



# **Bimat**

## **Buddha's Tooth III**

**A VIETNAMESE ADVENTURE**

**Robert A. Webster**

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**ISBN 978-1-4457-8402-1**

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## *Author's Note*

Somehow, this madness must cease. We must stop *now*. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor in America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.

*Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.*  
*The Trumpet of Conscience, 1967.*

Đi ra một ngày, về một sàng khôn  
(translated) Go out one day, and come back with a basket full of knowledge.

*An ancient Vietnamese proverb 'Ca Dao'*

Don't grumble or complain son. There are many people a lot worse off than you:

Son, weak people make excuses, but it's weaker people whom accept them:

*She was a wise old bird, my old mum 'Pearl Nielsen.'*

Friends are like angels who lift us to our feet when our wings have trouble remembering how to fly:

*Vicky Eggleton, 1944-2007 favourite Aunt.*

With nearly seven, billion people, over 250 countries and 22 main religions, but only 1 life and 1 sick planet. Use one wisely to heal the other:

The world is a fine place and worth fighting for and I'd hate very much to leave it:

*Earnest Hemingway*



**All foreign words and phrases within the sections of this outstanding, informative novel are in the language of the country the Chapter depicts: Vietnamese, Cambodian and Thai.**



## *Foreword*

**J**ust when you thought it was safe to travel to South East Asia. The feckless heroes return for their third adventure. Stu, Spock and Pon team up again to rescue a priceless treasure.

Follow their hapless bumbling's through yet another beautiful country in South East Asia as they go into Vietnam and encounter another diverse culture and a disparate people. Go along with their calamitous escapades that lead them through dense rain-forests. The Hurly-burly of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, [formerly Saigon] to the warm golden beaches along the North West coast of scenic, and beautiful Vietnam.

Follow their race against time to recover a cherished possession from an old dangerous adversary, a cunning, astute, antagonist driven by greed and funded by obsession.

The quest takes them from Thailand, through Cambodia and into the beautiful and accommodating country of Vietnam. They learn of the conflicts and witness evidence of history of a time when the world went mad and experience the transformation from a war ravished country to the present modern day nation it has become.

An abduction and implausible ransom demand lead the three into a perilous pursuit, which requires all their strength and survival instinct to obtain a good seat at the bar. Enjoy the adventure, and once again witness the metamorphosis from being mild mannered ‘Wasters’ to ‘Super Wasters’ by the intake of the magic potion ‘Beer’ in this case it is strong ‘Saigon beer’ not for the weak livered: zero to spannered in three glasses, so beware.

The three, now closer than brothers, rely on one another more than any time in their lives as the past throws up some guilt-ridden **Bimât’s** (*secrets*)

Enjoy the third and possibly final chapter of the Buddha’s tooth adventures.

The Tinju warrior returns.

This time it’s personal!



## *Prologue*

**T**he exhaustion had started to take its toll. It had been a long frightening day, and all he now wanted to do was eat and replace his energy. Something in the distance caught his attention.

‘Food’ he thought as he made his way over to a white suspended object and took a large ravenous bite. He felt a searing pain in his mouth and then water rushed past his face as he was dragged along. Panic set in as he struggled for breath. Helpless and confused, he hurtled toward a large object.

“Look matey, I’ve caught one” beamed Spock, as he swung the rod and took hold of the little fish.

“Mate it’s a monster, lucky if it would cover a Ritz cracker” said an unimpressed Stu, sarcastically, “Put it back in the sea, maybe you will catch again it when it grows up to be two inches long,” he chuckled.

“Oh yes! And what have you caught then, hmm?”

asked a disgruntled, but proud, Spock.

The two lads had been fishing for about three hours now and the only result was the baby Quoy parrotfish, which was now housed in Spock's large hand as he de-gorged the hook from the fish's mouth.

"Another exciting day in paradise" mumbled Spock as he placed the small fish back into the sea and watched it swim away.

'It has been a very exciting day, it's a bloody hard life being a fish' pondered the little Quoy. Shortly followed by 'Oh bollocks' as he swam into the gaping jaws of a passing barracuda.

The two lads packed their fishing gear away into Stu's motor and decided to go home early after their fishing expedition had turned into a flop. They headed towards their homes. They now lived in Pattaya with their wives, Dao and Moo.

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Several years had gone by since their last adventure in Cambodia and their lives had changed. They both had houses built in the Suvapom estate on the outskirts of Pattaya. They'd bought some land and built the properties, which thanks to their good friend, the mad monk, Pons intervention, had taken no time to build and cost very little. They now lived idyllic lives.

They had taken Dao and Moo to England several years

earlier, which at first was fun. The two girls were gullible, especially when told that they would see herds of wild bison meandering majestically over sandy plains and, after looking up what a bison was they became very excited. Although when this turned out to be a few scraggy arsed donkeys wandering up and down Cleethorpes beach, with a few even scaggier arsed tourists wearing 'kiss-me-quick hats' riding on the donkey's, the girls knew this wasn't going to be the paradise they had hoped for and 'shit hole' was an expression they frequently used. After a few months the girls became restless, cold and homesick, although they never moaned. Dao missed Thailand and her young son. Stu and Spock had noticed the girls change and knew deep down they weren't happy and truth be known neither were they. Stu decided after long talks with his mum Pearl, to sell his business, move to Pattaya, and try to set up in business with the girls.

It was a long painful goodbye with their respective parents and Chunky, Stu's old boxer dog, who was to stay with Pearl. Two lovable old fossils, taking care of each other. The foursome promised they would always stay in contact with their families and try to visit several times of the year. Mainly the summer months as the two Thais didn't like the cold, and as Stu was too stingy to have central heating installed, insisting they put on extra jumpers and told them that the word is 'brisk' not 'fucking freezing' therefore the four decided they would not return during winter or autumn.

They relocated to Thailand, much to the delight of Pon



and Kim who had helped them by using their high-ranking status. Pon had used his influence to build their Pattaya homes and he was happy he could help, as his debt to the lads could never be repaid.

Pon and Kim were regular visitors from Bangkok. Spock and Moo, Stu and Dao married in a joint ceremony just after they'd come back to live.

Dao and Moo set up a clothes shop on Threpassit market and doing well. Spock and Stu did bugger all, which suited them, although Spock was a little short of cash at times, even though he'd somehow wangled a small disability pension from the UK. They had several attempts at learning to speak Thai, but lost interest after the first few lessons and gave up even with the girls badgering. The girls eventually gave up trying, coming to the conclusion that the loves of their lives were as 'thick as pig shit'.

\*\*\*\*

Pon intended to pick Kim up from Bangkok's Savarnabhumi airport that afternoon. She had been gone for almost a fortnight visiting her parents in Vietnam after her mother had been rushed to hospital.

Pon missed Kim more than he could have imagined. They had been married now for over two years and, apart from the odd weekend, when his duties took him to Salaburi to teach the Tinju, this had been the longest period that he and his wife had been apart. Kim stayed by Pon's side and, when he had his tail surgically removed

for the first time, she would not let go of his hand throughout the long surgical procedure. Spock and Stu also attended the hospital to visit, but that was just to take the piss.

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“What time are Pon and Kim coming matey?” asked Spock.

“I’m not too sure” replied Stu “He said he was picking Kim up from the airport at one o’clock and then they would come straight here, so I guess around four o’clock”

“That gives us plenty of time to pop for a beer?” said Spock

“Yeah, shame not to” replied Stu, as he drove toward the butterfly bar in search of an afternoon libation, and get their todgers fondled in the short time bar.

“Oh and did I mention I caught a fish” gloated Spock

“Yes, several times” sighed Stu.

“I can’t wait to tell Moo,” he boasted.

“You do that,” groaned Stu as he accelerated and wished the butterfly bar had been closer so he wouldn’t have to listen to Spock bleating on about that bloody fish.

“Did I mention I caught a fish” Spock beamed and asked again moments later, this was followed by another burst of acceleration and another long groan from Stu.

Dao and Moo were happy. They both enjoyed working in their clothing business, although hard at first, they now had settled into a routine and making enough

money to send back to their homes and take care of their parents and Dao's son. That day they were going to close their shop early today, because of Pon and Kim's visit. Spock and Stu said they would pick them up and take home at around 3.30pm. The girls enjoyed the times Pon and Kim stayed with them as they could speak good English, albeit with a Northern English twang, and chatted endlessly with Kim about her lifestyle at the palace and the Royal Family. Moreover, it was a good excuse to get rid of the lads, which suited Spock and Stu, as that meant that they could go on the piss with Pon.

The girls started to pack up the shop and Moo noticed Dao wasn't her usual happy self.

"What's the matter?" enquired Moo "Everything OK?"

Stu and Dao rarely argued, unlike Spock and Moo who regularly argued, but always made up and it became normal to hear the slapping of Spock's head and "stupid man" emanating from Spock's garden.

"Yes, I'm Ok," said Dao

Moo had known Dao most of her life, they grew up together and knew she'd lied

"No you're not," said Moo, "Kim is coming, you are usually ecstatic"

"I'm OK," said Dao now raising her voice

The girls carried on putting their stock inside boxes and.

Dao said

"Sorry, Moo" she said, "I do have something on my mind"

Moo knew there was a problem and she had an idea what,

“The secret?” said Moo

Dao nodded

“When is he due to arrive?” asked Moo

“He arrives tonight, and due here tomorrow,” said Dao sullenly.

“You need to finish it this time” advised Moo “You have too much to lose and, with Pon and Kim being here you won’t be able to go and see him, you know how observant Kim is, she will ask questions.”

There was a short pause, and Moo told her

“If Stu finds out you will lose everything and I know you don’t want that.”

“I know, I will, this time” said Dao unconvincingly “I promise.”

“Ok” said Moo, knowing Dao still lied.

They carried on packing away the stock in silence.

The bar girl scene was behind them now. It had been years since they had worked as bargirls. Dao and Moo were now happily married and content. Nevertheless, they both still had a had a past history with customers, which at times had caught up with Dao, although she’d managed to make excuses and bluff her way through. Unfortunately, for the happy couple Dao and Stu, on this occasion her timing would prove disastrous.

\*\*\*\*

Pon relaxed in his plush apartment within the palace grounds. He had just finished phoning Kim, who was now in the departures lounge at Noi Bai international Airport,

Hanoi and awaiting her flight.

Pon had gained weight over the years, although still muscular he had to train harder to keep trim, especially after his Pattaya excursions, but he had lost no speed, power or agility he'd just gained a little beer podge. His mother, Banti, had called in earlier to see if her son would be happier now that Kim was coming home and to enquire if he'd changed his mind about going to Pattaya and visit his English brothers and became disappointed when Pon said his plans were unchanged.

Banti thought, "It will only be for a few days and I can cook them a meal when they return and it will give me more time with Samnan." Banti had grown close to her Son, Daughter and, baby grandson.

Kim had been way for almost two weeks visiting her parents in Ha Tay, a town situated just on the outskirts of Hanoi, Vietnam. She received news from her father that her mother had suffered a minor heart attack and had been admitted to Bach Mai hospital in Hanoi. Her father had told Kim that her mother had been feeling unwell with stomach pains for several days, but when they visited the Doctors for an examination, and the blood tests came back negative, she was diagnosed and treated for indigestion. A few days later, her mother collapsed at home, they rushed her to the hospital accident and emergency department and treated her for a cardiac incidence. The specialists then did full toxicology tests and found small traces of \*Thalium in her system and after the doctors explained about Thalium, her bemused and concerned husband wondered 'how the hell did she get that, and why?'

Kim and Pon had discussed the visit to Vietnam. They usually went everywhere together, however a Saudi dignitary had made an appointment to view the sacred light and protocol dictated the Prime Master had to be present to, so they therefore decided for Kim to travel alone.

Kim hadn't visited her parents for some time and although the situation was a solemn one, at least she would see them, and some old friends in Hanoi.

Kim currently worked in the Thai Royal Palace's foreign diplomatic office in Bangkok. It was her role to act as intermediary between Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam for Royal visits, which had been similar to her work in Cambodia, but required more administration. She loved her job and spent many times on the phone with the palace in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, speaking to her old friends, including the Royals, especially Her Majesty Norodom Monineath Sihanouk and Princess Bhuba Devi, who had become like second mothers to Kim when she worked as their maid in waiting. The incident with Colonel Tighe had long since been forgotten and no trace of the colonel was ever found

.

Kim and Pon made an ideal couple, madly in love with each other, and they doted on their one- year- old son Samnan.

Pon and Kim had spoken several times a day on the phone and, after a week in hospital, her mother had would

make a full recovery and the poison had almost been cleared from her system, so they would send her home for outpatient care.

The doctors told Kim that mother may have been poisoned, which confused both Kim and her father, She told Pon that her mother had suffered a minor heart attack, although Pon knew that something else troubled Kim, because she was evasive on the phone. They both decided that when she returned home they would spend an hour with Samnan and then go to Pattaya and visit their second families for a few days. It was Kim's request, as she needed to get some advice from Stu or Spock on a matter that troubled her, and with them being English, they would be able to advise her.

Pon agreed to her request, as he had not been on a good night out since after the second, unsuccessful operation attempt to remove his tail. Neither Pon, nor the surgeons, could understand why the bloody thing kept growing back, but it did, much to the amusement of Stu and Spock. (Rumbles revenge was permanent).

Pon now spoke English, although he'd learned a few extracurricular words, which couldn't be found in any English dictionary. However, according to Spock and Stu they were colloquial words used commonly in the North East, an example of which: "stop talking bollocks" which Pon had heard Stu, Spock, Dao and Moo say this to one another, so it must have been fact.

Pons thoughts were of Kim's return, he'd booked the Royal limousine to go to meet her at the airport. The dark tinted windows gave Pon ideas of what to do on the

twenty minute journey to the palace, and even more notions about the two hours journey to Pattaya, he chuckled to himself ‘I think I’ll pack the mullet’ he thought.

His passionate thoughts were interrupted by a buzz on his intercom.

“Your car is here, Prime Master,” said a female voice

“Thank you Nid, tell the driver I will be there shortly” replied Pon

It had seemed like Kim had been away years, but she would be home in an hour, so he went into their bedroom to search out his mullet.

It was a hot and sweaty afternoon in Pattaya. Stu and Spock pulled up at Threpsit market, alongside Dao and Moo’s shop. The girls had already packed away. Stu stopped the car and the girls climbed into the back seat.

“Hello darling” said Stu, leaning over to kiss Dao.

Dao smiled and put her arms over the front seat and over Stu’s shoulder hugging his chest

“Did you catch any fish?” she asked

“I did” interrupted Spock, who then started to tell how he wrestled the monster. Stu banged his head against the steering wheel in despair

Moo rescued the situation from becoming too boring by slapping Spock around the head and said,

“Don’t talk bollocks stupid man.”

Spock went silent, ‘I’ll tell her the story again later, only next time with Gusto,’ he thought.

Stu drove the pick-up out of the market and headed for home.



They arrived home around 3:30pm, it had been a tiring day and they waited for their friend's arrival. Pon and Kim planned to stay in Stu's spare room, which was where they usually stayed, because Spock's home always stunk of sweaty feet, although it was Moo's feet that gave off the pungent odour after being stood on the market all day.

The time ticked by, and at 4.30pm Stu said,

“I Thought Pon would have phoned by now?”

“Maybe he is still at the palace or delayed” reassured Spock.

Stu's mobile telephone rang.

“He must have known that we had been talking about him, the mystical old dog”

Stu answered.

“Hello mate, are you on your way?” enquired Stu  
Pon sounded anxious

“No Stu, Kim never got on the plane. Her father drove her to the airport, watched her go to check-in and nobody has seen her since”

Stu thought for a moment and said

“Don't worry; maybe she's getting a later flight”

“No” insisted Pon “She called me this morning from the airport and told me that she had been in departures and waiting to board her flight.” He continued

“I contacted her father, Minister Thran, and he went back to the airport after I told him that Kim didn't board the plane and he has been frantically checking flight departures and paging her unsuccessfully for several hours, he is concerned.” . . . “There were things that Kim wouldn't tell me over the phone, things that troubled her

deeply and she wanted to discuss them with you and Spock, but I haven't got a clue about what."

Stu paused for a moment, relayed the conversation to Spock and the worried looking Dao and Moo, who could tell by Stu's expression something seemed wrong.

Stu glanced at Spock, who looked worried as Stu returned to the phone conversation

"Are you still at the airport, Pon?"

"Yes I will stay here until I get some news" replied

Pon

"Stay where you are, we are on our way" said Stu

"Thank you my friends" said a relieved Pon.

Pon started to pace around the arrivals gate, knowing this was fruitless, although he could think of nothing else to do for the two hours that it would take for the lads to get there.

Stu and Spock felt concerned

"It maybe something or nothing" said Spock "but we have to go and give him some moral support"

"He sounded frantic," said Stu, "If it turned out to be nothing, we can always stay a few days in Bangkok"

"Right girls" said Stu, in his authoritative voice

"Pack our bags; we could be going on another adventure."

\* **Thallium** salts, especially the acetate and sulphate, which have been used as rat baits, are very poisonous. Taken as a low dose the symptoms of chronic poisoning are manifested by severe abdominal pain, vomiting, and hemorrhagic gastritis,

diarrhoea and respiratory difficulty and after long-term exposure cardiac arrest, High doses result in immediate cardiac failure. Its use has it has been eliminated in many countries because of its use for murder, Thallium has gained the nicknames "The Poisoner's Poison" and "Inheritance Powder" [alongside arsenic].Thalium can be either ingested or absorbed through the skin. One of the main methods of removing thallium from humans is to use Prussian blue, which is a solid ion exchange material, which absorbs thallium and releases potassium. The person takes up to 20 g per day of Prussian blue orally, and it passes through their digestive system and comes out in the stool.

\***Vietnam and Cambodia** have a policy whereupon the people can both work in each other's respected countries without visas or permits, but still require passports.

## – Chapter One –

Ca leant back in the passenger seat, with a contented look of relief on his face. He noticed the speedometer read 120km/hr.

“Slow down” he said to the driver and placed his hand on the drivers shoulder to reassure him. “We are not in any hurry, the hard part is over”

Tuong, the driver, eased off the accelerator and the car slowed to 80km/hr.

“Are you ok Tuong?” enquired Ca,

“Yes, fine” replied Tuong.

He then turned his head toward the rear seat and smiled

“Are you okay?” he said to the angry passenger, who ignored him.

Ca faced forward, relaxed, and closed his eyes as his thoughts drifted back into memories.

Ca was born in 1970 in a small seaside village of Phan Yar, a few kilometres South West of Ky Anh, on the north east coast of Vietnam. Phan Yar is a small bay with clear sapphire blue shallow water. The bay is bordered by rocky outcrops with many shallow rock pools and coral reefs just offshore. The white sandy beach extends onshore to approximately twenty meters and then joined a lush jungle, scattered with coconut trees and shrubs. A

small village community dwelt within a large glade, several metres from the beach. This had been Ca's home.

Ca's real name was Gio-A Tho, but he'd earned the nickname Ca 'Vietnamese, meaning fish' as he'd always in the rock pools as a child and tried unsuccessfully to catch the small spry.

He grew up in a small wooden shack on the village outskirts, close to the ocean. His mother Diudang Tho worked sun drying, salting and curing fish that his father caught, which they would sell on the market.

In 1973, his father Nguyen went away with some of his friends from the village to join the, National front for liberation of South Vietnam Vietcong army and travelled to Cu Chi province to fight the Americans from the underground tunnels.

Young Ca didn't understand what an American was, or why they were fighting, and he and his elder brother Phaol, took up their father's roll as fishermen. This was a happy time for Ca and because he was young and small, his brother did most of the work, leaving young Ca to potter around in the rock pools.

As a Vietcong soldiers families received no communication, Ca had almost forgotten about his father, until one day, in 1975, as he played in his favourite rock pool, he heard, loud bangs, cracks and sounds of people cheering emanating from the of the village.

Phaol sloshed his way out of the ocean and went to Ca.

"What's happening?" enquired a curious Ca.

"I don't know," said a nervous Phaol.

An old jeep headed towards them, they recognised the

vehicle that belonged to Pu-ed, the market owner and head of the village.

The passengers were also familiar, His mother and a small, fierce looking man

“Dad” yelled Phaol and ran towards the oncoming jeep with little Ca stumbling behind trying to keep up.

Over the following years Vietnam changed. The Northern army had taken Saigon in the South April 1975 thus ending the Vietnam War The Northern armies backed by the communist block were victorious against the South and thanks to President Nixon’s Vietnamizm policy the Americans had scarpered. July 1976 North and South Vietnam were unified and although this was going to be a hard and bloody time for the country, Ca, his family and village escaped unscathed due to its obscure location.

The family went back to a normal routine and young Ca started to understand a little about war, mainly due to his father screaming in his sleep about his dead friends. He had told the brothers about the poisonous centipedes and bloodsucking leaches that roamed around the muddy, dank musty Cu Chi tunnels, and the screams of the wounded men in the underground hospital section. He was not the same man as Phaol remembered. This once peaceful and gentle fisherman now had a cold vacant expression.

The family had been given the land that they lived on, plus a hectare of lush fertile land approx 500 meters away from their seaside home, for the bravery Nguyen Tho had displayed during the war. The new Vietnamese

government had very little money, certainly not enough to pay the soldiers, so they gave land instead. This pleased the family and they went about their usual business of fishing, but now tended the land.

One day as Ca, Phaol, and their father splashed the water in order to scare fish into their net, they heard a vehicles' horn sound several times. They went to the water's edge and saw several jeeps, many of them full with soldiers in uniform coming towards them. Nearly all the soldiers were known to the Tho family, they were Vietcong soldiers from the last war and Nguyen's old comrades.

Nguyen went over to the jeeps. An officer, unknown to Nguyen greeted him and they drove the short distance to the Tho's small wooden house and went inside

Ca and Phaol could see that their mother was still inside and their father closed the door as the two confused boys, arrived at the hut.

"Are you coming with us Phaol?" asked one young soldier.

"Coming where?" enquired Phaol.

"To kick the Khmer rouges arse," laughed the soldier.

Phaol didn't understand.

Several moments later their mother, father and the officer emerged, the two young boys walked towards their parents. Nguyen, now attired in his old army beige uniform, got into the front seat of a jeep and looked at his sons.

"Take care of your mother," he said without any

emotion and then stared forward as the jeep pulled away. That was the last time they saw their father.

“Where’s dad going?” asked an inquisitive Ca.

“He has gone to help the Cambodians, who have some nasty people in charge called Khmer Rouge, your father has gone to fight these people and liberate the good Cambodians.” explained his mother as simply and plainly as possible.

“Why?” asked a confused Ca “If Cambodians were fighting Cambodians, why does Dad have to fight.”

His mother looked down at her young son and tears welled up in her eyes as she whispered.

“Because the worlds gone mad, son”

She wiped away her tears, went into the small outdoor kitchen area and shouted “Dinner ready in 10 minutes”

Several months later, a government official and a soldier visited the family home and informed Diudang that her husband was last seen in Neak Loueng a large tropical-forest on the outskirts of Phnom pehn, where much of the fighting had taken place. He explained that Nguyen and his troops were engaged in a bloody battle with the Khmer rouge and, although his troop had been victorious and forced the Khmer Rouge to flee farther into the rainforest. Nguyen had not reported into base and, as many bodies could not found in the dense rain-forest vegetation and, because of a wide fast flowing branch of the Mekong River, which dragged bodies under. Nguyen was therefore, presumed dead.



The year was 1986 and Ca had grown into a small but handsome young man. He still lived with his mother on the beachfront and still fished, but now alone as his brother had gone to work in Ho Chi Min city a few years earlier. They employed two boys from the village to tend their land and crops that now flourished. They had fairly good soil although a little sandy, they grew serrano peppers, luffa beans, aubergines, and other seasonal vegetables.

Vietnam changed considerably and a new reformer government came to power led by 71-year-old Nguyen Van Linh, who became the party's new general secretary. The new government turned Vietnam from a command economy to a socialist-oriented market economy. With the authority of the state remaining unchallenged, private ownership of farms and companies engaged in commodity production, deregulation and foreign investment were encouraged, while the state maintained control over strategic industry. The economy of Vietnam subsequently achieved rapid growth in agricultural and industrial production, construction and housing, exports and foreign investment.

This had been an exciting and liberating time for Ca and the Vietnamese people.

He frequently visited the discos and night scenes in Ky Anh town, and regularly sang along with the local bands. He never had a steady girlfriend and was not particularly interested to have one.

One hot and humid afternoon Ca was sitting on the porch of the families new brick home that had renovated

by funds from Phaol sent home from Saigon. He noticed a red Hyundai excel 1.5 driving towards his house. He had not seen many cars, certainly none this new.

The car pulled up in front of the porch and the driver got out and asked him for directions to a plot of land his client had just purchased. Ca looked into the car, where another man was sat in the passenger seat. The first man introduced himself as Go-Lhom, an architect and surveyor. The second man looked more official and had a superior demeanour. This man never spoke as Ca gave directions to the large plot.

The man in the car then thanked Ca and introduced himself.

“Thran Tangh” he said and went on to tell Ca that he lived near Hanoi and worked for the government.

“Looks like we are going to be neighbours young Ca” said Thran and then he and Go-Lhom drove to the plot

Over the next few days bulldozers, builder’s, surveyors and Go-Lhom moved into the area and constructed prefabs for the workers and family turning the site into a small community

Over the next few months a large house started to take shape.

Ca and his mother watched with interest, as did the villagers.

After six months the large brick, modern 5-bedroom house was complete with high external walls and a large drive, gate and swimming pool. The small community of builders slowly started to disperse, much to the annoyance of Pu-ed the market owner, who had done a roaring trade

over the past few months.

Furnishings started to arrive and a few days later, the Hyundai arrived, went through the gates and pulled up outside the front door. Three people got out and went inside.

The village heard the newcomers had arrived and decided to throw a party in their honour. Pu-ed delegated himself to go and invite the new arrivals and the village all rallied around to cook meals and supplied the Saigon beer and *ruợu quốc lủi*. Rice and Kans grass: Vietnamese moonshine.

Twilight saw a community centre alive with music and laughter

A stage and small diesel generator had been set up which powered the lights, record player and microphone, Several Vietnamese musicians playing Moon Lutes, Bing Nams, similar to a harmonica and Thungs, bamboo xylophones and everyone was having a great time.

The new family arrived around 7:00 pm accompanied with Pu-ed, who got onto the stage, grabbed the microphone and addressed the community.

“Hello comrades and friends” he spoke

“This is Thran and his lovely wife Nga, and their daughter Hern.” He paused. “Welcome to Phan Yar village,”

The Tangh family bowed and smiled at the crowd and exited the stage. The music started up again and the villagers went back to their dancing, apart from Ca, who couldn't take his eyes off Hern. He estimated her to be around 14 or 15 years old and she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen, he noticed she permanently smiled and

seemed to be headstrong as, she strode up to the record player, removed the record and replaced it with one that she had taken out of a plastic bag containing several black vinyl records.

The villagers all went silent as the record started to play.

An American pop song started to play. Hern got onto the dance floor and started to dance. Everyone looked and listened and after two minutes joined in, even though they could not understand the words.

Ca went on the dance floor and edged his way towards Hern. He moved closer until he danced in front of her and said.

“Hello, my name is Ca”

Hern looked at Ca and smiled

“Hi Ca, how are you”

“I am fine, well I am more than fine now” he said with an impish smile and continued, “I met your father a few months ago”

“I’m Hern, nice to meet you Ca. I hope we can be friends when I am here,” she said blushing.

Ca awoke early the next day. The evidence of last night’s party was still strewn around the village centre, Ca walked the few kilometres into the centre, which now bustled with villagers, cleaning and setting out their street vending shops. Ca assisted with the cleanup and had started to wash down a piece of muddy pathway when a soft voice behind him said

“Good morning Ca”

Ca swung around to face Hern

“Good morning,” said Ca, noticing how cute Hern looked in the first light of day, she seemed to gleam.

“How are you?” she enquired

“Fine” said Ca “You’re awake early, I thought you city folk slept all day” he chuckled

“Very funny, I have just come to see if I could help to clean, before we leave for Hanoi at noon”

“Leave” gulped Ca “but you’ve only just arrived”

“Don’t worry” said Hern smiling “We will return soon, my father has some work in the city next month, so my mother and I will come here for while” and added, “why, will you miss me ?” she chuckled

Ca smiled and nodded

“Sure” he said, “I need someone to dance with.”

Ca’s mother came out and scolded him by saying that the dirt wouldn’t clean itself, Hern smiled

“See you soon” she whispered and walked away.

The days dragged by for Ca, over the next month, he could not get his mind off Hern, and although the meeting was brief, he knew this was the girl he would one day marry.

One day in late February as Ca set his nets, he noticed a figure walking on the sand towards him. Hern noticed Ca had seen her and waved.

He smiled, anchored his net and walked to the shoreline and, while trying to appear macho, he tripped on a sharp rock and stubbed his toe and yelped. He hobbled ashore and made his way to join a giggling Hern,

“It hurts you know” said an indignant Ca

“Sorry” she said, still giggling

Ca looked at her and smiled

“Never mind, welcome home”

The next few days were like a dreamy haze for Hern and Ca. Hern’s father was in Saigon and her mother kept herself to herself in their large home. They had house cleaners and auxiliary staff but Hern’s mother Nga liked to tend to the gardens herself.

Hern and Ca became inseparable and spent balmy days on the beach. Ca taught her how to fish, although she spent most of the beginning of her lessons belching out seawater, when she tried to go out of her depth. Hern was well educated and attended the High School for Gifted Students, Hanoi. **HNUE** \*

Hern was very intelligent and analytical like her father but enjoyed the new freedom and social scene that teenagers now enjoyed, especially the western music. She taught herself English along with her father, as the state schools never had it on their curriculum, it became a good bonding experience for them both to learn together and Thran was always getting good teaching aids shipped over from all parts of the world. She and Ca used to listen to her records in her house and Hern tried to explain the meaning of her favourite song, the one she played at the party, but Ca just thought it didn’t make sense, no sad story but because Hern liked it, so did he.

Nga noticed the friendship developing but trusted them, they were Vietnamese and no hanky panky allowed until marriage.

Ten days later, Thran returned from Ho Chi Minh and Ca and Hern said a tearful farewell to each other.

Ca watched them leave and saw Hern in the back seat. She must have sensed he had been there as she looked back and smiled.

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Hern's father, Thran Tangh, was the deputy minister of public security and an influential communist party member, who had just been elected to join the national assembly of four hundred and ninety three delegates. Both Thran and his brother, Lee, had been *Trung Tá*, Lieutenant Colonels during the American-South Vietnamese, and Cambodian conflicts. However his brother had decided to remain in Cambodia as a liaison officer and assist with the restructure of this war-torn, ravished land and impoverished, helpless Cambodian people.

The Tangh family became regular visitors to their beachside retreat over the next few years. Ca and Hern had grown extremely close. Hern taught Ca how to read and write Vietnamese and to speak a little English and they spent most of their time together. Hern wanted Ca to move to Hanoi and work but Ca refused, he didn't want to leave his mother. This exasperated Hern as she knew he could better himself and find a well paying job, but he was a happy fisherman and the only thing he wanted in life was a family, with Hern.

They had fallen in love and both felt that they would marry.

Hern, now nineteen worked in Hanoi with her father in the security department as his Personal assistant and,

although well paying job, she loathed it and felt she had wasted her education. The Only thing she looked forward to being with Ca. She couldn't telephone him, as the village didn't have any phones.

Her father Thran was kind although strict, he usually let Hern have her own way and, although he never showed emotion, Hern knew her father loved her and beside she had her uncle and his new wife to supply the pampering on his visits over from Cambodia, although these visits had become less frequent as the Cambodian Royal family were due to return from exile and her new aunt had been placed in charge of the reintegration of the royals as a Government liaison.

Ca desperately wanted to marry Hern, who kept asking him to wait, as she didn't think her father would approve, and although Thran and Ca got on well her father had made it clear on several occasions that Hern would marry someone of the same high status and wealth.

Ca and Hern sat on the beach watching the twilight as they did most evenings when she visited.

Ca took Hern's hand and said

“We have been together for many years. I want to stay with you forever and to wake up next to you every day for the rest of my life. I will ask your father for his permission, I am sure he likes me”

Hern frowned and looked at Ca

“My father likes you a lot, but I have already told you about the kind of man father wanted me to marry. Wait a few more years I am sure he will mellow when I refuse to marry any suitor that comes along.” She kissed



Ca on his cheek “I love you so much, but wait, we are happy aren’t we?”

Ca thought for a moment, nodded and mumbled

“Yes we are happy, okay I’ll wait a while longer”

Although he’d already decided that he had waited long enough and wouldn’t wait any longer. He’d planned to ask Thran and Nga alone ‘The worst they can say is no’ he thought, and they had become like second parents to Ca, he’d always given them the best, largest and freshest fish daily when they visited, so he was sure they would approve, besides he was a landowner, albeit only a smallholding.

Hern and the family intended to leave the following day and Ca thought he would ask that night. The sun went down over the horizon, like a bright red and orange curtain followed by a fiery mauve and then dark royal blue as the night set in.

The couple lit a candle and faced each other, Hern smiled and Ca stroked her face

They walked hand in hand towards the Tangh’s home.

Thran watched from the window as the couple wandered up to the house. Thran knew Ca and Hern were close, but assumed they were like brother and sister, and he trusted Ca like the son they’d never had.

Hern and Ca went into the house and up to her room to listen to records as they usually did until Ca went home around 8.30. However tonight would be different and as Thran was still admiring his new S.U.V. Ca went into the living room and over to Thran.

“What is it Ca, you look like you have the weight on

the world on your shoulders?” he asked.

“Thran” said a nervous Ca, “Hern and I are very much in love and I would like your permission to marry her,” he blurted out.

Thran thought for a moment and then asked him where Hern was.

“She’s in her room playing records. She thought I was going home,” said Ca.

Thran changed from a mild happy looking man, to a raging bull. He went to the foot of the stairs

“Hern” he hollered, “Hern come down here, NOW”

Hern came out of her room and looked down on her father and Ca who stood nervously behind him

“What’s the matter?” asked a confused Hern

“Come down here” he bellowed, waking up Nga, who also went downstairs.

They assembled in the living room and Thran shouted at Hern and Ca, firing questions about how long had the affair been going on? How many times had they had sex? Etc, he ranted and raved at the confused and frightened couple. Hern had never seen her father this angry before and she saw a different face of this Jeckel and Hyde, and she didn’t like it. She looked at Ca, who cowered.

‘Why didn’t he listen?’ She thought

The yelling, screaming and denials went on for about twenty minutes with the final sentence from Thran, directed at Hern.

“You know the rules young lady, you do not marry beneath you, and fisher boy here is sole shit. You will not see each other again, do you understand?”

Hern bowed her head

“Yes father” she sobbed

“As for you Ca, if I see you here again the repercussions will be hard and permanent, do you understand?”

Ca looked straight into Thran’s eyes. He knew Thran was rich and powerful, this wasn’t the same man he’d always regarded as his second father that feeling had disappeared thirty minutes ago.

“Yes I understand very well, but I still and always will love Hern,” retorted Ca, defiantly.

“Get out of my house,” Thran ordered and pointed to the door.

Ca left the house full of fear and confusion he’d never expected that reaction,

‘What have I done?’ he thought.

The next morning Ca walked around to the Tangh’s house and hid behind a tree. Twenty minutes later the S.U. V came out and drove past his hidden position. Hern was sat in the rear seat as the vehicle sped away. Hern never looked back.

Thran only wanted the best for his daughter, somebody rich with high status to make her life easy and a poor fisherman with an un-educated upbringing would certainly not be an ideal candidate, now his thoughts turned to damage limitation. Although Hern and Ca both denied having sex it would be hard to find a good husband if the bride wasn’t a virgin, especially in Vietnam. He felt betrayed by Ca and would never forgive him, but for now, he would forget and concentrate on creating the best

future for Hern.

Over the next few years the Tangh's visits got less frequent, Hern hardly ever came, and when she did, she was kept in the house or stayed within the grounds. Although unbeknownst to Thran and Nga she occasionally snook out to meet Ca, but their meetings were brief, anxious and planned like a military operation. Thran threatened Ca at every opportunity, During one of their secret trysts, Hern told Ca what her father had planned.

She was to go to stay and work in Cambodia. Her uncle had procured her a position in the palace as a maid to Her Majesty Norodom Monineath Sihanouk.

Her father had changed her name to make it not so Vietnamese, so any prospecting husbands would not be able to trace her indiscretions,

*Vietnamese, Cambodian and Thai people can change their name by simple deed pole, which is commonplace among the rich younger South East Asians*

Although she was rebellious and ostracized her father, Kim could not disobey him. Thran had chosen her new surname and renamed her after his, and the whole countries army hero, the brilliant tactician 'General Doung Van Mihn' or 'Big Mihn' as he was better known.

She told Ca that she had been allowed to choose her new forename. She had chosen the name of her and Ca's favourite singer from their special song 'Kids in America.'

She would now to be known as Kim Doung.

Ca and Hern held onto each other, entwined in a lovers embrace for ten minutes. Hern told him that her family would depart early morning and she would fly to Cambodia the following evening from Hanoi. Her uncle Colonel Lee Tangh would meet her in Phnom Penh

Ca didn't know what to say or do.

He chuckled nervously

"I still love Hern Tangh, but now I also love Kim Doung"

"And I will always love Gio-a Tho" wept Hern and stroked Ca's tearful face. She walked away into the darkness with her flashlight. They both knew this could be the last time they saw each other. Hern/Kim never looked back. Many years would pass before Ca would see Hern again. He'd received a few letters from her stating how much she enjoyed her job and how the Royals had been good to her, but she missed him so much, although the letters became more formal as time went on. Ca wrote back several times but didn't know if she had received his mail, and after several months her letters stopped.

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The village had grown into a prosperous community and many new wealthy Vietnamese had bought cheap plots of land and had properties built. There seemed to be continuous developments, modernisation and construction work going on.

Ca sold the families Hectar of land to a developer for

a tidy profit, and used some of the money to renovate and extended the family home. He had bought several small long tail boats and set up a fishing tour company for the new tourist invasion.

Thran and Nga never visited anymore, which suited Ca, as he now loathed Thran and felt that he had ruined his life, he dreamed of hurting him and became a nasty vindictive man, who could not get Hern out of his thoughts.

