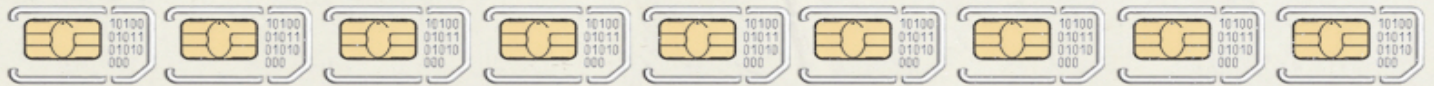


HACK



**HOW THE TRUTH
CAUGHT UP WITH
RUPERT MURDOCH**

Nick Davies



ATTACK

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About the Book

At first, it seemed like a small story. The royal editor of the *News of the World* was caught listening to the voicemail messages of staff at Buckingham Palace. In 2007 he and a private investigator were sentenced to prison and the case was closed. But Nick Davies felt sure there was more to it and began his painstaking investigation which ultimately exposed a world of crime and cover-up, of fear and favour – reaching all the way to the top.

This book is the definitive, inside story of one of the major scandals of our age. Drawing on exclusive interviews with private investigators, journalists, politicians, police officers and Murdoch executives, it blows the lid off Fleet Street, Scotland Yard – and Downing Street. It tells for the first time how Davies and a network of rebel lawyers, MPs and celebrities took on Rupert Murdoch, one of the most powerful men in the world. It takes us into the newsroom of the *News of the World* and exposes the bullying and law-breaking that went on there, and into the underworld of the private investigators who hacked phones, listened to live calls and bribed the police. It discloses how News International attempted to protect itself with lies and money; how the press regulator floundered; and the history of failure and official secrecy inside police ranks. Above all, this book paints an intimate portrait of the power elite which gave Murdoch privileged access to government, and allowed him and his people to intimidate anyone who stood up to them.

Hack Attack is a nail-biting account of an investigative journalist's quest, and is a shining example of the might of good journalism. It tells the story of what happened when truth caught up with power.

About the Author

Nick Davies writes investigative stories for the *Guardian*, and has been named Journalist of the Year, Reporter of the Year and Feature Writer of the Year in British press awards. Between July 2009 and July 2011, he wrote more than a hundred stories about crime in Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World*. He has written five books including *White Lies* and *Dark Heart*, and most recently the bestselling *Flat Earth News*, exposing falsehood and propaganda in news media.

He has three children and lives in Sussex.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*White Lies: The True Story of Clarence Brandley, Presumed
Guilty in the American South*

*Murder on Ward Four: The Story of Bev Allitt and the Most
Terrifying Crime Since the Moors Murders*

Dark Heart: The Shocking Truth about Hidden Britain

The School Report: Why Britain's Schools are Failing

*Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes
Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*

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For Jean Davies, who died in 1986.
She would have loved this story.

HACK ATTACK

**How the truth caught up with
Rupert Murdoch**

NICK DAVIES

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

Who's Who

Sue Akers	Deputy assistant commissioner, Metropolitan Police
Tamsin Allen	Lawyer for hacking victims
Matthew Anderson	Right-hand man to James Murdoch
Sky Andrew	Sports agent, hacking victim
Mr Apollo	Code name for original source for story
Joanne Armstrong	Legal adviser to Professional Footballers' Association, hacking victim
Sir Ian Blair	Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 2005–09, hacking target
David Blunkett	Home Secretary, hacking victim
Charlie Brooks	Racehorse trainer, husband of Rebekah Brooks
Rebekah Brooks	Editor, <i>News of the World</i> and the <i>Sun</i> , chief executive of News International from September 2009
Chris Bryant	Labour MP, hacking victim
Ian Burton	External lawyer, News International
Lady Buscombe	Chair, Press Complaints Commission, 2009–11
Vince Cable	Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for business
Glenn Campbell	BBC journalist
Richard	Managing editor, the <i>Sun</i>

