

Simon Volpert

The Villain

Derek stepped out of the black limousine onto the red carpet. The crowd met him with a deafening roar. Derek smiled and walked towards the Administration building. He could make out select phrases, pushing through the uproar:

"Villain!"

"Murderer!"

"I hate you!"

Special unit thugs held the line on both sides of the carpet, keeping the raging crowd at bay; Occasionally, thrown rocks rebounded off their riot shields. At the Administration building's doors Derek stopped, turned to face the crowd and exclaimed with irony in his voice:

"I, too, love you very much!"

The crowd went into frenzy and nearly swept the special unit thugs off their feet. Still grinning, Derek turned and entered the Administration building.

The glass doors closed behind him, cutting off outside noise.

"Is everything alright, Mr. Drago, sir?" an extremely nervous, sweaty man in a gray office suit and glasses, with an office file in his hands, asked.

"Perfectly fine, nothing I couldn't handle," Derek smirked. "Are these my reports?" he asked carelessly, pointing at the file the assistant was nervously clenching in his hands.

"Y-yes, sir, of course, sir, I'm sorry, sir," the assistant jumped and handed over the file as quickly as he could. He began shaking uncontrollably. "I'm terribly sorry, for a moment, I forgot..."

"No problem, no problem, just make sure it never happens again," Derek grinned and walked towards the elevator.

"Oh-oh-oh-of course, sir," the assistant forced, then fainted.

Entering the elevator, Derek gave himself a satisfied nod. While the elevator was rising to the sixth floor, he skimming through the reports in the file. The examination left him satisfied, and he left the elevator whistling. After walking down the corridor to his office (the guards at the door stood at attention on his approach) he flopped into his custom-made, ultra-comfortable, president-class high back chair. Here, he took the time to study the documents more thoroughly, scribbling notes on the margins and in his notebook. A secretary showed up with a full cup.

"Your coffee, Mr. Drago," she said quietly.

"Thank you, Janice," Derek grinned, giving the secretary's butt a playful pat.

"Mr. Drago, sir..." the secretary protested meekly.

"Come to see me later, clear?" Derek said sternly, accepting no objections.

"Yes, Mr. Drago," the secretary sighed resignedly and left the room.

Derek let off a satisfied smirk, sipped his coffee and got down to work.

Over the course of the next two hours he signed countless orders of execution, arrest, interrogation, torture and other assorted methods of repression and demoralization against individuals, who were careless enough to raise suspicion in those, whose opinion mattered, displayed insufficient loyalty or the complete lack thereof, allowed themselves the audacity of mocking the Ministry, or simply came into his personal dislike; He reviewed and rejected several military operation plans, judging them to be insufficiently cruel and indiscriminate; Finally, he ordered the closure of a factory, which was not producing anything military useful, yet provided two thousand people with jobs.

He was in the middle of rejecting a plan for a violent suppression of a peaceful protest, scheduled for next week at the city's main square (with the note "needs more casualties") when the door to his office opened.

"Janice, dear, where is that project I was looking at yesterday? I can't seem to find..." Derek began, then stopped. "You're not Janice," he pointed out, throwing a careful look at the rough-looking man with an unhealthy glint in his eyes, who has entered his office.

"Derek Drago, your reign of terror has come to an end!" the man proclaimed, pointing a gun at Derek.

"Is that so? How peculiar!" Derek responded with unfeigned interest. "It sure seems like I should fire my security, as it's obviously no good," he said ironically, giving the man with the gun another long, studying look.

"The vengeance of the People has reached you, despicable dictator!" the man with the gun informed.

"What is your name, young man?" Derek asked calmly, without batting an eye. The intruder balked, hesitated for a moment, then replied:

"Brian... Brian Right."

"Splendid! Let's talk a bit, then, Mr. B. Right!" Derek smiled. "I would like you to start off by answering a question for me: did you come here alone, acting out of your own free will, or are you here representing some sort of rebel organization?"

"I am none other than a manifestation of the will of the People, a weapon of its justice, a sharp blade, that shall smite you for your many crimes!"