It had been many years since Hern had been gone. Ca was in the village, drunk as usual in one of the dingy Karaoke bars. He sang *Di Prolap Chim* [blood on the hands] a sad Vietnamese love song and one of his favourites. He wobbled unsteadily and then focused on a familiar figure stood by the doorway smiling.

“Hern!” he exclaimed

Hern waved and went over, put her arms around him, replaced the microphone, led him off the stage and walked him out of the karaoke bar.

“Ca, I have not heard from you for a long time and I need to speak to you.” She said with a serious, but sad look on her face.

Ca’s heart raced, and he couldn’t think straight as he tried to fathom out whether he was dreaming or not, they got onto his moped, drove to his house and went into his bedroom.

They sat on Ca’s bed and Herm complimented on how well his house had turned out.

She then held his hand and told him about her time in Phnom Penh and her new life. She had never received his letters, but she paused and said

“Even though we have been apart for many years you have always been in my thoughts and I have always been loyal and had no interest in other men” she paused, sighed and sadly announced

“I am engaged to be married”

Ca felt that his heart had been ripped from his chest, although he half expected it, they had spent what seemed like a lifetime apart, but the bond between them had remained strong and he'd always clung to the hope that they would be together one day and the revelation hit Ca like a sledge hammer..

Hern went on to explain about her fiancé colonel Tighe Nye and how the marriage had been arranged with her parents

“Do you love him?” croaked Ca.

“No, and I never will, he is a horrible old man but very rich and powerful. He went to Ky Anh with my parents to pay a large Dowry, they seem to like him and although father is rich, he thinks that with this man I will be set for life. Father has ordered this and I cannot, or dare not refuse. Tighe can cause Uncle Lee harm in Cambodia and I am afraid”. She sniggered to ease the tension and said, “I am supposed to be shopping, but I had to see you, I still, and always will, only love you.”

Ca, still drunk started to cry.

Hern then stood up and whispered,

“I have something important to give you, something only you could ever take.”

She started to remove her clothing, kissed Ca, and whispered. “My virginity”

That was the first and last time that they would ever

make love.

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It had been several years since Ca had been intimate with Hern and his life had changed. After Hern left he had moped around in and out of bars, getting into fights and ending up in drunken stupors. Eventually, with the assistance and constant support from his mother and brother Phaol, he accepted the loss of Hern and married a young girl from the village.

He concentrated on his boat business which did extremely well and he now owned six boats that he and his old friend, now brother-in-law, Tuong, the local \*Vovinam [viet Vo Dao] master/instructor, operated and ran together. Ca was contented with his life, but not happy.

His mother came home one day from the now large modern village centre and showed him a copy of the *Thanh Nien* newspaper and although his mother couldn't read, she recognised a face.

Ca read the newspaper article, and saw a photograph of a wedding party with the Cambodian and Thai royals and the smiling bride and groom, Pon and Kim, and stood alongside was the man he hated with a vengeance and who he blamed for wrecking his happiness, Hern's father, Thran Tangh. He stared at Pon in the photo 'I thought she said he was old' thought Ca. He threw the newspaper in the bin.

That had been a few years earlier and Ca, now into his late thirties had two young daughters and several well



established lucrative business's, including several properties around the now expanded village, which he'd bought, developed and now gave him a rental income. Ca was content. Life for him became okay and steady.

That was until a couple of months ago and the strangers arrived.

**\*The Cambodian–Vietnamese War** was a series of conflicts between the two countries, culminating in the establishment of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation and the subsequent invasion led by the Vietnam People's Army, which resulted in the removal of the Khmer Rouge regime from power and the establishment of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Despite the ensuing occupation of Cambodia, this war ended the Cambodian genocide from 1975-1979 under the rule of Pol Pot

**\*Than Nien\*** is one of the leading Vietnamese language daily newspapers. It provides latest world and domestic news and commentary.

**\*Vovinam** Vietnamese: Việt Võ Đạo, is a Vietnamese martial art practiced with and without weapons. It is based on the principle between hard and soft. It includes training of the body as well as the mind. It uses force and reaction of the opponent. Vovinam also includes hand, elbow, kicks, escape and levering techniques. The wide range of techniques include punching, kicking etc. as well as forms of wrestling, sword, staff, axe, folding fan and others. Self-defence techniques cover defence against weapon less attacks like choking from behind and defence against attacks with knife or sword. Advanced students

learn to combine the techniques and learn to defend themselves against armed opponents. Instructors train traditional weapons like the long stick, short stick, knife, sword and sabre. Thereby the weapons serve as training devices for reaching optimal control of body and mind.

## – Chapter Two –

The Toyota Hilux pulled into the large main car park of Savarnabhumi airport in Bangkok. Stu and Spock stepped out, much to the relief of Stu who had endured two hours of Spock's wittering about that bloody sprat that he'd caught, and recipes that he could have used to cook it and, to top off the already shitty day Stu was having, just before they'd arrived at the airport, Spock pulled out the hat, given to him after their last adventure, which had spent the past few years gathering mould in his wardrobe.

“Adventure hat matey, you shouldn't leave home without one.” Spock had told him

Stu groaned, surprised by the appearance of the hat ‘All we need now is the mad monks stupid mullet and that would really round the day off’ he thought.

Luckily, for Stu, a frantic Pon didn't wear his mullet as he met them at the arrivals entrance. He greeted them and led them through the airport and into the cordoned off V.I.P lounge. Inside, a myriad of laptop computers and uniformed officials chatted away on mobile phones, both in Thai and Vietnamese. Pon went over to Taksin, who coordinated the operation.

“Have you heard anything yet?” enquired Pon

“Nothing at all” said Taksin who looked concerned as he greeted Stu and Spock and continued. “Kim's father

has mobilised his security teams and had road blocks and search parties out since the late afternoon, but nothing. He told me that the last sighting of Kim had been when she'd checked in her luggage, although a passenger did remember seeing a Vietnamese lady leave the departure lounge and meet someone outside.

Taksin looked at the anxious Pon and said

“It doesn't appear that there is much you can do here, why don't you take care of Stu and Spock and any developments I will call you.”

“You are right, Khun Taksin, I will be of more use at the palace, please inform me if there is any news.”

Pon had arranged two rooms to be prepared in his quarters for Stu and Spock .and they drove to the Palace.

“Thank you for coming to help me. Kim was insistant that she spoke to you the last time we talked, so maybe together we can shed some light on this subject.”

A few hours later as Pon, Stu and Spock where sat in Pon's quarters discussing the events, the phone rang.

“Hello Thran, any news?” said Pon frantically

A conversation then took place in English as Pon couldn't speak much Vietnamese and Kim's father spoke no Thai. Spock and Stu therefore could understand the conversation and what they gleaned thus far, Kim had been kidnapped.

Several minutes into the conversation Pon looked at Spock, Stu

“Wait a moment Thran” said Pon, and he pressed the speakerphone button so the lads could hear the rest of the conversation

“Could you repeat the last part so my English friends

can listen?"

"Certainly" said Thran, with a tremble in his voice he told them the shortened version about how he'd received a phone call stating Kim had been abducted and, although she was safe for now, they insisted we must call off the search or she would be harmed." Then Thran repeated the part of the conversation that Pon wanted the lads to hear.

"The caller sounded English and I think that I know this man, he came to my house before my wife, Nga got sick."

"What did he want?" stammered Pon.

Thran then went explain that the man wouldn't say only that he would contact them again the following day, unless he saw any police searching or suspected that they were investigating, in which case they would have to accept the consequences. Then the man hung up.

"Did they trace the call?" Enquired Pon

"No" said Thran and continued "it was made from a state of the art scrambled Satellite phone, which wasn't anything we have ever come across before. We checked with the US military to see if it is something that they had developed, but they said no. I have called off the search for now, but I have instructed my internal security forces to start undercover investigations."

"Is that wise?" asked Pon

"They are the best and discreet, they will inform me of every step before they take it" said Thran. "She is my only daughter and they will pay for this with their lives" He nervously raged.

"She is also my beloved wife and Samnan's mother."

Pon informed him

There was a pause and Thran said softly

“I know Pon, sorry. I am a little edgy and angry. Good night my son-in-law, I will call you when they contact me again and please give my grandson a hug”.

Thran hung up the phone and the three friends sat and looked at one another. Pon had many thoughts and emotions running through his head and they felt a menace in the air, which Pon couldn't understand. But Pon, the Tinju Prime master and unbeknownst to Thran, a highly trained assassin, would find out and exact his own revenge. However for now, all they could do was wait. E situation felt grim and Pon felt helpless. Spock leaned over to Pon and put his large arm around the small monks shoulder and whispered

“I caught a whopper of a fish today.”

Dao and Moo had been chatting after the lads had departed and wondered what could have happened to Kim. She was like a sister to them and they were concerned. Stu had called Dao earlier and told them they'd arrived at the airport and would call them when he had more news.

As the girls had heard nothing for a few hours they decided to go to bed, Moo decided to stay in Dao's spare room so that she was close by in case they received any news. Dao's mobile phone rang and she looked at the caller's number. She looked nervously at Moo who glared back. Dao took the call and said.

“Hello John”

After speaking for a short while Dao said

“No problem, I will see you tomorrow, call me when

you get here”

Dao finished the call and looked nervously at Moo, who glared at her.

“Come on” said Dao trying to justify her action “We are Thai and we did it when we had been workings girls, this is only for money and sex. I love Stu and I will finish with John this time”

Moo firmly reminded Dao.

“We are now wives, and if Stu find out you’d betrayed him, you will suffer, you have been lucky so far, but if you spoil things for Spock and I, our friendship will be over, do you understand, Dao?”

A chastised Dao nodded, but Moo knew she’d lied.

After Spock and Stu’s first visit to Thailand many years earlier, Dao and Moo returned to Pattaya and went back to work in the happy world bar.

Over the next few weeks Moo went with a few men, short time sex. Dao had stayed in the bar with the other girls trying to learn English and wait for Stu. However, the mamasan told Dao that Stu would not come back, they very rarely did Mamasan became insistent that Dao go with other foreigners in order to make money to support the bar, and her family.

“Besides” she told her “Stu hadn’t been sending her any money, so he couldn’t have cared that much.” Mamasan tried her hardest to convince her, but Dao felt certain that Stu would return, but to keep mamasan happy she started to be more outgoing and stayed close to Moo to learn the tricks. A few weeks went by and two foreigners came into the bar. One, a quiet unassuming,

middle-aged man, the other, a brash mouthy character who went straight over to Dao and Moo.

“Hello sexy man” said Moo

The brash man responded,

“You’re nice, if I buy you a Bacardi Breezer will you ride me like Sea-biscuit”

He then burst out roaring with laughter at his own wit knowing that the Thais wouldn’t understand.

The two men ordered Dao and Moo Bacardi Breezers and started to talk to the girls. The brash individual introduced himself as Taff from Wales and the other man called John, also Welsh and they intended to stay in Pattaya for a week.

They stayed in the bar for about an hour talking, and then the men paid the bar fines for the girls.

Dao was nervous around John, she did not want to be with him, but because of the pressure exerted by Moo and mamasan, to enjoy herself, as this was their job and besides, it would only be for a week.

Dao relaxed after a few days of fun with the welsh lads and started to enjoy being with John, who seemed a patient man and helped her with her English language. They had paid a thousand baht a day to the girls, plus bar fine. They drank in the Happy World bar every night, so everyone was pleased. Dao never felt the same excitement or affection for John as she did with Stu, but he gave her money.

Taff and John departed a week later, Dao and Moo returned to bar work. John told Dao that he would keep in contact and Taff told Moo that he wouldn’t see her again, she was too wild, which suited Moo as she liked the non-



committal short timers and loved Spock.

However, the thunderbolt had struck, John.

John kept to his word and called Dao frequently, and sent her 20,000 baht a month, without fail.

Stu and Spock returned to Pattaya a few weeks after the Welsh lads had gone home and rekindled their romances with the girls over the next fortnight and blissfully ignorant of what the girls needed to do to make a living.

Over the next few years Stu and Spock had made frequent visits as did John, although usually at different times. If Stu and John came out at the same time Dao would usually stay with Stu, but sneak out to see John, but lied to him her baby about her baby being sick and having to go home to her village. She occasionally told the same story to Stu, if John had booked an excursion away from Pattaya. This arrangement suited Dao for a while until things got serious with Stu.

Dao didn't tell John she was marrying Stu as she knew how he felt about her and did not want to hurt him, besides, Stu had been her first, long-time boyfriend.

Now married and had everything she had always dreamed about and had almost forgotten about John. That was up until a few months ago, when she and Moo were setting up the shop on Threpasit and a familiar voice behind her said.

“Hello Dao”

She turned around and saw John, smiling like a puppy that had been given a shoe to chew.

She smiled and said, “Hello John, how are you?”

They engaged in a short conversation about her

changing her phone number and how John had spent the last couple of years trying to trace her and thought about her all the time, telling her that he still loved her and was happy to see her again.

Moo had known about John for many years, but couldn't say anything to Spock, as this was the Thai way and besides, it was at Moo's insistence Dao went with John in the first place. Dao and John chatted for several minutes and John asked.

"Can I see you later?"

Dao saw the hopeful look in John's eye's and agreed to meet him later. She knew that Stu and Spock would be out until late and she and Moo usually closed the shop around 10pm and went home. She agreed to meet John at 8pm much to the annoyance of Moo, which meant she would be packing the shop stock away alone.

Dao met John in The Green Onion, a small restaurant on second road, she knew she would be safe meeting John there as it was a place she and John had eaten together many times before, and a place Stu never went near.

Dao told John about Stu, who wanted to know why she never told him before. John had sent her a lot of money over the years that he'd said he didn't care because he just wanted to be with her.

Dao had not taken to being westernised or bar work as quickly as Moo, she was still gullible. To have two or more boyfriends was normal, mamasan had told her it was only her work until a commitment was made by the *ferang, foreigner*.

Moo only went short times for business and once she

committed to Spock that stopped. However Dao had grown fond of two foreigners.

Dao became confused and although Stu was now her husband and she loved him, John still wanted her and had sent her a lot of money in the past.

They finished eating and John pleaded.

“Will you come to my room and talk some more.”

Dao felt sorry for John, who told her he slept alone and assured her would never take another girl, now he had seen her again. Dao nervously agreed and they left the restaurant and went to John’s hotel.

Over the next few months, Dao had liaisons with John, unbeknownst to Stu. She didn’t know how to say no to John, she realised that she had broken his heart, so felt guilty and remorseful and spent the odd day and occasional a few hours at night with John when he came to Pattaya. This wasn’t a problem in Dao’s mind, as she now only had feelings for Stu, her husband

Moo had tried to talk Dao into ending the affair with John many times, she told Dao secret trysts were, although commonplace in Thailand, it wasn’t accepted by westerners.

Pon and Stu stayed awake all night. Pon was worried and restless, and Stu couldn’t sleep through Spocks snoring.

The telephone rang at 6am, it was Thran.

Pon put on the speakerphone so they could all hear.

“Good morning everyone” said Thran “I have received a call from the kidnappers, this time however the voice was synthesised, unidentifiable. The conversation

was brief and had instructions for you, Pon”

Pon looked bewildered and Thran went on to inform them.

“On Kim’s flight there would be two unclaimed pieces of luggage, Kim’s and one other belonged to, a Mr. Lang Duc, it was a green holdall with a North Territory logo, and you will find instructions in that. That was all he said”.

“Ok” said Pon “I will check and inform you later of the contents and hopefully a plan”

Pon called the airport to retrieve the luggage and conduct a search for the whereabouts of Mr Lang Duc.

Pon, Stu and Spock arrived at the airport an hour later and were met by Taksin, who hustled them through to the operations centre in the VIP lounge. A holdall was on a table with its contents laid out, which were some old clothes, rags and a large envelope addressed to:

Prime Master, Pon Meesilli,

“This was laid on top of that pile of clothes,” said Taksin.

“What about Lang Duc?” enquired Pon?

Taksin showed Pon two copies of photographs from the computer records of entries and exits.

“Lang Duc arrived on Kim’s flight in the afternoon and never claimed his baggage” said Taksin pointing to one image, “and Mr Huer Deng departed on the Vietnam flight at 6:30pm” showing him the other photograph

“Same man, different name and passports” exclaimed Pon “That’s why they waited and called in the evening to give their man chance to get away and back into Vietnam. This has been carefully planned”

“Shall we call Vietnam” enquired Taksin “and find him.”

“No” said Pon, “He will be long gone and we don’t know his real name, but I will mention it to Thran later, they may have his picture on their databases”.

Pon took the envelope and ripped open the seal. He pulled out a sheet of A4 typed paper and read it. A strange look came over his face as he pulled out the rest of the contents. There were several aged photographs, newspaper clippings and a Compact disc.

Pon read the letter:

*If you want to see Kim Meesilli / Hern Tangh, alive you must follow the instructions on the enclosed DVD.*

The letter then carried on to spell out the individuals who should be involved, along with the kidnaper’s demands. Pon and Taksin had seen the clippings and photographs before they had been uncovered in an investigation several years earlier.

Pon showed the letter to Stu and Spock and they looked at the newspaper clippings. One in particular caught their attention. It was an old picture of them with Pon, Taksin, some officials and royals taken outside the ‘temple of the sacred light’ and because the article was in Thai, Pon translated it for them. Pon, Stu and Spock’s heads had been circled by a red marker pen on the clipping.

They looked baffled at one another.

“This is what they wanted in exchange for Kim,” said Pon handing Stu an enlarged photograph.

The lads stared at the photograph and, as Pon

ordered a DVD player to be brought in, Stu whispered to Spock, and showed him a picture that he was holding.

“That fu\*\*\*ing box will be the death of us”

“Another adventure matey, maybe catch some fish”  
smiled Spock trying to lighten the situation.

A DVD player and TV were set up. Pon placed the disc into the slot and pressed play. There was silence in the room as the disc loaded and then a face that had been digitally distorted, appeared on the screen.

## – Chapter Three –

**S**heik Mohammed Del Alaz was terminally ill, he had been given only months to live. He lay in his private hospital room inside his palatial home in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He had the best care and facilities that his wealth could buy as money to him was certainly no object. His bodyguards and medical staff were never more than a few seconds away from his large well-equipped bedside.

From his death bed he could view all the treasures and holy relics from different cultures that he had amassed over the years, the collection, worth billions of dollars, had previously been housed in a large underground vault. Now he'd moved to where he could always view them, and displayed in his final accommodation and soon to be, mausoleum.

'These would appease Allah and the prophet Mohammed, he'd always thought, as he looked around at the religious icons.

Only one relic however had eluded him, and cost the life of his closest advisor, and friend Abdul Bhunto. That was many years ago, but he had not forgotten what he had witnessed from the webcam and the newspaper clippings regarding Abduls demise, which still haunted him.

He'd kept up to date with the news media of the event, but due to his other business commitments at the

time, followed by his illness and its slow and painful spread, he hadn't found the time or energy to pursue his justice or exact his revenge.

Now he knew and accepted his demise, he could therefore focus on his last defiant act.

Mohammed looked around his treasure room and the empty case that he'd had built to house the relic he'd never obtained, with an enlarged photograph of Abdul placed in the space.

He stared at the photo and thought to himself. 'Soon my old friend, I will see you. You died bravely on the quest with the infidels. You will be sitting at Allah's right hand,' He prayed to himself

Mohammed's pain grew, he self medicated a little morphine from the machine at his side and fell into a narcotic sleep. He was awoken moments later by somebody at his bedside, he gazed as an ectoplasmic figure took shape. It was Abdul, who appeared gaunt and ghostly with empty hands cupped as if something appeared to be missing. The apparition looked at Mohammed and then faded. Mohammed woke up in a cold sweat and let out a piercing scream, his bodyguards immediately rushed over to him. He calmed down after the doctors gave him another sedative and relaxed into a dreamless sleep.

Mohammed awoke pain free, alert, and irritated a few hours later and summoned, Mophi, his head of security.

Mophi was a giant, expressionless faced man from Iran. He had been ex-Iranian Special Forces and was now



a mercenary and a ruthless bastard.

Mohammed typed instructions into a laptop computer on his bed table. Mophi entered and walked over to his bedside. He showed the bodyguard the pictures on the screen.

“Get the Ayatollah, Sons of Islam have been offended and slain, we need to get a fatwa, ruling, against these infidels.

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Dawn broke over the arid, dry, plains of Las Vegas. The clanging of gates, loud heavy doors banging and the chatter, yelling of prisoners and guards, signalled another day at Clerk detention centre. The inmates’ all getting prepared for the breakfast line up.

A tall slim man stood alone, his looked weary as he waited in line for food. The stocky, shaven headed tattooed man who stood behind him shoved the man.

“Sorry professor” he mocked in a southern US accent. The man turned and stared at the large bully and then he faced forward as the server dolloped some scrambled eggs onto his plate. The tattooed man shoved again

“Do you intend to eat that?” he growled

“Yes I am” said the man in a high-brow southern English accent.

“You are getting brave professor,” said the lout  
They both walked over to a large table and sat; the bully glowed at the slimmer man.

The Englishman picked up his plate and scraped the

contents onto the bully's, who smiled.

"That's better" he growled and started to eat both breakfasts.

The Englishman got up and sauntered back to his cell. 'I hate this place' thought Julian Grimes 'But it's better than the alternative, I suppose'.

Grimes A.K.A John Crawford and also known in Las Vegas as the Duke of Southerby, had served six months of a seven year jail sentence for multiple gambling frauds he'd committed around Vegas. Grimes had returned to Vegas and set up another convoluted con against the man he had previously conned out of a fortune, Sheik Mohammed Del Alaz.

Grimes arrived in Vegas and had spent a few months settling in. He'd integrated himself into the high rolling scene at the casinos and acquired a nasty cocaine habit. He became sloppy and uncontrollable.

Funded by the Sheik, he lived far beyond his means and kept the Sheik continually paying for the fictional quest to discovery of the whereabouts of the missing Gnostic gospels of Judas Iscariot, which Grimes had claimed contained documented conversations between Judas and the Messiah and stating that the information within the gospels had been reputed to be mind blowing revelations about Judas being requested by Jesus to betray him to the Romans, thus completing his final act for god.

After several years of living the high-life, the Sheik and his advisors warned Grimes that they now wanted results. The Sheik threatened to cut off his funds for search and excavation, wine, women and song and give him a short deadline to produce some proof.

Grimes, becoming fearful that his ruse was about to be uncovered, flew to England and met with an old acquaintance. A Cambridge professor who specialised in translating early languages, and although Grimes had previously duped the professor, they formulated a plan to fool the stupid Sheik. Grimes then travelled to Beni Masah, in Egypt, the site of the discovery of the original gospels and other scrolls found from the same period. These had been leather bound, Coptic papyrus and, after befriending a local official with a few bribes, he obtained an old batch of papyrus containing only a small piece of script, which had been considered of no historic value.

He returned to England where he and his colleague salabrated the text, to collect the small piece of the remaining ancient ink, and erase the text completely. This took weeks of effort with microscopic scraping, shaving and laser to achieve. Grimes colleague, Professor Daniel Farquarson, mixed the reconstituted ink with squid ink and used an ageing process that he'd pioneered. It took several weeks for the new ink formula to integrate and stabilise, and then he wrote a different set of words on the Coptic papyrus.

Grimes played roulette in the Riviera hotel's casino. His mobile phone rang.

"Hi John" said the voice on the line from England using the name that he knew Grimes by.

"Hi Dan" said Grimes "Is it finished?"

"Certainly is" Daniel said breathing out a mock sigh of relief.

"Great" said Grimes "I will be on the first available

flight to London.”

“See you soon” said Dan and hung up

Grimes lit a cigar, picked up his martini and put his arms around an escort girl who hovered nearby.

“Pick a number young lady and put \$10000 on it, I’m on a roll.

The next day Grimes flew to Cairo and met his contact, Fayed. There was another man with him, a young tall Egyptian, who introduced himself as Tariq, the editor for the Sawi Al-Azhar the weekly independent newspaper. The three went to the Grand Hyatt hotel to a pre booked conference room. After approximately one hour, the editor and the contact departed.

Grimes exited ten minutes later, took a taxi to the Cairo international airport, and caught a British airways flight to London, Heathrow.

Grimes arrived in Cambridge during the early hours of the morning and, after hiring a car at the airport drove to Dan Farquarson’s house in Cambridge.

Dan invited him in, and then led him into the living room where he had a leather bound bundle of papyrus laid out on the table. Grimes took the pile of papyrus and whilst Dan made a pot of tea, he unfolded it to inspect Dan’s handy-work.

The writing seemed perfect, it appeared aged and faded and, although he couldn’t understand the text, he felt certain that Farquarson would have written something poignant.

Dan brought in the tea and while he poured it into bone china cups, Grimes enquired

“What have you written?”

“Oh, as you instructed, conversations between Judas and Jesus, with one in particular about the Messiah asking Judas to grass him up. That’ll cause a stink in Rome if it ever gets out” chuckled Dan.

After about an hour, Grimes got to his feet, thanked Farquarson and handed him \$200.

He looked at Grimes and asked,

“Same as the last time, what can I do with dollars; don’t you at least have sterling? You promised me a lot more, £2000 to be precise. It took weeks of hard work. He protested.

“No” said Grimes becoming aggressive. “That’s all I got from my buyer, now take it or leave it”.

Reluctantly Dan took the money. Grimes left and got into his hire car smiling at the stupidity and weakness of Farquarson. Dan Farquarson watched from the window as Grimes pulled away. He smiled and spoke aloud

“Shame me once, then shame on you. Shame me twice, then shame on me”

He refreshed the teapot and fiddled with the mobile phone that he had taken from Grime’s jacket pocket that he’d hung in the hallway. He turned on the phone and started to browse the contacts.

Grimes did another bounce flight to Cairo airport a few days later and again met with Tariq and Fayed Tariq handed him a copy of a newspaper and Grimes handed them both a wad of cash. He then boarded a flight to King Khalid International airport, Saudi Arabia and taken to Mohammed’s palatial residence.

Mohamed apologised for rushing the search, but it had been many months since his search began and had so far cost the Sheik a small fortune, most of which had gone on the roulette wheels. Grimes did not mind, as his depleting money stock would soon be replenished. He convincingly deceived the Sheik about the search, recovery and, how he'd eventually managed to obtain possession of the lost gospels.

Grimes produced the leather bound pieces of papyrus and handed them to him.

The Sheik unravelled the roll and stared at the scripture.

“Excellent Julian” he exclaimed.

Grimes then gave the Sheik the newspaper that Tariq had given to him written in Arabic. The front page had a photograph taken inside a small cave with empty catacombs and a few small pieces of ancient papyrus scattered around the floor.

The article read:

*A cave was found two days ago on the outskirts of the village of Minya Beni in the district of Mazar. The cave contained several empty catacombs. The evidence suggests from the remaining fragments of papyrus that these may have been the long rumoured parchments from the Gnostic gospels and scriptures of Judas Iscariot, the cave was almost empty, the Egyptian police believes this to be a recent plunder and following several leads.*

“Excellent Julian” thrilled the Sheik and handed Grimes a suitcase containing a million dollars in cash.

The Sheik leaned back in his chair and spoke to

Grimes

“Why don’t you take a well earned break? You can call me when we you have another acquisition”

There had been something about the Sheiks expression that worried Grimes.

Grimes never phoned the Sheik often and when he did it was either from somewhere on his Middle East visits or the United Kingdom, telling Mohammed that he had been doing research. Grimes, although always a meticulous con man who usually left no loose ends or trace now felt a little uneasy.

Several days later, as he had been again loosing at the roulette tables, a concierge from the Riviera came up to him.

“Sorry to disturb you, your grace, but there is a phone call for you”

“What?” said Grimes “Nobody knows I am here.”

Grimes went over to the reception desk and into a phone booth. He picked up the receiver and said.

“Hello”

“Hello Julian or maybe I should call you Duke Phillip, of Southerby” said a voice on the other end of the phone.

Grimes stammered and replied

“Hello Mohamed, what can I do for you?” still bemused as to how the Sheik had found.

“If you look outside your booth you will see a large Arabian gentleman”.

Grimes looked and sure enough stood at the side of a pillar in the plush hotel stood a giant Arab, glaring at him.

“That is my bodyguard, Mophi and he has been

following you since you left my home.” Mohammed told him.

“Why?” said Grimes “you have the papyrus and the clipping from the newspaper”

“Oh yes, the fake clipping,” said Mohammed “The one written by the, late Tariq Fayed”

“Late” repeated Grimes, now terrified

“Nasty accident” said Mohammed “drowned in his pool” Mohammed continued. “As for the papyrus shall I tell you what it says should I? My translators deciphered the following: Baked beans in tomatoes sauce, Cheese, bread sliced etc. . . . Need I go on,” said the sheik “Oh” he added, remembering something else “as well as a shopping list there was also an item that my research team couldn’t understand, but a friend of yours from England, Dan, kindly pointed out that it was the instructions for using your mobile phone”

The Sheik then went silent to give Grimes time to respond.

Grimes responded and rushed out to where Mophi stood and told the giant, intimidating Arab that Mohammed needed to speak to him, urgently. Mophi went into the booth, picked up the phone, and spoke to the bewildered Mohammed, who knew Mophi had fallen for Grimes ploy and ordered him to find Grimes, who had rapidly scarpered onto the casino floor.

Mophi went onto the gamblers floor, but Grimes was nowhere to be seen. Mophi continued to search until he got a tap on his shoulder from two, in-house security guards.

Mophi was ordered to go with them to their office



within the inner section of the Casino. He was led between the two burly security men into a big warehouse. The security men told him to sit down. Mophi glared at the two, smiled and struck the nearest guard in his throat with lightning speed, and before the other guard could react to the surprise attack Mophi struck him hard on the jaw-line knocking him unconscious.

He then went behind the choking man and sharply twisted his head and snapped his neck. He repeated the process with the unconscious guard and then calmly walked out through the casino and into the hot Vegas air. He then rang the Sheik for further instructions.

Grimes snook around Vegas for a few more months, until his money ran out. He didn't care, he knew that he was a dead man walking, but figured that the Sheik would assume that he had bolted far from Vegas and search elsewhere. The Sheik had never cared about the money, which meant nothing to him, he'd sort of respected Grimes for being able to fool him for all those years, he liked this toffee nosed Englishman and he'd only sent Mophi to scare him and then return to Saudi, which had been accomplished at the cost of only two lives.

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Grimes spent the next few months terrified and amassed a fortune in debt. He turned himself in and admitted to the police how he had conned nearly every casino in Vegas out of millions posing as an English Duke and selling non-existent plots of real estate and forged deeds to fake castles, and with his previous spending and elaborate

cons, every casino gave him large credit facilities. Grimes wanted to be caught; he knew that the safest place for him would be prison.

He confessed to everything, even for crimes he hadn't committed and sentenced to seven years in prison.

He had spent most of his life escaping justice and now wanted to be locked up.

He was arrested under his real name, John Crawford and detained in Clerk county detention centre.

Because of his arrogant nature and posh English accent, the other inmates targeted him and the guards hated the fact he had wasted and gambled away more money in two minutes that they could earn in a lifetime, so they turned a blind eye when he was bullied.

Grimes's only ally was a friendly Arab in the next cell.

The Arab told Crawford that he had come to Vegas on holiday from his home in Egypt. Befriended some Egyptians who lived in Vegas who duped him into being a mule for supplying cocaine, the police caught him delivering what he'd thought were bibles to a local priest. Crawford spent many hours in conversation through his cell bars passing codes for just a general chin-wag, he found the Arab to be intelligent, articulate and his knowledge on forged artwork, Crawford had found fascinating and plausible. The only time they lost contact was when a new cell-mate arrived and intimidated Crawford and their conversations ceased. However, the new cell-mate was found dead in the shower block, his throat slit with a shank.

Crawford had just had his food stolen again and sat in his cell, staring into space. A prison guard came into his cell.

“Crawford” he barked, “Pack your gear you are being released.

“What?” said Crawford “but I am not due for parole for at least another three years.”

“I don’t know, said the guard “now do as you are told and pack your gear.”

Confused, he packed his meagre prison belongings and trudged to the release section and given his personal effects, although his clothes now smelt musty, it felt good to get out of prison fatigues and into a suit.

A deputy sheriff came over and along with the prison, guards checked Crawford out. A large gate opened and the deputy, along with Crawford walked outside. Crawford panicked, insisting that the deputy inform him of why he has been released early.

“You certainly have friends in high places” was all the deputy would say as they both got into a police car and drove off along the desert highway into Las Vegas.

The deputy pulled the squad car into the parking lot at the South district police station. He and Crawford went inside.

An embassy official stood in the waiting area. He introduced himself as a U.K attaché, Crawford was then informed by the man that he had been released due to an anonymous benefactor, who’d paid off all his debts.

Crawford became afraid.

“So what happens now?” he nervously asked

“You will deported to the U.K. Once we have all the

paperwork” said the official “and I will be escorting you to the airport”

Crawford and the official left the police station after about thirty minutes. They got into a small saloon car and sped off towards Mc Carren airport.

About four kilometres before they reached the airport, the car pulled into a diner car park and the attaché said to Crawford

“We still have a few hours before the flight, so do you fancy a last taste of US cuisine at its finest?” and chuckled.

“Ok” said Crawford, now a little edgy, as something about this man’s behaviour didn’t seem normal.

They sat in a booth and Crawford ordered a burger. The attaché excused himself and went to the washroom.

After tucking into his burger, savouring the flavour, the attaché returned and sat back down.

Grimes became aware of someone stood behind him

“Slight change of plan, Julian” said the man.

“Nobody has called me Julian for years,” He said anxiously, spitting out bits of burger.

“Maybe my friend’s employer has,” the man grinned as he pointed to the figure stood behind Grimes

Crawford spun around and looked up into the intimidating face of Mophi.

“Shall we go?” said the man posing as an attaché.

A dishevelled Crawford got off his seat, like a condemned man walking to his execution, and went outside.

Mophi took Grimes around the back of the diner, and got into a limo.

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Sheik Mohammed Del Alaz hobbled around his large hospital room gazing at his treasures. The room was under a large golden dome, built on the top of his Mecca wing, a large building that faced S.S.W towards Mecca approximately 700kms away. The centre of the dome was in exact alignment with the centre of Mecca. The dome section and Mohammed's private ward housing his treasures were impregnable

Within the vault there were housed 130 tempered glass cases, with all but one containing a religious icon or precious treasure.

The ceiling was adorned with paintings, murals and collages that had been artistically created by modern day artists, copied from the originals in Mohammed's collection and transferred onto his special ceiling material. His temperature regulated air-conditioners and heating, kept his treasures in perfect condition, and filled the back of the dome into rows similar to library bookshelves, although with somewhat large items. He had electronically operated panels, which covered large highly tempered glass tinted planes to the front of the dome facing Mecca. Inside his private hospital ward also had a comfortable plush study area with sofa's, desks and computers placed around his array of life preserving equipment, with another small piece of equipment that looked out of place and situated on a side wall.

Both internally and externally the dome was not only a work of art, but held a sinister secret item that Mohammed had included, which would ensure, that unlike

the Egyptian pharaohs, who'd left their treasures to be pillaged and plundered. Mohammed had been adamant that this wasn't going to happen to his.

Under the exterior of the gold plated dome, the ceiling was covered in Reinforced Carbon-carbon, RCC space shuttle tile material tiles, and a layer of laminated Graphite resin. This gray and lifeless material was then adorned with the fantastic paintings and murals, which appeared normal, except for the fact it could withstand temperatures exceeding 1260 C temperatures. Internally it had been reinforced with steel and concrete to ensure sure this building was a bunker. However it wasn't designed to protect from any attack from the outside. This had been designed to protect the outside from events that would occur within.

Two small silver canisters, skilfully engraved to match in with the decor hung on the wall and blended in with the decor. However, these sinister containers were full of Tithium and deuterium gas, which, harmless on their own, but when mixed became a detonator for the fusion boosted fission bomb that Mohammed had installed into a small space under the floor underneath his hospital bed, a Russian layer cake, acquired from Saddam Hussein

The bombs kiloton yield had been calculated to destroy the room and turn his treasures into plasma, which would encase the room, making everything unsalvageable. The room would remain radioactive for several years, so Mohammed's legacy to the mortal world would be. . . . Nothing.

A doctor came into the room, Mohammed returned to his

bed and reconnected his machine leads and assured the doctor he felt fine, the doctor adjusted some of the equipment, took some readings and left. Mohammed reached for a remote control. A solid panel on the side of the dome slid open to reveal a window that overlooked the city. Mohammed watched and waited.

The dome glistened with gold leaf and golden Islamic crescents, except for a shimmering darkened window. It was an impressive sight to behold especially from the sky, as the occupants of an executive bell jet Ranger helicopter witnessed as the helicopter banked and landed on the helicopter pad of the Mecca wing. Three occupants got out and went into the large building, through a series of corridors and a thick electronic sliding door, and into the dome.

Mohammed sat on a large armchair behind a large wooden desk at a computer.

“Sit down gentlemen” he beckoned.

He pushed a button under his desk and a few seconds later an Arab entered with a briefcase. He handed it to one man, who opened it and counted the cash content. The bogus attaché smiled and left the room.

Mohammed then turned his attention to the remaining individuals.

“Everything went according to plan?” He asked Mophi

“Yes sir,” replied Mophi grinning

He then stared into the eyes of Grimes, who appeared gaunt, feeble and afraid.

“Hello again Julian, you’ve been a naughty man”

Julian looked at the pale, death riddled Arab and croakily whispered

“If you’re going to kill me, get it over with.”

“Kill you,” said Mohammed “My friend if I wanted you dead I would have done that a long time ago” He nodded to Mophi

“No” said Mohammed “I need your help, and because of your meticulous sense of planning it would be an easy task for you”

Mohammed tapped on a keypad and images flashed up onto a screen.

Mohammed gave details about his ghostly encounter with Abdul to now relieved Grimes. He gave him an envelope, and along with the information on the screen Grimes studied the images and the information. The Sheik became tired and said they would continue the conversation the following day.

“Just remember, Julian,” said Mohammed to the now reinvigorated Julian Grimes. “You have to find a way to carry out all my orders” he tapped his finger on a printed newspaper clipping to reaffirm Grimes was paying attention. “Oh and to make sure that this time you carry out my commands, Mophi will be coming with you”

Grimes nervously looked at the large expressionless Arab and turned to face Mohammed.

“I’ll work on this straight away,” said Grimes

“You have all the resources you require at your disposal, spare no expense, just get it done,” said the Sheik “I also have another surprise for you.”

