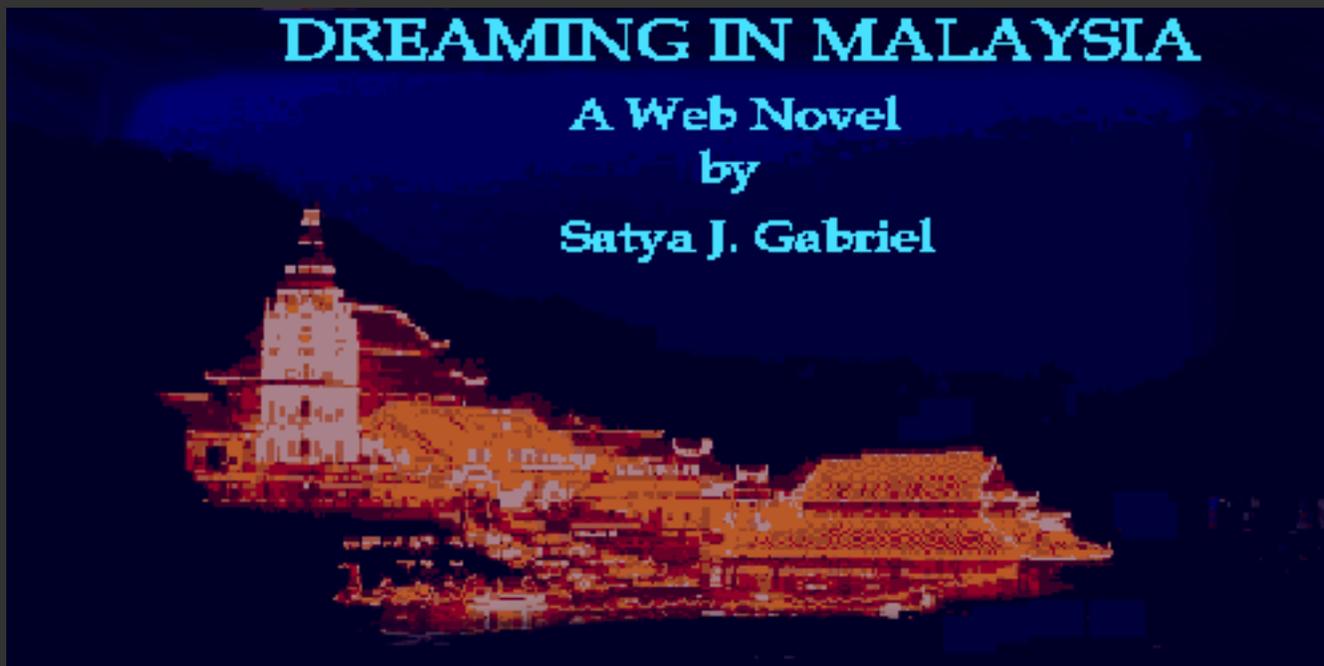


DREAMING IN MALAYSIA

A Web Novel

by

Satya J. Gabriel



CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

The Napoleon Club

People hurried along the sidewalk, in the wake of a hard rainfall. Jay walked past a homeless Brit who sat on the ground outside a restaurant in the shadows of the streetlights, trying to cover himself in a dirty blanket. Jay made it to the corner just in time. A yellow and green minibus pulled to a stop and he climbed in. He went to the back and sat down, watching the backs of the heads of others. The streetlights and lights from buildings reflected against the wet pavement from an earlier downpour. The bus stopped again and a woman in a belted black leather dress stepped inside after discarding a half-smoked cigarette. She glanced toward the rear and saw Jay. Their eyes made contact and for a long moment she seemed to hesitate before swinging into a seat near the front of the minibus. Jay smiled. Every encounter, no matter how fleeting, contains an alternate universe: a path that breaks off from the one you settle upon. Jay caught a glimpse of this alternate universe in her eyes, her soft lips, the way she swung into the seat. How do you know which is the right universe to inhabit, to create? You don't. He didn't. And neither does she, although her movements, her look, indicated a willingness to explore. It was up to him. Hong Kong culture allowed for a certain aggressiveness in females, but still put the burden on the male. He had to choose which universe. Jay smiled again. The illusion of choice came and went, a tickle, a tease.

Outside the rain started up again. The woman in the leather dress glanced back at Jay and smiled, then looked out at the rain through the rain soaked glass. Thunder crackled in the distance. A woman and a man sitting in the front got into an argument in loud Cantonese drawl. Jay watched them for a few minutes, then the argument waned and they started kissing. At this point he lost interest. *Nothing lasts forever.* The thought came and went. He stared out the rain soaked glass at the rain beating down on the streetlight illuminated pavement.

Mercifully, the rain stopped before he reached his destination. He barked out the Cantonese request for the next stop and the minibus driver did not even notice that the speaker was a foreigner. He glanced up

at the distant clouds beginning to part and moving swiftly away. *Nothing lasts forever.* He walked along the street, seeing the woman in leather glance out at him one last time, then watching the minibus disappear.



A Kandinsky painting hung on one wall of the office just above the gracefully curved arms and turned legs of a teak settee. In a corner, a grandfather clock chimed. Simon Rekker glared at the flat computer screen set on top of a large mahogany desk, his back straight in a matching high backed mahogany chair, the fixtures in what had become Rekker's temporary Southeast Asia headquarters, a complete floor of the Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong. Jack Degenhardt sat on the opposite side of the desk waiting, moving his tongue around in his mouth, savoring the lingering taste of a room service chicken salad sandwich. Rekker leaned back and took his eyes from the computer screen for a moment. "The international monetary system consists of a lawyer's maze of rules and regulations, yet there's no one who is really watching the store. All these damned institutions and not one of them knows what is going on."

"Bureaucrats," Degenhardt responded.

"Bloody right," Rekker agreed. He turned back to the computer screen, his eyes narrowed. "So what do you think, Jack? Should we do it or not?"

"You have traders who know the currency markets a helluvah lot better than me, Simon."

Simon smiled. "But they don't have your instincts."

"What's the rupiah doing?"

"Going down faster than a heavyweight on the take."

"It's a good thing you sold the rupiah short," Degenhardt said, smiling sarcastically.

"It's bloody chump change," Rekker said.

Jack Degenhardt knew that Rekker had already made up his mind, one way or the other, and that this was, as they say, an academic exercise. "Well, if Suharto is driven from office then the rupiah is going to Hell and there's going to be a fire sale on Indonesian assets. I guess that's where the real cheese cake is."

Rekker smiled. "Bloody Hell, Jack, you're starting to think like me."

Jack returned the smile.

"You know, Suharto is a sly fox," Rekker said, as if teasing his sidekick. "He's been in power longer than anyone, except Castro and Togo's Eyadema."

"But what's that the mutual funds say, past performance is no guarantee of future success."

Rekker nodded. "Bloody right. Capitalism is about creative destruction, sometimes the destruction of companies, sometimes the destruction of governments. No one can stand in the way of history."

"You sound like a Marxist, Simon."

Rekker grinned. "Bloody Hell, what's a Marxist but a capitalist who hasn't grown up yet. It's a rat fight to the top, Jack. The biggest, baddest rat with the sharpest teeth always win."

Degenhardt nodded.

"Anyway, Jack, the model indicates that we're only at the beginning of this wave. The ripple is just beginning to move regional currencies. In fact, it predicts a sharp and catastrophic second wave will hit all the Asian currencies, especially the rupiah."

"If that happens, you can buy those assets for pennies on the dollar."

"Right again. When all the wailing stops, I'll own half of Asia." He was, of course, exaggerating, although only in terms of the magnitude of his conquest, not the implications.

"I'm still surprised at how idiotic people can be when it comes to money," Jack said. "Why are people dumping perfectly good assets just because of *market psychology*?"

Rekker smiled. "Perception and information, Jack, that's what markets are all about. You ever negotiate a deal on an automobile?"

"Lots of times."

"How did you know what price to settle on?"

Jack frowned.

"You didn't. It all depended on perception and information: How you perceive the automobile and the automobile dealer and how the dealer perceives you. How much you know about the motor car and about what the dealer will accept. In the end, you are grappling with the effects of ignorance and a perception shaped by other people's perceptions. How much do you want the motorcar? Will buying this particular motorcar help you get that woman in bed? Will it bring you the adoration of your friends and associates? If the dealer takes you to be a fool and you're weak enough to be manipulated because you really *want* the motorcar at that moment, or you're tired, or you've brought your girlfriend along, or a buddy you want to impress, or because of any number of extraneous but important factors, then you'll pay through the nose, as they say. It has nothing to do with intrinsic value, you understand. Intrinsic value is an illusion, a toy for economists to play with. Markets have nothing to do with any fundamental laws of intrinsic value, but have everything to do with perception and information. The trick is to manipulate perception by manufacturing information and vice versa. If you can do that, you win the bloody game."

Jack continued to frown. He didn't get it. "And all this is in that damned computer model?"

"In a way, it's ultimately based on psychology," Rekker said. "That's the beauty of it. Michael Maxwell should have been a shrink instead of an economist."

"A model seems a thin reed to hang a fortune on. It's not like buying a car."

"I have no reason to doubt the predictive power of the model. So far, everything is on schedule." He looked at the computer screen again. The rupiah was tracking like a cross country runner going down a steep hill. "Actually, it's a lot like buying a car. Only in this case, I'm the dealer."

"So you're going to say no."

He looked at Jack and smiled. "Bloody hell, Jack, you're on a roll."

Jack grinned from ear to bloody ear.



The house is built of the stones that were available. -- Bertolt Brecht



The revolution is unending. Richard Chen sat back in his chair in the tiny office at Chinese University of Hong Kong and contemplated his small bit part in the opera that was history. For much of his 61 years he had been a member of the Long March. He was a patriot. The Communist Party may have faltered from time to time, but the Long March continued. China was being restored to the center of the world.

"Rekker is very powerful, but he is not the puppet master," Shi Dao said.

Chen studied Shi Dao's face. He saw no stress. He acknowledged that Rekker was more puppet than master. "I believe we can use Rekker, just as we can use the computer software he commissioned."

"China can benefit from the financial crisis?"

"Of course," Chen replied. "But it is not this crisis that matters. It is only the first in a series of crises that will reshape the global economy. We need to use every weapon available and Rekker is a weapon, as is the software you acquired. We are in a struggle over the natural resources and productive labor of this planet. It is the same struggle that brought the British to our shores and led our humiliation in the *Opium War*." He said *Opium War* with a obvious distaste. "Each crisis will result in a massive redistribution of wealth. We need to be ready to be on the winning side of these redistributions."

"The Americans will not make that easy. They are very clever and very adaptable."

Chen shrugged. "When has it ever been easy. History is not kind to those who suffer hubris."

Shi Dao smiled. He liked that word hubris. "The Raven continues to be a valuable asset," he said.

Chen nodded. *You read my mind*. "I am taking measures to protect his identity, as we discussed."

The long March had agents inside the CIA and British intelligence. "We can't afford to lose him, not now."

Chen agreed. "Soon, the Raven will be dead, as far as the Americans and Brits are concerned."

Shi Dao nodded. "Eventually he may need to be terminated, but for now he is irreplaceable."

Chen smiled. Once again, you seem to read my mind. "I understand completely."

Shi Dao picked up the small envelope in front of him on the desk. "I will take of this immediately."

Chen nodded once. "I am looking forward to the handover," he said.

Shi Dao smiled in agreement, stood, bowed politely, then turned and departed.



