reputation for respecting and advancing human rights by any ill-considered actions or policies regarding the detention facility. We are doing everything in our power to ensure that once the action is over and the facts are clear for all to see, there is no stain remaining on our moral reputation."

"Forgive me, but I must drill down here. It sounds like you're saying you want to clean up the camp and bury all the evidence before you let the press in. How can you counter that perception?"

"We can only counsel patience. We're only too aware that our actions to enforce public order and respect for the law are controversial and indeed have given rise to sensational and entirely unwarranted speculations, but we are clear in our purpose and steadfast in our intent to deliver on it in full, in accordance with the pact we have made with the British electorate. Our aim, as I said, is to enforce law and order in the UK, no more and no less."

"Okay, let me back off a little. Why did you choose to set up a camp on the Isle of Wight when you must have known it would attract sensational historical comparisons?"

“We did so because its island status offers a high level of security that we would be unable to achieve so easily on the mainland. Like Britain as a whole compared with Europe, the Isle of Wight is a natural fortress that can easily be isolated completely from the mainland in order to contain any of its inhabitants whom we deem it advisable to keep separate from the rest. In the case of Great Britain as a whole, we have no ambition to maintain total isolation, of course, but we can take advantage of our island status in another way by taking control of its borders to keep out any people we deem to be undesirable. Whereas in the case of the Isle of Wight, we can concentrate the troublemakers and the undesirables there in order to lighten the burden of the security forces on the mainland, and especially those in the inner cities.”

“You may feel this is unduly sceptical, but was one reason perhaps that you could impose a media blackout and give yourselves more freedom to punish people you regarded as offenders more severely?”

“That was naturally a consideration, but not the primary one. Law and order come first, and enforcing them requires methods that may not always meet with the instant approval of – forgive me – self-appointed moral apostles in the media. As I think Otto von Bismarck once said, if you like sausages don’t go sightseeing in a sausage factory!”

“We sincerely hope the Isle of Wight hasn’t been turned into a sausage factory. But seriously, the point of critical journalism, as I think was demonstrated during the Trump presidency, is to hold politicians to account and prevent abuses of power – if possible before they happen and not after the atrocities have already been committed. When we see how you’ve set up the Isle of Wight camp we naturally think of Guantanamo Bay. Are we wrong?”

“Not at all. That’s a natural concern to have. However, I can allay it quite easily. The Isle of Wight is still part of the United Kingdom, and as such our law still applies there. We are not free to do just as we like, and once the action is over all the security and other personnel who served there will be held accountable for their actions in the usual way.”

“But haven’t you applied martial law on the island? And doesn’t that limit powers of appeal after the event?”

“Well, there are legal complications, of course, and I can’t discuss them now for obvious reasons, even disregarding the fact that I’m not expert enough to do so. But before you try to follow that trail any further I think it’s worth reminding you that the troublemakers we’re relocating to the island are people who have effectively declared war on the British state. We are faced with a national emergency and engaged in a struggle for the survival of all we hold dear, and pausing at this moment to worry about due process and so on is really unhelpful. We need to get on with the job with all the energy we can muster and clean up the mess afterwards.”

“Forgive me again, but this is precisely the point I made with the Trump presidency. We need to have at least some of the facts before the atrocities are committed, if possible, not when it’s too late and the island has been sanitised.”

“There I must correct you for going too far. You talk of atrocities as if they were already happening, but they are not. We are conducting ourselves in accordance with the highest standards of military discipline to eliminate the danger posed by a large number of enemies of the state, and moreover doing so at a time when the resources at our disposal are extremely limited, as I’m sure you know, as a result of the imposition of a partial but damaging blockade of our trade with EU member states by an absurdly excessive regard for pettifoggery

regulations on the part of border officials who seem to have no idea of the havoc they're causing within our national economy. When at the same time we face security challenges in Ireland and Gibraltar – as well as the looming threat of a shooting war with Russia – you can perhaps see we need to be robust about due process on the island.”

“A neutral observer, like the many Americans who look here with concerned sympathy, might conclude that British intransigence is responsible for all these crises and that the whole problem the island camp is designed to address is a further symptom of the economic and political self-harm caused by Brexit. How do you respond to that charge?”

“With weary denial. Brexit, as I have said many times over the years, was a free choice by a sovereign people to change the nature of their economic and political relationship with their European neighbours. It has nothing to do with the arbitrary imposition of a damaging blockade on much of our trade with the continent or with the confusion that has emerged among UK citizens in Northern Ireland about what sort of political future they want or with Spanish grievances over Gibraltar or with Russian aggression at the borders of British territory. Brexit was Brexit, a simple act of national self-determination, whose consequences I am continuing to deliver as intended.”

“President Newman recently said Brexit was the dumbest idea since the German invasion of Russia in 1941. It ruined a flourishing trading relationship, turned a powerful group of potential friends into bitter enemies, was based on a totally erroneous and divisive view of the world, was impossible to bring to a good conclusion without a level of support that was nowhere in sight, and led to the utter destruction of the state that started it. Any comments?”

“President Newman has his own opinions, and this one, if indeed it has been correctly reported, on which I have my doubts, is reprehensible. I reject and detest the comparison utterly. I can only hope he was merely reporting a sick joke.”

“Perhaps, but is there perhaps a grain of truth in the five parallels he listed?”