"Excellent!" Derek approved. "In that case, before sending you here, they should have taught you how to use a gun, right?" he suggested. "Perhaps, mention some insignificant, trivial detail, like the need to take the safety off before you can shoot?"

Brian lost his composure, looked at his gun with an alarm, quickly took the safety off and hurriedly pointed the gun back at Derek.

"Your last hour has come, foul tyrant!" he announced, but without his former confidence.

"By the way, you mentioned some so-called 'crimes' of mine before," Derek continued, completely unfazed. "Would you be so kind to tell me which crimes specifically am I being accused of?"

"Don't you dare feign ignorance, villain!" Brian burst into a fiery speech. "You are guilty of so many terrible crimes, that the blood of the bravest of men chills at the first mention!" he began waving his gun around in excitement. Derek listened with genuine interest. "You and your executioners have committed countless murders! Teachers, public figures, thinkers, people honorable and virtuous, anyone who cared deeply about the well-being of their fellow people — all fell, innocent victims of your bloody regime, were arrested, tortured and brutally murdered — at your direct order! And those, who survived, were forced to give up their ideals, denounce their former views, sacrifice their very freedom of thought in exchange for a pitiful existence, unworthy to be called 'life'! You have doomed countless people to hunger and poverty, systematically oppressing them, destroying their workplaces and strangling them with enormous, inhumane, completely irrational taxes! Countless are the people, who are forced to feed on bread and salted potatoes, because they cannot afford even the basic of groceries — and all while a small privileged minority feasts on nuts, raisins and chocolate! What sad, pitiful society is it, where a small fraction of the populace drives around in private limousines, while the rest must suffocate in the crowds in the subway — if they even travel to begin with? Your rule turned what was once a united city into a collection of ghetto blocks, which no one can leave and through which no one can travel without a special permit! And do I even need to mention the countless surveillance cameras your spies have installed in every nook and cranny, and through which your police thugs and cutthroats constantly watch everyone and everything, twenty four hours a day? You have robbed people of their privacy, crushed their freedoms, silenced their speech, stole their sovereignty, stripped them of their rights and killed democracy!..."

"Did you rehearse that a lot?" Derek asked. Brian stopped in embarrassment. Derek continued, ignoring his confusion: "I must say, I'm a little disappointed. While you did your best, trying to describe my deeds on the post of Head of Administration, you outright downplayed many of them, made multiple regrettable factual mistakes and failed to mention some important details."

"Oh, yeah? Such as?" Brian demanded defiantly.

"For starter, the number of executions I have ordered is not 'countless', as you naïvely put it, but exactly 12,584. As the Head of Administration, I am required to know not only their exact numbers, but also the specific reasons that made those so-called 'murders' not just unavoidable, but strictly necessary. You see, my dear B. Right," Derek continued, paying no mind to Brian's growing perplexion, "Contrary to your little speech, my rule is by no means arbitrary. Far from it! It is ruled by a single guiding principle, a grand goal, which you, most likely, won't be able to fully grasp, and which I am resolved to accomplish, no matter what it takes. And, in any endeavor, there are always externalities involved, be it broken eggs when making an omelette, or flying splinters when cutting down the woods. The end doesn't only justify the means, as a smart man you, probably, never heard of once said, it defines them." Derek shrugged, then continued: "Secondly, by closing down a factory and throwing hundreds or thousands of people to the streets, not only do I work towards my goals, but do those people a major favor on the way. Having been kicked out of their mind-numbing daily routine, their pitiful little comfort zone, these people are forced to think, make decisions and take all manner of sensible actions, rebuilding their lives. The moment of losing their job becomes for each of those small, unremarkable, utterly average people a priceless one-time opportunity to start over elsewhere and, perhaps, reach new heights. That is why, by closing a factory — which, as you are well aware, brings me no popularity whatsoever! — I simply add to preexisting factors of natural selection in society, creating an environment that encourages willpower, determination, cunning and adaptability, which results in the growth and strenghtening of the nation as a whole. As for the poverty and hunger you painted so vividly, as far as I'm aware, charity centers giving away free food exist and function in each and every suburb..."

"Only a desparate person is going to eat..." Brian started, then stopped.

