

# Bastards!

(full version)

A comedy by Patrick Mackeown

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## Bastards!

- Consultant: "Hello, you are the proprietor I presume?"
- Customer: "That's correct, who on earth are you?"
- Consultant: "I'm from your management consultancy. We're late for the stock market launch, of this software company. I've done a staff skills audit and I've come to the conclusion that you don't have any computer programmers."
- Customer: "What not one?"
- Consultant: "Not a single one I'm afraid, in fact you are the only employee."
- Customer: "Do you think that'll be a problem?"
- Consultant: "We don't call things problems, we call them potential solutions."
- Customer: "Why has your management consultancy fixed all our programmers salaries at twenty three pence a year?"
- Consultant: "That's all the money you have!"
- Customer: "But our capitalisation was set at forty eight million only last week!"
- Consultant: "Er, yes, I know. Yesterday we gave the whole lot to your new managing director as a bonus."
- Customer: "What, all of it?"
- Consultant: "Er, yes, I'm afraid so."
- Customer: "Why so much?"
- Consultant: "Well, you see it's the only way to attract a famous executive to your company. We had to bleed the company dry and give all the proceeds to the executive."
- Customer: "So how much do we have left?"
- Consultant: "Do you want me to give you a precise figure?"
- Customer: "Yes please."
- Consultant: "Er, nothing."
- Customer: "What will happen to the software we were working on before we hired your company at vast expense?"
- Consultant: "It'll never work I'm afraid, but don't worry. My company is famous for launching software companies which can't program computers. We do it all the time. Most are for government projects of course, but luckily for you, most ordinary companies these days, buy dysfunctional software too."
- Customer: "Don't you think it's necessary for a computer program to work?"
- Consultant: "Not if it involves staying after 5.30"
- Customer: "What if it runs a nuclear power station?"
- Consultant: "Is the power station anywhere near Bexley Heath?"
- Customer: "No, why?"
- Consultant: "I live in Bexley Heath."
- Customer: "Oh, I see. Well, what do you propose I do next?"

Consultant: "Have you any personal assets?"  
Customer: "Yes, some, a house for instance."  
Consultant: "Get rid of them."  
Customer: "Yes of course, you mean transfer them into my wife's name, bank account in Jersey, that sort of thing."  
Consultant: "No I don't. I mean, get rid of them, out, out, out!"  
Customer: "I'm sorry, I'm not following you, get rid of them how exactly?"  
Consultant: "Go up to the first person you meet, outside in the street and give them absolutely everything. In fact I see one now, there, that young boy."  
Customer: "He looks a lot like you."  
Consultant: "Does he really? I don't think so, honestly. Don't open that door. It's awfully cold in here just now. Chuck a cheque out of the window, it's far easier."  
Boy: "Hello dad."  
Consultant: "Dad, er, yes, that's consultancy speak for dominance after deductions. Hello young man, I'm Spencer McKlintock."  
Boy: "No you're not. You're my dad."  
Consultant: "I say, is that a gigantic bird trying to peck its way through the sky-light?"

Hits the boy around the head -wack-

Boy: "Ouch! What was that for?"  
Consultant: "Get back up the street and out of sight!"  
Customer: "I can't see anything."  
Consultant: "It must have gone. They fly awfully fast these large birds, you know. Is that the time? Well, I really must be getting along."  
Customer: "Must you be going so soon? Well, goodbye then."

They shake hands.

Customer, to himself: "That's funny. I could swear I put my watch on this morning."

9 AM In the office.

Customer: "Good morning. It's nice to see you again."  
Consultant: "We've come to install your software."  
Customer: "What software? I didn't order any software."  
Consultant: "If you're launching a new company you must have all the latest software. Expensive software always looks good in the promotional literature. So we took

out a high interest loan and bought you the most expensive software we could find.”

Customer: “What does it do?”

Consultant: “How should I know? I don’t know anything about computers. I can tell you it’s version 700.”

Customer: “Ah, version 700.”

Consultant: “We didn’t realise there was a version 700. We had to take out another loan for that. Originally we bought you version 600.”

Customer: “Ah, version 600.”

Consultant: “Of course the interest on the second loan is considerably higher than the first.”

Customer: “What’s the difference between version 600 and version 700?”

Consultant: “A hundred.”

Customer: “A hundred, of course. How much did it cost?”

Consultant: “Would you like a precise figure?”

Customer: “Yes please.”

Consultant: “A million pounds each.”

Customer: “As a software company, couldn’t we just write the software ourselves and save an enormous amount of money?”