Caseby

Jon
Chapman

Legal director, News International

Peter Clarke

Deputy assistant commissioner, in command
of Op Carylaid

Max Clifford

PR agent, hacking victim

Daniel Cloke

Director of human resources, News
International

Dave Cook

Detective chief superintendent,
Metropolitan Police

Andy
Coulson

Editor *News of the World*, media adviser to
the prime minister

Tom Crone

In-house lawyer, *News of the World* and the
Sun

Ian
Edmondson

Assistant editor (news), *News of the World*

Emissary

Code name for government source

Kieren
Fallon

Jockey, hacking victim

Paul Farrelly

Labour MP on media select committee

Dick
Fedorcio

Director of communications, Metropolitan
Police

George
Galloway

Respect MP, hacking victim

Clive
Goodman

Royal editor, *News of the World*

Andy Gray

TV presenter, hacking victim

Simon
Greenberg

Director, corporate affairs, News
International

Mark Hanna

Director of security, News International

Charlotte
Harris

Lawyer for hacking victims

Dean Haydon	John Yates's staff officer
Andy Hayman	Assistant commissioner, responsible for Op Caryatid
Amelia Hill	<i>Guardian</i> reporter
Ross Hindley	<i>News of the World</i> reporter
Les Hinton	Chief executive News International until December 2007
Sean Hoare	Show-business reporter, the <i>Sun</i> and <i>News of the World</i>
Jeremy Hunt	Secretary of State for culture, media and sport
Lawrence 'Lon' Jacobs	In-house counsel, News Corp
Jingle	Code name for police source
Tessa Jowell	Secretary of State for culture, media and sport
Karl	Code name for police source
Ian Katz	Deputy editor, the <i>Guardian</i>
Trevor Kavanagh	Political editor, the <i>Sun</i>
John Kelly	Lawyer for hacking victims
Joel Klein	Executive vice president, News Corp
Stuart Kuttner	Managing editor, <i>News of the World</i>
David Leigh	Investigations editor, the <i>Guardian</i>
Mark Lewis	Lawyer for hacking victims
Will Lewis	General manager, News International
Lola	Code name for source in criminal justice system
Mark	Detective, attached to Op Caryatid

Maberly	
Alice Macandrew	Media adviser to James Murdoch
Ken Macdonald QC	Director of Public Prosecutions, 2003–08
Paul McMullan	Journalist, <i>News of the World</i>
Mango	Code name for whistle-blower source
Alex Marunchak	Executive editor, <i>News of the World</i>
Sir Christopher Meyer	Chair, Press Complaints Commission, 2003–09
Fred Michel	Lobbyist for James Murdoch
Sienna Miller	Actress, hacking victim
Greg Miskiw	Assistant editor (news), <i>News of the World</i>
Dominic Mohan	Editor, the <i>Sun</i>
Daniel Morgan	Private investigator, murdered 1987
Piers Morgan	Editor, <i>Daily Mirror</i> and <i>News of the World</i>
Max Mosley	Victim of <i>News of the World</i> story, funded hacking victims
Glenn Mulcaire	Phone-hacking specialist, <i>News of the World</i>
James Murdoch	Executive chairman of News International, 2007–11
Rupert Murdoch	Chairman and chief executive of News Corp
Colin Myler	Editor, <i>News of the World</i>

Ovid	Code name for Mulcaire's ghostwriter
Alec Owen	Senior investigator, Information Commissioner's Office
Brian Paddick	Deputy assistant commissioner, Metropolitan Police, hacking victim
Lucy Panton	Crime reporter, <i>News of the World</i>
David Perry QC	Senior prosecutor
Robert Peston	BBC business editor
Nicola Phillips	PR to Max Clifford, hacking victim
Julian Pike	External lawyer, News International
John Prescott	Deputy prime minister, hacking victim
Adam Price	Plaid Cymru MP on media select committee
Jeremy Reed	Barrister for hacking victims
Ed Richards	Chief executive, Ofcom
Alan Rusbridger	Editor, the <i>Guardian</i> from 1995
Gerald Shamash	Lawyer for hacking victims
Michael Silverleaf QC	Barrister for News International
Adam Smith	Special adviser to Jeremy Hunt
Keir Starmer QC	Director of Public Prosecutions, 2008-13
Jules Stenson	Features editor, <i>News of the World</i>
Sir Paul Stephenson	Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 2009-11

