

JOHN REBEL

AUTHOR OF "MEGA MERCIES"



THREE PAGODA PASS

AN ASIAN TECHNO THRILLER

"Unstoppable Reading"

Three Pagoda Pass

By John Rebell

An Asian Techno Thriller

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Dedication

To Lennon. You are the best part of me. You make it all worthwhile.

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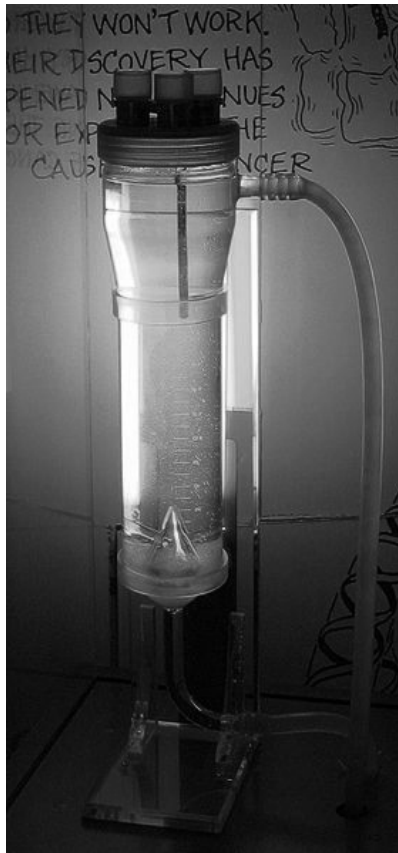
John Rebell

Three Pagoda Pass

An Asian Techno Thriller

Book One

The Bioreactor



Prologue

The “General” was convinced that children made the best killers, especially if trained from the proper age.

That age, according to the General was between seven and ten. History, in fact, sided with the General on this, something which history rarely did. The legendary Spartans of Ancient Greece also started training their soldiers at the age of seven, and just as brutally. While the General had little knowledge of ancient history, he had great experience in the tactics of terror.

His monthly “drafting” of soldiers usually took place around three a.m. He would choose a village at random and set up surveillance. The trick was in knowing in advance where his future soldiers lived. His army was also based on gender equality. He did however; think that ten to twelve was a better age for girls..for personal reasons.

His soldiers would get to the village sometimes one week before the raid, set up a perimeter, and watch the daily routines, noting where the children lived, what parents were in attendance, and how likely the threat of resistance was. Once he had this information he was ready to act.

He had seen the Western “Rambo” movies where Asian warlords swept into villages, floodlights blinding everyone, with troops jumping out of trucks, firing their weapons at anyone and everyone. That was Hollywood. He thought it was very dramatic, but also very stupid.

He sent his fighters into the village in silence, directly to his target’s house. They would creep through the flimsy doors of the shanty, and then the high-powered flashlights would come on. He knew perfectly

well that waking up out of a sound sleep to blinding light was disorientating.

This way he could round up a maximum of soldiers with very little danger to himself or his troops. Of course, there were exceptions, like tonight.

In that case, it was permissible to have a little fun.

“Boot camp” was to begin immediately. First, the boys were separated from the girls and hog-tied on the ground. The girls would get his critical eye later. It was important to separate the boys from family and keep them together.

The General jumped down from the Jeep. He was thirty-seven, almost geriatric in this part of the world. He wore solid gold bracelets on each bicep. A US Army, Vietnam era sleeveless flak jacket hung on his muscular frame, as did the dozens of medals he had awarded himself.

He walked to the first family. The boy was the proper age. He cut the duct tape handcuffs from the boy and handed him a gun.

“Shoot her,” he commanded the boy, pointing to the boy’s mother. The boy looked at him with complete incomprehension.

“It is very easy, little one. No more than killing a fly. You don’t need her anymore. You are one of us.”

The boy looked down at the gun, it smelled of gun oil, it felt heavy and greasy in his hand; he looked at his mother, and then looked at the General. Without hesitation, the boy turned the gun on the General, aimed and pulled the trigger. The hammer came down with a dry click.

The General burst out laughing. “Yes, little one, very good, you have the makings of a very fine soldier. Here, let me show you how this is done.”

This time the General used his own weapon. He placed it in the boy’s hand, wrapping his own hand around it, placing the boy’s finger on the trigger and in one quick, well-practiced, fluid motion, raised the gun and fired a shot directly into the boy’s mother’s face at close range.

The sound was huge. She went down in a heap like dirty laundry, the impact of the .45 caliber bullet blowing her sideways in a cloud of red mist. She came to rest face up, eyes open, face half gone, staring at her forever damaged son. “Uh, uh, uh ...” the terrified little boy was un-

able to grasp, or articulate what had just happened.

His dead-eyed child soldiers stood around him, and looked on with boredom.

“That, little one, is how easy it is done”, said the General, with a hint of satisfaction. “You, are now a soldier in my army.”

Chapter 1

The refugee camp hospital at Three Pagoda Pass was a sorry affair. The camp was located on the border between Thailand and Myanmar. It was over-crowded, built from bamboo, thatch, and banana leaves. It lacked water, basic sanitation, and had no medicine.

It also suffered from complete indifference on the part of just about everyone in the outside world. Even though Myanmar laid claim to “The World’s Longest Running Civil War” few people outside Asia had ever even heard of it. It held over 19,000 people.

Michael McAdams, a trauma specialist with Doctors Without Borders, stethoscope around his neck, walked around on the packed dirt floor of the refugee hospital in a filthy, blood-splattered smock. He walks among children doing triage. Flies rise, and then settle slowly as he passes. Nothing in medical school, nothing even in a big city ER, prepared him for this. To call this hospital “primitive” was an understatement.

The three simple rules of triage repeating in an endless loop in his head:

The ones who are too far gone, you don’t waste time on.

The one who’ll survive anyway, you don’t waste time on.

The one who has a chance to make it with intervention, deserve 5 minutes.