“None whatever. The British people are not Nazis. End of story, end of interview. I take offence at your raising the idea at all and would ask that you don’t publish that question.”

•

I didn’t publish that question at the time but I think it needs to be on the record now. I think Jon was in denial about the level of detestation many British citizens felt for some of the foreigners who lived in the UK. Later revelations about the crimes against humanity perpetrated in the camp on the Isle of Wight certainly don’t support the view that British citizens were – or are – any nicer than citizens in Germany when the chips are down and the going gets tough. But I don’t want to spoil my timeline by getting into all that now.

What does make sense at this stage is to outline the press reports on what was going in the Isle of Wight camp. They reveal candidly how much was known and how much effort the authorities put into their media blackout. Let’s start with the more basic stuff.

Records of sea ferry journeys from Poole, Southampton, and Portsmouth reveal that many thousands of people took a one-way journey to the island. The figures quoted in the press were certainly underestimates, since they fail to include ferries from other south coast ports and also fail to account fully for all the native islanders being shipped off the island, who would reduce the net total of one-way passages. More importantly,

any detainees who were shipped in naval vessels or flown in military transport weren't counted, and to judge by the air and sea traffic it seems possible, indeed quite likely, that most of the detainees went in that way.

As for provisions that went to the island, again excluding the military transports, the best guess is that nowhere near enough food and water and so on went in to meet the needs of so many thousands of detainees. Observers tracked large quantities of building materials going to the island of the sort you'd need to build a prison camp, airfield runways, a few roads and so on, but images from satellites in Earth orbit really didn't reveal much.

Visual sightings of the island from the mainland revealed almost nothing of interest, naturally, and sightings from sea or air platforms were prevented by the naval patrols around the island. Several people made efforts to fly drones over the island, but all the drones were shot down well before they reached the shoreline. The lockdown of the island was as secure as any that any observer had seen before.

Reports from the inner cities the detainees were taken from show that the great majority of them were Muslim, and most of those apparently extremist or fundamentalist Islamists, while the rest were a mixture of ideological radicals, some of them from various ethnic minorities and some of them native or white activists of various kinds, including extremists from the right and left wings, bloggers and so on, but no one is sure. By all accounts these people were apprehended robustly, to use the current euphemism, by police officers or army squads and driven off in sealed trucks.

Estimates of the scale of the military manpower involved suggested a huge undertaking by British standards. So many soldiers were taken from other duties that only token forces

remained for the usual tasks, or at least the more essential of them, such as manning the border in Northern Ireland (where all the available armoured vehicles were deployed to make up in firepower what they lacked in manpower) and changing the guard at Buckingham Palace.

Secrecy was maintained by harsh measures. Several whistle blowers who offended against the Official Secrets Acts were “disappeared” to the island and never seen again. This had a chilling effect on others, as you can guess.

Fortress UK still had a way to go before the final descent of the titanic wreck into the abyss, but it was already looking doomed.

Terror

The bomb went off at a time when the British economy was already in poor shape. The Channel Tunnel was an obvious target for a terrorist bomb and security there was tight, but a well-planned attack was always possible.

The truck (or trucks – no one can be sure) must have contained at least forty tons of high explosive. The effect was like an earthquake – an RAF bombing expert said it was like the effect of several simultaneous direct hits by the “Grand Slam” bombs the RAF dropped in 1945 to demolish the last massive concrete fortifications and bunkers built in Europe during the Third Reich. The effect was catastrophic – the Channel Tunnel collapsed and flooded in seconds. Everyone in the tunnel was killed.

The attack raised the siege mentality in Britain by several notches. No one was surprised when Islamist terrorists in a Mideast network claimed responsibility, but no one knew for sure whether they really did it and conspiracy theories about an inside job done with a nod and a wink from EU customs officials abounded in the British tabloid newspapers. This was a story they could milk for a whole summer long, and they did, relentlessly.

I followed Jon’s answers in parliament, as televised by the BBC, with interest but was left none the wiser. Jon had a knack of speaking eloquently from the front bench without revealing anything about his real opinions or feelings. I guess this is a required skill for parliamentarians, but to witness someone you know doing it is depressing.

The practical outcome of the bomb in the short term was a lot of rhetoric about cracking down on extremism and so on, with renewed media pressure for more drastic action, and a general sense that the siege of the last bastion of the British Empire was for real. In the longer term, it made trade even more difficult, made many prices rise further, raised inflation, and caused the pound to sink yet further. It was now below parity with the dollar, let alone the euro, and financiers began to bet against a recovery of sterling.

In Northern Ireland the balance of forces shifted visibly in favour of the republicans as U.S. volunteers began to take up positions along the border and as the weakness in the British line began to show. A line of British tanks without a mob of squaddies to fill the big gaps between them did not look like an impregnable defence, and the hotheads on the southern side began to boast about simply storming the border.

Gibraltar was now in a real state of siege. Supplies were still getting in by sea and air, but Spanish forces looked ready and able to cut the lines at will, which would force the Brits to start a major shooting war to keep the Rock. Jon vented patriotic bluster in parliament but it was clear to all that the chance of British victory in a Falklands-style war were slim. France had already declared its solidarity with Spain and pledged to contribute as many forces as necessary to deter a British invasion fleet.

