



Lunch with Jason King

"Peter Wyngarde - one time star of 1970's TV series 'Jason King' - is looking forward to lunch at his favourite restaurant on the French Riviera. But when he meets his host, a young TV producer from London, all is not as it first seems..."

From "Lunch with Jason King" - Nick Wray's short stories and bedtime tales from the past, present and future of the Digital Age. Includes, 'Three Clicks' (full-version also [available on the website here](#)) as well as 'Machines for Singing', 'The Beach at Narbonne' and cult-classic 'Lunch with Jason King.'

As a tribute to mark the death of Peter Wyngarde, announced today (Friday 18th January 2018) I'm making this short story available, free of charge, for a limited time. It was inspired, in part, by the appalling

Daily Mail 'news' story: "Is that really Jason King..." at:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1259498/Is-really-Jason-King-suavest-man-TV.html>

If you enjoy it, please feel free to forward it to anyone else you know who admired the man and his various 'parts'! ☺

[More stories at www.lunchwithjasonking.com](http://www.lunchwithjasonking.com)

Lunch with Jason King



Short stories & bedtime tales from the past, present & future of the Digital Age

by Nick Wray

"Dark & creepy, sexy and funny - a cult classic in the making..."

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Lunch with Jason King

The bloody sod was late. TV, media-types always were, weren't they? A breeze stirred as he looked around, once again, searching the restaurant terrace. "One o'clock" he'd said. *Lying bastard*. The actor gulped back another mouthful of wine. Half full? Half empty? Depended how you looked at it, didn't it? The glass flashed, blinding him for a moment in the bright afternoon sun.

Louis, the Maître D, smiled at him from across the terrace, tipped his head to one side and waggled another bottle of wine in the air expectantly. The actor shook his head. No. Not yet, anyway. He had to perform. Better to keep a clear head, he thought, nursing the remains of his wine. And he wanted to make sure that the producer – or whoever it was that supposed to be turning up – was going to pay. Expenses, were not what they used to be, were they? Indeed, nothing was quite what it once was, he thought, stroking his stomach.

Nearby in the hot, bustling port the bell of the Vieux Clocher rang for the second time since he'd sat at the table. Despite the cue, he still found himself checking the scratched old Rolex once more. 'Too much?', he heard himself mutter out loud. Then he wondered: would anyone even turn up?

He thumbed through the thin sheaf of papers in front of him, again, now wet and ringed from the base of his wine glass:

"Remember Jason King?" — Janus Productions

– Background notes –

Jason King, (TV series 1971-1972) This spin-off from the earlier *Department S* continued the adventures of hedonistic, womanizing dandy Jason King. After leaving 'Department S', Jason settled down to a full-time career of writing (trashy) Mark Caine novels. He philandered his way around the world, doing research for his stories and tripping over a variety of odd — often verging on surreal —

cases, usually involving beautiful women. He was occasionally blackmailed into working for British Intelligence under the threat of being arrested for unpaid back taxes."

IMDB- The Internet Movie Database

As if he needed to be told about *Jason King*! For a moment he thought he was seeing double. It happened sometimes. Then he realised his hands were shaking. It was just stage fright, he told himself. Pure and simple stage fright.

A cigarette. Yes; a cigarette would help calm his nerves. He could almost taste a Gauloises on the hot Mediterranean air. A proper, old fashioned *Disques Bleu*. But these days, even in France, for pity's sake, you couldn't light up, could you? True, he had always got away with murder. And perhaps not just on the stage. But then Louis, the Maître D, would never permit it.

Would the interviewer even recognise him? Had he already been and gone?; arrived at the restaurant, looked around, not recognised him? It was over forty years ago, after all, wasn't it, since *Jason King*, had been famous?

Keenly, he searched the terrace again, before returning his gaze to the bottle on the table. Even without the glasses he needed, but never wore, he could see drops of condensed water superimposed like beads of sweat on his image reflected in the ice bucket. His homunculus also appeared to shiver.

What would the first question be? The inevitable "I've always wanted to meet 'Jason King'?" He smoothed his hand over his head. Bandaging his scalp, grimacing as he camouflaged his balding pate from the glare of Marseille's midday sun. The afternoon heat burning through his thinning, dyed, mane, searing out the bald truth...

'Excuse me?'

'Yes?'