Jay sat down at his desk with the pile of pink phone messages and the little stuffed Garfield the Cat in front of him. He took the note from the Garfield and looked at it. The gift was from Helen. He smiled and tossed the note into the wastebasket. He looked over the phone messages, determined that none of them was worth returning the calls right away and turned to his computer. He connected to the HKTDC database. He found the information on Simon Rekker and Rekker's various corporations. He traced their holdings in Hong Kong and noted new real estate transactions --- the leasing of a floor of the Peninsula, the leasing of two full floors of an old office building in Kowloon, and the rental of a house on the Peak. He connected to a shared database of several small Hong Kong brokerages and looked for information on Rekker's financial transactions. He smiled when he thought about how efficient Hong Kong businesses can be when given the proper incentive. The records were not complete but probably as good as those of any New York investment bank, at least regarding the financial machinations of Simon Rekker's Hegemon Holdings, which was primary vehicle for Rekker's currency speculation. The brokerages did have some sophisticated help in gaining this access, however, including operatives working at Hegemon's main office in Manhattan. Nevertheless, penetration of Hegemon's computer system was no minor matter and, even with help, had required some very careful stealth programming. The result was that the network run by these brokerages collected ongoing data on Hegemon transactions, storing the data in a secure area of an IBM mainframe. Jay had finagled the phone number to the mainframe from Graham Carville. He found what he was looking for, downloaded the information onto an optical disk, and exited the system. He twirled in his chair and stared out his window at the Harbor. The puzzle pieces were falling into place. He would have some rather interesting information for Uncle Shi when he arrived in Hong Kong. In addition, he decided it was time for him to liquidate his holdings of Hong Kong stocks.



After the decisive moment comes the long moment of reflection, sometimes regret. Mohamed held the telephone receiver in his hand, having just completed a conversation, and looked up. The driver was looking at him via the Mercedes' rearview mirror. "I'm booked into a room at the Federal," Mohamed said. The driver nodded and speeded up, now certain of the destination. Mohamed thought for a moment, then quickly punched in another set of telephone numbers.

"Ishak, this is Mohamed. I need you to do something for me." After Ishak quickly agreed to do this thing, Mohamed continued, "I need you to find someone." He gave Ishak a name. "This is urgent. I want you to find her and bring her to the Federal Hotel. I'll be in suite 1201. And, Ishak, be discrete." All problems have solutions, Mohamed thought, as he returned the phone to its cradle.

He sat back in the leather seat and peered out the window. He had the power to get what he wanted. Why pretend otherwise? Fadil Hamzah had crossed a line and would have to pay. Nevertheless, a question remained to be answered. Why? What was Fadil doing? He had used Mona to pilfer information. The deputy finance minister using the daughter of the party chairman to spy on the finance minister. It did not

make sense. Unless Ali Jamal had something to hide, something that could be uncovered from documents inside the finance minister's office. But if Ali Jamal was doing something inappropriate than why keep evidence inside his office. And if there was nothing provocative in the office, then why would Hamzah need the documents. As deputy finance minister, surely he could gain access to any information relevant to the ministry. It suddenly struck Mohamed that he did not know what he dealing with. He sighed. He had no doubt that he had acted properly, given Hamzah's actions. Nevertheless, he needed to know why Hamzah wanted those documents. He had invested a lot of good will in Ali Jamal. If this was a mistake, he needed to know it. Unfortunately, if Hamzah was dead, he might not know until it was too late.



The sun set over Kuala Lumpur, marking the end of another day of decisions and indecisions, of people thinking fate had come their way, of others thinking fate had failed them, and still others who thought it all a random play. During the day the financial markets had attempted a recovery, only to shudder and shake again. The world was beginning to move underfoot. A slow but steady movement of financial and emotional platelets. Prime Minister Akil Abdullah noticed the movements and had grown annoyed by them. He did not want anything to slow down his progress towards the *New Malaysia*. He had told the press that "foreign speculators" were at the root of the problem and called upon Western governments to do more to control this behavior.

On a plane coming in for a landing at Changi Airport, Mica Brant reread the now ancient copy of the *Washington Post*. She smiled as she reread the comments of the good Prime Minister Abdullah. She knew that Abdullah was considered by many in the various Asia divisions of the Company to be, as one of her bosses had put it, "a pain in the ass" and his latest comments would not change that attitude one iota. This did not change the fact that the man was right. Nevertheless, it demonstrated more than an ample amount of poor horse sense to say things like that in public. *Doesn't he know who is listening?* She was quite certain that the speculators would now pay even more attention to sinking the Malaysian ringgit. And this not-so-veiled threat of raising capital controls would most certainly not help matters any. *Does Abdullah really believe he can get away with capital controls? Doesn't he understand that the moment he hints at such actions is the moment when every foreign investor who is listening will turn their backs on Malaysia?* She shook her head at the stupidity, once again concluding that many of the world's so-called leaders were men of dubious ability leading government's of dubious construction: sort of like having an idiot captain on a ship that is unseaworthy.

She looked at the hot fasten seatbelts sign and shifted the little pillow from the curved bulkhead near the window, where she had only recently been resting her head, to a spot at the base of her back (one of many rituals she followed when flying). She stowed the *Post* in the compartment on the back of the chair in front of her, behind the magazines and the barf bag. She recalled her conversation with Bernie Stifel. Washington wanted to get rid of Ali Jamal and they wanted it done by the end of the summer. If that's what they wanted, then that's what she intended to bring about. Mica had learned to surrender herself to her work. It was a bit like playing a game of professional tennis: there is no time or space for introspection or questioning. Whatever Washington wanted, she found a way to deliver. That was her job. She was not an analyst. It was not her job to analyze. Nevermind that she still could not make heads or tails of why Washington would want to get rid of the pro-Western finance minister, rather than the arrogant son-of-bitch prime minister. She had some fairly strong opinions of the leadership in Kuala Lumpur and she really disliked Akil Abdullah. She sighed, twisting her neck on the pillow.

After checking into the Federal Hotel, Mica received a DHL package. It contained a bubble wrapped CD. She placed the CD into her notebook computer, which was equipped with special software to unlock the hidden information on what would have appeared to anyone else to be a CD full of MP3s. The info was a status report from her primary operative in K.L. Most of the information was routine, but the report also outlined some of the activities of Taiko Hing, a crime boss that the agency had used in the past. Hing was now working at cross purposes with C.I.A. objectives and needed to be brought back on the reservation.



The Finance Ministry was much busier than usual, a chaos of whirling dirvishes. Mona felt the way the Ministry looked, confused and disorganized, but trying to keep up the façade of being organized. The source of the heightened motion and tension was an early morning meeting in which Ali Jamal had criticized his entire staff for failing to anticipate that the problems in Thailand would have repercussions in Malaysia. He wanted an action plan for stopping the knock-on effects of the Thai devaluation before any further damage was done in Malaysia. Rumor had it that Prime Minister Abdullah had, earlier that same morning, called Ali Jamal on the carpet, as it were, for failing to anticipate this crisis.

This was all happening at a very bad time for Mona. She had gone home to find that the effects of her ill considered honesty had, obviously, triggered some sort of serious rift between her father and Izmeen. She had hastily moved back into her father's house, but only to find that her father had disappeared. To be more exact, he had disappeared from living in the house. As for his work, he was actually quite visible. According to Television Malaysia, he had met with a key group of party elders just that morning. It seemed that all of a sudden everybody was meeting with everybody else. Except at her father's house, where Izmeen had refused to talk to her and hurried out of the house before Mona departed for work, Mona's siblings in tow, and to make matters worse and things all the more weird, Crystal, who might help make sense of all this, was no where to be found.

Despite what had happened with her father, Mona had not expected this day to be any different than any other. She had known her father would be angry. She did not expect his anger to abate quickly, but in her confused state had come to the false assumption that having to resign and look for a new job and being being forced to come home would be the full extent of the consequences. How else can one explain her decision to wear black platform shoes: the latest craze in Hong Kong and Singapore? Now it seemed inappropriate, her plopping from place to place in those ugly, noisy platform shoes.

After the meeting, she had hurried down the long corridor toward her office, plopping all the way. The shoes more than anything got people's attention, despite the tension and the chaos. She could feel the eyes, even when she couldn't see them. *What is wrong with that woman?* That's what she imagined them saying. Shukri was the only one to actually comment. "Nice shoes," he'd said.

When she got back to her desk one of the senior staff, Dr. D. J. Nathan, was already waiting for her. He was at the meeting and she couldn't understand how he had gotten to her office before her until she remembered the little interruption from Shukri. D. J., as he liked to be called, was frowning when Mona plopped into the little office. His eyes were bloodshot. With suprising suddenness, Mona felt a sudden wave of trepidation: what if her father told Ali Jamal and now Dr. Nathan was here to lower the axe? He motioned for Mona to sit down. She complied. "Your father called," he said. Here it comes, she thought.

"He wants you to call him immediately." And that was it. She waited for more, but that was it. Before D. J. Nathan left the office, he told Mona to begin preparing a speech for Ali Jamal that would address rapidly growing currency crisis. "Be creative," he said. And then he turned and walked out.

Shukri appeared at her door just as she was about to call her father. She didn't want to see him and was about to tell him this when his hand appeared from behind his back, clutching a very red rose. "This is for you," he said, smiling broadly. She frowned. He walked over and handed her the rose. She looked at it, then at Shukri. She was completely nonplussed. "Back to work," he said, winked, turned and left. She sat there for a long time just looking at the rose. Tears started to form, then made their way down her cheeks. She had originally planned to write her resignation this morning. *Should I write it?* She asked the rose. She didn't want to write it, but she didn't want to call her father either. The rose was no help at all.



"Fadil Hamzeh has been supplying us with intelligence," CIA Deputy director Gilboy confided to Senator Birch, a member of the senate intelligence committee, as the two shared drinks and cigars at the very private, secretive Napoleon Club in D.C. "He's our man in Kuala Lumpur."

The two men sat in plush chairs under dim lamp light in a private sitting room. Birch had a double Scotch no rocks and Gilboy a rum and Coke. "You think our boy has a chance of becoming the next prime minister? I mean, I understand that bastard Ali Jamal has the inside track. Be nice to have another friend in a Muslim country. That Jamal has been a pain in the ass."

"Jamal is almost finished." Gilboy said, not wanting to elaborate any further.

"You know, John Whitehead's still mad about that K.L. Wireless deal."

They both sipped from their drinks and agreed that Ali Jamal had been an impediment to several business deals. Birch really only cared about one of the failed deals. Some of his oil buddies had failed to gain control of a Malaysian oil company with extensive interests in Indonesia.

"And he has interfered in U.S. interests that are none of his business," Gilboy added sternly.

Birch smiled. "You mean, his meetings with Louis Farrakhan, the Black Muslims?"

"Yes. He wants to fund some business venture with them. Probably a front for terrorist activities."

Senator Birch had a visceral hatred for the Black Muslims. Troublemakers who would foment rebellion among the Black masses, with their talk of a separate nation and their rejection of Christianity, which was the foundation of social stability in the U.S.A. "Crush the fucker," he said and grinned.

"We'll do our best, senator," Gilboy said, nodding agreement.



He thought he had never seen a sky so blue or so high before as the one that greeted him when he stepped out the sliding doors of Portland International Airport. *Where was the famous rain?* The taxi driver who

took him into the city, coming in from the North and sweeping West across one of many magnificent bridges, was very talkative. He sang the praises of Portland and the state of Oregon, as if he was in the employ of the tourist bureau.

"Thank you," Samuel said to the driver, after the man had removed the single hardsided carry-on from the trunk and set it down on the sidewalk in front of the Benson Hotel, a beautiful two-tone brick building that dated to 1912. Samuel gave him a big tip, something the British were not known to do, and something Samuel probably could not afford to be doing (he had borrowed money from his aunt before leaving Hong Kong and was silently singing the praises of HSBC for not hassling him over the wired loot). The driver was so pleased that for a moment Samuel fully expected the man was not going to get back into his cab, but might instead try to start up a new conversation. But then the man smiled and nodded, telling Samuel to enjoy his stay in the "City of Roses."