Then there were the Russians. The prize for the Russian submarines was tracking and neutralising the British Trident submarines. If the Russian subs could lurk undetected near the Firth of Clyde, which led to the Faslane naval base where the Trident boats were bunkered, they could shadow them and be ready to take them out instantly if the state of crisis were to escalate to war. The cat and mouse game with subs had been

going on for decades and both sides knew the score. But the stakes were high, all the way to nuclear war. (I'm indebted again to my defence expert colleague at CCN for beefing up my notes here.)

Returning to Jon, a nationwide terror alert had continued all summer long and the British troops who could be spared to help maintain it were overworked and exhausted, so Jon announced an immediate return to conscription. All British young men – and women too – who were unemployed or in temporary or zero-hours work and all college and university students were required to present themselves to draft boards. Jon defended the action in a speech, which was transcribed in the Thunderer as follows.

•

All of us in Britain are indebted to our brave young men and women in uniform. Their courage and dedication to duty keep us safe and secure as we go about our daily lives. In the last year, we have steadily increased the work they have to do without at the same time increasing their numbers, until now we must admit the game is up. We need more troops.

This country has a long and honourable history of asking its young men and women to do their duty when the times demand service and sacrifice. Today these times are upon us again, and it is my solemn duty to ask all those who are able to do so to step up and do what needs to be done with as much dutiful obedience and good cheer as they can muster. When the current crisis is over and easier times return, all those who have stepped up and done their bit will be able to rest assured that a grateful nation will be sure to remember their courage and sacrifice and garland them with honours. Until that day, duty calls.

Before I outline the mechanics of the conscription, let me remind you of the tasks we as a nation face in the troubled times we live in. You all remember vividly the bombing of the Channel Tunnel and we all know it was perpetrated by a group of terrorists who are determined to make life difficult for us. Well, we are made of sterner stuff than they seem to think. We will respond to their outrages with steady resolve and firm discipline, and we will defeat them.

Another task that faces us in our hour of trial is to resolve the Northern Irish question, peacefully if possible but by force if necessary. Foreign adventurers of Irish descent have flown into the Republic of Ireland to stir up further trouble on the border, and we cannot be expected to take this lying down. We must reinforce our presence in Northern Ireland and neutralise the threat that lurks across the border. For this task we need several thousand extra personnel, whom we can only find within our armed forces if we make economies in our deployments elsewhere.

I need hardly remind you that we are experiencing tensions with Spain and Russia. Managing these tensions demands the highest level of skill and professionalism our servicemen and women can muster, and these are not duties a conscript force can accomplish, but every extra help behind the front lines frees up more people within the armed forces to take a more active role at the sharp end. We believe we can safely let the professionals do the fighting, but to do so, we must be ready to do all we can to help them.

Finally, I come to the most challenging task of all, because it is new, it is onerous, and it is a dirty job we dare not leave undone. That task is to operate our new detention facility on the Isle of Wight. There we are holding all the troublemakers and dissidents and subversives and potential terrorists until we

can process them safely, either to return them to civil society or to administer justice in accordance with the full rigours of the law. This is no task for softies and we need the best. We have already scoured our police and prison services for suitable men to help out, but we need more. Anyone drafted to this duty will serve in the knowledge that however unpleasant the work, once they have done it they will never need to prove their patriotism again. The details of their duty will perforce remain secret but its importance will not, so they will be remembered no less as heroes than those who can boast in all candour about their exploits.

As you can see, we face challenges. But we can rise to meet them and emerge strengthened by the ordeal, ready to face the future with new vigour and new confidence. First and foremost, what we need is for a few thousand tough young men and women to do what has to be done.

The hardest jobs will be reserved for strongest and fittest among the new recruits. The work will be physically hard and emotionally challenging. It will involve steely resolve and iron discipline, under conditions that may sometimes be brutal. We need the roughest and toughest men and women we can find, so long as they can take a punishing workload. For these jobs, paper qualifications mean nothing. We have an emergency to master and are happy to offer this opportunity to any rough diamonds who have fallen through the cracks in the civilian job markets of the past.

We are also recruiting college and university students for assignment to more clerical work associated with the state of emergency. This will involve planning and administration at many levels, and many students will find the work both interesting and of practical utility in terms of skills acquired and experience accumulated. I am aware that many students find

their college or university courses of study too academic and too remote from the practical concerns of the modern working environment. That's why I'm sure that in national service they will be happy to take the opportunity to correct those deficits in terms of their own personal preparation for later life. Any students who meet the demands of their new employment to a satisfactory level will be offered a full grant to pursue their chosen course of study at a British college or university once the state of emergency is over.

Once we have the manpower in our emergency services, I am convinced we can master the challenges that confront us. We will face the future more united than before as a nation forged in the furnace of conflict and ready for any new fight. A nation in distress will have become a force to be reckoned with, thanks to your service.

•

As a journalist used to political rhetoric I was bemused by this one. It wasn't just the usual claptrap – this was an admission that Britain had sunk far below the level where civil society kept a calm face and business went on as usual. I was worried. If I were younger, I think I'd have responded to the sense of crisis and gone along with the draft. But what lay behind all that “rough and tough” stuff?

