

A random selection of incomplete chapters from

Framed & Hunted

A True Story of Occult Persecution

Written and Edited by

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Big Bad Bangers

Bangkok, Thailand. June/July 2001

All the action is in Khao San Road – that's where you want to go

The taxi from the airport dropped me off at the end of Khao San Road around ten o'clock at night. The sky was black, the lights were bright and the street was packed. Tourists, locals, bars, street stalls and all manner of street vendors, beggars, drunks and cops filled every free bit of space. It was hot, humid and noisy and the seething mass of people was made up of, predominantly, young, free, sexy twenty and thirty somethings from all over the world. *Fucking Wow!* From rural UK to tropical down town Bangkok in less than twenty four hours. Quite the culture shock, even after Australia. Khao San Road was a 24/7 tropical street party. I had a tip for a place to stay in a nearby street, but, exhausted after the flight, I grabbed the first single room I could find. That turned out to be almost exactly half way down Khao San Road.

I checked in, freshened up and headed straight outside to explore the madness.

Barbecued chicken and a bottle of water sorted out my immediate needs, then I wandered up and down the street just to observe it all.

Holy smokes! A big, angry looking ladyboy was striding down the pavement towards me. *Fuck that! Crazy bastards, I've seen you guys scrapping on the Jerry Springer show before – look like women but fight like men, fucking nut jobs!* The only transgender I ever met before was back home. It was a sad story. When the guy was young he'd been a drinker and a fighter but he was declared criminally insane and sent to prison after going on the rampage and beating up some cops before breaking his mate out of the local holding cells. While he was in prison the psychiatrists convinced him his anger came from his being a woman trapped in a man's body. He got taken in by all their psycho babble and agreed to a sex change. 1980s style. It was a rough job. The guy was well over six foot in heels, tough looking and as butch as they come.

Twenty Superkings lights please, and the paper.

It was a deep voice. I turned to grab the cigarettes from the shelf behind me without looking up. A big man's hand with bright red finger nails put some coins on the counter in front of me. Seventeen year old me looked up, horrified. I saw a butch, stubbly face made-up with red lipstick and blusher. Sad eyes looked out from underneath a dodgy wig. He was dressed in an old lady's overcoat. After he left, Sylvia, the woman serving on the till next to me, told me his story. As soon as he got out of prison he regretted his decision but he was stuck like it so he spent the rest of his days living as a woman.

Half expecting to get thrown out of the way if I didn't move fast, I crossed the street before the angry looking ladyboy got a step closer and I made my way back to the hotel. It was a hot, sweaty, noisy sleepless night. On first light I checked out and made my way to the recommended accommodation a couple of streets away. That place was full, so I went next door to *My House Guesthouse* on Soi Ram Butri. The same part of town as Khao San Road, but separated from the main strip by a large Buddhist temple.

I checked into a cheap basic room, dumped my bags and had a shower before parking myself on a triangular lounge cushion in the lobby with a book for company. People gradually started to fill the place up - checking in, checking out and ordering breakfasts. I was keen to get talking to other

travellers who already knew the city, country and region. I wanted the heads-up on what was what, where to go and what to look out for. The only thing I knew about Thailand that interested me was the Full Moon parties on the islands down south but I hadn't a clue how to get there.

A confident young Japanese woman stepped up off the road into the wide entrance of the guesthouse lobby. She caught my eye. Not the best looking girl in the world but certainly not the worst. She had short blonde dreadlocks, a don't-fuck-with-me expression and a small cotton dress that was so thin it showed off her skimpy green underwear. She looked like she was up for it. Whatever it was. A punky hippie. No frills or pretensions. She had a funky attitude and a strong sexual energy.

The wide open lobby lay before her. To her left was a scattering of travelers, including me, chilling out around the low wooden tables, eating, drinking, chatting, watching whatever movie was on the big TV, or reading. Or waiting to meet someone. Straight ahead of her was the pathway to reception. To her right were a few cafe-style tables where other travelers sat eating, drinking and watching TV. She scanned the room from left to right. I watched her from over the top of my book. She strode towards reception, stopping close to the desk just a few metres away. She scanned the room again from the opposite angle and then, just as she looked like she was about to leave, we made eye contact. She smiled, set herself and walked straight over.

