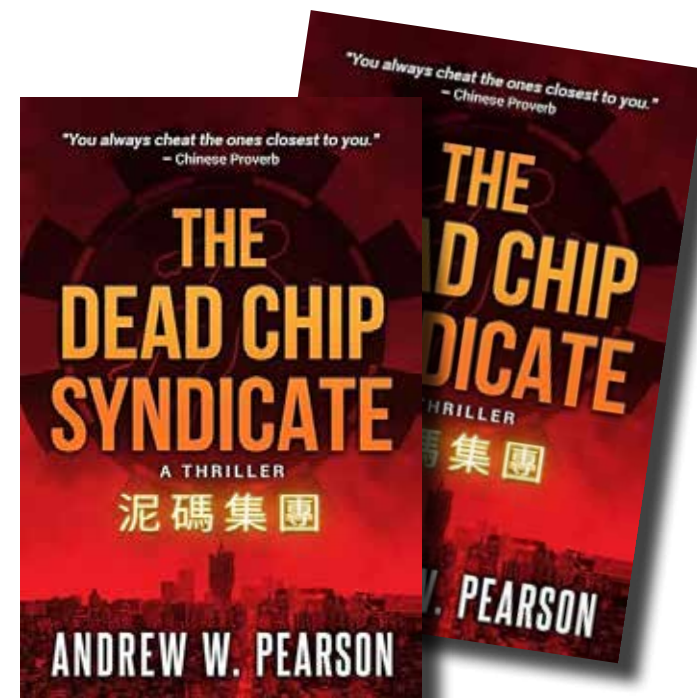


澳門的孤注一擲 Taking a Gamble on Macau

文 BY ANDRÉ VINAGRE / 譯 TRANSLATION ERRIS HO / 圖 PHOTO MARK PHILLIPS



作家 Andrew Pearson 出席了今年的澳門文學節，並與讀者討論了他的第一部小說《泥碼集團》。這是一個以澳門為背景的虛構故事，但大致取材於他的親身經歷。

Author Andrew Pearson attended this year's Macau Literary Festival to discuss his first novel *The Dead Chip Syndicate*, a fictional story set in Macau and inspired by some of his own experiences.

能跟我詳細介紹一下您的新書《泥碼集團》嗎？

在許多方面，這本書是自傳性質的，當然除了謀殺、洗錢和所有犯罪活動之外。但是主角Anthony Wilson和我一樣，曾是一名編劇，住在洛杉磯，努力為自己的作品爭取製作機會。後來獲得他的雙胞胎兄弟的誘人工作機會後搬到澳門。雖然故事是虛構的，但我和角色的故事有相似性。

我將安東尼塑造成一個虛構版本的自己，這種方式適合第一次寫小說的作家。因為這簡化了寫作過程，不需要通過另一個不同的人物角色進行創作。這是一個關於一位2018年抵達澳門的美國僑民的故事。角色、時間和地點都被簡化了。我只需要通過自己的眼睛觀察這個虛構的世界，並做出相應的反應，或者寫出相應的東西。

故事圍繞著澳門的賭場行業展開，對吧？

是的，故事的核心是澳門的賭場行業、美國的電影行業以及全球範圍內的加密貨幣陰暗世界。小說通過這三個世界的交替，呈現出層次豐富的情節。我在這三個行業都有一些個人經驗，在很多方面它們非常相似。它們往往吸引著那些懷著致富夢的天真的人士，至少賭客是如此。這個環境中充斥著一大批騙子、詐騙者和詭計多端的人，他們利用他人的弱點謀取利益；這是一個關於貪婪、財富和兄弟背叛的驚悚小說。

Can you tell us about your new book *The Dead Chip Syndicate*?

In many ways, the book is autobiographical – except the attempted murder aspect, the money laundering, and all the criminality, or course – but the main character, Anthony Wilson, is, like me, a former screenwriter who lived in LA, struggled to get his work produced and then moved to Macau after receiving an enticing job offer from his twin brother. Whereas the events are fictional, Anthony's voice is very much mine.

I made Anthony a fictionalized version of myself, which is something recommended for first time novelists. It simplifies the writing process because you don't have to worry about trying to see things through the eyes of another character who might be different to you. This wasn't the story of a female warrior taking on a legion of aliens in 2070, it was the story of an American expat arriving in Macau in 2018. Character, time, and place were simplified. I just had to view the fictional world through my own eyes and react – or write – accordingly.

The story revolves around the casino industry in Macau, correct?

Yes, the story centers around the casino industry in Macau, the film industry in the US, and the shady world of crypto everywhere. The novel gets quite layered as it flips through these three worlds. I have some personal experience with all three of these industries, which are quite similar in many ways. They tend to attract people with naive dreams of striking it rich – at least on the patron side of the gambling industry. It's a milieu filled with a whole host of hustlers, conmen, and tricksters, who feed off the weakness of others; rich and fertile terrain to set a thriller about greed, extreme wealth, and brotherly betrayal.

Since you worked in the gaming industry for a long time, did you use some real stories from inside the industry?

Yes, I used quite a few stories from my experience. Several years ago, some of the casinos had figured out a way to utilize facial recognition and image recognition technology to track a patron's gambling habits. They used AI to spot the gamblers playing the riskier, read "higher margin," bets. These gamblers are more valuable to the casino since the house can make considerably more money on these higher margin bets, so the casinos were prioritizing their marketing to these types of players. The Macau gaming board soon caught wind of this and immediately put the kibosh on the practice. In *The Dead Chip Syndicate*, one of the main characters, Cash uses facial recognition technology to track his players in a similar way, but he's using it to catch the money launderers in his casino, not the riskier players. It's information he hopes will protect him should he get into some legal trouble, which, of course, he does.

