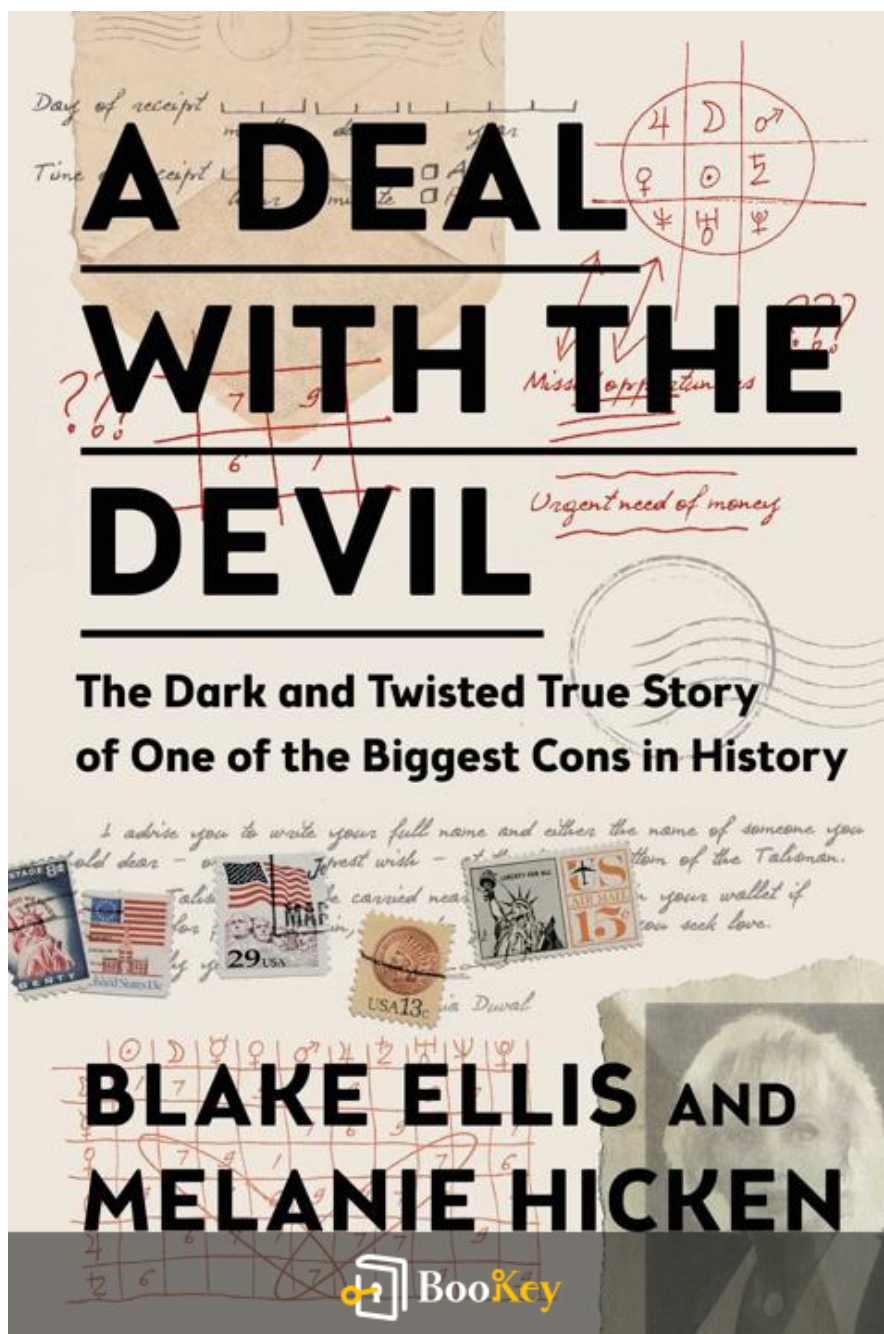


A Deal With The Devil PDF (Limited Copy)

Blake Ellis



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A Deal With The Devil Summary

Temptation and sacrifice in the pursuit of success.

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About the book

In "A Deal with the Devil," Blake Ellis takes readers on a gripping journey through the treacherous landscape of ambition, desire, and the moral compromises that often accompany the pursuit of success. This captivating narrative weaves together the stories of individuals who found themselves at crossroads, where the allure of power and wealth beckoned them to make Faustian bargains that would forever alter the course of their lives. As the characters grapple with the consequences of their choices, Ellis challenges readers to reflect on the true cost of their own aspirations and the lengths they might go to in the name of fulfillment. With twists that keep you on the edge of your seat, this book invites you to ponder: what would you sacrifice for your dreams?

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About the author

Blake Ellis is an accomplished author and journalist known for her riveting storytelling and keen ability to explore complex themes within her work. With a background in investigative journalism, she has contributed to various high-profile publications where she honed her skills in narrative non-fiction, drawing readers into compelling tales that often highlight the human experience amidst challenging circumstances. In "A Deal with the Devil," Ellis combines her extensive research and journalistic prowess to delve into the darker aspects of human ambition and morality, creating a gripping narrative that captivates and provokes thought. Her previous works have garnered critical acclaim, establishing her as a significant voice in contemporary literature.

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Chapter 1 Summary: The Journalists

In the opening chapter of "A Deal with the Devil" by Blake Ellis, readers are introduced to the enigmatic figure of Maria Duval, a French psychic whose long history of exploiting vulnerable individuals through deceptive mailings presents a disturbing exploration of trust, manipulation, and obsession. For decades, Duval has thrived on the desperation of many, particularly the lonely, elderly, and ill, leading them to believe in her purported powers to bring them fortune, love, or solutions to their ailments. Many victims endowed her with their trust and hard-earned money, convinced that Duval cared for them more than their own families.

The narrative centers on two young journalists at CNN, both twenty-eight, who find themselves entangled in an investigation into Duval's fraudulent schemes after a chance encounter with a peculiar letter from another psychic, Patrick Guerin. This letter piques their interest with its claims of miraculous lottery wins and transformative luck. As they delve deeper into the world of psychic scams, they discover a staggering array of complaints from victims who have been drained of their savings by Duval's manipulative letters filled with ominous warnings and promises of financial change.

1. **The Discovery of the Scam:** The journalists begin sorting through a multitude of unsolicited mailings they received from various unethical organizations targeting the elderly. Among these was a bizarre package from

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Patrick Guerin, which caught their attention due to its excessive promotional materials, including a DVD touting the psychic's supposed life-changing abilities.

2. Investigation Unfolds: Their research quickly reveals that Guerrin is merely a minor player in a more extensive scheme orchestrated by Maria Duval. They find numerous emotional testimonials from victims who describe the devastation wrought by her letters, many expressing feelings of helplessness and betrayal. The sheer volume of complaints leads the duo to realize the widespread impact of Duval's operation, which appears to fleece millions from unsuspecting individuals.

3. Revelation of Scale: A conversation with Clayton Gerber from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service highlights the enormity of the con. Gerber reveals that Duval's scheme is among the largest and longest-running in history, potentially stealing nearly a billion dollars from her victims over the years. He expresses frustration regarding the international reach of the scam, which complicates efforts to hold anyone accountable.

4. Call to Action: Urged by Gerber, the journalists recognize their role in uncovering the truth behind Maria Duval and her operation. Motivated by a desire to protect the vulnerable and expose injustices, they embark on a multifaceted investigation that promises to unveil the complex nature of a long-standing deception.

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The chapter concludes with a sobering realization of the far-reaching implications of Duval's actions. The journalists are driven not only by curiosity but also by a sense of responsibility to reveal how easily trust can be exploited, especially in times of vulnerability. This sets the stage for an engaging exploration of truth, ethics, and the impact of predatory practices on society. Their journey promises to be filled with increasing complexities and moral dilemmas as they chase the elusive figure of Maria Duval and confront the realities of human deception.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Importance of Vigilance Against Manipulation

Critical Interpretation: As you reflect on the revelations about Maria Duval's deceptive practices, allow yourself to be inspired by the notion that vigilance is crucial in safeguarding your trust and well-being.

Life, like a labyrinth, often presents alluring paths that promise easy solutions or miraculous transformations. This chapter emphasizes the significance of maintaining a discerning eye and questioning the intentions behind those who seek your trust, especially when you're feeling vulnerable. Remember that true empowerment comes from awareness; by acknowledging the potential for manipulation and remaining steadfastly skeptical of quick fixes, you can navigate your own life with purpose and clarity. This chapter's exploration of human vulnerability serves as a powerful reminder to always seek the truth and maintain your autonomy in a world where deceit can masquerade as genuine concern.

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Chapter 2 Summary: The Promises

In this letter, addressed to you, a personalized communication unfolds, hinting at the intriguing journey that lies ahead as part of your unique experience with the author, Maria Duval. You are immediately reminded of a special package containing "Your Special Compendium of Divine Formulas" and a genuine Cross of Invocation of the 7 Powers, underscoring the confidential and sacred nature of this information. Anticipation builds as you are informed about the completion of your first personal astral-clairvoyant forecast, which notably requires more extensive detailing than initially expected due to the significant findings regarding your life.

As the narrative progresses, there's a contemplative focus on an important concern of yours: the future of the nation and whether it will improve. Additionally, you are promised personal lucky numbers that could influence your fortunes in games of chance, suggesting a deeper connection between divine insight and daily life. However, amidst the excitement of positive revelations, there's a reminder that not everything will be entirely favorable. You're assured that any challenges lying ahead can not only be mitigated but also transformed into advantages, instilling a sense of empowerment.

Moving forward, a pivotal date is presented: May 2, 2014. This date is highlighted as a significant turning point in your life, marking the beginning of a transformative period with the potential for profound significance.

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Encouraged by the belief in forthcoming positive changes, you are invited to remain confident in the outcomes that will manifest as time unfolds.

Ultimately, this letter embodies a blend of hope and caution, emphasizing the trust placed in the author while suggesting that the journey ahead will be both enlightening and transformative. As you reflect on this message, the bond established with Maria Duval is underscored, promising her unwavering support in facilitating the changes that you seek in your life. As the months progress, your experience will help solidify the trust you've placed in her, and you will start witnessing the realization of the predictions made.

This nuanced communication speaks not just to the anticipation of personal growth and fortune, but also to the broader implications of self-belief and divine guidance, crafting a rich tapestry of interconnected themes surrounding fate, trust, and transformation.

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Chapter 3: The Scam

In Chapter 3 of "A Deal with the Devil" by Blake Ellis, the narrative centers around the intricate and chilling details of a fraudulent scheme orchestrated by a woman named Maria, who presents herself as a gifted psychic with a storied reputation. With her striking appearance—chin-length platinum blonde hair and dark lips—she manipulates the emotions of her victims through personalized letters that claim extraordinary abilities to predict lottery winnings and influence destiny.

1. **The Illusion of Powers:** In her letters, Maria boasts about her lineage, claiming her psychic powers were inherited from a saintly uncle and her fame as a guide to celebrities and high-profile leaders, thereby establishing a façade of credibility. This elaborate persona captivates her victims, many of whom are vulnerable due to mental health issues like Alzheimer's or simply seeking hope in their lonely lives.

2. **Personalization as Manipulation:** The letters are crafted to include intimate details from the recipients' lives, such as birthdays and personal

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Chapter 4 Summary: The Victims

The narrative surrounding the victims of Maria Duval underscores the insidious nature of scams targeting vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly. The story of Doreen Robinson, as told through the memories of her daughter Chrissie, illuminates the devastating effects of such exploitation. Doreen, a once vibrant and independent woman, became ensnared in a web of deception that left her marginalized and financially crippled as she struggled with Alzheimer's disease.

1. Unraveling of Identity: Doreen's battle with dementia stripped away not only her memories but also her personality. Once a fiercely independent woman who never left home without her signature lipstick, she found herself in a sterile nursing home room, dressed in a drab hospital gown, her vibrant essence reduced to a mere shadow. Chrissie vividly described Doreen's decline, where instead of lively interactions, her mother was eventually reduced to a state of confusion and despair.

2. The Descent Into Deception: It was during Doreen's slip into dementia that she unwittingly fell victim to the scam orchestrated by Maria Duval. In the months leading up to her eightieth birthday, Doreen began responding to Maria's letters, which promised hope and healing. Chrissie discovered that Doreen had written at least forty checks, driven by a desperation to find a cure for her failing mind rather than the pursuit of



wealth. This reflects the targeted nature of such scams; they prey on the vulnerabilities of those grappling with cognitive decline and despair.

3. Psychological Impact of Scams: Doreen's obsession with Maria's letters revealed a deep-seated need for companionship and hope that she was no longer able to receive from her family. The psychic's letters gave Doreen a sense of purpose in her later years, amidst the chaos of her deteriorating mind. It is evident that victims like Doreen often succumb to such scams due to feelings of loneliness and a search for connection, making them especially susceptible to manipulation.