Consultant: “I see, yes, actually write the software. Hum, I can see where that idea came from, but of course it’s out of the question: Firstly, you’ve already paid for it. And secondly, your company profile has to look expensive and the brand Delux Expensio-Software has that quality about it.”

Customer: “But we don’t know what this software does and I haven’t got two million pounds.”

Consultant: “That’s true, but we’re hoping to offer you another service to advise you on getting out of the debt launching the company has gotten you into.”

A pawn-broker arrives to take away the customers suit. In his vest and underpants he unpacks a meagre luncheon.

Customer: “It’s lunchtime, I think I’ll eat these scraps of dry bread here.”

Consultant: “Wouldn’t you prefer it if I took you out for a champagne lunch?”

Customer: “Oh, rather! What a stroke of good fortune. Who is paying for that?”

Consultant: “You are.”

Customer: “Me, but I can’t afford champagne lunches!”

Consultant: “Don’t worry yourself over that matter; the past month that my family and colleagues have spent lunching on your expense account hasn’t been entirely wasted. We’ve come up with a plan.”

Customer falls to the ground and wakes up on an office table surrounded by bright lights.

Customer: "Where am I?"

Consultant: "You're still in your office, Mr Simmons. We had to cancel your health insurance to pay the restaurant bills, but don't worry. I once read a medical textbook. You won't feel a thing."

Consultant: "There, how are you feeling?"

Customer: "Much improved thanks."

Customer points to large ice containers containing organs.

Customer: "What's in those containers?"

Consultant: "What, that? Oh, nothing. Say, can you explain how one goes about selling human organs on Ebay?"

Dawn on Monday in the office.

Consultant: "Aren't you ready yet? He won't wait for ever. Time is money to these chaps you know."

Customer: "Are you sure you won't let me bring my laptop?"

Consultant: "We've got the home cinema, the digital overhead display and the dancing girls. What do we need the laptop for?"

Customer: "The laptop has our software on it."

Consultant: "The City isn't interested in your software. It wants to know if you've got Va Va Voom."

Customer: "Ah, Va Va Voom."

In front of an imposing financial building in the heart of London's Square Mile.

Consultant: "Right, we're here. I'll hold the door while you take care of the cab."

Customer: "It's a revolving door. I thought you said you'd been here before."

Consultant: "They must have renovated the place since I was here last."

Banker: "We've heard so much about you. Right, if you'd just like to sign this equity transfer?"

Customer: "Equity? I'd come to discuss my loan."

Consultant points out of a large window into the hall.

Consultant: “Isn’t that Gordon Brown, the Chancellor?”

Consultant swaps the documents.

Customer: “I didn’t see anyone.”

Consultant: “Yes, they move fast these chancellors, tricky fellows. Financing foreign campaigns is a bothersome business. Well thanks Mortimer. It’s been a pleasure as always. We really must be going.”

Customer: “We didn’t give him our presentation.”

Consultant: “He’s far too busy for all that..”

Scantly clad chorus girls pass on the stairs, carrying a digital overhead display and a home cinema.

Consultant: “But then, on second thoughts.”

Customer steers the distracted consultant back to the waiting taxi.

Customer: “Right, we’re back at the office. What do we do now?”

Consultant: “It’s time to start thinking about the Stock Market launch.”

Customer: “Why, it’s not till next year?”

Consultant: “My god man, we can’t possibly wait that long; we’ll lose the element of surprise!”

Customer: “How much did you want to bring it forward?”

Consultant: “About a year.”

Customer: “By law we can’t launch tomorrow: we haven’t completed the due diligence process and we’ve only got one director. We must follow the law on pain of imprisonment.”

Consultant: “Yes, it’s a great pity that. Still, don’t forget, no matter where they incarcerate you, be sure to notify my office of your new billing address.”

Customer: “I’m so glad we haven’t announced the flotation. You nearly gave me a heart attack.”

Consultant turns on the radio.

Radio Announcer: “And now for some business news. Mortimer Spinks of Splunket, Blunket and Sprocket, one of the oldest merchant banks in the city, has just announced the surprise flotation of Half-Made Software. For an in depth analysis we go now to Peter Arbothnott in the city.”

Customer: “Half-Made Software, who gave our company that bloody awful name?”

Consultant: “We hired an image consultancy to dream that one up. They did it in record time. It only took them four months.”

Customer: “Four months, how much money did that cost me?”

Consultant: “Do you want a precise figure?”