'I'm sorry I'm so late. Traffic, from the airport... It, it is you, isn't it?' asked the young man.

'I think that's irrefutable.' Replied the actor, still seated at the table.

'Fantastic! I still can't believe I'm actually having lunch with Jason King!'

'Well, you're not.'

'I'm not what?' Said the young man.

'You're not having lunch with Jason King.' The actor looked at the young man benignly.

'I'm sorry... I thought... I'm sure... surely, it must be you...?' For a moment, the young man's expression, as a masked play, turned from a smile to tragedy.

'You're having lunch with Peter Wyngarde. The actor who played Jason King. That's the whole point of all this? Isn't it? The interview?' The actor pointed at the wine-wetted paper he'd been reading earlier on the table. 'To give me a chance to tell my story?'

'What a relief! Yes of course. You frightened me for a moment.'

'A drink?' suggested the actor. The young man raised his glass towards the actor who winced as he saw it grasped by the bowl, instead of held at the stem. The actor over-filled both their glasses.

'To Jason King!' said the young man offering his wine glass; 'Cheers!' A Champagne cork popped flatly elsewhere on the terrace. Their glasses kissed, ringing coldly for a moment, before separating quickly.

'It's Santé!' Replied the actor.

'Sorry, Santé! But you know what I mean?' The eager-to-please smile appeared again on the young man's face. 'Do you mind if I record our conversation? Just for my notes.' Without waiting for

a reply, the young man positioned his shiny black phone on the pure linen cloth, as though placing a chess piece.

'Be my guest.' The young man seemed oblivious to the sarcasm in the actor's voice.

'Let's talk first. We can do some pics and video later?'

'Perhaps.' Replied the actor.

'You've had a chance to look at the outline? For the show?'

'Several times... whilst I was waiting.' Both men swallowed deeply from their wine glasses at the same time. It was the young man who broke the pregnant pause.

'What do you think? Good, isn't it?'

'It's one of my favourites. A 2007. Domaine LaRoche Grand Cru Chablis.' The actor took the last sip from his glass. 'Delicately chiselled texture, with a flinty finish... A little bit like, me, perhaps?' The actor held his inquisitive expression then burst out loud into laughter. The young man smiled, uncertainly and spoke: 'I meant the outline. For the *show*. Good, isn't it?'

'Ummm. Well, it's all a little vague, isn't it?' Said the actor.

'Yes, of course. But we can fix everything in the edit suite.'

'If only life were so simple?'

'We've already put together a rough cut. To set the tone.'

'What? How? We haven't even recorded anything, yet?'

'No. but most of the programme's been put together from clips on YouTube, Vimeo? That kind of thing?'

'Clips?' said the actor. The young man ignored him, as continued. 'All we really need are a few reaction shots from you.'

'Reaction shots?'

'Yeah, to this kind of stuff...' The young man grabbed his phone off the table and thrust it towards the actor. See the screen all right, can you?'

'Despite apparent appearances, I'm not completely blind, yet.'

'This one's from 1971, the original trailer for the show. Here we go:' With sleight of hand the young man conjured up once familiar footage on the phone's screen now only vaguely remembered by the actor; once film, then television, and now digital:

VOICE-OVER: "Peter Wyngarde is Jason King. Suave, sassy, strong yet sensitive, and with a flamboyance to match his flares..."

WOMAN'S VOICE: "Look at that man!"

'Can you turn it down a bit!' The actor hissed. The other diners... We don't want everyone in the restaurant to "look at that man". Assuming anyone would even recognise me these days?'

'But you look just the same to me. You'll always be Jason King, to your fans, Mr King.'

'It's Wyngarde. Peter Wyngarde!'

'Now, just wait a sec...; The young man smiled fondly anticipating the next video clip about to appear on the phone's screen: You'll love this, here we go...and cut to...'

ACTRESS: "Jason King?! But that's incredible!"

VOICE-OVER: "His quest for adventure and taste for excitement lead him to beautiful women..."

JASON KING: [RAFFISHLY]: "Well, I hope so...!"

VOICE-OVER: "Dangerous criminals and exotic locations"

The young man killed the video on his phone. 'Well what do you think, Mr King? I mean Mr Wyngarde?'

'I thought the show, the *interview* was going to be about me?' About my career. My whole career. The career of actor Peter Wyngarde? Not just Jason King?' He held back his worn crocodile shoes from snapping a kick at the young man.'