Samuel lingered a moment on the sidewalk. He looked at the Benson and thought this hotel seemed more suited for Britain than the United States. He looked at the street sign. *Broadway. Does every American city have one?* And then he watched the people going by. The people seemed cheery enough. The streets were clean. He smiled, thinking that this city could even please Lee Kuan Yew, the elder statesman of Singapore and architect of that city's long list of laws designed to guard against unsanitary behavior. Finally, he picked up the carry-on and walked up the stairs and into the very antique looking hotel. The lobby was absolutely gorgeous and not at all given away by the exterior façade: Italian marble floors, Circassian walnut walls, ornate crystal chandeliers. *I can't afford this.* He was greeted by a bell-boy, who offered to take his carry-on. He declined the offer and made his way to the reception desk. His reservation was in order: all taken care of by the same friend of Helen who had booked him in a seat next to Colonel Crazy. The cost was, however, more than he had been told back in Hong Kong. He tried politely arguing this point, but to no avail. The receptionist kept her smile and her pleasantness but was quite firm about the daily rates. He finally relented, thinking that perhaps he would be able to cut his stay short and still come out ahead. After all, he was to meet *oregon rosewater* for breakfast in the morning. Perhaps he could be checked out of the Benson by eleven and into a cheaper hotel. He smiled at the receptionist, filled out the requisite card, and handed over his credit card (which, he hoped, was still within its limits). Once again he had to turn down an offer of help, as the woman behind the desk offered to have a bell-boy accompany him to his room. "I can find it, thank you."

The first thing he did, after dumping his carry-on on the double-bed, was to head for the bathroom to take care of relieving his urinary needs, then washing up in a futile attempt to relieve the jet-lag. He decided to take a full-blown shower, although in the end that also did not wake him from the groggy, dream-state. He knew that if he allowed himself to go to sleep so early in the day he would sabotage all possibility of an early release from the biological/chronological malady. He changed into more casual attire, pocketed the room key, and made his way back out onto the Portland streets, where he simply walked and walked, ending up in a part of town that was called Old Town, an area of quaint old shops and 19th century/early 20th century buildings. On the way to Old Town, he had stopped for a long time to stare in the distance at the beautiful snow capped mountain to the east: Mount Hood, he would later be informed. He had just stood there on the sidewalk, people moving around him, until he realized what he was doing, pulled himself out of this strange reverie, and moved on. He decided to take a free bus back to his hotel, but decided mid-route that this was a mistake. Sitting nearly put him to sleep and he just barely made his stop.

After he had trudged back into the hotel and up to his room, he sat down on the bed to catch his breath,

then lay back to relax a bit and let his eyes close, since they were tired . . .

Samuel sat on the bus looking out the window at the 19th century buildings going by. It was twilight or at least the light was dim as in twilight. Michael sat down next to him and touched his arm. "What are you doing here?" Michael asked. Samuel looked at him and smiled. "I was looking for you," he said. Michael returned the smile. "You are a good brother, Samuel." "Thank you." "I just wanted to tell you that. I wanted you to know." "Why did you disappear like that? Where were you?" "I just had some errands to take care of." "Are you done?" Michael shook his head. They were standing on a street corner, it was now night, shadows were cast crookedly against a brick wall from a gas street lamp. Shadow-people moved about on either side of the street. "I have to go now," Michael said. "Why?" "Errands to take care of," he said. "No," Samuel said. Michael's eyes were black again, two black buttons in the gaslight. "I don't want you to go," Samuel continued. But Michael was already at the other end of the street. Samuel tried to move towards him but his feet were fixed in place. "Tell Margaret that I'm sorry I forgot to return her blender." "What? Who is Margaret?" Michael was gone. The street was vacant, even the shadow-people were gone. Samuel stood alone in the street in front of the Benson. It was darker than before, no street light nor moonlight illuminated this darkness.



▪ [→ GO TO NEXT CHAPTER](#)

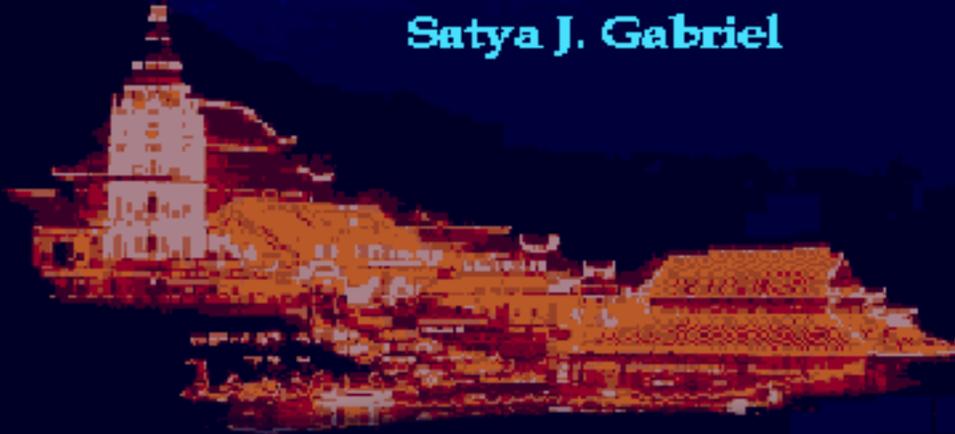
Copyright © 2000, Satyananda J. Gabriel. All rights reserved.

DREAMING IN MALAYSIA

A Web Novel

by

Satya J. Gabriel



CHAPTER FOURTEEN: *Synthetic Judgment*

The young man could not stay awake a minute longer. He kept his eyes open only because of fear, yet even his eyes began to betray him. His inquisitor made him repeat his words several times, making sure each and every word would be clearly audible on the recording. And in his near sleep, he found himself saying all sorts of things, confessing to all manner of crimes and associations, under the carefully crafted prodding and coaching of the inquisitor. He was cold and naked. The room was air conditioned and he had been doused with ice cold water, thrice. The lights in the room were so bright he could barely see anything but an outline of the ghostly figure that would not let him sleep. "You had sexual relations with Ali Jamal?" He heard the dream-like question repeated and again he said, "Yes, I had sexual relations with Ali Jamal." He nodded his head enthusiastically, hoping that his cooperation would be the key to his release, that they would at least let him sleep, even if they did nothing for this cold that made his muscles ache, that made his skin burn. Please, he thought, please let me sleep. And then he heard footsteps and a door opening and closing. His eyes had teared to such an extent that he could not see even the ghost of the inquisitor. Then he realized he was alone. The man had gone. And he lay down on the cold floor and, shivering, he fell fast asleep. As he slept, he dreamed of being questioned while he lay dying on a cold slab of marble in the Hall of Justice. His inquisitor was a creature with the head of a dragon and the body of a giant snake. The body of Ali Jamal, stripped naked, hung from the ceiling behind the dragon-snake, who now wore a white wig, like the Brits had once worn for occasions such as this. Each time he answered a question, someone would come and remove a layer of skin from some part of his naked body. And he heard laughter. An audience seemed to be quite entertained. And then he could not answer any more questions because his voice was gone. He tried to speak but no words no sound came from his mouth. He wanted to quote from the Koran, but even these words failed.

That evening the doorbell of Fadil Hamzeh's house interrupted his reading. He put down the Koran on the small roll-top desk and went to answer the door. He pulled it open and was surprised to see a woman, obviously a Westerner, standing expectantly in the doorway. It took him a moment, but he recognized her just as she said, "Doctor Hamzeh, my name is Mica Brant." He looked her over. She was dressed inappropriately in a shockingly thin and revealing creme colored blouse, a thin golden necklace falling provocatively between her breasts. She carried a leather brief case. Hamzeh smiled and invited her inside.

"Mica Brant," he said, "Central Intelligence Agency, formerly with the State Department." He smiled. "Why would you come here, to my home? People might misunderstand, perhaps even think that I am in bed with the Americans." He paused. "My enemies would, as you might say, have a field day."

"I apologize for coming to your home," she said. "But don't worry about your enemies." She opened the burgundy leather briefcase and retrieved a computer disk in a circular plastic case. She handed it to Hamzeh. "This contains a video recording that you may find useful." Hamzeh accepted the disk.

"I assume that this involves our finance minister?" He looked at the disk, which was unlabeled.

She nodded. "As we discussed."

Hamzeh took the computer disk and asked Mica to accompany him to his study. She did so. The study looked very much like the stereotype of a study in an English gentleman's mansion, constructed of rich, warm toned, exotic woods and smelling of leather and cigar smoke. Hamzeh went to his desk and put the disk into the drive of a relatively new computer. He watched the videotaped confession. "Where is this young man now?" She told him the man was in the custody of Malaysian Internal Security. Hamzeh nodded. "I see." He stopped the video and sighed. "You've given me what I wanted. Now what?"

She refrained from smiling. "I'm just a messenger," she replied. "My boss simply asked me to give you the disk. But I do want to warn you that we also received some other disturbing information."

"Disturbing information?"

"Yes, sir," she said, being quite deliberately polite. "We have reason to believe that Mohamed bin Haji Bilal, your party chairman, contracted with a known criminal to have you killed." She paused, as Hamzeh reacted. "We have neutralized this threat, but it is nevertheless a concern."

Hamzeh frowned. "A concern?" He sat back against his desk and shook his head. "You have evidence of this?" She nodded, and he continued, "You need to turn this over to me immediately."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," she said. "It would compromise one of sources."

His frown deepened. "What can be important than this?"

"We want to continue supporting you, sir," she said. "We can't do this if we compromise our sources."

Hamzah was one of those sources. "I can appreciate that," he said. "But still . . ."

"As I said, we've neutralized this threat, sir. You should trust our judgment on this."

The information on the disk, coupled with a signed confession in the presence of Internal Security, would

end Ali Jamal's political life. It could even mean prison and torture, depending on how Akil Abdullah reacted. For some time now, he had been turning the prime minister against Ali Jamal. This would be the final blow. "I want you to understand, I have no interest in being prime minister."

"I assure you, Dr. Hamzeh, we want a partnership, a mutually beneficial relationship. I am authorized to tell you that our government is willing to provide you with funds for your charitable activities, further information that might be of use in your political future, and any other ancillary support that might be necessary. We appreciate the importance of Malaysia and the ambitions of the Malaysian people. We understand that there are many wise and decent people in this country, such as yourself, and we want to work with you, whether or not you seek the prime ministership."

Hamzah could not help but smile. She wounded more like a diplomat than a spy. He realized he had won. He had the U.S. on a leash. "Thank you," he said humbly. "Thank you very much, Miss Brant."

After his meeting with Mica Brant, Fadil Hamzeh contacted his man in Internal Security. The young man in the video had, indeed, signed a confession, and was willing to do more, anything to avoid being returned to those who had treated him so rudely.



The morning was gray and wet and it didn't take listening to the morning news report to know the air quality would put a paper mill to shame. All you had to do was breathe. Jay looked out the window through the rough but thin wrought iron jigsaw that, although it obstructed only a tiny fraction of the window, still annoyed him, even if it did provide additional security. Outside the window you could see other weathered apartments and a sliver of sky. He closed the curtains and sat down to drink a cup of coffee and read the *Hong Kong Standard*. The television droned on in the background. It was the CBS Evening News. Normally he listened to these American broadcasts, but today he had set the timer on the VCR and it was whirring peacefully. His memories were not so peaceful. The previous morning he had been watching the CBS Evening News and heard a story of an African American man who had been released from prison (on the basis of DNA evidence) after being incarcerated for nearly twenty years for a crime he did not commit. The images on the television screen of the jubilant but clearly broken old man had brought back memories of his father. Instead of seeing the face and body of the man who had just been released, Jay saw his father. The sad eyes of a man who had been mistreated to the point of losing something essential. Jay knew from his few experiences with his father that the man had gone to his grave with his humanity intact, but in a shell that was so weakened that this humanity flowed too too freely, too chaotically, like muscle on a frame without sufficient bones. Long before his death, the man couldn't even watch *I Love Lucy* without crying. He remembered his father talking about the time he had been placed under a car held up by a carjack in the parking lot of the motel he was managing by Arkansas sheriff's deputies (watched by the sheriff himself), who then knocked out the jack, laughing and leaving him for dead. And the anger came back. Red hot and fresh as new roses. Jay so carefully controlled his anger that it always surprised him when it surfaced. He had quickly restored the beast to its cage and turned off the CBS Evening News. As it were, he'd probably not watch today's tape (he had a library of unwatched video tapes), but if something of importance had happened, he would be able to check it later. Truth was he found American news broadcasts virtually useless. They had very little

news in them and even less insight. It was as if the advertising execs on Madison Avenue had taken control of disseminating the propaganda that is called news.

