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Though it seems silly in retrospect, we worried at the beginning of this process whether there was enough in the *Brillante* case for a book-length work. Could the events of one night in the Gulf of Aden, we wondered, really serve as the basis for a ninety-thousand-word narrative? Luckily for us, our brilliant agent Ethan Bassoff had no such doubts—and was a tireless advocate for making that story a reality. The team at Portfolio—Adrian Zackheim, Niki Papadopoulos, Kimberly Meilun, and most of all our gifted editor Noah Schwartzberg—were also believers from day one, and their confidence lifted us at our most difficult moments. Noah deserves a special thanks for expertly guiding two first-time authors through the process of turning an intimidating mass of reporting into something people might want to read.

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“The strategy emerged even more clearly when Mr. Gaisman QC pressed Mr. Iliopoulos on the fact that it was the owners who had the motive for hacking into the emails. Mr. Iliopoulos clearly lost his temper and effectively threatened the insurers and their legal representatives from the witness box in a disgraceful manner, thereby exposing, as I pointed out to him, what his real motive now is: to build up a case against the insurers and their representatives in Greece. With this intemperate and menacing evidence, Mr. Iliopoulos lost any remaining shred of credibility.”

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

There was lucrative employment: First Witness Statement of Richard Julian Veale, *Suez Fortune v. Talbot Underwriting*, Sept. 28, 2017.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

The only way to get: Witness Statement of Richard Veale, 14–15.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

Theodorou had helped: In his 2019 judgment, for which detailed citation information is included on page 256, Justice Nigel Teare said the following of Veale’s account of his interactions with Theodorou:

“Mr. Veale, an insurance investigator, gave evidence that Mr. Theodorou, one of the local salvors who boarded the casualty, told him (over six meetings between September 2016 and May 2017), that the fire on the vessel had been planned in advance by Mr. Iliopoulos. There is

no reason to doubt Mr. Veale’s evidence that Mr. Theodorou told him the matters which Mr. Veale said he did. Mr. Veale gave his evidence in a forthright and compelling manner. No particular reason was advanced during his cross-examination which suggested that this evidence should be doubted. However, whether Mr. Theodorou’s statements to Mr. Veale were true is another matter. He did not sign a statement, wanted a large sum of money for his evidence, was not available to be cross-examined and there are problems with his evidence (identified by counsel for the Bank as 13 ‘inaccuracies or inconsistencies’). Although counsel for the Underwriters emphasised that ‘the core’ of the accounts of both Mr. Theodorou and Mr. Plakakis was strikingly similar and that they told the same ‘essential story,’ I consider that what Mr. Theodorou said to Mr. Veale can only be accepted as true to the extent that it is supported by other compelling evidence.”

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

He admitted that much: Witness Statement of Allan Briones Marquez, *Suez Fortune v. Talbot Underwriting*, Aug. 28, 2017.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

Tabares would say: Day 14 transcript, *Suez Fortune v. Talbot Underwriting*, 48–52.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

Tabares denies that: In his judgment, Teare said the following of Marquez, who did not testify in person in the 2019 trial:

“I am unable to place any weight on the evidence of threatening behaviour by Mr. Marquez. It was not tested in cross-examination. It was denied by the chief engineer and Mr. Paikopoulos.

However, I find it impossible to resist the conclusion that those who said that the armed men announced themselves as ‘the authorities’ did so because they had been requested to do so, and not because it was the truth.”

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

Iliopoulos completed the course: “Results Ritsona Hillclimb 2017,” accessed Jul. 19, 2021, <http://www.rallycross-photo.com/heuvelklim2/results-ritsona-hillclimb-2017/>.

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The backup Audi: Vassilios Sarimbalidis, “Marios Iliopoulos’ Audi R8 Le Mans Caused Panic Among the Spectators,” *Zougla*, Apr. 13, 2017.

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According to the account: Witness Statement of Theo Blake, *Suez Fortune v. Talbot Underwriting*, Oct. 25, 2017. “Theo Blake” was the pseudonym used by the City of London Police to protect the identity of Dimitrios Plakakis.

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He apparently even had: Embassy Nairobi, “Somalia—Political Perspectives from Dubai,” WikiLeaks Cable: 08NAIROBI2619_a, dated Nov. 20, 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08NAIROBI2619_a.html.

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Rumored to be a veteran: Lucas Winter, “The Adaptive Transformation of Yemen’s Republican Guard,” *Small Wars Journal*, Mar. 7, 2017, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-adaptive-transformation-of-yemen-s-republican-guard>.

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As he recounted: Witness Statement of Theo Blake, 9.

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Vergos was happy: Witness Statement of Theo Blake, 16–24.

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Eager to build: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Ongoing Efforts to Combat Piracy on the High Seas: Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 111th Cong., 1st sess., 2009, <https://www.congress.gov/event/111th-congress/senate-event/LC6133/text?s=1&r=1229>.

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It received about \$30 million: Jeremy M. Sharp, *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL34170 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 15.

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In the final phase: Sally Healy and Ginny Hill, *Yemen and Somalia: Terrorism, Shadow Networks, and the Limitations of State-building*, MENAP/AFP BP 2010/01 (London: Chatham House, 2010), 11.