'Of course, it is. Jason. Mr King. Sorry, I mean Peter. But we must set the scene. To lead with what you're best known for, don't we?'

'What I'm best known for?'

'Like I said that's just a rough cut. To give you a feel for how we might position it.' The young man looked between phone and the actor as though at a loved one. 'So, what do you think, Mr King?'

'It's Wyngarde! W-Y-N-G-A-R-D-E. P-for-Peter. Peter Wyngarde. I am the actor that played the eponymous Jason King. Gettit?'

'Yes, sorry.'

'What else have you got?'

'There's loads more.'

VOICE-OVER: "Jason King. He's an author who creates imaginary stories by solving real life crimes. And he discovers surprise endings he never expected... He's an expert investigator of a most unusual sort. You probably knew that already. He's Jason King!"

'Jason King, Jason King, Jason King! It was all a very long time ago. You must realise. I'm a different person, now. I can finally be, well, me. Isn't that what your programme is going to be about?'

'Yes. But Jason King's got to be part of the story, hasn't it? It's what you're best known for.'

'Is it? Is it really? Even after all these years?'

'Your voice, that look. No one could mistake you! You haven't changed a bit. Anyway, like I said that's just a rough cut. So, what do you think, Mr King?'

'I'm not Jason King!' A couple at the next table turned as they heard the actor's raised voice.

'No but that's what we're promoting, aren't we?'

'Are we?'

'The interview. It's just a tie-in, really, isn't it? To help WebFlicks promote "Fit for a King: the complete Jason King library". All 25 episodes of *Jason King*, everything digitally remastered; plus out-take material, special interviews... those incredible alternative endings.'

'You must be beside yourself, my boy.'

'You must be a little excited?'

'Well I certainly didn't realise that I – that *Jason King* - was being resurrected. I'd better call my agent, to remind her to pass on the royalties. Assuming she's still alive?'

'Sounds like you don't get much work these days, then?'

'I didn't say that, did I?'

'Do you go to many Jason King conventions?'

'Jason King, Jason King, Jason King! You must understand. That was the 70s – that's over forty years ago, for Christ's sake. Jason King really isn't anything to do with me, now.'

'Your fans don't care about all that. You'll always be the same Jason King to them.'

'Which channel did you say our 'tie-in' would appear on?'

'WebFlicks.'

'"WebFlicks", you say? So not the BBC, or ITV...?'

'No, WebFlicks.'

'WebFlicks?' Repeated the actor.

'You know, streaming, online, the "Interweb"?' The young man made quote marks in the air as he spoke.

'Before we go any further. Who, pray tell, will be interviewing me?' Graham Norton? Or one of the new ones? Alan, what's his name, Alan Carr?, God forbid!' The actor found himself looking round the terrace as though for a familiar face from television's past.

'Well...' Said the young man.

'Sorry?' Said the actor, as he turned back to face the young man.

'I am.' Said the young man.

'You are, *what*?' Said the actor.

'I'm going to interview you.'

'*You*?' said the actor.

'Yes?'

'But you're just the producer aren't' you?'

'Oh!' Said the young man again.

'...another "Oh?"' Quizzed the actor?

'I thought you knew?'

'...knew?'

'Didn't anyone from the production company email you?'

'Quite possibly. I never look at email. But you're a, a producer or something, aren't you?'

The actor swallowed the remains of his wine with a gulp.'

'Well, I'm not actually a producer.'

'I thought you seemed rather young.'

'I'm a Runner.'

'A Runner!' The actor's raised voice caused the young couple to look round again. As they looked back at each other they giggled.

'...to be honest...'

'Well to be honest... I'm not actually a Runner. Not yet, anyway.'

'Go on?'

'Well. I'm an intern. But they've said there could be a three-month contract...'

'As a *Runner*?'

'Yep, if...'

'If...?'

'If I came out here, and filmed a few reaction shots, to the clips I showed you. We're doing the interview, today. Now. That's why I'm here.'

'Now! How?'

'On my phone.'

'On your iPhone?'

'It's an Android, actually.'

'You surprise me!' said the actor.

'Yeah! 4k. You know. Ultra-High Definition? Don't worry. It's broadcast quality.'

'Is it? Is it really?' Said the actor.

'Yeah, everybody does it this way, now. The video still looks great, Mr King.'