"...And seem to be doing well, as you, apparently, know first-hand," Derek continued without batting an eye. "Those of the citizens who are better off — and the differentiation into rich and poor had existed since the dawn of time — can afford paying for gourmet meals; And those, who can't, well, they can find sustenance in the free soup given there, which is, according to recent reports by the Ministry of Internal and External Affairs, which you can see here on my desk, is rich in nutrients and contains all necessary vitamins and microelements. By the way, please note — and it is a very important detail," Derek lifted a finger to emphasize the point. "Those charity centers are not only completely independent from the government, but function autonomously, without support or funding of any sort! As you can see, difficult conditions force people to be more cooperative, unite them and suppress any minor quarrels and disagreements in the face of a common threat. 'Anything that doesn't kill us, makes us stronger', as was neatly put by another smart person of whom you, regretablely, also never heard," Derek continued, to Brian's growing distress. "The registration system is the only effective method of limiting the mobility of criminal cells and eliminate smuggling attempts. You worry about something as banal as freedom of transportation? The overwhelming majority of the populace haven't used it since the beginning of the twentieth century, staying in their homes and avoiding any travel! Freedom of speech? It had to move aside to make way for responsibility of speech. The problem lies in the fact that speech, free from consequences, devalues and thus gets irresponsibly and indiscriminately thrown around. It's much better when the words we say have a price tag attached! Twenty four hour surveillance? Hah! Did you ever notice how the first ones to object to surveillance are the same ones, who just

so happen to engage in something illegal or immoral, shameful or embarrassing? Did you notice also, how people self-consciously start behaving to their highest standard when they think someone is there, watching them? In ancient times, the role of the omnipresent observer was reserved for God; Nowadays, as religion came into decline and lost its regulating role and power, a new All-Seeing Eye had to be created; And it is obvious, to anyone who isn't blind with outdated political slogans, that, in the end, it's only for the best!"

"No!" Brian grasped to his arguments with the last of his strength.

"Yes," Derek didn't let go. "You speak of sovereignty and independence, oblivious to the fact that independence is an illusion, and always was! In any complex system — and society is one such by any definition — all parts are interconnected and interwinded, each part depending on all the others and vice versa. Independence is an empty concept, that can only be taken seriously by inept people not only ignorant of system theory, but lacking understanding of the simplest, most fundamental ideas! No, no, truly," Derek shook his head with dismay. "The cruelty, or, maybe, stupidity of these people knows no limits! What are they thinking, what do they count on, sending naïve amateurs to attempted assassinations without explaining the situation and filling their heads with hollow political slogans instead of real, serious training?"

"What?" Brian exclaimed. He was lost and overwhelmed.

"You were set up, my friend, in the most cruel and shameless way possible," Derek explained patiently. "You were grossly misinformed — not to say brainwashed — with the direct opposite of the truth. Though, what can one expect from those fools, anyway? You came here, thinking me a villain. But let's think clearly for a few moments: why am I here? What for? During citizenship classes, which you were supposed to attend at school, you were supposed to learn, that my position is an elected one, and that despite the unlimited power and authority it grants, its term is limited. And, if it's an elected position, it means I was elected, right? Let's presume that I was; Who did the election and for what purpose? Your citizenship teachers were supposed to explain, among various other things, the exact mechanism by which a Head of Administration is elected, and, if you were listening, then you should know, that any candidate for the position must present a long-term program he plans to enact while holding the post, for public examination. I did this, and my program was absolutely clear and unambiguous: I would use my power and authority for evil, surpassing and outshining my predecessor. I stated my intentions clearly and unambiguously — no, much more, I have *sworn* to do this! And, as you can see, I was elected: not despite, but thanks to it! Therefore, those who elected me knew full well what they are doing, and I, therefore, am here not on a whim, and not by accident, but thanks to true democracy, the freely expressed will of the People!"

"No! It's a lie!" Brian shouted in shock.

"I know, it is hard to believe," Derek said sympathetically. "Everybody knows how well politicians use lies to obscure the truth; However, I can assure you, this is much less effective than carefully selected, arranged and presented truth!"