Jon had refused to grant me an interview since the abrupt end to our year-end talk about the Isle of Wight camp, when I mentioned President Newman's comparison of Brexit with the German invasion of Russia in 1941. But this speech was an occasion too ripe to miss, so I tried again. I was surprised when he granted me another go. Here's the relevant part.

•

Kate: “In your big speech about reintroducing the draft, you said the recruiting boards were looking for the roughest and toughest young recruits for punishing duties on the Isle of Wight. Can you explain what sort of work it is that demands such an unusual recruiting profile?”

Jon: “Yes, it was a collective cabinet decision that we should be candid about the nature of the work. We chose to do so after we had received a briefing from a serving officer on conditions now and in future in Camp Chrysalis, as we’ve called it.”

“Chrysalis, you mean like the insect shells?”

“Yes, the idea is that the new Britain will emerge like a butterfly from its present state, once the camp has done its work and enabled us to shed the dross that held us back.”

“Dross – you mean the people in the camp.”

“I mean the troublemakers and terrorists. We are beyond the stage where we wish to hide behind a fig leaf of political correctness about them. They are the dross of our society, people who have wilfully failed to make the grade as regular citizens, and the sooner we’re rid of them the better.”

“But still, how do conditions in Camp Chrysalis make it so different from any other detention camp?”

“Well, as I said in my speech, conditions there will be brutal and dangerous, and we need guards there who can follow orders with maximum prejudice, if you know that phrase.”

“I recall it from a movie. You mean kill people, right?”

“The camp will be operating under martial law, and the sentence for the some of the offences we expect to find some inmates guilty of is death by firing squad – so yes, some of the guards will be involved in execution duties. That requires a certain mind-set that only the roughest and toughest young people are likely to possess. I know this sounds terrible, but

this is the point. Anyone who feels squeamish about such duties will have no place in the camp.”

“Aren’t you worried about human rights advocates finding your methods here rather brutal?”

“Yes, precisely. That’s why we imposed a media blackout on all the operational details of the activities in the camp. As I said in our last interview, if you like sausages – and so on.”

“I can’t be alone in feeling shocked and appalled at this way of administering justice. Is there no easier way?”

“Look, we face a national emergency caused in part by the fact that our society has been riddled with people who don’t play the game, who don’t fit in and refuse even to try. That is quite simply unacceptable. If they don’t like us or want to live as we do, with our political arrangements and so on, we don’t like them and we’ll do our best to get rid of them. If we need to declare them enemies of the state and shoot them, so be it. But before you protest, we are a civilised nation and we don’t just shoot people wilfully, for no good reason. We impose the strictest military law, with no exceptions, so that afterwards we can say it was all done by the book, where the book in this case is the latest edition of the army manual of King’s Regulations governing discipline.”

“I’m baffled. Does that allow you to shoot British civilians without the ceremony of a civil court and a jury and so on? What about, I don’t know, cruel and unusual punishment?”

“There’s nothing cruel and unusual about death by firing squad. Quick, clean, simple – and backed up with precedents as far back as there have been rifles to shoot people with.”

“But even enemy combatants still have basic human rights, like the right to life, don’t they?”

“Well, no, I think our experience around the world with terrorists shows we have to go beyond that sort of thinking.

This is a matter of survival in face of an unprecedented threat from people who simply don't think in terms of categories like the right to life or due process."

"This is not the idealistic young parliamentarian I used to interview in earlier times. Are you not shocked at your own casual attitude to killing?"

"Again, not to hide behind political correctness, no. We face enemies, so we shoot them if we can. Is that shocking? What about if I press the nuclear button – which I could do in theory this afternoon, by the way – and condemn several million people in Russia to death by nuclear blast, radioactive fallout, and radiation poisoning? Would that be better? Yet it goes with the job of being prime minister. I have to be cool in face of such possibilities."

"But this is surely different. You're shooting people up close, one by one, coldly, for political reasons."

"That's why we need tough guards, who are most likely to be people who've been hardened by bitter experience in rough environments. We need people who have no qualms about pushing back against violence from strong men."

"I don't think I'll be alone in finding it utterly shocking that a prime minister of a civilised nation should have sunk to this. How can you even think that way?"

"Ask any war leader. Ask Winston Churchill why when he was home secretary back in 1911 he ordered in the army to get rid of a bunch of Latvian anarchists who were holed up in a house in Sidney Street in London. When the house caught fire, he held the troops back and said let the anarchists burn to death. That's the right spirit, I'd say, when you're faced with a state of national emergency – and it's precisely the reason why I think we need tough and hardened conscripts in the camp. They need to follow such procedures without protest."

“Now it’s my turn to end the interview. I need to go outside and retch, if that’s okay with you.”

“Sorry to have upset you.”

•

I was really shaken that someone I knew – my stepson, for God’s sake! – should say the things he did, or even for a moment think that way. Perhaps that just shows I’d be a useless prime minister. I’d never have the balls to press that nuclear button.

Jon’s secretary called me an hour later and asked me not to publish that part of the interview. I made the cowardly choice and complied. Now it needs to be made public.

To end on a lighter note, the next marker to go under on the side of the Titanic was a news announcement just after our interview that two big Japanese car makers had decided to pull out of the UK and relocate their operations in central Europe. That was a few more billion pounds wiped off the British gross domestic product.