Hey! Can I sit with you?

Sure

Small talk was easy. Satoko was the first person to approach me for a relaxed, friendly conversation since I arrived the night before. She laughed at all my jokes, got instantly close and touchy-feely and was not at all shy about holding eye contact for a suggestible amount of time. A proper little live wire. Said she'd spent the previous couple of years living in Australia with her boyfriend but they'd broken up. She'd left Australia for good and had a few days in Bangkok before flying on to India. Her new favourite album was exactly the same as mine – Manic Organic by Ganga Giri. Coincidence? Maybe. Satoko was twenty three years old. Same as Claire. And a 'Japanese Aussie', of sorts. Back in Australia when I'd been profiled by those 'kids' who'd peppered me with questions I'd said I liked Japanese Aussies. This was a trap. Satoko was the bait, but I didn't make the connection.

You like to smoke?

Fucking right!

Come with me, I know an Israeli!

Cont...

Undergrad

Plymouth, UK, 2005

University started well enough. Karen, a fellow student on the Access course, had chosen to study International Relations (IR) at Plymouth alongside me. Karen was a devout Christian and mother of an autistic teenage girl. She was a mature, grounded and well-behaved friend and ally to have amongst all the eighteen year olds fresh out of school. I had no concerns whatsoever about university, the other students, the course or my ability to deal with it all so when, during our introductory course lecture, the head of IR announced with a look of distaste that there were some particularly unsavoury characters among us and then fixed his eyes on me, I felt a bit uncomfortable but didn't take it personally. *He's probably referring to the drunken antics of some of the youngsters...* Fresher's Week is notoriously messy for the vast majority of young new students. It was another one of those curious moments though. *A what the fuck did he mean by that?* moment similar to a couple of snipes I'd had at college. There was obvious inference in what he said. It wasn't good, and it seemed to be directed at me. My motivations and intentions were all positive and sincere so I refused to let it bother me.

It did signify a new pattern forming though: snipe attacks - obvious double talk and hostile inference being delivered from people in relative positions of power. There was a subliminal element to his speech just like there had been from the leader of the Access course a few times. *If you start reading too much into these things then you really do start to lose the plot mate, its just paranoia...* Again, with nothing but positive and sincere intentions, I made a mental note and filed it in the new *what the fuck were they on about?* folder in my brain.

In the first couple of weeks of uni the head of IR also pissed all over my post graduation plans to set up an NGO taking neutral educational materials to impoverished rural communities in under developed countries. He gave a lecture on the subject, during which I realised that such an organisation could have a lot of profound and unforeseen negative consequences: I would be filling a role that should be filled by national governments and, in doing so, absolving them of one of their most basic obligations. Many of the countries I would plan to operate in would be run by dictatorial, communistic and/or highly corrupt governments. I would be indirectly supporting these by providing schools the materials required for the ruling regime to further disseminate its propaganda and social engineering. Finally, such organisations also foster cultures of subservience and dependency. For development to be sustainable and empowering it is important for cultures to evolve from within and not be subsidised from abroad. With my pipe dreams firmly ground into dust, I was, all of a sudden, free to study with no particular agenda or direction in mind. Far from being disheartening, it was a very liberating position to find myself in.

Cont...

Eric

Lebanon, April 2011

A brief return to the UK was necessary to set myself for the adventure ahead. I had to cash in some investments I'd made after selling the house in Yelverton, repack my bag, fatten up a bit, take care of my ailing health and book a ticket to Lebanon. I figured on a month, long enough to get a grip on the national cannabis culture and put a decent article together. Through the Blogosphere, I made a connection before I went – Eli, a guy from Beirut who ran a blog called Free Thinking Lebanon.