Sir John Stevens	Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 2000–05
Keith Surtees	Detective, deputy lead investigator on Op Caryatid
Gordon Taylor	Chief executive, Professional Footballers' Association, hacking victim
Mark Thomson	Lawyer for hacking victims
Neville Thurlbeck	Chief reporter, <i>News of the World</i>
Hugh Tomlinson QC	Barrister for hacking victims
Tim Toulmin	Director, Press Complaints Commission
Mr Justice Vos	Judge in hacking cases
Neil Wallis	Deputy editor, <i>News of the World</i>
Tom Watson	Labour MP on media select committee
James Weatherup	News editor, <i>News of the World</i>
Derek Webb	Covert surveillance specialist, <i>News of the World</i>
John Whittingdale	Conservative chair of media select committee
Phil Williams	Detective, lead investigator on Op Caryatid
John Yates	Assistant commissioner, Metropolitan Police

Part One

Crime and Concealment

All members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional standards.

Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice

You don't get to be the editor of the *Mirror* without being a fairly despicable human being.

Piers Morgan

1. February 2008 to July 2009

I was sitting in a BBC radio studio, getting ready to vomit.

They wanted me to talk about a book I had just written, *Flat Earth News*, about the scale and origins of falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the media. In theory, I was happy to talk to them: I'd spent two years breaking my brain to produce the book, which was finally being published now, in February 2008, and this was a chance to persuade people to read the result. But the thought of this interview flooded me with anxiety.

This was live national radio. Worse than that, this was the *Today* programme. The Queen listens to the *Today* programme; the prime minister, foreign ambassadors, the whole damned UK power elite chews its breakfast with one ear on the *Today* programme. And worst of all, a few minutes earlier, while I was pacing up and down outside the studio, just before I sat down for my ordeal, they had revealed that they had brought in Stuart Kuttner to oppose me. Kuttner!

I had never met him, but I'd heard plenty. Kuttner was this figure from the shadows – the managing editor of Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World*, lurking just behind the editor's throne, the guy who kept the secrets, who got rid of the problems, who dealt with the really dirty stuff. You wouldn't spend long trying to describe Stuart Kuttner without using words like 'tough' and 'ruthless' and 'basically very unpleasant'.

The interview started, I mastered my nerves and started to talk. Kuttner stepped in a couple of times, to inform the nation that I must be from a different planet because he

certainly didn't recognise the newspaper industry I was describing. Then I got on to the 'dark arts', outlining the few scraps of information I had found about private investigators who for years had been working for most British newspapers, breaking the law to help them get scoops. Kuttner moved in quickly. 'If it happens, it shouldn't happen. It happened once at the *News of the World*. The reporter was fired; he went to prison. The editor resigned.'

Certainly it crossed my mind that he was not telling the truth. He was right on the simple fact that only one reporter from the *News of the World* had been sent to prison – the royal editor, Clive Goodman – but the idea of the 'one rogue reporter' had never quite made sense to me. Goodman had been jailed a year earlier, in January 2007, for intercepting the voicemail of three people who worked at Buckingham Palace. The private investigator who had helped him to do that, Glenn Mulcaire, had been jailed not only for hacking the voicemail of those three royal targets but also for eavesdropping on the messages of five other people who had nothing to do with the royal family. Why had Mulcaire done that? Nobody had suggested for a moment that it had been the royal editor who had told him to hack non-royal victims. So who had asked him to? Other reporters? Editors? Mysterious voices in his head?

Kuttner swept over the top of me, on a rhetorical roll. British journalism, he declared, was 'a very honourable profession'. A newspaper like the *News of the World* was really a kind of moral watchdog, keeping an eye out for misbehaviour among the powerful. 'We live in an age of corrosion of politics and of public life – degradation,' he warned.

On that high note, the interview finished, and that might have been the end of it. I didn't believe all this stuff about the *News of the World* being a defence against the degradation of public life, but I wasn't interested in the *News of the World*. I didn't read it and I didn't want to

write about it. I was only relieved to be out of the studio and happy to go off spreading my ideas about *Flat Earth News*, which is mostly about quality newspapers and the deep flaws in the way they now operate. But, unknown to me, Stuart Kuttner had just made a mistake, a very bad mistake. 'It only happened once,' he had said. Somewhere out across the airwaves, a man I had never met nor heard of had listened to what Kuttner said and had felt so angry about it that he decided to contact me. Which is what happened a few days later.