He takes the stethoscope out of his ears and stands up. The flies surrounding the child rise as he does, then settle back down like a black mist to feed. He can smell the stench of sepsis in the open, running sores. He notes the mottled greenish color surrounding the wound. *At least the flies are eating*, he thinks silently. He shakes his head slightly at

the nurse. She nods her head in understanding. You can't save them all.
Shit! He thinks silently...*I can't save any of them today.*

The next child is not in the latter stages of malnutrition, nor has a traumatic injury. Dehydration, for sure, but no open wounds.

Hummm...BP slightly above normal, thought McAdams. *Heartbeat elevated, but steady. Maybe my luck is changing.* McAdams glances up at the nurse.

"What do we have in the stores?" He asks quietly.

"UN supplied rice," She replies indifferently, "I think...if the rats and the rains didn't get it."

"WHAT DO WE HAVE IN THE STORES?" the doctor repeats impatiently.

"Well, nothing..." the nurse shrugs her shoulders, and turns away indifferent.

McAdams feels like Saint Jude, the Patron Saint of Lost Causes.

Chapter 1.1

Outside the refugee camp life was even worse.

While McAdams worked to save a child's life, My Lin, a child herself, worked to save her own. Twelve years old, dressed in rags and barefoot, picking through trash in a third world dump, her only occupation...survival.

She's been scavenging all day in the hot sun. She's become used to the smell of burning plastic, toxic waste and the constant droning of flies buzzing in the background. She picks carefully over the broken glass, in bare feet, knowing full well a small cut can have serious repercussions in the tropics. Infection can set in in a matter of minutes, bloating her foot to the point of being unable to walk in hours. With no water, and no basic sanitation or medical care available, a small cut can mean death.

The other workers here at the sprawling hundred-acre garbage dump where trash fires burn and plumes of black smoke choke the air with toxic gases, are mostly children as well, hundreds of them, between the ages of 7 to 13.

Some of them, like My Lin, work in the dump barefoot and shirtless, combing through mounds of rubbish for tin cans, plastic bags and other recyclable goods. On a good day, she can make almost 50 cents a day.

My Lin lost both parents to the fighting four years ago; Sambo Lon, one of her few friends, 8, was abandoned by a divorced mother; Kunthea Nim, 10, lost her father to a land mine in 2010. That same year, her mother died during childbirth. All the children must work to pay off the debts of their parents.

Burmese Health officials say the dump site is extremely treacherous. Two years ago, a Japanese study found dangerously high levels of dioxin in the soil and large amounts of heavy metals in the metabolism

of children who work in the dump here. Dioxins, which can come from burning chemicals, is a highly toxic chemical that can cause cancer. Myanmar is not alone in allowing children to work as scavengers at dump sites. There are thousands of child laborers at such sites in Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, India, Nigeria, Brazil, Argentina and the Dominican Republic.

My Lin knows it is perilous work. The land is soggy, and huge bulldozers rumble through, dumping pile upon pile of garbage, seven days a week, 20 hours a day. My Lin and the other children start as early as three a.m., when some of the first garbage trucks arrive. They often leave well after seven in the evening, when it becomes too dark to forage.

Even on the hottest days of the year, when temperatures climb above 110 degrees and the air becomes nearly unbreathable. My Lin watches children as young as five sifting through the smoldering trash heaps and racing after the garbage trucks that arrive with fresh loads of refuse.

My Lin spies a group of boys running after the trucks. They jump into the jaws of garbage trucks to fish things out before they even reach the dump site. The drivers pay no attention. More than once a child didn't get out in time.

When a vehicle -- any vehicle -- crosses into the dump site, children fling their bags of tin cans in front of the wheels, hoping to crush their cans to increase the space inside the bag.

Discarded batteries, pesticides, fluorescent light tubes, and medical waste cause the most serious health threats for young scavengers.

She knows many of the children here were born into impoverished Cambodian families that moved to the area from the countryside after the end of Pol Pot's murderous rule. Instead of finding urban fortunes, many of them settled in a slum that grew up along the rim of the dried lake bed, a dump infested with flies that gravitated to the refuse and dregs of a nation. The slum housed more than 10,000 adults and children.

Another friend, Ratha, 12, sits down beside her.

"Those boys are hitting me and pushing me into the garbage", she whines, showing My Lin her cut and scraped up leg. She is another girl who still works at the dump, trying to earn money to pay off her par-

ents' debt.

She wears a stained white blouse and a pair of soiled long pants. Her sandals are too big, and her dirty hair, which falls down to her shoulders, is tucked under a dusty, purple knit hat that protects her eyes from the scorching sun. Stitched to her pants was a Winnie-the-Pooh patch.

She carries a metal pick to help her poke through the garbage, and a white burlap sack that she uses to collect her recyclable goods. A condition known as Chloracne, caused by toxic chemicals, have resulted in a red, boiling, rash which crawls up her face and neck. They talk a while, then My Lin moves away.

My Lin continues walking around the dump edges, turning over this pile of trash, or that.

My Lin spies a piece of meat in the garbage. She looks around to see if anyone else is watching, then pounces on it, feral, she scrapes the maggots off with her fingers, eating it as fast as she can. Indistinct shouts in the distance, as boys spy her eating and start throwing rocks. One lands close to her and she looks up, fear and determination in her eyes. A rock hits her back, drawing blood in a slow trickle down her shoulder blades, as the boys get closer. She puts the rancid offal in her shoulder bag and runs.

Chapter 1.2

“You have absolutely no idea what you’re doing, do you?” The CEO said, smugly, with a hint of contempt.

Fortunately for Cobalt, and unfortunately for the CEO, Cobalt knew exactly what he was doing. He had his private investigators compile an extensive dossier on the CEO, as well as others. For example, he knew the CEO ran a 350 employee, Fortune 500 company, that it was family owned, and operated.

He knew that the CEO was a “Type “A” business personality, and his management style was authoritarian. That his employees lived in fear of him, and his temper. That no one dared to cross him. They called him “The Grim Reaper” behind his back.

Cobalt also knew the CEO was a health nut who jogged 5 miles every morning. He knew he was a rabid anti-smoker, gave a sizable donation to the American Cancer Society every year and considered second hand smoke “The biggest man made killer of this century.”