Firestorm

Early in 2024, smoke was seen rising from several tall new chimneys on the Isle of Wight. A sick joke went around on social media about the inmates of Camp Chrysalis enjoying a seaside holiday in Auschwitz-on-Sea – toasty down there in the sun! – until the landlord turned the heating up too high in the guest room and burnt the toast.

As spring returned to the Irish countryside and freshened up the shades of green, thoughts turned anew to settling the Irish question once and for all. The British line north of the border looked less sparse, thanks to conscription, but the southern line looked even busier, thanks to an agitated mob of Irish Americans among the natives. The Americans were quite fearsomely armed with assault rifles and bazookas and so on, and were ready to surge ahead and take their chances with the Challenger main battle tanks and Warrior armoured personnel carriers in the British line.

President Newman broke the stand-off. He signed a deal with the Irish taoiseach (prime minister) to station a squadron of U.S. Army Apache helicopters at the Casement air base near Dublin. The Irish Air Corps was based there, but it was a sleepy little outfit equipped only for coastguard and liaison duties. With Apache gunships on the base, suddenly there was a tank-killer capability in town that neutralised the British assets north of the border. Newman was sending a clear message to Jon and his cabinet colleagues in Westminster.

Jon got the message. His government did not rely on the Democratic Unionist Party of Protestant hardliners to vote

with his Conservatives in parliament and he gently informed them that he was inclined to hand over Northern Ireland to the Irish Republic in return for a guarantee of fair treatment for the Protestant majority in the north. Under duress, the DUP leaders agreed not to undermine the deal and formal talks were opened with the Irish government to hammer out a treaty and a timetable for reunification.

As soon as the talks were scheduled, the president of the European Union in Brussels applauded the move and said a wise next move would be a similar deal for Gibraltar. But for Jon and his patriotic colleagues in Westminster that was a step too far. Northern Ireland they gave up under American pressure, but the motherland would never forgive them for giving away her precious jewel in the Mediterranean to the garlic-eating Spaniards!

Even with the help of my CCN colleagues, I didn't follow all the details here, but the gist was clear enough. Jon let his admirals send a naval task force including the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth to Gibraltar and then France sent its aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle to the area. The British ship carried American F-35B fighter jets, but it only had 12 of them and they were jump-jet variants with reduced payload capability, while the French ship carried 24 Dassault Rafale fighter jets, which were capable warplanes.

Again, President Newman broke the stand-off. He sent the new American supercarrier USS Gerald R. Ford to the Med. This big boy carried more than 75 aircraft, including large numbers of F-35C fighters, with full capability because they were built for cats and traps (don't ask – I'm just repeating what I was told) and Super Hornet strike aircraft. He warned that if either side started shooting he'd join in, and reminded everyone that they were NATO partners, dammit.

Jon and his team were stopped. The Gibraltarians were under siege but they were gung-ho and said they were ready to hold out to the bitter end. The British media were spoiling for a fight too, but Jon could see there was no way. Without the Americans on his side he couldn't do a thing.

I can guess that President Newman didn't want to alienate his Latino voters. Unlike Ronald Reagan in 1982, who went along with Maggie Thatcher's reoccupation of the Falkland Islands, Newman didn't have a cold war with the Soviets to worry about. He also didn't care too much about his navy's preference for a British presence at Gibraltar to guarantee their access to the Med in a crisis. Some Pentagon heads said the Europeans might try to stay neutral in a showdown with Russia so as not to risk their winter gas supplies. Newman was having none of it – he was pretty sure he could deal with Spain. At least that's my reading.

There were only about 35,000 people living in Gibraltar. Jon said in parliament that it would be cheaper to fly them all back to the UK and pay them for a year while they settled in than it would be to fight with Spain over their rights. The defence secretary said the armed forces were overstretched already but would do their duty if asked to do so. Joe Steel, for the opposition, said that if it came to a handover the people of Gibraltar would probably be better off staying in Spain and enjoying the warm sun and EU welfare benefits until they could retire alongside all the other Brits in Spain than they would be living in a UK under siege.

The parliamentary debate was long and heated. Finally, the house decided to hold a free vote (which meant members were not “whipped” by their parties, to recall Jon's comment in his notes) on whether to give Gibraltar back to Spain. The result was a narrow majority in favour of giving it back.

I think what swung the vote was the realisation that things on the home front were looking dire. As Jon told the house, the first priority had to be to pacify the inner cities and stabilise the economy. Everything else was a distraction that only delayed the “renaissance” (his word) and compounded the damage being done every day by the chaos. He guessed that Britain needed a year to get back on its feet and a decade to get fit again.

In the summer break, Jon published another article in the *Thunderer*. This one was controversial, as you’ll see.

•

Britain is battered and bruised. The economic consequences of Brexit plus the rioting in the inner cities, caused in large part by ethnic tensions, have weakened the old bulldog and loosened its grip. We have had to give up both Northern Ireland and Gibraltar, and these losses grieve me, as they must grieve all patriotic subjects of our kingdom.