The Lebanese civil war is one of my outstanding childhood memories of the world on television. I had no idea who was fighting who or for what but it looked and sounded apocalyptic. Beirut was a constant war zone. I studied the country briefly at university to gain a better understanding of its history, religious factionalism and political structure. Still, I had no idea what to expect when I touched down in Beirut. The cheapest hotel in the listings looked alright. It became my base in the country.

Eli suggested we meet at an ice cream bar in a shopping mall. It was good to get a visitors briefing from someone who knew and understood my reasons for being there. When it came to cannabis people were ultra cautious so he advised to tread carefully. Police made frequent use of urine tests to catch people and always applied heavy pressure to snitch in return for a lesser punishment so there were lots of informants around. He told me of a town called Britel: *if you want a crazy story to write go there – there's a gang that targets expensive cars in Beirut for ransom; if the owners don't pay on time the cars get exported.*

Like I said, good to get a visitors briefing.

The Bekaa Valley is the famed historical epicentre of Lebanon's cannabis production. A map of the country shows Baalbek as the region's largest town. Baalbek is also the location of some of the world's most famous and spectacular ancient ruins so there's plenty of places to stay. As a foreign white face I could blend in quite easily. The ruins are worth the trip on their own, which is just as well because I couldn't even get the guys at the local pool hall to talk about hashish, let alone sort me out with some. A group of European cyclists had gone missing in the region recently. They were suspected kidnap victims. All tourists were advised to be cautious and aware, so I didn't push too hard for any hash connections. Three or four days later, it was back to Beirut.

The hotel had got busy. The war in Syria was just starting to kick off so all the foreign language students had been told to leave the country. Significant numbers of them headed straight for Beirut. A bed in the dormitory was all that was left. One of the other dorm guests was an interesting looking American guy, Eric. He was a veteran of the Iraq war, a battlefield medic who'd been given an honourable discharge due to a severe non-combat head injury. He'd traveled to Lebanon from Egypt, where he got caught up in their 'Arab Spring' protests. He was arrested and beaten by the Egyptian police. As a result of his non-combat head injury, he was also a drug addict. He said his US doctor reduced his painkiller prescription too soon so he'd had to supplement it with heroin from street dealers. In Lebanon, and Egypt, he could buy all the pharmaceutical painkillers he needed and still have plenty of his army disability pension left to live on. He offered me some of his pills. I declined. A couple of days later he offered me along on a trip to a brothel: *they've got some Moroccan whores there...* Declined again. Next was guns. He knew someone who lived somewhere we could go shooting. No thanks. *Were these honest offers, or was he dangling cherries and hoping I'd bite?*

Despite, or even because of, his eccentricities, I thought Eric would make a decent travel buddy. He knew the language, knew the culture, wasn't afraid of guns, drugs, gangsters or police, had no pretensions about him and he was well up for going on a mountain mission to find some hash.

Cont...

Spooky

Bolivia, 2011

First stop in Bolivia, after another long bus ride, was the historic high altitude silver mining town of San Luis De Potosi. The town sprawls down the side of a bleak, treeless, rocky mountain and the mines above the town sit four and half kilometres above sea level. It was cold, wet and dark under a thick blanket of cloud. Life is tough at four thousand metres above sea level. So are the people. Dynamite, detonator cord and coca leaf are over-the-counter goods, tourists are invited to take shots of 96% proof rubbing alcohol after breakfast and the lack of oxygen just makes everything feel even more surreal than it already is. I woke up gasping for breath in the middle of the night more than a couple of times. Two nights was enough. Onward bound, with a stick of dynamite and two minute length of detonator cord as souvenirs.

Sucre is a couple of thousand metres lower than Potosi. Its a popular place to stop for a while and take some language classes. Brushing up on my Spanish early on in the trip was a top priority. Argentina seemed like the logical place to do that but Sol advised me not: *When we travel in other Spanish speaking countries nobody understands us. Argentinian Spanish is different. Bolivia is the best place to learn Spanish – they speak Spanish Spanish and lessons are cheap.*

A bit of time in the gym would also help fix my stiff back. The hostel in Sucre was highly rated and run by a German man who'd married a Bolivian. He was a good host and it was a well-run place with more mid and long term guests than I've ever found at a similar sized hostel. Nearly all of us were language students. Among us though were a few who raised my suspicions.