Which was why Cobalt took a certain delight when he looked at the CEO and calmly lit up a Marlboro.

“There is a strict no smoking policy in this boardroom, and building. I demand you put that out,” said the CEO, standing up from his chair, glaring across the conference table at Cobalt.

“Then call security,” said Cobalt, quietly, meeting his eyes.

Cobalt continued looking at the Chief Executive until he dropped his eyes and picked up the phone. The CEO wasn’t about to give up that easily.

“Mary? Get security up here. Have them escort Mr. Cobalt out the door.” The CEO said this with satisfaction, curling his lips. “So you want to play rough, Cobalt?”

Cobalt didn’t bother to answer, he quietly continued to smoke placidly. Within minutes, two security guards hustled up from downstairs lobby and stood in the doorway looking from one man to the other.

Neither moved.

The CEO glanced over his shoulder at them and said, "Please escort Mr. Cobalt out of the building. He's overstayed his welcome."

Security stayed rooted to the floor, not daring to breathe, understanding they were bit players in a drama they didn't understand and wanted nothing to do with.

Cobalt came to their rescue.

"Whether I know what I'm doing or not is irrelevant" Cobalt delivered this equally as quietly, without emotion, to the stunned boardroom. "What is relevant is that, as of 9am New York Time, I own controlling shares in this company. That means, you are now my employee, and THAT means, you're fired."

The executive's face turned a deep shade of scarlet; he started to sputter, his voice rising. "You can't do that, this is a family owned, private company, I'll..."

"I can, and more importantly, I did. This company belongs to me now. Make this easy on yourself, because I'm not going away."

"My lawyers went over our agreement with a fine-toothed comb. They assured me..."

"Then my advice? Hire better lawyers the next time. Security? Please allow the CEO to clean out his office, then escort him out the building."

The CEO, the family patriarch, was used to getting his way in all things, and in over 26 years never had anyone spoke to him this way. He looked ready to kill, or suffer a brain aneurysm. Cobalt watched with interest as the veins in the CEO's temples started pulsating.

The CEO opened his mouth to say something, then thought better of it as each security officer put a restraining hand on his elbow. The CEO gathered up his papers and left the boardroom.

"I'll see you in hell for this, Cobalt," he said as he passed.

"You'll probably get there first." Cobalt said softly, after the slamming door finished reverberating around the conference room. Security hustled out, trying to catch up with the angry CEO.

"OK, let's move on..."

Maximilian "Max" Cobalt was 44 years old, he carried his six foot frame with ease, his hair was still jet black and his eyes were still ice blue. A self-proclaimed "Corporate Raider" by profession, he scouted out weak companies, whose management were making gross mistakes, came in on the pretext of injecting needed capital into the ailing com-

panies, and then bribed weak family members into selling their shares in order to take the company over.

Cobalt had no illusions about himself. In business, and life, he was a driven, cold-hearted bastard. He knew most people thought he was a certifiable prick and could care less. What never ceased to amaze him that after 20 years in the business is no one ever saw it coming.

Cobalt looked for specific companies. He liked older, established family owned companies having between 150 and 350 employees. Usually found in manufacturing, and lately, high-tech. Usually headed up by a nepotistic older management teams, who moved slowly, rarely took risks, and were slow to adapt to the changing circumstances of the marketplace.

Dinosaurs were also slow to adapt and we all know what happened to them.

Next, Cobalt turned his eyes on the CFO, the Chief Financial Officer. He was the son-in-law of the CEO. Cobalt had met the CEO's daughter before acquiring the company and thought the two deserved each other. In fact, she was the one who sold Cobalt the remaining controlling shares, selling her own family business down the river.

He was a fussy little man, prematurely balding, with an air of preoccupation and rapidly blinking eyes. Bean Counters always had a slightly superior air about them. As though they are privy to secrets no one else knew. Which, of course, they were.

"Your fourth quarter estimates seem a little...optimistic." Cobalt lets the statement hang in the air as a question.

"Actually, they aren't. You see, once past account receivables are tallied, we can confidently extrapolate..."

"You're history too," Cobalt said quietly. To his credit, the CFO simply nodded his head, gathered his papers and quietly left without another word.

The head of the table, as well as the right hand seat was now vacated. Senior management was hemorrhaging.

The corporate blood bath continued.

Cobalt turned his attention to the left hand chair, the COO, Chief Operations Officer. He was the CEO's sister's husband. He was bombastic, had slicked back hair and the overbearing confidence of a door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman pushing his way into your home.

Before Cobalt could even open his mouth, the COO launched into a well-rehearsed sound bite.

"Fourth quarter sales were MUCH better than anticipated, in fact, we..."

"You're toast," said Cobalt softly, cutting him off. The stunned executive just looked at him in disbelief.

"I think if you'd just give me a chance to explain, you'd see we're on a projected growth pattern that..."

"Go on, get out of here. My secretary has your severance package ready." Cobalt delivered this in the same soft, unemotional style.

With the entire top management gone, the air in the room was a little less stuffy. It was replaced with the smell of uncertainty and the stench of fear. Cobalt got up from the opposite end of the table from the now banished CEO, and walked slowly and confidently to the head of the polished oak table. He could feel eyes, awe, and hatred on his back. He stood at the CEO's vacant chair and looked across at the senior V.P's.

Cobalt looked down at the cigarette in his hand with distaste, then stubbed it out on the conference room table.

"In case you didn't get the memo, heads are rolling...who wants to be next?"

No one volunteered.

Chapter 1.3

“I’d like to introduce this year’s Hauptmann Award winner, Ms. Anya Chin,” said the Dean of Biological Sciences Dept., air-clapping silently as he finishes the introduction. The sparse crowd followed suit and clapping politely, but unenthusiastically.

The lights dim, and murmurs from the crowd start to die down. Anya Chin, 26, an Asian Doctor of Biology, in a white smock mounts the stage. Her high heels tap a tattoo beat across the hardwood. She is petite, raven haired, and has the flawless Asian skin that make women jealous. She is small breasted and weighs no more than 90 pounds. The single most beautiful thing about her is the fact that she herself is unaware of her own beauty.