He padded across the floor of the living room and down the corridor to his bedroom. He got dressed in a handmade blue silk suit and found a suitably fashionable and high quality tie. He put on his everyday watch, a titanium Seiko, grabbed his attache case and left. He rode the buses to Wan Chai. In his office overlooking the harbor, he settled in and checked his messages. He smiled. It was from his "uncle." *Please call.* He reached down and picked up his backpack, opened it on the desk and removed a shiny black cell phone. He flipped the phone over, opened a compartment on the back, and removed a small programmable chip, which he then replaced with a different one he took out of a case that was also in the backpack. He then punched in a set of numbers and waited. It connected to an answering machine that had an unusual message in a machine voice. The message was a sequence of numbers. Jay disconnected, then went on the Internet. He watched a web-based manuscript pop up on his screen, the letters in white against a black background. Reordering the sequence of numbers according to a pattern based on the day of the week, a number that he and Shi Dao had agreed to in advance, and the closing price of HSBC Holdings in the Hong Kong market on the previous day, he was able to determine what page and line contained the message from Shi Dao, as well as a second telephone number.

"I'm glad to hear you're doing well," Shi Dao said.

"Why wouldn't I be doing well?" Jay asked.

"I have some information for you," Shi Dao ignored Jay's question.

"I'm all ears."

"What?"

"What's the information, uncle?"

"You understood the message?" He was referring to the message in the webnovel.

"Yes. How soon do I need to be in K.L.?"

"Tomorrow."

After hanging up the phone, Jay sighed. He didn't like these last minute things, but he could not say no to his "uncle," so he had better get his butt to K.L., no matter how inconvenient the timing. The message had indicated that his presence in K.L. was imperative. He got up from his desk, thought of a convenient but completely believable lie and headed for Frank Chan's office.



Night fell into a deep crevice and took me with it. In the wash of moonlight I could just barely see the reflection of the ghost in the mirror. I read somewhere that we are continuously losing our cells and new ones take their place. In seven years time, we are completely new. The old person that we were is left somewhere as dust.

It was very late when Mona finished at the Ministry. She had mostly procrastinated, wasted time surfing the Internet and doodling on a notepad. She had finished a draft of the speech on the financial crisis,

having received some crucial ideas and data from D.J. Nathan and a bit of encouragement from Shukri, she had insisted he go away and let her work. She shut down her computer and was packing up work to go home when a frazzled Ali Jamal stepped into her office. He said something about the stock market dropping like so many stones. "This is going to be a very bad time," he said, pacing about her office, as she stood near her desk watching, confused. He was not himself, not the strong, stiff upper lip Ali Jamal. He saw the concern in her eyes and walked up to her. "Too many problems," he said and gently touched her right cheek. "But don't worry too much, Mona," he made a weak effort at smiling. "As long as the party supports what we're doing here, there is nothing to fear. We have time." She threw herself into his arms and held him. At first he just let her do this without any reciprocation, then he wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. He felt that he was acting in a fatherly way, but the gesture was observed from the dim light of the hallway by Shukri Chamrong, who took it as a sign of something unseemly. Ali Jamal finally pushed Mona back and looked into her eyes. "You need to go home now," he said. "We are all quite exhausted. I will need you fresh again tomorrow, yes?" And she agreed.



Fadil Hamzeh arrived at the Federal Hotel, escorted by a big bear of a man, a little after nine o'clock in the evening. The two men walked directly to the elevators and rode up to the twelfth floor and then to Mohamed's room. Two pairs of heels clicking on the hallway floor, reverberating in the hollow space. When Mohamed opened the door to the suite, he was visibly surprised to see that Hamzeh was not alone. Nevertheless, he ushered them both into the room, although the man, whose name was Luqman Zain, remained near the door. "Why are you staying in a hotel, Mohamed? Our illustrious party chairman, a man of the common people, living in a tourist hotel, like some criminal."

"Welcome," Mohamed said, ignoring Fadil's question. "I want to clear up any misunderstanding . . ."

"Misunderstanding?" Fadil interrupted. "I had a conversation with Taiko Hing. You know him?"

Mohamed glanced at Luqman Zain, who appeared disinterested in the conversation, and was standing with his arms folded, leaning against the wall near the door. He seemed to be admiring the decor. "I know how you were using my daughter, Fadil. I'm not about to apologize for anything."

Fadil nodded. "Yes," he said, "I can understand your position, Mohamed."

A time existed when Mohamed bin Haji Bilal was ruthless in his pursuit of power, both for himself and for his party. He felt that he had become weak since the lung surgery. "Do you want to explain to me what you were doing? And why did you have to blackmail *my* daughter?"

"I did it to sabotage her relationship with Ali Jamal," Fadil said in a policeman's voice.

"What are you talking about?"

"Your loyalty to Ali Jamal has blinded you."

Mohamed stopped. He turned away from Fadil and walked to the other end of the room.

"I had hoped to destroy the relationship without you knowing about it."

Mohamed turned back to Fadil. "Relationship? What are you implying? Relationship? Do you have any

evidence of this *relationship*?"

"Just this morning a member of my staff said she had overheard one of Ali Jamal's staff talking about your daughter and our finance minister *kissing* in her office." Fadil stopped for a moment and watched Mohamed's face contort. "If you were more watchful of your daughter, you wouldn't need *evidence*."

Mohamed felt discombobulated, too much disorder in too short a time span: Izmeen, Crystal, Mona. And now this information about Mona and Ali Jamal. How could Ali violate their friendship? He knew that Mona had feelings for Ali. He had heard or seen lots of evidence of this, but had not suspected it was more than adoration, an infatuation. She's *your* daughter, he said to himself.

"What do we do now, Mohamed?"

"You want to tell me why you wanted documents from Ali's office? You are deputy finance minister, why would you need to steal documents, to make secret copies, all this cloak and dagger nonsense?"

"This is precisely the problem," Fadil said. "I should not have to do these things, but Ali Jamal has been operating in the darkness. He has kept secrets and he has sold secrets." Mohamed's eyebrows went up. "You know I have friends in Internal Security?"

Mohamed knew this all too well. He had taken this into consideration when he had decided to make a deal with Taiko Hing, a man he had worked with before and who he felt would keep his confidence.

"Well, Mohamed," Fadil continued, "I found out that Ali Jamal was selling information to both the Americans and to the Chinese. He was using his privileged access to information about business deals, about the banking system, and banking transactions, about the financial markets, to benefit himself, and to pervert the workings of the free market that he has championed as finance minister, and as the man who would be the next prime minister. Did you know he has a secret bank account in the Cayman Islands and another in the Bahamas?" Mohamed shook his head. Fadil continued, "This is very serious business, Mohamed. If the world finds out that our finance minister has been misusing his position in this way, it will stain everything, the entire government, our party, each and every one of us. I've been trying to piece the whole thing together, to take information to Akil Abdullah so that he might use his wisdom to help find a way out of this. I wanted to find a way to isolate the problem to Ali Jamal, to protect those who might be tainted by him, and most of all to protect our national interests."

Mohamed could see Fadil Hamzeh and Akil Abdullah working together to figure out the machinations of a renegade finance minister, whose actions could set back the carefully orchestrated development plans that were the salvation for Malaysian society, for the unity of its diverse people. Mohamed wondered if somehow Ali Jamal's machinations might even have contributed to the recent financial problems. Akil Abdullah had said, quite emphatically, that currency manipulators, with their hedge funds and ties to the American intelligence community, were deliberately attacking the ringgit and trying to sabotage Malaysia 2020 and the other plans of the ruling party. Perhaps Ali Jamal was just a puppet of these foreign speculators. Secret bank accounts? Mohamed shook his head in disgust. "I want to help," he said, finally. "I want to help make things right again. I supported Ali Jamal. It is my responsibility to fix this."



Samuel had spent the entire day trying to keep awake. He had failed miserably. He was partly aware of this in the depths of his sleep, as he listened to a distant ringing. He started climbing the great stairway to consciousness until the ringing stopped and he fell back. When he finally did awake and checked the clock in the hotel room it was almost eleven. The darkness outside the window confirmed that it was eleven p.m. He had slobber on one side of his mouth. He could smell his own breath and the taste inside was that of an old shoe. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, which were sore, then made his way to the bathroom. He was splashing water on his face when he heard the knock at the door. It was a light rapping but insistent. He wiped his face with a towel, then went to the door and looked out the keyhole. He saw the distorted image of a woman. "Mister Maxwell, are you there?" His head felt like someone had stuffed it with glue while he was sleeping. Nothing seemed to be working in there. He opened the door. She had wavy brown hair that fell just past her shoulders, an almond shaped face with dark brown eyes, and was wearing all black: a simple cami and cropped pants. He found himself staring at her bare shoulders. "You're Sam Maxwell?" She sort of tilted her head to one side when she asked this. She looked over his face, paying particular attention to the beard, then looked into his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "I'm afraid so. Can I help you?"

"You didn't have the beard in the photo?"

He frowned. "What photo?"

She barged into the room. "You might want to close the door," she said.

"What photo?"

"The one that Mike showed me. But that must have been an eternity ago. People change."

He hesitated a moment, looked down the hall both ways, half expecting the police (sleep deprivation has a strange effect on people), then complied with her request. "Who are you?" He remained near the door, looking at her as if she were a lot more than five foot six.

She rubbed her neck and smiled. "Sorry for the surprise." She walked over to him and extended her hand. "I'm Maggie," she said. "Margaret Elizabeth Gregory."

He took her hand. Her grip was strong, despite her diminutive size. He noted that her arms were slim but muscular. "Do I know you?"

"Yeah," she released his hand. "Can we sit down?" She looked in the direction of the table and chairs near the window.

He nodded. After they were seated, he asked, "How exactly do I know you?"

"We're supposed to meet for breakfast tomorrow."

"Oh," he leaned back in his chair. "How did you know where to find me?"

"Piece of cake," she said. "I just kept checking with the airlines to see if you'd arrived and when you did I assumed you'd have checked into one of the downtown hotels. I finally got confirmation from the Benson and just came over."

"They gave you my room number?"

She shook her head. "A hotel like this doesn't just give out people's room numbers. I have a friend who has a friend who has a friend that works here. You follow all that?"

He shook his head.

"I tried calling you earlier," she said. "I thought maybe you had gone out."

He shook his head.

She shrugged. "So, how do you like Portland?"

"Nice city," he said, not able to muster any more that given the state of his brain.

"Yeah, Mike thought so, too."

"How do you know my brother?"

She smiled. "Let me see," she said this with a coy look on her face, "how do I know Mike? Let me count the ways. Well, let's just say he and I had an intimate relationship for about six months before I finally dumped him." She took on a quizzical look and added. "I'm trying to change my life."

He frowned. "I don't understand."

"I worked for the I.M.F. for two years before I finally got tired of all the shit. I quit and moved out here. I've been here since '95. Mike and I worked together from '94 until I told the IMF to take a flying leap."

Samuel folded his hands together, tried to claw more thinking space out of the glued sections of his brain, and sighed. "Good grief," he said.

"Mike and I have remained friends, though. He's fundamentally okay, just has a lot of insecurities and can sometimes be a selfish, arrogant, greedy little shit. But I still love him."

"You were seeing Michael in 1994 and 1995?"