'I would like to have a discussion with you,' he said. 'I think you will like what I have.'

He left me his mobile phone number, but told me never to leave a message on it.

It's fair to say that reporting is a great deal easier than most reporters like to pretend. People tell you things; you do your best to check them out; and then you tell a lot of other people what you've found. There are some hidden subtleties in there and a few simple skills, but generally speaking, there is nothing very clever about it.

I arranged to meet my intriguing caller. I am never going to be able to say who he is. That's a really common problem. Over and again, you find that the people who have the most interesting things to say are the people who are least able to say them, because they are under pressure of some kind – they are worried that they will be arrested or sacked or divorced or beaten up. Anonymity protects them. This man is going to crop up several times, so he needs a memorable name. I'll call him Mr Apollo.

As soon as I met him I liked him, but I didn't necessarily trust him. We sat in his room in a central London hotel, him faffing about with the coffee-making equipment while he started to talk, me wondering how he knew so much and what he wanted in return.

He told me that Kuttner was a liar, that the *News of the World* had been hacking phones all over the place and that this was how they got most of their stories: they picked up their leads by intercepting voicemail, and then they went out to get photographs and quotes to lay a false trail, so that they could pretend that they had found the story by normal, legitimate means. It wasn't just Clive Goodman who had been doing it, he said – that was a complete joke, loads of reporters had been at it. It was such an easy trick, he said. You dial your target's mobile phone number and when you get through to the recorded message, you hit '9', then the recorded message asks you to enter a four-digit PIN code. Most people don't bother to change the code from the factory setting, so you know what it is. Or, if they do change it, they use something really obvious like the year of their birth. You put in the code and that's it, you can listen to their messages. Of course, Mr Apollo explained, you need to work this so that the target doesn't answer their phone when you call in. So maybe you call during the night, or when you know the target is in a meeting.

Most of the time, he said, it was so easy to do this that you didn't need a private investigator like Glenn Mulcaire to make it happen. Mulcaire's main job, he said, had been to 'blag' the mobile phone companies – to call them up and pretend to be one of their staff – so that he could get numbers for people who were ex-directory, or, more important, to get a PIN code changed back to the factory setting if the target had bothered to alter it. Once the *News of the World* were inside one target's voicemail, they would pick up messages with the numbers of their closest associates, then hack their voicemail, get more associates and create a whole network of eavesdropping around the target. The targets would not discover the codes had been changed for weeks. And if they did discover it, they would think it was some kind of techno foul-up.

This was interesting stuff, and it was tempting to get involved. It would be good to put Kuttner back into his box. It would be better still to do something about tabloid journalists behaving badly. It was not just that a small minority of cowboys with notebooks were making up stories and ruining people's lives; they were also making it much more difficult for other journalists to do their jobs, because people generally now expected to be bribed, bullied and cheated by reporters, so they were far more difficult to deal with.

But it wasn't that great a story. Nobody was going to be very surprised to be told that some tabloid reporters behaved badly and, even if I wanted to pursue it, the difficulty was that all this was just the word of Mr Apollo, who might be right or might be wrong but who had made it very clear that he could not be quoted or named to defend anything that I might write.

By now, he had got the better of the coffee-making, and he sat down and started to relax and to talk about the police. He claimed that Scotland Yard had found masses of mobile phone numbers which had been logged by Glenn Mulcaire but they had never followed up on them. They had made no attempt to prosecute Mulcaire for all these other possible victims, nor to find out who else might have been giving instructions to Mulcaire, nor even to tell all these people that they had been targeted. This was getting more interesting. Why would the police behave like that when dealing with a particularly powerful newspaper, which happened to belong to Rupert Murdoch, the biggest media mogul in the country?