4. Family Struggles: Chrissie's journey through the realization of her mother's financial exploitation was fraught with emotional turmoil. As she sifted through Doreen's mail, she found not only the physical evidence of the scam but also the psychological burden it placed upon her mother. Doreen's secretive behavior towards her finances complicated their relationship; it underscored the shame and confusion that often accompanies cognitive decline.

5. The Broader Epidemic: The systemic issue of such scams extends beyond Doreen. Research has shown that the elderly are prime targets for con artists, with many suffering financially due to manipulative schemes like those orchestrated by Maria Duval. The phenomenon of "sucker lists" demonstrates how easily a vulnerable individual can be exploited, as names

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are traded among scammers to maximize the likelihood of successful deceit.

6. The Emotional Manipulation: The letters not only appealed to Doreen's desire for financial relief but also capitalized on her emotional state, creating a sort of cult-like dependency on Maria, who presented herself as a confidante. Dr. Peter Lichtenberg's insights into the psychology of scammers reveal that isolated individuals often seek validation and connection, making them easier prey for such manipulative tactics.

7. The Climactic Tragedy: The narrative took a particularly haunting turn with the story of Clare Ellis, a young girl driven to despair allegedly due to her involvement with similar psychic letters. Her tragic death underscored the extreme repercussions of such scams, demonstrating that the emotional toll of being ensnared by fraudulent promises extends beyond the elderly to the young and impressionable.

Ultimately, the accounts woven throughout this chapter serve as a sobering reminder of the vulnerabilities inherent in human nature and the devastating consequences of exploitation by those who prey upon the innocent and the desperate. The profound emotional scars left on families dealing with the fallout of financial exploitation resonate, illustrating the urgent need for awareness and protective measures against such predatory practices.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Emotional Manipulation of Vulnerability

Critical Interpretation: Imagine yourself in a moment of uncertainty, perhaps facing personal challenges that have left you feeling isolated and alone. In this chapter, you see how easily the emotional void created by such struggles can be filled with deceptive promises, like the letters that ensnared Doreen. Her yearning for connection and reassurance highlights the need to nurture genuine relationships and seek support from loved ones during difficult times. This realization can inspire you to reach out, not only to safeguard your own heart but also to be a beacon of hope for others who may be walking a similar path of vulnerability. Recognize that true strength lies not just in independence, but also in the vulnerability to connect and the courage to seek help.

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Chapter 5 Summary: The Address

In Chapter 5 of "A Deal with the Devil" by Blake Ellis, the narrative delves into the deceptive operations of a psychic scam that unfolded around an intriguing address in Sparks, Nevada. Victims across the United States were directed to send their money to a seemingly personal mailbox associated with a woman named Maria Duval. This mailbox, located in a modest area of Sparks—an ordinary town known for its proximity to Reno casinos—was imagined by many victims as a genuine connection to the psychic they believed in. The letters they sent, complete with personal anecdotes and gifts, created a false sense of intimacy, luring them deeper into the scam.

1. **The Illusion of Personal Connection:** The address in Sparks reinforced a family-like atmosphere for the victims, as many perceived Maria Duval as a caring pen pal. For instance, one woman shared how her elderly father viewed Maria as a confidante after losing his wife. This manipulation exploited vulnerability, making the victims feel a personal bond that masked the predatory nature of the scam.

2. **Investigative Pursuit:** The chapter recounts the investigation undertaken by the authors to uncover the truth behind the elusive Maria Duval. When they attempted to locate the address, they encountered dead ends and miscommunication, culminating in a visit to a run-down strip mall. Interviews with local business owners revealed their ignorance of Maria,



shedding light on the obscure operations behind the scam.

3. Frustration on the Ground: The authors' search exposed the disinterest and bewilderment of the local community toward the psychic scam. Despite asking various shop owners about Maria Duval, the responses ranged from indifference to confusion, underscoring a disconnect between the victims' experiences and the local residents' awareness.

4. An Improbable Location: The choice of Sparks as the operational base raised questions about the scam's origins. Local employees speculated on the randomness of the location, speculating whether Maria had ties to the area. However, the truth unraveled further as the investigation revealed that the address was linked not to a psychic, but to a businessman in Switzerland—an unexpected revelation that hinted at the broader networks involved in the fraud.

5. A Disturbing Reality: The chapter concludes by highlighting the governmental efforts to dismantle the scam, including the cessation of operations at the mailboxes linked to Maria Duval. The local UPS store, previously a hub for victims' letters, turned out to have been closed pending legal action, illustrating how deeply ingrained the scam had become before it faced scrutiny.

Through detailed exploration of the victims' emotional ties and the elusive

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nature of the scam's operations, Chapter 5 provides a rich tapestry of how deception can mask itself within familiar settings, all while exposing the lengths individuals went to in their search for truth and closure. The chapter ultimately reflects on the complexities of trust and manipulation within the world of scams, revealing both the human elements involved and the calculated machinations behind them.

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Chapter 6: The Mysterious Psychic

The investigation into the enigmatic figure of Maria Duval reveals a complex web of intrigue, deception, and a plethora of theories surrounding her existence and the controversial letters associated with her name.

1. The Search for Truth

Initially, a simple search for "Maria Duval" produced various individuals sharing the name, but little concrete information about the psychic tied to the fraudulent letters. The existence of a woman named Carolina Maria Gambia, supposedly linked to an Institute for Parapsychological Research, raised more questions than answers. While some information seemed credible, aspects like the mentioned institute's existence turned out to be unfounded.

2. Insights from Investigators

An interview with Ron Reinhold from a Canadian private investigation firm offered valuable insights. He shared his belief in Maria's real existence and sent letters showcasing her manipulative tactics—using fear to sell talismans that promised protection. Reports suggested Maria could be dead, yet

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Chapter 7 Summary: The Psychic Sidekick

In Chapter 7 of "A Deal with the Devil" by Blake Ellis, the narrative takes a deeper dive into the investigation surrounding Maria Duval and her alleged accomplice, Patrick Guerin. The chapter highlights the authors' increasing conviction that they can find substantial leads to understand the reach of these psychic figures, who have seemingly lured numerous victims into a web of financial exploitation.

1. The authors identify Patrick as a potential key player in uncovering more about Maria's operations. His letters, typically overshadowed by Maria's, suggest he might be a lesser-known front in a broader scheme—a means through which Maria capitalizes on the vulnerabilities of her followers. While Maria's correspondence attracted numerous complaints, Patrick appeared to function more as a conduit to extract additional funds from those already entrapped in Maria's allure.
2. The narrative takes a turn when the authors receive an unexpected phone call from Patrick himself, recognized for his psychic prowess. His reputation as a lottery-winning seer adds an intriguing layer to the investigation, suggesting he may possess genuine abilities—or at least the power to manipulate belief in those abilities. Patrick's letters unveil a meticulously crafted narrative where both he and Maria claim to share a psychic vision for the letter's recipient. The promise of financial windfalls and a solution to

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life's pressing issues fosters an almost hypnotic allure for their audience.

3. Patrick's persona is further illustrated through his active online presence, complimented by an array of publications that bolster his credibility as a psychic advisor. The researchers discover a detailed description of his consultation practices, layered with imagery of tarot cards and the promise of personal revelations—reinforcing the narrative of hope and rebirth that often accompanies such schemes.

4. In pursuit of solid evidence, the authors strategize to engage Patrick directly, posing as prospective clients interested in a psychic reading. Their careful planning underscores the seriousness of their investigation as they reach out to him, hoping to uncover insights into Maria's operations. Despite initial enthusiasm and seemingly promising communication, the authors encounter a frustrating lack of response, hinting at the challenges and elusiveness often faced when trying to expose fraudulent practices.

Ultimately, this chapter paints a vivid picture of the dynamics between those who exploit psychic beliefs and the vulnerable individuals seeking solace and solutions. The narrative instills a sense of curiosity while exposing the deceptive practices at play, leaving readers keenly aware of the intricate web woven by figures like Maria Duval and Patrick Guerin. The authors' pursuit of truth amidst such obscurity encapsulates their determination to shine a light on the darker sides of the psychic industry.

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Chapter 8 Summary: The Sightings

In the chapter titled "The Sightings," the narrative revisits the enigmatic figure of Maria Duval, a famed French medium and clairvoyant, and her multifaceted public appearances.

- 1. Media Presence in Russia:** Maria's notable public disclosure occurred during a heavily scrutinized press conference at the Central House of Journalists in Moscow in 2008. This event was marked by an official press release detailing her achievements and projected predictions on a range of significant topics including the future of society, the U.S. elections, and technological advancements.
- 2. Public Reception and Predictions:** At the conference, Maria garnered attention by confidently predicting that the next president of the United States would be Black, a foresight made just weeks prior to Barack Obama's election victory. The Russian media's captivated response underscored her impactful presence, as did her predictions of a potential collapse of the U.S. dollar and the evolving technological adeptness of future generations.
- 3. Retirement and Continued Influence:** While a French newspaper announced her supposed return to her hometown of Callas in December 2008, claiming a retirement from public life, evidence suggested that Maria's influence persisted. Letters bearing her name continued to circulate, often



misleading recipients into believing they were winners of various psychic contests.

4. Global Letters and Continuing Operations: Investigators discovered that millions of letters attributed to Maria were still being distributed as recently as 2014, targeting various demographics including vulnerable retirees. This persistence raised questions about whether Maria remained an active participant in these operations or had simply become an unwitting figurehead.

5. YouTube Revelations In 2009, a series of YouTube videos surfaced featuring an elderly woman purportedly being Maria Duval. These videos provided insight into her claims regarding her psychic abilities and how she linked them to her early life experiences, further blurring the lines between her public persona and the ongoing letter campaigns.

6. Claims of Healing Powers: The videos and letters notably highlighted her assertions of healing capabilities, revealing a new dimension to her public image. There were bizarre testimonials from supposed beneficiaries claiming significant changes in their lives due to Maria's alleged interventions.

7. Identity of the Uploader: The mysterious user “gd2use” who uploaded these videos became a point of intrigue. Attempts to uncover their identity

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led to a dead end, exemplifying the veil of anonymity surrounding Maria's empire.

8. Maria's Narrative of Authenticity: Across interviews, Maria portrayed herself as a reluctant participant in the commercial aspect of her psychic practice, framing her talents as gifts rather than commodities. This narrative conflicted with evidence showing her active role in soliciting and participating in the very mail campaigns she later disavowed.

Through these revelations, it becomes increasingly evident that Maria Duval was not merely a passive figure. Instead, she orchestrated an intricate web of public relations and marketing, thus deepening her enigma while securing her financial gains from the very fabrications that shaped her identity. The interconnectedness of her various roles as a psychic, a media personality, and a business operator illustrates the complexity of her character and underscores the ongoing allure of mystique in the realm of psychic phenomena.

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Chapter 9: The Dentist's Wife

In Chapter 9 of "A Deal with the Devil" by Blake Ellis, the narrative revolves around the remarkable telepathic abilities of Maria, a figure known for her skill in locating missing individuals. A central theme is her reputed ability to find those who have gone missing, sometimes even in heart-wrenching circumstances. Maria's prowess extends beyond humans to animals, with claims of locating a dog belonging to the iconic actress Brigitte Bardot, among other animals.

1. **Maria's Uncanny Abilities:** Throughout her publicized experiences, Maria continuously emphasizes her gift for locating missing entities. In her videos, she shares that the emotional toll of informing the parents of found missing children about the tragic outcomes led her to stop involving herself in such cases. Despite this, her stories remain a captivating blend of the extraordinary and enigmatic, showcasing the scope of her claims—from pets to humans.

2. **The Dentist's Wife Incident:** One of the most compelling yet

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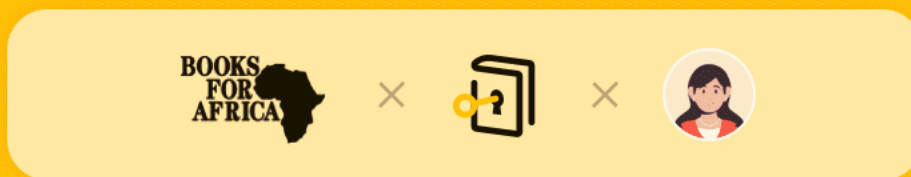
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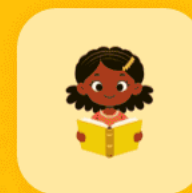
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Chapter 10 Summary: The Investigators

In the pursuit of justice against a deceptive mail fraud scheme, the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) dedicated significant resources to dismantling the complex operations behind the infamous Maria Duval scam. These investigators, part of an agency with a storied history of tackling mail-related crimes, focused on the elaborate network of businesses that facilitated the fraudulent activities linked to Maria Duval, as well as Patrick Guerin.