Customer: “Yes please.”

Consultant: “I thought you were going to say that.”

Wife and son arrive to pick customer up from the office. His son calls out to him from the computer screen nearest to the door.

Boy: “Dad, did you know that in the 1381 peasants’ revolt they cut off the head off the man who was robbing them blind and stuck it on a spike?”

Customer: “What kind of spike?”

Wife: “Darling, are you ready?”

Customer: “No dear, I have to sit in on a board meeting.”

Wife: “You could have warned me. How long will it take?”

Customer: “Three minutes.”

Boy: “How can you have a board meeting in only three minutes, dad?”

Customer: “By being the only person on the board. I’ll be back in a moment.”

Consultant, Boy and his mother press their faces to the window. Customer sits in boardroom. He runs from seat to seat and addresses a completely empty room.

Boy: “What’s he doing now?”

Wife: “Your father has been under a lot of strain recently, dear. I think he’s letting off steam.”

Customer: “All those in favour of revolution say aye. Aye!”

Customer raises both his hands, pauses, tidies the chairs around the table and then emerges from the office and embraces his wife.

Customer: “Let’s go home then.”

Consultant: “What about the launch party. The limousine is waiting.”

Customer: “You, that outrageously expensive managing director of yours and the corporate launch have all been comprehensively and ignominiously rejected by the board. If you want to cancel the party, there’s a payphone outside.”

Early next morning at the office.

MD: "Morning, you must be Simmons. I've been meaning to catch up with you for quite a while. There's a small outstanding matter about my salary."

Customer: "I see you've converted the whole top floor of our building into a single office, full of marble busts which bear an uncanny resemblance to yourself."

MD: "If only we could rent the building next door. Then I could spread out a little."

Customer: "Where are all your management certificates and accolades, which brought you to us at great expense?"

MD: "Gone west."

Customer: "You're the one responsible for the fantastic urban regeneration in Ireland?"

MD: "No, my burger van burned down."

Customer: "You and your statues are fired. Take your bloodsucking management consultant and get out!"

Consultant: "My firm has decided to reduce its consultancy fee to a mere twenty million pounds, in the light of the one or two minor objections which you've raised."

Customer picks up a bill, a long pole adorned with a medieval cutting implement and tipped with a sharp, protruding spike.

Customer: "Ever heard of Archbishop Sudbury?"

Consultant: "Er, no, why?"

Customer: "Sudbury the poll-tax collector lost his head completely in the Peasants Revolt of 1381. They knew a thing or two about trimming down top-heavy bureaucracy in those days. I've revoked your expenses and in modern business parlance, I've had a head-count and counted far fewer heads this time."

The office door opens and a uniformed constable enters.

Policeman: "You reported a theft, sir?"

Customer: "These two gentlemen, using a variety of techniques including sophistry, barefaced cheek and American management jargon tried to steal forty million pounds from my company."

Policeman's face lights up.

Policeman: "The spirit of free enterprise is not completely dead then? Right then sirs, which one of you offers private tuition?"

The men are bundled off in handcuffs.

Policeman: "Do you write computer programs?"  
Customer: "Sometimes."  
Policeman: "The forty three forces in England and Wales want a modern, computerised surveillance and crime prevention system."  
Customer: "Intrusion detection, heat sensors, that sort of thing?"  
Policeman: "Not exactly."  
Customer: "Oh?"  
Policeman: "Have you heard of the academic research Kingston University has carried out into computer systems which can identify suspicious human activity?"  
Customer: "Yes, of course I have."  
Policeman: "Well, I want a system which identifies the perpetrator from a combination of CCTV pictures and police mug-shots, selects his mobile phone number from the criminal intelligence database and telephones him, shouting at full blast `come out of your house, you're surrounded, resistance is futile!' How soon can you deliver it?"  
Customer: "Come back after lunch. I'll have a demo ready."

Policeman sits down at the demonstration.

Customer: "I added a flourish, I hope you don't mind. It can access the FBI, CIA and NCSA databases. If it discovers that any innocent British dignitaries have been accosted by mob-handed US immigration officials, it wakes the president and the Secretary of Homeland Security at four o'clock in the morning, by playing Cat Steven's `Peace Train` at full volume through their television sets."

Policeman: "We'll buy a job-lot."

Radio: "This is the news: Following the introduction of their new computer program, police forces all over the country are reporting drastic reductions in crimes of all kind. Ministers report that the crime figures for England and Wales have fallen for the eighth successive month. However, they do admit that the software written by Half-Made Software Ltd, is new, and that all of the conflicting sets of crime figures and surveys, could be wrong."