We started talking about the trial of Goodman and Mulcaire, about the fact that it never did make sense that Mulcaire admitted hacking five non-royal victims. That was when Mr Apollo finally opened the door so that I could see a way forward. He claimed that one of those five unexplained victims was suing and was trying to get the

police to hand over some of the evidence which they had collected and never revealed. Apparently, it was causing some panic at Scotland Yard. Now here was a way to check Mr Apollo's story. If a judge went ahead and ordered Scotland Yard to hand over evidence, the police would have to comply and then, with any luck, I could get access to the court files and see what was in there.

It was only later that evening, after I'd left Mr Apollo with thanks and a guarantee to stay in touch, that my brain finally clicked into gear and I understood the biggest reason for going after this story. It was not just about the most powerful news organisation in the country apparently cheating and breaking the law, and about the most powerful police force in the country failing – maybe deliberately refusing – to go anywhere near exposing the truth about it. I finally realised that what really mattered was that the man who was editing the *News of the World* at the time – Andy Coulson – was now working as media adviser for the leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron. And although it was the Labour Party who were in government, it looked very likely that the Conservatives would win the next election and Cameron would become prime minister. Andy Coulson was on his way into Downing Street.

I remembered Coulson resigning as editor of the *News of the World* after the trial of Goodman and Mulcaire, explaining that he had known nothing about Goodman's evil ways but saying that he felt he should go because it had happened on his watch. If Kuttner was lying about all this, then maybe Coulson was lying too. And yet he was aiming to take on the job of organising the communication between the government and the people of the country – really a very unsuitable place for a liar. More than that, if he really had presided over a regime of illegal eavesdropping at the *News of the World*, what would he do if he found himself in Downing Street and he wanted to find

out who was talking dirty behind the prime minister's back? Would he go back to the dark arts?

What is the difference between a reporter on the *Guardian* and a reporter on a paper like the *News of the World*?

Don't believe anybody who tells you that it has anything to do with moral fibre, or intelligence, or sensitivity. There are bastards and moral weaklings, good guys and idealists, in both worlds. All reporters are really very similar. They run on a flammable psychological mixture, like petrol and air, a volatile combination of imagination and anxiety.

You train your imagination, pushing it like you'd push a muscle until it's stronger than other people's, until it becomes almost freakishly powerful. And over and over again, you point it at your problem and you guess, with great energy and vivid mental pictures: what could the truth possibly be; where could I possibly find the evidence; who could know; why would they talk; what's next; what's missing; how do I finish this jigsaw puzzle in the dark? Then, when you go out to check what your imagination has delivered, you complete the mixture by pouring in equal measures of stomach-burning anxiety. What if this goes wrong; if they won't talk to me; if they talk to somebody else with a notebook; if they lie to me; if they tape me; if they grass me to the opposition? What if I'm wrong? What if the stupid news desk won't run the story?

There is one other thing, the equivalent of the spark that ignites the fuel and air. Most of the reporters who survive and thrive are driven by some kind of deep need. I know one who spent years pretending to himself and to the rest of the planet that he was not gay. He diverted his sexual energy and his waking hours, day and night, into fighting all the powers that be, and he did extraordinary work uncovering all kinds of secret scandals until finally he accepted himself and relaxed and never really produced another story worth reading. I know another who says he

grew up with a secret in his family – there was this thing that nobody was allowed to say. Eventually, in his late teens, he discovered that his father was Jewish while his mother was not and that, when they married, their two families had protested so bitterly that the couple resolved never to mention This Thing again. So this reporter can't stand secrets, and he has spent years earning a living and winning awards by hunting down concealment wherever he can find it and tearing it apart.

OK, so mine is this: I spent my childhood being hit by people – grown-ups – some of them genuinely vicious, some of them simply believing the noxious idea that if you spare the rod, you spoil the child. I had been working as a reporter for a couple of decades, thinking I was interested in criminal justice and social problems, before I looked back and saw how over and over again I had been drawn to stories where I might have saved victims: particularly victims of unfairness (miscarriages of justice, police corruption); and, even more than that, victims who were children (working as prostitutes, losing out at school, being sexually abused, living in poverty, struggling in prison, being attacked by a mentally disordered nurse). Underlying all of this work, I could see, was some deep-seated urge to hit back at anybody at all who takes power and abuses it.