The men in the front row of the auditorium, sitting at eye level to her ankles, admire her slender legs. Their lascivious eyes travel up her legs to under her knee length skirt. The view from “the pit”, is almost worth the fact that the air conditioning in the auditorium is on the fritz and the temperature is rising. Most of the men now have a new reason to start sweating.

The auditorium seats about 100 people. Only 50 or so are in attendance this afternoon, scattered about the room in twos and threes. Many of the students are here only because it is required. They have their legs up on the chairs in front of them, silently texting their friends.

Anya Chin wastes no time. She starts setting up her laptop computer, plugging in the A/V cables quickly and efficiently. She hits the enter key, and immediately a PowerPoint slide show presentation springs to life behind her. She takes the “clicker” and starts walking about the stage.

“Right now, as I stand here, 70 children are dying of starvation. That’s 100,000 per day, 4,200 per hour, and 70 per minute. In the time it took me to say that, 3 children died.”

Click: another slide showing extreme malnutrition in Darfur

Click: Slide showing children starving in a concentration camp type conditions in Rwanda.

Click: Slide showing inner city starvation in LA and New York.
 “That’s 300,000 per month, 3,600,000 per...”

“Excuse me? Doctor?” A bored, tired, voice from the audience speaks up.

A prematurely balding man in his 40’s holds his hand up, picks up a wireless microphone and taps the head, which squeals with feedback in distaste. He has the disheveled look of a academic bureaucrat, today’s soup stains on his tie. His shirt has given up the struggle to stay fresh. He is a life member of the “Academic Ignorati,” as Anya likes to refer to them. He pushes his glasses up his nose and continues...

“We’re aware of this. We know the problems. It’s the solution that brings us here today. The question is...Do you have a solution?”

The Pretty Asian professor looks away, far too polite to confront his rudeness head-on, a faraway look in her dark, smoky eyes.

“As a matter of fact, I do, I...”

“Yes, yes, I’m sure you do,” Interrupted the bureaucrat again, “would you mind however if you moved this along?” Even hostile looks from the audience at his appalling rudeness didn’t seem to faze him. “I have a meeting and I was hoping we could conclude this.”

Anya looked down at him from the stage, no sign of irritation in her eyes, or any emotion at all registering on her facial features. She continues without missing a beat.

“Consider this: Imagine for just a moment an organism that...

- Can be used to end world hunger.
- It can create nutritious health foods and has been eaten for centuries in Asia.
- It can solve the “Peak Oil” energy crisis.
- It can contain over 60% lipids (oil) which can be used in biofuels.
- It can be used to produce biofuels, bioethanol, jet fuel, and bio gasoline.
- Has the ability to grow incredibly fast, or slow
- It requires no cropland to grow, and displaces no food crops.
- It has no growing season and can be cultivated year around.

- It can be used to clean raw sewage into drinking water.
- It can produce low cost medicines, pharmaceuticals and vaccines.
- It can be used organic animal feed for the world's animals and livestock.
- It can be used as organic fertilizer to grow organic vegetables.
- It can be used to cure:
 - Diabetes
 - Cancer
 - Obesity
 - Reduce anxiety and sleep disorders
 - Anti-aging effects on skin, hair and organs
 - Improves mental function and enhances concentration
 - Improves immune system."

Anya looked up and realized that her audience had drifted from a state of skepticism to one of disbelief.

Microphone feedback squealed again as the bureaucrat tapped it a second time. "Besides in science fiction, do you know where you can find such as an organism?"

"I certainly do. In fact, it is almost impossible not to find. It grows abundantly all over the earth, in every climate, even on the polar caps, in your swimming pool and bird bath... It's called pond scum."

"You realize of course that is absolutely ridiculous," said the bureaucrat, "if this is some sort of joke, I'm not amused."

"I assure you, it's not a joke," said Anya calmly, with conviction.

"Do you have sort of documentation to back up these ridiculous claims..."

"Of course, I do. It's..." Then Anya Chin stopped in mid sentence.

Realizing that fighting entrenched ignorance and rude hostility was a losing battle, she calmly walked off the stage not bothering to answer.

Chapter 1.4

“GERALD GARCIA HENDRIX!!!” His mother yelled down the cellar steps.

Christ, he hated it when his mother called him that. Geri, looked up from his science project, rolled his eyes, and decided not to answer, and went back to work.

It was bad enough that his last name was the same as a dead rock star, then to add insult to injury, his parent decided to name him after their idol. His mother and father met on a “Dead Head” tour, and he was the product of 3 days of sex, drugs and rock and roll. His father dropped dead of a heart attack a year later. As though she can even remember The Old Geezer Reunion Tour. Talk about embarrassment.

To quote (one of)is his namesake(s), what a long, strange, trip it's been.

OK, moment of truth. He flipped a switch and the strange machine whirled into life. A long, clear, glass cylinder burst into life, bubbling and gurgling.

Fuck me sideways!! He thought, *it works!!*

“Gerald Garcia Hendrix I’m not going to tell you again. Your dinner’s cold and if you don’t get up here this instant, I’m giving it to the dog!”

Go for it. To quote another questionable rock and roll dead-beat..”you can’t always get what you want.”

The light green colored water bubbled silently. He added some nutrients, stood back, then added some more. There. Perfect. In 3 days he ought to have some concrete proof.

“For that last time, this is your last warning, young man. Come to dinner right now or I’ll...”

“Coming. Oh, Mom, did you say something?” He asked all innocence and wide eyes.

Let's see Brittany McGuire and Bart Williams top this, he thought, as though she even knows I exist. If I win this prize its a thousand bucks. With a thousand bucks I could...Visions of him in a top hat and tails as he whisks the blond Goddess Brittany McGuire off her feet...The voice of Mick Jagger fades in his mind

"Please allow me to introduce myself/I'm a man of wealth and taste..."

