

## Cleantech Con Artists

Rossi

I've got a story, ain't got no moral. Let the bad guy win every once in a while – Billy Preston

The people Rossi writes about are real. Most of them are still on the streets, still enjoying their ill-gotten gains. A confidence man is an aristocrat among thieves. He doesn't hurt people physically. They may not even know they have been scammed, and they may be compromised to the point that they don't do anything about it.

Confidence men wreck lives, destroy dreams, ruin families. As a graduate student with a triple major in business history, environmental history and environmental engineering Jim Rossi was brought into a business incubator for environmental startups.

Rossi had considerable work experience before returning to campus. He had graduated from Rutgers in the 1990s and worked as a reporter and feature writer, including 10 years for the Los Angeles Times. The program managers immediately put his writing experience to work, reporting on and doing publicity for environmentally oriented projects.

He writes "I've always enjoyed being a literary s\_\_\_ talker in the Tom Wolfe/Nassim Taleb tradition. " I would add Hunter S Thompson, whom he quotes fairly frequently on the subject of Las Vegas. He takes colorful images and quotes and beats the Ho Li Fuk out of them. Where did that come from? A Chinese airliner splashed into San Francisco Bay because the pilots were relying on automation instead of watching out the windows. Who were the pilots? A mischievous guy from the NTSB fed the names Sum Ting Wong, Wi Tu Lo, Ho Li Fuk and Bang Ding Ow to the news media – where they were read over the air. Rossi repeats the names constantly to underscore surprise coincidences in his narrative.

He landed a position as a graduate assistant with the Nevada Institute for Renewable Energy Commercialization, NIREC. The Global Solar Summit conference he helped organize drew a number of interested parties, among whom was a suspiciously overenthusiastic volunteer who called himself X. Xavier Cross, as he introduces himself a few pages later, has a mesmerizing patter on all matters renewable and cites a CV too incredible to be believed. The ZBT (Zero BS Tolerance) that Rossi has developed as a poor kid growing up in the Italian neighborhoods of North Jersey and honed as a newspaper reporter kicks in. Las Vegas is a cynical town – nobody gives things away for free. What is this generous volunteer up to?

Rossi's stated motive in finding out is to altruistically protect his fellow UNLV students from being scammed. It's also a bit of self-righteousness on his part, and his reportorial instincts.

The rabbit hole down which he chases Xavier has a great number of unexpected twists and turns, and a larger number of people than a rational person would expect turn out to be not whom they seem. It's a fascinating white collar crime story, reminiscent of Liars Poker, The Big Short, The Chickens\_\_t Club and The Spider Network.

Rossi more than confirms the observation of those four named books. You cannot trust the government institutions charged with preventing crime from doing so. In the best of circumstances they have limited resources. As often as not they are compromised and have conflicts of interest. A good many bureaucrats are simply lazy and disinterested. And, as Rossi discovered, the principles of such organizations are all too frequently beneficiaries of the scam.

“The law is not a guidebook for ethical conduct,. It is a handbook for staying out of jail.” Scammers know the law much better than their marks, often better than the police. Scammers are usually the first to apply new technologies to cheating people. This book is Rossi's application of rough justice. Although the scammers he names will probably never go to jail, exposing their names may make it more difficult for them to cheat people in the future.

The book came together in stages. Much of it was written in 2013, as Rossi was hot on Xavier's trail. Although he had compiled a lot of evidence, there was nothing for law enforcement to work on and there remained a number of loose ends when he graduated in 2014. From there he went on to the University of California graduate school of journalism. Characteristically, he managed to take as many courses as possible from Haas Business School instead of journalism, graduating in 2018.

Although the book appears in 2019, it has been a work in progress throughout Rossi's graduate school career. As he states very clearly in his afterword, pursuing the kinds of questions that interest him is not the way to build career success as a journalist. He irks too many people. The powers that be will not have much interest in promoting this book. That is a shame, because the common sense he offers – that we are each on our own, and the watchdogs that posture and growl and say they will protect us are really just paper tigers – is more needed than ever.

This is a five-star rating most joyfully awarded. Over the course of the book Rossi touches on a great many of the issues and themes that characterize modern America. See the headings below for his takes.