"It's impossible!" Brian was struggling with the last of his strength.

"On the contrary. It is quite possible. You thought you came here on the will of the People to do Justice? You couldn't be farther from the truth! Who do you think finances the organization, that sent you here?"

"Anonymous benefactors..." Brian said weakly, quickly losing ground.

"Wrong." Derek was implacable. "Here's the truth, from the most official inside sources: all rebel organizations in the North Atlantic Commonwealth of Interdependant States are financed from a special clause in the government budget, which, by the way, gets approved on a dedicated government meeting — by me."

"No!..." Brian was almost whispering.

"You are here in vain, dear Brian. You are not going to kill anyone. Do you know why? Because, contrary to what you were told when you were handed this gun, you are powerless to do anything. They tried to convince you that by killing me you will rid the People of a tyrant, a villain. They lied: my death will change absolutely nothing. In the best case scenario, it will make you, personally, feel better for about five seconds — that much it will take my security to break in and kill you. Then, a new 'villain' will be elected, and he will continue what was started long ago — not even by me. All those rebel organizations are simply playing a role game, trying hard to make themselves believe in this romantic fiction, this fantasy. And yet, you believed, and came here, failing to understand one simple truth: I am here, to give people exactly what they want," Derek was talking, and each phrase was crushing Brian and draining his will. "A controlled evil is preferable to an evil uncontrolled, and a known devil is far better than some unfamiliar fiend. I am here, because I'm needed, because I provide people a reflection of their flawed selves, a perfect negative role model. By manufacturing barriers, trials and hardships, I provide people with a much-needed context field for self-expression. Only thanks to me, they can manifest themselves as heroes, standing up to a hostile environment. I am not hated for something I did; I am hated, because people need someone they could hate! You came here to depose me? You don't even need a gun to do that! The only thing it really takes, is that people come to the polling stations and vote against me! Yet, they never do that — do you know why? I see by your eyes, that you suspect the answer! It's because they know I am right, because they know what I'm here for, because they like to feel strong and capable, and only the hardships I, the Head of the Evil Administration create, give them the chance! I am here, because I'm needed! As for you, my dear B. Right," Derek rose from his chair, preparing for the final strike. "You are no one, and nothing!"

Brian moaned and bitter tears flowed from his eyes. Despair flooded him. Through his own weeping he felt the gun he still held in his weakly hanging hand. Sobbing, he rose his gun, put it to his temple, and, with an immense feeling of relief, pulled the trigger. A gunshot rang out. Blood, mixed with brains splattered at the wall and carpet. The would-be revolutionary's legs gave and his lifeless body slumped to the floor.

Derek sat back into his chair with a feeling of immense satisfaction. The door to the office opened and a security guard peeked in.

"Is everything alright, Mr. Drago, sir?" he asked, giving the corpse on the floor a curious look.

"Of course," Derek replied, smiling calmly. "Clean up this mess, and get me a von Essen Platinum Club Sandwich and a coffee. And a dessert, too — an ice cream with whipped cream and Amedei Toscano Black chocolate crumbs," he ordered.

"At once, Mr. Drago, sir," the guard assured and vanished.

While his office was being cleaned up, Derek watched a news story about himself on TV, recounting his many dreadful, awe-inspiring acts of villainy. The reporter's descriptions got Derek in a good mood; He felt that he is making an impact, that his long and stressful work hours are not in vain, and that he is holding his post for a good reason. Yes, it was very hard, demanding work, but the pay was pretty good, and the perks were very pleasant as well.

Janice walked in, carrying a thick pile of papers.

"What is this? Impossible!" Derek exclaimed. "No, that's really over the limit! Are they out of their minds, there? How long can a man overstrain himself? No, this won't do!" he informed, skimming through the top few documents in the pile. "I'm signing these ten, just put a Ministry stamp on the rest. Enough is enough!"

He stood up, swiped the papers off his desk in a wide motion and grabbed the secretary by her hand.

"Lunch break time! Let there be vice!" Derek cried joyfully and pushed the secretary on the desk top.

He knew perfectly well that the camera in his office broadcasts a live feed of all that went here all over the world.

However, he had to provide an example.

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