What's the difference between a reporter on the *News of the World* and one on the *Guardian*? The difference is in the office, in the hierarchy – in the Bully Quotient. There is a lot of bullying in Fleet Street – a lot of puffed-up, pissed-up, overpaid, foul-mouthed, self-important editors-in-chief and people who run news desks and features desks, who can't tell the difference between leadership and spite. I've come across it in quality newsrooms but there is no doubt that the worst of the bullying thrives in the downmarket tabloid newsrooms. Why? It begins with train timetables.

There are 50 or 60 million people crammed into England, Scotland and Wales and, ever since the Industrial

Revolution, it's been possible to print a paper in London or Glasgow and put it on a train at night, knowing that by dawn it can reach any household in the land. Compare that to the US: until the electronic revolution, a newspaper that set out at night on a journey from New York City, for example, would be halfway to nowhere by the next morning. So while the US developed city papers, usually no more than a couple in each city, the UK developed a national market for newspapers which was bursting with competition as a dozen or so daily titles fought each other for the attention of all these readers. And the competition has always been most intense among the mass-market tabloids. Their very survival depends on circulation, on selling lots of papers – on printing something that the competition has missed. By contrast, the upmarket papers don't expect to sell millions: they aim for the wealthiest people in the market and make most of their money by carrying advertisements which are aimed at their readers' well-padded wallets.

The commercial pressure in UK newsrooms is relentless, particularly for the mass-circulation titles. Tabloid editors will send out their reporters with an unmistakeable message pinned painfully to the back of their heads – 'just get the story'. No excuses are accepted, no failure is allowed, you stand on that doorstep till she talks to you, you keep asking till you get the answer, open that miser's paw, just get the damned story. And a lot of these editors will scream abuse and shout threats and tip verbal acid over the head of any fool reporter who dares to come back with an empty notebook.

If you succeed in a tabloid newsroom, you'll be given big stories and great foreign trips, lots of bylines, a licence to fiddle your expenses, cosy lunches with the editor and private pay rises. If you fail, you'll sit lonely in a corner, being given no stories or just crap stories that will never make it into print; you'll be woken up at dawn and kept

going till midnight; you'll be sent away to Sunderland just as you were leaving the office to go to your own birthday party; if you happen to write something that gets into the paper, you'll get no byline, no thanks, no respite; you will wish you were somebody else. (I know some of this at first hand: I spent my first few years as a reporter on tabloid papers and fled to escape one particularly remorseless bully.) So, of course, when those reporters are out there on the road with nothing much more than their imagination and their anxiety for company, some of them may well decide to invent quotes, fabricate facts, cheat sources, steal pictures, ignore rules, break laws – anything to be allowed to feel good.

Compared to that, the life of a reporter on the *Guardian* is as soft as a baby's face. It's not just that – like the other 'quality' papers – there is less pressure to sell copies. Beyond that, unlike the other quality titles, the *Guardian* belongs to a trust. Instead of having shareholders trying to claw profit out of the newsroom, the trust has subsidiary businesses whose profits are used to fund the newsroom. The paper is still run as a business and it has to survive in the marketplace, but the commercial pressure which distorts so much behaviour in so many newsrooms is reduced to the bare minimum.

What's the difference between the *News of the World* and the *Guardian*? From a reporter's angle? The Bully Quotient. Just that really. I'm allowed to fail.

Not everything that Mr Apollo told me was a total shock.

When I was researching *Flat Earth News*, over the previous two years, I had contacted reporters who had worked in Fleet Street newsrooms, looking for the stories behind their stories, to try to understand why it is that so often our work fails to tell the truth. A lot of reporters had helped and a few of them had gone further and started to tell me about their use of private investigators to gather

information by illegal means – these ‘dark arts’. Coming from the soft world of the *Guardian*, I had known almost nothing of this.

