

In brief

Chris Austin made one mistake in an otherwise brilliant career. He risked the livelihood of those close and dear to him in his personal and business life, and he risked funds entrusted to him by his company's clients when an American, Robert Lindon entered his life.

Bob Lindon described to him a financial scheme which, with powerful logic, produced an opportunity for very, very large amounts of money to be made available. So vast the amount, and so certain of the success of the scheme, Chris became totally pre-occupied with it. Bob Lindon's reassurance that Chris's actions were fully protected by funds already under the American's control in the States effectively countered a feeling that there might be any problem. Chris and, to a lesser but nonetheless significant extent, his friends, had before them a vision of a whole new and exciting future coming to reality. It was, indeed, the stuff that dreams are made of.

Dreams, though, can become nightmares, and when Bob Lindon failed to honour his promises the reality of life for Chris Austin and many others became that nightmare. Brave efforts were made to recover or to replace the £1 million or so lost through following Bob Lindon's advice but these efforts served only to increase the vulnerability of those making them. Vulnerability, not only to the inevitable actions of the authorities but also to the sinister implications of their beginning to learn more about the reasons for Bob Lindon's failure and the type of people involved in the background than those people desired to become known. Gradually, support for Chris by his colleagues petered out and finally, reluctantly, in early 1985, he too had to give up. His career ruined, his physical reserves depleted and his dreams shattered, he stood alone to face the consequences.

This story commences, a couple of years later, when Chris Austin walks away from a London court and experiences a freedom of a sort that had evaded him for so long. The events of the past, though, still haunt him, as does a determination to discover the truth about Bob Lindon.

A dramatic sequence of events results in old associations being renewed. Complex twists of motives and emotions emerge as the loyalty of once-close friends comes into question. People are threatened, attacked and some killed as individuals try to make sense of the frightening new circumstances in which they find themselves.

The threats are very real and, involving - as they do- the innocent, seem all the more effective. When those who threaten seem not to have furthered their objectives savage attacks follow but with few clues as to those responsible.

The explanation of the killings remains a mystery throughout the story and even at the devastating climax the reader may have to search for an answer to this as well as a series of other questions that arise.

Excitement abounds in chases by air, sea and water with the tensions of tiredness, mistrust and troubled emotions. A strong visual impact stems from settings in a Swiss mountain village, a Greek island and the strange Slav borderlands where Yugoslavia meets Albania in the south west and Austria in the north.

Lighter - often positively hilarious - moments permeate the account of some stages of the characters' adventures. Bob Lindon, in particular, shows extremes of attitudes from an almost impenetrable silence to rudely loud verbosity. Distinguishing pretence of good humour from the real thing may be frustratingly difficult but moods dictate so many of the aspects of the characters' reactions that the detection of even slight change of emphasis can add immensely to appreciation of the course of events.

On several occasions strong erotic elements are featured; always, though, sensitively phrased and with justification within the overall direction of events. Much is left to the imagination, as is the case in the expression of love in the relationships that develop. The strands of feeling may be faintly written but they are carefully and very specifically woven so that omission of the word 'love' by no means implies lack of the emotion in certain characters.

The unpredictability and unusual appearance of a little-known race in the Slav mountain lands brings starkness to an already tense atmosphere and in another part of that country English and Greek are silenced, stunned by the moving tones of a small town folk singer.

Other feelings, friendships and fears will be found as the story unfolds. A story that is credible, because it is based largely on fact, yet incredible, because it is not easy to believe that such things could happen. A story that will shock with the violence of some, yet calm at the care shown by others. A story where sensations are vivid but senses still reel. A story that attacks the emotions then tends its wounds. A story with few explanations because only a few of the people still exist.