"We broke off the relationship in the spring of '95 and I left the I.M.F. in the summer of that same year." He gave her a look that she immediately interpreted, then added, "No, my leaving the I.M.F. had nothing to do with Mike. That work just wasn't for me." He looked somewhat relieved. She also noticed that he continued to stare at her shoulders and adjacent places on her body. "You look hungry," she said.

"Yes," he said, clearing his throat, "My digestions in an uproar. Do you mind if I try and get something from room service?"

She checked her watch. "They're shut down by now. If you want to eat, I know a place."

He blinked. His eyes were sore. He did not feel much like going anywhere, but he was hungry.

The Old Town Spaghetti Haven was not far from the area where Samuel had been walking earlier in the day. Nevertheless, he would have been completely lost without Maggie. The area looked completely different at night and especially to someone suffering from having gotten just the wrong amount of sleep. The restaurant did not have a front entrance, but instead was entered via an open courtyard, from which could be heard the sounds of Eric Clapton's *Black Rose*. The entrance to the courtyard was a

stone archway with the name of the establishment in gothic gold lettering. There were tables in the courtyard, but no chairs. Samuel assumed this area was only used during the day. Maggie led the way through the row of tables and into an open doorway. The place was busy, noisy, and you would have thought it lunchtime, rather than a bit after midnight. You had to order your meal at the front counter and they gave you a playing card. Maggie asked Samuel what he wanted and he looked over the menu for an eternity before finally telling her he would like to try the broccoli risotto torte with salad. He knew how to make a broccoli risotto torte and only hoped they could make one that approximated his own. Maggie ordered vegetarian lasagne for herself and a flask of wine for the both of them. She was given the Ace of Spades. She took Samuel by the hand and led him up some stairs and to a second floor seating area. They found a table towards the rear and Maggie took the seat facing out, leaving Samuel the one facing her and the backwall. The corner seemed darker than the rest of the second floor, shielded to some extent from the glow of the overhead lamps. The wall that now served as background for Maggie was also dark green, while the other walls were painted a light green. There were white brick columns on both floors.

"Did you come here with Mike?"

"Never," she said, shaking her head as if that question was ludicrous. She inserted the playing card in a small wooden holder on the table and Samuel wondered how the server would know to look upstairs. "Mike did visit me a couple of times, but we never had time to eat out." He decided against asking why. She had, after all, told him that her relationship with his brother had ended before she moved to Portland. He had guessed that Michael had visited her because he knew of at least one visit to Portland, although Michael had told him it was for a conference. Perhaps he was simply testing her. In that moment, in the restaurant, he looked at the world around him and felt a glimmer of skepticism, somehow nothing seemed quite right. It was as if the weight of everything that he had experienced since first arriving in Hong Kong had finally piled up so deep that it caused a temporary fissure in his sense of reality. She seemed to sense what Samuel was thinking and smiled. Her words acted to close the fissure and bring back a sense of normality. "I tried talking Mike into moving to Portland. I told him this was his kind of place. But to tell the truth, I don't think this is at all Mike's sort of place. He's too high strung. And Portland is too laid-back." She frowned. "He was pretty angry most of the time, even when he didn't show it on the surface. People have different ways of dealing with fear. Mike's way was to get seriously pissed. Maybe if he'd stayed here a while it would have mellowed him out."

Samuel agreed that Mike was *high strung*, but he did not say so. "I'd settle for just knowing where he is?"

She nodded. "I don't like the vanishing act, either," she said. "He's never done anything like this before, has he?"

He shook his head. "No."

She shrugged. "It doesn't make any sense." *Life is absurd. A Beckett play.*

"I was hoping you could help me sort it out."

"Okay," she said, and looked genuinely eager. "But I have to tell you, I don't have a clue."

"First of all, who is this Frank Hyde?"

"Hyde? Oh yeah, that's what you wanted to know in the e-mail," she said. "He's a jerk. Complete neantherthal. A character out of Ionescu. He teaches economics at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. He plagiarized an article that Mike wrote . . ."

"He what?"

"I'm surprised Mike didn't tell you about it. He was livid at the time. He wanted Hyde's head on a platter. Hyde wrote an entire article that was taken from a paper that Mike had published. Not a single reference to Mike in Hyde's paper. Not one. He acted like he had come up with the idea completely on his own. That's why I was surprised when he told me he would be working with Frank Hyde."

"Working with Frank Hyde on what?"

She looked around the room, it seemed almost involuntary, as if she was a little kid about to reveal a secret that her parents couldn't know about. "If I tell you, you have to keep it to yourself." He did not understand this last statement, but did not want her to stop talking, so he nodded agreement. "I'm serious about this," she added. "Mike told me that this had to be between him and me."

"I assure you, I don't plan on publishing this, although I don't see why it's so important to keep it secret."

"Look, I trust that Mike wouldn't have made a big deal about keeping it secret unless there was a good reason."

He could not argue with her on this and nodded.

"Okay, then," she said, seeming a bit relieved. "It had something to do with the big arbitrageur, Simon Rekker. Mike was doing work for Rekker for several months, even when he was still in Washington, and said that he had run into a roadblock, that he was having trouble coming up with a working model that was satisfactory to Rekker."

"Model of what?"

"You'll need to read Mike's paper. I have a copy." Again, Samuel nodded. "Anyway, Rekker was convinced that Hyde could get them the rest of the way because of his use of fractals in presenting Mike's argument. It seems that the fractal mathematics provided a possible solution to making the model do what Rekker wanted. I'm not clear about what exactly Rekker wanted, but I have my suspicions." Samuel's eyebrows went up. "We can talk about that some other time," she went on. "But since Mike couldn't solve the mathematical problems properly and Rekker didn't want to have to bring a mathematician up to speed on the economics, the choice was made to bring Hyde into the game. I guess Mike protested this, but Rekker was paying the checks." She looked like someone who had tasted bitter fruit. "I tried to get Mike to just quit and get as far from Rekker as he could, but he kept telling me that I had nothing to worry about and that Rekker was paying him way too much to just drop out."

"Nevertheless, I can't understand why Michael would work with this Frank Hyde."

"Yeah, I guess it was just the money. According to the holy books of economics, if you dangle enough money in the face of a saint, you can buy a sinner. Well, Mike was no saint. And Rekker has enough money to buy the apostles." She fell silent for a moment. When Samuel did not fill the void, she said, "Mike was obsessive compulsive about money."

"Is there anything that you are obsessive compulsive about, Margaret Elizabeth Gregory?"

"One or two things," she said with a little smirk. "Play your cards right and you might find out what they are. In the meantime, let's focus on the reason you came all this way --- finding Mike."

"So you think the reason Michael went to Hong Kong was because of his work for Rekker and he met up with this Frank Hyde there?"

"I *know* that's why he went to Hong Kong," she said firmly. "Just like I know that you can't tell anyone what I've told you."

"I've agreed to that," he said, a bit annoyed at having his integrity questioned.

"Okay," she said once again. "Just checking."

He thought for a moment, then said, "Can you tell me anything else that might help me?"

She thought for a moment, then shook her head. Just when he was certain that he had exhausted the information well with Maggie, she frowned, then said, "I really don't trust Simon Rekker. Whatever you do, don't go to him for help. Try every other source first."

"Why do you say that?"

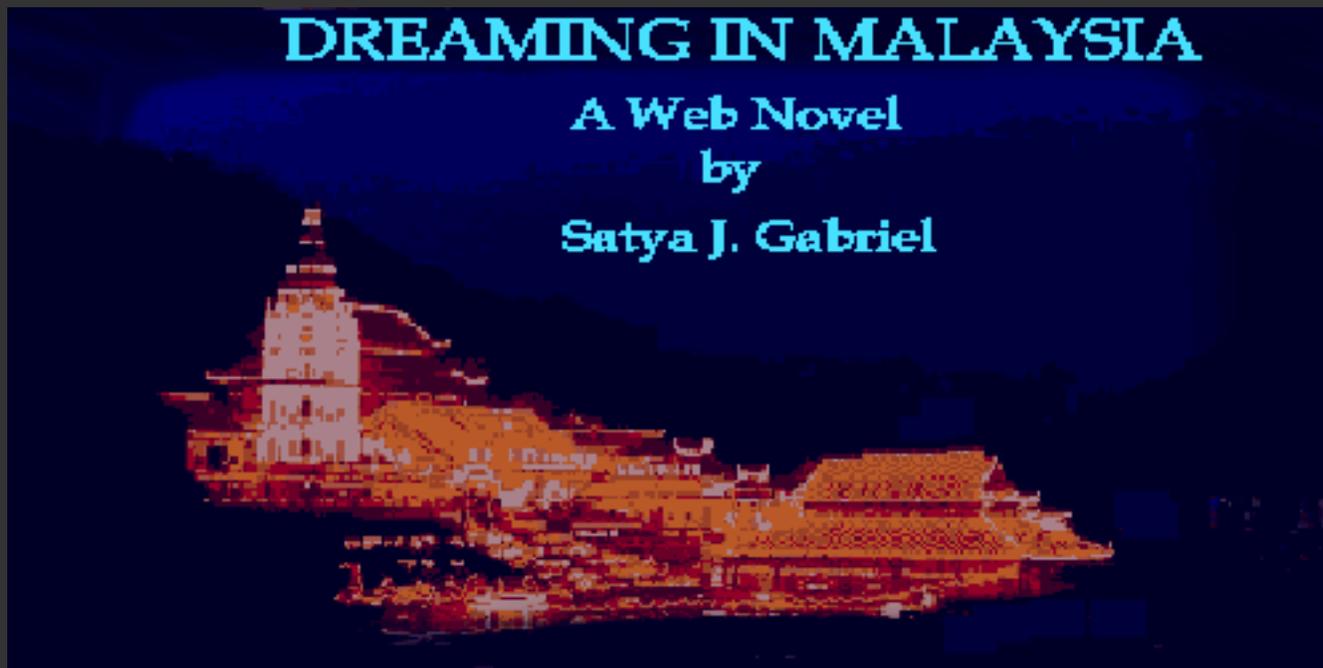
"You don't become a multi-billionaire by being nice," she said.

Samuel sighed. He noticed that Maggie was looking at someone over his shoulder and he turned. A tall woman with green bloodshot eyes seemed to be studying them. Then he saw that she was carrying a tray. The food had arrived.



Izmeen fumed in silence. She was so angry she could hardly see straight. Her mind raced through scenarios. Finally, as she was pacing across the living room floor for the umpteenth time, she stopped. She smiled. The cookies, she thought. She had recently baked a new batch, even more flavorful than the last, richer in the special spice that would bring eternal dreams, and with more sugar, too. She had hoped to feed them to Mohamed, had envisioned watching him eat them. He would belch more bad breath than ever, and his stomach would turn into a sea of violent snakes. He knew this and yet he would always eat them. Just enough. He wasn't greedy. But then she wasn't in any particular hurry. Not then. But now she felt the need to see the bitter fruits of her labors, to achieve completion. But where was he? No matter. She had something even better in mind. She would punish him for what he had done to her in a way far more permanent than death.

Izmeen called the children. Xarmina and Hussein. She herded them into the kitchen, promising them all the cookies they could eat.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Invisible Man

In the darkness Jay groped around for his watch on the nightstand. It was well hidden underneath a magazine and a box of facial tissues, the overturned framed photo of him receiving a trophy, and other bric-a-brac. He found it only after knocking the box of tissues to the floor. Outside it was raining and the rain blended with the weak rattle of the air conditioning. The doorbell rang again. He pulled himself up from the deep sea of sleep and peered at the illuminated dial. It was just past four o'clock. He wasn't planning to get up until six. His flight to Kuala Lumpur was at eight. He switched on a light and padded down the hallway.

He coughed once, then asked who it was. There weren't a lot of choices. The number of people who knew where he lived you could count on two hands with a couple of fingers left over. On the other hand, this was Hong Kong, secrets were not easy to keep.

"Police," said a voice. "Please open the door."