I really need to get these cheesy rock and roll lyrics out of my brain,
He thought.

"So Mom, what are we having?"

"It's Tuesday night, you know we always have Tuna Surprise on Tuesday..."

Geri's Mom's voice droned into a distant buzz in the back of his mind. Geri turned out the basement light and climbed the basement steps, like the condemned, going to the guillotine. He hated Tuna Surprise.

What he didn't see was the low light infrared camera as it came on at the same time as the lights went off. The miniature camera, hidden in a broken radio, continued to film the progress on the strange cylinder glowing strangely green and red on the work bench.

Chapter 2

A line of 5 black limousines, front bumper flags flying from the respective nations, circled the block once on Wireless Rd. in Bangkok, then entered the side gate into the US Embassy. The cars held ambassadors and represented the countries of Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, and Myanmar.

China was intentionally left out of this meeting as an undisguised snub to the current ambassador and for the military build-up and coming conflict over the Spratley Islands in the South China Sea for the oil and gas rights. This was perfectly fine with everyone present as there was no love lost for the Chinese with this group either.

Immaculate Honor Guard Marines stood at attention, swords drawn and held to the nose, as the dignitaries pulled into the circular, Greek columned portico. Not even sweat dared to mar the perfection of the Marines in the humid, tropical heat.

The US Ambassador to Thailand, Richard Jenkins (“Jenk” or “Jerk” depending on who you talked to) was on hand to greet each guest personally, and shake the sweaty hands of the visiting politicians.

Jenkins was an old hand in the Foreign Service, which was how he got this plum assignment with the past administration, a favor for his services in “outing” Valarie Plame, a CIA operative and “Big Mouth” according to the last administration.

He had the impossibly white teeth of a celebrity, full head of silver hair, and always knew exactly what to say no matter how uncomfortable the situation. While he could back-stab like the career diplomat he was, yet he had somehow managed to never have to fall on his own political sword.

“Mr. Nguyen, a pleasure to see you again. I was sorry to hear about General Giap’s recent passing,” He said to the ambassador of

Vietnam, thinking; *I hope the General rots in hell for all the embarrassment the man handed the American's during the Vietnam War.*

"Thank you, thank you so much," said the ambassador of Vietnam, "I know you were always special to the General. I'll pass your sincere wishes to his widow." At the same time thinking... *the only thing that would make the General happy is if he could reach from his grave and twist your testicles off and feed them to you for the 3 million of my countrymen you helped kill.*

Jenk smiled his unbearably white smile and reached out to shake the hand of his next guest, the ambassador of Cambodia.

"Mr. Pram...I fell in love with those candies Cambodia is so proficient at making the last time I was there." *In that shit-stained, back-water you call a country,* he didn't add.

"Ambassador Jenkins, an honor to see you again." *Here's to hoping you choke, and shit blood on the next one,* the Ambassador silently wished his counterpart with an insincere smile.

"Ah...Somporn, it's been way too long. I hope His Majesty is keeping you busy?" *Are you still supplying little girls to the Prince?* He thought inwardly with a huge outward smile.

"Mr. Ambassador, You always look so young. I wish I knew your secret. The demands of the Kingdom are always pressing." *Of course, it is no secret your secret is Thai plastic surgeons and Thai girls 35 years younger than you,* thought the Ambassador to Thailand.

So it went. The US ambassador greeted each of his guests like visiting royalty, which, in some cases, they were. Expressing his intense and insincere love of whatever wonderful country he happened to be talking about.

Of course, he fooled no one.

His guests, equally diplomatic, also outwardly expressed their deep respect and intense devotion for all things American, while inwardly expressed their equally intense distrust and in some cases, disgust, of all things American.

"So in conclusion," Jenk couldn't wait to wrap this up and get to his current favorite whore on Soi Cowboy, off Sukhumwit Rd., "I feel confident that the current troubles in Myanmar and the South China

Sea can be easily solved when a dedicated group of like-minded, and peace loving members of the international community as we have here today, join hands in a common cause. Furthermore, we are here today to...” Jenk’s monotone drone was already putting most members to sleep.

Ambassador to Vietnam: *Furthermore, we were here today so that you could lay the groundwork for the US stealing our naval base at Cam Ranh Bay back.*

Ambassador to Myanmar: *Furthermore, we were here today so that you could get a business foothold to rape the natural resources of my country.*

Ambassador to Thailand: *Furthermore, we were here today so you fuck more of my country’s girls and get your teeth whitened again.*

The meeting ended with a rousing toast of well wishes to a wonderful host.

Chapter 2.1

Paul Savage was ex Delta commando and corporate “fixer”, a Black Bag guy, made famous by G. Gordon Liddy of the Watergate Fame. He was also one of the best in the business. But this job was taxing his expertise.

It was difficult to move inside a house, in the middle of the night, when all the motion detectors are connected to lights and burglar alarms. Yet that is exactly what Savage did.

Of course, night vision goggles and infrared helped in that respect. The occupants were all upstairs asleep. He was dressed in black, moving close to the walls, NV goggles firmly in place on his forehead, making him look like a hybrid human-insect. He moved surely, without haste and no wasted movement towards the basement door.

Why did a normal house have all these motion detectors? He had a feeling that little fuck Geri Hendrix rigged it up. In which case, who knew what other surprises the little shit dreamed up and lay in wait.

At this point he knew he was in a blind spot, one of the few, of the motion detectors so he knew he could move more freely. He tested the basement door by opening it slightly, detecting the dry shriek of rusty metal.

He took a small can of WD-40 and sprayed the hinges of the cellar door. He opened the cellar door the minimum necessary, squeezed through, and went down the basement steps, distributing his weight evenly over the steps as to not make a sound.

While the house was wired up the wazoo, the lab had no security at all. Go figure.

He approached the Geri’s work bench and looked at the camera hidden in the broken radio, checked it’s batteries and set up a wireless relay to beam the video signal to another relay outside the house.

Next, he went to the workbench, laid Geri’s notes out and took pictures with a miniature camera. He paid close attention to the nutrient input and growth patterns.