The most obvious was a serious looking guy from the UK. Tallish and slim. Short fair hair with unremarkable features. Early thirties, ish. He looked familiar. I was sitting on the roof terrace at a table with Camo when the guy first approached us.

Mind if I sit down?

Go for it

We had a brief conversation. Mr Serious asked what we were doing in town. I asked him what he was doing.

Just traveling. I'm a software engineer, I can live wherever I want and work from my computer. Every time your Java Script updates – that's me.

My Java script had been updating itself far too often, three or four times a day sometimes. It'd been pissing me off. *Did Mr Serious hunt me down specifically to let me know he had a back door into my computer and how he was accessing it?* It definitely felt like it. *And where the fuck do I know him from?* He got up and left after a blunt five minutes.

I turned to Cam:

That guy's a fucking spook, guarantee it

Cont...

Danger, Danger, Everywhere

South Africa, 2013

Touching down in Johannesburg and fully aware of its reputation, I made straight for the bus station and waited for the next coach to Durban. For those not familiar with the cannabis world, Durban Poison is one of the most famous modern cannabis strains dating back to the 1970s or 80s. Durban is also relatively close to 'Jozi' and a mate who'd visited before told me it was a cool place. It was the logical first stop.

After twenty four hours of buses, trains, airports, bus stations, another bus and a taxi, I checked into a beachside hostel. Wanting a proper walk to stretch my legs, the staff at the hostel recommended the old whaling station a few kilometres up the beach.

It took a while to get to the old part collapsed metal fence that sectioned the whaling station off from the rest of the beach. The once daunting fence was knackered though, easy to slip through for a quick look around. It was a big, strange place. Massive, derelict, empty and rubble strewn rooms had been stripped of anything worth salvaging long ago. There was nobody else around. The perfect place to roll up some of the strong Dutch hash I found in my pocket.

It was a hot, sunny day. I was all alone in a surreal, derelict, post apocalyptic concrete shell and freshly high on some of Amsterdam's finest. My first day in Africa. I did what felt right and stripped off to honour the continent for a few minutes in my birthday suit. Primeval man on a beach in Africa. I've never been one for public nudity but I did get a giggle of righteous naughtiness when I wandered out on to the beach butt naked and felt the sun all over my body. I snapped a quick photo for posterity. All of a sudden, I was aware of something, or someone, moving behind me. I turned to look over my shoulder, back into the old whaling station and caught glimpse of a huddled figure scurrying away a couple of rooms distant. Oops. I got dressed again as fast as I could, finished my spliff and slipped back through the fence on to the public side again.

I hadn't walked more than ten or twenty metres when I caught the nod of a rough looking white South African sitting on the beach with his fishing rod:

Alright? Howzit bru?

All good cheers mate, just checking out the old whaling station.

Did you know that's a military base?

Eh?

Yeah, no shit man. The military took it over years ago, they already had property that backed on to the place – South African army are all over it. Don't worry about it though, loads of the locals still go in there looking for old copper wire to strip out and sell for scrap. Most of it got stripped out years ago though.

You smoke hash?

Of course

Wicked, I got some in my pocket I just brought over from Amsterdam...

He raised an eyebrow. I sat down next to my new friend Eugene, rolled a joint and shared it with

him on the beach.

Eugene was a veteran of the South African army, Special Forces. He lived in an illegal bush camp hidden in the undergrowth surrounding the old whaling station. He was squatting on a military base. He invited me in to check it out when his mate turned up, three fish in hand ready to cook. My first day in South Africa, hanging out with a couple of homeless guys in an illegal squat on a military base, cooking fish and smoking hash. I loved it.

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by

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