The investigation was ignited by USPIS inspector Thomas Ninan, who, while reviewing bank records in March 2014, identified suspicious withdrawal requests associated with a company named Destiny Research Center. As investigations unfolded, it became clear that this was merely a façade for a broader scheme designed to exploit vulnerable populations—particularly the elderly and financially desperate—through misleading solicitations.

1. Historical Context of the Investigation: The USPIS, established by Benjamin Franklin, has a robust history that includes significant takedowns of dangerous criminal enterprises. From thwarting the Black Hand's extortion tactics to apprehending notorious conman Charles Ponzi, the agency demonstrated its commitment to combating mail fraud. The legacy of their work underscored the importance of their current endeavor against the

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Maria Duval case, which was reminiscent of past campaigns against predatory scams.

2. Unraveling the Business Network: Thomas Ninan's initial investigations revealed a multifaceted web of businesses, with the Canadian firm Infogest Direct Marketing at its core. This company was responsible for sending millions of letters that deceptively promised psychic insights and services. Through careful piecing together of evidence, investigators discovered that the letters were strategically designed to manipulate recipients into providing personal information and payments, thus perpetuating the cycle of fraud.

3. Manipulative Marketing Practices: The scam employed a sophisticated system of data acquisition, using lists obtained from data brokers that pinpointed likely victims based on their previous financial behavior. Advertisements disguised as research opportunities further lured in potential targets, making the communication seemingly personal and credible. This method of personalizing fraudulent requests played a crucial role in the effectiveness of the scheme.

4. Operational Procedures: The logistics of the scam were equally intricate. Letters printed in Canada were transported to New York, where they were systematically mailed to victims across the United States. Upon receipt, victims were encouraged to send in not only payments but also

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personal mementos—like hair and photos—promised to enhance the psychic connection. However, unbeknownst to the victims, these personal items were discarded without a second thought.

5. Evidence Collection and Legal Action: As the investigation progressed, Thomas and his colleagues employed various tactics, including monitoring the mail processing at a Long Island company, Data Marketing Group Ltd. This company processed and handled the correspondence from the victims, reinforcing the fraudulent cycle. Investigators turned to literal dumpster diving to retrieve evidence, which ultimately provided the legal ammunition necessary to combat the mail fraud.

Through an extensive investigation characterized by dedication and ingenuity, the USPIS sought not just to dismantle a single fraudulent operation but to uphold the integrity of mail services and protect vulnerable individuals from targeted scams. Despite existing cease-and-desist orders against previous iterations of the scam, the fraudulent operations persisted under new guises, illustrating the ongoing battle against deceitful practices in an ever-evolving landscape of mail fraud. The legal and investigative groundwork laid by these efforts would ultimately lead to a court ruling aimed at permanently barring the circulation of Maria Duval's deceptive letters within the United States.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The necessity of vigilance and discernment in the face of deceit.

Critical Interpretation: As you navigate the complexities of life, let the relentless pursuit of justice by the USPIS in the Maria Duval case inspire you to cultivate a sharp sense of discernment. Realize that the world is often filled with manipulative forces aiming to exploit your vulnerabilities. Just as Thomas Ninan meticulously pieced together evidence to expose a web of deceit, you too can empower yourself by staying informed and questioning the intentions behind solicitations that promise quick fixes or easy answers. This chapter teaches you that vigilance is not merely a protective measure but an essential skill for maintaining your integrity and safeguarding your future. By embracing a proactive stance against possible deceptions, you find the strength to confidently pursue your goals, ensuring that you are not easily led astray by those who prey on desperation.

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Chapter 11 Summary: The Business Web

The investigation into the notorious mail fraud scheme centered around the figure of Maria Duval revealed a complex network of operations spanning multiple countries and involving numerous individuals and businesses. While US authorities labeled it as one of the most significant frauds in history, they struggled to identify its masterminds due to jurisdictional limitations and a lack of enforcement power abroad. When efforts to trace the origins of the scam were undertaken, it became evident that the scheme's roots were not solely American, but rather global in scale, often shifting rapidly from one country to another when attempts were made to shut it down.

In their pursuit of answers, the investigators from a New York City newsroom delved deep into a vast array of documents, mapping the connections among various players associated with the mailings. Amidst their extensive research, Joseph Patrick Davitt emerged as a potential key figure in the mystery surrounding Maria Duval. His company, Listano Limited, was linked to domain registrations of websites associated with her, indicating a web of business interests that had previously allowed the use of Maria Duval's name for commercial purposes. Despite his name not appearing in any official actions by US authorities, his connection to the letters led the investigators to question the extent of his involvement.

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As they tried to engage Davitt directly, multiple attempts to contact him led to obfuscation, unavailability, and ultimately the disappearance of his online presence. This sense of evasion heightened suspicions about the operations behind Listano Limited, which was traced to a nondescript address in Stratford-upon-Avon. Upon investigating further, it became clear that this location was merely a facade; numerous shell companies were registered at the same address, highlighting a deliberate effort to obscure the true nature of the businesses tied to Maria Duval.

One important revelation was the role of registered agents like Barney McGettigan, who provided facade addresses for numerous companies, enabling their dubious operations to remain hidden from scrutiny. Despite this breakthrough in understanding the mechanics of the fraud, direct contacts yielded little fruit, as many leads either fell silent or offered evasive responses that compounded the mystery.

The investigators' quest for answers took them across the globe, leading to frustrating encounters with former associates of Maria Duval. Notable amongst these interactions was a Danish representative who distanced himself from the scandal and a belligerent individual in Thailand, Gerard du Passage, who had previous connections to the mailings. Language barriers and further layers of deceit complicated their efforts, reinforcing the belief that the extensive network surrounding the mail fraud was designed to obfuscate and deflect inquiries.

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The investigations revealed a harrowing truth: this elaborate web of deceit was carefully constructed, with individuals moving deftly through a labyrinth of business dealings, shell companies, and false identities, each steeped in secrecy. As the team attempted to navigate the complexities, it became increasingly daunting to unravel the true origins and orchestrators of the ambitious and deceptive mail fraud scheme. The relentless pursuit of truth underscored the challenges of reporting on such a multilayered and elusive con, where each new discovery led to exponentially more questions. With every contact pursued, it became evident that uncovering the masterminds would be no easy task, as the enigma of Maria Duval continued to deepen.

Key Element	Summary
Investigation Background	The investigation focuses on the mail fraud scheme linked to Maria Duval, recognized by US authorities as a major fraud case involving a global network.
Jurisdiction Challenges	US authorities faced difficulties in identifying the masterminds due to limited jurisdiction and enforcement capabilities abroad.
Key Figure	Joseph Patrick Davitt emerged as a key figure, connected to Maria Duval through his company, Listano Limited.
Obfuscation Issues	Attempts to contact Davitt were met with evasion, further raising suspicions regarding Listano Limited's operations.
Facade Locations	Investigations revealed that the registered address for Listano Limited was a facade housing multiple shell companies.

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Key Element	Summary
Agents and Shell Companies	Registered agents like Barney McGettigan contributed to obscuring the businesses involved.
Global Pursuit	The team's investigation took them worldwide, encountering various individuals who provided little to no useful information.
Complexity of Fraud	The scam involved intricate layers of deceit, shell companies, and false identities, complicating the investigation.
Conclusion of Investigation	The relentless pursuit of truth highlighted the challenges of unraveling the sophisticated mail fraud scheme linked to Maria Duval.

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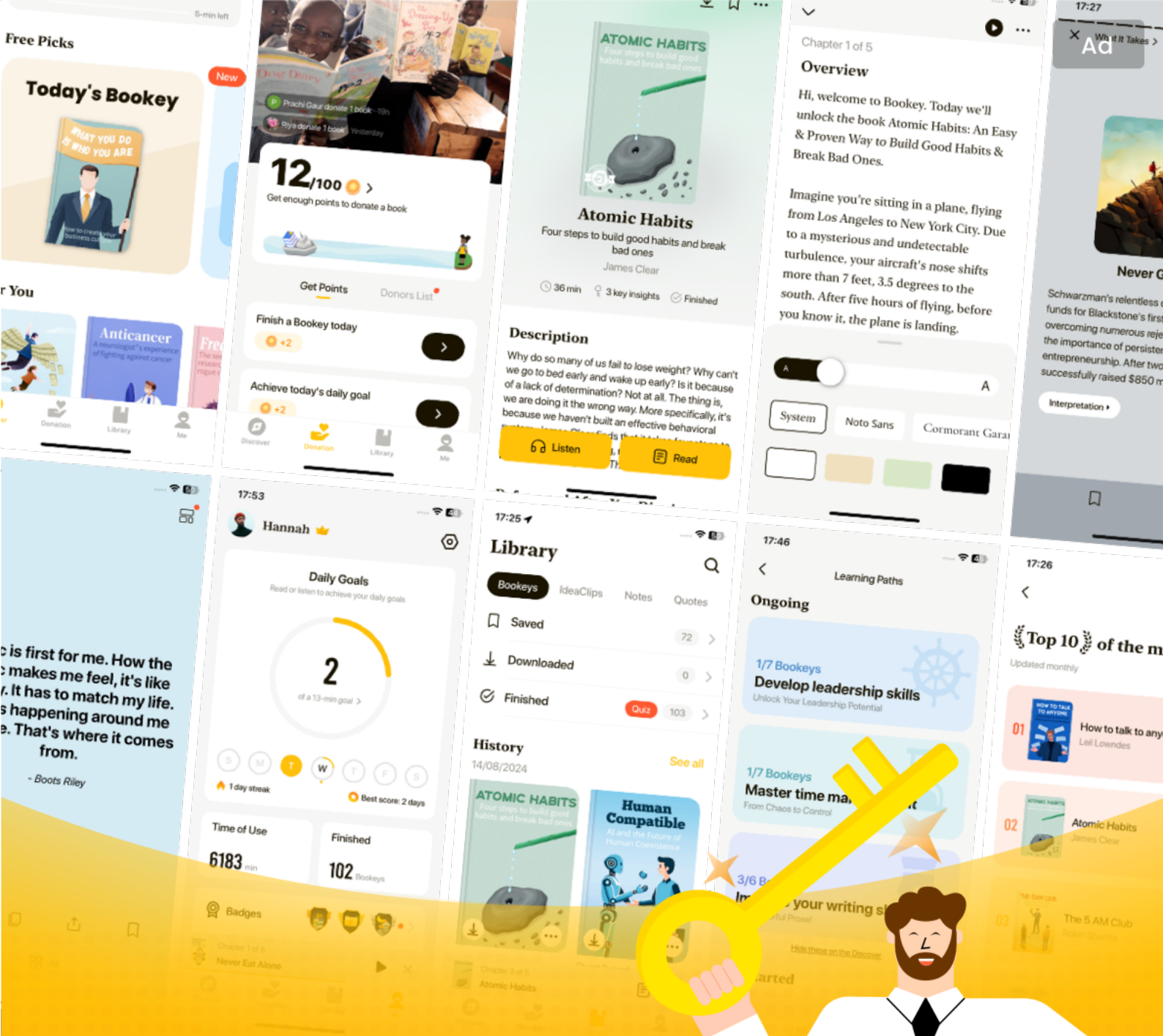
Chapter 12: The Sparks Connection

In this chapter of "A Deal with the Devil," the narrative centers around the elusive Martin Dettling, identified as a critical figure in a government lawsuit due to his position as the director of the Destiny Research Center in Hong Kong. This organization has been linked to the distribution of contentious letters. Despite being in his seventies, Martin's professional footprint was tightly woven with a network of shell companies, one of which had ties to Andrea Egger, an attorney involved in trademark applications for a subject named Maria. Additionally, he operated a website catering to spurned spouses seeking revenge on unfaithful partners.

In an effort to locate Martin, the authors explored potential family connections, reaching out to relatives mentioned in a decades-old obituary of what was presumably Martin's brother. They spoke to Martin's niece, who could provide little information other than that she had met him once during a family vacation in Switzerland in 1967. This conversation raised doubts about whether the Martin they sought was indeed the nephew born long after her father emigrated to the United States in 1929.

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Chapter 13 Summary: The Whistleblower

In our investigation of the Maria Duval scam, we relied heavily on whistleblowers—former employees who possess key insights, leveraging their insider status to expose the truth. Initially, our searches focused on staff from Astroforce, a company associated with the scam. We sent numerous inquiries to former employees, but one unexpected email arrived late at night, revealing critical information.

The sender, a former employee of Astroforce, shared his anxiety regarding his past involvement with the scam but ultimately agreed to speak with us. He recounted how he became entangled in the scheme while seeking what he thought was a promising marketing position. His fear of association with the con was palpable, leading him to request anonymity throughout our conversation.

