

The Prometheus Club

'Prometheus', in the Greek translates to 'The Forethinker'. This is what this club put their best efforts into as members of the British Secret Service. They were both paid and directed to be ahead of the game and guide events in the right direction. They, in theory, were not involved in retribution or cold revenge, but of course, if their plans went pear-shaped, they were not above taking it out on the person who caused them grief. This was sort of done as a matter of course rather than a firm directive from Management.

The members of the Prometheus Club are all now retired, some are quite ancient, and some are recent retirees. Whatever their age, they are mentally as sharp as tacks and after their monthly meetings at the Reform Club in St James, current men from the secret service are not above calling around for an after lunch port or brandy; both to pass the time of day with these princes of the past and more often to toss a current problem into the ring to see what ideas they may have to offer. It's safe enough to do this with secrets of state. All of the Club members are bound by the provisions of the British draconian Official Secrets Act.

Once in a while, they have along as guests both past and present members of the CIA. They have even had an octogenarian in recently, who served in the famed OSS. Here again they discuss past great events, past occasionally monumental stuff-ups and sometimes quite significant current events under consideration of or on the go. The Yanks are particularly appreciative of being able to come along to the Reform Club when they have a need to tap the British veteran's brains or to crow over a recent win. By way of a gesture of appreciation for the continuing co-operation, they bring over in the Diplomatic Bag cartons of the very best beer in the world. It's called Ah Ming and the CIA source it from the brewery that makes it in Shanghai. Actually, between this beer and a very fine whisky brewed in Tasmania by a company that one of their members, Sir Alex Silverstone, owns, the Club drinks very well at no cost to it.

The skills of the members are very specialised, but are also broad-based. They can encrypt messages, decipher unbreakable codes and assassinate almost anyone anywhere in the Caucasian world (the Muslims are a different kettle of fish, but the Israeli Mossad help out here when asked and when it suits them), so the Club members arm is long indeed.

Just in the near past the CIA and the Prometheus Club have co-operated very closely in a spot of removals. They had five suspected terrorists in their sights and the potential damage from what they (the terrorists) were planning, called for a bit of forethinking. This mob were prone to move around the English countryside on motorbikes, and after intercepting emails and getting a lucky break on cell phone calls, their nearly youngest member, the Honourable Vincent Price, did some handy work in close co-operation with watchers to get rid of the entire cell by stringing across a country lane, a length of stout number 8 wire borrowed and later replaced, from a nearby farmers fence. Messy, they tell Price. But very effective, he fires

back. No SWAT teams, no dramas, no explosions, no kick-backs. Nicely out in the open and no TV coverage.



Today at the Reform Club, the members have enjoyed their Chinese beer and a meal that embraced Queensland crayfish starters, mains of roast potatoes and a beef wellington so exquisite as to almost bring tears to the eyes of the gourmets amongst them. They finish on treacle tart and cream to bring them back to cruel reality and adjourn to their private smoking room. They are well settled into their Tasmanian whiskies and black long Cuban cigars – again sourced free of cost by the CIA. Their visitors arrive.

Lord Erskine, who sits in the House of Lords, but has always had a lot to do with England’s secrets, comes in with two others.

“Well done with the motorcyclists,” he tells Sir Alex. The members laugh.

“Water under the bridge, Lord Erskine,” he says. “What next do you have for us?”

Erskine sips his drink, takes a pull on his cigar. “In a minute,” he says.

There’s a subdued knock on the door and the embarrassed Hall Porter brings in a tall good-looking woman. This is strictly a male domain and it’s a very rare event for a woman to be let in. They look enquiringly at Erskine.

“When the devil drives.....he says and lets it tail off. “Perhaps,” he says, “Mary, you will outline the problem, but let us first get you a drink.”

“It’s like this,” she says. “It’s sort of a woman problem and that’s why I’m here today. It’s all about Princess Diana and her latest light of love – all organised by that blasted Al-Fayed. Dodi Fayed was comfortably engaged to quite a nice girl – a girl he surely doesn’t deserve, when Fayed had this brainwave that a matchup with Diana, who is a brain dead twinkie on a good day, and Dodi might solve his problem of gaining a British passport and get him back the sponsorship of the Badminton Horse Show for Harrods.”

“Have you tried talking to Diana?” the Honourable George Martin-King asks.

“Can’t get to her,” Mary Goldsmith says, “just can’t get to her. She’s obviously enjoying the dubious spotlight again and it must be embarrassing the shit out of old Prince Charlie.”

“What are you looking for from us?” Sir Alex asks.

Erskine sits up. “Stealth and guile,” he says, “to get the Queen and the Nation out of this contretemps.” Erskine gets up. “I have told you of the problem,” he says, “We fear there may be an engagement and following nuptials in the wind. Think of the media coverage, think of the embarrassment to our Royals, perhaps there is a solution, perhaps an unthinkable one. I have to get back for a vote in the House. I’ll leave Mary to get down to the dark and perhaps dirty details.”

Erskine goes. They settle down to think-tank this, oh so, delicate matter. Old Tommy Skinner, who used to run the Russian desk in the good old days, says, “A pellet solution seems to be the go, perhaps.”

“What sort of pellet?” Mary asks.

“9mm Cupro nickel would be best,” replies Skinner.

They turn to the shootist, only just retired, but a clear winner of the last Queens prize at Bisley. Thomas Shroy is the issue of his late father; Lord of the huge Temple Newsome Estate in Yorkshire and a Yugoslav girl who came to the Manor as a house servant. He has inherited her long-faced look, is as sharp as they come and quick with it.

“What chance of a clear shot?” he asks. The second man, who hasn’t said a word until now, says, “We are right on it, but she is living in his pocket and he seemingly in her jeans and the terrible pair seem inseparable. We hear they have an appointment at Lamage in Paris, Monday, presumably to buy an engagement ring. We seem to have only the coming weekend for executive action.”

“Ah,” says the shootist. “We will need that gun camera thing we used in Frankfurt last year. Perhaps a scooter board type motorbike and you’ll have to come up with the rider.”

And it goes from there. The shootist, with his serving officer bike rider and the gun camera, blend in with the horde of paparazzi outside the Ritz on Saturday evening. The Chemist, Walter Whitby-Bart bribes his way into the Ritz Cocktail Bar and slips Jean Paul (the driver) a spiked drink with the alleged compliments of Al-Fayed. It’s all been well done and the shootist locks onto the speeding Mercedes expecting the spiked drink to get Jean Paul into a daze and pull up on the kerb side. This to allow a clear shot at Dodi. But the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry and old Jean Paul falls into Monza driving and crashes the beautiful car. Diana, Dodi and Jean Paul are history although the single Secret Service man on duty is pulled out unconscious and stays that way for some time.

The next meeting of the Prometheus Club is somewhat subdued. In the after dinner Port and cigars stage, the same trio that called into the last meeting arrive along. Lord Erskine acknowledges their welcome, he looks at Mary Goldsmith. She doesn’t rush in for a beat or two, but finally says,

“There are two points. One – no recriminations are called for. Two – certainly as far as the Service is concerned, ‘better dead than Mrs Fayed’.”

The Prometheus Club stand and give her a silent hand clap.