'How many times – I'm not Jason King!'

'Sorry, yes of course!' The young man blushed. 'I've had my head buried too long in the Kong [sic] server.'

'The *Kong* server?'

'It's just what we call it. The Jason King server. I've been looking through your film archives. Everything's digital now, of course.'

'I'm not.' Replied the actor.

'You are!'

'I am what?'

'Digital.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'Well that clip was digital, wasn't it?'

'But, that wasn't me, was it!'

'Well no, but... as soon as we put some teasers on the web you'll be a meme in no time.'

'I've always wanted to be a "Meme in lights."' Louis appeared as the nearby clock struck three. 'Louis! Thank goodness. Save me from this madness. Before we go any further, young man, let me introduce you to Louis, the real star of this place. Louis is owner and Maître D of *Louis*'. Our master of ceremonies. He runs the place. Louis, this is...'

A loud ringtone played from the young man's phone. The phone lit up, and started to vibrate and move across the tablecloth as though dancing to the melody coming from the device.

'Young man, what on earth is that noise coming from your phone?'

'Recognise it? The sound track?' Asked the young man.

'Oh God, no! It isn't, is it?' Said the actor.

'Qu'est-ce que c'est, Monsieur Wyngarde?' Said Louis.

'It is.' said the young man smiling proudly, his head nodding to the music.

'Monsieur?' Said Louis looking at the young man, then towards the actor. 'Monsieur Wyngarde?'

'It's that theme tune, Louis.'

'Theme tune?' said Louis, looking puzzled.

'The title music. To Jason King, Louis.' Said the actor, his voice almost drowned out by the sounds coming from the phone.

'I digitised it.' The young man said smiling triumphantly.

'Ah, oui. Monsieur Wyngarde?' Your alter ego, non? The waiter turned to the young man.

'You have captured him on your phone, non?'

'Yes. I mean "Mais oui!" ' Said the young man with a self-effacing smile. Like a screen shot, he seemed frozen in time, until Louis broke the icy silence on the baking terrace.

'Vous avez choisi, messieurs?'

'I need another drink, Louis. When you're finished playing with your phone, young man, pray tell, what would be music to your ears on the wine list?'

'Dunno? When in Rome..?'

'But we're not in Roma, are we?'

'Maybe some, some rosé, then?'

'Rosé? Rosé, really? Are you sure?'

'Sorry. I don't really know much about booze, Mr King. I mean Mr Wyngarde. I have got Hugh Johnson's Atlas of Wine on my phone, though.'

'How did you squeeze it all in?'

'It's not a real book. It's a Kindle – you know an e-book? An electronic book?'

'Yes, I know. I was joking. So, with all that at your fingertips, surely you're as much of an expert on that as you are on me?'

'I haven't actually read it yet, the wine book, to be honest. I've been too busy. God, is that the time? I've gotta get back to the airport by 7pm.'

'You fly from London to France, for lunch, with *me*; then you have to rush back before you've almost arrived? Can't you enjoy enjoy the moment? The here and now?'

'That's deep. Are you in to all that? Nice one. You know, I've got Buddhify on my phone, too, Mr King?'

'What will it be, then?' Said the actor biting his tongue.

'Yeah. A glass of rosé. You can't go wrong with rosé, can you?'

'A glass? Of rosé, you say? *Really*? Well, I suppose it does all rather depend on what we're eating, doesn't it? Any thoughts? No? How about over there? No, the other table. See? The Fruits de mer. Now – like me – there's a truly authentic dish for you, no? Even from here, you can almost taste the lobster, the garlic butter, the mayonnaise. Ah, Marseille! Just look around you. Isn't it just too beautiful, too real, my boy? The harbour, the sun on the water. And what's that on the air?: rosemary, thyme, just smell the...'

'Coffee?'

'I was going to say, *scent*... in the air. This is *life*. Reality? Can you really capture all this? This *truth* with your Androids and YouTubes and memes?' The young man appeared deaf to the actor speaking. 'What on earth are you looking at on your phone now?'

'Hmm... Uber reckons I need to leave here by four.'

'Smartphones über alles?' said the actor, tempted to kick the young man.

'What?' said the young man looking up. I don't speak German.'

'What language do you speak, young man? Perhaps you could just leave your phone alone for a few moments, whilst we enjoy a leisurely lunch before, before *filming* – such as it is –

commences?' A bird's song seemed to answer the actor's question for the young man. 'Yes? Good. What shall we eat then? A Provençal speciality? Perhaps a classic Bouillabaisse?'