Mohammed pressed the button again and a person familiar to Grimes walked into the room carrying a small



pewter box.

“Hello Julian” said the new arrival

“Akhim!” exclaimed Grimes, startled as he faced the Arab convict who he had befriended in Jail.

Mohammed then spoke.

“I not only didn’t have you murdered, I had you protected at all times . . . and I will have you killed if you fail me.” Weary, Mohamed made his way to his bed and Doctors came scurrying to his aid

Akhim gave Julian the box and all three departed the domed room and went to their respective living quarters.

Grimes sat behind a large desk in his quarters and placed out all the contents of a large envelope that Mohammed had given him that contained photographs, newspaper clippings and batches of information gathered throughout the years. He shuffled the papers into some kind of order then turned his attention to the pewter box given to him by Akhim. He opened the box and stared at the wide powder within.

He removed a plastic card and a three-inch thin straw from the container, spooned out a portion of the contents, formed two straight lines then bent down and snorted the powder. His nasal septum burned for a second as he sniffed the cocaine further into his nose, he leant back into the chair and thought about this strange day.

“This morning I had been in Jail fearing for my life and now I am in a billionaires quarters, snorting great cocaine, with servants running around after my every whim, just because the mad Sheik had a bad trip on Morphine and thought he’d seen his dead friend and now

he wants to give me twenty million dollars to obtain a small box and have a few people killed. I will leave the killing to the big dope, Mophi. This should not be too difficult.’

The cocaine started to make its presence felt, he again stared at the papers on the desk.

‘Akhim must have been brought into help’ he thought “Our chats had been about planning and scheming and his knowledge as a forger was unparalleled, he must be an expert if he is employed by the Sheik’

“Welcome back, Professor Julian Grimes.” He said aloud.

Crawford lay back in the chair and, as the cocaine took hold he pondered some more.

## – Chapter Four –

The room fell silent as the distorted face on the TV. Monitor started to give out information. A few military officials, the police chief, Pon, Taksin, Spock and Stu watched bewildered as photographs and newspaper clippings that they'd already obtained from the envelope were repeated on the screen, this time with commentary and a lot more information.

They all glared with interest as the blurred faded out face and the digitally transformed voice that sounded like a Darlek continued to speak.

“We have in our possession, Mrs. Kim Meesilli. For the time being, she is safe. She will remain unharmed, so long as you follow these instructions” then an enlarged picture of the jewelled box showed on the screen.

“This is what we require for the exchange of our hostage” Pon’s skin crawled when they mentioned the word hostage.

“We want possession of this relic and”, the voice continued as the picture on the screen changed.

“These three men brought to justice”

A newspaper clipping was now on the screen, which showed Spock, Stu and Pon receiving thanks from Taksin and palace officials for recovering the relic for the first

time.

The screen changed again and the voice continued.

“For the brutal, cold blooded murder of Mr. Abdul Bhunto and subsequent murder and unknown deposal of the body of Mr. Andrew Towhee. The screen showed a photograph of a smiling Abdul, and a separate photo of Towhee.

“We understand,” continued the voice “our other people involved” The screen then showed a still picture of Dam and Miguel taken from the web cam in the dolphin hotel. “Are possibly dead and had been double crossed.” The voice went on.

“The item we require had already been paid for and now must be handed over to its rightful owners”

The voice then went on to give instructions about where and when the exchange would occur, along with whom should deliver it and their instructions. This carried on in detail for another 30 minutes and finished with a chilling warning.

“You have offended a son of Islam, and any infidel life we take in this quest to achieve our goal is of no consequence to us, however, we will be honourable if our requests are fully carried out.”

The screen then showed the violent scenes taken from the webcam many years ago, which showed Abdul, with the voices of Miguel and Dam calmly doing business with the relic, and then cut to the part with shouting, screaming and ended with Abduls scalp being cut off, although unseen who the killer had been as the action had taken place behind the laptop. Gunshots were heard and the last piece of footage showed Abdul leant back in a

chair, dead, with blood splatters on the camera and somebody's hand grabbing the relic off the desk in front of him. The screen then showed again, the pictures of Towhee and Abdul, along with Arabic music and chants of Allah is great, which then faded, leaving an uneasy silence in the room.

Two confused Englishmen looked over towards Pon, who acknowledged the look and said,

“I will explain later my friends, but their information is incorrect. They must have assumed that it was us three who had stolen the relic all those years ago. I am baffled, why now, and how had they found their information, especially about Kim?”

Spock just shrugged and thought.

“Who were these people and what has Pon been keeping secret for all these years?”

He wasn't angry, after all he and Stu had also been keeping a little secret from them all.

Stu just cursed “that f\*\*king box” under his breath.

Pon went and stood by a window, confused and desperate he pondered,

“Do I give up my faith and position to hand over the most treasured symbol of my faith, King and country, and can I put my best friend's lives in jeopardy to save the single most important thing in my, and my son's life. Or just refuse their demands and let fate decide the outcome?”

He thought there must be an alternative. Even though the recording had been very specific on the instructions, he felt sure that with Taksin's help they could come up

with a plan and change the game to their favour. The recording gave a time period of two days hence along with the location of the exchange. However Pon knew that they needed to gain more time to attempt a rescue. He realised listening to the recording that if they played to their rules, both he, Spock and Stu would be murdered. He assumed that had been the, ‘brought to justice’ that the recording intimated. Pon’s thoughts turned to Kim and what she must be going through, he knew she wouldn’t want him to throw his life away, but how could he look Samnan in the face later in life and tell him his mother had been killed, but maybe he could’ve prevented it.

Taksin interrupted Pons thoughts

“What are your instructions Prime Master?”

Pon turned to face Taksin and said

“I don’t know my friend, there appears no way to contact them, we need more time to think and plan. I think all we can do is pray and ask Buddha for help and advice.” Buddha must have been listening as Pon’s mobile rang, it was Thran.

The room again went silent as Pon spoke to Thran.

The conversation lasted for fifteen minutes however, over the last few minutes of their dialogue, Pon had a wry smile. He finished the conversation and addressed everyone, who stood agog awaiting the news.

“Firstly” said Pon, “My wife is safe and unharmed, they let Thran speak to her via their sat phone.”

Pon then went on to say they had demanded complete compliance and would send one of their men to Thran’s home to ensure this. Although. Thran would be their connection; this man would be their liaison and monitor

the situation. The kidnappers had informed Thran the system they had put in place to monitor this had been scrupulously planned, and any deviation from the instructions would result in Kim being killed.”

Thran informed Pon that the kidnapper’s agent would arrive at his house later that day, so all investigations would have to be carried out from Thailand, which Thran would hurry to authorise. He told Pon that any relevant information he would transmit to the Thai operations centre.

Pon then told those gathered of the good news relayed by Thran. The Sat phone they had used to communicate with was a new piece of secret hard-wear developed by the U.S. It was untraceable, according to the U.S military and it is impossible to triangulate a fix. However, the Chinese already have the technology and they stated that although it was difficult to trace, it was possible. Thran got both superpowers on a race to prove their claims. The Chinese had to move a few satellites into low earth orbit, but were eager to help and confident they would be able to assist. Thran arranged for the Chinese to contact Thailand if they succeeded.

Thran told Pon that he’d investigated the Englishman who had contacted him and, whose voice he’d recognised, but there were no files on any FBI or Interpol database to discover his identity from the name the man had previously used to Thran. This had baffled one FBI computer programmer, who stated he’d found ghost files with the name but nothing else, so it appeared as if the files had been deleted.

Pon repeated the last part of the conversation with Thran, who warned that they dealt with a tenacious, dangerous and motivated group, who appeared to be well funded and possessed all the latest high tech equipment. After Pon had related the information gleaned from Thran, everyone in the room started to formulate plans. Stu and Spock, who had not quite grasped the severity of the situation, planned their beer stops along the way. Pon spoke to Taksin.

“We need more time and more information,” Pon knew that any workable plan would come from Taksin’s analytical mind.

“I know Pon, but they seemed to have planned this extremely well”

Taksin thought for a moment, and suddenly had a ‘House’ moment.

*In the T.V series when Dr House gets a flash diagnosis five minutes before the show finishes, having spent most of the episode faffing [messing] around discussing Lisa Cuddy’s menstrual cycle, then abruptly announces that it’s not an infection and administers the patient drugs that miraculously cures them and they bugger off home.*

Taksin told Pon,

“I think I can buy us more time” and continued “If I’m successful then we just need to plan how to get you, Spock and Stu to their arranged point before their appointed time and attempt a rescue. That way if things go wrong, you will be already at the location and carry out



their instructions. The kidnappers need be none the wiser” Pon thought and said

“We don’t have the information of the whereabouts of Kim, only where we have to meet their agent placed with Thran’s”

“I agree,” said Taksin “but I hope we have that information soon.”

“This is a dangerous situation. I don’t want to put my friends into a harmful situation, they are innocent and oblivious to what happened before,” said a concerned Pon

Taksin spelt out his options. If they were to make the exchange, then he, Stu and Spock would almost certainly be killed. If they did nothing, Kim would be murdered. It appeared they had only one alternative, attempt a rescue.

“You have done it twice before, Prime Master,” Taksin reminded him

Pon looked over at Spock and Stu who were trying to chat up two women customs officers in the corner of the room, who had just brought them in some bottle’s of Singha beer.

The sight of his two English friends being their normal selves, gave Pon a feeling of well-being, he could think of nobody better to have by his side again, and no one he would protect more.

“Let’s formulate a plan and decide,” said Pon

“Ok” said Taksin, now noticing a gleam in Pons eyes, a look he hadn’t seen for a long time, the look of the Tinju warrior.

Taksin, Pon, Stu and Spock sat in the limo and headed back to the palace and Taksin’s operation centre. They

had maps and information about Vietnam, which had been transferred to the computers situated in the operations centre at the airport by Thran. Taksin and Pon sifted through the paperwork, examining documents and maps. They spoke in Thai, as it was easier for them at this stage, they didn't need Spock and Stu to be fully aware about what was happening.

“What's up buggerlugs, you're quiet?” enquired Spock as he noticed Stu looking a bit sullen.

“I've been trying to call Dao all day but her phone has been off, and she only turned off her phone when she goes to see her son, because she told me there was no signal in her village. . . . She never mentioned that she was going”

Spock, seeing his mate confused and unhappy, phoned Moo

“Hello goyt-head,”

Stu heard Moo mumble.

“Where's Dao?” enquired Spock

Another mumble

“Why don't you know?” asked Spock

The conversation went on for about five minutes then Spock hung up.

Spock relayed the message from Moo. Dao had gone out, but she didn't know where” Spock reassured Stu.

“Maybe she's got a problem with her phone matey”

“That's strange, those two are usually joined at the hip,” said Stu

“I wouldn't worry mate, it is probably nothing” said Spock, but the way Moo sounded, Spock knew that she

hid something.

“Yeah, you’re right, let’s do some more research for our adventure” said Stu and picked two small books from the pile, Vietnamese pub guides, and started to study them.

Pon and Taksin scrutinised the maps.

“How long had it been before Thran set up his initial road blocks?” asked Taksin,

“It would have been roughly three hours after I called him to inform him that Kim didn’t board the flight, about 3:30.” answered Pon

“So they’d had around three hours to make a getaway, so assuming they could have done around 150-200 kilometres in that time, that was a fairly wide area to cover,” said Taksin as he circled a section on the map to denote the area. He thought for a moment about how intelligent and organised their adversaries had been so far. He looked further down the map, and then back to his markings. He pointed to an area on the map that he noticed with interest and showed Pon.

Just outside Hai Phon town Taksin pointed to a small marked, Airstrip, and said to Pon

“They would want to be in Vietnam as inconspicuous and untraceable as possible and, with the money and resources at their disposal, they probably flew into Vietnam at this airfield, less than 100km away from Hanoi airport”

Taksin dialled a number and gave instructions to one of his staff to obtain any information relevant available on his theory .He and Pon started to formulate a plan.

Stu and Spock noticed the pair no longer studied the

maps. Stu leaned over and asked Pon about the men on the photograph and what did they all have to do with it.

For the next fifteen minutes, until they arrived back at Taksin's operation centre, Pon gave them some of the details. Spock and Stu found some of it unbelievable, they had known Pon for many years and knew about him being a monk and bodyguard, but not an assassin, and although a little shocked, this revelation put them surprisingly at ease, as they knew this was going to be dangerous and could cost them less time in a bar.

Pons mobile rang, just as they pulled up at the operations centre, it was from Thran's number. Pon was about to answer when Taksin stopped him, Taksin took the phone and answered. An unfamiliar voice said.

"Are you Pon?"

"I am," said Taksin "and who are you?"

The voice ignored the question and told Taksin that he was monitoring everything so make sure they follow the instructions. Taksin told the voice, that they were now at the palace for an audience with the King to get permission to take the relic.

The voice then hung up after giving Taksin several more warnings and insults.

"That's one good start at least. He now believes that I am you, so we have a window of opportunity, but only a day and a half to fill it. I need to buy us more time," said Taksin.

"Not much time for bar-crawling matey" muttered Spock to Stu, who was again trying to call Dao. The four went inside Taksin's building.

Taksin's office, now the main control centre was

alive with activity as people spoke on phones. Large maps of Cambodia and Vietnam were plastered on the walls. Satellite photos, information on people, places and equipment were strewn about.

A man approached Taksin and handed him several copies of transcripts between a man at Air traffic control in Hanoi and a supervisor at the small airstrip. Taksin showed the information to Pon who nodded. He phoned a number that Thran had sent him.

The room went silent as Pon relayed some new information to the gathered team.

He spoke in Thai, so Stu and Spock decided to hunt out the canteen and source some beer stocks. Pon could fill them in with the details later.

Taksin started to reveal the findings and went over to the enlarged map of Vietnam hung on the wall and spoke.

“A helicopter took off from this airstrip,” he pointed to the airstrip on the map. “A small 6 seat Bell 206L-1 aircraft call sign W1342B at 3:27pm. This is well within the correct time frame to Drive from Hanoi airport to this point. The aircraft had registered a flight plan to *Tan Son Nhat* international airport Ho Chi Mihn city. The flight log registered 2 persons on board, but the airport supervisor reported seeing at least five people inside the chopper”.

Taksin continued

“The helicopter pilot then reported smelling smoke at 4:45 and stated he’d found a clearing for an emergency landing, here” Taksin again pointed to the map, marked the area with a felt pen and went on to inform them

“The aircraft landed for twenty minutes then took off again, reporting a false alarm and it landed at Ho chi mihn

airport at 6:05pm, where two people, the pilot and Co-pilot, logged in.

The ground authorities at Ho Chi Minh investigated the helicopter which they found out, had never been registered. It was apparently an import, which according to the phoney paperwork they'd received, it had been undergoing trials. The pilots must have also had false papers, they quickly disappeared. Now the police departments are investigating the helicopter to see if any evidence can be found that the abductors and Kim were on board".

He paused and then announced

"We will concentrate our search in this area" again pointing at the map and the area Taksin had circled.

"That appears to be the side of dense rain-forest" shouted one of aids

"We are aware of that" said Taksin "and the nearest township is miles away and heavily policed, so here would be a perfect place to hide" He tapped his finger on a landmark within the area and continued.

"If we're correct we have a 75 square mile area to search"

A man went up to Taksin and handed him a copy of a satellite image of the area from three months prior. Taksin studied the image against the up to date image and continued, "The rain-forest appears to have grown overnight, so I think that this is the correct position, but unfortunately that will still only give us a day to get there." Taksin rubbed his forehead with frustration and thought. It was too far, there was too vast an area to cover, and Pon, Stu and Spock had fly to Hanoi to meet with

their man at Hanoi airport as instructed with the relic the following day, therefore without more time it would be impossible for Pon to attempt any rescue.’

It would be difficult mobilise the Vietnamese military as the movements had to be directed through Thran as commanded by the kidnappers who would be monitoring their movements. They couldn’t send in the Thai army, again too indiscreet and the abductors would find out.

Disheartened, Taksin looked at Pon; suddenly he had an idea and a glimmer of hope.

“You can be in two places at once now they believe I’m you, but for you to attempt any rescue we will need a lot more time.”

Taksin ordered silence in the room, took Pon’s phone and said

“It’s a long shot, so here goes nothing”

He dialled Thran’s number and placed the phone on speaker phone

The voice answered

“Have you kept to your schedule?”

“No” said Taksin and continued, “The royals refused the request as the relic is not theirs to decide, it belongs to the people”

“You’re wife will be dead within the hour” said the cold uncaring voice

“No wait!” yelled Taksin “I can get the relic for you, but I will have to steal it and you know I am in the best position to do this, but I will need more time to set things up”

The voice paused for a few seconds and then said

“How much more time?”

“At least another five days” said Taksin “I will have to plan the robbery, escape from the palace and Thailand, and then get to Vietnam. It will take a lot of favours and involve a few close friends but I need at least five days,” pleaded Taksin who fakes remorse “I can never return, so if I do this terrible thing you will have destroyed my life,” There was a momentary pause.

“Wait!” ordered the voice and hung up

“He’ll be contacting his boss, I think,” speculated Taksin

The room was silent with anticipation for the next twenty minutes and then the phone rang

“Hello” said Taksin

“Be in Hanoi as directed on the sixth, same time, same place and I will be contacting you every day. . . . And remember, we can always trace you,” said the voice, who abruptly hung up

A sigh of relief echoed around the room. Now they had five days in total to plan and complete a mission, which they still felt would not be a lot of time but they could to try and Taksin could keep in contact with the kidnappers and everything could be monitored and any problems overcome. This had been the break that they needed. Taksin looked at Pon.

“Now my friend, we can instigate a rescue.”

They would require the help of another friend and family member. Pon called Brigadier Lee Tangh, Kim’s uncle in Cambodia who had already been made aware of Kim’s abduction and desperately wanted to help.

Taksin and his aides continued to formulate plans.



Pon had a discussion on the telephone with Lee.

Stu and Spock were chilling out in the canteen enjoying some cold beer and snacks. They filled some bags with Singha cans for the journey ahead.

A young woman came into the centre and handed Taksin a sheet of paper. Taksin looked, smiled, and asked for everyone's attention:

"This is from The China National Space Administration [CNSA]" said Taksin "they have just picked up a trace from the Untraceable. American satellite by using a satellite they pushed down into earth's lowest orbit, which gave a triangulated position for here, which confirmed our suspicions"

He pointed to the area on the map.

"We now have a search area of 2kms. . . I bet the Americans are really pissed off," he continued

"That's the location confirmed, so now let's use the time to plan well"

"But it will take days, just to cover that jungle terrain" remarked an old Thai colonel"

"Not necessarily" said Taksin and produced a large laminated sheet of paper. A tourist guide.

It had been a long day, Stu and Spock snoozed in the conference suite. Pon came in and told them they would all be departing soon, so they should pack.

The first part of the plan needed to be launched from Lee's estate in Cambodia where they were to meet up with five of his elite commandos, who were highly trained in jungle warfare, and would assist them once they'd entered Vietnam.

Stu, Pon and Spock met up in Taksin's office. Pon and Taksin waited on a delivery. Stu was still unsuccessfully trying to call Dao, and Spock was picking his nose and watching a military Bell 412 helicopter land in the courtyard outside.

A woman entered with two armed guards stood either side of her. She bowed and handed Pon a small parcel, bowed again and left the room. Pon put the parcel in his old cloth bag along with the other items he would be using.

"The last resort" said Pon smiling at everyone as he puts the small parcel into his bag.

Ten minutes later one depressed looking Englishman, One stupid looking, large Englishman, holding a hat firmly on his head to avoid the rotor wash, and one small Thai, Elvis impersonator holding onto his mullet, boarded the helicopter.

The chopper took off in a Southerly direction, and entering Cambodia, flew towards Sihanoukville for their rendezvous with Lee.

The lads had fun in the helicopter and, because it flew low the entire way, they could see the lights of towns and cities. The lads thought it looked like different coloured land-stars glittering beneath the night sky. They noticed people going about their lives like ant colonies it was fun and amazing for Spock and Stu to witness. As they flew closer to their destination, the aircrew member let them sit in the open section at the side.

The helicopter came in for circuit and a final approach towards Lee's estate, Spock and Stu were sat in

the doorway having a whale of a time with the aircrew and dangled their legs over the side whilst happily singing away about drunken English sailor song, while they splashed their cans of beer around. They felt on top of the world.

The pilot issued an order to the aircrew, who assumed the two passengers spoke Thai, and passed on the instructions.

“What did he say?” said Spock

The aircraft banked sharply to the right, jolted the two lads who had to grasp for a handhold.

“That was close,” said Stu as a crewmember grabbed him and pulled him fully inside.

“I dropped my beer” grumbled Spock as he pulled himself inside, hung on and peered over the side edge of the helicopter.

“There are some houses below. I hope I never hit anyone.” He said

The helicopter landed on Lees large halogen lit lawn, and the passengers disembarked, ducked under the slowing rotors and went over to be greeted by a serious looking Lee and five even more serious looking Special Forces, Airborne 911 Cambodian commandos wearing black uniform, with QBZ-95 Bullpup assault rifles slung on their shoulders.

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Nick had been having a great few years. His life had taken on a blissfulness he had only ever dreamed about. He now spent almost all his time in Sihanoukville, and only

returned to the U.K. when he had a few weeks of guaranteed work lined up to make some big bucks. He lived cheaply in Cambodia with his wife Shanti. They had married the year before and every day to Nick seemed like a honeymoon. He occasionally worked in the Kangaroo Kitchen restaurant/bar and did some odd jobs around town to fill his time and subsidise his income. Shanti still worked at the Snake house and they had rented a cheap house, close to the beach.

He had not had a calamity for many years, which was proof in his mind that Spock and Stu were his nemeses.

.He sat on his roof terrace and looked out to sea at the small lights of the fishing fleet in the distance. 'Life was great' he thought as he reflected on his happy existence.

This was Nick's favourite spot, especially at night. He spent hour's just sitting, thinking and drinking beer until Shanti arrived home from work around 10pm.

For some unexplained reason he felt as if that night seemed different. Nick noticed a bright light on the horizon, which appeared to be heading towards him at great speed, and then he heard the sound of rotors.

'That's weird' he thought, 'you don't get many helicopters flying over here and I've never seen one at night before'

Nick smiled as the helicopter came closer becoming lower, and banked as it started to descend. Nick watched as the chopper flew low overhead.

He looked up and a half-empty can of Singha beer struck him on his head knocking him unconscious and a nasty

gash on the side of his head.

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The party went inside Lee's large study where plans and computers showing terrain had been laid out on a large table .Pon, Lee and the commando's went over to study information. Spock and Stu squeezed their way in.

The conversation took place in Cambodian so Stu and Spock didn't have a clue what was going on. Lee noticed the two lads looking bored. Lee had met several times before and spoke to Pon, who nodded and said to the lads

"We are planning our way to the destination, therefore it's not important for you to be here, and I will give you the details later. Lee has put his driver and S.U.V at your disposal"

Pon pointed through the window at an oncoming car heading down the large driveway towards them and said

"Why don't you go out?"

Pon then went back to studying the maps.

"Oh, and don't be late, we..."

He looked up and discovered he now spoke to thin air, as the lads had already legged it out of the study and running towards the vehicle.

"...have early starts" Pon finished his sentence

"Spock moves fast for a big lad," chuckled Lee.

Laughter flushed through the room, which broke the tension and gave them all a glimmer of hope.

## – Chapter Five –

The rain-forest reeked of death, a haze of cordite filled the air as Nguyen, and his troop crept onto their positions. There had been a bloody battle on the outskirts of the jungle, resulting in heavy Khmer Rouge losses. The Vietnamese had forced the Khmer Rouge to flee deeper into the rain-forest and scattered them in disarray. Nguyen and his troop of twenty soldiers had been ordered into the jungle. They knew what to do, they were proficient in this type of warfare and, armed with their Chinese 56 combat rifles' and rubber tyre slippers, they split up and stealthily made their way through the foliage, however this time they had been fighting an enemy who was also adept at this form of warfare.

The fighting had been fierce and as Nguyen made his way through the dense vegetation, he headed in the direction of the Mekong riverbanks, stepping over fallen decapitated corpses, some Vietnamese, but mainly dead Khmer Rouge. The stench was foul but he'd dealt with this before many years ago and now immune to it. His objective was simple, go into the rain-forest and kill or capture the fleeing Khmer Rouge stragglers, ahead of the main push through to liberate Phnom Penh.

He made his way through thick, stinging foliage, until he heard the fast flowing water. He edged his way

towards the river bank and surveyed the area. He checked the bank for any signs of an ambush, but all he noticed were rotting, leach covered corpses of dead soldiers who had been wedged in the root of mangrove trees along the rivers' edge and patches of blood in the water, swirling around like red whirlpools. He checked his bearings and turned to go back into the jungle. He suddenly came face to face with a Khmer Rouge soldier.

“Damn” he thought, “why didn't I hear him?”

Nguyen raised his rifle and aimed at the boy's head.

‘Why doesn't he fire, I am an easy target?’ he thought

He looked at his foe, who stood quivering with fear. Nguyen estimated the soldier to be about 13 years-old and looked like a street urchin; looking dishevelled and his face covered in tear streaked mud. This boy reminded Nguyen of his sons, Phaol and his little scamp, Ca, but he knew the Khmer Rouge children had been brainwashed and unfeeling.

The boy had raised his rifle, but Nguyen noticed that he shook too much to take aim, his facial expressions distorted as he fought clumsily with the large, heavy bolt-action M1 carbine rifle.

Nguyen had the boys head in his sights, the youth knew he was doomed, he closed his eyes and awaited death. Nguyen saw this pitiful site and lowered his weapon.

“Put your weapon down” he shouted swiftly in Vietnamese, hoping not to attract any attention.

The boy ignored him and fired at Nguyen, but the bullet missed and went into the jungle. Nguyen got off his

shot as the boy fired again. The bullet hit Nguyen on the top of his head and ricocheted off, unfortunately for the boy, Nguyen's bullet ripped into the boy's chest and left a small entry wound, but like any 7.62 calibre, left a gaping exit hole in the boys back, destroying his chest cavity and killing him.

Nguyen's world went fuzzy and black as he fought consciousness. His legs gave way and he tumbled uncontrollable down the muddy embankment. He tried to grab onto anything to stop his fall, but this proved futile as he splashed into the dirty, brown, blood drenched fast flowing, Mekong River.

He became caught in the fast flowing current, which dragged him along and under. He tried to grab hold of something to stop his advance. He managed to grab hold of a mangrove root. He took a lung full of air and held on to the root, pulling himself through a mass of floating foliage and debris to the edge of the bank and wedged himself between some trees roots. He caught his breath, to regain his faculties and rest his weary, injured body. Nguyen rested for a short while, he knew that he needed to go downstream in order to get any help, so he let go of the branches and floated on his back and washed along by the current.

This wasn't a well-planned strategy as he drifted along on his back for about forty minutes being smacked against rocks in the shallows, and pulled under in the depths.

Exhausted and feeble he decided to guide his body into the shallows and hang on to something and rest. Eventually he grabbed onto the branches of a fallen tree,



but some of the branches spiked him in the side, causing more puncture wounds and lacerations to his already beaten flesh. He knew that he had lost a lot of blood from his head wound and felt that he was going to die.

He swung around in the shallow water; his foot touched a root under another fallen tree. He wedged his foot under the root and let go of the branch, pivoted around and managed to beach himself onto a shallow sandy bank. He had snapped his ankle on this manoeuvre, and the pain felt excruciating. He took a few breaths then his world went dark. Nguyen had sporadic lapses of consciousness. He remembers looking up at two shaven headed emancipated faces smiling down at him, and then blackness, his next recollection saw slight tree top canopy and he felt a sharp pain under his armpits were a hard vine had been tied, he'd felt a sensation of being lifted and dragged, and then darkness. He regained conscious again as the smell of decaying flesh filled his nostrils, he recognised the same face from before, who now mopped his brow. Although the woman had a gaunt placid face, a skull covered in skin with despair ridden eyes, Nguyen could tell she is a kind and caring woman.

The woman lifted his head and gave him a drink of foul smelling Mekong water, which he drank before losing consciousness.

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Nguyen's nursemaid, Darah, had been once a happy woman, but all that now seemed a lifetime ago. She and her husband had been lawyers 'new people', and used to live in Phnom Penh, before they being shipped out to various communes and work camps, along with other new people, who were despised by Pol Pots', Khmer rouge regime, who worked them to death.

Two years after they'd arrived at a camp, Darah got pregnant, which made life easier as the Khmer rouge knew they would have another youth to brainwash, so the hard labour for Darah stopped. She and her husband were moved to an easier work camp closer to Phnom Pehn. Eight months later, the Vietnamese invaded to liberate Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge attitudes dramatically changed and the heavily pregnant, undernourished Darah and her husband were scheduled to be transferred to Choeng Ek death camp, and better known as the killing fields.

They, along with others were forced to tramp several miles under guard and crammed into a small river boat, driven down the river to one of the small transit camps set up to process the wretched individuals and slot into the schedule for final transfer to Choeng Ek their final destination.

They arrived at the transit camp, located within thick rain-forest and accessible from the small riverbanks. They were herded off the small vessel and taken to a patch of jungle that had been cleared from trees and vegetation. They were ordered to sit down and a young Khmer rouge soldier barked out the Pol Pots doctrine and what was expected of the new arrivals.

There was no food or water available, and told they would be leaving early the following morning for Choeung Ek and would be fed there. There were about 30 soulless Cambodians in the camp, kept prisoner in small palm leaved roofed open shelters.

Darah had felt sharp twinges on the boat and, during the evening, with the help of a woman in the next shelter, using dirty Mekong water and chewing through her umbilicus chord, she gave birth to a son. The infant tried to in vain to suckle on Darah's shrivelled up breasts.

The sound of gunfire and shouting brought the new day to an abrupt beginning with everyone being ushered outside into the small clearing. The Khmer Rouge soldiers were shouting, screaming, and pushing the people into two rows, with men on one-side, women the other. They were forcibly knelt down and told to dig. As they all started to dig with their bare hands, they could hear the gunfire, coming closer.

The soldiers scurried around them, told them to stop digging, put their hands behind their backs and stare at the ground.

The frightened people complied and two soldiers walked behind the men and two behind the women. One Khmer Rouge bound their wrists, while the other bludgeoned the back of their heads with a hoe.

There were no sounds heard from the victims during this systematic murder, they had already suffered years of torture under the Pol Pot regime and death would be welcome relief.

A young girl soldier came over to Darah and snatched her

newborn out of a small scruffy cloth holster at Darah's side. The girl nonchalantly took the infant to a nearby large tree and swung it hard against the trunk. There was only a small thud to signal the end of the baby's life, she then unceremoniously dumped the corpse at the base of the bloodstained trunk. She looked at Darah who remained expressionless and gave her an impish grin as if to say, "You're next"

Darah raised her head to look at her husband opposite. He smiled at her and she noticed that his hands were about to be tied. Happy memories of them together washed through her and she hoped they would spend an eternity of peace together. A Khmer rouge soldier pushed her husband's head down and then a loud crack sent his lifeless bloody body lurching forward, face down into a small pit of earth.

Dara felt her arms being pulled tighter behind her back as the soldier tightly bound her wrists.

A loud explosion suddenly shook the ground as a mortar hit the top of a nearby tree, sending shards of metal, wood, flame and smoke, cascading above their heads. The thunderous blast bought pandemonium to the Khmer rouge. Panicking they shouted, screamed at one another and fired their rifles into the jungle.

Silence ensued after about ten minutes and apart from the smoke and smell of scorched timber, it became peaceful and serene for the survivors of the genocide. They remained in the same position. Darah's ears still rang from the sound of the explosions and, expecting the Khmer rouge to return and finish the job. She thought, 'at least these bastards will get their comeuppance'. She had

heard the Khmer Rouge soldiers talking about the evil Vietnamese coming to conquer their country and they talked about being prepared to die for Pol Pot, but these evil children had run away. Darah had only hatred in her heart for them even though she was Cambodian.

Minutes passed by in silence. A man knelt opposite Darah broke the silence as the gunfire sounded to be getting further away.

“They’ve gone,” he mumbled

They looked up and saw no sign of the Khmer rouge.

They gingerly stood up and for the next few hours milled around looking for a sense of guidance and direction.

The survivors dragged their dead into the nearby jungle, and because they were too weak to dig, they covered the bodies with lime from a large brown sack, which the Khmer rouge, used to turn humans to fertiliser. They then went to their small shelters and rested, awaiting their call of death.

Over the next few days of aimlessly wondering around and realising, the slaughterers would not return. Darah and a few others reconsidered their situation and knew that they had a water supply from the Mekong and could hunt, pick or scavenge food. She was determined to survive, or at least try.

Dara and another female survivor went to survey their surrounds. They saw the bedraggled, almost dead Nguyen getting dragged around by the current and wash up onto the shallow riverbed. She saw that he’d lost a lot of blood and shouted back at the nearby camp for help as she and the other woman slid down the embankment.

Nguyen drifted in and out of consciousness over several days and, with no medical aid, he would be lucky to survive. The sixteen who now lived at the camp started to get a new sense of survival and hope. They formed into a little community, caught fish from the Mekong, and cooked on the fires, lit using basic methods. They gathered fruits and fauna from the nearby abundant rain-forest, which had been slow arduous work. They took turns in attending to Nguyen, who they'd nicknamed 'The liberator' even though in the past there was never any love between the Cambodian and Vietnamese people, however they all knew that, this time the Vietnamese had come to help rid their land of their Cambodian nightmare, the Khmer Rouge.

Several months passed and Nguyen made a slow and painful recovery. The camp remained unchanged but had a lot more activity and purpose. Flotsam had drifted down the small tributary, pieces of clothing, weapons, ammunitions and a large supply of corpses, which they had managed to drag on-shore and took anything useful and then push the naked body back, to carry on its journey. They struggled at first, but quickly became knowledgeable and resourceful and the longer they held out, the stronger they became. Because the Khmer rouge never kept these transit camps on record, no one knew the camp existed.

As Nguyen's strength returned he helped with building huts using lumber from the jungle. The stench from the previously buried corpses of Darah's, and the other survivor's families had dissipated and a pleasant floral aroma drifted through the camp, which lifted their

spirits, they felt their loved ones presence.

The corpses and useful debris stopped drifting by, which made Nguyen, assume that the battle had moved on, but neither he, nor the rest of the survivors, knew where they were.

Wary of the Vietnamese, but because they had been 'new people', educated people, before the regime, they looked to Nguyen for leadership and guidance, which he provided by using his expertise in jungle survival, hunting, scavenging and taught them the natural recourses of their jungle surrounds.

Nguyen's head wound had taken a long time to heal and, although he could remember his name and a few sketchy details from his short term memory, however his past life remained a mystery; although he felt that he had a family somewhere.

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Eighteen years passed and the camp had grown into a small self-sufficient community. They had used the rain-forest's resources' to make clothing and basic homemade implements to survive and were happy, despite being cut off from the outside and, unbeknownst to them, a conflict that had been over for seventeen years

There were now thirty-eight inhabitants, some of the men and women paired off and had children. The camp resembled a native village. Their small tributary of the

Mekong had no water traffic, due to it not being on any maps. They received their water supply from the many Klongs, small lakes, surrounding the camp. Nguyen and Darah had a child, two years after they first met. Nguyen still couldn't remember his past life, but when Darah gave birth to their son, for some strange reason Nguyen insisted they call him, Ca, even though he couldn't figure out why and. as 'fish' in Cambodian is *Threy* nobody knew what the name meant.

They developed their own language, a hybrid Vietnamese /Cambodian.

They still feared the return of the Khmer rouge, so with the rifles and ammunitions that had been washed up years before and kept in good condition, with oils from tree saps, remained on constant vigil. .

They had been trained by Nguyen to shoot, and mastered the homemade bamboo, cobra venom covered blow darts, an accurate and lethal weapon at close range. Nguyen also taught them how to rig booby traps, from the simple punji and bamboo stake pits to the lethal Malay whip log, two large logs suspended from two opposite facing trees, when the trap on the ground was tripped the logs came together crushing the unfortunate victims, messy but very effective. The community had been taught these skills and were formidable hunters especially the children. They felt safe and secure and thought that nothing or nobody could come into their world uninvited. Until the strangers arrived.



## – Chapter Six –

Grimes had planned the operation in his usual precise, meticulous, and methodical manner. He'd thought about the different scenarios of robbing the item directly from the temple, but decided after two already failed attempts, not to go down that route. Grimes knew he needed to get the relic and targets away from Thailand. He had been a guest of Mohammed now for three days and with the constant pressure being put on him by Mophi, who referred to him as Grimey, which Grimes hated, he wanted to get this job over quick and spend his millions.

He'd researched the male individuals on the newspaper clippings and while he studied the wedding photograph of Pon and Kim, he thought.

“What's her story I wonder?” and tapped away at his computer for several hours and then he came up with an idea.

He and Akhim talked over the tactics and presented it to Mohammed, who approved the plan and told them to start straight away, time was of the essence. Over the next few days', Grimes organised teams of surveyors, engineers and technicians.

The scheme was to build somewhere suitable in South East Asia that would be undetectable. He'd gathered information about Kim and her family and decided to focus his attention on her for the primarily

target.

Grimes thought that with Kim being Vietnamese, could work in their favour and decided to carry out the operation in Vietnam.

However, his plan had to ensure that Kim travelled to Vietnam, alone.

The first phase would involve the Sheik. He would use his status as a Royal dignitary, to book a private viewing of the sacred light in Bangkok, which would require the Prime Master's attendance. This would ensure Pon stayed in Bangkok.

The Sheik's staff phoned Bangkok to enquire when the viewing would be convenient for the prime master. He made an appointment, informing Bangkok that this date must be set in stone and could not be changed,

Grimes knew the Sheik's illness would be a perfect excuse for him to miss the appointment. He now had his time slot.

Grimes knew that once Kim came to Vietnam they couldn't hide her amongst the general populous as her father would eventually locate her. Therefore, he came up with a bold, albeit costly plan. He found a site that would best suit his purpose and studies satellite photos, maps and topographies of a specific area.

The site, an area of rain-forest close to the Cu Chi tunnels that he had surveyed, along with tunnel plans. He'd decided to attach his project to one of the many tunnels, within a 75mile maze of winding passage ways. Some of these tunnels contained man-made underground

rooms, which the Viet Cong had used as HQ's and hospitals during their American conflict and now a tourist attraction. He chose a vein cut off from tourist's tunnel that they could block off inconspicuously, and use as an escape route to exit and mingle with the tourists and guides.