He provided an in-depth account of the scam's origins, attributing it to two European entrepreneurs in a small Swiss town: Jacques Mailland, a “mailing genius” from France, and Swiss businessman Jean-Claude Reuille. Although the whistleblower had never met Maria Duval, whom the scheme leveraged significantly, he characterized her as "not a smart woman." According to him, Maria was largely a pawn in a scheme that profited from her image without her full understanding of its implications. Her involvement primarily revolved around financial compensation, but her awareness of the specifics

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of the scam remained vague.

Our whistleblower shifted focus to Jacques and Jean-Claude, emphasizing their roles as central figures in orchestrating the deceptive practices.

Jean-Claude was identified as the operator of Astroforce and Infogest, a company implicated in the distribution of troubling solicitations. Our investigation had previously uncovered information about a Canadian affiliate, Infogest Direct Marketing, suggesting a larger network of fraud encapsulated within the operations connected to these figures.

Jacques, he explained, had crafted the narrative around Maria's psychic persona, aiming to create a compelling lure for victims. Originally, three psychics were involved in the letter-writing, but Maria quickly emerged as the standout star. Our source's revelations highlighted the organizational sophistication behind the scam, which he described as a "fraud in a box," capable of extending its reach internationally through various companies licensed to operate under this umbrella.

As our conversation concluded, the former employee's insights not only validated earlier suspicions but also raised new questions regarding the current status and involvement of Jacques and Jean-Claude in ongoing operations. Had these masterminds merely shifted responsibilities, or were they still orchestrating the scam from behind the scenes? The revelations surrounding the inner workings of the Maria Duval scheme certainly

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signaled a critical turn in our investigation, illuminating the shadows that had long obscured the truth.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of courage in revealing the truth.

Critical Interpretation: In this chapter, the whistleblower's bravery in coming forward serves as a powerful reminder that true integrity often requires taking risks to expose wrongdoing, even when facing personal fears. Imagine standing at a crossroads: one path leads you back to comfort and silence, while the other requires you to confront your past and share your story, potentially impacting the lives of many. This decision echoes in your own life, encouraging you to embrace courage in your pursuits—whether speaking out against injustice in your community, sharing your authentic self, or taking that leap into the unknown. Let his story inspire you to recognize the value of your voice and the strength found in vulnerability; after all, every truth you uncover could be a beacon for someone else navigating their shadows.

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Chapter 14 Summary: The “Mailing Genius”

The narrative surrounding Jacques Mailland, often referred to as the "Mailing Genius," sheds light on his pivotal role in the operations of Maria Duval, an international figure in psychic mailings. Initially recognized as a secretive figure who handled Maria's correspondence and public engagement, Jacques was a copywriter specializing in psychic content, as revealed by various whistleblowers and associates from his past. His career took flight in the mid-1990s, during which he crafted persuasive letters targeting those seeking psychic insights, ingeniously exploiting the allure of the supernatural to drive sales.

1. Jacques's Marketing Prowess: Jacques's connections to the world of psychics were deep-rooted, as he orchestrated collaborations with well-known psychics through contracts that permitted the use of their names and likenesses in marketing materials. This underlined his expertise not just in writing compelling narratives but also in navigating the ethical dilemmas tied to this line of work.

2. A Complex Persona: As information about Jacques emerged, varying images of him surfaced—from a psychotherapist in years past to a vibrant personality in social media. His online presence revealed interests that spanned from fine dining to kitesurfing, ultimately painting him as a multifaceted individual who lived a seemingly fulfilling life.



3. Attempted Contact and Investigative Struggles: In-depth investigations by journalists like Willem Bosma highlighted Jacques's evasiveness when it came to demystifying his involvement with Maria Duval. Contacts indicated that Jacques was the linchpin for media inquiries regarding Maria, underlining his critical yet controversial role within the psychic mailing scheme.

4. Justifying the Scheme: Jacques, when contacted by Willem, contended that his operations offered individuals a sense of well-being, even invoking the placebo effect as a legitimate component of healing. His perspective reflected a detachment from the potential harm caused to individuals misled by the operations he managed, illustrating a moral complexity that many in the industry navigate.

5. The Unexpected Twist: After months of attempts to reach Jacques, a startling revelation arrived: he had died in a motorbike accident in May 2015, just months before the investigation began. This shocking news brought an abrupt end to any hope of directly understanding his motivations or justifications for the business practices linked to Maria Duval.

Jacques Mailland's life and untimely death encapsulate the intricate web of the psychic mailings industry, blending elements of persuasion, ethical ambiguity, and personal intrigue. The unanswered questions surrounding his

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life and operations present a compelling narrative that highlights the complexities of ethical decision-making within the context of commercial endeavors linked to human vulnerability.

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Chapter 15: The Bizarre Businessman

In Chapter 15 of "A Deal with the Devil," the focus shifts to Jean-Claude Reuille, an enigmatic figure intricately tied to the Maria Duval letters scheme. Our investigation began with the discovery that he was alive and residing in Thailand with a new wife. Jean-Claude is characterized as a serial entrepreneur peddling an eclectic array of unconventional products that would be at home in late-night infomercials, including weight-loss shoe insoles, a device that ages wine, a home heating box, a versatile knife, and even an asparagus pill for quick weight loss. Despite his low public profile compared to Jacques Mailland, Jean-Claude had significant connections to the inner workings of the scam, with clues pointing to his past ownership of Infogest, a company directly associated with the letters.

Our research uncovered a 1994 Swiss magazine article portraying Jean-Claude as a cheerful and spiritually inclined businessman enjoying considerable success. The article hinted at his alleged revenue exceeding \$30 million from his various ventures, leading us to ponder the authenticity and ethics behind such figures. Intriguingly, Reuille's unconventional journey

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Chapter 16 Summary: The Copywriter

In exploring the elaborate world of direct mail fraud, particularly through the lens of the infamous psychic Maria Duval, we uncovered the critical role played by skilled copywriters, or "mailing geniuses," who crafted letters designed to hook vulnerable recipients. At the center of this operation was Jacques Mailland, the master copywriter whose techniques involved deeply personalized elements, utilizing the recipient's name, age, and other intimate details to create emotional connections and fabricate compelling narratives. Each letter was meticulously designed to resonate with individuals feeling lonely or uncertain about their futures, portraying Maria as a confidante who understood their struggles and could predict a bright future for them if they responded to her messages.

The emotional manipulation was systematic and sophisticated. The letters successfully tapped into the right psychological triggers by offering not just advice, but a promise of companionship and understanding. For instance, this involved mundane yet relatable concerns, framing Maria as a friend who shared in their feelings and struggles, ultimately providing a false hope that was hard to resist. Presenting her as a sympathetic ally enabled the letters to foster a sense of belonging and connection, particularly for the elderly, who often felt isolated.

1. The Connection Between Copywriting and Deception: The journey to

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understanding the origins of these letters led us to a former journalist and copywriter who candidly shared his experiences in the mail-order business. He transitioned from reporting real news to crafting fictional narratives aimed at persuading individuals to part with their money. He saw little distinction between journalism and copywriting, emphasizing that both involve storytelling, albeit under different pretenses.

2. Selling Solutions Rather Than Products: This copywriter emphasized that the focus was not on selling products but rather on selling solutions and dreams. He noted that the most effective letters were those that crafted a vivid picture of the recipient's prospective future happiness, while artfully avoiding explicit promises that could be deemed illegal. This manipulation often involved addressing the fears and aspirations inherent in the target demographic, particularly the elderly, who were looking for reassurance and connection.

3. Balancing Morality and Profitability: Despite the morally questionable nature of his work, the copywriter justified his actions by suggesting he was filling a void in people's lives, especially the lonely elderly. He posited that creating a sense of friendship through his letters served a purpose, providing a temporary solace to those who felt abandoned. Yet, he also acknowledged that his involvement often played on the vulnerabilities of these individuals, particularly regarding their fears about health or loneliness.

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4. Understanding the Demographic: Delving into the mind of his audience, the copywriter characterized his ideal recipient as a widowed senior living alone on a fixed income, who likely had experienced disappointments in life. His objective was clear: to reassure her that Maria could help lighten her burdens, thereby manipulating her psychological state for profit.

5. The Craft of Writing: The copywriter's process was both instinctive and structured. He would vividly imagine the narrative and write it out in a conversational tone that invited reading aloud, ensuring that it felt personal and relatable. He made adjustments after reviewing his work, fine-tuning the emotional resonance without excessive revisions, showcasing a reliance on his experience in storytelling rather than a rigid adherence to the written word.

Through this exploration, it became evident that behind the dubious glamour of psychic mailings lay a calculated apparatus of deception, where skilled writers twisted the narratives of their letters to exploit human vulnerability for financial gain. The blend of empathy and exploitation in their work highlights a disturbing intersection of human experience, as these letters often served more as instruments of manipulation than of genuine aid.

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Chapter 17 Summary: The Nucleus

In this gripping chapter from “A Deal with the Devil,” the investigation into the enigmatic Maria Duval and her long-standing network of schemes takes a new turn as the authors delve deeper into the origins of the notorious letters attributed to her. Initially established by the Swiss company Infogest, founded by Jean-Claude, the trail begins to unravel when they converse with Lukas Mattle, a former director of Infogest who now runs a driving school. Throughout a series of interrupted phone calls, it becomes evident that Infogest, along with the Maria Duval operation, appears to have met an untimely end. Lukas ambiguously refers to the company as “finished,” leaving the authors questioning the continuity of the infamous letters that continued to circulate despite the company's liquidation in 2014.

The pursuit of answers consumes the authors' lives, as they grapple with the convoluted web of conmen and shell companies that surround Maria Duval. Their inquiry leads them to discover a Russian website promoting psychic services under Maria Duval's name, which showcases a number of misleading testimonials paired with stock images, raising their suspicion about the operation's ghostly persistence. This site, notably distinct from Maria's former U.S. presence, reinforces their belief that her identity has been hijacked by opportunists capitalizing on her name.

Digging further, they unearth connections back to Jacques, a figure

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previously involved in the Maria Duval saga, suggesting that he may have continued the deceptive practices long after Jean-Claude's claimed retirement in 2006. Jacques's recent death leaves a power vacuum within the scam network, further complicating their investigation; it seems there may now be no one left to hold the reins. The authors postulate a theory that the operation could run on autopilot without a clear leader, involving countless minor players content to profit from the chaos.

Amidst this labyrinthine endeavor, they realize that the vast array of individuals contributing to this ongoing con are primarily pawns in a larger scheme. Their efforts to piece together the scattered evidence highlight the complexity of the case, a true “fraud in a box,” and epitomize the challenges law enforcement agencies face in dismantling such intricate operations. As the chapter closes, the narrative shifts from the legacy of the scammers back to Maria Duval herself, leaving the authors intent on unraveling the mystery surrounding her true motivations in this heartless scam: was it monetary gain, the allure of power, or something deeper? Unquestionably, Maria remains the focal point of their quest, her story waiting to be unveiled.

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Chapter 18: The Windfall

In this captivating chapter of "A Deal with the Devil," the authors find themselves on an intriguing journey to locate the elusive psychic Maria Duval. Starting with a well-known French address that had been referenced repeatedly, they initially question whether Duval is indeed a real person. Upon contacting the town hall of Callas, France, they are pleasantly surprised to discover that not only is Duval real, but she also has a new address and is known in the community. Encouraged by this information, the journalists pitch their trip to their editors, who astoundingly support the idea of sending them to the picturesque wine country of France.

This chapter highlights several pivotal moments in their investigative process. Firstly, they connect with Françoise Barre, a former mayor and personal secretary to Duval, who shares a treasure trove of anecdotes that both astound and amuse. She recounts the miracles Duval performed, including curing a motorcycle accident victim and even solving a missing person case over the phone. The details shared by Françoise introduce a layer of complexity to the narrative, thickening the air of mystique

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Chapter 19 Summary: The Trip

As they embarked on their long-anticipated trip to Callas, the dynamic duo of Blake and Melanie faced a cascade of setbacks that tested their resolve. Their journey began with an unexpected email from Antoine, the son of Maria Duval, who firmly requested they cease any direct contact with his family. This stern message, arriving just hours before their departure, filled them with hesitation and doubt—concerns about their approach to Maria stirred, as they realized they might have already overstepped their bounds.

1. The early signs of trouble were compounded by the loss of their French-speaking colleague, Julia, who misplaced her green card just before the trip. This unfortunate mishap threatened to leave Blake and Melanie stranded in France without the necessary communication skills to connect with locals or navigate their purpose. Compounding their worries, a massive winter storm loomed over the East Coast, threatening to derail the travel plans of everyone involved.