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Early in 2011: Margaret Coker, “U.S. Military Aid Is Available for Hire in Yemen,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 4, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204204004576049660513491614>.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

Vergos repeated the advice: Witness Statement of Theo Blake, 33–34.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

This time, Plakakis listened: Day 19 transcript, *Suez Fortune v. Talbot Underwriting*, 52–55.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

On the advice: Day 19 transcript, 64.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

Although Judge Teare: In his judgment, Teare said the following of Gonzaga:

“A feature of his evidence, however, was a failure to answer difficult questions. For example, he maintained that he believed the intruders to be the ‘authorities’ because they wore uniform and ‘authorities’ with arms had boarded his vessel in West Africa and other places. When his evidence as to this belief was probed he tended to repeat his belief and the reasons for it without answering the question put. That suggested that he was unwilling to answer the question perhaps because he had no credible answer to give.

“Another feature of his evidence was a tendency, on occasion, to give answers which were surprising and lacked reality. For example, when asked whether he was concerned at the approach of a small boat he said he was not because it might have been a boat selling fish. He was asked whether the fact that those approaching in the small boat not only carried arms (which he accepted would heighten his concern) but also wore masks was a reason for yet more concern. The master said he did not think so. When asked why, he said that the masks might protect against dust. When it was pointed out that the boat was at sea, he said that the masks might be protection against infection. He later suggested that the men might be wearing masks to avoid a bad smell. These answers suggested that, having appreciated where counsel’s questions were going, he was prepared to say whatever was necessary to avoid making admissions which might later prove to be damaging.”

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

“There was no trust”: Day 17 transcript, *Suez Fortune v. Talbot Underwriting*, 46–47.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

His written judgment ran: *Suez Fortune Investments Ltd & Piraeus Bank AE v. Talbot Underwriting Ltd & Others*, [2019] EWHC 2599 (Comm), <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Comm/2019/2599.html>.

[GO TO NOTE REFERENCE IN TEXT](#)

“The armed men”: The relevant passage in Teare’s judgment is as follows:

“Having considered all of the evidence in the case and counsel’s detailed submissions on that evidence and having stood back from the detail to view the story as a whole, in the round, I have reached several firm conclusions.

“First, the armed men who boarded BRILLANTE VIRTUOSO with an IEID did so with the intention of starting a fire on board the vessel. They had no intention of hijacking the vessel for ransom and only pretended to be pirates. They activated the IEID for the purpose of starting a fire on board the vessel.

“Second, the master and chief engineer assisted the armed men in their task. The master decided to drift off Aden to make it easier for the small boat carrying the armed men to come alongside the vessel and then permitted the armed men to board the vessel. The chief engineer in all probability provided the accelerant for the IEID and the additional fuel to enable the fire to spread from the purifier room. There is no clear evidence as to what the accelerant and additional fuel consisted of, but it may have been diesel oil as suggested by the fire experts.

“Third, Mr. Vergos of Poseidon was party to the conspiracy to damage the vessel by fire. He was aware that there was to be a ‘fake’ attack by pirates and once he knew that that had occurred and that the vessel was on fire he proceeded to the casualty. On arrival he failed to take obvious precautions to prevent the spread of the fire. When it appeared that the fire was about to go out he, or one or more of his salvage team, damaged the drain cock to the diesel oil service tank so as to cause the resurgence of the fire.

“Fourth, the orchestrator of these events was the owner of BRILLANTE VIRTUOSO, Mr. Iliopoulos. It is improbable that the armed men, master, chief engineer and Mr. Vergos took part in the conspiracy on their own initiative. By contrast Mr. Iliopoulos had a motive to want the vessel to be damaged by fire, namely, the making of a fraudulent claim for the total loss of the vessel in the sum of some US\$77 million which, if successful, would solve the serious financial difficulties in which he and his companies were at the time. Moreover, his involvement is consistent with his early telephone calls to FOS and Poseidon between 0300 and 0400 on 6 July reporting that the vessel was on fire and positively indicated by the striking coincidences that (i), although it is clear from the VDR audio record that the armed men identified themselves as ‘security,’ almost all of the crew in their early statements said that the armed men identified themselves as ‘the authorities’ and (ii) that the statements of those few crew members who said that the armed men identified themselves as ‘security’ were amongst those not disclosed to the Underwriters until, some years later, the Owner’s solicitors disclosed them. Only Mr. Iliopoulos had reason for the crew to tell an untrue story. Thus the evidence relating to the loss, the crew’s untrue evidence in their early witness statements that the armed men described themselves as the authorities and Mr. Iliopoulos’ motive for setting fire to his vessel amount to a cogent and compelling case that the events were orchestrated by him. The case against him is strengthened by what is known of his character from the findings made by Flaux J. and by the inference that

the documents he was unwilling to disclose would have supported the case against him. I have therefore concluded that Mr. Iliopoulos was the instigator of the conspiracy.”

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“We believe that society”: Seajets, “SEAJETS’ WorldChampion JET Wins the ‘Ship of the Year 2019’ at the Lloyd’s List Greek Shipping Awards 2019,” press release, Dec. 11, 2019, <https://www.prnswire.co.uk/news-releases/seajets-worldchampion-jet-wins-the-ship-of-the-year-2019-at-the-lloyd-s-list-greek-shipping-awards-2019-866040484.html>.

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* The account of Plakakis's role in the *Brillante* case in this and the following chapter is based on official law enforcement records, court testimony and documents, and interviews with people who spoke to him about his involvement.

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