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*'I think that the people of this country
have had enough of experts.'*

Michael Gove

BREXISTENTIAL MATTERS

There are few, if any, subjects better suited to the noble art of bluffing than Brexit.

Firstly, it's the dominant political issue of our age. Brexit consumes most of the government's bandwidth, and most of the political news coverage. Heck, it's probably the most dominant political issue of any age within living memory. You may like to opine (for the true bluffer always has one eye on history) that the country has not been so split since 1642, when parliamentarians and royalists styled themselves Roundheads and Cavaliers respectively and fought a nine-year civil war. Like Brexit, that conflict was preceded by a constitutional crisis in Scotland: like Brexit, the issue of sovereignty was of paramount importance; and like Brexit, the role of parliament was also crucial.

Second, everyone has an opinion on Brexit. This is not a debate for the neutral. Brexit is tribal (more on this later). If Brexit was a sporting rivalry, it would be Rangers vs. Celtic, India vs. Pakistan, Real Madrid vs. Barcelona, Ali vs. Frazier. Whatever you say, you

degree of nonchalance. This is especially important in these heady days of instant online information: when everyone has Google literally at their fingertips, failure to polish your bluffing techniques will leave you at a social and professional disadvantage.

This book is therefore not a 'How To' guide, but rather a 'How To Pretend You Know How To' guide. (There is a subtle distinction.) It's not about being an expert, as Mr Gove would tell you. It is certainly not a comprehensive Brexit primer, as one of those would run to 10,000 pages and be the kind of insomnia cure for which Big Pharma would pay billions.¹ As the Bluffer's Guides strapline reads: 'It's not what you know, it's what they think you know.'

This book gives the basics of Brexit: the history behind Britain's relationship with Europe, the referendum itself and the way it divided (and continues to divide) this country, the legalities of the split, and some of the areas which will be most affected. It drops in a few French, Latin and Greek terms, which you should use judiciously in order to give you that certain *je ne sais quoi* (there's another one for free).

So come in hard, drop some esoteric facts, make a few opaque allusions, and with any luck your interlocutors will think you have the kind of inside knowledge usually confined to the most senior civil servants. If in doubt, ask yourself: what would Bruce Willis do? He'd bluff hard. He'd bluff harder. And when all else failed, he'd bluff hard with a vengeance.

Be like Bruce.

1 Memo to self: ring agent with that idea immediately after finishing this.

can guarantee that half the people are going to agree with you and the other half are going to tell you you're mistaken (though they may put it more trenchantly than that). Either way, you will be called into action.

And finally, no-one really has a clue what's going on. Oh, they *think* they do, and they will certainly *tell* you they do. You will, for example, come across people who insist in sonorous tones that we are heading serenely towards sunlit uplands, and who will repeat this assurance no matter what they're asked. These people are called Cabinet ministers.

Conversely, if you read warnings that the whole process is a farce and that Britain will soon be a post-apocalyptic wasteland, you are almost certainly on the *Guardian* website. Both these outcomes cannot be true. It may be that neither of them ends up being true. Brexit will rumble on for years, and no-one can predict the result for sure, as it depends on so many factors which are both individually and collectively unquantifiable. The effects are, at best, only just starting to be felt.

In this absence of certainty lies the bluffer's natural habitat. The guiding principle of Bluffing, and the *raison d'être* of the Bluffer's Guides (now entering their fifth decade of imparting instant wit and wisdom) is that a little knowledge is a desirable thing. Since that is all most of us are ever going to have anyway, we might as well get to know how to spread it thinly but effectively (like Marmite, or Gentleman's Relish, or Sandwich Spread, or indeed any other significant British contribution to world gastronomy, all of which are best applied sparingly).

Careful manipulation of some rudimentary facts will help you bluff your way through with a reasonable