The only consolation is that the more we concentrate our energies and our attention, the faster we can be cured of the afflictions that weaken us. Those afflictions are twofold. The first is the economic predicament we face as a result of the intransigence of the European Union in refusing to make the concessions we need regarding their arbitrary imposition of border controls that hinder the free flow of traded goods. These unnecessary controls will cost Britain several billion pounds in lost trading opportunities this year alone, and are being imposed for the sole reason that certain EU member states do not trust us to impose the customs and compliance checks that EU regulations prescribe. The implied suggestion that British traders are unable – or even worse, unwilling – to identify and banish any cheats and crooks among their ranks is

frankly outrageous, and I have said as much in plain words to my European counterparts. But the pain persists, and will persist until the cause is treated.

The second affliction from which we suffer is, I believe, the ultimate cause of the economic pain we must endure at the hands of our European neighbours. This affliction is the continued existence within our national community of people who fail to fit in. The reasons for their failure are many and varied, and this is a complex and extremely delicate issue, but let no one say it is intractable.

Under my leadership, we have made a bold and decisive start in tackling the issue of removing such people from our midst once and for all. Our security services have performed heroic services in identifying and monitoring anyone who for any reason comes under suspicion, and as a result we have a long and growing list of people against whom the case for removal is substantial and irrefutable. Over the years we have made prudential investments in our security services to equip them with the best tools, and above all computer tools, that money can buy. This investment has paid off handsomely in their preparation of the list of people I mentioned. That list has enabled us to act more swiftly and more confidently than anyone would have thought possible a few years ago to find the traitors and troublemakers among us and arrest them.

These detainees are being held on the Isle of Wight in a secure facility where they can be held, tried, sentenced, and punished in one fast, seamless, and efficient workflow. For obvious reasons, this workflow is running outside the public gaze, and will continue to do so for as long as necessary, but I can assure any potential critics that all applicable rules and regulations are being followed to the letter and all actions are being logged meticulously so that in due course a full and fair

accounting can be given to the public of what we have done on their behalf and of what extra measures we have taken to ensure that the entire operation ran as transparently as the nature of the process allowed. We have done all we can to ensure that history will judge us kindly and that no aggrieved parties will be find occasion to change that judgement.

It would be improper for me to go into details regarding the mechanics of the operation but I will say a few words on whom we have chosen as the targets of our attention in the sweep. We agreed in secret session that the strategic risk to the state was greatest in the long term from organised and fanatical Islamists who regard themselves as working above and beyond any national state to establish a global caliphate for believers. We judged that such people were not criminals but enemy combatants to be dealt with according to military law, and we acted on that judgement.

Before I came into office, I took the trouble to study the background of Islamist beliefs and values in comparison with the beliefs and values that have emerged in western society. I can honestly say I was left in no doubt that the danger the Islamists represent is both real and of existential magnitude. You can take it from me that our deepest values and beliefs are under threat, not today or next year perhaps but certainly in the course of this century. And I for one do not want our descendants to look back and say we lived in the end times for tolerance and reason and an optimistic faith in the human potential for doing great good in this universe. I want them to say I saw the danger and acted before it was too late.

Britain is not the only state to be the target of this evil threat. Many states in Europe have large Muslim minorities and hence harbour a potential breeding ground for extremist perversions of their faith to take root and fester in darkness. In the end,

people must rise up and act across Europe. My small part in this historic drama was to do what needed to be done here in Britain. I trust that others will study our example and draw the hard but necessary conclusions. In this way, Brexit Britain, in its economically bloodied but politically unbowed condition, can still serve as a beacon and an inspiration for others.

Historic tasks are not always easy or pleasant. The task I have taken on is exceptionally hard. But I am convinced that generations to come will judge me to have acted correctly, so far as this was possible in our United Kingdom.

•

As you'd expect, Jon suffered a firestorm of criticism and condemnation for that one. The media world divided half and half, with some faintly praising Jon for having stated a few home truths – and then diluting his truths for their public – and others abominating his vile bigotry and rank prejudice. Offended parliamentarians got together and drafted a vote of no confidence in the government, but after a brisk three-line whipping the Conservative members were cowed into voting it down. Jon remained unrepentant.

In the following weeks, several huge riots broke out in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, and other cities. All of the rioters protested against rising prices, static wages, and discrimination against Muslims, who had obviously been targeted in the detainment sweeps that “disappeared” many hundreds of victims from each city. The emergency services and the army were severely stretched again, and the CCTV cameras were busy again recording images for the big GCHQ computers to crunch over with face recognition software to identify new candidates for attention in the next round of detention sweeps.

Then came three big truck bombings. Somehow, perhaps because the security services were too busy feeding further detainees to Camp Chrysalis, the warning signs for those bombings were missed and the Islamists who did the jobs were able to organise themselves more effectively than usual. The bombs were big – each truck packed maybe ten tons of explosive – and they went off outside big government office buildings in London. Over two hundred civil servants were killed and well over a thousand injured. The routine work of government went with a limp for the rest of the year. As for the perpetrators, the truck drivers were killed in their blasts and the planners and facilitators covered their traces well, so fears of an encore remained awhile.

The government propaganda machine made hay with the heightened tensions. Forgive me for sounding cynical, but Jon must have been quite pleased by the timing of the bombs. They reinforced his message about Islamists rather handily – indeed that was probably what saved him as prime minister for the rest of his tenure.

Amazingly, Camp Chrysalis remained out of the headlines for months. The usually shrill and alarmist press organs of Fleet Street seem to have imposed a conspiracy of silence in the issue, perhaps because they feared government censure and perhaps because many of their readers quietly applauded the whole disgusting business. Either way, the result was that the camp continued to do its dirty work for an entire year before people rose up and did something.