Mophi recruited a unit of ten, mercenary soldier's, who were ex-foreign legion. Grimes hired a Vietnamese team of engineers and surveyors required for the plan. Grimes sent Akhim to Vietnam with a pot of cash and assigned him some other vital tasks.

Over the next few weeks, the project commenced. Grimes wanted the Vietnamese to believe that they intended to build a modern, technical museum underground containing war artefacts and high definition visual aids, movies, and 3D images depicting the lives of a Vietnamese tunnel fighters and the lives and deaths of the unsuccessful, U.S tunnel rats. They proposed building a high tech museum adjoining the tunnels. With a few bribes and computer generated images and movies, Akhim had convince the district government it would increase the tourism to the Cu Chi tunnels. Akhim arrived back in Saudi with planning permission, legal papers and licenses, which would keep both the locals and authorities none the wiser about their real objective.

They had surveyed the satellite photos, and printed pictures of treetops, to mimic a dense canopy, onto thin Lycra canvases, indistinguishable from the real treescape if viewed from the air.

They brought over tunnel boring machines, large generators, steel interlocking whaler walls, excavating and

TBM moles onto the site. This had been a logistical quagmire and cost a lot in bribing a few senior officials on Phu Quoc island,\* shared jointly by Cambodia and Vietnam.

They flew the heavy machinery in with an old C54 heavy helicopter, procured on Phu Quoc. This was the time they would be most vulnerable from the skies, but Grimes could monitor all satellites in the area from his Saudi Arabian H.Q, so he could direct the incoming flights without detection.

Once the equipment had arrived, the large building and survey team set to work at a frantic pace, using a shrinkage Stope technique together with Vietnamese tunnel making methods. They excavated a large area of land and dug a deep hole, approximately 30mx30m, and 6 metres deep using explosives, and small amphibious trucks to remove the dirt. They then fitted interlocking whaling steel panels to the sides and concreted on a roof 4mtre high then covered the top with earth.

A portion had been dug out from the topsoil at an angle, giving the appearance of a WW2 bunker entrance under a mud roof, which would be their entrance into the 'Operations' Centre'. A team of technicians went to work installing the environmental and electronic equipment that the team would require for their temporary stay and specialist security equipment was fitted. The builders and mercenary's carried on refitting the inside for accommodation, offices, and dividing sections off for the confinement of the awaited guests.

A larger, main entrance was bored into the rain-forest. This tunnel, approximately 2 km long connected

the jungle to the control centre. They used the printed camouflage jungle canvas to obscure any ariel view, blending in with the appearance of the rain-forest canopy.

They joined the small vein of the selected section of Cu chi tunnel network branches and closed it off with a removable panel doorway.

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Grimes had a tumultuous few weeks, the supervisors on the site were always in dispute and, with the ever present Mophi, looking over his shoulder, when the day came that he'd received the phone call to say they'd finished became a welcome relief.

Grimes, Akhim and Mophi stood at Mohammed's bedside, although wasting away and on high amounts of narcotic, analgesia, he still appeared as an astute, proud man.

"We have finished the building stage, Sheik," said Grimes

"Well done" said the weak Mohammed and gazed at Mophi

"We fly to Vietnam tomorrow morning," continued Grimes

"When can I expect my treasure and my other instructions to be carried out?" Enquired the Sheik.

"There is still a lot to do, but I estimate two months," said Grimes

Mohammed, his strength waning as the cancer ate him away, still felt strong and alert. His Physicians weren't really sure either, for some reason he seemed to

have found new energy and strength. Mohammed was convinced he was still alive because Allah wanted him to fulfil his quest

“You have two months,” croaked Mohammed  
They bowed, Grimes and Akhim left the room, and Mophi went and knelt down at Mohammed’s side.

“Keep a close eye on, Grimes” whispered Mohamed  
“and don’t forget my last instruction.”

Grimes walked with a spring in his step as he went to his quarters and stood in the shower, ‘I might have to live rough for a few months, but then the life of riley’ he thought and said aloud

“How should I going spend all that lovely money?”  
Mophi walked passed Grimes’s room and smirked; he would ensure that Grimes wouldn’t be enjoying any money.

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Grimes stood in the middle of the operations centre aghast. He looked around the underground room, it felt as if he’d just walked into a large dimly lit steel shipping container with a mud floor. The room gave of a pungent earthy aroma, making him feel claustrophobic, and gave the feeling of being buried alive.

Grimes, Mophi and Akhim had spent two days travelling to Vietnam by air and road, followed by a hot sweaty journey through the rain-forest, covered by stinging

foliage that slapped against an open jeep that weaved its way around trees and thick vegetation on its route. They drove up to the bunkers entrance and went through the door and down a makeshift set of concrete stairs into the control centre.

Grimes was not amused, he felt hot and tired and in need of a shower. He surveyed the large room, and the Vietnamese workers trying to erect walls and partitions. Electricians and technicians scurried around with plans, monitor screens and various, other equipment.

Akhim went to supervise the unpacking and storage of the extra equipment they'd brought from their Saudi control centre and Mophi went to talk to his mercenaries.

A Vietnamese man with an interpreter came over to Grimes and, through the interpreter, said that he wanted to show him around. He went through the plans with Grimes, showing him where partition walls where to be built. Then he showed him over to a small door at the rear of the centre, and explained that was the entrance for the tunnels, which Grimes had planned as the escape route. He swung back the door and a look of horror came over Grimes face. Half way up the doorway was mud and a small arch tunnel approximately 3 feet high and 3 feet wide. The man handed Grimes a torch and he shone it into the tunnel. It was the same all the way down, a small brown, wet muddy pipe, it appeared to Grimes like looking through a miner's elevator into a small hole between shafts.

“What's this?” said Grimes as he pointed to the tunnel

“Tunnel” said the Vietnamese

“It’s very small,” he said sarcastically

“Why you think we win war, you people too big, can’t turn around, tunnels easy for us. . . . What did you expect?” replied the man in broken English

‘He had a point’ thought Grimes who had expected to open the door and stroll down a large well lit and aired tunnel.

This escape route was definitely out of the question, he imagined squeezing behind Mophi who would not have fitted. ‘This day couldn’t become any worse’ thought Grimes.

He was shown along the side of the centre where the T.B.M. had been discarded, Carbine cutters removed and the driver’s cabin and tube section was now home to a few Vietnamese. ‘Over three quarters of a million dollar piece of equipment and now just a shack,’ thought Grimes.

The large tunnel entered directly into the control centre. Grimes noticed a concreted covered passage way with a concrete flat road, and a LRCV-V amphibious vehicle parked there, which they used this to transport people and equipment through the tunnel.

The Vietnamese man drove Grimes through the two kilometre stretch of artificially lit tunnel. They came out of the tunnel under the artificial canopy.

Grimes stood and looked at the rain-forest, feeling glad that Mohammed had mentioned, money no object as this project’s budget had already run into millions and, as far as Grimes was concerned had little to show for it.

He had a short stroll to get the musty smell out of his nostrils, and ordered the Vietnamese to drive him back to the control room.



With activity still going on around the centre, Grimes searched out his office area and went through his unopened boxes of equipment and papers. He started to organise some documents, photo's and copies of official papers.

“Now Mrs. Meesilli, Miss Doung, or should we now call you, Hern Tangh, what other secrets are you hiding”. he said aloud as he tapped on several photos of Kim ranging from early childhood through to her marriage to Pon along some recent prints taken by Thai ‘private eyes’ who he’d contracted.

He called Mophi and Akhim into his office and told them that the next phase must be started immediately. Mophi and Akhim never argued as they were in just as much hurry to get out of this unfinished and unhygienic underground chamber.

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**Phú Quốc** [known as **Koh Tral** by Cambodians] is the largest island of Vietnam. Administratively the island is part of Kiên Giang province. The district of Phú Quốc includes the island proper and 21 smaller islets. The district seat, Dương Đông, which is located on the west coast, is also the largest town on this island, whose total area is 574 km<sup>2</sup>. On May 1, 1975, a squad of Khmer Rouge soldiers raided and took Phu Quoc Island, but Vietnam soon recaptured it. This was to be the first of a series of incursions and counter-incursions that would escalate to the Cambodian– Vietnamese War in 1979. Tourism plays an important part of the economy with the beaches being

the main attraction. Phu Quoc is served by Phu Quoc Airport with air links to Ho Chi Minh City [Saigon]'s Tan Son Nhat Airport and Rach Gia's Rach Gia Airport.

## – Chapter Seven –

**L**ee, Pon and the commandos studied the information and maps laid out on the large desk.

Pon and Lee's plan seemed simple. The commando squad would leave that night, fly into Vietnam by helicopter and dropped into a clearing 5kms South of where the Sat phones signal had been traced, and using G.P.S and night vision equipment they would hike to the location and set up a covert intelligence and surveillance operation.

Pon, Stu and Spock would fly out later that morning, to the Chao Doc border and enter Vietnam on foot as tourists with Pon as their tour guide.

They would be driven to Cu Chi and join with a pre-booked tour of the tunnels. They planned for Spock and Stu to continue with the tour, while Pon slipped away to investigate the tunnels and later meet with the dug-in commandos to compare Intel and formulate the best strategy for a rescue attempt. He would return to stay with Stu, Spock and the tour group in Cu Chi village overnight.

Depending on the information gathered, regarding entrances, work force, firepower etc, they could decide to either, attack together with Pon, alternatively he would go in alone and assault one entrance, whilst the commandos attack another.

A helicopter would be on standby at a predetermined

landing zone to airlift the commandos and Kim to safety, with the assumption that once the kidnappers had been overcome, the agent with Thran would panic and run, or a sniper secretly positioned near Thran's house would take him out.

On a successful completion Pon would return to Cambodia with Spock and Stu.

If the commando's or Pon couldn't find a safe, easy way to infiltrate the kidnapper's hideout, they were to abort and the commando's would be airlifted out. Stu, Spock and Pon would stay in Ho Chi Minh City for a few days and then fly to Hanoi at the appointed time and date to meet the kidnaper's agent.

They finished the briefing and the commandos started to gather up their equipment as the turbines of the helicopter outside, growled into action. The commandos' silently boarded the chopper and it took off on an easterly direction, heading into the night sky.

"My best men, the elite" bragged Lee

Pon relied on them being the best and, if things went according to plan he would be reunited with his beloved wife within a few days.

"They look very competent" responded Pon and continued. "The squad leader looked intense and his footwear was interesting, his shoes looked like they were made from car tyres".

Lee chuckled, and said that they were. Lee told Pon he had to phone his Vietnamese counterpart, and family friend, this was a private number therefore it wouldn't be traced. Lee figured his brother, Thran, would be aware he would contact their friend knew Thran would have left

any messages and instruction with him.

Stu and Spock's role in this sophisticated plan was, as usual, to do bugger all. Travel along, do a touristy thing, look at some mud tunnels and try to keep out of mischief. Simple.

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Spock and Stu plans for that night was even simpler. Get drunk as quick as possible, have some fun, maybe get laid, tease Lee's driver, and then go home. Pon had phoned Lee's driver after the briefing to make sure he brought them back early, as they were due to depart at 04:30am. The instruction came too late, the lads had already given him the slip and, while the driver frantically searched the downtown area, the lads had been in a tuk-tuk heading for the beach, searching for their old friend, Nick.

Lee's driver had driven the lads to the downtown area of Sihanoukville. The last time they visited the town, they'd spent most of the time on, or near, the beach, bypassing the downtown area, because their guide Shifty, had told them that downtown was shit and now they could see why. The driver dropped them off on the quiet main street and instructed them to meet him there in one hour. Spock and Stu smiled at him and walked up a side street.

"He was a serious little man," said Stu.

"Yep" said Spock "Maybe the half empty can of Singha I left on his back seat might cheer him up."

"That's not like you to leave a beer," said Stu

"It's okay, it had gone flat" said Spock, pleased over his generosity.

They went along another side street looking for a drinking establishment and saw a sign, which made them feel at ease

“Bar” shouted Stu with glee as he and Spock quickened their pace.

They went into a large restaurant/bar, sat on some high stools and ordered two draught beers. A small squeaky voiced Cambodian girl brought their drinks over.

The long bar was well stocked with spirits. The lads noticed the number of bottles of liquor placed along the shelves on the back wall.

“Got most spirits available,” said a large friendly Australian man who stood behind the bar, and went over to the lads.

“I’m Gary, welcome to the Kangaroo Kitchen” Spock and Stu introduced themselves and Gary stayed and talked to the lads for a few minutes about how he’d obtained such a large impressive collection of liquor.

Gary told them that the Kangaroo kitchen was a busy bar, run during the night time by his Cambodian manager Mrs. Thorn, he then pointed at a scruffy individual behind the bar.

“Why do you call him Mrs?” enquired Spock

“Don’t ask” said Gary. Thorn noticed Gary speaking to the lads and gave them an effeminate, little wave, showing off his pink painted fingernails.

Gary went on to explain that during the day, it was by his English manager, Nick.

The way Gary described Nick made Stu and Spock think maybe it could be their old mate and after they enquired about Nick Gary informed them that Nick

occasionally drank at ‘escape bar’ near the beach.

They decided to go investigate after drinking several more beers and noticing that every time Gary talked about his spirit collection his eyebrows would get excited and move uncontrollably.

“Looks like the eyebrows are in for another Mexican wave,” tittered Spock as Gary started to speak with another customer.

“Woohoo” the lads yelled, raised, and lowered their arms in the air.

Gary looked, smiled and nodded at the pair, not understanding what was going on with these two dopey pomes.

Merriment over for the present, the lads decided to go to find out whether it was the same, Nick, they knew and loved. They stopped and got on a passing tuk-tuk and instructed the driver to take the route that would bypass Lee’s driver. The tuk-tuk driver was a happy, chatty sole and gave the lads some Cambodian chewing gum and said “try, *chnang*, tasty” They decided to nickname him ‘Happy tuk-tuk.’

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Nick wasn’t too far away, in fact he was only 50 yards around the corner, in the clinic having his head sutured and ranting to Shanti, stating that before the beer can hit him, he’d looked up into the face of the angel of death, who resembled Spock, hovering in the night sky above him.

Shanti as usual ignored him when he’d had visions of

Stu and Spock. “Concussion darling” she kept repeating at Nicks gibbering.

Stu and Spock had fun with the tuk-tuk driver as the old battered vehicle made its way toward the beach. Stu noticed Spock having trouble with his mouth and trying to gnash something loose and asked him.

“What’s up mate?”

“This chewing gums tastes like fruity shit and it’s stuck to my bloody false teeth,” moaned Spock

“I know, I spat mine out straight away, it tasted awful,” said Stu

Spock not wanting to upset Mr Happy tuk-tuk attempted the sticky, sickly gum, but not wanting to put up with the taste any longer, he rolled the gooey substance into a ball with his tongue and, as the driver swerved to avoid some cows, Spock spat out the sticky gumball, along with his dentures.

“Bollocks!” shouted Spock as the package flew out of the back of the tuk-tuk

“Stop, stop” Spock shouted at the driver.

The driver came to a halt.

The street was well lit and Spock knew roughly, where he’d expelled his gnashers, they’d had a soft landing in the middle of a cowpat about five meters behind them.

Stu waved at the cows they’d just avoided and joked.

“My large friend thanks you” then he broke out laughing

Mumbling, and listening to Stu and happy tuk-tuk’s laughter ringing in his ears, Spock trudged towards his dentures and shit pile. He approached the small heap and



another tuk-tuk sped out of a side street and ran over the mound.

Oblivious to what he had just done, the driver carried on passing two men in fits of laughter and the words “bastard, useless, and knuckle sandwich” being hollered from behind him. He couldn’t understand English so he ignored it.

Spock got to the now splattered pile, bent down and recovered one half of his denture, and dug out the second broken piece. He walked back to the tuk-tuk holding gingerly one soiled small chunk in each hand.

Happy tuk-tuk brought him a bottle of water and flushed off the poop.

“No problem, can fix” chuckled happy tuk-tuk  
Stu hadn’t stopped laughing throughout.

‘Well at least he’s stopped moping over Dao, perhaps now we can have some fun,’ thought Spock.

Happy tuk-tuk put the two halves of Spock’s dentures into a plastic bag and received a short clip from Spock for killing his dentures. They got back into the tuk-tuk and Happy told them he would go fix Spock’s teeth.

“Where do you want to go?” asked Happy,

“After all that pain and emotional stress we need a cold anaesthetic. Take us to the nearest bar lisped the gummy, dentally challenged Spock.

Happy took them to a small bar complex, The golden lion plaza and dropped off at the top of a small road which led down to ten open bars, four either side with two at the bottom.

“This seems lively,” commented Stu

“Ok, I go fix teeth and bring back here,” said happy

holding Spock's teeth in the bag and Happy sped off. Spock and Stu walked down into the plaza. They stopped at the first building, an Irish bar with the Pogues blasting out; they sat themselves at the bar and ordered two draught beers. They spoke to the woman who served them, who introduced herself as Maureen, although her real name, Heng, her boyfriend assigned her a more European nickname. Maureen was Vietnamese

"Perfect" thought Stu "we can learn the basics here that'll save us time for when we go to save Kim"

Maureen was happy to teach the lads and after thirty minutes, the lads knew the essentials: draught Beer: *Bia hoi* cigarettes: *dieu thuoc la* toilet: *su trang diem*, how much/cost: *gla*. She explained to them that every time they took a drink with the Vietnamese, they had to shout *Zho Zho!* Cheers, they practiced this making a point to take many sips and shouting, but after they noticed other customers glaring, they decided to save this little piece of fun for Vietnam. Maureen then asked them to try the bars special drink and, as she had spent time teaching them, they felt obliged to try.

"It's blue," grumbled Stu as the drink came

"Hmmm" groaned Spock knowing it would surely be a fruit based drink for a lady

They took a swig from the blue, cold, fruit drink that had a hint of aniseed flavour'

"The Blue Hengster" proudly boasted Maureen "I invented it"

"Not too bad" Stu complimented.

Happy tuk-tuk came into the bar with a broad smile and handed Spock his clean and repaired dentures. Happy

spoke to Maureen in Cambodian, who had noticed gummy Spock, but didn't want to mention it, and Happy must have told her about the cow pat episode as she walked further down the bar in fits of laughter.

Spock and Stu grabbed Happy and pulled him into a space between their stools and while Spock investigated his badly, super glued gnashers. Stu force-fed happy with the two nearly full glasses of 'Blue Hengster'.

Spock replaced his dentures and after rubbing his tongue up and down the repair and finding it annoying and uncomfortable, he realised he would need some more anaesthetic, beer.

They left the Irish bar and went into another lively bar several doors down, dragging Happy along.

As soon as they entered the bar, 'Paccinos' a man came up and greeted Spock.

"Hello mate, long time no see," said Strat

Spock greeted the musician, who he'd previously met in Siem reap several years ago. Strat had remembered Spock and Stu. Strat, whose real name was Steve, was an ancient sixty year old rock legend in his own teatime, a small rotund man who resembled Grandpa Smurf and whose stories always revolved around shagging, usually the first words out of his mouth, being

"When I was in the Philippines" his loud friendly cockney demeanour could entertain and amuse any audience.

Spock, Stu and Happy tuk-tuk settled in and joined Strat and his drinking buddy Brendan, who had a striking resemblance to a young, Fester Adams, scary. Stu quietly asked Spock who Strat was.

“I have no idea matey, but he seemed to know us” said Spock. Neither Stu nor Spock could remember a great deal about Siem Reap, thanks to the Rumbles, and a marijuana laced pizza.

Spock chatted with Strat and Brendan, about Strat’s favourite story from the Philippines, involving his hernia operation, a J-cloth and shitting through the eye of a needle. He reminded Spock of Uncle Albert on fools and horses with his constant line ‘during the war’.

Stu engaged in conversation with Alvin, the friendly English bar owner, all of them force-feeding Happy with beer and spirits.

It was late when they left Paccinos, Spock and Stu decided to carry on their search for Nick and squeezed a now shitfaced, Happy into his tuk-tuk, with directions for the ‘escape’ bar which they were told wasn’t too far away, lucky for Happy.

The tuk-tuk was about to depart, when Lee’s Lexus came screeching to a halt in front of them, blocking their escape.

Lee’s driver got out and gave Happy a ‘round of fucks’ telling off. Happy gurgled and smiled, he just wanted to sleep. The lads thanked Happy and gave him \$20, and the lads helped him move his tuk-tuk onto a side reservation. Happy crawled into the back seat and went to sleep, \$20 richer and happier

Lee’s driver ordered the lads into the car and informed them they had to depart at 4:30am.

Spock and Stu did as instructed and the car sped away, Stu in the front seat, and Spock contentedly sat in the back seat swigging on his half-finished, flat can of

Singha beer.

They arrived back at Lee's around 12:30

Just as Stu and Spock went to bed in Sihanoukville, the commando unit had arrived at the drop zone and had moved rapidly through the dark, inhospitable jungle. With the pitch blackness, and no visible stars to navigate, the squad had to rely on their knowledge and honed skills to move through the stinging, spiked foliage, even though they had GPS, it was useless, because they knew the enemy may have GPS scramblers, so they only used them to direct them to the fixed position, obtained from the original sat phone signal

It was a hazardous hike, but they were an elite squad and trained many years in this terrain, using all their senses, mainly hearing and smell, their natural night vision had become enhanced. They moved like nocturnal gazelles. They arrived at the position at 4:30am, on schedule.

They had taken just over 4 hours to trek 5km, find the kidnappers HQ, and get into position. The squad did a quick perimeter reconnaissance and spent the next hour and a half of darkness, locating, arranging and digging into their covered positions.

A grumpy, tired. Spock and Stu had been woken up early, and complaining about it still being dark, and how they'd only just gone to bed.

The commando's helicopter had returned, refuelled and waiting on Lee's lawn for the occupants for the next part of their journey to *An Giang* the Cambodian side of

the *Chao Doc* Vietnamese border crossing.

Four people boarded the chopper. Two Asians, looking refreshed, and two English zombies. Lee's driver noticed the four boarding, he had woken up early to scrub the beer stains off the back seat of the Lexus.

The helicopter lifted off and flew east into the early morning sky.

## – Chapter Eight –

The year was 1996 and Colonel Lee Tangh stood in deep thought, surveying a small village that had recently been abandoned. His small landing squad searched small huts for signs of life. The embers of fires still smouldered, indicating the inhabitants had recently fled in the dense, tropical-forest.

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Lee had fought, lived and worked in Cambodia since 1978. He'd had many fierce battles with the Khmer Rouge, on the way to victory.

After Cambodians liberation in 1979, Lee decided he would serve more of a purpose staying in Cambodia to help stabilise the war-ravaged country. Now at peace, he regarded his job as a peacekeeper not victor. His main task after the short war was to act as a liaison between Vietnam and newly established Cambodian army. His first appointed task had been to find, and record M.I.A Vietnamese soldiers, or identify the dead, so they could be catalogued and next of kin informed. This seemed an impossible task as most of the fighting had taken place in the inhospitable, jungle terrain and many Vietnamese soldiers had been unaccounted for. He nevertheless carried on with this essential work, despite being a high-ranking officer.

After many years, his role changed to one of

administration, integrating and rebuilding Cambodia back into the civilised world, and his searches for MIA had ceased in the early eighties, with still many unrecovered souls.

Lee requested to remain in Cambodia and was given an honouree Cambodian army rank of Colonel, commanding the new Royal Cambodian Armed forces in Zone 3. Lee was scheduled to be promoted to Brigadier General; his new duties would be to assist with the main government transition. He was happy with his life, happily married, his wife had a good job and with two army incomes and plots of land given to him by two, grateful governments, his life was good, although but boring.

In 1996 a report appeared on his desk about a four man survey team who had been plotting and mapping along a small branch of the Mekong River, they'd reported spotting a woman stood on the embankment and, as nothing was supposed to be there, and as they pulled their boat to the bank to investigate, the women ran off.

They found a faint path and walked through into thick jungle. Two of the men immediately became impaled on punji stake traps. They had to be cut free, and in agony and, through the loud screams of pain and copious amounts of blood spurting out, the two injured men were dragged back to their small wooden motor boat. They eventually made it back to Phnom Penh and received medical attention, but both died a few hours later.

The report intrigued Lee and he decided that he wanted to investigate the case and, with his prior knowledge, thought that he would be the best person to



investigate, plus he would be able to spend some time away from his desk and back into the field. He knew once his promotion to Brigadier came through he would be permanently office bound so this would be the last field trip he would have.

‘Could there still be surviving stragglers after 17 years?’ He wondered

Lee visited the two survivors from the survey expedition and took down the details and location. He had surveillance helicopters fly around the area, but nothing could be seen under as thick jungle canopy.

Lee decided to go in with a small ground force of soldiers. He’d hand-picked five soldiers, experts in jungle and Vietnamese booby trap warfare. He knew these five be the best as it had been him who had trained them.

Lee didn’t know what to expect when the small wooden craft docked by the small bank and they made their way into the rain-forest.

They slowly and methodically found and disarmed about 20 traps along their way to the deserted village.

The troop spread out looking for the inhabitants, and disarmed a few more traps.

After two hours, the five gathered in the centre of the small village and reported to Lee they hadn’t seen or found anyone, but the smouldering clay pots suggested people had recently been there, and they could not be far away.

“They seemed to have vanished into thin air sir” reported one soldier. They suddenly heard the cocking of

rifles and shouting, as a group of men and women appeared out of nowhere and surrounded them, some jumped down from the cradles of the trees, some pushed out from behind thin layers of tree bark, camouflaged against a tree trunk.

Within seconds, the six highly trained soldiers were surrounded.

The soldier carried sidearm's and as Lee, who now stared down the barrel of an old, M1 carbine, removed his gun belt and let his pistol slip to the floor, the other five followed suit.

The soldiers were butted, shoved and herded into a small group. They couldn't understand the language as the villagers shouted at them in a screechy, hybrid tongue.

The six soldiers observed how thin and gaunt most of the attackers appeared, so were surprised and impressed by such a stealthy, vicious attack.

A small, frail looking man came to the front and spoke to Lee after he'd recognised his uniform and rank.

Lee didn't understand at first, so the old man stood in deep thought for a moment, and then spoke again, in Vietnamese, which he appeared to be struggling with.

"Why are you dressed in a Cambodian uniform, yet you show the Vietnamese red-star insignia on your epaulettes. You are Vietnamese, yet your soldiers appear Cambodian, why?"

Although Lee hadn't dealt with this type of scenario for many years, knew how to diffuse, reassure and take control of the situation, although usually it was an individual he'd had to convince, not a full village. Lee smiled and calmly asked.

“What’s your name soldier?”

“Hạ sĩ, corporal, Nguyen Tho” said the old man, intrigued by this officer

Lee came forward with an open armed gesture to symbolise trust and openness.

“Well Nguyen, and all you good people, the war has been over now for over 17 years. Cambodia and Vietnam are now peaceful countries and have long since forgotten the war.”

A gasp went around the villagers. Lee knew what was coming next. . . . Mistrust.

The villagers chattered amongst themselves for about ten minutes, and then Nguyen said

“Prove it.”

Lee had already accounted for this usual response and he slowly reached into his backpack and brought out magazines, newspapers and some photographs both from Cambodia and Vietnam and handed them around the villagers. The pictures depicted Vietnam and Cambodian officials together, cars, street scenes, festivals and wedding photographs from Lee, Vietnamese, and Su-Tee’s, Cambodian, happy day

Lee waited as the pictures were handed around, and M1 carbine still pointed at his face. This unwavering weapon, being wielded so steadily by a boy of around sixteen years-old, and his icy cold stare made Lee feel edgy.

After 15 minutes Nguyen went over to Lee

“Okay, so the war is over, thank you for letting us know, but what do you want?”

Lee thought for a moment and replied.

“It’s up to you. We can find your families and inform them you are all still alive. Then, if you chose, we can integrate you back into society and get you some much needed medical aid, supplies and modern utilities”

Lee noticed they used only rough clay pots and old and worn away army knives.

“Alternatively” said Lee. “You could remain here and I can get you communication devices to contact the other villages and towns nearby and maybe set up a small trade route”.

Nguyen spoke to a few of the elder villagers. He ordered his people to lower their weapons, which put Lee at ease, as he became unnerved by the boys unwavering stare.

The other soldiers went to mingle with a few of the villagers, especially the older ones, who had tried to remember their native language and now practiced their Khmer; it was a strange, exhilarating feeling for the gathered folk.

Nguyen returned after a few minutes of discussion with Darah and some other elder dwellers. He spoke to Lee.

“We have no other family, we are family, I have no recollection of my previous life and the others don’t wish to remember what happened in Cambodia all those years ago. We won’t understand the outside world”

Nguyen pointed to the boy that had previously been holding the rifle aimed so steadily at Lee’s head and announced.

“He’s my son, Ca, he could have shot the fluff out of your ears, he is that good a shot” and whispered proudly.

“The cold icy stare I taught him too.”

Ca smiled at the Colonel, gave him an icy stare, and then smiled.

Over the next few hours, an euphoric feeling abound in the centre of the village. The soldiers told stories to the older Cambodians, who had started to understand them as their memories of their native language returned. They informed them about how the country had changed over 17 years.

*Despite some sporadic running battles from the few remaining Khmer Rouge guerrillas that had set up in Southern jungle retreats. The actual invasion and liberation took little over a year for the Vietnamese to overthrow the Khmer rouge, but bruised, battered and scattered factions of K.R, didn't stop incursions and disruptive attacks until Pol Pot died in 1999*

Lee and Nguyen sat together and spoke in Vietnamese. Lee told Nguyen how Vietnam had grown into a modern and multicultural society, embracing western music, culture and tourism. Nguyen soaked up all this information with interest, but when Lee informed him, that he could trace who he was from records and, find out if he'd had a family in Vietnam, Nguyen thought, but declined his offer

“If I have any family, then they must think that I am dead and would have new lives now, besides I can't remember them, so to me they would only be strangers. Darah and Ca are my family now, so please don't seek

them out,” Nguyen requested.

Lee understood, and assured him that no attempt would be made to investigate his past.

They chatted until the sun went down, slowly the villagers started to return to their shelters. There were no blankets or cotton in the village, so the soldiers, including Lee, huddled in the centre around one of the small smoking embers of peanut shells that they burnt at night to keep the mosquitoes and other flying bugs away.

Daybreak, and the villagers, along with the soldiers cooked meals and carried out general chores. A meeting was held at 8 am, the villagers gathered in the centre.

Five soldiers and the younger village members went off and started to clear all the remaining booby traps.

Lee joined the meeting and, with the help of Nguyen, translating gave the villages their choices. Nguyen then separated a conversation with the villager's.

Lee couldn't understand this, so went and stood alone. Nguyen's son went over and joined Lee. Ca could not speak Cambodian, only a little Vietnamese, which his father had taught him as a boy. Ca pointed at Lee's sidearm then drew a small thin knife out of his waist belt. Lee observed this interesting boy, Ca pointed to a tree. And then threw the knife, which impaled the tree. He walked over to the tree, dislodged his knife, and showed it to Lee. Impaled on the blade was a small camouflaged lizard, which Ca removed and ate.

Lee was impressed, he'd had years of jungle training and thought he had the eyesight of an eagle and could spot anything moving, but he never saw the now digested

reptile.

‘This kid is special’ thought Lee.

Lee and Ca, still trying to communicate were interrupted by Nguyen, who came over and told Lee that the village wanted to remain as it was, however they would accept assistance, especially medical help as dysentery had been a constant problem and, as some of the folk were old this could become fatal. Nguyen also requested construction materials, and tools.

Lee and his small troop left the village and returned to Phnom Penh in their small boat later that day.

The next few days bought a flotilla of small boats with builders, materials, basic tools, medical staff and Lee, along with his five soldiers. Over the next few days the villagers and workers mingled as they built small concrete and wooden dwellings. They’d received small amounts of foodstuffs and utensils and loaned a small boat. Nguyen and a few others travelled down river and discovered other villages along the main branch of the Mekong, a conduit of small basic villages that traded amongst themselves along the river as far as Phnom Penh.

Lee visited the village most days to chat with Nguyen and, although he’d witnessed first-hand, the corpses of the killing fields and the genocide within the country, Nguyen and Darah’s story touched him deeply.

After six days the village now had enough resources to give them a better quality of life, especially with the

medical supplies that included supplies of Vitamins and minerals.

Builders taught the villages how to construct simple, but secure, homes from concrete and timber and they had small generators with a supply of fuel, which they could replenish by trading with their new neighbours.

It was now time for Lee and the outsiders to leave the village and return to Phnom Penh. The village location would be mapped although it would remain a quiet little self-contained community.

The villagers decided to stay, with exception. Nguyen approached Lee on the last day and asked him to take Ca and educate him. Nguyen and Darah realised they lose contact with him for a while, but they wanted the best chance for educating their son and Nguyen had noticed how Ca liked to spend time with the soldiers, especially Lee. Nguyen knew his son's future didn't lie within the village, which they now named *Sereypheap*: Khmer for Freedom

Lee was more than happy to help and informed Nguyen that because Ca was uneducated his best chance for a better life was to become a soldier. He had noticed Ca's abilities and strengths while in the village and knew this boy could not only be taught, but could also offer his knowledge in the training of jungle skills and warfare. Ca, Nguyen, and Darah said a tearful farewell, and then Lee, Ca, and the few remaining stragglers from the building project and the soldiers, left the village.

Lee took the sixteen-year-old Ca back to the soldier's



quarters in Phnom Penh. He had thought about why Nguyen had called his son 'fish', but after a little chuckle to himself, decided if the Cambodian soldiers found out the meaning of his name and jibed him, it would make him tougher.

Lee then transferred Ca along with the other five soldiers returning them to their garrison at Takethmey village. Kambol. Angsnoul Dicstrict. Kandal Province. West of Phnom Penh. Lee would be his Commanding officer, teacher and, unofficial guardian.

## – Chapter Nine –

“Ok Grimey, I will go to the control centre. . . remember you aren’t alone, so don’t try anything” growled Mophi, “or then again, please do” he snarled and made a slicing motion across his throat. Mophi then smiled and left the hotel room.

“I really hate that bastard,” Grimes said to Akhim

“Never mind, after a few more weeks you’ll never have to see him again.”

“Yes I know my friend” sighed, Grimes “okay, let’s get back to business”

The two sat around a table scrutinising paperwork. Their next phase, fortunately did not involve Mophi, so he decided to revisit the now completed control centre, to ensure the mercenaries and Vietnamese were ready to play their part.

The next part of Grimes’s plan would start the following day. This next stage would tell whether Grimes careful planning, deceit and preparation would succeed.

Grimes had done his research well and he, Akhim and four Vietnamese entered Phan Yar village, on a hot, humid afternoon and drove into the village centre.

They stopped at a small coffee shop and their Vietnamese employees went around the village and market asking questions and showing photographs trying to gain

information. Due to the hot, sticky atmosphere, it became difficult for foreigners to bear, Grimes and Akhim remained drinking coffee inside the cafe, attracting a lot of interest by the locals as foreigners never came to Phan Yar, as it was a small Vietnamese village off the tourist route

The villagers ambled around in *Ao canh* their rural dress, colourful silk pyjamas and a round dried grass conical hat *Non la*. The few westerners that visited these parts usually went to Ky Anh town and most of the villagers had never seen a foreigner, especially two different in appearance, a Caucasian and an Arab.

After approximately thirty minutes, one of the Vietnamese returned to the restaurant with a small, chubby old local man, who introduced himself as, Pu-ed, the boss of the market.

Grimes, through his interpreter, asked Pu-ed for any information on the individual in the photograph.

Pu-ed gave Grimes a lot of useful information, after been plied with glasses of Ruou, urban Vietnamese whisky, which tasted like paint stripper, and Grimes had given him an envelope containing 200 million Vietnamese Dong, approximately \$10,000

“Where can I find this, Ca?” asked Grimes

“He will probably be out on a fishing tour or in a bar.” said the now spannered Pu-ed, and gave them directions to Ca’s beachside house.

Grimes and the others left the cafe, got into their S.U.V, and headed off in the direction of Ca’s house.

Grimes had previously sent in a group of Vietnamese posing as tourist ministry officials. He had researched the Tangh's well and found out that they used to own a holiday home in Phan Yar.

When the team contacted Grimes, they told him about Hern/Kim and her love affair with a local fisherman, now businessman and how her parents had broken off the affair and sent her away many years earlier. Grimes then ordered them to find out everything about the fisherman, and the affair. The group found out details from the villagers, who were a close knit and still relatively poor community and a million dong bought a lot of loose lips. The details about the affair had been consistent amongst the villagers, because at the time it was big news in the small community.

'Jackpot' thought Grimes 'this will make the set up a damn site easier.'

They arrived at Ca's large modern house set back off the beach. Ca and Tuong sat outside playing cards.

One Vietnamese man got out and spoke to Ca, who eyed up Grimes, and then went over to the car.

"What do you want"? Said Ca, in English. "Are you the same people who had asked about me a few weeks ago?"

"Yes" said Grimes "is there somewhere private we can talk?"

Ca invited the party into his house, sat them down in a small living room, and gave them some water.

Grimes took out some photographs and lay them face

down onto a small coffee table.

He then went on to ask Ca about his love for Hern/Kim.

Ca became angry and told him,

“That was a long time ago in another life” and went on to explain how his life had changed and he never wanted to hear her name mentioned.

Grimes knew this would probably be his response and his expertise as a conman kicked into top gear.

“She is still in love with you, and needs your help.”

Grimes then went onto explain about how Hern was so unhappy and afraid of her husband, Pon and she feared for her life as well as the life of her baby son. Grimes continued to tell Ca that she was close to her son, even though her husband had always forced sex upon her and he had recently arranged to hand their son over to the palace hierarchy to be raised by them, also how sad, lonely and afraid Hern had become.

Grimes had been extremely persuasive and showed Ca evidence by turning over the photographs one at a time, pausing for effect. These photographs had been expertly fabricated and showed shots of a battered and bruised Kim.

Grimes went on with his tale for about an hour, turning over photo after photo of Kim, which were taken by one of his contacts in Bangkok and doctored by grime’s team in the control centre.

Grimes convinced Ca that he is one of HERNs closest friends and showed the fake photos of him and Hern together with the ominous face of Pon lurking in the background. Grimes noticed Ca’s features change every

time he looked at a photo.