'Bouillabaisse? Eh, remind me?'

'Bream, turbot, monk fish, mullet, shell fish too; sea urchins, langoustine, *velvet crab*...'

'Sounds quite fishy? Cod's alright. But I don't like really fishy fish.'

'Too fishy? Very well. Can I tempt you with some of Louis' delicious moules, then?'

'Moules?' Asked the young man.

'They come with pommes frites. No? That's chips.'

'Moules, moules...?' Repeated the young man blankly.

'Mussels! Louis' always had great muscles [sic], just look at him.' The actor noticed a sudden change in the young man who seemed to stiffen.

'Louis – he's one of your, your friends?'

'I've known Louis for years. If that's what you mean?' Said the actor. The young man looked deeply into the actor's eyes then suddenly broke his gaze away.

'Those burgers over there look juicy?' Said the young man.

'Burgers? You mean the *steak haché*. That's children's food. Why not try a steak tartare, instead?'

'I do like steak.'

'*Steak tartare* – finely chopped raw minced beef, mixed with onions, capers and a raw egg yolk, with a soupcon of Worcester sauce? What a face! Well, I suppose it's not to everyone's taste. *Louis*' is a seafood restaurant, really, anyway.'

'Messieurs. Vous avez choisi?' Both jumped – neither of them at the table had heard *Louis*' enter stage.

'It's going to be the Bouillabaisse for me, Louis, and...?'

'A steak...?'

'*Tartare*, young man?' Asked the actor.

'No. A proper steak' Replied the young man.

'... well done?' The actor's sarcasm seemed pitched beyond the young man's threshold of awareness.

'Thank you.'

'No I mean do you want it cooked *well done*?

'Yes, please.'

'And, Louis, a steak – bien cuit...' The actor spat the words out like gristle on his tongue.

'Bien cuit? Oh, non, Monsieur Wyngarde!'

'Oui, bien cuit, malheureusement. The naivety of youth, eh, my friend?'

'D'accord. Monsieur, Monsieur Wyngarde.' The MD walked away.

'Funny.' Said the young man.

'What?'

'That waiter.'

'Louis – the Maître D?' Asked the actor.

'Yes. His accent it's so, so...'

'...so?'

'Well, so French.'

'Well he is French.' Said the actor.

'He reminds me of one of those 'swarthy foreigner' bit-parts you often had in *Jason King*.

You know "Gino the greasy Italian; Fritz the fat, thuggish German; Stavros the swarthy Greek"? Bit racist, I suppose, by today's standards? Do you think it was racist?"

'It was what it was at the time.' Said the actor. And don't let Louis hear you deride his "fake" accent.'

'Sort of topical, though, isn't it? When you think about it? What with Brexit and everything. Might be interesting, to talk about? As long as we don't get too heavy?'

'Heavy? I can't see why the most disastrous political vote in the last 40 years by a frankly foolish electorate – led by craven politicians should get "heavy" in any way, do you?'

'So, you were a Remoaner, I mean Remainer, then?' said the young man, suddenly more alert once again.

'I'm English. But I live in France. I was born in France. I speak French, amongst other languages. I'm a citizen of the world. An, an internationalist, I suppose.'

'Like a Communist?'

'No, not like a Communist. But you know at one point, as a child, I lived with my mother in Shanghai. J G Ballard and I — no don't look it up on your phone, I can tell you. He's a writer; JG and I were actually playing, there in the streets of Singapore together, when the Japanese invaded.'

'Which war was that?'

'Oh, never mind! I'm sure you can look that one up if you really need to? But at least we're finally starting to cover more ground than the eponymous "Monsieur King". You know. before Jason King appeared on television, I worked as an actor? A proper actor, on stage, films...'

'Yeah, I googled that. Apart from "Pardonnez-moi", *Jason King*, weren't you in stuff like *Department S*, *The Prisoner* — "I'm not a number I'm a free man"...' said the young man, punching the air, in a voice which drew the other diners' attention to their table once again. The actor raised an eyebrow.

'And my stage work?'

'Stage work, stage work? Now, weren't you in, no don't tell me... *The King and I*?' The only sound was that of the actor slowly refilling his glass.