## Cleantech companies

Every new technology represents an opportunity for fraud. Clean technology has certainly been no exception. He talks about Solyndra, leaving open the question of whether it was a fraud or a matter of simple over optimism. Rossi would make a strong case that wherever government money is available to be picked up, less than scrupulous people will line up to take it.

His take on Elon Musk, from the 2013 portion of the book, is not very flattering. Musk has been in line for every cleantech handout going, from solar cells to Tesla to his Los Angeles transit tube run by the Boring Company. The queue of people waiting to write Musk's business obituary is incredibly long. My guess is that Rossi will be content to read somebody else's work on this topic.

## Neurolinguistic Programming

"If a company can't describe in one sentence what it does, it's illegal." A lot of the scammers that Rossi writes about speak glowingly about how they can use NLP techniques to help people overcome whatever difficulties they may have in their personal life. Rossi describes the origins of NLP at the University of California Santa Cruz campus with a guy named Richard Bandler. Bandler was a poseur – pretending to be a PhD without having earned it, and using the money he made from this miracle cure to destroy himself rather quickly with cocaine and alcohol.

The number of people willing to queue up for miracle cures, personality improvements, weight loss and so on is endless. There will always be a rich market for scammers.

My take from Ukraine is that foreigners are unusually gullible in accepting the pontifications of Americans on such topics. NLP workshops have done pretty well here. Ukrainians prize American education, although Rossi and I would tell them it is overrated and overpriced. My son is getting the Ukrainian education. Spare me the social justice nonsense about the evil white man and teach him how to read and write, please.

## Universities

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas treated Rossi shabbily. When he made waves by attempting to find out who Xavier Cross really was, and having found out, to alert the heads of programs that were being scammed, the University took the easy way out and turned on their graduate student. Shut off his email, refused to release his grades, and subjected him to a kangaroo court in which he was allowed no opportunity for proper defense.

Rossi turned to the Foundation for Individual rights in Education, FIRE, for advice and defending himself. This is news you can use. The kangaroo courts in most universities have the strong leftist bias of the universities themselves. They are also stacked against white men.

Rossi writes: "By having women or LGBT people act as faces for their administrative chicanery, they can frame the optics against me. When I defend myself, I'll look like an angry "privileged" white man bullying two women working alongside the openly gay Burns.

"I'd like toxic hyper-masculinity for \$ 800, please, Alex... It's the Daily Double!

"The panel judging me includes grad students and adjunct faculty with miniscule salaries and without tenure. This, according to the FIRE, is also textbook – textbook Stanley Milgram, that is. Get people whose futures lay at the mercy of university administration to judge me. Impartial? Yeah, right."

Rossi toughed it out. Following the FIRE advice he didn't admit anything or sign anything. And he came out of it all right – eventually.

## Journalism schools

Rossi knows about journalism, having worked as one for a decade and a half prior to returning to university. Even in the days of yellow journalism, he reports, the business was in selling newspapers, not disseminating the truth. It has gotten worse since print has given way to online news. It is all about click bait and eyeballs.

That's what journalism schools teach. They receive their endowments from deep-pocketed lefties and they teach adherence to the party line, not investigative journalism or creative thinking. Upon graduating from Berkeley's journalism school it was clear to Rossi that as an independent-minded white man he has no future to look forward to in mainstream journalism.

He has a wonderful put down of "Trust Fund Lefty Matt Taibbi, Rolling Stone's self-described "professional misanthrope" and purveyor of ham-handed hatchet jobs." As well turned as this phrase is, I have to disagree. I think that Rossi will find Taibbi to be a fellow in arms after reading his latest, [[ASIN:B07NJFS98Z Hate Inc.: Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another]]. He should be pleased by Taibbi's mea culpa regarding the hatchet jobs. And I think that he will find Taibbi's background more similar to his and mine than a Trust Fund baby.

## Las Vegas

The City of Lost Wages is a phrase that recurs, as does "some guys just can't handle Vegas." Rossi offers a thumbnail history of the city and a more detailed history of the gambling operations there. He is especially articulate on the topic of moral ambivalence. When Benny

Binion died Amarillo Slim eulogized him. "He was either the gentlest bad guy or the baddest good guy you'd ever seen."