Grimes knew all the signs of a good confidence trick working and knew it to be the time he closed this chapter and, using the knowledge his people had obtained from a villager, he turned over the last bogus photograph, which showed Hern smiling with an old 45 vinyl record in her grasp.

“Kids in America!” exclaimed Ca.

“Hook, line and sinker” thought Grimes as he watched Ca’s face change from an emotionless looking Vietnamese man to a love struck teenager, as the seeds of memories Grimes had planted, knocked down the barriers inside Ca’s head.

Ca looked at Grimes

“How can I help?” he said

Grimes told Ca that he and Hern had planned to get her back to Vietnam by using a family crisis, and then she, along with her mother, planned to keep her in Vietnam.

Grimes knew from reports that Ca despised Kim’s father, so he added

“This had been secretly been planned for months without her Father, Thran’s knowledge.

Ca thought for a moment and said

“Okay, what do you want me to do?”

Grimes told him that all he would have to do was pick Hern up at the airport when she was due to depart for Thailand. Take her to a safe house and away from her father for a few weeks, until Hern and her mother could persuade Thran to let her remain in Vietnam and away from the abusive Pon. Grimes also added that Hern had asked for Ca, her only true love to be the one to take care

of her whilst in Vietnam, which explained why Grimes had been there.

“What do you mean, when she departs? Is she here?” asked Ca.

Grimes told Ca that Hern would soon be arriving but convinced him that Pon would surely have Hern monitored while she was in Vietnam, so he explained to Ca that they had a plan to rescue her on departure and his signal to act would be after she used her phone in the airport, which had been an obvious assumption by Grimes that Hern would call Pon to tell him she was on her way home. He told Ca that would give him and Hern about a four-hour window of opportunity to make their escape, and informed him that all arrangements had been made and would be given to Ca, if he decided to help.

Grimes kept repeating how Hern still loved him and had spoken to Grimes many times about her feelings. For Ca. Grimes knew his mind games had paid off.

“This is all up to you Ca” said Grimes, “but we need a quick decision” and Grimes said solemnly

“If you still have any feelings for Hern you will help to get her away from danger and find happiness again, but she told me if you can’t, or won’t get involved, she will understand, and her love for you will never change.”

Ca thought for a while and told Grimes he would let him know later.

He took Grimes’ mobile phone number, the group then departed, leaving Ca in the living room alone and deep in thought about his family and the effect this would have, but he’d still had deep hidden feelings for Hern, which now had resurfaced.

Grimes left Ca to his twisting and turning thoughts and they drove to a hotel in Ky Anh. Grimes pleased with himself and knew full well he would be contacted soon by Ca, he started to assemble Ca's instructions.

The next morning Grimes and his team drove north on route 1 to Hanoi, after first stopping off for an hour in Phan Yar, to visit his new and very keen and willing employee Ca, and give him his instructions. They arranged another meeting for several days hence and Grimes left Ca to study the well laid out details. His worried wife, along with her brother, counted out the 100 million, Dong, which Grimes had given to them to cover any expenses.

The journey by road would take about seven hours but Grimes didn't mind, it was the most inconspicuous way to travel and he still had wrinkles in his plans that needed to be ironed out.

He called the office that he'd had set up in Hanoi several weeks earlier and checked that everything had gone according to plan and enquire if the trunk that he'd sent from Ho Chi Mihn city had arrived.

Grimes arrived in Hanoi early evening. He went to his office, scrutinised and checked the contents of an old wooden trunk, which would play an essential role in the next part of his plan. He went outside, walked around the corner to Xuan Dieu Rd and into the Sheraton hotel. He strode over to the reception.

The receptionist noticed Grimes enter and informed



the manager who went over to him and in a cheery voice said

“Welcome back your grace” and gave a courteous bow.

“Your squire, Akhim is already in your suite” He then enquired

“Is Mr Mophi not with you?”

“No” said Grimes “My bodyguard has another assignment. I require an early morning call at 6:30, with breakfast” ordered Grimes

Grimes went to the presidential suit and used the hotel phone. He heard the receptionist inform the recipient who was calling. Grimes made an appointment with the man on the other end of the line and then hung up with a smug look of arrogance on his face.

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“Good morning Duke” said Thran as he greeted Grimes at the door

“Good morning Minister,” said Grimes as they shook hands.

“Good morning lady Nga” said Grimes as he took Nga’s hand, brought it to his lips and regally kissed it.

Nga chuckled; she loved this greeting from this English gentleman.

The three then went inside, whilst the antique trunk got unloaded from the large Mercedes S.U.V that Grimes had just arrived in.

This part of the sting had taken several weeks to

organise, but using his skills as a con artist and Akhim's skill as a master forger, along with a few old contacts in the U.K it hadn't been too difficult. The objective of this phase of the plan was to get Kim into Vietnam where she could be easily targeted for abduction. Grimes figured the easiest way to do this would be to target her mother.

He had researched Thran and Nga thoroughly and formulated an elaborate plan.

He first needed to gain their trust.

Grimes rented an office in Hanoi; this would be the Hanoi HQ.

He assumed his old alias of Duke Phillip of Southerby and contacted Nguyen Gia Khiem, The Vietnam Prime Minister, who didn't understand anything about royalty. Grimes's U.K. contacts persuaded him, they were the figure heads of many commonwealth countries, and in order for Vietnam to be able to trade with the countries they must pander to royalty. Intrigued, the P.M agree to meet with the Duke, Grimes.

Grimes, as the duke of Southerby, met with the PM and informed him that the U.K. royals wanted to bestow an honouree doctorate for Business and industry, on a Vietnamese government member to make trade between the two countries easier. Grimes then showed him lists of honours and explaining that Vietnam had been chosen because it is one of the fastest growing economies in Asia, etc.

The Prime Minister became overjoyed at this opportunity to get a foothold in the UK and European markets. Grimes told him the only thing the nominated

individual would have to do was to visit Oxford and join in with a regalia.

All the fitting of robes, degrees, official and photographs would be processed in Vietnam.

After a few more appointments and, some convincing performances by Grimes, he informed the Prime Minister the Royals had to make a decision as to whom should receive the honour.

Grimes told the P.M that a list of Vietnamese government officials and their roles, records and history's had been sent to the U.K and they've come up with a suitable candidate.

Grimes then produced a large envelope with a fake Buckingham palace wax seal stamp on the rear. He opened the letter in front of the P.M and handed it to him. The excited PM read the letter and then looked disappointed.

“Is everything alright Prime Minister?” asked Grimes

“Yes” he gloomily spoke “I thought they would have chosen me, but they said that a Prime minister can only be chosen once in twenty years and, it was only 2 years since they had a P.M honoured, so they have chosen the recently promoted Minister of Public Security, Thran Tangh, for his endeavours in business development and in the field of regulation.”

Grimes had been thoroughly convincing and had made the P.M. believe everything. A disappointed Prime Minister introduced Grimes to Thran, who had been convinced by his good friend, the Prime Minister, how important Duke Phillip was, and how much new trade and

technology Vietnam could obtain from their new commonwealth trading partners and therefore how important it would be for Thran to accept graciously the doctorate.

Grimes explained to Thran that it was his responsibility to prepare the Minister for his new role as honouree doctorate. Grimes visited Thran's home in Ha Tay every day over the next week to prepare him. Grimes took Thran's measurements for his robes and bonnets and taught him etiquette for meeting the English monarchy. He also got to know, Nga 'the target'.

A spy was already in the Tangh's house as a newly appointed gardener, who Nga had employed the day after the old gardener had suddenly died of a heart attack.

Grimes got to know Nga's tastes and on his visits bought her small gifts of jasmine, *Cay hia nhai*] smelling ornaments. Nga cooed when the noble Grimes brought her presents and she'd always commented about Jasmine being her favourite fragrance. Grimes convinced her that it was the also the Queen of England's favourite. She and Thran enjoyed looking at Duke Phillips, phoney photographs of him with the Queen. He'd assured them that they too would meet the Queen in person.

One day Grimes visited and informed Thran that they were making his scarlet robes and black /gold tasselled Tudor bonnet in Oxford, which would not take too long now.

He handed Nga a pewter box engraved with a royal seal and accompanying letter. Nga read the letter, looked at Grimes, then opened the box and smelt the contents.

“Thank you Duke, this is from the Her Majesty” she shrilled, showing Grimes his forged letter and a small bar of fragrant soap in the box.

“I mentioned it to Her Majesty that you shared the same taste in fragrances, she must like you already.”

Nga took out the contents of the box out and took another lingering sniff.

“Jasmine and. . .” she paused

“English rose” cuts in Grimes

“Ahh.... Nga lets out a pleasing sigh, excuses herself and goes into a bathroom with the soap.

Grimes and Thran talk more about what Thran needs to learn and Grimes told him that he would have to leave in the next few days and travel to Oxford to pick up his Thran’s regalia.

After ten minutes, Nga rejoins the two men, smiling.

“Oh lady Nga, you smell more wonderful than ever” gushed Grimes “Doesn’t she Thran?”

Thran smiled and agreed.

“I will use it all the time, it is beautiful” said Nga

“I hope you do, the Queen will be delighted”

Grimes then left the Thran’s and returned to the Sheraton, pleased in the knowledge that the target was happy with her royal Jasmine, English rose and Thalium soap.

Grimes spent the next few days in and out of the Tangh’s home complimenting Nga on her new fresh fragrance and going through useless fabricated protocol with Thran.

Once Grimes sources had gotten the information he needed about Ca. Grimes made the excuse about Thran’s robes being finished and he had to go to the UK for a few

days to personally collect them and said that he would contact Thran on his return.

Grimes then got on a British airways flight to the UK via Bangkok as Duke Phillip of Southerby, returning from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh two days later as Julian Grimes with an old looking wooden trunk, which he sent to Hanoi. He then delved into the Ca investigation and after successfully completing his conniving on Ca, Grimes returned to Hanoi, once again playing Duke Philip to complete the Thran episode.

The contents of the trunk were Thran's academics robes and bonnet. They had been made in Thailand in one day. Thran strode up and down his living room in the lordly fashion which Grimes had taught him and looking pleased with himself. The photographer Grimes bought with him, set up a regal background scene, on a screen depicting hounds and English countryside, in the corner of the living room.

Grimes noticed Nga, sat silently on a large chair looking pale and in discomfort.

“Are you feeling alright, lady Nga?” asked Grimes

“Yes” she said, putting on a brave smile “I have just got a little stomach ache, I think must have caught a bug”

Photo session over, Grimes and the photographer left promising to return every day over the next few days with the finished package and final instructions for the Tangh's UK debut. He wished Nga a speedy recovery.

Grimes visited the Tangh's regularly over several days noticing Nga's condition deteriorate, and she still used the soap. He reassured her that she would soon be

well again.

Grimes knew the Thalium had been effective and had spread into Nga's internal system. He'd studied Thalium and knew the lab in Saudi had impregnated the correct amount of the poison into the soap to present the symptoms now shown by Nga. He informed Thran that everything, for now, had been completed and he would be leaving for Oxford the following day, but would return nearer the time to escort them both to the U.K. for an audience with Her Majesty. He said farewell to Thran and the ailing Nga.

'A few days more' thought Grimes as he left the Tangh's house for the last time

He needed now to concentrate on his remaining plan. Grimes, while in his office, within the now finished, fully equipped control centre next to the Cu Chi tunnels, received a phone call from his Vietnamese secretary in Hanoi who relayed the message from Thran's gardener informing him that Nga had been taken to hospital and all the evidence had been removed and destroyed.

'That's it!' thought Grimes 'All we have to do now is wait'

## – Chapter Ten –

The helicopter landed on a small field and four passengers disembarked. They went over to an open tour bus that had been waiting for them.

“This will be inconspicuous for the border crossing,” said Lee.

A man came up to the four men and handed Lee a small package containing three passports. Pon, travelling again under the name Chait-ead, posed as a tourist, which normally would have had Stu and Spock in fits of laughter had they not been feeling tired and as rough as badgers arses, all Spock could muster was welcome back Shithead. Lee then gave them fake passports in case of emergency.

“You should use your own passports going in, but keep these if you should need them . . . Good luck,”

Lee then returned to the Helicopter, which took off heading towards Chou Doc.

Pon, Spock and Stu got on the tatty tour bus; they looked at their new passports, which they thought had been good copies considering the time that the Cambodians had to process them. Stu would be Mr Kerry Eggleton and Spock Mr William Anchor.

“They’ve named you after the Cambodian beer and our young prince, that’s smart,” noticed Stu

Spock had a different interpretation for the name:



“W. Anchor, Wanker!” said Spock indignantly  
“Some boneheads got a sense of humour”

“You’re not wrong, but at least they haven’t given you a bloody woman’s first name,” added an embarrassed Stu.

The old bus drove fifteen minutes to the small border crossing, with Spock and Stu both hoping never have to use their fake identities and swearing Pon to secrecy or risk increased ear clippings.

Pon agreed, not knowing what the fuss was about, it wasn’t as bad as ‘shithead’

They crossed over the border and met up with a waiting tour group. There were about eight other foreigners in the group, mainly Chinese. They took the small bus to a waiting boat for the three-hour journey down the Tonle Basak River.

The boat journey was tedious, although the craft was a speedy modern riverboat with a large air-conditioned cabin and large comfortable seats; noisy Vietnamese Karaoke screeched out from the T.V’s positioned at several locations on overhead compartments.

“Sounds like two cats with their knackers in a grinder” commented Spock who promptly fell asleep and started his own wind section of the karaoke. Stu was already asleep and Pon meditated, planned and thought about Kim, his brave wife. They missed all the beautiful rural scenery and attractions, pagodas, colourful and sweet aromas of the floating markets. They slept through the boat trip and most of the bus journey from Can Tho to Behn Dinh town, which took another three hours. This was a long, but safe route.

They arrived in Behn Dinh town near Cu Chi\* and the tour leader, a small Vietnamese man who spoke English, booked them into a small guesthouse and instructed them to meet in one hour at 2pm for the tunnel tour. Spock, Stu and Pon sat in Stu's room and went over their plan again.

The tour group met in the reception and got on the bus for the twenty-minute journey to the start of the tunnels. Stu noticed how little traffic there was, mainly mopeds and pushbikes trundled up and down the modern quiet roads, which seemed a pleasant change from Pattaya and traffic congestion.

They arrived at the designated area and the guide took them around. A dozen Vietnamese men dressed in their renowned 'black pyjamas' performed demonstrations with AK47 rifles, shooting at targets. The guide then took them to one of the numerous spread out small hatches that the Vietcong used to pop out of and shoot the Americans. The guide joked how the holes were too small for the large westerners to fit through, and informed them it was the northernmost hatch. The tourists all peered separately down the small hatch then the group moved on, with one exception.

Pon entered the hatch, got quickly into the tunnel and scrambled along his planned route. He followed his GPS signal location to the target. They had already realised the satellites fixed position they had obtained went well into an unmarked section, beyond the tunnels, so they'd correctly assumed a new section to have been added to the

jungle. The Commandos task was to map and survey this new section for entry and exit, number of enemy and firepower. This information would decide on whether an attack was viable.

They had also guessed on a second entry point that may be attached to a tunnel and, in order to confirm this Pon now crawled through a hot, humid, insect infected small branch of a main tunnel marked on the old charts. . Pons task was to find the entrance and if possible get inside the section, survey that entrance and its viability for a second entry and rescue attempt. Pon and the commandos would then rendezvous as scheduled, plot their strategy and if everything appeared okay, mount an early morning assault.

Pon crawled approximately half a kilometre, through the muddy tunnels on his hands and knees and stopped to check his route map, he saw that around the next narrowing bend he should come to a dead end. However, the sat phone signal that the satellite had picked up was at least another 200 yards further along.

He rounded the corner and saw a sudden bright light illuminate the small tunnel for a few seconds and then it went dark again as a door closed. He then shielded his eyes against a large bright torch beam being shone into his face. An irate Vietnamese man came face to face with Pon and pointed a pistol at him. Pon understood little Vietnamese, but knew enough to know the man was serious and unsheathed his Glave.

The irritated man kept the torch on Pon but his voice changed as the man realised what must have happened and now being given instructions from another person lurking

behind him in the shadows. The man replaced his pistol and shouted at Pon

“Stupid tourist you got lost again” said the man in English

The speaker and his mysterious shadow knew if this man was a tourist and went missing, they would instigate a search, which they couldn't risk.

Pon responding to the situation, pleaded.

“Please can you help me, I have been going around in circles, for what seems like hours, I only stopped for a few minutes to take photos” and he showed the man his GPS which he hoped he would mistake for a camera. The man in the shadows gave an instruction, and as Pon sheathed his Glave, the first man gave him directions on how to exit the tunnel.

Pon squeezed himself around and crawled along his way back. Knowing that he had stumbled onto the entrance he felt around the wet muddy floor of the damp tunnel and found two pressure pad detectors buried under the surface.

‘This entry will be difficult but not impossible,’ he thought, as the tunnel behind him illuminated again briefly as the Vietnamese men disappeared back from whence they came. Pon crawled along until he'd rejoined a main tourist tunnel, he came upon a tourist station and, then after a lot of apologising to some angry tour guides, he was escorted to rejoin his tour group.

Stu and Spock knew that Pon would be gone for a while and had a cover story if asked any questions. Therefore, they went on a merry tour to find useful tourist attractions

and some cold beer. The hair of the dog.

They along with the tour group ate some *Naime*, Vietnamese soft spring rolls and then went along with the guide, who, after showing them the small hatches, took them to a larger section of the tunnels. The main tunnels had been enlarged to accommodate large, western tourist's, however there are large, and extra large and Spock fitted in the 'not a bloody hope in hell category'. The big lad went as far as the entrance, peered inside the tunnels, turned around, informed the tour guide that they stank, and had bats, and Spock hated bats.

Therefore he and Stu would just potter around topside and wait for the group. Besides, Happy tuk-tuk's denture fix had been chaffing his tongue and he needed some ice.

The guide just smiled as if it happened all the time, which it generally did, zero to claustrophobic in one foot of being inside the tunnel had been a regular occurrence. Tourists became scared once inside the tunnel system some parts were dimly they were unable to turn around and, as Spock had pointed out it stank, although no bats.

Spock and Stu went over to a bullet riddled tank, and a guide instructed them about the old booby-traps and they fired off a few rounds of an AK47 with the black pyjama clad tour guides. They ambled around for a while watching the T.V monitors of the tunnels and films about the American conflict.

They quickly became bored with all the war stuff and didn't fancy eating any more food from the annoying yappy food vendors, due to their past experiences with buying from street vendors in Thailand, which hadn't been pleasant and they had spent most of their first holiday with

arse sphincters like blood oranges.

They strolled around a small souvenir shop and bought a 7.62mm bullet with the gunpowder removed and turned into a cigarette lighters'. The lads decided that it was now well past beer time and decided to search out a source of the amber nectar.

They came across a small shack with a Hesky, cold box full of cold Saigon beer, so they decided to wait there for Pon or the rest of the tour to return.

Pon had left his cloth bag with Stu, only taking his Glave and GPS with him and, as the lads guzzled their well-deserved beer, the bag started to ring.

“There’s a phone in Pons bag” said Stu as he fished in amongst some papers, small bottles, various coloured bags of powder, his neatly parcelled light monks cassock with red and gold sash, the small package from Bangkok and, a ringing mobile phone”

“Who’s calling?” asked Spock

“Doesn’t say,” said Stu looking at the screen “only call 1, but no number”

“Must be from outside Vietnam,” commented Spock

“Answer it,” instructed Spock,

“It may be from the kidnappers,” said Stu “we’d better not.”

“Could be important,” said an inquisitive Spock.

The phone continued to ring, the lads ignored it and drank their beer.

After thirty minutes of steady drinking, their tour group emerged from one of the tunnel exits. The tourist consisted of awestruck Japanese and Chinese people and one embarrassed looking Thai at the head of the pack

being bollocked by the guide.

The lads went over to the group and the tour guide told them Pon had gotten lost, but luckily, some other tour guides found him and brought him back.

“Bad dog, naughty shit head” Spock chastised him and gave him a sharp clip around the ear, which gave made the guide smile.

The group were herded onto the bus for the journey back to the hotels

“What’s happening now?” Spock asked Pon

“I am due to rendezvous with the commandos near the rain-forest later,” said Pon “now we just wait”

The phone in Pons bag started to ring again and Stu handed it to Pon who answered.

“Hello Taksin” Pon said

The conversation went on in Thai for a while and by the tone of Pons voice, the lads knew something was wrong, very wrong.

Pon finished the call, looked shaken and spoke. .

“My friends we have a big problem. Taksin just informed me the commandos had been captured this morning and are probably now dead. The kidnappers called Taksin and threatened to kill Kim immediately.”

Pon cursed himself for not acting in the tunnel, and getting inside the hide-out.

Pon told them that Taksin hoped that he’d managed to convince the abductors that it was a Cambodian action, which must have been Kim’s uncle Lee, and he alone must be responsible for this unforeseen attack and Taksin hoped the kidnappers would accepted this excuse.

However, because of this attempted infiltration, the

kidnappers had moved up the schedule. They have now given you until tomorrow to get to Hanoi and meet with their agent at the rendezvous with the relic.

Taksin had told Pon that he thought he had managed to diffuse the situation by demanding to talk to Kim and make sure that she was still alive, then angrily called their bluff, if no call was received, he would assume she was dead and threatened to hunt them down.

Taksin then reassured Pon by telling him that Thran called an hour later confirming he had spoken to Kim and that she was still alive and unhurt and he knew that they wouldn't harm Kim yet, she was only the bait, and their target was them and the holy relic. .

Pon looked distressed as he relayed Taksin's next instructions

Taksin had booked a flight for them from Ho Chi Minh to Hanoi in the morning that would coincide with an incoming Thai airways flight, so it would appear as if they'd arrived from Thailand.

Taksin also said that he'd had the Bangkok Post newspaper put in an article to convince the kidnappers that you, Spock and Stu had stolen the relic. The back-up plan would now have to be put into effect, and they had no more time for a rescue.

Pon on the other hand had another plan, and once he'd relayed Taksin's news to Spock and Stu. He told them about another option, which was for him to go back through the tunnels, enter that way and attempt a solo rescue. Spock and Stu could carry on with the tour and return to Cambodia.

The lads however, wouldn't agree to that option



“We stay together,” said Spock, now starting to realise the full danger they were in.

“We are family” added Stu and joked

“Besides Spock would have to find someone else’s ears to clip and he has just got used to yours, so let’s utilise Taksin’s proposal, besides the town looked like a one horse, beer depleted, fun-less little place and the Vietnamese people don’t seem that friendly.”

Spock looked at Stu and smiled, he knew the bloody fish story was about to be told again just to annoy him.

Fortunately the story never came as Pon phoned Taksin to confirm they would fly to Hanoi.

All three stayed in Stus room planning, they all went to bed early so they could be fresh and ready for the next day.

They all had a sleepless night, Pon with his thoughts of Kim and the danger that he could be putting his brothers into. He knew Kim was still alive, he just hoped she was unharmed and safe. Stu’s thoughts had been on Dao and what had happened to his wife, he was confused.

Spock couldn’t get that bloody, long digested and now barracuda shit, fish, out of his head and imaginary tunnel bats.

The following morning they caught a taxi for the 40km journey to Ho Chi Minh international airport and the two-hour flight to Hanoi.

They had figured out a plan, which would involve Spock’s unique talents and, as usual it was a stupid plan and doomed for failure.

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**\*The Chu Chi tunnels** are an amazing collection of tunnels just outside Saigon [Ho Chi Minh City] stretching about 75 miles long that were part of a network of tunnels that went all over Vietnam. Cu chi district is well-known nationwide as the base where the Vietnamese mounted their operations of the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tunnels are between 0.4 to 1m wide, just enough for a person to walk along by bending or dragging. However, parts of the tunnels have been modified to accommodate visitors. The upper soil layer is between 3 to 5m thick and can support the weight of a 60-ton tank and the damage of light cannons and bombs. The underground network provided meeting rooms, sleeping quarters, commanding rooms, hospitals, and other social rooms. By visiting the Cu Chi tunnels provides a better understanding of the prolonged resistance war of the Vietnamese people and of the persistent and clever character of the Vietnamese nation.

## – Chapter Eleven –

**K**im, for now was safe and well taken care of inside the Control centre. Although her short journey had been confusing and arduous. Her confinement cell was quite swanky even without windows or natural light, similar to a hotel suit without the decor, but with an en-suite bathroom, large bed and a small sofa.

She was now sat on the bed with. Ca knelt in front of her between her legs and clasping her hands. .

Kim gazed upon the sad and perplexed face of Ca and stroked his brow. She had no way of knowing how long she had been captive, with all her personal items removed and phone discarded at the airport she could only guess time periods, which now seemed like days and it had seemed a long time since she'd made her phone call.

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Ca, Kim and Tuong arrived within the control centre and met at the amphibious vehicle entrance by Mophi and a mercenary. They were taken into Grimes's large office. Kim noticed how much Hi- tech equipment was in the centre. Several Vietnamese technicians milled about, and she noticed several large westerners, strutting around and messing around with rifles and knives. They entered

Grimes's spacious office and the Englishman greeted them and congratulated Ca and Tuong on a job well done. He went on to explain to Kim about why she had been abducted, showing her photos, video footage and holding Pon to blame for the predicament she now found herself in. Grimes informed her that her husband would be coming with the stolen item they required along with his two friends in the next day or so.

Kim listened to Grimes and said.

“My husband is not a murderer, or a thief. You have the wrong information, my husband won't come but my father will certainly make you pay for this” and she defiantly changed the subject, screaming at Grimes.

“You are the man who conned my father and poisoned my mother”

Kim suspected the doctorate was an elaborate hoax, even though her father tried to convince her otherwise, and that's the reason she needed to speak to Spock and Stu, they would be able to find out if the pretence was genuine or bullshit as they were from England.

“Of course I am” boasted the arrogant Grimes “Duke Phillip at your service” he stood up, sarcastically bowed and sat back down.

Kim knew these people had spent a lot of time and expense setting this up. But she had already figured out that if Pon arrived, they would all be dead and the shadow of Mophi lurking around the office with a large menacing grin, aimed mainly at Tuong, fuelled her suspicions. Grimes deceived them for over an hour about the exchange and their release, once the relic had been

verified. Grimes then spoke to Ca and told him he would share the room with Kim and they'd set up a room for Tuong to stay next door.

"Who knows?" said Grimes "maybe you will rekindle some old dormant passion, I love a happy ending" he gushed 'especially when it's mine,' he thought thinking of his millions

They were taken to their respective rooms and Kim sat on the sofa, Ca slumped down on the bed and stared ashamedly at his feet.

Tuong went in his room. The minutes and hours mingled into just time and there had been no way of knowing if it was day or night.

There were a few moments when Kim and Ca heard tumultuous noises through the thin walls of the room. The first occasion was approximately an hour after they'd arrived. There was a lot of shouting, cheering and booing just outside their room, which lasted for about 30 minutes, and after they'd heard a cheer, a crack, and then voices grumbling that seemed to be moving away and then silence.

Ca looked horrified but he and Kim never spoke as Ca sat up on the bed and listened and when the silence came, he just leaned forward, closed his eyes wept. Kim stared contemptuously at Ca, and as the time ticked by she had sporadic bursts of anger aimed at him. Ca just sat and apologised. They'd had several visits from Grimes, who just told them that her husband may not come and goading the pair to get closer as they could be happy spending the rest of their lives together.

Kim had already made her feelings for Pon known to Ca and he had accepted that the love they'd once felt for each other had gone, buried in the past.

Grimes loved these mind games and didn't care about the delays from Thailand at first. The only thing that infuriated him had been Mophi and his thugs.

The next sounds came what seemed like days later and woke Kim and Ca. The sounds of weapons being loaded, checked, and excited gruffly male voices hollering, this went on for some time before fading into silence. Then, after three hours, more excitement as the men returned and sounded like a group of hunters who'd had a successful kill. This Kafuffle went on for another few hours with the sounds of bottles being smashed open, men belching, cheering one another, and thumping noises that emanated from room next door. Then the raucous slowly died away.

Grimes had also been awoken by the noise of the patrol leaving and returning. When normality returned to the control room and the mercenaries had gone to their quarters to drink and brag some more after they'd shackled the new guests and beaten them some more

Grimes decided to scrutinise the recordings from the infra red cameras and screens from the laser security network mesh, which surrounded the centre and video footage of the recent and apparently successful first mission.

Something caught his eye and he called in a now 'spannered' Mophi.

Mophi, Grimes and the mercenary who had

coordinated the attack repeatedly studied the footage, until the mercenary and Mophi persuaded Grimes that it had been a glitch. They came up with a plausible explanation that Grimes would have to swallow, either that or Mophi's fist, as he was tired but wanted to rejoin his party.

Grimes was not convinced and called Akhim in Hanoi to inform him of the failed rescue attempt and have him move up the deadline.

Several hours later Grimes came and led Kim away to speak with her father on the sat phone.

That lifted her spirits, although it had been a short conversation, she felt sure that her father would be planning her rescue and she knew he wouldn't let anything happen to her gentle, kind and loving husband Pon, and his friends.

She returned to her room and looked at Ca, who, apart from taking a shower and eating he'd never spoken or moved from his position on the bed.

He now looked at Kim and tears welled up in his eyes

"I am sorry Hern. I have been a fool and have been duped by that English bastard and I am sure they've killed Tuong"

Kim thought for a moment about how her father, a well educated man, had been easily taken in by Grimes.

She walked over to Ca and took his moist tear stained face in her hands and whispered,

"I forgive you"

Grimes smiled as he watched the CCTV monitor in his office and the images from the camera in Kim and Ca's room.

“At last, this could be interesting and another devastating blow for Pon. Mohammed will be pleased with this new development. I will work more on these lovebirds, although it will be short lived”.

Grimes reported this new development to Mohammed and he seemed pleased, although it was hard to tell as his illness took a firmer grip. They'd had daily contact with him, first in the Hanoi office and now at the control centre through a scrambled audio/video live time feed.

Grimes and Mophi spoke to him and reported on the success of each part of the plan, assuring him that he would soon have the relic and his fatwa would be carried out in front of the screen, so he could witness Allah's revenge. The conversation always ended in Arabic between Mophi and Mohammed, which made Grimes nervous and suspicious.

Grimes plan had started coming to fruition. Everything had been meticulously detailed and now he just had to wait a few more days, before the final and most demanding part of the operation took place, and then his escape.

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Ca was an easy target. Grimes had all the information as to Kim's return flight to Thailand from the gardener that he had planted [no pun intended] at Thran's house.

A D.V.D with demands and instructions from an unfocused faced Mohammed had been placed into a bag



full of tatty 2<sup>nd</sup> hand purchased clothes. He gave the bag to Ca with instructions to take one of Grime's Vietnamese colleagues, Mr Lang Duc from his Hanoi office to the airport to catch a flight. Then, when Lang gave the signal Ca would go the window, attract Kim's attention, get her outside and give her a letter. Grimes convinced Ca that Kim would be expecting him, but Grimes told Ca that as part of the plan she would act confused, just in case Pons spies lurked around.

"Don't be surprised by her reaction," said Grimes "this is part of her plan"

Ca could not drive a car, so he asked if Tuong could come along, Grimes agreed and the strategy was put in place.

Ca and Tuong arrived at the airport on schedule and dropped off Lang at departures. Ca had been both excited and agitated the whole journey up to the airport thinking about meeting his Hern after all these years. After dropping off Lang, Ca and Tuong waited in the car park for the signal.

They didn't have to wait long as a large white car with a red star painted on the side stopped outside the departures gate. Kim and her father stepped out. The driver removed Kim's bags from the trunk and placed them onto a trolley, Kim and Thran said their goodbyes and he drove off and Kim walked into the departures section to check in.

Ca was full of trepidation after the first glimpse and all his old feelings were rekindled, all he wanted now was the signal, so that he could be close to her.

Kim checked in her baggage and went into the small

window covered departure lounge, situated on the ground floor. Airports in South East Asia are very informal and you can wander around or go outside.

Kim telephoned Pon to let him know she was on her way home and when she'd finished she went to stand by the window and thought about her mother and father, and wondered what had happened.

Lang Duc noticed Kim make her phone call and go to stand by the window. He dialled a number, let it ring three times and turned the phone off and went to stand beside Kim.

He saw Ca heading towards the window, waving at Kim. He noticed Kim watch as Ca got closer and she let out a sigh of recognition, surprise and disbelief

“Ca” she said aloud as he neared, she excitedly waved back. Ca came to the window and a happy joyous Kim shouted through the window about how she couldn't believe that it was him and it had been a long time. Ca made a signal to suggest that he could not hear her.

“Wait” she mouthed and motioned that she would come outside. She turned and bumped into Lang.

“Sorry” she said and continued on her way to meet Ca, Lang took a seat and watched as Kim and Ca embraced like two lovers, rejoined after a lifetime apart.

‘That’s nice’ thought Lang as he disassembled the mobile phone that he'd just nimbly stolen from Kim and threw some parts in the bins scattered around the airport, he would discard the remaining parts elsewhere.

Ca's heart raced as he held the woman he hadn't seen for what seemed a lifetime. Kim had recognised Ca

immediately although it had been a long time and they had both aged.

“What are you doing here?” asked Kim.

“I am here to help you,” he said proudly

“Help me, how?” said Kim furling her expression.

“Come with me” ordered Ca excitedly.

“I have a plane to catch, I can’t” replied Kim

Ca then handed her the letter as per Grimes instructions. The large brown envelope wasn’t addressed and had been sealed. Therefore, Ca had no idea of the content, but it looked official and had a government stamp.

“Who gave you this?” asked Kim, before she opened the letter

“You know” said Ca and smiled “your good friend Julian.

“Who?” said Kim, looking confused as she tore open the letter and read the script.

***Dear Mrs Kim Meesilli /Miss Heng Tangh***

***I want to inform you about the grave danger your family is in and things would become increasingly worse if you don’t follow instructions, implicitly.***

***As a demonstration of our power and influence we admit to easily poisoning your mother. If you want no further harm to come to your family you will go with our agent Ca.***

Kim glanced at Ca and read on

***If you try to run back into the airport you will be killed by our agent, now stood at the window.***

Kim looked at Lang Duc now stood at the airport window. Lang saw her looking, nodded, and tapped his waist

showing a bulge the shape of a pistol, which was a plastic water pistol that he would discard later.

The letter continued

***If you try to draw any attention to yourself please look ahead to the third tree in front of you.***

Kim spotted the trees and saw a figure lurking at the side of the tree pointing a rifle directly at her.

This had been a cleverly created optical illusion set up that morning by Akhim and his pictographic colleague, they used three notice boards on the front and from the road, and it was just an advertisement. However, the reverse had prints of foliage with arranged shadows, which appeared from most viewpoints to show three separate boards, but from the position Ca and Kim where directed to stand the pictures came together looking like a 3D image of a man holding a rifle.

Convinced she was now trapped and her life was in danger, decided for now to go along. She had wrongly assumed that her father was somehow involved and he was the probable target.

She thought, 'These people don't know who they were dealing with, my father will have them sorted out in no time,' so for now she didn't feel in much danger, and they obviously needed her alive. Besides Ca was there and she hoped he would protect her even though she didn't yet understand his role in this. Kim read on, and as instructed and took several photographs from the envelope. The first doctored shot had been of her uncle Lee, sat on Sihanoukville beach with a menacing figure stood behind him. The others included Banti pushing Samnan in a

buggy along a Bangkok street and being followed by the same ominous figure. The next showed her mother and father in the hospital after Nga had her heart attack showing a doctor administering an Intravenous infusion. She noticed the doctor had been the same menacing figure as in the other photos. Mophi was very photogenic. The photographs backed up the letter, which warned her that they could get to her loved ones at any time, but assured her that no harm would come to her or her family, so long as she followed their commands.

The letter then carried on to explain that the reasons for her abduction would be divulged when she arrived at her destination. Kim knew she had no alternative but to obey.

She returned the envelope to Ca as ordered, who folded it and put it in his pocket ready to return to his good friend and creator of his new happiness Julian.

Ca noticed Kim's expression change from one of joy to sadness, disillusion and fear. Ca just thought she'd put on a great act just as Julian said she would.

"What have you got to do with this Ca?" she snapped  
Ca leant forward and whispered in her ear,

"Your happiness and freedom" he said

A bewildered looking Kim, fearing for her and her families lives, decided to follow instructions, she went with Ca and got into the car, terrified, but curious.

The journey to the small airstrip took nearly two hours and Ca relaxed with his thoughts and memories, while Tuong drove and Kim sat silently in the rear seat, confused by what was happening, and why?

Ca thought once they'd boarded the helicopter they would be in the clear and Hern and he could talk, but the noise of the helicopter made conversation difficult, so they seldom spoke throughout the noisy journey. However they spoke even less after they left Grimes's office and Ca realised he'd been duped.

Now that Grimes had Kim as his hostage, he awaited the phone call to tell him Lang Duc had returned safely from Thailand as Huer Dang, before the next stage could commence.

Akhim confirmed that many hours later, and told Grimes he had paid Lang off who'd reverted back to his own identity, with all evidence destroyed. Akhim informed Grimes that everything was set in Hanoi and he was ready to visit the Tangh's in Ha Tay to play his role.

"That will be tomorrow my good friend," Grimes informed him and advised him to contact the gardener, to get an update and to get a good night sleep as the next few days was going to be dangerous.

Grimes then made the initial phone call to Thran. He wanted to make the call personally, knowing Thran would recognise his voice, which had been his egotistical way of letting his victims know he had fooled them.

With Kim, Ca and Tuong locked away, it was now just a waiting game, which Grimes was used to in his line of work and had found many things to pass his time, like planning the rest of his life around beach resorts and casinos across the world

Mophi had other ways to entertain himself and his

soldiers of fortune.

An hour after Kim, Ca and Tuong had been put in their rooms. Two mercenaries dragged Tuong out and led him to a large dimly lit space to the rear of the control room.

The mercenaries stood around forming a square, with Mophi stood in the centre.

A frightened Tuong was hurtled into the middle and bounced off Mophi's chest.

Mophi grabbed him and smiled as he lifted the small Vietnamese off his feet, so they were face to face.

"So little man, you are a Vovinam master" snarled Mophi.

Tuong nervously smiled and nodded

"Well let's just have some fun" Mophi said as he threw Tuong across the room like a rag doll.

Tuong righted himself in mid air and landed on his feet, spun around and faced Mophi, the mercenaries cheered at this manoeuvre.