'You do realise that that was about the King of Siam. Not *Jason King*, don't you?' The actor emptied his glass in one. 'More wine?' he asked the young man.

'Why not? Yeah — *The King and I*. Now I saw an old interview of you going on about it

'On the Kong server, no doubt?'

'That's it. Now, what was it called? The, the... I know, wasn't it *The Russell Harty Show*?

'I'm not sure if I really count TV-like *Russell Harty* — or vaudeville, like the King & I — as part of my serious acting career. But let me think. It is true, the *King* was playing at the Adelphi, wasn't it? 262, or-thereabouts, performances — if my memory serves me correctly. It was work. But you know I

played *Uncle Vanya* at the Old Vic? I want to cover that, too. In the interview. And I appeared at National, too, you know?'

'The National? The National Theatre?'

'Y-e-s.' Said the actor. 'That's the one.'

'Really? What were you in?' Asked the young man.

'The play... now then, what on earth was it?' The actor swallowed hard, his throat suddenly dry as he felt his hands shake once more. 'It was all a very long time ago. Well, I don't actually remember that now...'

'I can check?' The young man looked down at the phone in the palm of his hand.

'Just give it a bloody rest, can't you?' Said the actor. 'Sorry. What I mean is don't worry. Let's just enjoy our lunch for the moment. Let your phone lie. It will come back to me.'

'So, what are you doing these days?' asked the young man. 'Are you still doing any? Acting?'

'My point is *Jason King* was only a few short years of my life.'

'Three.'

'What?'

'It was three years, wasn't it? If you include *Department S*, which you probably must, really, shouldn't you?'

'Sorry?'

'I'm pretty sure, but let's check...' The young man picked up his phone once again. 'Um, yeah, here we go this is what Wiki says: "*Department S* (first screened March 1969) Spy-fi series prequel to...'

'Don't say it!' Pleaded the actor. The young man appeared deaf.

'...yes, *Department S*, the prequel to *Jason King*... not a great signal, here, is it?'

'I suppose eating on the terrace has certain drawbacks...'

'Here we are,' the young man continued stroking his phone's screen. '*Jason King*, ended, um, um, um...yes thought so – 1972. 28th April it was.'

'Really? April, was it. The 28th you say. Well I never.' Said the actor.

'OK.' This time, the young man had heard the sarcasm in the actor's voice. 'So, what *have* you been doing, since then? What are you actually doing, now, at the moment?' As the young man spoke, Louis who had been hovering over the adjacent table shucked an oyster from its shell which missed the plate and landed on the hot terrace floor.

'Well... well.'

'Yes?' Said the young man. 'Go on?'

'Well, there's, well there's my experimental theatre work I'm, I'm, I'm working as a dramaturge. I'm helping to develop a short piece for a small theatre group in Marseilles.' Lied the actor.

'What's it about.' The actor pondered and remembered a story he'd read in *Le Monde* that morning. *Fake News*.'

'*Fake News*? Really?', said the young man, sounding surprised.

'Yes, fake news and um...' Now what was the other story he'd seen, he thought?

'Edward Snowden.' Said the actor quickly.

'You're saying your play is about *Fake News*; *Fake News* and Edward Snowden?'

'And Wikileaks, and Julian Assange?' The actor couldn't stop himself, now.

'So, you're into all that, are you? Wasn't Julian Assange, the one that became a woman?'

'No, that's Bradley – Chelsea – Manning.'

'Your play's about a cross-dresser? That sounds good! Is that something that interests you?'

'No! Well. Yes...'

'Yes?'

'No, well...'

'No! What I mean is that I was hoping this interview would be about a bit more than Jason-King-Kong! I want it to be about me. The real me. There's been more to my life than that. I'm 77, now. I've lived a rich, a full life.'

'77?'

'Yes. 77'

'77... Are you sure? Hang on.'

'Can't you just put that phone down for a moment?'

'That's odd. Wiki says you're 87...?' The actor was silent for a moment.

'How very gallant of this Monsieur Wiki.'

'Wikipedia. The Internet encyclopaedia.'

'Yes. I'm not a complete ignoramus, you know. I was being sarcastic. How very gallant of the internet, if you prefer. But it is 77. And that's what goes into the programme, too. Got it?'

'Does age bother you then?'

'Tell me young man. What exactly do you actually know about me other than *Jason King*?'