The consultant and his friend the managing director re-enter the office. The customer is surprised to see them.

Customer: "I thought I sacked you two blood-suckers several days ago?"

MD: "That's right, you did. But the stipendiary magistrate gave us community service orders and that's why we're here."

Customer: "He knows nothing about computers and what can you do?"  
MD: "I can cook burgers."  
Policeman: "We need someone to explain the contradicting crime figures to all the news channels."

Everybody pushes the management consultant forward.

News Reader: "Good evening, I have an expert here to explain why the Home Office crime figures from England and Wales show crime falling and the British Crime Survey shows something else. Expert, what's happening here?"  
Consultant: "I haven't the faintest idea."  
News Reader: "If I understand it correctly your company actually produced these figures. Is that correct?"  
Consultant: "Er, well, yes."  
News Reader: "Splendid, well if you'd just like to explain to us how these figures are calculated I'm sure the whole matter will be cleared up in no time."  
Consultant: "Would you like the precise figures?"  
News Reader: "Yes please."  
Consultant: "It's extremely complicated, horribly complicated; it uses trigonometry and differential calculus. Are you sure you wouldn't rather talk about something else?"  
News Reader: "The whole country would like the explanation if you wouldn't mind."  
Consultant: "It's made up."  
News Reader: "What's made up? The survey, the figures what?"  
Consultant: "We get the figures from the Home Office and lower them a bit. Then, if they look too high we lower them a bit more. Then we show them to the government, who lower them a bit more and reclassify some crimes as not being crimes at all. They give the figures back to us and we remove the remaining figure and publish the number zero."

The television screen goes blank.

News Reader: "I'm sorry; we seem to have a problem in our studio. We'll be with you just as soon as we can."

MD and Policeman: "We're getting thousands and thousands of orders for our new software. There are two thousand eight hundred orders from the United States alone. The Americans want to know how long it will take us to incorporate the robotic element which captures unwanted visitors, tortures them a little and dumps them over the Mexican and Canadian borders?"

MD: "We've received a letter from the Prime Minister which says if we don't complete the American order, robot and all, within the next twenty four hours, Britain will

lose its `Special Ally` status in Washington and we'll be charged with treason and have our heads cut off and stuck on spikes on Tower Bridge."

Customer: "What on earth are you doing with that robot?"

Consultant: "I'm programming it."

Customer: "Hitting the computer screen and shouting, `follow your instructions, you useless heap of tin,` isn't a form of programming I'm familiar with."

Consultant: "I know, I'm sorry. I panicked."

Customer: "Order is restored. Would you like me to teach you to program the robot?"

Consultant: "How long would that take?"

Customer: "Which, teaching you or programming the robot?"

The robot crosses the floor and pauses in front of the consultant. Its light comes on and "STOP THIEF!" flashes on the computer screen on the desk. The consultant climbs onto the desk in terror. The silence is broken by the sound of a modem dialling.

Consultant: "What's it doing now?"

Customer reads the computer screen.

Customer: "Hmmm, you know those databases I told you the robot updates when it finds a criminal: the FBI, CIA, Interpol, Europol, MI5, MI6 and the Nazi High Command?"

Consultant: "Er, vaguely."

Customer: "It has just updated your profile on the whole lot. Right now, you're now wanted on completely different spurious charges, in fifty seven separate countries."

Consultant: "Oh, my God! How do I get my details back off these horrible systems?"

Customer: "I thought you said computer programming only mattered between nine and five-thirty. It's a little after six."

Consultant: "This is a matter of life or death."

Customer: "Now you're getting the hang of it. I see you've listed the Fifty Second State of the United States of America as Great Britain."

Consultant: "Is that wrong? I downloaded the list from the Pentagon Battlefield Strategy computer."

Policeman: "Right then, we're ready to present your new program to the Chief Constable. Are you ready?"

Customer: "Yes, I think that's everything."

He turns to the consultant.

Customer: “Don’t forget to turn the lights out when you’ve finished. The alarm will come on by itself.”

Consultant: “You can’t leave me here like this!”

Customer: “Why ever not?”

Consultant: “They’re after me! What’ll happen to me? All these things are out to get me!”

Policeman reads the screen.