Mophi smiled and charged at Tuong, who side stepped out of the way, spun around and landed a spinning fist to Mophi's temple sending him sprawling to the ground. This infuriated Mophi and over the next few minutes a battle ensued with Tuong's skills and calmness getting the better of the monster. The mercenaries stopped Mophi getting hurt on several occasions by pushing and grabbing Tuong, which gave the blood splattered, dazed Mophi time to recover. Tuong knew he stood no chance against these odds but the brave little fighter held his ground, even attacking the odd mercenary.

The combat lasted about twenty minutes. Tuong's

skills were masterful, never taking a major blow. Mophi was knocked to the floor again, this time by a devastating kick that connected with his head. He was bruised, bloody and nearly defeated.

He looked at the mercenary behind Tuong and nodded. Tuong saw this, spun around to attack the man and felt electricity curse through him as he got tasered. Everything went dark and Tuong's next recollection was being on his stomach with a powerful force around his neck lifting his shoulders off the floor. He heard men shouting and uproar, and then a sharp pain as his neck got snapped.

Tuong's lifeless corpse was then unceremoniously dumped in the amphibious vehicle, driven through the tunnel and thrown into the deep rain-forest.

Bragging and laughing throughout the short journey, Mophi tried to convince his comrades that he'd had Tuong easily beaten and told his team of louts how he couldn't wait to take on his other adversary when he arrived.

"He will be easy, he is almost my size, but maybe we will get some practice in before he arrives" he said, and then smiled, growled and postured like the incredible hulk.

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The five Cambodian commandos arrived at the coordinates on schedule. They silently made their way through dense vegetation and undergrowth, until they reached the origin of the sat signal, the control centre. They crept up to the entrance peered down the tunnel and



then separated to dig in to positions within the jungle. The squad leader had been highly trained in jungle warfare from a young age and the many years of special forces training made him alert and at home in the rain-forest.

Unsure of what technology that the enemy possessed the squad needed to ensure that they would be invisible. The commander chose a site, by a small river away from the centre and positioned himself in the cradle of a tree. He set up his equipment, covered himself in the cool moist mud from the riverbank, and prepared for a stakeout.

The control centre was awash with the noise. Of mercenaries shouting and donning night vision equipment, and checked radios and weapons. Mophi and two mercenary's watched a monitor displaying red and orange moving images. Mophi shouted out coordinates to his men.

The rain-forest was restless. The insects and nocturnal animals noisily fought their nightly battles for food and mating. This noise hampered the commando's who had been unable to use their heightened hearing to the fullest.

In the control centre, the man monitoring the action transmitted locations and instructions to the soldiers of fortune. He concentrated on one position at a time and, when the units were all in place, he gave the order, Go, Go, Go! He watched the monitor that showed his red and orange teams close in on solitary, prone, stationary figures.

The jungle erupted with the sound of shouting, gunfire and explosions from thunder flash grenades. The ambush had taken only minutes. The screens then showed

spectral images, the scene showing his group leaving the site with prisoners. However, one group had left the scene without any prisoners and the man at the monitor smirked “Heartless bastard Mophi, they could all have been taken alive” He looked to the largest heat detected individual on the screen as he now moved away to join the others after spending time next to a still target and needlessly pumping more bullets into the corpse.

“Control room, this is five” said a mercenary over the radio

“Go ahead five”

“There’s nothing at the location you gave, over”

The controller replayed the recording on another monitor and saw an image for a few moments that seemed to be moving erratically on all fours in and out of view, and then disappeared towards a small river.

The technician thought for a moment.

“Five, this is control, confirm there is no sign of any equipment or individual.”

“Confirmed” said a tired, uninterested mercenary

“It must have been an animal,” advised the controller  
“Ok return to base.”

The set up, capture and the return to base had taken just over an hour, two prisoners were led into the control centre and beaten by the rowdy and now beer soaked conquerors They were hammered relentlessly until unconscious, then with no more fun to be had, they were shackled, gagged and locked in Tuong’s old room.

The Special Forces squad leader had observed all this from his bark covered tree cradle position. He knew the cold river mud would hide him temporarily from any

heat sensors he now knew that the enemy possessed. Now he knew his foes capabilities he would have to move out of range and wait for the heat of the sun to allow him to move around freely and plan a rescue attempt for his captured men and complete his mission.

Dawn broke and the sun started to radiate its daily warmth. The squad leader shimmied down the sun facing side of the tree and stealthily moved between warm, dense patches of vegetation until he reached the entrance to the tunnel and now in closer proximity he slid back into the tropical-forest.

He knew Pon and the lads were due later that day so he would spend the day on recognisance. He knew that during the day this was his domain and he could easily smell, see and hear better than any device. He intended to rendezvous with Pon and together work out another course of action. He skirted around the side of the centre and noticed another slightly raised mound that seemed to disappear under the trees into the dense rain-, which looked like the start of a separate underground tunnel.

“Where does this lead I wonder?” He thought and headed off to investigate.

Ca and Kim started to speak to each other after Kim had spoken to her father. They tried to figure out what had happening and why. The countless hours passed, they spoke about their current life. Kim told Ca about her planned wedding to Colonel Tighe, who’d appeared to have vanished and, how she met and fell in love with, Pon. Ca listened to this now distant woman and realised she had feelings only for her husband, Pon.

They talked for hours, with the odd interruption from Grimes. Grimes persuaded them if they became a couple again they could comfort each other in this time of need. Grimes's mind games made it seem as if no rescue would be forthcoming, and placing the blame on Pon

Fearful, confused, and feeling isolated they eventually embraced. Ca told Hern he had never stopped loving her and if they were about to die, he wanted to spend what time they had left with her. Kim looked at Ca and smiled, which reminded him of the old Hern, who could always melt his heart with that smile and, eventually through the hopelessness, and with all the memories flooding back, they kissed.

They held onto each other wrapped in each other's soul. They then got under the bed sheets and carried on with their loving embrace.

Grimes watched from his office CCTV monitor, elated. He had monitored, cultivated and nurtured this, using his proficient lifelong talent as a swindler and when he saw them kiss, he yelled aloud

“About bloody time, another few hours and it would have been a waste of time. Am I the best, oh yes! Crawford is the boy” he bragged and did a little jig around his office.

He then had the video technicians make a collage of pictures and clips, which would play continually on the screens in his office.

‘That should please Pon when he gets here, which should be soon. He thought and glanced at his watch. He then went over to the technicians and insisted they checked the equipment over again for the next part of the

operation.

The sat phone rang thirty minutes later and Grimes, who had been looking through more travel magazines and watching the collages and clips of Kim and Ca on his screens, answered.

“Hi Akhim everything on schedule” he shouted as he heard noisy rotors in the background.

“Of course” shouted Akhim “En route, be there in about an hour with our guests.”

Grimes then organised Mophi to get his unit into position, which seemed to cheer up Mophi as soon he would get to meet his new opponent in the flesh.

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The commando spent the first few days scouting the centre around the tunnel mouth. He found the discarded corpse of Tuong. He'd decided the tunnel entrance would be the easiest and most surreptitious entry for a frontal attack.

The commando realised the plan had been aborted when Pon didn't show for their rendezvous. However, he had no intention of leaving the zone. Two of his men had been killed and the two captured, who maybe still alive. During the day he observed and monitored the entrance and planned ways to infiltrate unseen and attempt a rescue. Nighttime he moved into the jungle to the start of the river, to a position which he knew would be out of range of the heat sensors. He built a shelter, hunted, ate, slept and prepared his additional weaponry.

He went to his daytime lookout position just after

dawn broke and he felt the sun's warmth, he'd had productive evenings with his tasks.

On the third day he saw several fuel drums being wheeled out of the tunnel and set out, hidden beneath the camouflaged canopy, it appeared as if they were expecting something. As the Vietnamese fuel crew stood and waited an amphibious vehicle exited the tunnel. Six men got out of the vehicle, laughing, shouting and ordering Vietnamese workers to check the fuel. One voice he recognised from the raid and execution of his troops. He stared as the intimidating man terrorised the Vietnamese with his contempt. The commando glared from his camouflaged position at this individual.

One man grabbed some aircraft direction paddles and started to view the sky towards the north.

After a few minutes the sound of rotors could be heard in the distance, one of the men pointed to a dot in the sky. The sound intensified and moments later, the helicopter hovered above the landing site. The batman directed the large M1-172, 19 seat Puma, to land and roll forward under the canopy and signalled to stop the engines.

The squad leader noticed the markings on the chopper. Helicopter Vietnam charter.

The rotors idled to a stop and Mophi gave the order for immediate refuelling, with enough fuel to take them the 40min flight across the border into Laos's airspace.

Mophi knew they needed enough fuel to fly non-stop to Wattay Laos's international airport where they would board Mohammed's private jet to Saudi Arabia.

"We will soon be going home boys," Mophi

bellowed as the rotors finally came to a halt.

The mercenaries went to the side of the helicopter as the door was slid open. Akhim got out with Pons cloth bag slung over his shoulder and went over to speak with Mophi.

The mercenary's readied their weapons as Mophi went to the side of the helicopter. Three individuals got out of the doorway with their hands tied behind their backs. They were lined up and as three mercenaries trained their weapons at the captive's heads, the other three patted them up and down for concealed weapons. Mophi and Akhim stood back and watched. Mophi hadn't taken his eyes off Spock. He compared him to the photographs and profile that Grimes had shown him, Mophi decided he would be no match for him. Mophi was taller by at least six inches and perfect muscle tone for his 320lb frame, a brick shithouse in comparison to Spock who appeared to be just a large, lard arse. 'No contest' thought Mophi.

Stu, while being searched noticed Mophi's intense stare towards Spock, and said

"Have you upset that Arab in some way?"

Spock had already noticed Mophi and replied

"Not yet" and blew Mophi a kiss.

This infuriated the Arab who growled and started to stride towards Spock, Akhim stopped him and told he would have to wait a short while longer before he could deal with Spock, he gave Mophi' Pons bag to take care of and calmed the situation told Mophi,

"When we get into central you take this to Julian, while I check everything's ready for our journey home"

“Now I’ve upset him,” said Spock with a big toothless grin, as they were led away towards the amphibious vehicle at gunpoint and herded onto the motor, and while Spock and Stu looked a little nervous with all the firepower, Pon had a confident grin and contemplated.

“These thugs aren’t so proficient” he wriggled with his partially cut binds and adjusted his extra proboscis to make sure it was prepared. It would certainly be unexpected. He glanced toward the jungle

“They didn’t capture them all, he thought  
Pon was curious to see what the instigator behind all this had in store for them, and he felt sure that a greater danger lurked at the other end of the tunnel.

The vehicle sped off down the tunnel leaving the aircrew and maintenance readying the ‘Puma’ for the onward journey.

The camouflaged commando witnessed this and recognised the three newcomers. He retreated into the shadows and undergrowth, but was curious how Pon had seen him. He noticed Pon, dressed in his monk’s attire start to discreetly sniff the area. Pon stared straight at his location, smiled then looked away as they walked towards the vehicle. ‘He will be an impressive ally,’ thought the commando .also considering Spock to be a big toothless foreigner who looked handy, and fearless.

The commando waited for the amphibious vehicle to get a good head start down the tunnel, he gathered his belongings, left his camouflaged position and entered the tunnel, undetected.



## – Chapter Twelve –

**P**on, Stu and Spock came out of the arrivals section along with other passengers. Taksin had planned well and the domestic flight from Ho Chi mihn, plus the international flight from Thailand had landed within ten minutes of each other.

They'd spent the previous night planning imaginative, although unrealistic schemes, Pon felt it would take their minds off the seriousness of their situation. Pon changed his phone card to the clone he and Taksin had prepared, so any calls now made to Taksin from the hostage takers via Akhim would now come directly to Pon.

The three lads walked into the car park as instructed and met Akhim. They had been given his description, and the location he would meet them at from Taksin. Akhim sat on the bonnet of a Hyundai reading that day's Bangkok post.

He never said hello, he just looked at the three, grinned and showed them the morning headlines. The front page had been dedicated to a theft that occurred the previous evening. The article headlined the burglary of the beloved relic from the temple of the sacred light and spoke about the significance of the artefact and the great loss to the Thai peoples. Then it showed three separate photographs and underneath the photographs, it read:

These three people, giving Spocks Stu and Pons names are the only suspects and a nation-wide manhunt is underway for the arrest of the fugitives. The story went on to offer a reward and a request for information.

Akhim watched their reactions as they read the newspaper and noticed the Englishmen seemed nervous and confused, but the Thai remained calm, which he put down to his acceptance of fate.

Akhim asked how they'd escaped and Stu answered as Pon, didn't want Akhim to recognise his voice and realise he wasn't the same man he'd been negotiating with.

Stu told Akhim an elaborate story of how Pon had stolen the relic and together, with the help of some inside help at the palace, had joined them at the airport, and boarded a plane under assumed names and disguises.

They showed Akhim the counterfeit passports William Anchor, Kerry Eggleton and Chait-ead wearing his mullet.

Stu managed to bluff their way through, although Akhim could speak English, he couldn't grasp the Northern dialogue or enunciation, or the fact that Stu had been talking bollocks.

Akhim then ordered

“You will come with me, now.”

Pon pointed to the toilet and started to walk towards the men's room, leaving Spock and Stu to place their bags in the boot of the car. They got in and sat with Akhim asking him question after question Akhim ignored them and told them to shut their mouths. He asked Stu why Pon took so long in the toilet.

“Probably grooming his tail,” chuckled Spock, he and Stu burst out laughing. Akhim not understanding

became impatient and started to sound the horn.

Pon went into the men's room, he was surprised the group had only sent one man to escort them, but as they held all the cards, he knew that they wouldn't consider them a threat. He went into his cloth bag and brought out his neatly parcelled monks attire and his Glave. He removed his mullet and walked towards the car and got into the front passenger seat. Akhim was taken aback by Pon's appearance, now in monk's lightweight orange robes with an impressive red and gold sash, with his shaven head as bald as a babies bum.

Akhim gave Pon a look of disdain and said

"Is the relic in there?" pointing at his bag

Pon nodded

"Give it to me," ordered Akhim

Pon wanted to tell him fu\*\* \*ff but knew that if Akhim had recognised this hadn't been the same voice he had been speaking to, the game would be up, so he reluctantly handed over his bag.

'I have what I need out of it anyway' thought Pon, whose attention was interrupted by Stu, who warned Akhim not to put his hands in the bag there was almost certainly a mullet on the loose and it would bite.

Akhim ignored this and drove to the airstrip. Pon staring ahead in silence, while Spock and Stu invented mullet jokes in the back.

They arrived at the small airstrip where a large helicopter waited with rotors idling. One of Akhim's staff greeted them. The man had bribed the airport superintendent not to report the helicopters arrival or

departure as it wasn't a registered stop. The man would drive Akhim's Hyundai back to Hanoi and dump it.

Spock, Stu and Pon were ushered into the large passenger section where a Vietnamese aircrew member directed them to the rear. Akhim boarded last and produced some plastic tie wraps, made them place their hands behind their backs and fastened the wraps in place around their wrists. Once the three had been secured, he sat them down and went forward to sit near the pilot, and ordered him to take off.

By the time the helicopter reached its cruising altitude Spock and Pon had started to work on their bindings.

They didn't have a set plan, as they didn't know what scenario they were up against, they'd had a few stupid and sporadic ideas, one of which they now trying.

Pon eased his supple body through his arms so he now had his arms and hands in front of him, then 'thwap.' Spock spat his dentures out and into Pons cupped hands. He snapped the dentures at the repaired break, so he had two sharp pieces. Stu kept a lookout on Akhim, while Pon partially cut through his bindings then proceeded to do the same with Spock's and Stu's restraints.

"One good tug and they'll snap," said Pon "I just hope they are as careless with their search when we reach our destination."

Pon repositioned his arms behind his back and disposed of Spock's dentures between the seat folds, much to the exasperation of Spock, who said aloud.

"No night out in two days, woken up at silly o'clock in the morning, beer levels at an all time low, not even a

sniff of a shag, and now my poor old dentures are fucked. . . . Somebody deserves a major arse kicking.”

Even through the noise of the rotors Akhim could hear Spocks hollering, he turned around to see his passengers now sitting innocently, similar to the three wise monkeys smiling back at him. He turned back to look out of the pilot’s window.

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Akhim had played the most exposed part in the plot. He didn’t mind, he was confident in his and Julian’s plan and knew he had been the only one that could’ve accomplished this vital section and, for his fee of Ten million dollars it was certainly worth the risk.

Akhim, an Egyptian, and one of the world’s most accomplished forgers. A short, thin, bearded, unobtrusive character. He had been originally employed by Mohamed to duplicate the original art treasures in his vault to decorating his lavish Saudi home, and hospital wing ceiling. Mohammed had been so impressed he permanently employed the thirty-eight year-old Akhim.

When Grimes was imprisoned, Akhim volunteered to assist in monitoring his well-being and safety, he’d heard about Grimes from both Mohammed and other individuals in the same line of business. Grimes had an illustrious reputation. Akhim cleverly forged papers and set up a cover story stating he was an Egyptian undercover police officer and needed to be incarcerated to observe and

monitor Grimes. This worked and with the contacts Akhim made in jail, lifers with nothing to lose, and a few dollars that went a long way. He inconspicuously protected Grimes until Mohammed had further uses for him, or got bored and wanted him dead.

Akhim found some of Grime's ideas fascinating during the time they spent as inmates and when the opportunity came up for them to work together, he leapt at the chance. Their plan had gone perfectly so far. He, Grimes and Mophi had surveyed the plans of Thran's home and surrounding area. They knew that when their plan was put into action they would have to avoid snipers and other obstacles that would be put into place by the Vietnamese. They had to ensure Akhim had a safe escape route from the Tangh's home. They'd left nothing to chance, the gardener, diversions and misdirection had all been scrupulously prepared.

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After Grimes had made the initial phone call to Thran and the instructions given. Akhim went to the Tangh's home. He parked the Hyundai in the forecourt of a house a few streets away that the group had rented and walked the short distance with his bag of equipment.

Thran met him at the door as instructed and, as expected he was angry and made threats in Vietnamese and English but Akhim just ignored them, walked inside, and took control ordering the Tangh's into the bedroom and directing them to stay there until they were needed. He locked the door and issued orders to the staff, which

consisted of one female cook, her female helper, one female cleaner, a repairperson and a gardener. The cook doubled as a nurse to Nga who still suffered the after effects of the Thalium and side effects from the Prussian blue treatment.

Akhim had all the windows, along with entrances and exits to be covered, and then set up his monitoring, broadcasting and communication equipment. Throughout the ordeal he spoke to the Tangh's as little as possible, spending his time monitoring the worldwide websites for any significant information and his own satellite feed monitoring any military movement on the area near Cu Chi.

He had convinced Thran that any intervention meant his daughter would die and the fact that he was an Arab made Thran believe this was a fanatical terrorist cell. Thran complied with every instruction, the berretta 92F pistol Akhim constantly waved about, made Thran nervous and with Nga still not fully recovered he decided at this stage 'discretion being the better part of valour' he would just conform.

Akhim instructed the household to remain working as normal, which he knew from Grimes undercover research exactly what that entailed, which would be pivotal in his evasion. The gardener had been instructed to keep a low profile among the other staff and inform him of any plot or scheme to overthrow him.

Akhim reassured the gardener that this would lift suspicion when the assignment was over, and he would be the richest gardener in Hanoi. Akhim had a willing, obedient and expendable minion.

Even though there was a strange atmosphere in the house, the staff went about their business. The cook prepared the meals for them all, she moved freely in and out of Thran's and Nga's confinement room at meal times with Akhim always nearby to monitor her and the gardener constantly lurking not too far away. The young woman kitchen hand went to the market and shops early every morning to fetch the daily supplies.

This small but efficient single man operation centre ran smoothly and Akhim had all the information he needed at his fingertips. He checked in with Grimes in the control centre regularly and he had given the gardener a satellite phone connected direct to the control centre just in case anything was to happen to him.

Everything went according to plan over the next few days, the minor delays from Bangkok was reported and discussed with Grimes who made all the decisions. Everything had remained calm, until the capture of the commandos, which made the tempo shift into a higher gear as Grimes instructed Akhim to apply pressure to Pon/Taksin to move up the deadline. There was a lot of shouting, screaming and threats from Akhim made down the phone and pleading from both Taksin and Thran, who Akhim had dragged out of his room to be involved with the conversation. Eventually calm was restored and Thran locked back up in his room and the deadline reset.

'That had been convincing,' thought Akhim as he relaxed in Thran's armchair, glancing at a framed photograph of Thran in Academic robes, with an English countryside backdrop holding a diploma.

'Good old Julian, he thought, 'he really is the master



trickster. And all being well I should be out of here tomorrow’

Early the following morning Akhim prepared. He scoured the internet from first light and logged into the site he required at the Bangkok Post and read that day’s news. He did not have to search far as the story he looked for was headline news.

The household knew something appeared different as Akhim told a kitchen hand she would not be doing the shopping that day.

He gave the gardener instructions to keep everything as usual during the day. He fed him a story to tell the authorities and gave him strict instructions to free the captives after 8pm, stating that the kidnapper left in the morning, but threatened that he would be returning early evening and he was afraid to let anyone go any earlier.

Everything else had been pre set and planned for the next few moments.

Mophi predicted that the Hanoi Chief of police would have snipers in position on rooftops to observe and protect Minister Thran. He had been correct and at 7am the snipers observed the kitchen hand stood in the doorway and about to leave on her daily walk to the market, and as usual she wore her Ao Dai and Non La, silk dress and large conical hat.

“Have you seen her face yet?” asked one of marksman and laughed

“Not yet” laughed the other as he sat up and stretched “Those stupid Non La’s don’t let you see anything from up here, but I’m sure I love her,” he

laughed. A large blast suddenly rocked their position.

Two more explosions shook other rooftops, blowing snipers off their feet, their eardrums imploding, and flesh tore from their bodies.

The scene was chaotic, men screaming on fire, and blinded from the small packets of pre concealed C4 placed inside some unassuming clay flowerpots,

Akhim put the detonator in his shopping bag and, as the panicking neighbourhood came rushing out to see what had happened, he strolled to the parked Hyundai and drove away. Once he felt sure he was safe, he took off the Non-la and threw it in the rear seat next to his large shopping bag containing all the hi tech equipment. He stroked his chin and complements himself on a job well done.

He drove along route 2 towards Noi Bai airport and turned off alongside a rice paddy and stopped his car alongside parked car. Two Vietnamese greeted him. The men looked at him, trying not to snigger as Akhim got out of the car in his Ao Dai and ignored them until he'd gone behind some thickets and changed into the clothes he'd worn at Thran's.

He gave the men their instructions, checked they had the bribe money and told one of them he would meet them at the airstrip. He then gave them his bag containing his equipment to be put onto the helicopter and some women's clothes to dump. They all got into their respective vehicles and drove back to the road then headed in their different directions.

Akhim knew he would still have to wait about four hours until Pon, Stu and Spock would arrive, he checked the arrival times for the Thai airways flight. He bought a copy of the Bangkok Post, which had arrived on the first incoming flight from Thailand, and then he drove around the airport stopping to eat at one of the many small indoor restaurants surrounding it. He ate *Banh Cuon*, a rice flour roll stuffed with pork and prawns served with a spicy sausage, and watched a Vietnamese TV station report on several unexplained explosions in the Ha Tay area of Hanoi. Although Akhim couldn't understand Vietnamese, he recognised the area he'd just departed from and saw the carnage from his handy work and, while the Vietnamese and tourists chattered around him, he sat and read the newspaper.

## – Chapter Thirteen –

The vehicle came to a stop within the brightly illuminated control centre, Mophi beckoned to the mercenaries who shoved their three prisoners out of the vehicle and ordered them to stand in line. Pon surveyed the area and noticed rooms, partitioned sections, Hi-tech monitoring and testing equipment and several desks, arranged around the large, open centre. Several technicians and the remaining mercenary's appeared to be busy monitoring the security and environmental screens. Akhim and Mophi walked up to a large office and entered carrying Pons bag. Three mercenaries trained their rifles on the three captives, while the others three went over to their comrades and started bragging how easy the job had been. They then walked over to the far side of the centre and into their quarters to finish the last of the alcohol, pack their belongings for their imminent journey home and do a final check on the explosives that would destroy the centre.

Spock and Stu stood in silence looking around the control room, which appeared to them like a low budget 'set' from an early James Bond movie. The centre had a dank, fusty smell. The lads watched Mophi and Akhim enter Grimes office Pons attention however was on another room, where he had gotten a whiff of Kim's sweet scent

mixed with other odours, man and fish. He also noticed an earthy, dried blood smell lingering from another room. Pon noticed that the other mercenaries in the control centre were only lightly armed with M9 side arms, unlike the ones that guarded them who carried Bullpup rifles. Pon weighed up his options now he knew what numbers they had and the weaponry they'd possessed. Although he realised they were outnumbered and outgunned he knew the information he was gleaning now would come in useful later when his secret ally arrived, who he figured wasn't that far behind.

Akhim and Mophi came out of Grimes office and walked back over to the group. He barked orders to the mercenaries and they stood back lowering their weapons, Mophi then went over and pushed his face against Spock's "Soon, my friend" he threatened, "you will die slow and painfully" Spock stared at the larger and more powerful Mophi and he grinned.

"Yeah right," said Spock and head butted Mophi on his nose.

Mophi yelped, covered his broken bloody nose with one hand, and slapped Spock with the other. Pon became nervous in case Spock would lose his cool and snap his partially cut bonds. Spock however just stood proudly upright looking at the damage to Mophi's nose, Akhim again stepped in to calm Mophi down.

The prisoners were then shoved about 100 yards until they were outside the door of Grimes office. Spock mentioned how he'd appeared to have upset the Arab, again. Stu imagined entering the office and seeing a man

with a silly Russian accent with a fat, white cat purring on his lap. Pon, the Tinju warrior, focused on their options to mount an offensive. They entered Grime's large office.

Grimes sat behind a large desk. Several large plasma screens were positioned on various walls. Some gave information from CCTV's cameras placed in several locations in and around the centre, others showed satellite images and live feeds to and from Mohammed and one 52" screen behind Grimes, showed the recording of Kim and Ca.

The prisoners were shoved in front of Grimes desk and three mercenaries took up positions behind Stu, Spock and Pon, aiming rifles at their heads.

The contents of Pons bag was laid out neatly in front of Grimes, his jeans, T-shirt, his small bottles and powders, along with the parcel from Bangkok which had been opened and the holy relic now placed on top of the wrapping.

Grimes noticed Pon's shocked expression as he watched his wife kiss and canoodle with Ca. He knew this affected him deeply as he'd presumed it would, but he still hadn't finished having his fun with the monk before he died. Grimes thought it would make him more subservient and easier to handle.

Grimes looked at the three. He noticed the blood on Spock's forehead and Mophi nursing his bloody nose and realised what must have happened. He sniggered and glanced over to the table in the corner, which had been laid out with beers, wines and spirits, including the single bottle of a certain brand of beer with the lethal dose of poison that he'd prepared for Mophi, for when this stage

was over, and they celebrated.

He let the room linger in silence before he spoke in order for them to watch his film show.

After several minutes he spoke to the three.

“Good afternoon gentleman, I have been expecting you”

Spock and Stu’s focused on Pon, who watched the images on the screen, much to the delight of Grimes who couldn’t resist taunting the upset Pon and said,

“Your wife seems to be getting on well with her captor, doesn’t she?”

Pon looked, but outwardly refused to show any emotion.

“Why are you doing this?” asked Stu “We’ve done nothing to you”

“My good fellow it’s not me, it’s my employer, I would never hurt my fellow Englishmen, not even northerners” smirked Grimes

All three stared at this unassuming man [without a fat white cat] and listened while he enlightened them about Mohammed and what they had been accused, sentenced, and were about to be punished for.

Stu beseeching Grimes about having that the facts all wrong, but all Grimes would say that if his benefactor says they were correct, as far as he was concerned that was fact.

Grimes got great pleasure from this as the longer they grovelled the better he felt and gave Pon more time to watch his wife.

Now incensed, Pon broke into the conversation,

“We have done as instructed, now stop talking

bollocks and let me see my wife.”

Akhim looked at Pon, this was the only time he had heard Pon speak since they had arrived and the voice didn't sound the same as the one he had heard on the phone over the last few days, however he ignored this as Grimes spoke

“All in good time” he said, taken aback by Pons statement “let's see if what you've brought us is authentic.”

He slid the holy box in front of him, inspected it and compared it with some diagrams. He pressed a ruby on the front.

Spock and Stu looked horrified, expecting sand and Nick's crowns to spill out, followed by their guts in a hail of bullets. They looked at each other and closed their eyes. Silence fell on the room as the box popped open. Grimes gave out an instruction to Akhim to take a sample and test that it was genuine. Bewildered, Spock and Stu slowly squinted and then fully opened their eyes.

Grimes spooned a tiny amount of the black ash out of the box. Spock and Stu looked befuddled at each other, shrugged their shoulders and watched.

Akhim came forward with a gelatine-coated Petri dish and placed the sample inside, he then walked outside to several machines and placed the dish inside a carbon dater, when that machine had completed its specific function. He moved the sample to a different tester.

Grimes placed the box in a machine on his desk for a spectral analysis on the stones.

“This will only take a few minutes gentlemen” he informed them and added, “Let's check on your wife shall



we?”

Grimes sniggered as he looked at the screen behind him and pressed a button. The video feed stopped and the screen now showed the live images from the CCTV camera in Kim’s room.

Kim heard the commotion when the amphibious vehicle arrived. She and Ca listened against the door of the room. Kim then heard a familiar voice, Spock; she had definitely heard Spock before she heard Mophi yelling.

“Damn” she thought,

“If Spock’s here that means Stu and Pon are also here. Why have they risked their lives, that bastard Englishman said they weren’t coming”

She looked at Ca and told him she was sorry but she must try to help her husband, Ca agreed and looked around for something they could use to escape, or make a weapon. Ca then discovered the hidden camera behind an air conditioning vent.

They were horrified that they were being spied upon. Ca covered the vent with his shirt.

Grimes’s look of happy expectation turned to disappointment as the screen the he expected to show some steamy action between Kim and Ca, now showed only red cotton. He ordered one of the mercenaries to go to check it out. ‘The odds were now coming down,’ thought Pon as the mercenary left the room.

Akhim returned to the room as two of the screens lit up with data. The box’s gemstones immediately flashed positive on the spectrometer, which meant the stones were genuine rubies, and sapphires of mid range quality, as

expected.

Grimes and Akhim studied the data from the other screens and waited on the third. The third screen stayed blank and then flashed up stating ‘sample contaminated re supply’

Grimes and Akhim looked at each other. Mohammed’s instructions had been very specific on the amount of material he would allow to be removed and that small quota had already been used.

They considered their options, the other tests, albeit not the most significant, had come back 75% positive.

“We can accept this” said Grimes “and we can supply a result if need be” he whispered to Akhim

Akhim agreed, “Let’s get it over with and go home” Grimes and Akhim looked at Mophi still nursing his nose and eyeing up the table full of spirits, champagne and Vietnamese beers, also his separate bottle of beer that Grimes had brought with him from Hanoi, especially for Mophi, it was his favourite and a hard brand to find in Vietnam. Grimes and Akhim nodded to each other and Grimes turned off the third screen. They knew Mophi never comprehended the technical parts and Grimes said to him.

“Everything positive Mophi and the tests confirmed” Mophi smiled and stared at the back of Spocks head, replied.

“Good, soon the killing can begin”

“So much for being honourable and letting us go as promised” spat Stu

Mophi laughed and went to stand between Stu and Spock Akhim stood alongside the seated Grimes as they

waited for one screen to come to life. The display went blue with the words ‘awaiting satellite link’. After a few seconds the screen started to show a blurred image, which focused to a clear image of a smiling Mohammed with his head resting on a pillow

“Good morning Mohammed” said Grimes, knowing the local time was 4 hours behind Saudi time, still late morning.

Akhim and Mophi greeted Mohammed in Arabic and praised Allah.

Grimes had the cameras in the room placed at specific locations, so Mohammed could see everything through split screens. They waited a few seconds while a weak looking Mohammed stared at each individual view and gave instructions to someone to zoom in on the relic.

“Is it genuine Akhim?” he asked in Arabic

“Yes it is” said Akhim

Mohammed smiled and took a breath from an oxygen mask.

He looked at the section on his screen at Pon, Stu Spock, with Mophi looking over their shoulders.

“Are these the three infidels?” he asked, now looking agitated.

“Yes sir” said Mophi smiling

“You know what to do,” he said

“Yes sir” said Mophi

“Get it over wi...” Mohammed never finished his sentence as his head lolled sideways surgically gloved hands and white coated doctors came rushing into view, scrambling around as beeps and sirens wailed from the machines in Mohammed’s room.

“What’s happening?” shouted Grimes at the screen  
There was pandemonium in the hospital room as the doctors worked frantically on the motionless Mohammed.

“Looks like your boss is about to pop his clogs” sneered Spock into Mophi’s ear

Mohammed suddenly opened his eyes and the doctors stood back. Everything became surreal as Mohammed eyes glazed over and he looked at peace.

Grimes, Akhim and Mophi stared at Mohammed on the screen

Pon nudged Spock and then snapped themselves free from their plastic bonds.

They couldn’t believe their luck by this unexpected diversion, so now they would try their next stupid pre planned diversion. Spock let rip a thunderous fart. The mercenaries looked at Spock, not hearing the light thudding sound from the floor between Pons legs, or noticing his stealthy footwork as he recovered his Glave.

Mohammed stared into space for a few seconds and then with eyes wide open he let out a death rattle. And then it was over!

“No, No!” yelled Grimes, as he stared at the screen and the serene scene as the doctors proceeded to last offices, preparing the body. Some holy men came into view, and a hand filled the screen before it went blank.

“Now” shouted Pon as he sprung the blades out of his Glave and flipped into the air to get into a clear space, and then let fly his Glave.

Spock brought his fist up and back- fisted Mophi on his already painful nose, he leant his shoulder into Mophi’s chest and with Mophi off balance shoved him

backwards into one of the mercenaries, knocking him down. Another mercenary moved to get a clear shot and immediately dropped his weapon as the razor sharp Glave's blade pierced into his eye, went through his eye socket and lodged in his brain, killing him instantly.

Mophi's faculties quickly returned and he stood up and lunged at Spock grabbing his throat and pushing him back against a wall. Spock had never been manhandled like this and he realised he had underestimated Mophi's strength and flayed out trying to catch him with a punch.

Pon removed his Glave from the dead man's eye and noticed the other mercenary getting back up.

Grimes stood and gawked at the blank monitor in shock and disbelief and Stu pummelled way on Akhim's face.

When all the action started, Akhim had been focused on the events unfolding in Saudi. He then witnessed the fracas going on behind him, and drew his pistol. Stu saw this and dived across the table landing head first into Akhim's chest, knocking the gun out of his hand and the wind out of chest. Stu grabbed Akhim's shirt and gave him a hard Glaswegian kiss, head butt to the bridge of his nose. Then with all the pent up crap he had been through in the last few days, and like a man on fire, he pummelled the little Arab to the floor and continued the beating. Stopping to catch his breath he then picked up Akhim's gun and pistol whipped the Arab until unconscious. Still pissed, he pulled the still shocked and oblivious Grimes off his chair and started to give him a good bashing.

Spock had a problem he had been shoved against the wall and held off the ground by his throat by a grinning,

powerful, Mophi.

“I Knew you would be easy” growled Mophi

Spocks flailing stopped as he felt himself losing consciousness. He then felt Mophi’s grip ease, and then release as Mophi stepped back with a shocked expression, and then his face scrunched up in agony.

Spock noticed a flash of orange slide out from between Mophi’s legs. The Arab crumpled to his knees, clutching onto the place where his testacies had hung, moments earlier. Spock rubbed his neck and looked down at the rolling gonads ‘Nasty’ he thought as blood flowed through the clasped hands of Mophi.

Mophi, still on his knees, whimpered as he looked at Spock who thumped him solidly on his jaw, which relieved him of his pain and sent him into slumber land.

Pon had swiftly dispatched the remaining mercenary with his speed nerve point kicks and punches the mercenary didn’t realise he was dead until he hit the floor. Pon recovered his Glave from the eye of his first kill and then slid between Mophi’s legs and castrated him.

Pon went over to Grimes’s desk and observed the carnage that Stu had caused. Stu had beaten Grimes unconscious and he and Akhim sprawled out next to each other, with an angry Stu standing over them, hoping for more action.

Spock joined Pon and Stu at Grimes’s desk, he saw the two laid out figures and praised his usually placid old friend. Then turned to Pon and said.

“I told you your tail would come in useful one day.”

Pon had concealed his Glave under his tail, so if any of you thought it came out of his ar\*\*, . . . Shame on you.

With Mophi, Akhim and Grimes taken care of, their next problem was how to escape with Kim. There were still eight, armed mercenaries out there.

“The only advantage we have is the element of surprise, so we may have time to devise a plan, they don’t know what’s happened in here, yet” Pon informed them.

That lucky break quickly disappeared as the door opened and the armed mercenary that Grimes had sent to check on Kim and Ca returned. Pon heard him approach a split second earlier/

The man pushed open the door with his rifle shouldered. He was met face to face with Pon who tried to pull him into the room. The mercenary, taken aback, jerked the trigger sending a hail of bullets into the floor. Pon slashed his Glave at the man’s throat and kicked him outside closing the door. They’d just lost their element of surprise as the blood gurgling mercenary stumbled outside, which had alerted the others, before he dropped down clutching his open throat.

A hail of small arms fire came within minutes as the remaining mercenaries opened fire. Spock, Stu and Pon shoved the large table over and sheltered behind it to get protection as the 9mm rounds pierced the walls and lodged in the table.

From inside Grimes’s office they could hear more shouting and weapons firing from outside as the other mercenaries joined the affray. Then came a moments silence as one of them shouted to cease fire, and then shouted for Mophi, but reply came.

The mercenaries shouted among one another, and

there became constant ranting from the Vietnamese technicians, now trying to flee through the Cu Chi tunnels exit. They triggered alarms that sent the control centre's sirens wailing out intruder alerts. A mercenary dragged a few technicians back at gunpoint and the alarms were disarmed and silenced.

Stu and Spock peered over the upturned desk and looked through the bullet holes in the walls. Most of the monitors were now riddled with bullets and smashed, apart from one showing the helicopter area.