2. As the day progressed, the distance and travel logistics added to their anxiety. Blake's carefree nature met with hurdles as she missed her flight to Chicago, leading to frantic efforts to connect with Melanie, who had already boarded her flight. This disconnection heightened Melanie's anxiety, especially since she had been relying on Blake's presence to alleviate her own nerves ahead of such an important assignment.



3. Their reunion at London's Heathrow Airport was fraught with tension, as Blake faced additional security checks that threatened to delay their plans. However, they managed to board their flight to Nice just in the nick of time, only to be faced with a new challenge upon arrival: the daunting task of navigating the winding roads to their hotel in Draguignan.

4. The duo's adventurous spirit turned to dread as they drove a large SUV through narrow and treacherous mountain roads, desperately trying to keep pace amidst oncoming lights and steep inclines. Overwhelmed by their surroundings and the complexity of driving in a foreign country, they felt the weight of each twist and turn. Their GPS inadvertently set to avoid tolls led them on a perilous route, amplifying the sense of urgency and danger as they inched cautiously towards their destination.

5. Completing their arduous journey, they met Julia and producer Jordan Malter at the hotel, relieved to see everyone had arrived safely. Unlike Blake and Melanie, who felt battered from their lengthy travel, Julia appeared effortlessly stylish, further highlighting the stark contrast between their chaotic adventure and her smooth arrival.

Over a simple dinner, they recounted their tumultuous drive, only to discover that a more straightforward highway route had been available—one they had unintentionally avoided due to their GPS settings. This realization

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brought a mix of relief and disbelief as they shared laughter over their harrowing experience, unaware that every twist and turn along the way had paved the road for their upcoming challenges in Callas. With spirits heightened by camaraderie and a glass of wine, they prepared to face whatever lay ahead in their ongoing quest.

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Chapter 20 Summary: The Dusty Archives

The next morning, we woke early, eager to escape the discomfort of our cold hotel room. We joined Julia for a brief French breakfast of soft cheese, baguettes, and strong espresso, during which she informed us about a meeting she had arranged in Nice—the city we had just left. This easy drive along the French toll road left us feeling a mix of embarrassment and urgency as we prepared to confront Maria.

Our first priority was to gather as much background information on Maria as possible. Given her purported popularity, we figured local archives might yield valuable insights, so we headed to Nice-Matin, the local newspaper. Once there, we met Alain, the dedicated archivist who excitedly revealed the extensive materials he had maintained over the years. His enthusiasm was palpable as he showcased a digital archive and successfully retrieved an article from 1992 featuring a much younger Maria. The headline described her as “a gentle witch,” highlighting her return to Callas due to her love for animals. Alain's casual assertion that he believed Maria to be a real psychic showcased his long-standing admiration for her.

Fueled by curiosity, we peppered Alain with questions, eager to discern the truth behind the local celebrity. Confused by our skepticism, he ultimately invited us to explore the newspaper's physical archives, a treasure trove of bound newspapers stored in the basement.

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As we descended into the dimly lit, musty space, the immense collection of newspapers loomed before us. Knowing the specific dates we sought helped cut through the overwhelming volume of material. Our earlier research had unearthed alleged newspaper clippings related to Maria's psychic claims, which we had initially dismissed as fraudulent. Now, we were determined to substantiate or debunk these stories directly from the source.

Our first attempt to verify an outlandish story about Maria locating someone by helicopter in Saint-Tropez ended in frustration; the article lacked a definitive date, and Alain couldn't locate it in their archives. Another article we sought was curiously absent from the shelf. However, persevering, we eventually unearthed a heavy volume from 1977, our target date.

Much to our shock, we discovered a photo of a woman who, despite having brown hair, unmistakably resembled Maria. This was the very same article we had previously deemed a hoax. Alain, equally excited, translated a caption from beneath the photo. It recounted how Maria had successfully located a lost man using only a photograph provided by the distressed family, which Alain characterized as showcasing her remarkable sixth sense. This moment fueled our quest, weaving Maria's deeper narrative into the growing tapestry of her enigmatic persona. Each revelation steadily raised the stakes, preparing us for our impending confrontation.

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Chapter 21: The Psychic No One Sees

In the small, picturesque town of Callas, where the quiet cobblestone streets wind through scenic vineyards and historical buildings, the enigmatic figure of Maria stands out, yet remains largely unrecognized by the locals. During a winter visit to uncover details about her life, our team found Callas astonishingly desolate, lacking the usual influx of tourists that characterize nearby coastal cities like Nice and Marseilles. As we searched for signs of Maria's elusive existence, we began our inquiries at the local tourism office. Here, a young woman quickly acknowledged Maria's name, marking her as a notable but infrequently present resident, known mainly for her appearances at local music festivals. Interestingly, we were informed that we might be the first visitors actively seeking her out.

Our exploration continued at a dimly lit restaurant where the middle-aged owners displayed reluctance to engage. Despite their hesitation, the husband shared that while he had never seen Maria physically, she had resided in Callas for some time, keeping her life private. This sense of discretion encapsulated the general sentiment we encountered among the townsfolk.

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Alex Walk

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Chapter 22 Summary: The House

Maria Duval's residence was a challenge to locate, shrouded by thick concrete walls and a high metal gate that reinforced the impression of someone determined to remain hidden. Our journey began with a series of fruitless attempts to pinpoint her address, utilizing two leads: one from a city employee and the other from public trademark records. Each address we entered into our GPS led us to unexpected destinations, from a steep cliffside estate to a four-way intersection called Les Quatre Chemins, which bore no resemblance to a home.

Time slipped away as we wandered, hopeful yet disheartened, until a faded yellow sign caught our attention. It marked a dilapidated stucco house adorned with white shutters and a red tiled roof. We realized that we had likely overlooked the right location, missing it by mere feet due to the absence of a house number. Encouraged, we turned around and parked nearby a horse stable, believing that her house must be just a short walk away.

Upon further exploration, we encountered a large tree with a number affixed to it, leading to an imposing gate secured with a padlock and surrounded by a chain-link fence. Caution prevailed as we read signs indicating that this was private property, with warnings of video surveillance and aggressive dogs. As we walked along the perimeter, the sense of isolation was palpable,



yet the sporadic traffic on the main road reminded us of civilization not far away.

In due course, our persistence paid off; we glimpsed a two-story white house, though it remained obscured by thick greenery and a formidable wall. A buzz button beckoned; trepidation surrounded the expectation of what lay beyond. After repeated efforts, the gate began to creak open, revealing a woman just out of reach. However, as soon as Julia initiated contact, the gate promptly closed again, leaving us to decipher whether we had actually made contact with Maria herself.

The woman claimed to work for Maria and informed us that she was currently in Rome, suggesting we leave a note for her to facilitate communication. Despite seeing a blond woman, Julia was convinced that the encounter could not have been with the elderly psychic, raising doubts about Maria's whereabouts. Our hopes dimmed further as we shared speculation that her absence seemed too coincidental given our visit.

Convinced that our pursuit was not entirely in vain, we penned a letter to Maria, expressing our intent to report on her story and inviting her to share her perspective. As daylight waned, we deposited the note in her small white mailbox, hoping for a response that could lead us to uncover the truths we sought.

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In summary:

1. The initial search for Maria Duval involved multiple misdirects and challenges, emphasizing her desire for privacy.
2. Persistence led to the identification of her property, with trials around security and warnings creating an atmosphere of foreboding.
3. An essential encounter with a woman on the property raised the possibility of dual identities, leaving us with lingering questions.
4. Ultimately, our visit culminated in the hopeful act of leaving a message, representing our commitment to uncovering Maria Duval's story.

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Chapter 23 Summary: The Sister

The following summary outlines the key events and discoveries in Chapter 23 of "A Deal with the Devil" by Blake Ellis, where the protagonists continue their investigation into Maria Duval.

1. Determined to find Maria Duval, the team sets up in Julia's sunny hotel room filled with light, in contrast to their previous dark quarters. They spread out their research, including documents naming a potential relative of Maria—a woman named Marie-Françoise Gamba. Intrigued by this new lead, they investigate further.
2. After spotting a phone listing for Marie-Françoise, the group uses Julia's phone to call her. To their astonishment, an elderly woman answers. Julia introduces herself as a journalist interested in Maria's connection. The atmosphere is tense as they anticipate learning more about Maria's situation.
3. During the conversation, Julia learns that Marie-Françoise is indeed Maria's sister. While the two listeners can't comprehend every part of the conversation, crucial words like "Switzerland," "Jacques," "letters," and "Infogest" catch their attention, signaling potential connections.
4. Julia takes frantic notes, relaying questions on the group's behalf to Maria's sister. They inquire about Maria's health, business dealings, her



financial status, and the letters being sent in her name. Marie-Françoise reveals that she speaks to her sister almost daily, although she doesn't provide specific details about Maria's health condition.

5. Shocked by the news of a U.S. lawsuit against Maria alleging mail fraud, Marie-Françoise explains that her sister could not be responsible for the letters, calling it a scam, or “escroquerie.” She provides a key insight: years prior, Maria sold the rights to her name to a Swiss company, likely Infogest, which explains why she may no longer have control over the letters being sent out.

6. While discussing the implications of these revelations, the investigation continues to deepen. Julia contacts Françoise Barre, Maria's friend and former mayor of Callas, who suggests a business arrangement managed by Maria for overseeing the letters. She confirms that Maria has stated she no longer has control over these operations.

7. Despite calling Maria a good person with extraordinary psychic abilities, Françoise is not surprised by the potential for deception involved with the letters, indicating that Maria's claims may not be entirely trustworthy.

8. Conclusively, after gathering this substantial information, the team resolves to reconnect with Maria. They are particularly motivated by the notion that her sister, who speaks with her frequently, mentioned Maria's

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health could dictate her current whereabouts, challenging their prior assumptions about her being in Rome.

This chapter highlights the investigative process behind uncovering the complexities of Maria Duval's life, introducing new leads, and raising questions about her involvement in fraudulent activities connected to her psychic business. The juxtaposition of personal relationships, business dealings, and ethical dilemmas continues to enrich the narrative, illustrating the intricate web the protagonists must navigate to uncover the truth.

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Chapter 24: The Pot of Jelly

The narrative unfolds with a palpable sense of apprehension as the protagonists grapple with their decision to revisit Maria's house, mindful of her son Antoine's recent warning urging them to stay away. Their moment of uncertainty quickly transforms into urgency when they spot a large white van exiting the property. Fueled by a desire to uncover the truth, they impulsively dash across the street, completely forgetting their notebooks in the rush.

As they approach the vehicle, the driver, an older man who reveals himself as Maria's gardener, informs them that she is currently in Rome and has communicated no details regarding her affairs. His evasive demeanor raises suspicions, suggesting a premeditated cover-up surrounding Maria's whereabouts. Despite their probing, further inquiries are interrupted as other vehicles approach, prompting the gardener to hastily drive away, leaving the group in a state of bewilderment.

Determined that Maria is indeed at her home, they proceed to search the

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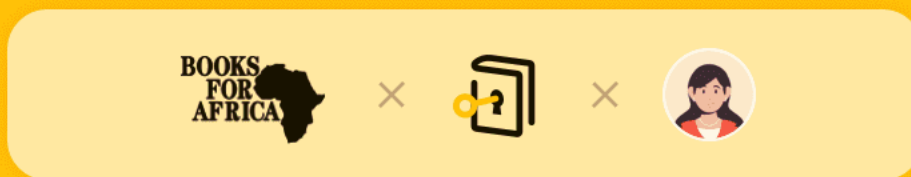
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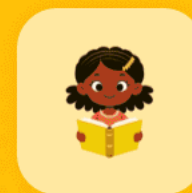
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Chapter 25 Summary: The Lover

In an intriguing twist of events, our quest to locate Maria has led us down a complex and confusing path. Despite our efforts to gather information in Callas, we found that no one seemed to have seen her since her jelly pickup in December. Even her former friends and close family, including the sister and the past mayor, had not had any contact with her recently. To add to the mystery, Maria's neighbors were completely unaware of her existence, raising suspicions about her current whereabouts.

1. In our growing desperation, we pivoted towards Maria's business manager, a figure mentioned in a local newspaper article. Realizing that time was slipping away, we intensified our search for this individual, thinking he might hold crucial information regarding Maria's disappearance. Our online investigation proved fruitful, revealing that he owned a business located in an industrial park characterized by a distinct sulfur odor.
2. Upon arrival, we navigated through a sprawling complex filled with numerous empty buildings. Sadly, clarity came with little effort as we stumbled upon a busy yoga class. The instructor, unfazed by our intrusion, directed us towards the construction business related to the manager we were seeking.
3. Once we located the construction company, we were greeted by a friendly



younger employee who significantly clued us into the dynamics of Maria's former relationship with her manager. We learned that not only had he been her business manager, but they had also shared a romantic involvement that lasted for several years. Complicating matters, he was married and eventually ended the relationship in 2009, one year after the article we had found was published.