Policeman: “According to the program you’ve just written: they’ll lock you up in Belmarsh Prison, from where they’ll deport you to America, deprive you of sleep threaten you with large fines and unpaid taxes, accuse you of conspiring to cause explosions in Afghanistan, take photographs of you naked, make you vote for a mad-warmongering-right-wing-president and then dump you over the border in Mexico. But look on the bright side. At least you’re not a hippy-pop-singer like Cat Stevens. Look what happened to him!”

Consultant: “How do I change it? How do I change it? Help me!”

Customer: “Well, in theory you phone the Americans and say ‘look, I’m an ordinary British citizen and you’ve got me all wrong on your computer list. I’m really not one of those terrorist fanatics or criminal lunatics. The only problem is, the last person who tried that approach got put back in the system for processing. That was four years ago and we haven’t heard from him since. And I hear US immigration officials gave him the rubber glove treatment for two whole days.”

Policeman: “Not the rubber glove treatment?”

Policeman makes a probing mime in mid air.

Consultant: “Is that a dagger I see before me?”

Policeman: “I think he’s having a dramatic turn. Quick, let’s scarper while we still can.”

The office is quiet. The door is broken off its hinges and the robot turns in circles in the centre of the room.

MD: “Ah Simmons, I’m glad you’ve arrived I want to talk to you urgently.”

Customer: “Is it about the consultant. Have you perfected a plan to rescue him from the intensely guarded, electronically monitored, maximum security area of Paddington Green Police Station already? I must say, I am impressed!”

MD: “Not exactly.”

Customer: “Of course not, how stupid of me, stupid, stupid, stupid! The maximum security section of the police station has been moved below ground and you have to pass through ten consecutive reinforced steel doors. You’ve been waiting for me to help

you with the computerised door-release sequences. How inconsiderate of me! Look, here they are.”

MD: “Not exactly.”

Customer: “Of course, of course, I knew it! The unauthorised release of the doors will trigger the automatic alarm system and armed response units from the floors above will swoop down and overpower you during the rescue attempt. You want advice on procuring tear gas to incapacitate the security teams.”

MD: “Actually, this isn’t about the rescue plan.”

Customer: “Oh, I see. How much of the rescue have you planned?”

MD: “Well, none. Actually I want you to give me twenty million pounds.”

Customer: “Twenty million pounds to rescue one person and not just any person at that. You want me to give you all that money to rescue the only person on the planet whose name brings me out in a rash. What on earth do you need that much money for? What have you done, booked the entire Twenty Second SAS Regiment for a weekend sortie?”

MD: “Good grief, no! I wouldn’t contemplate anything as ridiculous as that. What on earth do you take me for, a complete imbecile? Oh, no, this is for the company org chart.”

Customer: “Company org chart? There is only one employee and that’s me. Anyway, how does an org chart help you in the rescue?”

MD: “It doesn’t. I suggest we abandon the consultant in his hour of greatest peril and let him rot in gaol. I’ve got a much better idea. Instead of that particular man plotting the meteoric rise of this corporation into the exalted annals of British business history, we hire four hundred corporate managers, led by me of course, to do the job instead. Look!”

He sweeps back a curtain behind him to reveal a gaudy, flashing display showing an organisational tree with his photograph at the top and four hundred chalk outlines are joined where vacancies exist below. Behind the curtain stands a mannequin dressed in an ermine robe, holding a sceptre and crown. Around the waist of the mannequin a sash proclaims the wearer to be “The King of Corporate Computing.”

MD: “What do you think?”

Customer: “It’s the most stupid, wasteful, ridiculous, prattish, dumb, clottish, imbecile idea I’ve ever heard of. You won’t get a penny out of me, not now not ever! Burn this hideous rubbish immediately!”

MD: “I’ll take that as a maybe.”

The policeman approaches with a cigarette lighter. As he lifts the ermine cape to set the mannequin ablaze, a lonely figure at the bottom of the org chart comes into view.

Customer: “Wait! What’s that?”

MD: "What? That? Oh, that, that's a programmer. I'd completely forgotten about him."

Customer: "Why is he so small and so far away from everybody else?"

MD: "It's a question of perspective, you see: I'm the brains behind the organisation of course, that's why I need to be surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of acolytes, er, I mean assistants, receive an enormous salary and secure numerous generous retirement benefits."

Customer: "No you're not. You're a burger cook without a van!"

MD: "The fact that he gets his hands dirty actually doing the programming isn't the only reason he got shoved way down there behind the robe. He actually comes from a software company with four hundred managers, where he's the only programmer. So he's well used to receiving hundreds of conflicting directives simultaneously and resolving them instantly. He's just the person we need."