Grimes and Akhim still lay prone behind the desk. Stu knew that the 9mm had only a short killing range so for now, they would be okay, however the bullpups higher calibre could penetrate the table, and them. Stu saw the two dead mercenaries' rifles and decided to sneak out to get them. Spock noticed something else that might come in useful, so he moved along the desk and out towards his target.

Pon noticed the thin walls were only gypsum with a gap filled with polystyrene for noise reduction. He looked through the bullet holes into the control room. There appeared to be a lot of activity with mercenaries moving about to get into better positioned. Pon crawled to the sidewall adjacent to Kim's room and tested the strength of the wall.

Stu had managed to grab both of the weapons in the office and had returned behind Grimes desk. Spock grabbed what he had been after and returned. Akhim regained consciousness, although played possum and while the lads were preoccupied, he watched the



outside, monitor and their departing helicopter. ‘Damn’ he thought, ‘they must have heard the commotion and panicked.’ The lads had bound both him and Grimes, so he decided to stay motionless and wait for any opportunity. One man outside shouted.

“You are outgunned and outnumbered, if you come out now you will be allowed to live, we can leave together, we have no quarrel with you, our job is over,” They never had chance to respond as a new wave of panic started outside and bullets again started to fly.

Spock and Stu ducked behind the desk. Stu cocked the rifle ready to return fire but no bullets came their way. Stu gingerly peered over the table and through the odd hole in the wall. The mercenaries appeared to be firing erratically in all directions.

“What’s going on?” asked Spock?

“No idea?” replied Stu

Pon knew. It must be his ally joining the fray, which gave him his opportunity. He got to his feet, sliced a mark with his Glave and then smashed through the flimsy wall with his fists and feet, making a hole, large enough for him to get through.

Pon dived into Kim’s detention room, the noise of gunshots covering his movements.

Several moments later, there was silence again outside as a mercenary hollered for a ceasefire.

After a few tense moments, they heard more shouting and movement outside. Stu and Spock tried to see what was happening, but only saw flashes of people passing the bullet holes. This activity went on for about five minutes, Stu and Spock assumed they had been trying recover the

dead mercenary outside as they heard men shouting instructions at one another about finding the person who had just killed two mercenaries. Then they heard a familiar voice above the rest.

Stu and Spock looked over the desk to the far wall where Mophi had been lying unconscious. Now, all that remained were severed gonads, a piece of bloody trouser material and a slimy blood trail where Mophi had slid along the floor leading to the now ajar door.

“The bugger’s escaped,” said Stu.

Pon entered into Kim’s room like a leaping panther and rolled onto the floor, landing beside Kim. Kim and Ca looked frightened as they witnessed his violent entry.

“Pon” she cried and held him. Ca and Kim had the sense to remove the mattress and use that and the wooden bed as a shield. Pon hugged and kissed his wife and gave Ca a menacing look, and moved Kim over in order to kill him. Kim gripped onto Pon, sobbing uncontrollably with relief and delight to see her husband. Pon felt the same, and for now, just being reunited with Kim was enough, and seeing that Ca appeared defenceless, he decided to wait until they were out of danger. Pon glared curiously at Ca. He became confused as had seen his face already that day.

The shouting and confusion outside eased as Mophi started to control and organise his men. He lay in the centre of the control room surrounded by barricades of tables and equipment that had been arranged by the mercenaries

Two mercenaries had been caught on the peripheries

by the commando squad leader and dispatched with a neuron toxin, venom covered dart, shot into their temples.

Pon ensured Kim was safe and then he and Ca used the calm to make the defences as solid as possible by tipping over all furniture to barricade the door and walls.

Kim saw a side of Pon that she had never witnessed before as he set about the wall and burst through into the next room, which he had picked up the earthy, smelling individuals. Pon knew that it must be the surviving commando's from Lee's unit. Ca noticed Pon wasn't the mild mannered man that Kim had described, and he suddenly became very nervous.

Although Mophi was a loutish, intimidating bully, he was previously a great soldier and had always led his squads into well-planned and executed successful operations. His specialty had been urban warfare. He knew roughly, what these foe's strengths were, and their biggest weakness, Position, they were pinned in like fish in a barrel.

Mophi lay in the middle of the assembled barricades in excruciating pain, he knew his unit had no leadership qualities or escape plan, but being in pain felt better than being dead.

He armed the remaining technicians, ordered them into position, and told them if they tried to run, he would shoot them. He had heard all the banging and commotion from Kim's room and knew they would be setting barricades, which he was not concerned about, as Bullpup rifles would make short work of shredding their defences. His focus concentrated on the lone insurgent, and his own escape. He knew that he had to get the detonator for the

explosives set to blow up the centre, which was in Grimes's office.

A sudden explosion from the small kitchenette in the rear of the centre interrupted his thoughts. The technicians panicked and started firing their pistols wildly. The mercenaries crouched into firing positions and Mophi croaked for them to stop shooting. The firing ceased and an armed mercenary nervously went to check out the cause of the explosion.

The diversion had worked and the squad leader broke the lock off the door and rolled into the room containing his surviving men. He felt a sharp blade touching his throat and a crouched Pon greeted him. Pon removed his Glave, nodded and smiled then leant over him and pushed the door closed. The leader went over to check his battered and badly beaten soldiers.

The mercenary returned and reported about the microwave oven exploding and how the place stank of sulphur.

Mophi acknowledged the information and smiled to himself. 'Bullet in the microwave, a diversion', he thought but since no more of his team had been attacked he could only assume that it had been done so for the lone attacker could join the others.

'Stupid move' thought Mophi as he looked at the broken lock on the door. 'Now they are all fish in my barrel.'

He sat back against his barricade holding his injured part and instructed a technician to get him some ice and a field medical kit. The man returned several moments later

and whilst he placed the ice on his still bleeding crotch he opened an Omnopon Syrette and injected himself, then removed a first field dressing and gingerly applied the gauze padded section to his bloody and gonad vacant area. He lay back as the narcotic analgesia took effect

Stu and Spock could see into Kim's room and a little way into the soldier's compartment. Stu taught Spock how to use the bullpups he'd recovered.

"Take the safety off, point it that way and squeeze the trigger" Stu instructed, as he pointed over the desk towards Mophi's position, he showed Spock the safety catch, which he applied in case the big lad got trigger happy and set the gun in the rapid fire position and primed the chamber.

Grimes and Akhim still appeared unconscious. They had been bound using Grimes jacket and belt and leant up against the wall. Akhim still played possum as he didn't fancy another beating off Stu.

Spock had grabbed the beer that he'd seen on the now overturned tables, which had been his earlier mission Spock recovered six bottles of nectar and also found where his and Stu's bags had been unceremoniously dumped.

Grimes regained consciousness. He nudged Akhim who responded by opening his eyes and turned to face him. The lads didn't notice as they had been sorting out the beer stash. Grimes gave a reassuring look to Akhim then at the bottle Stu held. Grimes had seen that it was the bottle he had laced with Thalium, earmarked for Mophi, it

was the only bottle of that particular brand, to avoid any mix-ups. He had also noticed something else lodged under the corner of the table. The bejewelled Buddha's tooth' treasure.

"All's not lost" he whispered to Akhim "If Mophi can get the situation back under control, we can ransom the box back to Thailand and still come out of this in profit"

He then felt a dull thud, and glass smash on his head as Stu hit him with the laced bottle of beer.

Spock looked at Stu with the broken neck of the bottle in his hand.

"Arrogant bastard, causing us all this grief" growled Stu, as he looked at Grimes bloodied head

Spock, about to mention to his still angry friend about wasting good beer, noticed the bottle neck and label.

"Heineken!" said Spock, knowing that Stu hated that beer and to justify his action more, Stu mentioned.

"And it was a flip off top and as we don't have an opener, I thought I would give it to that smug southern Jessie"

Akhim went back to playing possum. Grimes whimpered as Thaliium flavoured beer, mixed with his blood, oozed down his face, the lads settled back into siege mode and took a swig from their screw off capped Saigon beer. Spock had noticed Grimes looking toward the end of the desk and then he crawled towards the edge and saw the contents of Pons bag strewn between the mangle of computers, monitors and papers. He then saw the gold, jewelled box glistening under the corner of the desk; Spock slid the relic out and went over to show Stu.

“What do you think happened here?” he asked Stu showing him the box “I expected to see Nicks’ crowns and sand come spilling out”

“Me too, I’ve no idea” declared Stu, surveying the box and instructing Spock.

“Put it in your pocket we can ask the mad monk later if we ever get out of here alive”

They sat back against the desk, drank their beer and waiting.

‘That’s the second time today I’ve seen that face, although this is a younger version,’ thought Pon as he looked at the commando tending to men. Pon again noticed the strange footwear of the soldier, introduced to him by Lee as Captain, Ca Tho: Special Forces 911.

The two captured commandos had been badly beaten and with their bones broken they could hardly move.

Pon and the Captain realised the soldiers would be of little use in any attack so they made barricades with the bed and furniture and Captain Ca gave them a pistol to defend themselves. Pon then turned his attention to Kim’s room and told Ca that he wanted to be with his wife and then try to affect an escape plan along with Spock and Stu. The Captain agreed and they both dived and rolled silently and separately through the hole Pon had made.

Mophi knew that the pounding and bone breaking thrashing that he and his men had given the two soldiers would put them out of action, so he knew they were unserviceable, useless and out of the equation.

He thought that he had plenty of time and looked around the centre to weigh up his options, he was in no

hurry.

Pon and Captain Ca landed within a split second of each other next to Ca and Kim behind the barricade. Pon went to Kim, nudged Ca out of the way and hugged her. He looked to make sure the Captain, who had landed next Ca was okay.

The sight of the newcomer, a younger version of Ca shocked Kim. The two Ca's together, now side-by-side looked like a window to the past.

The two Ca's looked puzzled at each other's appearance, for Ca the fisherman it was like looking into a mirror ten years ago. He noticed the captain's shoes and became dumbfounded. Captain Ca had also been confused at the uncanny resemblance and, as Pon went back to reassuring his wife, the Captain and his older half brother leant against the wall together and whispered to each other.

Fisherman Ca introduced himself as Gio-A Tho, but he was always nicknamed Ca. Captain Ca told him that Ca was his given name. They realised that they somehow must be related, the resemblance was too uncanny. They spoke in Vietnamese about Ca's father Nguyen and how he'd been reported as missing in action, presumed dead and he'd only ever wore homemade tyre slippers. Captain Ca confirmed the name of his father was Nguyen and the details, and depiction sounded identical, allowing for age. The two compared notes and within a short time, realised that they could be stepbrothers. They talked about their different upbringings and their lives for what seemed like



ages, which seemed surreal, considering the situation they now faced. Fisherman Ca realised Pon spoke no Vietnamese, so he told his brother about Kim and how he had been mixed up and conned into getting involved and how much he regretted being fooled. He told his new brother he'd had feelings for Kim, but the exact details would have to wait. They both considered that there must be a reason why fate had brought them together and, neither thought it was to die.

Pon and Kim had been discussing what to do during the lull, which had lasted well over an hour. Pon noticed the way Kim kept glancing at Ca, but decided this would keep for another time as they had enough immediate concerns. Pon was still confused and angry, but he was a Tinju warrior, in danger and cornered with his loved ones to protect. Two of his loved ones had a major problem in the next room. They were nearly out of beer, but they had a plan.

Pon and Kim also had a plan. Pon knew Stu and Spock spoke a little Thai and shouted at them. It took the lads a few minutes to decipher and figure out what he wanted, and although not fully understanding, Stu leaned over to the still whimpering Grimes and asked him where his special, Mouse phone was. Grimes a little confused, pulled the sat phone from his desk drawer and Spock hurled it through the hole in the wall to Pon who caught the phone and handed it to Kim.

Mophi dozed on and off, as the morphine took hold

but he remained alert at his position. He was about ready to carry out his plan, and waited for his men and technicians to get one more piece into place. His plan was to redirect the detonator from Grimes office to a simple remote controlled device he had. He intended to spray the rooms with bullets from the Bullpups and pistols and then while the noise, smoke and confusion would disorientate his foe, he and his unit would make their way over to the main control entrance a few hundred yards, closing all doors and hatches and blow up the centre killing all inside. When all his barrellled fish had been dispatched and the dust had settled, Mophi would go back down and retrieve the relic from the debris, make their way through the jungle to Cu Chi and then on to Ho Chi Minh where they could disappear. He didn't care about the money, as unlike Grimes, he and his mercenaries had already been paid, but he wanted the satisfaction of a completed mission.

Although the plan took time to set up it was the best and safest for Mophi, with no more risk or losses to his unit. He knew that he had the upper hand. He'd also come up with a back up idea if things went array and his unit had been briefed and ready for both. His only regret would be leaving Akhim to die, but that would be collateral damage, an acceptable loss.

He watched the few remaining Vietnamese technicians, splicing, re-routing electrical, fibre optic cables, controls and feverishly, but nervously working while the mercenaries kept guard on the rooms. However as most of the Vietnamese had previously escaped through the narrow Cu Chi tunnels when the bullets started to fly and, before the mercenaries grabbed a few back, they had

taken longer than expected, Mophi watched and barked out orders, and after some ninety minutes the work neared completion.

Spock and Stu also put their plan into action and slapped Akhim, who opened his eyes, his feigning over.

Kim used the sat phone and recognised a programmed number was her father's, so she pressed the call button. Pon, still holding onto his wife, realised their situation appeared hopeless. The two Ca's were still deep in conversation, the Captain tried to get's his brothers mind off the inevitable and cursing himself for not staying on the outside and inflicting more damage.

Kim started to yell in Vietnamese down the phone at the gardener, and hung up and hugged Pon.

After ten minutes, the phone rang and a jubilant Kim started talking to her father. Pon couldn't understand the conversation but saw the tears of joy and relief in her face. The conversation was brief but she gave her father the details of their current situation. Thran realising that his daughter, although safe, knew her situation to be dire, and because Thran had given previous orders not to interfere because his communication had been monitored, it would now take time to mobilise the army although he informed her that he would also call his brother Lee for help. She relayed her father's message to the others and they considered that they may have a chance, but they had somehow to stall Mophi.

Spock and Stu roused Akhim, who stared nervously at them, especially Stu.

“Right my little Arab friend; this is what I want you to do.”

Stu went on to instruct Akhim to speak to Mophi about releasing them and they all go for a beer, as this situation wasn't getting them nowhere. Stu informed Akhim to tell Mophi that he and Spock were both trained by the military and proficient in using their weapons. Akhim nodded his agreement and in standard Arabic shouted to Mophi. Stu clipped him around his blood-caked head

“English” barked Stu “speak English”

“Mophi doesn't speak or understand English,” said Akhim

“He did when he threatened me,” intervened Spock

“Only certain phrases” insisted Akhim, lying

Stu and Spock thought for a moment

“Okay, but if you are lying, you would get the same as him, pointing to the now silent, bloodied Grimes.

The two fell for the ploy.

“Mophi” shouted Akhim in Arabic “act as if you agree to everything I say.”

Mophi listened and shouted back he would

“The woman has contacted her father; the gardener must have released him”

Mophi thought and then shouted back and lied about how he intended to rescue him and Grimes.

“What's he saying?” said Stu cutting Akhim off

“He says you are correct, they want to end this too. They just need to decided on a way you can mutually disarm” smiled Akhim

Stu and Spock smiled at each other as Mophi shouted

again about their armaments and Akhim informed him of the two Bullpups, but didn't know what armaments the others possessed.

Mophi leaned back and beckoned over a mercenary and whispered

“Go to Plan B, tell the others to get into position and get the technicians positioned, silently” He painfully altered his position, so he could monitor and provide further back up fire.

“Well?” said Stu starting to get nervous as it seemed too easy.

“Wait” said Akhim also getting nervous, as Stu looked ready to bash him again

“Whatever you plan to do Mophi, do it now,” pleaded Akhim

“Okay” shouted Mophi “lay flat and we will come get you”

Mophi calculated that at the most they only had the two rifles and two possibly three side arms and he couldn't see how they could compete with trained military personnel when it came to a gunfight. Time seemed now to be of the essence, and his safe tactic wasn't complete. He decided to risk the loss of a few men to enable him to escape.

The mercenary came over to him and reported

“All ready Mophi”

“Okay get the technicians to lay down blanket fire, with pistols then go in blazing and kill them all,” He said

“All of them?” asked the mercenary

“All of them soldier,” ordered Mophi raising his squeaky voice.

“What’s he saying now?” Stu asked Akhim who just glared at him

“Death to the infidels” Akhim sneered  
Stu was again pummelling Akhim’s face when the firing began.

Bullets ripped through the three rooms some 9mm mixed with 7.62mm calibre rounds that exploded through the walls and into the barricades.

Stu leant back against the desk, which was being peppered by bullets. Stu along with Spock returned fire, which bought a momentary lull as mercenaries moved for cover as bullets flew around them.

Mophi knew this would be short lived, as he knew they had only one magazine of ammo and the way they sprayed indiscriminately it wouldn’t last long. The rounds coming from the two rooms had been only 9mm, so Mophi continued barking out orders to continue firing, he then shot a technician in the back to keep the other few subordinate, and the firing recommenced.

Grimes and Akhim had laid down flat keeping their heads down anticipating rescue. Pon lay on top of Kim to protect her. Captain Ca carefully fired off his side arm with slow single shots. Spock and Stu, scared stiff, fired away, thinking their bullets would last forever. The mercenaries now started sporadic bursts with the bullpups, while the scared technicians fired 9mm bursts at the rooms.

The noise of the gunfire echoed around the centre and the smell of cordite from spent rounds of ammunition filled the air.

Stu and Spock knew they were almost out of ammo and nodded to each other like Butch and Sundance, but unlike them, they weren't intending to bravely run into the sun and die in a blaze of glory. They would be cowering behind a desk, shitting themselves, but nevertheless, together.

The bullets started getting closer as the mercenaries found less resistance coming back. Suddenly all hell broke loose as the sound of more shells thundered through the air followed by shouting and bellowing. This cacophony of sound went on for several minutes and Stu noticed from his cowering position that less bullets seemed to be coming into their room. He looked at Spock who had been firing off his few remaining rounds in a last defiant act.

Stu then noticed the Captain next door shouting in Vietnamese. He peered through the large hole in the wall as the captain moved towards the door, opened it and ran outside with his pistol blazing, Pon following closely behind with his Glave.

After a few more minutes of ear splitting gunfire, the uproar ceased, leaving only the sound of shouting and chattering in both English and Vietnamese.

Spock and Stu, confused but mightily relieved that the bullets had stopped, looked through the clearing smoke, and although they heard shouting in Vietnamese, the combat seemed to have dissipated.

After several minutes Kim and Pon appeared at the hole in the wall from the next room, Pon had returned to get Kim and they stood in the gap smiling at Spock and Stu.

“You can come out now my friends, it is over,” said Pon

“Hello you two, I’m happy to see you again” joined in Kim “sorry to put you through this, you have my sincerest thanks” the relief on her face said it all.

Spock and Stu stood up and brushed themselves off

“Hi Kim” said Stu still confused “Just glad to see you safe”

Spock looked over the desk at the devastated wall and the now bullet riddled corpses of the two mercenaries previously dispatched by Pon and wondered what had happened over the past few minutes and, as near death experience hit home, he fainted.

“Spock, Spock” Shouted Stu as the dark veil lifted and Spock regained his faculties. He looked up and saw the concerned faces of Kim, Pon and Stu staring down at him.

“Are you Ok big lad?” asked Stu as he puts a bottle to his lips and told him to drink.

Spock took a gulp of whisky that Stu had recovered from amongst the smashed bottles that lay on the floor.

“I could only find this bottle intact,” explained Stu “they’ve shot up what remained of the beer.”

Spock took a few large gulps and they helped him to his feet.

With Spock and Stu sharing the bottle of whiskey, they walked outside the door with Kim and Pon.

The control centre, although filled with a hazy cordite smog now seemed quiet as a dozen black pyjama clad Vietnamese, with smoking AK47’s, had two mercenaries



and two pleading technicians lined up with arms in the air and rifles on the ground, near three dead soldiers of fortune.

The assault by the Vietnamese Special Forces had been straightforward as they crept out of the Cu Chi tunnels entrance one by one, unnoticed. They found positions and grouped at the rear of the centre as the individuals inside had been preoccupied concentrating on their attack on the rooms in front. The attack had been a complete surprise, with the Vietnamese force sustaining no losses. However, three mercenaries and a technician had been shot and killed in the first few seconds, caught out in the open. It was a precision operation, skilfully executed.

Captain Ca and some of the Vietnamese soldiers now assisted his wounded men out of the room and towards the amphibious vehicle. Other black pyjama soldiers milled around, searching for any hidden enemy survivors.

“That’s a tour guide from Cu Chi tunnels,” noticed Spock as some of the soldiers came over to assist them.

“Yeah so it is” said Stu as he also recognised one who’d impressed him with his proficiency in shooting. The senior officer came over, and respectfully greeted Kim and then the others. Kim translated for them.

“This is Lieutenant Minh-Xun of the Vietnamese Special Forces, and he apologises for cutting it so fine. Although they had been put in place several days ago disguised as tourist attractions, but had to wait for orders

from their Colonel to launch an assault, that order had come about twenty minutes ago.”

“Cutting it fine is a bloody understatement,” mumbled Spock, realising he now needed to change his soiled pants and so did Stu.

Lieutenant Minh-Xun then contacted his superior and reported to the Colonel that everything was now under control, and Kim was safe. The Lieutenant’s phone rang again and Kim spoke to her elated father. Uncle Lee then called, and Kim thanked him for organising the rescue along with their friend Colonel Nhat. The Special Vietnamese forces commander, Pon also chatted to Lee while the soldiers carried on with the cleanup operation.

The mercenaries and technicians prisoners got taken to the amphibious vehicle at gunpoint; they would be transported by helicopter into police custody in the Ho Chi Minh City prison. The bodies of the dead mercenaries and technicians were placed in body bags and removed to the vehicle. It had been arranged for Kim, Pon, Spock and Stu to fly in a separate helicopter and go directly to Hanoi, where Thran would meet them.

Spock and Stu ignored all the confusion, as they couldn’t understand what was going on, decided to recover their bags and change their pants.

As they approached the office, Grimes and Akhim were being led away by two soldiers.

“Bastards” screamed Stu as he saw the still smug faces of Grimes and Akhim, he ran up and pummelled some more on Akhim’s face, having to be pried off by Spock and the soldiers, but not before getting a last kick in on Grimes’s bollocks leaving him doubled up in pain.

“Steady old friend” said Spock “you’ll have a heart attack”

Spock and Stu, now feeling justified returned to Grimes office and found their debris covered bags.

“First things first” said Spock and with his soiled pants now around his ankles he recovered his hat from his bag

“Adventure hat” then something else caught his eye,

“Oh look matey,” he said as he wandered over to the wall and, through the debris of wood and broken glass found another undamaged half measure bottle of Nep Moi Vietnamese Ruou, strong urban whiskey

“The bus looked full,” said Stu “we’ll wait for the next one,” they sat down and drank.

Captain Ca returned from the vehicle and spoke to Minh-Xun about his new brother. The Lieutenant’s orders had been to take everyone involved into custody. Captain Ca knew he had to follow his orders, so he requested to catch the vehicle on its return so he could spend some time with his brother and decide on their future. Minh-Xun agreed and the two long lost brothers sat and talked.

Pon noticed this as they were led to the now almost full vehicle; some of the soldiers ran ahead through the large well-lit tunnel, some stayed in the vehicle to guard the prisoners and corpses. Kim and Pon had been found seats, but as the vehicle started to move, Pon jumped out and shouted to Kim

“We’ve forgotten Spock and Stu, I’ll go to get them and I need to retrieve my belongings darling, I will get the transport when it returns” He ran back into the centre and

up to the Tho's.

He addressed them in English and spoke to Ca, the fisherman

“You kidnapped my wife and seduced her, you must pay. Stand up like a man and face the justice of the Tinju”

Ca didn't argue, he had been involved in the kidnap although he couldn't understand 'seduction' or 'Tinju' however stood up to face Pon who sprung out the blades of his Glave.

“No” said Captain Ca “Please sir, my brother is also a victim of these people he has been stupid and naive”

Pon never listened as he threw his Glave, which whistled past Ca's head, removing his ear and impaling it to the wall behind him, Ca wimped in pain from his lost lug.

“That was your first lesson,” said Pon as he wasn't about to use his weapon to slaughter an unarmed man.

Captain Ca knew that his brother stood no chance against Pon and leapt at the monk, who spun around and using the soldiers' momentum, kicked him through the air sending him crashing to the floor. The Captain quickly got to his feet and once again attacked Pon. For the next few minutes, the two allies clashed in a ferocious, bloody aggressive battle, with Pon easily overwhelming the resilient, tough but well outmatched soldier. All the years of fighting and skirmishes in hand to hand combat never prepared him for an onslaught like this and he'd never been hit so hard, fast or with such fury in his life.

Pon knocked him to the floor many times and respected the man for still getting up. Ca felt exhausted but launched another attack and went to feebly strike Pon who grabbed

his wrist, twisted his arm straight and punched his elbow snapping the bones, he then brought his foot up and struck the Captain behind the head, sending him to the floor in agony. Captain Ca couldn't move and lay there waiting for a fatal and conclusive blow.

Fisherman Ca then moved in front of his brother to protect him.

“You want to kill me, not my brother, so kill me and leave him alone,” said the defiant Ca

“There has been too much pain today already, so finish it now,” he continued.

Pon stood back and looked at the battered and broken Captain, now being tended to by his blood soaked brother.

Pon thought about his own brother, Dam, and how he'd had to kill him before he had gotten to know him, a regret which still haunted him. Remorse crept in as he watched the bond forming between these two and wished he'd been given the same opportunity with Dam.

Pon had never experienced the feelings of betrayal, jealousy, or mistrust before, he'd been sheltered as a simple monk and had a settled life with his faithful wife Kim, or so he'd thought.

Nevertheless, as a man of peace he only resorted to using his highly honed skills in defence and carry out his duties as a Tinju, and this had been neither.

He silently walked over, pulled his Glave from the wall and returned to the Tho's.

“There has been enough bloodshed for one day” He said and offered his hand to Ca and helped him to his feet; he then assisted the Captain who cradled his shattered arm

and hauled him up to a standing position.

“You fought bravely Captain” complimented Pon

The brothers nodded to signal their relief and gratitude. The poignant moment suddenly shattered by a voice who hollered.

“Hello everyone, what you all up too?” said a gummy smiling, spannered, Spock, wearing his hat at an angle as he and Stu, also spannered, approached them from Grimes’s office.

They sensed a strange atmosphere from the three and saw Ca, the man from the movie clip with Kim and realised Pon must have kicked his arse and chopped off his ear. They recognised the beaten, bruised and bone shattered Captain from Lee’s house and noticed the uncanny similarity between the two. However, as they’d already had too much to comprehend for one day and as everything now seemed fine, they decided it wasn’t worth wasting their spannered state worrying about.

“Where’s everyone gone?” enquired Stu

Pon explained how they waited for the vehicle to return and pick them up.

“Oh well,” slurred Spock “good timing, all the booze is finished.”

Spock took the relic from his pocket and gave it to Pon and told him that his bag was still in Grimes office. Pon asked Spock to hold onto the relic until he’d recovered his bag and salvaged his belongings, he then walked to Grimes’s office and Spock put the relic back in his pocket.

The two Ca’s hobbled together in the direction of the meeting point for the vehicle and grabbed a first aid box

situated there.

“That was the fate my brother, we must have been brought together to save each other” said fisherman Ca as they continued on their painful hobble.

Spock and Stu looked around and decided to wait around for Pon.

They wandered over to the mercenaries’ barricade and looked over to the space in the centre. They noticed several blood stains on the floor and grimaced.

“We were lucky mate,” said Stu to a preoccupied Spock.

“Look at that stain,” said Spock “it slides from our room to here,” he pointed “ and then forms into a dry patch and then a fainter trail goes between the gap through those machines” he again points

“And your point, Sherlock?” slurred Stu

“My point is” said Spock trying to be sensible “I don’t remember seeing that big dopey Arab being taken away, or in fact seeing him at all after everything had calmed down”

Stu and Spock followed the blood trail as it disappeared around the rear of the barricade and towards the Cu Chi entrance door. The small tunnel door had been left ajar, and a faint moaning sound came from inside. They opened the door fully and gazed into the tunnel. Apart from a small shard of light seeping through along the ceiling like a blocked water pipe with seepage, the tunnel looked pitch black.

The pair grabbed torches hung nearby and shone them into the tunnel. The large bulk of Mophi’s waist, rear end and legs came into view, the rest of his torso being

obscured as he'd tried to squeeze into the narrow turn and had gotten himself well and truly stuck, unable to go forward or back.

"Help Me," pleaded Mophi, "I can't move"

Spock and Stu looked at Mophi who couldn't move anywhere and then at each other.

Spock slammed the door shut

"Fuck him" he said "let the plonker suffer for a while longer"

They walked back towards Grimes's room sniggering. Pon came out wearing his jeans and T-shirt, wondering what had amused his two friends.

"Ready matey?" asked Spock and put his large arm around Pons shoulder.

The three went over to join the Tho's as Spock imparted to Pon his drunken philosophy about women to his impassive friend, and Stu wisely said

"Now's the time for the healing to begin"

The amphibious vehicle returned a few moments later with four armed Vietnamese soldiers, one spoke to Captain Ca and then they all went into the control centre. The remaining five boarded the vehicle and it pulled away along the tunnel. Captain Ca turned to Pon and said in English

"They can't find the mercenaries' leader."

Stu and Spock didn't say anything, they knew Mophi would be found eventually, but for now going nowhere and he could suffer in silence.





## – Chapter Fourteen –

The scene that greeted them when they exited the tunnels resembled an old U.S. Vietnam war movie. The floodlight-lit area as helicopters landed unloading, men and equipment. Regular soldiers arrived and assisted with the clean-up operations

Kim rushed over to the amphibious tram and hugged Pon. She noticed the Captain nursing his broken arm and Ca minus an ear. A team of army medics started to administer medical attention. Pon leapt off the vehicle and into Kim's arms, she never assumed for a moment it was Pon who had caused the injuries, but she had witnessed a different, fierce side to his normal peaceful demeanor, but she was his wife and she adored him. They held each other close, kissed and smiled with relief.

Spock and Stu got out of the vehicle and sat down by the medics and had their cuts, bruises, splinters and abrasions cleaned and dressed, they watched as the bodies of the dead being bagged, tagged and placed into a helicopter. Grimes, Akhim, and the surviving mercenaries got ushered into another chopper with their army guards and medics, which then got airborne heading.

The Vietnamese Special Forces unit got into a separate

helicopter and another medical helicopter loaded the two commandos' from Lee's team onto stretchers. Captain Ca gives the location of his murdered comrades and Tuong within the jungle. He then went over to his brother, Ca and assured him that he would contact with their other brother, Phaol, and see what they could do to help.

Ca was then ushered away by an armed soldier and into a helicopter, along with the captured Vietnamese technicians. He looked back at Kim and Pon as he got onboard the chopper and smiled as if saying a fond farewell to two friends. He waved goodbye to his new brother, Ca as the aircraft took off. Captain Ca, his arm now in a sling, got into a chopper with his men, which took off.

One soldier who stood near Spock and Stu had a two-way radio, which suddenly sprang to life, and the Vietnamese soldier gave an order to the amphibious vehicle, which sped off back down the tunnel.

After a while, the commotion died down as the helicopters had either taken off, or had stopped their engines and waited for the ground force to finish the clean up. A team of police investigator had been brought along and in the process of searching and examining the crime scene.

Spock, Stu, Pon and Kim waited for their transport. They all hugged with relief etched over each of their faces. Kim told Spock and Stu that they would be staying at her parent's house, where physicians would be waiting to take first class care of them. Spock nudged Stu,

“Physicians, does that mean women?”

“No mate, it means doctors,” said Stu

“Escape plan?” enquired Spock hoping for a positive response, as he’d now almost sobered up

“Escape plan” Stu concurred

“A White jet ranger helicopter landed 50 yards in front of them and an army officer came up, saluted Kim and escorted them all into a helicopter.

The large helicopter was about to when the amphibious vehicle returned and Mophi stumbled out and hobbled over to the medics at gunpoint, holding his groin, and appearing to be in agony, just as you would expect to look if your knackers had been chopped off and you’d been stuck in a wet, humid, dank, black tunnel. He watched the helicopter depart and saw two English and one Thai face at the window pointing, laughing and sticking up there clenched hand with middle finger extended. Spock blew him another kiss. The helicopter rose into the clear night sky and headed north, toward Hanoi.

They touched down ninety minutes later, on the landing pad at Bach Mai hospital. Thran and Nga ran over and hugged Pon and Kim. Police guard surrounded the chopper for protection. Doctors and nurses came over to tend to Spock and Stu and then taken inside to a private wing of the hospital along with Kim’s parents.

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Grimes, Akhim the mercenaries, and later joined by Mophi, had been flown directly to the hospital wing at

Trai Giam Chi Hoa prison in Ho Chi Minh City, shackled and under constant guard, they were put in the hot, humid, clammy detention facility with its stained walls, archaic equipment and infested with insects

“I am Muslim,” insisted Akhim “I have to pray”

“You are *Tu Chinh tri* a prisoner of Vietnam a *coi ai chang ra gi*, Nobody’s,” sneered an English speaking guard, as a team of scruffy orderlies washed and scrubbed their cuts and bruises. On his arrival, Mophi went under guard to the operating theatre to have his wound tended too.

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Ca and the Vietnamese technicians had been flown to Ho Chi Minh and driven under escort to the main police station. Ca was taken to a small nearby clinic and had his wound cleaned, sutured, padded and given antibiotics. He was then taken back to the station and placed into a small, dank holding cell along with the technicians.

Spock and Stu felt exhausted, they lay on beds in the quiet private room within the hospital. They had only suffered minor cuts and bruises, but the doctors and nurses had given them a thorough check. Now together in the room they dozed, all plans to escape to a bar had long vanished. The medical staff decided that they should all stay and be monitored before going to Thran’s house.

Pon walked into the lad’s room, he and Kim had also only suffered minor cuts and splinters from flying debris.

He brought in his monks robe, neatly folded and draped, along with his sash.

Spock and Stu stirred and raised themselves to a sitting position, Pon sat on the edge of Spock's bed.

Pon asked Spock if he could have the relic. Both Stu and Spock noticed how nonchalant about the relic Pon seemed to be this time, no pomp or ceremony as before.

Spock removed the relic from his pocket and handed it to Pon, who removed his sash from his bundle and placed the jewelled box in the centre of his cassock and secured the sash, making a parcel

Spock and Stu's curiosity and confusion got the better of them and Spock said to Pon

"That had been nice of the King to trust you with the relic"

Pon smiled, thought for a moment and in a quiet voice replied

"My brothers, what I am about to tell you must remain a secret." He said, paused and announced "The box is a fake"

"Really," said Stu, both he and Spock trying to act surprised, as Pon continued to explain.

"The Royal family decided that because the holy relic had already been stolen twice, they had no intention of letting it happen again, so they ordered and commissioned an exact copy to be made. This took many master craftsmen, jewellers, goldsmiths and specialist technicians a long time to get the gems copied to emit the same sacred spectral light. About a year ago the copy was exchanged for the original and went on display for the first time. Fortunately nobody noticed the difference not

even the Tinju guards and they viewed the spectacle every day....only a handful of people knows about this so it must remain a secret”

The lads felt like a large weight had just been lifted off their shoulders.

“Don’t worry” said Stu “It will also be our secret, we won’t say a word, shall we Spock”

“No mate, we’ll keep it to ourselves” Spock replied and thinking, “we kept the other one secret long enough”.

“So where’s the original?” enquired Stu “and what was the stuff inside, it looked very convincing”.

‘Well a damn site more convincing than sand and ceramic dentures’ he thought, as Pon gave them more details.

“The original was sent back to Salaburi and is once again guarded by the Tinju, which also allowed us to recommence, the ceremony of the great journey, but this time we use our ancient skills combined with modern technology and, because nobody knows it’s there, it is perfectly protected and secure.”

He paused to think and continued.

“The sacred holy relic must never be opened, the contents are not only sacrosanct, but their age and exposure to air after all this time would cause great damage”.

‘Flushing them down the sink didn’t do them much good either’ thought both Stu and Spock, relieved that their guilty secret would now be concealed forever... hopefully Pon carried on with the story

“Taksin suspected that these people would open and test the contents. The box itself would pass any inspection, but the only definite test that the contents would undergo

would be to determine the age by carbon dating. The box had been filled with charcoal ash and brown fine talc powder, which when opened wisps of the mixture would escape giving the impression of being sealed and unopened for eons. They also crushed some pigs teeth into small nuggets and the scientists at the palace sprinkled and mixed in something that I can't pronounce, the name Rioma...zi,\*or something like that.” said Pon struggling to enunciate the additive. The scientist informed us that this would make carbon dating impossible by undetectably affecting the machines.”

Pon finished his explanation as the lads complimented him and Taksin on their ingenuity and wisdom.

Spock and Stu started to liven up a little; Pon stayed and chatted about Kim for a while about how he was unsure what to do about the situation with Ca. He told the lads that Kim had promised to tell Pon everything, but after they'd rested and things had quietened down and had told Pon and this was neither the place, nor time.

Stu told Pon not to judge until he had all the facts and Kim was right, now would not be a suitable moment.

Kim then came into the room, kissed and hugged Pon, and announced

“We have all been given a clean bill of health and being discharged. We can go home for a good night's sleep”

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They arrived at Thran's large house. Spock and Stu were shown to their guest rooms, whilst Thran, Nga, Pon and



Kim chatted for a while then retired to their rooms. Both Stu and Spock were asleep before their heads hit the pillow.

The next morning the lads awoke early and went downstairs to join the Tangh's and Pon who gathered in the large dining room discussing the day's activities. Thran had decided to take time off, his subordinates could handle the workload, for now he wanted to spend time with his family and ensure his justice would be carried out for the people responsible for the kidnapping of his daughter and son-in-law, and the terrorist attack on the neighbourhood, which they had been busy clearing up. These people were going to pay, dearly.

Pon had contacted Taksin who was clearly relieved and delighted. They decided it was not yet safe to return to Thailand until they were cleared of their fugitive status, which he would initiate this immediately with the Bangkok post.