One more thing – I managed to get through to Downing Street for a brief telephone interview with Jon on his Islamist message. Here's how it went.

•

Kate: “Hi, Jon, I know you’re busy so I’ll try to be brief.”

Jon: “Hi, Kate, thank you.”

“Your article on your historic mission to rid the world of Islamism seems to have touched a raw nerve for many media commentators. Do you see your idea that Brexit Britain will be a beacon and inspiration for years to come as a kind of epitaph for your term as prime minister?”

“Well, I think it’s a bit early to be talking about an epitaph, but if things turn out that way then, yes, I guess that about sums it up.”

“If I understand it rightly, you’ve used the opportunity presented by Brexit – a state of emergency and so on – to do a dirty job that needed doing in order to get rid of the actual and potential Islamists in Britain. Is that it?”

“I wouldn’t want to stress the dirty job so much, but more or less, yes. I’ve set an internal security priority, namely to focus on Islamism and burn it out.”

“Don’t you think your effort will only fan the flames and give rise to a new generation of Islamists?”

“That, Kate, is precisely the threat the Islamists hold over us. If we escalate, they escalate further, heedless of the cost in life and limb. Our challenge is to hold firm and burn them out anyway. They are arsonists and we must meet fire with fire. We must defy them.”

“Even at the risk of burning British cities to the ground?”

“Even at that risk, because I know we’ll win before it gets that far. Do you want to see all the proud achievements of our civilisation reduced to ashes? I’d rather fight back and perish in the firestorm, if need be.”

“Ouch. That’s all I wanted to know. Thank you, Jon.”

•

That was the last time I spoke to Jon. I'm sure I wasn't alone in thinking he'd crossed a moral red line and become lost to civilisation as we know it.

At least he didn't have to fuss over a new crisis involving Russian submarines. Russia was quieter again because EU trade with Russia had increased in proportion to the decrease in trade with the UK. Russians were feeling too smug about their good fortune to want to rattle the NATO cage in the Baltic states.

As for America, my reading of President Newman is that he was happy to have succeeded in using his superpower to contain Jon Ball's Brexit Britain internationally. He may have thought the British implosion was a disaster, but at least it was an implosion and not an explosion like Nazi Germany. The damage was localised and limited.

Newman had scored more points. Ireland was reunified, Gibraltar belonged to Spain, and he had pressured the three greatest economic powers in the world – America, China and Japan – into trade deals with the European Union that Brexit Britain could only look upon with envy.

But soon cool water washed away the hot tears of envy, as big ocean waves splashed over the titanic hull of the British ship of state.

Adieu

The first serious protest about what was going on in Camp Chrysalis came from German human-rights activists. A few of them built a stealth drone as a sort of hobby project and succeeded in flying it at low level over the camp. At last the world had images showing more than the satellite views on Google Earth, which showed only a boring grid of roads and low buildings next to an airfield.

The German drone shots were shocking. As some people had feared from the meagre shipments of food going to the island, the inmates of the camp were apparently being starved and looked in poor shape. They wore crumpled pyjamas and flip-flops and moved with slow shuffling steps. There were plenty of them too – first estimates ran to many thousands, and that was obviously not counting any that had already gone through the sausage factory.

The video documentary the activists compiled from this footage quickly went viral in the first weeks of 2025. Soon an outcry arose from all over the world and especially Europe to end this abomination before any more people were processed. Camps of protesters began to form along the beaches of the north coast of France, from where the Isle of Wight was only a few hours away by boat.

The EU governments agreed to respond immediately with military force if they could get no diplomatic satisfaction from London. The previously hyped European defence brigade was only a symbolic unit but the EU armies quickly stocked it up to around 10,000 combat troops and began to train them for

an airdrop operation. Even Russia offered to contribute a few big military transport aircraft filled with Russian paratroopers. Somehow, within weeks a viable invasion plan was prepared. Astonishingly, all the actors managed to maintain operational secrecy.

D-Day was Saturday, March 1, 2025. French, Danish, Dutch, and German warplanes flew sorties over the island before dawn. Some performed reconnaissance and electronic jamming while others fired missiles to take out installations along the island. Soon the southern half of the island was covered in a huge cloud of smoke.

At around dawn, the paratroopers went in. They dropped all over the island and moved swiftly. Military hovercraft landed on the beaches to deliver vehicles and supplies for the camp inmates. By the end of the day, the island was secured, the camp was occupied, and the camp inmates were being cared for by humanitarian aid workers.

The British resistance had been stiff at first, but the forces on the ground were too weak and scattered to mount a serious defence of the island. Also, it seems most of the defenders had no appetite for a fight. Many of them were exhausted from their operations in British inner cities.

The RAF put up a better fight. RAF Typhoon fighter jets flew sorties over the island and were met by Luftwaffe Typhoons. In the resulting visual confusion, the dogfights became elaborate aerial ballets. A few missiles were launched and several Typhoons shot down, but both sides soon drew back, the RAF to the airspace north of the Solent (the stretch of water between the island and the mainland) and the Luftwaffe to the south.