Politeness was a feigned trait of the Hong Kong Police. The please was uttered in a voice that sounded less like a plea than a demand. "Okay, hold your horses. I need to get some clothes on. I'm not decent." He turned and walked back into the bedroom and put on a pair of pants. The police waited patiently for his return or so it seemed. He opened the inner door and smiled at the two men on the other side of the wrought iron security door with the lattice-work window. One man was uniformed and Chinese, one not.

"Police inspector Davies," the man in the rain splattered blue suit said. This was not the voice that had requested he open the door. He looked at the uniformed officer. "And this is Sargeant Lee."

"Robert E.?" Jay asked, smiling at the Sargeant, who did not seem to get the joke. Jay cleared his throat again, unlocked and opened the security door and waved them into the apartment. "How can I help you gentlemen?" It was not everyday that he got a visit from the Royal Hong Kong Police. In fact, it was not something he had ever had the pleasure of experiencing. He had lots of experience with policemen, nevertheless, even if not in Hong Kong. In fact, he flashed back on 1989, two years after he graduated Amherst College and was doing graduate work at M.I.T. He was living in Mission Hill in '89 when he was similarly awakened in the middle of the night by a couple of neantherthals with badges. After being pushed around in a futile attempt at humiliation, he had been told that he fit the description. As it turned out, a lot of brown skinned men in Mission Hill fit the description. The perpetrator, on the other hand, did not fit the description. The man who had murdered, in ice cold blood, the pregnant woman named Carol Stuart turned out to be her very pale faced husband.

"I assume you're Sanjay Harris?"

Jay nodded, resisting the urge to lie and say that he was Jay's cousin, Denzel Washington, visiting from the States. It would have been an old joke, in any case.

"We're investigating a disappearance," Davies said.

It did not seem like standard operating procedure to wake someone at four in the morning because of a *disappearance*. Jay stopped smiling. "Someone lose their pet poodle?"

Davies did not seem amused. "We're trying to find the whereabouts of Faith Lam. I believe you may have been acquainted with her." *Cheeky bastard.*

"What makes you think that?" He knew who Faith was, but it seemed a rather far stretch between that slim knowledge and their presence in his flat at four in the morning.

"We know that you are friends with Helen Fung . . ."

"And how do you know that?"

Inspector Davies was relatively young. He had been promoted partly because so many inspectors had resigned and caught the first flight out to Britain. They had been disinterested in sticking it out until the hand-over, which was now only days away. Despite his age, Davies knew that Sanjay Harris was a bit too cool for someone who had been yanked out of bed by the police. He felt more than a bit suspicious, despite the fact that this early morning visit had seemed silly when he was ordered to do it by his superior, who was himself under orders from heaven knew who, perhaps it came from the governor's office, but why would the governor be interested in this uppity American? "I think I'm supposed to ask the questions, Mister Harris. Now, can you tell us what you know about Faith Lam?"

"That's a short story," he replied. "I don't know anything about her. I never even talked to her." He knew that Faith had gone walkies from talking to Helen. But he assumed that was inconsequential. She had most likely gone home to family or gone off in search of Michael Maxwell. Shouldn't these ghost-busters be searching for Michael Maxwell?

"Her family has reported her missing. Are you certain you don't know anything that might help us?"

He nodded. He was beginning to think that putting a shirt on might be called for.

"What about Samuel Maxwell?"

"Who?"

Davies did not respond immediately. He looked at Jay with obvious suspicion. He knew Jay had been talking to Maxwell. "We had Maxwell under surveillance. And we are quite aware of your relationship with the suspect." *Suspect?* Davies cursed himself. He should not have described Maxwell as a *suspect*.

Jay smiled, recognizing the discomfort on Davies face, and the silliness of the Queen's constabulary. "I didn't have a *relationship* with Maxwell," Jay said. "I spoke to him about his reasons for being in Hong Kong and that's about it."

"And why was he in Hong Kong?"

"Aside from being a tourist, he was here to see his brother. Problem is, his brother went walkies and didn't bother to leave a note about where."

Davies was aware that Samuel Maxwell had approached Martin Fung about his brother's disappearance. Martin had failed to write a full reporting of this meeting and was now in Richmond, British Columbia. "He was a tourist?"

Jay shrugged. "I can't think of anything else to call him. As far as I know, he spent all of his time just hanging out and occasionally going shopping. That's either a tourist or the governor of Hong Kong. I happen to know he wasn't governor." Davies narrowed his eyes.

"Look, do you guys think Maxwell did something to Faith Lam?" Jay looked at both men, expressing incredulity. He knew that Shi Dao had been busy planting evidence against Samuel Maxwell with intelligence agencies. He didn't know the exact nature of this evidence. For all he knew, Shi Dao could turn the mild-mannered Maxwell into a kidnapper and murderer, as well as into a superspy.

Davies realized interrogating Sanjay Harris was a waste of time. He also thought his superiors were fools for having allowed Maxwell to leave Hong Kong and only then starting an investigation. That was most certainly putting the cart before the horse. "I must apologize for disturbing your sleep," he said politely, as if he had been selling insurance. He handed Jay a card. "If you should think of something we need to know or find out anything that might be helpful, please give me a ring."

Jay resisted saying something about not giving a ring unless he intended to propose, but even in his sleepy state he thought better of that line. He had probably pushed enough of Davies' buttons. And he could tell by the look on Sargeant Lee's face that the uniformed officer would have liked nothing better than to try teaching this uppity American a lesson or two. Jay thought that might be interesting, at least. "Sure," he said, unable to suppress a stupid grin that belied his affirmative response.

Later, after they had gone, he turned on his stereo system and listened to Nancy Wilson's silky smooth voice singing *Do You Still Dream About Me*. He finally felt the long sharp string of unease slide through his body. He didn't like having his invisibility compromised, especially the day before he was to leave for Kuala Lumpur to meet with Malaysia's deputy finance minister. On the other hand, Davies was a dunderhead who could not *really* see him. His thoughts were completely of Maxwell. He saw Maxwell. The art of invisibility is not to disappear, but to appear as someone else. That was the first axiom of espionage. Jay was so good at the game precisely because he seemed unworthy of close scrutiny. He

smiled. At least July 1st was, as they say, right around the corner, and all the dunderheads in Her Majesty's service will be on a paid-for cruise back to merry old England.



The black mercedes sped past the birdlike structure spanning the road leading to the parliament buildings. Mohamed was on his way to the press conference announcing the party's full support for the acting finance minister, Fadil Hamzah. The morning news had been saturated with coverage of the arrest of Ali Jamal on corruption charges. A rumor was circulating that his crimes included some of a sexual nature, further whipping up the journalistic frenzy. It was Mohamed's job to refocus the attention of the domestic and foreign press to the unity of the ruling party, the cohesiveness of the government, and the stability of the nation. He had already been in contact with Tun Dr Abdullah, who had already expressed his shock and grief at the events that were unfolding, and who had asked Mohamed's opinion of elevating Fadil Hamzah to the post of finance minister. Mohamed had insisted the appointment be "interim" and subject to further evaluation. "No need to rush into anything," Mohamed had said. "We need to be careful at times like this." And the prime minister had agreed. Mohamed had also been in contact with Ibrahim Musa, Home Affairs Minister, and technically in command of the Internal Security Agency that had taken Ali Jamal into custody. Musa had assured Mohamed that Ali Jamal would be well treated and that proper procedures were being followed. Finally, Mohamed had tried contacting Mona, to no avail. When Mohamed's car reached the parliament building, it was immediately surrounded by the press.

"Press conference in thirty minutes," he told them firmly, and pressed his way into the building.

"Mr. Chairman," a voice called out from the lobby of the parliament building.

Mohamed turned to face Wing Kim Wee, leader of a key faction within the Malay National Coalition. Mohamed stopped and chatted briefly with him, but then hurried off to his office.

Faces followed him across the lobby and into the elevator --- In his office, he met his chief advisor.

"How have you been getting along?"

"Fine, fine, and you, P. K.?"

"I am struggling with this," P.K. Sam said and made a weak effort at smiling.

"As are we all."

He reached over and handed Mohamed two sheets of paper. The words on the paper were bolded and in large print. "I've gone over this several times. I hope it is satisfactory."

Mohamed nodded. "I trust you," he said. "How do I look? Normally, Izmeen . . ." The words trailed off.

"You look fine."

Mohamed leaned back in his chair and read the press statement. "What's happening in the markets?"

"The ringgit is under pressure. There is some concern about our foreign exchange reserves and so the stock market is taking a beating." P.K. watched as Mohamed placed the press statement on his desk and began shaking his head. "We'd better get going," he advised. "No time to keep the press waiting."

"My first order of business," Hamzah told the gathered staff, "is to impose capital controls and stop these currency outflows. The ransom money is becoming dangerously thin."

The combined staff from Jamal's and Hamzah's offices looked at each other suspiciously.

"The staff at the Central Bank is not so sanguine about the currency situation. I've had a good look at the dollar reserve data and I don't think we can delay these measures any longer. You are all going to work together and with the Central Bank to make this work."

He did not ask if there were any questions.

"Imposing capital controls is rather drastic," D.J. Nathan said, after the meeting was adjourned. "Do you think it might signal that we are abandoning reforms? The Western nations don't use such controls."

Fadil watched the others leave the room, then turned to Nathan and said, "Do you know why the West does not capital controls? Because their money, the dollar especially, has been turned into a narcotic in the international blood stream. If we don't get regular injections we become ill and if we get cut off from that narcotic we go into full scale withdrawal, perhaps even die. As long as they allow the free flow of the narcotic, they control the global financial and economic system. Capital controls wouldn't be in their interest. We, on the other hand, need to gain control over this addiction. Capital controls is a first step."

"However, we need to continue attracting hard currency into the nation if we are to keep modernizing. Aren't you afraid that placing controls on the free movement of hard currency will act as a deterrent to foreign direct investment?"

"You assume that *liberalizing* the economy is the source of growth, rather than the fact that our wise and benevolent leader, Dr. Abdullah, has rooted out corruption and placed the machinery of governance back in the service of the nation. We are developing because of an activist state, not some free market fantasy."

Hamzah reached over and took hold of Nathan's shoulder. "I need to know that I will have the full and complete support of every member of my staff, especially you, Dr. Nathan. You have been a trusted advisor to Ali Jamal, a loyal Malaysian. We are facing difficult times." Dr. Nathan nodded in agreement. "I've spoken at length with Dr. Abdullah on these matters and we have his support. Our party leader has also pledged his support."

"I am always a Malaysian first," Dr. Nathan said. "I will do what is best for the country and I assure you that I understand the need for unity at this time. I will do my best to implement your policies."

"Thank you, Dr. Nathan." And with that Fadil Hamzah had begun. He left the meeting with the staff and went immediately to another meeting at the Central Bank.

Mona had not attended Fadil Hamzah's first meeting as interim finance minister. In fact, she had not gone to work at all that day. She had, ostensibly, gone to her apartment to pack up more things to transfer to her father's house (which had become solely Izmeen's house), but instead she had spent the day there doing almost nothing when Meipo had surprised her, walking through the door unannounced.

"What are you doing here? You're supposed to be in Europe."

Meipo dropped her bags on the floor and burst out crying.

"What's the matter?"

Meipo shook his head. "There's no more money," she said, as Mona came up and hugged her. "My father said he could not pay for my luxuries any more."

"What are you talking about, Meipo?"

"He told me to come home."

Meipo would later explain that her father was dealing with some sort of financial disaster at Orbaw International and she and brother Beng had jointly decided to force the family onto some sort of austerity budget. It seemed so selfish on their part, such a small amount of money for Meipo's Europe trip. Mona told Meipo about her father's tirade but not the reason for it and the two spent the day commiserating.