'Well, I love your cameo in *Flash Gordon* as General Klytus – "Masked Head of Emperor Ming's secret police force". I love that film – when Princes Aura says "Look water is leaking from her eyes." And Max Von Sydow – I mean Emperor Ming replies "It's what they call tears. It's a sign of their weakness" At lot of people see your *Klytus* in *Flash Gordon* as being an expression of the darker side of Jason King.'

'Listen! Do you know why I wore that mask to play General Klytus? No? I had to. Just to get work. One minute, I'm playing our eponymous playboy, chasing "glamorous women in exotic locations." The next I'm up before the beak for gross indecency at Gloucester Bus Station. You must know about it? I was – in the language of the time – outed as a bugger. I certainly didn't dine out like this, for a while.'

'But you'll always be...'

'...yes, I know: "Jason-fucking-King" to my fans... I'm sorry. But I really can't see this going anywhere. I think it's time for the bill, don't you?'

'No, look. I'm sorry. I've never done this before. I'm sorry if I've pissed you off. But if I go back without an interview, I'll lose my job.'

'You mean your "trainee-internship", or whatever it is you do?'

'Couldn't we carry on? With another bottle of that delicious wine you chose for us? What was it called?'

'You mean the Domaine LaRoche?'

'Yes.'

'It is rather expensive...?'

'Please? The young man was almost pleading, now.

'Oh, very well. But if — and only if — we can cover some real ground. About me. Not just Jason King?'

'Yes. Your whole life.'

'Everything?'

'I'll put my phone down and you can just talk.'

The actor thought for a moment. Even though the sinking sun formed a halo behind his inquisitor's youthful mane, he could see desperation in the young man's eyes. It was a chance to be in the limelight. And anyway. What other options did he have? The publicity would be fantastic. And if it raised his raise a profile would always help with some of those bills in life that never seem to go away. And if nothing else it was a chance to enjoy a good lunch.

'Go on tell me everything I'll leave my phone on the table. Promise. I won't touch it. Please!' A gust stirred the air on the terrace.

'Well, I suppose I was your age once...' A buzzing warned the actor that a wasp was dangerously close

'Well you're only 77, now, aren't you?'

'Exactly!' Said the actor. 'Very well. But you're right. We'll need another bottle, before we begin, won't we? If Janus Productions doesn't mind, that is?'

'They've given me the company Gold Card for today.'

'Excellent! Then I'm sure we can put on a Gold Star performance to match, can't we my boy? As long as you don't do a *runner*.' The actor laughed uproariously. 'Never mind. Now, Louis, Louis...? where's that man got to?'

*

And as the afternoon lengthened and *Louis*' gradually emptied, their conversation spilled over into laughter, louder and louder laughter, laughter which echoed around the honey stone terrace until the sun set. And then, finally, it was quiet, and all that was left in front of the actor were empty wine bottles whose shadows pointed accusingly towards the young man's now vacant seat.

*

'It was dusk as the young man, unsteady on his feet, entered the airport. He looked up at the screens, scanning for one which would tell him where to take flight. Trying to find, trying to focus on a monitor which would give him the right information to tell him where to go. As he looked up he pulled his phone out. His fingers automatically made their well-practised ritual movements. His call rang only twice before being answered.

'News desk.' Came the disembodied voice from his phone.

'Oh, for fuck sake. I wanted Features. Sorry, can you put me through?' It was only when he heard the dead space as the call was transferred he added '...Arsehole.'

'Hello? Yeah, it's me. No, I'm still in fucking Marseille, aren't I. What? No, I missed the earlier flight. speak up. Sorry? I've only got half a bar on my phone. You were right. Total piss head! Yeah, I got it. Easy. He was clueless. Still thinks he's an actor. Silly old poof. I've loads of great stuff. You wouldn't believe half of it honestly. We'll crucify him. Whole list of names, yeah. Something funny going on with him and the waiter, too. Very *tête-à-tête*. Reckon they're bum chums or something. What? No; pretended it was a TV interview. About his life. What? Quite — as if! I've got some great shots for Side Bar of Shame, though. The Subs are going to have a field day with the captions on those. I'm just squirting the jpegs to you. You've got them, already? "Wow". The Interweb eh?' The young man looked at his distorted reflection in a column of chrome as he watched himself draw the quote marks in the air with his fingers for a second time that day. 'The pictures? How about the one

with the open neck silk lilac shirt? Yes, I know: and those leather trousers! It will look great, won't it? We could Photoshop in a rhino horn necklace, too? No, no, no. Just kidding. Don't! How about the one with him holding out his wine glass. We can crop out his mate, Louis, the Waiter, Maître D, or whatever he is? My phones just about to die, what? A caption? I dunno; how about "The Man Who Still Thinks He's Jason King."?' '

*

Above the warm stones of the restaurant terrace the evening sky was as beautiful as the actor had ever seen it.

