

*Chapter One*

# **Motorway Strategy**



**Lesson:  
Don't Believe  
Your Own Blarney**



“*Gaiety is the most outstanding  
feature of the Soviet Union.*”

— Joseph Stalin



“**I**reland is a warm, welcoming, magical, mystical land—a land of legends and leprechauns. One legend has it, that at the end of every rainbow, you will find a leprechaun and a pot of gold. Leprechauns are fairy-like creatures that bring good luck, well-being and happiness. Locals claim that at dusk, if you are very quiet and very lucky, you might see leprechauns dancing on mushrooms. When Irish people feel upbeat—this is normal—and believe they can achieve anything, it is not unusual to hear them proclaim they could ‘dance on mushrooms.’”

Jake Boyd smiled and replaced the airline magazine in the seat pocket in front. If the land of his grandparents was as nice as the many gushing reviews he had read, he would be happy. Already, he could see the green countryside as Aer Lingus flight

129 made its initial approach to touch down at Shannon Airport on the west coast of Ireland.

The prospect of staying with a relative he had never met and previously only communicated with by phone and email was an intriguing one. Just as intriguing was his cousin's name. Finbarr Kozlowski was not the most Irish of names, he mused.

Emotionally and physically exhausted, Jake's thoughts drifted to the need for this seven day vacation. Business had been more difficult in the last year than expected. The seven percent decline in sales was disappointing. Nor could he take pride in the dramatic reduction in margin—a primary contributor to the loss-making year. Jake felt lost and uncertain about the company he founded six years previously.

The recent acquisition proposal from Velt, Frommer-Hell, a venture capital firm, was substantial enough for him to consider selling—something he would not consider if he knew how to rejuvenate what he referred to as his “love child.” Jake privately referred to Velt, Frommer-Hell as Vultures from Hell, but he understood the marketplace. If his business could not regain profitability soon, it would die, placing one hundred and seventy employees out of work. The alternative was to accept the Velt, Frommer-Hell proposal.

The gentle bump on landing interrupted his thoughts. The pilot thanked the passengers for their custom and brought a broad smile to Jake's face when he said in a gentle Irish brogue, "You can always be sure of an easy landing here, folks. Our rainy climate ensures we have very soft ground."

Jake collected his bags at the carousel and moved through immigration and customs. He had developed an easy relationship with his cousin during the numerous telephone and internet communications of recent weeks. Finbarr had promised him a welcome he would not forget and was now obviously keeping that promise. Recognizing his cousin from emailed photographs, Jake broke into a laugh. Finbarr Kozlowski was carrying a large placard with the legend 'Jake Boyd go home' written in large strokes. Incongruously, an oversized black cowboy hat with very wide brims rested on his head, partially covering his ears.

"Finbarr?"

"Jake! Welcome to the Emerald Isle, my man. I hope you don't mind the message on this sign. A hundred thousand welcomes to you, man, a hundred thousand welcomes to you." The words were spoken quickly with a light lyrical brogue.

"Thanks for having me. Is this the normal welcome



message you give people, Finbarr?”

“Only to those we like, Cousin, but you know that is nearly everyone.”

Finbarr, at twenty-eight, was of a similar age to Jake, but he seemed to carry himself in a lighter, more easy-going manner. The initial introduction and previous communications confirmed Jake’s view that his relative had a permanent smile on his face.

“You’re traveling pretty light, Cousin,” Finbarr said as he loaded the two bags into the trunk of the medium sized sedan.

“I think I’ve got all I need, including a raincoat, galoshes and umbrella,” responded Jake.

“You’re generalizing, man. All you’ll need for the next week are golf clubs and sun lotion. Oh, and maybe some hangover medicine. Come on, let’s move.”

Jake moved to the right side of the car until Finbarr reminded him, “Hey, Yank, passengers on the other side. Don’t you know we drive on the correct side of the road here?”

The visitor felt uncomfortable sitting in the front left seat, unable to exercise control over the vehicle as Finbarr drove at what seemed terrifying speed on the “correct side of the road.”

Jake’s anxiety faded as genuine and cordial



conversation developed with his Irish cousin.

Lowering the sound pounding from the car radio, Finbarr said, “So things are pretty tough for you at the moment, business wise? You seemed really down when we spoke on the phone last week. Got to say, you don’t convey a lot of optimism in your emails either, Couz. What’s the story?”

“I’m tired, Finbarr. I’m tired of the whole entrepreneur thing. Or at least I’m tired of the loss-making entrepreneur thing. I once thought I knew it all and could rule the world. No problem. Now the world is ruling me and I’m close to packing it in. Maybe the world isn’t ready for *JB’s Good Food* after all.”

“That might be true, Couz, but it could be too easy an explanation. Maybe all you need is a bit of fine tuning and you could have a very profitable business. What is your strategy?”

Jake was taken aback by the blunt question and the confidence with which Finbarr was addressing his problem. He did appreciate the genuine concern.

“Finbarr,” he took a deep breath, “I’m not sure I know any more. I wanted to introduce a range of gourmet foods under the *JB* brand. Initial reaction was positive with good trade listings, but consumer sales have never been great, and now I’m getting hit with de-listing or threats of de-listings. It seems no