On a hot and muggy afternoon in K.L., the same day that a plane had landed in K.L. and Sanjay Harris disembarked, the same day Meipo had returned from her European vacation, the same day that Shi Dao, unbeknownst to Sanjay Harris was in K.L. for a brief but important meeting, and the same day that an associate of Taiko Hing had located and abducted a certain former servant of the chairman of the ruling Malay National Coalition, with the consent, ne upon the request of that said chairman, on that same very day there was a secure telephone conversation between Mica Brant and Bernie Stifel from a telephone at the United States embassy in K.L. During that conversation, Bernie indicated Mica's efforts in K.L. were greatly appreciated among those in the "inner sanctum" and that she should proceed to the next stage.

"We need someone close to the new finance minister," Bernie said. "The name I forwarded."

"You're sure he's the person you want on contract?"

"He's been vetted," Bernie assured her. "He has his issues. But I suspect he'd even be able to get through the process here if he wanted to be a full fledged employee. He looks clean and he's resourceful."

"What makes you think he would want to help? Money?"

"He doesn't care about money," Bernie said, although he thought everyone cared at least a little bit.

"Patriotism?"

"He will do it because he finds it interesting, because his profile indicates he is a bit of an adrenaline junkie, big ego, and because of you, Mica, because of you." There was a pause on the line, then Bernie added, "Just remember, The Rhino trusts him." For communications purposes, Fadil Hamzah had been codenamed "The Rhino." Prime Minister Abdullah was "The Elephant."

"And we need someone to make sure The Rhino doesn't go off the reservation?"

"We need someone who can talk honestly with The Rhino, make sure everything is copacetic."

"He seemed willing to take advice from us directly," she said. "Do we really need a go-between?"

"That's bullshit, Mica. We have an investment here to protect. We need some risk management."

Mica smiled, switched the phone to the other ear, and said, "I understand. I'll work on signing on the risk management associate."

As another part of the public relations blitz to drown out the press' focus on Ali Jamal's arrest, which now included the revelation that there were charges of sodomy, in addition to corruption, there was a banquet in honor of party chairman Mohamed bin Haji Bilal, with prime minister Abdullah in attendance. This did not, however, stop the Malaysian stock market and the ringgit from continuing to plummet.

The next day, the sky was overcast and an ill-behaved wind whipped K.L.

An associate of Taiko Hing, Luqman Zain, was sent to "pick up" the former housekeeper of the National Malay Coalition at her sister's dormitory on the outskirts of K.L. "Your boss sent me," he lied.

Crystal looked through the keyhole at the big man on the other side of the door. She did not want to open the door, but he was wearing the uniform of a police officer. She made him repeat who had sent him, but this time he said Mohamed Bilal. She was still not ready to open the door.

"Are you ready to go or do you want to wait until more police come and we break down this door?"

She opened the door. "I'm sorry," She said.

"Forget it," he said. "You need to come with me. Your boss wanted me to help you."

"Help me?"

"Yes. You're going back to the Philippines." He took Crystal by the arm and they headed down the hallway.

Downstairs, they walked right past the reception desk where an overweight woman frowned at them, but the police uniform was enough to limit her reaction to that. Luqman opened the front entrance for Crystal, playing the gentleman. He pointed to a parked van and said, "That's our getaway car."



"What do you think happened to Michael?" Samuel watched as Maggie poured tea into two cups. Her apartment was fragrant with the smell of flowers, particularly the kitchen. He looked around expecting to see flowers somewhere and, although there were lots of plants, particularly spider plants, there were no flowers to be seen.

"Potpourri," she said, smiling. He turned, one eyebrow went up. "That's the smell," she said.

"How did you . . .?"

"Sometimes I do that," she said. "As for Mike, I think . . . that I don't really know what happened to him." She brought the two cups to the kitchen table and set them down. "I don't want to scare you,

Samuel, but are you sure you want to find out?"

He frowned. "What do you mean?"

She sat down across from him. "I mean, do you think Mike would be gone this long if he was all right?" She looked squarely at him.

He frowned. "Why did you ask me to come to the United States?"

She turned her cup on the table and thought for a long moment. "I did it as a favor to Mike," she said finally. "At least I think that's why. Sometimes motives aren't easy to figure out, even if it's your own motives."

His frown deepened. "What?"

"He always talked about you," she said. "He admired you, did you know that?"

"You didn't answer my question."

"I didn't think you were safe in Hong Kong."

"You didn't think I was safe?" He lowered his head and looked at her the way a judge looks at a guilty party who refuses to admit culpability. "Do you realize how long I was in Hong Kong? What are you talking about, Maggie?"

"I don't know how to convey this to you, Samuel, but you have to consider the very real possibility that Mike is dead." This was not something she was certain of, but believed it should not go unspoken. The possible explanations for Mike's disappearance seemed rather limited, and none of them were good. She waited for Samuel to react --- he frowned, but didn't say anything, and she continued. "In fact, I think whatever has happened to Mike, Simon Rekker had something to do with it. I believe Rekker is a dangerous man."

He just stared at her for a long, uncomfortable moment. "Why?"

"Did you read the two papers --- Mike's and Hyde's?"

He sighed. "Yes," he said. He had read them, but neither paper really registered. He blamed it on lack of sufficient sleep, but the truth was he just didn't understand Michael's paper because he had insufficient background in corporate and international finance --- his master's level economics training had leaned heavily in the areas of methodology and the history of economic thought --- and he understood Hyde's mathematical mumbo-jumbo even less. He had never had occasion to study fractals or, more generally, topology.

"Mike stumbled onto something with that paper," Maggie said. "He was always skeptical of the concepts of equilibrium and efficient markets. He believed in the power of manipulation of gullible economic agents, in the ability of well-placed managers, representing an invisible elite, to steer the course of economic progress, to crush enemies and help allies, to accumulate wealth on a scale that was the financial equivalent of Everest. He took his skepticism and suspicions to another level with that paper. His argument that the players in financial markets not only can't properly discount the future correctly but often act in irrational but *predictable* ways --- easily manipulated by powerful financial institutions --- provides a blueprint for making large amounts of money on the markets, particularly if a person has

the financial wherewithal to be the manipulator in specific markets. He argued the point that by manipulating financial markets a person can change the fundamentals upon which the markets are supposed to be based, thus changing the future, deciding on the winners and losers in the global economy. A person who properly uses such a model could make money in both the short and the long-term, creating short-term profit-making conditions and producing longer-term market environments which they alone completely understand. I don't think most people would have recognized it, but I think Simon Rekker knew that Michael had come up with something very valuable, with a little tweaking. And he hired Michael and Frank Hyde to do the tweaking. Once they had a working model, Rekker went to work."

"Went to work?"

"Rekker is using the model to manipulate Asian financial markets. I can see his handiwork as clearly as I'm looking at you." She left out a key bit of information: Maggie had received a compressed file attachment from Michael before his disappearance with a detailed set of algorithms, complete enough for Maggie to understand what Rekker was doing and how he was doing it. She knew that Michael had taken a rather large risk in sending her the file --- he had made this clear in a separate e-message --- and she did not think it prudent to share this information with Samuel. If she was correct about Rekker then it was better that no one else, not even Samuel, especially Samuel, know that she had the file.

Samuel shook his head. "I'm afraid I still don't understand. What you're saying makes absolutely no sense to me."

"Well, let me put it this way. How much money do you think Rekker can make if he places a bet on a horse at 1000 to 1 odds and knows in advance that this horse will win?"

"If he knows the horse will win, then it isn't a bet."

"How much money?"

"If he knows the result before the game begins, then it would make sense to bet as much money as possible. He would win 1000 times that amount."

"Do you think he would kill in order to keep secret this rigged game?"

Samuel felt sick. It came suddenly, like a wave of putrid liquid flooding his veins. "Do you have any evidence to back this up or are you just being paranoid?"

She tried the tea. "I think it's ready," she said. He ignored this, and she said, "I don't know anything. And God knows I'm paranoid. I can't argue with you about that."

This was no comfort. If she had said she was sure, he might have had more doubts about her judgment. As it was, she did not seem to be a crackpot and that was disturbing.

"If I'm right," she said, "then this might explain why Faith Lam disappeared. If I'm right, then you could be in a lot of danger. In fact, if anyone knows of my connection to Mike, I might not be all that safe either. You can call it paranoia, but I think we had better be very careful."

"You think something happened to Faith . . . because of Rekker?"

She shrugged. "It makes sense, doesn't it? She's either been eliminated as a potential problem or has

somehow realized the seriousness and gone into hiding."

"And you think Rekker might do us harm?"

She shrugged again. "Rekker is very anal," she said. "He doesn't like to leave loose ends."

"You seem to know a lot about Rekker."

"Mike and I had lots of conversations about him."

"Why would *we* be in danger?"

"Loose ends," she said with a shrug. "Rekker doesn't want anyone to know what he's up to. If he thinks Faith Lam knew about Mike's work, then you might have the same information."

Samuel frowned. "Is that why you came to the hotel, instead of meeting at the restaurant as planned? You think someone might be watching me?"

She nodded.

"Why not just go to the authorities?"

"And who exactly would that be?"

"You really are paranoid, aren't you?"

"You should try your tea before it gets cold," she said.

"I'm not about to abandon my search for Michael," he said firmly. *I am not a quitter.*

She nodded. "That's good. I wouldn't want you to. But don't let anyone know any of what I've told you, especially that you suspect Mike was working for Rekker."

He shook his head. "You're telling me not to go to the authorities. What if I need to investigate . . ."

"Don't."

It was silent for a while. Maggie drank more of her tea. Samuel looked at her, then at his tea cup, then sighed. "You don't know me very well, Maggie," he said. "I can't give up the search for my brother, not without knowing more than I do now."

She nodded. "I know," she said.

"I can't just go on with my life."

Again, she nodded.

"After what you've told me, I think it all the more important that I find out what happened."

"It's in your nature," she said.

He sighed. "I suppose you could say that, although I don't know that I believe in human nature."

"I wasn't talking about human nature. I was just talking about one very unique and special human being."

He smiled weakly. "Thank you, Maggie, but I'm not sure exactly how you could know *my* nature, even if I had such a thing."

"You sound just like Mike."

"I assure you, I'm not him. We have a good deal in common, but I'm not Michael."

She looked at him warmly. "I know that, too," she said.



"Do you remember when father died?" Michael asked.

Samuel thought for a moment. He looked at Michael with narrowed eyes and clinched teeth. Unable, for some reason, to speak, he finally just nodded.

"I don't understand death," Michael said. He paced across the room. The wind through the open window blew the curtains. "How can people simply disappear? Where do they go?"

Samuel shook his head. *How? Where? Why?* It seemed that he lived in a world where people just suddenly vanished. Or maybe it was he who had vanished. Maybe he had fallen through a crack in time and space and ended up somewhere else. Maybe everything was a dream. *Row row row your boat, gently down the stream.* He could ponder such thoughts in this dream, thoughts he would not normally have entertained. Wasn't that what dreams were all about, pondering the unanswerable?

"Do you remember Mister Lester?"

The old man who lived down the street and who was always so kind to the both of them. It was not typical British behavior towards children. He could see Mister Lester out walking his cocker spaniel, tapping out a rhythm with his cane while navigating the sidewalk. Mister Lester seemed like a monument to aging, contented with the present and the past, always full of good humor. He liked to tell jokes, never off-color ones, and sometimes they were funny, even to a twelve year old. But what had happened to Mister Lester? One day he did not come out for regular morning walk and the boy's had noticed on their way to school. No Mister Lester. Later they had seen the middle aged man and woman coming out of Mister Lester's place with the cocker spaniel. And after that day they never saw Mister Lester or his cocker spaniel again.

He looked about the room, but Michael was gone. He started to walk across the floor but noticed that the planks were broken and some missing. The floor was a jig saw puzzle with a lot of missing pieces. He could see a long drop down several stories through the missing planks. Crazy stairways winding up towards him but not quite making it that last stretch. He was afraid to move. He felt the planks beneath his feet creaking, beginning to bend. He looked about for something to hold onto, but there was nothing. The planks cracked and gave way. He fell . . .