Now, he turned his attention to the bioreactor.

It was a cylinder of clear acrylic, roughly 4 foot tall, and 12” inches wide. It glowed in multi colors of red, blue, and white of the LED lights which were submerged inside the bioreactor. The culture itself was a dark greenish tint. Inside he could see floating clumps of dark green material being blown about the cylinder in a circular pattern by the air stones releasing oxygen and CO2 into the tank.

Savage took more pictures documenting the growth in the bioreactor and left as silently as he came.

Chapter 2.2

In Social Studies class Geri Hendrix couldn't keep his eyes off Brittany McGuire sitting one row and two seats ahead of him.

He looked down at the computer screen, but in his mind's eye he was in the tropics with Brittany in yellow string bikini, her bikini standing out on flawless tanned skin. Geri tapped on the computer keys, pushing his glasses up his nose, reading as he goes...

"There are now few cases of outright starvation among poor children. Indeed, obesity is now more of a threat. This was not always the case. In 1968, a group of physicians issued "Hunger in America," a landmark report documenting appalling levels of malnutrition among poor children.

They wrote that "Wherever we went and wherever we looked, whether it was the rural south, Appalachia, or an urban ghetto, we saw children in significant numbers who were hungry and sick, children for whom hunger was a daily fact of life and sickness in many forms, an inevitability." Their report to Congress exposed shocking levels of nutritional deficiencies in areas of the United States that were comparable to those in developing countries."

Brittany, fully aware of the effect she had on boys, had it all. Sixteen years old, blond, with all American cheer leader good looks, she knew she could have any boy she wanted..including most of the male teachers as well.

If Brittany had it all, Geri Garcia Hendrix had none of it.

At 17 years old, Geri sported kinky, wiry red hair, geek glasses, and a pocket calculator. Even he admitted he looked like Carrot Top with a pocket protector. The Brittany McGuire's of the world looked right past

him. Not only did he not exist on the Planet of Brittany, he doubted if he could even be a minor moon orbiting her heavenly planet.

Brittany leaned back in her chair to giggle a moment with Bart Williams, this year's Quarterback. The movement stretched the flimsy fabric of her low cut T-shirt, delineating her perfect young breast. Almost every man, boy, not to mention the jealous females, in the room stopped breathing for a few seconds.

She gave Bart a "*you're horrible*" look, giggled some more, and went back to her studies, ending the short peep show. Unfortunately, adolescent hard ons remained. Geri decided, then and there, today was the day. Today, he would ask her out. Today he would defy the Gods. Today he would take a chance at heaven on earth.

Why not? He asked himself over and over.

No guts, no glory.

A faint heart never caught fair lass.

No pain, no gain, he told himself as he pumped himself up.

The rest of the class was spent composing the right words. He practiced killer one liners and witty repartee that would sweep her off her feet.

The bell rang and he gathered up his books quickly. He hurried over to Brittany's desk just as she was getting up. The moment of truth was here.

"Brittany, I was wondering if you, I mean, will you...."

"Ewwww" Brittany interrupted half way through Geri's well planned, heartfelt, monologue, looking Geri up and down with disgust.

"Look, Bart, Pond Scum decided to speak. Go back to the other one celled organisms you call your friends and ask them out."

Brittany giggled at her own wit and took Bart's arm. Bart Williams gave him a withering "You're dead, asshole," look and they both dismissed him out of their lives without another glance.

Geri stood there, rooted to the floor, not daring to breathe. He could feel the blood rushing to his face to make his complexion an even brighter orange than it already was.

What just happened?

Pond scum? he thought, hoping there was a way to die on the spot. *She thinks I'm pond scum. Slimy, stinking, oozing, pond scum.*

Chapter 2.3

Bart Williams thought today would be an excellent day to beat the shit out of Geri Hendrix.

Not having forgotten the insult of being pushed aside just as he was making the final moves on Brittany McGuire, the only manly thing to do was to fuck up someone 50 pounds lighter and 3 inches shorter than he was. The fact that the competition was unequal only made it more fun.

He had it all planned out and even enlisted the help of Brittany. He told her the plan and she even rolled her eyes and gave him her patented “*you’re horrible*” look again as she giggled with delight.

Since today was Tuesday it meant he would get out of gym class and walk this hallway. Brittany unbuttoned one button on her blouse and made sure her top showed plenty of cleavage.

The bell rang and class was dismissed. The hallway soon filled to flood tide, like a student river flowing down the main hallway with tributaries branching off into individual classrooms.

Geri Hendrix was one of the last minute stragglers as they knew he would be. Brittany reached down rubbing her ankle with a look of pain on her face.

“Geri? Could you help me?” She cocked her shoulders in such a way as looking down her blouse was unavoidable.

“Sure. What can I do...?” replied Geri, all too willing to help his Damsel in Distress, even if she did shit all over him the day before.

“Just help me outside. I think I twisted my ankle. I need to go home early.”

Geri helped her stand up and she slipped her arm around his waist. She leaned against him and Geri could feel her soft breast pressing warmly against his arm and immediately forgot about everything else.

As soon as the door closed and they turned a corner they ran into Bart Williams. Sadistic glee spread over his face like a crimson blush.

“Hi Asshole, remember me?” Since Geri’s hands were full of Brittany, he didn’t have time to react, and instead took the full force of the sucker punch on the side of his face.

Brittany immediately regained her footing after almost losing it and falling in a heap with Geri. Bart took the opportunity to follow up with a sweeping kick taking both of Geri’s legs out from underneath him and landing him flat on his back.

Brittany backed up to watch with a twisted smile and sickly fascination as the beating began.

Bart knew he had already won, but just to make sure, a kick straight to Geri’s testicles as he was down on the ground soon brought the point home.

Bart knelt and took his time lifting Geri up by the shirt front with one hand, and smacking him back down with his fist with the other. Geri never had a chance to retaliate, or cover his face from the blows.

Geri felt Bart’s class ring completely dislodge one of his molars. Another punch he felt his nose explode, and lay at an unnatural angle.

