

BEECHWOOD

Smoke and Mirrors

LONDON, PARIS & RIO DE JANEIRO

“He stole millions. The real crime was hiding them.”

Feature film · Crime thriller · Original screenplay

LOGLINE

A disgraced London accountant falls into a VAT carousel fraud and builds a lavish criminal empire — only to find himself trapped between a relentless HMRC investigator, a Russian oligarch who wants his money back, and a confiscation hearing that could send him back to prison. His only weapon: smoke and mirrors.

SYNOPSIS

Quinn Richards is a sharp, quietly ambitious accountant at a Swiss trading bank — passed over, undervalued, and finally made redundant. On the day he loses his job he also loses his wife. With little left to lose, he accepts an introduction to Walid Khan: a charming businessman running a VAT carousel fraud — buying and selling phantom mobile phone components through shell companies, collecting VAT refunds from HMRC and vanishing before the Revenue can collect.

Quinn’s instinct for numbers and his nightclub contacts make him the ideal operator. He builds the scheme into a multi-million pound enterprise — Bentleys, Savile Row suits, Dom Pérignon. All paid for by the British taxpayer.

Jack Bowen, HMRC’s bulldog investigator, closes in via Operation Equus. Convictions secured. Quinn faces the confiscation hearing alone, defeats it on a legal technicality, then engineers a spectacular escape — outwitting Bowen, the oligarch’s enforcer, and the Crown Prosecution Service in a single night.

KEY THEMES

Greed and consequence — Quinn is not a career criminal. He is a man of talent and limited options who makes one catastrophic choice — and rides it all the way to the bottom.

The art of misdirection — Quinn defeats the system the same way he deceived it — by making everyone look at the wrong hand.

Class and ambition — From redundant backroom accountant to Bentley-driving nightclub impresario: a darkly funny portrait of a man who found his talents in entirely the wrong place.

The limits of the law — Bowen wins the prosecution and loses everything else. Quinn breaks every rule and walks free. The film asks whether justice and legality are the same thing.

KEY CHARACTERS

Quinn Richards

Accountant turned fraudster — sharp, self-contained, charming under pressure. Discovers his real talents only after the law has finished with him.

Jack Bowen

HMRC's relentless investigator — small, precise, entirely without sentiment. Gets his conviction, then spends the rest of the film trying to understand how Richards beat him.

Nick Holmes

Quinn's oldest friend — decent, loyal, completely out of his depth. Bears the consequences of that loyalty.

Walid Khan

The man who pulls Quinn into the carousel — charming, philosophical, fatally unable to pay back what he owes.

Dimitri Vazkov

The Russian oligarch behind the entire operation. Silk suits, Paris views, a very long memory for debts.

Alexei

Vazkov's enforcer — economical with words, generous with violence, ultimately the instrument of his employer's downfall.

STORY STRUCTURE

ACT ONE

The Fall

Quinn is made redundant and his marriage collapses on the same afternoon. Introduced to Walid Khan, he is drawn into the VAT carousel fraud. The money is extraordinary. The lifestyle follows.

ACT TWO

The Empire and the Net

Quinn builds a lavish criminal enterprise across fifteen nightclubs and thirty-seven bank accounts. Operation Equus closes in. Bowen secures convictions. Six years. In Paris, a Russian oligarch calculates what he is owed.

ACT THREE

Smoke and Mirrors

In prison, Quinn reads law and gets fit. Khan is killed — a warning. Quinn defeats the confiscation hearing alone, then engineers a double bluff delivering Vazkov's enforcer to Bowen — while Quinn boards a flight to Rio under a different name.

COMPARABLE TITLES

The Full Monty · Catch Me If You Can · The Lavender Hill Mob · Layer Cake · Sexy Beast (tone)

PROJECT DETAILS

Format Feature film

Genre Crime thriller

Setting London, Paris & Rio de Janeiro

Tone Sharp, darkly funny, propulsive — a British caper with real menace underneath

Basis Original screenplay

Status Seeking representation & development

WRITER'S NOTE

Smoke and Mirrors began as a story about a very specific kind of crime — one that most people have never heard of. VAT carousel fraud is extraordinary: victimless in the immediate sense, vast in scale, and built on nothing but paper and nerve. It seemed to me the perfect vehicle for a character study.

Quinn Richards is not a monster. He is a man of considerable intelligence who chose, with open eyes, the most interesting option available to him. The joy of writing him was that he never loses the audience — even when he's spending taxpayers' money on Cristal champagne and a Bentley, there is something rooting for him.

Jack Bowen is his mirror: equally driven, and ultimately outmanoeuvred by a man he underestimated. The final scene is Quinn at the bar in Rio, a coin disappearing between his fingers. Don't look at the obvious. It's the oldest trick in the world.

— **Warwick Jaggard**

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