My enlightenment began one evening in a shady bar in Soho, where a very experienced news reporter spent several hours talking me through his own paper’s involvement. He started with ‘Benji the Binman’, a deeply eccentric loner who had spent his nights buzzing around London in a little van, scavenging in the rubbish bins of law firms and record producers and anybody else who might be in touch with celebrities, and then selling the news he found among the filth. Eventually, he was caught and convicted of theft, which hadn’t stopped newspapers using private investigators, or sometimes their own staff, to carry on rummaging through garbage in search of scoops. This reporter said his own paper certainly had done so. They had even displayed as a trophy on the newsroom wall a pair of knickers discarded by the daughter of a leading politician and retrieved from her dustbin by somebody who was pleased to call himself a journalist.

Crouched over a candle on a rickety table in the corner of the bar, we talked on, and he told me in some detail how newspapers had started using ‘Trojan Horse’ emails to steal data from their targets’ computers, which was seriously illegal; and how one newspaper – Rupert Murdoch’s *Sunday Times* – had ended up doing so much illegal stuff that, in July 2003, they had appointed a specialist reporter, David Connett, to act as a kind of fallback fall guy. They had taken Connett on as a staff reporter but put him on a freelance contract, made sure he didn’t have an office phone number or email address, and then given him the job of commissioning the dark arts. That way, if he got caught, the paper could stand back, disown him and pretend that he was just some crazy freelancer who was nothing to do with them. Connett had become the

butt of jokes in the office, with colleagues pretending they couldn't hear him 'because you're not here, mate, are you?'

That little scheme had turned bad. The paper had cut back its staff and made Connett redundant. He asked for the pay-off he would have received as a staff member. They told him he was freelance and so he wasn't entitled to it. Now, he was taking them to an employment tribunal. Weeks later, I sat in on the hearing and listened to the evidence, including the denials of the *Sunday Times*. The tribunal accepted that this master of the dark arts was clearly more than a casual employee and awarded him compensation for unfair dismissal.

Others who had worked for the *Sunday Times* went on to confirm all this. One of their senior journalists later met me in the coffee lounge of a sedate hotel and, in amongst the old ladies with their tea and digestive biscuits, he not only described that paper's long history of illegally 'blagging' confidential data from phone companies and banks and government departments but also gave me the name and contact details of the specialist who had been doing it for them for years – a former actor from Somerset called John Ford. Another described how they had used a con man, Barry Beardall, to try to entrap Labour politicians.

Since the research for *Flat Earth News* was an attempt to investigate truth-telling on quality newspapers, my education about the dark arts tended to come from them. I found scraps of evidence that other quality papers were also hiring blagging specialists to trick organisations into disclosing confidential data – a criminal offence unless it was justified by a clear public interest. The Conservative peer, Lord Ashcroft, named an investigator who had tricked the Royal Bank of Scotland into disclosing details of the party's bank account, on behalf of *The Times*. A reporter from the *Sunday Telegraph* gave me a copy of a fax about Dr David Kelly, the weapons specialist who had committed suicide after being caught up in the furore over false claims

about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. It had been sent to them by a private investigator on 18 July 2003, the day that Dr Kelly's body was found, and it recorded every phone number Kelly had dialled in a previous eight-week period.

Similarly, the reporter who first told me about bribing police officers was not from a red-top tabloid. He had spent years with the *Daily Mail*, probably the most hardline law-and-order newspaper in the country, always ready to call for more police and tougher punishment – unless it is itself the offender. The *Mail* reporter told detailed stories of using a former detective as a go-between, to hand over envelopes of cash for serving officers, to persuade them to disclose material from police computers or from current investigations. I found more journalists, from the *Mail* and other titles, who had also used the same man to bribe police; and yet others who had been paying their bribes through a particularly nasty bunch of private investigators who ran a London agency called Southern Investigations.

It turned out that all this crime had built up slowly among numerous Fleet Street papers, quality and tabloid. It had reached the point in the early 2000s where several news desks had banned their reporters from commissioning investigators, not because so much of their work was illegal but simply because they were costing such a lot. Those papers began to insist that only executives could commission the dark arts.

Of course, little of this had ever reached the public domain. It's not as if papers were about to start reporting it. The one big glimpse for the public was the material which had been published in two reports in 2006 by the Information Commissioner, whose job is to police databases containing confidential information. These two reports described a network which for years had been run by a private investigator called Steve Whittamore, who specialised in blagging confidential information out of key