“Don’t ever, (punch) ever, (punch) EVER, push me aside again, Pond Scum, or this is going to seem like tickle time.”

Brittany watched in sick fascination, at the bruised and bloody form at her feet, and then started to giggle.

Chapter 2.4

Anya Chin looked through the frosted glass of the hospital door at Geri Hendrix. Geri had been one of her students when she was substituting at the high school last year. They formed an odd friendship and had kept in touch. She knew Geri had an odd flair for both mechanical engineering as well as biology.

She felt eyes, and saw Geri was staring at her. She pushed through the door into the hospital room. She saw his jaw was wired shut and he couldn't speak. She felt sort of stupid standing there with flowers. Just what every beat up high school geek needs.

"Don't talk, Geri," she said softly, not really knowing what to say. Geri made a motion in the air, like writing on air. Anya didn't catch the meaning at first.

"What do you want?" She asked again, feeling stupid. *Good show, Anya, she thought to herself, the kid can't talk and is in horrible pain and you want him to repeat himself.*

Geri motioned in the air again, slower this time.

"You want to write?" Geri nodded his head.

Anya pulled a notepad and pen from her pocketbook. She put the notepad down on the bed next to him and handed him the pen, wrapping his fingers around it for him. Geri's eyes never left her as he wrote.

"You smell good." He wrote. "Give me a sponge bath?"

Christ. She was being hustled by the medical equivalent of the Mummy in a hospital room. Anya rolled her eyes. At least he had a sense of humor.

"Very funny, Geri. But I don't think that is the topic of conversation." Anya said, smiling.

Geri shrugged his shoulders, as if to say, what are you going to do, beat me up?

"What happened? Who did this to you?"

Another shrug of the thin shoulders.

“Doesn’t matter.” He wrote. *I’ll deal with them in my own time*, thought Geri.

“It matters to me...Why did you have the nurse call me, Geri? Why didn’t she call your Mom?”

Another shrug. “I can’t listen to her right now.” He wrote.

“Then listen to me. You have to get well, before...”

Geri was writing again, this time with large exclamation slash marks.

“LISTEN!!! He wrote. “The PBR and the polyculture work. We did it...”

Even though it hurt Geri like hell to do so, they both looked at each other and smiled like fools.

Chapter 2.5

“Is all this cloak and dagger stuff necessary?” Savage said, feeling like a total ass dressed in plumber’s overalls, stainless steel lunch pail, and thermos.

“What make you think I want anyone to see me with you? You honestly think I’m going to let you waltz into my office with a booked appointment?” Sharif replied. His English accent making him sound like a total wanker, thought Savage.

Truthfully, Savage could care less what he thought. If he wanted to play spy games, for the money he was being paid, he’d play spy games.

They were sitting on a downtown park bench, the executive and workman, sharing a pleasant sunny day, watching female skin jiggle as it jogged by.

Savage grunted noncommittally, and unscrewed the top of the thermos. He slid the papers of the report out of the flask and casually laid them on the bench between them. The executive’s newspaper covered them in an instant.

“So tell me what you found.”

“The kid’s got the place wired up like the fuckin Department of Defense. Motion detectors, tied to infrared lights, tied to sirens, alarms and booby traps. He’s a regular fuckin McGyver, that one.”

Savage took a bite out the sandwich he was holding. It was better than he thought, and took another bite, Geri Hendrix forgotten.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Tell me about the PBR,” said Sharif, impatiently.

“What’s there to tell?” Said Savage, talking around a mouthful of meatball sandwich. “That’s your area of expertise, not mine. I don’t even know what I was looking at. It’s a tall, green, multi-colored, bubbling piece of apparatus that stank like someone’s uncleaned bird

bath.”

“Was it warm to the touch?”

“Yes, it was. It also looked like something swimming around in it.”

“OK. Was there any other equipment on the workbench?”

“Yeah, I took pictures of it. It’s in the report. It looked like one of those hydraulic screw presses you see in machine shops...the kind you use for crushing oil filters? There were also bottles of what looked like green colored oil as well as an open peanut butter jar of green powder.” Savage ticked these off from memory.

“Hummm...those are for oil extraction. The little fuck is further along than I thought. He had green oil, huh?” Sharif actually had a little awe in his voice.

“Yeah, another peanut butter jar of it...about a liter, I’d say.”

“OK, here’s what I want you to do.” Sharif slipped into order giving mode. “I want you to go back and make a final sweep of the place. Gather any and all notes you find. Photograph everything. Get the oil and the green powder and anything else which points to how far along he is or any final conclusions...”

“It’s your money, but is this really necessary? What’s this kid got that is making you spend this kind of money? Wouldn’t be easier to just buy the technology? Throw in a six pack of beer and a \$500 a night hooker and the kid will probably go to work for you. I mean, the kid is....”

“Believe it or not, this kid, either through shit blind luck, or sheer brilliance has created something even my researchers can’t replicate. But, I’m not finished.” Cut in Sharif. “You need to do this quick, before he gets home from the hospital.”

“He’s in the hospital? Since when? What happened?”

“He started sniffing around the wrong pussy and got clobbered. Not your problem. Just go back before he goes home if you can. After you have gathered everything together, wait for my word and then burn the place to the ground.”

Chapter 2.6

Cobalt didn't suffer from self-doubt.

He had no patience, or understanding of men that did. What he couldn't understand was the whiny, liberal attitude that the world was unfair, and mankind owed something to all the downtrodden.

Sure, life was tough. Had there ever been a time when it wasn't?

While he certainly sympathized with their ideals, he knew altogether too well the deck was stacked against the ordinary person by the power elite.

He could also understand taking to the streets to protest the inequality.

He could understand bringing the fight to the very people who sucked so much fat off the already thin bones of the under class.

He could understand getting arrested for something you believed in with your whole heart.

He could understand nonviolent protest in the tradition of Gandhi and MLK, who he considered two of the greatest warriors of all time.