4. Armed with this new information, we were provided with the manager's personal phone number written on a bright yellow Post-it note. Eager to uncover the details, we called him, but he was distinctly uncooperative. His defensive tone suggested he was unwilling to discuss any personal connections with Maria. He claimed to have only spent a month at her residence as a construction manager, asserting that they hadn't spoken in a decade.

5. When we pressed him about why Maria would misrepresent him as her manager, he implied that she was desperate to maintain an aura of importance during her peak, hence the fabrication. He vehemently denied knowledge of the "Maria Duval letters" and expressed his outrage upon discovering his name had been tied to her in the aforementioned article. He even mentioned that he had contacted the newspaper to demand a correction.

6. This interaction prompted us to revisit the articles about Maria that Alain, the observant archivist, had previously compiled for us. After a quick search,

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we pinpointed the article that described the business manager's relationship with her. Tucked away at the bottom was a correction stating that he was "no longer the manager for the astrologer and clairvoyant Maria Duval," indicating a shift in their professional ties that aligned with the timeline of their personal breakup.

Consequently, the search for Maria deepens, revealing layers of personal and professional intrigue, each new lead provoking more questions than answers as we endeavor to uncover the truth behind her enigmatic life.

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Chapter 26 Summary: The Son

In the final days of their time in France, the protagonists faced uncertainty about their next steps in their investigation into Maria Duval. Despite efforts to reach her through various contacts, including her family and associates, the lack of communication left them feeling frustrated and contemplating abandoning their quest. Their focus shifted to Maria's son, Antoine, who had initially reached out via email but had become unresponsive to their inquiries.

1. Digging Deeper into Antoine: As the duo delved into Antoine's background, they discovered his involvement with the Freemasons, a historically secretive society. Although Freemasonry is described as a charitable organization focused on moral values, the narrative surrounding it is filled with conspiracy theories, particularly in France, where it is viewed with suspicion. The duo learned that through his affiliations and even trademarking his own Masonic organization, Antoine was deeply integrated into these mystical traditions. This connection piqued their interest and made Antoine a potential key to unraveling the mystery of Maria's past.

2. Exploration of Spiritual Roots: As they researched further, they encountered diverse spiritual practices connected to Antoine, including a group drawn to esoteric knowledge and psychic abilities. This entailed studying topics like alchemy and tarot, which aligned closely with the



themes present in Maria's previous correspondence. This layer of mysticism surrounding his interests added to their understanding of both Antoine and his mother, hinting at deeper familial ties to the unexplained.

3. The Search for the Bookstore: The duo eagerly attempted to visit Antoine's bookstore, La table d'Hermès, only to find it recently closed down. Despite the disappointment, they pushed forward to visit the site in Toulon. Their journey through the quaint town, filled with bustling cafés and shops, encapsulated the picturesque yet surreal atmosphere of their quest.

4. A Fortuitous Encounter: Upon reaching the deserted bookstore, they stumbled upon a phone number advertising the property for sale. In a twist of fate, while calling the number, they found themselves unexpectedly speaking with Antoine. This fortunate moment led to an in-person meeting arranged at a nearby café, reigniting hopes to finally connect with him and gain insight into Maria's enigmatic life.

The chapter captures the protagonists' determination amidst setbacks, underscoring the complexities of familial bonds, secretive societies, and the allure of uncovering truths from the past as they prepare for an important rendezvous with Antoine. Their journey reflects a blend of frustration, intrigue, and the anticipation of revelations that could emerge from connecting with a figure so deeply intertwined with their subject of inquiry.

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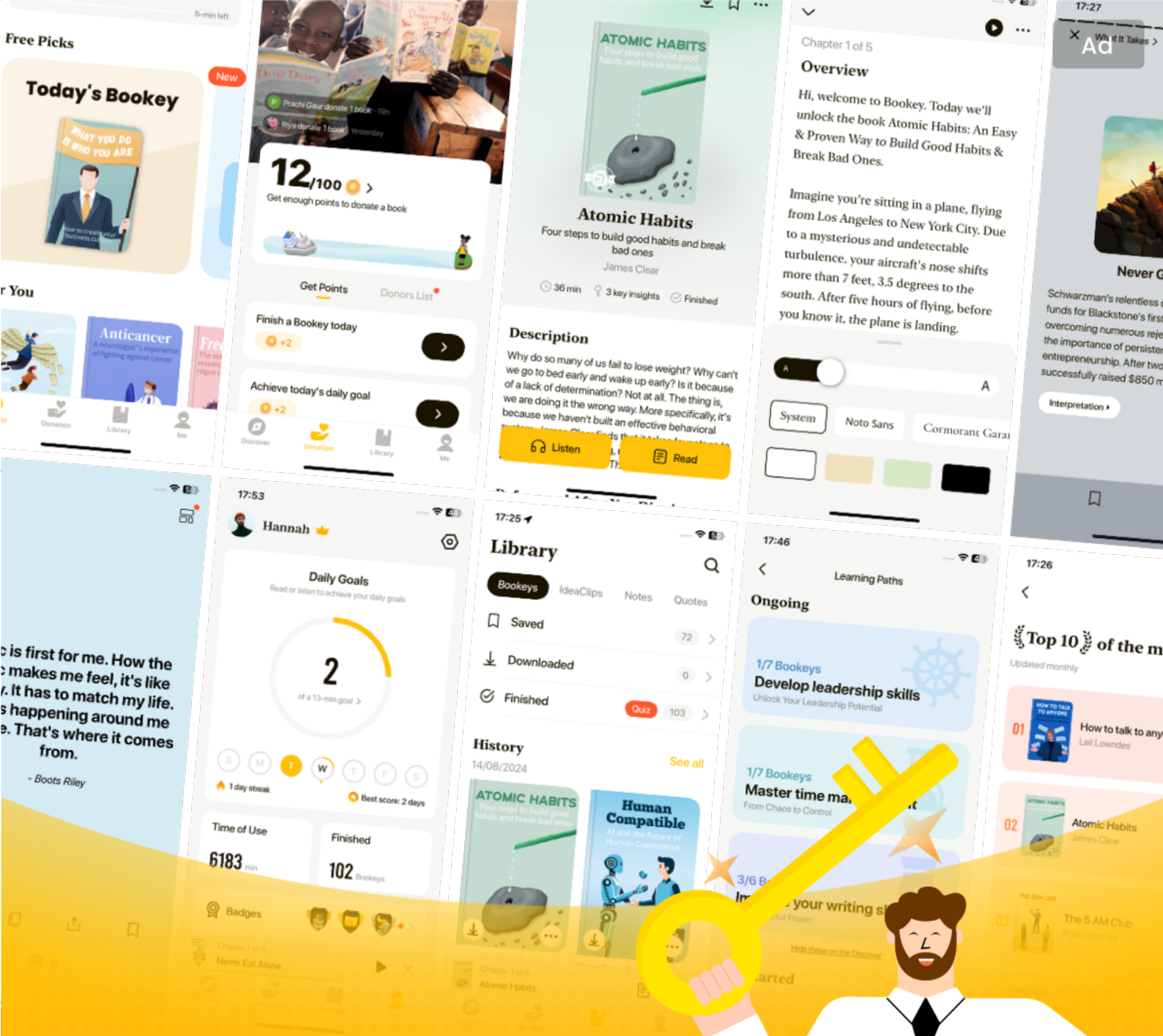
Chapter 27: The Attorney

In the days leading up to a pivotal meeting with Antoine, the team focused on locating Andrea Egger, a Swiss attorney closely associated with the Maria Duval operation. Their search led them to the striking city-state of Monaco, famous for its luxurious appeal and shadowy financial practices. Monaco, often filled with well-dressed high rollers, sparked curiosity about the sources of their wealth. Although Andrea hadn't been implicated in any wrongdoing or named in government actions, he had been involved in filing trademark applications related to Maria Duval, which had initially put his name on their radar.

Despite months of attempts to contact Andrea, the breakthrough came when they discovered a personal address for him in Monaco. The drive to the city was breathtaking, showcasing rock tunnels along the coastline. However, finding parking proved challenging in the narrow streets of this compact city. After a frustrating search, they finally located a public parking area, which required a strenuous trek down many flights of stairs to reach Andrea's luxury residence.

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Chapter 28 Summary: The Deal

Part of us never truly believed that Antoine would attend our anticipated meeting. After returning from our visit to Monaco, we made our way to Toulon, arriving hours early to find the ideal locale for our late-afternoon interview. The café Antoine had chosen was a charming two-story venue adorned with elegant glass chandeliers and intricate crown molding. We opted for a secluded corner upstairs, outfitted with a tufted velvet couch and a small table, where we diligently reviewed our questions in preparation. Given our assumption that Antoine lacked proficiency in English, Julia felt particularly anxious, knowing she would bear the weight of the interview.

Eventually, Antoine approached our table, accompanied by his daughter. His appearance matched the file we had on him; he had a round face, short graying hair, and wore wire-rimmed glasses. As expected, he was not comfortable speaking English, so after exchanging a “Bonjour,” we awkwardly smiled throughout the formalities while Julia translated their conversation. Initially skeptical of our motives, Antoine requested to see our official CNN IDs before opening up, yet the discussion ultimately extended for over an hour, interrupted only when the barista politely ushered us out as the café closed—something we half-suspected was Antoine’s strategy all along.

The interview began with straightforward biographical inquiries about

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Antoine's mother. He recounted her journey from Italy to France, revealing that Maria had discovered her psychic abilities while still a child. He confidently asserted that his mother possessed genuine psychic talent, recalling instances from her childhood where her premonitions had materialized. Although his mother eventually shifted focus to running an industrial pool-cleaning business and opening clothing stores across the South of France, her psychic abilities remained, leading her to offer consultations to friends from her shops. Over time, her fame grew, eventually featuring her in local media, writing horoscopes, and aiding in finding missing persons.

This revelation rekindled our curiosity about the extraordinary claims we had encountered in the letters, suggesting that perhaps fictional aspects were rooted in truth, especially regarding Maria's alleged ability to locate the missing. Antoine referenced a specific case from Saint-Tropez we recognized from Maria's YouTube narrative, raising our suspicions about her involvement in genuine rescues, especially when an archivist surfaced an article about her aiding in finding a lost elderly man.

Furthermore, we inquired about the mysterious Callas Parapsychology Institute mentioned in the letters, to which Antoine affirmatively acknowledged Maria's past presidency, despite our inability to verify its existence. He also shared details about her marriage history and the unusual alias, 'Duval,' which stemmed from her second husband, dispelling our

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theory that it was merely an invented stage name.

Antoine painted a vivid picture of living with a psychic mother, describing it as "dangerous" due to her perceptive nature. He recalled instances when Maria would inquire about his day in a way that made it impossible for him to lie. His daughter Morgane chimed in, noting that Maria always offered advice less overtly, guiding both Antoine and Morgane in their careers and romantic pursuits.

Antoine further revealed that despite her age and deteriorating health, Maria remained dedicated to her work, interacting with political figures and ordinary people alike. This led us to reconsider the authenticity of the YouTube testimonials we had viewed, previously dismissed as mere promotional material. Was there sincerity behind her predictions, or was Antoine simply adept at crafting a convincing narrative?

Our question about how Maria had become embroiled in the scam unraveled a troubling story—Antoine remarked that his mother had sold her name over twenty years prior. Once the name was sold, it ceased to belong to her and instead became a commodity for others to exploit. Although he vacillated on specific details, he suggested Infogest as a possible firm involved, but his reluctance to name individuals led us to conclude that legal complexities surrounded the situation, restricting further inquiry.

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We pressed for clarity regarding her decision to sell her name, learning that Maria sought to protect her identity because her psychic abilities had garnered recognition. Her initial agreements, reportedly lucrative, appeared to diminish into endorsements for potentially dubious products as corporations fueled by profit became involved. Antoine shared with a mix of resignation and concern that these entities had exploited his mother without her full understanding of the implications.

Antoine's discomfort intensified as we prodded about her fears of legal ramifications surrounding the letters and her efforts to withdraw from the contract. To our astonishment, he insisted it wasn't a simple contract one could walk away from; attempting to sever ties could result in severe repercussions. We found his insistence that Maria had not written any of the letters—merely acting as a figurehead in a broader deception—to be unsettling yet plausible. His assertion that she was more victim than perpetrator, despite having profited from the enterprise, created an unsettling dichotomy for us.

