

'Dancing with a Chameleon'

A story based on true events, by Peter Russell

Author:	Peter Russell
Genre:	Drama/Suspense/Crime
Time period:	1999 – 2000 Also includes flashbacks to 1960s/70s and 1980s/early 1990s
Location:	Australia, London, Milan, Switzerland, Belize, Costa Rica
Budget:	Medium-High
Target audience:	Young adults + Appeals to audiences interested in action, high stakes crime and murder, also to those interested in high fashion and stylish settings, people and lifestyles.

Logline

A petty criminal and small time thug turned murderer, with ambitions of becoming a respected businessman, attempts to reinvent himself after his jail time, and graduates to a high stakes investment scam. Where there is money and power there are often governments and deceptions and at the promise of a sizeable return, an Australian investor becomes involved with repatriating US foreign aid money from a powerful African family, via a large Milan bank. Investors in the two schemes become embroiled and more violence, deception and greed ensue before murder and blackmail allow for the agreeable closing of the deal.

Synopsis

Social outcast JOSE BATISTA turns from the ridicule he feels and his need for acceptance, to a life of crime, violence and intimidation. Meeting SONNY JOHNSON while in jail Batista has found someone to give him the admiration and respect he has craved since childhood. Batista and Johnson become involved in a variety of shady dealings, culminating in the creation of an investment scheme where individuals invest a minimum of \$1 million each, but early investors are paid out of the investment capital of later investors and no capital is ever invested by Batista. While running his scheme from Las Vegas, Batista meets casino waitress PERLEY LEE. The two date but Lee becomes intimidated by and tired of Batista's attitude and returns home to London to escape his threatening behaviour. In London Lee begins working as an escort, and for influential businessman ANTHONY GALATOLO, where she is required to take incriminating photos of an African businessman. After accumulating \$150 million Johnson and Batista plan their exit from the scheme. Before fleeing Batista follows Lee to London and sees her working as an escort. He feels betrayed as he believes she belongs to him, and kills her.

Meanwhile one of Batista's shunned investors MARTIN LISTON comes across the Milan Transaction, where a total of \$900 million in skimmed US aid money will be returned from Africa. Liston has employees ROBERTO MENDEZ and JOHN HALE find an investor to pay the bankers' the \$3 million they demand to release the money. Hale knows of Australian investor GEORGE CARTER who may be willing to risk \$3 million for a return of \$8 million – an expected \$5 million profit for Carter.

Carter meets with Mendez and Hale in London to discuss the details of the transaction and Mendez is found to be a private, secretive and complex character who is desperate to secure Carter's investment. After a misunderstanding about Mendez's appearance and attitude is resolved, and Carter has run checks on the major players in the transaction with the help of his private investigator friend FRANK BRICE, Carter meets with ENRICO PANNINI, the Milan lawyer who will coordinate the transaction, to finalise details and secure guarantees and conditions for his money.

Meeting with Pannini goes well and Carter organises to wire his investment to Pannini's account to start the transaction. While still in Milan Carter sees Mendez in an altercation with two men in a restaurant and is worried about police involvement and his investment being jeopardised; he puts a hold on his investment transfer. Carter uses the risk of exposure as an excuse to involve Brice in the transaction. Carter seeks Brice's counsel and both continue background checks into the major players. Mendez approaches Carter to explain the altercation and reveals the connection to Liston and to Batista. In checking Mendez's story, Brice is asked by fellow investigator SAMMY LE LEU to assist in tracking Batista. Carter and Brice decide to finalise the Milan Transaction and work together again on the hunt for Batista and the investors' money. After a border crossing and Carter's investment being converted to Euros, Carter's involvement in the Milan Transaction is at an end.

Carter and Brice head to Geneva on a lead about Batista from Le Leu. The pair meet with Brice's European contact DIETER HARTMANN but lose the trail of Batista as he heads for the airport. Pannini is able to track Batista to Costa Rica; Carter, Brice and Hartmann follow. Here they meet former detective turned private investigator MANUEL TERCERO who helps them track Batista to Quepos, where Tercero sends Carter ahead to meet with fellow former detective turned private investigator CHICO PEREZ. Tercero and Perez's local knowledge are integral in tracking Batista, and Tercero and Brice interrogate Johnson and learn how to access Batista's account to allow them to recover Liston's money. The investigators follow Johnson to Batista's house where they see Johnson callously murdered for his betrayal. Carter, Tercero and Perez also witness Batista cull others he perceived to have betrayed him, before meeting an unfortunate end himself.

With Batista's money split between Carter, Brice, Tercero and Hartmann and the investors compensated, Carter learns the Milan Transaction has failed. The untimely death of an integral banker allowed the African family to pocket Carter's investment return and the payments of others involved. Further investigations allow Carter and Brice to track the family's representative SALI MADU to London where Galatolo is able to provide the photos previously obtained by Lee, to Carter, helping him secure the return of his investment.