

## The Art of Greed: A Novel of the Rise and Fall of the Asian Great Gatsby

**Hans Peter Brunner**

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(360pp)

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*A complicated opportunist talks through the circumstances of his fraudulent financial activities in the thrilling novel The Art of Greed.*

In Hans Peter Brunner's suspenseful novel *The Art of Greed*, a young, hubristic businessman profits from international financial deals through trickery and deceit.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, idealistic and ambitious Jho, a Malaysian citizen and Wharton Business School graduate, covets a sovereign wealth fund—a sum of money controlled by a government entity that is used for large-scale financial investments. Enamored of the power that comes with brokering billion-dollar deals, Jho schemes his way into the lives of powerful financial players, including the future prime minister of Malaysia and a Saudi Arabian prince. Through aggressive social climbing during which he presents himself as wealthy, Jho influences Middle Eastern and South Asian financiers, accumulating capital as fast as he can build his reputation.

Though Jho calls himself the “Asian Great Gatsby,” he proves to be more of an Asian Bernie Madoff. His orchestrations led to an enormous financial crash and scandal in 2015. He covers this all from a present-day vantage, looking back on the fraud he perpetuated and explaining how he arrived there in convivial terms. He is fleshed out in terms of his complex, sometimes contradictory motivations. Idealistic and excitable, he is not propelled by greed at first, but as he deals with larger and larger sums, he transforms. Still, he is compelling because of his early ambition and naivete.

The novel is propelled by Jho's earnest, single-minded desire to be a large-scale player in international finance. He makes connections, orchestrates deals, opens shady offshore accounts, and deceives his investors with youthful arrogance. Opportunistic, he manufactures first meetings with powerful people by researching their schedules and inserting himself into their lives. This over-the-top determination persists as Jho gets older, remaining consistent through his changes.

Though covering ample time and ground, the book takes care to explain the precise actions Jho takes and what rules he breaks. Its information is delivered in accessible terms, distilling Jho's financial expertise into fodder for the tale's momentum. The book's progression is easygoing, though still reflective of the pride that Jho feels over his business dealings. His thoughts are clear and his goals well defined. Flourishes come not through the language, but through accounts of extravagant displays of wealth, as with a \$40,000 twentieth birthday party and the baubles he uses to bribe the Malaysian prime minister's wife.

Based in truth, *The Art of Greed* is a gripping novel about one of the greatest financial frauds of all time.

LEAH BLOCK (January 13, 2025)

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