Pon and Kim called Banti and spoke to her and Samnan. The family group were engrossed in their lives and thoughts. Spock and Stu sat outside in the large grounds at Thran's, listening to the banging and crashing of men and machines demolishing and clearing unsafe buildings that were rocked and damaged by the explosions.

They spent a relaxing day at Thran's, by the pool and amusing the staff, except for the gardener who looked shifty and miserable. Kim had told the lads it was he who'd answered the phone and released her father. The

lads couldn't understand why he had the phone in the first place, but never mentioned it as they were sure the police knew better.

Therefore, they just decided to recharge their batteries and do bugger all and to save themselves for the nighttime.

Pon and Kim having spoken to Banti and listened to Samnan making baby gurgles, decided they should talk and went to their room.

The couple sat on the bed holding hands and Kim started the conversation by telling Pon that he and Samnan were the most cherished and important people in her life, she then went on to tell the story about her, Ca and colonel Tighe. She spoke for about an hour with Pon who listened intently, with different thoughts and emotions running through his mind. She told him of the abduction and of what Grimes had told her about him not coming to rescue her and, without making excuses she told of the kiss she and Ca had shared, denying anything else had happened. Pon told her about the film in Grimes's office that showed them getting into bed and other raunchy scenes, which Grimes had bogusly added. Kim verdantly denied any wrong doing this. Pon didn't know how to deal with the facts, he had trusted Kim implicitly before, but he had trouble in believing the film was fake, when he'd seen it along with Spock and Stu. Now she had told him about Ca, Pon became uncertain, he was a sheltered monk only taught the teachings of wisdom and, with no distractions from the outside world, including women, and this was a completely new set of emotional

guidelines.

Pon then asked the question that he never wanted to ask and, Kim hoped he wouldn't

“Have you and Ca ever made love?”

Kim squeezed him tight and kissed his head.

“The past should stay in the past” she said “Please let's move forward... I apologise for deceiving you with all my heart and soul, but it happened when I was at my lifetime low and before I met and fell in love with you”

After an odd silence Pon then spoke,

“I have never lied to you when you've asked me about my past life. I have always told you I was a monk”

He then went on to explain about the Tinju, their demise and subsequent resurgence, his first duty and his brother Dam, and without going into all the details told her what he sometimes needed to do in order to conclude duties as a Tinju. He then gave her a copy of the ‘Siam Storm’ and told her to read that, as it explained everything. [Only joking I just thought I'd lighten the mood!]

Pon talked for about twenty minutes, his heart felt like it was in his stomach as he spoke and when he'd finished there was another silent respite.

Vehicles had been coming and going at the Tangh's during the morning with officials from the military, law enforcement, justice department and his own security department to deal with one subject. Thran issued his commands, and then gave orders to reconvene that evening with results. The house went quiet around lunchtime. Spock and Stu still lounged poolside.

Pon and Kim, still sat in silence in their room, were disturbed by a familiar voice who shouted to them from downstairs that they should come down to join them.

They went downstairs and greeted Lee and Captain Ca, whose arm, now in a surgical sling, wore his military dress uniform.

Lee explained that he'd flown in from Cambodia the previous night and spent time with his two badly beaten, wounded soldiers, arranging their medivac and for his dead soldier's bodies flown back to Cambodia for a full military burial.

He had been debriefed by Ca on the mission and brought him his uniform and some extra clothes. Ca only mentioned he'd broken his arm during the mission, but never mentioned how

"And now" announced Lee "I've come to visit my favourite niece." And smiled at Kim

Spock and Stu came inside and greeted Lee, and then they sat around a huge dining table, chatted and ate a feast of Vietnamese food.

Lee told them the story of how he'd first encountered, trained, educated and mentored Captain Ca when he'd discovered Sereypheap village many years earlier. Lee sounded like a proud father as he told the tale, they all listened intently and when he'd finished his anecdote they all gazed at the embarrassed Captain as he quietly spoke,

"Thank you sir, you taught me and took care of me more than I can ever repay, and during this mission I also found some answers about my past"

The Captain then told his account of meeting his half

brother, who unbeknownst to him was the man Thran had grown to hate and loathed and even more now after recent events.

The room went quiet and Lee detected a tension between his brother Thran and what the Captain had just told them

The Captain finished by saying he wanted to help his brother.

Thran, infuriated, immediately excused himself and went outside, he was joined by Lee who wanted to find out what had happened to make him so angry

“What is it brother?” asked Lee.

While the brothers spoke outside, the bewildered Captain and the others wondered what had just occurred. Kim and Nga didn't want to speak about it openly, in case Pon got more upset. Kim had already told her mother she would tell Pon about Ca, so they just sat in silence. Spock and Stu in ignorant bliss, finished off bowls of Pho Bo beef noodles and fish soup, which they found tasty, considering it was not covered in grease and wrapped in a bread roll.

Pon then received a phone call from Taksin, which broke the tension as he and Taksin spoke.

After several minutes the conversation ended and Pon announced.

“Taksin has set things in motion to clear our names and we can return to Thailand tomorrow” He looked at Kim trying to judge her reaction. Kim grabbed his hand and smiled

“Let's go home darling and see our family”

Pon smiled and kissed her on her forehead. ‘Things

will be fine' he thought as he recalled the teaching of Buddha 'Holding onto anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone, you are the one getting burnt''

Spock then imparted his wisdom as he nudged Stu and whispered,

“We'd better go out to get a shag tonight matey.”

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Grimes, Akhim and their band of collaborators thoughts had been a long way from getting a shag. They'd been transferred to holding cells within the prison, which came as quite a shock to their system, well beyond their imagination and horror of what a Vietnamese prison would be like. They thought it would be modern with facilities similar to Vegas. The two mercenaries, Grimes and Akhim were shackled together in a small cell with a hole in the floor and a stone container, which contained filthy water to wash their hands after they had wiped their sphincters. No beds just a hot wooden floor to sit or lay on. They were all cut and bruised from their injuries [Grimes and Akhim's, courtesy of Stu] but apart from the initial treatment had received no follow up care. The heat inside the cell was unbearable, with no fans or any form of relief from the high temperature. Drinking water was available in a large drum in the corner, with a ladle but the liquid was soiled, so none of them drank. The flies were relentless and swarmed around the new inmates to lay their eggs in their open wounds.

The guard's only spoke Vietnamese and therefore

any requests had been ignored. Grimes and Akhim tried to plot a way out, they thought they could get some money, bribe the guards then escape from Vietnam and start again. They were informed that Mophi would be joining them shortly, when he'd fully recovered from the anaesthetic and their respective embassies would be visiting. They would then be charged and moved into the main prison facility to await a trial date. They all thought at least the prison would be better than the cramped cells.

Ca had been placed in custody in the police station cells,

His ear wound throbbed. The technicians had been released as the police and army decided they didn't really have anything to do with the caper, they were only workers.

Ca pondered on his situation, he expected the harshest of punishments from Minister Tangh and he stared through his cell bars into space, thinking about Kim, and his new brother, captain Ca.

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Lee and Thran returned into the dining room after about thirty minutes of intense conversation. They both looked a little more relaxed as the conversation shifted to the food, which Spock and Stu had eaten and found delicious. The assemblage then split. Pon and Kim went back upstairs to phone Banti to tell her they would be coming home soon, and then Pon called Taksin to finalise the arrangements and requested him to arrange for Vitthae and Cenat to visit him and help with some spiritual matters.

Nga went into the garden along with Spock and Stu who went back to the pool. They wanted to phone Dao and Moo but never had a Vietnam phone cards and didn't want to disturb the group, who seemed engrossed in conversation, so they decided to wait until they got back to Thailand.

Lee, Thran and Captain Ca sat around the now cleared table, Thran explained about his outburst and relayed the story of Ca, Kim, Phan Yar and the feelings of betrayal and deceit Thran felt toward Ca.

Kim had told her father about Ca's involvement and informed Thran that if Ca hadn't been there, she probably wouldn't have survived, and how he'd also been an unwitting participant of Grimes plan. Lee reminded his brother how he'd previously considered Ca as a son whilst they were in Phan Yar and before he broke his trust. Captain Ca felt a little uncomfortable and remained silent. The conversation went on for an hour with some sporadic discussion and then silence, giving Thran time to consider the information. He wanted the full force of the law to be brought to bear on Ca at the start of the conversation. However, the longer he thought about what his brother had said and the fact that Kim was now happily married to Pon and that he didn't handle the Ca situation well and had let anger cloud his judgement. Thran eventually started to compose himself and his thoughts drifting back to the happy quiet times and Ca's fresh fish.

Pon came downstairs and stood in the doorway and listened in to the last few minutes of debate. Captain Ca noticed him first and stood up as Pon came into the room and went over to sit by Thran.



Lee noticed a look in Ca's eyes that he'd seen in his prodigy before, but only shown to him, respect and a little fear.

Thran turned to face Pon.

"What are your thoughts on this, Pon?" he asked.

Pon thought for a moment and replied

"I didn't catch the whole story, but Kim and I are going to be fine, we will need time to heal further and I was angry, but that anger will never disappear so long as the thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind. Anger will disappear just as soon as the thoughts of resentment are forgotten and it seems to me Thran your resentful thoughts are rapidly diminishing."

There was another moment of silence, as they tried to figure out the load of bollocks that Pon had just come out with and then Thran spoke directly at Captain Ca.

"Your brother will need to be punished," and added,

"But I will show leniencies, after all you two are brothers and I don't know what I would do without mine," he smiled at Lee.

The tender family moment abruptly being broken by the arrival of several armed police cars screeching to a halt outside Thran's door. The police chief apologised sincerely for the disturbance as two armed police, captured and escorted the gardener away.

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Grimes sat in a dingy interview room along with a fierce looking Vietnamese police interrogator and a member of the British embassy. He had sung like a canary about the

plot and execution of the kidnap, implicating everyone and trying to make them believe that he'd been a victim in this terrible episode.

Grimes then offered the police officer a few thousand dollars, so this mess could be sorted out speedily. The interrogator took notes, and after Grimes implicated the gardener, he left the room leaving Grimes alone with the embassy official. The small, wiry man had said very little and when he did it had been short and carefully considered.

Grimes asked him what the embassy intended to do to get him released. The man looked at Grimes and said.

“Mr Grimes, or Crawford, whatever name you go by nowadays. You do not appear to understand the seriousness of the situation. The embassies hands are tied. No Vietnamese defence lawyers will touch this case; Minister Tangh is much too powerful for them.”

Grimes squirmed “I have money, so does my unit, just bribe somebody and get us out”

“Have you any family you want me to contact in the UK?” said the man ignoring Grimes statement.

“You're not listening to me,” yelled Grimes “there's money in it for you too.”

The man stared at Grimes.

“No, Mr Grimes” he said calmly “You are not hearing ME, we can't do anything for you, this is Vietnam we have no authority here, especially against the Minister you targeted, plus the terrorist attack on his neighbourhood and the murders you and your accomplices committed.”

Grimes interrupted,

“Money will sort it out” and gave a smug grin “If you won’t except it someone will”

“Mr Grimes” the man firmly but calmly stated “money will not help in your case, you can’t buy them off, and it is a hopeless situation for you. You are not innocent until proven guilty here Mr Grimes, you are already guilty. There can be only one sentence in Vietnam for what you are being charged with. The man went on to explain the sentence, and punishment.

Pale, shocked and numb Grimes was led with his arms and feet constrained back to his cell and shackled to the others. He was the first one to have his embassy visit and the other men were keen to find out what had happened Grimes was too shaken to speak.

Akhim spoke to him

“What’s happening Julian?” and he informed Grimes they had been told they would be charged and moved later that day or first thing in the morning after all the embassies had visited.

Julian Grimes looked at his foul and filthy surrounds and now realised the main prison would be just as bad if not worse. Then, trying to come to terms with what he’d just been told, quietly spoke to the silent gathered group.

“It seems it has already been decided gentlemen” he paused, because he didn’t want to hear the words come out, then finished his sentence

“We will receive the death penalty.”

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A nervous tension abounds in Thran's living room, although a happy relief after the events of the afternoon. Now early evening, the Tangh's, Pon, Captain Ca and Colonel Nhat sat around discussing the recent events with an army Lt Colonel, a senior police chief, and two top judges in order to find a quick but fitting court date to hand out the verdicts, sentences and punishments for the insurrectionary prisoners now in custody.

There would be no slick lawyers to get them out or any early release, this was Vietnam. The power, authority and influence lay with the men within this room, literally the power between life and death.

Spock and Stu sat in comfortable armchairs watching Vietnamese TV in the conservatory of the large drawing room.

Thran noticed them looking bored, although now considered part of the family they could play no part in this conversation. He phoned his driver then spoke to Pon, who shouted over to them

“Thran has put his car and driver at your disposal if you want to go out”

“You'll need some money, but if yo...” said Thran, unable to finish his sentence as the pair were already out of the door

Lee, Pon and Captain Ca laughed as the two lads did their disappearing act. The lads hurried over to the parked car with the driver starting it up. They got in and smiled at the shocked driver.

Thran looked taken aback, however Pon and Lee told him he would get used to that. Thran called his driver again and told him to give them some money, a few million Dong, equivalent to \$200 each and told him to give them more if they needed it, they certainly deserved it.

The car pulled out and along route 3, the driver spoke English and asked the lads where they wanted to go.

“I think first on the agenda must be a soapy” said Spock. Stu nodded eagerly and instructed the driver.

“Soapy massage” they sat back and enjoyed the sights, sounds, hustle and bustle as they entered the heart of Hanoi. The driver drove around the city and the lads took in the sights and succulent aromas from the open-air restaurants. The driver pulled into the rear of a large hotel and the lads saw a large sign stating, body massage. They went inside and greeted by several Vietnamese women, all wanting to take care of them and looking at their injuries. A smartly dressed man then came up to them and enquired which lady they wanted.

They didn’t hang about and chose two women, who grabbed towels and oils and led them up some stairs and into small clean rooms with a small, white massage mattress laid on the floor. They were given baggy shorts and a robe, led in to a shower cubicle, given a bottle of liquid soap, and instructed to wash themselves.

“This is different,” they both thought.

One hour later, they met up in the foyer, both in pain and searching for their driver in order to give him a good slapping. They’d had their already aching bodies,

kneaded, twisted and pummelled as the masseuses gave them a full body massage, with no happy ending.

They paid and went into the car park where the driver opened the door for them, but he got scared as the two strode towards him looking angry.

“Good massage sir?” he asked to the oncoming lads

“No stupid it wasn’t a bloody soapy, it was bloody agony” said Spock spitting on his clipping hand, to prime it ready to meet the drivers head.

The driver then pointed to the large sign above the door, which read

‘So-Pee’s body massage and ‘spa’ and showed pictures of people getting different stages of massage.

They couldn’t blame the driver, after all it was a so-pee, unfortunately not a soapy as they knew it and now their ardour had worn off, due to them being in pain. However the driver informed them they would feel the benefits the next day, which earned him his clip around his ear for reminding them they were sore and Spock didn’t want to waste his primed hand. They decided to hit the bars and told the driver to take them to the beer bars.

He drove them to the old quarter of the city and dropped them off at the Spotted Cow pub.

“I will wait close by,” said the now cautious driver.

The street, lively with both Vietnamese and foreigners alike all seemed in party mood as the lads got settled and ordered two Bia Hoi to lubricate their stiff joints. The beer tasted great and they ordered several more and a couple of Vietnamese ladies joined them and chinked the lad’s glasses “Zho Zho” they said, and the lads remembering from Maureen that it meant cheers! repeated the toast,

drank more and bought the girls a drink. They then spoke to the girls and the Australian bar owner, who was curious about their cuts and bruises, but lost interest when they explained what had happened, thinking another load of old bollocks, he usually got that from the Yanks that came in, and he'd learned to turn a deaf ear.

Their female companions went and spoke to other men who'd entered the bar, leaving Stu and Spock to drink and chat, which they were pleased about as it had been a hard few days and they were still worn out, besides they knew that they would be seeing their wives the next day, although Stu was still concerned and confused about Dao, he thought it would all be sorted out when he got home.

The fatigued lads decided to look around and then risk eating at one of the outdoor vendors, the delicious smells had been wafting through the open bar. They popped into an Irish bar and then a pub called the Polite Pub, which was not very lively, so they went and sat at a small outdoor-seated restaurant and studied the menu.

The menu was written in Vietnamese so they just ordered what the foreigners at the next table had, which looked and smelt rather tasty. Two steaming hot bowls of a chunky meat broth with rice and a hot sticky roll of sweet coconut were brought over to them. The couple on the next table assured them that the soup wasn't spicy, as they both struggled to eat spicy Thai food; in fact they both struggled with eating anything spicier than Yorkshire puddings.

They tucked into the soup, which tasted delicious; they ordered some cold cans of beer and savoured the

soup.

The busy restaurant was noisy as Vietnamese and foreigners socialised and Stu looked around and spotted something of interest and pointed for Spock to look.

“That’s strange to have a pet store within a food market,” he observed.

“They seem to have a lot of dogs and they look a bit mangy,” noticed Spock.

“Look they’ve sold one” said Stu as a Vietnamese woman lifted a dog out of a small pound and took it around the back.

The couple on the next table smiled and pointed to their nearly empty bowls and then pointed at the dogs, and stuck their thumbs up to denote they had enjoyed their stewed dog.

Shock went coursing through Stu as he thought of old chunky and of what he’d just eaten and he spat out the lump he’d been chewing on.

Spock just carried on chomping and also thinking about Chunky, or rather fricasseed, Chunky.

They’d had an average evening out and went back to Thran’s house early, only a little spannered and looking forward to flying home. They’d had another shag-less night, but felt sure they would make up for that the following day when they got home.

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\***Ryozinthium** : A stable isotope used in chaff, military



countermeasures, It's properties are found to distort the electromagnetic waves given off by modern day missile tracking devices, radar and any other device that uses the wave bands between W – D 110GHz - 300GHz. Its function is to distort and send out false information. One such machine that Ryozinthium is very effective on for giving out false readings is carbon dating equipment

## – Chapter Fifteen –

Covered with cuts and bruises Pon, Kim, Spock and Stu walked down the passenger boarding stairs. The other passengers got onto buses to take them to the arrivals gate. Taksin and other officially dressed individuals, greeted the four as journalists and photographers snapped away at the bedraggled party,

They stood posing for several minutes, much to the curiosity of the other passengers. They gave their passports, both phoney and original to one official and got into a large stretched limousine and drove out of the airport.

Taksin chatted to them all about their adventure, produced several copies from the previous days Bangkok Post, and showed them the headlines:

It showed their photographs again and a news item that explained how the original story had been a ruse. The article went on to describe the plot made by terrorists and how the three men had recovered the holy relic and the palace had sanctioned the story.

Spock and Stu thought, ‘That’ll impress the girls’

They knew the Thai’s didn’t sensationalise things, so their new celebratory status would go unnoticed

Their limo arrived at Pons quarters; an overjoyed Banti and family greeted them along with an excited baby, Samnan. Kim and Pon went over and hugged their tot,

who thought he was being suffocated and started wailing, but Kim settled him down and they all went inside.

Vitchae, Cenat arrived late afternoon, and they all tucked into a meal that Banti and Pons sisters had prepared, while relaying the recent events to a captive and attentive audience.

Pon noticed Spock and Stu kept looking at their watches and realised they wanted to go see their loved ones, so he leant across the table and said to Stu.

“Your Hilux is parked around the back, it’s been cleaned and they have put a full tank of ga.....”

Once again talking to himself as the lads whizzed around the table shaking hands with Taksin, wai’d the monks, hugged the girls and kissed Samnan.

They then headed off toward Stu’s pick up. Shouting back how they would call them later and see them soon.

Driving along the motorway Spock got his phone out of his bag and turned it on. The familiar signal for Thai 1-2-call flashed up and he started to dial. He looked at Stu

“Aren’t you going to call Dao?” he asked as he typed in Moo’s number.

“Maybe later” said Stu, nervous in case her phone had still been off

“Ok mate, good idea” said Spock, and he puts his phone back in his pocket.

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The new detainees at Giam Chi Hoa prison felt subdued and terrified, they had all been given the same information

from their respective Embassies, and now started to comprehend the hopelessness of their situation. Mophi had been unceremoniously dumped and shackled with the others earlier in a lot of discomfort from his recent operation. An infestation of flies swarmed around his gauze-covered lesion, but he was too weak to swat them away.

Later in the day they were informed they had been charged, although they never knew what for as it was none of their business until the trial date of what charges they faced. The trial had been set for six months hence and in the interim they would all be incarcerated in the main prison.

They were released from their manacles, and led at gunpoint outside, across a small forecourt and into a large foreboding building and into the main hot and sweaty prison housing. Once their hands and feet had been re-shackled they shuffled along until the guard opened a 3m x 3m cell that already held three chained foreign convicts who sat uncomfortably on the hard floor. They were shackled with the other three, thin, gaunt individuals and the cell was locked.

Grimes stared out of his chamber at the rest of the cells nearby, full of Vietnamese convicts all chattering away, some shackled some stood at the cell doors. He noticed some of the cells contained about twenty men and looked cramped and inhumane with no room to move. Grimes felt a strange sensation as he surveyed his new surrounds; it was one of despair and hopelessness.

A guard came to the bars, uttered something to them

in Vietnamese, and smiled.

“What did he say?” asked Akhim.

One old convict looked up and translated for them:

**‘Welcome to hell.’**

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Pon spent the afternoon with his family and friends just enjoying his homecoming. He, Vitthae and Cenat went to the temple of the sacred light and returned the fake relic to its glass case positioned above the Buddha’s head and waited for the spectral light show as the sun passed overhead. They were alone in the holy place. The light show finished as the sun carried on its journey; the three monks sat and prayed giving thanks for the safe return of everyone.

Vitthae and Cenat both noticed that Pon seemed different but decided that if he wanted to talk about anything they would be there.

After several minutes of prayer and meditation, Pon asked them for their advice and told them about Kim and Ca.

The two elder monks listened and although shocked they reminded him of the fact that what had happened was in the past.

“Lord Buddha teaches us don’t think of the past or the future, one has gone and the other hasn’t happened, only think of the present and you are a holy monk, it’s time to forgive.” advised Cenat

Pon knew his old mentor had given him wise guidance.

He stood up and respectfully wai'd the two old monks, friends and advisors

“Excuse me Masters, but I have something important to attend too.”

With a glint in his eye, he left the temple, walked purposely towards his quarters to be with Kim and trying to remember where he had left his mullet.

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Spock and Stu drove along Sakhumvit Rd the main road into Pattaya and decided to go for an afternoon welcome home beer. They knew that the girls should still be at the market. They headed down Pattaya Nua Road and towards the dolphin roundabout; they decided to go to the beach road bars. Stu suddenly stopped the car. He'd spotted someone familiar outside an open-air restaurant.

Spock noticed Stu looking back, so he looked and gasped

“What's Dao doing there and who's that she's with?” asked Spock to a shocked Stu

“I don't know but I'm about to find out” said an irate Stu as he backed his pick up into a parking space and they both got out.

Dao had her back to the lads as they walked up and stood behind her.

John saw the lads hovering and nodded for Dao to look around.

Dao turned and saw a cut and bruised Spock and her husband. With a shocked expression she spluttered,

“Hello darling”

Stu felt like his stomach had hit his throat, dizzy and bewildered he pointed to John and bawled.

“Tell me who the fuck’s this?”

Dao fumbled for any words that would come out

“This is my friend John, he’s from Wales”

John just looked at the two lads and didn’t want to get involved in a domestic dispute, especially not with the two rough looking characters who now confronted him.

“What do you mean friend, is he the reason your phone has been turned off?” shouted Stu getting angrier by the second

Dao taken aback and lost for words, kept looking at John for some moral support, which never came as Stu’s facial expression turned to one of rage, and it was the same look Spock had witnessed before when he’d pummelled Grimes and Akhim. He didn’t want his friend to hurt like this, so he calmly suggested they all went and talked in private. John stood up and told them he didn’t want to get involved and told them that all he ever did was to send Dao money and stay with her occasionally when he came to Pattaya. Stu thought about the times Dao used to tell him she went home to be with her son, when she had actually been meeting John. Stu calmly leant over the table and thumped John hard on the nose. He then turned and walked over to his car with Spock hot on his tail, he got into his Hilux and screeched away, leaving Dao trying to catch up to him and John holding his bloody and broken nose.

The car sped down beach road. Spock looked at his friend who had a vacant expression and no awareness of the

situation as he drove erratically and uncaring.

“Come on matey” said Spock, knowing from his own past experience, whatever outside pain Stu had endured over the last few days, paled into insignificance compared to what he now felt inside.

“Let’s stop for a beer and chat, you don’t want to crash” Spock advised, noticing how close Stu had been getting to the other vehicles on the road, especially the slow moving baht buses that have a nasty habit of just stopping without indicating.

Stu turned off onto Soi Six and parked the car and they both went into the King Kong bar, Stu wasn’t in the mood but knew that a short time may take away a bit of the pain.

After copious amounts of Singha and tequila shots downed in quick succession, a wankered Stu was driven home by a slightly spannerd Spock.

Moo had left the market early after Dao phoned her; she then called Spock who told her to close the shop and go wait at home until Stu got his head straight.

They returned home early evening, with a wankered Stu protesting he wanted to drink more. Spock helped him into his house. Moo and a tearful Dao where sat waiting in the living room. Stu saw Dao and shouted at her a few chosen obscenities then he went to their bedroom to pack her bags.

Spock questioned Moo about John and whether she had been aware of the affair, he became angry when she admitted she did but could not tell him. Spock mellowed as he realised Moo had been put in a difficult situation.

Moo broke the tension between them and told him he



looked a twat without his teeth and told him she would go with him to the dentist first thing in the morning.

Dao went upstairs to see Stu and returned a few moments later with her bags packed with her clothes dumped inside them, in tears.

Stu lay on the bed, he felt empty inside, with the words of advice Nick had told them when they'd first met now ringing in his ears

Fall in love with the place, not the girls.'

Stu had a restless night tossing and turning and thinking about Dao and the happy times they had together and the 'what if's'? He thought about what he'd just experienced in Vietnam and was glad he'd had Spock and the Meesilli's to pull him through. He would phone the mad monk later for some wise advice. He eventually fell asleep around 9am.

Spock and Moo had called in around 9.30am they'd had a key so they let themselves in. Spock went to Stu's room and, seeing he was asleep decided to leave him and call in on the way back from the dentist.

Dao had been calling Moo constantly throughout the morning as Stu had his phone switched off. Apologetic, Dao wanted her and Spock to help, but Moo got angry and said in Thai '*Som Nam Nar*' [serves you right] Spock and Moo would help, but not yet.

Spock and Moo visited the dentists and impressions and moulds were taken for his new dentures, and as he and Moo walked out of the dentists' reception Spock picked up an English newspaper and casually walked out

with it, much to the distain of Moo. You are a ‘Ka-Moy,’ thief, she said to a smiling gummy Spock.

“I’ll bring it back when my teeth are ready” and he glanced at the paper.

“It’s three days old anyway,” he grumbled looking at the date.

They returned to Stu’s around lunchtime. He was still sleeping, so Moo went to open the shop, while Spock potted around his house and garden, until Stu woke up. He left the newspaper on Stu’s coffee table, unread.

Stu woke up around 4pm, turned his phone on and within five minutes had a phone call from Dao. He had calmed down a little, but felt hung-over, exhausted and empty inside. Dao spoke for about ten minutes, but Stu did not want to listen, so he eventually told Dao he would talk to her later and hung up and went downstairs to make a cup of tea, joined a few minutes later by Spock who had seen him from his kitchen window.

“How are you feeling matey?” enquired a concerned Spock

“Rough’ said Stu as he pulled out some bacon from his fridge and started to fry them both a sandwich, which they took into the living room. This would take a lot of healing.

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Ca sat alone in the small police holding cell. He had been told that he would be transferred to the main prison the following day as the powers to be, were still deciding

what to charge him with.

It was a hot afternoon and he stared out of his cell, his head bandaged with a large pad covering his severed ear. He heard faint familiar voices arguing with a guard about how much a visit would cost them, a bribe to visit prisoners, which is standard in South East Asia.

Ca could hear the deal being struck by his mother and his brother, Phaol.

They stood outside while the guard removed Ca's shackles allowing him to move closer to the cells iron bars. He put his arms through the space between the bars and held onto them both. They had a tearful embrace, Phaol and Diudang explained to Ca that his wife had also come but she was trying to find a nearby hotel for her and their daughters to stay for a few days and that they would be along shortly.

Ca explained what had happened and they shared some barbequed fish that his brother had brought along. Ca told them both about meeting Captain Ca and how he had already saved his life. Ca's mother sat in shock at the news about her husband still being alive. Phaol, also taken aback, kept asking question after question about his new brother, whilst his mother just sobbed as the memories of the past came flooding back.

"I would like to meet this man," said Phaol

The conversation went on uninterrupted for about an hour, then the clanking of keys and outer doors opening temporarily halted the talks

"We are not leaving yet" Phaol told Ca "We have paid to visit all day" he assumed the guards were either

coming to kick them out or get more money. He was wrong on both counts as a smartly dressed soldier, in Cambodian military uniform with his left arm in a neat sling, was escorted into the holding cells and taken along to Ca's cell.

Phaol and Diudang were stunned how much the soldier resembled a younger Ca and they just stared with mouths agape.

Diudang tried to stand up but her legs had gone numb from sitting on the floor, so Captain Ca told them not to get up and he joined them and squatted on the wood deck

After the initial shock, Ca introduced the Captain to his mother and brother, and told him how pleased he was to see him and thanked him for coming.

The family chatted to the Captain for about twenty minutes about his life and upbringing and of their husband and father. Captain Ca appeared a little vague as his father never spoke about his past life in Vietnam, because he couldn't remember a great deal from that period. This put Diudang's mind at rest about why he'd never tried to contact her and why he remarried, although she became a little sad by the news.

Ca then produced a photograph from his pocket and showed it to them all. The photograph, taken a few years ago in Sereypheap village, showed the Captain in his uniform, standing between his mother Darah and his proud father Nguyen. He handed Diudang the photo and she again sobbed and stared at the now much older Nguyen. Although he now looked elderly, she could still make out the features of the man she fell in love with and

married.

The boys continued chatting as their mother held onto the photograph and her mind wandered to the past, occasionally chuckling to herself as a memory popped into her head. She had single-handedly raised two sons and life had been good to her, she never had any unpleasant feelings toward Nguyen and wished him a long and happy life.

The conversation between the men ebbed and Captain Ca promised that when he returned to Cambodia he would visit his parents and inform Nguyen about his old family and maybe they could all meet, although he was not sure of what his fathers' reaction would be, but maybe this would provide closure on his past life. Diudang wasn't sure of her feelings either. It had been too many years and they would now be strangers.

She handed the Captain back the photograph but he told her to hang on to it. The Captain told them he had to return to Cambodia with his Commander in a few days time, so he could stay in Ho Chi Minh City and visit Ca until ordered back to Hanoi. He then turned to face Ca and with a sombre look spoke.

"Yesterday I met with Minister Tangh to plead your case; we discussed this until well into the evening"  
Ca sat back away from the bars as if he knew what his brother was about to tell him as he spoke

"After a lot of discourse, mainly by my commander, the ministers' brother and Kim's husband Pon, he's decided to show leniency." The Captain paused as he could see his half brother looking dazed and surprised then continued,

“You are to be punished, but would only receive the minimum sentence of two years imprisonment.”

Although Ca and his family felt stunned by the news of his pending incarceration, they realised that two years wasn't a long time and it could have been a life sentence or worse, He'd misjudged both Thran and Pon, He considered himself lucky and uttered. “Thank you brother, that's twice you've saved my life”

***If you are going through hell, just keep on going!***



## — EPILOGUE —

Spock felt bored, so he decided to read the three-day-old Independent newspaper that he'd swiped from the dentist's reception. Stu stared at the T.V but didn't paying much attention, he couldn't concentrate, Spock realised his friend had a lot on his mind and nothing he could say would help, also the CNN news was on, and he knew Stu hated the news, so he continued reading the headlines on the front page. The cover story caught his eye.

“Hey matey listen to this”, he said, as he started to read the article aloud.

“Saudi armed forces combined with coalition special forces and antiterrorist squads, today raided the palatial home of Sheik Mohammed Del Alaz in the district of Riyadh, after undercover investigations unearthed evidence of weapons of mass destruction and an anonymous tip off that Alaz intended to detonate a nuclear device”.

The article continued about it being the first joint raid between the two allies and would open the way

towards more co-operation in the fight against terror in the Middle East. The story carried on about Alaz's possible connection to Al Quida and his prior connection to Sadam Hussein.

"And furthermore" carried on Spock excitedly to the uninterested Stu,

"Del Alaz had been found dead and a specialist unit had to disarm a small nuclear device. Several of Del Alaz's acquaintances had been detained for questioning and scores of hidden weapons and priceless treasures have been uncovered and removed" Stu then interrupted

"Which will take weeks maybe months to catalogue and the Saudi government will have to either return to the rightful owners, museums, auction off, destroy or keep, and the treasure could amount to billions of dollars worth"

"How do you know that smartarse?" asked Spock.

Stu pointed to the T.V, as the story still made headlines, especially the treasure, and the news showed several priceless items that had been recovered and catalogued.

"There's no photograph of him in the paper, just a dead stiff being wheeled out in body bag, but I bet that's the same bloody Arab that caused us all that grief" growled Spock

His suspicions confirmed a few moments later when a photograph of a serious and unwell looking Sheik Mohammed Del Alaz flashed on the T.V. screen and the news item went on to slate his character.

"Bastard" said Spock pointing at the screen "that's him" then noticing Stu had gone back to depressed mode, he continued reading silently the full story, while listening to the T.V.



Mohammed's prized treasures had been raided, looted and pillaged only three days after his death. The pharaohs must have been having a good chuckle.

After an hour or so, Spock could see that his old friend still wasn't paying much attention, he knew from his own experiences that this mental torture gnawed its way inside and neither pill nor potion could cure this hurt.

Spock had long since forgotten his own heart-wrenching episode, which now seemed like a lifetime ago. He knew his friend needed time to contemplate and his friends close by. He remembered a movie he'd seen years earlier and decided to use this wisdom to impart on Stu. He leant over to Stu who tried to force a smile.

"Matey" said Spock in a quiet reassuring voice

"When two people are in love but something goes wrong and they can't quite get it together, when do they stop trying?"

Stu looked at his long-time friend's large face, with no teeth, cuts, bruises and abrasions resembling a jigsaw puzzle and after a pause whispered

"Never Spock, you never stop trying"

Spock then eased himself further back into his chair looking like a two legged dung beetle whose shit pile had been too heavy and, with fingers intertwined and the smirk of a wise man, who has just discovered the meaning of life and imparted his wisdom on to his apprentice, who'd got the answer correct.

"So what do you want to do about Dao, mend it or end it?" enquired the newly enlightened, Spock.

Stu then envisioned Spock, with his new found

wisdom, suddenly turn green, shrinking, his ears becoming even pointier and throwing himself around the room with a light sabre squealing, “Jedi Vulcan I am. Human you buck up.”

This flash gave Stu cause for a smile and in a silly Yoda voice squeaked “Going for a beer we will, master” Spock just looked strangely at his friend

“What’s with the Yoda impression?” he asked

“Nothing” said Stu “private thought and before you get all melancholy and wise again, we saw that stupid film together.”

The two old friends got out of their chairs, walked outside and into the warm Pattaya night air. Their lifelong embarrassing *Bimat*, secret still intact,

Until now:

They both used to drink Babycham and sobbed like babies when Bambi’s mother died

**‘When a man has once loved a woman, he will do anything for her, except continue to love her.’** *Oscar Wilde.*

**THE END**



## **Novels by Robert A Webster**

### **Siam Storm:**

A stolen relic launches a deadly chase through Thailand, where three English lads are having the holiday experience of a lifetime. Enjoy their first adventure as they become embroiled in the recovery and the subsequent voyage of discovery whilst undergoing the many stages of intoxication from juiced to wankered as they hunt for a good place at the bar. A must read for anybody travelling to the land of smiles.

## **Chalice**

The discovery of a mysterious corpse leaves law enforcement agencies baffled. This adventure sees the lads join forces with their new friend and ally, whilst they once again attempt to recover a holy relic, this time stolen for a completely new and sinister reason. The chase takes them into Cambodia, as they thwart plans, which could affect the planet and change them into fruit based drinkers.

## **Bimat**

A kidnap and ransom demand lead our hapless heroes into a pursuit through Vietnam. They encounter an old foe, driven by obsession in his revenge driven quest. This time they face many challenges in both their adventure and their personal circumstance and although they almost lose everything, they never lose hope.

## **Trilogy:**

All three South East Asia adventures.

## **P.A.T.H**

A team comprising of three psychics, use their unique talents to provide a link between the mortal world and the celestial plane in order to locate lost treasures and give them to their recipients. One particular case finds the team caught up in a plot that had been conceived during world war two, and instigated in present day. The team has to solve a mystery that threatens to split the delicate fabric joining the two worlds.

**The return of the Reich.**

## **SPICE**

Ben Bakewell is a master baker with a unique gift that made him the grand master of his culinary craft. More commonly known as ‘Cake’ he meets up with Ravuth, a Cambodian man residing in England ,who has spent the majority of his life trying to trace his long lost family..

Jed Culver is a disgraced D.E.A agent whose bitterness for his old employer and lust for revenge lead him along a deadly path, as he also pursues the plant, although for a far more sinister gain.

This thrilling, but yet sometimes hilarious quest, takes you from the glitz and glamour of the fashionable London

restaurant scene, to the wild, untamed tropical forests surrounding the Cardamom mountains region of South East Asia, as the participants race to discover the whereabouts of a remarkable plant and locate a misplaced family

## **FOSSILS**

Enjoy the hilarious antics of an elderly four piece band as they embark on a whirlwind tour of several countries in South East Asia, unaware of their amazing worldwide success. Steve Baker (Strat) Elvin Stanley (Chippers) Charles Clark (Nobby) and Wayne Logan (Sticks) more famously known as ‘Fossils,’ are four musicians from varying background who are inadvertently united and form a band with a unique and exciting sound that filled an auditory hiatus that has been lacking for decades in the modern day music industry. Pursued and hounded by ruthless record producers, this unassuming rock band discover a new, exciting and carefree way of life, which they enjoy to the fullest, or at least what remains of it.

Viagra, snuff, and Rock’n’roll.

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