As for the Royal Navy, Britain's second aircraft carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, had been in Portsmouth at the time of

the attack and steamed quickly out of the harbour to join the battle, but it was caught by a missile from a French Mirage fighter jet and had to turn back. Two British destroyers nearby were blinded by jamming signals from Luftwaffe Tornados for long enough to let French fighters cripple one destroyer with missiles. The other one was sunk by a torpedo from a German U-boat – moments before the U-boat was sunk in turn by a British submarine.

Altogether, it was not a glorious day for the British team. The European forces took the island in a single day.

•

The fallout from the fight was immediate. RAF Typhoons took up residence in Bournemouth Airport and flew regular sorties along the Solent in readiness to fight a second Battle of Britain if challenged. A pair of Royal Navy nuclear attack submarines started patrolling the Solent to seal off the island by sea from the mainland. And a few army units dug in along the shoreline from Bournemouth to Bognor Regis. But the Brits made no effort to retake the island.

The fallout from the liberation of the camp took longer to spread its dismaying effect. For CCN, I went in and looked around the remains of the camp. As expected, the clean-up of any evidence of atrocities had been ongoing, so there was nothing too incriminating left for us to find. We were shown around a number of huts and cell blocks, as well as a crematorium with a big oven, but there were no bodies lying around. The liberators found only a few thousand thin and weak prisoners. They are still in quarantine.

The political fallout was devastating. The government had to resign, and for a day or two Field Marshall Sir Tarquin Biscuit-Barrel was in charge, under direct orders from the king

to do nothing but hold the fort until an extraordinary high commissioner from the EU could take control of the Whitehall machine and make provisional arrangements. The EU woman quickly scheduled a general election for Thursday, June 5, which gave the political parties less than three months to get their election campaigns together – and try to return British political life to normal.

•

Jon went into hiding and issued a statement of resignation for the media from a “safe house” in Hobbitage. He had presided over the most humiliating debacle in modern British history – in fact possibly the most humiliating debacle since 1066, when an army of Norman invaders under William the Conqueror defeated the English king and established a polity that with relatively minor hiccups such as a few dynastic takeovers and a small civil war had endured for almost a thousand years. For the first time since then, the integrity of the home islands had been breached by armed foreigners.

Jon could not escape a dire fate. On Sunday, June 1, while he was driving around Hobbitage on a routine errand, a white van drove up close beside him and exploded in a big fireball. Jon was killed instantly. Islamists claimed the assassination as their handiwork, in revenge for the martyrdom of countless believers in Camp Chrysalis.

•

Jon’s legacy is something historians will need time to agree on. Under his leadership, Britain had suffered a catastrophic moral meltdown. Had Jon seen it coming? Was this the heart of darkness he had seen it as his mission to expose? Had some such reckoning been inevitable? No one knows.

One conclusion was quickly agreed. Going it alone is a risky undertaking for a national state exposed to powerful global forces. It was obviously far safer to move forward with a group of partners and meet the global challenges together.

My own conclusion, for what it's worth, is that Jon had lost his moral compass. He had no religion and no spirituality – nothing but heartless opportunism.

•

Joe Steel's Labour party won the national election by a huge majority. Britain now has a socialist government and Joe Steel is the new prime minister.

The European Union offered assistance to the government to help it rebuild the economic and political systems in Britain. Its sole condition was that Britain join the union again as a new member, with the euro as its currency and within the Schengen area of free travel, without passports, across EU national borders. Joe Steel put the issue to parliament and a majority voted to accept the offer. After a decade of turbulence, British sovereignty was tamed again.

As for the monarchy, the British people rallied round it as a symbol of national continuity. The king allowed that he had been none too persistent while asking his prime minister for reports on what was happening on the Isle of Wight and allowed that he had held discussions with the military top brass about what to do with troublesome people in the cities – but none of this was held against him. Then he volunteered that the British constitutional monarchy was ready for a good overhaul. He proposed a less prominent political role along Scandinavian or Dutch lines, if not a complete withdrawal along French or German lines. He said he would be happy to abdicate in return for a quiet life.

Prince Chioles performed a further service to the nation as bearer of the proud title Defender of the Faith. Together with the reformist young King Mohammed of Saudi Arabia, who offered both religious expertise and petrodollar funding, he founded the International School of Islamic Studies on the Isle of Wight, where a big prepared site with a good airfield stood ready. The college would be dedicated to integrating Muslim communities in Britain and elsewhere into modern secular life and reviewing and updating the doctrinal basis of Islam.

After only a brief parliamentary debate, the socialists voted to make Britain a republic. A select committee of experts were tasked to draft a constitution for the new republic, complete with proportional representation, an elected upper chamber, and so on. Its new name would be the British Republic and it would have three provinces – England, Wales, and Scotland. But soon talks were scheduled with the Dublin government to join them in forming a Great British Republic comprising Ireland too. With the Cross of St Patrick back, traditionalists could again fly the good old union jack.

Thanks

Thank you for your patience in reading this far – and if you purchased this book, thank you again. Reward in coin for my labour as a writer is fitting.

More importantly, I would like to thank all the people who helped me in a variety of ways to produce this little volume. They may remain unnamed here.

More practically, I would like to reassure anyone who feels personally touched by the events in my story that no disrespect was intended. The story is fictional, including references to organisations and people resembling real ones.

Last but not least, I hope you enjoyed the tale.

Andy Ross
November 2017

R**VER**