Samuel awoke from the dream, straining to see in the darkness. He appreciated the solidity of the bed underneath him. He shook his head, disgusted at the childishness of such a dream. How could he actually think he was falling? He had felt the loss of support, the pull of gravity, in every part of his being. His heart was pounding. He marveled at how real it had seemed. He climbed out of bed and walked to the bathroom. When he came out of the bathroom, rather than returning to bed, he made his way precariously

(he just barely remembered the layout of Maggie's second floor) to the stairs and then down the stairs to the kitchen, where he found the light switch. He was temporarily blinded by the light. He squinted as he looked for the cabinet where Maggie kept her drinking glasses. Having found it, he took out a glass and filled it with water from the sink faucet. No sooner had he shut off the flow of water than he felt someone looking at him. He turned to see Maggie in the entranceway.

"Couldn't sleep?" she asked.

"Bad dream," he replied, and sighed. It sounded like the response of a five year old, or so he thought. Nevertheless, it was the truth. He thought it better to tell an embarrassing truth than a fragile lie.

She nodded. "Me, too."

His eyebrows went up, then he smiled. "It seems we have something in common," he said.

"Besides Mike," she said and shared his smile. He nodded. "Would you like some tea?" She was moving towards the stove, even as he nodded yes. She took the teapot off the back burner and joined him at the sink. "You look pale," she said, removing the top from the teapot and filling it with water.

His smile widened. "Pale?"

She replaced the top. "Yes, pale." She went back to the stove and placed the teapot on the same back burner, then switched on the gas. She turned and looked into his eyes. "Like you've seen a ghost."

He lost the smile. "We don't know that Michael is . . ." He stopped, feeling a strange twinge in his stomach.

"Dead," she finished for him. She shook her head. "We don't know," she said. She did not know. It was not like when she had known her sister was dead from the car crash even before the phone call had come. In this case, she had no premonition. However, she did not see many reasonable alternatives for Mike's failure to reappear. Then again, there was no premonition. There was nothing, except the pain she felt flowing from Samuel. "Mike was very selfish," she said finally. "Maybe he really did just run off for some reason that we don't know. Maybe he met somebody and is living the good life in Bali or Tahiti." She looked into Samuel's eyes. Her words were hardly soothing. The pain did not diminish.

And he did not believe her. He knew his brother well enough to not believe that he could have just "run off." Samuel shook his head. "Tell me about your relationship with Michael."

"Why?"

He blinked at this unexpected question. "I just want to know." Once again he thought he sounded like a five-year old.

She sighed and looked away, then turned back to him. "It won't make any difference."

He shrugged. "Nevertheless . . ."

"Okay," she conceded, but then hesitated.

"Did you love him?" Samuel asked, seemingly uncomfortable with his own question.

She smiled, then shrugged. "I guess it depends," she said.

"On what?"

"On what love is," she replied. "I cared about him, still care about him. I worried about him. He's very fragile, you know. But I don't think I really know what love is, or whether that's how I felt about him."

Feel about him? Or felt? Samuel shook his head. "I don't think I ever thought about him as fragile."

She nodded. "He likes to pretend to be as solid as a rock, but he's pretty porous," she said. "Sometimes he can be cold." This last sentence seemed to just come out unexpectedly.

"What do you mean?" Samuel knew that his brother could be cold, but he wanted to know what she meant by this all the same.

"About other people's feelings."

Samuel nodded. "What did he do?"

to hurt you. That was the rest of the sentence that Samuel hadn't added, but Maggie heard it all the same. "He sometimes acted as if all the other people in the world were just part of a fantasy he concocted for his own entertainment." She stopped and made a sour face. "You know, I really don't want to talk about this."

"Sorry," he said. He sighed.

She turned back to Samuel and looked into his eyes, reading him. She walked over to him, placed her hands on his face and drew him towards her and kissed him.



Jay drove to an area of KL where the houses were fronted by carefully tended greenery, indicative of wealth but not ostentatiousness. Architecturally the houses reflected both Western and Eastern influences. Jay drove the rented ocean blue Proton Perdana up the paved driveway and parked.

The maid who greeted Jay at the door was tall and dark and had bags under her eyes. She recognized Jay, although she had only met him once. "Please come in, Doctor Harris," she said. "Doctor Hamzah is expecting you." He liked the way she said "Doctor Harris." Made him sound like royalty.

"Thank you," he said. She led him into the expansive living room. He walked across the Persian carpet and sat down on a teak sofa facing an open window with painted white iron latticework. To his left was a teak table with a large photo book on Malaysia. Nice touch, he thought. Fadil was so damned patriotic.

"It's good to see you, Sanjay," Fadil Hamzah said, as he entered the room.

Jay stood up and the two men shook hands. Fadil then waved Jay back onto the sofa. He sat in a matching teak chair on the other side of the table. "There's a lot of new construction going on," Jay said. "Seems like every time I come there's something new to see."

Fadil nodded. "Prosperity," he said. "Akil Abdullah has been good for our country."

"Malaysia, Incorporated is a very efficient operation," Jay said and smiled.

"The Prime Minister does not approve of calling the country by that name. Malaysia is not a business,

but a nation, a family of people who are learning the benefits of working together for mutual prosperity. It is the arrogance of the Western press to call our country Malaysia, Incorporated. And how can they talk this way about us when their own governments and businesses are controlled by a small elite of *White men*?"

"You don't need to sell me, Fadil."

"Of course not." Fadil smiled. "I think the West comes up with such names to make themselves feel better about dealing with an Islamic leadership. No matter."

Jay thought about pointing out the validity of the label --- Malaysia, Incorporated. After all, Prime Minister Abdullah had always favored the business community over the common people, preferring a "trickle down" approach to improving standards of living. Abdullah's preferential programs for the indigenous Malay elite were often sold to the people as helping the average citizen (at least those of the right heredity), but the policies tended to bypass the truly needy. Malaysia, Incorporated captured the cozy relationships that Prime Minister Abdullah cultivated between government and business, creating bonds that often made it difficult to distinguish between the two, and fostering easy movement of managerial types from government to business or business to government. People who worked their lives in wage labor jobs (the true foundation of capitalism) hardly had any say in governance. But instead of saying any of this, Jay simply nodded agreement with Fadil and said, "I would be remiss if I didn't say congratulations, Fadil. Finance minister."

"Interim finance minister," he corrected. "And I can't feel good about it under the circumstances."

"Seems like quite a mess."

"It's bad timing, as well," Fadil said, leaning forward. "But at least now we will be in a position to stop the outflow of hard currency from Malaysia. It was your advice, yes?"

"Yes."

Fadil smiled thinly. "Any second thoughts?"

Jay shook his head. "I've seen the economic model that Rekker's using."

Fadil sat up straight in his chair, hands interlaced, elbows on his desk. "You've seen the model? How is that possible? I assume Rekker didn't post it on the Internet."

"Not that I'm aware of," Jay responded.

"Are you in a position to share this *model* with me?"

"I wish I was," Jay said with a sigh. "But I'm afraid it wasn't in my possession very long."

Fadil nodded. "No matter. One of the traits I always appreciated about you, starting when we were at M.I.T., was your honesty. That's why I value our friendship."

"I'm sure of one thing, you're going to have your hands full. You once told me that currency is the life blood of market economies. Rekker and his allies plan on a lot of bloodletting."

"Jay, why don't you stay and work for the Finance Ministry? Your skills could help us manage this problem and, after it's over, you could help in the building of Malaysia 2020, instead of wasting your talents in an immoral wasteland like Hong Kong."

"Hong Kong suits me," Jay said, without hesitation.

"I'm being serious. I'm offering you a position with the Finance Ministry. We could work together."

Jay told Fadil about the Stroup Institute contract, that he would be in Malaysia for several months, on leave from HKTDC. "This means I'll be around. You can get my advice, for what it's worth, for free. And you won't need to take responsibility for anything I may say or do."

"The offer stands, if you change your mind."



When Jay returned to Hong Kong, he met with Shi Dao and told him about Fadil's offer. He then went to Wan Chai and his office. He did some paper work and at lunch time went to the HKTDC library where there were computer terminals for public use. At any given moment there were several civilians sitting at these computers working. Jay sat down at one of the terminals and gained read access to the Royal Hong Kong Police Unix computer. In particular, he did a search for the recently filed reports of Police Inspector Raymond Davies. He knew exactly where to find the files. The report was in a directory assigned to the new Police Commissioner. This bit of amateurish hacking wasn't all that difficult for Jay. He had simply called the computer operator on the graveyard shift and talked him into revealing the access telephone number for the Police Unix system. The fact that Jay knew the name of the operator's boss made it an easy scam. The access number had provided Jay the keys to the door, so to speak, and he had inserted innocuous code into the system that allowed him privilege level access and guaranteed that he would be able to gain continual access, even if the access number was changed. The computer simply forwarded its address and passwords to the servers at two other sites that Jay had hacked into, leaving this data where only Jay would be likely to find it or understand it. Jay decided that now was a time to use his access. He typed in a few commands and had the relevant files forwarded to the HKTDC system. The files were simple .txt files. Shortly thereafter, Jay knew exactly what Raymond Davies knew or, at least, what he claimed in the report to be the extent of his knowledge regarding Sanjay Harris, Helen Fung, and Samuel Maxwell. To wit, Davies claimed that he found no evidence that either Helen Fung or Sanjay Harris had more than casual contact with Samuel Maxwell. The full report was, the .txt files indicated, forwarded to MI5, MI6, and the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation. It seemed the F.B.I. was investigating Samuel Maxwell and, as a result, this had triggered two other investigations: MI5 was now investigating Maxwell and the Hong Kong Police had belatedly decided to investigate the disappearance of both Faith Lam and Michael Maxwell. Reading between the lines, Jay realized that the F.B.I. was convinced Maxwell was involved in espionage and probably considered Faith and Michael to be potential operatives working with him or under his command. Jay was once again convinced of the absolute idiocy of all bureaucratic institutions. Life on the planet Earth was the only option, but he felt certain there must be more intelligent life in the Universe, somewhere. All these machinations just to reproduce a status quo, the power of certain humans to govern others, the social arrangements whereby a

privileged few could live in absolute, not just relative, abundance, even to buy a longer life, while most of their brothers and sisters on the planet were doomed to a life of struggle. What role was he playing? What about *the Long March*? Shi Dao had told him that Helen would be *removed* as a potential threat to Jay's cover. He did not explicitly say that Helen would be killed, but there was hardly any ambiguity in Shi Dao's meaning. And, as if to reinforce his intention to cleanse Jay's tracks, Shi Dao indicated that he would similarly eliminate other potential problems. Jay understood that Shi Dao had concluded that protecting the Sunshine algorithm and the Rekker program were far more important than any person. This was not about protecting Jay's cover. Indeed, Jay knew that he, too, was expendable. And then he found out, a couple of days after his meeting with Shi Dao, that Graham Carville had died of a heart attack. On the way home from his office, Jay rented a video, *Eye of the Needle*, one of his favorites. He sat in jeans and a white t-shirt, munching on cold noodles from his refrigerator, watching with such an intensity that one would have thought he had never seen it before. And his concentration was particularly sharp when Faber took out his switch-blade and skewered his old friend, Billy.

In that moment in the television glow broken darkness of his Mid-levels apartment, Jay was outside of himself. He was Henry Faber. It was a talent that many children possess, but lose in adulthood, in that difficult transition across an uncharted boundary. But some never lose the talent. Some become actors. Others sell on commission. A few become spies. Jay held the remote out and clicked off the VCR after Lucy killed Faber. Jay went to the window and looked out at the lights streaming in the darkness. He looked at the problem as one of erasing a tape that was incriminating and the path to this erasure as a series of logical steps, the way a programmer thinks. Helen was not the problem. Shi Dao was the problem. Only Shi Dao knew that Jay had ever worked for *the Long March*, or so he was led to believe. Without Shi Dao, he would genuinely become the invisible man.

•→END OF BOOK ONE

Copyright © 1999-2000 Satya J. Gabriel. All rights reserved.