Rossi is even somewhat gentle with the Mob that ran Las Vegas from the 1950s to the 1980s. They had their own code of justice, and they didn't (much) hurt anybody. When Estes Kefauver came to town to bust them, they were able to resist. When John F. Kennedy betrayed them, after they handed him the 1960 election, he got whacked.

## Humboldt County

Humboldt County, California, on the Oregon border grows some of the best marijuana in the world. It is also where a lot of the counterculture people bugged out after civilization got to be too much to handle. Rossi describes Pacific Lumber, the company that rather paternalistically managed the old-growth redwoods, to the point that they represented a juicy takeover target for unscrupulous operators who would buy them out and cut the prime redwood they had spent years protecting.

Rossi talks quite openly about the drug culture, admitting to enjoying a joint or two himself. A few of us can take it or leave it, but like Las Vegas, and perhaps the hippie lifestyle itself, it has a narcotic allure that as often envelops people in a haze of unfulfilled dreams as enhances their lives. I write this as a resident of Haight-Ashbury of the 1960s. Rossi and I survived, but both of us have had many friends and acquaintances who were hurt by it. Let's not romanticize it, to the point of not mentioning it if it is not germane to the narrative. In this case I don't think it is.

## Silicon Valley

Rossi has a good history of Silicon Valley, starting with Robert Noyce and William Shockley and proceeding through the founders of Intel and the other major high-tech companies.

He offers a cautionary story. There are a lot of grifters and conmen hanging around Silicon Valley waiting to steal intellectual property. In today's world they can sell it to the Chinese.

As he writes, the culture has changed dramatically from the early days. Reading the accounts of Apple, Intel, Oracle, Microsoft and other companies of the 1960s and 1970s, they were often started on handshakes. There was a lot more trust and openness in that era.

Rossi reports accurately, in my opinion, on the leftist conformity and political correctness being enforced on employees and even customers by today's high-tech firms in Silicon Valley. The change in culture, in my mind, tracks the change in people. Noyce was from Iowa and had Iowa values. The people running Silicon Valley today are as often as not money people from

back East and Indian immigrants. Without going into it deeply, I would observe that those cultures transmit different values than Iowa.

Robert Trivers

Rossi writes matter-of-factly that he took four courses from Trivers as an undergraduate at Rutgers and picked up some valuable pointers from him. He devotes a few pages of his book to talking about this fellow, one of the most influential intellects of the twentieth century.

Trivers was the guy that figured out that every member of a family – father, mother, child and sibling – has different interests. They work together as a family most of the time, but the father's biological interests might be served best by having affairs, the mother's by keeping dad close to home, and a child's by doing what it takes not to have competition from siblings. The most recent book I have reviewed that cites him is [\[\[ASIN:B074VFW3GP On Genetic Interests \]\]](#). He has made extensive contributions to the field of evolutionary psychology.

Trivers also had ZBT. The dominant Marxists during his time at Harvard, Lewontin, Rose and Gould, denied that biology and evolution had anything to do with the differences between the races. Trivers, who married two Jamaican women and befriended Black Panther Huey Newton, knew better than to accept that BS.

Trivers' 2017 book, [\[\[ASIN:B06XKQPLR5 The Folly of Fools – the Logic of Deceit \]\]](#) deals directly with the topic at hand – deceit. He writes at some length about what kind of people are easiest to deceive, and the tricks used to deceive them. This applies not only to out and out fraudsters, but to the casinos analyzing the psychology of the punters. How to give them complimentary drinks, etc. to keep them wedded to your casino.

Names to watch out for

Although the major protagonist in Rossi's yarn, Xavier Cross, operates under an alias, most of the people he names continue to live where they have always lived with the names they have always had. Unscrupulous though they may be, by dint of luck, skill and good lawyers they have avoided prison. Or, having done their time, they have gone back to doing the same sort of scams that went on before. Rossi's objective is to name and shame. It is worth naming the names. Though most of the names are certainly not going to be unique, many will want to read this book to protect themselves from such people. Here is a list of names to scrutinize carefully in your business dealings.

Xavier Cross

Alex Cruz

Quyen T. Kiet

Rex Northen

Seymour Segnit  
Hugh D. "Chip" Evans  
Cleantech Open