What he COULDN'T understand was giving up the fight because it got too cold, or because the police pushed a little too hard. They couldn't anticipate winter in the North East, for Christ sake? Why start a peaceful revolution in the fall, if you think your feet are going to get cold in a few months? Why not start it in Southern California then?

What he couldn't understand, or relate to in the slightest, was piss-poor planning on the part of the leaders. The troops did their jobs. The leaders sold out as soon as it was past their bedtime.

As usual.

He was a capitalist, and proud of it. There wasn't a socialist bone in his body. But Christ man, if you're going to fight for what you believe in, then FIGHT for what you believe in.

Cobalt moved through the crowds in Zucotti Park. Contrary to the media depiction of events, he didn't see a lot of "dirty hippies." He saw a lot of middle class mommies, and beaten-down daddies, lower middle class blue collar workers, and scores of ordinary "down-sized" people.

Lots of college educated kids looking for the government to forgive their student loans. *Good luck with that one*, he thought silently. *Another Ponzi scheme the middle class bought into hook, line, and sinker.*

A riot cop on a huge horse, brushed past him silently. Standing over 6 feet tall, Cobalt came up barely to the horse's shoulder. *What a magnificent animal*, he thought. *A warhorse, in the true sense of the word.* He respected the animal, but not the cop.

The cop sat atop an animal of power, both figuratively and literally. Cobalt knew very well that all power corrupted, and destroyed. It was the nature of power. To expect power to do otherwise was like expecting this horse to learn the Hoboken Shuffle. The cop was there to protect the power elite, not the people he was sworn to protect or paid his salary.

That power was far more destructive than these foot soldiers ever imagined. But then again, it was always was. Power always pulled the strings, always held all the high cards.

As Emma Goldman once said, "If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal."

Cobalt worked his way to the "Gourmet Soup Kitchens." They lived up to their name. The air smelled of homemade, hearty, steaming, soups by the vat. Working chefs clad in white kitchen garb. One of the soup chefs was giving orders in a thick German accent which brought to mind the Seinfeld comedy episode the "Soup Nazi."

He quietly, and nonchalantly, put ten, \$100 bills in the donation bucket.

Everyone was friendly. Either nodding their head as he passed or they said hello with a quiet "Hey, Man."

He wondered if they would feel differently if they knew he was on his way to a meeting with their ideological enemy.

Chapter 2.7

The General had raised kidnapping to a high art in this part of the world.

He found that “inviting” his enemy’s family members to come stay with him had a positive effect on the outcome of any battle. He had also discovered that in many cases, multi-national companies kept “K&R” (Kidnapping and Ransom insurance) on their executives. This made kidnapping an extremely lucrative as well. The trick was to always kidnap either influential or rich victims.

Every so often, however, he ran across someone, either family or insurance company, which refused to pay. In which case, one of the general’s favorite fun-time activities took place with his kidnap victims.

It involved telling the kidnap victim that help was on its way, and he just had to hold out hope for a little while longer and pay the price for that hope....

The pharmaceutical company executive name was Vince Cargil. He was from Bristol, Connecticut. He joined Advanced Renewables straight out of college and spent 15 years working his way up through the company. He had a Masters in Engineering and turning biomass into chemical compounds was his specialty.

When he was offered a plum position, with great pay, in an exotic location, he jumped at the opportunity. His wife couldn’t take the extreme humidity and hardship of being an ex pat. She took the kids and went back to the East Coast. He was 37 years old and wouldn’t live to see his next birthday.

Somchai was a dwarf. He was also the General’s Chief Torturer and executioner.

Being handicapped or different in this part of the world wasn’t an easy life. Since most Burmese were Buddhist, they believed he must have done something seriously wrong in his past life to be reincarnated as a dwarf. He had long grown used to being shunned, made fun of,

and beaten for sport. He had learned to speak Pidgin English in the tourist sections of Chang Mai.

“Hey you! Joe! I come to tell you, your people are gonna pay the General. You just hold out a little while longer, then you go home.”

“Somchai, please give me some food and water,” pleaded Cargil.

“No, listen. If General catch me, he kill me. Very dangerous. Listen!”

“Food...water...”

“I hear General tell your people that they have to give money or he kill you. But they want “Proof of Life.” They want to talk to you. General say no. So you have to choose. General say he take either hand or foot to send to them as proof. So you have to choose which hand or foot. Choose one you can live without...maybe left hand, uh?

“What?” Cargil said, unbelieving. I have to choose between losing my hands or my feet? Is he crazy?

“Yes, but don’t worry. General keep his word. Maybe you lose hand, but keep life. Choose quick!”

As if on cue, the General appeared.

“Ah, Cargil, there you are,” as though Cargil had been flitting about the camp like a social butterfly, “I have talked to your people and they are very agreeable, you will live, go home soon. But I have to send them a little present first. You understand, yes? It is not me. But your people demand proof of life, so I must give it to them. I am a generous man, so I will let you choose. Would you like to send them a hand or a foot?”

Cargil was slipping in and out of consciousness from starvation and dehydration, unable to comprehend.

“OK, if you insist,” said the General, “I will take your hand. The bones are easier to break there anyway.”

Vince Cargil was tied upright in a tent. The General untied one of his hands, and in a quick motion, used his machete to cut cleanly through the limb at the wrist.

“Ah, ah, AHHHHHH...” Cargil let out a shriek as his hand, severed cleanly from his wrist, fell to the ground.

“Yes, don’t worry. I think they will be able to get the fingerprints off your hand. No need for you to worry, proof of life is assured,” said

the General, with a big smile.

Somchai, the dwarf, handed the General another machete. This one had been getting red hot on the fire. The General used it to cauterize the Cargil's stump as the shrieking and gibberish continued until Cargil mercifully passed out.

The General picked up the bloody hand and looked at it critically, spat on it, and then threw it into the fire.

Buy It Now



- You know you want to find out what happens to the characters.
- Cobalt and crew in a world of trouble? (Wait until he gets to Asia)
- There is going to be some hideous bad guys. (We haven't gotten started)
- There is going to be non stop action
- The ending is NOTHING like you expect, or have ever read before.