As the conversation darkened, Antoine characterized the companies behind the letters as ruthless and driven solely by profit, illuminating the disturbing reality of the fraudulent operation that had turned Maria into a metaphorical puppet. Although he expressed sympathy for his mother, our understanding of Maria's truth diverged sharply from Antoine's presentation. The mystery surrounding her past and the events leading to her entrapment in a deceptive

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scheme remained unresolved.

At the end of our interview, Antoine reiterated the distinct divide between Maria as a person and her name as a brand. He cultivated a stance that positioned her as a victim of circumstances far beyond her control. However, our research countered his narrative with documentation that showcased Maria had indeed profited significantly from the very letters she was now painted as innocent of creating.

As we left the café, a tension arose as we noticed a group following us, igniting a brief panic. Yet, Julia confronted them fearlessly, reinforcing a spirit of determination within us as we proceeded to review the audio recordings of our conversation. We discovered nuances in Antoine's words we had missed earlier, such as Maria's relationship with Jacques and his connection to her family, further complicating our perceptions of their interactions.

Ultimately, our journey to uncover the truth about Maria Duval had left us ensnared in a web of conflicting narratives. We vacillated between viewing her as a naive victim ensnared in a convoluted business scheme and as a willing participant driven by personal ambition. We were left grappling with the complex interplay of innocence and guilt, revealing the murky realities inherent in the life of a woman whose name had become forever intertwined with manipulation and deception.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The complex interplay of innocence and guilt in personal narratives can inspire us to seek deeper truths.

Critical Interpretation: As you reflect on Maria's story, consider how your own experiences are often layered with conflicting narratives. The revelation that individuals can embody both victimhood and complicity serves as a profound reminder that life is rarely black and white. Embrace the complexity of your own journey; acknowledge that your decisions may be influenced by circumstances beyond your control while also owning your agency. This awareness can inspire you to navigate your life with greater empathy, understanding that everyone harbors their own struggles and contradictions. By doing so, you can forge deeper connections with others and cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the human experience.

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Chapter 29 Summary: The Myth

In the intriguing narrative surrounding Maria Duval, a woman hailed for her supposed mystical abilities to locate missing persons, numerous accounts both verify and contradict her storied past. The investigation begins in France, where an archivist presents a decades-old article claiming that Maria found an elderly man solely using a photograph provided by his family. Despite the media coverage illustrating her as a remarkable figure with uncanny skills, skepticism lingers, particularly regarding an infamous rescue story set in the luxurious town of Saint-Tropez, where the details appear to shift depending on who recounts it.

1. A striking inconsistency emerges between Maria's versions of the story and the information on her website, where the missing individual is identified as a dentist's wife, while the articles focus on a doctor's wife. The confusion intensifies when the authorship of the narratives is considered. They suggest that the captivating tales may stem from either exaggerations or poor translations of earlier articles, leading investigators to question the reliability of the accounts. Additionally, a friendly archivist sheds light on a 1978 article that praises Maria's talents as a psychic, noting that local authorities often turn to her after conventional methods have failed.
2. The compelling recounting of Maria's involvement in the search for the missing doctor's wife paints her in a favorable light. According to the



article, she was invited to assist with the case after search efforts faltered. Utilizing a pendulum and a map, she apparently pinpointed the woman's location, prompting a successful rescue operation. The description of this event aligns closely with the various tales circulating about her, yet the inconsistencies regarding the identities and specific details cast doubt on her purported abilities.

3. Beyond the rescue narratives, deeper layers of Maria's life are revealed. The article details her claimed childhood in Italy, steeped in a familial lineage of psychic prowess, and includes peculiar anecdotes, such as her supposed ability to locate missing pets—a claim reminiscent of her letters asserting she once found Brigitte Bardot's dog. Despite these captivating stories, the investigation leads back to the origins of the documentation concerning Maria Duval. It becomes evident that the journalist behind the favorable articles appears to have vanished, with no trace linking him to contemporary sources, leaving the legitimacy of the acclaim along with the alleged rescues shrouded in uncertainty.

In summarizing the saga of Maria Duval, the essence of her myth is rooted not simply in a single fabrication but rather in a complex web of public fascination, with media portrayals feeding the narrative further. The evolution of her legend continues to reflect how stories can be shaped by anecdotal evidence and the allure of mysticism, leading many to wonder how much of the information surrounding Maria Duval is genuine and how

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much is artfully embellished. Even the skeptical researchers begin to grapple with the reality that while they set out to debunk a myth, they may have unearthed something far more intricate: a tale deeply embedded in cultural narratives and personal legend.

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Chapter 30: The Responses

In the complex narrative surrounding Maria Duval, a woman renowned for her psychic abilities in France, her story transcended into a multi-million-dollar enterprise that captivated attention globally. The CNN series that unveiled the truth about Duval ran over six weeks during the politically charged winter of 2016, coinciding with the fervor of the U.S. presidential debates. This extensive investigation shed light on a scheme that had persisted for over a decade, eventually leading to a decisive conclusion where the U.S. government formally dismantled the Maria Duval operation, reportedly with Duval's own consent to a settlement.

As the dust settled on the Duval story and the team transitioned to a new investigation, this time focusing on Donald Trump's modeling agency, they uncovered a disturbing parallel. The agency appeared to have profited from a visa program targeting foreign workers, a contradiction to the anti-immigrant rhetoric that characterized Trump's political candidacy. This inquiry into Trump's operations revealed widespread labor abuses within the modeling industry, providing a fresh perspective on exploitation within a

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Chapter 31 Summary: The Other Psychics

Amid a deluge of emails received in their special-investigations inbox, the authors stumbled upon a message from a French self-proclaimed “astropsychologist” named Dr. Turi. His cryptic advice, “Do not throw the baby with the water!” initially left them bewildered, but they soon discovered a blog post in which he critiqued their work as an attack on the spiritual and psychic community, portraying them as naive for not understanding the complexities of the world they were investigating. He recounted his own experiences with dubious psychic mailings, paralleling the situation of another psychic, Maria Duval, whose operations they had been examining.

Eager to engage further, the authors reached out to Dr. Turi, only to regret their decision as they faced a barrage of emails from his fervent followers sharing fantastical tales about aliens and government conspiracies. A phone call with Dr. Turi and his wife revealed a chaotic exchange, showcasing their dramatic and convoluted communication styles. Dr. Turi recounted an experience where he was ensnared in a profitable yet fraudulent contract with a Canadian marketing firm, intended to promote his psychic services. However, much to his dismay, the company utilized his name and credibility to distribute misleading psychic content, leading to claims of fraud against him from his followers. Echoing Maria’s experience, Dr. Turi expressed his feelings of being deceived by the arrangement he hurriedly entered into.

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From their discussions, the authors began to grasp the considerable network of mail-order psychics capitalizing on similar stories of personal deceit.

Their research unveiled a range of psychics, each with their distinct narratives yet connected through dubious business practices. Among them were Laetizia, an elderly clairvoyant claiming heritage from a lineage of psychics; Alisha, a young woman touting her success in problem-solving; and Rinalda, who claimed she received her abilities after a severe medical ordeal.

These psychics operated under a striking resemblance in their promotional strategies and testimonials of success, mirroring the patterns established by Maria and Turi. However, despite their efforts, many of these individuals gained little public recognition in comparison to the infamous Maria Duval. The authors later encountered Martin Zoller, a charismatic Swiss man with ties to Maria's past, who was running a separate psychic business under a glamorous facade.

Exploring deeper, they learned about Anne Chamfort, another so-called world-renowned clairvoyant whose origins were intertwined with the early schemes of Jacques Mailland. Anne's letters, reeking of replication from Maria's, continued to circulate, targeting markets in countries like Vietnam and Russia, but they lacked the powerful branding and acceptance that Maria enjoyed.

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This chapter reflects the complex and often confounding world of mail-order psychics, hinting at a widespread ecosystem that preys on vulnerable individuals through a veil of credible personas. The authors' inquiries into Dr. Turi and the other psychics unravel layers of deception within a business model that thrives on the shadows of legitimacy, underscoring the immense power and influence wielded by figures like Maria Duval, who outshined their counterparts despite the shared undercurrents of manipulation.

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Chapter 32 Summary: The Checks

Weeks following the publication of our investigation into the Maria Duval scam, we turned our attention to a lesser-known Canadian company named PacNet Services, which had been facilitating the cashing of checks associated with the scam. Over the years, PacNet profited from a myriad of global mail fraud schemes. Our inquiry soon revealed that we were not alone in scrutinizing PacNet; coincidentally, on the day our article was released, the U.S. government took a groundbreaking step by designating PacNet as a “significant transnational criminal organization.” This classification placed the company alongside some of the most infamous gangs and drug cartels around the globe, a severity borne out of frustration from years of targeting individual scams separately. Authorities hoped that dismantling PacNet would lead to the broader disruption of these fraudulent operations.

To comprehend how a relatively obscure payment processing entity found itself labeled a criminal organization, one must understand the operational mechanics of PacNet. Situated in a nondescript high-rise in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, PacNet effectively shielded numerous con artists from law enforcement, enabling them to collect millions of dollars deposited by victims through checks made out to accounts in PacNet’s name. For instance, consider a victim named Doreen, who might receive a letter claiming she had won \$1 million, with instructions to send in a \$20 fee to claim her prize. The letter resembled a legitimate communication,

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prompting her to respond by mailing the payment. These transactions often concluded at PacNet, which retained a commission and held the remaining funds before transferring them to the con artist's bank account. The layered complexity of this operation meant that victims typically had no awareness of PacNet's involvement, unless keen-eyed family members managed to trace payments back to the company via fine print on canceled checks.

Throughout the duration of our investigation, PacNet consistently maintained that it did not knowingly enable fraud, despite compelling evidence linking it to numerous fraudulent schemes. Ultimately, U.S. officials determined that PacNet was part of a vast global network of unscrupulous companies and scammers that thrived on mail fraud. These scams shared a commonality — generating millions by deceiving individuals into believing they had won lottery prizes or discovered psychic advisors like Maria.

As our inquiry progressed, we began to observe recurring individuals and suspicious interconnections among the fraudsters and the businesses that supported them, coining the term "the mail fraud mafia" to refer to this interconnected network. Notably, those involved in the Maria Duval scam seemed to have significant ties that permeated through various operations.

Annually, many members of this underbelly convened at glamorous conferences across the globe, orchestrated by PacNet in luxury resort

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destinations. Examples included a five-star floating "yacht hotel" in Gibraltar, the scenic mountains of Whistler, British Columbia, and the sun-kissed shores of Marbella, Spain. These events featured a mélange of social activities, such as Sangria-making contests and lavish dinners that extended into the early hours. Our imaginations sparked as we envisioned these gatherings, picturing fraudsters exchanging victim lists like prized possessions and toasting to future multi-million dollar schemes with flutes of champagne.

Old attendance lists from these conferences revealed notable figures, including key executives from Infogest (the entity responsible for Maria Duval's operations in North America), the copywriter behind her letters, and other prominent names tied into the vast web of deceit we had meticulously assembled over the preceding months. The presence of Jacques Mailland, whose name emerged as an attendee at the Marbella conference, further underscored the intricate connections linking these players within the fraud landscape, solidifying our understanding that this network was indelibly woven together.

Key Point	Description
Investigation Focus	After researching the Maria Duval scam, focus turned to PacNet Services, a Canadian company involved in cashing fraud-related checks.
Government Action	The U.S. government designated PacNet as a "significant transnational criminal organization" on the same day the investigation article was

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Key Point	Description
	published.
PacNet's Operations	PacNet facilitated payments for fraudsters, allowing them to pocket millions while shielding their operations from law enforcement.
Victim Scenarios	Victims, like Doreen, were tricked into sending payments for non-existent prizes, with funds ending up channeled through PacNet.
PacNet's Defense	Despite evidence linking it to fraud, PacNet claimed it did not knowingly enable illicit activities.
Mail Fraud Network	The investigation identified an interconnected group of fraudsters, dubbed "the mail fraud mafia", with ties to PacNet.
Global Conferences	Members of the fraud network met at luxurious conferences organized by PacNet in places like Gibraltar and Marbella, Spain.
Notable Attendees	Attendees included key figures from the Maria Duval scam, highlighting the collaboration among various fraud operations.

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Chapter 33: The Dark and the Strange

The narrative surrounding the enigmatic figure Maria Duval unfolds further, revealing a deeper, darker web of intrigue. This chapter introduces us to Dr. Turi, an astropsychologist whose own experiences with deception set the stage for uncovering a troubling aspect of Duval's story. The investigation, initially focused on consumer fraud, begins to reveal connections to a shadowy organization linked to the dark arts and cult activities.

1. **Intriguing Communication:** The journey begins with an unsettling email from an anonymous documentary filmmaker suggesting a potential link between Maria Duval and a secretive group that supposedly manipulates individuals into scamming the vulnerable. This communication ignites a sense of urgency and fear among the investigative team, drawing them deeper into the mystery.