由於您在博彩業工作了很長時間，您是否使用了一些業內真實故事？

是的，我用了不少我的經驗故事。幾年前，一些賭場想出了一種方法，利用面部識別和圖像識別技術來跟蹤顧客的賭博習慣。他們利用人工智慧來識別那些玩風險較高，也就是「高利潤」賭注的賭客。這些賭客對賭場來說更有價值，因為賭場可以從這些高利潤的賭注上賺到更多的錢，所以賭場優先向這類賭客進行營銷。

但很快澳門博彩局很快就發現了這一點，並立即制止了這種做法。在《泥碼集團》中，Cash使用面部識別技術以類似的方式追蹤他的賭客，但他是用這種技術來捉來賭場裡洗錢的人，而不是風險較高的賭客。他希望這些信息能在他陷入法律糾紛時保護他，當然，他也確實陷入了麻煩。

小說中的角色，是否以某種程度上，以澳門的真實人物為基礎？

這是一個棘手的問題，可能會給我帶來很多法律麻煩，但答案是沒有。角色並不是以任何真實人物為基礎。當然，除了我自己。不過，第二位主要角色Cash Cheang則是基於多年前一位意大利演員。他聘請我為他撰寫劇本。他是一個非常有趣的人物，我將他獨特的個性保存下來，以備將來使用。我將他塑造成一位亞洲男子，四十幾歲，梳著一頭五十年代的蓬鬆髮型，有著香港著名演員梁朝偉的迷人魅力。

這是你的第一本小說。是什麼促使你決定寫它？這是你一直想做的事情嗎？

我有兩個選擇：寫小說或者心理治療。但我沒有足夠的錢去接受治療，所以我選擇了第一個選項。孫子有一句偉大的名言：「混亂之中也蘊藏著機會。」在寫這本書的時候，我真的將這句話牢記在心。在澳門生活了幾年之後，我已經構思了一個相當完整的情節，但接著疫情爆發了，給了我更多寫小說的時間。

澳門真的是一個不羈的溫床。某種程度上，這是一個滑稽的地方。世界上一些最富有的人來到澳門，做著各種瘋狂的事情，以難以想象的方式揮霍金錢。我認為澳門是一部獨特的驚悚片的完美取景地，它將東西方文化融為一體。澳門在我的書中是核心人物，我的澳門既關於賭博，也關於路氹城那些大型綜合度假村中流淌的數十億美元的貪婪。

是的，這是我的第一部小說，但從我記事起，我就一直在寫作。嘗試從零開始寫一部小說是一項艱巨的任務，也可以說是我的一場豪賭。我在澳門下了很大的賭注，值得慶幸的是，《泥碼集團》似乎給我帶來了不錯的回報。

當Anthony Wilson得到機會，經營他的雙胞胎兄弟的人工智能公司時，他放棄了不順利的編劇生涯，來到澳門重新開始。Cash Cheang當時給了他一袋人民幣，讓他在賭場里安裝面部識別系統。Cash聽說Anthony過去曾是一名編劇，於是向他提供了另一份工作：為這位賭場大亨撰寫一本傳記，講述他從澳門的窮街陋巷一步步成長為澳門最成功的商人之一的經歷。然而，隨著Anthony對Cash生活的進一步瞭解，他意識到這本傳記中充滿了中國精英階層的危險秘密，這些權貴們希望將其永遠埋葬。

Offered the chance to run his twin brother's A.I. company, Anthony Wilson ditches his failing screenwriting career to start anew in Macau. The job turns highly lucrative when Anthony's new client, Cash Cheang, hands him a bag full of cold hard Yuan to implement a facial recognition system in his casino. Hearing about Anthony's past life as a screenwriter, Cash offers him another job - ghostwriting a biography about the casino mogul's life rising from the mean streets of Macau to becoming one of the city's most successful businessmen. However, as Anthony learns more about Cash's life, he realizes the biography is filled with dangerous secrets about the Chinese elite, secrets these powerful people would rather see buried for good.

Are the characters – even if slightly – based on real people in Macau?

A nice trick question that could get me in a lot of legal trouble. So no, not based on any real people. Except me, of course. However, the second main character, Cash Cheang, is based on an Italian actor who hired me to write a script many years ago. He was such a colorful character; I stored his quirky personality for future use. I turned him into an Asian man in his early forties, with a full head of hair slicked back in a 1950s pompadour style, with the smoldering looks of the famous Hong Kong actor, Tony Leung.

This is your first novel. What made you decide to write it?

And was it something you always wanted to do?

It was either write the novel or go into therapy. I didn't have enough money for therapy, so I took option number one. Sun Tzu has a great quote, "In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity." I really took that to heart while writing this book. After living in Macau for a few years, I had a pretty solid plot, but then COVID hit, which gave me the time to write the novel.

Macau is truly a hotbed of irreverence. In many ways, it's a place that makes no sense at all. You have some of the richest people in the world coming to Macau, doing all kinds of crazy things, spending money in unimaginable ways. Macau, I believe, is the perfect place to set a unique thriller that buttresses the East and the West. Macau is a central character in my book; my Macau is about gambling as well as the greed chasing the billions of dollars flowing through those massive integrated resorts in Cotai.

Yes, this is my first novel, but I've been writing for as long as I can remember. Trying to write a novel from scratch was a big undertaking, a big gamble on my part, if you will. I made a big bet on Macau, and, thankfully, it seems to have paid off with *The Dead Chip Syndicate*.

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