'Monsieur Wyngarde?'

'Louis! You startled me. Pardon. I was enjoying the sunset.'

'Monsieur. Your guest he is returning?'

'Probably, Louis.' Or someone like him. There's always someone like him out there. In the ether. But not today, Louis. Not today.'

'...Un café?'

' "It's a bit too early for coffee; I'll have a Scotch." '

'Monsieur?'

'A private joke, Louis. From the past.'

'A line from something?'

'From a part I used to play, yes.'

'Ah, d'accord. *Jason King*, Monsieur?'

'Yes, Jason King. Somehow you guessed, Louis.'

'Quelques olives? Du fromage, Monsieur?'

'Thank you, but no Louis. I think I've had enough cheese for a while. For quite a while, thank you. Je suis terminé.'

And Cut! That's a wrap, thank you everyone.

*

DVD Options

Alternative Ending : 'Lunch with Jason King'. (Never screened)

...

'Quelques olives? Du fromage, Monsieur?'

'Du fromage, Monsieur?'

'Thank you, but no Louis. I think I've had enough cheese for a while. For quite a while, thank you.'

'And cut!' The actor at the table was speaking.' There was a bustle as the film crew moved around. 'I don't know? Isn't it just all too poignant? Look, we've still got half an hour of light. How about we try this instead:'

MAITRE D: '...Un café?'

WYNGARDE: ' "It's a bit too early for coffee; I'll have a Scotch". '

MAITRE D: 'Monsieur?'

WYNGARDE: 'A private joke, Louis. From the past.'

MAITRE D: 'Ah, Bon! Du fromage?'

WYNGARDE: 'Thank you, but no, Louis. I think I've had enough
cheese for a while.'

'And then,' said the actor, 'the camera pulls away to reveal Wyngarde alone on the restaurant terrace, after the meal, with a film crew filming him. Yes, no? Wyngarde then gets up from his table, goes across to the director, shakes his hand, and finally turns to the camera and winks – at us, the audience. Then fade to black?'

*

DVD Options

Alternative Ending 2: 'Lunch with Jason King'. (Never screened)

'Du fromage, Monsieur?'

'Thank you, but no Louis. I think I've had enough cheese for a while. For quite a while, thank you.'

'And cut! I don't know. Is it just all too poignant? Said the actor. We've still got half an hour of light.

How about we try something like this:'

"Monsieur Wyngarde? Your guest is returning?"

"Probably, Louis. But not today. Not today."

'Then they laugh together' Said the actor. 'Then the waiter says:'

"Do you think he twigged, Monsieur?"

'Then the man sitting at the table says:'

"Well, we gave him enough clues. You'd have thought he'd twigged? Seeing that you're famous, after all. But you do make a very convincing waiter, *Monsieur Wyngarde*."

'So the audience realise that they've swapped places,' continued the actor who had been at the table. 'Wyngarde has been playing Louis, and vice versa. Do you see? Wyngarde's been playing the maître d'hôtel the whole time? Yes? No? And then we just finish off with some dialogue like:'

MAN AT TABLE (LOUIS): He's posted it up on their website already, Monsieur Wyngarde. Look: "The Man Who Still Thinks He's Jason King."

MAITRE D (WYNGARDE): A bottle of Champagne and two glasses, Louis. Time for me to call one of the competitors to that man's newspaper, I think. We've got a good story to sell, them...

'And then,' continues the actor, 'we make a final cut to the face of the young man, back at his newspaper's office in London, looking at his phone. His face drops in horror as he sees his story being held up to ridicule on the competitor's web site and their caption "Lunch with Jason King?"

Notes

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Inspired in part by *Daily Mail* 'news' story: "Is that really Jason King..." at:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1259498/Is-really-Jason-King-suavest-man-TV.html>

'Lunch with Jason King' by Nick Wray

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