

When Bad Guys Fall Out
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We have been watching the implosion of the Putin Empire, a fascinating drama unfolding on television. History once more repeats itself: villains eventually fall out. I am just surprised it took this long.

What defines a "bad guy"? My definition is a person with no compassion, totally selfish and totally ruthless, capable of summoning willing toadies for support, toadies who are also motivated by power.

We have our own, of course, Donald J. Trump, whose grip on power and freedom from accountability is in meltdown. The law may be slow, but it is eventually thorough. We will be watching court cases unfolding over the next few months and it appears the prosecutors have solid cases. Many of Trump's fellow villains have lined up to serve as witnesses in order to save themselves.

Another arch villain, Vladimir Putin, has squashed Russia's post-Soviet baby democracy and has made himself President for Life in propaganda-laced elections. His own subjects have attempted to protest, and several fearless heroes who would have opposed him in elections are now in prison. Putin courts (rubber stamp justice), a toothless parliament, a demolished free press, and a public accustomed to Russian misery, have seemed inevitable.

But this misery eventually spurs revolt. The seemingly powerful Soviet Union collapsed with virtually no bloodshed. In the chaos that followed, Putin saw his opportunity. A former spy, a sober man in a world of drunks, and an expert in making deals with other potential leaders (some of them villains), assembled an inner circle of former intelligence operators and together, they transferred all former Soviet state treasures to themselves. These men owed Putin, and as long as they stayed out of politics, he let them become billionaires. But any who tried to propose democracy wound up dead or in prison.

Putin then made a huge mistake: he attempted to take back the pieces of the former empire. He expected Ukraine to be a pushover, not even calling his invasion a war: they were a "special military operation." His huge Russian army has only the benefit of size, not quality. Russian recruits are abused, underpaid, undertrained, and the grunts suffer from the national disease, alcohol.

When Ukraine's resistance surprised everyone, and a young leader, President Zelensky, summoned support from other democracies, including the US, Ukraine's army began trouncing the Russians. Putin sought help: summoning a mercenary army, the Wagner Group, led by his old buddy: Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Prigozhin matches Putin in villainy. His private army is comprised of criminals released from prisons, and he doesn't depend upon the Russian government to pay them. He uses the funds from his ownership of the largest salt mine in Russia and from gold and blood diamonds stolen from equally villainous rulers of Africa's most miserable country, Central African Republic.

Prigozhin's army is noted for war crimes (rape and looting civilians), drunkenness, and total lack of empathy for human values. When soldiers die in combat (which thousands have so far), their bodies are returned to Russia and buried at night. No weeping parents in sight.

This alliance of villains is now falling apart. Prigozhin attempted a coup and marched on Moscow, with no resistance. In towns he held, mobs cheered him. This alarmed Putin. Initially he condemned Prigozhin for treason, but the same day he forgave him and sent him to exile in Belarus. At this writing, both men are largely missing from public eye. Putin's weakness shows.

Shakespeare frequently showed us villains falling out. In King Lear, Lear has three daughters, two of them Lying hypocrites and the third unwilling to feed Lear's vanity, but loyal to him. As the play unfolds, the two sisters plot, along with their equally evil husbands, to seize power. They strip Lear of everything and turn him out in a storm with only his loyal fool with him. His loyal daughter gathers an army, but she is too late.

Meanwhile, however, the terrible sisters begin to fall out, along with their ambitious husbands. They all fight, leaving a bloodbath behind them.

Putin's power is no longer guaranteed. The bad guys are gathering.
The cracks are growing. Keep tuned.

687 words

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