Customer: "He sounds like a terrific fellow. I'd love to meet him. Where is he?"

MD: "He's being treated in hospital for three hundred and ninety nine different stress related illnesses. But I gather he's due to be discharged any day now."

The light on top of the robot starts flashing. Text scrolls rapidly down the computer screen.

MD: "What on earth's the matter? What's it doing?"

Policeman: "I think it's discovered an armed robbery taking place at an address in Eaton Square, Belgravia. Looks like a posh address to me. It's next door to that Russian billionaire, the one who owns Chelsea United!"

MD: "Holly Mackerel, that's my house! My god man, don't just stand there, do something!"

Policeman: "Like what?"

MD: "I don't know. You're the policeman. What do you normally do?"

Policeman: "I don't do anything. I'm in intelligence."

MD: "Phone somebody, quick! That Paddington Police Station place, you said they've got guns in the building. Phone them and be quick about it!"

Policeman: "I've got the superintendent in charge of firearms on the line. What do you want me to tell him?"

MD: "Tell him there are five armed men in my house. It's a robbery man. Tell him to send someone out there."

Policeman: "He wants to know if the armed men are still in the house."

MD: "For the love of God, man, of course they're still in the house. Where else would they be?"

Policeman: "I thought so. He says to tell you we can't send any of our men to that address, not if the intruders are armed; it's health and safety you see. Guns are dangerous; somebody might get injured."

MD: "What about my house, all my property?"

Customer: "Hurry, give me the keyboard."

The customer types rapidly on the keyboard. Suddenly the armed robbers appear on television in the front room of the house they're robbing. Cat Stevens music blasts out of the stereos on two floors of the building and the home-cinema's wall-mounted speakers scream at full volume: "Drop your weapons! Drop your weapons! Come out of the house with your hands above your heads. The house is surrounded!" Sirens sound and helicopter rotors churn above the din. The men throw down their shotguns and emerge from the house into an absolutely peaceful street, in single file. They lie face down on the pavement, spread-eagled. A bemused pair of passing constables handcuff the robbers to each other through the railings of a nearby house, because they haven't enough pairs of handcuffs.

MD: "Well, roll my todger in flour and pickle it in apricot brandy! It works. The damn thing actually works!"

Customer: "Of course it works. What do you think I've been doing all this time, sticking my finger up my jacksy?"

MD: "Why don't we use it to spring the consultant from Paddington Green Police Station. I mean, if it works on criminals, it might also work on the police."

Customer: "I hardly think so. Two hundred heavily armed policemen aren't going to be fooled by a cheap set of PC World computer speakers raving about the building being surrounded and playing seventies pop music, now, are they?"

Policeman: "I don't know. It sounds like a great idea to me."

Customer: "Whose side are you on?"

Policeman: "Oh, right, yes, sorry. Still, I do think it's worth a try."

## Thrillers by Patrick Mackeown - available from [www.bookscape.co.uk](http://www.bookscape.co.uk)

### **Mutilation Murders**

The torso of a black child has been discovered in London's Kensington Gardens. Detective Chief Inspector Hawthorne and his men quickly discover that the boy was a victim of a ritualistic killing. At Heathrow airport a second child, Jubulani, and his mother disembark from their plane. On his arrival in London Jubulani is kidnapped. A Ju Ju witchdoctor in South London is preparing the new child, Jubulani, to be sacrificed. Hawthorne is racing against time to save the boy.

### **Midwinter's Children**

Georg, a nine-year-old street child, has been captured by human traffickers from Moscow and is about to be sold to a child pornography ring in Amsterdam. Detective Chief Inspector Hawthorne, from Suffolk CID, is on the case...

### **The Black Daimler**

Nexus, a London-based Chinese dissident, learns that his friend was found with an axe embedded in his head. As more of his politically active associates die, he becomes involved in a frantic struggle to understand and defeat the threat to himself and his organisation.

### **The Expendability Doctrine**

Oil tycoon Keith Connors is found dead in the garden of his villa; undoubtedly the work of a pro. His ex-wife flees to Libya, where she is linked to the brutal murder of the White House Trade Representative. In his investigations, Inspector Hawthorne discovers a sinister web of treachery and greed in the international oil business.

### **The Devil's Brothers**

Catherine Bronston, a fifteen-year-old girl, is snatched outside her local swimming pool. The kidnappers, ruthless Albanian mafiosi, issue a ransom demand containing dismembered body parts. Catherine's father fears that the ongoing police investigation could reduce the possibility of her being found alive.

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