2. **A Sinister Organization:** As their discussions unfold, the filmmaker proposes an outlandish theory: a cult-like organization, reminiscent of the Illuminati, may have influenced Duval's delusions of grandeur as a psychic.

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Chapter 34 Summary: The Romanians

Months slipped by without any significant developments, and as August arrived, the media narrative was dominated by Donald Trump's ascent as the Republican presidential nominee. Amid this political frenzy, our focus remained on an intensive investigation into PacNet, especially after a high-profile U.S. lawyer threatened legal action against us. However, an unexpected email from Romania reignited our curiosity and drew us away from PacNet for a moment.

The email originated from a Romanian journalist claiming to have information about Maria Duval. The reporter hinted at possessing tangible evidence regarding her operations and requested access to various documents we had gathered—photographs, letters, and customer testimonials. The email was laden with intrigue, mentioning Maria's transformation into “Madame Duval” and her continuation of misleading practices involving talismans and other fraudulent items. Our initial instinct was to assist, recalling the support we had received from international journalists in our own research on Maria's schemes.

Despite our willingness to help, we proceeded with caution. We sent the journalist a copy of a publicly accessible U.S. lawsuit, hoping it would suffice for his inquiry. In return, he provided a comprehensive PDF packed with photographs of Maria and materials we'd yet to uncover. One particular

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image piqued our interest; it depicted a digitally altered photo of Maria purportedly holding a crystal ball, raising suspicions that scammers might be leveraging our investigative findings to replicate their deceitful operations abroad.

Curious about the source of his information and anxious for any further details about Maria's address in Romania, we reached out again but received no reply from the reporter. Instead, two days later, a new email arrived, not from the journalist but from an office related to Maria's operations—a message that included a copy of a note we had previously left for Maria in France. This response only deepened our confusion and curiosity. Why were we suddenly receiving communications from Romania, and what was the significance of a secretary being mentioned in connection with Maria?

The tone of the email suggested a direct connection to Maria, with the sender offering to answer questions regarding her. The mention of "Office Express" raised more questions. Were the reporter and the secretary connected? Were they potential scammers seeking to extract more information from us for their own gain? Ambiguity loomed large, and despite our instincts urging caution, we engaged once more, inquiring about the nature of her relationship with Maria and the purpose of "Office Express." Unfortunately, our follow-ups elicited no further response, mirroring the disappearance of the reporter, which left us shrouded in uncertainty about the authenticity of these communications and the true

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nature of Maria's operations in Romania.

1. Months passed without updates on Maria Duval as we focused on our investigation into PacNet amidst political headlines.
2. A Romanian journalist's email piqued our interest, claiming to have information and requesting our documents to support a TV report.
3. We cautiously provided a public lawsuit copy and received a twenty-seven-page document filled with curious information about Maria, leading to suspicions of scam replication.
4. Another email from Romania included our previous note to Maria, complicating our understanding of the situation and the potential connections between the new sender and Maria.
5. Our attempts to clarify the situation with the secretary yielded no responses, leaving us questioning the motivations behind the communications and the integrity of the ongoing investigation into Maria Duval.

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Chapter 35 Summary: The Childhood Friend

In the midst of an ongoing investigation into sexual abuse in nursing homes, the team received a seemingly innocuous message from a man named Patric, who claimed to know Maria Duval, a key figure in their inquiry. Unlike previous correspondences from Romania, Patric was eager to discuss his connection over the phone. He introduced himself as a childhood friend of Jean-Claude Reuille and confidently asserted that Maria Duval existed and was indeed a real person. Through a conversation facilitated by their colleague Julia, Patric provided tantalizing details about Maria, stating that her rise to fame was closely tied to Jean-Claude's influence and involvement in various business ventures worldwide.

As the conversation progressed, Patric revealed that Maria had experienced financial mismanagement, spending her earnings on frivolous pursuits largely due to younger romantic interests. He hinted at possible romantically influenced property investments in Argentina, connecting this to an alleged purchase of land from a man named Mr. Ramos. His eagerness to meet in person suggested ulterior motives, especially when he mentioned that Jean-Claude might want to meet with the team in early 2024, implying a deeper connection than previously acknowledged.

However, when the team reached out to Jean-Claude for confirmation, they encountered confusion on his part. He denied any acquaintance with a

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"Patric," only recalling individuals named Patrice and Patrick who he hadn't spoken with in years. He stated that if he wanted to meet, he would do so directly, casting doubt on Patric's credibility. This left the team questioning the nature of Patric's intentions and his legitimacy as a childhood friend.

The intricate web of connections grew even murkier as the team attempted to piece together an evolving narrative fraught with misunderstandings and potential deceit. Jean-Claude's insistence on not knowing Patric raised alarms about whether the latter might have hidden motives, prompting concerns about the safety of their inquiry, especially given the involvement of wealthy figures and sinister allegations surrounding their investigation.

As the investigation intensified, the team returned to the initial source of their inquiry—a filmmaker who speculated on the existence of a satanic cult within the financial schemes they were exploring. The puzzling layers of deception included multiple anonymous warnings, confusing emails, and a renewed lack of communication from the filmmaker, deepening their suspicion about the connections between these individuals and highlighting a possibly dangerous situation.

In summary, this chapter unfolds the complicated dynamics between the characters involved in the investigation, revealing not only their relationships with one another but also raising significant questions about trust and the potential risks they face in unearthing a tangled conspiracy

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linked to sexual abuse and collusion among powerful individuals. As they navigate through misleading communications and suspicious characters, the team grapples with the realities of conducting an investigation that may delve into dark and dangerous territory.

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Chapter 36: The Return to Sanity

In the unfolding narrative of our search for Maria, fear and paranoia loomed heavily over us. Despite our efforts to convince ourselves that there was no cause for alarm, the troubling reality was that we had not encountered any tangible proof of Maria's existence since the last signature attributed to her—a seemingly dubious mark on a court document regarding an alleged settlement involving her. This document, nestled among pages of legal jargon, raised numerous red flags. Specifically, the inconsistencies struck us as particularly alarming: the notary's stamp lacked a signature or accompanying details, and Maria's name was misspelled, a notable error for someone who had supposedly signed it.

The only other detail that shed some light on her whereabouts stemmed from a prior sighting almost a year ago, where she was last seen collecting her pot of jelly. Prompted by this sparse information, we reached out to the town hall in Callas again, only to encounter a hesitant response from an employee. While she mentioned having a directory of jelly recipients from the recent holiday season, she remained ambiguous about whether Maria's name was

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Chapter 37 Summary: The Bizarre Businessman Revisited

In a reflective and somewhat confrontational conversation lasting an hour, Jean-Claude expressed his displeasure over our prior portrayal of him in articles related to his business operations. He notably likened us to Maria Duval, suggesting that we lacked her integrity. He asserted that while Maria exhibited kindness and honesty, our journalism fell short, leaving us to question our self-respect and morality.

Jean-Claude vehemently distanced himself from any associations with Maria's letters, arguing that his company operated merely as a fulfillment center—akin to the postal service, which facilitates deliveries without involvement in the contents. Although he lacked a criminal record and had not faced governmental scrutiny, his familiarity with Maria raised eyebrows. Initially reluctant to discuss her, he gradually revealed insights from their lengthy acquaintance, dating back to her rise in reputation in the South of France. Jean-Claude recounted enjoying wine and humorous exchanges with her, emphasizing that he found her to be genuine and credible, bolstered by glowing testimonials from locals and authorities who regarded her as a person of great ability.

Yet, despite his admiration for Maria, he admitted to a preference for personal consultations over written readings, which he deemed overly

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technical. His connection to psychics was not limited to Maria; he recounted a memorable experience with another psychic in Geneva, further illustrating his openness to such practices.

He acknowledged that Jacques, Maria's longtime business associate, had a far deeper relationship with her than he did. His respect for Jacques was evident, claiming he was the mastermind behind Maria's operations. Unlike other narratives we had encountered suggesting exploitation or manipulation, Jean-Claude characterized Maria as shrewd and experienced, casting her business decisions in a positive light. He confirmed Jacques's death in 2015, noting he had sent condolences but did not attend the funeral. Recognizing the pivotal role Jacques played in the business, Jean-Claude expressed doubt about the letters' viability without him, effectively sealing the legacy of their partnership.

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Chapter 38 Summary: The Fading Myth

The narrative surrounding the Maria Duval letters witnessed significant transformations in the years leading up to 2016, pointing towards the eventual decline of this notorious scam. In late 2014, the U.S. government intensified its efforts to dismantle the fraudulent operations linked to Maria Duval. This included a temporary freeze on North American operations that ultimately culminated in the complete eradication of the business from the U.S. market by 2016. Concurrently, the Swiss company Infogest, previously tied to the scam, faced bankruptcy. The tragic death of Jacques Mailland in a motorcycle accident in 2015 further contributed to the instability of the scheme, leaving its operations vulnerable and uncertain. Moreover, the primary individual behind the facade, Maria Duval, was increasingly battling health issues, casting doubt on the future of the letters.

These shifts suggested a declining influence for the scam. There were observable declines in its presence: websites promoting Maria Duval became inactive, reports of new letters dwindled, and trademarks associated with her name lapsed. Public appearances had become a thing of the past, signaling a retreat from the spotlight that had once kept the scam alive. While it was conceivable that the scam might persist in isolated pockets abroad, particularly in regions like Romania, its former vastness seemed to be a thing of the past.

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The allure of the Maria Duval letters had always rested on the belief in the existence of a genuine psychic, and with Maria's health deteriorating, the myth that had shrouded the scam began to unravel. As she retreated from the public eye, the letters lost their potency. Her decline mirrored the plight of many victims who had been ensnared by her promises. Throughout the journey of uncovering this tale, numerous poignant stories surfaced, revealing the human cost of the scam.

One of the earliest and most affecting stories featured an 88-year-old U.S. military veteran who, driven by the hope of winning the lottery to afford a nursing home, sent over 80 checks to Maria, amounting to nearly \$4,000. Other victims included a man from Charlotte, North Carolina, who fought to rescue his 101-year-old aunt from Maria's influence, only to find she had sent \$6,000 within a year. A heart-wrenching account from Belgium revealed an elderly couple that would walk to the post office multiple times daily, faithfully sending checks while their daughter recounted the anguish that the schemes wrought on her father's mental health.

The collective experiences of these victims paint a harrowing portrait of the psychological and financial toll that the Maria Duval letters exacted on vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly. As Maria Duval faded from public consciousness and health, so too did the remnants of the once-mighty scam.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The importance of vigilance against scams and deception.

Critical Interpretation: In a world where the allure of quick solutions and promises seems enticing, remind yourself to maintain a healthy skepticism. The fall of the Maria Duval scam is a testament to how even the most seemingly rampant deceptions can decline when met with scrutiny and resistance. As you move through life, let this serve as a powerful reminder to question the motives behind what you are offered. Rather than chasing illusions, focus on building genuine connections, seeking credible information, and relying on personal judgment. This awareness not only protects you but empowers you to help others spot the traps that can ensnare the unwary, ensuring a community grounded in truth and support.

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Chapter 39: The Irony

As we reflected on the tragic trajectory of Doreen's life amidst our investigation of Maria, her story emerged as a poignant reminder of the frailty of human experience. This once-strong woman, revered for her financial acumen and independence, ultimately became a victim of a deceptive scheme, illustrating a common thread among many who find themselves ensnared by con artists. Doreen epitomized a vibrant, hardworking individual; her early life unfolded against the backdrop of World War II, shaping her resilience and determination. With roots in England, her journey spanned from managing the finances of her family to navigating the challenges of starting anew in Canada, where she established a pet and hobby store and nurtured a loving household. Doreen was both sensible and strict in her parenting but also infused warmth into her family life through moments of creativity and affection.

In her later years, however, Doreen faced a different battle—dementia. The once-enlightened matriarch fell prey to a fraudulent psychic scheme, demonstrating how cognitive decline can erase the astuteness that once

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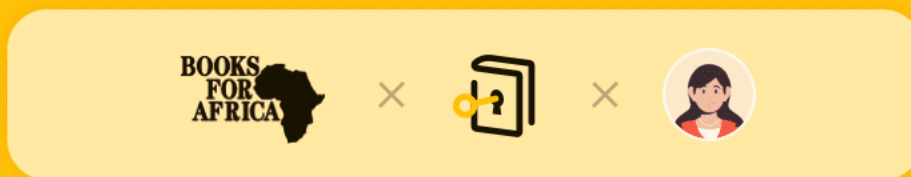
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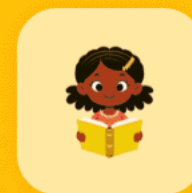
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